

*Transnational Networks
within the Australian
Fashion Industry:
Case Studies on Akira Isogawa,
Easton Pearson and Vixen*

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for the Degree of Master of Arts (Fashion)**

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Declaration

I certify that this submission is the author's own work, except where due credit has been given; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for another academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research programme; and any editorial work, paid or unpaid carried out by a third party is acknowledged.

Shazia Bano

4th September 2012

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Questionnaire

Proposed research questions for the study of Transnational Networks within Australian Fashion Industry: Case studies on Akira Isogawa, Easton Pearson and Vixen

- 1 How do you describe your work? Is there a particular philosophy that you follow while designing.
- 2 How do you define the Australian fashion industry? Does it have its own identity or is it heavily influenced by Europe and America?
- 3 Given its geographic proximity with Asia, is there an Asian influence prevalent in the Australian fashion industry?
- 4 Do you as a designer look towards Asia for any of the following reasons:
 - Asia as an inspiration
 - Asia for its diverse textiles, textures & colours
 - Asia for its rich cultural history
 - Asia for its low manufacturing cost
- 5 This study is looking at the influence of India, China, and Japan on the Australian Fashion Industry. In your opinion, what is the influence each of these countries may have had on Australian fashion?
- 6 What does Asia mean to you? What has its impact been on Western aesthetics? Have you seen a change in perceptions here in Australia in the past 10 years?
- 7 Do you think recent films, books, music etc have also led to the growing popularity of Asian influences? If so which films, books etc in your opinion have made an impact in changing the aesthetics of Australian designers.
- 8 Would you agree that specific pieces of garments from these cultures have had a strong presence in Australia and have become a part of our wardrobe e.g. Cheong Sam, Kaftan, Kurta, Nehru Jacket, Henna, Beads, Bangles and the Indian slipper.
- 9 Which garment from these cultures has inspired you the most?
- 10 Asia is rich in its hand crafted textiles, dyeing, printing and techniques of surface embellishments. Which of these are used most in Australia, and within which market segments?
- 11 What is the future trend of the global fashion industry, in your opinion, will the Asia covered within the scope of this research play a dominant role in terms of influence.
- 12 Do you feel that Asian aesthetics are subject to misappropriation?

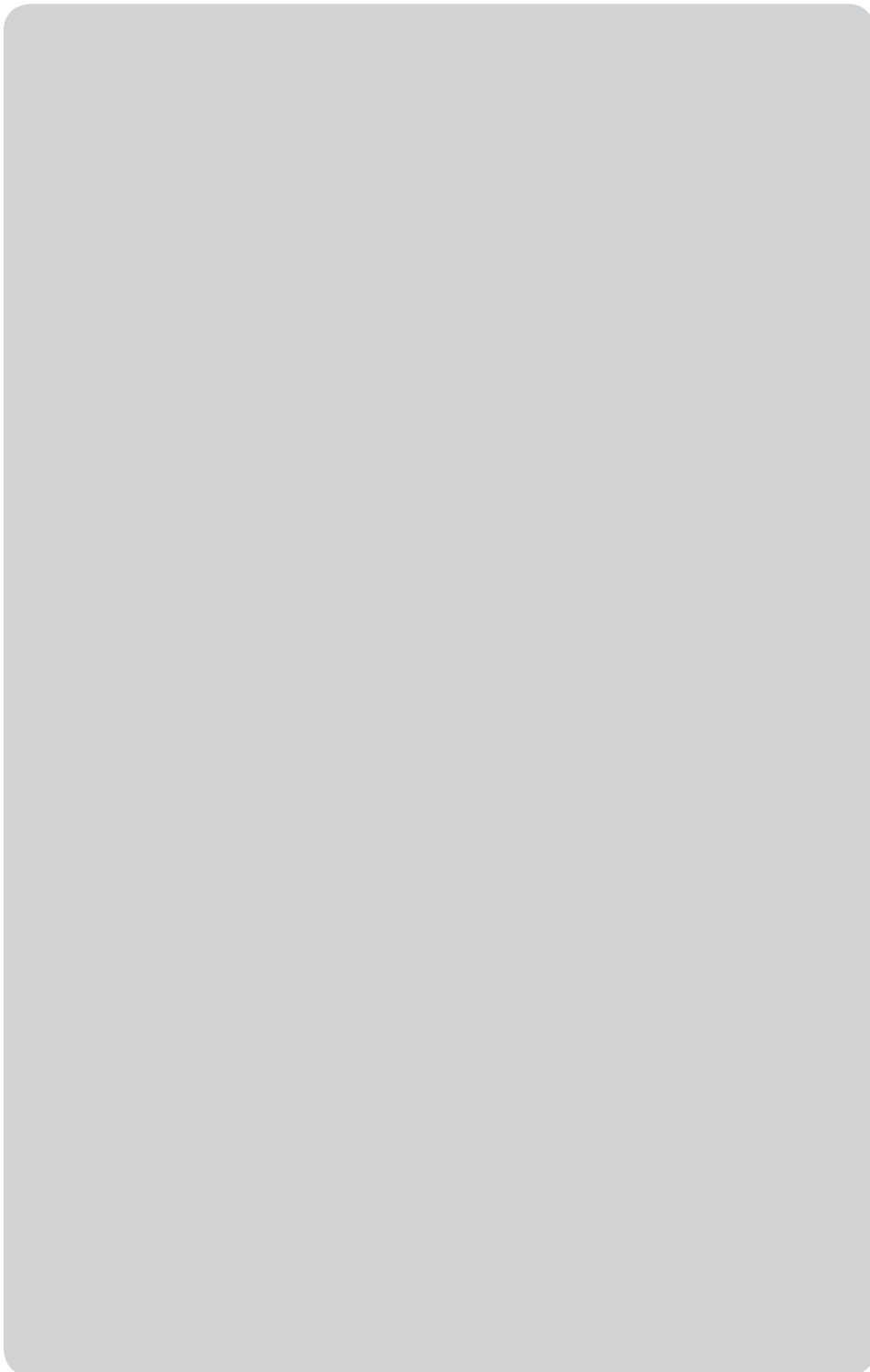
Summary

This research focuses on the creation of fashion using a transnational establishment whereby traditional Eastern techniques are accessed in different geographic locations and applied within a Western context to create fashion that is global in nature. The study analyses the practices of three Australian womenswear designers: Akira Isogawa, Easton Pearson and Vixen to ascertain the presence of transnational networks. The objective is to identify the geographic aspect of these practices with a view to bringing their aesthetic into context. Which countries do they access and why?

These Australian designers base their fashion on the production of specialised fabrics in which the textiles are custom made according to their specifications in locations other than Australia and largely situated in parts of Asia. This process creates a type of fashion that adds value to a concept through the different stages of its making, which is based across different geographies in terms of inspirations, aesthetics and manufacturing.

Thus, the nature of their transnationality is brought into question: are they accessing these regions for economic reasons or is there an underlying philosophy at work? Their actual practices are therefore examined with the view to identifying both their commonalities and their differences.

Introduction





The Australian fashion industry consists of a diverse array of designers designing for different segments of the Australian market. Some of these designers have been successful in exporting their collections around the world to established stores of the calibre of Bergdorf Goodman in New York, Browns in London, Villa Moda in Dubai and Joyce in Hong Kong. The success of these brands is based on the uniqueness of their designs and the craft involved in their manufacturing. These designers create pieces that do not appear to be trend-driven and have a timelessness about them that makes them *toujours à la mode*. They are set apart by a fusion of Western aesthetics and Eastern craft techniques manifested through the incorporation of the skills of the Asian artisan using a multitude of traditional techniques available in that region. It is this segment of the Australian fashion industry that is investigated within this thesis.

The focus of the research is on the practices of three specific Australian womenswear designers; Pamela Easton and Lydia Pearson of Easton Pearson, Akira Isogawa of Akira and Georgia Chapman of Vixen (Figure 1.1, 1.2, 1.3), with a view to defining the context of their practice. The subjects chosen for this research are successful Australian designers and their success lies in marrying the traditional East with the modern West, to create fashion that is appreciated within a high end, niche market. Each of these designers differs in their respective product and approach to fashion, but there is one underlying concept that is common within their practices: creating fashion by exploring the handmade aspect of artisanal craftsmanship. Based in Australia in three different states, (namely Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria respectively), they target a Western consumer, and create fashion that is sold into sophisticated stores globally. These designers source the craft traditions of Asia to add value to their fashion by way of the specialist, handmade skills available in the region to create a product that has, in turn, created a niche for itself and is easily distinguished from the mass manufactured fashion of the day. Their customers appreciate and understand the quality of the aesthetics and the artisanal touch that goes into the production of these labels.

This research examines the nature of the designers' relationship and interaction with the craft communities of Asia. The studies are written with a view to capture the essence of their practices through interviews, published text and observations in order to situate their methodologies using transnationality as a research framework. Akira Isogawa sources the skills of the artisans of India and China and combines them with the aesthetics of his native Japan. Easton Pearson employs the artisanal skills of India and Vietnam to furnish their practice, whereas Vixen sources the traditional motifs, colour combinations and shapes of Asia. In the case of the first two designers, the artisan creates the fabrics by applying

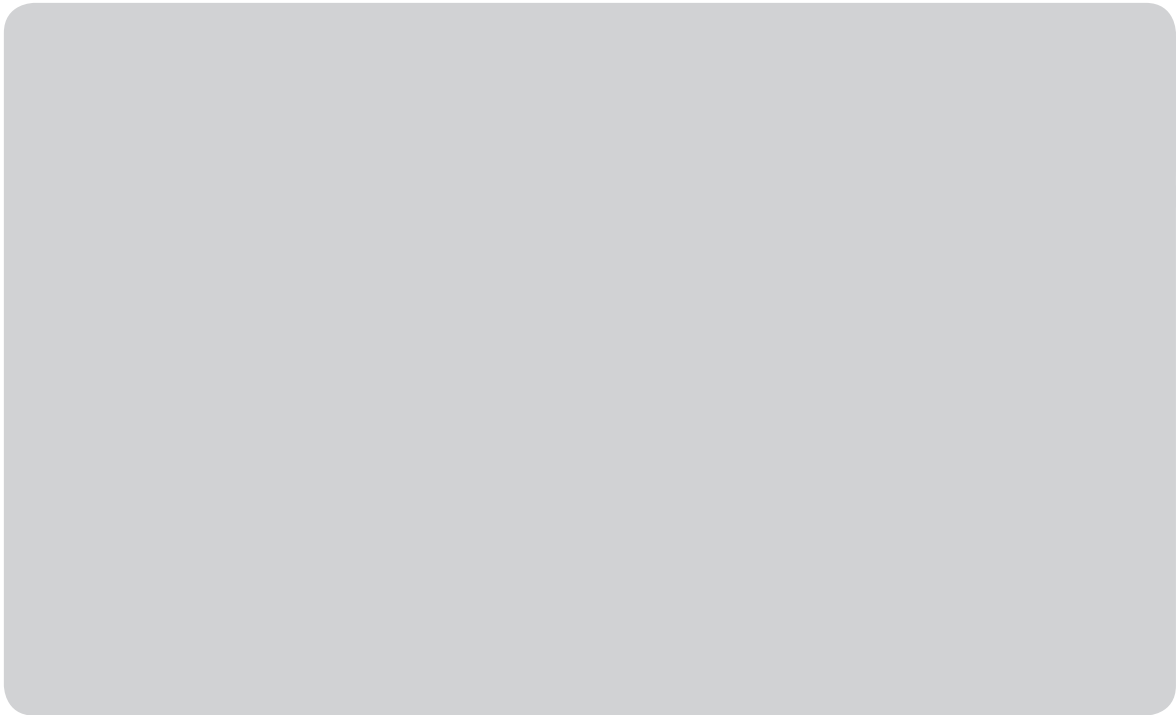


Figure 1.1 Pamela Easton and Lydia Pearson designers for the label Easton Pearson
Freestyle: new Australian design for living. Parkes, B. (ed.), Sydney, N.S.W.: Object: Australian Centre for Craft and Design; Melbourne, Vic.: Melbourne Museum, 2006, Print.

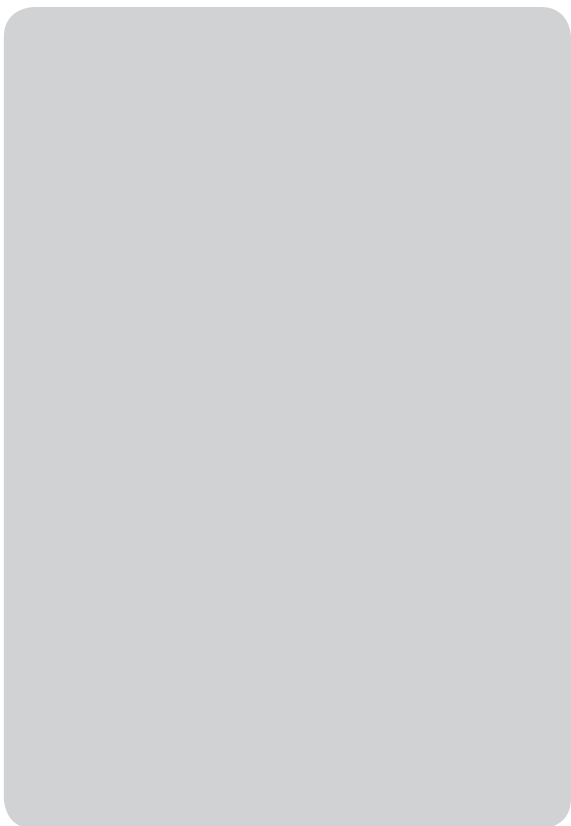


Figure 1.2 Akira Isogawa designer for the Label Akira
Freestyle: new Australian design for living. Parkes, B. (ed.), Sydney, N.S.W.: Object: Australian Centre for Craft and Design; Melbourne, Vic.: Melbourne Museum, 2006, Print.

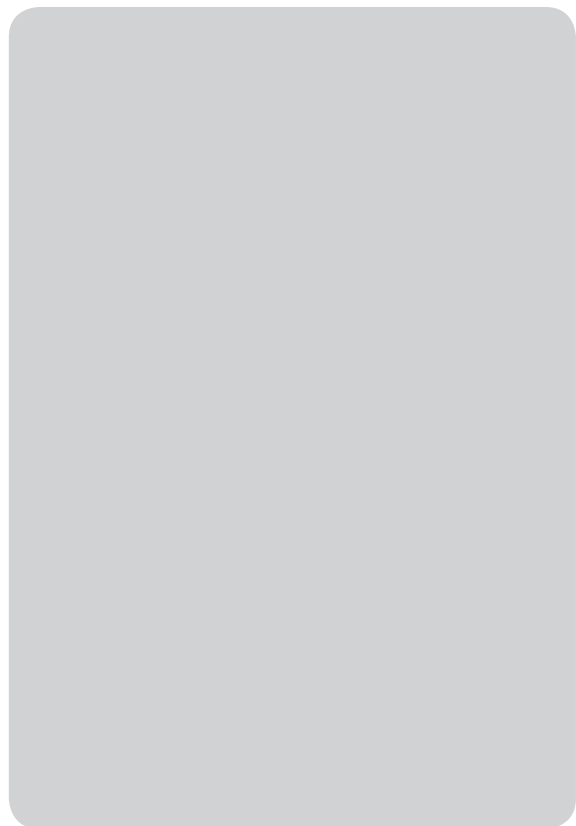


Figure 1.3 Georgia Chapman designer for the label Vixen
Freestyle: new Australian design for living. Parkes, B. (ed.), Sydney, N.S.W. : Object: Australian Centre for Craft and Design; Melbourne, Vic. : Melbourne Museum, 2006, Print.

traditional skills handed down through generations of artisans including the techniques of weaving, embellishing and embroidery available in that region. Conventionally used for ceremonial decorative attire within an Eastern context, these skills are employed here using Western sensibilities. Western motifs, colour and abstractive design are fused with Eastern techniques; which results in the traditional craft of the East changing its context. The artisanal skills initially confined to an Eastern milieu become part of a Western vocabulary, such as *zardozi* (gold thread) work and *ari* (Chain Stitch) work.

Australian designers have not initiated this practice in recent times; it has been prevalent since the advent of colonization in one form or another in different parts of the world. The primary impetus of the research was to identify the presence of Asian elements within the practice of Australian designers and the reasons for the use of these typical traditional techniques. The traditional Asian crafts of beading, embroideries, weaving and dyeing techniques, amongst others are immediately visible. These observations were analysed whilst considering various pragmatic aspects of the fashion trade. Was it a cost-cutting measure? Or, the easy access or geographic proximity of these regions that facilitated accessing these resources? Was there an influence of this region within Australian Fashion proper? The case studies conducted revealed information that led to the understanding that these elements were present due to the nature of the practices of these designers. To distinguish their craft from the mass manufacturing these designers developed a niche of handcrafted fashion which celebrated the artisan.

Asia provides a medium to explore their design directions by using the skills available locally. Therefore, designers such as Isogawa can use his Japanese inspirations and create fusion by interpreting them through the handcraft palette available in Asia. The case studies also revealed that these practices engage artisans over multiple geographic locations within the Southern Hemisphere. The end product is marketed in the Northern Hemisphere to both sides of the globe. Hence the nature of these ateliers could be termed as 'transnational' practices where aesthetics, traditions and crafts of different regions combine to create a product. The resulting exchange of aesthetics and crafts can be termed *fusion fashion*, or *hybrid fashion* in which diverse elements of East and West coalesce to create fashion within a *transnational* network, where two different cultures and countries interact within the domain of fashion to access and utilize the living traditional crafts of the region (Figure 1.4). In such a transnational scenario, traditional Eastern techniques are applied within a Western context to create fashion that has a global market. This entails the study of the movement of aesthetics of different cultures via production in different parts of the world, to create fashion that is marketable globally as suggested by Appadurai (1986).

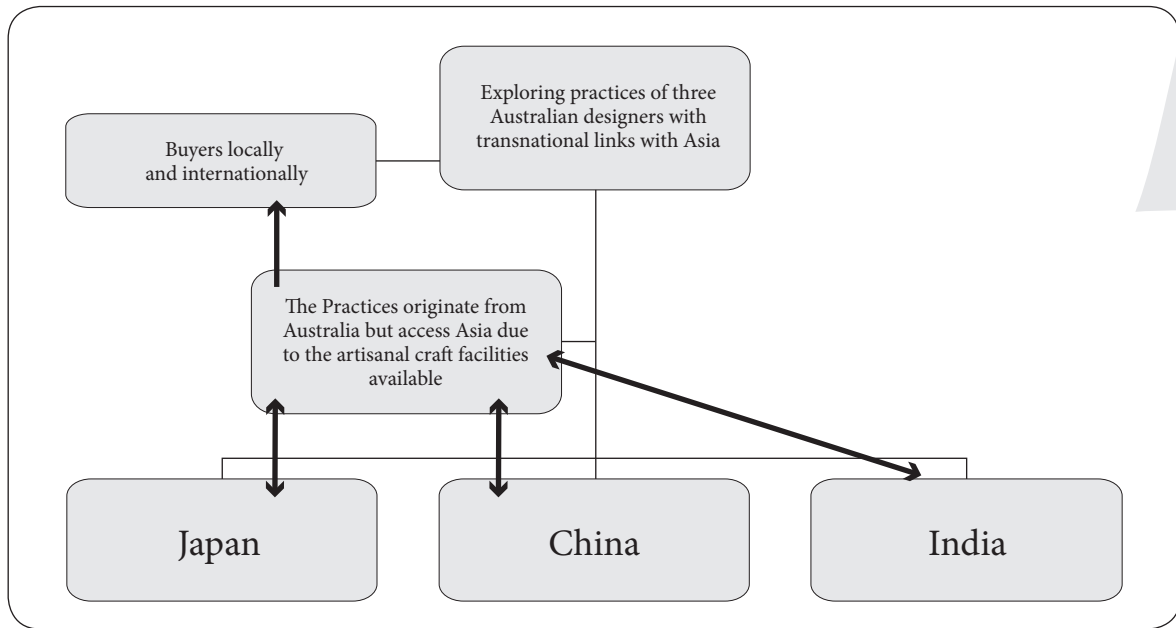


Figure 1.4 Diagram explaining the Thesis, Shazia Bano 2012

Research Questions

The questions that dictated this research were:

- (a) Is there an Asian influence within Australian fashion? If so, how can it be quantified?
- (b) What are the cultural, economic and social factors that encourage the acceptance of Asian elements in the Australian fashion industry?

The research questions developed through observations within the different tiers of the Australian fashion industry during the years 2006/2007, when Asian aesthetics were evident within the seasonal collections of many local designers. By definition, Asian aesthetics within the confines of this thesis are applied to the presence of colours, shapes, motifs, textiles and surface embellishments within Australian women's fashion that are indicative of Asian origins.

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the presence of this influence and its nature. This was undertaken by identifying and investigating the factors that could be responsible for the dissemination of such an influence within the womenswear segment of the Australian fashion industry. Was it a response to the fickleness of fashion, the search for new ideas or globalisation? During the course of the research, it was confirmed that as fashion is cyclical, such trends appear periodically such as they did in the Nineties when there was a strong Asian flavour within the international fashion scene. However, the nature of fashion at the present time is far more complex than warrants mere labelling as 'Asian influenced.' Hence, the research sought to analyse not simply why fashion takes influences from a particular

culture, but to take an in depth view of the reasons behind the appreciation of Asian crafts within the fashion industry.

The case studies selected for this research displayed a milieu which exhibited an appreciation of creating fashion that was not trend-driven; could be distinguished due to the quality of craft utilisation exhibited within their fashion; narrated the story of its production; had an association with the craft communities and artisans in particular parts of the world, and were not manufactured in nameless factories in Asia. The case study designers showed a clear aversion to the mass-manufactured garments of the day and believed in celebrating the labour intensive craftsmanship of their chosen artisans.

The practices in question are based in Australia but source aspects of their products in Asia. As such the product is clearly not manufactured in Asia for cost considerations but due to specialist skills sourced overseas mainly due to the lack of availability in Australia. The patterns and garments are made in Australia utilising experienced industry professionals. The cut and the shape of the garment can be simple as in the case of Easton Pearson (Wallace, 2009) and Vixen, or it can be elaborate as evidenced in Akira Isogawa's layered dresses, but the final product reveals an artisanal touch which is manifested depending on the designer's aesthetic.

The practices of these designers access different geographies whether for surface embellishments or for aesthetic inspiration. A literature review of various texts (Crang et al., 2003, Dwyer and Jackson, 2003, Jackson et al., 2004, Dwyer, 2005) revealed that the approach to manufacturing involving different geographic locations can be assessed through the concept of the 'transnational' expressed as '... multiple ties and interaction linking people or institutions across the borders of nation-states.' (Vertovec, 1999). Therefore, the research focuses on examining the transnational nature of production in fashion. Analysing the case studies through the lens of the transnational provided an insight into the workings of the fashion industry. It also serves to shed light on examining the individual practices of the designers *vis à vis* their specific transnational circuits and their specific interactions with the craft communities of the regions.

Aim and Scope of the Thesis

“There is no border in the world of aesthetics. Everyone is looking for something beautiful and fresh.” Hanae Mori (quoted in Kawamura, 2004: p 153)

The aim of the thesis is to develop an understanding of the Australian fashion industry through the lens of the transnational. As the word consists of the prefix ‘trans’ i.e. (across), this involves the interaction of Australian designers with different geographies. Therefore, this construct helps define and identify the countries that constitute their system of practice. It also analyses the nature of the interaction that they have with these countries. Australian designers access the craft and manufacturing facilities overseas mainly in Asia, due to its global proximity, the construct aids in the understanding of the methodology of their business. Are they accessing Asia due to its mass manufacturing potential or are they interacting with specialized communities. What is the form this interaction? Is there an aspect of reinventing traditional local crafts, or networks that create a hybrid cultural translation manifesting new imaginaries? This concept of is discussed at length in Chapter Two.

The geographic scope of the thesis has been identified as including Australia, India, China and Japan where womenswear designers based in Australia, the principal country of design origin, access various aspects of the craft traditions of these countries within their individual practices. Hence, three specific Asia-oriented case studies are presented with the intention of confirming and exploring the possibilities of transnational networks within the womenswear segment of the Australian fashion industry. It is hoped that examining the Australian fashion industry through transnationalism may provide a deeper understanding into the workings of the industry.

India, China and Japan have been identified not only due to the links found within the practices of the labels in question, but also due to their individual importance within the global fashion industry.

Japan holds a prominent position in the international fashion industry due to its singular approach to clothing and tailoring which has impacted significantly on the Western fashion world. Japanese fashion is considered vastly different from Western/Australian style, with regard to its construction, silhouettes, shapes, prints and fabric combinations. The early collections of Japanese designers such as Issey Miyake, Junya Watanabe, Rei Kawakubo of Comme des Garçons and Yohji Yamamoto inspired a new generation of Western designers. The now common use of an all-black/monochrome palette, the deconstructed look and the identifiable asymmetry being traced back to them (Wardy, 2001).



China has been chosen as it was, and is, a significant player in the global fashion industry, both on an aesthetic and economic level. Over the last two decades, the developed world has shifted its production to countries such as India and China with the perception that this will lower the cost of production in terms of facilities, labour and resources. China maintains an important position for Australian fashion designers because of its presence in the global textile and clothing sector. It produces garments at globally competitive prices, hence offshore solutions are pursued by various Australian businesses to be competitive on the global stage (Lindgren et al., 2010).

India is important to this research on several levels. Firstly, India is known for its cultural impact on the rest of the world, embodied in the vivacity of colours in Indian culture and traditional festivals. The multitude of different peoples and their respective cultures makes India a melting pot of religions, culinary tastes, diversity of population and costuming styles. Specifically related to the fashion industry, India's forte is the repertoire of crafts that engage the international fashion industry whether it is beading, dyeing, embroideries, or embellishments, (Belkin and Benhamou-Huet, 2009). Secondly, India has tangible links with the Australian fashion industry: designers such as Easton Pearson locate their embroidery and fabric development studios in Mumbai, and the richness of the colours, textures and traditions of this country have proved a source of inspiration.

The Asia identified for this research is prominent within the designs of Akira Isogawa, Easton Pearson and Vixen. The similarity between these designers is most discernible in their shared approach towards a design philosophy. They relate to the Asian traditions of giving primacy to textiles. Their design methodology starts with creating the fabric for their collections based on Asian artisanal aesthetics or techniques. Varied inspirations and ideas collected from diverse locations are researched and developed using the craft-based techniques available in Asia. These three designers look towards Asia for specialist artisanal qualities, or a particular aesthetic that can add value to their product. The handmade element originating from Asia, whether it is in the printing, dyeing or embroidery adds value to their collections and provides the niche that a high end fashion label merits.

Research Method

The case study method was selected in order to investigate the nature of these practices in depth through the use of collected data. Bergen and While (2000) state that case study has become an accepted method for conducting research in a number of disciplines; for example, in education, experimental psychology and nursing. They quote Hammersley's (1989) account of the Chicago School of Sociology, where he states that, in essence, the

term 'case study' refers to the collection of unstructured information from a variety of sources about a particular individual, group or institution including the accounts of the subjects themselves. Hammersley supports the placing of case study research within a qualitative paradigm.

Bergen and While (2000) differentiate between the case study (a research method) and the case (its object). Defining the case study as an entity would mean that any object could be labelled a case study regardless of the methodology used. On the other hand, the case, according to the authors, can be an event that is less defined than a single individual, and can also be about decisions, programs, and organizational change.

Stake (1995: p 7) suggests that the case study approach is seldom an entirely new understanding of phenomenon, but rather “ a refinement of understanding” and is of interest for both its uniqueness and commonality.


A case study is also defined as a method, a strategy, an approach with an overarching intent and a methodological purpose that outlines the methods chosen for the data collection (Simons, 2009). It is an empirical inquiry that looks into a contemporary phenomenon with a real life context, where the boundaries between the phenomenon and the real life situation are not clear and where multiple sources are used to gather data. It is also a method used when researchers need to cover complex or multivariate situations and not isolated variables.

The methods or techniques of research such as interviews and observations are referred to as the strategy for the research, by which access is gained to conduct, analyse and interpret the case. Case studies are conducted to explore the uniqueness and particularity of a single case. In this thesis, three designers were chosen from an initial shortlist of eleven. In the initial appraisal, selection was predicated upon the unique nature of their practice; where a link to Asia exists, either by way of their heritage, interaction with the crafts of Asia, an appreciation of the handmade, or purely due to economic considerations.

The case study approach assisted in understanding the unique qualities of each individual designer and their practice, and helped in gauging the similarities and differences between each practice. The use of this methodology also helped to identify the broader overarching issues that formed the basis of this thesis; the study of the transnational networks within the fashion design industry.

Simons (2009) cited definitions of how the concept of case studies is viewed:

- Lou Smith (1978) refers to case study as a 'bounded system',
- Mac Donald & Walker (1975) refer to it as an 'instance in action' and
- Mac Donald (personal communication) as an 'authenticated anecdote.'



According to Simons, a *bounded system* comprises a single unit of analysis, a class, an institution, a project or programme or, as described in this study, the individual practices of three Australian designers. Such a bounded system can also contain a sub-element that helps investigate the research question, such as the geographies involved in the practice of these three designers, which make their case studies specific. ‘An instance in action’ refers to the lived experience of particular individuals, programmes and projects or the specific interaction of the designers with the craft communities of Asia. ‘The authenticated anecdote’ is the unusual incident evidenced and validated that offers insight into a specific event. In the cases of Akira Isogawa and Easton Pearson, the authenticated anecdote would be their first contact with the Indian artisans that determined the future course of their practices.

In a case study, the researcher plays a key role in collecting and interpreting data. Case study reports that are focussed on a particular issue contain naturalistic observations, interview data and are written in the words of participants. Simons (2009) defines it as a process that is evidence-led, and is inclusive of different methods. The key objective of a case study is to engender an in depth understanding of a specific topic to generate knowledge and/or inform professional practice. Hence, the practice of three Australian designers analysed through the case study method revealed the depth of each practice in terms of the various layers that collectively formed the label. It revealed how the ethos behind the practice that celebrated the craft of Asian artisanal communities sat under the umbrella of the transnational design networks. Craft techniques of the East and aesthetics of the West combine to form a class of fashion that has a global appeal, within certain segments of the targeted markets.

Asia, in particular India, China and Japan set the boundaries of the case studies, where the overarching intent that dictates the thesis is the nature of the relationship of Asia within the realms of the Australian fashion industry. This is further analysed by the existing practices and experiences of the three Australian designers Akira Isogawa, Easton Pearson and Vixen and their distinct interaction with Asian crafts and aesthetics. The nature of their relationship with this region is explored by analysing their practice with reference to the situation of Asian craft and aesthetics within their designs. This relationship is observed through the concept of the transnational with a view to establishing the movement of aesthetics from one region to another.

The key text used to facilitate the understanding of the case study method was *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* by Robert K. Yin (2009). According to Yin, case study research is a preferred method when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon; the researcher has little control over the events, and ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are posed. In this

scenario, the richness of the phenomenon and the extensive nature of the real life context require the researcher to deal with technically distinctive situations. There may be more variables of interest that may require multiple sources of evidence with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion.

According to Yin, however, it is not always possible to distinguish between phenomenon and context in real life situations: other characteristics become part of the technical definition. He states that this method explores many variables of interest, depending upon multiple sources of evidence and prior development of theoretical constructs to guide collection of data. In this case, the data collected was analysed through the literature review on the transnational, which gave insight and understanding into the practices of the designers.

The case study method of research is used in various situations to analyse an individual, group, organisational, social, political and related phenomenon. It is applied as a method of research in psychology, sociology, political science, anthropology, social work, business, education, nursing, community planning economics, and to understand social phenomenon. Briefly, this method allows investigators to retain holistic meaningful characteristics of real life events. The case study is an important tool when the researcher must rely on primary and secondary documents, and cultural and physical artefacts as the main source of evidence, but also includes the direct observation of events being studied and interviews of the persons involved in the events. “The case study’s unique strength is its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence – documents, artefacts, interviews, observations ...” (Yin, 2009: p 11)

Therefore, Yin states (2009: p 18):

A case study is an empirical inquiry that:

Investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and its real- life context, especially when,

- *The boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.*

The case study inquiry:

- *Copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variable of interest than data points, and as one results*
- *Relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result*
- *Benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis.*

Yin (2009) asserts that the first stage consists of pattern matching whereby several pieces of information from a case may be related to a theoretical construct and this strengthens the internal validity of the research where relationships are being examined. The second stage consists of replication logic, which is similar to multiple case studies, where the results of the entire case are compared with other cases and with a proposed theory.

He proposes the use of triangulation in order to undertake the pattern matching analysis, strengthening the construct validity of the research, which is the establishment of the correct operational measures for the concepts being studied. Yin advocates that triangulation for case study and its methods should include interviews, surveys, observation, records etc. He also suggests that the sources of evidence suitable for case study research are unlimited and discusses six specific courses – “documentation, archival records, direct observation, participant observation, interviews and physical artefacts.” (Yin, 2009: p 98). These are discussed briefly below.

Documentation

Documentation can take many forms and should be the object of clear data collection strategies. These can include letters, memoranda, personal correspondences, notes, agendas, minutes of meetings, reports, editorials, museum catalogues of exhibition featuring the designers and press coverage of fashion shows. These should be carefully used and not be accepted literally as they may be biased; for example, the press clippings of the designers were studied carefully for editorial not advertorial content.

Archival Records

These are the same as the documents but may sometimes be obtained from the case in question to give an idea of the history of the case. For example, the Easton Pearson swatch books accessed by (McNeil, 2009) dating from 1989 and 1993 from the archives of the designers, gave an insight into the methodology of the designers in the initial years and their primary contact with the Indian printers.

Direct Observation

According to Yin (2009: p 109) “the case study should take place in the natural setting of the case,” allowing the opportunity for direct observation. These observations act as another source of evidence for the study. In case of the designers in question, direct observation was part of the research methodology where the actual garments were analysed within the shop locations to understand and appreciate the level of the Asian craft utilised within their products in situ.

Participant Observation

This is a special mode of observation according to Yin (2009) where the researcher is not only a passive observer but can assume a variety of roles within the case study situation and can participate in the events being studied. This particular aspect of the case study research method does not apply to this research.

Interviews

One of the most important sources of information collection for a case study is the interview. It is the primary source of data collection and has been an important aspect of the research of the case studies for this research. A type of case study interview is an “*in-depth interview*” and another is the “*focused interview*” (Yin, 2009: p 107). In the first instance, the facts of the matter and opinions of the interviewees about events can be taken as well as their insights into certain events that might lead to further inquiry. Whereas for the latter, a short interview of perhaps an hour’s duration can be conducted, where the interview remains open-ended and can assume a conversational manner following a certain set of questions according to the protocol of the study. For this study, the second approach was undertaken in which hour-long interviews were conducted to ascertain the views of the designers that then served to develop the case study in combination with other published material and personal observation.

Physical Artefacts

The last tool for case study research identified by Yin (2009) is the physical artefact which may be a technological device, or an instrument or some other form of physical evidence that can be observed as part of the case study. According to Yin (2009), physical artefacts have less potential in most typical case studies but when they are relevant they can be important components in overall case assessment.

The six commonly used sources have been discussed for collecting data for a case study research. Not all sources will be relevant and a selection can be made to define the parameters of the investigation.

To conduct this research, the case study method was adopted, this entailed a developing a method of **documentation** of information on the participants of the research by developing a questionnaire identifying the areas of inquiry through a series of **interviews**. This questionnaire was used to conduct preliminary interviews to identify and shortlist candidates duly approved by the ethics committee at RMIT University. A total of eleven fashion design industry practitioners were interviewed to obtain valuable input for the research. These practitioners ranged from trend forecasters to fashion event organisers

to practising designers to acquire their input towards the research. The data collected facilitated the selection of the final three designers chosen as the case study subjects. The preliminary findings of the interviews are outlined as follows:

- China is viewed as a manufacturing base for the mass manufactured clothing within all tiers of the industry due to the low cost of production.
- India is seen as the creative hub because of the country's rich cultural traditions and artisan base where independent designers can create a point of difference in their product.
- Japan's influence on the Australian Fashion Industry lies in its creative exploration and experimentation in fashion, which maintains a strong impact in certain segments of the Australian market.

The three designers were selected on the basis of their practices involving Asia in their design methodology and showing an affinity towards Asian crafts, colours, shapes and ethos. The aim of the research was to identify the nature of their respective interactions with Asia as their collections exhibited different aspects leaning towards Asian origins. This included the shapes of the garments in some cases; to the motifs and the surface embellishments in others; to distinct textile techniques reminiscent of Asian origins. These features were not seasonal but were repeatedly visible or an underlying aspect within the labels' methodology.

Upon selection of the designers, a **three-tiered methodology** was adopted to conduct this study. In the first instance, **interview** responses were reviewed and transcribed with a view to establish the nature of each designer's practice. This entailed **documentation**; reviewing responses about the establishment of the brands, the philosophy of the designers, the design methodology, the production centres and the targeted market of the brand.

The second phase of the research was the **archival records** i.e. content analysis of the published material on the designers: press coverage in newspapers and magazines on the brands since their inception; interviews given by the designers at various stages of their practice; museum catalogues of exhibitions featuring fashion; and press coverage of shows to gauge the reviews by fashion media. This also involved developing a chronological image bank to view the progression of styles over the years.

The third phase of the research was the **direct observation** of the garments in the showrooms and the high end retailers to observe the product first hand. This phase helped in distinguishing the Indian craft from that of China.

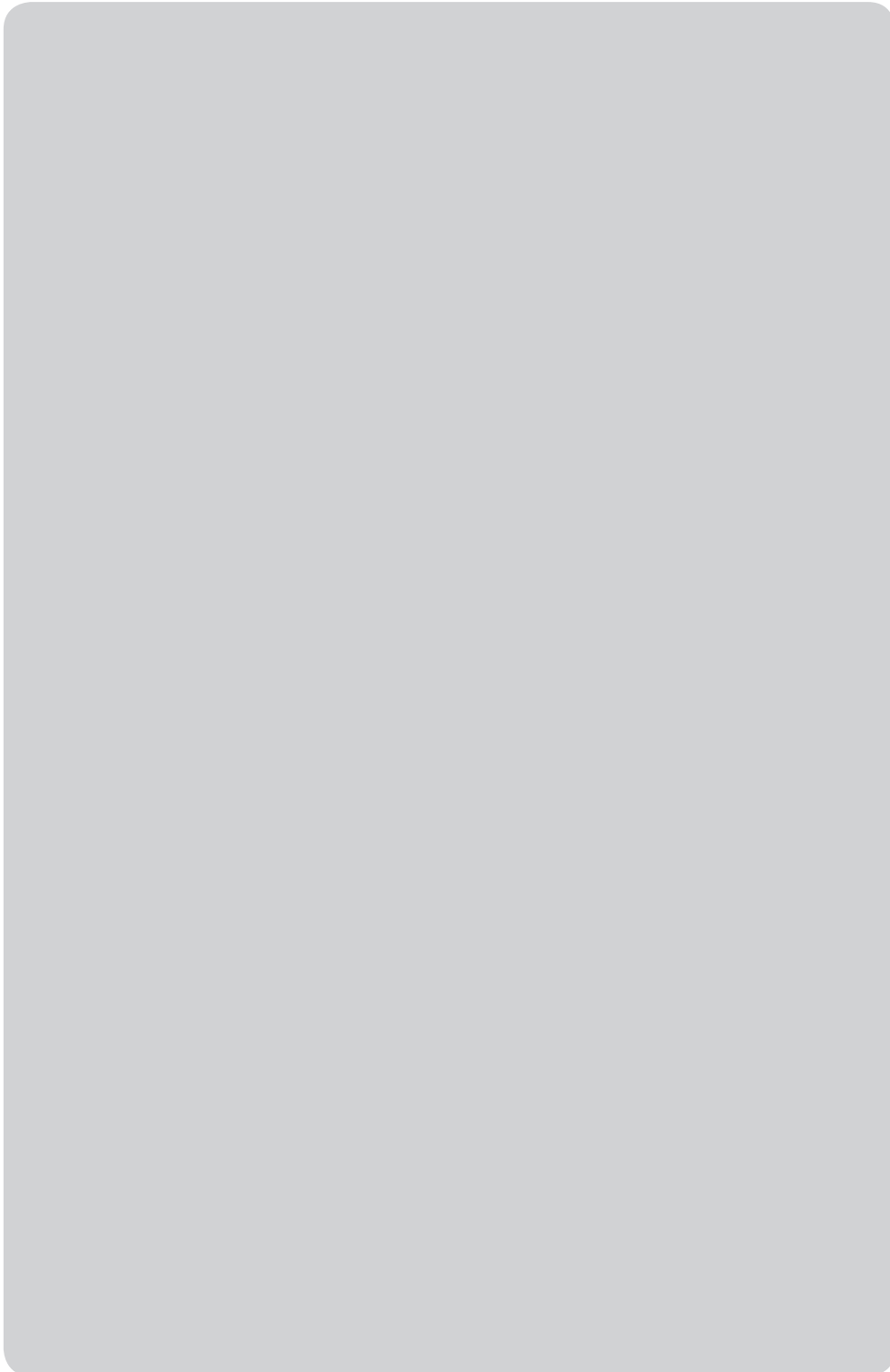
The three phases of the above methodology helped develop substantial evidential data to analyse the different aspects of the designers practice in order to write a comprehensive case study as the following chapters will exhibit.

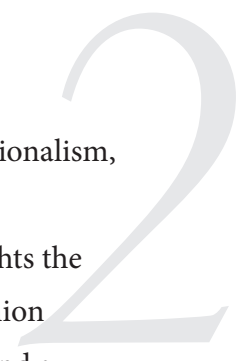
Conclusion

This chapter defines the focus of the research, which is the respective practice of three Australian womenswear design labels to find the transnational links within their practice and the relationship and interaction with the craft communities of Asia. These practices based in Australia source aspects of their products in Asia whereas the final product comes together in Australia. These practices access different geographies for surface embellishments, weaving or aesthetic inspirations. The scope of the thesis has been identified as Australia, India, China and Japan and the reasons for this selection have been given. The concept of transnational is applied to discover the presence of such networks. In order to investigate these practices in detail, the case study method has been employed as the research methodology and the reasons for this selection have been outlined. The elements of data collection that were utilized to gather information to write the case study have also been identified.

Discovering Transnationalism

2





This Chapter focuses on the literature informing the process of transnationalism, which is responsible for the circulation of aesthetics between different geographies. Approaching fashion practices using this method highlights the underlying flows and exchanges that enable labels to realise and develop their fashion identities. It also highlights the importance of Asia as both a creative inspiration and a manufacturing hub. The technical facilities available facilitate designers to experiment and develop ideas in a variety of ways, including but not limited to textures, prints, motifs, weaving and surface embellishments. Through this transnational exchange of aesthetics, these designers interact with the craftsmen/women themselves and exchange knowledge on a personal level. This two-way conversation enables the designers to transfer Western aesthetics to the craftspeople and by developing and/or altering traditional techniques with their collaboration, new vocabularies of design and technique for the Western consumers are developed. Exchanging aesthetics brings about a fusion that results in innovation of an existing technique and its acceptance within a Western context. A new set of aesthetics is developed and these can be termed as transnational, which caters to a specific high end niche market of the East as well as the West. As the art of hand-making is time consuming and costly, it involves a patient partnership between the artisan and the designer. This type of fashion has a double appeal: on the one hand, it expresses the freshness of the artisanal touch, and on the other, a resonance of a traditional story which connects with the uniqueness of a culture that holds reverence for the hand made.

As the concept of the transnational has many facets, a review of the fashion collections of the 1990's as investigated by Niessen et al. (2003) is discussed below to develop an understanding of the phenomenon.

Rationale for the Research

The 1990's heralded the acceptance of Asian styled fashion changing the way people within and without Asia think about and practice dress (Niessen et al., 2003). This trend, termed as 'Asian Chic' occurred in waves with an initial peak in 1992/93 corresponding with the release of Asian-themed films, 'such as *M. Butterfly* (Cronenberg, 1993), *Indochine* (Wargnier, 1992), *Heaven and Earth* (Stone, 1993) and *The Wedding Banquet* (Lee, 1993), and Asian-inspired videos by Janet Jackson and Madonna (Niessen et al., 2003: p 1). A second wave occurred with the release of *Memoirs of a Geisha* (Golden, 1997) and with the growing popularity of the Dalai Lama and an interest in Buddhism. Neissen et al. state that throughout the decade, stylistic inspirations and cultural practices from Asia



became mainstream but retained an exotic flair. Sarong skirts, Kimono jackets and yoga pants became part of the working vocabulary of American designers. Over the years, traditional garments such as the Salwar Kameez, the Japanese Kimono and the Chinese Cheongsam have become familiar around the globe and serve as inspiration for European, North American and Australian designers. They argue that even as the cross-fertilisation of Asian and Western styles change concepts of dress, dress practices associated with Asia and Asians have constantly been reworked through what they term as ‘homogenized heterogeneity’: “their difference identified, assessed, and appropriated, purportedly with the goal of deciding where Asian dress fits into the global pantheon of clothing configurations.” (Niessen et al., 2003:P 5).

The authors argue that no matter how applauded these styles may be by fashion elites located in the centres of power, they are considered lesser than, or other to their Western counterparts. This view is contrary to the suppositions proposed by this thesis, where the three case studies of Australian designers exhibit environments that are part of a niche market where this very aspect of otherness is celebrated through the incorporation of Asian shapes, craft, textures, motifs and fabrics. These designers source Asia to distinguish themselves from the mass manufactured fashion template, and to celebrate and integrate various aspects of Asia within their craft. This exchange between East and West creates a hybrid fashion that is appealing and is marketable to both sides of the globe, from the countries in the West to high end boutiques in the Middle East. To avoid over simplifying the issue, the case studies are examined with a view to not only celebrate the existence of Asian crafts and aesthetics within the Australian fashion industry, but to understand the reasoning that governs these practices.

Is it, as according to Niessen et al.; a cultural acceptance of Asian imagery and aesthetics that has redefined the way people inside and outside Asia think about and practice dress in the 21st Century? Or is it a niche market practice that celebrates the difference of cultures by interweaving East with West. Can it be viewed through the lens of the transnational where national borders are traversed to access and combine cultures and aesthetics to create new imaginaries? These are the questions that underpin this thesis and will be analysed by exploring case studies on the three nominated Australian designers who share an affinity with Asian inspired aesthetics, crafts, textures and embroideries. Their practices span multiple geographies to combine cultural traditional techniques with Western aesthetics to create transnational imaginaries.

Transnational Link

This study began with the view to confirm the presence of Asian aesthetics and techniques within certain segments of the Australian fashion industry and the reasons governing their inclusion. Completing a literature review for the research led to the awareness of the phenomenon of transnationalism, which brought a new lens and aided in viewing these practices in a new light. Based in Australia, these practices are accessing the textile resources of Asia as a medium to develop and furnish their labels. The geographies involved are an integral part of their practice and serve as an offshore workshop which functions as a high end atelier combining Western aesthetics with Eastern techniques. As the case studies will exhibit, traditional techniques are applied in non-traditional ways thus creating hybrid designs that are neither Eastern nor Western (see Figure 2.1).

The distinction that should be made at this point is that these practices do not involve middle men that outsource work to nameless factories somewhere in Asia. On the contrary, these designers collaborate with the artisans in an exchange of skill and creativity that develops new – and borderless – imaginaries.

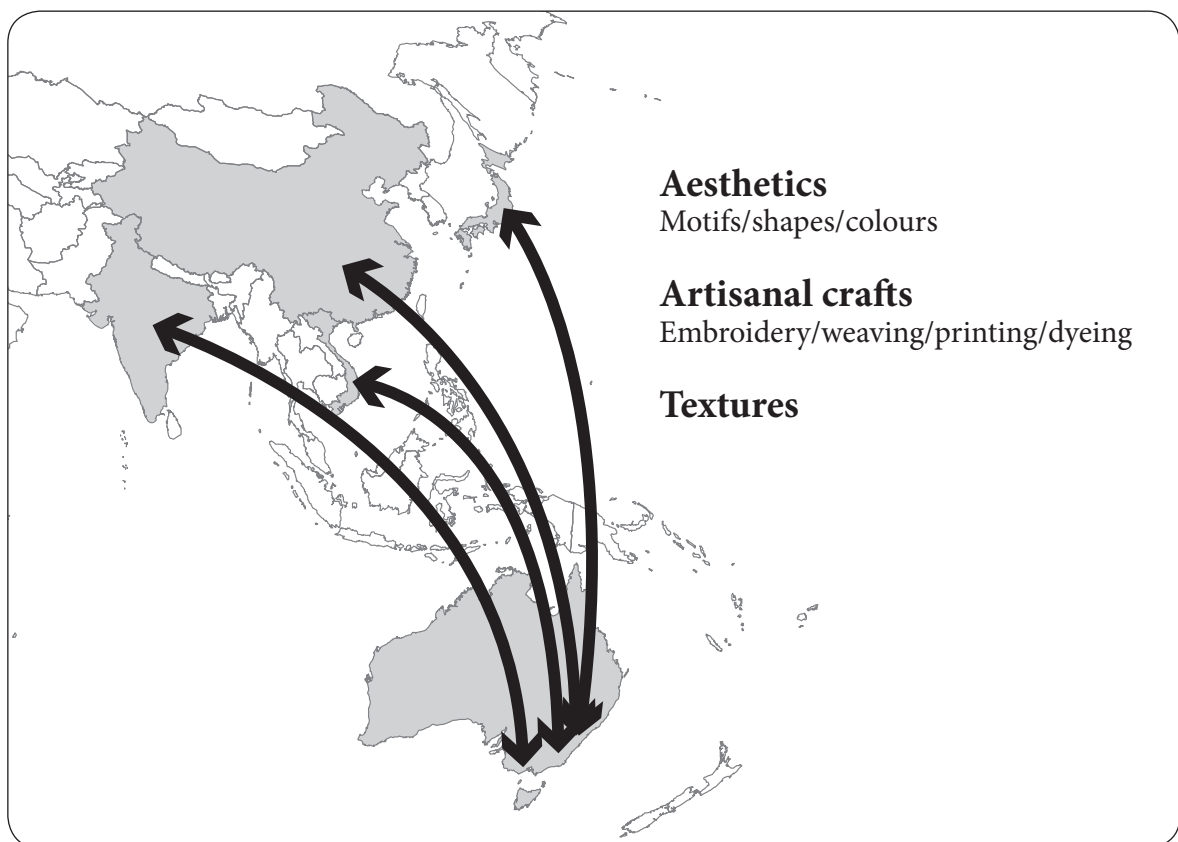


Figure 2.1 Flows of aesthetics and crafts within a transnational framework, Shazia Bano 2012
Map [Accessed 30th June 2012] from http://www.freeusandworldmaps.com/html/World_Projections/WorldPrint.html

Transnationalism

To analyse the concept of transnational fashion, literature review was conducted on the writings of (Appadurai, 1986, Cook and Crang, 1996, Crang et al., 2003, Dwyer, 2005, Dwyer and Jackson, 2003, Jackson et al., 2004). Arjun Appadurai, who edited the groundbreaking text *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (1988) examines the role of material culture in human social life. Appadurai's article, "Commodities and the Politics of Value," (1998: p 3) summarises a socialized view of commodities. He argues that commodities may be said to have social lives because they embody value as created by a society. Moreover, Appadurai stresses that "commodity" is only one possible phase in the social life of an object as it travels within different regimes of value.

Cook & Crang, Dwyer and Jackson's extensive research on transnationalism in the field of commodity culture, cuisine and fashion, posits that transnationalism deals with two rather different contentions. The first addresses the interconnectedness between people and places, which has intensified during the modern epoch producing an increasingly compressed economic, political and cultural world. The second is the increased consciousness of these compressions and their construction of the world as a single locale.

To appreciate it in depth, it is important to contextualize the historic development of the concept of transnationalism and its contemporary application with reference to fashion.

'Transnational' as a word has been described by the online Oxford dictionary resource (Oxford, 2011) as '*extending or operating across national boundaries*' whilst as a concept transnationalism has been described as a recent phenomenon (Vertovec, 1999, Mitchell, 2009, Calvin, 2005). The term was first coined in 1919 with reference to discussion of migration and identity in the United States (Calvin, 2005).

Nye and Keohane (1971), published their pioneering work, *Transnational Relations and World Politics* defining transnational as a global relationship that can be seen in a wide variety of phenomena including multinational business enterprises, trade unions and scientific work, international air transport cartels and communications activities in outer space. Global interactions can be grouped as movement of information, money, physical objects, people or other tangible or non-tangible items across border-states. These global interactions can be grouped into four categories:

1. movement of information, ideas, doctrines;
2. movement of physical objects such as merchandise;
3. movement of money and instruments of credit;
4. movement of persons for travel or work.' (Joseph S. Nye and Keohane, 1971: p 332)

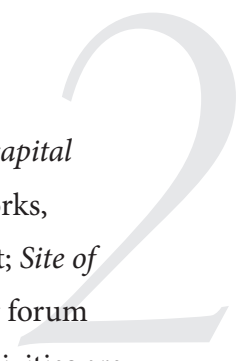
Many international activities involve all four types of these interactions simultaneously through networks, communities, flows and boundaries.

Secondly, Sklair (1998) defines transnational practices as practices that cross state boundaries but do not necessarily originate with state agencies or actors. He further states that transnational practices operate in three spheres: the economic, the political and the cultural-ideological, which he terms as 'the global system.' He argues that individuals, groups, institutions, communities, local, national or transnational, can exist outside the global capitalistic system. According to Sklair, the building blocks of global system theory are the transnational corporation, economic transnational practices and the culture ideology of consumerism.

The third perspective is outlined by Vertovec (1999), the Director of the Economic and Social Research Council's (ESRC) 'transnational communities' research programme conducted by the University of Oxford. Vertovec (1999: p 447) states that, "transnationalism broadly refers to multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of Nation-states." These systems of ties, interactions and mobility function in real time disseminating information throughout the world. Transnationalism expresses a situation where, despite great distances and notwithstanding international borders, certain kinds of relationships have been strengthened and take place in a planet-spanning area of activity, which can also include the virtual world. Recent literature on transnationalism has attributed the characteristics of intensity and simultaneity as a hallmark of the term. Vertovec (1999) offers insight into six distinct conceptual premises which form the basis of theory and research on transnationalism. These include:

- *Social morphology,*
- *Type of consciousness,*
- *Mode of cultural reproduction,*
- *Avenue of capital,*
- *Political engagement, and*
- *A reconstruction of place and locality.* (Vertovec, 1999)


In one way, Vertovec's concepts build on the four categories suggested by Nye and Keohane in 1971, where *social morphology* relates to the concept of diasporas, movements of people for work or travel as suggested by Nye and Keohane. *Types of consciousness* links individual's awareness of decentred attachments creating new transnational imaginaries that reshape different forms of contemporary cultural production. *Mode of cultural reproduction* shares the concept of movement of information, ideas, and doctrines where a fluidity of constructed styles and ideas are often described as *creolization, bricolage* and *hybridity*.



Vertovec attributes this concept to fashion, music, film and visual arts. *Avenue of capital* is concerned with transnational corporations, globe-spanning structures or networks, which Nye and Keohane refer to as movement of money and instruments of credit; *Site of political engagement* refers to a transnational framework – a global public space or forum for the mobilization of support and enhancement of public participation. Such activities are represented by international non-governmental organizations including the Red Cross and various United Nations agencies; *Reconstruction of place* and locality relates to practices and meanings derived from specific geographical and historical points of origin due to the high degree of human mobility, telecommunications, films and videos that have contributed to the creation of trans-local understandings.

The concept of the transnational explores an awkward cohabitation of two different geographies according to Crang et al. (2003: p 404), “It operates as a figure that liquefies borders, challenges appeals to local contexts and evokes a condition in which we are all in some way implicated.” The authors suggest that the concept should be viewed through the lens of commodity culture. Such a space can locate accounts of the transnational in the particular movements of commodities, ideas, people and capitals and at the same time, avoids fixing transnational space into overly simplistic and concrete forms. The authors suggest that; “transnationality is a multidimensional space that is multiply inhabited and characterized by complex networks, circuits and flows... that the transnational needs specifying and locating, its geography re-emphasize” (Crang et al., 2003: p 441-442). This suggests that the concept cannot be moulded into a specific definition as it occupies space that has geographies, networks and flows that are specific to individual situations. They base their argument on the culinary culture of our times, which combines the flavours and tastes of multiple geographical settings whilst at the same time, being tasted and accepted in a local environment. In such scenarios cultural and spatial distances are refashioned to create products celebrated for their global sourcing and their local appeal. They posit that these commodities in their construction obscure their own origins and the product appears and disappears before the consumer’s eyes. Furthermore, only an astute consumer can distinguish the provenance of the commodity and the communities involved in their production.

Transnationalism, within the scope of cuisine and fashion, localises tastes and aesthetics from different locations and morphs it into a globalised form where “distant places of production are... brought together into a network where diverse environments interact... through the actions of a corporate food industry” (Arce and Marsden, 1993, p 302) as quoted in (Cook and Crang, 1996).



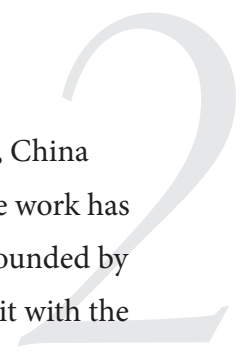
Within the confines of fashion, products are often sourced in the developing countries either due to cost considerations or the appreciation of artisanal qualities using local artisans. Once the product manufactured in any part of Asia reaches the Western markets, it is difficult for the average consumer to distinguish the provenance of that garment unless the product sits in a market catering for a clientele who have the knowledge and the means available to them to appreciate the craftsmanship of the commodity.

Transnationalism explores connections, communities of interest, commonality of character and groups sharing the same organisation and locality (Calvin, 2005). Calvin argues that transnationalism is best understood as creating *honeycombs*, a structure that gives shape and sustains the identities of nation-states, international and local institutions and social and geographic spaces, but at the same time, contains hollowed out spaces where individuals and ideas have their own identities and imaginaries.

Mitchell (2009) defines the term as one having heightened interconnectivity of people and things that flow across borders and boundaries in greater volume and speed than ever before. According to Mitchell, transnationalism is generally used in the social sciences to describe a practice where cultural or territorial boundaries of the nation are crossed or contested in new kinds of ways. Within the scope of this study, these border crossings or boundaries will be referred to by the circulation of commodities and flow of culture and ideas as proposed by Jackson et al (2004). Mitchell states that the study of transnational commodity culture widens the field of study to encompass a range of activities, goods, people and ideas that would not qualify as transnational if the term was restricted solely to “an ongoing series of cross border movements in which immigrants develop and maintain numerous economic, political social and cultural links in more than one nation.”

A historical analysis of the transnational phenomenon provides an insight into the investigation of the case studies in question as similar routes of contact exist between different geographies. This leans on the concepts of social morphology and mode of cultural development as proposed by Vertovec. These definitions discuss transnationalism in terms of bounded systems, which can be defined as the specific components constituting the parameters. This study researches a bounded system of creativity and production of a particular type of fashion where the actors involved in the supply of fashion are designers catering to a select group of consumers who ascribe to the handmade aspect of fashion. Each one of these designer labels operates within a transnational system with their own specific boundaries that define their transnationality.

On the whole, the geographically bounded system of this study is currently comprised of Australia, India, China, Japan and Vietnam. The fashion discussed in the case studies in



question, has the provenance of East and West: East being Asia (specifically, India, China and Japan) and West represented by the cultural context of Australian fashion. The work has an emphasis on hand-crafted and artisanal content by creating hybrid design unbounded by geographical constraints but employing the aesthetics of the West and combining it with the techniques of the East, and in this process, it develops a unique identity.

Before analysis of the above mentioned case studies, a literature review was conducted on parallel studies where there were inter-geographic practices with similar premises of sourcing in Asia and selling in the West. These studies shed light on the commodity culture of the transnational.

Parallel Studies on Transnational Fashion

To investigate the broader field of transnational social space, research conducted by Crang et al (2003) was reviewed. Their study analysed this concept within a larger parameter of the food and fashion sector. The study involved a number of phases including:

- an overview of the food and fashion sector
- the selection of a smaller number of case study firms for in-depth interviewing
- a series of focus groups with consumers in Britain and India.

Through this empirical work, they were able to develop the argument that transnationality is multiply-inhabited, which means that the social space encompassed by transnational commodity culture includes a wide variety of actors with varying investments in experiences and expressions of transnationalism. They studied cases of companies run by British-Asian entrepreneurs, and companies founded by non Asians; Damini's clothing company originally of Indian descent, i.e. operating out of Asia but catering to migrant communities (indigenous flow), and fashion retailers EAST, operating between Britain and India and catering to a wider community (reverse flow). Their research reveals various dimensions of transnationalism that can be traced in an analysis of commodity culture. They suggest that transnationalism can be considered in a biographical sense in terms of the personal, familial profiles of particular entrepreneurs. A comparison of clothing companies Damini's, EAST (Figure 2.2), Anokhi and Ghulam Sakina (Figure 2.3) (Dwyer, 2003, Dwyer and Jackson, 2003, Dwyer and Crang, 2002) reveal different biographical stories.

They placed their emphasis on the production of difference through the manufacture and marketing of particular branded goods. In addition, they examined the manner that goods acquire meaning at different points along the commodity chain: particularly, the way the case study firms commodified their connections with India; ethical trading and social responsibility, and culturally constructed ideas of design individuality. These cases are

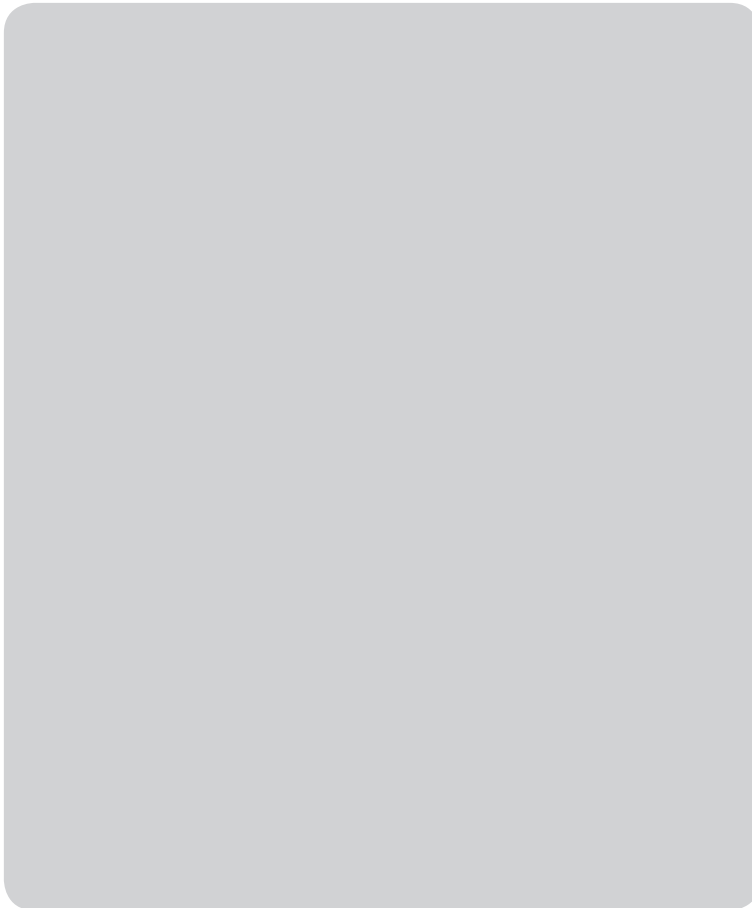


Figure 2.2 Ghulam Sakina. A transnational label using combinations of Colours and textures and traditional Indian shapes manufactured in Delhi and London. *British Asian style : Fashion & Textiles, Past & Present*, Christopher Breward, et al., London, V&A Publishing 2010, Print.

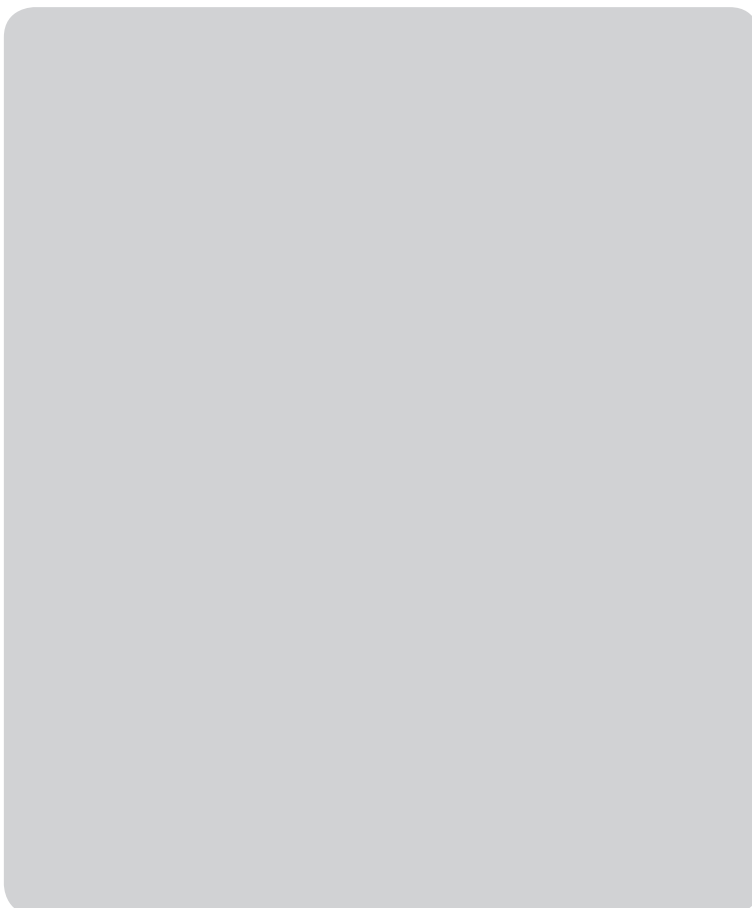
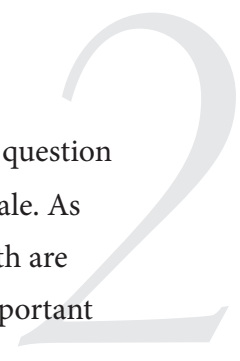


Figure 2.3 East. Mirror Embroidered Yoke Tunic Black [Accessed 31st August 2012] from <http://www.east.co.uk/store/MIRROR+EMBROIDERED+YOKE+TUNIC/BLK-BLACKX/Black/>



reviewed for this thesis as there are similarities with the Australian case studies in question in terms of their contact with Asia and where the common thread is the Asian locale. As such, there are common transnational threads between the two sets of studies. Both are involved in transnational networks of production and marketing, but there are important differences in terms of their commercial objectives and business practices.

For example, EAST strives to extend its High Street through its association with a generalised ‘ethnic’ aesthetic but also through a commitment to design individuality. Similarly, Anokhi has an ‘Indian’ aesthetic, based on the traditional crafts of hand-blocked printing methods and a socially responsible attitude towards their work force of indigenous handmade production Dwyer and Crang (2002).

They focus on the flows of particular transnational commodities between the Indian sub- continent and Britain in the food and fashion sector. They argue that transnationalism is not restricted to transmigrant communities, but by tracing the commodity culture, they emphasise that:

transnational space is inhabited by a whole range of differently positioned actors, including producers (owners of labour and capital), wholesalers, buyers and retailers (in supermarkets and specialist outlets) and cultural intermediaries (including advertisers, journalists and other expert writers) as well as a wide array of consumers in a wide range of places.
(Crang et al., 2003: p 448)

The case studies conducted by Dwyer and Crang referenced the concept proposed by Arjun Appadurai in his 1986 text *The Social Life Of Things* in which he posits that “things-in-motion... illuminate their human and social context” (Appadurai, 1986: p 5). He further states, “... We have to follow things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories.” (ibid).

Appadurai’s approach inspired this research in terms of following the practices of these designers to chart the route that their products take during production and onwards to their markets, in order to better understand the exact nature of its human and social context, and to comprehend what differentiates one design practice from another.

The case studies forming the basis of this research include: the design label Easton Pearson, who have a deep respect for the crafts of India and incorporate the skills of the Indian artisans in their collections with Western aesthetics; Akira Isogawa, an Australian-based design label of Japanese origins using the aesthetic sensibilities of Japan and combining them with the specialities of the Indian craftsperson and; Vixen, an Australian label based in Melbourne founded by textile designer Georgia Chapman, and heavily influenced by the aesthetics of Asia as evidenced in the colours and prints of her collection.

Defining Fashion as Commodity

Within the context of this thesis, fashion has been viewed as a commodity as suggested by Mitchell (2009). For this reason, it is important to define the word *commodity* and its usage within this thesis. The Merriam–Webster dictionary defines ‘commodity’ as “something useful or valued” (Webster, 2010).

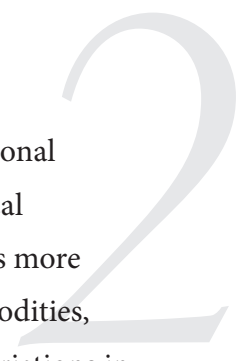
According to Watts (1999), *commodity* can be understood as many things: it can be the product and embodiment of social relations of production; a form of aesthetics; a means of realising an exchange value; the product of particular business and organisational geographies; and a resource allowing the objectification of social relations for consumers.

Appadurai (1986) approaches *commodities* as things in a *certain situation*; he describes a situation as one that can characterise many different kinds of things at different points in their social life.

Elaborating on these two definitions of commodity, it can be said that the biography of a commodity (fashion garment) charts the movement and the flows of objects undergoing production from one geographic locale to another. The fashion produced by the Australian designers undergoes a set of social relations that can be termed as *situations* during each step of their production. These situations are geographically bounded, flowing from the aesthetics of one geography to the production and marketing in different geographies.

Commodities represent very complex forms and distributions of knowledge (Appadurai, 1986). Another aspect comes into play in understanding the flow of commodities, which is the knowledge involved within those flows or circuits. Appadurai argues that knowledge can be of two types; the knowledge that goes into the production of the commodity, i.e. technical, social, aesthetic and so forth, and knowledge that goes into appropriately consuming the commodity. Furthermore, he suggests that the production knowledge with which the commodity is imbued is quite different from the consumption knowledge that is read from the commodity. Hence, according to Appadurai, if we consider that some commodities have “life histories,” then it becomes helpful to look at the allocation of knowledge at various points in the life of the commodity. The point of production, “is likely to be dominated by culturally standardized recipes for fabrication” (Appadurai, 1986: p 42).

These culturally standard recipes of fabrication are tapped by Australian designers and applied to their practices using non-traditional applications to create fashion. An example to support this statement is the Chinese thread work embroidery sourced by Akira in China but altered/modified to create new imaginaries (Parkes, 2006). Thus, according to Appadurai these production loci are repositories (in the first place) of technical production of a highly standardized sort. These may range from factories and forges to mines, and



in the domain of fashion ateliers, workshops/studios of artisans involved in traditional handcraft techniques and designers involved in creative development. The technical knowledge required to produce primary commodities such as grains, metals etc. is more standardized than the knowledge required to produce secondary or luxury commodities, where personal style, taste, trends and individual experience are likely to create variations in production knowledge.

Identifying Bounded Systems of this Study

For this study, three different sets of bounded systems are identified that recognise the commodity situation of the individual practices of three Australian designers. As explained previously, these bounded systems entail traffic between three to four different geographic locations within two different cultural milieus. The designers chosen create a distinction within their product by emphasising/utilising the communities involved in their production system thus authenticating the specified paths used to construct their commodity. These three geographies suggest the understanding that the production of localised knowledge adds value to the product. This would identify a geographically bounded system, which has spaces of identity exhibiting a culture other than the mass manufactured, hence a niche market within the Australian fashion industry where specialised craft or technique can be practiced as part of the normal system. Such a system would use non-domestic (transnational) technologies for their production and domestic sites for their consumption.

In terms of fashion, cloth has long been considered an instrument of sending finely-tuned social messages and as such is likely to be less responsive to shifts in supply or price (Appadurai 1986: p 33). For this reason, the demand for handcrafted textiles in fashion is not trend-directed but is cherished for the skill involved in its production. This relates directly to that segment of fashion design that sources the specialist skills of Asia to produce their products. However, if as Appadurai states, cloth is an instrument of sending finely-tuned messages then within the context of this thesis, what are the messages being sent by this design community within the context of their practice? Are they accessing the crafts of Asia due to the specialist skills available there, or is it a question of creating a point of difference in their product by way of accessing the unique qualities of a handcraft, which is practically non-existent in the Western Hemisphere? Moreover, is it done specifically to serve a community of the artisans, or is it purely of an economic nature? In either case, the effort that goes into producing a handcrafted garment is clearly visible in the quality and techniques involved, and it is this artistry that the consumers within this niche market seek

out. Such garments are trend averse and are consistently presented from season to season.

The most significant aspect of the argument is why do these designers go to Asia? The answer to this question cannot be simplified as merely price-driven which is a major factor for many designers choosing to produce in Asia. For the purposes of this thesis, there is distinct differentiation between the mass market and the high end niche market. The reasons then for designers working in the high end niche market choosing to source from Asia can be attributed to their methodology of incorporating artisanal handcrafting skills within their product. Such artistry is minimally accessible in the West and using the local skills available, Asian countries provide the perfect environment in which to transform Western ideas and inspirations into fashion garments ready for the Western market. The resulting process is a fusion of Eastern techniques and Western ideas and gives rise to a niche market that is accepted for this very quality. As such, the analysis of the case studies of Australian designers seeks to explore the culture-producing process where Asian aesthetics and techniques are absorbed, and used within a Western bounded system of aesthetics, whilst being accepted as a hybrid creative expression. In employing the traditional local crafts of Asia, these designers are creating a diverse path for those indigenous skills that are readily becoming a part of the Western fashion vocabulary and creative system, as Appadurai states. These traditional techniques break away from their original mould and are accepted within a foreign environment due to their unique craftsmanship. This phenomenon will be further discussed.

Aesthetics of Decontextualization

Diversion of commodities is described as a scenario where objects produced for aesthetic, ceremonial and sumptuary use in small communities are changed culturally, economically and socially by the tastes, markets and ideologies of larger economies (Appadurai, 1986). This phenomenon best expresses itself in the domain of fashion; where Western brands source the craft communities of Asia to furnish their design practices. Crafts traditionally used for ceremonial and religious purposes are used to supply the demands of fashion, domestic display and collectors. Appadurai uses the term commoditization by diversion, where value in the art, or fashion market is enhanced by placing objects and things in unlikely situations: situations that decontextualize aesthetics, traditional techniques, or their applications. Appadurai calls it the *aesthetics of decontextualization*, which is driven by the quest for novelty. This concept resonates with the practices of designers within the milieu of fashion, where practitioners source techniques of a wide variety of specialized craft communities in diverse geographical locations, and place those indigenous techniques

within Western contexts creating diversions. These commodities now break away from their original meaning and hence can be termed as decontextualized objects.

A good example of such decontextualization is the company Vastrakala, established in India by Jean-François Lesage, the son of the legendary French *haute couture* embroiderer François Lesage. Vastrakala is based in Chennai, India, and specializes in embroideries catering to the high end lifestyle and interiors' industry. The crafts of *zardozi* and *ari*, traditionally applied in the Indian subcontinent to embellish ceremonial attire, is re-purposed here to create cushions, curtains and soft furnishings, etc. Employing over two hundred craftsmen, since 1993, the workshop continues the centuries old Lesage family embroidery tradition. Vastrakala was responsible for creating the king's bed chamber draperies at Vaux le Comte, Henry IV's Chambre at the Pau chateau and sewed Josephine's curtains at Malmaison amongst other historic European museum commissions (Morel, 2009). Objects created at Vastrakala today are removed from their workshop setting in Madras and these items, as mentioned by Appadurai, "...break away from their original mould" (Appadurai, 1986), and are completely absorbed in a European setting (Figure 2.4).

The same practice applies to fashion where garments are developed in Asia using the typical indigenous crafts and decontextualized by applying Western aesthetics to appeal to a given audience. In these objects, it is possible to see not only the equation of the authentic with the exotic everyday object, but according to Appadurai, the aesthetics of diversion. For example, the Australian designers source the traditional crafts of Asia for a fashion destined for the Western markets. These traditional techniques break away from their original mould and are absorbed within an Australian context.

The enhancement of value through diversion of commodities from their customary circuits underlies this thesis; as the diversion of the artisanal crafts of Asian communities combined with the aesthetics of the West and coupled with the entrepreneurial link, defines the practice of these designers. But Appadurai states that diversions are meaningful only in relation to the paths from which they stray. Hence, to understand the diversion in 'the social life' of any commodity in a given society, the challenge is to define the relevant customary path of the commodity in question, to understand the logic of diversion properly. He suggests that it is imperative to define the path and the diversion and to understand the relationship between the two. The fashion world is full of examples of the phenomenon of diversion of commodities. Another example is the Australian label Caravana, founded by designers Cath Braid and Kirsten Ainsworth who worked with women embroiderers living in the North-West frontier region of the Chitral Valley in Pakistan, where they attempted to incorporate the traditional embroideries of local women within a fashion practice.

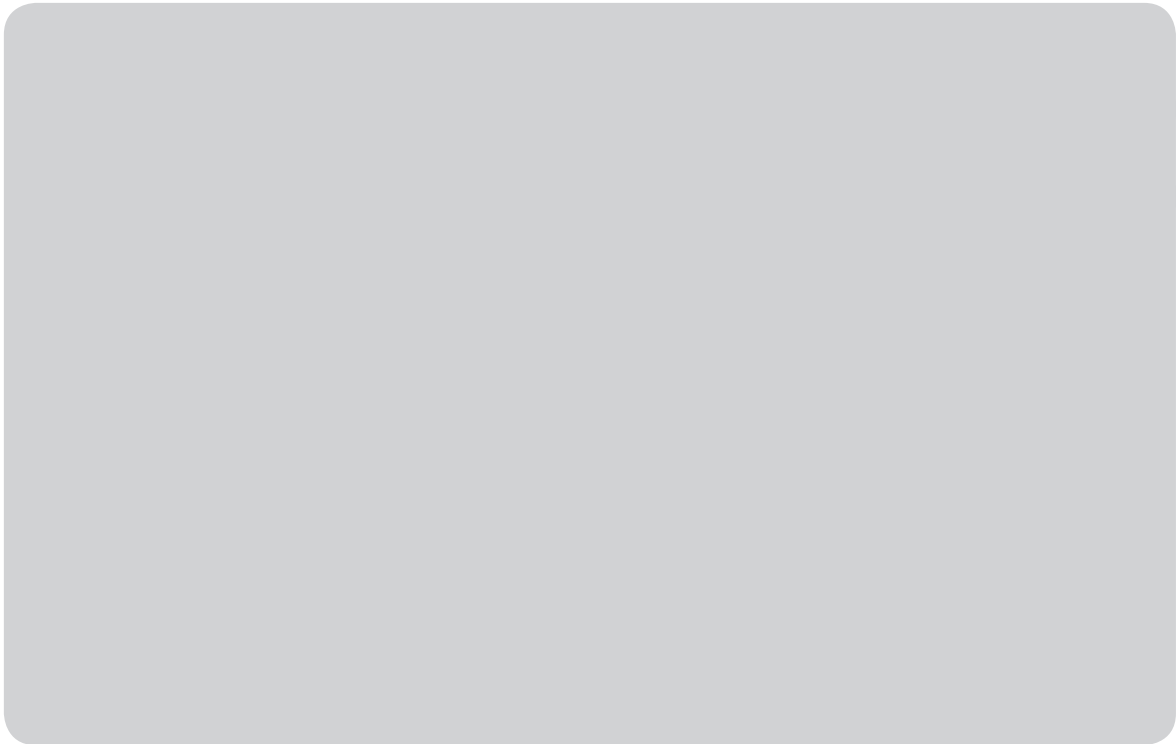


Figure 2.4 Jean Francoise Lesage, French couturier and owner of Vastrakala
[Accessed 7th February 2010] from <http://www.thehindu.com/arts/crafts/article77176.ece>

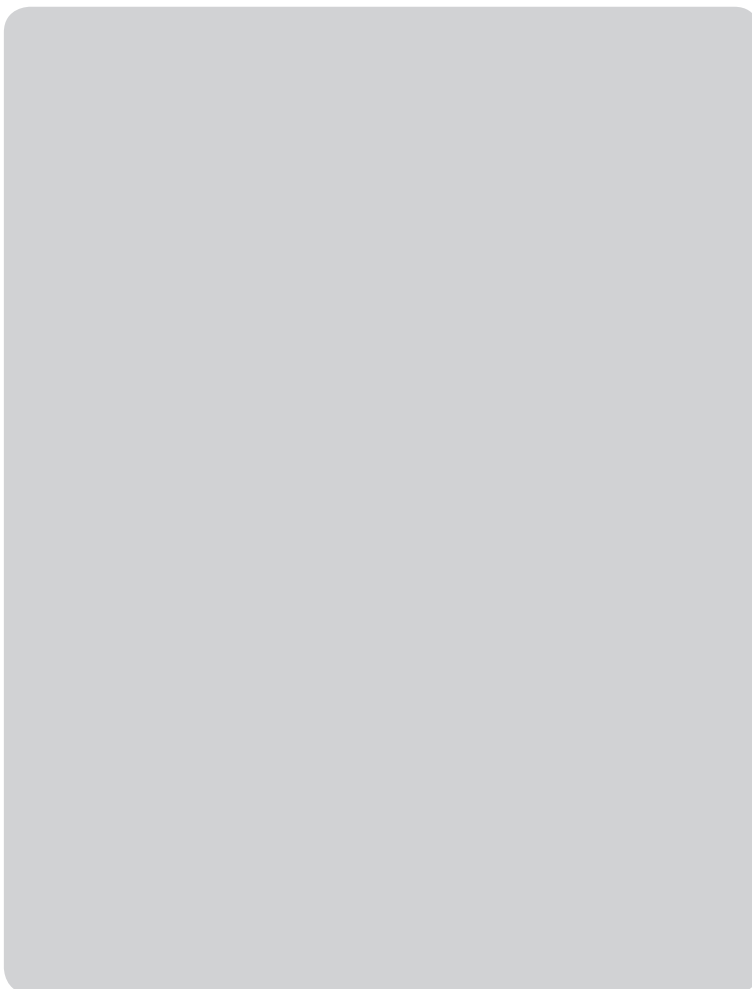


Figure 2.5 Caravana Autumn Winter 2006
[Accessed 7th February 2010] from http://fashion.vogue.com.au//media/images/1/4/2/0/0/142044-1_n.jpg?

Their embroideries combined traditional patterns within the Western format provided by Caravana (Figure 2.5).

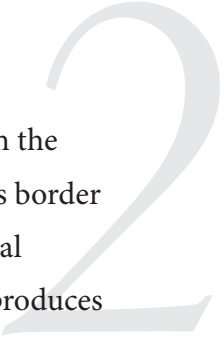
The results proved very successful despite the enormous difficulties involved in the process. Located in the mountainous region of the Karakoram ranges, the valley is virtually cut off from the rest of the world during the winter months. Caravana's practice celebrated the art of the handmade in its true essence by incorporating the indigenous techniques of a select group of women in the Karakoram Mountains, made it accessible to the world and at the same time, acceptable in a Western environment. Once again, the craft changed form once it was decontextualised and became part of a hybrid design practice, which displayed a different identity to the earlier traditional application of the technique. International designers such as Belgium's Dries Van Noten and the UK's Matthew Williamson have also been inspired by the rich colour and crafts of India (Blanchard, 2002, Menkes, 2009) and have sourced fabrics, embroideries and printing in India.

The Diasporas of Imagination

The reason that the concept of the diaspora has been mentioned at this point is that the literature review conducted for this study developed a recognition/awareness of a troupe of designers/labels that access the crafts of Asia to enhance the content of their fashion by way of adding the handcrafted element available in specific communities in Asia. Can these troupes be called Diasporas of Imagination? To understand this concept, it is important to analyse the meaning of the word *diaspora*.

The term *diaspora* is derived from the Greek verb *speiro*, meaning 'to sow' and the preposition *dia* meaning 'over' (Cohen, 1997). Ancient Greeks used the word diaspora to refer to migration and colonization. For the Jews, Africans, Palestinians and Armenians, Diaspora signified a collective trauma, a banishment where living in exile they dreamed of home. In recent years, communities living abroad maintaining collective identities have defined themselves as diasporas, though they neither faced prosecution nor were active agents of colonization, thus the definition of diaspora varies greatly (Cohen, 1997).

Cohen suggests five types of overarching diasporas: Victim, Labour, Trade, and Imperial and Cultural diasporas, the last also includes a diaspora which is formed by acts of imagination. This thesis relates to the latter. This concept claims that transnational bonds do not have to be confirmed by migration or territorial claims. Cohen argues that in the age of cyberspace, a diaspora can be created and held together through shared imagination, through cultural artefacts and through the mind.




It is the intention of this thesis to look at the concept of the transnational through the lens of the *diasporas of imagination* which are created by designers involved in cross border networks and systems; developing types of consciousness through a mode of cultural reproduction. The selected case studies for the research are part of a diaspora that produces fashion built upon constructed styles created through shared imagination that can be termed as hybrid cultural translation manifesting new imaginaries. The labels Easton Pearson and Akira Isogawa communicate across long distances to further their practice where their products are developed in Asia, and subsequently involve the traditional technical expertise of a substantial number of people. Can these designers be part of a *diaspora of imagination* as proposed by Cohen (1997)? Such a diaspora would comprise of creative professionals in the field of fashion design, who traverse national boundaries to combine the imaginaries and culture of nations, in search of skill, techniques and craft. These distant lands are generally somewhere in Asia, due to various reasons which can be economic, cultural or skill based.

Conclusion

This chapter discusses the concept of transnationalism as one that extends and crosses national boundaries and is visible in a wide variety of phenomenon. These transnational practices should be viewed through the lens of commodity culture as proposed by the literature referenced. Transnational is a multidimensional space that is inhabited by many factors and specificities. Each transnational setup has its own specifics, which identify the elements constituting that system. For example within the practice of fashion designers, these can range from individual geographies to cultures, craft traditions, techniques and artisans involved within transnational space of that designer.

Various explanations/definitions of the term transnational were reviewed which informed this research. For example; transnationalism dealt with the interconnectedness between people and places and the increased consciousness of the world as a single locale; a phenomenon which includes different types of business and scientific practices; practices that cross state boundaries but do not necessarily originate with state agencies or actors. Transnationalism expresses a situation where despite great distances and notwithstanding international borders, certain kinds of relationships have been strengthened and take place in a planet spanning area of activity that can be virtual as well.

The literature reviewed argues that the transnational operates as a figure that liquefies borders, and the concept should be viewed through the lens of commodity culture. Such a space locates accounts of the transnational in the particular movements of commodities,



ideas, people and capitals and at the same time avoids fixing transnational space into overly simplistic and concrete forms. The literature suggests that transnationality is a multidimensional space that is inhabited by complex networks, circuits and flows that vary from each other. This concept informed the research in that there is no specific definition of the term as the phenomenon occupies space that involves geographies, networks and flows that are specific to individual situations.

The concept of the transnational has been viewed in terms of a bounded system that can be defined as the specific components that constitute the parameters of each transnational network. Each case study analysed for this research has its own transnational network where the designers involved ascribe to the handmade aspect of fashion and operate within a transnational system defined by the selection of their own prescribed geographies that constitutes their practices.

The overarching bounded system of this study comprises Australia, India, China Japan and Vietnam. The fashion produced by the case studies in question has the provenance of both East and West; East being Asia (India, China and Japan), and West being the cultural context of Australian fashion. The work has an emphasis on hand-crafted and artisanal content by creating hybrid design, which is not bounded by geographical constraints but uses the aesthetics of the West and combines it with the techniques of the East, and in this process develops a unique identity.

The chapter situates the concept of transnational within the confines of fashion where products are often sourced in the developing countries due to cost considerations or artisanal qualities using local artisans. Due to the combination of various specificities of the manufacturing of the garment, which does not only include the artisanal hand work but also the Western aesthetics, including choice of colours, cut of the garment, fabric used, the Asian craft techniques become embedded in the final product and are hard to distinguish for the average customer unless the product is geared for a specific market that appreciates the quality of the craft.

To develop a better understanding of the Australian case studies, parallel studies were analysed that looked at practices between India and Britain in the domain of food and fashion, which reveal different biographies and transnationalities.

These cases were based on companies run by British-Asian entrepreneurs, and companies founded by non-Asians accessing Indian craft. They reveal various dimensions of transnationalism that can be traced in an analysis of commodity culture where things in motion illuminate their human and social context. This approach helped in following the practices of Australian designers to understand the exact nature of the human and social

context, and to comprehend what differentiates one design practice from another. The case studies that form the basis of this research focus on the design labels Easton Pearson, Akira Isogawa and Vixen, which are influenced by and access the craft or aesthetics of Asia within their practice.

This chapter also analyses the concept of fashion in terms of a commodity, which is defined as the product and embodiment of social relations of production; a form of aesthetics; a means of realising an exchange value; the product of particular business and organisational geographies; and a resource allowing the objectification of social relations for consumers. Commodities have also been defined as things in a certain situation, and a situation is defined as one that can characterize many different kinds of things at different points in their social life.

Elaborating on these two definitions of a commodity (fashion garment) charts the movement and the flows of objects undergoing production from one geography to another. Hence, the fashion produced by the Australian designers undergoes a set of situations during each step of their production. These situations are geographically bounded, flowing from the aesthetics of one geography to the production and marketing in different geographies.

Another concept reviewed in this Chapter is that of the *aesthetics of diversion*, which can be described as a scenario where objects produced for aesthetic, ceremonial and sumptuary use in small communities are changed culturally, economically and socially by the tastes, markets and ideologies of larger economies. The term commoditization by diversion is a situation where value in the art, or fashion market is enhanced by placing objects and things in unlikely situations. Designers access the craft communities of Asia known for traditional techniques but change the application of the craft to suit a Western audience.

The concept of the *diasporas of imagination* is also touched upon as the literature review conducted for this study developed a recognition/awareness of a troupe of designers/labels that access the crafts of Asia to enhance the content of their fashion by way of adding the handcrafted element available to specific communities in Asia.

This concept claims that transnational bonds can be created and held together through shared imagination, through cultural artefacts and through the mind created by designers involved in cross border networks and systems; developing types of consciousness through a mode of cultural reproduction.

The selected case studies for the research are part of a diaspora that produces fashion that is built upon constructed styles created through shared imagination that can be termed as 'hybrid cultural translation manifesting new imaginaries.'

Asian Aesthetics

3



This Chapter entails a brief review of the aesthetics and crafts of Asia. The topic is analysed due to its relevance to this research. Three Australian designers are studied due to their contact with the Asia prescribed, which incorporates the craft and aesthetics of that region in various ways within their practice to create fashion that absorbs Eastern traditional techniques combined with Western aesthetics. To facilitate the understanding of these practices relevant information about Asian aesthetics and craft has been reviewed. The central inquiry at this juncture is raised: does the transnational network of the nominated designers' practices access only the craft techniques of Asia, or do the aesthetics of the region also appear in their fashions through the concept of a decontextualized aesthetic, and if so, which of these aspects can be seen and visually identified?

As the aesthetics of Asia is an extensive topic, it has been limited in its analysis to their usage within the Australian fashion industry. Accordingly, a review of Asian aesthetics has been conducted to situate the various elements of those cultures that have been utilized by the designers, which forms the main part of the study. This approach has been taken after careful analysis and evaluation as the breadth of the subject warrants a separate study on its own. The purpose of this thesis is the transnational exchange of craft and aesthetics between Asia and Australia and its application within segments of the Australian fashion industry. The research on the aesthetics and craft of Asia has been limited to certain parameters that relate to the practices of the designers in question.

Firstly, the geographical scope of Asia has been limited to India, China and Japan, as per the rationale stated in Chapter One. Secondly, the aesthetics of these countries have been viewed keeping their application within the prescribed design practices in focus. The analysis within the text broaches the traditional and its application within a Western context. Chinese embroideries as well as Japanese craft traditions and philosophies of life have been highlighted to appreciate the methodology of Akira Isogawa. The Asian dress shapes and motifs that lend an aesthetic to the practice of Vixen, and the Indian textile traditions featured within the work of Easton Pearson have been researched.

The literature review on the aesthetics of Asia is conducted on the following lines:

- Shape of the Asian Garments
- Colours of Asia
- Textile Textures of Asia

Shape of the Asian Garments

The first aspect of the research pertains to the shape of the garments in Asia, and this is undertaken with the view of finding parallels within the works of the designers studied. The typical garments of Japan, China and India have been explored as these are relevant to this research.

One of the main points of reference in Asian garments is the surface of the fabric and not the actual form of the human body. This surface provides an area of embellishment that represents the status and aspirations of the wearer. (Wilson, 1990)

The shape of the Japanese garment

The most widely recognized shape of the Japanese costume is that of the Kimono (Noma, 1974) (Figure 3.1), with its slender shape that conceals the body and directs the attention of the viewer to the imagery on the garment, through a coded classification revealing the age, sex, class, season and occasion through the colour, pattern and decorative detail. The flat simple lines provide the craftsman with the ideal canvas to display his art of surface embellishment, whether it is dyeing, fabric painting or embroideries. This simple garment in itself is built up of layers of techniques, embroideries and patterns, which provide designers various sources of inspiration.

Its construction is simple requiring the use of blocks of fabric to minimize fabric wastage, a standard width of approximately 32 centimetres, and approximately 12 yards of fabric in length, is enough to make an adult size garment (Dalby, 2001). Two straight lengths of fabric comprise the body of the Kimono. They are joined up the middle of the back and left open over the shoulders down the front. Two half-width sections are sewn on to each side of the centre front called the *okumi*. The *okumi* is overlapped left side over right side; it provides the amplitude of fabric to fit different body sizes and is held together by a sash at the waist or hip. The *eri* (collar) is a folded piece of fabric attached to the front opening around the neckline reaching a third of the way down the *okumi* on each side. Sleeves (*sode*) consist of another width of fabric attached to the sides of the body. Thus, the entire amount of fabric is used and geometric pieces of fabric are cut out in the manner of a jigsaw to construct a flat garment that attains a shape when draped on the human body. According to Dalby (1993), four common elements form a Kimono: the entire use of fabric cut geometrically using minimal cutting; adding a piece to the front to overlap enabling the fitting of more than one sizes; attaching a neckband around the front opening; and sleeves cut using the width of the fabric (Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.1 Embroidered Kimono
Fine Art of Kimono Embroidery, S. Kusano, Tokyo
Kondanasha International, 2006 Print

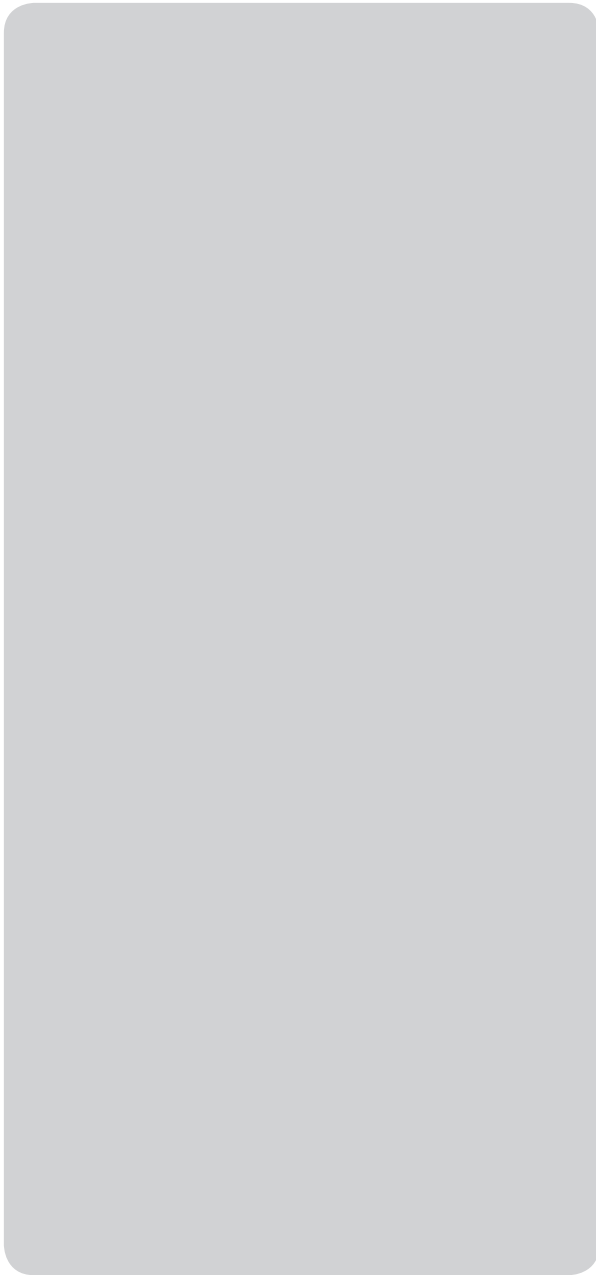
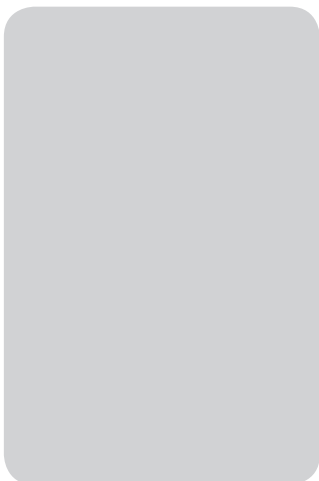


Figure 3.2 Cut of the Kimono [Accessed 23rd August 2012] from http://media.vam.ac.uk/vamembed/media/versions/uploads/new_images/making_kimono_610x610.jpg



Figures 3.3a & 3.3b Junihitoe, a twelve layered Kimono [Accessed 23rd August 2012] from <http://www.lamijapan.com/2011/10/heian-costume-junihitoe.html>

A costume called the Junihitoe was developed during the Heian Period (794-1185). Literally meaning ‘the twelve unlined robes,’ these were worn on top of each other. Each robe was simple in colour and design, but the final outcome was a complex combination of layered colours at the collar and the sleeve openings. *Kasane no irome* (colour combination of the robes) was the term used, defining the combinations appropriate for the season and occasion. Each robe was similar in shape and cut but the quality of silk and the number of layers, colours and weave were dictated by the season and rank of the wearer (Dalby, 2001) (Figure 3.3a and 3.3b).

Another interesting aspect of the Kimono is that it came only in two sizes, the male and the female (Richie, 2003). This concept offered an aesthetic and practical possibility beyond conventional Western tailoring. This meant that the garment differed not in shape but in the colour, weave, embroidery and the decorations on the garment. This exhibits an important aspect of the Japanese system that discounts gender differentiation where the garment does not enhance sexual allure by means of overtly revealing the body, but rather, conceals the body. The female body ceases to be an object of desire but merely an object of exhibiting a creation, a thought, a concept by layering, cushioning or abstract shaping.

In short, the shape of the traditional Japanese garment is a genderless garment cut geometrically to use the entire fabric. The shape is straight, tubular or flared at the hem with a defined waistline and sleeves of various lengths. The weaves and techniques of surface embellishments along with the typical motifs and weaves define occasions, events, ranks, whilst the choice of colours heralds different seasons.

Two of the designers researched for this study, namely Akira Isogawa and Vixen reference different elements of the Kimono in their designs, which is stated in the case study, and these range from the colour combinations found in vintage Kimonos to the layering of the Junihitoe to the typical motifs and weaves that are present in the kimonos.

Shape of the Chinese garment

Chinese costumes are manifold but the one that can immediately bring China to mind is known by English-speaking curators and collectors as the ‘mandarin robe’ or a ‘Dragon Robe’ (Wilson, 1990a). This robe is called the *Long Pao* by contemporary Chinese scholars and was predominantly worn by men mostly in blue; but brown, turquoise, orange, yellow and red ones exist as well. The prominent aspect in the design is the embroidery with the stripes at the hem representing water with waves above. A similar design is repeated on the sleeves at the elbow with mountains rising above the water. The main body of the garment displayed dragons, which were placed symmetrically among clouds. The cut of the garment

required three lengths of silk: two for the body, and one for the upper sleeves, collar and the front side fastening flap (Wilson, 1990) (Figure 3.4). It is obvious from the image of the uncut robes that one length of fabric consists of the back, front and the integral upper sleeve of one side. Hence, two lengths are required for the right and the left side and no shoulder seam is necessary; a straight vertical seam along the centre back joins the two sides together, while the front extension – the side front flap – is joined to the centre front. The garment is then folded horizontally at the shoulder and the side seam and the sleeves are joined together. These robes were of varying lengths depending on the fashion but they were never long enough to sweep the ground.

The pattern and the shape of the dragon robe are its two most distinctive features. The water, mountain, cloud and dragon combination dates back to the Tang dynasty (618-906 BC) and this combination is also seen on the ceramics and lacquer of the Ming period (1368-1644) (Wilson, 1990). The stripes at the hem denote water and Buddhist emblems including; the flaming wheel, white umbrella, a fish, a canopy, a red knot, a vase, a lotus flower and a shell are often a part of these compositions. While many dragon robes are embroidered, some are also woven in such a way as the shape of the garment is revealed on the loom. The most common technique for these woven robes is known as the ‘silk tapestry,’ or *kesi*, involving cut silk after the vertical slits that occur when one thread ends and another begins.

Another garment that identifies itself with traditional China is the *qipao*, a style continuous with the robe worn by the Manchu, also known as the *qi* people. The Cantonese term “cheongsam” (*changshan*) meaning long shirt or robe was also used. *Qishan* was another way of referring to the same garment and in some places it was simply called the *changpao*, “long gown” (Finnane, 2007) (Figure 3.5). The hallmark of the cheongsam is the high fitting collar, also referred to in the West as the ‘mandarin collar,’ in a fitted long dress with a diagonal opening from the collar to the armhole. Many different versions of the dress evolved before it developed its final shape. From the *qipao*, a long dress with no slits, to the *qimajia*, a sleeveless ankle length tunic with slits worn over a blouse, low cut at the neck unlike the *qipao*. Other versions of this dress appeared in China in 1925 including; the “wrapper blouse” (*taoshan*) which buttoned up both sides from the underarm to the neckline and revealed the shape of the waist and the bosom (Finnane, 2007). Changes continued to occur wherein the gown was slit to the knees; trims were added to the side seam and to the neck opening between the collar and the armhole. The *qipao* underwent a series of transformations where the hems of the sleeves and the dress went up and down and the side seam approached the actual shape of the body over the puritanical, angular cut.



Figure 3.4 Cut of the Dragon robe
Chinese dress, by V. Wilson. London Bamboo Publishing in association with the Victoria and Albert Museum, 1990, Print.

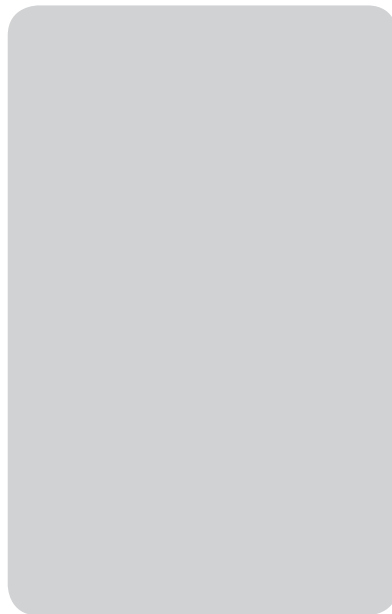
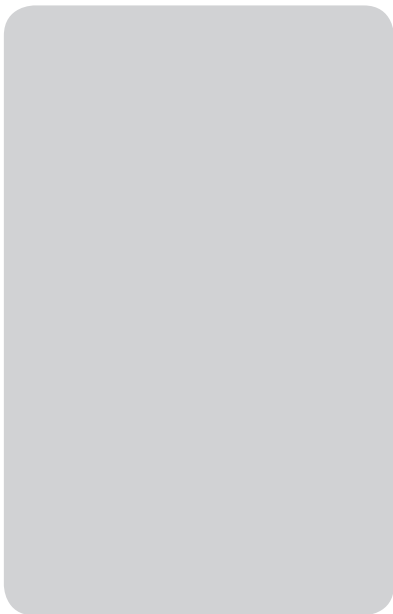


Figure 3.5 Cheongsam
Changing Clothes in China: Fashion, History, Nation., by A. Finnane, Sydney, University of NewSouth Wales Press Ltd., 2007, Print.

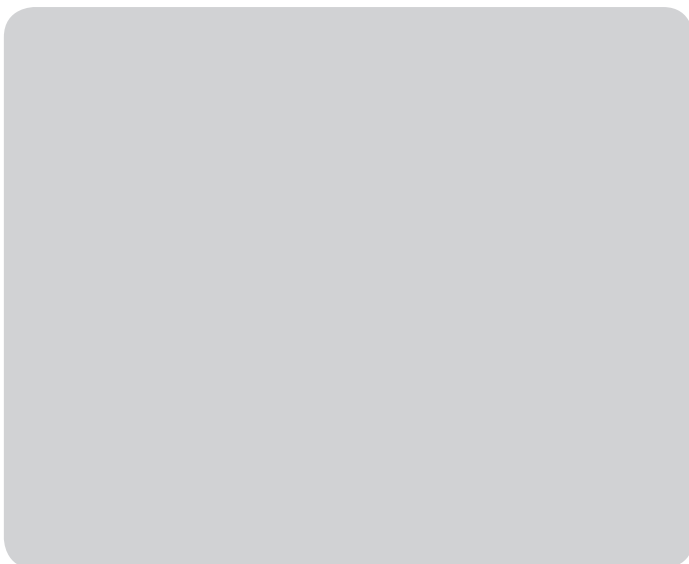


Figure 3.6 Ghagra, A gathered Indian Skirt.
Indian Textiles, by J. Gillow, & N. Barnard, N., London, Thames & Hudson, 2008, Print.

Decorative trims became a part of the dress and the collar became a work of art ascending the throat embellished through piping and lace edgings.

This aspect of the Chinese dress is visible in the creations of designer Georgia Chapman of Vixen where there is a melange of Chinese and Japanese shapes and a distinct reference to Asian motifs and textile techniques. The mandarin collar, the side opening of the cheongsam and the obi sash have all been a part of the Vixen collections.

Shape of the Indian Garment

Due to the multicultural nature of the Indian society there exists an array of styles in the Indian Sub-Continent. These may be loosely separated into two categories; the stitched and the unstitched (Kumar, 1999). In terms of the unstitched garment, the emphasis in traditional Indian garb is on the weave and texture of the fabric as it is draped around the body. The stitched garment have varying shapes depending on regions and traditions, dating back to the rule of the Mughal Empire. Several of these are visible within the present and past collections of the Australian designers and will be discussed below.

Stitched Garments

The traditional Indian skirt is known as the *ghagra*, customarily worn with a tight fitting bodice (*choli*). Early *ghagras* were full in volume and were worn below the knee to reveal seven jewelled anklets on each leg. To tie the *ghagra*, a drawstring called the *izarband* was used, which was left visible at the side. These were often decorated with tassels, cowrie shells, jewellery or bell-shaped ornaments called the *jhumkas*. The length of this garment varied over time, and in North India it was worn over a *paijama* as an outer garment. The decorations on the *Ghagras* were elaborate and region specific with the style of the embroidery identifying the region (Figure 3.6).

Designed primarily as a brassiere, the basic form of the *choli* has changed little over the centuries. It is held in place by strings tied around the neck and under the bust. This basic structure comes in a wide variety of styles; some are knotted at the front, others cover the back and still others leave the back bare. Regardless of the style, they all have attached sleeves of varying length. The structure of this garment is comprised of triangular pieces of fabric, known as *pardahs*, and these are stitched together to fit snugly over the breast. This garment; i.e. the bodice and the sleeves, are heavily ornamented (Kumar, 1999). In Western India it was most commonly backless and was worn under a sleeveless *kurti* which has a neckline sufficiently generous to sit below the *choli*. The *odhni* was an essential part of the ensemble. This was a long piece of embellished cloth tucked into the waist band at one end

and then wrapped loosely around the back and thrown over the shoulders to partially cover the breasts.

The *kurta* is straighter and is generally constructed of straight panels of fabric stitched together at the selvedge to form a tunic to which wide sleeves are attached at right angles. It is essentially a unisex garment popular in the colder regions where it was worn with *ghagras* and *paijamas*. The *kurta* has evolved in a number of different ways: straight and gored panels were added below the sleeves for greater fullness. In warmer regions, the garment was constructed of finer fabric (Figure 3.7).

Paijama, a compound of two Persian words – *pae*, meaning feet or legs, and *jama*, referring to a garment that is a trouser from India (Kumar, 1999). A *churidar paijama* is cut on the bias and is wide at the waist held by a drawstring and very narrow at the leg with the length being much longer than the legs so that they can be worn bunched at the ankle forming fold, gathers or bangles. Hence the name *churidar paijama* which translates as *churi* (bangle), *dar* (like), *pai* (leg) and *jama* (garment), or ‘trouser with bangles’ (Figure 3.8).

The *angarkha* is a long sleeved coat or gown made up of a bodice and a skirt joined together at the waist but open at the front in a round edge, or a triangular opening covered by an inner panel known as the *pardah*. The style of the opening varies from region to region but they are most often fastened at the neck, underarm, chest and waist with cords or fabric ties (Figure 3.9).

These Indian styled garments have been seen in the collections of Easton Pearson where the long kurta shaped garment, bangle trousers, ghagra styled skirts and angrakha style dresses were evident in their earlier collections of Spring/Summer 2002/2003.

Colours of Asia

Analysing the colours is an important aspect of the background research as each colour is symbolic in nature and varies in significance depending on the region. “It is invested with great deal of emotional and psychological symbolic importance, and so it is used carefully and purposefully to evoke a certain feeling or idea depending on the garment” (Hayden, 2007: p 6). Feelings associated with different colours vary from one region to the other. Understanding the significance of colour and exploring its application by designers gives a probable insight into symbolism within their collections.

The ancient Chinese believed the world was constructed through abstract principles and symbols: according to their ethos, the universe was self-generating. It had no beginning and no end, but was created from chaos by two abstract cosmic forces, Yin (passive) and Yang (active) (Pang, 1988). These two forces were believed to inspire the twin forces of all existence. The Yin force is present in the earth and moon, and such qualities as darkness

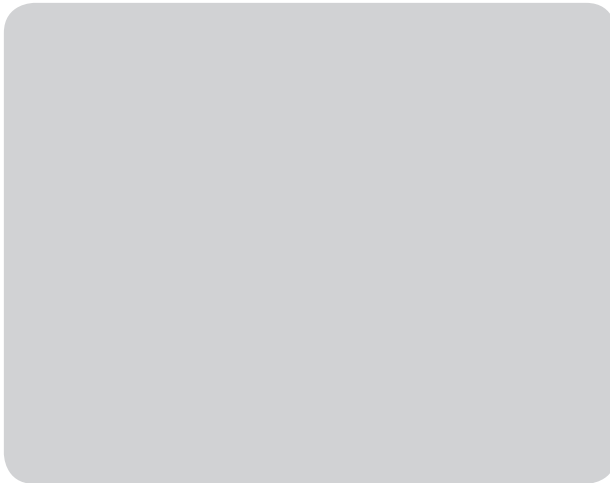


Figure 3.7 Kurta, Traditional Indian Garment.
Costumes and Textiles of Royal India, by R. Kumar, London, Christies Books, 1999. Print.

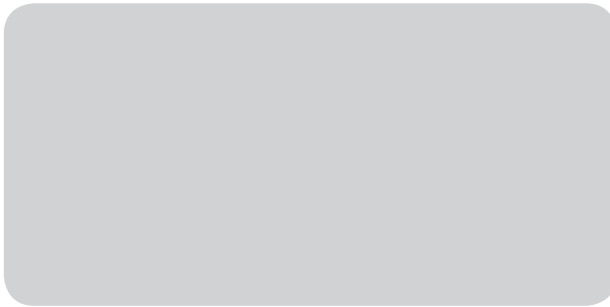


Figure 3.8 Pajama, Traditional Indian trousers.
Costumes and Textiles of Royal India, by R. Kumar, London, Christies Books, 1999. Print.

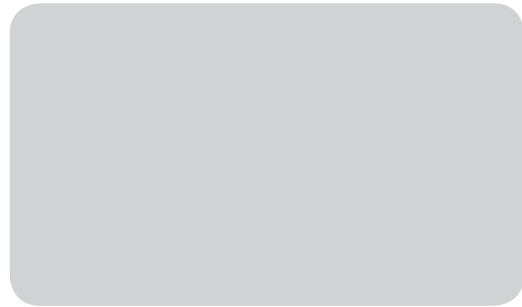


Figure 3.9 Anrakha, Traditional Indian waisted dress
Costumes and Textiles of Royal India, by R. Kumar, London, Christies Books, 1999. Print.

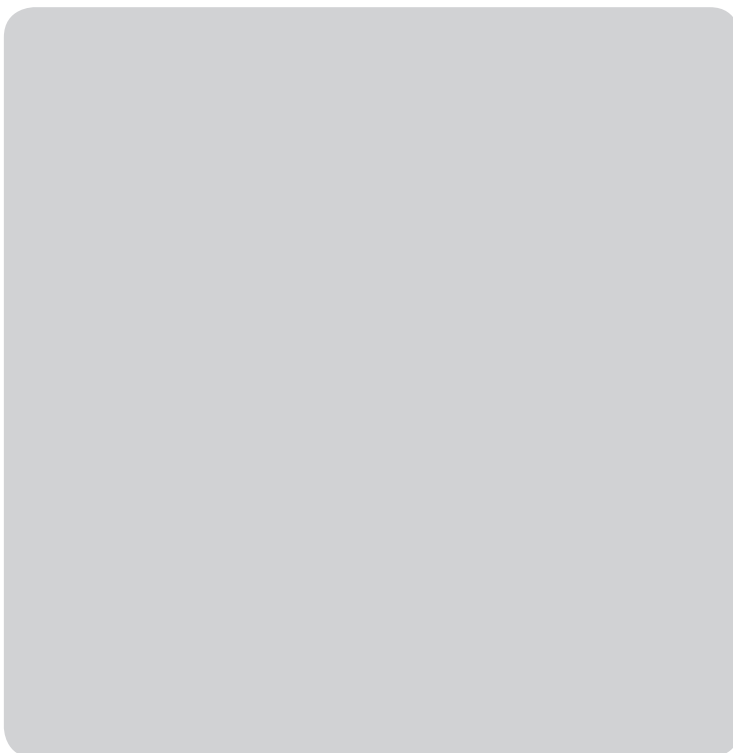


Figure 3.10 A cosmic diagram of the Chinese universe. *Dragon emperor: Treasures from the Forbidden City*, by A. M. Pang, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 1988, Print.

and femininity, and is balanced by the Yang force, which is found in the heavens and the sun and is visible in such qualities as masculinity and light.

The Chinese tradition has established a set of five auspicious colours. They are called the *goshiki*, or *goshuku* and have been defined as red, yellow, blue, white and black (Baird, 2001).

Due to the cultural accretion of Japan, many of the traditions and symbolic imagery follow on from China. For this reason, the concept of the *goshiki/goshuku* is also applicable to Japan, where each colour has a special symbolic meaning. According to both Chinese and Japanese tradition, when the five colours appear together it is a sign of divinity:

- *Red is associated with the sun, the southern quadrant of the universe, summer, the vermilion bird (a type of reddish sparrow) and the active yo (Chinese: yang) principal in the in-yo (Chinese: yin-yang) system.*
- *Yellow is associated with the passive in (Chinese: yin) principle, the earth element, and the centre.*
- *Blue (incorporating, and sometimes represented as green) corresponds to the eastern quadrant and spring and is associated with the dragon.*
- *White represents the west and autumn and is associated with the tiger.*
- *Black represents the northern quadrant and is associated with winter the tortoise and snake.* Baird, 2001: p 28 (Figure 3.10)

However, the aesthetic sensibilities of Japan are not the same as China's. Whereas China celebrates colour, the Japanese society appreciates harmony, balance and simple colour schemes. "Japanese aesthetic preferences echo... understated colour, subdued textures ... a predilection for simplified design" (Hayden, 2007: p 6). This difference can be explained by the fact that Japanese society is directly informed by nature, expressed in the geography of the country comprising of islands covered with profuse vegetation, tightly integrated into larger masses over hills (Swirnoff, 2000). The atmospherics of Japan are misty, damp and overhung with clouds. Hence, there is a condition of lowered luminosity, and this affects their use of the five colours. According to Swirnoff (2000), this lowered luminosity evokes darker, more neutralised colour. The subtlety of colour lies in its ambiguity: the Western eye seeks a target hue, whilst the Japanese eye seems to tolerate the ambiguity of a colour. The Chinese use brighter shades of the *goshiki goshuku*, whilst the Japanese tend to translate them into muted or subtle tones.

Viewed in accordance with the *goshiki goshuku*, along with the significance of the Japanese motifs visible within his work, Akira Isogawa's collections provide an interesting insight

into his Japanese mind and his interpretation of the seasons *vis à vis*, his chosen colour palettes as discussed in the case study.

In India, the beauty of the multitudes of people in their colourful, magical attire accessorised with brilliant ornamentation is a reminder of India's romance with colour (Wheeler, 1972). The aesthetic sense in India is almost always merged with symbolic meaning. In the manner of traditional dance where every gesture is equivalent to a word or a concept, likewise every colour, every woven or printed fabric or piece of ornamentation means something to the wearer in India.

The sensitivity to colour in India is expressed in painting, poetry, music, and in the attire of the rich and poor of the nation (Jayakar, 1972). Colours are surcharged with emotional content and the sensitivity to colour has been expressed in the folk poetry and ballads of India. Red is the colour of the *chunari*, a tie-dyed sari, which is a symbol of marriage. Yellow was the colour of spring. Maroon and Black were the colours of mourning. *Nila* (indigo) was the colour of Krishna, the Child God, who is likened to rain-filled clouds and *hari nila*, the colour of clear water reflecting the spring sky. The Gods too have their individual colours: red for *Brahman*, white for *Shiva* and blue for *Vishnu* (Jayakar, 1972). *Gerua* (saffron) was the colour of the earth and of the yogi, the wandering minstrel, who renounces the earth. These colours were worn by peasant and emperor alike and were but a projection of the moods evoked by the changing seasons.

It is evident from the analysis of the case studies that where Akira Isogawa and Georgia Chapman (Vixen) both express the colour sensibilities of Japan, in Isogawa's case, the designs can be read in terms of the symbolism of the *goshiki/goshuku*, whilst Chapman takes them as inspirations and converts them into her own palette. Based out of India, Easton Pearson's practice appreciates the aesthetics of Indian colour with the varied combinations but the designers select their colour palette in Australia attributing this to the brightness of the Australian sun which changes the shades of the colours when compared to the Indian light (Easton and Pearson, 2007).

Textile Textures of Asia

The textile textures of Asia are numerous. Not only are these regions famous for their embroideries but also textile techniques such as weaving, printing and various types of tie-dyed textiles. There exists a unique style of embroidery for almost every region of Asia; from the specialised embroideries on the Japanese Kimono, to the various types of satin stitch in China, to the famous embroideries of Rajasthan India, there is almost a signature style for every region. The analysis of these textures in this section is relevant and pertinent

to the practices of the designers, and as such, only those accessed by the subject designers will be mentioned here.

The textile techniques of Japan visible within the collections of the Australian designers are Surihaku, Shibori, and Origami. (See case studies)

Surihaku is a method of metallic foil transfer on to fabric using paste or lacquer; the shape to be foiled is laid with paste and foils are affixed. Extraneous foil is removed creating a pattern (Hayden, 2007) (Figure 3.11).

Shibori is a dyeing method where sections of fabric are wrapped before dyeing to resist colour (Figure 3.12). The wrapping, tying, folding and clamping methods used to resist the dye on the fabric generate different variations of texture that not only colours the fabric producing a pattern but also creates shapes depending on the resist method applied. Isogawa uses this technique frequently for his collections where he uses the *shibori* method to dye the fabric, but also relies on it to create interesting textures for his garments to emphasise this signature quality of his fashion. *Origami* is the traditional Japanese art of paper-folding (Somerville, 2004) that creates different textures and shapes. Akira Isogawa has applied this technique to his fashion using the folding techniques in his garments to create interest within different aspects of his collections. There might be origami-inspired flowers on an accessory, or an element of the sleeve or neckline that might have a recognisable origami aspect to it.

The textile techniques of China visible in the collections of the Australian designer Akira Isogawa are the embroideries and the weaving.

“Traditionally the background material for Chinese embroidered garments is plain, twill, or satin weave silk. Simple gauze weave silk ... velvet and self-patterned silk” (Wilson, 1990: p 106). Silk thread is used to create the embroideries crafted onto these fabrics employing the satin stitch embroidery technique well known in China. Historically, the lustre of Chinese embroideries was achieved by parallel stitches laid side by side. As the glossiness of the thread reflected light, the angle of the satin stitch was altered from motif to motif resulting in light reflecting from the surface. The two common variations of Chinese embroidery are known as *encroaching* and *shading*, which work together (Wilson, 1990). In the encroaching style, each new stitch sits in between the base of the two stitches on the previous row and this can sometimes give the effect of long and short stitches, which is not the case. The silk strands tend to separate between the starting of the stitch and are collected

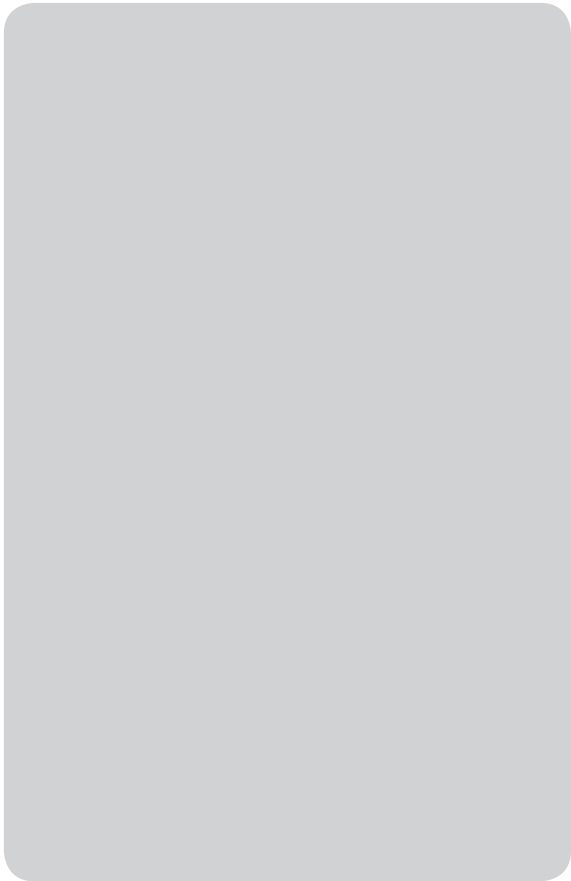


Figure 3.11 Surihaku technique – Akira Isogawa Resort collection, Spring Summer 2009 [Accessed on the 4th of March 2010] from www.sixphotography.com.au

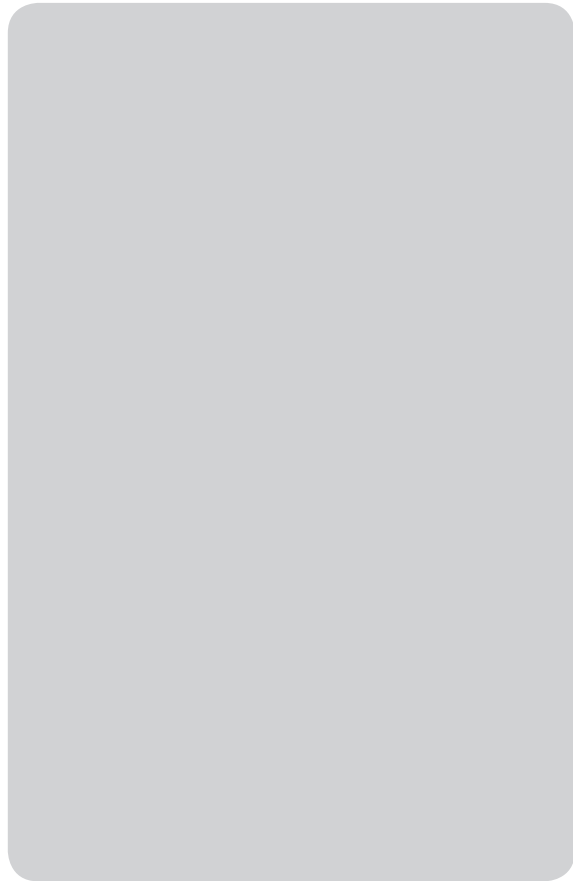


Figure 3.12 Shibori – Akira Isogawa, Australian Fashion week, Spring Summer 2003, [Accessed on the 4th of March 2010] from www.sixphotography.com.au.

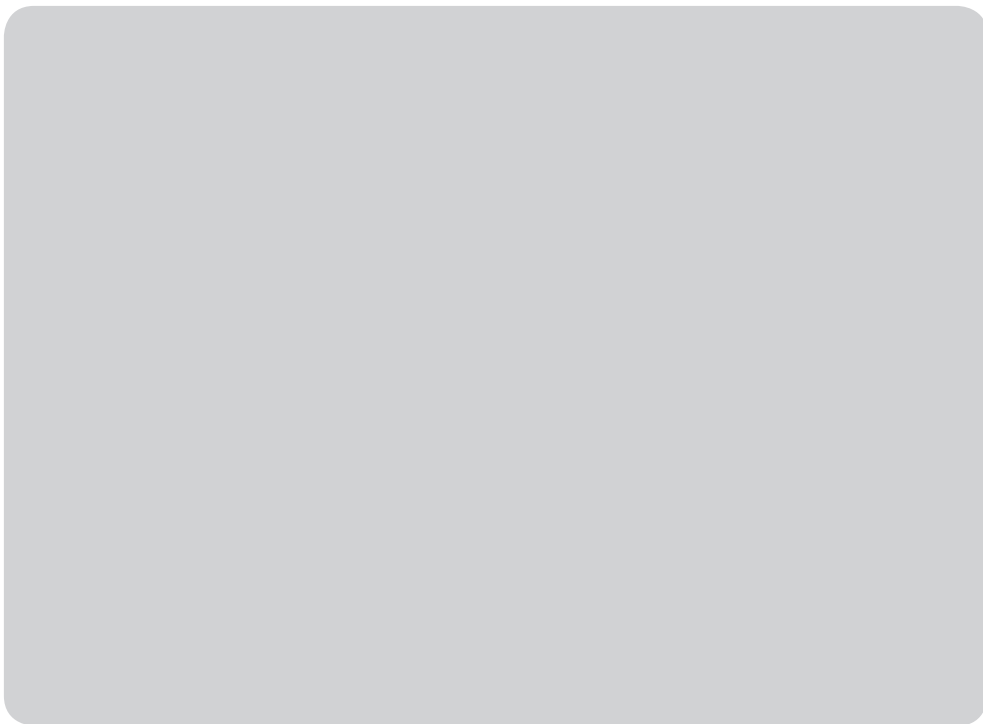


Figure 3.13 Chinese embroidery – Image from Akira Isogawa Exhibition Catalogue. *Akira Isogawa : Printemps – E'te'* by K. Somerville, Exhibition Catalogue, Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria and the Asialink Centre of the University of Melbourne, 2004, Print.

when they go through the fabric to give an impression of long and short. Introducing different colours to this technique also creates the shading effect (Figure 3.13).

The Chinese embroiderers also use a technique called *voiding*, which gives sculptural effect. This is achieved by leaving a thin line of the base material free between two motifs. This creates a clear boundary line between the satin stitches (Wilson, 1990) and defines the motif.

China also has a wealth of textiles and resources to weave custom-made textiles. Since historic times, textiles were woven with intricate and complex patterns (Chang, 2010). Silk was not only reserved for the nobility but was used by people of lower status. However, the use of colours and motifs was controlled according to status. For example, the dragon and phoenixes were popular in folk art but the specific five-clawed dragon was restricted to imperial use only.

In China, traditional symbols and images were used as decorative motifs for the court dress of the Qing imperial court. Since ancient times, the Chinese have found their symbols from their mythology, legends, folklore, philosophy and religion. Though drawn from nature, pictorial images were used to express ideas. Thus, these symbols or decorative motifs are used as a language where images are used instead of words. To decode this visual language, it is important to understand what they mean. The symbols varied with every passing dynasty. There are many symbols in Japan and China that have been well-documented in various texts, and it is impossible to discuss all of them here but several common examples are listed here and these have been selected from a wide range of books.

According to Pang (1988), during the reign of the Qing dynasty, court officials were distinguished by the emblems on their official clothes. Civil officials wore badges with birds and military officials wore badges with animals. It is important to note that civil officials were higher in rank than their military counterparts and this is probably why the civil officials were assigned birds due to their ability to fly, are closer to heaven and are linked to literary talent and wisdom. Likewise, terrestrial animals are physically powerful and ferocious but earthbound in relation to knowledge. As mentioned earlier, the motifs, whether embroidered or woven, represented pictorial codes, which offered inspiration for textile patterns (Chang, 2010). Flowers and fruit depict noble qualities; bamboo, a plant that does not bend, depicts personal strength; whilst animals also have symbolic importance, for example bats represent luck and deer denotes success. Akira Isogawa accesses the embroideries of China for his bridal collections. His silks are woven in China with his choice of colours and motifs. This will be discussed in detail in his case study.

The textile techniques visible in the collections of Easton Pearson and Akira Isogawa are beading, embroideries, tie-dyed textiles, printing and weaving and these primarily originate from India.

Indian embroideries are the most readily identifiable and popularly applied in the fashion world at present. The two richest areas of folk embroidery are Western India (Irwin and Hall, 1973), which comprises of Gujrat, Rajasthan and the Pakistani province of Sindh. For centuries, this part of India was renowned for producing the best embroideries in the world. The caste system in India was largely responsible for this as it bound generations of a particular caste to a specific occupation, which served to ensure the continuity of a particular craft (Bhatnagar, 2004). Additionally, the various rituals and ceremonies that were part of this region facilitated the continuance of the textile craft. The Indian artisans are in a pivotal position between traditional India and the international market place as designers and buyers from across the world come to India to access their skills. Belkin and Huet (2009) state that producing samples for these buyers is an intensive process, which requires not only skill but the research and development of new materials for embroideries to furnish the Western demands. This involves a process of developing embroideries piece by piece, as clients tend to make vague requests, and these workshops offer up to fifteen samples using patterns and textures with embroideries, beads, buttons, shapes, crystal, sequins, ribbons interpreting the ideas put forward by the designers (Belkin and Huet, 2009). Sometimes, new materials are developed to satisfy the customer and at other times, existing materials such as sequins and beads are used in unconventional ways to create new applications of traditional materials. This can be related to the work of Akira Isogawa and Easton Pearson where they apply their creativity to utilize existing materials, and at times, develop new materials/ingredients/decorative elements to furnish their designs. These *karigars* (artisans) are trained to interpret embroidery in various effects with the use of different materials enlarging and reducing the scale of the motif to give the impression of volume or detail.

Among the many types of Indian embroideries and motifs, the following are the better known and more frequently employed by international designers.

Beadwork

Beadwork is a comparatively recent craft in India dating only to the latter part of the Nineteenth Century (Bhatnagar, 2004) (Figure 3.14a, 3.14b). Its development in India has introduced a lively sense of colour and design. The motifs are worked in coloured beads or

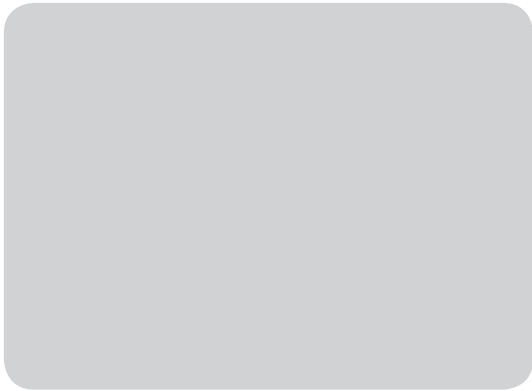


Figure 3.14a Bead Work – Akira Isogawa, Earring Dress, Spring Summer 2005, [Accessed on 20th August 2012] from <http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/col/work/78498>

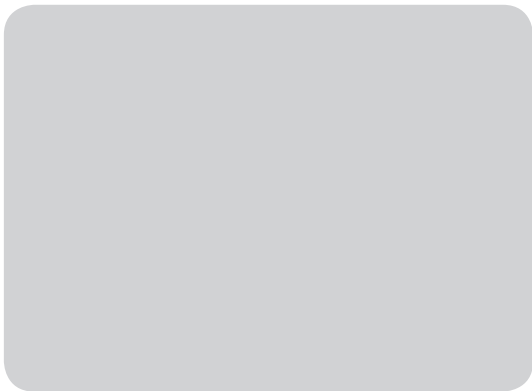


Figure 3.14b Bead Work – Easton Pearson, Namoli Cardi Spring Summer 2005, Easton Pearson by Wallace et al. Exhibition catalogue, Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery of Modern Art, 2009, Print.

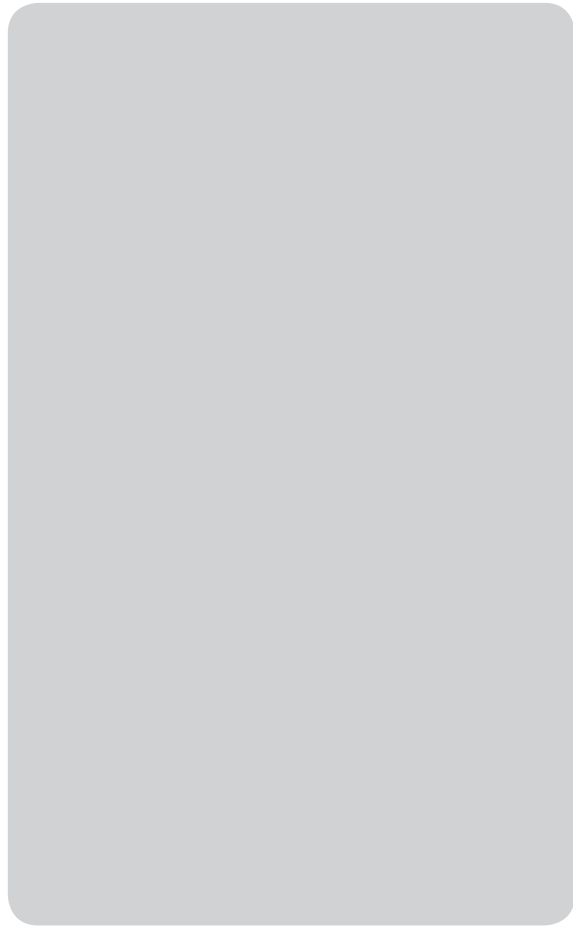


Figure 3.15 Bead Work – Akira Isogawa, Earring Dress, Spring Summer 2005 [Accessed on 20th August 2012] from <http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/col/work/78498>

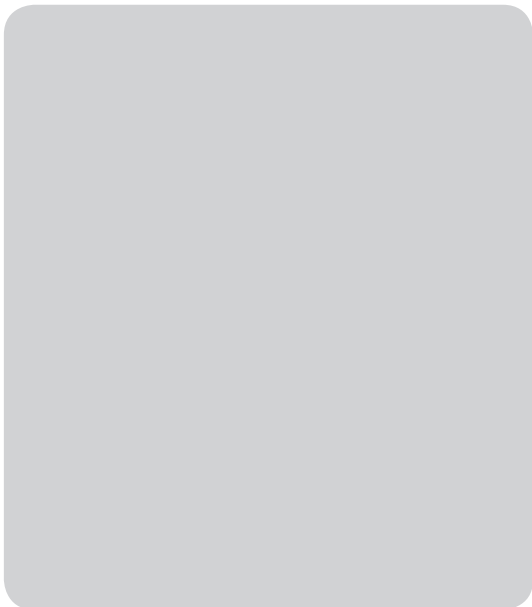


Figure 3.16 Easton Pearson's Spy Top dress Autumn Winter 2009. Easton Pearson by Wallace et al. Exhibition catalogue, Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery of Modern Art, 2009, Print.

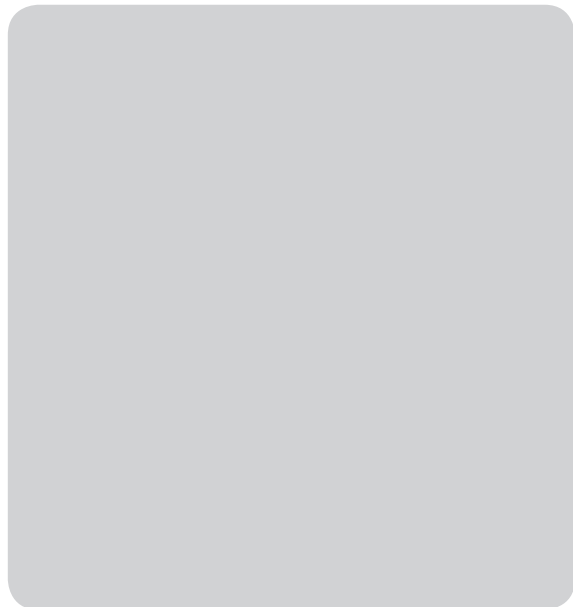


Figure 3.17 Zardozi *The Techniques of Indian Embroidery* by A. Morrell, Loveland, CO., Interweave Press 1995, Print.

different sizes and textures, transparent and semi-transparent in different shapes and sizes made of varying materials. In its current state of exchange, the Indian craftsman creates new textures and shapes to the demands of the buyer, whilst at the same time invents new ways of application of those beads as exemplified in Akira Isogawa's Earring Dress Spring Summer 2005 (Figure 3.15) and Easton Pearson's Spy Top dress Autumn Winter 2009 (Figure 3.16).

Zardozi

The word *zardozi* is of Persian origin and refers to embroidery worked in gold and silver thread. The sophisticated art of *zardozi* is the most prevalent in the industry employed using very fine needles and requiring a great deal of sophistication. The embroidery utilizes *zari*, a fine metal thread covered in gold or silver and applied to velvet, satin and heavy silk bases. Originally, the embroidery of *zardozi* used pure silver wires coated with real gold, known as *kalabatun*, although silver and gold wires have now been replaced with synthetic threads (Figure 3.17).

Ari Work

Ari work requires less attention to detail and uses a metal awl instead of needles to do the embroidery. The embroidery is characterised by chain stitch similar to the European crewel embroidery (Figure 3.18).

Chikenkari

Originating from the north Indian town of Lucknow, a renowned centre for craft patronage and for its culture and sophistication, *chikenkari* is embroidery rendered in white thread on white cotton cloth. The effect created depends on the variety of stitches and the contrast of different grades of thread to form lace-like patterns, opaque fillings and detailed outlines. The embroidery involves approximately forty stitches with six basic ones. Each stitch has an individual name and involves a specific number of threads. Finely detailed, dense floral patterns with knots and threads pulled to create a net effect and other textural elements are characteristic of this work. The embroidery is executed upon muslin; the patterns are stamped from small blocks, which wash out after the embroidery is done. This work is generally done by women folk at home to supplement their income (Bhatnagar, 2004) (Figure 3.19).



Figure 3.18 Ari Work
The Techniques of Indian Embroidery by A. Morrell,
 Loveland, CO., Interweave Press 1995, Print.



Figure 3.19 Chicken Kari
Indian Textiles, by J. Gillow, & N. Barnard, N., London,
 Thames & Hudson, 2008, Print.



Figure 3.20a Kantha work
The Techniques of Indian Embroidery by A. Morrell,
 Loveland, CO., Interweave Press 1995, Print.

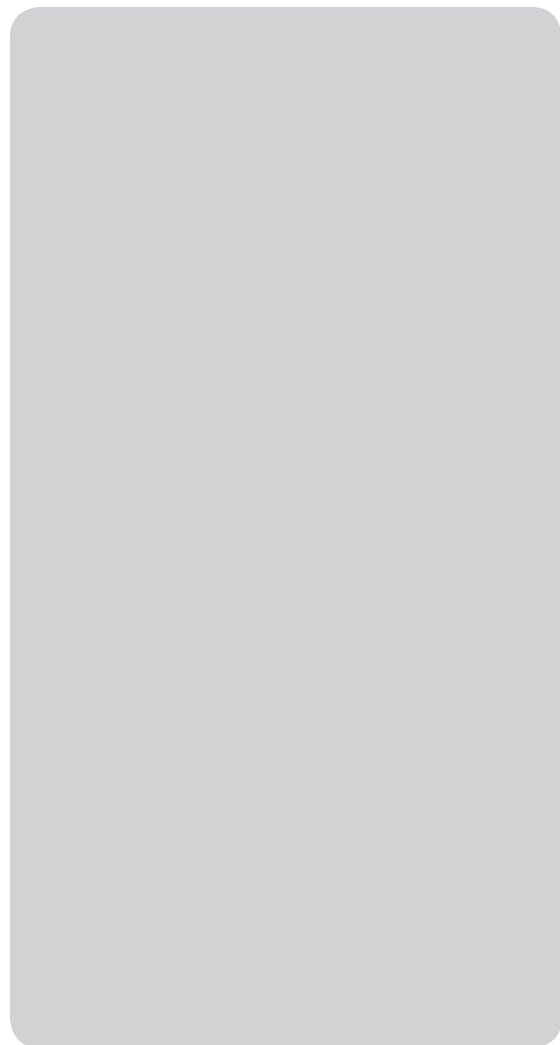


Figure 3.21 Tie Dyed textiles – Easton Pearson, Kivu Singlet
 and Bintang Sarong, Spring Summer 2003. *Easton Pearson*
 by Wallace et al. Exhibition catalogue, Brisbane: Queensland
 Art Gallery of Modern Art, 2009, Print.

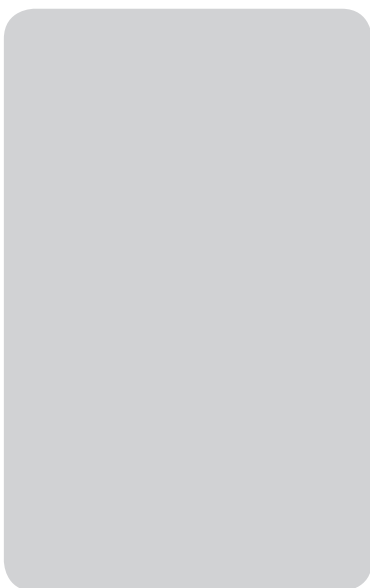


Figure 3.20b Akira Isogawa, Resort collection 2011,
 Yellow Scarf with Kantha embroidery [Accessed on
 20th September 2011] from www.Akira.com

Kantha Work

This is folk art of West Bengal literally means ‘rags.’ The village women of Bengal create artistic fabric from worn out clothes. *Kanthas* are made with lengths of old saris placed one on top of the other. These are quilted together to form a padded surface. This surface is then used as a base to create human and animal foliage and floral motifs using running stitches with a different coloured yarn (Bhatnagar, 2004) (Figure 3.20a, 3.20b).

Tie-dyed Textiles

Tie dyed textiles in India are referred to *bhandhani* or *bandhana*, but this technique is internationally known by its Malay-Indonesia name *palangi* (Gillow and Barnard, 2008). The term refers to both the technique and the finished product and is practiced in Rajasthan and Gujrat, which are famous for this technique. The fabric is pinched and resist-tied before dyeing producing circular designs (Figure 3.21).

Conclusion

This chapter analyses the aesthetics of Asia that feature within the practices of the nominated Australian designers. The techniques accessed by the designers have been discussed briefly to provide an understanding of the place and culture that is accessed. As discussed later in the studies, these traditional techniques are altered from their traditional application creating an aesthetic that traverses geographies and is accepted in different environments.

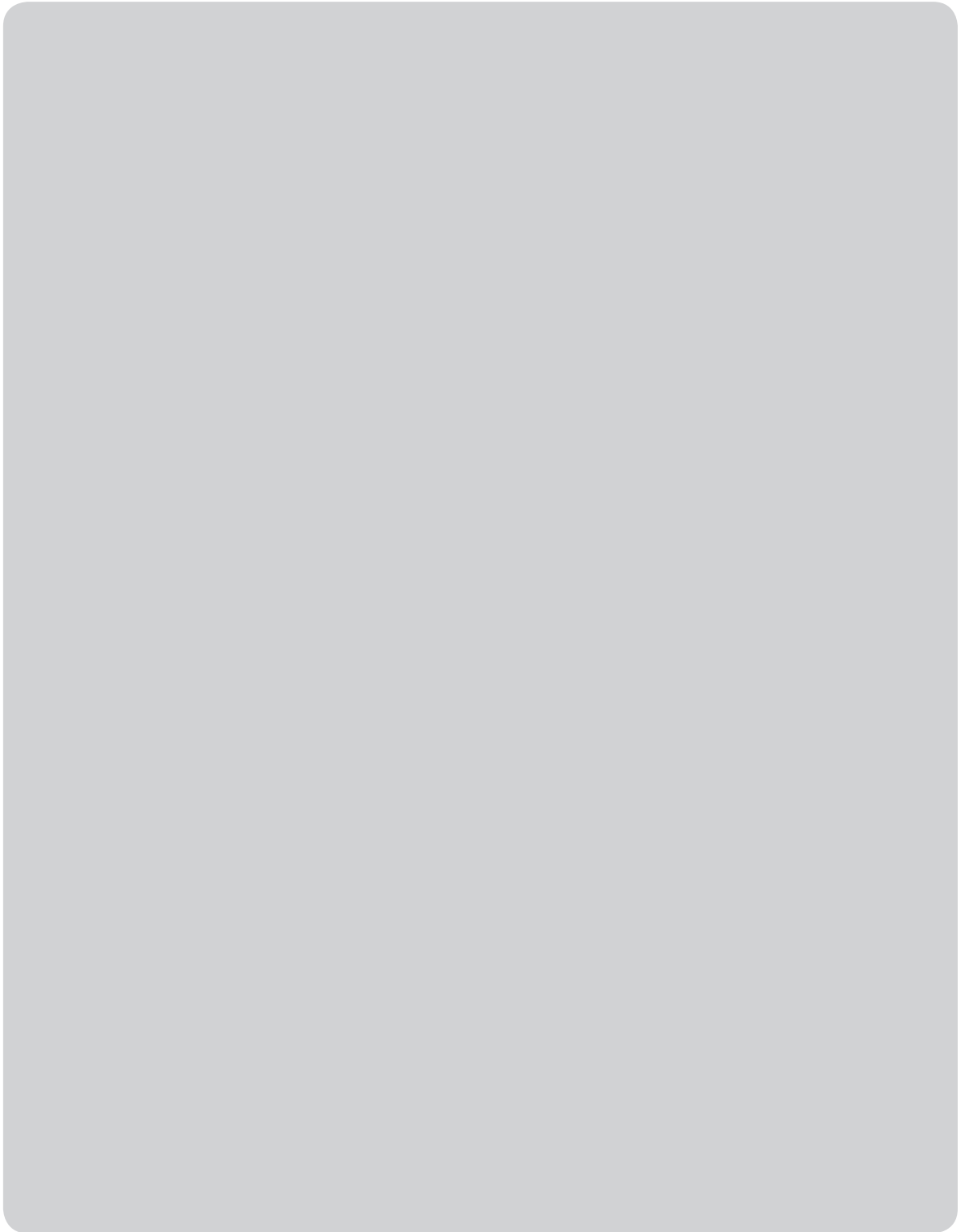
Therefore, in the case of Akira Isogawa, Japanese textile techniques and colour sensibilities are combined with Western aesthetics and manifested using the crafts of India and China to create fashion that detaches itself from the host country and develops a new identity, which is transnational in nature.

Similarly, in the case of Easton Pearson, Western aesthetics are visualised using the traditional craft techniques of India, resulting in the decontextualisation of the Eastern aesthetic creating new creative vocabularies.

In the case of Vixen, the aesthetics of Asia, in terms of shapes, motifs and textures are combined with Australian sensibilities in a local context to create fashion that is accepted for its exotic references to Asia and the hand-crafted application of those aesthetics.

Case Study of Easton Pearson

4





Easton Pearson, a very successful womenswear Australian label has been in business for over twenty years. The brand is a partnership between Pamela Easton and Lydia Pearson, two college friends who came together to create a fashion label. Their designs are frequently acknowledged by the Australian fashion press at large as eclectic; exhibiting craftsmanship, colour and texture. They have created a niche for themselves both within the Australian fashion industry and internationally due to their design aesthetic. The ethos of the Easton Pearson label can be best described in the following words excerpted from the press release text for their 2007 'Post Card Collection':

'This collection seems like the family album of the past era whose memories still survive, inspiring the fresh and new, even though the world they belong to has changed.'

Parker, 2009: p 135

Their design philosophy is based on referencing bygone eras and interpreting them according to contemporary fashion. Vintage garments, fabrics, techniques, embroideries, paintings, and post cards from varied sources, inspire them. They are collectors; their inspirations range from vintage fabrics found in specialist flea markets in Paris, to trims, bows and buttons, and homewares that can be incorporated as design details within a garment. These inspirations are materialized using the artisanal craft techniques of Asia, which include traditional embroidery techniques like *ari* work (chain stitch embroidery), *zardozi* techniques (gold thread work) or tribal Rajasthan embroideries to create a unique product. It is for this reason that Miranda Wallace, Senior Managerial Researcher, Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art, and curator of the exhibition "Easton Pearson," (Wallace, 2009) calls them 'experiential garments,' as their fashion is a collection of textures, colours, prints and techniques from different regions that provide an artisanal experience of these regions. "Ethnically eclectic imprint" is how Whitfield (2010) describes their work. Easton Pearson's aesthetic is based on continuing experimentation with textile technique rather than trend based design. Their story has been the subject of many articles in the Australian media over the last twenty years. They are referred to as, "renowned for exquisite embellishment and exotic prints," (Hush, 2009) and as "...having truly captured the attention of the international market thanks to consistently innovative, original collections rich in decorative textiles and embellishments" (Feeney, 2009).

The label has been in business for over two decades and has established itself within the Australian Fashion Industry over this time. This is due to the nature of their practice which is based on the aesthetic sensibilities of the designers where the essence of the garment is in the construction and the detailing techniques and eclectic interests referencing styling of the past.

History of the Label

Pamela Easton and Lydia Pearson started their business in 1988 (Parker, 2009) by establishing a label called Bow and Arrow. Their first collection entitled the 'Opening Summer' comprised of cotton dresses made in fabric similar to the chintz prints with small floral sprays, of the style printed at Mulhouse, Jouy and Marseilles. These observations were recorded by McNeil (2009) fashion historian, for his article for the Easton Pearson exhibition at the Gallery of Modern Art in Brisbane. His research provides a rare insight into the beginnings of the label, their design methodology from the inception of their partnership and their progress in terms of the development of their work practice in a chronological order. In addition, it explains their workings as designers and their early interactions with the artisan communities in India, as a beginning of their transnational design practice. His analysis of their archival swatch books reveal a penchant for the nostalgic dresses of lilac, pink and blue floral chintz, and 1950's style dresses, swing skirts and cocktail sleeves (Figure 4.1).

There were also references to experimentations with different materials such as raffia, which identifies an early interest in creating textures and fabrics; thus creating new techniques of construction and production, a skill that has flourished in the later years of their practice. McNeil notes that the books reveal an immaculate and organised practice, which is methodical and well thought out, where nothing is left to chance. There are instructions to their Indian printer for specific details of motifs to be used, references made to the type of embroidery applications or use of traditional dyeing techniques. These swatch books clearly indicate the emphasis on the artisan, with notes stating: "all hand woven" for the raw silks to be used in the September 1991 collection. McNeil considered that in pursuing the ethnic, Easton Pearson aligned themselves with contemporary international designers including: Dries Van Noten, Rifat Ozbek, Kenzo, Ugur Ile Alijan, Anna Sui and Peter Som.

Their Practice

The process of experimentation and creation for the label began in 1988 when, as stated by Parker (2009) and reiterated during the interview conducted by the author (2007) for this research, they were introduced to Sudha Patel, a friend's sister who became their contact in Mumbai. The meeting was the beginning of an ongoing partnership that has lasted twenty years and has seen their business evolve. Pamela Easton and Lydia Pearson started to design clothes in the 1980's when the prevailing look was tailored, crisp and slightly oversized,

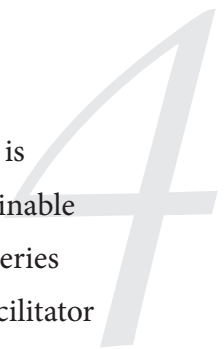
and shiny elements like sequins were very unpopular: “...*anything with a bit of sequins on it and you wouldn't have sold it to anyone with style.*” (Author interview with Easton Pearson, August 10, 2007). Contrary to the trends of that time, Easton Pearson started their practice by commissioning a small amount of embroideries from India. They experimented with thread work initially, and slowly developed their line of textured garments using the various crafts available in India. Their ethnic inspired dresses became popular and by 1993, the demand for Bow and Arrow by Easton Pearson increased to such an extent that internationally recognized buyers and retailers including the influential Joan Bernstein, owner of Browns boutique in London UK, and Joyce Ma of Hong Kong boutique ordered clothes from their collections.

At this juncture, their Indian connection supported a sustained growth of their business. As the label started to gain importance within the buying circles, Easton and Pearson decided to visit India themselves with the view of setting up the business on a larger scale. The opportunities inherent in the artisanal crafts available in India unlocked huge potentials for their business and with the collaboration of Ms. Patel, they set up a workshop in Mumbai in 1993. To have a better understanding of the usage of the Indian crafts and to develop an understanding of its application from the artisan's perspective, they realised that they had to make regular trips to India to develop a collaboration with the local craftsman. This collaboration would entail an understanding and exchange of techniques from the artisan to the designers and Western aesthetics from the designers to the artisan. This framework provided them the opportunity to develop a repertoire of techniques and samples that would give their garments the unique aesthetic they had sought to incorporate within their designs. Eclectic inspirations were translated combining Indian craft and Western sensibilities. The product, a melange of inspirations, aesthetic and technique, coming from different geographies, would bear a distinct Easton Pearson signature. This combination was the beginning of their success, a fact that they readily acknowledge.

“... We both are really interested in embroidery and technique and hadn't really had the opportunity to explore it, so it was just like an explosion and it happened at the right time, when the business was growing ... It's what really made us: it's what we are.”

Interview with Easton Pearson, August 10, 2007

By this time, the helping hand initially offered by Ms. Patel developed into a full time business as she managed the workshop in Mumbai, India. Her contacts proved very helpful in establishing and sourcing the artisans for the label. Ms. Patel had worked for the Khaddi



Corporation on a voluntary basis before she met Pamela and Lydia. In addition, she is also on the Board of the Women's Cooperative 'Sharujan,' which helps provide sustainable income to the women of the Kutch region by developing products for their embroideries and marketing them in India (Figure 4.2). For Easton Pearson, Ms. Patel acts as a facilitator who communicates their design ideas to the local crafts people in Hindi. Easton Pearson convey their ideas to Ms. Patel via drawings with the necessary specification and details; she notates them in Hindi for the craftsmen to understand what is expected from them. The drawings are sampled according to specifications provided and sent back to Brisbane for comments and approvals. This process continues until a satisfactory outcome is achieved.

Easton Pearson's practice is not restricted to this workshop only as the workshop is involved in embroideries and textile techniques. They also source hand-woven fabrics from different regions of India and in Vietnam. The fabrics commissioned from various global regions are then tie-dyed, embellished and printed in India using the facilities in Mumbai.

Their principal master craftsman, Mr. Moti has been working with them since their first contact with Indian crafts. In the early days of Easton Pearson in India, he and his team of two were making wedding ghagras on commission. At the behest of Ms. Patel, he subsequently came to work for the designers, and since this time, his team has grown and at the time of the interview in 2007, a work force of between fifty to one hundred were working with him specifically on Easton Pearson garments. This was due to the size and volume of work; as the size and capacity of the workroom, in the number of *karigars*, (artisans) working at any given time increases and decreases according to demand. Easton Pearson's workshop operates with a specific number of permanent employees and hires additional help when the work requires.

Easton Pearson has expanded their practice to include Vietnam, where they source textiles for the label's collections. The reason they went to India and then to Vietnam is that Australia is well-placed geographically to access the textile resources of that region. Comparing this to Europe, it is more expensive to import fabric due to high costs associated with production, tariffs and logistics (Easton Pearson 2007). The opportunities to produce handmade fabric are far greater in Asia and portend immense creative possibilities. The uniqueness in design, textures, and the availability of natural fibres along with the singular quality of the handmade can be sourced to create difference in the product at prices, which remain competitive. Fabrics can be woven, printed and dyed in different traditional techniques and surfaces embellished according to given specifications. The final product that undergoes these processes becomes a unique item with added value that is comparable to European fashion. The value addition creates new tactile surfaces and textures and this

aspect has been widely acclaimed by international buyers. Hence, traditionally Indian fabrics like *matka* silk, *gajji* silk, *chanderi* silk/cotton, *tussah* silk, and embroidery/textile techniques such as *katori* sequins, *gandhani* work and *gota* braids are products that were developed and introduced to Australia by Easton Pearson.

A common assumption exists that Western designers 'go East' in search of cheaper production sites, could, in general, be correct. However, when assessing the work of these two designers, the notion needs to be further investigated. Easton Pearson access the resources of India not for the low cost of production, but due to the specialized crafts available. When questioned on this aspect, the partners claimed to pay their artisans well; a statement which cannot be verified, but for the fact that master craftsman Moti and his team has been with them for over 20 years, which validates their claim. According to them, they use the crafts of the region because it is a 'living craft'; it is still part of the quotidian lives of the people of India. When filtered through the imagination of Easton Pearson, these crafts create garments that have a strong handmade element to them. India and Vietnam provide them the techniques with which they associate and these are inculcated into their style of clothes. Remarking on their process, Pamela and Lydia state that:

"... It's impossible: the skills are not available generally in the Westernised countries because the tradition of this type of work in everyday life exists in these countries: it's there and it's a living skill and we are attracted to those cultures."

Interview with Easton Pearson August 10, 2007

Significant within the practice of Easton Pearson is that by using the indigenous skills, techniques of a culture different to theirs, they are challenging the traditional application of the craft; within their practice, the craft changes form. This is what Appadurai (1986) termed as the *aesthetics of decontextualization*. In such a practice, the designers use the existing skills of a culture, and by challenging their traditional application; by exercising a certain control over an existing traditional technique; the outcome of the product not only changes its form, in terms of the shape and appearance but also changes the cultural context of the traditional application (Figure 4.3).

In employing these 'living skills' of India and Vietnam, Easton Pearson separate themselves from the ordinary and reinvent the application of the craft giving it an entirely new dimension. In doing so, the Asian-crafted garments travel around the world and are situated within a Western context. It is the nature of the Easton Pearson practice that differentiates them from other Australian designers. This concept is also reiterated by McNeil (2009: p 113) when he states that:

Continuing with the modernist tradition in which both the cut and the materiality of non-western garments provided European and American designers with the opportunity to create new visions of dressing the female body, 'traditional' garments are given new contexts and meanings. Within Easton Pearson's design imagination, traditional designs are not simply copied but rather amended to create new allusions and aesthetics.

In order to work within this milieu, Easton Pearson have consciously established their practice in a manner where they can control the creative output by working directly with specific crafts people to create their East-West aesthetics. An example quoted by Pearson was her experience of working with master craftsman Moti, in charge of the embroideries, who, inclined to create symmetric designs as per tradition, had difficulty adapting himself to their design aesthetics:

"... [the craftsman] has the most beautiful, even hand and if you ask him to draw something it is symmetrical and it's even. That's not our way and we are constantly telling him, 'no Moti, not so precise. Look: like this...'. And if we leave him to his own devices, it always comes back perfect... he has [now] become used to it and doesn't mind doing it, but he still can't do it by himself: he has to have someone free him up, free his hand."

Interview with Easton Pearson, August 10, 2007

The interaction with the artisan provides them a unique opportunity to develop their ideas on a one-to-one basis with the craftsman. In this way, they communicate directly with the artisan with the help of Ms. Patel, thus having control over the final product. It also provides them the chance to explore new techniques and commission new materials for their surface embellishments.

"We don't employ any big manufacturing company to do any work for us anywhere. Everywhere we work, it's with specific people, specific makers who are under very clear control and in very good conditions, and we personally know what the factories look like."
(ibid)

This is also reiterated by Merten (November 2001) when she states:

Another important element is their emphasis on ethics. In an industry that often has a bad reputation for low pay and long hours, they make a point of paying their out-workers well and they ensure that the women in India who do their hand beading and other elaborate work on their fabrics are paid fairly.

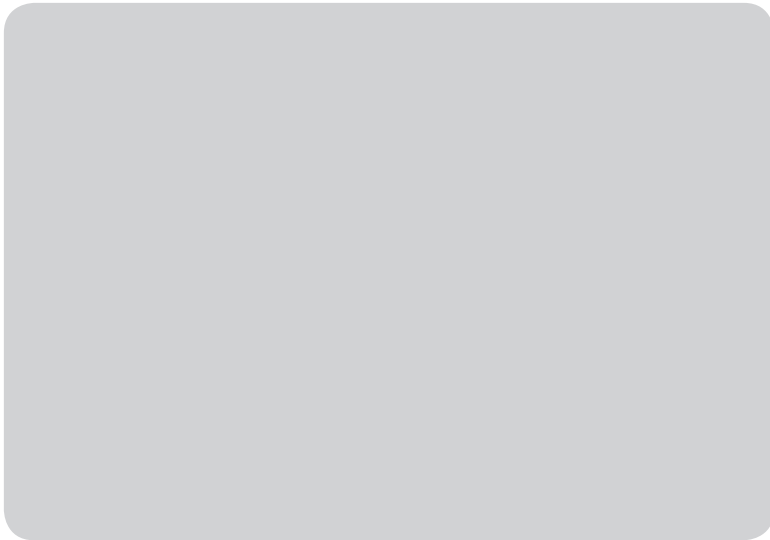


Figure 4.2 Logo of Womens Cooperative Shrujan Shrujan. 2010. *Shrujan Story* [Online]. Ahmedabad: Shrujan. Available: <http://www.shrujan.org/index.html> [Accessed 13th April 2010].

Figure 4.1 Easton Pearson Swatch Books Spring Summer 1993 (Easton Pearson archive). *Easton Pearson* by Wallace et al. Exhibition catalogue, Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery of Modern Art, 2009, Print.



Figure 4.3 Eastern Pearson Angola Smock top Spring Summer 2002. *Easton Pearson* by Wallace et al. Exhibition catalogue, Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery of Modern Art, 2009, Print.

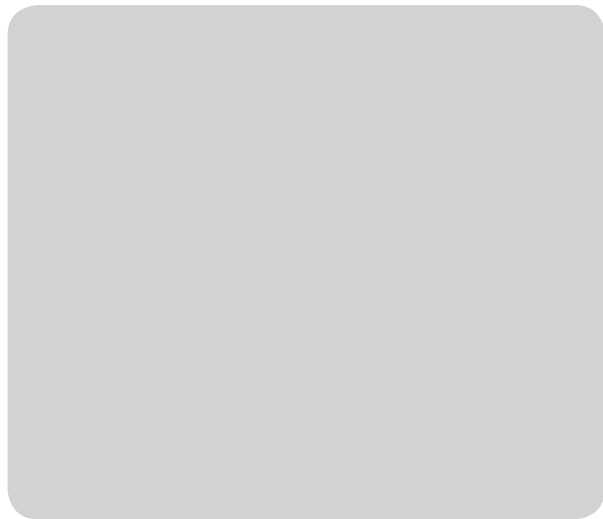


Figure 4.4 Chain Stitch Embroidery *The Techniques of Indian Embroidery* by A. Morrell, Loveland, CO., Interweave Press 1995, Print.

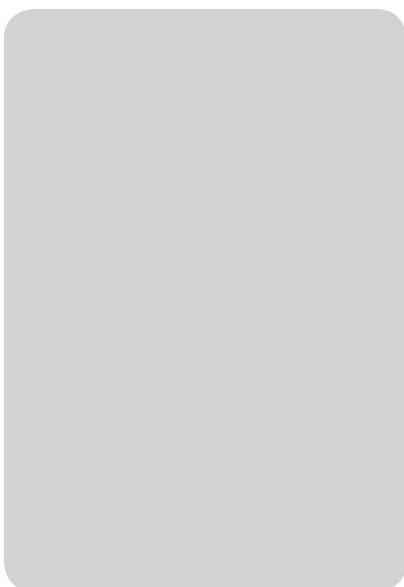


Figure 4.5 Wish Top and Bhutto skirt Spring Summer 2009 *Easton Pearson* by Wallace et al. Exhibition catalogue, Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery of Modern Art, 2009, Print.

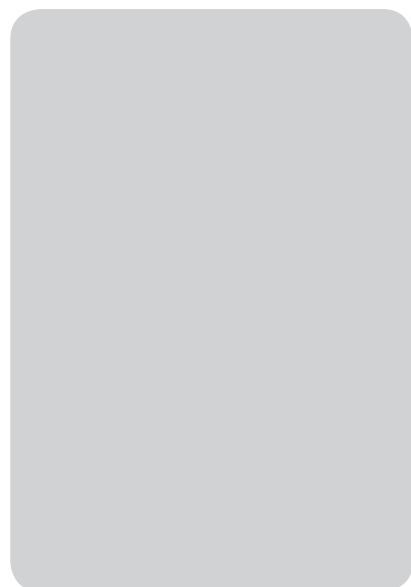


Figure 4.6 Fete Shirt Dress Spring Summer 2009 *Easton Pearson* by Wallace et al. Exhibition catalogue, Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery of Modern Art, 2009, Print.

Easton Pearson is also known for the utilization of the Shrujan women's cooperative in the Great Rann of Kutch. Shrujan was founded in 1969 by Chandaben Shroff, a philanthropist, who was involved in the drought relief efforts in the Kutch region. During her visits, she realised the wealth of craft traditions of hand embroidery that existed in that area. The craft was handed down from mother to daughter for generations. Each community has their own particular style of embroidery and repertoire of stitches and motifs. These drought stricken communities were given the opportunity by Shrujan to engage in sustainable income generation by promoting their craft throughout India and beyond. According to their website, they work with "16 different styles of embroidery, done by 3,500 women across 100 villages." (Shrujan, 2010). The work of the region is generally characterized by chain stitch and open chain stitching and mirror work using bright colours. The motifs representative of the region are floral together with parrots and peacocks (Figure 4.4).

Easton Pearson provides sustenance to these communities by incorporating the craft within their own design practice. An example of the application of the embroidery can be clearly seen in the Spring/Summer 2009 collection in the 'Wish Top' and the 'Bhuto skirt' (Figure 4.5), with colourful thread embroidery incorporating mirror work. Easton Pearson has also been known to import the quilts handmade by the women of Shrujan into Australia. Once made diligently by young girls for their weddings, these embroideries are now a sustainable source of income for the women of the region.

An interesting fact shared by Easton Pearson is that craftsmen working in high end work rooms in India are paid more than those who have a graduate degree and are working as clerks in offices or operators in call centres. The operational environment provided by these workrooms is far better than the call centres (Easton Pearson, op cit 2007). There is a sense of creativity and integrity, where an individual craftsman is part of a creative process, where he may be the specialist of a particular technique and is acknowledged and respected for his skill. Unfortunately, the children of these craftsmen often lose this skill as they choose other professional options. Easton Pearson advocate that the more people understand that this is an honourable profession with a huge scope, the better it will be for them in the future and this will support craft preservation. According to them, it is very rewarding for a high end work room craftsman to see a picture of their handcrafted dress in the United States edition of *Vogue*, rather than sitting behind a desk in an office environment.

The Inspiration

Every designer approaches the concept of design differently and that element of their work defines their practice. Within this context, some designers sit within the milieu of the avant garde, whilst others are labelled as ‘contemporary’ in their approach towards design. Easton Pearson fall into the category of designers who are contemporary but are not entirely trend influenced within their design practice. This aspect of their clothing is due to their design philosophy which includes celebrating the craft of the ‘*handmade*’. From the weaving of the cloth on hand looms in different parts of the world; to the different techniques of dyeing; to the various methods of surface embellishments by specialist crafts people in India; to the final product, which would include the hand-cutting of each dress and stitching by the experienced machinists at the Brisbane workshops in Australia. The garment undergoes a process of creation which is not only transnational in nature but also is the source of livelihood for a group of skilled craftsmen, some of whom have been carrying on this work for generations.

But it is not only the crafts of India that inspire them: it is a method of expression for them by which they express their creative genius. The real inspiration for Easton Pearson, the reason why they started to design was, as Wallace (2009) says, is “the echo of the vintage”; “the op-shop ideal of their youth.”

This is the reason that the St Ouen flea market in Paris is a favourite stop during their overseas trips, where they look for inspirational ideas. A good example of these finds would be their Spring/Summer collection in 2008, which was also a celebration of the 20th anniversary of the label. Dress design was inspired by vintage post cards featuring rose orchids digitally printed onto fabric. Moreover, the design features influences from the Japanese wood block prints known as *ukiyo-e* (also referred to as images from the ‘floating world’) which were taken from two antique Japanese prints found at the flea market (Wallace 2009) (Figure 4.6).

When treated with a wash of Asian techniques, these inspirations from the past give a modern take to a vintage idea with textural qualities. For Easton Pearson, inspirations are continuous and emanate from around the designers’ environments – in their travels and from people, artists they admire. These inspirations act as an umbrella that guides them through their work. Sometimes, it can also be an idea that was not fully explored in an earlier collection. Reflecting during the interview they remarked that:

“There is definitely a continuity and that comes from all sorts of places. It’s difficult to say that it’s from one particular thing. It can be from art or history or a place or something

that we might focus on... and often all those influences are posthumous, they are sort of an umbrella that we use when we are halfway through the collection and try to tie it all together... often it's something in the background a little bit.” Easton Pearson, 2007

They are inspired to produce unique fabrics, and they achieve this through their special collaborative relationship with the artisanal communities of Asia. Fabrics sourced and commissioned are crocheted, hand embroidered, knitted, woven, beaded and embellished from artisans and crafts people in India and Vietnam (Parkes, 2006: p 112). This aspect of their design gives them the edge over mass-produced fashion.

What inspires these designers cannot be described in one sentence, as their creations are a melange of varied sources. ‘The Desserts of Sahara’, the rugged regions of the Rann of Kutch, the paintings on the mud houses of the Basotho women in Africa, and even the artist colonies in Mexico, the South of France, Italy ... the list goes on (Wallace 2009). Artists that have inspired their past collections include Frida Kahlo, Georgia O’ Keefe, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso and Gustav Klimt, amongst others. These inspirations are at times directly visible in some of their creations, like the Lobi Tank and the Star Sarong in the Spring/Summer 2003 collection inspired by the mud houses of the Basotho women of Africa, and the Autumn/Winter collection of 2006, which was inspired by Klimt; or the less evident work like the Mazay Dress (Autumn/Winter 2008) inspired by Matisse’s ‘Interior at Nice’ (1920) (figures 4.7 and 4.8).

Easton Pearson also acknowledge the influence on their work of legendary French couturier Paul Poiret (1879-1944) and Madeline Vionnet (1876-1975). According to Wallace (2009), Poiret was known for his love of the Oriental, especially his fascination for the decorative arts of India and the Middle East, and in doing so, helped to liberate European women from the corset. Madeline Vionnet, on the other hand, was known for introducing the bias cut which revolutionised the cut of women’s clothes. Both these elements are visible in the Easton Pearson collections, as their clothes are known for their comfort and style.

They commented, “*We’re very aware of things that make life simpler. We believe in comfort without sacrificing style.*” (Easton Pearson as quoted in (Munroe, September, 1991)

According to the designers, another important inspiration is the impact colour has on their creations. They set their own palette for every collection, as they prefer not to buy fabric that is pre-coloured. This allows them to colour the base cloth, silk, cotton or calico according to their own colour ways. An inspirational 1950’s French colour palette, or a 1970’s Indian palette will be amended according to the season, their customer base and the prevalent trends. They elaborated in interview:

“We love colour. We look at all different kinds of influences. We can look at a 50’s French colour Palette or a 70’s Indian palette, or we can look at an 18th Century palette and then we will make it our own in any case. But we colour all of our own prints and we colour all of our base cloth. It is very unusual for us to buy anything, which is already in a colour.”

Easton Pearson, 2007

An interesting point to note within the practice is that Easton Pearson can never decide their colour palette in another country, as they feel that the Australian sun is more luminous and the colours are brighter than the Indian light. It is especially important if they are working in India during the monsoon season; when the light is very dull, grey and soft. Once all the techniques have been developed and the surface embellishments finalised, the tone and shade of the colours for the collections are always set in Brisbane as they can rely on the correct shades under the Australian light.

The Beginning of a Collection

Easton Pearson’s design methodology is such that they do not start out with a concrete concept as they are constantly exploring and developing ideas. Often the collection begins after their trips to India. Samples, ideas, textures are trialled in their workshop in Mumbai, using the varied techniques that may embrace a weaving technique, digitally printing an image on fabric and working on the scale of the motif to minimise or emphasise an effect. Trialling out a new technique of surface embellishment may range from appliqué, beading, using traditional embroidery in an unconventional way or exploring the idea of using champagne bottle caps as decorations on a skirt (Figure 4.9). The result of this experimentation catalyses the collection.

The techniques trialled in India are brought back to Australia to decide the final outcome. They place their trialled samples on each garment and decide the scale of the motifs; the designs are drawn onto paper patterns and then the patterns are sent to India, or on to Vietnam. Upon completion of the decoration/embellishment stage, the fabric is returned to Brisbane where it is stitched in the Easton Pearson ateliers. They state that during the sampling period, they can receive up to thirty courier parcels in a week from India and Vietnam and they would be sending back twenty with their selections and comments. Due to the different cultural settings of their work practice, the preferred method of communicating is via fax, or samples parcelled with annotations giving specific instructions, which are then communicated in Hindi by Ms. Patel to the workers.

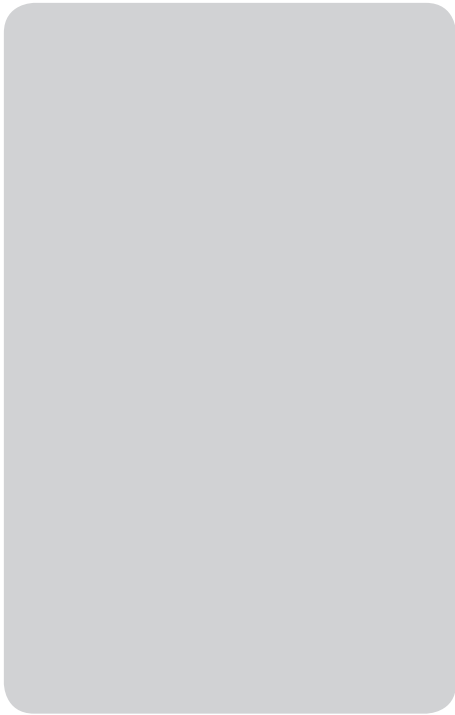


Figure 4.7 Lobi Tank and Star Sarong Dress Spring Summer 2003. *Easton Pearson* by Wallace et al. Exhibition catalogue, Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery of Modern Art, 2009, Print.

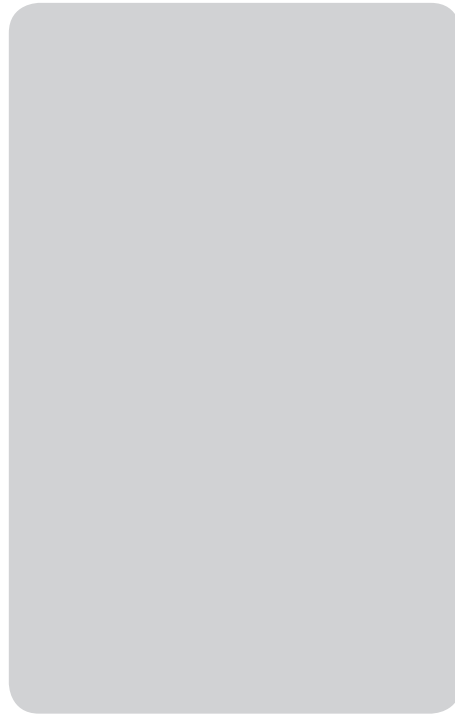


Figure 4.8 Mazay Dress Autumn Winter 2008. *Easton Pearson* by Wallace et al. Exhibition catalogue, Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery of Modern Art, 2009, Print.

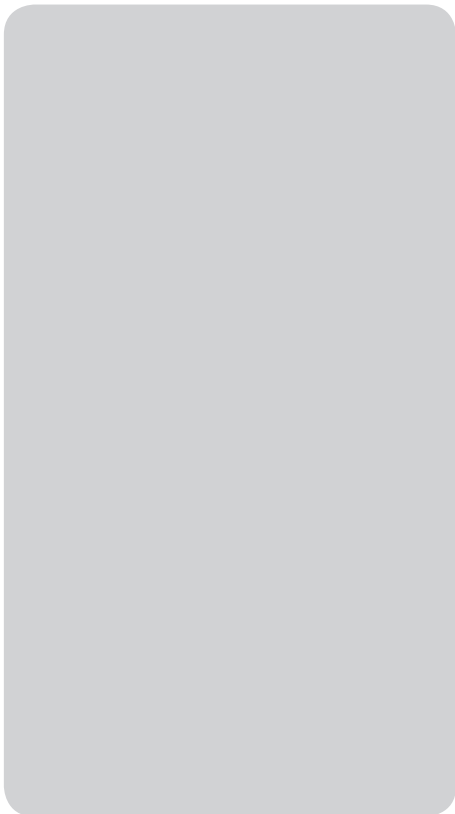


Figure 4.9 and 4.13 Fidelity Smock and karma Skirt Spring Summer 2002. *Easton Pearson* by Wallace et al. Exhibition catalogue, Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery of Modern Art, 2009, Print.

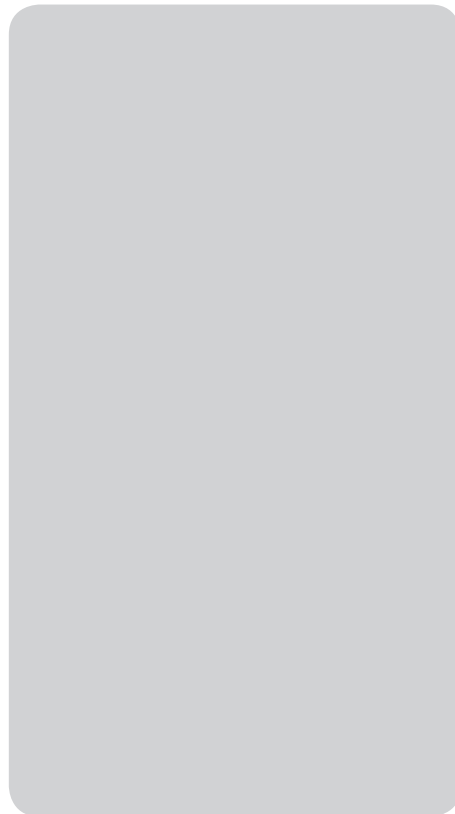


Figure 4.10 Eli Singlet and Irma Skirt Spring Summer 2001. *Easton Pearson* by Wallace et al. Exhibition catalogue, Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery of Modern Art, 2009, Print.

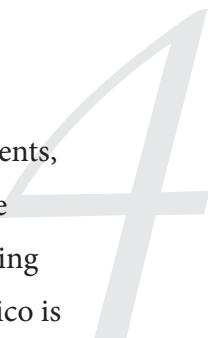
“...The people who work there don't work very well with emails so it is all faxed or TNTed [sic]. It's quite hands on... and we don't speak Hindi and the master craftsman doesn't speak English, so really our friend [Ms. Patel] does all the interpretation.” ibid

During an interview for the Power House exhibition in 2002 entitled, 'Sourcing the Muse' (Easton and Pearson, 2002) they explained their design methodology. The brand Easton Pearson starts the creative process by employing the craftsman to create the fabric. Once the base fabric is prepared, which might be woven for them, or acquired pre-woven and coloured according to their specifications, the next stage of their production begins. Detailed handwork is sometimes done to the shape of the garment, in which case paper patterns are made and sent to India with detailed instructions on the embroideries, motif, colours textures to be created. In other instances, the fabric is entirely embroidered in which case detailed specifications are set to India on the type of embroidery to cover the fabric. Upon receiving the fabric in Brisbane, they draw a sketch of the dress for the pattern-maker, writing down detailed specifications of the dress. These patterns are made in calico or muslin and are fitted on a live model; alterations suggested by the designers are incorporated by the pattern-maker and produced in real fabric. If the fabric is too expensive, then up to two fittings are done until the designers approve the final prototype. These trialled techniques become a repertoire of research that serves as an idea bank to which they can refer for each collection and at the same time develop a working library of techniques.

Style and Content of Easton Pearson

Miranda Wallace, Curator of the exhibition, 'Easton Pearson', held at the Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane writes in the exhibition catalogue (Wallace, 2009) that their clothes are experiential in a way that they take the wearer on many different journeys, which are a collection of stories from different parts of the world. These stories are complex combinations of skills and techniques as well as the effort involved in the creation of the garments.

The use of the word *experiential* refers to the quest for meaning within the garment. It also refers to the sense of the otherness that is experienced when wearing an Easton Pearson garment and the journeys the garment has undertaken. This could commence from the maker's hand weaving the silks or the Khaddi cotton and Batiks from India and Vietnam to the complete garment in Brisbane. The word *experiential* could also refer to the tactile experiences that the wearer goes through when looking at or wearing an Easton Pearson



garment. The experience would include the feel of the natural fibres within the garments, which would include a wide variety of fabrics with an array of textures. The signature element that Easton Pearson has developed over the years is the aesthetic of contrasting textures (Wallace 2009) where fabric such as calico is used in a fashion garment. Calico is normally utilised in the fashion trade for creating prototypes. Easton Pearson embellishes the fabric with a contrast such as sequins, or raffia, or even ric-rac to create a product that highlights the qualities of calico (Figure 4.10). In industry calico is also known as greige fabric that comes in different weights and is cotton at its most basic form. The beauty of cotton, as we know it, is highlighted when it is bleached, dyed or printed to make it useable. Easton Pearson celebrates the raw and makes it worthy of catwalk appeal.

“So we are always experimenting, trying to use new ideas to take a traditional technique and change it to make it more modern or adaptable.” Easton Pearson 2007, op cit

This experimenting with different techniques involves the participation of many hands of experienced artisans each having their own speciality, which in turn develops the unmistakable mark of creative genius of an Easton Pearson garment.

Elaborating on Wallace’s comment, an important feature in the work of Easton Pearson is the way they use diverse elements in their work combining them to create fascinating garments, such as using raffia on silk, sequins on calico and silk with cotton appliqué. The label juxtaposes different aesthetics, textures and finishes through layering in one outfit. Their application of the traditional crafts of India using contemporary imagery separates them from the gamut of designers practising in Australia. It is a very different approach to fashion where textures and techniques typical of Eastern cultures are used employing the aesthetics and sensibilities of a Western culture. The result is fashion rich in content and context that is a combination of transnationality, individuality, craft appreciation and craft preservation. In this scenario, creativity is not restricted by fixed parameters but by experimenting, combining and creating. As Wallace observed:

However it is the sheer variety of references – cultural, historical, geographical, personal- makes it hard to pin down exactly what makes Easton Pearson’s clothes so different and appealing. Wallace, 2009: p 14

Their collections are not made of only calico; cotton used in Easton Pearson collections ranges from fine muslin to cotton sateen, heavy cotton calico and jersey. These fabrics, according to Wallace, are woven in Chanderi in Madhya Pardesh, Central India or

West Bengal where they source their hand spun and loomed *khaddi* cotton (Figures 4.11 and 4.12).

The aesthetic of contrasting textures is also found in the layering of Easton Pearson's garments where *khaddi* cotton is paired with delicate Battenberg lace in the Fidelity Smock and is worn over a boldly-patterned batik garment in the Karma Skirt Spring/Summer 2002. The batik skirt was embroidered with metal sequins and edged with Champagne caps (Figure 4.13). In keeping with the same aesthetics, they experiment with visual contrasts as in the Pixo Dress Spring/Summer 2007, (Figure 4.14) made from hand woven matka silk, which has a natural irregularity both in its weave and in appearance looks like hessian, but upon touch, reveals the smooth lustrous softness of silk. To add to the contrast, the dress had raw unfinished edges, but was finished with tiger's eye, semi-precious gemstones adding to its value. An Easton Pearson garment can sometimes be a bit of a riddle that can only be unravelled upon close contact. Easton Pearson's craft can be appreciated also for the reason that many of these traditional techniques are not in use or are restricted to a very elite small segment of the market due to high cost of production. Common techniques used within Easton Pearson garments are called mashru, bandhani, kantha, abochini and gujrati embroidery.

Easton Pearson is a label that has created a niche within the Australian fashion industry and at the same time is marketed worldwide. In 2003, Easton Pearson had more than seventy international clients in twenty-five countries, from Norway to Saudi Arabia, with Italy and the US its biggest markets (Alderson 2003). Frazer (2006) states that the label now sells in stores throughout Europe, Japan, Russia, the United States, Asia and the Middle East. The global nature of Easton Pearson collections sits well with the high end customers of the West as well as the East, with the exception that certain styles are made full length for the Middle Eastern buyers. The reason for this success is the simplicity of the cut and the intricate details of the garments. An Easton Pearson garment has a certain value that transcends time and can be worn season after season. This is due to the unique nature of their clothes where the emphasis is on intricate detail and hand crafted workmanship that is exhibited by their creative input such that it becomes a valuable item in the wardrobe. Wallace (2009) states that it is the profusion of the different techniques of hand embroidery in their work that is reminiscent of Edwardian or Victorian Dress. In particular the Cornelli embroidery, ribbon work, ric rac trimmings, appliqué, lace work and beading.

Analysing the garments, Wallace states:

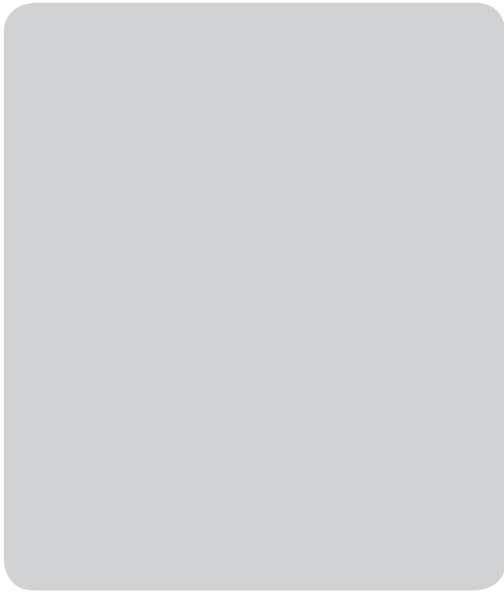


Figure 4.11 Map of India
The Techniques of Indian Embroidery by A. Morrell,
Loveland, CO., Interweave Press 1995, Print.



Figure 4.12 Detail Map of Textile Production Centres Accessed
by Easton and Pearson. *Indian Textiles*, by J. Gillow, & N.
Barnard, N., London, Thames & Hudson, 2008, Print.

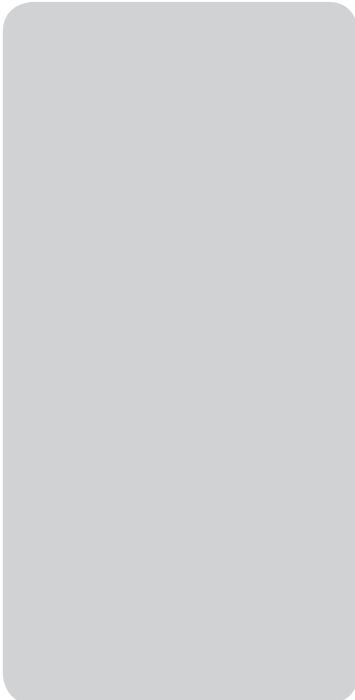


Figure 4.14 Pixo Dress Spring
Summer 2007
Easton Pearson by Wallace et al.
Exhibition catalogue, Brisbane:
Queensland Art Gallery of Modern
Art, 2009, Print.

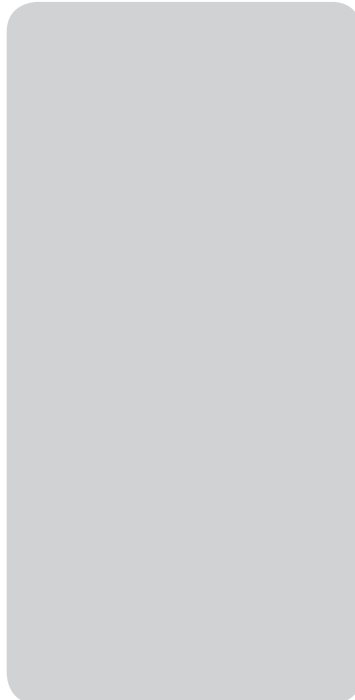


Figure 4.15 Isaiah Smock Spring
Summer 2002
Easton Pearson by Wallace et al.
Exhibition catalogue, Brisbane:
Queensland Art Gallery of Modern
Art, 2009, Print.

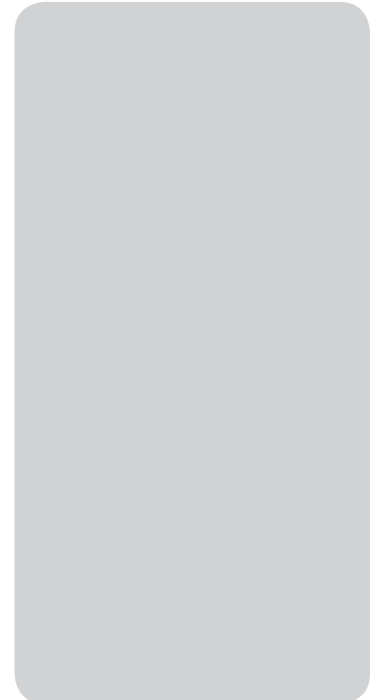


Figure 4.16 Kantop Skirt Spring
Summer 2002
Easton Pearson by Wallace et al.
Exhibition catalogue, Brisbane:
Queensland Art Gallery of Modern
Art, 2009, Print.

Simple shapes underlie many Easton Pearson designs, and several basic forms recur across collections, such as the A-line tunic or the more exaggerated trapeze dress, the peasant smock and 'Zouave' pants, and the empire line dress. Wallace, 2009: p 12

In addition, McNeil (2009) also makes the same comment that Easton Pearson clothes are not primarily about cutting: their use of indigenous textiles tends to add abstracted shapes to garments. Garments are at times based on traditional clothes such as the skirted garments worn by the Mughals of India, or the little jackets worn by the sheep herders of Rajasthan and Gujarat. More recently, they have designed clothes using inspiration from artists and movements such as the New York school of the 1950's and 1960's, which translated into artist's smocks in deep colours with embellishments around the *décolleté* and cuffs.

"We have used some traditional and Indian, Chinese fabrics: we use quite a lot of traditional Indian jacquards. We've used some paisley and we have used oriental motifs too. Years ago when ethnic dress was very fashionable we used some Indian cuts in garment shapes. The cholis, the ghagras, the bangle pants... We have actually done them again."

Easton Pearson, op cit, 2007

For the Spring/Summer 2002 collection, Easton Pearson made Victorian blouses and paired them with African batik skirts. The cut of these blouses was Edwardian but were made using embroidered Indian khaddi. Variations of the style included the Isaiah smock, a full length waisted dress with the bodice in *khaddi* and the skirt made out of Battenberg lace with a batik wrap belt and Indian bangle trousers (Figure 4.15). Or the Charity Cami (Spring/Summer 2002) in hand woven *khaddi* cotton with tone on tone thread embroidery paired with a cotton wood block printed skirt. Another example is the Kantop skirt in calico and cambric cotton with hand appliqué resembling the appliqués of the tents generally used for festivities as large canopies, or also applied on animal trappings (Figure 4.16).

Analysis of a Garment

To understand the methodology of these designers, a garment has been selected from their collection to analyse it with a view to investigate the craft techniques used within the garment and to visualise how an Easton Pearson garment comes together: the inspiration and its realisation by way of using the various craft facilities available to them in India and Vietnam.

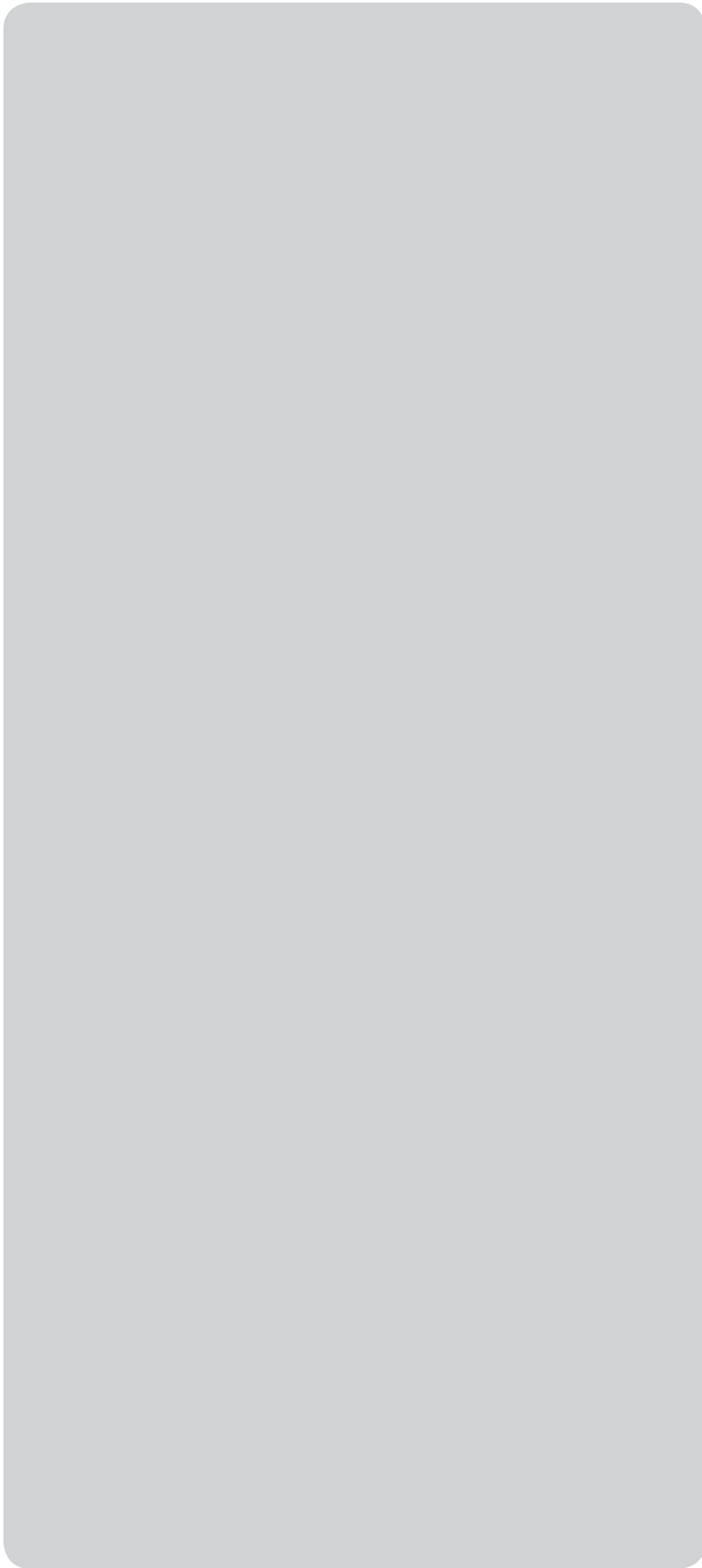


Figure 4.17 Cimi Dress Spring Summer 2008
Easton Pearson by Wallace et al. Exhibition catalogue, Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery of Modern Art, 2009, Print.

The garment selected for analysis is from their Spring/Summer 2008 collection entitled the *Cimi Dress* (Figure 4.17). The description of the dress given in the catalogue for the exhibition entitled 'Easton Pearson' held at the Queensland Art Gallery in 2009 is as: "Silk, digitally printed and hand decorated with lurex and plastic sequin applique' and cotton embroidery".

This dress, from the collection designed to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the label, was inspired from the Japanese *ukiyo-e* wood block prints acquired by the designers from the Saint Ouen market during one of their trips to Paris (Wallace, 2009). The *ukiyo-e* prints were also known as the 'images of the floating world' due to their dream-like depictions (Chisaburō, 2001). They were also used as posters in Japan in the 19th Century to promote events such as the Kabuki, the Japanese theatre or the Yoshiwara, brothels. These prints had a profound impact on the Impressionist and Post Impressionist movement of that time. The line, flowing curves and the naturalistic aspect of the Japanese aesthetic were appreciated by European painters and became evident in the Art Nouveau style as well.

This Japanese inspired print has been digitally printed, possibly in India where Easton Pearson base their production. This print depicts a sunset in the *ukiyo-e* tradition where there is a linear quality to the image and a contrast of light and dark shades to emphasize the sunset. The sky is light whereas the water takes on a darker shade of the night. The bright orange sun adds brightness to the otherwise monotonic image.

Traditional *gota* work has been applied to create circles. *Gota* is a type of metal embroidery from Rajasthan where a band of gold or silver ribbon in varying width is woven in satin weave. Originally, silver & gold metals were used but have since been replaced by copper-coated with silver. Nowadays, a metalized polyester film is coated as per requirements, which has reduced the cost of the *gota*. The polyester *gota* has good resistance to moisture and has a longer life as compared to the metallic *gota* (Textiles, 2011). When typically used as a ribbon or as braids, *Gota* is called *champa*, and in the shape of leaves is called *gota patti*. For this dress, it has been applied in an unconventional way to create circles that are silver and gold in colour. This combination of using silver and gold together is referred to as *ganga jamna* in India. This term is widely used in the decorative arts, and in this case, the *gota* circles have been used in a *ganga jamna* sequence. These circles appear to be falling from the sunset and lend a surrealistic effect to the dress. The circles have been connected together by the use of running stitch embroidery. This effect is taken from the *kantha* work employed in India; a type of running stitch used to create patterns where parallel running stitches produce contours, and depending on their density, not only create colour values but create texture of the surface (Mittal, 2004).

Zari work, which is popular in the Indian repertoire of embroidery techniques, is used to create the floating flowers on the kaftan. *Zari* is basically a word used for gold thread work. These flowers are filled with silk thread embroidery in different colours as well as plastic and lurex sequins. The motif of the flowers is Japanese in shape and thus the embroidery merges with the background print, but adds a three dimensional aspect giving the effect of actual floating flowers. Likewise, the neckline has been embroidered in sequins, zari and thread work. The neckline is interesting as it contains the garment through the embroidered band but the embroidery is muted and understated and does not detract attention away from the entire garment; rather, it reinforces the effect of the sunset through the muted brilliance of the *zari* work, which gives the effect of the approaching stars.

The kaftan is an interesting choice of garment to apply this print on as the volume of the garment provides the width to express the entire effect created from the print. Of Asian origin and an ideal garment for the summer, it has been widely accepted in the Western wardrobe with a shape that fits many sizes.

This is a good example of a marriage of aesthetics and artisanal technique. A printed kaftan would be an interesting garment in terms of the choice of print, colour and its adaptation *vis à vis* scale on to a garment. But the addition of the hand embroidered floating flowers and the shiny celestial circles falling from the sky followed by their trails gives the garment an interesting twist. Do these orbs fall into the water and blossom into floating flowers at night? The aesthetic is a melange of different cultures but constructed through Australian tastes.

Easton Pearson's Transnational Practice

Easton Pearson practice fashion within a transnational circuit (Figure 4.18), whereby the label is based in Australia but access the crafts of India, Vietnam and Hong Kong for different parts of their practice. The focal point of the practice is Australia from where the entire traffic of the business originates and culminates. The first phase of their transnational circuit takes place between Australia, the Northern Hemisphere and during their trips to Paris for the *Salon Prêt-à-Porter*. This is not only a sales trip for the designers but it is also an important phase of their practice as it provides them unconventional avenues of research furnishing further impetus for their design development. As mentioned earlier, these ideas can originate from old books, magazines, post cards, or vintage fabrics found in the specialist flea markets of Paris.

The second phase of their practice occurs in Mumbai, India where the designers source the local crafts to develop and refine ideas. It means that inspirations in terms of fabric

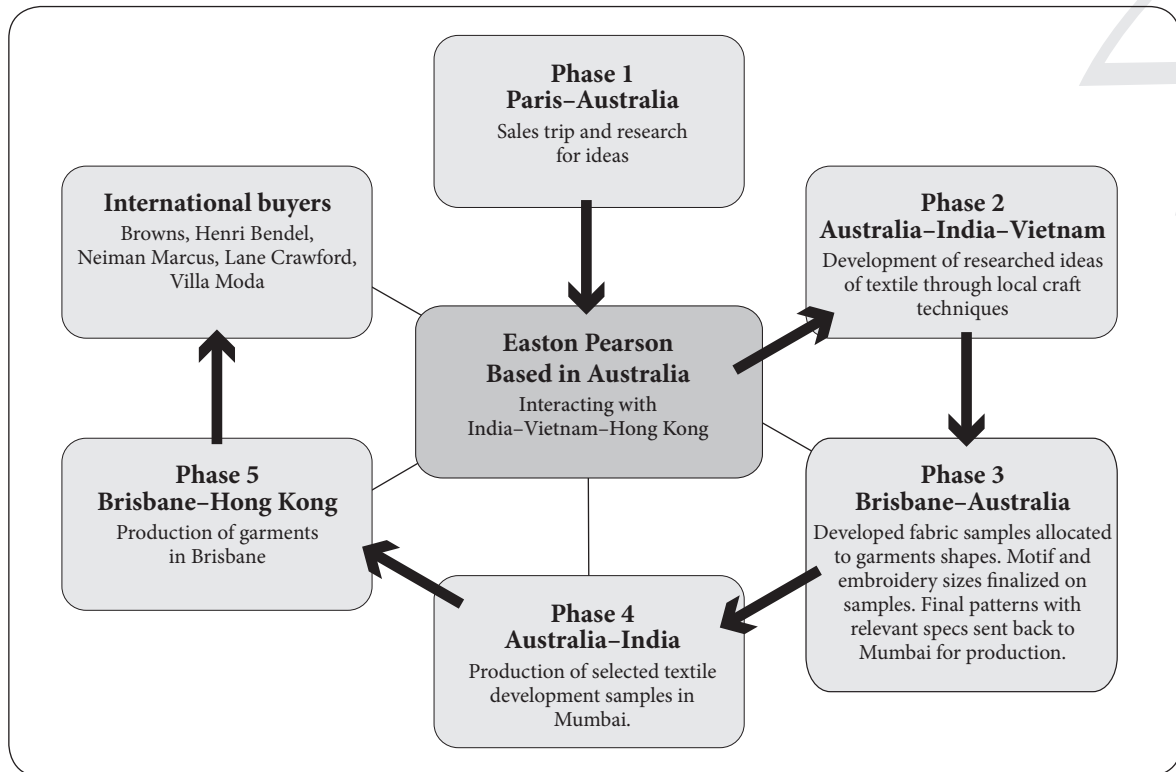
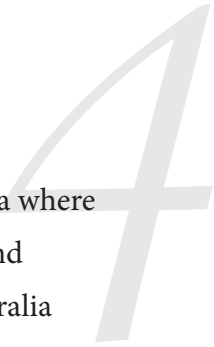


Figure 4.18 Transnational Practice of Easton Pearson Shazia Bano 2012

swatches, a motif, a piece of lace, a sewing technique, a portion of ornament, a metallic shape, or even a particular texture will be explored and developed using the various traditional craft techniques available in India. The interesting part of their work is that these traditional techniques are used in non-traditional ways, which in turn creates new images and textures tending towards the abstract at times, but is always an entirely new way of interpreting the craft. According to Appadurai (1986), this is termed as the *aesthetics of decontextualization*. The original craft is used in unconventional ways that alter its traditional form and adapts itself to new impetus, which changes the context of the craft. These samples are developed by Easton Pearson in conjunction with the artisans, shaping and moulding and directing the creative process. This means that they are involved in the developmental phase of their work and do not subcontract their work off shore to middle men working on their behalf.

The third phase of their work is when all the trialled samples from Vietnam and India are brought back to Australia. This is when the collection starts taking shape. As explained, earlier sketches are drawn, patterns are made and motif placements and surface embellishments are finalised to their size. Detailed specifications are made along with colour swatches and notes relating to the samples produced earlier. All these are sent to India to start the sample garments.



The fourth phase is in Mumbai where the final approved fabric samples go into production. The final phase of their transnational production takes place in Australia where the whole practice comes together and with the help of Australian pattern makers and machinists who use their skill to create garments that are not only marketed in Australia but are sold in countries around the globe. This collaborative process takes up to eighteen months from conception through to production.

What drives this transnational practice is the desire to create individuality and uniqueness, through the emphasis on ‘what is touched by the hand’, the hand-made. Easton Pearson (2007) explain that the middle range manufacturer is facing difficulties in competing with the imports coming out of China, and the only way to compete successfully in such a scenario is to make something that is unique that can’t be replicated. They attribute their success in the export market to their decision to stick to their own ideas in keeping with the prevalent trends but have a certain individuality to them that cannot be found elsewhere. They give the example of Italian buyers who import their collections from Australia to Europe, paying substantial duty on them due to the uniqueness of their product. Needless to say, it would be far simpler and cheaper for these Italian buyers to purchase locally from Europe. This is the nature of the work of Easton Pearson, which traverses transnational boundaries on both sides of the business: in manufacturing and retailing, where there is a unique combination of Western influences treated with Asian techniques of manufacturing creating fashion that is inimitable in its own right and is catered to a select audience around the world beyond the boundaries of Australia but on both sides of the globe.

It is for this reason that Asia could continue to play an important role within the fashion industry due to available skills and will be proudly accepted and recognized for its skill base. Easton Pearson has always acknowledged the use of Indian and Vietnamese Crafts within their practice.

“When we see a new client, we are perfectly happy to say that our embroidery is done in India and Vietnam because these people are extremely skilled and they can do the most beautiful work and we want to perpetuate those skills. That is a big part of what we do.”

Easton Pearson, op cit

The Easton Pearson label now sells worldwide to Browns in London, Henri Bendel in New York, Neiman Marcus (US), Lane Crawford in Hong Kong and Villa Moda in Dubai (McNeil, 2009).

Conclusion

Easton Pearson practice design within a transnational framework. Based in Australia, their production centres in Asia are spread over multiple locations. It is a practice that creates fashion using the skills of Australian professionals within the fashion industry and the craft of Asia, sourcing the ingredients for their product from Asia and applying them to Australian fashion using Western aesthetics.

Their practice is based on their own interaction with the craft communities of Asia and their interpretation of the local craft. Using this methodology, they are able to distinguish themselves from the mass manufacturing fashion of the day. Due to this interaction, Western aesthetics travel to Asia, where combined with the local craft, fashion is created that sits within a Western context.

This interaction creates fashion through a process that adds value to a concept, through the different stages of its making. Likewise, the practice of Easton Pearson is a process of accretion of value, where the artisanal handmade aspect of Asia is used to create a valuable product, an aspect that emphasises the effort that goes into the production of fashion through the craft of Asia, which entails hours and hours of patient skill exhibited by the local craft communities and collaboration on behalf of the designers.

These skills are accessed to create individuality within their design, as hand-crafted fashion is difficult to replicate. Easton Pearson sources a living skill of the region, and by changing the aesthetic context of a traditional regional craft make it applicable within a Western context. In this way, the craft changes form and is absorbed within a Western context.

Case Study of Akira Isogawa

5



5

Akira Isogawa is one of Australia's foremost womenswear designers and has operated an established label called 'Akira' for the past nineteen years. His clothes are unconventional: the shapes, textures and motifs in his collections emanate from a deep understanding of a sensibility that has its origins in Asia. His designs are a combination of the traditions of the East coupled with Western aesthetics that create a fashion that is built on layers of colour, texture, form, asymmetry; elements that are not necessarily Western but originate from an Eastern palette. Isogawa's artful juxtaposition of East over West, and vice versa, creates garments that are unique and are accepted by fashion enthusiasts who belong to a select group where the emphasis is on aesthetics that transcend geographies and combine to create a hybrid style.

Isogawa's designs were a synthesis of Eastern and Western aesthetics: loosely structured, layered and inventive. His post – modern reworking of antique kimono fabrics, brocade, embroideries, delicate silks and velvets rejected conventional Western tailoring methods to preference aspects of his Japanese material cultural heritage. Whitfield, 2010: p 197

An Akira garment is created from its maker's vision, one that differentiates Akira from other Australian designers. He calls it his 'Eastern eye' (Hume, 2004), which originates from an appreciation of the imperfect, the asymmetric, and the acceptance of imperfection as a trait of human beings. It is his expression of the *Wabi-Sabi*, a design aesthetic that plays an important role in the subconscious of any Japanese designer be it Kawakubo, Yamamoto, Miyake, or in this case Isogawa. It starts with the appreciation of the imperfect, impermanent and the unconventional. "Wabi-Sabi is a beauty of things imperfect, impermanent and incomplete. It is a beauty of things modest and humble. It is a beauty of things unconventional" (Koren 1994: p 7). A most conspicuous and characteristic feature of traditional Japanese beauty, it is also a Japanese way of life. Koren refers to it as the opportunity of spiritual richness, which appreciates the minor details of everyday life and insights into the overlooked aspects of nature.

The way Isogawa sees disparate elements and combines them to create a dainty dress is what sets him apart from the others (Hume, 2004). Akira's clothes are pure and elegant, bringing to mind a harmony of fluidity of outline originating from constant experimentation with patterns and developing new methods of textile manipulation (Kariminas, 2005).

That said, Akira Isogawa's practice is unique as he is creating a brand that is not purely Japanese but creates hybridity within his fashion that originates from a Japanese mindset but is purely global in nature.

According to his website, Isogawa's design philosophy is to translate fabrics into romantic silhouettes:

"A garment can transcend, giving it a soul..."

"I translate fabrics into soft and romantic silhouettes, using natural fabrics like silks and cottons, which are kind to the skin."

"Distressing fabrics and alchemically treating them, gives the feeling of already 'being loved', thus evoking emotion. Even one-off fabrics found in flea market can be given new life."

"Richly embellished fabrics echo Eastern influences, and I have great respect for their traditions. Inspiration can be found from the past – re-using vintage textiles and sometimes creating replicas of them, incorporated with specific craftsmanship."

"The number of hours someone has spent on manual work like this makes it priceless."

"I see craftsmanship as an implement with which to realise one's vision. Past, present and future; that slogan continues in almost everything around which my work evolves. Timeless beauty and femininity in my design is profound, in a way for the wearer to express their inner soul." Isogawa, 2012

His philosophy works to inspire him where he replicates vintage fabrics by absorbing specific craft techniques of different regions as an implement to realise his vision.

History of the Label

Akira Isogawa was born in Kyoto, Japan, a city renowned for its culture and textile production. Akira grew up studying Buddhism and social work at university but showed an early interest in the colours, textures and motifs of his native land and learned to appreciate the traditional sensibilities of Japan that presented themselves in the gardens and temples of Kyoto (Isogawa, 2008). Isogawa moved to Australia in 1986 captivated by the free spirit and vast expanse of the land coupled with the bright blue skies overhead, which was a contrast to the dull skies and regimented traditional Japanese society.

Backpacking around Northern Territory and Tasmania, he realised that this was a country that was far more ancient than his own and this contrast of old and new allowed him a freedom to break free from the traditions of Japan (Hume, 2004). This contrast also presented itself in the form of 'Op-shops,' which were a sharp contrast to the shiny new materialism of Japanese consumerism (Hume, 2004). The Op-shop finds gave him a

creative outlet to experiment and create clothes by altering them for himself and his friends. Surprisingly, this also became the beginning of his foray into the world of Australian fashion.

“I’d dress myself and I would dress others and I brought a sewing machine and I placed the sewing machine in the kitchen and got fabric from the second hand shop and started sewing. This is how I started my own business. The fashion was very bland and boring and I thought I could make a difference and make something more exciting.”

Interview with the author Akira 2007

Realising his calling, he enrolled in the East Sydney TAFE where he studied fashion and supported himself by working as a waiter and a tour guide. Isogawa started his business in a modest way with a small domestic sewing machine: his first creations were sold at David Jones and the luxury boutique, Belinda. In 1993, he opened his store in Sydney’s Woollahra district and a collection followed in 1994 (Isogawa, 2012). Two years later he presented at the Australia Fashion Week Spring/Summer 1997/1998 with a collection entitled Sartori and received critical acclaim. International fashion journalists such as Anna Piaggi (*Italian Vogue*) and Hilary Alexander (*Daily Telegraph*, UK) viewed his collection with interest and Browns, London purchased the entire lot (Whitfield, 2010).

For obvious reasons, his early work incorporated an array of Japanese elements including Kimono fabric, which later shifted to the incorporation of textiles and textures created from varied sources including batik and embroideries from different regions. His initial use of Kimono fabrics and Japanese sensibilities, earned him the title ‘*The Japanese Designer*’ by the Australian press (Kanamori, 2003) (Figure 5.1).

“Yes, because I started by unpicking and cutting up those vintage kimonos, I started to be categorised as Japanese, ‘what is-his-name Japanese designer,’ that is what I used to be called, ‘Akira Something-or-other’... Then I tried to move away from kimono culture and find a new style or perhaps find a new technique in the way of cutting fabric or in the way of making, sewing, which I experimented with in different ways. For instance, by combining Indian embroidery, by combining Italian woollen jersey, by combining Chinese prints and so on.” Isogawa in Interview with Kanamori, 2003

This was contrary to Isogawa's initial vision of his label, as one that would cater to the high end Western market, locally and internationally and he started to move away from using visible Japanese aesthetics and began to research ways of creating a difference in his product by combining textile techniques of other regions in expressing his creativity. Parkes (2006) reiterates that Akira's early work was a fusion of Western aesthetics and Japanese traditions where he often used pieces of beautifully detailed vintage Kimonos. Presently, his textile influences are a mix of a wider variety of cultural contexts and countries, which are woven into his creations and through his deft touch are transformed into stylish and sensitive hybrid forms.

It is interesting to note Akira's inspirations, which come from varied sources, channelled through a Japanese mindset, treated with a wash of Indian embroideries or prints, or woven by artisans in China, resulting in a melange of different cultures, traditions and skills. The outcome of this blend is a collection of stories emerging from different geographies that involve the skills of craftsmen speaking different languages, from different parts of the globe but united by a common product. The challenge for Isogawa is to interpret his own Japanese background in a multicultural way. This is achieved by situating his practice within a transnational setup, one that offers him avenues of creativity by employing the traditional craft bases of Asia. Hence Chinese weavers and embroiderers, Indian beaders, weavers and printers and Vietnamese craftsmen translate his ideas and inspirations. The result is a global aesthetic language that can be appreciated and understood here in Australia as well as anywhere around the world. This combination of hybridity has also become his signature style, incorporating aesthetics and textile techniques of varied geographies.

Style Development/Inspiration

Akira Isogawa's style is one that is described as ethereal, fluid, pure, elegant, revealing a creative mind that is constantly involved in textile manipulation and experimentation with patterns. The shapes are simple yet elegant and reveal different ways of controlling the fabric to create shapes and textures.

His approach to design and how he creates his garments are very much about folding and wrapping. He often works with paper to work his ideas through. The origami aspect is something that isn't new in his work but is something that is probably the most pure version of it in terms of translating ideas through to garment. Somerville in Kariminas, 2005: p 464

The inspirations for his creativity come from a wide range of sources but mainly involve elements of the Japanese traditional garment – The Kimono (Isogawa, 2007). These can include; the folding methods of origami, the Japanese art of paper-folding; the shibori dyeing, the Japanese art of embellishing a textile by way of shaping it through different methods of tying before dyeing (Wada et al., 1999: p 11); the essence of the kawaii, the concept of the cute that combines weakness, submissiveness, colour, juvenility and sweetness (McVeigh, 2000); a particular colour combination that he has found in a vintage kimono or a particular Japanese motif that would be woven in fabric for his collections.

In his initial years as a designer, Isogawa explored the kimono to develop a better understanding of this traditional garment. Unpicking the kimonos gave him an insight into the relationship between the placement of the motifs, the textures and the embroideries. The beauty of the kimono is in the motif, the embroidery, the texture and the placement of the motif on the length of fabric that covers the body Isogawa (2008). This aspect is visible in his collections where the textures and embroideries are an important element of his style and are harmoniously balanced in his creations. The embroideries, beading or the prints never overpower a creation but are fused together with great finesse to create a well-balanced garment.

Understanding the kimono early on in his career gave him an insight into developing his own style. During one of his visits home to Kyoto in the early days of his practice, Isogawa visited the Kobo-san flea market near his home. He was amazed at the richness of colours, embroidery and textiles and bought a few bags full to give as presents to his friends in Australia (Isogawa, 2003a). At the flea market in Kyoto, these textiles were antique, vintage, old-fashioned items but in a different environment, in Australia, they changed their context. Vintage kimonos and kimono textiles transformed under the blue Australian sky and appeared very modern to Isogawa in a different cultural setting. At the flea market in Kyoto the kimonos were antique but under the luminous Australian skies, the kimonos appeared very modern as the motifs, colours and embroideries took on a new light Isogawa (2003a). The kimono did not look Japanese on a Western body: the shape was the same but the garment changed its context. This proved to be an exciting revelation for the designer as he started to play with the straight length and narrow width of the kimono fabric to design Western garments. Unpicking kimonos and styling them into Western garments requires skill and creativity as the kimono is a straight length of fabric with a width of 34 cms and an approximate length of 15 meters. Working within these self-imposed limitations wasn't easy but according to Isogawa (2008) he found these limitations very exciting as they forced him to be creative and to develop alternate methods of pattern-making to create his garments.

“When you are limited by certain rules, existing rules, then what it does to you is that you are forced to be creative and I found it actually to be very exciting to work with those kind of limitations.” Isogawa, 2008

Exploring and experimenting, Isogawa draped the straight pieces of the unpicked kimonos by placing them on a bias on the mannequins in various ways and letting the fabric create different silhouettes. He developed this technique by studying the works of Madeline Vionnet and her bias cuts of the 1920's. Vionnet's training taught her to favour the natural as the guiding motive for any design. She viewed the body as a three-dimensional whole and not as specific pieces of a pattern. Her designs hovered around the body touching, not moulding it using geometric shapes as decorative and functional devices (Arnold, 2009). In this way, French technique combined with Japanese tradition was the catalyst for the creation of a hybrid style that was a fusion of East and West: it was also the beginning of the development of Akira's trademark style; rich in texture, layering and colour.

It is widely known that the shape of the kimono is unique as it is without gender (Ritchie, 2003). The differentiation between a male and a female kimono comes through the patterns, colours and the motif on the garment. Isogawa used this genderless garment adapting it to a Western silhouette where there is a juxtaposition of different textures in terms of technique, embroidery, weaving and printing, combining different lengths to create ethereal forms. This layering aspect is quite evident in Isogawa's collections, where textures combined in varying lengths add fluidity to the garments and is a recurrent feature in his collections; for example, Spring/Summer 2003 or Spring/Summer 2004 (Figure 5.2). This feature also references his traditional Japanese heritage, most particularly, the historic Heian Period (794–1185) when the *juni hitoe* was a popular garment known as the twelve layered kimono in which a combination of twelve unlined kimonos were worn on top on the other (Dalby, 2001). The beauty of this garment became evident when the tiers of different colours, fabrics and textures worn together imparted a layered look. The specific colour combinations were dictated according to seasons and status and would show through the overlapping collars, sleeves and hems.

Apart from the kimono, Isogawa specialises in combining disparate elements harmoniously to create his collections (Hume, 2004). His trips to the flea markets in Paris also provide him with the impetus to combine eras, for example; turn of the century fabrics found in Paris as an inspiration for his collection. This also might be used as an example to reprint the design in India, weave a motif from that fabric in China or create a piece of embroidery in India. Once his textile is developed, the textile dictates the form of the fabric and he uses his expert pattern-making skills to create a design worthy of the fabric.

His fabrics are a combination of inspirations, which range from the vintage to different regions, cultures or are a combination of pattern and techniques of fabric manipulation and surface embellishment. At the heart of his creations lies the most important aspect of his methodology; that is, to make garments that are wearable.

“If you cannot wear it then I’m defeating the purpose – and that is a mistake. This is the trick – to find the balance between what is wearable and what is art. This is all I aim for.”

Shand et al., 2009: p 12

The Fabric Creation

Asian culture gives primacy to textiles. The silhouettes of Asia give importance to the fabric. Traditional Asian clothes whether the kimono, sari or the cheongsam have simple shapes yet it is the motif, embroidery, print or weave of the fabric that is on display rather than the costume itself. Isogawa relates to this aspect as his designs are a conversation between the relaxed Australian fashion sensibilities and the rigid costume and textile traditions of his native country. His design methodology stems from this East-West dialogue where he develops textiles exploring colour, incorporating traditional cuts to create fabrics, applying traditional Asian techniques or new technologies to create wearable textiles (Kariminas, 2005). Hence intricately beaded silk tulles, custom woven silks, prints designed by Isogawa and printed in India or embroidered organzas, are all part of his repertoire. Also visible is the application of traditional Japanese techniques of *shibori* and *origami* into fabric. The folding and pleating methods of the *origami* (Figure 5.3) or the hand-knotted *shibori* fabrics add a different dimension to the way he perceives textures in fabric and this has become a hallmark of his style.

Inclusion of these Japanese elements within the Western attire has been seen as far back as the 1920’s and 1930’s. Designers like Lanvin ever so subtly infused their work with an essence inspired from the traditional elements of the Japanese culture. Whether it was the adaptation of the Kimono sleeve in a bolero by Lanvin in 1934 or the existence of the kimono and the bias in the 1920’s and 30’s, the Japanese tradition of wrapping and folding and covering rather than revealing and establishing the garment as a gyrating cylinder around the wearer has been a source of inspiration for the west (Martin and Koda, 1994). What Isogawa brings to the subject is the interpretation of the Japanese aesthetic by a Japanese designer but catering to a Western audience. This aspect of his work distinguishes him from the rest of the Australian designers.

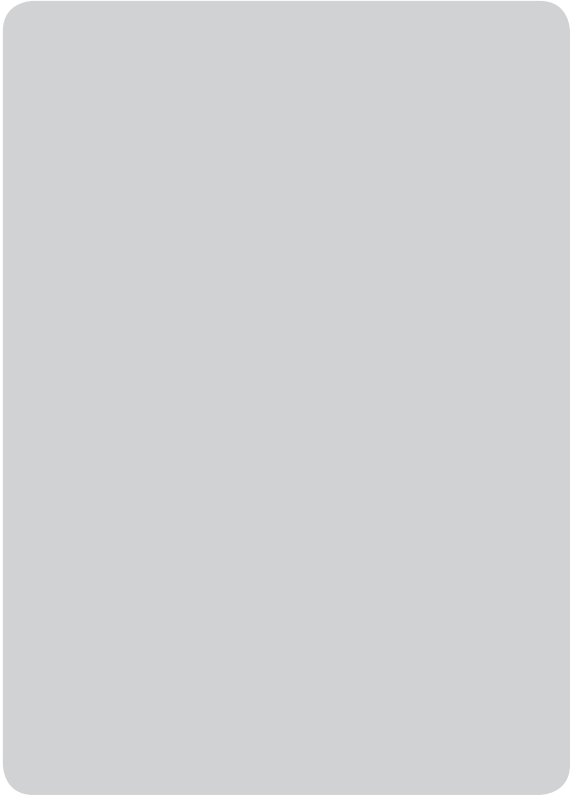


Figure 5.1 Akira Isogawa, Printed and Hand Painted Lime green Kimono silk Dress March 2001, *Akira Isogawa* by A. Isogawa, in Exhibition Catalogue: Object-Australia 2001. Centre for Craft and Design. Sydney, 2001, Print.

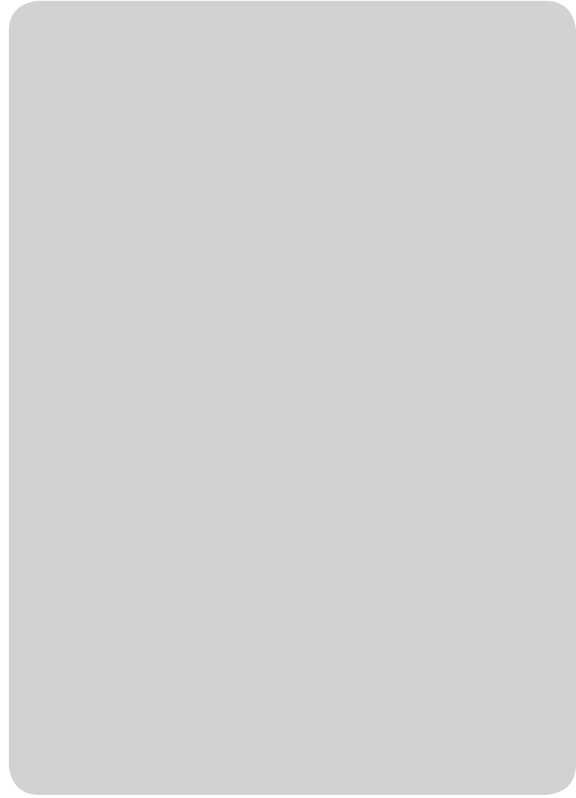


Figure 5.2 Akira Isogawa – Australian Fashion Week Spring/Summer- 2004/ [Accessed 14th February 2009] from <http://www.six6photography.com.au/Fashion04/MAFW2004ss/3May%20Akira%20Isogawa/3May%20Akira%20Isogawa.html>

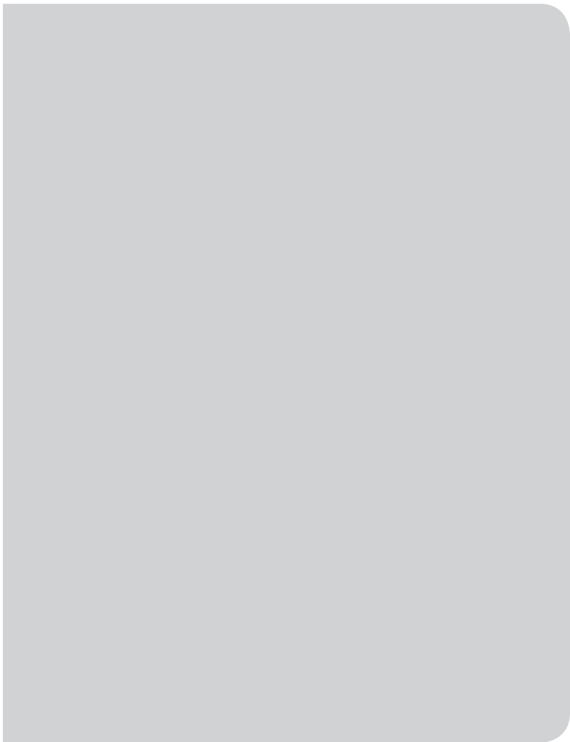


Figure 5.3 Akira Isogawa, Outfit 2008, Resort 2009 (detail) *Together Alone: Australian and New Zealand Fashion*, by Shand et al., Exhibition Catalogue: National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 2009, Print.

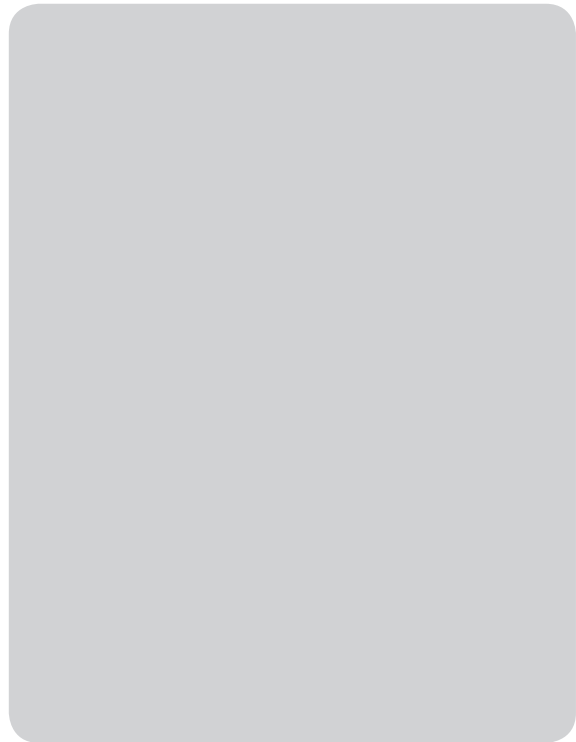


Figure 5.4 Akira Isogawa, Earring Dress, Spring Summer 2005 [Accessed on 20th August 2012] from <http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/col/work/78498>

Isogawa's creativity therefore, starts by creating the fabric. In keeping with his Asian heritage, he gives importance to the creation of textile. Like the kimono, it is the textile that dictates the garment. The same philosophy applies to his fashion. It is the textile that inspires him, the motifs, elements such as decorative techniques; *shibori*, the craft traditions of *origami*, the particular embroideries or colour combinations on the kimonos are an essential source of inspiration for him. These inspirations are brought to life using the artisanal possibilities available in Asia. Traditional Asian techniques are applied to the impressions/ideas collected in Europe or elsewhere using Japanese sensibilities. This blend of different geographies in terms of craft, aesthetics and ideas results in a palette of creativity which cannot be confined to any one geography: the result is quite unexpected as it is not purely Japanese, French, Chinese or Indian – it is a hybrid of diverse cultures.

His designs bring to mind a harmony and fluidity of outline; his fabrics are influenced by Japanese traditions and his female silhouette is pure and elegant, cultivated from his persistent experimentation with new and innovative methods of textile and pattern manipulation. Kariminas, 2005: p 461

Design Methodology

Isogawa's methodology is based on creating textiles built on the Japanese aesthetic but produced using the artisanal skills of global craftsmen. His inspirations in developing his textiles originate from various sources such as the flea markets of Kyoto, Paris, textile techniques, embroideries or vintage prints but are refined and filtered through his Japanese mind. These inspirations undergo a complicated process of development not only in Australia but spread over three countries. Produced by the artisans in Asia, authentic traditional crafts are treated with Western aesthetics and in a Western environment, change their form, just like the kimono did when Isogawa draped it on a Western body in a Western environment. Isogawa realised very early on that the traditional craft of any culture can be adapted by changing the setting of the craft. Thus, by using the craftsmen of Asia, whether weavers in China, embroiderers in India or Vietnam, he creates a product, which celebrates the individual craft of the region but at the same time stands out as a garment that can be marketed to any global high end retailer.

This specialised niche market production relies on artistic development based on quality and not quantity. The result is not a run-of-the-mill production but rather a specialised process of artistic development where the collaborators from different geographies of

the world collectively share and develop ideas suitable for a Western market. In this process, the skill of the artisan is celebrated and nurtured. In the catalogue supporting the exhibition ‘*Un Wrapped Australian Fashion and Textile Design*’ held at Bendigo Art Gallery in 2003 and curated by Meredith Rowe (Bond, August 16 – September 21 2003.), Isogawa shares his experience of working with artisans in multiple geographies explaining that his garments were created through a collaboration with a *shibori* maker in Suzhou, China; and his experimentation with craft-based textile techniques in India. The result of his experimentation discovers new applications of traditional techniques.

The selection of garments was from my experience of collaboration with a shibori maker in Suzhou China. The bright yellow sequined piece was initially bleached with a motif Chrysanthemum wave and was then hand sequined in an irrelevant motif to give the illusion of depth with a flat surface. I visited weavers in a humble village 100 kilometres from Calcutta in India and gave them some yellow beads so I could incorporate their skill in creating neck/waist piece. As the weavers wove hand spun silk, they threaded the beads onto the silk yarn. The result was surprisingly pretty. Isogawa, 2003b

Reflecting on his methodology, Isogawa (2010) gave an insight into this process. He explained that during his trips to Kyoto he searches out vintage kimonos that he brings back to Sydney where the concept development stage begins. Once in Sydney, he scans the images of the fabric that inspire him and stores them to create his own version. With this image library, he begins the creative process whereby he may combine three different motifs from three different Kimonos to create his own print. The artwork prepared acts as a canvas where different iterations in terms of scale of the motif and colour combinations are experimented with until a final draft representing Isogawa’s signature style is developed. Subsequently, experimental texture is added to this developing print by suggesting beads or sequins or exploring other aspects of surface embellishments such as textile techniques of embroidery, origami or shibori. Once the prints and embellishments are approximately finalised, the second phase of the development takes place overseas (Figure 5.4).

Some of these ideas are trialled in China where, over the years, Isogawa has developed strong contacts in the city of Suzhou, renowned for its silk production, where he sources the silks for his collections (Isogawa, 2007). Most of the woven silks used in his collections are produced in Suzhou where they custom weave silks according to his specification of fabric, motif and colour. Suzhou is also the source of the silk thread embroideries visible in his bridal creations and the production of kimono fabric and *shibori* creations. Hence it can

be deduced that the woven silks with hemp, peony and crane motifs for his Spring/Summer 2009 collection were sourced from Suzhou as well (Figure 5.5).

Pure silk fabrics are woven to the specifications provided by Isogawa and traditional Chinese embroidery reworked to different scales and applications that change the context of the technique by experimenting with the local craft to create new imaginaries. For example, for his Akira Embroidered Silk Organza Wedding Bird Layered Dress (Autumn/Winter 2006) he negotiated with the Chinese embroiderers to dramatically loosen and scale up their work to create the embellishments (Parkes, 2006) (Figure 5.6). This resulted in the creation of an entirely new application of traditional Chinese thread work embroidery. Isogawa (2007) explains that the benefit of working in China is that Chinese manufacturers custom make orders of any size according to the specifications given in terms of fabric and embroideries for example; colour, thread, dye as it is a handmade process.

Part of the artworks developed in Sydney also travel to Mumbai, India with Isogawa to begin sampling. It is also possible that the fabrics woven in Suzhou are embellished in India. The traditional craft skills of the region play an instrumental role in developing the collection, where beading, printing and embroidery are easily accessed and trialled on the ideas developed in Sydney. For Isogawa, beads and sequins are custom made in Mumbai to his requirements. Hence a double value addition takes place where fabric is custom made and hand embellished with material created specifically for Isogawa's collections. In this process, a traditional craft is reinvented or modelled to cater to a Western audience. This creative methodology involves the collaboration of the specialist artisan who completes the artistic requirements in India and China of a designer who has travelled from Australia and will sell the finished product into a Western market.

“But for me the most interesting part about working with a Chinese manufacturer is that some companies can custom make something very special for myself in smaller quantities because they are hand made. So I select the base fabric; for example, a kimono manufacturer in China and I tell them that can you actually dye them in a particular colour and embroider it and use that particular silk thread, and I advise them how I wish that it is embellished and they do exactly what I ask for in China.” Isogawa, 2007

This process of product development is tedious as it takes about three to four months to develop textiles in India and China. Isogawa visits these countries at least a couple of times to develop and oversee the fabric development for the collection (Isogawa, 2007). Generally, where a designer sends his or her work to an offshore production base for manufacturing,

and where a middle man is in charge of the production, can be attributed to cost cutting measures. In the case of Isogawa, it is a creative collaboration with the artisans in the third world countries as his methodology is based around interacting with specialist craftsmen to develop and create textiles and textures. It is for this reason, that Isogawa personally visits every single manufacturer and artisan as the contact or interaction with the craftsman is personally very satisfying and the process of developing his ideas with the crafts men is a 'creative collaboration' for him (Isogawa, 2010). *"It could be anywhere in the world. I just find rare textiles, hand-crafted by people, and that experience of working with them is quite inspirational."* (Isogawa in Smith, 2010)

Once the fabrics are developed, they are returned to Sydney and the collection starts to take shape. Isogawa and his dedicated staff of pattern makers and machinists transform the fabrics into beautiful garments. It is interesting to note that during my visit to interview Isogawa, I noticed that all the pattern makers working in the studio were Japanese. Isogawa attributes this to their superior garment construction skills and I suggest it goes back to the concept of 'the way' as proposed by (Hammitzsch, 1982). These pattern makers ascribe to the Japanese philosophies or mindset that Isogawa accesses when indulging in the creative process. Hence they can relate not only to his methodology of practice but also the repertoire of skills, techniques, and approach that is central to his practice, which comes from the ideas and ideals inculcated in the Japanese mind. Hence, in Sydney, these skills are applied to the fabrics crafted in Asia to create garments that are appreciated by the connoisseurs of a fashion that exhibits a fusion of traditional hand craft and western aesthetics.

Shops in Australia

Since the opening of the first shop in the suburb of Woolhara in 1993, Isogawa has opened three Akira stores in Australia: George Street Sydney, GPO Melbourne and Fortitude Valley in Brisbane.

Akira's range has increased from the signature Akira Black label to Akira Red, which is a diffusion line manufactured on a mass level in China and is stocked in David Jones and leading boutiques across the globe. This is a middle market range available alongside the Akira Black for under \$300 along with Akira Bridal which is also available and is stocked at David Jones locally (Purkis, 2009). Isogawa has developed a loyal clientele overseas, and is marketing his collections around the world in London, France, USA, Japan and other cities throughout Europe and Asia (Isogawa, 2001).

Symbolism in Akira's Clothes

The label 'Akira' is rich in content and can be appreciated for its artistic collaborations as well as for the layers of cultural symbolism therein. The simplicity of the line, fluidity of the shapes, the techniques of textile manufacturing can be appreciated or the symbolism present in the collections can be deciphered to better appreciate his aesthetic. Symbols depict shared experiences, knowledge of cultural traditions and sentiments about those experiences (Baird, 2001). Isogawa expresses these sentiments and experiences of Japan through his garments in the use of symbols that need to be analysed to be appreciated. This section of the study explores the underlying implication of the visual language present in Isogawa's collections to evolve a better understanding of his style. A study of Japanese philosophy and symbolism sheds light on this subject, as discussed further in Chapter Three, but here they are examined *vis à vis* the garments in Akira Isogawa's collections.

The prints, embroideries and textile techniques of Isogawa's collections access imagery that can be referenced in the Japanese culture. The display of cherry blossoms, chrysanthemums, fruits and vines, flora and fauna are evident in his designs, as are birds like the crane and swallow, and typical hemp motifs used as a base print or a woven motif in the fabric. A brief review of the symbols of Japan revealed an interesting reading of the garments. The motifs and prints used in Isogawa's collections may look beautiful to the Western eye but they follow a prescribed Japanese symbolic code with regards to the colour and significance of particular images in his prints.

According to Japanese tradition the cherry blossoms (*sakura*) are the most beloved flower of Japan: the brief blooming time and the fragility of the flowers represent the transience of life. The maple leaf is a seasonal symbol and represents Autumn. The chrysanthemum is revered for its beauty and elegance and represents the virtues of endurance and integrity. Swallows (*tsubame*) are migrant birds that arrive in Spring and thus signal the arrival of the season. Likewise, the sparrow, or *suzume*, seen on many of his creations, is a bird said to be obsessed with its honour. According to the ancient Chinese notions of the cosmos, a reddish sparrow, represents the positive *Yo* (Chinese *Yang*) forces of nature, which denote positive symbolism and heralds the beginning of spring, prosperity and good fortune. The crane signifies longevity and good fortune in East Asia. It is said to be able to navigate between heaven and earth and is a symbol of the New Year and marriage ceremonies (Baird, 2001).

These symbols are evident in practically all Akira's collections and the beauty of Isogawa's creation is the concealed imagery that is not immediately obvious but has to be noticed to be appreciated. This references the single colour woven silks in his collection for the

Rosemount Australian Fashion Week Spring/Summer 2008 displaying peony, cranes and the hemp design woven into the fabric as the latent feature that builds the collection. These motifs have specific positive implications assigned to them and these access the Japanese mindset

The symbolism of *wabi sabi* is also an active part of his design methodology, as evidenced in his Spring/Summer 2009 collections (Figure 5.7). The beauty of this garment is that it expresses the aesthetic of simplistic beauty, which originates from a simple, well-tailored, A-line dress and emerges into a complicated neck line which is not entirely symmetric nor are the folds crisp but wilted like that of a flower. This gives the impression of inherent imperfection, which is the essence of Japanese design. Accordingly, the *wabi sabi* element also references destruction and construction, evolution or devolution. From this simple dress, the neckline shows a process of evolution where layer upon layer is evolving, as the petals of a flower emerge layer after layer as the flower blossoms showing the inner beauty hidden within the simplistic bud.

Akira's clothes exude a sense of playfulness called the *kawaii* that is an important element of Japanese design. The *kawaii* can be deemed 'cute and sexy' but in an orderly way.

"Adorable is a quality that I find hard to resist, this person has a pure and honest quality; something that adults have lost. I try to make something that is gorgeous or elegant.

The extravagant and extraordinary somehow do not inspire me as much as adorable."

Akira Isogawa interview with Kariminas, 2005

This aspect is visible in Isogawa's work where he combines colours and shapes to create a playful essence to his collections. Though his style does not exactly reflect the essence of the infantile, but there is a lively element in his designs that exudes a pleasant sense of enjoyment.

Collaborations

Central to Isogawa's philosophy is a willingness to work with others. This paradoxically engenders a spirit in his collections, which sets him apart from many other designers. (Somerville, 2005: p 5)

A major aspect of his design methodology is the aspect of collaboration, which has been discussed briefly in the previous paragraphs but requires special consideration to understand his practice. Over the years, Akira Isogawa has collaborated with a number of museums, artisans, artists, ballet corps, furniture and rug manufacturers. The process of

collaborative experimentation sits at the heart of his practice as the process of sharing ideas and expertise from professionals in varied fields not only enriches his practice but also adds value to his product.

His solo exhibition in 2001-2002 at the Object Gallery, Sydney (Isogawa, 2001) demonstrated his dedication to textile development and his commitment to collaboration. The exhibition featured garments with a variety of different textile techniques evident in the catalogue such as:

“Stretch georgette with 3D floral print, hand printed and clear sequined silk organza, acid washed heavily beaded floral skirt, ribbed raw silk, tie dyed red leather coat, printed and hand painted butterfly on kimono silk.” Isogawa, 2001

As he is based in Sydney, it is obvious that these were a collaborative endeavour with craftsmen and artisans from different regions. Isogawa has searched for skilled artisans, crafts people, specialists in embroidery and print and textile producers in places such as Bali, Hong Kong, India and Vietnam with the aim of developing experimental textiles (Parkes, 2006).

“I’m part of an industry – part of a society – I don’t aspire to lead or to have a particular impact. But what I’m really interested in is collaborating – to be able to work with other creators. So I’m not ambitious to lead the industry, but to work within. That is what I do. I’m very privileged to be able to work with other creators.” Isogawa, interview by Sommerville K., Melbourne, 20 August 2004 in Shand P. et al. 2009: p 12

In 2005, the National Gallery of Victoria collaborated with Isogawa to present the exhibition Akira Isogawa : Printemps Eté (Akira Isogawa et al., 2004). It took eight months of organization and planning between Isogawa, Exhibition Designer Dee Dzelaija, and Katie Somerville, curator of Australian Fashion and Textiles at the National Gallery of Victoria. This exhibition examined the process behind the production of his Spring/Summer collection, developed for Paris Fashion Week in October 2004. The exhibition unveiled his design methodology through installation pieces, prototype works in different stages of construction, objects and sounds as well as pieces from his Black Label collection (Kariminas, 2005). The exhibition explored the collaborative process of Isogawa’s methodology by investigating the transformation of his inspirations into wearable garments. The process of this journey comprised the following stages: *“inspiration, collaboration, proportion, construction, execution and presentation”* (Somerville, 2004: p 10).

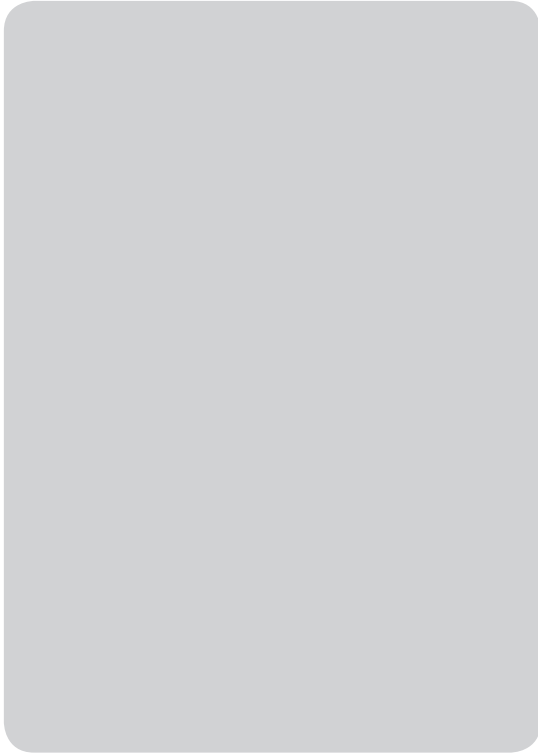


Figure 5.5 Akira Isogawa – Green Dress with Hemp Woven Motif, Rosemont Australia Fashion Week Spring/Summer2008 [Accessed on 20th August 2012]
<http://www.six6photography.com.au/Fashion08/rafw2008ss/2May/Akira/Akira.htm>

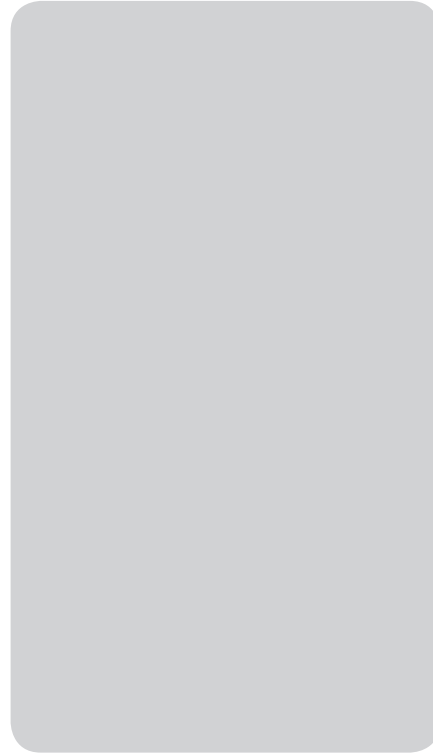


Figure 5.6 Akira, Embroidered Silk Organza Wedding Bird Layered Dress, Autumn /Winter 2006, *Freestyle : new Australian design for living*. Parkes, B. (ed.), Sydney, N.S.W. : Object: Australian Centre for Craft and Design ; Melbourne, Vic. : Melbourne Museum, 2006, Print.

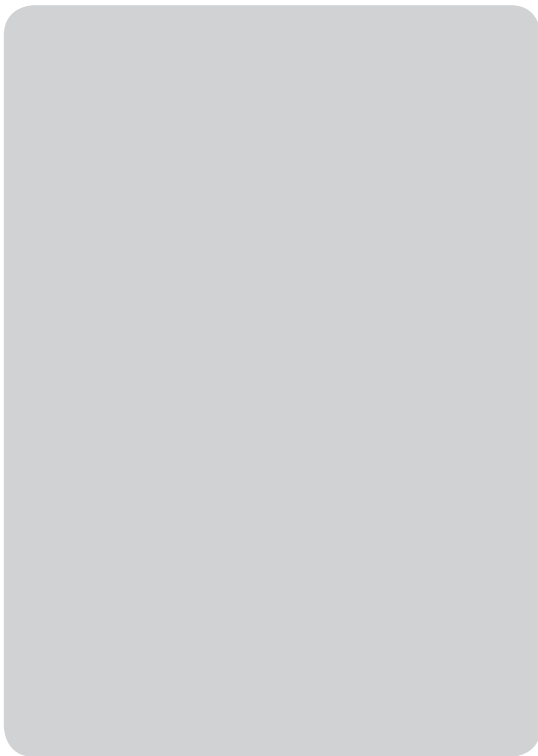


Figure 5.7 Akira Isogawa Pink dress with Asymmetric Collar, Rosemont Australia Fashion Week Spring/Summer 2008 [Accessed on 20th August 2012]
<http://www.six6photography.com.au/Fashion08/rafw2008ss/2May/Akira/Akira.htm>

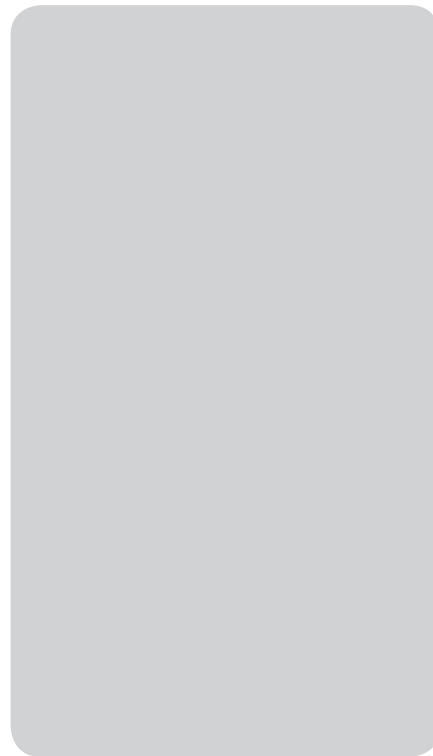


Figure 5.8 Akira Isogawa, Paper Dolls. *Akira Isogawa : Printemps - E'te'* by K. Somerville, Exhibition Catalogue, Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria and the Asialink Centre of the University of Melbourne, 2004, Print.

For this collection, he worked with his long-time collaborator, artist Christiane Lehmann and master origami-maker Takihiro Shirai (Isogawa et al., 2004, Kariminas, 2005, Whitfield, 2010). ‘This exhibition comprised enlarged versions of the paper dolls, small-scale origami works in newsprint, calico toiles, ten finished garment and accessories’ (Whitfield, 2010: p 198).

Paper Dolls

The collection was based on oversized French paper dolls dating back to the early 20th Century with page-boy hairstyles and large eyes used as a muse, inspiration and a template for developing the collection. Found by Lehmann in the Glebe Flea Market as A4 size cut out figures, they were enlarged to create life size figures (Burns, December 2, 2004) (Figure 5.8). Each doll was embellished with a collage of found objects, composed of different materials including; embroidered fragments, crushed silk, paper, fragile leaf skeletons, woven braids, beads and petals (Somerville, 2005). These decorated collage dolls served as an inspiration to develop wearable garments where the created image was replicated in different ways to translate them into saleable garments. The final garment exhibits Isogawa’s approach to silhouette, where shapes are derived by wrapping and layering of the body to create a sculptural extension of the human form (Somerville, 2005). One such example is the Earring Dress where beads have been used to decorate the doll. The image created by the cut out is ingeniously replicated to create the garment by using the inspiration as a digital print in *tromp l’oeil* effect on the length of the dress and heavily hand beading the collar using varied shapes and texture to create richness in the dress.

Origami Textiles

The second inspiration for the exhibition was the translation of the art of *origami* into textiles by collaborating with Master Origami-maker Takihiro Shirai. Shirai worked for Isogawa for two years as a pattern maker in Sydney (Crafti, 2004). He worked on the exhibition to develop intricate adaptations of *origami* to fabric. Together, the pair developed newspaper sheets folded to create surfaces which resembled woven textures but without a single cut. These news print models were adapted to calico to create 3D surfaces to develop a sequence of garments and accessories in fabric. The methodology of paper folding was applied to the fabric creating interesting shapes and exploring them by draping them on the mannequin. “...The origami story specifically reflects on Isogawa’s technical ability to translate abstract ideas through to garment.” (Kariminas, 2005: p 463)

“I use paper to make pattern, I don’t rely on computers- I’m old –fashioned – I like creating shapes with scissors and paper. With paper, I fold it onto mannequins to create the folds and shapes.” Isogawa et al., 2004

Isogawa uses *origami* as a starting point to make a selection to resize and translate them on to annotated paper patterns and calico *toiles*. Using *origami* as a basis of generating patterns deletes the reliance on fabric cutting or embellishments and the folded fabric creates an interesting aspect of intricate layered and geometric criss-crosses to give a three dimensional sculptural quality to the surface. This artistic manipulation of the fabric does not preclude the most important element of the garment – its wearability, as according to Isogawa, the most important aspect of his creation is to find the balance of creating fashion that is wearable.

The next step of designing his collections, according to Somerville (2004), is the collaboration that takes place to realise the collection. This involves his team working with Isogawa to translate these designs into finished garments. They include specialist embroiderers, textile printers, skilled pattern makers, seamstresses who pattern make, cut, construct and finish the garments.

Akira Isogawa has also collaborated with the Sydney Dance Company to produce the costumes for *Salome* (1998), *Air and Other Invisible Forces* (1999), *Ellipse* (2002) and recently, with the Australian Ballet on Graeme Murphy’s *Romeo and Juliet* (2011).

In the past he has worked with the Australian Wool Board (AWB) to create specialised fabric for use in dance presentations to dress the ballet performers for the piece, GRAND developed by Graeme Murphy for the Sydney Dance Company. The AWB developed a featherweight jersey in a trans-seasonal wool fabric that felt like silk upon touch, softness and drape, using a blend of Merino wool and Modal, a rayon fibre produced from beechwood (Williamson, 2010).

In 1999, Isogawa collaborated with Signature Prints to develop a printing technique for the production of costumes for a dance being performed at the Sydney Opera House. Isogawa wanted to print Japanese calligraphy on net and Signature Prints provided a solution for his problem. Signature Prints are also the owners of the Florence Broadhurst catalogue of Screen Prints and have over 530 original designs from the designer. Isogawa has used two of those prints for his collections; the Nagoya (a pattern of dangling fruit hanging from branches) and Chelsea, a pattern with long petalled chrysanthemums (The Design Files Guest Blog, Lennie, September 14, 2010).

Defining Akira Isogawa's Transnational Framework

Akira Isogawa practices a design process in which his transnational system comprises multiple phases (Figure 5.9). It is a bounded system that is defined by its geographies and the craft that is practiced within that system. Hence we can identify a process of creating fashion that involves India, China, Japan, Vietnam and Australia, with Australia being the nucleus where different trajectories of artistic development take place between each individual country and Australia. The culmination of all separate phases comes together in Australia.

The first phase of his transnational practice can be defined as one inherent in his work, and is almost an invisible phase involving an aesthetic nature that travels with him subconsciously between Japan and Australia. This phase forms the basis of his design philosophy and ideas are treated through these Japanese aesthetics (given the prevalent trends) and materialized in the subsequent phases. Thus the essence of the *wabi sabi*, the *kawaii*, Zen, *kawaii*, the Japanese philosophies of colour and motif all form the inherent palette he uses to outline his picture. His interaction with individual craft communities from different nations adds colour and texture to his painting, thus creating a canvas full of contexts and meaning waiting to be appreciated and understood. The beauty of his designs is that each individual technique, motif, shapes and colours is harmoniously balanced and becomes an integral part of the design whole.

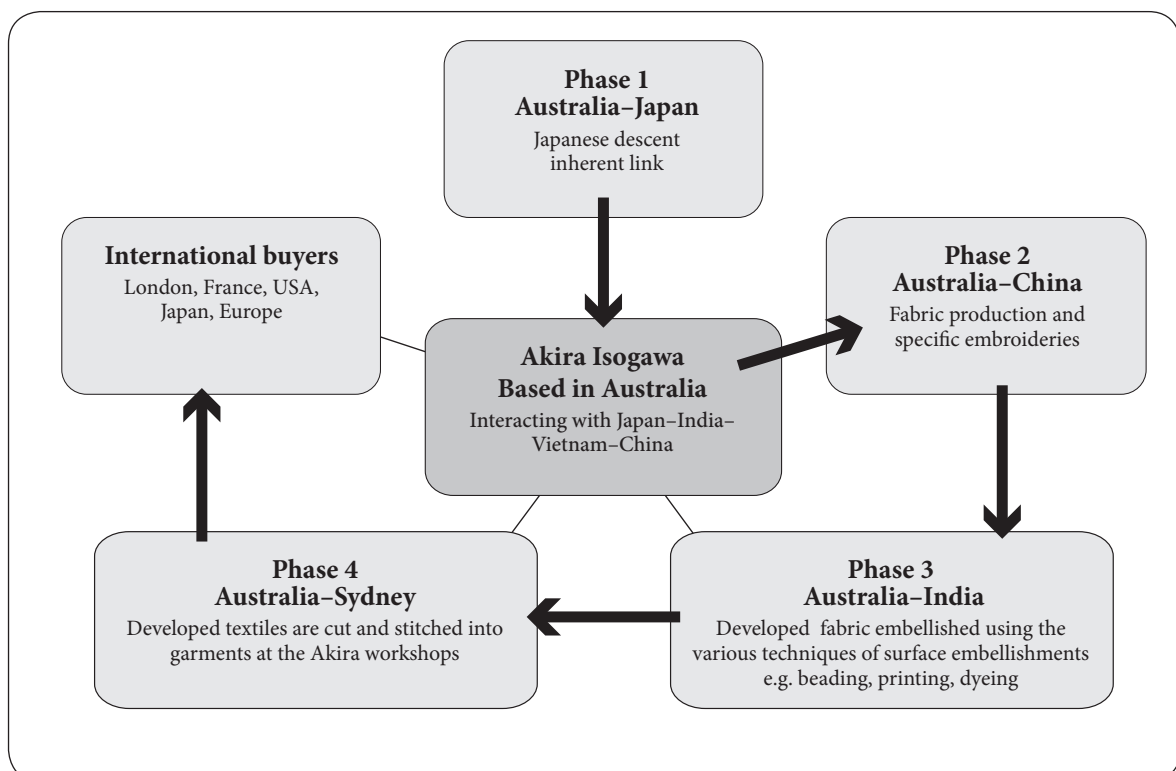


Figure 5.9 Transnational Framework of Akira Isogawa, Shazia Bano 2012

His subsequent commodity phase works between Australia and China where fabric production takes place. Isogawa sources his silk from Suzhou, China where according to the designer, many traditional kimonos worn in Japan are now manufactured (Isogawa, 2007). This is due to the high cost of labour in Japan making local production of traditional items cost prohibitive. Hence off shore manufacturing possibilities are increasingly investigated. The silk produced in Suzhou is of a very high quality as the natural setting of the city provides the ideal conditions for silk production thus allowing for the creation of inspirational fabrics in the colours of the season. Traditional aesthetics of Japan are refined using the traditional techniques of China to make a product that would suit a Western audience.

Another phase of his work takes place between India and Australia where creativity meets the handcraft traditions. The fabric produced and sourced from various suppliers in different regions; for example, China and Vietnam, is used as a canvas in India to add value using the various techniques of surface embellishment available. These techniques can range from printing to tie dyeing to embroidery to beading. Textures can be created by craftsmen manufacturing custom made beads, sequins and materials specifically ordered by the designer as seen in the Earring Dress from the Spring/Summer collection 2005.

Hence China provides the perfect setting for Akira to commence his creative process. The interesting to note point here is that Akira was introduced to China by a Chinese migrant woman living in Sydney who came to see him with some Chinese fabrics. This meeting showed him the way to explore possibilities in China and sheds light on the multicultural nature of Australian society, with its rich cultural heritages, which comprise its demographic fabric.

Isogawa explored India on the advice of Marion Hume, the then editor of *Vogue* Australia who had researched an article on Parisian designers and their interaction with embroidery workshops in India (Isogawa, 2007). Designers of the calibre of Jean Paul Gaultier work with textile companies (Hayt, January 19, 2006) in India to furnish their textiles with handcrafted artisanal work. At that particular time, director Baz Luhrman had released the movie *Moulin Rouge* (Luhrman, 2001) and the textiles for the costumes of this movie designed by Catherine Martin (who is known to Akira) were produced in India as well.

The wealth of artisanal possibilities available in India provided Isogawa the opportunity for his company to grow and his textile development is now based out of India, China and Vietnam. *“What makes me excited is to be able to mix those exciting influences from the East but fused with Western society. Because all of our clients are Westerners, and we actually follow measurements that are based on Western body, so it is exciting to mix elements.”*

Isogawa, 2007

The last phase of his practice takes place in Australia. This is an equally important and interesting phase in the development of the collection as all the different pieces from his transnational network come together and start taking their final shape here.

As per Appadurai (1986), Akira's practice is the collective result of four commodity phases that capture the movement and the production of his designs; is defined by the association of varied craftsmen working in different geographic locations; combining to create a situation where exchangeability (past, present, future) or (development, manufacturing, marketing) of his fashion is its socially relevant future.

Analysis of a Garment

This outfit is from the Spring/Summer 2008/2009 collection presented during the Australia Fashion Week (Figures 5.1a and 5.10b). This garment has been chosen because it reflects Isogawa's philosophy and methodology on many levels as it combines the aesthetics, textile traditions and symbolism of several different geographies. The ensemble consists of three pieces; a straight printed dress, a leaf print obi belt and a bolero styled jacket with kimono sleeves. The dress has a floral print depicting racemes of purple wisteria flowers with tendrils in a playful combination of orange, green, yellow, and purple with flying swallow birds in between. These flowers are generally depicted in a wide variety of images in Japanese visual repertoire and according to Japanese imagery the swallow bird announces the arrival of spring. In Japan and China, this bird is also an emblem of good fortune, and fertility (Baird, 2001).

The combination of colours used in this ensemble is termed as *goshiki/goshuku*: the auspicious five colours (red, yellow, blue, white and black) a sign of imperial divinity when they appear together. The obi belt is orange in colour and references the kimono where the belt is used not only to tie the garment but to accessorise it as well. The belt has silver metallic leaves printed on it that reference the *surihaku* technique of decoration.

In pure white, the Bolero has a tapered waist and is slightly gathered at the back, where it has an embroidered motif displaying a combination of the dress print with racemes of wisteria falling out of a basket, and birds. The motifs on the dress and the bolero are references to the Gods of Luck where the combination of fruits, birds and flora are described in Japanese symbolic language as the signs of prosperity.

The embroidery technique is assumed to be made in China where most of his textile development occurs. The image exhibits an embroidery style that resembles a Chinese inspired satin stitch style technique. Isogawa accesses India for beading and printing so the fabric may have been printed in India. The obi is printed with silver leaves, which references

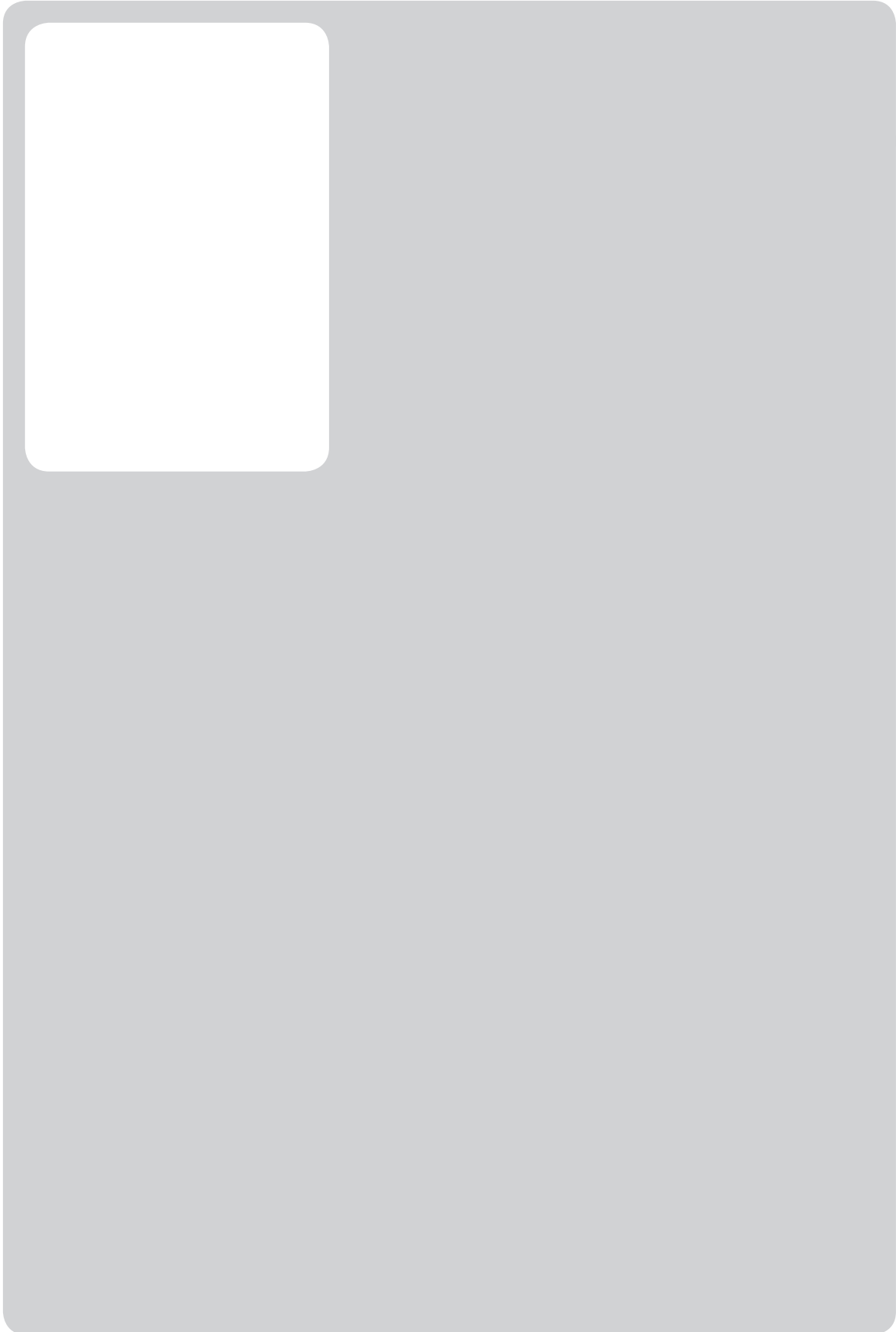


Figure 5.10a and 5.10b Akira Isogawa – Print Dress with orange Obi Belt and White Bolero, Rosemont Australia Fashion Week Spring / Summer2008 [Accessed on 20th August 2012]
<http://www.six6photography.com.au/Fashion08/rafw2008ss/2May/Akira/Akira.htm>Akira Isogawa

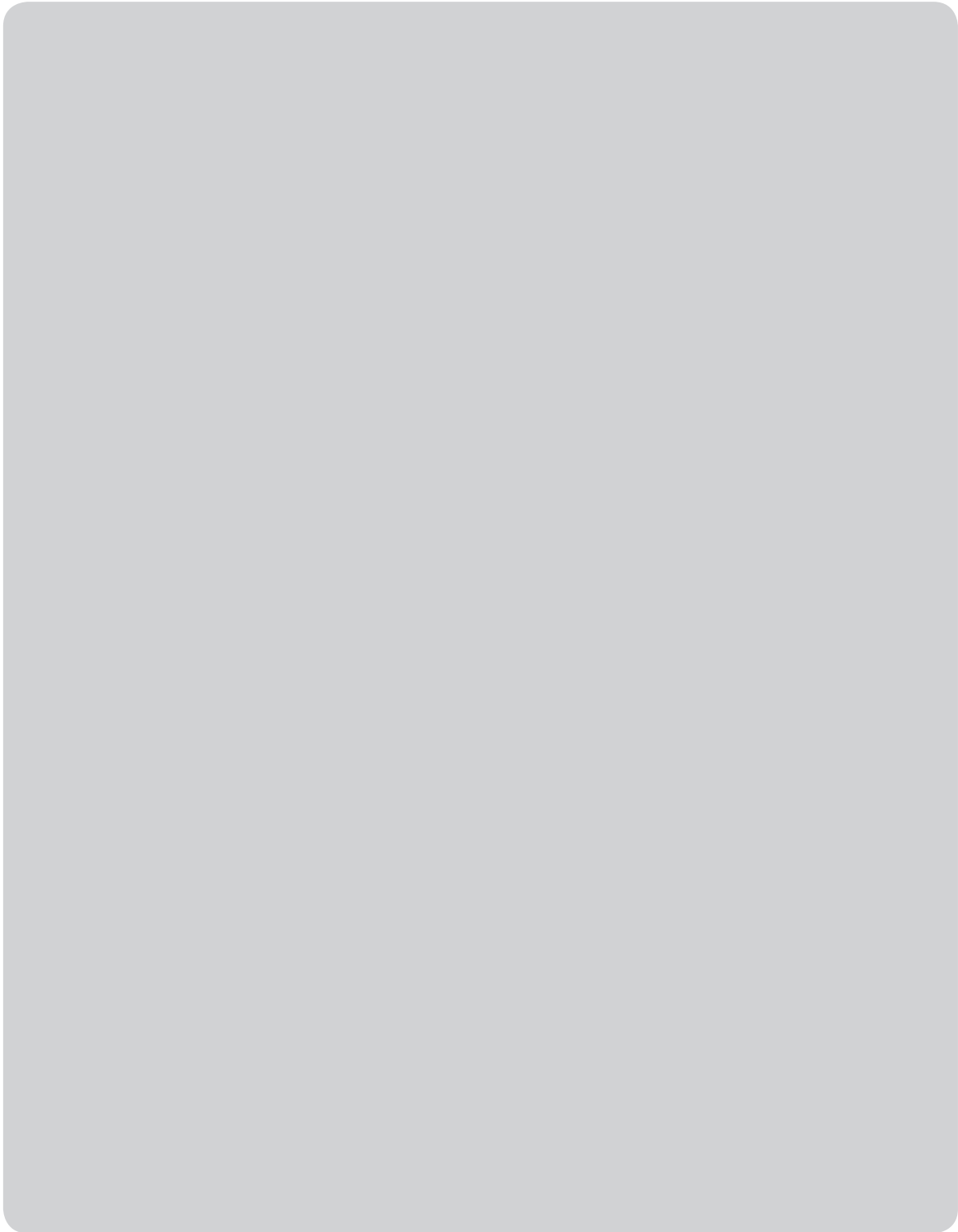
a Japanese technique of foil transfer. This may have been printed in India as well.

Conclusion

To conclude this study, Japanese born Akira Isogawa, has created a niche for himself in both the Australian market and on the international fashion scene by creating a label that expresses the aesthetics of Japan using a transnational work practice accessing the craft and techniques of Asian artisans. The result of this collaboration is the creation of a fashion that is hybrid and absorbs all the different elements of his methodology through the craft communities to create a product that is rich in content vis à vis the working lives it accesses from the beginning to the end of its realisation.

Case Study of Vixen

6



Georgia Chapman opened her Mikado collection of slim-silhouette silk cross-wrap pieces, double wrap sarong dresses and cheongsam-style overdresses in sheer black georgettes, spiked with colour. Loose, thin pants featured under several of the outfits, accentuating the Asian lilt across the collection. Burns, May 9, 2001: p 5

The label Vixen has been selected as part of this thesis study as it is a design practice which engages the Australian artisan to create fashion that incorporates the aesthetics of Asia within the design sensibility. As the case study will exhibit, this is a practice where the emphasis is on the Australian craftsperson, but the inspirations for the designs come from a passion for the eclectic. The reasons for selecting this label for a case study included the craft based hand printing involved in the production of the label's garments and the references within the colour, motifs, textures, shapes and silhouettes that are very Asian in nature. References to India, China and Japan in the titles of their collections such as Shanghai Rose Winter 2007, Mikado 2001, revealed an incline towards Asia, which was simultaneously visible in their use of Asian aesthetics in terms of chinoiserie, paisley, Japanese inspired prints and vibrant colours, and in the shapes and silhouettes of their garments. Thus it was felt that this label warranted further investigation with the view to determine the presence of a transnational establishment. Whether this practice subscribes to the definition here of a transnational practice remains to be seen.

A Melbourne-based fashion label situated in Gertrude Street, Fitzroy, Vixen is renowned for its simplistic beauty and excellent craftsmanship. It was co-founded in 1993 by textile designers Georgia Chapman and Meredith Rowe, and since that time has made a substantial mark on the fashion industry for the exotic ethnicity and timeless quality of its fashion, not dictated by trends. Unfortunately, the label closed down its retail operations in August of 2012 and will now focus on online sales. As a textile designer, the primary focus of Chapman's creations was an ethos in which the fabric – the textile prints and textures – dictate the shape of the garment that will follow. The label started with a clear intention of giving due credit to the textile designer who is generally anonymous within the hierarchy of the fashion industry. “*We wanted to put a face on our textiles. We wanted recognition that they were original, hand printed and uniquely designed by us.*” (Ham, October 12, 2004: interview with Chapman)

Their fashion was defined by double-wrap sarong skirts, cheongsam-style overdresses, and blouses, where the emphasis is on layering of fabric to create a look that is enjoyed by women of all sizes (Figure 6.1). The wrapping and layering aspect of their fashion allowed the customer to individualise the clothes and wear them according to their preference.

The tactile aspect to Vixen's fabrics had a luscious tactility: they felt gentle on the skin. Fabrics ranged from silk satins, velvets, jacquard and devoré, where patterns are created on the fabric by a burning process, amongst others. The differentiating factor for this label was their textile design, which was the forte of the label. Designed in house by Georgia Chapman and hand printed, the fabrics were known for their remarkable colours and exotic prints inspired from a range of sources. Jones (2002) describes the label as a successful Australian business combining craft-based practice and aesthetics with a high fashion product by applying layering, texture, colour and pattern and using the various techniques of dyeing, hand printing, etching and embellishing.

History of the Label

The narrative arc of the label can be separated into two phases: The Establishment period and The Consolidation period.

The Establishment period

The label Vixen started in 1993 when Meredith Rowe and Georgia Chapman, two RMIT graduates started working together to create one-off pieces using their training as textile designers. Their decision was motivated by a perceived lack of opportunities of artistic expression within the corporate world. Chapman worked for Sportsgirl after graduation but left the organisation after eleven months disappointed by the corporate culture and the sales- driven nature of the product (Chapman, 2007). Chapman states that at that point in time, there were limited job opportunities for textile designers in Australia, where the emphasis was to copy overseas trends. Accordingly, she decided to set up a practice in which she could celebrate and create the art of designing and printing fabrics.

Meredith Rowe had similar feelings about commercial design. Since her graduation she had been freelancing, lecturing at the RMIT and doing various other jobs to support herself. Chapman and Rowe were drawn together by a common desire to apply their knowledge into practice and create original printed fabrics.

"... Finding it really uninspiring, mostly being paid to copy designs from overseas, or to re-colour other people's designs. We agreed that knocking off designs went against our moral fibre so without thinking about it too much we decided to join forces." Chapman, 2007

Beginning of the Label

The label started by producing exhibits for craft-based exhibitions and gradually took on commissioned work, which included designing and printing work for fashion designers (Chapman, 2007). They produced their first range of six scarves in 1992 for an exhibition at the Meat Market Craft Centre, in North Melbourne, which had a printing facility for designers and makers. Chapman sold these scarves to David Jones and Georges (Ham, October 12, 2004). These scarves were produced in the most labour intensive way. As Rowe recalls, one of the first orders for David Lawrence was a collection of two hundred tie-dyed scarves necessitating two hundred pieces of silk georgette be hand-twisted and tied with pieces of chopped up plastic bags, twisted the other way and tied again. The reason for this, according to Chapman (2007), was their desire to express the beauty of the uninterrupted textile as they were passionate about surface decoration rather than the product itself. Scarves offered a fine way to display their prints in much the same way as the sarong proved to be, giving the designers a flat space on which to exhibit their prints and at the same time requiring very little in terms of manufacturing. This handmade approach along with the exotic prints and techniques used to create the fabric was a contrast to the mass manufactured products readily available, and precisely what caught the eyes of the buyers (Rowe, December 2006).

During the first few years of the label, Vixen also developed fabrics for other fashion labels including Scanlan and Theodore, Collette Dinnigan, and larger companies like Country Road and Sportsgirl.

“Mainly we would design for them and then they would print offshore but we were also doing a lot of hand printing... We eventually pulled back from producing for other labels. It got to the point where we felt we had become fabric printers.”

Moir, 2006: Interview with Chapman

In the early stages of the company, commissions enabled Chapman and Rowe to build up the business and gradually employ more staff. As the company grew they refused commissions and concentrated on designing and printing purely for their own production. The label offered two collections per year, Spring/Summer and Autumn/Winter. These collections showcased their signature pieces, sarongs and scarves and took at least three months of preparation from the designing to the hand printing in the Vixen Studios. The collections were wholesaled through different outlets. The feedback received from the retailers and customers informed them that the unique colour palette and the original

prints of their product were very popular and there was a growing demand by the customers for garments that could be coordinated with their collections (Rowe, December 2006, Chapman and Sohn, 2002a). Hence, there was an opportunity to develop their fabrics into fashion garments as well as accessories. This direct feedback generated the confidence to develop a clothing line.

Vixen started their creative journey by designing scarves, manufacturing basic simple products but aiming for a high standard of finishing (Chapman, 2007). The scarf and the sarong did not need any pattern cutting and reassembling, and gave them the time to explore methods of printing their fabrics on a commercial scale rather than the craft-based individual pieces that they learned to print at the university. The sarong is a piece of fabric wrapped around the body and is Indonesian/Malaysian in origin. This piece of fabric became an important element within the practice of the Vixen label, as according to Chapman:

“A sarong also has ambiguity – as a piece of fabric, it’s open to interpretation. It can be wrapped around the body in many different ways. The body suggests the form.”

Chapman, 2007: p 3

The essence of the sarong is visible in the Vixen range as the idea of ambiguity was central to the label. As such, many of the garments were designed to wrap and drape the body and were adaptable to personalised interpretation.

Foray into Fashion

Their first range of garments consisted of basic georgette and slip dresses, and catering to demand, more pieces were added to the collection. Following the customer feedback and analysis of the sales data formed the essence of their growth (Rowe, December 2006). The feedback informed them that although their product was generally popular within all segments of the market, there was a strong market within the older women category due to the versatility of their clothes, which suited most body shapes. This realisation came due to the fact that their most effective retailers were Blondie and Andrea Gold. These outlets were popular with high income professional women who could afford to pay the price for a hand crafted garment. Their product was labour intensive as the prints were designed by the designers and then printed manually before the garment was stitched. This time consuming method increased the cost of the garment. For this reason, Vixen garments could cost on an average from AUD\$ 400 to \$1200 (Bond, 2001), but sold well within a market of high

income earners who could appreciate and afford the exclusivity of the handmade aspect of the label. The niche became popular within a higher age group of women who could not only afford the label, but also related to the aesthetic and functionality of the designs. Their bigger sizes and styles in longer lengths, loose-fitting garments were popular among larger women. The Vixen style was not only for larger women: the adaptable nature of their clothes suited women of different age groups attracted to the wrapping and layering of the garments that could be personalised individually by this customer (Figure 6.2).

As an emerging label, customer feedback was essential for the designers as it assisted them in improving their brand. Vixen developed a way to meet these customers personally through annual sales that became a popular event. This provided them a direct contact opportunity to develop their mailing lists to stay in touch with their customers, and to obtain first hand feedback about their product, customer preferences and expectations from the label. These sales were also a forum to create and sell one-off items from left over fabrics from production runs. Among these, cushions and homewares were introduced and these soft furnishings became very popular.

“It was based more on doing something and then you follow the customer reaction and then you try to make another thing and it just keeps on rolling, it was very much shaped I think by us learning as we went along and by talking to customers.” Rowe, December 2006

Design Methodology

Chapman and Rowe started as a team and shared the inspirations and design direction of the label. During this partnership their design methodology was based on individual approaches to a theme and bringing them together to create a line that represented the label. Creative development started by deciding upon a theme for the following season; the fabrics were identified in terms of weight; for example, lighter fabrics like silks and chiffons for Summer and heavier velvets and satins for Winter (Rowe, December 2006). The collection was named to set the mood for designing the prints. The two designers would then design separately according to their tastes and based on their interpretation of the theme and the season. The collaborative essence of the business is evident here as the individually designed prints were collectively assessed and the most suitable were selected for production. This method facilitated the development of a design repertoire and at the same time prepared a collection: prints not selected were stored for later use. The selected prints would be sampled for production, which also included trialling suggested

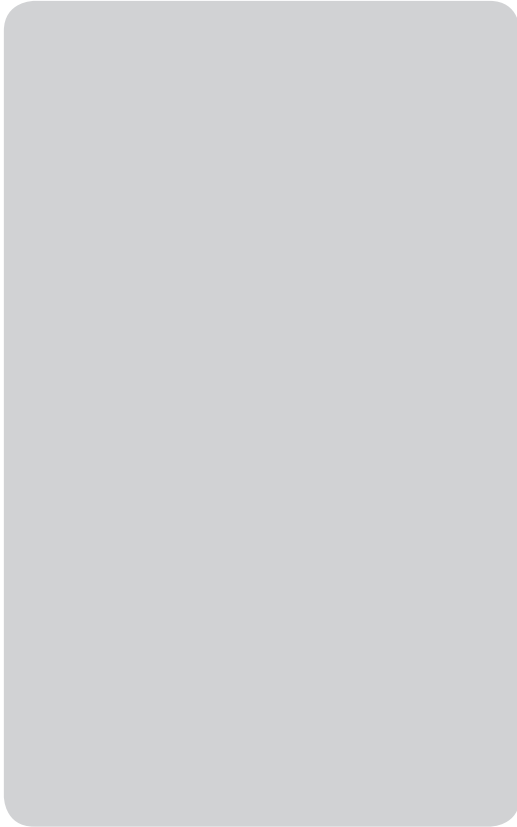


Figure 6.1 Vixen Sarong Skirt, Melbourne Spring Fashion Week, Spring/Summer 2000 [Accessed 31st January 2008] from <http://www.six6photography.com.au/Fashion/Msfw2000/Vixen/Vixen.html>

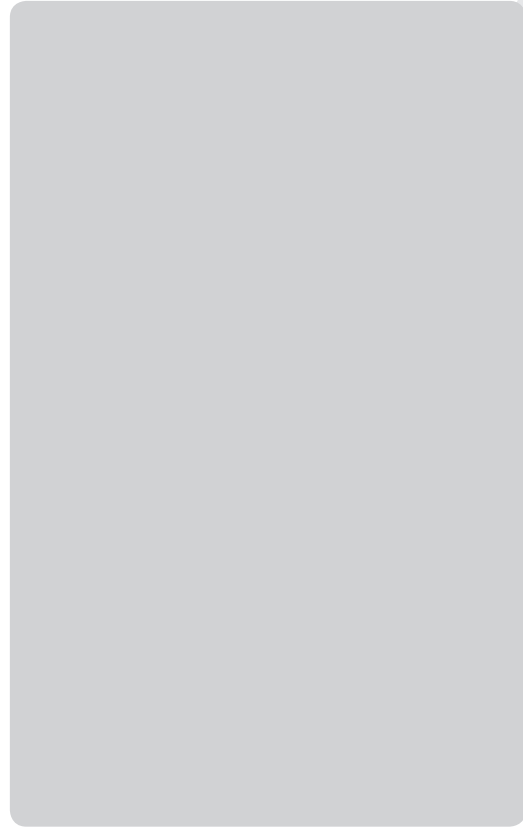


Figure 6.2 Vixen Chinoiserie Spring Summer 2006 [Accessed 31st January 2008] from <http://vixenaustralia.com/macPage.html>

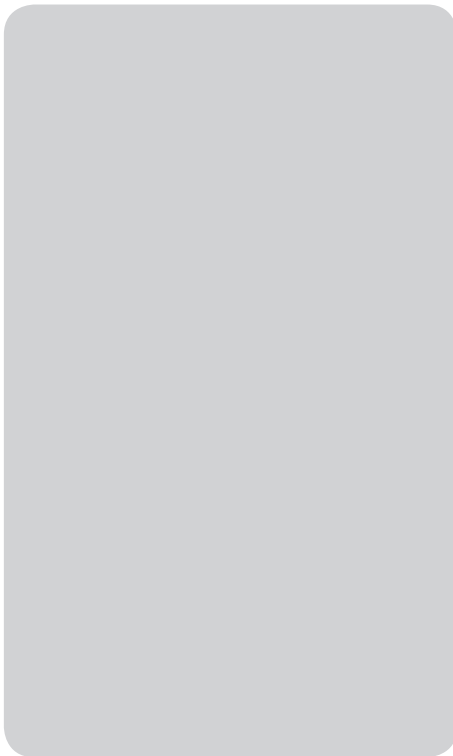


Figure 6.3 Vixen, Indochine 2003, [Accessed 31st January 2008] from <http://vixenaustralia.com/macPage.html>



Figure 6.4 Vixen Design Methodology [Accessed 31st January 2008] from <http://vixenaustralia.com/macPage.html>

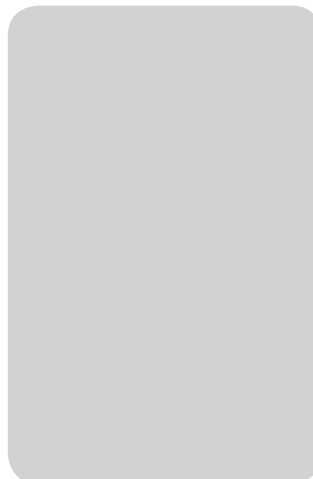


Figure 6.5 Vixen Chinoiserie 2006, email to author 3rd April 2008

colourways. The outcome of the sampling would determine the application of the motif or print, as Vixen garments are a collection of different pieces of fabrics, textures, motifs and colours. A Vixen garment was not necessarily cut from a bolt of fabric but was created by applying a combination of textures and motifs from different fabrics and textiles. Hence a pattern could be printed only for the sleeves or as a border on a skirt or as part of a detail. The collection thus developed like a jigsaw puzzle where sometimes a garment made for a previous collection was reviewed to create new garments. The collection was a development or value addition to a base fabric such as plain silk, silk chiffon, silk georgette, silk satin and silk velvets by applying various methods of printing, textile techniques and beading to create their signature fabric (Figure 6.3).

In the early years of the label, the silhouette of the collection was not considered important for the label as their emphasis was on bringing the printed fabric to the fore. However, as the label grew, the prints and the fabrics became the essence of the shape of the garments. These shapes varied but there was a tendency in the label's design sensibility towards shapes that were inspired by Asian cultures. Their signature shape was and remained, the sarong, which is Asian in origin. Being textile designers, they could relate towards the richness of the Asian cultures in terms of colour, patterns, and cultural aesthetics and borrowed heavily from those regions. Therefore, it was common to see dresses that had a touch of the cheongsam; Thai wrap pants; references to the kimono and the Japanese Obi sash. The motifs also reflected their interest in Asian cultures. The Mikado Collection of 2001 featured original hand-prints, reminiscent of kimono colours such as bronze, shell pink, flesh tones and ivory with slashes of Oriental red. (Cusworth, May 19, 2001)

In 2000, Meredith Rowe decided to leave the company, as the two had developed their own distinct signature styles and wanted to pursue textiles differently. Meredith Rowe was interested in the technological application of artistic textile design whereas Chapman wanted to take the label to the next level and pursue fashion (Cawthorne, 2000) (Figure 6.4).

Asian Influence

Georgia Chapman and Meredith Rowe grew up in an Australia where neighbouring Asian cultures were being welcomed and appreciated. Their eclectic interests developed due to the fact that at the time they were growing up in the 1970's, there was a cultural shift towards Australia aligning itself with the Asia-Pacific region. This was a multicultural Australia that incorporated different cultures from the neighbouring Asia-Pacific region, including Asian languages, which were being taught at schools along with an introduction to Asian history.

Chapman's interests in Asian culture were also nurtured by her mother from an early age due to her own affinity with Eastern cultures and textiles. Chapman has a vivid memory of a hand painted Japanese fan from her childhood (Chapman, 2007). Therefore the lure of other cultures was very strong and urged her to further research them when designing later on in life. Rowe studied Asian history at school, which fascinated her and developed her passion for Eastern textiles and Asian art. Their interests were further enhanced during their education as textile designers at RMIT where they were able to formally research this area as part of their undergraduate degrees. As textile designers they realised that there was a deficiency of textile traditions within the Australian textile history, which lacked the depth that was available in the traditional Eastern cultures. Therefore, they explored traditional motifs, textile techniques and garments of different cultures, which became their style at Vixen, incorporating them as part of the design methodology and inspirations.

The traditional techniques of Asia have been a source of interest for the label; applications such as tie-dye *shibori* and woodblock printing and they often used generic Japanese patterns like the hemp and the *karakusa* styled arabesque designs in their prints. What they found amazing about these patterns was how adaptable they were and the ways they could be used on different products. Japanese textiles were a source of inspiration due to their unique colours and timeless patterns, which are derived from nature. Chapman also searched for traditional textile techniques to authenticate their methodology by reinventing the application of an archaic inspiration and creating something modern (Jones, 2002). For example, when working with Rowe, they used patterned wooden blocks from India and Nepal but modernised their application (Rowe, December 2006). The blocks were printed with opaque colour on to drafting film and converted into printing plates and the designs were screen printed on to fabric for a collection. The prints created from this exercise inspired a host of other designs.

Asia was not only a source of prints and techniques for Vixen; the label also featured Asian garments as inspirations such as the kimono, cheongsam, and sarongs. The themes for their collections as listed on their web page (Vixen, 2012) give us an indication on the design

direction of the label. Many of the collections have Asian inspired titles and reflect their Asian bent, for example Arabesque Summer 2010, Metro Oriental 2009, Shalimar 2008, Voyage 2007, Shanghai Rose Winter 2007, Chinoiserie 2006, Bohemians Winter 2005, Indo China 2003, Lotus 2003, Mikado 2001 and Silk Road 2000.

The names of the collections clearly indicate the eclectic nature of the label with a leaning toward the cultures of the Asia–Pacific region. When interviewed by the author both Chapman and Rowe described Asia as an amazing source of diversity and felt that it is used in Australia more in terms of inspiration for colour, patterns; in referencing a cultural aesthetic. According to Rowe (December 2006), these aesthetics include simplicity of lines, less structured forms (in garment construction), and an alternative way of thinking of balance – asymmetry and organic shapes. Rowe (December 2006) relates it to a form of classicism that is not based on Roman or Greek concepts, but rather on ideals of Buddhist, Confucian, Sufi and Sanskrit philosophies. According to Rowe, the influence that these cultures exercise within Australian society in terms of garments include the popularity of the cheongsam, kaftan, the rectangular Indonesian/Malay sarong; Tubular flores/Thai sarong, Thai wrap Pants and workers shirt, the kimono (as a dressing gown and wrap top), and the shalwar kameez (“wearing pants with dresses is very common in Australia.”) The reasons for this are argued to be Australia’s geographic positioning, multiculturalism, weather similar to that of Asia, a beach culture that accepts certain Asian garments like the sarong, travel and immigration patterns, and gastronomy.

A New Beginning

Following Rowe’s departure, Chapman became the creative head of the business and was involved in the design and production from start to finish (Moir, 2006). A good relationship with local pattern cutters, fabric agents and manufacturers along with her staff helped her run her new business model. The technical aspects of fashion were put in the charge of Maureen Sohn, a designer who created the silhouettes that are aligned with the textile design aesthetics of the company and helped Vixen evolve into a high fashion label due to her expertise in garment construction (Jones, 2002). What changed in recent years was that instead of producing the fabric in house, Chapman started to outsource the printing of her fabric and was also using digital printing as a method of applying her prints on to the fabric.

Chapman and Sohn worked well as a team, as there was a constant dialogue between the two about the product; looking at fabrics, colour palettes and silhouettes together (Chapman and Sohn, 2002b). Within the partnership, their roles were defined as Sohn

developing the silhouette and garment construction and Chapman concentrating on the textile design. Chapman and Sohn collaborated together to develop a label that is not trend-driven but is based on a passion for celebrating the textile by way of fashion that acknowledges the techniques of handcrafted textile manufacturing and histories of design.

Collaboration was a major aspect of their practice and has seen them work with a diverse group of craftspeople with industrial process knowledge as well as with fashion retailers, the local textile industry and art galleries. A particular example cited by Rowe (December 2006) was their working relationship with Kraftkolour, a company that supplied print dyes and materials in the early years. This company was a good source not only of materials but also technical help as they were willing to order in small amounts of any new product that Vixen was willing to try out, along with any technical support that they required to use that product. In this manner, using the flat terrain of the fabric they employed different techniques to create texture such as foil printing and devoré impressions on fabrics. All of the research and development fed into their fashion business. During this period, they developed a strong relationship with local embroiderers, specialists machinists and pleaters (Vixen through and through, 2000). Chapman developed new printing techniques and recipes for their colour palettes stating: “We’ve got dye books for all the colours and small swatches for the sample range, but fabric can change so there’s lots of different variables” (Moir, 2006).

Designing the Fabric

Chapman created her prints through a painstaking method of sketching on paper and working with photocopies to explore imagery and scale. Although adding colours gives the design a new perspective, her preference was to work in black and white producing samples, which were initially trialled on small screens and printed on to fabric. At the same time, Sohn worked on the garment shapes and patterns in consultation with Chapman. The outcome of the fabric sampling served to determine the direction of the collection as certain motifs were just used for sleeves or borders whilst others become part of a dress. The final outcome of the sampling determined the amount of fabric required for production. Moir (2006) states that four different fabrics made up a garment so the designers required the expertise of specialist machinists as the fabric might be textured or beaded. Every season, Vixen produced over a thousand metres of fabric.

Due to the collaboration with Sohn, their designing process was a double production whereby they first designed the fabrics and then hand printed them. They then cut out the garments from the printed fabric, which is not a simple process as there is a mix and match of textures and motifs (Figure 6.5).

Change in the Business Direction

The Vixen label changed their business strategy in keeping with the demands of the times. Chapman took charge of setting the design direction of the label and providing the design impetus to her staff to come up with the prints for the range. She also took charge of the planning and operations of the label, as the production involved not only designing the fabric but also coordinating the production, which was out sourced locally, but required timely despatch to the retailers.

The major change in the methodology of the label was process driven. Whereas the prints had been designed and printed in house, the printing was now subcontracted out and digitally printed. This was due to the nature of fashion in that, according to Chapman (2007), customer perception had changed: still immensely appreciative of the nature of the unique prints and individual colours of the label, the customer wasn't necessarily able to differentiate the printing technique. Hand printing is a very labour intensive method of production, requiring many man hours thus increasing the cost of production, which inhibits growth.

Transnational Network

An analysis of the label reveals that the label did not comply to the definitions of the transnational as defined in the thesis parameters as it was a Melbourne-based business with design and production based locally (Figure 6.6). The interesting fact is that it does comply with Appadurai's (1986) concept of decontextualized aesthetics, where objects produced for aesthetic, ceremonial and sumptuary use in small communities are changed culturally, economically and socially by the tastes, markets and ideologies of larger economies. In this case, the aesthetic elements of Asia, in terms of motifs, colours and shapes were applied to a Western silhouette to create a fashion that can be termed as 'fusion.' Therefore, the aesthetics of Asia break free from their typical setting and become part of a wider design practice. In this case, the fashion practice of Vixen was known for its application of a unique Asian aesthetic coupled with the shapes of Asia to create a label that sat within a niche market.

Analysis of a Garment

"I have been extremely passionate about textiles and begin by creating high-quality, beautiful fabrics... the emphasis is on beautiful clothing and perfect fit and form. I like to create garments that enhance, rather than hide, a woman's shape: feminine and sensuous."

Chapman in Bond, 2001: p 1

Vixen's designs were based on different cultural inspirations, where each collection was grounded on a well-researched theme, which exhibits a sophisticated understanding of the textile history of various cultures (Figure 6.7). Bond (2001) states that the collections exhibit a considered response to particular themes and are not just reproductions of cultural textiles. There is a narrative in the garment that is created by the shape of the garment and the print, which transports the wearer to another place and time. Chapman achieved this through combining different patterns and textures, layering and splicing to reinvent an uncomplicated garment through fabric combinations, creating a textured and eclectic look (Bond, 2001).

Prominent aspects visible within the collections of the label were the eclectic cultural references present within the garments with flora, fauna and colours visible in traditional Chinese embroideries, Japanese kimonos, Florentine tapestries, Moroccan inspired bias cut dresses, opulent printed sarongs and an exotic ethnicity that has been a permanent feature of the brand from its inception. Their clothes did not look Asian or Eastern, but were reminiscent of several different cultures, as any one piece is a collection of different

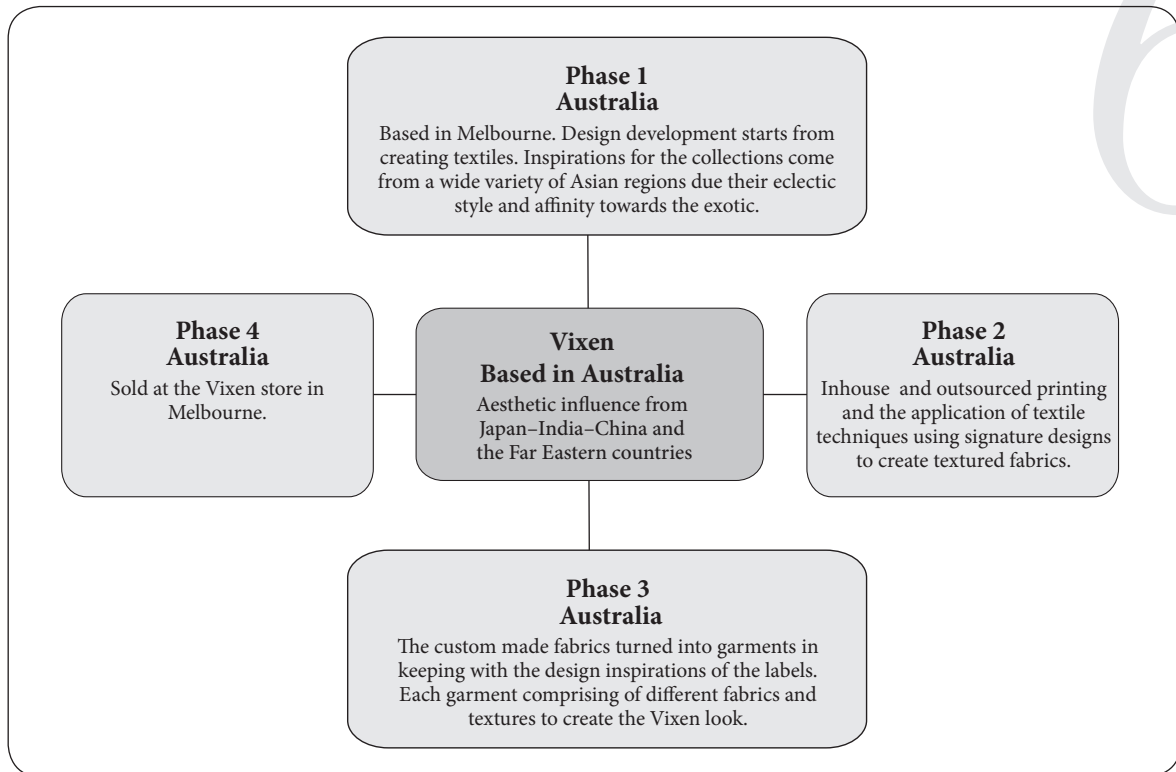


Figure 6.6 Diagram of Vixen's Practice, Shazia Bano 2012

textures, prints, colours, which are harmoniously balanced under the trained eye of Chapman.

The garment pictured is from the collection *Chinoiserie 2006*, and expresses the essence of Vixen. The model is wearing a silk printed dress that has many aspects and textures to its form. It comprises four pieces of different fabric textures with the textile techniques involved clearly visible. Each will be analysed separately, but the style of the garment is a melange of different elements of cultures. Firstly, the shape of the dress is an A-line, cut on the bias, slightly fitting the body at the waist and dropping at the hip. This is a feature used frequently by Vixen as it is a cut that favours the larger sizes. It is paired with straight trousers, which is very Asian in style and is reminiscent of the Chinese staple of wearing trousers with long styled dresses. The front of the dress is comprised of two pieces of fabric, both of which are heavily textured. The top panel is made up of a silk with a woven effect that is not clearly visible but seems to have a wave-like weave to it. It is attached at the waist with a bias cut skirt in white silk devoré. The sensuous nature of the dress is slightly revealing with a lace panel at the back attached to a silk satin panel that is not waisted like the front is cut, but is on a bias cut with a seam at the centre back. The back neckline is a low cut V-neck and the front neckline, though not obvious, seems to follow the same shape. The fitted lace panel at the back gives the effect of an obi sash, with the minute overlap at the back neckline referencing the closure of the kimono. The cut out short sleeves add an

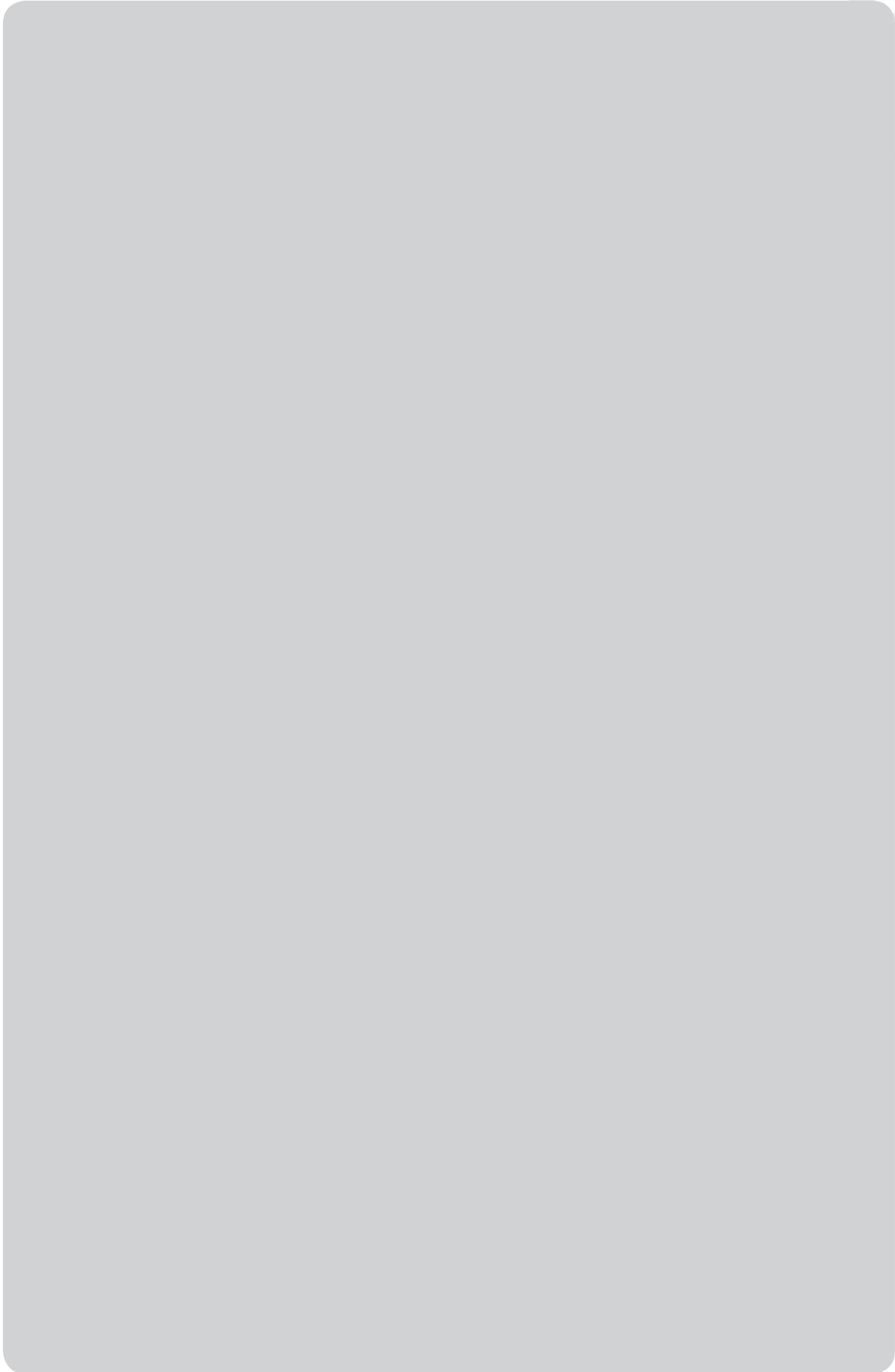


Figure 6.7 Vixen Indochine 2003 email to author 3rd April 2008

interesting element to the dress. The irregular handkerchief styled hemline is shorter at the front and longer at the back with pointed sides and centre back. The outfit is completed with a neckband with a flower on it.

Surprisingly, this dress is rendered in various shades of white, which is unlike the signature Vixen creations but the lack of colour has been compensated by textures and prints that are interesting to read. The visible pattern of the front skirt is based on a hexagonal lattice with a stylised chrysanthemum in the centre. The hexagon in Asia is a symbol of the turtle, hence the turtle back motif is an auspicious sign (Baird, 2001). Flowers hold special significance in the Asian design vocabulary. The chrysanthemum is a sign of longevity and since the Meiji period (1868 – 1912) has been a symbol of the Imperial family. The print at the back is a Spring motif with a collection of flowers heralding the season with the cherry blossom motif clearly visible. The cherry blossom, known as the sakura in Japan, is a favourite flower of Japan and has a symbolic relevance to the Spring season symbolising the transient nature of life. Therefore, the garment is a typical Vixen piece with texture, colour and motif playing the lead role in the design.

Sales Outlets

Vixen fashion and homewares have been stocked in over twenty stores in Australia and overseas. They have sold to stores in America, United Kingdom, Singapore and New Zealand. The Melbourne market provided Vixen with its largest proportion of sales (Moir, 2006). In 2001, the label sold into Lane Crawford in Hong Kong; to New Zealand buyers and the US boutique Midnight Farm on Martha's Vineyard as part of the export portfolio (Cusworth, May 19, 2001). Vixen opened their flagship store on Gertrude Street, Fitzroy in 2007 and operated in that premises until August 2012 when the retail operations closed down. Vixen will now be available online.

Conclusion

The Label Vixen operated for nineteen years starting as a small operation co-founded by Meredith Rowe and Georgia Chapman. They were known for the hand made aspect of the textiles where the prints were designed and printed in house. Their style referenced the aesthetics of Asia in terms of shape, colours and motifs and experimented with different textures to give importance to the beauty of the textile. The signature Vixen style was about pattern, texture, colour, layering and draping, and involving the customer in how the garment is worn individually due to the versatility of the garment. Due to the intense nature of the product in terms of its development and production, the label situated itself in

a category of garments that was not seasonal but could be worn over time due to the nature of the design element and cut of the garment that didn't acquiesce to prevalent trends. Print was the main emphasis of the brand with the colour combinations and the various textures that combined to create a Vixen garment, and these were finished to a very high quality including French seams and hand finishes. This label ascribed to the concept of decontextualized aesthetics, sourcing traditional elements of Asian cultures for the design development of their product.

Conclusion

7

This thesis discusses the presence of transnational links within the Australian fashion industry by analysing the practices of three womenswear designers and their relationship with the craft communities of Asia. The scope of the study has been identified as India, China and Japan due to their present links with the international fashion industry. Japan has been influential in the international fashion industry due to its approach towards clothing, which is different from the Western world. India has been the creative hub for international designers for years that access the hand made crafts in terms of embroideries, beading, printing, etc. China has been identified due to its manufacturing abilities catering to a wide segment of international fashion at various levels of the fashion chain. Therefore, the concept of the transnational is applied to discover the presence of networks that exist between Australian designers and the craft communities of Asia.

In order to investigate these practices in detail, the case study method was employed as the research methodology as it deals with empirical inquiry that looks into a contemporary phenomenon with a real life context. The elements of data collection have also been identified to capture the essence of the practice by using real/primary data and historic and contemporary published information.

This study also discusses various concepts of transnationalism as proposed by academics in the field. Transnational is a multidimensional space that is inhabited by many factors each containing its own individual specificities. The literature reviewed explained that the transnational liquefies borders and is a combination of complex networks, circuits and flows that vary from each other. Therefore, a definition emerged that defines the term as one that occupies space that involves geographies, networks and flows that are specific to individual situations. The concept of a bounded system was also viewed which assists in understanding the specific components that constitute the parameters of each transnational network. Each designer analysed for this research has their own transnational framework where the designers operate within a transnational system defined by the selection of geographies that constitute their practices.

The overarching bounded system of this study comprises Australia, India, China Japan and Vietnam. The fashion produced has the provenance of East and West: East being Asia (India, China and Japan) and West being the cultural context of Australian fashion. The designers chosen place substantial emphasis on hand crafted and artisanal content by creating fusion design that uses the aesthetics of the West and combines it with the techniques of the East.

An Akira Isogawa, Easton Pearson or Vixen garment transports the wearer into a different dimension as it is a collection of aesthetics, craftsmanship and traditions of a number of cultures from different parts of the globe. The shapes and textures of their creations do not conform to any given trend and are the result of a creative process that gives primacy to the creation of textiles. These textiles are created using a transnational network, one that sources the artisanal techniques of craftspeople in Asia. This network consists of designers based in Australia travelling to India, Vietnam and China to source the hand crafted textile traditions of communities based in Asia, in which the crafts of India and Vietnam, fabrics from China and inspirations from diverse sources are juxtaposed to create fashion that is global in nature. The wealth of the crafts available in Asia are adapted through the Japanese mindset in the case of Akira Isogawa, an Australian mindset in the cases of Easton Pearson and Vixen and are created for a Western audience. It is pertinent to point out that the label Vixen was a brand that did not conform to the transnational set up in terms of their sourcing of the artisanal base, but it is one that sourced the aesthetics of Asia for its creative input.

All three designers chosen for this study ascribe to the concept of giving primacy to textiles, where they source the craft communities in Asia to develop the flat terrain of cloth using their Western aesthetics and applying them to the indigenous crafts of the region or alternatively, reinventing the use of traditional techniques and exploring and developing new ways of application of authentic time-honoured crafts. Such a practice decontextualizes the craft and it becomes accepted in a new environment. At the same time, such a practice falls into the category of transnational design practice, where multiple geographic locations are accessed to furnish a design practice.

The possibility of the transnational being a source of cheap labour was also analysed, but was discounted in relation to the practices chosen for this study. This was due to the nature of their designs, which not only includes the artisanal hand work but also Western aesthetics including choice of colours and cut of the garment. Within these practices, Asia is not accessed due to cost considerations but due to the unavailability of the crafts in Australia. Once the fabric has been woven/embellished/dyed/printed, it is returned to

Australia to be stitched in keeping with the quality of fashion expected from these labels. Therefore, these labels do not access Asia purely for cost considerations but due to the specialised craft skills available in that region.

The concept of *aesthetics of diversion* was also reviewed, which is described as a scenario where objects produced for aesthetic and ceremonial use in small communities are changed by the tastes, markets and ideologies of larger economies. This concept developed an insight into the practices of the nominated Australian designers as the traditional craft accessed by them changes with their application of Western aesthetics. In this process, the craft becomes decontextualized and breaks free from its origin.

The concept of the *diasporas of imagination* was also reviewed. This claims that the transnational can also exist through shared imagination, through cultural artefacts and through the mind, created by artists and designers involved in cross border networks and systems. The concept can be related to a troupe of designers/labels that access the crafts of Asia to enhance their product applying the handcrafted element available to specific communities in Asia. The selected case studies for the research are part of a diaspora that creates fashion through shared imagination that can be termed as ‘fusion cultural translation manifesting new imaginaries.’

In this study, the research is based on a type of fashion created by a process that adds value to a concept through the different stages of its making and is spread across different geographies. Similarly, the practice of niche market designers is a process of accretion of value within a transnational circuit, whereby the artisanal handmade aspect of Asia is used to create ‘a valuable thing’ to illuminate and emphasise the importance of the hand made that goes into the production of fashion and entails hours of patient skill exhibited by the craft communities of Asia, whether they be in India, China or Japan.

To provide an understanding of the place and culture that is accessed, the thesis also briefly analyses the aesthetics of Asia, which feature prominently within the practices of the Australian designers. The embroideries of China were discussed; the aesthetics of Japan and the craft techniques of India were briefly touched upon to provide the relevant context to analyse/appreciate the case studies.

The three case studies bring forth the following outcomes:

The study confirmed that Easton Pearson and Akira Isogawa’s practices work within a transnational framework due to the fact that, originating from Australia, their production centres are spread over multiple locations including India, China, Japan and Vietnam. Their methodology employs the skills of Australian professionals in Brisbane and Sydney sourcing the elements for their product in different regions of Asia to combine Western

aesthetics and Asian crafts, thus creating fashion that is unique and has the added element of the hand made. Furthermore, their contact with Asia is based firmly on their personal interaction with the craft communities of Asia and their own interpretations of the local craft. Thus, a direct contact with the craftsman results in the exchange of aesthetics and skills that benefits both parties: a more profound understanding of the traditional craft on the part of Easton Pearson and Isogawa, and access to methods of improvisation of the traditional craft for the artisan. This methodology enables the selected designers to distinguish themselves from the mass manufacturing fashion arena. This collaboration results in the creation of fashion that can be termed as 'fusion' through the interaction with the respective craft communities to create a unique product.

The Vixen label does not strictly ascribe to the concept of the transnational as it was a Melbourne-based brand known for the hand-made aspect of the textile. Vixen referenced the aesthetics of Asia in terms of shape, colours and motifs to bring the textile to the forefront and in this way, fell into the category of designers who relate to the context of *aesthetics of decontextualisation*.

This study has highlighted the concept of transnationalism and contextualized it within contemporary practices of the Australian fashion industry to ascertain the presence of this phenomenon. In doing so it expressed that a practice involving two or more geographies would be termed as transnational. It also explored other aspects which were a part of the designers transnational practice, for example; the aesthetics of Asia and their exchange here in Australia being viewed through the concept of aesthetics of diversion; the collaborative nature of the exchange with the artisanal communities; the nature of fashion business, which starting from Australia going through a transnational framework is sold in reputable outlets throughout the globe. The study elucidates that this process removes the aesthetic/craft from its host environment and transforms it into a global aesthetic.

To further this research it is possible to explore the wider fashion industry within Australia, to explore the nature of business within the different tiers of the industry. This will facilitate in categorizing the levels/types of transnationalities present and identify the presence of indigenous or reverse flows which may in turn enable to identify the various genres of transnationalism present within the industry.

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