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The Mediating Role of Design Knowledge and its Relational Effects on Interactions with Fashion Objects against the Chinese Cultural Backdrop

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Designers engage in various activities to shape individual experiences and perceptions in the creation of finished objects, implicating the communication of design intent as an extension of design knowledge. This thesis investigates the role of design knowledge in mediating the interactions between users and fashion objects and analyses the flow of knowledge as the transaction of meanings from the perspectives of design theory and theory of design practice. The study conducts a series of pilot interviews with young Chinese designers in Shanghai, which investigates how local designers respond to change and re-evaluate their practices to align with users' needs within their local fashion communities. Their experiences were analysed to map how design practices generate knowledge of design and influence the creation of meanings. This research follows a constructivist epistemology of knowledge, taking sensory experiences into account to produce real interpretations. The fashion movement triggers social interactions to become a socially constructed phenomenon embedded with cultural meanings.

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**THE MEDIATING ROLE OF DESIGN KNOWLEDGE
AND ITS RELATIONAL EFFECTS
ON INTERACTIONS WITH FASHION OBJECTS
AGAINST THE CHINESE CULTURAL BACKDROP**

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Ph.D.

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

2015

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University
School of Design

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and its Relational Effects on Interactions with Fashion Objects
against the Chinese Cultural Backdrop**

Harah Chon

June 2014

CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINALITY

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CHON, Harah

ABSTRACT

Designers engage in various activities to shape individual experiences and perceptions into the creation of finished objects, implicating the communication of design intent as an extension of design knowledge. The design object assumes the representational form of this knowledge which is embedded and made cognizable to end-users, emphasizing the dynamic relationship between users and objects. Designers transmit knowledge as design intent, through interactions involving the user and object, allowing individual interpretations to serve as the meaning-making function of design knowledge.

Positioned against the phenomenon of fashion, user-object interactions produce meanings to fulfill and establish relevance in specific social and cultural contexts. The consumption process creates a point of negotiation between design intent and user interpretation, utilizing the surface of the body to visually communicate and display the fashion object. The fashion system, as the interplay between the individual and society, requires a critical review of the design process during which design knowledge and its relevant meanings are produced and understood against changing cultural contexts.

This thesis work deeply investigates the role of design knowledge as mediating the interactions between users and fashion objects. Supported by evidence of cultural change affecting the first generation of only-child adults, known as the Post-80s & 90s Chinese, the research analyzes the flow of knowledge as the transaction of meanings from the perspectives of design theory and theory of design practice. A key cultural variable, the Chinese concept of “face”, was identified as influencing the aesthetics and tastes of young fashion consumers. To further investigate this concept,

a series of pilot interviews were conducted to provide rich, qualitative insights. Young Chinese designers in Shanghai were included in this study to investigate how local designers respond to change and reevaluate their practices to align with the needs of users within their local fashion communities. Their experiences were analyzed to map how design practices generate knowledge of design and influence the creation of meanings. The conceptual framework of this research links the “face” concept (users) to design knowledge (designers) in the transactional system of meanings.

A significant branch of design research focuses on the domains of knowledge, which have been identified as epistemology, praxiology, and phenomenology. This research follows a constructivist epistemology of knowledge, taking into account the linking of sensory experiences to produce interpretations of reality. The fashion movement triggers social interactions to become a socially constructed phenomenon embedded with cultural meanings. Designers are creators who communicate and transfer knowledge through design activities and processes, while users interpret this knowledge by relating it to social standards of aesthetics and taste. The object, more specifically the fashion product, is defined and analyzed as an epistemic artifact that elicits emotional responses in consumers. Users, as aesthetic subjects, are seen as active players in the construction of design meanings by embodying a form of dress. They shift knowledge of design into a representation of meanings, which are further communicated and shared through social relations and interactions. This culminates into a transactional system of negotiation between designer and object (embedded meanings), user and object (constructed meanings), user and society (co-constructed meanings).

PUBLICATIONS

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*"By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established;
through **knowledge** its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures"*

Proverbs 24:3-4 (NIV)

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GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

Design Knowledge

Design knowledge refers to the knowledge accumulated, used, and generated through activities of design. The different levels of interaction shift this knowledge into the transactional system of meanings.

Design System

The design system refers to the dynamic interplay between the designer and social world through the reevaluation of the design artifact.

Cultural System

The cultural system refers to the dynamic interplay between traditional inheritances and modernity through the reevaluation of inherited values.

“Face”

“Face” refers to the traditional cultural value that directs the social function of individual behavior. It is related to the outward expression of self and influences the expression of self-identity.

Fashion System

The fashion system refers to the dynamic interplay between the individual and society through the reevaluation of the fashion object.

Object

The objects in this study refer to fashion objects that are created by designers through design activities. It is referred to as such due to its various roles within the stages of design, user, and social interactions.

Transactional System

The transactional system refers to the perceptible function of design knowledge, which enters into the negotiation of embedded, constructed, and co-created meanings.

User

The user refers to consumers of fashion. This study aims to investigate the fundamental aspects of fashion by separating all brand associations from the design products and consumers. Therefore, consumers of fashion are referred to as users of fashion objects who partake in interactions contributing to the assigning of meanings.

Chapter I. Introduction

1.1 Background of Research Context

Chinese society has undergone radical changes throughout the past century that have revolutionized social standards and implemented new systems of cultural change (Lau, 2007). Prompted by the Open Door Policy of 1978, the past three decades define a period of fast growth affecting political, economic, and cultural systems. These institutional changes have launched new cultural movements leading to China's progressive modernization, affecting traditional values, beliefs, and practices (Tang, 2007). Globalization, technological advances, and new modes of communication define China's current phase of modernity that has influenced the interconnectivity of social relations and identities (Holzner, 2007). The integration of foreign concepts and injection of new knowledge has produced social transformations, disrupting the continuity of traditional ideas and values.

Social movements signify the weakening power of traditional values in guiding social behaviors, suggesting that the changes affecting recent developments will have altered traditional Chinese concepts and institutional systems (Lau, 2007). The fast development of Chinese cities has resulted in the current urban population concentration, affecting consumption behaviors and accelerating growing interests toward fashion products. During the Cultural Revolution, a strong collectivist identity was enforced to restrict the female expression of individuality through forms of dress (Walker & Gilbert, 2009). This rigid and stagnant period of fashion was revitalized by the "Four Modernizations", resulting

in the industrialization of China's textile and clothing industries while spreading Western-style fashions (Finnane, 1996). The displacement of the Mao suit, with individual expressions of style, marked a departure from traditional systems of thinking towards the materialization of expressing personal values and uniqueness through dress.

Recent years have shown an increase of brand awareness and materialistic values in China, as a result of the large influx of international fashion brands. According to Rindfleisch, *et al.* (2009), materialism influences the need for brand connection as a means to strengthen an individual's existential security. It acts in many ways as a substitute for the loss of community and is a result of "face", the social concept of self in China's traditionally collectivist culture (Liao & Wang, 2009). The current indication of progressive consumption styles among Post-80s & 90s Chinese can be interpreted as an instance of cultural change, triggering a conflict in cultural identities and adopted values. Against this backdrop of change, the subjective nature of individual perception affects the extent to which young Chinese consumers experience and interact with fashion products.

Fashion, as a bodily display, requires a presentation of the self that embodies both individual and social activities (Entwistle, 2000:11). The fashion system¹ can be defined as containing the ongoing negotiation between individuals and society through the assigning of meaning and significance to design objects. Within this system, individuals are positioned at the boundary between expressing a personal representation of the self and imitating the acceptable social standards of what is

¹ The fashion system is discussed in Section 2.5

fashionable. The expression of self-identity constitutes the social group while simultaneously reflecting the group's influences on aesthetic choices and taste, indicating challenges in the social order of power and dominance over the individual. The interaction is twofold, involving negotiations between (1) user and object and (2) user and society.

Designers are individuals who utilize and transfer knowledge into the production of artifacts. The role of designers is to affect and effect changes to future situations of the artificial world, requiring the ability to shift tacit knowledge through design practices into a finished object. The physical components of the design object produce knowledge of the design which, when moved into the social context, yield sensorial and perceptive knowledge that transforms into the cognitive interests of meanings (Narvaez, 2000). Fashion, which positions users at sociocultural levels of interaction, involves a process of meaning-making in the trends set by its leaders and the styles adopted by followers. The dynamic changes affecting the social and cultural environment of Chinese consumers has been defined as an appropriate backdrop for this investigation into the role of design knowledge as mediating interactions between (1) designers and objects, (2) users and objects, and (3) users and other users.

1.2 Statement of Research Problem and Questions

Cross (2001) states that what designers especially know is how to alter and propose changes to the "artificial world". This requires design knowledge, which is (1) inherent in the activity of designing, (2), inherent in the artifacts of the artificial world, and (3) inherent in the processes of producing new artifacts. The

domain of fashion, in both the production of design objects and as a social movement, creates and produces its own knowledge that is transferred through cultural meanings. Fashion objects are explicitly positioned and displayed on the surface of the body, forcing users into a form of communication. This leads to questions of how, or to the extent of which, changes in individual or user perception affect the creation of symbolic meanings associated with fashion objects. If meanings are an extension of design knowledge, representative of the knowledge transferred through an object, then design knowledge acts as the mediation for such meanings to be established. Following a comprehensive review of literature and acknowledging existing gaps in research, the following research problem has been identified in the form of the question:

*In what ways does design knowledge mediate the relationships
between designer and object, between user and object,
and between groups of users?*

Individual perception is formed as a result of the physical presence of being-in-the-world, developed through user experiences and interactions within a social context. It is proposed that changes to the social environment will consequently alter individual perceptions, as perception is influenced and shaped by experience. The traditional Chinese concept of “face” is also proposed as undergoing a similar transformation, as a result of changing perceptions, and will affect individual standards for expressing aesthetics and taste. This first set of research questions concerns the relationship between cultural change and individual perception:

- 1.1 To what extent have sociocultural changes influenced the development of individual perception and self-identity among Post-80s & 90s Chinese?
- 1.2 How do changes in perception relate to the traditional Chinese concept of “face”?
- 1.3 Does the new definition of “face” disrupt or alter existing perceptions toward aesthetics and taste?

Fashion functions within a system of leaders and followers, forcing individuals to choose between the opposing poles of imitation and differentiation. Fashion designers use, develop, and produce knowledge that is transferred to users through the object. It is suggested that the mediating role of design knowledge will alter perceptions of “face”, aesthetics, and taste. Furthermore, it is proposed that the mediating role of design knowledge, when inducing and facilitating a meaning-making process, will allow users to establish symbolic significance to objects. This will enable greater abilities to negotiate aesthetics and taste against the tensions imposed by the fashion system. The second set of research questions address the mediating role of design knowledge in relation to three levels of interaction:

- 2.1 What measures constitute design knowledge within the fashion context and to what extent does it mediate the relationship between designer and object?
- 2.2 How does design knowledge, transferred through the object, mediate the relationship between user and object?
- 2.3 How does design knowledge, as the creation of meanings, mediate the relationship between user and groups of users?

This study draws on social transformation theories to explore the impact of cultural change affecting Post-80s & 90s Chinese. Their reevaluation of cultural values is addressed to define the variables influencing individual perception and

the decision-making process. Existing knowledge literature will explore the specific domains of design knowledge and its impact on both local Chinese designers and users. In addition, the effects of external changes on individual perception will be defined in relation to the cultural values of “face”, aesthetic judgment, development of taste, and individuality. Chinese designers are included in the Main Study of this research, using the case-study method for analyzing the situational context of the chosen phenomenon of study.

1.3 Research Objectives

The purpose of this research is to acknowledge the user as an active player in the creative process of styling and dress by investigating the social aspects of cultural change in relation to the role of design knowledge. This study reconciles gaps in previous fashion research that have failed to address design knowledge as a key influence in user-object interactions. The empirical analysis of this study is based on existing literature and theories that serve as indicators for the key variables of cultural change affecting young Chinese. These variables will be explored against design knowledge, through a series of pilot interviews, to develop the conceptual framework of this investigation.

This study aims to present implications supporting the fluidity of design knowledge between designer and object, user and object, and its role in mediating the social construction of meanings within a community of users. Three different relationships are reviewed in this study through interactions involving (1) the designer and object, (2) the user and object, and (3) the user and society. Design knowledge mediates these relationships through a facilitative mediation, by

providing the space for the negotiation of meanings. As symbolically significant meanings are culturally produced, this study accounts for the social and cultural changes affecting the target audience under investigation. The process of meaning-making is mapped into a framework of knowledge flow and discussed by fulfilling the main objectives of this study.

Research Objective 1:

- 1.1 To identify the key cultural variables affected by individual perception
- 1.2 To categorize the three levels of interaction through the systems of culture, design, and fashion
- 1.3 To develop a model mapping the role of design knowledge and the facilitative mediation of meaning-making

Research Objective 2:

- 2.1 To define the mediating role of design knowledge and appropriate implications for establishing and communicating meanings through fashion objects

1.4 Research Approach

A qualitative methodological approach was adopted to develop and explore a model for the purposes of identifying and defining design knowledge within the domain of fashion design. This study aims to understand the ways in which design knowledge is communicated and reinterpreted, through embodied experiences with fashion objects, in order to develop a framework explicating the meaning-making process of fashion as a form of communication. A framework was developed to provide a basic foundation of knowledge, as the flow of meanings, relevant to the practice of fashion design and research.

Taking into consideration the cultural significance of design meanings, Pilot Studies were conducted in Mainland China in order to become familiarized with and fully immersed in the local culture. These investigations were conducted through face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with university-aged students. Local fashion designers were included as part of the main investigation, resulting in the identification of main themes for the Conceptual Framework. Interviews included qualitative data collected from 23 female university students from the Jiangsu Province, and 4 fashion designers in Shanghai. These semi-structured verbal interviews generated supporting evidence for the existence of tensions in the design, fashion, and cultural systems. The research methodology is developed through a phenomenological approach that supports both the generalizations and interpretations of the researcher throughout the process of analysis. An Experimental Study is included, exploring the epistemological dimensions of design knowledge from the perspective of design activities involving a culture-specific case-study. Insights gained from the researcher's own involvement in the design study produced further support, defining and conceptualizing the levels of design knowledge mediation.

The Pilot Studies explored the main variables relating to Chinese culture and design knowledge, providing the empirical grounding for interrelationships which cannot be identified in existing literature. To address the scale of China, the tests involving cultural change focused on university students as a diversified representation of Chinese culture. An inductive analysis was utilized to discover patterns, themes, and categories relevant to the research topic and main focus of the investigation. Rather than relying on predetermined variables or analytical

dimensions, existing theories supplied relevant perspectives for the systematic collection of data. The findings were then shaped and interpreted into concepts, which were later abstracted and refined into meanings.

Research Problem

In what ways does design knowledge mediate the relationships between designer and object, between user and object, and between groups of users?

Research Objective 1 is centered on the development of individual perception, its relationship to cultural change and its impact on interactions with fashion objects.

Research Question 1:

- 1.1 To what extent have sociocultural changes influenced the development of individual perception and self-identity among Post-80s & 90s Chinese?
- 1.2 How do changes in perception relate to the traditional Chinese concept of “face”?
- 1.3 Does the new definition of “face” disrupt or alter existing perceptions toward aesthetics and taste?

Proposition 1a: The cultural values undergoing change are defined as: (1) “face”, (2) aesthetics & taste, and (3) individuality

Proposition 1b: External changes affect the development of perception, therefore affecting the roles of cultural values

Research Objective 2 is centered on design knowledge and its mediating role.

Research Question 2:

- 2.1 What measures constitute “design knowledge” within the fashion context and to what extent does it mediate the relationship between designer and object?
- 2.2 How does design knowledge, transferred through the object, mediate the relationship between user and object?
- 2.3 How does design knowledge, as the creation of meanings, mediate the relationship between user and groups of users?

Proposition 2a: Design knowledge exists in the domains of: (1) design epistemology, (2) design praxiology, and (3) design phenomenology

Proposition 2b: The shared sociocultural context of local fashion designers and users will increase the fluidity of knowledge transference and the level of meaning-making

Proposition 2c: The interpretive nature of design knowledge will positively influence the cultural relevance of fashion objects and its effects on the local fashion community

Table 1.1 *Summary of Research Questions*

The research statements have been developed in relation to the research problem and questions identified in the previous sections. They are separated into two main research objectives: (1) relating to the individual and cultural change and (2) relating to design knowledge and the production of value. The Pilot Interviews provided the basis for inferences made on cultural change, particularly in how young consumers view the concepts of “face”, aesthetics and taste, and individuality.

The analysis of the designer and student interviews resulted in the development of the Conceptual Framework, which identifies (1) the effects of the sociocultural environment on Chinese designers and users and (2) the transactional system of meanings resulting from interactions involving the fashion object. Critically examining the sociocultural implications of the local environment is crucial for the process of further defining how design knowledge triggers the meaning-making process. Therefore, assumptions concerning the key cultural variables were supported by and examined through a series of pilot tests in order to substantiate the groundings for this cultural study.

Design knowledge was examined through the Main Study focusing on the design practices of four local fashion designers. Each case-study included a theoretical discussion leading to conceptualizations on the role of design, identified through relevant themes. To further define the themes relating to design activities and design knowledge, an Experimental Study provided a scenario for exploring the relationship between design, cultural change, and localized knowledge through a case-study involving a Kesi silk factory. The experiences documented through the

experimental design study were summarized and defined into three levels of design knowledge mediation.

1.5 Significance of Research

The motivation and purpose of this research is to define how knowledge of fashion design exists in the form of meanings, outlined within the boundaries of cultural specifications. Recent external changes and developments are affecting how young Chinese perceive and use fashion products, warranting the study of how they relate to objects and what they gain from increased interactions within the fashion system. The cultural variable of “face” is also undergoing a transformation, as young Chinese are attempting to break away from traditional culture and moving towards independent and autonomous ways of thinking and acting. A comprehensive review of existing literature has identified the gaps in design theories and fashion research. The knowledge perspective of this study follows a constructivist epistemology, supported by the positioning of fashion research at the intersection of sociological and design theories. Interpretations of reality are produced through the linking of sensory experiences involving the designer and object, the user and object, and the user with other users. It is proposed that fashion objects, by mediation of design knowledge, allow for such interpretations of meanings to be socially and culturally established.

This study attempts to understand how Post-80s and 90s consumers define their cultural identities by identifying the extent to which traditional inheritances of culture inform or influence the development of individual perception. The major theoretical contribution of this study lies in defining the role of design knowledge

within the context of young Chinese consumers and fashion designers, leading to the exploratory analyses of how design knowledge develops and regenerates across different levels of interactions with fashion objects. This thesis introduces the development of a Conceptual Model that incorporates the changes affecting the cultural values of Post-80s & 90s Chinese and evaluates the determining factors and effects of design knowledge, addressing gaps identified in existing fashion-related research. The levels of design knowledge mediation are instrumental in identifying the types of knowledge produced and utilized by designers, users, and society. This thesis concludes with a classification of design knowledge outlining the knowledge functions of intention, inference, and interpretation. A final Knowledge Framework synthesizes this research by defining the types of knowledge existing at each level of interaction with the design object.

Justifications for this study are based on the following grounds: (1) the rapid development of urban Chinese populations has left existing literature on young consumers varied and inconclusive, (2) the relationship between the role of design knowledge and its effects on user interactions with fashion objects has not been established, and (3) an investigation into the practices of young Mainland designers as valid participants of cultural change and sources of design knowledge has not been fully explored. This thesis fulfills the research problem and subsequent research questions with a threefold contribution of objectives. First, it develops a Conceptual Framework identifying the cultural orientation of Post-80s & 90s females. Second, it defines design knowledge in terms of how it transmits and evolves across its respective domains. Third, it discusses and

explores the role of design knowledge within various exchanges and interactions between designers, users, and within user communities.

The practical application of this study addresses the fashion knowledge relevant and valuable to Post-80s & 90s consumers. It proposes to provide new perspectives for design practitioners to better understand the relationship between design intent, design inference, and interpretation at the user and social levels. The introduction of the Conceptual Framework suggests new directions for researchers of fashion phenomena to consider the cultural implications on the sociology of dress against the backdrop of Mainland China. Furthermore, the Knowledge Framework serves as a reflective tool for guiding future studies involving knowledge-based fashion research and the mapping of cultural meanings through material objects.

1.6 Thesis Structure

This study comprises six principle chapters: (1) Introduction, (2) Literature Review, (3) Research Design, (4) Framework of Investigation, (5) Application of Framework, and (6) Conclusion. See Figure 1.1.

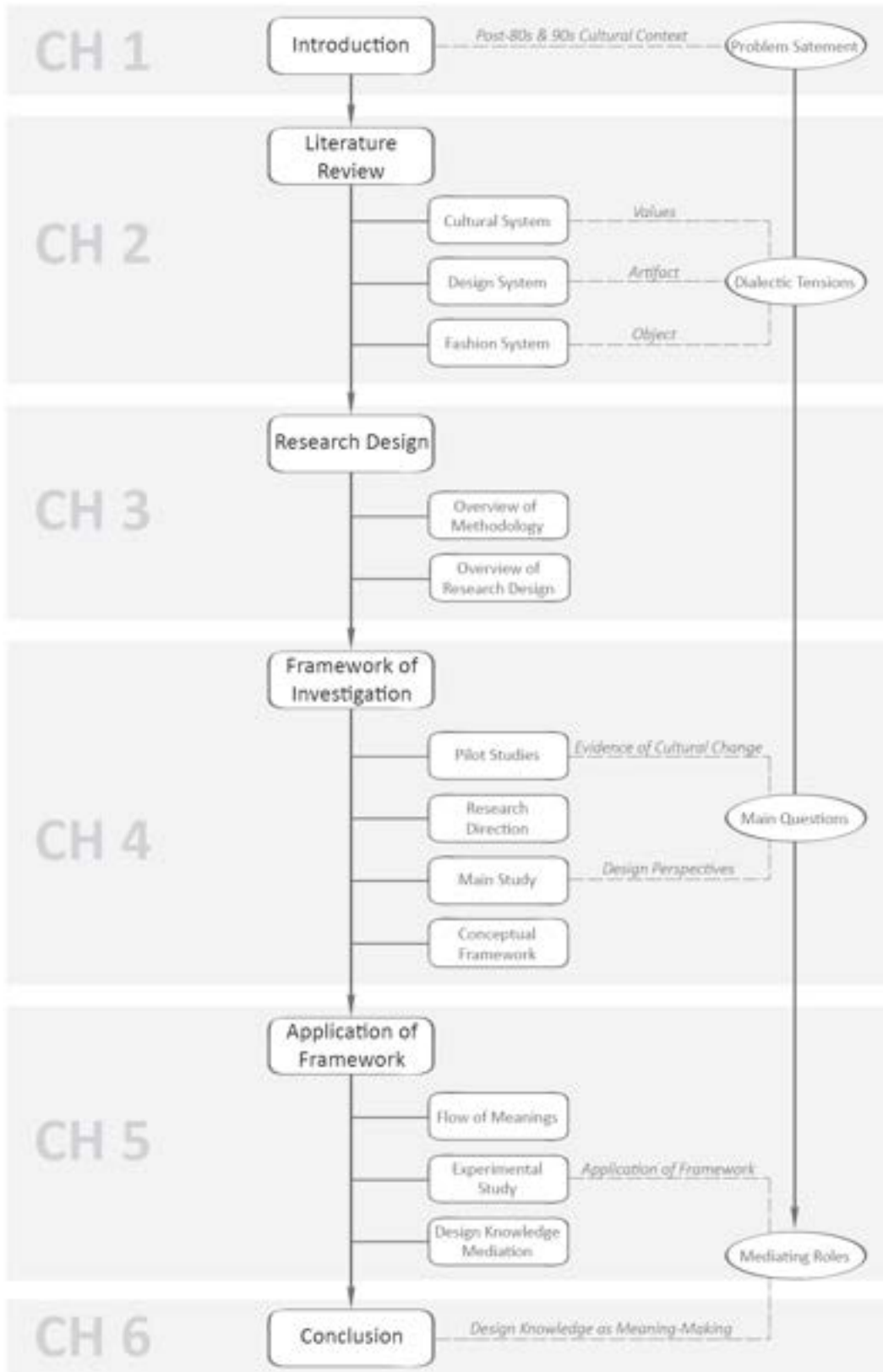


Figure 1.1 Outline of Study

Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive overview of the theoretical concepts relating to this study: (1) the cultural system and the identification of key variables of cultural change, (2) the design system and a review of design knowledge perspectives, and (3) the fashion system and a review of user-object interactions. The problems and prospects of design knowledge are elaborated upon, in terms of embedded and constructed meanings. It is argued that the cultural changes affecting the young Chinese generation will significantly impact the ways in which they experience design objects. This shifts the emphasis away from the domain of design and designers into the interaction and interpretation of users. Chapter 2 concludes with a summary that synthesizes the reevaluation and changes occurring within the cultural, design, and fashion systems.

Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology by detailing the research design, the justifications for the selected research approaches, and the stages in which the research was conducted. The methodological positioning of this study is supported by the approaches in data collection and analyses.

Chapter 4 discusses the findings and results through an interpretive analysis of collected and generated data. The theoretical concepts introduced in Chapter 2 are related to the main cultural constructs of this investigation as part of the development of the Conceptual Framework. Following two Pilot Studies, the implications of the findings are related to the design, fashion, and cultural systems. The Main Study includes discussions and the identification of four case-studies concerning Chinese design perspectives and the future impact of Chinese fashion designers. The Conceptual Framework introduces propositions involving the role

of design knowledge and the “face” concept, through interactions culminating in the negotiation of meanings.

Chapter 5 begins by recapitulating the flow of meanings and applies the implications of design knowledge in an Experimental Study of cultural knowledge and design. Inferences are drawn to define the levels of design knowledge which exist within the framework, inducing further discussions of the types of knowledge that are worth capturing as part of the transactional system of meanings. Design knowledge is further elaborated and defined into three levels of mediation. The chapter concludes with a summary of knowledge that compiles the discussions throughout the thesis on knowledge from the Literature Review, Main Study, and Experimental Study. A Model of Knowledge Classification and Knowledge Framework are introduced to illustrate the relationships between designers, users, and society through the various levels of interaction.

Chapter 6 includes a summary to review the main research statement and objectives introduced in Chapter 1. The chapter concludes by highlighting the theoretical contributions of the framework, the practical implications, delimitations of research, and future research direction.

Chapter II. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 introduced the contents of this study, presenting the outline of the thesis investigation and the main focus of research by acknowledging the changing culture of young Chinese consumers and reviewing the impact of design knowledge in user-object interactions. The research problem was stated in the form of the question, *“In what ways does design knowledge mediate the relationship between designer and object, between user and object, and between groups of users”?*

A framework for the relevant literature relating to the research problem is outlined in Figure 2.1. The Literature Review is intended to provide evidence to support the development of the research problem and questions. Limitations in related areas of existing fashion research are addressed in the first section of this chapter, followed by the main subject areas of (1) the social transformation affecting the cultural values of the Post-80s & 90s generation, (2) design knowledge as the transmission of intent from design process to finished product, and (3) design knowledge and its implications on user-object interactions within the fashion system. This chapter concludes with a summary that reviews the roles of values, design artifacts, and fashion objects within their respective cultural, design, and fashion systems.

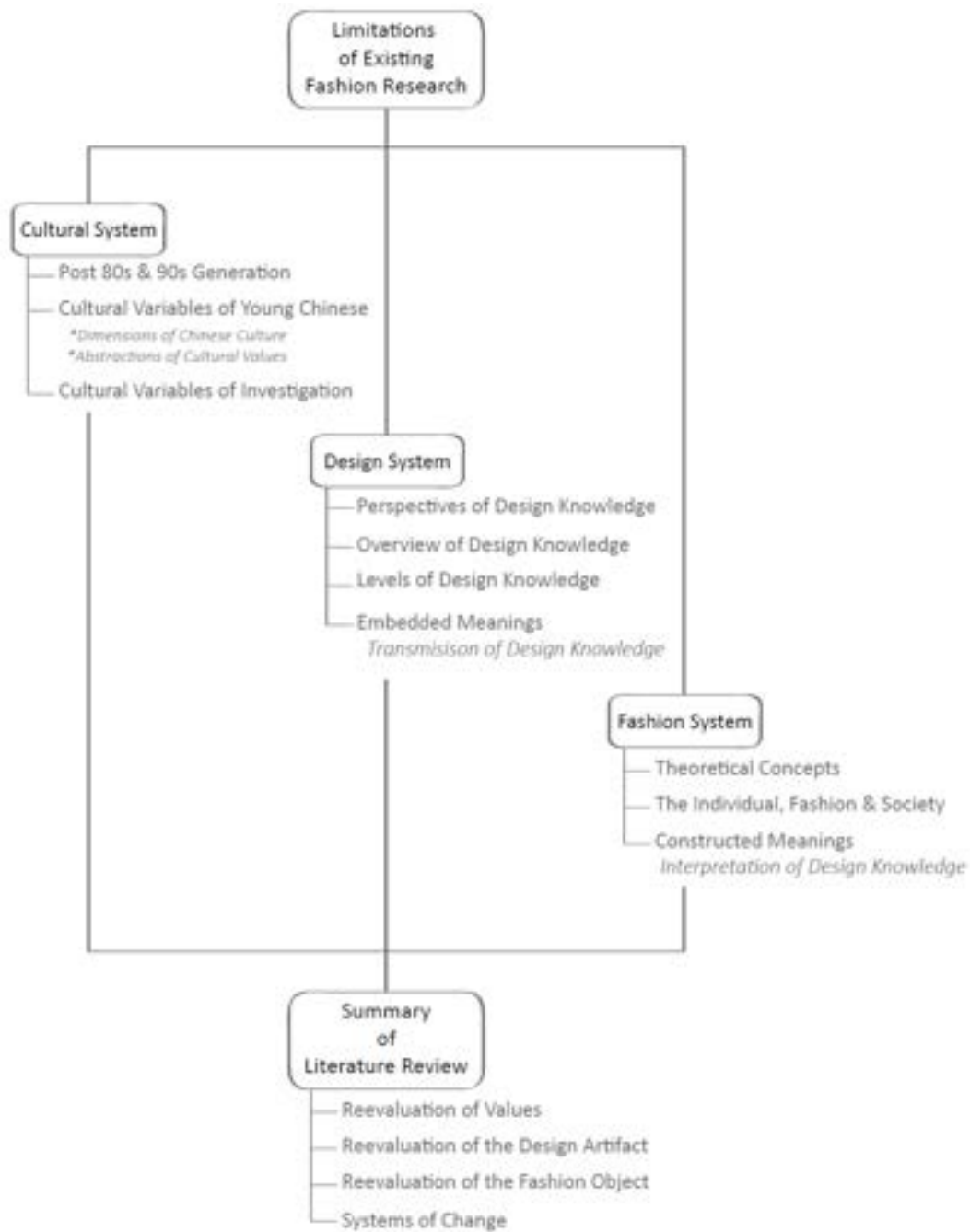


Figure 2.1 Framework of Literature Review

2.2 Limitations of Existing Fashion Research

The existing literature relating to fashion studies and Chinese culture comprises research across various disciplines and theoretical perspectives. There is evidence of current Post-80s & 90s consumers exhibiting more progressive attitudes toward money and spending to reflect their increased emphases on materialism and vanity (Durvasula & Lysonski, 2010). According to Vieira (2009), it is crucial for designers and marketers to understand consumer perceptions for judging fashion brands and products. Although numerous researchers have measured the levels of consumer involvement with fashion products, the existing scales fail to incorporate the antecedents and consequences of such involvements in relation to design knowledge. It can be assumed that frequent interactions between the consumers and products will result in an increased stock of fashion knowledge. However, this presents only a vague understanding of the generalized concept known as fashion knowledge and, furthermore, it is suggested that the role of fashion knowledge will vary depending on the specific cultural context under investigation.

The study of consumer involvement measures the relationship between consumers and products based on needs satisfied through rational and emotional values (O'Cass & Choy, 2008). A number of models and tools have been adapted and modified for assessing consumer involvement within the fashion industry. Kahle's List of Values (LOV) measures consumer values against the experiential, social, and functional needs satisfied from clothing (Kim *et al.*, 2002). However, the findings left unanswered the mediating role, if any, of fashion knowledge

throughout the purchase decision process. Sproles & Kendall's Consumer Styles Inventory (CSI) establishes mental and cognitive orientations as the foundation for decision-making behavior, which is defined by eight decision styles (Fan & Xiao, 1998; Kwan *et al.*, 2008, Liao & Wang, 2009; Wang *et al.*, 2004). CSI has been widely applied as a key instrument for interpreting cultural decision-making styles but, while it measures these styles at the individual level, it fails to account for how culture influences the cognitive dimensions of the consumer. It also focuses solely on the strict assumption that aesthetic attributes such as design silhouette, color, detail, and texture overwhelm the utilitarian functions of a product, and fails to consider the influence of brand perception on consumer decision-making (Eckman & Wagner, 1995). The Fashion Clothing Product Involvement model (FCPI) measures the degree of importance a product occupies in increasing consumer self-relevance within the dimensions of involvement concerning the product, purchase decision, advertising, and consumption (O'Cass & Choy, 2008). Vieira's (2009) study modified the FCPI model to include the dimensions of fashion clothing involvement, fashion clothing knowledge, and fashion clothing confidence. The findings from this study revealed a strong relationship between fashion involvement and brand knowledge as influencing perceptions toward future brand purchase. However, fashion clothing knowledge and brand knowledge do not equate the larger study of design knowledge.

Existing research on the significance of brand image has led to conclusions that brand consciousness is a main factor leading towards consumer decision-making (DeLong *et al.*, 2004; Dickson *et al.*, 2004; Finnane, 1996; Kim *et al.*, 2002; Kwan *et al.*, 2008; O'Cass & Choy, 2008; Parker *et al.*, 2004; Rindfleisch *et al.*, 2008;

Wang *et al.*, 2004; Wang *et al.*, 2010; Wong & Ahuvia, 1998; Zhuang *et al.*, 2008). Compared to their Western counterparts, Generation Y Chinese women tend to be more image-conscious (Walker & Gilbert, 2009) and greatly value brand name and country-of-origin as a symbolic medium to express one's social status and image (Kim *et al.*, 2002). Country-of-origin indicates not only the symbolic and physical qualities of a product but determines a brand's initial perceived value (Choi *et al.*, 2009). Acknowledging the symbolic influences on social status, Wang *et al.* (2010) find that China's domestic brands hold a weak presence in comparison to the global foreign brands that represent or equate status and prestige. DeLong *et al.* (2004) reveal that while foreign brands are preferred as an indication of superior quality, no women's apparel brand holds more than 3 percent market share. This uncovers the potential for local Chinese brands to regain market share by emphasizing design and style as key factors in purchase decisions (Dickson *et al.*, 2004).

The fashion concept is associated with ambiguous connotations in both its material translation as clothing and the conceptualization of symbolic values in material culture (Crane & Bovone, 2006), resulting in the relatively unexplored research area of fashion consumption and design knowledge. Previous researchers have employed great efforts to define fashion consumption in relation to the influences of vanity and materialism, disregarding the fundamental question of how consumers appreciate the basic principles of design and style. Apparel design extends beyond the function of wearable garments and is a creative process portraying a visual narrative, often one that is obscured by brand name. Design value can be seen as being closely related to the effective translation of design

intent beyond the aesthetic and perceivable qualities of fashion objects. This signifies a need for research into the epistemology of design knowledge, of how it is translated into the design of fashion objects, and effectively communicated to users. The dimensions of design knowledge will be further elaborated upon to understand how symbolic meanings are developed through varying levels of individual perception.

Wong & Ahuvia (1998), acknowledging that culture is not homogenous, evaluate the role of “face” by measuring its effects on defining the internal and external self-concepts that shape brand perception and value. Liao & Wang (2009) find that the relationship between “face” and brand consciousness is positively correlated, increasing consumer efforts to maintain “face” through brand selection. This regard for “face” suggests that brand perception, rather than product design and function, dictates the decision-making processes among Chinese consumers (DeLong, *et al.*, 2004; Dickson, *et al.*, 2004; Parker, *et al.*, 2004; Wang, *et al.*, 2010). Fashion brands, therefore, express the symbolic values that establish social communities while satisfying individual needs through fashion awareness (Cholachatpinyo *et al.*, 2002). The concept of “face” has been tested and proven to be a key influence in the product selection process. While previous researchers have evaluated the directional and moderating effects of “face” mediation on consumer perception, they have not addressed how external changes affect and redefine the understanding of this cultural value. A review of existing literature shows that “face” is one of the strongest Chinese cultural inheritances, yet there is a limited understanding of how it relates to the development of human perception. This study aims to identify whether “face” has maintained its importance among

young Chinese and how it has changed in regards to its role in directing everyday behaviors, particularly in the negotiation of symbolic meanings associated with fashion objects.

Although the existing models and tools have been proven to be effective measures for consumer involvement and fashion consumption, they offer practical benefits for fashion marketing and branding. Therefore, they are inefficient for and irrelevant to the theoretical and philosophical study of design knowledge as a meaning-making mechanism within the fashion context. While some of the research methods can be applied for this study, they are not appropriate for understanding the subjective nature and insights associated with design knowledge. Previous research focuses heavily on the influences of brand consciousness leading towards brand preference, whereas this study concerns the role of design knowledge in how it is created, represented, transferred, received, and interpreted. Rather than investigating the effective use of branding, this study takes into consideration the intrinsic and extrinsic understandings of fashion that exist in the form of design knowledge. Furthermore, it explores the ways in which fashion exhibits the user as a communicator of values by establishing cultural and social meanings.

2.3 The Cultural System

Culture, according to Swidler's (1986:273) definition, has influence over a society through "symbolic vehicles of meaning, including beliefs, ritual practices, art forms, and ceremonies." Within such a system, the human life-world is based on the unity between mind and body wherein the expression of the body points to the

condition of the mind (Kim, 2001). The perceptible changes of a society's culture, therefore, correlate to changes affecting individual values in terms of adopted philosophies, behaviors, and aesthetics. Values, acting as shared symbolic elements that serve as intermediaries for directing human actions and decisions (Swidler, 1986), are discussed in this section.

2.3.1 Post-80s & 90s Generation

In the decades following the Cultural Revolution, China has undergone many changes leading toward current developments in economic reform and modernization. The enforcement of China's one-child policy has resulted in unintended social consequences, indirectly forming a unique society of young consumers who differ greatly in upbringing and family environment than previous generations (Smith & Hill, 2009). Recent studies indicate that there are an estimated 200 million people that fall into the Generation Y cohort and the growth rate of China's youth markets exceeds all other major markets, with a projected spending increase of 50% within a five-year period (Yu & Zhou, 2009). Despite the economic downturn experienced in 2008, China continues to be one of the world's most lucrative luxury markets as affluent and middle-class consumers grow in their affinity for high-end designer brands. China's affluent consumers are on average 20 years younger than their US or Japanese counterparts, making the younger generations a key target for global marketers (He *et al.*, 2010).

Social transformation has produced the current phenomenon of Chinese consumerism, which is characterized by changing social behaviors and the spread of materialistic values (Latham, 2006). Representing the largest consumer base in

the world, Generation Y Chinese adults, known as the Post-80s & 90s generation, were born under the “little emperor” family structure of the one-child policy (Parker *et al.*, 2004). They represent an emergent generation stemming from recent modernization and newfound affluence, forming a segment of consumers that seeks fulfillment from wealth and material success (Durvasula & Lysonski, 2010). This young generation is pioneering China’s future cultural orientation with behaviors that are less tradition-bound and increasingly more concerned with brand symbolism (Parker, *et al.*, 2004).

As social and economic shifts have transformed China into a market driven, consumer-oriented society, it can be deduced that young consumers will continue to develop stronger attitudes toward materialism and vanity. This particular segment of consumers has become a focus for marketers due to their growing familiarity with foreign brands and propensity for hedonistic spending. In a traditionally collectivist society, Post-80s & 90s Chinese are beginning to express individual independence by means of personal style and dress. The modern Chinese woman’s increased interest in fashion and lifestyle magazines reveals a growing reliance on taste, style, and fashion to mark their new, contemporary identities (Hung & Li, 2006). However, studies indicate that while embracing more progressive consumption values, young consumers still retain a degree of interdependence and use products and brands as a form of validation among peers (Li *et al.*, 2009). Chinese consumers favorably perceive US brands as superior to domestic brands in terms of status, quality, workmanship, fashionability, comfort, and fit (Dickson *et al.*, 2004). Despite the influencing role of fashion media on establishing fashion culture through references to objects, trends, and people

(Choi *et al.*, 2009), Chinese consumers have limited brand knowledge in comparison to their Western counterparts and are still relatively unable to differentiate between brands (DeLong *et al.*, 2004).

The values that individuals assign to objects, determined through individual perspectives of perception, are dependent on experience (Mead, 1934:4-5). Individual experiences of activity contribute to the behaviors of the larger social group, acting as part of the whole. Understanding the cultural orientations of Post-80s & 90s Chinese requires a comprehensive review of how values are formed and established. The inconsistencies surrounding this generation's behaviors limit the extent to which the cultural implications can be generated. Therefore, the consumption styles of young Chinese implicate brand preference as the correlation between personal values and the perceived status associated with brand symbolism. The changing consumption patterns of young Chinese females provide an indication for changes in behaviors and attitudes toward fashion, justifying further discussions on the specific cultural values affecting these changes.

2.3.2 Cultural Values of Young Chinese

Social institutional changes – government, ideology, and cultural norms affecting societal behaviors – have directly impacted young Chinese and the values that they emphasize, such as materialism and novelty-seeking (Hung *et al.*, 2007). While earlier studies have concluded that Chinese consumers are more influenced by social pressures than their Western counterparts, in terms of “face” consciousness and group conformity, more recent studies involving younger

generations reveal inconsistencies in these findings to present evidence of deviation from traditional Chinese cultural values (Jin & Kang, 2011). The inconclusive findings are indicative of the tensions within the cultural orientation of values, encasing the struggle between maintaining traditional inheritances and expressing modern values.

2.3.2.1 Dimensions of Chinese Culture

The study of culture has been approached from different perspectives and disciplines, leading to numerous methods for mapping the influences of how inherited cultures affect individuals within a society. In the broadest terms, culture can be defined as the collection of values, beliefs, behaviors, customs, and attitudes that distinguish a society at the international, national, regional, business, and organizational levels (Fan, 2000). Hofstede's (1983) multidimensional definition of nation culture includes: power distance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, and low versus high uncertainty avoidance. A fifth dimension was later added (long-term versus short-term orientation), also known as "Confucian dynamism" (Hofstede & Bond, 1988). Based on these five dimensions, Hofstede concluded that Chinese national culture represents the following:

CHINESE NATIONAL CULTURE	
<i>High Power Distance</i>	Accepting of power inequalities in organizational relationships
<i>High Collectivism</i>	Preference for interdependent relationships; social integration
<i>Low Masculinity</i>	Preference for modesty and nurturing relationships
<i>Low Uncertainty Avoidance</i>	Low tolerance for ambiguity towards the future
<i>High Long-Term Orientation</i>	Respect for traditional values; face consciousness

Table 2.1 Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions (Source: Hofstede & Bond, 1988)

The fifth and final dimension, long-term versus short-term orientation, was built on the concept of Chinese values deeply rooted in Confucian tradition. Within this cultural orientation, greater importance is placed on trust and relationships rather than tasks and schedules which suggests that the forming of relationships is emphasized for attaining end goals. Hofstede's interpretation of national culture provides a generalized view of culture which may differ when testing the dimensions against different segments based on age, gender, education and socio-economic background.

Chinese culture has been exposed to and influenced by different cultures to result in a transformation of values, beliefs, and behaviors (Faure & Fang, 2008). These changes, however, are not substitutes for the Chinese traditional value system but signify coexistences between old and new cultures. Throughout China's 4,000 year history, it can be assumed that Confucianism is the dominant influence for defining the foundations of national culture. Confucianism forms the behavioral and moral standards that pertain to human relationships, social structures, virtuous behavior, and work ethics (Fan Y. , 2000), shaping the philosophies and inherent values of contemporary society. It concentrates on public life in terms of harmonious social relations, moral standards, and ethical behavior (Jenkins, 2002), defined by a set of rules and lessons comprising the following key principles:

CHINESE CULTURAL PRINCIPLES

"Wu Lun" – The 5 basic relationships based on mutual respect

The concept of family as the example for all social organizations – containing individuality

Extending virtuous behavior toward others – treating others as one would like to be treated

Maintaining virtue through skills, education, hard-work, practicing patience & preservation

Table 2.2 Key Principles of Relationships (Source: Hofstede & Bond, 1988)

2.3.2.2 Abstractions of Chinese Cultural Values

The most recognizable aspects of culture are the values produced and emphasized, which provide evidence for defining and understanding a society. Values are the key underlying motivational constructs relating to personalities and emotions, representing the nature of people within a culture (Smith & Hill, 2009). The set of values acquired through social interactions become the cultural values guiding individual behavior and contributing to consumer decision-making styles (Bao *et al.*, 2003). Previous researchers have concluded that cultural values influence consumer behavior as a powerful force capable of fulfilling consumers' needs by shaping motivations, lifestyles, and product choices (Wang & Lin, 2009). This is reflected in the current phenomenon affecting young Chinese consumers, who are moving towards the previously considered Western ideals of material wealth and consumer overspending (Podoshen *et al.*, 2010).

Researchers have attempted to define national cultures through the identification of cultural values. Cultural values are found to be formed during adolescence and highly resistant to change thereafter (Smith & Hill, 2009). Hofstede and Bond (1988) associate the following values with East-Asian cultures as defined by the Confucian Dynamism Scale: *perseverance, hierarchies in relationships, thrift, sense of shame, personal stability, protecting face, respect for tradition, and the reciprocation of greetings/favors/gifts*. The Schwartz Values Survey was used by Smith & Hill (2009) to measure the following individual values of Chinese university students: *security, conformity, tradition, benevolence, universalism, self-direction, stimulation, hedonism, achievement, and power*. The results

concluded that Post-80s & 90s Chinese remain deeply rooted in traditional culture, in the sense that individual values are secondary to the needs associated with group membership. It can be assumed that certain inherent aspects of culture are stable, regardless of external changing forces. However, because culture is dynamic in nature, values are susceptible to change. Fan (2000) states that Chinese cultural values remain somewhat constant in the way they are adopted and used to identify with one another, yet differ in how they are interpreted and expressed. This is reflected in the case of young Chinese, whose evolving individual values shape their attitudes toward national culture to influence their current cultural orientations.

Due to shifts in consumer trends among the younger generation of Chinese, much attention has been placed on understanding the factors influencing decision-making styles. The current modernization of China does not equate Westernization but is, instead, changing the cultural value systems of younger generations. Previously held classifications of Chinese culture, as harboring traditional attitudes of modesty and self-restraint, are being challenged as increased emphasis on individualization encourages the inclination towards self-expression (Wang & Lin, 2009). This is evident in the review of consumption, in contemporary Chinese culture, as a means for fulfilling social needs for identification, status, and social recognition (Faure & Fang, 2008). Young consumers are using brands as a form of self-expression and heightened individuality, opposing traditional concepts of Chinese culture which value group conformity (Gong *et al.*, 2004). They have been found to possess a high propensity towards hedonistic consumer behavior, leading researchers to discover

linkages between hedonic values, brand consciousness, and preference for foreign brands (Wang *et al.*, 2010).

However, the current movement of China's younger generations toward individualism differs significantly from the Western definition. The Chinese view of individuality is based on a duality of self, which is dictated by outward influences and constantly revised at the internal level to fulfill social needs (Yan, 2010). Although China's young consumers strive for individual differentiation through dress and appearance, the influence and emphasis on group membership remains intact. This suggests that the current tests and challenges imposed by socio-economic change do not penetrate through certain inherited aspects of traditional culture.

Many factors have contributed to the social and cultural transformation of Chinese society. Isolating and extracting the specific values of change is challenged by the large geographic scale of China, which includes the various minority groups that make up sub-cultures within the larger cultural context. Therefore, this study relies on interpretative methods to identify the abstractions of changes occurring in the cultural values and behaviors of young Chinese. This builds a "thick description" to define the complexities of a given culture (Geertz, 1973). Individual experiences will vary and result in differing perceptions, yet the whole of experience is framed within shared social conditions that are indicative of the common whole (Mead, 1934:37). It can be deduced that the key components of local Chinese culture exist at the social level, providing clues into the conceptual worlds framing identifiable values and behaviors.

2.3.3 Cultural Variables of Investigation

The nature of human experience produces feedback from the external world onto the individual. Predisposed with a natural ability to sense, perception allows the individual to develop an understanding of the world where reality becomes a socially constructed activity that relies on social relations to transmit knowledge. Through the act of creating and assigning meanings, the symbolic representations ascribed to material objects serve as a connection between individuals and the social world. The constructed understanding of the social world is an extension of individual perception and, when set against culture, these meanings are given a specific context and interpretation for producing significance. Development of self-knowledge relies on the cultural backgrounds that influence social norms and codes of behavior. Therefore, individual perception is specific to the given culture and will alter the meanings of symbolic objects depending on the cultural context. Assuming that culture is the key to understanding a society, it is important to identify any cultural inheritances pertinent to the main objectives of this research. From the existing literature and results of culture-specific marketing research, three main cultural variables have been extracted for this study.

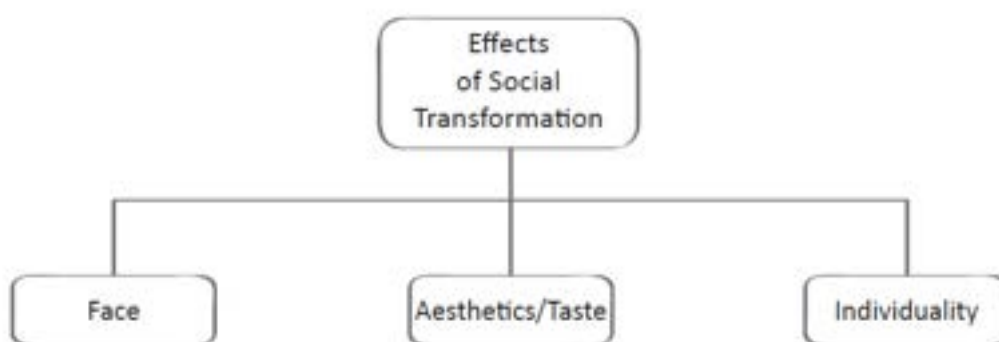


Figure 2.2 Extracted Cultural Variables

The Chinese language system is without directness or explicit meaning, instead relying on subtleties and abstract implications (Pitta *et al.*, 1999). This creates an indirect and suggestive communication style, relying on qualities such as modesty and self-restraint to conceal true feelings or intent. The traditional concept of “face” is unique to Chinese culture and is defined by two sets of criteria relating to the individual and social situations (Hu, 1944). It is a behavioral construct that is continually cultivated by the individual, who assumes the responsibility of revising and modifying it to enhance moral or social status. Outward actions are perceived as reflecting one’s moral character, emphasizing the importance of individual behaviors. “Face” directs Chinese behavior by serving as a catalyst for social harmony through the “controlling of feelings, appearing humble, avoiding conflict, and even hiding competition” (Faure & Fang, 2008). The connotations associated with this concept can be considered against two dimensions (Shi *et al.*, 2010):

- *Mian* – the kind of prestige stemming from the visible achievements of flaunting
- *Lian* – the kind of respect given to someone who has a high moral reputation in a group

Behavioral patterns are influenced by “face”, especially when measured within the context of consumerism, as self-identity is defined by one’s social roles, public perception, and position (Wong & Ahuvia, 1998). It can be seen that “face” plays an important role in Chinese consumption behavior as a means for achieving group conformity and social status. Individuals with higher levels of face consciousness will have a greater appreciation for the extrinsic qualities of products based on how they enhance one’s social view of self and potential

acceptance by others (Liao & Wang, 2009).

Despite the external changes and social movements affecting young Chinese, it is proposed that the concept of “face” remains a key component of individual and cultural behaviors. A review of existing studies has revealed that “face” relates to self-perception in how users² select fashion products and brands to enhance social standing and gain group acceptance. The first variable, “face” has been found by previous research to be an inherited cultural value with strong relevance in modern Chinese society. It is proposed that this traditional concept has been redefined by Post-80s & 90s females and its effect or influence on attitudes toward fashion will have subsequently changed.

The second variable of interest involves the development of aesthetics and taste. Confucius defined the “Six Classical Arts” – *music, dance, painting, architecture/sculpture, poetry/prose, literature* – that have been passed down through the centuries by way of repetition and reproduction, suggesting the extent to which traditional philosophies have shaped aesthetic forms (Faure & Fang, 2008). Experience, however, affects the continuity of aesthetic principles as seen during the Mao Era when the expression of beauty became static to reflect the non-existence of fashion (Barthes, 2006:91). While traditional inheritances such as Confucian philosophy remain deeply rooted in Chinese culture, institutional changes affecting ideology and cultural norms have directed young Chinese to adopt new values such as materialism and novelty-seeking (Hung *et al.*, 2007). These noticeable changes in values influence how individuals perceive different

² The term “consumer” will hereafter be supplanted by “user”

levels of aesthetics, suggesting that aesthetics are expressed as part of the “face” concept.

Taste, the perceptive judgment for what constitutes good or bad, is the form by which aesthetics manifest. Differences in taste among individuals mark the distinctions of social class, signifying a relationship between one’s educational level and the cultural representation of aesthetic values. This social hierarchy implies that an educated individual will be better equipped for objectively judging the aesthetic qualities of a desired product (Miller, 1987:118-121). Conversely, an uneducated individual may rely primarily on the immediate satisfaction that a product can offer, in terms of enhancing social reputation, and thus emotional values replace aesthetics. In the case of Post-80s & 90s, this questions whether attitudes toward fashion correspond to an aesthetic appreciation of taste or simply act as a means for social validation.

Whether aesthetics are natural inheritances or developed through experience, it is evident that they exist within the domain of fashion and are manifested in the form of taste. The judgment or expression of taste corresponds to educational and cultural levels, implying its relational linkage to distinctions of social class (Bourdieu, 1984:468-469). It is suggested that external elements of social change will have affected the development of aesthetic values and levels of taste, as Post-80s & 90s are influenced by the globalization of fashion branding and marketing. Furthermore, it is proposed that the changing definition of “face” will affect perceptions toward aesthetics and taste at the social level.

The final construct is individuality, acknowledged as a primarily Western concept.

Group affiliation is an important aspect of traditional Chinese society as well as a key requirement within the fashion system. The social relevance of fashion is established by indifference to criticism, demand for adherence and exclusion of those to fail to abide by its area of operation (Blumer, 1969). This suggests that the freedom to deviate from stylistic norms requires a level of confidence or knowledge. Therefore, individuality will be explored to define how young Chinese females view this concept, how it is expressed through the use of fashion objects, and how it correlates to self-identity.

2.4 The Design System

The design system involves the role of designers, as perceptive beings, who engage in activities to produce artifacts intended for the future situations of the social world. Fashion is a phenomenon requiring the active participation of users to fulfill the social aspects of dress (Blumer, 1969) and it is within these social conditions that designers work to prescribe new social relations (Dilnot, 1984). Design artifacts represent the existing knowledge of designers, the knowledge of the design process, and knowledge transferred into finished forms. Perception, however, affects how designers produce subjective and personal knowledge of the world. The different perspectives and levels of knowledge are discussed in this section.

2.4.1 Perspectives of Knowledge

According to Polanyi (1962:4-5), the study of knowledge should extend beyond the scientific forms of propositional or formulaic knowledge and into more

immediate sensory experiences. This knowledge concerns an embodied knowing that is personal and tacit in how it is known and unable to be captured in its entirety when transferred from one individual to another. The example of skillful performance, particularly in the pianist's touch, explains that while the instrument is a constant and known mechanism, the variance of quality and sound depend on the individual's interpretation (Polanyi, 1962:50-51). This form of knowledge is not knowable to an audience, but observable when modified into the expression and transmission of meaning. Therefore, tacit knowledge can be defined as the knowledge embedded in the minds of individuals and translated through symbolic forms.

Design produces its own forms of knowledge as a result of the designer-object relationship, which comprises the design process during which practitioner skills are applied and reconfigured for the production of possible solutions. Designers, as individuals, undergo this process to generate multiple perceptions of the world that serve as the intuitive knowledge a society. The largely tacit knowledge of design is articulated and made known when framed within specific contexts. Table 2.3 compiles the different perspectives of knowledge in terms of context, antecedents, mediating variables, and outcomes. There is a common theme among the varying perspectives shown in Table 2.3 that, while the world lends itself to be perceived, what is actually comprehended or known is construed by human activities through experiencing the world. Knowledge becomes a means for making sense of things, through an act of mind, in which the world can be categorized and structured into representations (Daley, 1984).

Author	Context	Antecedents	Mediating Variables	Outcomes
Cassirer (1944)	Theory of Knowledge	Being in the world	Symbolic interaction	Understanding the world Codes of communication Generate meanings
Polanyi (1962)	Theory of Knowledge	Being in the world	Symbolic interaction	Personal knowledge as tacit & subjective Generate meanings
Hudson & Ozanne (1988)	Theory of Knowledge	Nature of reality	Symbolic interaction	Social construction of reality Codes of communication Generate meanings
Popper (1994)	Theory of Knowledge	Being in the world	Sensory ability	Ability to perceive Understanding the world
Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton (1981)	Self Knowledge	Being in the world	Feedback	Ability to perceive Self-expression Codes of communication
Heinamaa (2012)	Self Knowledge	Being in the world	Sensory ability	Ability to perceive Self-expression
Miller (2005)	Self Knowledge	Clothing system	Dressing	Connecting internal & external views of the world Codes of communication
Scheler (1973)	Self Knowledge	External world	Feedback	Ability to perceive Self-expression Organizing the world
Woodward (2005)	Self Knowledge	Clothing system	Dressing	Self-expression Belonging in the world Generate meanings
Cross (1999) & (2000)	Design Knowledge	Being in the world Human -object relationship	Experience	Contribute to creation & maintenance of the artificial world
Friedman (2000)	Design Knowledge	Being in the world	Feedforward & Feedback	Experience Ability to perceive Belonging in the world Reflective practice
Hoadley & Cox (2009)	Design Knowledge	Design practice	Experience	Create processes Meta-knowledge
Narvaez (2000)	Design Knowledge	Being in the world Human & object relationship	Social Influence	Projective ability Design thinking Dialectics between designer & user
Schoormans, et al. (1995)	Product Knowledge	Design concept	Product experience	Ability to perceive Expertise
Eckman & Wagner (1995)	Fashion Knowledge	Creative input	Dressing	Ability to perceive Visual communication Self-expression
Weller (2007)	Fashion Knowledge	Being in the world	Sociocultural Influence	Ability to perceive Power

Table 2.3 Perspectives of Knowledge (Source: Compiled by Author)

2.4.2 Overview of Design Knowledge

Designing, as a creative process, requires a combination of skills, expertise, and knowledge. It is a type of connoisseurship, an art of knowing as much as an art of doing, that develops into a type of awareness (Polanyi, 1962:54-55). The external world provides the context for designers to apply knowledge in conceptualizing artifacts relevant to the environment. In design practice, experience is gained and becomes a form of knowledge creation when transferred in feedforward as well as feedback (Friedman, 2000). Designing generates forms of knowledge that exist along the spectrum of explicit to tacit dimensions, extending and moving across individual to cultural levels. According to Friedman, human beings possess the ability to comprehend knowledge across different frames or domains to generate the following results: *to embrace, enlarge, internalize, transmit, shift, recontextualize, and transform*. Therefore, the primary task of the designer is to transform thought into action by moving and working through the varying dimensions of knowledge.

Existing knowledge transforms through the practice, or process, of designing to what can be categorically defined as design knowledge (Olsen & Heaton, 2010). The knowledge transferred into the finished product, materializing semiotic qualities, has the greatest power of influence on transforming the perceptions of consumers (Weller, 2007). Considering that all perceptions are based on an existing stock of knowledge, design knowledge can be classified as the knowledge transmitted from the designer through the design process into the final design product. This knowledge contains all systems of symbolic meaning

generated throughout the design stage, relying on the effective transmission of its representational forms.

Establishing that design knowledge is formed by people, processes and products, Cross (1999) categorizes design knowledge within the domains of epistemology, praxiology, and phenomenology. Design knowledge is rhetorical, as a conversational activity, and initiates dialogue between designers and non-designers through the symbolic medium of the object. The abilities of designers are neither fixed to design practice nor restricted to the professional knowledge and expertise of designers. Instead, designers are individuals possessing knowledge of contributing to and maintaining the creation of the artificial world (Cross, 2000).

Domains of Design Knowledge		
<i>Design Epistemology</i>	<i>Design Praxiology</i>	<i>Design Phenomenology</i>
Resides in People	Resides in Processes	Resides in Products
Types of Knowledge Produced:		
Designerly ways of knowing	Design practices and processes	Form & configuration
Human ability	Design methodology	Implicit knowledge
Engaging & reflecting in design	Using & reflecting upon	Product –context semantics

Table 2.4 *Domains of Design Knowledge (Source: Adapted from Cross 1999 & 2000)*

Design knowledge takes on a more direct and active role when set against the backdrop of fashion. The fashion object, represented in the form of garments, demarcates the boundary between the individual body and the artificial human world. Dressing becomes an act of self-expression that contains all possible combinations of meanings of the design object, the self, and society. The design knowledge existing within the domain of fashion design is transmitted, diffused and translated from a mass production system into consumer perceptions (Weller, 2007). Weller defines fashion knowledge, an aesthetic form of knowledge, as

socially constructed and culturally accumulated. While fashion products are an indication of current trends, designers create fashion artifacts by moving across different spatio-temporal patterns to generate new ideas or concepts. Design knowledge used by fashion designers is not only shared but becomes regenerative in its ability to innovate and forge communities. Fashion knowledge is a form of knowledge-in-motion that transmits when mobilized through the different stages of interaction.

Fashion incorporates elements of ergonomics, trends, and subjectivity (Rocha *et al.*, 2005) in the shaping of malleable surfaces to create appearances embodying social relations and states of being (Hansen, 2004). The fashion design process involves the visual and technical interpretation of creative inspiration, utilizing a form of applied design to create products for practical purpose and use (Metz, 2006). Vieira (2009) defines the design process as integrating tactile experiences to serve the functional and ornamental needs of clothing, resulting in the creation of codes or visual language conveying a form of social identity. Apparel design represents an aesthetic understanding of knowledge that transforms a product's perceived value in relation to the product life-cycle and external cultural changes (Weller, 2007).

Fashion involvement comprises knowledge of brands within a product class, knowledge of product-usage, product attributes, and experiences to generate more knowledge through increased user interactions (Vieira, 2009). Design knowledge within the fashion context can be defined as the information contained in the relationship between the user and object to initiate action, namely the

consumption of products. Bertola and Teixeira (2003) define this knowledge as being developed through physical, conceptual, and emotional interactions with a product to influence individual behaviors and values.

2.4.3 Levels of Design Knowledge

Design knowledge can be defined as reflecting the perceptions and experiences of the designer, throughout the process of designing, which are transformed into a material object. Containing the knowledge of designers, the object communicates this knowledge to a perceivable user through its emotional, volitional, and cognitive interests (Narvaez, 2000). The specific ideas, intent, and functions created and shaped by the designer are communicated through the object (Kazmierczak, 2003). When consumed and used by the individual, the object becomes cognizable and is able to convey its existence. The knowledge embedded or encoded into the object regenerates into new ideas and knowledge when encountering the existing knowledge base of the individual through increased interactions.

Design requires “projective ability” – the understanding of the relationship between human beings and objects within a social context (Narvaez, 2000). Design thinking contains knowledge relating to the social phenomenon of material production, defining design as the production of material and nonmaterial culture. The activities of design comprise the skills, expertise, and knowledge of the designer, transferring experience into the conceptualization of artifacts relevant to the social environment (Friedman, 2000). Design’s epistemological dimensions shift knowledge from tacit to explicit forms by

moving and transforming design thought into action. Qualitatively different from the knowledge of other disciplines, design knowledge relies on the experience, practice, and iteration of designers to make tacit knowledge explicit (Hoadley & Cox, 2009). The process of moving from “doing” to “knowing” requires designers to turn critical inquiry into reflective insight, transforming experiences into new knowledge (Friedman, 2003).

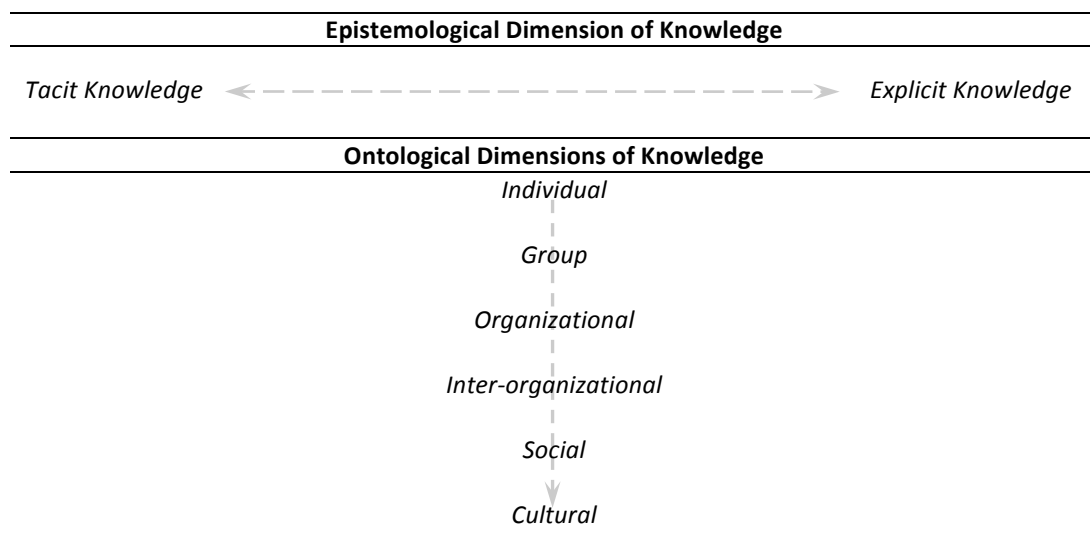


Table 2.5 *Dimensions of Knowledge* (Source: Adapted from Friedman, 2000)

Fashion knowledge is the expert knowledge embedded in the space of social networks and framed within the boundaries of interactions (Weller, 2007). This knowledge is difficult to constrain as social interactions accelerate its fluidity to become a homogenizing force that disperses trends across the space of fashion. Weller (2007) defines five modalities of fashion knowledge, where knowledge is found to be viscous in areas when it is deeply embedded to meanings and fluid when its symbolic values circulate and are communicated through increased interactions.

Five Modalities of Fashion Knowledge	
Localized Dress Practices	Steeped in local culture Knowledge changes with changing social norms
Cultural Capital	Belongs to the privileged style elite Knowledge circulates in dense, socially competitive urban environments Knowledge is critical – used to judge social peers Knowledge is entangled with social inclusion and exclusion
Institutionalized Fashion	Knowledge possessed – economic value bound to brand identity Knowledge managed – purposely universalized
Mass Media	Embedded and represented in magazines or electronic media Knowledge is spatially fluid – fashion is displaced Meaning depends on relational interactions with users
Semiotic Content of Material Objects	Embedded in design qualities of garments Knowledge creates economic values when it stimulates consumption Value depends on relational interactions with other knowledges

Table 2.6 Modalities of Fashion Knowledge (Source: Adapted from Weller, 2007)

The ongoing dialectic between imitation and differentiation perpetuates the incessant changing nature of fashion (Simmel, 1971:294-297). Within the hierarchal network of the fashion system, this tension is reconciled by the diffusion of trends from key innovators and leaders to the mass population of users. Design knowledge, an expert form of knowledge, dilutes as it flows through the fashion system by means of reproduction and imitation. The spread of fashion trends moves knowledge into less complex social contexts, allowing it to become less viscous and more fluid (Weller, 2007). Design knowledge is created and used in its tacit form by designers and made explicit when translated and recognized as the common, codified, or informal knowledge of users.

2.4.5 Embedded Meanings – Transmission of Design Knowledge

Knowledge is transgressive, linking its producers to users through a socially integrated and distributed process (Nowotny, 2000). In the study of social situations, the role of socially robust knowledge is significant for initiating

zchanges to knowledge cultures and establishing the relevance of future designs (Olsen & Heaton, 2010). Fashion is a socially constituted practice that requires individual members to acquire knowledge of cultural norms and expectations (Entwistle, 2000:11). These norms set the boundaries of fashion's standards within which individuals are able to construct a space of personal freedom and develop knowledge of the inner self (Nedelmann, 1990).

Objects embody the intentions of individuals, evoking and constituting meanings that build self-awareness (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981:104-106). Ewenstein & Whyte (2009) define the object as a key component in knowledge development through its various roles:

OBJECT ROLES	
<i>Epistemic Objects</i>	Objects that are abstract, characterized by incompleteness and defined by plurality
<i>Technical Objects</i>	Objects that provide the fixed and stable frame for inquiry
<i>Boundary Objects</i>	Objects separating the abstract from concrete, able to mediate knowledge across dimensions

Table 2.7 *Object Roles in Knowledge Development (Source: Ewenstein & Whyte, 2009)*

The object represents the tangible materialization of design, reflecting the knowledge and ongoing dialectic between the designer and user. Narvaez (2000) categorizes the knowledge produced by design into the following levels: empirical-analytical, hermeneutical-historical, and sociocritical. The physical properties of the finished form are made perceptible to users, who are able to recognize the functional or technical components as knowledge of the design object. These objects transition to the hermeneutical-historical domain when physical existence is contextualized against interactions and produce knowledge

through aesthetic experience, semiotic functions, and communication. When set against user-object relationships, objects have the ability to evoke and transform existing social and cultural norms. This affects the attitudes, values, habits, and lifestyles of cultures within the larger social context.

Basic Categories of Design Knowledge		
<i>Empirical-Analytical</i>	<i>Hermeneutical-Historical</i>	<i>Sociocritical</i>
Physical Object	Sociohistorical Object	Evoker-Transformer Object
Types of Knowledge Produced:		
Physical	Sensorial & perceptive	Paradigms changed by object
Mechanical	Semiotic	Attitudes, values & habits modified
Organoleptic properties	Communicative	

Table 2.8 *Categories of Design Knowledge (Source: Adapted from Narvaez, 2000)*

The design object can be translated as an object of knowledge that communicates to the perceiver an interpretation of a social reality (Narvaez, 2000), accounting for the social and collective dimensions that link designers, producers, users, and culture within a shared world (Almquist & Lupton, 2010). Design knowledge is created and owned by designers, further cultivated and expanded by the design process, and transmitted into the physical attributes of the finished object. As a product of material culture, the fashion object acts as the filter between individuals and the social world (Crane & Bovone, 2006). Designers work within their local knowledge communities to transform their tacit understandings and ideas into a process of innovation, encoding the object with knowledge through intentional choices in materials, colors, silhouettes, and details. The fashion object, therefore, materializes the semiotic content and function of meaning, embedding design qualities that stimulate the emotional responses of users.

Objects serve as visual representations, in their concrete forms, to convey abstract

meanings (Ewenstein & Whyte, 2009). The visual aesthetics of fashion outline the sensory connection between the individual and object, which function as symbolic representations of self-identity (Workman & Caldwell, 2007). Fashion objects act as codes of communication and meaning, leading to questions of how designers transmit their knowledge into the finished product to be received by the user. As design knowledge develops from experiences, observations, and storytelling, designers are challenged with the task of effectively transferring their tacit knowledge into explicit forms (Hoadley & Cox, 2009). This reiterates the discrepancy between the encoding of design intention and the decoding of knowledge through user interpretations. According to Schoormans, *et al.* (1995), product meaning is altered when the design concept is not reflected in the product or when the user is influenced by existing knowledge of the product. This implies that an individual with more product knowledge is better able to grasp the true meaning of the design, estimate its relevance, and understand the benefits. Knowledge strengthens perceptions, allowing individuals to discern and judge product attributes while recognizing conceptual details.

As direct producers of material culture, designers embed symbolic meanings into design objects (Rocamora, 2002) and, through the consumption process, the individual actualizes the self-fulfillment of consuming the meanings relating to the product (Baudrillard, 1988:21-25). The designer and user are connected through the design object, which transfers knowledge in its representation of conceptual intent and meaning. This emphasizes the importance and responsibility of designers to translate and make accessible any content, information, data, meanings, and messages relating to the design object (Kazmierczak, 2003).

2.5 The Fashion System

Fashion is an integral part of culture that serves as the interpretation and representational form of a society, is indicative of time, and generates a sense of rhythm. The fashion system allows users to construct new forms of social and cultural meanings through visual expressions of the self. Utilizing the space of the body, by incorporating fashion objects through dressing, users create abstract meanings and values that are influenced by individual perceptions. The development of perception concerns individual experience within the greater social context, representing the dualities between the inner and outer perspectives of self. This section discusses the theoretical foundations of individual perception as an introduction to the dynamic tensions within the fashion system.

2.5.1 Theoretical Concepts

Merleau-Ponty (2004:39-40) defines the world of perception as the world which is made known through the natural ability to sense and experience everyday life. The physical world is revealed and comprehended in the representation and development of a perceived phenomenal world (Zahorik & Jenison, 1998). By mere existence, or being-in-the-world, the individual is given access to a perceptible world. The reciprocity of the relationship, between the perceiver and perceived, demarcates the boundaries within which human existence and experience take place. It implies that all individuals are afforded with experiences of the world, yet all experiences are subject to perception. This leads to a discussion of the theoretical concepts forming the foundations of this study,

providing evidence to support the social transformations affecting Mainland China.

Everyday life is the presentation of reality that is interpreted with subjective meaningfulness, leading to the creation of a coherent world (Berger & Luckmann, 1966: 33). At the fundamental level, human existence relies on experience to refine and strengthen man's symbolic activities toward progress in thought (Cassirer, 1944). The presence of being-in-the-world exposes the individual to be perceived by others, representing the dualities between the internal-external self and the physical-mental states of being. Individuals respond to the social process of experience and behavior by means of reflexiveness through modification (Mead, 1934: 134). The adjusting of social acts constitutes the social whole which, in turn, defines the social development of the individual. It is by developing symbolic systems, serving as the artificial medium allowing individuals to adapt to changes affecting the external world, that the expression of feelings and affections reiterate the emotional responses of the human condition.

Guided by perception, the assigning of value to objects is a natural human ability (Rinofner-Kreidl, 2012) and it is through culture that the phenomenal world is ordered, divided, and categorized to develop a system of meanings (McCracken, 1986). Culture becomes a system of accumulating meanings, which are affected by changes in the external social environment. Social transformations confront the individual level of existence, influencing changes toward perceptions of the world and the reorganization of shared values within a cultural system. These symbolic attachments are affected by social movements and reflected in the cultural

accumulation of values, attitudes, and behaviors (Ball-Rokeach & Tallman, 1979). Through the examination of a society's collective actions and beliefs, the cultural production of meaning construction can be further identified (Johnston & Klandermans, 1995).

Human experience leads to the creation of symbolic activities, producing an understanding of reality as a constructed view of the world (Cassirer, 1944). Popper (1994:14-15) uses the 'bucket theory of the mind' to illustrate the effects of how the external world transforms perceptions into expected regularities of knowledge. This knowledge is gained through the inherent function of sensory stimuli utilizing the body's natural inclination to receive, expect, and perceive. Through the act of sensing and existing in the world, one is able to transfer the conscious state to perceivable bodies as part of the behaviors and relations within a social environment (Heinamaa, 2012). The physical presence of being-in-the-world allows the individual to perceive the phenomenal world as a representation of the physical world (Zahorik & Jenison, 1998). Through this use of perception, the individual (as subject) becomes the filter by which interpretations of reality are generated. Perception and experience produce a point-of-view for the world while reinstating the subject as a temporal and spatial being (Merleau-Ponty, 2004:51). The different perspectives of human existence, the social world, and the creation of meanings are compiled in Table 2.9.

Theoretical Concepts of the Social World

Author	Perspectives
Ball-Rokeach & Tallman (1979)	Social movements create a state of self-dissatisfaction that leads to the reevaluation of cultural values, attitudes and behaviors
Berger & Luckmann (1966)	The social construction of everyday life is the dialectical process between the individual's objective and subjective realities, leading to meaningfulness
Bourdieu (1984)	Cognitive structures are internalized, embodied structures that make possible a common, meaningful world
Cassirer (1944)	The whole of human life is defined by an adapting mechanism through a symbolic system
Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton (1981)	Culture provides the clues of the phenomenal world to determine the types of objects available
Geertz (1973)	The collective response to meaning-making, as being a public and social activity, is reflected in culture
Heinamaa (2012)	The act of sensing and perceiving allows individuals to relate to each other
Johnston & Klandermans (1995)	Meaning construction is based on a group's collective actions and beliefs as part of cultural production
Kim (2001)	The physical mode of existence is reflected in man's ability to change his environment through manipulations of the body
Mead (1934)	The mind is socially constituted and, therefore, the individual act is seen within the social act of implicating objects with meanings
Merleau-Ponty (2004)	As embodied subjects, situated in being, human existence begins with experience of the external world through perception
Rinofner-Kreidl (2012)	Human existence guides perception, imagination, recollection and judgment into assigning value to objects
Scheler (1973)	The body provides a common link between the individual perspectives within social situations
Simon (1996)	The production of artifacts serves as the interface between the inner and outer environments confronting existence

Table 2.9 Overview of Theoretical Concepts (Source: Compiled by Author)

Experience is a necessary precondition to understanding the world framing the meaning of human existence. The world can be seen as a correlate of the individual, where one constructs a unique perspective, represented through different forms of self-expression (Scheler, 1973). Each individual is pre-disposed to attain knowledge of the external world, of other subjects, and eventually of oneself (Popper, 1994:14). Self-knowledge is a function of transforming awareness into consciousness, developed from environmental responses of feedback towards acts of control (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981:90). Knowledge of the self, reified through individual perceptions, constructs interpretations for understanding the external world to guide behaviors and norms.

According to Miller (2005), there is no boundary or distinction between individuals and their environments. Establishing that reality is a socially constructed activity through the development and transmission of human knowledge, the world is received through systems of symbolic representations containing meanings. The schema of the human body provides the framework for understanding the communicating role of fashion and the significance of product choice. If the physical space of the human body demarcates the self from the external world, then its superficial form creates new codes for communication. Clothing becomes the surface by which individuals are exposed to the external world in order to be read (Woodward, 2005), acting as the connection between the sense of what lies within and outside of the self (Miller, 2005), and fulfilling the aesthetic needs of the individual while articulating expressiveness (Eckman & Wagner, 1995).

Choices made by the individual reiterate the social boundary of self, as the meanings of objects reflect a system of signs (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981:113-114). Dressing requires a level of creative input from the individual, who assumes a role of power and influence when presenting expressive forms ascribed to different meanings (Eckman & Wagner, 1995). Through use of the fashion object as a form of visual communication, the individual is positioned to become a part of the social world. This demonstrates the ability of individuals to transform perception into knowledge of the world and assign symbolic meanings to objects as a method for making sense of a social reality. Human experience results in the development of individual perception, further impacting the dialectic tension between individuals and objects. If individual perception is formed by the human predisposition to sense, then it is a result of the influences and feedback received from the external world. This forms the basis for addressing the problem of perception and how it affects the individual's socially constructed understanding of the world.

Based on the assumption that the human world relies on symbolic representations of meaning, the fashion object becomes a significant catalyst of communication in everyday life. The subjective nature of perception implies that individual perspectives and constructed views of reality will differ. This reinforces the imperative need to create systems of meaning, through symbolic activities, to establish meaningful interactions and connections between individuals and material objects. It is within these preconditions of perception and experience that fashion establishes a system.

2.5.2 The Individual, Fashion & Society

Fashion is synonymous with change, operating within a movement that positions the public to adopt new social forms to replace old practices and beliefs (Blumer, 1969). This defines fashion as society's collective response to external forces, serving as the interpretation and representation of the infinitely irrelevant positioning of humanity (Stafford, 2006). Barthes (2006:8-10) defines fashion as a system that creates value through the arrangement of garments on a concrete wearer. Each object forms one component of the system that can be ordered in any number of combinations to become a medium of self-expression. Appearance is projected as a representation of the individual onto the external world, creating a form of visual communication. Fashion can, therefore, be defined as a circular process of social interaction involving the exchange between individuals, society, and objects (Nedelmann, 1990).

For centuries, clothing has been a code referring to social standing as “to change clothes was to change both one's being and one's social class” (Barthes, 2006:93-94). Social differences are reconciled by the standardization of fashion trends. As fashion dictates society's aesthetic homogenization, it directly confronts the freedom to articulate individuality. The very concept of dressing signifies distinction, by separating oneself from any possibility for comparison, and reiterates its primary role of self-expression. However, the social implications of fashion trends limit the extent to which individuality can be expressed. According to Simmel (1971:297), fashion is defined by the opposing functions of unity and segregation. The autonomy of individual dress is restricted by the

pressures leading toward social adaptation, creating a conflict between the freedom to choose and the social demand for imitation.

Fashion is a phenomenon that evolves over the course of time and, at the height of its appeal, becomes an indication of the present (Nedelmann, 1990). The condition of fashion signifies changes in social interactions that account for evolving tastes, selections, and choices. As a social phenomenon, fashion relies on the development of taste to rationalize and determine collective choices. In response to the external world and the changes affecting society, fashion sets a rhythm which allows adjustment in an orderly and unified way (Blumer, 1969). Therefore, the social significance of fashion requires active participation within a process of social change. The pressures imposed by society become a breach to the freedom of individual expression, influencing mass conformity towards dress and style norms (Nedelmann, 1990).

Fashion relies on trend cycles that signify the present, while pointing to the past and future as indications of being “in” or “out” of fashion. The mass adoption of a style marks the end of a trend cycle, as the novelty of newness expires and stimulates fashion leaders to generate new forms of differentiation. Fashion triggers a mechanism of collective selection, flowing from innovators to leaders, followers, and all related participants (Blumer, 1969). This distinction between fashion leaders and followers indicates that the individual’s positioning on the spectrum of fashion depends on the level of confidence to adopt a personal fashion mode (Simmel, 1971:304-307). A confident individual would be more inclined to express a personal style regardless of judgments made by others,

whereas an unconfident individual would prefer to imitate trends adopted by the masses. The relationship between fashion and society restricts individual freedom and the autonomy of choice, as self-expression is opposed by the social standards that dictate good taste.

The social relevance of fashion is established through indifference to criticism, demand for adherence and exclusion of those failing to act within its areas of operation (Blumer, 1969). Individuals exist between these antagonistic forces, influencing the natural tendency towards uniformity, similarity, and imitation (Simmel, 1957). Therefore, fashion can be interpreted as requiring its related members to follow a set example in order to satisfy and adopt a given social condition. Blumer (1969) defines individual choice as an intentional and calculating act that develops the similar sensitivities and appreciations of users co-existing in a world of intense stimulation. Within the dialectics of the fashion system, the object reconciles the coexistence of exclusivity and standardization (Crane & Bovone, 2006). The conflict between imitation and differentiation shifts into social interaction through the fashion object, which mediates the tensions faced by the individual against society's standards (Nedelmann, 1990).

2.5.3 Constructed Meanings – Interpretation of Design Knowledge

Consumption provides an interface to transform the perceived value of fashion objects, by creating a space for individuals and fashion knowledge to intersect (Weller, 2007). The design object operates symbolically through its semiotic function to generate meanings, suggesting that meanings can only be fully realized when actively received by a receiver (Kazmierczak, 2003). Ownership of

meaning shifts to the individual when the object's meaning is reconstructed with new significance. The tensions imposed by society are reconciled through the consumption process, allowing individuals to conform to social standards while satisfying needs through establishing significant meanings to objects (Baudrillard, 1988:37). Individual needs are integrated into the social structure of the products and product choice becomes an indication of status and recognition, fulfilling a greater social function.

The flow of fashion trends disseminates knowledge across social levels and groups, standardizing distinctions in social class through the homogenization of clothing styles. Individual freedom is emphasized by the nature of fashion, which allows the opportunity to constitute oneself through choices of dress (Barthes, 2006:96). This freedom, however, is limited by the fluctuations and rhythms of fashion which dictate social standards for acceptable styles and tastes. Therefore, the individual is positioned to modify and personalize object meanings to reassume power over the fashion selection process.

Polanyi (1962:81-82) describes the representation of experience as occurring in three stages of (1) primary denotation, (2) reorganization, and (3) reading of the result. These stages take into account the symbolic operations that individuals encounter when shifting tacit elements into explicit understandings. The intellectual capacity to reorganize symbolic meanings requires the ability to observe objects, to contextualize their relevance, and to interpret alternative relations. This increases the personal meaningfulness of objects, allowing the user to acquire knowledge through its associated meanings. Neither knowledge nor its

meanings are tangible, yet by physically engaging with objects the user is given access to its inarticulate and tacit components.

The experience of dress, utilizing the body's surface as the interface between the sense of self and the external projection of identity, is an open text that inscribes the body with meanings (Emberley, 1987). Fashion is a social phenomenon that produces a meaning-making process through the expression of symbolic values within cultural contexts (Crane & Bovone, 2006). Meanings embedded within fashion products adapt to new representational forms when met by the individual's perception, shifting into new dimensions of significance (McCracken, 1986). Fashion objects are, therefore, defined by different perceptions, social contexts, and cultural perspectives.

In the transaction between people and things, the cultivation of perception is contingent to meaning creation (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981:173). The cognitive interfaces suggested by the design object provide an interpretive structure for mediating the signs pointing to different meanings (Kazmierczak, 2003). This implies that while meanings transform once received by an end-user, some indication of the original design intent should be inferred to measure the effectiveness of the design. The designer's aesthetic and conceptual purposes are translated into the creation of objects, which are adopted and standardized by society. Against the example of fashion, seasonal styles and trends are determined by the fashion elite who demand the imitation of its fellow members (Simmel, 1957). The individual's freedom of expression through the object is limited by the pressures imposed by the fashion system, discouraging any deviation from social

standards of aesthetics and taste. Individual freedom is, therefore, reinstated through the function of interpretation. Barthes (2006:96) states that clothing allows an individual the freedom to constitute oneself according to choice, even if what has been chosen is a representation of a predetermined choice. This supports a need to focus on the role of user interpretation, which restores the individual's power to reconstruct the object's symbolic value by choosing its meaning.

Designing transfers intentions into the finished design, communicating specific affordances to users (Almquist & Lupton, 2010). These affordances allow users to infer the original meanings intended by the designer. The freedom of the user, to reinterpret the design's meaning or utility, is afforded by the intentions embedded by the designer. Kazmierczak (2003) defends the semiotic function of design objects with a focus on designing the inferences leading towards establishing symbolically significant meanings. This is reiterated by Crilly's (2008) position that designers should design for the anticipation of interpretation rather than the communication of intent, by emphasizing the aesthetic components of objects to trigger the emotional responses of users.

2.6 Summary of Literature Review

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the main themes and topics related to the study. The theoretical background of this research is founded on the fundamental human experience of being-in-the-world, which serves as a critical factor in the development of individual perception. Understanding the body's physical configuration in regards to internal-external and individual-social contexts has been instrumental in relation to the dialectic tensions presented by

the fashion system. The cyclical rhythm and patterns demanded by fashion result in the constant need for change, involving the active participation of leaders and followers, and requires individuals to choose between the opposing poles of uniformity and segregation. This emphasizes the pressures implied by the fashion system in the constant struggle between the freedom of individual expression and the imitation of social standards of taste.

2.6.1 Reevaluation of Values

The changes affecting modern Chinese society have influenced the reevaluation of cultural identities and value systems. Post-80s & 90s Chinese represent the first generation of only-child adults in Mainland China, suggesting that they will exhibit new cultural values and behaviors through their expressions of individuality. Existing literature indicates that the traditional concept of “face” cannot be eliminated or disregarded in Chinese society, as it is an inherited cultural construct directing the dynamics of individual and social relationships. While “face” is a key behavioral construct, there are questions as to how younger generations define this concept in regards to self-perception and the perception of others. The recent development of Chinese urban cities has increased the presence of global fashion brands which have become familiar household names among young Chinese. Existing studies support that younger generations are using brand names to enhance “face” among social peers, rather than appreciating the aesthetic components of fashion objects as the expression of self-identity. This leads to further investigations into how “face” relates to the expression of aesthetics and taste.

Aesthetic values are related to the emotional and sensorial responses of design objects, which can increase or evolve depending on the mode of interaction (Ventakesh & Meamber, 2008). Taste is cultivated as a result of individual life experiences, thereby corresponding to one's social or educational level (Bourdieu, 1984:466). Aesthetic values arise as a result of experience, filtered through individual perception, and articulate taste as the expression of self-identity. Therefore, this study accepts the position that aesthetic appreciation cannot be discussed without acknowledging its relationship to individual levels of taste. Aesthetics and taste are linked within a symbiotic relationship, each influencing the other as a result of individual experience. This study groups aesthetics and taste as a common variable of cultural change. The cultural emphasis of this study proposes that “face” will have an impact on the development of aesthetics and taste, as well as the expression of individuality.

Chinese society is traditionally a collectivist society that highly values group acceptance and social recognition. However, recent studies show that the attitudes of Post-80s & 90s Chinese are changing and they are beginning to adopt more individualistic behaviors. It can be assumed that the Chinese expression of individuality will differ from the Western definition, which is less influenced by group situations. As the traditional concept of “face” changes, it is proposed that it will affect individual self-perception, reflecting modifications in the expression of self-identity through the fashion system. Individuality will be further explored and defined against the modern Chinese context, particularly in how it is perceived by Post-80s & 90s females through fashion objects. If the fashion phenomenon demands users to abide by its rules of imitation and mass adoption of styles, then

this questions whether changing attitudes toward individuality will affect user interactions with fashion objects.

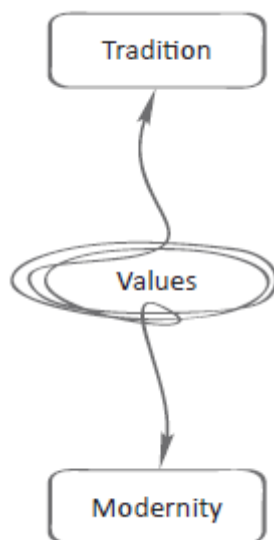


Figure 2.3 Reevaluation of Values within the Cultural System

The cultural context of this study identifies three main values undergoing a process of change, or reevaluation, within a system affected and influenced by external forces of social and cultural movements. The three values – “face”, aesthetics and taste, and individuality – exist between the tensions imposed by the desire to maintain traditional inheritances and the need for modernization (Figure 2.3). While affected by external societal forces of change, the cultural system triggers a movement in the internal values of its individual members. The cultural system encases the reevaluation of values, impacting designers and users alike.

2.6.2 Reevaluation of the Design Artifact

Design knowledge is defined as existing within the domains of epistemology – *knowledge of people*, praxiology – *knowledge of process*, and phenomenology – *knowledge of products* (Cross, 2000). The epistemological concerns of this

research consider design knowledge as stemming from local design activities in addition to being transferred by non-local designers and embedded into design artifacts. However, this thesis focuses on the developing fashion design industry of Mainland China and the growing number of young Chinese fashion designers. The impact and influence of local designers provides significant insight into the changing sociocultural environment, as they cultivate their own practices to contribute to the shared cultural values of their generation.

Design relies on social implications that signify how its artifacts are produced, received, and used (Dilnot, 1984). Designers, as members belonging to the social world, transfer their experiences into the creation of finished designs. These artifacts become representative of the designer's experiences, perceptions, and knowledge. Designers shift knowledge through the design activity and into the production of material objects. The designed artifact symbolically reflects the tacit components of the designer's knowledge as well as the intentional levels of conceptual development. Designers, while existing in the present, utilize foresight to produce outcomes relating to future situations concerning "how things ought to be" (Simon, 1996:133). Therefore, design activities instigate changes that affect social relations through the materialization and production of design artifacts.

As social beings, designers are confronted by external changes that permeate through internal activities. The specific cultural context of this study concerns the cultivation of new values, particularly those affecting the functions of "face", aesthetics and taste, and individuality. Designers do not exist outside of the cultural system, but are involved in local cultures through design activities. This

study defines the role of designers as producers of design knowledge that is culturally relevant and design artifacts that are socially acceptable. If design artifacts are intended for producing socially integrated outcomes, then design intent becomes less explicit and more suggestive. The artifact exists between the confrontation affecting the functional role of designers and the reception of the social world, as illustrated by Figure 2.4.

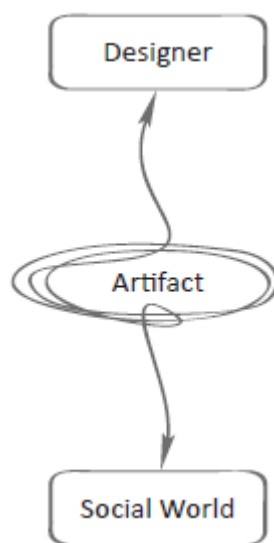


Figure 2.4 Reevaluation of the Design Artifact within the Design System

Designers transfer conceptual knowledge, developed through individual experience and perception, into a finished form. These artifacts serve as a reflection of design knowledge through embedded meanings. The social function of these artifacts, however, affects the flow of design knowledge as it shifts from a design to social realm. Design intent, as a purely unidirectional flow of knowledge, is no longer viable as it is injected with external responses from the social world. The designer's position is challenged by the social world, thereby entering the reevaluation of original meanings and intent associated with the artifact.

2.6.3 Reevaluation of the Fashion Object

Fashion produces a cyclical rhythm of change that begins with innovators and leaders who standardize dress norms, requiring participants to follow predetermined judgments of taste. Dominant fashion norms are established when popular fashions are adopted and imitated by the masses, setting the social standards for taste. Simmel (1957) describes fashion as forcing its users to either conform to accepted style norms or be excluded by deviating from the social standards. The social aspect of fashion leads to the creation of tensions within its areas of operation, pressuring members and participants to choose between satisfying the functions of imitation or distinction.

Clarke & Miller (2002) find that in most cases, users prefer to follow social standards as a form of reassurance in matters of taste and aesthetic choice. The social function of fashion produces a social condition wherein individuals are influenced by a mass standardization of dress. Individual choice exists between the forces of uniformity and segregation, shifting emphasis towards the fashion object. The preset social conditions of fashion present users with an aesthetic standard of taste. Within this relationship, the fashion object assumes a significant role of allowing users to assign personal symbolic meanings. Although fashion is a predetermined selection based on the discretion of its leaders, users are allotted the freedom to reconfigure fashion objects as the expression and representation of self-identity. The presentation of the dressed body expresses a personal interpretation while simultaneously reflecting the social order of aesthetic influence over the individual.

The fashion object functions as a representation of the self, creating different values when arranged on the surface of the body. These objects contribute to a system of communication, implicating the embodiment of dress as a social activity. Each object was designed with a specific conceptual or functional intent that is embedded within its finished form. The user's level of interaction with the object significantly alters how the design is received and interpreted. This transaction can be seen as one form of knowledge exchange between designers and users through use of the fashion object. The user's final interpretation of the object is reassigned when placed on the surface of the body and further reconstructed when received or confronted by other groups of individuals.

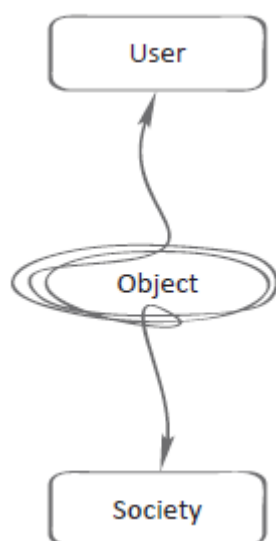


Figure 2.5 *Reevaluation of the Fashion Object within the Fashion System*

Design knowledge regenerates through each stage of interaction, indicating the endless possibilities for meanings to exist. Although users function and conform to the rules set by the fashion system, they achieve differentiation through the reevaluation of the object's symbolic meanings. Fashion is a social activity that

expects users to function according to a given set of rules, challenging the autonomy of self-expression with its standards of aesthetics and taste. As represented by Figure 2.5, the tension within this system is created by the opposition between the need for individuality and society's demand for conformity but reconciled when the object transmits design intention and fulfills its symbolic role to afford the user with new generated meanings.

2.6.4 Systems of Change

The Literature Review introduced an extensive range of subjects and theories relating to constructivist philosophy, epistemology of knowledge, theories of design knowledge, fashion theory, and sociocultural transformation. This study focuses on the current social situation of Mainland China, which has impacted the lifestyles and cultural orientations of its younger generations. Against this backdrop, the tensions within the three systems of culture, design, and fashion are connected to form the grounds for investigation.

The external world framing human existence accounts for the changes occurring in social situations that are diffused into local cultural systems. This study views the cultural context as encasing the ongoing conflict between traditional and modern philosophies of thinking, triggering changes to local cultural values. The actors involved in this system of cultural change are the local designers and users, who share similar experiences that have influenced their orientation of values. Relationships between the designer-object and user-object have been simplified into a common relationship involving the designer and user. It is within culture that the design and fashion systems exist, thereby impacting the values of

designers and users. From the literature review relating to the cultural system, three variables have been identified for this study as “face”, aesthetics and taste, and individuality. It is proposed that designers and users act within the tensions imposed by the cultural system, resulting in the reevaluation of values to influence how designers engage in design activities and how users interact with design objects. Figure 2.6 combines the cultural, design, and fashion systems to illustrate the relationship between designer and user in a shared cultural context. The external influences of the social world are separated from the shared cultural system, which involves the internal changes affecting the design and fashion systems of designers and users.

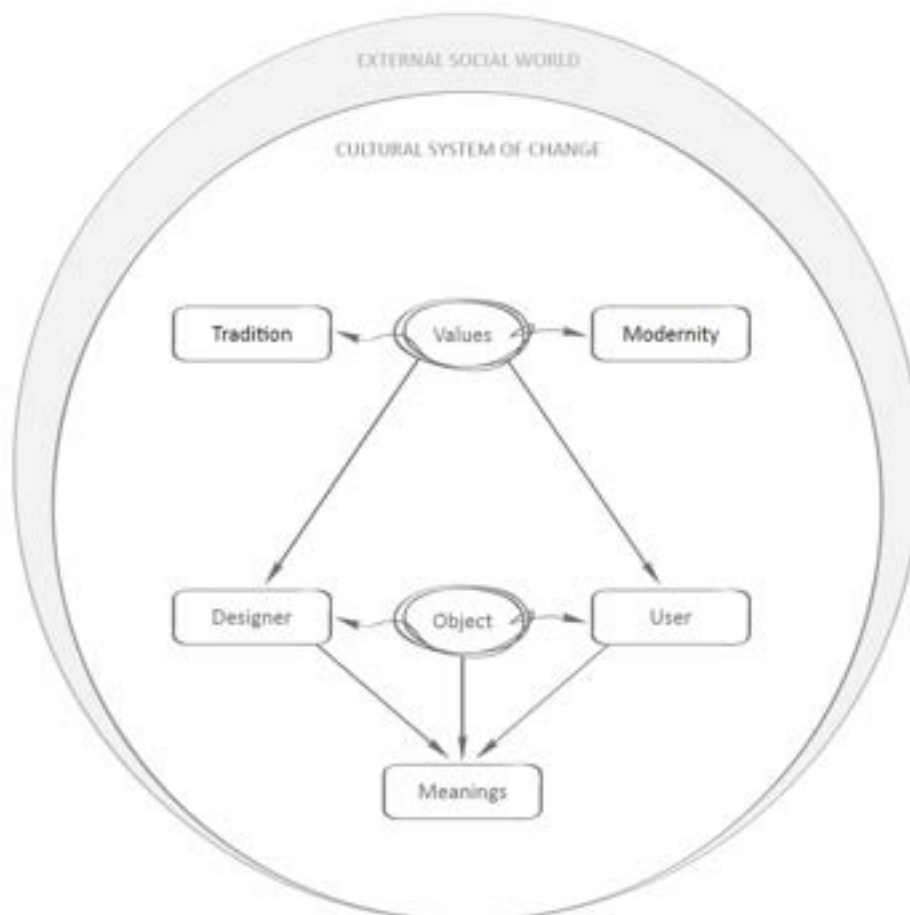


Figure 2.6 Relationship between the Cultural, Design, and Fashion Systems

Polanyi (1962:53) asserts that there can be no explicit recognition of another individual's tacit knowledge. Instead, one is merely able to observe the rules within which the discernable activities or practices occur. In the case of fashion, designers attempt to translate tacit ways of knowing into the symbolic form of the finished garment. These objects do not capture design knowledge in its entirety, but function as a representation of design intent which transforms into user interpretations. The symbolic function of meanings is how knowledge is transmitted from sender to receiver, from designer to user, and reinterpreted as the actualization of the object's social and cultural relevance. This reinstates the autonomy of the user to function outside of the tensions associated with the fashion system, displaying the outward expression of the self through symbolic systems of meaning.

Chapter III. Research Design

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the ways in which historical developments and existing concepts frame and solidify the current empirical world. In forming generalizations and abstractions, theoretical backgrounds provide interpretations for understanding the phenomenal world. This chapter discusses the use of case-studies for researching the empirical world through inductive logic and reasoning. The chosen methodology is based on the Literature Review and theoretical foundations of knowledge discussed in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 provides the justification for the purpose of the study, unit of analysis, sampling design, and data collection methods. The research steps are outlined to clearly demonstrate how the research was conducted. This chapter introduces the main justifications for the research, which are elaborated upon and developed into the Conceptual Framework in Chapter 4.

3.2 Overview of Methodology

In consideration of the main research problems and the interpretive nature of the study, a qualitative approach was chosen to identify the variables forming the objectives for this research: (1) reviewing the cultural changes affecting Post-80s & 90s females, and (2) defining design knowledge as a precursor to the symbolic production of meanings and a mediating factor in interactions between designers, objects, and users. This research follows a sequence beginning with a Literature

Review, Pilot Studies and review of cultural variables, Main Studies and data analysis, the development of the Conceptual Framework and Experimental Study (Figure 3.1).

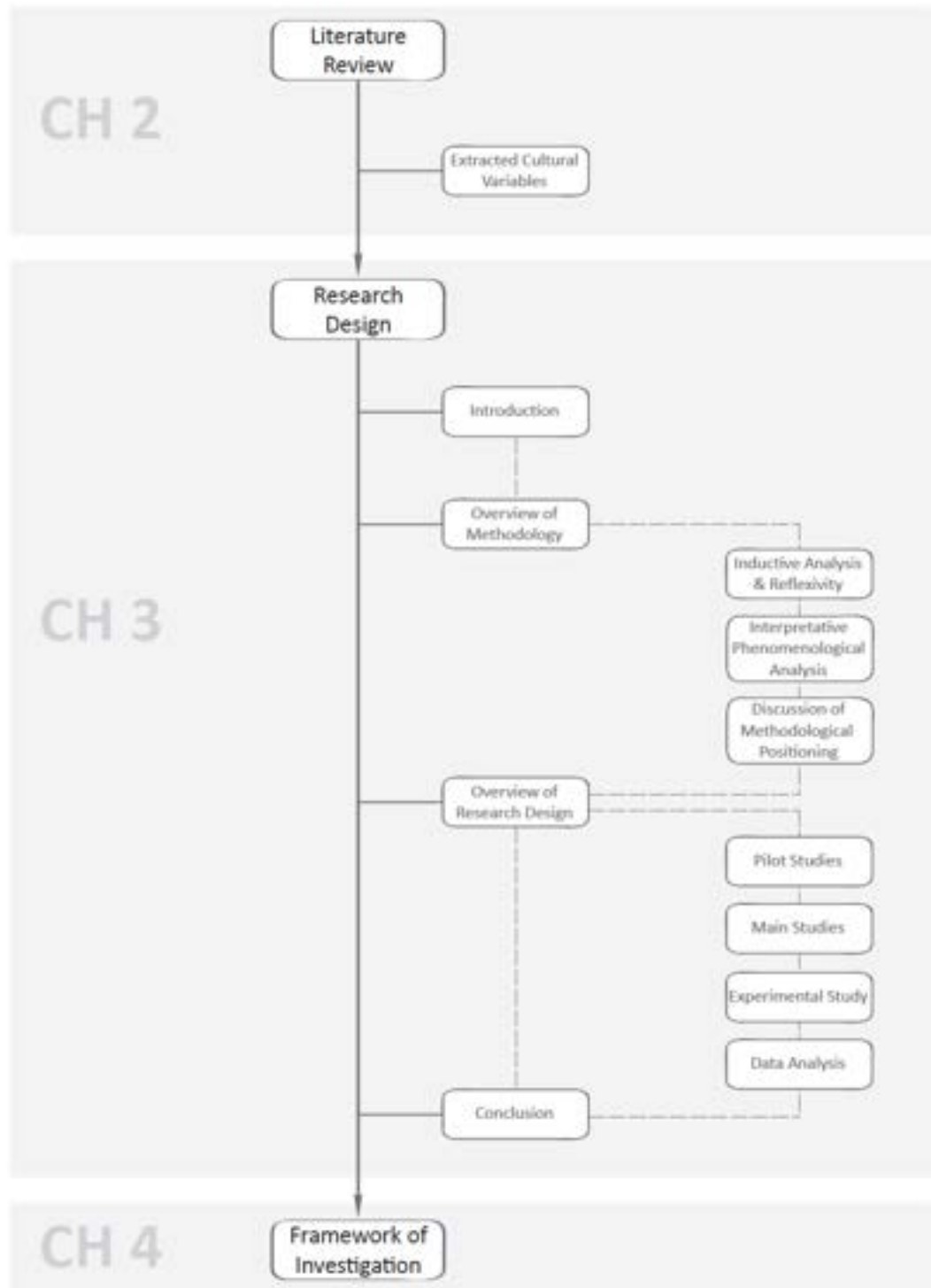


Figure 3.1 Framework of Research Design

The use of a qualitative methodological approach was chosen based on the considerations of: (1) the match between the main research questions and the characteristics of qualitative research, (2) the validity of contextual information and discourse as an understanding for user-object interactions, and (3) the need for qualitative insights into the role of design knowledge and its effects at the user level. On the whole, this research is an applied investigation that was conducted with the intention of filling existing gaps in fashion-related design research by defining the role of design knowledge to broaden the field of knowledge-based fashion research.

Qualitative data assists with identifying *how* external changes to the socioeconomic environment affect the key cultural values, in addition to *how* and *why* changes occurring at the internal and individual levels relate to design knowledge. This research is not focused on hypothesis testing but aims at exploring and explaining the mediating role of design knowledge in the creation of meanings. Placing emphasis on the discovery of insights through the form of in-depth interviews and observations, a qualitative approach was found to be most appropriate for this investigation. On the whole, this research was conducted by utilizing an inductive method of reasoning following a review of relevant information to logically integrate all related findings into the formulation of the Conceptual Framework³, Model of Knowledge Classification⁴, and Knowledge

³ Discussed in Section 4.4.2

⁴ Discussed in Section 5.5.1

Framework⁵.

3.2.1 Inductive Analysis & Reflexivity

According to Miles and Huberman (1994:10-12), qualitative data analysis involves data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction is an ongoing part of the analysis, as a process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting and transforming data; data display is the organization of information into categories or themes; and conclusions are drawn as a result of comparing and verifying data against other forms of data.

Exploratory qualitative research supports the diagnosis of a given situation in order to better understand the nature of the research problem (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This research began with an exploratory study, through the Pilot Studies⁶, to gather preliminary information, define the relevant terms, and clarify the existence of tensions within the situational context. Based on the theoretical foundations of this study and to develop coherent explanations for the research problem, preliminary studies in the forms of questionnaires and in-depth interviews were carried out. The first round of Pilot Interviews focused on generalizing the changing culture affecting young generation Chinese and their perceptions toward fashion objects. Following the first Pilot Study, the collected data was sorted and categorized into respective themes concerning the main constructs of the study. The concepts were modified into a new set of questions which were addressed in the second series of Pilot Interviews.

⁵ Discussed in Section 5.5.2

⁶ Discussed and Analyzed in Section 4.2

The second Pilot Study involved a deeper investigation into the cultural situation affecting young Chinese through field observations, shadowing of lifestyle habits, and in-depth interviews. Interview transcripts were later compiled and summarized into a review of cultural variables, defining the significance of the Chinese cultural concept of “face” in relation to the development of aesthetics & taste, individuality, and design knowledge. An ethnographic approach was utilized to fully immerse into Chinese culture, using an iterative process for interpreting cultural ideas and behaviors. Interview transcripts were analyzed through the content analysis method, making inferences through the systematic and objective identification of significant messages while recognizing recurring themes or patterns from interview responses. The cultural findings were contained at the user level, serving as the situational context of the research investigation, for the role of design knowledge to be fully examined in the Main Study.

Case-studies are a preferred method when examining contemporary issues or phenomenon through direct observation and systematic interviewing (Yin, 1994:19-20). The Main Study⁷ of this investigation focused on case-studies to serve as examples for how Mainland designers view the current situation affecting Post-80s & 90s Chinese and to what extent their design activities contribute to the experiences of users. Through a series of semi-structured interviews and site visits, each case was documented and insights from the designers were examined against the main theoretical concepts concerning design knowledge. This analytical reviewing of concepts created an internal dialogue, involving an iterative exchange between the collection of insights and the author’s ensuing

⁷ Discussed and Analyzed in Section 4.3

interpretations, resulting in the identification of themes corresponding to each case-study. A descriptive study approach was applied to describe and analyze the relevant facts surrounding the main phenomenon of interest. The emergent themes arising from the Main Study are discussed in the latter sections of Chapter 4 and integrated into the Conceptual Framework.

3.2.2 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

This study explores the experiences of participants, both designers and users, to understand how they make sense of their personal and social worlds. Taking into account the points-of-view of the participants, this form of research involves hermeneutic approaches that negate the notion of objectivity in phenomenological analysis (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Instead, it considers the dynamic process and active role of the researcher's own perception when exploring the participants' personal experiences. The holistic approach of IPA leads to a richer examination and concern for how individuals construct meanings. In this manner, it becomes an interpretative method that requires identifying and empathizing with the subjects. Taking into consideration the researcher's role throughout the data collection process, IPA allows direct involvement when drawing inferences from the descriptive experiences provided by interview participants.

IPA is suitable for studies investigating how individuals perceive particular situations and make sense of personal and social worlds through the construction of meanings or meaningful associations (Smith & Osborn, 2008). These studies focus on small sample sizes in order to conduct detailed analyses of participants, accounting for the concentrated scale of interviews in the Jiangsu Province. As

the purpose of IPA is not to form generalizations, the use of homogenous purposive sampling increases the significance of the research in a particular culture without needing to relate it to broader cultures. IPA is an effective method for linking findings to existing literature and the researcher's own personal or professional experiences in order to represent the totality of the topic of investigation.

Following the IPA method, the steps of research involved semi-structured interviews, detailed transcriptions, analysis and annotation of themes, connection and clustering of themes, comparison of individual case-studies, and final outlining of inherent meanings (Smith & Osborn, 2008). IPA involves the researcher's own participation in providing the final interpretation of findings based on personal experience and perception. This research is set against the Chinese cultural backdrop, which differs from the researcher's own cultural background. Therefore, IPA is justified as a suitable method for this investigation, as it allowed the researcher to establish inferences and interpretations without diluting the complexities of the study in the forming of empirical generalizations.

The case-studies forming the Main Study of this research were analyzed following the IPA method. Each case involved semi-structured interviews to build on the examples for design practice in Mainland China, which were transcribed in detail, analyzed to identify themes, and later outlined into a transactional system of meanings. The insights derived from the case-studies were contextually compared to existing theories from the literature review and reinterpreted based on the researcher's own understanding of the situation from the perspectives of

design theory and theory of design practice.

The qualitative insights and interpretations inferred from the Pilot Studies and Main Study were transformed into the development of the Conceptual Framework. To further explore and analyze how design activities lead to the increase of knowledge, an Experimental Study was included to address the questions and issues arising from the Conceptual Framework. The Experimental Study focused on a case-study of embedded cultural knowledge that directly involved the researcher's participation in the embodied experience of designing. Following a phenomenological approach, through interactions with the materials on hand, the researcher was able to document the experience of design and identify the known parameters framing the main design and cultural context.

3.2.3 Discussion of Methodological Positioning

In his book *Empire of Signs*⁸, Barthes presents an experience of Japan where the distinguishable features of culture are recreated as freely circulating, empty signs. The signs are never grounded to a central meaning, as they cannot be explicitly revealed, allowing them to be read and interpreted according to the observer. This engages the reader as an active participant to convert empty text into establishing personal meaningfulness and significance. The reader must read the empty text, distinguish the surface of features, grasp the symbolic, and assign a personal meaning. Following this same spirit of interpretation, and moments of discovery, this study positions the researcher as an observer of cultural phenomena. The facts

⁸ Barthes, R. (1981). *Empire of Signs*. (R. Howard, Trans.) Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, Inc.

and details concerning Chinese culture are not explicitly defined, but described and analyzed based on the impressions gained from the researcher's own experiences.

Husserl's phenomenology claims that reality presents itself as pure phenomena, rejecting the independent existence of objects in the external world (Groenewald, 2004). Therefore, all absolute and reliable knowledge exists as part of the immediate experience as an extension of personal consciousness. The researcher's role is positioned to capture lived experiences and to describe the perspectives of those involved in a particular phenomenon or issue of study. This concern for experience lends itself to the identification of meanings pertinent to everyday existence (Lavery, 2003), requiring the researcher to develop a study that probes into a deeper level of meanings.

Meanings are realized and uncovered by achieving a sense of understanding from the perspective of the researcher, taking into account the mundane details of experience as it is lived. The idiographic nature of design experience supports the use of a phenomenological research approach, allowing access into the insights, skills, and knowledge represented by designers. Designers undergo a creative process of framing design problems into future-oriented activities, which concerns the experience of discovery. This creativity is pertinent to achieving design solutions that are not immediately obvious, leading to moments of insight that often occur outside the constraints and limitations set by the design problem (Crilly, 2009). The ability of designers to reframe design problems and explore within certain boundaries demonstrates the potential for creative solutions to be

achieved. Therefore, how designers reach the moment of discovery, in both existing phenomena and design creativity, are subject to individual experience.

Research into design activity implicates the design process as a phenomenon in itself that is indicative of the designer's own experience. Through a phenomenological approach, the design experience uncovers the situational knowledge surrounding the particular phenomenon of interest and a deeper understanding of the intentional levels of meaning. Jonas (2001) argues that design is not art, not technology, not science, but an expert discipline of a special kind that alludes to integration, relation, and meaning. Researching design, therefore, requires a methodology specific to its domains of operation.

This study is based on the understanding that design performance is evaluated by the effective transmission of knowledge, as design intent, from a designer through design activities to produce a design object. Design activity is defined as a process that explores the novelty of unexpected insights for creatively solving design solutions. Rather than limiting the design process as a necessary precondition of matching appropriate solutions to problems, this study considers designing as an exploratory research method for framing appropriate design problems that are characterized by high levels of uncertainty. Through perceptive and intuitive abilities, the researcher is able to grasp the underlying meanings relating to the role of designers in transferring knowledge to users.

3.3 Overview of Research Design

The Literature Review provided the groundwork for the investigation, identifying

gaps in research and suggesting areas for further examination. Chinese culture has been studied from various disciplines yet research on Post-80s & 90s is limited and undefined, largely due to the cultural and socioeconomic diversity of Mainland China. This study does not attempt to define the cultural orientation of the Post-80s & 90s nor provide a measure for consumption behaviors, but examines the mediating role of design knowledge at the user level and its effects on the construction of meanings which, in turn, impact the sociocultural world. The investigation is, therefore, a circular two-staged process of (1) understanding the individual's experience of the sociocultural world and its effects on user-object relationships, and (2) interpreting the effects of user-object relationships as an influence on the sociocultural environment and future experiences. This study begins with a series of two Pilot Interviews, through which the cultural assumptions based on the Literature Review are substantiated and the main inquiry of this study is established. The cultural component of this research is defined at the user level, in terms of the main cultural variables identified from the Literature Review, and the Main Study focuses on establishing design perspectives for Chinese fashion.

3.3.1 Data Collection

This research involves exploratory and descriptive studies. The Pilot Interviews were designed as an exploratory study to gather preliminary information in order to define relevant terms and clarify the existing problems of the situational context. Insights from the Pilot Studies were related to the Main Study, which were conducted through descriptive studies to identify the relevant aspects

involved in the phenomenon of interest and determine potential outcomes.

3.3.1.1 Pilot Studies

Fashion is a visible representation of self-identity onto the social world, enabling a mode of communication. Therefore, the user-object interaction within the context of fashion is a communal activity that cannot be restricted at the individual level. Following a thorough review of relevant literature and review of cultural phenomenon, an interview guide with corresponding questions was developed for Mainland university students. University students were included in the two rounds of Pilot Studies to gather evidence of cultural change and examples for how users relate to the key variables of this study – “*face*”, *aesthetics & taste, individuality, and design knowledge*.

Pilot Study I involved a brief questionnaire followed by semi-structured interviews, which were documented through field notes and memos. Taking into account any potential language barriers, the questionnaires were translated into Simplified Chinese to allow students to fully comprehend the main concepts. It was discovered from the professional bilingual translator that *individuality* is a term which is not immediately translatable to Chinese and was therefore changed to “*independence*” to avoid any misconceptions or misunderstandings. Design knowledge was changed to “*fashion knowledge*” in order to specify the exact context of knowledge. A brief introduction was made to students before distributing the questionnaires. Each of the students was interviewed separately in face-to-face semi-constructed interviews to expand on their understandings of the main topics. The order of distributing questionnaires followed by interviews was

intentional, as it allowed participants to process the main topics prior to sharing more in-depth insights and experiences. Interviews lasted approximately 10 minutes and were carefully transcribed to draw upon main themes and subthemes relating to the four variables of interest.

The second round of interviews for Pilot Study II was conducted over an extended period of one month, from September – October 2012 at Jiangnan University in Wuxi, Jiangsu Province. It was discovered during the first pilot study that Mainland university students displayed high proficiency in the English language and, therefore, interviews were conducted entirely in English. This second study involved a non-confrontational style of minimal personal involvement with the use of open-ended questions. In order to avoid any influence or bias due to the researcher's background and ethnicity, a conversational approach was utilized to allow interviewees more freedom and establish mutual trust. Following a self-introduction and explanation of the research topic, the structured questions were posed concerning the four main variables under study. Each interview, lasting approximately 40-50 minutes, was voice recorded with additional documentation. Noting from the previous pilot interviews that respondents needed more contextual information to fully comprehend the questions, brief narrations were provided using examples to simplify the terms, definitions, and theories. An illustrative diagram⁹ was also presented during the introduction phase, as a means for participants to visualize the framework and context of the research, which was positively received.

⁹ Appendix B

Conducting a more in-depth investigation and profiling of students was proposed as providing deeper insights for the cultural background and context under investigation. This study was developed over a longer period of time, allowing the researcher to fully immerse in the local culture and establish relationships with the students prior to conducting the interviews. As a visiting researcher stationed within the university, inside access was a key incentive for engaging with the students as a fellow peer while simultaneously observing them as an investigator. Establishing relationships with the participants allowed for a candid approach to gather information, resulting in more honest reflections. Sampling followed a “snowballing” method to diversify the backgrounds of interviewees.

3.3.1.2 Main Study

The Main Study of this research focused on four case-studies to demonstrate how designers, as individuals, perceive the world in which their design activities produce objects representing the symbolic significance of meanings. In order to produce a balanced understanding of designer insights ranging from independent to more seasoned and experienced designers, the case-studies for the main study were purposely selected based on the following criteria: (1) scale of business, (2) local following, and (3) educational background and training. This resulted in the inclusion of case-studies to present the design experiences of local designers. Each case-study involved interviews, site visits to design studios and, in some cases, supplementary questionnaires to formulate themes relating to the historical development of Chinese fashion and its effects on future modes of operation. The variation in the selection of cases allowed for the identification of themes which

were further elaborated into a final framework mapping the mediation of design knowledge.

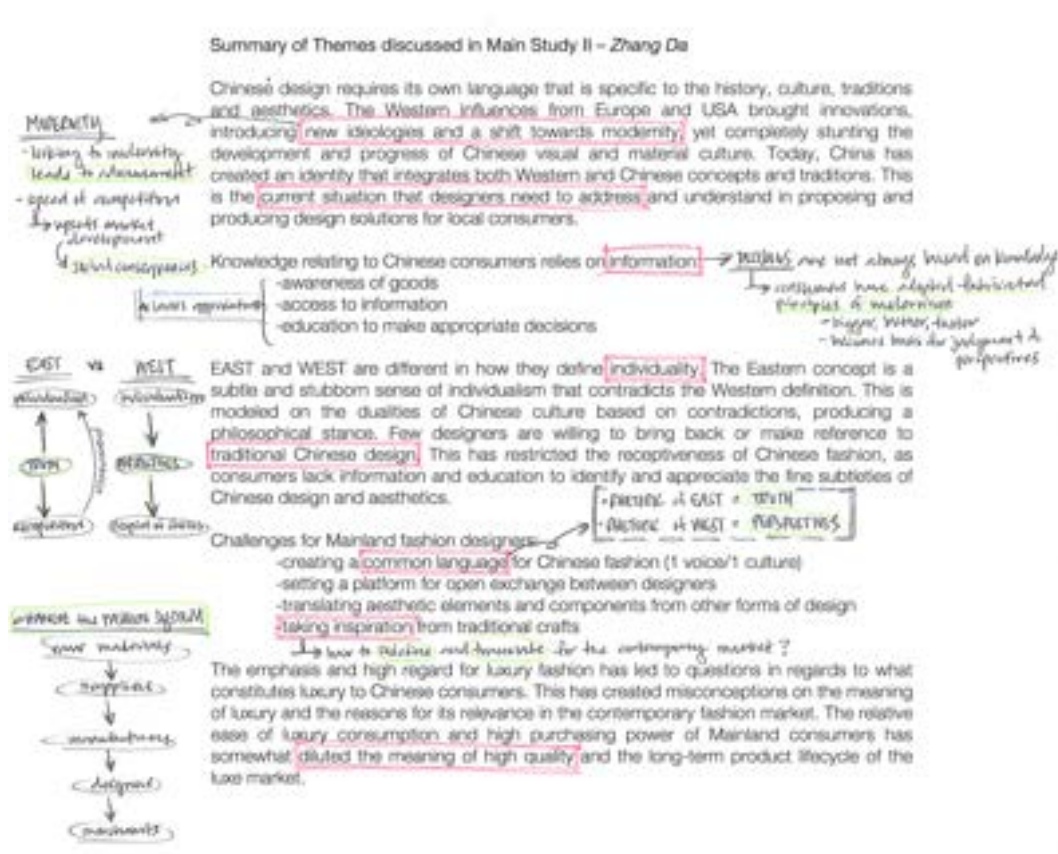


Figure 3.2 Example of Reflective Memo

Through dialogue, each case-study interview was documented with the simultaneous use of reflective memos as depicted in Figure 3.2. These memos were not only beneficial for subsequent follow-up questions to direct the flow of conversation, but allowed the designers freedom in exploring the topics of interest. This allowed the researcher to take note of significant insights without restricting the designers’ reflections on their own experiential accounts of related design issues and practices. To reduce misinterpretations during the data collection process, the intentions of the study were formally introduced and any critical issues were later clarified through supplementary questionnaires.

3.3.1.3 Experimental Study

The Pilot Studies and Main Study were developed into a Conceptual Framework¹⁰ demonstrating the influence of cultural change on design and user activities into a transactional system of meanings. While the framework defined the meaning-making effects of design knowledge, it raised a new set of questions relating to the types of knowledge existing within the domain of local culture and design. The themes of the Main Study were addressed in an Experimental Study, directly involving the researcher in the experience of design activities. In consideration of the common theme identified from the four case-studies of local designers, the reeducation and reintroduction of traditional Chinese design and aesthetics, the Experimental Study was structured around a case-study involving a Kesi silk factory.



Figure 3.3 Example of Sketching & Creative Process

¹⁰ Figure 4.17

The researcher's direct involvement in the Experimental Study was intentionally designed as a means to gain access to the experiences embedded within the Kesi materials and extract the perceivable levels of knowledge. Direct involvement allowed for the construction of rich narratives of a chosen experience, refined into themes to offer possibilities for transformation and growth (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998). Through the conversational activity of designing, the researcher was able to apply sketching as a means for exploration into the main phenomenon of the Kesi study. Sketching provided moments of reflection and insight which were documented through note-taking and annotations. The Experimental Study defined knowledge existing within the parameters of the design context and provided a scenario for mapping the flow of knowledge in the form of meaning creation.

3.3.1 Data Analysis

The Literature Review concluded with an overview of changes affecting the cultural, design, and fashion systems. These systems summarize the dialectic tensions leading toward the reevaluation of cultural values, the design artifact, and fashion object. Contextualized against the shared social and cultural environment of Mainland China, designers and users undergo similar changes that affect their understandings of fashion and the various roles of design knowledge. The mediating role of design knowledge is addressed by first defining the relationships between users of fashion and changes affecting the "face" concept, the development of aesthetics and taste, and the cultural understanding of individuality. Social theories from the perspectives of design, fashion, and culture

support the presumed correlations between the cultural variables under investigation which were evaluated through the Pilot Studies. Responses from the first round of Pilot Interviews were modified for the second pilot study in consideration of how university students understand the main objectives of the research. To further investigate the depth and impact of cultural change affecting the development and mediation of design knowledge, local designers were identified to serve as case-studies to analyze the intentional levels of design knowledge. The timeline of the research flow is illustrated in Figure 3.3.

Each stage of data collection involved formulating a list of questions and undertaking in-depth interviews with the individuals concerned. The interviews and conversations were documented through field notes, voice-recorded, and transcribed. The recorded transcripts were carefully scrutinized to reflect on the core concerns of each interview, to systematically identify and categorize the important information, and draw on valuable inferences. Following a content analysis method, the textual information was coded into units of sentences and phrases to classify the views of respondents. All opinions and insights arising from the conversations and questionnaires were attached to high levels of significance, which were further related to the main research issues and the proposed linkages between cultural change and the subsequent impact of design knowledge.

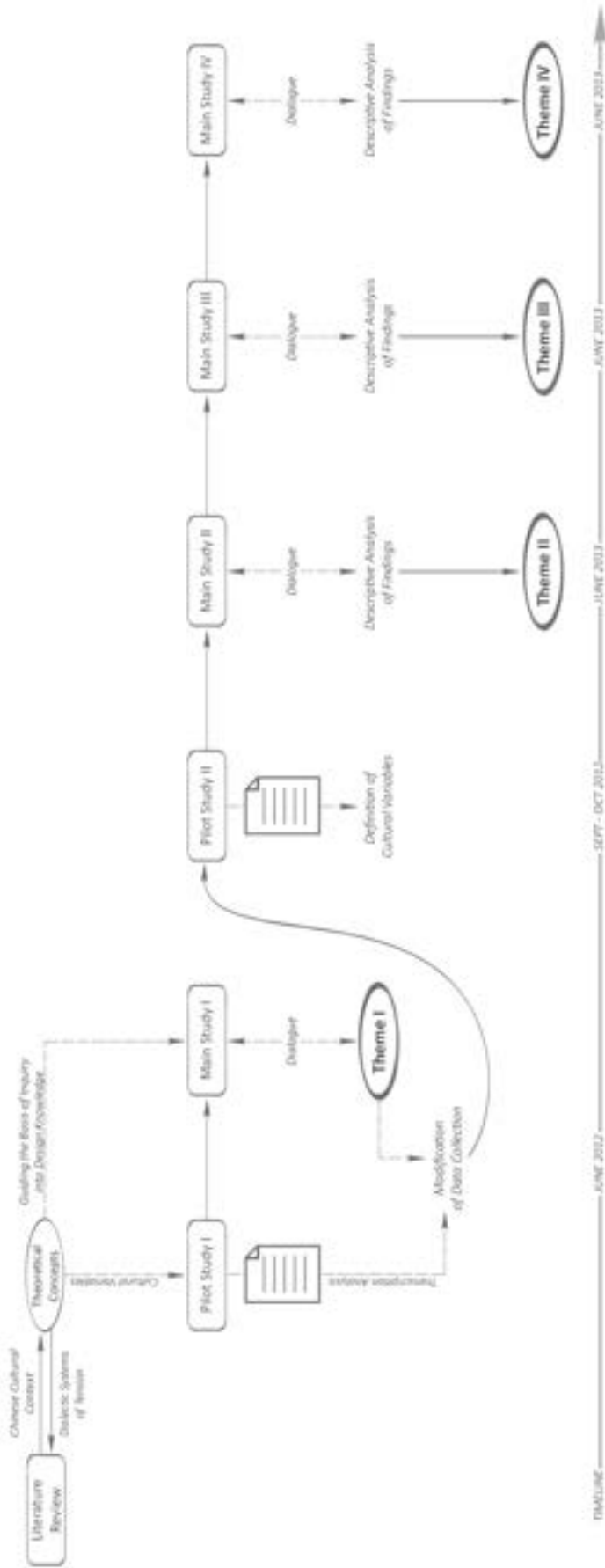


Figure 3.4 Flow of Research

Language, in the form of conversation, allows internal thought to be communicated and transferred. Marsh (1987:138) describes the problem of language in existential phenomenology as the interpretation of language and thought:

Language is not external clothing on thought otherwise complete in itself, but is essential for thought to become definite and complete. An artist painting a picture, a poet creating a new poem, and a philosopher writing a philosophical treatise do not know what they wish to say until they have said it.

Experience, involving thought, is difficult to explicate as it is expressive, embodied, and historical. The way in which individuals articulate thought is through expressive and linguistic means which, in this study, involve the documentation of conversation and the reading of the fashioned body. This research acknowledges that all individual experience is made cognizable through expression and, therefore, becomes open to interpretation as a way to gain access to meaning. At both individual and social levels, the subjective nature of fashion phenomena cannot be adequately comprehended in its entirety as it involves meanings that are hidden and personal. This requires the observer, or researcher, to assign interpretations that move beyond description and into explanations for a given phenomenon of study.

The researcher acts as an interpreter for the relationship between the designer's experience of knowledge transference and the user's experience of knowledge acquisition. This study introduces the circular process of dialogue as the mode for forming descriptive analyses which are further interpreted into the identification of main themes.

3.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter has clearly described and justified the decisions regarding the chosen research design, primary use of qualitative research methodology, need for preliminary Pilot Studies and the case-study approach. The research investigation is concerned with building a theoretical framework for the flow of design knowledge which is embedded, extracted, and constructed into the process of meaning-making. While the communication of meanings exists at a social level of interaction, meaning construction is a personal and individualized activity. The theoretical framework of this research is broadly defined but relatable to specific instances, situations, and contexts. Therefore, evidence collected from the Pilot and Main Studies are not subject to proof through observations, but discussed and analyzed in Chapter 4 and further applied through an Experimental Study in Chapter 5.

Addressing the range of related critical issues, Chapter 3 forms a solid foundation for the development of this study. This chapter proposed a qualitative methodology and research design addressing the two main purposes of this study to (1) better understand and define the cultural changes affecting the perceptual development of Post-80s & 90s and (2) define design knowledge within the Chinese cultural backdrop through case-studies involving local designers. The main background relating to the knowledge of designers was introduced and will be further analyzed in the following chapter to draw meaningful inferences addressing the main research questions and the development of the Conceptual Framework.

Chapter IV. Framework of Investigation

4.1 Introduction

According to McCracken's (1986) framework, design meanings are culturally accumulated as they flow from the culturally constituted world through the consumer good to be received by the end-user. This study suggests that the function of cultural meanings acts as the mode by which knowledge can be transferred and interpreted. The role of design knowledge must, therefore, establish social and cultural relevance in order for users to fully grasp the meanings represented by design objects.

This chapter presents and discusses the main findings of the research leading to the development of the Conceptual Framework. A series of Pilot Studies were conducted to better understand and establish the cultural changes affecting the target group of users, the Post-80s & 90s females. The Main Study introduces specific case-studies which were selected to serve as a broad representation for the different classes and levels of fashion designers in Mainland China. From the Main Study, four main themes were identified and integrated into the Conceptual Framework. The flow of Chapter 4 is outlined in Figure 4.1.

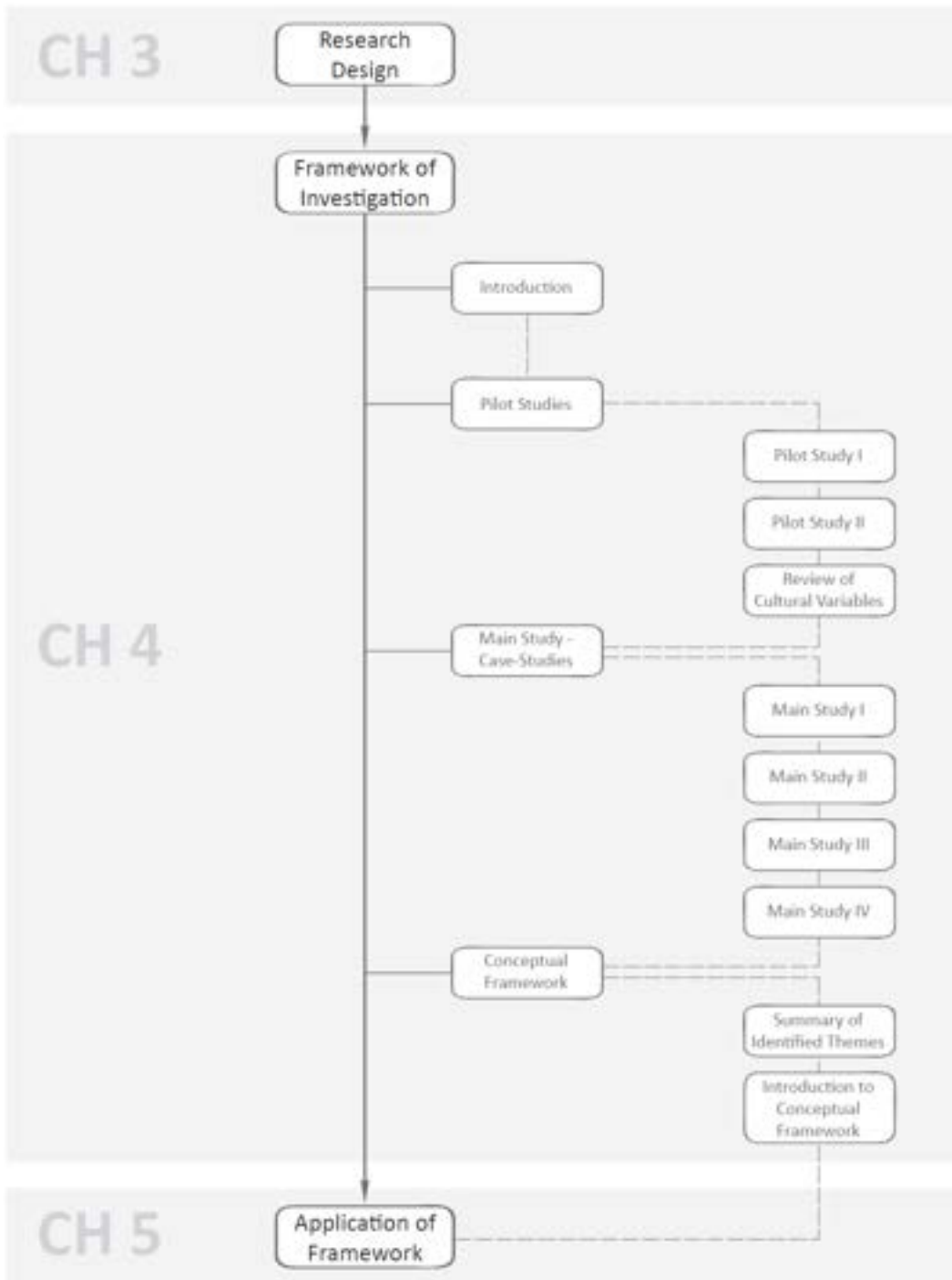


Figure 4.1 Outline of Chapter 4

4.2 Pilot Studies

A series of two Pilot Studies was developed to further explore how young females in Mainland China understand fashion objects and to what extent they seek to increase their own knowledge base relating to fashion. This section summarizes the field study findings, providing insight into the cultural changes affecting the Post-80s & 90s and how users of fashion interpret or understand its associated meanings. Taking the main cultural variables extracted from the Literature Review relating to the Chinese cultural system - *face* (面子), *aesthetics & taste*, and *individuality*, interview questions were formulated to relate the findings to design knowledge. The first round of Pilot Interviews assisted with refining the main concepts, leading to the in-depth approach of the second Pilot Interviews. This section describes how and why the Pilot Studies were conducted and provides a summary of results.

4.2.1 Pilot Interview I

The cultural backdrop of this research concerns Post-80s & 90s females and the impact of the sociocultural changes on their systems of values. Influenced by the rapid changes impacting their social world, this generation is faced with redefining their cultural values to align with new perceptions toward design objects. This particular generation of Chinese was selected for this research due to (1) the gaps identified in the Literature Review in consideration of their cultural orientation and (2) evidence supporting their unique positioning as the first generation of single-child adults. Female students were chosen as target users

based on the nature of the research, concerning the interest to increase interactions with fashion objects.

Fashion provides the medium for self-expression, using the body's surface and arrangement of objects to project oneself onto the social world. The Post-80s & 90s generation of China provide the cultural user-context for understanding how individuals are able to utilize fashion objects and its various meanings to represent and communicate their distinct identities. Four main constructs have been extracted from the Literature Review to form questions regarding how design knowledge acts as a key factor leading towards the increased affectivity of fashion objects. The purpose of this Pilot Study was to gain knowledge of the cultural context and explore the extent to which participants understood the scope of relevant topics.

No.	Age	University	Study Major
001	22	Tongji University	Industrial Design
002	21	Tongji University	Industrial Design
003	21	Tongji University	Fashion Design
004	21	Tongji University	Industrial Design
005	23	Tongji University	Industrial Design
006	21	Fudan University	Advertising
007	20	Fudan University	Marketing
008	24	Jiangnan University	Interaction Design
009	24	Jiangnan University	Interaction Design
010	24	Jiangnan University	Interaction Design
011	24	Jiangnan University	Interaction Design

Table 4.1 Profile of Interviewees – Pilot Interview I

Pilot Study I focused on young females in the Jiangsu Province, accounting for the regional challenges due to geographical and demographic differences. Universities in China's major cities attract students from all over the country,

providing a fair representation of Chinese young-adults for convenience sampling (Fan & Xiao, 1998). In June 2012, 11 female university students (aged 21-24) were interviewed from Tongji, Fudan, and Jiangnan Universities. The interviews were exploratory in nature and conducted to obtain the main abstractions of cultural changes affecting young females and determine whether societal developments have any impact or influence on their involvement with fashion objects. Profiles of Interviewees are listed in Table 4.1.

Findings from the first Pilot Interviews¹¹ are summarized below in Table 4.2.

Summary of Findings from Pilot Interview I
FACE
<p>“Face” is a form of achieving group identity</p> <p>Expressed in the reciprocation of behaviors</p> <p>Face may not necessarily be important as a self-concept, but emphasized in group situations to increase one’s social standing</p>
AESTHETICS & TASTE
<p>Design appeal is more important than brand value as an indication of good aesthetic judgment and taste</p> <p>Finding what is suitable for oneself outweighs the pressure to follow fashion trends</p>
INDEPENDENCE
<p>Post 80s & 90s are independent in their view of themselves as edgy, open-minded, liberal, seeking change, proactive and opportunistic</p>
FASHION KNOWLEDGE
<p>Fashion knowledge would influence future purchase by forging connections to brands and designers, enriching product appeal through storytelling</p>

Table 4.2 Summary of Findings from Pilot Interview I

The results were valuable to form the basis for more detailed and direct questions relating to the main constructs. It was found that respondents required more

¹¹ Transcriptions are included in Appendix C

background information regarding the main themes discussed in the interviews. There was also indication of a growing interest from respondents towards the concept of design knowledge, in how it can be attained and benefitted from. “Face” is still a primary factor of influence on how Chinese users receive, perceive, and understand products based on their extrinsic qualities. Aesthetics & taste are based on levels of education and depend on personal preference, yet heavily influenced by group culture, fashion media, and “face”. Independence is also an important variable affecting the individual’s level of confidence to exist and function outside of their immediate social groups. These three main cultural variables were further tested to establish linkages and interdependencies to present a solid basis for defining cultural change.

Fashion knowledge was found to be too abstract of a concept, suggesting that it should be studied from a different perspective. While respondents understood that increasing fashion knowledge was beneficial to the selection process, it was difficult for them to understand the different levels at which knowledge exists. As this research follows a theory that defines design knowledge as residing in three separate domains – *individuals, process, products* – there is a need to first define knowledge within the context of local Chinese designers. For the sake of extracting the specific forms of fashion knowledge local users retain, each respondent was asked to name several brands or designers that they value¹². This revealed that their awareness and perception of fashion is fairly limited, in the sense that they are unable to distinguish between foreign and domestic brands. However, they seem to prefer local fashion brands or designers as a way to “show

¹² The specific brands used and preferred by respondents can be found in Appendix C

off’ to friends about new or novelty forms of fashion knowledge. The user responses to the concept of fashion or design knowledge was found to be directly related to “face”, as knowledge becomes a measure of value when it can be expressly articulated in group situations. Therefore, it can be deduced that gaining more knowledge of the design object is profitable at the external level of users.

Assumptions and Questions following Pilot Interview I

Assumption 1	<p>Research has shown that Post-80s & 90s Chinese are affected by rapid economic developments and sociocultural changes.</p> <p>A significant factor influencing the behaviors of young adults was the enforcement of the single-child family structure.</p> <p>This first generation of only-child adults can be defined as significantly different from previous generations, as seen in their experiences, lifestyles, culture, etc.</p>
Question 1	<p>Have these factors affected the traditional value of “face”?</p> <p>Does “face” among young Chinese differ from older generations?</p> <p>Is it a result of cultural inheritance or influenced by individual perception?</p> <p>How does it affect behavior? When is it emphasized/not emphasized?</p> <p>How much of the “face” concept is affiliated with family or self?</p>
Assumption 2	<p>It is through exposure to fashion objects/media that the point-of-reference for “taste” develops.</p> <p>As part of human experience, “taste” is something learned from user-object interactions and cultivated through practice.</p>
Question 2	<p>Does “face consciousness” influence “taste”?</p> <p>What are the local/cultural standards for determining “good taste”?</p> <p>What are some efforts made to increase “taste”?</p>
Assumption 3	<p>Today’s young adult Chinese exercise more freedom in their choices: lifestyle, attitudes, behaviors, etc.</p> <p>They see themselves as more independent than previous generations</p>
Question 3	<p>How is independence defined within the local/cultural context?</p> <p>Is their concept of independence separate from traditional values that emphasize family connections?</p> <p>How does independence affect “face” or the development of “taste”?</p> <p>Is there a relationship between perception, face, taste, and independence?</p>

Table 4.3 Assumptions and Questions following Pilot Interview I

Following the first round of exploratory interviews, three sets of assumptions and corresponding questions were formulated to be addressed in the second Pilot Interview. The assumptions and questions in Table 4.3 link cultural change to young Chinese by questioning the influences of “face” on user-object interactions.

4.4.2 Pilot Interview II

Pilot Interview I provided an understanding of the cultural situation of Post-80s & 90s, clarifying the context of investigation and design of the ensuing study. The assumptions and questions arising from the first set of interviews indicated the need to explore the key concepts in relatable terms. It was also evident that students were reluctant to share insights or reveal examples of behavior perceived as deviating from social and cultural norms, diluting the validity of the responses and development of further conceptualizations. Pilot Interview II followed a different approach to minimize the extent of filtered responses from users by forming friendships with the students and gaining a level of trust prior to conducting the face-to-face interviews. It was discovered that this new approach allowed for more candid conversations between the researcher and students, leading to deeper insights and specific examples to define the main constructs of study.

As shown in the Table 4.4, 12 female students, ranging from the ages of 18-25, were selected and interviewed to reflect a range of perspectives based on demographical backgrounds. The personal backgrounds of students – family history, educational levels, and lifestyle habits – serve as indicators for understanding the key cultural variables of this study. The interviews included

four sections of questions relating to the four main variables. Responses were extracted, sorted, and categorized into written transcripts to clearly summarize the main views and ideas. The results of the two Pilot Interviews were an important step in reaching the implications concerning Chinese culture, young female users, and fashion objects. Pilot Interview II followed an intimate approach to access the personal thoughts, feelings, and insights of the respondents.

No.	Age	Hometown	Study Major
001	21	Chengdu, Sichuan Province	Industrial Design
002	21	Yangzhou, Jiangsu Province	Industrial Design
003	23	Tianyuan, Shanxi	Interaction Design
004	24	Nanjing, Jiangsu Province	Interaction Design
005	23	Taian, Shandong Province	Interaction Design
006	21	Xinjiang Province	Accounting
007	20	Dalian, Liaoning Province	Education
008	21	Changzhou, Jiangsu Province	Environmental Engineering
009	19	Zhejiang Province	Landscape Architecture
010	24	Changsha, Hunan Province	Interaction Design
011	25	Wuxi, Jiangsu Province	Industrial Design
012	19	Shenzhen, Guangdong Province	Animation

Table 4.4 Profile of Interviewees – Pilot Interview II

It was discovered that regardless of age or personal profile, students were very much aware of how the Post-80s & 90s are represented. This was an indication that much of the existing literature on this generation has produced stereotypes, which do not accurately reflect how young Chinese describe and view themselves. Each interview began with questions regarding the concept of “face”, which was validated as the single most important Chinese cultural value that directs behavior. The concept of “face”, depending on how it was defined by each respondent, was related to the development of aesthetics & taste. Independence was a difficult concept for most participants to comprehend, as Chinese culture highly values group conformity within a collectivist society. This concept was found to be an

internal expression that is hindered by the emphasis placed on “face”, the outward expression of the self.

Summary of Findings from Pilot Interview II

FACE
“Face” builds self-confidence by leaving a good impression on others
“Face” is the outward effect of “self”
“Face” is important for earning the respect of others in order to reach a level of respect through one’s own efforts
“Face” is not only a behavioral effect but gained through activities, skills, talent, and display of power
“Face is showing confidence or achieving status
“Face” is a way to hide the true self
AESTHETICS & TASTE
The ability to recognize what is suitable for finding own sense of style
Leaving a good impression of “self” through outward appearance
Related to educational levels, knowledge, and openness to new or foreign ideas
Sensitivity to trends, quality of products, and brands
Being confident enough to express something different from others
INDEPENDENCE
Independence is encased in the struggle between fulfilling individual and group needs
Physical autonomy can lead to independence in thoughts, actions, beliefs, and expression
Experience is the most important factor affecting independence
Personal independence is related to the need for uniqueness
Independence can be expressed in the spirit of “self”
FASHION KNOWLEDGE
To gain design knowledge requires effort and time to research
The emotional aspect of the product is related to design knowledge
The perceived value of a design is related to increasing one’s stock of design knowledge
Design knowledge leads to a deeper connection with designers and fashion products
“Meanings” are an important component of design knowledge in terms of color, product, brand, and model

Table 4.5 Summary of Pilot Interview II

Table 4.5 summarizes the common themes extracted from the interview transcripts¹³. All students responded with generalized definitions of the “face” concept but, when probed further, were able to share personal insights of how they integrate “face” in everyday life. The concept of “face” is a central influence in the behaviors of Post-80s & 90s Chinese. It defines the duality of the Chinese self-concept, guiding the switch between masking or exposing the internal self through external forms of expression. The high collectivism of Chinese society demands a level of cooperation and conformity from its members, linking “face” to the management of behaviors for achieving a positive status within group and social situations. It is also not entirely behavioral but concerns the perceived value of an individual based on their affiliations and measurable attributes, such as educational level or individual talents. However, at the core of the “face” concept is the manipulation of self-expression to disguise any unfortunate or negative associations.

Aesthetics and taste were identified as the ability of users to recognize not only what is fashionable or trendy but appropriate to the user’s own perception of self. Many of the responses hinted at the need to dress according to one’s body shape, to disguise or enhance the user’s attractiveness through clothing. Good taste relates to “face” in the manner that the user’s selection of fashion objects and the presentation of the self directly correlate to knowledge of fashion. The findings relating to aesthetics and taste were compared to the researcher’s own observations of the interviewees, that those students who actively sought to achieve “good face” displayed a high level of fashion consciousness. Many of the

¹³ Transcriptions can be found in Appendix D

respondents felt that aesthetics and taste are developed separately from “face”, yet can be used to enhance “face” when considering the quality of an object or value of a brand. Aesthetics and taste require knowledge, by educating oneself of current styles and trends while remaining open to new and novel ideas. The expression of aesthetics and taste is a public and social activity, as the personal selection of style is visibly expressed through bodily presentation. Therefore, the communication of individual aesthetics and taste requires a high level of confidence.

Independence was a concept that many of the students struggled to grasp, due to their adopted understanding of human experience as involving social activities. However, when given further examples and contexts for exploring this construct, many of the responses produced insights that physical independence can lead to independent ways of thinking, acting, and expressing. The fundamental principle of independence relates to a need for uniqueness, to be set apart from others through individual experiences. Against the backdrop of Chinese culture, which emphasizes the importance of group affiliation and social conformity, independence is an internalized concept that is expressed through personal ways of thinking. However, the fashion system limits the user’s independence with its demand for the mass adoption of styles and trends.

The user’s access to fashion knowledge requires efforts to learn and be exposed to sources of information. Responses in regards to fashion knowledge were diverse, as many of the students had difficulty differentiating between active and passive ways of acquiring knowledge. Some students shared a genuine interest in gaining

fashion knowledge through researching trends, shopping, observing others, etc. However, many of the students felt that there was no need for actively seeking this type of knowledge as it is quickly disseminated by way of social interactions. The value of gaining fashion knowledge was positively perceived as a means to gain “face”, as it signifies an individual’s ability to make informed judgments on the aesthetic level of objects. Furthermore, the responses supported the importance of meanings in relation to fashion-related knowledge. The majority of respondents acknowledged the emotional connections that occur between a user and object by establishing meaningfulness.

Similar to the first round of Pilot Interviews, it was found that fashion or design knowledge is not a construct that can be quantified or measured. Although each respondent was asked to list the specific types of fashion knowledge they seek and possess, it does not significantly impact the development of this study nor does it support the development of the Conceptual Framework relating to design knowledge. Furthermore, this research investigates design knowledge and its mediating role in the production of meanings rather than testing the extent of the user’s understanding of design knowledge. This justified the decision to separate the variables relating to cultural change from the study of design knowledge, indicating that the concepts and formation of design knowledge be further explored through the Main Study involving designer interviews.

4.4.3 Review of Cultural Variables

The two Pilot Interviews provided qualitative insights for defining the relationship between the cultural variables of “face”, aesthetics & taste, and individuality.

Responses relating to these three constructs have been carefully transcribed to draw upon commonalities and themes for establishing the cultural orientation of Post-80s & 90s fashion users. The role of “face” has been found to be a key influence on the development of aesthetics and taste, yet unrelated to the expression of individuality. While the respondents value individuality as a form of empowerment and autonomy, they are unable to fully adopt the concept due to cultural restrictions imposed by “face”. Earning the respect of others results in “good face”, requiring individual members to act within the acceptable rules or norms of a given social set. This proposes that the Chinese cultural understanding of individuality is exercised within the boundaries of “face”, set between the poles of displaying either good or bad levels of face.

The previous chapter introduced the fashion system as encasing the tension between the individual and society, triggering a reevaluation of the fashion object through the reinterpretation of meanings. Within this relationship, the individual is challenged with the dynamics of fashion that forces users into a selection process that denotes one’s positioning along the spectrum of imitation versus differentiation. This implicates the fashion object as corresponding to individual standards of aesthetics and taste, a correlation that is reflected by the relationship between “face” and the display of aesthetics and taste. In the manner that the expression of individuality exists within the dimensions of taste determined by society, “face” is a social concept that fulfills the outward display of the self. Therefore, it can be presumed that individuality is a concept that cannot be expressed outside the social function of “face” which serves as the standard and measure for guiding social behaviors.

The fashion system reevaluates the object's function by signifying the user's positioning between the "imitation of" and "differentiation from" accepted social standards of aesthetics and taste. Within this relationship, the user's selection immediately correlates to an outward display of taste within the constraints of society. The object is caught between the tensions of user-society and imitation-differentiation. This relationship is reflected in the cultural context of this study, where "face" determines the user's acceptability against the social context. The user is able to show and exercise "good face" versus "bad face" based on a value set by society. Individuality was found to be a limited concept, as it is dependent upon the display of "face" and exercised only within its boundaries. The user's decision to conform to group norms is a display of "good face" which opposes the expression of individuality. Therefore, this study concludes that the Chinese cultural understanding of individuality is not a separate behavioral construct but a functional measure of the broader "face" concept.

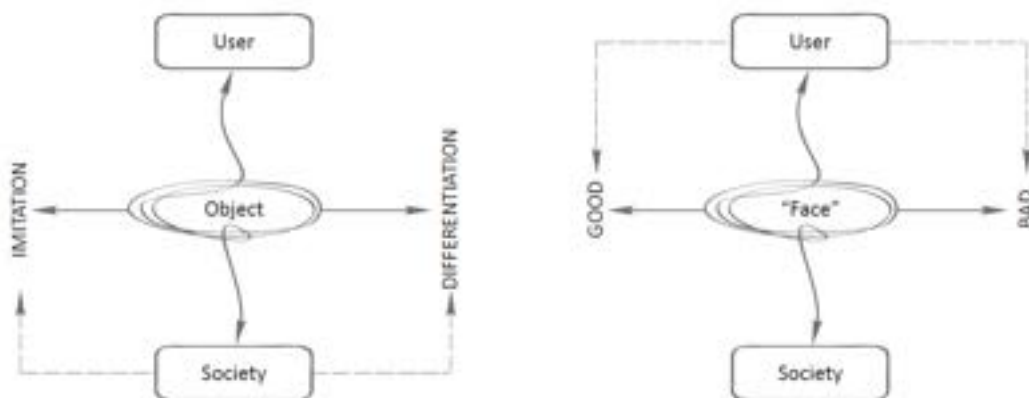


Figure 4.2 Parallel Functions of the Object and "Face"

Figure 4.2 demonstrates the user's display of "face" in the process of object selection. The user chooses between "good face" and "bad face" by the object's

corresponding signification and positioning along the spectrum of imitation versus differentiation.

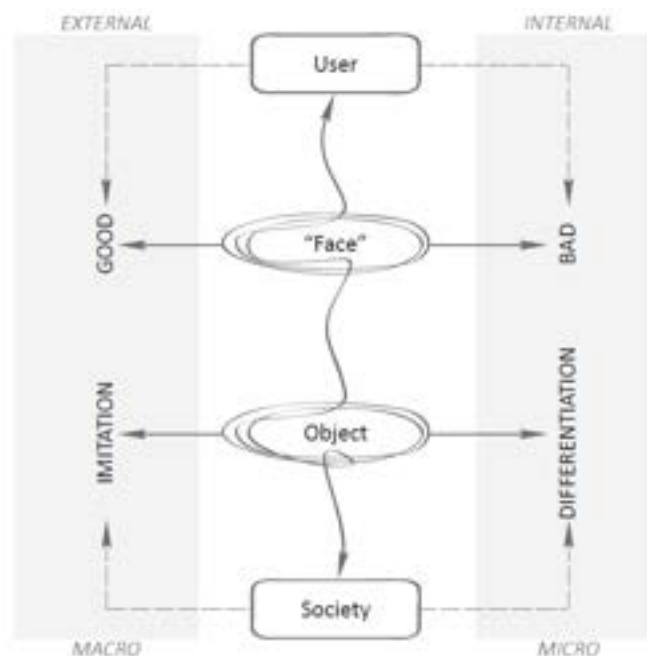


Figure 4.3 Relationship between “Face” and Object Selection

The display of “good face” is the external behavior of the user that aligns with the macro movements of fashion, dictating the imitation of mainstream styles of trends. Subsequently, actions exhibiting “bad face” expose internal views of the self that oppose social standards when deviating from the group norm. The micro view of fashion comprises the alternative communities that exist outside the boundaries of the larger high-level fashion movements, such as the underground communities that deviate from mainstream fashion. Within the specific cultural context of Chinese society, to deviate from the uniformity of the group threatens one’s social positioning by signifying the user’s inability to function within society’s rules. This implicates “face” as the gauge or measurement for self-expression, wherein the user’s sense of individuality is expressed intently

within the boundaries of fashion.

The cultural variables were identified as “face”, “aesthetics and taste, and individuality. Based on the responses collected from the questionnaires and face-to-face interviews, it has been concluded that the Chinese expression of individuality exists as an extension of the “face” concept. Users cannot fully exercise individuality, or independence, due to the high collectivism of Chinese society. Therefore, this study has established individuality as a value that is negotiated within the actions directed by “face” to correspond along the spectrum of imitation versus differentiation.

This work is based on a body of literature that supports Simmel’s (1957) definition of the fashion system as dictating social standards of aesthetics and taste, requiring fellow members to abide by its rules and within its boundaries. Individual users are faced with decisions to follow and imitate socially accepted standards or deviate from fashion norms as a form of social exclusion. Set against the cultural context, Chinese users filter their individuality through the concept of “face” and, by choosing to display “good face”, their actions and behaviors are altered according to their social needs. As perceptive individuals, users are affected by external changes which alter their understandings of aesthetics and taste. The collective response of adopting a fashion results in the accepted standards of society, yet variances among individual levels of aesthetics and taste are resolved by the social implications of the “face” concept. This concludes that users allow the cultural value of “face” to filter and measure the representation of expressions for individuality, aesthetics and taste.

4.3 Main Study – Case-Studies

This investigation seeks to identify linkages between design knowledge and cultural change to form an understanding of how members of a society use design objects to redefine their identities and establish meaningful connections. The Pilot Studies revealed that exploring the significance of design knowledge at the user level cannot be achieved without first defining it in terms of its development among local designers. In order to maintain consistency with the student interviews conducted in the Jiangsu region, designers in Shanghai were identified to expand on cultural conceptions of design knowledge. The main objective of purposive sampling is to select interview participants intently based on their ability to assist the researcher to understand the research problem and questions. As relying on a snowballing approach to sampling may limit the scale of diversity, key designers in Shanghai were identified using the purposive sampling approach to gain insight into how local designers impart knowledge.

Each case-study was selected to fairly represent the classes of designers and their impact based on overall scale of business. This section provides an introduction of the four main studies beginning with brand history and concept, discussion of findings, and identification of themes. The purpose for these case-studies is to understand the various perspectives of local designers and the knowledge they have of users, of the Mainland fashion industry, and identify emergent themes for future practice. Dialogue, as a phenomenological method, was used in order to allow the designers to describe experience and clarify its meaning to the researcher by way of realizing it through conversation (Pollio, H. R *et al.*,

1997:29). Figure 4.3 illustrates a value mapping of the four designers, measuring the positioning of their design practices in terms of pricepoint and scale.

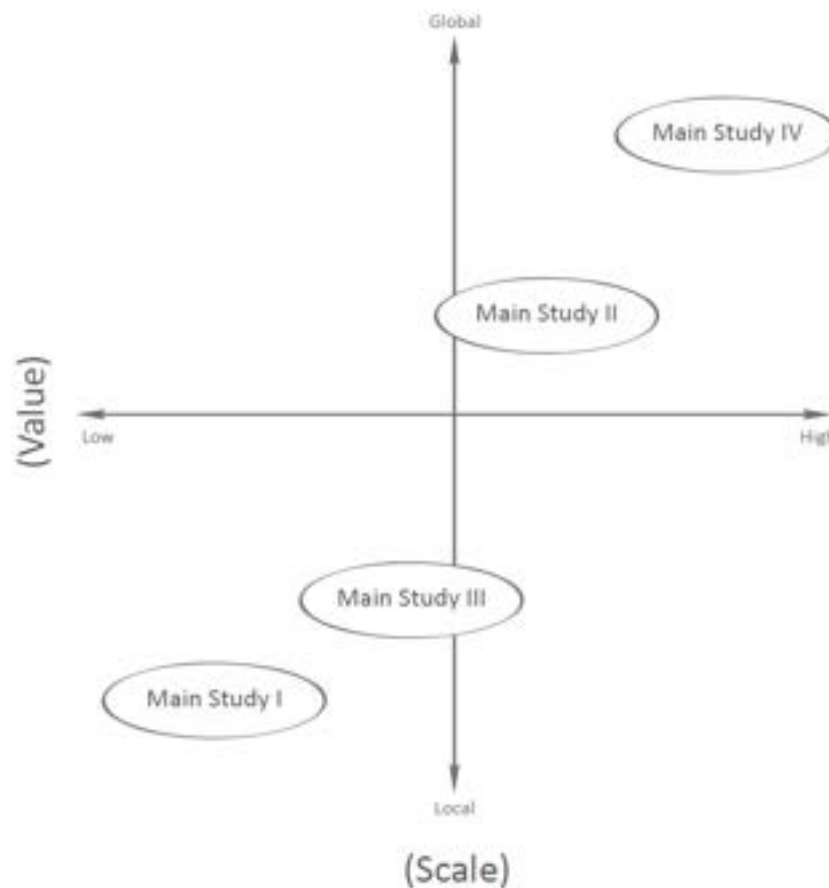


Figure 4.4 Positioning of Designers

4.3.1 Main Study I – Yilei Wu

In June 2012 a young designer in Shanghai named Yilei Wu was interviewed as part of a case-study, which took place simultaneously with the first round of Pilot Interviews, as an extension of the inquiry into the Post-80s & 90s generation. The interview was conducted in Yilei’s boutique and documented through field notes that were later refined into reflective memos. As a follow-up to the face-to-face

interview, a supplementary questionnaire¹⁴ was later emailed to Yilei in which she further divulged the details of her practice and her personal views on the role of fashion as a form of communication. The qualitative data collected from this study were compiled, sorted, and categorized.



Figure 4.5 ½ Eternity Campaign (THT Production)

Yilei represents an example of an emerging group of young Chinese fashion designers who were trained in top international design schools, have been exposed to the global fashion industry to gain outside experience, and have returned to the Mainland to launch their own fashion brands. In sharing the same cultural background as her target group of customers, Yilei has the benefit of firsthand knowledge for strategically positioning her brand in a specialized niche market. ½ Eternity was inspired by Yilei's former experience with the French brand – Anne Fontaine, which specializes in the white shirt. For Yilei, the simplicity of the white shirt represents the “old Shanghai” which she describes with the image of an elegant lady, dressed in white, walking out of a colonial style home in

¹⁴ Supplementary Questionnaire can be found in Appendix E

Shanghai's French Concession. The brand hints at nostalgic references to the colonial period of China's history before the events leading up the Cultural Revolution, marking the decades during which Chinese fashion and the very notion of fashion ceased to exist. The shop is located in the Jing'An Villas, an area that has retained the original French influences of Shanghai, providing an outlet for Yilei to control the direction and strategies of her small business.

Creating a brand focusing solely on a single product category and offering only a single color option may seem limiting, in terms of brand growth, but Yilei has intentionally built her business on the concept of the white shirt. The white shirt is considered to be a fashion staple, an item that all women possess and will always continue to purchase. While seemingly simple, producing a white shirt involves details and craftsmanship that far exceed the construction of other garment categories. Yilei designs 4 collections a year, each collection introducing 10 new styles which are all produced in small quantities to avoid excess inventory costs. Procurement of materials is a critical stage that requires locating fabrics that can carry and support the structure of the intended design, are durable in terms of yarn count and weight, made of high quality cotton, and fall within seasonal costing restraints. Yilei is a firm advocate of slow fashion consumption, believing that a well-designed white shirt should transcend seasonal trends and each garment should be constructed with a high level of workmanship. The concept behind the white shirt is to offer a simple design yet allow the wearer to form an emotional attachment, thereby rendering it an irreplaceable and essential item.

4.3.1.1 Discussion

The control that Yilei exerts on the production scale is intentional, as she never implements a promotional strategy. She positions her brand within the category of “accessible luxury”, justifying the decision to forego the offering of off-price items to discourage the disposable and fast nature of contemporary fashion. Although not following a traditional approach to sustainability, Yilei endorses the use of fashion across a long-term scale with the streamlined practicality of her design concept. Clothing is how users express individuality, while allowing a surface through which users experience the world.

“As much as I love conceptual designs, I also love the idea that many customers can actually wear my shirts, go to different places, and experience the world. It has to be practical.”

Fashion becomes irrelevant and stagnant when it cannot be integrated or adapted to everyday life, implicating clothing as a filter by which users experience the world. Yilei’s immediate advantage in gaining the interest of local users is her ability to relate to them on a cultural level as a member of local society. When asked to describe today’s young generation of Chinese, Yilei identifies with them in a personal way. They represent not only her main target group but fellow peers who share her cultural background. Yilei has identified the advantages of open communication with her customers to forge connections, increasing the attractiveness of her brand to local groups of users. She engages users to participate in collaborations to promote the brand through social networking events. A recent social experiment, “Girls in White”, invited local customers to

take a photo wearing one of her designs to be showcased in an exhibition. This type of local visibility has allowed Yilei to form meaningful connections to her customers, allowing for direct communication between designer and user.

“Obviously they are more trend oriented, informed by extensive media resources. They are happy to share their opinions and even private life.”

The Post-80s & 90s represent a group of users who are open in terms of self-expression and social behaviors. Yilei’s ability to connect with this group establishes access to their individual perspectives, representing the designer’s knowledge pertaining to user perception and experience. This knowledge serves as the foundation for her designs, allowing her to address the aesthetic preferences and needs of her customers. This form of direct contact with users gives her access to knowledge for tailoring future designs to meet local tastes and, furthermore, influence new levels of taste.

“The fact is that many customers become my friends – they contact me for brunch, drinks, and even relationship issues. Since I am a rather outgoing and curious person, this works well as I gain insight into their lifestyles which definitely helps when I design my shirts.”

Designers are able to convey a conceptual perspective, through the process of designing, which is represented in the form of the finished object. As previously discussed in the Literature Review, these objects reflect the designer’s intentions yet are open to the interpretation of users. Fashion objects often serve an ornamental purpose that utilizes the surface of the body as the outward presentation of the inner self. The dressed body visually communicates an

individual, implicating the social world as a society made up of dressed bodies. In this manner, Yilei is very much attuned to the communicating role and social significance of fashion.

“I like the idea of dressing as a way of silent communication. Customers should have the right to interpret and style it the way they want to.”

Yilei acknowledges the freedom associated with fashion, which allows users to reassign the significance of design objects as a means of validation. Users embody fashion by way of the body, communicating themselves as aesthetic objects which are projected onto the social world. The linking of fashion objects constitutes the user’s interpretation while the whole of the body presents itself as a perceivable form. As social beings, users communicate by positioning the body against other users in an exchange of aesthetic representation. Designers are, therefore, designing for multiple interpretations rather than designing for a single utility or function.

4.3.1.2 Identification of Theme I

According to Mead (1934:235), the human situation is rooted in social foundations that govern the development of the individual as part of the whole of society. Mead describes the development of self as involving the greater social context, in which individuals exist in a world of shared participation. This concept can be extended to Yilei’s role as a designer and as part of local society. By mere presence, her experiences contribute to the cultivation of internal and external perceptions in regards to self and towards society. It is this form of knowing that

allows her to utilize her role as designer to influence changes affecting her design practice, the immediate cultural surroundings, and local fashion community. The value of her design practice is aligned to the social foundations of local fashion movements, framing her self-development and social participation in a shared cultural context.

“I will be honored if my work can contribute to the creative circle here, and influence the customer behavior, even just a little bit.”

The communication between related members of interaction defines the circularity of design knowledge, which transmits from designer to user in a co-constructive manner through the reciprocal negotiation of meanings. A form of social interaction is developed as a result of the effected change arising from the communicative medium of the fashion object, establishing membership among individuals to form shared meanings. The positioning of the designer is, therefore, not to encode or transfer a single perspective of design intention but to allow the development of multiple interpretations to occur as part of user experience.

Yilei holds a very realistic understanding of her role as designer. Although her primary interests are to impart her knowledge and conceptual perspectives through design development, she forms an integral part of the larger social group in a symbiotic relationship. Her actions affect the development of her local community much in the way that the local culture influences her design practice. This can be seen in the following statement, which hints at the collaborative nature of her design philosophy against the notion that fashion is a part of the everyday experience.

“Sometimes I insist on my own design, sometimes I compromise happily. The ½ Eternity label is for everyday use.”

The designs attain a level of everydayness through the ways in which they function as common connections between the designer and user. Yilei is afforded with the flexibility to collaborate with customers on designs due to the small scale and local production of her business. The “compromise” that she refers to involves the direct input from customers, circulating the knowledge from designer to object to user and back to designer. This results in the identification of Theme I as the circular interaction between designer and user. Figure 4.6 illustrates the circularity suggested by the relationship between the designer and user in a shared cultural framework of interaction, shifting the experience from designer to user through consuming, engaging with, and reflecting on the design object.

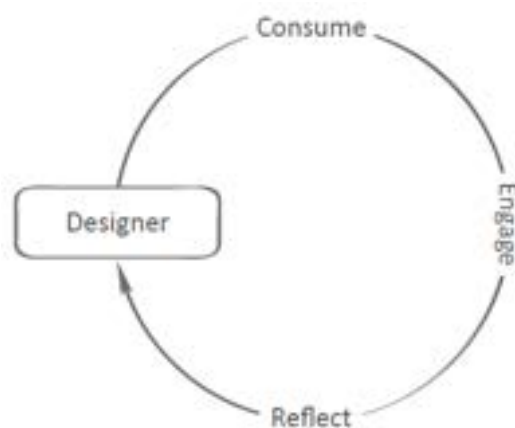


Figure 4.6 *Circular Interaction between Designer and User*

As a producer of material culture, the designer creates objects with the intention of initiating future consumption. The user consumes the fashion object, engaging with its discernible attributes and properties, to reflect on any significant relevance associated with the object. Schon (1983:78-79) argues that designing is

a conversation with the materials of a situation, in the shaping of situations, to produce reflection-in-action as a form of dialogue or conversation. Mirroring this conversation-like activity, the user can be seen as undergoing a similar experience of cultivating aesthetic appreciations to assess and make sense of interactions involving the fashion object. The tacit components of the designer's knowledge is embedded into the creation of the finished object (Kazmierczak, 2003), encoded with intent and meaning to be decoded through future interactions involving the user. Figure 4.7 depicts the circularity of interaction, implicating the user as a change agent.

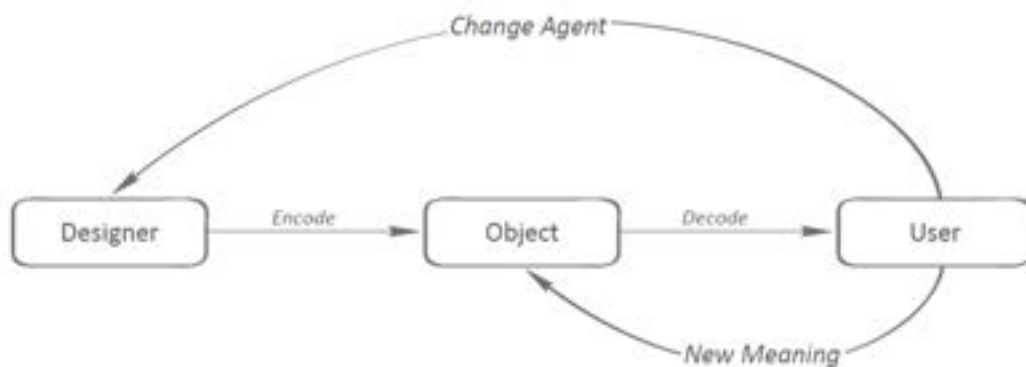


Figure 4.7 User as Change Agent

The traditional semiotic model of communication follows a linear transmission of information. In the case of design knowledge, the designer encodes messages or meanings into the product to be decoded by the user. However, when set against the backdrop of a shared cultural background, the connections established between designer and user support a more effective transmission of design knowledge through a change mechanism. The ability of the user to assign new meanings and interpretations to the object allows a form of feed-back, stimulating the circularity of design knowledge. Design knowledge is not contained within the

domain of design practice but shifts into the actions and intentions of the user, who reconfigures the object and its associated meanings. The user acts as a change agent, moving from passive receiver of intended codes of knowledge to an active sender of new symbolic meanings.

The situational context of this first case-study provides a scenario in which the interaction between the user and object lends itself as a discursive exchange. Sharing in a common cultural and social background, the designer is not disconnected from the consumption process but is an integral player in the communication of ideas and meanings. The fashion object transforms from what the designer initially conveys to the interpretation of the user, establishing the designer as a simultaneous affecter of behavioral or emotional responses and a receiver of new meanings. Design knowledge, as existing in tacit forms of knowing, is made explicit through creative activities and produced as the finished object. However, this knowledge is mobilized through increased interactions between user and object and flows as a communal activity between designers and users.

4.3.2 Main Study II – *Zhang Da*

Zhang Da was identified as a key player in the Mainland fashion industry with extensive experiences within the local fashion community. He launched his fashion atelier in 2005 and is currently the acting creative designer for the first Chinese luxury brand, Shang Xia. In June of 2013, Zhang was included as part of this study to gain insight on his impressions of Chinese fashion. The interview was verbally conducted and documented through field notes and memos, which

were later converted to transcriptions.



Figure 4.8 *Portrait of Zhang Da*
(www.jingdaily.com/the-chinese-designers-who-will-change-our-minds-about-fashion)

In order to develop the thematic direction of the interview, questions were not predetermined but posed at opportune moments to deepen and expand on topics relating to culture and design. The designer shared insights from Chinese cultural history in relation to current fashion movements and practices.

4.3.2.1 Discussion

Zhang's perspectives on fashion are influenced by his training and background in the fine arts. He sees fashion as the design of wearable products to create and fulfill aesthetic illusions while serving basic functional needs. As a Chinese designer, Zhang holds strong opinions and positions on the current state of Chinese fashion and the perception of "Made in China" designs. He endorses more emphasis on the theoretical and aesthetic components of Chinese designs, which need to be translated into the quality of finished products. Chinese design is limited by a lack of attention to craftsmanship and creativity, resulting in the global perception of Chinese products as inexpensive and mass produced. There is a need to redefine Chinese design by focusing on the presentation of design itself,

from “Made in China” to “Created in China.” This is part of the reeducation of user levels of taste and aesthetics.

“Fashion in the 90’s was about catching up – to understand what was happening in Paris and Milan.”

The Chinese fashion user is changing, particularly in the larger cities where fashion is very much a part of everyday life. However, a common misunderstanding among local users is that fashion equates an understanding of the Western lifestyle and aesthetic sensibility. This has resulted in the use of fashion brands and products as social indicators of status and class. According to Zhang, for some groups of Chinese, displaying knowledge of fashion translates as the openness and ability to adapt to change. This has accelerated the reception of local fashion movements, as styles and trends are quickly adopted and disseminated, but fashion has not yet been established as a medium of self-expression.

Zhang draws clear distinctions between the Post-80s and 90s, finding that the Post-80s are pioneers of cultural change whereas the Post-90s are products of that change.

“The Post-80s Chinese are the first generation to gain outside experience, study abroad, return to China and influence new changes to the social situation. The Post-90s are different. They have a clear definition of attainable goals and have healthy attitudes toward money, unlike the negative mentalities of their parents born in the 60’s or 70’s.”

Today's Post-80s generation is represented by young adults in their late-20s and early-30s. Particularly in the larger cities, these individuals have been fortunate to have access to extensive knowledge of the outside world which they have gained through international experience. Zhang identifies them as being an inspiring group of individuals who have returned to China with new perspectives, influencing their social peers and affecting the development of the social situation. In this way, they are injecting new ideas and ways of thinking to stimulate cultural development and progress. The Post-90s, now in their late-teens and early 20s, have benefited from the experiences of the Post-80s. Having been born into a modernized China, this generation is more open to change and willing to take advantage of their social and economic positions. The traditional values of modesty and virtue are disregarded by the Post-90s, who are bold in their display of wealth, education, and abilities.

“The Post-80s & 90s do not question the right or wrong of getting ahead. It is just important to be included and accepted. They don't necessarily understand fashion, but they are able to follow trends and are influenced by media and pop culture.”

Despite the differences between the Post-80s and 90s, they are similar in their goal-oriented attitudes toward success. Unlike previous generations, they have been taught to believe that they can and should achieve more. This attitude is adopted in the manner with which they approach fashion, using products and brands to validate their status within social situations. According to Simmel's (1957) theory of fashion, the individual exists between the poles of inclusion and

exclusion. To gain group acceptance reconciles the tensions imposed by the fashion system, evident in how young Chinese understand fashion and the symbolic value of luxury brands.

“The obsession of Chinese consumers with luxury brands and products is damaging the brand image. This is the case with Hermes, Chanel, Louis Vuitton, and Gucci. Purchasing luxury goods may be a show of good taste and quality, but associating those brands with the actual consumers can actually kill the brand.”

In regards to the current attention of luxury spending in China, Zhang argues that it is counterproductive to the intended strategies of luxury brand marketers. Chinese use brands as a social symbol, which has inadvertently resulted in the purchasing of counterfeit goods to attain a sense of group acceptance. According to Zhang, the Hermes customer is on average much younger in China as many of them are purchasing from the counterfeit markets. This may allow an individual to gain “face” in a social sense, yet it is damaging the integrity of the brand. Furthermore, the Chinese customer’s appreciation for luxury brands is ambiguously formed and many purchase brands based on word-of-mouth rather than individual preference.

“Chinese fashion consumers cannot differentiate good taste, as they lack the education of this development. However, this will slowly change. There is a need to re-educate taste.”

Zhang states that there is a need to re-educate levels of aesthetics and taste, so that

users can develop and establish a sense of purpose for the fashion items they use. Fashion should not merely correlate to one's social status, but be appreciated as a medium of expression. However, there is still a lack of knowledge relating to the distinctions between good and bad taste. Zhang uses an example of the French brand, Lanvin, which was not well received when it first appeared on the Chinese market. Local users had never heard of the brand, so were unable to determine if the brand was a sound representation of good taste. In recent years, as the brand has gained global exposure and become more familiar, it has increased value in the perceptions of Chinese users.

Designers also need to assume some level of responsibility in directing new standards of aesthetics and taste. Zhang finds that this is challenged by the influences of fashion media, which often overtake the conceptual ideas and direction of young designers who lose the opportunity to have their voices heard. Many young designers prefer to conduct business on a local scale as independent designers, rather than following mainstream approaches to market themselves internationally. This signifies the different attitudes between older and younger generations of designers. The measure of success, for Post-80s & 90s designers, is not on a large scale business turnover but in the level of impact they have on local communities. This signifies the shift in attitudes and perceptions toward Chinese fashion, suggesting that a designer's value and success is not measured by international presence but can be achieved at the local scale. Zhang follows this attitude with his views on reimagining Chinese fashion instead of mimicking European standards of style and aesthetics.

4.3.2.2 Identification of Theme II

The user develops individual perception as a result of experiences framed within social and cultural contexts, influencing how aesthetic configurations are constructed and projected onto the social world. Figure 4.9 illustrates the parallel functions of the object's role of creating aesthetic configurations and fulfilling social functions. Social and cultural contexts influence perception, affecting how the user cultivates an aesthetic configuration in the public display of dressing. Similarly, the object's perceived value satisfies the user's needs for fulfilling the social function of gaining group acceptance. Aesthetic configurations and the use of objects to fulfill the social function of needs are interdependent, as both function as the outward expressions of the self. Zhang's observations of Chinese fashion consumption supports this framework, in which the user is influenced by both the development of perception and the satisfaction of needs through the extrinsic values associated with the object. The fashion object validates the social functions of dress, allowing the user to achieve a level of "face" and display good taste in the aesthetic representation of the body.

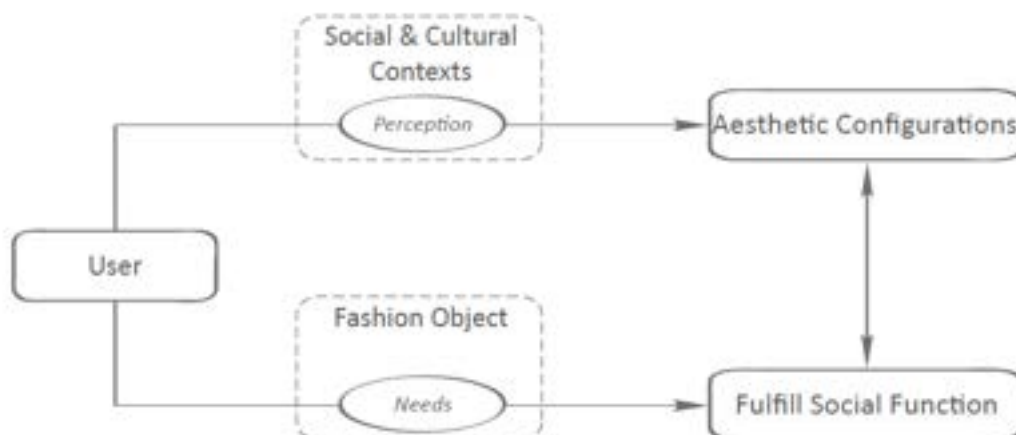


Figure 4.9 *Aesthetic Functions*

This framework can be similarly applied to the local designers, whose aesthetic appreciations and values are cultivated as a result of experience. Their designs fulfill both intrinsic and extrinsic needs, as they represent the personal aesthetics of the designer that are externally communicated. According to Zhang, this emphasis on group acceptance and “face” is linked to the current state of Chinese fashion.

“High-end designers in Shanghai or Beijing prefer to show in Paris, Milan, or London, because they want European acceptance. To be successful locally, in China, is financially rewarding but does not fulfill the same level of ‘face’.”

The above statement suggests that the perception of Chinese fashion among Chinese designers and users has been negatively developed. Zhang finds this to be an indirect result of China’s historical past which implemented a Western style of national dress, prematurely stunting the development of traditional clothing after the Qing Dynasty. Chinese designers today are affected by the inexistence of fashion during the Cultural Revolution, as it has positioned them with the current challenges of reinstating Chinese fashion. The current decade, however, marks a significantly different movement in Chinese fashion, as designers are adopting new methods and approaches to gain a local following. It is less about chasing after Western styles but applying traditional Chinese design elements to modern and contemporary silhouettes.

Theme II has been identified as the reintroduction of Chinese design. Based on the interview with Zhang, a significant difference between older and younger

generation Chinese is in their attitudes toward social and cultural progress. Dou *et al.* (2006) separate today's Chinese into four different generational cohorts:

- i. *born before the establishment of the PRC* – experienced the greatest economic hardships, becoming strong believers of the communist ideology
- ii. *born after the formation of the PRC* – came of age during the Cultural Revolution, experiencing disillusionment at the collapse of communist ideals
- iii. *born after the Cultural Revolution* – saw firsthand the economic reform, taking pride in individual accomplishments
- iv. *born after China's economic reform years* – experienced the rapid development of the market economy and Western material culture, resulting in more opportunities for higher education and personal development

Cultural differences and varying experiences of institutional change have affected how each generation view and understand fashion. The changes affecting cultural values become integral to the reeducation of aesthetics and taste, as part of the reintroduction of Chinese fashion. It was found that Post-80s & 90s are influenced by “face” in guiding the outward expression of aesthetics and taste. This suggests that until the social value of Chinese fashion is favorably perceived, users will be less inclined to adopt them. According to Zhang, few designers are progressive enough to bring back traditional Chinese style and design. It relies on fashion's role of communication, allowing an exchange between designers that can be translated across different design forms and traditional inspirations. The effective transformation of Chinese fashion requires a clear definition of what the identifiable features of Chinese design entail.

“Mainland designers are now trying to find their own ways – or language – to design in a way that is specific to China. For designers wishing to bring back Chinese inspirations in fashion, they need to translate the charm of Chinese design.”

This second study has identified the need for Chinese fashion to return to its roots of traditional style and design, redefine it, and reintroduce it in new design forms for the modern fashion environment. The essence of Chinese-ness has been overlooked in the struggle to follow the Western ideal of fashion, resulting in a loss of indigenous and cultural knowledge. The challenges of Chinese fashion designers are to identify the elements defining Chinese design and effectively translate it into socially acceptable levels of aesthetics and taste, defining new standards for users.

4.3.3 Main Study III – *Niki Qin*

Niki Qin was included in this study to provide an example of a local small-scale, Shanghai-trained, Shanghai-based designer. She was interviewed in her free-standing boutique inside Shanghai’s Xintiandi Style shopping mall in June 2013. The interview was documented through field notes and photo documentation, followed by a walk-through of the current collection to illustrate the functional elements of the designs. Niki first launched her brand, Moodbox, after graduating from the Raffles Design Institute in Shanghai. The inspiration behind the name “Moodbox” comes from her philosophy of clothing, which she sees as a way to express one’s feelings or share a story. She believes that everyone and everything can be expressed through shapes, therefore designing

clothing to match the moods of different emotions.



Figure 4.10 Moodbox Boutique at Xintiandi Style

As a young girl, Niki recalls experimenting with clothing to create new shapes and styles. This same concept of “play” is translated into her designs, in which she purposely integrates versatility and functionality. Working with a team of 10, her collection is designed in her studio and produced locally in Shanghai. She emphasizes good craftsmanship and quality in the attention to details. All garments are finished in such a way that the interior is as seamless as the exterior, making all pieces reversible with the option of being worn inside-out. This is intentionally done to emphasize the playfulness of her collection and allow wearers to reconfigure the garments to match their particular moods. Niki does

not follow the norms of contemporary fashion that dictate the trends, colors, and silhouettes of the seasons. Instead, she emphasizes the malleability of shapes that enhance and disguise the body according to how and by whom the garment is worn. She believes in the use of clothing to recreate oneself by way of a transformation, as suggested by the name Moodbox. Each user is framed by a given mood, which should be communicated through a way of dressing, and clothing allows those expressions to be portrayed.

4.3.3.1 Discussion

Niki, like Zhang Da, endorses the need to reinvent Chinese fashion by reintroducing traditional elements of Chinese design. She finds that Chinese fashion has been misrepresented as simply “copying” the styles of European designers, evidence that local designers stray from creating what they know to what they think fashion ought to be. Her own design philosophy borrows inspiration from traditional Chinese motifs that she interweaves with her distinctive silhouettes, establishing her approach to creating and producing modern Chinese design.

“It is important to bring back Chinese design and build a new image for Chinese fashion. I want to mix Chinese and Western styles to create Modern Chinese style.”

Niki acknowledges the challenges of being a local designer and comments on the need for a knowledge community of like-minded designers to communicate ideas and collaborate on projects to promote Chinese fashion. The translation of

traditional Chinese design to contemporary fashion relies on the collective efforts of local designers, culminating in the synthesis of ideas, experiences, concepts, and knowledge. Niki suggests a different approach to establish local and international interest, based on a definition for success as not an independently achieved accomplishment but raising an awareness of Chinese fashion that benefits the knowledge base for all local designers.

“We should build a community of local designers who share similar concepts, thinking, and imagination to create a new image and example for Chinese fashion. We are Chinese people, so we need more Chinese culture.”

In the above statement, Niki reflects on the loss of cultural identity in Mainland China. The attention and emphasis placed on the superiority of non-Chinese fashion brands and designers has challenged the practices of local designers wanting to integrate traditional aesthetic elements into their designs. It is not merely changing the preconceptions that traditional Chinese design is unfashionable or outdated but, rather, solidifying a movement of change at a greater social level. The public acceptance of a fashion style or trend is sensitive to its corresponding perceived social value. As stated by Niki, this requires the efforts of local designers to support the reintroduction of the new Chinese aesthetic and change existing perceptions on Chinese design. It is through the collaboration of local designers that user perceptions can be influenced to adopt new appreciations toward the Chinese aesthetic.

“There is a growing group of local customers who are proud to wear Chinese styles of fashion.”

According to Niki, there is a growing interest from local customers who proudly choose to purchase and wear Chinese fashion as a statement of their own personal styles. This suggests that the reception towards reintroducing the Chinese aesthetic is relatively positive but will require novel ways of integrating these elements into a finished design. Based on the Pilot Studies, it was found that users are not attracted to designs which are too obvious but drawn to objects that inspire them towards a new discovery in the form of design novelty. Therefore, objects assume the role of producing affects to engage and connect with users, triggering emotional responses and attachments (Marenko, 2010). It is through the aesthetic experience that the individual is able to explore the object, which fulfills and satisfies individual needs. Table 4.1 categorizes the aesthetic experience as involving aesthetic qualities, codes, and values.

AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE		
<i>Aesthetic Qualities</i>	<i>Aesthetic Codes</i>	<i>Aesthetic Values</i>
The ability to recognize the significant attributes of the design	Transferred as part of the tactile experience of fashion objects Creates a visual language conveying a form of identity	Realized through the functional experience of a product

Table 4.6 *Aesthetic Experience*

Influencing user perceptions and aesthetics towards the new phase of Chinese fashion relies on involving the experience of discovery. The object, or fashion product, produces affects that influence and afford the user with an aesthetic experience. Design intention is communicated through perceivable aesthetic qualities and codes, as part of the overall value of the design. Through experiencing the fashion object, the user is able to recognize the aesthetic qualities, create a new personalized set of aesthetic codes, and satisfy individual

needs through the design's associated values. The aesthetic experience, therefore, involves the user's process of assigning a personal significance and meaning as part of the interaction with the object.

4.3.3.2 Identification of Theme III

The concept of embedding or encoding design knowledge into a design object is supported by the conceptual direction and development of Niki's designs. As suggested by the name of her brand, Moodbox, she creates a space for aesthetically experiencing the designs.

"I always think about the angles of the design – front, back, side – all sides must be flattering. This is how I understand the customer, as a connection between my creativity and their needs."

Niki acknowledges the connection between the body, clothing, and gesture as the transformation from a two-dimensional pattern into a three-dimensional form. The dressed body alters the shape and silhouette of a design, creating new visual forms that vary from one individual to another. This requires flexibility from the designer to envision the design as an intended outcome and reframe this vision into a final interpretation. In this manner, the designer relies on the user to fulfill the tangible outcomes of a design concept by acting as interpreter through the facilitation of the body which determines the ensuing appearance of the design object. The body allows the fashion object to be presented in its intended form, while simultaneously modifying the form to mold and drape to each slight change in movement. In the practice of dressing, the user assumes control over the

physical attributes of the object by embodying its form and affording a personal experience. The user, through physical interactions with the fashion object, recreates the aesthetic codes associated with the design as a dressed body. The aesthetic codes intended by the designer differ from the codes reconfigured by the user. Niki endorses the notion of dressing as a form of play or exploration.

“Clothing should have a ‘surprise’ element, something for the customer to discover when wearing the design. A shirt can become a dress, a skirt can become a shirt. When a single piece becomes many designs, it is one way fashion can be sustainable.”

A concern voiced by many local designers, including Niki, is the negative impact of the fast fashion movement on fashion consumption. Fashion no longer operates on a top-down dissemination of knowledge and trends, but has become established as a part of everyday life. Particularly in Mainland China, users have open access to online platforms and social media networks to gain information on designers, brands, trends, styles, etc. This has, along with the influx of fast fashion brands such as Zara and H&M, affected how users perceive and learn to appreciate fashion objects as designed artifacts. The shortened lifespan of fashion trends and relatively low cost of purchasing fast fashion brands has affected the overall attitude towards fashion, as users quickly dispose of old styles in order to keep up with newness and novelty.

While some designers address the sustainability issues associated with fashion through strategies such as upcycling or use of sustainable materials, Niki integrates the function of play in her designs. This is evident in the hidden codes

embedded into each design, which require knowledge of the garment and its construction in order to reach the intended level of discovery. Each garment is finished by hand and all seams are clean finished in order for each piece to be fully reversible, to be worn inside out. She experiments with the fitting and finishing of her designs so that a dress can transform into a cape or a blouse can become a skirt. As she does not disclose this information to her customers, users must enter into a process of exploration to discover and experience the codes which she embeds. By creating an experience of not only the perceivable attributes of the design, but the experience of dressing, Niki believes it is one approach to the sustainability of the fashion object. When the user realizes that each garment can be worn and experienced in numerous ways, they will be discouraged from quickly disposing of fashion objects and more inclined to discover and rediscover the experience of fashion.

“The customer is also an inspiration. Sometimes they will wear the design upside-down, something even I never thought about.”

The user uncovers the aesthetic codes intended by the designer through exploration, by a path towards discovery. Niki's brand, Moodbox, recreates an experience for users to engage with the garments according to a particular mood. She acknowledges that our moods affect our sensitivity to color and, therefore, darker designs are double-faced or lined in bright colors so that they can be worn inside-out. The versatility of the designs affords the user with an experimental process to convey the aesthetic experience. This leads to the identification of Theme III as the communication of aesthetic experience through the quality of

fashion experience. Figure 4.11 maps the flow of the aesthetic experience.

The user's interaction with the fashion object elicits an emotional response, afforded by the object, to fulfill individual needs in relation to the greater social environment. By embodying a form of dress, the user is assigning a personal interpretation of the object and presenting the body as an extension of the self. In the ordering and arrangement of fashion objects, the dressed body represents an aesthetic configuration and presents itself as an open text. Users exist within a shared cultural world to interact with other users in a social context. The user, as a dressed body, becomes an aesthetic configuration that is latent with personal significance and assigned meanings. When positioned against the social world, the user enters into a negotiation of meanings as the fashion objects lend themselves to be read and further interpreted. This process of engaging with, emoting, embodying and expressing oneself through the fashion object leads to the creation of value, as part of the overall aesthetic experience.

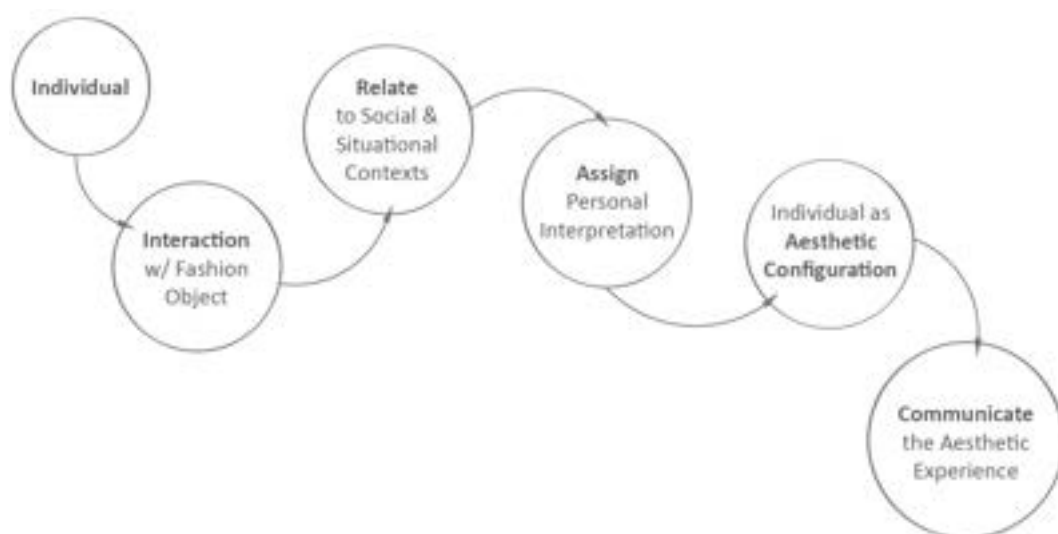


Figure 4.11 Flow of Aesthetic Experience

According to Dewey's (1980:35-57) definition, experience is a continuous occurrence as part of the process of living and, while all things are experienced they do not necessarily constitute an experience. The satisfactory fulfillment of an individualizing quality defines an experience, emphasizing the emotional and qualitative aspects of a conclusive individual experience. Objects contain affordances allowing users to form appreciations for the utilitarian and semiotic roles associated with the design. Niki embeds within her designs the experiential element of discovery, directing the user into the process of constructing and communicating an aesthetic experience as identified in Theme III. Her designs facilitate the path towards attaining a sense of individualization by engaging the user to participate in constructing a rich experience of the fashion object.

4.3.4 Main Study IV – *Han Feng*

Han Feng has achieved a rare level of success on an international level through her unique design ability and professional background. Among the four designers included in the Main Study, Han Feng is the only designer who has launched and established a design reputation outside of China. Due to her busy travel schedule between the US and China, a face-to-face interview was not a feasible method for this study. This final case-study was conducted in several different stages with the bulk of information gathered through secondary sources, guided by direction and support from Han Feng's Shanghai showroom. A formal showroom visit took place in June 2013, where a walk-through was given to introduce the latest collection and key runway looks, and supplementary information was supported by Han Feng's personal assistant.



Figure 4.12 Han Feng Shanghai Showroom

Due to the difficulties and challenges of gaining direct access to the designer, this final study is based heavily on the researcher's own interpretation and observations of Han Feng's design practice. Secondary sources, such as online materials from the official website, sufficiently provided factual information related to the designer's background and the conceptual development of the brand. This information was then carefully assessed and analyzed against concepts discussed in the Literature Review to draw inferences leading to the identification of Theme IV.

4.3.4.1 Discussion

Han Feng has successfully established a reputable status as a fashion designer in the US. Unlike other Mainland designers who have studied abroad and returned to China to begin their design practices, Han Feng was educated in China and later moved to New York City to begin her career. Her first collection was launched in New York's Bryant Park fashion show in 1993 and she has since built her career as a versatile, contemporary designer. Upon establishing her brand and presence in the US, she returned to China to open a showroom in Shanghai. Her designs bridge the disparity between local and international markets by translating

elements of Chinese style and culture for the larger global perspective. She has successfully integrated her vision for contemporary Chinese fashion through her collaborations with the music, theatre, and film industries as a costume designer. Her design capabilities are not restricted to fashion and costumes, but extend into projects such as contemporary installations, culinary arts, and interior design that have been exhibited in the US and Europe.

Similar to Niki Qin, Han Feng designs clothing that considers the body's natural movement. When viewing her designs, it is apparent that she focuses on the intricate details of creating shapes. The materials are treated, manipulated, and restructured to produce new textures and surfaces that complement while accommodating natural movement. These designs transform when recontextualized onto a three-dimensional, living body, creating a visual texture through the subtle interplay of light and dark. Each fold and crease forms shadows that become an additional layer of depth, transforming the garment into a moving object. The changes affecting the silhouette of the design are not caused by the shape of the body or through the manipulation of natural movement but, rather, the textures and patterns that the materials afford when juxtaposed against a light source.

There is a performative element to dressing, which presents the body as a perceivable aesthetic object. The body functions as an object that becomes subject to its surrounding context in order to achieve relevance, fulfill aesthetic needs, and create value. Expression is an act of emotional identification (Dewey, 1980:76), but the body as an object shifts from the emotional response induced by

the material towards a retreat from all emotion. The body, as object, acts as an epistemic object that is ever-evolving in its incompleteness and marked by plurality (Ewenstein & Whyte, 2009). It is within this intermediate space that all emotional attachment is momentarily suspended and the object is devoid of meaning. This space represents the transition between the user's interactions with the object towards the user's interactions with other users. The object's representation of the design intent shifts into a neutral space and is detached from meaning until reconfigured onto the user's body, as a perceptible and embodied object.

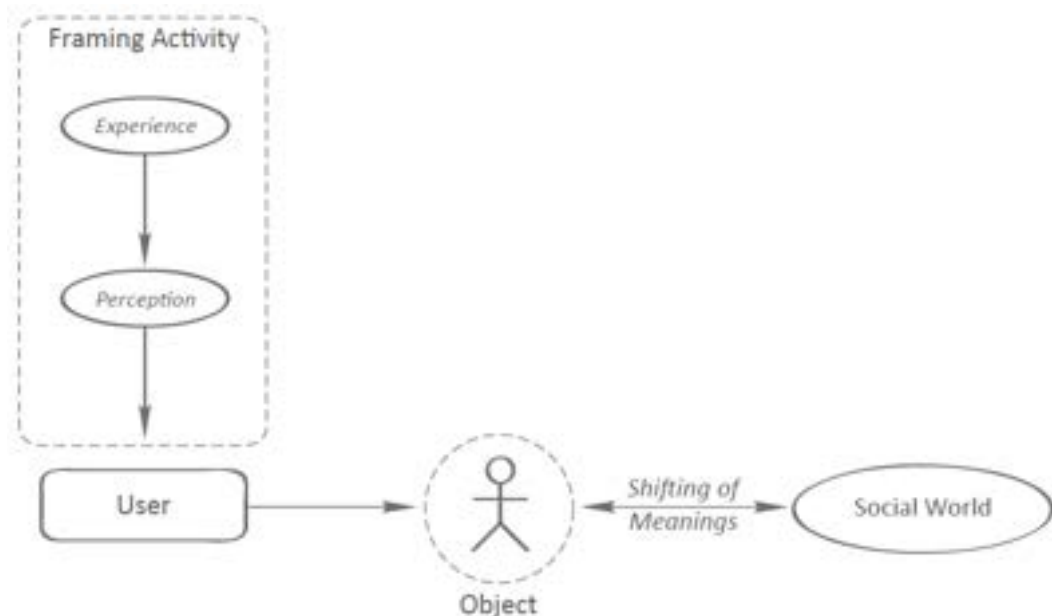


Figure 4.13 User as Epistemic Object

Figure 4.13 represents the changing functions of the user and object. The relationship between the user and design object is transactional, as a negotiation of symbols and meanings (Almquist & Lupton, 2010). As the user is presented as a cognizable object to other users, the significance assigned to the design object shifts into social and collective dimensions. The user enters into a framing activity

in which experience alters individual perception, affecting the quality of interaction with the fashion object. It is in this way that the design object, containing and representing design knowledge, is recontextualized in the embodied form of the dressed body and mobilized to be further read and reinterpreted by other groups of users.

4.3.4.2 Identification of Theme IV

Crilly (2011) introduces the concept of design objects as rhetorical artifacts, emphasizing the persuasive role that objects assume when eliciting responses from users:

The idea that users infer the persuasive intentions of designers presupposes that users recognise that products are designed and also presupposes that users have an image of a design process that allows for persuasive intentions to shape the product. These suppositions point to a much more general question: what knowledge of design do users possess?

The notion that design objects are suggestive of intent is challenged by judgments made from users, who construct an experience when faced with interactions involving design objects. Crilly argues that the final interpretation of users, when judging a design object, relies on inferences of design intent and warrants an investigation into the rhetorical interpretations occurring as part of user experience. Against the backdrop of fashion, the rhetorical quality of design interpretation is greatly magnified as the reconfiguration of objects on the human body creates its own form of visual language. The persuasion of intent is suggested by the object's physical form, acting as a primary means of expression (Crilly, 2011).

Fashion as a social movement mobilizes knowledge, as knowledge represented by the design object is confronted by the perceptive knowledge of the user. This releases the object from any prescribed meanings, associated with design intent and knowledge, allowing it to regenerate through future interactions between the user and other groups of users. The persuasive intentions of the designer afford the user with the opportunity to infer its meaning before it is recontextualized as an interpretation. Figure 4.14 illustrates the relationship between design intent and user interpretation through the affordance of experience.

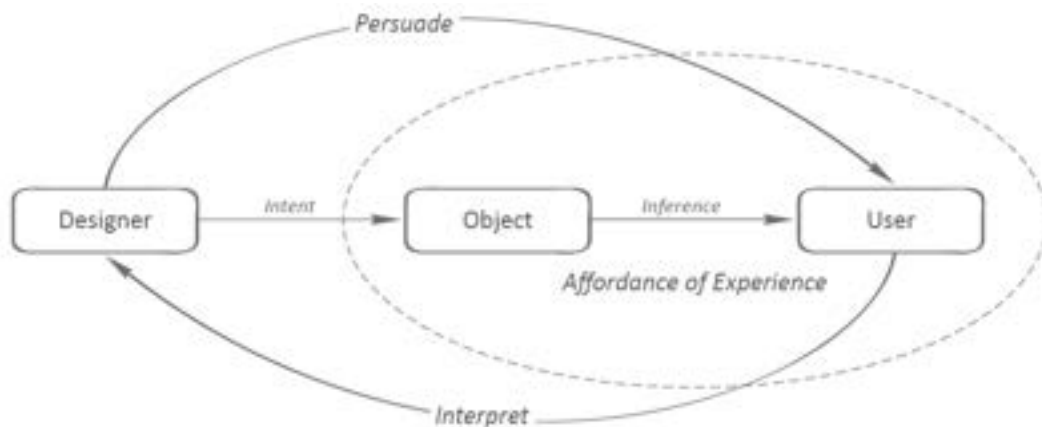


Figure 4.14 *Affordance of Experience*

Weller (2007) defines fashion as knowledge that is *fluid* when shifting from key decision makers to the masses and *viscous* when adapted and adopted within social situations. The ideas, concepts, trends, and styles of fashion are characterized by change, evident in the way that Han Feng is able to use her knowledge of fashion and transfer it to other disciplines, industries, products, and ideas. As knowledge flows from one domain to another, it transforms and regenerates to gain new relevance and meaning. This leads to the identification of Theme IV as anticipating the transgressivity of fashion knowledge.

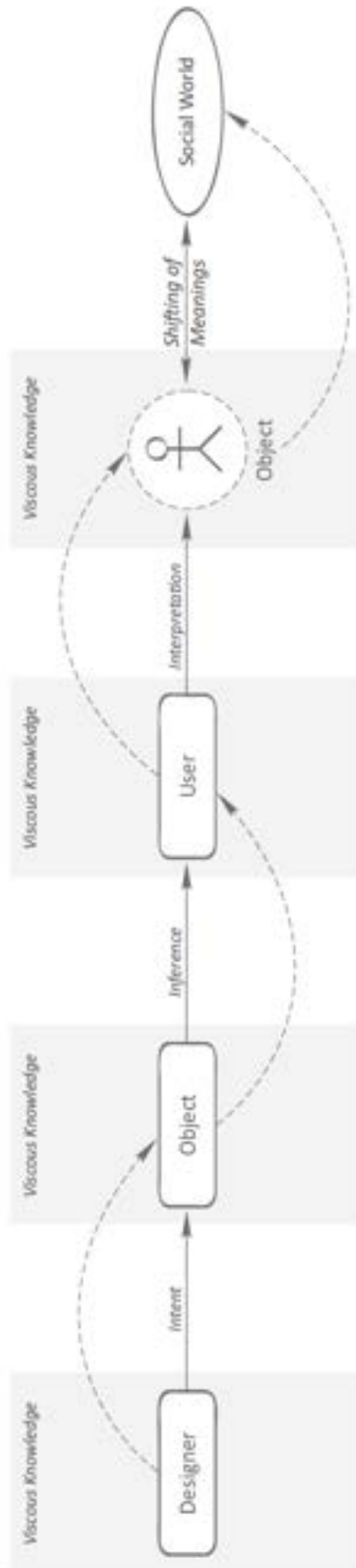


Figure 4.15 Viscous and Fluid Knowledge

Design knowledge, as design intent embedded within design objects, is suggestive when it cannot be explicitly communicated. The tacit components of this knowledge are linked to the designer's ways of doing, knowing, experiencing, and understanding. User experience is framed within an activity of reading the perceptible features of the design object, inferring its suggested intent, and forming a new interpretation. The flow of knowledge between designer and user alternately shifts from viscous to fluid rhythms, contingent to how and when it establishes meanings. Figure 4.15 maps the flow of viscous and fluid knowledge. Knowledge is fluid when it is transferred from one domain or activity to another yet becomes viscous as it develops significance and meaning.

Knowledge within the domain of the designer exists as part of the designer's perception and is fixed to the designer's existing knowledge base. This knowledge is fluid when it transfers through the design process and into the formation of design intent, which is embedded into the finished object. The object becomes a symbolic representation of knowledge that is immobilized by its connection to design intent. Through the inferential experience afforded by the object, knowledge is once again released until it establishes meanings at the user level. The user's interpretation of a design object leads toward a process of discovery, culminating in an embodied experience of translating an interpretation of the body as a dressed object. This experience of forming and establishing an interpretation relies on the fluidity of knowledge to explore the utilitarian, ornamental, and aesthetic functions of the design object.

The dressing of the body, serving as a personal interpretation, temporarily

suspends the flow of knowledge as an individualized activity. Against the social aspects of fashion, the user is positioned as an aesthetic object to be read and reinterpreted by other groups of users. Any significant meaning assigned by the user is not directly transferred but undergoes an exchange between the user, as an embodied object, and society. This relationship is defined by a transactional exchange wherein the user presents the body as an affect to stimulate an audience and elicit the emotional responses of other users, while simultaneously being influenced by the movements and changes of society. Therefore, design knowledge as the communication of meanings is characterized by fluidity as it shifts meanings across the individual, group, cultural, and social levels.

The phenomenon of fashion is not restricted to clothing but, rather, impacts society as a way of life. Fashion as transgressive knowledge extends beyond interactions between related players and shifts into peripheral areas of activities and operation. As a trained fashion designer, Han Feng has established a reputable career in the New York fashion industry while successfully transitioning into other neighboring industries. The versatility of her design ability is not merely at the abstract level of the persuasive intentions suggested by Crilly (2011), but embedded in the aesthetic quality of her design sensibility. Her garments are a form of wearable art, in the sense that they fulfill both aesthetic and functional needs. Rather than relying on the material to inform the design, Han Feng reinvents materials as part of the design. Her approach to fashion considers the importance of dimensionality, shape, and the visual juxtaposition of light. She creates new patterns with the materials to invent a new texture, which then becomes the focal point of the design. Figure 4.16 illustrates the transference of

knowledge through the experiential process of designing.

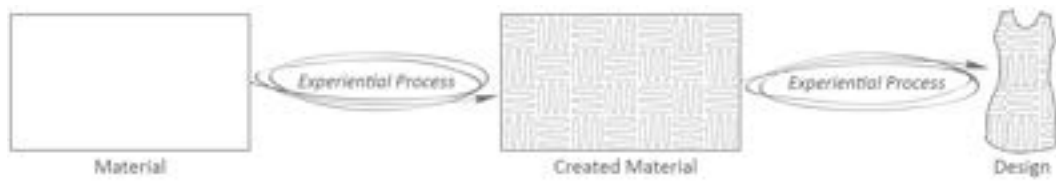


Figure 4.16 Transference of Knowledge

This approach to design is not systematically generated but an organic way of learning and knowing through the process of making and doing. The ensuing result, through experiencing the materials to create a new material for a finished design, is the development of a sculptural piece that easily translates into other expressive art forms. It is perhaps this process of creating and philosophy of making that has allowed Han Feng to transform her designs into art installations. Fashion provides the means for knowledge to reach a level of transgressiveness with its ability to adapt and relate to other areas outside of fashion's immediate operations, relying on this continual role of provoking and stimulating audiences.

Design knowledge is embedded within materials and its intentions are transferred into the finished design object. Users undergo a similar experiential process of understanding the design and recognizing the features as a means to reinterpret it as part of an embodied experience. This reiterates the identification of Theme IV as the anticipation of transgressive knowledge. The designer's role is to transfer intent as a predicate for inferences to be made, affording the user with the experience of assigning personal interpretations. Han Feng's design practice has provided a scenario for illustrating the cultivation, transference, and transgressiveness of knowledge as it shifts from one domain to another. The

creative process of design is not merely the transference of design intent, but moments of novelty and discovery are an inclusive experience of design. Her ability to transform the materials and produce new textures and finishings affords the user with the opportunity to access the richness of the original intent, allowing for knowledge to be transgressively experienced. The concept of designing in anticipation for the transgressiveness of knowledge summarizes the versatility of fashion experience through the plurality suggested by Han Feng's practice.

4.4 Conceptual Framework

The insights gained from the Pilot Interviews and Main Study cases proved to be valuable in obtaining supporting evidence for the main constructs under investigation. These findings contributed to establishing a cultural understanding of Post-80s & 90s females and local designers, leading to the formation of the Conceptual Framework. Pilot Interview I was instrumental in understanding the cultural situation affecting Post-80s & 90s fashion users and further defining the key cultural variables of "face", aesthetics & taste, and individuality. Findings from the first pilot test were applied to refine the questions for Pilot Interview II, producing a more focused and intentional study of "face" relating to the development of aesthetics and taste in the expression of individuality.

The Pilot Studies revealed that design knowledge, in the form of fashion knowledge, was prematurely introduced and should be addressed as a separate construct unrelated to the cultural values undergoing a process of change. Design knowledge was, therefore, further explored in relation to the domains defined by Cross (2000) as the semiotic function of meanings contained within design

objects. Cross' definition of design knowledge as residing in people, processes, and products, was further explored and analyzed through case-studies involving four Chinese fashion designers. The designers included in the Main Study are seen as unique in their positioning as members of local society and contributors to the cultural environment through their design activities. Their local practices corroborated the findings from the Pilot Studies while providing critical insights for reasons why Chinese users select fashion brands as an extension of the "face" concept, leading to questions of whether their understandings of aesthetics and taste are in need of reevaluation. The immediate advantage of local designers is how they understand the needs of local users and, therefore, the case-studies focused on how perceptions and experiences influence the formation, usage, and dissemination of design knowledge.

4.4.1 Summary of Identified Themes

The case-studies introduced, discussed, and analyzed in the Main Study resulted in the identification of themes which have been further elaborated in relation to the levels of knowledge and meanings discussed in the Literature Review of Chapter II. The design system involves transmitting knowledge into the form of a finished object, resulting in embedded meanings. In the fashion system, knowledge exists in a representational form and relies on the interpretation of users to construct meanings. It is evident that, while each of the designers included in the Main Study differ in design approach and sensibility, they share similar views on (1) the role and function of fashion, (2) the interactions and experiences afforded by fashion, and (3) the interpretive nature of design

knowledge. The coexistence of designers and users in a shared cultural world shifts knowledge into transgressive forms, which are reinterpreted through different stages of usage to form co-created meanings. Table 4.7 provides a summary of the four themes identified from the design practices of the four designers included in the Main Study.

<i>Identification of Themes</i>		
THEME I	Circularity between Designer and User	Interactions between user and object are communicated back to designers
THEME II	Reintroduction of Chinese Design	Reeducating taste to inform users of traditional Chinese aesthetics and quality
THEME III	Communication of Aesthetic Experience	Dressing as an experience afforded to users that convey an aesthetic configuration of the self
THEME IV	Anticipation of Transgressive Knowledge	Design knowledge shifts from intent to inference, leading to interpretation

Table 4.7 Summary of Themes

Theme I concerns the interactions occurring between the user and object which are communicated back to the designer, establishing circularity in the transference of knowledge between the designer and user. Designers create objects which are consumed by a user, engaged-with through interactions, and reflected upon when interpreted and established into a personal meaning. The user's interpretation of the fashion object is presented to the social world and inadvertently communicated to the designer. This implicates the user as a change agent in the flow of knowledge, altering the intended meaning into new symbolic significances.

Theme II emphasizes the need to reeducate users with the reintroduction of

Chinese design. It was discovered in the Pilot Studies that “face” influences the individual expression of aesthetics and taste, thereby defining “face” as a dominant influence over individuality. Chinese fashion users can be classified as highly conservative in their selection of brands, relying on the object’s relational effects on fulfilling the social function of needs. Clothing is an outward display of an aesthetic configuration, which influences the user’s decision-making process when set against the “face” concept as a gauge for gaining and maintaining social acceptance. This leads to the importance of reeducating and redefining social perceptions toward Chinese design into acceptable levels of aesthetics and taste.

Theme III translates the user’s interaction with the fashion object into the communication of aesthetic experience. The user’s process of dressing is an experience that affords the user with the opportunity to convey an aesthetic configuration of the self. This shifts value from associations with the object towards the overall experience of the user, which relies on the ability to enter into an interaction, relate the object to a given social context, assign a personal interpretation, and present oneself as an aesthetic configuration that communicates the overall experience. The communication of the aesthetic experience requires the user to enter into a mode of exploration and discover novel ways to express the fashion object.

Theme IV defines the objective of design as the anticipation of transgressive knowledge, allowing knowledge to shift from design intent to object inference to produce user interpretations. The persuasive role of designers is defined by the notion of embedding or leaving perceptible clues of design intent, which are

materialized in the finished form of the object. Objects afford the user with the experience of inferring the designer's intention, allowing an interpretation to be communicated. The flow of knowledge is defined and discussed through its mode of transference, as a fluid and viscous exchange. Fluid knowledge is defined by abstractness and plurality, shifting from one domain of interaction to another. Viscous knowledge is the cognizable knowledge that is stationary and fixed to meanings, able to be perceived and accessed through interactions. Knowledge becomes transgressive when it is able to be translated across different perceptions, contexts, domains, and meanings. The experiential process of designing transfers the same notion of discovery to the user, thereby stimulating multiple possibilities for knowledge to shift through increased interactions between the user and object.

The themes arising from the Main Study have highlighted the key components of fashion-specific design knowledge as being circularly transmitted, pertaining to cultural and traditional aesthetics, projected as individual experience, and becoming transgressive. A commonality among these four themes is that fashion operates socially in the manner that trends and styles are adopted, disseminated, and communicated through the positioning of the user against the larger social world. Clothing, when experienced and embodied by a user, becomes the surface by which meanings are transferred between user and other groups of users. The relationship between the designer and object leads to the interaction between the user and object, transferring design knowledge from the design process into the object to establish significance and meanings. This relationship is defined as a transactional system of meanings, wherein the levels of design knowledge transform as meanings and are transmitted, represented, and reinterpreted through

different modes of interaction.

4.4.2 Introduction to Conceptual Framework

The Literature Review in Chapter II concluded with a summary of the changes affecting the cultural, design, and fashion systems. Supported by evidence collected from existing research, it was found that changes to the systems affected the reevaluation of values, the design artifact, and the fashion object. The systems were discussed separately but combined into a single system under the condition of designers and users existing in a shared sociocultural world, sharing in similar life experiences and undergoing the same changes to cultural values. This concept was evaluated through the Pilot Studies and Main Study to substantiate the assumptions and assess the extent to which cultural changes affect the development of perception towards fashion, the transference of design knowledge, and subsequent interactions with fashion objects.

In consideration of the shared cultural world between the designers and users included in this research, they have undergone the same reevaluation of values between the need for traditional continuity and progress towards modernity. This has affected how designers and users engage in their respective activities to perceive and understand fashion objects. Designers, through various processes, embed their conceptual ideas and initial meanings in the form of design intent. The Main Study has revealed that local Mainland designers feel a responsibility to influence local users on Chinese design as part of the reeducation of taste, producing culture-specific design knowledge. Changes to the cultural system have resulted in the behavioral influences over Post-80s & 90s users, affecting the

development of self-perception (*individuality*) and perception towards the social world (*aesthetic standards of taste*). It was revealed in the Pilot Studies that behavior is governed by the “face” concept, which influences the outward display of individuality and aesthetics.

The cultural changes affecting designers and users comprise an ongoing process, encasing the struggle between traditional ways of doing and modern ways of thinking. It leads to the dual roles of designers to reinvent Chinese design while re-educating levels of taste as part of local design knowledge. Rather than reinterpreting Western influences of style for the Chinese market, local designers are reinventing Chinese aesthetics as a means to reintroduce traditional design elements for the contemporary market. This process of recreating a new image for Chinese design contributes to a localized knowledge base that is fluid in how it transfers from designers to users and into user communities, becoming viscous when establishing cultural meanings. Designers influence the social world through personal perceptions which are translated in the intentional levels of the design object, establishing a form of design knowledge. This knowledge builds on the existing knowledge of designers, thereby increasing the stock of knowledge specific to the role, intention, and processes of design.

Users are made known through their behavioral influences over the expression of individuality and aesthetic standards. In the Chinese cultural context, the “face” concept filters the extent to which individuality and personal aesthetics are expressed. This implicates the “face” concept as a key influence on individual behavior and the development of user perceptions toward the cultivation and

expression of self-identity through fashion objects. The user's continual development of self-knowledge leads to new standards for expressing individuality and aesthetic preferences. However, the dominant function of "face" disrupts the direct expression of self-identity and forces the user to adapt to social rules dictating fashion operation.

The Main Study identified themes relating to the transference of knowledge between designer, object, and user. This relationship has been integrated into a transactional system of meanings, which reconciles the tensions and challenges in the designer-object and user-object relationships. The transactional system allows for knowledge to regenerate into new levels of meanings. While the Literature Review discussed design knowledge as leading to embedded and constructed meanings, the Main Study identified the social functions of knowledge which shift meanings across social and collective dimensions. The transactional system transfers knowledge into embedded meanings, constructed meanings, and co-created meanings.

The Conceptual Framework defines the designer-object and user-object interactions as a transactional system stimulating the construction of meanings, allowing knowledge to embed itself in local cultural contexts. This transactional system will be further explored and defined with an Experimental Study in the following chapter. The transactional system will also address how meanings are created and shared by individuals within the larger social context, analyzed through the flow of meanings and design knowledge mediation.

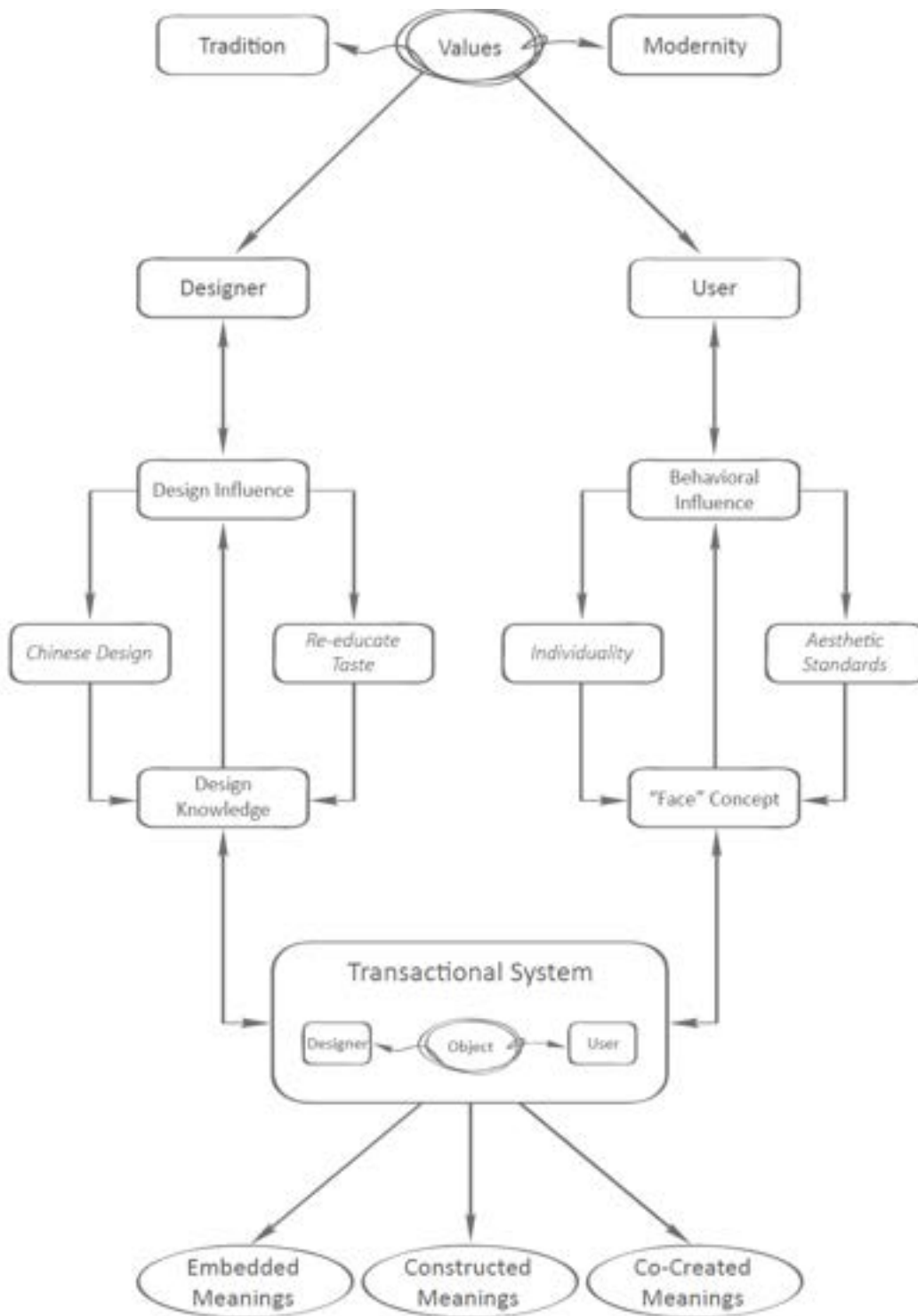


Figure 4.17 Conceptual Framework of Investigation

The Conceptual Framework has aided in determining relevant propositions relating to the role of designers, concerning design knowledge, and the role of users, who are influenced by the “face” concept. It was developed on the understanding that changes affecting the sociocultural environment will influence the development and modification of cultural values. The designer and user, existing within a shared cultural world, enter into an interaction mediated by the transactional system. This system contains the negotiation between ideas, meanings, and behaviors as defined by material culture and social relations. To gauge how fashion objects mediate design knowledge and act as sources of meaning and meaning creation, the transactional system will be further explored in an experimental study to address:

- i. What exists in the domain of local culture & design (objects & actions)?
- ii. How do they relate to one another?
- iii. How are they used inside/outside of this domain?
- iv. Are there any rules governing the negotiation of design knowledge as meaning creation?

4.5 Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 has reviewed all findings relating to this research by introducing the results of two Pilot Studies, the Main Study, and the development of the Conceptual Framework. It was revealed that the traditional value for “face” is a significant motivational influence for Post-80s & 90s users, affecting their behaviors and confidence to act independently from their respective social groups. The Main Study involved four case-studies of Mainland designers in Shanghai, resulting in the identification of four main themes. For the purpose of

emphasizing the system of meanings as a transactional relationship, the findings and themes arising from the Pilot Studies and Main Study have been separated as the roles of the user and designer.

This chapter introduced the Conceptual Framework, which culminates in the transactional system of meanings involving the designer, user, and object. A discussion and summary of the themes identified from the Main Study provided a third outcome for the transactional system as the transference of knowledge through social relevance, in the form of co-created meanings. The transactional relationship comprising the mediating role of the object, between the designer and user, has been defined as producing embedded, constructed, and co-created meanings.

Chapter V. Application of Framework

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the findings of the study and introduced the Conceptual Framework of this investigation. This chapter further develops the propositions presented by the framework through a discussion of the flow of meanings and evaluates the validity of the implications through an Experimental Study. Chapter 4 concluded that the shared cultural context between the designer and user affects their interactions with the design object, as part of the transactional system of meanings. Chapter 5 recapitulates the concept of design knowledge as the flow of meanings by elaborating on the respective roles of the designer, the object, and the user. Findings from the Experimental Study are reorganized and reassessed against the discussion on the levels of design knowledge mediation. The three levels of design knowledge mediation are translated into a Framework of Knowledge. Figure 5.1 outlines the sequence and flow of Chapter 5.

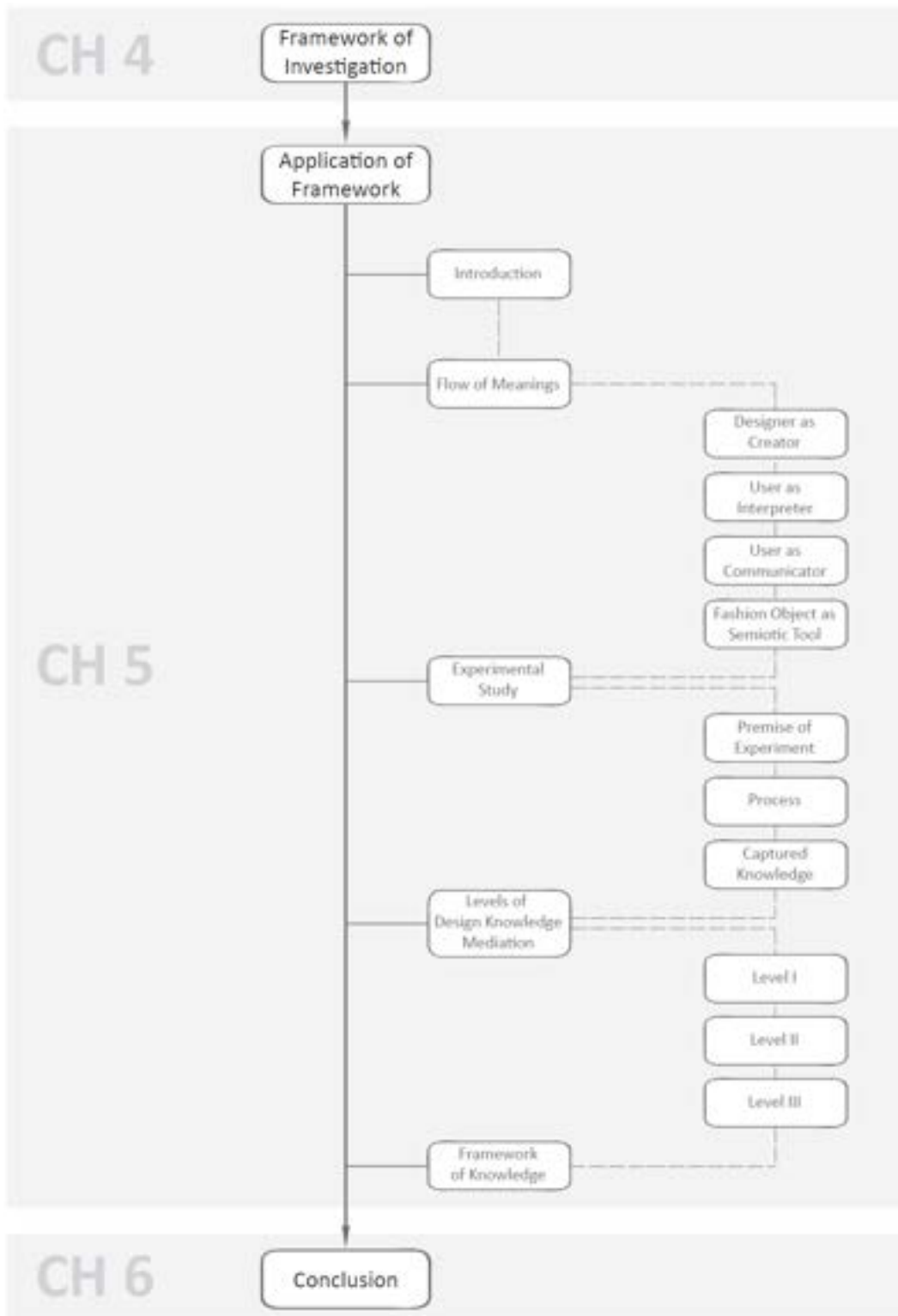


Figure 5.1 Outline of Chapter 5

5.2 Flow of Meanings

Design practice requires fundamental knowledge of aesthetics, art, technology, and human factors that contribute to the process of appropriating solutions for design problems through studies involving the possible relationships between users and objects, systems of objects, and objects and their components (Narvaez, 2000). The finished object exists as the representational form of the designer's knowledge which comprises design concept, design intent, design process, and physical design elements. According to Friedman (2000), design is a process that requires the articulation of knowledge from tacit to explicit forms by shaping experience into knowledge through: (1) reflecting on the past, (2) making strategic judgments to design futures, and (3) projecting future possibilities in a cause and effect network. When knowledge flows from the individual to social and cultural dimensions, knowledge creation becomes a social process. Within the fashion system, designers utilize their understandings of current situations to create possible future actions in the transference of responsibility over the object. The manner in which design knowledge is communicated from designer to object to user is through the function of meanings. Design knowledge is metaphorically and symbolically translated when the object elicits the emotional responses of the user, establishing a personal connection through the creation of meanings. This section discusses the flow of meanings within the relationships and respective roles of interaction involving the designer, the fashion object, and user.

5.2.1 Designer as Creator

The Main Study introduced four case-studies to present local practices of fashion designers in Shanghai. Some commonalities between the four designers include a shared cultural background, inspiration from traditional Chinese design, emphasis on the social construction of fashion, and the philosophy of fashion as a form of self-expression. The nostalgic attachment to the past, particularly of China's visual culture and history, is a significant statement for local designers. There is a sense of permanence to the past, situating design practice as informing adopted values and patterns of behavior (Margolin, 2009).

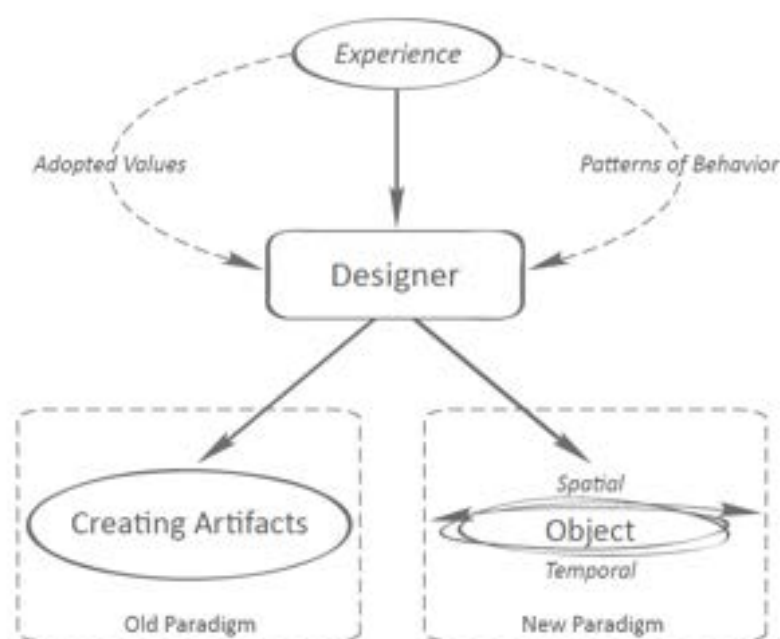


Figure 5.2 *Changing Role of Design*

For designers, to recognize and know the significance of the past allows the ability to speculate towards the future and create objects in relation to surrounding social conditions. This presents the shift from design culture as the creation of

visual artifacts towards the structuring of design as spatial and temporal cognition (Julier, 2005). The primary role of fashion is not to merely produce aesthetic objects but contribute towards the creation of social situations that allow fashion, and its incumbent meanings, to regenerate. Figure 5.2 illustrates the changing role of design.

5.2.2 User as Interpreter

Although the term “product semantics” first came into usage in reference to styling and product forms, it should concern human interfaces through the layer of cognition centered in the experiential world (Krippendorff, 1990). This suggests that designing creates objects which afford and support user interactions towards understanding, meaningfulness, and transparency. Design should, therefore, concern less of the materiality of objects and focus more on the understanding of human practice to optimize the creation of meaningfulness. This reiterates the intervention of designers to challenge existing practices of living as a trajectory allowing users the experience of making sense of or reaching a level of understanding.

Crilly *et al.* (2008) discuss the relationship between designer and user as the mediation of the designer’s influence over user interpretation and the user’s inference of the designer’s intentions. The relationship between intent and interpretation signifies how design objects are interpreted differently by different individuals within different contexts of use. It is expected that user interpretations will differ from design intent, shifting the focus towards the relationship between the user’s inferred intentions and the actual interpretation as shown in Figure 5.3.

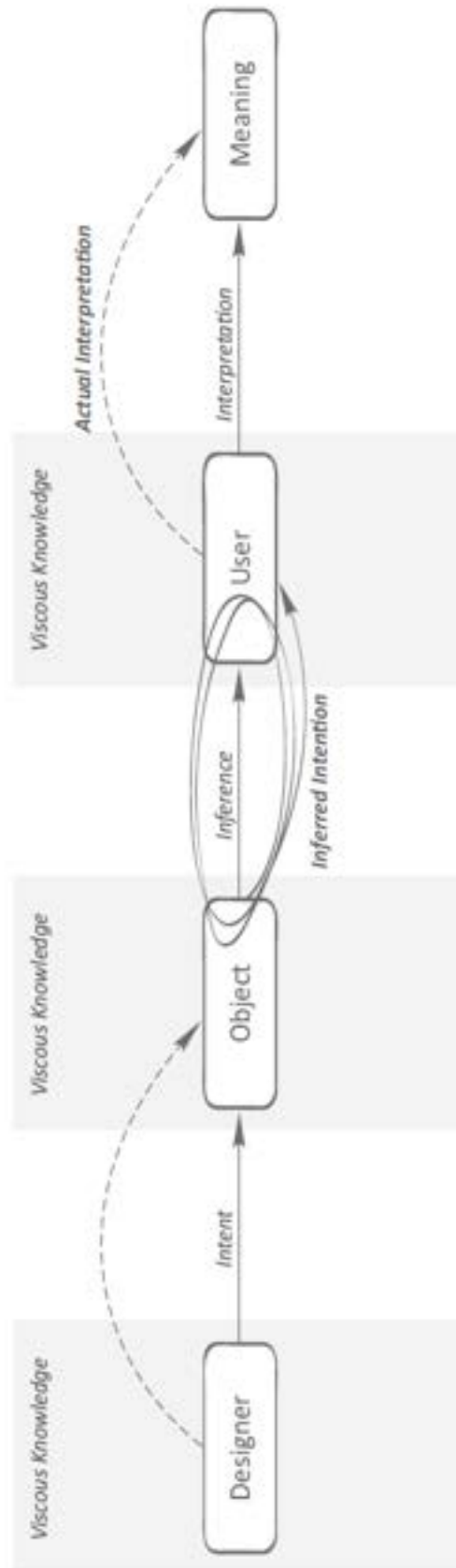


Figure 5.3 Relationship between Inferred Intention and Actual Interpretation

5.2.3 User as Communicator

Fashion requires users to participate in a process of communication through the medium of clothing, using objects to express or send a message to elicit a response or change in another user (Barnard, 1996:30). Fashion objects allow users to communicate through social interactions in order to produce meanings, connecting one user to another as part of a larger negotiation process. The body is turned inside out, exposing the surface as an open space where experience is texturized as part of the outer garment (Emberley, 1987). Clothing delineates while connecting one individual to another, signifying the user's existence as a part of the larger whole. Although the user acts as the sender of a message, the user's interpretation is based on the intentions of the object's meanings informed by the designer and through the design process. Regardless of the original creator or sender of the object's corresponding meaning, the final interpretation is constructed by the receiver. Figure 5.4 illustrates the user's communication through the object.

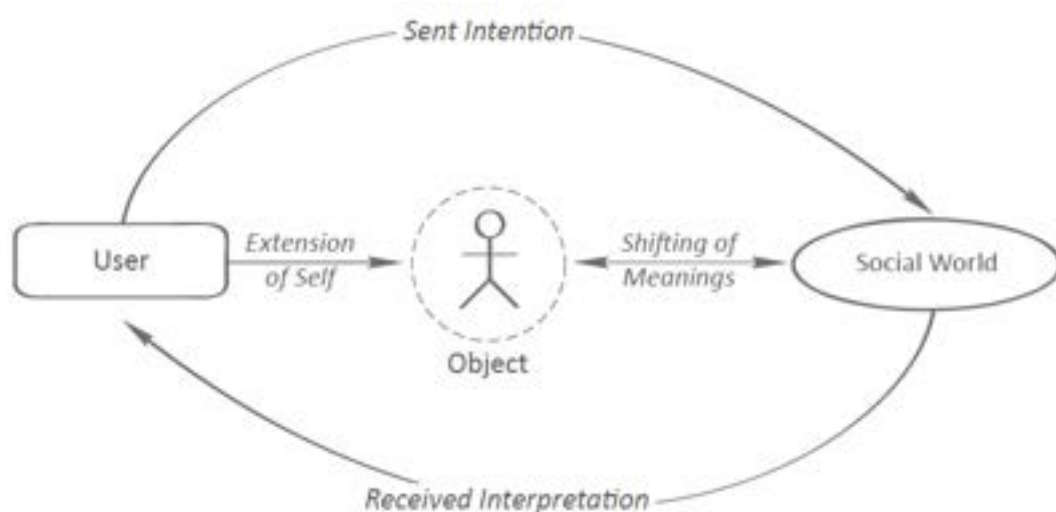


Figure 5.4 Object as Channel of Communication

5.2.4 Fashion Object as Semiotic Tool

Fashion is a mechanism by which the body acts as text and texture of the body to extend the experience of inscribing meanings (Emberley, 1987). Each object component represents a symbol, as a vessel for meaning construction and transmission. Merleau-Ponty (2004:63) describes the condition of objects in the perceptual world:

The things of the world are not simply neutral *objects* which stand before us for our contemplation. Each one of them symbolises or recalls a particular way of behaving, provoking in us reactions which are either favourable or unfavourable. That is why people's tastes, character, and the attitude they adopt to the world and to particular things can be deciphered from the objects with which they choose to surround themselves, their preferences for certain colours...

The rearranging of objects recontextualizes the total meaning, or statement, in the manner of recognizing the object within the context of other objects. As in the use of language, to know a language is to understand and interpret each word within a given structure to describe and express the total meaning (Larson & Segal, 1995:20). This is reflected in the role of objects as tools for transferring meanings from (1) designer to object, (2) object to user, and (3) object to object. The first level of meaning transmission, as discussed in the previous section, requires designers to produce objects facilitating future opportunities for meanings to evolve and regenerate.

The ordering of an object changes the context of the intended meaning, shifting meanings from the domain of design intent to user interpretation. Main Study III

introduced Niki Qin who intentionally embeds elements of surprise and discovery into her designs. The garments are intended to be explored and experienced according to the preferences of users, signifying a change of meaning. A blouse can be worn as a dress or a skirt, altering the intended usage and the object's symbolic meaning. Fashion objects exist as the representation of design knowledge, in the form of design intent, to be read and interpreted by users. The object acts as a semiotic tool, in its representational form, and transfers meanings from one entity or domain to another.

5.3 Experimental Study

Taking into consideration how meanings flow from designers to users to user-object relationships, an Experimental Study was developed to extract and identify knowledge within the domains of design epistemology (*knowledge of designers*) and praxiology (*knowledge of process*).

5.3.1 Premise of Experiment

Pilot Study I included a unique case of a young student from Fudan University who, being particularly averse to the very concept of fashion, shared her firsthand experience of being exposed to ethnic Chinese culture. This student traveled to Yunnan Province and was greatly influenced by the ethnic traditions of the region's minority culture, traditional handicrafts, and geographical landscape. Upon her return to Shanghai, she realized how her short experience in a different region of China had changed her existing perception of Chinese culture and design. Her own personal aesthetics were greatly impacted by the experience and

evident in her changing behavioral responses toward fashion.

An initial inquiry into how this student began to develop an interest in cultural artifacts, gain knowledge of traditional handicrafts, and cultivate a sensibility towards Chinese aesthetics was expanded into an Experimental Study involving the dying tradition of Chinese silk weaving. Chinese cultural industries are in need of regeneration, as younger generations are increasingly unwilling to work in local factories and migrating to larger cities in pursuit of professional careers. The unique case of the Fudan University student serves as an indication and need for opportunities to expose Post-80s & 90s users to China's cultural heritage. Main Study II, involving Zhang Da, identified the theme of emphasizing the reintroduction and reeducation of Chinese aesthetics and design. This Experimental Study presents the challenges of collaboration between designers and cultural industries through an embodied design experiment. Through a Kesi case-study, a real scenario is presented on the challenges affecting China's cultural sustainability. The experiences shared by the young student support this Experimental Study by indicating the potential for disseminating cultural knowledge through design activities by transferring knowledge from a traditional to modern model of design.

The objectives of this Experimental Study address the questions arising from the Conceptual Framework introduced in the previous chapter. This study further explores the distinctive roles of designer and user by identifying how knowledge is used, gained, and developed as part of the designing process within a specific cultural context. The use of the case-study method is proposed as allowing a

focused discussion of the practices of fashion in everyday life (Buckley & Clark, 2012). Instead of reviewing a broad scenario of fashion operation and systems, Buckley & Clark endorse an approach that critically examines the close-up and small scale of the fashion phenomenon that exists in the identification of things, people, and ideas in the mundane and overlooked. This Experimental Study introduces a Kesi case-study to explore how activities of design allow access to knowledge and the experiences embedded within the materials used.

5.3.1.1 Background of Kesi Experimental Study

Silk production in China, dating back 7,000 years, is one of the most significant contributions to human culture that has influenced modern textile manufacturing (Hong Kong Museum of Art, 1995:44). Kesi silk weaving is a traditional technique with a 3,000 year history that is losing market value due to an inability to adapt to the contemporary market. The primary purpose for the silk material was traditionally used in clothing, but is now confined to the less utilitarian function of collectible artwork. In an attempt to understand the existing limitations of the knowledge base relating to Kesi silk, an Experimental Study was developed to transform the silk technique from a traditional handicraft to a marketable fashion product.

The researcher was introduced to the master weaver, Wu Wen Kang, in September 2012 during a visit to his shop and factory in Suzhou, China. Wu began learning the Kesi style by studying its designs, color selection process, and production techniques throughout a two-year apprenticeship (Wu, 2013). Encouraged by the party secretary of a large state-owned silk factory, he designed

and created 10 silk looms and proceeded with opening his own factory in his hometown of Dongzhu, Suzhou. Personally training the weavers in the Kesi technique of tracing patterns, assembling threads, and adjusting looms, he was able to grow his business to meet the large demands from the Japanese market for Kesi products. He has since mastered the technique and has devoted the last 30 years to the preservation of the basic characteristics of Kesi weaving while attempting new variations in design.

5.3.1.2 Current Challenges of the Kesi Factory

Although being a UNESCO recognized “Master of Chinese Fine Arts and Handicrafts” and holding the ranking of “Senior Industrial Artist”, Wu is faced with many challenges in regards to the future of his factory. The Japanese market, which had previously sustained his business for decades with consistent production orders, has completely vanished. Some major challenges include, but are not limited to, the following:

- i. There is no specific government support for the Kesi industry, challenging the cultural preservation and sustainability of related skills and techniques.
- ii. The cultural inheritance and transference of the factory’s knowledge is threatened, as younger generations migrate to neighboring cities rather than finding employment in local industries.
- iii. Currently, the factory has 35 workers aged 43-50. With the average age of retirement being 50 years, the industry is in danger of disappearing completely within the next 5 to 8 years.
- iv. Despite attempts to apply the silk technique to a wider product range, there are limitations in terms of scale, design ability, and quality. The Kesi materials reflect high quality and value, yet are challenged with reaching appropriate design solutions.

This Experimental Study takes the current situation of the Kesi factory as the backdrop for evaluating the propositions of the Conceptual Framework introduced in Chapter 4. Designers are positioned to influence local design knowledge by reintroducing Chinese design and reeducating social levels of taste. This study focuses on the influential role of designers by documenting the process of design to identify the types of knowledge existing within the scope of designing and ways in which knowledge accumulates. The researcher's own involvement in this design experiment provides interpretative and phenomenological insights to better comprehend and experience the knowledge represented by the factory, Master Wu, the weavers, and target groups of users.

5.3.2 Process

Primitive weaving techniques originated as a response to the requirements of everyday life, leading to the invention and development of woven cloths as a means to protect and beautify the human body. The tracing of decorative silk cloths, throughout the periods of Chinese history, serves as an indication for how the Chinese understood the composition of silk and explored different techniques of weaving as part of its design development.

The standard weaving method consists of both warp and weft threads that are moved across the loom, whereas the simple Chinese loom allows only the warp (vertical) threads to extend back-and-forth through the fixed weft threads. This technique of weaving produces the Kesi style in which the tapestry can produce the same image on either side, in its reversed form on the back of the finished piece. Due to the intricacy of the details and technique, all Kesi pieces are

completed by hand on a manual loom and require the time consuming efforts of skilled weavers. The complexity of maneuvering the looms requires each weaver to spend months on a single design, suggesting that each finished Kesi piece serves as a representation of not only the required skills and techniques but emotions and experiences. A method for accessing or entering the experiences of the weavers is by tracing the actions of the research subjects and modeling after their behaviors through the experience of weaving. Owing to the researcher's lack of ability to learn and master the technique of Kesi weaving, drawing and sketching were used as a method of phenomenological inquiry.

5.3.2.1 Design Knowledge and the Kesi Factory

Cross (1999 & 2000) defined three domains of design knowledge. *Epistemology*, as the knowledge residing in people, concerns how people come about knowing in consideration of individual experience. *Praxiology* comprises knowledge of processes that exist within modes of operation, production, and various design activities. *Phenomenology* exists in the knowledge embedded within finished objects, becoming knowledge represented by the design. Each domain of knowledge can be systematically identified within the Kesi case-study. The knowledge source resides in Master Wu's experiences, which have produced knowledge in the form of expertise. He personally trains each of the weavers, thereby transferring knowledge into the process of weaving and utilizing the silk looms. The weavers accumulate knowledge throughout the experiences of weaving, which are manifested in the finished design and embedded with emotional experiences.

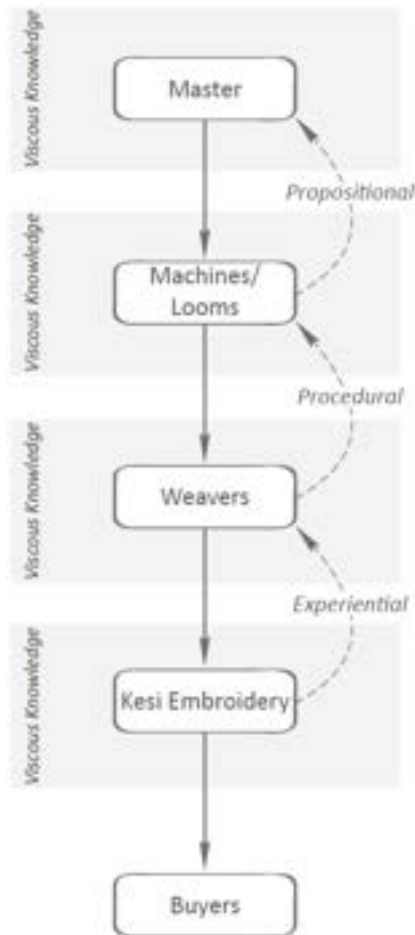


Figure 5.5 Flow of Knowledge within the Kesi Factory

During a site visit in September 2012, a review of the factory's operation allowed for a deeper examination into the structure and flow of knowledge. In an analysis of the knowledge flow between the front-end sales and mode of production, it was discovered that knowledge represented by the factory is stagnant without any possible regeneration. Knowledge within the factory exists in various forms of expertise, yet operates only within its specific domains. Each level of knowledge transference is delegated by Wu, who acts as a primary source of knowledge. The knowledge at each level of transference is viscous, due to the lack of opportunities to transform outside the domain of Wu's personal stock of knowledge. Therefore, knowledge flows in a unidirectional fashion from the master weaver to the various

members involved in the production line as depicted in Figure 5.5.

Although a situational analysis has provided an understanding of Wu's challenges, it merely addresses the superficial levels of the main problems within the factory. All knowledge flows from the master and each level of transference shifts viscous knowledge into the propositional, procedural, and experiential domains. The looms used inside the factory were designed and built by Wu, thereby requiring propositional knowledge in the manner of testing his own levels of expertise. Each weaver is trained by the Master and their experiences with the looms require procedural knowledge, when operating in the practical functions of weaving. The finished Kesi design contains the experiential knowledge of the weavers, which is representative of the emotional levels of knowledge woven into each silk design.

The process by which the weavers come about knowing or gaining access to Wu's knowledge is through shadowing. When observing, imitating, and doing, the weavers are able to access the tacit components of knowledge which cannot be expressly communicated. The issues presented in this Experimental Study are explored through a phenomenological approach to design research. This study utilizes a practice-based design experiment as a form of inquiry to extract knowledge of the situation and involved players, substantiating design activity as a reflective and generative approach to research.

5.3.2.2 Justifications for Phenomenological Approach

Each finished piece of Kesi represents the unique experiences of the factory weavers, which cannot be directly replicated or known. Instead, this Experimental

Study utilizes intentional interactions with the finished textiles, through design activities, to allow the researcher to access and gain insight to the skills and knowledge represented by the silk pieces. It is proposed that designing requires perceptive and intuitive abilities, which are the subsequent results of experience. Wu's craft and skills have been developed and cultivated through expertise, spanning a 30 year timeframe, to produce knowledge specific to Kesi weaving. The way in which the researcher can accurately understand and describe the experience, for the purpose of identifying cultural knowledge, is to shadow the experiences related to the Kesi materials as the underlying structure of the phenomenon.

This Experimental Study relies on design activity as the method of analysis and vehicle for exploration to communicate the design representation (Galle, 1999). By putting pen to paper, the researcher acts as designer to initiate an internal process of exploration in search of the design intent, producing a framing activity and practice of reflection as defined by Schon (1983:163-164). The visual representations resulting from design activity, in the form of sketches and prototypes, provide a method for understanding the knowledge inherent to the designing of artifacts and the knowledge embedded within the raw materials. This study explores Kesi textiles to achieve the following objectives:

- i. Appreciate the experiences represented by the Kesi cloths
- ii. Extract the rich quality of required skills, knowledge, and culture of the traditional technique
- iii. Explore the finished textiles to develop design intentions

The use of a phenomenological research approach captures the lived experiences of individuals involved within the chosen phenomenon of study. Through personal reflections and assumptions, hermeneutical phenomenology requires the researcher's own interpretations of the situation (Laverty, 2003). This Experimental Study utilizes experience as the mode of inquiry into the design problem, relying on reflections and critical assessments to form interpretations. The experience of designing is explored as a tool to better comprehend the knowledge existing within and represented by the Kesi case-study.

5.3.3 Captured Knowledge

Phenomenological studies require researchers to accurately describe the phenomenon without relating it to any prescribed framework and, instead, identify themes and meanings based solely on the facts surrounding the issue of study (Groenewald, 2004). This requires the researcher to define an epistemological position appropriate for the specific phenomenon of study. Acknowledging Master Wu as the primary source of knowledge within the case-study, this Experimental Study was developed to gain access to knowledge of the Kesi cultural industry, technique, and business. The objective of this study is not to corroborate the Conceptual Framework but, rather, use the process of design as an exploratory tool for explaining the phenomenon presented by the case-study. This form of exploration is proposed as leading to knowledge that is related to the experiences of Wu and the factory's weavers.

The current efforts of the Kesi factory are focused on building upon its existing knowledge base to increase value through design, manufacturing, and branding

activities. Wu began sampling Kesi designs that shift away from the classic Chinese style towards more contemporary designs, experimenting with the balance of color, texture, and scale. These samples were used to explore the potential of translating the traditional technique onto modern-day artifacts. For decades, Wu's factory has maintained a consistent production order from the Japanese market to use the Kesi silk for the kimono "obi" belts. This prior experience in producing ornamental accessories was taken into consideration for this study and the category of small fashion accessories was found to be the best fit to transition from "Kesi as collectible art" to "Kesi as a statement of fashion". Furthermore, it supported the concept of recontextualizing knowledge from one domain to another as a means for regeneration.

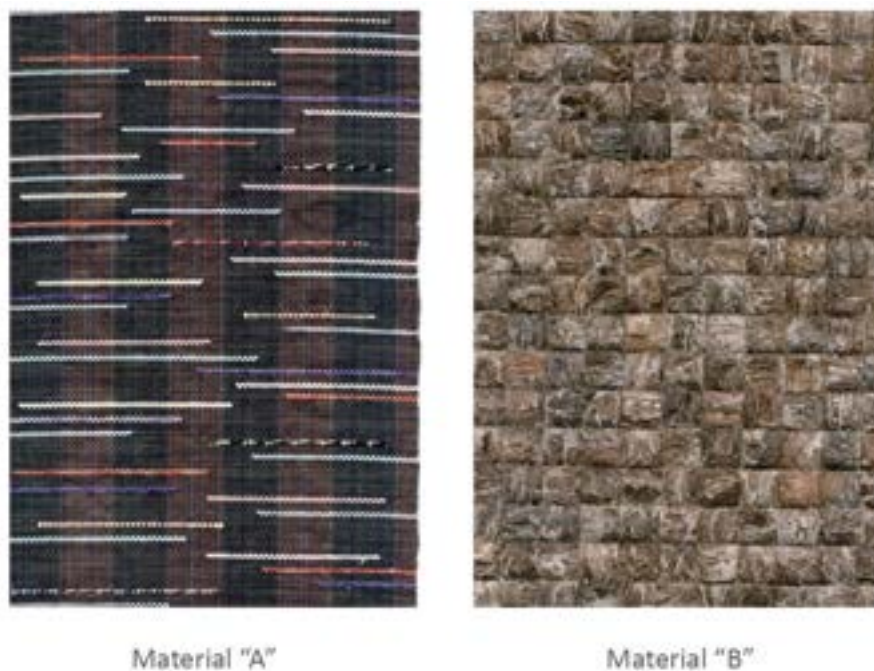


Figure 5.6 Materials "A" and "B"

This Experimental Study began with two finished textiles which were sent from the factory as possible materials for the finished designs. Material "A" was a cloth

piece mimicking an ethnic Chinese style of textiles and interwoven with twisted “slub” threads along the weft weave. For the selected criteria and design premise, Material “A” was found to be the more appropriate selection for fulfilling the design requirements. Material “B” was an experimental piece created from the cocoon shells of silkworms. Although Wu’s intention for designing this material was to augment the sustainability of Kesi silk and minimize wastage through the recycling and upcycling of the cocoon shells, the finished material lacked the aesthetic considerations of color, texture, and durability. The materials are representations of Wu’s intentions and account for numerous actions involved in the production of the finished designs.

The process relied on sketching as a tool enabling the discovery of creative outcomes in a circular fashion. Drawing, a skill pertinent to design, is often a mindless activity that is conversational in nature. Glanville (2006) states that there is one activity that is central to design, which is the ability to sketch and doodle. Sketching is the means by which designers explicate ideas, yet also serves as a form of inquiry when presented as the conversational activity between pen and paper and between designer and designed. When sketching, the designer enters into a conversation through the switch between *drawer* and *viewer* in a circular process of *making* and *looking*. Each line, stroke, and end point distinctly characterizes a reflective practice that signifies the ongoing dialogue through the placing of pen to paper. The moment of discovery, or novelty, is attained when what is seen or observed differs from what the designer intended to draw. Without explicit rules or guidelines dictating the nature of sketching, the designer is able to explore the possibilities of different shapes and solutions to meet the requirements

determined by a set of parameters. In this manner, the Experimental Study explored a series of design sketches to open the space for inquiry. The known parameters of this Experimental Study concerned (1) the Kesi materials and (2) the product category, as illustrated in Figure 5.7.

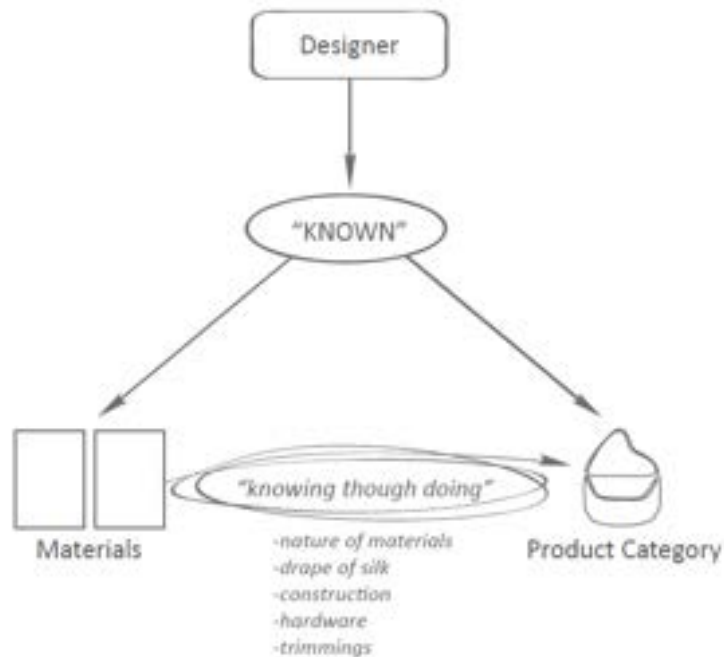


Figure 5.7 “Known” Parameters of the Kesi Experimental Study

A series of handbags were designed from the two materials and the process was documented in the form of rough hand sketches and supplementary notes. The knowledge captured, deemed worthy of capturing, were known through doing (sketching). In sketching, the researcher was able to anticipate potential design outcomes based on the materials in hand. The process of sketching sought knowledge of the nature of the materials, the drape and durability of the silk, the construction details of the finished design, and the required hardware and trimmings. Each sketch involved an expectation, through projective ability, towards a design solution for the known product category. The necessary steps in

achieving the final outcome forced the researcher to inquire after the unknown criteria of the design premise, exposing the previously unknown knowledge to aid in finishing the design sketches (Figure 5.8).

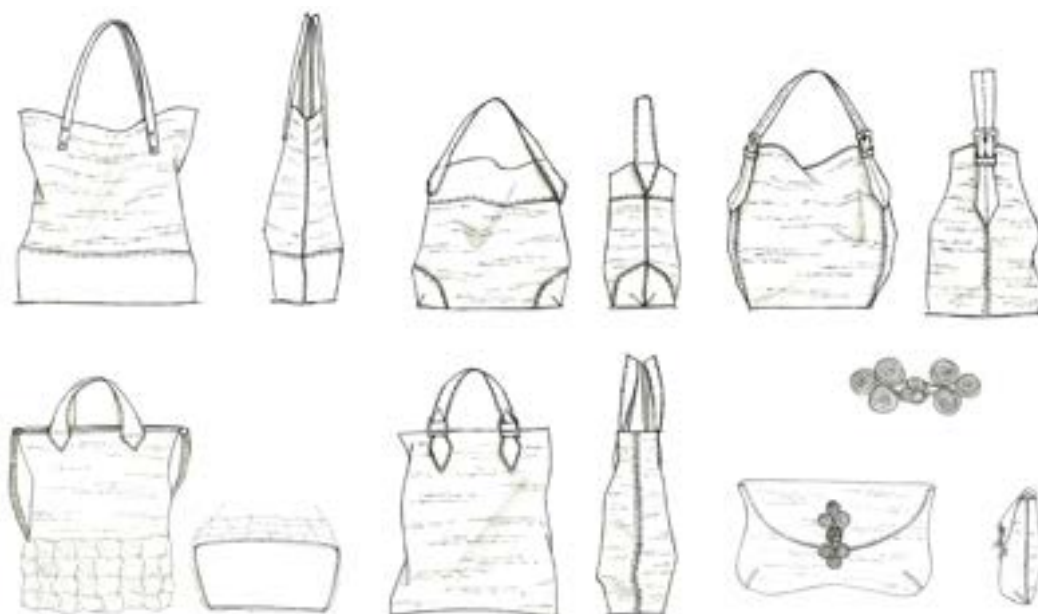


Figure 5.8 Design Sketches

This Experimental Study was based on a set of unknowns concerning the Kesi case-study. Beginning with the first site visit and initial analysis of the factory's knowledge structure and flow, it was evident that the factory had a production capacity and capability for creating new designs. Following a series of conversational activities between sketching and the forming of shapes, insights were gained relating to the knowledge represented by the factory. Kesi is a subjective and personal product, hand-woven by the highly skilled weavers. The weavers spend anywhere between one to three months weaving a single piece and, therefore, each finished design represents a personal achievement. Although the subjectivity of experiences is not directly transferrable, the tacit levels of

personalized attention and care are woven into the silk materials. The materials afforded the researcher with a specific perspective for addressing the Kesi designs, influencing the process of sketching and reaching the final design outcomes.

Materials “A” and “B” are symbolic representations of knowledge flowing through the process of weaving, articulating the experiences of the weavers. Designing follows a systematic process of relating to the raw materials to fit the proposed criteria in the creation of objects. When posed with a set of unknowns, in regards to the Kesi materials, the designer is faced with establishing new significance in order to contextualize the materials against the projected ideas or designs. This requires forging an emotional attachment, or connection, to the materials in order to successfully translate design intent into the final design.

The experiences of the weavers are not explicitly communicated, yet the clues are presented in each thread and intentional or unintentional mistake. Therefore, the designer acts as an interpreter of the materials and embeds new emotional significance when shifting the material into a proposed design. Sketching allows a mode of reflecting on and revising the assigned significance, capturing the tacit levels of knowledge embedded into the Kesi cloths through the exploration of materials. The experiences of the weavers are reproduced in the Kesi silk and transformed into the designer’s conceptual process. Designers capture this knowledge through the conversational medium of sketching, which allows a deeper evaluation and assessment of the materials, concepts, significant meanings, and design intentions throughout the related design activities.

It was initially determined that the materials overtook the process of design, as the

main objective was to showcase the significance of the Kesi materials rather than the novelty of the finished design. Through the process of an embodied design activity, knowledge relating to the Kesi case-study was accessed. The act of sketching mimicked the phenomenological approach of “tracing” the lived experiences of the skilled weavers. A deeper probe was enabled through the sketching process, which facilitated direct interactions with the materials allowing a deeper appreciation and empathy towards the hand-woven intricacy of the Kesi designs. Designing, as a process of negotiation, occurred in the transformation of rough sketching to the shaping of exterior forms while simultaneously providing insights and interpretations for knowledge pertaining to the Experimental Study.

5.4 Levels of Design Knowledge Mediation

The main investigation of this thesis investigation involves the role of design knowledge as mediating relationships between the designer, object, and user. From the review of literature concerning knowledge, it has been found that it is not knowledge but the representation of knowledge that mediates the intentional levels of interaction. The types of mediation are discussed as involving three levels: (1) between designer and artifact, (2) between user and object, and (3) between user and society. This section addresses the questions arising from the conceptual framework:

- i. What exists in the domain of local culture & design (objects & actions)?
- ii. How do they relate to one another?
- iii. How are they used inside/outside of this domain?
- iv. Are there any rules governing the negotiation of design knowledge as meaning creation?

5.4.1 Level I – Designer and Artifact

The Conceptual Framework introduced in Chapter 4 illustrates the effects of cultural change on the practices of designers and users, culminating in a transactional system through interactions involving the fashion object. Against the backdrop of recent socioeconomic developments affecting Mainland China, the influential role of designers emphasizes the need to reintroduce a new Chinese aesthetic as part of the reeducation of taste. In order to understand the design process as a means to solidify and produce design knowledge, an Experimental Study was developed. This study addressed perceptual and experiential knowledge relating to the rules governing the design premise and subsequent actions leading to the creative process of designing. Sketching, as a conversational activity, was utilized as the main method for exploring the phenomenon of interest to identify the known parameters framing the cultural implications of the design experiment.

The Kesi Experimental Study was included as part of this research to introduce the current situation affecting the cultural industries of Mainland China. As Post-80s & 90s young adults are given more economic and educational freedom, they are migrating towards larger cities to pursue professional career paths. This has significantly affected small factories, such as the one owned by Wu Wen Kang, which relies on the handiwork of skilled weavers to transfer and preserve its specific knowledge. Experience is personal and cannot be replicated, thereby requiring the researcher to mimic the experience through a method of shadowing or tracing. The Experimental Study utilized the activity of sketching to explore

how designers attain, apply, and accumulate knowledge through design activities.

i. What exists in the domain of local culture & design (objects & actions)?

The Experimental Study identified factual knowledge regarding the current state of the factory's production and the tacit forms of knowledge embedded within the finished materials. Under the premise of the Experimental Study, the design process was developed in order to produce solutions addressing the challenges of cultural preservation. The researcher was able to interpret the experiences of the weavers by reading the surface features of the finished silk, undergoing an exploratory process of engaging with the Kesi materials. Sketching allowed the researcher to engage with the materials in such a way that feasible design solutions were reached. The recursive activity of sketching, in the conversation between the drawer and the observed, allowed for the materials to be negotiated and recontextualized into a new form. This required knowing the context of the specific phenomenon, the materials available, classification of the proposed solution, and factual information surrounding the materials. The subsequent actions involved an embodied experience to forge a connection to the materials, following a phenomenological approach, which allowed the researcher to gain access to knowledge embedded and woven into the silk.

ii. How do they relate to one another?

The process of design takes the existing knowledge of designers, accumulated as part of individual experience, to develop perceptions for understanding the given design problem. Through designing, knowledge shifts from tacit to explicit forms

in the materialization of design solutions. In the transactional system of exchange between designer and object, designers transmit intentional levels of meaning into finished objects. The experiences of designing lead to knowledge specific to design which mediate the presumed intentions of the designer. This identifies Level I Mediation, in Figure 5.9, as the direct mediation of design knowledge between the designer and object.

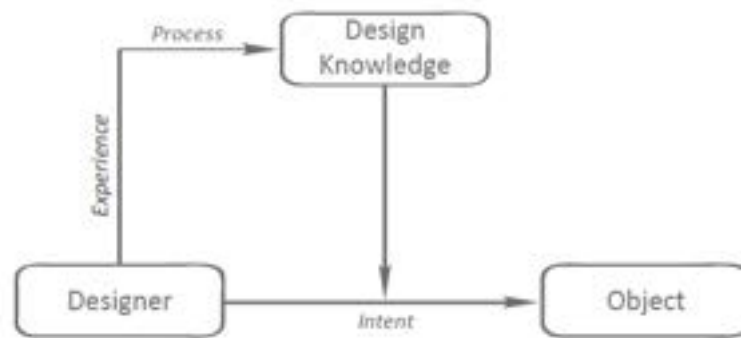


Figure 5.9 Level I Mediation

Kazmierczak (2003) defines the first stage of meaning construction as the intended meaning encoded into the design itself. The model for Level I Mediation, between designer and object, argues that before intention is finalized it is mediated by knowledge developed from design experience. Increasing knowledge throughout the experiential process moderates the designer's projected intention, altering the subsequent meaning. This first level of mediation impacts the designer's own development of intention. Design knowledge during the stage of Level I Mediation is tacit, referring to non-verbal activities that are visual, performative, and gestural. The epistemology of this knowledge is experientially oriented and involves design expertise, connoisseurship, and intuition (Mareis, 2012). Designers formulate personal knowledge into the conceptualization of design intent, as part of design activities involving the anticipation and application

of knowledge. The design process requires projective ability as part of conceptual development, yet it is the non-verbal activity of designing that produces design knowledge. Therefore, increasing design knowledge positively correlates to fluctuations in the modification of design intent.

5.4.2 Level II – User and Object

The Conceptual Framework of the previous chapter illustrates the parallel existence of designers and users within a shared cultural context. Users, specifically Post-80s & 90s, are undergoing a process of change affecting their cultural value systems. According to Clarke & Miller (2002), modernity leads to conditions under which individuals no longer follow the authority of institutions and rules but become increasingly concerned with redefining normativity in the determining of new behaviors and actions. This is evident in the case of the Post-80s & 90s, as supported by the Pilot Studies, where behavioral changes affect the role of individuality and aesthetic standards. In the cultural context of Mainland China, it was found that the traditional value for “face” cannot be disregarded as it serves as the main influence over individual codes of behavior.

iii. How are they used inside/outside of this domain?

The previous section discussed the objects and actions within the cultural domain of design using the example of the Kesi case-study. Following the researcher’s own involvement in the Experimental Study, knowledge was identified as the “known” parameters concerning the premise of the experiment. The main objective was to reinvent and recontextualize the Kesi materials into a consumer

object, specified by the product category of small accessories. Within this framework of known variables, experiences within the design process produced new levels of knowing categorically defined as design knowledge which interject the designer's projected perception of design intent (*Level I Mediation*).

The relationship between the user and object has been discussed throughout this thesis investigation as the negotiation between design intent and user interpretation. Within the domain of design, the designer's intentions are manifested in the finished form of the fashion object. Outside of this domain, the intent is communicated through the object and received by the user. Intent serves as a form of meaning, made cognizable through reading the object's surface of attributes and features. Crilly (2011) supports the design stance of predicting the behavior of objects, defined as the user's ability to understand the design through knowledge assembled and developed through life experiences. Based on Shannon's¹⁵ framework, design is adapted into a process of communication flowing from design team (*source*) to product (*transmitter*), environment (*channel*), senses (*receiver*) and ending with cognitive responses (*destination*) to form the aesthetic impression, semantic interpretation, and symbolic association (Crilly, Moultrie, & Clarkson, 2004). The final stage of transmission relies on a user's cognitive response, or affect, towards the object by producing emotional responses based on individual judgments.

The user-object interaction involves a negotiation process between the transmission of design intent and the perceptions leading towards inference to

¹⁵ Shannon, C. E. (1948). A Mathematical Theory of Communication. Bell System Technical Journal, 27, 379-423.

produce the user's final interpretation. Within this exchange, Level II Mediation is identified as the object's representation and the user's inferred understanding of design knowledge. The process of developing the object's interpretation is negotiated through design knowledge. User interactions rely on individual perceptions that serve as the basis for judging the recognizable features and attributes represented by the object. Crilly, *et al.* (2004) define semantic interpretation as the object's apparent utility and perceived qualities, limited to what the object appears to communicate about itself. The object, representing design knowledge in the transmission of intent through its semantic functions, produces affects influencing the emotional responses of users.

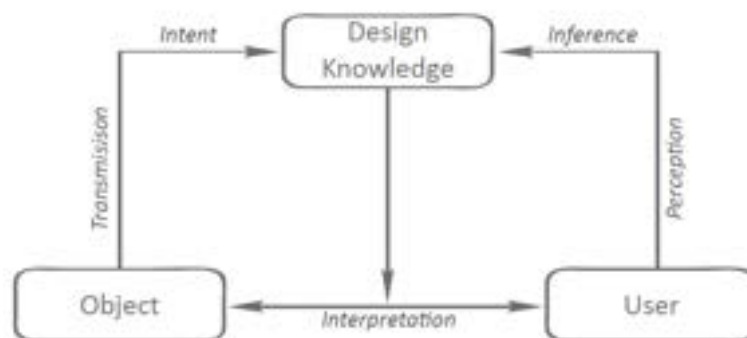


Figure 5.10 Level II Mediation

Design knowledge, within Level II, mediates the negotiation of interpretation through user-object interactions. This knowledge comprises the relationship between the object's intention and the user's inference of design intent. When following the framework of design communication defined by Crilly *et al.* (2004), the designer is the source of intent that is transmitted through the object. The communication of intent flows through the channel of design knowledge, which is influenced by the perceptual inferences made by the user. Design knowledge,

therefore, acts as a predicate to the user's interpretation of design intent.

5.4.3 Level III –User and Society

The social value of design objects is not merely the intended expression of self-identity to others but the imposition of identity onto oneself (Crilly *et al.*, 2004). While the previous section discussed semantic interpretation as relating to the object's indication of itself, the user's outward projection in relation to the object is defined by Crilly *et al.* as symbolic association. The concept of symbolically projecting self-identity through object selection is especially relevant within the fashion context. Users attain group membership by way of selecting fashion objects, affording them with social interactions through the surface of clothing (Barnard, 1996:32). Through the object, the user is symbolically associated with other users sharing common values and cultural understandings. Within the context of fashion, all communication is centered on the experiences of the lived body as the site for all symbolic representations. Fashion objects, or clothing, serve as dominant metaphors for shaping experiences of the body to immeasurable expressions and forms (Emberley, 1987). Fashion is, therefore, the experience of individual transformation that is narratively communicated through social interactions.

- iv. Are there any rules governing the negotiation of design knowledge as meaning creation?*

The previous section discussed the user's interpretation of design intent through interactions with the object. Utilizing the body, users translate object

interpretations into symbolic expressions of self-identity and the personalization of fashion objects signifies the repurposing of intention into interpretation. Interpretations correspond to symbolic meanings assigned to objects, which are personal and subjective. The embodied activity of dressing allows these meanings to be displayed, refashioning the user as a perceivable object, and signifies the final channel of communication between user and society. Visual representations bridge the gap between the concrete and abstract (Ewenstein & Whyte, 2009), and the fashioned body materializes the user's interpretation of design intent to be reinterpreted when confronted by other users.

McCracken's (1986) framework defines meanings as existing in a complex system, organized into three locations: (1) the culturally constituted world, (2) the consumer good, and (3) the individual consumer. The fashion system shifts meanings from the culturally constituted world to the object, while user interactions move meanings from the object to the user. Cultural principles guide user behaviors and interactions, thereby influencing and determining the user's process of meaning creation. The social process of human activity transfers and communicates relevant cultural meanings, which are substantiated through material goods. Therefore, meanings interpreted by a user are socially communicated through the user's existence in the socially constituted world.

Main Study IV identified the theme that design is the anticipation of transgressive knowledge. Nowotny (2006) states that knowledge and expertise are by nature transgressive, as they cannot be contained, and seep from science to society and through various institutions. The transgressive nature of knowledge is supported

by what Nowotny defends as socially robust knowledge. This type of knowledge relies on the critical abilities of individuals and extends transgressive knowledge into social integration, linking producers of knowledge to users, to develop and increase in value. The role of users is amplified in the form of reverse communication, accounting for human intervention as a means to reinstate the loyalty of users. This leads to Level III Mediation, which is the mediation of design knowledge in the negotiation between user and society. Design knowledge affords the user with the ability to form an interpretation while informing society with a context for negotiation, involving the shifting and co-creative efforts of communicating meanings between user and other users.

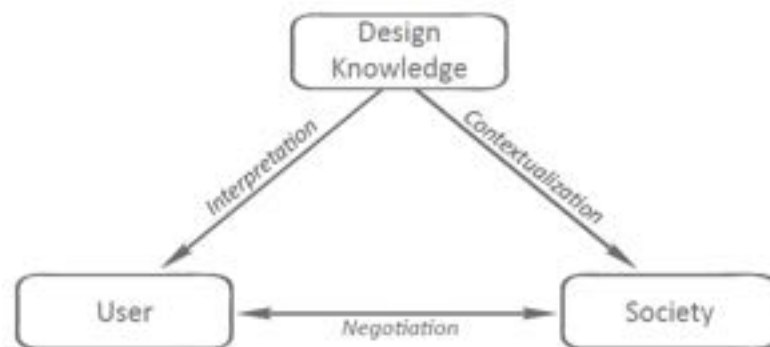


Figure 5.11 Level III Mediation

Design knowledge, in Level III Mediation, is the knowledge existing in the representational form of the fashion object that facilitates the exchange between user and society. Fashion objects serve as artifacts and practices that constitute a society's cultural orientation in the manner that beliefs, values, ideas, and experiences are expressed through clothing and dress (Barnard, 1996:39). Users who embody the experience of the fashion object are communicators of cultural phenomena, thereby producing and reproducing social values through the

expression of identity and group membership. The negotiation between the user and society is not merely restricted to the user's expression of a personal style, but involves the negotiation of cultural production through an exchange of symbolic meanings and associations.

Fashion objects signify a social order of operation, wherein the visual display of the dressed body act as references to identify common values and membership within groups. Simmel's (1957) theory bases all decisions in fashion selection as existing between the *differentiating* and *socializing* forces that delineate user membership against the larger social context. Level III Mediation builds upon this theory by emphasizing the role of design knowledge. If users use fashion objects as a measure of social acceptance, then design knowledge mediates the user's perception and interpreted value of the object. At a broader and more general level, society produces a system of signification that communicates meanings. The fashion object immediately bridges the gap between the user's independence and society's codependence through the visual negotiation of identity, common values, and meanings.

Main Study I discussed the practice of designer, Yilei Wu, whose local accessibility allowed her to involve users in a social practice for defining new cultural identities. The study identified the circularity between designer and user, where the user's interpretation and actual representation of the fashion object produces a feedback to the designer. This is reflected in the relationship between user and society, as the user's presentation of the dressed body serves the dual roles of expressing a personal identity while signifying membership in a larger

group context. The user's interpretation of the fashion object is evaluated by other users, transferring meanings in the reconfiguration of the object with other objects. Meanings are communicated through the user's positioning against society, signifying the user as a sender and the social group as receivers. The socializing forces of fashion, however, limit the extent to which users can deviate from dress norms adopted and valued by a society. Therefore, the expression of individuality is not a contained activity but part of a negotiation between user and society to produce cultural phenomena.

Meanings projected by the user onto other users contribute to the social production of fashion norms. Equally, society's existing systems of values and behaviors signify practices in everyday life which affect the experiences of users. Within a culturally constituted world, the user's expression of identity is evaluated under the preconditions of a given social and cultural context. The meanings interpreted and reconfigured by the user are reinterpreted when communicated onto the social world. Design knowledge contextualizes the social world by emphasizing how individuals relate and contribute to knowledge production. The mediation of design knowledge affects the relationship between the production of user interpretation and the social contextualization of related meanings.

5.5 Framework of Knowledge

The main objective of this thesis investigation was set to define the mediating effects of design knowledge against the Chinese cultural context. Knowledge has been defined, categorized, and discussed across different perspectives throughout

the Literature Review, Main Study, and Experimental Study. Themes have been identified in regards to knowledge production, application, and outcomes. Table 5.1 provides a summary of knowledge identified and discussed throughout this thesis.

Summary of Knowledge	
Literature Review	
Design Knowledge	Knowledge of people, processes, and products Concerns the development of perception based on experience
User Knowledge	Knowledge of how people interact with design objects Concerns specific social and cultural dimensions
Viscous Knowledge	Knowledge that is stable and fixed to meanings or intentions Concerns transferrable knowledge
Transgressive Knowledge	Knowledge that transcends intended modes of operation to regenerate and effect change Concerns knowledge that is fluid
Main Study	
Embedded Knowledge	Knowledge transmitted from the designer to the object Concerns knowledge of designers, design processes, and object semantics
Constructed Knowledge	Knowledge extracted from the object to the user in a new representational form Concerns inferred knowledge
Co—Created Knowledge	Knowledge expressed and communicated from user to user Concerns reinterpretations of meanings
Experimental Study	
Cultural Knowledge	Knowledge that informs and shapes behavior Concerns a society's 'way of life'
Propositional Knowledge	Knowledge that is cultivated through modifications Concerns conceptual knowledge and tacit 'know how'
Procedural Knowledge	Knowledge through doing and making Concerns practical skills and expertise
Experiential Knowledge	Knowledge of 'reflecting on' and 'anticipating for' future user-object interactions Concerns the aesthetic experiences of users

Table 5.1 Summary of Knowledge

Design knowledge, as discussed in the Literature Review, can be found as residing in people, processes, and products. This knowledge relies on experiences, particularly from the perspectives of designers who organize data and information to guide the development of conceptualizations for the social world. Design knowledge formulates the synthesis of ideas into a conceptual process, generating a finished design which translates knowledge through its states of existence in terms of physicality, tangibility, function, and aesthetics.

User knowledge is defined as an understanding of how people engage with and interact with design objects. This knowledge concerns the specific sociocultural dimensions of the chosen group of users, as culture determines user perceptions and behaviors toward design. Designers propose the possibility of altering future situations for the external world, requiring knowledge regarding the users for whom the design propositions are designed (Simon, 1996:157). Simon describes a common core of knowledge which can be shared by all members, leading to an understanding of human activities in relation to the inner and outer environments defining the space of existence.

Viscous knowledge is knowledge that manifests into the symbolic production of meanings. The symbolic levels of design knowledge become viscous when attached to the conceptual development of design intent. This knowledge, while made transferrable through the object, dilutes and becomes increasingly fluid when shifted from the interaction between designer-object to user-object. The user's interpretation of the object's inferred meaning transforms viscous knowledge into transgressive knowledge.

Transgressive knowledge shifts the viscous forms of design knowledge into socially robust levels, allowing knowledge to regenerate and effect change. The nature of meanings involves individual ways of linking sensory experiences to emotional responses. Users are social beings, implicating all actions as being socially constructed and communicated. Therefore, the user's interactions with design objects immediately contribute to the potential for knowledge to become transgressive.

Embedded knowledge is knowledge that exists in the finished form of the design object. This knowledge communicates design knowledge through its cognizable features, leaving clues for users to infer its intended levels of meaning. The design process shifts the tacit components of design knowledge into the materialization of the finished object. Krippendorff (1990) defines product semantics as the interface that provides cognitive interactions leading to the understanding, meaningfulness, and transparency of objects. Knowledge embedded into the object indicates knowledge of the designer, the design process, and semantic relationships.

Constructed knowledge occurs within the level of user-object interaction and is the ability of users to infer the intentional levels of design knowledge as part of the process of forming interpretations. The fashion system facilitates constructed knowledge through the user's rearrangement of objects. Dressing requires users to take objects and recontextualize them against other objects to create a final aesthetic configuration, illustrating the method by which users shift knowledge from intended to inferred levels of meaning when assigning a personal

interpretation.

Co-Created knowledge relies on social interactions to express and communicate knowledge across users. The placement of fashion objects on the surface of the body presents the user to be visually read. Users, as social beings, engage in activities that allow their interpreted configurations of different objects to circulate. Knowledge, therefore, becomes fluid and transgressive when it is met by multiple perceptions. The meanings assigned by the user, rearranged onto the body, affect and influence other users into the creation of social and cultural relevance. In this manner, knowledge relies on the co-creative effort of groups of users to reinterpret meanings and embed them as part of local culture.

Cultural knowledge comprises past experiences which inform a culture's traditions and systems of thinking. This knowledge is inherited as part of one's culture but undergoes a reevaluation when affected by external forces of change. Designers rely on cultural knowledge to contextualize their conceptual processes and anticipate how objects will assimilate into a particular social or cultural situation.

Propositional knowledge is defined as the tacit components that facilitate the designer's form of inquiry during the design stage. The conceptual development of the design process is inquisitional, as it involves the testing and evaluation of potential design solutions. Therefore, this knowledge is propositional in the manner that it is continually modified and refined until applied in the final design.

Procedural knowledge is linked to the process of design activities, relying on the

ways of design knowing through doing and making. Designing has been discussed throughout this thesis as allowing unexpected moments of creativity or discovery. The reflective practice of designers, as defined by Schon (1983), involves framing activities as a vehicle for exploration. Designers enter into a conversational process that probes the design context, seeking out patterns of logic to reach feasible design solutions. This knowledge requires specific skills and leads to expertise.

Experiential Knowledge is developed from the experiences that develop the perceptual abilities of individuals to respond, reframe, and anticipate future situations. This knowledge concerns the experiences of both designers and users, serving as the fundamental capacity for knowing. The discussion of experiential knowledge in this research focuses on the interaction between user and object. User experience involves the individual's ability to gain knowledge for making judgments on assigning meanings to appreciate and interpret information (Ferne, *et al.*, 2003). This knowledge concerns the aesthetic experiences of users, increasing the value of knowledge through the expression and communication of an aesthetic identity.

5.5.1 Model of Design Knowledge

The Literature Review introduced the theoretical perspectives of knowledge relating to the role of human experience and the development of perception. Following the Cross' (2006) domains of design knowledge, the Main Study produced a Conceptual Framework leading to the transactional system of meanings. Design knowledge was defined through the fashion object as assuming

the sensorial, semiotic, and communicative functions of meanings. The assumptions inferred by the Conceptual Framework were further elaborated with an Experimental Study of a case-study involving issues of a social and cultural nature. Through the researcher's own involvement as part of the phenomenological design approach, new insights of knowledge were discovered relating to the experiential and emotional quality of designing with cultural artifacts. The Experimental Study identified new categories of knowledge throughout the process of designing, which were related to the three levels of design knowledge mediation.

Design knowledge is broadly defined as existing within the domains of people, processes, and products (Cross, 2000), yet other forms of knowing related to these domains expands the classes of knowledge into different levels and categories. The Literature Review, Main Study, and Experimental Study have identified knowledge based on how they affect people, processes, and products. Simon (1996:154-155) states that the step towards understanding any set of phenomena is to learn and understand what exists in the chosen focus of study by developing a taxonomy. The properties defining the representations of knowledge are organized through a means of classification, marking the first step towards theory construction and forming the logic of design. Designing requires judgment when evaluating and adapting the sequence of actions for conditioning possible worlds. This requires a classification of design knowledge to identify the levels of interaction, types of knowledge produced, the processes, purposes, modes, and domains.

This research has focused on the object's multiple roles of transferring knowledge from intention to inference to interpretation. Each level of interaction allows knowledge to transform across different relationships between designer and object (intention), user and object (inference), and user and society (interpretation). The intentions of the designer are transferred through the object, allowing the user to infer its meaning into an interpretation. As social beings, users present the interpretation to be received by society through the dressed body. Table 5.2 presents a model of design knowledge that consolidates the themes discussed throughout this thesis investigation.

Design Knowledge Classification			
Level of Interaction	Designer-Object	User-Object	User-Society
Types of Knowledge	Embedded Meanings	Constructed Meanings	Co-Created Meanings
Process	Transforms through the designer's existing stock of knowledge and into the design object	Transforms through affordances embedded within the cognizable attributes of the finished object	Transforms through the embodied presentation of the dressed body
Purpose	Conceptualize, predict, and change future situations	Personalize and reassign emotional significance to symbolic meanings	Critically evaluate to adapt into culturally significant meanings
Mode	Propositional	Experiential	Communicative
Domains	Epistemology Praxiology Phenomenology	Aesthetic Experience Perception Semiotics	Way of Life
Representation	Intention	Inference	Interpretation

Table 5.2 Design Knowledge Classification

The representation of design knowledge is transferred through intention, inference, and interpretation. Intention concerns the transmission of knowledge that is embedded through the design process in the interaction between designer and object. It is formed as a result of the designer's perceptive ability to analyze current situations to propose potential designs for changing future situations. The user-object relationship concerns the object's representation of design intent, allowing the user to draw inferences between the original intention and the constructed interpretation. This knowledge relies on the aesthetic experiences of users to identify the relational meanings associated with the object and assign personal interpretations through the reconfiguration of the body. The body's communication of the aesthetic experience shifts knowledge into a socio-critical mode, concerning the reinterpretation of co-created meanings. Users are, by nature, social beings and therefore all individual activities constitute a form of social behavior. Fashion objects allow meanings to shift from internal to external expressions of user identity, facilitating a mode of communication. The social context of interaction between user and society produces the co-creation of cultural meanings, allowing knowledge to embed itself as part of a society's culture.

The three levels of interaction constitute knowledge that is propositional, experiential, and communicative. Designers rely on propositional knowledge to produce design objects, stemming from an existing stock of knowledge which is filtered and refined through individual experience and perception. This knowledge is transferred into the object and represents design intent in the form of embedded meanings. The experiential knowledge of users is gained through interactions

with design objects and relies on the user's ability to frame the activity of perceiving, extracting, and interpreting the object. Objects operate symbolically through semiotic functions to generate meanings, producing constructed meanings. The user's positioning against the social world involves communicative knowledge, activating the transformative and generative functions of knowledge. Knowledge that is communicated from one user to another becomes transgressive when undergoing critical evaluations to establish meanings that are significant and relevant to the context of culture. The interaction between user and society allows meanings to exchange, circulate, and transform, leading to co-created meanings.

The purpose of the Design Knowledge Classification is to outline the boundaries defining the types of knowledge existing within the three levels of interaction. Each level establishes and produces meanings which are represented by intention, inference, and interpretation. The classification provides a guideline for how the various levels of interaction capture, utilize, exhibit, and reconfigure knowledge in the expression of symbolic meanings.

5.5.2 Knowledge Framework

In March 2011, a group of 17 design anthropologists and scholars of indigenous knowledge took part in dialogues to discuss alternative paradigms for cultures-based innovation. The conference discussed ways of transferring cultural systems of values and practices of knowledge from local to community levels. This generated knowledge and collaborative projects which were outlined in the

“Bellagio Mandala”¹⁶. The main objective of the conference was to explore support systems for innovations based on tangible and intangible cultural heritage to benefit indigenous communities. Discussions and insights arising from the conference were consolidated into the principles outlined by the Bellagio Mandala. The Mandala presents a holistic approach to ways in which cultures-based innovations transform the futures of local communities, with each of the five layers representing a different stage of reflection concerning the group’s discussions. With “people” at its core, the layers include knowledge and practices used, approaches for participation, domains of impact, and intentions. The purpose of the Bellagio Mandala is not to be tested or applied, but is a self-reflection tool for negotiating the outlined objectives.

The previous sections of this chapter discussed the meaning-making function of design knowledge and explored the application of procedural knowledge through an Experimental Study, which identified three levels of design knowledge mediation between (1) designer and object, (2) user and object, and (3) user and society. These levels were instrumental in defining a classification of design knowledge, which organizes knowledge into the three representational roles of intention, inference, and interpretation.

The framework proposed by the Bellagio Mandala has been adapted and modified into a Knowledge Framework (Figure 5.12) to synthesize the themes discussed throughout this research investigation. Three systems were discussed in the Literature Review as undergoing a process of change – the cultural, design, and

¹⁶ <http://www.cbinnovation.net/mission.html>

fashion systems. Each of the systems encases the dialectic tensions imposed by the conflict between tradition and modernity (culture), designer and social world (design), and user and society (fashion), influencing the reevaluation of cultural values, design artifacts, and fashion objects. This research proposes that design knowledge reconciles the tensions presented in these systems by mediating the various levels of meaning creation.

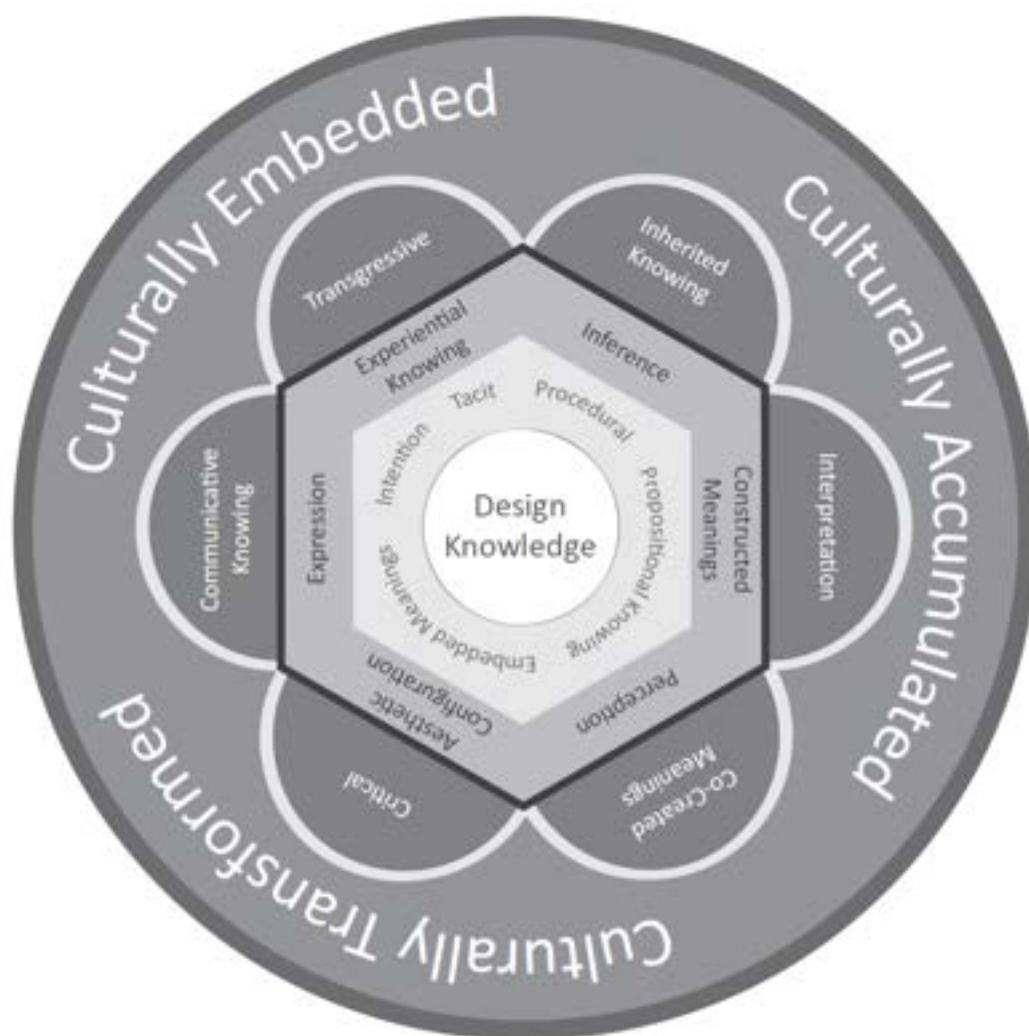


Figure 5.12 Knowledge Framework

The themes, sub-themes, conceptualizations, and identification of design knowledge mediation are organized into a Knowledge Framework in Figure 5.12. This framework places knowledge at the core of all activities and each level represents the characteristics of knowledge that flow through each stage of interaction. The Knowledge Framework comprises five levels which are identified as (1) design knowledge, (2) design system, (3) fashion system, (4) cultural system, and (5) meaning system.

Level I of the Knowledge Framework is the central focus on design knowledge. This thesis investigates the relational effects of design knowledge mediation through the levels of designer and object, user and object, and user and society interactions. Design knowledge is, therefore, explored as the fundamental knowledge that is central to the meaning-making mechanism of the design, fashion, and cultural systems.

Level II of this framework concerns the design system, which has been defined and discussed as the struggle between the designer's influences against the norms exhibited by the social world. This level comprises knowledge that is largely tacit, in design skills and activities, which shift into the procedural domain of the design process. According to Narvaez (2000), designers require the projective ability of foresight to anticipate the potential impact of their activities on future situations. This leads to propositional ways of knowing which materialize design intentions and embedded meanings in the finished form of the design object.

Level III involves the fashion system, where the user's sense of freedom is confronted and challenged by pressures to conform to the standards of society.

Users have the perceptive ability to infer the intentions suggested by the design object. This affords them with experiential ways of knowing, through engaging and interacting with the object by means of an aesthetic experience to express a fashion identity. The resulting product of this level is a constructed meaning that represents the user's reconfiguration of the object's intention through an inferred interpretation. Level III shifts the focus away from the designer and into the actions and decisions of the user.

Level IV represents the cultural system, which involves the interaction between user and society. The struggle between traditional and modern ways of thinking is reconciled through the exchange between users, influencing and impacting the larger sociocultural context. This level begins with inherited ways of knowing, as the stock of a society's shared cultural knowledge. The nature of human activities within a socially constituted world leads to social interactions, triggering the transfer of knowledge by means of communicating through the user as a dressed body. Communication, in the visual arrangement of objects, allows the interpretive levels of knowledge to be negotiated and established through co-creative meanings. Knowledge, when critically evaluated against a social setting and recontextualized, becomes transgressive. Furthermore, the cultural context establishes shared knowledge through an exchange between the designer's intended meanings and the user's inferred interpretations. The user's ability to infer and recognize the intentional levels of design objects allows knowledge to become explicit in the manner of communication, leading towards common understandings of what objects represent within a given cultural system.

The final level, Level V, involves the system of meanings. This research focuses solely on the Chinese cultural context but all designs are cultural artifacts, as their meanings are determined by the cultures that produce and consume them.

Krippendorff (1990) defends the importance of designing for cultural meanings:

Some cultural anthropologists have long seen the artifacts we create as the medium through which cultural identities are preserved and communicated to subsequent generations. Others have gone so far as to equate culture with the artifacts a society uses...to identify the cognitive processes that enable designers to create things that are meaningful to others, things that people can use, talk about and assemble into larger complexes, things that enable design practice to be distributed and become a part of everyday life...things that center individuals in an individually meaningful but constantly evolving world.

Knowledge within this level exists independently from the designer and object, as it shifts into the social domain. Krippendorff states that the cognitive processes of design transfer knowledge into the creation of meaningfulness, allowing symbolic meanings to circulate as part of cultural production. The system of meanings, therefore, relies on the ability of design knowledge to be culturally embedded, accumulated, and transformed.

5.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter began with a discussion of the flow of meanings, reiterating the functional roles of the designer, user, and fashion object. In order to substantiate the transference of meanings from designer to object to user, an Experimental Study was developed to explore the epistemology of design knowledge through a case-study involving the design process. The Experimental Study of the Kesi

case-study utilized a phenomenological approach situated around the identification of the lived experience, producing a context for evaluating and appropriating the levels of design knowledge mediation. Three levels of mediation were identified as existing between (1) designer and user, (2) user and object, and (3) user and society. The discussions on design knowledge mediation addressed the questions arising from the Conceptual Framework's transactional system of meanings.

Chapter 5 concluded with a summary of knowledge compiling the varying definitions of design-related knowledge from the Literature Review, Main Study, and Experimental Study. A model of design knowledge was produced to categorically represent how the different levels of interaction transfer knowledge into the production of meanings. The final section of this chapter presents a consolidated knowledge framework that comprises culture, design process, object intention, user interpretation, and the mediating roles of design knowledge.

Chapter VI. Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This research investigates the mediating role of design knowledge by evaluating the extent to which social and cultural changes have affected the cultural values of Chinese designers and users. Following a comprehensive Literature Review of themes relating to the main subject at hand, a series of two Pilot Studies and Main Study were developed into a Conceptual Framework of meaning creation. The framework was further explored through an experimental design study involving the researcher, supporting the propositions presented by the Conceptual Framework. Chapter 5 concluded with an analysis and discussion of the levels of design knowledge which mediate knowledge between designer and object, user and object, and user and society.

This chapter discusses the evaluation of research objectives, the contributions and implications arising from this study, and research limitations. Chapter 6 concludes with future directions for research relating to the subjects, themes, and findings throughout this thesis investigation. This thesis concludes with future approaches for fashion research and potential methods based on the framework of knowledge developed throughout the course of this research.

6.2 Summary of Research

This research began with an interest to identify how design knowledge relates to the changing cultural values and perceptions of Post-80s & 90s Chinese. Reasons

for focusing on the cultural changes affecting Post-80s & 90s female users are justified by the lack of literature supporting the redefinition of Chinese cultural values in relation to the role of design knowledge. Although marketing surveys and tests have measured and identified the consumption behaviors of this generation, they disregard the value of gaining qualitative insights into how individual experiences and perceptions affect the user-object relationship. Furthermore, this research examines the role of design knowledge mediation against the backdrop of cultural change to define knowledge as the production and flow of meanings.

The concept of design knowledge mediation was inspired by how designers might communicate knowledge and to what extent knowledge transforms through increased interactions. While design knowledge has been defined and discussed in design literature, the concepts are not immediately applicable and relevant to fashion-related design research. Furthermore, existing fashion research lacks a sound knowledge framework integrating theories of culture, sociology, philosophy, and design. This research critically examines the co-existence of designers and users against a common cultural context, identifying the ways in which design knowledge flows from intention through inference to interpretation.

6.2.1 Review of Research Statement and Objectives

The main research statement of this thesis investigation was stated in Chapter 1 as:

In what ways does design knowledge mediate the relationships between designer and object, between user and object, and between groups of users?

The research began with two sets of objectives, with the first addressing the cultural development of individuals and the second centered on the role of design knowledge mediation. Chapter 2 provided a Literature Review organized into three sections discussing the cultural, design, and fashion systems. Relevant themes and discussions were reorganized into the reevaluation of variables within the systems of change.

This research defines design knowledge as the meanings created, intended, inferred, and interpreted through interactions involving the fashion object. Upon a review of literature discussing the role of fashion objects as enabling modes of communication, the concepts were related to the chosen cultural context of this investigation and developed into a series of Pilot Studies. The first set of research questions, concerning the effects of cultural change on Post-80s & 90s females, was addressed through Pilot Interviews I and II.

1.1 To what extent have sociocultural changes influenced the development of individual perception and self-identity among Post-80s & 90s Chinese?

The Literature Review provided a comprehensive overview of the concepts and themes relating to social development and cultural change. Concepts reviewed included existing literature on Post-80s & 90s Chinese, the dimensions and abstractions of cultural values, and the identification of the main variables affected by cultural change. It was determined that literature relating to the young generation of Chinese was fragmented and inconclusive, particularly in consideration of how knowledge of design and fashion are produced, disseminated, circulated, and shared against the cultural backdrop of change. This

research was inspired by questions of how individual perception affects user-object interactions. The main cultural variables linking perception to self-identity were defined as “face”, aesthetics and taste, and individuality.

1.2 How do changes in perception relate to the traditional Chinese concept of “face”?

Literature relating to external changes affecting the cultural values of Post-80s & 90s Chinese provided the basis for Pilot Interview I, which included a study of 11 participants. The findings revealed that local users were well aware of the changes affecting their generation and how they are perceived by older generations of Mainland Chinese. Their responses substantiated the assumptions and claims made in the Literature Review and the cultural role of “face” was identified as a key determinant of user perception. Pilot Interview II further explored the “face” concept, defining it as a key cultural concept that influences personal ways of thinking and directs social behaviors. The dominant function of “face”, as the external display of self, displaces the role of individual perception. Users were found to emphasize efforts to maintain “good face” and group inclusion over exercising the expression of actions correlating to perception. Therefore, changes affecting the development of perception are interjected and influenced by the cultural value of “face”.

1.3 Does the new definition of “face” disrupt or alter existing perceptions toward aesthetics and taste?

Pilot Interview II comprised an in-depth study of 12 participants who shared personal insights on the role of “face” with examples of how it relates to fashion

aesthetics and taste. The literature review provided a sound understanding of aesthetic development as corresponding to individual experience and filtered through perception. However, in the context of Chinese culture, “face” overrides the role of perception and the display of aesthetics and taste is linked to socially accepted rules within the fashion system.

2.1 What measures constitute design knowledge within the fashion context and to what extent does it mediate the relationship between designer and object?

The literature review presented a discussion of design knowledge as defined by Cross (2000) within the domains of epistemology, praxiology, and phenomenology. Fashion knowledge was discussed as being spatially fluid in its dissemination and viscous when establishing meanings (Weller, 2007). The Pilot Studies attempted to review design knowledge at the user level but it was determined that it should be explored from the perspectives of designers and design activities. Four case-studies of local designers were included as part of the Main Study to understand how designers view the current phenomenon of Chinese fashion, resulting in the identification of themes related to the role of designers. The themes gave rise to the conclusion that design knowledge is transferred in design intent, as the extension of design meanings. A flow of meanings mapped the designer as creator, user as interpreter, user as communicator, and the fashion object as a semiotic tool. Focusing on the epistemology of knowledge, an Experimental Study was developed through which the process of design was documented utilizing a phenomenological approach to understand lived experiences. The Experimental Study aided in further refining

the role of design knowledge into three levels of mediation. Level I Mediation discusses the relationship between designer and object as the negotiation of the designer's projected intention, mediated by knowledge arising from experiences of design.

2.2 How does design knowledge, transferred through the object, mediate the relationship between user and object?

The Conceptual Framework introduced in Chapter 4 included a transactional system of meanings in the interactions between designer, object, and user. It was proposed that the transmission of design knowledge creates embedded meanings, which correlate to Level I Mediation between designer and object. The representation of design knowledge leads to constructed meanings, between the user and object, which translates into Level II Mediation. This level of design knowledge mediation introduces the relationship between the user and object as the negotiation between design intent and user interpretation. Design knowledge mediates the relationship between user and object through its representational form, comprising the object's transmission of design intent and user's perceived inference. The object produces affects that elicit the emotional responses of users to form judgments. Interactions between the user and object increase the user's access to design knowledge, allowing an inferred understanding to reach a final interpretation. Design knowledge, therefore, exists as the representation of the object's intention and the user's inference of design intent.

2.3 How does design knowledge, as the creation of meanings, mediate the relationship between user and groups of users?

The Conceptual Framework's transactional system defines the final stage of meaning creation as the reinterpretation of design knowledge into co-created meanings. This is reflected in Level III Mediation, which involves the interaction between user and society. Fashion objects connect users with society through symbolic associations, signifying commonalities in shared values and cultural understandings. The metaphors represented by fashion objects shape individual experiences into expressive forms, which are communicated through social interactions. Knowledge is transgressive and increases its robustness and value when socially integrated through the linking of its producers to users. Level III Mediation affords users with the ability to form interpretations while informing society with a knowledge context of relevant meanings. Design knowledge within this level of interaction assumes a facilitative mediation by bridging the gap between the user's sense of individuality and social standards of conformity. The user's interpretation of a fashion identity contributes to the social production of fashion norms while simultaneously being influenced by the existing systems of values and behaviors. Design knowledge mediates the production of user interpretation and the contextualization of social conditions within which individuals relate and contribute to knowledge production.

6.2.2 Framework of Design Knowledge

This research has identified, extracted, defined, and discussed knowledge across various perspectives. The Conceptual Framework in Chapter 4 defined design knowledge as the creation of meanings within a transactional system involving the designer, object, and user. Design knowledge was further analyzed as the flow

of meanings and explored through the Experimental Study, identifying three levels of design knowledge mediation. Chapter 5 introduced a framework of design knowledge addressing the interrelatedness of design-object, user-object, and user-society relations against the larger cultural context.

This research proposes a framework defining the transference of design knowledge as design intent, user interpretation, and social integration. The chosen cultural phenomenon of Post-80s & 90s Chinese served as a contextual backdrop for exploring and defining the mediating role of design knowledge. Each level of design knowledge mediation was informed by insights and evidence gathered from the Pilot Studies, Main Study, and Experimental Study. The framework provides an overview of design knowledge that is structured around the cultural, design, and fashion systems.

Applying this framework allows the researcher a perspective for viewing and mapping fashion phenomena as the transference of design knowledge by way of meaning construction. The framework invites designers to expand on the notion of projective ability, anticipating future situations in which the designed artifact or fashion object reinvents itself into related meanings as part of its regeneration.

6.2.3 Evaluation

Finlay (2003) defends the role of reflexivity in the positioning of the self (*researcher*) in phenomenological qualitative research. This requires a research stance that moves from an introspective towards a critical self-reflective methodology as a valid form of evaluation. The reflexive evaluation of qualitative

research acknowledges the researcher's participatory role in constructing, selecting, and interpreting data as a co-constituted practice that joins the participants, the researcher, and their incumbent relationship (Finlay, 2003).

This investigation involved the researcher's interpretation of data to produce the initial Conceptual Framework and the subsequent framework of knowledge. Two Pilot Interview studies and the Main Study of four fashion designers validated the propositions on cultural change and design knowledge, producing a Conceptual Framework of the co-existence of designers and users within a transactional system of meanings. Meanings are negotiated within social contexts, thereby reinstating the researcher's presence in sorting, constructing, and transforming the collected data into interpretations. Subjectivity has become an opportunity for exploration within qualitative research, expanding on the dynamics of the researcher-researched relationship (Finlay, 2003). The researcher's interpretation of the Pilot Studies and Main Study resulted in the Conceptual Framework reviewing the effects of cultural change on the function of meaning-making. Supported by interviews and case-studies leading to the construction of conceptual models, the data collected and documented were compared against the theories and concepts discussed in the Literature Review.

The Conceptual Framework, while defining the role of design knowledge as mediating the negotiation of meanings, gave rise to epistemological questions of how experiences of design lead to the identification and creation of knowledge. This was supported by and further explored through an Experimental Study, which allowed the researcher to participate in the experience of designing to

access and extract knowledge of the chosen cultural phenomenon of study. The researcher's involvement in this process was intentional, allowing for further interpretations to be made regarding the current situation of Chinese cultural industries. Interacting with the Kesi materials and documenting the stages of the design process allowed the researcher to find a balance between the themes identified in the Pilot and Main Studies. The Pilot Interviews revealed that the cultural emphasis on the "face" concept filters individual expressions of aesthetics and taste, while the Main Study identified themes of current design practices addressing the reeducation of Chinese aesthetics and experience of fashion. Through direct involvement in the experience of designing, the Experimental Study allowed the researcher a perspective for identifying how design knowledge mediates the levels of meaning creation from design intent to user interpretation and socially integrated fashion norms.

The examination of the Knowledge Framework is not based on testable variables or hypotheses, but supported by the steps involved in each stage of the research investigation. Reflexivity is incorporated into the methodology as a means to reconcile the researcher's own socially oriented beliefs, assumptions, and preconceptions of Chinese culture. Evaluative methods, through reflections, are instinctively constructed throughout each progression of research development, thereby supporting and articulating design knowledge as the flow and mediation of symbolic meanings.

6.3 Theoretical Contributions

The concepts and findings arising from this thesis investigation are relevant to

design research, research methodology, and design practices in the fields of fashion design and theory. This research conceptualizes design knowledge as mediating the relationships between designer and object, user and object, and user and society. Existing literature on design knowledge has defined knowledge in terms of knowledge sources, levels of knowledge operation, and knowledge outcomes. This thesis introduces a holistic overview of design knowledge specific to the domain of Chinese fashion and culture in the Conceptual Framework of Chapter 4. The final framework of knowledge comprises levels of knowledge transference, through the creation of meanings, which flow from designers to users to society. Implications of the Knowledge Framework in Chapter 5 shift the focus of design from an emphasis on user interactions towards the regeneration of culturally relevant meanings.

This thesis contributes to Chinese design research through a unique perspective and approach to understanding cultural change by integrating phenomenological research methods for accessing cultural knowledge and formulating a model of knowledge addressing the interrelatedness of the design, fashion, and cultural systems. Although the study of design knowledge against the cultural backdrop of young Chinese has not previously been attempted, the creative industries of Mainland China are actively supported by government and educational interests to promote design culture and knowledge. Examples of recent initiatives include the Re-design Design Education and Philosophic Concepts Conference¹⁷ and the

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<http://www.design-thinking.com/re-design-design-educationphilosophic-concepts-conference-jiangnan-university-school-of-design-wuxi-china-2014/>

DESIS China Spring Festival¹⁸ held at Jiangnan University's School of Design in May 2014. The findings arising from this thesis investigation establishes a framework of design knowledge specific to Chinese culture, contributing to the growing literature on Chinese design and research. It expands on fashion-related studies with an emphasis on redefining the social roles and functions of the individualized body, providing a framework for basing future research investigations on Chinese fashion and design knowledge.

Buckley & Clark (2012) suggest a return to the everydayness of fashion by focusing on research that interprets the intimate. This notion is supported by the Conceptual Framework which provides design researchers with an approach for viewing the Chinese cultural context in the relationship between designers and users as a transactional system of meanings. Qualitative data collected from the Pilot and Main Studies produced themes around which design practice and user experience were developed to include the need for reeducating Chinese aesthetics and cultivating a fashion identity as part of the "face" concept. The Knowledge Framework consolidates the themes identified, analyzed, and discussed throughout this thesis. It serves as a reflective tool for researchers supporting the impact of culture on the creation and flow of design knowledge in the mediation of established symbolic meanings. Each layer presents a positioning, or stance, for researchers to further anticipate and predict future actions for conducting knowledge-based fashion research.

¹⁸ <http://www.desis-network.org/content/desis-china-spring-festival-2014>

6.4 Practical Implications

Chapter 4 introduced four designers as part of the Main Study which concluded with the identification of themes extracted from their current practices. The main contribution of this thesis has produced a framework for fashion research centered on the mediating role of design knowledge across three levels. This framework integrates culture, specifically Chinese culture, as a main influence on the creation, transmission, interpretation, and reinterpretation of meanings. It is proposed that the framework provides a comprehensive guideline and reference for fashion designers, presenting a holistic understanding of how knowledge flows from designer to user in the culturally constituted world.

The implications of the Conceptual Framework for Mainland designers is to provide a specific perspective for designing for the Chinese fashion market, taking into account the themes discussed on the role of designers as leaders in changing local understandings of taste and aesthetics. Furthermore, it is suggestive of local designers to adopt a collaborative attitude for reimagining Chinese fashion both locally and internationally. The Main Study revealed a common theme among the four designers of reintroducing Chinese traditional design elements into contemporary fashion objects. This challenges the current trend of Post-80s & 90s preferences for foreign brands, revealing the potential opportunities for redirecting fashion users toward local designers and brands to express self-identity, cultivate personal meanings by way of aesthetic experiences, and apply meanings to fulfill the social function of “face”.

The Knowledge Framework articulates itself as a reflective tool for practicing

designers to review the role of knowledge against the cultural, design, and fashion systems. It is indicative of the need for designers to adopt peripheral understandings of design affects and effects, impacting the cultural world within which design activities are framed. The conceptualization of design knowledge, as mediating the creation and regeneration of meanings, challenges designers with enhancing awareness for the symbolic associations of fashion objects.

6.5 Delimitations of Investigation

This section outlines the arbitrary boundaries within which this thesis is investigated. First, this thesis explores the social transformation of Mainland China within the context of external changes affecting the cultural values of Post-80s & 90s Chinese. These findings are based on existing theoretical perspectives and ethnographic observational studies. The abstractions of culture, therefore, may not be transferable to all Post-80s & 90s Chinese. Although the student body representation of Chinese universities is diverse, it does not serve as a substitute for the entire generation of young adult Chinese.

Second, this study focuses on the design knowledge of local users and designers. It does not test the validity and scope of design knowledge at an international or global level. The focus of research was concentrated in one region and, therefore, is not representative of the entire culture. Therefore, generalizations should be carefully applied when comparing the findings to other contexts involving young Chinese users and designers.

Third, the contextual background of this study relies on the current impact of

social transformation and external elements of change. Therefore, validity of findings and results are fixed to the timeframe of the research. The themes identified from the Main Study are sensitive to the current situation of Chinese fashion and the implications arising from the Conceptual Framework are fixed to data collected from the Pilot and Main Studies.

This research was conducted within the context of design practice and research, leading to the conceptualization of two frameworks for knowledge-based fashion research. The cultural context of this study examined a small sampling of university-age students and any implications of changing cultural values were contained at the user level. Designers were included as part of the Main Study to introduce how social transformation has affected the local fashion industry and identify the emergent themes of current Chinese fashion. The sampling of user and designer interviews was relatively small, therefore producing a limited variation of responses and themes. However, the objective of this thesis investigation was not to define the changes affecting local culture but to identify the role of design knowledge mediation through the consolidation of the Literature Review, Pilot Studies, Main Study, and Experimental Study.

6.6 Future Directions for Research

This thesis explores the designer's role in affecting and effecting aesthetic influences through the diffusion of knowledge. Design knowledge is defined as mediating the negotiation of design intent (knowledge of designers), design inference (knowledge of objects), and design interpretation (knowledge of users). This study introduces a Knowledge Framework which can be further developed

and tested against different contexts of design phenomena, leading to the identification of relevant themes contributing to the study of small-scale and culture-specific fashion research.

The user is discussed as an aesthetic subject, one who extracts design knowledge through interactions involving the fashion object, and defined as an active player in the negotiation of meanings. Future studies may include a focus on the study of bodily representations of individuals through an examination involving the social functions of fashion phenomena. The use of fashion artifacts to create and maintain a sense of identity is linked to the fulfillment of social needs and values, highlighting the development of self-perception as occurring as an instance of the everyday lived experience.

Research towards the socio-critical study of fashion produces knowledge of how fashion movements utilize the design object to evoke social transformations. This involves various sociological positions and theories relating to the decoration, presentation, and identity formation of the individualized body. It also proposes to reconstruct a model of the fashion system, shifting from an agent-based diffusion of knowledge to an examination of the everyday lived experience. The results of this future research direction contribute to existing knowledge literature and studies involving the interdisciplinary humanities.

The idiographic nature of cultivating a fashion identity provides the space of inquiry into the discovery of meanings in everyday life, suggesting that fashion objects transcend their ornamental functions by alluding to social integration, relation, and meaning. How individuals communicate through bodily

representations requires a deeper examination of the cognitive modeling of internal perceptions into outward expressions of the self. Approaches for developing this future research may include ethnographic studies, behavioral observations and experiments, and theoretical analyses and reasoning. The contribution of future research in the social phenomenon of fashion defines: (1) the manifestations of everyday lived experiences and (2) the role of embodied fashion as producing social representations of identity to create codes of communication and systems of meaning.

6.7 Chapter Summary

This closing chapter has addressed the main research questions and objectives identified in Chapter 1. The main findings of this thesis investigation are summarized in the development of themes and concepts through each stage of research. All themes explored, evaluated, and discussed have contributed to the two frameworks of this investigation. The concept of reflexivity in qualitative studies is discussed to support the evaluation method for the themes, conceptualizations, and frameworks arising from this research. This chapter outlines potential contributions to the theoretical knowledge of design research and the implications for practicing designers. Limitations arising from this thesis are identified to define the scope and boundaries outlining the conception, design, and development of this research investigation. The final section of this chapter proposes future directions for fashion research based on the findings and frameworks introduced and discussed throughout this thesis.

Appendices

Appendix A. List of Interview Questions for Pilot Interview (I)

Part I. Interview Questions

Age of Interviewee: _____

University: _____

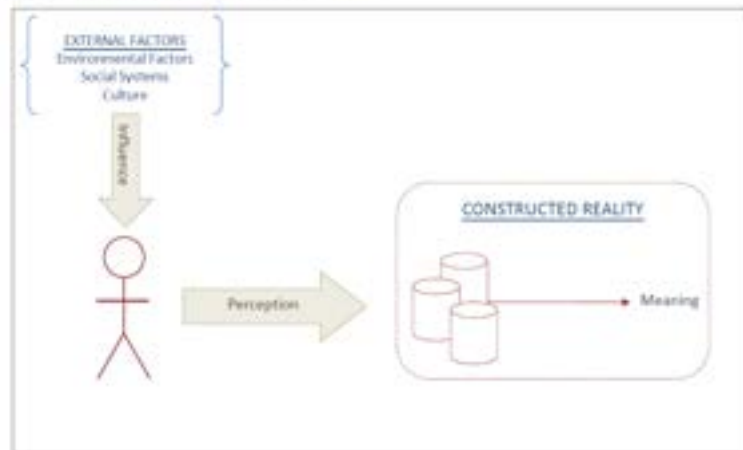
Study major: _____

-
1. List some key terms that describe your generation.
 2. What does “face” mean to you and how do you relate to it?
 3. How does “face” affect your perception of fashion brands, designers and products?
 4. Who/what is the greatest influence in directing your personal fashion taste?
 5. Do you choose fashion products based on brand appeal (face consciousness / group conformity) –OR– for design appeal (individual self-expression / aesthetic judgment)?
 6. If you had more knowledge about a fashion product (the designer, the brand, the conceptual intent, product attributes), how would it affect your purchasing decision and your level of fashion confidence?
 7. Do you prefer foreign or local/Chinese fashion brands? Please list the top 3 fashion brands that you currently purchase and the top 3 fashion brands that you aspire to someday have.
-

Appendix B. Questionnaire for Pilot Interview (II)

Part I. Introduction

The Schema of Human Existence



Part II. Interview Questions

Age of Interviewee: _____

City/Province of Origin: _____

Study major: _____

“FACE”: *The traditional Chinese concept that influences behaviors in social settings based on the need for social acceptance or recognition.*

- Q1 In your own words, how do you describe “face”?
- Q2 Please explain – with examples - when it is used and how is it applied in daily life.
- Q3 Is today’s concept of “face” different from the traditional use – for older generations?

“TASTE”: *The measure guiding judgment, usually aesthetically.*

- Q4 What does it mean to have “good taste”?
- Q5 Do you have a standard for judging “good taste” from “bad taste”?
- Q6 In your opinion, does “face” affect the desire to have “good taste”?
- Q7 Please give examples of ways you learn to increase “good taste”?

“INDEPENDENCE”: *Researchers have found that Post-80s & 90s see themselves as being “independent” – having the freedom to act outside of social norms, boundaries or restraints.*

Q8 Do you see yourself as “independent”? If so, is it expressed in your attitude/beliefs or through actions?

Q9 Does “independence” affect how you use “face” in your relationships?

Q10 Does “independence” affect your desire to develop “good taste”?

Q11 Do you see “independence” as being unique? If so, then how do you express uniqueness – through appearance, actions, behavior, etc?

“FASHION KNOWLEDGE”: *It is clear that global brands have a strong presence in China.*

Previous research indicates that young consumers are frustrated with the “over-branding” of foreign fashion.

Q12 Typically in Western cultures, consumers use brands as a form self-identity. Do you see your choices (of appearance and fashion products) as an extension of your self-identity?

Q13 Decision-making requires some form of knowledge. For fashion products, knowledge is not always obvious and relies mostly on the individual’s perception or taste. Can you describe the forms of knowledge you use – brand, designer, origin, detail, material?

Q14 What other forms of knowledge would you benefit from? Would this knowledge help you to link your self-identity to your appearance?

Appendix C. Qualitative Findings of Pilot Interview (I)

In order to ensure that all participants fully understood the interview scope, the questionnaire was translated by a professional bilingual translator into Chinese. Therefore, the following transcriptions are English translations of the original questionnaire feedback.

Q1. List some key terms that describe your generation

Ambitious	Fashionable	Liberal
Awesome	Fast	Like to show off
Brilliant	Fearless	Love self-parody
Creative	Free	No rules
Dynamic	Fresh	Open-minded
Daring	Hardcore	Opportunistic
Edgy	Have own ideas	Proactive
Energetic	Immature	Seek change
Enjoy life	Individualistic	Sometimes crazy
Exciting	Innovative	Up-beat

Q2. What does “face” mean to you and how do you relate to it?

[001]: *If your spending matches with your identity, income & temperament, you do not have to pursue “face” deliberately.*

[002]: *“face” = how others look at me or how they see me. It is important, but not as important as how you see yourself.*

[003]: *It’s important when I’m in public, but it’s not when I’m with my close friends.*

[004]: *It means how the people around you evaluate your style of conversation. I would not force myself to have “face”.*

[005]: *Showing vanity and value reflecting. I would not “seek face” deliberately, but I do use “face” to resolve some problems sometimes, it’s easier for getting the business/things done with “face” sometimes.*

[006]: *If you care too much about “face” it can be a constraint sometimes. We just have to leave the “face” behind to get more opportunities. If “face” means your appearance or outfit, I think fitting the occasion is the most important.*

[007]: *Man should live in a decent way. Decent means living according to social standards and expectations (not being very free-spirited).*

[008]: *True respect. “face” is not on the surface of just wanting to flatter others, it should be the respect from the bottom of the heart.*

[009]: *I do not care much about “face”, it depends on the occasion and people*

[010]: It doesn't matter. Have "face" is of no use. It's a bit like floating in the air, not realistic and not pure.

[011]: Success, mature, stable & capable, competent. "face" is something that you fight for, if you have ability and advantage you have "face".

Q3. How does "face" affect your perception of fashion brands, designers & products?

[001]: No influence

[002]: I particularly despise people who use LV, despise behaviours that play around with brand logos. This type of people are the ones I look down on, seems that they are afraid other do not know they have money or whatever.

[003]: First, I choose the things I like. Second, I choose the better brands.

[004]: It does not affect much, what I concern is how comfortable it is.

[005]: "Face" products like luxury goods, they are right on spot with catching some of the consumers' vanity and showing-off-their wealth psychology. Regarding "face" products, it all depends on whether they suit you, as well as the real situation, that makes it better. You do not have "face" to own all of them.

[006]: It depends on the style, if it fits I would consider/think about the brand. I like anniversary/limited editions.

[007]: I have never had the thought of "wearing this brand shows your taste and gives me face", or I should say it never influenced my choice of purchase.

[008]: Fashion depends on occasion and situation. On daily life basis, decent clothes would be "face" in formal occasion, whatever suits would be "face. Designers should respect the consumers' perception. If the product is sustainable, it can be used by more people and serve its function better.

[009]: It affects my perceptions most.

[010]: Style, logo, subjective judgment

[011]: Have taste, knows how to appreciate

Q4. Who/what is the greatest influence in directing your fashion taste?

[001]: No taste. Wear something comfortable, simple.

[002]: My dad's boss "Why China does not have her own local luxurious brand?"

[003]: Myself

[004]: The images in magazines or in other visual media.

[005]: "Design" teacher. The fashion design and events/functions mentioned during class.

[006]: Mother & body shape

[007]: There's not anyone. But I had an experience, I had spent a month in Yunnan in summer and I like their cotton clothings and tribal style very much. When I went back home, what I chosen/purchased from the online store were all of the tribal style.

[008]: Friends around me. Although there is a saying "my life, my way", but in reality (society) the influence of your friend circle should never be underestimated. If my friend told me which style suits me, I would continue buying similar items. But if I think it does not look good, I would stop trying.

[009]: My boyfriend. Our tastes are similar so there are not any big influences.

[010]: Friends around me.

[011]: My mother. Being in a relationship and growing up.

**Q5. Do you choose fashion products based on brand appeal
(face consciousness / group conformity)**

–OR–

for design appeal (individual self-expression / aesthetic judgment)?

[001]: *I would choose the style and brand that suits me.*

[002]: *Design appeal? Products that have just a huge logo on them would never be considered. Whatever fits your body shape is the most important, comfort is very important too.*

[003]: *Design appeal*

[004]: *Design appeal*

[005]: *Individual self-expression. The feeling of being me and suitable for me.*

[006]: *Design, charm*

[007]: *Design appeal. Brand appeal also depends on design appeal & quality, not "face consciousness/group conformity".*

[008]: *I would not be overly face conscious. I would rather choose something that suits me. There are clothes that I really like and beautiful, I just do not think they fit the atmosphere/environment in school.*

[009]: *Design appeal, but I think the above two do not necessarily clash with one another.*

[010]: *Whatever suits me.*

[011]: *Personal bias. I would follow the trend, I do not care so much about the brand.*

**Q6. If you had more knowledge about a fashion product
(the designer, the brand, the conceptual intent, product attributes),
how would it affect your purchasing decision
and your level of fashion confidence?**

[001]: *I would choose the style that suits my style.*

[002]: *I do not really care about the designers or the brand. Product attributes should fit my own temperament.*

[003]: *I don't know...maybe!! I'll still choose products I like, no depend on the brand.*

[004]: *I would have a stronger bias when making decisions on what to buy.*

[005]: *I would choose the designers I like. I think it has a more individual and distinct style, the quality would be better as well.*

[006]: *Maybe I would choose a product with a story behind and with rich design substance.*

[007]: *Take Muji as an example. Even though clothing is just one of the products, it well demonstrates the idea. Because the beliefs of the designers and brand match with mine, I particularly love this brand and its quality products.*

[008]: *If I understand the designers' past experience and belief, I would accept his design but it does not mean I would purchase.*

[009]: *Designer and the product attributes would have a greater influence. Design appeal to a large extent would affect my choice of purchase.*

[010]: *Maybe*

[011]: *It would affect the style of clothing I purchase and the manufacturing process*

**Q7. Do you prefer foreign or local/Chinese fashion brands?
Please list the top 3 fashion brands that you currently purchase and the top 3
fashion brands that you aspire to someday have.**

[001]: No. JNBY, H&M, Zara.

[002]: Play, A02, ONLY. D&G, Chanel. Dior

[003]: I prefer ... no, I like both. Buying now: Angs, JNBY. Aspire to have: Pomellato, Moschino, qi-pa.

[004]: No. I don't care much about the brand. It still depends on the feeling towards fashion.

[005]: H&M, My City, Vero Moda. Not sure about future ones.

[006]: It's alright. Buy now – Staccato, E-land, Etam. Buy later – Ports, Prada, Marisfrolg

[007]: No. For now and in the future, I would not have any fashion brands that I pay special attention to. There's an online shop that I prefer and like called Liebo.

[008]: No particular brand. European style might not fit due to body shape limitation. Japanese simple and clean styles are well celebrated in China. Muji, Uniqlo, H&. I hope to own Issey Miyake or other simple style designs.

[009]: Yes. Zara, Adidas, Nike, H&M. Chanel

[010]: So-so. H&M, C. A., Honeys

[011]: I do not care much about brands but I like a local brand from Hangzhou called "Turn Blue".

Appendix D. Qualitative Findings of Pilot Interview (II)

“Face” Q1 – Q3

[001]: Mianzi (face) seems to be important for most of us – how we act/how we perform is to leave a good impression on others. It is related to dignity, self-respect, self-confidence. It is about the outer effect but it has important influence on me.

[002]: People use face to leave a good impression and to feel good through what they wear, what they use and how they act in daily life – to earn respect from others. But, I don’t think it’s really important for myself because others will not define my life. I try to earn it but it’s not necessary.

[003]: Face is important because China is a very traditional country and since my parents/grandparents are successful, I need to be as good as them. This is why I use brands or products to show others that I am as successful as them.

[004]: I think many young people in China buy something expensive or a famous brand and they will get face and be respected by others. So, we will buy something ‘not true’ – it is very common in China. I am concerned about face but I will buy something that is special or unique to make others think that I am a girl who is not ordinary but can express myself, my thinking, my style.

[005]: In my province, there is a saying that face is more important for the man than the woman. For myself, face is about how I look or how I can use something expensive or beautiful to show off.

[006]: I think everyone likes to have external mianzi – Chinese people like luxury brands that will show their status in society. It is not about what is inside, it is about external things.

[007]: Mianzi is power. If I have power, I can choose whatever I want and do everything I want.

[008]: Mianzi means that others respect you, like you, want to make friends with you. When you have some troubles, you can find others to help you. To some extent, it means you have status that can make you feel confident.

[009]: Mianzi is something we don’t want others to know about ourselves, so we pretend to be some higher grade of people to show off ourselves. It’s same as in foreign countries but Chinese people think mianzi is important and often cover their mistakes and sometimes we won’t tell the truth because of mianzi, so we need it.

[010]: Mianzi is like doing something to cover your weakness. In China, some young people have no money but when they make friends they will be very generous. It is when somebody does something they can’t do but pretend.

[011]: I think it is about the perception of somebody, level of society and the relationship between him and other people. Face sometimes is connected to your salary, background and family – not only yourself.

[012]: Maybe it is about caring about what you wear, your appearance, your hobby or anything about you. Chinese care about face, about how others respond to them or appreciate the value of their objects. They will try very hard to have face.

“Taste” Q4 – Q7

[001]: Good taste means to try something that is suitable, not too strange. It can be outstanding but not strange – comfort is important, color is important. Trends are not that important, my own judgment is more important. I read the Japanese magazines to see what might be suitable for me, also surf on the internet to learn more about fashion, learn from others and also comment on others’ dress.

[002]: Taste is learned from the family – it is a type of social phenomenon. If I see somebody who

looks comfortable and fits the surroundings, then that is good taste.

[003]: Good taste is not about the price, but about whether the product is suitable or not. People need to know themselves so they can use the clothes their weakness or show their advantage – that is good taste.

[004]: Good taste is being sensitive to fashion icons, to follow the trends, to mix simple things, to make it special, to know good quality. If someone can choose products or clothes to fit themselves is good taste.

[005]: The most important is to have approval from friends or classmates. I always look at 'taobao' to see what is good. Sometimes I follow the styles from tv.

[006]: Good taste is in how the person experiences the clothes he/she is wearing. If they look comfortable, then that person has good taste.

[007]: Good taste is to have knowledge. I think if a person's behavior is kind, responsible and honest, then that is good taste. High taste is to have high mianzi, so they are related.

[008]: Having good quality or different and meaningful experiences is how to have good taste. Someone who lives their own life and work towards what they want is having good taste – not being the same as most people from their actions, opinions and ideas.

[009]: Good taste is to like something that others don't know or don't like. If some people or magazines are similar to me, then I have good taste. Then that is 'you mianzi' (have face).

[010]: If I find something that can combine traditional or international, since the old style is more in fashion now in China. Some young Chinese like to wear Japanese, Korean or Western style but I prefer traditional Chinese style.

[011]: Having good taste means to have own idea, not just following other people, book or media. I think we should do, wear or say something according to their level of reception in the world. If people just follow the trends, it is not good taste.

[012]: Good taste is to like something that other people already accept.

"Independence" Q8 – Q11

[001]: I don't think our generation is really independent. I don't make decisions by myself, but I listen to the opinions of others to help me make decisions – either with my friends or with my parents.

[002]: You have to push to be independent or you cannot survive. You need to meet others' needs, to meet superiors, so in society I am not independent.

[003]: People think this generation is more independent because we are compared with our parents or grandparents. I am the first one to leave my province and study far away, which makes me independent.

[004]: I am not really independent – maybe because of the traditional culture of China. We always follow the words of our parents, so it is very hard to change.

[005]: I am a very independent girl, but in my mind and heart I don't want to be independent. Since I have to live by myself, the experience makes me independent. People with good education should be more independent.

[006]: From the economical point, I am not independent, but in other ways I am independent. I am apart from my family, taking care of myself and my life, so that makes me independent in my life. In my thinking or in my own mind, I am not independent since I am easy to be affected by others.

[007]: Yes, I am independent because I must be different with others. I think if I always some different ideas and my ideas are useful, then it is related to good mianzi.

[008]: In thinking, I am independent but in daily life I will depend on my parents.

[009]: I am independent in many ways – I don't often listen to teachers or parents, my life is

independent because I do things by myself and I make my own decisions or listen only to myself. I won't be influenced by other peoples' judgment or opinions.

[010]: Independence is necessary but it does not mean you must be outside of your social circle, only your spirit must be independent. I think independent people are those who can communicate with others to influence but they will think and make decisions on their own.

[011]: If people can be more independent, then they can show better taste to be unique. I think independence is very important in the successful experience of life.

[012]: I am independent since I left my parents, studying and living by myself. My thinking is independent because I don't care what other people think about me but I just rely on myself. Independence means that you won't follow the ideas of others too much, but you also need friends to know that your ideas are acceptable.

"Fashion Knowledge" Q12 – Q14

[001]: I don't think our generation is really independent. I don't make decisions by myself, but I listen to the opinions of others to help me make decisions – either with my friends or with my parents.

[002]: You have to push to be independent or you cannot survive. You need to meet others' needs, to meet superiors, so in society I am not independent.

[003]: People think this generation is more independent because we are compared with our parents or grandparents. I am the first one to leave my province and study far away, which makes me independent.

[004]: I am not really independent – maybe because of the traditional culture of China. We always follow the words of our parents, so it is very hard to change.

[005]: I am a very independent girl, but in my mind and heart I don't want to be independent. Since I have to live by myself, the experience makes me independent. People with good education should be more independent.

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[007]: Yes, I am independent because I must be different with others. I think if I always have some different ideas and my ideas are useful, then it is related to good mianzi.

[008]: In thinking, I am independent but in daily life I will depend on my parents.

[009]: I am independent in many ways – I don't often listen to teachers or parents, my life is independent because I do things by myself and I make my own decisions or listen only to myself. I won't be influenced by other peoples' judgment or opinions.

[010]: Independence is necessary but it does not mean you must be outside of your social circle, only your spirit must be independent. I think independent people are those who can communicate with others to influence but they will think and make decisions on their own.

[011]: If people can be more independent, then they can show better taste to be unique. I think independence is very important in the successful experience of life.

[012]: I am independent since I left my parents, studying and living by myself. My thinking is independent because I don't care what other people think about me but I just rely on myself. Independence means that you won't follow the ideas of others too much, but you also need friends to know that your ideas are acceptable.

Appendix E. Supplementary Questionnaire (Main Study I)

1. How did you come up with the concept for 1/2 Eternity? Was this decision influenced by the local fashion environment of Shanghai?
2. As a young independent designer, what are some challenges you face?
3. China's top-tier cities, like Shanghai, are over-saturated with the presence of global brands and luxury products. How do independent designers like yourself gain market share? What are some examples of how you promote your "niche" potential?
4. What is the scale of your business? (number of collections per year, styles per collection, point-of-sales, etc)
5. How did you choose the current location of your shop? Was there a reason for this particular location?
6. Who are your target customers? (age, profile, local/non-local)
7. Who are your actual customers? (if they differ from your target)
8. Currently, marketers are targeting the post-80s & 90s consumers for their potential as big spenders. From your observations, what are some characteristics describing this generation? Are they really different from older generations?
9. What do you think young consumers look for in fashion products? Do they have enough "confidence" to stray from the social norms of "mainstream" fashion brands and seek local, independent brands like your own?
10. Owning your own shop, you have access to consumers on a daily basis. How does this face-to-face interaction affect their perception of the products/brand? Do they develop more trust in the product after meeting you?
11. How does the interaction with consumers affect your own design practice? Is their feedback valuable to you? How do you implement any changes?
12. As belonging to the local culture, do you see yourself as an initiator of change? What advantages might you have that foreign brands are unable to access?
13. How does your design practice or business model impact the current phenomenon of fashion consumption among younger generations? Do you see yourself as having any influence on the development of good fashion "taste" and "judgment"?
14. How are you able to communicate your perspectives on fashion? Does this always translate directly to the consumer? (ie: you envision your designs one way, but your customers may interpret it differently)
15. What do you think is the future for independent designers in Shanghai? Will you be innovators in creating the new wave of fashion?

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