FASHION IN SHANGHAI: THE DESIGNERS OF A NEW ECONOMY OF STYLE

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Abstract

In this thesis I contend that the momentum of Chinese fashion is at a tipping point. Typically this process has been constrained by two key forces that have shaped the perception of Chinese development. Chinese culture, and Chinese politics have long held an almost insurmountable presence over many aspects of daily life, including cultural and creative expression, however this is changing, in part because of exchanges of aesthetic information due to globalisation, but also because of China’s global ascendency as an economically powerful nation, and its recent implementation of creative policy. Accordingly I used the Chinese city of Shanghai as a case study where between 2010 and 2012, I explored the field of independent fashion design and production so as to understand how fashion designers are building businesses and forging their aesthetic.

To examine this field I developed a simple model to conceptualise the clothing industry, Shanghai’s fashion system, and the Eurocentric clothing system. This model was utilised as a means of organising semi-structured interviews with fifteen fashion designers in Shanghai. As well, my professional practice, spanning twenty years in the global fashion industry has facilitated a more critical examination of the field. The research outcomes show that despite the dominance of the Eurocentric fashion system in China, some very successful designers in Shanghai have developed an uncompromising design aesthetic that is based upon a third key force of Chinese Buddhist and Daoist philosophy.

I found that their work, in many ways, rejects the model of Western consumption that propels the Eurocentric fashion system, and instead they have created clothing brands that are ethically, morally and philosophically sound, and incorporate innate sustainable practice. Furthermore, in a powerful demonstration of China’s ‘soft power’, in March 2013, China’s First Lady, Peng Liyuan, accompanied her husband President Xi Jinping, China’s newly elected leader, on their first state visit to Russia. Instead of a European luxury brand, Peng Liyuan wore clothing from one of these designers
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Statement of Original Authorship

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signature: QUT Verified Signature

Date: 17/02/2014
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Terminology

On Chinese names in this thesis:

I have used Romanised pinyin for Chinese names, with the family name first, in accordance with Chinese convention. In some cases, where the person is usually known in the West by a different form, I have provided more common spellings.

On the ‘West’:

Throughout this thesis the term ‘the West’ is used to describe countries outside China. In the field of fashion, and for the purposes of this thesis ‘the West’ generally means the Euro-centric fashion system.
The impetus for this research extends to 2002 when I travelled to Shanghai to establish a professional workroom for my independent Australian fashion label. In the years that ensued, I found myself navigating a clothing industry unlike any I had previously encountered. Because of the Chinese government’s official focus on export, Shanghai’s clothing industry was oriented directly away from its own emerging fashion system. In many other countries, these two entities are symbiotic, yet in Shanghai they seemed unrelated, even disinterested in each other. I also found the increasingly popular narrative of the rise of Chinese creativity to be weighed down with the baggage of Chinese cultural discourse.

The dissonance was most evident in routine difficulties I encountered, mostly associated with locating textiles, and skilled labour but also in the maze of local bureaucracy that with apparent indifference hindered my efforts to build a business and employ people. Instead of the unlimited and accessible resources one might expect to find because of China’s reputation as a global garment manufacturer, my sourcing was confined to the remnants and by-products of the clothing industry. In my workroom, I trained technically proficient workers who were transitioning from the clothing industry, and attracted to employment with new domestic fashion brands, in the aesthetic content and high standards of designer fashion that is so acclaimed by the European fashion system. Yet these workers were quickly appropriated by other emergent and more agile fashion businesses for a few kuai more each week.¹

Despite these production problems, my thoughts also extended to how my brand might enter this new marketplace, so during this time I considered how Chinese fashion designers would build their businesses in a creative environment that was rich, bustling and vibrant, and appeared to offer much opportunity. However, my

¹ Kuai is the Chinese term for Renminbi, the Chinese currency. At the time of writing 1 kuai (1 RmB) equals approximately US $0.15.
experiences in the European fashion system did not allow me to identify such a system in Shanghai, and there was little structure that I could adhere to.

In 2006, the catalyst for this thesis occurred when a staff member at the Australian Chamber of Commerce, (Austrade) in Shanghai arranged an interview for me with Wang Wei who was about to travel to London as the first Chinese designer to show at London Fashion Week. When I arrived at his studio in downtown Shanghai, it was clear that official expectations were high. A noticeable tension existed in the air as a local television crew jostled with journalists from the Shanghai Daily and the China Daily newspapers for Wang Wei’s attention. I had spent much time thinking about a foothold in the European marketplace for my own brand and as I watched from the sidelines, it was apparent to me that Wang Wei, who was very well known in Shanghai, might face problems in his navigation of the Eurocentric fashion system, where he was without reputation. Hindsight shows his path was difficult and I discuss the outcome of his experiences in chapter five.

**Research question**

The problems I encountered in building my business, and my thoughts about my own creative journey, considered in the light of Wang Wei’s experiences lead to my research question. Fundamentally, my concern lies with the production of fashion as an artifact emerging from the Chinese cultural milieu, and more specifically with the ways that Chinese fashion designers are shaping their aesthetic signature in Shanghai’s nascent fashion system. In other words, how are fashion designers moving from roles in the clothing industry to becoming actors in a fashion system? What kind of professional development is occurring, and how are designers forming their identities? Secondly, what kinds of collaboration, urban creative settings and working practices are being used? Is this different to other models?

Finally, I am also concerned with determining the motivations of fashion designers in Shanghai. Are they intent on entering the Eurocentric fashion system, and if so, why? Alternatively, are fashion designers in Shanghai more interested in the Chinese domestic market for fashion? If so, an important question to ask is how they are assembling their aesthetic knowledge and what its content consists of? In brief, my question is, how do Chinese fashion designers operate, and to what end?
Research purpose

Wang Wei’s journey to London occurred in 2006, and his personal goals were in keeping with Shanghai’s aspirations of attaining a position among the great fashion cities of the world; aspirations that have been integrated in the recent re-shaping of this city into a role model for Chinese creative enterprise. However as Breward and Gilbert (2006) explain, in the West, China is still primarily thought of as a global centre of clothing production. When China opened for trade in 1978, after then-president Deng Xiaoping granted Chinese entrepreneurs new permissions, foreign fashion companies were attracted to valuable economies of scale and competitive costs of garment production, resulting in China becoming the garment manufacturer to the world (Zhang 2006). Since then, the Chinese government has become increasingly aware of the importance of moving beyond this role, particularly as it has re-focussed on its domestic economy.

There is great financial value yet to be realised from the infrastructure of the clothing and textile industries and China’s need to provide employment for a domestic populace is increasingly urgent. The accompanying demands of consumption means re-thinking how these processes will take place and what the implications are for the established Eurocentric fashion system. Michael Keane (2007) has previously discussed this transition phase in terms of the Chinese government’s early grasp of the economic importance of the creative industries, a concept that originates from the British government’s mapping of their own creative sector. In the United Kingdom, the exploration was undertaken as a means of identifying key aspects of their creative economy, so as to understand, and better manage its flows of financial and aesthetic capital (DCMS 1998).

The Chinese government is pursuing a similar purpose. As Keane explains, ‘Made in China’ is to be supplemented with ‘Created in China’, yet it is the manner in which this is occurring that is important. Typically this process has been constrained by two key forces that have shaped the perception of Chinese development. Chinese culture, and Chinese politics have long held an almost unsurmountable presence over many aspects of daily life, including cultural expression, however this is changing, in part because of exchanges of aesthetic information due to globalisation, but also because of China’s global ascendancy as an economically powerful nation. Chinese fashion designers are increasingly capable,
confident of their skills, and comfortable with their nationality. Moreover, their
global forays and their domestic successes, while relatively unappreciated by a
global fashion culture concerned with the consumption of Western products, and the
subordination of the Chinese consumer, have been translated into examples of
international success by the Chinese domestic media.

In this thesis I speculate that the momentum of Chinese fashion is now at a
tipping point. I note that at a policy level the Chinese government’s most recent, 12th
Five Year Plan, implemented in 2011, clearly articulates a renewed focus on the
domestic economy. The plan is to move China’s economic momentum from an
export-led income to domestic-led consumption. Furthermore, the plan stresses less
reliance on foreign technology, and a greater importance of domestic innovation.
Point eight, of the ten-point plan, specifically encourages cultural production in order
to increase China’s ‘soft power’ (Harris 2011). Yet, for China to truly transition from
‘Made in China’ to ‘Created in China’, success is needed in its design industries.

In robust design economies, such as Japan, a wide range of design has
flourished, for example, the global lifestyle brand Muji, the carmaker Toyota, and the
fashion designer Issey Miyake. As is commonly recognised, ‘Made in Japan’ has
come to represent an attention to detail and a quality that was previously understood
as a manufacturing capacity. Many other creative sectors such as architecture and
product design have high barriers to entry, for instance the amount of time and
money needed for investment in research and development. These restrictions mean
the architectural and industrial design sectors tend to form around the collaborative
work and investments of a firm. Fashion on the other hand, requires less investment
and in China, a robust clothing industry infrastructure already exists.

There is also another perspective that is noteworthy, and perhaps more
relevant to the economists and business people who measure the global flows of
financial capital. The textile and clothing industries are typically among the first
industries to take hold in developing economies (Keane and Velde 2008; Weller
2010). In China’s transitioning economy, its government-controlled industry body,
the China National Garment Association (2013) has shown that in 2012 these
industries contributed 1.7 trillion Rmb (approximately US$ 283 billion) to the Chinese domestic economy, as well as an export value of US$ 153 billion.\(^2\) China’s textile and clothing industries employ approximately 10 million people, and are rapidly improving their infrastructure so as to take part in a new phase of development, which corresponds with increased brand development and profitability. In contrast, the global fashion system contributed US$ 1.3 trillion to the global creative economy (Bennie, Gazibara and Murray 2010). It follows that a strong domestic fashion system means China’s internal economy will retain a greater share of the profit margins the occur from the increased values of Chinese clothing, as it moves through a system to become Chinese fashion.

A sign this process may have already begun occurred in March 2013 when China’s First Lady, Peng Liyuan, accompanied her husband Xi Jinping, China’s newly elected President, on their first state excursion to Russia.\(^3\) Instead of wearing a luxury European fashion brand traditionally favoured by heads of state, Peng Liyuan specifically wore clothing attributed to the mid-priced Chinese fashion brand called Exception. Her careful choice of a non-luxury Chinese fashion label caused immediate and ongoing speculation in the Chinese and international press about her reasons for doing so (Hung 2013; Jing Daily 2013c; Zoo 2013).

For many in the Chinese cultural sector, Peng Liyuan’s choice was seen as politically driven in a new governmental era where corruption among officials, most evident in the conspicuous consumption of foreign luxury fashion brands, has been reframed as a noxious practice in the new president’s term of office. In fact, President Xi Jinping has made fighting corruption a top priority, urging the ruling Communist Party to ‘oppose hedonism and flamboyant lifestyles’ (Shanghai Daily 2013). Peng Liyuan’s sartorial message is also powerful, and alludes to an increasing acceptance by elite officials of Chinese consumer brands, yet this action might also be interpreted as an oblique directive enacted by the wife of China’s most powerful official, generated from deep within the political hierarchy. At the China Foreign

\(^2\) At the time of writing, US $1= approximately 6 Rmb.

\(^3\) President Xi Jinping was formally elected on March 14\(^{th}\) 2013.
Affairs University, Wang Fan, head of the Institute of International Relations proclaimed, ‘In her role as first lady on this visit abroad, Peng Liyuan is exhibiting China’s soft power,’ (Moore 2013.) Furthermore, Zhang Yu, the editor of Vogue China said, ‘It’s the first time that China’s first lady appears [sic] like a modern woman…after so many years, we finally have a first lady who can represent us so appropriately. I think it is a landmark event’ (White 2013). While time will diminish the newsworthiness of this event, the attention given to Peng Liyuan serves best to illustrate the great expectations, and aspirations of the Chinese creative sector.

Chinese fashion brands have faced difficulties in gaining the attention that is needed to create enduring brands. As the prominent Chinese fashion critic, Hung Huang (2013) notes, Mao Jihong, the chairman and co-founder of the fashion label, Exception, that is favoured by Peng Liyuan, is more political than other Chinese designers. Mao Jihong’s position as vice-chairman of the China National Garment Association offers him opportunities to mingle with high-ranking officials and their wives. Consequently it is an automatic stamp of approval that he is not only politically acceptable, but has also been politically vetted. Hung Huang’s view is reliably informed because she was previously married to the famous Chinese film director, Chen Kaige, and was thus exposed to a cultural industry where political control, and the security of cultural form are paramount. Hung notes that China is an authoritarian state where ‘the power base does not support anyone and everyone supports the power base’ (Hung 2013). Furthermore, Hung Huang believes that if Peng Liyuan decides to support Chinese fashion, it is most likely she will create her own program through an official Chinese agency, in an entity such as the China National Garment Association.

From this structural perspective, a strong domestic fashion system that supports and nurtures fashion designers in Shanghai is needed if the aspirations of the city’s leaders are to be achieved. Alternatively the dominant Eurocentric fashion system offers a model that has successfully perpetuated the mythology of Paris as a global fashion capital, and whose products have been embraced by rapidly growing numbers of Chinese consumers. However, the pillars of authenticity that for foreign brands extend far into their cultural and creative histories, often for tens of decades in the case of the European luxury brands of Louis Vuitton, Burberry or Christian Dior, do not exist in China in this era of globalisation. Here the cultural bedrock allows
these same pillars to extend only thirty or so years into the past, to the moments when Deng Xiaoping granted China’s creative entrepreneurs passage, and therefore Chinese fashion designers have had less time to assemble their brands and reputations.

The fashion theorist Yuniya Kawamura (2011) has demonstrated that these processes occur when legitimacy is granted by a fashion system, which highlights some of the imperfections of the Chinese fashion system. These flaws also show how the system may be open to manipulation. For instance, the role of Shanghai’s local government in promoting fashion moves the rationale of Shanghai Fashion Week toward place making rather than a support mechanism for creativity. Yet this justification neglects the importance of developing an infrastructure and support mechanism for emerging designers, activities that are often undertaken by independent commercial entities.

However the structure of the fashion system is also dependent upon the cultural and aesthetic message that provides its content. A fashion designer’s aesthetic as with other creative practitioners is shaped in a mutually dependent relationship between the structures of culture and creativity which is produced in a social system, as Janet Wolff (1993) explains. Furthermore it is their aesthetic that is important for recognition by a fashion system, because this intangible representation forms the core of a creative business, allowing ideas to materialise as tangible products for the consumer market. Fashion is therefore a cultural artifact, which means that a production of culture perspective is important for framing this thesis.

**Fashion and the production of culture**

Because the design of fashion emerges from cultural immersion, in this study I have adopted a production of culture approach. Yuniya Kawamura (2005, 33) explains this cultural perspective is most useful for investigating movements in popular culture where production is foremost. Furthermore, fashion systems are constructed of individuals, organisations and institutions that in combination serve to validate cultural products. Kawamura’s perspective asserts that the production of culture involves social cooperation, collective activities and groups, which is made manifest as a fashion system. Therefore, in contrast to the view that fashion emerges in mysterious ways that epitomise cultural trends, it is clear that fashion emerges
from sets of interacting organisations that shape its content in various ways (Crane 1997; Kawamura 2011).

While some theorists have argued that fashion is a modern cultural practice tied to the emergence of capitalism and consumer culture, Jennifer Craik (1994, 3) contends that fashion is not exclusively the domain of modern culture. Craik’s perspective arises from the idea that fashion emerged from the adornment of the body, and therefore a type of fashion system existed that was evident before the emergence of Western capitalism, thus there are many fashion systems.

Richard Peterson and Narasimhan Anand (2004) have written extensively of the production of culture. They explain how cultural production focuses on the shaping of symbolic elements of culture by the systems in which they are created and distributed. Their perspective forms a multi-faceted model of the production nexus in which they analyse how cultural objects are manufactured, valued, and consumed. Peterson (1997) first made use of this model in an examination of the music industry in the United States, in which he utilised the key criteria of technology, law and regulation, industry structure, organisational structure, occupational careers and market. Peterson’s perspective initially allowed a view of one vantage point at a time, however as his co-author notes, further scrutiny of this perspective provides a holistic view of the way an industry is cohesively held together because elements of the production of culture act in concert (Anand 2000).

In the field of fashion, Diana Crane (1997) utilised the production of culture perspective in a study of the French luxury clothing industry, concluding among other findings, that small firms are an important source of innovation in cultural industries. Crane’s finding is important because this thesis is concerned in part with the development of a fashion designer’s business model in contemporary Chinese culture. Fashion as a cultural form can also be explained using the production of culture perspective, so as the use of this perspective unfolds, it is also necessary to understand the technical processes for manufacturing and distributing cultural objects as well as how they are given meaning in changing contexts. This is a valid line of enquiry in China because of the unique and distanced relationship of its fashion system and its clothing industry.

explained, culture is the medium through which people give meaning to the world in which they live. Fashion is intangible and therefore the concept of fashion uses clothing as a symbolic manifestation, which places emphasis on the activities of actors and institutions in the fashion system. Contemporary accounts for the term ‘fashion’ include Jennifer Craik’s (2009, 5) suggestion that fashion is structured into social processes and meanings by the way it constructs cultural messages and symbols. Yet Kawamura (2005, 7), believes fashion as a social phenomenon has been treated poorly because it is linked with outward appearance and gender. In Kawamura’s view, the irrationality of fashion, and the presupposition that men are defined by their occupation, and women by their social role has meant that fashion has received less interest by scholars. In corroboration, Gilles Lipovetsky, whose scholarly work, *The Empire of Fashion*, is a considered précis of fashion, notes that the question of fashion is not fashionable even among intellectuals. Yet fashion ‘turns up everywhere on the street, in industry and in the media but it has virtually no place in the theoretical enquiries of our thinkers’ (Lipovetsky 1994, 3). His stance is that the study of fashion needs a new impetus, and in a nod to the model of Western fashion consumption, he questions how an institution ‘structured by evanescence and aesthetic fantasy managed to take root in human history’? Yet Lipovetsky confines his study to existing fashion knowledge, asking why in the West and not elsewhere, and thus there exists an opening to consider possibilities of ‘elsewhere’. As has been shown earlier, the economic flows derived from the fashion system are not inconsequential.

In Lipovetsky’s view, fashion has become a socio-historical reality characteristic of the West and of modernity itself. For instance, Lipovetsky argues that in the last hundred years, the enigma of fashion has seemed unresolved. However I signify that my study is not of the nature of fashion, but of the production of fashion in its role as an important commercial activity that contributes to the economy, and cultural identity of China, and its citizens. Because of my focus on production, it follows that an exploration of the system used for the production of fashion is necessary.

*The importance of this study*

In keeping with Jennifer Craik (2009, 63), I recognise that there are many kinds of fashion systems in existence at different times and across different cultures.
For instance, while the Eurocentric fashion system is evident in the contemporary perpetuation of the global consumption of fashion, Craik (2009, 54-58) draws parallels with tribal dress in Mount Hagen in Papua New Guinea, noting the ‘extraordinary degree of individual manipulation of aesthetic codes and materials to achieve desired effects in the designs’. As well, in China during the Maoist years, the Eurocentric fashion system was de-legitimised, and replaced with a system that legitimised military dress, and the sartorial style of Mao Zedong and his cadres. Antonia Finnane (2007, 235) notes specifically how those who were not soldiers wanted to support the cause of the military and accordingly, great care was taken with the quality and colour of the cloth used to make home-made uniforms.

Nevertheless, this case study is concerned with Shanghai’s current iteration of a fashion system and so this study of Chinese fashion is important for these reasons. Firstly, there is limited scholarly literature on the contemporary production of fashion in Shanghai. This may be because Shanghai’s recent fashion system has evolved quickly, and has only recently begun to build the kind of infrastructure necessary for sustained consolidation. However this also leads to the premise that without this infrastructure, there has been little substantial activity that can be reliably analysed. Shanghai’s fashion system is in flux, and so the actors that coalesce around these yet-to be formed structures also operate in a state of perpetual urban liquidity. Nonetheless, the gathering momentum of Shanghai Fashion Week means some of Shanghai’s designers are also becoming increasingly visible outside China.

Secondly, this study will demonstrate that there are some important ramifications to this formative process. While the fashion system provides structures, institutions and behaviours for fashion designers to cling to, ultimately it is filled with the aesthetics of design, and it is this content that may provide a unique point of difference for Shanghai particularly as the city attempts to compete with other global fashion cities. In turn, aesthetic content emerges from individuals and their capacity to engage with a fashion system, which helps to shape their ideas for the consumer market. Therefore this study is important because it illuminates how some fashion designers in Shanghai are forging their aesthetic identity.

However, in the main, this study is necessary because it picks up where others have left off. There is a distinct gap in the literature that shows that the development
of a creative identity and an individual aesthetic for Chinese fashion designers has not yet been explored fully, and so pursuing this course of action means investigating creative individuals, their relationships and their roles in Shanghai’s urban culture. As Wu Yuanyuan (2009, 181) has provided, ‘ultimately Chinese aesthetics, not made-in-China garments, will define Chineseness in fashion and authenticate Chinese designs’. Wu’s perspective provides an opportunity to move forward from this point, into a new exploration of Chinese fashion designers.

Finally, and from a distinctly commercial perspective, this study is valuable to fashion designers and other design-led creative practitioners, who might be considering their practice in a global context, where the importance of China, and the specificities of its burgeoning domestic consumer market will shape how businesses in the creative economy engage with the potentialities of this new marketplace.

1.1 METHODOLOGY

1.1.1 LOCATING THE DESIGNERS

I have framed this new research a case study because it is geographically bounded, culturally specific and also because my investigation occurred during a particular period of time in Shanghai. Therefore this is a case study of a group of fashion designers in Shanghai during a three-year period. Gary Thomas (2011) explains that case studies cover much ground. They might be analyses of persons, events, decisions, periods, projects, policies, institutions, or other systems. Case studies are studied holistically by one or more methods.

Furthermore, David Silverman (2010, 138) explains that particular cases have boundaries, and represent a ‘case’ of something the researcher is interested in. Silverman also notes that in order to achieve focus, the research question will provide a means of confining these parameters to the specific features of the case. This type of case study may also be described as an instrumental case study, in keeping with Robert Stake (2000, 435-54) who explains in a general manner that a case is examined to provide insight into a specific issue.

Between the years of 2002 and 2011, and over the course of twenty-five or more extended visits to Shanghai, I have pursued numerous conversations with small fashion retailers, fabric market stallholders and tailors that have shed light on the early stages of the design of fashion and the business of building a viable brand in
the city. In addition, my ongoing interactions with key production personnel in many garment factories have provided me with a rich canvas that serves as the backdrop to this investigation, and also allows me to substantiate much of the research data that emerged from my conversations with the fashion designers.

However despite these previous experiences, for this thesis I have specifically obtained key data from individual, semi-structured interviews with fashion designers during field trips to Shanghai in 2011 and 2012. Several designers previously interviewed by Wu Juanjuan (2009) for the book, *Chinese Fashion: From Mao to Now*, and by Christine Tsui (2009) for the book, *China Fashion*, have also been included in my new research, consequently there is some broad continuity. However, for my research I desired to begin afresh and in doing so I adopted my own methods to locate designers. For example, by drawing from my experiences in China, I have included the clothing industry as a place to examine a group of emergent designers, as well as those designers already to be found in Shanghai’s fashion system. In this way my approach approximates Silverman (2010, 144) who describes the process of theoretical, or purposive sampling as a means of selecting groups to study on the basis of the relevance to the research question.

I used three methods to identify potential interviewees. Firstly, I asked contacts in the clothing industry if they could recommend to me any designers they knew who were starting out. Secondly, from personal observation, I walked Shanghai’s city streets, identifying designers from their freestanding shops, in fashion areas such as Changle Road, Xinle Road, and Tianzifang, and also from wherever I perceived a new fashion area might appear. Thirdly, I also took interest in Shanghai Fashion Week, an event that was initiated during my years in Shanghai, and in this way, I identified designers who participated regularly by checking its official schedule. The use of these three methods allowed me to crosscheck and verify the activities of each designer.

In addition, during 2011 and 2012, several new fashion agencies, namely the Hive, Dongliang and The China Fashion Collective, appeared in the market as commercial entities to represent new Chinese fashion designers, and I have utilised their client lists to further validate designers. Finally, various sources of information from the Internet allowed me to substantiate the activities of many of the designers included in this thesis.
1.1.2 APPROACHING THE DESIGNERS

During my two official field trips to Shanghai in 2011 and 2012, I followed the protocol required by the Queensland University of Technology’s ethics unit, and sent email requests to a list of forty designers compiled from my early field research. In my email I explained my affiliation, and the purpose and length of the interview. I received no replies. Consequently I decided to approach each designer more personally, through their retail outlets or a place of contact in a factory, so with a translator, I spoke to staff in each location, leaving my name-card, with my details in English and Chinese, and further information of my request. My translators during these trips were Shanghainese, and their use of this dialect, instead of standard Mandarin, helped provide a more localised approach when I was faced with employees who controlled access to some designers.

From my list of forty designers, I received seventeen replies agreeing to an interview, however because of time constraints, and other conditions, such as seasonal impacts, (for instance, when I was in Shanghai, some designers were out of their ‘fashion season’ and on holiday, or working in other Chinese cities), only twelve face-to-face interviews were conducted. I spoke with two designers on the Internet service Skype because of this reason. In the final case, a public relations agent for the designer, Ma Ke, explained a private interview was not possible, however I was provided with access to a series of previous interviews on the designer’s website. In all, I communicated in various ways with fifteen designers.

1.1.3 LIMITATIONS TO THE RESEARCH

In the first instance, this is a study of designers who are operating in Shanghai, and should not be considered representative of other cities in China. While there will be many parallels with Beijing and Guangzhou for example, it is important to note that provinces, and municipal governments in China support creativity in different ways, depending on their interpretation of policy surrounding the cultural industries in China. However, during the period of research it became apparent that the designers included in this study in general are extremely mobile and routinely undergo travel to Chinese cities other than Shanghai.

Secondly, in many ways this study is a snapshot in time. The pace of change in Shanghai is rapid and designers appear in the marketplace quickly, often to vanish
within a single season as their resources are exhausted. Shanghai is also a very large city, with a population of more than twenty-three million people, a figure expected to increase to thirty million in 2020 (Dong 2012). While this kind of speedy emergence and disappearance is common to creative practice, the process is exceptionally quick in Shanghai, and for designers, grasping hold of the still-to-be-formed structure of the fashion system is more difficult. Later in the thesis I discuss Zygmunt Bauman’s (2005) contextualisation of culture as a liquid field because it is from his theoretical standpoint that I conceptualise this incredibly fast moving and multi-dimensional phenomenon.

This extreme fluidity brings me to the third point, which relates to the proliferation of information about Shanghai’s fashion designers in local media, and on the Internet. There are numerous would-be gatekeepers, also vying for a viable role in Shanghai’s evolving fashion system, which is in extreme flux. Many of the designers I spoke to regarded the local media with disdain, preferring not to become involved. In fact, this is a notable occurrence. Bert de Muynck and Monica Carrico (2012, 27-29), conducted a recent survey in China and describe quite specifically the media weariness of reputable Chinese fashion designers. The Internet is especially problematic, where numerous blogs and websites that purport to provide fashion commentary simply reproduce endlessly, a single media report, quite often blurring the detail with poor translation and unscrupulous editing.

Furthermore, many of these sites serve commercial purposes, for instance, to re-direct a query of a designer’s name to a factory, or other operation. However, in this digital age, the Internet is the most globally resonant, and also the least expensive form of communication with diverse, connected and creative communities. Despite providing me with a valuable way to verify the narrative of each designer, I have used information from the Internet cautiously, and ensured corroboration with other sources.

1.1.4 TALKING TO THE DESIGNERS

Regardless of some difficulties associated with initially gaining an interview, each designer was happy to talk to me. In accordance with the qualitative methodology of this thesis, I conducted semi-structured interviews with a series of questions, in a variety of locations including studios, retail shops and factories. David
Silverman (2011, 169) explains this method as an emotionalist approach in which ‘interviewees are viewed as experiencing subjects who actively construct their social worlds’. The location of the interview was important, and I tried to interview designers in their workplaces to gain added context, for instance by noting the amount of stock on display in a shop, or the number of sewing machines in a workroom. Each interviewee spoke English, except for three designers, (who spoke some English, but preferred Chinese), however a translator was present at each interview. Several interviews concluded after half an hour, because the interviewees were called away. However some designers were also uncomfortable with being recorded when they were discussing sensitive subjects, and would purposely move away, so taking field notes was also necessary.

1.1.5 LIMITATIONS TO THE METHODOLOGY

I have considered how my many years of experience in various fashion systems may impact on this study, because the value of information gathered by qualitative means is intrinsically limited by the quality of information one receives. For instance, Silverman (2011, 178) notes specifically the problem of ‘self presentation’. In my case, it was clear that some designers might say what they thought I might want to hear, however my own experiences helped me to determine whether their answers were reasonable. Yet it must be made clear that I presented myself as an independent researcher. This also meant I needed to acknowledge my personal role in the interviews and remain objective. When the designers moved away from the recorders, it was because they did not want to be recorded, however they were willing to continue the conversation out of range. I perceived this as a genuine response to the topic at hand, corroborated by my translator, who confirmed that in some cases, designers would not provide answers that might criticise the Chinese Government.

Fortunately, I was able to circumvent basic questions about the technical processes of clothing production, and because I shared a common technical and fashion terminology with the designers, our conversations were mainly fluid, and mostly I received as many questions as I asked because of a genuine interest in the topic.
1.1.6 ARRANGING THE DATA

In accordance with my field questions (Appendix F), I organised the responses of each designer into the three themes that ensued from my research question. My first theme investigated areas of professional development, education and working practices. My second theme explored urban creative settings, including creative clusters, and institutions such as fashion week to understand how emergent designers might collaborate across creative fields. My third theme considered whether designers were focussed on Shanghai’s domestic fashion system, or the global fashion system, and how they were constructing their aesthetic.

By constantly comparing the responses of each designer, I could begin to arrange the designers into three groups, characterised as those wanting to get into a fashion system, those who relied on a fashion system, and those who could move beyond reliance on a fashion system. This process is explained as a method of grounded theory, in which a theory is developed that emerges from an area of study (Strauss and Corbin 1998, 12). My method of organisation also corresponds with the career progression of a creative practitioner, broadly in keeping with Howard Becker’s (2008, 95-130) conceptualisation of careers in art worlds.

1.1.7 CONTEXTUALISING THE FIELD

My contextualisation differs from previous examinations of this field. For instance, in her book, China Fashion, Christine Tsui (2009) organised interviewees according to three generations of designers, emanating from the 1980s, the 1990s and the twenty-first century, defining them as the pioneers, the practitioners and the prospects. In contrast, Wu Juanjuan’s, (2009) study, Chinese Fashion, describes an evolving fashion industry that has moved in step with the development of the Chinese fashion education system where most of China’s most influential designers are graduates of this state-run system. The education system has given these graduate designers many advantages in comparison to the designers who began their practice in the 1980s and 1990s. In a more recent publication, The Chinese Fashion Industry, Zhao Jianhua (2013) generally agrees with the order given by Christine Tsui, but points out that some designers in her first group, the pioneers, are successful and enjoy great media exposure, an aspect I have also found to be true.
Wu and Tsui have also concentrated on well-known Chinese fashion designers who have endured in the fashion system and continue to prosper. However their focus on successful designers and their progress in the fashion system does not fully account for emergent fashion designers and their role in early stages of the production of fashion as a cultural form. In Shanghai, these people can be found in the clothing industry, gathering experience and education before they attempt legitimisation. Therefore, my inclusion of aspiring fashion designers intent on entering the fashion system contributes to a more complete discussion of the evolution of a career in fashion in Shanghai. Importantly, Wu and Tsui also fail to contextualise fully some designers who are self-supporting and control their own distribution systems, which allows them to work without reliance on the fashion system.

Howard Becker (2008, 96-97) describes the aspect of self-support or independence as an important stage in the development of an art career. This capability allows some designers to develop their own aesthetic, independently of the aesthetic shaping that occurs in fashion systems. Developing an aesthetic, or a refined capacity to use one’s senses to make a critical observation about one’s culture in the pursuit of beauty, is an individual attribute. As Becker (2008, 132) explains, ‘artists create an unformalised aesthetic through workday choices of materials and forms’. Therefore forming an aesthetic is a way of making sense of the environment we live in, and a personal aesthetic defines our terms of engagement with our culture. This aesthetic is used either to determine how we consume, or how we produce cultural artifacts, such as fashion.

Yet, as will be demonstrated in the course of this thesis, while individual creativity is core to the process of self-realisation for fashion designers, as it is for many creative practitioners, it is the depth of engagement with the fashion system that determines peer recognition, and subsequent commercial viability. This is relevant, because as Chris Bilton (2007, 49) points out, creativity is located within a system or network rather than a gifted individual. Bilton (2007, xiv) also contends that creative individuals tend to be more successful in systems or organisations, where they know how to ‘deploy and manipulate their own talents and those of other people in crossing and recrossing different perspectives and stages in a process’.
With this in mind, I have utilised Yuniya Kawamura’s (2005) production of culture framework as a means of spatially siting the designers. Kawamura describes the production of fashion as a system of institutions and gatekeepers, such as educational infrastructure and the media, who collectively legitimise the work of fashion designers and in doing so, shape its aesthetic content. Kawamura (2005, 51) also describes this process specifically as ‘an institutionalised systemic change produced by those who are authorised to implement it’. Therefore, the production of fashion is a process incorporated in a system that legitimises cultural artifacts such as fashion.

In contrast, I conceive the clothing industry as an industrial mechanism where garments are manufactured only to be validated once they enter a fashion system. Furthermore, it is solely in the fashion system that products are legitimate, because the distribution and sale of fashion also occurs from within the fashion system. A key pivot-point in Shanghai’s fashion system is Shanghai Fashion Week, which is a twice-yearly event. Because of the importance given to raising the status of Shanghai as a global city, Shanghai Fashion Week is heavily promoted and it is an official government event. As a result, one’s participation is an important measure of validation.

At this point, I would like to introduce the concept of hegemony, which needs care when discussed in the context of fashion, however I believe my use is appropriate because of its inherent political nuances. Moreover, Yuniya Kawamura (2004, 10-13) provides a precedent for its use in the field of fashion. The Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) is responsible for developing the concept of hegemony beyond the predominance of one nation over another, and hegemony now describes the intricacies of power relations in many different fields, including cultural studies and international relations (Ives 2004). In this study, I use Gramsci’s concept to allude to the dominance of the Eurocentric fashion system that emanates largely from Paris, however the overlapping fashion systems of the United States of America, including New York and Los Angeles also form part of this control. Gramsci redefined hegemony as the formation and organisation of consent that includes how legitimisation occurs. In Marxist philosophy the term cultural hegemony describes the domination of a culturally diverse society by the ruling class, who manipulate the culture of the society, including the beliefs, explanations,
perceptions and values, so that their ruling-class becomes the worldview that is imposed and accepted as the cultural norm (Flank 2007).

In the context of the global flows of the economy of fashion, I perceive this powerful fashion system emanating from Europe as this ruling class, and to support my position, I point to the fact that only three publicly listed European corporations, LVMH (French), Richemont (Swiss), and Kering (French, and formally known as Pinault-Printemps-Redoute or PPR), control more than a hundred of the most aspirational global luxury and fashion brands, including Louis Vuitton, Gucci, St Laurent, as well as numerous prestigious liquor, perfume and watch brands, and also large retail chains (Appendix D). Their combined sales in 2012 amount to more than € $47 billion.\(^4\) Importantly, Asia (including Japan) accounts for more than a third of their sales. (LVMH – 36%, Richemont – 51%, Kering – 37%), and their profit margins are in excess of twenty percent of gross turnover (Appendices A, B and C). There are also numerous other luxury fashion brands focussed on China’s domestic market, such as Chanel and Prada, that also rely on the strength of this message, as well as the rise of popular fast fashion brands like the Swedish chain H&M (Hennes and Mauritz), and the Spanish chain Zara.\(^5\) It is clear that their profit margins depend upon reinforcing the dominant view of Europe as the fashion centre of the world.\(^6\)

I also contextualise the Chinese clothing industry, Shanghai’s fashion system, and the hegemonic Eurocentric fashion system as distinct and separate entities, that overlap each other because they are mutually dependent. In fact, it is in this way that the Eurocentric fashion system utilises Chinese manufacturing capacity to produce goods for validation in its own system, while simultaneously providing those goods

\(^4\) Approximately $US 60.4 billion (€1.00 = $US1.28 at the time of writing)


\(^6\) Chanel is privately owned by the Wertheimer family, and does not provide financial reports, (although sales are in excess of US$40 billion per annum (Nagasawa 2011)). Net revenues for Pradagroup for the year ended January 31, 2013, amounted to € 2,555.6 billion, (US$ 3.278 billion), an increase of 24.9% compared to the figure of € 2,046.7, billion (US$ 2.623 billion) recorded in 2011 (Pradagroup 2012).
to consumers in China. This occurs in a systematic program of opening new retail shops and maintaining control of the consumer predilection for luxury or foreign products. Shanghai’s emergent fashion system also models itself on the Eurocentric system, but in relation to my research question, I ask to whom is the fashion that emanates from this system directed? In my model, flows of capital, new ideas and aesthetic knowledge circulate continually, maintaining the momentum supplied by creative individuals.

![Diagram of the clothing industry and fashion system](image)

Figure 1.1: Clothing Industry and Fashion System, Tim Lindgren, 2013.

In addition to its fresh perspective, my contextualisation provides a place to situate cultural activities that occur outside official channels in the overlapping areas. Aesthetic knowledge seeps between the Eurocentric fashion system, and the Chinese clothing industry into Shanghai’s fashion system as part of the global business of fashion. Its intangible nature means it becomes a new addition to the culturally sensitive, tacit knowledge in this creative and entrepreneurial milieu.

Understanding this flow of information allows me to contextualise some contentious and very visible consumer activities that are common in China, that I have observed in Shanghai, and that I encountered regularly in my interviews with the designers. These include shanzhai, localisation, and the grey market for clothing, which are processes of innovation and production that depend on the value-
generating properties of the fashion system, and that further raise questions in the discourse of copyright in the Chinese creative industries (Montgomery 2010). ⁷ Yet another activity in this conceptualisation involves representing a Chinese product as foreign in origin and this process is described as lobalisation (Chew 2009).

These activities are contentious because they taint nearly every activity in daily life in China, and while they are not relegated solely to the clothing industry, their impact contributes to undermining the country’s national stability. According to Yu (2012), counterfeit versions of almost anything can be found in markets in China, including fake luxury goods, electronics, household goods, food and beverages, certificates, official documents, receipts, and even counterfeit Apple stores. The tainted milk scandal that was widely viewed in global media in 2008 epitomises the deep mistrust the Chinese public have with their government’s ability to provide food security (Ryan 2013).

Rather than helping combat these crimes, Yu contends local Communist Party officials are known to cover for the perpetrators because their activities contribute to local GDP, which is a key metric used to evaluate officials seeking promotions, and local governments also tolerate counterfeiters who pay their taxes. The revenues from fake products are deeply ingrained in the infrastructure of the Chinese domestic economy. For instance, the city of Yimu is a five-hour drive from Shanghai, and is marketed as the ‘Capital of Small Commodities’, although it is better known as ‘Counterfeit Central’. Yimu is where international buyers come to purchase fake products in bulk, choosing products from among forty thousand wholesale shops, selling approximately one hundred thousand items, of which ninety percent may be counterfeit (Litke 2013).

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⁷ Shanzhai is the adaptation of a foreign product by domestic entrepreneurs to meet a localised need. Localisation is the cultural adaptation by a foreign brand of a global product to a local market. The grey market demonstrates a logistical problem where clothing is sold through unofficial channels, without the permission of the brand owner. Lobalisation is the unofficial adaption of a global brand’s intellectual property to a local market, where it purports to be official, imported or foreign.

⁸ In 2008, a significant public scandal erupted over powdered milk that had been contaminated with melamine. Officially 300,000 children were harmed, with numerous deaths, however unofficial accounts allude to multiples of this figure (Ryan 2013).
Because these activities are located within a Chinese cultural, moral and political context that allows their existence, I situate the Chinese clothing industry and Shanghai’s fashion system within the broad envelope of Chinese culture, as Figure 1.2 demonstrates.

In addition, this contextualisation provides me a way to separate the activities of the production and consumption of fashion. As garments and fashion designers are similarly legitimised by the fashion system, consumers also look to the fashion system for information that will inform their behaviours of consumption. In this way the fashion system serves as a mediator, situated between producer and consumer, on one hand shaping the aesthetic content of fashion, and on the other, communicating the renewed aesthetic message of fashion designers and fashion brands to consumers of fashion.

1.1.8 SITING THE DESIGNERS AND ORGANISING THE THESIS

I have organised this thesis over eight chapters. The current chapter is an introduction to the thesis and provides contextual background, the research focus, and the methodology. After the introduction, chapter two consists of a review of the literature. In this chapter, I explore several related theoretical fields in order to ground this thesis including culture and modernity. I define the origins of fashion by considering various perspectives that have been prominent since fashion became a
topic of study. Secondly, because of Shanghai’s role as China’s first modern city, I discuss fashion and its role in the perpetuation of modernity, and also its place in culture, by investigating the interrelationships of the diffusion of fashion, fashion consumption, and how the signs and symbols of culture are read in the context of fashion.

I also appraise the structural nature of fashion in a discussion of the fashion system, an entity in contrast to the clothing industry. This chapter includes an exploration of accepted models relating to the spread of commercial fashion, the role of the fashion designer in the fashion system and importantly, conventional thought about how a fashion designer might form their aesthetic style with reference to the European school of thought and to Chinese philosophy.

Chapter three relocates the narrative to Shanghai, where by utilising the theoretical underpinnings previously established in chapter two, I consider the development of the Chinese fashion system to its current iteration. Shanghai’s modernity reflects the multi-cultural complexities of its metropolitan development and in this chapter, I include a discussion of Haipai, an urban culture that developed in this city and nowhere else, and that provided the momentum for modernity in Shanghai at the turn of the twentieth century. I also reflect upon the demise of Haipai briefly before the chapter moves forward to the 1970s and 1980s, when China began to emerge from the Mao Zedong era, into a period of social re-construction.

During this period, Shanghai’s increasingly dominant role as a global clothing manufacturer meant that it could also begin to reclaim its prestige as the premier fashion city of China, a mantle earned during the Haipai era, and now embedded in official policy that guides Shanghai’s anticipated transformation into a city of global importance. However in this process, Shanghai has remained a city of contrasts. The dualisms of East and West, and of tradition and the liquidity of postmodern life, resonate in tensions of identity and aesthetic development for Chinese fashion designers.

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9 Also known as Mao Tse Tung.
The simple model I have developed allows me to organise the designers into three groups according to their interaction and legitimisation with either the clothing industry or a fashion system. Chapter four is the first of three chapters to investigate how designers in Shanghai are engaging with Shanghai’s fashion system and developing an individual aesthetic. In this chapter I introduce the first group of five designers whose activities are more closely involved with Shanghai’s clothing industry. Here they have not been validated, or accepted by the fashion system. Their activities are mostly related to apprenticeship, trade and technical education and life experience, rather than formal fashion training. This group sheds light on the diverse industrial milieu in Shanghai from which aspiring fashion designers propel themselves toward legitimisation. Therefore these fashion designers are characterised as emerging and yet to be validated by a fashion system, consequently they are unknown, and are aligned more closely with the clothing industry.

Chapter five introduces a second group of designers who have been validated in Shanghai because of their participation in its fashion system. Shanghai’s nascent fashion system depends on their engagement, as much as they depend on it for validity. Designers in this chapter are validated, possess good reputations and are engaged with and recognised by Shanghai’s fashion system. Validation depends upon a reciprocal relationship with the system, for as Becker (2008, 138) explains, aesthetic principles and systems are interdependent practices. However the designers in this group are still anchored to the cultural bedrock of Shanghai as well as its diverse and multicultural history, which has become known as Haipai culture.

In chapter six, I introduce the final group of designers, who move between Shanghai’s fashion system and the Eurocentric fashion system. Some are able to operate without dependence on either system, and their financial independence means they can pursue their own creative journey, which can be conducted outside the system constraints. In this chapter, the designers clearly articulate a sophisticated aesthetic that includes cultural references that illuminate the differences between Western and Chinese thought. These concepts are included in their design philosophy, which steers clear of clichéd cultural iconography. Many of the designers in this study have numerous retail shops, and some have built their careers after the tutelage of the famous cultural entrepreneur Chen Yifei who helped shape Shanghai’s emerging fashion system.
As well, domestic, international and academic media often substantiates their practice, which further facilitates their movement between fashion systems. These designers have moved to a state of independence, and no longer rely upon a particular fashion system, while their names are generally recognised in the global fashion system. International recognition is telling because it alludes to the mutual receptiveness of a global aesthetic, regardless of nationality, and therefore an additional and underlying current most evident in the final chapter is the exploration of an individual creative journey, or a journey of self-actualisation as McRobbie (1998, 103) describes, in the pursuit of creative freedom.

In chapter seven, I revisit the research question as a means of discussing the activities of all the designers in relation to the literature, and also the responses of the designers. My analysis of their activities also allows me to suggest some further areas of research, which includes how my conceptualisation of this field might be expanded to include clothing industries and fashion systems in other countries. I also consider how this model might apply to other creative industries, such as film and television, and music. In chapter eight I conclude my thesis by recalling the narrative of each chapter, and the attributes of each designer briefly.

1.2 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this introductory chapter has provided the reason for this research in a brief description of the circumstances that have caused me to consider the development of Chinese fashion design. The research questions, of professional development, creative settings, and local versus global mean that a production of culture perspective is the most appropriate way to approach my thesis, in a similar way to Yuniya Kawamura’s examination of Japanese designers in France. In this way the thesis shows how Chinese fashion designers may become leaders in global fashion.

Accordingly, the methodology is qualitative, and consists of semi-structured interviews conducted over two field trips to Shanghai in 2011 and 2012. My contextualisation of the field includes a simple model that separates the clothing industry from the fashion systems of Shanghai’s and Europe that further explains activities that occur outside legitimate supply chains. The model is situated in the light of the hegemonic Eurocentric fashion system that perpetuates fashion
consumption, and the mythology of their brands for the accompanying profit margins. The model allows me to arrange the designers into three groups.
Chapter 2: Fashion and Culture

Fashion and clothing are often used to describe the same activity, yet while clothing may be a generic reference appropriate for basic apparel, the term ‘fashion’ conveys numerous social, symbolic and cultural meanings. For instance, Yuniya Kawamura (2005, 3), describes ‘fashion’ as the action or process of making, manner, a prevailing custom, a current usage, and conventional usage in dress and mode in life. Synonymous with ‘fashion’ are ‘style’, ‘vogue’, ‘trend’ and ‘mode’, although these words each have slightly different meanings. Significantly, Ulrich Lehman (2000, 11) links ‘mode’ with ‘modernity’ noting how the description for modernity derived for the first time from a review of a fashionable work of art written by Théophile Gautier.10

‘Fashion’ is also used to define changes in social and consumptive behaviour, however the term can be used to refer either to clothing, or the term can be used as a general mechanism, logic and ideology that includes clothing among other things. In her work on fashion, Diana Crane (2000) notes that clothing styles show how people in different eras have perceived their position in social structures and negotiated their status in society, and thus a distinction is made from the generic construct of clothing to one that indicates change and a forward momentum that challenges established convention. Fashion is therefore an important phenomenon because it provides a material, visual and social representation of society in the context of cultural flux. This is important because, the opportunity to observe the design and production of fashion in Shanghai provides new information about Chinese culture and society. In this thesis, fashion is contextualised as the change in the symbolic value of garments that leave the clothing industry, to begin a systemic process of legitimisation in a fashion system.

10 Théophile Gautier was a poet and a friend of the early fashion critic Baudelaire.
2.1 CULTURE AND MODERNITY

In this section an analysis of the relationship of fashion to culture is provided, as well as fashion’s role as a phenomenon that represents modernity. It is of consequence to discuss these relationships so as to explore the role of the fashion designer in the production of fashion, and to also to ground this thesis in the discourse of the polarities of self and culture, which in this context occurs against the merging of Chinese and Western culture.

Accordingly, in the first section, I consider culture from the Chinese perspective and the Western perspective, including a brief discussion of cultural artifacts and time. Because the relationship between time and the emergence of new cultural artifacts is not constant and is able to be manipulated, I also draw attention to specificities of the conception of time in Chinese philosophy. What I intend to show is that in the Western model, the design and production of fashion is reliant upon the perpetual mythologisation of previously established ideas to represent a new vision of one’s self, whereas the Chinese philosophical model looks to the craft of making, as a similar representation of one’s self in culture. A further discussion of the concept of authenticity adds weight to this discussion. In the final section the concept of modernity is outlines, followed by an important discussion of liquid modernity.

Culture has been defined by Kenneth Allan (1998, 4), who emphasises ‘a symbolic reference system whereby humans manufacture and reproduce a meaningful real world in action and interaction’. Allan’s description of culture sits well with this thesis, because he offers logical order as a means of conceptualising how structure relates to system. However Jennifer Craik’s (2009, 3) various definitions of culture are also appropriate, thus ‘a way of living, traditions and habits that are particular to a social group and transmitted from one generation to another, development and improvement by education and training, a particular stage or state of civilisation and the act of cultivating’ also add to the cultural approach of this thesis by exposing the social and fluid nature of culture.

During the eighteenth century, the term ‘culture’ appeared in its current iteration in Europe, coinciding with industrialisation and denoting a process of cultivation or improvement. Jackson and Hogg (2010) accord that culture is derived from man’s activities in the natural world. In contrast to the inter-connectivity of
man and nature, in the late nineteenth century and during the period of industrialisation, being cultured came to represent the refinement of the individual, especially through education, and then to the completion of national aspirations or ideals. The German philosopher Georg Simmel (1957) wrote extensively of fashion, and referred to culture as ‘the cultivation of individuals through the agency of external forms which have been objectified in the course of history’. Simmel’s imagery invokes an image of man as uncultivated, aspiring to cultivation through acts of self-managed change, and show how in society’s move away from dependence on the natural cycles of the world, man came to view himself as separate from nature.

In China, the concept of culture can be traced back to the Chunqiu period (Loewe 2011). The Chunqiu, or ‘spring and autumn period’ took place from approximately 771 until 476 B.C., and arose from the conceptualisation of patterns in nature by Chinese scientists. Importantly, the Book of Changes, a key Daoist text, can be traced to the Western Zhou dynasty from c.1050-771 B.C, corresponding with this period. Furthermore, Michael Keane (2013, 19), explains in China, culture (wenhua 文化) has deep roots, where it literally, means ‘to transform (hua 化) by learning (wen文)’. In this process, Chinese culture evokes a journey along a road (dao 道) that has already been established in the cycle of time. This corresponds with a fundamental cosmological principle of Chinese thought, which is that all things relate to each other. The concept of Yin and Yang describes this condition in which there exists two opposite but related and interdependent ideas or objects. Their interaction is thought to maintain the harmony of the universe and influence everything within it (Wang 2012b). In particular, the microcosm reflects the macrocosm and vice versa (Little and Eichman 2000). In the mid-nineteenth century, scholarly use of the term ‘culture’ referred to a universal human capacity, and consequently ‘culture’ became specific to human endeavour.

Yet, in the midst of this tension resides the concept of the fluidity of culture and the role of self. Giles Lipovetsky (1994) writes of Simmel’s philosophy as reflective of the transitory nature of existence. Simmel explains that whereas every inanimate thing only possesses simply the moment of the present; that which is alive extends incomparably over the past and the future, and thus the first inference of the influence of time, in the Western context appears. Consequently, culture comes into
being by the coincidence of two elements, neither of which contains culture in itself, the subjective soul and the objective intellectual product. Furthermore, as soon as life progresses beyond the purely biological to the level of the mind, and the mind in turn progresses to the level of culture, an inner tension appears.

This viewpoint is fundamental to Chinese philosophical thought, because of its similarity to the concept of Yin and Yang. In this way, the creative dynamism of life produces cultural symbols or artifacts, as a manifestation of being, which in turn provide culture with forms of expression and actualisation. In Frisby and Featherstone (1997), Simmel’s perspective shows how these artifacts are fixed at a particular point in time, consequently, they are ‘vessels for the creative life, which immediately departs from them, and for the life which subsequently enters them but after a while they can no longer encompass’.

**Cultural Artifacts and Time**

Two key ideas are important to varying perceptions of the emergence of cultural artifacts and their relationship with time, because Chinese cosmology and Western tradition treat time differently. Georg Simmel contended that culture has a history when cultural artifacts are bought into existence, at which point they have their own ‘logic and laws, their own significance and resilience and an inherent claim to timelessness’ (Simmel in Frisby and Featherstone 1997, 105). It follows that as quickly as such artifacts appear, they become fixed at a specific point along the historical timeline of cultural evolution.

Moving forward, Don Slater (1997, 197) explains that, ‘History is reduced to signifiers, styles, references, images, objects which can circulate independently of their original contexts’. Fashion in its manifestation as a material representation of culture is an example of such a signifier because of processes fashion designers use to draw inspiration from along the historical timeline of cultural change. In doing so,

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11 An important principle emerging from early Daoist thought is the importance of the cultivation of virtue (de 德) and of living in balance with the natural world. De is translated as ‘inner power’, which is thought of as a psychological condition of focussed and balanced awareness from which the adept is able to respond spontaneously and harmoniously to whatever arises (Roth 1996).
they place proven or established ideas in a new cultural context. These ideas may often be represented as ‘classic design’.

An alternate understanding lies in Chinese philosophy, which provides that sheng (生), which means growth, generation and life is an important form of change.\textsuperscript{12} Sheng emerges from the polarities of Yin and Yang, and is timeless (Wang 2012b). In this way, time is conceived differently, and pursued as a holistic whole. Chinese cosmology holds that time does not follow a linear progression, but that everything is bound in a plurality of relationships at the same time, related to both multiple things, and to the same thing in multiple ways (Wang 2012b).

\textit{Authenticity}

While human memory may be able to take cultural artifacts from one context and place them in another, their immediacy from the site of their initial emergence into the cultural milieu is lost, drawing attention to the problem of authenticity. The claim of authenticity is often made by the creators of fashion, however Eric Hobsbawm (1983) notes that authenticity is a manufactured construct generated from reassembling elements and artifacts residual in society’s collective consciousness. For example, Don Slater (1997, 197) identifies how fashion ‘endlessly recycles, revives and recombines period clothing; national cultures and ‘heritage’ are torn from their contexts to be moulded into consumable commodities’.

Richard Peterson (2005, 1093) also refers to the problematic nature of authenticity, particularly in relation to creativity, where he notes that ‘on the face of it authenticity and creativity seem to be diametrically opposed’. Peterson questions the authenticity of the constructed self, citing Charles Taylor’s (1991) definition of remaining true to one’s self, as a form of self-reflexivity.

In the context of fashion and identity, Richard Sennett (1977) has concluded that the ‘intimate society’ of the nineteenth century sought to probe beneath the appearance of man in order to find the ‘inner truth’ of the ‘other’. Sennett (1977, 72) observed clothing became related to the character of the person wearing it, and that

\textsuperscript{12} The word Sheng originally referred to a plant growing out of soil, and is also a term for giving birth (Wang 2012b).
as clothing began to connect more closely to the body and the individuality of the wearer, it was read for its ‘authenticity’. Consequently, the debate that surrounds authenticity has much to do with the way traditional structures of society were changed by consumption, but also with the divorce of man from the cycles of the world, and so the momentum of change became embodied in modernity.

2.1.1 MODERNITY

In an examination of fashion on Shanghai, a discussion of the impact of modernity is necessary because the emergence of modernity in China occurred in the first instance in Shanghai. Modernity is also a much-discussed term (Bauman 2005; Foucault 2004[1978]; Giddens 1991; Slater 1997). Generally the term refers to social reformation associated with the rise of capitalism that took hold after the period of the Enlightenment which occurred between 1750 and 1800 AD (Wilson 2005).

Breward and Evans (2005, 3) describe modernity in relation to fashion and more specifically as ‘the development of consumer culture in the wake of eighteenth and nineteenth century industrialisation’. Thus modernity is bound to commodity culture. For Marshall Berman, (1983, 16), modernity refers to the way that industrialisation permeated every day life, changing the way we think and how we respond to our cultural environment in the context of new choice. In Berman’s view, modernity is drawn from modernisation, which refers to processes of political, scientific and technological innovation that became urban, social and artistic in their impact (Breward and Evans 2005). Furthermore, modernity cuts across all boundaries of geography and ethnicity, of class and nationality, of religion and ideology, enabling its momentum in China at a similar time that modernity took hold in Europe.

The role of fashion in modernity is considered to have arisen in parallel to the burgeoning capitalist and later industrial economy of post-Medieval Europe (Lipovetsky 1994, 55-62). Paul Nystrom traces its impact more specifically. Nystrom (1928, 227), writing in the moment at the turn of the twentieth century, explains the development of modern fashion was due to the Industrial Revolution, which began in the middle of the eighteenth century, when machine production superseded hand manufacturing, ‘providing an accompanying rise in standards of living of great masses of people who had formerly enjoyed little more than subsistence’.
Lars Svendsen (2009) observes that an important element of the role of fashion in society is the abolishment of traditions, but he also contends that fashion is essentially unpredictable because it consists of change for the sake of change. This theme has been pursued previously by Walter Benjamin (1973, 177) who described in more detail the ‘violent jolts and dislocations of modern life’ as traditional structures that comprised the activities of daily life crumbled, citing Charles Baudelaire’s description of the ‘crowd as a reservoir of electronic energy’ and foretelling the concept of liquid modernity associated with Zygmunt Bauman (Elliot 2007).

Benjamin described modernity as a rupture from the past during which new social behaviours came into being, where the sense of sense of ‘self’ became foremost, in turn giving rise to new ways in which people viewed their position in life and particularly in relation to new cultural milieu (1973). Thus fashion as a form of social distinction finds its place in this discourse, and Breward and Evans (2005) explain this further, portraying fashion as a process with two distinct forms of making meaning. Importantly, they note that fashion acts as a ‘fulcrum for negotiating the meeting of internal and external worlds’ (2005, 2). Initially, in terms of production, it is a cycle of consumer desire and demand driven by the market, but it is also a modern mechanism for the fabrication of the self.

Modernity’s momentum was built upon cultural structures embedded deeply in the consciousness and institutions of societal behaviours. Capitalism and its pursuit of social distinction through consumption was able to ‘push off’ from these solid structures into a new state of ‘disembedding without re-embedding’ where the liquidity of culture that has become prominent is the assembly of self.

**Liquid modernity**

It is Zygmunt Bauman’s (2005) description of postmodernity as ‘liquid modernity’ that is most poignant for this thesis because it characterises the creative milieu for fashion designers in Shanghai. Bauman (2001, 91) explains that ‘solid’ modernity demonstrates engagement and structure, while ‘liquid’ modernity is centred on disengagement and constant uncertainty. In fact, Bauman (2005, 107) states that ‘liquid life is consuming life’, and that liquid life means constant self-scrutiny, self-critique and self-censure, ensuring that liquid life feeds upon the self’s
dissatisfaction with ‘itself’. Bauman’s reference to the fluidity of culture also sits comfortably with the fashion theorist, Jennifer Craik (1994, 8), who has described previously the ‘unfettered circulation of free floating signs’, alluding to the liquidity of culture. Both definitions refer to a culture of fluidity or lightness, comprised of artifacts of differing values through which individuals move from a state of uncultivated to cultivated in the manner Simmel previously described.

Consequently, fashion designers may be drawn to the institutional structure of the Eurocentric fashion system because it is more clearly defined than Shanghai’s fashion system. Political expectations and Chinese cultural behaviour is also relatively normalised, or more viscous. The dissemination of fashion on the other hand, is subject to volatile and rapid change, especially in Shanghai, which operates as both producer, and consumer of global fashion.

2.1.2 THE DIFFUSION OF FASHION

The diffusion of fashion relates to behaviours of consumption. For Theodor Veblen (1994 [1899]), fashion was the capacity for individual differentiation. Veblen conceived that being ‘in’ fashion demonstrated how some people were ‘out’ of fashion and therefore excluded from taking part. Veblen explained that fashion as a symbol of inclusion is fundamentally concerned with the requirement of novelty, however the importance of various capitals was stressed more pointedly in his discourse. Paul Nystrom, whose interest in fashion was of its economic value to the clothing industry, followed the travels of Veblen’s leisure class noting the cities they frequented. His views are noteworthy because he wrote at the immediacy of this cultural change,

> The capital cities are the centres of wealth, leisure, culture, influence and power for their own countries and in the case of London, Paris, Berlin and some of the others, these cities are congregating points for people of wealth and leisure from all over the world (Nystrom 1928, 163).

Yet, in context, Veblen’s concept of the processes of fashion is more appropriate to his time than that of Georg Simmel (1858-1918). Simmel’s later perspective is exemplified in a popular model of the spread of fashion, where new styles are first adopted by upper-class elites and gradually diffused to the middle and then the working classes. Simmel observed that fashion can be used as an indicator of the
process of civilisation, because an awareness of fashion indicates an egocentric awareness of self, an important point of reference for this thesis. According to Lehman (2000, xvi), Simmel viewed fashion as ‘infused with the radical spirit of modernity’.

Lars Svendson (2009, 157) also notes that Simmel postulated how a swifter momentum to the development of fashion indicated an increasing complexity of self-image and self-identity. In Svendson’s view, Simmel observed how imitation assures the individual that they are not alone, and have followed a path already determined by others. Therefore the individual is relieved from the difficulties of self-determination.

It is important to note that these concepts of the diffusion of fashion and its consumption were formulated in immediacy to the rise of fashion and consumption, as functions of industrialisation. Diana Crane (2000, 14) explains that the ‘top-down’ model of Simmel and Veblen was prevalent in Western societies until the 1960s when demographic and economic factors increased the importance of youth. In contrast, the alternative to the top-down or trickle-down conceptualisation is the bottom-up perspective, a contemporary viewpoint in which new styles emerge in lower status groups to be adopted by higher status groups. Ted Polhemus (1994), whose professional work encompasses street-style, further explains that adolescents and young adults in lower socioeconomic groups generate styles that lead to imitation at other socioeconomic levels. Polhemus’ concept has become generally known as the ‘trickle-up’ explanation of fashion diffusion (Craik 2009).

In a stance mostly aligned with Polhemus, Grant McCracken (1985) particularly draws attention to social processes of imitation and contagion that resemble the ideas of Polhemus. In the case of Shanghai, McCracken’s idea is particularly apt to the democratisation of fashion. While ‘contagion’ is a word that supposes connotations of negativity, it actually implies the positivity of opportunism. McCracken argues more recently that in contrast to Simmel’s perspective of the superiority of elite groups, that lower status groups seek to adopt the clothing of higher status groups and set in motion a process of social contagion where groups of inferior status levels adopt styles successively. McCracken particularly identifies ‘an upward chase and flight’ pattern created by a subordinate social group that ‘hunts’ upper class status markers. McCracken’s perspective also draws attention to Fritz
Haug’s (1987) thoughts about consumption whose Marxist inspired discussion of commodity aesthetics implies the ‘buying-off’ of people’s consciousness as they pursue with mindlessness, objects of dubious value. Again, Haug’s observations are particularly applicable to the culture of consumption in Shanghai, where the cultural adaptation and mythology of a brand is as important as the product it represents.

Consequently, industrialisation has provided social mobility and rapid change to patterns of consumption, while inequality is no longer aristocratic but borne of democratic individuality. An apt précis is that fashion acts in conjunction with modernity, constantly challenging established consumption behaviours and cultural norms and offering new alternatives for the construction of identity, thus I conclude that fashion is an externalised construct for the formation of an internalised identity for use in the social structures of culture.

### 2.1.3 Fashion and Consumption

The role of fashion in consumer culture has typically been defined in terms of its relationship with the modern West as a mode of cultural reproduction that extended from the eighteenth century to the present day. This definition arises from the early formation of core institutions, infrastructures and practices of consumer culture that emerged during this period. Despite consumption being linked to early court life, especially of Louis XIV of France (1638-1715) where its purpose was to demonstrate political power (Kawamura 2005, 21-23), the age of industrialisation has provided the impetus for modern consumerism. While Lipovetsky (1994) traces modernity to the middle of the nineteenth century, Don Slater (1997, 12) traces the impetus of consumption to the early twentieth century. He writes that, ‘the 1920s was the first decade to proclaim a generalised ideology of affluence’ as it promoted a strong link between consumption and modernisation.

Fashion played a pivotal role in a consumer culture that was dominated by the fact that everyday life should be modern, while advertising and marketing incited the public to modernise themselves, their homes and transport. Thus the activities of the 1920s can be viewed as the result of the emergence of systems of mass production, emerging from the middle of the 1850s onwards, that were less focussed on heavy industry than consumer goods. As Slater (1997, 10) states, ‘Consumer culture is about continuous self-creation through the accessibility of things which are
themselves presented as new, modish, faddish or fashionable, always improved and improving’. Thus fashion, consumption and modernity merge in a diffuse variety and fluidity of values, roles, authorities, symbolic elements and social encounters, out of which individual social identity must be produced and maintained.

The notion of consumer culture implies that in the modern world, core social practices and cultural values, ideas, aspirations and identities are defined and oriented in relation to consumption rather than to other social dimensions such as work, or citizenship. Fashion is linked especially to these criteria and consumer culture has become the behavioural practice of a market society, because we do not make ourselves the goods through which we reproduce everyday life, but purchase them. Slater (1997, 26) contributes further to this perspective. In the first instance he says that that modern society is now a consumer culture because consumption has become a central focus of social life and, secondly that consumer culture is a ‘capitalist’ culture because it develops as part of the capitalist system.

Following this theme, Slater contends that consumer culture gains momentum when the regime of non-capitalist societies breaks down or loosens its control in conjunction with conditions of sufficient technical and material resources, and thus capitalist entrepreneurialism arises because of expanded consumer markets. Furthermore, consumer culture is also identified with freedom of choice and in turn, private life and the individual, which appears to contradict social order, solidarity and authority. This kind of contradiction indicates well-known tensions in contemporary Chinese society, evidenced in conspicuous consumption that has preoccupied the elite of Chinese society, and thus consumer culture becomes a medium for negotiating status and identity in post-traditional societies.

**The Signs and Symbols of Culture**

Fashion has consequently become a cultural practice evident as a system of diverse meanings to be interpreted for the creation of identity and ‘self’. Don Slater (1997) has explained how culture comprises systems of signs or codes, which determine the meaning of all goods for all people and constitutes the people themselves. This applies to both producer and consumer in the fashion system and has been described as the production of imagery by Elizabeth Wilson (2005).
The semiotic approach was furthered by Jean Baudrillard (1981). For Baudrillard, who defined consumption in terms of the ‘logic of indifference’, the meanings and values of goods are derived entirely from their position in social codes, which includes codes of function, prestige and aesthetics. Accordingly, despite the exchange of goods, or commodity exchange referring to a ‘finality’ or real object or service, we now consume signs, rather than products. In other words, the consumption of fashion has become the consumption of what the material artifact is purported to represent. In the fashion system, such artifacts are represented by fashion brands that mythologise a product, which also explains the appeal of counterfeit goods.

2.2 AESTHETICS

Thus far the concepts of culture, modernity and the diffusion and consumption of fashion, as well as how culture is read have been explored for the purpose of understanding how fashion designers create and share their ideas. The purpose has been to create a scaffolding to aid the approach to the research question. Whether Chinese fashion will compete with Western design is often asked and in many ways moot, however the query leads to the how Chinese fashion design might be measured (Craik 2009; Tsui 2009; Wu 2009). For instance, Finnane (2005) explains that the Chinese fashion system is ‘vexed’ with how to convert the ‘Chinese century’ into world acknowledgement. Logic might explain that in systems of cultural production, countries would be predisposed to compete in this now-global economic field of fashion, however it seems that many scholars have neglected what this means to the design journey for an individual.

The question of creativity and aesthetics has great implications for Chinese fashion design, and is important to this new exploration of Chinese fashion designers. In the epilogue of the book, Chinese Fashion, Wu Juanjuan (2009) describes new tensions that have arisen between the Chinese desire to leave the isolation of the past in the quest for global citizenship and their desire to remain Chinese. The need to embrace a global market economy, yet to also create a distinct Chinese style has also been examined recently with a focus on tradition and heritage as a means to create a market niche for Chinese designers (Ferrero-Regis and Lindgren 2012). Yet in recent literature, Christine Tsui’s analysis in her book China
Fashion, appears to have overlooked the role of Chinese aesthetics, instead querying whether Chinese designers should be evaluated by ‘creativity or sales numbers’ (2009, 239) perhaps implying the Eurocentric fashion system is dominant in China.

As well, the ‘China Mapping Report’ (de Muynck and Carrico 2012), recently investigated the market for fashion in Shanghai and Beijing. The report was a comparative study to identify commercial opportunities for Dutch designers in the Chinese marketplace. Likewise, Lorraine Justice (2012) in her book, China’s Design Revolution, provides a cursory glance at Chinese fashion, locating fashion designers as a third generation analogous to Tsui’s organisation of designers. Consequently, it would appear that it is only Wu Yuanyuan (2009, 181), in describing the search for a sartorial symbol to mark this Chinese identity, who contends that Chinese aesthetics will ‘define Chineseness in design and authenticate Chinese designs’.

2.2.1 EUROPEAN AND CHINESE AESTHETICS

To this point in the thesis, fashion design has been considered mainly from established Western perspectives of the role of the designer in the fashion system. However aesthetics play a vital role in the formation of self-identity, and an aesthetic vision is also a fundamental aspect of design. Furthermore it would appear that a discussion of aesthetics and Chinese fashion designers has not yet appeared in the limited body of literature available on fashion in China. Aesthetics plays an important role in the creation of self, and the refinement of self through creativity becomes a gateway or path forward for the ratification of one’s existence.

Chinese intellectuals first hailed the aesthetic at the turn of the century as an indispensible constituent of modernity. Liu Kang (2000, 6) has documented how the eminent scholar and advocate of cultural enlightenment, Liang Qichao, extolled ‘beauty’ or ‘aesthetics’ as the most important element of human life’, and thus meishu (美术), or the art of beauty became prominent in Chinese cultural discourse. In this vein, three distinct views of philosophical aesthetics are relevant to this thesis. These are the European view, the Chinese view and a third view that incorporates scholarly attempts to forge a singular perspective.

In consideration of the European perspective, Liu Qingping (2006) writes that Western aesthetic tradition has typically regarded the study of aesthetics as a science, which is problematic for various reasons. Liu explains there is a fundamental
difference in the philosophical spirits of Chinese and Western aesthetics. Accordingly, Western philosophy manifests as a ‘cognitive-rational’ spirit whereas traditional Chinese philosophy is made manifest as a ‘practical-emotional’ spirit.

Wen Haiming (2010) explains how from a cosmological viewpoint there are two basic views about creation. ‘Creation from nothing’ and ‘creation in situ’ explain the differences between Western and Eastern thought. In the West, the conception of God as creator situates creativity with moral goodness, harmony and spirituality, thus creativity belongs to God. In Eastern and Chinese philosophy, the cosmos is a process of ‘creatio in situ’ which is transformational and therefore one thing becomes another. Consequently Western philosophy is ‘mechanised’, the real world is reduced to minute, or atomic physical particles. It becomes analogous to man conquering and reassembling nature self-purposely, while Eastern philosophy is inclusive. Hence man is an integrated part of a holistic and natural ‘whole’ (Fang 1957). Wen explains in Chinese thought, cosmos is an internally connected organism that is holistically integrated into a dynamic wholeness.

Furthermore, these concepts extend beyond the day-to-day machinations of political parties and power relations. An appropriate example occurs in a discussion of Mao Zedong thought when Adrian Chan (2003) explains how as Chinese Marxists accepted the Marxian worldview, which is conceived as the materialist perception of history, they also accepted new ways of understanding the world and changing it. These views were fundamentally different from anything that had been part of Chinese tradition. As Chan (1997, 239-243) explains further, the Marxist materialistic conception of history demands an acceptance that history develops in a linear form as it moves toward a specific goal in a process called progress. However this perception is alien to Chinese culture, because Chinese cosmography has no discrete act of creation, no creator and no beginning, so the cosmos is not seen as moving toward a specific goal. Chan considers that the prime concern in the brief span of a human’s life is to live in harmony with the environment.

Early attempts to bridge the philosophical divide were undertaken, notably by the English philosopher Alfred North Whitehead. Whitehead’s working of process philosophy distinguished God from creativity. Whitehead (1967 [1925]) was active in the 1920s, and noted that science had become increasingly dominant in preceding centuries, placing less importance on human intuition and aesthetics, so he sought to
form a comprehensive and holistic cosmology to describe the world. Thomé Fang (1957) was a Confucian and Daoist scholar who had travelled to America for education during the 1920s returned to China with Whitehead’s philosophy. Fang criticised the materialistic and mechanistic worldview of modern science and his work reifies the ‘dynamic wholeness’ alluded to by Wen Haiming. According to Fang, ‘freedom’ is the capacity to create incessantly,

Both in man and in nature there is always something new and progressive which indicates the realities of man and nature. The whole universe exhibits novelty and wonder all the time and everywhere and there seems to be a high order to which it abides. Let’s borrow the words from Whitehead, nature in essence is a creative advance (Fang inYu 2005).

Thus, Yu Yih-Hsien’s (2005, 244) exploration of Fang’s work makes it clear that the mechanistic view ignores or even denies the freedom of man, and that the creativity of nature is an aesthetic condition that provokes our feelings, and ‘values of all kinds prevail in it’. Freedom and its capacity for creation also have profound implications for designers in China. Importantly Bauman and Fang collectively emphasise the concept of freedom as an important creative ally.

The well known Chinese scholar, Li Zehou (2010b), whose deliberations have been prominent in the field of Chinese philosophy, also created a hybrid version of traditional Chinese philosophy. Li explains how aesthetics has always played a key role in Chinese views of society, going beyond the realm of art and literature to encompass the ‘art of living’. Li Zehou possesses a contemporary view that attributes a transformative power to art and aesthetics. In his view, the ideal human being and the path to spiritual transcendence are located in the province of aesthetic thought. Li tells us (in a similar vein to Richard Sennett) that creativity, the making of tools and the cultural artifacts that ensue, elevates human beings to higher levels of existence (Cauvel 1999). Li’s views come from his investigations of Confucianism and Daoism and also include his extensive readings of Karl Marx and Immanuel Kant.14

13 In Whitehead’s time, the ‘preceding centuries’ correspond to the age of industrialisation.

14 ‘Daoism’ is the modern Romanised version of ‘Taoism’.
Li Zehou’s beliefs contribute to his theory of sedimentation, or jidian (积淀) as cultural accumulation. He reminds us that an individual’s idea of beauty, truth and harmony is a product of sedimented layers built from cultural, social and psychological preferences based on one’s life experiences. In addition, he explains that from our common human perspective, we are also historical, cultural and personal beings. In many ways, Li Zehou’s concept simulates Pierre Bourdieu’s ‘habitus’. Bourdieu (1984) defines habitus as ‘structured’ from one’s past, such as family upbringing and educational experiences. It is ‘structuring’ because one’s habitus helps to shape one’s present and future practices and it is a ‘structure’ because it is systematically ordered rather than random or unpatterned. Thus, like layers of sediment, this structure comprises a system of dispositions, which generate perceptions, appreciations and practices (Grenfell 2008).

Li Zehou explains that an artist cannot escape the social and cultural sedimentations that have shaped him therefore a Chinese scholar reading a Chinese painting will read it differently to a Western scholar with a dissimilar ‘cultural-psychological’ background. This is similar to the view held by the Italian philosopher, Antonio Gramsci, who explains that every language contains elements of a conception of the world and of a culture (Ives 2004). In the ‘world’ of the cultural artifact, both scholars will see things common to their human perspective, yet there will be a different reading in terms of worldview, symbols and cultural attitudes (Cauvel 1999). Complimenting these ideas is Eliot Deutsch’s (1975) view, that to understand or to ‘read’ a cultural artifact the beholder must first know the worldview of the artist and secondly, must understand the aesthetic preference of the artist, because each culture embodies a wide range of styles and preferences.

Deutsch explains that the formal content of the artifact must be understood, the way the composition is designed and the constituted whole, while the complex of symbolic values inherent in the artifact must be apparent to the beholder. Jane Cauvel (1999) worked closely with Li Zehou, and believes that Deutsch’s views are necessary for communicating with a work of art from another culture, therefore it is feasible that Deutsch’s criteria can be applied to fashion as a cultural artifact. Li Zehou, Whitehead and Deutsch’s views converge conveniently, because they agree there is a common field of knowledge that is innate in all men, that of creativity which is borne of freedom and the self.
Furthermore Michael Polyani offers a simple theory of knowledge that synthesises further the positions of Li Zehou, Deutsch and Cauvel. Polyani (1958) explains simply that all knowing, no matter how formalised, relies upon commitments. Polyani’s most important idea relates to ‘tacit knowing’. Tacit knowledge is difficult to transfer to another person, and the effective transfer of tacit knowledge usually requires extensive personal contact, regular interaction and trust. According to Polyani, tacit knowledge can only be revealed through practice in a particular context.

In the nineteenth century in concert with industrialisation, the German concept known as Bildung emerged as an important cultural force in Germany. It sheds further light on this common field of knowledge. Josef Bleicher (2006) explains Bildung was a concept that, at the cultural level, found itself trying to maintain the inheritance of humanist ideals in the face of the dehumanising effects of rapid industrialisation and the transition of a national identity based on culture (Kulturstaat) to a modern economically driven nation state. Bleicher notes that the conceptual history of Bildung parallels that of Kultur (Culture), as the micro and macro levels of cultural self-formation. Bleicher particularly refers to the fulfilment of human potential as arising from a naturalistic setting. Yet for the individual, the notion of Bildung refers as much to the process in which the individual acquires its form, as to the product of this process for the formation of soul and spirit. Furthermore, Liu Kang (2000, 6) explains the incorporation of German philosophy and aesthetics into traditional Chinese thought by Wang Guowei, one of the founders of modern scholarship in China, was based upon the premise of the aesthetic ideal as the paramount model of human life.

Also illuminating is Liu Qingping’s (2006) discourse of Chinese and Western aesthetics. Liu explains how the tendency to reunite man with the natural world emerges from traditional Chinese aesthetics which holds beauty is not only a pleasant property of objective things, yet is first and foremost a free state or way (dao) of human life, itself in harmony with the natural world. Liu explains that it is most important for human beings to make their own lives or existence beautiful through their practical-emotive activities. In China, the role of the human in the natural world eventuates in the interrelated Chinese philosophies of Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism. Generally, Confucianism stresses the profound significance of human
endeavours in practical activities to make human life beautiful, as a rational ethics that reduced tensions with the world to an absolute minimum (Liu 2006).

Confucian philosophers also believe that heaven and man were of the same nature and they resonated with each other (He 2002). Confucian philosophy incorporates three key ideas. Firstly the desire to be cultivated underlies the basic stability of ordered human society. Secondly, ‘humaneness’, ‘humanity’, or ‘human-heartedness’, denoted as ren (仁) relates to how individuals behave toward each other. The third key concept is the passage of xiao (孝) that marks all the relations of the inferior to his superior, whether this is a son-parent, subject-ruler, or minister-monarch relationship (Nancarrow 2009). Therefore Confucianism is fundamentally an ordered way to live in harmony with other people, rather than a philosophical worldview.

In contrast, Buddhism places importance on the relationship of man to the world he lives in. Buddhism originated in India, however early Daoists asserted that Indian Buddhists had learnt their ideas from the Daoist master, Laozi, and thus Buddhism was authenticated as a Chinese phenomenon, and so has become incorporated in contemporary Daoism (Little and Eichman 2000). Chang Chung-yuan (1963, 27) notes how Buddhism was reinterpreted in China in terms of Daoist philosophy, and this practice resulted in ‘a remarkable fusion of Indian Buddhism and Taoism’. However, Daoism is indigenous to China, and stresses the relationship of man to nature and the universe in a cosmological way.

Similarly, Daoism esteems beauty as a naïve, yet harmonious, unity of human beings with the natural world. Liu Kang (1997), by extension, describes Daoism as a submissive state. In Daoism, the process of self-creativity is expressed by the Dao as the ‘source from which all things derive’ (Chang 1963; Hall 1982). In Laozi’s view, human creativity functions as Dao-making, which is non-action (wuwei 无为).15 Liu Qingping (2006, 35) explains this as ‘taking no-action-yet-leaving-nothing-undone’, while Haiming Wen (2010) explains that non-action simply means that the world is

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15 Traditional Chinese. Wuwei is 无为 in Simplified Chinese.
being made constantly while no one can determine how it happens. Furthermore, according to Laozi, wuwei does not mean doing nothing, and keeping silent; everything should be allowed to do what it naturally does, so that its nature will be satisfied (Chang 1963). According to He Ping (2002, 98), Laozi, the Daoist master advocated that heaven, man and nature ‘are unified in the dao’. However Chang Chung-yuan (1963, 66) explains, ‘the Daoist concept of creativity is of self-realisation’, thereby giving creativity the important role of providing momentum for the journey of self. In other words, human creativity functions as the making of a path for one to travel upon.

Chang Chung-yuan explains further that when inner reflection takes place, it fulfills the process of manifesting ultimate reality, thus the value of the dao lies in its power to reconcile opposites on a higher level of consciousness. Following this train of thought, Raylene Chang (1991) explains the self-actualising person in Western thought and the sage in Taoism bear similarities in the development of human potential, a view that reminds us of Li Zehou’s description of common human attributes, but which might also be aligned with Howard Becker’s (2008) depiction of creative progression through an art world.

2.3 FASHION SYSTEMS

In this section the role of an aesthetic as a central means of creative production in a fashion system is undertaken. The fashion theorist Joanne Entwistle has explained that fashion occurs as a result of a series of activities that are aesthetic, industrial, economic and cultural, and therefore fashion is of major cultural significance (2000). Most definitions of the fashion industry show that it comprises a system of institutions, organisations, groups, events and practices that contribute to the transformation of clothing into fashion,

In Entwistle’s (2000, 45) view, the ‘fashion system’ describes the relationship between the manufacturing, marketing and distribution of clothing into retail outlets. Jennifer Craik (2009, 19), adds that this is a complex system of cultural

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16 Laozi is attributed as the writer of the Daodejing, a classical Chinese text. According to tradition, it was written around the 6th century BC.
communication that articulates the collective identity of a culture while exhibiting enormous individuality, variety, creativity and innovation. According to Craik (2009), fashion is also a cultural practice that is bound to the specification of our sense of self, both as individuals and as members of groups. Craik explains that at a broader level, the fashion industry is also a cultural industry that determines the aesthetic and practical dimensions of our clothing habits. Fashion is related to time in the context that cultural producers are able to manipulate the timeline of cultural artifacts, drawing upon the past in an endless recreation of ‘new’ items.

The French fashion system that emerged in concert with industrialisation is generally understood to be the dominant model (Breward 2003; Crane 2000). Yuniya Kawamura (2004) explains that the phenomenon of fashion is synonymous with French fashion and that Paris has long been the fashion capital of the world. However Craik and Finklestein (1996) maintain that because fashion has become so globally dispersed and because the Haute Couture has become an advertising medium for lower priced goods such as perfume and accessories, Paris is no longer as important as a centre of production of clothing, and in keeping with Roland Barthes (1967), as a centre of image-making. A relatively new perspective suggests the presentation of fashion has been reframed, thus the ‘catwalk economy’ has come into being as a highly choreographed release of novelty, conducted through events and ritualised display in an environment of extreme excitement (Löfgren 2005). Yet the myth of Paris as the epicentre of the world of fashion persists, partially because it has sought to position itself as such and also because Paris has a legitimate and historical claim to this role.

Paul Nystrom (1928) described early iterations of the Eurocentric fashion system during the first decades of the twentieth century, noting that the leading fashion capitals of Europe at the time were London, Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Rome, Stockholm, Oslo, The Hague, Brussels and Madrid. However he concluded ‘Paris is pre-eminently the leading city of the world in fashion’ (1928, 165). In this early

17 The haute couture is the highest calibre of dressmaking that epitomises French fashion. In France, the term haute couture is protected by law and is defined by the Chambre de Commerce et d’Industrie de Paris.
depiction, Nystrom attributed important principal values to Paris, including its ideal geographic location for the travels of Veblen’s leisure class, its reputation as the greatest resort city in the world, and importantly that it was the centre of an industrial area, ‘in certain ways the most remarkable in the world devoted to the production of textiles, apparel and accessories for men, women and children, but more particularly for women’ (1928, 167). Crane (2000, 15) explains that in the nineteenth century, fashion emanated from this single source, whose influence was widely accepted in other industrial countries, however this relationship is now more complex. The preeminent role of Paris as the centre of fashion is consequently built upon strong industrial foundations that have propelled it to the role it now possesses as the mythical centre of the global fashion world.

The production of fashion was reliant on the age of industrialisation that grew through the mid-nineteenth century rapidly expanding the market for consumer goods. While overseas imperialism was opening new markets for European consumer goods in trading ports around the world, such as Shanghai, (Bèrgere 2002; Breward 2003), Roy Porter (1990) explains that innovative ways in which goods were being consumed were being developed in the urban locale. Small retailers and traditional methods of clothing consumption were displaced by a new phenomenon of singular importance to modernity and consumption. The construction of department stores in the mid-nineteenth century created new spaces of consumption for an aspiring and increasingly affluent middle class to browse and an increasing egalitarian mood created new opportunity for the sale of fashion and a new lifestyle, aided further by the development of consumer credit (Aitken 2011).

In Paris in 1852, the famous department store, Le Bon Marché, was founded by borrowing directly the innovative styles of presentation first shown at the Great Exhibition in London. Le Bon Marché created a spectacle of consumptive experiences by bringing a diverse array of goods and services under one roof, and by displaying prices for the first time (Craik 2009; Kawamura 2005). 18 There would be

direct implications for Shanghai from this new way of shopping. Le Bon Marché further consolidated Paris’ importance as a centre of fashion by its use of mail order catalogues that pursued the tendrils of imperialism as far away as Australia. Records show that by 1902, the department store was sending out more than six million catalogues a year, and receiving approximately four thousand orders a week from this source of revenue (Aitken 2011).

During this period of time, the pursuit of fashion in home furnishings also began to lean towards imperial motifs as exotic new products and ideas appropriated on overseas trade routes began to invade the domestic spaces of the middle class household. Fashion designers as well, were employing the signs and symbols of other cultures that followed back along these trade routes in their garments. For instance in 1896 in Paris, an early fashion designer, Paul Poiret, was known to be ‘adept at reconfiguring visual elements from the Far and Middle East (China), India, central and eastern Europe’ (Breward 2003, 38). Increasingly the myth of the fashion city was also being reinforced in film. Breward (2003, 170) describes how ‘Hollywood film directors and Fifth Avenue editors’ branded an enduring image of an eternally feminine and elegant Paris as world fashion capital on consumer consciousness and thus a symbolic ordering of cities within the fashion media has had a major impact on the ways that fashion is interpreted.19

These narratives serve to remind us that the fashion system is not a singular system of activities that flow from a purported centre outwards but a self-maintaining, dependent aggregation of diverse actors and institutions that collectively reinforce the concept of fashion. Fashion is put into practice through the actions of individual agents, producers, buyers, consumers and retailers in various subsections of the fashion industry, which also serve to legitimise fashion and fashion designers, as Joanne Entwistle infers. As well, the fashion system is comprised of different systems of production with different supply chains.

19 Agnès Rocamora’s (2006) essay on fashion cities provides rich detail particularly about Paris and the enduring role of the media.
Consequently, the term ‘fashion system’ has come to mean the organisation of resources that perpetuate fashion’s role as a symbol of social connectedness, which is very much of modernity. However the idea that cities such as Paris continue to hold all the power in a fashion system is no longer valid. Lise Skov (2011) demonstrates that fashion is now a mass phenomenon. For Skov, the production of fashion has been divided between a globalised clothing industry which leans towards extreme centralisation and localised designer fashion sectors, acting as intermediaries, although some change to established fashion systems can be attributed to shifts of manufacturing to less costly locations. This is caused in part by a global competitiveness defined in terms of raw materials, labour and infrastructure as well as the rise of new technologies. Within this new economic focus on the fashion system, recent emphasis is placed upon aesthetic innovation and the production of new signs and symbols to distinguish products as well as place in the global marketplace (Lash and Urry 1994).

If this new emphasis is considered in the context of Shanghai, the call to creative innovation is well underway as China attempts to recast the perception of the country as a global manufacturer of clothing to a creator of fashion. The rise of an upwardly mobile and substantially sized middle class of affluent, aspirational consumers might be likened to societal changes that occurred in Europe during and after the age of industrialisation. However, as Michael Keane (2007, 13) explains, in China the dominant institution is socialism, and by extension, a political perspective that is unlike the democratic leanings that have inspired capitalism and entrepreneurial freedoms of other countries where fashion has become important. Therefore deliberation given to the development of aesthetic innovation explained by Lash and Urry becomes of paramount importance. In fashion, the role of the designer as the individual responsible for the management and delivery of an aesthetic sensibility to consumers participating in the fashion system becomes of consequence, as a vital catalyst for the rapid change that fashion represents. It is the designer who is usually attributed with the capacity for determining how resources are used and for applying an aesthetic value to clothing that imbues it with its status as an object of fashion.
2.3.1 THE ROLE OF THE FASHION DESIGNER

To understand the role of the fashion designer, this section includes two approaches. Initially the role of the fashion designer within the fashion system is discussed by placing strategies for emergence into the system in context. This leads to how a designer is legitimised. Secondly, the concept of creativity is considered from the designer’s perspective because this activity has a fundamental effect upon fashion as a cultural symbol but also alludes to the idea of ‘personal creative journey’ undertaken as an actor within the industry. In both approaches the development of a personal aesthetic is important.

Yuniya Kawamura (2005, 58) explains that the phenomenon of fashion, its processes of fashion and the diffusion of fashion have occupied recent discussions, however the role of the fashion designer within the fashion system is less apparent. Fashion designers emerge in the fashion system as a result of collective activity and while it is simple to identify as a fashion designer, it is a more complex matter to be legitimised within a fashion system. Jennifer Craik (2009) notes further that design emerged organically from the ranks of tailors and dressmakers who were considered part of the service industry. Palmer White (1986) also adopts this view and explains that during the period of late industrialisation, designers were considered artisans or tradesmen and a usual path for employment was to be apprenticed to a designer or a design house in order to learn the role.

The conditions for the rise of the celebrity designer were the same that paved the way for the emergence of the modern consumer, and Christopher Breward (2003) explains they arose from the expansion of urbanity and a reorganisation of labour in terms of industrial manufacturing. Breward notes that it was in the specific locations of London and Paris, that a revolution in fashion production took hold, thus creating the role of the fashion designer in an industrial context, in comparison to the role of the artisan. The skill attributed to this emerging class of celebrity designer resulted from their ability to ‘read the implications of cultural and stylistic change and incorporate it into a characteristic and very well-promoted personal vision’ (Breward 2003, 23).

In the French fashion system, most designers were trained in the house of established fashion labels, resulting in a cohesive group with shared ideologies, norms, and values that aided the diffusion of new trends, and contributed to the
success and prestige of the mythology of the couturier during the twentieth century (Crane 2000, 138). This process of apprenticeship was a difficult and exploitative role. Angela McRobbie (1998, 100-101) notes that it provided few guarantees for permanent employment. In fact the exclusivity of the French system and its dated employment hierarchies meant it was an elitist and poorly paid way to gain experience. In contrast, the more informal style and culture of English design meant designers were viewed as artisans, rather than artists and were generally employees of clothing firms. McRobbie (1998, 79) also explains that many early entrants into this system were from working class backgrounds in stark contrast to their French class and status-conscious counterparts.

In America, the dominance of the Eurocentric fashion system was also evident to Paul Nystrom who wrote of the industrial and commercial flows of fashion at the time. Nystrom (1928, 407) notes that until American Independence in 1776, practically all fashion styles were imported from London, often in the form of costume dolls sent by ship, and subsequently manufactured by dressmakers and tailors. Furthermore, Joanne Entwistle (2000, 219) also notes Europe’s influence over the fashion in America throughout the eighteenth century. Nystrom (1928, 203) however, supplies much detail about fashion designers in Europe who had become well established, noting that ‘for the most part, the most representative and best known style creators are truly artists. Most of them have had an artistic education and are thorough students of art’. He notes further that the ‘art’ and the ‘product’ are associated in the mind of the purchasers and the users directly with the personality of the designer and thus the mythology of the designer as artist, that started with Charles Frederick Worth, Jacques Doucet and Paul Poiret has come into being (Breward 2003, 28-40).

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20 Paul Nystrom writes that the best known houses in the dressmaking trade were established in buildings constructed for some other purpose but remodelled and rebuilt to serve their present tenants or owners (1928, 192). This is similar to the way that creative clusters initially came into being in Shanghai, discussed in section 3.2.
**Legitimisation**

In Nystrom’s (1928) chapter, ‘The Paris Creators of Apparel Style’, he reserves only two small paragraphs for ‘one of the younger designers’ called Gabrielle Chanel who ‘has come into prominence since 1920’. Eighty-five years later, Christopher Breward (2003, 47), describes the ‘near impossibility’ of divining truth in the mythology of the enduring brand of ‘Coco’ Chanel, who remained in control of her own now-legendary narrative until her death in 1971, and how this now contributes to the allure of products bearing her name. Breward (2003, 47) notes Chanel was more successful than her competitors because of ‘her fundamental understanding of the value attached to celebrity in contemporary society’, and her capacity to apply the creative mystique of the couture designer to the mass market for clothing.

Chanel’s mythologised provenance provides clear evidence for Kawamura’s (2005) observation of the ‘star’ system of designers, which draws upon such historical conceptions of ‘artist-as-genius’. However Kawamura refutes the idea of genius and firmly locates designers as actors in the fashion system. While the star still needs to be a single individual, Kawamura (2005) also views the designer-as-star as a manufactured idea, sometimes created by publicists who weave both real and fictitious elements together to increase cultural capital. In the context of the elitism of the French fashion system, Joanne Entwistle (2000) contends Paris has lost its place as the singular centre of fashion, and no longer dictates style to the world as it did in Nystrom’s narrative of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, hence fashion has now become a system, or systems of production. This is also known as the fashion industry.

For the fashion designer, the process of design involves interacting with many other actors in the fashion system in order to undertake the various stages in the process of designing clothing. Some of these activities are explained by Jennifer Craik (2009, 222), and include ‘having a conceptual idea and the ability to translate it into form, choosing fabric, making samples, building a thematic clothing collection, finding manufacturers, obtaining exposure and marketing, retailing, evaluating success and beginning the cycle again’. Thus the process becomes an anticipation of the future while remaining in keeping with resonances of the past. The challenge for a designer is to transform emotional or aesthetic values into a garment for advertisement according to a feeling or a mood.
In industrial and mass fashion, and for many large brands, designers can be hired as ‘aesthetic enablers’ depending on their ‘fit’ with a fashion house, which is contingent with their ability to manage existing aesthetic capital and intellectual property. McRobbie (1998, 43) describes this as a category of professional fashion. Designers who work with well-established fashion houses must adapt to the aesthetic legacy left by founders of the house, and thus their work consists of producing reiterations of ideas and motifs resonant of the legacy of the house. Craik discusses the creative legacy of Paris in terms of key designers who have been awarded iconic status, thereby inflating the prestige of the city, however Craik’s commentary moves beyond the realm of individual designers into the area of ‘brand’.

In England, the amalgam of art language and the individual image of the designer have been found to merge as part of the process of marketing and branding, coming together in the concept of the label, where the label represents integrity, but also functions as a commercial device (McRobbie 1998, 115). This transformation from a personal vision to an industrial and product-motivated view demonstrates the changing role of the fashion designer in situ with modernity and industrialisation.

2.3.2 DESIGN

The idea of a fashion designer as a genius or an isolated mind is contentious, and this hypothesis stems from Immanuel Kant’s (1968 [1790]) introduction of the ‘artistic genius’ who owes their talents to nature, since his or her knowledge is ‘a priori’. The important German scholar, Friedrich Nietzsche (1986 [1878]), emphasised the position of the individual but discounted the natural born genius. Nietzsche argued that geniuses acquire knowledge and that a person may become an artist by working hard and by being different, unhindered by social roles and conventions (1986, 250). Thus the discourse surrounding artistic geniuses has contributed to the mythology that sustains fashion designers. Crane (2000) notes particularly that during the period between the two World Wars, the myth of the designer as a genius emerged as the designer acquired the charisma of an artist.

21 ‘A priori’ knowledge or justification is independent of experience.

22 Nietzsche’s position appears to mirror existentialist thought.
Approaches to design

Designers utilise different strategies to frame the aesthetic qualities of their work that are derived from their perceptions of themselves as artists, or artist-craftsmen. According to Crane (2000, 152), fashion designers also generally utilise one of two approaches to their work that are also sometimes used in conjunction with each other, either the evolutionary process or the cyclical process. In ‘evolutionary’ design, changes to fashion emerge as evolving ideas, perhaps encapsulated in a collection of clothing, that become slightly altered iterations of previous collections. Fashion designers also project a distinct image that customers understand and can locate in each new collection of clothing as a sign of stability. Fundamentally, core elements remain the same as the designer moves their collection forward in incremental steps, keeping time with the pace of cultural change. This approach, with its concentration on the accumulation of cultural capital or contextual knowledge, lies in direct contrast to the industrialisation of the fashion industry where remuneration is to be found in the accumulation of financial capital.

The cyclical process described by Crane (2000, 153) involves the variation and rearrangement of elements that have been used successfully in the past. Designers draw from disparate sources to form their collections, sometimes from previous collections while including items of fashion that resonate with a historical context that has become relevant again (McRobbie 1999). The silhouette or the cultural sedimentation of imagery that comprises the re-imagined garment becomes more important than the idea of craft, although craft still holds much importance to the execution of the idea. McRobbie’s exploration of fashion designers in Britain demonstrates the importance of craft to a designers’ identity, as she describes the ‘technologies of self’ and the embrace of a language of craftsmanship when designers speak of their work (1998, 108-110). This ‘revolving’ instead of evolving process means also items tend to reappear at regular intervals as they are revived for a new consumer, who may not been in the market at the time of the first iteration. Some designers develop collections solely from historical references, as in the case of Christian Lacroix, prevalent in the 1980s and 1990s, who states; ‘I revive what I feel like reviving and what I think women want. Every one of my dresses possesses a detail that can be clearly connected to something historic, something from a past culture. We don’t invent anything’ (Thim 1987 in Crane 2000). McRobbie (1998)
notes also how Vivienne Westwood returns to the world of classical painting, and incorporates historical elements of dress and costume in her work.

Following this theme, Diana Crane (2000) explains that particular shapes, such as skirt lengths or shoulder size are typically replaced with their opposites, and that successful designers become accomplished at determining the timing of revival. In contrast to these evolutionary and cyclical processes, which paradoxically can also work in conjunction with each other, some designers using disruptive strategies that work against the evolutionary flow of fashion in general to enter the market, or to garner attention. Avant-garde or provocative techniques challenge public perceptions and violate the expectations of the audience (Craik 2009; Loschek 2009). The most notable example of this occurred when, in the 1960s and the 1970s, a group of Japanese designers used an avant-garde strategy to obtain recognition in Paris (Crane 2000; Kawamura 2004). Another perspective is the idea of social commentary. More recently, the late Alexander McQueen, whose work at the epicentre of global fashion kept his audience sometimes uncomfortably engaged with his presentations explained, ‘I’m making points about my time, about the times we live in. My work is a social document about the world today’ (Bolton 2011, 12).

Yet another strategy for entry includes incorporating details from contemporary ethnic cultures providing for differentiation in the consumer market (Craik 2009). Patterns of fashion flows have moved rapidly since industrialisation and designers have consistently borrowed the motifs and symbols of other cultures for inclusion in their collections. Many European fashion designers have appropriated the symbolism of Asian countries in the past, and placed it in new contexts (Kawamura 2004). Yet this practice has much to do with the advent of modernity, and later with the momentum of globalisation, and has become less effective in the digital age as global consumer markets have tended to become homogenised, while consumers become quickly aware of the emergence of new cultural artifacts. Arjun Appadurai (1996, 4) has emphasised that this practice seeks to ‘annex the global’ into the practice of modernity, however in the process of translation, the agent of this act cannot escape the weight of his own origin.

Diana Crane (2000) in particular notes that fashion design is a difficult proposition because of the ambiguous and contradictory nature of the work produced with multiple frames of reference. Importantly, in keeping with the discussion of the
manipulation of cultural artifacts in section 2.2.1, Elisabeth Wilson (1990) observes how designers have always drawn from the past, even beyond the period that is generally referred to as modern, and that this process seems to have escalated and become increasingly disordered. Bauman’s (2005, 107) liquid modernity becomes relative to this context with his concept of ‘disembedding without re-embedding’. In describing the illogical order of things and the disembodied reference points of society, Bauman’s theory might be applied to describe the nature of the production of fashion, as seasons blur into weekly clothing drops and consumers can buy online from around the world, and in different time zones.

For designers, cultural and social capital, in terms of its capacity to induce creativity, often has a greater use-value than financial capital, especially at different stages of their career. Craik (2009) contends that cultural capital refers to specific knowledge that makes sense of the techniques of the body to both the individual and the observer. Cultural capital might also be called ‘specific experience’ within a particular cultural field. Patrik Aspers’ (2006) exchange on contextual knowledge bridges the gap between the romantic vision of fashion design and the industrialised view of fashion as a product. Aspers’ contends that creative aesthetic work is separated from other kinds of work because it contains both aesthetic and creative elements and therefore the mix of economic activity with creativity leads Aspers’ to define this ‘creative aesthetic’ work. Aspers’ also draws from Martin Heidegger’s (Richardson 2012) concept of ‘lifeworlds’ as a way to situate the designer in their creative practice. In this framework, and in a similar way to Li Zehou’s ideas of sedimentation, all forms of knowledge are based on interpretation, which by necessity draws upon the lifeworld and depends upon the pre-understanding of the interpreter. Thus knowledge is a key requisite for creative work, and the capacity to undertake what is needed is dependent on prior experience.

Patrik Aspers’ mention of cultural context is valuable for understanding how a designer’s career progresses, and also their ability to ascertain how they reflect upon the cultural milieu that they are immersed in. Inexperienced designers may only able to discern the surfaces of their immediate environment (in keeping with Sennett and Entwistle’s ideas about authenticity) and are likely to learn their craft by engaging in the repetition and imitation of cultural symbols that have easily understood values (McRobbie 1998). This is because their ability to read and manipulate cultural
symbols is yet to develop. It follows that sophisticated and experienced designers are likely more knowledgeable about meaning embedded in the sedimented layers of cultural artifacts and behaviours, and are thus able to see beyond immediate cultural references, and ultimately, in Simmels (1957) words, analyse the tensions between their inner self as humans and their culture.

Sennett (2008) views this as a personal journey, guided by an ability to consider the importance of popular culture, to place tradition in context and to incorporate the authenticity of ‘self’ in their practice. However experienced designers are also dependent upon a consumer who is similarly able to interpret their ideas. When this ability is harnessed for commercial gain, designers are able to narrow their focus to a specific range of symbolic values, which they use as a structural framework to construct the aesthetic parameters of their tangible product, in turn enabling the development of brand ‘DNA’ or a brand ‘signature’ that reinforces those cultural elements expected by the consumer.

Some scholars have linked the ability to refine one’s focus to a disengagement with aspects of culture that are unhelpful to the process of creativity or self-actualisation (Bauman and Tester 2001; Maslow 1956; Sennett 2008). If Bauman’s perspective is considered first, we are shown that creativity is tied to human ambition and freedom from necessity and compulsion. Bauman (2001) explains his conviction that ‘this rising above necessity which is called freedom is the secret of the amazing creativity which humans go in demonstrating when it comes to seeking and finding and inventing the modes of being-in-the-world’. Maslow (1954) in contrast, concentrates on creativity emerging after the satisfaction of one’s needs and Sennett’s focus is on the sense of self that shows man is his own maker (2008). Creativity in this context is therefore closely linked to individual expression, which is contained in the concept of aesthetics.

2.4 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the differences between clothing and fashion and the origin of fashion have been examined. In section 2.2, in a discussion of culture and modernity, fashion has been defined as a cultural artifact, where its emergence from the cultural field demonstrates that in the process of cultivation, and with the creative dynamism of life, man produces artifacts that become static symbols of culture, and that
correspond with specific periods of time. This differs from the Chinese philosophical viewpoint, where man and nature exist as a holistic 'whole'. For the purposes of fashion, in the Eurocentric system, a designer’s ability to reach into time and manipulate cultural artifacts means they lose their immediacy from the point at which they emerged, and are no longer authentic. However designers in China are able to utilise a traditional philosophical perspective that posits a closer relationship between self and nature.

Consequently, authenticity has been determined as a manufactured construct. A discussion of the role of fashion in modernity, as arising in tandem with industrialisation and new consumption behaviours, moved to liquid modernity, as described by Bauman (2005). The loss of structure that modernity offers, and the ‘consuming life’ of self-scrutiny, and self-critique, has many similarities with urban Shanghai, where consumption is foremost and the city is in constant redevelopment. As well, the discussion on the diffusion of fashion, and the consumption of fashion has provided an understanding of an individual’s role or the ‘self’, in culture.

Because Shanghai has long been a multicultural city, and designers are exposed to a variety of influences, the discussion of aesthetics that explored European and Chinese aesthetic thought, including the creative journey and self-actualisation demonstrated some apparent differences. A generalisation is that Chinese philosophy asks for one to believe in one’s self, and one’s relationship with nature, while European thought divorces man from nature, and asks for belief in an external deity. The discussion of aesthetics explored these concepts by utilising Li Zehou’s concepts of sedimentation, before the key Chinese philosophies of Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism were explored.

The discourse relating to the reading of fashion provides a place to locate the work of Li Zehou in this thesis. In a discussion about the formation of the ‘self’, Robert St Clair (2007) and Li Zehou (2010b) explain that sedimentation is a way to conceptualise human behaviour, which is important because of cultural differences between China and the West. The concept of meaning is not the same for individual people in the context of culture, whether they are producers or consumers. In this way, an understanding of the layers of meaning that accumulate in culture and cultural artifacts become important when, in the next section, the systemic organisation of fashion is discussed.
Further to this in a discussion of fashion systems, the organisation of fashion has been explained where the fashion system is portrayed as a series of relationships between the manufacturing, marketing and distribution of clothing, however Yuniya Kawamura’s (2001) perspective is more concerned with the aspects of legitimisation attributed to the fashion system.

The role of the designer in the fashion system was discussed next, and the ensuing examination of legitimisation showed how fashion designers emerged as ‘star’, or celebrity designers. This section included descriptions of how a fashion designer might formulate their ideas, by interacting within the fashion system. From this discussion the idea of a designer as a genius, or isolated mind can be refuted. Fashion design is a creative activity that occurs in a methodological way, as a series of processes that are cyclical, evolutionary, or avant-garde, and fashion designers also borrow contextual knowledge from other cultures, and they draw from the past. Because these are processes of cultural reflection, designing fashion can be a process of self-actualisation, where one embarks on either a creative journey, or a commercial role.

From either perspective, one’s cultural knowledge is important. Craik (2009) has explained this capacity as specific knowledge that makes sense of the techniques of the body to both the individual and the observer. Bauman (2001) alludes to creativity as a means of seeking freedom, however this depends very much on one’s ability to ‘read’ culture. Accordingly, a fashion designer is dependent on their capacity to re-assemble cultural cues. Their experience with this process will eventually become their aesthetic, an intangible concept under constantly refinement, encapsulating among other things, their design ideas, their concept of beauty, and their life experiences. In the next chapter, the concepts of fashion and modernity, and aesthetics are utilised as an underlying foundation so-as-to consider the multicultural milieu that provides the source material for the construction of a creative aesthetic in Shanghai.
Chapter 3: Fashion in Shanghai

In this chapter, I describe how the role of fashion was included in Shanghai’s route to modernity, which began in conjunction with the age of industrialisation in Europe. Marie Claire Bèrgere (2002) writes that it was in Shanghai where the term ‘modeng’, (摩登), a transliteration of the word ‘modern’ first appeared, alluding to all that was new and fashionable, and thus modernity is integral to the ongoing discussion.23 In section 4.1, I provide a brief historical background to Shanghai’s role as a trading port, a topic that has been covered extensively in previous historical accounts of Shanghai (Bèrgere 2002; Dikötter 2007), however there is particular emphasis on the development of Haipai culture, which was specific to Shanghai in the 1920s, and which emerged from the charged and multicultural intermingling of Chinese and European behaviours during a specific period of time in Shanghai’s history.

Fashion, in its immediate and very visual role as a symbol of cultural dynamism has became an important indicator of the challenges of modernity to established social structure, and Shanghai in its latest incarnation as a city of the twenty-first century, deliberately evokes the spirit of Haipai as it reassembles its once-held identity as a global fashion city. Subsequently, in Section 4.2, the chapter includes a discussion of the development of an early fashion system in China and provides a contemporary account of the environment in the city for fashion designers. In addition, it considers in a new light, how Chen Yifei provided momentum for the fashion industry, including his role in developing a creative cluster in Shanghai.

23 It is interesting to note that the Chinese characters mo, 摩 means to rub, grind or friction, and deng , 登 means to rise, mount or climb. These are all words that could be used to describe the challenges of modernity.
3.1 SHANGHAI AND MODERNITY

Shanghai’s route to modernity gained momentum in 1842, when the Treaty of Nanjing, between the reigning Qing Dynasty and the British Government, designated it a Chinese port among four others, to be opened for foreign trade (Bèrgere 2002). Industrialism was well established in Europe and colonialism was the dominant British model for the expansion of territory and trade. As a result, Shanghai’s geographic location at the mouth of the Huangpu River, drawing it into a huge inland basin that served the centre of China, meant that it became an important entry point into China for Europe. Thus, Shanghai became the country’s chief centre for international commerce through which the artifacts, culture and behaviours of Western civilisation flowed, melding with Chinese culture (Finnane 2007).

The interactions, cooperation and rivalries that occurred between the original Chinese inhabitants of Shanghai and the rapid influx of European traders served to turn the city into the capital of another ‘China’ that was both cosmopolitan, entrepreneurial and welcoming of change, in contrast to the rest of the Chinese empire that was dominated by a long rural and bureaucratic tradition. Shanghai quickly became a model of modernity founded upon Western traditions but adapted to the Chinese culture. The local environs of the city became the preferred place of residence for foreign entrepreneurs who set up their businesses in the port and according to Bèrgere, ‘the adaptability and flexibility of these people injected an extraordinary dynamism into Shanghai society’ (2002, 4).

Yet, Bèrgere also notes that the Chinese imperial government had been relatively unconcerned about the settlement of Westerners on China’s coastal regions adopting the idea of treaty ports initially as a means of limiting the spread of foreign culture rather than an embrace of commercialism. In Shanghai, Westerners were kept from the Chinese population by the formation of diplomatic concessions or ‘countries within cities’ that provided special privileges, such as the ability to build factories, and the ability to manage their own affairs from within.

This deliberate ‘loose rein’, or secret political policy known as jimi (机密), allowed the Chinese central authorities to maintain distance from the influences of
the foreign residents who became known as waiguoren.\textsuperscript{24} Thus the guoren, or Chinese people, had little direct contact with the inhabitants of the concessions and the influence of foreign institutions was limited to a few areas of society (Bèrgere 2002). However the ensuing cultural exchanges were uneven and foreigners became regarded as models from whom the Chinese borrowed production techniques as well as economic, social and political institutions to be grafted onto traditional systems.\textsuperscript{25} By 1914, the concessions had surpassed the area allocated for the Chinese districts and increasingly become the centre of the city (Zhu 2009a).

Following the Xinhai Revolution in 1911 that toppled the Qing, China’s final dynastical faction, and now free from all central authority, Shanghai committed itself to a path of modernisation and democracy during a brief and significant period of intellectual and political fervour. This led to the establishment of the Chinese Republic in Nanjing in 1912, with Dr Sun Yat-sen in place as president (Yeh 2007).\textsuperscript{26} During this period a boom in Shanghaiese capitalism took hold and the international ramifications of World War One brought rapid growth to Shanghai’s economy as foreign traders were affected by mobilisation and either closed their businesses or reduced their activities.\textsuperscript{27} Simultaneously, demand for products available through the port of Shanghai rose and as imports declined, exports rose substantially as the market benefitted from protection that it had previously been denied (Wu 2009; Bèrgere 2002).

Yet it was not foreign interests that profited most during this period, but mainly Chinese entrepreneurs who capitalised on new methods of production and new

\textsuperscript{24} ‘Waiguoren’, (外国人), translates as ‘outside country people’ in contrast to ‘guoren’, (国人), ‘compatriots or fellow country people’. I believe this definition reitifies the notion of the Chinese emperor as the centre of a civilised and universal tributary system that did not include the ‘uncivilised’ foreigners. The term continues to today.

\textsuperscript{25} According to Bergere (2002, 5), the xenophobia that arose from the arrogance of the foreign residents and their privileged way of life meant that Shanghai was where nationalist awareness and the mobilisation of the masses first occurred .

\textsuperscript{26} Sun Yat-sen (His Western name) was born in Guangdong province. His family name is Sūn Démíng, (孙德明).

\textsuperscript{27} 1914-1918.
Dikötter’s (2007) extensive account of this period explains that industrialisation was based upon the production of consumer goods and private initiative, and from 1912 to 1920 the growth rate of national industries averaged approximately 13 percent per annum. In Shanghai, cotton goods were mainly responsible for rapid growth, and by the late 1920s technological advances in the industry for man-made cloth meant that the industry expanded more quickly than anywhere else in the world, at times surpassing England and Japan (Dikötter 2007, 194). By 1936, ten percent of exports from China comprised manufactured cloth, cotton pieces and factory yarn destined for overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia, and Shanghai had become firmly entrenched in the world of international trade.

**Haipai**

‘Haipai’ (海派) or the ‘Shanghai style’ emerged in the city during a period of rapid change, and epitomises the culture of consumption and modernity in Shanghai at the turn of the twentieth century. Earlier in this thesis Don Slater (1997, 12) linked modernity directly to the age of consumption in the 1920s and the idea that everyday life should be modern. This typifies the rise of Haipai in Shanghai at this time. Marie Claire Bèrgere (2002) has also described this period in detail in her vivid chapter on Haipai, yet there are few other direct references to this singular cultural attribute that still resonates in the architecture and the streets of Shanghai and strongly in the collective memory of the Shanghainese people. Yet, as Bergere (2002, 429) describes, Shanghai’s cadres have become increasingly aware of the value of Shanghai’s urban legacy over the last decades, seeking to preserve it, not so much out of sentimental attachment, but in order to profit from it and revitalise the seduction that attracted so many foreigners in the nineteenth century, along with their money.

In scholarly literature on Chinese fashion, neither Wu Juanjuan, nor Christine Tsui mention this cultural term, although Tsui includes this time period briefly in her

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28 For more detail, see Bèrgere’s chapter, The Golden Age of Capitalism in *Shanghai, Gateway to Modernity*.

29 海派 (hai) also means school or faction.
narrative on the development of Chinese fashion industry. This is possibly because their work focuses solely on Chinese participation in various fashion systems, while Haipai is a reminder of the influence of the West. However Shanghai’s current reconstruction in part attributed to its historical legacy draws deeply from the global age of modernity. It must also be noted that Haipai refers to the advent of modernity in Shanghai and not just fashion, thus it is also reflected in the literary and architectural identity that was formed in the city during this time.

Haipai is a metropolitan culture that was specific to Shanghai and most evident in the frisson of everyday life in the city. Haipai represented the ideal of modernity, evident in the change in direction in Shanghai from a focus on production, infrastructure and political institutions to the embrace of new lifestyles and new kinds of intellectual and artistic creation. Yeh Wen-hsin (2007) notes that it was the several million Chinese immigrants who flooded the city, many of them refugees and reformers fleeing violent campaigns in the countryside, beginning in the mid-1800s with the Taiping Rebellion who provided the labour resource for the rapid urbanisation. The new arrivals found protection in Shanghai and commenced work as merchants and middlemen, coolies and gangsters (Yeh 2007). Thus these migrants helped forge the country’s first modern urban identity, leaving behind an inland empire that was still deeply agrarian.

While family traditions remained Confucian, dress in Shanghai had become an amalgam of foreign and Chinese styles and the city’s culture increasingly capitalist. In this new and modern Shanghai, a budding ‘Chinese bourgeoisie’ emerged, (Bèrgere 1986), including Chinese industrialists, capitalist bankers, small business owners, intellectuals, students and revolutionary activists. Many played different roles, and were engaged in daily work with Westerners while some were allied with volatile ideological positions. Consequently Haipai also came to remind the residents of Shanghai of tensions that emerged from the issue of national identity.

According to the Shanghai News and Press Bureau (2012), the term Haipai entered the vernacular because of criticism by a group of Beijing writers, notably of some Shanghai scholars and their styles of writing in the 1920s and 1930s that embraced money and foreign culture. The Beijing school argued that the literature of the Shanghai school was purely commercial and did not advance social progress at a time when ‘social’ was a recurrent theme in Confucian thought (Bell 2008). However
members of the Shanghai school were educated literati who were beginning to question their own status in society as well as the purpose of art, and consequently they had anticipated the impending modernisation of Chinese society.

This became known as the Jingpai (京派), (Beijing school), versus Haipai (海派), (Shanghai school), debate. Bèrgere (2002) describes in detail the denigration of Haipai by high Confucian cultural elites who continued to regard trade as a source of moral degradation and intellectual vulgarity. During this era of rapid social change, creative works from the Shanghai school were widely innovative and diverse, and often contained thoughtful yet subtle social commentary (Bèrgere 2002). Thus Haipai was also described as ‘rebellious’ while its counterpart Jingpai represented tradition, hence the duality of fractiousness versus stability.

While Beijing remained the academic centre of the country during the Republican era from 1912 to 1949, Shanghai became home to the nation’s creative impetus including media, the publishing, film and entertainment industries, as well as the performing arts. Dirlik and Zhang (2000) argue this has contributed to a postmodern aura in China’s coastal cities, including Shanghai, helping to create a pluralistic cultural atmosphere that emancipates artists imaginations. Shanghai and Beijing’s polarised stances on fashion have also remained a constant source of comparison. In the fashion industry, Beijing supports China Fashion Week, which is supposed to represent the nations finest designers, yet Shanghai also holds its own event, Shanghai Fashion Week that is localised and not supported by the central government.

An important attribute of Haipai is an ethos that extended beyond the Westernisation and commercialisation of Shanghai because this cultural change had the approval of the Chinese residents, who embraced it without hesitation.30 Shanghai created its own identity as a self-controlled trade port and its autonomy was unpopular in Beijing. Yang Dongping (1994), explores what lies behind this intense urban competition in his extensively researched account, Chengshi Jifeng, of the

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30 Ballroom dancing is a remnant of this idea, often seen practiced in the parks and public spaces of Shanghai, and directly related to Haipai culture (Kang 1997).
long-standing and ongoing rivalry between Shanghai and Beijing, two cities whose cultural differences and relative merits have been debated since Shanghai became a treaty port in the 19th century. Consequently Haipai is polarised in its contrast with Jingpai, the ‘Beijing style’ and it is from this comparison that important differences are brought to light because they demonstrate fractures in thought between Beijing, the seat of government and Shanghai, the gateway to the rest of the world.

At this time, Dr Sun Yat-sen, president of the new Republic, who had been accused of advocating a wholesale Westernisation program for China as early as 1894 in his petitions to Beijing for reform, was a proponent of new capitalist movements, thus threatening the Confucian hierarchy. Dr Sun Yat-sen recognised that foreign banks controlled China’s financial capital, and thus determined to free this resource to facilitate commerce as part of the modernisation of Shanghai. Harold Schriffen (1970) notes that Dr Sun Yat-sen mentioned themes of ‘maximum use of human talent, the fullest exploitation of the benefits of the land and resources and the unrestricted flow of commodities’, in his petitions. Effectively Dr Sun Yat-sen’s purpose was to legitimise the merchant class and to take control of China’s prosperity away from corrupt officials by implementing a system of taxation on commodities like that of America (Young 1998). He believed,

The Chinese people will be welcoming of the opening-up of the riches of China, providing China is protected against the corrupting influence of the mandarins and will have a guarantee of normal intercourse with foreign states (Sun 1918 in Young 1998, 41).

The merchant class followed European business models closely and department stores quickly became a new method of distributing new consumer goods. Chinese retailers had previously sold goods sourced from China, but the Wing On Department Store presented itself as a ‘universal provider with a ‘hundred goods’ policy, methodically procuring goods from North America, Western Europe and

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Yang examines a long list of polarities associated with these two cities: North and South; Yin and Yang, hierarchical and democratic; xenophobic and cosmopolitan; distrustful of the West and adoring of the West; conservative and open-minded; socially stratified and rigid and socially mobile; traditional spiritual values and modern materialistic values; Chinese and foreign.
Japan broadly in line with, but not directly linked to, Dr Sun Yat-sen’s policies (MacPherson 1998).\textsuperscript{32} The Sincere department store opened its doors opposite in 1917, and with the Wing On Department Store, (founded in 1918 with foreign capital), they transformed Nanjing Road into the city’s prime shopping destination. Sherman Cochran (1999) links Haipai directly with this great shopping street, citing the writer Cao Juren who upon observing the dress of Chinese women promenading in Nanjing Road, commented that ‘Haipai is like a modern girl’.

Furthermore, Yeh Wen-hsin (2007, 59) provides a richly detailed account of the operation of these stores, noting in the 1920s foreign imports comprised three quarters of goods in the Wing On store. Young (1998, 33) also identifies that Sun Yat-sen promoted the idea of department stores as a way to realise his program of modernisation and also invested in their stock. However Dr Sun Yat-sen was firmly aligned with a new Chinese future, and the alteration of a military uniform as his preferred form of dress (Garrett 2007), the ‘Sun Yat-sen’ suit, would continue to visibly remind his constituents of his position, as Mao Zedong would also do later with the ‘Mao’ suit (Craik 2009; Wu 2009).

Consumption was a prime driver of the modernisation of Shanghai and department stores radically altered the retail environment, taking their cue directly from the opening of the Le Bon Marché in Paris in 1852. Bèrgere (2002) notes in Shanghai this period dates conveniently to 1917 and 1918, when the status of merchants and traders improved and an attraction to material goods available in the concessions conferred a new positive value upon consumerism. Thus consumption became a new criterion of modernity and of social distinction. By the 1930s, Shanghai was among the ten largest cities in the world. Local shops carried the latest fashions and luxuries while its reputation as the ‘Paris of East’, or ‘Pearl of the Orient’ spread along the same trade routes that bought foreign goods to its port (Craik 2009; Xu 2003). Along similar trade routes travelled Chinese students to be trained abroad, and when they returned to Shanghai they became cultural conduits

\textsuperscript{32} Baihuo 百货, ‘Bai’ 百 means eight and ‘huo’ 货 means goods, commodities or products.
conveying personal and intellectual experiences into a society increasingly under pressure from nationalist concerns.

Haipai culture and its propensity for the easy assimilation of foreign ideas into Shanghai culture would also generate a new kind of globally connected citizen as people began to travel overseas for extended periods of time for education and leisure. Thus the Chinese public continued to recognise foreign influences as the signs and symbols of modernity. In the immediacy of the street, Haipai culture was notably evident in the Yuefenpai (calendar) or poster advertisements that used renderings of Chinese girls in various states of dress, often the tight fitting qipao that had become a symbol of changing values, by showing how traditional Chinese culture was being transformed by foreign ideas (Figure 3.1), (Lin 2013).  

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33 Yuefenpai (月份牌) are highly collectable among collectors of Art Deco memorabilia.
The qipao has become an iconic symbol of this period of time in Shanghai, because it is a visual manifestation of rapid societal change demonstrated by the Shanghainese shortening of the qipao from its original calf-length iteration in imitation of the Western skirts in style at that time (Figure 3.2).  

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34 The qipao is also known as the cheongsam, particularly in Southern China. Antonia Finnane’s chapter on the qipao is very detailed (Finnane 2007, 139).
As new attitudes developed, so did the conceptualisation of self. Entwistle notes the modern ‘care of the self’ has become one of the defining features of consumer culture, because the body is the source of our identity (2000, 124). In Confucianism and Daoism, the preservation of health related to longevity however a new focus on physical vigour and beauty arose and accordingly, the cult of physical appearance as a criterion of modernity established the reign of fashion (Finnane 2007). In 1934, the Republican government launched the New Life Movement, to combat the rising influence of communism, Western individualism and the moral decay of Chinese society (Wu 2009).

Yet Bergere (2002, 276) notes that it was the literary accomplishments of the Shanghai modernists who wrote of ‘the female vamp and the elusive city, two equally powerful symbols of modernity that exert the same fascination and arouse the same frustration’, that bound this period of time in written text. Thus Shanghai, because of its successful textile industry, and its unique geographic position as a gateway for foreign ideals into China would lay the foundations for its legacy as

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35 Nationalist propaganda in the 1930s linked the regeneration of Chinese culture to the individual vitality of every citizen.
China’s fashion city. Bèrgere (2002, 284) notes particularly how Shanghai asserted its cultural originality with vigour. Haipai was important because it presented a model of a new national identity, and the ‘golden age of capitalism from 1917 to 1927 in Shanghai constituted a direct prelude to the ‘Belle Époque of the 1930s’.

**The End of Haipai**

As ties to China’s feudal past receded during the Republican period (1912-1949), women gained more freedom to express their identity, femininity and their modernity, and when the Mao era commenced in 1949 with the founding of the People’s Republic of China the liberation of women and sexual equality became official government policy.³⁶ Wu (2009) notes how Haipai was quickly relegated to the past as the Cultural Revolution led to a new asexual uniformity in dress that homogenised gender differences in the pursuit of revolutionary fervour. This ‘fashion forbidden period’ led to the resumption of private enterprise by the state and changed the cultural ideology of the Chinese people (Tsui 2009). Clothing became a political statement and the Mao suit and the associated Lenin suit were popular public attire.³⁷

Craik (2009, 311) observes the Communist party quickly realised the importance of dress as a technique to produce different kinds of citizens, by mixing traditional and military dress. In keeping with Veblen and Simmel, the high social status of the military meant that the army uniform attained prestige and was quickly taken up by the public. Tsui (2009, 17) also writes of extremes of military dress that became the uniform of the public, usually worn with an emblem of Chairman Mao. Wu (2009) describes these as the ‘three old styles’, ‘lao san zhuang’. The Mao suit, ‘Zhongshan zhan’, the youth jacket, ‘qingnian zhuang’ and the casual army jacket, ‘jun bingzhuang’, were worn in conjunction with the ‘three old colours’, ‘lao san se’ of khaki, blue and black.³⁸

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³⁶ The People’s Republic of China is the Zhōnghuá Rénmín Gòngghéguó, (中华人民共和国).

³⁷ Wu Juanjuan’s chapter on Reinvented Identity contains much detail about these suits.

³⁸ Lao means ‘old’, san refers to the number three (Yi, Er, San in Putonghua = 1, 2, 3) and zhuang refers to ‘style’, thus ‘three old styles’.
Thus China’s economic era became entirely controlled by the state and the introduction of the coupon system in 1954, enabling the purchase of basic items like food, fabric and furniture would last thirty years until 1984 (Tsui 2009). Consequently the legacy of the Cultural Revolution was not only a changed view of fashion and identity, but would come to represent a break from China’s traditional culture, which had evolved over five thousand years.

3.2 ART, EDUCATION AND INDUSTRY

As China struggled to overcome the effects of the Cultural Revolution, the sectors of art, education and industry coalesced around Shanghai’s emerging clothing and textile industry, and a very early fashion system. This section touches very briefly on fashion after the period of Haipai and mainly follows literature that relates to the development of the fashion industry in Shanghai. In this instance, Bèrgere’s short account of fashion in Shanghai supplements Antonia Finanne’s (2007) very detailed account of this period of time tracing economic change in Shanghai that facilitated the emergence of Shanghai’s early fashion industry. However Wu and Tsui also provide additional perspectives about this culturally repressed time in Chinese fashion. The section then moves into a discussion of the formation of the fashion industry.

Li Xiaoping (1998, 75) provides another Chinese duality by clarifying how the Chinese term for fashion, shizhuang (时装) signifies the modern because it clearly contrasts with fushi (服饰), which means costume, and has always referred to clothing styles in Imperial China and especially of ethnic minorities. Consequently it is shizhuang, not fushi that links China to the outside world. Li notes that fushi always points to tradition and the past, while shizhuang is closely associated with internationalisation and modernisation. As a result, the utilitarian nature of clothing became associated again with fashion as China opened its doors for global trade. In the 1980s, the Cultural Revolution was still a powerful influence on the behaviour of the Chinese people. Most industries were dominated by state-owned entities that operated under a planned economic system, which in general meant competition was non-existent.
Tsui (2009) explains that suppliers, sellers, products and distribution methods were organised and controlled by the administrative department of the state government. In the 1950s clothing firms were transformed under a national program, into factories that manufactured clothes predominantly for the former Soviet Union. In 1959, the export focus changed to capitalist countries as China’s political impetus altered. Tsui (2009) explains that it was in this initial phase that China began to shape its image as a global manufacturer that continued to strengthen. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the production of clothing for export continued as fashion resurfaced in response to official modernisation projects were launched in 1976, and in 1979, the Chinese media began to address the emerging fashion consciousness of the public (Finnane 2007).

The state economic plan also made a decisive shift from heavy industries to light industries prioritising the garment and textile industries. Li Xiaoping (1998, 76) notes that in Beijing, the seventh Five-Year Economic Plan enacted from 1986 to 1990 included setting fashion trends as a priority. The Chinese government used consumption to stimulate the domestic economy with a myriad of activities such as fashion shows, fashion media and the appearance of the first Chinese modelling team at the Shanghai Clothing Export Fair. Consequently a functioning fashion system has been the goal of state-funded research institutions since the end of the 1970s, and the Shanghai Clothing Research Institute now serves as a design, research and technological entity (Wu 2009).

**Resurrecting the Ghosts of Haipai**

In the 1980s there was also a gradual shift in the meaning of fashion. Both design and the practices of fashioning the body in everyday life fluctuated with the political environment and official attitudes to the West. During this period Shanghai regained its reputation as the major fashion centre in China and new industry arose in other provinces. At the end of 1992, China’s leader, Deng Xiaoping contended that China should initiate a market-oriented economic system within the framework of socialist administration, and the effect on Shanghai was to solidify its position as the national centre of fashion and commerce as the district of Pudong became a free-trade area. Wu’s (2009, 136) description of Shanghai during this time casts light on how the influence of the concessions had an enduring effect on the city’s sense of modern fashion. According to Wu, the Shanghainese had always maintained a
fashionable image and were more receptive than elsewhere to Western fashions and lifestyles. However fashion design was still a job that was associated with industry.

**The Fashion System in Shanghai**

Shanghai’s attempt to create its own fashion system is reflected in the Chinese government’s systematic efforts to produce global fashion centres as well as world famous fashion designers and popular domestic fashion brands. Craik (2009, 91) notes particularly that Shanghai has invested heavily in reviving its reputation as a site of fashionability. In 2000, at the Shanghai International Fashion Centre opening, the then-mayor of Shanghai, Xu Kuangdi pledged that one of the immediate planning goals was to build the city into the ‘world’s sixth fashion centre, alongside London, Paris, New York, Milan and Tokyo (Xu 2003). Yet while Paris’ role as a fashion capital was related to the rich cultural connectivity of its industrial history, Shanghai had much work to do to link the intricate relationships between actors in the clothing industry with a functioning and productive fashion system.

Kawamura’s (2005, 43) description of a fashion system as organisations, institutions and individuals interacting with one another to legitimise fashion designers and their creativity aligns firmly with activities that have been undertaken since the 1980s to support the fashion industry. Wu (2009) explains that as well as a rapidly expanding fashion education system and fashion media, state funded institutions, research and design centres and national design competitions were established. In the 1980s, three cities were identified as recognisable nodes of China’s fashion industry (Finnane 2005). Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou all combined strong regional roles of national significance with sites where China had conducted exchanges with the West.

Antonia Finnane’s very detailed account of the ‘Reform Era’ period that occurred in the late 1970s and the early 1980s provides a picture of the Chinese fashion industry starting anew, from where it left off prior to the Cultural Revolution. Finnane (2005, 601) explains that consumers were tentatively trying new styles, and Guangzhou with its Suipai culture near Hong Kong was ‘reliving its role as the half
open door through which foreign goods seeped in’ (2007, 259). Beijing presented its Jingpai image, or serious and culturally dense culture, and Shanghai its Haipai culture of liveliness, commerciality and entrepreneurialism.

The first Chinese fashion designers emerged from this industrial transition to a market economy in the 1980s, however Wu also closely links the development of the Chinese fashion education system with the development of the fashion industry. In her book, China Fashion, Christine Tsui has conveniently arranged three groups of designer according to a timeline from the 1980s onwards, although this thesis takes a slightly different approach with its inclusion of contemporary industry participants. At this time, Shanghainese residents bought their clothes mainly from small tailor shops or made them at home. The first designers, ‘the pioneers’ were part of the factory system and were active at the beginning of the market economy in 1978 when roles in clothing production were still controlled by state-run factories (Tsui 2009; Wu 2009). The products they generated were mainly exported, but exposure to European aesthetics and factory knowledge of the technical specifications of Western apparel fanned new aspirations.

Their experiences were shaped by the lack of domestic industry infrastructure, prohibiting them from developing their own brands alongside a marginal consumer market for the type of fashion inspired by their experience. However it was during this time that there was a growing focus on the domestic market by clothing producers, generated mainly by the popular culture of TV shows and movies (Wu 2009). Wu explains that new styles were developed by clothing technicians and designers with limited skills in modern design, but great skill in patternmaking and tailoring, and thus mass produced styles for the domestic market bore little resemblance to contemporary international fashion.

In terms of design education, Wu (2009) explains that the Central Academy of Art and Design in Beijing offered the only degree program with a fashion major in 1980. The majority of college educators and founders of design programs had received extensive training in the fine arts, and possessed exemplary drawing skills

39 Suipai means ‘romantic’ culture.
which forged an emphasis on a technical education. Admission to most fashion design programs was by tests of sketching and painting. Similarly Angela McRobbie’s (1998) analysis of the English field of education for fashion designers also indicates that ‘art’ was a prevailing focus of the British design curriculum at this time, set by as series of government reports,\(^\text{40}\) thus the Chinese education system for fashion in some ways mirrored this approach. However fashion in England became prominent because of the sudden explosion of pop culture that gained momentum through the 1960s, at a time when Shanghai was embroiled in the Communist Revolution.

Thus English fashion became part of the burgeoning consumer culture, legitimised through its close association with popular music. Yet fashion in China was still limited to industrial production where opportunities for legitimisation in Shanghai were fewer as the cultural vision that emerged from modernity became an aesthetic expectation. Domestic fashion magazines with titles like Zhongwai Fuzhuang (1984), Shanghai Fushi, (1986) stimulated consumer interest in fashion (Finnane 2007, 266). Prior to this, publications had been for industry and devoid of obvious fashion trends. In 1979, English Vogue made a foray into China, using the opportunity to photograph foreign brands against the background of Chinese culture and landmarks, but it was not until 1988 when the international magazine, Elle entered the Chinese market under license with little initial success. The later arrival, via partnership, of Vogue China in 2005, was promoted as the arrival of the ultimate fashion critic, no longer subtly promoting the socialist ethos but espousing the trappings of new Western lifestyles (Hartley and Montgomery 2009).\(^\text{41}\) Wu (2009) mentions this first edition of the magazine strengthened links with other actors in the fashion system like photographers and particularly raised the profile of now-famous Chinese models like Du Juan.


\(^{41}\) See also Michael Keane’s observations of entering the publishing sector in Created in China, the great leap forward (p161).
Tsui’s second group, ‘the practitioners’ began during this time of increasing social aspiration and have been described as a transitional generation who grew up in a modern era of reform. Clothing choices were no longer reliant on interpreting an intricate political culture, and luxury brands began to enter the country foreshadowed by the first fashion show from Pierre Cardin in 1978. Opportunities for creative experimentation were fertile ground for the now-iconic Chinese designer, Ma Ke, who started her label in 1996, after graduating with fashion-specific training previously unavailable to the last generation. In 1994, the first international design school was established in Shanghai as a partnership with the Donghua University and eventually became the Raffles International Design Institute (Tsui 2009).

During this period, internationalisation was rapidly gaining momentum while entrepreneurs were encouraged to start businesses. The clothing industry was among the first to privatise with business entities known as ‘getihu’ and ‘siyeng qiye’ (Garnaut and Song 2003). Garnaut and Song’s detailed survey of small businesses shows many entities begin as a husband and wife or family unit and are typically labour intensive. Access to start-up capital is a core problem and compliance with regulatory statutes hinders growth. Their survey suggests many new-start entrepreneurs borrow funds from family members for long enough to prove they have the funds to the regulatory authorities who demand evidence of capitalisation, and then return them to their owners (2003, 393).

The orientation of fashion production towards the West was also changing as a domestic market for newly relevant clothing expanded and small business focused on satisfying local demand. However, designers still did not have a firm grasp on a particular consumer market and a fragmented industry structure meant individual creative efforts met with little official support. Wu observes that as these designers began to establish their private labels, the lack of business education became

42 Donghua University (DHU) was formerly known as the China Textile University and was founded in 1951. DHU is one of the key universities directly accountable under the Chinese Ministry of Education. Its key disciplines, which include Fashion Design, Textile Engineering, International Trade, Material Science, and Information Technology, are regarded highly in Shanghai.

43 Getihu are small family enterprises (up to seven people) and siyeng qiye are small to medium-scale private enterprises (limited liability with two to fifty shareholders).
noticeable. Their training in art and drawing meant their aspirations of commercial success, in emulation of Western designers in the dominant Eurocentric fashion system, was hindered. Wu (2009, 133) notes particularly the focus by these designers on the French Haute Couture, which espoused high artistic ideals instead of commercial return.

In particular, Finnane (2007, 279) observes that many clothing companies did not have a design section but relied on ‘hot items’ from Shenzhen. These were re-sold under private labels, or picked apart to provide patterns for their own manufacture. The industry was also coming to terms with the idea of the semiotic value of the brand. There was an acute consciousness that Western brands were no better constructed than some Chinese brands, yet commanded prices that were substantially higher (Finnane 2007; Wu 2009). Most importantly, the aesthetic development of fashion designers was constrained by the tight grip of the ruling Communist Party on personal interpretations of history and culture.

Finnane (2007, 281) explains that in the 1990s, Marxist Mao Zedong thought was replaced quietly by patriotism as the guiding principle of Chinese life. Thus success in the international arena became an intense preoccupation, while an obsession with Chinese culture was simultaneously encouraged. However this served to create confusion on fashion runways when designers, when trying to align their aesthetic with cultural expectations presented clothes decorated with red lanterns and Chinese embroideries, motifs that had been long appropriated by the West.

Tsui describes the last group of Mainland Chinese designers as ‘the prospects’, emerging from the generation embodied by the one child policy and having grown up in an era of relative social stability where education is viewed as key to social standing. Importantly, digital media and the Internet have radically altered the flow of information and Shanghai’s urban culture now epitomises Bauman’s (2005, 1) descriptions of liquid modernity as a space where ‘the conditions under which its

44 In fashion, ‘hot items’ are popular and quick sellers. Turnover is quick and shelf life is limited.

45 Shenzhen is located in Guangdong province, directly opposite Hong Kong. In 1979 it was a small fishing village. It is now one of the fastest growing cities in the world.
members act, change more quickly than it takes the ways of acting to consolidate into habits and routines’. Positioned at the forefront of a society weary of moral doctrine and of modernity and oriented to materialism, they have grown up walking under the billboards of luxury fashion brands like Armani and Gucci wondering whether this type of global appeal is possible for Chinese fashion designers (Wu 2009, 176)

Opportunities for validation appear to have become plentiful in the multitudes of traditional and online fashion media that sustain the now normal practice of consumption, yet questions remain about the value and integrity of such media. For instance, De Muynck and Carrico (2012, 27) have found that some designers are cautious about their involvement with fashion media, to the point of being ‘media weary’. Market, consumption and media, all conceived in global rather than national terms have replaced the revolutionary mobilisation of previous decades as the dynamising force of social change, ‘announcing the triumph of the ideology of consumerism, but also opening the way for the liberation of peoples and localities by a plurality of worldviews’ (Dirlik and Zhang 2000, 8). Yet this is still a field of mixed symbolism, where the media weariness of designers might be better described as a lack of interest in the relentless spruiking of aggressive marketing. Furthermore, the plurality of worldviews in postmodern Shanghai means that fashion designers here face many difficulties in forming their own perspective.

Resonant in liquid modernity is the question of the aesthetics of design, and of authenticity. Authenticity implies not only retaining a genuine Chinese national terrain from which inspiration can be drawn for the formulation of a Chinese design entity, but also implicates ‘self’. As Eric Hobsbawm (1983) reminds us, the manipulation of cultural artifacts makes us question the nature of the terrain, and thus this third generation also question what it is to be a Chinese designer. For Liu Kang (2000, 132), Shanghai is the ‘authentic origin of China’s Western-style cultural life and even revolutionaries such as Mao could not help but submit to the alluring temptations of this style’, embodied by Mao’s, wife Jiang Qing who was a third-rate movie star in the 1930s. Yet as Kang explains further, it would also be misleading to

46 Dirlik and Zhang explain the exhaustion with the promise of modernity in their introduction to Postmodernism and China (Dirlik and Zhang 2000).
presume that popular culture in China falls under the hegemony of global capitalism’s cultural imagery.

For Kang, the revolutionary legacy of the culture of the masses, in conjunction with the legacy of China’s own folk and craft traditions and customs, constitutes a distinctive space that has not yet found a position in the global geopolitical order. Finnane’s consideration of this problem shows that fashion designers constantly return to Chinese history for design inspiration, incorporating military as well as ethnic elements in their designs, mainly because their historical clothing culture remains the foundation of their identity as Chinese artists. However another tension exists. As Simona Segre Reinach (2005) argues, Chinese fashion designers must also cast off the reputation of China as the home of fast fashion and a place of copying.

In many ways, designers who emerged in the first of Tsui’s groups, the practitioners resemble designers who emerged during the period of industrialisation in Europe when as Nystrom explained, the rise in consumption enabled consumers to move from hand-made, craft-based clothing into fashion that was new and easily available. In section 2.2.4, Slater reminds us that when the regime of non-capitalist societies loosens its control in conjunction with condition of sufficient technical and material resources, expanding consumer markets provide opportunities for entrepreneurial activities, as has happened in Shanghai. Therefore this group of designers was still firmly anchored in the industrialised nature of fashion production while beginning to make tentative steps toward private enterprise.

**Chen Yifei**

The formation of the fashion system in Shanghai owes much to one individual rather than any state actors. In fact, Chen Yifei, in numerous ways attempted a single-handed assembly of the kind of fashion system that Yuniya Kawamura describes, and his legacy as an early catalyst of the fashion system in Shanghai is not inconsequential. Tsui (2009, 189), Wu (2009, 148) and Zhao (2013, 83) each mention Chen Yifei (Figure 3.3), however the importance and extent of his influence on Shanghai’s fashion system has not yet been discussed previously in a way that demonstrates the importance of his early entrepreneurial role in Shanghai’s emerging creative economy.
Chen Yifei was born in Ningbo near Shanghai in 1946 and died prematurely in 2005 at a time when the ongoing discourse of China’s creative industries was gathering momentum. Yet Chen Yifei’s legacy lives on in the minds of the citizens of Shanghai who recall him as an instigator of popular cultural change. Chen Yifei’s reputation was made as a leading painter of the Cultural Revolution. Chen was the first artist from the People’s Republic of China permitted to study art in the United States (Wu 2009). He enrolled at Hunter College in New York, and graduated with a Masters degree before he returned to China to settle in Shanghai in 1990 where he continued to paint the landscapes of Tibet and his native Zhejiang Province, near Shanghai.  

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47 Hunter College is among the oldest public American Universities, founded in 1870 in Manhattan, New York. It has a strong Arts program.
However the lessons in capitalism Chen Yifei learned during his years in America meant that his artistic reputation could be leveraged into something greater, and upon his return to Shanghai, he reinvented himself as a singular aesthetic brand. Chen Yifei explained that his duty was ‘to provide beauty for the people’ (Suh-kyung 2002). Shanghai’s entrepreneurs were receptive to the fresh ideas he brought from New York, and Chen Yifei famously said, ‘When I came home, there were one billion people in China living without any real sense of lifestyle’ (in Darwent 2005). By 1996, Chen Yifei had transformed himself into a style entrepreneur, creating the stable of Layefe fashion brands to sell high-end clothing as a response to the high cost of imported fashion brands.48

In 2005, Layefe controlled more than 160 retail locations, and employed several fashion designers for numerous clothing lines (Webb 2001). Many of these designers were also participants in Shanghai’s education infrastructure that included Donghua University. Chen Yifei subsequently created the Layefe Home label to sell chic home furnishings, and situated his first retail outlet at the prestigious Xintiandi development in Madang Road in Central Shanghai.

Chen Yifei also created one of the country’s biggest modelling agencies, the Yifei New Silk Road Models Agency, which generated momentum for the formation of new protocols that would inform the early infrastructure of this ancillary fashion sector. Consequently, the Starz People Model Agency and the Oriental Modelling and Media Agencies emerged to forge a competitive marketplace. In 2000, Chen Yifei was invited to become the art director for China’s most contemporary fashion magazine, sponsored by the China Youth Magazine under the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League.

Chen Yifei’s involvement and his foreign experience was considered important for the cultural development of this politically aligned magazine at a time of a burgeoning inquisition of foreign aesthetics (Wu 2009). The inaugural issue of the monthly Vision Magazine offered articles on art, fashion, cosmetics and technology.

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48 Chen’s label is a transliteration from the French where the. ‘Yifei’ becomes ‘La ye fe’ for the female label, hence ‘Layefe’ and ‘Le ye fe’ for the male label, hence ‘Leyefe’. (‘Ye’ is pronounced ‘yi’).
and was published in December 2005. In a culture where size and weight is deemed impressive, the magazine was renowned for weighing two kilograms, and comprised over 460 pages, with a circulation of 100,000 copies dispersed to the commercial regions of Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou (People's Daily 2001). According to Chen Yifei, ‘the people buying our clothes, reading our magazine are all part of the New China’ (Suh-kyung 2002).

However, it is Chen Yifei’s work as a catalyst for change in the fashion industry that is most important for the early fashion infrastructure in Shanghai. After his early death, the head designers at Layefe Fashion, Wang Wei, Zhang Da, Hu Rong and Wang Yiyang, would go on to form some of the most influential and successful independent fashion brands in Shanghai (Wu 2009). When, in 2005, the first issue of Vogue China was launched, much of the focus lay on the Chinese models on the cover. Yet inside the issue also featured this famous quartet prominently, as ‘China’s new force in design’ (Wu 2009, 148). The fashion system in Shanghai still holds true to much of the creative momentum that Chen instigated. However Chen Yifei’s involvement in producing films that emphasised the narrative of traditional Shanghai and Haipai culture, as a way to preserve the legacy of a city that was quickly being demolished, subsequently caused him to become directly and intellectually involved in the formation of Shanghai’s early creative infrastructure as well.

**Creative Clusters**

Li Wuwei (2011) explains that the concept of the creative industries was introduced to China in Shanghai, and in 2005 the Shanghai municipal government issued policies to stimulate the development of the creative industries. It was at this time that the first iterations of Shanghai Fashion Week were also taking place. Creative clusters have become a key policy-led strategy for engaging with the evolving creative industries sector in China. According to Li (2011, 102), Creative clusters are no longer ‘just ‘precincts’ or ‘old warehouses’ enclosed by walls, they are open communities combining work, life and commercial activities’. For fashion designers, creative clusters can be an important place to locate a business and therefore creative clusters are valuable, and possibly unique urban additions to the fashion system in Shanghai.
The first creative cluster that was developed in Shanghai is called Tianzifang, located in the French Concession in Taikang Road. Tianzifang was named by Huang Yongyu, the internationally acclaimed Chinese artist, known for his woodblock prints, after Tian Zifang (田子方), who was the earliest recorded painter in China (Zhang 2010b). Huang changed the last character ‘fang’ 方 into ‘fang’ 坊 meaning streets or lanes with storefronts and workrooms, especially for craftsmen, artists and other skilled people, hence Tianzifang (田子坊) (Figure 3.4).

Figure 3.4: Plaque in Lane 210 at the entrance to Tianzifang.


It is less well known that Chen Yifei was instrumental in the formation of the early ideology of this cluster. Chen Yifei was invited to visit the development site by Wu Meisen, the site’s chief consultant and planner while it was under consideration for demolition in 1999. However Chen Yifei convinced the authorities to promote Tianzifang as a creative and artistic quarter in a similar way to SoHo in New York, as he emphasised the fact that Tianzifang was originally the gathering place of writers, painters, artists and intellectuals who assembled here from the time that the site was the Xinhua Art College (March, Wang and Yao 2009).

To support the formative cluster, he opened separate studios for his pottery, painting and photography businesses in Tianzifang, at the junction where Lane 210
enters the hutong from Taikang Road. He also attracted his friend Er Dongqiang (Deke Er) who was famous for documenting the destruction of Shanghai’s old buildings, to establish a photography studio. Subsequently intense media campaigns that were aligned with the prevailing implementation of creative industry policy meant by 2002, Tianzifang was established as one of eighteen cultural and creative clusters in Shanghai.

Tianzifang is an important creative destination because fashion designers as well as other creative practitioners were encouraged to populate these new spaces (Zhang 2010b). This helped to generate momentum for an emerging national awareness of the potential of the Chinese creative economy at a time when Shanghai’s governing body was coming to terms with the impact of creative and cultural industry policy (Keane 2007; Li 2009). However tensions between design as an individual pursuit and ‘industry’, which infers the pursuit of profit, meant running a small creative business was difficult, as new commercial values attributed to the gentrification of these areas became apparent.

The core purpose of creative clusters is often blurred and is subject to diverse economic, social and political forces. For instance, Tsui (2009, 234) notes that fashion designers moved quickly into the creative cluster, The Lofts, in Shanghai, only to have to close their businesses soon after as neither wholesale buyers nor clients visited the building. Yet Tianzifang’s central location in urban Shanghai has ensured its success as a cluster role model. Small fashion brands as well as restaurants have flourished, although tenant turnover has been high (Figure 3-5). Tianzifang also provides foreign tourists with a view of traditional Shanghai Shikumen, or lane houses as it trades upon its cultural roots.49

49 Shikumen means literally ‘black door with a stone frame’. It is the simplest and oldest architectural style of lane house.
Many of the business owners in Tianzifang speak English due to the diverse customers the centre attracts and therefore in some ways the success of Tianzifang lies in its role as a cultural intermediary, however critics note that because of the replacement of many of the artist’s studios and workshops with small retail ventures, its true purpose has been lost (Figure 3.5). As Li Wuwei (2009) says, tolerance is important and a change to traditional thinking is necessary for creativity and by extension for creative clusters to be allowed to enrich the city. Furthermore, the government’s official stance of support for creative endeavour is often undone by its lack of implementation or corruption at lower levels of power (Lemos 2012). Accordingly, some clusters that rely solely on fashion have become speculative ventures motivated often by the appreciation of real estate, rather than creative policy and as a result the success of Tianzifang means that it is difficult for tenants to feel secure about their place in the creative cluster.

This is evidenced in the insatiable pursuit of capital gain by state authorities, and a lack of awareness for the maintenance of culturally important memory, which has meant Chen Yifei’s iconic studio in Tianzifang has come under threat as real estate values increased and its lease disputed (Ling 2012). When this occurred, the studio retaliated by reiterating Chen Yifei’s importance:
As pioneers of Tianzifang Creative Park, Chen Yifei’s celebrity and brand value enhances Tianzifang’s cultural and creative atmosphere and it has become a new landmark of Shanghai fashion because of the creative contributions it has made. It should receive rent concessions because of the social functions made to the cultural industries (Wang 2012a).

Shortly after this occurrence in October 2012, Er Dongqiang, Chen Yifei’s friend and a co-founder of Tianzifang whose studio was located opposite that of Chen Yifei, was left with little choice but to leave the creative cluster after twelve years, as his rents also became unnegotiable (Zhou 2012). These are not isolated incidents and in 696 Weihai Lu, another artist’s cluster, Ma Liang (known commercially as Maleonn), a well-known painter and contemporary fashion photographer was forced out of his studio after seven years. He now works from an apartment in the suburban Songjiang district. He explained, ‘It’s hard for artists to afford a studio in these cultural and creative industrial parks. There’s no support from authorities’ (Zhou 2012).

696 Weihai Road was a popular cluster that housed working artists as well as art galleries yet the city’s five-year plan means that this area will become part of an international media district because the Shanghai Television Station, and the largest newspaper group, Wenxin Publishing Group are located nearby. The Jing’an District government who control this precinct hope to turn Weihai Road into an extension of the prestigious and expensive Nanjing Road, the home of many flagship stores belonging to European luxury brands (Bound 2011). In addition, the demolition of the Shanghai studio of the prominent Chinese artist, Ai Weiwei, on the city’s outskirts means other artists in the city are also facing the loss of their spaces. An old factory in downtown Shanghai, which has survived for more than four years as a dissident artist colony, and is only a few hundred meters from Shanghai’s main luxury fashion street Nanjing Road, which hosts the Louis Vuitton China flagship

50 Songjiang is a large fashion and textile hub located an hour from Shanghai.

51 Ai Weiwei is possibly China’s most outspoken contemporary artist, known for his comments about living conditions in China. He has substantial support from creative communities outside China (Fok 2013).
store, Prada and numerous other big-name brands, now faces closure as the local government has moved in to evict the tenants (Poulton 2011).

However, changes in the appreciation of the economic value of creativity in Shanghai means that authorities are more capable of ascertaining how creative clusters should be managed and it is often known publicly to potential tenants and in advance that such areas are to be re-developed. He Shouchang, a vice-director of the government support team for the promotion of cultural and creative industry development, indicates support is available for artists if they find the right area for their studio, ‘Some creative industry parks are particularly for artists, some are for business and some are for public service and cultural development. Each person or enterprise has to find the appropriate place to settle down and they will get support’ (Zhou 2012).

3.3 CONCLUSION

In this chapter the role of fashion has been included in Shanghai’s route to modernity, which began in conjunction with the age of industrialisation in Europe. In section 4.1, I provided a brief historical background to Shanghai’s role as a trading port, and how the Chinese government used a political instrument called jimi, to separate Shanghai from the rest of China by creating the foreign concessions, which in turn served to foster a vibrant cultural milieu caused by multicultural intermingling. Further in this section, this cultural milieu was explained as Haipai culture, which became specific only to Shanghai in the 1920s until it was phased out by advent of the Republican period and the absence of cultural development during the Mao Zedong era.

However at the start of the post-Mao period, there was a shift in the meaning of clothing, from fushi, or costume, to shizhuang, which means fashion. Deng Xioping’s opening of China for trade in 1978 re-instated the attributes of Haipai, and now citizens of Haipai culture are perceived as globally interconnected and entrepreneurial in nature. At the same time, Shanghai’s early fashion system was taking shape, with education institutions, and early incarnations of fashion gatekeepers appearing in the form of magazines and award ceremonies. Thus the ghost of Haipai has been resurrected as a vehicle to raise attention to the new status of Shanghai.
In Section 4.2, I discussed the fashion system in China and provided a contemporary account of the environment in the city for fashion designers. The investigation of the famous contemporary painter, Chen Yifei showed how his return from New York enabled the early infrastructure of a fashion system. He also provided momentum for the fashion industry in his role in developing a creative cluster in Shanghai. Consequently, Chen Yifei’s timely and instrumental role as an agent for change in the formation of the evolving fashion system in Shanghai means that some Chinese fashion designers can now capitalise on a clothing industry infrastructure by utilising the design ethos of Haipai culture and also upon Shanghai’s unique heritage.

Importantly, Chen Yifei created the template for a commercial pathway for some of Shanghai’s now famous and commercially successful fashion designers, and in doing so provided an embryonic Shanghai fashion industry with legitimate role models for other independently minded designers to follow. In the next chapter, I examine the first group of designers, with this contextual background in mind.
Chapter 4: Getting Started: Emerging Designers

In this chapter, I use interviews with five emerging fashion designers to gain insights into the development of their aesthetic as they try to build their businesses, reputations and brands. I chose these designers because they are beginning their creative practice and in a transient phase, moving mainly from immersion in the ubiquitous, industrialised clothing industry, toward engagement with Shanghai’s fashion system. They are yet to be validated.

Identifying a Chinese design aesthetic inevitably draws attention to Shanghai’s creative and cultural dichotomy, where the confusion of cultural symbolism and the plethora of contextual differences that constitute this distinct creative milieu means designers spend much time mired in the act of the repetitive reassembly of cultural symbols, before they become experienced enough to conceptualise their aesthetic position. Therefore, in line with the model demonstrated in the introduction to this thesis, I locate these designers in the clothing industry.

To understand their activities, I examine each designer’s practice in three themes, in keeping with the research questions. The first theme (professional development) investigates areas of professional development, education and working...
Chapter 4: Getting Started: Emerging Designers

practices. The second theme (creative settings) explores urban creative settings, including creative clusters, and institutions such as fashion week to understand how emerging designers might collaborate across creative fields. The third theme (local versus global) considers whether designers are focussed on Shanghai’s domestic fashion system, or the global fashion system, and how they are constructing their aesthetic. I conclude the chapter by considering whether their activities are significantly different to established models.

I introduce the interviewees in the following order: beginning with Chen Mei, who has just opened her first retail shop, Hu Tao who has recently closed a retail shop and Zhou Liang, who has shown several collections to the public. These designers are all aged in their mid-to-late twenties. In addition, in their mid-thirties, Wang Wei, who works as a factory agent, and Luo Zhixiang, who runs a shop at Shanghai’s fabric market complete the group.
4.1 CHEN MEI

In 2009, Chen Mei (Vanessa) moved from Beijing to Shanghai to establish her fashion business. She has a business degree from the Capital University of Economics and Business, however she lacks formal fashion training, so her knowledge of the clothing industry comes mainly from experience in fashion retail. With financial capital from her husband, Chen Mei specifically opened a retail store in the French Concession on a busy street corner, reasoning the space would also function as an office and design area. She said she had fewer connections in Shanghai and it was difficult to find a shop site, however an estate agency friend provided potential locations, and Chen Mei dealt directly with the landlord to negotiate a contract.

Her shop is small, of about thirty square metres and has limited storage. The street is noisy, and in summer dust soils her stock. Excess shop fittings and inventory are stored at her apartment nearby. However, the location of her shop in the French Concession is important to Chen Mei, as some of her customers are European, which influences her product offering and allows higher prices. She works by herself, undertaking the administrative as well as creative roles in her shop. Key issues that concern Chen Mei are the opaque business environment and corruption, working with other designers to produce and sell her designs, and trying to build an aesthetic point of difference while operating on the fringes of the clothing industry.

Professional Development: The local land bureau

Chen Mei’s distanced relationship with her landlord illustrates how opportunism from officials affects her business. She explained that her landlord is married to the head of the local licensing bureau for land management, providing her with access to government property, which includes the building housing the shop they have rented to Chen Mei. Her rent is paid in cash, to the landlord’s driver. As a result, she was not confident of the security of her lease because ‘nobody finds trouble for the landlord’ (Chen Mei 2012), however she was working quickly to organise a second retail location.

52 The Capital University of Economics and Business (CUEB), Beijing, China was established in 1956.
Not surprisingly, Chen Mei was outspoken about the opaque business environment in China. She also felt the government was ambivalent about creative enterprise. As she explained, ‘for me, I am too small. If you are a factory owner and you have the right connections, then maybe there is more help but they are only focussed on export quantity to keep their debts paid’ (Chen Mei 2012). Her statement showed that there are differences between product quality for the domestic market, and for export. Chen Mei felt instead of looking for help, the key for any kind of business was to have good relationships with family members and also with government although as she also explained, business relationships with government officials take a lot of time and money to nurture.

*Creative Settings: Making and Selling*

Chen Mei focuses mainly on stocking her own shop, yet she also places her designs with other small retailers, as well as selling on the Internet. As well, she offers a made-to-measure service. In her shop, she carries her own label that she manufactures in collaboration with friends from Beijing, and she also stocks their brands. Their unique, collaborative production methods of production are noteworthy. Firstly, Chen Mei liaises closely with other emerging designers in Shanghai and Beijing and sells their designs under her own brand in her shop. Secondly, the original designers also sell the same styles through their own outlets under their own names, and again on Taobao under their own label.\(^{53}\) In this way Chen Mei and her friends collectively increase production volumes, meaning they can outsource to small garment factories for more consistent quality control.

Chen Mei personally travels to each factory depending on the technical specifications of each collection to discuss how garments might be varied for different designers. She explained visiting the factories was necessary because some factories often misunderstood her directions. For instance she recently produced fifty garments, working closely with a small factory of eight workers. However, occasionally the small factory team would hire itself as a complete work unit to a

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\(^{53}\) Taobao Marketplace was founded by the Alibaba Group in 2003 and provides a platform for small businesses and individual entrepreneurs to open online retail stores that mainly cater to Chinese consumers. It is similar to eBay.
large factory, causing her problems. Chen Mei explains, ‘It is because they do not have any contracts, and sometimes the big factories offer them a fixed price to come and work, especially when big orders are due. For me I lose everything when the production stops’ (2012).

Chen Mei said Taobao offered the opportunity to be near other fashion brands, which is important for exposure; ‘If you don’t go there, (to Taobao) no one will find you. They won’t go searching for you because there is too much to find (on Taobao)’ (Chen Mei 2012). The ‘always-on’ access to the Internet demonstrates how small creative entrepreneurs in Shanghai, have circumvented problems and costs associated with traditional ‘bricks and mortar’ retail stores. This is a popular and low-cost strategy for entry to a fashion system in the early stages of a fashion career. Chen Mei also offers a made-to-measure service because some of her customers are expatriates and their physical proportions differ from Asian bodies.

I do not have so much stock and the designs are unique, so my good customers know that they can ask for something to be made in their size following the style. This way I can still keep the sample on the floor and my stock level stays the same (Chen Mei 2012).

In order to promote her business, Chen Mei relies primarily on attractive window displays however; ‘My shop is on a corner and it is very noisy and dirty outside so I have to always pay for someone to clean the windows, and also when it is raining no-one comes’ (Chen Mei 2012).

Chen Mei distrusts the local media and had considered hiring a part-time public relations manager. She explained how she had observed that Chinese fashion and lifestyle representation is second to the promotion of foreign brands in local magazines. She also spoke of how most local fashion publications fail before their second issue, or of fashion blogs that are not updated beyond a few posts, ‘Everyone wants to be famous but it is not very good because they are just following the celebrity culture’ (2012). Her customers also influence her promotion. Some are expatriates and do not speak Chinese; conversely some speak little English.

The local government provides other opportunities for promotion, and Shanghai Fashion Week is much anticipated each year, however Chen Mei was dismissive of the event. Shanghai’s Fashion Week is considered by some to be an important step for emerging designers, especially for its role in enhancing cultural
capital. It is one of four annual events, including Art, Movie and Television and Tourism Festivals.\textsuperscript{54} She was conscious of the government’s control, and felt strongly it was focussed on the global prestige Shanghai hoped to gain by association, ‘It’s just for the governments’ relationships you know, so they look good and then their wives get the relationship with the designer’ (2012).

Chen Mei said some designers felt obliged to participate in Shanghai Fashion Week because they relied on stable dealings with local councils, despite possibly not recovering the show costs. The ramifications of being involved, once invited, go beyond the three days of the event, and tremors can be felt throughout the year as designers try to lease government property, or register businesses and extend official relationships. In this instance, Liu Kang’s (2012) commentary on the residual resonance of Mao’s collectivism in Chinese society comes to mind, as designers face another tension. How do they stay politically aligned with the opaque mandate of the national good while reaching for independence and creative freedom?

\textit{Local versus Global: Building an aesthetic, localisation and copying}

In the Chinese press, Shanghai Fashion Week faces stiff opposition for coverage from the nationally oriented China Fashion Week in Beijing.\textsuperscript{55} While on the fringes designers may debate the merits inherent in participating in either event, the fact is many designers officially lauded in Beijing are not household names, and occupy roles in successful state-owned manufacturing enterprises where their legitimacy is measured in terms of export output volumes, and their alignment with the national good. Chen Mei points to this disparity in her comments on Beijing designers; ‘It’s because all the government is from Beijing. Where do you think Shanghai gets its money? Beijing always tells Shanghai what to do. Those designers (in Beijing) have to stay real close (to the government) if they want to make money’ (Chen Mei 2012).

\textsuperscript{54}The official name of this event is the Shanghai International Fashion Culture Festival, but it is referred to as Shanghai Fashion Week.

\textsuperscript{55}I note that in 2010 at the time of Shanghai Fashion Week, there was no coverage of designer shows in the Shanghai Daily newspaper, however by 2012 a professional website existed for the event.
Many small shop owners have close associations with the clothing industry and can take advantage of excess from huge volumes of orders placed by foreign fashion houses for production in factories around Shanghai. Leakage into the local vicinity is inevitable, mostly in the form of production over-runs, samples and faulty garments. These shops re-locate often and without warning, so local knowledge is necessary to find them. When Chen Mei opened her shop she didn’t have enough stock, so she filled her racks with foreign brands from sources that complimented her style. She is slowly replacing this inventory with her own designs, however Chen Mei continues to include branded accessories, such as silk scarves branded with famous names like Louis Vuitton, Hermès and Leonard Paris with her garment displays to increase the cachet of her garments. It is clear these are counterfeit because they are sourced outside legitimate channels, yet in contrast, Chen Mei stressed the design process for own label resulted in unique and original clothing. She explained her friends also had their own style consisting of Chinese elements and traditions, ‘We all try to design from what we know about China, to use the original crafts and styles but to make them more up-to date … we should be proud of China but most people want foreign brands’ (Chen Mei 2012).

Chen Mei said some successful Chinese fashion designers copied foreign clothing styles, and she believed China had its own history to draw upon. However she could not explain how she combined Chinese culture with foreign garment styles, other than to say that Chinese culture had a long history of high quality that she tried to incorporate in her clothing. Her friends also used ethnic and handcrafted textiles to represent the ‘true China’ although she found these garments did not sell very well (Chen Mei 2012). Also, the diversity of her customers meant it was difficult to satisfy everyone, while the reality of fixed retail costs caused her to focus on profit.

Some want the real Chinese ideas, especially my Western customers, but usually this kind of clothing is very simple and I can’t make much margin unless I use expensive silk fabric. It is easy for the machinists. I have to build the brand name of the designers, and my brand, so we can make more (Chen Mei 2012).

However Chen Mei also indicated that travelling to different countries was important for her perspective, explaining, ‘one of my habits is to travel a lot and I enjoy it for the culture’ (Chen Mei 2012). Travel was an important way for her to understand
how other cultures behaved, and also a fresh way to bring new ideas into her work. She explained this as having the opportunity to look at the ‘original life of the countries and not the life in magazines’ (Chen Mei 2012).
4.2  HU TAO

Hu Tao is twenty-eight. She describes herself as self-taught and her motivation for a career in fashion is self-employment. After completing high school in Shanghai, Hu Tao studied Japanese so she could work with a denim company in Japan before returning to the city to start her own fashion label. The experience of working overseas for a foreign company has provided important skills, valuable industry knowledge and a small network of contacts to draw upon as she builds her label. To do this, Hu Tao has also explored a variety of models during attempts to establish a viable business, including wholesale, retail and using the Internet. Hu Tao’s key concerns have been the maintenance of her cash flow, trying to simultaneously produce and promote her collections, and trying to rearrange the signs of her cultural heritage into a brand that can gain traction in a consumer market she perceives is interested in only foreign brands.

Her most recent attempt at viability was a shop in the creative cluster 1933 Old Millfun, which she closed after a year.\textsuperscript{56} She chose this creative zone because of its spaciousness, and because she could not afford a shop in Tianzifang, but expected more foot-traffic than she received. Her perceptions of new associations, specific support services and a potential stream of new customers also did not eventuate. For instance, Hu Tao said 1933 Old Millfun often looks empty because its decentralised nature provides open spaces that are architecturally pleasing, but difficult for customers to navigate. The emptiness is in direct contrast to Tianzifang’s central location and vibrant laneways with tenants close to each other (Figures 4.2 and 4.3). She also indicated financial aid was available from the local council for creative businesses in 1933 Old Millfun, however she was unaware of how to apply for it, yet she understood it was conditional on remaining a sole trader and financial reporting:

\textsuperscript{56} 1933 Old Millfun, in Hongkou district, originally housed the Shanghai Municipal Council Slaughterhouse built in 1933. The complex focuses on creative fashion lifestyles and brand promotion and it houses approximately 30 creative enterprises. It has tried to emulate the success of Tianzifang, Shanghai’s premier creative area.
There is just me and I don’t have time to spend. It takes a lot of time to fill in the forms and to find the right department and then the government moves so slowly, and sometimes the official wants some money (Hu Tao 2012).

Hu Tao preferred to rely on advice from friends and family because the information she received was specific and to be trusted although she said other small business owners also seemed to be mutually supportive. Hu Tao’s partner ran a commercial painting studio, yet between them they knew little about business management, which she felt contributed to the failure of their shop. However she also said she had relied on private family money to pay for business licences, and many other fees for administrative services when she opened her shop, and her obligations to repay this money placed additional pressure on the enterprise. When her retail shop in Old Millfun closed, Hu Tao was left with unsold stock that she sold on Taobao, and she now used an online shop on Taobao to sell small quantities of clothing, to test new ideas and to interact with her consumers.

Figure 4.2: The outside of 1933 Old Millfun.

Courtesy: Tan Choon Hong, 2009.
Professional Development: Maintaining Cashflow

Hu Tao also maintains cashflow by selling clothing designs to large fashion manufacturers such as department stores or large factories. In the Eurocentric fashion system, designers traditionally sold clothing illustrations on a freelance basis to manufacturers and were paid per piece. For example, Kawamura (2004, 127) notes how the Japanese designers, Yohji Yamamoto and Kenzo Takada used this method in Paris in the 1960s in the early stages of their businesses. McRobbie (1998, 96-98) also notes emerging designers in England in the 1990s undertook this path, albeit with mixed success, when they sold designs to Japanese manufacturers.

Yet Hu Tao is also the only designer in this group with first-hand knowledge of department stores. When Hu Tao’s agent sells her designs for the department stores in-house clothing range there are two steps to the process, and she has no control...
over the eventual production. Initially she must provide a sketch, and subsequently she must organise a first or production sample.\(^5^7\) She said it was never her label on the garment, because she sold the sample outright. However if there was a production problem she would be called to the factory and this was considered to be part of her responsibility. However Hu Tao explained sometimes her drawings were stolen. She could do little about it, and she was also unsure where in the process chain this was happening, ‘I don’t know whether it was the agent or the factory who took the idea. They each said they didn’t know, but I didn’t get paid and they used it in their factory collection but what can I do’ (Hu Tao 2012).

Creative Settings: Producing and promoting a collection

It is extremely time consuming to locate components for her clothing collections and the small factories she uses are often unable to find what she needs, or more importantly, to guarantee quality. Like most other designers in this group, she often travels around Shanghai on public transport. The city is vast and busy, and this process is tiring, occupying much of her day. Hu Tao sourced decorative items for her garments at numerous small outlets and also travelled to the Bund, where she visited several accessories markets for buttons, zips and thread, as well as various lining fabrics (Figures 4.4 and 4.5).\(^5^8\) Hu Tao often goes to Lujiaibang Road (South Bund Soft-Spinning Material Market) for fabric and then to a popular accessories market close by:

It is hard because I just go and try to follow my list but I always spend too much time looking at all the new details and interesting accessories and then I have to spend maybe one hour or two hours to get to my next place (Hu Tao 2012).

\(^5^7\) A first sample is a high quality sample garment that is repeatedly referred to throughout the manufacturing phase as an exemplar. It is often followed by a second sample, with small technical changes. A first sample is constructed by a sample machinist who is typically more skilled, experienced and more expensive to employ than a production machinist.

\(^5^8\) The Bund (along Zhongshan Dong Yi Road) is the historic waterfront area on the bank of the Huangpu River on the Puxi side of the city. It originally comprised the English Concession.
For example, the recent production of a small denim collection required special components. Heavy duty zips, rivets and thread are required because denim garments usually undergo industrial finishing processes like enzyme washing and sandblasting, and these items were sourced from a friend in a large denim factory. Local knowledge is also important for quality. Hu Tao knew the YKK zip brand is often specified by European denim designers because of its reputation for reliability, however Hu Tao explained the brand was not highly regarded in China:

Even I can find fake YKK at the markets and sometimes the factories don’t care. They just buy the cheapest ones and then when I have a problem because it [the zip] breaks, it makes me miss the delivery deadlines, so I have to check the quality myself (Hu Tao 2012).

She also used her father’s trading company to import small meterages of cotton denim from the company she had worked for in Japan. Hu Tao explained Japanese denim was the best quality, and Chinese denim was of inconsistent supply and suitable only for the domestic market. The collection was manufactured by a local factory and transported to her friend’s factory for industrial washing, before Hu Tao helped to press the finished garments for sale on Taobao.

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59 It is well known in the industry that Japanese denim is of high quality. It commands a premium price because of its premium construction and the skilled, artisanal craft required to operate the original Toyoda weaving looms that are used in some denim factories.
Figure 4.4: Approaching the Caoyang Road fabric market.

Photo: Tim Lindgren, 2005.

Figure 4.5: Entrance to the Caoyang road fabric market.

Photo: Tim Lindgren, 2005.
Hu Tao’s limited resources means promoting her clothing collection is difficult, so she relies almost solely on participation in local fashion events. Shanghai has a vibrant entertainment culture evident in numerous bars and clubs, providing opportunities for fashion designers to show collections to the public. For instance, Shanghai’s cosmopolitan culture of working and relaxing late into the evening makes fashion events popular for networking. At m1NT bar at 318 Fuzhou Road, a designer collection night is held each month, and Dada bar at 115 Xingfu Road in Changning district is also popular for fashion promotion. Hu Tao says, ‘sometimes I don’t really know anyone but there are some small [sic] famous people there but usually they don’t stay for long. There are lots of parties to go to’ (2012).

Opportunities to show clothing ranges as entertainment for club patrons demonstrate how establishing a brand is a trade-off between low-cost publicity and uncertain return. However Hu Tao felt she must be involved if only to see what other designers are doing, and this was also her first attempt at publicity. ‘The fashion shows don’t cost me much and I can use my friends as models… Shanghai Fashion Week is too professional for me’ (Hu Tao 2012).

Consequently, her perspective of Shanghai Fashion Week was less than positive. She felt access was prohibitive and could not rationalise the financial benefits of participation. Her tentativeness is indicative of the ‘circling’ by emerging designers around this event, on one hand quietly hoping for a chance at fashion stardom, yet on the other, unsure how to plot a path to that point. Instead, Hu Tao was more interested in fashion competitions than Shanghai Fashion Week. She felt she was not famous enough to participate noting how a place on the official list of preferred fashion designers was necessary, yet if one were invited, substantial fees would be incurred. Furthermore, she believed participants in Shanghai Fashion Week had mostly studied abroad and were already winners of fashion competitions.

*Local versus Global: Rearranging the Signs*

Jennifer Craik’s (2009, 301) descriptions of the tenuous link between the global zeitgeist and ethnic and local references are appropriate to Hu Tao’s practice, and Hu Tao’s description of her design signature echoes Craik’s comments about fashion and post-colonialism. Hu Tao’s conceptualisation of her clothes as ‘sweet
and bubbly’, despite also declaring her attraction to ethnic handicrafts represents a contradictory aesthetic. When she described travelling to the countryside on weekends to visit village markets in a search for old textiles, it was because she felt this part of China was disappearing as foreign ideas took over, and she wanted to represent it in her work. Like many designers in this group, Hu Tao also struggles to find a place to situate these ever-present icons of Chinese historical fashion; ‘My style is not an embroidery of Chineseness and I call it trans-wave’ (Hu Tao 2012).

Hu Tao’s clothing was for the local market. She had tried to incorporate traditional embroidery in her clothing without incorporating obvious Chinese motifs of dragons and peony flowers, however she cannot afford to pay the embroiderer’s costs. Yet Hu Tao aspires to greater things, and in keeping with McRobbie’s (1998, 115) depiction of an art vocabulary to build cultural capital, Hu Tao has named her clothing line ‘Nutcracker’ in a reference to the classical music composer, Tchaikovsky’s famous Nutcracker Suite. However like many other designers with dual Chinese and English names, this double entendre also relates to her Chinese name. ‘Hu Tao’ translates as ‘walnut’ (胡 桃), and her retention of two names is a succinct way to align with Western ideals while staying true to one’s Chinese identity.
4.3 ZHOU LIANG

Zhou Liang (Vincent Zhou) has pursued several pathways including studying visual arts before arriving at fashion design. He graduated from Shanghai Art and Design Academy, and in 2006, set up his Z Gallery fashion studio. After studying at the Shanghai-Paris International Fashion Academy (IFA) until 2009, Zhou Liang held a number of part time jobs with other design companies as part of his internship program at IFA. After competing in the first graduation runway show at IFA, he became a contestant in the initial season of My Style, Shanghai’s version of the popular American television show, Project Runway. This provided him with confidence to open a design studio (Dragon TV 2009). The key areas of concern for Zhou Liang are the lack of a base to work from, difficulties in promoting his brand without capital, and interpreting the merging of cultures that is Shanghai’s modern legacy.

Professional Development: Without a Shop or Studio

Zhou Liang operates without a centralised workroom, studio or shop and consequently his business is conducted informally in the sample rooms and cutting tables of numerous small factories around Shanghai. Therefore he spends much of his day in transit between suppliers and factories, usually on public transport. A mobile phone is his most important tool as he places orders, checks production and organises deliveries of fabric and garment components to small factories. As he said, ‘I don’t have time to manage staff and my business is not big enough yet, so I do this all myself’ (Zhou Liang 2012). However his interaction with small manufacturers is very important because he finds learning about various production processes valuable for their applications to his own practice.

Zhou Liang noted how garment production in the clothing industry in Shanghai is inundated with foreign ideas that are not globally synchronised. Because clothing destined for many different markets is being manufactured simultaneously, Zhou Liang encounters vast seasonal variations in the factories he visits, causing him

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60 IFA Paris established its school in Shanghai in 2002, the first Sino-French joint venture in fashion education approved by the Chinese government.
confusion, but also testing the boundaries of what references he should be including in his collection, which is destined for the local market. He feels an urgency to utilise ideas that have not been released to market but the context is important. ‘Where I make my evening wear, there are some interesting ideas from a foreign company that I can use, but it is for their winter, and we are going into Shanghai’s new season now’ (Zhou Liang 2011).

Like Chen Mei, Zhou Liang visits street shops for excess production from factories, however he explained his interest lay in accessories he might use in his photography campaigns. His comment points to differences between the domestic and export markets that sustain this activity. As Zhou Liang explained to Lee Mack (2008), ‘It’s a good idea to buy accessories in small boutiques because they usually have an over-stock of items for brands that are not selling in China’. Yet this scenario also provides evidence of how constant immersion in a fashion system laced with foreign signs and symbols contributes to difficulties in defining a personal aesthetic for this group. Furthermore this activity takes place in the overlap of the clothing industry, and the fashion system, where grey market, or excess production from factories might be found.

Creative Settings: Promoting a Brand

Unlike Chen Mei and Hu Tao, Zhou Liang’s focus has been to try to create a brand before he has stabilised his collections, which is exacerbated by his lack of financial capital, but also demonstrates how creative business structures are sometimes built incrementally without a clear sense of purpose before designers are legitimised. Maintaining a steady income is a consistent problem for designers who are yet to be accepted by the fashion system, whilst simultaneously relying on it for cashflow, and often they have a separate job that pays the bills. Becker (2008, 96) refers to this as a ‘day job’ that provides income while their ‘art job’ is yet to be fully realised, so Zhou Liang sometimes revisits his previous career as a visual artist, aiding fashion shops in their window displays, and providing advice on internal shop fit-outs.

Zhou Liang feels he lacks information about how to create the right structure for his business. For instance, in a recent news article he commented on the difficulties of becoming an independent fashion designer, ‘I know how to design, but I need professional advice on marketing, event organisation and even business
development, but there is little support available for up-and-coming designers in Shanghai’ (You 2010b). As a result he has concentrated on building social capital by holding fashion parades that consume his resources. As he said after a recent foray, ‘I spent all my savings on this event. I need to make serious money to get my next fashion show rolling. I need to sell the clothes and find someone to do the next production’ (Zhou Liang 2011).

As with Hu Tao, the m1NT bar is also part of his promotional strategy and a script for his fashion show provides further clarity about the purpose of this event, demonstrating how designers are portrayed as entertainment in this early stage of their career.

This evening’s FCC Art, Fashion & Luxury Networking Soiree offers the usual card sharing, job-seeking chitchat, as well as a fashion show by Zhou Liang. Drinking and mingling officially begins at 7pm, running until 10:30. Zhou Liang fashion show at 9:00pm at m1NT (Blagden 2010).

The Fortune Connection Club press information also provides further insight into the debateable value of these events, especially where the designer’s collection are expected to attract patrons. For instance, ‘Zhou Liang is currently a ‘university instructor, evening gown designer for Dior, and running his own eponymous brand’ (FCC Club 2010). 61 Chinese fashion graduates commonly teach at Universities, as in the case of designers in further groups, and it is also possible that Zhou Liang interned in a reciprocal program with the prominent French fashion house of Christian Dior when he studied at the Shanghai-Paris IFA, however the uneven attempt at validation places the spotlight on processes of pseudo-legitimisation that contribute to a lack of credibility for emerging designers, instead serving to restrict them from the fashion system.

Furthermore, inherent pressures within the Eurocentric fashion system urge fashion designers toward celebrity, yet without the substance of cashflow, the pursuit

61 According to their website, The FC Club (Fortune Connection Club) is the biggest English business social organisation in China serving over 100,000 active members in Shanghai, Beijing, Hangzhou, Hong Kong and Singapore.
of celebrity is an unsatisfactory approach to legitimisation. In regard to Shanghai Fashion Week, Zhou Liang perceived few benefits in taking part.

I’ve been invited by Shanghai Fashion Week, [sic] a few times, but I said no to all of the invitations. I don't think it can bring me any substantial benefit. There are no good fashion buyers or department stores present yet (You 2010a).

However Zhou Liang’s ability to participate is related more closely to his cashflow. He has explained that it is difficult for him to put together a seasonal collection if he has few stockists, and in turn, he cannot attract stockists without publicity, thus like Hu Tao, he retains a focus on low cost collaborative ventures to build social capital, while retaining a job that provides a sure income.

*Local versus Global: A Merging of Cultures*

As has been explained, Shanghai is typified by a merging of fashion cultures, which often makes designers feel they are caught in the global spotlight before they are capable, but there is also a great deal of global interest in China from many sectors. The mixed cultural symbolism influences Zhou Liang’s aesthetic, ‘Haipai style is unique to Shanghai, and Shanghai is very stylish because of it. This is also my style. My career goal is to have my own brand and shops, to have two collections and two shows every year’ (Mack 2008).62

However, in 2010, Zhou Liang was working as a design supervisor at the Chuangyi Tang Clothes Company and also running his private studio, the Vincent Zhou Fashion Design Studio in Shanghai when he produced his first commercial clothing collection in an attempt to capture this aesthetic (Figure 4.6). Yet he also explains he is a sole parent and he has a responsibility to provide an income, ‘my inspiration mainly comes from my daughter. I always have a princess image when I design. That’s probably why I focus on pure, romantic and elegant dresses and skirts’ (You 2010b). However, Like Chen Mei and Hu Tao, Zhou Liang has not been able to establish a distinct design aesthetic, and consequently his collections have not yet been received favourably.

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62 Haipai style is explained in the next chapter.
Figure 4.6: Zhou Liang: Flower Girl collection.

Courtesy: Zhou Liang.
4.4 WANG WEI

Wang Wei is older, and more experienced in the clothing industry than the other designers in this group. Her family are from Beijing and after finishing high school she studied at Shanghai’s Donghua University, where she completed an undergraduate degree in 1998 in the School of Textiles before moving to Guangzhou, to work for a Hong Kong garment agent. Her speciality was knitwear and this was Wang Wei’s first opportunity to travel beyond Mainland China:

When I went to this job, Hong Kong was like the centre of the world. Everyone was working like we were crazy. All the companies had clients from Europe and the U.S and we were travelling in and out of China every second day organising the samples (Wang Wei 2011).

In 2003, Wang Wei relocated to Shanghai to be near specialised factories that her clients required, and in 2004, she decided to start her own label, mainly because of opportunities generated by her professional associations. Wang Wei still works primarily as a factory agent, so key concerns with her design practice include how her strong industry knowledge appears to relegate her to a localised fashion economy, keeping her isolated on the outskirts of the Shanghai’s fashion system, and the tension of what it means to be Chinese.

Wang Wei runs her label for three reasons. In the first instance, she places her collection in two or three local retail shops (Figure 4.7). Secondly she sells her collection to other designers for rebranding with their own label, an activity reminiscent of Chen Mei’s practice. Thirdly, she is able to organise production for emerging designers because of her factory access. She also helps designers wishing to export their collections by organising, for a price, the factory ‘chop’, available only to accredited manufacturers. Significantly, when she graduated from Donghua University, she did so with approximately four hundred other students, many of whom have entered the clothing industry to work mainly in various administrative and production positions around Shanghai.

63 Donghua University’s School of Textiles has degree programs for Bachelor of Engineering, Master of Science and Engineering, and also a Doctoral Science program. It was among the first schools at the University to provide a graduate degree program.
Thus it is Wang Wei’s direct link to industry via this network of classmates that provides her with a distinct point of difference, and this underpins her practice. However Wang Wei must be diligent: ‘I must always visit them and give them gifts, but also some of them are my friends from university and we became good friends at school before they went to work in those factories’ (2011). Wang Wei does not have a studio or an office so consequently she spends most of her day in taxis or on other public transport.

*Professional Development: At the Intersection of the Clothing Industry and a Fashion System*
Wang Wei’s working practice provides a closer perspective of the intersection of the clothing and fashion system that other designers do not have access to. Because Wang Wei is a clothing industry ‘insider’, she is able to develop products across a great range of fabric types and construction techniques:

Denim or silk or knitwear, it doesn’t matter, and I can organise all the care labels, the content labels and also for the packing [sic] and also arrange the shipping. Even the quantity can be small if you only need a few units (Wang Wei 2011).

Her regular contact with factory production staff provided a source of new ideas originating largely from designers outside China, and importantly, factory staff also kept her informed about the minutiae of each factory’s production schedules:

I know the sample room manager in three factories and every day I phone them to talk about my production. Sometimes they tell me what fabric foreign designers supply, and how big the quantity is for their range. Maybe I can get some over-run. Sometimes they tell me when the designer will come to China to do QC (Quality control) and I will go there to see what they look like (Wang Wei 2011).

After careful negotiation, Wang Wei uses preconfigured production lines for her own clothing range, thereby utilising techniques and equipment configurations previously established for large production runs of foreign clients. This occurs mostly after hours. In this way she manages to incorporate globally relevant details and trends, perhaps already validated by fashion media, into her small clothing collections. She also purchases excess or over-run imported fabric from the foreign production which is usually better quality, more specialised and more exclusive than domestic textile production.

Alternatively, Wang Wei used sample rooms to place her small production orders. She explained the factories could not set up a production line if the quantity was too small but she could pay a small charge of about Rmb 50 to Rmb 100 (approximately US $10 to $20) to produce her garments in the sample room where the quality would be high. One of the sample rooms in a silk garment factory she uses has more than a hundred sample makers. As has been established by Hu Tao, a common practice means designers source their garment components personally:
For every big Western brand, there is a fake China brand, even Riri zips can be copied if you know where to go, but usually this is for domestic production. If the export order contains fake zips or anything, the client will be unhappy and the government will take their factory export licence (Wang Wei).64

Wang Wei was very knowledgeable about how factories filled orders, and how leakage into the domestic market occurred. In fact Wang Wei depends heavily on the overlap between the clothing industry and the fashion system for her resources. For instance, multiple samples of each garment are produced for quality control during production, especially with large orders. The samples are usually discarded afterwards. Sometimes the client orders ‘salesman samples’, which are also subject to excess production.65 Because factories anticipate production problems, they also routinely produce in excess of the ordered amount of garments.66 Wang Wei explained it is very difficult for the client to control the precise amount of clothing produced. She also explained it was possible to gain access to sub-standard clothing prior to its market release, in which case it could be rebranded with labels other than the original. Quite often the logo label and the point of sale packaging, including the swing-ticket is original, but the actual garment is not. This is how brand name garments filter into the fake markets that exist in various locations in Shanghai.

This activity might be described as copying, yet it illustrates a previously unexplored practice situated on the fringes of the clothing industry, but not legitimately part of the fashion system. In Wang Wei’s case, despite directly utilising production techniques, fabric and the styling of international designers, her small

64 ‘Riri’ is an Italian brand of zips known for their fineness. They are used particularly with high quality fabrics such as silk for eveningwear.

65 Salesman samples are multiple copies of a collection that is for wholesale. For example, each fashion agent in a pre-defined sales territory receives a set for retailers to order from. Some large European brands might produce fifty such sets, before final production quantities are fixed with the manufacturer.

66 This is often known as the ‘plus ten percent rule of production’. An excess of ten percent of the order is produced therefore an order is manufactured to one hundred and ten percent with the best one hundred percent shipped to the client.
collection is destined for a localised marketplace and thus it is unlikely to be seen alongside the original and authentic garments ordered by the original designers. Appropriating ideas is an integral part of her business, and she carefully protects her access to the inner workings of factories, as it is vital to her survival. However she offers a particularly pragmatic Chinese perspective,

This is China. China is different. We have so many people and it is hard to control everything. The government just cares about the money and jobs and if people are copying or working at the fake markets, then they have a job and the government doesn’t worry about them (Wang Wei 2011).

**Creative Settings: On the Outskirts of the Fashion System**

Wang Wei has a ten-year old son who is her main concern and all her decisions are for his benefit. She and her husband wish for another child, but cannot afford the fine, which is why she continues to work as a factory agent, which provides her with a steady income but a lack of creative fulfilment. As she contemplates how she might make more money from her label, she has considered department stores but she explained they are notoriously difficult to deal with, demanding large discounts and mired in restrictive administration. Several factories she has worked with manufactured clothing for in-house brands for department stores, and Wang Wei indicated maintaining cashflow for the factories was difficult because of continued delayed payments, saying because of their status, department stores were aligned closely with the government; ‘my advice is to stay away. Find your own channel, because the department stores are faced [sic] to the government and not to the designer’ (Wang Wei 2011).

Wang Wei pointed to the perception of the Shanghai Fashion Week among the clothing industry as entertainment rather than a genuine attempt to sell clothes. She knew the organisers arranged for famous designers from Europe to attend so they could use their names to promote the event. Her comments align well with the mythologised narrative of the fashion city, where it is argued cities use fashion as a

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67 Both members, (husband and wife), of a family in Shanghai will each pay 110,000 yuan ($17,300), three times the city's average annual post-tax income, for a second child. The fine increases with income. According to He Yafu (2012), US $314 billion has been collected in fees since 1980.
signifier of urban modernity and of world status (Yusuf and Wu 2002, 127). She explained that the event was for the ‘face of the city’ and ‘no one could make any money from it yet’, yet she tried each year to attend a show. She said it was very interesting to see what new designers would present.68

The discussion about Shanghai Fashion Week inadvertently emphasises the division between the clothing system with its export focus, and the fashion system intent on creating a regional fashion identity, and Wang Wei indicated factories she worked for had no understanding or interest in Shanghai Fashion Week. She said, ‘I think the fashion life can be beautiful. In the factories they (the workers) do not know where the clothes they make are going, or even what country. This is not a beautiful way’ (Wang Wei 2011).

Local versus Global: What it means to be Chinese

Like Chen Mei, Wang Wei’s aesthetic development was anchored firmly in real life, shaped mainly by information from friends in factories and centred around the needs of her son, implying the presence of a commercial rather than a creative dynamic. Yet there are several indicators that allow us to perceive how she thinks, including a sense of self, an immersion in popular culture and the desire for travel.

In the first instance, Wang Wei’s perception of herself as a Chinese citizen with a strong desire to make money conflicts with a growing sense of independence and the self-actualisation of a creative journey. She explained that being Chinese is a state of mind, as she spoke of the compulsory acquisition of her family’s property during the Cultural Revolution. She reiterated that what remained were relationships with other families, thus she was exceptionally careful to maintain these friendships. Accordingly, her use of social capital is integral to how she derives an income. She explained that things in China change quickly, so she preferred to concentrate on making money first, and then to think about her fashion collection second.

However the influences of her design ethos are located firmly in popular culture. Not only does Wang Wei’s job expose her to the technical and aesthetic

68 Xintiandi is an architectural re-construction of Shanghai’s laneways that has been criticised for its commercial orientation and lack of authenticity.
aspects of foreign designers, she is an avid consumer of fashion magazines, purchasing three or four new magazines every week, including local fashion magazines, and keenly following European luxury fashion brands. Her good understanding of English, in conjunction with direct contact with international clients means useful information could be extrapolated from this relatively cheap and readily available resource. She was experienced enough to notice styles filtering from international magazines such as *Vogue Italia*, and *Elle* into the content pages of local magazines, and to correlate this with garment styles in the factories she frequented, and thus Wang Wei’s attention lies firmly with foreign ideas and the potential of displaced contexts.

Magazines are an important item in the toolbox of fashion propaganda and their glossy sheen portends to rationalise the grittiness of an industry inhabited by these designers, offering the glamorous allure of fashion and the endless ‘new’ of an alternate modernity. They are available on many street corners, wrapped in plastic because of pollution and dust and often contain a gift. In fact, Wu Juanjuan (2009, 83) notes specifically a ‘war of gifts’ that invaded the market place as more than forty magazines tried to boost sales in the late 1990s. Wang Wei also explained she visited small shops in her neighbourhood to buy fake goods from labels such as Dior, Prada and Gucci, and that many famous American brands were available in this grey market.

You know the quality is usually good so I don’t mind if the price is more high [sic] than the other clothes in the department stores or in the small shops. Also I can find something different like in the magazines (Wang Wei 2011).

Similarly to other designers, domestic travel is routine for Wang Wei as she moves between Guangzhou, Shanghai and Beijing for work. Wang Wei travelled between Shanghai and Beijing often. Her family was originally from Beijing where they lived prior to the Cultural Revolution. Wang Wei’s father was elderly and when she routinely observed the filial piety that is part of a Confucian upbringing, she spent as much time meeting factory friends to discuss work. Importantly, Wang Wei’s business used a simple company structure and she could organise letters of referral that allowed her to apply for an entry visa to countries other than the ‘Four Tigers’ of Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan, a more difficult task for
the other designers. She travelled recently to Milan but found the experience expensive and difficult:

In Italy I had my ticket and small bag stolen when I went on the train to the airport. I was carrying all my samples and had too many suitcases and couldn’t stop them. I was by myself. At the airport they didn’t care and kept sending me to other offices. After maybe one or one and a half hours I found an older Chinese man who spoke Shanghainese and he helped me. I almost missed my plane (Wang Wei 2011).

Wang Wei had no connections in Europe and did not want to return. She explained she has many ways to get things done depending on the people she and in turn, her friends, know in Shanghai and so her reliance on guanxi betrays her dependence on relationships. 69

69 Guanxi describes a personal connection between two people in which one is able to prevail upon another to perform a favour or service, or be prevailed upon. Guanxi is also used to describe a network of contacts, which an individual can call upon when something needs to be done, and through which he or she can exert influence on behalf of another.
4.5 LUO ZHIXIANG

Like Wang Wei, Luo Zhixiang works on the fringes of the clothing industry, straddling the gap between the clothing industry and the fashion system. He has no formal fashion education, and commenced work in the family business when he finished school, however his long experiences with the clothing industry, and his ongoing and direct engagement with customers has provided him with a street-smart perspective. He is in his late-thirties, and with his extended family he operates a retail store of approximately fifty square metres, on the second of four floors at the Lujiabang fabric market, known officially as the South Bund Soft-Spinning Material Market, near the Nanpu Bridge on the Huangpu River (Figure 4.8).

The Lujiabang Road fabric market is a popular destination for foreign and Chinese tourists, and here Luo Zhixiang runs a well-established business that has evolved from simple fabric sales, to include a small branded clothing label. He depends on long-standing family relationships with specific factory owners who sell him end-of-production run and flawed fabric. Some of the factories are silk specialists, reflected in his floor stock, and his capital turnover is substantial. The building manager estimated that like the other fifty tenants on the second floor, Luo Zhixiang was turning over between three and four hundred thousand Renminbi each calendar month (approximately A$50,000-$65,000) from his combined sales of fabrics and his small collection (Lindgren 2009).⁷⁰ Key concerns for Lou Zhixiang are the way he has developed a business model that capitalises on his proximity to the clothing industry, and his use of China’s cultural heritage to develop a fashion brand.

⁷⁰ At the time of the interview, A$1.00 = Rmb 6.5
Professional Development: Three Activities

There are three separate activities to Luo Zhixiang’s business, which on the surface appear closely aligned, but are in fact quite distinct. Firstly he is primarily a fabric trader, selling small meterages of fabric to a variety of customers. Because it is factory excess, there is no guarantee of quality, or ongoing supply, so the turnover is brisk. For instance, Hu Tao visits these markets and has complained that she can never purchase more than thirty or forty metres of the same fabric, and that she has to check each metre for flaws. Secondly, like the other tenants, he also offers a tailoring service, which duplicates any popular Western style, or re-makes favourite pieces of clothing (Figure 4.9). (The legacy of tailors is traced to the modernisation of Shanghai when they learnt to make European clothing in the foreign concessions (Finnane 2007)).

The numerous samples of suits and dresses hanging in his shop would seem to indicate this is his prime activity, however this service is outsourced to one of numerous tailors located outside the building, who often quietly attend to garment fittings. In this instance Alan makes most of his money from selling fabric to the
client, and then arranging the construction of the garment for another small fee. He has a preferred tailor, and has advanced this relationship further to design a collection of his own clothing styles, which have been heavily influenced by fashion magazines and also his customer’s requests, but also touch upon grey market activities.

Figure 4.9: Inside Luo Zhixiang’s shop. Photo: Tim Lindgren, 2011.

This third activity has arisen because Luo Zhixiang has access to traditional Chinese fabrics such as silk brocades and Chinese mud silk (Xiangyunsha), which first appeared in the Tang Dynasty (618-907) (Lin and Mammel 2012). In contrast to other designers who are still trying to build infrastructure and develop a point of difference, Luo Zhixiang has managed to find a unique niche in the market. Importantly, he has an established cashflow and a regular cycle to his business that is outside the seasonal demands of Shanghai’s fashion system, Yet on the other hand, his business is still reliant on the by-products of the clothing system and he spends a lot of time travelling to factories to inspect potential fabric purchases and delivering them to his shop, which trades seven days.

*Creative Settings: Cultural Wariness*
At the front of his shop, Luo Zhixiang displays numerous copies of European fashion magazines that are used as a catalogue for many of the foreign tourists who are time-poor, and lack knowledge of specific trends in fashion. However more care goes into his own small collections, as he mines Shanghai’s cultural legacy in ways very much aligned with official cultural policy. By sticking closely to traditional styles and fabric he ensures continuity with Shanghai’s cultural timeline, occupying common ground with his Chinese customers and perpetuating an aesthetic that reverberates beyond the period of Shanghai’s advent into modernity. Luo Zhixiang has entertained a more concerted approach to his silk and mud silk collection by promoting it in conjunction with the Luohu office for Cultural Heritage, however he is wary of attracting too much attention. He says ‘if I make a bigger story from this, then everyone at the market will copy me immediately’ which is a reasonable commercial concern, however Alan also explained he did not wish to engage officially with processes that would entail fee-paying and cultural monitoring.

He considered other ways to promote his business but he said he paid a lot of rent and it was the responsibility of the building owner to attract people to the fabric market. While he knew some tenants intended to offer incentives such as a small discount or a gift to attract more customers, he was not interested. He felt he was busy enough and did not want people think his clothing was cheap. He said, ‘Why should I give a discount? Already people try to bargain my prices down and some do not understand my quality’ (Luo Zhixiang 2011). Similarly when Shanghai Fashion Week was discussed, he explained he knew about it because some designers came to the markets for special fabrics, but he was not personally interested. He said he was too busy trying to keep up with the demands of his business and although he was unsure how to develop his collection into something bigger, he knew Shanghai Fashion Week was expensive.

This is a carefully calculated ploy because of the ‘seven day syndrome’, Foreign tourists are often on a seven day trip, and visit the market early, when they place their order, however they must also return for a fitting toward the end of their trip. Often they are stressed, rushed and about to leave Shanghai, and consequently they are taken advantage of. Many tourists have no idea of current (seasonal) changes to a European brand, and are sold a ‘label’, instead of a contemporary design.
Local versus Global: Local and Global

It is apparent Luo Zhixiang is anchored in the domestic market where he draws his resources from the by-products of the clothing system. His business is viable and financially secure, yet paradoxically it is also integrated with the global fashion system. Many of the tourists that come to the markets are Chinese, European, or American, and Luo Zhixiang must be knowledgeable about contemporary global fashion trends, however his small collection is a unique mix of foreign and Chinese styles made from traditional and ethnic textiles. His clothes are also popular with many tourists, in part because some of the fabrics he uses are organic and heritage-listed (Quince 2008; Han 2007). 72 Abbey Lillethun (2008), noted that some high profile fashion American designers of Asian descent have initiated a trend to use mud silk and it follows Luo Zhixiang may have been exposed to this knowledge in the fabric market, possibly through fashion magazines.

However there is also a strong recognition of the traditional roles of these fabrics among mainstream Chinese, emphasising how items of fashion drawn not only from traditional culture, but also from the Shanghai of the 1920s, have endured in cultural memory. Luo Zhixiang finds this work easy because he says he understands it in contrast to constructing foreign clothing styles that he reduces to a set of technical specifications because he is not quite sure of the client’s context, ‘We all know about the mud silk, it is a very famous thing from our history, so we should use this to show who we are’ (Luo Zhixiang 2011).

His small collections derived from traditional Chinese clothing are simple variations of ethnic inspired styles in traditional textiles that reverberate deeply with the collective memory of Shanghainese culture, and also with tourists searching for authentic Chinese clothing. Many of his clients for these products are older and remember these garments from the cultural landscape of their youth, however some clients ask for Western styles in these traditional fabrics. In the liquid flux of postmodern Shanghai where designers like Hu Tao, Chen Mei and particularly Wang

72 Chinese mud silk is part of the non-tangible cultural heritage list initiated by the Luohu local Government. Fashion designer Liang Zi has been instrumental in gaining this protection.
Wei flounder with their aesthetic, Luo Zhixiang’s adherence to cultural institutions that possess a historical reach beyond the influence of the West and the turmoil of the Mao era, yet also emblematic of Chinese identity have provided him with content for his design aesthetic. However it must be asked whether this would sustain Luo Zhixiang, if this became his sole source of income? As well his reliance on China’s past means the lack of the endless ‘new’ promised by the consumption of fashion inhibits the growth of his brand and so Luo Zhixiang seems forever bound to a specific set of ingredients for his work.
4.6 CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have discussed the activities of five designers located in and around the clothing industry, but yet to be legitimised in a fashion system. Chen Mei, Hu Tao, Zhou Liang, Wang Wei and Luo Zhixiang are a group of designers who have managed in various ways to exist on the fringes of Shanghai’s fashion system. From a professional point of view they have adopted differing strategies to do this, and mainly have an income from a different source while they build their businesses and brands. This mostly corresponds with Becker’s (2008, 78) depiction of a day job and an ‘art’ job in the art world, but also with his description of how people ‘learn on the job’, possibly as free-lancers. In terms of their creative connectivity in the urban environment, these designers are immersed in the process of gaining experience and their lack of resources, while a hindrance to their progress, is not insurmountable as Zhou Liang illustrates in his use of factories, and Chen Mei in her collaborative efforts with other designers.

Finally, in terms of their aspirations, they are focussed on survival and brand building, and despite their immersion in Shanghai’s environment of global cultural liquidity, they are firmly engaged with the domestic market, as the initial step toward being recognised by Shanghai’s fashion system. In my discussion in chapter seven, I discuss their activities more completely, in comparison to the other groups of designers.
Chapter 5: Haipai Culture

In the previous chapter, I examined the activities of five designers at the intersection of the clothing industry and Shanghai’s fashion system. This chapter includes a further five fashion designers who are integrated with Shanghai’s fashion system for insights into the development of their aesthetic as they operate their businesses, and in turn cultivate their growing reputations and brands in Shanghai. By understanding the processes through which these designers have become legitimised, I intend to make clearer the relationship of Shanghai’s fashion system to the Eurocentric fashion system, while the distance between this group and the designers discussed in the previous chapter is placed in context. These designers were included because they are fully immersed in their creative practice and possess relative stability, while they are also primarily engaged with Shanghai’s fashion system.

As in the previous chapter, I examine their practice with three themes, in keeping with the research focus. The first theme (professional development) investigates areas of professional development, education and working practices. The second theme (creative settings) explores urban creative settings, including creative clusters, and institutions such as fashion week to understand how emerging designers might collaborate across creative fields. The third theme (local versus global) considers whether designers are focussed on the global fashion system or Shanghai’s domestic fashion system and how they are constructing their aesthetic. The chapter concludes by considering whether their activities are significantly different to established models.

The distinctive style of this group has become known as Haipai wenhua (海派文化), which is usually translated as ‘Mandarin style with an overseas touch’ (Shi 2010). However, Haipai wenhua is also described in Shanghai as a process shaped by the interaction between local cultures, between local and foreign cultures, and between foreign cultures (Guang 2011). Therefore for these fashion designers, European and Chinese elements are fused together to form a new style unique to Shanghai with distinct historical overtones, which is described as Haipai culture. In
this group, designers are characterised as the owners of viable businesses. Mainly their infrastructure is complete, leaving them free to manage the creative and aesthetic development of their label, of which the momentum is derived from consistent incomes and regular clientele.

A significant difference from the last group is that all possess a fixed address, which functions as their studio or showroom. Most importantly, the fashion system in Shanghai has validated their activities because these designers engage in collaborative activities that strengthen their brands while also structurally reinforcing Shanghai’s nascent fashion system. Consequently these designers have managed to resolve the problems of mixed cultural symbolism that faced the previous group into their own style. Thus, in the context of Shanghai’s fashion system, their legitimisation comes from aligning themselves with the authenticity of Shanghai’s Haipai era, where the re-assembly of cultural artifacts and aesthetics borne of Shanghai’s modernity of the 1920s and 1930s, referred to by Don Slater (1997, 197) as ‘heritage’, is re-imagined as a newly consumable commodity. In accord with the model conceptualised in the introduction to this thesis, I locate these designers in the following figure (Figure 5.1) in Shanghai’s fashion system.

![Figure 5.1: Shanghai fashion system, Tim Lindgren, 2013.](image)

I introduce the interviewees in this order; beginning with Li Hongyan who is in her early thirties, and a consistent participant in Shanghai’s fashion system where she is described as ‘having long been well-regarded’ (Parent 2012b). Ji Cheng is the
next designer, in her mid thirties, and referred to as ‘a design veteran’ (Parent 2011a). The third designer, Tang Jia is commercially successful. Ni Hua follows her, and Wang Wei, a well-known male designer concludes this chapter, and whose presence in this group forms a link to two designers in the next group.
5.1 LI HONGYAN

Li Hongyan (Helen Lee) has been an independent designer for ten years and epitomises this group. She initially studied at Donghua University and subsequently at Montreal’s LaSalle fashion college.\textsuperscript{73} After graduation Li Hongyan worked in Tokyo for several Japanese fashion labels before creating her own denim line. She explained how her first and iconic label, InSh, began on the spur of the moment after a conversation in Shanghai; ‘I was working in accounting for a company and I had always wanted to create a fashion label so I took the risk. One night I was at a bar with a friend and I just decided’ (Li Hongyan 2012).\textsuperscript{74} Importantly, Li Hongyan decided to build a shop in Tianzifang because of her acquaintance with Chen Yifei, siting her first shop there, ‘He told me that I should come here and I liked the feeling of the old buildings and what he wanted to do with the area’ (2012).

Li Hongyan was attracted to Tianzifang because of spacious and high ceilinged rooms with timber floors and whitewashed walls, and at the time the rent was relatively low:

When I first came there was hardly anyone in the building. We had to go outside to Taikang Lu (Taikang Road) to get our lunch from the small food vendors in the street. Now they are all gone and everywhere inside, (Tianzifang) is filled with many kinds of restaurants and bars (Li Hongyan 2012).

Li Hongyan’s key concerns are maintaining the business infrastructure she has already built, her role in Shanghai Fashion Week and creating a contemporary fashion brand that incorporates the specificity of Shanghai.

Professional development: Creative Cluster or Social Network?

\textsuperscript{73} Donghua University was formally known as the East China Textile Institute of Technology and is responsible for the education of many fashion designers. College LaSalle is an international fashion and arts school in Canada.

\textsuperscript{74} InSh stands for ‘In Shanghai’. The label comprises mainly T-shirts printed with witty comments about Shanghainese culture.
Li Hongyan works with her Canadian husband in the head office and studio on level three of Lane 210 in Tianzifang. Here she conceptualises strategies for business growth, plans photo-shoots and liaises with manufacturers. Her studio is also where expensive fabrics are delivered (other fabrics go straight to the factories) and where her special clientele arrive to discuss made-to-measure garments, such as wedding dresses, and undergo fittings. In her studio, Li Hongyan manages a small staff although not everyone is located at the premises. Her team consists of a patternmaker, a sample machinist and several people who perform numerous other tasks.

Sample collections are subsequently sent to small factories for production. As many of her pieces are produced in small quantities or of unusual fabrics, she must find specialised workers from outside Shanghai. For instance, Li Hongyan works with ethnic minorities whose traditional embroideries she has applied to a range of military inspired coats in blue cotton (Figure 5.2). She also prefers simple textiles because they make her range accessible and fabrics can be re-ordered if popular. Li Hongyan says, ‘we are always working with natural materials, such as cotton, silk, linen or natural fibre blended materials. This fits our target consumer needs and I feel comfortable working with these materials’ (Li Hongyan 2012).

Figure 5.2: Li Hongyan’s ethnic embroidery on a military inspired jacket.
However the idyllic studio is the result of much hard work. Li Hongyan recalled the struggle to begin her business with limited financial capital:

I found that creativity, personality and business strategy are the important keys to get more funding. In the beginning all I had was the passion and the dream to start a business. But on top of that I had to use my financial background to come up with a business plan’ (Wallflower Dispatches 2009).

Despite building a popular brand image, her progression has been difficult. Until 2010, Li Hongyan’s original shop, InSh, was prominently situated outside the entrance to Tianzifang at Lane 210 on Taikang Road, where it had been an increasingly popular destination for seven years. Prior to Shanghai’s World Exposition in 2010, Li Hongyan was given a short time to vacate by local government, who justified the takeover as the need for a tourist information booth for visitors to Shanghai. Yet when World Expo commenced, a coffee shop catering to the influx of foreign visitors was in place. Li Hongyan explained the impact of World Expo was devastating for small businesses in the city:

In one month the rent for some government properties doubled and then tripled, especially where the local authorities thought they could make money. It was crazy, everyone was using their connections to get the best location, and my whole business nearly stopped when they took the InSh shop (Li Hongyan 2012).

In a narrative similar to the fate of Chen Yifei and Deke Er who also occupied tenancies in Tianzifang, fashion commentator, Imran Amed (2008), observed that several years earlier, Li Hongyan was already under commercial pressure; ‘They are dramatically increasing the rent on her studio in trendy Taikang Road, effectively forcing her out of the district where she was one of the first to arrive’. Li Hongyan was bruised by the actions of the local government and the loss of her shop caused her to momentarily reconsider her fashion career, however her new and eponymous label, Li Hongyan is suitably aligned with a growing sense of national pride. It is displayed in a new shop, called after her English name, Helen Lee, and is situated away from Tianzifang at 171-1 Fumin Road, (Figure 5.3). According to Li Hongyan, her new label is a ‘more upmarket and contemporary take on Chinese culture incorporating Communist-era colours, traditions and uniforms that are transformed into designs for a modern Chinese way of life’ (Li Hongyan 2012).
The InSh label got me to here, but now this is mainly a tourist kind of brand for us. It was good at Tianzifang where the tourists came but now I am in Changle Lu (Changle Road). I still like designing the ideas, but there is more money in my Li Hongyan collections. I cannot put the InSh label on the runway, because it is not really fashion. I don’t do a new collection for it, just updates when I have time. Li Hongyan is more interesting and where my future as a designer is (Li Hongyan 2012).

It is important for Li Hongyan to have a shop that conveys her aesthetic message because she is a long-time participant in Shanghai Fashion Week. However, despite a new store and a busy commercial schedule, Li Hongyan’s website provides no new information beyond 2007. As she said, ‘it takes too much time to always update, I need a new format and also I have to stay on top of my collections’ (Li Hongyan 2012). Her more pressing problems relate to managing the growing scale of her business in a volatile marketplace. For example, Li Hongyan recently worked

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75 www.insh.com.cn
with an Italian knitwear manufacturer who sponsored her for Shanghai Fashion Week and she spoke of simple difficulties associated with fabric deliveries and other problems with logistics and courier companies:

My studio is at the top of three flights of stairs. They just drop it at the bottom floor and go away. I never know if it has arrived, and many times the parcels have come from Europe or Italy and we have waited weeks for the yarn, and then it gets stolen. We have to run up and down all day checking for deliveries. Chinese companies don’t care. They haven’t learnt yet and I can’t trust them for anything (Li Hongyan 2012).

Creative Settings: The Perils of Shanghai Fashion Week

The focal point of Li Hongyan’s year is Shanghai Fashion Week, an event held each year in April and October (Figure 5.4). She has participated since 2006 and it is where she launched her new label however her experiences have been mixed. Participation costs are high and it is tightly controlled, often by inexperienced people appointed by the government body running the event, ‘they have no idea, except to charge us the money, the services we have to pay for are always late and we have to use only their connections’ (2012). Norma Rantisi (2011, 264) reiterates this perspective, explaining how governments are prone to adopt a ‘top-down, instrumental and outwards focussed policy orientation, since fashion is viewed as a medium for place marketing rather than place making’.
Li Hongyan explained how it was extremely frustrating to have so many seats for her runway shows allocated to local government figures at the expense of her clients:

Sometimes my good clients are calling me on my phone from right outside the tent before the show, trying to argue for a seat, while there are fifty or a hundred empty seats I cannot use because the government officials didn’t arrive, but I can’t use them in case they have passed them to someone else. I need my clients to buy the clothes but the government just takes what they want and then doesn’t use it (Li Hongyan 2012).

In fact Timothy Parent (2011b) notes government officials are often required to attend these events as part of their official duties. Yet Li Hongyan is very aware her profile in the press is of a premier Shanghainese designer so she feels she must participate in this event to maintain visibility however she also drew attention to a fundamental problem with the event. Because she is primarily a retailer, and there are...
no wholesale buyers in attendance, she says ‘I must support my new shop. This is where the money comes from. The small accounts I have in other places don’t bring in much. Also my shop in Fumin Road is my flagship. I have to direct attention to it’ (Li Hongyan 2012). It is well known that the purpose of Fashion Week in the global context is to provide a platform for buyers to view new designer collections as the event originated as a trade show. This contradicts the current iteration of Shanghai Fashion Week, yet this also directs attention to the dominance of the Eurocentric fashion system that still prefers to view China as a manufacturer, rather than a creator.

Local versus Global: Using the Past, Present and Future

Li Hongyan routinely draws upon elements of Chinese culture for inspiration, and views herself as a Chinese designer creating a fashion brand steeped in the ethos of Shanghai’s Haipai culture, by offering a new vision of Chinese fashion, which communicates Chinese culture in a contemporary way. She said ‘Because of different cultures, different environments, and most of all different markets, each country’s design has their own inspiration and focus on their own design elements’ (Li Hongyan 2012). Li Hongyan also described precisely the aesthetic construction typifying this group, ‘I use Shanghai’s past, present and future as I imagine it and then pick up the core element of each period’ (Li Hongyan 2012).

Sheena Burnell (2012) who is a critic of Shanghai Fashion Week, confirms how Li Hongyan’s ideas combine the city’s ‘icons, people and ideas with bright colours, energetic shapes and cross-cultural themes to create an aesthetic that is true to Shanghai’. Li Hongyan aspires to build a viable business, based upon her aesthetic vision in parallel with the rise of Shanghai and this is why she participates in Shanghai Fashion Week. She says,

If Shanghai continues until it is like London or Paris, things will settle down and my brand will be a foundation brand. We would like to reach the level of big names such as Chanel and make it successful. It is also important to have a long history since in the long run we will appreciate it and be proud of it. These things are important to me, and I believe it’s going to happen. But it takes time and we have long way to go (Li Hongyan 2012).
5.2 JI CHENG

Ji Cheng (Jenny Ji) has carved a firm place in Shanghai’s nascent fashion system, initially leaving China for education, and returning to build her brand in the midst of dramatic changes to domestic consumption (Figure 5.5). Ji Cheng majored in economics at University but chose to pursue her interest in fashion because of the rapidly changing nature of the Chinese economy, graduating at ‘the cusp of a time when a new generation of entrepreneurs were born’ (Ji 2012). Initially Ji Cheng assisted a Japanese designer at a prominent apparel company in Hong Kong, before moving to Milan to study fashion at the design school Marangoni. Later internships with fashion labels Basic Krizia and Missoni Sport provided transferrable experiences for the Chinese market.

Figure 5.5: Ji Cheng.

Courtesy: Chinadaily.com.cn.

In 2002 and upon returning to Shanghai, Ji Cheng launched her own fashion brand, La Vie, in Courtyard 7 of Lane 210 in Tianzifang. In 2005 Ji Cheng was invited to present a collection inspired by the Peking Opera at Singapore International Fashion Week, and also at China Fashion Week. She was subsequently

76 Istituto Marangoni was founded in Milan in 1935 as the Artistic Institute of Garments Marangoni. It offers programs specialising in all areas of fashion to approximately 2000 students across three campuses including London and Paris.
described as one of China’s most sought-after fashion designers, and appeared in ‘Growing China’, a documentary produced in 2006 by the New York Times and the Discovery Channel.

In 2008, Ji Cheng was also honoured with the Shanghai Creative Leaders Award and the Hurun Fashion Pioneer Award. In 2009, Ji Cheng opened her third boutique in the high-end shopping precinct of Xintiandi in Shanghai. Ji Cheng’s key concerns are staying engaged with Shanghai Fashion Week as the lure of London Fashion Week becomes more attractive, creating a Chinese aesthetic from her knowledge of Chinese culture that resonates with a global audience, and maintaining the high standards of quality and craftsmanship her label is known for.

Ji Cheng works mainly in Shanghai with a small production team preparing samples in her studio, and liaising with small factories for the manufacturing of her collections, which is normal practice for designers in this group. Her days are long,

In the morning, I normally arrive at my studio at 9:30am. I first check my email, then review with my design team, meet with vendors and confirm materials. In the afternoon I normally review production samples and then spend three or four hours designing. I will leave my studio around 7.30pm (Breden 2013).

She works most closely with her patternmaker because as she explains, ‘this is the only person who can understand the ideas I have, and also the culture and put them into measurements for the first sample’ (Ji Cheng 2012).

*Professional Development: The Paradox of Shanghai Fashion Week*

Ji Cheng has also been a constant supporter of Shanghai Fashion Week because she says it fits her promotional strategy yet she notes how it has changed:

At the beginning it was all about international designers. We just had four young Chinese designers sharing one show, sharing the models and the makeup. Soon, they lost their big sponsors, and the international designers stopped coming, but we got our own show, so I was happy with that…this Shanghai Fashion Week has more than 40 brands and lots of designers, so I think it’s a big development over the past 10 years (Hall 2012).

Her presence is important to the event because, ‘usually designers show once and are never seen near the tents again, which leaves attendees speculating who and what
they will see next season’ (Parent 2012c). In 2005, Ji Cheng presented her first spring-summer collection at Shanghai Fashion Week as an up-and-coming designer and has shown each season since. However Timothy Parent, the owner of the China Fashion Collective agency criticises Ji Cheng’s rationale of using Shanghai Fashion Week to show styles that are currently available in her shops, rather than to foreshadow a new season collection, which betrays the global prerogative of a fashion week. He argues if China hopes to get buyers to attend the fashion week, then designers have to be consistent with fashion weeks in other cities: ‘If designers keep on ignoring international standards for the industry and show the wrong season, how can they expect to gain attention of buyers and become international’ (Parent 2012c)? Yet Ji Cheng counters, ‘If there are no buyers, then the Shanghai Fashion Week is for what? I have to use it to promote my brand’ (Ji Cheng 2012).

**Creative Settings: Moving toward International Recognition**

Ji Cheng’s aspirations go beyond fashion, extending to the concept of a lifestyle brand, including a bridal line, lingerie and home-wares, but increasingly her focus is on establishing her name in the European marketplace, evidence that she is keen to move beyond Shanghai’s fashion system. She showed her first collection, called Zen Awakening, in 2012, at London Fashion Week (Figure 5.6). She has also recently been included in a contingent of designers under the ‘Design by Shanghai’ initiative. This new program was launched during the 2013, Autumn-Winter season at London Fashion Week and promotes Shanghai’s emerging fashion talent in conjunction with Vauxhaul Fashion Scout, a platform for emerging designers. She said her next step is to appoint a showroom in Paris for her collections and follow the path of celebrity endorsement (Breden 2013).
Yet as Ji Cheng indicates, it is Shanghai’s cultural amalgam that provides her with new ideas.

Shanghai was a fashion centre at the beginning of 1920s, and it’s still a very fashionable city. People can accept a lot of things -- it doesn’t matter if it’s from the West or East, or from other Asian cities, which is great. Shanghai also has more and more influence on provinces near it. It’s a leader in fashion (Fong 2010).

The construction of her aesthetic provides an insight into the conceptualisation of her brand and the diverse sources she draws upon. She explained she always looked to
items or behaviours that had not changed in China’s history because these were safe and widely recognised.

I have been experimenting with infusing Chinese culture into European-style cuts and textures for a long time. This is, as far as I am concerned, the best way to demonstrate the Haipai Wenhua school of design unique to Shanghai (Shi 2010).

Sometimes she travels around China with her photographer for inspiration. For example in 2010, a collection at Shanghai Fashion Week titled Blue Tiger Porcelain, took inspiration from Chinese kitchenware, and other collections have materialised from relationships with Chinese minorities such as embroiderers from Guizhou province.77 Her Autumn-Winter 2013 collection was called Koi’s Whisper, inspired by the Koi carp of classic Asian folk tales (Figure 5.7). Ji Cheng said ‘their graceful movement resonates (with) ancient Chinese decoration, signifying beauty, calm and elegance, and it is this that we wanted to get across in our latest collection’ (Braukämper 2012).

Her latest collection, shown in London for Spring-Summer 2013 is called ‘Teaism’, and relates to the art-like status the culture of tea drinking has acquired in China over many centuries. As Ji Cheng explains: ‘this season I look at an age-old tradition, rooted in Chinese culture to draw similarities between the East and West. Tea is considered an art form in China and I hope that this beauty translates into my newest collection’ (Davies 2012). She states that by bringing her collection to London, she is reiterating her aim of showing the popular aesthetic of contemporary China to a much wider audience: ‘We want to bring out more things with Chinese culture and modern design that are wearable, fashionable and designed for Chinese people's lives’ (Ji Cheng 2012). However this seems to be an attempt at selling Chinese culture to an audience already familiar with the message and the question of whether this aesthetic is sophisticated enough for commercial viability in the Eurocentric fashion system must be raised.

77 Guizhou is located in the southwest of China.
Ji Cheng distinguishes herself from previous designers because she is very focussed on quality, and she also incorporates sustainable and environmental practice in her design. Her attitude toward quality is allusive of Richard Sennett’s (2008) discussion of craftsmanship, but also shows how she has adopted the working habits and aesthetic inclusions of the Eurocentric fashion system. For instance, she takes...
great pride in authentic fabric with an exclusive supply of a handmade material from London which dates to 1835 that is available to private clients (Shi 2010). In her bridal collection, garments prices begin at Rmb 20,000 (A$ 3000) and utilise imported fabrics.

As long as we are making Haute Couture, we should strive to give our customers as many exclusive rights as possible. Therefore, we are trying to import first class materials from Europe as well as learning their advanced design trends and patterns (Shi 2010).

The growing discourse surrounding sustainable practice in the global fashion system finds itself included in her work as a way of aligning with her peers, despite that it is only a small part of her practice. In 2008, Ji Cheng participated in the first EcoChic Shanghai event, held at the 1933 Old Millfun creative park. The event was mainly held to show new environmental concepts to Chinese consumers, but an alternate purpose was to educate designers about environmentally friendly practices (Redress 2010).

When I started this label, I insisted on eco-friendly materials because not many Chinese designers were using organic fabric. It’s very comfortable and you can feel the difference. We want La Vie to be an environmentally friendly brand, but from the business side, we also think this is the future (Wing-Yee 2010).

In her latest collection called ‘Teaism’, which was shown in London early in 2013, her press release notes she has used organic cotton, silk and bamboo as she blends ‘Eastern inspirations with Western tailoring’. 
5.3 **TANG JIA**

Tang Jia is a quiet and unassuming designer in her mid to late forties who prefers to let her retail shop convey the ethos of her brand. She received her fashion education in Paris, where she studied the techniques of Haute Couture. Upon returning to Shanghai, she opened her first shop in 2007 in Changle Road, but moved nearby to 167 Xinle Road in 2008, where she opened a flagship store called ‘Jade en Plus’, close to the mainly government owned street of Donghu Road (Figure 5.8).\(^78\) Her corporate entity is the Shanghai Jiaxu Fashion Company Limited and she has a strong vertical and insular infrastructure, preferring to control all aspects of manufacturing and distribution.

\[\text{Figure 5.8 Tang Jia’s Shop in Xinle Road. Photo: Tim Lindgren, 2012.}\]

She is also very careful about her brand image. Some of the key points for Tang Jia come from a European education that has provided her with the skills to build a sound business structure. She is also extremely independent and runs a vertically

\^[78] Tang Jia explained her brand name was a fusion of Chinese beauty (Jade) and the French expression ‘en plus’ which signifies ‘something above and beyond’.
integrated business model, so she questions the value of Shanghai Fashion Week. Her main strength is a clear domestic expansion strategy.

Professional Development: The Value of a French Fashion Education

Tang Jia spends most of her working day at her factory at 3131 Jinshajiang Road in Putuo district, where she works closely with key staff including a head pattern-maker and a sample machinist who produce sample collections to be subsequently placed into production in her own work rooms, and she maintains strict quality control. She also works very closely to the retail stock levels in her store and does not produce extensive quantities of her clothing. She produces seasonal collections, which are very important to her design strategy because they mirror the cycle of the European production schedule she learnt in Europe. In keeping with her ethos the clothing is well made and of high quality fabrics that are mainly imported. She explained most fabrics she used were not available in China except for some good quality silk:

Here we cannot get the special couture kinds of textiles. All of the special fibres do not really exist in this market, so I buy from Korea, Taiwan, Japan. Sometimes I get some from my contacts in Hong Kong but this is also imported so the quality must be good. My best fabrics come from Europe, but I have to be careful with the minimum quantity. I don’t import beaded fabric. We can do this here if we need but it is not my style (Tang Jia 2011).

The distance from Tang Jia’s factory across Shanghai to her store takes an hour to travel so she will only do so for special appointments with clients or for press. Notably, Tang Jia’s retail store occupies a prime and historic position in Xinle Road, in an early residence reputedly of Soong Ching-Ling.⁷⁹ Renting this historic retail space adds prestige to her label, which indicates she is well connected locally, however she explained she was aware of constant interest in her property by the local authorities who control her rent, so she must be seen to be very active. The precinct

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⁷⁹ Soong Ching-Ling (Rosamonde Soong) was born in Huangpu district in Shanghai in 1893. Her marriage to Dr Sun Yat-sen, the first President of the Republic of China, after becoming the first Chinese girl to be educated in the United States, provided her with political and social influence. On 16th May 1981, several weeks prior to her death, she was admitted to the Communist Party as Honorary President of the People’s Republic of China.
is controlled by the Government-owned Donghu Group, which, since the Cultural Revolution has controlled much of Shanghai’s prime real estate, and Xinle Road, and Changle Road in particular, are known for their volatile lease disputes, and ever-increasing rents (Yao 2013).

**Creative Settings: Running a business, or Relying on a Fashion System?**

Tang Jia also takes part in Shanghai Fashion Week, however it does not have the same attraction for her as it does for Li Hongyan or Ji Cheng, and she is a relative newcomer to the event. Her label, Jade En Plus, was featured at the latest Spring-Summer Shanghai Fashion Week (2013). Tang Jia explained it was important for her to be seen to be supporting the event because she depended on her relationship with the government to keep her business stable, but Tang Jia is also very independent and is not sure that the event is the right forum for her label. She said there were only a few designers with the resources to participate regularly, which meant there was not much interest from the press. She also said that there was a lot of choice for building a fashion label in China.

Many of the designers she knew had been educated overseas, and either followed the path of going to Europe to build their name or returned to Shanghai as she had done. Her particular path was focussed on retail, and as she explained, she perceived a lot of opportunity if her promotional strategies were implemented properly. Accordingly, she preferred to concentrate on her point-of-sale merchandising, and the maintenance of a V.I.P club for her customers. She explained V.I.P clubs are very popular schemes in the fashion system in Shanghai. Her particular version allows her to control all aspects of the communication of her aesthetic message, mainly through in-store events.

**Local versus Global: A Domestic Expansion Strategy**

Tang Jia has a strong orientation to the Chinese domestic market, and she sees her mission very clearly as one of bringing high quality clothing to a new and growing class of young urban professional women, based upon the skills she acquired in the Eurocentric fashion system. As she seeks to expand her business, Tang Jia has looked further afield, to concessions within department stores and has been successful in gaining a place in Shanghai Westgate Isetan, a large department store located in Nanjing Xi (Nanjing West) Road. She explained her main retail
presence in Xinle Road would remain as her flagship store, however she has a new diffusion label, Jade en Plus Women, which is capable of higher volumes of sales.

Tang Jia plans to continue with the concession model of collaborating with other department stores in Shanghai, Wuhan, and Hangzhou. Her forethought is evident in plans for a shop in a Tianjin shopping mall, where a small network of agents will promote the brand and long-term plans include positioning the label as a high-end brand in Beijing, again strategising the use of agents. Tang Jia explained further:

Of course, we do not do fast fashion, we will slowly settling down, continue to explore the cultural connotation of the European fashion and design quality, but in order to meet the ever-expanding market demand, we will be appropriately increasing the speed of the design frequency and style updates (Tang Jia 2011).

She described the retail fit-out for her expansion as ‘unified’ and different to her small floor space in Changle Road, however ‘it will be an introduction to the 1920s and 1930s with old Shanghai elements depicting the feeling of an antique museum’ (Tang Jia 2012). Tang Jia clearly feels that the elements of Haipai she uses in her work are applicable across a broader Chinese spectrum and she also thinks her increasing use of organic and environmentally friendly materials will reach an interested consumer, however she concedes this is also a part of her long term strategy because of the general lack of awareness among her clients. Despite a flourishing retail network and careful planning, an Internet strategy is not part of her plan. Tang Jia’s website at jadeenplus.com has not been updated since 2010. She explained her website was just an introduction to her brand, but this also alluded to a lack of time and a focus on her Chinese client base who did not communicate on the Internet.
5.4 NI HUA

Ni Hua (Nio) operates her label Miss Mean in a retail space and showroom that also functions as her design studio. The name of her label, Miss Mean, derives from combining the initials of four French words: Mode, Elegance, Amour, and Nature and, ‘tends towards a modern French style, integrating the uniqueness of the Asian silhouette and expressing and emanating individual charisma’ (Ni Hua 2012). Ni Hua spent her youth in Shanghai, leaving to attend Lyon University in France where she studied French language and culture from 2004 to 2006. Ni Hua subsequently studied at Studio Berçot in Paris for three years.80 During her stay in France she gained work experience at various fashion labels including John Galliano and Heider Ackermann (Nio 2009).

Figure 5.9: Ni Hua at her desk.

Photo: Zhang Danqing (Joy), 2012.

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80 Studio Berçot is a prestigious fashion school located at 29 Rue des Petites Écuries in Paris. In 2012, the tuition cost was €9000 per annum for two years of a three-year degree. The final year of study is free and spent under apprenticeship. Fluency is French is required.
Ni Hua enjoys the life of the fashion designer she learnt from her extensive education in France. She is attentively dressed and thoughtful of the space she occupies in Shanghai as a creative individual (Figure 5.9). Her main concerns are the daily problems of running a business in the French Concession, the extensive promotion she undertakes, and ensuring her resources are not spread too thinly.

*Professional Development: Working in the French Concession*

Ni Hua has purposely distanced herself from the popularity of Tianzifang because she thinks it is mainly a tourist destination, so her business is situated in the French Concession at 12-B, 1462 Fuxing Zhong Road where the historical architecture of Shanghai remains relatively untouched. She explained: ‘I love the former French Concession in Shanghai. That’s one of the reasons why I have my studio here but whenever I need to find inspiration, I will go to find the traditional Shanghainese art forms’ (2012). Her business is small and she runs it mainly herself. A friend helps with mundane aspects of the day-to-day running of her business, yet she aspires to a business partner who might balance the business responsibilities and provide advice. She has many problems that are mainly related to her limited cashflow and so she does much of the day-to-day work by herself. Her role in clothing production extends from cutting patterns to sourcing fabric, trims and sewing the first production sample for the small-scale factory that she uses.

Ni Hua explained that it was exceptionally difficult to obtain fabric and trim that represents this era: ‘Because of the historical reason [sic], we have lost the originality. Maybe we have some adaptation or things that have some feature some of the original, but we don’t have very vintage pieces of the sense of the original items’ (Ni Hua 2012). Ni Hua said it was easier for designers outside China to find fabric in their countries, that there was less choice and that quality was always a problem:

I have to substitute the fabric. It is impossible to find even any fabrics that are close to the original style. I use the colours and the printing methods from the original and put it together with more suitable fabric (Ni Hua 2012).

Shanghai is portrayed as a substantial textile and garment-manufacturing region, however Ni Hua explained that less quality textile manufacturing occurs here and is mostly on the outskirts of the city in small mills. The fabric she uses is mainly
imported, because of problems of consistency and quality from local manufacturers. Quantities are small and mostly come from Japan but, ‘in Shanghai, there are agencies that help the small business, so it is not a problem for me to get what I need’ (Ni Hua 2012). Ni Hua said she would not have a problem with order quantity because her independent business meant that she was very flexible, and could reconfigure her orders if necessary, however this created other problems.

She indicated that it was difficult for her to estimate quantities of fabric she would need because of the small production runs she undertook:

Sometimes the stock in the stores I sell to stays there for a long time, and sometimes I make only one or two pieces and it goes in one day. The fabric I buy is quite limited in quantity and I cannot get it again so I sometimes use very simple fabrics in my collections, however this makes the clothes idea not very bright. I have to balance it (Ni Hua 2012).

Although her business is small, Ni Hua is conscious of the potential theft of her ideas. Because she is very active in promoting her brand, she worries that in Shanghai’s volatile marketplace, someone will capitalise on her brand aesthetic before she is able to. She has registered her business and trading name but this did not mean much to her, ‘It is too easy for the brand name to be stolen, or leech away. How can I fight this?’ (Ni Hua 2012). However she also explained she felt her label was not big enough yet to be copied. Ni Hua felt that people were more interested in copying large foreign brands such as Prada and Louis Vuitton because these were easier to sell, and this was clearly not how Ni Hua perceived her journey:

I have to follow my own path for my design. If they copy me or I copy them, I think this is not true design. For me, my label is about being a designer of my own styles even though I must know what other people are doing (Ni Hua 2012).

Ni Hua explained that she was ‘young in her journey as an artist’ and she still had a long way to go before her ideas would be clear and everyone would know her label when they saw it, without having to ask the brand name.

**Creative Settings: Promoting her Brand**

Ni Hua perceives the evolution of her aesthetic is fundamentally where ongoing value for her brand lies. In the last three years,
she has nurtured relationships with a network of independent clothing boutiques. Ni Hua likes to sell her clothing to small boutiques because the ‘procedure is quite informal’ (Ni Hua 2012), but she is very careful to visit them herself to ensure she is paid. She felt department stores were difficult to deal with because of the way that they are managed. The administrative process means that independent designers are also less able to meet regulatory requirements of department stores.

Ni Hua explained that documentation regarding company structure and invested capital in a business must be provided for certification. Ni Hua also explained if you managed to get through this process, gaining a company supply number had further implications, ‘Then you must maintain a specific profit margin on your clothing turn-over and this had big problems for my manufacturing and my production orders’ (Ni Hua 2012). She concluded department stores are more suited to mass manufacturers who are able to sell licensed brands or have very big production capacity.

Ni Hua also places some of her clothing collection in the Hive and Dongliang, or ‘supporting independent design shops’ as she described them. These relatively new gatekeepers are important to Shanghai’s designers because they provide a singular point of contact for the press. However she said there is little profit margin and it represents only one of her activities, but it also places her clothing on the same racks as some of Shanghai’s well-known designers so it is important to have her label there.

On the other hand, Ni Hua was extremely active with her website Missmean.cn, where she displays a brief personal profile and contact details for her studio. Her website displays her fashion shows from 2009 onwards. Her use of the Internet means she views her collaboration with online shopping platforms such as AnyShopStyle.cn, and Xinlelu.com as an opportunity to attract new customers and to observe other designers in her locale, ‘When my collections go there, I can instantly see the quality and direction of the other fashion designers who have shops in Xinle Lu’ (Ni Hua 2012). However she stayed away from Taobao, because she views it as a platform for cheap clothing, or as a site where fashion brands are devalued, but also as the quickest way for a designer’s clothes to be copied, especially if one is were successful.
As with many of the designers, Ni Hua’s perspective of fashion week relates to its alignment with the city’s interests. She explained she felt honoured to be asked to take part in it, but it really only mattered if you could pay the fees; ‘It is very commercial and does not appear to be innovative’ (2012). Ni Hua spoke of the difficulty of negotiating processes involved in taking part:

It is mainly a very official bureaucratic event in Shanghai and there is a lack of buyers so for a designer it is not very useful. There are too many people to deal with and if you are not a named designer then you have trouble to attend (Ni Hua 2012).

In her view, Shanghai Fashion Week mirrors China Fashion Week in Beijing. These events show the government trying to build an urban fashion culture that replicates fashion capitals such as Milan or Paris, however similarly to Shanghai Fashion Week, there are few wholesale buyers, it is expensive to participate, and involvement depends upon one’s relationship with the government’s official managing body. However Ni Hua also stresses the importance of maintaining a professional stance toward the event. She felt expressing her personal opinion about the event was not professional, and she had to be careful about criticising the event because she lived and worked locally. She said it was not her way to criticise other people’s work and she had her own direction.

Ni Hua explained that the entry cost is around 50,000 Rmb (approximately A$8000), before model costs, show guides, runway hire, music, visual production and hair and makeup costs. She believed the cost might double to around 100,000 Rmb, and then she must have a promotional campaign in place to take advantage of any press she receives. For instance, a recent collection shown at Shanghai Fashion Festival was promoted by a self-styled publicity campaign when Ni Hua modelled the clothing and directed a photo shoot with the well-known Shanghainese photographer, Maleonn (Figure 5.10). She explained there are plenty of photographers to choose from, ‘but I need to decide the synergy, style and relationship feeling that I want presented and also I must decide on their price’ (2012). Because she does not have a retail store Ni Hua felt also it was very important to build upon her exposure at Shanghai Fashion Week by generating additional publicity. Like many of her peers, Ni Hua cannot determine the value of
participation. However this brings to mind the message that Ni Hua intends to impart.

![Figure 5.10: Ni Hua’s collection photographed by Maleonn, with Ni Hua modelling. Courtesy: Miss Mean 2012.]

Local versus Global: Orientalism

Ni Hua concentrates mostly on refining her aesthetic, which she describes as a blend of her international experiences with her Chinese roots. She explains, ‘My style is a French nostalgic style that combines French femininity and Shanghainese artistry’ (Ni Hua 2012). She was particularly articulate about the development of her aesthetic, which is concerned with Orientalism, explaining that cues for her design come from how China as a whole is perceived in the Oriental art, books and other artifacts she was exposed to while studying in France.81 Her use of Orientalism as a

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81 According to Edward Said (2003), the Orient signifies a system of representations framed by political forces that brought the Orient into Western learning, consciousness, and empire. The Orient exists for the West, and is constructed by and in relation to the West. The ‘Oriental’ is a sweeping generalisation and a stereotype that crosses cultural and national boundaries.
motif is interesting because of the way in which Europeans historically mediated references to Asia by filtering them through their own experiences. In fact, when the famous Italian designer, Giorgio Armani was asked of his interest and influences of the Orient in his work, he replied ‘what better inspiration than to dream of a country that you don’t know? Reality can be disappointing’ (Potvin 2013, 231).

Shanghai’s legacy as China’s first modern city provides Ni Hua with much source material. Notably, when she studied in Paris, the main preconception of the development of fashion in Shanghai among her peers was during the 1920s and 1930s. Ni Hua knows also because of her experience in Paris, the market for fashion outside China is saturated and so she thinks there is more opportunity in Shanghai. However she also says it is important to go to Europe for education because ‘you can get a much better name when you come back’ (Ni Hua 2012).
5.5 WANG WEI

Wang Wei is a Shanghai native who studied traditional painting at university before becoming interested in fashion. He is not to be confused with the female designer, also called Wang Wei, who appeared in the first group. He is now in his late thirties, having graduated from Donghua University in 1996 (Figure 5.11). In 1997, he was employed by Chen Yifei as the designer for Leyefe, the men’s brand that was an extension of his popular Layefe women’s wear label. During his eight-year stay with Chen Yifei, Wang Wei’s efforts helped the label become popular with over seventy retail stores satisfying the growing demands of the middle class for stylish and better quality clothing. Wang Wei left Chen Yifei’s stable with a reputation as one of Shanghai’s most successful designers, and staged runway shows in Osaka, Taipei, Hong Kong and Shanghai, while also collaborating with global organisations such as Lycra, Tencel and L’Oreal.

Figure 5.11: Wang Wei, 2008.

Courtesy: Wang Wei.
Wang Wei began his own business to serve as a conduit to high quality Chinese manufacturers for English designers such as Mathew Williamson. Importantly, in October 2005, he was featured in the first Vogue China issue with Zhang Da, Hu Rong, (not discussed in this thesis), and Wang Yiyang, who were all designers for Chen Yifei. Here his path diverges from the others. Some key issues for Wang Wei have been coming to terms with his fame in China in contrast to his anonymity in the Eurocentric Fashion system, his inability to straddle two cultures, and how his activities call into question the content of a Chinese aesthetic.

**Professional Development: An Attempt at International Validation**

Wang Wei’s determination to enter the Eurocentric fashion system garnered support from the British Fashion Council, and eventuated in an invitation to show at London Fashion Week. In 2006, he set up his label, Wang Wei Gallery, to represent his advance, and consequently he became the first Chinese designer to show at London Fashion Week’s sideline show, a showcase of new talent. Prior to his show, Wang Wei commented, ‘I don’t want to judge other Chinese fashion designers, but I do believe that redness and embroidered dragons aren’t the only signature characteristics of Chinese fashion’ (Xu 2007).

At this time Wang Wei wished to emulate the success of an English design cohort featured prominently in the international press, including Mathew Williamson and Stella McCartney. In the domestic Chinese press, he was acclaimed as the first Chinese designer to gain entry to this event, however he was unable to sustain the effort of offshore brand building, and returned to Shanghai after one season, yet he has not lost his focus. He explained: ‘The locals are largely influenced by the West so it is necessary to be accepted in Europe first, and then I can present my own concept’ (Li 2008).

Despite exhorting his Chinese cultural roots, some in the media believe Wang’s aesthetic is confused, and his attempt costly:

Strolling in Wang’s studio in Shanghai and skimming through his London exhibition pictures, you will not find any of those touches, at least, not in the shapes, colours or patterns. His style could be confused with any other European designer. For the time being, shall we be happy that we have a real international designer, or sad that Chinese elements have been left alone or even regarded as totally unimportant (Wu 2011)?
It is for this reason that Wang Wei appears in this group and not the next. Despite fame in Shanghai, and a secure place in the popular culture of the fashion system of greater China, Wang Wei’s preoccupation with gaining validation through the Eurocentric fashion system, and a desire for international acceptance means he has neglected to build his brand in his home market, and he has also failed to generate a discernable aesthetic. In fact, he still relies heavily on his celebrity to maintain an engagement with Shanghai’s fashion system, and his domestic momentum relies on collaborative ventures to maintain his cultural and social capitals. He has been described as the most successful commercialised Chinese fashion designer of the moment because of his willingness to work with disparate partners such as Roewe, a car manufacturer and the liquor brand Johnny Walker (Xu 2007). Yet these activities draw more attention to the efforts of foreign brands to ingratiate themselves in China, than to the validity of Wang Wei.

For some, China’s ascent involves asserting a Chinese identity without assimilating Western ideals. For instance, Wang Wei believes China’s traditional culture may be an obstacle for individuality and innovation, which are requirements in fashion. Believing he has been singled out unfairly, he has said ‘as the Chinese proverb goes, the bird that flies out of the flock first is the first one targeted by hunters’ (On Mon 2008). Furthermore, in a discussion with the journalist Wu Yingying (2011), Wang Wei explained that the Chinese fashion system is still young: ‘we lack in creativity, management and regulation, although the manufacturing industry has almost kept pace with our European counterparts’. His comments about fashion gatekeepers are also disparaging: ‘what makes matters worse, the fashion media has long been disjointed from the fashion industry and business which has created a bad environment for designers here’ (Wang Wei 2011). This singular comment is reiterated by many of the designers in this study, who complain of the focus of the Chinese fashion media on foreign brands who are able to afford their advertising rates.
Wang Wei’s statements illuminate a fundamental divide that most designers in this group have managed to resolve by aligning with Haipai culture. On one hand, the domestic fashion media is extremely intent on delivering the message of foreign luxury brands to the masses, propelled by large advertising budgets, while the domestic clothing industry is intent on manufacturing clothing for export. In this way we see their alignment with the hegemony of the Eurocentric fashion system, however this serves to demonstrate how the inflows of imported and legitimised fashion symbolism into Shanghai contrast dramatically with the yet-to-be validated outflows of the products of Chinese fashion.

The evolving fashion system remains in the maelstrom between, where designers are pressured to create their ‘Chinese’ brands. As they do so, they must negotiate this space, liaising with industry and media who seem to have different purposes. In fact, Wang Wei has previously claimed his factory in Shanghai manufactured garments for the well-known English designer, Mathew Williamson, and at the time of the interview (facilitated by Austrade), he said he was as capable as Mathew Williamson of designing the collection (Lindgren 2006). However his experiences delineate another problem for Chinese fashion designers, of tensions between industry and art that Angela McRobbie (1998) has raised previously. Wu (2011) described him as a designer without a definable aesthetic and he has also been described as too commercial:

> If I am just commercialised, I can’t be allowed into the young artist’s show of London Fashion Week or the Paris Fashion Week. It is all about pure art. But what I should state clearly is that most Chinese artists are too conservative. Why must artists be high-hearted like hundreds of years ago? Why must artists behave like they have never tasted food? Even an artist should present himself and his works through modern commercial models (Xu 2007).

Since showing at an early iteration of Shanghai Fashion Week in 2005, Wang Wei has stayed away, mainly because he does not produce regular collections, which are a staple of fashion weeks around the world. His long-term trajectory has seen him concentrate on developing a presence in Europe rather than an immediate focus on the domestic market, and one of his methods is to adopt the role of a mentor in
Shanghai’s fashion system. He has been very active as a guest lecturer and teacher, mainly at the LaSalle fashion school, but also occasionally at Shanghai’s Museum of Modern Art, where he has spoken of his experiences in London. These interactions allow him to remain anchored in the infrastructure of fashion education, and also provide him with opportunities to travel to London and Paris in his capacity as a teacher. More importantly, he remains a part of the fashion infrastructure because of his engagement.

*Local versus Global: What is a Chinese Aesthetic?*

Wang Wei’s aesthetic style and aspirations have been singularly focussed on gaining validation in the Eurocentric fashion system, and subsequently entering the European fashion market. However many other younger, and more versatile designers have already travelled to Europe for education and are able to navigate the multicultural environment with greater ease than Wang Wei has shown. Moreover, many are active in both Shanghai and Europe and have a fluid grasp of French, perhaps Italian, and English as well as Mandarin, skills that Wang Wei lacks, (Ni Hua for instance had to learn French to study in Europe).

Furthermore, many European designers are also intrinsically multilingual, a skill that serves further to alienate Wang Wei, so it is clear that the ability to be culturally adept is important. Upon reflection, his leaning toward European styling can also be attributed to his long involvement in the clothing industry with Chen Yifei, where he re-interpreted foreign styles for the domestic market, which has unfortunately left him aesthetically adrift in Shanghai’s fashion system, as well as that of Europe.

Yet this is also remonstrative of the foundations of his fashion education. Wang Wei has been very critical of the education he received at University, where he believes there was too much emphasis placed on art and drawing skills, instead of design and business.

We spent so long studying the correct way to paint and draw, to understand all the important techniques of the famous Chinese artists. No one, not even the teachers could see how fast we would need to understand business and the Western fashion industry (Wang Wei 2011).
Although he believes his designs combine Western techniques with Eastern philosophy, he has been criticised as making clothes that are too closely aligned with a European sensibility, ‘I am Chinese and it is difficult for others to understand my spirit without using obvious things like red colours and gold embroidery’ (Wang Wei 2011). For instance, Tangzhuang, (唐裝), is a traditional Chinese suit that is intended by the Chinese state to represent a national dress (Zhao 2013). Wang Wei believes people now wear these suits for formal occasions to show their ethical taste, and their political alignment, ‘Tangzhuang is everywhere nowadays. That’s why we leave Westerners with an image of as always draped in dragon embroidery. I think the oriental spirit does not mean designing details on the surface, but something from the inside’ (Xu 2007).

In his defence, some of the criticism comes from spectators who, perhaps unrealistically, expect more of Wang Wei in his role as a famous, yet domestic Chinese fashion designer. Accordingly, his philosophy is to ‘balance contradictory elements present in Chinese and European dress and try to make them cooperate with each other using Western techniques for tailoring and using deconstructionism’ (Wang Wei 2011). In a typical Confucian manner, Wang Wei also states his age and experience are not sufficient to give him a deep enough understanding of Chinese culture, so he says he is ‘not yet ready to express his national spirit’ (Wang Wei 2011).
5.6 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, in this chapter I have discussed the activities of five designers who can be conceptually located in Shanghai’s fashion system. They have been legitimised as successful fashion designers by a system that depends on their engagement, as they in turn depend upon it. From a professional perspective, they differ substantially from the previous group because they are able to work with the Haipai ethos of multiculturalism, and commercialism, but also because they have developed strong fashion businesses. They are also well educated, and most of these designers have been trained outside China. Their experiences of the Eurocentric fashion system, and this has shaped how they have constructed their creative identity. However this means they are reliant on this infrastructure. Becker (2008, 129) explains how ‘artists produce what the distribution system can and will carry’. Their creative orientation is directed toward Shanghai Fashion Week where they are portrayed as successful Chinese designers, but there is also evidence of them stepping toward international engagement. For instance Ji Cheng has begun to show in London, however this is an activity still confined to the Eurocentric fashion system. In the discussion in chapter seven, their activities are explored more completely, in comparison to the other groups of designers.

Becker (2008, 129) also explains that some artists who are willing to forego the exposure characteristic of a particular art world produce other kinds of work, however the system will ordinarily not distribute their works. Yet they may become the ‘nuclei of new art worlds that will grow up around what the more conventional system does not handle’. He also says the development of new art worlds frequently focuses on the creation of new organisations and alternate methods for distributing their work. This typifies the kinds of activities undertaken by designers in the next chapter.
But when we come to the consideration of the Taoists we are suddenly transferred to a different world—a visionary dream world. The Taoists make the best type of space-man. They are wont to take flights into the realms, unfrequented by the common run of people, to which they lift us, level after level, each more exalted and mysterious than the last. From their vantage point at a height unafraid, they gaze disinterestedly upon the stratified world below in which the tragi-comic persons are involved in the regressive lapse into folly and wit, illusion and truth, appearance and reality, all falling off from the supreme Perfection, Truth and Reality (Fang 1964).

In this chapter, the activities of five fashion designers and their labels are examined for further insights into the development of their aesthetic as they manage their well-established businesses from Shanghai. By understanding their relationship to the Eurocentric fashion system as well as Shanghai’s emerging fashion system, the processes through which these designers have become legitimised as well as the relationship between Shanghai’s fashion system and the Eurocentric fashion system are made clearer. These designers were chosen because they are fully immersed in their creative practice and have achieved financial stability, which means they are also able to pursue an individual creative journey, either as a part of their main business, or as a separate ‘concept label’. This means their reliance on a particular fashion system has lessened.

Significantly, their work is often discussed in inter-disciplinary realms, such as visual arts, design and architecture. They have been referred to as ‘experimental’, ‘intellectual’ or ‘mysterious’ (Wang 2010), or even ‘prolific’ and are typically industry veterans. Gescey and Karaminis (2012) refer to some designers included in this group as exemplars, having moved beyond the practice of design into the realm of conceptual fashion. Importantly, their work is a dialogue between tradition and
innovation, instead of the cultural merging of the Haipai designers in the previous chapter.

As in the previous chapters, their practice is examined via three themes in keeping with the research focus. The first theme (professional development) investigates areas of professional development, education and working practices. The second theme (creative settings) explores urban creative settings, including creative clusters, and other institutions to understand their practice creative fields. The third theme (local versus global) concentrates on the construction of their aesthetic. The chapter concludes by considering what their practice means in the context of the Eurocentric fashion system.

Some important questions addressed in this chapter include whether designers in Shanghai are engaging with fashion systems outside their own, and if this is for education? In addition, I ask whether their attempts are concerned with global validation, or does their focus rest on the domestic Chinese market? In accord with the model conceptualised in the introduction to this thesis, these designers are found between Shanghai’s fashion system and the Eurocentric fashion system.

The interviewees are introduced in this order beginning with the team of Zhang Heili and Qiao Tao and their label ãdarsa. The next designer is Wang Yiyang who is commercially successful, and once worked for Chen Yifei with Zhang Da, who follows him in a separate discussion. Qiu Hao, who straddles the dual fashion
systems of Shanghai and London, is the fourth designer. The final designer is Ma Ke, whose practice is included because she is widely regarded as China’s most creative designer.

### 6.1 ZHANG HEILI AND QIAO TAO

The discussion begins with a team whose philosophical ethos is integral to their business. Zhang Heili and Qiao Tao are a young husband and wife team who operate their label, ãdarsa, in several retail shops in Shanghai (Figure 6.2). They are the least accomplished in this group, yet they are included because the central aspect of the aesthetic composition of their creative work is their personal life philosophy. They were both educated at Wuhan Textile University in the College of Apparel Engineering. During their study, Zhang Heili was awarded an internship in Milan. This experience was formative because it allowed him to compare his journey thus far with European business models, ‘It was very interesting but not quite what I expected. Design for only money is not about design, but about money’ (2011).

![Figure 6.2: Zhang Heili and his wife Qiao Tao outside their Changle Road shop.](image)


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82 Wuhan Textile University (WTU) was founded in 1958 in Hubei in central China. WTU is the only college in Central and Southwest China with textile and apparel courses.
Eventually the now married couple moved to Shanghai where they have undertaken a program of opening retail shops. In the current iteration of their business in the French Concession, their main shop is in Xiangyang Road and they have recently opened a smaller shop in Xinle Road.

Their key concerns have been the day-to-day running of their properties, retaining workroom staff and refining their aesthetic message. Perhaps their biggest challenge occurred several years ago when the Government announced a new subway line that caused them to close four of their six retail shops they operated at the time.\(^3\) Since then they have rebuilt their cashflow and recommenced opening shops, and they have also attracted the attention of a silent investor who helps provide consistency to their cash flow, and business advice.

**Professional Development: Running the Business**

Zhang Heili and Qiao Tao operate a small, efficient team, separated into retail, and production divisions. Although both contribute to the design process for their main collections and also the conceptual pieces, their business is tightly run. Much time is spent ensuring a smooth-flowing retail operation and both designers spend as much time as possible on their shop floors. They also employ permanent retail staff who are trained to impart their corporate ethos of sustainability, quality and a ‘connection with life’, to their consumer, (Zhang Heili 2011). To support this strategy, they have a very successful V.I.P Club, which provides members with access to private in-store events and discounts on clothing, but is also used to explain their attitude and values. The V.I.P Club also provides clients with the opportunity to directly interact with the designers, fostering brand loyalty.

In their workroom, located in Hongqiao, their biggest problem is retaining highly trained workers. Both designers trained as pattern-cutters and they work with eight machinists. Expertise in garment construction at a high level is valuable and once workers are trained, they are often lured away by other companies. Mainly this is because many workers in this sector have exited the clothing industry, to work in

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\(^3\) Metro line 10 was built quickly prior to Expo 2010 to enable a connection between Pudong International Airport and Hongqiao Domestic Airport, located on opposite sides of the city.
the evolving fashion system where the increased requirements and responsibility for aesthetic content differ. In the traditional Confucian-like hierarchy of Chinese workrooms and factories, where workers tend to adhere strictly to authority, new behaviours including a sense of personal accountability are difficult to instil.

For instance, the very high quality of their garments means machinists and patternmakers must work together intuitively contributing thoughtful and considered creative advances to samples during construction. To do this, their workers must be completely engaged with the aesthetic content of new samples, as they are constructed, but also mindful of the kind of consumer that might purchase them. Here lies a potential problem, for this ability is rare. Most Chinese workers will not question their employer.

Recently they created a second clothing label called Buddha, destined to represent a conceptual line of clothing and because of small quantities and higher prices they need to separate it from stock in the ādarsa stores. It offers a substantial increase in terms of quality, and Qiao Tao explained she was working with several key staff to develop this label, with her eye directed toward the luxury market. However Zhang Heili explained their ādarsa label was most important, because of its contribution to their cashflow, however increased consumer demand, particularly for items produced in limited numbers, or of exclusive styles meant the new label was needed.

Creative Settings: New Working Practices

Despite Shanghai Fashion Week’s omnipresence, Zhang Heili explained he did not have enough time to participate, and the event was also not suitable for their business model. Compiling seasonal collections is a strategy that emanates from the Eurocentric fashion system. It requires long-term planning and promotion, especially if the designer intends to wholesale their collections, and some designers in Shanghai, like the ādarsa team have adopted another strategy more suited to Asian regions close to the equator. Working with two seasons instead of four means summer and winter become the pivots around which the design year operates.\(^\text{84}\) This

\(^{84}\) In the tropics, this is sometimes referred to as the wet and the dry seasons.
means a more consistent flow of garments into their stores, and a closer relationship to weather conditions in the city instead of trying to anticipate demand in advance. Their adaptation also negates the knock-on impact Chinese New Year when the business cycle is disrupted by a month of holidays and public travel. Yet another advantage is the capacity to remain abreast of small aesthetic changes in the market. Therefore this strategy means they can produce flexibly, reflexively and quickly without the risk of committing to large quantities of fabric.

Because of their vertical integration, Zhang Heili and Qiao Tao were less interested in involvement with the domestic press, or other forms of domestic engagement, and perceived the local fashion media as interested only in the superficiality of fashion. They are proud of the fact that their brand is made in China, and that it represents high quality. In response to the overwhelming presence of foreign advertising in local media, Zhang Heili (2011) thought ‘the foreign brands just want new market share and more money, they are not interested in finding the real China’. Yet Zhang Heili and Qiao Tao were very receptive to foreign press because of the opportunity to promote themselves to an interested market, ‘we are faced [sic] toward an intelligent buyer. Generally this is the way in Europe where there are many people who understand our feeling. Here there are not so many who understand our quality and ideas’ (Zhang Heili 2011).

Local versus Global: Aesthetic Underpinnings and Natural Creativity

Zhang Heili and Qiao Tao adhere to a philosophy of Buddhist and Daoist principles, integrating a strategy of non-intervention, natural creativity and minimal waste into their work. This means slow and incremental changes to their design practice, that are undertaken in a constant process of refinement. For instance when the government resumed their shops they used the forced downsizing to concentrate on increasing the quality of their clothing and re-thinking its aesthetic message, and they now enjoy a popular following. In fact, Zhang Heili, (2011) spoke pragmatically of compromise rather than conflict, ‘we only have a certain amount of energy to use, and a certain amount of time to use it. It is better to build than to destroy’.

They are very confident in the ongoing refinement of the aesthetic content on their brand and there is a direct relationship to their own sense of self. Consequently, they have also stayed away from the designer-as-celebrity phenomenon, preferring their staff and clothes to extol their aesthetic message. Despite their acute awareness
of the fashion capitals, they show an indifference to the Eurocentric fashion system, because they run a vertical business that operates without relying directly on fashion trends. Zhang Heili thinks this positions them well for the future, as China’s consumption of fashion matures and attention turns to domestic designers. As he pointed out any problems they have encountered have been related to the constant reconstruction of Shanghai, rather than their business model, and they have been able to rebuild quickly. He attributes this to a loyal customer base that is similarly aligned with their philosophy.

A key point raised by Qiao Tao, was that many of their customers were interested in high quality clothing with Chinese design elements, but they also want clothing without logos and obvious surface embellishments, which re-directs attention from the visual appearance of a garment, to other elements such as fabric and construction quality. Therefore the craftsmanship adarsa offers becomes more important than the fashionability of the brand. As Zhang Heili (2011) said, ‘it doesn’t matter if it is just blue cotton, it is what I do with it, how I make it. It must be the best I can do’. Likewise, their use of natural fibres fits an ethos of remaining grounded in real life and the environment.

Zhang Heili likes to use leather for some of his conceptual pieces constructing the most basic garment shapes from hides he sources locally (Figure 6.3). Shanghai’s animal hide industry was already well established in the 1930s and the leather is of export quality (Dikötter 2007). However Zhang Heili often leaves the edges unfinished, attracting the eye to the natural drape of the leather on the body.85 Some of their leather garments cost between 5000 and 7000 Rmb, (A$800-$1000 approximately), and are perennially included in their collections.

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85 Shanghai’s creative development, 1933 Old Millfun, in Hongkou, is an old slaughterhouse that supplied the tanning industry (Tang 2007).
The advance of Japanese designers such as Issey Miyake, Kenzo, Yohji Yamamoto and Comme des Garçons on Paris, during the 1970s and 1980s, shook the Eurocentric fashion system, and this also offers insights into ādarsa’s aesthetic inspirations. Zhang Heili was very aware of the Japanese aesthetic, and explained, ‘it is not about fashion but about living’ (2011). He explained there is a different concept about one’s relationship to nature that becomes apparent in the space between body and garment. Loose clothing and the lack of obvious body contours is a way of being in harmony with the natural world, where there is no tension. In this way the inner character of the person is realised, and appreciated by others. Western clothing is confrontational and in its immediate fixed shape, it quickly tells you about a person, ‘even if it is a false story’ (Zhang Heili 2011).

Issey Miyake, who is one of their revered Japanese designers, articulated a similar thought: ‘I do not create a fashionable aesthetic…I create a style based on life’ (Mendes and de la Haye 1999, 233), and Rei Kawakubo (from Comme des Garçons), has previously said; ‘fashion design is not about revealing or accentuating the shape of a woman’s body, its purpose is to allow a person to be what they are’ (Jones 1992). Furthermore, Zhang Heili said that their clothes are a reflection of a harmonious way of life, ‘they should be calm inside. We live in the city but the city
should not live in us. It is hard to understand Shanghai’s crazy life so we go our own way’ (Zhang Heili 2011).
6.2 WANG YIYANG

Wang Yiyang was born in Jilin province in northeast China and is one of China’s most lauded commercial designers, now in his early forties (Figure 6.4). In 1992, he graduated from the Fashion Institute of Design at Donghua University, Shanghai where he subsequently took a teaching position, until Chen Yifei employed him as designer-in-chief for the newly formed Layefe label. He worked with Chen Yifei from 1997 until 2001 and in 2002 he established his ZucZug brand, (Su-ran, 素然) with an initial investment of Rmb 500,000 (approximately A$80,000).86

Figure 6.4: Wang Yiyang.


In 2004, ZucZug was named China’s Most Promising Designer Brand, and Wang Yiyang received the Fashion Changning Sharp New Designer Award. By 2012, seventy-three retail stores existed in major cities such as Shanghai, Hangzhou, Wuhan, and Hong Kong operating under the ZucZug brand, including franchised stores in smaller cities. International wholesale distribution to Japan, Singapore, France and Belgium has further increased the brand’s reach. In 2004, Wang Yiyang


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also created CHAGANG, with design partner Zhou Xia, which is now considered one of Shanghai’s important conceptual clothing labels. Key issues for Wang Yiyang are maintaining consistency to his production, determining how he engages with fashion systems, and separating his conceptual practice from his commercial work.

**Professional Development: Production**

Wang Yiyang works from a large studio in Shanghai, sometimes directly on the sample room floor with his team of pattern-cutters when he has time. He also oversees a team of twelve designers who are responsible for ZucZug and collectively they create collections of up to three hundred pieces. Approximately fifty people work in his studio and the operation’s complexity finds them spread across various departments such as design, technology, production, sourcing, sales, marketing brand image, brand business, finance and logistics (Tsui 2012). Mostly Wang Yiyang works with his operations manager, or is in brand development meetings.

Garment production is outsourced to large factories, but this has not always been an easy process. Because of the export orientation of Chinese factories, most are only interested in large orders, however recent declines in economic activity means export orders have diminished, and so Chinese manufacturers are now turning to local designers to utilise capacity in their factories. When speaking of a recent order placement, Wang Yiyang said, ‘we find Chinese printers and fabric suppliers are more ready to work with local designers in this economic downturn’ (Hung 2012b). These activities also allude to a gathering momentum in the domestic economy, as consumers become more open to Chinese design products, while an import tax of seventeen percent on imported fabric also makes the use of Chinese textiles more attractive.

**Creative Settings: Engaging with the Fashion System**

ZucZug was chosen for the finale of the 2012 Shanghai Fashion Week where a series of brightly coloured, simply cut clothes were shown on the runway. Yet Wang Yiyang indicated they did not need to take part, but did so because he thought it was important to support domestic fashion. ‘This is not really our kind of fashion; we work on making our clothes accessible. Fashion Week makes the designers clothing exclusive and expensive’ (Wang Yiyang 2012). However there are critics of his label, in particular of the price-point that positions the clothing as upmarket. For
instance, one critic commenting on his work has said ‘There are a bunch of talented designers in China, but many of them are targeted only at the so-called petty bourgeoisie,’ (Birkitt 2012).

Yet Wang Yiyang feels there is a place for his label in the diverse Shanghai market, especially as consumption patterns change, but also as consumers start to trust Chinese products more. ‘Because there is so much distrust, from everything like basic foodstuffs and even medicine here, customers want foreign goods, but this is changing. More people want our brand, and we have more franchises to open (Wang Yiyang 2012). Domestic franchisees also need to position ZucZug as a Chinese brand, with a message reinforced in local media, which is another reason Wang Yiyang participates in Shanghai Fashion Week.

As well as Shanghai Fashion Week, another key communication tool is Wang Yiyang’s website for ZucZug at zuczug.com, where the brand’s commercial acumen is apparent. He is aware that ‘iPhone-toting 20-somethings are big trendsetters and influencers for his brand’ (Burkitt 2012), and his online sales strategy means adapting his line for what he describes as the ‘screen era’, by including vibrant colours and patterns that lend themselves to video and pictures on social-media sites. As he explained, ‘you design clothing and clothing must sell. If it doesn’t sell, it doesn’t have value’ (Zhangke 2011). He conveys this message with an interactive website that is designed to support his retail stores, with additional multimedia that provides supplementary perspectives of his activities, for example, his Shanghai Fashion Week show, and his Vegetable Market collection. However he also uses the website to recruit staff, and the wellbeing of his staff is another important corporate focus. Wang Yiyang is highly regarded for his support of team members, believing them to be the reason for the success of his label, saying ‘my team are the most important resource we have. I try to bring new ideas to ZucZug and the best way is through hiring young people and helping them grow’ (Wang Yiyang 2012).

Wang Yiyang says he wants to make ZucZug a global brand, but he does not yet have a concise strategy in place and he is not in a hurry. He perceives the domestic marketplace will provide new opportunities unmatched offshore, so in the short-term his plans include opening more stores in China and elsewhere in Asia. Yet he sees endless opportunities for Chinese fashion in general, ‘There is a distinct birth of creativity in this country. Some people just don’t know about it yet’ (Burkitt
2012). He thinks the pace of life in the city has become frenetic as people try to make money quickly as if trying to make up for lost time, but he also acknowledges tensions that arise from a lack of transparency in the marketplace as well as the problems of doing business in China. He believes things need to be ‘settled down, people need to go slow and taste life’ (Wang Yiyang 2012).

Consequently he has separated his commercial activities from his creative practice, conceding volume pressures from department stores constrain his creativity. To enable his creative practice, he operates two labels with distinctly different aesthetic content. Inspiration for ZucZug, his biggest label, comes from the immediacy of daily life. For instance, a 2012 collection named Vegetable Market comprised fabric prints of fish and butchers knives, and knitwear woven with hanging ducks and vegetables (Figure 6.5). The idea resulted from an excursion he and his team made to one of Shanghai’s wet markets, a place of traditional grocery shopping, where they took a series of photographs that became the graphic foundation of a series of prints. He thinks this connects with new Chinese consumers who are looking for a sense of

Figure 6.5: ZucZug: Vegetable Market Collection, 2012.

Courtesy: ZucZug.
reality that is based in the recurrent actions of urban living. ‘They’re designed to be comfortable, for everyday life’. I’m not designing for a party or a runway event. This is just for an average day’ (Birkitt 2012). He also eschews the use of professional fashion models, preferring to use people he encounters in his every day activities, regardless of age, gender or nationality.

Local versus Global: The Conceptual Label

For designers who are financially secure, the chance to operate a conceptual label provides a purely creative outlet, in contrast to designing commercial collections that are constrained by financial viability. Wang Yiyang’s label CHAGANG represents a conceptual exploration of clothing, space and the body conducted via a series of small collections that are created when Wang Yiyang feels he has something new to say. His eponymous shop CHAGANG is not readily apparent in the vista of Yongfu Road and recently Wang Yiyang covered the shop sign making it harder to find (Figure 6.6).

Chagang (茶缸) means container, and refers to the ubiquitous receptacles used in Chinese daily life to carry mainly tea, but also other drinks.87 Wang Yiyang explained CHAGANG examines how one’s ‘essence’ takes the shape of the container it is poured into. For example, in the 1970s and 1980s many people routinely prepared chagang in the morning before they went to work in state-owned firms, so his label CHAGANG is a visual reminder of times when economic conditions were poor, and people were constrained to consume less.

87 This is not to be confused with Chaju (茶具), which means teapot. Chagang (茶缸) has no specific shape while Chaju has only one shape.
Timothy Parent (2012a) whose fashion agency, the China Fashion Collective, represents many designers from Shanghai, explains the concept behind CHAGANG in a different way. Parent describes the aesthetic of CHAGANG as stemming from a time when resourcefulness was needed to survive, and access to proper teacups and teapots was scarce, thus people used any container. However he also refers to the small team of four people that hand-makes the CHAGANG garments with great attention to detail and quality, in order to provide an ease of wearing that is ‘as simple as drinking a cup of tea’.

Figure 6.6: The CHAGANG shop after the sign (on the left of the doorway) was covered.

Photo: Tim Lindgren, 2012
Zhang Da is a designer of similar public stature and age to Wang Yiyang, however he has taken a less commercial, and more creative path with his design practice. He was originally employed as a teacher at the North West Institute of Textile Science and Technology in Xi’an in Shaanxi province, east of Shanghai. His school partnered with the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp, and he worked closely with Belgian teachers, teaching and preparing classes (Figure 6.7).

A friend forwarded Zhang Da’s resume to Chen Yifei, causing him to move to Shanghai where he worked with Chen Yifei’s Layefe brands alongside Wang Yiyang until 2002. After several years of freelance work, including a three-month internship with an Haute Couture company in Rome he established his own design studio called
Parallel in Yan-An Road in Shanghai, whilst also establishing his label Boundless (Meibian, 没边).

Boundless refers to the ‘limitless life we lead’, a concept convergent with eastern philosophy.88 Like other designers in this group, Zhang Da is also involved with another label, and he works with Shang Xia, (上下), a new artisan and conceptual label financed by the French luxury label Hermès.89 Shang Xia might be described as commercial design, in contrast to Boundless, which is more conceptual. Key issues that Zhang Da contends with are managing resources for his own label, maintaining his collaborative projects, and managing the tensions between a Chinese and a foreign aesthetic.

Professional Development: Boundless

For his Boundless label, Zhang Da works with a small team of twelve long-term staff, producing concise clothing collections that will be placed in various shops in Shanghai and Beijing. His employees are also responsible for media promotion and the ongoing search for investors. The production output for Boundless is small and limited by access to quality materials and prints, and motivated more by aesthetic content, than commercial outcomes. He produces capsule collections that are often inspired by social issues, and quite deliberately works outside seasonal timeframes. Zhang Da says he is not interested in building a large retail organisation, because ‘without having to look after shops, I can move around and do what I want’ (Zhang Da 2011).

For example, a recent collection shown in Beijing, named Blue, drew upon 1970s and 1980s clothing styles and integrated Chinese cultural and historical references, such as the padded cottons often found in farmers clothing, as well as

88 ‘There exists Great Boundless Tao, and there are individual souls, created by Tao, that have to learn to use correctly the freedom of will granted to them by Tao’ (conversations with Huang Di) (Chang 1963)

89 The ethos of Shang Xia symbolises a balanced and harmonious lifestyle from the social sphere to the private, and from urban to nature. The philosophy is about finding a balance between and 上, (Up) and 下, (Down) (Young 2011).
traditional indigo dyeing techniques, citing inspiration from common people and
daily necessities.

Zhang Da referred to this collection as more realistic than the abstract
concepts he has previously developed for Boundless (Zhang 2010a). He showed the
garments by using people from the audience, instead of professional fashion models,
on a set comprised of shabby furnishings and whitewashed walls with scratchy music
in the background. The set was specifically constructed to conjure the personal
memories of the 1970s and 1980s, for a new audience; ‘simpler slower times that
were far less materialistic’ (Wang 2010). Zhang Da is also very involved in
collaborative projects. A recent project was called ‘Hidden.Fashion’, and found him
partnered with Vitamin Creative Space, a graphic agency, wherein the designer
repurposed donated cloth ‘to investigate the relationships between our bodies,
clothing material and life’ (Li 2010a). Blankets, bed-sheets, towels and coats were
remade into new garments and offered for sale at a small discount.

*Creative Settings: A Chinese aesthetic for the world - Shang Xia*

Because Zhang Da is willing to question the status quo, he is known as a
philosophical designer due to a rigorous focus on his own creative truth. In fact,
Timothy Parent from China Fashion Collective believes he was one of the first to
‘forge his own aesthetic in a place where copying is king’ (Shea 2012). Zhang Da
explained he expects his work for Boundless to ‘transcend limitations’ and
‘encourage experimentation and possibility’ (Yang 2010). Charles Wang, of
Dongliang, says Zhang Da’s appeal lies in the fact that he is ‘very much like a
scholar; he does a lot of research on culture, anthropology, nature. His world is very
pure and full of interesting ideas’ (Shea 2012), yet he strives for harmony. As Zhang
Da said when commenting on the constant re-construction of Shanghai, ‘you cannot
eat money, but you cannot live without it, there must be a balance’ (Zhang Da 2011).

It is precisely these qualities that drew Zhang Da to the attention of Hermès.
Shang Xia aligns with a cultural shift toward thoughtful, sustainable design and a
renewed interest in craft and quality materials that some see are beginning to take
primacy over speed and economy. According to a recent report (Atsmon, Dixit and
Wu 2011), one third of luxury consumers in China said they would prefer to buy
products that were designed specifically for China and incorporated Chinese
imagery. As Shang Xia CEO and artistic director, Jiang Qiong’er explains further,
The aim of the collection is to see nature through the eyes of [these groups of] people, and to discover how their lives are consistently intertwined with their environment. It looks deeper into the colours of nature aiming to hear its voice and understand the close relationships that man and nature hold (Jing Daily 2011).

Zhang Da has embraced the role by producing practical but philosophically based garments that reflect traditional Chinese craftsmanship and simplicity and shed new light on materials and form. He explained his role at Shang Xia is to provide people with wearable, everyday apparel:

I have no desire to work for some company designing haute couture, so I was very interested when Herms [sic] approached me. I was also drawn to their design aesthetic, which aims to maximise practicality and durability rather than hawking products that are meant to be discarded after one season (Yang 2010).

Local versus Global: A System for Cutting

Zhang Da utilises garment construction methods that reflect his philosophical understanding of Asian culture. Similarly to other designers in this group, Zhang Da said the Japanese are his favourite designers; ‘they really set up Japanese fashion style. Before them there was only one style, after them there was [sic] two standards and later came another standard from Belgium’ (Shea 2012).90 When he works with Boundless he utilises techniques that combine traditional silhouettes with experimental cutting. For instance, his Flatline collection offers a two-dimensional silhouette of simple circular and rectangular shapes in cotton blends (Yang 2010). These shirts, dresses and skirts take shape only when worn, falling differently depending on body type (Figures 6.8 and 6.9). Other capsule collections such as Curvilinear and One-Size-Fits-All follow conceptual approaches, challenging

90 The Belgian designers, Dries Van Noten, Dirk Bikkemburgs, Walter Van Bierendonck, Dirk Van Saene, Ann Demeulemeister and Marina Yee were referred to as The Antwerp Six. They were a group of influential avant-garde fashion designers who graduated from Antwerp’s Royal Academy of Fine Arts between 1980-1981, where they had presented a distinct, radical vision for fashion that established Antwerp as a notable location for fashion design. (Critics note this may be a mythologised viewpoint).
standard notions of form and asking wearers to accept alternatives to traditional dress,

We have a different mentality of how we look at the body. Both Chinese and Japanese, we think the body should be covered, not shown to people. From ancient times, Chinese and Japanese clothes were very loose. You cannot see the body directly...you can feel the shape of the body but you don’t actually see it. That enables more imagination (Shea 2012).

Zhang Da explained how he understood Western fashion meant showing the contours of the body, and Eurocentric methods of cutting and sewing techniques are meant to realise these effects.

Figure 6.8: Zhang Da’s system for cutting. Courtesy: Zhang Da, 2012.
From this perspective, the garment’s function is to highlight the body hence designers deliberately accentuate the hips, or make breasts look bigger. However, Zhang Da perceives that traditional Chinese practice looks to a system for clothing. He says ‘you don’t make the finished garment itself, you make the system to generate it; the thing comes out of the environment that you create in’ (Shea 2012). Thus the system allows many possibilities of dress instead of an unnaturally fixed shape to which the body must adapt. Zhang Da’s methods allude to an innate understanding of Fang’s (1957) holistic and natural ‘whole’ where creative freedom is borne of an inclusive and integrated system and comes into being without effort in contrast to the forced manner of form fitting to the body of foreign clothing.

However Zhang Da’s approach to Shang Xia means applying new techniques and also learning about his heritage. Shang Xia is positioned as a luxury brand that places craftsmanship and an authentic attitude to life as its ideal. He said, ‘Shang Xia has certain codes that must be followed. It is interesting researching new fabrics and material…we have some freedom but we still need to listen to the design directors (Shea 2012). He also says of his work with Shang Xia, ‘the brand ‘pays attention to the quality of raw materials and craftsmanship, producing exquisite but practical items that reveal China’s temperament…this is a meaningful thing’ (Yang 2010).

Zhang Da feels the next five to ten years will be exciting, however there are still problems to solve; ‘The general situation now in China is active, full of chances. The economic boom generates more demand, which enables more opportunities for designers, but the general design level is not high’ (Shea 2012). He noted many students now go overseas to study and the knowledge they bring back will help increase design values in Shanghai’s fashion system, but he also says his own personal inspiration is an accumulation of experiences and knowledge (Zhang 2010a).

He acknowledges there is a lot of work to do in order to find some stability referring to life in the city as ‘a big mess’, where ‘everything is mixed, Western things, Chinese things, old things, new things’ (Shea 2012). Shanghai’s industrialised 1970s and 1980s represented a profound shift in cultural expectations as the textile
and garment industries provided impetus for transitioning to a market economy. During this period Wang Yiyang and Zhang Da were children, and this was also a time when some think China started to re-think its cultural values (Kang 2000).
6.4 QIU HAO

Qiu Hao was born in 1978 in Taicang, west of Shanghai. In 2001, after studying interior design, he launched his first ready-to-wear line called NeitherNor (Figure 6.10). In 2003, Qiu Hao, with another designer and business partner, Wang Qiaoxiao, opened the ONEBYONE retail store on Changle Road in the French Concession to represent his label NeitherNor, as well as other designers. However in 2004, Qiu Hao left Shanghai to complete a Master of the Arts in Fashion at Central Saint Martins in London.91 He graduated in 2006, and returned to Shanghai to establish his eponymous label QIUHAO. His garments have been featured in numerous international fashion magazines (Hao 2012).

Figure 6.10: Qiu Hao in his studio.


91 Central Saint Martins is a prestigious fashion college in London. It offers a philosophy of experimentation, innovation, risk-taking, questioning and discovery. Famous alumni include John Galliano, Alexander McQueen and Hussein Chalayan.
Qiu Hao has also presented his collections in Singapore, Paris, Stockholm, and Sydney, and in 2008 his knitwear collection was shown at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris, winning the prestigious Australian Woolmark Prize. In 2010, Qiu Hao was named by the influential Forbes magazine as one of the twenty-five most important people in Chinese fashion (Hao 2013). Qiu Hao’s key concerns are working in a small studio, developing products for different fashion systems, and incorporating his life philosophy in his creative practice.

Professional Development: A Small Studio but a Global Audience

Qiu Hao works from a minimalist studio where approximately six employees are kept busy producing samples for his collections (Jing 2013). His biggest problem is finding the appropriate manufacturer, ‘When I have an idea and am finishing the design process, how to make it an actual product is always the key to success’ (Qiu Hao 2012). He also thinks that there is still not enough attention placed on structural aspects of Shanghai’s fashion system, and cites the need to move forward at an international level, ‘but we need the support of manufacturers, media and other people in the industry’ (Qiu Hao 2012). However he has also experienced problems with the government who reclaimed his store in Changle Road for renovation and when an opportunistic landlord doubled his rent in a Jinxian Road shop, he was forced to close. As a result, he has gravitated toward retail properties where there is more stability, such as department stores and shopping centres, where the government has less control over individual tenants. His most recent shop opened in at the prestigious Xintiandi Style shopping centre in Madang Road.

To move beyond the limitations of Shanghai’s urban environment, and to capitalise upon his global education, Qiu Hao has adopted a three-pronged approach to building his brand. Like some other designers in Shanghai, Qiu Hao also designs for several labels with differing aesthetic content. He originally worked with Wang Qiaoqiao his design director on the NeitherNor label but appears to have moved onto work independently on his eponymous Qiu Hao label. Yet he still works collectively

92 Other notable designers to have won this award include Karl Lagerfeld, Yves Saint Laurent, Giorgio Armani, Ralph Lauren and Donna Karan.
on the expansion of the ONEBYONE stores as a means of expanding their combined brand presence. Their aesthetic is very similar and they make a good team, sharing the same workspaces. Wang Qiaoqiao has been described as,

One of those fashion designers that has a lot of staying power. Her designs are wearable… She does have this Japanese influence, you can see this sort of Yamamoto influence in her style…She has the commercial knack for design. She knows what Chinese women like. She’s probably the only person who can design another commercial line similar to [Ma Ke’s Exception de Mixmind], except not cotton (Hung 2012a).

However the NeitherNor label now receives less attention than his Qiu Hao label, under which he is beginning to show in Europe. The aesthetic of NeitherNor has been developed over a long period of time. Its design director, Wang Chuqiao, says of the brand,

NeitherNor has always shown its difference of self-confidence and autonomy to the public through the image of free and independent urban women. The essence of deconstruction is hidden in the casual posture by fluidly [sic] cutting skills. Regarding ready to wear, NeitherNor with its aloof temperament is an individual choice of low-key and endless charm (Chiqiao 2013).

His relatively new label, Qiu Hao, is more conceptual and has been described as ‘artisan-like’ (Hung 2012a). However this means that only small quantities are produced, limiting the commercial return.

Creative Settings: Working in Different Fashion Systems

The ONEBYONE shop format also represents several other designers who, like Qiu Hao, completed the Master of Arts program in Women’s Wear at Central Saint Martins in London, where they studied directly under Professor Louise Wilson, who is highly regarded in the English fashion system.93 This small cohort, including the increasingly successful designers Masha Ma and Yifang Wan, is exceptionally

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93 Former students of Professor Wilson at CSM include Alexander McQueen, Sophia Kokosalaki, Peter Jensen, Emma Cook, Jonathan Saunders, Eley Kishimoto, Jens Laugesen, Bora Aksu, and Marios Schwab, who are all well-known, independent designers in the Eurocentric fashion system.
well versed in both Shanghai and London’s fashion systems. In fact some critics have pondered whether this group represents the next Chinese advance, although this sentiment insinuates itself in many conversations about contemporary Chinese fashion design (Chen 2012a).

The expansion of the ONEBYONE stores across China is a means of exposing other emerging Chinese designers to the domestic market, as well as to his own label. Curating a selection of like-minded emerging designers is also a similar strategy to the Dongliang and Hive agencies, however Qiu Hao works with three other designers in a united effort to expand their brand’s collective visibility. Currently there are nine stores, in various cities ranging from Hangzhou to Shanghai, and to Harbin in the far north of China (Onebyonestudio 2013).

He says, ‘As a China-based designer, I think what is important is to find the way to develop my business in China first. So for the last two years, I’ve tried to be on a lower profile in the media, very selectively on doing interviews and working with business partners’ (Qiu Hao 2012). Previously this had included staying away from Shanghai Fashion Week. He says he would like to show his collections to more people, ‘I thought about doing Shanghai Fashion Week but I prefer to organise my own show’ (Zhu 2009b). Accordingly, Qiu Hao is setting the groundwork for a domestic Chinese business by building a retail infrastructure that will be positioned to take advantage of his activities in London, choosing to slowly develop opportunities for the Qiu Hao brand in China first, before an international push.

I want to expand my business internationally. But after I got the award, there is a reason I didn't start promoting myself in Paris, I wanted to keep on doing my design and management in China. Getting into the international market is a big investment. I think I need more time to be ready for this expansion (Satellite Voices 2011).

However in February 2013, Qiu Hao was drawn back to Shanghai Fashion Week, where he was portrayed in the media as an internationally successful designer whose presence raised the status of Shanghai Fashion Week (Jing Daily 2013a).

Local versus Global: A Buddhist Philosophy

Welters and Mead (2012) have previously described Qiu Hao’s work as based on Buddhist philosophy, and it is evident that the Qiu Hao label is more conceptual
than commercial. Hung Huang, China’s most prominent fashion buyer and critic says of his aesthetic, ‘I think he is really a genius, he is so talented, so incredibly well trained and versed in the language of fashion. If anything, his clothes are poetic’ (Hung 2012a). In conjunction with his philosophical beliefs, Qiu Hao also draws on many traditional Chinese elements for inspiration. For his highly acclaimed Autumn-Winter 2012 Collection titled Serpens, some of his designs were inspired by Chinese opera, and Qiu Hao incorporated traditional textiles such as horsehair, that have been long been part of the artisan palette of the couturier (Figures 6.11 to 6.14). As he says, ‘for me it happens in the moment. I like to play around with the fabric, which helps me conceive the design’ (Qiu Hao 2012). Yet he also looks to other Chinese fashion designers in this group, whom he believes have followed their own path. ‘I respect Ma Ke and Wang Yiyang for the fact that they’re doing their own thing (Zhu 2009b).

Qiu Hao includes much knitwear in his collections, because this is a medium he is most familiar with. Knitted wool and cotton, and also technically advanced fibres offer an opportunity to pit soft, sinuous fluidity against stiff unyielding textiles like leather, or heavy cotton canvas and denim. This dualism, or Yin Yang-like tension, is evidenced also in textural contrast; rough and coarse fibres competing with smooth and shiny surfaces, and the use of contrasting colours like black, white, grey and red to draw attention to line and volume, instead of shape and form. Other palettes include earthy colours, tones of brown, beige, and cream. He says this is a way of demonstrating the inner and the outer aspects of a person,

In Shanghai, we have been overtaken by European clothes that no one can make sense of. We are becoming all the same when we dress. My designs intend to show another way to see a person, and another way for a person to live (Qiu Hao 2012).
Figure 6.11: Qiu Hao, Surface Collection, 2012.

Figure 6.12: Qiu Hao, Surface Collection, 2012.

Figure 6.13: Qiu Hao, Serpens Collection, 2012.
Qiu Hao usually introduces approximately thirty new styles each season, and his latest collection is titled ‘Retiring from the World’. It is inspired by the traditional costumes of the Yi ethnic group from Southwest China. The collection utilises high quality fabrics such as cashmere and wool, presenting simple lines without unnecessary embellishment, and colours of black, white and ochre are dominant.

Qiu Hao travels the same international route between London and Shanghai as Masha Ma and Yifang Wan, who are represented in the ONEBYONE shops. He is comfortable taking part in dual fashion systems, and it is important to note that Qiu Hao has been long immersed in European fashion culture. In many ways he demonstrates how nationality is no longer a determinant of design capability, as he rearranges the signs and symbols of global culture into an appealing and contemporary fashion aesthetic. However he also believes,

Made in China is a fact that nobody can escape with, and create [sic] in China I think would becoming an important creative focus in the near future.
And I believe made in Shanghai would soon be worth as much as made in Paris too (Qiu Hao 2012).

Qiu Hao has reflected on what it means to be a designer from China saying, ‘I often get asked about being Chinese and the subject of China. I am a Chinese designer, but it is only an external label. It doesn’t bother me at all’ (Chen 2012b).
6.5 MA KE

The exemplar in this group is Ma Ke. For many Chinese designers, such as Qiu Hao, Ma Ke’s conceptual label called Wuyong represents the pinnacle of Chinese fashion design. I have included Ma Ke in this group as a sounding board against which other designers can be measured, but also because the views articulated in her practice are similarly resonant in the attitudes and ethos of other designers in this group. A philosophical approach drives the conceptualisation of the Exception and Useless labels and Ma Ke is perhaps China’s most revered and intellectually thoughtful designer.

Ma Ke is the only designer who has pursued fully her journey in the Chinese fashion system. She has undertaken several forays into Europe and returned to China to engage aggressively with a new fashion economy intent on assimilating everything from the West. However she has also created the time and space to step aside from participation in the fashion system to concentrate on her journey of self-actualisation (Tsui 2009). In 1998, the China Fashion Designers Association invited Ma Ke to become a member of the China Fashion Committee of Experts. The key issues that Ma Ke contends with are expanding in the domestic market, imparting her ethos of environment, luxury and craftsmanship, and her rejection of fashion as a destructive consumptive practice, causing her to follow a path of self-discovery based upon her life philosophy comprised of Confucian, Daoist and Buddhist doctrines.

Ma Ke’s journey also parallels the journeys of designers previously discussed, as she travelled from Guangzhou to Hong Kong for work in the 1990s (Tsui 2009). She entered early competitions like the now defunct Brother Cup, and in 1995 was named in the Top Ten Chinese Fashion Designers. Ma Ke and her then husband Mao Jihong started their business by selling expensive handmade clothes opposite Guangzhou’s landmark Garden Hotel. In 1996, they began wholesaling the Exception label, however substantial debt, exacerbated by poor business partners, meant retreating to rebuild a vertical business model so as to control their own retail outlets. Exception subsequently became so successful it was widely copied, forcing the closure of their shops in Shenzhen (Tsui 2009). During this time Ma Ke parted from her husband, but she still remains the design director of Exception, which is
available in more than one hundred company owned stores in China (Fig 6.15). The company is headquartered in Guangzhou.

Figure 6.15: Media screen in an Exception store showing an artisan at work.

Professional Development: The Domestic Market

Despite making inroads into the European fashion system, Mao Jihong and Ma Ke have chosen to grow steadily in the domestic market first. Mao Jihong says, ‘in the years since, we have been penetrating the Chinese market slowly, but steadfastly. The competition is very fierce, and every brand is out to profit from China’ (Jukes 2012). Their strategy shows their belief in the potential of the Chinese market for fashion consumption, however Ma Ke has built an intrinsic ethical focus to the brand that she believes makes it stand out from its competitors. Mao Jihong says they have recognised the rejection of foreign brands by some of China’s new consumers, and so Exception offers quality clothing that is not inexpensive, but connects with the philosophical underpinnings of Chinese society.

In 2006, Ma Ke also began her conceptual and artisan label Wuyong (无用, Useless). She was invited to show Wuyong in Paris in 2007, as the first Chinese

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94 Wuyong (无用) is a Chinese term that means useless or worthless and is a fundamental concept in Daoist philosophy.
designer to show at the French Haute Couture. In 2008, Jia Zhangke, an award winning film director, created a film (called Useless) about her exceptional work (Brody 2007). The documentary traced the preparation in Guangdong, and launch of Ma Ke’s collection, Wuyong, in Paris. In the film, footage of workers in a Guangzhou garment factory is contrasted with images of Ma Ke’s artisans at their handlooms, placing a new emphasis on labour and sustainability. Critics described the film as an exploration of the lives and economic woes of people in China’s post-industrial wastelands, especially those who make mass-market clothes for Western chain stores. They view Ma Ke as a designer showing the path back to nature with clothes that embody the natural processes of growth and decay (Doan 2008).

**Creative Settings: Environment, Luxury and Craftsmanship**

Their corporate entity, the Mixmind Art and Design Company is run on a daily basis by Mao Jihong, who controls the production and distribution of both labels, however there are very different aesthetic messages in each label. The Exception label aims to create and transmit the art of contemporary living based upon a Chinese philosophy, articulated in its mission statement, ‘Mixmind Art and Design, it means to embrace a variety of cultural ideas, creativity, ideas, knowledge, and imagination’ (Mixmind 2013). In keeping with their environmental prerogative, the brand uses natural fibres such as cotton, linen, silk and wool, ‘respecting nature and the environment’ (Jukes 2012).

In 2005, Mao Jihong started a marketing campaign for Exception, to introduce an idea he calls ‘new luxury’, for China’s generation of wealthy consumers. He believes his customers care as much about environmental issues as Western aesthetics when they consume fashion. In keeping with Ma Ke’s design ethos, he says, ‘I have been questioning the ‘luxury’ concept. I hope that our generation can give birth to the concept of ‘new luxury’, which focuses on the ecology of a product’ (Jukes 2012). In order to control the quality and integrity of these products they pay close attention to the production process. Clothing is made from all natural materials, the use of dyes and chemical colorants has been minimised, and the manufacturing process is conducted mostly through traditional techniques of spinning, weaving and sewing. They are also exploring traditional Chinese aesthetics and he says, ‘Westerners use sight as their fashion sense, whereas Chinese tend to favour touch and texture as a measure of beauty’ (Jukes 2012).
Local versus Global: The Rejection of Fashion

Despite her design role for Exception, Ma Ke works from her studio in Zhuhai in Guangdong Province and rarely appears in public because she believes her work conveys her message. However she also uses her website to convey her message:

Because I do not want to be celebrity, too much people know what I look like [sic]. I’m more than happy to share my thoughts, completely open, only my portrait I would like to keep as my privacy. I want to be an ordinary person, nobody recognises me no matter where I go which is free and pleasant (Ke 2010).

However she has been asked on numerous occasions to speak about her design ethos, for instance, at the Beijing Icograda Design Awards in 2009.95

Ma Ke’s articulation of the deep divide between man and nature that is visually evident in China’s environmental degradation draws attention to global consumption behaviours that perpetuate the problem. Ma Ke has also received awards such as the prestigious Prince Claus Award from the Netherlands, where in 2008 she was honoured for the superb craftsmanship and aesthetic quality of her work, for highlighting the complex interactions of clothing, culture and the body, and for promoting socially, culturally and environmentally sensitive design and production.96

Her label Wuyong imparts a more considered, and deeply environmental message than the Exception label. In fact, she says ‘Wuyong is not fashion’ (Ke 2010). During an installation in May 2008 in London, Wuyong was described as more suited to the field of contemporary art.

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95 Founded in 1963, Icograda promotes the value of design practice, thinking, education, research and policy, and represents more than 200 organisations in 67 countries.

96 The Prince Claus Awards are presented annually to eleven individuals and organisations in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean for outstanding achievements in the field of cultural development, and the positive effect of their work on their direct environment and the wider cultural or social field. Quality is an indispensable condition for an award. The Prince Claus Fund presents one Principal Prince Claus Award of €100, 000 and ten Prince Claus Awards of €25, 000.
The idea behind the brand is that Ma Ke looks at objects which are discarded, sometimes regarded as useless by people, and then takes a different viewpoint and fashions them into some of the amazing clothes that we have seen here today. So, for instance, the idea of recycling an old tarpaulin or a paint-splashed sheet or ripped, ragged clothing and creating something new (Victoria and Albert Museum 2009).

Ma Ke describes herself as a philosophical purist who seeks spiritual and artistic attainment through her clothes, and therefore she continues her creative journey in a different way from the Eurocentric fashion system. As a result, she looks to her inner self, instead of a fashion system for inspiration. In 2008, Ma Ke was asked who her favourite designers were, and she replied,

The grand nature is the greatest creator that human being could never go beyond. Human himself is the works of nature [sic]. Man-made creation is never perfect enough, but the masterpieces of nature are everywhere (Ke 2010).

Figure 6.16: Wuyong garment, 2009.
For example, Ma Ke includes Arnold Toynbee’s discourse, ‘Mankind and Mother Earth’, when expressing her ethos, pointing to the destruction humans have wrought on the biosphere, and to the misuse of modern technology, emblematic in the ‘ostentatious consumption and hedonism of modern fashion’ (Ke 2010). Consequently as a designer she has formulated three responsibilities. Firstly she believes in ecological responsibility or a responsibility to the future. Secondly she speaks of ethical responsibility or a responsibility for the present, and finally she adheres to a cultural responsibility, or a responsibility to the past (Appendix E).

Importantly, Ma Ke points to the twenty-first century as China’s century, but states this refers not to China’s political might, nor its military, science or technological prowess, instead pointing to Chinese culture. ‘That is the Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism doctrine which will be carried forward and will bring stability and peace in the world… as the intellectual property of all people in the world’ (Ke 2010). Fundamentally, she believes the question of oriental aesthetics has not disappeared from the contemporary discourse of daily life, defining it as ‘Implicit, broad, profound and pure. Of course it exists in every Chinese’s blood’ (Ke 2010).

As Ma Ke continues her creative journey, she notes this perspective provides with a path forward, by living in harmony with her surroundings. She says traditional Chinese culture points to the ‘Heaven and Man concept, advocating the harmonious coexistence of people and people, people and society, and man and nature’ (Ke 2010). Consequently, from her studio in Zhuhai, Ma Ke is pursuing her own goals.

My next goal is ‘no self’… tolerance gives us a broader vision…now I understand there are things in this world that are neither wrong or right and

97 Arnold Toynbee was a prominent British historian whose work followed the rise and fall of civilisations. His book ‘Mankind and Mother Earth: A Narrative History of the World’, was published posthumously by the Oxford University Press in 1976.
we don’t always need answers for everything…I think there is nothing more important than creating your own life journey (Tsui 2009, 178-182).

Yet in typical manner, when China’s First Lady, Peng Liyuan chose to wear clothing from the Exception label on her trip to Russia with her husband, Ma Ke re-directed the attention from herself to Mao Jihong. While most media outlets initially attributed Peng Liyuan’s outfit and bag to Exception, industry insiders note that they actually belonged to Ma Ke’s Wuyong label (Fig 6.17). All the clothes worn by Peng Liyuan for her first state visit to Russia, Tanzania, South Africa and the Republic of Congo have been made by Wuyong, who provided approximately one hundred garments for the First Lady over three months.

Figure 6.17: President Xi Jinping and his wife Peng Liyuan, wearing clothes by Ma Ke. Courtesy: China Daily newspaper, 2013.
6.6 CONCLUSION

The discussion in this chapter has been of the activities of five designers that have been conceptually sited in both Shanghai’s fashion system and the Eurocentric fashion system. Their validation in Shanghai’s fashion system has been accomplished and although some now move toward validation in the Eurocentric fashion system, they have all developed an appreciation of a global aesthetic. From a professional perspective this group differs substantially from the previous group because they have developed strong fashion businesses and commercial reputations. From a creative perspective they all interact with separate entities, or fashion brands that allow them to explore their conceptual ideas. These ideas are unilaterally based upon a strong Chinese philosophical and cultural understanding, which demonstrates a turning away from reliance on a system for validation, toward a focus on self-validation.

However their activities do not negate their ongoing involvement in a fashion system. Despite their experiences in the European fashion system, mainly the designers in this group are intent upon building their brands in the Chinese domestic market. They have used their foreign experiences and European education as a way to build credibility in China. As Howard Becker (2008, 96-97) explains, artists who finance their own work can be free of the existing system for their medium. They need not distribute their work at all, and if they do so, it may not be for monetary return, yet most artists remain sufficiently oriented to the art world to need its distribution system to bring their work to an audience. These findings are more fully explored in chapter seven.
Chapter 7: Discussion: A New Economy of Style

At the beginning of this thesis, a series of questions were raised about Chinese fashion designers in Shanghai. These questions emerged from an interest in how fashion as a form of cultural production is taking place, and more specifically with the ways that Chinese fashion designers are shaping their aesthetic in Shanghai’s nascent fashion system. Shanghai’s creative industries are increasingly important as China moves from a manufacturing and export focus to a design and consumption focus for the domestic economy. How fashion designers in Shanghai are moving from roles in the clothing industry to new places in Shanghai’s fashion system was also queried.

In addition, an interest was expressed in determining the motivations of fashion designers in Shanghai. The success of the European fashion system and its role in promoting the consumption of foreign goods, especially luxury items, is well known, so the query arose of whether these designers were intent on entering the Eurocentric fashion system, and if so, why? However, China’s consumer market is also less than satiated, so alternatively, a further query asked whether fashion designers in Shanghai are more interested in the Chinese domestic market, where the consumption of fashion is expected to increase.

A more direct question emerged from the review of the literature, when Wu Yuanyuan (2009, 181) expressed very clearly the view that the success and authenticity of Chinese designers would depend on how they develop their aesthetic. Regardless of their medium, a designer’s aesthetic is an individual attribute, contextualised from one’s ability to reflect upon one’s culture, and accordingly, a key focus of this thesis has been to gain new knowledge of how Chinese fashion designers are assembling their aesthetic knowledge, and to discern its content. As Arjun Appadurai (1996, 4) has offered, cosmopolitan human experiences are enacted through the migration of both persons and signs into a form of translation whereby individuals seek to ‘annex the global into their own practices of the modern’. Following Appadurai, it is contended that Shanghai is China’s most modern city, and
the designers of its new modernity are very active, because they have long been immersed in the ‘global’.

However this examination also involves thinking about the reaction to the shifts in financial capital that occur from value-adding activities in the creative economy, which is couched in a transitioning Chinese economy. As was explained in the introduction to this thesis, in 2008, the global apparel, accessories and luxury goods market generated total revenues of US$1.3 trillion. A brief analysis of three European luxury companies, (including Chanel and Pradagroup) showed that in 2012, more than US$100 billion flowed to these corporations alone, with profit margins of approximately 20 to 30%. In addition, there are numerous other foreign fashion companies seeking to control a sector of this new space for fashion consumption.

In the context of the broad narrative of China’s creative industries and watching closely in their impending transition, Michael Keane (2007, 13) asked what the shift from ‘made in China’ to ‘created in China’ means for the rest of the world. In pursuit of this question and in the context of the value-adding processes that change clothing into fashion, the thesis asks how Chinese fashion designers operate, and to what end? Moreover, although this thesis has concerned itself conceptually with the transition of ‘made in China’ to ‘designed in China’ by using fashion as the medium of exchange, it has become apparent that this debate is less about the export and import of products, and more related to the consumption of ideas.

In this vein, during the course of this research, the question of how products are subject to national borders, while ideas are able to transcend them has arisen. This is a process of transitioning from producing tangible products to one of producing intangible items such as trends, design information and new innovations. The model introduced at the beginning of the thesis shows how the seepage of intellectual and aesthetic knowledge occurs between the clothing industry, Shanghai’s fashion system and the Eurocentric fashion system, however in this instance the thesis also refers to the fact that ‘made in’ once specifically meant a regional or national specialisation. As well, the term originally indicated a provenance anchored in a traditional knowledge base, which in turn guaranteed quality.

This premise forms the foundation of the Eurocentric fashion system, whereby dominant European luxury brands like Louis Vuitton, or Gucci trade on claims of
authenticity, craftsmanship, and heritage, and expect further claims of quality and geographic place to placate the consumer. In China this provenance has often been reduced to clichés and other ideas long appropriated by the West, perhaps mediated through the lens of concepts such as Orientalism. In contrast, the label ‘Made in China’ has been more strongly identified with labour conditions than design aspects or quality, despite that China manufactures products for many of these luxury brands that are subsequently legitimised in the Eurocentric fashion system (Thomas 2007).

7.1 THE KEY FINDING

This thesis demonstrates there are some important ramifications to the formative process of design. While the fashion system provides structures, institutions and behaviours for fashion designers to cling to, as Wu (2009, 181) posited, ultimately it is an aesthetic content that fills these structures, and which will differentiate Chinese fashion designers. As domestic consumption increases and more products are designed rather than simply manufactured in China, it is apparent new actors, new systems, methods and processes of legitimisation will arise to challenge the hegemony of the dominant Eurocentric fashion system where the flows of capital currently leave China to become profits for foreign companies.

In fact, this thesis provides evidence that such change has already occurred. The emergence of new gatekeepers such as the agencies, the Hive, Dongliang, and the China Fashion Collective, serve to curate only Chinese fashion designers for a new Chinese consumer, and foreign media have been slow to react to the strengthening undercurrent. In Beijing, Hung Huang’s retail store B.N.C, (Brand New China), and her fashion magazine iLook provide not only a similar service, but a reputable and culturally sensitive voice that is syndicated to the global fashion media service, Woman’s Wear Daily. Most importantly, rather than a new system arising for legitimisation, it is the not-so-obvious process of self-legitimisation that has become central to the practice of experienced Chinese fashion designers.

The concept of self-legitimisation brings to mind Michael Polanyi’s (1958) view that the universe is always seen from a centre within ourselves and that truth is always personal. However is truth the same as authenticity? As Eric Hobsbawm (1983) explains, authenticity is malleable and open to coercion, and as Richard Peterson (2005) contends, authenticity is a very different concept when compared to
creativity. Thus it may be concluded that authenticity is a cultural manifestation, and creativity through the process of design is an intrinsic process that is driven by the search for a personal truth and a desire to achieve harmony, or balance. Mainly these ideas are revisited because they are used them as a way to think about the evolutionary and creative journey of these designers in an urban environment replete with global symbolism.

The thesis also posits that one’s conception of authenticity, from a personal perspective, can be explained by the application of Li Zehou’s concept of sedimentation. For instance, one’s most authentic experiences are likely to be the first of a kind and the most impressionable. These experiences form the inner layers or the first sediments of our ‘self’, and it is against these that all other experiences in our life journey are measured. Ideally, as we progress or become cultivated, in the Chinese tradition, we become adept at quickly discarding those concepts and life experiences that do not immediately resonate with our existing personal and inner sedimentation. Eventually very little is needed from our environment because we have formed a unique and individual reasoning and we consequently seek to live in harmony, or in balance with our cultural environment.

For some this means the natural environment. A Chinese philosophical perspective would reiterate the search for balance as the endless tension of Yin and Yang as a way to explain this state, and the Confucian perspective would offer this homily to explain this process, (in fact this resonates with Wang Wei’s view that he is not yet ready to express his national spirit):

At fifteen I set my heart upon learning. At thirty, I took my stand. At forty, I came to be from doubts. At fifty, I understood the Decree of Heaven. At sixty, my ear was attuned. At seventy, I followed my heart’s desire without overstepping the line (Confucius 1979 [551-479 B.C]).

The thesis contends this is how an aesthetic is constructed for we each possess our own view of the world and therefore our internal aesthetic becomes our means of engagement with the external construct we know to be culture. It would appear that the designers in the last group behave just so. However Shanghai’s urban environment is also replete with global symbolism that designers must understand, so as to incorporate or reject new ideas, and consumers as well must also acquire the ability to interpret these symbols so as to make a choice.
A very general conceptualisation of this process is where Chinese philosophy asks for belief in one’s self, and one’s relationship with nature, while European tradition divorces man from nature and asks for belief in an external deity, an act that relocates the responsibility for one’s self elsewhere. Moreover, the Chinese philosophical process is not abstract, nor is it philosophical wishful thinking, because the designers in this last group have shown their practice already forms the basis of some very successful domestic fashion practices and businesses. Furthermore, in recall of the names of some of their brands, ādarsa’s Buddha label, Wang Yiyang’s ZucZug and Chagang labels, Zhang Da’s Boundless label, and Ma Ke’s Wuyong label are resoundingly rich with Chinese philosophical concepts. Ji Cheng’s recent collection titled ‘Zen Awakening’, and Qiu Hao’s collection, called ‘Retiring from the World’ also allude to a Chinese philosophical stance. The translation of Wang Yiyang’s label, ZucZug or Su-ran, as ‘raw, plain, essence and nature, and correct or right’, epitomises the carefully layered thinking that accompanies their brands. Thus the path of self-legitimisation, rather than reliance on a fashion system is the key finding of this thesis.

7.1.1 LOCAL AND NATIONAL

This finding brings to the fore an ever-present narrative that incorporates Chinese nationalism and Chinese identity in its discourse. This dialogue reverberates with Liu Kang’s (2000) collectivist stance, where Marxist aesthetics are invoked as an alternative modernity for China. Kang (2000, xiii) recalls the origins of modernity in nineteenth century Europe to demonstrate that when Western capitalist modernity expanded from a local historical movement to a global experience it opened up alternate possibilities for China. However these alternate possibilities have been fraught with numerous tensions, and turmoil that have resolved little, and now China’s ascendency is undertaken in its guise as a single party-state with a Communist government. Yet paradoxically China, as it reaches again for global prominence is embroiled in the embrace of Western capitalism with its practices of consumption that are so visibly epitomised by foreign fashion brands. This tension is also a source of much searching for cultural and aesthetic identity for some fashion designers who seem caught between their Chinese ethnicity and the representations of the Eurocentric fashion system.
Despite a long cultural history spanning over five thousand years, there are signs that Shanghai’s advent into modernity, and the ensuing pursuit of foreign goods is seen as an aberration in China’s history. For instance, the designer Zhang Da notes that China has a very rich heritage of craftsmanship, but it has been ‘cut and broken many times’ (Zhang Da 2011). His work with the label Shang Xia is an attempt to share a life philosophy that resonates with people, emotion, and craftsmanship, which correspond with inner human values. Shang Xia stands in direct contrast to the appearances of Western luxury brands that rely on conspicuous logos, brand names and prestigious shop fronts for validation.

### 7.1.2 WHAT IS A CHINESE DESIGNER?

In re-thinking what it is to be a Chinese fashion designer in Shanghai, the question of what comprises China must be revisited. From its northern borders with Russia, and Mongolia, India and Kazakhstan to the west, and to its Westernised port of Hong Kong in the far south, China is an ethnically diverse and geographically large country that contends with the close proximity of other Asian countries like Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and Vietnam. Indeed, these regional Asian neighbours exert a great deal of influence on Chinese popular culture including fashion, music and television and film, though the import of their influence has not found a place in this thesis. Many of the designers interviewed for this research were born and educated in Chinese cities other than Shanghai, and return to these places to explore their own cultural and ethnic particularities for inclusion in their work, and just as many are drawn to overseas travel for education and a sense of perspective.

However, as the designer Qi Hao has indicated, the question may no longer be of relevance. His global mobility means that although he is a Chinese national, he thinks this is an external label that bears little relation to his design philosophy. Accordingly, ‘China’, may be conceived of as both a geographic location, and a third place where the concept of ‘China’ differs, depending on one’s life experiences.

Ma Ke’s viewpoint that the Confucian, Buddhist and Daoist doctrines are the intellectual property of all people in the world moves this argument further along.

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98 The Han Chinese is the largest group (91%), and 55 other ethnic groups are recognised in China.
and provides evidence to support the most viable path forward for Chinese design. This research began with the question: how do Chinese designers operate and to what end? In answer, the thesis contends that some Chinese fashion designers are on the path to becoming globalised fashion designers because they have embraced a global aesthetic that resonates with the human condition, rather than the model of Western fashion consumption that is based upon a mythologised heritage, with its accompanying environmental degradation, and issues of sustainability caused by irrational and conspicuous consumption.

These Chinese fashion designers are ‘designers for humans’ because they are able to recognise and look beyond the mythology of fashion, and the Eurocentric fashion system, to a place where they explore the tensions of man and culture. In fact, the evolutionary narrative in this thesis shows how the first groups of fashion designers search for a role in the fashion system, while the final group adopt a perspective that might be described as existentialist as they question their role in global culture in their conceptual collections. This is not to say that they have rejected the accepted fashion retail model or the wholesale model, or even the Eurocentric fashion system, however their design ethos pursues beauty, truth and harmony in the Chinese philosophical sense, as well as incorporating financial return in a process that is still enacted through a fashion system. The advent of the digital era has also radically altered the capabilities of traditional gatekeepers and systems, while enabling a greater capacity for global homogeneity.

Furthermore, in support of this viewpoint, where in their history they might return, and what cultural iconography they might revive in their design practice that has not already been appropriated by the West? Additionally, the momentum of capitalist inspired consumption in China is strong, and will be difficult to change these patterns until there is a shift in its critical mass. This research show that this shift has already begun, and that it is in the production of fashion that this shift will be most noticeable because of the philosophical stance of these designers and the visible nature of the medium.

In the introduction, reference was made to the normalisation of corruption in China, and how these activities impinge on all aspects of daily life. For fashion designers, this means a constant awareness of fake garment components, and fake fabric. These items might include fake zips (Riri, and YKK), substandard thread or
meterages of polyester that are sold as silk. Sometimes these items are defective and have been rejected by a foreign client, and seep into local markets. In my own experience, even the industrial sewing machines used in a workroom are grounds for concern, causing one to choose between the imported original brand, (Singer, or Brother), the counterfeit of the original brand (fake Singer or fake Brother), or the copied Chinese clone (Feiyue, or Jack and numerous others).

As Hu Tao, and many other designers indicated in their interviews, these activities cause a fundamental distrust of the basic tools and components needed by a fashion designer, and contribute to many problems related to the structure of the fashion system. When combined with the oppressive and relentless daily vista of visible levels of pollution, the routines of tainted food, and official corruption, the reaction makes itself manifest in the work of the designers, who prefer to import the fabrics and components of their garments. It is against this backdrop that some key concepts of Daoism and Buddhism find a place for exploration where designers turn from away from these spinoffs of consumption and turn toward practices that seek to resolve some of the tension.

To conclude the discussion, the next sections include some other themes that emerged from my research. The concepts of sustainability and luxury have appeared throughout my thesis and have also arisen in many of the discussions with Chinese fashion designers. The commercial implications of the research will also be briefly discussed.

7.1.3 SUSTAINABILITY

Although not a direct focus of this research, the topic of sustainability arose in various ways with nearly all of the designers. Usually it was treated as an adjunct to the acute awareness of the environmental degradation and pollution that visually apparent in China. Despite their personal philosophical perspective, those in the first group tend to treat the concept mainly as a relatively new criterion of brand legitimacy in the fashion system, and therefore beyond their control because they are

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99 In a trend called ‘face mask fashion’, young Internet users post photos of themselves wearing air filtration facemasks. One popular mask is hot pink and another looks like a panda bear (Kaiman 2013).
more focussed on survival than maintaining an aesthetic position. However the latter groups are more knowledgeable. This is mainly because they face the problems described here on a regular basis and because they are also in a better financial position to cope with implementing a sustainable strategy. Their regular contact with consumers in their shops also exposes them to a well-travelled pool of customers who are increasingly discerning about the product they wish to wear. The final group has made their environmental awareness a core driver of how they visualise their products, and their consumer, and are they willing to speak publically of their views.

However, unlike the Australian fashion economy where industry support in the form of initiatives from the Australian Council of Textile and Fashion Industries (TFIA 2013), and Ethical Clothing Australia (ECA 2013) provides producers and consumers alike with a framework to question their practice, the Chinese clothing industry is yet to facilitate these behaviours. As one Chinese designer explained, ‘Unfortunately, the ‘biggest trend’, and one of the only overarching trends is that eco-fashion brands still seem to be rather limited to a niche market’ (Bundshop 2013).

There are two key themes about sustainability in relation to designers in Shanghai that should be discussed. The first is that some Chinese designers perceive the term as an accompaniment to the model of Western consumption. It travels alongside this model in a discursive attempt to mitigate the detrimental effects of the production of fashion, and is a Western response, often measured by its financial impact. Perhaps the most obvious statement is that the model of irrational consumption is finite. For example, as with the first mapping of the creative sector in the British Government’s DCMS report, the first concerted attempt to map the area of sustainability was undertaken by the United Nations. The Bruntland report (1987) posits that the only truly sustainable form of progress is that which simultaneously addresses the interlinked aspects of economy, environment and social wellbeing. The report speaks very clearly to the relationship between environment and human development, and is couched in terms such as ‘carbon footprint’, ‘eco-awareness’,

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100 The Bruntland Report, ‘Our Common Future’ was commissioned by the United Nations.
‘green production’, and ‘environmental responsibility’, all set to the linear progression of time.

Further ideas about the careful use of resources include recycling and up-cycling, a process of converting waste materials or useless products into new materials or products of better quality or for better environmental value. This is most evident in the Hidden.Fashion project of Zhang Da and in Ma Ke’s use of old paint splattered tarpaulins and textiles in her presentation at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 2008. Most importantly the Bruntland report also notes the inability of man to align with nature:

From space, we see a small and fragile ball dominated not by human activity and edifice but by a pattern of clouds, oceans, greenery, and soils. Humanity’s inability to fit its activities into that pattern is changing planetary systems, fundamentally. Many such changes are accompanied by life-threatening hazards. This new reality, from which there is no escape, must be recognised - and managed (United Nations 1987, 11). 101

The second theme relates to a concept described as ‘innate sustainability’, in that this is an inherent and intrinsic aspect of Chinese philosophy. Rather than utilising the Western rhetoric of sustainable practice, which in accord with the Greek tradition is about fixing nature, the fashion designers in the final group utilise their philosophical beliefs in a holistic and preventative way by considering their use of resources.

For instance, the desire for routine and regularity in daily life is explained by an understanding that nature makes itself known in patterns. Traditional scientists like Zhu Xi understood that there was a ‘pattern-principle, or reasons’ (li 理) for the timing of planting and harvesting crops, and the regularity of the natural order (He 2002). 102 At ãdarsa, Zhang Heili and Qiao Tao look to ideas of minimal waste in their production processes, calling this a ‘connection with life’ (Zhang Heili 2011).

101 Note the parallels between the statement from the Bruntland report, and the statement by Thomé Fang at the beginning of chapter six.

102 Zhu Xi was a Song Dynasty Confucian scholar who became the leading figure of the School of Principle and the most influential rationalist Neo-Confucian in China.
For the designer Wang Yiyang, the wet markets in Shanghai are a reminder that daily life is in the moment, in routine and regularity like the seasons, which resonates with Baudelaire’s depiction of the frisson of daily life, but is also a reaction against what some might see as the loss of Chinese identity in the globalised city that Shanghai has become. Wang Yiyang’s concept label Chagang explores the role of the human being in culture, and looks to resourcefulness and hand-made clothing as a form of simplifying the complexities of life in Shanghai. Similarly Zhang Da explores recycling and re-use in his collaborations, and in his work with Shang Xia, he places an emphasis on craftsmanship, and quality in his use of sustainable design practices. Furthermore Zhang Da makes use of the Chinese term, ‘put emotion into objects’ (Ji Qing Yu Wu, 给情于物), as a way to incorporate the immediacy of experience with the consumption of fashion.

7.1.4 LUXURY

As Zhang Da (2011) said, luxury is about craftsmanship, which is ‘a meaningful thing that reveals China’s temperament’. I interpret his comments to mean a search for harmony between material and form, or substance and shape, but also as a mission to understand his role as a Chinese designer. Zhang Da’s quest correlates neatly with the tensions of Yin and Yang where Robin Wang (2012b, 13) shows instead of a focus on the polarities of Yin and Yang, ‘the whole is made of the interaction between the parts, not the individual parts themselves’. Qiu Hao demonstrates his grasp of this concept in his work, where he contrasts soft sinuous fluidity against stiff unyielding textiles, whilst incorporating traditional textiles such as horsehair in his work. These ideas are a different conceptualisation to the idea of European luxury because they are not measured by their visible logos and associated expense, but by their execution. In fact, Zhang Da (2011) has said he thinks the ‘most precious things in the world are time and emotion’.

Mao Jihong’s conceptualisation of a ‘new luxury’ with the Exception label shows how a duty of care during the production process by using traditional spinning and weaving techniques, the use of natural materials, and a consumer similarly aligned with this Chinese aesthetic stance can be very successful. Exception has more than a hundred retail stores in Mainland China and the clothing is not expensive when compared to imported European brands. Mao Jihong has managed to
supplant the market’s prior need for an overt demonstration of value in the form of logo’s and brand names, with a sense of self-responsibility, and self-worth. ‘Self’ is the central concept for Ma Ke, who as the environmental artist Abigail Doan (2009) says, is a designer leading us back to nature with clothes that represent the natural patterns of growth and decay. Ma Ke’s formulation of an ecological, ethical and a cultural responsibility in design is a blueprint for other designers to follow, and her desire to live in the ‘moment’ or with ‘no self’ shows a focus on harmony.

7.1.5 A NEW ECONOMY OF STYLE: THE COMMERCIAL IMPLICATIONS

In the introduction, it was explained that during the years I was in China to build a workroom for my Australian fashion label, I was also considering how to sell my designs in the Chinese marketplace. At the time the market for fashion was expanding quickly, and in particular the attraction of foreign brands was growing. However, while this is still the case in some sectors, there is also much evidence that such demand has slowed or changed its form. Some prestigious first-to-market foreign brands are now considered old. Affluent Chinese now enjoy unprecedented flexibility in how and where they can purchase, which has resulted in robust outbound tourism spending on products that are less costly offshore, and offer a more varied selection, and importantly for wary officials, a lowered risk of scrutiny. A Chinese import duty of approximately thirty percent, depending upon the product, means many consumers prefer to travel to Hong Kong or Europe to purchase luxury products, as well as fashion.103

Chinese e-commerce, which was almost non-existent five years ago Shanghai has emerged as a major sales channel for retailers with combined sales of about RMB1.3 trillion, (US$211 billion) in 2012, second only to the United States of America (Wassener 2013). Many European fashion brands have adjusted their expansion strategies accordingly and are reducing their bricks-and-mortar investment in China. For instance, in a belated attempt to catch up with changing tastes, in

103 Most imported goods are subject to a series of taxes and dues including the Customs Inspection Tax, Quality Inspection, VAT, Business Tax, and Consumption Tax before they are offered for sale. These factors increase the price of luxury products in China, to almost a third higher than the price outside China.
January 2013, Louis Vuitton commissioned the actress Fan Bingbing to promote a new set of ‘China-exclusive’ leather, logo-free handbags that are dramatically different from the company’s signature canvas logo style. In addition, its number of planned store openings has been reduced in order to maintain exclusivity (Jing Daily 2013b). However, Hermès strategy of building a domestic luxury brand with Chinese partners is unique in its approach, because of its long-term vision, sustained by its deep pockets. This research shows how this approach of aligning with the underlying Chinese philosophical context is the most appropriate way to engage with a new Chinese fashion consumer.

Despite that some brands mentioned here are large corporate entities, this approach is as appropriate for small fashion operators. An important strategy is the clear communication of an environmentally sound ethos because this will align with official directives, even if local officials are unsure about the implementation of such initiatives. Furthermore, the domestic focus has shifted to Chinese brands that are of the same quality as imported products and that are more philosophically and culturally aligned with an ethos that, if not consciously adhered to, is deeply engrained in the Chinese psyche. In the wake of this momentum, Ma Ke’s blueprint of responsibilities for fashion designers is an idealised call to arms for a new generation of fashion designers. Her view, borne of the global ‘intellectual property of Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism’ implicates the role of fashion in China’s new creative economy with a new economy, or sustainable frugality, of style.

### 7.2 CONCLUSION

In this final chapter the research question has been considered in the light of fifteen interviews with Chinese fashion designers in Shanghai by summarising some key characteristics of each designer according to the themes previously established. The globalisation of fashion has found a place for discussion, and it has been reasoned that while the idea of a ‘Chinese’ designer may be a matter of national identity, this has less to do with the construction of a designer’s aesthetic as each person becomes more experienced. However Chinese designers have much guidance to draw upon from Chinese philosophy.

The key finding of self-legitimisation, rather than by reliance on a fashion system does not discount the necessity of a fashion system, but shows some
designers are able to adopt a Chinese philosophical viewpoint that looks to the cultivation of self in relation to nature. This viewpoint is fundamental to Confucian and Daoist ideals and relate more closely to a belief-system rather than a fashion system, but it is their application that is important. Earlier in the thesis, the sum of one’s experiences and how this relates to authenticity was discussed in reference to Li Zehou’s concept of sedimentation. The question of how Chinese designers operate and to what end has been answered by the position that some Chinese fashion designers are travelling the path to becoming global fashion designers because they have embraced a global aesthetic that resonates with the human condition. They are therefore ‘designers for humans’.

Some interesting concepts that were not part of the original focus of the thesis also came to light. The notion of sustainable practice arose from the perspective that on one hand it is an accompaniment to the Western consumption model, and on the other a holistic relationship with nature is an important aspect of Daoist philosophy and from a Confucian perspective, rooted in the routines and activities of daily life. According to the designer Mao Jihong, sustainability is key to his concept of new luxury. The implications of China’s new economy of style were among the last points made as attention was directed to rapid shifts in consumption patterns and new spending choice during exposure to the field in Shanghai.
Chapter 8: Conclusion to the thesis

In summary, this thesis has pursued its purpose over eight chapters, and so in this final section the course of examination of Chinese fashion designers in Shanghai is revisited. In chapter one, the purpose of this thesis was outlined, where it was explained how Chinese fashion is possibly at a tipping point. This standpoint when aligned with political policy, or ‘soft power’ would see Chinese productivity move away from ‘made in China’ to a greater emphasis on the domestic economy and domestic consumption, by providing momentum for a focus on ‘created or designed in China’. The introduction provided contextual background to the thesis, including the research focus, the methodology and the research design. This chapter also introduced a simple model that was developed to conceptualise the relationship between the clothing industry and the fashion system.

Chapter two consisted of a review of the literature. Here the narrative moved from a discussion of the broad theoretical concepts of culture and modernity that underpin the thesis, to the relationship of fashion to culture. A discussion of Chinese and Western aesthetics followed before moving to an exploration of the fashion system and the role and practice of the designer. Chapter three placed the previous chapters in context by examining fashion and its historical relationship with Shanghai. This was undertaken with particular reference to Haipai culture.

Chapter four, five and six are studies of fifteen designers divided into three groups. Each group reflects the relationship between the clothing industry, the fashion system in Shanghai, and the Eurocentric fashion system in different ways. The activities of these groups were investigated by following common themes emanating from my research question. Chapter four included the results of interviews with five emerging and yet-to-be validated designers and are recapped here.

8.1 GETTING STARTED: EMERGING DESIGNERS

Chapter four began with Chen Mei who had just opened her first retail shop. Key issues for Chen Mei were the opaque business environment and official
corruption, which, in her case, comes in the form of the appropriation of state property. Other important attributes included how Chen Mei works with other designers to improve her production volumes, and how her design aesthetic is influenced by her proximity to grey production practices.

The next designer was Hu Tao who is more advanced in her career than Chen Mei with professional experience in Japan. Hu Tao’s main difficulties related to her cashflow, which caused her to close her shop in a creative cluster, and she also found producing and promoting her fashion label difficult. She spends a lot of time sourcing materials that come from the fabric markets, which in turn rely on the by-products of the clothing industry. Her biggest problem is trying to reconcile her cultural heritage with her ideas of design, so as to produce a recognisable design signature.

The third designer in this group was Zhou Liang, who, like Hu Tao lacks a workroom or studio, so he works from the sample workrooms of factories he deals with, and must travel around Shanghai. He also lacks capital, has a separate job that provides him with a dependable income, and has found he can promote his label by networking at the m1NT Bar. His biggest issue is interpreting the merging of cultures that is Shanghai’s modern legacy, and consequently he also is attracted to grey production as a means of increasing his aesthetic capital.

Wang Wei is the fourth designer. She is very experienced in the clothing industry and has used her knowledge, and network of contacts gained at the intersections of the clothing industry and fashion systems to build a small fashion business. Key issues for Wang Wei relate to how her strong industry knowledge appears to relegate her design practice to a localised fashion economy, keeping her isolated on the outskirts of the Shanghai’s fashion system. Her family’s property was taken during the Cultural Revolution and consequently she is also very aware of the tension of what it means to be Chinese and also the need to make money quickly.

From Shanghai’s famous fabric market came Luo Zhixiang, the final designer in this group who runs a shop with his family selling fabric. He has also developed a clothing collection based on traditional Chinese fabrics. Luo Zhixiang’s main characteristics are his innovative business model that capitalises on the aesthetic knowledge of the Eurocentric fashion system while he locates resources from the clothing industry. Simultaneously he draws upon the cultural heritage of Shanghai as
a tailor and as a designer. However he must also be careful of not raising the attention of local officials, who might use their office to impose fees related to cultural monitoring.

**Professional development and education**

From a thematic perspective, these designers each demonstrate activities that occur prior to legitimisation in the fashion system. In terms of their professional development, and education, it is apparent that their experiences in the clothing industry are formative to their evolution as fashion designers. For example, Hu Tao’s experiences in Japan have provided her with a small network, however the clothing industry provides more than just a manufacturing capacity and is therefore responsible for shaping their aesthetic to a small degree. Furthermore, their knowledge about the local clothing industry and their location at its intersection with the fashion system provides them with information about foreign design that can be adapted to the local market.

**Relationships**

An indispensable capital that has emerged from this group is the importance of relationships especially when there is a lack of other resources. Michael Polanyi’s (1958) concept of tacit knowledge is a thread that runs throughout the experiences of these designers, as well as each designer in the ensuing groups, because it is within the social groups that specific knowledge about their practice is transferred. This knowledge is learnt by observation and adaption, and because it is so specific it can be reformed with ongoing experience into a personal aesthetic or design signature.

The working practices of Wang Wei provide a valuable insight into how relationships can be leveraged, and how they are regarded as an important and tacit capital. In fact, the term ‘social network’ might be an appropriate substitute for the terminology and connotations associated with creative clusters. Wang Wei’s use of her university classmates as a prime social network is innovative and logical, but she also bemoans the amount of time she must spend maintaining her friendships, yet the storability of guanxi, as this behaviour is described in China, is one of its main attributes.
Chen Mei has also come up with a thoughtful way to capitalise on her network of friends and has solved some of her production problems by collaborating in innovative ways to increase the quantity and quality of her manufacturing volumes. In other fashion systems, the manner in which she re-labels clothing for different markets and different designers might be viewed as a questionable manipulation of intellectual property to the customer’s detriment, however it is an organised process, the other designers are also culpable, and the process is motivated less by aesthetic development than by a desire to make money.

Mainly, the urban reality of a difficult and shifting business environment, where one’s guanxi is as important as financial capital and local media is viewed with suspicion is a characteristic of each designer. Yet it is also apparent that most of these designers come equipped with previous education that provides an important foundation for their design aspirations. For instance, Wang Wei’s textile degree from Donghua University has provided access to a job in the clothing industry that she is trying to leverage into an independent design position, while Chen Mei’s business degree provides her with an advantage that Hu Tao lacks. Only Zhou Liang has fashion-specific training undertaken in Shanghai, but his lack of capital means he conforms to Howard Becker’s day-job versus art-job depiction. Becker (2008, 78) also explains that in early this stage of monopolising resources, art world members teach themselves the basic skills, often by imitation, and by using available art works as a guide.

*Urban creative settings*

In fact, in terms of their activities in the urban environment, this group must all undertake a variety of roles so as to fund their creativity. Each retains an income-producing job, in a variety of business structures while they develop their creative practice. Angela McRobbie (1998, 100) notes the stage of setting up a small business enterprise is important and even necessary in establishing a name and a reputation and can be seen as a transitional stage. This is a valuable point because transition is a process of change or passage. Thus, these early approaches to building fashion brands, from participating in free nightclub events to considering showing at Shanghai Fashion Week, illustrate tensions between financial resources and
professional experience but also serve to highlight their aspirations of moving from the clothing industry to the fashion system.

Shanghai Fashion Week is an important event that might be considered a pinnacle of Shanghai’s fashion system, and these designers also view it as necessary for their career. Yet their perspectives merge in their collective view of the occasion as simply yet another government event. Chen Mei was particularly scathing about the behaviour of officials who appear to support the event for favours, while some designers worry that if they do not participate they will be looked upon unfavourably in other endeavours. Without fail, Zhou Liang, Wang Wei and Luo Zhixiang showed little interest in the event, except perhaps as a source of personal interest and learning, yet this may be because they have few reasons to participate at this moment. However their involvement in low cost promotions conducted in nightclubs and bars supplants Shanghai Fashion Week at this early stage of their careers.

Finally, the rapidly changing way that clothing is sold in China, and also in a global context, is evident in their approach to the Internet and Taobao. The disembodied sense of distance between consumer and designer highlights the increasingly mobility of these designers, because of the cost of building fashion infrastructure as well as having to travel for much of their working day between factories and suppliers and clients. Yet this also alludes to Bauman’s (2001) conceptualisation of liquid modernity, where life is centred on constant uncertainty, or Craik’s (1994) free floating signs that represent the liquidity of culture.

Travel is an effective means of learning about the production and consumption of fashion outside Shanghai, and a job with a foreign company from Japan, Korea or Taiwan means the opportunity to gain an employment visa, which provides an opportunity to travel. However Wang Wei’s experience demonstrates that in these early stages, designers may be culturally ‘bound’ or ‘locked in’ because of their unfamiliarity with foreign cultural and behavioural processes. Consequently these designers occupy a formative stage, where their activities are concerned with acquiring the aesthetic capital that will enable them to create a discernable vehicle, or brand, for their fashion practice. Thus they remain in a fluid state, not yet attached to the structures of the fashion system.
Local versus global

It is apparent that the experiences and attention of these designers revolve around the domestic market, where they are already engaged. Because their activities occur in and around Shanghai where they are trying to assemble an aesthetic point of difference, so this milieu will inform their aesthetic development, as this is where they sell their clothes. Yet their location in the clothing industry in transit to the fashion system correlates with the kind of career progression noted by Becker (2008). This linear, or Marxist progression means they have a mechanistic focus on rebuilding, and reassembling the world, through their activities in the capitalist oriented processes of consumption, instead of engaging with the Chinese cosmographic concept of harmony. Their activities are very different to the next group of designers, who have made sense of multi-cultural Shanghai to build reputable fashion businesses and brands, mainly because of their willingness to engage with Shanghai’s fashion system. Chapter five included the results of interviews, and additional data with a further five designers who are well established in Shanghai’s nascent fashion system, and who define their aesthetic according to the Haipai culture of the city. A summary of their attributes follows.

8.2 HAIPAI CULTURE

Li Hongyan was the first designer allocated to this group. She has been an independent designer for ten years, and a key issue for her practice involves the maintenance of her business structure. As an early participant in Shanghai’s creative economy she has been particularly bruised by the ongoing development of Tianzifang and has had to relocate the retail section of her business, while her original studio remains under pressure from rent increases. She is also extremely dependent on Shanghai Fashion Week for legitimisation, and is an original member
of a small group of designers who have consistently supported the event. Li Hongyan’s brand identity also relies on alignment with the ideals of Haipai culture, which is in tune with the mandate of the city.

Ji Cheng is the next designer in this group. She is often referred to as a design veteran in Shanghai. Her key problems involve managing the tension between participation in different fashion week events, which emphasises her difficulties in creating a distinctly Chinese aesthetic. Furthermore, this strains her ability to maintain the high level of workmanship she expects. Ji Cheng uses references to Chinese cultural icons as inspiration for her collection in a process that shows how she is attempting to revitalise old ideas to an audience already familiar with the visual aspects of Chinese cultural artifacts.

The third designer in this group is Tang Jia, who is more commercially minded than the other designers in this group. Tang Jia’s main attributes have been her ability to capitalise on her French fashion education, but she also exhibits some tension in participating in Shanghai’s fashion system, when it appears to provide her with little return. Tang Jia has a carefully constructed domestic expansion strategy that appears to be financially well supported, involving concessions in department stores, and stretches to a brand presence in Beijing and Tianjin.

The fourth designer allocated in this group is Ni Hua, and like Tang Jia, she has been educated in France. Her experiences overseas have influenced her greatly, and are evident in her attraction to Orientalism as a motif for her design aesthetic. However Ni Hua runs a much smaller business, and her key problems revolve around the day-to-day running of her business. She is very collaborative, and also extremely independent, having made a deliberate choice to stay away from Tianzifang, where many designers congregate. Ni Hua’s social capital is her main asset.

The chapter finishes with the fifth designer, Wang Wei, who is well known in Shanghai, and whose presence in this group forms a link to two designers in the next group. Despite great success as a commercial designer for Chen Yifei, Wang Wei’s most obvious problem has been the evolution of a personal aesthetic. This is evident in his attempt to break into the international fashion system in London, and also in the tension of a design practice conceptually located between his ideas of China and the West. His experiences serve to highlight some of the difficulties that Chinese designers face during the construction of their aesthetic.
From a thematic perspective, this group differentiates itself from the first group for many reasons. Firstly, the prevalence of overseas education among the group, particularly from reputable fashion institutions in Europe has allowed these designers build financially viable businesses in their hometown. Their places of education range from Montreal to Milan and to Paris. Wang Wei is the only designer to have remained in Shanghai. In terms of professional development, all of the designers have worked for other clothing labels, and there is an overwhelming trend toward working with Japanese firms, particularly in the case of Li Hongyan and Ji Cheng. Wang Wei’s knowledge of the domestic market is particularly strong because of his experiences with Chen Yifei and the LayeFe brand, however this has left him less equipped to create his own aesthetic.

Moreover, their professional experiences have exposed them to knowledge about business building unavailable to designers in the previous group, and so their business structures take various forms, from Tang Jia’s strong vertically integrated model, to Ni Hua’s horizontal model based on maximising collaboration across diverse creative fields. In the lull after his attempt to break into the international market, Wang Wei now typifies the ‘designer for hire’ model, and he finds himself spread across numerous and sundry projects. Howard Becker (2008, 81) explains this process as free-lance. Collectively, their working practices appear to be little different from designers in any fashion system. They are not genius designers, and rely directly on the fashion system, however their commercial success, in turn has allowed them to become key actors in a nascent fashion system that needs their engagement for its own survival. This is the key characteristic of this group. Shanghai’s fashion system does not yet know fully what it is made of but these designers are vital for its own legitimacy and also for stabilising the system.

A notable aspect of the legitimisation process in Shanghai is the number of awards these designers have been bestowed with in such a short time. It is apparent that award ceremonies are among the first steps toward legitimisation and often the process is a means of validating more than one actor. For instance, Ji Cheng’s Shanghai Creative Leaders Award in 2008 provides her with prestige, but also serves to publically demonstrate that the government is engaged with creative industry policy.
Urban creative settings

Urban creative settings, such as fashion weeks and creative clusters are part of the drive toward a more innovative creative economy however some criticism might be levelled at the drive toward this goal. The city’s orientation toward Shanghai Fashion Week as a place making mechanism rather than a tool for supporting the fashion industry shows how precarious this situation is for individual designers. For instance, the lack of wholesale buyers at Shanghai Fashion Week, and the preponderance of officials to retain the best seats frustrate Ji Cheng and Li Hongyan, while Ni Hua spoke of levels of bureaucracy that dissuade her from participating. Tang Jia also participates begrudgingly because she is concerned that she must be seen to be supporting the initiative so that her place in the fashion system remains stable. These issues point to a creative environment that is controlled rather than free and self-regulated which is at odds with the idea of the freedom of creativity.

Creative clusters

Tianzifang also illustrates the tensions inherent in a successful creative cluster. While the cluster of 1933 Old Millfun, which is situated in Hongkou district is sometimes described as nearly deserted, Tianzifang, only fifteen kilometres away, has been so successful that it is in danger of driving the original tenants away. Ji Cheng opened her first shop here, as did Li Hongyan, who has relocated her retail shop to Changle Road, about ten minutes from her studio in Tianzifang. However perhaps it is the model of a creative cluster as a purpose-built enclave for creative professionals that is flawed. It would appear that in the case of these designers, a social network is a more appropriate way to describe the professional relationships they have formed. Creative clusters were supposed to facilitate collaboration among like-minded tenants, however there is no evidence in this group that this is the case. The greater expanse of the French Concession might be considered a more relevant version of a creative milieu because mainly the designers are located in its vicinity. As Ni Hua said, she has stayed away from Tianzifang due to her perception of it as no longer authentic but she remains located in the French Concession.

Local versus global
The final theme, of local versus global, is best considered in light of Wang Wei’s attempts to enter the Eurocentric fashion system in 2006. His experience demonstrates the importance of a distinct and fully formed aesthetic style. Despite his superior technical skill, he was bewildered by the lacklustre response to the barely discernable Chinese aesthetic in his clothing. This response illustrates the danger of trying to align too closely with the demands of a specific fashion system, particularly when there are profound differences in the consumer’s aesthetic knowledge. This raises another key point. In the main, the designers in this group have concentrated upon refining their aesthetic in the domestic economy, which has been shaped by their overseas education. They have utilised this hybrid aesthetic to build businesses based in the Chinese domestic economy, before considering, (in Ji Cheng’s case), validation in other clothing systems.

However, what is most notable in the formation of their aesthetic is how they look mainly to cultural references that populate the lengthy timeline of Chinese history. Instead of incorporating the philosophical foundations that traditionally inform the fields of design and the arts in China, most of the designers included here look to tangible cultural artifacts that represent the visual history of China, whether these are Tang Jia’s icons of Haipai, or Wang Wei’s inability to reconcile the ‘details on the surface…or something from inside’ (Wang Wei 2012). As with the previous group, their behaviours are keeping with the Marxist materialistic conception of history, which provides that history develops in a linear fashion. However Adrian Chan (2003, 109) explains this is a perception alien to Chinese culture. Accordingly, their conception of history is profoundly Western, which causes another tension to arise. Is this Chinese design, or is this design by Chinese designers that is aligned with the Eurocentric fashion system?

In this way this group betrays their dependence on the fixed construct of Haipai that, on one hand, has enabled them to resolve issues of mixed cultural symbolism that are representative of Shanghai’s sartorial and cultural history into their own style. As has been explained, Haipai was made manifest as a reaction to foreign modernity. However this also means their aesthetic development is reliant on this medium, thus they remain fixed to this cultural bedrock. If as Kawamura (2005, 63-72) explains, legitimisation is a process through which a social system comes to be
accepted as appropriate and generally supported by those who participate in it, then in the context of the fashion system, these designers have been legitimised. However this means they continue to work from within the confines of the system. In brief, the aesthetic development of these designers shows a progression away from industrialised aspects of fashion production to the conceptualisation of their fashion identity in alignment with the inherited urban culture of the city.

This chapter also shed light on some new gatekeepers in Shanghai. The fashion agencies of the Hive and Dongliang have emerged into a gap in the market that might have been more appropriately filled by Shanghai’s local government and these businesses act as curators of the aesthetic of this and the next group. For those designers able to shape their aesthetic in ways beyond the cultural manifestations of Haipai, and without reliance on the fashion system, their journey is more closely aligned with a process of self-actualisation, again in keeping with Chan’s (2003, 109) view that Chinese cosmography has ‘no discrete act of creation, no creator and no beginning, so the cosmos is not always seen as journeying towards a goal’.

Chan’s view is an important precedent in the ongoing argument of this thesis, and consequently in the next group designers are found to possess highly developed aesthetic perspectives that have evolved over lengthy periods of immersion and activity in the fashion system. While several of the interviewees continue to build infrastructure, this is no longer critical to their forward momentum, and for most, their path is now a creative journey sustained by self-sufficiency borne of much experience. Chapter six included the results of interviews and other data, with a final five designers, some of whom have long been established. In this group, the designers are sure of their aesthetic signature and some move between multiple fashion systems. Their attributes are revisited here.

8.3 TOWARD A GLOBAL AESTHETIC

The first designers to appear in this group were the husband and wife team of Zhang Heili and Qiao Tao who operate their prime label ādarsa as well as their conceptual label called Buddha. Their main problems involve the day-to-day running of their business whilst ensuring that their aesthetic message is strongly reinforced in their shops and fashion collections. They run a small, vertically integrated business and have chosen to work outside the time constraints of the fashion system. They do
this by manipulating seasonal change in their collections and by remaining at a
distance from fashion media. Importantly, they conduct their business according to
Buddhist-Daoist principles and seek non-intervention, natural creativity and minimal
waste in their practice.

The second designer to be discussed was Wang Yiyang, whose commercial
label ZucZug is available in seventy-three self-controlled shops, and whose
conceptual label Chagang is to be found in a single hidden-away shop in Yongfu
Road in the French Concession. Wang Yiyang first worked commercially for Chen
Yifei before building his own business. His key issues are maintaining consistency
for his substantial production quantities whilst maintaining the trajectory of his brand
without becoming too involved in Shanghai’s fashion system. While his commercial
label draws upon the urban routines of daily life, his conceptual label explores the
space between body and clothing in irregular collections.

Zhang Da is the third designer in this group. He also worked with Wang
Yiyang for Chen Yifei, but has his own conceptual label called Boundless, which in
a similar way to Wang Yiyang interrogates contemporary cultural issues. Zhang Da
also works with the French luxury label Hermès on its Chinese label, Shang Xia,
which provides him with the means to explore and incorporate elements of Chinese
philosophy in his design. His key problems rest with his own label and constitute
difficulties with production and fabric quality. However he is regarded highly for his
diligence and his aesthetic perspective and articulates strongly his views on the
differences between foreign and Chinese concepts about dressing the body.

The fourth designer is Qiu Hao whose fashion education in London has
propelled him quickly to prominence in Shanghai. Like each designer in this group,
Qiu Hao is involved with several labels, but it his eponymous label that currently
provides him with momentum. His key concerns have previously been building the
infrastructure for his label, however like several of his peers he is currently engaging
with the London Fashion Week, and Shanghai Fashion Week. He is known to follow
a Buddhist philosophy in his work, where he explores the tension of difference,
evident in competing fabrics, and the concept of the space between the body and its
covering.

The final designer of this last group is Ma Ke who is the co-director of the
popular Exception label with Mao Jihong. However but this role is counter-balanced
with her conceptual, non-fashion label called Wuyong. Ma Ke has pursued her journey through the Chinese and the Eurocentric fashion systems, and has stepped away to concentrate on her creative journey of self-actualisation. She has experienced many of the problems that have beset this group, and that designers in previous groups are undergoing, however her position now explores the concepts of ‘no-self’ found in Daoist teachings. Ma Ke regards the Confucian, Buddhist and Daoist doctrines as the intellectual property of the world.

*Professional development and education*

From a thematic perspective, each of these designers is extremely capable, and consequently they are able to produce fashion collections as a prime requisite of the commerciality of a fashion business. They do this while also exploring their own creative journey in a conceptual label. In many ways, their professional development aligns with designers in Christine Tsui’s (2009) analysis of the Chinese fashion system. Certainly Wang Yiyang and Ma Ke, who are described by Tsui as ‘practitioners’ have earned their position from lengthy experiences, however this is no longer the case. They are clearly role models who now shape the fashion system when they choose to interact with it. Some like Wang Yiyang, Zhang Da, (and Helen Lee in the previous group), have Chen Yifei to be grateful to for their place in Shanghai’s fashion hierarchy because their professional development and working practices can be traced directly to him.

In their practice, they work in similar patterns to the Eurocentric fashion system, building businesses and producing clothing that is validated by a fashion system. However there are significant differences between this group and the last two groups in their aesthetic stance. Firstly, each designer works with two labels. Their primary focus is a commercial label that is engaged with the fashion system and provides them with a source of income. In Wang Yiyang’s case, this is represented by his ZucZug label, which is available in seventy-three company owned shops however he also operates the Chagang label, which is a vehicle for his creative self-expression. With this label, he works outside the constraints of the fashion system,
examining the essence of self and the historic resourcefulness of the Chinese populace.

Similarly, Zhang Da works with Shang Xia for Hermès, and in contrast for his own label Boundless, where he explores the nature of authenticity and Chinese aesthetics. Likewise, Zhang Heili and Qiao Tao at ãdarsa have their conceptual label Buddha to compliment their main label, as does Qiu Hao with his eponymous label. The final designer in the group, Ma Ke designs for the hugely popular Exception label and balancing her creative output with her Wuyong label, a label she has declared non-fashion. In this way, Gescy and Karaminis (2012) correctly refer to some designers as having moved beyond the practice of design into the realm of conceptual fashion.

Secondly, the philosophical underpinnings of Daoism, Buddhism and Confucianism means collectively their individual practices and inherent philosophical beliefs provide a system of thought and a Chinese perspective with which they navigate the amalgam of popular culture, distilling what is important to them. Instead of producing garment collections in revolving or evolving manners established by Crane (2000), some like Zhang Heili and Qiao Tao at ãdarsa produce ethically, minimising waste and in two seasons instead of four while Wang Yiyang’s practice is bound to the activities of real life. Wang Yiyang very smartly utilises the ‘everyday’ as a way to connect with new consumers, in a manner that Charles Baudelaire might have done, when he challenged the artists of his generation to leave their studios, mingle with the crowds and draw inspiration from the authentic characteristics of everyday life (Baudelaire and Mayne 1995). Wang Yiyang’s appropriation of the traditional Chinese wet markets for inspiration provides the mundane a new relevance and serves to reinforce what it means to be a citizen of Shanghai.

_Urban creative settings_

Producing a conceptual label allows these designers to reflect on their place in the world, guided by their philosophical and intuitive perspective. Ma Ke’s hand in the Exception label, available in more than a hundred company-owned shops, shows an aesthetic comprised of environmental concern, sustainable manufacturing and a growing self-awareness, which resonates with a like-minded consumer, evident in
the success of the brand. Her Wuyong label is a stronger, pared down and more refined label with a less commercial imperative. Importantly, these designers also work to the highest possible standard, articulating an ethos of craftsmanship, and quality that allows them to forge distance between China as a clothing manufacturer and China as an emerging fashion leader.

Local versus global

At the beginning of chapter six, a particularly apt analogy from Thomé Fang (1964) illustrates how the designers in this group demonstrate their ability to travel between fashion systems with a creative freedom borne of self-belief, or to remove themselves, in the process attracting the attention of other designers who are at varying stages of their journeys. As was established in the discussion of aesthetics, Eastern philosophy and Daoism in particular seeks to resolve these tensions in a mutually beneficial relationship. Further to this chapter’s analogy, Fang (1957, 684) also contends,

In the process of living in concord with creative Nature, man is charged with an ideal to be fully realised in the light of the principle of comprehensive harmony… Man and Nature together form a sort of interlocked unity. If man is incomplete and defective, then Nature must be so for that reason.

Collectively, the three prime attributes of craftsmanship and quality, a concise aesthetic and a respect of time for brand-building means these designers have stepped away from the irrational ‘gold-rush with Chinese characteristics’ (Kang 2000, 142) that mobilises earlier groups to concentrate on a truthful and authentic manifestation of their creative vision. In doing so, they ask their consumer to reconsider the values of living and consumption.

Chapter seven was a discussion of this new economy of style. This is a reference to the new ways of building businesses that will information these designers as well as the importance of following the substantial economic flows of fashion. Key findings included a discussion of the constituents of a Chinese fashion designer, self-legitimisation, sustainability, luxury and a reference to the digital economy. Finally, chapter eight concludes this thesis.
Further research

The model conceived to organise the designers in this thesis in which the clothing industry, the fashion system and the Eurocentric fashion system are separated, and the relationship between each actor is analysed, might be applied to other creative and cultural fields. In the model a clear distinction is made between industry and system, or production and legitimisation. However, there is another way to consider this process that might provide yet another perspective in the debate about the definitions of creativity and culture, in the context of the production of fashion in the Chinese creative industries.

Three terms that are suitable for use are creativity, industry, and culture. Throughout this thesis, the strongest philosophical perspective posits that creativity comes out of the Dao and is effortless. It is apparent in this unattributed Chinese verse from the eighth century,

The wild geese fly across the long sky above.
Their image is reflected in the chilly water below.
The geese do not mean to cast their image on the water,
Nor does the water mean to hold the image of the geese

(Chang 1963, 57).

As the designer Zhang Da (2011) said, after studying in France, he can see now that it is the capacity to be free that is most important to him. Chang Chung-yuan (1963, 8), also says when the artist reveals the reality concealed in things, he sets it free and in turn liberates and purifies himself. This invisible process, fundamental to Chinese art is the action of the Dao, and is also defined as creativity.104

Industry implies the industrialised repetition of a creative idea in its manifestation as a product. This is a process that can only occur after the idea has been conceived. In this way, creativity becomes transferrable in its capacity to inform new ideas. Culture, on the other hand implies normalised behavioural patterns

104 Chang Chung-yuan derived this idea from a series of lectures by the philosopher Jacques Maritain, conducted at the National Gallery of Art in Washington in 1952.
that are reinforced to varying degrees depending upon the particular behaviour. Culture is always in flux, and creativity is constantly being informed by culture. As Chang Chung-yuan (1963, 56) also expresses, ‘creativity is a mere intuitive reflection of things’. For instance, the normalised activities that are associated with fashion constitute a fashion culture. Therefore this cyclical and evolutionary model is another way to consider the production of any cultural artifact.

Though it is a simple conceptualisation, the model might apply to other fields of cultural production, for example, film and television, and music. Furthermore, this frame of enquiry might also be utilised to include the clothing industries and fashion systems of other countries. For instance, the developing fashion economy of India offers a similar scenario to China, where actors in the hegemonic Eurocentric fashion system are moving rapidly to develop consumer behaviours for imported fashion, while its own designers struggle with their sense of national identity.
APPENDIX A: FINANCIAL DATA FOR LVMH

FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

Revenue (EUR million)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20,320</td>
<td>23,659</td>
<td>28,103</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Revenue by business group (EUR million)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Business Group</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wines and Spirits</td>
<td>4,137</td>
<td>3,524</td>
<td>3,261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fashion and Leather Goods</td>
<td>9,926</td>
<td>8,712</td>
<td>7,581</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfumes and Cosmetics</td>
<td>3,613</td>
<td>3,195</td>
<td>3,076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watches and Jewelry</td>
<td>2,836</td>
<td>1,949</td>
<td>985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selective Retailing</td>
<td>7,879</td>
<td>6,436</td>
<td>5,378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other activities and eliminations</td>
<td>(288)</td>
<td>(157)</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>28,103</td>
<td>23,659</td>
<td>20,320</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Revenue by geographic region of delivery

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Europe (incl. France)</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia (Excl. Japan)</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other markets</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Profit from recurring operations (EUR million)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4,321</td>
<td>5,263</td>
<td>5,921</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Stores (number)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2,545</td>
<td>3,040</td>
<td>3,204</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Stores by geographic region (Number as of December 31, 2012)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>644</td>
<td>518</td>
<td>412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>910</td>
<td>910</td>
<td>910</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>670</td>
<td>670</td>
<td>670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Markets</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Courtesy: LVMH.com (A publicly available document at: http://www.lvmh.com/investor-relations/lvm-at-a-glance/key-figures).*
APPENDIX B: FINANCIAL DATA FOR RICHEMONT

Richemont: Consolidated results for the year ended 31 March 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In € millions</th>
<th>31 March 2012</th>
<th>31 March 2011</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sales</td>
<td>8 867</td>
<td>6 892</td>
<td>+ 29 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross profit</td>
<td>5 651</td>
<td>4 394</td>
<td>+ 29 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross margin (%)</td>
<td>63.7</td>
<td>63.7</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operating profit</td>
<td>2 040</td>
<td>1 355</td>
<td>+ 51 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operating margin (%)</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>+ 330 bps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profit from continuing operations</td>
<td>1 540</td>
<td>1 079</td>
<td>+ 43 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earnings per share - diluted basis</td>
<td>2.756</td>
<td>1.925</td>
<td>+ 43 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash flow generated from operations</td>
<td>1 789</td>
<td>1 696</td>
<td>+ € 93 m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net cash position</td>
<td>3 184</td>
<td>2 589</td>
<td>+ € 595 m</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sales by Region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In € millions</th>
<th>31 March 2012</th>
<th>31 March 2011</th>
<th>Movement at:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Constant exchange rates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographical Region</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>3,097</td>
<td>2,588</td>
<td>+ 20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia-Pacific</td>
<td>3,684</td>
<td>2,569</td>
<td>+ 46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Americas</td>
<td>1,253</td>
<td>998</td>
<td>+ 30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>833</td>
<td>737</td>
<td>+ 9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8,867</td>
<td>6,892</td>
<td>+ 30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Courtesy:** Richemont.com (A publicly available document at www.richemont.com/investor-relations/key-figures.html).

**APPENDIX C: FINANCIAL DATA FOR KERING**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Figures</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Revenue</td>
<td>9,736</td>
<td>8,062</td>
<td>+ 20.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O/w generated in emerging countries (as a % of revenue)</td>
<td>37.6%</td>
<td>36.8%</td>
<td>+ 0.8 pt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EBITDA</td>
<td>2,067</td>
<td>1,739</td>
<td>+ 18.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EBITDA margin (as a % of revenue)</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
<td>- 0.4 pt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recurring operating income</td>
<td>1,792</td>
<td>1,501</td>
<td>+ 19.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendices
## Key Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recurring operating margin (as a % of revenue)</strong></td>
<td>18.4%</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td>- 0.2 pt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Net income attributable to owners of the parent</strong></td>
<td>1,048</td>
<td>986</td>
<td>+ 6.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>O/w net income from continuing operations excluding non-recurring items</strong></td>
<td>1,269</td>
<td>990</td>
<td>+ 28.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Free cash flow from operations (1)</strong></td>
<td>930</td>
<td>931</td>
<td>- 0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average number of employees</strong></td>
<td>29,378</td>
<td>24,292</td>
<td>+ 20.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1) Net cash flow from operating activities - net acquisitions of property, plant and equipment and intangible assets.

## Per share data (in €)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Earnings per share attributable to owners of the parent</strong></td>
<td>8.32</td>
<td>7.82</td>
<td>+ 6.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>O/w continuing operations excluding non-recurring items</strong></td>
<td>10.07</td>
<td>7.85</td>
<td>+ 28.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dividend per share (2)</strong></td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>+ 7.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(2) Subject to the approval of the Annual General Meeting on June 18, 2013.

Kering: Breakdown of revenue by region

2011

- Western Europe 32%
- North America 19%
- Asia Pacific 24%
- EEMEA* 7%
- South America 6%
- Japan 12%

* EEMEA: Eastern Europe, Middle East and Africa.
## APPENDIX D: TABLE OF LUXURY BRAND OWNERSHIP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LVMH</th>
<th>Richemont</th>
<th>Kering</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Louis Vuitton</td>
<td>Vacheron Constantin watches</td>
<td>Gucci</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Céline</td>
<td>Purdey - gun maker</td>
<td>Bottega Veneta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loewe</td>
<td>Baume and Mercier</td>
<td>Saint Laurent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berluti</td>
<td>Jaeger Le Coultre watches</td>
<td>Alexander McQueen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenzo</td>
<td>A.Lange and Söhne</td>
<td>Balenciaga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Givenchy/ Christian Dior</td>
<td>Cartier watches and jewelry</td>
<td>Brioni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marc Jacobs</td>
<td>Officine Panerai watches</td>
<td>Christopher Kane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fendi</td>
<td>IWC watches</td>
<td>Stella McCartney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emilio Pucci</td>
<td>Piaget watches</td>
<td>Sergio Rossi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Pink</td>
<td>Lancel</td>
<td>Boucheron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donna Karan</td>
<td>Alfred Dunhill</td>
<td>Girard-Perragaux</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edun</td>
<td>Van Cleef &amp; Arpels</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOWNESS</td>
<td>Montblanc pens and watches</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R.M. Williams Australia (40%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moët &amp; Chandon</td>
<td>Chloé</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dom Pérignon</td>
<td>Azzedine Alaïa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veuve Clicquot</td>
<td>Shanghai Tang</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krug</td>
<td>Roger Dubois</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercier</td>
<td>NET-A-PORTER.COM</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruinart</td>
<td>Peter Millar</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Château d'Yquem</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Château de Cheval Blanc</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hennessey</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Glenmorangie Company</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belvedere</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domain Chandon California</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bodega Chandon Argentina</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domain Chandon Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cloudy Bay</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tag Heuer</td>
<td>Joint-Venture with Ralph Lauren to create Ralph Lauren Watches</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zenith</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hublot</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaumet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgari</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De Beers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRED Jewellery</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parfums Christian Dior</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guerlain</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parfums Givenchy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**APPENDIX E: MA KE’S DECLARATION OF RESPONSIBILITIES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kenzo Parfums</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benefit Cosmetics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acqui Di Parma</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parfums Loewe</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fendi Parfums</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DFS (Duty free)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sephora</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le Bon Marché, Le Samaratan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table compiled by Tim Lindgren from publicly available data at LVMH.com, Richemont.com and Kering.com, 2013
In the face of such a world, designers can no longer continue the identity in the industrial era, which sees economic development and profit maximizing are the two most important factors. Albert Einstein once said, “To get over the crisis, then you can not rely on ways of thinking caused by this crisis.” In the twenty-first century, designers should not just show their individuality blindly or create short-term popular consumer goods, the crisis we are facing is no longer on a regional, national scope, this is the first time in history, everyone should unite under the same umbrella to solve the problem, in front of this crisis, everyone has responsibility, everyone is equal, without exception, this crisis has made keenly aware of people around the world: We are one, whether in developed or developing countries, whether poor or rich, whether in city or small village, we are interdependent with each other. The creators of our living environment — designers, design should not longer close the door and enjoy in self-satisfaction in dreams, and if you have witnessed a real world, you will have a new understanding to the designer in this era and their responsibilities. Personalized era can hardly be sustained, while the symbolic sharing of whole biosphere (of course including human), the continuity of this only way out comes from the necessities for human survival, the other half comes from the constant surpass of humanity. “We urgently need to establish the concept of environmental ethics, every invention in the world should be for the best interests of all the beings on earth. Human ingenuity should not be used to loot other species selfishly on the world, we should understand the wisdom of moderation and self-discipline and take the initiative to abandon many convenience, which lead to the environmental damage and deprive the right to survive of other species. As a designer, I believe that I have the following responsibilities:

1. Ecological responsibility (the responsibility to the future). The designer must be responsible for any damage to the ecosystem caused by the production process. She must not work for purely commercial interests and to the detriment of the environment, and must conserve natural resources. The designer must also consider the recyclability of her design in the interest of long-term sustainable development, and not create disposable products.

2. Ethical responsibility (the responsibility to the present). A designer’s sensitivity and creativity should not only be used as a profession, but also as a social role to raise awareness. The designer must have her own attitude, and must not simply be out to please her clients. They have responsibility not to over-design, but to express properly, not to provoke unnecessary desires and promote blind consumption in the pursuit of profit. The most admirable quality in the social role of the designer is honesty. You should not sell your soul for fame or profit.

3. Responsibility to pass on cultural heritage (the responsibility to the past). We are living in a world of abundant wisdom of generations past which we should protect and pass on to future generations, instead of cutting off the tradition in our own time. Our cultural inheritance is not to be put in musuems, but to interpenetrate our daily lives, to revitalize old traditions through living creativity.
APPENDIX F: FIELD RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Tim Lindgren Interview questions.
(For ethics review, please note that the method is a series of semi-structured interviews and it is likely that further questions will evolve from these initial questions. The questions that have been developed emanate from three research themes.)

1) The first research problem asks whether there are differences in practice between established international models and Chinese designers. Questions in this section will include:

- Why did you want to become a fashion designer?
- What do your family think?
- Is there anyone who is creative in your family?
- Did you go to design college?
- What do you think is the difference between a designer and an artist?
- What or who inspires you?
- Who, in your opinion are the most important designers in the world today?
- Where do you mainly work now?
- Have you a work room/studio for product development?
- Do you sew, Can you pattern-make, what is your role in production? Where do you press your garments?
- Do you use fashion photographers, stylists, make-up artists or models in your work?
- How do you know which photographers/stylists or modelling agencies are the best?
- What about fashion magazines? Which ones do you read?
- What about the Internet? What fashion sites do you go to?
- Do you sell on Taobao? (Internet Website like eBay)
- Do you use social media to talk about fashion or to sell your clothes?
2) The second research problem refers to the types of interconnectivity that already exists or is being formed in Shanghai. The concept of fashion networks can be explored here:

- Are you from Shanghai?
- Do you live far from where you work?
- Does anyone in your family work with you?
- Do you have a business partner?
- What is your major daily challenge?
- Where do you get your fabric? Is it expensive in Shanghai?
- Is there a formal wholesale industry for fabric?
- What about your trims (buttons, zips, thread)?
- Do you have staff? Where do they come from? What criteria do you use to hire employees?
- Who makes up your garments? Do you work with a factory for production?
- Do you travel to other cities often (for instance: Guangzhou, Hong Kong or Beijing)
- Do you know any other local fashion designers? Do you know any other artists? Where do you find them?
- What support do you have from the government or local council?
- Is there an official industry body you can go to for help?

3) The third research problem draws upon the groundwork established in the previous questions. It asks whether Chinese fashion designers are accessing international markets or if they are concerned with the domestic market, and if they have any particular competitive advantages or disadvantages.

- What happens when someone copies your work?
- Have you registered your brand name?
- How do you sell your clothes? Your own shop or wholesale or in department stores?
- What is the wholesale system in Shanghai?
- Do show at trade shows? What about Shanghai Fashion Festival?
- Are there any trade shows you would participate in?
• Do you want to show at China Fashion Week?


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