

**SEEKING CULTURAL ORIGINALITY
A CRITICAL STUDY ON
CONTEMPORARY PRODUCT DESIGN
IN CHINA**

Peipei Yu

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Faculty of Arts, Design and Media, Birmingham City University

Abstract

The intention of this thesis is to explore, by a critical perspective, the originality of product design in China, along with the expression of Chinese cultural values in product design in the contemporary international arena. Starting from literature reviews of design in China, this research focuses on both historical and cultural aspects of product evolution. It will take into account the indigenous innovation phenomenon – ‘*shanzhai*’ and ‘Chineseness’ in order to pursue a comprehensive understanding of the origin of product design and innovation trends in a contemporary context. Also, interview data from senior designers and professors from various design institutions and companies in China has been elicited in order to understand different perspectives.

IKEA and MUJI have been selected as the main case examples to demonstrate their design principles, brand loyalty and cultural impact, based upon their experiences in transcending national borders through global policies. Xiaomi has also been used as a case study to support the study of *Shanzhai* phenomenon, while the case study on PINWU and SHANGXIA has also been conducted to study the current interpretation of contemporary Chinese product design in China. Furthermore, there will be interpretation of their brand management, marketing strategies and brand philosophies as case examples, which may indicate new directions for design in China.

Ongoing, extensive literature searches and data analysis have revealed significant relationships between design, creativity, culture, branding and marketing. This research has identified the important influences of cultural values in product design in globalised markets which are needed in order for Chinese design institutions and companies to deliver their indigenous values to a competitive world.

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Chapter One Introduction

The opening-up of China from its closed-doors brought in a new and exciting world of culture, including design predominantly from the West. China has changed dramatically in recent decades, from the conservative communism that restricted markets, to the open-door policy in 1980s which saw an aggressive adoption of capitalism within the communist ideology (Diamond and Liu, 2005). According to Barboza (2010)'s research, China is currently the most populous country in the world, with a total of 1.4 billion people, and is currently the world's second largest economy after the United States. The opening-up policy introduced in the 1980's saw an acceleration in the Chinese economy, with vast manufactory creation and industry development. Horner (2009) holds the point of view that, after the implementation of the reform and opening-up policy in the 1980s, the Chinese economy developed quickly and the coastal cities become more prosperous. Manufacturers from all over the world have established factories in China, making China the 'world's factory' – it could be said that 'Made in China' is the main factor of rapid growth of the Chinese economy. According to the research of Towson and Woetzel (2014), professors at Peking University's Guanghua School of Management, China's strong consumer market will continue to surprise the world with its market growth, which is the fastest compared to any other country in the world, along with the greatest potential amongst emerging economies to be the next economic superpower (Ma et al., 2015).

Over the last decades, various researches have raised the concern that China is losing domestic nation brand within the globalised market (Wu, Borgerson and Schroeder, 2013) and, in several scenarios, 'Chinese Design' has been labelled as 'imitation' and 'uncreativity' (Li, 2009). Obviously, despite the presence of a flourishing economy, contemporary design in China has not followed through in its development in comparison to the country's economy. China has hardly any design brands or design companies which are internationally well-known and capable of representing Chinese culture (Liu, Li and Feng, 2008). At the meantime, the China domestic market has almost been fully suffused by multinational companies, which has been successful in winning the favour of Chinese customers. Significant academic resources concerning the assessment of different countries design credentials can be found. It is shown that Japan, USA and some Western countries are dominant global design powers, with strong and reliable industrial reputations by designing with uniquely cultural products (Barboza,2010).

In an increasingly globalised economy, the financial, cultural and consumer ideals of the West have become widespread. China, alongside most of the developing world, has since been consuming and adapting to the culture-specific products that consist mainly of what Sathikh and Kumar (2000) named “English Language Centric Products”. With increasing Western influence in a growing Chinese economy, many researches have indicated China had lost its way in its design direction and various imitation products have created a new trend - the ‘*shanzhai*’¹ phenomenon in product designing flourished amongst an upcoming society - individuals has had a growing income alongside an increasing demand for products associated with a certain economic status. Meanwhile, the *shanzhai* period of Chinese economy which contribute significantly to the economic uprising of China was discovered to be driven not merely by economics, but also a myriad of cultural and historical motives – which traces back to the philosophy and socio-economic backdrop of imperial China, which will be explored further in this research.

Razzaghi and Ramirez (2005) believe that “localization of products can act as a counter-balancing force for the maintenance and durability of national cultures facing globalization as well as its potential capacity for holding, preserving and presenting cultural values to the respective product users.” Given the lack of cultural originality in contemporary product design in China, and the potential of the Chinese consumer market, designers are seeking to move away from Western consumption to embrace a style with more Chinese elements. The need to change tastes and demands away from Western-ideology, to those that embrace Chinese designs with embedded cultural value is a difficult and long one. Current interpretation of contemporary product design is not seen to be mature, as it lacks inclusion of original culture within the design. The present designs of Chinese products are deemed a Western interpretation of Chinese culture, such as the addition of oriental images on existing products. The lack of appreciation for Chinese design products has brought frustration to contemporary designers in China, who see the importance of keeping true to the originality of Chinese design and culture. The quest to design products that capture Chinese culture is one that contemporary designers are striving to achieve – theirs’ is a long battle against the demands of the market for international products. The need for innovation in Chinese design not only stems from the issue

¹ The term *shanzhai* was originally used to refer to the mountain stockades of regional warlords or bandits, far away from government control. Today, however, the term has become a new name for the fake or pirated goods produced in China, which are usually associated with low-quality and ‘lookalike’ features. *Shanzhai* in contemporary context refers to counterfeit products.

of originality, but also from an economic argument. According to Wang (2015), Director of Easyhome (one of the major furniture and home companies in China), originality in design is the only means of surviving in today's competitive free market, where Chinese firms can no longer rely on cheap labour and *shanzhai* production to run a profitable company.

The objective of this research, in broader sense, is to investigate the challenges and transformation of contemporary product in China. Specifically, by a critical perspective, to explore the development of product design and the expression of Chinese cultural values in design in the contemporary international area. Research to date has concentrated more on product design development in the contemporary context from the Chinese economic reform in 1978. Previous research from Norton (2013) has already found that originality is a complex concept and is used as a fundamental concept within academic fields, as well as being one of the goals of creative industrial activity. This study is based on the diverse notion that designers' cultural values have an effect on the formation of the product concept during the process of product design. To assess this effect, a literature review will provide a foundation for a philosophy of product design and underpin how the theories and approaches which influence a completed design may be understood. This will begin with the concepts and theories of product design in the chapters which follow.

Significant academic resources concerning the assessment of different countries design credentials can be found. It is shown that Japan, USA and some Western countries are dominant global design powers, with strong and reliable industrial reputations. Chinese designers can look to successful examples of contemporary product design in other countries, where uniquely cultural products enjoy worldwide success. Polster (2008) pointed out that it is generally known that the functional principle traditions of German design reflect a strict social, cultural and industrial emphasis on practical results, as well as on functionality and quality, such as Krups Apotheker, Melitta and Siemens, which not only demonstrate stylish appearance but are also associated world-wide with outstanding quality (Empen, Loy and Weiss, 2015). Such factors have gradually formed the typical image of German design – which possesses a solid appearance – rational, high quality, reliable, functional and indifferent (Becker and Podobinski, 2008). Furthermore, another Western brand, Sweden's IKEA, has presented Scandinavian cultural features to the world through its products, and has gone on to become the largest transnational home supplies company in the world. Without a doubt, IKEA not only shapes its

cultural character under the process of globalisation, but also leads the way in the realm of the modern trend-conscious lifestyle (Mochon and Ariely, 2011).

Successfully brands not only emerge from Western countries, but also in Asian countries: Japanese brand MUJI are globally popular, especially in Europe, North America and Asia. Kanai (2010) has explained the reason why MUJI is so popular, MUJI conveys a look and feel that is Japanese in origin Koike (2011). The first impression of MUJI products may be commonplace, but MUJI have a significant effect in spreading MUJI's lifestyle to the world (Fukasawa, 2007); products based on brand principles then become part of a consumer lifestyle choice. For example, generally speaking, the concept of Japanese design is to offer people a new idea in order to pursue a more comfortable as humanized living style – focusing on design details and humanity, keeping the nature of simple but elegant. Whether cars, electric products or living supplies, Japanese design is in an advanced state (Hara, 2011).

IKEA from Sweden and MUJI from Japan selected as case examples this study, will explore to understand and discuss cultural originality as well as brand development in design. China has an overwhelmingly rich history in product design, especially during the pre-communist era – an originality stemming from the Chinese culture, economy and social system, that still differs from other countries today (Ma et al., 2015 ; Song and Parry, 1994). Such cultural identity has flourished into everyday life. In today's context of Westernised consumption, there is a huge challenge – but also a great opportunity – for Chinese design to 'go back to its roots', to produce both revolutionary and culturally significant designs that fully represent its origin – China.

1.1 Aims and Objectives

The main aim of this study is to explore Chinese contemporary product design and explore factors causing the lack of originality in Chinese design, furthered through an investigation of the means of building cultural identity and values into designs suited to today's China. The aims of the study can be further articulated as the following four main objectives:

- To identify the factors leading to the lack of originality in product design in China;
- To review the role that so-called 'Chineseness' is playing in the development of product

design in China;

- To assess the presence and impact of originality in the development of contemporary Chinese product design;
- To explain how Chinese cultural values can contribute to innovative and original design in contemporary China

Originality is a complex concept central to an academic field and also, in this case, to an industrial activity. This study is based on the ‘diversity notion’ that designers’ cultural values have an effect on the formation of the product concept, during the process of product design. Also, it will underpin the interviews and inform the research and its conclusions. The foundation of the philosophy of product design and how these theories and approaches influence a complete design is planned.

The content of this research is divided into seven chapters:

Chapter one provides an outline of this research and introduces the research context for seeking cultural originality in contemporary China. The remit of the thesis is also defined in this chapter along with the statement of the research aims and objectives. An overview of the methodological approaches of the thesis will also be addressed in this chapter which includes literature review, case studies, interviews and observations.

Following from the introductory chapter, chapter two of this study addresses the origin of product design by walking through the historical context of the development in design and expound on the product design development in China. It goes on to justify the transformation of product design in China by understanding the industrial, machinery and informational periods. The existing national situation in design is being described holistically in this chapter with literature and interview findings from the educational perspective as well as from the perspective of the Chinese contemporary design industry. In addition, in the search to understand factors that cause a lack of originality in contemporary product design in China, literature has supported the findings which demonstrated means of how Western design has influence product design development in China.

Chapter three highlights the key challenge in originality in Chinese design – the imitation phenomenon of *shanzhai*, known to scholars as a key period of product design development in China. In order to understand how *shanzhai* has become a cultural phenomenon, definition and implication of *shanzhai* will be explored in both historical and contemporary context in this chapter. Also, the relationship in marketing, manufactures, and customer of *shanzhai* product will be investigated in order to provide a comprehensive perspective to the issue. *Shanzhai* product has made a significant contribution to the economic growth to China, and hence this study will analyse existing examples to evaluate an understand the limitation and opportunities of *shanzhai*. Xiaomi has been selected as one of the case examples in this chapter to demonstrate the possibility to achieve Chinese design innovation through the humble and controversial beginnings of manufacturing *shanzhai* products. A critical discussion of either *shanzhai* is an innovation or a violation phenomenon will be reflected in this chapter.

After identifying and understanding the reasons for a lack of originality in the Chinese design industry through literature and interviews on the topic of *Shanzhai*, chapter four will dealt into the difference between Chinese elements and Chineseness design with the aim of seeking a new interpretation of ‘Chinese elements’ which could potentially inform originality in the Chinese context. In order to review the role of the so-called ‘Chineseness’ in playing its part for the development of original products in China, Chinese elements in current design practice in China and other countries will be examined under the globalised context. With the obvious understanding that the topic of Chinese elements can be very wide, it is necessary to summarised as much possible in this chapter, a structure understanding of Chinese elements based on the popularity of current ‘Chinese elements’. A Chinese visual element identification system will be established in this chapter as the indication to convert the Chinese elements into Chinese design elements in hopes of structuring Chineseness design into a cognitive structure. Cultural values which informs many of the Chinese elements discussed in this chapter will be reviewed through literature to weigh its significance towards originality.

Understanding the importance for Chinese designers to seek originality through embracing cultural and national values from previous chapter, chapter five will conduct a detailed investigation into two successful case examples that have been able to incorporate cultural values into its design to form a strong originality case for contemporary product design. These two companies are IKEA and MUJI, which in this study would act as a reference and a revelatory example for which China can seek to achieve uniquely through its own cultural

design. The differing and contrasting approaches of IKEA and MUJI's design development with global expansion will be demonstrated in this chapter. Through the case studies, the critical success factors will be identified in both IKEA and MUJI which will inform application to Chinese contemporary design in its market focus; localising of design; and customer prioritising. Additionally, this chapter also considers the importance of branding cultural values into its marketing strategies within the globalised context, for which both case examples have seen financially recognised success in.

Upon seeing the potential that both case examples in chapter five presents to Chinese design, chapter six studies two existing Chinese companies that have adopted a similar approach of culturally informed design namely SHANGXIA and PINWU. Both companies have strived to intergrade the aesthetics of traditional Chinese handicraft into contemporary design. Analysis in this chapter also includes five other domestic furniture companies which shares a similar focus of combining oriental culture values with contemporary design. The in-depth research into the current embodiment of traditional Chinese culture amongst modern brands will be discussed in this chapter in order to explore the core values and trends of cultural identity in product design in contemporary China, which will indicate the potential to be competitive in the global context.

Finally, chapter seven is summarise the finding and analysis of the whole study, expounding on the conclusions of the significance in interpreting culture into contemporary Chinese design under a globalised market. A reflection of 'Chineseness' will also be addressed followed by key recommendations for Chinese designers to incorporate cultural identity and national uniqueness into future designs with an aim of establishing a design work that can be representative of Chinese values and origin in the global industry of contemporary design. Limitations of this study will also be outlined in chapter seven with recommendations of future work proposed to bring forward further contribution to the literature of Chinese contemporary design.

1.2 Research Methodology

This research contains seven chapters based on qualitative research methods. In this section, these are introduced together with their applications.

The purpose of the methodology section is to accurately and clearly describe the research design and the procedures undertaken to collect and analysed data, and to present the rationale for choosing each for the study (Fox and Jennings, 2014. p.138).

In approaching the research on Chinese product design in contemporary China, it has been identified that a qualitative approach is ideal. This is because a qualitative research, as noted by Brannen (1992), allows the researcher to tackle their research through a wider perspective in identifying patterns and connectivity over a myriad of theories and ideas; contrasting to the quantitative approach, being narrowly focused upon a given set number of variables and testing of correlations. Instead of formulative methodology, effective qualitative research relies on the researcher as the instrument (Brannen, 1992) for collection of data with an assumption of the researcher's ability to be objective and yet flexible (Cracken, 1988). As the nature of this study is primarily concerned with the critical study on product design in a wide context of contemporary China, qualitative research is a much-needed approach in allowing flexibility and objectivity to seek the originality of Chinese contemporary design.

There are four main qualitative research methods applied in this study: namely literature search and review, observation, interviews and case examples. The research first starts with a literature review, observation and data collection, in order to develop and provide an original contribution. The subsequent sections: case examples, in-depth interviews and subsequent data analysis comprise the essential research methodology to support my research.

1.2.1 Literature Search and Review

Phillips and Pugh (2010) mention that a research thesis must be supported by relevant justification, which gives strength to its direction of persuasion. Reviewing current literature in the contemporary Chinese design field provides a platform for critical discussion, which is at the centre of this study. The research objectives are derived from an under-research field, a range of methods and a novel set of contexts were needed due to the paucity literature. The literature was selected in both the Chinese and English languages reflecting the complexity of the issues. The main literature searches were: design journals, non-design academic journals (philosophy, management, culture and history), library databases, company websites and

publications, conference papers, marketing and design reports, as well as visual sources, such as exhibitions, catalogues, etc.

The literature search has underpinned the research across several areas: the introduction and research objectives (Chapter 1); the basic understanding of the historical origins and development of design (Chapter 2); the design or lack of design in the *shanzhai* phenomenon and its correlation to economic developing countries (Chapter 3); the ‘Chineseness’ in contemporary design (Chapter 4); the case examples of global contemporary design companies (Chapter 5); the main findings of this study detailed in (Chapter 6) and the final conclusion and suggestions for further research (Chapter 7).

Current literature utilised may be categorised thus:

- Chinese Product Design History

To understand the development of product design in China, a review of literature was conducted, starting at the beginnings of Chinese product design after the Chinese Economic Reform in 1978, followed by the process of development on design throughout the modern history of design in China.

- The Nature of Originality

‘Chineseness’, or Chinese elements and originality has to be understood to form the basis of critical study for the development and potential of contemporary Chinese design in China. The rise of the *shanzhai* in 2008, which was a predictable imitation phenomenon amongst developing countries, found its way into Chinese manufacturing – which informs the understanding of the states of originality and creativity in Chinese design. There are many critical publications around *shanzhai*, in particular its contribution to national global growth under Chinese capitalism and the potential for development of originality and maturing of design in contemporary China.

- Cultural Value in Design

Much of the literature review of this study has been devoted to reviewing cultural value in design of specific countries, which has established not only global brands but a distinct cultural originality in their designed products. The purpose of reviewing the literature

surrounding designs in other countries is to investigate how unique cultural values originate from distinct social, geographical and traditional practices and how they can contribute to contemporary design. Designs and designing from Japan, China, the United Kingdom and Germany have been reviewed.

- Chinese culture and design

Chinese culture and its philosophy of design has had a great influence on the past development and current state of contemporary product design. Design was a relatively Western concept amongst the Chinese. However, literature also points to the presence of types of ‘design’ in traditional China, which differ significantly from Western design philosophy, but which add to the uniqueness of ‘Chineseness’ in its maturing development of design.

- Data Research

In providing a context for the case examples of IKEA and MUJI, relevant marketing data has been collected with regards to both companies’ commercial performance, from 2000 to 2008. These data were collected from marketing reports on the official websites of both companies, as well as from scholastic journal articles.

Data was also collected for XiaoMi’s commercial performance to illustrate the scale of business that the *shanzhai* phenomenon, represented through XiaoMi, has in China.

1.2.2 Critical Observation

In understanding the limitations and potential of contemporary Chinese design, observation is an important part of this research. Findings from critical observations have been incorporated throughout the study, mainly documenting the visual differences in design between China and other countries, in Chapters 2 to Chapter 5.

Throughout the period of this research, critical observation has been used in three fields: (1) design exhibitions and museums, (2) design companies, and (3) design institutions. Product design exhibitions have been a crucial source of observation, as well as design museums. Contemporary design trends and patterns could be observed through shows, such as the Beijing

Design Week, Design Shanghai in China, and the London Design Festival in the UK, which have been attended. Through careful observations of exhibitions, a comparison of design features between China and Western countries could be summarised. Through attendance at these exhibitions, opportunities developed for conversations with product designers, allowing the researcher to re-examine the current situation of designing and the design process in China. Moreover, museum observation provides the linkage between Western industrial design history and product design development in China. Perspectives on the design process in conceptual learning and market requirements have also been presented by visits to education institutions and design companies. The full list of design exhibitions and shows that were attended are detailed in Appendix 1.1.

A design content analysis of various classic products has also formed part of the observation research methodology, whereby products designed in industry by different designers were included in this research. Areas of analysis included visual product comparison, design materials, design philosophy, country of origin and the background of designers.

1.2.3 Interviews

Another method used in this study was in-depth interviews. Interviews allowed the researcher to obtain first-hand information from identified parties who could uniquely contribute findings to the investigation. Within the methods of qualitative research, individual interviews provide the opportunity to understand macro social impacts from personal experience (May, 2002), which allow researchers to gain perspectives surrounding the particular topic of study.

In this study, a total of 17 interviews were conducted amongst a group of key figures within the Chinese contemporary design industry. The qualitative research interview seeks to describe and the meanings of central themes in the life world of the subjects. The main task in interviewing is to understand the meaning of what the interviewees say (Kavale, 1996). The 17 interviewees consist of a sample of professors and academics from seven important design universities in China; four founders of contemporary design companies, two designers in a design firm; a product manufacturing company founder; and a manager from a design-based retail store. A full list of individual interviewees that have participated in this study has been listed in Appendix 1.2. The academic interviewees selection criteria was generally based on either their research as scholars on the *shanzhai* phenomenon or Chinese cultural values in a

sociologic context; and/or their industrial experience as designers in the field, with relevance to the contemporary Chinese design of this study.

These interviews were conducted between September 2014 and May 2016 during multiple field-work visits to China. Interviews are particularly useful for getting the story behind a participant's experiences. The interviewer can pursue in-depth information around the topic. Interviews may be useful as follow-up to certain respondents to question (McNamarra,1999). The precise selection criteria for academics and industrial leaders was based on their influence through reputation; that these individuals work towards contemporary Chinese design; and their known insights as both educators, employers and pioneers within the contemporary Chinese design setting.

In consideration of the specific audience and individuals that have been identified for interviewing, this study has taken a semi-structured, semi-standardised, participatory approach, using mainly open-ended questions in order to obtain complex views and contexts that a standardised approach would limit. The interview questions were formed by the Research Questions and key summarised findings of previous Chapters (Chapter 1, Chapter 2, Chapter 3 and Chapter 4); the aim being to obtain first-hand information on current design situations in China, the features of contemporary Chinese design which are influenced by the *shanzhai* phenomenon, and trends through Chinese elements. Shared context interview questions were adjusted slightly to the interviewee background. The interviews were ethically conducted and transcribed with the informed consent of all participants. The analysed findings of these interviews have been integrated into each chapter. These are based on recorded narratives and have substantially influenced the research findings of this study, forming a balanced picture of current Chinese contemporary design in China across both academia and industry.

1.2.4 Case Examples

A total of five case examples were developed for study in this research as part of the critical view of contemporary Chinese design in the context of its originality and identity. According to Bell (2010), case studies offer an opportunity to investigate problems deeply and are suitable for individual researchers. Zeisel (1991) says that this method of research allows a deeper understanding of object and context. In conducting qualitative research, case study provides

for a holistic approach which takes into account real contemporary events surrounding individual, community, regions and global relations (Yin, 2003).

Within the required scope of this study, both transnational and local contemporary events were included to give a contemporary context to the investigation of design in twenty-first century China. The selected case examples are manufacturing and design companies with an emphasis on their origin, philosophy and cultural identity in design. The following are case examples of companies that this study has selected as case examples:

- XiaoMi

Chapter 3 of this research discusses the *shanzhai* phenomenon in China in both a negative and positive light. XiaoMi, a Chinese grown technological company, was selected as a case study to expand on the ideology of *shanzhai*. XiaoMi, despite starting off as a *shanzhai* company with a serious deficit in originality and identity, has moved from imitation goods to become one of the major technology manufacturers in the world, allowing this research to conduct a critical study over its *shanzhai* originality, growth in innovation, and a rebranding of a new XiaoMi identity.

The growth of XiaoMi, as seen through their history, also beckons a larger picture on the relationship between the ability for companies to innovate and their national economic capability. Concurrently, the study of XiaoMi's *shanzhai* practices also raises questions on ethics and intellectual protection in comparison to innovation.

- IKEA and MUJI

Both IKEA and MUJI were used as case examples of successful product design companies that embody cultural originality and function into their design. A detailed critical study has been conducted in Chapter 5 in relation to globalisation and localisation, as seen through these case examples, in their ability to translate national, cultural and geographical traditions and values into their designs, followed by mass production and global success in retail.

The study of these two companies comprised literature review, observation and scrutiny of the company's products. The philosophies and cultural identities of both IKEA and MUJI

were carefully examined in order to understand the link between the recognition of national values, influenced by the local climate, culture and ethos, and the need to design products befitting to the above, whilst also making them globally marketable.

- SHANGXIA and PINWU Studios

Despite the *shanzhai* phenomenon in contemporary Chinese design, there have been successful examples of companies producing distinct Chinese products, which moved forward from the general designs with ‘Chineseness’ to those which fully represent Chinese culture. SHANGXIA and PINWU Studios are two design companies used as case examples in Chapter 6: ‘Representing Chinese Culture in Product Design in Contemporary China’.

Studies of both these companies were conducted through in-depth interviews with Zhang Lei, the founder and lead designer of PINWU Studio as well as the Retail Store Manager of SHANGXIA in Shanghai. Drawing from the interviews, this study is enriched with first-hand information regarding current contemporary design in China, challenges that the design industry faces, and the hopes of front-line designers within the business of championing contemporary Chinese designs.

In this research, a specific range of ‘products’ will have to be identified during the research process. The process of selection and the development of the criteria will be part of the research, in order to recognise and have in-depth understandings of cultural value in product design. For example, a range of products within the notion of ‘home’ can be selected to illustrate the idea of cultural value and its significance in contemporary China. ‘Home’ is the place for relationships, and products at home not only provide functionalities for daily life, but more importantly, shape people’s living styles and behaviours within particular cultural contexts. The following table gives an indicative example of the product analysis of Chinese cultural practice in comparison with Western equivalents.

Table 1.1: Chinese product selection in cultural perspective

Product Design Area	Associated locations for Chinese cultural practice and western equivalent	Indicative Selection Criteria

Home Accessories	Traditional Chinese cultural accessories. Conurbations of differing products, such as lighting and decorations. The growth of leisure and life quality required.	Selected home accessories development in parallel with the people living behaviours and designers' response to this.
The Kitchen Products	Daily family life. The development of international cuisine and the preservation of traditional Chinese food and its preparation. Traditional and new manufacturing materials.	Selected designs of cooking products or utensils linked to one food type historically, over time.
Furniture	Traditional Chinese living style. Offering more storage space and reasonable planning for people. Comparably, some design of beds become more and more multifunctional and stylish. The dining set as a way of social discussion and interaction, which also represent cultural tradition with food.	Selected products of major furniture pieces not only can meet the basic need of people daily life, but also represent the different life styles and preferences.

As can be seen from the table above, these products are not individual, and there are very strong connections. The purpose of analysis is to find out a way to explain Chinese cultural originality in products, and to also express the Chinese contemporary design concept. Therefore, the aforementioned products will be considered as a selection example in my further research.

1.3 Summary of research overview

An overview of this research in summary will see an initial analysing of the development of

Chinese product design, followed by an in-depth study of the contemporary design industry in seeking cultural originality and design culture within the Chinese context. The significant academic resources show that many successful design brands have created cultural national values via designing products – showing that it is worth evaluating these design powers from different perspectives. As far as can be determined, the factors influencing the designers' own culture, the regional culture and individuals' habits and behaviours have not yet been investigated within the industrial design research field. Also, further research has to be conducted on how China is able to recognise its own emergent design culture. An indicative model of the particular image of Chinese contemporary product design will be developed.

The remit of this research deals predominantly with the contemporary design of products with in depth exploration into product brands of various nationalities and within China. With case examples and literature coverage of other designs included, such as architecture design, interior design and in areas of fashion and environmental design, the main remits of this research remains within the depth of product design. This study has also research an contributed on the interpretations and critiques of 'Chineseness' from a product design perspective, non-wholly-inclusive of the incorporation of Chinese elements in other areas such as Chinese fashion, Chinese literature and so on. The remit of this research also only addresses the findings of Chinese contemporary design through the perspective of industrial experts and academic scholars alongside the content from available literature. The perspective of users and customers have not been included in this study in which could be recommended as a future study upon this research.

To be conclude, this research will propose a philosophy of Chinese-style product design, which can make a contribution to the development of Chinese industrial design. It is anticipated that Chinese cultural style in a product will be shaped, to not only fit the culture and philosophy of China, but also to be competitive within the global market. It is anticipated that through this study there will be a contribution to the literature in the area of cultural originality in Chinese contemporary product design. There is a need for culturally embedded contemporary designs which tap into the rich cultural values and originality of the Chinese culture, not only to increase the design value and economic competitiveness of contemporary Chinese products, but also to tap into the potential for Chinese designers to explore the wealth and magnitude of Chinese cultural product design.

Chapter Two: An Understanding of Product Design in China

The conceptualisation of ‘product design’ was not of Chinese descent, the fact that product design has a Western origin, which, through cultural influence, made its way to the East. Rather, the idea of ‘design’ was largely attributed as a Western ideology (Yan, 2011), which saw its embryonic beginnings in the Industrial Revolution and underwent a century of maturing through the post-industrial age of mass production (Raizman, 2003). Morris and Kwok (2010) provide a context for the researching of Chinese product design originality that product design was brought into China mainly through trade, following the Chinese open-door policy of the 1980s (Insch and Brad, 2004). Indeed, understanding product design as an industry in China has a history of only 30 years, and the similarity and obvious lack of originality of Chinese product design over the last three decades, can be explained by these early Western influences. The pioneer educators of product design in Chinese universities were also influenced by Western design methodology, introduced by academic colleagues with a Western design education.

Horner (2009) suggests that, after the implementation of the reform and opening-up policy in the 1980s, the Chinese economy developed quickly and the coastal cities become more prosperous. Manufacturers from all over the world have established factories in China, making China the ‘world’s factory’ – it could be said that ‘Made in China’ is the main factor of rapid growth of the Chinese economy. Through years of industrial development and capital accumulation, the Chinese people began to realise that it was necessary to exploit domestic demand, as well as serve the export market, and that Chinese industry should be enhanced from a manufacturing transition to brand creation (Ikenberry, 2008). Meanwhile, according to the research of Ross (2008), the Chinese government also advocated creative industry; and in 2002, the Chinese Communist Party made a statement to support the contemporary industrial development at the sixteenth National Congress². As an emerging industry proposed and

² The National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China is the highest organ of state power in the People's Republic of China stipulated in the "Constitution of the People's Republic of China." The National People's Congress and the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress exercise the power of state legislation. The National People's Congress is composed of representatives elected by provinces, autonomous regions, municipalities directly under the Central Government, special administrative regions and the military. All ethnic minorities should have a proper quota of representatives. The first NPC held in 1954. The 16th National Congress of the Communist Party of China was held in Beijing from November 8 to November 14, 2002. There were 2114 formal representatives present at the meeting, 40 specially invited delegates, representing 66 million members of the country.
<http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64162/64168/64569/65444/4429125.html>
(CONSTITUTION OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA,2016) Retrieved: 10 March 2016

supported by the state, suddenly cultural product development gained high attention from Party committees and government officials at all levels, as well as close concern from various circles. In 2006, the Chinese government once again put forward that it was necessary to accelerate the development of creative industry³. Since then, ‘creative industry’ appeared frequently on various media. However, the way in which competitive Chinese native design and local brands can be developed both globally and locally, remains to be studied and explored in all fields. In order to provide a context for the present study, it is essential to review the historical and cultural process of product design deeply, to understand the reasons for the successes and failures in its development, and to analyse the ‘aesthetic culture’ which relates closely to people’s lives. The methodology employed in this chapter to inform understanding of product design in the Chinese context predominantly relies on literature review, case examples, critical observations and interviews. Literature of product design history from pre-industrial revolution (Ozment, 1980) till contemporary design issues in China namely the *Shanzhai* have been included in this chapter to provide the framework for this research the seeking of originality within the Chinese context. A lack of literature in contemporary Chinese design leads to the other two methodologies in informing the present state of product design in China – interviews and observation. Interviews were conducted with 17 key figures within the Chinese contemporary design industry which consist of academics from prominent design universities in China, founders of contemporary Chinese design companies, and professionals within the Chinese design-retail sector, which contributes to the findings of this chapter. Observations through key design exhibitions both in China and overseas have also been adopted to inform the study of current trends and interpretation of cultural and national relevant designs. The full list exhibition attended has been listed in Appendix 1.1.

2.1 Origins and Influences of Chinese Product Design Development

As an extension and development of mankind’s design activity, product design has a long history context. Ulrich (2003) describes product design as an independent and complete modern discipline, which experienced a long embryonic stage. The pre-conditions for the generation of product design included the modernisation of big industry and mass production, which moved towards fierce market competition through designing objects for modern batch

³ The 16th National Congress of the Communist Party of China. Source available: <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64162/64168/64569/65444/4429125.html> , Retrieved: 10 March 2016

production. Researching the origin and development of product design reveals a complex process. Because of its particular cultural characteristics, its changes reflect the levels of material production, as well as the science and technology of an era – illustrating the conditions of social ideology within politics, economy, culture and art of the society. So, to illustrate the characteristics of the historical evolution of product design, it is necessary to study the development of its social background in order to grasp the real impetus and sources involved in its evolution.

Based on the research of He (2004), product design progress could be divided into three developmental stages. The first stage was from the late eighteenth century to the early twentieth century, which was the preparatory and exploratory period of industrial design. During this period, old and new design ideas began to confront one another and, through the Design Reformation Movement, traditional handicraft design gradually transferred to industrial design: this was the period known as the pre-industrial revolution. The second stage, between the World War 1 and World War 2, was the formation and development period of modern industrial design. During this period, industrial design already had systematic theory and was broadcast throughout the world: this was the age of machines in industrial design. The third stage spans from the end of World War 2 to the modern days – the time of writing this research. During this period, industrial design was combined with computer science and technology, as well as materials innovation and new modern manufacturing technology, leading to unprecedented achievements: this is the industrial design period in the information age. As mentioned previously, design was largely attributed as a Western ideology which transferred into China during the 1980s (Liu et al, 2008). In the West, the period of industrial design prior to this had a sound history, during which the fundamental structures and ideology for product design were formed, before eventually being introduced to the China. The study of the industrial, machinery and informational periods would present a historical context in the understanding of the transformation in Chinese product design.

2.1.1 Early industrial revolution period

Prior to the Industrial Revolution, design's early existence was in the form of traditional crafts in the early capitalist organisations in Europe, and its origins could be traced from the late Middle Ages to the sixteenth century (Ozment, 1980). Woodham (1997) holds the view that the large number of handicraft producers aided and developed the growth of trading in Middle

Ages. Though traditional skills continued, they became more specialised. In order to meet the bourgeoisie's requirement to pursue similar lives to the nobility in periods of upward social mobility, skilful craftsmen copied and sold complicated decorative products at relatively low prices. Designers in Italy and Germany developed pattern and style manuals at the beginning of the sixteenth century, which were machine-printed and published so that craftspeople could imitate and manufacture colour weaving patterns, furniture and decoration. This process could be described as the transition from traditional handicraft to modern design.

The word 'design' itself existed in the Renaissance period, when it was used to describe the process of thought germination in the artists' mind before artistic creation. However, it was not until the Industrial Revolution in the nineteenth century that designing transformed into full-time professional roles (Petrie, 1991). It is suggested that the origin of design has a strong link with the Industrial Revolution; according to Pevsner (2005), the concept of design originated from the thinking of William Morris (1834–1896), who led the Arts and Crafts Movement, and John Ruskin (1819–1900) a leading English art critic of the Victorian era. During the nineteenth century, there was a rapid change from handicraft industries to mechanised production – the Industrial Revolution. Russell (2014) holds the view that in 1769, James Watt improved the steam engine, which helped Britain achieve time transgressive technological accomplishment and enabled the manufacture of numerous powerful machines. This greatly increased the productivity of Britain and helped establish a new factory system, transforming the previous small-scaled and scattered traditional handicrafts into concentrated, refined, large-scale organised production. By 1850, Britain's industrial output surpassed 40% of the world's total production; and in 1851 Britain held a 'Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations' to herald the arrival of a new industrial age through new machinery, which truly astonished the world (Ashton, 1966).

Morris and Ruskin worked positively against the negative impact of mechanised production, including, for instance, poor product quality and aesthetic fatigue. Even though the 'idea of design' came from negative social surroundings, due to low quality products produced by machines, design as a mode of thought and cognition was resident in society at that time (Hara, 2007). Also during that time, Morris decided to abandon the world that produced abundant simple and crude mechanical goods; instead he returned to artisan craftsmanship, trying to fight against shoddy mechanical goods with a small quantity of hand-crafted, unique and noble products. Auerbach (1999) states that many artists also put forward that the most prominent

disadvantage of the Great Exhibition was the lack of design principles. Morris went on to promote the 'Art and Crafts Movement', which was the prelude of modern design and proposed combinations of arts and crafts for the first time in history. Its main features were fidelity to nature, use of natural materials and emphasis on design through materials. Its decorative style was concise and simple and included furniture, dyeing and weaving, interior decoration and metal work, etc. However, it may be said that Morris was limited in his understanding when he spoke against machinery within the Arts and Crafts Movement. Its essence is handicraft involving revitalised art, rather than industrialised art, which is surmised as one of the reasons behind the Movement's early decline (Tillyard, 1988). Therefore, designing products to be 'modern' got greater attention which also indicate the position to against mechanical product prevails (Pericles, 2000). According to the research of Li (2007) , there were two characteristics contained within Modernist design: firstly, 'functionalism' as the form of beauty – whether in buildings or products – which emphasised the function as a decisive effect on the form. The idea of 'form follows function' was proposed by Louis Sullivan (1856–1924)⁴ and is a principle that states that the shape of a building or object should be primarily based upon its intended function or purpose – such axioms were associated with industrial design and Modernist architecture of the twentieth century. The second characteristic for Modernist design, according to Li (2007), is 'rationalism', which was inspired by the rigorous and rational philosophical features of Germany and other Northern European nations. In terms of design, it weakened individualistic consciousness and instead promoted product standardisation, normalisation and efficiency based on rigorous and logical rational thinking, and scientific, objective and systematic analysis. To push design development, machines were recognised and emphasised as an inexorable outcome for the progress of modern society, and machines could aesthetically express their own era rather than being featured with traditional and historical styles. Design in the Modernist style adopted abstract geometric forms, as a way of modelling language so as to symbolise efficiency and rationality in the age of the machine, and the external form of products reflected their internal structure and function (Ley, 2014).

2.1.2 Industrial design period in the age of machine

⁴ Louis Henry Sullivan (September 3, 1856 – April 14, 1924) was an American architect, and has been called the 'father of skyscrapers' and 'father of modernism' Kaufman, Mervyn D. (1969). *Father of Skyscrapers: A Biography of Louis Sullivan*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company

But by 1923, only four years after the Bauhaus had been founded, crafts were disavowed. No longer were they thought of as ends in themselves. Gropius had reconsidered the future direction of the school, and craft was not to be an essential component of it. As he wrote in his essay "Theory and Organization of the Bauhaus," published that year in the catalogue of the first comprehensive Bauhaus exhibition, the "Bauhaus does not pretend to be a crafts school. The teaching of craft," he explained, "is meant to prepare for designing for mass production," and the school's workshops were to be seen as laboratories devoted to the making of models for industry (George, 2008).

George (2008) holds the view that the Bauhaus Movement (1919-1933) generated many innovative design concepts and marked a new age of art and design practice. The Bauhaus Design Institute, which laid the intellectual foundation and development direction for modern industrial design, was established in 1919. Its modernising spirit had significant influence, making an important contribution to the popularisation of Modernism in Europe and America. It attacked old artistic forms and pursued the representation of the industrial age. However, its over-emphasized geometric forms of design led to another formalism and caused the rejection of the historic cultural traditions and features of countries and regions, and led to the machine-made 'International' style (Giedion, 1967). In architecture, this was expressed by a 'matchbox style' featuring by a flat roof, white wall surfaces and uniform long windows (Girard, 2003).

After World War 2, the design tendency became more commercialised in terms of economy development and expansion of consumption. Industrial design was gradually developed into a new science-based independent discipline, and – due to the economic recession, energy crisis and environmental issues – was combined with ergonomics, materials science, psychology, marketing, environmental science and other modern science subjects (Cross, 2001). Furthermore, with the help of the information industry, people were impacted by the information tide linked to a revived global economy. Commerce and trade communications between countries were frequent and convenient, and information accelerated the spread and combination of various cultural thoughts. Modern information products which spread information were frequently upgraded due to the high-speed growth of economies (Fred, 1977). There is no doubt these factors influenced product design development.

2.1.2 Industrial design period in the information age

Since the 1980s, mankind has entered a new age of information which is ever expanding through the swift development and popularisation of computer technology, and the rapid expansion of the Internet. This has significantly changed the technical features of human society, and its influence on society, economy, culture and many other aspects of modern life has been far-reaching. Industrial design is at the very core of human technology and culture, and, as such, also experiences the challenges and unprecedented changes of this technological age. People have committed to conducting various design activities using the powerful functions of the computer since it was first created in 1945 (He, Sun and Bao, 1999). He, Sun and Bao (1999) also state that great achievements have been made in computer hardware and software for use in industrial design within the overall progress of science and technology since the 1980s. The computer is now widely used in numerous fields of industrial design as it is convenient; efficient; accurate; precise; easy to store; and greatly aids efficient communication, modification and design. Industrial design methods have fundamentally changed due to computer aided design. Myers, Douglas, and Christine (2016) report that the computer can be used to produce various design drawings; quick prototype technology can replace clay modelling; and virtual reality can be used for simulated display of products. Moreover, a parallel structural design system can be established to optimise and integrate design, engineering analysis and manufacture into one system, so that people of different specialties can promptly feedback information with each other, thus reducing the development cycle and ensuring a high quality of design and manufacturing (Tovey, 1989). In many cases, these changes require higher integral consciousness and greater engineering technology knowledge for designers. Based on this, industrial design practice is being strategically transferred, from the traditional industrial product to the new high-tech products and services represented by computer, which plays an important role in the process for commercialisation and humanisation of high and new technology. It also produces many classic works and creates a new era for development of industrial design. With the further development of this technology, the form of the computer will become more varied, to become the main part within the product design process.

2.2 Historical Context of Product Design in China

Before the Industrial Revolution, technique was manifested as the handicraft of manual labours, which was a kind of craft-based experiential skill handed down from generation to generation.

However, in the age of industrialisation, modern mechanised engineering technology replaced traditional handicraft. The advancement of techniques contributed directly to the improvement of manufacturing design, accelerated the realisation and perfection of production speed, function and standardisation. The birth of modern Western design could be summarised as machine-manufactured, standardised and large-scaled. After the Industrial Revolution, products were mass-produced, creating great demand for raw materials and stimulating the development markets from Europe to the rest of the world, including China.

Zhang (2013) has described the development of modern Chinese industrial history in four periods, as Table 2.1 shows below. The first period was from the close of the Opium War in 1860, through to the Revolution of 1911⁵; which represents the initial transformation of modern industry, alongside the start of heavy industry under the guidance of the Westernisation Movement. The second period was from the Revolution of 1911, to the point at which the nationalist Government took over the British concession in 1927. This was the period of integrated development of industry in the early Republic of China, as well as the formative period of modern industrial structures. The third period was from 1927 to 1937, which was the ten years under the administration of the Nanking Kuomintang Government (KMT), during which Chinese industry experienced its rise and decline. The fourth period was from 1937, to the founding of the People’s Republic of China, in 1949. During this period, there was a transient revival of the distribution of domestic national industry, due to the breakout of the war against the Japanese.

Table 2.1: Historical stage and industrial state - Periods of Chinese Industry, Zhang (2013)

1860–1911	Initial stage of modern transformation; emergence of heavy industry
1911–1927	Integrated development; formation of modern industry structure
1927—1937	Rise and decline
1937—1949	Transient revival of national industry

⁵ The Revolution of 1911, also known Xinhai Revolution, was a revolution that overthrew China's last imperial dynasty (the Qing dynasty), and established the Republic of China (ROC). The revolution arose mainly in response to the decline of the Qing state, which had proven ineffective in its efforts to modernize China and confront foreign aggression.

The modern social structure of China greatly changed with the introduction of Western technology, which encouraged China to develop its industry. The importance of machines in industrial production was recognised by the Western-facing Chinese, who pursued self-improvement and wealth. With the aim of learning from the advanced technologies in the West in order to resist the invasion of the Western powers, these industrialists actively learned new technology and founded a group of new modern industrial enterprises. Zhang (1898), leader of the ‘Westernisationists’, published an article putting forward “four importances”: (1) importance of traditional Chinese history, (2) importance of attaining practical use, (3) importance of learning Western techniques, and (4) importance of learning Western administration. The essence of Zhang (1898) thought was the “Chinese learning for fundamental principles and Western learning for practical application”. Its aim was to take on the Chinese feudal political system and introduce advanced Western science and technology, as well as social management systems for appropriated use (John, Liu and Denis, 1980).

This played a significant role in improving traditional Chinese manufacturing techniques and also produced direct influences on the development of modern industry. A good example of this was the design and manufacture of the ‘made in Hanyang’ rifle, in 1895, which was based on an archetypal German 1888 Committee Rifle. At that time, the Hanyang Iron Works and Arms Shop were established one after another, and German weapon manufacturing technology was introduced in order to successfully produce rifles and mountain guns – weapons which had determined the fate of China in the early twentieth century. Based on their own requirements, as well as the usage habits of Chinese soldiers, the Qing Government transformed the German 1888 rifle and manufactured 88 ‘made in Hanyang’ rifles. From the 1911 revolution through to the end of Anti-Japanese War, ‘made in Hanyang’ rifles were one of the major weapons in Chinese battlefields (Fig. 2.1). It could be said that ‘made in Hanyang’ represents the early importance of modern Chinese industrial products, symbolising the traditional production mode which transformed new industrial design practice; however, it also illustrates the phenomenon of product imitation.

Figure 2.1: German 1888 committee rifle vs. 'made in Hanyang' rifle



Zhang (2013) also believes that the concept of Chinese learning for fundamental principles and Western learning for practical application pushed industrial development by absorbing advanced Western technology. This manifested in their ideology of advancing with the times, to reform machine production on the basis of inheriting traditional designing and manufacturing techniques. Superficially, machine production conflicted with traditional manufacturing skills, however, it was in just such conflict that modern industry found its own developing road and acquired a good development stance.

Yeh (2007) holds the view that since the middle of the nineteenth century, when Shanghai removed the administration of Qing Dynasty, China has developed at high speed into a modern industrial civilisation. It began to have trade relations with foreign countries from 1843 and from that point various foreign goods were imported from the West into inland China. At the beginning of this new age, the appearance of various 'strange', unfamiliar products impacted the Chinese people both visually and mentally. Firstly, people who lived in Shanghai experienced numerous machines for civil use, as well as various mechanically-produced goods, all imported from the West. According to the records of Li (2002), there was a movable printer; a sewing machine (1851); a steam engine (according to the diary of Wang Tao written on January 5, 1860, it was called 'a steamer'); a gas lamp (1865); a match; a telegram (1868); an electric light (1882); a railway train (1876); and a telephone (1881). Besides new technological machines, there were also numerous daily necessities and amusing instruments, such as a camera (in the 1850s) and a bicycle (1868). There were also glasses, clocks and striking clocks, glassware, woollen clothes, toys, music boxes, dulcimers, furnishings and so on. Effectively, the material living environment was occupied mostly by Western products; it could be described as nearly industrialised.

Li (2002) also indicates that from as early as the 1850s, there were people in China who simulated and manufactured Western products with Western knowledge. By the late 1960s,

Chinese merchants began to run factories independently, however, due to a lack of knowledge of machines and technology, they often also lacked discrimination capacity when purchasing machines and employing technicians.

By now, there were many imported products in China. Since the signing of 1895 Treaty of Shimonoseki⁶, Western industries also moved into China to produce a variety of its daily necessities. Meanwhile, Chinese politics, economy and even people's livelihoods were all devoured by the Western and Japanese manufacturing industry. However, facing such subjugating aggression, China was slow to take countermeasures. Wang (2011) pointed out, that in 1901, Zhang Zhidong⁷ submitted a petition to Emperor Guangxu⁸ on modifying agricultural policies and promoting technology. It clearly stated that officials of the Qing dynasty already had a fundamental understanding of the practical objectives and economic values of technology and the design of products. However, the Qing government had still not realised the importance of developing industry; in the meantime industry in the West was developing fast.

Large international exhibitions of industrial civilisation and technological development – expos – were held in Europe from 1851. China was invited to attend the Paris Exposition for the first time in 1866, an invitation which was ignored by the Qing dynasty. It was not until 1873 that the Qing dynasty attended the Vienna Exposition for the first time. However, officials of the Qing dynasty thought the expo was just a place for the countries to provide interesting things for fun, so they reluctantly agreed to allow only folk workers and merchants to attend the expo (Fernsebner, 2010). Thus, it could be seen that the Qing government was uninterested in global expositions and did not encourage people from industrial and commercial circles to attend them. On the contrary, the reforming Japanese government paid great attention to expos. It even established an Expo Affairs Bureau, specifically to organise merchants' attendance with

⁶ The Treaty of Shimonoseki was a treaty signed by the Qing Empire and the Great Japan Empire in Japan on April 17, 1895. The signing of the treaty marked the end of the Sino-Japanese War and under the treaty, China ceded the, Taiwan Island and its affiliated islands, Penghu Islands to Japan, compensation of 200 million taels of silver to Japan. China also added Shashi City, Chongqing, Suzhou and Hangzhou as commercial ports and allowed Japan to invest and set up factories in China's ports of commerce. This treaty followed and superseded the Sino-Japanese Friendship and Trade Treaty of 1871.

⁷ Zhang Zhidong (1837-1909) Representatives of the Westernization School of the Qing Dynasty advocated " Chinese learning should be followed as the essence; western learning as the practical application." He paid great attention to education and public order, dominating the modern Chinese police system and greatly influenced the education and social development in the late Qing Dynasty. Zhang Zhidong and Zeng Guofan, Li Hongzhang and Zuo Zongtang also called "the four important ministers" in the late Qing Dynasty.

⁸ The Guangxu Emperor (14 August 1871 – 14 November 1908), personal name Zaitian, Guangxu, means "glorious succession". He was the eleventh emperor of the Qing dynasty, and the ninth Qing emperor to rule over China.

their items for display. Japanese representatives saw with their own eyes the advanced design of Western products. A Japanese representative who attended the expos even created the word 'pattern' to bring Western concepts of design wholly into Japan. At the end of the nineteenth century, Japan established a 'pattern department', which began to cultivate talents in the industry of design (Baird, 2001). With the end of the Opium War, and through the Westernisation Movement, China also began to produce mechanical and domestic products. In 1905, the first large-scale movement to boycott foreign products broke out in China, with the aim of proposing that Chinese people should use domestic products and resist the economical aggression of foreign products. Subsequently, in 1908, a movement to specifically boycott German products broke out in Qingdao, Shandong Province, China; then in 1909, people in northeast China began to boycott Japanese products. These boycotts played decisive roles in promoting the production and development of products made in China (Li and Smith, 2010). Balassa (2014) mentioned that a group of textile entrepreneurs founded a Chinese Domestic Products Society taking advocating domestic goods, developing industries, improving technology and promoting commerce as its purpose. With the outbreak of World War 1 (1914-18), European countries struggled and the transportation of products to China was greatly reduced. Taking advantage of this, China actively promoted domestic products and industry revitalisation.

However, it was impossible to maintain the selling of domestic products only through patriotism. Liu (1994) reported that Sun Yat-sen said one might be willing to sacrifice motivation by patriotism; such emotional impulses goes against economic principles, which could not last long. While fighting against imported goods, the Chinese Domestic Products Society advertised continuously to improve domestic goods is to maintain domestic goods" and "there is no other way to maintain domestic goods but to improve it. People would fall in love with it once it was improved. To achieve this, it was understood that it was necessary to develop energetic design, which was called industrial art or pattern specialty (He,2004) .

2.3 Current Interpretation of Product Design in China

The specific national situations in China determined a level of industrialisation which lags far behind that of the West. Such backwardness manifested not only through industrial lags and low technical capacity, but also in the deficiency of 'contemporary' ideology and cultural consciousness in the process of industrialisation (Tan, 2003) . Through this, 'passivity' became

an obvious feature in the development of contemporary Chinese design. Ever since its appearance, the connotations and extensions of product design in China had peculiar differences from traditional Western industrial design. After the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), the Chinese people have been shocked by the progressive development of the advanced countries; as a consequence, the Chinese government has put in place some methods to speed up industrial development, which using experience gained from the other advanced countries. With the development of the economy, the Chinese people have become increasingly preoccupied with appearance and started to purchase more luxury items (Liu,2011). However, people who cannot afford the luxurious products will go for alternative *shanzhai* products. The *shanzhai* phenomenon, as a logical result of fast economic growth, plays a significant role in product design development, which will be demonstrate in more detail in the next chapter. Yan (2011) believes that extravagance purchasing and non-concept products have now spread across the country.

China established a socialist market economy through reforms and an opening-up policy, which highlighted the gap between Chinese product design and that of Western countries. Ning (2009) clearly suggests that the industrialisation process leads to huge markets and that development is the absolute principle becomes the creed in daily life. As such, people pay much more attention to the implementation of specific projects, and the national and local governments spare no effort to increase mass production of light industrial products. However, faced with the achievements, people seem to lose their direction and neglect new exploratory development of product innovation and the linked essence of industrial design.

There are some disadvantages from profits and reality, and at present Chinese industrial design has fallen behind that of developed countries. But many enterprises seek out quick success and instant benefits – to pursue profits, production and processing technology is emphasised, and productive thinking in industrial design process is neglected. To ‘copy’ excellent foreign design has become a well-known ‘secret’ in domestic design circles (Sheng and Shi, 2010b). Product design does not develop as fast as expected, even in a period of high-speed economic growth under a market economy system. With the participation of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), industrial design in China faces international competition. On the one hand, to ‘copy’ will be increasingly difficult, as regulations related to international intellectual property protection develop; on the other hand, international, famous design companies have entered the coastal areas of China, challenging the domestic design developments. Zhao (2013)

believes that at present, product design in China is still in an initial development stage. As an independent social occupation, the profession of product designer is not established, and there is a great gap between domestic design companies and design companies in developed regions, in terms of quantity, scale, comprehensive strength and economic capability. This may prevent China from promoting the design quality of its own industrial products, as well as increasing the competitive capacity of its product designers and catching up with the top levels of global industrial design.

2.3.1 Educational perspective

The teaching of product design ideas and philosophy was introduced from Western countries to China (Liu et al., 2008). Design education played a significant role in transferring the design concept to the younger generation, to produce designers for contemporary society in China. In order to achieve the ambition to bring Chinese cultural brands to a global audience, it is essential that the educators have the same understandings in order to guide the students – the future designers in China. At the beginning of the 1980s, many universities – such as the Academy of Art and Design, at Tsinghua University (1984), and the School of Design, Hunan University (1982) – pioneered the industrial design education in China. All of the course founders studied design in various Western countries for many years in order to observe the Western teaching system (Wang, 2007) . Over the next few decades, the design education system in China continued to build, based upon the Western teaching structure (Yan, 2011). Given the high demand, Chinese design education has grown significantly in recent years and the number of universities which have design courses has exceeded 1,000. When interviewed, Zhao (2014) stated that there are around 700 universities which offer industrial design and 100 or more students graduate from different universities each year. At the same time, Zhao (2014) indicated that most courses operate at a basic level of industrial design understanding, and because of limited faculty resources and the education system of some universities, the capability to conduct design projects cannot be achieved.

Currently, the design education systems in various Chinese universities have similar features, in that they have a large quantity of students. The challenges would be to guarantee the quality of teaching and make sure the course structures are distinct to all the students. During the interview with professor Pan, he has pointed that the most common issues are that there are a lack of connection between each subject and most of institutions focusing on sketching technic

rather than the research and creativity. The discrepancies could be attributed to the universities literally following other countries' design progress, whilst ignoring the indigenous design quality and cultural values of Chinese products. Wang (2007) concluded that the teaching falls into a three-phase teaching form: modelling foundation, specialty foundation and professional design. However, the internal connection between these courses needs improvement, a systematic teaching model should be formed and achieved, and the provision of comprehensive training skills falls short; and as a result, the students would not be able to fully master the design methods and procedures. Moreover, Mathias (2005) critically states that some Chinese universities have changed direction, moving more towards creating profitable businesses. Several graduated students were influenced by this kind of industrialisation education system; moreover, many scholars, such as Pan (2014), stated in the interview that the problem is political and that some leaders of the university want to be making urgent political achievements rather than thinking of education improvements.

The main educational debate according to specialist Jackson, Martin, Malcolm, and James (2006) think that design education, especially at undergraduate level, is to cultivate the universal genius. Within the natural changes of time, knowledge and economic structures develop alongside the property and content of design; creative and technical demands are growing, and in facing the changing social requirements, the new talents needed appear uncultivated in traditional industrial design education (Scott, 2002). This interpretation differs from that which combines businesses and design projects for the benefit of students. For instance, the education system of the product design subject in Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts is one of the pioneer institutions in China that has changed from traditional classroom teaching to studio teaching (Chen, 2017). Based on the interview with the course leader, Professor Zhang in 2014, the course modules and structures were set up comprehensively, which included the project collaboration with many external design companies. In addition, they encourages students to participate in international product design competitions, such as IF and Red Dot, to understand world-wide design trends whilst promoting Chinese design globally (Zhang, 2014). In some ways, the traditional Chinese teaching style may leads to the restriction of students' imagination and creativity, but by analysing the education methods of leading industrial countries, the advantageous teaching techniques and experiences can be brought in to provide a new insight and inspiration for product design education in China.

Moreover, according to educational research and the interviews conducted in China as part of this study, interview findings shows that there is a systematic concern within the cultivation concepts, education model and teaching methods. According to Peter and Lai (2012) some of the curriculums are out of date and appears to be unchanged even though the environment faced by education is changing. Professor Zhao mentioned in the interview, almost all universities have a course module that involves investigating and designing products by using Chinese elements, with the aim of establishing Chinese design identity. However, there is an enormous debate in relation to Chinese elements, which will be discussed in a later chapter. Secondly, the scope of specialised knowledge in most of design institutions is limited and focuses on design skills rather than design thinking. Professor Pan states in the interview that students are not fully supported in their creative skills, as some universities pay more attention to design skills rather than originality and creativity. At this stage, many of the students can only be considered ‘mechanics’, but the real ‘designer’ flourishes after their graduation (Yan, 2014). The professional skills are limited to basic knowledge, which means that the students cannot combine their learning with real design projects, due to a lack of analysing and problem-solving capability.

In the current situation, the goal is to expand the education foundation and cultivate interdisciplinary talents applicable to the requirements of the time (Ruper, 2014). Design education is one of the most signification factors in design development of contemporary China and it is the main method of imparting the importance of cultural values in design, given that university education is the primary way to inspire potential designers. Therefore, the teaching of design in China and the methodology of training suggested to be rethink if the aim is to cultivate more culturally original designers.

2.3.2 Design company perspective

After joining the WTO, China became eager for enterprises to improve their investment in developing innovative products. Innovative and creative design talents were of high value and were to be cultivated, in order to facilitate the transformation from ‘copying’ to ‘creating’. Wang (2007) critically pointed out that, at that point in time, there were approximately thousands of product design companies during its high-speed economic growth period in Japan, and now Japan have set up many branch offices overseas. Currently, the quantity of product design companies in China remains small in the worldwide context, as does the relatively small

number of domestic advertising and graphic design agencies, and packaging decoration companies (Lu et al., 2009). The annual business volume of various Chinese product design companies, over the last three years, rarely exceeds RMB 2.5million. Under the current stagnant market, many design companies worry about operational issues in such a tough situation (Williamson and Zeng, 2009).

The interviews with the design companies in China have been conducted in this research. Qu (2014) pointed out in the interview that most of industrial designer teams in China composed by the younger generation, and majority of them having recently graduated from university. As mentioned in the last section, some of the graduates are lack of practical experience. During the fieldwork interviews, the product design companies could be summarised into two types: first type is that the design company who focuses on Chinese cultural products and whose purpose is to inherit Chinese culture by combining Chinese traditional elements into contemporary products. The investigation of distinctive domestic design companies in China will be analysed from a different perspective in the later chapters. The other type of product design company is the small-scale design company, of which the majority are imitating products in order to reach high profit levels.

There is a massive proportion of the population in China who cannot afford products designed by international design brands, hence, *shanzhai* products are popular due to the strong domestic market demand. Tan (2012) takes the iPhone as an example. In the USA, where the average wage is ten times that of China, the average iPhone price is about \$699; if an iPhone reflected the wage difference and sold for a tenth of that, i.e. \$69, in China, people would afford it to purchase a real iPhone. However, given that the actual price of a genuine iPhone in China is about 7,000 RMB, many ordinary people find this unaffordable and may purchase a *shanzhai* one instead. Due to high market demand, the *shanzhai* phones are getting popular, however, most *shanzhai* products only focus on copying the appearance rather than the actual quality of the goods. For example, the ZoPhone shares the exact same appearance of the iPhone5, however, it costs only about a fifth of the price, and although they look similar, the *shanzhai* mobile phone offers a totally different operating system from Apple's IOS. Which means that consumers can pay less to get a similar product, enabling them to stay on trend (Sheng and Shi, 2010b). Nonetheless, the company who produced the ZoPhone aims to create and expand their market after the launch of the *shanzhai* handsets. Like other producers, this company plans to introduce new types of mobile phones at a fast pace, offering customers more choices; although

there is no revolutionary design, they focus on some new function or quirky feature that responds to the demands of customer in lower-tier cities and their special requirements. For example, its mobiles give a dual SIM card option to customers who have mobile subscriptions that charge higher rates for domestic long-distance calls and text messages.

Xu (2014) has pointed in the interview that many enterprises seek quick success and instant benefits. In order to gain profits, they copy and imitate internationally advanced products; they attach importance to processing technology and abandon innovative talents and technology strength, which would develop new products. In order to cater for clients, *shanzhai* design companies copy other works, and this phenomenon leads to the domestic market issuing additional similar products immediately after certain high quality international brand products appear (Leng and Zhang, 2011). Overall, many companies produce *shanzhai* products because it quickly and easily leads to increased profits, which has caused an unhealthy competition system, and impeded the design companies who are keen on designing and innovating products. More discussion about *shanzhai* will take place in the next chapter, as it is a crucial stage in design development in China.

To return to the designers; according the interview with the founder of the design company, Qu (2014) mentioned that new designers must receive training in design practice for at least six months, even they have already graduated from university. This is challenging for designers, to tactfully balance their design knowledge for product development with their customer's requirements. At present, some Chinese design companies do not conduct market research in strict accordance with standard procedures. They finish deliberation and discussion at the early concept phase, carelessly concentrating too much on 2D and 3D computer rendering. Therefore, more and more companies focus on appearance through digitally created images and neglect many problems related to product design, such as ergonomic and user mentality (Deng, 2007). Zhong (2014) mentioned in the interview that in order to attract clients, some companies exaggerate these digital images in such a way that many clients are disappointed when they receive the actual product. One of the grave consequences of this phenomenon is that a few square meters of house, several computers and several designers are enough for many design companies. Many factors directly influencing the final quality of product design, such as concept maps, market research and analysis tables, appearance models and functional models are left out (Lu et al., 2009).

Qu (2014) states in the interview that product design companies in China rarely have more than 40 members of staff and most of them operate in a workshop model, which mainly focuses on completing the appearance design of the products. However, in Western countries, influential companies have more than 60 employees – some large companies even have over 500 – and are equipped with advanced facilities and have a stable customer base abroad and at home. Many companies have developed to the level where they provide the combination of product design alongside other relevant disciplines and technology fields, thus offering a series of complete services to the customer, such as market research, product design, engineering design, ergonomic analysis, production technology, product development and industrial consultation.

Increasingly, there are many varied international design events, which facilitate discussion, academic exchange, competitions and business, which clearly shows that product design has gained more and more attention. This clearly indicates that product design companies are striving to grab the worlds' attention and trust with their great enthusiasm for improvement through knowledge exchange (Zhang, 2014). With the development of the society and design field, from the economic perspective, product design is the bridge for science and application, technology and live, enterprise and market, as well as production and consumption. In the current world economy, both manufacturing and service industries have an important role. In the Chinese marketing sphere, there is a need for close cooperation among production, design and sales; and product design is the activity that can make various factors operate in balance and in the right order. It can make consumers' benefits and manufacturers' profits form a balanced entirety, and can make creation part of our lives by unifying beauty and function (Lin, 2007).

Product design innovation should be central at all levels, it is no longer limited to the appearance of the products, it potentially redefines innovation as new product functions, materials, processes, manufacturing standards, consumption concepts and life styles. Investigating the methods of innovative design will help China to master the global market because the country that lacks innovation will be left far behind the international competition. The motivation for design development relates to the continuous pursuance by mankind towards harmony (unification in technique, culture, appearance, human factors and cost). Such a pursuit is both spontaneous and inherently part of the human spirit. It is this kind of ambition for harmony that becomes the strong power in developing and sustaining the social economy. Chen (2007) states that in the history of human beings, industrial design is the bridge between

advanced technology and daily life, and is the link between enterprises and consumers. At the same time, industrial design also drives market competition; connects technology to the market; creates fine products and media; opens the difference among goods; creates the high added-value; creates the new market and promotes the subdivision of the market; and reduces the cost. In the growing competition of the globalised economy, industrial design is becoming the important resource for enterprise operation. Product design can be the important factor, and it also drives the development of the social economy, as it can not only meet the growing material needs of people, it also should meet their spiritual needs.

2.4 The Reflection in Design History and Design Development

In the search to understand factors that cause a lack of originality in contemporary Chinese product design, a thorough research of the origins of product design in this chapter has shed light with regards to the Western influence on Chinese product design. This chapter has undergone an extensive literature review into the history of product design itself, which originated in the Renaissance period and described the conceiving of artistic ideas before being created by the artist.

According to Pevsner (2005), the concept of design originated from the thinking of William Morris (1834-1896), the leader of Arts and Crafts Movement, and John Ruskin (1819-1900), a leading English art critic of the Victorian era. Both man advocated the concept of artisan craftsmanship and placed an importance on aesthetics in response to the mechanical production of goods during the Industrial Revolution, which produced items that lacked design creativity and principles (Auerbach, 1999). In the nineteenth century, handicrafts production saw an accelerated progression to mechanised production, forming the Industrial Revolution. Morris disagreed with the production of symmetrical goods with no design quality promoted the ‘Art and Crafts Movement’ in the nineteenth century, which opened the prelude of modern design and proposed combinations of crafts and art for the first time in history. Its main features were fidelity to nature, use of natural materials and emphasis on design through materials. Its decorative style was concise and simple for furniture, dyeing and weaving, interior decoration and metal work, etc. This led to the terminology of product design as a vocation, which matured in the nineteenth century (Petrie, 1991).

China has also seen the growth of industrialisation of mass-produced goods. The development of Chinese industries from a product design history can be seen in the four periods addressed by Zhang (2013): the emergence of heavy industry through the Westernisation Movement from 1860 to 1911; the development and formation of modern industrial structures post-revolution from 1911 to 1927; the rise of the Kuomintang Government, which gave way to increased development of industries from 1927 to 1937; followed by the formation of the People's Republic of China which then saw a rapid increase in domestic industries within China from 1937 to 1949. The industrial periods from 1860 to 1937, which are now seen as the beginnings of industrialisation in China, were greatly influenced by Western technology with a similar emphasis on the mechanical production of the Industrial Revolution. In the wake of the revivalist Chinese industries, there were nationalistic sentiments to resist the invasion of Western powers, which encouraged the Chinese to learn advanced Western science and technology, as well as social management systems for appropriated use (John et al., 1980), which at that time was deemed more effective and developed. The nationalistic sentiment also led to the boycotting of foreign goods in the early 1900s, including goods from Japan and Germany. This gave way for local manufacturers to promote domestic products and the revival of Chinese manufacturing through the motivation of patriotism (Li and Smith, 2010). However, due to China's boycotting of foreign influence, the development of technologies in product design and manufacturing lagged severely behind the West, its severity highlighted especially during the Cultural Revolution in the 1970s. As described by Tan (2003), China was losing not only in its industrial maturity and technical know-how, but also the development and understanding of modern design ideology linked with cultural awareness during the period of industrialisation. Henceforth, it is to be deduced that the backwardness of Chinese industrialisation in the period of rapid global industrialisation has resulted in the deficiency in maturity and originality of Chinese contemporary product design. As evidenced by Li (2002), the Chinese businessman, who started manufacturing products through varying degrees of acquired Western technology and knowledge, struggled with the appropriate technical capacity and know-how to produced quality Chinese goods.

Through interviews conducted with educators of product design in China, it is being discovered that the education of product design originates directly from design schools in the West (Wang, 2007). In the past few decades, the design education system in China has been built up based on the Western design and teaching structure (Yan, 2011). Educators have brought the teaching ethos of the West back to China, which was now a healthy economy with high demand in mass

production for both markets in and out of China. While product design education was in its infancy in China in the 1980s, the market opportunity has drawn a large demand for products especially in the wake of the open-policy. The economy disparity among the Chinese, alongside the growing demand to own goods, drew a widening opportunity for imitation goods. Imitation goods became prevalent in the 1980s amongst Chinese manufacturing, with an emphasis of products appearing to be similar to the original but produced at a lower price. This phenomenon, named *shanzhai*, has created a market with huge demand for imitated goods, both within and outside of China. The lack of understanding of copyright laws, coupled with a growing demand for goods within a growing economy, caused *shanzhai* to flourish within the country, leading industry players to further focus on imitation and copying Western advanced products, rather than producing original and culturally relevant Chinese goods. The *shanzhai* phenomenon will be further discussed in the following chapter, taking into account its cultural background, and its present implication on originality in contemporary Chinese product design.

Comparing the historical context of product design in the West – as championed by William Morris during the Industrial Revolution as a response to the sub-quality mass-produced goods with aesthetic fatigue – the lack of originality and quality of the Chinese goods in contemporary China can be seen as a mirror to the mass-produced goods during the industrial Revolution. With the maturation of design within product design in the West post-Industrial Revolution, it is optimistic that the current lack of design originality in Chinese goods is a parallel phase to a developing industry; which, through the natural impacts of a globally competitive open market, will be ideally phased out through the maturing of industry into one with a greater emphasis on Chinese design.

Chapter Three: Shanzhai - A Cultural Phenomenon in Contemporary China

In order to understand the reasons causing the lack of originality in China's product design, an investigation and reflection upon the *shanzhai* (山寨) phenomenon is centre to underpinning the huge gap in originality and creativity in China's contemporary design. The *shanzhai* phenomenon – a culture of mimicry and imitation – became a household term in 2008 (Edward, Kevin and Yu, 2009) and carried significant influence on the ideas and ideals of Chinese manufactured goods or products, ranging from grass-roots businesses to large manufacturing companies.

The term *shanzhai* was originally used to refer to the mountain stockades of regional warlords or bandits, far away from government control. Today, however, the term has become a new name for the fake or pirated goods produced in China, which are usually associated with low-quality and 'lookalike' features. According to the paper published by Hennessey (2012), the term *shanzhai* has had an expanding meaning throughout the centuries. The common connotation of *shanzhai* in contemporary terminology refers to industrial counterfeiting or the violation of intellectual property through piracy and copying. However, this single view is not exclusive and may often be misleading. A wider historical and contemporary context of China will be taken into consideration in following chapter, which aims to deconstruct *shanzhai* from the historical, contemporary and cultural perspectives.

Hsiao and Chou (2004) discuss that in the current market environment, with short product life cycles and intense competition, product development must not only satisfy the quality and speed of production, but must also ensure that products themselves have included innovative values. Thus, Chinese designs must be creative and novel in order to stay competitive in current international markets. People hold different views, as they think "Creativity is still one of the most mysterious elements in human thinking" (Hsiao and Chou, 2004). The advantages and disadvantages of *shanzhai* will be demonstrated below, in both its development and its influence on design innovation, defining the *shanzhai* phenomenon as an understandably norm during a country's development stage.

The cultural origins of *shanzhai*, its relevancy and impact on today's contemporary Chinese design seen in Chinese products are researched in this study through the reviewing of literature of both Chinese and Western research, allowing this chapter to present a holistic representation of this unique cultural phenomenon that is usually only seen in the critical light from the West. Interviews have also been conducted with Chinese contemporary design personnel to obtain timely relevant perspectives on the climate of Chinese contemporary design, its influences and potential. The semi-structured interview approached with considerable amount of open-ended questions has allowed this research to acquire complex understanding from the interview in which other more standardised approach may have limited. Findings from the interviews with practitioners and academics of the contemporary Chinese design industry have since been analyse, to form much of the arguments of this chapter.

3.1 Cultural Origins of *Shanzhai*

According to the literary definition, the term *shanzhai* (山寨) has two meaning: one, is “a fenced place in the forest”, and the other one is “villages in the mountain that have stockade houses”. Interpreting this literally, ‘shan (山)’ means mountain and ‘zhai (寨)’ means village. However, despite this origin of *shanzhai*, we historically utilise a derivative meaning of “counterfeiting culture”.as an explanation. Liu (2000) demonstrated that at the end of the Han Dynasty (206BC – 220AD), there was social unrest, as people suffered from ceaseless war. People built their own forts, also known as *zhai* during the time which meant “temporary station of army” (Hennessey, 2012).During the Tang and Song Dynasties (618-1279), *zhai* was also a common phenomenon amongst the people of building for self-defence and military purposes.

Through time, *zhai* turned from temporary structures to permanent structures which were used for defence – for example, villages surrounded with fences, barriers, trenches and other enclosed defences to form a fortress. As time passed, the *zhai* built by people to protect themselves against bandits, was invariably also used by the bandits, especially in chaotic periods of conflict (Shi, 2010). As mentioned by Chen (2011), the bandit organisations formed during periods of war and unrest tended to imitate normal societal structure. The leaders of the bandits were called ‘King (King of the Mountain)’, and were also referred to as ‘the master of the *zhai* (寨主)’, thus their headquarters came to be called ‘*shanzhai*’. *Shanzhai* was also originally used to refer to the mountain stockades of regional warlords, where they were used

for military defensive purpose. The terminology of *shanzhai* was linked to bandits, far away from government control; they were ruthless thieves and who stole possessions that belonged to others. The term has then been extended and used to describe products which were not under governmental control, and which have stolen the originality of other products, or have been produced in direct imitation of other goods, giving the ancient word *shanzhai* a contemporary context in describing counterfeit products and goods.

The evolution process of *shanzhai* in a historical context can also be traced from Chinese literature which had a significant impact on Chinese culture and worldview. *Shanzhai* culture can be traced back to one of the most influential novels in Chinese literature, called ‘Outlaws of the Margin’ which describes stories of ‘The 108 Heroes’⁹ which, according to Henessey (2012), consist of:

Women as well as men, hard-fighting, hard-drinking ruffians, murderers, kung fu fighters, wandering knights, and errant vagrants who stand for a curious sort of loyalty and justice, mayhem and deception, is part of the basic popular cultural fabric of a Chinese upbringing to this day. Most of the heroic characters in the stories hail from the lower strata of Chinese society, have little or no formal education, and devote themselves to physical pursuits such as martial arts, drinking, and fighting. They also live and die in accordance with a consistent shanzhai moral code (Henessey, 2012. p.7).

Before examining above paragraph, it is necessary to understand the origin of the popularity of Louis Cha (Jinyong)’s *kung fu* fiction of martial arts and chivalry, called the *wuxia* genre. Principally in the novel, itinerant swordsman and chivalrous women have similar personalities and aims as the 108 heroes, that is, to eliminate the marauders and help the down-trodden knightly (Huss and Liu, 2007).

Such novels celebrate the ‘heroic’ novelty of men and women who may be courageous and righteous, but who, ironically, are outcasts from formal society or from warlords. Yang (1998)

⁹ The 108 Stars of Destiny refers to one of the four famous "Outlaws of the Marsh" in Liangshanpo 108 leaders, composed of the Sirius 36 members and the Earthly Fiends 72 members. The 108 different characters, each with its own merits, different outcomes, is a classic figure in the history of Chinese literature. The novel "Water Margin" is also one of the most portrayals of novels.

holds the view that the major aspect of Chinese feudal society is centralisation and local separation. Towards the end of each dynasty in ancient China, the government would usually begin to lose central control over its territories, while corruption among governmental officials would begin to intensify, which led to revolt by armed bandits and outlaws. These bandits, who robbed the wealthy to help the poor and kill corrupt officials, received support from civilians, which contributed a force capable of rivalling the government. The popularity of such novels, may be in readers identifying with and celebrating the deeds and acts of bandits, and indirectly reflecting present society. The moral dilemma, as Hennessey (2012) suggests, outlines the cultural fabric of the Chinese, which has been deeply embedded for centuries. These counter-cultural elements share similar attributes with *Robin Hood* in the Western culture and are widely accepted among the ‘grass-root’¹⁰ people who have no power over an authoritarian dynasties or government.

These heroic figures, formed mostly of social outlaws with little or no recognition in the formal society, would have the opportunity in ‘*shanzhai*’ societies to express their identity and rebellion against the feudal systems, even if their conduct was invariably against the law (Deng and Li, 2010). However, both *shanzhai* and grassroots innovation are outside of government control, because ostensibly they have an official sanction as ‘indigenous innovation’, although it is a ‘pathway’ influencing mainstream culture, which also violates the rights of intellectual property. Liu (1989) suggests that the essential cause of modern *shanzhai* counterculture in China is linked to the fact that modern Chinese culture ironically still reflects a bureaucratic culture, just as it did in imperial times. Additionally, Hennessey (2011) provides similar arguments for the linkage between counterculture and official bureaucratic culture:

There are distinct indications that in some quite remarkable ways China’s contemporary official bureaucratic culture is actually reconnecting with its seemingly ineradicable Confucianist roots. China’s contemporary shanzhai “copycat” counterculture responds to Chinese contemporary “official” bureaucratic culture in a strikingly similar fashion to the ways in which shanzhai counterculture of popular fiction and secret societies of yore reacted to its official Neo-Confucianist counterpart in imperial times (Hennessey, 2012 p.637).

¹⁰The meaning of grass roots: the ordinary people as distinct from the active leadership of a party or organization; people at a local or ordinary level; available at: <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/grassroots>

The acceptance and rise of grass roots *shanzhai* culture, as explained above, reflects the cultural reality of the Chinese in a yearning for expression and self-determination under a wider culture of strict protocols and regulated freedom, both in imperial times and contemporary China, which provides a different perspective of *shanzhai* in its historical socio-political context.

Following the exploration of *shanzhai*'s terminology history, it is imperative to understand how the term became an adjective to describe imitation products, and how *shanzhai* culture has become an important contemporary phenomenon. The word *shanzhai* topped the list for most searched term on the Internet in 2008, and has seen increasing interest among people throughout China, rapidly spreading via social media. The Tencent Company¹¹ defined 2008 as '*shanzhai* year'. The popular use of the word *shanzhai* begun in 2001, according to Zhang (2009), the first modern use of *shanzhai* was in the mobile phone industry, where some small factories imitated the design style from original brands, such as NOKIA. The products had the same configuration, but with a different logo of NCKIA instead, as Figure 3.1¹². As discussed earlier, the 'ZoPhone' which shares the exact same appearance of the Apple iPhone5, but at about a fifth of the cost; however, although they look the same the *shanzhai* mobile phone offers a totally different operating system. Hence, consumers paying less gain a low-quality product.

Figure 3.1: Left: *shanzhai* NCKIA vs. Right: NOKIA



Additionally, Xu (2009) holds the similar view of the usage of *shanzhai*, in that it comes from the Cantonese slang, meaning small medium enterprise (SME), and that the main features of

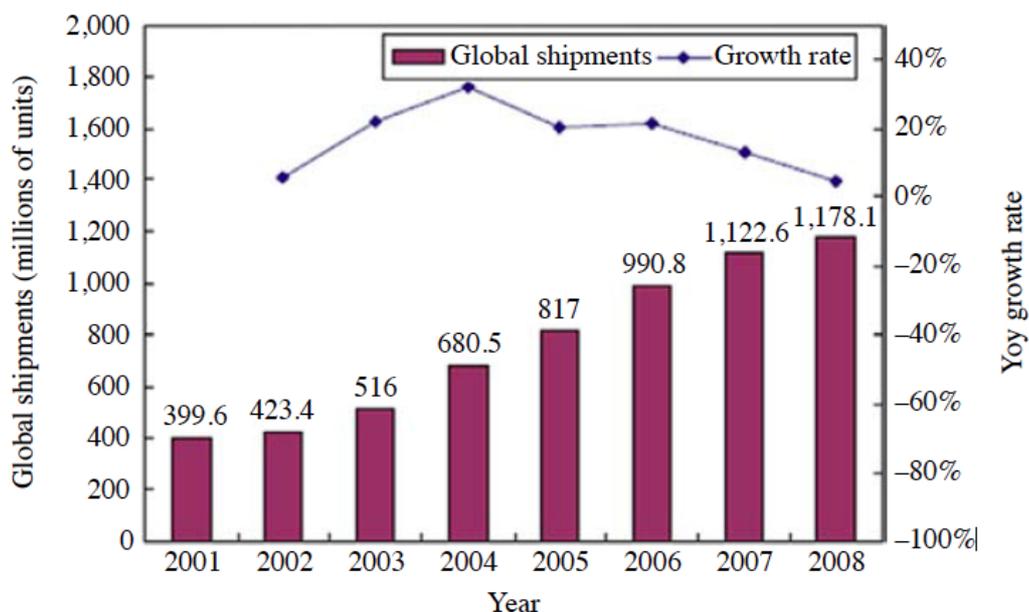
¹¹ Tencent Company, founded in November 1998, Tencent is one of the leading providers of Internet value-added services in China. Tencent services include: social and communication services QQ and WeChat / WeChat, social networking platform QQ space, Tencent games QQ games platform, portal Tencent, Tencent news client and network video services Tencent video (Tencent, 2016).

¹² Image source: Zhang, Pengfei. (2009). Shanzhai and Shenzhen. Solid-State Circuits Magazine, IEEE, 1(2).

shanzhai are imitation and rapidity. Another suggestion on the origin of *shanzhai* is that it originates from buyers in other parts of China, who were calling their imitative products ‘*Shenzhen* products’ because most of the electronic component manufacturers in China were based in the city of Shenzhen, in the Guangdong province. *Shenzhen* and *shanzhai* sound similar when people speak Mandarin with a Cantonese accent, hence, ‘*Shenzhen* product’ has slowly transformed into ‘*shanzhai* product’ (Han, 2011).

The word *shanzhai* is the most suitable word to describe the imitation phenomenon in both contemporary and historical context. The mobile phone industry is the starting point of the *shanzhai* trend, it is necessary to investigate their important developmental features. Along with the booming economy and the rapid growth of China's modern industry, especially after China's entrance into the WTO, the issue of industrial design has become unprecedentedly crucial. According to Gao (2011), *shanzhai* as an informal economy, in the context of cultural revolution and globalisation, was eventually reborn in a new form. China had already become one of the greatest production powers in the world, especially in the mobile phone market, as can be seen in Figure 3.2¹³.

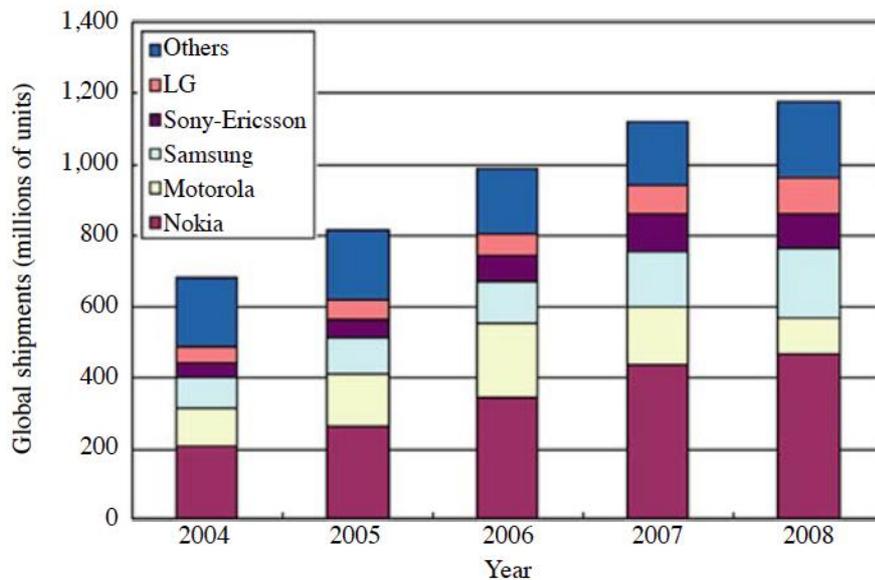
Figure 3.2: Mobile phone handset and growth rate



¹³ Figure 2.2: Mobile phone handset and growth rate; Source: Strategic analytics (2009)

In 2008, global shipments in the mobile phone market had nearly tripled in comparison to those of 2001. Between 2004 and 2008, more than 80% of the mobile phone market was dominated by five brands: Nokia, Samsung, Motorola, Sony-Ericsson and LG. As can be seen in the analysis shown in Figure 3.3¹⁴, over 60% of the 1.2 billion mobile phones were produced in China, and the ‘others’ were produced mainly in Shenzhen, Guangdong province (Ho, 2010).

Figure 3.3: Five mobile phone handset vendors



According to government policy, manufacturers are not allowed to produce mobile phones without a license, however, the majority of licenses are monopolised by the large international and domestic corporations. As a result, smaller factories and businesses who are unable to afford the extremely costly license fee have no choice but to go into underground production, tax evasion, imitation and duplication – ultimately forming a unique phenomenon in China (Leng and Zhang, 2011). Being free from license restrictions, the *shanzhai* companies are able to launch new mobile phone models every one or two months, giving them a distinct production advantage over the non-*shanzhai* brands, whose models could take six months from proposal to release. By the time the official brand is on sale, the *shanzhai* brand could have saturated the market with several new models.

Du (2009) divides *shanzhai* mobile phone scenarios into three main types: firstly, smuggled handsets; secondly, high quality duplicate phones or exact duplicates, which break copyright and patent laws; and thirdly, new products that could not be sold in the general market due to

¹⁴ Figure 3.3: Five mobile phone handset vendors; Source: Strategic analytics (2009)

heavy licensing fees. Du (2009) also mentions that the government should not put a complete stop to this phenomenon, but instead should discourage the first two scenarios and develop policies to help companies reach the third scenario, in order to encourage creativity and innovation. Sheng and Shi (2010a) indicate the essential perspectives of the use of *shanzhai* are as follows:

Because of its fast growth, huge volume shipments, very short life circle of new product introduction and indigenous innovation or adaptation, as well as secretive supply chain traceability, the PRD (Pearl River Delta region in China) people give this phenomenon a strange but rather romantic name – the Shanzhai phenomenon (Sheng and Shi, 2010a. p.31).

The *Shanzhai* phenomenon exists in many product areas, not only in daily-use products but also in entertainment service products. The social media and the entertainment industries have also been struck by this phenomenon. *Shanzhai* movies, television series, music records, cartoons, newspapers and even celebrities. China Central Television News (CCTV, 2008) addressed the issue on *shanzhai* in its news program on 3rd of December, 2008 – the first time a home-grown issue such as this has been covered on National Television.

Some *shanzhai* supporters think that the development of *shanzhai* provided employment opportunities and stimulated the economy (Boeing 2009). *Shanzhai* expanded throughout the whole digital area, into a variety of consumer electronics and IT products, such as handphones, game consoles, digital cameras, etc. Furthermore, after the initial breakthrough of imitated products being termed ‘*shanzhai*’, many more products have extended beyond consumer electronics into the food and beverages industry, pharmaceutical industry and the clothing industry, etc. These products appear to have lost the essence of creativity which their predecessors (*shanzhai* mobile phones) once had, turning them into sub-quality products that hide behind the cosmetic illusion of imitation. These products are merely imitation – wearing the hat of *shanzhai* – and do not truly carry the values their predecessors once held (Ding and Pan, 2011).

Indeed, some *shanzhai* brands have achieved success in their own right. For instance, the Chinese domestic mobile phone brand K-Touch, which is one of the biggest local handset

makers in China, produces relatively inexpensive smartphones and targets value-conscious customers (Erin, Sun, and Chen, 2010). K-Touch has not only surpassed its main domestic rivals, but has also narrowed the gap with overseas giants such as Nokia, Samsung and Motorola, moving aggressively into overseas markets. However, in the initial stages, it appealed to consumers who actually embraced China's *shanzhai* culture. The mobile phones launched by K-Touch are similar to the 'ZoPhone' and other market leaders, again they have a similar appearance but a different configuration.

Nonetheless, as discussed in early section, after entering the market by launching *shanzhai* handsets, K-Touch aims to create and expand on a large scale. With this in mind, they always introduce new mobile phones at a fast pace, offering consumers increased choice. Although there is no revolutionary design, K-Touch focuses on small function-oriented details and quirky features – such as the dual-sim card discussed in early section– that respond to the special requirements and demands of customers in the less-affluent cities (Hu, Zhu, and Wan, 2011).

BYD is another example of success where the manufacturer changes from imitation to innovator. BYD's original business module was based on making copies of Toyota's vehicles, whereas now it applies for more than 200 patents for their products every year, far more than Toyota does (Shirouzu, 2009). This prevents BYD keep from being involved in legal disputes, and they are still able to maintain a low price for their customers. However, H. Wang and Kimble (2010) hold the view that BYD's innovation was based on developing its own technology – electric cars – in response to a deteriorating economy, rather than focusing on cutting costs and developing smaller cars like many other local manufacturers. After making a significant breakthrough in car battery design, the company has incorporated its new technology into China's first electric hybrid car.

Clearly, as can be seen from the above examples, creating purely *shanzhai* products is not the way to success. The reason why these enterprises survive and mature, despite vehement competition, is that they abandon simple imitation and move towards indigenous innovation. However, *shanzhai* has turned from a phenomenon into a more of a culture in China. Tan (2012) gives his view on the popularity of the *shanzhai* phenomenon in China, he states that *shanzhai* development mainly relies on the market ecosystem particular to China. China is a developing country, which moves forward in an unsystematic manner. Many foreign brands became well-established during China's rapid economic development and are far ahead of Chinese brands,

in both technical quality and reputation. When global products flood the Chinese market, the local industry is uncompetitive, as developing new technologies and building a good brand reputation takes time. Some Chinese regions still have low levels of consumption and the people there cannot afford the high-quality global brands, however, they still demand new products in order to improve their living standards. Therefore, there is strong domestic demand for *shanzhai* products.

Shanzhai has gained worldwide attention, and there is now an ironic meaning associated with product imitation, in that some *shanzhai* companies imitate products because of brand worship. More specifically, taking Apple as an example, all the products from Apple occupy leading positions in the market, which is a serious challenge for the small companies to exceed. Therefore, small companies copy and imitate as an expression both of adoration and dissatisfaction of the market monopoly. These products are essentially similar, yet portray differences. In one way, it demonstrates the mainstream driving forces of the economy, yet in another, shows the cultural dissatisfaction and views of the newer generation. Thus *shanzhai* is utilised as a medium to express these feelings (Zhang, 2009).

To summarise, the historical and contemporary points of view have an uncanny connection. In the past, *shanzhai* referred to making camp on an inaccessible mountain to protect oneself against imminent danger; eventually, a leader was elected, and the camp grew to become a village, with its own tailored rules and regulations, which the people believed were realistic and able to offer them protection. But in the political scene of our modern era, commoners have little or no direct way to influence the decisions and policies dictated by the upper-class or government societies. To fill the esteem gap, they seek other methods to express their feelings within the boundaries of the law, again building rules and regulations that are tailored to their beliefs, like in the past, eventually sparking the *shanzhai* phenomenon.

The *shanzhai* phenomenon can be categorised as a part of a mass media that has its own set of differences, which are non-ideological and non-traditional. It is a culture that arises from the society, born through emulating and challenging mainstream cultural practices by using creative imitation, thereby challenging underlying values in order to surpass its original counterpart.

The *shanzhai* culture shares some similarities with the essence of vigilantes, where the like-minded gather to do justice in their own way, openly challenging those in power, and robbing the rich to help the needy. They are not afraid of authority and are willing to oppose it to fight for materialistic and social freedom. In the present context, if not fully understood and followed blindly, the *shanzhai* culture would be exploited by businesses, utilising underhanded practices to maximise monetary benefits. The rise and development of the *shanzhai* phenomenon in essence, could also be due to the rapid growth of modern economic and cultural developments.

3.2 Opportunities and Limitation

In the previous sections, the history of *shanzhai* and its effects on contemporary society was discussed. The following section is going to discuss the greater knowledge of the usage of *shanzhai* and its effects. Bellandia and Lombardib (2012) suggested that the features of *shanzhai* products mainly target local markets and mass-consumers, due to their low costs, highly effective production lines and suitability for local requirements. Tan (2012) points out that typical *shanzhai* companies mainly target the less developed localities, such as the lower-tier cities of China or other developing countries, meeting these customers' local requirements perfectly. Moreover, *shanzhai* companies have also identified the global demand and have taken the opportunity to occupy the middle to low range markets, which are mostly neglected by multinational companies.

To some extent, *shanzhai* manufacturers directly challenge the origins of traditional industries. At the same time, these *shanzhai* companies slowly develop their production towards maturity. To be specific, effective and optimised industrial processes leads to significant reductions in production costs. Normally, *shanzhai* products have a shorter production cycle, less than a quarter of the original brand production cycle, as the research and development stages are omitted. Li (2009) concluded that *shanzhai* is replication and a partial innovation. *Shanzhai* products can be cheap, but the quality and customer service cannot be guaranteed.

Despite the various *shanzhai* methods in different fields, there are always certain characteristics that they share. Josephine (2010) suggests that the demand for *shanzhai* products remains strong in rural areas and among migrant workers with less income. However, *shanzhai* culture not only includes mimicry and parody, but it also contains a grass-root innovative spirit. Many *shanzhai* companies have begun to move beyond merely copying, extending into creative

innovation – building their own brand by insisting on technological improvement and new product development. Some *shanzhai* products are exported overseas, which has given impetus to the development of the Chinese economy. These companies are also creating job opportunities (Sheng and Shi, 2010b).

Generally, there are three levels of imitation which *shanzhai* products can be streamed into. Firstly, an exact external replica, this kind of *shanzhai* product utilises the similarity to the original product as an attraction point to consumers, and at times makes it difficult to distinguish the genuine from the imitated goods, as in Table 3.1. The second category takes the original product as a base and makes minor adjustments to the appearance of the product. The third and final category, copies the most unique points of the original product and makes changes to the rest, imitating but improving it at the same time, and bringing a certain sense of creativity.

*Table 3.1: Comparison of Original design and shanzhai*¹⁵

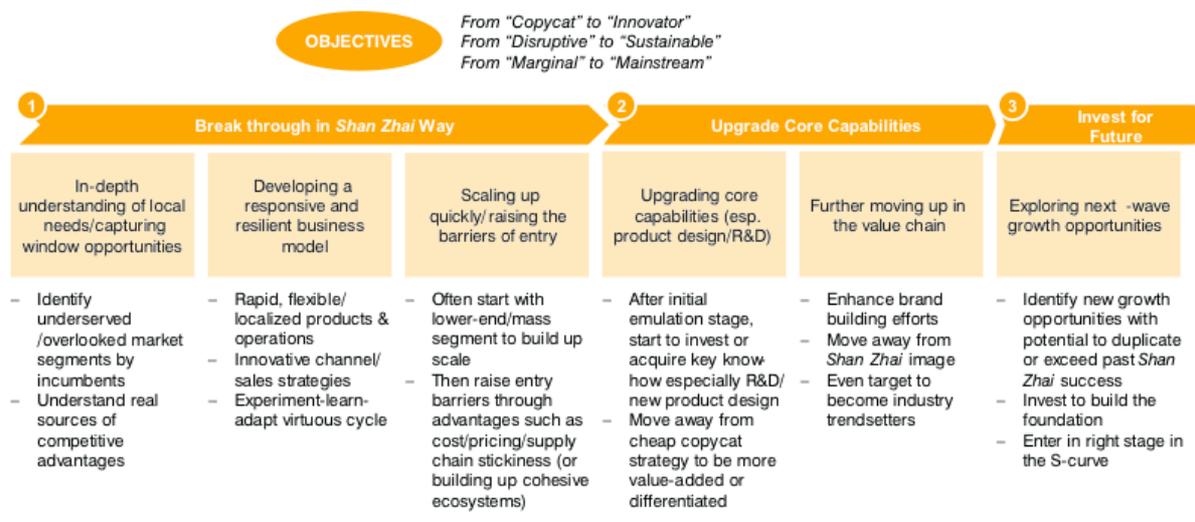
	<i>Original design</i>	<i>Shanzhai product</i>
<p><i>Eames chair</i></p> <p><i>Designed by Charles Eames</i></p>	 <p>Price: £333</p>	 <p>Price: £16</p>
<p><i>Vitra butterfly Stool</i></p> <p><i>Designed by Sori Yanagi</i></p>	 <p>Price: £ 618</p>	 <p>Price: £15</p>

¹⁵ Figure Source: <http://www.vitra.com/en-gb/product/butterfly-stool>; <https://www.polyandbark.com/eames-dsw-style-molded-plastic-side-chair-set-of-2.html>; www.taobao.com

‘Shanzhai’ can be considered as a catalyst which playing an increasingly bigger role in stimulating economic growth, creating jobs, increasing tax revenue, and invigorating the market (Mitra, 2017). However, on the other hand, ‘shanzhai’ also breaks some rules. Imitation – a leading feature of the *shanzhai* culture – can be legally allowed, only if it is limited to such an extent that the legitimate rights are not infringed. *Shanzhai* products have always attracted consumers by copying popular designs and technology. The violations of intellectual property rights have strayed from orthodox policy and are developing the national business intentions of China, yet, this also leads to the decline in the reputation of Chinese products.

Edward et al. (2009) also summarised the phenomenon of *shanzhai* into three phases as Figure 3.4 shown below:

Figure 3.4: Development stages in shanzhai



Through deeper analysis of *shanzhai*, it can be seen that copyright infringement and stepping beyond the law do not appear to be characteristics of the *shanzhai* phenomenon. The main characteristic is to reduce manufacturing costs and to imitate the creativeness of actual products. *Shanzhai* gains its fame through low production costs, by selling imitations of popular products, and by further improving the products. Thus, the *shanzhai* phenomenon and the widely speculated imitation goods, have a degree of difference.

Replicating a product does not share the same boundaries as that of imitating a product and bringing improvements to it. Similarly, low production cost is not the main focal point of imitating/improving a product. *Shanzhai* relates differently to different markets and industries,

some produce products that look externally the same as those of famous brands, some produce products that share the same design concept, and others, the same functions. There are even some imitated products that daringly change the outlook and functionality of the actual product. Some *shanzhai* businesses that have grown and amassed a certain amount of capital and skills have begun to strike their own new and creative paths. The Xiaomi company is a typical example of the transformation based on *shanzhai* in both the Chinese and global market.

Arthur (2015) states that Western brands used to refer to the Chinese mobile manufacturer Xiaomi as the Chinese version of Apple, as they thought that Xiaomi was a Chinese mobile phone maker which mimicked Apple's design. But today they can see the genuine and innovative side of Xiaomi. Numerous media from various countries describe Xiaomi mobile phones as the most popular mobile phones in China, maybe even the global market. Thus, it appears important to investigate the development of Xiaomi.

For many years, the Chinese mobile phone market offered consumers an unappetising choice, presenting both a challenge and an opportunity for Xiaomi. People could either buy a high-quality, imported phone such as an iPhone or a Samsung Galaxy, and pay a high price, or instead settle for a cheap, inferior domestic equivalent. As its official website states, Xiaomi was founded in 2010 by a serial entrepreneur named Lei Jun (2010), with the belief that "high-quality technologies do not need to cost a fortune." To bring that vision to life, he gathered together an intelligent management team and technically skilled technicians, as well as many skilled people who are referred to as senior elites in the industry, including people from Google, Kingsoft, Microsoft, Motorola, Yahoo and other global Internet and technology companies. Consequently, Xiaomi has created remarkable hardware, software and Internet services for their brand followers. Back in 2013, Xiaomi was a relatively obscure Chinese handset maker, but quickly became a highly successful company with significant product sales. Indeed, by the first quarter of 2014, it had become the top smartphone seller in the largest handset market in the world: China (Lee and Hung, 2014).

A report published by Canalys Analyst Company¹⁶ in 2014, highlighted Xiaomi's remarkable growth, surpassing giants like Samsung and Lenovo to become the top player in China. Due to its huge growth in China, Xiaomi became the fifth largest smartphone maker in the world. Over

¹⁶ Canalys is an independent analyst company that strives to guide clients on the future of the technology

the second quarter of 2014, Xiaomi shipped 15 million smartphones within China, up from 4.4 million in the same period of the previous year. According to the report, over the same period, Xiaomi beat Samsung, which sold 13.2 million smartphones in China, down from 15.5 million in the same quarter of the previous year. Overall, in comparison with the second quarter of 2013, Xiaomi grew 240%, to take 14% of the Chinese smartphone market. According to Gartner's (2014) latest report, the real growth in the third quarter of 2014 was in developing markets. With the price difference between conventional phones and smart phones becoming negligible, companies in developing countries seemed to be trading upwards.

Rivera and Meulen (2014) state that Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Africa recorded their highest growths, with sales of smartphones growing almost 50% year-on-year. Although Samsung and Apple are still the biggest single brands, due to its aggressive progress, Xiaomi is likely catch up with them soon and now accounts for 38% of total global sales mobile phone and 47.5% of smartphones. Within three years, nine out of ten mobile phones will be smartphones. Xiaomi incorporates feedback into their expanding product range, which currently includes the Mi 4, Mi 3, Mi Pad, Mi Box, Mi TV, Redmi 1S and Redmi Note, Mi Power Bank and other accessories (Xiaomi, 2014). Also, Xiaomi sell their products directly to customers instead of going through distributors or retailers, in order to keep their prices competitive. With more than 18 million Xiaomi handsets sold in China in 2013, and with the launch of products in Singapore, Malaysia, Philippines, India and Indonesia, Xiaomi are clearly getting ready to take the next step into global the market.

Papenfuss (2015) stated that Xiaomi topped the list of the ten best Chinese technology companies of 2013, and also mentioned that Xiaomi has phenomenally mimicked Apple. Meanwhile, the founder Lei Jun became famous. Table 3.2 shows the comparison of Chinese "Apple" and the genuine Apple.

Table 3.2: The Product ranges of Comparison of Xiaomi and Apple

In Product Launch	Xiaomi 4 vs Iphone5s
	
Mi pad vs Ipad	Xiaomi track pad vs Apple track pad
	
Xiaomi HEZI vs Apple TV	Xiaomi mobile phone vs Iphone 5C
	

Although, Xiaomi was first known by its *shanzhai* image, it has changed the way it operates, offering a wider product range, tailored to the customers' needs, and is now more innovative, with more sustainable development. Lei Jun, who has been nicknamed by Chinese media as the Steve Jobs of China, has truly helped generate a lot of attention for the company (Chen, 2014).

Schiacenza (2013), explores the background to Xiaomi becoming a prevalent commercial force in China. Xiaomi was labelled as 'attractive' because their smart phones are fully functional and, compared with the universally defective *shanzhai* products, the quality of their products is of a high enough quality to enough to compete with any of the world's biggest mobile phone

makers. Also, Xiaomi products are less than half the price of an iPhone. The popular Mi3 model, for instance, costs only \$327; in comparison, Apple's iPhone 5s retails for \$866. In comparison to the iPhone or similar Samsung phones, Xiaomi price their products within a more affordable range as. However, Xiaomi products are not that cheap, Custer (2013) pointed that “The price is right in the sweet spot—it's cheap enough that it's still affordable to most people in their target demographic, but expensive enough that people know it's not garbage”. According to Wolf (2013), the price is 40% to 60% higher than similar mobile phones from Samsung.

Chen (2014) states that besides competitive pricing, in order to lure customers Xiaomi focuses on offering special software that customers cannot get with other Android devices. The company offers a customised version of Android, called Miui, which customers can help design by giving feedback online. The company releases a new version of the operating system every Friday, which spurs engagement and innovation within the community, and quickly develops to provide services that are tailored to Chinese customers, such as anti-harassment and anti-disturb functions. The difficulties in these developments are not seen in the technology, but in the need to always keep an eye on the customers' needs and feedback. This strategy has contributed greatly to Xiaomi's positive reputation and enlarges the market in a very short time.

It can be concluded from the previous research, that initially almost all ranges of *shanzhai* products have the similar features: targeting the domestic market in order to fit local requirement; lower income customers; short cycle production and quick market response; and low production costs. However, perhaps the real secret to Xiaomi's success is its marketing strategy, which, oddly, is to avoid any marketing at all. Most Chinese mobile phone companies rent space in the country's ubiquitous multi-story shopping centres, but Xiaomi sells its devices online only, which saves almost 60% of costs and gives the company an exclusive advantage that other mobile phone manufacturers lack. Also, Xiaomi has created brand orientation by extracting many experiences from Apple and has been working on designing new products to suit domestic market requirements. Considering their marketing strategy, it is difficult to judge that whether Xiaomi is an innovation company based on *shanzhai*, or a *shanzhai* company violating the principle of design.

3.3 Innovation or violation

The *shanzhai* phenomenon although commonly viewed as an imitation phenomenon (Boeing, 2009), is worthy of a critical rethinking, as it illustrates how Chinese companies can achieve success in developing competitive advantage without following conventional wisdom in product development. *Shanzhai* can be seen as either a new wave of innovation, or an outright violation of intellectual property rights. *Shanzhai* exists in numerous product areas, and to most people imitation, copycat and poor quality are generally the first impressions of *shanzhai*. However, *shanzhai* brings benefits – Sheng and Shi (2010b) state that up to one million people have been involved in *shanzhai* development resulting in an annual estimated flow of 100 billion RMB. As mentioned previously, *shanzhai* is built upon imitation and creativity breakthrough, especially tailoring imitated products according to the demands of the market. Chen (2015) as the founder of a Chinese manufactory states in the interview that some *shanzhai* companies utilise the skills and expertise gained from imitating other products to pave a new and creative pathway, and some have even transformed into popular and famous enterprises. On the other hand, *shanzhai* companies selectively utilise various resources to carry out integrated innovation and development of new products. Through learning by doing, imitating and tailoring, *shanzhai* companies can accumulate expertise and creative skills – a classical use of experiential learning. As theories from technologies and innovation suggest, ‘learning on the job’ is the best method for gaining experience and skills, and the skills attained will be the foundation of new technological and creative breakthroughs.

Improving economic market growth and consumer benefits at the same time, is the ideal. *Shanzhai* products are cheap and affordable, allowing consumers to buy products earlier, allowing them to enjoy the benefits of new technologies in the market. Compare with before, there are more people in China can afford a smartphone, which would not have happened if not for the *shanzhai* phenomenon. Even consumers who would prefer buying better known branded smartphones, would still reap the benefits of lower pricing as they are facing competition from *shanzhai* brands (Barboza, 2009). Moreover, the *shanzhai* products include a vast array of selections with numerous functionalities, which has changed the structure of the market, forcing global companies to import newer products into China to satisfy the demands of the consumers and to populate the markets. This, in return, allows consumers to have more options and is but yet another advantage that the *shanzhai* phenomenon has brought about. A further advantage is the ‘catfish effect’, where strong competitors are causing the weak to improve themselves, to either gain more technological advancements or fail completely.

Furthermore, Ho (2010) pointed out that economic growth can be stimulated as *shanzhai* products are cheap, and because of these cheap products, potential buying power can be increased and can also, in turn, stimulate domestic demand. This may even have a multiplier effect, for example, the appearance of *shanzhai* products revolutionised the phone, which once was a symbol of status, into a mere household product – a product which is mass produced, thus spurring the economy. *Shanzhai* started from imitation, but acted as competition towards multinational companies – adopting the classic Chinese saying ‘learning barbaric methods to attack barbarians’ – and could well be the basis of rebuilding the industrial chain, allowing more of the profits to be contained within China, deterring multinational companies from exploiting China's global manufacturing capability. Obviously, the *shanzhai* phenomenon brought multiple disadvantages, for example, if not carried out properly, the *shanzhai* process may overstep legal boundaries and violate intellectual property rights. This is also the most common mistake a new *shanzhai* company will make, and as such companies should pay more attention to it, and the government should play a role to advise and direct them.

According to Chen (2015)’s point in the interview, some *shanzhai* companies during their start-up phase may place too much emphasis on the manufacturing process to be ‘short, flat and fast’, to maximise short term profits, however, this misleads them towards evading control measures, not registering their companies and evading taxes (Leng and Zhang, 2011). This has to be harshly dealt with and eradicated in many cases, without impeding the progression of other *shanzhai* companies. Many *shanzhai* companies are law abiding and follow regulations set out by the government. For example, many *shanzhai* smartphones utilise MTK chips and lower branded components resulting in little to no difference from state owned brands, except of the lack of a license (Zhao, 2013). If the government is willing to provide them with an open, equal and fair platform, many companies would be able to survive and grow, minimising the occurrence of black markets and also bringing more profits to China's economy.

Poor or no aftersales service is one of *shanzhai* brands' main weaknesses. At the same time, they are also guilty of disparity between the promised performance of their products, compared to that of their original counterparts. For example, some *shanzhai* phones may advertise a 5MP camera but in fact they only support up to 3MP. However, these problems have been greatly improved recently, and an increasing number of *shanzhai* manufacturers are providing aftersales service.

Shanzhai products' main weapon is its selling price, but because of homogenisation, their profit margins are constantly reducing. For example, where a multinational company enters the low-end market and aggressively sells products that are similar in functionality and price to *shanzhai* ones, it may be difficult for *shanzhai* companies to follow suit. Since the end of 2008, many multinational companies have done just that, causing many *shanzhai* businesses and manufacturers to close or to radically change their product lines (Liu and Si, 2010).

The lack of core technologies is the most imminent danger that *shanzhai* companies face while expecting growth due to the financial capital, human resource and technological know-how required for technological innovation (Sheng and Shi, 2010a). In the case of the phone industry, despite being able to innovate through additional physical features on imitated products, the capability required to innovate technologically in operating systems is one that most *shanzhai* phone companies do not possess seeing that even sizable state-owned phone manufacturers do not own such capacity and rely on third-party technology solutions (Lee and Hung, 2014). It is evident that a common problem among Chinese *shanzhai* companies suffers from the lack of investment in newer technologies.

The *shanzhai* infringement problem may be seen as purely a poverty issue. However, the *shanzhai* phenomenon is not only specific to China, it could be summarised as a global phenomenon during the development stage. Jiang (2012), a former member of China's Supreme Court, suggests that counterfeiting is not so much a Chinese cultural issue, as a developmental issue. Other developed countries like Japan and Korea have progressed through a similar period of 'imitative industrialisation', which seems to suggest that developing countries would need its people to grow in wealth prior to legislation to increase intellectual protection.

*Table 3.3: Shanzhai in multinational corporations*¹⁷

	Shanzhai Company	Post-Shanzhai
<i>Multinational Corporations</i>	Nike was <i>shanzhai</i> ASICS' tiger running shoes	Become one of the largest sporting companies

¹⁷ Source: Study on the general disciplinarian of SHANZHAI phenomena and its policy suggestion, School of Management and Economics, University of Electronic Science and Technology of China (2013)

	Dell Studio one 19 was shanzhai Apple Mac	Become one of the largest computer manufactory
	Toyota was <i>shanzhai</i> Dodge	Become one of the largest car companies in the world
	Panasonic	Become the world's leading electrical companies
	Hyundai and KIA	Korean car already has influence in the world
<i>Privately- owned Chinese car company</i>	Chery QQ	From <i>shanzhai</i> to innovation
	Geely	
	BYD <i>shanzhai</i> Toyota	
<i>IT Companies</i>	QQ <i>shanzhai</i> MSN	The largest instant chatting apps
	Weibo <i>shanzhai</i> twitter	It is one of the most popular sites in China, in use by well over 30% of Internet users, with a market penetration similar to the United States' Twitter.

The first few companies in a market have an increased chance of achieving greater profits, due to the fact that they are providing a new product or service that has been introduced with little or no competition. The introduction of *shanzhai* companies utilising imitation and low-cost production, causes profit margins to decline rapidly, but achieves balance in the market. The decline of profits for the companies that entered the market early, forces them to change their focus into something new and original. This is one of complex processes by which technology, economy and the society are improved. From this viewpoint, we can see that *shanzhai* is neither uniquely Chinese, nor a recent phenomenon. In fact, the *shanzhai* phenomenon appears in many developing countries, many renowned companies or rapidly developing companies utilised *shanzhai* methods in order to progress and develop. As shown in Table 3.3, *shanzhai*, as a process, has a distinct history and exists in many different countries and companies.

Shanzhai manufacturing is an important factor in industrialisation. 60 years ago, ‘Made in Japan’ was regarded as representative of low-cost and low-quality products. After 10–20 years of committed development, Japan has become the global leader of electronics (Sheridan, 1990). Likewise, in the past Hong Kong lacked the ability, equipment and the management skills to industrialise themselves. We have witnessed the growth of Hong Kong, from an insignificant city to a global economic hub; from this, the *shanzhai* phenomenon then migrated and became the leading force of China’s economy. Many world cities and industrial regions that have experienced rapid economic growth have roots that could be traced back to *shanzhai* beginnings. Thus, from the global perspective, the *shanzhai* phenomenon that China is facing appears unavoidable, but the most crucial common issue is the evolution to overtake its predecessors in order to achieve greater originality. Overall, Chinese enterprises’ competitive abilities are weak and they are unable to successfully promote national brands’ reputations. The sheer quantity of *shanzhai* products and their inherent legal problems not only ruin the reputation of the goods made in China, but also deviate from the national development strategy of constructing innovation in the country. Additionally, *shanzhai* companies are a barrier to the development of domestic enterprises who are intent on building their own successful brands. Such brutal competition may leave these developing domestic companies uncompetitive, which is also an obstacle for guiding the sustainable development of Chinese industry.

3.4 Review *Shanzhai* Phenomenon in China

To summarise, the lack of originality in Chinese designs can be largely attributed to the cultural phenomenon in China called ‘*shanzhai*’. The *shanzhai* phenomenon, which has a historical context of rebels establishing unregulated territory as an expression of counter-culture to main stream society due to oppressive regulators, has been revived in modern China through the production of imitation goods. The irony of the lack of self-determination in ancient Chinese history and the modern era demonstrates an embedded Chinese culture of a distant but authoritative government, and a culture of Chinese commoners who seek political, economic and social expression through counter-culture efforts. Similar to the bandits and unofficial regulations created in *shanzhai*, modern Chinese people created rules and regulations within the boundaries of law in the quest for expression tailored to their beliefs. Hence, giving life to the modern *shanzhai* phenomenon in the period of open-policy in China under the fresh capitalism influence in business and manufacturing.

In seeking an answer to a lack of originality in Chinese design, understanding *shanzhai's* history has significant value, giving a fresh perspective towards the topic, as the lack of originality in current design can be linked to China's social history of challenging mainstream culture through imitating the values and practices of mainstream and powerful institutions, thereby challenging their underlying values and, in certain cases, defeating the original counterpart (Jiang, 2012).

Li (2009) has pointed out that *shanzhai* could be a new method of innovation, despite its controversial approach. The method of mimicry and imitation on a national scale, while being branded as 'Chinese', is seen in many other countries during their developing years. Korea and Japan are examples of countries which have undergone a period of 'imitative industrialisation' in the production of low quality imitation goods and which have since succeeded in innovating themselves into global leaders in design and manufacturing. This shows that *shanzhai* can also be seen as a development issue, rather than purely cultural.

Therefore, through the research into global expansion, *shanzhai* can be concluded as an essential stage in learning to innovate, although critical arguments in innovation limitation and definition of originality are necessarily taken into consideration in following chapters. *Shanzhai's* culture is a push to organisations that may profit from developing new products, as *shanzhai* eliminates the unjust pricing found when there is a lack of competition. Some people may even see the *shanzhai* culture as entertaining, or even as a cushion to soften the impacts of social distress. However, the ill effects of *shanzhai's* culture cannot be ignored as unawareness of this issue has led to the issue of this research, which is a lack of originality in products manufactured by the world's second largest economy – which implicates the huge cost of lost cultural identity, and the lost potential in designing products that are able to inherit the rich cultural history and oriental essence of China.

Chapter Four: Chinese Elements

In the 1980s and 1990s, Western style prevailed in many design areas in China, including architecture, product design, interior design and graphic design, etc. The majority of these styles were accepted and indeed some designs were blindly imitated (Ang, 2005). Following China's economic reform and open-door policy, people's living standards have improved through economic growth, which has brought a certain set of requirements for design and aesthetics. Xin, Cagan, and Vogel (2007) hold the view that in order to occupy the market, designing products with reference to Chinese elements is a common strategy, no matter whether that's domestic or international companies. Some of the new generation designers have recognised the negative influences and impacts of the rampant *shanzhai* phenomenon on domestic design in China, therefore, the designers are starting to get inspiration from traditional Chinese elements. In the view of Yang (2014), integrating design with Chinese elements is one of the ways to show the long history of Chinese culture and spirit to the world. The trend of using Chinese elements as a design objective has experienced a sudden surge in popularity, and features in many industries and professions, such as advertising, music, design and art, exhibitions, products and animation (Wen and Huang, 2010). However, Moalosi (2007) pointed out that some designs with Chinese elements are extremely symbolic, due to the lack of research in relation to culture and design on the part of the designers. Xin et al. (2007) also hold the similar view that the core value of the cultural product is not only symbolic formalism, but to also obtain the meanings behind the product.

After the experiences of the *shanzhai* period, the importance of originality and creativity in the design field has gained more and more attention and, hence, design with Chinese elements can sometimes be mistaken for Chinese design. In terms of the long history of China, a design with Chinese elements can carry cultural characteristic, spreading an expression of 'Chineseness', but it is not qualified enough to be stated as 'Chinese design' in contemporary China. This chapter is going to address the meaning of Chinese elements from different perspectives in order to establish which factors comprise the view of Chinese elements. Also, taking current designs as examples, there will be an analysis of how Chinese elements appear in different design fields, using designs which express 'Chineseness' in order to categorise Chinese elements and to summarily present the Chinese elements applications method.

The methodology adopted in this chapter consist mainly of interviews with designers, academics and design professionals in the Chinese design community. Through interviews with professionals of the sector, a clearer picture of present ‘Chineseness’ and ‘Chinese Element’ interpretation is allowed, building upon available literature. Observation has also been used as another methodology to record the difference Chinese designs in the past which aims to communicate “Chineseness”. A detailed breakdown through various Chinese designs obtain over observation will be detailed in this chapter in which analysis is being done over, with aims to provide a better understanding of the influence of Chinese elements on product design development in China.

4.1 Defining ‘Chinese Elements’ in Design Practice

China has become the manufacturing world centre due to the rapid development of the manufacturing industry in China (Zhou, 2008). Alongside this growth, product design in China is also experiencing immense development (Nolan, 2001). China, with an ancient civilization dating back 5,000 years, has a myriad of Chinese elements that could be used as features to embody ‘Chineseness’ in the global context. Through the interview, Xu (2015) states that being infamous for its *shanzhai* manufacturing, it will be a challenge for the designers in China to move away from the negative connotations of ‘Made in China’ to a newly confident ‘Designed in China’. Faced with economic globalisation, how Chinese contemporary design can be recognised alongside global design trends is an important issue to be considered. Is the way forward to continue imitating Western design or perhaps to adopt traditional elements of Chinese culture into contemporary design?

According to the research of Liu and Nie (2010), ‘innovation’ is one of the most frequently used words in contemporary China. ‘Chinese elements’ is also a hot topic in recent years, and the use of Chinese elements has already become a shortcut for design innovation in China. Wen and Huang (2010) also suggest that ‘Chineseness’ in design is a popular topic in the design industry and Chinese elements have been used in many fields, especially after the Beijing Olympics in 2008. However, many researchers now argue that using Chinese elements as a design innovation has not been successful for Chinese design innovation. Zhu (2014), for example, argues that Chinese elements have never been so recognized for more than one hundred years since twentieth Century. However, the most ironic thing is that China is comprehensively influenced by Western culture and the associated lifestyle is far from the

Chinese tradition. For the sake of modernisation, Chinese elements have been deeply influenced by Western and away from the original innovation intention due to a large amount of vulgar information which lacks of cultural connotation. As discussed in previous chapters, Chinese elements are presented as part of a new era to carry forward traditional culture, whilst conveying modernity of contemporary features.

Before investigating Chinese elements, it is necessary to understand the meaning of ‘elements (元素)’ under the context of China. Lao Tze¹⁸, believed that the universe was burned in chaos, and historically, ‘elements’ refers to the chaotic state of the universe at the beginning of time. The word ‘Yuan (元)’ refers to “origin, big and maximum” while ‘su (素)’ means “simple or arterial materials” (Chen and Zhang, 2010). ‘Elements’ also means life, which is equal to ‘the Gate of Wonder’ and ‘the Gate of Mystery’. Different concepts of ‘elements’ in ancient and modern China can present different ways of thinking between Oriental and Western philosophies. From the perspective of ‘birth’, it is perhaps better to select the concept of ‘seed’ in Buddhism. Modern audiences are familiar with the word ‘element’, however the original meaning of ‘element’ not only refers to ‘composition’ but also has to include the sense of ‘birth’, as ‘birth’ is the fundamental way of thinking and the ideological basis of the philosophy of life of Chinese national culture (Cheng, 2010).

Ni (2009) holds a similar view, that ‘element’ refers to “the basic components of the constitution”. Combined with the word ‘Chinese’, it has been endowed with cultural significance, that is, ‘Chinese elements’ actually means ‘Chinese cultural elements’. As the definition of culture is very broad, with profound meanings, related research into its definition and connotation will be discussed in the later chapters. In defining this investigation, a wide variety of terminology associated with Chinese culture can be classified within ‘Chinese elements’. According to Ding (2010), Chinese elements covers all 56 ethnic Chinese groups, each with their own cultures. The word ‘Chinese’ is not only understood within the name of the Chinese nation, but also represents the entire Chinese culture (Ding, 2010). All these unique, specific features shown by distinctive symbols can be called Chinese elements. Specifically,

¹⁸ Lao Tzu (BC571-BC471), was an ideologist, philosopher, writer and historian in ancient China, the founder and main representative of the Taoist school, and was remembered as the ancestor of Li by the Tang emperors. Lao Tzu is a celebrity in the world of culture and one of the hundred celebrities in the world. His "The Tao Teh King" (also known as "Lao Tzu") are surviving from the world. The core essence of his works is simple dialectics, which advocates action through inaction.

what belongs to the Chinese civilisation: its history, geography, nature, science and technology, material, spirit, temperament, quality, languages, arts, customs, patterns and institutions can be regarded as ‘Chinese elements’ (Wang and Lin, 2009). In the past decade, Chinese elements in design have received increased attention from the government, education and society (Saxenian, 2002). In 2006, the first Chinese Element International Creative Award (CEICA) was established by the China Advertising Association (CAA)¹⁹ and supported academically by Tsinghua University and Peking University. Since the first award was launched it has spread through 20 cities and 32 countries, however, initially the competition was only concerned with the field of advertising, but now its coverage is comprehensive (CAC, 2010). Each year, the CEICA has academically promoted the usage of Chinese elements, and introduced Chinese design inheritance, subversion and integration. The concept of the competition is to inherit and spread the vitality and creativity of Chinese elements in the design field. Meanwhile, the competition also provides a platform for domestic designers and businesses to address key issues around the importance of Chinese elements in today’s global market. Similarly, almost all design courses in Chinese university include a ‘Chinese elements design’ module and an ‘ethnic culture’ module, and national culture field research is also provided (Wang, 2007). According to Zhu (2014), the first Chinese Element Cultural Festival, was organised to take place online on 8th August 2007, to mark ‘Chinese elements Day’. The following year, the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympic Games marked the culmination of the Chinese elements movement. Chinese cultural design has been strongly promoted by the government, education institutions and social media, and a wider variety of products with Chinese elements has gradually appeared on the market, such as those shown in Figures 4.1- 4.4.

¹⁹ China Advertising Association (CAA), was founded in December 27, 1983, is an institution directly under the Industry State Administration and directly led by the relevant state ministries. Registered by the Ministry of Civil Affairs non-profit community organizations, associations belong to the national level. Voluntary association of the country have certain qualifications advertisers, advertising operators and advertisement publishers, and advertising-related enterprises, institutions, juridical association and so on. The association on behalf of People's Republic of China to participated in international co-wide organization.

*Figure 4.1: Close stool design*²⁰



*Figure 4.2: Red wine packaging design*²¹



*Figure 4.3: Chinese elements poster*²² *Figure 4.4: Chinese wine company exhibition stand*²³



The selected examples separately represent the particular design field which includes product design (Figure 4.1), packaging design (Figure 4.2), graphic design (Figure 4.3) and exhibition display (Figure 4.4), the similarity of these examples is that they simply use Chinese characteristics in design to present ‘Chinese Design’. Evidently, this kind of ‘Chineseness’ design also appears in other design fields, for example, the well-known architectural design the China Pavilion: ‘The Oriental Crown’ (Figure 4.5), which was created for the Shanghai Expo 2010, and is the largest and most expensive national pavilion with an estimated value of \$220 million.

The China Pavilion: ‘The Oriental Crown’, has distinct Chinese characteristics, which are combined with a variety of Chinese elements and integrated with modern construction techniques. Figure 4.6 demonstrates the part of the National pavilion which is blended with the

²⁰ Image source: <http://news.to8to.com/hangye/1319.html>, Retrieved 01 Oct, 2015

²¹ Image source: <http://www.chineseelement.com/awards/#/2007/45>, Design by Jie An and Yingming Zhang (XinJiang PuLaNa Planning Co, Ltd), Retrieved 03 Oct, 2015

²² Image source: <http://www.suca.com.cn>, Retrieved 03 Oct, 2015.

²³ Image source: <http://www.cdqyzl.com/Case.asp?Clas> , Retrieved 05 Oct, 2015.

nine ‘overlapping seal’²⁴ patterns, the curved strokes of every word dependent upon recognisable simplicity. The overall shape is adapted from the concept of Ding²⁵ – a kind of vessel – from the three dynasties of Xia²⁶, Shang²⁷ and Zhou²⁸, as shown in Figure 4.7. The four-legged tripod of Ding plays a supportive role in the pavilion design.

*Figure 4.5: China Pavilion: The Oriental Crown*²⁹



*Figure 4.6: Nine overlapping seal pattern*³⁰



*Figure: 4.7: Ding (vessel)*³¹



The pavilion designer, He (2010) states that the overall building is coloured red because this is the colour of many traditional buildings in China. There are so many red elements in Chinese culture, therefore, he thinks ‘red’ suitable to represent China. As a significant national landmark building, the role of ‘Ding’ is not powerful, but a need to convey a sense of power

²⁴ The seal is a very special Zhuan character, which originally was popular as a “stated official seal” in Song dynasty and mainly used for seal engraving with its curved strokes and symmetry.

²⁵ Ding (Chinese: 鼎, dǐng), formerly romanized as ting, were prehistoric and ancient Chinese cauldrons, standing upon legs with a lid and two facing handles. They are one of the most important shapes used in Chinese ritual bronzes. They were made in two shapes: round vessels with three legs and rectangular ones with four, the latter often called fanding. They were used for cooking, storage, and ritual offerings to the gods or to ancestors. Image source: <http://www.baike.com> Retrieved 09 Oct, 2015.

²⁶ The Xia dynasty (c. 2070 – c. 1600 BC) is the first (likely mythical) dynasty in traditional Chinese history. It is described in ancient historical chronicles such as the Bamboo Annals, the Classic of History and the Records of the Grand Historian.

²⁷ The Shang Dynasty (c.1600-1046 BCE) was the second dynasty of China which succeeded the Xia Dynasty (c. 2700-1600 BCE) after the overthrow of the Xia tyrant the Shang leader.

²⁸ The Zhou Dynasty (1046-256 BCE) was the longest-lasting of China's dynasties. It followed the Shang Dynasty (c. 1600-1046 BCE) and it finished when the army of the state of Qin captured the city of Chengzhou in 256 BCE.

²⁹ Image source: <http://www.way2english.com/c12009.html>, Retrieved 09 Oct, 2015

³⁰ Image source: <http://www.galinsky.com/buildings/chinapavilion/index.html>, Retrieved 09 Oct, 2015

and authority, which requires the four pairs of grand pillars – like a great four-legged ‘Ding’ – to raise the China Pavilion on stilts, presents a state of sturdy and unrestrained authority. In addition, it can also convey the power, which is characterised with steadiness, generosity and magnificence, demonstrating the ‘Chinese style’. Barr (2012) states that the design of the building is a combination of Chinese elements and modern design, which also conveys a concept of rising powers and simultaneously demonstrates Chinese cultural confidence to the world.

The China Pavilion design was explained by the Shanghai Expo authorities as denoting ‘civilian closeness’, which actually appears to be a rather sarcastic explanation, given that the way in which the building is designed hardly offers a cosy communal embrace, on the contrary, the building stands as an authoritarian symbol that exudes a disengaged majestic distance. Zhu (2010) takes issue with the cosy connotations: firstly, compared with national pavilions of other countries, the China Pavilion occupies a very large area, completely exceeding human dimensions, expressing the imperfection of human nature; secondly, the capped structure progressively grows upward with an excessive repression, causing a kind of tension visual threat to the visitors; and thirdly, the entry gate at the bottom building is similar to the entrance of a royal tomb of the Ming and Qing dynasties, reminding people of the old feudal bureaucratic empire.

According to Barr (2012), the China Pavilion: ‘The Oriental Crown’ is an approach to create contemporary Chinese national images for both domestic and international viewing by the Chinese ‘soft power’. Nye (2004) states that the original definition of ‘soft power’ is the ability to shape the preferences of others through the attraction of one’s values, culture and policies. According to the arguments Barr (2012) has mentioned, it is suggested that the use of Chinese characters in the design of the pavilion has reflected a willingness to represent the fast development in China in order to improve its international image. However, this huge piece of architecture was given the expression of strict authority, which is far from the civility, humanity and equality of modern-day China; even the ‘red colour’ means auspicious in Chinese folklore. Although the whole design of the China Pavilion combines Chinese elements and expresses Chinese features from traditional concepts, its ‘Chineseness’ is only a veneer – it doesn’t actually deliver the real contemporary features and meanings to the outside world.

The designing of products incorporating Chinese elements is not only prevalent in China but can also be seen in Western countries from as early as the seventeenth century. According to Hamilton (1984), the sense of traditional Chinese elements spread to the West and led a trend in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which focused mainly on the areas of ceramics, furniture, silk and silverware, etc. Western artisans took inspiration from Chinese symbols such as flowers, bamboo, animals and added special decorations into their own designs. Needham (1970) mentioned that the earliest academic literature, which relates to how Chinese style appeared in Western designs, not only analyses the various changes in the images of ‘Chineseness’ within the European concepts, but also describes the evolution of Chinese elements in the different stages in design. Jacques (2009) states that, during the eighteenth century, Western countries saw China as an ancient civilisation, well known for its etiquette and rich cultural heritage. However, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the perspective of the West changed from admiration to indifference due to the lack of social development in China. It was perceived to some extent that cultural heritage and innovation had not experienced parallel development. After the Chinese economic reform³², the economy developed rapidly, China opened the door to other countries and started to interact in global business and cultural exchanges. China also embraced the opportunity to let more and more people comprehend the ‘new China’, creating a new Chinese national image. Nevertheless, comprehension of the concept of ‘Chineseness’ for the majority of the Westerners is still based on basic Chinese images and symbols, which can be illustrated by some examples of existing designs (Figures 4.8 and 4.9).

³² Chinese economic reform refers to the program of economic reforms called "Socialism with Chinese characteristics" in the People's Republic of China (PRC) that was started in December 1978 by reformists within the Communist Party of China (CPC) led by Deng Xiaoping.

Figure 4.8: Left: Roberto Cavalli; Centre: Christian Dior; Right: Armani Privé ³³



Figure 4.9: Left: Swiss Brand – Huntsman; Right – Swiss Brand: Swatch ³⁴



As can be seen from Figures 4.8 and 4.9, Chinese elements are used in many successful international design brands. Also, because of the famous design brands of Roberto Cavalli, Dior Amani and their international fashion shows, using Chinese features has become a trend in the fashion world. Multinational companies lead different kinds of marketing research in order to participate in the Chinese market, as they understand the significance of the Chinese market. In terms of Chinese aesthetics, some Western designers select Chinese elements and combine them with Western design to attract customers, and some companies set up a new department only for Asian market research and design (Melewar, Meadows, Zheng, and Rickards, 2004). Despite the centuries-old relationship between the West and the East, the impression of China for many Westerners still remains basic, limited to the visual symbol effect. Considering the literal meanings of Chinese elements explained previously, designing products

³³ Image source: Daria Werbowy for Roberto Cavalli (Autumn/Winter 2005, John Galliano's for Christian Dior (Spring/Summer 2009) and Haute Couture show of Armani Prive. <http://blog.ifeng.com/article/37106142.html>, Retrieved 06 Oct, 2015

³⁴ Image source: <https://www.victorinox.com/global/en/Products/Swiss-Army-Knives/>; http://shop.swatch.com/en_gb/watches/originals/new-gent Retrieved 10 Oct, 2015

with ‘Chineseness’ should adhere to the Chinese way of thinking and philosophy in life as a priority.

Chinese contemporary design has developed over several decades. During the period when Western contemporary design was dominant, Chinese modern design followed Western influences by imitating their style and design methodology. Later on, they gradually started to pay attention to the inheritance and development of their native culture. As can be seen from this process of development, Chinese contemporary design is moving forward step by step and now is much closer in internationalising Chinese cultural elements. However, even though the influence of ‘Chineseness’ in art and design has in many ways spread from China to all parts of the world, the form of this art is restricted to a form of visual representation – oriental images with a Chinese influence – which are not a representation of contemporary Chinese design (Yang, 2006). Real Chinese design should not be merely in the visual elements, but also in the values, culture, philosophy, languages and so on. Chinese designers, therefore, have a long journey ahead to rethink better ways of spreading ‘Chineseness’ through their designs to go beyond vague visual elements. Currently, creativity, research and design in Western countries are more advanced than China’s, and it is a concern that Chinese designers, faced with the effects of globalisation and competition, continue to innovate from a Western interpretation of Chinese design, rather than innovating original designs originating from ‘Chineseness’.

4.2 Understanding of ‘Chineseness’ design by Chinese elements classification

How to perfectly apply Chinese elements into the design of contemporary products for innovation and integration has been widely debated. Qi and Grégoire (2000) provide a selection of cultural symbols that can represent China: Confucius, the Great Wall, Imperial Palace, the Classical Gardens of Suzhou, Master Sun’s Art of War, Taoism, Terra Cotta Warriors, Tang Empire, Mogao Caves, Porcelain, Silk Cloth, Beijing Opera, Kung Fu, Shaolin Temple, Journey to the West, Temple of Heaven, Mao Zedong, Acupuncture, and Chinese Cuisine. Wu (2014) stated that people of Western countries are interested in ancient China as a cause of curiosity. These symbols of China, however, cannot entirely represent contemporary China, therefore, it is important to understand what features demonstrate contemporary ‘Chineseness’ design. After a period of design development and growth, there is now noticeable progress in the use of Chinese elements in product design. From the initial stage of imitation, designers

have learnt how to explore and innovate, and now strive for independence to develop product designs with Chinese characteristics.

According to the definition of Anastas and John (1998), design as a broad term has already contained the meaning of craft and can be divided into material and immaterial forms. The innovative inspiration for contemporary design can be extracted from the massive resources of profound Chinese elements, which can be converted to the essence of ‘Chineseness’ (Morelli, 2002). A Chinese visual element identification system might be established to convert the Chinese elements into Chinese design elements. Chinese elements are such a wide topic, which could also be summarised into material and immaterial aspects if based on the popularity of current ‘Chineseness’ product design trend.

4.2.1 Chinese elements: immaterial form

According to Alvarez et al. (2013), one of the main barriers in any design field is to translate immaterial processes into physical design, which requires designers to understand social communication strategies by comprehensively considering a variety of complex information. The investigation starts with current Chinese elements design and the three most common immaterial aspects in the context of the current Chinese market, as follows.

Firstly, the extraction of design elements from traditional Chinese folk-art and Chinese characters. Some domestic designers in China were endowed with abundant artistic materials and inspiration from Chinese folk-art. According to the research of Fischer (1986), folk-art is one of the original sources of all art forms, and is an important factor that constitutes traditional arts of diverse ethnic groups. It is passed from generation to generation, continuously innovated and developed into a beautiful art forms full of national characteristics. Chinese art characters, such as traditional painting and calligraphy, are also applied into designs. Figure 4.10 and Figure 4.11, show examples of designs which have used traditional Chinese symbols as design elements: Figure 4.10 illustrates inspiration taken from the Peking Opera; and Figure 4.11 shows how the Chinese characters “見” and “土” have been incorporated into product design. Characters or images can express particular visual meanings in a certain design form (Liu and Nie, 2010). In his research, Zeng (1986) named some examples of folk-art and handicrafts,

which include New Year woodblock prints, paper-cuts, shadow plays, puppets, facial makeup, drama, figure stone, graves, kites, blue cloth and the knot.

*Figure 4.10: Peking Opera Facial Makeup Chair*³⁵



*Figure 4.11: Chinese Characters bookshelf*³⁶



According to Chiang (1974), Chinese traditional painting, calligraphy and seal cutting can be described as the quintessence of Chinese culture which can be expressive in a variety of ways, sometimes atmospheric and vigorous, but other times detailed and exquisite – which could be a unique style in design expression. Chinese folk-art is the essence of Chinese culture and arts, as it accumulates the wisdom of the people, has strong artistic appeal and cultural connotations. By cleverly using these traditional art symbols, designers feel that the sense of ‘Chineseness’ might be truly realised and cultural heritage might be better inherited (Wen and Huang, 2010).

The second immaterial aspect can be seen in the taking of inspiration from visual images with ‘meaning of pattern’. Associated with Chinese visual elements are the Chinese people’s emotional connotations, such as fear, retributive justice, worship and hope, and these are expressed by metaphor, symbol and homophone. Chinese people like to offer sacrifices to their

³⁵ Image source: <http://00931.teambuy.com.cn/jiaju/infor.php?infoID=354742>, Retrieved 17 Oct, 2015

³⁶ Image source: <http://www.yi-zhi.com/article-768.html>, Retrieved 16 Oct, 2015

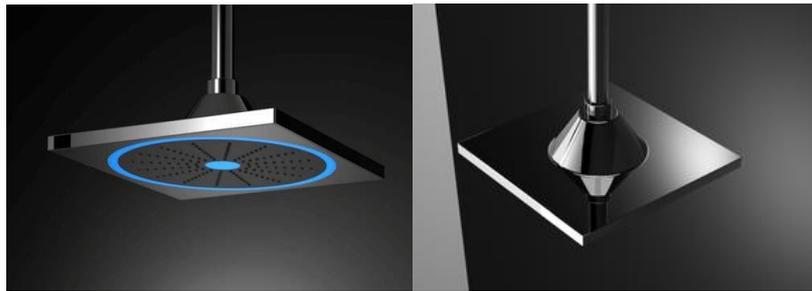
ancestors, and go to the temple to pray for fortune, safety and health Zeng (1996). The implied meaning of luck, and its symbolic image, forms many characteristics of Chinese elements. Chinese propitious belief, stored in the image as a religious element, has become a special point of coherence in contemporary design. Visual patterns extensively include lucky characters, literary quotations, idiom, figures, scenery and plants, costumes, the zodiac, animals, spiritual totems, seasonal behaviour, Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, mysterious divination, fortune telling and conventional object combinations. Hao (2009) holds a critical view that designing in modern techniques but with traditional patterns should keep the soul of the meaning simultaneously whilst processing the shape. Due to current social influences in China, some of the younger generation are unconscious of the concept of national values, which may lead to a superficial understanding of the core of 'Chineseness'. Many young designers do not know how or where to start to capture relevant elements from traditional Chinese patterns; preliminary designs may simply use the traditional elements without considering their appropriateness. The furthest some designers may go might be just to include simple colour combinations and an overall composition. In this way, such traditional elements have become merely folk decorations, barely relative to regional features and folk customs, giving people an empty, far-fetched and unfilled impression.

Similarity between semantic meaning and product implication often demonstrates the content and meaning that designers want to express; this design element is not compulsorily integrated into products but is the extension of meanings. Symbols are not only decoration, which makes the traditional elements fragmentarily present the additional meaning, rather than comprehensively highlighting the charm of the graphic symbols; thus, a lot of elements have become meaningless (Xing, 1998). In terms of product design, the integration of Chinese traditional folk-art elements is not to gain merely decoration or certain symbolic significance, but to take the prerequisite of interlinked product semantics; however, this does not mean that there should be random use any Chinese folk-art elements, as this may add a burden to products or make people feel overwhelmed by 'Chineseness'.

The final immaterial aspect can be seen in extraction from the way of thinking and means of artistic expression. In his research, Zhang (1985) expressed that in terms of the long historical cultural influences, the Chinese have a special way of thinking, such as through the causal circle, theories that mankind is an integral part of nature, etc., and this has created a theory of Chinese design. For instance, the SOLUX showerhead design, shown in Figure 4.12, which

was a winner in the IF design competition³⁷ – the inspiration of the design was from a traditional Chinese idiom; a theory of “a square earth and spherical heavens” (SOLUX, 2015). Han Chinese traditional culture advocates the theory that the human is an integral part of nature and pays attention to imitation of nature.

*Figure: 4.12: SOLUX shower head*³⁸



In Geomancy theory³⁹, the hemispherical dome cosmology is a special interpretation of this worldview. That is to say, orbicular sky produces motion and variation, rectangular earth leads to convergence and stillness (Zhou, 2001). Pursuing development and change means that there will be career achievements and mankind will continue to make progress; the human aspiration for stability allows people to live a comfortable and peaceful life. Shatzman and Fu (2002) believe that architecture was invented to reflect people's pursuits and hopes, so that fitting between the square and the circle has become indispensable content for all types of architecture and products. Because of Chinese heritage, when such concepts are displayed in a design Chinese people will understand the meaning when seeing or using it. The inherent principles of overall arrangement and technique of expression emerge from different ways of thinking in modern art design.

4.2.2 Chinese elements: material form

Based on recent research, Kleinman and Lin (2013) state that the successfully cultural heritage of Chinese characteristics normally come from its integration, evolution and development

³⁷ The iF Product Design Award was introduced in 1954 and is annually conferred by the iF International Forum Design. Every year the iF attracts more than 2,000 product entries from around 37 nations, which are judged by renowned experts, with the best of them receiving an iF seal of outstanding design quality. The best of the best are awarded with an iF gold award, known as the "Design Oscar".

³⁸ Image source: <http://www.sbjj.cc/baike/gongye/201312121438.html>, Retrieved 17 Oct, 2015

³⁹ Feng shui (pinyin: fēng shuǐ) is a Chinese philosophical system of harmonizing everyone with the surrounding environment and closely linked to Daoism. The purpose is to choose the methods and principles of the palace, village site selection and cemetery construction. The original intention is to choose a suitable place for a knowledge.

which with the specific Chinese nation. Such achievements are created and inherited by the Chinese people and reflect Chinese humanism and the folk-psychology belonging to the Chinese element, regardless of the material or spiritual context. Liu and Nie (2010) have summarised the categorisation of Chinese elements from a different perspective – by analysing Chinese elements within current popular design, the material form can be broken down into four aspects, as follows.

Firstly, reflecting traditional Chinese colour in design. By reasonably applying the traditional colour to properly express its cultural meaning in design, the national artistic charm could be shown by the design. For example, as discussed earlier in relation to the design of China Pavilion: ‘The Oriental Crown’, the bold and strikingly attractive application of ‘Chinese red’. According to Kai (2003), when consumers are buying a product, the first impression is based on the colour of the object, before consideration of the shape – in the first 20 seconds of contact with a product, 80% is colour sensation and 20% shape sensation. Thus, it can be seen that colour steals the thunder. Besides, to perfectly express a product’s design, it is vital that the colour is well-matched with the shape and texture, as colour is one of the keys in product design (Debby and Ndubisi, 2006). Every nation has significantly different psychological perceptions of colours, as likes and dislikes for a certain colour are often derived from the individual nation's myths and religious beliefs. Colour has symbolism, even it has to be attached to a specific carrier (history, legend or object). For instance, in the common understanding of many Chinese people, yellow partly symbolised the emperor of Imperial China, and red is the colour of festivals and which presents lucky. The perception and use of Chinese colour symbols is very meaningful to Chinese product design.

While associations and habits are important to people as a basis for product colouring, traditional colours are not applicable to all types of products, especially in the case in contemporary Chinese product design. Debby and Ndubisi (2006) suggest that when choosing colours in design, designers should move away from the traditional colours to consider different products and regions. Different colour trends can be used in a variety of products. The use of traditional colours can enhance the time and space value of modern products and improve their cultural value. However, in terms of colour selection, product nature and users’ experience should also be considered, rather than blindly emphasising the use of Chinese colours, i.e. choosing colours based on properties of the product to be appealing and competitive.

The second material aspect is the use of traditional Chinese materials in design. The application in product design of traditional materials, such as various types of Chinese-style wood and jade, can reflect and contain the Chinese traditional aesthetic view (Lin, 2007), indeed jade has become an iconic symbol in China (Zhuge, 2007). Primitive product materials are natural – earth, stone, bamboo, and wood – but later, with the development of productive forces and social progress, humans gradually expanded the scope of material choices, and non-natural products also come into being. The materials used to design products will not only affect the realisation of product features, but will also produce different visual and tactile effects. The aesthetics of product modelling design is inseparable from the research of materials, and the understanding of materials has gone through a development process from beginner to advanced level. With the development of science and technology, more options are open for the development and research of new materials, and product-modelling has also become more fashionable and artistic due to the use of new materials (Huang and Shen, 2010).

The use of traditional Chinese materials can directly deliver a feeling of primitive simplicity, which can inspire and strengthen people's emotions and upgrade the cultural value of products. Kay (1997) believes that material semantics is the basic human perception of products; some products appear in people's vision and stay on an elementary level, with a basic physical form and clear meaning. In most cases our understanding of products moves beyond the material form, but the material form to form the basis of meaning and expression in the product – the depth of thinking of 'Chineseness' sometimes needs to be manifested by this kind of material performance.

The third material aspect is that of reflecting traditional Chinese form into product design. The traditional form is highly welcomed by people, due to its higher aesthetic value and cultural meaning, and the extraction of the traditional form is the most common application of traditional elements. Chinese traditional three-dimensional modelling lines are mostly full, mellow, and full of tensile strength, presenting a simple, elegant and generous feeling. This is closely related to the Chinese traditional aesthetic pursuit and national psychology of perfection and completeness, as well as the extensive and profound national culture. Round and oval can show tolerance, help to create a happy, lively atmosphere and reflect Chinese people's special emotional desire for reunion (Hang, 2009). Traditional Chinese shapes and forms were selected as a method to design products with 'Chineseness'. Chinese traditional modelling has been

known for reasonable functions, beautiful shape, unique decorations and oriental aesthetics. It has been passed down through the centuries, gradually endowed with typical model significance, and now plays a role in passing down certain cultural symbols. From the contour, curves and circles are fuller and more generous than lines and squares, therefore, Chinese traditional three-dimensional modelling: minimises the chance of straight lines and squares as much as possible; advocates superposition of cylinders and spheroids at different sizes; and uses arc for convergence at the transition (Wu, 2014). However, modern product design cannot solely pursue the aesthetics and implications of Chinese line elements, but should consider functionality and usability of products, draw on diverse elements and excellent qualities of other traditional three-dimensional modelling, and rely on specifically chosen materials and production processes.

The final material aspect is the application and combination of traditional decoration and handicraft into the product design. In all periods of history, every nation has its traditional decoration and handicraft passed down. Integrating Chinese-specific decoration and handicraft into contemporary product design will show the Chinese-specific charm. According to (Gu, 2009), even after thousands of years of development of traditional handicrafts, the materials, technology and decoration have been unable to meet the needs of social development in contemporary society; yet its simplicity, nature, human-orientation and reflected national culture and spirit, and inherent aesthetic style have enlightened people, and become a source of breakthroughs in modern product design.

Guo and Hang (2006) hold the view that China has a long history of traditional techniques and crafts, which continues to transform and regenerate. Transformation does not mean demise, rather that it will regenerate into a new form, and only by continuing to transform and develop under the new environments, and adapting to new cultures and new aesthetics, can traditional handicrafts survive. Similar to many Chinese traditional arts and cultures, traditional handicrafts experienced a peak and were grappling with decline, however, today they appear as a new carrier, a new form. Their meanings and characteristics have been quite different in comparison to previous years, and their inner spirit and ideas have deeply touched people. Liu (2006) states the similar view that, on the one hand, while mankind has undergone a long development period from traditional handicrafts to present electronic products, and forms and carriers have undergone considerable changes, the underlying demand for 'hand-made' has not changed. The relationship between humans and handicrafts lasts longer than that between

machinery and electronics, and the long-established sense of dependence and intimacy cannot be replaced. On the other hand, the aesthetic psychology of a nation is not instantaneously formed, but develops over thousands of years or more. The unique artistic charm of traditional handicrafts with their natural materials, intimacy of contacts between materials and skin, and free expressions of thinking while doing, have all been a significant influence on, and a source of inspiration to, the field of modern packaging design. Extracting traditional Chinese techniques into product design could be a pathway for tradition continuance in contemporary society.

Researching the connotations and extension of Chinese elements provides a foundation for the classification of Chinese symbolic elements. Chinese elements can be classified by cultural landscape, folk custom, costume style, natural landscape and humanity. The screening and rating of Chinese symbolic elements that are related to the basic necessities of life, art, design and crafts, may uncover the importance of these symbols in the world (Yang, 2014). Through this classification of Chinese symbolic elements, a better understanding of the Chinese spirit and culture could be achieved. The concept of Chinese elements is considerable, its connotations are profound and widespread, and the pattern of manifestation is not simply limited to the visual surface, while its theories and ways of thinking are closely connected to the national condition and characteristics. Chinese national characteristics belong to collective Asian ethnicities, and include diligence, intelligence, individual struggle, face, comparison and emphasis of family.

According to the research of Assmann and John (1995), every independent culture possesses its own space, realm and symbols, such as the road in Rome, ‘three-dimensions’ in Greece and endless space in Europe. Their most specific presentation is through their art. Rome’s road, Greece’s sculpture and the scenery of Rembrandt’s paintings in Europe have inspired us to engage with the in-depth spirit of these three cultures (Woolf, 1994). For the symbol identity of China, the profound national character needs to be included in product design. Unfortunately, regardless of the colour, materials, models and decoration skills, most of the applications and extractions of Chinese traditional elements in product design are still basic and do not reach the meaning and essence deeply hidden in the spirit of Chinese traditional elements. There is a popular notion in the field of the automotive design, that: the energy saving and compaction of Japanese automobile reflects the frugal and fine character of Japanese nation; the largeness and high oil consumption of American automobile reflects the straightforward and liberal national

character of Western cowboy; and the precision and high technology of German automobile reflects the high rationality and preciseness of the German nation (Jürgens, 2000). Thus, in order to make every detail of products reflect the brightness of the Chinese national character, the feature of Chinese elements in product design should be further and deeply explored. The Chinese element applied in the product design does not simply need to be seen, more importantly, the broad and profound national thought and lofty national character need to be experienced when using the products, across the world.

4.3 The reflection of ‘Chineseness’ Products

In the globalised economy today, promoting national spirit is a broad theoretical topic proposed by Chinese academics. The core of national spirit is to maintain the foundation of a nation, but the inarguable fact is that Chinese national spirit is being gradually lost in the contemporary design context (Lian and Gu, 2008). To recover and introduce ‘Chineseness’ for product design in contemporary China has become important for both designers and scholars, who advocate the remodelling of morality and national spirit. The full name of Chinese elements should be ‘Chinese cultural element’, reflecting how the Chinese people established the country by taking the culture, life style and customs as a cohesive force when they established their national consciousness (James, et al. 1967). Also, according to the statements of Confucius (907), the Chinese nationality refers to a nation that has exceeded region, blood relationships and nationality, based on its cultural identity. It is Cheng (2010) point of view that Chinese elements represent a kind of cultural pattern between material and spirit.

Xie (1986) has pointed that ‘compatible’ is one of the major connotations of the Chinese spirit. The phenomenon of ‘pseudomorph’ may be able to explain the compatibility of culture continuation. The word pseudomorph’s philosophical meaning is a kind of civilised spiritual life embodied by means of other civilisations. Literally known as a concept of geology, it refers in particular to a phenomenon where a kind of rocky lava is injected into the gap and cavity of other types of rock. As a result, two different type of lava mix into one – it looks like rock-type B, but in fact covers rock-type A (Sibley and Jakes, 1982). Additionally, pseudomorph also happens in culture developments, where it originates from the competition between different nations. The highly developed Buddhist cultural history of China supports the national spirit of the nation with the help of mode, language, and costume of a foreign culture. Pseudomorph is an integration of two cultures in spiritual temperament and inner structure; if the foreign

culture is extremely powerful, the local culture will be forced to accept the appearance of foreign culture, resulting in pseudomorph. Today, Chinese elements are regarded as traditions and, after hundreds of years, there are many elements that have been assimilated. For example, elements, such as Buddhism, cheongsam, and Marx theory, have become an integral part of Chinese elements. The essence of the Chinese element is innovation, advancing with the times, hence the Chinese element should not only be selected for inheritance, but also be converted with innovation. Yang (2008) has the same point of view and suggests that Chinese design should not only demonstrate its shape and spirit, but also innovate. The result of innovation may be reflected in the material product aspect, but more significantly through the non-material knowledge aspect. There is more than one mode to study the integration, innovation and application of the Chinese elements and contemporary design from practice to methodology: abstraction and traceless integration.

Product design is influenced by the phenomenon of globalisation in a contemporary context. It could be concluded that globalisation is a trend in many fields all over the world, Amartya (2001) defines the word globalisation as “A global movement of ideas, people, technology and goods from one region to others, benefiting the people at large”. Steger (2003) says the definition of globalization in different perspective:

A multidimensional set of social process that create, multiply, stretch, and intensify worldwide social interdependencies and exchanges while at the same time fostering in people a growing awareness of deepening connections between the local and the distant. Globalization is a process of interaction and integration amongst the people, companies, and governments of different nations, a process driven by international trade and investment and aided by information technology. This process has effects on the environment, on culture, on political systems, on economic development and prosperity, and on human physical well-being in societies around the world (Sathikh and Kumar, 2009. p.156)

Against the background of globalisation, people generally have similar values, lifestyles and product modernity, and the design style has to follow the market demand in some way. As discussed in Chapter 3 – taking the mobile phone industry as an example – multinational companies, such as Apple and Samsung, capture the majority of market. Therefore, within the

context of globalisation, when competing with Western companies, national brands must be distinguished by special cultural features. Language is the carrier and the ethnical expression form of culture. Some of the proverbs and graphics are able to directly reflect the national psychology, thoughts and emotions, values and other features of the language (Guo and Lin, 2002). In an era of intellectual plurality, collision and exchange of cultural ideas might push different civilisations to blend with each other and transform. In diversified development, reflecting cultural consciousness in design will increasingly intensify, thus creating brand new images and integrating the charm of all ethnic groups. Xu and Zhang (2007) hold a different point of view, that an influential design should demonstrate the common thoughts of people from different regions and cultural backgrounds, so that they would be able to avoid communication barriers which result from culture, geography, language and race; the design can then be open to direct interior communications through visual graphics. Various image expressions can co-exist within one design or design theme, and ‘good ideas’ are needed based on real lives and independent thinking. The best solutions are arrived at through judgments around various elements and by avoiding the distraction of unimportant aspects. The recognisable element is the minimum unit of design; the form of various sizes, material, color and characters, etc. Each element being used can be considered as an independent design symbol, and can be applied according to our demand within a different themed design task (Han, 2011).

The research of Liu and Nie (2010) investigate the relationship between element abstraction and extraction. Design is an abstraction process that summarises traditional elements, while element extraction is to use colours, materials or patterns of elements in one particular or multiple aspects. It is specific, too much abstraction will affect the performance of traditional elements, and too much extraction makes understanding the traditional elements superficial. Hence, whether the degree can be aptly grasped in product design has directly determined the vivid use effect of traditional elements. Managing the relationship between inheritance and innovation of national elements when designing a product with ‘Chineseness’ is also important. This requires designers to: successfully grasp the essence of traditional elements; ensure the selected element images properly and accurately express their thoughts and feelings, while embracing other cultures; creating new design elements; and developing further the national culture (Tian, 2003). Moreover, different viewpoints of design thinking with Chinese and non-Chinese elements have different implications. Local designers in China, when using Chinese elements to design a product, frequently add or replace traditional elements in accordance with

the traditional mode of thinking, which will cause creative limitations. Designers need to think ‘outside-the-box’ and use post-modern deconstruction thinking to re-recognise traditional elements. Whilst there are some Western designers who can use Chinese elements appropriately (Jenks and Rod, 2000), there are fundamental differences in the creative process of designers from the East and the West. Western designers can use Chinese elements from a ‘non-Chinese’ point of view, completely free from the shackles of conventional thinking, which has so far brought positively surprising results.

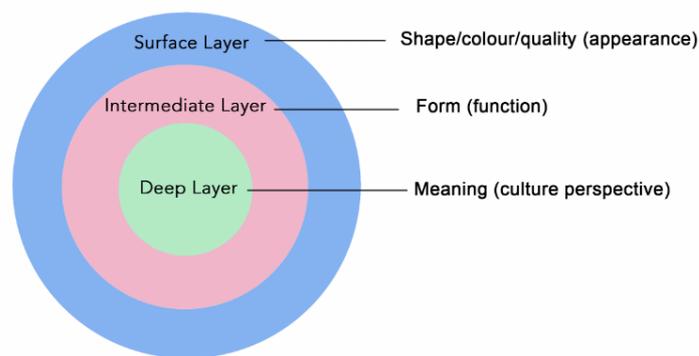
People communicate through language, while an object communicates with people through its form and function. When people create a product, its function is endowed with a certain shape, which can express certain characters, just as if it has come to life (Dougherty, 1992). Aesthetics of the arts is a thinking process from the outside to the inside, and from the shallow to the deep (Bresler, 2006). Specifically, it starts from perceptual impression to image analysis, to the spiritual insights, and then aesthetic pleasure in the mind. Product form is the visual language of design and a communication tool between designers and users. Designers use pattern languages to express their thoughts and emotions, and to transmit functions and information. Design improves a product’s meaning of existence and also endows it with other meanings. Fundamentally speaking, contemporary design is to condense and materialise a variety of cultures in concrete design works. Design is not a simple creation, but is functional, aesthetic and economic – a harmonious entity that breeds the rich affections of people. In the context of globalisation, national traditions should be returned in succession and created in integration; a reasonable integrating point should be found in contemporary design and traditional design vocabulary, to blend the essence of traditional arts into modern design concepts, so that products can carry cultural traditions to the world.

4.4 Rethinking Product Design with Chinese Elements

Based on the investigation of Chinese elements, the current products in the market with Chinese elements design could be summarised into immaterial form and material form. The immaterial form includes three aspects which are: extracting design elements from traditional Chinese folk-art and Chinese characters; taking inspiration from visual images with ‘meaning of pattern’; and getting inspiration from the way of thinking and means of artistic expression. The material form includes four aspects which are: traditional Chinese colour; traditional Chinese material; traditional Chinese form; and traditional Chinese decoration and handicraft.

By doing so, it provides a clear understating of the current ‘Chineseness’ design market situation and design trend, which also provides a foundation of Chinese cultural design development. After the *shanzhai* period, designing products by using Chinese elements has been marked as the way to seek originality. As can be seen in the research of current ‘Chineseness’ design, the different form of ‘Chineseness’ reflect the layer of cognitive cultural originality (Figure 4.13).

Figure 4.13: The cognitive structure of ‘Chineseness’ design



In the surface layer, the physical visual elements are directly and clearly shown through the product; people can directly experience the Chinese elements through the interaction of vision and touch. In the intermediate layer, the application method of the product, users’ experience and Chinese elements are organically combined. In the deep layer, the product meaning, product culture and Chinese elements are integrated. Additionally, Li et al. (2007). have suggested to translate the Chinese visual element into design (constitution of shape and colour) is to understand or extract all the information into points, lines, surface, objects, shapes, colour and texture. According to the modern constitution method, the form and element should be deconstructed, reconstructed and integrated into the contemporary design. Moreover, Liu (2008) recommends that abstracting traditional elements with the spirit of the time, which requires “getting refined internally and externally”, during the process of product design. Getting refined internally is grasping the traditional culture; getting refined externally is mastering the scientific thinking method. In order to realise the compatibility between the traditional elements and ‘time-thinking’ of the entire design. It is also important to ‘observe’ the traditional elements, again within a scientific thinking method, and then grasp the popular formal elements of the time, including new energy, new materials and new technology, in order

to: seek the joint point between these formal languages and traditional elements; deepen the design on this basis; and highlight the time theme as a way to express the ‘Chineseness’ in design. However, Ding and Clark (2003) hold the point of view that fusion of Chinese and Western elements might be the new way to innovatively use ancient Chinese elements and purpose in order to improve the creative skills as a soft power, improving the perception of the national brand to the rest of the world, and rebuilding national confidence in contemporary design. Economic globalisation will inevitably cause great impact and friction with different cultures. Whether it is the eastward transmission of Western sciences or the dissemination of oriental learning, different cultures still retain their respective characteristics while seeking mutual recognition (Fernandes, 1995). The initial phase of manifesting Chinese traditional elements in contemporary designs has been successful, yet contemporary Chinese designs should continue to have a profound feeling and understanding of Chinese traditional culture in order to incorporate them in the proper ways. In the globalisation context, it is necessary to seek numerous methods to properly integrate Chinese elements into modern product designs.

Within the ever moving and developing world, designers can innovate and develop the fusion between tradition and modernity, and then apply it to various fields; using Chinese elements in modern designs also reflects this. Traditional things should not be an awkward label and affixed to modern products, which are devoid of content and can be seen through at a glance. Tradition is not just a particular symbol or shape, but includes people’s feelings and cultural behaviour. Nowadays, it is difficult to state that people are fully confident in the Chinese cultural traditions as Chinese design has been affected by Western culture heavily. The absorption of traditional design is by no means an imitation of form, but is to absorb rich ethnic flavour, find elements that can reflect the spirit of contemporary creativity, which is also accepted by the majority of Chinese people. If the use of traditional elements in modern fields is only deemed as the re-use of classic traditional patterns, it will soon become useless, and naturally people will have no confidence in traditional culture. The artificial appropriation of traditional patterns and symbols would not sustain the cultural value of the products.

From another perspective, a national culture is so broad that it absolutely will not be confined to several repeatedly-used elements. The contemporary Chinese national spirit is, in fact, a selective inheritance from the ancient Chinese national spirit, while also being an inheritance from the national spirit of modern times. It reminds people to re-examine the cultural heritage

of the Chinese nation and to integrate it into our modern designs. Rich traditional culture is an infinite source of creation. Therefore, Chinese designers should get back to the drawing board and think of themes and innovations that would better showcase the uniqueness of Chinese design, and create an identity for the contemporary design of China. Such an identity should broadly showcase a multi-dimensional culture that has originated from China. There are numerous elements of Chinese essence found within its rich culture, history and traditions that Chinese designers need to extract and embed into modern applications – it is both the collective reflection of creative designs and the search and reconstruction of the national spirit and self-confidence. In the information age, with more profound economic and cultural globalisation, inheriting and carrying forward the national culture and promoting the use of indigenous languages in modern designs shows the consumer demand and cultural diversity of the times.

Chapter Five: The Cultural Values Development in Design

The term 'culture' refers to the sum of related knowledge or experiences that are formed and accumulated over the course of human and societal development. Culture is a kind of expression of the adaptation of the natural environment and surroundings, which also relates to humans' understanding of themselves and other creatures (Fan, 2000). Various definitions of culture have been proposed by different scholars. During the late nineteenth century, the study of culture itself was defined as being representative of the study of human thought and behaviour (Arnold, 1882).

In a broad sense, culture could be defined as a collection of words, languages, architectures, foods, tools, skills, knowledges, customs, pieces of art and so on. Generally speaking, it can be said that the lifeform of a nation can represent its own culture (Williams, 1976) . From an archaeological perspective, culture represents the combination of many historical sites and relics of ancient times, where the same tools and manufacturing techniques symbolise the same culture. From a Western perspective, Tomasello (1999) also asserts that culture is central to the way we view, experience and engage with all aspects of our lives and the world around us. Thus, even our definitions of culture are shaped by the historical, political, social and cultural contexts in which we live. In the product design system, globalisation, cultural influence and localisation are intricately connected.

Globalization, though not a new process, has intensified over the last twenty years or so. Global, but also localized, consumer cultures, are one of the important outcomes of globalization, has transformed companies to become increasingly sensitive and vulnerable to both local and global economic environments. Localized consumer cultures remain critically important and reflect differences in lifestyle related to culture, tradition, history and even climate. The existence of local consumer cultures represents an opportunity for companies that are able to differentiate products by core markets. The on-going deepening of globalization continues to alter geographies of production and enhanced competition among companies operating in the global arena. (Vanchan and Bryson, 2013. p.3)

Design in China is in its development stages, which is not quite the same as developed countries. According to Hollensen (2007), facing the globalisation trend, there is always a debate on how a design brand may enter a local market successfully while keeping to its original design principle under the globalised context. At present, with the expansion of globalisation in various fields, art and design areas are also affected. Across every design field, Chinese designers, especially the younger generation, are deeply influenced by the European and American design culture. They believe that all aspects of art and design are the best in Europe and America, and, therefore, they must follow their design styles. For instance, urban and architecture designs in China are simply pursuing the post-modern style; and film and television shows are based on American Hollywood, etc (Chen and Tang, 2010). Those designs which have been affected directly lead to the lack of Chinese cultural connotation and reflect the inadaptability of Chinese design and the effect of globalisation.

There is no question that the impact of globalisation has its advantages and disadvantages. One challenge to Chinese designers is how to ensure that Chinese contemporary design becomes unique, gaining recognition under the trend of the international cultural exchange and global cultural development. As discussed in previous chapters, cultural value could be one of the methods contributing to innovative design in China, which would help companies remain competitive in the global market. The following sections are going to investigate two successful worldwide design brands – IKEA and MUJI – which may provide significant experiences based on their local and global brand development.

Case study has been adopted as a methodology to research on successful brands that have incorporated cultural values into its design and enjoy global recognition. Literature has also been used to enrich the existing arguments which relates cultural designs that has used its cultural or national identity as not only its company philosophy but also uniqueness in market offering. Two companies were selected as Case Examples, IKEA and MUJI. They offered both representative and revelatory opportunities through the use of the following selection criteria they both: reflected the characteristic and underlying issues identified in the research, promoted and appeared to represent national cultural characteristics, operated successful global design policies, represented appropriate product diversity and range, presented differing and contrasting approaches to design development and were accessible at policy and operational levels (Yin, 2003). More importantly, to identify the ways that IKEA and MUJI express tangible and intangible cultural values during the brand and products development, particularly

in their success with global expansion. Additionally, this chapter also considers the importance of branding cultural values and marketing strategies in product design within the globalised context.

5.1 IKEA

5.1.1 Scandinavian beginnings

Globalisation represents the rapid flow of capital, production, technology, service, information and other factors around the world, wherein transnational companies play the role to speed development. The strengthening power of transnational companies indicates the further deepening of globalisation. At the same time, transnational companies, as the main engine of globalisation, are emerging along with globalisation itself, participating in and accelerating the globalisation process (Ash and Thrift, 1995).

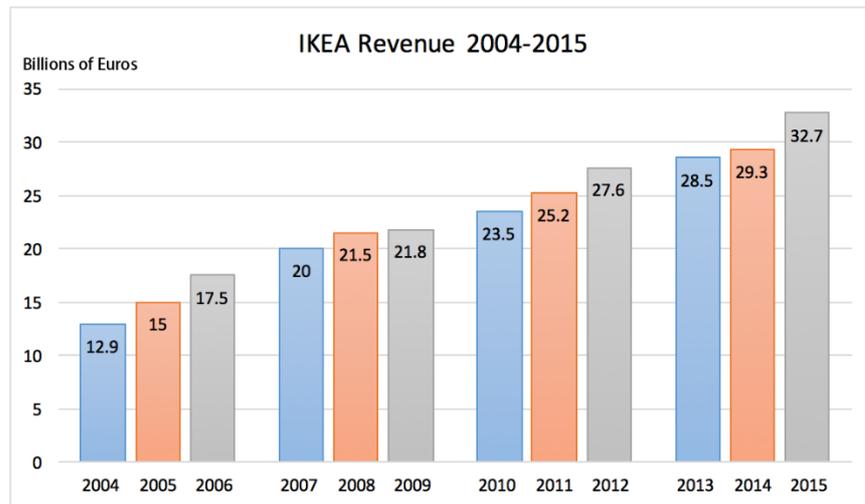
As a transnational company, IKEA was founded in 1943 under the principle of providing consumers with a wide variety of beautiful, practical and affordable home supplies. After 73 years of growth and development, IKEA stores can now be found all over the world, with 328 branches across 28 countries. As demonstrated in Figure 5.1, IKEA's sales volume reached €31.9 billion in the 2015 financial year, representing an 11.2% increase on the previous year (IKEA, 2016).

The IKEA Concept starts with the idea of providing a range of home furnishing products that are affordable to the many people, not just the few. It is achieved by combining function, quality, design and value always with sustainability in mind. The IKEA Concept exists in every part of our company, from design, sourcing, packing and distributing through to our business model. Our aim is to help more people live a better life at home. (IKEA, 2016)

IKEA has now become the largest transnational home supplies company in the world. Without a doubt, the transnational IKEA Group not only shapes the process of globalisation but also leads the way in the realm of the modern trend-conscious lifestyle. The kind of business model adopted by IKEA, where a small-town convenience store eventually grows into a major

transnational brand, has been referred to as the “IKEA phenomenon” (Mochon and Ariely, 2011).

*Figure 5.1: IKEA revenue 2004 -2015*⁴⁰



Unlike many of its competitors, IKEA rarely uses sales staff to accompany customers around its stores to promote its products. Instead, IKEA focuses on allowing customers the freedom to browse at their leisure, lounge around on its furniture, and be playful when exploring the products on offer. Rather than being approached by sales staff, customers are able to seek help only when they desire it. IKEA encourages customers to interact with its products on the shop floor, to touch them, pick them up, sit or lie on them, and fully experience them. IKEA places greater emphasis on this level of interaction rather than on the fear of customers accidentally damaging products, which makes IKEA a uniquely relaxed place to shop. Inevitably, many IKEA stores in China become overcrowded at the weekend. White (2012) discusses IKEA’s sales strategy and notes the concept of ‘soft power’, arguing that consumers’ purchasing demand increases under such a strategy, since they can feel the gap between ideal and reality after enjoying such a comfortable environment.

In order to meet different demands, IKEA stores are arranged in a series of showrooms with layouts that have been staged and presented to represent different types of living styles. This helps customers to visualise what their homes could look like in the future and to really

⁴⁰ Fig 4.1 IKEA Revenue, Marketing data resource: IKEA website, Retrieved: 7th June 2016, available at: http://www.ikea.com/ms/en_GB/this-is-ikea/about-the-ikea-group/index.html

experience the cosiness that IKEA's products offer. Most homeware stores lay out their shop floors based on product or range type, such as having dedicated lighting areas, sofa areas, and so on, which would allow customers to easily find a single component. However, since these stores offer very little in the way of interior design concepts that allow customers to emotionally connect with products, this type of layout can increase the likelihood of after-sales refunds and exchanges. IKEA offers the best of both worlds, with individual product type destinations and room layouts. This solution offers both time- and cost-saving benefits. In terms of IKEA's cost-saving strategy, most of IKEA's products are flat-packed and compatible with many standardised fittings. After consumers select their desired products, they then collect them before the checkout and build them at home with the help of an instruction leaflet. This, on the one hand, allows customers to save on delivery costs, and on the other hand fulfils the psychological demand of many urbanites who enjoy the fun of DIY (Michael, Mochon, and Ariely, 2011).

Although creativity is important to IKEA, its global procurement and production process still adheres to the principles of Scandinavian design: simple, direct, functional and natural. It can be said that the Nordic style has been integrated into the DNA of IKEA's designers (Michael et al., 2011) However, the determining factor of IKEA's design style is not only limited to aesthetics. Whilst most consumers love to buy beautiful things, it is difficult to identify a universal standard for beauty. Mura (2011) argues that IKEA is a realisation of the concept of 'democratic design', where products are developed based on the principles of function, aesthetic appeal and affordability. This means that IKEA does not sell anything that could be considered impractical. A good example of this is IKEA's kitchen trolleys, which extend users' kitchen counter space whilst also offering additional storage (see Figure 5.2).

Figure 5.2: A typical IKEA kitchen trolley



Yi (2011) states that the design process of the kitchen trolley begins with ensuring that the maximum storage capacity is achieved first, then the price is considered based on the materials used and the dimensions of the product. This kind of design approach has been used since IKEA was first established, determining function on the basis of understanding consumers' demands and needs. Moreover, in order to obtain first-hand information and feedback, IKEA's designers conduct market research with the brand's target market.

In order to obtain real feedback and ideas, IKEA designers visit local customers in their homes. In some cases, they even stay in customers' homes in order to make lifestyle observations that allow them to design the most useful products. IKEA may then select customers living in different situations and going through different stages of life, working with single people, married couples, families with children, 'empty nest' families and so on. Yi (2011) asserts that meeting customers' needs and solving their home-related problems are the priorities for IKEA. For instance, families with babies need storage space for the baby's clothes and toys for daily use; taxi drivers who take night shifts need a dark bedroom during the daytime; whilst people living in a small space tend to need highly functional and flexible, multi-purpose furniture. Moreover, IKEA encourages consumers to experience its products first-hand, and the design team will provide a corresponding solution based on customer requirements. Design function may arise from the needs of the family, but cost control must be realised through suppliers. Price is also one of the core elements within IKEA's product design system, which includes the costs of the design process, materials used and the production of the product. In order to achieve this, IKEA sets the price according to the cost of designing and producing the product, under the guidance of the user's experience. Designers make a great deal of effort to visit factories in various locations in order to find suppliers that can implement their ideas. Finally, most products need to be able to be flat-packed to reduce logistics costs.

In order to further reduce operating costs, IKEA generally does not offer delivery unless the customer places a large or expensive order. Consumers typically write down the product code when visiting the store, then they go to the storeroom area to pick up the product and take it home themselves. Most IKEA products are designed to be easily assembled, and the modularised product format enables consumers to enjoy the fun of DIY and achieve a sense of satisfaction after they successfully assemble the furniture (Kuznetsov and Eric, 2010).

5.1.2 IKEA in China: The plight of localisation

Edvardsson, Bo and Michael (2006) note that Swedish culture places high value on nature and the home. In fact, one of the best ways to describe Swedish home furnishing style is to describe nature – full of light and fresh air, yet minimal and unpretentious. Consumers are becoming increasingly keen on Swedish design. Many people associate Sweden with a fresh, healthy way of life (Wells, 2000). The Swedish lifestyle is reflected throughout the IKEA product range. The freshness of the open air is reflected in the colours and materials used and the sense of space they create: blond woods, natural textiles and untreated surfaces. In a country that is cold and dark for much of the year, these light, bright living spaces create the sensation of summer sunshine indoors all year round.

Consumers enjoy a wealth of different choices through the IKEA product range. The brand is associated with modern design without being faddy, being functional yet attractive, being both people-focused and child-friendly, and with carrying on Swedish home furnishing traditions (Josson, 2008). With the principle of offering perfectly-designed and affordable home supplies for everyone, IKEA opened its first store in China in 1998. IKEA then began to further penetrate the Chinese market, opening a total of 20 stores in mainland China to date (IKEA, 2016). “IKEA's changes for the China market are finally starting to help the retailer to see growing profits. Sales are up 17% this year, making China one of the retailer's fastest growing markets” (Hatton, 2013).

However, competition is fierce in the Chinese home retail industry due to low barriers to entry into the home accessory market, and the fact that there are many companies selling similar products who battle to differentiate themselves through pricing, marketing and aftersales services. Therefore, IKEA's globalisation and move into mainland China did not run smoothly.

A feature of globalization is the fact that we can now go into shops and businesses throughout the world and see something which is remarkably similar to versions in the company's country of origin. There are, however, limits to this because all sorts of cultural and economic factors can get in the way of transposing an enterprise from one nation to another. A characteristic reckoned to make IKEA stand out among global retailers is its standardized approach to every market it enters. Allegedly, IKEA looks and operates the

same in every market. However, China is in many ways a culturally different market, which has provided huge challenges for IKEA. (Direction, 2009 .p.43).

The following subsections outline a number of key culture differences which challenge IKEA's globalisation process and must be addressed.

5.1.3 Pricing and Service

Based on the original principle of IKEA, the brand markets its products at a relatively low price in order to attract consumers. In the European market, IKEA is known for offering a good balance between quality and cost. However, there are differences in the economic development and living standards of Western countries and mainland China, which has led IKEA to position itself as a relatively higher-end retailer in China (Direction, 2013). This is because the cost of, for example, a simple wooden stool from IKEA is the same as that of a small sofa from a domestic home supply store. It is worth understanding why IKEA positions itself in this way in China, despite this going against the company's original principle.

Johansson and Thelander (2009) suggest that high import tariffs are behind IKEA's globalisation strategy in China. Many of IKEA's products were imported from overseas when IKEA first entered the Chinese market in 1998. On the one hand, import VAT and logistics costs (including transportation and storage fees due to lack of distribution centres at that time) were high; on the other hand, IKEA's rents were high due to the company operating in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou. Therefore, IKEA attempted to recoup costs by positioning itself as a more premium brand in China, losing the price-based competitive advantage that the company enjoys elsewhere in the world.

As mentioned above, IKEA does not employ sales staff responsible for promoting and pushing products in store. Although IKEA has successfully emphasised customer participation in the Western world, local consumers in China are not accustomed to this way of shopping, nor were they familiar with the brand at first. Many Chinese consumers may find it difficult to make a decision when shopping in IKEA, especially given the large size of its stores – especially without an introduction by a salesperson. It can generally be thought of as human nature to want to explore the function and feeling of products and make decisions based on this feeling

(Rogoff, 2003); however, based on the long history of customised service in China, consumers tend to prefer to obtain all product information from sales staff rather than using a measuring tape and pencil in store to take their own measurements. The notion that ‘customer is God’ has long prevailed in the service industry. According to Jones (1997), this is based on the customer psychology, wherein consumers are considered as keen to be exalted and spoiled. Generally speaking, customers can feel neglected when they have to approach a salesperson themselves, which goes against IKEA’s customer service philosophy.

Moreover, Chinese consumers initially struggled to accept IKEA’s aftersales service, including the principles of self-delivery and self-installation. Baker and Hyvonen (2011) report that only around 5% of Chinese consumers owned a private vehicle during that time, which is far below that of Western developed countries. Therefore, most Chinese consumers have to take public transport after visiting IKEA, which caused customers to register complaints, as this was inconvenient and often led the products to become damaged on the way home.

IKEA attempted to solve this issue. Wei and Xi (2007) note that after many complaints about the brand’s delivery service, IKEA began offering home delivery in China for a charge. However, the delivery charge was complicated, rising in line with the size and volume of the product ordered. Furthermore, customers had to pay extra for installation, disassembly and packaging. Consumers generally believed that store delivery should be offered for free, and that IKEA was greedy for imposing such charges. Additionally, whilst flat-pack DIY was becoming a little more popular in China due to Western influences, the opening up process and economic reform, only a small number of products were purchased in this format. Furniture assembly could also be challenging for the consumers, and instead of enjoying the process, some may have felt it was a time-consuming burden. IKEA also faces issues with determining liability if customers cause damage to products or install them incorrectly.

Unlike other multinational companies, IKEA is not only a leading retailer of home supplies, but also sells own-brand and patented products. The company employs 12 permanent designers from different countries around the world to create the latest product designs for IKEA every year. The company also employs many freelance designers, who understand IKEA’s principles and create over 2000 product designs for the brand every year. However, IKEA faces an issue defending its intellectual property rights due to the numerous small-scale workshops that imitate IKEA products in areas close to IKEA stores. These small manufacturers inform

customers that they can select any IKEA product and have it replicated by the smaller manufacturer at a lower price, including free delivery and installation (Wei and Xi, 2007). It is easy to see why consumers might choose to buy furniture of a similar quality from the smaller company for a lower cost and free delivery.

5.1.4 The conflict between localisation and globalisation

IKEA has also encountered issues expanding into other countries. According to Johansson and Thelander (2009), IKEA'S past experience of entering different markets has not always been positive. During the 1970s and part of the 1980s, IKEA tried to enter Japan but at that point in time, the Japanese did not like the flat packaging, which required do-it-yourself (DIY) skills. Moreover, IKEA struggled to penetrate the US market, as the dimensions of the European furniture were considered too small and narrow for American consumers, who were used to purchasing larger items.

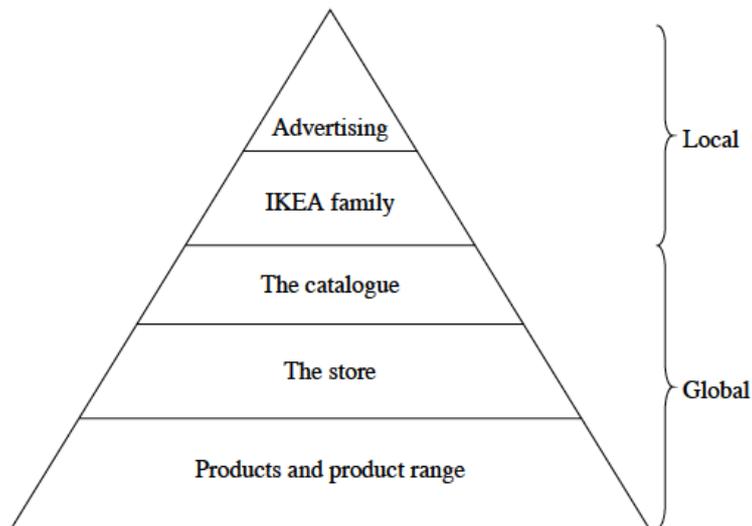
Given these difficulties, the ways in which IKEA could approach 'localisation' should be addressed if the brand is to achieve sustainable development and profitability in China over the coming years. According to IKEA's 2005 business report, its sales volume in China was just over 1.2 billion, accounting for less than 1% of the total sales volume (14.8 billion) of the whole IKEA Group (IKEA, 2005). In order to reduce costs, IKEA has been increasing its procurement in China. In 2001, procurement in China accounted for 14% of the company's entire global procurement volume, reaching 15% in 2002, 18% in 2003, more than 20% in 2004, and now accounting for around 400 suppliers in total (IKEA, 2016). China has become the most important supplying country, in terms of raw materials and semi-manufactured goods, and many procurement centres have been established across China. At the same time, the company has recruited more designers in China and has gradually shifted to establish core production manufacturers in China. However, there are new problems caused by IKEA's cost control measures, in that some of its products have been produced to substandard quality. Therefore, the company's localisation strategy in China has led to a decline in standardised product quality.

Furthermore, if IKEA wants to reduce costs from other aspects, it has to consider the decrease in average cost due to economies of scale. Since the IKEA brand is positioned at the high-end level of consumers' minds in China, people seem to have a higher expectation in terms of

service, such as free delivery. From IKEA's perspective, it has never offered free delivery. However, it adapted its policy over time and allowed customers to receive free delivery and installation if they spent a certain amount (Wei and Xi, 2007). Treadgold (1991) discusses international retailers in the context of local responsiveness and the benefits of integration. Global retailers, such as IKEA, are argued to achieve high benefits from integration and displaying low-local responsiveness. The challenge for IKEA is to find ways to keep its original principle whilst becoming localised. Perhaps IKEA needs more time to complete its strategic positioning and expansion in China, but it must also consider the balance between globalisation and localisation.

Lascu (1994) holds the perspective that globalisation is easier than localisation as it can be replicated. This means that large companies, such as Coca-Cola, KFC, Wal-Mart and IKEA, could adopt a globalisation strategy that allows them to take a similar approach in each country they operate in. However, the localisation process is not a stylised process, especially in emerging markets, such as China, which are characterised by a wide range of demands. Globalisation without localisation inevitably leads to a loss of competitiveness. Equally, if we sacrifice globalisation for localisation alone, the cultural values and company principles will be compromised. IKEA's business concept, which aims to make the company's products suitable for many different types of consumers, can be considered in terms of three models: experience, spatial diffusion and localisation. In terms of product research and development, IKEA's products adopt a modular approach, enabling the customer to experience the fun of DIY. IKEA's inspirational prototype rooms, unique Swedish restaurant, and its thoughtful children's play area all enable the consumers to have a rich experience and enjoy truly recreational shopping. As mentioned above, designers conduct a great deal of local research before designing products for IKEA. This allows IKEA to specifically meet local requirements and regularly update its promotions and advertisements to reflect local cultural events and activities. In order to successfully target a broad variety of consumers, IKEA has also begun to localise its pricing structure. Johansson and Thelander (2009) present a triangle chart (see Fig. 5.3) of the relationship between the localisation and globalisation of IKEA's strategy, as shown below:

Figure 5.3: Pyramid of IKEA's different marketing aspects



Looking at IKEA's marketing strategy, a conclusion must be drawn that it is standardized – using the same marketing instruments in the same way around the world – giving individual countries and stores a minimal opportunity to respond to, what is perceived as, national and local market needs. From IKEA's point of view, the strategy of standardization is logical as it provides a product with a “low price” for “as many people as possible” in a way that an adapting strategy would not.(Johansson and Thelander, 2009. p.207)

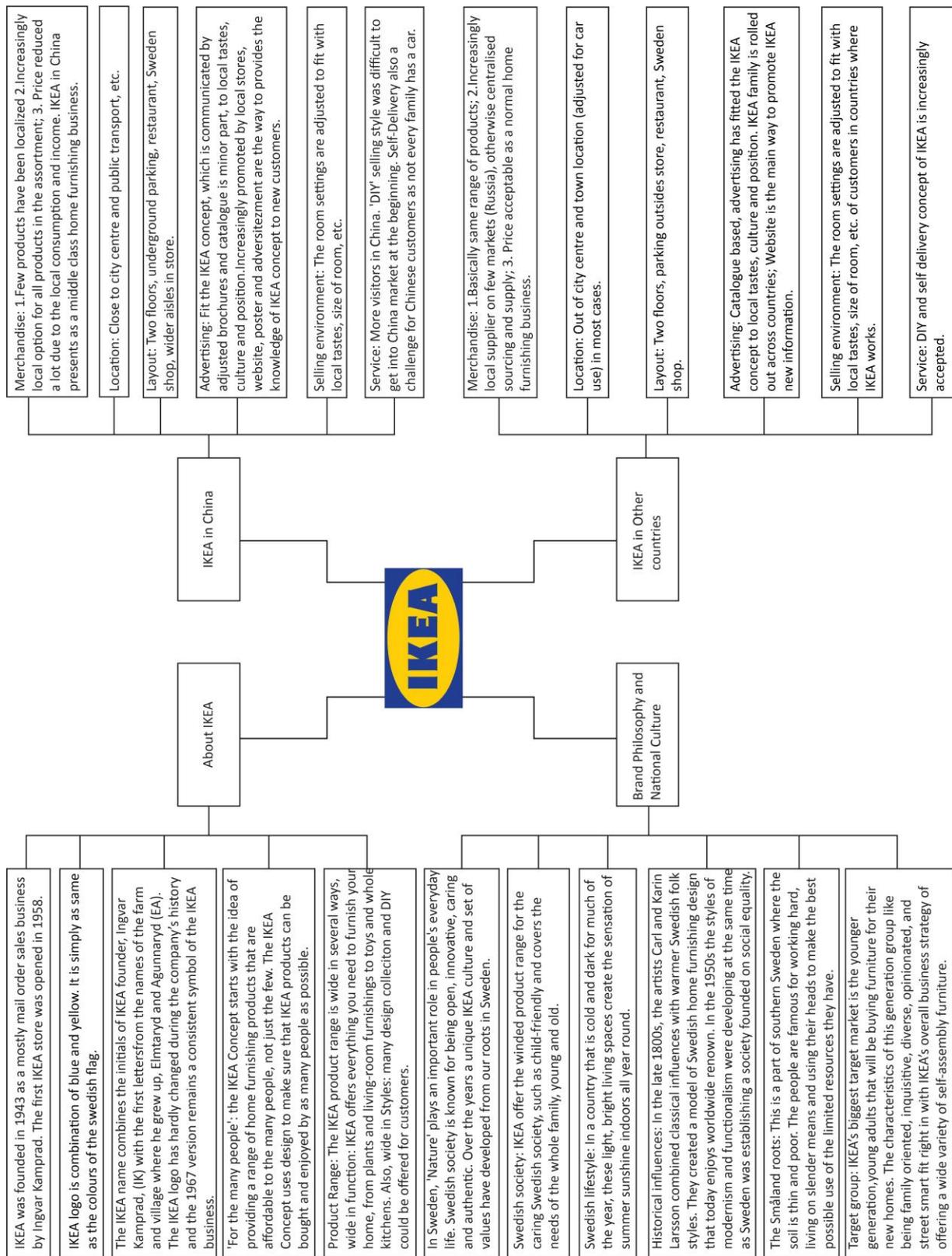
IKEA has changed its strategy to adapt to each country. Schutte and Ciarlante (1999) state that following Chinese consumer behaviour market research, IKEA now targets female customers, since China has a huge population that must be segmented into a specific target group. IKEA's business model has supported its continued expansion for its global influences and cultural design values, and the company's strategy is constantly adjusted in response to the uncertain economic environment. IKEA's strategy of combined localisation and globalisation, coupled with an ability to stick to its main brand principle, could help the company to achieve maximal and sustainable success in the global context.

5.1.5 Reflection of IKEA

IKEA, as a Swedish brand, successfully conveyed a Scandinavian design style with its 'DIY' feature becoming popular around the world. IKEA has also managed to successfully adapt to

the era of globalisation in its entry to overseas markets. IKEA is a worthy example to illustrate that it is necessary to find the balance between globalisation and localisation. Based on the findings of the case examples on IKEA, which is a successful brand that embodies its cultural heritage with both its success and challenges on the global market, the Chinese design industry could benefit from learning from the critical success factors of this case example. Therefore, a comprehensive evaluation of IKEA has been summarised into the diagram shown below (Table 5.1)

Table 5.1: IKEA case example summary



Along with the spatial diffusion of IKEA in each country, its operating concept also penetrates to the greater world. Torsten (1968) thoroughly researched the rules and inner mechanisms of innovative spatial diffusion and raised two important factors: the proximity effect and the level effect. The former effect means that innovation is diffused from its place of origin to the surrounding area, while the latter means that in a city system, innovation diffuses according to the level of the city. The classical work of Torsten (1968) has laid the foundation for contemporary spatial diffusion theories. The spatial diffusion of IKEA, in the context of globalisation, features the point-axis diffusion model as well as the diffusion model, based on the level of market threshold, traffic node and social culture. Therefore, IKEA's diffusion strategy evolves with external changes. The success of IKEA can essentially be attributed to its strategic adjustment of globalisation and localisation. Innovation diffusion has no unified model (Michael et al., 2011). However, no matter what diffusion model has been chosen, it is important that IKEA retains the combination of globalisation and localisation, and follows the framework of globalisation under the precondition that it will always adjust to local culture. Whilst globalisation is on the rise, cultural conflict is still inevitable. IKEA's spatial diffusion will be difficult to extend if it fails to innovate in line with a sense of local spirit in its global penetration.

5.2 MUJI (無印良品)

Salzer (1994) notes that IKEA opened the door to bringing Swedish style to consumers around the globe. IKEA has successfully exported Western culture into Asian countries. However, IKEA is not the only successful multinational company of its kind. MUJI is another leading company that successfully exports Asian culture by selling its products worldwide, including in Western countries. The official MUJI website states that "at the heart of MUJI design is the Japanese concept of 'Kanketsu', the concept of simplicity" (MUJI, 2015) aiming to bring a quiet sense of calm into strenuous everyday lives. Both MUJI and IKEA's designs have their own cultural identity, and the brands have now become two major brands associated with prestige and contemporary lifestyle.

MUJI was founded in Japan in 1980 as an antithesis to the habits of consumer society at that time. On one hand, foreign-made luxury brands were gaining popularity within an economic environment of ever-rising prosperity. On the other, poor-quality, low-priced goods were appearing on

the market, and had a polarizing effect on consumption patterns. MUJI was conceived as a critique of this prevailing condition, with the purpose of restoring a vision of products that are actually useful for the customer and maintain an ideal of the proper balance between living and the objects that make it possible. (MUJI, 2015)

The Japanese brand MUJI has successfully marketed its functional, well-designed products for urban living under the ‘No Brand’ moniker, and is now becoming known by an increasing number of consumers (Vaid and Alastair, 2003). MUJI mainly engages in product manufacturing and sales activity as a business model. As a domestic brand of Japan, MUJI started to provide affordable products to customers so that the brand could be closer to people’s daily lives in Japan and not overly-focused on providing cutting-edge style. MUJI is short for ‘Mujirushi Ryohin’. ‘無印 Mujirushi’ literally translates to ‘no pattern’, but could be thought of as meaning ‘no design’, whilst ‘良品 Ryohin’ translates to good quality products (Kanai, 2010). Zhang (2008) has summarised MUJI’s success as being related to the brand’s natural design philosophy. Moreover, MUJI gives products a unique sense of ‘Zen culture’⁴¹ and expresses admiration of this concept. Many excellent designers, such as Hara Kenya and Naoto Fukasawa, are also essential to the brand’s success. MUJI is always humbly serving the public and guiding people to discover the beauty and quality of life.

Hiroyoshi Azami, the President of MUJI USA, describes MUJI's design culture as centred around designing ‘simple’ products that are basic and necessary. MUJI applies the principles of both traditional Japanese aesthetics and nature to its products and marketing activities, whilst maintaining its ‘no design’ concept, which has captured the attention of global consumers. At the same time, MUJI also practices the ‘良品 Ryohin’ ideas to achieve high quality design. The figures prove its success. The appearance of MUJI is not accidental; it was formed and developed under the influence of Japanese national history, culture and aesthetics, which therefore reflect the tastes and preferences of many Japanese people. It is necessary to

⁴¹ Zen (Chinese: 禪; pinyin: Chán) is a school of Mahayana Buddhism that originated in China during the Tang dynasty as Chan Buddhism. It is an important and uniquely theoretical term in Buddhism. Harvey, Peter (1995), An introduction to Buddhism. Teachings, history and practices, Cambridge University Press

investigate the factors that influence the Japanese nation in their general pursuit of natural aesthetics. Zhu and Wang (2013) suggest that because Japan is a narrow topographical island with lots of mountainous, located in a volcanic and seismic zone, its geographic disadvantage can give people a sense of loneliness, which causes the Japanese people to want to be close to nature. However, Cox (2013) argues against this perspective in favour of Japan's geographically higher latitude and abundance of natural plants, supported by the mild climate, suggesting that Japanese people believe in 'the beauty of nature'. This means that in Japanese culture, it is believed that nature requires no modification to achieve beauty. This concept also applies to people's daily lives, suggesting that products used daily should be as natural and true to their original features as possible. It could be said that the natural environment of the nation fundamentally produced a national aesthetic for nature. The relationship between humans and the cultural environment not only applies to Japan, but also to MUJI's development as a brand. MUJI's design process and style follows environmental guidelines, seeking to "restrict the use of substances that may have a significant impact on people or the environment" and "reduce waste by standardizing modules, facilitating disassembly and by reducing packaging" (Hara, 2011).

5.2.1 The design concept with culture

The first impression of MUJI products may be commonplace, but it has had a significant impact around the world (Fukasawa, 2007). Today, the act of collating products commonly used in daily life is thought of as lifestyle, and lifestyle has an impact, not on selling itself, but on sales promotion. If a product has no design features, customers will not be satisfied. The concept behind MUJI's designs is to offer consumers a new idea in order to pursue a suitable lifestyle by focusing on design details and features of humanity. "MUJI conveys a look and feel that is Japanese in origin", says Koike (Kanai, 2010).

MUJI began with three steps: selecting the materials, scrutinizing the processes, and simplifying the packaging. MUJI's concept of emphasizing the intrinsic appeal of an object through rationalization and meticulous elimination of excess is closely connected to the traditionally Japanese aesthetic of 'su'—meaning plain or unadorned—the idea that simplicity is not merely modest or frugal, but could possibly be more appealing than luxury. By eliminating from products the elements of

individual personality and partiality to taste, two things that people were obsessed with at the time, MUJI left room for the individuality of the customers themselves, enabling them to make choices on how they would use the products. Original slogans such as 'Lower Priced for a Reason' and 'MUJI' for 'Each and Every Person' convey the powerful concept of MUJI that arose from these circumstances, and continue to this day (Kanai, 2013. p.14).

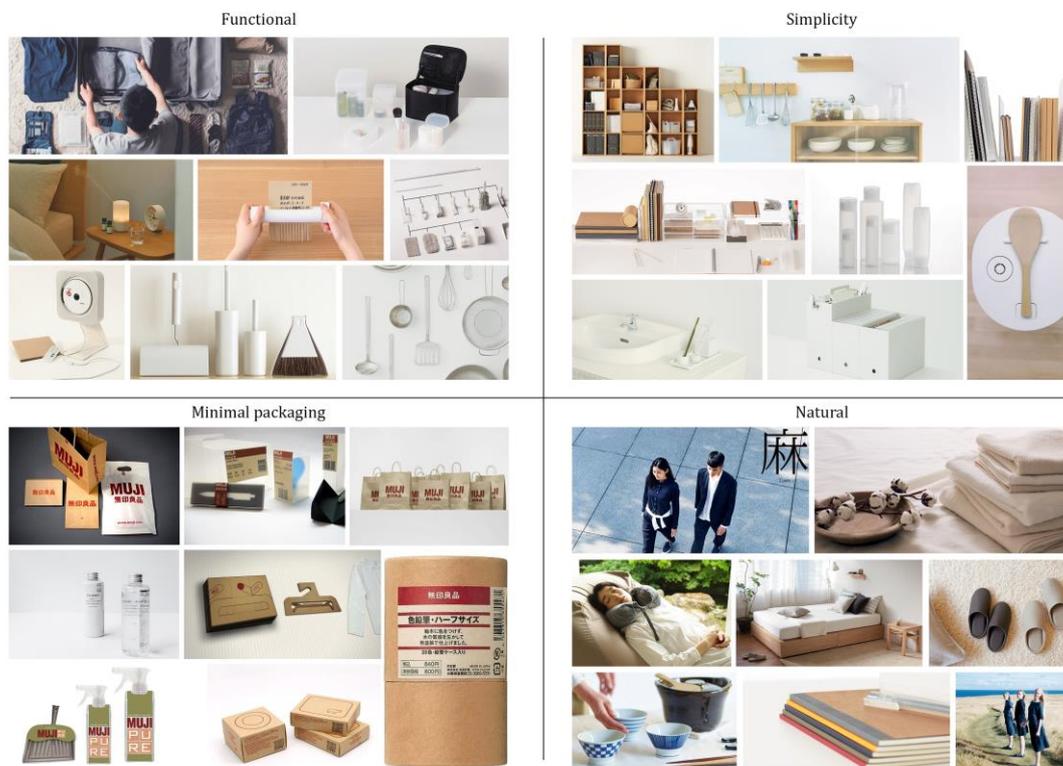
As Kanai (2013), the Managing Director of MUJI, mentioned above, it is necessary to conduct in-depth research on those three steps in order to have a better understanding of intention. The rapid development of digital media and the constantly changing environment of the information era have caused consumers to be inundated with commercial product promotions. However, MUJI focuses primarily on the concept of “easy to use, people-oriented” (Fukasawa, 2007). Bolick (2005) believes that MUJI advocates a simple life. It does not have a special form of merchandising, just the use of suitable materials and production processes to bring the design to life.

Product packaging is often the first direct contact a brand has with consumers, which can intuitively reflect brand image from the first impression. The packing of a product clearly highlights brand image, specifically through the packaging material, colour, characteristics and intuitive features (Holdway, David, and Mark, 2002). MUJI not only upholds a people-oriented design philosophy, it also focuses on the relationship between humans and nature in its designs, and pays attention to consumer demands and living environments. MUJI rejects the use of complicated design simply to follow recent trends and instead focuses on consumer psychology, highlighting the principles of pursuing high quality rather than the pursuit of a luxury lifestyle. To be specific, MUJI has paid much attention to the selection of suitable materials, production process details and simplified packaging. The brand's people-oriented design concept is embedded into all its products, then passed on to consumers to create a unique brand image.

Eco-friendly design and green consumption are two areas achieving much global attention nowadays. In terms of MUJI's model, its designers captured the green concept and advocate the use of recyclable materials, typically using natural ecological materials and respecting the advantages of their natural properties. MUJI designers then try to meet the functional requirements of the product specification and combine them perfectly. MUJI both makes full

use of recyclable resources and ensures that it operates with a sense of social and environmental responsibility. The criteria for the material selection of MUJI is ample supply and low prices, which could reduce costs (Chen, 2010). MUJI does not make special packaging for any single product, sticking instead with natural materials and no superfluous decoration. It seems that Chen (2010) understanding of MUJI’s material selection is questionable. Hara (2011) argues that MUJI advocates simple packaging because its unique beauty gives consumers a sense of purity and freshness. Based on the design research of Sen (2009) and the MUJI products collection, a number of MUJI’s design features can be presented into four catalogues in this research in Figure 5.5 shown below:

Figure 5.5: Design features of MUJI



The simplicity policy of MUJI is not only reflected through its packaging, but also by its concise text and graphics. MUJI’s designers use minimal words and graphics on MUJI’s product packaging to allow consumers to get a sense of the product when purchasing them. Using simple packaging, the company’s designers give consumers a potential guideline to think about and explore the lifestyle attitude that MUJI wishes to transmit. The use of streamlined text and graphics are the most significant parts of MUJI’s brand identity. Most MUJI products are manufactured in black, white, grey and other natural colours, such as wood, which

constitute the unique cognitive strategy of MUJI. There is some evidence to show that the visual feeling of colours accounts for 80% of human's first impressions of an object (Randi and Wisenblit, 1999). MUJI has captured consumers' attention by standing out with its unique minimal colour scheme in the colourful modern world. Consequently, MUJI has created its own unique characteristics and brand image. Rattray (2005) agrees that MUJI's choice of brand colour incorporates traditional Japanese aesthetics whilst also appealing to modern consumers. MUJI is unlike other brands, in that it is concerned with more than just using cheap materials to maximise cost reduction and achieve maximum benefits. Instead, MUJI aims to make customers feel good about their products and their lifestyle (Hara, 2011). MUJI provides a simple service, embodies a connection with the natural world, and minimises the presentation of information on the products themselves, with positive effect.

5.2.2 Marketing advertisement: telling the MUJI culture

Since MUJI's establishment in the 1980s, MUJI has responded to local societal change and developments and other key movements that have occurred via marketing advertisements. So far, this section of the paper has discussed design features, material selection and cultural background, however, it is also important to examine MUJI's marketing strategy and brand culture delivery methods to both the local and global market. Based on the literature review, the marketing development could be split into three stages: the 1980s, the 1990s to the early 2000s (Tanaka Ikko period), and the late 2000s onwards (the age of Kenya Hara).

The initial concept of MUJI was demonstrated in its very first poster, designed in 1981 by a team led by Tanaka Ikko⁴². During the first ten years, MUJI's poster designs (shown in Figure 5.6) aimed to express its brand principles, advocating the theme 'natural', 'definite' and 'label-free', which reflected MUJI's inexpensive and good-quality brand positioning in the Japanese market. Product information, including price, origin, materials and so on, were displayed using small, dense background characters (Koike, 2016).

Figure 5.6: MUJI posters in the 1980s

⁴² Tanaka Ikko, born in Nara, Japan (1930-2002), Ikko Tanaka, the leading designer of the generation in 1980s, created a style of graphic design that fused modernism principles and aesthetics with the Japanese tradition. He is most well-known for his poster design for the Nihon Buyo performance by the Asian Performing Arts Institute.



These were classified and arranged under the brand concepts of ‘material selection’, ‘process examination’ and ‘package simplification’. ‘The Whole Salmon’ poster shown in Figure 5.7 was used to introduce all MUJI’s food products that year. In the context of advocating the economy and consumption in Japan, the design of this poster was based on the concept that every part of the salmon could be used. This reflected MUJI’s brand philosophy. It stressed that delicious food products could be guaranteed, even through the use of non-optimal parts of the salmon, which could reduce prices. In the 1980s, in a period of stable development following high-speed economic growth, Japan suffered an energy crisis after the global economic downturn. The demand for consumer goods had reached saturation point, which caused consumers to take a more rational approach to consumption and to turn away from luxury goods. With label-free clothing, natural colour schemes of black, white, grey and blue, and through a transformation from figure-rich designs to striped designs and unbleached paper in its natural colour, MUJI had distinguished itself from logo-oriented brands. ‘MUJI is against the system’ in its omission of all kinds of excess decoration and challenge of the real value of commodity (Tsutsumi, 2004). MUJI developed a series of products named ‘natural colour’. MUJI selected the colour of animal fur and other natural materials, and used cloth which had not been bleached or dyed. One of the core principles of the brand is an appreciation of colour derived from nature. Moreover, MUJI launched when vests came into fashion – a popular commodity – and targeted them at children and young fathers. This commodity contained the message that the brand wanted to deliver: that the connection between people could be sensed through ordinary clothing and casual surroundings, just like the communication between the minds of a father and a son, which could be guaranteed without language. MUJI’s buyers travelled around the globe in order to search for materials. MUJI wished to convey a message

highlighting the vast range of goods on this ‘Huge Earth’ and the communication with the resource sites of the planet. During the 1980s, at the time when MUJI was just beginning, marketing strategies and design principles focused on local markets with the flow of global change.

At the beginning of the 1990s, the economic downturn in Japan contributed to a global recession that has lasted to the present day. Despite this, however, the sales volume of MUJI largely increased for seven successive years, when other markets were gradually dying. MUJI arrived with an attitude that life was meant to be simple, plain and comfortable. It refused brand-worship and pointed straight to the essence of life, which can be seen from the posters of MUJI from 1990s to early 2000s (Figure 5.7):

Figure 5.7: MUJI posters in 1990s and early 2000s



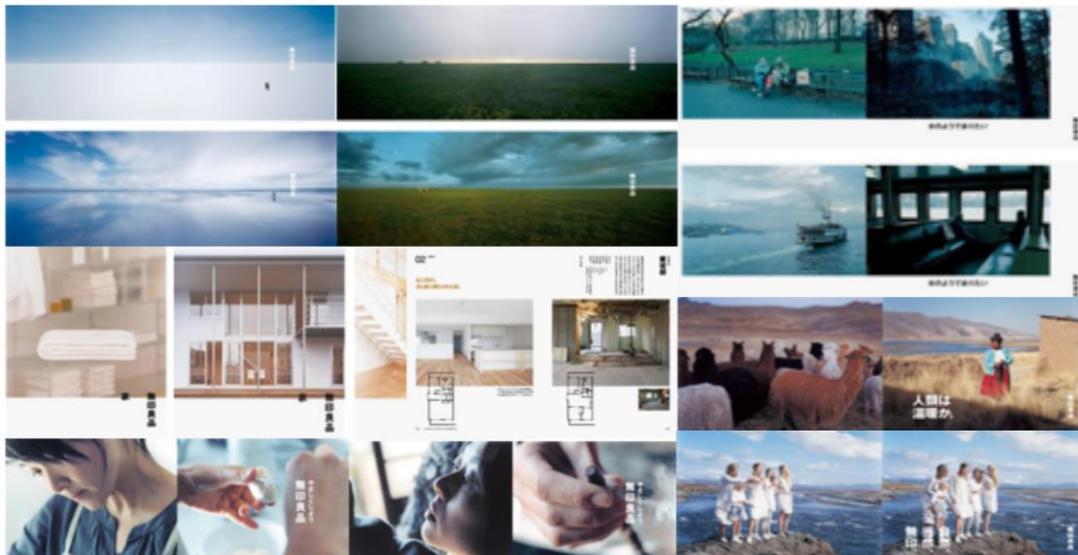
This ‘anti-system’ attitude was an inexorable trend after the rapid development of the economy, just as the advertisements noted:

After having enough teppanyaki and goose liver, people would suddenly feel that Ochazuke is so tasty. This is what people feel about MUJI. Simplicity will not be ashamed when facing luxury, for it has its

mysterious intellectuality and sensibility, or rather a world to be proud of. If such value system could be popularized, people will live a richer life with resources spent as little as possible (Tanaka Ikko, 1999, p.19).

Since the 1990s, MUJI's strategy of 'A richer life with resources spent as little as possible', focuses on the real pace of consumers' daily life and impresses consumers all over the world with its low-key attitude. However, MUJI suddenly suffered a economic downturn in 2000, with a 75% drop on the stock market. After Tanaka Ikko passed away in 2002, Kenya Hara became a member of MUJI's consultative committee and was then responsible for the direction of art. If it could be said that MUJI opposed fashion and the system during the Tanaka Ikko era, it could also be said that MUJI was injected with a new philosophy under Kenya Hara (Kanai, 2010). Moving into and beyond the 2000s, is the age of Kenya Hara, and the insistence on 'everyday life' which influences everyone who comes to understand MUJI. The advertisements shown in Figure 5.8 were produced between 2002 and 2008, are were used to represent MUJI's annual vision, which primarily focused on products. The advertisements begin with a distant and empty perspective, moving towards the themes of products and home worldwide.

Figure 5.8: MUJI posters in the 2000s



This group of commodities thoroughly pursued extreme simplicity, not as the absence of design, but instead to highlight the new image of MUJI – the pursuit of perfect design through completeness. The poster released in 2003, 20 years after MUJI's establishment, was created

not only to broadcast this new ethos, but also in the hope that it would be a carrier which contained the impression of all different kinds of people to the world (Zhu and Wang, 2013). MUJI produces furniture, clothing, food, various household supplies and all kinds of goods that are closely related to daily life. Starting from the perspective of a lifestyle ‘editor’, MUJI talks about how to build a ‘home’; it looks again at the existing lifestyle of ‘purchasing ready-made goods’ and proposes various home-building plans that fit consumers’ habits through the approach of filling an empty skeleton of a building with compatible products. Low-cost manufacturing is an inexpensive circulation technique that supports global commercialism in the pursuit of money. However, by 2008, consumers were resistant and opposed to this approach to consumption (Isomura and Huang, 2016). Therefore, MUJI came up with the slogan of ‘tender treatment’, what is called the ‘beautiful hands’ in visual arts. This reflects the aesthetic sense of Japan and the honest spirit of labour. The ‘beautiful hands’ message serves as a metaphor of this thought. MUJI has successfully promoted their brand principle worldwide, yet MUJI does not aim to dazzle consumers like an expensive perfume or bottle of champagne, but rather aims to be like water; natural, relaxing and comforting. The images in the advertisements show that MUJI has been deeply integrated into the life of all countries.

MUJI faces ‘everyday life’ fearless of the rapid development of the outside world, it searches for the essence of people’s demands for design with a humble yet sharp perspective and accurately places itself in the site where its intentions can be brought to life. When our daily life is being forced into a stereotype, MUJI keenly perceives the symptoms and signs, and consciously and independently challenges the unknown. The freshness of their designs, which go against the stereotype, lies in the fact that they have found the necessary space of design and they conduct their design within that space.

Today, MUJI has 63 retail stores in 11 European countries and 12 retail stores in North America. Its first UK retail store was launched in 1991, which was also the brand’s first step into overseas markets (Keikaku, 2016). Isomura and Huang (2016) argue that, when building a global brand, the main problem for Japanese companies who embody traditional Asian culture is that most global market is already dominated by American and European brands. This was particularly true during the 1990s. MUJI examined its overseas strategy in various ways in order to enter the European market. The brand’s initial methods were problematic, for instance, MUJI hosted a launch celebration in the Liberty Shopping Centre without conducting any target market

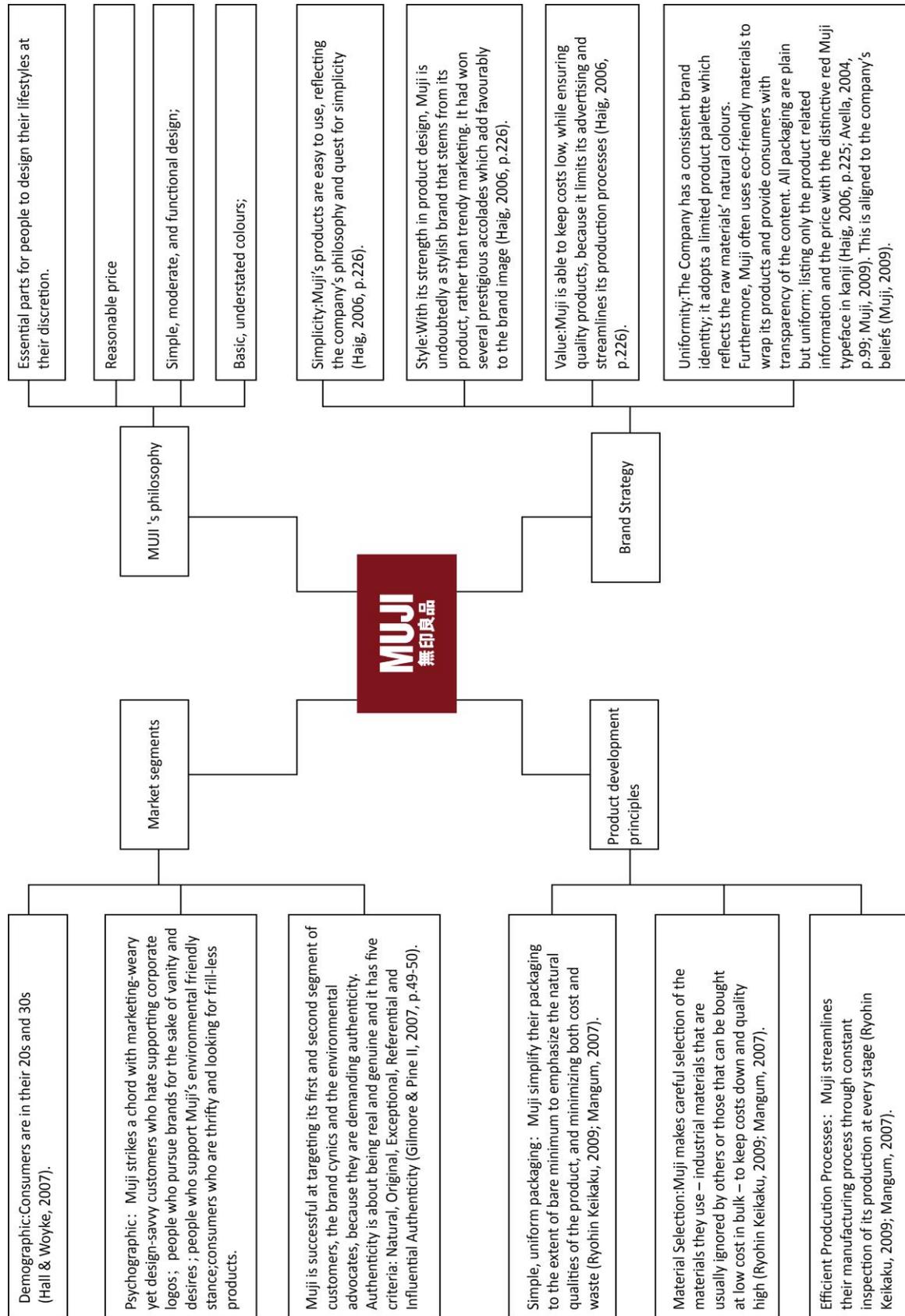
research. It also increased its network of retail stores without having an evaluation standard to monitor progress, and it also encountered management issues in large-scale stores (Ying, 2013).

However, if Isomura and Huang (2016) findings are accurate, MUJI revived its international strategy in 2001. Firstly, MUJI re-inspected product development in its overseas markets and then invited local customers to be part of its product development community, emphasising its design values in terms of new projects like ‘World MUJI’ and ‘Found MUJI’. Secondly, MUJI set out to evaluate its marketing values and also systematised store management by setting up standardised operational principles. Moreover, Watanabe (2006) asserts that the main success factor in MUJI’s globalisation is its incorporation of Japanese aesthetic and national culture, which has prevailed since the very beginning, even despite collaboration with leading international designers. MUJI’s merchandise, from the overall brand concept to specific products, reflects Japanese cultural characteristics, and their designs have become diversely associated with the humanistic spirit of the philosophical realm – such as human civilisation, philosophy and cultural values – which potentially lead consumers to think about the brand and the topics it embodies.

5.2.3 Reflection of MUJI

Compare with IKEA, MUJI has taken a different approach to explore the global market. MUJI has focused on humanistic design and the relationship between humans and nature. MUJI shuns complicated design, and, as Hara (2011) mentioned, envisages that customers are able to resonate with the brand’s values long after the products have been purchased in store. In the global context, MUJI never lost its individuality in pursuit of globalisation. MUJI recognises the value of difference, and will succeed as long as it continues to understand the world whilst still being true to its brand values and origins. A comprehensive diagram has also been created to summarise the discussion on MUJI, Table 5.2 as follows:

Table 5.2: MUJI case example summary



‘MUJI is not only a brand, but also a philosophy of life.’ Through simple pricing, it stresses not what is on-trend, but rather the real meaning of commercial value. MUJI sublimates products to the cultural level through the brand’s simple and plain design outlook. Hara (2011) referred the design approach of MUJI as being associated with “lust”, which Hara argues represents the beginning of all creativity. If a product is created to meet people’s expectations, then the essence of expectation will act on the essence of the product. Lust, however, is often inert, thus it should be restrained and educated. Whilst design must profoundly act on the essence of lust, it cannot be tolerated all the time. Thus, lust should be implicit, but reserved. An excellent example of this concept can be found in traditional Japanese sliding doors and partition boards, which bring balance and order to a space. Individuals push and pull the screens and stand or sit on tatami. These designs are not overtly associated with feelings of lust, but are instead practical and pleasurable in a graceful and reserved way. This represents the simplicity and humility of traditional Japanese homes.

Based on the findings of the case example on MUJI above, it is understood that MUJI is successful example of a company with a strong and distinct cultural philosophy originating from its Japanese roots, which also has found global success in operating stores across the world selling MUJI branded household goods. Through this study, we can identify critical factors leading to MUJI’s global success which can be applied in seeking a globalised, yet culturally Chinese, product brand. The success factors in MUJI’s case example can be summarised as: distinct market segmentation; consistent product development principles; and branding strategy. Hara (2011) notes that he hopes MUJI is able to allow people to experience the same sense of resonance once they have used MUJI’s products. In the global context, MUJI never lost its individuality during globalisation, it recognises the value of difference and diversity. Therefore, MUJI will survive as long as the brand maintains its roots, whilst understanding and shifting with society and the world. However, Shinobu et al. (2009) interpretation overlooks much of the historical research and presents a critical view of Japanese design, noting that, historically, Japanese culture absorbed American and European influences and integrated them into the national culture. As mentioned in the previous chapters, this mirrors the situation in China. Those multi-culture invasions have created a new culture, which has also influenced Japan. Japan must maintain a unique design direction, after moving through the era of the economic bubble, the atomic bomb and the seclusion policy, if it is to lead the way in the design arena.

Market segmentation is one of the key success factors of MUJI which could be adopted in a Chinese context. Being focused on the market segment allows companies to build a relationship with its focus group; which in MUJI's case focuses on customers with a desire for simplicity, along with sentiments of anti-establishment in the corporate branding context. Chinese companies need to understand the market segment – not just in terms of economic understanding, but also in a psychological and social context – to capitalise its philosophy on the desires and aspiration of the target customers, as seen in MUJI's case example. Findings from MUJI's case example also show that the consistency in product development principle has made MUJI's product distinctly MUJI, encompassing its value of eco-friendliness and minimalism (Mangum, 2007).

MUJI has also adopted a branding strategy of simplicity, reflecting the company's quest for simplicity (Haigh, 2006). The product functionality and simplicity of MUJI's goods allows its branding to focus on the philosophy of its company, giving way to a successful branding strategy in a commercial environment of competitive branding. The strategy of differentiation has made MUJI's brand distinct from its competitors, thereby acquiring the actual benefits of effective strong branding (Avella, 2004). Chinese companies, although not necessary needing to adopt similar branding of simplicity, could focus on a distinct branding strategy of their own which compliments its product philosophy. Companies could carve their branding uniqueness through investing in the promotion of a company philosophy or a unique ideology, as seen in MUJI's case example. Uniformity of branding is also a key success factor, stretching from product simplicity, the philosophy of environment friendliness (reflected in its product production and materials used), all the way to its packaging (Haig, 2006; Avella, 2004). The strategy of being uniform and consistent in its company philosophy should be adopted in contemporary Chinese design companies seeking to be identified as a global Chinese brand.

5.3 Globalisation and Localisation: The Cultural Influence in Design

As an extension of Hagerstrand's (1968) earlier work, Barbu (2011) highlights the influence of cultural adaptation in products aimed at local consumers in the global context:

Globalization determines the companies to operate abroad; therefore, the firms sell their products to markets where the consumer patterns might differ from their national market. It is of high importance to be able to understand

and to adapt to local consumer habits. The culture has a strong influence on products adaptation in particular, and on international marketing in general. Companies must be able to adapt their products, but in the same time, to keep the note of originality, so that the global image of brand to gain consistency. (Barbu, 2011. p.105-106)

As part of his work for the Research Institute of Industrial Design at Zhejiang University, Xu (2002) stated that product design is not the same as art design or the design of technology. Instead, product design can be referred to as a product of cultural innovation. Xu (2002) also asserts that the core of product design is to blend social human culture into a design concept that can satisfy consumers' requirements. Therefore, the relationship between culture and design is evident. Product design can be regarded as a combination of technology, humanities, cultural identity and cultural invasion, potentially existing in every product. Quality is another important element of product design, and it has led to a transformation of the way we live and behave today.

According to the White (2012), IKEA has succeeded in producing products unique to its national identity and values, while simultaneously globalising the sales of its brand, thereby penetrating markets which are foreign to its ideology yet able to assimilate within its local culture. MUJI on the other hand has crafted a brand of "no brand" through its Japanese minimalism culture due to the country's scarce amount of resources (Zhu and Wang, 2013). Both brands are successful examples of globalised companies with yet the success of assimilating national culture within its design.

The critical success factors identified in both IKEA and MUJI, through this study, which could be applicable to Chinese contemporary design include: market focus; localising design; and customer prioritising (Mura, 2011). Both IKEA and MUJI's success is mainly attributed to its focus on the larger customer group of the middle classes, and its strategies of pricing and quality in order to fit the demands of this market group. Targeting the growing middle class not only allows both companies to sell more products, due to the total net volume consumed by this income group, it also allows the brands to be more accepted in the countries where it operates, as a result of the large volume of consumption. Based on this finding, it is suggested that Chinese design companies need to capitalise on not just the upper-class customer group, but also penetrate the middle-class market to popularise product acceptance and, subsequently,

consumption. Being focused on the larger market group, would allow culturally embedded designs to reach a wider audience, thereby introducing Chinese designs more effectively into the specific targeted market.

The second factor of success for both IKEA and MUJI that Chinese designers could learn from is the localising of design (Mura, 2011) IKEA has faced challenges when entering some international markets, such as Japan and China, as the cultural design and operation of IKEA stores were culturally different to Sweden; MUJI also faced similar challenges when entering China due to the stark difference in the two cultures. The entering strategy initially did not include the customising of product design to local culture, which has proven to be unsuccessful. It's subsequent investment in research towards cross-cultural understanding, and the localising of IKEA and MUJI's product design as mentioned above, have brought subsequent success to both international brands. These findings show that being able to customise design and function for local culture and practices would be a success factor that Chinese designers need to grasp. Pure imitation of products design for the West, as mentioned in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, has caused failure of the Chinese designers to produce culturally unique and localised products that have a national or international presence. The two main case studies have demonstrated continual success as globalised players in the furniture and product design industry has shown the importance of understanding local culture, and thereby tailoring designs unique to its targeted region.

Lastly, the customer service of both conglomerates in prioritising the customer is a key success factor that Chinese companies should learn from. IKEA's one-year guarantee on returned products demonstrates its commitment to customers' assurance. Its operational features, which prioritise customers, also include the convenience of online furniture shopping, which IKEA champions within the furniture industry. Both IKEA and MUJI provides a unique in-store experience allowing customers to explore and experience its products and philosophy, displaying open planned production phases, allowing customers into the design and testing process, which enhances brand familiarity and encourages loyalty as stated by (Hara, 2011) Being customer focused is what Chinese design companies could learn from the case examples. The challenge facing Chinese design companies in contemporary China is not only to focus on the design of products with Chinese cultural value, thereby localising its design, but also to understand customer relationship management on a globalised operation, which, according to

the case example of IKEA and MUJI, remain one of the key success factors for its globalised operation.

However, IKEA's compromised on quality over price may not be a suitable strategy in which Chinese companies should adopt. Waking up from the past decade of 'Made in China' stereotype being associated with *shanzhai* and substandard quality, compromising on quality would be the last thing a Chinese company with ambitions of bringing Chinese design to a global market would want to do. IKEA's market strategy of competitive pricing may be suitable for its scale and global reach but would not fit a budding Chinese design company wanting to make its global dent. As Chinese design companies are still finding its position in a global market, branding would be key to its success. The branding strategy adopted in MUJI's minimal branding methods may also be unsuitable to a buzzing and growing economy like China. However, unlike MUJI in a global scale, their relatively low-key branding strategy have proven to be challenging in penetrating established economies like Europe or the United States. Therefore, in order to be effective in branding, Chinese companies would need to seek a branding strategy aligned to its company's cultural design philosophy, which is what MUJI has essentially been successful in. Ensuring products across the range stay consistent with the design principle is a key success factor that Chinese companies need to adopt. Chinese companies which seek global success need to maintain principle consistency throughout the whole chain of production: from material selection, factory processing to distribution, even if faced with cost implications.

Chapter Six: Representing Chinese Culture in Product Design in Contemporary China

In the context of the increasingly globalised market, companies must reflect their own unique character in order to survive. Branding is an essential core component of any company, and it is also a prerequisite for progression. IKEA and MUJI have promoted their brand concepts step-by-step and, as a result, have been the catalyst for a new global business trend. However, brand image should not only be built based upon intuitive and tangible visual elements, but also in a way that allows consumers to feel the philosophy behind the brand. In-depth research into the current embodiment of traditional Chinese culture amongst modern brands will be discussed in this chapter.

Since the beginning of the 1980s, the continuous innovation of science and technology made many ideas feasible, and the design can be presented in the product. Kanwisher, McDermott, and Marvin (1997) believe that the future of industrial design must return to the perspective of the humanism aesthetics, and that science and technology are only a technical level of support and cannot be used to dominate the design. Therefore, the thinking content of the design must be converted to humane care to consider the emotional changes in the use of consumer products. Product design will no longer simply follow the product form analysis or pure market investigation, which can observe the phenomena of consumers' lives but which cannot find the values of life (Senthil et al., 2013). In this chapter, humanistic product brands, covering such areas as furniture, home accessories, etc., are going to be the focus, as a representative to explore cultural products' features.

The aim of this chapter is to explore the core values and trends of cultural identity in product design in contemporary China, which could also help China to become more competitive in the global context. The methodology employed for this chapter is through both case studies on current Chinese design companies – SHANGXIA and PINWU; as well as through interviewing the owners and professionals working in both companies. The case studies allow this research to dealt into current efforts amongst the Chinese design companies in their work of producing Chinese culturally embedded designs and their performance allows us to critique means of which China can see a global design brand which is able to represent Chinese design. Interviews conducted with the store manager of SHANGXIA and owner of PINWU contributes

to this research in obtaining primary source of information that allows this study to contribute to the literature of Chinese contemporary design.

Based on the previous research, it could be concluded that China has been experiencing the '*shanzhai*' phenomenon and the Chinese elements trend, which has already been outmoded in the competitive international arena. In order to investigate the relevant factors of how design brands achieve global success, SHANGXIA and PINWU have been selected as case examples in this chapter. The methodology used in this chapter are mainly based on case study on these two companies, reviewing literature with references on them as well as conducting interviews with designers and staff from both SHANGXIA and PINWU. The principle of SHANGXIA, as a global sub-brand of Hermès, is to integrate the aesthetics of traditional Chinese handicraft into contemporary design, supposedly an attractive way to get into Chinese market. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate the design and marketing promotion of SHANGXIA's ethos. The Chinese cultural product branding and marketing development will be also discussed, based on the SHANGXIA case example. PINWU is an innovative design studio for traditional handicrafts, which aims to continue traditional Chinese culture by following natural development. PINWU is focused on its natural design principle, rather than being marketing-profit centric, and its aim is to inherit the traditional handicrafts which have become endangered through combination with modern design. SHANGXIA and PINWU will be demonstrated from different perspective in this chapter. Moreover, through analysing domestic furniture design companies, this research will investigate what relevant factors could influenced success.

6.1 SHANGXIA (上下)

In 2008, Hermès⁴³ created the first global Chinese brand targeted towards the Chinese luxury market. The launch of the brand was a surprising move. Jiang (2012)⁴⁴, the artistic director of

⁴³ Hermès International S.A., Hermès of Paris, or simply Hermès is a French high fashion luxury goods manufacturer established in 1837, today specializing in leather, lifestyle accessories, home furnishings, perfumery, jewellery, watches and ready-to-wear. Its logo, since the 1950s, is of a Duc carriage with horse. Nadège Vanhee-Cybulski is the creative director. (Dianna, 2016) Available at: <https://closetfullofcash.com/>

⁴⁴ Jiang Qiong'er, artistic director and CEO of SHANGXIA, is an internationally renowned designer. After many years studying in Europe, Jiang brings a cosmopolitan approach and bi-cultural experience to her designs. Respectful of tradition, she draws inspiration from a vast range of sources, and this is reflected in her versatile work. She was born into a family with a strong artistic tradition and began learning the art in the time-horned style. Available at: <http://www.salonemilano.it/en/trendlab/intro-trendlab/talks/Jiang-Qiong-Er.html>

SHANGXIA, asserts that as long as the presidents of international luxury brands have the opportunity to come to China, almost all of them will want to see SHANGXIA. As a sub-brand of Hermès, SHANGXIA is considered a luxury brand. It is necessary to understand the original idea behind the French brand's decision to explore a new area: traditional Chinese crafts and culture.

According to an interview with Patrick Thomas who became the Global General Manager of Hermès in July 2003. Shortly after taking office, Thomas found that the company was facing a strategic problem: how could the brand maintain balance between the scarcity of brand value and its financial growth? Thomas identified two possible solutions: create a new brand, or carry out an acquisition of another company (Thomas, 2014). Based on Hermès no-acquisition policy, Thomas decided that the best way forward would be to create a new brand. However, it was important that the new brand adhered to one important principle: to maintain the same shareholder structure and brand philosophy as the Hermès brand. Thus, the new brand should be based on traditional arts and crafts, innovation and brand style, but must be different from the Hermès brand. In 2007, Thomas met with the Chinese designer Jiang Qionger, who proposed the idea of reviving Chinese traditional crafts. She found that from the beginning of 2006, the trend and demand of returning to Chinese culture had emerged in the Chinese market. After a period of worshipping Western luxury, Chinese consumers had begun to return to their own cultural roots and embrace high-end brands with their own national characteristics, in order to highlight their own tastes and cultural attributes.

The brand name and logo 'SHANGXIA' is simple yet profound and was designed by Jiang Qiong'er. The logo (Figure 6.1) is composed of Chinese character graphics and the phonetic composition of 'SHANGXIA'. The logo has the cultural connotation of the Chinese seal cutting, which is shaped like a shelf. The logo conveys the concept of time and culture: the accumulation of China's 5000 years of history, wherein the past and present, transposition and dialogue, tradition and modernity, East and West, and human and nature are all combined (Jiang, 2012).

Figure 6.1: SHANGXIA logo



Wendlandt and Denis (2013) note that in the early stages of brand building for SHANGXIA, the product was endowed with high cultural artistry and was designed for life, by the people, for the people. Like Hermès, the brand also pays great respect to arts and crafts and is focused on culture, life and emotion, with the inheritance of fine arts and crafts and also the production of high quality lifestyle goods at the same time. Standing on the deep cultural foundation of China, SHANGXIA's brand designers committed to bring Chinese crafts into contemporary life and push them forward onto the global stage. Now, SHANGXIA has retail stores in Beijing, Shanghai and Paris. Most luxury brands have imitated domestic product lines and marketing models, in order to suit the local market. Some brands, therefore, redesign their products with Chinese characteristics in order to attract local consumers. However, Bergstrom (2012) questions this argument, stating that SHANGXIA maintains a connection to cultural practices with historical fluidity.

SHANGXIA's product range includes furniture, home accessories, clothing, jewellery and products related to Chinese tea culture. These products are in accordance with the style features of arts and crafts as per the Arts and Crafts Movement: that is, to use a simplified form of smooth and linear shapes to achieve the natural integration of form, function and decoration.

'SHANGXIA', which aims to revive Chinese crafts that were nearly destroyed by China's cultural Revolution, including ancient styles of porcelain, cashmere, felt and furniture, is part of new generation of Chinese brands elbowing their way in to the crowded European luxury goods markets. (Wendlandt and Denis, 2013.p.93)

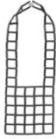
SHANGXIA's product design is full of the spirit of the Chineseness principles of 'function' and 'beauty', adopting a combination of contemporary design and traditional crafts. The brand's products are primarily inspired by Han Dynasty costumes, Song Dynasty artefacts, and

Ming Dynasty furniture. With a production process that involves traditional Chinese handicraft practitioners, designers communicate very closely with crafters and work in partnership to create arts and crafts in a new way. This involves the use of traditional elements to make simple, logical and functional products in accordance with modern design. SHANGXIA, therefore, brings traditional arts and crafts into contemporary life, and it boasts a new style with the vitality of the times (RedLuxury, 2012).

Sun (2011) also states that SHANGXIA needs to absorb the quality of traditional arts and crafts, as well as the Chinese traditional aesthetic taste. Jiang (2012) believes that the costumes of the Han Dynasty, the artefacts of the Song Dynasty and the furniture of the Ming Dynasty are typical representatives of Oriental aesthetic value, which therefore become the aesthetic inspiration of SHANGXIA’s products. Unlike many brands that deduct from Chinese style – using dragons, phoenixes and carvings in their designs – SHANGXIA has stressed the act of ‘taking the spirit and abandoning the form’ in its design concept. Thus, rather than incorporating tangible, visible Chinese elements, the brand aims to interpret Chinese charm. Only in this way, Jiang argues, can SHANGXIA products reach the contemporary philosophy of design, which is to be ‘alive’ and global, rather than to simply repeat the development of historical elements.

Table 6.1: Background of SHANGXIA

	<p>Target Group</p>	<p>‘SHANGXIA’ did not develop a target customer base, but instead chose natural selection. Its brand and product positioning eventually brought together a core customer base with economic capacity and taste and cultural accomplishment. The brand loyalty of this customer group is greater than that of customers who have been won over through the mass media. These customers not only have economic capacity but also cultural aspirations, and they hope to find a local high-end brand that captures both traditional Chinese and modern design. In this way, SHANGXIA could meet their needs (Zhu and Cui, 2014).</p>
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	Marketing promotion	SHANGXIA has its own unique approach to marketing promotion, primarily using small, exclusive exhibitions to spread its message. The brand never advertises, nor does it participate in tradeshow activities.
	Design principle	The design principle behind SHANGXIA's products is defined as achieving a restrained exterior and gorgeous interior (through the use of high quality raw materials and crafts).
 <p>Product range and price</p>		<p>APPAREL</p>  HIDDEN DRAGON £1,200  JOY £1,100  SUN&MOON £777  SUN&MOON £1,500 <p>JEWELRY</p>  BAMBOO CHARM £311  WUFU EARRINGS £222  BRIDGE WOVEN BAMBOO BRACELETS £422  TIAN TI £200 <p>TEAWARE</p>  IN HEART £6,111  BRIDGE £1,666  FOR HAPPINESS WOVEN BAMBOO ORNAMENTS £833  FOR HAPPINESS WOVEN BAMBOO ORNAMENTS £2,888 <p>FURNITURE</p>  DA TIAN DI (ZITAN) £32,777  DA TIAN DI - DESK (ZITAN) £97,777  MINI DIAN DI £4,000  DA TIAN DI - ROCKING CHAIR (WALNUT) £8,666 <p>HOMEWARE</p>  "BRIDGE" BAMBOO WEAVING VASE (M) £722  SHAN SHUI INCENSE HOLDER £533  TWILIGHT £1,200  WISH BAMBOO MARQUETRY PEN BOX £200

6.1.2 SHANGXIA Design

As can be seen from the product range and prices, SHANGXIA clearly positions itself as a luxury brand, focusing on the unique aesthetic qualities of natural materials, such as the Ming Dynasty style furniture made of precious rosewood and eggshell porcelain, woven bamboo, leather products, as well as clothing and scarves that are made of bamboo, cashmere, wool, silk and other natural materials. These are expensive materials that are relatively scarce. SHANGXIA's design concept aims to be both functional and emotional, going beyond the visual and into the psychological, with carefully chosen materials and design features. For example, the eggshell porcelain bowl, 'Tian Lai' (see Figure 6.1), with its simple shape and translucent material, conveys the cultural connotation that white is a very unusual colour, and because the white porcelain has become almost colourless and transparent, it raises the question of whether it is empty or not (Wu, Borgerson and Schroeder, 2013).

According to Zhu and Cui (2014) explanation of colour use in design, colour is not just a simple modelling element, rather it symbolises a national aesthetic consciousness. Here, the colour is above the object, which is perceived and felt by consumers in the cultural context of the brand. The colour not only conveys the ultimate goal of heaven-man unity, embraced within Oriental aesthetic, but also highlights the style and taste of the SHANGXIA brand. This feature is vividly reflected in the costumes and accessories of the SHANGXIA brand.

SHANGXIA, as a Chinese local cultural brand, has focused on every detail to interpret and inherit Oriental aesthetics. The brand blends tradition and modernity, the East and the West, and the harmony and unity between humans and nature. However, many traditional crafts are only for display and are not practically useful. Jiang (2012) stresses that SHANGXIA should have a lifestyle attribute, to meet both the artistic and practical needs of consumers; because only the creation of the arts and crafts which are able to convey feelings can make SHANGXIA gain lasting vitality and involvement into contemporary lives. However, at the same time, customers who purchase SHANGXIA products should be able to appreciate and afford the brand's design principles and be willing to use SHANGXIA products to create an elegant life with an Oriental flavour. Moreover, considering the product pricing and target group, it is a challenge for SHANGXIA to move towards the masses and to become a part of people's daily lives.

From a marketing perspective, it can be concluded that SHANGXIA aims at a niche market, with high-end positioning, and that it hopes not to become a brand with broad appeal, but to attract only luxury consumer groups. On the other hand, it can be said that SHANGXIA also hopes to expand the scope of the brand to target other consumer groups. Selecting the mass market for brand communication may attract non-target groups that are not the brand's ideal customer type. However, the brand will limit its potential consumer groups if it limits its marketing communication to the niche market. Due to the long denial of mass communication, this will cause problems such as brand fuzziness and will secure only a small population of customers. To illustrate, Wu et al. (2013) undertook a small-scale study (33 existing and potential customers), using in-depth interviews. The research showed that 45.27% of respondents believed that SHANGXIA has no iconic product that could represent its brand image, no brand image came to mind when asked about SHANGXIA (Wu et al., 2013).

The way in which SHANGXIA promotes its products is somewhat controversial, and there is an argument as to how could the brand could achieve effective communication through a suitable middle route to the target customer group, whilst also following both the Hermès and SHANGXIA brand principles. Vickers and Franck (2003) mention that Hermès firstly popularised its brand concept and mission and, secondly, maintained quality whilst adopting the appropriate brand communication strategy. For instance, could they reduce the cost of advertising in the mass media and place an emphasis on investing resources in its product, marketing and employees, which could help to attract customers with appropriate financial ability and gain higher brand recognition. Going back to SHANGXIA, Wang (2013) holds the perspective that brand communication should be consistent in all channels. In addition to the marketing strategy focusing on the niche market, a number of large-scale activities could be held to interpret the brand story richly and specifically through lively and vivid ways. This could be achieved by telling the story of the product and describing the typical user, and spreading the brand's message through various channels. This would create a yearning in the minds of the target consumers, portraying SHANGXIA as a luxury high-end brand that is exclusive and not available to everyone. The brand could also use word-of-mouth marketing to spread its message to its core customer base. SHANGXIA is a brand aiming to inherit traditional Chinese culture, incorporating traditional Chinese craftsmanship into modern design. However, it was established by a French company, which could indicate that the French company is attempting to capture the Chinese market under Hermès' marketing strategy. If the

recent research of Schroeder, Janet and Wu (2015) is accurate, Hermès' management of SHANG XIA can be summarised in four points.

Firstly, the brand is fully decentralised. Other than timing and finance, Hermès' support is also reflected in its management decentralisation. Thomas (2014) was of the opinion that the new brand was likely to be overly-controlled and as a result growth would be stunted; and that natural growth would likely expose the nature of the problem, which in turn would need to be addressed by the local team. However, despite holding a controlling 90% stake in SHANGXIA, Hermès does not interfere with the brand's development. Jiang Qiong'er, as the SHANGXIA Brand Director with only a 10% stake, has the freedom to apply her own management style and choices. Pierre Alexis Dumas (the artistic director of Hermès) and Patrick Thomas (CEO of Hermès) advise her on design, staffing and global strategy through regular meetings every three months, but Jiang Qionger has the ultimate right to make the final decisions.

Secondly, innovation is at the core of design and operation. Today, an increasing number of younger consumers are purchasing luxury products. The incorporation of Chinese characteristics does not mean stopping and standing still in tradition, but instead being innovative with traditional crafts – not only focusing on the charm of Chinese traditional culture, but also breaking free of the traditional way of simply expressing Chinese elements. This means that there may be a need to grasp the traditional and modern 'emotional bond', and to find the appropriate modern expression of traditional influences. Innovation can be performed at multiple levels, such as creative design, exploration of the production line and marketing methods (Wendlandt and Denis, 2013).

Thirdly, patience is an important factor for the brand's success. To achieve world-class success, high-end luxury brands need to build up their product quality, and this quality must be prioritised even if this means that the brand develops at a slower pace. In reality, many enterprises are able to recognise the importance of quality, but fierce competition can make them lose sight of their pursuit of long-term interests in favour of short-term gains, which will ultimately undermine the long-term competitiveness of such enterprises. If China wishes to boast a world-class brand that is respected and desired, it needs a steadfast spirit and long-term strategic vision (Zheng, 2007).

The final point is accurate positioning of the target group. The essence of marketing is to identify the customer base and match the product to meet the requirements of these customers. Wu et al. (2013) believe that, in this regard, SHANGXIA demonstrates outstanding performance, and that its core customer base is a group of people who intend to find a brand that is able to reflect their own tastes and characteristics. The consumer interviews, discussed earlier, reveal that many customers are seeking brands that are not only international designer brands, but that also demonstrate their own national characteristics whilst maintaining high quality and exclusivity or uniqueness. In this sense, SHANGXIA has met its customers' demands.

Overall, Hermès' creation of the new brand SHANGXIA followed the trend, 'from made in China to made for China'. China has already become one of the largest luxury consumer goods markets in the world (Cui, Wajda, and Walsh, 2015). However, the focus on Western lifestyle aspirations and *shanzhai* products has gradually passed as time has gone on. Blindly imitating Western design, or simply add demotic Chinese elements into the design, could therefore narrow the local market and make the SHANGXIA brand less competitive. Consequently, identifying a new way to innovate under the influence of globalisation and meet the needs of the Chinese market is not only challenging for China, but is also a global issue pursued by many other multinational brands. However, considering the pricing structure and target consumer group of SHANGXIA, even though its principles rest upon Chinese tradition via design, its focus on only a small group of customers is not the way to carry tradition forward globally.

6.2 PINWU (品物流形)

PINWU studio was established in 2005, by Zhang Lei⁴⁵, with the name of the studio being taken from the 'Book of Changes'.

云行雨施，品物流形。——《易经》

Extensive implement grace, breeding and giving form.

⁴⁵ Zhang Lei, the founder of PINWU, is a product space designer, graduated from Italy DOMUS Design Institute, majoring in automotive design. He is dedicated himself to the traditional Chinese culture design and hold the traditional future design exhibition in China, Italy, Holland, the United States for eight times successively.

The name of the studio embodies a deep understanding of the above sentence. The meaning of this saying is that all things constantly change and develop, grow and form, because of rain moisture. 'Breed' and 'give' are chronic verbs, and 'give' is forming in the way to wash the stone with rain, whilst 'breed' is creation by natural force and design. The studio, with a name rich in Oriental imagery, is located in Hangzhou. The studio clearly positions itself and its design as 'from Yuhang'⁴⁶ and has been located in Hangzhou for a decade. If it carries a brand essence, it is not China or Hangzhou, but Yuhang. Despite two of its three core designers being from outside China – Christoph John⁴⁷ from Germany and Jovana Bogdanovic⁴⁸ from Serbia – with only Zhang Lei being from Tianjin, China, in their view, they and their designs are from Yuhang (PINWU, 2015).

The initial principle of the PINWU studio can be discussed in terms of its conceptual product design. In 2005, the PINWU studio won the runner-up prize in the Electrolux global design contest, which is the first prize for Chinese designers. This year, the PINWU studio won a dozen international concept awards, including the iF and Red Dot awards (Yuan, 2012). At such an early stage in the PINWU studio's development, these awards are undoubtedly proof of its strength, and will aid their rapid growth. However, Lockwood (2007) mentions that each award has its own preferences, and whilst awards could be considered a motivation for new brands, mature design brands still need to have their own strong concept rather than purely focusing on winning awards. Thus, rather than being the ultimate goal, winning awards and taking the prize is only the platform from which to achieve recognition, but not success.

PINWU was a typical product design studio created to design products by meeting customers' requirements. PINWU has spent over a decade working towards achieving its design vision, which it determined back in 2005, at a time when PINWU carried out a project with the aim of developing a high-tech fruit juicing machine. The juicing machine's function was innovative, using infrared sensors to detect data, making it possible to check the nutritional content of fruit. PINWU studio invested a significant amount of time and energy into the design and development of the machine, and eventually this product was successfully developed. Yet,

⁴⁶ Yuhang District is a suburban district of Hangzhou, Zhejiang, in the People's Republic of China. Yuhang formed a separate city. It is the earliest settlement recorded in the area of present-day Hangzhou. The district contains the remains of Neolithic settlements from the Liangzhu period.

⁴⁷ The promoter FROM Yuhang and design director, Christoph John, designing furniture and automotive, was born in Germany, who graduated from Italy DOMUS Design Institute majored in automotive design. He has worked in Italy, Germany, and Finland, now living in Hangzhou, China.

⁴⁸ Jovana Bogdanovic, a furniture and space designer, graduated from University Belgrade College of applied arts.

PINWU perceived its attempt to create this product as a pivotal failure in the studio's development, for a number of reasons. Firstly, high technology content leads to high product costs, and this meant that the juicers had to be sold at seven or eight thousand RMB in order to recover costs. Secondly, high technology content can also lead to unstable performance, and if the product functions are too complex, it can be difficult to detect which specific parts have issues (Zhang, 2014). The reason for positioning this failure as pivotal is that the PINWU studio finally found its own design principles through this ordeal. Thus, the project helped the studio to embrace creation with a natural attitude, the pursuit of minimal technology, the conservation of energy, and the consumption of development.

In 2008, Zhang Lei left the PINWU studio to his colleagues and travelled to Italy to learn car design and to realise his dream of many years. In a new country, Zhang witnessed diverse design approaches from all over the world and had access to international designers from various countries from around the globe. As a Chinese designer, he was disappointed to realise that the Chinese design aesthetic was absent. The continuation of tradition in Italian design inspired Zhang Lei to assert that the continuation of traditional Chinese culture should lie at the core of PINWU. PINWU entered the Milan exhibition in 2009, becoming the first Chinese design brand to do so (Bruno, 2012). Nowadays, the PINWU studio has a total of 12 designers from four different countries, and the company has adopted its own cultural design style to explore ways in which to continue and develop traditional Chinese culture in design.

6.2.1 PINWU's cultural product development

Hangzhou was initially chosen as the location for the PINWU studio. Yuan (2012) highlights the reasons that the studio's designs start in Hangzhou, Yuhang, known as the land of fish, rice, silk, flowers and fruit, and the state of culture. Hangzhou has a long history of canal culture and Zen tea culture, which are renowned overseas. This allowed a profound historical background to be built and the rich cultural heritage of Yuhang to be brought together. Zhang (2011) holds the perspective that 'leaving the country, returning home' is the guide behind PINWU's design. The term 'leaving country' means to sanitise the tag of 'Chinese elements and Chinese designers'. Since China is a multicultural country with a huge population, it is a one-sided, subjective and false proposition to justify what can be considered 'Chinese design and Chinese designers'.

Zhang Lei has lived in Yuhang for more than a decade, and his work demonstrates clear cultural traces of the region. It is argued that all designers need to ‘return home’ to answer the question, ‘Where are you from?’ (Zhang, 2014a). People used to pay attention to avoiding being ‘stuck in the well’, but in the Internet era, too much information synchronisation makes people feel identical no matter which city they are in.

Everyone is floating around the outside world; no one has a feeling of easement and assurance (Zhang, 2014a).

In Zhang (2014)’s opinion, designers have to settle themselves and think about how to immerse their ideas into local design. In 2010, Zhang Lei met four paper-umbrella masters when he visited the countryside in Yuhang. He believes that a piece of bamboo, five threads, seven pieces of paper, 36 ribs and 70 steps should not just be an umbrella. Therefore, he set himself the challenge to attempt an exploratory design that would restore the Hangzhou umbrella, which almost disappeared, and bring it back into modern life. Traditional umbrella handicraft can be broken down into completely different products depending on the region of origin. In the interview, Zhang (2015) pointed out that designers from different countries have a very strong national characteristic in design. German designers, such as Christoph John, are very rigorous, precise and detail oriented; Serbian designers, like Jovana Bogdanovic, tend to have very strong design decoration for functional purposes; and Russian designers tend to be very diverse and rich in their form, with high artistic accomplishment. Whilst there are advantages and disadvantages to all of these individual features, Zhang Lei hopes that they will be able to maintain their own local style and work style whilst working together and contributing to the whole team. The three main designers at PINWU studio – Zhang Lei, Christoph John and Jovana Bogdanovic – spent two years with their team, in 12 villages, and worked with traditional craftsmen to study the concept of natural life and traditional craft materials in order to look for the direction of Chinese design in Yuhang (PINWU, 2015; Yuan, 2012) .

As a designer in Hangzhou, I feel very honoured and lucky. My work is actually very simple, which is to look for traditional materials, traditional artists, traditional way of life and traditional culture in the hundreds of years. (Zhang, 2014a)

From the first project ‘Rethinking Chinese design’ in the 2009 Milan design exhibition, ‘Reflection on evolution’ in 2010, and ‘Yuhang decorative future’ in 2011, to ‘From Yuhang’, Zhang Lei led the PINWU studio to locate the source and path of Chinese design, striving to find a more capacious space for traditional process by designing products. From Yuhang to Milan, 483 days, 17 traditional crafts, 12 ancient villages, ten design works, eight traditional craftsmen and one design team represent a subversion and tribute of design to tradition, which is the ‘traditional future’ way of thinking after the deep study of the natural lifestyle and traditional craft materials (Bruno, 2012). Yuan (2012) also believes that ‘From Yuhang’ adheres to the concept of symbiosis: symbiosis of farming culture and the modern civilisation; symbiosis of traditional craft and modern technology; and symbiosis of local design and Western design. The concept of ‘symbiosis’ agrees with the state of common growth and development in a variety of cultures in Yuhang.

PINWU is an innovative design brand for traditional crafts, advocating the abandonment of craft by the market in order to bring life to the modern setting, incorporating a little of traditional craft’s power with each designer’s area of strength. The products designed by PINWU have been combining and continuing special features of materials and handicrafts in subtle ways, the relations between PINWU products and traditional Chinese materials, handicrafts has been surmised in Table 6.2 as below:

Table 6.2: The traditional Chinese materials and handicrafts of PINWU products

	PRODUCT	MATERIAL	HANDICRAFT
AIR CHAIRS	 <p>‘AIR’ is an unconventional interpretation of traditional Chinese bamboo weaving. The concept explores the limits of bamboo’s weight</p>	 <p>Bamboo Wood</p> <p>At first glance, it seems like wood. In fact, it has many of the same physical characteristics as other forms of timber, but it</p>	

	<p>and strength. The result is a significantly lightweight chair with the same durability of a much heavier chair.</p>	<p>grows at a rate 3 times faster than other trees. It is the perfect substitute for timber, widely used for furniture and building materials.</p>	 <p>Traditional Chinese Bamboo Weaving</p>
<p>REN</p>	 <p>Uses 'RONG' as the design philosophy, by melting the wisdom of traditional bamboo weaving handcraft and annealing it again to form a new material which is both natural and flexible. This can be used in furniture production, giving a natural look to industrial materials.</p>	 <p>Bamboo Stripe</p> <p>After finishing, it can be as slender and rounded as a vine, or ribbon-like with pliability and flexibility. After baking at high temperatures, the bamboo split is easy to shape. It is a very durable material and allows designers to explore a wide range of possibilities.</p>	<p>Bamboo weaving is a kind of handcraft art which weaves various tools and arts craft by sycophant or bamboo silk from the moso bamboo. This kind of handcraft can be divided into three steps: material handling, Knitting and finishing.</p>

<p>WU</p>	 <p>Design from the method of work of Yuhang decorative light ductile frame and papering. The framework for the production of bamboo (bone), the traditional paper making external skin (skin) approach, which will let the mask frame and the shade achieve the best effect, the lamp revealed natural light.</p>	 <p>Bamboo Paper</p> <p>Bamboo paper made from pulp has excellent ink absorption and good toughness. The principle raw material is young tender Moso bamboo. Fuyang, a city in Zhejiang province, is the most famous place for bamboo paper. Bamboo paper manufacturing began in Fuyang during the Southern Song Dynasty, and has been passed down from generation to generation for more than a thousand years.</p>	 <p>Handcraft of paper umbrella from Yuhang</p> <p>1 signing bamboo: it means selecting bamboo. 2 making skeleton: pare the trestle of the umbrella, and make some essential technical management like Water immersion, sun drying, and then make the skeleton. 3 fixing the surface of the umbrella: stick the cut paper to the skeleton, trimming, oiling, exposure, after the completion, it can be used</p>
<p>PIAO 2</p>	 <p>PIAO 2 is a chair fashioned out of paper and a grid of bamboo strips, following the traditional craft of Chinese lantern making. Applying this technique allows the chair to be surprisingly strong and durable, yet also</p>		 <p>Traditional craft of Chinese lantern making</p> <p>Paste (mounted), firstly making paper lanterns and cotton cloth, then paste the two layer of single light paper which are used to make lanterns. Using</p>

	thin and lightweight - a true paper chair.		cotton gauze would first flat brush dilution paste uniformly on the surface of the frame, then using the gauze attached on the light frame, with a brush dipped paste brush.
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PINWU has its own principle to investigate the relationship between nature and design. Firstly, according to Wang, Chen and Zhao (2013), PINWU means ‘nature breed things to form the body’: in other words, to create things through nature. The design principle of the PINWU studio is the imitation of nature, but not in favour of unnecessary innovation. PINWU agrees with the rationalisation of things, and that deliberate innovation will violate the law of development of things. Looking for original law, reflection and evolution represents the basic method of the PINWU studio. It strives to trace the source and find the origin of Chinese civilisation, which is rooted in the depths of each Chinese character and the influence of Chinese classical philosophy (mainly in Confucianism and Taoism) for thousands of years. Humans are a part of nature, and there is more harmony in nature. Zhang (2014b) also mentioned in an interview, that people should follow the idea of the law of nature. It is uncertain how to adhere to it in the tradition of the common language, and what form tradition will appear in in the future needs to be explored. In the modern world, tradition cannot be completely adhered to; if handicraft disappears, that is because its historical mission has ended, and any action we take to the contrary may violate the law of development.

Another important point is to seek, scatter and restructure tradition. This is an ideology Chinese Taoism, the mutual transformation between yin and yang, and the principle of “Dao begets one, one begets two and two begets all livings” (Creel, 1970). The characteristic of PINWU is that Tao gives birth to one, one to two, and two to many. Its feature is that it cares more about the future of traditional things, scattering the traditions and restructuring them to the design language of our own time, to respect yet subvert the tradition. In the view of PINWU, tradition is sugar and modern design is water, and when these are combined they become a sugar solution – the sugar cannot be seen directly, but it is surely sweet – ultimately, people cannot find the tradition in design, but it is embodied within. This is the best possible product of the combination of tradition and modernity (Yvette, 2014).

We still hope that there are less utility and purpose in our design, as long as we can survive (Zhang, 2014b).

From a marketing perspective, the PINWU studio believes that design is not a purely commercial behaviour, indeed, as long as the studio can survive, PINWU only manufactures its own favourite designs. PINWU's products are not common in the domestic markets, and some customers are unable to afford the studio's products due to the high costs involved in manufacturing goods made using special handicraft techniques. Most companies follow a business model of setting the market price and peeling back the cost until the company can recover the cost of manufacturing the product. However, the PINWU studio does not want to create anything that is not good enough to control costs. PINWU operates in an idealised area to express its concept through its products. However, it is difficult for people to understand the principle if the products are not being used as part of their daily lives. Zhang (2014) argued that if we wish to go to the front, we must dig into our history and integrate what we find with those in the current frontier. PINWU is very simple: it is a tool of traditional inheritance. PINWU aims to become a representative of Chinese design for foreign designers and consumers. However, Bruno (2012) does not believe that PINWU's products can be simply identified using terms such as 'East', 'China' or 'tradition'. In his opinion, what PINWU uses is contemporary design language influenced by Western culture. PINWU hopes to use old material goods to continue a spirit of contemporary design. It is clearly not possible to become a future traditional design centre for business purposes. In addition, Zhang Lei hopes that the PINWU studio remains a highly China-oriented design company, and that it can continue to help enterprises incorporate Chinese tradition in the future.

PINWU is committed to building the 'traditional future', even though the traditional is inflexible, whilst the future is open. This has a double dimension of inheritance and innovation. A future of tradition pays great attention to the cultivation and growth of tradition in the future. However, traditional future focuses on the development forms of the future in the traditional light. That is, blending 'imaginative naturalism' into the thinking of the 'traditional future'. Rogoff (2003) holds the critical view that design has to become embedded into people's daily lives to allow the customers to feel it, which is the conveyer to deliver cultural behaviour. Essentially, culture is created by life, not from ideals. Zhang (2015) mentioned in the interview that the most satisfying products in recent years are often created at the last moment, such as

the umbrella from Yuhang. Zhang hopes that the future is open, which is something unknown, and that designers will be surprised. Zhang appreciates the unknown, the exploration, and the challenge of figuring out what kinds of products to create. This reflects the development trend of PINWU, which is unknown development in the known tradition. At the same time, innovation has become an important factor in PINWU's future development strategy. The designers of the PINWU studio are looking for the nature and law of things in order to play them to the extreme. Chinese tradition is magnificent, but designers lack the courage to play with their imaginations, which is the most prevalent ability demonstrated in Western design and technology. The design temperament of PINWU should, therefore, be derived from both Chinese tradition and Western imagination.

Zhang (2015) also mentioned that Chinese design easily immediately links business models with an attempt to reach the heart. However, Christoph John and Jovana Bogdanovic focus on encapsulating the ideas of beauty and emotion. This has a particularly great influence on Zhang Lei, and now he has divided design into three levels: first, a design attracts the eye and brings a good visual feeling; second, the design attracts logic, and encourages consumers to buy; and third, the design impresses your mind, and touches the consumer in a way that cannot be expressed in words, which is the highest level of design.

6.3 Domestic furniture companies in China

In term of interviews and observations during the field work in China, HC28, HAO Style, Maxmarko, ACF HOME and Mexarts have been selected as domestic original furniture brands for investigation and discussion, as all of them are struggling to be original and valuable under the global context, even though their backgrounds, experience and strengths are different. Wang (2014) holds the point of view that now is the best time and also the worst time for design revelation; the worst time refers to the current economic situation, where the majority of enterprises are experiencing difficulties; the best time means that the era of imitation is no longer trendy, labour costs are increasing, so economic development has to rely upon design innovation. With this in mind, the domestic furniture industry also has to depend upon design innovation, otherwise it may collapse. Analysis of previous research has provided an understanding of design innovation from various perspectives, however, the next section will outline the relevant factors which influence current issues in the domestic furniture design companies, as detailed in Table 6.3.

Table 6.3: Five domestic furniture design companies

	Background	Design Principle
HC28	<p>The founder of HC28 is Francois Champsaur, who is originally from France. Since the late 1990's, Jianwei LI and the Fargo Group have been working hand-in-hand specialising in the distribution of leading contemporary design brands from France and Italy on the Chinese market (Openings, 2009).</p> <p>In 2006, they put together a multinational team of experts in furniture design, distribution and production to create HC28. The majority of the design was composed of Western styles, supplemented by the Oriental style such as Chinese and Japanese, an integrated relationship.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. True design innovation and sheer creativity from the West serviced by exceptional craftsmanship and a deep commitment to refinement from the East, rarely achieved at the level (HC28, 2016). 2. Focuses on high quality materials and extremely refined manufacturing details – finds a place in today's multicultural world. 3. Creating the brand for the world. To incorporate the Oriental thought while taking the Western ideal as the majority. The combination of both the Oriental and Western shall be the inherent brand gene of HC28, during the design process, it did not intentionally quote the Oriental or Western elements, but utilise such a global language and method to express its thought (Openings, 2009). 4. Using the asymmetric design language to express the perfect and imperfect philosophy thinking of life.

HAO Style

The founder Hao Wen, who is also the director of furniture research institute of Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts (Xie, 2014). The brand name points out the attitude with life as priority and the standard of advanced life, aiming to the optimisation of Chinese life style.

In 2001, a series of daily furniture made with bronze as the main material was awarded gold prize at the Shanghai Furniture Exhibition, with the splendid transformation of his original design, created the post-Orientalism bronze furniture brand (Xie, 2014).

1. Design origin: the philosophy of balance (Taoism) 'Balance' shall be the core concept of Oriental culture, the Oriental philosophy aiming to the balance should be the design origin for the produce.

2. To transmit the distinctive aesthetic sense of Chinese and the sustainable aesthetics. Simple, but never boring.

3. Post-Orientalism. By weakening the binary opposition between the Oriental and Western to enhance its dialogue property, to promote the fusion and development of the world's cultures with the diversified cultures and equal spirit. The 'post-Orientalism' shall start from the Oriental philosophy and culture aesthetics, to show the Oriental charm to the world with the method that can be understood by the Western and the international language (Gong, Wu and Wang, 2011).

4. The design shall make the qualitative change from 'functional demand' into 'cultural demand', the furniture shall have the cultural property, to present the taste of the family as the cultural carrier.

Maxmarko

The founder Darui Chen graduated in industrial design from the Tsinghua Academy of Fine Arts. Maxmarko used to be the name of an RandD centre for furniture products. After few years' hard work, the studio had produced some remarkable achievements, and he felt that it was the time to design products under a brand name to have more people experience what they have

1. Inheriting the design concept with the beauty of fusion, to concentrate the diversification and life styles of both the Oriental and Western society into the extreme aesthetic opinions (Chen, Wu, Zhang and Danya, 2012).

2. To shape a design style for 'contemporary China'. Today is an era with grand cultural fusion, people cannot mechanically follow the

achieved (Bei, 2016). Therefore, Maxmarko was registered in the spring of 2010.

Western life style, but also not inherit or follow with the life style in both the Ming and Qing Dynasty. As one of the main themes, ‘contemporary China’ has arranged such fusion with both the design, arts and life.

3. To let the design continuing the sustainable life, with the influence of Carl Malmsten⁴⁹, who is the initiator of North Europe style. Function should be more important than the form. Durability is the essential section (Art Exhibition, 2011).

ACF:

HOME

The founder Xin Wang is also the design director of ACF: HOME brand. The cooperative designers come from different cities around the world such as, Beijing, Taiwan, Venezuela, Paris and Holland, etc. They are hoping to design the household products under the same concept guided by ACF, to express how they understand Chinese culture and life (ACF: DESIGN GROUP, 2016).

Since 2015, ACF: HOME continuously completed the systematisation and ancillary properties of their products, to step toward the direction of overall ancillary furniture by saying goodbye to the era that taking single personalised products as main business.

1. The letter of A, C, F in ACF: HOME brand represents the aesthetic, culture and functionality respectively, the brand dedicates to explore and find the life style suitable for temporary people through the original design, to create the quality life with cultural implication with the household products for life. And also, ‘:’ represents the right of speech that the new generation of designer (Liu, 2015).

2. Originated from details, ended at simplicity. To make the design carrying the practical function, transmitting the emotional value.

3. ACF HOME has been always focused on ‘Design and Life’, and believes the beauty and comfort of the space will affect people's spirit and tolerance, and they always strive to explore the results of design to evoke people's concern of the living space and enthusiasm and attention of life (ACF: DESIGN GROUP, 2016).

⁴⁹ Carl Malmsten (7th Dec 1888 – 13th Aug 1972) a Swedish furniture designer, architect, and educator who was known for his devotion to traditional Swedish craftsmanship and his opposition to functionalism. He considered the rationalization of the home according to functionalist principles a debasement of its traditional role as an intimate place for gathering and repose.

Mexarts was established in 1995 by taking “transmitting the happiness of life through the goodness” as operational concept. Over the last 20 years, Mexarts maintained close cooperation with top-rated global brands and designers, finally spreading their overseas retailer shops into the top household shopping malls in Europe, Australia, Japan and South Korea, etc. Currently Mexarts has established four direct sales stores in China, in the cities of Shanghai, Hangzhou, Beijing and Tianjin respectively (Ji, 2017).

As an international household product brand that originated from China, and also got well developed overseas, Mexarts has possessed a powerful team consisting of global top-rated designers, manufacturing craftsman and service experts. Its design team members mainly come from Asia and Europe.

1. Integrating the Oriental and Western thought with aesthetics. Integrating the ‘cultural arts and life style’ through the construction technique of the overall spatial atmosphere, to create the design style with the combination of both the function and comfort meanwhile focusing on the details accordingly (Shanghai Economy, 2015).

2. The classic design could construct the eternal time and space. Mexarts always practiced the operational concepts of “to simplify the complexity, pursue the perfection and inherit the originality”, to interpret the life aesthetics with high quality through the art works with good quality. To feel the quiet and joyful life, the simple and elegant life style integrating with the nature perfectly.

Even though these five companies have different backgrounds, they are all working towards a similar target: to design products for contemporary China, and to lead Chinese design to be globally competitive. Having designers from multicultural background seems to be a trend in design companies in China. HC28 was a pioneer in recruiting designers from the Western culture, in order to create original designs rather than imitations, which is a good example for the other companies (Wang, 2014). Jianwei Li, the founder of HC28, had been working as an agent about 15 years, frequently visiting furniture exhibitions in different countries; he then decided to set up HC28 as he noticed that high quality furniture was under high demand during the market development. Li (2016) holds the point of view that HC28 is aiming to produce products with high quality, great design and international norms, never forgetting the original intention: to design inclusive products. What is inclusiveness? Including culture inclusiveness, traditional and modern inclusiveness and market inclusiveness, which is the design route HC28 are looking for: the combination of China and the West. Renowned designers around the world have joined the design team, utilising a global language to create a cultural band for the world.

However, Hao (2016) points out the key problem with this explanation is that the sense of belonging is the weakness and the missing part of Chinese design created by Western designers, as it is difficult for them to fully understand the core of Oriental spirit. Hao (2016) also believes that Chinese knows Chinese, Chinese brand have to use domestic aesthetic thoughts and emotions, the market will not exclude the original design and design should not fear any combination with business. Wang (2016), the founder of ACF: Home, gives consideration to current design situation, in that the product quality requirements for younger generation are far higher than that of the previous generation at the same age, which means the designers need to know what the current marketing is demanding. From both Hao's (2016) and Wang's (2016) observations, it could be generally said that in terms of design perspective, the shape and appearance is not the most important consideration, compared with the consumer demands. Returning to discussion the product quality, Lue (2016) mentioned that Mexarts is a design enterprise born in China but grown abroad, they are specialised in developing the manufacture of handicraft products, and quality is their core principle. All those five design companies have the same target – focusing on Chinese design and brand development – and some of them have successfully entered into the global market. With regards to the design development aspect, the majority of designers in HC28 are from the West and, therefore, are using Oriental culture from a Western perspective to create a brand for global citizen. In terms of Taoism, Hao's style concisely seeks the balance between simplicity and elegance, and also tries to transform from furniture functionality to cultural demand. However, the price of products from these design companies are costly and unaffordable for the majority of Chinese, which raises the question that under the high-class customer target strategy, how can these brands be acceptable and popular among the huge population market?

6.4 Reflection in Cultural Design Values in Contemporary China

In today's globalised competitive economies, the importance of distinct cultural elements within national economic activities will be increasingly significant (Julier, 2013). Distinction of products through cultural relevant design will be a key factor in maintaining national competitiveness in a global market. This chapter has studied seven Chinese companies that has seek to produce culturally original products of Chinese culture with varying degree of success. These companies which are used as case examples for this study, plays significant role in the representing and advancing of Chinese product design in contemporary China. As a the most populous country with the second largest economy in the world, the maturing of the Chinese

consumers has brought a greater demand for products of deeper cultural aesthetics. No longer are the Chinese consumers satisfied with products that merely fulfil functions of product utility, material suitability and comfort features, but have now grown to incline more towards fulfilling emotional functions, aesthetic satisfaction, psychological comfort and other culturally distinct needs. Toffler (2013) holds the similar view that humans not only need high-technology products but also require products that has emotional elements that interacts with the emotions and feelings of its users. When consumers shop for goods, it is not only to fill their material needs, but also to fulfil a cultural norm or societal conformity. Once a product has been given a notion, it will shorten the emotional distance between itself and the people, at the same time, the purchase behaviour may potentially reflect cultural identity.

By contrast, domestic Chinese brands still face many challenges in meeting the rising and complication of needs amongst its consumers. These challenges include but are not limited to: understanding the need for localisation within globalisation; emphasising Chinese cultural identity; reviving traditional handicraft into contemporary design; enhancing brand loyalty by arousing consumers' emotional resonance, etc. The design brands which have been investigated in this chapter have noticed the challenges and most of them have started to seek Chinese cultural values within their products. However, different perspectives achieve different aims: SHANGXIA is a French brand exploring Chinese traditional handicraft notions with unavoidable debates. Under the well-known luxury brand Hermès, SHANGXIA has the strong backing platform to do research, to recruit designers and to promote Chinese culture, which is an efficient way to be recognised. However, in terms of SHANGXIA's orientation, it is not so much as a design brand as an art brand, even though its principle insists on Chinese traditional handicraft. Specifically, the expensive products only target a small consumer group, which is not the way to extensively extend Chinese culture, and the furniture designed by SHANGXIA tends to revive an ancient Chinese furniture style –Dynastic Tradition – rather than an innovation. PINWU's design philosophy on the other hand emphasises the maintaining of Chinese culture and the innovating of traditions to better serve society. One of their main aspects of design is to follow the flow of nature, to pay attention to the interdependent relationship between things, and to follow the law of natural development and customer demands. The design ethos of PINWU meets the demand for culturally Chinese products that embodies its unique traditions to its best of their interpretation. Similarly, the other five domestic design companies studied in this chapter namely, HC28, HAO style, Maxmarko, ACF:home and Mexarts, all have similar ambitions to be a globally competitive Chinese design brand. These brands focus its design

policies on oriental aesthetics using Chinese domestic materials and seek to produce products that combines both Eastern and Western influences and features.

There are few common features that could be concluded from the design companies above. A multicultural team of designers is one of the shared features amongst the case examples, demonstrating a trend in contemporary Chinese design companies that popularise multicultural collision and collaboration in the designing process. This study shows that this form of designing is seen to be one of the most effective methods to achieve continuation of Chinese tradition in contemporary design. To design products with an Oriental notion with a Western designers' perspective not only retains the product and design quality by using experienced designers, but could also explore global boundaries. However, the argument against multicultural designing is that the ability to design well in a culture does not directly equate to designing well in another. There is a difference between the knowing of a culture through personal experience with "the designerly way of knowing" through training as Nigel Cross (1982), British designer and academic calls it. Having a multicultural team divides the originality of the cultural design process as designers of non-cultural background would be designing through the knowing of design rather than a knowing of cultural values. It would be a great challenge for non-Chinese designers to completely understand the cultural values distinct to the Chinese culture, resulting in a unique 'Western-Chinese' design product which may come close to the concept of Chineseness but not thoroughly.

Secondly, similarities are also seen in the companies' design principles and marketing responses, in that, design principles are mostly inspired by Chinese traditional handicrafts; Chinese traditional materials (wood, bamboo etc.); Chinese traditional elements; the moral of Chinese ancient slogans; and religion (Taoism and Buddhism). Moreover, the price of the products is geared towards middle to upper-class market, which is hard for marketing distribution. Hjarvard (2013) has a critical view of pricy contemporary design, in that he thinks that design should conform to the cultural values of the time, that product design should influence the cultural atmosphere of human society, and then guide the formation of a new form of life culture. In a sense, an increasing population are beginning to consider the significance of cultural values in products and pay attention to the values in the process of product design, in order to truly realise the appreciation of cultural products for enhancing the cultural competitiveness of product.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1 Findings of this study

The focus of this research is to seek cultural originality in contemporary product design in China. In the search for cultural originality, this research has considered: specific factors causing a lack of originality in product design in China; originality's importance through the development stages of Chinese product design; and the current interpretation of 'Chineseness' in contemporary product design. These issues have contributed to a new understanding of existing Chinese cultural values and their potential to create innovation and original design in contemporary China.

Findings from a historical and cultural literature review has suggested that the lack of originality in contemporary Chinese products can be attributed to the influence of Western design ideologies and technological knowledge in the design industry in China. The early beginnings of Chinese industrialisation, between 1860 and 1937 (John et al., 1980), were led primarily by the technology and know-how of the West that had already undergone the Industrial Revolution (Zhang, 2013). A period of nationalistic reaction in the early 1900's caused China to boycott foreign products and focus on domestic manufacturing, which sheltered China from global technological advancement and but which also delayed the maturing of cultural and original design ideologies which has developed significantly in other countries, such as Japan, Germany and the United Kingdom (Tan, 2003).

From an economic perspective, the literature review suggests that the imitation phenomenon in Chinese products can be seen as a parallel phase in a developing country, rather like the periods of industrial revolution in the West, where manufacturing emphasises was on mass production rather than design (Williamson and Zeng, 2009). China is one of the largest economies in the world (Barboza, 2010) but remains a 'developing country'. Literature has suggested that other country like Japan has also undergone periods of producing non-original goods during its economic development (Wang, 2007). China has, in the last century experienced a similar four stage development: from 1860 to 1911, the emergence of heavy industry through the Westernisation movement; from 1911 to 1927, the development and formation of post revolution modern industrial structures; from 1927 to 1937, the rise of the

Kuomintang Government, which gave way to increased development of industries; and from 1937 to 1949, a rapid increase in domestic industries within China, and the formation of the People's Republic of China. During the Chinese Cultural Revolution, China began to participate in global commercial activities (Smith et al., 2004). The word 'Chinese design' was formed during this period of industrial revival in order to resist the invasion of Western powers during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This encouraged the Chinese to learn advanced Western science and technology, as well as social management systems for appropriated use, which at that time was deemed more effective and developed (John et al., 1980). Various imported foreign goods in inland China were imitated and manufactured domestically – which provides evidence that the *shanzhai* phenomenon already existed in China during that time. More and more imitation products occupied the market in order to keep up with increasing demand. However, the imitation trend caused a stunted development in domestic design leading to a severe deficiency in Chinese design originality. The backwardness of Chinese industrialisation in the period of rapid globalised industrialisation has resulted in a lack in maturity and originality in Chinese contemporary product design.

Based on the interviews conducted with educators of product design in a number of Chinese universities as part of this study, findings have suggested that education is another important factor causing a lack of originality in contemporary product design in China. It is apparent that the design education methodology in China was originally learnt from Western countries, where the majority of product design professors in the sample of interviewees received their design education. Evidence from literature also suggests that educators brought the teaching ethos on design from the West (Yan, 2011) back to China in the 1980's (Liu et al., 2008), when the country was facing a healthy economy with high demand for production from both in and out of China. Due to the Westernised approach in design education –highlighted in the aspects of concept cultivation, education model and teaching methodology – students in China graduating from these institutions would naturally be equipped with a Western design inclination rather than one of Chinese origins.

Based on the literature review of the design industry, it is suggested that design companies have also contributed to the lack of originality in contemporary Chinese product design. Due to the economic climate in China that produced a growing middle-class, the demand for foreign consumables increased sharply. Design companies in China rushed to produce imitated goods to capitalise on the Chinese consumers' appetite for branded products (Leng and Zheng, 2011;

Westernised approach in teaching and, hence, the creation of Chinese designers with a lack of originality in their design inclination. Designers either formed or worked for Chinese companies that feed into the growing Chinese market which, in its rapid growing stage, demands Western products due to the globalised popularity and maturity of the foreign or Western products. The inter-relationships between all these factors have caused the lack of cultural originality in contemporary Chinese products. The outcomes of the complex inter-relationships point to several new factors influencing Chinese design creativity and originality. The combined *shanzhai* and ‘Chinese elements’ phenomenon could be acknowledged as the inevitable outcome during the design development of a growing economy such as China.

7.2 The Cultural Creativity

The findings of this study through the literature review, interviews and case studies, suggest that there is a high value in a cultural uniqueness that is derived from the basic fabrics of a certain culture, heritage and values, established over years of refinement and improvement into a unique cultural creativity. These unique cultural creativities of various origins can act as a sustainable driving factor for brands to compete in an increasing globalised and transparent economy. In the case of this study of Chinese contemporary product design, the historical context of China is taken into account, predominantly the *shanzhai* phenomenon, which has in many ways shaped the product design and manufacturing industry in China.

According to the historical literature review of this study, the lack of originality in contemporary product design in China has direct relations to a cultural phenomenon called *shanzhai* (Chen, 2007). Since 2008, the *shanzhai* phenomenon has risen to become part of mainstream culture, as a result of the imitation trend in industry during the fast design and development period of Chinese manufacturing. The implicit meaning of *shanzhai* described the forts occupied by the bandits far away from government control, where they could find means of self-expression and individualism in a feudal system that suppressed the so-called freedom of self-determination. These counter-culture forces were mostly formed by outlaws of society, with little or no recognition in the formal judicial system, allowing the outcasts to have an opportunity in ‘*shanzhai*’ societies to express their identity and rebel against the feudal systems, even if their conduct was invariably against the law (Deng and Li, 2010).

From a social and political perspective, *shanzhai* can be seen as a counter-culture sentiment against the sovereignty of ruling power, reflecting a culture of creativity that is induced from the China's distinct social and political pressure on the ordinary citizen, demonstrating their desire for grassroots self-determination and in speaking out against mainstream culture (Liu, 1989), which ironically still exists in modern bureaucratic China (Hung, 2011). An economical perspective suggests that this period of counterfeiting, on a national manufacturing level, has occurred in other developing countries during their development stages, such as Japan and Korea (Jiang, 2012). Even so, the arguable creativity seen through China's *shanzhai* phenomenon can be seen as an innovation and has opportunities for creativity beyond its starting route through replication (Li, 2009). Utilising a technological perspective, it can be understood that the rise of an imitation industry in China can largely be attributed to the lagging behind of technological know-how and expertise, leading to a learning process of imitation likened to the reverse-engineering of the Japanese during Japan's developing years after World War 2 (Jiang, 2012).

This research has shown that the *shanzhai* phenomenon is much more complex in relation to design and culture context. Through all of the imitation and counterfeiting of the Chinese products, the findings from both literature and interviews have demonstrated a unique cultural creativity amidst Chinese *shanzhai*. Edward et. Al's (2009) three phases of *shanzhai* suggest that companies move from imitation to innovation and on towards investing in future research and development. The industry arisen from *shanzhai* has been seen as an innovation by scholars, like Li (2009), as companies continuously makes improvements from the base of imitated products, whether it is: efficiency of production logistic; improvement of features tailored to a local market; or the investing in future development for new growth and opportunities. XiaoMi, which is a typical example of a Chinese company in the *shanzhai* context, has gone from *shanzhai* to creating the world's top five smartphone, which has achieved the objectives after the imitating period: from 'copycat' to 'innovator', from 'disruptive' to 'sustainable' and from 'marginal' to 'mainstream'.

The exploration of *shanzhai* history has undoubtedly reflected the connection of counter-culture between historical and contemporary contexts, including that which is 'real' and that which is 'ideal'. A summative connection of *shanzhai* between historical and contemporary context can be compared and contrasted, as Table 7.1 shows below:

Table 7.1: The connection of shanzhai between historical and contemporary

	<i>Historical</i>	<i>Contemporary</i>
<i>Hero/ bandits</i>	Ideally, bandits would like to help people to express themselves. (Idealism)	For economic benefit (money) and time saving (Realism)
<i>Shanzhai system/ kingdom</i>	Making camp at an inaccessible mountain to protect themselves against imminent danger. A leader will be selected and the camp grows to become like a village, with its own tailored rules and regulations, which they believe is realistic and able to offer them protection. (Realism)	Commoners only have little or no direct way to influence the decisions and policies by the upper-class societies or government. To fill up the gap, they seek another method to express their feelings within the boundaries of the law, akin to building rules and regulations that suit to their beliefs. (Idealism)
<i>Cultural Creativity</i>	The written folk literature and the development of traditions outside of the formal governmental supervision and judiciary.	Innovating from imitation, making improvements tailored to the local needs and demand using the foundations from imitated products, outside the confines of strict legislation.

Through the development and subsequent analysis of case examples conducted on two selected successful cases, namely the Swedish furniture company IKEA and the Japanese chain MUJI, a thorough analysis of both companies has helped in identifying key success factors which underpin respective cultural creativity in both companies, which can be transposed onto China and Chinese design. Despite being culturally and ideologically distinct from one another, both IKEA and MUJI have been proven successful in rooting its nationalistic culture within its product design, marketing, promotion and distribution methods. IKEA specialises in Scandinavian design with their emphasis on ‘DIY’ derived from Scandinavian culture, which has become IKEA’s flagship product feature. Despite facing cultural differences in its global stores where its key principles may not be culturally accepted throughout its network, IKEA has been successful in diffusing its strategy according to external changes, globalising its brand

and product whilst simultaneously localising their services to meet the needs of different markets. MUJI on the other hand has demonstrated success in embodying its Japanese cultural philosophy of ‘simplicity’ and ‘sustainability’, producing products that are distinctively MUJI with an emphasis on the human relationship with nature. The success in branding itself through its Japanese philosophy has made MUJI a global leader in affordable and quality goods. Similarly, MUJI is able to integrate not only traditional Japanese values in its company, but has also assimilated contemporary culture with influences from America and European countries, thereby propelling its branding in an international market.

In light of these two case study companies, it is demonstrable that cultural creativity can be a key driver of innovation in major companies to reflect distinct cultural characteristics, tradition and character in order to maintain or improve competitiveness. Combining the findings of literature, interviews conducted for the purpose of this study and the case studies of IKEA and MUJI, it can be suggested that the lack of originality and quality of the Chinese design in contemporary China is a mirror to the mass-produced goods during the Industrial Revolution. Chinese companies have, in the past, extracted the core values from advanced Western design, which has helped them understand design; followed by their customising to meet local needs so as to capture the opportunities of setting up a resilient business model and upgrading core capabilities in the value chain.

With the maturing of product design in the West’s post-industrial times, it is optimistic that the current lack of originality in Chinese design is seen as only a parallel phase to a developing industry. Based on the same phenomenon in the West, the global competition in an open market will ideally phase out the non-competitive Chinese designs that lack originality, and will encourage the maturing of industries into those with a greater emphasis on original Chinese design.

7.3 The reflection of ‘Chineseness’

A critical assessment on contemporary ‘Chinese’ design has through this study shown that the interpretation of ‘Chineseness’ varied widely amongst designers. This research has discovered the longevity of ‘Chineseness’ in Chinese culture and Chinese heritage, existing from Imperial China up to the present day. However, it has been suggested through the findings of this research that the interpretation of ‘Chineseness’ in contemporary China differs amongst

Chinese societies, as well as non-Chinese societies. Through the interviews with academics and product designers in China, it was discovered that few individuals understood ‘Chineseness’ as being more than a symbolism or element. ‘Chineseness’ became, to many companies, a methodological approach in achieving Chinese design, rather than a national and cultural identity. Designers were using ‘Chineseness’ as an element, while for others, it was a methodology for design. A renewed understanding of what makes a product ‘Chinese’, in a material or immaterial form, is crucial in the quest for cultural originality in the context of Chinese contemporary product design.

In this research, ‘Chineseness’ has been specifically defined to only focus on product design to identify the definition and application of ‘Chineseness’ in current product design in China. Through the literature review, interviews with practitioners and academics, the findings conclude that ‘Chineseness’ is conceptually fluid and not fixed to a specific representation. The academic literature review suggested that designs of ‘Chineseness’ have been presented as ‘Chinese elements’ design during design development in China (Zhou, 2008), especially true during the overflow of *shanzhai* products in the Chinese domestic market. Chinese elements presented to showcase national identity of ‘Chineseness’ have been particularly widespread, both in China and throughout international countries, after Beijing successfully won the bid for 2008 Olympic Games. Not only did domestic designers rapidly utilise Chinese elements, but multinational business took an interest in ‘Chineseness’ as well (Horner, 2009), with the purpose of penetrating the growing Chinese market. Despite the development in cultural creativity in Chinese designs, the majority of these designs were still restricted to visual representation, such as Chinese symbols or Chinese characters (Yang, 2006).

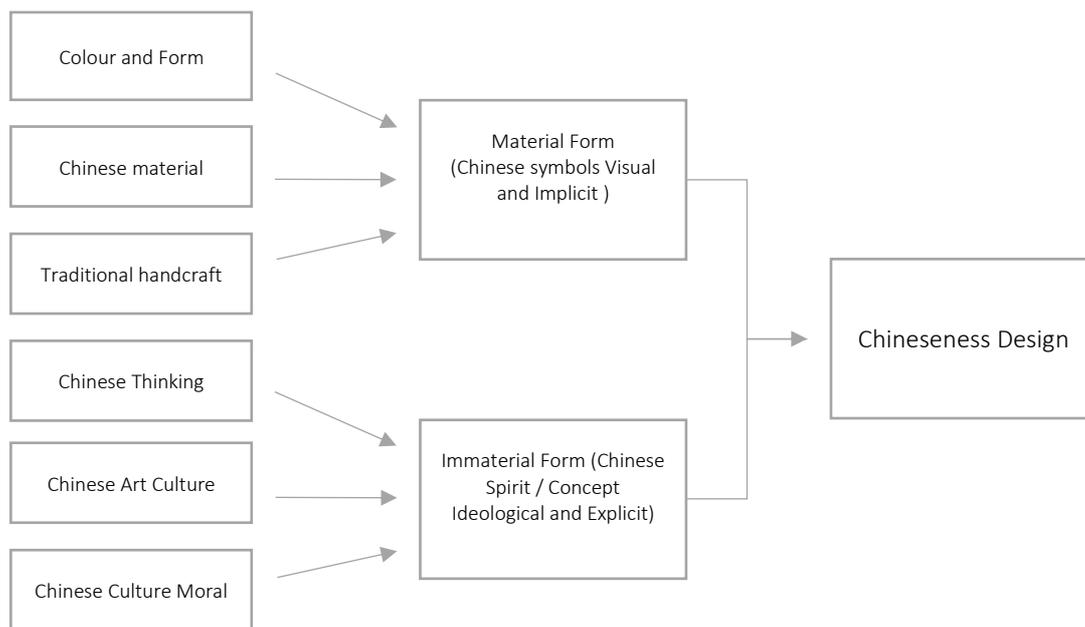
Following the detrimental effects of *shanzhai* towards cultural originality, this study has seen that over the last decade – post-Beijing Olympics – Chinese design has increased in inclination towards embracing ‘Chineseness’ as a design identity in its creative process. Governmental influence in ‘Chineseness’ had been prominent, with encouragement in the promotion of the country and of Chinese culture, causing an increase in Chinese elements seen in product design in the domestic market. These products of ‘Chineseness’ were visible across various industries, including but not limited to: manufacturing, architecture, product design, industrial planning and creative media (Moalosi, 2007). The China Pavilion, also known as The Oriental Crown, shown at the Shanghai Expo 2010, was one of the examples that showcased ‘Chineseness’ in its design.

This study has discovered that the interpretation of ‘Chineseness’ in product design amongst contemporary Chinese designers is seen as lagging behind that of Western designers (Yang, 2014). Global international brands have begun using Chinese elements to design products to attract Chinese customers, and to access the Chinese market – the second largest economy in the world (Adhikari, Ramesh, and Yang, 2002). Contemporary design usage of Chinese elements by these international corporations were seen as ‘better’ than the Chinese domestic designs from a design perspective, as the West incorporated better user experience and had better product reviews (Yang, 2014). The maturity in interpretation of ‘Chineseness’ by the West may be attributed to the maturity as a whole in product design in the West; indeed, literature suggested the usage of Chinese elements by the West could be traced back to the seventeenth century (Hamilton, 1984), after they had spread to the West through trade during that period.

Li et al. (2007) have suggested that there are a few methods of extracting Chinese elements in product design. The translation of Chinese visual elements into design (constitution of shape and colour) is to understand or extract all the information into points, lines, surface, objects, shapes, colour and texture. According to the modern constitution method, the form and element should be deconstructed, reconstructed and integrated into contemporary design. Moreover, Liu (2008) recommended abstracting traditional elements with the spirit of time, which requires ‘getting refined internally and externally’ during the process of product design. Getting refined internally is grasping the traditional culture; getting refined externally is mastering the scientific thinking method. In order to realise the compatibility between the traditional elements and ‘time-thinking’ of the entire design, ‘observe’ the traditional elements again within a scientific thinking method and then grasp the popular formal elements of the time – including new energy, new materials and new technology – to seek the joint point between these formal languages and traditional elements; deepen the design on this base and highlight the time theme also a way to express the ‘Chineseness’ in design. Chen and Zhang (2010) state that any image, symbol, behaviour or custom which can be recognised by most Chinese people, adheres to the spirit of the Chinese national culture, and if their values reflect the national dignity and the interests of the nation then they can be regarded as Chinese elements. Once recognised, the creative cultural products with Chinese elements will produce new effects and reflect their ‘value in use’.

‘Chineseness’ in this research has been identified as existing in two forms and three layers of interpretation. The two forms of ‘Chineseness’, as suggested by the findings of this study, consist of the material form and immaterial form; while the layers of interpretation were categorised into the Deep Layer (cultural perspective), Intermediate layer (function) and Surface Layer (colour, shape and quality).

Figure 7.2: Analysis of ‘Chineseness’ Design



Based on findings of this research, the cognitive structure of Chinese elements in the products can be summarised in Figure 7.2, as shown above. ‘Chineseness’ in the material form would be accessible through its colour, material and method of handcraft, which would usually be visual and implicit in nature. Designs of such ‘Chineseness’ allow users to directly experience the Chinese elements by interacting with them through the five senses of hearing, seeing, touching, smelling and, in some cases, tasting. The immaterial form of ‘Chineseness’ presents itself through the explicit forms of cultural thinking, Chinese culture and Chinese culture morale. Users are required to think, reflect, meditate and, in many instances, have pre-existing knowledge of cultural understanding in order to experience the ‘Chineseness’ of designs in this form.

As understood from the interpretation model of ‘Chineseness’ presented above, ‘Chineseness’ is not only an abstract concept, but a cultural design with specific intentions and motivations.

The research has identified the specific roles of ‘Chineseness’, including the place of indigenous cultural experience incorporated within Chinese design, from imitating to originality and in generating richer perspectives towards ‘Chineseness’. Designs which simply add Chinese elements into its products to qualify itself as a product with Chinese elements are non-representative of ‘Chineseness’ and of Chinese cultural products. Many products which claim to be designed with ‘Chineseness’ merely superimpose Chinese elements onto the surface without an effort to incorporate the essence or any meaning of ‘Chineseness’ in its design.

A clearer interpretation, as presented in this study, is crucial in ensuring users of products do not misunderstand the true meaning of ‘Chineseness’ in contemporary product design. The range of ways to assimilate ‘Chineseness’ in contemporary China is immeasurable, and this study contributes to a direction for a deeper interpretation and embracement of ‘Chineseness’ in contemporary design in China. It will be a continual challenge and prevalent topic for Chinese designers to seek better means of promoting ‘Chineseness’ in the increasing globalised market.

The heavy influence and inter-relationship of Western design culture on the Chinese design culture may cause a diminishing of Eastern or Chinese culture, whereby local cultures will be forced to accept the appearance of Western culture, leading to pseudomorph, an integration of two cultures in spiritual temperament and inner structure (Xu, 2011). However, Ding and Clark (2003) hold the point of view that a fusion of Chinese and Western elements might be the new way to innovative in the use of ancient Chinese elements, and may improve the creative skills as a soft power, assisting the national brand in the eyes of the world and rebuilding national confidence in contemporary design. Economic globalisation will inevitably cause great friction with different cultures. Whether it is the eastward transmission of Western sciences, or the dissemination of Oriental learning, different cultures still retain their respective characteristics while seeking mutual recognition (Fernandes, 1995). Design thinking is able to uniquely bring together differing cultural knowledge and experiences, hence from a design perspective, designers should adopt the attitude of respect towards cultural depths and differences in their designing process. Manifesting Chinese traditional elements in contemporary design has had a good start in the initial phase. Chinese contemporary designers should have a profound confidence coupled with a good understanding of Chinese traditional culture in order to

incorporate Chineseness in various ways. In the globalisation context, it is necessary to seek plenty of methods to properly integrate into modern product design.

7.4 Cultural Interpretation in a Globalised Market

The case studies conducted on global brands, IKEA and MUJI, that have successfully developed its unique market through culturally national identity products, and the case studies of SHANGXIA and PINWU, both Chinese companies in the process of growing their products within the context of Chinese cultural values, have demonstrated how the interpretation of specific culture into design can contribute to innovation in a globalised market. In the context of a globalised and free economy, companies need to maintain and continually enhance their cultural uniqueness in personifying their nationalistic characteristics and cultural identities and originality within their products.

As can be seen in the two case examples of MUJI and IKEA, a globalised company with specific cultural values requests to not only continue its specific traditions through their design and branding, but it is also equally crucial for companies promoting cultural heritage to have a wide reach into different segments of the market to gain mainstream buy-in and to maintain cultural continuation. For this research, two Chinese companies have been identified to representing the design development in Chinese cultural product design in contemporary China: SHANGXIA and PINWU. With an overtly Western luxury focus in the consumer market since the economic opening up of China, the Chinese consumer market has gradually matured and begun to appreciate Chinese aesthetics designed in China.

SHANGXIA is a brand positioned under Hermès, but operates independently from the mother company. It demonstrates a company's realisation of being global by entering various countries and localising its design to gain market share. SHANGXIA's mother company Hermès is a globally recognised brand with specific design philosophy and targets the luxurious industry. SHANGXIA through the luxurious aesthetics lens of Hermès reinterprets Chinese culture into its design to target the niche market of affluent Chinese consumers. Presenting itself as a revivalist in the appreciation for ancient Chinese products in modern China, SHANGXIA is seen as effectively translating French aesthetical appreciation onto a Chinese context through its pursuit of high-end materials and textures such as rosewood, eggshell, porcelain, weaving bamboo and leather products. The cultural reinterpretation of Chinese culture through

SHANGXIA has seen much success in contemporising Chinese culture and re-popularising Chinese craftsmanship in contemporary design. The strategic direction of SHANGXIA fits with the reasoning of utilising Chinese cultural values in innovation in order to remain relevant and to meet the growing aesthetic demand of Chinese consumers.

The drawback, however of SHANGXIA is its accessibility. Positioned as a luxury brand, the pricing structure and marketing strategies limit the reach and potential of the company to be a globally recognised brand such as IKEA or MUJI. The contribution that SHANGXIA brings to contemporary Chinese through Hermès is recognisable, seen through its dedication to remaining focus on Chinese characteristics, such as the costumes of the Han Dynasty, crafts from the Song Dynasty and the furniture designs of the Ming Dynasty. However, just like the exclusivity of similar products in the Imperial Dynasties, the strategic direction of SHANGXIA is not sizable enough to be compared to its contemporaries from Japan or Sweden, whereby both IKEA and MUJI are able to compete on a mass scale in a globalised economy. As a subsidiary of Hermès in its global operations, SHANGXIA acts more of a cultural re-interpreter in ancient Chinese design than an innovator and promoter of Chineseness and Chinese cultural values. It lacks the innovation and originality that IKEA and MUJI demonstrate in their products to compete in a global economy. Product design is seen as the result of cultural representation and creativity, embedding cultural elements specific to a certain cultural background, which results in unique products that can represent a specific nation, culture or institution (Xu, 2002). This research has sought to explore the means of how Chinese product design can capitalise on rich Chinese cultural values to innovate and produce original designs distinct to contemporary China in light of an increasing globalised market. It is essential to identify the ways in which Chinese product design can remain true to its cultural values while simultaneously being able to embrace innovation, which is key in remaining relevant and sustainable.

PINWU, similar to SHANGXIA, is a Chinese design company that also emphasises on 'Chineseness' and Chinese cultural heritage. PINWU's staffing of its design team with cross culture designers is their interpretation of an effective method of producing contemporary Chinese design. PINWU is an innovative design brand for traditional crafts, advocating the revival of abandoned traditional Chinese crafts with modern design techniques, which provides a unique innovation in bringing life to traditional Chinese craftsmanship. The company has allowed the rich history and culture of its specific locality to be embodied in PINWU's designs

by strategically positioning its design studio in Hangzhou, which is the origin for many of its traditional crafts. Drawing strength from the uniqueness of both traditional craft and the technology of modern design tools, PINWU is a brand that stands out in this research of one that incorporates ‘Chineseness’ in its products. The company’s emphasis of returning to one’s origin and cultural heritage, challenges the Chinese design notion beyond the labels of ‘Chinese elements’ towards an international and multicultural design team for Chinese contemporary design (Zhang, 2011). The multicultural design team of PINWU, as can be seen in many major design companies around the world, is in the Chinese context seen as translating international interpretation of Chinese culture through a diverse designing team on its products which are labelled as Chinese cultural products. The translation of Chinese culture through the multicultural interpretation is seen by some a drawback for PINWU (Yan, 2014). This is due to the lack of cultural identity and experience amongst multicultural designers in their work to represent Chinese values and culture despite having a good knowledge of design itself. In this book ‘Designerly ways of knowing’, Nigel Cross (1982) explains that knowledge of design through training and the personal cultural knowledge of Chineseness is significantly different which affects multicultural design companies like PINWU in its ability to produce cultural representable products that communicates Chinese values and originality.

7.5 Evaluation of Study

This study has been conducted based on qualitative research, utilising methodologies of literature review, interviews, case studies and observation. The combination of these methodologies in this research has allowed the researcher to employ multiple perspectives in generating findings on the study of cultural originality in contemporary China. This study was conducted over a period of three years in multiple locations in China and the United Kingdom.

Literature in both Chinese and English has been utilised during the literature review, which has enabled the findings to represent both Western and Eastern views on contemporary Chinese product design. The using of cross-language literature can be difficult, as meanings of certain terminologies or expression can be lost in translation. The disadvantage of cross-language literature is also the conformity of standards leading to the comparability of literature. As literature of both languages lays weight onto the findings of the study, the issue of conformity on standard research practice and outcomes can be a challenging one. Having said that, the area

of research concerning contemporary Chinese product design can be limited in Western literature hence employment of Chinese literature is both crucial and inevitable.

Interviews were mainly conducted in China through face-to-face appointments and the selections of interviewees was based on the experience and area of expertise with relation to the study on cultural originality and contemporary Chinese product design. A total of 17 interviews were conducted amongst academics and senior designers in the field of contemporary product design in China, which have provided insights into both an academic point of view and a practitioners' view on the research topic. This includes the senior designers and store managers of SHANGXIA and PINWU, both important case studies in this research. However, this study did not include interviews with representatives of IKEA and MUJI. The reason for this is because information regarding these two highly established companies is available in literature. With that, this study could be even more comprehensive if interviews were also conducted with senior management or designers of IKEA and MUJI.

Overall the research has met the research objectives set out at the beginning of this study and has contributed to the literature of contemporary Chinese design, which is still a growing area in the Western research publication. Literature in the areas of Chinese contemporary design would definitely require further contribution from researchers and academic scholars of this field.

This study has achieved its objective of identifying factors leading to a lack of originality in product design in China. This objective has been achieved to a good degree, as seen through the findings of Chapters one to Chapter six, summarised in the intra-relationship of originality between Western design culture with Chinese design education, Chinese designers and Chinese design companies, Chinese design products and the Chinese market. The second objective of this research in assessing the presence and impact of originality in the development of contemporary Chinese product design has similarly been achieved to a good degree. The presence of originality in Chinese design was seen to be lacking, with imitation being a significant occurrence. However, this study has suggested that the lack of cultural originality in products of contemporary China is but a mirror to the mass-produced goods produced during the Industrial Revolution in the West, and is also seen in many developing countries. The third objective has been met through both literature review and interviews, in reviewing the role of 'Chineseness' in the development of product design in China. Findings of this objective are

seen to be comprehensive and this study has contributed new means of interpretation of ‘Chineseness’, which has not been seen in previous literature. The fourth objective, of explaining how Chinese cultural values can contribute to innovative and original design, has been researched through case study examples of other successful companies of other cultures and countries, in comparison to aspiring equivalents in China. An in-depth understanding of these case examples, through both literature and direct interviews, has allowed this study to identify the importance of cultural values in a culturally successful brand and its key success factors. This study, despite identifying key factors influencing the innovation and originality of cultural values in contemporary China, was not able to expand precisely on the methods of how Chinese cultural values can be translated into innovation, something which could be studied by future research.

7.6 Recommendation and Future Work

Through the findings of this research on Chinese cultural originality in contemporary design, we are then able to conclude and recommend future actions especially amongst the Chinese design community. The lack of originality pressed first and foremost the need to seek the reverse in contemporary Chinese design. ‘Chineseness’ as understood through this study is a cultural design with specific intentions and motivations, in which Chinese designers need to seek a clearer interpretation and demonstrated through their designs. The innovation force through incorporating the essence of ‘Chineseness’ can be as claim by Razzaghi and Ramirez (2015), have immense benefits within globalisation to forge a strong national culture, providing a platform for Chinese designs to be represented on a global scale. As suggested through the findings, cultural creativity has the potential to be a main driver of innovation for design companies to display cultural traditions and characteristics unique to its own national identity, thereby giving these companies a competitive advantage in both domestic or international market.

The past of Chinese design immersed in imitation has been suggested in this research as the result of a developing country that could afford low wages while seeking economic growth within a short period of time. This symptom of imitation economy comes with no surprise and can be seen in past developing countries such as Japan or current ones such as India, Bangladesh and Vietnam. With the momentum of the Chinese economy on a global rate and the contrived effort of the Chinese government to expand its economic activities globally

through 'One Belt One Road' initiative, there is an increasing acceptance of 'Chineseness' and a huge potential for Chinese products. Chinese design community would need to seize this opportunity through a more concerted effort in the promotion of Chinese culture to see a wider acceptance of Chinese products that are able to represent Chineseness to the world. This would potentially open up new opportunities of discussion for governmental funding in the creation of Chinese contemporary design, in which the Chinese design academics, students and private companies could begin the discussion with.

The Chinese companies from this study are still in the stage of focusing on a niche market or high-end customers, which results in Chinese contemporary products being branded as exclusive rather than accessible. Drawing from the success of IKEA and MUJI, Chinese companies need to globalise their outreach to penetrate into a global market and to continually improve on adapting their product ranges to localised needs. Chinese companies focusing on Chinese cultural innovation need to be more ambitious in market growth if there are to be hopes for a Chinese brand that will be recognisable in the global arena for its unique product design with rich Chinese cultural values and philosophy.

This study has covered the perspective of designers and scholars on the research area of contemporary product design in China. Future work can be built upon the findings of this study to research on contemporary product design in China from a consumers' perspective. As the Chinese market warrants further attention, given that it is the fastest growing and second largest economy in the world, insight into consumers' understanding and needs in contemporary Chinese product design could be of important value to both literature and the industry. The findings of this would also help both scholars and practitioners of the design field to understand the development of contemporary Chinese design in twenty-first century China. Methodology of this proposed study could utilise interviews and questionnaires to research the consumers' understanding and views of Chinese contemporary design through both qualitative and quantitative findings.

In addition, a cross-cultural comparison could be conducted as a future research in identifying a similarly developing country to China, with a sizable economy, in order to study topics such as cultural creativity and originality in contemporary design. Countries of the BRICS (Brazil, Russian, India, China and South America) is a good basis for comparison due to their similarity in development stage, which may correlate to the manufacturing trends of imitation and

innovation. Case studies of design companies in these countries will potentially provide productive insight into trends, cultural design and market potential of cultural products in emerging economies. Research on this area would also potentially contribute to means of seeking a methodology in creating cultural originality within product designing through the comparison of developed and developing countries.

Lastly, with the rapid design development in China, a further study of contemporary Chinese design in search of a design methodology for producing products with Chineseness qualities is also seen to be a possible extension of this research. This research has studied the new interpretation of Chineseness in contemporary China, its many features and its development through modern China, but have not been able to further its research on formulating a Chineseness design methodology which would extend literature onto the means of enabling companies to ensure originality and cultural identity in its design.

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Appendix 1.1: List of Critical Observation Sources

Design Exhibitions and Museums:

London Design Festival, UK (September 2013-2016)
Beijing Design week, China (September 2014)
Birmingham NEC Autumn Fair- China area, UK (2014-2016)
BMW museum, Germany (August 2014)
Tsinghua University industrial design conference (October 2014)
Shanghai Design week, China (August 2016)
Porsche museum, Germany (November 2016)
London Design Museum, UK (November 2016)
21_21 Design Sight, Japan (November 2017)
Red Dot Design Award Centre, Germany (December 2015)
Mercedes-Benz Museum, Germany (December 2015)
Milan Furniture Fair, Italy (April 2016)

Design Companies:

IKEA STORE, CHINA, UK, GERMANY, SWEDEN (2013-2017)
MUJI Store and Exhibitions, China, UK, Germany, Japan (2013-2017)
APPLE Store, China, UK (2013-2017)
PINWU Design Studio, China (October 2014)
LKK Design Studio, China (October 2014)
AZ Design Studio, China (October 2014)
Daye Design Company, China (November 2014)
Mini Cooper Factory, UK (May 2015)
SHANGXIA flagship Store, China (May 2016)
HEILAI HOME, China (May 2016)
Golden Scissors, China (May 2016)
XiaoMi Store (August 2016)

Design Institutions:

Tsinghua University, China (October 2014)

Shenzhen University, China (October 2014)

Guangzhou Academy of Art, China (October 2014)

Central Academy of Art, China (October 2014)

Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts, China (February 2016)

Tianjin University, China (February 2016)

Tianjin University of Technology, China (February 2016)

Changshu Institute of Technology, China (May 2016)

Jiangnan University, China (May 2016)

Appendix 1.2: List of Interviews

Unless otherwise stated all interviews were conducted by the author

Interview with Chengliang Wang, Product design lecturer, China Central Academy of Fine Arts Beijing, 23rd October 2014.

Interview with Professor Chao Zhao, Head of industrial design, Tsinghua Academy of Art and Design, Beijing, 24th October 2014.

Interview with Professor Yang Yan, Director of industrial design, Tsinghua Academy of Art and Design, Beijing, 24th October 2014.

Interview with Bo Zhong, Senior Designer, LKK Design Company, Beijing, 25th October 2014.

Interview with Wanli Yang, Head of Design Department, LKK Design Company, Beijing, 25th October 2014.

Interview with Ming Lei, Senior lecturer in Exhibition Display Design, Guang Zhou Academy of Art and Design, Guangzhou, 28th October 2014.

Interview with Xiangyu Liu, Senior lecturer in Product Design, Guang Zhou Academy of Art and Design, Guangzhou, 28th October 2014.

Interview with Professor Jian Zhang, Director of Product Design, Guang Zhou Academy of Art and Design, Guangzhou, 28th October 2014.

Interview with Professor Lei Zhang, Co-founder, PINWU Studio, Guangzhou, 28th October 2014.

Interview with Shang Qu, Co-founder, Daye Design Company, Guangzhou, 29th October 2014.

Interview with Yongxing Xu, Co-founder, Daye Design Company, Guangzhou, 29th October 2014.

Interview with Professor Yun Pan, Director of industrial design, Shenzhen University, Shenzhen, 30th October 2014.

Interview with Dongping Zhang, Design Director, AZ Design Company, 30th October 2014.

Interview with Professor Songfei He, Director of industrial design, Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology, Beijing, 31st October 2014.

Interview with Professor Wei Li, Director of Product Design, China Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing, 31st October 2014.

Interview with Guopeng Chen, founder, product manufactory in Fujian province (China), UK, 7th Sep 2015.

Interview with Liu, SHANGXIA Flagship Store Manager, Shanghai, 27th May 2016.