Looking Modern: Fashion Journalism and Cultural Modernity in Shanghai, Singapore and Hong Kong

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Asia, chinese-ness, city, consumption, cosmopolitanism, creative cities, culture, cultural modernity, fashion, fashion journalism, Hong Kong, journalism, looking, magazines, popular culture, sex, Shanghai, Singapore, visual culture.
Abstract

This thesis examines the development of Asian cultural modernity in the cities of Singapore, Hong Kong and Shanghai through their fashion magazines. These three cities have positioned themselves as aspirants to global city status, concurrently facilitating their ambitions by relaxing media laws and emphasising cultural production. One outcome is a growth in the production and consumption of fashion magazines. There has been a parallel growth in the consumption of and interest in fashion and self-adornment in these cities, particularly through global brand names. This thesis investigates these cultural transformations by examining the production of fashion texts in the context of their cities. It does this by utilising the concept of fashion journalism (as a product of fashion, journalism and the city) as a means of identifying the contemporary social, cultural and political articulations of these fashion texts. To do so, this research draws together a framework that takes into account different fields (fashion, journalism, modernity, city, Asia) that contribute to the concept of fashion journalism, thereby approaching fashion texts through a multi-disciplinary perspective anchored by establishing the contexts of each city and its specific magazine. The subsequent analyses of Vision (Shanghai), WestEast (Hong Kong) and Harper’s Bazaar Singapore reflect and capture an evolution of these cities coming into their own. With particular emphasis on the cultural assertions of global Chinese identities in WestEast, an escape from national discourses through participating in
cosmopolitanism in *Harper’s*, and the emphasis on popular visual culture as a form of popular literacy and knowledge formation in *Vision*. These findings contribute firstly, towards an understanding of the issues occurring in the cultural modernisation of these cities and secondly, of fashion journalism as a promoter of the experiences of cultural modernity in Asia.
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### Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CBD</td>
<td>Central Business District</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCP</td>
<td>Chinese Communist Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIPP</td>
<td>International Federation of the Periodical Press</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GAPP</td>
<td>General Administration for Press and Publication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Harper’s</em></td>
<td><em>Harper's Bazaar Singapore</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MITA/MICA</td>
<td>Ministry of Information, Communications and The Arts (Singapore)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OB Markers</td>
<td>Out of Bounds markers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAP</td>
<td>People’s Action Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAR</td>
<td>Hong Kong- Special Administrative Region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>WE</em></td>
<td><em>WestEast Magazine</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>WMM</td>
<td>Worldwide Magazine Marketplace</td>
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<td>WTO</td>
<td>World Trade Organisation</td>
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Statement of Original Authorship

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

Signature  __________________________

Date  _____________________
Acknowledgements

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CHAPTER ONE: introduction

Introduction to Research Context

_It wasn’t so long ago that pickings were slim on Asia’s newsstands for those in search of a bit of escapism into the world of high spending and fast living. Newspapers, business magazines and a couple of internationally-recognised magazine names have been the staple for years._ (2003, Media Hong Kong)

A cultural and industrial shift is sweeping across Asian cities like Singapore, Shanghai and Hong Kong. It is characterised by a growth in the availability of consumer media products (Wilson 1995; e-Newsletter 2002; Evans 2003). Media has always played an important role in the process of modernisation and the establishment of Western modernity. Along with the rise of the cultural consumption of media and its liberalisation in these cities, other shifts, such as investments in infrastructure for arts and culture and resurgent interest in local talents and designs, evidence a swing towards a cultural revisioning. Yet, what does this cultural revisioning in the city have to do with fashion magazines? What is the relationship between fashion, journalism, modernisation in Asia and the cities of the region?

The quotation above indicates that part of this shift is a print revolution occurring at the street level. The key figure (let’s imagine a girl) is part of the increasingly affluent rising middle class (Chua, 2000) who are now able and keen to access a much wider and more diverse range of popular international and local consumer fashion magazines for a combination of reasons from pleasure to escapism, entertainment to information. Local fashion magazines, as a practice of journalism
and a cultural product, provide a textual guide to what is exciting and new in the city in terms of what is ‘in fashion’ (clothes, accessories, language, people, places). This thesis looks at the media shift in fashion magazines and its journalism to analyse what is occurring in these cities at their cultural, national and/or regional levels. The modern city, given its width and depth, can never be known in its entirety — so it is experienced through different forms of mediation. Thus, fashion magazine represents one means of negotiating and experiencing the city, a way of accessing the information and understanding its cultures.

Fashion magazines inscribe different experiences and capture different representations of the city, its modern life and its dilemmas. To the reader, the ubiquity of fashion magazines and the increased proliferation of titles on the street is evidence of a widening of these modes of experiences occurring in the city. Every fashion magazine targets an ‘ideal’ niche reader, and by doing so defines its own ‘girl’, her taste, style and attitude. The readers of Marie-Claire know that it is expressing a different style from Cosmopolitan, which is again different from Vogue or I-D. The displayed differences of interests, styles and information come to denote and represent the differing identities which readers can assume or explore through the magazine. This is reflected, perhaps too instrumentally, in the statement below by Olivier Burlot, the CEO and publisher of Adkom Media Group, a Hong Kong based publisher (Evans 2003):

*Magazines are one of the best mirrors of what you think you are yourself. You buy Elle because you want to look like Elle. You buy Asia-Pacific Boating because you want your friends to think you are part of this elite.*

Yet, this fluid self-exploration of modern ‘DIY’ identities (Hartley 2003) is not an abstract occurrence but is part of the democratic traditions earned through the
processes of modernisation. As fashion and cultural theorist, Elizabeth Wilson points out, fashion, through the processes of modernisation and industrialisation has produced paradoxical outcomes — sweat shops and democratised bodies (Wilson 2003, pp.72-77). In understanding the double-edged development of fashion, it is possible to acknowledge the abhorrent practices and conditions of fashion labour as a condition of industrialisation in the early nineteenth century (Wilson 2003, pp.73-78), as it is equally important to appreciate the role of fashion and the potential form of expression it offers to the modernised environment through designs, subcultural identifications, resistance and the establishment of social comfort (Hebdige 1979; Lehmann 2000; Postrel 2003).

This unfettered modern condition allows our imagined girl to walk down the city in her goth or punk outfits, tapping into any of the style tribes (Steele 2000) she desires and exhibiting part of the democratic freedom achieved through cultural, social, economic and political progress. While this may seem superficial, underlying this expression of identity(ies) is the anonymity and individual freedom that epitomises the cultural experience of modernity in the city. Georg Simmel, a nineteenth century social theorist, points out that crowds and the freedom of modern dress (as opposed to hierarchical dress) combine to give the individual a level of anonymity in the city — and this anonymity that opens up the way for the freedom of self-expression (Simmel 1969).

In considering this argument, the city plays a central role in the creation of modern subjects because as James Donald contends, the city is a primary site to examine modernity (Donald 1999, p.xi). Within its spatial and temporal structure, the city
frames the liveliness of its human drama and the rapid energy in the proximity of crowds transforms the urban spaces into a live spectacle. It is where the self is always put on show, to perform and therefore to transform, to keep up with trends and fashions in the city. Paradoxically, this also produces an anxiety about the self, glimpsed through questions about comportment and self-presentation: Do I look alright? Am I dressed ‘correctly’ for this place? Do I fit in? This produces an ongoing tension to conform to the larger societal dress code while also expressing a differentiated unique self within it.

Fashion whether it is mediated by journalism or consumed as a material object, is tied to the city as a site where modern experiences of the self are mediated, negotiated and articulated. Thus an urban and modern environment is a precondition for the success of fashion and fashion magazines. In addition to tapping into readers’ desires and aspirations to be a modern subject (through negotiations of cultural and sexual identities), they also capture the tensions of local modern life and reflect emerging trends in international consumption.

Media historian, John Hartley, states in *Popular Reality: Popular Culture, Journalism and Modernity* (1996, p.33) that ‘journalism is the sense making practice of modernity (the condition) and popularizer of modernism (the ideology)’. He argues that the denser the urban environment, the more journalism thrives, and this is a reflected in its interdependent relationship with the city. Within the the city, journalism exists as its communication and social lifeline. As a genre of journalism, fashion magazines are overtly pedagogic in promoting various forms of modern knowledge. Studies carried out on fashion magazines have emphasised their DIYs,
didactical formulas and emulative potential for readers (Winship 1987; Hermes 1995; Rosenberg 1995; Weiner 1999; Cameron 2000; Craik 2000; Hartley and Rennie 2004). These authors demonstrate how fashion magazines institutionalise new forms of identities and promote feminism/freedoms while dispensing information to enable readers to integrate within socio-cultural environments. Thus fashion magazines are associated with the promotion of new lifestyles and the introduction of different and modern experiences, particularly in the modernising Asian context. Articles addressing seemingly innocuous know-how such as Western table etiquette or wine connoisseurship, are seen to be especially appealing to Asian readers who are interested in consuming new modes of experience and in improving their knowledge beyond their customary practices.

Even by way of a short introduction here, it is evident that fashion journalism occupies an important but complex terrain. Yet in journalism practice, it is often regarded as frivolous and trivial when compared to political or financial journalism and remains under-theorised in academic accounts of fashion and journalism. Furthermore, the studies cited above tend to accept ‘fashion/women magazine’ as an uncomplicated independent cultural entity, thus overlooking the potential for fashion communication or the practice of cultural journalism conducted through it. This approach tends to neglect the independent heritage of fashion and journalism as separate constructs — journalism’s historical trajectory as an emancipatory media and fashion’s ability to induce differentiation and conformity.

Drawing fashion journalism together is an attempt to identify what fashion and journalism as two different fields offer each other, and understand the context of
their operation (the modern city). Fashion journalism is just as instrumental for the negotiation of the everyday modern life as political news in the public sphere. It contributes to forms of social knowledge and the process of identity formation by anchoring readers in a culturally specific socially constructed localised/global environment. Thus, in capturing and shaping events and experiences in the city (through reportage), fashion journalism inherently carries and reflects social-cultural values to its readers. The connection lies between the self (that is publicly presented) and an inner life that is consistently conditioned by the modern environment.

As far back as 1886, Simmel, in *The Metropolis and Mental Life* (1969), deliberated on the question of how the inner self may be transformed in the context of industrialisation in the modern metropolis, in other words, conditioned by the industrial city. Richard Sennett (1990, pp.5-10) approaches this enquiry from the other end, arguing that when the inner and outer life became separated in the secularisation of society, divisions of truth from fact, street life (outer) from private life (inner); it represented a break between motives and action, played out in the city. More recently, in *Imagining the Modern City*, James Donald (1999, p.xi) argue that the city engenders a modern and culturally specific manner of thinking and imagining. What these authors advance, is the idea that the city - through its cultural institutions, shapes and even compels its inhabitants toward specific ways of acting and feeling, with Sennett conclusively stating, ‘A city ought to be a school for learning how to lead a centered (sic) life.’

However, this thesis proposes that in addition to ‘acting and feeling’, the negotiation of the city is importantly, a culturally specific way of ‘looking’. Sennett in, *The
Conscience of the Eye (1990, p.xii) equates looking to thinking in the city, stating ‘…us[ing] their eyes in the city to think about political, religious, and erotic experiences…’ is a central means of negotiating public life. Looking can often comprise of a quick assessment of the urban landscape, or it may represent a far deeper engagement with urban surrounds, from watching giant TV advertisements on the sidewalks to a glance at what another person is wearing, or simply flipping through pages of fashion magazines. Looking is an integral part of engagement with the modern city, which can similarly be compared to the studied gaze of the flâneur. This comprehensive intake of information visually allows one to make sense of, and a quick judgement of, the environment in order for the person to move ahead.

Fashion magazines are one means by which the modern experiences of looking, acting and feeling are constantly reflected and re-negotiated in the city — effectively establishing a didactical relationship between themselves and their readers. Looking is thus, an act of agency, different from reading in that, it accounts for the structure of feeling, desire and opinions that may stem from a comprehension of the text.
Research Questions

Three main research problems drive this thesis: the relationship between fashion magazines and the cities, the practise of fashion journalism and the application of Western models of modernity in an Asian context.

1. If fashion magazines instruct in different ways of looking, acting and feeling (the experiential) in the city, one of the main questions this thesis asks is, what do these magazines tell us about the modern condition in Shanghai, Singapore and Hong Kong? More specifically, what specific ways of looking, acting and feeling are being promoted through the selected magazines? Furthermore, what aspects of these cities are evoked through these texts?

2. In identifying fashion journalism as a neglected area of study, how can fashion journalism be conceptualised and understood? What are its conventions and uses? And what are the limits of its practice?

3. Asian detractors claim that Asia presents itself as a ‘failed replica of modernity’ (Ong 1996) both ideologically and materially to the Western one, is this a demonstration of the cultural incommensurability between East and West? Or, is it a claim for indivisible difference?

It is important to note that although these research questions drive the research project, the three areas carry unequal weighting and emphasis in the research that follows. It is clear that the relationship between the cities and the fashion magazines form the main focus of this thesis. They present the specific temporal and spatial context in which to consider the other two questions that, respectively, highlight 1) an important but neglected area of research and 2) the problems and limitations that
may arise from cross-cultural theoretical applications. Nonetheless, these two questions contribute to the overall structure of the project focus as well as the methodological framework required to approach the analysis.

**Asian Modernising Context**

The next two sections provide an overview of the industrial, political and media landscapes of Shanghai, Singapore and Hong Kong to investigate the common trends and pressures they are experiencing. They explain the conditions leading to this cultural re-visioning, vis-à-vis shifts in media regulations, the rise of creative industries and the maturing of consumer markets. These shifts are exemplified by a general turn towards fashion and media industries and a preoccupation to grow a global creative city that will attract foreign talents. Even though the three cities have adopted these agendas at different intensities, pace and depth across the three cities, the similar policy emphasis and contexts represents a general landscape within which to consider the popularisation of fashion magazine consumption and production. In addition, the contention by some politicians and intellectuals that Asian modernity is different and incompatible from the Western version is explored in the context of these cultural shifts.

It has been widely noted by Asian theorists such as Chua Beng Huat, that across Asia the growth and wealth generated in the economic sector has had a corresponding trickle down effect on the disposable income of its consumers, leading to the conjectural rise of a middle class (Chua 2000). In Shanghai, for instance, numerous articles report on the intensive growth of wealth and conspicuous consumption, with the reinstatement of the ‘consumer’ as exemplar of the triumph of the market
economy in China (Rosi 2001; Larmer 2002; Escobar 2005). In the context of the exchange of global goods and services and rapid societal changes, magazines provide a means of navigating this material ‘invasion’ and shifts in consumer taste. As Adrian King, a research director at MediaCom a Hong Kong based publisher states:

There is very much an aspirational kick to these things and that’s why they have become so popular within the region because many people feel they aspire to this lifestyle… It’s a case of aspire to these goods so, therefore, I’m going to purchase a magazines that talks about these goods. (Evans 2003)

The rise and demand for local fashion titles, represents an expansion of consumer interests and a potential fulfilment of demand, increasing the diversity of social identities for emulation. However, this expansion needs to be considered against the Asian landscape of strict media regulation, whereby the tension between personal aspirations and expressions are often curtailed by the state’s micromanagement of ideological beliefs through the media.

**Media laws and political control**

Singapore and China are known for their strict media policy and censorship laws, this includes consumer and fashion magazines both syndicated and locally produced. Hong Kong has experienced a less stringent regime of media control under the former British government and, to a certain extent, already possesses a developed media market which is considered to be almost saturated (Media Convergence 2000). But since its 1997 handover to China, many have doubted whether the one–party, two-systems (Hong Kong as a Special Administrative Region of the People’s Republic of China) can work politically, economically and socially (Loh 2004; Lo 2005). This sense of anxiety is experienced as a crisis in cultural identity at the national level and an increasing need to become politically conscious (Abbas 1997, p.4; Ma 1999, p.1; Loh 2004; Lo 2005).
Western media outlets consistently argue that unless Asian cities/state achieve political modernity that possess freedom of the press, liberal-plural models of governance, democratic traditions enshrining humanitarian policies and a corresponding civil society, they will never be recognised as complete democratic modernities in their own right. *Far Eastern Economic Review* is one of these publications that have consistently clashed with the Singapore government, see also (Seow 1998). Singapore’s ex-Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, has always asserted the existence of an alternative ‘Asian modernity’ that encompasses unique cultural traits and practices and is distinctively different from Western models (Lee 1995; Milner 2004; Gordon 2005). His ministers have, over the years, validated his belief and ideology by arguing that a distinctive Asian modernity privileges the industrial and traditional communal aspects of Asian values and assume a different approach to modernity and its corollaries, including individual freedoms (George 2001; AFP 2004).

China under Socialism is known for its tight state control over political, cultural and economic aspects of everyday life. The Chinese state demands political obedience, as demonstrated by events at Tiananmen Square in 1994 and the banning of seven film directors in 1994 (Donald 1995). Similarly in Singapore, media self-censorship (Seow 1998), bans on foreign publications (Seow 1998) and unscripted art performances critiquing governmental policies (Webb 2002) are examples of the government’s use of policy control. Under stringent state governance and control there is relatively limited mainstream political diversity or outlets for individual expression. Despite certain strong arm tactics, Singaporean and Chinese governments
have legitimised their leadership through economic success and by adapting to
globalising and industrialising forces. Indeed, Deng Xiaoping’s industrial reforms of
‘one-country, two-systems’ directed at Hong Kong, and the establishment of the
Special Economic Zones and FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) for industrial
development has generated two decades of strong economic growth (Lamy 2005)
which they argue is a mandate to lead.

Similarly, Singapore has attracted international recognition through its economic
achievement since its beginnings as a small fishing village. Despite the aspiration to
modernise, Singapore has demonstrated its reluctance to achieve developed nation
status. Taking into account its industrial indicators of social and economic outcomes,
such as income per capita, infant mortality rates, gross national product and national
healthcare, Singapore was classed a developed nation by OECD (Organisation for
Economic Cooperation and Development) in 1996. However, the state fought against
this status, arguing that while it possesses a robust market economy and is
industrially developed, its citizens lacked ‘culture and social graces’. The Minister of
Trade and Industry, Yeo Cheow Tong, asserted that Singaporeans would only attain
the required level of ‘culture’ in five to ten years (Asiaweek 1996). This strange
response elicited comments that Singapore’s move was an indirect refusal to adhere
to OECD’s policy of ‘plural democracy’ as a developed nation.

The pressure for media reforms in Shanghai (and China generally) came partly from
external forces and partly from the ground up. Within the context of its opening up,
China has been very cautious in regards to media liberalisation. Like Singapore, the
media in China is managed as an ideological propaganda tool that must be
manipulated to foster societal harmony and enhance political stability (AFP 2004). Hence, the governments of Singapore and China (Shanghai and Hong Kong) share great similarities in their political worldview and policy governance. However, several factors have led to a change in their mindset towards the media and cultural sectors, a central one being the desire to become competitive global, creative cities.

The general push towards the status of creative cities is in part a securing of long-term economic goals for these cities. New economy theory suggests that innovation, knowledge and creative inputs are central to the differentiating and value-adding economies of the future (Venturelli 2005). The embedding of these values is arguably derived through the cultural sphere, thus, cities that employ and embody these cultural values will sustain themselves as creative spaces attracting investments, talents and cultural know-how (Leadbeater and Oakley 1999). Content and services that add to this cultural sector are seen as advantageous, thus the growth of fashion magazines (adding knowledge, social and cultural awareness to the intake of the citizenry of the cities) are perceived favourably.

Economic Future & Developing Creativity

London and New York are the giants in the West, not merely as financial capitals but as centers of culture, learning and innovation. In East Asia, the picture is murkier. Tokyo, with its business clout and vibrant arts scene is seen as one of the world’s most important cities. Shanghai, Hong Kong and Singapore are considered the leading Asian contenders for future inclusion in these ranks. (Wong 1999, p.1)

Coincidentally, the Wall Street Journal article also identified Singapore, Shanghai and Hong Kong as aspirants to global city status. Taking their lead from ‘Cool Britannia’ the cities acknowledge the growing importance of cultural and creative
industries as contributors to the new economy. By 2000 Singapore had established a
blueprint for developing a knowledge-based economy using ‘creativity’ and
‘innovation’ as buzz words to signal a stronger entrepreneurial culture in the City
State (MICA 2000). They were manifested in initiatives promoting design, fashion,
media and the arts (Lee 2003) worth $10 million from July 2005 (Contact Singapore
2005). In Hong Kong, similar sectors, including tourism and advertising, were
identified in the Chief Executive’s policy address (Chief Executive 2005) in a
baseline study of Hong Kong’s creative industries released in September 2003
(2003).

Another important outcome of this turn towards creative industries is the re-
packaging and re-branding of the cities under new tourism campaign slogans:
‘Uniquely Singapore’ and ‘Hong Kong –Asia’s World City’. Besides serving as
promotional devices to rejuvenate the tourism sector, their aim was to further
dislodge tired old tourism stereotypes.

Shanghai’s rapid industrialisation via manufacturing is complemented by an
increasing awareness of its long term unsustainability and over-dependence on
labour intensive resources and manufacturing (Kalish 2003). The development of
culture and creative talents in the new economy is part of building for the future
economy. Officials have been promoting creativity and innovation, with particular
emphasis on new media, fashion and design sectors, which are prioritised in market
de-regulation (McHugh 1999; FriedlNet 2003). Shanghai’s cultural modernisation is
also aided by powerful agencies such as United Nations Development Programs
(UNDP) which not only boosts Shanghai’s efforts but also draws in skilled expertise and drums up valuable international interests (UNESCO, 2006).

It is thus possible to regard this as a cultural watershed for these cities; it is an urgent recognition that future economic prosperity depends on innovation, creativity and a knowledgeable talent pool. As global economic functions are concentrated in increasingly fewer cities (Sassen 1995) it is crucial for cities to attract the level of hype, innovation, technology and economic influence that will allow them to remain economically competitive, sustainable and prosperous. Thus, culture is recognised as the key input and commodity for the development of creativity and the growing of a knowledgeable talent pool. Shalini Venturelli argues in *Culture and the Creative Economy in the Information Age* (2005, pp.394-5) that culture is the ‘gold’ of the information age and that the development of the creative spirit is key to the cultural wealth of the future. Further, that nations which fail to engage the ‘inventive and creative capacities of its present’ (p.394) will reduce their competitive advantage. Therefore, there is a perception that what is at stake are the economic imperative and social futures of these cities.

Significantly, what has been glossed over in the implementation of these policies is the undetermined freedom required for creative self-expressions. Creative and innovative entrepreneurs require an open, liberal and culturally diverse environment to flourish, (see also Richard Florida’s (2002) argument in *The Rise of the Creative Class*). Creative expressions and ideas tend to run the entire gamut from commercially viable ones to ones that articulate alternative viewpoints, wherein exists the clash between policy and individual practise. In other words, how do you
teach creativity and innovative thinking without having political or social freedom of expression? Civil liberty groups concerned with gay rights, alternative politics and women’s issues have been stalled by the refusal of local politicians to address political aspects of Asian modernity (Shameen and Reyes 2000). According to civil liberty groups, Asian modernity prioritises industrial and economic outcomes without dealing with the political and civil aspects of modernity.

Richard Florida in *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002) argues that indicators of creativity, such as his bohemian and gay indexes, are a useful gauge of a community’s tolerance, which attracts and retains the globally mobile creative class. He contends that a liberal, tolerant and inclusive culture is important to the overall cultural milieu for the production of creative ideas and attracting of global expertise. This push for civil rights through the economic bandwagon has been widely practised. Hong Kong is already ahead in this aspect, and Shanghai is not far behind in granting specific forms of liberty related to sexual identities (Yusuf and Nabeshima 2003). However, Singapore still has some way to go in decriminalising homosexuality (Hacker 2004). What Florida suggests is that creativity depends on this all-embracing, culturally tolerant and open environment to flourish. This issue is further discussed in the Singapore chapter, where the boundaries between creative and artistic control are severely policed by the government.

**Cultural development: media hub, fashion centre, global city**

Policies directed at the political, social, industrial or cultural realms of society seem to presume these sectors to be distinct and separate. However, it is quite clear that within the lived experience of everyday life, those distinctions are active and blurred
articulations which are not simply compartmentalised. Social and cultural theorists such as Mica Nava (2002), Shalini Venturelli (2005), Rachel Bowlby (1985), Elizabeth Wilson (2003) and John Hartley (1996) demonstrate through their work that this complex and diverse platform incorporating the commercial are imperative to the rise and development of consumer cultures and, in turn, to alternative forms of cultural identification and social consciousness. Mica Nava (2002, p.81) in her analysis of the origins and conditions of *Cosmopolitan Modernity* argues that ‘the modern cosmopolitan consciousness is first experienced at the boundaries of consumption and popular commercial culture.’ Her study of the early modernising culture in London identifies industrial modernity and the market economy as the central site on which early cosmopolitan imaginings and wider definitions of sexual identities are forged. Taken together, Florida and Nava’s arguments suggest that the freeing up of society from political rules and embracing the popularising impetus of commercial platforms will engender this cultural shift towards creativity and produce alternative spaces of cultural articulation and imaginings.

The evidence in these cities reflects a take up of these arguments. Hong Kong, which is widely seen as a creative city in Asia, has further capitalised on its traditional strengths of tailoring and fashion manufacturing by turning to fashion design. In addition, it has long been the centre for many Chinese films and television programs (Lo), which is played up in its tourism campaigns (Videos accessible online http://www.discoverhongkong.com). Recently, Hong Kong’s Central Policy Unit has attempted to map out its creative industries in two studies: Baseline Study of Hong Kong’s Creative Industry (2003) and Creativity Index (2006). Plans were also made to establish a Hong Kong Cultural Centre to house and further incubate new design,
fashion and media industries. However, those plans are now in hiatus due to public furore. In Shanghai, the policy shift towards understanding culture and creativity is reflected in key conferences and events that aim to promote the importance of creativity. The most recent conference in 2006, *Enhancing the Creative in Developing Countries*, was co-hosted by United Nations Developing Program (UNDP) to facilitate social and economic goals through cultural development.

Chen Liangyu, Shanghai’s vice mayor points out that China has the infrastructure without the cultural content, stating: ‘We have world class facilities, but not so many performances have been world class’ (Muzi.com 2002). The local government’s interest in cultural development is registered in the fact that China Youth Magazine (an arm of the Chinese Communist youth league) is the sponsor for *Vision* magazine. This new socialist push for fashion is highlighted by Shanghai’s vice-mayor, Jiang Yiren’s statement, ‘The socialist system wants to beautify people’s living. When we paid attention only to class struggle and denounced bourgeois things, everyone wore the same clothes and colours. There was no concept of beauty’ (Mickleburgh 1995).

At a less governmental level, this attention to beauty, the urban environment and visual culture is also a preoccupation of Chen Yifei, the founder of *Vision*. He aspired to instil through his magazines (*Vision, Shanghai Tatler & Mook*) an appreciation of popular aesthetics in everyday life and to bring the outside world to the Chinese readers. This serves as an indication that the ‘cultural movement’ is not only a policy momentum but has significance at the commercial and popular level. The local production of fashion magazines as a cultural text is situated within this
conscious embracing of knowledge and creativity in an aspirational, consumption based society.

Media liberalisation marks an important and exciting cultural watershed for these cities — Shanghai’s return to the market economy; Singapore’s relaxation of cultural control; and Hong Kong’s re-definition of its cultural identity. The arrival of fashion magazines in these cities is more than just media diversity, it represents a new mindset and an attempt by the cities to rejuvenate and re-imagine themselves as cultural entities.

While the current creative and cultural push is mostly dominated by a top down government approach, the media policy reforms has opened up a space which fashion magazines are beneficiaries of. Thus, while they are mindful of government dictates, the focus tends to be catering to the fashion, taste cultures and consumption of their readership. So, what forms of cultural imaginings and negotiations are occurring through these different ‘reforms’ and developing spaces? My analysis of the fashion magazines will examine what is being promoted and how that is situated within the wider cultural politics of their city.

**Cultural Background & Issues in Shanghai, Singapore and Hong Kong**

There are issues that are endemic to and prevalent in these three cities, and which circulate among them, thus, it might be appropriate to refer to a larger cultural Chinese-ness in these three cities. This section provides a background of the shared cultural, historical and social values to support and understand this claim. Even though Singapore is officially a multi-racial country with approximately eleven
percent Indians and eight percent Malays, the Chinese form the majority of the population. The notion of Chinese-ness is widely understood to be a reference to their Han Chinese roots, as opposed to the Qing Dynasty (Manchurians), the ethnic minorities from Yunnan or Tibet who are considered foreigners. Most of the migrants to South-east Asia are from the southern parts of Han China. As such, there is a presumption of a shared value system and practices based around the loose notion of Han culture and Confucian ethics.

The three cities share a common historical base as Chinese immigrant trading cities that became successful because of their strategic geographical locations. Singapore, Shanghai and Hong Kong began life as fishing villages, but were strategically located to take advantage of the expansion of trade that was to emerge around the world in the nineteenth century. Singapore was ‘founded’ (developed) by Stamford Raffles in 1819, Hong Kong was ceded to the British in 1842 and Shanghai was signed over as a treaty port to the British in 1843. As British trading ports, Hong Kong and Singapore attracted migrants and labourers from Southern China which is reflected in the local dialects of these two cities. Shanghai however, has its own dialect (shanghaishua), which is a dialect of northern Wu Chinese.

Shanghai and Hong Kong share a more complex and competitive history. During Shanghai’s high point in the 1920-30s, Hong Kong existed as a ‘second rate’ off-shore city to Shanghai’s modern cosmopolitanism (Lee 1999, pp.328-9). After China Communist Party (CCP) took over, many of the business investors, skilled craftspeople (eg. tailors) and artisan knowledge transferred to Hong Kong along with its migrants (Lee 1999, p.331). Until China became inaccessible in the 1960s, Hong
Kong existed as an intermediary of resources, labour and knowledge for China and the rest of the world. Hong Kong’s continued acknowledgement of its dependence on its people and its proximity to China, which guaranteed its place as a ‘bridge’ between East and West is coming to an end with China’s rapid opening up. This national ‘worry’ is reflected and explored through *WestEast Magazine*.

This brief overview of their histories demonstrates their underlying shared Chinese cultural affiliations and shows how these three cities grew because of their strategic location as British ‘entrepôts’. These ports are connection nodes for the global system. They are thus historically outward looking cities that depend on international trade, migrant settlements and a flow of global commodities for their success. Yet, despite the international cultural influences that move in and amongst these cities, there is also a strong subscription to an Asian/Chinese notion of identity.

**Asian values**

Around the 1990s, this sense of identity became associated with the idea of ‘Asian values’. Asian leaders such as the former Prime Minister of Malaysia, Mahathir Mohamad, and Singapore Senior Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, were the most vocal champions of the idea of incompatible democracies (Mahbubani 1998). During the Asian economic boom, Asian values, underpinned by a Confucian ethics (Economist 1998), was widely cited as the primary reason for the successes of the Asian Tigers (Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea). Kishore Mahbubani, a Singaporean diplomat and intellectual, advanced these values in his book *Can Asians Think?* contends that, ‘attachment to the family as an institution, deference to societal interests, thrift, conservatism in social mores, respect for authority’ (Mahbubani
1998) are all Asian values. This distinction is further accentuated by former PM Mahathir who (in)famously stated in the first Asia-Europe Summit of 1996 that ‘Asian values are universal values. European values are European values’ (Robinson 1996; Economist 1998; Postrel 2003). Julie Gilson, a political scientist, argues that Mahathir was very clear in his ‘Asia for Asians agenda’ during this summit, which speaks of a divisive-ness primarily built on race and cultural differences (Gilson 2002).

The differences in cultural values was frequently cited as the reason for the ‘moral decline’ witnessed in liberal Westernised democracies where the traditional nuclear family is becoming a minority and where ‘drug-taking, promiscuity, mud-slinging and violence’ (Economist 1998) are rampant. To a certain extent, Chua argues that India has been seen as the poor example of an Asian country championing western attributes of freedom of speech, expression and democracy at the expense of its economic performance, even though they are now progressing industrially. Chua argues that critics of the Asian values debate saw the search as an ‘ideological gloss over political authoritarianism in the less than democratic nations in the region’ (Chua 2004, p.201). This perpetuated and encouraged popular support of Asian identity and displays of local national validation in television and popular media.

By the time this bubble eventually burst with the 1997 Asian Economic Crisis and supporters of the Asian Values debate saw their argument dissipate before their eyes, the idea of Asian values had become entrenched in the national imagination (Economist 1998). Even SM Lee’s recant in Newsweek, 2001, while signifying a wider change of heart among proponents, does not shift the idea of the innate
differences between the cultures (Hirsh 2001). What frequently sits unchallenged at the heart of this debate are the flimsy attempts to homogenously and geographically unify ‘Asia’ or the ‘West’. As a source of public discourse, *The Economist* also stated that the values given to define Asia are not representative of the larger geographical region that is subsumed under it — the multiple religions, the languages spoken and the cultural practices (Economist 1998). Professor of Asian Studies, Anthony Milner, similarly argues that ‘the region is so culturally complex that it is ridiculous to speak of Asian consciousness or Asian values’ (Milner 2004). He argues instead that it is often co-opted in specific ideological situations where Asian values are ‘a radical conservatism that serves the needs of capitalism at a particular stage of its development in specific Asian societies’ (Milner 2004). The many Asian leaders that are not proponents of the Asian values discourse range from the former President Lee of Taiwan, former deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim (Malaysia), Aung Sung Suu Kyi (Myanmar), President Kim Dae Jung (South Korea) — all advocates of democracy, human rights, freedom — liberal values that do not sit comfortably with the conservative politics of Asian values.

Despite these demystifications and deconstruction around the concepts of ‘Asia’ and Asian values, the cultural and visible racial differences exist as a marker of an Other. The essentialist position is difficult to move away from when it is lodged on differences based on visibility. However, it has contributed to a belief that Asian modernity is constituted differently from Western modernity. To deny the rhetoric of Asian values is not to deny the common cultural and historical practices which are shared by the citizenry of mixed ethnicities in the region. The uniqueness of the local
identity is informed by a shared socio-cultural base, often experienced in the specific
details of cultural consumption. Chua argues, in respect to Singapore, that:

To emphasize Singapore’s modernity is not to deny that each of the ethnic
groups … engage in their respective particularistic cultural practices…At its
most mundane, rice and noodles still remain the main staples of Singaporeans
(Chua 2003, p.986).

While this consumption is non-exclusive it is a symbolic reference to the diasporic
history and diverse intermixing cultural heritage of the region.

Asian leaders are not the only advocates of indivisible differences. On the other side
of the fence Western conservatives such as Samuel P. Huntington, Benjamin J.
Barber and Francis Fukuyama also argue this irreconcilable difference. Huntington,
in his article, *The West versus the Rest* (Huntington 2000), perceives cultural and
value differences as innate ideological ‘clashes of civilisations’ with Islam and
Confucianism providing the impetus of calls to war. Barber argues in *Jihad versus
McWorld* that Islam, as a fundamentalist religion, sits uncomfortably with modern
ideologies, leading to bloodshed (Barber 2000). Fukuyama’s, *The West is Best*
argument similarly finds that the rest of the world order will instinctively follow the
Western neo-liberal capitalist path that has been proven to be the best model
(Fukuyama 1992). The advocates and critics of these theories will not be given here,
except that they posit an essentialist understanding of culture and history as fixed
rather than fluid (Iwabuchi 2001, p.57). Furthermore, that by cementing Asia or the
West as culturally and geographically homogenous (Chen and Chua 2000, p.10)
leads to the unhelpful posits of a simplistic directory of opposing binaries.

Similarly, western decadence has been blamed for the perceived rise of social
problems such as sexual promiscuity, increased divorce rates, immorality, abortion,
drunkenness and rebellion in Asia. Advocates of Asian values fail to see that these are not phenomena exclusive to Western values but are part of a wider spate of societal problems inherent in the arrival of universal urbanisation and modernisation. The relegation of these ‘social problems’ to being symptomatic of corrupting Western influence is an easy abdication from understanding the wider causes and changes in culture and society.

The legacy of these cultural biases, however, has a popular resilience that frequently re-surfaces in political and cultural discourses. Chua Beng Huat in *World Cities, Globalisation and the Spread of Consumerism* (1998, p.985) argues perceptively that Modernity as a cultural context has never been an importation of the West imposed upon and destroying an existing ‘traditional’ culture….Singapore was, thus, never a Third World location, culturally and economically isolated on the periphery of capitalism; rather its very own trajectory has been inextricably tied to global capitalism.

Chua’s assertion is applicable to all three Asian cities and it offers a way forward out of the cultural blockade espoused by the other theorists, by understanding that all three cities are located as beneficiaries of a historical process of modernisation.

It is also useful to note that Asian values are, in part, a recent entry to the overall dialogue on development and Asian modernity. What it brings is less appropriate for cultural understanding than politicised ideological wrestling. Chua observes that:

> Singapore’s modernity and the cultural hybridity of its people have been made more problematic under the independent national government’s multi-racial policies and its ideological transmutation of the modern component of its culture negatively into Westernization, in the government’s attempts to ‘Asianise’, or self-Orientalise’ the population within the current ideological conjuncture (1998, p.986).

As the advocates of Asian values fell together with their stock prices in the wake of the Asian Economic Crisis in 1997 (Economist 1998) there is still a desire to explain
the shared values and practices. Academically, this has been taken up by the idea of ‘culturally proximate’ nations. The term cultural proximity picks up on the discussion by Koichi Iwabuchi (2001, pp.56-9) to explain the successful exchange of television programmes amongst nations that share a regional and/or cultural affinity. The term was first developed by Joseph Straubhaar in 1991, to account for the flow and translatability of media texts (television) indicated by cultural traits such as language, religion, dress, music, non-verbal codes, humour and ethnicity.

Iwabuchi stresses that cultural proximity should not be an assumed pre-condition, but, rather, it should be a self-recognising desire within the audience/reader to make that connection and affiliation. As such, analysis invoking cultural proximity arguments need to articulate the particular cultural value that is in common. Thus, the shared language and customs (Chinese), ethnicity, dress, religion and history among the three cities establish a reciprocity that allows them to be considered culturally proximate. The idea of culturally proximate nations may provide a useful way to consider how these three cities may relate to each other in the circulation of fashion texts.

The shared language, cultural and economic affiliations explains the increased exchanges in regional popular cultural exchanges, from regional syndication to pan-Asian celebrities (Fung and Curtin 2002; SPH 2004). It also highlights the increasing exchanges of media personalities, celebrities and media products across the cities, such as the pop stars like Faye Wong, Andy Lau and Jay Chou. Studies on, The Anomalies of being Faye Wong (Fung and Curtin 2002) and Marketing Popular Culture in China: Andy Lau as pan-Chinese icon (Fung 2003) examine the popular
reception and amorphous transformation of these stars across different media platform.

**Asian Consumption**

The success of the Asian Tigers in the 1980s and the rest of the region by the 1990s (prior to 1997) saw the Asian region grow economically and materially (Chua 2000; Tan 2003). This general improvement in the material quality of life of many Asians enabled a growing middle-class who could now afford to subscribe to global taste cultures and luxury commodities, demonstrating conspicuous consumption and a desire to acquire more knowledge of these goods. Books from Chua Beng Huat’s *Consumption in Asia* to, Krishna Sen and Maila Stivens’s, *Gender and Power in Affluent Asia* and *Rogue Flows: trans-asian cultural traffic* (Iwabuchi, Muecke et al. 2004) cohesively addresses the rise of Asian consumerism. Chua argues that the rise of this middle class (businesspersons and professionals) presented a significant societal transformation as it denoted a general rise in standard of living and the affluence required for the growth of a consumerist society (2000, p.2).

This consumerism is signified by the pursuit of all things fashionable and modern — the latest fashion, music, books, home furnishings and electronic devices — all indicating a modern attitude, making the body and its extensions — the home, its content and car — an embodiment of this lifestyle. ‘Looking’ modern, both as a matter of self-presentation and as a mindset, has become one of the ways of demonstrating one’s modernity. This middle-class consumerism is important to this thesis for two reasons. Firstly, it establishes a broad platform for popular cultural exchanges and development in Asian and Western media to take root (for example,
the consumption of fashion and fashion magazines). Secondly, it has brought about a
discernable ‘generational gap’ between the older savings-oriented culture and the
younger consumerism-as-lifestyle set (Chua 2000, p.14). This cultural ‘change’ is
symptomatic of on-going modernisation.

Similar arguments of Western influence again take centre stage as this younger
population buy into ‘western decadence’ (Chua 2000, p.14) of wasteful or
conspicuous consumption of designer brands and spending time and money in
foreign restaurants and discos. Chua argues that moral and ideological critics often
belong to segments of the population that have lived through underdevelopment and
they view rapid expansion of consumerism as antagonistic to traditional ‘Asian’
values of savings and, by default, morality. This group thus perceive that the
contamination and disruption of traditional culture arrived on the back of Western
consumption. The development of a middle class, its consumptive practices and
popular discourses mirror historical and societal developments in later nineteenth
century and early twentieth century Europe which will be returned to as the need
arises for such comparison.

Classically, Karl Marx posited that consumption furthered the capital accumulation
of producers and, therefore, consumers were manipulated and complicit in an
aberrant social practice that was superficial and wasteful. This idea of consumption
only began to shift in the mid-70s when the growth of consumerism exceeded the
base of production. The rise of consumerism research by social sciences, in particular
Raymond Williams (Cambridge) and Stuart Hall and Richard Hoggart (Birmingham
Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies) interrogates the importance of consumption (Chua 2000, p.3).

This overview of Asian consumption provides the context from which to understand the production and uses of fashion magazines in these cities. Fashion magazines are perceived to be ‘Western’ in origin, with their content promoting a consumeristic lifestyle in pursuit of goods and services. Conventionally, fashion magazines function as style guides offering advice on modern problems and social normative codes of behaviour. Beyond that, they capture and reflect the styles, issues and concerns of the readers in their city. Most of all, they encapsulate an attitude towards modern life that is distinctively different from the previous generation. A diverse range of fashion magazines thus, speak to different style tribes, niche interests and, therefore, divergent issues. Magazines offer a cultural link through which readers can acquire a ‘do-it-yourself’ (Hartley 1999, p.47) identity.
Thesis Outline

Chapter One has introduced the context surrounding the rise of fashion magazines in the Asian cities. This discussion posed the research questions and the framework is established by understanding the cultural, political and media issues in the Asian cities. The discussion also points out the similarities between these cities — the basis for their selection.

Chapter Two explains the research approach. First, it examines the theoretical terrain of a multidisciplinary multifaceted research approach adopted in this thesis. It demonstrates the significance of context and how the theoretical idea of ‘imagining the city’ becomes the means for interrogating fashion texts, transforming the reading of the city in the fashion texts. Secondly, it provides an overview of the fashion media industries in the cities and a profile of the fashion publications, providing reasons for the selection of the fashion publications.

The next chapter reviews the theoretical concepts of modernity, fashion, journalism and the city. By visiting the early institutionalisation of modernity in fashion and journalism in the urban city, it provides a means for understanding and comparing historical processes of modernisation in the Asian cities. It also establishes the theoretical connections between the disciplines of fashion, journalism, city and modernity. This review highlights how the examination of cultural modernity is built on the articulation of the experiential within the urban.
These first three chapters frame the research questions, the methodology and literature used to contextualise both the cities and their media. The subsequent chapter draws upon these methods and literature to approach the reading of the cities. Chapters Four, Five and Six each deal with one city and its magazine. However, rather than adopting one approach to reading the cities/fashion magazines, the internal mechanics of each chapter reflects the central concerns and issues that emerged out of the individual investigations. In dealing with the multi-disciplinary theoretical context, it is necessary that the readings take into account the shaping of the cities by their unique historical background. Therefore the different internal organisation of each chapter is a conscious demonstration of media, cultural and historical difference.

Chapter Four begins with *Vision* and the city of Shanghai. It examines *Vision* in light of its visual aesthetics, pedagogy and editorial push. The strong modernising ethos of its founder, Chen Yifei, is compared against the history of Chinese media, its ownership and its modernisation. While primarily analysing the function and pedagogy of *Vision*, I also visually compare Shanghai’s cultural and industrial modernity to photo spreads in 1930s.

Chapter Five examines the new *Harper’s Bazaar Singapore* (Harper’s) as one of the few local high-end fashion magazines in Singapore. Taking into account Singapore’s strict media landscape and history of social engineering, this chapter compares the frequently used public discourse of cosmopolitanism and sex in *Harper’s* to the governmental one. It explores and synthesise the arguments and discussions of the
fashion texts against social and public online discussions, academic writing and interviews.

Chapter Six focuses on Hong Kong’s *WestEast Magazine (WE)*. As an independent glossy fashion magazine, *WE* has successfully made it as an international fashion publication. Even though Hong Kong is known for its diversity of media publications, *WE* is one of the few independent fashion publications from Asia that has a global distribution and unique, high calibre production costs. This chapter analyses the explicit choice made by the publisher in choosing Hong Kong as its production base against the context of a Hong Kong in cultural transition. The assertions of a rising China made by the editor, is also the context in which the fashion images and texts in *WE* are read.

Chapter Seven draws together a cohesive discussion of the key themes and issues raised through the previous three chapters. It addresses the research questions in the context of the analyses of the cities and their fashion magazines, highlighting the dominant and complex shifts in cultural identities reflected and captured through the analysis. It returns to the research questions to articulate broader conclusions about the cities, their magazines and the question of what forms of looking, acting and feeling are promoted within the diegesis of the magazines, and what that says about the practice of fashion journalism in Asia. Theoretically, how does the Western canonical texts on cultural modernity and city apply in the inter-cultural context of Asian magazines?
Chapter Eight concludes the thesis by providing a synthesis of the analysis and arguments made across the previous three chapters by recapitulating the important aspects of the findings and readings from the three cities and their fashion magazines, that fashion journalism is a promoter of the myriad of issues and diversity of cultural modernity. It also poses questions to the snapshot of the modernity captured in this analysis, and raises further research questions.

**Conclusion**

This chapter introduced the complex and extensive terrain of social, cultural, economic and political environment of the three cities. By taking a historical approach, this chapter emphasised on the importance of the cultural watershed these cities are currently facing and the need to develop culture, arts and media as long-term economic sustainability goals. In mapping out the areas and issues of research, I also introduce the research questions and the key concepts contributing towards this research, which explains why fashion journalism is a useful way of understanding cultural forms of modernity in Asia.
CHAPTER TWO: research approach

The last chapter introduced the thesis research questions and the general context of inquiry followed by a discussion of the key issues the cities are grappling with. This chapter will discuss the approaches taken to devise this research framework by firstly explaining the methodology and research approach underpinning the inquiry; secondly by exploring the global fashion media industry such as, the business practice of syndication; and, finally, by providing the criteria for the selection of the three fashion titles. This chapter outlines the variety of methods used (textual analysis, semi-structured interviews, historical research, policy and industry reports) to contextualise and situate the questions of this research. The research methods used in this project are straightforward. However, the adoption of a multi-disciplinary approach that takes into account five different contexts and how they interact requires some clarification. In addition, positing that the city and its negotiations with cultural modernity could be read through fashion magazines requires theoretical unpacking to underline the methodological rigour. Therefore, this chapter begins by highlighting the importance of the conceptual links between the five main concepts of this research, namely: fashion, journalism, city, modernity and Asia which is demonstrated in the Pentagram (Fig 1.).
Explaining the Research Approach

The conceptualisation of this research proceeds from an interest in the phenomenal uptake of fashion and fashion magazines, and their development as cultural industries, across three Asian cities at different points of their modernisation. The three research questions posed in Chapter One are divided into five aspects of investigation:

1. What do these fashion magazines tell us about these cities?
2. What specific ways of looking, acting and feeling are promoted?
3. What aspects of the cities are evoked through their texts?
4. How does the analysis of fashion journalism progress our understanding of its theoretical contribution?

5. How does the modernity (as predominantly European in condition, in literature) translate to Asian cities and their developmental modernity?

This research argues that the analysis of fashion journalism in Asia is necessarily multi-disciplinary, as it is conceptually derived from five different fields of study. As such, it is important to identify the trajectory each concept contributes to this study. As laid out in the Pentagram in Fig 1, the five concepts of fashion, journalism, city, Asia and modernity provide a general context from which to derive the methodological formulations of this research framework.

While, fashion and journalism are essentially two very different sets of industry practices with their own particular theoretical formulations, it is also possible to trace their simultaneous beginnings (as they now function) as products and practices of modernity (Lipovetsky 1994; Hartley 1996; Evans 2003; Wilson 2003). This thesis argues that fashion and journalism, as forms of modern practices, are promoters of the democratising impetus of modernity. Also, central to the manifestations of modernity is the context of the urban city, where social change was first intensely experienced and observed (Simmel 1969; Donald 1999). In fact, as many fashion theorists have demonstrated in their studies, it is within the context of the city that fashion and its practices of conformity and differentiation flourished (Lehmann 2000; Steele 2000; Wilson 2003). Similarly, the intensely populated urban city space is where journalism evolved to become one of the most important means of urban communication (Hartley 1996).
By demonstrating the interdisciplinary nature of the concepts here, it is clear that the subject of analysis in this research — fashion journalism (as a genre of journalism and its textual practices) — is underpinned by a matrix of theoretical contexts. Richard Johnson, the then director of Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, states in reference to textual analysis that the context is what determines the meanings and cultural transformations of any given analysis. He states:

All this points to the centrality of what is usually ‘context’. Context determines the meaning, transformations or salience of a particular subjective form as much as the form itself. Context includes the cultural features described above, but also the contexts of immediate situations (eg. the domestic context of the household) and the larger historical context of conjuncture. (Johnson 1995, p.601)

Thus, the context represented by these three cities, were chosen ahead of the fashion texts due to the intensive economic and cultural developments occurring within them. Furthermore, their topographical make up of shared migrant histories, geographical location, ethnicity and exchange of cultural flows and model of government, all of which were discussed in the last chapter, accentuated the commonality of their socio-political background — linking them and emphasizing their suitability as research texts. Yet cities exist beyond their spatial self as they are a palimpsest for a multiplicity of uses. In evoking its textual representations — of which fashion magazines are one — it allows for the social identities, cultural transformations and issues to become apparent. My reading of the city is conducted through the fashion magazines, and anchored by secondary research texts from historical research and semi-structured interviews to policy documents, media industry reports and industry associations. Actual time spent in these cities
conducting the interviews further substantiates these findings. The methods used not only provided a means of anchoring and cross-referencing the texts, they acted as the context guiding the textual analysis.

**Reading the Texts**

Textual analysis is the primary means of research method utilised in this thesis. The scholarship of reading is widely utilised by theorists in the area of media, cultural and communication studies but originally emerged from literary studies. This reading of the city through fashion texts, is informed by the works of John Hartley, Richard Johnson, Stuart Hall, Michel de Certeau, and James Donald.

Richard Johnson contends that the reading of texts is akin to ‘an act of production’ itself (Johnson 1995, p.601), and academic reading is one of the many positions assumed in the reading of texts. In other words, multiple forms of (identification) reading can take place by locating it as part of a wider social or political discourse that evokes a larger cultural context. Johnson states:

> The text’ is no longer studied for its own sake, nor even for the social effects its may be thought to produce, but rather for the subjective or cultural forms which it realises and makes available. The text is only a means in cultural study; strictly, perhaps, it’s a raw material from which certain forms (eg. of narrative, ideological problematic, mode of address, subject position, etc.) maybe abstracted. (Johnson, 1995, pp.596-7)

Rather than of themselves, texts refer to a larger cultural or social problematic and/or question that which is being investigated. Johnson (1995, p. 601) points out that ‘More commonly texts are encountered promiscuously; they pour in on us from all direction in diverse, coexisting media, and differently-paced flows. In everyday life, textual materials are complex, multiple, overlapping, co-existent, juxta-posed, in a
word, ‘inter-textual’. In other words, texts are open, polysemic and subjective, hence the importance of the context in anchoring each reading and analysis. Every reading is open and, to a certain degree, will be subjective to its contextual interpretations.

As a central means of tapping into public and current social discourse (mainstream and competing) I conducted a sustained search in the areas of media and fashion industries, governmental policy and historical background of cities through newspapers, press releases, organisation websites, trade papers, chat sites and magazines over the period of my research (see Table 1).

| Newspapers, Magazines & Periodicals (Print & Online) | Asia Times Online: http://www.atimes.com  
Asia Pacific Media Networks: http://www.asiamedia.ucla.edu  
Asia Week: http://www.asiaweek.com/asiaweek/  
Asia Times online: http://www.atimes.com  
China.org.cn: http://www.china.org.cn  
Danwei, Chinese Media, advertising and urban life: http://www.danwei.org/  
Far Eastern Economic Review: through library database  
Latelinenews: http://latelinenews.com  
Media Convergence Asia Pacific: http://mediaconv.com  
Muzi.com: http://www.muzi.com  
South China Morning Post: through library database  
Straits Times Interactive: http://www.straitstimes.asia1.com.sg  
Time Asia: http://www.time.com  
Wall Street Journal: Library Database (Ebsco/Proquest)  
Xinhua News Agency: http://fp.xinhuanet.com/english/ |
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<td>Bharattextile.com: <a href="http://www.bharattextile.com">http://www.bharattextile.com</a></td>
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<td><a href="http://www.just-style.com">http://www.just-style.com</a></td>
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<td>Editor and Publisher: <a href="http://www.editorandpublisher.com">http://www.editorandpublisher.com</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Federation of International Periodical Press (FIPP):</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.fipp.com">http://www.fipp.com</a></td>
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<td>Folio: The Magazine for Magazine Management: through</td>
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<td>International Council of Shopping Centres:</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.icsc.org">http://www.icsc.org</a></td>
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<td>International Federation of the Periodical Press:</td>
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<td>Media Convergence Asia Pacific:</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.mediaconv.com/">http://www.mediaconv.com/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Periodical Publishers Association (PPA):</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.ppa.co.uk">http://www.ppa.co.uk</a></td>
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<td>Trade Development Council: <a href="http://www.tdctrade.com">http://www.tdctrade.com</a></td>
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Table 1. Primary Media Resources

This secondary research is crucial to this research as it provides a means of drawing together information from the different bodies of knowledge (governmental, journalism, interest groups, tourism promotion boards etc) towards an understanding of fashion journalism in the city. Thus, I glean from these sites are not just issues, context and socio-cultural preferences but also the historical relationships underlying the analysis enabling me to identify shifts in the current social and cultural landscape.
Moving away from the textual and context of research, this thesis also focuses on the structures of production; ownership and publishing structures the formats, title, distribution, circulation and the niche readership of fashion magazines in the Asian region. They also anchor the local publishing industry to the global and regional distribution channels in. Therefore, understanding the practice of syndication allows us to make sense of the flows and exchange of global content and images circulating in concurrent syndicated issues of *Elle* or *Vogue* globally. Taken on a whole, the multiple contexts of industry, history and policy enables this research to better situate and analyse the texts.

This research does not undertake an ethnography of the readership. The nature of the research questions concern the analysis of the fashion texts and their attempts to capture, reflect and pedagogically communicate aspects about their cities, their ‘imagined’ readership (‘imagined’, as in idealised, or self-declared and not unreal) and social and cultural developments. Primarily, it is the relationship between the fashion texts and the cities that is investigated, rather than the response of the readership. While readership surveys and participant interviews were considered in the initial formulation of the project, the varied response from each magazine and the problem of assembling the readers across three cities, with language difficulties in Hong Kong made ethnographic research an inappropriate research strategy.
Semi-Structured Interviews

One means of data collection is interviewing the editors and staff of the fashion magazines. The semi-structured format of interview engages the interviewee in a discussion with key research questions, which were emailed to them in advance. The interviews presented the opportunity to ask questions on specific aspects of production, the impetus for topics, and decisions made about brand, identity and readerships. For the independent media outlets, this was also the opportunity to understand and observe the relationships and dynamics behind such small creative entrepreneurial teams. The interviews with WestEast and Vision editorial teams amply rewarded this strategy. However, after many futile attempts to contact Harper’s Bazaar Singapore the interviews were abandoned, though interviews with two other Singaporean publishers Heart Publishing and Pan-Pacific Publishers were still conducted.

The nature of semi-structured interviews allowed the interviewees to take the lead in discussing and expanding upon issues that they considered important in the production and decision making of the fashion magazines. This method was a success in that it yielded interesting and unexpected information about the creative process, the collaborative production, distribution and decision making endemic to smaller creative enterprises. The WE editorial team were very open and honest in their discussions of the production and operational problems they faced and this led to a more nuanced understanding of WE’s distribution and production system. However, this interview structure was more problematic for Chen Yifei and his editorial team, who seemed more evasive about the withdrawal of sponsorship by
China Youth Group. The upshot of the interviews was that it enabled a scoping of the size of each media operation and their location.

Yet, despite the research methods and multidisciplinary approach taken to address the research project, the question of how to read the city through its fashion magazine is still to be addressed. Part of the question relates to the selection of texts: on what basis will the images or written texts be selected? And, how will the issues of the city be represented through the fashion magazines? A scan of the magazines showed that this may be problematic as most of the fashion magazines revolved around the central issue of fashion, fashion celebrities, consumption and ‘hip’ retail spaces of consumption. Not all the titles imaged their own city, although all invariably presented far-off exotic locations of holiday, such as Morocco or Venice.

**Reading the City**

These questions are resolved through first understanding how the city has been traditionally investigated. Donald’s review of the approaches used to study the city is integral to the formulation of this analysis. This section reviews the ways through which the city is ‘made’ textual via the representations of different media, as discussed by James Donald in *Imagining the Modern City* (1999). Secondly, how that representation gives rise to new ways of seeing and imagining is linked to forms of visual knowledge production in an increasingly visualised culture. Thirdly, this visual culture is popularly and widely consumed and negotiated in everyday popular life, as underlined by Michael Featherstone.
This theoretical method informs the research rationale and its interrogation, forming the basis for further textual analysis of each chapter on the city/magazine. The fields of fashion, journalism, the city, modernity and Asia (as reflected in the pentagram) contribute to our understanding of the relationship between the city and the fashion magazines. Due to the limitation of time and space, the readings of the fashion texts focuses on selected key issues and the provision of selected examples that are illustrative rather than exhaustive.

Donald (1999) contributes two key points about the city. Firstly, that ‘the city can be used as a way of thinking about politics’ (p.xi) and, secondly, that the ‘ways of seeing and understanding the city inevitably inform ways of acting on the space of the city’ (p.26). How do these propositions help us to think about the city in its textual forms? Donald examines different mediums of representation, from novels and photography to statistics and medical discourses, occurring in mid-nineteenth century to demonstrate the ways the city have been imagined and socially constructed.

Using the novel as an example, he argues that the works of Charles Dickens, such as Bleak House have influenced how we imagine London historically and by doing so it still dominates our impression of London today. Novels promote and construct a particular way of seeing and imagining the city that is deeply entrenched in current cultural and social mores. Donald states (p.2):

The city presented by Bleak House remains part of the present in which we live, part of our common sense. It does so less through its vivid representation of that city then, however, than through its pedagogy. The novel teaches us how to see the city, and how to make sense of it. It defines the co-ordinates for our imaginative mapping of urban space.
By teaching readers how to see and imagine the city, it inevitably shapes the way the city is imagined and experienced. Donald stresses that the connection between public, rationalist thoughts and the ephemeral and imaginative are more porous then commonly recognised. Textual interface form a separate layer of semiotic network that interconnects to the multifaceted city, articulating and actively shaping our consciousness.

In considering the context of the heavily industrialised cities of Manchester and London in the mid-1800s, Donald notes that the city was being radically transformed, with ‘new class relations and new patterns of urban segregation in terms of work, residence, class, occupation and ethnicity (p.28)’ being established via concurrent processes of disruption and construction. Health reports from the 1830s reveal how the city was imagined by public policy-makers then. For example, Richard Whately, Professor of Political Economy at Oxford in the 1830s, saw poor health as ‘inevitable, if unfortunate, facts of nature’ {Donald, 1999 #8}(p.29), which was not within the ambit of public policy to aid.

Other professional administrators and reformers such as Edwin Chadwick, Thomas Southwood Smith and Neil Arnott, who wrote the Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain in 1842, perceived urban ills as a metaphoric form of disease and believed they were a serious threat to the health of the general polity. From a less privileged social position, they were more aware of structures of social inadequacies and attempted to ‘devise new techniques of social observation and political calculation to tackle the perceived problems created by urbanisation’ (p.29). The metaphors used conveyed their attitudes and ideological
approach to the problems of urbanisation, revealing deeper instances of class bias and social divisions.

Another reformer was Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth, a Manchester doctor who wrote the pamphlet, *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester* in 1832. His first hand investigation into the social conditions of slums reveals ‘how metaphors structure his way of seeing, understanding and narrating the city and its problems’ (p.30). He saw public and social problems as being directly linked to urbanisation, and, as such, identified abysmal living conditions, malnourished diets and inadequate sanitations, ‘pernicious’ morality of Irish immigrants and the exhausting labour as symptoms of urban ills to be challenged, rather than as effects of a commercial system to be tolerated.

Interestingly, Kay-Shuttleworth also argued that modern capitalistic society had the potential to democratise and provide the ‘comforts and luxuries of life, and to elevate the physical condition of every member of the social body’ (p.30). Thus the body politic became imagined as being under threat from the impoverished environment — extending the belief that if the body was well, society would correspondingly be well. Arguably, these were the nascent rationale underpinning modern social welfare, one that seeks to render the city and its inhabitants as a healthy functioning whole. Importantly, these progressive beliefs shaped the push for new techniques of investigating the social ‘disease’ by making the city knowable.
One of the new techniques formulated to render the city as a ‘knowable and
governable object’ (p.30) was the use of statistics as a method of investigation. The
pure act of counting and collecting statistical information on the urban population
(age, gender, race, occupation, geographical distribution, rates of fertility, health,
literacy, sentiments, domestic life, temperance, criminal propensities, etc.)
demonstrated new ways of understanding and ‘reading’ the population. Donald’s
contribution that ‘the city as a problem of administration had to be rendered as ‘text’ – not in any metaphorical sense, but through medical pamphlets like Shuttleworth’s and increasingly in official reports and commissions to bring it into the ambit of government’ (p.30) reflects the fluidity of forms ‘the city’ can assume.

Ian Hacking sees the invention of the statistical collection of profiles as a form of
‘making up people’ (1986, p.292), for it produced useful population profiles for
governmental policy and shifted the perception of the population as a ‘homogenous
and opaque mass’, to one with specific attributes, identity and significant
characteristics (p.31). This was a radical and novel development for the
administration of the urban populace. However, Hacking points out that an inevitable
consequence of this census collection was the institution of normative categories
which in the long term became a means for guiding governmental policies and
overlooking the exceptional or disadvantaged.

These various public undertakings to render the city knowable gave rise to the further
use of textual tool to analyse the city. Therefore, these knowledge and ‘facts’ also
become open to various challenges via different readings and interpretations. One
important counter reading is taken by a German cotton trader, Friedrich Engels, who
arrived in England in 1844. His hugely influential book *The Condition of the Working Class in England* in 1844 challenged the dominant paradigm and produced a different form of knowing by reading the ‘illegible’ and chaotic industrial city as ‘a total intellectual and imaginative structure’ (p.33). His techniques of walking, social observation and mapping out the overall shape and power structures in Manchester — the location of its offices, warehouses and where new roads lead to the prosperous suburbs — indicated a sense of class distinction and power dynamics in operation through urban landscapes. Engels (1892, pp.45-54) argues that at the macrostructure of the city, certain social dynamics were evident,

> the money aristocracy can take the shortest road through the middle of all the labouring districts to their places of business, without ever seeing that they are in the midst of the grimy misery that lurks to the right and left.

In describing the ‘filth and horror’ of the poverty, Engels perceived the chaos of the impenetrable urban spaces as, inevitable social consequences of forms of production. In direct contrast to the metaphors of ‘social malfunctioning and disease’, Engels’ philosophical framework posits the city as an all-encompassing dominant structure that is the ‘spatial embodiment or manifestation of economic relations’, ergo, undergoing revolutionary transformation was the only effective route to affect social change. Whilst the revolutionary impetus limits Engels’ study for policy formulations, his reading is nonetheless original, if not alternative, for its time and context. Donald stated that Engels’ methodology of ‘social and semiotic mapping enable[d] him to impose a spatial and narrative unity in his account’ (p.35). In perceiving the city as a structure that functions in totality with its parts bearing meaning only in relation to the whole, Engels’ contribution importantly posits the city as a structure of social relations that is dynamic and constantly shifting.
This perspective on zones of structure and power relations is still influential in informing present generations of Marxist geographers and sociologists, especially evidenced in the theoretical work of Saskia Sassen (2002) and Sharon Zukin (1995). However, it is imperative to point out that while this research takes into account theoretical contributions made in the fields of cultural geography and social theory in the spatial and cultural dimensions of the city, it does not employ a cultural geography approach to analysing the cities.

By studying the cities as represented forms of mediated fashion texts, a comparison between the experiences in the city are possible as demonstrated by social theorists such as Georg Simmel and Walter Benjamin (reviewed in next chapter). Their works are, inevitably, inter-disciplinary and employ diverse fields of study from, fashion to cultural geography, and modernity to economics and architecture. However, here, their observations of the early modernising cities of Berlin, London and Paris allows them to be compared to the developing Asian cities.

Texts in the form of public health reports, statistics, documentary photographs, novels and architectures reveal specific details about the way a city has been shaped through its imagined reality. Donald argues that ‘The city for the most part was used to define this type of experience, this way of seeing, rather than to portray a place’ (p.3) thus, it is an appropriate tool with which to think about the wide-ranging politics of self. To conceptualise the city as an abstract body of ideas is to reinforce two key aspect about the texts. Firstly, that the ways of seeing and its imaginative consequences is about establishing pedagogies surrounding specific politics of identity and culture in the city. Secondly, that this form of active ‘seeing’ is deeply
embedded in the mediatised visual culture, and is a form of knowledge formation. This point is explored in the section on Visual Literacy.

**Reading the Asian Cities**

To think about the city through fashion magazines is to work with texts that are situated at a popular and accessible everyday level in the city. To read the city through its mediated representations such as, fashion journalism enables us to understand how processes of modernisation are negotiated in fashion texts — the cities are reflected, captured and consumed through the fashion pages. When these texts choose to reflect and direct their gaze at their own city, as *Vision* and *WestEast* did, the process of self-imaging becomes a discursive choice about the representation of one’s own city. This is emphasised in Richard Johnson’s exposition that the text infers to reality outside of itself, stating, ‘The text’ is no longer studied for its own sake, nor even for the social effects its may be thought to produce, but rather for the subjective or cultural forms which it realises and makes available’ (1995, pp.596-7).

Therefore, the choice of images, metaphors, social issues, festivities and celebrities reflect processes of articulation within the structure of cultural formation in the fashion journalism continuum. Fashion magazines of each city are inevitably located in a specific culture, with its own issues, customs, politics, people and identities — all constituting facets of the city. The city exists as a palimpsest encompassing these diverse representations and yet, is constituted by them. Therefore, what this thesis reading will produce is one of many possible representations and configurations of identities and culture in that city. It is one experiential dimension in the multiple
ways of looking, feeling and acting in the city, reflected through this specific time and space continuum of these fashion texts.

**Visual Literacy and the Rise of Visual Culture**

Studies in visual literacy similarly analyse ‘ways of seeing’ and looking in the city as important means of knowledge formation. While, visual literacy was mainly developed through film studies on the ways of looking and ‘the gaze’, in cultural studies the emphasis has been put on the visual culture in everyday life (Becker 1999). This thesis borrows from this understanding that the sight provides an active and engaged form of learning to apply to fashion texts. Fashion magazines rely mainly on its visual components — the fashion images, pictures of celebrities, far-off locations and glossy consumer products to attract readers and in this instance, to instruct. To understand how visual texts are pedagogical, this section briefly explains how and why visual culture is associated with knowledge formation in popular culture.

Martin Jay, professor of history and visual culture contends in *The Scopic Regimes of Modernity* (1988) that the sight of the reader/audience is traditionally believed to be ‘static, monocular, unblinking and disembodied’ (Cartesian Perspectivalism). However, he proposes that there are a plurality of alternative ways of seeing which are practiced by the viewer that are active, ‘fragmentary’ and ‘detailed’ (1988, pp.5-7). In cultural studies, sight and perspective have been associated with the production of power discourses on the dominant versus marginalised communities. Recognising alternative ways of viewing, therefore, broadens and opens up the multiplicity of ways in which social meanings and ways of knowing are produced and read. Cultural
studies professor Karin Becker (1999) states that ‘The rise in visual culture in modernity has been marked by struggles among various forms and techniques of knowledge and knowing.’

In arguing that visual culture is one site of popular knowledge formation, Becker contends that the production of power discourses is integral to specific ways of seeing (perception). At its most basic, images and photography, through new technologies, have the ability to persuade through parody, reproduced reality or fantasy. These means of production create new ways of representing reality by shifting the conceptualising of knowledge and new forms of subjectivity. Hence, new knowledge and pedagogies can be effectively established through visual culture.

Relating this to fashion magazines, it is evident that fashion texts (written and visual) may promote ideological, pedagogical ways of seeing that lie outside the boundaries of familiarity or local-ness, challenging cultural knowledge and worldviews. Becker (1999) notes that ‘the relationship between knowledge and vision as a discursive formation and the centrality of the visual in re-formations of cultural values have received limited attention within cultural studies’. Perhaps, that is not so surprising especially in popular media forms like fashion magazines, which is transient and not highly regarded. The domination of written texts over the visual has its roots in the Reformation and growth of literacy outlined by Hartley and Rennie (2004) in ‘About A Girl’: Fashion photography as photojournalism.

Mike Featherstone’s (1991) work on The Aestheticization of Everyday Life describes a much larger societal shift, utilising the idea of ‘aesthetics’ instead of the ‘visual’.
While, the term ‘aesthetics’ has a much longer history and politics in the academy through art history theory, however, Featherstone’s use of aesthetics is similar to Becker’s visual culture, pointing to the popularisation of aesthetics in everyday life and its fall from its pedestal as sacrosanct. He argues that within the course of twentieth century artistic and cultural movements there is a consequential rise of a distinctive everyday aesthetic of life that stems from a challenge to the belief that art is sacred or respectable in its location in the academy. The first suggests that life can be a work of art, where the personal taste, aesthetics and cultural knowledge of the private individual stands as testimony to their artistic and intellectual capacities. This is especially manifested in consumer cultures where, the ‘dual focus on a life of aesthetic consumption and the need to form life into an aesthetically pleasing whole on the part of artistic and intellectual countercultures should be related to the development of mass consumption in general’ (Featherstone 1991, p.95).

The second refers to the ‘rapid flow of signs and images which saturate the fabric of everyday life in contemporary society’ (Featherstone 1991, p.95), which is evidenced in mediated displays and visual spectacles in advertising, journalism, logos and graphic products. Both these perspectives of aestheticisation points to the increased significance of ‘artistic’, visual and stylistic notions that come to fully frame all aspects of cultural consumption and production. Featherstone (1991, pp.96-7) draws from Baudrillard’s *Simulations* to argue that ‘art ceases to be a separate enclaved reality; it enters into production and reproduction so that everything even if it be the everyday and banal reality, falls by this token under the sign of art, and becomes aesthetic’.
Featherstone (1991, pp.94-96) argues that this has impacted on consumer culture and modern life as consumer culture draws from a wide range of popular sources, from advertising to design, fashion and commercial art to architecture and journalism. While critics have often used the same arguments to denote the coercive and inescapable nature of this world, Featherstone offers a counter-reading arguing that through these mediated forms the dream world ‘transmit aesthetic dispositions’ which educate the public in new forms of styles and taste (p.105). To trace how art was transformed in the context of postmodernism in the twentieth century becoming demystified and popularised for the everyday, he moves to the nineteenth century constructions of urban metropolis to examine their nascent meanings and interface between modern visual culture and consumption.

He argues that the visual presentation inherent in urban city dreamscapes and its mediation through journalism, fashion, design and mass commodities encourages a consumption of the popular aesthetics of displays and environment as well as the commodities themselves. The works of Simmel and Benjamin demonstrate how the developing Parisian arcades and cityscape had become aestheticised:

…architecture, billboards, shop displays, advertisements, packages, street signs etc. and through the embodied persons who move through these spaces: the individuals who wear, to varying degrees, fashionable clothing, hair-styles, make-up or who move or hold their bodies, in particular stylized ways. (1991, p.104)

This Parisan aestheticised urban environment is comparable to the modernising urbanscape of the Asian cities. In Hong Kong, every building façade and urban surface is a potential spot for advertisements, notices, graffiti and posters of every kind. The overcrowded city grows upwards, and the advertisements and signs follow, spreading to the point where the entire urban environment is horizontally and
vertically embedded with visual signs, codes and information. Visual installations of giant screens projecting news, live events, fashions or advertisements have become markers of networked social metropolitan life. In Singapore, a walk down Orchard Road, the main shopping thoroughfare, is framed by overhead trees, fairy lights and is closed in by advertising, signs, massive glass-front displays — it is comparable to the arcade-like environment described by Benjamin. If the urban visual signage is a signpost of advanced modernities, it is evident that Shanghai, in contrast with the other cities, is not at the same level of industrial development. There are, however, emerging signs of urban visual development, such as the *Vogue* magazine banners flying from lamp-posts, cosmetic advertisements at bus-stops, but as yet there are many blank façades.

Drawing from Simmel’s work (Frisby 1981), the flâneur was observed to carry an objective detached view from within the crowds as a strategy of surveillance. However, there is an opposite effect that Featherstone terms the ‘de-distantiation’ effect. This de-distantiation effect is in fact ‘the pleasure from immersion into the objects of contemplation’ (1991, p.99) where subjects are openly and emotionally engaging with the full repertoire of stimuli. By recognising the subjective nature of these two positions and the ability of most subjects to effectively engage and switch between them, this research argues that this form of engagement within the mediated urban space is reproduced in the consumption of fashion texts. Thus it is possible to understand how readings of fashion journalism in written form and images is at once a double action of immersion and distantiation, a procuring of knowledge and a desire for the self.
This aestheticisation of modern life argument expressed by Featherstone is useful in explaining how modern social life comes to be submerged in an aestheticised environment and how the intermediaries of ‘art’ (as part of popularised aesthetic) are corollaries of modern cultural productions. This suggests that even as common everyday objects are becoming aestheticised, art and visuality itself is becoming democratised into popular modes of consumption. This is especially seen through high profile examples about the merging of commodity and art in Louis Vuitton’s collaboration with contemporary artists.

Within the field of journalism studies, this aspect of popular aesthetics has an increasing place in feature stories. News privileges the written text (Hardt and Brennen 1999, p.2) and the visual component are often documentary photography aimed at anchoring or sensationalising the story on the page. One of the few studies to cohesively address visuality in journalism is by Hardt and Brennen (1999) in *Picturing the Past: Media, History and Photography*, which noted that the 1920s saw the imminent rise of a visual culture impacting on journalism brought on by photography. Initially, photography was believed to disseminate the allusion of truth, a sense of objectivity which journalism under the scientific spirit recognised as facts. Yet, with the progress of new technologies and digitisation, images began to reveal more about the subjectivity of ‘imaginary spaces and the challenge of reality’ (Hardt and Brennen 1999, p.2).

The challenge to photography’s representation of reality also stems from the endless reproduction and distortion capabilities of new technologies. Hardt and Brennen (p.2) posits that ‘the camera eye teach[es] readers an aesthetic appreciation of the
visual and its potential in the context of integrating art and social practice through print or film’. However, they contend that photography was essentially a ‘seductive surface quality that the culture industry exploits’ (p.6) and imposes a structure of meaning upon its readers rather than, interrogating the space for production of multiple meaning-making. Despite recognising the centrality of photographic images in recording truth (photojournalism), its importance in establishing nation-building discourse and its ability to subjectivise ideological discourse, Hardt and Brennen’s criticism of photography is a recourse to bias against image and surfaces — values denigrated in the Protestant culture (Hartley and Rennie 2004).

These criticisms stand in direct antagonism to the advocacy and importance they placed on photography in their overall scheme of arguments. This conflicted notion of photography’s subjectivity lingers on because of an inability to recognise the role of the readership and consumption in maintaining a position of active negotiation of meanings. An initial reading of Vision denotes the primacy of the visuals over the written texts, would that suggest that this magazine is a superficial rendition of commodities, playing up its seduction value over any other substantial negotiations of cultural meaning? A deeper reading suggests that this is not so. However, Hardt and Brennen’s arguments serve as an indication of the bias that exists against popular visual culture in journalism. More than anything, the arguments of Mike Featherstone, Karin Becker and Martin Jay seems to rest in the importance of visuality (looking) and its active agency and negotiation towards politics and the rethinking of culture.
Contextualising the Publishing Industry

The second section of this chapter outlines the fashion publishing market conditions in the three cities by contextualising the business practices of syndication and independent publication. It then goes on to establish the selection criteria for the three fashion titles.

Introduction to Market Conditions

People come from all over China to Shanghai to shop’, says Michelle Cheng, a businesswoman based in the city. ‘I was browsing in Gucci, and so many people there looked like farmers. They were not your typical designer shoppers, but they were trying on shoes and picking out bags to buy. It makes you realise how far the lure of designer clothes is extending in China. (Lowther 2005, p. 245)

Asia is often referred to as the largest untapped consumer market in the world. Shanghai is now the second largest metropolis behind Tokyo (Yusuf and Nabeshima 2003). In its publication marketplace, projections indicate a boost in both ad-sales and circulation, while the affluent markets of Hong Kong and Singapore continue to provide incentive for expansion. However, these growing markets are niche and fragmented into specific tastes and narrow specialised interests and multi-national publishers such as Hearst Publications or Conde Nast agree that there is no one strategy to aggregate readerships across the Asian markets (Zenith Media 2003) except perhaps by giving the readers what they want.

Local, independent and internationally syndicated publications have to respond to the local needs and aspirational values of their readers, even at the risk of taking on issues that are sometimes socially taboo. Aun Koh (Tsui 1999) who has founded
several magazines in Singapore, believes that the media business in Asia is about ‘pushing the envelope’ and finding out ‘what you can do with the new parameters.’ Chen Yifei (Chen 2004), the successful Chinese painter, fashion designer and film director, wants the fashion magazines to teach design and aesthetics to its readers. Kevin Lee, editor and founder of _WestEast Magazine_ in Hong Kong, believe that it is important to showcase the best of the East visually and textually through high-end fashion, popular culture and investigative features (Lee 2001).

However, publishers are rightfully cautious due to the relatively small and undeveloped Asian magazine readership. In 1998, Singapore for example, the average magazine readership per issue is 50.5 per cent (adult 18+) with almost equally gendered readership (AC Neilsen 1998). In terms of frequency only 43 per cent will read a magazine over the course of a month, while 83 per cent will read a newspaper daily (Zenith Media 2003). In China, magazines only occupied 2.7 per cent of the total ad-spend market, with magazines reaching an average monthly 49 per cent of the 934 million adult (15+) population (China Statistical Yearbook 2000; World Magazine 2003). The breakdown statistics for each city was not available. In Hong Kong, the weekly magazine reach is 33 per cent of the 5.7 million adult readers, with magazines taking 13.4 per cent of the ad-spend market (2000) (World Magazine Trend 2002). When drawing together figures for comparison across countries, there is a difficulty of acquiring a base level of comparison. This is especially so in China where there are many problems associated with accuracy and collection of data.
Compared with a mature magazine market like Australia, where the monthly penetration is 90+ percent of the adult population, highlights the potential growth (World Magazine Trend 2002) of these markets. This challenge has been taken up by multi-nationals such as Hearst Magazines International to market local versions of *Cosmopolitan* and *Harper’s Bazaar* into China and Singapore respectively. Hearst president and chief operations officer, George Green, believes that the Asian magazine market is still relatively underdeveloped with large untapped niche markets in part due to a strictly policed media environment (Tsang 2001). The potential for growth is evident however, the challenge is how to conscript these readerships given the competing media landscape and varied media diets that people enjoy.

**Syndicated Publications**

Examining fashion magazine as an independent or syndicated title is one way of categorising the magazines via their production system and taking into account the ownership, funding, distribution models and media regulations. It also recognises the globalised nature of magazine publishing, distinguishing between the pioneer titles and the duplication of successful formats. The ‘lineage’ of the magazine for example, *Vogue* becomes crucial to how the content, style and scope of diversity are structured and looks in the format.

China, of course, everyone’s trying to get into China. I think there’s going to be a Chinese version of every U.S. title.

Jasja de Smedt, managing director, Primedia International (Caperton 2003).

Syndicating is a common business practice among magazine giants in Europe, the United States and the United Kingdom to access new developing markets such as
Singapore and China. Here, syndication refers to the industry practice of establishing a magazine in a new market based on an original title and format that has been largely successful and famous. It combines content produced by the original team with additional local content from the city to inject a local feel and relevance into the new title. Syndication has been a successful means of strategic business expansion, especially for the publication industry. As a business model, it is similar to franchising, as its popularity as a business model stems from its financial viability which banks on its brand (title) and formats that readers may be familiar with.

Across the three markets of Singapore, Shanghai and Hong Kong, global publishing conglomerates such as Hachette Filipacchi Magazines, Hearst Magazines International and ACP Publishing have actively syndicated local versions of titles such as Vogue, Elle, FHM, Women’s Weekly, Esquire, CosmoGIRL! and Cosmopolitan in partnership with local media outlets or publishing houses. In Shanghai, the circulation figures for Cosmopolitan China stands at 550,000 in 2004 (Borton 2004) and Esquire (Men) at 231,000 in 2001 (Tsang 2001). Hearst International launched Good Housekeeping in 2001 (Tsang 2001) but Hachette Filipacchi was already in China with its successful local version of Elle by 1996 (Faison 1996). Even publishers such as The Straits Times Group in Singapore is exporting syndicated versions of their popular publication: Her World to Thailand, China and Malaysia (SPH 2004).

Harper’s Bazaar Singapore also by Hearst International was launched in 2001 in partnership with Australian Consolidated Press (ACP). In Hong Kong, South China Morning Post (Holdings) jointly publishes Harper’s Bazaar and Cosmopolitan both
circulating at 32,000 and 48,000 copies respectively. In 2004, local Hong Kong versions of *Elle, Cosmopolitan, Marie Claire* and *CosmoGIRL!* circulated approximately around 34,500, 42,000, 22,000 and 40,000 issues respectively (Hong Kong Audit Bureau of Circulations). These magazines represent the total of officially audited fashion publications.

Despite the high profile entry to these markets, George Green, Chief Operations Office of Hearst International, points out some structural and regulative problems that hamper development in these cities. For example, in Singapore, he states ‘The Lion City may be one of the freest in terms of conducting business, but not in talking publicly about sex’ (Tsang 2001) (cited in *South China Morning Post*). For example, after lobbying for years, *Cosmopolitan* magazine was finally allowed into Singapore, but only its international title rather than a localised version (AFP 2004).

In China, the media regulatory scene is still extremely complex. Even though China has made efforts to deregulate and open up its media sector prior to and since entering WTO (World Trade Organisation) in 2001, the official protocols and procedures are still confusing for publishers. All publishers have to team up with a sponsoring government organisation in China in order to acquire a permit for publishing. So, for example, *Elle China* is sponsored by Shanghai Translation Publishing House and *Vision* by Communist Youth China. In 2005, the newest, but perhaps the most famous fashion title, *Vogue China,* was launched in partnership with China Pictorial. Furthermore, the Chinese regulative body, General Administration for Press and Publication (GAPP), stipulated that fashion magazines can only use fifty percent of materials from foreign magazines, whilst science
publications are allowed seventy percent (People's Daily 2003), thereby preventing heavy syndication. Foreign publishers are required to provide all the direct infrastructural investments and resources, but sponsoring organisations can pull out anytime, with detrimental consequences to publishers.

According to research by Fudan University, Shanghai’s publishing market, at 4.5 percent in 2003, is the fastest growing among Chinese cities. It has 9,029 periodicals in the market with only 614 owned by local publishers — also, the highest among the Chinese cities (China Daily 2003). As the pace of development increase, traditional notions of mass readerships and market have given way to notions of fragmented and niche markets. GAPP strategically informed local publishers to target their niche readers as market reforms occur or foreign publications will beat them to it (China Daily 2003). Charles McCullagh, from research house De Silva & Phillips USA (1997), supports this, stating, ‘magazines tend to support and export, different world views’, with the homogenous readership as a thing of the past. He contends that specialist markets and diverse niche readerships heat up the local and global competition, and the ones who offer consumers that diversity will succeed.

This is also the view taken by international publishing trade organisations like FIPP (International Federation of the Periodical Press), Worldwide Magazine Marketplace (WMM) and Editors & Publishers that facilitate global publishing know-how. Globalisation of the publication marketplace has not produced a homogenous fashion media, instead syndication strategies suggest that unless publications are able to offer local readers the unique different world views they crave then the magazines are not going to succeed (McCullagh 1997). Similarly, media mogul Rupert Murdoch asserts
that ‘information must be local and respectful of the culture and mores of a region’ to be successful (McCullagh 1997).

However, there is the on-going tension that exists between giving readers the content they want and what Asian governments are willing to accept. Foreign publishers especially, are essentially dealing with the production and dissemination of cultural material that offer readers the chance to look into and imagine another world. As Zhang Bohai, the vice-chairman of the China Periodicals Association states, ‘Magazines serve as a window on the world, through which foreign experiences can be learned’ (Zhang 1997). As such, cultural producers have to be cautious in cities like Singapore, Hong Kong and Shanghai if they want to continue publishing. Despite the ability of these popular commercialised mainstream publications to offer alternative worldviews in trends, lifestyle and fashion, they are limited in direct discussions of politics as the magazines must balance between sanctioned content that attracts readers yet satisfies the government.

Syndicated fashion magazines thus inhibit a global/local space and politics that is far more complex than is usually presumed. The subject of fashion is one of the most fluid and successfully translated among the global publications (McCullagh 1997) and because it is dependent on visual culture, it is able to present issues with some ambiguity. As a form of cultural consumption, it is still a private space where modern identity formations and cultural fragmentations are expressed, displayed and negotiated. While syndicated publications are to some extent foreign companies, which has offered them some protection from local governments, media commentator Jeff Sprafkin of Media Pacific Shanghai says this will not be the case
for long, citing the example of Procter & Gamble who were taken to task for making ‘unsubstantiated’ advertising claims (McCullagh 2005). Green is adamant that these syndicated magazines are not ‘western magazines’, instead ‘they are Eastern magazines with Western mothers’ (Wilson 1995) which allows them to relate directly with their readers. Also, the practice of syndication has not always been a west to east relationship — in the past, British *Elle* and *Vogue* were syndicated from the USA.

In an underdeveloped market like Singapore, where the magazine sector only accounts for 4.9 percent of all media spending as opposed to a more mature market like Hong Kong which has 10.8 percent share in 2000 (Media Convergence 2000), it indicates the market potential for growth and Green’s belief in the ease of entry if media legislation is enabling. The diversity of emerging publications in the last five years is paralleled to the growth of differing cultural identities and style tribes. An indication of some of these titles just from 1998-2002 are, *Flirt, U Magazine, Glamour, Cosmopolitan, Vogue Singapore, Harper’s Bazaar Singapore, Singapore Seventeen, FHM Singapore, Cleo*. In lifestyle magazines, *Project Eyeball, 24/7, Ante, Loaded (April 2003), Singapore Tatler, Asian Entrepreneur, Clubpets, Emanix, First, Gravity, Hardware Mag, I-Mobile, Dare, I-S, Juice, Pulp, Savvy, Simply Her, Lien, New Man, Playworks and Lifestyle*. The only international publication that is still famously banned is *Playboy* magazine.

Despite the influx of titles, many do not last the distance, and the badly hit ones are often local titles, *U Magazine* and *Flirt* ceased in November 2001 and April 2002 respectively, each lasted for approximately a year, perhaps verifying that syndicating
an international title is a much safer business strategy. As the chairman of the Yongder Hall Group, Hong Kong publishers of *Marie Claire, Esquire* and *Penthouse*, Alan Zie Yongder reiterates, ‘Creating something this well known would normally take 20 years and a lot of money. This way it takes a year or two’ (Wilson 1995). Trading on the iconic titles and a bankable brand absorbs a level of risk, but its success is still largely dependent on the relationship it establishes with its readership. Therefore, strategically selecting a syndicated title like *Harper’s Bazaar Singapore* enables this study to understand the form of business practice and the content, in contrast to the independent titles *WestEast* and *Vision*.

Although what is clearly outlined by the media proprietors’ rush to get into Asia is, unequivocally, profit and share of the world market. This thesis argues that the commercial imperative itself does not discount the social spaces opened up for identification or cultural agency in the media texts. In fact, the mainstream popular medium exists as a reflection of the broader social and cultural changes taking place in society. This is also the main argument put forward by Rachel Bowlby in *Just Looking* (1985) and *Carried Away* (2000). She states that the growth of modern democratic values such as emancipation, freedom for women and minorities in the traditional status quo is made possible through ideas of independence and self-sufficiency through the market and not hierarchical or feudal distinctions. She argues that, ‘To ‘go out’ and buy invokes a relative emancipation in women’s active role as consumers’ (1985, p.22) and this has been the historical precedent since the beginning of the industrial revolution in mid-nineteenth century.
The realisation of potential is a significant progress towards self-actualisation. The fashion magazines offer diversity of potentials — both imaginative and real — through fantasy and logic, whether it be the means to achieve a style, a certain fashionable self, or to pursue a job or a relationship. It offers these readers discursive space and narrative possibilities via images and texts, allowing readers to play, imagine and negotiate with the texts and forms of self-identification. Taking Singapore as example, the emancipation of minorities (homosexuality) and women (sex, traditional status quo) is still underway which is demonstrated by articles in *Her World* and *Harper’s Bazaar Singapore*. So, what forms of cultural articulations will we find in Harper’s? In a highly competitive market, the commercial imperative can only be maintained by offering readers cultural and social content that gives them a way to make sense of the world yet homosexuality practices are still criminal offence.

The institutional and regulatory progress in Singapore’s media scene is itself a progressive step forward for media liberalisation, and is a demonstration of larger governmental commitment to policy goals. (The issues and social context resulting in this contribution are outlined in the Singapore chapter.) An important and discernible shift in media policy has allowed the entry of more publications, such as fashion magazines. Therefore, these policy shifts directly translate to the increased uptake of discursive practices in the public sphere around the development of civil society, gender equality, minority rights, multicultural co-existence and cosmopolitan aspirations that are overall concerns central to cultural modernity’s development.
Independent Magazines

Independent titles refer to their localised independent ownership status in the context of their country and city. They are usually, owned by individuals, corporate, national or regional players like South China Morning Post (Holdings), The Straits Times or Xinhua books (unrelated to the news agency), but can also be considerably smaller enterprises like Heart Publishing (in Singapore) or WestEast Magazine (in Hong Kong). In my interviews with them, it became clear that in targeting niche markets in high-end global fashion smaller publishers do not necessarily depend on sales and subscription for their income but rather international advertising dollars. This has seen relative success with WestEast Publications, Heart Publishing, and Pan-Pacific Publishing allowing them to expand their range of titles and distribution. In addition to WestEast Magazine, WestEast Men was launched in 2005, and Heart Publishing is branching out World of Watches & Folio Men to Malaysia (Lee 2004; Koh 2005). Despite, Heart Publishing’s move into Malaysia, the full production is still conducted from Singapore where less than ten full-time staff runs the entire operation.

The success and popularity of independent fashion magazines in Asian countries emphasises the importance of addressing cultural and language differences, which until recent syndication practices was not something global media publishers paid attention to. It is partly the reason why the incumbent top selling fashion magazines in Singapore were mostly local titles such as Her World, Female, Teenage (English, Singapore) and Citta Bella, Nuyou (Mandarin, Singapore). It is telling that the top circulation have been usurped by Singapore Women’s Weekly and Cleo Singapore (Asia-Pacific Media Directory 2000). Similarly in Hong Kong, the highest circulations are recorded by local media companies such as NEXTmedia, which
publishes the tabloid *Apple Daily* (newspaper) and *Next* magazine which circulates at 145,000 (unaudited) (Asia-Pacific Media Directory 2000). Popular local titles such as *YES! Magazine* and *Jessica* are also utilising cross media platforms such as interactive websites to pull in the younger readers.

An interesting note arising from conducting searches is that information on China’s fashion and media scene dominates the result lists. In fact, most searches revolving around the news of fashion media in Asia often produce results on China. With the borders between Hong Kong and southern China being fairly porous to media flow, there has always been a fair amount of media exchange from both sides, as noted by Anthony Fung and Eric Ma (2002). However, it is not within the scope of this research to go into it here.

China’s opening up is to be expected as it potentially presents a large untapped consumer market. However, pre-Socialist China had a flourishing magazine and newspaper industry and publishing culture which will be explored in the Shanghai chapter. By the turn of the nineteenth century magazines were selling well in China (Lee and Nathan 1985), and by the 1930s, there was a diverse mix of political, entertainment and fiction periodicals and magazines (De Burgh 2003). It is important to note that such consumer and lifestyle publications are not new to Chinese readers despite their re-connection to the market economy, therefore unlike newer cities such as Singapore and Hong Kong, Shanghai has a much longer media history. Local fashion media entrepreneurs such as Huang Hong and the late Chen Yifei, serve as newer exemplars of the newly independent Chinese publishers. Hong Huang, the daughter of Mao’s translator, was educated in the U.S. but returned to China and
eventually set up a blend of independent and syndicated titles — *TimeOut Shanghai, Beijing, Seventeen* and *iLook* magazine. She was profiled in the March, 2005 edition of *Wallpaper* as part of China’s new elite (Ansfield 2005). Her motivation for *iLook* is about promoting discernment and taste cultures among Chinese consumers, such as being able to tell the genuine from the fake and the importance of dress and comportment for status-conscious women with increasing disposable incomes (Borton 2004). She also publishes *Rayli* (*Reili*), a basic ‘how-to’ magazine for its mid-twenties readership (Borton 2004). Other popular titles circulating include *Love* and *With* by Shanghai General Literature & Art Publishing House (China Daily 2003). Despite the practices of syndication and business strategies to promote independent titles, publishers and distributors alike stress the relevance of the content. Magazines are cultural mediums that only succeed by relating to their readers and given the increasing fashion titles to chose from, this is an enormous challenge.

**Selection of Fashion magazines**

> In the global brand business, fashion always leads the way. 
> (McCullagh 1997)

This section provides a background to the fashion titles of this study and the criteria applied to their selection. It also highlights some of the problems and issues that arose during interviews and the primary research process. The first magazine selected was *WestEast*, which is distributed in Brisbane, where I am conducting my research from. As a large glossy print, high-end fashion magazine *WestEast* uniquely carried fashion photography spreads of both Asian and Western models, lesser known artists, media and cultural news transversing the east west divide. It also had
Mandarin translations of the English features, which was surprising to find in Brisbane. *WestEast* is from Hong Kong.

While, I have a competent level of Mandarin, it was inadequate for the purposes of reading large amounts of Mandarin features or for performing in-depth textual analysis. Thus, I concentrated on fashion texts that were in English, or had English translations. Moreover, having worked as a freelance magazine journalist in Singapore in the early 1990s, I knew that the English publications were often perceived to be sorry seconds to the Mandarin fashion magazines, which seemed to follow the lead of ‘Asian’ fashion in Hong Kong or Japan. The Mandarin publications also tended to carry stories of regional celebrities and Chinese pop music that promoted Chinese/local culture, as opposed to the English magazines which had limited connection to Hollywood celebrities. The local English media, with the exception of *The Straits Times* newspaper, the only broadsheet, were not as successful or popular as their Mandarin counterparts. For these reasons, finding high-end English language fashion magazine with an Asian popular culture orientation while still featuring Western celebrities, global fashion culture was surprising.

The other criterion was that they had to be fashion rather than women’s magazine — the difference being that there would be more upper-end fashion photography spreads, haute couture displays, more features relating to the practices of arts, cultural productions or collaborations. Therefore, it would be *Vogue* magazine over *Women’s Weekly*, more flamboyant, aesthetically focused and consumption driven and less about everyday chores or recipes. Reflecting on research that suggested Asia’s growing affluence and appetite for consumption, it seemed useful to focus on
texts that promoted desire and cultural consumption on quality and higher-end taste. Qualities such as the visual aesthetics, the quality of photo production, fashion styling and designers end up producing a hierarchy among fashion titles.

After collating a list of the fashion titles in each city, their accessibility in terms of cost and distribution became another hurdle and criteria. For example, I only managed to subscribe to *Vision* in Shanghai after considerable effort, but even then only half of the magazines arrived, and when the Communist Youth Party took over the editorship of the title, the magazine ceased to be delivered completely. The problem of distribution and circulation is an on-going publishing industrial problem for China and its cities. Partly, they are new to a market distribution network and they are inexperienced in setting it up, and also because media laws, publishing regulations and distribution codes are still in the process of being upgrading towards a functioning market economy (Liu 1999; FriedlNet 2003). In comparison, Singapore and Hong Kong both have an established publishing and distribution system in place that services the region with printery and designing facilities catering to the publishing industry. Therefore, while the selection criteria for the fashion magazine was not restrictive or exhaustive, it concentrated on primary aspects of accessibility, language and a more sophisticated visual fashion aesthetics, and the problem of distribution had to be taken into account. In order to contextualise the chosen fashion titles in their respective markets, an overview of the emergent magazine publishing industry in Asia and the expansion strategies is outlined here.
a) Vision by Yifei Media Group Ltd

Chen Yifei was a celebrated artist who first painted portraits of Chairman Mao Zedong during the Cultural Revolution. In the 1980s he left for New York after heading the Shanghai Arts Academy. He achieved international recognition and success in New York, exhibiting in Marlborough Fine Arts gallery and selling his paintings for record prices. However, he chose to return to China in 1994; in part to return to where he belonged and the other, to improve the lifestyle of Chinese by inculcating visual culture and aesthetics to them through a series of cultural industries: fashion label (Layefe), modelling agency, graphics and furnishing design, films and fashion magazines. He especially saw that fashion magazines had a pedagogic potential — the ability to impart that ‘dream…to bring aesthetics to Chinese society’ (Beech 2002). He opined that ‘meixue’ (aesthetics) was the key value-adding component integral to improving future cultural production for China (Chen 2004) however, it needed to be inculcated and taught to the Chinese society now.

*Vision* is produced at its headquarters in Shanghai but it is distributed from Guangzhou to Beijing and Shanghai (three of the most economically affluent cities in China). *Vision* was perceived as a revolutionary publication when it was first launched, receiving a lot of media attention because it was 300 plus pages thick and was among the first high-end fashion magazines to be produced in China since it opened it doors to world trade. Content-wise, *Vision* is a highly visual (image-driven) publication that communicates through interesting and creative iconographic designs, illustrations, graphic layout and global fashion photography — marking it as a contemporary of international magazines like, *Wallpaper, Pavement, Doingbird or*
Another Magazine. This also differentiates it from other fashion magazines in the Chinese market as its target readership was not the women readers but the affluent professional, white collar design-oriented workers and arts students (Beech 2002). It is mainly in Mandarin with some English translations in the back pages.

I obtained an interview with Chen Yifei at his private art studio in TaiKang Road (artisan region of Shanghai), fourteen months before his death in April 2005. He stressed that his travels outside of China enabled him to understand what China required to become beautiful, strong and successful — and it was a sense of aesthetics and visual culture, a heightened awareness of applied aesthetics from the body to the overall urban environment. He contends that what distinguish a city as modern and cultured are its urban visual style, architecture and fashion. He believes that this visual education is a cumulative process that can be imparted through visual mediums such as fashion magazines. Therefore, Chen saw fashion magazines as a popular form of visual literacy that adds to the long term viability of national culture (Chen 2004).

The sense of national purpose underlying Vision’s establishment stems not from government instigated patriotism but arises out of a genuine concern and belief in the advancement of Chinese society. In the course of this research, Chen’s motivations are found to parallel other earlier historical publishing figures of the 1920-30s in Shanghai, as outlined in Lee Ou-fan’s (1999) Shanghai Modern. In realising this link to an earlier vibrant independent print culture of pre-Socialist Shanghai made it necessary for me to include a historical approach to analysing Shanghai’s modernity as a way of understanding this cultural continuity. For during that period, magazines
were similarly popular medium of cultural consumption capturing 1920s urban modernity and its material cultures.

Therefore, the Shanghai chapter takes into account the complex and multi-layered modernisation condition. The fashion texts are read against the context of rapid industrial and urban developments and a recognition that, historically, Shanghai has been through similar forms of modernisation. Taking this into account, it is interesting to look at how contemporary Shanghai is portrayed and captured by Vision. What pedagogic forms of ‘looking’ the fashion texts are trying to promote; the forms of visual culture that are being ‘imparted’; the aspects of the city and its modernity that are being invoked. With an appreciation of historical knowledge, can Chen be compared to the cultural modernisers of old?

b) Harper’s Bazaar Singapore by ACP Asia Pte Ltd & Hearst International Bureau

*Harper’s Bazaar (Singapore)* was launched in 2001 as a joint partnership between Australian Consolidated Press (ACP Asia) and Hearst International. Australian Consolidated Press (ACP) made an earlier entrance into the Singapore market with its successful Australian title *Women’s Weekly Singapore* in 1987, it also runs the local version of *Cleo Singapore*. ACP Asia is a subsidiary of ACP Pte Ltd which belongs to the Packer family’s PBL (Publishing Broadcasting Limited) in Australia — the country’s largest publisher of magazines. *Harper’s* entry follows a second wave of syndicated magazines entering Singapore since its initial media liberalisation in 1994. Since 1999 international syndicated titles like *Esquire, Maxim Singapore, FHM Singapore, Men’s Health, Seventeen* (Malaysia & Singapore) have
exploded onto the scene joining the widely popular Elle Singapore, Singapore Women's Weekly and Cleo Singapore. The latest to enter Singapore is the international edition of Cosmopolitan magazine in 2005.

Along with strict media ownership regulation and a reputation for censorship and media bans, the magazine publishing industry has been slowly opening up to international publications. While news and economically driven titles such as AsiaWeek, The Economist, Far Eastern Economic Review and Newsweek have long had a presence in the country, fashion and lifestyle consumer titles have been much slower to develop. This is partially due to the strict media regulatory environment, which allowed local English language staples such as Her World, Female, Teens and Teenage to corner the market. The perceptible growth of the middle class (Chua 2000) in the last decade has also cultivated demand for more diverse and sophisticated consumer titles.

In the late 1990s the growth in syndicated fashion titles demonstrated a readiness by the multinational publishing giants to woo the local readerships, changing the magazine landscape forever. In a highly competitive and brand conscious society like Singapore, Harper’s Bazaar is instantly recognised and associated with its global version, thus establishing fashion cache. The selection of a syndicated title like, Harper’s poses an interesting research contrast to the other two independent fashion titles. Even though all three fashion magazines are located in Asia and pertain to Asian cities and modernity, they represent a distinct variety from media ownership to approach, content and format and structure in fashion journalism resulting in a diverse mix of media texts to investigate.
As a syndicated title, *Harper’s* assumes the format of its global parent and utilises between 25-40 percent of syndicated fashion images and features (Wilson 1995). Its target demographic is Singaporean women between the ages 20-40, and it has achieved a circulation of approximately 25,000 in three years. The content of *Harper’s* presumes a shared common cultural interest in the social events and cultural issues of the city while keeping readers updated on global fashion stories. Its features concentrate on social investigation such as inter-racial relationships, new fashionable hot spots and up-coming local celebrities. Even a quick scan of several issues establishes that it is less interested in the subject of art/high culture and more in cultivating a lifestyle and culture of consumption than the two independent titles. *Harper’s* approaches its readers by informing them about current lifestyle trends and products, similar to that of *iLook* (China), which Hong Huang, says is all about instructing the readership in different forms of taste culture and social know-how (Borton 2004).

In a market that experiences high turnover, *Harper’s* advantage over independent new titles is its access to international publishing resources such as skills and experience in magazine management and strong financial backing. One such casualty of lack is *Fashionista*, a high-end, independent, bi-annual by Heart Publishing. *Fashionista* was initially considered for the selection of this study, but its demise after two issues made long-term comparisons impossible. Nevertheless, as an existing niche publisher the interviews with Heart Publishing demonstrated how their long term survival in the Singapore mediascape is about tapping into niche readership markets.
The Singapore chapter draws from a wider range of fashion magazines than the rest of the cities partly because they were accessible but mainly because *HBS* was responding to a wider governmental discourse on sex and cosmopolitanism that benefited from wider cross comparisons with other fashion titles. In fact, given the context of the strict media environment in Singapore, this research asks what form of looking, acting and feeling are sanctioned and promoted by *Harper’s*? What forms of cultural issues and identities of the city will be raised and interrogated? How will it balance the media regulations and demands of readership? As a syndicated title, how will *Harper’s* demonstrate its Asian-ness to its local readership? Will the overriding presence of governmental discourse dominate the main content or how will as a key site of such discursive representations struggle against normative content?

c) WestEast Magazine by WestEast Publishing Ltd

In 2001 Kevin Lee, a young twenty-something fashion journalist turned independent editor and publisher, launched his first magazine, *WestEast (WE)*, in Paris. As a fashion journalist in Paris for Taiwan *Fashion TV*, Lee decided to start a fashion magazine from Asia about Asians, selecting Hong Kong as his base of operation. As it later turns out, there were strategic marketing and cultural reasons behind Lee’s decisions to be based in Hong Kong and having its launch in Paris. *WE* was primarily chosen because its fashion texts exhibited an array of fusion and hybridity of the greatest melange between Western and Eastern concepts, and has a visually fluent style. The inclusion of *WE* as one of the independent fashion texts provides an opportunity to analyse a unique fashion magazine in Hong Kong.
Lee stated that his motivation to publish a fashion magazine began in Paris when he noticed that Asians seemed to lag behind in the art, design and fashion industries. His idea was to produce a high profile fashion magazine that showcased current Asian culture, fashion and celebrities, righting the cultural flow of fashion texts arriving from the West (Lee 2004). As such, *WE* incorporates a high-end, at times avant-garde style of fashion photography by renowned photographers and models, with features that range from emerging Asian ‘indie’ artists, Asian popular culture, travel in Asia, fashion in Asia, architecture and Asian traditions. While it includes Western icons such as Linda Evangelista, Kylie Minogue and Peter Jackson, the early issues of *WE* concentrated on Asian celebrities and icons such as Japanese pop princess Ayumi Hamasaki, Hong Kong actress Gigi Leung and then emerging Chinese star Zhang Ziyi.

Beyond fashion photography and celebrities, *WE* also profiles popular artists such as Michael Lau a creator of collectible Asian figurines and Lynn (a Chinese fashionista from New York). In doing so, *WE* suggestively presents and addresses the Asian region as one cohesive text, culturally bridging and fostering a two-way exchange in the flow of popular texts between East and West. This preliminary observation recalls a statement by Christopher Cheng, the chairman of Trade Development Council at the Hong Kong Fashion Week, Fall/Winter 2003 cited in Bharat Textile trade report. He states that Hong Kong is still the major stepping stone to the Chinese mainland (BharatTextile 2002) and, to a large degree, China is becoming the market for Hong Kong products, investments and skills. Therefore, does *WestEast* magazine (*WE*) parallel and reflect Hong Kong’s position in the region and, perhaps, as a global city? If so, what does it tell us about Hong Kong? What aspects of the city is
being promoted through its texts? And what forms of cultural modernity is being negotiated? Looking within the city, what forms of looking, acting and feeling are promoted through *WE*?

After a year, *WE* had managed to establish good connections at the local level. The publication received plenty of media recognition and accolade from *South China Morning Post*, a leading newspaper for Hong Kong and the region. In one such media report, *South China Morning Post (SCMP)* pointed out that *Generasian*, *WE*’s fourth issue with Japanese pop princess Ayumi Hamasaki on the cover, has seemingly been copied by Sharp’s new advertisement, commenting, ‘It might be Hamasaki facing the ad, but what’s that they say about imitation being the sincerest form of flattery?’ (Hilditch 2003). Lee is often profiled in the social pages, even making it as one of the ‘best dressed’ bachelors in the city’s fashion awards.

*WE*’s visual fluency and determination to showcase an alternative popular visual aesthetics combined with its links to global talents and circulation makes it an interesting magazine for analysis. Furthermore, as an English language magazine with selected Mandarin translations, the content straddles an indeterminate position, veering between East and West, local and global, ‘indie’ and the popular, at different times. In linking the *WE* texts to the city, it is necessary to take into account Hong Kong’s current political and social climate as it negotiates its new-found identity as part of mainland China.

As such, all the three magazines and cities are approached differently in each chapter, this is because rather than bringing a fixed structure to the reading of the
fashion texts, I would like the different issues in the fashion texts to be articulated against the context of imaging the city. By that, I mean that instead of looking for imposing a set of thematic concerns and issues in the fashion magazines (which is a usual method of textual analysis), the fashion texts are read within the wider context of the politics of its city, taking into account its industry background, social history and cultural issues. This approach picks up fashion discourses (visual and written) that correspond to the events, issues and development accumulated by the politics of the city, its media and fashion industry, and governmental and public discourses. By doing so, what is reflected and what emerges from the analysis of fashion journalism will tap into the larger cultural development and experiential modernity.

**Conclusion**

The three fashion titles have a shared commitment to visual and aesthetics through their layout and images, yet they also occupy a variety of positions in the fashion magazine marketplace, trading on different issues, representations and readerships. Instead of approaching the fashion texts and the cities as structured case studies, this research takes a more qualitative and explorative interrogation of the fashion texts by focusing on what they ‘say’ about their city and their cultural developments.

Each chapter focuses primarily on one magazine in each city over approximately a year and a half. Other fashion magazines and local media will be cross referenced where required, to provide contrast or comparisons. However, primarily, this thesis is interested in the imaging and discursive construction of each city through its fashion magazines and within the context of its economic and cultural developments. The
analysis of the fashion texts are triangulated against current issues and the historical background of the cities to ensure that the textual analysis is anchored.

This chapter and the last have demonstrated that the industrial, commercial platform may be less an impediment to democratisation and cultural development than is traditionally believed. As products of industrial modernity, these fashion texts will be read as cultural media, allowing us to understand the forms of imaginings, reflections and aspirations captured by their cities.
CHAPTER THREE: fashion, journalism and the city in modernity

Introduction

Up to this point, modernity has been addressed as the condition through which progress and development in Asia is occurring. The last two chapters introduced the context of the three cities, the publications and the research approach taken for this investigation. This chapter discusses how the concepts of fashion, journalism and the city connect to modernity, and more importantly, how they inform this research. Clearly, the five concepts raised in chapter two are, in themselves extensive fields of study and their relationship to each other are drawn together to frame the context of this investigation.

This research proposes to examine the practice of fashion journalism in the three cities of Shanghai, Singapore and Hong Kong as a means of understanding the cultural push and modernisation they are undergoing. To investigate the negotiations undertaken by the fashion magazines we first need to understand how these different urban phenomena connect and respond to modernity. This chapter examines the literature on why the city is an optimal platform to study modernity, and further, how the consumption of fashion and journalism are at the same time, individual practice and engagement with modern city life. With the literature demonstrating why fashion and journalism are promoters of cultural modernity in these cities. Lastly, the uses of
fashion magazines and fashion writing as a genre of journalism are explained within the three fashion titles of this research.

This next section examines the context of the growing emphasis for culture and creative industries in the modernisation of the Asian cities. However, before that, the issue of Asian and Western modernity needs to be briefly highlighted. The current model of modernity is understood to be European inflected due to Europe’s earlier uptake and development of modernisation (Hartley 1996, p.33; Donald 1999, p.xi). Asian academics such as Ong Aihwa (1996, pp.60-62) worry about the danger of using ‘Western’ concepts to investigate Asian practices. They fear that it will further embed Eurocentric notions of modernity in Asia and perpetuate Asian modernity as a failed replica that cannot match up. In pushing for Asian culture and modernity to be recognised as different and not ‘wrong’, other academics have raised the idea of Asia as an ‘alternate’ modernity (Iwabuchi 2001). While being mindful of this desire for cultural assertion and claim of difference, this chapter aims to situate the historical examination of the cultural experiences in the city and mediation by fashion and journalism within the context of the Asian cities and texts.

The Context of Asian Modernising

In the context of China’s industrialisation, one of the many headlines on Shanghai led with, ‘Shanghai working to Reclaim Reputation as World Fashion Centre’ (Mickleburgh 1995). The vice-mayor, Jiang Yiren, stressed that Shanghai needed to ‘catch up’ with the rest of the world and resume its place as a global leader in the fashion industry. This article is one of many, illustrating the nationalist sentiments often evoked in cultural contexts and not reserved to China’s political leaders. Chen
Yifei, the founder of Vision, recognised that the leap from manufacturing to culture and the information economy is already taking place in China, stating: ‘Our society is moving ahead. It used to be that people worked and spent money to live, but times are different. People are spending money and getting a certain lifestyle’ (Au 2002).

To Chen, a modern aesthetics is central to cultural production where design and creativity are key elements in the new economy.

Hu Angang (2002, pp.240-245), a Professor of Public Management at Tsinghua University, states that there is huge motivation for China to improve and ‘catch up’ with other countries. He uses the terms ‘latecomer’ and ‘catching-uppers’ in referring to China’s progress towards modernisation. He argues that at three points in modern history, the USA, Japan and the East Asian economies have each caught up with global developments by relying primarily on technology, learning from others and social motivation. China belongs to this fourth wave of catching-uppers, and in terms of GDP growth rate it has exceeded that of the East Asian economic miracle. It only took China seventeen years to structurally shift its economic base from agriculture to manufacturing, while it took Japan 80 and the USA 50 years (Hu 2002, pp.246-7).

This speed of change indicates a process of leap-frogging or hyper-modernisation in China, where the processes of industrialisation are accelerated. The access to technological, communications and informational tools has allowed it to draw on international experience and shortened the time taken to achieve the current level of industrial development. It has progressed from agriculture to manufacturing from the end of the Mao era to the opening of China in 1978, and China has rapidly learnt to integrate and tap into the world economy’s demand (Hu 2002). Since the late 70s,
China has moved so quickly through each step of industrial development that it is simultaneously dealing with issues of manufacturing (such as the regulation of environmental pollution and sewage systems) alongside the emphasis to develop cultural industries and production (People's Daily 2002; Lorenz 2005; Bezlova 2006). This hyper-modernisation conflates and reshuffles the timeline for progress so that cultural production skills like creativity, innovation and design — often features of advanced economies — demand attention simultaneously with basic infrastructural necessities like water and sewage.

Living in Brisbane in the 1990s, I often overheard Chinese university students exclaiming that they could pick out the Chinese nationals by their clothes. They stood out because of their sense of fashion and the choice of colours and cut. A decade later, you heard pronouncements that the Chinese nationals had learnt fast; their dress sense reflected a more contemporary modern aesthetic — they dressed like everyone else, if not better! Even at such a microcosmic level of comparison, this anecdote suggests that China is changing and adapting very quickly and so are its citizens. Therefore it is important to ask: how is China doing it? and, what are the experiences for the consumer-citizens? Shanghai as the exemplary commercial site of urban imaginings in China is an excellent city from which to investigate this shift.

In terms of modernisation, Shanghai is at the tail end of the three cities. Hong Kong is by far the most culturally liberal and developed in terms of diversity, tolerance and media laws (Yusuf and Nabeshima 2003). Singapore, like Hong Kong, is industrially developed with modern infrastructures, services and is part of the international banking network. They have in common industrial economies with a skilled and
highly educated population. However, politically, Singapore is still holding tight to regulative mechanisms on civil liberties, which is outlined in chapter five. In Hong Kong, Christine Loh, CEO of Civic Exchange, a Hong Kong based think-tank, argues that a recent surge in political protest is about people wanting to guarantee their cultural way of life, personal liberties and freedom, through governance (Loh 2004). Their problem lies in redefining and repositioning their sense of cultural production in relation to the new information economy. As indicated by Venturelli (2005), the rapid shift to the new economy demands that the issue of cultural production in many countries be addressed.

The growing volume of literature on creative and culture industries, suggests that design, innovation and creativity are important cultural inputs to creative production. One of these authors, Richard Florida (2002, p.283) argues that the production in design and innovation has to start in a creative environment involving experimentation and an open, tolerance to a diversity of lifestyles. Yet, creative influences and visually rich outputs are arguably embedded in forms of cultural consumption. The new fashion magazines in these cities are prime showcases of the latest and trendiest range of global/local design, and cultural displays of goods and services. The ubiquitous presence of fashion magazines in the city mirrors the growing power of the consumer, signalling an interest and desire to pursue fashion, beauty and lifestyle as a means of becoming modern, both culturally and visually. It is thus possible to see within these texts, a form of cultural development – one that reveals the character of Asian modernity and also its challenges.
This section has outlined a general account of Asian modernisation, highlighting modernity as a condition and historical process. Before moving on to assess the particularities of Asian modernity, the next section will underline how the literature in city, fashion and journalism connect to that of modernity and its applications for this thesis.

**Characteristics of Modernity**

In *The Gender of Modernity*, Rita Felski argues that the scope of modernity is too large and its histories and concepts too wide to be examined or sufficiently addressed within any one study. Felski (1995, p.15) states:

... I am sceptical of those writing which equate the entire modern period with a particular and narrowly defined tradition of intellectual thought stretching from Kant to Marx (as if several centuries of history could be reduced to the writings of a handful of philosophers!) in order to celebrate the emergence of postmodern ambiguity and difference against modern homogeneity and rationality.

Felski’s study is directed at the representations of feminism in modernity, one that has been neglected and undermined due to totalising and reductionist discourses but she makes three integral points that are relevant to this research. First, being the immense size of modernity, (temporally and spatially) which present difficulties in its study and scope of analysis. Second, that modernity is far more heterogenous and complex phenomenon than the conflated world view presented in most accounts. Third, Felski notes that the experiential and the register of emotive responses need to be acknowledged:

Within the specific context of late-nineteenth-century Europe, for example, appeals to science, rationality, and material progress coexisted with Romantic invocations of emotion, intuition, and authenticity as well as alongside self-conscious explorations of the performative and artificial status of identity and the inescapable metaphoricity of language. Rather than inscribing a homogenous cultural consensus, the discourses of modernity reveal multiple and conflicting responses to processes of social change. (1995, p.15)
What Felski points out is that the development of emotional, intuitive and self-conscious (reflexive) accounts were also important aspects of the Enlightenment, not just the promotions of rationality and appeals to progress that are privileged in most accounts of modernity (see also (Bennett 2001). The recognition of this experiential and emotional aspect of modernity is key to understanding how the engagement with modern processes such as fashion draws on such emotive responses. By understanding the developments of modernity as uneven, heterogenous and even paradoxical (Berman 1983, p.15) and emphasising the underlying processes (its condition) that have helped to shape cultural modernity, an examination of modernity is enabled that stems from a culturally different space and time, producing a different set of questions for the Asian cities of this thesis.

Thus, this research approaches modernity as a historical, rather than as a philosophical or ideological category, taking into account the different consequences as products of modernisation. In his study of journalism and modernity, John Hartley also proposes that modernity is a condition and an ideology (Hartley 1996, p.33). This historical condition is the platform on which fashion, journalism and the city are bound together as phenomenon of modernity.

Political modernity is often seen to be the most important characteristic of modernity, and it is popularly imagined at the site of the French Revolution (Popkin 1995; Hartley 1996). However, the attitudes, values and characteristics representing modernity, such as markets, money, technology, the arts, and the growth of nation-states while occurring as an overriding phenomenon can be segmentised to represent different fields of study, which divides the mammoth task presented to scholars of
modernity. Modernity can be loosely subdivided into industrial, political, cultural, aesthetic and literary modernity, among others. This categorisation is observed in studies on modernity in sociology and anthropology (Anthony Giddens, Mike Featherstone, Jonathan Friedman), literary and aesthetics (Georg Simmel, Walter Benjamin, Rita Felski) and political theory (J.S. Mill, Tom Paine) to name a few.

The industrial process tends to dominate in accounts of modernisation as overt acts of destruction, but nonetheless, it is an important aspect of modernisation and one among the many as shown by these conceptual divisions. Thus, the divisions provide a useful analytical tool for isolating perspectives and discourses of study. Felski (1995, p.13) describes the modernisation project as a ‘complex constellation of socio-economic phenomena’ that occurred around Western development, as exemplified by the British Industrial Revolution. These phenomena have since broadened their reach around the globe as ‘scientific and technological innovation, industrialization of production, rapid urbanization, ever expanding capitalist market, development of nation-states and so on’ (p.13). The industrial and economic development and expansions of cities over the last 400 years of human history is symptomatic of this process of modernisation. Similarly, while the modernisation of Shanghai, Singapore, and Hong Kong are first observed at the industrial and economic categories, their present attempts to develop their cultural sectors can be seen as a bid to further progress their cities.

Despite this cultural turn, initial development still begins with the industrial platform on which these three cities are now thriving. The work of sociologist Anthony Giddens is helpful in understanding this progression. Giddens sees the market
economy as shorthand for modernity and as central to the economic order. He perceives ‘modernity as the creation of a modern economic order that is capitalistic in nature’ (1998, p.94) which is identifiably different from preceding societies. Its main difference is essentially in its preoccupation and dynamic orientation towards the future. This is demonstrated especially in the development of Shanghai since China’s opening up. Developing a market as opposed to a socialist system of organisation and distribution of resources has a far-reaching impact on the conditions and structure of everyday life of its inhabitants. The move to a market economy has allowed Shanghai to re-industrialise, engage in trade, and more recently become one of the first cities in China where consumption and the development of services drive the economy.

Giddens and Pierson outline three main ideas which they believe are inherent in any modern society (Giddens and Pierson 1998). First, that society is influenced by a set of attitudes towards the world, believing the world is open to the transformation of human intervention. Second, that modern society comprises a complex set of economic institutions, especially industrial production and the market economy, which are understood to be free. The idea of the free market was argued 1776 by Adam Smith in his book *The Wealth of Nations*. His book outlined the notions of free enterprise, efficient use of resources and ‘the invisible hand’ of the market, tying these economic endeavours to human nature. These ideas continue to influence contemporary economics. In cities like Shanghai and Singapore, economic sustainability and commercial independence are not only demonstrative of modernisation, they also legitimise their polity’s claim to political sovereignty. This taps into a debate that argues that industrial marketplace can successfully co-exist
with semi-authoritarian government as exemplified in Singapore and China explored in chapters four and five.

Anthropologist Daniel Miller (1987, p.196) points out that the assumptions that authoritarian regimes are not compatible with capitalism, or that mass consumption is only supportive of capitalism, are flawed, as these cities have demonstrated. Authoritarian regimes realise the potential of media and culture very differently. The semi-authoritarian-ruled cities of Singapore and Shanghai, exhibit signs of advanced industrialised economies yet take a different approach to media and communication technologies to Western democratic countries. Consumption needs to be seen within this context

Third, political developments of modern societies are built around a range of political instruments that promote the establishment of nation-states and popular democracy. Giddens points out that the creation of nation-states was brought on by modernity’s process of instigating changes at every level of social life. These changes are far more significant in light of the broader study of social modernity. He suggests that modernising tensions such as progress set against tradition and custom (ritual) often result in the retreat of tradition paving the way for new forms of knowing and the construction of modern life.

The dislocation and discontinuity from traditional ways of view and life are symbolic of the gradual dismantling of customs in favour of the establishment of new social and cultural ethics, codes andbehaviours (see also (Habermas 1983; Calinescu 1987, p.48; Giddens and Pierson 1998). This temporal break is a central aspect of
modernisation. Elizabeth Wilson (1985, p.60) argues that the breakdown of traditional hierarchies initiated the way for the rise of the bourgeoisie and for fashion to become a social marker of class and identity rather than as a fulfilment of sumptuary duties. As we shall see in Chapter Six, these characteristics of modernisation are rehearsed and witnessed in the pages of WE magazine (Hong Kong) as it explores and captures the rhythm and speed of the change in China, from the images of architectural urban renewals to the traditional ways of life in Shaolin Temple, Tibet and in villages. The shift towards an emphasis on modern attires and dress in Chinese cities is captured in Vision, which allows us to observe modernisation in progress and their responses.

City as a Site of Modernisation

The city is often conceptualised by social theorists as the embodiment of modernity, with all its modernising tendencies, where ‘the metropolis [exists as] one of the key sites for the changing modes of experiencing modernity’ (Frisby, 1986, p.5; see also, Donald, 1999, p.44). The modern city is mostly understood to be a porous multi-faceted subject with multi-dimensional social, political, industrial, cultural and philosophical edges. Some literature parallels this modernisation as also a sociological means of control, therefore the city looms as a larger ‘socio-biological’ object that represents the larger body polity (Sennett 1994, p.23), or a metaphorical discourse related to social disease which James Kay-Shuttleworth sought to find a cure for (Donald 1999, pp.28-31). Or in Friedrich Engels’ case the social is political – he argued that social spaces were manipulated for the outcome of power and profits (Engels 1892).
While these different means of examining the city provide useful ways of thinking about and through the city, we can draw a general consensus that the city is positioned here as a text. A text that can be examined and analysed in its parts or its totality, and a text that represents a certain level of transparency which can be uncovered. Thus, in juxtaposing the fashion magazines to its city, we can imagine one text in dialogue with the other and the texts in a fluid exchange. Thus, when James Donald proposes that the modern city imposes a way of seeing and imagining itself, arguing that:

Juxtaposing the category of the city with the concept of modernity is to ask about an experience, a repertoire of ways of acting and feeling that is culturally and historically bounded. (Donald 1999, p.xi)

Donald’s analysis provides a framework to consider, how the city can be variously represented and captured through different mediums. In positing the city as a site of modern spectacles and transformations, Donald situates the city as a text that has been ‘made known’ and understood via different means of excavation. He proposes six categories or ‘professions’ that have been influential in producing and conceptualising the city: the flâneur, the administrator, the planner, the artist, the photographer, and the detective.

Donald’s textual approach to the city takes into account how different varieties of historical text have influenced the way the city is imagined and articulated. These texts form a body of work related to the city, ranging from public policy documents, statistics, documentary photographs to paintings and poetry. They ‘teach us’ ways of experiencing and, thus, expressing and responding to the city. Donald draws on the novel (specifically, *Bleak House*, *Little Dorrit* and *Our Mutual Friend*) to articulate an experience of how the city, its urban spaces and the relationship of the citizens to
each other. Donald contends that the novel locates the readers in a culturally specific
time and space which allows the exploration of contemporary relations within the
city to occur, adding that: ‘The novel teaches us how to see the city, and how to
make sense of it, it defines the co-ordinates for our imaginative mapping of urban
space’ (p.2).

Yet, Donald fails to include the novelist in his list of six ‘professions’ which he
nominates as being central to the shaping of our experiences and responses to the
city. Along this line of argument, it would be appropriate to also consider the
practice of journalism and fashion as being integral to our understanding and
experiences of the modern city and its urban image. Journalism is the lifeline of
urban information and its circulation, it structures what the public reads, knows and
how it is known. Similarly, the public appearance of private self are a key aspect of
negotiation in the city – the social, economic and cultural consequence of fashion
have been well noted by many theorists. Thus, in the context of this research,
fashion, journalism and the city are connected as key modernising agents through
which to experience and understand the development of cultural modernity.

Specifically, fashion, journalism and the city invoke a way of seeing that potentially
affects how the urban space is imagined and mapped, one that is influential in
shaping how the public imagines its social relations and city to be. The use of
imaginary here does not suggest that it does not exist; rather, it refers to the
potentially alternative ways of visualising and looking. As such, this particular ‘way
of seeing’ is coterminous with an implied sense of didacticism which the city instils
in its citizens, which modern experiences through looking, acting and feeling are
important key means of re-imagining. Yet, what are these modern experiences and how do they differ from the pre-modern? Furthermore, how does the city engender such modern notions?

Experiences of Modernity

Within the context of early Europe, accounts of the experience of modernity focused on its constant newness and change. This social experience of the ‘new’ is central in Marshall Berman’s account of modernity in *All That is Solid Melts into Air*, a Marxist critique and exploration of the paradoxes of modernity. Berman emphasises the universality of modernity stating (1983, p.15):

> it is an … … experience of space and time, of the self and others, of life’s possibilities and perils – that is shared by men and women all over the world today … Modern environments and experiences cuts across all boundaries of geography and ethnicity, of class and nationality, of religion and ideology: in this sense, modernity can be said to unite mankind (p.15).

Thus, the experience of modernity is a unifying force on contemporary life as it potentially cuts across all segments and organisation of social life, eradicating differences and establishing its own legacies and social codes. Yet, what exactly does this new environment do, what are the new experiences associated with modernity? More importantly, what are the ways in which modernity can be experienced?

We may turn to Charles Baudelaire, a poet and essayist who was concerned with the exploration of this ‘new’ in mid-nineteenth century France. His explorations concentrated on the paradoxes and ironies produced in the modernisation of society. He wrote in *The Painter of Modern Life* (1863): ‘By modernity, I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable. Every old master has had his own modernity’ (p.12). This quote
has been used in disciplines of modern art to architecture, fashion to philosophy and visuality — fuelling decades of debate on the dualism of modernity. At the heart of this debate is the juxtaposition of the eternal with the ephemeral (and temporal) which is arguably, the double-edged condition of modernity.

Baudelaire believed that the visual representations of modern life in art could capture the essence of modernist impulses inherent in social and economic life. He saw that art, the representational medium of its time, could distil the essence of the moment while capturing its permanent trajectory because he contends that ‘every age had its own gait, glance, and gesture’ (Baudelaire 1995, p.12). Thus, visual representation captures this temporal socio-economic change. Baudelaire’s work contributes two relevant aspects; the first being that a paradox and dualism of modernity is contained in the concept of the eternal and the transient (which is exemplified in fashion and explored later). Second, the concepts of ‘looking, acting and feeling,’ highlighted in chapters one and two as strategies for exploring modernity in the fashion texts, are similar to Baudelaire’s exploration of the categories of glance, gait and gesture. These categories are similarly concerned with interrogating the performances of urban negotiation. In the fashion texts, the promotion of specific forms of looking, acting and feeling are ways of experiencing and constructing social identities and self-presentation. Thus, the question of how modernity feels or is experienced in the Asian context is not new, but a reconfiguration of the same question in modernity’s timeline.

In Simmel’s application of Baudelaire’s work to *The Psychology of Fashion* (1895) and *The Philosophy of Fashion* (1905), he saw fashion as a demonstration of the
modernising ethos. He contends that ‘fashion is the continuous announcement of newness [that] always disturbs and destroys that which is already in existence’ (Frisby and Featherstone 1997, p.14). The passing away of each fashion era paves the way for incoming ‘new’ fashion while denoting the demise of the incumbent. Thus the passing away of 1960’s fashion while demonstrating its temporality, ironically capture those styles as representing the ‘60s – thus achieving an eternal status.

Fashion can be conceived as the visual and aesthetic representation of modern social life, which as Simmel as argues is, ‘forms of human expressions which can capture the fleeting nature of inner experiences’ (Frisby 1986, p.47). This personal expression arguably links the response of the inner self to the modern public environment, which Simmel sought to investigate and measure:

The essence of modernity as such is psychologisms, the experiencing and interpretation of the world in terms of the reactions of our inner life and indeed as an inner world …(Frisby 1986, p.46)

This research is conversely interested in this issue from another angle, how the city and its modernity can be understood through its fashion texts, what forms of experiences are promoted? Are they social, cultural, or political? How is the city and modern life represented in the fashion magazines?

Simmel argued that visual representations and expressions can potentially shift the ways in which we think about the contradictions and paradoxes produced in modernity’s progress (1986, p. 47), thus opening up new ways of resolving them. It is therefore my contention that fashion magazines belong to this contemporary visual and social expression, and they play an important role shaping readers’ ways of
thinking about their modern experiences and contradictions. Magazines capture, reproduce and juxtapose modern social dilemmas, issues and self-representations. As a hybrid medium, the magazine encapsulates fashion’s ethos while retaining the form and functions of journalism practice. Concerned with the communication of social and cultural life in the metropolis, fashion journalism is an intensely modern media form that pedagogically informs and instructs the modern public.

Simmel’s study systematically works through the conditioning effects of the city on the individual. He posits that time, space, money, technology and attitudes all coalesce on the individual as systematic modes of engagement that tempers and disciplines the individual (Simmel 1969, pp.51-55). Dave Harvey similarly states that the arrival of modern mass transit systems (1985, p.9), ‘profoundly changed the rhythm and form of urban life’, for example, by introducing the morning journey into work impacts on everyday life through its imposition of a sense of uniformity in space and time. Within this same line of argument, Berman contends that, ‘the modernisation of the city at once inspires and enforces the modernisation of its citizens’ souls’ (1983, p.147). This research however, differs from that of Simmel and Berman in arguing that, the conditioning of consciousness in modern cities did not produce a homogenous effect. Rather, other urban forms like journalism, as a primary form of information for the public, also contribute to the shaping of public views and individual opinions. Fashion too plays a central role in allowing individuals to choose whether to fit in (or become anonymous) through normative dressing or to stand out in the city. Donald sums it up by stating, ‘The city teaches us the arts, the techniques and the tactics of living in the present’ (1999, p.7). The city
by engaging with practices of fashion and journalism promotes and instruct in the individual negotiation of this environment.

What is advocated through Baudelaire’s and Donald’s argument in chapter one is assuming a tactile and sensorial approach to investigating modernisation in the city. Our girl (from chapter one) engages with the city by incorporating an active and transformative gaze that encourages others to look at her, even as she reinvents herself through their gaze. It is possible to imagine that she is the girl in the features of different fashion magazines across different countries — looking modern in a variety of ways. If so, how are her experiences as a modern subject shaped by the fashion media and expressed through her fashion? Furthermore, does ‘looking modern’ feel the same everywhere? At an abstract level, the girl becomes an expression of the culmination of the desire and the fixation of our gaze. Yet the transformations of desire are constantly tempered by the instinct of differentiation and conformity. To fully understand her (our) experiences in the city, we have to understand her social expressions reflected and captured through fashion magazines and circulated in the city. This relationship between consuming fashion and journalism in the city can be illustrated through Mica Nava’s exploration of cosmopolitan modernity at its developmental point.

**Cosmopolitan Modernity**

Mica Nava’s *Cosmopolitan Modernity: Everyday Imaginaries and the Register of Difference* (2002) analyses the experience of cosmopolitanism during the turn of the twentieth century in London. She argues that this modern cosmopolitanism is built on the platform of commerce, popular consciousness and the consumption of the
subjective register of difference within a largely conservative Anglo-centric, colonial
culture. Centring her analysis on Gordon Selfridge, the owner of Selfridges
department store, Nava examines how the opera, *Arabian Nights* caught the popular
imagination of the public, thus subsequent sale of ‘exotic’ artefacts began a
consumption of ‘racial’ difference in Selfridges which illustrated an allure of
‘difference’ fuelling the imaginative consequences of cosmopolitan ideals. Nava
demonstrates that the consumption of popular culture through the commercial
mainstream are central means to the way modern society imagines itself and how
difference is transformed to an ‘exotic’ allure.

It is obvious that Nava’s conceptualisation of cosmopolitanism is qualitatively
different from the politicised notions of cosmopolitanism taken up by Ulf Hannerz,
Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy. Hannerz, for example, defines
cosmopolitanism in terms of its intellectual potential, arguing that it is ‘an
intellectual and aesthetic stance of openness towards divergent cultural experiences,
a search for contrasts’ (Hannerz 1990, p.239). However, he excludes tourists,
migrant workers and exiles of oppression as necessarily possessing this intellectual
disposition presenting an intellectuality that is privileged and located as a minority.
Nava argues that this version of cosmopolitanism is built around the exclusive form
of cosmopolitan privilege and mainly informs a male identity, as it discounts the
variety of emotional responses that cosmopolitanism is often located in.

Nava contends that cosmopolitans do not acquire the cultural competencies to
negotiate within new systems without becoming open to new experiences or
remaining culturally and emotionally detached. Gender and social privilege are
markers of traditional paradigms of class and status in society and Hannerz’s
definition of cosmopolitan suggests a model of elitism which stands in opposition to
cosmopolitanism that is popular, vernacular, commercially open and increasingly
defined by women. In fact, Nava’s cosmopolitanism differs markedly from
Hannerz’s intellectuality that denies the reality of commercial impulses, the lure of
the aesthetically beautiful, the inspiration and agency that is fired by attraction and
the pleasure of the consumption of new lifestyles, foreign food and changes in
fashion and body adornments as promoted through fashion magazines.

Instead of an intellectual stance, she argues that the modern cosmopolitan
consciousness needs to be tied to a ‘subtle emotional and unconscious register,’
where the irrational is as important as the intellectual in calibrating cultural and
emotional encounters with the new (Nava 2002, p.89). The idea of the ‘irrational’ in
this context does not suggest a rejection of rationality, but rather recognises the
experiential aspects of modernity, configured by a host of dichotomous intermixing
between rationality and non-rationality, affective and intellectual, the particular and
the general. These opposing views are both necessarily part of the modernist
experience, one prescribing modernity as ‘a rational autonomous subject’ and
‘absolutist, unitary conception of truth’ and the other as ‘a culture of rupture, marked
by historical relativism and ambiguity’ (Calinescu 1987, p.91). In fact, among the
literature surveyed on cosmopolitanism, Mica Nava remains one of the few feminist
writers to argue that personal subjective and emotional responses are valid ways of
examining modernity.
Yet, the negotiation between the global and the local is marked by a relatively fluid and dynamic response that is emotional and necessarily personal. This involves appropriating what may be a global fashion trend for localised consumption and display of the self. Thus, implicit in the context of the cosmopolitan experience is a global-local dichotomy. Cosmopolitanism works within a global context to enact a local response. This stems from the origins of cosmopolitanism, especially during the early twentieth century, where sites of cosmopolitanism were often urban spaces where the marginalised, migrant and diverse communities gathered such as Jane Jacobs’ description of the uses of sidewalks in Boston in the early 50s (Jacobs 1961) or, as Arjun Appadurai argues, Bombay before it became Mumbai (Appadurai 2000). Consumption is an important marker of all these accounts of change in the city,

Nava’s work on cosmopolitan modernity is specifically relevant to chapter five in this thesis, where the promotion of cosmopolitanism in Harper’s Bazaar is read against the national interests and rhetoric of Singapore’s incumbent government. Her work also re-emphasises two central arguments of this thesis as a whole: the importance of emotional and subjective responses to modernity as part of the negotiation of the experiential; and the contention that consumption, popular culture and the industrial platform are central to the configuration and instigation of such identifications.

This section explored modernisation through the city and argued that it is important to recognise the experiential and emotive responses as ways to understanding cultural modernity. The question of how the city could be experienced via looking, acting and feeling will be taken further in the next section on journalism and modernity.
Journalism and Modernity

The research context has addressed the city within modernity, as a site and platform for urban manifestations and transformations. In recognising that the city is also a text that is legible and thereby knowable, this section explores how the practice and history of journalism contributes to modernisation in the city. This section visits modernity through one of its central tools of promotion — journalism and its impetus for promoting change. First, I look at journalism’s revolutionary and civilising impetus, drawing on John Hartley’s work, and then James Carey’s discussion of the consciousness rousing impulse of journalism. In the second section, fashion journalism is situated and conceptualised within the context of cultural modernity.

Journalism is the communicative system whereby modern information and stories are exchanged. Hartley argues that this is because journalism is the ‘textual system’ (p.32) whereby ideas are popularised and communicated to the public and therefore, journalism takes up the struggle to communicate issues, ideas and developments central to modernity. From the outset, Hartley contends in Popular Reality that journalism is central to the instituting of modern democracies as, ‘Journalism is caught up in all the institutions, struggles and practices of modernity’ (1996, p.34). Thus, Hartley’s exploration of the dialectic between journalism and modernity begins by understanding that modernity is about ‘democracy, middle-classness, freedom, equality, reason, virtue, modernization, comfort, utility, secularism and popular sovereignty’ (1996, p.79). It is conceivable to understand that as political journalism is a process and a product of political modernity, it is concurrently possible, to examine fashion journalism as a process and product of cultural modernity.
**Journalism and the rise of political consciousness**

Media and culture theorists, Jeremy Popkin, John Hartley, Tim Harris and Pierre Rétat all emphasise that journalism and modernity are indispensable to each other, and especially to the inauguration of political modernity. Tim Harris and Pierre Retat assert that ‘the press does not bring about the revolution, but it is one and the same with the revolutionary process’ (Popkin and Censer 1995, p.5). They contend that revolutions are the hallmarks of early political modernities (such as in France and the USA) and that journalism enables and engenders this process. Hartley (1996, pp.8-17) demonstrates that while the form of journalism currently in circulation is Western in origin and that its democratic traditions arose from the French Revolution, its values are an actualisation of enlightenment goals.

The assertion that, journalism is an instigator of change, and an agitator of social processes, stem from its original function as a propaganda tool (Popkin and Censer, 1995, p.5). Rétat contends that journalism is represented as a symbol of political emancipation because its practices are historically tied to the processes of political modernisation. This is arguably located in the 1789 French Revolution that was about the promotion and ‘co-creation of modernity, popular sovereignty, the politics of comfort, popular journalism and popular readership’ (Hartley 1996, p.13). Journalism was not only central to the promotion of the revolutionary cause; it was the primary promoter of the political modernity that institutionalised the values of democracy, fraternity and egalitarianism and promoted comfort.
Journalism is not only a condition (product) of modernity, it also promotes modernity in all its myriad contradictions and diversity (Hartley 1996, p.33). During the revolutionary periods of the English uprisings (1640s), the French (before and after 1789) and Russian (1917), Hartley notes that there was a marked increase in popular literacy, accompanied by increased numbers of published pamphlets and proto-newspapers. Similarly, Popkin and Censer state that in the American revolution of 1776, the newspapers both publicised the military successes and ‘popularized political ideas that legitimated the struggle against England’ (1995, p.6). Journalism both promoted and educated the public about the ideals and values of the Enlightenment that largely went into constituting modernity. Along with the establishment of the public sphere, newspapers and the press formed the most direct route to the public and enabled a wide dissemination and formation of popular opinion with the popularisation of literacy, a means of establishing public readerships.

The rise in popular literacy and the demand for journalism in this period are particularly relevant to the current scenario in Asia, where a similar rise in the demand for fashion information and the consumption of popular fashion journalism denotes a marked consciousness about comportment and personal presentation. Furthermore, the rising interest in fashionable lifestyle pursuits, taste and popular culture indicates a similar culturalisation of the public spheres marked also by an increase in fashion journalism publications and their consumption. If as Hartley argued, the political press popularised ideas of equality, self-sovereignty and democratic governments; what values do fashion journalism promote? And, how will the changes be instituted?
Popkin and Censer notes that journalism have often been associated with partisan politics and served as ‘surrogates for political parties, [thus] journalism was a risky profession’ (1995, p.8) during the induction of political modernity. These historical aspects of media propaganda carry most resilience in authoritarian states like Singapore and China, where the danger of journalism as a political and propaganda tool is deeply guarded by media policy and regulations. The presses in Asia from Singapore, to Malaysia and China are frequently, government-owned or controlled, de-emphasising journalism’s political role and intent. In a sense, journalism’s pedagogic and didactic impulses has not dissipated but it has migrated across the different modes of the modern, which I argue is now located in the cultural arena.

**Journalism and the rise of Cultural Consciousness**

Journalism is essentially a state of consciousness, a way of apprehending, of experiencing the world (Carey 1997, p.90)

In his analysis of the history of journalism, Michael Schudson argues that despite journalism being popularly seen ‘as a bastion of liberty and conscience’ (1997p.79), there was a general change in mindset and self-reflexivity about the practices of journalism in the academy in the 1970s. Principles such as objectivity and truth were critically examined and questioned. It was in this context that James Carey (1997) issued a challenge in *The Problem of Journalism History* (1974) to journalism scholars to consider other elements in journalism’s history and practice.

Carey argues that the ‘Whig interpretation of journalism history’ denoted the ‘marriage of the doctrine of progress with the idea of history’ (p.88). In this
approach, journalism study is approached as the ‘slow steady expansion of the freedom and knowledge from the political press to the commercial press, the setback into sensationalism and yellow journalism, … into muckraking and social responsibility’ (p.88). Carey points out that these studies often adopt an impersonal, public approach to the history of journalism, largely concentrating on the ‘events, action, institutional and organizations of the past’ (p.88) which in turn have contributed to our understanding of its ‘industrialization, urbanization, and mass democracy’. While these are important historical hallmarks of journalism, Carey argues that the impetus of the Whig version of history is exhausted and the intellectual work is done, he states, ‘One more history written against the background of the Whig interpretation would not be wrong – just redundant’ (p.88).

Instead, Carey argues that journalism studies needs to be reinvigorated by new interpretations, such as the ‘history of consciousness’ (Carey 1997, p.89) and, ‘a history of reporting [that] remains not only unwritten but also largely unconceived’ (p.90). What Carey promulgates is simply that the study of journalism should pick up on this cultural ‘consciousness of the past’ (p.89) that examines ‘the particular constellation of attitudes, emotions, motives, and expectations that were experienced’ (p.89) in the event, act or institution.

Carey’s proposed course of study relates directly to the questions raised in this research on fashion journalism. His call to investigate other areas of journalism, such as fashion journalism and the emotional registers it evokes calls to our attention the need to investigate fashion journalism in the context of the developing cultural modernities of the Asian cities. Furthermore, what are the concerns of fashion
journalism, its history and cultural consciousness are the fashion publications promoting? In essentially recognising that journalism is much bigger and deeper than just its political news stories, both Carey and Hartley see in journalism, a whole system (Hartley, 1996) and ‘a corpus, not as a set of isolated stories’ (Carey 1997, p.148).

In his analysis of the consciousness of the past, Carey assumes that consciousness has a history and that the imaginings people have of each other are ‘solid facts of society’ (1997, p.89). Furthermore, the variety of imaginative significances that lie behind actions and historical events need to be recorded. Otherwise, he argues, history becomes subdued and conflated, which over time erases the undulations of conflicts and struggle, recognising only the temporal and spatial importance of the event. In essence, the study of the cultural history of journalism is recovering the emotive and the experiences that may have been potentially problematic to these events, creating an in-depth understanding of the complexity of the struggle and its ambiguities.

These assertions are exemplified in the textual analysis of WE and its attempts to reconstruct a Chinese consciousness that is build on revitalising its history and communicating solid facts about its current diasporas. By recording its recent histories and the retelling of personal narratives (journalism), WE is promoting a cultural consciousness about its own Chinese modernity. The work of Albert Kreiling on, the history of the black press in America is an example given by Carey to demonstrate the origination of the rise of black consciousness and the press (see 1997, p.92). The black press’s promotion of the conscious desire for cultural and
political civil liberties, identities and rights is synonymous with the history of the black papers, its editors and institutional struggles reflecting the process of cultural and civil formation.

Benedict Anderson’s idea of ‘Imagined communities’ (1983) lends itself to explain national or subcultural imaginings which are exercised and negotiated, in this case, through the conscious rousing potential that journalism captures and expresses. In Carey’s own words, cultural history moves beyond the study of institutions and particular events to examine the ‘thought within them’, the ‘recovery of past forms of imagination, of historical consciousness’ (Carey 1997, pp.89-90). It is integral that fashion journalism is understood constitutively to be part of this larger journalistic history, establishing through different cultural concerns, alternative forms of identities and consciousness.

If it is as Carey posits, ‘Journalism is essentially a state of consciousness, a way of apprehending, of experiencing the world’ (1997, p.90), then the political, cultural, and social are all part and parcel of this modern imaginative consequence. This consciousness is then part of the modern attitude that is constitutive of modern life and modernity itself (Giddens and Pierson 1998). Similarly, Hartley argues that ‘Journalism is the sense-making practice of modernity…and popularizer of modernism; it is a product and promoter of modern life, and is unknown in traditional societies’ (1996, p.33). Its textual form is the mode of communication, the promoter of a state of consciousness about the modern and cultural experiences of this space and time.
Studying Fashion

As opposed to the study of city, journalism or modernity, the study of fashion takes place across a more interdisciplinary background, which is briefly visited here so as to understand the assembled nature of the study of fashion and its relationship with modernity. Academically, fashion and dress sits on the boundary of a diverse range of academic disciplines from, art and design history to sociology, crossing over to media, gender and culture studies. Its wide scope stems from the issues it addresses, from body modifications to the establishment of trends and emerging aesthetics, concepts in design, construction of social identity and gender (sexuality), to that of social and cultural communication. Thus, it is not far-fetched to claim that fashion, as a text, is notably rich and complex, not only because of the specific social and cultural aspects of its design, influences and historically problematic production, but also its consumption. Thus, the study of fashion frequently reflects an interdisciplinary approach that is incorporated to take account of its multiple histories, its civilising impetus but also its visuality, connecting its manifestations to social and cultural phenomenon.

Academically, fashion has always occupied a neglected and marginalised place. Within the domain of philosophy and sociology, fashion is often considered frivolous and unworthy of analysis (Entwistle and Wilson 2001, p.14). Academic dissertations on fashion by Thorstein Veblen point to the superficial and wasteful nature of fashion in relation to its consumption. Veblen’s (1994) arguments on ‘conspicuous consumption’ by the leisure class demonstrates how fashion is consumed as an object of distinction to emphasise forms of social class and status. In The Philosophy of Money (1900), Simmel perceives fashion as a signifier of the rise of commodity
culture, and theorises that the dissemination of fashion operates as a trickle down
effect from an upper class pursuit practiced primarily to be differentiated from the
masses. Since that thesis in 1890s, the trickle down effect theory has largely been
disproved and made irrelevant through technological advancements and the ways in
which consumers have produced fashion and music subcultures and the rise of street
fashion in the 1960s. However, Simmel and Veblen’s analysis of fashion and social
modernity makes fundamental contributions by highlighting fashion’s importance as
form of social and cultural communication.

Subcultural appropriation and combination of everyday items into fashion statements
as bricolage (punk) significantly changed the way the fashion system operated, and is
perceived. Fashion became an exemplary model of modernity’s democratisation
effect as dress was used potentially as a form of subcultural identifier and a site of
resistance. In this area of study, the work of Dick Hebdige (1979) Phil Cohen
(1978) and Paul Willis (Willis 1978) provides detailed examinations of such
subcultural manifestations in the movements of hippies, punks and radicalism.
Angela McRobbie’s work on youth culture as a subculture (1991) also informs this
area of study demonstrating how the public presentation of the self, through fashion
is often a central aspect of sociological analysis.

Therefore, fashion’s ability to communicate and reflect instantaneously the
sentiments of its wearer is one of its most appealing aspects. Complex social codes
intrinsic to subcultural communication utilises fashion as a visual sign though which
social norms could be violated and transgressed. The use of these social and visual
codes is taken up by Roland Barthes (1990) in his analysis of *The Fashion System*
that applies social codes and semiology to fashion and dress, contributing to the idea that fashion is not mere material object, but is symbolic and conveys particular meanings in social and cultural analysis. Some critics, such as Entwistle and Wilson (2001, p.3) have argued that Barthes’ ‘structuralist approaches tend to be reductive, failing to take into account the many complex social dimensions of fashion as it is practised in everyday life.’ Barthes’ study of fashion’s social and symbolic signification is similarly extended by Clive Scott’s *The Spoken Image: Photography and Language* (Scott 1999) which decodes the fashion (as symbolic objects with meanings) in fashion photography. While both Barthes and Scott’s work on the symbolism and meanings of fashion items are helpful to the interrogation of meanings in material objects, this thesis is more concerned with the reception and location of fashion as media texts in culturally-specific and socially different cities.

Fashion is also examined under costume history within the discipline of art history. Costume history is concerned with the dating of clothing and its representation in paintings, as studies in questions of authenticity and general connoisseurship in the general area of art history. It also traces the linear chronological progressions of art and stylistic directions that have influenced fashion history (Breward 2000, p.23). Cultural and fashion theorist Christopher Breward (p.23) argues that due to the influences of various approaches in the 1970s, there emerged a new school of art history in which ‘social and political contexts were prioritized over older concerns of authorship and connoisseurial value.’

The new art historical approach which is informed by Marxism, feminism, psychoanalysis, structuralism and semiotics, redirected debates in the area of fashion
and dress towards issues of ‘body, social identity, gender and appearance or representation’ (Breward 2000, p.23). While art history re-articulates a new concentration towards the emphasis on social meaning and cultural relevance, Breward argues that it was still primarily concerned with issues of representation in culture and image. This approach, whilst taking into account its visual traditions does not include critical dialogue or investigation into the impact or consequence of fashion and dress on consumers and social identity formation.

Subsequently, the visual studies in design history began to address the study of fashion and dress. As a younger discipline than art history, it examined questions of production, consumption and their relationship with design. Although this approach introduced another set of debates about the role of fashion (dress) and its relationship with haute couture, Breward (p.23) argues that fashion ‘remain marginal to the wider design historical concerns.’

The gradual dominance of individualised culture has also meant that fashion, as a social and cultural system, is often examined as ways in which people make sense of their own identities. In moving towards this analysis, a cultural studies approach takes into account analyses of the visual and textual traditional and the context surrounding the issue. Cultural studies works by understanding the image and the product to be a form of text rather than as a representation of authorial or authentic works. This methodology is ideal for fashion studies as it is capable of providing a platform for a multi-faceted analysis which takes fashion from a practice of consumption to that of identity formation and identity studies (Breward 2000, p.25). By understanding culture as a site ‘where that sense or meaning is generated and

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experienced becomes a determining productive field through which social realities are constructed experienced and interpreted’ (Turner 1996), it allows fashion to be examined within the social contexts of its consumption and meaning-making. This is especially relevant for this research on the communicative aspect of fashion journalism.

Elizabeth Wilson’s (1985, p.9) seminal study of fashion Adorned in Dream acknowledges the class, conformity and moralistic dimensions of fashion, but argues that it is also needs to be explored as a ‘cultural phenomenon, as an aesthetic medium for the expression of ideas, desires and beliefs circulating in society.’ She contends that, like any image industry which operates at the ideological and imaginary levels, fashion exists as a site of the imaginary, where social contradictions can be explored or resolved. Wilson argues that by taking a reductive or moralistic slant, we risk ignoring the richness of fashion and its propensity to express social play, identifications and constructions. From the complexity of street fashion in Harajuku, Japan to the new shopping malls of Shanghai — fashion is an intrinsic way to express cultural and social identity especially as trendy modern (unique) subject.

Asian fashion is often informed by post-colonial discourses concerned with the dichotomy of West versus East. The post-colonial approach often articulates interesting if predictable discourses, often taking an antagonistic East versus West, (America-Eurocentric) approach in its reading. This is exemplified in Hiroshi Narumi’s Fashion Orientalism and the limits of counter culture, where an indictment of both self-orientalists and western orientalists consumers is made. Narumi notes that the contribution of Japanese designers to the global fashion scene through avant-
garde works by Rei Kawakubo and Issey Miyake are local articulations, using fashion as a mode of resistance, but it becomes commodified and appropriated by global markets. He blames globalisation forces for absorbing the aesthetics of local resistance. What he fails to recognise is that fashion is primarily an industry and a system, and furthermore, an industry where success is determined by a few key cities and fashionistas. For fashion to be fashion, it often has to be global, to be taken up and circulated as a spectacle, to influence any impetus (of avant-gardism) or change. This is especially so for individual designers.

Studies on fashion from Asia also emerge from the disciplines of sociology and cultural studies. These studies often build upon Western theories of modernity to examine social contexts of local change and fashion uses. These studies also often utilise inter-disciplinary approaches, employing a fair degree of historical data analysis such as studies conducted by (Finnane 1999; Chan 2000; Baulch 2002; Chua 2003; Skov 2004) which discusses the issues of modernisation and the changes it brings to Asian fashion by analysing the demise of national costumes and the conundrum of what Chinese women should wear in the context of urbanisation and joining the workforce.

**Fashion and Modernity**

This section explores the history of fashion highlighting its relationship with modernity. While this overview of fashion and modernity is by no means exhaustive its aim is to reconstruct the connection between fashion as part of the urban phenomenon with journalism and the city in modernity.
Fashion cultural theorist Elizabeth Wilson, in her influential book on fashion and modernity, *Adorned in Dreams*, argues that what one wears is always a statement about oneself, as no clothes (in the Western system) exist outside of the fashion system, (Wilson 1985, p.3). Whether the styles are ‘in’ or ‘out’ of season, or intentionally anti-fashion, all dress carries a wide social significance and cultural meaning. In general, dress fulfils a number of social, aesthetic and psychological functions, which is true of both modern and ancient dress. Before elaborating further on the broader functions of fashion, it is necessary to differentiate between fashion and dress.

Wilson (1985, p.9) posits that fashion is what was added to dress towards the end of the Middle Ages, (1066-1347) at the beginning of mercantile capitalism (modernity) in the West. As such, fashion is dress in ‘which the key feature is rapid and continual changing of styles’ (p.9). It allows us to focus on the main feature that delineates fashion from dress — the element of change that is symptomatic of modernity and its progress. Simmel (Frisby and Featherstone 1997, p.14) notes that fashion’s preoccupation with change and ‘new-ness’ sets in place an eternal dialectic interplay in which ‘fashion as the continuous announcement of newness always disturbs and destroys that which is already in existence’. This continual unfolding of new trends paradoxically begins with the demise of the present trend. Thus, fashion represents the unfailing adoption of the new in modern societies.

This paradox of fashion in modernity entails a pursuit of the new and the creation of a new standard of beauty and fashion style (Wilson 1985, p.9). This constant adherence to changes in sartorial wear is a frequent criticism of fashion adversaries
to demonstrate the superfluous and contradictory nature of fashion, adding to its image as frivolous and trivial. However, the denunciation of fashion can only be countered by a thorough study of the uses of fashion, its conventions and consumption (Wilson 1985, p.9). Fashion’s preoccupation with the new is in fact, a demonstration of its system that is lodged in the birth of modern capitalism.

Fashion is ultimately a modern condition. Fashion and its manifestations are deeply connected to the emergence of modernity and the rise of mercantile capitalism. Wilson argues that fashion prior to the eighteenth century hardly existed, ‘Fashionable whims affected only a very small number of people. One cannot really talk of fashion becoming all powerful before about 1700 (Wilson 1985, p.60)’, (see also, Craik, 1994). Partly due to the impetus from increased trade, new technologies and the operation of mercantile capitalism, cities and the momentum of society were beginning to speed up. As stated earlier, Wilson (1985, p.60) contends that industrial modernity via its capitalistic push created a new, turbulent world where ‘motion, speed and change’ were its key characteristics. This early capitalism also contributed to the initial stages of the breakdown of the hierarchical society and the rise of the bourgeoisie, which, in turn, paved the way for fashion to become a social marker of class and identity.

Wilson contends that fashion and modernity are integral to the mutual shaping of the other within the establishment of mercantile capitalism. She argues that, metaphorically, ‘Modernity seems useful as a way of indicating the restless desire for change characteristic of cultural life in industrial capitalism, the desire for the new
that fashion expresses so well’ (p.63). Fashion is a metonym, a visual expression of the impetus for change and of change, occurring throughout urban city life.

Within the impetus of the move to an industrial age, the change in gear towards the perpetual movement of modernity both thrilled and terrified the new citizens of the great industrial centres. Fashion thrived and developed within the unfolding of mercantile modernity. Walter Benjamin states that fashion is the ‘tireless help-maiden of modernity’ (Frisby 1986, p.13). Similarly, philosopher Mark C. Taylor underlines this connection by pointing out that the advent of fashion is intrinsic to the process of modernity, stating, ‘Fashion is a recent invention. Indeed, fashion did not exist prior to the advent of modernity. It is, therefore, no more possible to understand modernity and modernism apart from fashion than it is to understand fashion apart from modernity and modernism’ (Seelig, Stahel et al. 2001, p.63). Just as fashion demonstrates the social identity and status of the modern individual, so journalism is also a product of industrial modernity, communicating the meanings and trends of modern social life intrinsic to the process of modernisation.

To illustrate this interconnection between fashion and modernity, Annie Chan’s (2000) article *Fashioning Change* points out the social changes brought in via fashion and dress in Hong Kong at the onset of modernity. She argues that the traditional women’s *sam fu* (jacket and pants) and *qipao* (cheongsam) in the 1960s were gradually phased out due to introduction of women to the labour force. The *samfu* and *qipao* were deemed unsuitable for public work; the *samfu* belonging to the manual labour class and the *qipao* being seen as too ‘traditional’. Chan states that women working in public spaces chose Western style clothes in order to fit into this
professional modern environment. This, and imported Western popular culture (films and music), had a subsequent effect of hastening the introduction of casual or ‘social’ clothes into the everyday wear of women in Hong Kong. This article is particularly relevant as it demonstrates how traditional Chinese clothing was perceived as traditional and thus, redundant at the ‘arrival’ of industrial modernity in the city of Hong Kong. Women had to have the right attire and appearance, if they wanted the modern professions. Fashion is again an expression of, and the look of modernity.

Fashion occurs more intensively in urban spaces, where the clothed self is representative of the individual and where enclosed spaces redirect our attention to the attire of the individual. Within this discussion, Frisby contends that, ‘the metropolis was the site above all others upon, which one of the crucial manifestations of modernity could flourish: namely fashion’ (Frisby 1986, p.250). Diana Crane (2000, p.244) explains that in the urban cityscape, people felt they were put on display when they walked down the streets/performance spaces. Within the crowds and teeming activities in metropolises, where relative anonymity is the norm, new self (identities) could be established through the re-fashioning of appearances.

This literature emphasises the importance of recognising fashion as the performance of being modern (acting out) and its connection with the experiences in the city. The modern city is a platform for both the practice of fashion and journalism to flourish. In privileging the experiential and emotional register of cultural modernity, the city, fashion and journalism are understood to be part of the conditioning tools of modernity on the citizenry.
Street Fashion

Street fashion presents another form of urban conditioning, one that denotes a response from the ground level up that sits alternatively to mainstream society. The study by Don Cameron in 2000 of Japanese street fashion demonstrates how the personal construction of dress is deeply tied to self-expression and identity. Furthermore, the degree of outrageousness achieved (denoted by body piercing or colour of hair, combination of clothes) indicates their social standing among other street youth.

This particular use of fashion taps into a specific aspect of fashion consumption which Simmel has commented is the dialectical interplay of differentiation and imitation in fashion (Frisby 1986, p.14). Fashion is consumed in the context of a desire to conform to general society, yet its performance is mediated by a search for a unique-ness and expression of individuality within that conformity. Even subcultural groups such as punks, who embrace anti-fashion tendencies as a disavowal of societal norms, have an established group identity dress and visual codes. Within this non-conformity, individuals still express their difference via body adornment and differing fashion (Steele 2000, p.11).

This play of fashion is evident in the study of everyday fashion and its consumption. As a marker of social identity and the self, fashion and dress offers a space for cultural articulation and expressive play as a negotiation of cultural identity. Fashion, as an expression of social and cultural identity formation, applies to the formation of subcultural identities such as the punks, the mods, the hippies during the 1960s. (McRobbie, 1999) Instead of dying out, such subcultural identities have been
reinvented and re-appropriated by youth of subcultures (Craik 2000; Baulch 2002). Currently, this form of subcultural demonstration is most notably seen in Japan. It is also highlighted in fashion magazines such as *WE* — to illustrate the wider uses and play of fashion to its readers.

Like journalism, Wilson’s contention that fashion is a visual ‘medium for the expression of ideas, desires and beliefs circulating in society’ (2003, p.9) essentially sums up fashion’s importance as a metaphoric canvas for the aesthetic expression of social and cultural values universally. However, this definition of fashion and its consumption is also widely disputed by critics of fashion, who liken fashion to a pathology in modern society. Fashion is perceived as a symbol of instant gratification, or the oppressive regime of social conformity and the constant craving for the new that is associated with a modern pathological obsession (Giddens and Pierson 1998, p.120). In fact, a popular strand of fashion discourse and criticism often takes up the issue that fashion is synonymous with its problematic production and its equally aberrant consumption practices.

**Criticisms of Fashion and Consumption**

Even within the progress of early modernity, with the increasing breakdown of feudal distinctions, Sweetman states that fashion ‘acts to express or maintain distinctions between different social groups in a situation where rigid and inflexible social hierarchies no longer apply’ (Sweetman 2001, p.61 ). This contributed to greater social class affiliation where the maintenance of status and hierarchies was carried out through an appropriate dress code. In post-industrial society, this
distinction is even more salient where it is used to express conformity and various levels of identification within cultural groups.

Many critics of the fashion system, such as Jennifer Craik (2000, p.26), argue that the production of fashion is still a top-down elitist process that is first consumed by the elites and designed for the elites. When the style finally reaches the masses, the elites have already abandoned that style in search of a new one. This reinforces the difference in status through appearance. Theorists such as Veblen (1899), Simmel (1857) and Baudrillard (1981) all perceive the fashion system as being part of an elitist system. This classic theory of fashion is outmoded for several reasons. Using the democratisation thesis, Valerie Steele argues that although costume historians found that men from England, France and America in the nineteenth century all wore a typical costume of jacket and trousers at all levels of social class in cities, it does not provide for the extent of variation in appearance at different social class levels (Steele 2000, p.78).

More importantly, street fashion and social and cultural movements from the 1960-70s suggest that consumers can influence designs. Subcultural aesthetics devised by punk and goth have been adopted by designers such as Alexander McQueen. Famously, Mary Quant, who opened up a store for women’s fashion in Kings Road in 1955 as a promenade for mods and rockers, as a space where youth, music and fashion style met head on took inspiration to design the Art Student look which was, ultimately, anti-conformist to the style of that time. Then, in 1961, the year the Beatles were discovered, Quant began to mass-produce miniskirts, and when
attributing the influence, Quant claims, ‘It was the girls in the streets who did it’ (Steele 2000, p.10).

Another critic, Joanne Finkelstein’s (2000, p.226), understands fashion to be an anomic world. She argued that its relentless pursuance of new styles mimics a conspiracy to encourage eternal consumption, encouraging an increased global dependence on the capitalistic market economy that privileges wealthy elites, further commodifying everything in its path from the culturally exotic to the latest industrial reflections towards mere consumer profit. This impetus further seeks out the cheapest, most exploitable global markets and utilises them to its advantage. This approach to fashion can be summed up in Adorno and Horkheimer’s critique of the politics of cultural industries. However, Rita Felski, a critic of Adorno and Horkeimer’s states that their mythological dreamworlds, seductive commodities and promises of endless fun are one of the key means through which individuals are reconciled to the prospect of a totally administered society ruled by a logic of profit and standardisation (Felski 1995, p.5).

Despite fashion’s aberrations and problematic issues of production, Wilson argues that an objective appraisal of fashion should not undermine its complexity as a social and cultural phenomenon. The history of female emancipation and modernisation has been constructed and played out in fashion, its uses and consumption have provided a means of approaching the public domain and exiting the private sphere during the developmental phases of feminism. Rachel Bowlby (1985) in *Just Looking* argues that prior to feminism, the emergence of consumption and the spectacle of the department stores in the 1850s, capped by the World Exposition in London,
contributed to a shift in the perception and practices of consumption and the
delineation of public and private spaces. This is particularly relevant to chapter five,
where the consumption of a cosmopolitan lifestyle is associated with more than just
its representations but evoked a cultural imagining that sits antagonistically to the
nation.

Bowlby further argues that the relationship between commerce and women needs to
be open for a reading that does not subscribe to traditional dominant views of the
shopper as inherently female and a victim of commercial wiles. In reflecting on the
historical aspects, the ‘go out and buy invokes a relative emancipation in women’s
active role as consumers’ (Bowlby 1985, p.22) that was destabilising to male
authority. Revisiting and rewriting history essentially allows alternative views to
emerge. Contemporary uses of fashion and its consumption have shifted drastically
and fashion needs to be situated as one of the production of modern society rather
than as a culpable system of oppression of women and culture allowing us to
examine the ways in which a variety of social meanings and identities have utilised it
to express their own development. The next section on fashion magazine explores the
uses made through the mediation of fashion.

**Study of fashion & women’s magazines**

A survey of the field of literature on fashion magazines reveals several categories of
research that are useful for this study. By fashion magazines, I refer to publications
that concentrate on the high end showcase of fashion and its display, as distinct from
women’s magazines that, although contain the latest fashion spreads, tend to be
focused on the local personalities and everyday level of activities, such as *Women's*
Day. Fashion and women’s magazines are textually and productively (qualitatively) different, lending themselves to the study of different demographics and issues. High-end fashion magazines such as Harper’s Bazaar, Vogue and I-D, are constitutively different from the women’s magazines in the issues and concerns they raise, the readers they attract and how the readers are addressed and thus, the advertisers. As such, this section firstly reviews the study of two fashion magazines in two very different eras and societies (modernities) and, secondly, gives a broad review of the study of women’s magazines and some of their characteristics, to understand how magazines are used and characterised.

What is articulated through the reviews not only signals the scope of academic literature in the field of magazines, it also highlights the different approaches taken to research magazines. Many of the approaches ranging from feminist, journalistic content analysis or identity and consumption are illustrative of the increasingly multi-disciplinary method of approaching such studies.

In Fashion readers: the avant-garde and the British Vogue, 1920-29 (2002) Aurelea Mahood examines the launch of British Vogue in 1916, when war prevented the import of Vogue from the United States. British Vogue saw its role as instructional, advising readers on how to achieve a chic and modern appearance, yet it was also a bridge between high culture (art) and fashion. British Vogue targeted the ‘discerning woman of fashion’ (Mahood 2002, p.37) who even then saw fashion as addressing knowledge pertaining to wider issues and cultural topics — comportment, health, beauty, travel, contemporary literature and the world of modern art. Mahood argues that Vogue established itself as being central to self-fashioning and modern
knowledge, and only by reading *Vogue* closely could readers be educated and appreciate the challenges of modern art. In articulating the possibilities open for self-makeovers *Vogue* created a complex didactic relationship with its readers, becoming the intermediary and arbiter of high culture, taste and fashion knowledge. By linking art and fashion, Mahood contends that fashion was imbued with the significance of art, infused with ‘the same spirit of innovation as the contemporary arts, claiming legitimacy as a focus of attention and study’ (p.40).

Between the years 1922 and 1926, the then editor, Dorothy Todd, promoted the concept of avant-garde, often juxtaposing it with feminine fashion with the intent of instilling the fashion magazine with a sense of contemporary artistic modernism (Mahood 2002, p.40). Other demonstrations of avant-gardism are represented by the literary essays by Virginia Woolf, reports of Paris exhibitions, and editorials by Aldous Huxley. Mahood’s analysis is both textual and historical in perspective, utilising avant-garde to refer to an abstract association with modernist texts in references to popular and mass culture. However, as with most studies on fashion magazines, it fails to analyse the images or the visual aspect of the magazine.

Looking through the scope of studies on Asian fashion magazines tend to be dominated by Japanese studies of fashion magazine consumption, perhaps this is due to Japan’s more developed media system. One such study is conducted by Don Cameron on the relationship between the street youth, fashion and fashion magazines. He analyses the desire for imitation and differentiation represented in the street fashion magazines and the uses made of them by young people in Japanese cities. Cameron states that the street fashion magazines initially popularised both
mainstream and peripheral fashions during the 1970s, but they began to evolve as a
genre to represent street fashion for all forms of youth fashion. The content offered
the newcomers to street fashion a range of street wear imposed through a sense of
spatial conformity on the streets. Cameron argues that the catalogue-style format that
displayed pictures of young people taken outside streets, ‘encouraged the
development of a kind of gaze and promoted the simultaneous pursuit of conformity
and differentiation among readers’ (Cameron 2000, p.180). This mode of visual
consumption reproduced a sense of transposition from the symbolism of the
mediated space of the streets to the streets where the everyday is experienced,
encouraging a sense of engagement and priority with the visual objects.

Cameron argues that the fashion dialectic of differentiation within a consensual
conformity is exemplified in the streets of Amerika-mura. This collective difference
plays itself out on the streets where it highlights and unnerves visitors who are
visibly different through gender, age or ethnic background. Argued in terms of the
age-generational divide, these spaces become uncomfortable and alienating for
people who do not subscribe to that display. Here Cameron refers to Yoshimi
Shunya’s notion of ‘frame of exclusion’ whereby subliminal psychospatial dynamics
articulated in such spaces sets up boundaries of exclusion where differences in
gender, age, ethnic background or appearance become markers of alienation. Thus,
fashion and fashion magazines are utilised for setting up forms of identity and
establishing the boundaries and limits of that imitation.

In The Face of Fashion, Jennifer Craik provides a brief exploration of the didactic
function of magazines that combines a historical perspective tracing the genesis of
magazines from the eighteenth century through the development of the printing industry. She states that magazines were then concerned with ‘body techniques, interactive modalities and mental dispositions through which feminine attributes are displayed’ (Craik 2000, p.47). This relates to the instrumental belief that ‘becoming feminine was a task of learning about the attributes of femininity, a task wholly identified with the world of leisure and a task that can be a pleasure and not a labour’ (Craik 2000, p.47). Thus, Craik notes that magazines such as The Tatler appealed to the upper echelons of society while titles like Lady’s Magazine appealed to wider audiences, concentrating on issues of marriage and the struggle to achieve happiness as women’s issues.

While the agenda may have changed — those women magazines were the forerunner of present day women’s magazines. Key features such as the ‘agony aunt, the occasional news reports with a woman’s slant, features on famous women, cooking recipes, sewing patterns, medical advice, readers’ letters, regular contributors’ (Craik 2000, p.48) are still popular in today’s magazines. This is observed in chapter five’s fashion publication, Harper’s, where the key relationship with the reader is set through these established practices and formats. The tone is friendly and conversational, inviting and informing readers about the current trends, ways of solving problems and advice on relationships.

Craik states that the late nineteenth century saw the emergence of a new mode of addressing female readers. Instead of targeting women through the different stages of their life — wife, mother or girls waiting to be married — magazines also began to address the readers as feminine consumers. It is not a coincidence that this
corresponded with the growth of consumer advertisements in magazines as the promotion of beauty products and the use of visuals in magazines began to emphasise and link appearance and dress with identity formation (Craik 2000, pp.49-52). Within the changing social conditions of the early twentieth century, women’s lives were inflicted with more contradictions and conflicts, with issues becoming more complex. Tensions arose as women embraced independence through employment, heightening tensions between work and home. While some women advocated that emancipation came with financial independence and employment, many publications were preoccupied with domestic chores and problems, child rearing and personal concerns. However, magazines were changing in emphasis from discourses of women’s duty and ‘nature’ to reflecting definitions of femininity of twentieth century and women’s achievements and labour (Craik 2000, pp.48-49).

Other studies of women’s magazines by (Winship 1987; Ballaster 1991; Hermes 1995; Rosenberg 1995; Sakamoto 1999; Weiner 1999) are concerned with how women’s magazine create a ‘world of women’ and the images they offer for consumption. Janice Winship (1987, Preface) argues that the semiotic space created in the magazines becomes a privileged world within which to construct and explore femininity. However, Craik (2000, p.50) adds that ‘most studies have noted the lack of fit between the ideals of femininity and the practical conduct of women.’ This is fitting with more recent studies, such as McCracken’s Decoding women’s magazines, 1993, and the studies on the consumption and influence of Japanese magazines and women readers in Women media and consumption in Japan, 1995.
Most of the studies analyses specific fashion title(s) and its influence and relationship with its readers over a specific period, often reflecting on the issues of subversion, resistance or dominance these texts played in the lives of their readers (Ballaster 1991; Rosenberg 1995; Skov 1995). However, analysis and generalised attempts at interpreting women’s magazines often point out instead the incoherent and interrupted process of feminine emancipation, with readers often being sceptical, insistent and inconsistent in what they eagerly consume (Craik 2000, p.55). What this reveals is a complicated process of slow individual emancipation that is nonetheless segmented within larger societal articulations for such freedoms.

Kazue Sakamoto’s (1999) study of ‘Reading Japanese women’s magazines’ identifies Van Zoonen’s ‘transmission model’ as a dominant paradigm for feminist media studies, especially in Japan (Yasuka Muramatu, 1979; The Croissant Syndrome, Matubara, 1988). This approach to media studies and the perpetuation of patriarchal ideology inherent in ‘mass’ media (read popular media), is summed up in Van Zoonen’s argument that ‘media reflect society’s dominant social values and symbolically denigrate women, either by not showing them at all, or by depicting them in stereotypical roles’ (Sakamoto 1999, p.175). However, this approach is clearly outmoded and makes several assumptions. It assumes that the reader is ultimately a passive mass audience that absorbs media mindlessly, does not engage with multiple-platform media formats and, further, it negates other complex relationships between women and the media, such as the pleasure of the text or knowledge formation.
Various studies of women and media usage have proved that cause and effect
theories and linear ideological approaches often neglect several other key aspects,
such as consumer resistance and how readers make sense of texts. For example,
Angela McRobbie (1991, 1996) explores sexuality in teenage magazines and
of the way women read and speak about magazines. Sakamoto’s article examines
the changing lifestyle choices of Japanese women through three magazines in the
1970s. She argues that the emergence of these new magazines coincided with social
changes that markedly differentiated the lifestyles of women through the areas of
work, education and marriage.

The three magazines exemplified the initial trend towards the establishment of an
age-segmented market in Japan, in this case the 20–30s group. The new magazines
(*An’an, Non’no and More*) reflected changes in content, style and layout and specific
readerships, rather than social gossip about celebrities and the Japanese royal family
(Sakamoto 1999). They covered travel, fashion, interior design and carried translated
copies of French *Elle* cooking recipes and catered to the taste of the new generation
of young Japanese women who were highly educated and wanted to postpone
marriage in order to ‘see’ the world.

Other studies of Japanese magazine consumption carry out similar investigations of
particular social and cultural phenomenon relating to women and media usage. Lise
Skov deconstructs the discourse surrounding environmentalism as read through
women’s magazines (1995), and Rosenberger examines the discourses of Japanese
women as presented through the magazines (1995). Both investigations are
concerned with the alternative discourses of ideas and practices presented to women, and the degree of self-actualisations these readers had. While Japanese fashion magazines formed a large part of such studies, fashion journalism from other Asian cities are beginning to be studied illustrated by, Anthony Fung’s (2002), *Women’s Magazines: Construction of Identities and Cultural Consumption in Hong Kong*. This is an identifiable gap in academic research in the scope of Asian magazine research conducted.

Another academic investigation constructed along similar lines is Susan Weiner’s (1999) ‘Two Modernities: from Elle to Mademoiselle. Women’s Magazines in Post-war France’, which explores the French socio-cultural context and the magazines’ changing readerships. The article explores the transformation of Elle from targeting adult women to one that appealed to French girls as consumers. Weiner argues that the transformation of Elle and its readership brings to light a post-war female modernity that was maternal and nationalistic. Elle defined the images and exigencies of female roles during the post-war culture. By addressing Elle’s readers as wives, mothers, homemakers, professionals and citizen, it was summoning the various female personas towards efforts in post-war reconstruction, echoing that of the Republic.

While women were called upon to reproduce, they were also granted entry to the workforce and universities. This, alongside the growing acceptance of abortion and contraception, represented significant social progress for women. Inventions in household technology meant that home appliances were replacing domestic labour, introducing the home as a fantasy space that women of all social classes could
experience. The acquisition of these material appliances signalled both pleasure and modern progress, shifting the housewife’s position to that of a stylish, modern, efficient consumer.

With progressive rights installed, the place and role of feminism began to be called into question. Weiner notes that by the middle of the 1950s, the image of the reader as a housewife and nation-builder was usurped slowly by that of the female adolescent (Weiner 1999). The sexualised teenager became the epitome of the new modernity, one that was transformed by trading in the ‘old ideas’ of happiness for the new of ‘success’ and ‘go-getter’. Weiner (1999, p.405) traces this change in ideology from *Elle* France, 1957: ‘Our young miss 1956… is a wily one… her big sister in the euphoria of the Liberation taught her that one is only what one makes oneself. So she believes that millions can replace happiness. What would she do with a husband?’

This again situates fashion magazines at the forefront of feminist social movements. Whether they are merely reflecting and reporting it or capturing the spirit and actively translating it for its new readerships, successful magazines must be able to tap into the pulse of the social flow. By tracing the discourses and rhetoric of *Elle* France, Weiner demonstrates that *Elle* promoted and updated the category of the adolescent through its construction for its new readerships, capturing the sentiments of the younger generation in modernity. Weiner’s application of ‘modernity’ as the shifting social reality for which each group of women may have been confronted with is a particularly resonant case-study for this thesis.

In another representation of shifting modernities, Mila Ganeva examines German modernity and modernism through the commercial fashion photography of Yva
during post-war Germany. She argued that photography was becoming a means of artistic self-expression for women and plausible career moves in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Yva, otherwise known as, Else Neulander Simon became one such experimental fashion photographer. Her photographs often defied outright classification due to their complex infusion of both commercial and artistic production, conventional and avant-garde experimentation of product advertising and fashion displays. Furthermore, she was not associated with any particular institutional slant such as the Bauhaus. Nonetheless, Yva imparted to the public a notion of popularised modernism through the medium of illustrated magazines, movies, and photographic exhibitions. Yva was also Helmut Newton’s mentor. Ganeva argues that it was advertising that powerfully promoted a visual literacy of how modernity, fashion and commerce would work together, and more importantly, it demonstrated the ‘unprecedented occasions for the mass experience of technological and artistic advances’ (Ganeva 2003, p.11). Ute Eskildsen (1995) also examines this German photographic industry and the emancipative role it provided women of that time. Many of the photographers were from white, middle-class families and their participation in the process of representing women to themselves during the 1930s allowed women to become a crucial part of the technical movement and innovators, affecting modernist styles in media.

Uses of Magazines

The pedagogic function of magazines brings into question the relationship between the fashion magazines (media text) and the fashion (commodity) that is on display. Fashion magazines are not consumed in isolation; rather, they are closely related to
the retail end of fashion consumption. Fashion magazines hold permanent the transience of the cyclical and relentless fashion trends. The magazines hold the fashion images and poses, deciphering the zeitgeist of the catwalks and the photography shoots into discernible styles. It allows the closer examination of fashion for the varied purposes of imitation, reproduction or rejection (differentiation). As such, fashion magazines engender issues which are sometimes deeply embedded as cultural norms and values. With such explorations, identity issues relating to sexuality, race and class may be parodied, ‘iconic-ised’ and framed within different value systems, giving free play to visualisation and self-articulation.

A review of Craik’s (2000, pp.46-48) work demonstrate that women’s magazines were historically a way of ‘instructing femininity’ and constructing gender identity, leading towards the specific trainings of social etiquette that constitute identity, social position and sexuality. In addressing women in their role as housewives in articles on the practicalities of running a home, or the economics of managing household finances or the moral side of nurturing or caring, these magazines constructed a very specific readership. It set the agenda for a specific normative gendered identity. While many magazines today have shifted away from gender-role based texts, a residual desire for advice on issues of comportment and family remain firmly reflected in women’s magazines.

Within the framework of my analysis, Vision, West East and Harper’s Bazaar are classified as fashion magazines rather than women’s magazines. There are several reasons for this. First, this study of fashion magazines is not constructed with a feminist approach in mind, although it may build on feminist critiques. Even though
*Harper’s Bazaar* is clearly targeted at females rather than males, this investigation is concerned with the social and cultural phenomena in the city rather than being restricted to gender specific issues. Textual constructions of femininity and identities often work within the basic binary oppositions of male-female in mind and the overall analysis will keep bear that in mind.

Secondly, it was noted that magazines are interested in promoting the impetus of fashion and experiences within the city-scape, which as Craik (p.48) states were, ‘akin to training manuals for the masses’. However, who were they training? And, what it was cultivating in the readers is necessarily different. Craik argues that different magazines carried inherent contradictions in their dialectic intentions of a feminine ideal. From issues of emancipation to ideas of beauty, education, household management and employment, the magazines, on a whole, were contradictory in their advocacy of a feminine ideal. This is not surprising in that it constituted the beginning of women’s fragmentary identities, reflecting the various roles they play in embracing most modern day settings. The function of magazines has not moved very far from this paradigm of informing and educating. In my analysis, *Vision* magazine especially takes up the call to instruct its readership in the aesthetics of dress, design and colour in China (Beech 2002), *WE* in the promotion of Chinese identity and *Harper’s* in its promotion of a cosmopolitan lifestyle.

The instructional pedagogic imperative flows strongly throughout all three publications. They are all concerned about the representation of issues through visual displays, the relation of these representations to cultural identities and the display of elusive fashion trends within the diegesis of the magazine themes. This research is
interested in this diegetic play of identities and fashion displays within the cityscapes. These magazines construct a privileged space within which to create visual spectres of societal or cultural concerns and taboos, often through parody and irony. The extremely graphic displays (in *West East*) — pornography, prostitution, celebrities, and pop stars — traverse the terrains of art and commercial logic while bridging the gap that often confines art to the high brow and entertainment or commercial (consumption) to the low and trivial.

Some critics may argue that these images of highly stylised niched commodities and sexuality only serve as a hook for educated and nouveau-riche Asians, inducting them into the lifestyle of a modern consumer. A *South China Morning Post* journalist asked Chen, ‘Can this [visual and design literacy] be achieved by showing readers advertisements of Cartier jewellery or Christian Dior fashion?’ Chen, the editor-in-chief of *Vision*, explains that ‘China needs to go through this, it needs to see the best of what’s out there so people can move towards that’ (Au 2002). Part of the research will interrogate this pedagogical aspect of the magazines. Are they striving towards a form of visual literacy? How would they (the readers) know they have achieved it? And once acquired what does it enable the readers to do? At its most fundamental, perhaps this visual literacy becomes a tool for negotiating modern cultural texts. Does that imply a visual literacy that is universal?

Further, if this visual literacy can indeed be imparted through the magazines to their readership, this research is also interested in the origination of that creative aesthetics. In essence, what is raised here is the particular question of how these magazines are different to other local magazines widely available in Singapore,
Hong Kong and Shanghai. They seem to explore new notions and ‘push the envelope’ within the confines of acceptable societal taste. In the issue of Sex, *WestEast* confrontational images and issues were raised that were primarily aimed at raising questions. Would these textual provocations be acceptable if this was a run-of-the-mill women’s magazine, not couched under tags of ‘artistic explorations’? Are fashion magazines allowed more discursive space because of the fact that they are high-end fashion magazines? Is the suggestion of art being involved in the equation the reason for this openness? How do readers respond to this?

In a sense, this suggests that social and cultural boundaries are being challenged, testing the margins of social conventions, visually (fashion photography) and textually, through the discursive personalising narratives that adopt a technique reminiscent of storytelling conventions. Adopting a narrative strategy which readers are familiar with eases the negotiation of the diegesis as the primary object. However, this raises more questions about the social boundaries of these different Asian cities: What influences these magazines in their production of issues? And what social conventions are followed or abandoned?

**Fashion Journalism**

I felt that to dismiss women’s magazines was also to dismiss the lives of millions of women who read and enjoyed them each week. More than that, I still enjoyed them, and found them useful and escaped with them. And I knew I wasn’t the only feminist who was a ‘closet’ reader

(Winship 1987), Preface, *Inside Women's Magazines*

As distinct from straightforward ‘hard’ news and political journalism, fashion writing in magazines and newspapers is often categorised as ‘features’ and ‘human interest’
stories. Catharine Lumby (1999) in *Gotcha: Life in a Tabloid World* argues that there is a connotation that because it is not ‘hard’ news or politics, it is not as important. While Lumby examines this dichotomy from the point of view of journalism production, Janice Winship looks at it from that of the readership. In *Inside Women’s Magazines*, Winship (1987) states that there is a general contention that fashion and women’s magazines are oppressing women through the ideals placed on women’s lives. However, she argues that to dismiss this popular readership is to dismiss the ‘lives of millions of women’ (p. xiii).

Both Lumby and Winship point out that, as a genre of journalism, feminised forms, such as magazines and subject matters like fashion, are often belittled in the context of a masculine public ‘news’ oriented work space from both the production and consumption continuum. Winship adds that ‘women’s magazines are the soaps of journalism, sadly maligned and grossly misunderstood’ (p.7). These categories of human interest, ‘soft news’ and magazines have a common background of being marginalised, as they are often perceived to be feminine issues, dealing with domestic matters, personal experiences and popular entertainment, which may be sensational, aesthetically pleasing and often unimportant.

Fashion magazines as non-canonical forms of journalism are under-rated by professionals and scholars alike. They are not dealing with the masculine, important world of politics, business or trade, nor are they public issues integral for the running of the state or community and society formation. What is dangerous about this binarist divide is that it confines and limits the potential and function of what non-news journalism (such as, fashion journalism) has already accomplished. However,
this is also countered by studies on the social, national and public roles and causes that magazines have taken up over the years, for example, Susan Weiner’s (1999) study of French Elle magazine during the post-World War II era which demonstrated its instrumental place in calling the national community of French women to participate in rebuilding the nation through a variety of forms: saving money, reusing second-hand clothes or in the mid 1950s, introducing emancipationist notions of higher education and advocating sexual choice in contraception and abortion.

However, this bias is observable even in contemporary public archival system. It is possible to gauge what institutional gatekeepers of knowledge, such as libraries and museums value by simply noting what gets archived. Archiving denotes that which is thought to be important and edifying to human society and progress. Libraries function as repositories of what is thought to be important. Fashion magazines are viewed as transient media, if not trivia and, in most cities, current fashion magazines on display are not kept for more than a year or two. Fashion researchers have to go to specific libraries in the world to access old copies of, say, Vogue or Marie Claire.

Many research have championed for the importance of fashion magazines as a mode of communication, pedagogy and the establishment of feminised public space, as demonstrated in the Uses of Fashion Magazines (Hermes 1995; Skov 1995; Sakamoto 1999; Cameron 2000; Craik 2000; Mahood 2002; Hartley and Rennie 2004). However, not many recognise the integral aspect of journalism practice within fashion magazines, or its relations with the urban cityscape. Fashion magazines are positioned at the intersection where public and private issues meet; where the feminisation of the public sphere (Hartley 1996, p.145) is in development in Asia;
where the subjective and the experiential can take precedence over claims of objectivity (Simmel); where arts and humanist ‘truths’ are as important as scientific ones (Bennett 2001); and, finally, where visual and popular aesthetics hold as much sway as written texts. Thus, to recognise fashion journalism’s place as a genre of journalism practice is to understand the emancipationist impetus of journalism (in initiating freedoms and consciousness) that is part of fashion magazine.

As a form of journalism, it coheres to the basic notions of journalistic practice and as a ‘sense making system’ (Gripsrud 1992, p.86; Hartley 1996, p.33) of society, modernity and culture. It functions as a mediated public sphere for an alternative reading public. As Hartley (1996, p.37) states, ‘Journalism deals in knowledge, symbol, images, information, story’. It informs and communicates, teaches and provokes through its images and texts, questioning the body in relation to the domestic and the public persona, the aspirational and the utilitarian, the ephemeral and the eternal, the superficial and the psychoanalytical. While it is journalistic in form, the ideas and issues explored fuse fashion’s preoccupation with play, desire, death, utilitarianism, conformity, difference. All that fashion demonstrates, interrogates and provokes is enveloped, mediated and disseminated through the consumption of fashion journalism. Fashion journalism can be seen to be part of the ‘forms of human expressions which can capture the fleeting nature of inner experiences’ (Frisby 1986, p.47) as emphasised by Simmel.

Furthermore, if fashion exists as a palimpsest and, as Wilson argues, it is ‘an aesthetic medium for the expression of ideas, desires and beliefs circulating in society’ (2003, p.9) then fashion journalism holds still fashion’s ephemerality and
locates it in a spatial and temporal hiatus for multiple forms of consumption. Where fashion means to carry ‘experiments in taste and political means of expression for dissidence, rebellion and social reform’ (Wilson 2003, p.8), it is fashion journalism that captures the fashion moment through its textualisations of images and words. The meanings are mediated and can be disseminated instantly through new technologies to a global readership or enjoyed pensively via magazines.

Yet, beyond just reflecting and communicating fashion’s impulses, fashion journalism also extends new ground and incorporates old forms. Hartley and Rennie’s (2004) study of fashion photography argues that photojournalism and its visual articulation of social, political and cultural issues is now found in the pages of fashion photography. Fashion photography, as a conscious promotion of desire coexists with the promotion of comfort and everyday-ness, and constantly readjusts to the production of an imagined and lived experience of modern life. The importance of fashion photography as a form of fashion journalism is noted in WE and Vision’s visuality and their attempt to promote this visual literacy through their texts.

**Conclusion: Fashion, Journalism and City in Modernity**

The theoretical concepts in this chapter provide a framework for understanding modernity and the urban phenomenon of fashion and journalism in the city. This review aims to make the underlying connections between fashion, journalism and the city as the conditioning apparatus of modernisation. By recognising that the city is the prime site for exploring the unfolding modernisation, what is emphasised is the cultural forms of modernity that privilege the subjective, experience and emotional
response through the structures of looking, acting and feeling. These ways of seeing and experiencing the city becomes a means through which the self can be reconstructed and rethought of, an aspect of cultural consciousness. Finally, the fashion literature allows us to make sense of the communicative and social meaning-making conducted through sartorial wear. Looking modern is a demonstration of the individual’s fashion sense within the context of that city. Thus, the importance of fashion journalism lies in the fact that it is a promoter and communicator of the cultural modernity, constantly exploring the drama of urban phenomenon. Fashion journalism presents a mediated space from which to understand the shifts and changes taking place in the cultural modernisation of the three cities.
CHAPTER FOUR: Shanghai (Vision Magazine)

Introduction

So, now we have a market system which is competitive - China is becoming a world factory. What is this factory like? Is it manufacturing? Or, is it for your own products? You show the world, your best products. What is it? It is design, aesthetics.

China’s changes need us to immerse ourselves in design, because design can increase our value….Instead of thinking that we will be concerned with design when we are rich, design is what gives us advantage in selling.

An artist cannot exist only for making money, there is a spirit involved- this spirit means that you transmit the things you’ve learned to others. This is the reason why artists exist, not just for commercial gains but a duty to their people.

(Chen 2004, Interview)

In capitalising on his success as an artist, Chen Yifei, the founder and publisher of Vision magazine turned his attention to the promotion of aesthetics (meixue) and design for a developing China. He traded his canvas for other creative mediums from, fashion retail label (Layefè) to home wares, modelling agency to graphic designing and fashion publications. The fashion label, Layefè (a play on Chen’s name) expanded to more than 200 branches in China with a turnover of $25 million (Yoon 2002). Chen’s success at transforming aesthetics and cultural knowledge into popular consumer products suggests that he has his pulse on the tastes of a growing consumer society. He also directed and made several films, of which, Reveries on
Old Shanghai (1993) is a poignant and nostalgic exploration of 1842, the year Shanghai was established as a port city (Jessie 2003).

In several interviews, Chen stated that the lack of aesthetics in the everyday life in China motivated him towards selling his vision and aesthetic sense to elevate and improve the cultural standing of his fellow Chinese citizens (Au 2002). Hence, all his enterprises placed particular emphasis on the importance of modern visuality and aesthetics in the function of everyday life:

- fashion wear (bodily adornment),
- graphic, architecture and interior designs (environmental, textual)
- models (standards of beauty),
- advertising (modes of commercial aesthetics),
- film (he made Reveries on Old Shanghai (1993), Evening Liaison (1995), Escape to Shanghai (1998) – all visual reconstruction of Shanghai’s past
- fashion magazines (the promotion and communication of these forms of visuality and aesthetics)

To Chen, his own visual consciousness is situated in personal experience which was triggered by his time in New York. His realisation of the importance of visual culture in everyday life and its lack in China made him anxious to promote this to the greater Chinese public:

If it wasn’t for New York I don’t think I would have the ideas that I have today …. I remember reading all these wonderful magazines in New York and thinking to myself how great it would be if China had its own. But, I waited 20 years for the right time to do it (Au 2002).
As the flagship of Yifei Publishing and the materialisation of Chen’s beliefs, *Vision* adopts highly stylised images combined with lengthy features on famous personalities, fashion trends, locations and global brands to convey its trendiness. Launched in September 2001 by the YiFei Group, *Vision* is a commercial expression of Chen’s concept of ‘grand art, grand vision’ for China (Chen Yifei.com). Together with other fashion magazines — *Mook, Shanghai and Beijing Tatler* — *Vision* was edited by Chen and his hand picked team of young editors who he felt brought youth, vitality and relevance to the content of *Vision* (Chen 2004).

YIFEI VISION aims to build up the top brand of (China’s) visual publications in China …

As a book lover, I am quite disappointed that in the area of visual publications (in China), there is a huge gap between (us) China and the western countries, in terms of quality, (variety), quantity, design, production and distribution (sales).

Chen Yifei (Editorial, Yifei.com)

*Vision* is thus an expression of Chen’s aspiration to educate the wider Chinese public in ‘quality’ modern aesthetics and visual culture. Furthermore, ‘Vision’ is a translation of the Mandarin words *Shijue* — ‘shi’ meaning vision and ‘jue’ referring to the sense of perception and experience. The ethos captured through them proposes the use of sight and perception to explore modern experiences in the urban environment. This visual and tactile form of exploration is a means of engaging with multiple sensory experiences from food (taste and smell) to fashion (touch) and music (sound). As such, the title invites readers to use sensorial and tactile modes of exploration to experience the ‘new’ of the modern environment and culture.

Marshall Berman in *All That is Solid Melts into Air* envisages modernity as a universalising agent that transforms the social experience, stating, ‘Modern
environments and experiences cut across all boundaries of geography and ethnicity, of class and nationality, of religion and ideology’ (Berman 1983, p.15). In other words, to know this new environment and its modern cultures one has to go out and be immersed in a sensorial and experiential engagement with its public systems, its street culture, the fashions and food, new technologies and so on. Among all these signifiers of modernity, it is fashion that captures the tell-tale signs of each individual’s modern-ness. Thus it is appropriate that, as a fashion magazine, *Vision* is concerned with the exploration of the boundary between the private body and its public representations. It is through fashion that social status and cultural affiliations are clearly displayed in Shanghai, in place of everyday blue and brown uniforms.

*Vision*’s definition of fashion is a wide one that encompasses the urban and seasonal fluctuations of design and visuality across aesthetic mediums — from clothes and bodily adornments to architecture and interior décor, from global urban holiday spots to famous personalities. While many magazines are no different, *Vision*’s equal emphasis on each of these categories almost denotes it as a general lifestyle magazine similar to *Wallpaper*. It displays an eclectic composite of styles across different mediums, sometimes with little or no thematic harmony.

Given the centrality of *Vision* within Yifei media publications — as the representative voice of Chen — and *Vision*’s wide circulation amongst Shanghai’s creative workers and readerships (Beech 2002), what forms of looking, acting and feeling are being promoted? More specifically, given our understanding of the emphasis placed by Chen on the development of aesthetics and visual culture, how does *Vision* reflect that concern? Furthermore, how is Shanghai evoked in *Vision*’s
visuality? Does *Vision* open a window to the world for its Chinese readers, or does it concentrate on showcasing ‘the world of China’? 

Yet, before these questions can be further examined, the context of Shanghai’s media history and its social and cultural development needs to be addressed. I have broken them down to three main issues: the first relates to media cultural history as seen in the figure of the cultural moderniser and the representation of Shanghai in pictorial magazines of the past. This knowledge frames my reading of *Vision* as it specifically addresses how Shanghai had been textually represented in the past and the roles played by cultural modernisers in establishing that representation.

The second relates to the model of modernisation and the fact that China has been practising different forms of modernisation, thereby relegating the current Socialism-Capitalism form as its latest. Thirdly, is the current socio-industrial context of China, and specifically of Shanghai. This social and industrial milieu informs the production and practice of fashion journalism and the consumption of fashion magazines in Shanghai. Furthermore, as fashion magazines are shown to address and reflect social concerns, desires and aspirations that deal directly with contemporary issues (Weiner 1999; Cameron 2000; Fung 2002), understanding the contemporary context allows the reading of the fashion texts to be guided and anchored to the social reality of the city. Third is the realisation that China has been through several different models of modernisation, and this Socialism-capitalism model is but its latest form.
Historical Comparison: Pictorial representation & Cultural Modernisers

Zhang Bohai, the Vice Chairman of the China Periodicals Association (1997) stated in a speech for International Federation for Periodical Publication (FIPP) that ‘Magazines have been crucial in propagating new ideas and promoting social progress over the past hundred years’. The current number of new foreign syndicated titles in China, as well as China’s own independent magazines, newspapers and websites provide an indication of the high media demand and consumption in China. Chanel’s regional director, Bonnie Gokson, at the opening Chanel’s latest flagship store at Plaza 66, noted that consumers have been hungry for more fashion information in China and there has been a considerable influx of international fashion magazines to feed this appetite (Rosi 2001).

Since the opening of China in 1979, its rapidly globalising market economy and the attendant developments have been drawcards for global investors and sociologists alike. China, and in particular Shanghai, are getting back on track with industrial developments that are remarkably similar to its pre-socialism days. As such, the flourish of capital investments and economic activities are not new. Before the turn of the nineteenth century, Chinese seaports, especially Shanghai, were awash with foreign currency and international trade in silk, rice and tea. China bought and sold with the rest of the world, trading items from opium to porcelain and tea. Politically, there were even popular demands for the twin markers of modernity: democracy and progress (Nathan 1986, p. x).

China had a dozen or so periodicals and presses that existed pre-1895, however 1895 is notable as it marked the arrival of the political press and its rise as a popular aspect
of Chinese culture. This was due to the perceived crisis in national security after Japan won the war and rights to Chinese treaty ports and control over Formosa (Lee and Nathan 1985, pp.363-4). Newspapers thus provided the forum for political discussions and information the public craved. Just after 1895, the newspapers numbered 216 and magazines 122, and by 1901 the number had stabilised to around 80 newspapers and 44 magazines (Lee and Nathan 1985, p.364). The highest circulating paper was Liang Zhichao’s *Hsin-min ts’ung-pao*, which reached fourteen thousand copies in 1906.

By 1938, Mackinnon argues that, China’s ‘golden age’ of journalism had arrived, arguably centred in Wuhan, where the papers were relatively free to pursue political discussions. It alone had fourteen dailies and 20–30 weeklies (MacKinnon 1995, p. 175). Shanghai was the base for several of the largest publishing houses in China (Lee 1999) and as one of the larger treaty ports had imported printing machines (Lee and Nathan 1985, p.368). As early as 1915 a variety of women’s sports and fashion magazines were already available to the local middle-upper class in Shanghai (MacKinnon 1995, p.181).

This brief history of Chinese journalism understandably provides a point of reference for understanding current journalistic practices. In fact, Chinese media researcher Hugo de Burgh states that the history of Chinese journalism allows current journalists to explain their work and to further facilitate their search for alternative models of journalism to adapt (2003, p.195). Jenner argues that the role of history in Chinese culture and identity formation is comparable to that of religion in Western nations. Jenner asserts that, ‘The religion of the ruling classes is the Chinese state,
and it is through history that the object of devotion is to be understood’ (Jenner 1994, p.11). Thus history acts as a framework against which everything that is new and changing in the Chinese society is measured.

a) Cultural Moderniser

The figure of the cultural moderniser is raised by Lee Leo Ou-fan in his study of the early print culture in Shanghai. He points out that cultural modernisers took the forms of publishers and elitist populist intellectuals. The populists, he contends were interested in making knowledge more accessible to the ‘general ‘new people’ who were “created” after all, by their textbooks and newspapers’ (Lee 1999, p.63). Publishers such as Commercial Press were fervent advocates of national knowledge development as I shall discuss later.

Lee’s research on Shanghai in the 1930s indicates that amongst these cultural modernisers, ‘their own quest for modernity — a quest conducted with full confidence in their identity as Chinese nationalists. In fact, in their minds modernity itself was in the service of nationalism’ (Lee 1999, p.309). This phenomenon of the Chinese community leader (entrepreneur and/or intellectual) who labours in service of the people (laobaixing) — even if it is in a paternalistic manner — is an important footnote in the Chinese social history.

Chen has continually expressed (in interviews and editorial comments) his aesthetical aspiration (mei-xue), his cultural pride in China’s national identity and a desire to assist in propelling the nation towards Western or global standards (Chen Yifei.com). Thus, within this context, I suggest that Chen could be considered as one
of Shanghai’s contemporary cultural modernists; his beliefs, methods and ambitions lie significantly close to the cultural positions other Chinese ‘leaders’ have occupied in the past. In a sense, what propelled them (and him) is an urgency to improve the lives of Chinese nationals (zhongguo renmin) and, by extension, the Chinese civilisation through cultural modernisation (Lee 1999, pp.50-54).

b) Pictorial Publications

The commercial nature of Chen’s aesthetic and visual culture is not new. In fact, one of the popular pictorial magazines, Liangyou huabao (The Friendly Companion), published by The Good Friend Book and Printing Company in 1925, also aimed at introducing a visual photography culture to the Shanghai Chinese readership (Lee 1999, p.64) then. These popular photography promoted images of Shanghai’s urbanity advancing notions of the nationalistic ideals and commercial development circulating in Shanghai between the 1920s–40s.

Lee also cited that publisher, Commercial Press, was crucial in promoting notions of enlightenment through the popularisation of knowledge. He points out that as the largest commercial publisher of that period Commercial Press published the well-known Dongfang zazhi (Eastern miscellany, 1904–1948) and at least eight other magazines, including Woman Magazine. It enlisted influential editors to prepare foundational texts which contains, ‘all the necessary knowledge that a national citizen should possess’ (p.53). Compiled collections such as Textbooks for the Republic that aided in the nation-building task of the Republican government (Lee 1999, pp.50-54). Due to its popular commercial nature, these literature became readily accessible to the wider public and schools.
Furthermore, the pictorial Liangyou huabao (The Friendly Companion) founded by Wu Liande in 1925, a former employee of the Commercial Press, also boasted the use of the new technology of photography printing. One of its key attractions was its cover page — a photograph or pictorial of a ‘modern woman’ with her name tagged beneath. Lee suggests that this may be a carryover of Qing conventions, where famous courtesan ‘flower girls’ were displayed on newspaper covers (1999, p.63). This convention of displaying real ‘modern’ women of renown on the cover page transferred the public persona of women as courtesans to famous actresses and wives (for example, Song Chingling, see page 262). While the impact of the magazines on the transformation of the public persona of Chinese women cannot be dealt with here, suffice to say that modern women were beginning to be publicly represented by a more diverse repertoire of figures.

Other pictorial magazines such as Silver Star (Yinxing), Modern Women (Jindai funu), Arts Weekly (Yishu jie) and Athletics World (Tiyu shijie) continued with the modernist fervour, promoting all that was new, different and urban. The editors capitalised on the public’s desire for ‘new day to day urban lifestyle’ (Lee 1999, p.65), and provided scope and diversity of emulation and role models upon which new modern behaviours could be learnt.

Most importantly, in 1934, Liangyou huabao began a series of photo-essays on Shanghai, exploring aspects of Shanghai’s modernity. Lee argues that these pictures captured Shanghai during the 1930s as a fully-fledged Chinese modernity. This representation bears comparison to Vision’s photo-essay of Shanghai 70-odd years
later. While there are substantial differences, it nonetheless situates *Vision*’s pictorial and textual exploration within this historical trajectory and raises questions about the differences in their visual treatment of Shanghai and its cultural modernity.

Therefore, even in comparisons between 1920s and contemporary Shanghai, there are notable such as the importance of the cultural moderniser and the roles played the publishing houses in establishing what Lee terms the ‘cultural imaginary’ of society. ‘Cultural imaginary’ refers to a ‘contour of collective sensibilities and the significations resulting from cultural production’ (p.63) which in application is useful for considering the location of *Vision* and its imaginative potential within the current cultural collective that is negotiated through pre-existing and present cultural formations.

By recognising that a larger cultural community is constructed and forged through the imaginative potential of histories, technologies and mediation, Lee’s concern is that: ‘we must not neglect the “surfaces”, the images and styles that do not necessarily enter into the deepest of thought but nevertheless conjure up a collective imaginary’ (p.63). In other words, the imaginary consequences of these cultural forms, whether they be visceral ‘surfaces’ or deep analytical features, in images and/or written texts, have the capacity to transform and shape ways of imagining the urban environment and consequently our identities.

**Modernisation Models**

The second issue that needs to be briefly mentioned is the understanding that this current modernisation underway in Shanghai is not the first, but (at least) the third
version. As a society and country, China has been modernising through different models for a century. Any analysis of Shanghai’s modernity needs to recognise this complexity and further that what is ‘captured’ through the fashion texts needs to be read within this historical condition in mind. If modernity is distinguished as both a condition and an ideology (Hartley 1996, p.33), then the conditioning is integral to the overall cultural investigation of Shanghai’s modernity. While China’s 1978 opening-up to global trade is represented as the death-knell of socialism. Socialism was, nevertheless, one model of modernisation and China’s historical condition. Furthermore, while heated debates still rage between Chinese left wing intellectuals, historians and political scientists on the significance of Mao Zedong’s contribution to China, what is worth noting is the China that Mao left behind is radically different to the one he begin with.

Prior to the advent of Socialism, China’s trade with Western nations had created an earlier version of capitalistic modernity. Lee contends that by the 1930s Shanghai was considered to be on par with Western cities such as New York and London, superseding Paris in international infrastructure, culture, entertainment and services that denoted Shanghai as modern city in its own right (1999, pp.37-8). Although it is this earlier form of cultural and entertainment circuit (for example, flower girls, and dancing halls) that Shanghai is most remembered for, its culture industries were also important. Its literary culture spawned a group of Chinese modernist writers and translators who became famous for inventing Chinese modernism. Most notable amongst these modernist novelists and essayists were Eileen Chang (Zhang Ailing), Shi Zhicun, Xu Chi and Lu Xun, all of whom would have been writing within a common cultural milieu (WestEast Magazine devotes a feature to tracing Zhang
Ailing’s life and works after she left Shanghai for America). Significantly, this was when the terms ‘republic’, ‘democracy’ and ‘modern’ became incorporated into the Chinese vocabulary. Lee notes that while modern translates to *xiandai*, in Shanghai it was directly transliterated to *modeng* (Lee 1999, p.5), as a direct imitation of the global trends.

Thus, it is not surprising that as Shanghai began to attract attention to its aspirations for world city status in the last eight years, it is the 1930s Shanghai, as Pearl of the Orient, that is vividly recollected and represented (Muzi.com 2002). This is seen in that cultural and tourism products currently flooding the streets of Hong Kong and Shanghai and exhibitions and magazines, hark back to that era (Lee 1999, p.332). This has also kick-started academic examinations into ‘nostalgia’ in Shanghai (Levenson 1971; Lee 1999; Abbas 2000; Eckhardt 2001). Elizabeth Wilson, in relating city to nostalgia, perceives it as ‘a movement whereby we appropriate the present by acknowledging and understanding that past’ (Wilson 1997, p.139). As such, looking to the past is also a way of looking towards the future. It is telling that the present has selected this particular segment of Shanghai’s history — considered by the CCP to be decadent and bourgeois — to be highlighted and remembered. This period of Shanghai’s history also significantly contributes to global fashion texts with flamboyant fashion moments such as, the hybridisation of the qipao and the incorporation of the western suits for the urban Chinese male.

If nostalgia is a means of reconciling past and present, it is towards the future, and to progress, that it looks. The 1920–30s Shanghai was a cosmopolitan world city, and it is this buzz and representation that China seeks to reinstate in Shanghai, to aid in
powering up China’s industrial growth and to hasten the modernisation processes. However, it is telling how far Shanghai still has to go. Shanghai, ‘Pearl of the Orient’, was a city of lights — neon, gas lights, cafes, movie theatres and dance halls — with a rich commercial culture in the form of posters, advertisements, promotional pamphlets, notices on the sides of buildings and so on. The Shanghai of today is only beginning to accumulate the signs of visual commercialised culture; visual paraphernalia of gigantic billboards, rolling banners and flashing neon lights are quickly making their way back to the city, with commercial signage always denoting the ascendance of a global promotional urban culture.

Yet, the speed of Shanghai’s urban transformation is so rapid that perhaps this nostalgia instigated by the pace of change which ‘rather than effacing the past, may even intensify our memory of what is no longer there’ (Wilson 1997, p.129). Thus, the Shanghai of today occupies a complex spatial and temporal relationship with its past and, perhaps, its future. The urgency to modernise and progress necessitates a hybridity of recombined models in Shanghai, which Deng Xiaoping has famously called ‘Socialism with Chinese characteristics’. Yet how would the economic aspects of this modernity work? Can socialist state ethos exist with private wealth and material accumulation?

While, these questions can not be answered within the scope of this thesis, the wider emerging framework of urban cultural production and consumption in China promotes this rhetoric of possibility. This chapter specifically examines the function and pedagogy of the fashion magazines in promoting this societal dialogue. The public brought up on socialism must somehow adjust to the industrial modernisation
rhythm of demand and supply. It needs to be educated about the speed of modern life, its constant transformations, the complex labour market and the disciplining of the private self in relation to all these issues - fashion magazines are a good place to start due to their ubiquitousness in the urban space and their popularity.

**Contemporary issues: Development and Consumption**

The third contextual issue framing this analysis of Shanghai relates to the force of media and industrial development. Since the economic reforms instigated by Deng Xiaoping, the world community has kept their eye on the vigorous transformation and growth of China. In the manufacturing sector, China has taken over as the primary factory for much of the world’s production, so much so that other manufacturing countries such as India, Mexico, Korea and Taiwan have been severely affected (Kalish 2003). China now produces more than 50 per cent of the world’s cameras, 30 per cent of air conditioners and 25 per cent of washing machines. Within the region, China’s low cost of assemblage has replaced counterparts in electronics companies from Korea, apparel companies from Hong Kong (since the 1980s) and computer manufacturers from Taiwan (Kalish 2003, pp.1-3). In 2002 its exports reached US$325 billion, a 22 per cent rise from the previous year which accounts for 22.4 per cent of China’s GDP (Gross Domestic Product) (p.3). The volume of Shanghai’s stock exchange (one of two in China) traded at $150 billion in 1998 (Buckwalter 2003, p.27). Export is the main driver of China’s exponential growth, but the flow-on effects of personal wealth reported in the media in 1990s went beyond the personal success stories. Stories of problematic consumption by youth, conspicuous consumption and extreme cosmetic procedures
reflect the quick shifts in societal attitude in just one generation (Beech 2002; Engstrom 2003; Escobar 2005).

In Shanghai, the arrival of international labels and franchises are a validation of its rapid growth and the city’s globalising status. The latest high-profile fashion magazine to make it into China is *Vogue China* (in September 2005). However, other magazines such as *Harper’s Bazzar* and *Cosmopolitan*, headed by Hearst Publications, have long had a stake in the market. Even regional magazine titles such as *Her World* from Singapore launched a Chinese version (*Ni*; meaning ‘you’) in 2004 (SPH 2004). Cultural events like the staging of international Broadway musical *Les Miserables* at the Shanghai Grand Theatre, in 2002 (China.org.cn 2002), and winning bids for international events like World Expo 2010, demonstrate that Shanghai is returning to a favoured status destination for international and domestic travellers alike.

Other high-end consumables, such as the arrival of international fashion houses Gucci, Chanel, Louis Vuitton; popular fast food chains like Kentucky Fried Chicken and McDonalds; and the hundreds of international financial institutions that now inhabit the banks of Pudong, are significant in that they are the most basic iconography of global trade and cultural consumption that most Western cities possess. The intention to turn Shanghai’s waterfront into an international passenger terminal centre catering for luxury water travel also points to long term planning towards a value-added tourism infrastructure and leisure milieux of international standards (Muzi.com 2002).
These changes stand in stark contrast to Chen’s impression of China on his return in 1992 (Au 2002). His impressions then were of 1 billion people still living in ‘drab apartment blocks, decorated their whitewashed walls with the same tacky calendars and wore the same blue and brown clothes day in and day out… without any real sense of lifestyle’ (Beech 2002). In just ten years the transformations includes the launch of *CATS: the Musical*, to the arrival of fashion boutiques such as Chanel and international home-ware chain IKEA. The establishment and popularity of Shanghai international fashion shows and a growing punk and rock n’ roll scene, all indicate that China’s industrial revolution is quickly acquiring a cultural, social and technological dimension. An ironic, if not indelible sign of modernisation are the individuals engaging in conspicuous, ostentatious consumption exhibited in public places and more problematic ones rooted to issues of personal debt and teenage cosmetic surgery. (Larmer 2002; Tian 2004; Escobar 2005)

Among the many media stories circulating on Chinese consumption, one story highlights the incredible story of exorbitant consumption. Among the paddy fields of Hangzhou looms an exact replica of the US White House, Mount Rushmore and the Washington Monument that Huang Qiaoling, a tourism magnate, built for ten million dollars simply because he could (Beech 2002). Another industrialist asked for the most expensive French wine in the most expensive restaurant and, upon tasting it, added Sprite to the wine to make it sweeter (Beech 2002). These stories exist beyond issues of personal taste; they illustrate the rise of a nouveau riche class yearning for luxury goods and services previously unattainable and when achieved they do not possess the cultural literacy or social competency to appreciate the value of the commodity. Lacking the appropriate response and knowledge for the object’s value
banishes such cultural consumption as meaningless beyond its superficial value, exemplifying sociologist Thorstein Veblen’s 1902 exegesis of conspicuous consumption (Veblen 1994).

Other social consequences of conspicuous consumption are highlighted by the media hype and reports over reckless spending by rich young Chinese consumers. Articles from Asia Times, Far East Economic Review and South China Morning Post, all cite a growing affluence that is fuelling the desire for ostentatious display. Another entrepreneur says, ‘In China, if you’re rich, you have to look the part’ (Beech 2002), explaining the demand for luxury labels. Plaza 66 and the new Times Square are just the tip of the 40 megamalls iceberg, with rows of shopping malls and fashion boutiques displaying Armani, Chanel and Prada in HuaiHai Lu in Shanghai (Escobar 2005). While some perceive it as a sign of affluence and progress, others criticise it for the overt influence of materialistic decadence and irresponsible spending by the new ‘generation me’ (Clifford 1991). Shifts in societal attitudes on beauty, fashion, ambition and individualism lead headlines, such as Newsweek’s cover ‘China goes Shopping’ (1 March 2004), ‘More young people see plastic surgery’ (Tian 2004), ‘The Money Revolution’ (Vittachi 2002) and ‘Rise of the Individual’ (Vittachi 2002). One particular article in The Weekend Australian Magazine reported on the extent of this beauty phenomenon, telling of young Chinese girls who are surgically stretching their legs by breaking them in order to be taller and, thus, more beautiful (Armitage 2003).

In view of these developments both industrial and social, how did China progress so quickly from its drab apartment blocks with its equally drab interiors to becoming the
land of shopping malls and Italian suits? How did they move from anonymous blue and brown attire to the latest Louis Vuitton and Gucci fashions? How did personal taste and individual adornment, especially fashionable pursuits, become an overriding motivation in less than ten years? The processes of modernisation and progress seem to have leapfrogged through China. The societal and cultural shifts are most visibly displayed through attitudes, personal consumption and adornment as noted by former Prime Minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew (2000):

In the 22 decades since my first visit, in 1976, I have seen China transformed. I find most astonishing not the physical structures, new buildings, expressways, and airports, but the different attitudes and habits of the people and their willingness to speak their minds. Books are published that would have been seditious in the 1970s or 1980s. The free market and modern communications have brought more openness and transparency. They will make China as different again in another two decades.

Perhaps the solution to material decadence and waste in China is not about criticizing consumption but about promoting responsible, tasteful consumerism that is aware of its social and environmental consequences. This ‘sans connoisseurship’ (Beech 2002) is, after all, a thoughtless pattern of consumption that often relies on the grapevine rather than on knowledge about the product. It also goes some way to counter Akbar Abbas’ criticism of the illiterate nature of Shanghainese consumption as an evolving culture of ‘transnationalism [in Shanghai] without a corresponding transnational subject’ (2000, p.783), making the point that while the global infrastructural change taking place across the city is global, it lacks suitable cultural citizens who are literate consumers.

However, cultural literacy can be inculcated. Taking into account the speed of development and the adaptability of the population, there is a conviction that the
Chinese public will be able to translate and cultivate these higher cultural values and taste cultures. In fact, this thesis argues that the process of instigating cultural literacy has begun, with fashion magazines situated as ideal cultural intermediaries upon which all sorts of social and cultural fads and consumption are reflected, constructed and addressed.

**Fashion Media: Industry and Regulative Policy**

The local government of Shanghai shares Chen’s concerns at the development of an aesthetic façade and its urban presentation. This new socialist push towards fashion is highlighted in a statement by Shanghai’s vice-mayor, Jiang Yiren (Mickleburgh 1995), ‘The socialist system wants to beautify people’s living. When we paid attention only to class struggle and denounced bourgeois things, everyone wore the same clothes and colours. There was no concept of beauty.’ This emphasis on attaining cultural attributes is part of, ‘catching up’ and is an impetus driven from both political and commercial spheres.

Media is a central part of this catch up strategy. In terms of media usage there is an increasing demand for information to assist the populace in making sense of other cultures, global movements, local industry developments, modern relationships and the emancipation of individuals. Chanel’s regional director of image and external relations, Bonnie Gokson, points out that ‘There hasn’t been much fashion information in the way of magazines but such is the hunger for them that many international magazines are starting to set up office on the mainland and are choosing Shanghai for their base’ (Rosi 2001). This was also noted by international publishers
Hearst International Publications, headed by George Green, which expanded into China with its international titles, *Cosmopolitan* and *Harper’s Bazaar* (Tsang 2001).

It is during this period of rapid industrialisation, surge in standards of living and a desire for global knowledge that *Vision* magazine was launched in September 2001. The fact that it is sponsored by China Youth Magazine, an arm of the Central Committee under the Communist Youth League of China (Cao 2005), again emphasizes the awareness of political leadership and the importance of fashion and fashion communication. Fashion and presentation has always occupied an important social place in Chinese society. At its most recent, the Mao suits worn by most men (women who were not Party cadres did not wear them) in China were a political and ideological statement of the classless utilitarian society that promoted gender egalitarianism by withholding any displays of individualism, ostentatiousness and rampant consumerism. It was also the uniform of public servants, because it signified the revolutionary ethos initiated by Dr Sun Yatsen and popularised by Mao as a show of national solidarity and unity (Finnane 1999, pp.22-3).

The abandonment of the uniform to ‘national wear’ status (Lev 2005) occurred because individualism, market variety and social aspirations began to dictate fashion tastes. This parallels the slow passing of the Socialist struggle and the rapid uptake of modes of self-expression through fashion, music and lifestyle. Yet how does an entire society accustomed to years of uniform begin to dress themselves for business, for education or for social occasions? Fashion magazines fulfil part of this dissemination process, introducing ideas and visual possibilities for dress and fashion to be a form of self expression and representation again.
The role of fashion magazines and journalism, as reviewed in Chapter Three, highlighted the instrumental purpose of fashion journalism in fulfilling its traditional pedagogic functions of instructing, advising and promoting. It is not a coincidence that *Shanghai Tatler* features in-depth instructions on cooking Italian dishes, appreciating wine and flower arrangement as art (July, 2005, pp.176-182, *Shanghai Tatler*). As newspapers are instrumental for understanding the city (Fritzsche 1996, p.63), fashion magazines shows us how the body can/should/is represented in the city.

Formal institutional education imparts ‘hard’ knowledge passed down through research, teaching and study in formal disciplines such as architecture, literature or science. However, a large part of the cultural knowledge required for socialising and networking lies beyond, in a variety of ‘soft’ knowledge. This includes knowledge of popular culture (film, music, fashion, celebrities, etc.) and cultural savvy-ness displayed through fashion taste in self-adornment, eloquence, social networks and the necessary knowledge to negotiate the urban visual and street culture. Such knowledge is not frequently imparted through the formal channels of education, it extends even beyond social etiquette classes. It is associated with a specific historical and culturally conscious way of looking, acting and feeling in the city.

While ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ knowledge are required for successful integration with society, they do not fall under categories of high or low cultural binaries, but cut across them in terms of the approach or ways of acquiring knowledge. Perhaps soft knowledge is more useful for informing personal, cultural and social etiquettes — for
example, how to be a modern bride (in China), what global fashion looks like, where the coolest hangouts are or what the latest slangs are. Soft knowledge can be likened to the ways of looking, acting and feeling being promoted by popular titles of fashion magazines. They are, as suggested by Jennifer Craik (2000, p.48), ‘akin to training manuals for the masses’. So, in the case of cultural intermediaries like Vision, Shanghai Tatler and Mook, what are ‘they’ training ‘them’ for? Who is being trained and how is it done?

b) Media Regulative Policy

Even though there are market demands and eager publishers and investors ready to enter the publishing industry, there are many barriers to entry. The first is media regulation. While, the government has been gradually de-regulating media industries, it still retains an acute awareness and belief in the media’s ideological power, and the need for its control. A brief overview of the overall size of the market indicates its profit potential. Around 9000 magazine titles are published a year, with a total number of 2.96 billion Chinese magazines distributed in 2002. Although an industry at its infancy and with poor regulative structures, its advertising revenues were calculated at 8.585 billion RMB (U.S. $1,946 billion) in 2002. This figure is considered low for a country of its population size; compare this to the U.S. with $26.1 billion in revenue in 2001 (Buckwalter 2003, pp.18-19). Market analysts have noted the potential for growth, but only if China can strike a balance between its bureaucratic regulative mechanisms and market forces — in other words, initiating a formative policy on the publishing industry (Tsang 2001; Buckwalter 2003; Zhang 2003).
Buckwalter (2003, pp.25-6) notes that the CCP is still cautious of consumer magazines and monitors them for ideological content. Control is exerted through licensing, bureaucratic red tape and a lack of transparency that hinders collaborative efforts in domestic and international publishing. For example, publishers first require a licence from The General Administration of Press and Publication (GAPP), which is directly controlled by the central government’s State Council and The Publicity Department (a.k.a. The Propaganda Department). Private companies and foreign entities are not allowed to engage directly in publishing in China (Stevenson-Yang 1998), they are required to obtain a government sponsor, such as the China Youth Magazine. Thus, when China Youth Party pulled their sponsorship from *Vision* magazine, Yifei Group had to ‘return’ *Vision* even though it was conceptualised, financed and published by Yifei Group. By the time I interviewed Chen Yifei, *Vision* had already been removed from Yifei Publishing and they were launching a new series of visual magazines + book entitled, *MOOK*. *Vision* is currently published by the China Youth Group.

Policies restricting capital-raising through international partnerships severely limit the number of ventures in China. In Chen’s case, he financed his start-up through the sale of this art works. Similarly, most international publishers were restricted from publishing or owning publishing companies in China, except for certain legal loopholes allowing for local ventures and sponsorship with governmental agencies. In 2003 legal changes permitted some foreign ownership in publishing and opened up distribution channels in provincial capitals (FriedlNet 2003).
Despite the market viability, the actual profile of consumer and readership surveys and background is still thin due to the lack of expertise and resources in information gathering. Buckwalter argues that international publishers seeking to formulate their budgets would be hard-pressed to rely solely on the circulation and small auditing numbers of 22 publications (by BPA) out of a known 566 registered publishing houses (Buckwalter 2003, p.41). This lack of accurate information or research on which to base financial decisions also hinders the level of international investments and start-ups.

The lack of proper understanding and financial management has also crippled the revenue in advertising. Zhang BoHai, the vice-chairman of the China Periodical Association, notes that in 2002 the income from advertising in magazines was only 1.68 percent of the total media advertising income, compared to television’s share of 25.58 percent of the market (2003, p.21). Yet, advertising dollars and circulation can only be strengthened by an equally robust distribution channel that allows cultural producers a quick response and turn-around time to ‘converse’ and cater to the needs of readers/consumers. Zhang argues that the Chinese distribution channels are the weakest links, with sales and distribution stagnating for ten years despite increases in publication titles. Zhang argues that this is due to underdeveloped newsstands and retail outlets. Subscriptions, both voluntary and compulsory, add to the confusion of data collection and verification of audits (Zhang 2003, p.21).

The last and most important point is that consumers play a vital role in this entire publishing cycle. With consumers becoming more sophisticated and media savvy through the use of multiple media platforms, from the internet to television and radio,
their taste and demands have grown drastically. Zhang points out that there is a demand for more niche and specialised knowledge and information, with a preference for higher quality paper, technical production and better visual magazine designs (Zhang 2003, pp.18-20). In this aspect, Chen has also observed that the apparent gap between China and the developed world lies in the ‘quality, (variety), quantity, design, production and distribution (sales)’ (Chen Yifei.com). This demand for better quality and specialised information is a sign of the move towards a more affluent information economy.

Despite Chen’s realisation that the ability to produce quality content will distinguish and value-add for China, Vision itself came under criticism by other publications in the industry for ignoring copyrights and ownership of photo-shoots and visuals. Most notably, Kevin Lee, founder and editor of West East Magazine (WE), cited the indiscriminate use of WE’s photo-shoots without its permission (Lee 2004). Advertising photo-shoots, such as the seductive and racy images of stockings for Espanashoes, are positioned like fashion photography, laid out over six pages (Vision 2003, pp.32-37). While the provocative photographs may have been included for pedagogic reasons — instructing in sensuality and urban styling — the visuals and layout (large visuals, large headline, six pages) reveal that it is advertisement copy utilised as a feature spread. The inability to develop and deliver creative, original content consistently is a pervasive problem in China, with copying of visuals being a traditionally accepted means of display and learning. For example, within the realm of writing and publishing, Lee states that in the 1930s many Chinese writers took freely from foreign translations and passages, including them into their work with no consideration for copyright (Lee 1999). Fowler also cites similar problem currently
with copying in creative industries such as the advertising market (Fowler 2004). Given the complex historical precedent of copying in China, producing original content is not only related to skills but a cultural mindset that Chinese authorities will have to inculcate over time.

As noted by Leadbeater and Oakley (1999), the key to a vibrant development of creative enterprise requires ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ infrastructural support. Government agencies need to get bureaucratic and legislative mechanisms right as international and local publishers make their way into the market. Buckwalter argues that despite the WTO push, the publishing industry is not included in infrastructural makeovers under the WTO list, hence governmental priorities are perhaps less committed. In any case, as policy makers are looking to ensure media control while still generating profitability, the general consensus is that, in the meantime, venture capitalists and publishing enthusiasts will continue to find loopholes until the industry get a full revamp (Buckwalter 2003, pp.29-30).

This industry discussion provides a brief review of the current developmental issues in Chinese fashion magazine industry, highlighting its relative immaturity and key problems. This demonstrates how far the media control and regulative mechanisms have progressed in twenty years, and how much further it will have to go before the publishing industry can be completely deregulated. One of the key attributes for its formative years is regulative discipline and transparency to ensure it provides viable platforms for production and quality publications for readers, as well as a stable system for future growth and cultural developments (Zhang 2003, p.21).
Vision Magazine

Vision magazine is described as resembling the international Wallpaper magazine in format, but with a Chinese flavour (that's Beijing 2005). While, the subject-matters are similar to Wallpaper’s — architecture, travel destinations, hotspots, fashion and accessories — the style, presentation and specific content are a radical departure. At 400-plus pages, it was possibly one of the thickest and heaviest fashion magazines in China. Sold at 30 renminbi (approximately A$6), it cost more than international franchise titles such as Elle, which sells for 18 renminbi.

Despite its higher cost, the Yifei Group justifies it by arguing that Vision is unique and a creative influence. They argue that Vision had a circulation figure of 10,000 copies monthly and was read by art students, designers and white-collar workers (Au 2002) and was distributed in the affluent cities of Guangzhou, Beijing and Shanghai via bookstores and roadside news stalls or by subscription. As a fashion magazine, Vision significantly differed from the usual titles in its absence of common editorial sections, its reader’s letters, favourite buys, health sections, how to put a look together or its profiles of local personalities. It did not address a specific female readership or pursue issue-based feature, instead it often carried general features that allowed visually stunning copy such as, photographer’s work or a famous art exhibition. Thus, its contents seemed to be directed at the general creative reader, rather than women. Vision also attracts design and art students who are specifically craving to be aware of global trends and fashion, while the cost of the magazine and its content on travel and leisure also restricts its larger readership base to middle class and white-collar yuppies.
Selection of Fashion Texts

*Vision Magazine* was launched in October 2001 as a monthly magazine in Shanghai under the sponsorship of China Youth Magazine. This sponsorship was withdrawn by China Youth Magazine in July 2004, therefore in total 34 issues were published by Yifei Group. Out of these 34 issues, I collected 19. Although I subscribed to the magazine in January 2002, the first copy did not arrive until some 2 months later and in some months, the magazine failed to be delivered at all. In those months, I managed to ask acquaintances in Shanghai to buy me a copy. Calls to the subscription office to inquire and at first to subscribe was fraught with many ‘unknowns’ – the magazine was distributed only in Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou, thus the staff did not have many international inquiries about *Vision* much less about international subscriptions.

Besides, the difficulty associated with gathering *Vision*, a central issue underscoring this analysis is the productive and influential role played by Chen Yifei, the editor-in-chief. An example about Chen’s influence is his belief that the younger generation has ‘something to teach us’, thus, he selected a young group of editors and graphic designers to run the magazine, providing them a textual space to explore their vision and hopes for the future under his guidance (Chen 2004). This section explains the rationale and approach used to select the fashion texts.

In collecting 19 out of the 34 issues, I found that most of the issues focused on international architecture, art, designers, fashion (celebrities, designers, fashion week, fashion houses) and international travel (exoticised locations accompanied by large sections of photography). An important aspect is that there is no editorial
address and the topics in each issue seemed to pick up random topics, often located in unsuitable sections. In fact, even though the magazine is ordered under ‘Fashion, ‘Space’ ‘Technology’, ‘Travel’, ‘Art’ and ‘Culture’ – what seems to hold the features together is the tone of address, its instructive-ness. For example, Elijah Wood is profiled in one of the articles about his role in *Lord of the Rings* (pp.172-175), in the April 2003 issue under the Art section. There is nothing to explain why this article is classified under Art, yet it is a timely piece (situated between the launch of Lord of the Rings: Two Towers in December 2002 and the third and last feature in December 2003). Even the article is a personal look at Woods’ transformation from teenager to Hollywood star and it sits next to an article on sculpture. The disorganisation of the subject-matter in the magazine is something I examine in closer detail (as illustrated through *Toying with Jewels*, p.180). Furthermore, I found after scanning, reading and then analysing the features, the overriding theme that held everything together is *Vision’s* intent to instruct, and it is this pedagogic purpose that is strongly conveyed in all the features (entertaining or serious), photographic sections and even in some of the advertisements. Therefore, my eventual selection of the fashion texts was to represent this aspect of my finding, illustrating it through the feature on Harry Benson and sections on, Magazine Culture.

The particular commercial and popular pedagogy that Chen was in favour of is peculiar in its disorganisation and the intensity of its occurrence, and part of my investigation in this chapter asked the question why? And, how is this pedagogy achieved? At a basic level, I pinpointed the practice of ‘image flooding’ that artists often used as a means of instructing younger artist trainees, which Chen as an artist was probably familiar with and the uses of symbolism in Chinese society. This
artistic vision and desire to inculcate the city with ‘good aesthetic’ is something Chen overwhelming emphasized, especially in his interview. Thus, given Chen’s love of Shanghai (he made films about Shanghai, painted its women and its culture) it became pertinent that I highlighted the irony and foresight that he took to producing the last issue in July 2004, capturing the modernity of metropolis Shanghai. The discrepancy of the represented images with the reality of the dirt and crowd in the city is something that Lee Leo Ou-fan similarly addressed in his analysis of *Liangyou huabao* in the 1930s. The reading and analysis of *Vision* is therefore, less concerned about a content-led analysis of the textual properties, as the immediately obvious urgency that Chen displays in imparting a visual literacy to its the readers, and furthermore, what didactic forms of looking, acting and feeling does he articulate through the magazine and on to the city?

**Visual culture**

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Figure 2. Cover of *Vision*, June 2003
On the cover page of *Vision* smaller scripts under the title state, ‘Everything you need to see’ in Mandarin (*shijue*, meaning vision + experience) invites the reader to take a sensorial approach to experiencing the newly modernised China. The different cover pages feature pairs of female eyes, emphasising again the focus on the visual and sight as a primary sensory organ of exploration. (See Figure 2. and Appendix 1) The magazine is categorised into sections: fashion, beauty, art, culture, space, technology, a city feature, criticism and dialogue. Additional content comprising advertisements sometimes dressed up as features (photo, text or both) and a lift-out section on magazine culture are intermittently included. The quality of the paper changes indeterminately from gloss to matt (pp.129-192). As noted earlier, the overall style of the magazine differs from conventional fashion magazines as it seems to allow the subject-matter to dictate the style and visual formatting of the page rather than using a stylised template layout.

For example, a selected visual feature from March 2003 displays a two page photo spread entitled ‘Toying with jewels’ (*Echo* 2003, p.60). It features costume jewels of long, coloured diamante chains being ‘squeezed’ out of coloured pastel tubes. It is an interesting conceptual representation abruptly cut off by the text box at the bottom. Next to the text box are chains of gold balls that sit disconcertedly, meandering aimlessly in and out of its boundary. On the far left corner is a woman’s naked back with strands of gold chain draped to her waist, with the small words ‘Yuri Ichihashi’, the designer. The title is given a lot of white space under the figure of the woman. The white background on which these different lines, text boxes and images are juxtaposed affect a convoluted layout that is less than professional. The assortment of
images conveys the feeling of cramming in too many objects across different styles, simultaneously resulting in a mishmash effect that is less than alluring.

This image seems to suggest that some improvement in layout editing and design is required. However, this visual feature is interesting because it also seems a likely metaphor for Vision’s pedagogic tactic. It crams as many topics, advertisements and features as it can into each issue (hence 400-plus pages). The images, texts and topics of each issue often do not share a thematic consonance but, rather, seem to be plucked out of a list of subjects that readers ‘ought to know’ and see. Therefore, the didactical nature of most of the articles far outweighs any thematic coherence of each issue. For example, the March edition is ordered as follows: Vision beauty features an article on Eva Herzigova (p.123) followed by (Vision art) ‘Quirky Creativity’ on using animals for advertising and showing a pitbull smiling and wearing a set of human teeth. Next is an article on HR Giger, ‘Alien Creator’, with his images of half-morphing human-like faces and half-entities of cyborg and alien shapes. This gives way to a visual feature on ‘Harry Benson – Celebrity Catcher’ (see Appendix 2-5). So far, each feature do not contain any thematic continuity except for their visual diversity which seems centred on the exploration of a variety of visual styles.

A short discussion of the feature on photographer Harry Benson (pp.130-147) demonstrates the explicit pedagogic intent of Vision. The featured images summarises Western history from the 1950s onwards. The black and white images range from OJ Simpson in the shower in 1972, Richard Nixon’s tearful farewell at the podium with his family, and a portrait of Ethel Kennedy. The colour images include Mike Tyson in the shower, Dennis Rodman posing nude with his girlfriend,
Michael Jackson sitting on a ‘throne’ chair with his baby son, and Giorgio Armani with a bare-breasted Ashley Judd watched by shoppers in Armani’s display window. Then in black and white again: Ronald Reagan on his farm, a series of miniatures shots of Bob Fosse, children in Baidoa running after a food distribution truck, a woman smashing the Berlin wall, Elizabeth Taylor in a hospital bed after a cancer operation (colour), a 1964 animated shot of the Beatles messing about in their hotel room and, finally, Bill and Hilary Clinton in an intimate embrace.

While the photo spread is based on the work of Harry Benson, it is also a visual narration of Western social and political history over the last 40 years. Most of the photos occupy one entire page, with some commentary by Benson. The black and white photos convey a sense of documentary realism and historical accuracy, a powerful but silent witness to a specific iconic moment in history — especially Richard Nixon’s sideway shot at his farewell speech. After 16 pages of images that transport the reader backwards and forwards in time, to different countries, across political and social situations — what is captured is a sense of the condition of humanity and its intriguing criss-crossing histories. Entrenched within these images of historical representations are the emotional journeys which invites readers to ‘feel’ along with the characters in the picture — journeys of exuberance (Beatles), anger (Ethel Kennedy, Berlin Wall), deliberate poise (Rodman), against the stolen observational shots of Nixon and Reagan, celebrities in sickness (Taylor) and health (Jackson & baby), innocence and joy (Baidoa’s children) and Simpson’s questionable innocence in the future. All juxtaposed and at play with each other as semiotic texts while the readers are positioned as historical witnesses to these personal responses. Thus readers are ferried across a temporal and spatial divide to
witness and understand these different historic events through the interface of popular fashion photography.

These personalities are famous for all different reasons — raise differing issues about contemporary society. They are brought together here and profiled visually by Vision as a means of promoting cultural capital. The popular knowledge made public to its Chinese readers in here specifically relate to a historical literacy of Western culture. In addition, the work of Harry Benson, a professional documentary photographer, ensured that the images captured are visually and emotionally powerful, displaying the subtle innuendos of a range of emotional experiences. Such popular visual knowledge is not found in text books, nor canonical literature but within the pages of popular transient media forms like fashion magazines. Part of the need to know the popular Western history of the last five decades is clearly an attempt and impetus to catch up on all the ‘news’ — not only in the scientific or technological realm but cultural, social and political, towards the development of rounded a cultural citizenship.

Furthermore, by juxtaposing the different visual forms from fashion design to catwalk and HR Giger’s art to cinematography (John Malkovich & Zhang Xiuping), installation art and architecture, what is being inculcated is a continuum of visual literacy that displays what is visually ‘good’ and important to its readers. This sentiment was expressed by Chen in the interview, contending that Chinese readers need to see and absorb a range of ‘good’ visual aesthetics to enable them to develop their own sense of style and aesthetics (Chen 2004). Therefore, these texts juxtapose and cut across the hierarchies of high versus popular (low) art and culture, as they are
read within this continuum held together by their visuality as models of good photography and complex popular texts.

Thus, as Hartley and McKee (2000, p.20) maintain that readers are multi-skilled, variously shifting and alternating in their positions as readers, audiences, publics and consumers within these texts. Vision’s primary agency of visual literacy is aided by readers’ engagements with the global fashion news and celebrities; performing at once the dual function of entertainment and education.

**Magazine Culture and ‘good’ aesthetics**

*Magazine Culture* is a monthly lift-out section that features different ‘good’ magazines from around the world. By reviewing different international publications from around the world, and interviewing the editors, *Vision* explains to its readers why these particular titles are ‘good’. The idea of what is ‘good’ in aesthetics or art comes up repeatedly as a criterion for judging the suitability of topics. So, the question of what *Vision* considers is ‘good’ aesthetics, art or visuals is central to their selection and inclusion of articles for the magazine, and this main criteria is also supported by Chen’s belief that to improve one has to learn through imitating from the best.

For example, in the June 2003 issue, *Magazine Culture* highlighted and compared *V Magazine* and *Visionaire*. The article points out that in the area of creativity *V Mag* has ‘left its competitors far behind’ (*translation*) pointing out its innovative treatment of Tom Ford as interview subject and its presentation of new forms of feminism through figures like Inez van Lamsweerde & Vinoodh Matadin. The showcase of *V*
*Magazine* gives *Vision* an opportunity to display their Galliano fashion spread, street punks, piercings, nudity, erotic and S&M advertising — all street cultural practices which are perhaps still heavily frowned upon in China. The next page features eight intriguing examples of fashion photography, one of which is a heat-sensored digital image of Alexander McQueen’s body and photo-shopped images of body-bending fashion photography. In essence while displaying these ‘good’ creative works, *Vision* is also utilising them as part of its feature and content.

*Visionaire* has even more pages devoted to its visual coverage, ‘You are what you wear’ Spring Portrait Campaign 2003, where images of catwalk models are digitally shrunk to form faces of fashion designers and icons such as Giorgio Armani and Dolce & Gabbana (Illustration 2). This particular artwork by Kevin Wolahan and its digital illustration by Kevin McQuire give fashion photography a new meaning. *Vision* highlights the unconventionality of *Visionaire*’s portfolio in engendering creative collaborations between commercial fashion dynasties such as Hermes, Tiffany and Dior and personalities like Nick Knight, Mario Testino, Wong Kar Wai, David Sims, Spike Jonze and so on. These successful collaborations again highlight the textually-rich junctures where the interstices of popular entertainment, art and consumption converge. These nine pages of photographs are carried with heavy editorialising on the importance of collaboration as a means of developing vision and a particular way of seeing the world. Looking (and imitating) is positioned as a fundamental way of learning about this modern environment.

This ‘message’ is similarly delivered and re- emphasised through the reviewing of *Wallpaper*, *Surface*, and *Exit* in April 2003; and *Spoon* and *The Face* in March 2003.
For many of the readers, such coverage condenses, explains and translates these different titles into soft knowledge that becomes part of their cultural knowledge and perhaps repertoire later. But even at the basic consumption level, this wider awareness of international magazine culture allows them to ‘look’ and ‘absorb’ the vast potential approaches and diversity of ideas in the global image bank. This process of updating themselves to global changes which have occurred historically and socially while information was inaccessible to them during China’s closed door policy contributes to our understanding of how fashion journalism functions as part of the textual educative system of modernising societies.

**Image-Flooding**

When Chen Yifei decided to pursue his ‘grand art, grand vision’ to elevate the standard of visual publications in China, he wanted fashion magazines to inspire and encourage readers to engage sensorially and experientially with the world. He wanted to reintroduce modern experiences and aesthetics as an ‘education’ in modernising without its institutional baggage. It is ‘soft’ knowledge inculcated through the familiarisation of visual techniques, formats and the experimentation of different stylistic representations. Essentially, all fashion magazines perform a multiplicity of functions of which instructing its readership is but one. However, *Vision* seems to be attempting to quicken the pace of this instruction by compressing a wealth of knowledge into every issue.

This education stretches from the often considered culturally insignificant popular knowledge, to political figures and social phenomenon — all deemed important to the subjective formation of a modern cultural citizen in the city. This rapid visual
inculcation can be likened to a form of image flooding, a rapid ‘downloading’ of information across a wide spectrum of knowledge, akin to the alien character of Leeloo in *Fifth Element* downloading all of earth’s history. As Hong Huang, the founder of *iLook* stresses, there is a need to teach consumers how to discern taste and cultural value through consumption rather than just participating in conspicuous consumption. Therefore, images such as the close-up of an embroidered designer top (June, 2003, p.18) and its editorialising essentially emphasises the importance of its sumptuous quality (zhizhao).

The concept of image flooding is regularly used by art schools as a creative practice to demonstrate and teach students different visual styles. It is also used in art appreciation, as noted by art teacher Marvin Bartel (Bartel), a practice that Chen would have been familiar with when he argues for a visual culture that is of ‘grand aesthetics’ and art. It is not art nor aesthetics with a capital A – that is, he does not mean classical art where the aura of artistic ability is hallowed and sacred. This is sufficiently demonstrated through his combining of art and commerce in his cultural enterprises.

His idea of an overriding aesthetic seems to be captured by Virginia Postrel (2003, p.6) in *The Substance of Style*, who defines this popular aesthetic as ‘the way we communicate through the senses. It is the art of creating reactions without words, through the look and feel of people, places and things.’ This falls in line with *Vision’s shijue*, which urges readers to utilise their visual senses to look, act and feel the tactility of modern environments, surfaces and commodities. To focus on the visual aspects of culture is to rely on another means of instruction — a literacy of
visual knowledge and aesthetics across society and culture. It is a historically modern and culturally specific way of looking and experiencing the city. Furthermore, the act of looking in urban spaces is specifically about activating the literacy of the modern reader through the visuals and aesthetics of modern life.

**Aestheticisation of Modern Life**

As discussed in Chapter three, Mike Featherstone observes an increasing aestheticisation of modern life as an intense saturation of images and visuality in the postmodern environment, wherein, aestheticisation could be taken to mean ‘the rapid flow of signs and images which saturate the fabric of everyday life in contemporary society’ (Featherstone 1991, p.95). He argues that this has come about due to an increase in consumer culture and the various technological mediations that have come to dominate and infuse everyday life. Featherstone argues that his hyper reality (evoked by Baudrillard in *Simulations*), plays itself out in that the ‘real and the imaginary are confused and aesthetic fascination is everywhere’ (Featherstone 1991, p.96). However, the build up to this point of intensification of aesthetics has a historical precedent.

Featherstone notes that with the rise of modernity and the age of industrialism, art’s impetus and power of illusion was transferred from painting into ‘advertising, architecture into technical engineering, handicrafts and sculpture into the industrial arts’ (1991, p.101). Within that period, Walter Benjamin’s study of the flâneur and the gaze was utilised to observe and investigate the rapid transformation of the urban landscape and the dreamworlds of consumption that was infused with the visual signage from billboards to shop displays, posters and graffiti to advertisements and
street signs. Simmel likewise notes that this aestheticisation is in the public body through fashion and adornments, with the acceleration of city life enforcing its seasonal change and further conformity to fashions (Frisby 1986).

Therefore, the rapid processing and ‘downloading’ of information observed in Vision, comprises a means and desire to both accumulate and familiarise oneself with visual history and the cultural iconography of modernity. The signs of new modern life carving up a city and dispersing the old are readily witnessed in the ubiquitous commercial visual signage creeping up in the urbanised spaces of Shanghai. The ‘downloading’ of information and knowledge through visual communication is derived from a desire to negotiate the modern aestheticised environment.

Significantly, understanding the visual signifiers in areas such as design, art, general trivia and popular cultural knowledge are tools that enable the reader to negotiate around global city and its cultures. Urban spaces like Times Square in New York are an example of this intense saturation of visual stimuli in an urban space where various digital arts forms, styles, street and popular culture are concentrated. Its hyper-reality of signs (especially at night) and lights invading the urban spectacle is only mediated by the individual’s ability to keep his/her bearings among the interweaving crowds to get to their destination. Part of this depends on the reader’s ability to understand the urban signals and signage.

While urban signs are a modern form of communication, the visual and symbolic values inherent in signs is not new to Chinese culture. Vision’s updating and familiarising of readers with new social, cultural and political knowledge through an
increasingly visual and aestheticised cultural environment has a historical precedent. Traditionally, moral and religious fear was instilled through Chinese mythologies, which depended heavily on visual texts as modes of instructions. This travels well across all sections of society as literacy was unevenly distributed across a range of age groups, gender and affluence. Thus visual symbols and iconography become a widely dominant mode of communication and recognition. *Daibiao*, meaning representation, is an important aspect of Chinese cultural traditions, where symbolism takes precedence in social and cultural events — colours (no black during Chinese New Year) and symbols ensuring good luck (double ‘happiness’ characters and cranes for marriage), mourning (red on black squares for sons, red on blue for daughters, grandchildren all blue and so on). Alternatively, as a form of discipline, the scenes from the eight levels of Hell — images of torture — feature both as symbolism and narration devices instructing in morality. The statues frozen in grotesque scenes are being punished for lying, stealing, covetousness, and sexual promiscuity and so on. People have their tongues cut out, bodies sliced open, have vats of hot oil poured on them, and there are a multitude of other tortures. This mythic representation can be witnessed in Haw Par Gardens in Singapore where kindergartens are routinely taken for school excursions to witness the life-size representations of the consequences of sin, instructed through visual horror.

Contrast this historically with the shifts in visual culture in the West, John Hartley and Ellie Rennie (2004, p.461) point out that the rise of Protestantism privileged print over visual forms. Print denoted what seemed to be modern values of reason, progress, science and realism; while the visual belonged to the realm of seduction, fantasy, emotion, private life and manipulation. They argue that visuality and its
social function of teaching stories and ideologies via a ‘corpus of visual, aural and spatial beauty’ (2004, p.460) have now migrated to the media and, in particular, entertainment media and magazines. They state that:

Cinema, TV, games and magazines continue to communicate like a medieval cathedral, via song, story and spectacle, using beautiful bodies and all manner of medieval devices to teach our secular laity the truths, values, morals and ideologies of these days (p. 461).

Vision instructs through its visually seductive collation of images of exotic travel, interesting personalities and desirable lifestyles promising happiness and beauty. In promoting desires and fantasies via a commercialised aesthecsed medium, all readers are invited to dream and participate in this future imaginary. If the flâneur’s promenade opened his eyes to the dreamworld of commodities and their endless promises in the arcade, then fashion magazines such as Vision take their readers through the same semiotic journey.

Mirror Images: Shanghai in Pictures

After visiting difference cities and countries (Lyon, Seoul, Paris, Spain, Africa, Idaho) around the world, Vision arrived at its own doorstep for its last issue (June 2003, entitled, The Face of Shanghai, pp. 79-90. See Figure 2-6). In scanning the diverse cultures, cities and societies around the world, it seemed to think it was time to apply the energies of looking, acting and feeling to home.

The city of Shanghai has been the subject of many photographic essays over its lifetime, not to mention one by WestEast magazine. Its newly built skyline has inspired many artists and digital designers to compose images of tribute. Liu Jianhua’s famous ceramic sculpture (Fig. 3) of Shanghai’s warped buildings and
skyline as reflected through the Huangpu River is a celebratory statement of its arrival in modernity, especially in an urban spatial sense.

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Fig. 3 Building Inverted Reflection in Water, Liu Jianhua, 2003

A magazine reviewing its own city is an interesting phenomenon. What does it capture and how is it captured? In advocating an aestheticised culture, Vision’s idea and reflection of Shanghai and its urban environment is important both for its domestic and international readers. Carried over twelve-pages, (see Appendix 6-9), Vision examined three spaces: the urban skyline, the street scenes and interior spaces. The opening photo is of a lonely, foggy evening settling down on Shanghai’s famous Pudong, made famous by the number of photographic essays on it. Shanghai’s commercial skyline and buildings are captured from a variety of angles through various times of the day. Half of this photography concentrates on the brand new skyscrapers and urban built environment in Pudong. It is clear that there is a certain pride in this modernised, commercialised urban environment which serves as the iconicisation and self-branding of new Shanghai.

Much as the Chrysler Building or the Empire State Building symbolises New York, the Jinmao Tower and the Oriental Pearl tower in Pudong has come to represent the
progressive ascendance of Shanghai’s modernity. One particular shot of the Jinmao Tower rising out of the horizon, reflecting a beam of sunlight, is emblematic of shots of other renowned buildings. These aerial shots bring to mind Michel de Certeau’s writing on *Walking in the City* where the modernist dream of looking down from a tower and seeing/experiencing with a ‘scopic’ ‘visionary’ eye becomes a reality. The distance from the crowd and life encourages a sense of being enlightened (1984, p.92). In the spatial sense, skyscrapers colonise the aerial and reshape the silhouette of a city. The view from the top potentially alters the spatial reality and imagination of a city. Such skyscrapers have also come to be markers of commercial success and the stamp of standard requirement in any global city, so that aspiring cities clamour to build the tallest skyscrapers, among them Kuala Lumpur with Petronas Towers and Taipei with Taipei 101.

In the second set of images, the street scenes feature human movements and activity; an evening shot of the traffic snaking through the Bund is a kaleidoscope of colours like a fairy wonderland. A heavy traffic starts up as a lone traffic warden stands in the middle of it under one of Shanghai’s highways. A black and white shot of a skate-boarder captured in mid-air, a man in a Western coat and bowler hat waiting on a train platform, a boy with his butterfly kite in a city square surrounded by buildings, boys playing on a basketball court framed by life-sized anime characters among parked bicycles. International brands such as Starbucks, a neon-outlined Chinese tiled roof, satellite dish, girl selling cigarettes by the roadside, public sculptures and coloured shots of pedestrians walking and, finally, lovers by the train station, all round up the street scenes.
These scenes attempt to convey the ‘European-ness’ of the city (after all, Shanghai is known for its European cosmopolitan feel) while creating images of idyllic romance at the everyday level. These are shots of a metropolitan city negotiate by its inhabitants at its everyday level. However, it is not just Shanghai that is branded but the Chinese modernity at large, held up again as a prime example of how it should look like and be experienced. Furthermore, part of modern city living is the question of, how do you act in the city? How the city conditions (disciplines) the inhabitants is a question which has been variously raised by writers such as Simmel and Donald in Chapter three. Vision shows how the city should be lived, negotiated, and individually expressed: they will run into traffic, skateboard, play basketball, be in love, and drink coffee— as expressions of life in an urbanscape. While limited in its range of activities, none of these scenes depict labour of any kind, but leisure, which is perhaps symptomatic of this romanticised portrayal of Shanghai’s modernity.

The last visual set is directed towards the interior spaces: the Beijing Opera, a concierge at a hotel, a military line up, traditional Chinese furniture in a wooden panelled room and a girl clad in traditional qi-pao waiting for someone. Not only are the photos beautiful, they are hauntingly shot and there is a spectre of muted silence in all the images. This silence contrasts sharply with the reality of the bustling city, as vendors tout their wares and cars toot their horns every few seconds. Yet, despite the activities perhaps this documentary silence holds the city in a lonely, alienated still gaze. It has managed to ‘stop’ the movements of urbanity in their tracks, allowing its readers to ‘reflect’ on their own modernity. In a city of 18 million people, where you can hardly pause on the street for fear of being knocked by other pedestrians, the urban spaces captured are devoid of people. Thus, I argue that the
individual reality and perception of Shanghai does not matter to *Vision*, it is about how *Vision* has chosen to represent Shanghai to its readers. Photos necessarily capture one aspect, one reality out of many, yet they are also the documentary evidence and choice of a certain present, a mimetic and verisimilitude testament of life. How do these images relate or compare to those captured 70 years earlier? Does this representation brand itself as a serious sophisticated cosmopolitan space? Is it a sobering stylised presentation desired to juxtapose against its earlier decadent memories?

The 1934 Issue number 84 of *Liangyou huabao* (the pictorial magazine) also focused on Shanghai’s urbanity. The two-page spread entitled, ‘Outline of Shanghai’ followed by subheadings state, ‘So, this is Shanghai: Sound, Light and Electricity’. The images carry shots of famous department stores, hotels, ballrooms, cinemas and women in qi-pao. In issue 85, pp. 14-15, another set of pictorials showed a jazz band, a new 22-storey skyscraper, scenes of horse and dog racing, a movie poster for King Kong and a row of cabaret dancers. Entitled ‘Intoxicated Shanghai’ or (translated ‘excitement of the metropolis’) (Lee 1999, p.75), this was the urban centre of the East, the modernity of China then, its Pearl of the Orient.

If it is indeed the case that, as Postrel argues, ‘Aesthetics conjures meaning in a subliminal, associational way, as our direct sensory experience reminds us of something that is absent, a memory or an idea’ (2003, p.6), then these images attempt at belonging through creating the association and link with the other great urban cultures and environments of our time. In Shanghai’s bid to become a global city, *Vision* is suggesting that it has arrived and has all the necessary ‘mod cons’ that
befits a metropolis. While the images do not express its intrinsic Chinese-ness (a constant critique of Shanghai by other Chinese cities) visitors can only experience it as such — its cultural expressions, its Shanghaihua (dialect), structures of everyday life denotes it as a Chinese modernity.

There is an inherent contradiction in the textual representations of Shanghai. For while the images, texts and photos signify a modernising urban city that calls comparison to other European cities (even the leisure activities and experiences pictured express Western activities), the ‘feeling’ of Shanghai is distinctively Chinese. The form, infrastructure and spatial dimensions of institutions reflect Shanghai as a global modern city space, but underneath all that the cultural negotiations demonstrate a Chinese perspective that seems to be unformed, still looking out to the global spaces to learn and copy what they are unsure of. If Shanghai resembles and is imagined as one of the metropolis of the world, the experiences and feelings conjured through Vision is a Chinese modernity.

Despite the signs of globalised, even universal practices of urban modernity displayed through the towering architectures and stylistic spaces, such as Xintiandi, cities are ultimately inhabited spaces, shaped by the cultural consumption and social practices of its inhabitants. A handbook written for travellers about Nanking Road in the 1920s by Reverend Darwent notes that ‘Foreign men are in offices. Women are at home or in carriages. He will realize that powerful as foreign influence is, this is China and the vast overwhelming majority of people in the streets are Chinese’ (Rev Darwent 1920, p.10-12). The Reverend’s point is that despite the modern Western infrastructure, Shanghai is both Chinese in its feeling and actions. In a way, the
absence of ‘essentialising’ photographs of an exoticised and Chinese flavoured
culture often put-on for visitors is a demonstration of a certain pride in its expression
as a Chinese modernity.

Lee states that after publishing the first set of photographs of Shanghai, Liangyou
_huabao_ decided to subsequently publish another series of pictures entitled, _On the
Sidewalks of Shanghai_ commenting on the neglected undersides of the city:

> used book and magazine stands, professional scribes whose business was to
read and write letters for the illiterate at a modest price, four men gawking at
pictures of women on a wall, a news-stand, a bucket of cheap fountain pens,
two men and a boy reading old pictorial storybooks, and beggars with their
open letters to the public unfolded on the ground. (1999, pp.75-76)

These captured a realistic representation of the other side of Shanghai’s everyday
culture, one that does not include the glamorous neon-lit night parties, or the
decadence and affluence of movie stars. But Lee argues that despite its realism, these
pictures were not popular because it was the fantasy of living in a modern metropolis
that excited its readership. Taking into account these pictorials and other
advertisements, Lee asserts that _Liangyou huabao’s_ pictorial construction of
Shanghai’s urban culture is an advertisement of its modernity (1999, p.76). It is how
the locals perceive Shanghai, how they imagine their own reflection to look in the
Huangpu River — as with Liu Jianhua’s sculpture.

_Vision_ does not attempt to showcase its disenfranchised world of working poor or the
illiterates or the predatory men; Xiangyang market (with its large proportion of
knock-off goods); the workers and long hours; the nannies (ahyi), drivers and
labourers daily migration into the city. Instead, it shows glorious images reminiscent
of how western cities look in other photographic essays: couples in love, blasé
strolling pedestrians, film culture, beautiful new shiny surfaces. Packaging and selling the modernity of Shanghai in the form of a romanticised modern global metropolis, like New York and London to its own readers. It is a practice in explicit propaganda and a promotion of the arrival of Chinese culture in the global community to its national readers.

**Reflections in the water**

Extending via the concerns of the magazine, it is perhaps interesting to ask, what lies beneath and behind the reflections of Liu Jianhua’s shiny bright skyscrapers. What is left out of this aspirational picture of a brave new world about to re-assert its global status? It is obvious that *Vision*’s intent to instruct a Chinese readership on the language of this global culture has necessarily brought the world home in textual forms, a world that consists of the beautiful, the luxurious, the aspirational, sometimes quirky or angry (the protest march against War- June 2003). In reflecting the outside world, it attempts to match Shanghai with other global metropolises, consequently its representations are necessarily poetic, majestic and silently beautiful like the courtesans of old. *Vision* is focusing on the world outside and search lighting China’s place within it, rather than on China’s own issues. (See, Appendix 6)

Within this new-found promotional façade, it is critical to note that there is no place for representations of the harsher side of life — the poor and homeless, the problems of pollution and waste management (which seems to be universal). In Shanghai, as in any densely populated metropolis, the issues of water and air pollution, public transport, education, housing, health and rising costs of living are concerns reported in the daily press. Perhaps fashion magazines are not ready (or not permitted?) to
deal with these issues. They are as a Chinese idiom goes: ‘dirty linen’ — not to be washed in public.

However, this positive rosy representation of Shanghai did not prevent China Youth Party from withdrawing the licence for Vision and since the reasons for Vision’s licence being rescinded are unclear, it can only be speculated that something offended the GAPP department. Or, alternatively, perhaps it was the profit motivation or the control over a visually superior publication that tempted them to take over Vision. No answers are offered to us for this question. However, the launch of Mook continues the visual work that Vision aspired towards through its thematic issues on global metropolises: London, Paris, Tokyo and New York.

**Conclusion**

Vision Magazine is an embodiment of Chen’s ethos and belief in Chinese society. Despite the eclectic selection of topics and layout, it is a publication by a team of young editors, directed by Chen, to produce culturally relevant content and visual knowledge for the contemporary generation of Chinese readers. Vision is complicit in establishing a visual literacy and promoting modern ways of looking, acting and feeling in the city. It is a promoter of Shanghai’s modernity through the aesthetics and visualisation of contemporary urban culture. It sees itself as being instrumental to the inculcation of a culturally and visually literate citizenship, by becoming its window to the global world. Part of this instrumental literacy involves teaching readers popular culture knowledge as essential inputs towards a service and information economy. Since Vision does not specify the criterion for ‘good’ aesthetics, but instead instructs by displaying a variety of visual styles and a melange
of contemporary work, it seems to suggest that acquiring the ability to negotiate and develop that criterion for oneself is something to strive for.

In specifically capturing Shanghai in its last issue, readers are given a choice to compare Shanghai against the images of other world cities displayed in past issues. In turning towards Shanghai, we ask what Vision has conveyed about Shanghai? Shanghai’s modern metropolitan skyscrapers interject among its traditional architecture and older spaces, taking over the traditional lands of not just Chinese but French, German, and English architecture. This urban development carves up the old city, transforming it into a contemporary version of a modern Chinese multidimensional city.

As discussed earlier, it is difficult to see Shanghai as anything but a Chinese city of 18 million people, and the minor excursions through the past parallel Shanghai’s current cultural progress. Yet its modern facade, growing cultural consumption and shifting social practices reveal its exposure to global conditions. Perhaps it is just too early to see the eventual character of Shanghai’s cultural modernity as it negotiates between its past and future, socialism and capitalism, traditional and global culture. Either way, the modernising of Shanghai takes on familiar global forms, skyscrapers, skateboarding parks, film stars and spanking new electromagnetic trains — which are neither Chinese nor Western. What would confirm and accentuate its Chinese-ness are the experiences in the city, the language, the social customs and etiquette, that is, the experiential form of the city which unfortunately Vision does not reveal much of, preoccupied as it is with bringing the outside world in. However, it is not a far stretch to re-imagine that the images of urban life captured of metropolitan
Shanghai in *Vision* are meant to be compared to New York, the city of Chen’s
rebirth. He sees in Shanghai, an emerging New York a great metropolitan city under
construction. Thus, the pedagogic instrumentality of *Vision* leads the reader and
consumer by first selling them this vision of Shanghai and its creative potential for
greatness.

Fashion journalism in this sense focuses less on the adornment of self, per se, than on
the adornment and development of the physical urban condition and its people. It
illustrates and maps the imaginative consequence of Shanghai’s future, utilising
aesthetics and urban visuality as part of the growing literacy, denoting and affirming
*Vision*’s role and place as modern text.
CHAPTER FIVE: Singapore (*Harper’s Bazaar Singapore*)

**Introduction**

**Who’s That Girl?**

The New Sexy extends beyond clothes.

**Name**: Many of the New Sexy Women are keeping their original Chinese, Malay or Indian names; maybe they cheat a bit by altering the spelling for an East-meets-West fusion effect, but no one is calling herself ‘Chanel’ anymore.

(Excerpt from, Ooh You Sexy Thang, *Harper’s Bazaar Singapore*, p.42.)

**Old Sexy vs New Sexy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OUT</th>
<th>IN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bare everywhere</td>
<td>Selective bareness — cleavage or legs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visible underwear</td>
<td>Dispensing with underwear if it ruins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clunky platform shoes</td>
<td>Shoes with fetish interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grubby jeans</td>
<td>Pristine jeans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian boyfriend</td>
<td>Boyfriend is local, and either a Singapore-based entrepreneur or a wide-ranging road warrior</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Hughes 2004, p.43)
Fashion magazines the world over follow a certain generic structure that attempts to dictate, inform and persuade their readership on the latest fashion offerings and how to wear them with attitude and panache. These excerpts taken from *Harper’s Bazaar Singapore* are no different in their address to the city’s cosmopolitan readers. What is noticeably different is that this advice on how to become the ‘New Sexy Woman’ is also rather humorous and perhaps a little exaggerated (see Appendix 10). In a style typical of fashion journalism copy, Hughes observes and recommends that names and relationships (signifiers of personal identity) are areas where sexuality may be practised. What is striking about her recommendation is the straightforward utilisation of race in fashion. In a play between binary opposites, she posits that the outright copying of Western names is no longer in fashion — in fact, using your local Asian name or hybridising is the ‘In’ thing to do. Secondly, Western ‘Caucasian’ boys are ‘out’ and local boyfriends are ‘in’ but they should be ‘entrepreneurial’ and/or widely travelled — displaying instances of adventurousness.

This category of what is ‘in’ or fashionable gives us an indication of past fashion preferences and how they are being interpreted through *Harper’s* now. We learn that Western boys were a preferred fashion status and that the adoption of western names was a popular means of demonstrating fashion consciousness in Singapore. What this ‘latest’ fad seems to point to is a distinctive preference in validating the local, or the hybrid personality, over the foreign ‘Other’ (which has long been the norm in Singapore). Fashion, in its unvarying search for ‘newness’ and ‘change’ (Simmel 1969), has this season co-opted race and cultural difference as one of the determinants of fashion identity in Singapore. Fashion journalism is the site where this ‘new’ identity is discursively produced, negotiated and consumed.
This shift is declared through large subtitles stating, ‘The new sexy goes everywhere, from office to club to a weekend at the beach. And for the New Sexy Woman, it’s a state of mind’ (Hughes 2004, p.40). Not only is the reader told how to ‘produce’ this ‘new sexy’ look through fashion but they are reminded that being sexy is a ‘state of mind’ and an attitude. Far from just being another fad, this ‘new sexy’ modern persona is here to stay, and while her modes of accessories may change with the fashion, her attitude does not.

Discursively, this ‘new modern sexy woman’ is specifically anchored to the social context of ‘Singapore’. Its addressee is constructed as cosmopolitan; she is a social (if not spatial) jetsetter and trendsetter who possesses a modern mindset, and fashion is the site where this identity is displayed. This personal presentation and performance is meant to be the outward expression of the inner self. Hughes argues that being sexy is no longer un-feministic, because the sisters are looking sexy for themselves, not just to please men. Therefore, when fashion and adornment invoke extreme or different representations of the self, it suggests that there are underlying shifts in identity formation. In fact, this sexual revision sounds suspiciously like a call to a sexual revolution, ranging from specific codes of behaviour to fashion and a changing mindset.

This is accentuated by the editorial of this issue, *Conspicuous Seduction*, where Sakinah Manaff declares that ‘sex is everywhere’ (Manaff p.22). Everything from cars to food is becoming sexualised. She further states (p.22), ‘In this issue, we also celebrate the New Sexy aesthetic. It’s a state of mind that not only translates into
your wardrobe, but also to your attitude.’ Sex, as the theme of this issue, is addressed in every dimension possible. For example, the photography feature entitled ‘Lust Frontier’ (Seow p.88) showcases the latest sexy fashion wear, and, preceding that, a health feature focuses on the demise of the female libido and how to get it back (Hutton pp.82-84). Yet if this issue is really focusing on sex, why is it hidden behind ‘conspicuous seduction’ and why have the prim and proper Michelle Yeoh on the cover page? Why is the representation of the New Sexy Woman so prescriptive and definitively narrow? Surely, a sexual liberation of sorts should encourage a wider choice in the diversity of identities. Furthermore, what does all this tell us about the issues relating to Singapore’s cultural modernity?

In other words, it is necessary to ask, if looking, acting and feeling sexy are invoked in this magazine’s representation of its own modernity to its readers. What does this tell us about Singapore’s present cultural modernity? And, vice versa, what does the practice of fashion journalism in Singapore inform us about fashion journalism? To answer these questions we have to turn to the context, firstly, to understand the characteristics of Singapore’s media and political history, the dominance of economic policy in everyday life and the cultural aspirations of the city to be an entrepreneurial and creative zone. Secondly, we need to take into account the history and practice of fashion journalism.

This fashion journalism article is similar to traditional woman’s magazines in its address of women readers. In the 1960s Elle (France) was a champion of emerging women’s rights and sexuality (Weiner 1999) and, in the 1920s, British Vogue promoted differences and avant-gardism (Mahood 2002). Fashion magazines are thus
no strangers to taking up causes, yet why is this call to sexual awakening defined within such narrow parameters? Does it have to do with the media policy of Singapore? For the answers, let’s return to the feature.

**Let’s talk about sex**

Racial differences and names seem to be peculiar additions to the usual instructive recommendations on what to buy or how to get ‘that look’. Yet for multi-racial Singapore, race has always been a key aspect of public discourse, and *Harper’s* has not shied away from dealing with it in this article. Racial grouping largely determine the allocation of social benefits for the local population, and most ‘non-locals’ (largely defined as non-Chinese, Malays or Indians) are not included. As such, they are both the embodiment and visual signifiers of cultural differences in Singapore. In the article, the way to appear fashionable this season is by abandoning ‘exoticised’ differences such as racially different Western boyfriends and self-concocted Western names. To be cosmopolitan in Singapore, one must now embrace local identity and validate what was once spurned. The local boyfriend becomes the binary opposite of the Anglo, white male. However, this can’t be just any local boy, he is only worthy as a match if he is a widely travelled ‘road warrior’ or successful cultural ‘entrepreneur’.

There are two main identities implicated in this discourse. The first one is the boyfriend, on which the overt nomination of a fashion and race (Caucasian or Asian) is projected. This is not surprising when ‘exotic-ness’ is often defined as non-local and different — an othering. The Other is an eroticised imaginary, where sexual desires coincide with an imagined phallic prowess (white, male) and rebellion in
breaking an inter-racial social taboo. This is reflected in the infamous Sarong Party Girls (SPGs) of Singapore who date only white, Anglo, expatriate men. While this has been a well-known social phenomenon in Singapore for some time, it became publicly outed through an SPG blog and was widely discussed in prominent Singapore alternative website Talkingcock.com.

Thus the Asian male occupies a sexually contested space which was at times denigrated and was, therefore, marginalised. But, in Harper’s he currently represents the new local champion, a status that stems from his new found reputation, as a ‘road warrior’ (travel), an implied affluence, business connections, educated and knowledgeable as well as displaying a curiosity about other cultures, places, and people. These used to be the attributes that the expatriate could offer the SPGs. More often than not, Caucasian men seemed to display a suave-ness and etiquette which local boys lacked, a cosmopolitan attitude to the world as outlined in the blog (http://sarongpartygirl.blogspot.com/2004/08/attraction-of-occident.html).

Obviously, this attributes mythic values — both imagined and desired — onto the white male. However, in return, it has also created feelings of animosity among local men towards SPGs and white men in Singapore who do date locals. This xenophobic voice is made vocal in a WE article entitled ‘The New Faces of Racism’ (Koh 2003, p. 147).

The SPG site on The Attraction of the Occidental points out that if local men were more worldly and knowing, it might make a difference to the woman’s choice of partner (Sarong Party Girl 2005). What Harper’s is suggesting is that this local creative entrepreneur can be fashionably hip and worldly. These same qualities are
heavily promoted and coveted by the Singapore government (Singapole 21 and Renaissance City documents). However, despite these specific debates about the male companions for our modern Sexy Women, the male identity is not the central figure. He exists as the ‘cultural accessory’ for the benefit of the New Sexy Woman, who is the protagonist in this redefinition.

Therefore, the important persona being discussed here is the addressee, the modern Singapore woman. Built into that persona is an implied Asian-ness surrounding the racial discourse — a variant of Chinese, Malay or Indian descent, a narrow but nevertheless Singaporean definition. This New Sexy Woman is identified by her occupation, her address in the city, her name and car. She is a professional, which implies that she is well educated, perhaps in a Western country. But instead of looking for a career in a multi-national company (traditionally known) for its travel perks, the article states that advertising and banking are just as ‘cool’. Instead of living in a condominium, she may live in a ‘cool’ public housing district. Instead of using ‘western’ names, she keeps her name and instead of driving a Beetle, she opts for Minis or MGs.

In unravelling the picture of this Woman, several characteristics become apparent. She is the equal of men, she is affluent, has a Western-style education or loves to travel, has a curiosity about other cultures, places and people but is not condescending to public housing estates. She consumes luxury products such as European cars and designer prêt-a-porter to keep up with global fashion. She is the reader of Harper’s Bazaar and she entertains a cosmopolitan and sophisticated attitude. At the heart of this redefinition are two central issues that have become
conflated — cosmopolitanism and sex, which are both part of popular public discourse circulating in Singapore.

The feature article in *Harper’s* stands out because of its superficial and seemingly flippant approach to race and names as fashion accessories. However, a closer reading produces deeper questions that reflect current issues circulating in the social and public sphere. Cosmopolitanism was a subject of much debate in Singapore after it was brought up in the 1999 National Day Rally by Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong in response to suggestions that some citizens were less patriotic than others. I will return to this subject shortly. First it is necessary to address the topic of sex in Singapore.

Sex (or the lack of it) has become a national worry in recent years, culminating in a public *Romancing Campaign* in February 2003. This anxiety was so prevalent that it was parodied in the Singapore film *I do, I do* (by filmmaker Jack Neo, 2004), which dealt with the topics of marriage, match-making and love in Singapore (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Singaporean_films). The campaign was a humorous, consensus-building discourse that legitimised the government line of match-making and procreation.

The issue centred around a decreasing birth rate and the prospect of a population unable (or unwilling) to replace itself (Singapore Budget 2004) — an experience common to many developed countries. Furthermore, this occurred within the context of a Singaporean economy still in need of resuscitation after the Asian Economic
Crisis of 1997. Therefore, the debates over sex actually tapped into an ongoing Singaporean socio-political environment.

According to the new creative industries theory, to attract international creative talents an open, tolerant and diverse society is required. Florida uses the Bohemian (Florida 2002, pp.260-264) and Gay Indexes (Florida 2002, pp.255-260) to argue that cities that are tolerant of sexual diversity and subcultures will attract more creative talent and knowledge-based workers (Lee 2003). Singapore has traditionally depended on a flourishing tourism industry, which has been hit hard by the Asian recessions (particularly Japan’s). Thus, part of its new tourism promotion strategy is aimed at portraying an image of Singapore that is free, open and exciting, using ‘tabletop dancing’ as a representation of its ‘newly sexualised’ and liberated image (Asia Travel Tips; Sg-Review 2004). Sex and its associated representations thus became an issue of national concern and an over-riding national priority.

Furthermore, in 2002 a Durex survey showed that residents of Singapore, Hong Kong and Japan had the least sex among 22 countries. By February 2003, the government had started a month-long Romancing Singapore campaign aimed at encouraging heterosexual couples to be more expressive with their partners, with the eventual aim of procreation (Romancing Singapore 2003). It was a move that both embarrassed and turned-off most of the public, even though it was probably intended to reinvigorate the cultural and tourism industries (Tan 2003, pp.404-406). Singapore was perceived to be too staid, ‘safe, stable and sanitary’ (p.405) to produce the spontaneous creative energies needed to transform the city into a creative global zone. Despite promoting sex and romance, the sexual campaigns were
exclusive and limited, targeting married, heterosexual couples. The current Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong (2002) paid lip service to the thinking that a conservative mindset is the root cause of both sexual inactivity and a risk-adverse social attitude that produces civil servants instead of creative entrepreneurs.

Similarly, cosmopolitanism became a national discussion point in 1999, when the then Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong brought it up in the National Day Rally speech. Thus, the fashion texts should be read in the context of the government’s attempts a year earlier to encourage procreation in sexuality and ‘sexiness’ through policy at the private and national levels. It is clear that the discourses of sex and cosmopolitanism are both concerns that the Singaporean government and Harper’s are addressing. A comparison of their discourses will produce insights into the cultural life of the city at both the popular textual level and in the policy domain. Are the topics of private sensuality and sexuality better addressed by a fashion magazine than a Senior Minister for State? Most would probably think so. However, when the Durex 2002 survey asked who the preferred sex educator was, respondents indicated that parents and schools were preferred over magazines and government campaigns.

It is important to keep in mind that, magazines and government discourses in this case seem to share similar credibility in the public eye. While the government may be good at providing and disseminating public health discourses on sex, are they also promoting a conservative viewpoint and a political agenda? Although ‘Sex’ and ‘Cosmopolitanism’ are discourses pertinent to Harper’s and the government, this chapter argues that their representations and dialectical aims are distinctively different. It is important to ask whether Harper’s is merely reproducing
governmental dictums, or whether it is attempting to engage with wider issues beyond national concerns. What forms of subtle innuendos and subversive play is Harper’s hinting at, if any? These questions allow us to proposition the research question of this chapter and its relationship through the table in Fig. 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Harper’s Bazaar Singapore</th>
<th>Government Campaign</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td>Representations of race</td>
<td>Procreation &amp; national image driven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cosmopolitanism</strong></td>
<td>Instigating new forms of identity</td>
<td>Versus national identity and ‘heartlanders’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Fig 4. Harper’s Bazaar Singapore & Government on Sex and Cosmopolitan**

**The New Sexy Woman and Cosmopolitanism**

As indicated earlier, a scan over the February issue reveals that there are several articles and photospreads dedicated to pursuing sex and its corollaries. However, the ‘New Sexy Woman’ four-page feature seems to be the central article encapsulating the perspectives necessary for the cultural production of this modern woman. At its denotational level, the New Sexy Woman is identified by her occupation rather than her status as married, single or divorced (the traditional means of addressing women). The section entitled ‘New Sexy at Work’ (p.40) focuses on the use of fashion labels and styles to unsettle her opponents in business. Similarly, the occupations endorsed are professional ones: banking and advertising, or jobs that reflect creative talent or financial whizzery. Hughes argues that she should not be afraid to add slinky tops, black lace bras or knee-high boots to her work wear, adding, ‘The only rule for the New Sexy seems to be that nobody – including married women in their 40s with kids- wants to be frumpy’ (Hughes 2004, p.40). As
if in defiance of the ban on *Sex And The City* on Singapore television, the article indicates that the New Sexy Woman will have watched the latest episodes on dvd.

By extensively describing the lifestyle of the New Sexy at work, parties and weekends, how the new woman should look, act or feel in the urban city is promptly laid out (see Appendix 11). Readers are told that her adornments, her name, her boyfriend, the fashion labels and her occupation — are all signifiers of this modern woman. Her social life is not conservative and quiet but, rather, it is about partying and dining-out on weeknights and being sporty on the weekends,

**New Sexy Weekends**

What’s giving the New Sexy Woman all this confidence? Maybe part of the answer is weekends spent doing outdoor sports such as windsurfing, wakeboarding, diving and kayaking, or at gyms where yoga and kickboxing are the preferred activities before a long flat coffee and a leisurely read of the paper at an outdoor café. (Hughes 2004, p.42)

Gyms and yoga, ‘long flat coffee’ and outdoor café spaces are forms of consumption and leisure activities are markers of this new, cosmopolitan, modern persona and lifestyle. Until a few years ago, coffee is the local form, made with condensed milk sold widely in hawker centres and food stalls for eighty cents. There were not many outdoor cafes encouraging lounging or the leisurely reading of magazines, as the high turnover of customers means more profits. Thus, the new sexy woman is marked by her active consumption as well as her companion. Yet the most important definition of the New Sexy Woman is her ‘state of mind’ (p.40) — a modern mindset towards work, socialising, fashion, consumption — that denotes her as different from the ‘old’ version. In addition, the penchant for travelling and sports cars confirms that these lifestyle directives are part of the affluent cosmopolitan lifestyle this new woman should aspire towards.
Cosmopolitanism

This characterising of a popular if vague subscription to cosmopolitan identity requires some conceptual unpacking. Not only does it explicate what cosmopolitan identity might comprised of in this context, but it sits comfortably within government description of cosmopolitans as flamboyant, lacking in moral fibre of the ‘heartlanders’ to ground them (Tan 2003, p.411). Cosmopolitanism is widely seen as a desirable global condition, whether it is ascribed to an individual or to a city. On the person, it describes someone who has adopted a taste for cultures other than their own, and thus lives a life as a ‘citizen of the world’ (Wikipedia.org) negotiating between global and local experiences. To be cosmopolitan is to be immediately adaptable and comfortable in a diversity of surroundings. It is seen as a positive attribute, desired for the development of a global city and the growth of cultural creativity. Yet cosmopolitans was for centuries a marginalised identity (Robbins 1998, p.1). Thus, the idea that cosmopolitanism is a desired status is new to the twentieth century and the perceived gap between the old and new definitions require an examination in the context of its relevance to Singapore’s modernisation. If Singapore is encouraged to look, act and feel cosmopolitan, what does cosmopolitanism look like in Singapore?

In their article on *Visuality, Mobility and the Cosmopolitan*, John Urry and Bronislaw Szerszynski state, ‘Cosmopolitanism involves a connoisseurship of place, people and cultures’ (Urry and Szerszynski 2005, p.2). Such connoisseurship is associated with the cultivation of taste and is directed at the consumption of material culture and fashion. Urry and Szerszynski further describe some of the practices that circumscribe a cosmopolitan attitude (Urry and Szerszynski 2005, p.3):
• extensive mobility (right to travel corporeally, imaginatively or virtually),
• a capacity to consume,
• a curiosity and openness about places, people and cultures,
• a willingness to take risk,
• a semiotic skill to interpret and understand representations, and finally,
• an ability to ‘map’ one’s own society and its culture in terms of a historical and geographical knowledge, to have some ability to reflect upon and judge aesthetically between different natures, places and societies.

These characteristics are, in one way or another, captured in the attitude and representation of the New Sexy Woman. Both the woman and her boyfriend share a curiosity for global society; they are open to sampling new food and drinks; have a capacity to consume new forms of cultural entertainments; are well-educated, implying a nuanced understanding of society and culture; and is, most of all, curious about places and cultures. This mobility, Urry and Szerszynski argue, is central to the experience of cosmopolitanism. Mobility, whether it is mediated through photographic images on television, radio or magazines or physical travels — nearby or far away — transforms the insular perception and extends the social and cultural ‘imagined community’ (Anderson 1983). They state that ‘sensations of other places create an awareness of cosmopolitan interdependence and the development of a ‘panhumanity’ (Urry and Szerszynski 2005, p.7).

The exploration of exotic locations is one of the main sections of fashion magazines like Harper’s; they portray places to holiday but also explore issues like human rights, exploitation or famine in a global context. As Nava (2002, p.7) argues, the
allure of elsewhere and the Other is central to the experience of cosmopolitanism, even if it is about the acquiring of knowledge. Beyond travel articles, most outdoor photo-spreads presenting fashion models in exotic or iconic urban scenes instigate an imaginary and a curiosity that is associated with the experience of difference. For example, feature covered the Annual Singapore Repertory Theatre celebration costume ball, A Night in St Petersburg, where the guests dressed up in period costumes to enact and party in a freezing ballroom to simulate St Petersburg (February 2004). While seemingly trivial and superficial, such forms of experimental play are few and far between in Singapore, even for those who can afford it. Such participation, transports and transform the citizenry from the locale of the city to another place and time, exposing them to a repertoire of experiences through the role play (whether imagined or authentic).

By understanding that consumption is a means of invoking the experiential, cosmopolitanism can be defined as a:

socio-cultural condition to consist of a cultural disposition involving an intellectual and aesthetic stance of ‘openness’ towards peoples, places and experiences from different cultures, especially those from different ‘nations’ (Urry and Szerszynski 2005, p.2)

This allows us to make sense of the emphasis on the New Sexy Woman’s state of mind, where cosmopolitanism is, and demands, an intellectual and aesthetic response.

**Cosmopolitanism in London**

The signs of early cosmopolitanism in twentieth century London as investigated in the literature by Mica Nava is useful for explaining the version of cosmopolitanism promoted in *Harper’s* — where the desire for the new, the aesthetic and physical
self-production is located at the boundaries of commerce, entertainment and consumption. As a syndicated magazine, the local and the global texts interact within the discursive imaginaries to produce an idealised yet plausible characterisation of cosmopolitanism for women. Global signs of brands and knowledge of international consumption are juxtaposed against the relevance of the local context, (eg. How to be the New Sexy Woman) with the body being the prime site of global-local transformation and display. This transformation of the self is perceived as the production of the modern sexy Singapore woman, where the local cosmopolitan identity is tied to the consumption of wider global fashion offerings and recognisable international brands like Starbucks or Omega.

Mica Nava argues that the emergence of cosmopolitanism in London was associated with a commercialised and popular cultural consumption that instituted women as a category of consumers (Nava 1998, p.187), see also (Bowlby 1985). This is particularly relevant for understanding the commercially derived cosmopolitan modernity occurring in Singapore. Moreover, she notes that this cosmopolitan consciousness is defined by ‘a psychic, social and visceral readiness to engage with the new, with difference’ (Nava 2002, p.82) and a readiness to revolt against the narrow prejudices of the English society then.

This framing of cosmopolitanism is important for two reasons. Firstly, it is tied to consumer culture, and thus differentiated from ideas of cosmopolitanism as philosophy (Beck 2002), or (in the context of post-colonial historicity) the nation state versus globalisation debate (Nandy 1998; Robbins 1998; Harvey 2000; Brennan 2002; Venn 2002). Cosmopolitanism has, in the past, referred to migrant, diasporic
experiences, or to resistance in figures such as ‘Christians, aristocrats, merchants, Jews, homosexuals, and intellectuals’ (Robbins 1998, p.1) who refuse to respond in like-minded way to the nationalism and patriotism of the host country. However, the currency of the popular commercial version is centred on its association with consumption, commodities and affluence.

Secondly, cosmopolitanism encompasses civil libertarian ideals, which have been strongly influenced by popular and vernacular politics in the 19th and 20th century (see Introduction, Breckenridge, Pollock et al. 2002; Held 2003). In more current political–cultural studies, this cosmopolitanism became closely associated with post-colonial thought and the experiences of diasporas in the work of theorists such as Homi Bhabha, Arjun Appadurai, Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy and Akbar Abbas. Breckendridge et al. argue in *Cosmopolitan* (2002) that within the context of a politicised agency it becomes necessary to dispel notions of a central, universal idea of cosmopolitan history or practice (Breckenridge, Pollock et al. 2002, p.8). Instead, we should recognise that each particular geopolitical history and cultural practice necessarily negotiates its own cosmopolitanism in relation to power and identity.

This warning of particularism should certainly be heeded in respect to cosmopolitanism in Singapore, where cosmopolitanism seems to focus on a mainstream celebration of global consumption, abdicating from local politics and history. It does not emphasise the political, overtly post-colonial or marginalised. This is a crucial difference as it signals a decisive difference in this version of cosmopolitanism as articulated through *Harper’s*. Thus, the Singaporean cosmopolitanism has more to do with fashion texts like *Cosmopolitan Magazine* than
with the cosmopolitan ideals of the Greek *cosmos*. Its location in commercially popular fashion texts suggest the implicit role fashion journalism has played in the promotion of this modern form of cosmopolitan expression. Yet before exploring what this version of cosmopolitanism in Singapore is like, the next section traces the economic and cultural contexts that led to the revision of these cultural priorities.

**New Economy Shifts: Aspirations not expiration**

All this political openness - it piggybacks on economic and political stability. Catherine Lim, (Li 2005)

The policy shift in Singapore and the accompanying changes in government mindsets are largely due to the emergence of the new economy and the emphasis on cultural knowledge. A string of new policy agendas have been introduced over the last five years. Of them, three key ones are noted here for their adoption and recognition of new economy goals: the *Renaissance City Report* (2000), the *Singapore 21 vision* and *Remaking Singapore* Committee report (2004). An analysis demonstrates the use of buzz words — ‘strengthening Singapore’s heartware’ (Lee 1999), being a stayer not a quitter (Goh 2002), knowledge economy, and Active Citizenship (Lee 1999). There is a strong push to protect and grow a local identity that is perceived to be continuously under attack and corrupted by Western and global forces (Chua 2003, pp.22-25).

The philosophy which underpins this policy effectively divides the social and political spheres from the economic and the industrial. This is seen in the operation of economic polices that invite expatriate expertise, multi-national companies (MNCs) and global investment while repudiating instances of foreign interference in
national politics, especially by any foreign media. The relatively open and unfettered regulatory climate to expedite economic ventures is not matched in the social and information sectors. The fear of foreign influence is perceptible in the government’s emphasis on the local (in PAP speeches) and in social policies such as *Singapore 21* and *Remaking Singapore*, which emphasise the preservation of local culture as ways of life.

Magazines, especially fashion and women’s magazines, are often less strenuously policed than many others as they are seen as non-news based and as having less of an agenda-setting role in politics. However, there is a preoccupation with the moral corruption of society through magazines, especially foreign titles. Thus the Ministry of Information, Communication and the Arts (MICA) patrols the content of these magazines, and issues that are deemed morally corrupting, sexually provocative or which fall under the Undesirable Publications Act may result in the publisher having their licences revoked or that issue of the magazine cancelled. An article entitled the ‘Diary of a Porn King’, from *Marie Claire Singapore* February 2004, was felt to be too risqué by the sellers and was pulled off the shelves. While MICA did not express any displeasure, such a quick response in self censorship can only be viewed in light of the history of media censorship and reprisals in Singapore. Couched in a language of moral corruption and undesirability, self-censorship remains a central principle of operation in contemporary Singapore.

After attempting for a number of years, *Cosmopolitan* magazine was finally granted a distribution licence in 2004, but not for a local version. *Playboy* magazine remains banned as it is construed as encouraging immoral consumption. Yet, as Koleskovic-
Jessop, a local fashion journalist observes, the local fashion magazines (*Her World*, *Female*) have in the last decade been providing highly sexualised content that readers have gobbled up (Kolesnikov-Jessop 2003).

Even though they may be somewhat ‘gestural’, these policies still represent a shift in the way Singapore is presented to its populace by the government. Catherine Lim observes that although sceptical and wary, the citizenry seems to have genuinely embraced ‘The Singapore Heartbeat’ — a national renewal vision espoused by the Prime Minister within the ambit of *Singapore 21 vision* (Lim 2000). Popular support for such initiatives is not unusual, where the rationale and philosophy of the day is framed within the ‘us against them’ mentality. Fed with the ‘national worry’ of ‘losing out’ to the competitive region and facing economic downturn, the government has placed these national campaigns and revivals as instances of local participation integral to the national success. Celebration of local-ness is an affirmation of the national and the dispersal of the globalised other.

The third policy, the Renaissance City report, was endorsed by the government in March 2000 as a means of establishing Singapore as a global arts city and to ‘provide cultural ballast in nation-building efforts’ (MICA 2000, p.9). A key survey from 2001 found that Singapore had to enhance its arts and cultural scene if it wanted to attract global talent and businesses (MICA 2000, p.10). One of the concrete results of this policy commitment saw the unveiling of the architecturally distinctive Esplanade-Theatres on the Bay, built at the cost of S$600 million in Oct 2002. However, critics of the Esplanade contended that the Esplanade was too expensive and too big to be useful to local arts and performance groups. They argued that it
catered only for international mainstream acts and the government would be better off funding local arts projects through its National Arts Council (NAC) (Webb 2002).

Nevertheless, the Renaissance City report foresaw long term economic performance via the potential development of the arts and cultural industries. Since then, there has been a formalised adoption of a creative industries strategy via the governmental body, Economic Development Board (EDB). However, an arts and culture scene that has been crippled by restrictive political agendas and censorship requires time and space to recoup trust and goodwill. The repeated punishment meted out when civil society and artistic discourses are seen as too critical or ambiguous for political comfort has created a zone of caution around arts and media practitioners.

One prominent incidence of censorship was the response to the performance or unscripted art of Josef Ng in 1994. Ng, a performance artist snipped his pubic hair in a public performance in protest against police rounding up gay men in a nightclub, incarcerating and caning them. More recently, Talaq, a play about rape within Indian Muslim families, was banned. Busking is not allowed and unscripted performances require licensing approval and monetary deposit as guarantee. Speaker’s Corner — Singapore’s version of Hyde Park — requires speakers to register their content and identity, which works to inhibit those conscious of political reprisals. As with the media, the arts are managed via this mixture of social bureaucratic and legislative mechanisms.
However, significant changes are signalled as a result of the *Remaking Singapore Report* (MICA 2004). Plays will no longer require vetting, the present legislation on Performance and Forum art will be reviewed, busking is allowed, the rating system will be extended to more media, street activity (for example, flea/antique markets) is permitted, and there will be easier access and registration of associations and societies, although there is no indication of when these changes will be initiated. However, the recommendations that were rejected are just as indicative of the government’s bottom-line. For instance, the self-explanatory, designated ‘free zone’ performance venue, championed by the committee, was turned down (Straits Times 2003). More importantly, the push for clarifications on where governmental ‘Out of Bounds markers’ (O-B markers) are have been rejected, which signifies a preservation of discretionary power by the government to dictate when they feel public discourses become ‘unsafe’ for the national body.

*Singapore 21* differs from the other two policies as it is directed at activating the citizenry rather than implementing structural changes. According to current Prime Minister Lee, the son of former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, its aim is to ‘strengthen Singapore’s heartware-social cohesion… sense of belonging and mutual responsibility’ (Lee 1999). By that, he insists that he wants Singaporeans to be more critical and aware of the global picture. This is revolutionary for Singapore. Perhaps, the impetus for this changed political position lies in the importance of local integration with the new global knowledge economy and its emphasis on the liberalisation of networks and information from the grass-roots (and its associative) levels up (Castells 2000).
The push towards the new economy was realised by former PM Lee as early as 1999, where he argues:

Asia needs to embrace the new economy. Failure to do so will mean an inability to compete….We need to get our people to be more willing to undertake risk. It requires a completely different mindset. For us, the change means the abandonment of rules which have served us well for 30-plus years (Shameen and Reyes 2000).

As Castells argues, new economy demands are relatively different, focusing on the provision of services, manipulation of information and orientation towards a knowledge-based labour (Castells 2000, p.415). This also means structural reforms of hardcore liberalisation and de-regulation signalled by the Asian Economic crisis of ‘97.

In a sense, the de-regulation was the relatively easy bit. The government divested itself of shares in government-linked corporations (GLCs), in its telecommunication company. Electricity was privatised. Temasek Holdings, which controls 15 to 20 of the largest listed enterprises, had to shed some of its portfolio. Liberalisation is far more challenging in a socio-political context where the government has held a tight rein over social and cultural exchanges. What will be liberalised and how it is done is interesting given PAP’s approach of ‘divide and conquer’ is usually achieved via stereotyping buzzwords such as, ‘stayers versus quitters’ (Goh 2002), ‘domestic versus foreign’, ‘cosmopolitans versus heartlanders’ (Goh 1999), and ‘Asian values versus western ways’. They are problematic constructs that serve ideological legitimisation, mostly obscuring and diverting attention away from everyday cultural negotiations.
After living in Thailand for ten years, performance artist Ng is sceptical about this change, stating, ‘Rules may be getting looser, but for what purpose? It seems to me: tourism. We want to show the world that we are a modern society. We want the foreign investors’ (Tan 2003). In Singapore any liberalisation is a tentative path and a balancing act. Russell Heng, a local playwright, points out that there is a wider degree of tolerance, stating, ‘It has become more liberal but it’s two steps forward, one step back’ (Webb 2002, p.58). As the Minister Lee Yock Suan states, the bottom line is still a ‘matter of privilege not of right’ (Reuters 2001).

Singapore’s aspiration towards a regional media hub requires a media and communication industry that is knowledgeable and experienced in the variety of media genres. There is still some way to go if films like *Formula 17* and universally popular soft porn magazines such as *Playboy* are still banned for fear of ‘encourage[ing] homosexuality’ (Stafford 2004) and ‘promoting promiscuous values’ (AFP 2003). As a late concession, the popular American TV series *Sex And The City*, was finally introduced to Singapore while the final series was being aired in the world, (Kolesnikov-Jessop 2003).

The aspiration of Singapore to join the top notch global cities is noted by *Wall Street Journal*’s description that ‘Singapore which has engineered its own version of the near-perfect city is striving to overcome its one acknowledged failing, a shortage of creative talent’ (Wong 1999, p.1). The Prime Minister even acknowledges that more than half the musicians in the Singapore Symphony are foreign born (Wong 1999, p.2). Singapore government realises that the city is too ‘stringent’ and ‘clean’ for creativity and innovation.
The shift to the new economy, with its emphasis on cultural developments, liberalisation, knowledge, innovation and promotion of creative city status has delivered major structural changes to society. Can it potentially re-route the industrial and structural character of a Singaporean modernity — something political opponents, foreign media and international governments have never yet achieved? Yet, how will the Singapore government deal with on-going bottom-up pressure towards liberalisation in the issues of homosexuality, women’s emancipation, media freedom, ‘westernised’ forms of leisure? These are part and parcel of the on-going developmental issues in the evolution of modernity — one that is forced to deal with the tensions of control from top and bottom. Finally, in opening up for the entry of new fashion publications, what forms of global cosmopolitan engagements are articulated in the texts?

For all the political openness that the new economy seems to be promoting, the realisation that knowledge, creativity, difference and ideals of modernity are not just input fodder for economic gains. As performance artist Ng asks, shouldn’t these social justice values count for more than just platforms to progress towards profit and economic sustainability? This also applies to Singapore’s frustrated civil society development. The issue of civil society is a contentious one that is not focused on in this thesis, however it has been extensively addressed by Terence Lee in *The Politics of Civil Society in Singapore* (2002) and Chua Beng Huat in *The Relative Autonomies of State and Civil Society in Singapore* (2000). Despite calls for a change of governmental mindset from artists, intellectuals and writers, government is still wary of anything that may overstep the ‘O-B Markers’ (Lee 2002, p.110).
**Cosmopolitans and Heartlanders**

As previously noted, governmental discourses tended to establish binaries as means of stereotyping the national populace. In his 1999 National Day Rally speech, former PM Goh labelled Singaporeans as being either ‘heartlanders’ or ‘cosmopolitans’, sanctioning a new and narrow discursive stereotype. Kenneth Tan (2003, p.411) a political scientist in National University of Singapore in addressing this divide defines the heartlanders as dialect-speaking ‘conservative Singaporeans who mostly live in mature public housing estates and whose horizons are mainly limited to Singapore’s boundaries’ (2003, p.411) who are seen as the keepers of Singaporean values and culture. The cosmopolitan Singaporeans are depicted as possessing world class talent and skills and are tapped into the knowledge economy. They can live anywhere in the world and export the Singapore brand, raising the country’s profile (Goh 1999). However, Goh also argues that this ‘mobility and global outlook can easily erode the idea of Singapore as home and a source of values and identity’ (Tan 2003, p.411). As such, heartlanders balance and ground the cosmopolitans, becoming the moral fibre to the cosmopolitan’s flamboyance and affluence.

Tan’s analysis goes some way to explain the coopting and conflation of cosmopolitans and Harper’s articulation of cosmopolitanism. The texture of this cosmopolitan modernity is characterised and demonstrated in a localness that is conservative and moralistic. Furthermore, Prime Minister Goh identifies Singaporeans as being either ‘stayers’ or ‘quitters’. ‘Stayers’ are the loyal, patriotic citizens who love the country and are ready to keep fighting for the economy and its citizens. Quitters on the other hand are citizens who will take the chance to leave the
country when the going gets tough. Conceptually resonant while discursively unsophisticated, his statements appeal to the national imaginary, with many Singaporeans taking up the debate in *The Straits Times*, the national broadsheet. Furthermore, policy documents such as *Singapore 21*, which received popular public success, represent narrow conceptions of a Singaporean national identity (like ‘heartlanders’) that is insular, exclusive and moralistic.

This insularity and national moralism goes hand in hand with cultural exclusivity. While the expressed difference does not result in hostile xenophobia, there is a perceptible discrimination between Us and Them at various levels. For one, the moral panic surrounding cases of foreign manual guest workers and maid abuse are exemplars of this emotional response. The highest circulating women’s magazine in Singapore, *Her World*, consistently featured articles on this subject (March 2004), as has *The Straits Times*.

The Singaporean ‘moral majority’ (Tan 2003, p.408) is strongly imprinted onto the psyche of contemporary modernity. The socially engineered environment must always present ‘difference’ as impending breakdown points, where only a concerted effort from the national populace will resolve the situation. The representations of ‘cosmopolitans versus heartlanders’ are depictions that validate and reassure the local ‘moral majority’ against any hostility they may possess towards the cosmopolitan outward gaze and their ability to jump to greener pastures. It is national micromanagement at its most minute level.
Cosmopolitans Imaginings in Harper’s Bazaar Singapore

This cosmopolitan identity is thus a symbolic expression; it is one representation of modernity that captures the essence of what it means to be a modern woman in Singapore. Furthermore, cultural consumption is pivotal to the expression and formation of a cosmopolitan identity in Singapore. Mica Nava identifies ‘cosmopolitan modernity’ as ‘part of the way of making sense of and embracing the modern world’ (Nava 2002, p.82), capturing the explorative and experiential dimension of cosmopolitan imaginings. Quoted earlier, Chua Beng Huat (1998, p.985), in World Cities, Globalisation and the Spread of Consumerism, argues that:

Modernity as a cultural context has never been an importation of the West imposed upon and destroying an existing ‘traditional’ culture….Singapore was, thus, never a Third World location, culturally and economically isolated on the periphery of capitalism; rather its very own trajectory has been inextricably tied to global capitalism.

Thus, as an original port city, Singapore is used to the flow of global commodities, first as raw materials and then, increasingly, as modes of personal consumption. Chua (2003) outlines in his book Life is Not Complete without Shopping that this highly consumptive culture is built around local experiences of consuming global products such as McDonald’s, perfumes and American television. Yet what is interesting is that the act of consumption is itself the root of production, especially in regards to fashion and identity formation. Fashion and its images are consumed and eventually rearticulated through self-transformation. Therefore the boundaries of consumption and popular commercial culture are also the sites of ‘modern cosmopolitan consciousness’ (Nava 2002, p.81).

A review of Harper’s sections and detailed analysis will confirm this. Over a year and a half, eleven issues of Harper’s were collected. This was partly because
*Harper’s*, unlike the other local fashion magazines such as *Her World*, *Female*, *Citta Bella*, tend not to be sold by street vendors. It is sold mainly at bookstores or music outlets that tend to be located at shopping malls or the central shopping zone in Orchard Road. The only street vendors that carry it are in Orchard Road, which targets the fashion conscious, working professionals and affluent shoppers. Even though attempts were made to interview the journalists and editors at *Harper’s*, their initial agreement to participate fell through and after numerous attempts the interviews were abandoned.

However, as this thesis adopts a multi-disciplinary approach that incorporates textual analysis with historical, industrial and theoretical research, the focus on the textual analysis of the magazines is not severely affected. In using a qualitative rather than a content analysis framework, part of the reading strategies included picking up on thematic ideas and discourses that correlated to current societal issues and cultural practices. Therefore, the examples listed here tend to be illustrative rather than exhaustive in their representation of the issues and practices they are chosen to highlight.

On average, less than 50 per cent of the content was devoted to local or regional stories and images. Regular issues carried five main sections, which expanded to eight or more in special issues. They are mainly *Fashion*, *Beauty*, *Life*, *Spy* and *Regulars*, with the alternative sections such as *Bridal Special*, *Living* and *Features* appearing from time to time. Out of these sections, *Fashion* reports on global trends, fashion labels, designers and collections, new cosmetic products, latest fashion looks with lots of images of cosmetic products and celebrities. In terms of layout, *Harper’s*
adopts a formal profile with ample white space maintained to produce a structured look in the overall page to denote a certain level of professional sophistication. This is juxtaposed with boxes that frame the images and words. The overall textual feel is one of discipline and elegance rather than fun, casual or of street aesthetics.

In the September 2003 issue, two out of the five photo-spreads were locally produced, with the other three syndicated shoots by international fashion photographers, Peter Lindbergh, Pavel Havlicek and Jason Copobianco. This seems to be the quota arrangements in the other issues as well. A comment that is often heard in passing conversations regarding fashion and fashion magazines in Singapore occurs around the weather. Readers are often quizzical about the relevance of fashion images portraying winter coat, trench coat, long wool socks, tweeds and hats in Singapore where the day temperature rarely dips below 28 degrees Celsius. This, for example, is the subject of Peter Lindberg’s shoot entitled *The New Tweed*, complete with on location shots of Carmen Kass on the street, in diners and gazing through shop fronts, hinting at 1950s fashion and urban aesthetics. Yet this reminiscence of a time and place alien to a contemporary Singapore is precisely the point for the inclusion of the fashion photography. Firstly, the photo text addresses the jet-setting, cosmopolitan readers and the global trend in winter wear. Secondly, the mood and aesthetics recreated in the shots refer to a historic spatial and temporality that existed as an iconic point in fashion history. The significance of the 50s as a historical period is a language that fashion literates and aficionados can, and are, learning to understand.
At a pragmatic level, this urban fashion imagination could not be further from Singapore’s perennially popular casual wear aesthetics and straight forward office/workwear. Therefore Harper’s idyllic construction of the modern jet-setter serves as the identification of the Other in the cultural imaginary, where the images are tied to a spirited worship of far away places and the allure of the elsewhere — a cultural escapism. This visualised global imaginary resides at the level of the hallucinatory, the desirable, the aspirational and similar to the cosmopolitanism of London is a configuration of the ‘transnational identifications and an interest in abroad and cultural difference’ (Nava 2002, p.82).

In Singapore, where the opportunity to revolt and express oneself publicly is limited, subcultural movements activating equal opportunity or the disavowal of society or sexual differences through feminists, hippies or gay rights movements, are unlikely to occur. Yet these movements, which have developed and acquired global status, are necessarily ‘borrowed’ responses, reflected and conveyed through these fashion texts. Revolt is consumed, understood and negotiated from a safe political place. This negotiation necessarily elevates the progress of cultural modernisation, widening and popularising individual agency from a commercial and popular level.

The main images proliferating in the pages of Harper’s are obviously the staple range of consumer products and services advertised in almost every issue. For example, images from local and international locations, featuring luxurious body spas, face and body products and celebrity icons who share in the appreciation of this consumption. Mostly, it is the advertisement of international brands from Gucci and Hugo Boss to Salvatore Ferragamo and Tiffany, and the list goes on, that brings
home and defines the global consumptive nature of this cosmopolitanism. On the surface, these luxury goods symbolise a superficial subscription to a global affluence and cosmopolitanism shared through the consumption of these products. However, the signification runs deeper because there is a recognition that this is where part of the technologies of self-construction and image reproduction occurs, where the body and its adornment serves as the iconic symbolism of cosmopolitan identity.

**Local cosmopolitanism and sexual difference**

The local identity articulated in *Harper’s* is configured as a type of cosmopolitanism that is discursively different from the local in, say, *Her World*. For one thing, the idea of the local modern woman in *Her World* is established around sexual escapades (Kolesnikov-Jessop 2003). *Harper’s* worldview expresses a larger more professional image of the modern woman at a local and universal level, for example, friendships or careers. One regular column entitled *Between Friends* focuses on local celebrities and their friendships — Kit Chan, a local popular singer and her classmate, Wong Sze Shiaw, who became business partners (September 2003); local comedian Irene Ang and Joanne Ho (March 2003); and sex guru Dr Yu Wei Siang and Deirdre Renniers (February 2004) partner up to dish out common philosophy on friendship to readers.

Even within this demonstration of platonic friendship, which seems to capture a visual representation of people about town and their emotional response, there is a subtle innuendo of sexual difference. Homosexuality is a criminal offence in Singapore, and activism by civil society groups, such as *The Roundtable*, made up of young politically conscious individuals, and other issues-based groups, such as
People Like Us (PLU), on gay activism have discourses that are situated outside of ‘civil society’, as defined in the Singapore polity. Homosexuality remains a deeply stigmatised concept in Singapore largely due to policy and structures of social conservatism. The subject of homosexuality is often associated with social mores, AIDS, police raids and humiliation. The politicised route that gay and lesbian culture adopts in Singapore is necessarily one of survival, where governmental de-criminalisation of homosexuality is a top priority and official recognition comes second.

Within the public sphere of this discourse, Yawning Bread is a popular alternative intellectual website that seeks to provide an insight to local media reportage and governmental takes in this issue (www.yawningbread.org). It often takes local fashion magazines such as Her World to task for their naïve, if not offensive, portrayal of gay identity and rights. As such, Harper’s representation of a platonic relationship between Ang and Ho, who visually characterise lesbian aesthetics and will be recognised by readers as such highlights the subtle inclusion of such represented differences. While critics will rightly argue for the politics of recognition, the reality is that such social progress takes time within a conservative public. Therefore, while Harper’s may highlight the need for heterosexual transformations in its features, its monthly columns, hidden at the back sections of the magazine, present a variety of sexual identities being negotiated.

It is in this relatively unfettered commercial public sphere that issues and representations in fashion magazines are distributed, consumed and practised. Given the context of Singapore’s aspirations to be a regional media hub and global city, the
insistence on curbing civil and political freedoms competes with the rhetoric of creative development and unhampered innovation. Yet the commercial sphere where fashion journalism resides is a fertile, popular, public site. Fashion texts express and resolve cultural issues at the private level. Nava states that the:

Market considerations- the imperatives of selling-ensure that commodities with foreign [or different] associations succeed if only cultural difference is produced as attractive. Denigration will not promote sales. In this sense, commercial narratives are related to the more positive- if still ambiguous-representations of contemporary avant-garde and popular cultural formations (Nava 1998, pp.185-6)

Thus, within this tightly controlled media space that racial and sexual differences become the staple of fashion journalism.

The assembling of the local in Harper’s is lodged through the redefinition of global phenomena through the strata of cultural consumption (for example, the aforementioned costume ball, A Night in St Petersburg (February 2004)); the desire for the elsewhere is recreated and replicated for the intimate experience of personal consumption. Other instances include the opening of the BCBG Maz Azria Boutique, The Celine ‘Femmes’ Photo Exhibition in Hong Kong, watch launches by Chopard and Girard-Perregaux. Society pages identify socialites and celebrities who are then featured for example, Between Friends column, or in charities. The socialites circulate at the national level serving as definitions of the local cosmopolitans: rich, knowledgeable and seemingly accessible — anyone can become them.

Extending the imagined Singaporean community further, the images and write-ups serve as definitions of who-we-are and who-we-have in our imaginations of ourselves. The idea of Benedict Anderson’s (1983) ‘imagined community’ is turned on its head when Harper’s identifies conclusively who ‘the people in your
[cosmopolitan] neighbourhood’ are. Through articles like ‘Made in Singapore’, visual art exhibitions, live performances, fashion personalities such as Ling and Ein Tan (international models) (March 2003) or Andrew Gn, fashion designer (June, 2003) are promoted. One particular spread, Singapore’s Sexiest Awards (p.150-153, February 2004), highlights ‘sexy’ hotspots and people, which tend to be representative of the global made local from Singaporean gourmet experiences, top nail spa, chefs, hotels, celebrity maitre d’, top model Colin Wee and chocolate martinis. Its target is to validate the local via globally recognised standards.

In fact, despite global personalities like Kate Moss, Drew Barrymore, Gong li outweighing local texts, it is the local that is championed, the local made cosmopolitan. The perceived contradictory stance between the local and the cosmopolitan does not actually occur in Harper’s. Even as the images inform readers of the global household celebrities, the written features represent a local cosmopolitanism that is unproblematic in collapsing the global and the local. Cultural and sexual pluralism is presumed rather than highlighted. If anything, the excessive and exaggerated ascriptions to fashion features and commodities at the beginning of each issue serves to widen (making room for difference) by creating a common platform of interests built on popular cultural and material consumption.

Interestingly, while cosmopolitan adoption is, in many cases, seen as diametrically opposed to a localism, this case study demonstrates that cosmopolitanism here is an attempt at redefining the local. Taking into account the role of cultural consumption in the calibration of cosmopolitanism in Singapore through Harper’s, reinstates the importance of difference and the uniqueness of Singapore’s cultural modernity in
transition. In advocating a cosmopolitan outlook as a new cultural mindset, readers are encouraged to look at the global concoction of commodities, lifestyles and sexualities as selections from which they are allowed to choose, rather than what is prescribed for them. By championing a local that is flexible, a local cosmopolitanism opens up categories of experiences through choices.

**Conclusion**

Despite the institutional rhetoric of cultural liberalisation and deregulation, Singapore seems to be making only gradual progress in this direction. However, the media deregulation of fashion magazines has made it possible for some cultural shifts and identity manoeuvres to occur. The captured representations of everyday Singaporeans are framed within a cosmopolitan discourse of global knowing and local affluence. Beyond reflecting a socially and culturally discerning populace, *Harper’s* discursive treatment of sex and cosmopolitanism echoes governmental concerns yet carries subversive connotations within its portrayal of cosmopolitan personalities. This allows larger definitions of difference, allowing more local cosmopolitan identities to emerge.

Thus, the analysis of the social discourses in *Harper’s* features and photo-spreads demonstrates that although magazines may seem fluid, flippant and ephemeral, they also provoke a cultural consciousness and emotional response at the individual level. Within the fragmented fabric of modern society, such personal forms of identification are indicative of seeds of emerging cultural formation. The historical reflection through fashion images evokes ‘borrowed’ responses where the subcultural developments of other cultures are imparted to everyday Singapore.
By comparing London’s cosmopolitan shift around the period of 1909, this chapter demonstrates that there is a parallel historical process occurring in Singapore around the key boundaries of commercial enterprise and popular cultural consumption through fashion journalism. The cultural modernity of Singapore — the freedoms, desires and imaginings sold to readers — assumes a wider, more openly diverse public that is attracted to forms of cosmopolitan imaginings. The key difference seems to be a determination from government to shape this modernity as much as it can within the limits of its control and legitimacy. However, by opening up modes of cultural consumption through popular fashion journalism, freer forms of global cosmopolitanism and wider sexual representations are made accessible through the agencies of looking, acting and feeling.

Even though the feature article on boyfriends and contemporary names appears to be a somewhat crude introduction to cosmopolitan identities in Singapore, the validation of the local is a necessary condition for cosmopolitan aspirations (Brennan 2002). The pedagogic ethos of fashion journalism consumption necessarily aids the accumulation of global literacy, while building on a nuanced, cultural appreciation of knowledge. While metaphorically keeping an eye on the fashions (taken at its widest meaning) at the global-sphere, the cosmopolitan instigates productive transformations at the local level. It is clear that while cosmopolitanism practices are not new to Singapore, the uptake and commercial success of Harper’s Bazaar, in this context, suggests that it is increasingly popular and aspired towards. The best thing about this cultural participation and difference is widely accessible to anyone.
CHAPTER SIX: Hong Kong (WestEast Magazine)

Introduction

I think I am selling a philosophy and a concept...Welcome to the premiere issue of WestEast, the magazine that endeavours to bring together the best of two worlds. Like most of our readers, W.E. is fluent in more than one language and the product of more than one culture.

Kevin Lee, Premiere Editorial, WestEast Magazine

This chapter examines a fashion magazine entitled WestEast which was launched in 2001. It is distributed globally as a glossy, high-end fashion magazine that showcases global fashion, Asian lifestyle and culture, news and celebrities aiming to bridge the cultural gap between East and West. The concept is not new, however its originality stems from its execution of marketing strategies and its fluent visual capital. Highly evolved in ways of representing East and West from his fashion experience, the editor and founder, Kevin Lee, a fashion reporter-turned-magazine entrepreneur, aims for global circulation while anchoring the headquarters in Hong Kong. The questions arising from this thesis relates to WE’s representation, reflection and construction of an Asian cultural modernity drawing on Hong Kong’s particular social and political history. Yet a closer textual analysis of WE reveals a transmission of a culturally vibrant, diversified and richly polysemic Asian popular culture promoted alongside a pan-Asian identity that is modernising and evolving. This construction raises familiar conceptual questions along the binaries of the imagined East and West, the production of a coherent Asia under the rubric of popular culture and a desire for a modernised Asia.
WestEast: the beginning

In the northern hemisphere’s winter of 2001, WestEast magazine (WE) was launched in Paris instead of its own city, Hong Kong. However, as I discovered later — given WE’s aims to be a successful global fashion magazine from Asia, this was an appropriate strategy. The Parisian launch was as much about business strategy as it was about the global fashion scene, this became clear during in my interview with Kevin Lee, its young entrepreneurial and creative editor and producer.

On the cover of the first issue is Devon Aoki, a Japanese-English-German model in a brightly coloured Chanel sequinned dress, pressing against a silver cellophane backdrop. In the feature, Aoki addresses her parentage and the issue of racial diversity in global fashion modelling stressing:

I think it’s really important to have Asian girls on the catwalk- it changes the face of fashion, diversifies it, stretches the boundaries and creates more possibilities for what can be beautiful. It’s amazing to see a black girl on the cover of American Vogue, and it will be just as amazing to see an Asian girl on the cover! (Belverio 2001, p.39)

Aoki’s statement about the lack of cultural diversity in the global fashion-sphere is not new. Much has been written about the importance of racial and cultural diversity in media representations to invoke and imagine communities (Shohat and Stam 1994, p.7). In a sense, WE positions itself as a challenge in the ‘West – the Rest’ divide (Iwabuchi, Muecke et al. 2004, p.9), seeking to improve the cultural imbalance in global fashion texts. However, this chapter posits that WE, beyond righting this cultural imbalance, accomplishes something else altogether. In attempting to produce global fashion texts which reflect cultural hybridities, it instead captures and evokes an assertive Chinese identity emerging out of a cultural convergence based around
the sphere of popular entertainment, a rising China and a never-before realisation of Chinese aesthetics and visuality. Thus \textit{WE} exists as a textual intersection that amasses the titanic rise of popular culture across various Asian countries. By assembling and then showcasing these different parts as one, \textit{WE} becomes a ‘semiotic port’ — an assembly point where a variety of new and old, popular and traditional forms of culture and arts are reconstituted to configure a popular yet visually distinctive mode of fashion text that capitalises on a global visual literacy.

\textit{WE}’s function as a ‘semiotic port’ bears a spatial parallel to its relationship to Hong Kong, the city in which it is published. There must be particular reasons why Hong Kong was selected as its base, since most of the executive team included are not from there; Kevin Lee is from Taiwan and Jeannie Guo, the Public Relations and Marketing manager is from Singapore. The connection between the spatially dense urban visuality of Hong Kong and the highly enriched semiotics of \textit{WE} demands a closer examination through their fashion texts. It is no coincidence that Hong Kong is also the centre of a highly successful Chinese media production. In fact Lo Kwai-Cheung’s insightful book, \textit{Chinese Face/Off: The Transnational Popular Culture of Hong Kong}, reminds us that Hong Kong has been a ‘prolific production center of Chinese diaspora culture and one of the most important platforms for Chinese-Western cultural mediation’ (Lo 2005, p.2).

Historically, Hong Kong grew from a fishing village to become an important seaport linking Western interests to the rest of Asia (Ma 2005, p.144). Thus, Hong Kong’s location and cultural identity has always been cited as a \textit{metaphoric bridge} between East and West (Lo 2005, p.9). Even now, as China successfully opens up to
international trade, it is Hong Kong’s knowledge, entrepreneurs and investments in and outside of China that provides these intrinsic links (Ong 1996, p.69). The initial links were provided through the intravenous investment feeds through border towns Shenzhen and Guangzhou and the reversal is carried through WE as it attempts to bridge the East and West from an Eastern point of view.

Devon Aoki physically epitomises the East – West cultural hybridity that WestEast espouses. Her reflection of this duality is a signposting of the fusion and cultural diversity that WE claims to instil and provoke. In his premiere editorial piece, Kevin Lee muses that the logo of WE — two circles — is a play with the duality of West and East. As seen in Appendix 12, ‘The solid circle represents a Western full stop, with the outline O reflecting an Asian one’ (Lee 2001, p.13). The WE logo is a neat, coherent and compact representation of this duality and exchange. Lee states, ‘WestEast’s philosophy is one of sharing’ (Lee 2001, p.13), a promotion of intercultural exchange. Yet, such coherent representations are often sites of disjuncture-fissures that require deeper excavation, especially when it glosses over complex notions of West and East. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam’s discussion on the background of multiculturalism provides relevant understanding of this West-East binary. They state, ‘these contemporary quarrels are but the surface manifestations of a deeper ‘seismological shift’- the de-colonialisation of a global culture- whose implications we have barely begun to register’ (Shohat and Stam 1994, p.5). Thus, the textual and visual/iconic representations require further examination in the context of WE’s aggregation of popular cultural texts in Asia. Interestingly, even though WE is published in Hong Kong, it does not make mention of its Hong Kong roots or base. What does WE’s textuality tells us about the contemporary status of
Hong Kong’s cultural modernity? Given its media and political history, how much of Hong Kong’s past is articulated in the present? Is there continuity or disjuncture from its earlier activities? As theorists have argued, Hong Kong as a site for Chinese media production and within its diminishing industry in the context of a return to China, what forms of negotiations are made within this reality? Is there a turning towards or away from China? If Hong Kong is a facilitator of media cultural exchanges in the past, what type of exchange will it facilitate in the future? What specific aspect of Hong Kong will be evoked through \textit{WE}? Furthermore, what forms of looking, acting and feeling are promoted through \textit{WE}? And who is this ‘global’ readership?

\textit{WE} fieldwork: Hierarchy of Distribution

Before continuing to address the questions raised above, I would like to take a sidestep to report on the methodology and primary research conducted as it provides the discursive clues for reading and contextualising the fashion text. This is necessary because compared to the other two magazines, \textit{WE} distributes globally. As part of the primary research, I went to Hong Kong after securing an interview with Kevin Lee and his team. Besides conducting the interviews, I also scanned locations where \textit{WestEast} is distributed and sold, as a means of determining the hierarchy of distribution. The geographical scan determined the positioning of \textit{WE} amongst other international fashion titles and the visit to their office provided a clearer understanding of the business of independent magazine publishing and the specificity of its production. By hierarchy of distribution, I refer to the type of locations where \textit{WE} is sold and the likely readers frequenting those locales. Part of this hierarchy is also determined by where \textit{WE} is physically positioned amongst the international
fashion magazines. Sitting among other magazines, *WestEast* stands out visually as it is slightly larger than the other glossy fashion magazines such as *I-D* or *Black & White*.

This section expands on the research approach explained in chapter two contributing to a greater understanding of *WE’s* distribution network. As part of my fieldwork, I located some of *WE’s* distribution points among newsagents in Brisbane and bookstores in Singapore and Hong Kong. This was to ascertain where *WE* is located as a point of sale in the overall distribution and hierarchy of fashion magazines. Jeannie Guo, the publicity and marketing manager, stated that *WE* did not have the specific breakdown of the overseas circulation numbers. In Brisbane, where this research is conducted, only a few inner-city newsagents carry a large selection of international fashion magazines. But even then, most of the newsagents do not carry international fashion titles beyond *Wallpaper, Another Magazine* or *Black & White*. I found that only one newsagent in the city central (from which I bought most of my copies) and Borders Bookstore regularly carried *WE* which often sold out quite quickly.

While local fashion magazines have a ubiquitous feel to them, due to their presence in street vendors selling them from train stations, traffic junctions and broad pedestrian strips in the city. *WE* can only be found in higher end or specialised book stores such as HMV, Borders and Kinokuniya bookstore. This is quite surprising in Hong Kong, the city of its birth and where street vendors carry a wide range of titles. This physical search for its point of sale demonstrate the almost archaic system of distribution of smaller independent magazines, where even the publishers are not
always aware of where their magazines are eventually placed. This characteristic of smaller independent publishers is similarly reflected in the interview with Heart Publishing (Singapore). This lack of knowledge or control is also a problem faced by magazines such as *WE* that distributes globally, in comparison, *Vision* and *Harper’s Bazaar Singapore* as domestic and national magazines do not have this problem.

In the stores, *WE* is situated in the ‘culture’ section of fashion magazines, next to *I-D, Another Magazine, B&W* and *V Magazine*. In terms of its content, *WE* is similar in varying degrees to these titles, for they concentrate on large, quality fashion photo-spreads and is more experimental in style and content, focusing less mainstream celebrities and specialising in fashion, music culture features and, often times, catering to subcultural tastes. Ironically, what makes these titles global is not their content but their point of origination; that is, they are published from centres where globalising activities are produced — global cities like New York, London, Paris, Belgium and Los Angeles. However, in terms of the content, they tend to focus on Westernised spaces, personalities and cultures. That is not to say that there are no Chinese magazines of this format and content, however they are mainly in Mandarin, such as *IDn*. As such, *WE* is the only fashion, lifestyle and culture magazine that is attempting to bridge this gap in English and translated Mandarin.

In terms of its production space, *WE* is located in a small office with its editorial team based in a side street in Central (the CBD). The office comprises five people, including Lee and Guo. Lee has a personal assistant and two other art and graphic designers. The rest of the editorial and correspondents are strewn across New York (Glenn Belverio and Lin Ting Ting), London (Lee Kuanting), Milan (Wagner
Raimondi), Tokyo (Michiru Shimano) and so on. Lee travels widely and frequently to meet up with the rest of his team to collaborate on stories and visuals as he finds ‘his inspiration everywhere’ (Lee 2004).

Guo and Lee state that most of the photographers, stylists and contributors work pro bono as they cannot afford to pay them. Citing the first anniversary issue of Sex with Kylie Minogue on its cover as an example; Guo explained how Minogue agreed to pose for them free of charge, after their photographer (an acquaintance of Minogue’s) approached her and gave her a copy of *WE* and she had liked the look of it. Lee believed that they have been very lucky and that most collaborators have done so out of love for the project. He believes that the incentive for the collaborators is that they can be as experimental as they want to be.

As their main source of income is derived from advertising, Guo states that their strategy of charging advertisers the ‘local rate’ for a global circulation has proven to be a success. Advertisers are pleased that their ads have a global presence and this directly translates to the taglines of a global commodity — ‘London, Paris, New York’ and the absence of a local address for many of the ads in *WE*. By their first anniversary issue, *WE* was commissioned to make in-house ad-copy for advertisers such as Vertu, and since then several other advertisers.

The business structure of *WE* is very lateral, which is common among other smaller enterprises, such as Heart Publishing. As the founder of the magazine, Lee is responsible for the artistic, conceptual and commercial direction of the company. It is a young team and they rely on him for almost all industry contacts from networks
with celebrities, famous photographers and stylists. The team works on a just-in-time production mode with only the next issue lined up. This is a considerably short line up compared to bigger and more consolidated syndicated magazines such as *Harper's Bazaar* or *Vogue* which works on three months or more.

Their marketing sheet provides a rough sketch of readers’ profiles, aged from 20 to 40 with an almost equal male–female readership. Interestingly three-quarters of the readers are single, and most of them are educated in ‘Western’ countries (72 per cent) while only 56 per cent of them actually live in the West (USA, UK, France, Germany and so on). The main occupations in terms of percentiles are banking, finance and then publishing. The highest category of readership had income levels of between US 35–50 thousand a year. Most of them obtain *WE* through the bookstore (38 per cent) and then through subscription and postal deliveries.

It is important to note that *WE* is the only magazine in this research that has been open enough to share their market and reader profile. The rest of the magazines were extremely cautious, only quoting or referring to it occasionally. Perhaps this is illustrative of *WE*’s lack of competitors, or maybe their openness and transparency is more symptomatic of Hong Kong’s open attitude towards media research.

**Interviews**

The interviews I conducted with Kevin Lee and the marketing manager, Jeannie Guo, offered up several interesting and peculiar cultural aspects in production. Their self-reflections and explanations for their market strategies offered insight into their
understanding of the global fashion industry, in the context of cultural consumption in Asia, particularly Hong Kong.

*WE* has managed to distribute successfully to a global fashion readership, which is both a desired and aspired to position. It has managed to maintain this from its locale in Hong Kong. Therefore, beyond addressing the central research questions, the strategies of *WE*’s success is also a pertinent part of this chapter: How did *WE* succeed in drawing together top celebrities, photographers, stylists? Furthermore, how did they attract a global readership for a new fashion title? How does the aspired global and parochial sit together in production? Lee addresses this in the interview.

Due to his tight travelling schedule, Lee is hardly ever in Hong Kong, and after several postponements I manage to meet him at the third attempt, en route from Shanghai. Lee is very much the entrepreneur and the creative, networked leader of *WE*. He travels at least once a week but resides in Hong Kong and Shanghai. While, he is originally from Taiwan, he moved to Paris after finishing school to study the language and visual art and design. Upon graduation, his first job was reporting for Taiwanese Fashion TV. Being in the fashion media enabled Lee to form important networks and relationships in the global fashion industry, and with its top players. He attributes his industry network to having access to the top rung of creatives in global fashion images, styles and ideas as his main contribution to *WE*.

Lee reflects that it was in the context of moving away from Asia and living in Paris that he began to observe that the Chinese seemed to lag ‘right behind everyone else’ in the field of fashion, art or design. His contention was that the general Asian
mentality was to copy directly with no innovation. Consequently, Asia was not producing any good quality fashion magazine that represented its ideas, arts or culture. With this idea in mind, he initially toured France and America speaking to more than a hundred people about his idea. In the final stages he went to Asia to round up some talent, but the response was one of disbelief and ridicule. Lee states, ‘Asians don’t believe in themselves, you can’t put the blame on others when you can’t believe in yourself…They (Singaporean photographer) laughed at me.’ To illustrate his point further, he states that a month before WE was scheduled to go to print, an Asian investor pulled out, preferring to invest in a Chinese version of Dutch. From his initial research, he realised that for the magazine to succeed in Asia, it would have to be successful in Western fashion capitals first. He calls it the ‘pigeon-eyed’ phenomenon.

Pigeon-Eyed

Both Jeannie Guo and Kevin Lee, in separate interviews, describe this cultural phenomenon Hong Kongers term as ‘pigeon-eyed’. It roughly translates to the act of Asians who look down on, or who consistently believe that, Western cultures or foreign products are much better than anything locals can produce. This was the reason why WE took this strategic route to sell their magazine. Lee states that:

_In my strategy, it is West and East mix, in France they respect culture and countries with cultural background. I wanted to modernise but it could not be too obvious, too Chinese, so I naturally mixed both sides, sold it internationally. With good sales overseas, I imported it back to Asia. So, we had to make a circle, do it well overseas before taking it back._

The premier issue of WE magazine, entitled ‘Enchante’, was launched with a huge party in Paris in late 2001. Although it was distributed to different Asian cities, the hard sell and promotion was made in Paris. By the end of the first year, WE had won
several international and regional awards, listed below1. Guo added that Asian talents who had refused to work with them in the first place, turned around asking to be contributors. Lee believes that to some degree, this turnaround demonstrates WE’s success in creating a high-end fashion magazine with original content in photo-shoots and features. This particular strategy of arriving in Asia via Europe is by no means limited to WE. While in Hong Kong, I found out that a popular Hong Kong street fashion label, Salad, also trademarks and registers its headquarters in Paris while actually producing and selling in Hong Kong.

This attitude is obviously commonplace enough for it to be attributed a direct Cantonese slang. However, Lee contends that it is by no means restricted to Hong Kong but is pervasive throughout Asia, most notably in the area of goods and services. Fashion labels from Italy, France, the US or the UK are perceived to be more prestigious and fashionable than local ones. Even successful High Street brands like G2000 (Japan) or Veeko (Hong Kong) will always be seen to be lower status goods than Zara from Spain, just as European appliances and European cars are perceived to be more luxurious than the Asian made ones. Cultural theorist and anthropologist Ong Aihwa notes that in the 1960s, British education was considered the best and Asia was frequently constructed as ‘failed replicas of the modern West’ (Ong 1996, p.60). This second tier mentality is what Lee seeks to eradicate. His argument is that the global fashion world should see what contemporary Chinese culture has to offer. Ironically, the challenge to revise this image of Asia is achieved by first using his understanding of Asian culture to attract a readership.

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**Imagining East and West**

Beyond its success, the particularity of the strategy serves to emphasise the associative meanings imbued through such cultural constructs as West and East and its resilience. As Anthony Milner has pointed out, the constructs of West and East are more imaginary (mythic) than real. They become empty signifiers of social, political or cultural aspirations and motivations. Geographically, Asia is often defined in terms of the subject’s speaking position, which could be anywhere from the Middle East to India and China. Culturally, Asia is made up of such a multiplicity of dialects, religious and hybrid cultures that it is impossible to begin to draw it into one cohesive whole. Similarly, Ella Shohat and Robert Stam contend that the West does not take in a melange of cultures and influences but is ‘constituted by them’ (1994, pp.13-14). Like the West, the East and Asia are ‘fictional construct embroidered with myths and fantasies’ (Shohat and Stam 1994, p.13). They are largely unstable constructs that serve their purposes via their imaginary potential as either community affiliation or as means of political differentiation (for example, the use of ‘Asian values’ by Dr Mahathir) (see Morris-Suzuki 1998). They are cultural constructs that accrue meaning through individual and community differentiation.

Thus concepts like ‘West’ and ‘East’ are intertwined rather than differentiated, the concepts denoting a binarism expressing essentialist positions of superficial and ascribed differences. In this sense, the West and East are ‘the verso and recto of the colonial sign’ (Shohat and Stam 1994, p.15), where colonial here points to the concepts’ historicity, the period of imperialism (1870-1914) where most of these constructs were made popular. This idea of direct binaries dovetails with Lee’s
conceptualisation of *WE*. He states, ‘The symbolism of *WE* is not West nor East but incorporates both, into a We. From the conceptualisation to the completion, the philosophy of everything is very Asian. It is very Taoism. Without the dark, you cannot know what is light’ (Lee 2004).

Extending from his philosophy, Lee sees them as the flip sides of a coin rather than the antithesis of each other. As such, the binaries constituting East and West exist in direct contrast and definition to each other. Modernity, as a concept, is often imagined as ‘belonging to’ to the West, thus its widely held attributes of science, technology, industry, economics, rational thinking, progress, democracy, truth and objectivity are all regimes constitutive of Western modernity. Since the period of the Enlightenment, most of these values have lost their universally esteemed position through the idea of subjectivity and are often reshaped through their practice in post-modernity.

Modernity itself has lost it lustre and is increasingly implicated by its ideological use in the imperialism of the ‘West’ and the harsh tactics of its many champions, as detailed in the accounts of Berman (Berman 1983), Donald and Jacobs. Yet Shohat and Stam remind us that the fabric out of which modern science and technology were advanced were borrowed from multicultural sources as Arabian, Chinese, Egyptian, Mayan, African, Aztec and so on (Shohat and Stam 1994, p.14). What this implies more than anything is not who modernity ‘belongs’ to but, how it became constituted. Western nations such as France, Britain, Germany, Holland, America and Italy, through their industrial modernisations, came to be represented by these economic manifestations and strong characteristics.
Asia and the ‘East’ represent the flip side of those characteristics — weak, conquered, traditional and often conservative. Time has not shifted much of these impressions; the general self-perception is still exemplified by the ‘West is best’ attitude. The West is associated with the global by an occidental gaze that both admires and castigates it for side-effects associated with globalisation and moral depravity (for detailed arguments, see (Chua 1998). Positioned from Asia and connected to the global fashion industry, *WE*, through fashion journalism, revisits this position by assuming the binaries of West and East as essentialising differences and indivisible matrices.

Fashion, as with any image industry, plays, explores and provokes this terrain at the imaginary and ideological level, resolving and interrogating social contradictions. Yet, for the textual richness of fashion and its propensity to express social play, identifications and constructions, it is necessary to leave the social and intellectual meanings open, and boundaries undefined. Whether it is playing with representations or extending essentialisms, the ideas behind the imagined West and East requires to be understood through more articulations and explorations rather than less, and in *WE* it has found a different and ‘new’ speaking position.

Like the *WE* logo, which displays a neat, coherent and compact representation of this duality and exchange, such simple idealistic representations are often sites of disjunctures that require deeper textual excavation, especially when it glosses over complex notions of East and West. However, these representations are also viewed as ongoing contributions to larger and deeper popular cultural dialogue on this
imagined East and West. Here, ‘imagined’ is used as defined by Benedict Anderson (1983), as being the production of imagined communities, but it is also used, in reference to the role of such cultural constructs, as empty signifiers imbued with social, political or cultural aspirations. Therefore, the imagined communities serve as a binaristic strategy to locate and separate the differences between East and West.

Theories and discourses surrounding ideas of polycentrism (Shohat and Stam 1994), multiculturalism (Hage 1998; Stratton 1998; Chua 2000) and cosmopolitanism (Breckenridge, Pollock et al. 2002; Brennan 2002) speaking from the margins (Hall) and studies on diaspora (Hall, Ang, Cunningham), intrinsically seek to engage with this ‘hegemonic’ globalised, male, white structure. They aim to proffer alternative versions and models of inclusiveness, attempting to insert them into the global visions of minority and marginal participation. WE reflects a similar preoccupation through the intersections of popular culture, fashion journalism and commerciality, conducting dialogue with this imagined global community of East and West by displaying alternative celebrities, fashion designers and lifestyles from an Asian position.

**Selection of Fashion Texts**

Over the course of this research, I focused on 11 out of the 24 issues of *WestEast* I collected from 2001 to 2004. Out of these, I found specifically three issues which were particularly relevant to the discourses arising out of the city. They became the main thrust and findings of the textual analysis discussed here, which is to say that because this thesis is directed toward examining the relationship between the fashion
texts and its reflection of the city, there are plenty of other social and cultural issues in the magazine which have been bypassed.

Firstly, I approached the magazines by scanning and reading all the issues as a reader. As Hartley and McKee (2000, p.20) suggested in the last chapter, each reader brings a multiplicity of reading positions to a text. As a researcher, it is important that I engage with the texts as a general reader (as much as possible), while keeping in mind that every reader brings their own interpretation and personal history into their reading. I subsequently conducted a second, more thorough reading and cataloguing of the features that were outstandingly surprising, new or repetitive. By that, I mean what often goes unreported, such as homosexuality or explicit sexual practices in Chinese culture. Like most other glossy fashion magazines, the magazine was categorised into fashion, culture, lifestyle, information, celebrities and events. Yet what overwhelmingly united all these different categories was the overriding theme of Asian popular culture.

Through the interview with Lee, I also ascertained that his favourite issue was ‘New China’, Issue 8. He spent a year or more conceptualising it, as compared to the usual three or so months he spends on the other issues. He favoured it above even the issue that he won the most awards for: Movement, Issue 2. Therefore, while I surveyed all 11 issues and took notes to their content, visual styles, angles and themes, I paid special attention to ‘New China’ ‘Sex’ (the anniversary issue), ‘Movement’ (for its awards), and ‘Enchante’ (the premiere issue) (see Appendix 13).
What I have found interesting about this method of surveying and reading this fashion text is that the central pedagogy made through the observation of the findings stay true no matter which issue or features in the magazines are selected. In a sense, the reading of fashion texts consistently verify the central pedagogy of the magazine. This is a departure from other studies of fashion magazines, as repetitive specific features or fashion photography are used to articulate phenomenon such as national identity (Hartley and Rennie 2004). However, as the central question of this thesis inquires about the pedagogy and articulation of WE within this specific period, we are more liable to find that it stays true to its ethos under that editorship and vision. Other fashion studies that have similar outcomes are in Cameron, 2000, Mahood, 2002.

**Asian Popular Culture**

Returning to texts in WE, it is important to consider whether WE as a self-proclaimed Asian magazine showcases Asian-ness differently. Does a metaphorically different speaker, occupying a different speaking position, offer a different perspective of what is circulating at the global fashion industry? The Premiere issue featuring Devon Aoki is followed by a digitally enhanced photo-spread that uses racial features from separate faces to form ‘new’ faces on which accessories and fashion outfits are displayed. The last page states, ‘All models are artificial. They are made of parts from different racial features’ (WestEast 2001, pp.28-36). The underlying message from this spread is clear after Lee’s strong editorial assertions that WE is ‘bring[ing] together the best of two worlds’ (Lee 2001, p.13).
Subsequent pages carry brief write-ups and original, artistically shot photographs of celebrities — actors, models, fashion designers — and dominated by Asian figures such as Maggie Quigley (p.42), a popular Hong Kong celebrity from a non-Chinese background (When Quigley revealed that she had no Chinese heritage, the Hong Kong press and fans were shocked); Ai Tominagi, an international Japanese model; Josie Ho, a Hong Kong actress and daughter of a Macau tycoon; Oliver Theyskens, the designer reinventing Rochas as a fashion house; and Edison Chen, a Chinese pan-Asian celebrity.

The features were inclined towards ‘rediscovering’ China, from the showcase of Chinese ballet dancers to Western ‘fashion designers in Asia’ (referring to China); architectural projects taking place along the Great Wall of China and Beijing’s disappearing Siheyuan (courtyard houses); to the emerging wave of new Chinese film directors. Budaixi, a popular Taiwanese puppet theatre, is investigated. Yet what stands out among all these features is a lengthy investigative feature on the underground punk rock scene at (in)famous Su Village, Beijing, written by Shaway Yeh. It is probably not coincidental that Yeh, a Taiwanese, is also the guest editor of this issue. She lives in New York, edits and writes for international and Asian publications such as *V Magazine* and *Dutch* and is in the process of moving to Beijing. A detour through this feature will illustrate the process of modernisation in China as seen through the prism of fashion journalism.

Entitled ‘I am a Middle-aged Groupie’ (p.144) is a feature with vivid black and white photo-shoots over 5 pages. Yeh describes the scene of a community of young musos who are extremely financially challenged and living in rundown huts along the
outskirts of Beijing. There are no creature comforts such as toilets or shower facilities, but they choose to live this way as a statement of rebellion, discontented with the affluence and expectations of their increasingly middle class families. They look to the Western notions of freedom and democracy, carrying the idealism of Woodstock, replicated in China. Their angst and disenchantment is inspired by figures such as Kurt Cobain and Limp Bizkit. This story of self-marginalised youth is an interesting departure from the norm, highlighting the alternative underbelly of China, an aspect that is unsanctioned and often goes uncovered in the present stratum of news. Yeh wrote bemusedly that at the end of the last night, the boys all shot their fists in the air and screamed, ‘Freedom!’ in a style learnt from their favourite Pasolini movie, Salo.

This story sits in contradiction to most of the other features. There is a resonance in its rawness and a duality that comes from the subjects’ adopting advanced avant-garde, alternative postures, tagged as ‘suffering for their art’ while the general country is developing and modernising rapidly. In a way, it is only surprising because we do not come across such stories about China very frequently. However, the earth shattering processes of modernisation often produce equally robust disparate subjects seeking alternative identities, a disavowal of mainstream success and a refusal to conform. This social phenomenon is not unique to present day China. Indeed, it seems to be a by-product and a characteristic of modernity. Romanticism during Victorian England was a response against Industrialisation (Wilson 1985, p.61), and modernism, as an artistic movement in early twentieth century, again captures the dissonant response to mainstream sensibility (Evans 2003, p.8).
The in-depth coverage of a rising subculture in China by a fashion magazine reinforces the point that fashion journalism has become the locus upon which many new social and cultural expressions are assembled and communicated. At a deeper level, this story posits an identity that is distinctively Chinese without any of the usual orientalist Chinese stereotypes or mainstream representations such as Hong Kong celebrities. This immediately positions the commercial and adult world against the subcultural aspirations and disenfranchisement of youth, and, more importantly, it situates this cultural response within the continuum of popular culture in Asia.

As a result, the attributes and representation of popular culture captured and displayed through *WE* is a disparate mix of celebration and critique. It is noteworthy that Shohat and Stam, in reference to cinematic traditions, argue for the plausible coherence contained within oppositional dichotomy, such as critique and celebration. They state that ‘within ‘critique’ we would add, there is also ‘celebration’ just as within ‘celebration’ there is buried a ‘critique’’ (Shohat and Stam 1994, p.8). This argument can similarly be applied to the popular culture represented in *WE*. The celebratory is juxtaposed against critique at different levels of the texts, this is important in denoting the emergence of a maturity in Asian cultural producers premised on a self-reflectivity that seems to be lacking in Asia’s madly conspicuously consuming societies. Thus, while Asian popular culture and its cultural producers are re-imagined and updated globally through *WE*’s status as a global fashion text, it is also clear from the examples that instead of being generally Asian, they are specifically about Chinese-ness.
Chinese Popular Culture

It is not difficult to see that even though both Western personalities (Victor & Rolf, Peter Jackson, Christy Turlington, Vivienne Westwood) and larger Asian historical traditions (Peranakans in South-East Asia, Taiwanese indigenous culture, Bollywood) are sampled and explored in *WE*, the emphasis is largely on pan-Asian Chinese popular culture that is being revised, magnified, and transmitted globally to *WE*’s international readership. Yet, what form does this Chinese culture and identity assume, given that the concept of Chinese-ness as racial or biological categories are undermined by science, and its cultural categories are in dispute. Some, such as Tu Wei-ming (1994), professor of Chinese history and philosophy at Harvard, call for a ‘cultural China’ to challenge the politics of the centre (China), while, diasporic subjects, such as Lee Leo Ou-fan (1994), argue that Chinese-ness requires a larger frame of engagement, to include the speaking positions of identities from the margin. Even when there is a conceptual agreement about a culture’s fluidity and its state of constant flux, the intention to widen the definitions and meanings of Chinese-ness needs to revert to a belief in essentialism and a set of core values.

Cultural theorist, Ien Ang (1998) in examining Chinese diasporas states that the notion of Chinese-ness needs to be recognised as being flexible and fluid rather than fixed, precisely because it extends beyond the racial demarcations of authentic/inauthentic, pure/impure or real/fake, (see also (Lo 2005, p.6). Making this argument in the context of large Chinese diasporas, Ang argues that: ‘Chineseness…operates as an open and indeterminate signifier whose meanings are constantly renegotiated and rearticulated in different sections of the Chinese diaspora’ (Ang 1998, p.225). It is possible to think that instead of practicing
‘specific’ cultural activities to denote one’s Chinese-ness, it is activated through one’s own sense of identification.

As Ang points out, ‘Being Chinese outside China cannot possibly mean the same thing as inside’ (Ang 1998, p.225) and it is from this outer position that diasporic subjects activate the formation of a different notion and practice of Chinese-ness. As such, even the difference in diasporas must be distinguished, as it would surely produce differences in experience and articulation. For example, WE is cultivated from the diasporic space of Hong Kong and Lee is from Taiwan, two majority Chinese diasporas, which differ radically (from language to cultural value system) from being, say, a Chinese minority in Australia, Canada or America. As a means for transcending the essentialism lodged in meanings of Chinese-ness, Ang proposes a post-Chinese-ness identity that allows the subjects ‘liberating productivity’, to engage in ‘diverse, lateral, unanticipated intercultural encounters in the world at large’ (1998, p.241) via a negation of Chinese-ness as racial or cultural background.

Despite its political idealism, it is pragmatically not possible for a race, ethnicity or culture to be negated within the confines of social mores. Many social interactions, especially in China and parts of Asia, race and cultural differences are foregrounded and emphasised not backgrounded. Not to mention that personal experiences and sensibilities are always made sense of within a subjective space shaped by cultural background. Indeed, it is within the spaces of cultural negotiations and different contestations that cultural meanings are produced to the benefit of overall society. It is the collective differences and practices contesting the ambiguous notions of Chinese-ness that widens the boundaries and challenges its relevance.
So, it is precisely through magazines like *WE*, which foregrounds its ‘Asian’ roots, that traditional and fixed notions of Chinese-ness are constantly being challenged, renegotiated and widened through the axis of race and identity — West and East at the level of the global fashionsphere. There is a double movement here, *WE* ‘collects’ these specific Chinese subjectivities and performativities from all ends of the globe (New York, Thailand, Hong Kong, Beijing, Shanghai, Tokyo, Singapore, London, Italy) as local fashion texts and transmits them as global texts, which are then consumed locally.

Therefore, the diversity and collective differences of what contemporary Chinese means globally is showcased in different issues as modes of new Chinese-ness. For example, Lynn Ban is a vintage fashion collector and ‘muse’ who lives in New York (Issue 1), and the successful China artists, Jerry Chen and Christophe Mao, in New York (Issue 8). One article entitled ‘Creative Asians in Paris’ (Issue 4) interviews a range of Chinese creative practitioners. Internationally successful designers such as Chinese architect Alexander Wong or Tim Yap, the set and costume designer for films such as *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, have, in their own ways, defined how Chinese history and the urban environment is imagined by the public. Beyond the features, fashion photo-spreads regularly incorporate Asian models and celebrities, from Ayumi Hamasaki to Devon Aoki and Ai Tominaga; Zhang Ziyi to Ling Tan and Japanese footballer Hidetoshi Nakata and Gigi Leung and so on. Their personal stories are illustrative of the widely differing definitions of successful Chinese-ness globally.
Within the continuum of Chinese popular culture in *WE*, I will discuss two recurring themes that are central to the re-definition of Chinese-ness: the contemporising of Chinese history and the re-imagining of Chinese sexual identities. As quoted earlier in Chapter Four, Jenner (1994, p.11) asserts that Chinese history is the prism and point of reference against which everything that is new and changing in society is measured. It is ostensibly this historical perspective that is being challenged and revisited through these two thematic concerns.

**Chinese History**

In echoing its earlier binarism of East/West and to play its iconic full-stops, *WE* juxtaposes the contemporaneous against a background of history and tradition. The major coverage of space, images and in-depth reviewing of the Chinese historical legacy — people, places, phenomenon, art forms and unique stories — are consistently linked to the present day in a bid to update and inform readers of their importance. These narratives are unravelled and positioned in a particular space and time. By positioning the current within the past, and the past in snatches of the present, the thematic juxtapositions of historical categories with current cultural phenomena establishes links between the past and the present, highlighting the element of continuity and the transformation of culture and values in society.

In a sense, it addresses a ‘black hole’ in Chinese history, as ‘ancient’, dynastic and imperial achievements are widely known, but there is a curiosity and lack of information about contemporary China and what it has been doing in the last 100 years, especially during its close door policy — not politically but culturally and socially. Therefore, these features of contemporary histories promote a re-
acquaintance with a Chinese-ness that is often only told through popular semi-fictional accounts like Jung Chang’s *Wild Swans*.

In issue 1, a central feature depicts an impressive photographic display of Beijing’s Siheyuan, addressing the process of urban renewal in Beijing’s traditional and architecturally distinctive courtyard houses (Siheyuan). This adaptation in the face of urbanisation demonstrates the increasing awareness of the value of historical artefacts and urban preservation for cultural distinctiveness. Also in Issue 1, another article traces the lives of Tai-Tais (wives of rich men) and their luxurious lifestyles in Shanghai between the 1920s-30s and their historic migration to Hong Kong pre-Socialism. The iconic tai-tai is revisited in other articles about Wong Kar Wai’s film *In the Mood for Love* and Josie Ho’s filmic rendition of a tai-tai. Partly the preoccupation with tai-tais has to do with the wearing of the cheong-sam, which they then exemplified and, to an extent, still do. The examination of the sartorial cheongsam is taken up across different issues, as will be demonstrated.

In Issue 2, the flower girls of 1920s Shanghai are examined through their eternally youthful poster-scapes. In reintroducing these sexually provocative and powerful images of flower girls, famous for their demure, coy sexuality (some courtesans and others prostitutes) *WE*, reinforces the message (similar to Lee Leo Ou-Fan’s work, 1999) that these girls were important to the modernisation of commercial culture in pre-socialist Shanghai. An article on Zhang Ai-ling (a female Chinese novelist) in Issue 8 brings up this issue again. The girls are credited with the early adoption and introduction of material and visual culture to 1920s–30s Shanghai modernity. In sum, these narratives highlight the relevant issues of urbanisation and preservation of
historical legacies for developing cities, all within the continuum of popular fashion texts. Old architectures are preserved through design aficionados and the legacy of tai-tais are revitalised in modern Chinese societies via features on films and the revitalisation of cheongsams.

In *New China*, Issue (8), the first article inappropriately or quirkily titled ‘Girl Power’, deals with Chinese women in positions of power from 420 AD to the more currently nostalgic figures of the Soong Sisters, whose private lives became part of the national politics of China. They each married famous husbands who took China in different political directions. Song Ching-ling married Dr Sun Yat Sen, who is acknowledged as the honorary father of modern China (Guofu); Song May-ling married Chiang Kai Shek, the Guomintang military leader who, upon losing to Mao, retreated to Taiwan to form a dissident state with his Chinese army; and Song Ai-ling married one of the richest man in China and left for America during the civil unrest. Its title is seemingly borrowed from current gender power discourse and examines the long under-rated role of women in traditional Chinese society. By providing in-depth background of the girls’ education in the West and their public roles, especially Ching-ling’s after the death of Dr Sun, served to establish that gender equality and feminism was alive and well during, before and after Communism in China. But, it is current society that has to recognise their place in national history.

Another prominent figure that *WE* featured is Zhang Ailing aka Eileen Chang (1920-1995), one of the most important women novelists in the history of modern China. Her literature is often centred on male and female love, utilising the backdrop of Shanghai culture, modernisation and the corollary of fashion, bridging East and West
aesthetics and exploring the phantasmagoria of Shanghai in the 40s. She wrote about the role of prostitutes in bringing in Western material culture such as lamps and furniture to Shanghai. Educated in Hong Kong University, she was considered a literary genius from a young age. Her fluid comparisons of Hong Kong and Shanghai allowed many later writers to build on the imaginative consequences of fiction and of early modernist Chinese writers. Furthermore, her experimentation with different cultures as a writer left a legacy of openness and liberal attitudes and a role model for Chinese girls.

In presenting several historical features, it is clear that the broad strokes of recent Chinese history are dispersed among smaller narratives profiling individual artists, celebrities, writers, descendents of nobilities, and many more. After updating readers about Chinese history, WE seemingly then attempts to re-personify what contemporary Chinese-ness could be, doing so through promoting and rewriting notions of gender equality from a historical viewpoint and articles on how the Chinese diaspora in Western and Chinese societies (eg. Singapore and Taiwan) fits into the larger picture. This representation of Chinese-ness is, thus consciously ideological. If the social imaginaire of the ‘East’, to borrow a phrase from Arjun Appadurai (1996, p.30), is to be revisioned and reimagined, such modernist aspirations often adopt ideological stand points as a base to articulate themselves. It is this dialogue of revisioning that WE is attempting to engage with, creating the future through the imaginative consequences lodged in current and present constructions.
WE encourages a revisionist look at Asia and China through historical glasses. By engaging the reader through re-considering historical roles and empathising with personalities and cultural practices, we are called upon to feel and act upon that understanding by re-imagining the meanings of contemporary society and culture through history.

**Sex**

In the pages of *WE*, sex is a key stepping stone to transcending conformity and articulating difference. In its first anniversary issue, *WE* turned its attention to examining the issue of sex, fronted by Kylie Minogue in a pink corset. To commemorate its coming of age, it presented readers with an innovative layout; the magazine was split in half with two spines on either side and joined at the centre, in essence like having two magazines. Sex with its myriad of issues, difference and torrid sexual representations was celebrated and explored. Lee’s editorial uncharacteristically struggles to verbalise its intentions, ‘sex … piques the interest in some and blushes from others’ (2002, p.8). This is strikingly so when compared to the contents and visuality of this issue. It not only teases with its graphic depiction of couples copulating next to the page numbers, it incorporates different forms of nudity in men and women and across different races. Some pages boldly feature keyholes where readers are invited to ‘peep’ at a naked Chinese girl in a half sitting posture with her knees up and legs spread out (p.74), another keyhole opens up to a naked Chinese couple having sex (p.87). The first photo-spread entitled ‘Chambre Close Shanghai 2002’ features several topless girls in Shanghai (pp. 24-31) (Appendix 15).
This aspect of Chinese nudity and of them being sexually active is interesting as Chinese girls are often presented as docile, ‘cute’ rather than sexual. In the Chinese social imaginaire, nakedness, nudity and sex, when associated with the female, are all traits of ‘bad’ ‘trashy’ girls and is frowned upon. Pre-marital sex, although common, is a taboo subject that is often openly attributed to the corrupting Western influence. Sex is taboo in most households and chastity is valued as the hallmark of Chinese girls.

Therefore, it is with a directly confrontational and subversive attitude that WE tackles the issue of sex, demolishing traditional paradigms of sexual and hidden connotations associated with conservative values. Historically, WE positions ancient Chinese society as rampantly sexual (See Appendix 14 for ancient sexual representations). It has vast treasures of knowledge on sexual practices, attempting to enlighten readers in several articles, such as ‘Return to the Old School’ (p.20), The Yin and Yang of Sex (p.16), and ‘The Clouds and the Rain (pp. 18-19), along with the Chinese ‘Kama Sutra’. For example, in the last article, ‘The Clouds and the Rain’ by Wang and Huang, reveals that traditional sexual knowledge was passed from mother to daughter in the form of pornographic coital pictures in the dowry on the night of the wedding, to ensure that they knew how to perform their duties as wives!

Therefore, WE’s articulation of experimental permissiveness by promoting a variety of sexual attitudes, positions and identities, grounded purely on visual desire and pleasure, is directly challenging to the status quo; visually suggestive ‘swingers’ and scenes from orgies, or bondage paraphernalia, triggers and taps into a seedy underside that is driven by fantasy as much as a hedonistic attitude. Dressed up as
fashion photography, it is hard to tell whether readers will perceive them as either, which is what fashion journalism succeeds in doing — obfuscating the boundaries between what is art, fashion and social taboo. Also it presents them all as part of a continuum of cultural consumption that lies beyond the traditionally narrow sexual representations of Chinese women.

Like a lesson in cultural studies, WE moves from gender discourse to interrogating sexuality and the narrow definitions of sexual identity in Asia. Sexual difference such as homosexuality and transvestism are not widely accepted in most Chinese homes. Lesbians and gays who ‘out’ themselves are still discriminated against and homosexual practices are banned in Singapore and China. Besides, taking a glamorous and ‘camp’ approach to a famous transvestite in Japan, WE also explores homosexuality at the level of the visual imaginary, through fashion spreads of bondage, gritty documentary pictures of Thai prostitution, gay saunas and drag queens.

This second section of the sex Issue is aptly titled, Voyeur. It features lesbianism and photo-realism shots of pensive beautiful male models (see Appendix 16). The images lure as any beautiful image would, tempting and inviting readers to transform their gaze from admiration to lust, and yet the written narrative undercuts this beauty, transforming by exposing the sentimental construction and marginalisation at the heart of these stories. It is clear that appeals to pathos as a specific way of feeling, acting and looking are being negotiated and expressed through this continuum of emotive, visually desirable images.
In featuring homosexuality and bondage through the continuum of fashion texts, there is an element of play, but also of sadness — this is not a humorous or colourful issue; in fact the background for many of the pages are black or darkened. The seriousness that underpins this issue suggests that the theme is a necessity. There is probably no other culture as uptight about homosexuality as the present Chinese society, even though it is widely known that traditional courtesans and prostitute dens had male and female prostitutes to cater for all tastes. In a sense, sex and sexuality remains the boundary where the curtain on respectable society is firmly drawn, thereby offering it as a terrain rife for contestation and a subversive site for modern identity formations and renegotiations.

It is not surprising then that three issues later, in ‘New China’, the topic of Chinese sexuality comes up again, however this time centring on the sexual promiscuities of youth and drugs, and alcohol infused clubbing scenes in metropolitan China. A series of articles focus on the ‘Beauty writers of China’ — a class of female writers that attain fame through torrid descriptions of their sexual activities, with writers as young as 15 year-old Han Han who publishes vindictive stories of sexual encounters with female classmates. These contrasting vignettes of sex in contemporary Chinese modernity, in the diasporic societies and China itself, are interesting, if not provocative.

As suggested earlier, the fashion texts and features provoke more questions than they resolves, which suitably challenges the validity of the normative standards. By asking what forms of feeling, acting and looking are suggested from these texts is to open up a plethora of challenging emotional responses that are often nascent
beginnings of social and cultural negotiations, substantiating the understanding that identity is flexible.

More specifically, it shows that diasporic societies with ‘fixed’ identities and value systems concerned with cultural preservation are often slower to adapt and change, such as Singapore compared to China. Even though homosexuality is banned in both countries, there is far more rampant policing, from geographical to internet spaces, and arrests in Singapore. While, admittedly, sexual identities may be more complex outside of media representations, this short excursion illustrates the shift in pace to embrace change and sexual ‘hang-ups’. Therefore, it is from the continuum of Chinese popular culture that practices and perceptions of sex and identity are being interrogated, and perhaps eventually reconstituted.

**Addressing Hong Kong and/or the Global?**

At the beginning of this chapter, one of the questions posited inquired about the context of Hong Kong in relation to the fashion texts. By intentionally choosing Hong Kong as the site of *WE* production, what are the factors that drew Lee to it? After analysing the textual intentions and discourses in *WE*, how do they relate to the wider urban-scape and issues in Hong Kong? Is the city of Hong Kong represented through these texts? Given the experiences of the social identities related through the fashion texts, is it possible to map the fashion texts onto the aspirations, concerns and perhaps the re-purposing of the city?

At the most denotative level, Hong Kong exists through its popular entertainment industry, for example, celebrities, Canto pop and especially the media talents many
of whom are captured in *WE*. This is especially so for consumers in East and South-East Asia; Hong Kong’s media personalities are its face, the personification of its talent pool, media capabilities, professional production and the centre of Chinese media production. Lo notes that Hong Kong has played a major role in representing Chinese-ness and Chinese popular culture to the world and despite the current downturn in film production, (it is currently tenth in the world) (MapsofWorld 2005) it is still recognised as such. Lo maintains that Hong Kong is a ‘prolific production center of Chinese diaspora culture and one of the most important platforms for Chinese-Western cultural mediation’ (p.2). Thus, the shaping of popular culture by the polysemic nature of media texts is given an additional dimension as culture becomes the bedrock on which contemporary meanings of Chinese-ness are being inscribed.

In fact, rather than a national discourse, Hong Kong’s lack of a distinctive nationalist structure under British/Chinese colonialism has produced a cultural identity that has wavered between positions of representing and disavowing or negating its Chinese-ness in order to appear ‘less parochial and more modern’ (Lo 2005, p.3). These swings between appearing Westernised and/or Chinese appear unusual as Hong Kong (the geographical entity) is often experienced as being intrinsically Chinese, articulating modes of Chinese characteristics of language and cultural practices within colonial infrastructure and governmentality. As such, it occupies a peculiar space, one that has managed to thrive on cultural rather than national narratives (Ma 2005, p.153). Cultural theorist, Eric Ma, argues that local history was deliberately ignored in formal education under the British, and history was never a discursive tool disposed towards myths of national construction as they are frequently utilised by
other nations (2005, pp.153-154). Within that space, popular media has stepped in to foster a sense of ‘community and history’ that relates more to the ‘opportunities of the present and a vision of the future’ (Ma 2005, p.154) than to the past.

Situated between political indeterminacy and an energetic economy that was vastly tied to the globalised market system prior to 1997, it is to the ‘local culture’ of the everyday that the Hong Kong public turns to, to make sense of their everyday lives (Lo 2005, p.27). Hong Kong’s media has always taken, as its point of cultural reference, narratives predisposed to either local diasporic experiences, which were largely Chinese, or to a globalising narrative. The 1980s and 90s saw Hong Kong as the Asian centre for the development of numerous multi-national corporations’ activities, and the connecting of these global fund managers to local regional economies and capital accumulation. Lise Skov’s (2004, pp.225-228) in-depth study of the history of the Hong Kong fashion industry observed that after China became the fully fledged People’s Republic of China, Hong Kong became the functioning export-based garment manufacturer for global fashion houses in Europe and America. It became a global wholesale market for accessing material, accessories and skilled-tailoring from Shanghai migrants.

Perhaps Hong Kong’s lack of political outlet and its consistent locale as a bridging medium has also served its media productions and talent pool well. Hong Kong, as the metaphorical bridge, has served the region no end, for British interests, for global capital, for regional exchanges. Thus, if we return to the idea of the bridge, which has two openings, where does it start from and where is it leading to? Does the bridge provide access both ways? Does it lead to exchange or is it a one-way transmission?
In a sense, the metaphor of the bridge can be easily repositioned to mean communication and transmission channels, in the context of media and cultural industries.

Instead of being a ‘cultural desert’ — the label given it by mainland Chinese, who also label Shanghai as such, referring to Hong Kong’s lack of ‘genuine’ natural culture — Hong Kong can, in fact, be seen as the ‘semiotic port’ of Asian culture, especially over the last 20 years or so (Lo 2005, p.8). Historically, it has successfully recreated and expanded the repertoires of ‘authentic’ historical Chinese mythic and fictional identities to which all forms of ‘Chinese’ cultural values have been ascribed. In place of a slumbering closed-door China, Hong Kong has been the popular and successful disseminator of this pan-regional diasporic sense of Chinese-ness.

**Semiosis in the City**

It is quite fitting to consider *WE* and Hong Kong as parallels in their roles as ‘semiotic ports’, transmitting a mediated sense of the Chinese self and, by tacit corollary, the social imaginings of the West. As a means of accommodating its intense urban residential-commercial spatiality, even the towering facades of Hong Kong’s skyscrapers are inscribed with all forms of neon-coloured advertising in written texts, images, iconographies, signifying both commercial interests and the lure of its endless entertainment. A vibrant economy (especially in the earlier 90s) is balanced by an equally vibrant nightlife. The hyped-up mobile phone culture has transformed stable social structures into the sudden instantaneous mobility of individuals who are ready to respond and interact with any advertising and promotional games on the visual façades.
The earlier discussion in Chapter Two of Mike Featherstone’s (1991) aestheticisation of everyday life explains how the dense urban-scape of Hong Kong can be perceived to be spatially inscribed by vertical and horizontal signs of capital consumption, brands and advertisements by neon-lights — it is an urban-scape that is literally and visually inscribed with semiotics. Yet, can the meaningful visuality of \( WE \) and the hyper-urban visuality of Hong Kong begin to test the hypothesis of there being a link between visual culture and knowledge formation, as is discussed in Chapter Three (Becker, 1999) and is aspired to by Chen Yifei? In parallelling the question Georg Simmel once asked of Paris: can the city impact on the inner, mental life of its citizen? While this is obviously a rhetorical question, it heightens the similarities between the different urban modernity processes, leading towards an evaluation of knowledge and taste formation informed by diffused informal education. The questions emerging out of this research also extends beyond the limits of this research.

In the Shanghai chapter, I argued that visual literacy is inculcated across multiple media platforms. The visually literate and competent not only become media literate, savvy consumers and, perhaps, other cultural producers. Hong Kong talents who have migrated to Hollywood, especially talents who are known for their distinctive visual styles such as Tsui Hark (director), Samuel Hung (martial arts choreographer, director), Jackie Chan (actor, producer, director), and Chow Yun Fatt (actor), have all left their imprint on global popular culture. As a means of comparing this creative input where the value chain argument understands the innate value of cumulative elements, such as branding, in exponentially increasing the outcome, so, similarly,
the inculcation of media knowledge, design, visual literacy and distinct styles are embedded, through immersion, in these cultural products and their consummate consumption and sampling.

Lo contends that Hong Kong’s residents are high consumers of print media, with 53 newspaper titles for six million people (Lo 2005, p.25). They are equally high producers in the image, design and software industries, as is evidenced in the Baseline Hong Kong Creative Industries (2003) report and the Creativity Index (2006). Lo contends that the popular Apple Daily competes for readership by becoming increasingly imaged-based, indicating a visual transformation of Hong Kong’s print culture largely influenced by the image-based web and televisual presentations, stating, ‘Colourful design and graphic layout have prevailed over the written language’ (p.29).

Semiosis in the city is perhaps engendered and embedded through the industries already present and its urbanised and highly visual culture. WE’s decision to be based in Hong Kong is influenced by the availability of design talents and a developed distribution network, and it is also largely influenced by the fact that there is more media freedom in Hong Kong (Lee, 2004) than in other Chinese cities.

**Conclusion**

Within the context of WE and its textual explorations, the urban-scape of Hong Kong does not figure much in the magazine. Unlike the images of Chinese-ness, such as the cities of Shanghai and Beijing or even the Shanghai Acrobatic or Arts Academy and Shaolin temples, the city of Hong Kong occupies a marginal space in the
One article by Glenn Belverio (2002, p.40) that does address Hong Kong, does so by self-admittedly taking an orientalist’s gaze as a first time tourist. It does not offer us any scope of the city beyond its touristic elements such as the World’s largest Buddha or the reminiscence of the World of Suzie Wong. 

As such, Hong Kong does not figure largely in the psyche of *WE*. What I mean by its ‘psyche’ is its frame of thought or reference. Readers in Hong Kong are not specifically addressed (unlike *Harper’s Bazaar Singapore*); there is no conscious referral to their place in the community of readers. In fact, the texts address a much larger, pan-regional, diasporic and globalised readership interested in the shifts in cultures of ‘East’ and ‘West’, predominantly situated around the notion of Chinese-ness. The crux of which is the changing representations of Chinese-ness and, conversely, the way Chinese-ness can view the West.

Therefore, it seems clear that the fashion texts primarily address this global readership, which is interested in global fashion but more so the shifts in global Chinese culture and identity. Hong Kong, thus, again, performs a bridging role and platform through which the global fashion-sphere is accessed and distributed by *WE*. In its role as a cultural base, the Hong Kong articulated in the texts is not of its street life or its visual brilliance, but it is the silent default, the transparent city-scape against which cumulative media texts are transmitted into a global fashion-sphere and where the articulations of Chinese-ness is re-imagined. This view is further justified when Hong Kong’s sporadic appearances in *WE* is contrasted with its consistent appearance in the advertising pages as a locale of high-end consumer labels. Its role in the advertising copy is to spatially and textually anchor global
commodities for local consumption, locating global brands such as Van Cleef & Arpels, Franck Muller or Diesel in Hong Kong as a global city.

However, more importantly, Hong Kong, as a modernised semiotically open space, points to and paves the way to a negotiation with evolving forms of modernised global Chinese identity. This is represented in *WE* in the context of the re-opening of China and its reciprocity with the larger imagined diasporic Chinese community. Ma (2005, p.146) states that ‘As Hong Kong has now become part of China, the identity border has been undergoing complicated restructuring’. Part of this re-structuring is a re-direction to China, a re-purposing and acceptance of Hong Kong by itself towards its own future, despite the complex and ambiguous journey.

The pervasive and powerful cinematic traditions of Hong Kong tell us through its latest popular films that China (culturally and politically?) is the answer. In *Shaolin Soccer*, directed by Stephen Chow (Hong Kong), the return of Chinese subjects to Shaolin principles of living empowers their lives and enriches their spirituality, limiting the all-consuming capitalistic greed. The entire city-scape becomes transformed through individuals practicing Chinese/Buddhist principles of kindness, ethics and community-mindedness. (This is especially farcical in light of the rapid transformation of Chinese society and embrace of capital, commercial and industrial development.) Compare this to *Hero*, directed by Zhang Yimou (China), which takes a more violent, nationalist and outright political stance; *Hero* demonstrates and justifies as worthy, the popular Chinese sentiment where the individual is sacrificed for the larger communal national good. These highly stylised utopias are
ideologically inflected texts that figure strongly in the collective imaginary on the
spiritual, cultural and political rewards inherent in Hong Kong’s return to China.

Similarly, \textit{WE}’s strong editorial direction pushes readers to look and imagine this
revised, updated view of modern Chinese-ness that is inclusive and openly flexible.
The cultural modernity that emerges through the pages of \textit{WE} is one that is different
from the Westernised version in degree rather than in kind. Ong Aihwa (1996, pp.60-61), argues for alternate versions of modernities that are not subjected to ‘replica’
standing, or that is derivative and second hand to the Western modernity. Hong Kong
has had industrial modernity directly transplanted by its British legacy, yet its
character is overtly Chinese or Asian. Whilst it is in the midst of larger cultural,
political and social shifts from external sources than, say, Singapore, it is a culturally
independent, developed modernity. As Lee claims, it is all about a \textit{re-vision}:

\begin{quote}
Although we were invaded and conquered, on the flipside, we learn and know
about the West, but they don’t know anything about us- so who actually wins
in this? Asians. If this is a competition, we’ve already won heaps, but we
can’t see it.
\end{quote}

Out of this reflection is the suggestion that the rise of a global Chinese identity
perhaps coincides with an official Chinese discourse, as outlined by Ong Aihwa
(1996, p.66):

\begin{quote}
…the uniqueness of the Chinese race is continually invoked, together with
the economic success of overseas Chinese communities as a way to exhort
Chinese citizens to constantly improve their economic performance and thus
strengthen the Chinese economy.
\end{quote}

Thus, it is possible to regard this globalising discourse on Chinese-ness as a sign of
popular assertion and cultural revisioning of the racial self, albeit one that is far more
inclusive, updating forms of Chinese-ness that is being communicated and negotiated through *WE*.
CHAPTER SEVEN: fashion journalism and cities

Introduction

The last three chapters investigated the different ways the three cities are imagined, imaged and reflected through their fashion magazines. As highlighted in the research approach chapter, the reading of the fashion magazines took a multidisciplinary approach that incorporated the theoretical contexts of each key term, to reflect a historically-grounded account of the cities in modernisation. The emphasis on their specific modernities is an attempt to relate the underlying modernising processes to larger comparisons across cities, against different temporal and spatial backdrops and within inter-cultural institutional structures. When considering the contexts involved this is clearly a big task within the framework of one dissertation. Alternatively, this can also be perceived as the continuation of the dialogue with other research trajectories already conducted in this area and as connecting with them at various meaning making junctures.

One central offshoot produced in this dissertation is the discursive exploration of fashion journalism as a hybrid of fashion, journalism, modernity in the Asian cities. Fashion journalism cuts across these different fields of study to meditate on the imaginative consequences of popular fashion texts in cultural development and broader knowledge formation. By taking into account the politics of these cities and their specific media histories, the readings reflect social and cultural meaning-


making occurring at the institutional and individual levels. In Harper’s, institutional discourses inflected by the government of the day compete with a wider representation of cosmopolitanism and sexuality, whereas WE and Vision, led by their entrepreneurial editors, turned their gaze towards the hopes and future aspirations of their reading communities. WE evokes global representation of contemporary Chinese-ness that is imagined as affluent, literate in popular culture and accepting of sexual and identity differences by revisioning the future through understanding the past. Vision promotes to its Chinese domestic readers a global knowledge that is centred on the inculcation of visual literacy for the future generation, it projects on Shanghai a vision of a city in the future — a great metropolis captured in the manner of London and New York. Therefore, all the fashion texts reveal specific negotiations of individual, local, national and/or global narratives in operation via their fashion journalisms relating directly to their current modernity.

This chapter aims to synthesise the central themes and emerging narratives from the fashion magazines to consolidate an understanding of how the experiential locus of looking, acting and feeling have been explored within the practice of fashion journalism in the cities. In addition, it emphasises the importance of connecting the reading of fashion journalism to the city (spatially and textually) as a means of contextualising and tapping into its everyday politics. Lastly, this chapter broadens its scope to discuss the commensurability between Asian and Western modernity by drawing together the theoretical review and their application on the cities in this finding.
Looking, Acting & Feeling

The analyses of the fashion magazines in Chapters Four, Five and Six revolve around key issues in the cities relating to the continued negotiation of (local) national and/or cultural identities juxtaposed with top-down city policy re-visioning. The tension surrounding these local negotiations emphasises the conscious regard for the development of a knowledge class that is shaped by the policy response to pressures of development within the global environment. Therefore, it must be stressed that even as these fashion texts, especially Vision, is pedagogically tuned towards the inculcation of visual literacy, it inherently captures and demonstrates the social and cultural politics of its city. The analyses are re-constituted here to examine the social and cultural meanings articulated through the continuum of fashion journalism. The concluding chapter further evaluates fashion journalism’s contributions to the five key concepts in the Pentagram.

The role of fashion journalism is to convey and capture the current trends of modern life, and therefore it is semiotically rich and textually embedded with cultural and social values. In addition, the identities, issues and reflections captured through fashion journalism is a representation of each city’s current negotiations. What the three fashion magazines in this thesis demonstrate is an ongoing interrogation of the politics of everyday life conducted through the experience and consumption of popular culture, music, art, design, celebrities, fashion, photography and travel, all occurring through fashion journalism. In other words, it is making sense of contemporary lifestyle through journalism. However, at its core, each of these magazines also demonstrates particular ideological imaginings and pedagogic
instructiveness that is consistently reproduced through fashion images, features, thematics and narratives of each issue that is explored here:

- **Vision** assumes a strong pedagogic style by establishing that they need to see ‘good’ aesthetics to inculcate visual literacy that is central to China’s future needs of being a cultural producer and not simply a manufacturer.

- **Harper’s Bazaar (Singapore)** discursively produces its own version of a cosmopolitan modernity while negotiating around governmental discourses on cosmopolitanism and sex, ultimately proposing a means of escaping the national via the fashion texts.

- **WestEast** magazine reflects the city of Hong Kong in its location as a semiotic port, a global bridge connecting Eastern and Western popular culture and utilising its status as a global magazine to insist on a wider cultural redefinition of what it means to be Chinese.

As stated in the introductory chapter, a consequence of the changes in media regulation in these cities is the increasing variety of fashion titles. These magazines treat readers to the diverse offerings of a cultural modernity that is readily experienced through cultural consumption. At one level, this is the function of fashion magazines and its journalism; they enable the readers to make sense of the social, urban cultures around them (Hartley 1996, p.33). Part of this socialisation is performed through narratives that present a specific world-view to its readers. This is reinforced by James Carey’s observations that journalism is also about persuasion, ‘journalists present to the world not a mirror image or truth but a coherent narrative that serves particular purposes’ (1997, p.157). While Carey is referring to the
ideological foment in political journalism it is easy to see how this is similarly applicable to fashion journalism.

Thus, it is useful to point out that the mediation of fashion journalism to national/social life can be seen as part of, ‘…cultural citizenship [which] consists of those social practices which enable a competent citizen to participate fully in the national culture’(Turner 1994, p.159). Fashion journalism utilises narratives that allow readers to negotiate with these social and cultural issues circulating at the global, regional/national or city levels. In structuring a particular ideological worldview, it connects up to the national culture, prompting the research to consider what forms of looking, acting or feeling are implicated in the texts and, eventually, in the responses. Using Singapore as an example, despite perceptions that such lifestyle and fashion magazines seem to be apolitical, Harper’s is deeply implicated in the discourses on the city that concern the nation. Yet, do the discourses counter national narratives and discourses or complement and legitimise them? Does it deal with the national culture and discourses directly? If so, what forms of social and cultural imaginings are demonstrated?

Before contextualising the analysis in the context of fashion journalism, it is important to point out some observations on the cities. Singapore is a City-State and, as such, the national politics of a smaller nation is played out at the city level. Similarly, Hong Kong has to a certain extent enjoyed governance from afar during British rule, and in some ways operated like a City-State. Shanghai’s extraterritoriality status in the past has located it more within the spaces of global politics than with China. Whilst that has changed, Shanghai is currently seen as the capital of
commerce rather than as a site for national politics. While, this is not to make a direct claim on the effects of distance between sites of authority, state power and media discourse, Holston and Appadurai (1996, p.189) in *Cities and Citizenship* argues that cities tend to circulate a different politics from their nation and the hinterland. Cities tend to be progressive centres where journalistic practices are intensified (Hartley 1996, p.33), in part due to the concentration of urban and media communications. Fashion magazines speak directly to certain readers in these cities and differ markedly in their journalistic concern, styles and addresses.

The connection between cities and fashion journalism thus forms an important junction in this thesis. As a locale of consumption, cities anchor global fashion images to its local readerships, and as a site of production it offers a means of investigating the local and national contexts. Any analysis of media texts needs to keep in mind a grounded approach that takes into account their production, distribution and consumption (Moeran 2006, p.227). This thesis has attempted to do this. However, due to the limits in time and resource, no ethnography has been conducted with the readers to further the analysis of consumption at the individual level. The use of textual analysis, however, opens up ways to combine the multidisciplinary fields of this research to investigate the productive aspects and consequences of fashion journalism.

**Fashion Journalism & Singapore: Escaping the Nation**

In the Singapore chapter, direct comparisons were made between the representation of national governmental discourse on the role of cosmopolitans (National Day Speech) and the need for more procreative sex in the ongoing *Romancing Singapore*
Campaign versus what Harper’s offers up as alternative interpretations of sex and cosmopolitanism within national boundaries. I argue that by contrasting notions of local and cosmopolitan in society the government attempts to reassure the heartlanders about their centrality in the nation while allocating the economy a central role (again) for the benefit of the nation. The cosmopolitans were represented as vital global links that bring in high-end expertise whereas the locals were represented as the stoic, stable heartbeat of the nation who preserves local traditions and values while fulfilling important lower end jobs. This is despite the understanding that both are not mutually exclusive practices or identities but, rather, speaks about a fluid set of lifestyle and consumption choices that are constantly being articulated in the community.

It is striking that while the local is being championed in both the national and Harper’s accounts, they are constructed differently. The governmental ‘local’ is represented as a site of political stability, the heartland of government support, whereas in Harper’s the local is the site of ongoing contested discursive shifts and identity articulations. In Harper’s account, the local reader (our girl) aspires towards cosmopolitan imaginings, and cosmopolitanism itself becomes a signifier for a globally savvy, culturally knowledgeable consumer. The cosmopolitan transforms into a fully-fledged citizen of the world who is able to negotiate much wider global cultural and political contexts than just the parochial politics of one land. Most importantly, Harper’s underlines how this transformative means is open to all its readers. By demonstrating the steps to becoming cosmopolitan through Harper’s instructive-ness, the different experiential forms of looking (at commodities), feeling
(sexy) and acting (out global knowledge) are called into play to enable the growth of a cosmopolitan attitude.

The cosmopolitan girl is persuaded to ‘feel’ empowered to keep her local name and pick a local boyfriend who is also cosmopolitan. The hip café cultures, lounging in the latest restaurants and travelling to the latest destinations for holidays are a continuing part of the experience and performance of these modes of modern consumption — feeling and looking the part. I argue that this cultural consumption is not the end but the beginning of an association beyond the nation. By working with nationalised identities (rather than against) readers are invited to take this familiar discursive identity and escape with it from the constrictions of national narratives and discourse to a global space where other forms of imaginative articulations are possible.

Part of this ‘other’ identity is articulated in the feature articles and subtle visual representations of androgynous men and homosexual characters. By asking readers to re-imagine other identities through new or unfamiliar spaces of global consumption (both local and overseas), they are encouraged to feel and act as cosmopolitans. Stepping out of national spaces they can transcend the top-down policy revisioning and, instead, employ this cosmopolitan imagining cultivating different ways of looking at social life. Breckenridge et al. (2002, p.6) argue that despite the globalised and multicultural nature of common experiences, the ‘world currency and international politics’ still reside within the nation, yet the practices of nationhood often show up the incongruity of modernist ideals, thus part of this
discourse of cosmopolitanism allows the reader to escape from the highly prescribed straightjacket of the ‘national’

By emphasising the competing discourses in Harper’s, what is highlighted is the process whereby forms of personal and private imaginings take root through disconcerting mean, stemming from a commercial media entity that seems to redeploy governmental (national) discourse. Fashion journalism is demonstrated to be integral to instigating this alternative form of looking and re-imagining of the self in the city (rather than in the nation). In John Urry’s discussion of Visuality, Mobility and the Cosmopolitan (Urry and Szerszynski 2005), he makes similar arguments that visuality (looking & imagining) is intrinsic to pursuing a cosmopolitanism that abandons uniformity for differences in society, and connects to the world (pan-humanity) instead of an insular national existence. In the context of a politically closed, nationalised culture in Singapore, these alternate representations and open negotiations offer escape from the overtly politicisation of national rhetoric.

Fashion Journalism & Shanghai: Imaginative Consequences

Learning (xuexi), has always been considered an admirable scholarly Chinese virtue, which in this case has been transferred to refer to a literacy in visuality and art. Chen (2004) states, at his interview that visual literacy is imparted through a process of visual ‘accumulation’ (jilei). Thus every issue of Vision contained a review of two ‘good magazines’ and explanations as to why they are good. This practice continues in the new versions of Vision published by the China Youth Party. This emphasis on visuality as a pedagogy underlines Chen’s vision of using art (including popular art) to improve and educate his readers. In his view, China has a long way to go to
become aesthetically and design savvy, and the widest most accessible means to transform society and get his message across is through the ubiquitous fashion magazine, not an art gallery.

After Chen’s death, the Yifei Group published a book entitled ‘Great Magazine’ (see Appendix 17), an edited collection of the ‘great’ magazines that have previously been reviewed by ‘Magazine Culture’. The foreword is by Sven Fortmann (editor-in-chief, Lodown) who captures this casual but didactic Yifei spirit by stating:

Talking about music is like dancing to architecture. Damn, I wish I could remember where I read that. I wish I could remember the person behind these words of wisdom. Whoever he was, he certainly knew what he was talking about. It just doesn’t make sense to talk about music, because music is a very sensual thing. *You have to feel it with your heart, body and soul.* As soon as you start to analyse it, you’re killing it. This may sound a little weird, but in my opinion you can say the same thing about magazines. (my emphasis)

A good magazine should attack all the senses. It should challenge you visually and content wise. It should be the extra cookie of the day. … Magazines right now are as cool and boring and vain and lame and interesting as ever. You can only make an impact if you deliver a personal point of view, a unique vision, to an already existing market that has almost covered everything already. Sven Fortmann, (p.3)

What Fortmann proposes is an experiential, even tactile, approach to reading and looking, capturing Chen’s emphasis. This means of reading (looking and ‘feeling it’) goes beyond the visual and textual properties to a sensorial and explorative way of engaging with global culture. Yet, more importantly, this book is imbued with the similar sense of pedagogy permeating the magazine, even after the departure of Vision magazine from their publishing fold. It captures the vibe, an attitude about youth culture, consumerism and modern life that Vision encapsulated — the experience of contemporary modernity through fashion journalism.
It is fitting that Chen sees visual literacy as the means to transfer all these ‘good’
aesthetics and design to its readers so that they will begin to understand and
conceptualise design, art and aesthetics. For, as Becker (1999) contends, the
knowledge formation potential in visual culture is largely neglected, ‘The
relationship between knowledge and vision as a discursive formation and the
centrality of the visual in re-formation of cultural values have received limited
attention within cultural studies’. While Becker intellectually backtracks to
understand visual culture through modern televisual media, and aesthetics through art
history, she argues that they share a common ancestry as modern categories of
seeing, emphasising the importance of reconceptualising the wider uses of visual
culture for contemporary society. This demonstrates an emerging interdisciplinarity-
ness conducted through studies like Becker’s that begins to break down the
boundaries between art and visual culture. Such institutional interdisciplinarity-ness
shadows what is already occurring in the industry, such as Louis Vuitton’s high
profile collaboration with artist Takashi Murakami (handbag) and visual artist

What these arts practitioners and theorists have demonstrated is a link between
creative input and creative output that is connected through visuality. As argued in
the Shanghai chapter, the concept of image-flooding relates to the visual form of
instruction that artists often practice. Thus, inherent in Chen’s philosophy is the
overriding importance of looking (sight). Looking and feeling, then acting — modes
of experiential life — are arguably part of this creative educational process towards
the creative production of design in fashion, graphic, illustrations and so forth. Lee’s
statement concerning the Shanghai pictorials accurately states, ‘we must not neglect

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the “surfaces”, the images and styles that do not necessarily enter into the deepest of thoughts but nevertheless conjure up a collective imaginary’ (1999, p.63). In other words, the imaginary consequences of these cultural forms, whether they be visceral ‘surfaces’ or deep analytical features of fashion journalism, collectively extends toward instituting new forms of knowledge for readers. Therefore fashion journalism as a commercial medium becomes an accessible continuum for the locating of new forms of visual knowledge and the instruction of taste and attitude in developing societies like Shanghai.

Fashion journalism offers a look into another culture, another world, with the capacity to re-imagine the self, the body and its relationship with the urban context in a variety of social, political and cultural ways. A central theoretical link that underpins the arguments made in Chapter Four (Shanghai) and Six (Hong Kong) are the conceptual uses and consequences of the ‘imagined’. There is a productive capacity inherent in the idea of the imagined. The theoretical concepts drawn from John Urry and Bron Szerszynski (Urry and Szerszynski 2005) positions the ‘imagined’ as the projection of the self in forms of travel, mediated as well as physical, that kicks into play the idea of multiple mobilities. Hence the ways in which one self can be imagined through cosmopolitan identity with its consumptive displays becomes implicated in this projected self-imagining.

Yet beyond the individual, the consequence of such imaginings are relevant to the production of much larger communal imaginings, as substantiated by Benedict Anderson’s (1983) ‘imagined communities’ and Lee Leo Ou-fan’s use of ‘cultural imaginary’, in articulating Shanghai’s cultural scene in the 1920s. However, they
differ in that Lee refers to cultural imaginary as a ‘contour of collective sensibilities’ (p.63) and Anderson refers to the limited nature of physical communities and hence the need to imagine its national cohesion. Both essentially point to processes intrinsic to understanding community building, drawing on the significance of the productive potential of the community that, first, needs to emerge as a larger form of consensual imagining. What is proposed is the articulation of an imagined reality through the mediation of visuality; or conversely, that visuality is the key to opening up alternate ways of imagining.

The pedagogic potential of visuality is outlined by Karin Becker’s (1999) study on visual culture and its impact on cultural studies. She underlines the importance of instituting visual culture as a tactic, and technique rather than as a discipline or field of study. This is clearly demonstrated through Vision which emphasises visuality as an overt means of instruction. In the section Magazine Culture, the editorial voice of Chen Yifei is clear. He states in the interview that it is important for artists to distinguish between good and bad art, so that they can produce ‘good’ creative works (Chen, 2004). In Magazine Culture, there is an overt demonstration of ‘teaching’ ‘good’ aesthetics. This is an emphatic claim of ‘we will show you what you need to see and know’. (see, Appendix 18)

WE also centre on a form of visuality that is pedagogically purposed towards its readers, but which differs greatly from Vision’s. While Vision and WE are both visually fluent and entertain readers by including contemporary global trends of fashion, architecture, art and celebrities, Vision distinctively aims to expose its local Chinese readers to the outside world, being their window to the global space. Its
restricted distribution to the metropolitan cities of Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou not only locates its readership to the urban metropolis but these readers would ostensibly be disposed to greater income levels, have access to fashion shops, cafes, hair salons and advertisements as aspiring consumers. As argued in Chapter Four, Vision does not showcase only contemporary celebrities and fashion but promotes historical knowledge of public personalities, aiming to situate its readers in a shared global ‘common’ culture.

**Fashion Journalism & Hong Kong: Re-visioning Global Chinese-ness**

This global popular cultural knowledge is similarly emphasised through WE. The global circulation and early marketing collection by WE on its readership in Western cities such as London, Paris and New York situates it in the middle to high income level bracket. As a general description, it would not be too presumptuous to say that the readers are well-educated and interested in inter-cultural issues, design and fashion. Part of WE’s cultural cache rests in its original fashion photography of celebrities by equally famous photographers.

From its beginning as a magazine run on a shoestring budget, its cache was derived from its access to big name celebrities and artists and a visual sophistication in layout and photography, and, especially, its promotion of an alternative but in-depth world-view on cultural matters. Therefore, its claim to a global cultural knowledge rests not in educating its readers or instilling in them these attitudes (they probably know of these personalities and features already). But in demonstrating their ‘in’ status with these superstars through their use of first person narration or third person observation writing, for example with Linda Evangelista (2004, Issue 11). By establishing a
global platform through such luminaries, *WE*’s accomplished visuality further woos its readers before it inserts culturally significant features about hitherto hidden cultural histories, social heroes, sexual practices or observing culturally divergent subcultural emergence, as in the Su Village rock scene or uncovering the ‘real’ Shaolin temple in China.

These texts reveal something about practice and neglect in fashion journalism. The examinations and cultural self-reflection on social histories of contemporary Chinese culture situates fashion journalism as a disseminator of modern history. Historical understanding about under-explored Chinese society contributes towards a budding cultural consciousness, which James Carey states is an aspect of journalism that is often neglected, misunderstood and overlooked in contemporary accounts of journalism studies (Carey 1997, p.93). Fashion journalism inherits the ethos of continual change and it continues to educate readers on this change and provide invaluable sartorial tips (for socialisation) but also on the manners and social skills required to carry this identity along.

As if establishing its right to speak about the ‘east’ and Asia through its cultural eloquence of the West as an Asian magazine, *WE* makes a global cultural assertion on Asia’s behalf. It is its own answer to the lack of an Asian international fashion design magazine in the global publications marketplace. As evidenced in Chapter Six, *WE* champions the diverse success of Asians globally, especially those who have ‘made it’ in the global centres of New York, London and Paris. Yet it attempts to accomplish far more than this global insertion of Asian-ness, it clearly aims to shift notions of Chinese-ness by picking out outstanding private social histories
relating to public persons, such as the Soong sisters and Theresa Deng (pan-regional pop star in 1970s) and alternative sexual practices. Through the fashion journalism platform, WE strategically place its global ambitions of Chinese cultural re-visioning within the space of global readerships.

Part of WE’s re-visioning is on its larger cultural imagining of Asia and the surge in popular cultural productions. WE demonstrates that Asia is not only a locale of conspicuous consumption (as it is widely recognised), but that the cultural cache of global popular cultural knowledge should (and does in WE) consider Asian contributions in cinema, literature, design, fashion, illustrations and artistic productions. As argued, it is entirely apt that this global assertion of an Asian fashion magazine pertaining to the rise of Asian popular culture is spatially located in Hong Kong, a city historically known for its Chinese media production. Given fashion journalism’s ability for capturing contemporary concerns, it is not surprising that this global articulation of a cultural revising parallels Hong Kong’s political and social climate.

By drawing together the main analyses from the three fashion magazines, it is clear that fashion journalism is not only implicated in global imaginings and local assertions. Its practice is lodged within the spaces and politics of the city where such cultural responses are made. All three magazines have expressed differing ways of looking — cultural imaginings (acting and feeling) — through their journalisms. Ultimately, these responses are symptoms of their cultural re-invention and local developments in the modernisation process of their cities.
The main research question proposed to examine the cultural developments and modernisation processes of these developing cities through their fashion magazines. The textual analyses reveals pedagogic and subconscious negotiation conducted towards these cities that either directly dealt with the local politics of the city (Singapore), or supported these social initiatives (Shanghai). In any case, the reciprocally impacting relationship between cities and their fashion magazines is not new and points to an older dialogue conducted around journalism and cities.

In many studies on the functions of fashion magazines (journalism), the city figure as a dominant context upon which social, cultural and political agendas, emancipatory and normative, are constructed and negotiated, see (Rosenberg 1995; Skov 1995; Weiner 1999; Cameron 2000; Fung 2002). Within these three Chinese cities, the examination of their fashion journalism in cultural modernity has taken place under an experiential approach that incorporates the additional fields of history, city, Asia, consumption and popular culture in order to make sense of the texts in circulation. This differentiates it from a straightforward journalism study. What emerges from this study is, thus, not just a snapshot of the cultural modernity (as proposed) but also a semiotic re-imagining that dictates the city is understood to be more than its physical dimension or even its representations. The city becomes a fluid entity that is made up of social conventions, cultural consumptions, political beliefs, ideological affiliations and, most of all, its people.

This seems like a simple conclusion, however it is only by recognising the ways by which people become imagined and constituted under formalised institutional labels of citizen, consumer, reader, mother, advocate and fashionista that they are
deconstructed. The city as an urban containment of these multiple social meanings and cultural identities becomes a palimpsest for the projection of values and, further, a site for such contestations and articulations. Thus, fashion and journalism are understood as important processes of modern social and cultural communications, flourishing in each urban hyper-intensive environment, incorporating and shaping the experiences of the reader in the city.

**Modernity**

The theoretical review demonstrated that the modernisation processes these Asian cities are undergoing are similar to what Western cities such as London, Paris, New York went through in previous times. Hard infrastructures and cranes, while heavy on symbolism are only one aspect of such urban development. Other less visible factors undergoing transformations in the social, political and cultural realm that binds the commercial, the political, the communicative and technological sectors (and so on) are just as important, if not more so. They reveal the internal structures and shifts that are tied to societal and cultural value systems. Therefore, in order to assess this commensurability between Asian and Western modernity, it is useful to examine the experiential through the responses of its inhabitants.

In *Cosmopolitan De-scriptions* Ackbar Abbas writes in response to the developments in Shanghai that there is a developing ‘transnationalism without a corresponding transitional subject’ (2000, p.783) in Shanghai, whereby spaces circumscribed as ‘global’ (such as high-end restaurants) do not attract social practices and users that demarcate it as such (aggressively loud and rude mobile phone users). He points to the incongruous nature of such social interactions as
instances of the ‘abuse’ or the dislocation of cosmopolitanism. Yet, perhaps these local ‘unruly’ behaviours forms part of the practices of carving out their own politics of consumption in their city and in claiming such cosmopolitan surrounds as their own. While Abbas is right to argue that such cosmopolitan imaginings with their multicultural knowing are utterly belied through such transgressive behaviours, he contends that such aporia raises the question of how cosmopolitan spaces and identities are to be negotiated.

However, it is conceivable that these urban ‘maladies’ are not symptoms of un-cosmopolitanisms but of a differently represented one. These spaces are embodied cultural testing grounds for a repertoire of urban responses that have yet to find their voices in a nascent capitalistic environment. As noted by Breckenridge, Pollock, Bhabha & Chakrabarty (2002, p.5), ‘A cosmopolitanism grounded in the tenebrous moment of transition is distinct from other more triumphalist notions of cosmopolitical coexistence.’ Therefore perhaps Abbas’ question is a little too premature for Shanghai? Nonetheless, it is an apt one that questions the conflicting individuated negotiation of transnational, cosmopolitan spaces.

However, his mindset betrays a more deep-seated concern about the inappropriate situations of modern social interactions enacted through mobile telephony and the boundaries of social etiquette, Abbas states (2000, p.783):

If the speed of change is creating spaces we do not understand, then one strategy might be to slow things down — to preserve some almost erased concept of civility and respect for otherness in the midst of chaos.

Such apprehension about the changes that modernisation brings, like the erosion of traditional mores (respect, civility, appropriateness, social etiquette), the speed of
modern life, and the change in social forms of interactions, are not new. The literature on the experiential responses to modernity in Chapter Two frames these anxieties, dilemmas and paradoxes as responses produced by the disruption of social traditions and norms in modernisation. Complaints about the traffic, the new skyscrapers, the new forms of socialisation and the negotiating of new communication technologies are reproduced in all developing modernities, marking the similarities, rather than differences, in responses.

While some Asian theorists continue to insist on ‘alternate modernities’ (Ong 1996; Iwabuchi 2001) that extent beyond notions of Asian values, perhaps the differentiation lies in the intensity of the cultural consumption and practices stemming from these responses. From WE magazine, it was clear that marginalised Chinese identities from homosexuality to punks and rock subcultures were slowly being championed. Social knowledge is being gleaned from Vision, and the availability of choice in fashion and self-adornment conveys versatility about the democratisation of culture. These social, cultural and political rights, articulated through fashion journalism, are part of the continuing traditions of modern identities and social freedoms. They are part and parcel of modernisation — an on-going negotiation process, not the destination.

If anything, Professor of Public Management, Hu Angang’s (2002) thesis on the ‘catch up’ strategy of late developing nations building on best practices models and technologies of developed nations, demonstrates the commensurability of modern development. Modernity as a process tends towards universalisation, as demonstrated in these magazines, but cultural differences (as way of life) demonstrates that
different forms of political conditions add to the social articulations and cultural negotiations in these cities. The end result is unique and culturally differentiated, but not an alternate modernity.

**Conclusion**

As products of the modern environment, the practices of fashion journalism have to be analysed within the context of their spatial, temporal and historical exchanges. In tending towards the modernised ethos of progress, change and development, fashion journalism relates to the nation at various angles, but rests snugly within the spaces of the city. As demonstrated in this analysis, the binary of nation and city is an important one around which textual imaginings are contested. The specific performances of looking, feeling and acting are encapsulated within these articulations and, more importantly, these practices speak directly to their contemporary cultural modernity.
CHAPTER EIGHT: conclusion

Grown-ups used to joke that London would be a wonderful place when it was finished, but I could never understand what was so funny about that; it seemed perfectly possible that a time would come when all the building work would be over and done with and that would be that: London, finished.

John Reader on post-war London in, Cities (p.2)

By looking at fashion magazines as a way of imaging the cities, it is important to recognise that this is a mediated representation of specific cities through its temporal reading communities - a snapshot of its continued change. Cities are organic spaces packed with communities, individuals and institutions that are constantly evolving, thus, the tensions that erupt as a result of competing agendas, resources and social exclusions require frequent scrutiny if the direction and shape of its growth is to be understood. Saskia Sassen, observes that (2002, p.3) ‘cities in the global south and in the mid-range of the global hierarchy…allows us to capture a dynamic in formation, unlike what is the case with global cities already well established.’ Yet, what lies beyond this scrutiny, beyond this knowing? This thesis aims to contribute to this dialogue on the modernisation of Asian cities, communities, journalism and fashion — bringing to bear the knowledge of how these reading communities construct and negotiate their identities through increasingly popular forms of mediation in these cities.

It is useful to remember that the context of this research rests on an evolving framework of modernisation that aims to reflect the process of change through the fashion media. In attempting to understand and examine what is occurring in these
cities through fashion magazines, this study has explored three main aspects: firstly, the process of identity negotiations and pedagogy undertaken via fashion magazines and establishing the social issues, cultural tastes and popular conventions that are in formation in Shanghai, Singapore and Hong Kong via the experiential means of looking, acting and feeling. Second, the popular but neglected area of fashion journalism and its location as a site for multiple forms of negotiations from identities to city formulations and social displays. Thirdly, the question of whether the underlying developmental processes demonstrate commensurability between Eastern and Western modernity. In the process of answering these research questions, this study has taken a multidisciplinary approach to investigating the five key intersecting concepts (fashion, journalism, city, modernity and Asia) to produce an intersecting study of all the theoretical fields, as demonstrated in the Pentagram.

This study draws from these five concepts to frame and analyse the practice and industry of three fashion magazines in three cities. In doing so, it pulls together the
concept of fashion and journalism as practices and considers the ways in which the consumption of journalism provokes an experiential looking, acting and feeling in each Asian city. Therefore, to conclude, I return to these key concepts by way of the research, to ask if the interdisciplinary analysis has shifted the uses and boundaries of the concepts in this context. Further, what questions does this allow me to ask about this body of work that I could not do before?

The theoretical review demonstrates that these fields of knowledge were traditionally investigated as distinct concepts, at times with interdisciplinary foci strands. Fashion as a newer discipline is often pursued as a phenomenon that is constructed and shaped by modernity, as discussed by theorists Elizabeth Wilson (1985), Christopher Breward (Breward and Evans 2005), Caroline Evans (2003) and Gilles Lipovetsky (1994). A century before, social theorists such as Georg Simmel (1895) and Walter Benjamin (Frisby 1986) saw fashion as a phenomenon of social modernity.

Similarly, studies in city and journalism are independent of each other, but their relationship with modernity has been analysed in James Donald’s (1999) *Imagining the Modern City* and John Hartley’s (1996) *Popular Reality: Journalism, Modernity, Popular Culture*, which is of primary relevance for this research. Thus the claim to a multidisplinary approach to this thesis comes from drawing together a context of research that takes into account these different knowledge formulations. Most importantly, these concepts are demonstrated to be connected and interdependent in their relationship through modernity and consumption. Where these five concepts meet is through the ambit of the research question, which inquires specifically as to the role and media representations of the fashion magazines, the theorisation of
fashion journalism and what they tell us about the developing modernities of these cities.

**Cities**

In doing so, it is important to acknowledge that this path of research privileges the exploration of media representation and its identities. It is clear that the examination of the cities did not adopt a cultural geography approach, but, rather, draws from the literature in cultural studies, film studies and cultural geography to analyse the city. Here the semiotic tools and the concept of ‘imagining’, as they are used across these different disciplines, are borrowed in order to play a central role to rethink what the fashion magazines represent about the city, who it represents and how it is represented (discussed in last chapter).

The city as a physical spatial entity is a site for contested politics of all kinds, from architectural designs; spatial uses (Crewe and Beaverstock 1998); resources (Sassen 1995); demonstrations of class and socio-economic paradigms (Bookchin 1995); urban planning policies; and, most recently, the manifestation of creative industries revisioning in creative cities ideology (Leadbeater and Oakley 1999; Hartley 2005). At the other end of this spectrum lies a more ephemeral and less tangible city that is semiotically dependent. Taken up in analysis of aesthetics and film studies (Donald 1999), identity politics (Appadurai 1996), and cultural politics (nostalgia, cosmopolitan, sex) the city is a shifting variable constructed by attitudes, identities and issues. By engaging with the visual and written representations of the cultural product (fashion journalism), this thesis has considered how the physical space and
the ephemeral elements of the city interconnect and engage with each other through mediated forms.

I have emphasised that the city is a lived experience by asking how looking, acting and feeling are forms of this experience and by considering how the spatial elements respond to the imaginative consequences at individual, communal or national levels. As part of this imaginative consequence begins with its visualisation; the performance of looking in the city are integral to relating to fashion magazines and as a means of self and community assessment. They are the points of negotiation that allow the reader to engage with and explore agency in the city. Thus, the city is the context and the subject through which to examine the politics of the land, the people, the cultures and practices.

In understanding the importance of the city in fostering and interpellating these different subjects, the relationship between the Asian cities, fashion and journalism are addressed from this viewpoint. In this thesis, the concoction of urban city policies occurring in Shanghai, Singapore and Hong Kong are understood to be concerned with repurposing and injecting vigour into their cities, to reconsider how they can tap into this re-imagining, and what it is the communities want to imagine. This is especially so, if social and cultural objectives are to align with political and economic ones, and they are to enable the successful reconceptualising of a functional adaptable city. Thus, if experiencing the city inquires about a category of performance (looking, acting, feeling) through which fashion journalism mediates with the city’s readers and what they imagine, then it will be interesting to consider
whether this category can be applied meaningfully to other social phenomenon (architecture) or journalism (music, travel).

In understanding the importance of the city to fashion consumption and production, conversely, how are cities similarly dependent on fashion’s cultural capital and practice? How are cities being branded through fashion as:

- Fashion destinations: consumption, fashionistas, branding of the city
- Fashion production: design & manufacturing
- Fashion distribution: network, infrastructure and capital investment
- Fashion media.

*Fashion’s World Cities*, by Christopher Breward and David Gilbert (2006) partially examines these categories. However, there is still more scope for analysis and exploration within the framework of developing cities, new designers, the global shift in labour and production conditions and, finally, the use of new media technologies in the mediation and distribution of fashion.

**Modernity**

In identifying modernity as the overriding condition that underpins this study, I have argued that the experiential, cultural and tactile aspects of modernity should be privileged. Modernity, like fashion, is both a process and a condition; it is an ever-evolving, shifting goalpost. For even as these developing cities are ‘catching up’, modernisation is about constantly moving forward. As a condition, modernity is constantly shaped through the mediation and urban phenomenon of fashion,
journalism and the city. It, in turn, shapes these urban phenomena as the conditions
of modern experiences and cultural practices through consumption.

Therefore, when media liberalisation opens up a spectrum for the development of
fashion and lifestyle consumer magazines, this becomes significant for media and
cultural researchers who are also interested in how these cities are modernising. This
is particularly so in the three cities under consideration, where media policies
primarily remain under stringent governmental regulation and, as the research
demonstrates, the media diet of consumers and citizens are closely regulated (Seow
1998; Wong 1999; Zhang 2003; Borton 2004; Loh 2004). This period of intensive
modernisation presents itself as opportune for this investigation.

In considering modernity through the examples of these three cities, two main points
were explored. By reading and looking through fashion magazines as a conditioning
of modernity, firstly, it is the experiential and the negotiated issues that emerge. If
the city teaches us the techniques of living in the present (Donald 1999, p.7) through
fashion journalism, then these issues arising from the fashion magazines present
important contemporary articulations and negotiations arising from the cities’
cultural modernity. In arguing that this is an experiential modernity that is being
interrogated, I have demonstrated the importance of recognising this aspect of social
modernity as propositioned by theorists, Georg Simmel, Marshall Berman, Walter
Benjamin and Charles Baudelaire. This modernity takes its lead from recognising the
everyday dissonant, paradoxical, dualistic and yet universalising qualities that
modernisation brings. This modernity is qualitatively different from the objective,
enlightened rationality that prevails, represented by quantitative scientific modernity
(Simmel 1969; Bennett 2001). This captures the subjective humanist elements of experiences (looking, feeling, acting) as important modes of narrating and studying modernity.

Works by theorists from diverse fields like, Mica Nava, Rachel Bowlby, and Daniel Miller similarly argue for the importance of consumption, the market and self-agency in carving out experiential, subjective modern spaces. In further highlighting this experience, Charles Baudelaire (Baudelaire 1995, p.12) reminds us that modernity’s temporal and spatial-ness contains a duality that is eternal and transient — the styles as captured through fashion are transient but ‘immutably’ final as they are fixed forever in the exemplary histories of 50s, 60s or 70s fashion aesthetics (Simmel 1969). By incorporating this argument, fashion magazines have demonstrated the expression of these dualistic notions, the ever changing trends and their recognisably fixed styles. Even the changes instituted through ‘fashionable’ architecture and infrastructure (Goth, Victorian, Modernist) remains eternally embedded in the city until such time as they are demolished.

Secondly, in applying this to the categories of journalism and fashion in the city, the modernity revealed, of Shanghai, Singapore and Hong Kong, reminds us of the paradoxes of modernity, especially in the photographic explorations of Shanghai by the earlier picture magazine Liangyou huabao. Scenes of poverty, environmental unsustainability and marginalisation are not visually explored in these fashion magazines, which is perhaps their greatest drawback. The paradox of progress in instituting comfort and development at a wider level, and the provision of potentials and opportunities are often conducted at the expense of unsustainable environmental
practices whether it be water, waste or overcrowding. The frequent national progress at the expense of local diversity, such as the adoption of one dominant, official language (Mandarin in China, and bi-lingualism in Singapore), has produced much progress but it is also the source of loss of local dialects and customs. As such, it is important to remember the losses occurred in modernity’s dualisms and paradoxes.

**Fashion**

The material representation of clothes, designers and trends are just one aspect of fashion. In this research, the study of fashion is also directed towards its cultural and communicative functions, its potential as self-expression and as a tool for potentially social and cultural transgressive mobilities. Fashion itself is a mediation of the self, engendering expression and capturing conscious display of identities. This display and performance of the self within the city is a statement of ‘who you show yourself to be’ and, thus, is necessarily shifting and flexible. The flexible identities at play through fashion are intensively produced through constant monitoring of the fashion landscape in the city — dependent on the consuming look at displays of fashionistas, window displays and fashion magazines.

What tends to be displayed and produced in fashion magazines is a visual and textual negotiation of a global fashion adornment (clothing, accessories), as well as cultural identities (both global and local). Thus fashion magazines perform a vital role of bridging the material to the cultural and communicative, engendering the niche production of a uniformity of social bodies within the varied style tribes in the local city. Studies on fashion recognise its social, communicative and cultural repertoires (Lipovetsky 1994; Breward 2000; Bruzzi and Gibson 2000; Crane 2000; Steele 2000;
Wilson 2003) repurposed for wider political or individual uses at local and global levels.

However, by and large, these studies do not discuss the integrated and multifaceted relationship between the local consumption of fashion and the global status emanating from it. Interestingly, even though each fashion magazine centres on distinctively different identities, issues and politics of their city, their renditions of the global as an aspired condition achieved through fashion is similar. In Vision, this global is situated as a productive capacity invoking ‘looking modern’ as a self-presentation and possessing a broader outlook, which will ultimately add to the cumulative effects of a consumer and reader who is knowledgeable in all things global, especially fashion and aesthetics. In WestEast, the global is the condition out of which all ‘worthy’ forms of consumption occurs. By utilising the ‘global’ tag, WE has managed to sell itself to Asia. Therefore, WE’s claim to global-ness stems from its association with the Western fashion capitals where, as David Gilbert argues, ‘a symbolic ordering of cities’ (2000, p.9) occurs, with Paris and Milan as sites of top fashion capitals. This taps into the study by Christopher Breward and David Gilbert in Fashion’s World Cities (2006) whereby fashion extends beyond the formation of social identities and individualistic aspirations to represent the productive economic articulation and cultural cache of particular cities in the fashion global-sphere. Thus, for a developing city, the achievement of fashion city status equates to a certain amount of success on the global stage.

In Harper’s, the global has a love-hate relationship with the city. While, fashion retail consumption and industry production are both tools for repackaging the city’s
image as a creative hub, it is with a view to the global audience and economic potential as a creative city that this repackaging occurs. The fashion discourse is complex because it is also partially subsumed by the rubric of the global in Singapore. Concurrently, the global is a symbolic discourse which also stands to encompass a range of identities defined as the non-local — cosmopolitanism, which is understood as contested and problematic. In considering these different responses to the ‘global’ status of fashion, it is clear that fashion and global-ness mean different things to different cities.

Therefore, I would propose that definition of fashion needs to be broadened to keep in mind and to recognise its wider connotations in developing cities. These meanings have effectively been repurposed to encompass a multiplicity of meanings from self-presentation to social discourse and representations of the aspired global condition. This question of fashion and the ‘global’ is an increasingly transitory and elusive claim due to the many aspirants in the field. It is an area ripe for further explorations in the context of the economic and cultural ascendance of these Asian cities and their search for a modern-ness to carve out spaces of global representations through fashion.

**Journalism**

Most studies of journalism tend to be situated on the political news, around the fourth estate, and the adversarial role by the press to safeguard public interests and the consequential fostering of democracies in history. Yet, taking into account journalism’s historical trajectory as being one of a development of human communication surrounding the growth of modernity, journalism is conceivably
much broader than its role in political democracy. James Carey’s contention that ‘The press itself is an expression of human consciousness’ (1997, p.93), that it should be recognised for its formation of cultural consciousness and community building, is a point taken up in this research approach to journalism.

Fashion and lifestyle journalism media extend the forms of journalistic practices to the domestic and private spaces whereby cultural and social forms of cultural consciousness can be negotiated. What this study suggests is that social and cultural communities are build alongside political emancipations, not just on it. If journalism is a means for communities to make sense of themselves and a consensual process of democratic participation, then cultural citizenships and civil society are dependent on journalism to move beyond the politics of the nation and the state to emancipate everyday life through comfort, public rights, private joys, democracies of fashion and personal beliefs. In these cities, where political emancipations are not to be won in the short run, lifestyle and fashion journalism, through cultural consumption buoyed by growing economic affluence, begins this process of cultural and social negotiations. The works of Catharine Lumby and John Hartley have already argued the importance of ‘soft news’ and tabloid media in instilling feminism in the public and private sphere (Hartley 1996; Lumby 1999). Hartley and Rennie’s recent investigation into fashion photography as a site for newer forms of politicisation of everyday life explores this politicisation taking place via a more intimate, accessible informal medium (Hartley and Rennie 2004).

The analysis of the three cities demonstrates the continuing dialogue on community formations challenging older fixed notions of Chinese identities (WestEast), localised
sex and cosmopolitanism (Harper’s) and instigating a competent visual culture (Vision) as part of each city's development of their cultural consciousness through journalism. Beyond the democracies instilled through journalism at the political, social or cultural level then journalism is also about the growth of the cultural life of the city and the processes through which such experiential media is able to provoke and promote these forms of public articulations through private consumption in Asian cities.

As pictorial forms of journalism (designs, architecture, fashion trade) such as Wallpaper, Dutch, IDn, are becoming more popular and accessible, what forms of trends and social and cultural development is occurring? What can we further understand about these cities through different waves of magazines and its journalism? Rather than just displaying the zeitgeist of the moment, especially in fashion, the journalism points to the moments of its development and gives instructions on how readers can participate in it. Conversely, it is useful to consider how cities may shape journalism practices, as they are the spaces in which journalism functions. Perhaps studies of journalism need to take into account a wider understanding and framing of journalism — looking at its relationship with the city (urban environment) and the other forms of journalism practices from music to travel and lifestyle.

Asia

Asia as an ‘imagined’ cohesive entity stands as the overall context for the three modernising cities of Shanghai, Singapore and Hong Kong. These cities sometimes share in more general bodies of cultural and social knowledge and literature, noted
by theorists and research that speak to specific city practices, for example, Leo Lee Ou-Fan on Shanghai (1999), Eric Ma on Hong Kong (2005) and Chua Beng Huat on Singapore (2003). In doing so, this research has not only surveyed literature that applies specifically to these cities, it has drawn on studies that contribute to the general area of Asian cultural and media studies.

The literature reveals that the analysis of Asian modernity, fashion, journalism and city tend to occur in very specific silos of disciplinary abstractions rather than interdisciplinary studies. For example, the notion of journalism tends to be analysed within the quantitative, mass communications paradigm that tends to privilege content analysis over textual analysis (Zhou 2006) and concentrates on the political and civil society outcomes of the media rather than any cultural notions of journalism (Richstad 2000, pp.274-281; De Burgh 2003; Wong 2004). This push for politically independent reportage is understandable, especially in the relatively developed city of Singapore (George 2003). However, this call for a deeper understanding of the cultural values of journalism practice is made alongside the context of political stalemate of overt and overriding governmental power against the relatively powerless media stewards.

Another relatively new area of study in Asia is fashion. Its newness stems from tailoring being upgraded from technical colleges as a practical subject to the understanding of fashion as a theoretical discipline. For instance, in Hong Kong the fashion industry has existed since the 1920s, but under the creative revisioning policy, its practice and design theory has been elevated to the status of cultural production and creative practitioners. Therefore, across many Asian cities fashion
and its study is facing a nascent revival. Thus the analyses of Lise Skov, Brian Moeran, Eric Ma and Anthony Fung on fashion and media in Hong Kong provide integral contributions to this field and are conducted through cultural, communication and media studies rather than fashion.

Similarly, in China studies tend to largely stem from analysis of consumption/urban society, communication and media studies rather than a focus on fashion (Ferry 2003). Other approaches to fashion analysis in China takes up the argument of global fashion capitals and the nation’s marginal role at the economic and design level (Finnane 2005). This thesis contends that it is important to approach the study of fashion from an understanding of its material, communicative and design perspectives that capture the variety of productive and consumptional innovations and subcultural formations.

The summary of the few key points above, serves to highlight that, firstly, the field of ‘Asia’ is still underdeveloped in interdisciplinary areas of study that are important means of recognising the diversity of cultural life and capturing the creative collaborations that exist, and are contributing to the wider formation of social and economic networks. Secondly, as this thesis has demonstrated the exploration of interdisciplinarity in these fields of study, opens up of ways of thinking through and about the constructs of city, journalism, fashion and modernity, which enables deeper explorations of their political, economic, social and cultural roots. Such research allows us to explore the question of alternate modernity and to engage with the dialogues surrounding the understanding of cultural differences and further interrogate such claims of innate differences.
Further study

I have pointed out earlier that due to the focus of study (fashion journalism), the conceptual framework has been drawn together to privilege the study of fashion journalism, so other aspects of the pentagram may have become secondary. Therefore, methodologically, other ways of reading fashion journalism are possible through the reconfiguration of different sets of research questions, building on different knowledge. For example, building on the theoretical contexts, another way of inquiring about fashion journalism through the city could be to ask how the six professions nominated by James Donald (flâneur, artist, administrator, photographer, detective, planner), as ways in which the city has traditionally been made knowable (Donald 1999), are reflected and utilised in fashion journalism.

Secondly, taking it beyond fashion journalism, the emergence and uptake of fashion in Asia is an extremely visible and popular one that requires further cross-cultural examinations, drawing on fashion as creative input, as cultural production, and so on. Given the uptake of fashion in these cities, it is important that more studies examine how fashion and consumption is further mediated and used to propel individuals’ and city’s cultural and economic goals.

Thirdly, by demonstrating through the theoretical context and the fashion magazines, the similarities in processes of development in cultural modernity as they are experientially negotiated through each city, follow up in ethnographic research with these popular readerships could tell us their responses and negotiation with their modern environments through the texts. What forms of cultural consciousness and
associations are made through these magazines? How do they participate in this form of cultural citizenship in cities where political participation is limited?

In asking what the function of fashion journalism is in the three cities of Shanghai, Singapore and Hong Kong during this period cultural modernisation, I had to examine the theoretical context where fashion journalism is located, thus opening up the analysis of fashion, journalism, consumption and the city and utilising the framework of modernity in Asia. In response, the analysis has offered a diverse, eclectic answer that speaks to the potential formation of:

- readers as active consumers, cultural connoisseurs and producers
- the potential re-imagining of cities through fashion journalism
- the formation and growth of a global cultural literacy through visual culture
- the negotiation and subversive potential of alternative sexual identities.

Finally, fashion journalism is a conscious promoter of contemporary cultural values in the modernising cities of Shanghai, Singapore and Hong Kong.
Appendix 1: Vision Cover Page

This appendix is not available online. Please consult the hardcopy thesis available from the QUT Library.
Appendix 2: Vision coverpage; Harry Benson

This appendix is not available online. Please consult the hardcopy thesis available from the QUT Library
Appendix 3: Clintons; OJ Simpson

This appendix is not available online. Please consult the hardcopy thesis available from the QUT Library.
Appendix 4: Nixon; Beatles

This appendix is not available online. Please consult the hardcopy thesis available from the QUT Library.
This appendix is not available online. Please consult the hardcopy thesis available from the QUT Library.
Appendix 6: The Face of Shanghai, *Vision*

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This appendix is not available online. Please consult the hardcopy thesis available from the QUT Library
Appendix 8: The Face of Shanghai, *Vision*

This appendix is not available online. Please consult the hardcopy thesis available from the QUT Library.
Appendix 9: *Harper’s Bazaar Singapore, Coverpage*

This appendix is not available online. Please consult the hardcopy thesis available from the QUT Library.
Appendix 10: Harper’s Bazaar Singapore, New Sexy Woman

This appendix is not available online. Please consult the hardcopy thesis available from the QUT Library.
Appendix 11: Harper’s Bazaar Singapore, Singapore Sexiest Awards

This appendix is not available online. Please consult the hardcopy thesis available from the QUT Library.
Appendix 12: WestEast Logo

This appendix is not available online. Please consult the hardcopy thesis available from the QUT Library.
Appendix 13: *WE* Covers

This appendix is not available online. Please consult the hardcopy thesis available from the QUT Library.
Appendix 14: *WE*, Sexual History

This appendix is not available online. Please consult the hardcopy thesis available from the QUT Library.
Appendix 15: *WE*, Shanghai Girls

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Appendix 16: *WE, Opera Men*

This appendix is not available online. Please consult the hardcopy thesis available from the QUT Library.
Appendix 18: *Great Magazine*

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