Young Women, Fashion, and Modernity in Taiwan

Ming-Chun Hong

PhD

University of York

Women's Studies

January 2013

Abstract

Young Taiwanese women are thought to have gained more individuality and agency over the last few decades. With the improvement in women's rights and the increase in disposable income, young women have been embracing new forms of identity and consumption values. It becomes apparent that, even in the seemingly straightforward act of consuming fashion goods, young women must navigate conflicts between modernity, traditional values and social expectations while constructing the self in negotiation with others. This research sought to study young Taiwanese women's perceptions of consuming fashion products and to determine whether their accounts conform to prevalent notions of modern women and the development of individuality. I examined how young metropolitan Taiwanese women managed their appearances in order to represent their identities, and how these decisions were subjected to the influence of parents, others and themselves. In the summer of 2009, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 24 metropolitan women between the ages of 19 and 31. These interviews focused on several aspects of fashion consumption, covering the meaning of brands and fashion goods to young women and their relationships with the construction of self-identity and social identity, self-image and public image and femininity. My analysis drew on Goffman's (1959) approach to impression management and other theories of self-identity. I found that for the women interviewed, the process of dressing themselves demonstrated contradictions between maintaining individuality and conforming to social norms. However, through acting 'not too over the top' and through the conscious inclusion of others, young women are able to achieve a balance in managing their appearance. Through reflexively negotiating external surveillance and self-monitoring they constructed a sense of self through their choices of fashion goods the construction of their image. This negotiated self is repeatedly exercised and practised in all private and social spaces.

Table of Contents

4

List of Tables

Acknowledgements

I am extremely grateful to the many people who have helped me through the completion of my thesis. The first is my supervisor, Professor Stevi Jackson, who has been inspiring and patient through this long journey. Without her deep knowledge, her mentorship, and many long hours in her office, I would not have been able to complete this thesis. I would also like to thank the other supervisor, Dr. Ann Kaloski Naylor who has provided invaluable insights and support for my research. I owe many thanks to Liz Sourbut and my boyfriend James for their proofreading and commentary. My friends at the University of York -- Maggie, Vincent, Iris, Evangeline, Hsin-Miao, Zu, and Dana, their friendship and encouragement enabled me to carry on this research. Finally, I would like to thank my parents, who have supported me in this long and difficult process. Their sacrifice and patience have made this thesis and all the other challenging enterprises of my life possible.

Author's Declaration

I hereby certify that I am the sole author of this thesis and that no part of this thesis has been published or submitted for publication.

Chapter 1 Introduction

Like many other women, I enjoy shopping and paying attention to my own appearance. My grandmothers and my mother were similarly fashionable women who wanted to be beautiful. I was aware of beautiful things from a young age and had my own ideas about how to dress. Yet, I couldn't always dress the way I wanted to. For example, I was not allowed to wear shirts that revealed my shoulders or shoes that showed my toes or heels. This made me wonder why, even in a democratic and liberal society, I couldn't wear the clothes I wanted and project the image I wished to present. Aside from the basic practicality of an item, I find myself growing concerned with the other 'effects' of a given piece of merchandise – 'how will it change the way people look at me?'; 'is it suitable?'; 'is it inappropriate?'. I wondered how other women my age or even in younger generations face similar struggles and resolve their conundrums.

By the early 1970s, universal education, Western influence and industrialisation had profoundly altered the status of women in Taiwan. Not only had the women's movement taken off, but also mass consumption. 'Generation Y' (born between 1978 and 1990) in Taiwan can be considered the first generation to be raised in liberalised families and democratised campuses.[1] And as a result of progressive calls for a more 'sentimental education', Generation Y learned to communicate as equals with authority figures and grew up to demand more democratic and liberal treatment. They expected a greater degree of self-determination in their lives, an expectation that extends to self-expression through dress.

Even though modern Taiwanese women see themselves as confident individuals in fashion and value their self-determined quality of life (as opposed to more 'traditional' values in education, income and family), there are still social and cultural demands on women's appearance and clothes. In addition, men have various preferences for women's appearance and women themselves, with their different personalities, have different preferences in dressing up. Women sometimes want to dress up in order to attract other people but sometimes they want to do it for their own sake. Selecting a fashion item is never an easy choice for them. In this thesis I will explore the extent to

---

[1] This generation, achieved adulthood after the lifting of martial law in 1987, see discussion later in this chapter.

which traditional constraints continue to weigh on young Taiwanese women, as well as the impact of other external constraints and influences.

During my master's course in International Marketing Management, the motivation and preferences of female consumers was a consistent focus of study. Yet, I feel that young Taiwanese women, who face life in a unique crucible of the new and the old, the East and the West, make choices about their appearances, purchasing and self-identification that cannot be explained by conventional consumer theory. It is necessary to explore the meanings of fashion for these women and therefore to conduct qualitative research.

Although plenty of magazines, blogs and other commercial literature portray the daily struggle of young Taiwanese women in their pursuit of 'fashionable' dress and lifestyles, few academic works look into the underlying contradictions in this pursuit. Hsiao-Hung Chang's works (1993, 1995, 2001) do cover some of these themes from a feminist perspective, but it takes a more overarching view and does not focus on 'Generation Y', who face a much more globally inter-connected world and have grown up under the general liberalisation of Taiwanese society. Generally, there is a lack of academic literature covering the intersection of fashion, consumption and identity as these three topics tend to be approached from different disciplines. This is especially true when these topics are approached from a feminist perspective –very little documents the intersection of the three topics. In addition, the existing literature that explores the linkages between the self and body image is mostly rooted in a Western cultural context, those that do examine non-Western contexts tend to do so within a dichotomous separation of the West and non-West (Craik, 1994). In my thesis, I hope not only to examine the linkages between identity, consumption and fashion in the Asian context but also to look at them in the context of today's cross-cultural flows. Taiwan's unique cultural history and modernisation provides an interesting backdrop for this.

Furthermore, the metropolitan and local identity of Taipei's women adds another layer that complicates these women's choice of clothes. As a transplant to the city, it was hard for me not to see that Taipei's residents were fiercely proud of their city and that this is an identity that can be defined in opposition to other localities. In terms of fashion, Taipei's women are felt to have unique tastes, values and views on consumption. This unique identity that blends the metropolitan and the local has always been of interest to me. In particular, I wanted to know how these metropolitan women view fashions from

the East and the West, how they interpret images of Asian and non-Asian women, and how these interpretations go on to influence the image they wish to construct.

In my observation, the young women of Taipei seem to be marked by three salient characteristics – they are highly mobile, highly sentimental and highly individualistic. These young and unmarried individuals spend more money on themselves and enjoy more disposable income than their mothers were able to. In the process they save less, delay marriage and delay childbearing. Furthermore, as women gain financial independence, the economic and demographic structure has changed, all of which has added to a markedly different consumer market. In Asia, the growth in the consumption power of women has been remarkable – by 2014, the spending of young and middle-aged women is expected to reach USD 44 billion and USD 25 billion, respectively, per annum (Wong, 2006). Unquestionably, women account for the majority of consumer transactions in the 21st century. Young unmarried women are likely to spend much of their income on fashion and leisure-related purchases such as luxury items, cultural events, travel, etc. News stories and anecdotal accounts document that more young Taiwanese women are willing to spend most of their monthly salaries or even take on credit card debt in order to procure designer-label goods. But what is the underlying appeal of these brands? Does this craze for designer labels, in varying degrees, apply to all Taiwanese women or have some of them developed alternative approaches to consumption? For Generation Y in Taipei, the overall 'pursuit of happiness' has arguably taken precedence over satisfying parental and societal expectations. But how do these attitudes extend to their sartorial choices? These are questions I seek to answer in this thesis.

It has been suggested that young women aged 26-30 are the group that has the greatest power to consume fashion products, while those women who are in or have just left college are facing a difficult economic environment (Chang, 2012).This research set out to explore the perspectives of cohorts of young women (aged 19-24 and 25-31) on their own and others' appearance, as well as their experiences of dressing, both facially and bodily. Throughout this thesis I seek to combine my own understanding with those of the young women I interviewed in Taipei. I was motivated to conduct this research by my interest in feminist views of identity, together with previous perspectives on young female consumers in Taiwan.

The central question of this thesis is: 'In the flux of tradition, modernity and global fashion trends, how do young Taiwanese women transform and interpret East Asian and Western fashion with regards to appearance, self-identity and fashion consumption?' The thesis addresses this question through a series of wider discussions around the body, fashion, image and identity. In the next chapter I review the literature on themes relevant to the central question and establish the theoretical foundation of my analysis. Chapter Three covers my methodology – I collected data through in-depth personal interviews conducted in Taipei, Taiwan's capital city, over the summer of 2009. The women I interviewed were aged 19 to 31, and were all current residents of the city. Subsequent chapters are based on the data and analyse the expressed contradictions and tensions experienced and negotiated by the participants in relation to their appearance, and how this affects their identities. In Chapter Four, I begin by showing the great conflict between conforming to parents' expectations and maintaining individuality in presenting their appearance that these young women have experienced. Chapter Five focuses on young women's embodiment in relation to conventional femininity. I turn to an analysis of consumer culture in Taiwan in Chapter Six, where I discuss perceptions of consuming fashion products, the current phenomenon of consumption of luxury brands and women's financial ideas about unnecessary products. I discuss the issues of social/peer perceptions that young women face while dressing up for different people in Chapter Seven. I pay special attention here to the linkage between social perception and identity dynamics. The final analysis chapter is Chapter Eight, in which I further discuss multiple identities expressed through the process of dressing up and body image perception, including national identity, identity in the urban setting and identity constructed through interpretation and contrast with images of Western or other Eastern women.

In the remainder of this chapter I describe Taiwan's historical and cultural background, which forms a unique backdrop for the linkage between fashion, identity and consumption. In particular, Taiwan's history of external influences and fashion evolution informs the understanding of how Taiwanese women have traditionally responded to and navigated these influences.

The Historical Background to Taiwanese Fashion[2]

In order to contextualise the contemporary transformation of Taiwanese women and their relationship to fashion I offer a brief history of Taiwan, situating the meanings of clothes and fashion within political and cultural changes. I roughly divide this history into the following periods: the Dutch period during the Ming-Qing Dynasty (1624-1895), the Japanese era (1895-1945), the authoritarian period (1945-1987) and the post-martial law period (1987 to 2000), and I conclude with a summary of women's position in contemporary Taiwan.[3]

Taiwan is the product of a series of migrations and occupations by external powers. In 1624, the Dutch established trading posts in Taiwan to develop trade between the Chinese and Japanese and Europe. At about the same time (1626), the Spanish also built a settlement in the north, but were driven out by the Dutch in 1642. The Dutch realised that Taiwan could be a thriving colony so they encouraged the Chinese who lived along the coastal cities in China to come to Taiwan to raise crops and sugar. As a result, there was an influx of Han Chinese, including Hakka immigrants from the Mainland areas of Fukien and Guangtung, across the Taiwan Strait who came to outnumber the aboriginal people (Rubinstein, 2006). During the period of Dutch rule, there were three main costume cultures: the Dutch Western European costume, Taiwanese aboriginal costume and Han Chinese costume from Mainland China. The Dutch did not plan on educating the Taiwanese as 'Dutch'; the only reason they occupied Taiwan was to do business with China and Japan. Thus, the Western culture at that time did not affect Taiwanese costume. The Taiwanese despised the Dutch and did not recognise their culture: they were seen as barbarians with red hair. Therefore, Taiwanese costume culture retained its own system in spite of 38 years of Dutch rule (Yeh, 2005).

In 1662, the Ming general Zheng Cheng-gong, also known as Koxinga, defeated the Dutch and established a base on the island as part of his attempt to recover Mainland China, which was occupied by the Manchurian-led Qing Dynasty. From 1662 to 1683, the Han Chinese in Taiwan followed the Ming costume system, which was distinct from the Manchu costume in Mainland China. Zheng Ke-shuang, a grandson of Koxinga,

---

[2] For a diagrammatic representation of this history, tracking changes in Taiwan against Western/global trends, see appendix X.

[3] The following history is referenced from Yeh's (2000) *History of Taiwanese costume and fashion*, Rubinstein's *Taiwan: a New History (2006)*, Kao's (2012) *Taiwanese (Han Chinese) traditional costume*, Shu's (2006) *The rise and decline of the garment industry: a cultural-economic analysis* and Ng's (1998) *History of Chinese women's costume: transition and liberation (1911-1935)*.

later surrendered to the Qing Dynasty (in 1683). From then on, the costume gradually became like the Qing costume. During the Qing Dynasty, most of the inhabitants of Taiwan were Chinese migrants from South Fukien and southeast coastal cities in China, so basically Taiwanese costume, customs and social conventions were the same as those of the Mainlanders in Guangtung and Fukien (Kao, 2012). However, the island's subtropical climate governed the composition and pattern of clothing, which consisted of lighter, thinner 'warm-weather' styles. In addition, Taiwan's geographical location was relatively remote from the Qing central government. This resulted in a much more open lifestyle, social mores and cultural values, which were also represented in Taiwanese costume culture (Yeh, 2005).

Taiwan was ceded to Japan by the Qing after the Sino-Japanese War in 1894-5. At that time the Japanese not only developed the island as a productive colony, but also showed off the coloniser's modernising skills. The most influential ideas on Taiwanese costume were the abolition of foot-binding for women and the cutting of men's queues. Women were therefore prompted to accept Western-style leather shoes. In 1900, Taiwanese women wore voluminous blouses and trousers, following the costume in Fukien and Guangtung, while after 1908 women's Chinese-style blouses became more fitted in the sleeves and body, and necklines were higher than before (Yeh, 2005). During this period, people's clothes often mixed Chinese with Japanese and Western styles, but Chinese remained the 'basic' style for women.

During the late 1920s, the New Culture Movement in Taiwan was launched by intellectuals to preserve the advantages of Chinese traditional culture as well as to eradicate negative aspects. Cheongsam or *qipao* were worn on formal public occasions in order to create a distinctive Taiwanese cultural identity. Meanwhile, Taiwanese women shortened their hair, wearing trousers and revising the *qipao* to assert their opposition to colonisation. Some liberal-minded female intellectuals also wore masculine costume. In the 1920s, women wore blouses with belled sleeves and Western long skirts, while the *qipao* became more popular during the 1930s. This attire was more visibly sexual, outlining women's breasts and revealing their legs (Ng, 1998). During this period, there were three styles of dress: Western, Chinese and Western mixed with Chinese. Japanese dress style was not popular because of Taiwanese anti-colonial attitudes. The movement towards more Western styles was thus developing. This was a period of transition to Westernisation.

After the outbreak of the second Sino-Japanese war in 1937, the Kominka Movement (Japanisation Movement) was launched to force the colonial people to be 'true Japanese' (Yeh, 2005). Taiwanese women had to wear kimono or Western-style clothing instead of Chinese traditional costume. On the other hand, the Japanese government also attempted to regulate clothing during the war. For instance, women had to wear simple and convenient clothing, such as a blouse and knickerbockers. These policies had a severe impact on Taiwanese indigenous costume. Although the attempt by the Kominka Movement was not ultimately successful, Taiwanese indigenous costume has been occidentalised since the Japanese occupation (Yeh, 2005). Any kind of Chinese-Western style costume could be seen everywhere at that time, and the acceptance of Western culture exceeded the influence of the Kominka Movement.

After World War II and the defeat of Japan, Taiwan became Chinese territory again, specifically it became part of the Republic of China (ROC). At that time the Civil War, which had been suspended during the Japanese occupation of the mainland, broke out again. Due to economic depression, Taiwanese costume from 1945-1949 was plain, functional and durable. Taiwanese women did not frequently wear the *qipao* because of the hostility felt towards Mainlanders in Taiwan (Yeh, 2005). The Civil War in China lasted until 1949. After the defeat of the Nationalists on the Mainland and the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the KMT moved the government of the ROC from Mainland China to the island in 1949. Women again started wearing *qipao* of 'Taiwanese style', which were more fitted than those in Mainland China. In addition to *qipao*, women also wore long overcoats which came with the Mainland women when the KMT government moved to Taiwan. During the 1950s, Taiwan's economy grew with the help of financial assistance from the USA. Taiwanese costume became increasingly Westernised or, more precisely, Americanised, because of the close relationship with the USA (Shu, 2006). Young women could learn about Western-style dressing from the newly-imported North American magazines. Therefore, one-piece Western dresses became very popular at that time. The styles of Christian Dior's 'New Look' line and 'A-line' prevailed over Taiwan. Japanese-style clothes fast disappeared – except the clogs.

During the 1960s, Taiwanese women stopped wearing simple and plain clothes, following Western cultural and fashion trends. Women's clothes were influenced by British designers, including Mary Quant, and the mini-skirt was very popular. Hippie subculture also spread from the US to Britain and Canada, and then was also absorbed

by the Taiwanese. Many chic Taiwanese were at the forefront of these fashions. As a result, the police applied the law of Offences against Morals[4] to warn women in mini-skirts and men with long hair of the potential offence they were causing. Yet the prevalence of television, movies and Westernised department stores had a revolutionary influence on the consumption of fashion, and the orientation of Taiwanese fashion culture shifted firmly towards the West.

The United States stopped its financial assistance to Taiwan in 1965. As a result, Taiwan began independent economic planning to help stabilise economic development and by the 1970s the nation was more affluent than before. Mini-skirts and sunglasses were still important, and alongside this a kind of unisex dressing style sprang up. The US fashions for jeans and flared trousers were very popular, as were hot pants, backless tops, big collar blouses, shoes with wedges and long boots. Taiwan was even re-exporting these Western styles, as local apparel companies fulfilled orders from the USA and European countries for fashionable clothes. Taiwan thus embraced Western fashion trends simultaneously with Western countries. Due to the rise in national income and better living standards, the international brand of Christian Dior cosmetics began importing into the Taiwanese market in 1976. This opened a new page in importing international high-end brands.

Another important Western influence arose in 1978 when the government removed overseas travel restrictions for the general population, and wealthy Taiwanese people were thus able to buy Western high-end fashion brands from the West itself. An influx of famous foreign brands therefore entered the Taiwanese fashion market during the 1980s. Many Japanese, American and European fashion magazines were also imported into Taiwan so that people could receive the latest international fashion information. On the one hand, the influence of foreign brands increased to the point where they were used to show personal social status. On the other, in response to the prevalence of foreign fashion brands, Taiwanese fashion designers developed their own fashion, which included a mix of indigenous clothing styles, and many established brands using their own names. Such globalised fashion influences fed into the growing Taiwanese 'yuppie' culture, a group of young people who were brand-embracing, with great 'buying power', who transformed Taiwanese fashion culture into one orientated towards young consumers.

---

[4] According to the Criminal Code of Taiwan, people convicted of indecent exposure are usually punished with a fine, short detention or writing repentant statements since it is a misdemeanour, not a crime.

The lifting of martial law in Taiwan in 1987 accelerated the rise of democratisation in both political and social fields. For example, the government opened up cable TV, which allowed people to receive more international information. In addition, international professional fashion magazines, such as *Harper's Bazaar*, *ELLE* and *Vogue* published Chinese versions in Taiwan, and avant-garde high-end brands such as *Vivienne Westwood* and *Jean-Paul Gaultier* opened branches in the country, an indication of Taiwanese consumers' increasingly diverse tastes in choosing clothes. Young women were not afraid to experiment, and a hybrid style of dressing was very popular. In the late 20th century, a typical style was short, one-size small tops, mini-skirts again, sandals, and figure-hugging clothes. Also, the *Hari* style – young people who adore Japanese things and Hip-Hop – was prevalent after 1998. According to Liao and Bei (2006), Western culture has been influencing Taiwanese society since the 1960s, especially in women's perceptions of consumption values. Furthermore, with the globalisation of information, Taiwanese people have access to international fashion magazines in which they can catch up-to-date fashion trends and take them as their references for fashion consumption (Lin, 2002). As fashion became international and multicultural, the development of international brands was thus boosted by an affluent Taiwanese consumption culture under the influences of profound Westernisation and globalisation.

Over the last decade, differences between Taipei culture and the rest of the country have become apparent. Many women in the capital seem intent on shaking off the fetters of tradition, and this is reflected in their taste in clothes. Compared with the past, Taiwanese women have stronger self-confidence about their appearance, especially young women. They do not mind showing off their bodies. It is startling that short, thin and transparent clothes are acceptable and welcome in the Taipei market. Young women are becoming more original in the way they dress. Women no longer see themselves as subordinate to men. The intention to show off is obvious. Yuan Ching, a Taiwanese journalist specialised in fashion phenomena, reported the changes of Taipei women's dress styles in the past ten years through his observations and interviews with fashion designers or retail managers. In Yuan Ching's article 'Taipei Walking' (2003), for example, Isabelle Wen, the Taiwanese fashion designer, pointed out that the increase in women's rights and the fast circulation of international fashion information have made women more confident about their new fashion sense.

Despite this, some conservative values persist. Two key styles: the '*kawaii*' cute Japanese-style among the young generation, and European/Japanese-oriented elegant style among career women in the older generation, could be found in Taiwanese fashion mainstream. If we observe them carefully, dressing femininely is the supreme rule for Taipei women. This phenomenon is echoed by Lin Jun-Hong, the purchasing manager of *Cerruti 1881 (*quoted in Yuan, 2003), who also states that basically Taipei women are unwilling to adopt a masculine style – it is seen as threatening to men. Several years ago a global trend of minimalist fashion featured unadorned, unfussy, clean lines, simple silhouettes and a neutral, monochromatic palette, but this did not catch on in Taipei. Simple styles are associated with the image of tough and less feminine women. From 2000 onward, a contrasting movement of romantic notions of floral prints, fancy frills, lace, pretty embellishments, bows and a pastel palette has returned to the fashion stage, which resonates with Taipei women's passion for dressing up. Furthermore, Qu Hong (quoted in Yuan, 2003), the brand manager of the renowned Italian dress brand *MaxMara* for career women, indicates that Taipei women do not want to show their arms, double-breasted coats are not acceptable and sales of trousers suits are not as good as skirts. I conducted a pilot interview with Gary, the brand manager of *Issey Miyake*, also points out that young women do not really accept Miyake's designs as there is no tailoring on the shoulder and bust for a fitted figure; he adopts an unstructured style with many lines based on a 'one-size-fits-all' tube of fabric (for example the *Pleats Please* line). These art designs of clothes are not easy to promote to contemporary young women who are body aware.

All of this demonstrates that Taipei women still have their own thoughts on clothes when adopting international brands. In this thesis I explore young women's ideas about clothes in detail. Before moving on to my own research, however, I review the relevant literature.

Chapter 2 Taiwanese Fashion Choices in Context: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Living in circumstances of modernity, women appear to be more autonomous and independent than in previous eras (Giddens, 1991). In the Taiwanese cultural context, social changes in the family system, education and employment have provided a context for young women to exercise greater individuality; these changes have, to an extent, liberated them from traditional Chinese patriarchal constraints. Taiwanese women have been changing, developing and exercising great freedom outside the domestic world, such as participating in the making of modern consumer culture/shopping (Lee, 2006). Consuming fashion products in order to create desired images allows women to transform their identities or play with the images on offer (Guy et al., 2001). Moreover, this increasing individuality in women's lives has also given them autonomy to present the self in almost every activity, based, in Goffman's (1959) terms, on different interaction contexts. Many scholars have agreed that our appearance is the site where we assert the self and individualistic characteristics, although the many ways of adorning appearance (fashionable dress and the beautification of the self) have also been argued to be expressions of subordination for women (Johnson and Lennon, 1999; Wilson, 1985). On the other hand, it is also argued that modernity in East Asian culture appears to be a different form of modernity – individualisation without individualism (Chang and Song, 2010). In line with these arguments, this thesis challenges assumptions about young women's autonomy over their bodies, their appearance and the consumption of fashion products in the context of Taiwanese modernity and its cultural specificity.

There have been debates about how power dynamics, social structures and cultural norms influence individuals in terms of their dressed bodies (Bordo, 2003; Bartky, 1990; Bourdieu, 1984). Much literature foregrounds the significance of the dressed body and consumption in the construction of femininity (Barnard, 2002; Tseelon, 1995; Lury, 1996; Entwistle and Wilson, 2001).These theorists and scholars share the notion that the dressed body is a form of communication, a language, and that this also affects our associations with others. The body, like the self, is seen as a site of interaction, appropriation and re-appropriation (Giddens, 1991: 218). In addition, Berry (2008) notes that what constitutes good looks and what does not is socially determined, and the economic system further plays a vital part in influencing the social value and social

17

meaning of appearance. Consumption has offered women the opportunity to escape from domestic femininity (Lury, 1996). Women do not passively take up the versions of femininity that they are encouraged to emulate, but actively attempt to redefine these femininities (Nava, 1992; Lury, 1996). The meaning of consumption indicates the empowerment of women, contributing to women's freedom in consuming fashion. Nevertheless, it is argued that this new consumer culture rests on categorical gender divides and exaggerates (or celebrates) gender differences and sexuality (Yang, 1999). This suggests contradictions in consuming fashion products and in the construction of femininity. But whether consuming fashion is thought of as liberating or oppressing women (or both) it is widely accepted that fashion consumption is highly significant for self-presentation, in three substantive ways. Firstly, the use of fashion products by young women entails the presentation of self. Secondly, the dressed body – femininity as an important component of body image and self-image – is part of the creation of self-identity. Thirdly, the process of shopping influences the meaning of commodities and associated constructions of femininity. It is likely that all these factors have played a part in changing the perceptions of young Taiwanese women about fashion consumption. The complexity of presenting the self and femininity in Taiwanese society has been little considered in the context of consuming fashion products; most of the literature in this field is Western and therefore does not take account of fashion in Asian consumer societies.

In this review, I explore significant contradictions in the field of fashion and appearance in both Western and Taiwanese cultural contexts, which will be revisited in later chapters in light of my findings. I begin with a brief review of the development and transformation of Taiwanese women in the family, education and employment, and go on to demonstrate the continuous influence of Japan and America on the Taiwanese women's movement, and how far the notion of 'new modern women' is put into practice, stimulated by the various kinds of information delivered by the mass media. First, I outline the relevant debates around the dressed body and femininity. I then explore issues surrounding the issues of self-presentation, self-identity, social identity and images by considering Goffman's work on managing presentation by distinguishing performances in the 'private' and 'public' spheres (1959). This is followed by an exploration of consumer culture and the basis of the arguments of different theorists, before moving on to consider the meaning and importance of consuming fashion products and the current state of consumption in Taipei.

2.2 The transformation of Taiwanese women in tradition and modernity

With the end of World War II and Japanese colonisation, the industrialisation and Westernisation of Taiwan accelerated, resulting in dramatic changes to its socio-cultural structures and economic status. During the ensuing period, modernity and tradition have been counterpoised in an evolving debate on Asian social change. The development of modernity has often clashed with the ideologies of the traditional social order and the vested interests that benefited from these traditional ideological interests. The patriarchal system is reinforced in a culture of ideals and symbols, reiterated daily in the mass media, literature, and even reinforced in daily conversation. Confucian ideals, in particular, have persisted as a significant force in the shifting cultural values and rising modernity of East Asia. Confucian ideology is especially evident in Taiwan, where Taiwanese women and men have inherited China's complex and longstanding patterns of gender definitions and relationships. The dominant masculine nature of Chinese modernity is further enforced in a nationalism that relies on the notion of womanhood as 'chaste, maternal and as guardians of tradition'[1] (Lu, 2004: 81). Furthermore, Japan's colonialism also reinforced male dominance through Japanese cultural norms (with its steeper and more rigid gender differences) and the symbolism of imperial exploitation. The oppression of women thus stemmed from patriarchy but was strengthened by the colonial system established during Japanese rule (Yuh, 2005). Thornton and Lin (1994) argue that Taiwan's relative peace during the decades of revolution and war in China meant that the older values of the Chinese family system were not altered when Taiwan entered the twentieth century and the post-war era.

Nevertheless, the post-war period also saw a concerted government drive and political commitment to improve equality for women (Chou et al., 1990). First, there was a remarkable transformation in women's educational opportunities. Starting with compulsory enrolment in primary and secondary schools, female educational attainment was vastly improved, progress that came about through determined social and governmental efforts. Driven by the promise of independence and high prestige, more Taiwanese women have attained a university education. Indeed, even compared with women in Japan and South Korea, where women's higher educational attainment mostly approaches or mirrors men's, more Taiwanese women have consistently attained higher education degrees – 57.2 per cent of women under 40 have a higher education

---

[1] For more on nationalism and sexualities see Parker et al., 1992.

degree, as compared to 53.3 per cent of men (Chen, 2008). Liao et al. (2005) suggest that these women, with higher education and a sense of economic independence, feel more entitled to buy higher-quality, fashionable products for themselves by virtue of their own status and achievements. As a result of the expansion of education, industrialisation and urbanisation since the 1960s, a larger proportion of Taiwanese women have entered this group and have concurrently experienced rapid and extensive changes in lifestyles and appealed to individualistic self-definition and career expectations (Thornton and Lin, 1994).

With industrialisation, particularly the rise of labour-intensive light manufacturing, more and more Taiwanese women entered the labour market and the outside world, away from their families. These working women gained an awareness of the connection between educational level, occupation and social status and that how one earns an income (e.g. manual labour versus office work) is the key indicator of status (Kung, 1976). Research shows that Taiwanese women, relative to women from other parts of Asia, enjoy more equal economic opportunities and status compared to men and more rarely experience breaks in their labour force participation due to marriage or pregnancy (Yu, 2009). Tang (2009) in particular points out that women's labour participation in Taiwan is more similar to European and American patterns than to those of other East Asian countries, where married women in Japan and Korea, for example, participate less in the economy and suffer much higher gendered wage differentials (to the order of >20 percentage points).

On the other hand, the mass media in Taiwan has been an increasingly important avenue for introducing foreign ideas, values and beliefs. Newspapers, magazines and satellite and cable television have experienced tremendous growth since the lifting of martial law and press restrictions in 1987. Diversity in Taiwan's media and unhampered access has created a truly open media environment (Rampal, 1994). The widespread prevalence of computers and internet use has only added to this trend. With increased access to information, the increase in disposable income has led to more than an improvement in material conditions. With greater access to information and ideas, the increase in disposable income not only allowed greater material comforts but also challenged women with new ideals and models that can now be pursued through consumption. Therefore, a woman's increasing sense of self benefits from increased media freedom and economic development. Moreover, the increased availability of household appliances has decreased the time spent on any given chore and women can

take advantage of the free time offered by these items to enjoy leisure activities outside the family context (Fricke et al., 1994). Seen in this way, Taiwanese women do not seem to be tied to traditional forms but have more personal choice than in the past.

However, in spite of the new freedoms afforded women, Tsai (2006) argues that Taiwanese women still adhere to frugality, which is valued in the Confucian family ideal. As such, it is uncertain whether women's leisure and 'disposable' income have increased in real terms – even if they have sufficient money, many may prefer to keep it in a savings account.

Japan is Taiwan's largest source of influence for fashions and trends. This is a result of Taiwan's intimacy with Japan due to both its history of colonisation and the significant level of bilateral trade (Liang and Huang, 2007). Taiwan is a major market for Japanese popular culture such as graphic novels, animation, comics, pop music, computer games, fashion, and TV dramas. In addition, from food and housing to electronic consumer products, the influx of Japanese culture can be easily seen everywhere and has been influencing Taiwan since the colonial era. Although Japanese TV programmes and popular songs were banned from 1972 to 1993, Japanese products and information remained in circulation throughout the 1980s. Subsequently, Taiwanese people have had free access to information about Japanese culture after the lifting of the ban against Japanese TV programmes (Ishii, Su and Watanabe, 1999).

Of note here is Japan's role in Taiwan's early fashion consciousness, especially with regard to Taiwan's knowledge of global brands and styles. Taiwan's knowledge of Western dress was first established during the period of Japanese colonialism and the first shops selling Western clothes appeared at this time. Even after Japan's defeat in World War II and its relinquishing of its former colonies, Taiwan's fashion consciousness remained closely influenced by Japan's – the most popular fashion magazines today remain those imported from Japan or translated from the Japanese (Liang and Huang, 2007). A new Taiwanese phrase coined by a leading news magazine in Taiwan, *Harizhu* or Japanophile, describes young people who are seen as 'mindlessly' accepting Japanese goods and concepts (Iwabuchi, 2004; Berger and Huntington, 2002). Japanese TV dramas, for example, draw daily audiences of young people who will discuss them with their friends. These TV dramas not only feature good-looking stars and their lifestyles (fashion, food, and other forms of consumption) but also depict younger people's love affairs, work and lives, and women's position in society

(Iwabuchi, 2004). During the 1990s, the lead actresses in popular Japanese dramas commonly presented an ideal woman who was sexually uninhibited, forgiving of a lover's inconstancy, assertive at work and perpetually smiling and cheerful (Ito, 2004). The image of the 'modern woman' or a 'woman of the new age' requires her to actively and frankly express her feelings. However, ambivalence between the traditional submissive Asian image and Western ideas is also on display in the Japanese media. The reception of these media products in Taiwan may be complicated by the fact that Taiwanese women possess more progressive feminist ideals/enjoy more equitable treatment than their Japanese counterparts.

The contradiction between traditional feminine ideals and modern fashion is reflected in Japanese fashion lines. The clothing shown in Japanese magazine pages and TV dramas exaggerate traditional feminine characteristics – such as lace and floral details, or colourful and sweet schoolgirl elements, which are prominently featured in the Japanese fashion mainstream, which, as we shall see later, is a significant contributor to Taiwanese fashions and trends while at the same time provoking ambivalence and disagreement.

In addition to the influence of Japanese media and mainstream fashions, Taiwan's own media reinforces patriarchal gender stereotypes. Lin (2011), for example, observes that Taiwan's most popular dramas take for granted patriarchal ideology and expectations. Thus, the representation of women in the media, under patriarchal culture, exhibits patriarchal ideals and conforms to gendered rules with the consequent objectification of the female body. However, Lin goes on to propose that female agency can also be depicted as subversive and as challenging existing patriarchal structures and ideals.

Although Taiwan was a Japanese colony for fifty years and Japanese culture retains an influence over many Taiwanese people, American popular culture has also emerged as another dominant influence, based on the close ties with America since the 1960s (Gold, 1993). The American presence and influence has been particularly associated with modernisation. Besides the import of American records and books, American movies have dominated the film industry in Taiwan and American sports are widely followed. It is not clear why American culture is so popular or why young people are attracted to it. For young Taiwanese people, it may be that American popular culture offers a more radical brand of modernity – freer in its expression and more distant from the current state they are unsatisfied with. Consuming McDonald's, Nike or films produced in

Hollywood might imply a performance of American modernity, a symbol of ability and status, or a reflection of people's life situation. This paints a general picture of the leisure and lifestyle of Taiwanese youth rapidly becoming Westernised (Ito 2004).

Finally, China's cultural legacy is undisputedly apparent in Taiwan's fashion and appearance. Based on the ideology of Confucianism, clothing in Chinese culture emphasised that dress should 'harmonize with the social hierarchy in order to maintain a stable society' (Yang, 2007: 28). Traditional Han Chinese dress adheres to this functional social requirement as well as exemplifying traditional character ideals and gender expectations, both of which are socially defined and anchored in a patriarchal social order. Simultaneously, the decades leading up to 1949, when China and Taiwan became fully separated by geopolitics, was a period of great conflict and upheaval, with the emergence of a 'new Chinese' identity in contrast to traditional Confucian norms. The large-scale immigration to Taiwan of China's industrial and intellectual classes (who had been the drivers and beneficiaries of China's modernisation) alongside Chiang Kai Shek's army (who were now detached from the familial and social structures of their homes) increased the volatility of the Chinese legacy.

The neo-Confucian ideology of the governing Nationalist party institutionalised a more progressive ideology that rejected traditional precepts that were seen as having held China back and to have led to both China's weakness and the Nationalists' defeat by the Communists. In response to its Marxist-Leninist ideology and the radical rejection of all Confucian traditions by the Chinese Communist Party,[2] the Nationalists took further steps to emphasise aspects of Confucianism that were seen as progressive in its instituted curriculum and propaganda. An overall push by the administration for sociocultural modernisation involved hybrid precepts from traditional Confucian philosophy as well as the industrial norms of the West and even Methodist Christian teachings. The resulting ideology had seemingly conflicting prescriptions for fashion and appearance that emphasised frugality and utility (dictates include: 'neat appearance' 'clothes should be plain and simple') alongside an overarching theme of 'living an artful life'.

Taiwan's sociocultural legacy of Chinese, Japanese and American influences has been further complicated by more recent political developments. The Democratic Progressive

---

[2] This was the case from the period from 1949 until recent times; however, now the Chinese Communist Party is rehabilitating Confucianism.

Party (seen as more anti-Chinese and appealing more to ethnic Taiwanese) has argued that Japanese colonisation, and the subsequent political oppression and rapid modernisation and democratisation are historical conditions that have created Taiwan's unique socio-cultural place as markedly distinct from China's (Lu, 2004).

Modernity as afforded by economic development and influenced by Japanese and American ideals brings women both liberation and new constraints. It also raises further questions about gender roles in the context of tradition and nationalism (McClintock 1993). Regarding the identity crisis of the 'new woman', it seems impossible for women to make a clear choice between the modern individual and traditional women (Farris et al., 2004; Hayami et al., 2003). Liu and Regehr (2006) suggest that young Taiwanese women are aware of the importance of gender equality and are comfortable in asserting it in private situations. Yet, due to both tradition and social pressure, Taiwanese women frequently yield to men and fulfil traditional gender roles in public to help men 'save face'. In their interviews, Liu and Regehr (2006) found that young female participants adopted 'chameleon-like' strategies when the opinions of elders/teachers/authority figures differed from their own, suggesting that 'power and hierarchy play the central role in participants' perceptions of self and others' (2006: 466). And, although individualism and hedonism have flourished over time, Tu (1996) argues that in politics, business and society, Japan and the newly industrialised Asian countries (South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore) symbolise 'a less adversarial, less individualistic, and less self-interested but highly energized and fiercely competitive approach to modernization' (1996: 28). This less confrontational mode of modernisation is bound to have implications for the role of women in modern Taiwanese society and the social identity they seek for themselves.

2.3 The Dressed Body

In a consumer society, the dressed body has become an increasingly important means of generating self-identity. Fashion and clothes reflect one's self-identity and self-awareness about one's own body. In this subset of modern consumer culture, the aesthetic and the voyeuristic take precedence over the utilitarian demands of a traditional agrarian society (Lin 1998). The body is deliberately constructed, both in how it is used and how an appearance is projected, as opposed to being a given (Craik, 1994). Jenkins (2008) further suggests that 'the human body is simultaneously a referent

of individual continuity, an index of collective similarity and differentiation and a canvas upon which identification can play' (2008: 41). In other words, it is a site for individuals to communicate with other people and to embody identity. It is through the social situations and ties, that "the body's potentials are used … within the social process" (Burkitt, 1994: 24). As Giddens (1991) notes, bodily appearance and demeanour have become significant with the advent of modernity. He considers appearance to generate social identity rather than personal identity – that, while the self and self-identity are intimately linked to bodily appearance, appearance ultimately designates a social identity rather than a personal one. Dress and body adornment as a means of individualisation must occur in a social context, and its resulting contrast with others is more important than any intrinsic expression.

Therefore, the dressed body is situated in the social world and is inseparable from the self. As Entwistle (2000) points out, dress is profoundly gendered and essential to the construction of femininity (and masculinity). In the making of the 'feminine', the dressed body is embedded within cultural and social categories, being operated as gendered through ways of walking, sitting and so on. Thus, the use of dress as a tool and the overall experience of dress are results of both social factors and individual choices (Entwistle and Wilson, 2001). For most of us, learning about the rules of dress and appearance was a direct and visual experience. Through repeated performance and observation we see and learn what clothes, body shapes, facial expressions and other aspects of femininity represent as well as which are the ideals (Bordo, 2003). As a result, femininity is a practice of construction.

2.3.1 The Dressed Body in Feminist debate

Fashion and dress have been long-standing issues within feminism. Feminists of different theoretical stances have debated fashion and dress to understand how power dynamics, social structures and cultural norms influence a woman in dressing herself. The various meanings projected by what a woman chooses to wear have likewise been a focus of discussion. This section will provide a brief overview of these theories, which will ground my analysis of fashion and dress.

Many feminists have seen fashion and beauty as reinforcing a patriarchal structure of gender relations. Wolf's and Faludi's works (both 1991) implicate the fashion and advertising industries as responsible for propagating a 'beauty myth' through a male-

25

dominated sociocultural discourse. The end result of this is the oppression of women through distorted self-perceptions and diverting a woman's limited resources from more empowering pursuits. Yet this argument is constrained by the fact that women have historically been in positions of power/change in the supposedly patriarchal system of fashion, advertising and general trend-setting. Scott (2005) makes the strongest challenge to Wolf's 'beauty myth' by arguing that the hedonistic enjoyment and pleasure gained from fashion consumption and dressing up may be empowering to women. She further argues that, indeed, women's participation in the fashion industry provides another pathway to power.

The distinction between sex and gender that emerged during the 1970s started an alternative interpretation of the binary division that assigned the dressed body and fashion to women. The interpretation of gender as distinct from sex allowed fashion and dress to be seen as the 'social processing' of female bodies (Entwistle, 2000). Post-modernist and post-structuralist interpretations have mounted further challenges to dichotomous divides. Judith Butler, for example, proposes that the sexed body is materialized through gender performances and 'reiterative acts' that bring feminine bodies and subjects to being (Butler, 1993). Women's dress, make-up, and even consumption could be seen as reiterative acts within this framework.

Foucault's post-structural ideas panopticism and self-surveillance, were highly influential in providing a post-modern feminist alternative interpretation to the male oppressor/oppressed female view of women's bodies and dress. While Foucault himself does not address gendered aspects of disciplined and docile bodies, feminist theorists have extended his perspective to postulate self-policing behaviour for women when it came to the dressed body (Bartky, 1990; Sptizack, 1990; Tseelon, 1995; Bordo, 2003). It was argued women internalise the male gaze and monitor themselves for deviations from the internalised cultural ideals. And when such a deviation is observed, disciplinary practices such as exercise and dieting are undertaken to correct the deviation. Women thus become specifically feminine 'docile bodies', not just through the male gaze but also through their own and each other's disciplinary observations.

While these post-modern feminists see power as being diffuse and even ubiquitous (rather than held by men), they still see the female body and appearance as being subjected. Entwistle (2000) agrees that dress is a critical aspect of socialisation, subject to external discourses both in daily life and as in wider culture, but she disagrees with

26

Foucault's view of the passive self and the docile body and argues for a greater attention to the lived body and its role as a site of the 'self'. She points out that:

> 'understanding dress in everyday life requires understanding not just how the body is represented within the fashion system and its discourses on dress, but also how the body is experienced and lived and the role dress plays in the presentation of the body/self.' (Entwistle, 2000: 39)

The female body and dress can be a way to empowerment through the demonstration of body-discipline and the rejection of feminine stereotypes (Bordo, 2003). The display of masculine traits (e.g. trouser suits) and shared values (e.g. the exercised body) through dress and appearance thus empowers women who achieve the things respected by the masculine. The 'unattractive' female form might also be empowering through the rejection of and resistance to the docile body, thus asserting control over her identity and agency (Russo, 1997; Conboy, Medina & Stanbury, 1997).

On the other hand it has been argued that an attractive and sexy female dress can likewise be empowering. Some researchers (not necessarily feminists) have come to argue that sexually attractive appearances represent a form of 'erotic capital', drawing both on the sociological definition of social capital and the more economic concept of human capital (Estrich, 2000; Hakim, 2010; Green, 2008). The idea here is that a sexually attractive appearance allows women to achieve greater power and professional confidence in a male-dominated field. In some circumstances, sexually attractive dress is also a tool for resistance when women are expected to be modest and docile (Lorde, 1984; Miller, 2002). Fashion and dress, as a means to empower women's sexual expression, however, is highly contextualised – possibly distorted or co-opted when a woman's self-perceived rebellion is primarily achieved through male objectification and enjoyment (Levy, 2005). Young (2005) generally sidesteps the agency issue but focuses on how women create a space through their interest in clothes where they can explore as they wish and derive pleasure accordingly.

Overall, however, feminists display ambivalence towards fashion and dress while generally agreeing that both are intricately tied to the self. Wilson (2003) has identified this conflict in the feminist literature and further argued that this debate between classifying fashion as subjugating or empowering percolates down into women's conflicts about fashion and the self. Efrat Tseelon (1995), sees a woman's relationship

with clothes as paradoxical; on the one hand 'clothes both confer a sense of self-worth and help creating it (1995: 61) and on the other hand appearance is a source of anxiety about how women appear to others. A study by Guy and Banim (2000) describes this nicely as the dual themes of 'stitched up' and 'gaping seams'. Their work, in particular, finds that women are aware of this ambivalence and assert agency through resolving these tensions and maintaining a continuity of identity.

2.3.2 The Dressed Body and the Media in Taiwanese Cultural Contexts

There is no doubt that the media plays a formative role in the social construction of gender. Much of the work discussed so far identifies the prevalent objectification of the female body as well as the various forms of discrimination against women in Taiwan's media. Perceived gender differences, whether newly constructed or rooted in traditional norms, work to perpetuate female stereotypes in advertising and television. Wu and Zheng (2004) have studied female roles in advertisements and noted three prominent feminine stereotypes in Taiwan – the embodiment of beauty; the good wife and mother; and the sex tool and object – all of which have been commonly depicted in the media. This use of the female body to reinforce the male gaze and to communicate a woman's manipulability is especially prominent in patriarchal societies. Thus, the image of women presented in the media is one that is constructed to meet patriarchal expectations. Modernisation, however, has created an alternate ideal of 'being a modern woman', which clashes with aspects of the traditional female stereotypes. The consequent compromise between the two anchors today's feminine ideal.

Huang and Chang (2005) also suggest that female body images are particularly affected by the media. The typical beautiful body (in Taiwan's case, 'thin is beautiful') and the need to improve on one's current body are messages frequently portrayed in various advertisements, magazines and television shows. In recent years, the desire for thinness has been a widely accepted norm in Taiwan, even if the plump figure was traditionally appreciated in Chinese culture and was seen to represent wealth, fertility and health (the body in Chinese culture was again subject to oscillating trends over the dynasties) (Kawamura, 2002; Chen et al., 2010). Dieting and physical exercise are increasingly common and even expected of young women.

During the 1990s, 'body toning', 'body beautification' and 'liposuction' first emerged as trending terms. And to date, these practices remain in public focus, representing an

extension of the social processing of the female body to its very core as well as the continued advances in advertising and sales techniques related to these products. Especially for 'Generation Y' in and during the 1980s, celebrity worship has provided more intimate body ideals and resulted in a greater emphasis on consciousness of their own body types. 'Dieting' has become an accepted cultural norm, discussed openly and often recommended to each other among peers and families (in this aspect, very different from Western practices). In Taiwan, as elsewhere, the media has played a vital part in propagating unrealistic and unattainable physical standards of beauty and contributing to high levels of dissatisfaction with their own bodies amongst women (Harrison & Cantor, 1997). Featherstone points out that in promoting the body as a 'vehicle of pleasure and self-expression' the media and consumer culture would deliver 'images of the body beautiful, openly sexual and associated with hedonism, leisure and display' (Featherstone, 1982:18). With this emphasis on presenting a socially acceptable/desirable appearance, women are marginalised and pressured when they deviate from this societal ideal and are therefore more likely discipline themselves in pursuit of the societal ideal.

Of note here is Shih and Kubo's (2005) observation that both Taiwanese and Japanese women subscribe to the *modern* ideal of femininity – a slim body figure, which by definition is one that requires social comparison amongst peers as well as against cultural expectations. People are more likely to believe that slim figures are associated with success in many respects. The thin woman is then a simultaneous embodiment of female powerlessness and a contracted female space as well as female autonomy and freedom (Bordo, 1993). Getting the body into shape means a sense of wellbeing, an 'efficient mind' and an enhancement of the self (Williams and Bendelow, 1998: 75)

2.4 Self-presentation and individuality

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2001) believe that tradition will not be simply swept away by globalisation. Rather, traditions retain their force as individuals choose and invent them through their decisions and experiences. Through intersection, combination and conflict with other identities, 'the hybrid identities and cultures that ensue are precisely the individuality which then determines social integration' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001: 26). Similarly, many people seek their 'new me' in different contexts (Jenkins, 2008). This pursuit of new or alternative identities is deeply rooted in daily life. For

example, the choice of dress and appearance, especially for women, is a means to create, perform, reveal and conceal certain identities (Guy and Banim, 2000). In emphasising the importance of performance for identities, and exploring the circumstances under which identities are formed, Jenkins (2008) suggests that the individual constantly adjusts herself to meet environmental demands and is aware that her actions are constant performances for the immediate audience. The actors would then employ manner and appearance cues as 'sign vehicles' to convey information to an audience during performances (Goffman, 1959).

Goffman (1959) uses the metaphor of 'front' and 'backstage' to explain performances that individuals construct in interaction with others. He defines 'front' performance as 'the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his (sic) performance' (1959: 32). In this dramaturgical theory, the individual is generally aware of the ideal role to portray on her different stages – where the body is a performance tool trained to achieve recognition from others. The backstage is where performances are prepared and rehearsed and may also be experienced as a relaxed environment in which individuals feel they can 'be themselves'. Goffman points out that since an individual may not fully identify with the role she is expected to play in different spaces, she may engage in role-playing behaviour where her performance is based almost entirely on external expectations. Everyday life can thus consist of different acts, audiences, stages and roles to play, with the consequent collision and overlap of performing identities. Goffman's theory of self-presentation emphasises an individual's acts and performances rather than her personal qualities.

An individual may have many motives in controlling the impression others receive. To do so, individuals adopt 'defensive practices' or 'protective practices' to safeguard the impression they make during their presence before others (Goffman 1959: 25). Goffman believes that interpersonal relationships are attempts to make an impression upon one another and that individuals are like actors, constantly attuned to the varied audiences they encounter and the different impressions they make upon their audiences. These impressions further a definition of the situation as formed by the performer, with daily life full of varied situations. Goffman argues the self is ultimately actualised through these different and repeating dramatisations. To some extent, the masks we take on represent both our already-formed sense of self and the roles we strive to actualise – what we are and what we try to be. Tseelon (1992) points out that, interpreted in this

way, Goffman's self is a social process rather than an independent fixed entity which resides in the individual.

In Goffman's terms femininity might be seen as is the appropriate surface presentation of the self within the interaction order rather an inherent characteristic of women. Where Goffman considers gender (1977;1979) he treats it as a matter of display and convention and appearance as crucial to identifying others as gendered and as crucial to ongoing interaction with others (1977: 318-319). As with other aspects of self-presentation, individuals can find the presented image to be an unhappy compromise between the self-image and the public image. As described by Jenkins (2008), when the individual presents an image of her 'self' for acceptance by others, she quickly undergoes an internal debate about her own identification with the presented public image while externally her public image is alternately accepted or rejected by her audience. Jenkins goes on to note that Goffman's impression management takes place in face-to-face interaction, where the upper body and the face are the most active in presenting selfhood.

Goffman's notion of 'front' and backstage can easily be applied to women's concerns with their appearance Items such as clothing, make-up and hair are then components of the personal 'front' for women and part of their 'arts of impression management' (Goffman 1959: 203ff), which can serve to project images consistent with traditional notions of femininity This personal front then functions to inform her audience of the woman's character and the activities in which she seeks to engage. Besides, 'the performer can rely on his (sic) audience to accept minor cues as a sign of something important about his performance' (Goffman 1959: 59). The 'front' can be prepared and repaired in the backstage area where women decide what to wear, dress themselves and put on make-up. Thus as Entwistle and Wilson (2001) note, while Goffman's work does not extend to dress and its role in the presentation of self, his ideas offer a template to elaborate upon how dress is used as part of presenting the self in everyday life. I would also suggest that this approach might be particularly useful in application to Taiwan. Compared with the Western cultural context, dressing in response to group pressures and/or to reflect occupational status is more evident (or at least more extensively discussed) in collectivist Asian societies.

Jenkins (2008) suggests that the individual's presentation feedback and responses from others may modify the way in which she presents herself to them. Consequently, these

are often the people with whom she has relationships: family, spouses, children, friends, etc. Thus women express themselves by performing through self-conscious use of dress and the body, in both artificial and (felt) authentic ways (Entwistle, 2000; Tseelon, 1995), and perfect themselves through the reception they receive from those with whom they share social contexts. On the other hand, by seeking to improve on nature through clothes and make-up, women now have the latitude and pleasure to express the individual self as they choose. The question that frames the intended research in this thesis is whether the self-significance of bodily appearance accords with or contests traditional femininity and how young women construct a sense of self through fashion.

An individual feels threatened and psychologically visible if she finds herself in an insecure environment in which she is being examined and measured, overshadowed by other people's better presentation, or judgement (Tseelon, 1995). In such stressful circumstances, the body as site and the gaze of self-reflexivity are more apparent as complementary aspects of modern agency. Some women are very concerned with beautifying their appearance and they spend much time and effort on cosmetics or clothes, through which they search for 'social acceptance and power' (Berry, 2008: 52). These products are considered to be a means of making us not only attractive but also acceptable. As a result, Berry found that we consume a socially dictated set of beauty standards because of dedication to looking the way we are supposed to look. There is clearly still an imbalance between consumers and capitalists/producers, and a continuous battle between the image we want to project and the image we know we should project. Williams and Bendelow (1998) feel that self-presentation is achieved through social acts that are predominantly consumerist, with the individual using signs, symbols, brands and practices of consumption to deliver the desired impression. The expression of sexuality runs through codes of dress and adornment in complex ways. Bartky (1990) sees women's self-presentation as based on what they see in other women. Women's desire 'reflects the current social norms according to which female desire is, or is supposed to be, constituted' (Bartky, 1990: 8). However, Tseelon (1995) suggests that women internalise men's perspectives and identify 'the perceived look of the *male other*' as a guiding force in their decisions (1995: 76). Craik (1994) simply argues that there is no clear pattern in how women construct their appearance or ways of seeing depending on 'male gaze' or female gaze.

2.5 The self and identities in appearance

Different academic disciplines arrive at similar definitions the self – one that is defined in relation (frequently in opposition) to others. In particular, the concept of the self has generally evolved from the idea of the individual to the self produced by society and culture, with increasing recognition and study of the way in which individuals are embodied within their social context (Burkitt, 1994). Rahman and Jackson (2010) suggest that the self is fundamentally social, an interactional self, 'as social in origin, arising from interaction with others, and reflexive – capable of reflecting back on itself' (2010: 155). This view of the self, suggests that women's sensitivity to and awareness of others is related to social location but also part of their sense of self. Jenkins elaborates that 'reflexivity involves observation and retrospection, and is similar whether I am considering myself or others' (2008: 55).

The emergence of reflexive self-identity, however, is subject to considerable debate. While Giddens (1991) considers it to be a modern phenomenon, where individuals take the initiative to reflexively construct their own personal narratives with the understanding that they are in control of their own lives and futures, Jenkins (2008) disagrees, arguing that reflexive self-identity is a ubiquitous, defining feature of being human, neither diagnostic of modernity nor peculiar to the modern world (Jenkins, 2008). By examining the individual self, Giddens (1991) suggests the variety of choices and lifestyles that contemporary society affords thus frees the individual to display different aspects of the self in different spaces and allows the individual to formulate a self-identity which is meaningful to that individual. While this may be partly attributable to the late modern condition, others, drawing on the work of G.H. Mead (1934), argue that reflexivity itself is an inescapable part of human social life (Jenkins 2008; Rahman and Jackson 2010).

The notion of others (relative to the self) is expanded by Markus and Kitayama (1991), who argue that the self is construed as individuals seeking to be 'interdependent with the surrounding context, and it is the "other" or the "self-in-relation-to-other" that is focal in individual experience' (1991: 225). Heine (2001) argues that the interdependent self that seeks to fit in with relevant others is felt to be particularly prominent in Eastern cultures. He compared the differences in self across two cultural contexts, North American and East Asian, revealing that the East Asian self focuses on relationships within the in-group. Compared with the North American self, the self-defining

relationships represented by East Asians play a much larger part in self-identity. How the individual behaves and identifies the self is ultimately determined by relationships within the in-group. In this regard, Turner et al.'s (1987, 1991, 1994) work on the self-categorisation theory of social influence offers a valuable insight on the social self. He argues that individuals share social identity, and it is this shared identity that enables the production of 'socially validated knowledge, shared beliefs about ways of perceiving, thinking and doing that we assume to be appropriate in terms of the demands of objective reality' (Turner 1994: 460). He goes on to suggest that a pre-condition of context-dependent self-categorisation is the act of thinking about others and categorising them, accepting or rejecting judgments from others (Turner 1994).

Cooley (1902) made a similar argument about the social self. In his landmark concept, the 'Looking-Glass Self', he describes the self as a consciousness of the thought of other persons, which includes three elements: 'the imagination of our appearance to the other person; the imagination of his judgment of that appearance, and some sort of self-feeling, such as pride or mortification' (1902: 152). The self is viewed as a process of interaction with other people. Cooley (1902) further elaborates that the process of self-feeling begins to develop in childhood, that is, the self perceives its own influence or power over other people and looks for the hoped-for effect. Self-evaluations are therefore affected by how we imagine other people see and evaluate us, and how we perceive these evaluations. Gecas and Schwalbe (1983) argue for a more limited view of the development of self-evaluations and their relationship to social structure, suggesting that the active, creative self has been the symbolic interactionist view of the individual. In this case, we regain a self that is both a potentially autonomous subject, with powers to transform the world and to derive self-esteem from this experience, and an object of reflection in the looking-glass metaphor. Despite the considerable criticisms, Cooley's work remains influential in conceptualising the interactions of our self with others. Therefore, based on Cooley's work on selfhood as an evolving combination of self-definitions and the definitions of others offered by the other, Jenkins (2008) defines individual and collective identity as the *internal-external dialectic of identification* whereby they are constituted and embodied in selfhood:

> 'Individuals are unique and variable, but selfhood is thoroughly socially constructed: in the processes of primary and subsequent socialisation, and in the ongoing interaction during which individuals define and redefine themselves and others, throughout their lives.' (2008: 40)

34

2.6 Consumer Culture

In late modern societies consumption has become a means of self-construction and self-definition. In his discussion of the rise of consumer culture and modernity, Slater (1997) describes consumer culture as being bound up with the emergence of modernity, with its particular focus on self and society. He regards modern consumer culture as feeling personally significant to modern subjects. He suggests that 'consumer culture is the privileged medium for negotiating identity and status within a post-traditional society' (1997: 29). He proposes that consumer culture and mass consumption were central to the emergence of the modern iteration of the self and society, as defined by our consumption choices (see also Joy et al., 2010).

The emergence of a consumer society in the West is usually dated to the mid twentieth century. By the 1950s, after two world wars and the great depression, manufacturing had shifted from the production of capital and industrial goods to the production of consumer goods, at prices and in quantities never seen before. This corresponded with a period of rising and more equitable incomes that combined to generate a significant rise in purchasing power – more individuals could now afford more goods than ever before and with more choice. Compared to even just a few decades ago, people are now surrounded by and use more merchandise. The non-essential and non-utilitarian nature of these objects carries significant cultural implications beyond the economic act of consumption. For example, lifestyles, as created by consumption choices, have become the primary stratification for young people, eclipsing more traditional categories such as class. Lury (1996) defines lifestyle 'as a mode of consumption, or attitude to consuming' (1996: 80). Lifestyles thus represent constellations of consumption choices where people exhibit their personal styles and self through customising and personalising mass-produced consumer goods. Slater (1997) argues that consumer culture is thus primarily concerned with the negotiation of status and identity through consuming social appearance. Specifically, individuals usually adopt a lifestyle to distinguish themselves from other groups of individuals. Featherstone (1991) further proposed that culture and lifestyle were intricately linked to the practices of consumption – the planning, display, and use of consumer goods in everyday life. Featherstone considers the symbol and the use of goods is a means of communication and not just utility, which further projects the meaning a consumer has ascribed to the commodity.

Celia Lury (1996) argues that consumption is no longer defined by negatives such as waste, depletion and destruction. Rather, individuals contemplate consumption as the uses of things, with the act of consumption actively and positively creating meaning. Thus, people consume items having assigned meaning to the merchandise. By providing 'a series of expert knowledge - for example, in relation to lifestyle, taste, health, fashion and beauty – which the individual may use to enhance his or her self-identity' (Lury, 1996: 8). Consumer culture is thus understood to have contributed to a self that is more reflexive, where identity is consciously chosen and constructed (Giddens, 1991). The self of late modernity is then formed by an on-going sequence of consumer choices and other decisions, with the modern woman deploying goods that symbolically fashion and display her own identity. Late modern identity is thus formed through these decisions and reflexively from ensemble to ensemble. As Lury (1996: 8) points out, consumer culture is 'a source of the contemporary belief that self-identity is a kind of cultural resource, asset or possession,' which includes 'a process of self-fashioning'.

According to Slater (1997), consumer culture is a process of selling an identity to various social markets, which dominate our sense of the social environment, through which individuals 'produce and sustain identities increasingly take the form of consumer goods and activities through which we construct appearances and organize leisure and time and social encounters' (1997: 85). The self in consumer culture is thus viewed as essential to the understanding of consumer behaviour (Joy et al., 2010). To capture one's self-identity through deliberate consumption has thus become a mark of modern society. This consumerist, represents a shift away from the livelihoods, identities and sense of self surrounding production jobs (Bocock, 1993).

Consumption has increasingly been seen as important to class distinctions. Bourdeiu (1984) suggested that 'taste' and patterns of cultural consumption were class specific and might become embodied in individuals as part of their habitus. He suggests that people with similar behaviours, or at least people with similar behaviours within a social class, will have similar consumption patterns that reflect their similar habitus. Habitus operates below the level of individual consciousness and is constructed by socially conditioned acts internalised as an individual's taken-for-granted preferences, inscribed in the individual's body; it shapes our bodies and develops as integral and lasting part of the self. These inclinations in perception, feeling, action and thoughts become imperceptible drivers of understanding, action and thought. As Bourdieu argues, our practice is always socially situated, this practical sense is localized to the 'field' in

which we are acting at that moment (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 22). The logic of our practice is embedded in the requirements of the field, practically mastered by its participants. Habitus is also the embodiment of our social location. It is apparent in our clothes, language, gait, posture, that are among the 'outward signs expressing social position' (Bourdieu and Thompson 1991: 123). Habitus thus includes bodily hexis which, Bourdiieu notes, is gendered as well as classed:

> 'Bodily hexis is political mythology realized, *em-bodied,* turned into a permanent disposition, a durable way of standing, speaking, walking, and thereby of feeling and thinking. The opposition between male and female is realized in posture, in the gestures and movements of the body…' (Bourdieu 1980: 69-70, emphasis in original)

The notion of habitus thus provides a conceptual framework for dress as a bodily practice and forms a link between approaches that prioritise objective structures or subjective meanings.

2.6.1 Fashion Theory – Consuming Fashion and Brand

Consumption is an expansive process, defined as encompassing 'reproduction, recreation and leisurely or hedonistic pursuits that have transpired beyond the command of the wage relation' (Arvidsson 2006: 71). Consumer culture is the culture of things-in-use (Lury, 1996), referring to: 1) how people use goods; 2) the meanings generated through consuming goods; 3) the meanings assigned to goods by people; and 4) the process through which these meanings are generated. According to Douglas and Isherwood (1996: xv), 'Goods are neutral, their uses are social; they can be used as fences or bridges'. They pointed out that humans need merchandise to manifest various aspects of culture and to create stability. Goods are a part of the cultural system with the act of consumption being meaningful in itself, with clear social functions. Individuals use consumer goods, such as clothes, to represent their sense of style. Women are the objects of a gaze in which what they consume is assessed for its usefulness in relation to the 'simulation' of femininity (Lury, 1996). According to Lury, women see beauty itself as a costume – achievable by choice, to be adopted or discarded at will. Femininity is then a performance that stems from and manipulates personal identity while providing pleasure in the very act of taking on roles and masquerades (1996).

Conspicuous consumption as defined by Veblen (1912) is a form of non-productive consumption by the leisured class, designed to project and display wealth and status to others and is thus heavily tied to symbols and style and is typically displayed in designated, almost theatrical, spaces and times. Veblen's seminal work on conspicuous consumption was pioneering in its exploration of fashion as a tool to communicate and reflect economic status. In his theory, Veblen argued that clothes were used as indicators of social class and wealth at the end of the nineteenth century. The bourgeoisie, in particular, sought to emulate the aristocratic upper classes by displaying their wealth through elaborate and ever-changing wardrobes, with new fashions driven by the constant need to demonstrate enhanced social status based on wealth. A man would dress his wife in the latest and most expensive fashions – usually impractical clothes that clearly identified her as a member of the leisured class – thus serving as a sartorial expression of his increasing wealth and leisure. Although aspects of Veblen's theory have been critiqued from a more contemporary perspective – particularly by Wilson (1985: 50-3), Kunzle (1982), Steele (1985) and Entwistle (2000: 58-66), who dispute his conception of fashion as necessarily wasteful and oppressive, negatively imposed onto women with the wearer exercising no personal agency in choosing what to wear, his theory of conspicuous consumption has continued to be influential in the field of fashion. His insights into the way in which unnecessary consumption is promoted for the sake of profit may have even more relevance in today's consumer society.

Many scholars have suggested that clothing is a means of communication, a language and a social expression (Bourdieu, 1984; McCracken, 1988; Barnard, 2002). According to Entwistle and Wilson (2001), clothing fashion not only represents anxieties about individualisation and self-expression, but also accommodates the contradictory decree of the individual standing out from the crowd and merging with it. Williams (1982) asserts that women's consumption is driven by impulses that are beyond their control and that they intend to squander money on the accumulation of ever more possessions. Other scholars also expand on this view of fashion as irrational and unjustified spending (Wilson, 1985), and argue that, in their experience of modern Western hedonism, women accept the powerful desire ignited by Western consumer culture. Douglas and Isherwood (1996) argue that consumption's values must be viewed as part of the social process, not just a result or a goal. Consumption must be viewed as a way for

individuals to connect with one another, that it is part and parcel of the construction of social identities and connections.

In discussing bodily presentation and appearance in consumer culture, Featherstone (1982) suggests that 'individuals are encouraged to adopt instrumental strategies to combat deterioration and decay…images of the body beautiful, openly sexual and associated with hedonism, leisure, and display, emphasize the importance of appearance and "the look"' (1982: 18). Featherstone goes on to argue that because individuals project and perform the self in order to impress others while monitoring their own performances, they are encouraged to find and purge flaws and signs of decay from their bodies since 'appearance, gesture and bodily demeanour were taken as expressions of self, with bodily imperfections and lack of attention carrying penalties in everyday interactions' (1982: 28).

Looking good and consuming to enhance one's appearance is particularly expected of women. The construction of modern femininity is therefore inseparable from the act of consumption and the role of women as consumers. Felski summarises an argument made by many feminist theorists, writing that 'any pleasure derived from fashion, cosmetics, women's magazines, or other distinctively feminized aspects of consumer culture has been read as merely another symptom of women's manipulation by institutionalized mechanisms of patriarchal control' (1995: 63). Craik (1994) argues that women's pleasure is proof that images delivered by the media have offered women fantasies, identities and momentary escape from the contradictions and pains of everyday life rather than reinforcing unsatisfying patriarchal relations.

Craik (1994) cites Elias, who comments that clothes are regarded as an expression of self-control, restraint and affect-transformation. Through displaying clothes, individuals and groups seek to represent conventions of conduct that contribute to the etiquette and manners of social encounters, 'a technique of acculturation' (Craik, 1994: 10). Presenting sexuality is also another technique of construction of beauty, which can be found in most women's magazines. According to Craik (1994), a social persona is constructed through an imitation of femininity, such as body training or codes of dress. How the body is dressed is the way in which social and sexual identities are constructed. Crane and Bovone (2006) see clothing as playing a curious role as both a vehicle for socialisation and social control and the expression of liberation from cultural constraints. They suggest that material culture involves cultural symbols and cultural repertoires that

make consumption meaningful. Similarly Dolfsma (2004) argues that in consuming fashion we express certain symbolic values that convey our identity to others.

Douglas (1997) argues that the consumer is not a compulsive being, but is a consistent and rational actor. - The act of shopping itself is associated with people's sense of self Robert Prus and Lorne Dawson (1991) consider shopping as a recreational if laborious activity. Although some participants from their interviews claim to enjoy the act of shopping, many others describe shopping in terms such as 'difficult', 'monotonous', 'unavoidable' or even 'defeating'. For example, some participants felt anxious about their bodies when they couldn't find clothes in sizes that fitted. Citing this study, Lee suggests that these negative experiences indicate a 'helpless self' (Lee, 2006). Shopping is more likely to be pleasurable if one's sense of self is incorporated into the products (Prus and Dawson, 1991). Shopping, therefore, is an active and social realisation of the self. Lee (2006) suggests that the negative and frustrating aspects of shopping are a result of modern women defining their femininity through consumption, with the culture of consumption requiring women to pay attention to their bodies and maintain beauty through different purchases.

2.6.2 Consuming Brands/Symbol

The consumption of high-end fashion brands can be seen as symbolic consumption – what consumers are buying is not the actual content of the item, but rather what the merchandise symbolises. This can also be the case with other commodities. Barthes (2009) suggests that consumption is only actualised through the symbols it communicates to society and as currently represented in culture. Barthes uses wine to exemplify the analysis of signs, or symbols. He suggests in France wine is a 'totem-drink' (2009: 65) that not only delivers a message of satisfying a physiological need but also many other meanings. He suggests that 'knowing how to drink is a national technique which serves to qualify the Frenchman, to demonstrate his performance, his control and his sociability' and is 'thus a foundation for a collective morality' (2009: 66). Bocock (1993) draws the conclusion that consumption has two components: one that fulfils needs (such as food and clothing) and another that transmits and preserves socio-cultural symbols, signs and structure. In these terms it could be argued that branded fashion goods do not simply fulfil basic needs (unbranded items would do this just as well), but have particular symbolic value.

The notion of products as commodity signs is portrayed by Baudrillard. He argues that: 'in order to become an object of consumption, the object must become a sign' (Baudrillard, 2002: 25). Therefore, all consumption can be seen as symbolic. What consumers purchase, then, is not the actual content of goods, but the symbols and status these items represent. According to Baudrillard (2002) the meaning of product consumption has been transformed from consuming for material utility to consuming the symbolic meaning of products (i.e. cultural consumption). This idea might not be applicable to all consumption, but may be useful in considering fashion, especially the consumption of high-fashion brands where the 'label' has meaning in itself and can represent status, style and wealth beyond the utility of the item.

2.6.3 Consumption in Taipei/Taiwan

The decades leading up to the mid-1990s in Taiwan were marked by some of the most rapid and equitable sustained economic growth the world has ever seen. Accompanying this rapid economic growth and industrialisation has been dramatic urbanisation and changes to family structures and dynamics (e.g. increased autonomy in consumption for women and children). Culturally, some have proposed a marked 'cultural cliff', whereby traditional culture has been undermined along with the regulating aspects of social culture, to be replaced by a profit-driven, utilitarian culture (Chen, 2005). Such a utilitarian culture encourages mass consumption and materialistic enjoyment, fundamentally changing both the lifestyles of Taiwanese people and the traditional role of the family – the consumption world outside of the family is now a critical source of personal identity formation.

The tone of the commentary and analysis of consumer culture in Taiwan has generally been one of a moralistic and critical perspective, adhering to prevalent concerns among intellectuals and even echoing traditional Confucian mantras against material consumption and commerce. Chen (2005) further argues that the consumption culture in Taiwan is a product of hegemony, that Western goods, made with superior and innovative manufacturing, invade other countries with their accompanying way of life, value system and patterns of consumption. The consequent loss of confidence in locally manufactured goods furthers the imbalance between producer and consumer, a disparity that extends to political and economic asymmetries (Hsiao, 1990). On the other hand, Taipei's consumers can be seen as bringing consumerism into aspects of their daily lives, making consumption an egalitarian lifestyle (Chen, 2005). What many domestic

researchers of consumption agree on is the growing dominance of 'I consume therefore I am' (Williams and Bendelow, 1998: 73) among the Taiwanese public, where consumption is used to affirm personal identity. In this consumerist/consumption society, consumption-created style and taste is an acceptable and prevalent way to highlight one's own uniqueness (Hu, 2006; Chiou; 2004; Yang, 2005). Continued trade liberalisation and cultural globalisation has increased the influx of imported and a higher priced fashion goods, with consumption of these items now increasingly an end in itself.

It has been argued that the dominance of capitalist/consumerist values drives people to pursue consumption and plays a dominant role in their lives. Notably, it is felt that, with the exception of the traditionally higher income residents of Taipei, the consumption of branded goods is motivated by mass consumption psychology – driven by competition, packaging and price rather than the intrinsic valuation of aesthetics or enjoyment (Chen, 2005). Chen further argues that popular culture and its accompanying mass consumption can function to empower people who feel disrespected and unfulfilled in modern society. For example, buying and using luxury branded handbags can be perceived as a readily accessible way to gain the respect typically afforded to the privileged.

In addition, young people most commonly identify finances as the main factor determining their decision to buy – many young people simply cannot afford to buy luxury-brand products because of the high price relative to their low (or non-existent) income. It has been argued that a tool of hegemonic consumer culture is to manipulate younger groups into irrational spending under the guise of 'individual freedom' (Chen, 2005).

In the rest of this thesis I consider how young women account for their own fashion purchases and clothing choices and how this relates to their sense of themselves as individuals. In the next chapter I explain how I conducted my research and introduce the young women I interviewed.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Following the literature review, the aim of this research can now be better refined on the basis of the following issues: 1) how Taiwanese women, under the influence of modernity, develop individuality; 2) the self-identity, social identity, images and self-presentation associated with fashion goods; 3) the formation and development of consumer society; 4) the symbolic meaning and lifestyles associated with consuming fashion/branded goods. Critically, I hope to explore the characteristics of young Taiwanese women and how these interact with fashion consumption. These areas will be covered through this feminist sociological research.

The impetus for these interviews is to gain insight into the thoughts and perceptions of young Taiwanese women on consuming fashion products/brands. In the interviews, I saw myself drawing upon both concepts of consumer behaviour and feminist approaches, while recognising how these two are at times incompatible. I seek to ask precise, directed questions while providing broad latitude for young women to freely describe the feelings and experiences associated with their answers. In order to more explicitly reflect women's perspectives on fashion products, I conducted pilot interviews eight months earlier than the formal interviews to test the validity of my research questions. Despite my schedules being set in advance, there were still situations that grew beyond my control. On the other hand, in spite of the age gap between me and the younger participants, my knowledge of fashion products and brands, as well as similar struggles over consuming fashion products, was able to reduce the distance between us. Moreover, the whole experience of interviewing and transcribing has forced me to re-examine whether I have experienced the same conflicts and thoughts in my own shopping. In this chapter I will present the design and process of my fieldwork and will discuss the problems and dilemmas I encountered that arose out of the interviews.

3.2 Research Design

According to Marshall and Rossman (2006), using qualitative methods will best address research questions that are in a particular setting, such as focusing on individuals' lived

experience. The researcher needs to understand the deeper perspectives through face-to-face interaction in order to capture individuals' thoughts, feelings, beliefs, values and assumptive worlds (Marshall and Rossman, 2006: 53). Qualitative methods include in-depth semi-structured interviewing which is a technique widely used in feminist research (Mason, 2002; Bryman, 2008) and was my chosen method. In order to examine young Taiwanese women's perceptions of fashion products, I conducted interviews in Taipei because of the nature of fashion and consumption – fashion tends to diffuse outward from metropolitan areas. I sampled my participants from women aged between 19 and 31. Young women within this age range were born between 1978 and 1990, during which time Taiwan experienced great transformations, both socially and economically[1]. By selecting women in the same 'generational group' I hoped to isolate a sample that would share similar values and upbringing. This generation, in particular, was selected because the identified Generation Ys (those born after 1977) have been acculturated into an environment that provides more opportunities and reasons to shop than ever before (Bakewell, 2003). I decided to divide these participants into two age groups to compare the similarities and differences.

The aim of my research is to explore young Taiwanese women's perceptions of consuming fashion products in relation to the transformations of modernity. Young women's experiences were expected to offer insights into the construction of selfhood in modern society but in an Asian context. On the other hand, when designing the fieldwork, I combined open-ended questions with a few closed questions in order to gain a complete overview of young women's perceptions when deciding fashion consumption.

3.3 Pilot Interviews

3.3.1 Participant Selection and Backgrounds for Pilot Interviews

I started my preparation for field interviews in the winter of 2008. Pilot interviews were conducted to test my research questions as well as to examine the feasibility of my topic guide. I also hoped to develop a more consistent and fluid interview style from the

---

[1] Taiwan's economy was affected by the two oil crises in 1974 and 1979. Although the economy was still stable, the economic growth rate declined and was growing slowly, which influenced the macro-environment and consumption. However, the lifting of martial law in 1987 transformed Taiwan into a liberal and democratic country that has absorbed diverse and multicultural information and consumerism.

experience gained in these pilots. Six pilot interviews were conducted in total. Three students from the National Kaohsiung University of Applied Sciences (where a family friend teaching a class advertised for subjects) were recruited and I also interviewed two of my friends and my sister-in-law. The pilot interviews were conducted in both Kaohsiung and Taipei, but all pilot subjects were born and raised in Taipei.

I also tested my intention to conduct a comparative analysis by grouping the pilot interviewees into two age brackets: 19-24 and 25-31 and to review the themes that emerged in these preliminary discussions. I consider that Generation Ys of different ages might reflect some differing values and perceptions even within a shared generational context. In particular, young women generally exit higher education and start a full-time job between the ages of 22 and 25 – two significant markers in the highly standardised life course of post-industrial Taiwan (Shanahan 2000). These transitions entail both a general gain in agency for young women and the encountering of new social groups, changes that can alter their identities in additional to the symbolism of the life stage transition. It should also be noted that some of the older participants had experienced the end of martial law when they were much younger – they can recall the rapid liberation or struggles over their appearance and consuming fashion products as part of their upbringing.

The three younger participants in the pilot, Karen, Anna and Rong-Fang,[2] had never lived outside of Taipei until they went to Kaohsiung for university. They were first interviewed in December 2008. In January 2009, I travelled to Taipei to carry out three additional interviews. My sister-in-law, Sophie, had lived in Taipei for her entire life except to pursue a Masters degree in America. My friend Jenny was a classmate from my time at the University of Bournemouth. Studying in England was also her first time living outside of Taipei. Yu-Ching was my colleague when I worked in Taipei and had lived in Taipei her entire life. The length of each interview ranged from one to two hours. My pilot interviews were generally very fluid and comfortable as these participants were friends of mine or family friends.

To supplement my pilot interviews, I also contacted the management of several designer labels in Taiwan to better understand the clientele and what potentially motivates fashion purchases. The store manager of Issey Miyake in Kaohsiung responded and provided anecdotal observations on the clientele for thirty minutes. He did not discuss

---

[2] All participants' names are pseudonyms.

45

more data-based observations since he was not authorized to release information that the company seen as confidential. I was satisfied with his candid assessment and his willingness to talk to me. The managers of Prada and Armani declined to be interviewed when I identified myself as an academic researcher and not a journalist/fashion writer as they first assumed. The interview refusals were disappointing as the observations from managers of Western brands would have been highly valuable to provide a comparative cultural context and alternative 'brand philosophies' of what they believe motivates their clientele in fashion and consumption.

3.3.2 Feedback and adjustment of research questions

From my interviews, I hoped to explore the experiences of Taiwanese women in 1) managing appearances, 2) establishing self-identity and 3) consuming fashion products. More questions explored how perceptions/practices in these areas are influenced by family, peers and the media. Their own experience and expectations of fashion products/brands were also discussed.

Pilot participants were generally willing to discuss their perceptions of fashion. Most agreed that the questions asked were not very private or embarrassing but could easily be considered casual daily conversation. One pilot participant was more reserved and I had to take the initiative with the first few open-ended questions by proposing multiple examples or assumptions to help her construct answers. The pilot interviews took a flexible and relaxed format. Taking advantage of the face-to-face interview format, answers to open-ended questions were often followed by additional questions that elaborated on the interviewee's answer. The sequence of questions in the interviews was not set and depended chiefly on the flow of conversation, but a list of pre-determined themes was used to guide the interview and ensure that all the topics of interest were covered.

Through my pilot interviews, I found that the initial list of questions and interview format was usable but could be improved. The initial weight of the interview centred on Taiwanese women's perception of fashion brands, but after transcribing and organising the answers from the pilot interviews, I realised that I needed to refine several questions to avoid vagueness. For instance, one participant mentioned that she wore completely different clothes when studying in America – none of her friends wore skirts but only jeans and t-shirts. Because of this, she had the feeling of 'becoming ugly' when she

started wearing similar clothes in order to conform to her social group at the time. Moreover, another participant told me that 'I used to love wearing low necks and bandeau tops. But after coming back to Taiwan all the clothes I wore in America have been weeded out from my wardrobe. People in Taiwan do not appreciate this kind of fashion style; it can only cause much trouble!' The statement reminded me to pay particular attention to this incongruity. Thus, the process of identity formation in different social environments needed further exploration, as did metropolitanism and how it affect young women's perceptions of fashion and consumption.

My interview with the store manager of Issey Miyake provided insights into what young women desire in fashion purchases (in this case, why younger women do not purchase Issey Miyake and the brand's clientele has remained predominantly middle-aged in spite of attempts to bring in more 'youthful' designs). The brand manager repeatedly emphasised that young women seek clothes that display their bodies, which Issey Miyake's one-size-fits-all approach does not lend itself to. This interview showed that the perspective of a brand manager on consumption culture in Taiwan remains valuable. And I decided I would try again to contact managers of other high-end fashion brands, to elicit their knowledge about contemporary urban young women.

3.3.3 Research Questions

The central overarching questions that emerged after my literature review were designed to examine young Taipei women's perceptions of shopping for fashion products, especially Western fashion brands – 'how do fashion products and brands interact with young women's self-identity, self-image and the perception of consuming fashion products (brands) themselves?' In conjunction with my literature review, I set four central themes to guide this research and to organise my questions. First, aspirations to be pretty and external influences on this aspiration: How do young women experience tradition and modernity in terms of being pretty? How do they deal with expectations about appearance from their elders? Have they experienced conflicts between conforming to their families' traditional values and maintaining individuality? How do cultural and social functions affect their sense of self? What impact is appearance expected to have on their identities? Secondly, expectations of managing appearance: what do young women expect from wearing feminine clothes or cosmetics? Have social expectations had a great impact on their choice of fashion products? What do young women see as influencing their choices for adorning their appearance – e.g.

47

magazines, friends, celebrities? Do traditional clothes (*qipao*) affect their perceptions of fashion? How do images of Western and Eastern women affect these young women? How do they interpret the "images for women" disseminated by the media? Thirdly, the meaning of consuming fashion products: What are their aspirations in shopping for Western fashion products? What is the meaning of brands? Have they expected to gain any social meaning via consuming fashion brands? How do they value the various traits of one item, such as brand (and its symbol), practical utility, price, etc.? What is the relationship between women consumers' perceptions of fashion brands and their own construction of self-image? How does this process relate to their financial management? Fourthly, what it takes to be a Taipei woman: What are the differences between Taipei women and Taiwanese women from outside Taipei? What images do Taipei women wish to construct? What images do they end up putting forward?

3.4 Interviews with Young Women

With my first round of literature review completed and my research questions refined, I returned to Taiwan in August 2009 for a month and half to conduct interviews. I retained the original sampling idea from my pilot interviews, recruiting 24 prospective participants between the ages of 19 and 31. Twelve women belonged to each age group (19-24 and 25-31). All participants were born, raised and currently resided in the Taipei metropolitan area. Interviews took place in Taipei city, conducted in three periods of three to six days.

Interview participants were recruited through convenience sampling, snowball sampling and advertisements. I started with convenience sampling among my own friends and family. While this does not yield a representative sample, it is a valid approach for when practical concerns outweigh a very marginal gain in representativeness that comes from random sampling or even stratified sampling to recruit 24 individuals. With the help of the convenience sample (two people) and through contacts of the pilot group, I recruited a further 16 women through snowballing. Six additional women were recruited through a call for participants posted on National Taiwan University's internet Bulletin Board System (BBS), the largest of its kind in Taiwan.

3.4.1 Participant Selection and Making Appointments

Before recruiting interviewees, my sister-in-law, who participated in the pilot interviews, suggested that 'if you want to interview women in Taipei, you will get what you want if you pay for it, they are materialists and are very realistic.' For this reason, I decided to provide a monetary compensation of NTD600 (approx. £12). While recognising that the provision of a monetary incentive may enforce a hierarchical power relationship between the researcher and the subject (Maynard and Purvis, 1994), I felt this was a practical necessity to secure the time commitment from my interviewees. Furthermore, for the young women being interviewed, this amount was unlikely to be significant or even incentivising, but was rather a token payment that formalised our conversations as an exchange that was safe, confidential and yet set apart from conventional social exchanges.

One of my friends, who works for a modelling company, told me that if I wanted to interview a model, or somewhat young chic women, the money I was offering was too low, saying the price I was paying would only buy me an interview with a cleaning lady. Another participant similarly pointed out that her pay per hour in her job was much higher than my compensation and that she only agreed to do the interview because I was introduced by her friend. On the other hand, a few interviewees frankly volunteered that they were participating in the interviews because of the monetary compensation, one even cited financial problems. Others reported that 'I haven't done this before, I'm very curious what is going on' or 'I like shopping and dressing up myself and I think I am very much aware of fashion trends.' Some of them even provided their personal online albums for reference. All the reasons I heard from these participants reflect the perspectives of a self-conscious, individualised generation.

Two interviewees were recruited from my personal contacts. One was a classmate from my university; another attended the University of York during the first year of my PhD course. Six of my personal contacts, including Sophie and Jenny from the pilot interviews and Helen in the final interview group, provided an additional 16 contacts who were interested in taking part in the interviews. Sophie, in particular, provided a list of contacts that included both her own acquaintances and friends of own younger brother that yielded 10 contacts. I recognise that this process took the interviewee selection out of my hands and may have resulted in a disproportionate number of women who were interested in fashion and thus more willing to talk to me. I also

recognise that this sampling method conforms itself to existing peer groups, resulting in under-sampling of individuals too far separated on the socio-economic hierarchy from my initial referral (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981). I tried to address this by starting my snowballing through as diverse a group of friends as possible.

I had initially planned to restrict my focus to those living within the administrative boundaries of Taipei City. After speaking to my own contact, who was born and lived in Taipei County (an administrative area surrounding Taipei) and worked and went to school in Taipei City, I decided to relax my recruiting criteria to include the whole metropolitan area. I felt that given the size of Taipei City itself and the availability of transport links between Taipei City and County, this was not a valid functional distinction. Rather, it was better to pursue other traits needed for my sample by recruiting from a wider pool. The residency criteria were reformulated to women who *self-identify* as Taipei women and currently reside in the Taipei metropolitan area. I was able to compare the women in different regions, who all identify themselves as Taipei women. It was my intention to obtain a diverse sample of young women in Taipei, representing different family backgrounds, educational attainment and income levels.

Although what I have said so far makes the recruitment process seem easy, in fact it was more difficult than I expected. Before returning to Taiwan to conduct the interviews, I had planned to find participants starting with my friends in York and in Taipei, who are either Taipeiers or knew some Taipeiers. I had asked them if they could introduce me to their female friends in Taipei whom I could interview. Moreover, since I am not from Taipei and most of my friends are not located in Taipei (or were over the age limit), finding specific participants from my own circle of friends was not easy. I decided to find participants based on my friends' contacts and would then snowball my interviewees. I would, in particular, target participants who self-identify as fashionable, 'love to shop', or are demanding in their own dress standards.

Prior to the start of my fieldwork, many of my friends agreed to help me recruit young women fitting the above criteria; however, not many followed through on this promise. For example, one student from York, who is from Taipei, promised he would find me at least three female Taipeiers since most of his friends are Taipeiers, which was not supposed to be a difficult task for him. Also, he had been returning to Taiwan at the same time for his holiday and could make his requests in person. But upon returning to Taiwan, I was unable to reach him and he never returned my call.

Overall, this made for a very frustrating experience as I only had six weeks in Taiwan to conduct the interviews. To compensate for a sudden shortage of leads, I contacted some acquaintances of mine to ask if they could help me out with finding participants. These sudden requests were of course awkward and embarrassing for my friends and I didn't blame them for turning me down. On the other hand, enough of my friends were able to introduce me to subjects that half of my intended sample was covered in this way. However, my friends' extended social circle generally belonged to the older age group of my intended subjects – few of us had friends who were under 25. It was becoming apparent that this could be difficult to achieve through my convenient sample and snowballing introductions. Interviews in the younger group were heavily clustered in high-income families and did not seem likely to snowball beyond that group. At this point in my recruitment, I had one younger woman who was my friend and five younger participants introduced by my friends and my sister-in-law's younger brother. I realised then that I needed an alternative to recruit a more diverse and representative sample with the limited time I had.

It was then that I decided to locate another six younger women through National Taiwan University's largest BBS board – PTT, posted under the section for short-term jobs. I wanted to find women arrayed across each age, not certain ages only (at the beginning there were participants aged 19, 23 and 24 only). I advertised for young women between the ages of 19 and 24 who considered themselves 'fashionable' and 'enjoyed shopping' and would be willing to participate in a two-hour academic interview. The amount of monetary compensation was stated. The PTT board is a great medium to recruit young people due to its widespread use among young people, with an audience that extends well beyond university students to include almost anyone who goes online. Over 20 people replied to this advertisement, at which point I explicitly selected volunteers of ages that were not represented from previous recruitment. Six women were recruited through this method. This was useful and predominately reached interviewees who self-identify as fashionable or being sensitive to fashion in some way. Most of the 12 younger females are undergraduate and graduate students, three of them had graduated from college and had full-time jobs, and some of the others had part-time jobs. A full profile of participants can be seen in Tables 3.1 and 3.2, below.

Table 3.1 Personal Characteristics of 12 interviewees, aged 19-24

Name	Age	Occupation	Marital status	Family members	Father's occupation; mother's occupation/self-defined family income level
Chrissy	19	Undergraduate student	Single	Only child	Both in family business/middle class
Waverly	19	Undergraduate student	Relationship	One older brother	Both self-employed/lower middle class
Tiffany	19	Undergraduate student	Single	One older sister	Professor; physician/upper middle class
Vanessa	20	Undergraduate student	Single	One older brother	Civil servant; employed in family-business/ upper middle class
Mandy	21	Undergraduate student, modelling as a part time job	Relationship	Only child	Teacher; teacher/upper middle class
Anita	21	Undergraduate student	Relationship	One older sister	Businessman; housewife /middle class
Judy	22	Graduate student	Single	One little brother	Businessman; housewife/upper middle class
Hsiao-Han	22	Graduated, studying for exams	Relationship	One little brother	Employed at medical devices company; museum employee/middle class
Felicia	23	Full-time job	Relationship	Extended family; One little brother	Businessman; accountant/middle class
Sherry	23	Employee in at foreign legation (as her mother's assistant)	Single	Has a half sister	Employed at international trade association; employed at foreign legation in Taiwan/wealthy
Angel	23	modelling as part-time job	Relationship	Only child	Civil servant; housewife (who also sells clothes)/middle class
Jessie	24	Teacher in an exam prep. School	Single	Extended family; One little brother	Entrepreneur; housewife/ middle class

Table 3.2: Personal Characteristics of 12 interviewees, aged 25-31

Name	Age	Occupation	Marital status	Family	Father's occupation; mother's occupation / self-defined family income level
Yo-Hsuan	25	Part-time translator	Relationship	1 older brother	Businessman; tour guide/middle class
Yumi	26	Self-employed nail artist	Single	Only child	Business owners/wealthy
Nini	26	Employee at multinational corp.	Relationship	1 younger brother	HR manager at computer firm; teacher/middle class
Violet	27	Full-time job	Single	2 younger sisters	Both small restaurant owners/upper-middle class
Shirley	27	Employee at telecoms company	Relationship	1 younger brother	Both small restaurant owners/ middle class
Nancy	28	Sales clerk at department store	Relationship	1 older and 1 younger brother	Both work in the family business/ middle class
Sharlene	29	Japanese teacher at language school	Relationship	Only child	Architect; housewife/wealthy
Shelby	29	Procurement manager at private company	Single	Only child	Retired businessman; insurance salesperson/middle class
Sappho	30	Employed at boyfriend's company	Relationship	2 sisters 2 brothers	Business owner; self-employed in investment/wealthy
Justine	30	Employee at bookstore	Relationship	1 older sister 1 older brother	Truck driver; housewife/lower middle class
Sandy	31	Masters student/ research assistant	Relationship	5 sisters	Both dry goods grocers/middle-class
Helen	31	Employed at husband owned company	Married	1 older and 1 younger brother	Financial executive; housewife/wealthy

3.4.2 Conducting interviews

I conducted semi-structured interviews that took the form of guided conversations. In this form of interview, the researcher will structure and facilitate conversations by asking questions. Different questions, asked in different forms, are combined to elicit information that reflect the topic of interest while allowing participants to 'explore issues they feel are important' (Longhurst, 2010: 107). An interview guide was designed with follow-up questions grouped around the main themes.

Most questions covered in the interviews were designed as open-ended questions prefaced by phrases such as 'can you tell me about...' or 'what do you feel about...'. There was only one closed question, which requested participants to arrange the several options in sequence according to their preference. The goal was to encourage in-depth responses, and as much as possible I would encourage the participant to elaborate on her answer. And although questions were prepared in advance, they were subject to change according to the interviewee's answers and experiences. As I learned from the pilot, the questions would most often shift because of the answers provided to questions on their personal history and their relationships with family members and friends. I thus started with these more simple questions both to provide the background for the remainder of the interview and to build confidence and comfort before moving on to more complex questions.

This style of question and conversation, however, needs to be managed by the researcher to ensure the direction and relevance are not lost (Watts, 2006: 398). The interview guide and prepared questions served this purpose. And while I generally tried to let the participants speak freely and limit myself to a listening role, as with the pilot interviews, I would prompt and encourage as needed. On the other hand, the consumption of 'non-necessary' products continues to carry negative connotations in Taiwanese society. To avoid an accusatory tone or a confrontational interview, I was especially careful to employ neutral words, while occasionally offering comments that established a confidential and empathetic space.

On average, the interviews took 2-4 hours according to personal experiences and life history, although the younger interviewees often took a shorter time than the older women. In conversations with the younger women especially I sometimes took myself as an example or shared my own experience, triggering them to think about their

attitudes to things they had taken for granted. However, generally speaking, all interviews were structured in the same way.

At the beginning, my first interview took seven hours to complete. The first couple of hours were spent on irrelevant issues, most of it was about the participant's life issues and experience. I was concerned about the time management but at the same time I also wanted to build up our relationship and earn her trust in me by not stopping her from talking. Not controlling the whole interview caused a serious delay for my next interview. It was an unexpected incident that affected the next interview, which had been arranged in another place. Therefore, to expedite the process, after that I learnt to control the interview length by introducing myself and outlining my research briefly, as well as chatting with them, all within 10 minutes. During the interviews, what I have come to regard as the fashion information in their accounts was something I could identify with and respond to.

My third set of interviews was conducted after term had begun, so many students could not fit in with my time schedule. One of the participants also gave me only a limited time to finish as she had a date after that, so I did not finish my all questions. The next day I phoned to ask if I could visit her to finish the rest but she was going to Hong Kong on business. Thus I took 20 minutes to interview her by cell phone before her boarding time. The quality of data-gathering under this situation was sometimes low. Running out of time within the interview had been a pressure for both the participant and me. For myself, I easily forgot the questions I was going to ask and I felt very stressed and could not concentrate on what she was talking about. On the other hand, I myself could generate the extended questions much more fluently if we both had flexible time and time-out. The information would be more complete if we had a little time to chat about less relevant personal issues, which could also establish more trust between the interviewee and me. Sometimes I stayed longer with the woman, walking her home, chatting without turning on my MP3 recorder.

I was aware that I was researching something that both I and my interviewees were intimate with and held strong views on. This insider knowledge was reflected in the way the research questions were asked and through the general interview – the descriptive and specific way I asked some questions regarding brands or asked my participants to clarify answers made the depth of my background knowledge obvious. I was familiar with most fashion brands, the fashion trends and the emotional struggle of shopping,

and these shared understandings, therefore, provided some common identity that I exploited to the full. Most of the time I could identify with the struggles these women were going through, which was helpful in gaining their trust and respect. The narrator's life history can be a way to evaluate the present, re-evaluate the past and anticipate the future (Cotterill and Letherby, 1993).

Finally, I prepared a formal consent form for each participant to read then sign at the start of the interview. As with the monetary compensation, this was to ritualise our interview as an academic discussion that is safe and confidential. The consent form stated my research topic, university and contact information, their rights during the interviews, the anonymity and confidentiality of this interview, and how I planned to use the data gathered. I repeatedly assured participants that I would follow the strictest confidentiality with everything they told me.

3.4.3 The Process, and Difficulties with the Interviews

Interviewing my own friends presented a challenge in its own right. I asked one friend to 'forget' I am her friend who has known her for more than 10 years and to answer my questions as though I did not know the answers. The pre-existing friendship (and my desire to maintain it) presented further challenges for questions that were highly personal, such as her financial management and credit card use. Fortunately, the personal friends I interviewed were generally comfortable answering the more personal questions and understood their necessity as part of my research. On the other hand, although most of my questions were not sensitive and were open enough to discuss in front of people, my questions about their monetary issues, their usage of credit cards and how they manage their income and expenditure might give more pause. Responses to questions on finances and spending were generally more guarded, with noticeably more precise word choices than the more free-associating tone in other parts of the interviews. Some women did reveal worries but due to their cultural background they did not refuse to answer the question directly, responding cautiously, vaguely or circularly instead.

Interviews with subjects I did not know previously presented a different type of challenge. I suffer from anthropophobia and holding long discussions with strangers was especially challenging for me. The semi-structured nature of the interview (the in-depth face-to-face interview) intensified my fear of talking to strangers. Nevertheless,

there was a learning curve (helped by the pilot study) where I learnt to familiarise myself more quickly with the interview subjects. But to the end, the establishment of personal comfort and easing of anxiety that is needed for a smooth interview remained a personal challenge that I had to repeatedly overcome with each new interview.

Building rapport with participants was crucial for me as the researcher, even though I was the one who was more afraid of talking to strangers. In order to be regarded as someone with fashion sense, I had to dress up and make up for the interviews. Warren (1988) points out that different kinds of dress and hairstyle can result in different levels of acceptance and rapport. Being identified by these participants as an insider – someone who is the same gender, the same generation, who shares similar interests in shopping and dressing, as well as a fellow Taipeier (without my own prompting or them asking, most of my participants assumed that I was from Taipei) made me an assumed insider of the group, someone who would share their values and deserving of their confidence.

There was a small deceit here, but one I thought was necessary and did no harm to the participants. It was important to give the impression that I was a Taipeier, although I come from Kaohsiung (Taiwan's second city located in the South)[1]. If they had known that I was not a Taipeier, they would probably not have been forthright about their feelings about Taipeiers and people from other cities, they would have described non-Taipeiers in a very polite way. In presenting myself as a Tapeier I received more honest answers, including some very derogatory remarks about provincial women (see Chapter 8). Also, because they assumed I was from Taipei they identify me as someone like them who shared similar experiences. I could be considered as someone 'on their side'.

The insider position was reinforced by their willingness to discuss their personal relationships as well as ask questions about my own opinions on studying abroad. Some of them were also interested in how my life was in the UK, so I also spent my spare time to chat with them. Casual chatting was an essential part of interviewing these young participants. Although responding to these questions meant much longer interviews (including the one that lasted seven hours), I felt that this was necessary both to engender trust and to improve the power dynamic so that the discussion would be more equal and non-exploitative.

---

[1] Those who were friends and some of those who were friends of friends already knew I was not from Taipei.

During all the interviews with these women, I used words and humour to inspire their talking in order to build bridges with them. Using a similar wording and speaking tone helped to prompt a temporary closeness through which they could share their feelings and experiences with me. Because of my close links with the shopping experience and brands over a long period, I had the advantage of 'insider' knowledge. My relationship with my participants was that I was similar to them in that they saw me as another woman with fashion knowledge. For example, one participant was trying to explain to me her favourite brand of jeans, which could only be bought from the U.S. She asked me, 'do you know this brand, which is very popular?', 'Oh yes you do', 'Wow you know that too!' As a brand enthusiast, I could name those denim brands before she told me, which did reduce the distance between the interviewer and the interviewee.

Also, offering some of my own experiences was another way to encourage them to talk. This 'self-disclosure' (see Reinharz and Chase, 2002) helped me to improve my relationship with participants and make it more mutual. On the other hand, a few of them showed strong self-defensive attitudes, generally they answered the questions briefly by saying 'yes' or 'no', and I was sad to have only a limited time to chat with them as a friend, not as a researcher. Therefore I could only further ask them or direct them for more detailed information.

There was a tricky part in interviewing Taipeiers, which was that I had to avoid speaking Taiwanese as most Taipeiers, especially the young generations, do not speak Taiwanese or do not want to speak it. For some slang or colloquial terminology, I still tried to speak in Mandarin. The other reason I did so was because of attempting to conceal that I am not a Taipeier. Being a member of the participants' group is essential for a researcher to conduct interviews.

Interview participants frequently expressed concerns about their competency to be interviewed. At the start of the interview, it was common to hear: 'I don't know if I'm the type you are looking for' or 'I really doubt if my answers will help your research.' This may have been a side effect of the rituals of the monetary compensation and the consent-form signing. However, once reassured that I was just looking for answers to a few open questions with no right or wrong answers, all participants grew more relaxed and talkative through the process of the interview.

Returning to the notes covering my early preparations for the research design, I tried to take notes during the interviews, but during the first session I found that this was very distracting and time-consuming because my participant usually stopped talking and waited for me to finish taking notes. Thus I stopped doing it and paid full attention to whatever my participants were saying.

Some interviewees, when asked 'how did you feel about it?' could not find the proper description, so I gave them some hints to elicit their memory. They told me: 'What you said sounds like what I felt at that time, why didn't I think that way?' This presented a dilemma in the recreation of experience – was I sparking discussion to further the guided interview or were my interviewees simply agreeing with my suggestions? Because of these concerns, I would generally seek to be more conservative in my prompts, keeping my suggestions generally broad and neutral while pointed enough to provoke thought.

Sometimes some participants gave me conflicting answers that did not agree with their previous description. When a narrative is inconsistent with earlier replies or patently could not be true, the researcher can point this out, to prompt the participant to think about and revise their views (Bryman, 2008). Once I tried this and questioned one woman about whether she was sure about what she told me or not, her face suddenly changed and she seemed to become uneasy. Therefore, I did not repeat this strategy as I was aware that I should not question what participants had told me or they would become very concerned about what they were saying.

I was enabled to see how these women had constructed their self-image through their responses to my questions. As I adopted the method of chatting instead of asking them questions one by one, usually I generated the next question after listening to their responses. Most of the time I observed their reactions to my questions and then asked further questions seeking more detailed descriptions. Meanwhile, I imitated their diction in the later conversation to evoke resonance, as well as relaxing the intercommunication.

I encountered different difficulties when interviewing the older age group. Generally, my interviewees in this age group had been part of the workforce for a few years. A few women asked: 'Are you sure you want to interview me? I am a housewife and all of my interest is in buying household stuff rather than fashion clothes,' and some questioned my definition of fashion: 'I am not sure what you mean by fashion.' These participants

were very modest about their sense of fashion. However, most of the older women could respond directly to my questions without needing an explanation of the questions. In particular, one participant sought my identification through the interview by asking me back about my opinions.

> Interviewer: What do you think of the degree of acceptance of fashion products?
> Interviewee: All Taiwanese women are very conservative and closed-minded, don't you think so? Compared with women in Japan and Hong Kong, Taiwanese women can only accept a basic top with jeans, am I right? How do you feel about that?

While I was prepared to share some information about myself with participants, I tried to avoid answering direct question like this one – especially where, as was the case here, I disagreed with the statement. In this situation I tried to remain neutral in order toretain my integrity.

Participants' responses concerning themselves were not transparent reflections of 'the truth'. I was made aware of this when I interviewed women who were friends with each other. For example, Nini was talking about her friend Yumi, whom I had also interviewed a few days before, and what she said to me about her friend was markedly different from what Yumi herself said to me – it seemed that for narratives even on simple events, a story and its presentation would be very different as the participant and when observed from the outside. I cannot get at some 'objective truth' (Jones, 2004) only what women told me – and I had to keep this confidential and not reveal to their friends.

Another issue was that some participants felt more relaxed and shared more information when the recorder was switched off. For example, after one interview, I sat outside with the participant while waiting for her friend to pick her up. I could feel that she was less tense from the way she shared with me her experience of getting haircuts and her dissatisfaction with her face and body, which she had not mentioned during the interview. The information freely discussed after the formal interview seemed to be more intimate and revealing – but of course I could not use this as data as it was not part of the 'agreed' interview, which was frustrating. For many participants, it became clear that the recorder was a barrier to telling the full story as the potential for record-keeping

seemed to prevent them from professing something embarrassing or otherwise 'losing face'.

A power relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee is unavoidable in interviews, which through the very act of questioning places the 'interviewees in a position of subservience or inferiority' (Bryman, 2008; 463). Since I was paying for their participation and I was generally older and better educated than them, the power balance was tilted further in my favour and this gave me a firmer hand in guiding the direction of the interview. Nevertheless, the downside of this relationship also led to less intimate conversations. Some of my interviewees therefore took it as a job, answering my questions formally and briefly during the interviews. They could not really chat with me as friends either because of this power imbalance or being unfamiliar with me. Having paid for their time, I also expected the participants to be able to fulfil my expectations, for example, I did expect them to detail their experiences straightforwardly rather than giving evasive answers. This may or may not cause uneasiness. Therefore I tried to balance the power relationship initiated by the research process by chatting about something irrelevant first on topics where we were likely to share similar views and which resonated with their experience.

Beyond the 24 participants, I also contacted four more brand managers to request interviews. All interview requests were declined, with the refusal from a Taiwanese designer brand, Shiatzy Chen, being particularly disappointing due to its local roots and arguably more profound insights into Taiwanese consumers. In addition to the above-stated reasons for wanting to interview brand managers, this brand combined contemporary Eastern styles with selected motifs and craftsmanship from the West. The director/designer of the brand had initially consented to an interview but was ultimately not available due to scheduling conflicts between my stay in Taiwan and their preparation for Paris Fashion Week. The difficulty I faced here was the inequality of power between me as the researcher and these managers of high-end international brands. They usually positioned themselves as important employees of multinational companies facing a PhD student lacking official support (from either the government or the university), meaning that I had even less access than fashion and news writers who can potentially promote their brands or products. They would question my intentions or insist that I conform completely to their schedules. The power imbalance thus compounded the logistical difficulties of arranging interviews with the producers/sellers of fashion goods.

Finding a quiet place where interviewees felt comfortable to narrate their own lives and perceptions was a difficult issue during this fieldwork. As I do not live in Taipei, in effect conducting interviews in a public space was no doubt the only choice. Although I realised that interviewees would feel more comfortable and safer if the interview could be carried out in a quiet and private place, it is not easy to find a quiet café in a crowded and busy city, especially as most of my interviewees were only available at weekends or after work. I was attempting to create a space in which the participant felt able to speak out her own thoughts and feelings. As I could only ask them to be interviewed in a coffee shop, the noise around us and the short distance to the next tables might result in uncomfortable feelings and less privacy. Only three participants invited me to their house to do the interviews. Carrying out research in interviewees' own space 'will usually make them feel more in control' (Letherby, 2003: 108). Those who invited me to their homes only did so having made sure I was the same gender and alone. On these terms, they felt more secure about inviting a stranger to their homes.

The practical and emotional problems I experienced throughout the fieldwork were that some interviews were often out of my control. Living 250 miles from Taipei and having strictly limited time, this was very tiring and the lack of time put a strain on my relationships with friends. On the day of the interview I found myself hovering around the area before the interview time, with my luggage. To save time and money in travelling between Taipei and Kaohsiung, I arranged as many interviewees in a day as possible. Serious delay during an interview therefore was not possible. I had a very tight schedule so that the quality of each interview was not certain. Yet most of the interviewees were late by more than 15 minutes, some were even one hour late, it was really frustrating that punctuality is not a priority in the younger generation and their laid-back attitudes usually concerned me. One of the participants even used 20 minutes to do an online business deal during the interview.

3.5 Data Processing and Writing up

All my interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese, with the occasional insertion of terms from the Taiwanese-Min Nan dialect that are commonly used to capture a more precise meaning (generally an emotional state). In order to preserve the underlying meaning and the coherence of the conversation, I decided to transcribe all the data in Chinese and to selectively translate passages into English as needed for the analysis. To

contextualise the conversations, it is also critical to record the reactions of participants, such as laughing, sighing or pausing, all of which provide additional definition to statements made. Listening to the recordings also gave me another chance to reconsider and analyse these young women's perspectives on fashion products. Nonetheless, reviewing the recordings was in itself a highly challenging and time-consuming part of my data analysis. Since the average interview time was over three hours, with some much longer some extended tangents to the conversation, irrelevant to the research questions, were not transcribed.

As Mason points out, transcripts of qualitative interviews are usually 'disorganised, eclectic incoherent in places, and may or may not take the form of a sequential narrative' (Mason, 2002: 150). This was definitely the case with my data. Returning to each transcript, I could categorically index (Mason, 2002) the issues generated from the responses of the participants. Reading the data was vital to revise my preconceptions and identify themes from my participants' perspectives. As an insider researcher, as well as sampling a group of participants sharing the same native language, I felt comfortable basing readings of my data on 'literal, interpretive and reflexive reading' (Mason, 2002: 149).

One of the major difficulties in presenting the data is using appropriate English words to represent the transcripts. Finding a word with the exact same meaning in a different language is always a challenge for research because of the discordant cultural backgrounds and limited knowledge of the language (Vulliamy, 1990). For example, some participants used the specific word '*chao*' to explain their dress styles, or their intention to be. Literally translated as tide, '*chao*' is a relatively modern word in Taiwan, having been adopted from similarly modern usage in Cantonese by the youth of Hong Kong. It is usually used by younger generations and can be used as an adjective to describe a person's characteristics, dress style or lifestyle. Even though there are some similar English words that might replace it, such as trendy or fashionable, they cannot capture the exact, underlying meaning of '*chao*' and why young people use it particularly to describe themselves rather than using other common words. Therefore, I decided to keep this original word by translating it into English literally and footnoting it. Moreover, during the transcription process, many terms in my translated transcript are Mandarin words for specific terms first created in English or French. For example, the Chinese term equivalent to avant-garde (*Chien Wei*) has been used by interviewees and is translated as such. However, when used colloquially by young women in Taiwan,

these are often used with an altered meaning as compared to its original use in European languages. In other cases, my interviewed subjects may self-ascribe labels simply out of aspiration or confusion, perhaps seeking to project something they hope to be rather than a more precise analysis of who they are.

3.6 Summary

The process of my fieldwork was marked by many challenges, both expected and unexpected. Finding suitable participants was not the only problem I encountered. Along with the logistical problems of recruiting interviewees, I usually located myself within my study. Accounts of women's perceptions, their recall of shopping experiences about themselves and their relationship to developing a sense of self all reflected my own life experience, and I also sought to begin to unpack what self is in these women's own terms. They gave me more extensive questions to think over. My position as an insider researcher and a shopping enthusiast both informed the questions I asked and is at times integrated into my data. Through the interviewees' multi-faceted narratives, my work reveals the complexity of their self-identity. At the same time I associate with contemporary young women's desire to 'try to be themselves', and their struggle to assert individuality and femininity within a patriarchal society. In the following chapter, I would like to present the struggles between traditional Chinese values and individuality under the impact of modernity.

Chapter 4 Women, Tradition and Modernity

4.1 Introduction

In traditional Taiwanese society, a woman's main obligation was to respect her parents, especially her father – she should be 'a filial daughter, dedicated mother and obedient wife' (Lee, 1997: 18). Women were prevented from doing the things they wanted to do and were required to subjugate their wishes to those of their parents and other male family figures. Although industrialisation has accelerated the acceptance of Western values, weakening many Confucian values, respect for parents remains considerable and is exhibited even in the management of individual appearance. Nonetheless, women are gradually gaining a sense of self. The core of traditional Confucian values has generally overlooked individual rights in favour of interdependence among family members as well as order and harmony within the family and wider society. Consequently, the obedience to authority and respect for elders are attitudes and behaviors accepted by and expected of members of society. But while this social conformity has deep cultural roots, young Taiwanese women today have far greater educational and career opportunities than previous generations and, as they also delay marriage until their late twenties or early thirties, they now have a degree of independence. The impact of modernity has thus contributed to these young women's orientation on lifestyle. Young women desire a greater sense of control of their own lives, they want to choose. In the Western context, Beck (1994) also argues that 'choice' forms a major norm for identity in late modernity.

However, although the idea of choice is popular in Taiwan, the bond between women and family remains strong. In Taiwan, an unmarried woman may live with her parents for various reasons, but it is generally more acceptable and prevalent as compared to young women in Western societies. Socially, Taiwanese women are expected to spend more time with their own parents before marriage – Taiwanese tradition still holds that young women 'marry into' another family and cannot come home to her parents so freely. In response, many young women also feel obliged to support or accompany their parents while they are unmarried. Filial piety and the responsibility of adult children to look after parents in old age are highly valued in Asia. Thus, a young woman living with her parents not only fulfils her own personal needs but also satisfies expectations under traditional mores. Even after marriage, many women would move back to their natal family before and shortly after giving birth. Finally, from a practical perspective,

the high prices of housing in Taiwan make it difficult for young women to achieve physical independence from their parents. If a young, unmarried woman attends classes or works in the same city as her parent's house, she would simply prefer to remain home in a more convenient and familiar environment. They then do not have to worry about food or chores and may have more money and time to invest in other aspects of their own life. In the context of the tight bond between the family and young Taiwanese women, few Taiwanese women desire complete independence from her family. Yet my participants constantly insisted that they were 'individuals' and saw 'individuality' as a positive goal and value. Individuality to them seemed to mean both independence and differentiation from their parents. They were thus faced with negotiating tensions and contradiction between conforming to familial norms and exercising their sense of individuality. This tension, between conformity (being like others) and individuality (being unlike them), as I discuss in later chapters, is also evident in peer groups. Since the young women themselves used the term individuality I use it here to try to convey their view of themselves and their social world.

This chapter focuses on the conflicts and compromises between young women and their parents when it comes to appearance. The transformation of self and its extension to establishing their own fashion choices is demonstrated and investigated through their concern for their appearance and in the sense of the diversity of fashion. After discussing the influence of Chinese family values, I offer an analysis of participants' reflections on exercising individuality under the constraints of traditional feminine expectations and restrictions. I suggest that young women exercise their individuality within the constraints of family relationships.

4.2 The influence of tradition and modernity

In Taiwan, women in previous generations were expected to disregard selfhood. Nevertheless, according to Szalay (1994), contemporary Taiwanese have found the Confucian virtues more of a burden even though they are still obligated (and profoundly so) to respect their parents. Traditional obedience to parents is preserved, but with the caveat that 'they make many references to internal conflicts, intrafamily arguments and

fights, suggesting that the reality of their family life is far from the Confucian ideals'[1] (Szalay, 1994: 59). Young women also voice some negative sentiments towards their parents, both mother and father. Women focus more on self-reflexivity and personal feelings, including negative feelings, criticism and personal resentment as well.

According to Wen (2003), Taipei is best described as a traditional Chinese society, especially compared with some other major Chinese cities such as Shanghai. The young, middle-class generation is growing up in stable income families – they can be a bit spoiled but are simple, they stress their autonomy but do so gently. Taipei women's thinking might be very progressive and modern, but the ways in which they act are nonetheless docile and traditional. In a young Taipei woman, you can see her mother's profile, which is very Chinese. In terms of marriage and family, most Taipei women are still very traditional. In my study, young women seem to be developing a new form of parent-child relationship in terms of their appearance. In many respects, there is still a degree of conformity with tradition despite the impact of Western values. Tradition is thus being reshaped in modernity (Jackson and Ho, forthcoming).

The increase in wealth, social status and power has in some ways effected a change in appearance, fuelling the rise of individuality and the reconstruction of traditional modes in the modern woman's concept of self. In addition, it is assumed that the economic and social changes accompanying industrialisation will drastically weaken parental power and thus reduce the influence of parents over children. I argue, however, that while young women's experience of modern life has shaped their fashion consciousness, this has not led them to disregard their parents' opinions about what they should wear.

Fashion is closely allied to the modern predisposition to keep abreast of the times (Davis, 1992). Buckley and Fawcett (2002: 11) point out that 'fashion was inherently modern and it offered a transformative space in which women could attempt to mark out their personal sense of modernity, one which was as much to do with the private body as with the public world.' As a result of modernity, younger Taiwanese women seem to be more individualised; however, compared with the older participants in my research, their individual lives are by no means directly related to the emancipation of women. Rather, they are influenced by the transformation of the social and economic system and the reshaping of tradition. From this angle, I explore the complexity of young women's

---

[1] According to the virtue of filial piety, being an obedient daughter, wife and mother is the expectation in Chinese tradition. In addition to respecting their own parents, after marriage, women have to respect their husband and parents-in-law and to dedicate themselves to raising children.

perceptions of fashion in Taiwan by analysing the ways in which women are positioned between traditional and modern ideas of appearance.

4.3 The conflicts between parental influence and maintaining individuality

The conflicts between increasing concern about appearance and enduring perceptions of the relationship with family are the basis on which young Taiwanese women manifest their strategies for maintaining individuality as modern women. In contrast with most research on fashion in the last decade, the literature covering East Asia has generally focused on discussing macro phenomena, such as social transformation and the influence of globalisation (Barnes and Eicher, 1992; Hansen, 2004), and these studies have failed to take into account the nature and value of the parent-child relationship. In this section I suggest that attention to appearance cannot be wholly explained by freely choosing from the modern way of dressing and following fashion trends. Rather, family ties can be seen as an overriding factor in the difficulties young women have in escaping from their parents' influence. In discussing this I will focus primarily on the younger women I interviewed because they appear to have stronger ties with their parents and are more conscious of conflicts and negotiations.

4.3.1 The mother's role

A majority of participants described how to dress and what to buy as a personal choice for them to decide. However, this expectation of dressing for themselves was expressed in different ways by respondents and with different consequences for the interaction between parents and themselves. Out of my 24 participants, 21 women reported that their mothers loved shopping and/or cared about their own appearance very much. Thus, to some extent, these mothers applied their fashion sense or opinions to their daughters' appearance. Only three participants, Shirley (aged 27), Sandy (aged 31) and Justine (aged 30), described their mothers as uninterested in fashion; they did not dress up or wear make-up most of the time because they were too busy managing their businesses to take care of themselves. Therefore, these mothers were not involved in their daughters' appearance. Rather, Sandy and Justine would help their mothers with their appearance on special occasions, such as going to weddings. This reverse influence was evident in other accounts. For example, Felicia said of her mother:

She is very proud of other people saying her daughter is really pretty….maybe she also feels her taste is not that good so she doesn't really get involved in what I should wear. In fact she likes whatever I buy very much, and she often asks me if I could give her something… she desperately wants what I bought, and then she will ask if she can wear the same clothes as me…Of course NOT [chuckling], but I will wear something a few times and then give it to her as a gift if she really wants it. (Felicia, aged 23)

Sharlene (aged 29) had similar experiences with her mother, saying: 'My mom said I am like her mother-in-law, that I always micro-manage her too much.' Violet (aged 27) would criticise her mother's outfits: '…this is a piece that grandmother would wear. Please, you're not that old yet, so don't wear this type of clothes.' Jackson and et al (2013) suggest a recent trend in Hong Kong in which the mother-daughter relationship is becoming companionship in family chores, such as spending time together watching films or going shopping. Daughters advise their mothers about the right things to buy. In my research, too, a new form of mother-daughter relationship seems to be emerging, which now affects both of the age groups I interviewed. It is becoming more difficult to distinguish the roles of mothers and daughters. 'Mother' has taken on the role of a friend who can chat and even share clothes in addition to the more traditional role of nurturing and disciplining a child. This can result in reversing the expected pattern of influence in terms of both family hierarchy and fashion. Veblen and Simmel have described the process whereby taste and fashion work their way down from the top of the social hierarchy (Trigg, 2001). Thinking of this in generational terms rather than social status, taste might be thought to trickle down from parents to children, but the reverse seems to be happening – a trickle-up effect, where the opinions of children (traditionally in subordinate positions in the family hierarchy) trickle up to affect their parents.

Further studies of women in Taiwanese families have shown that individuals tend to think of parents collectively and frame the proper attitude towards their parents along the lines of traditional values such as esteem, respect and filial obedience (Szalay, 1994). However, even though relationships with parents seem to be changing with the social transformation, whether women are feeling empowered in terms of appearance remains questionable. Sharlene (aged 29) appears to be an individual with assertive characteristics and strong opinions. However, she told me that, while her mother never refused any request from her, she did not want to buy Sharlene a 'Dior' bag that she had

been longing for. 'If I wanted to buy it, I would buy one of those [Dior] handbags… if I really wanted to buy something later, I would. Right now, it doesn't make a difference whether or not I have it. I wouldn't be too impulsive, especially towards designer handbags. We already have an impulsive one in the family, I should put a damper on it [laughs].' Avoidance of direct conflict or disagreement remains clearly visible in most participants' statements, although they prefer to exercise their individuality when their parents are not involved. Sharlene considers that bargaining with her parents is unnecessary because she focuses more on harmony with them. Sharlene described herself as an obedient daughter. She found it very easy to just follow whatever her parents told her, saying, 'it's not bad, I don't need to think what's next…' As the only child, Sharlene has maintained a close and meaningful relationship with her family. Basically, Taiwanese women, no matter in which age group, tend to be obedient in the family. Sharlene takes her parents' teaching for granted, accepting it without question. This may be considered illustrative of her personal characteristics and her trust in her parents.

Trying to avoid direct conflict with their parents can also be noted in other young participants' narratives. Cultural ideologies reinforce the relationship with parents and most of the participants still adopt passive methods when confronting conflicts with them. Nevertheless, they believe that if they act more obediently in other respects, then, in exchange, they may be able to have more freedom to dress as they please. A common observation of the women aged between 19 and 24 is that they are liberated in their lifestyles, but psychologically and morally bound to their parents. Johnson and Lennon (1999: 3) propose that women adopt 'something of a compromise' when dressing for the workplace, that they would compromise between the more feminine and body-revealing clothes they would normally wear and the power-projecting, more 'modest' clothes demanded in the workplace. I argue that young Taiwanese women similarly resort to compromise in addressing the competing demands of patriarchy, self-expression and parental expectations.

The idea of reverting to the traditional while asserting individuality is also demonstrated in the women's descriptions of negotiating disagreements with their mothers. Nini (aged 26) commented, 'I wouldn't say [to her] that [she] doesn't get it, I would just say this is what everyone wears.' For Nini, the crux of her argument relies not on an assertion of herself and her uniqueness, but on the argument that she is similar to others – a trait seen as practical and useful. This reflects a concern about creating conflict by their

choices of clothing styles, as well as from their desired appearance. The avoidance of direct conflict is a common trait in most participants' statements. Thus, young women are appealing to a discourse of negotiation with regard to how they dress. According to Chang and Song (2010), risk-averse individualisation is a social tendency in East Asian women. As part of this, the existing family system is reconstructed through both children's negotiation and parents' compromise. While the younger generation recognises generational shifts as a 'cultural' difference and may compromise accordingly, it is not always possible to paper over more fundamental adjustments in values and judgments. These changes have generated new patterns of interaction between parents and children. The morality of the family system is not shattered but this ambivalent development of the parent-child relationship, intensified by means of consumption and leisure activities, offers opportunities for young women to feel empowered in their own lives.

Yet the degree of parental involvement that the younger participants in my study described in managing their appearance and the amount of effort they expended on adorning their bodies demonstrates that, even if they are individuals with independent financial means, their connection with their parents is still strong. If they earned pocket money while they were growing up, they could spend that but they asked their mothers' opinions first before or after spending it. Although some women do not identify themselves with their parents, they have found several efficient methods to avoid potential conflicts.

On the one hand, being obedient to parents is viewed as an appreciated characteristic for Taiwanese women, and most young women I spoke to claimed that they would never go too far. They tended to passively show disagreement with their mothers' taste in clothes. In talking about something her mother bought for her but she did not want to wear, Waverly (aged 19) said she was afraid of hurting her mother's feelings: '…the clothes would be left aside…I would say, "oh, I'll wear it another day" but I end up never wearing it… I would pretend to like it but wouldn't wear it… worried that I would hurt her feelings. Later on, she realised and she would just tell me to buy clothes myself.' Similarly, Jessie (aged 24) comments, 'she found out eventually that I never wore what she bought me.' The effort required to balance their preferences about appearance with avoiding possible cracks in the familial relationship caused from rejecting the clothes bought by their mothers is evident in most participants' accounts. Felicia (aged 23) also told me that she would 'wear it once or twice to give Mom "*mianzi*"' because she was

71

worried that her mother might suffer the uneasiness of losing face and feel a serious loss of self-esteem. Neither side will feel awful or embarrassed if one makes an effort to save face for the other. In this way, there is a common feeling running through the narratives that open disagreement should be avoided. This seems to provide these young women with a steady relationship with their mothers, or at least it is perceived to be a means to maintain harmony. These participants' past experiences have enabled them to find a way to compromise between being obedient to parents and insisting on their own favourite clothes. The women's accounts reveal that they are very aware of the importance of harmony in the family, showing their complex negotiations and the tension between the traditional conception of obedience and the modern ideal of being independent.

The avoidance of conflict is also transformed into more positive communication. Sherry (aged 23) talked about the differences when choosing fashion products between her mother and herself, saying, 'I feel that she has different tastes from me, so I wouldn't want her to buy things for me. I would much rather pick something out first and ask her to bring it back or to take her with me and for us to pick things out together.' The wish to control her own appearance implies a practical and dynamic conversation. However, for Anita, educating her parents to understand what she likes is a more positive attitude in terms of her parents' purchases:

> They would go and buy things that they think are good, but our definition of what is 'good' would be different. They might choose something with good material and a famous brand, but we feel like… it is so unstylish, the pattern is so ugly…then we would tell them. Later they would…let me take them shopping occasionally and I would tell them this is something I'd like, that is something I'd like. When we read women's or fashion or entertainment magazines, we would say, 'don't you think this one is really pretty?' If they said, 'well it's just ok,' we would tell them this is the trend this year, or that I have seen it being worn, out on the street. I would say to her that if she buys that piece, it would make us super happy. (Anita, aged 21)

This account refers to a sense of individuality, and most comment on how that would make them much 'happier'. Thus, there is evidence to suggest a degree of women's autonomy over their own appearance, even in the context of a traditional family structure. On the other hand, young women with authoritarian parents seem to be

restricted in exercising individuality; often they seem to accept this while simultaneously finding ways around parental restrictions to make their own choices. Judy, for example, revealed how her parents sought to influence her choice of clothes by interfering with what kind of clothes she was going to wear, including the style and the colour. She said:

> They buy clothes for me, buying the style they like – like proper gentlemen and ladies. When I was in fifth and sixth grade, my classmates were wearing denims, flares. I wanted to imitate them, but my parents said that jeans are for blue-collar classes and wouldn't let me wear them. (Judy, aged 22)

In Judy's family, parental dominance and financial dependence created a different sort of paradox, and while she accepted that wearing decent clothes is a representation of family status she still wanted these jeans. Although she was forbidden to wear trendy clothes, she was aware of what she could achieve with an independent income. Women need adequate sources of social and financial support if they are to defend their rights in front of their parents. Judy illustrated that she could use her New Year's money[2] to buy trendy jeans, even if they were not accepted by her parents. A degree of financial independence can give women more leverage in their relationships with parents, as does coming-of-age and reaching adulthood. As documented and analysed by many scholars (Kung, 1976; Gallin, 1994; Simon 2003), going out to work can transform family relationships. There was, however, one participant, Angel, who, despite earning her own income, continued to have conflicts with her parents about clothes:

> My parents don't meddle in many things, their only concern is my dress style. They are more conservative in this way. From the first they started muttering about my obvious change in hair and clothes styles. For them, what you wear is a serious issue, which represents the feeling people will have about you, the first impression. They think it is really critical….I tried to communicate with them, I told them that for people my age, in this era, it is common for us to wear clothes like these. It doesn't mean people will think I am strange, even if you think I am a deviant. Gradually they've come to accept it a bit but they still can't bear with it completely. For example, trousers cannot be low-waisted, the top cannot be low

---

[2] New Year's money is exchanged among family members during the Lunar New Year in red envelopes. For children, this often represents money that they can spend as they see fit as parents have limited say over how their children spend money they receive from grandparents. The amounts given may vary from family to family, but it is meant to be a "sizable" sum for the recipient.

neck, and hair colour cannot be too light. Now they don't criticize my hair colour any more but they still mutter about my clothes when they see me. (Angel, aged 23)

Like Judy's parents, Angel's were worried about what other people would think. It is about respectability and class. Angel was a student but had a stable income as a part-time model. Even so, a prevailing tension remains between parental expectations of a daughter's appearance and her insistence on her own outfits. For Angel, it is a bitter process of negotiating her appearance with her parents. It is not surprising that only a few participants embraced free fashion styles. The degree of frustration involved in convincing parents that they were not unusual for their age group was demonstrated in most participants' statements. In a number of ways, these younger women challenged dominant notions of expected femininity and rendered any return to the ideals of their mothers' generation impossible. In addition, Angel, as the only child in the family, considered that being obedient in doing chores should give her the freedom to be herself in exchange. She commented further:

> Because my mom is a competitive person, she always compares me with other people. Therefore, from their viewpoint, I become a disobedient child in comparison with others. However, I think I am not, as I do the chores, whatever they ask me, such as washing, cooking, etc. Actually, the only things that I want for myself are my dressing style and my appearance, but they just cannot accept it. (Angel, aged 23)

Angel is perceived by her parents as aberrant or somehow different from other women. Her account, however, suggests a strong consciousness of bargaining with parents – obedience in other respects in exchange for freedom to dress as she pleases. Even for rebellious Angel, Confucian values have not been completely abandoned. Respect for parents and the virtues of filial obedience are still operative, if only conditionally. In general, Angel depicted her parents as disappointed in her appearance. Her conflict with her parents had resulted in various negotiations and strategies to pursue her preferred style of dress. In this case, Angel had not benefited from her negotiations and compromises, either emotionally or from a practical point of view, in achieving her goals. As a result, she moved out of her parents' house and living independently has given her the chance to escape from these conflicts. Her family background has probably shaped her independent characteristics. What she found most difficult was

negotiating a pattern of family relations that she found acceptable. Now, when she visits her parents, wearing her favourite clothes but a bit more conservatively is a way to resolve the conflicts, so she chooses something acceptable from amongst her favourite clothes when going home. She summed this up by saying that she has gained a good life and self-respect by moving out of her parents' house. It has allowed her to take control of her own life and affirm a positive attitude towards her appearance. In this case, the parents seemed to be unable to reverse the rising tide of individualism that accompanies the diffusion of new forms of relationship through education and the mass media. The loss of parental control leads to a reversal in the power relationship, with the more individualistic children often being more assertive. This is also true for most of the older participants; for example, Sappho (aged 30), who is another example of rebellion, explained to me that her mother prefers her to wear feminine outfits but she herself prefers a more unisex appearance. Thus they always disagree with each other and Sappho tells her mother to keep those feminine clothes herself as she told her she is not going to wear them.

In Judy's case, parental dominance over the daughter's appearance could be gendered. Compared with her younger brother, Judy feels her mother always exercises more control over her. She also gave me a recent example to explain how difficult her mother is, saying:

> Like, even now, she doesn't let me wear nail polish. Every time I wear it, she says something such as how it makes me look like someone who works at a hostess bar[3] ... Like, I wore it two or three months ago, and she said 'you take it off right now, or I won't let you eat.' (Judy, aged 22)

In forbidding Judy to wear nail polish, her mother condemned her behaviour by presenting this misleading image of women who wear nail polish. In her account, Judy stressed that men are far braver than women in situations of conflict by recalling what her brother would do if he was forbidden to do something[4]. Being a daughter as well as a woman, each individual in my interviews found that it was very difficult to go against their parents. They had to make more effort to minimise and mediate the conflict.

---

[3] Hostess bars in Taiwan employ primarily female staff to serve drinks and provide conversation for primarily male clients. It is generally considered a form of sex trade since transactional sex can often be arranged between the client and the hostess outside of the bar, while the hostess is expected to behave as a date while inside the bar.

[4] Judy's mother once threatened to throw Judy's brother out for doing something, at which point, he promptly got up and left. Judy said this is something she would never dare to do.

The Taiwanese female self is characterised by a combination of personal compromise, social judgement and self-satisfaction. According to Lu and Yang (2006), the traditional Chinese view of the self, in sharp contrast to the Western view, is of a connected, fluid, flexible, committed being who is closely bound to others. Being obedient is usually used as a means to feel empowered in some other field. In Chinese tradition, women have been taught to resolve conflicts by using their 'instinctive femininity', within the broader context of 'softness overcoming hardness.'[5] Similar solutions can also be found among my participants. The lives of the younger women, with their different rhythms and educational backgrounds from their parents, vividly illustrate that personality is reconstructed by the patriarchal family system.

Apart from Angel (aged 23) and Judy (aged 22), almost all the younger participants show affective ties with their mothers. Coming from a family with a democratic education, Hsiao-Han (aged 22) has a close relationship with her parents and siblings. She explained to me that she relied on her mother's opinions on styles of clothes – 'If she said something was not good, I would think it wasn't good either. I always ask for her opinion when I see something pretty, but if she said no I would give up.' Nevertheless, Judy (aged 22) and Chrissy (aged 19) are two examples who, even though they are deeply influenced by their parents, would develop another strategy to please themselves. They listen to what their parents ask them to do but then still secretly go and buy whatever they want. Nevertheless, they learnt their basic knowledge from their parents but adopted it selectively. They retained some minimum obedience to traditional values and meanwhile sought a balance between their parents and themselves.

Therefore, these participants' experiences are similar to Jenks' (1996) suggestion that the self is process not structure. Despite the visibility of parents' influence on their children, each new experience of a family's involvement in decisions about appearance is actually generating the sense of self. Moreover, even the widespread knowledge of maintaining individuality cannot obscure the fact that parents retain their place as the ultimate disciplinarians in an authoritarian family. This phenomenon has already been demonstrated in the individualisation of consumption behaviour. Chrissy's account was emphatic when parents tried to meddle in her consumption. She is another example of taking parents' advice but exercising her own preference:

---

[5] 'Softness overcomes hardness' is a Chinese proverb that originated with the Chinese Taoist philosopher Lao-Tzu.

Mom told me that the products in those places where I go shopping are made in China or Korea, the cost is quite low so I should bargain further. My father also gives it a veto as they [her parents] have a franchise on this stuff, which means I don't need to buy it from outside. (Chrissy, aged 19)

Chrissy's account is an interesting mixture of an ideal relationship with parents and more individualistic notions. Chrissy is the only child whose parents run a clothing franchise. Therefore, they do not like her buying clothes from outside because they are aware of the difference between the cost and the selling price. 'I just listened to whatever they said but I would still go and buy it later. However, due to the opinions of my parents, I know how to bargain because I know the difference between the selling price and the cost.'

All of my participants appear to have found their own particular way to avoid conflicts and to please both their parents and themselves. They have been seeking a compromise in order to maintain their preferred style. My findings suggest that different family, educational and personal backgrounds generate different degrees of individuality concerning appearance. Yet the individuality shown by Taiwanese women indicates 'cooperative or altruistic individualism' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001: 28).

It can be argued that individualism in contemporary Taiwan is typically articulated in both authoritarian and non-authoritarian parental education, but the former requires young women to make more adjustments in expressing their individuality. In recent years, individualism has advanced rapidly throughout Taiwan, with the result that symbols of personal distinctiveness are coming to function much like individual logos. Exercising individuality may be combined in different proportions with traditional ideas; each often complements the other in Taiwanese society. A young woman's individuality can sometimes develop in the context of her family but may be suppressed in a more authoritarian family – yet a degree of individuality persists with specific strategies to manage her family's expectations. The compromise over appearance, having been exercised for years, followed a family rhythm that was tightly defined and negotiated.

4.3.2 The father's role

Fathers are not usually involved in how their daughters dress. Most participants described their fathers' approaches to their appearance as 'strict', 'harsh', 'distant', or simply left to 'different genders'. Also, it was generally felt that their opinions could not

be trusted. Fathers in the family system maintain the role of breadwinner but stay away from the family chores, which would cause less conflict and communication with children. The mother is the one to look after and educate her children. As expected, a few participants reported their fathers as completely absent in terms of commenting on their daughters' appearances but were more involved in issues such school or job choice and academic performance.

However, for those who were the only child, such as Chrissy (aged 19) and Angel (aged 23), the family emphasised the need to be independent, with the girls being taught to develop traditionally masculine skills in addition to more traditionally feminine ones. Angel commented:

> I was not spoiled even though I am the only child. My father believed that girls should be as strong as boys. I was trained like a boy, such as playing basketball, swimming, hiking with bare feet, changing bulbs and fixing stuff by myself. Also my Mom was influenced by Dad, she asked me to cook in the very early morning when I was only 9. (Angel, aged 23)

Concerned about their daughters being on their own, these fathers have been training them in life skills. The daughters, in some respects, are expected to be androgynous. There are different perspectives on the gendered expectations of female performance. It could be argued that parents' expectations of their children are not generated by gender but by the family structure. Also, in these two cases, a new ideal of a good father avoids sex-typing his children, encouraging girls to be assertive achievers and coaching them in competitive sports (Rotundo, 1985). Thus, when it comes to his daughter's appearance, Angel's father is less tolerant of her preening behaviour but Chrissy's father pays more attention to how she looks, including her height, body shape and what types of clothes she wears.

Like Angel's father, Judy's parents are more authoritarian, which has influenced her personality to become a little bit conservative. She reflexively indicates that her self-presentation can be traced back to her parents' educational methods by reaching into her early childhood, as well as the life histories of her parents. She usually does not do her own thinking in decision-making even since starting university, and she commented, 'most of time I accepted whatever they asked me because they would threaten to kick me out of the house if I dared to argue with them. They are really hard parents and I am

an obedient daughter.' Therefore, no kind of preening behaviour was allowed. Judy was told that they would buy something for her but she was not allowed to buy things by herself. Compared with her mother, Judy feels that her father has interfered less in her appearance. By recalling her experience in junior high school, she reflected on what was improper at the time:

> It was just too much. Because life in middle school was just too stifling, I would sometimes start to put on make-up in front of the mirror. My dad would think I was a little crazy. And then [after she hid the make-up] if he found it, he would just throw it out. (Judy, aged 22)

On the other hand, in addition to developing strategies to keep clothes and cosmetics, these young women still rely to an extent on parental opinions about their appearances.Tiffany's father gave her advice about how and what she should buy, which has influenced her and she agrees with it very strongly:

> He felt that, it's just that, you can't have everything. You have to first understand what is suitable for you and then buy something that is quality. It's like when I was in junior high, when you would just look at a magazine and then buy whatever looked good in it. There's no style in that. (Tiffany, aged 19)

Surprisingly, I found an unusual consensus among fathers and daughters. Fathers usually avoid emotional or practical involvement and distance themselves from this issue, so do the young women. Only if a daughter wore 'improper' clothes would fathers sometimes have a word. Vanessa gave two examples of her father's reaction and her responses:

> Like this one time I was wearing tights inside and then a t-shirt. The t-shirt wasn't very long but it still covered my butt. And then my dad suddenly said 'hey, it's a little transparent.' And I thought 'what?' and I said 'these are pants' and he said 'oh'. So then I said 'okay, I'll change into something that is less obvious.' On another day, if I was standing by the door and wearing a dress with the wind blowing, and it was billowy, he would then say, 'it's really windy today, you're wearing a skirt?' And because I would always wear denim shorts underneath, I would just pull up my skirt and show him that I have shorts on. And he would just say 'oh'. (Vanessa, aged 20)

Vanessa's parents, with whom she has a close relationship, are usually open and democratic about her decisions. But even in this context, her father was still the one who was 'more strict'. There is a sense that obedience and conflict-aversion are the better solutions. Also, most fathers' concerns about whether or not the clothes expose too much are couched in the context of their daughters' safety. Thus, most of these women would generally comply with their fathers' concerns. The democratic and respectful approach is also more favoured and accepted.

On the other hand, whether being obedient or not, there was an unspoken rebellion for Hsiao-Han. When 'actually' putting on her clothes, there was a strong sense of self that was assertive and took ownership of the process.

> I seldom talk to my father, he might mutter behind me, 'it's so short!' something like that but he never shows it in front of me. My mom did complain about what I wear, so did my auntie. My auntie complained to my mom and my mom complained to me. One time I went to my auntie's house to print out some papers. She asked my mom why she let her daughter wear a mini skirt at night, and my mom said 'I told her! I did tell her not to wear it that short!' (Hsiao-Han, aged 22)

Elsewhere in the interview, however, Hsiao-Han represented herself as an obedient daughter (see above). She rebels only in controlling her appearance. The power of dress (Johnson and Lennon, 1999) is considered to override the potential threat of disagreement from the elders. As for fathers' roles in the family, most of them choose not to express their unhappy feelings, in keeping with patriarchal fatherhood, which is dominant, condescending and distant. Although Rotundo (1985) suggests that fathers tend to be freer in expressing their emotions to daughters than to sons, in the Taiwanese cultural context some still remain mute in response to their daughters' outrageous behaviour, particularly when it comes to personal preferences about appearance. It is also believed that the mother, being another woman, has more understanding of a daughter's appearance and is a more suitable influence here. Taiwanese women often feel pressure from their parents and other family members. They usually assume that their fathers would be unhappy about some life details but they ignore this if there are no apparent conflicts.

Purposefully ignoring their fathers' critical attitudes is used to bypass patriarchal hegemony. Unlike fathers, mothers are considered to be more sympathetic, intimate and

understanding. Indeed, this may account for why many young women remained relatively immune to the influence of their fathers.

> Mom is very trendy. She dressed me up in sexy clothes when I was young. My father disapproved of it after I grew up, he would say 'you're too over-dressed like that'. But we [Mom and I] both disagree with him: 'how come? It's really pretty!' and finally he would accept it by not saying a word. Mom always has a positive attitude towards looking pretty. (Waverly, aged 19)

Regardless of whether the father is likely to agree with his daughter's demands, the girl will first turn to her mother for support for a number of reasons. In the case above, support from Waverly's mother proved useful in coping with the pressure from her father. Waverly allied with her mother to defend their dress preferences, and finally affected her father's expectations, establishing the new norms that are now accepted by each family member. The approval of a supportive mother can also be important in the form of social recognition from a fellow woman. Thus, in the context of Waverly's family dynamics, where a more consensus-forming relationship exists between parents and child, the mother's support plays a pivotal role in her daughter's choice of dress.

4.4 Individuality and fashion styles

We are now faced with decisions about who we are and how we want to be (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001). This notion could be applied to changing ideas about fashion. Compared with the participants in the older group, my younger participants expressed more concern about 'having diverse fashion styles' – 'it's better to change more' or 'I don't like to have the same style' and 'I don't want to be like other people' are common motifs in their accounts. They claim that they are not limited to certain styles but talk more about which clothes are right for them. Angel's (aged 23) part-time job as a model gives her many opportunities to try different clothes. Asked whether she preferred a particular fashion, Angel defined her styles as diverse: 'probably straight hair today but curly hair tomorrow, sometimes wearing cotton sweatpants, sporty style today but punk style the next day. I don't think I have a particular style.' What concerns me here are the various strategies of self-presentation and impression management, in Goffman's terms (1959). In her narratives, Angel did present herself as acting different roles through these styles, but as expressing her 'real self' through these various outfits. She sees this

81

variety of styles in her everyday presentation as a form of social amusement, saying, 'I quite enjoy people's surprised faces every time I show up in a different outfit, even if I have been living in that area for a long time.' According to Tseelon's notion (1995) of the visible/invisible self, the individual would feel threatened or as though they were being scrutinised when situated in an insecure environment; while they would feel confident or comfortable in the opposite situation. Nevertheless, Angel enjoys giving different impressions in a secure environment even though it is full of unfamiliar strangers who might possibly examine her. Therefore, Tseelon's dichotomous self appears to be more complicated here, in that an individual could also feel 'invisible' and confident even under scrutiny, as long as she is in disguise (dress/clothes). In other words, appearance would help a person to increase her sense of security or the feeling of being invisible, no matter who she is with or what environment she is in.

Yo-Hsuan claimed that she dresses only to please herself, and does not care what other people think of her:

> I am more avant-garde, more carefree. I feel that I am quite willing to try other different styles… I am more self-centred…I just feel that I'm myself when it comes to the way I dress. If I want my own style, I will dress the way that suits me. Yeah, wouldn't you go out with me if this is the way I dress? There's nothing I can do about that. (Yo-Hsuan, aged 25)

Yo-Hsuan contrasted her own style with those of others. There is no doubt that she finds great pleasure in a feeling of self-empowerment through her choice of outfits. She feels that her nonconformist attitude is embodied in her appearance through the way in which she dresses. Even in claiming this individuality, she is still engaged in impression management through her clothes, consciously adopting ever-varying styles according to her own whims – which she also contrasts with that of her mother's generation. She emphasised that what she calls her 'self-centredness' is limited to her appearance, that she subscribes to group norms and common social values in other aspects of her life. Dress, then, is an exception, which manifests itself in how she can 'be herself' and not have to be accountable to or affected by others, or comply with traditional values and standards. In terms of dress and appearance, she thus places a high value on the pursuit of her own happiness and the need to 'be herself'. Of note also is how her self-described 'avant-garde' behaviour is generally a variation from the peer group norm rather than a true deviation creating radical social norms. For example, she cites how she would look

at more than 'just Japanese magazines, but also American ones' for her inspiration and that she would mix and match different styles.

In terms of performing the self in everyday life, the young women maintained that they could be who they 'really are' by appearing different, not being constrained by some particular fashion styles. I would argue that women's complex modes of consciousness show that, whether or not making the right impression is a concern for them, the presentation of different looks is. This suggests that pathways whereby personal selfhood is linked to the diversity within metropolitan lifestyles.

Like many of the younger participants, most of the older women were confident about what styles were right for them. And in spite of their varied preferences for different fashions, they converged on a preference for something 'casual' and 'comfortable' rather than the height of fashion. These reasons are full of individualistic representations, which can be seen in most participants' accounts. Only one participant out of the older group, Nancy (aged 28), was not sure what styles were for her and tended to decide through trial by imitation. If one style does not work out, she will try imitating another person. Nancy's father and two brothers run a business in Mainland China, and she therefore had a close relationship with her mother, as well as her older brother when she was young. As her brother has a good sense of style, her mother always complains about her taste in clothes and how she coordinates them. 'Why can't you have the same taste as your brother?' she would ask. Her mother's comment made her insecure. She told me that she does not trust her own eyes very much and how much she cares about how other people look at her. As a result, she sought help with her appearance after beginning a new job, thinking that other people's opinions are more accurate, just like she used to with her brother:

> …like some of my friends, they can just give me something and say 'this will suit you.' At that point, I feel like it does indeed suit me….So this is why I want to learn from, imitate others, look at how other people accessorise...…There isn't a pattern I like in particular; just what others compliment me on the most. It's roughly like that. It's changeable anytime, but the style is about the same. (Nancy, aged 28)

Nancy's account reveals how the self is constructed via learning and interaction with others (Rahman and Jackson, 2010). Apparently she relied on learning through trial-

and-error, with validation from peer groups – what suits her and what doesn't – and built up her sense of fashion that way. She felt that accepting other people's aesthetics through learning and imitation had allowed her to enrich herself both aesthetically and emotionally. Moreover, how the choice of clothes is perceived and interacted with by others would actualise her own aesthetics. From another perspective, different interpretations of 'what suits me' are not usual in this case. Insecurity and uncertainty about the right styles can be found in Nancy's description. It is difficult to exercise individuality here as the problem was surely compounded by her personality and the influence of peer groups and family members.

Nini (aged 26) had a much stronger sense of her own style than Nancy but was still very conscious of others' opinions and affected by them. Nini had a habitual style, which was usually based on past experiences. She would sometimes adjust her dress styles by borrowing her mother's dresses to wear when she felt she was facing disapproval, such as when her boss jokingly commented 'are you dressed for a stage show?' She commented, 'some of mom's clothes … it's really proper. Like she has one houndstooth dress that I really like, it looks really good with boots. She's a bit shorter than me, so when I wear it it's above the knees and I think that's a great length.' Although she was prepared to wear something she would not usually choose in order to avoid other people's disapproval, feeling that she had a better interpretation of the same dress was an important way of balancing her individualism while conforming to the expectations of other people. Moreover, her interpretation of her mother's dress style symbolises a rebellion against the social norms. On the other hand, by incorporating her mother's dresses into her own lineup, she identified with and followed up her mother's fashion taste. This was often seen in participants' accounts in the previous section, where they shared the same bag with their mothers, with the exchange being in both directions. It appears that these young women may reference their mothers frequently when talking about dressing themselves. This inclusion shows that their adjusted individuality evolves on the basis of the connections and ties with their mothers. Certainly, in Nini's case, the retro theme becoming popular in fashion in recent years promoted this connection.

One of the main characteristics of Generation Y is 'fearlessness'. They dare to express different opinions; they dare to be unique. They emphasise self-confidence and happiness, which suggests a more individualistic focus. While they have plenty of opportunities and do not struggle for a livelihood any more, they still have to make a

path for themselves. Nevertheless, a slight difference between the two age groups is seen in the degree to which they are influenced by other people. The older participants, especially those born in the 1970s, whose parents experienced Taiwan's economic transition[6], might thus be familiar with a more precarious existence and would be more concerned about their appearance affecting their financial stability. Also, all of them had been working for a while. The impact of socialisation may also have contributed to these women making fewer claims to individuality. As a result, they are more aware of other people than of themselves. The distinctions regarding individuality between the two groups are easily drawn from investigating their backgrounds.

4.5 Diversity/Variability: I like it so much, but…

Seven of the 24 participants indicated that they were very certain about what styles they would adopt and that they avoided wearing things that could possibly expose their 'defects'. They were very much aware of which parts of their bodies were assets and which were defects. For example, Crissy (aged 19) said, 'I feel that I have a smaller stature, so I don't feel like I'm suited for… that style a while ago with the long t-shirt and the tights underneath… I feel that if I was wearing that I would feel shorter.' Felicia (aged 23) also talked about style in terms of physical limitations – 'I don't wear Capri pants because I feel that I have short calves but I would wear shorts – the whole proportion of the leg would look better, but because the Capri pants are around the knee, it makes me feel that my calves are cut short again.' In their accounts, once they noticed that certain clothes exposed their disadvantages, they would quickly abandon that style. These concerns can be attributed to self-consciousness about their bodies. This is a common phenomenon in most modern societies, but in Taiwan it might also be associated with the traditional Chinese feminine virtue of being pleasing to others. These participants demonstrated their distinctive concern with their conscious use of techniques that displayed selfhood and identity. Whether or not something is 'right for me' was repeatedly expressed in every participant's narrative. Women's self-identity develops through cultivating the self in relation to others (Rahman and Jackson, 2010).

---

[6] From 1951 to 1991, Taiwan experienced rapid economic growth. GDP per capita grew from 158 USD to 9016 USD, accompanied by a transition from a rural agricultural economy to an urban, manufacturing and services economy. At the time of the interviews, in 2009, per capita GDP stood at USD 16,359 per person (at nominal exchange rates). Source: National Statistics, Principal Figures (93SNA). Directorate-General of Budget, Accounting & Statistics (DGBAS): Taipei. http://eng.stat.gov.tw/public/Attachment/2112316482071.xls

Nini (aged 26) explained, 'I see how it looks on others and I feel that it looked good but it just wouldn't suit me. That's something I can't help, it's not that I don't want it.' However, no matter how this process orients my participants towards individualisation, it is never independent of others, particularly the family. Vanessa (aged 20) commented, 'so there are some clothes that I feel look good, but aren't right for me or are more mature, I would recommend them to my mother.'

Some participants linked their self-expression through fashion to their relationships with their mothers. They demonstrated their individualistic traits by disapproving of the way their mothers dressed. In particular, in Felicia's case, her mother always asked her opinion about how to mix and match clothes before going out. Felicia commented:

> …I could only tell her how to do colours as I don't really think her clothes are pretty. My brother and I always tell her frankly that what she has is just awful. My brother's major is fashion design, neither of us can stand the way she is about this [fashion].…..We find that what she considers beautiful is shockingly bizarre. (Felicia, aged 23)

As previously mentioned in Section Three of this chapter, the transformation of relationships with parents manifests itself in Felicia's mother asking her for advice. According to Felicia, she has known what clothes to wear and what designs would be trendy since she was a child. She puts this down to a 'natural instinct', feeling endowed with an intrinsic sense of aesthetics. Vanessa (aged 20), Waverly (aged 19) and Sherry (aged 23), on the other hand, identified with family members, seeing their fashion sense as inherited since others in their families have a sense of style. In neither case were wider cultural influences acknowledged; frequent exposure to information and the media could lead these women to a certain attitude towards their appearance, which is demonstrated in their knowledge of the latest information about fashion.

Furthermore, what emerges from Felicia's narrative is that, while she feels that her sense of fashion is superior to her mother's, her outspoken assertiveness is attributed to her family background. Her upbringing, she explained, is what has allowed her to develop an independent personality, which she expresses in her attention to beauty, the very thing that now brings her into conflict with her mother. She expressed frustration at not being able to change her mother, the very person to whom she attributes her

independence. Despite her claims to individuality, then, Felicia made frequent references to her family background.

Generally among the women I interviewed there is a confidence and assertiveness about clothes since they have been preening themselves since they were young. Certain elements of having their own fashion styles are often spoken aloud and developed with much attention. Their expression of individuality illustrates what Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2001) have termed 'self-culture' (2001: 42). With 'the practice of freedom' and 'self-organization' (2001: 43), making one's own fashion styles is a mode of self-realisation, a total lifestyle, and a means of individualisation. The women's accounts suggest that their sense of style has been developed through past experience. According to Jessie (aged 24), she began to have her own fashion style after going to college because she lost a lot of weight and started trying different clothes. For Jessie, her body is a prerequisite for being fashionable. For her, only when women are a decent shape, can they be considered as being 'in a certain style.' Conversely, clothes can make them feel better about their bodies. For example, chiffon tops and jeans made Violet (aged 27) feel slimmer so that she started feeling that she was 'in style'. What makes you look slim was also emphasised by Hsiao-Han (aged 22), who defined her fashion style as 'don't look not *chao*, look slim.[7]' These explanations suggest that Taiwanese women are strongly influenced by the idea of thinness (see Chapter 5).

On the other hand, Vanessa (aged 20) decided on her fashion style because of how others see her face – 'I think it's because a lot of people say I look cute, maybe because I have dimples. But I don't want to just look cute, because if my face looks that way I don't want the rest of my body to look like that. It feels disgusting.' Therefore, she wants something quite opposite. Vanessa's mother complained that she looked dark and gloomy and asked her not to confine herself to certain styles. So Vanessa would sometimes wear 'lively' and 'cute' clothes when the occasion called for it. This, again, demonstrates the negotiation between conforming to the expectations of parents and exercising individuality.

In addition to stressing their diverse styles, a number of participants also connected their style with their personalities. Anita (aged 21) commented, "there's nothing [fashion] set,

---

[7] *Chao*, which literally translates as tide, refers to fashion close to the trend. '*Chao-Bau*' is further used to describe something that is extremely fashionable, and is often used in reports, newspaper and magazines. It means something trendy that contemporary young people are pursuing.

because I have a more boyish personality but I like more girlish stuff, so I would buy girl stuff and boy stuff. I can look very handsome or look very girlish.' To go with their more easy-going personalities, Sappho (aged 30) and Sandy (aged 31) also look for clothes in keeping with their personalities. Sandy said, 'you can't be wearing lace and then sit there with your legs open wide.' Their self-awareness is the basis of their style-consciousness, which was accentuated by every single participant, for example by Sherry (aged 23), who described herself as 'knowing what [she] wants'. The younger participants seemed more confident about their own perceptions of what is right for them. A few participants mentioned practical reasons for their choice of style, such as that it should shift with age and social group. Although there were other reasons for adopting particular fashion styles, 'knowing yourself' was the most significant and the most important to the women I interviewed. Fashion styles, therefore, depend on a sense of self.

Fashion style itself is important in enabling an individual to present herself and to be seen in a way she is comfortable with. Most participants wouldn't dare to dress too differently, or would choose something low-profile and simple. This is evident in Vanessa's (aged 20) response, when she said, 'I wouldn't go over the top. It would be just a little bit punk, or just a little bit mature, or just a little bit cute. Nothing too over the top.' This was echoed by Anita (aged 21) and Mandy (aged 21). Anita felt that style has to stay within limits that most people consider to be acceptable, nothing too outrageous or 'weird'. The notion of having one's own fashion style has consequences, and Mandy acknowledged the consequence of standing out, saying, 'Well, I don't like being gawked at and pointed at by others, I would feel uneasy.' This constrained individuality is undoubtedly still prevalent for these Taiwanese women, but having one's own fashion style is idealised and all the women aspire to it. Shirley (aged 27) and Yumi (aged 26), moreover, both said that they would go for styles that are 'safe'. The idea of safe and relatively conservative dressing was commonly mentioned in most participants' narratives. This self-contradiction is pointed out by Wilson, who suggests that 'to dress fashionably is both to stand out and to merge with the crowd, to lay claim to the exclusive and to follow the herd' (1985: 6). Chrissy (aged 19) feels that she would need to spend a lot of time to accept new concepts, even if she really likes or really wants to try new fashions. The concern that the same item would look different on themselves than in the pictures is another reason why most participants are reluctant to try new things. For example, Chrissy admires Japanese girls' fashion styles, but when

it comes to fashion details such as lace and layers, she considers them to be 'over the top' and would rather choose something 'simple'. For all participants, the most significant concern is whether or not the fashion they choose is 'over the top'. Although most of them are willing and intend to try different styles, actually making it happen is uncommon for these participants.

These presentations of fashion styles are often linked to an individual's family. Sherry's (aged 23) mother and grandmother are very trendy and dress well all the time. Thus, Sherry's fashion styles are greatly influenced by them. She said, 'I don't really like those bright colours. Like when I pick my own clothes, I wouldn't want more than three colours on me. This is something my grandmother taught me.' So, while Sherry owns her fashion style and makes choices on her own, the family-derived aspects of the self are also evident. 'Mix and Match' is a maxim that applies not only to fashion, but also to their attitudes towards their own appearances, a mixture of individuality and conformity.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that these young women feel they cannot freely go for the styles they desire. Notably, terms such as 'over the top' and 'strange' were routinely used to criticise women's fashion choices – bad fashion as an aspect of non-conformity. Despite most young women talking assertively about their fashion styles, these constraints from family and society and the fear of being criticised have been internalised and form the social expectations of Taiwanese women.

There was one participant, Yo-Hsuan, who made her own observations about Taipei women and her own experiences. She positioned herself as an outsider observing the Taiwanese fashion scene. She takes pride in being different from other young women and suggested that it is self-restraint rather than social pressure that leads Taiwanese women to be less adventurous in their style:

> …my personal style is various, if you could tell from this [indicates the long skirt she is wearing] and then you could tell [my personality]. Yeah, if today you see a girl wearing a long skirt or something else, basically you could tell this girl is more willing to try alternative styles. Because some girls would say 'oh I am too short or wearing this [the long skirt] would be very uncomfortable, or, it's strange to wear long skirts.' If you carefully observe the street you can see there are very few women wearing long skirts. You see there's no one! I've been observing for a

long time, if I wore a long skirt for a whole day I wouldn't run into any other girl with a long skirt. Am I right? I feel that everyone still dresses very conservatively. (Yo-Hsuan, aged 25)

By comparing herself with other young women, Yo-Hsuan claims a distinctive and unique identity for herself in relation to the narrower range of dress styles common among other young Taiwanese women. Yo-Hsuan has an impression that foreign women's attitudes towards fashion styles are more open, exemplifying less restrictive fashions, 'I don't care what you're going to think of me, if I want to dress this way I will do, if I want to wear a tank top to show off my breasts it doesn't matter.' Although her exaggerated description is not entirely accurate, it does represent her aspiration towards a style liberated from the constraints of local conventions.

Yo-Hsuan clearly attributed her unusual fashion sense to her parents' laissez-faire education. She was born in Ilan and then moved to central Taipei when she was in primary school. Her father has been doing business in Mainland China for a long time while her mother is an international tour guide who focuses her energy on her own business. Yo-Hsuan indicated that her relationship with family members is simultaneously close and distant as each of them is busy with their own jobs. She received little supervision from her parents and had what she called a 'democratic' upbringing. Basically her mother did not meddle in anything; she never pushed her to study hard but prescribed very basic principles such as not troubling other people or breaking the law. She drew attention to a cause-and-effect relationship between what her mother taught her and her later perception of fashion. 'You have to know what your needs are, you have to earn money on your own if you want something and do not covet it if you are incapable of earning enough,' her mother said. Following this line of reasoning, Yo-Hsuan thinks that she places more weight on being happy, independent and in charge of herself than many of her peers. Her independent attitude may then be partially explained by the dynamics of her family, although she also shows an awareness of wider social influences, such as rising living standards, urbanisation and globalisation.

Based on her experience of travelling to South Korea and Japan, and being an opinionated personality herself, Yo-Hsuan made frequent references to the fashion phenomenon in Taiwan and compared it with the variability among both Japanese and Korean women. Feeling that she is different, and is seen differently, from most Taipei

women, Yo-Hsuan has developed a personal narrative to explain her perspectives on Taiwanese women's dress:

> Korean girls like feminine styles…They like wearing skinny skirts, body shaping [clothes]… Japan is more diverse. Japanese girls are more their own people. You can see a girl with her hair made up high, or you can see her really punk-ish or wearing a t-shirt on top and a long skirt on the bottom. It's very different. ….Taiwan is really very conservative…. [The style in] Taiwan is very 'middle path'. They don't want to make great changes but you can feel they are making some changes, however the changes are very minor. If you dress up a bit, people will ask you – where are you going? Do you have a date? But no, I dress up when I'm in a good mood, is it not allowed? I'm not going anywhere, I just damn well feel like it. Right? (Yo-Hsuan, aged 25)

The narratives presented here provide a broad portrait of current Taiwanese young women. Yo-Hsuan often stressed the differences in fashion consciousness between Taiwanese, Japanese and Korean women that she sees in their individual appearance, and how these relate to a more ordinary and conservative dress code. She argued that young Taiwanese women are less willing to accept diverse clothes than Japanese and Korean women. She also pictured Western women as self-assured in demonstrating their individuality through fashion, whereas Taiwanese women need social affirmation or support to wear different clothes in exercising their individuality. Her forthright opinions were associated with wishing to challenge people's conservative attitudes. She also claimed that she would not change her dress style even if it were questioned many times.

To a certain extent, all the young women have been testing how far the public is willing to accept their appearance. Such a challenge becomes more than a mere *expression* of their individuality but is a formative part of it, defining their relationship with the outer world in terms of personal compromise and social expectation. Yo-Hsuan is unusual in pushing individuality to its limit and refusing to compromise in order to fit in.

In contemporary society, women consume clothes or dress themselves to demonstrate the self or to shape their personal lifestyles. This is currently the most successful display of one's individuality and freedom as well as the most tangible application of freedom in a market society. Because of this, every consumer can claim that she has achieved

freedom in dressing herself. However, in Taiwan's cultural context, how far does freedom in consumption equate with individuality? Kampmeier and Simon (2001) argue that in the past discussions of individuality have focused on either independence or differentiation. They point out that individuality contains both elements: independence and differentiation. Kampmeier's and Simon's (2001) definition of individuality can be applied to Taiwan's cultural background. Most participants from my study have developed a desire to self-determine their appearance, free from familial restrictions or influence, i.e. independence of taste. Although these young women were raised with different parenting styles, they all express a desire to think and choose independently about their appearances. The majority of participants in my research agree that their mothers loved shopping and/or cared about their own appearance, but only a few participants approved of their mothers' tastes. Consequently, when mothers buy clothes they feel are appropriate or beautiful for their daughters, the daughters would either object, pretend to accept, or even educate their parents on what is considered fashionable. This differentiation of their taste from that of their parents could be seen as individuality in the sense of differentiation, in which they want to be able to make their own decisions on appearance and have fashion outfits which are different from those of their mothers' generation.

If the parents adopt an authoritarian attitude toward their daughter's appearance, the daughter may still insist on her individuality and preference for clothes other than those their parents approve of. For example, Angel moved out of her parents' house in order to freely wear what she likes. Judy, another participant with authoritarian parents, believes that financial independence would allow her to wear jeans which are not acceptable to her parents. In contrast, if the parents have been emotionally supportive or tried to communicate with their daughters, these young women would enjoy better relationships with their parents, with greater degrees of dependence on their families. Yet, they would still enjoy a high degree of independence in choosing their own clothes and maintain clear differentiations between current fashions and the fashion of their parents, expressing a degree of individuality overall. For example, Anita and Sherry would take their mothers shopping and educate them about young women's fashion in case their mothers want to buy clothes for their daughters. These young women are willing to share experience on shopping or ideas on dressing themselves with their mothers. Independence in choosing outfits is simply facilitated in a family with more communication. Differentiation from their parents' generation in this context is less

obvious, but it does persist. Because of the concept of respecting elders and higher attachment to their families, these young women usually make efforts to negotiate with parents in order to keep parents' 'faces' and avoid direct conflicts. From my participants' accounts, there is some evidence to suggest individuality as differentiation is variously exercised in the Taiwanese family, with women constantly wrestling with their parents to establish their own taste. Paradoxically, however, differentiation from parents in the name of individuality is susceptible to peer pressure and their desire to fit in with their friends – there is a compromise of being similar but not identical in style. Therefore the degree of individuality that emerged here might be limited but is still valued by these young women when they themselves talk in terms of individuality.

4.6 Summary

For both age groups in this research, certain changes in parent-child relationships have taken place at the confluence of modernity and tradition. Although these changes are complex and contradictory, there remains a great deal of ambivalence and conflict between parents and children. The first thing to note is that the importance of parents' opinions is seen as conditional from the viewpoint of the interviewees. Overall, Taiwanese women have demonstrated a high level of individualisation, but this individualisation retains strong links with elders and families, especially the mother. And while the mother-daughter relationship has changed (from a more authoritarian relationship to today's more friend-like relationship), mothers were commonly mentioned spontaneously in the participants' accounts as being influential. Perhaps it is due to their shared gender that both mothers and daughters are interested in fashion and appearance, but it is notable that the mothers would often seek their daughters' opinions about clothes, with the daughters' opinions more often accepted by their mothers than vice versa. Most of the participants reported having accepting parents who wouldn't interfere with things that should be decided 'on their own'. But when these young women's clothes did not conform to expectations, most parents would step in, resulting in compromises between the daughters and their parents. In terms of appearance, they have learned to feel empowered through continual negotiation, applying economic power and self-cultivation. There is no reason to assume that young Taiwanese women have less freedom in caring for their appearance than Western women, but they do have less freedom when it comes to the conflicts between parents and the self. Asserting one's own preferences in appearance and conforming to parents' wishes co-exist.

Despite the expression of self-identity through fashion, where the self must be articulated externally, it seems that authoritarian patriarchy, albeit in new forms, remains in place in Taiwanese society.

Most participants are certain of what is appropriate and most of them consider themselves to represent the standard of acceptance. For the majority of interviewees, executing their own fashion styles is linked with many concerns. And although they talked freely about what is the right style for them, it is evident that these young women make their choices under the invisible control of family bonds and social pressure. This may reflect the nature of the Chinese self (Lu and Yang, 2006), which is considered to be more other-directed than the Western self. Self-constraint in choosing their own fashion styles is illustrated by the participants' concerns about being 'not too over the top' or feelings of shame about the body's 'defects'. They exercise individuality in fashion styles in the context of familial and social structures.

Chapter 5 The Curse of Being a Beauty – Women's Conformity and Resistance under Patriarchy

5.1. Introduction

Our appearance is our most direct visual interface with other people. To some extent, appearances are inevitably objects of attention in our daily lives. Not only do they guide other people's judgments of us but they also regulate and exemplify our self-identity. We are, in one sense, trapped by the performance of appearance. As Johnson and Lennon suggest, 'appearance will capture attention in social interactions' (1999: 1). Female appearance is commonly discussed and linked with techniques of femininity and body image. Although the standard of beauty in Taiwan is characterised by slimness, femininity and delicate looks, it seems that young women are still struggling with norms regarding appearance, and amongst my participants discussions of appearance invariably produced talk of body dissatisfaction. As attitudes towards beauty standards vary, it is necessary to consider how young women are responding, including feelings of anxiety and rebellion expressed by participants about conforming to social standards. These issues are developed further through the concept of 'beauty is power', which has been strengthening and gaining prominence in women's fashion.

The central focus of this chapter is the way in which participants have conducted themselves in order to construct feminine appearances, both for their interactions with society and for themselves. This chapter attempts to explore the complex attitudes and ideas surrounding weight, feminine looks and make-up. There are constant debates about body image and some of these have caused intense discussion about the aesthetic ideals we impose on ourselves and others. I have tried to focus on cultural ideals of facial and bodily attractiveness. By examining women's lived experiences of their concerns about weight, feminine looks and make-up, I will discuss how such awareness ties in with individuality and self-presentation within the context of the cultural imagination.

The discussion begins with a focus on concerns about figure – body shape and size. Looking slim or being slim has long been a pursuit of Taiwanese women. This involves viewing the body as a site for critique and drawing out contradictions between individuality and the collective as experienced by participants. I then bring in

participants' accounts of the ways in which young women talk about feminine appearance, how they define it, and how they try to construct a desired image. The contradiction this chapter addresses is the paradox of individuality represented by the appearance. This will be explored through redefining the meaning of their act of wearing skirts in Taiwanese society and of the links with traditional expectations about women's appearance.

The last part of this chapter deals with the importance of make-up to feminine appearance. In analysing the narratives, I have paid special attention to the relationship between attractiveness and how putting on make-up makes one feel more attractive and confident and how this affects women's self-identity. The issue here is whether traditional femininity empowers these young Taiwanese women in social settings or, on the contrary, if feminine looks undermine their agency.

5.2 Concerns about body/weight

There exist unspoken expectations about what constitutes a beautiful woman's body and appearance. What is predominantly a highly stereotypical idea of female appearance has shifted women's perceptions of their physical presentation. For example, most women express an interest in 'losing weight' or 'going on a diet', even though they are far from overweight. Especially in East Asian countries, a slim figure is prized in any circumstances. All of the participants in my research believe that a slim body can improve self-confidence in their own appearance. Since the late 1920s, the preference for a taller and fuller physique indicates that women have been gradually influenced by westernisation and modernisation (Ng, 1998). Influences from Japan and the West have added even more physical ideals and requirements, further increasing the dissatisfaction that Taiwanese women felt with their own bodies.

Shih and Kubo (2005) note that 39.5 per cent of Taiwanese perceived their bodies as 'fat'; previously Wong and Huang (1999) reported this percentage as 51.4.[1] Of my 24 participants, only Sharlene (aged 29) is entirely happy; she states that she is 'super' satisfied with her body, no matter how other people criticise her appearance. There are five women who describe their body shape as 'OK', and are slightly dissatisfied with

---

[1] This could indicate a decline in body dissatisfaction or may simply be a chance effect of different studies conducted at different times.

some parts of their bodies. The rest of the participants report their body satisfaction as 'strongly dissatisfied' or 'dissatisfied but acceptable'. Women commonly criticise their bodies and rarely feel able to state their positive bodily attributes. This self-criticism is evident in my interviews. According to Sanders and Heiss (1998), fat phobia is not common amongst Asian women, yet body dissatisfaction is. This argument fits with my participants' descriptions on the topics of body satisfaction and the idea of beauty. Chen et al. (2010) also suggest that different ethnic groups reflect differences in the perception of body weight and dissatisfaction, thus body image is culturally determined. In other words, the standard of beauty is defined by culture and time (Fallon, 1990).

The idea of 'slim is beautiful' has become a deeply rooted ideal in Taiwanese society. With the continued affirmation of this ideal by the media, the value of a slim body is undeniable. The women interviewed were very concerned with their bodies, and expressed anxieties about body shape. The perfect body and the ideals of social expectations encourage them to live up to the preferred body image demanded by the public. As Caputi suggests, a woman's body is her own 'enemy and obsession for life' (1983: 191). The most common opening phrase in the conversations with my participants in the interviews was 'if I were boney…' They felt that if they were thinner, they would 'look nice in anything' and would not be restricted to certain styles. The idea of 'looking good' (Craik, 1994: 69) seems to be associated with 'looking slim'. Slimness is interpreted as receiving more compliments and makes women feel confident.

Violet (aged 27) expressed her admiration for her thin colleague. Moreover she claimed that her boss judged women's competence at work in terms of their appearance, which mostly depends on whether they are slim or not. In addition, she believes in the multiplying effect that a slim figure has on her colleague's taste in fashion and her admirable appearance. Therefore, Violet and other colleagues would choose clothes similar to their thin colleague. She further stressed that her colleague would not feel uncomfortable with their imitation because 'she is very skinny, only 40 kg something, so no matter what she wears, any clothes on her are definitely better than on us.' Slimness is extended to perceived attractiveness and higher individual value, which is commonly believed to lead to more success in the workplace. However, it also implies an unspoken competition to be slim. In Violet's account, the perceived differential in body-shape attractiveness is so large among her colleagues that it prevents competition and settles into a more friendly equilibrium. Even though the non-competitive imitation of fashion styles is seen as harmless, the body is certainly a site of competition amongst

97

women. Violet further addressed her feelings about wearing the same clothes as her thin colleague:

> It was embarrassing, with her [wearing the same clothes] in orange and me in black. Other people pointed out 'eh, you're wearing the same thing today' and I would say 'yeah, we're dressed like sisters today.' And then later I would secretly tell my colleagues that 'it's too much, she's so thin and I'm just like this. When I wear it, it's clear that I'm fatter. Damn it.' (Violet, aged 27)

This paradox also emphasises the social and cultural nature of perceived body image, and how it is linked to the level of compliance with the dominant ideals. The idea of being slim is not only prevalent in the younger generation, but also affects parents' attitudes. For example, Chrissy's father very often complains about her plump body figure and height. Chrissy said:

> My father always says that 'you are so fat, if you don't know how to study, at least make yourself presentable!' ……At one time I sneaked to the kitchen at night to find something to eat, he was so angry at me! (Chrissy, aged 19)

The traditional patriarchal opinion of women's value is evident in Chrissy's narrative. She is the only child in the family and describes how she and her mother are afraid of her father's criticisms. Her father is regarded as being cruel about her appearance, just like other people outside the family. During the interview, she did not indicate that she disagreed with her father's criticism. Her attitude towards her father's judgment of her body is apparently one of powerlessness since she later told me that she cannot help having these 'congenital defects'. Silence, and thus tacit agreement with, the judgements of parents is a common strategy for Taiwanese women. Chrissy avoided direct confrontation with her father while being questioned about her self-care with regard to her appearance. She positioned herself as a subordinate and silent family member while being equal and even spoiled in other aspects.

When women are exhorted to change their unsatisfactory appearance, it becomes more difficult to exercise individuality in the face of the prevalent aesthetic body expectations or an authoritarian father. On the other hand, responsibility for taking care of the body/figure implies a complex interrelationship with women themselves. As Bordo (2003: 171) notes, young women 'must learn to embody masculine language and values of that arena – self-control, determination, cool, emotional discipline, mastery, and so

on.' Therefore, keeping one's body in shape is associated with self-discipline. These expected virtues have persisted in redefining representations of body image that are closely bound up with others. I suggest that the construction of body image has been invested with a great deal of the individual self.

Bordo has examined contemporary disciplines of diet and exercise as training 'the female body in docility and obedience to cultural demands while at the same time experienced in terms of power and control' (2003: 27). Helen (aged 31) is an example of someone who considers that a woman needs to be satisfied with her own appearance if she expects other people to react to her positively. She thinks women should go on a diet/lose weight before clothes shopping, saying, 'First lose weight until you reach a level that you find okay, so that when you're shopping, the sales lady won't be saying "we have a larger size". You should go shopping only when you're not going to hear this sentence.' Helen's assertion that she would lose weight before trying clothes on highlights the value placed on slimness. Moreover, maintaining one's body size and shape is a demonstration of self-regulation and self-control over the physical body (Bartky, 1990; Bordo and Haywood 2003).To some extent, then, Helen's narrative suggests a broader internalised ideal that women should be self-conscious about their bodies. The implication that 'you need a bigger size' represents Taiwanese women's fear of judgements from salespeople that might trigger negative self-feelings. Even so, in Helen's case, losing weight means more to her in terms of self-satisfaction, indicating the interrelationship between the individual self and cultural ideals.

Even more, the desire to fit into small-size clothes drives some participants to wear uncomfortable garments. Shirley (aged 27), Violet (aged 27) and Tiffany (aged 19) used to occasionally buy clothes that were one size too small to make their body look more perfect, or to some extent, to persuade themselves to lose a few pounds, squeezing into tight clothes. Angel (aged 23) comments, '[some jeans] make you look very thin, with the butt really perky. So that even if it's really uncomfortable to wear, I would still wear it, just not as often.' Violet also illustrates her obsession with looking slim by wearing super tight jeans: 'If I'm going out then I would like to look pretty …my fat always comes out when zipping it. But today I am hanging out with friends, the photos of me have to be good…' These participants all explain their tolerance of uncomfortable clothes as due to the fact that they make them look 'good/slim'. The compromise between discomfort and looking slim is reached by the frequency of wearing an item and reserving it for a special reason or occasion. A sense of pleasing one's self is a

common phenomenon in terms of dressing up. While they are concerned about their appearance, they also evaluate the compensation and advantages gained from their tolerance of uncomfortable clothes. This tolerance is thus conditional. When special occasions arise, wearing such clothes becomes worthwhile in order to present a better image: in Violet's (aged 27) case, looking slim in group photos. These women put up with the physical discomfort when they feel they need to present an image satisfactory to themselves and to others. This is a conscious trade-off that they are very aware of and they compromise their physical comfort according to the expected benefit. The accounts indicate that women seek to find a balance between their self-projected expectations and self-inflicted discomfort. This perceived pleasure stems not from the way they dressed but from the result they achieved by dressing in that way. However, the young women have come to prefer more comfortable clothes after experiencing clothes that are one size too small. Tiffany (aged 19) has transformed herself from dressing for other people's eyes to presenting a more individual sense of her appearance. She comments, 'Now I think I shouldn't torture myself. Comfort is more important than body shape. I would rather look bigger than wear something uncomfortable.' Individuality was repeatedly invoked by the interviewees to distinguish themselves from the hegemonic standards when it comes to feeling comfortable. Yet sometimes it is difficult for women to find a balance between pleasing themselves and presenting a better image. As Tiffany continues, 'No-one really cared and I didn't get any compliments after I dedicated so much to body shaping with clothes.' By the end of Tiffany's account, it becomes clear that the reaction of other still matters: whether other people 'care' or 'notice' is still a concern. Women might be more susceptible to presenting the desired image (and accepting physical discomfort) if their efforts were recognised and complimented.

Sandy (aged 31) would not try clothes that are one size too small because she felt it was ultimately unrealistic, but she would 'try to maintain my figure right now, and try really hard to get it smaller.' For Sandy, keeping herself in shape means having enough power or leverage to compete with other Taiwanese women and achieve the expected body image. These young women still tend to locate themselves within a 'standard' track of appearance even though the majority of my participants realise the difficulties of conforming to public aesthetics by endeavouring to be presentable in their appearance. Even though they are very keen on slim figures, in reality it is very difficult to achieve them. Therefore key issues influencing the desire to present slim images in decreasing order of importance are age, time and life stage. Shirley (aged 27) reports that 'I didn't

use to think about it much, but now do, and think more about it' and added that she 'aspires to it, but it doesn't seem do-able'. As a result, her frustration about losing weight has turned her towards buying something she 'hopes to wear in the next three days.' Justine (aged 30) has a similar reason for wearing something immediately if she buys a fashionable garment – 'by the time you've lost [the weight] it could be winter or summer and you can't wear it. And by the time it's next year, your style could be out of fashion.' These participants emphasise the temporality of fashion and its significance, implying a desire to accept their bodies and themselves in their *present* state as opposed to a possible future. Sherry (aged 25) is unsatisfied with her lower body, so she would wear something to cover it up instead. She said, 'The replacement of fashion is so speedy. It's too late to lose weight in order to fit in a dress. Before that day, the dress you want to squeeze into has gone out of the trend.' In many cases, these young women would rather find clothes that can create the appearance of being slim rather than actually losing weight to fit the clothes.

Nini (aged 26), like many other participants, is satisfied with her body except some parts of it. She has been dissatisfied with her lower half since she was in high school, describing her hips and thighs as 'large', 'plump' and 'a bit fat'. How she will appear in front of other people has been a great concern in her life. Therefore, wearing skirts becomes a means to hide her lower body. In order to avoid possible judgements from other people, participants emphasised the importance of wearing the 'right' clothes to convey the ideal image and boost confidence. Bartky's (1990) and Bordo's accounts of women's self-surveillance[2] seems to fit with the experiences of the women in this study, particularly their descriptions of covering or disguising unsatisfactory parts of the body. Nini continues to illustrate that hiding her body defects makes her feel more confident and secure and that this outweighs the possible inconvenience of wearing skirts. She comments, 'it [wearing skirts] is not a problem if you are careful. Body shape is a problem that you cannot look out for every time. I am more concerned that other people see me as fat. Slim-looking is more comfortable.' Dissatisfaction with their bodies thus not only has an impact on their preference for certain clothes, but also strengthens the fear of displaying a non-presentable body image. As Tesslon has pointed out, 'the anxiety resulting from threats to self-validation occurs where there exists a potential failure to convey the self-image' (1995: 48). Judy, aged 22, was concerned that her

---

[2] Both Bordo and Bartky draw on Foucault's notion of the 'docile body' and his ideas on self-surveillance (see Foucault 1977).

body was a bit fat so she never bought clothes online as she was worried about buying something she could not fit into or pull off. Concerns about the body are usually the key to influencing women's decisions on where and what to buy. Although it is very common for women to make an effort to hide body defects, it is notable that self-awareness is more obvious in the contemporary generations and they tend to be more realistic about their concern with appearance. My participants seemed to mask their inability to change such social standards by indicating that they fully controlled their own bodies. Instead of fulfilling the fantasy, these young women seek more practical methods to deal with their dissatisfaction with their bodies.

As mentioned above, many of the women's strategies have evolved from actually being slim to appearing slim-looking by means of clothes. Participants' accounts highlight that young women's desire to be slim is social in origin while the change from being slim to looking slim is a product of social and cultural influences and their interaction with others. In my interviews, the younger women claimed that their perception and judgement of their appearance was theirs alone. Unlike the older group, the absence of comparison with others was very noticeable in the conversation. The younger participants would claim that they are dissatisfied with their appearance because they feel that way, not because of the judgements of other people. They tended to deny social influences in order to represent their confidence, self-responsibility and individuality. Compared to the younger group, the older participants would more frequently compare themselves to other people or even their younger selves – perhaps suggesting a re-evaluation of appearance as they aged. For example, Violet (aged 27) compared herself with one of her thin colleague often in terms of their body difference. In addition, she comments, 'when I was young, I used to buy small-size clothes because they looked good and I imagined that one day I would wear them. However, I realised that becoming thin was a distant, distant goal [laughs] and they [those clothes] all ended up being given away'. External pressures and people's judgements have a greater impact on them. Their concern about the judgement of the outer world often diminishes their sense of self and their ability to adopt a confident attitude about their appearance.

Despite dissatisfaction with their bodies, some resistance can be seen among those who express body concern in order to escape from the ideal of thin women (which has become prevalent around the world) yet at the same time achieve a standard of physical beauty. A few participants try to fight against these standards. For example, Chrissy appears to be resistant to this ideal, feeling unhappy with the pressure when it comes to

sacrificing her favourite sport. She told me that many people around her, including her father, as mentioned above, mock her plumpness. She used to care about what they said, but now this has changed.

> Of course I want to be slim but it is a bit difficult [chuckling] because exercise makes it difficult. … I want to play basketball if I can only choose one or the other [either playing sport or being thin] because it makes me happy.[3] (Chrissy, aged 19)

Even though looking slim is universally approved, being happy with herself is also very important to Chrissy. She further comments, 'It [society] is really unbelievable, I am not that incredibly fat!' The intensity of the overwhelming thin ideal has backfired due to the negative associations of meanings constructed by and through her family and friends. The gap between reality and the desired image is regarded as impossible to bridge in Chrissy's case. Chrissy also cited the person who introduced me to her, saying that 'he feels that I am plump too!' to reinforce her own notion of self. Even though some friends told her she was cuter because of her plump figure, she thinks they were lying to her. Despite objecting to the aesthetic standards, Chrissy repeatedly fell back upon the social ideal of women's bodies in the struggle between her own feelings as happy but 'plump' and the 'ideal' slim body. Chrissy, however, would still prefer to enjoy playing basketball (and, as a result, put on a little more muscle) than conform to the ideal figure, showing a balancing act between other, non-appearance aspects of her identity with her body/figure.[4] Such a claim to pleasure can be found in most of the younger participants' responses. They tend to argue that they worry less about social judgements.

Violet (aged 27) displayed her simultaneous admiration and disdain for thin women, describing her thin colleague by saying, 'We always pick up her clothes and laugh, "Are these clothes for puppies? How can a human squash into this size?"' Her account illustrated that her attitude towards being slim is contradictory because at the same time she wants to defend her appearance as acceptable and 'normal'. Although Violet and Chrissy both consider clothes on a slimmer woman as prettier, Violet complains about these women having an 'abnormal' size in clothes. The prevalence of the thin ideal has been associated with Taiwanese women's perception of 'being normal'.

---

[3] While in the West the ideal is a slim toned body (see Bordo and Heywood 2003), with exercise as a way of achieving this, in Taiwan the ideal is much skinnier – muscles are not desired.

[4] In fact, to Western eyes, Chrissy would seem extremely thin rather than 'plump' or overly muscled.

The pursuit of this thin ideal (as normal Taiwanese femininity) thus fits with what Bordo (2003) writes about body management being a normalising process. At the same time, however this ideal can be seen, as in Violet's account, as 'abnormal'. Therefore this 'normalisation' of the thin body in a Taiwanese social context can be, making it normal for women to wear 'abnormal' sizes. Some women, like Violet, are aware of this paradox, yet they continue to compare themselves with the standards of an ideal body. The women in different age groups are all subject to social pressure. They clearly felt this struggle to 'be normal' hence their contradictory attitudes to the ideal.

All of my participants, however, ultimately desire a slim-looking image or 'paper-thin' body, although some disagree with an ill-looking thin body. This seems to contradict the notion of Shih and Kubo (2005), who suggest that Taiwanese women maintain traditional Chinese notions about women in which thinness was associated with poverty, bad fortune and ill-health. Huang and Chang (2005) argue that young women's perceptions of body images have been affected by gender (women feel less satisfaction with their bodies than men do), age (younger women feel less satisfaction with their bodies, the media and interrelationships with other people (Huang and Chang, 2005). My findings confirm this except in relation to age – the younger women in my sample were more satisfied with their bodies than the older group. All the women I interviewed, however, experienced Taiwan's prevalent pressure to be slim and among both age groups the tension between resistance and conformity was evident.

Cash et al. (1997) argue that women's physical beauty is more closely associated with the attentions of the opposite sex; however, my participants' accounts suggest a 'male-absent' body concern. During the interviews, all participants discussed their anxiety about body images, but males did not appear to be influential in the findings that young Taiwanese women are significantly affected by the standard of beauty and have been struggling to conform to it.

There was one participant who was detached from both social standards of beauty and a dedication to looking slim. Shelby shows some individuality by accepting body parts she considers unsatisfactory.

> Westerners have the advantage of having long legs… for Asians the advantage is being thin… then I feel I'm neither. I'm not thin and my legs aren't long enough. But I feel this is also a good thing, because then there are not many clothes that

you can buy. You get to save money because you would spend a lot of time picking something out before finding one or two pieces. That's good too; I would comfort myself by saying 'if you looked good in everything you would be bankrupt, because you would want to buy them all, and that would be bad.' [laughs] (Shelby, aged 29)

In positioning herself as lacking the advantages of either ethnic group, Shelby nonetheless found that there might be benefits in not having such an ideal body. There may be a limited range of clothes that suit her but, because of this, she can take comfort in not being tempted to spend too much money.

Experience of other social environments may lead women to revise their feelings about their own bodies. Feeling more comfortable about showing fat in foreign countries than in Taiwan was expressed in some participants' accounts. Shelby described her experience while staying in the US: 'In America you don't have to pay too much attention to appearance when you're wearing clothes. It's okay even if sometimes the pants are tighter and the fat around the belly shows a little, because everyone is like this. But this wouldn't happen in Taiwan, because everyone would want to hide that piece of fat. So it's freer in America, there's no restrictions.' Shelby talked at length about the way most Americans dress and how she felt happier with their casual style. However, later on the social pressure caused by living in different places forced her to spend half a year adjusting her appearance to the fashion styles/body figures of Taipei. It is this experience that seems to have influenced her perceptions of body images, making her aware of the ways in which different environments affect her confidence and satisfaction with her own body. Jessie (aged 24) also described her different feelings before and after going abroad, 'I've seen other people dress this way. Her figure wasn't great but she would still wear it, and it was okay, then I can do it too.' After coming back to Taiwan, she dares to wear shorts and skirts that are thigh length and shorter because the confidence that Westerners have in their bodies has given her more self-confidence. While most of the interviewees showed their concern about whether their body qualified as having a slim shape, comparisons with experiences abroad could change this, demonstrating the influence of social expectations in different cultures. For Jessie, after studying abroad in the UK, concern about body shape was no longer the problem of dressing up; she was more concerned about the restrictions placed on her by her job as a teacher as opposed to the casual style she had adopted as a student in the UK.

Vanessa (aged 20) explained again that all Taiwanese women care so much about being slim, however, 'abroad, we're already smaller. Because everyone abroad is more open, so if I'm abroad, I would wear sleeveless clothes. In Taiwan I wouldn't really wear anything sleeveless, except to go to the beach. But abroad it feels okay, since everyone would wear such things, even if they're really fat.' Indeed, Taiwanese women living in Taiwan are even more sensitive than those living abroad to social pressures to be thin. Sappho (aged 30) also comments that the sizes of Japanese clothes are 'hurtful', saying, 'their large is basically an American small.' Most Taiwanese women are very careful about what size they are wearing.

The young women interviewed were concerned about their literal clothing size (as on the label). Thus some of them found wearing American sizes very comforting, feeling they are 'small' or 'extra small'. Most Taiwanese women found it disturbing to wear size M or L. As a size, L becomes a disgraceful letter while the people wearing a size M would try to fit into a size S. This suggests that improving individual worth is not only dependent on slim body images, but that the very letter on the label is crucial to the self-affirmation of Taiwanese women. It seems that it's not only the actual act of slimming (measurable and visible) but the perceived act of slimming, affirmed in this case through the reduction in the labelled dress sizes, that gives women a feeling of empowerment and confidence in their bodies.

5.3 Ladylike dressing – Wearing skirts/dresses

With the diversification and variety of fashion today, the wardrobe is no longer rigidly separated by gender – men in masculine outfits, women in feminine outfits. The rapid evolution of design in fashion has blurred the gender divide but displaying feminine attributes seems to be the most favoured way for Taiwanese women to dress. My participants appear to blend individuality with concerns about the outer world into their choice of clothes.

In terms of wearing skirts, participants listed several benefits and downsides they might encounter. All participants reported that they do like wearing skirts, but there are many concerns about this choice. For example, 'inconvenient' and 'troublesome' are the issues most often addressed by these women. This inconvenience is related to the kinds of skirts worn in Taiwan. The island's subtropical climate governed the composition and

pattern of clothing, which were lighter, thinner and warm-weather styles. Skirts (especially short skirts and miniskirts) or shorts are the favoured options for young women. However, short flimsy skirts can be sometimes cause problems for women, which is why they sometimes hesitated to wear them. Nine participants talked about the inconvenience of wearing skirts even though they like them very much. Nancy (aged 28) gives an exact ratio of wearing skirts or trousers: 'It's about a three to seven ratio – because wearing trousers is more convenient, even though I like dresses, I like how fashionable they are. But I just feel that it's not really convenient, for example if the wind was stronger today.[5] So I think [I wear dresses] about three-tenths of the time.' Hsiao-Han (aged 22) also complains about how inconvenient it is to wear a skirt when taking the MRT – when the train comes into station, the accompanying draft would blow up her skirt, so she would choose a denim skirt, which is less likely to blow up. Shelby (aged 29) comments that she loves them so she buys a lot of skirts/dresses; however, she seldom wears them because of her concern about inconvenience. For these women, skirts/dresses seem to be both loved and indispensable in life, but also not always practical to wear. In addition to the practical concerns, Helen also brought up her concern about her body:

> To some extent I am afraid the skirt could flip up and my legs are not that slender. If I have to choose, I'd rather not wear skirts. In fact, wearing trousers could be feminine, you can match a sleeveless or body-hugging top, you could be curvy, you don't need to wear skirts. Most of the time in my work I still wear trousers with a feminine top. (Helen, aged 31)

By recognising these forms of wearing skirts/dresses as not the only way to present femininity, a feminine presentation of appearance has been profoundly internalised in women's perceptions. The image constructed by a feminine appearance is a form, an expression, and a symbol of feminine submission, but can also involve resistance. This is advanced by Angel (aged 23), who comments, 'I feel that if I'm wearing a short skirt, it needs to be a really short one. Or I wouldn't wear it, I'll just wear trousers.' Angel's account is the best example of alternating between submission and resistance to the female image as defined by Taiwanese society. Should she choose to appear feminine, she would do so provocatively, as a deliberate flouting of traditional patriarchal morality.

---

[5] Parents might also advise against wearing skirts in windy weather. See Chapter 4.

On the other hand, feeling no confidence in showing parts of the body is another reason for not wearing skirts or dresses. From Helen's (aged 31) narrative, her worry is not only about the inconvenience but also about showing 'not slim' legs. This is echoed by a few participants, who were hesitant about wearing skirts because of their body dissatisfaction. For example, Jessie (aged 24) and Tiffany (aged 19) did not feel their legs were beautiful, thus Tiffany commented, 'if I wear skirts, I always wear them with leggings.' Even though a lack of confidence in her calves leads Tiffany to avoid wearing skirts, the majority of Taiwanese women would not abandon skirts for any reason. They are unlikely to disappear over time as a demonstration of femininity. With some adjustments, the skirt evolves but never declines. Another example is Nini (aged 26), who was not satisfied with her hips and found that wearing skirts is an option to cover them. For both of them, wearing skirts is not an outright pleasure but is evaluated in terms of concealing or revealing perceived flaws. They conform to the value of wearing skirts but with certain adjustments and practical concerns, and this is perhaps explained by considering social expectations of women's appearance.

In connection with practical concerns, Violet (aged 27) explained that looking feminine may not always be a feasible option. Violet's views on wearing skirts have changed since her time in college. She told me how she admired the look of mini-skirts worn by women with slim legs. Yet, in reality, wearing skirts proved challenging at her university as the campus was in a mountainous area, where 'the wind would blow up dresses or skirts and you couldn't wear high-heeled shoes either because the mountain roads were all gravel, you would twist your ankle… you would have to close your legs…wearing [skirts] means your legs can't move much without looking unsophisticated, it was very hard…' Complex attitudes towards wearing skirts/dresses were expressed by the majority of participants.

'Safety' is also another reason for Felicia (aged 23) not to wear skirts very often and Angel (aged 23) would wear trousers to keep from getting a tan. These concerns correlated with Taiwanese women's struggles over the feminine presentation of appearance. From their accounts, wearing skirts/dresses usually increases the probability of being sexually harassed (Workman and Freeburg, 1999). 'Whiteness' has been an essential part of Asian understandings of beauty (Goon and Craven, 2003), and hence almost every Taiwanese woman is obsessed with skin lightening. Both the wearing of skirts and the idealisation of lighter skin can be considered as aspects of the social-cultural prescription of female vulnerability and have been extensively discussed

in literature (Terry and Doerge, 1979; Workman and Freeburg, 1999; Goon and Craven, 2003).

Although most of the women interviewed highlighted the downsides of wearing skirts, some participants seemed to simply like or dislike skirts because of the opinions of others. This was expressed with reference to their experiences in the past. For example, Chrissy (aged 19) comments, 'Dad doesn't like it when I wear skirts. Yeah… so I would try not to wear them. My father says "it's so convenient to wear trousers, why would you wear skirts?"' Likewise, Waverly's (aged 19) mother dressed her in skirts/dresses since she was little. She explained that this is the reason why she has been obsessed with wearing skirts and dresses. The influence of peer groups is also crucial for women in deciding their outfits. Anita (aged 21) and Yumi (aged 26) have no preference about trousers or skirts/dresses, yet Yumi commented that there was a period when she would wear mini-skirts every day, even during the winter, even when some people would criticise her for 'wearing too little' to go to class. She added that 'actually, no-one in the foreign language department would wear much, so once you're used to looking at it, you really don't feel [strange]… because everyone was like this.' Sherry started 'liking to wear skirts better' when her boyfriend preferred that look, but she isn't sure whether it was herself or her boyfriend who motivated her to wear skirts. As Schippers (2007) has suggested, both masculinity and femininity are produced, transformed and embedded within power relations. This social connection with appearance will be investigated in Chapter 7. It is clear, however, that no matter how fashion trends shift over time, a feminine appearance has not been out of the options for young Taiwanese women and it has not been altered as a result of shifting social attitudes and practical concerns.

About half of all participants in both age groups give higher credit to wearing skirts/dresses. As stated previously, all participants expressed that they either wear feminine dresses/skirts or trousers but that there should be at least one 'feminine' element in their outfits. Together with their preference for a certain fashion style, there is an acknowledgement of gender in the participants' accounts. This is highlighted by the use of 'woman' or 'girl' in describing their appearance. Vanessa (aged 20) said, 'I would want to be a woman/girl [*nu-sheng*][6] with more character, but still a woman/girl.' Vanessa describes her preferred fashion style as 'cool' or 'boyish', words usually

---

[6] This term is midway between the words for woman (*nu ren*), which is usually applied only to older women and *nu hai* meaning a teenage girl.

connected with masculinity. Thus her emphasis on her gender identity might express a fear of being identified as androgynous. Judy (aged 22) also indicates that being a 'woman/girl', will keep her from buying more masculine garments, even though she says she does not prefer skirts. Through elements of their dress, they seek to emphasise to others that they are women in nature and in personality. For every outfit, they seek to have a piece or an aspect that would be a symbol of their connection with the majority of women. This shows that, regardless of their overall stylistic preference, they still desire an outfit anchored in their own and others' expectations of femininity.

Feminine appearance is not only moderated to meet social norms but is also considered for simple, functional reasons, such as personal concerns about comfort, utility and hygiene. Compared with other younger participants, Sharlene (aged 29) and Yo-Hsuan (aged 25) had opposite explanations for why they think wearing skirts/dresses is more convenient than other outfits. Yo-Hsuan says, 'actually wearing jeans for girls is….is not all good… it's because of the ventilation… like it's more convenient for me to wear skirts, not only is it easier to use the restroom, it's elegant and comfortable. It's not hot and stuffy when it's summer. So I would rarely wear trousers.' Justine (aged 30) also liked their function of ventilation but stressed the risk of exposure, as in other participants' descriptions above. Moreover, from an aesthetic angle, Shirley (aged 27), Mandy (aged 21) and Sandy (aged 31) found wearing skirts allows for 'more variety' and 'easier matching'.

Feminine appearance also helped afford opportunities for young women to prove themselves socially and professionally. Helen explained that she wanted to change herself after high school because life and people became different. Wearing skirts is a change in her dress style, meaning stepping into a different life stage. She also found that wearing skirts in the workplace is much appreciated, demonstrating her feelings about wearing feminine clothes:

> I found out there is a bit of influence [in attracting males]. By wearing feminine clothing, I got more romantic encounters, got more attention, got more compliments, everyone evaluated you differently, got more working opportunities, got more help. Most of those were from male colleagues. I think feminine outfits or feminine behaviour can attract men's attention. This is good. It's a boost to my job or to interpersonal relationships. (Helen, aged 31)

Women's motivations for wearing feminine clothes are complex and varied. From the account above, feminine dressing can be purposeful and significant in daily life. Helen discovered that she received more help from male colleagues when she wore skirts in the workplace and attributes this help to her feminine appearance. By presenting 'desirable "looks"' (Craik, 1994: 46), femininity becomes an effective and pervasive means to achieve the purpose. Violet (aged 27) agrees with Helen, commenting, 'the girl in a mini skirt, got more opportunities, assistance at work, men all go to help her…' The softer appearance in the workplace must also be balanced with an image of professional competence. In this situation the gap between the two groups can often be observed in the descriptions and attitudes about appropriate appearance for work. In this case, the older women weighed up the convenience of wearing trousers against obtaining help and attention by wearing skirts. In contrast, the younger women were primarily concerned with the pure aesthetics of what they wore, and less with the message it sent.

5.4 Femininity and respectability

As Skeggs notes, appearance can operate as a 'mechanism for authorisation, legitimation and de-legitimation' (Skeggs, 2004: 100). Skeggs discusses this is relation to class, which is often embodied in the appearance of women with/without femininity. Appropriate femininity is thus a means of identifying class, displaying distance and gaining respectability; it is, for Skeggs, a form of cultural capital.[7] According to Skeggs' (1997) analysis, middle-class women 'use their proximity to the sign of femininity to construct distinctions between themselves and others' (1997: 99), while working-class women strive to invest their cultural capital and present a continuous performance to control their sexuality and thereby gain respectability. Representations of appropriate femininity are a central mechanism for legitimating the distance from inferiority of the working classes. Middle-class women are seen as showing respectable, appropriate femininity and this is an expression of society's way of passing judgement and exercising control. Outer appearance is read as a sign of inner character; by wearing feminine clothes and being feminine the young women who Skeggs interviewed laid claim to being respectable.

---

[7] Skeggs draws heavily on Bourdieu's analysis of class, habitus and cultural capital.

Class did not figure prominently in my participants' accounts but the ideal of femininity as cultural capital did. All of my participants strive to live up to society's female ideals by presenting their feminine cultural capital. It was noticeable that the dominant idea of feminine appearance indicates an aestheticisation of the dress generated by the possession of appropriate femininity. As is clear from the above accounts, young Taiwanese women are keen to conform to the norms of femininity. Even those who seem to deviate from these, such as Vanessa, with her 'boyish' style, still insisted on being seen as girls/women. All of my participants resist wearing obvious masculine outfits in terms of dressing themselves. It is possibly their assumption that other people would judge their appearance through the lens of heterosexuality. Performing femininity is interpreted as the legitimate embodiment of normality or the majority. As Skeggs (1997: 135) notes, 'Heterosexuality consolidates respectability'.

Women, since their childhood, have learnt the knowledge of femininity which is a combination of traditional textual source of femininity and local knowledge (Skeggs, 1997). Thus Vanessa tells how she deliberately avoids wearing sleeveless garments in Taiwan because it is not a common style, while it would be acceptable if she goes abroad or on the beach. One participant from my pilot interview also indicates that she stopped wearing bandeau tops or anything overly revealing after moving back to Taiwan from the States. This type of clothing is regarded as too sexual or tasteless in some ways, as well as signifying women's deviancy. Wearing revealing outfits in Taiwan equates with ungraceful, unrespectable and inappropriate. Therefore this cultural specificity stands in for wearing respectable dress. Moreover, the sense of class can emerge from wearing inappropriate clothes. For examples, Judy's (aged 22) parents do not allow her to wear jeans because they represent working-class people (see Chapter 4). Such overt references to class were rare among my participants, but worries about appearance and respectability were commonly expressed. Young women wanted to be feminine but not too sexy. Sexual looks are coded with degeneracy and lack of respectability. This is what these young women try to avoid. Wearing skirts or dresses for these young women is seen as an effective way to show femininity and respectability. However, this femininity is precarious. The contradiction of performing femininity demonstrated here is that skirts/dresses are obviously feminine but flipping-up can be seen as immodesty and as threatening one's respectability. A further anxiety of wearing skirts, and the danger of them flipping up, is that this can reveal perceived 'defects' (non-slim legs), which again could undermine femininity and respectability. In

Nini's case, she prefers to wear skirts/dresses because they are feminine and she believes that this type of clothes could cover her larger hips, while at the same time she worries about its inconvenience. Similar concerns are expressed by most of my participants. Showing perceived flaws (non-slim legs) for these young women is more than embarrassing; it implies an individual's lack of control over her own body.

My participants' obsession with slimness can also be understood in terms of Skeggs' perspective on respectability. Women's bodies are 'sign bearing', as well as carriers of taste. Thinness is seen as the signifier of managing one's appearance. A fat body indicates excess and enabled a reading of lack of discipline and self-governance. The unrestrained body can be seen as degenerate and vulgar. The negative value attaching to a fat body leads young Taiwanese women to fit into a category of ultra-thin femininity and to constantly scrutinise themselves.

Skeggs' research on working-class women suggests they strive to perform femininity in order to dis-identify from working-class. Participants in my research, young, educated and middle-class women, are also performing femininity, but to maintain respectability (and preserve their middle class status). These middle-class women also have lists of dos and don'ts in composing their appearance. In these ways they try to maintain respectability, to avoid excess, sexuality and vulgarity, and keep a distance from others, from those who have been positioned as vulgar and tasteless.

5.5 Facial Make-up

Some researchers have found that attractive individuals are perceived to be more successful and have more opportunities in the workplace than less attractive people (Chiu and Babcock, 2002). Facial attractiveness is usually the evaluation of primary importance (Dickey-Bryant et al., 1986), and this is closely associated with cosmetic use. Make-up is regarded as expressive, assertive and a performance. Although many studies suggest that whether one wears makeup or not has a great impact on a woman's attractiveness and her success in her career, participants in my study presented more diverse viewpoints in terms of cosmetics use. Craik (1994: 22) points out that 'the act of beautification can draw attention away from the individual as a person and thus detracts from individuality.' This notion is partly expressed by my participants. Further, there is a degree of ambivalence when it comes to facial make-up, probably because it is viewed

as such a crucial part of women's lives. When asked about their make-up practices, every participant discussed cosmetics use at length. Only one participant, Sappho (aged 30), talked in very negative terms about her experience of make-up, pointing out how much she dislikes it and did not admire a face with cosmetics – '…so sore when removing eye make-up…cannot believe some women even wear fake eyelash…[make-up] is burdensome…cosmetics beautify women but in the long term it is harmful…you should cherish your skin'. In contrast with Sappho, those in the younger group reported that they cannot go out without it, the question is not 'if' but 'how much'. Although using make-up is mostly portrayed as taken-for-granted behaviour, this practice can be seen as a process of internalisation. Most participants reported that they began to use cosmetics in high school and some women in both groups indicated that wearing make-up gradually became an inescapable essential when going out. For example, Jessie (aged 24) explained that she was not 'someone who wears make-up' before she started work – 'At first it was company policy... now, I can't accept [not wearing make-up]… because I would feel that my skin isn't in good condition, I would have dark circles, look flushed… I'm usually used to make-up and so I feel ugly without it. Now, even on my days off, I would make up a little before heading out.' Hsiao-Han (aged 22) echoes, 'it becomes a habit'. Thus, the view that make-up is self-consciously linked with beauty/ugliness arises from the way in which she looks into the mirror. The perception of beauty/ugliness is an exposure to these ideas through the media. This self consciousness fits with Cooley's conception of 'the looking-glass self' (1902), where the imagined views of others affect our self-feeling. This self-feeling is here associated with cosmetics use. In addition, make-up has been perceived as an irreversible routine in a woman's daily life. Once she started using it, she would never go back to accepting herself without make-up.

Indeed, make-up has become an indispensable part of life for a majority of my participants. The importance of make-up is reinforced by Sherry's (aged 23) statement. Shirley feels that make-up and consequently her appearance would affect her self-confidence as well as how other people perceive her. She was aware of the significance of facial attractiveness from a young age and said, 'I would rather wear my pajamas and make-up out than to dress up and leave the house without make-up.' Therefore she started wearing contact lenses in junior high school. She told me that at the time no other students were wearing contact lenses that early (most students would wear glasses). Also, Sherry has had seriously dark circles under her eyes caused by her

allergies since she was little, hence she would put on make-up to cover them even though she understands that some of the chemicals in cosmetics are bad for the skin. Graham and Jouhar (1983) indicate that the use of corrective cosmetics to combat the effects of ageing or skin disease can lead to improved appearance, which can lead to improved perceived personality, which feed back to increased levels of self-esteem and self-acceptance. Even more, she made herself wear make-up even when she was ill, and comments, 'even when I had styes on my eyelids I would still wear make-up to school or when I once had conjunctivitis I would still wear contacts.' In Sherry's case, cosmetics use is strongly linked with her self-consciousness and self-confidence. These seem to have advanced to the concern with having a secure base in a relationship. Sherry continued:

> I didn't even remove my make-up when sleeping with my boyfriend. I know this really hurts my skin but I still have no confidence. And I always jump out of bed to get clean before he wakes up. (Sherry, aged 23)

For Sherry, cosmetics not only protect and ground her self-confidence, but they also become part of maintaining her relationship. Her appearance is thus considered to be a source of leverage in a relationship. It can be argued that make-up is thus considered to be a strategy for gaining love and loyalty. The notion is that perceived attractiveness, femininity and sexiness linked to cosmetics are the elements of maintaining relationships. Later on she told me that even though her boyfriend or friends told her she still looks pretty without make-up, she felt she *has to* put it on. In this case, her own concerns and feelings about make-up are outweighed by the risk she perceives in not wearing it – in this case, losing her relationship. The belief that 'make-up will conceal flaws' has enforced long-wear make-up use. Thus, remaining perfect in appearance all the time means continuing to give the impression she wishes to project (Craik, 1994).

A majority of younger participants report that they cannot go out without make-up, believing that it is crucial to make the right impact. For example, Waverly (aged 19), Judy (aged 22) and Felicia (aged 23) demonstrated that they feel uncomfortable in public places unless wearing make-up. These young women, who routinely wear makeup when going out, express concern about looking 'colourless' (*wu sie-se,* literally without blood) without any make-up. Dellinger and Williams (1997) found that, of their interviewees, many women wore cosmetics to avoid being defined as unhealthy and unrested, which might devalue their facial attractiveness. It seems likely that the

transformation in appearance that cosmetics bring (Craik, 1994) has a strong impact on women's self-consciousness. This was evoked as giving both a better impression (to others) and confidence (to the self), suggesting a holistic interaction between cosmetics and the modern woman. For younger participants, it was wearing a physical mask that actually boosted confidence, suggesting their conformity with contemporary beauty norms. For older participants, it was the ritual of making up built into a comfortable routine. In addition, a strong sense that emerged from many of the interviews I conducted was the tangible pleasure in the process, somewhat comparable to the joy artists and artisans take in their work. It goes beyond the importance of appearance, or making the right impression on certain occasions, or conforming to expectations. Pleasure gained from doing research and their own trial and error is a hugely significant factor, one that is not particular to the young women and suggests that women find a broad appeal in the joy of the making up process and the accomplishment of the end product. Shirley started making up during her first year of college, and comments:

> It makes me look more animated in complexion and the packages of cosmetics are so cute, the boxes are very attractive. The feeling of using that is very pleasant. Also doing research on this is very interesting. Because it [make-up] makes me so different, you could turn from dull to radiance. The impression given makes a huge difference. This is extremely important. …lip gloss, there are many colours, trying colours is very interesting…I got so much fun…I spend lots of time on this, doing research, going to buy some colours to have a try. (Shirley, aged 27)

Shirley's narrative fits in with Dellinger and Williams' (1997) suggestion that making up is 'a woman's time for herself' (1997: 170). In fact, make-up practices are characterised by a mixture of joy, bitterness and 'a positive declaration of the self' (Craik, 1994: 158), which is about more than a boost of self-confidence and giving a better impression. Make-up is used not only to present an impression of the individualistic self, but in this context the desired self-image was also constructed through imitating friends and female stars. The internalised image of beauty and attractiveness is also another factor driving them to make themselves up. Vanessa (aged 20) expands it to a sense of autonomy, saying – 'a group of girls with make-up bags... it's just pretty all the time, always dressing up. This feels good, it feels like women who are autonomous.' Facial cosmetics have been reported by many scholars as an important component of women's self-presentation (Cox and Glick, 1986). Thus Vanessa's account suggests that cosmetics use signifies a woman as being her own mistress,

implying the capacity and desire to 'treat herself well,' to 'control herself,' and to 'express herself'. Moreover, Nini (aged 26) enjoys the process of making up itself, saying, 'actually, making up lets you see a result, there's a sense of accomplishment.' Thus, aside from considering the necessity and the hassle of make-up, many women identify it as pleasant and affirming experience. Some participants pointed out that the perceived pleasure comes from sharing information with other women. Information exchange could ensure that they keep up with the fashion trends, don't become out of date and offer advice to one another.

On the other hand, putting on make-up is regarded as a presentation of 'courtesy'. Angel (aged 23) considers make-up as an indispensable part of her life. As she models for a part-time job, she has to put on make-up most of the time while working. Therefore Angel wears make-up for her work and as a courtesy. Yo-Hsuan (aged 25) and Sharlene (aged 29) also stress the importance of showing 'courtesy' via cosmetics use. The idea of courtesy is an import from Japanese cosmetics culture. It is not surprising that Taiwanese women demonstrate the same ideas about their appearance based on the profound relationship with Japan. According to Lin (2004), Japanese convention holds women's make-up to be a matter of politeness to other people – to leave the house without it is considered to be a breach of social etiquette. He argues that Japanese collectivism places a high value on coordination with others and the group – should a Japanese women wear make-up that is too 'heavy' or has too much 'character', she runs the risk of being ostracised by the women around her. Hence, the Japanese woman must consider how she is perceived in this socially expected act of making up and take care to moderate her use of it. Therefore, the appeal of cosmetics use contributes to connections with other people and is an ideal to which we are all told to aspire. This is evident in Yumi's account, which demonstrates the adjustment of her appearance in different social groups as her concerns alter. She comments:

> For my closer friends, the ones I'm more familiar with, I might not put on make-up if we're just going for a bite. But if it's friends I'm less familiar with, I can't, I would have to make it nice. Like if we're going to the Eastern District, it's easy to run into acquaintances and I can't be seen without make-up and just dressed liked a mess. Although I don't care about other people, I don't want to meet someone just two or three times a year and have that person tell other people that so and so looks really ugly now. No, I can't do it… (Yumi, aged 26)

Apparently Yumi links make-up with her social network, which seems to be a consideration when it comes to whether or not she should put it on. She believes that her reputation for perfect looks would be ruined if she accidentally bumped into some acquaintances without any make-up. The imagination that other acquaintances would gossip or twist the truth forms an inevitable backdrop to cosmetics use. The consequence of presenting an unadorned face to acquaintances is something Yumi does not want to go through in her life. This may also explain why make-up is connected with insecurity and self-discipline. It can determine a woman's reputation.

In contrast, in the younger group, Tiffany (aged 19), Angel (aged 23) and Anita (aged 21) talk about make-up use differently. Tiffany said that she was most fashion conscious when she was in junior high. At that time she would put on eyeliner etc., but she has rarely used cosmetics since high school. One reason is that her classmates at university did not think she was prettier when wearing make-up. The other is that most of her classmates do not use make-up. She comments, 'male classmates criticise other women who put on heavy make-up, especially those in management school.' Tiffany is in the agricultural economics department and Anita also comments, 'women in my department (law school) do not make up.' It seems that make-up use can be prescribed or proscribed in different life stages and by varied social groups, such as peers. For most participants, the course chosen for university study becomes a primary identifier of other people. Accordingly, make-up choice becomes linked to personal characteristics as well as their academic departmental affiliation. In my interviews, many participants thought that women in literature, media, communication and management departments put on 'too much' make-up and dressed differently than those in other departments. This may imply these participants' low opinion of the act of making up, as distinct from their opinion of the academic status and personal characteristics of these women. The negative impression made by make-up is enhanced by Anita's father, who once joked about her fake eyelashes that she looked 'almost like a demon – be careful that if you go out and scare other people you might be exorcised.' For the young women who prefer not to apply make-up, something in common is the fact that their parents do not show any admiration for cosmetics or their mothers do not use them often. Therefore parents still have certain power to influence their make-up decisions (see Chapter 4).

Tiffany (aged 19) further stressed that cosmetics do not really boost her own confidence but she can only feel the trouble of removing make-up, a sentiment echoed by Helen (aged 31) and Nini (aged 26). They both admire the beautiful look after putting on

make-up but at the same time complain about the hassle of removing it. Even though Nini really enjoyed putting on make-up as a university student, citing her sense of accomplishment in the act, removing it was 'a bother from start to finish… it's like the aftermath.' For these participants, their concerns about not putting on make-up are strengthened by experience and this is perhaps explained by considering where they are in their life stage, the social context that they are in and what kind of occasions they are usually attend. For example, most older participants appeared to have no difficulties accepting themselves without make-up, indicating that their make-up practices depend on the place and the occasion.

Violet (aged 27) gave another reason for her hesitation around cosmetics use. Her company introduced employees to a cosmetics promotion from LG, and they taught female employees that they should make up because it is a courtesy, as discussed previously. Therefore there were more people in the company starting to make up. However Violet claimed that some of her colleagues applied too much make-up, perhaps because they had just left school. Speaking of one of them she said 'I heard other colleagues mocking her, male colleagues, not in front of her, they mocked her when we were chatting. I was thinking it was awful and I would rather not make up.' Violet's remarks suggest that her motivation around make-up is influenced by the context of her colleagues. While her co-workers taking up make-up en masse prompted her to start, she was later prevented from doing so because of her male colleagues' potential criticism. In this case, it is apparent that even her personal preference for facial make-up is influenced by her concern about other people's judgement and leads to a lack of confidence in applying 'proper' make-up. In Cooley's conceptualisation of the looking-glass self (1902), self-evaluation is accomplished through such bidirectional social interaction. In my participants' accounts, young women seem to observe the interactions among third parties and construe hypothetical situations to pre-empt social interactions, which allows for the incorporation of multiple social interactions and multiple potential feedback. In other words, to avoid making mistakes, a woman will first position herself outside of the field and only decide what to do after observing others' social interactions and feedback.

This is reflected to some extent in Nancy's (aged 28) account. Even though she had no confidence about making up a perfect appearance, Nancy found that her choice of cosmetics use is not entirely up to her. Sometimes it is company policy or her manager's demands – a well-groomed woman who uses cosmetics is regarded as an

essential requirement in many occupations. Nancy was once told by her manager that she should have come to work in make-up, even though she had basic foundation and simple make-up on at the time. She told me she would rather not put on make-up if it is not the norm at her workplace. This unwillingness is reflected in Dellinger and Williams' argument about make-up in workplaces (1997). They suggest that institutionalised norms in workplaces limit the possibility of resistance through personal appearance (1997). In order to keep her job, the use of cosmetics to look good and attractive is 'a grim necessity' (Bustelo, 1986: 76). Also, Nancy continued to explain that later on she changed to another job which does not require her to apply make-up. Thus she told me that she puts on make-up depending on how she feels on that day and whether she has enough time to make up before going to work. However, she often goes out without any. Nancy clearly states her observations of other women:

> Because some people, they look so different when they have make-up on at work and their make-up off after work. Because there are a lot of girls around me, they're the type where if they took off their make-up, it's just old. It's just different. And I would like to feel that I'm always a certain way – like when I put on make-up occasionally, someone will point out that I look a little different today but no one would think I look very old or very unattractive when I'm not wearing make-up. I would like to maintain this part, this level, because I will, I feel that I'm proud that I can go without makeup. (Nancy, aged 28)

For Nancy, the most important thing about make-up is to show a subtle difference in her appearance before and after making up. This expectation is to demonstrate how she takes good care of her appearance and how people admire her efforts. When beauty exists without cosmetics, it seems that the beauty norms may be undermined by experience when individuals realise the aesthetic costs under a capitalist system. Although Mandy (aged 21) thinks she needs to put on make-up if she is going out in public or seeing different people, she devotes more to looking after her skin, saying, 'I feel that if I keep breaking out, even if it looks pretty, it's more unhealthy to have to keep covering it up.' Mandy views make-up as optional if she keeps her skin well and healthy. For these participants, then, cosmetics are expendable; they claim that they would 'look the same' and pretty without cosmetics and do not have to rely on these products to feel empowered. Not all women, then, fit into the idea that women use make-up to seek empowerment (Dellinger and Williams, 1997). Some would rather seek femininity in a 'natural' look, avoiding make-up.

Furthermore, cosmetics are not always pleasant and could cause negative feelings and resistance. Justine (aged 30) comments, 'people at work would be like "oh, you have make-up on. You have a date tonight?" It's annoying, why do they ask me things like this?' The feeling of being gossiped about, or being subject to intrusive questions led to the intention of not using make-up. Thus she would rather not make up. Yo-Hsuan (aged 25) and Sandy (aged 31) have similar problems when putting on make-up. This involves an underlying sense of frustration as well as the desire to freely wear make-up without being gossiped about or attracting excessive attention. What was especially unpleasant to them was that their subscription to what should have been the socially docile 'proper femininity' could nonetheless be a continuing source of controversy.

5.6 Summary

This chapter has been concerned with three aspects of Taiwanese femininity: the cult of thinness, wearing skirts and the use of make-up. Taiwanese women live in a social environment where thinness is valued. Most participants feel that their bodies do not meet this social standard of thinness and feel pressured to meet it. My participants projected most young Taiwanese women's desire to be extremely thin, which previously signified disease and poverty but is now regarded as the standard of beauty. The ideal of slenderness has been internalised in Taiwanese women's perceptions of beauty. Although some of them do criticise the standard of beauty, they are largely concerned with 'looking good' and having a secure base from which to dress themselves. Looking slim seems to be the primary ideology for dressing their bodies. Of note is that, when asked to tell me about their appearance, almost every participant linked the topic with their concerns and dissatisfactions with body shape and weight. Regarding this fashioning of the appearance in the Taiwanese cultural context, these women comprehend the role that femininity and slimness play in the cultural imagination. They are aware of the contemporary beauty norms; almost every participant raised the widespread thin ideal and the consequences of not being thin. The idea that a thin body would lead to a better feeling of self has been central to creating a body image that can please themselves and at the same time conform to social expectations. However, it is interesting that most participants were not obsessed with being that slim. They want to be comfortable or retain their love of exercise, which might be a barrier to losing weight. Individuality apparently plays a significant role in women's body images. The conventional way (losing weight) to make women feel

empowered has been transformed into creating slimness through the use of clothing since many women have relegated actually 'being slim' to the realms of something improbable. Moreover, women's feeling of empowerment relies not only on an actual slim body or slim appearance but also on the very letter that marks the size of clothes.

Overall, while young women are conscious of the obsession to be thin and are capable of critiquing it, they nonetheless feel great pressure to conform to the thin ideal in their daily lives. Even pragmatically, they feel compelled to pursue changes in their bodies in order to achieve a more advantageous social position. These deep-rooted values cannot be changed in short order. It can be argued that over generations there can be seen a shift in attitude. Even so, the perception of the perfect Asian body as petite and delicate appears to remain constant, with only minor variations. This image of Asian femininity is enhanced by wearing skirts.

Although every interviewee listed several downsides to wearing skirts/dresses, they all agreed that they are an indispensable way of performing femininity; the same act conducted in different circumstances can represent different things. Remarkably, even though fashion styles vary along with fashion history, women's liberation and generations, the ideology of presenting femininity by wearing skirts/dresses remains unbreakable under Taiwanese socio-cultural expectations of women. On the whole, feminine looks in Taiwan are not seen to be less favoured. The ambivalence demonstrated over feminine appearance implies that a Taiwanese woman's 'choice' is often compounded with the preference of men, and of society at large. Although performing femininity has been instructed through body techniques and the emphasis on sexuality, my participants seem to be able to mix up these social expectations of women with their sense of self. Within the highly patriarchal Taiwanese society, the skirts/dresses that most exemplify feminine qualities have been reconstructed and reinterpreted by young Taiwanese women in order to match social expectations of women's appearance. These reconstructions further incorporate elements of their individuality (e.g. a feminine top matched with fitted trousers or denim skirts with leggings). This is increasingly balanced by the insertion of the self into feminine appearance. The meaning associated with feminine appearance enabled participants to define and redefine femininity without deviating from social expectations. It is ultimately a look that starts with the self, being comfortable and convenient, as well as meeting social expectations. Hence, womanliness presented in Taiwan is an amalgam of influences and concerns, rather than a pure aesthetic manifestation of womanhood.

Femininity can also be performed by applying cosmetics. Most participants felt it was essential to put on make-up as women, especially attractive women. This may be due to notions of beauty and social expectations of the performance of femininity. Indeed, make-up is a cultural performance for my younger participants, as the majority of women said that they could not go out without it. This reflects women's self-consciousness about their facial attractiveness and the influence of the Japanese culture of cosmetics use. Cosmetics uphold the cultural imaginary and reinforce the appearance of women. Therefore, for these young women, the frequency with which they apply make-up suggests their intention of meeting social expectations. This perhaps contributes to participants' experiences of not putting on make-up. Cosmetics not only represent a healthy and pleasant look to the public, but also provide them with self-confidence and security, in a relationship, in the workplace or in public space. Applying make-up is also seen as a process and an inescapable routine in their lives. However, for most older participants, make-up use seems to have become more complicated now and this is highlighted by the participants who see cosmetics as a disposable part of life. They often consider the occasion, the social group and their own observation of how other people react in deciding whether or not to wear make-up. The meaning associated with make-up enables participants to think about the self-image and body-image they are trying to construct. They try to put forward a natural look of 'zero-difference' before and after applying make-up (in turn implying that their own skin is healthy and unblemished) in order to overturn the more artificial femininity constructed by cosmetics.

Chapter 6 Consumption of Fashion Goods

6.1 Introduction

In previous chapters, concerns about clothes and body image have been investigated in the context of Taiwanese society and culture, which represent external forces that young Taiwanese women must juggle in relation to the self. In this chapter, shopping is examined in its commercial aspects where social pressure remains strong and women face concrete constraints through their budgets. This is examined in three sections: the evaluation of fashion products; the value of branded products; and the choice between shopping in stores or online.

I start by examining the 'meanings' and 'necessity' of fashion products/brands to the centrality of shopping and the ways in which they are interpreted by participants.. In an age where hedonism and materialism are highlighted, Western fashion luxuries have started a world-wide consumption wave of designer-label fashions. This is in addition to the general growth in high-end consumption reinforced by the immediacy and sheer immensity of the volume of today's mass media. In Taiwan, the 20 to 30 year olds who grew up in affluence are accustomed to a better life and pamper themselves through the buying and wearing of fashion goods. As a result, branded goods are said to be increasingly purchased by younger individuals, with the consequence that people who are far from the peak of their purchasing power (and knowingly so) expect to buy expensive items, even if it stretches their finances. In this section, aside from determining what makes young women go shopping and how they express themselves in the tug of war between fashion products, branded products and their finances.

The concept of brand has been extensively studied in marketing research, where brand plays a symbolic role between consumer activities and the cultural constitution of the self in the context the global circulation of brands. I will approach the contradictions that were expressed towards brand by the interviewees, including the meanings of brand logos. I also consider how young women perceive authentic branded products, second-hand fashion products and counterfeits, which reveals the formation of different consumption attitudes and the values they represent, paying particular attention to the meaning of luxury-brand products. Finally I examine the shopping strategies of my

participants focusing on the choice between e-shopping and street shopping and the financial constraints young women face.

6.2 The meanings and necessity of fashion products

Slater (1997) suggests that meanings, uses and needs are culturally defined. This view was reinforced but complicated when participants were asked about what fashion has brought to them. Fashion products, including clothes, accessories and cosmetics, like nail polish or lipsticks, are often considered to have little intrinsic utility. However, such merchandise has consistently occupied much of the 'women's market'. Luxury brand fashion has persisted through economic recessions and crises and has not been displaced by cheaper alternatives. According to Scott (2005), as early as the 1930s, cosmetics manufacturers were successfully persuading women to buy things they did not strictly need by dictating to them how they should look. This is reflected in the interviews in the ways in which fashion products are evaluated as more than just 'merchandise'. When asked about the meanings of and need for fashion products, a majority of participants answered with positive attitudes, Anita says:

> …the first impression given should mask yourself, hide any flaws. So if you dress well and look good in your clothes, your first impression will be better. You may be a gangster or country bumpkin today, but if you dress well, people may think that you studied abroad before you said or did anything. But if you didn't dress up your appearance at all, the first impression, even if you are from a wealthy family, people may think…(Anita, aged 21)

This idea of first impressions is echoed by Nancy (aged 28), who commented, 'it's just a tool for me, it's just that I'm a neat, clean, and beautiful girl. I hope that everyone would feel that I am good from the first look they take.' Dressing up is interpreted as creating a good image that ties into personal security, no matter whether it is true or fake. For Anita and Nancy, presenting a good appearance is something they can use to manipulate the judgements of others. Moreover, fashion products and cosmetics use are considered the means to become an attractive woman and thereby gain more opportunities in the workplace. Violet (aged 27) used to be a low-key person in terms of her appearance. However, she started to think that how she dresses is more important when she began working. She commented, 'after working more I found that it's not so,

125

it feels like, if you're more over the top, if you're more conspicuous, then you really do get more opportunities and other things.' For Violet, an attractive appearance where she projects her femininity is a more effective strategy than to simply present a respectable appearance. Women's appearance adorned with fashion products is seen as a presentation of sexual power (Evans and Thornton,1989). It seems to become a survival skill in the real world rather than being just about personal pleasure gained through consumption.

Fashion products therefore offer invisible and significant value to contemporary young women. More specifically, these young women are very self-aware in presenting themselves through clothes. Many mentioned the saying that 'clothes make the person just as the Buddha needs a coat of gold'[1], to illustrate the importance of wearing good clothes. About half of these women stress its association with their personality. The presentation of their personality through the way they dress is regarded as the most important issue. Yumi (aged 26), who is the only one from the older group to express such ideas, thinks this is extremely important since she would feel uncomfortable for the whole day if she wore something wrong (Felicia, aged 23) from the younger group, expressed similar sentiments). Yumi would even buy another outfit impromptu to replace an inappropriate one. Chrissy (aged 19) and Hsiao-Han (aged 22) associate appearance with self-confidence. Hsiao-Han comments, 'because I think I'm a very ordinary person, so I feel like I need clothes to decorate myself.' By dressing up her appearance, Chrissy gains more confidence from other people thinking of her as someone who keeps up with the trends instead of someone who is out of fashion. In addition, more individual concerns were listed by several younger participants. For example, fashion clothes represent individual habits and hygiene (Judy, aged 22), individual uniqueness (Waverly, aged 19), personal pleasure (Vanessa, aged 20) and individual preferences (Angel, aged 23). However, fashion clothes are seen as less important in everyday life for most of the older participants. For example, Shelby (aged 29) comments: 'it's not important, you just need to find the right clothes for the right occasion.' 'Wearing for the right occasion', 'dressing modestly and moderately', 'being comfortable' and 'being appropriate' are sentiments expressed by most of the older participants. Shirley (aged 27), Sandy (aged 31) and Sharlene (aged 29) further argue that others would first observe the face instead of the clothes, which diminishes the

---

[1] A Chinese proverb: it is used to describe the way in which a person's appearance relies on clothes. In Buddhism, the statue of Buddha is coated with gold, which is to represent his solemnity.

perceived importance of dress. Unlike the younger women, the first impression seems to rest on facial make-up rather than the clothes they wear. As a result, they would focus more on having proper make-up; Sharlene said, 'my clothes wouldn't be weird, even if they don't conform to the *dress code* [italicised words were said in English]'.On the other hand, the feeling of security and self-confidence gained through clothes is reinforced by Nini, who comments:

> I feel that is it something that makes me secure. Like if I were to meet someone, go somewhere, I would feel more confident, more secure, and would probably perform better. It's something that helps me. (Nini, aged 27)

In addition to 'looking good', Nini uses exact terms to describe the benefits clothes might bring her. A better self-presentation, even individual achievement gained through self-confidence and security reinforces the person-thing relationship in material culture in which goods usually carry meanings (Douglas and Isherwood, 1979). Moreover, to describe fashion clothes as 'helping' or 'adding points' extends Douglas and Isherwood's (1996) notion of goods as a communicator. It implies the role of goods as aids to advancing the self. Sherry (aged 23) also mentions this idea in her account; she is the only younger participant who considers her make-up to be more significant. There are distinctions between the younger and the older group, whereby the younger women tend to focus more on individual presentation through their clothes while the older women seem to place more value on facial attractiveness, reflecting the declining desire for fashion products at a later life stage. Overall, however, fashion products are viewed as a non-disposable part of women's lives and as a means of self-presentation in modern societies.

Even though these young women obviously agree with the necessity of everyday fashion, a few of them hesitate to make high-end fashion purchases. This is highlighted when high-end fashion purchases are perceived as sacrifices to their daily necessities and other personal hobbies – the desire for fashionable clothes and cosmetics persists, but does not take precedence. Chrissy (aged 19) describes her feelings about purchasing branded products and admits to their appeal, but distances herself from irrational consumption: 'I would want them [branded products], but I just don't have the money. Some people would not eat and save money or something….I don't think I need to do this, nothing makes me need to do this yet.' What is interesting here is that Chrissy frames this as a distinction between herself and other, implicitly misguided, people.

Moreover, Chrissy enjoys the feeling of negotiating a price at street stalls, it gives her a great sense of accomplishment. As a result, branded name products hold relatively less appeal. If buying branded products would cost her food and drink and yield little enjoyment, she is willing to do without it.

Chrissy (aged 19), Sandy (aged 31) and Justine (aged 30) also illustrate the dispensability of fashion products by giving priority to 'going out', including travelling, which gives them more satisfaction than buying fashionable things. Hsiao-Han (aged 22) similarly states that, compared with buying fashion products, she would prefer to travel to Japan or Bali Island. Sandy describes travel as 'more interesting' than buying fashion products. The benefits gained from travel are seeing many different things and a different world. According to a survey conducted in 2007 by *Cheers* magazine, the largest expenditures for Taiwanese women are in fashion goods and travelling, which is consistent with the accounts above. Taken together with their critical approach towards fashion goods, it is possible that there is a shift from spending on external appearances to more internal, introspective consumption. Relative to the similarly hedonistic act of dressing the body, these young women seem to present a more sophisticated attitude towards non-essential consumption. This is also a possible response to the stigma against women's preening behaviour, with women responding by engaging in more 'thoughtful' consumption to avoid criticism of being a 'vase', an empty space within a beautiful exterior. It is also worth noting that the consumption of fashion products might be becoming a form of consumption that carries negative meanings such as greed, shallowness, immaturity and a lack of self-control. Thus, young women seem to wish to avoid being categorised as fashion addicts.

Similarly, personal interests for some older participants are viewed as a priority when dressing up. They would rather buy cheaper clothes from street vendors in order to save money for their priorities. In addition to spending a lot on travelling, Justine's (aged 30) favourite hobby is belly dancing, and most of her spending is on tuition and costumes for dancing. She sees this as 'making herself happy' and a step towards an ideal life. This hedonistic concept is extended to perceived actual benefits, in Justine's case, spending money on learning dancing as a skill means more to her than dressing her appearance as a pretty woman. Shelby (aged 29) explains that she stopped shopping about six months before she left to study in America. Purchasing fashion goods seems to be given lower priority when something is perceived to be a better investment in herself. Therefore, the shift in consumption accounts for the new form of self-

cultivation and the importance many participants place on this in their explanation for why they pamper themselves. However, the pampering behaviour of investing in themselves can be minimised and redefined after women get married. As in the case of Helen (aged 31), the pattern of consumption changes – Helen pointed out that after getting married she mostly bought household items and appliances. Heyn (2011) suggests that married women tend to spend much more time and money on the household or other family members than on themselves. As in Helen's case, women seem to spend less on items for themselves and return to the caring role under the family structure.

6.3 Contradictory attitudes toward brands

Since the mass expansion of branded luxury retailing during the 1990s in Taiwan and the prominent coverage that such goods receive in the mass media, there has been controversy over the consumption of luxury-branded products. The buying of designer-label clothing has been criticised by the wider society and intelligentsia, who argue that it is a wasteful and even degenerate behaviour (Yang, 2005). Almost every participant, especially the older women, identified the brand value of designer-label bags rather than clothes. Branded clothes are considered to be 'not worthwhile purchases' (Yo-Hsuan, aged 25). Or, as Nini (aged 26) comments, 'you can hold [the same] handbag every day, but you can't wear [the same] piece of clothing every day.' Product value is reflected in its price tag. Sappho (aged 30) says, 'you get what you pay for.' Sandy (aged 31) explains that, for a branded bag, 'it's expensive for a reason, since you can use it for a long time.' This lifelong usage is echoed by Tiffany, aged 19, who places different values on luxury handbags with different prices – 'A six hundred or seven hundred thousand [NTD] crocodile handbag is worthless and harms animals. Something that is forty or fifty thousand but you can use for a lifetime is really worth it,'[2] she says. Tiffany's parents often buy her designer-label handbags that she never asks for. Her father recently asked her to choose a wallet for herself as her coming of age gift, which could cost 20-30 thousand NTD (£400-600). He told her that if a wallet costing twenty or thirty thousand can be used for a lifetime and kept as a memento then he would feel that it was worth it. Clearly, Tiffany's values bear a strong resemblance to those of her parents, where the cost-benefit ratio of an item matters, and that only if a luxury good's

---

[2] 600,000-700,000NTD is about £13,000-15,000; 40.000-50,000NTD is approximately £870-1,100.

use can be maximised does it achieve true value. This perceived value is what Zeithaml (1988) means when she writes that value is the quality consumers get for the price they pay. For Tiffany, the assessment of what is received and what is given is based on the price (how much she would pay) and the quality (how long she would use it) rather than the brand.

In other cases, the brand (and the financial worth of the brand) can also be entirely ignored. Mandy, aged 21, explains that she does not have preferences for branded handbags but she has bought a few just as she has bought other ordinary handbags. She accessorises according to how she feels today or what clothes she is going to wear. To Mandy, the 'brand' neither accentuates her status as a modern woman nor does it represent any inherent value. Anita (aged 21) also echoed that 'I feel that it is just a bag, you shouldn't look at it as a high-end brand.' In my interviews, when I asked my first question about designer labels, some interviewees would ask me in return to define what should be considered a designer label. Yet Violet (aged 27) did give her own definition of it by indicating, 'actually, it's a branded product if it has a counter at the department store. So I feel like if you buy it from a certain counter in the department store, it's a branded product.' Sharlene defines brands as something to present to other people:

> It's just like when the boys buy Benzs and BMWs, it's for other people to look at. I feel that it's the same for me with branded handbags. It's just for someone else to look at. But do I really like it myself? It's because I care about other people's gazes, that's it. (Sharlene, aged 29)

Upon further questioning, it became apparent that, for some, a brand in and of itself provides limited added value or meaning to merchandise. Rather, what gives something value is whether or not it looks good, whether it 'fits them' or whether the price is reasonable. This notion is expressed most eloquently by Felicia:

> I will only buy it if I think it looks really good, like I buy it if I see celebrities looking good carrying it. I am like this. But I wouldn't say that just because I have a lot of money now that I would by a designer-label handbag, it has to be something I really like. It is more related to personal taste, not that I would just want to have something from this brand and that is all I want. (Felicia, aged 23)

Personal preference and the product itself are always the priority when buying a fashion product, not the brand. Individualism has strengthened Felicia's attachment to the tangible value. In this case, the self and the commodity are closely intertwined, not just an illusory symbol granted by the brand. Brand attachment (Kleine et al., 1995) in most narratives seems to be relatively low. Felicia further stresses the lack of connection between personal taste and brands, saying, 'you are not someone with good taste just because you have a designer-label bag…taste is something that you naturally exhibit through the things you use and what you think.' Practicality is also another important concern when choosing a bag, not the brand. Jessie (aged 24) explains that she feels nothing when she sees someone carrying a luxury-branded bag on the street, rather, she demonstrates her demands for three things in a bag: 'colour, function (is it big enough to carry books) and affordable price.' Rather than owning a designer-label bag, Jessie opts for a more useful bag in which she can find a balance among the qualities of need, aesthetics, and price. In Jessie's narrative, designer labels seem inconsequential or even to be explicitly ignored in her purchasing decisions.

Although most women interviewed pointed out that brand is not a factor in their purchasing decisions right now, many of the younger interviewees stated that they would buy a designer-label product when they 'have extra money in the future.' This suggests that the brand is a status symbol, or even a milestone that they aspire to, but not something that they take into account in their current purchases. Waverly, aged 19, agrees with the value of a designer bag and says that she will buy one when she has enough income. She comments, 'even though designer labels are expensive, they have a degree of uniqueness, and it's not so easy to run into someone else wearing the same thing.' Waverly explicitly claims that she has never bought any branded product worth over 20 GBP; however, she is very familiar with fashion designers such as '*Valentino*' and identifies with some branded products. Uniqueness is always the essential requirement for motivating her to purchase fashion products. She explains that many designers may design products she likes this season but the same design will not be seen the following season, so buying these branded products will then distinguish her from most other young women. Thus, the exclusivity that brands can bring gives Waverly a different perspective on branded goods. According to McCracken (1993), brands are valued through their symbolic meanings by which consumers can use them to express themselves to others. Thus, the most important benefit gained from brands for young

women is self-presentation and individual distinctiveness. Hsiao-Han also connects individual reliability with brands:

> Maybe when I'm older, I would want an LV handbag or something else. It's the same with clothes, the pantsuits, etc… If it's necessary for work to dress like this, like if you are a real estate agent or something… you feel more reliable like this. (Hsiao-Han, aged 22)

Speaking of using designer-label products, Hsiao-Han states that she only has one designer-label accessory – a *coach* purse she bought with 'consumption coupons.'[3] She further justified this purchase by saying that she and her boyfriend wanted to each have something as a token of their relationship and that her purse was showing signs of wear. She emphasised that, since the purse is something she uses every day, it was definitely worth the money. Hsiao-Han, like most of the women interviewed, feels that buying designer-label bags should be mainly predicated on necessity and what is affordable, or how one's social and professional role demands appropriate dress and accessories. For Hsiao-Han, designer-label purchases are not externally or socially motivated in the sense that they are not used to signal (or even elevate) taste, social status or wealth. The external motivation is circumscribed by necessity, rather than vanity. Not surprisingly, the 'necessity' of a designer-label handbag is mostly self-perceived pre-requisite for performing certain social functions appropriately. This perceived necessity is in turn dictated by the use of designer-label products being a social convention. Curiously, she does believe that designer labels can be used to make other, more nuanced statements about herself, such as reliability, which project a positive image and ultimately achieve social identity. Thus, for Hsiao-Han, as for other young women using a luxury-brand product is something for the future. Anita (aged 21) gives the example of a *Burberry* shirt to further illustrate this idea, when she explains, 'I wouldn't feel that it is that appropriate… practicality and whether or not I am at the right time line are more important.' Branded products are also seen as rewards for individual accomplishment. Since most of the younger participants are not financially independent, they would regard buying branded products as a lavish consumption, which does not fit their social status. Anita continued, 'if I had accomplished something, I would feel okay spending this amount.'

---

[3] In early 2009, Taiwan's government issued 3600 NTD of 'consumption coupons' to all permanent residents as a stimulus measure. These coupons are redeemable at all retailers for goods and services and must be spent within a given period of time.

These narratives suggest that buying branded products is only considered in a context of necessity, whether this necessity is interpreted as 'real needs' (the product itself) or 'abstract needs' (e.g. a reflection of social status). It then becomes clear that a woman's self-image is not simply constructed through the consumption of brands, but through reflection of what is suitable for them and they evaluate brands in these terms. Fournier (1998) argues that person-brand relationships appear to be irrational. Based on my study, I suggest that young women tend to make rational assessments of brands in the context of their own social situation.

Moreover, Dittmar (1992) points out that the symbolism of an item is instrumental in the expression of self-identity and the realisation of other people's recognition (cited in Chen, 2005). Thus, from the descriptions of the interviewees, the complex attitudes to using designer-label goods originate in the link between the self and others/society. They are not especially aware of the changes in their appearance brought about by wearing designer-label pieces, but can become more self-conscious and more sensitive to other people's reactions and the subtle differences in interacting with others:

> When I carry it [a designer handbag], the shop assistants are more willing to tend to me. Usually, when I just carry whatever, they don't really care about me. It feels as if … 'it looks like you can afford this.' You think this inside, but you don't really know whether this is what is happening. (Tiffany, aged 19)

Tiffany feels that the use of designer-label bags brings positive returns. While it is impossible to determine whether the shop assistants truly react differently to individuals carrying luxury goods, Tiffany clearly *perceives* a difference in attitude. She added – 'if the designer-label bags can make other people more polite to me, I would gladly buy a few more.' The branded item here is given a higher value, intrinsic to the brand, and she believes in the added social value the brand brings. Indeed, how others react is the catalyst for the attachment between the individual and a given brand. Attention to the 'consequences' of carrying designer-label handbags and the reactions of other people illustrate Tiffany's eagerness to express her social identity through these branded products. Individuals usually explore the extent to which one gains respect from society through the use of branded goods with their historical social meanings (Kao, 2003). The brand-self relationship (Fournier, 1998) is repeatedly examined among my participants. They have long been aware of the fashions reported in the media, the approximate prices of these items and how celebrities and socialites wear these pieces in public. In

my study, most of the younger women seem to distance themselves from these luxury goods, perhaps in recognition of either their own limited financial means or their different social statuses. Hsiao-Han (aged 22) reports that if she carried a Louis-Vuitton handbag, she would 'feel uncomfortable and start to think that everyone was looking at the bag and whether someone would snatch it suddenly.' She has self-imposed definitions of how these goods are appropriate for some other groups and not herself. Even though carrying a designer-label bag does not really mean that she will be robbed, it is the act of carrying such a bag that leads her to feel insecure. Hsiao-Han further adds that even if she was carrying a genuine Louis-Vuitton handbag, other people would think it was a fake. She also sees the combination of an expensive bag and an ordinary outfit, which is all she can afford, as being 'weird'. In contrast, most of the older women claim that since they do not spend much on fashion clothes, it is necessary for them to carry an expensive bag to 'balance' (Nini, aged 26) the outfit, to 'elevate' the whole sense of it (Yo-Hsuan, aged 25) and to avoid an overall impression of 'cheapness' (Sharlene, aged 29). The enrichment of self-value through luxury bags supports the argument that brands affect a consumer's self-image (Graeff, 1996; Kressmann et al., 2006). From this, I argue that the processes of dressing up and accessorising with both branded and non-branded products is the modern young women's attempt to translate high-end luxury goods into something that is closer to their own perceived social status and self-identity. Nevertheless, the possibility of a negative self-image is highlighted in Hsiao-Han's (aged 22) account when it comes to using a luxury-branded bag (which might incite robbery or be seen as fake). Most of the other younger participants appear to reflect similar concerns. They seem to be less likely to achieve social recognition or even self-recognition through designer brands, which might be seen as falsely representing themselves. Following this thread, the majority of participants point out that before carrying a designer-label item, they would first consider the scenarios and individuals they would encounter that day. Sherry comments:

Like those handbags worth tens of thousands [NTD], I wouldn't bring them to school. I don't want others to feel like [I am] very wealthy, I don't like that feeling. I would carry those nicer bags when I go out with family or shopping, I wouldn't carry them to class. Or I would carry them when I am with family or going out of the country. You couldn't really put them on the ground, you worry about other people kicking it and it's really hard to clean, you have to worry when you take them out, it's a bit tiring. (Sherry, aged 23)

During the interview, she showed me the handbag she had with her. She said that it had cost about four thousand NTD (about £87) and that she bought it during her first year at university. She had carried it from then until now, almost daily – first to class and later to work. The use of luxury items is, as she described, dependent on the occasion and leading to concern in terms of care and maintenance. As seen here, the value attached to branded products is conditional[4]. Also, she feels more at ease using a 'normal' handbag. Many other younger participants have similar concerns. Anita (aged 21) further explains how different brands, in the context of interacting with different individuals, can produce different meanings. For example, she would carry a '*chao*'[5] brand bag to the dance society (the school organisation), but a high-end brand bag to meet different people. Tiffany states that she has three luxury-branded handbags. Before she leaves the house each day, she checks herself to see whether carrying a certain bag will look 'out of place' that day. Mandy (aged 21), who works as a commercial model at night, says that, while she works, she has to put the bag aside, so she does not like to carry anything too expensive that other people might want to take. But she carries her designer bags to school, because people are used to it, so it is 'okay when everyone carries them.' Craik (1994) suggests that clothing and other kinds of ornamentation make the human body culturally visible. However, these young women present more complicated and ambivalent attitudes towards branded bags. In these cases the younger women prefer to be *less* visible when using a luxury item; it is only when everyone else is using them that they feel comfortable using designer-label items. Or, they feel secure using designer-label goods only when they are with people they trust or in places where they feel comfortable. This suggests a great concern about social relations even in using an ostensibly personal item. From my interviews, it appears that Taiwanese women realise that they are more scrutinised and judged than men in their interactions within society. This understanding extends to their use of luxury goods. Therefore, they learn to represent themselves by using luxury goods 'appropriately'. This involves women's choice, which is influenced by perceived product value and is evaluated in terms of the people and the location. It has been argued that in our 'post modern' world individuals will use symbolic purchases to avoid social order and hierarchical controls, thus achieving liberation from mainstream rules or rigid traditional lifestyles (Sun and Fong, 1995). However, these young Taiwanese women seem to use luxury goods in such a

---

[4] Conditional value is one element of consumer choice behaviour, which is 'a value ascribed to an object through circumstance of use' (Pope, 1998: 126).

[5] For a description, see Chapter 4.

way as to reaffirm their place in the social order. I suggest that the relationship between an individual and a branded product is not simply an individualistic choice; rather, it is a dynamic bond reinforced by the linking of the self and society through the purchase and use of a given item. It could be argued that this self-society dynamic is very culturally specific.

The idea of 'using a branded bag depending on the occasion' is also accentuated by a number of older participants, although they give slightly different reasons. Sharlene (aged 29) thinks that using a branded bag on the proper occasion could bring other people pleasant feelings, and she comments about a well-dressed woman without a branded bag, 'Why would you come like this when I invited you to my party today?' She added, 'It just feels like you're not giving someone face. I don't like this feeling. And once you go in, everyone would look at you, you wouldn't feel good yourself…' Similarly, Sandy (aged 31) used to buy designer-label bags but she sold them later on in order to buy a better camera. However, she still borrows branded bags from her sister when there is an occasion, saying it is to 'keep face'. As Brewer and Trentmann (2006) note, the use-value of the brand is associated with what kind of social relations people want to form around themselves. The cases presented so far illustrate the careful consideration entailed in these women's use of designer labels and the concurrent, diverse ways they have evolved to deal with others and themselves. My research suggests that young women's decisions on whether to carry a designer-label bag or not is dependent on personal background and financial status, as well as social expectations and relationships with others.

Even though the majority of my participants recognise the brand value of luxury bags, Shirley (aged 27) expresses her opinion that designer-label bags should be limited to one or two, and can be used to match most outfits. She comments, 'the expense with clothes and such is more expensive. Because from head to foot, with the hair, jewellery, cosmetics, clothes, shoes and bags, the expense is just too high, so [this branded bag] quota would only be this much.' For Shirley, the desire to buy other fashion products is stronger than her wish to spend most of her money on branded bags. These items, for her, are a part of her appearance that does not carry many unrealistically high expectations. In addition, many older women report their experiences of buying luxury branded bags as a result of '*shih sin fong*'[6] (Sandy, aged 31) or '*having a ghost cover*

---

[6] This is used to describe the status of someone losing control about buying things.

the eyes' (Justine, aged 30). These metaphors are commonly used to describe irrational buying behaviour. These young women generally cannot find a specific reason to explain a purchase, thus blaming something non-controllable is a way to express the compulsiveness of their buying behaviour. A further example of this can be observed in Yo-Hsuan's narrative:

> First, it's so obvious, it can be an object of envy to others. Maybe the ruffian might want to go after that bag. Second, it might be suspected as to whether or not it's genuine or fake. Don't you think this is such a silly question? Even though I don't have a habit of using fakes, but being asked just puts you in a bad mood, right? And then, third, it's hard to preserve. I feel like maybe it might get stained or something. I feel like it's not practical to fool people and it's too expensive to take it to the store to fix. I feel that it's insane, it's just so not-cost-effective. I feel it's much better to buy a useful bag than a good-looking bag. This is how I have started to think about these things. (Yo-Hsuan, aged 25)

Yo-Hsuan reports that she once blew her credit limit to buy designer handbags and that after spending a period of time to pay off the money, her own material desires were lessened. Her ideas about using designer-label bags changed after she realised that fashion is something unpractical, indicating her feeling of 'emptiness' about owning those branded handbags, which echoes Bocock's (1993) argument that consumers may experience emptiness after purchasing a product which they have saved for or longed for. She further explains it as 'a realisation' in recent years that '[I can] buy so many things, but I don't actually have that many bodies to wear them.' All these factors have undoubtedly contributed to her reluctance to use branded products. In addition to the decline of brand value with her experiences of using branded products, her concern about practicality seems to arise from those negative feelings. Her changing attitude towards brand purchasing is demonstrated during her self-reflection.

As discussed in previous chapters, young Taiwanese women have strong connections with their parents in terms of appearance. Violet (aged 27), Shelby (aged 29) and Helen (aged 31) also stress that their concepts of consumption are strongly affected by their parents. Violet claims that she only uses 'less-known brands' bought from department stores since her father told her that she does not have the social status to use a luxury brand. Her father said, 'Like if I were to take a fake [bag] out, other people would think that it's real [due to his social status]. But for you, it would be the opposite.' Helen

further explains the importance of 'savings' rather than 'brands' by explaining: 'I feel that it's not necessary to compare what's outside with other people. She might be carrying a 50,000 NTD bag, but that 50,000 NTD might be the whole of her assets.' Therefore, whether or not someone has the wealth or social status to justify the purchase is what determines whether or not they are 'qualified' to own a branded item. This is something Helen's parents have taught her. Shelby admits that she has no intention of buying branded products because her mother likes buying products of good quality, and she comments, 'Something that's good doesn't have to be expensive, because what's expensive is usually the label. You can buy something good even without that label.' Recognising brands, for them, is a survival skill for fitting into their social groups, as Violet suggests: 'You may not like these things, but you would still have to know them.' The self presented by these women has been shaped by both their parents and their social groups.

However, some younger participants demonstrate a higher degree of individuality when facing these choices and thoroughly enjoy the process of freely choosing their favourites without being constrained by the trend for using luxury bags. Angel (aged 23) and Sherry (aged 23) emphasised that much of the pleasure in adorning their appearance comes from cheaper but varied clothes and accessories, not from a single luxury-brand bag:

> Because I feel like if I buy a handbag that expensive, I might not have the money to buy other bags. But I don't like carrying the same handbag every day. Yeah, like it would be different according to what I wear. If today was a sportier day, I would like a sportier bag. If today was more lady-like I would want a more glamorous and shiny bag. If I bought an LV bag and had to carry it every day, it would feel so monotonous. (Angel, aged 23)

Angel defines her fashion styles as varied, so that she likes to change her outfits to a different style every day. Therefore, it is unlikely that she will use luxury products while she has limited income to purchase them. Hsiao-Han, aged 22, and Sherry, aged 23, have similar ideas about buying luxury products. Rather than spending a lot on only one thing, they would prefer to use the same money to buy piles of clothes. Sherry says, 'I feel in a different mood when I wear different clothes. I might feel great today when I wear new clothes... I'd rather spend on many small things.' Angel and Sherry come from two distinct family backgrounds, though both are the only daughter. Sherry is from

a very wealthy family but Angel is the opposite. Angel is distant from both of her parents. According to her, her parents have used up her childhood savings and, because of a family financial crisis, they ask her for money every month. Because of this, she rents and lives away from home even though her whole family lives in the city. Angel is a part-time model right now, although she says that the income from jobs is unstable. Sherry, in contrast, has a full-time job working for her mother. She explains that, while both parents earn very high salaries, they seldom purchase designer-brand items. It is only on special occasions or when they travel abroad that her parents bring a piece or two for her.

Financial status and family background does not always determine young women's fashion choices. Despite coming from a wealthy family, Sherry (aged 23) does not agree with the values embodied by luxury brands, saying: 'It's crazy, I just don't think this is a lifestyle for me.' As Fournier (1998) noted, brands give meanings to consumers' lives so that they are choosing lives, not brands. Living in a world filled with luxury brands is indeed not a life Sherry is keen on. The other reason she dislikes some luxury brands is that they lack outlet stores and so are out of her own defined price range. So she buys from Coach because 'after discount, you can get it for maybe two thousand or three thousand, at most eight or nine thousand.' Therefore, Sherry is a value-conscious consumer. In her description, she can only agree to prices that are within her accepted valuation of brands. The price in this case determines the value of a brand. High-priced brands, such that they can be considered excessive, ostentatious, or wasteful, do not have a relatively high brand value for her. Rather, the items that can bring more variety and trendiness are given higher value, regardless of the brand (or lack thereof). For example, Vanessa aptly describes the pleasurable process that underlies shopping and choosing among non-branded goods:

> I don't like going to department stores, because I feel that many of these branded clothes are only just all right, but they would be priced over 2000 NTD. But if I go to the curb-side vendors I can buy better-looking ones, ones that I like more, but the price will be much lower. (Vanessa, aged 20)

Compared with her friends who only buy branded products, Vanessa focuses more on the pleasure gained through discovery, and comments: 'They don't know how to bargain… how to pick out clothes… It's with our help that they would gradually discover the small vendors.' She further places different value on buying a designer t-

shirt by saying: 'those where each one has to be one or two thousand. But it's just a simple t-shirt, nothing particular in style, not very matching. I feel there's no point to that.' Just as in Angel's (aged 23) narrative earlier, luxury-branded goods can crowd out the purchase of other items by virtue of their high prices, thus creating a wardrobe with fewer choices. This exemplifies itself through the young women feeling 'bored'. Tiffany, aged 19, also tells me that when she uses a designer-label bag, she often has to force herself to 'not change my mind'. Indeed, young women exhibit a number of contradictions in many respects when they use – or avoid – luxury goods. From another aspect, globalisation provides a variety of commodity messages, from daily fashion, high-street fashion to high-end fashion, which fill our daily lives with 'choices'. Young women thus make it a habit to look for diversity, hating staying in a rut. Even the so-called classical series in top brands are refreshed every season in order to attract the young generations. Vanessa (aged 20), Angel (aged 23) and Sherry (aged 23) do not conform to the expectation that young women desire and pursue luxury brands. Although they have different financial capabilities, they all show a preference for goods that are cheap, fashionable and replaceable.

In Vanessa's case, she emphasises the 'I' when she purchases fashion goods, such as '"I" like ...more' or 'the fun "I" have got'. She uses strong words to point out that her friends who only purchase brand products cannot realise the joy of matching clothing and bargaining. Vanessa builds up her self-identity through her observation, comparison and experience with other people. If a fashion product is expensive just because of the brand, it will lose value in assisting self-realisation for these young women. Angel (aged 23) also echoes this point of view, '...I think jeans are just something for people to put on, you don't look much different from me by putting on those priced thousands of NT dollars.' For these younger participants, their perceptions of price and self are relatively high, but they are relatively low in brand attachment. They focus more on the connection between themselves and fashion products, without relying on the brand to raise confidence, or emphasising the quality for durability. The relationship between people and products seems to go back to pure hedonism. In other words, the pleasure offered by the product itself is the most significant part of fashion consumption for these young women. The added value conferred upon a product by its brand does not seem to play an important role in individuals' self-presentation. Younger participants appear to deviate from the mainstream of consumption based on brand-driven aesthetics, and develop new hedonistic person-product relationships.

6.3.1 Brand logos

The notion of '"the gaze of the other" playing the central role in the construction of the female visual self' (Tseelon, 1995: 67) could extend to how young women utilise or avoid branded merchandise to express the self. Logos make wearing particular brands visible to others. Most of my participants claim that they are not fond of fashion products with logos, indicating their preference for less noticeable logos in order to represent their fashion tastes or remain low-profile. For some participants, the move away from brand logo fantasy is seen as a process of 'growing up'. They admit that they used to insist on buying something with logos; Yumi (aged 26) comments: 'It was like that when I was young, feeling more relieved spending on something with logos.' Consumers buy the products with logos, not because they add anything tangible to the item but in order to convey certain meanings, such as social status or fashion tastes, (Tseng, 2002). There is one younger woman, Judy, who not only illustrates this perspective but also connects it with Tseelon's notion that the construction of women's appearance is oriented to the gaze of the other:

> It's a strong tendency [to buy things with a logo], because I feel like I only have so much money…. I feel that I should buy something that others can see and know what it is…I …would choose something more high-tone. I would buy something that everyone would know. (Judy, aged 22)

Judy explained that her ex-boyfriend did not care for logos and would choose something low-profile that costs a fortune, while she could find similar items from the street vendors. Limited economic capital is usually the main concern for students in purchasing branded goods. That is the reason why she prefers to buy something recognisable. Through a highly recognisable brand logo, she feels physically visible by wearing or carrying branded products with logos. This is regarded as a symbolic upgrade from being a student to someone with fortune and status. Stressing brand logos becomes a strategy to affect others' impressions and judgement. In addition, the brand logo not only becomes a shortcut for people to distinguish themselves from others but can also create false images between classes. In terms of Veblen's (1912) idea of conspicuous consumption, I suggest that, on the one hand, logo preference projects individuals' personal styles and status to other people; on the other hand, it can be also be used to camouflage individuals' actual financial and social status. Prendergast et al. (2001) pointed out that the vanity generated by consuming the logo is more crucial than

the products themselves. Indeed, young women's purchases of branded items are arguably more about the image that can be created and the effect produced than about the item itself. Much research on fashion emphasises that brand consumption is about expressing the self so as to distinguish oneself from others; rather than expressing taste and style, individuals are inclined to satisfy their expectations and personal fantasies by purchasing brand logos (Wallendorf and Arnould, 1988; Jamal and Goode, 2001).

Judy (aged 22) also stated that she would be attracted by more prominent brand logos. However, young women also showed conflict in their attitudes towards brand logos. Judy hoped that the brand logo would draw people's attention in a low-key way. The brand logo represents a sign and forms a distinctive sign value (Baudrillard, 2002). Sign value produces difference; in relation to brands it differentiates one from another through the product symbol (logo). My participants illustrate that sign value seems to be affected by cultural features and social environment. For example, Judy mentioned that she thought the logo of *Loewe* is interesting for its simplicity accompanied with decorated flowers, but the logo would lose value if it was designed to be all over the product because there have been too many similar products or counterfeits on the market. In Taiwan, the spreading of counterfeits and the popularity of branded products has resulted in a very different interpretation of brand logos by young women. Possibly these are the reasons that most of my participants do not like to use fashion products with logos. Sign value is therefore formulated in a more complicated way in the Taiwanese context. Anita gives an example to express her reluctance to choose noticeable brand logos:

> ...now there are many counterfeits of the Ralph Lauren big pony, like different directions of the polo mallet [the logo]. It would be embarrassing if you were found wearing a counterfeit. Besides, it won't be special if everyone wears the same shirt. (Anita, aged 21)

The presentation of appearance always involves interacting with other people. Anita's narrative indicates that using branded products needs to be considered carefully, which would affect her decisions about consumption. Using recognised branded products might not be favoured in terms of displaying uniqueness in appearance. However,

uniqueness in appearance is integrated with the doctrine of '*Jhong Yong Jhih Dao*'[7] from Confucianism, which is reflected in women's use of branded fashion products. Anita says, '...I won't put on something ostentatious where everyone would know what the brand is, but I might wear brand products that others do not pay attention to or only accidently notice.' She told me how she responded in low profile when people noticed the brand logo incidentally. Tiffany (aged 19) also explained that some logos are so prominent that they caused her to hesitate, she dared not buy them. Most young Taiwanese women are cautious in selecting branded fashion products when it comes to logo accentuation. The self-image through using low-profile branded products with less noticeable logos is constructed to avoid social judgement and to receive pleasure from consuming fashion products.

6.3.2 Second-hand vs. Counterfeit

Even though a number of my participants take their financial circumstances and social judgement into consideration, almost every woman said that she has never bought second-hand bags when I asked their opinions on second-hand products. Only one participant, Justine (aged 30), had bought a second-hand *Dior* handbag from her friend. Most of these young women display negative attitudes towards this kind of consumption. Anita (aged 21) told me that she would consider second-hand bags but they did not have priority, unless they were inaccessible or her favourite. Sherry (aged 23) said she did not consider them for sanitary reasons as she did not know who had used it last. She was a bit obsessive about cleanliness, feeling that it might be dirty having been used by someone else. Judy stressed more the process that she enjoyed in purchasing new products:

> I would still buy from the dedicated counters. Because you know that the price is added in the service they provide, they'll greet you very warmly and then wrap it very carefully. It's very satisfying. When I see a beautiful wrapping, I feel very happy. Yeah, actually that happens, I'll be drawn by the really complex wrapping on the outside. Even if it goes from 40,000 NTD to 20,000 NTD, but going into a second-hand shop that just lets people buy casually, it feels wrong. (Judy, aged 22)

---

[7] This doctrine is an important concept in Confucianism. The appeal is to find an inner and virtual balance. It is a harmonious status between 'not being excessive' and 'not being sufficient'; it is a status of 'just right'.

To Judy, the pleasant experiences involved in purchasing branded products are more valuable than the products themselves. The services that customers receive in high-end branded stores are independent of appearance and social class. When she shopped, she felt she was being identified with the upper class; her satisfaction and self-esteem rose at the same time. Wong and Ahuvia (1998) pointed out that purchasing behaviour is more personally oriented than socially oriented (cited in Chen, 2006). On the other hand, since it is considered respectable to buy authentic branded products in a shop, young women whose self-esteem or individuality are undermined in other situations, like in the family or the workplace, find this attractive. Judy grew up with a strict upbringing (see Chapter 4). The respect she gets at high-end branded stores can balance the oppression she experiences in other aspects of her life.

The concern with the authenticity of luxury brands is connected with expectations of young women towards themselves and other people. All of my interviewees indicated that they could not accept counterfeits. These young women demonstrated moral objections to using counterfeits of luxury brands, with most saying that they would not and 'should not' buy fakes. Yo-Hsuan (aged 25), for instance, said that 'she owes it to her conscience to' not use counterfeits, while Sharlene (aged 29) argued that 'it's one thing to lie to yourself, it's another thing to lie to others.' Instead, they indicated that they would rather purchase cheaper non-branded products than counterfeits. Hsiao-Han, aged 22, said that using fake products would be so embarrassing if someone found out. Sherry (aged 23) demonstrates her disdain for people who use counterfeits, commenting, 'counterfeits make me feel like this... this excessive consumption that I look down on. It's for saving face. So, vanity, I don't think it's a good thing.....If I buy, I buy the real thing.' Tiffany echoes this sentiment by describing her experience of receiving fake branded products from China:

> I can't accept counterfeits. For second-hand things, it depends on their lasting value. I can accept second-hand, but not counterfeits. The fakes from China, someone used to give them to us...we just can't stand it... and these fakes are not cheap either. For something that's worth ten thousand [NTD] they would sell it for five or six thousand. If so, why not save up a little money and buy a real one, even a second-hand one is all right. But the fakes are really a no-go. (Tiffany, aged 19)

At least superficially, the younger women demonstrated much stronger individualistic arguments on the topic of counterfeits. They feel that a person should be true to herself rather than the fake self constructed by counterfeits. The presentation of an authentic luxury brand is thus considered to be the presentation of 'authentic' style. For this reason, Sherry and Tiffany exhibited palpable distaste towards counterfeits and the people who use them, feeling that the item and the user are both fakes. On the other hand, as previously described, the younger women are conservative and cautious in their use of designer-label goods. They are constantly concerned that what they wear would be thought of as counterfeits by others. The fear of possible social judgement has been implanted in these women's minds and they would rather spare themselves the pressures and possible social indictments. As more and more counterfeits improve in quality, to the point where they are indistinguishable, Tiffany explained that such items can be priced at half or more of the genuine item. Even if the counterfeits are increasingly similar to the genuine item in their material and tangible value, the social value they generate for these young women remains low.

Shelby (aged 29) expresses a different attitude towards designer-label products. Like other participants, she does not approve of buying counterfeit products. However she once travelled to Mainland China with friends where she forced herself to buy class-A counterfeits because 'today's itinerary is just to buy "class-A counterfeits". When everyone is doing it, you're a loser for not doing it.' And though Shelby was socially pressured to buy a fake product, she chose a low-profile brand since the price of the authentic piece is not that high, it would therefore be less noticeable and she would be less likely to get caught. Or if she were to buy a higher profile brand 'I would tell people from the start that it's a fake… instead I would be much more concerned if people thought it was real, since other people would wonder how I could waste so much money on one expensive item.' As already mentioned, using designer-label products can be difficult in the Taiwanese social context. Even though spending on luxuries is closely linked to the rise in women's purchasing power and an expression of the self, Taiwanese women remain sensitive to the social criticisms that may come along with their spending.

In terms of the construction of self-image, counterfeits always remain unreal and unacceptable, without having the sentiment or the brand value of the real thing. The relationship between ethical beliefs and the self, between the social meaning and the social value, have become the focus of brand shopping. Interestingly, a number of my

participants do not hold a correspondingly positive opinion of those who use a genuine item, only thinking that these people are from 'a wealthy family'. They do not feel that the users of genuine items have more taste or belong to a totally different group, but that it is a coincidence and personal choice. Felicia, aged 23, emphasises that 'I'm me, I just want the things I want and that would be fine.' These 'things' might not be designer labels, but are definitely things she likes. What she values is how much she likes a particular item (regardless of the label), not the social recognition gained from using these things. It can be argued that the use of distance between herself and others is a reinforcement of her sense of self.

6.4 Shopping Perceptions - Internet vs. Street Shopping

Studies and marketing research suggest that shopping for most women is considered to be an enjoyable and social activity in which they can please themselves and their social network. Yet, it seems as though the process and experience being talked about here by a few participants are entirely different. Jessie (aged 24) talks about her shopping experience in terms of the frustration of trying to find a pair of satisfactory shoes: 'I've been looking for shoes in all my shopping areas, Gongguan, Taipei Main Station and Shilin night market,[8] any shop I know. It was really exhausting because I had to walk for a long time and I'm super lazy.' Jessie turned to online shopping rather than street shopping because searching online was simply easier than searching in a physical shop. She points to her personal characteristics, and the physical and emotional involvement associated with the experience to highlight the shift from street shopping to online shopping. A similar experience is exemplified by Yo-Hsuan (aged 25), who says, 'If you're looking for something particular, like a white or black t-shirt, you have trouble finding it in shops, it's so handy to get one by searching on the website.' However, trust in online products must be tested and reinforced through seeing the real products, which represents a trade-off against the convenience of the physical search. Jessie further

---

[8] Taipei main station shopping district and its surroundings: this combines the train station, shopping centres, department stores and small shops.

Gongguan: a shopping district with a night market which caters mostly to students of the nearby National Taiwan University (NTU).

Shilin night market: the most famous night market in Taipei, the surrounding streets and lanes are full of clothing shops and street vendors.

describes her past online shopping experiences, where she was not satisfied. Therefore she does not trust online shopping that well:

> I will be worried about what I will get if I don't see the real products. I am a really fussy person, even if I see the real product I still have to think about it [whether to buy it or not] for a long time. If I'm doing online shopping, probably the quality of the product is just that [level], and I will be disappointed after they deliver it to me. (Jessie, aged 24)

She talked about the insecurity that came with online shopping for groceries and receiving substandard vegetables and extended this to fashion shopping. As a result of the experience of disappointment, Jessie has found it necessary to engage in street shopping to regain her confidence in shopping. According to Ward and Lee (2000), the low costs of setting up a website is likely to undermine the confidence a consumer may have about a product. Felicia (aged 23) also comments that she has '…been disappointed [in online-shopping] too many times…' Insecurity caused by not seeing the real products is commonly expressed in the interviews. Like Jessie and Felicia, Vanessa (aged 20) and Sharlene (aged 29) are also less willing to buy products online as they worry that the real products will not be the same as those shown on the website or that there will be size problems. Justine also complains about the quality of things bought online but admits her irrationality in continuing with online shopping. The interviewees expressed practical, logistical concerns about shopping online and none would do all of their shopping online. It is worth noting that the desire to see a real product points to a more emotional and person-defining shopping experience.

Although Jessie (aged 24) expressed her ambivalence about street and internet shopping and found it difficult to give consistent views, she readily included the opinions of the elders in her family situating herself within a space where the issue of e-shopping could be evaluated through other family members. However, when she was sharing her experience with the elders, she actually defended herself for deciding to shop online: '…at first the elders excluded online shopping for me…but I think I have done enough homework by communicating with the seller, size, delivery, I also spent lots of time on it.' This indicates that Jessie still retains her individuality, doing shopping based on her own decisions. Nevertheless, individuality here is vacillating in the process of shopping. The inclusion of elders can also be found in Waverly's (aged 19) case. 'Urm, online shopping….. occasionally I tell my mom unless I really like it. I ask mom to buy it for

me when seeing something pretty online.' Seeking approval from elders forms the basis of these participants' perceptions of shopping. In these cases, the involvement of their elders in decision-making provides opportunities to assert their individuality through differences of opinions. These women not only dealt with the messages from tradition, family and their peer groups but also defended themselves when being interpreted incorrectly. Through explaining their shopping strategies and negotiating with parents, these young women were able to assert themselves and their own preferences even while conforming to the social norms for respecting their elders.

Violet's (aged 27) account differs from Jessie's in that she focuses on how her peers affect her perception of shopping. She admires a colleague's fashion style and her working ability. Thus, when this colleague initiates online shopping, 'my workmates, let's buy online auction!' many colleagues pick out clothes and then ask her opinions. Judy also learnt online shopping from a friend:

> I knew a friend who is really good at online auction shopping so I started learning how to buy good products online. Also, I used BBS[9] a lot, there are e-shopping boards, helpbuy boards, things like that. Sometimes I compared for the price. I am now keener to compare price first, not going to department stores and buying things impulsively. (Judy, aged 22)

For both Violet and Judy, their perception of shopping is shifted due to the influence of their peers. Peer groups play an important role in affecting their shopping habits. Judy's ex-boyfriend used to influence her clothes shopping: 'He has great taste in shopping'. Since they split up she has been influenced by friends. Paradoxically, although she was influenced by the people around her, she did not entirely accept the way her friend did shopping, commenting: 'I don't get it why she needs to buy A&F[10], her behaviour is a bit beyond my understanding, you only show [the layering] a little bit, who knows!' Violet was also influenced by others, her colleagues, in starting to do online shopping. In her case, this was motivated by the benefits of shopping as a group.

> At first it was to gain small benefits, it's really cheap if we all buy a great amount. If each person in the office buys one item, [the order] could be huge so we can get

---

[9] BBS –Bulletin Board System, an online forum format. See Chapter 3.
[10] <u>Abercrombie & Fitch</u>: American brand, which is not imported into Taiwan. Therefore young people have to order via official websites or use the website helpbuy ((is it helpbuy or helpby?)), in which people offering helpby service because either they travel to the USA regularly or live in the USA – rephrase this final sentence – not quite grammatical.

an extra 15% or 20% off. At first I didn't join them, but I started thinking 'ok, join them!' when everyone is ordering and it's very cheap, and [they] have new clothes to wear every day. (Violet, aged 27)

Violet clearly described her motives for being part of a shopping group. Violet has to pay for everything on her own; since she started working, her father will no longer pay for anything for her, and so lower price is another significant concern in joining the group. Transcending her prior preference for buying branded products in department stores and the acceptance of cheap products may be interpreted as indicative of the influence of peers. Shopping therefore may also be a way to gain group identification through 'joining in' a shared activity.

Justine, as mentioned earlier, prioritises spending money on travel and dancing, and tries not to spend too much on clothes. In addition to some online shopping (despite her reservations about it) she also engages in street shopping, but limits this to control her spending. Justine claims that she likes to be more systematic and plan out her clothes shopping, rather than going shopping simply because there was not much to do:

> Probably I go shopping once a month. Then I buy some clothes and spend roughly a total of NTD2000 [about £43] and I only go to Wufenpu[11] or Shilin night market. I don't go to department stores. (Justine, aged 30)

Her reason for not buying clothes in department stores is her realisation of fast-changing fashion trends. She told me that she can throw away those cheap fashion clothes when they fall behind the trend next year, while she would feel awful if they cost thousands of NT dollars (bought from department stores).

Yumi (aged 26) told me that she goes shopping almost every day as her company is in East Taipei upmarket shopping area. She said that she will never decrease the frequency of street shopping. Yumi suggests a hedonistic perception of shopping, saying, 'If the stuff can make you very happy, no matter how much it costs, for example if a pair of shoes costs NTD26,000 [about £560], you should buy them.' For Yumi it is clear and taken for granted that street shopping is a regular habit and she does enjoy receiving the latest fashion trends by browsing around. Because she works in the upper Eastern area she has to pass through the shops every day. Yet she reminded me that no matter where

---

[11] Wufenpu commercial zone: a popular clothing market where over 100 outlets supply trendy clothes at the lowest end of the price range.

she worked, the point is to buy it or not. Like most other interviewees, she also claimed that she often rashly bought fashion products when she was young. By learning from experience, Yumi, Justine and Violet see themselves as rational shoppers now. They have redefined themselves in an effort to control their environment. The women in the older group, as in the examples of Justine and Yumi, focused on their ability to control desire (although having differing priorities) but they all took buying for granted as it is necessary to make them happy.

The younger women also sometimes expressed pride in being careful shoppers, for example taking pride in bargaining while street shopping:

> I am a bargain hunter. I like the feeling of bargaining with the clothes seller over the price. Shida night market[12] is a good place for bargaining. Ximendin[13] sometimes you can, sometimes you can't. I know the cost of those clothes is much lower than the selling price. It makes me feel so proud of myself if I can make a deal with a satisfactory price. (Chrissy, aged 19)

While being keen on finding bargains, young women do not want clothes that look too cheap or too commonplace. For example, Hsian-Han explains her e-shopping strategy in this way:

> As to online auctions, I have to evaluate the clothes first. If it looks like I bought it in an online auction, I'm not going to buy that. For example, if lots of people bid for one item, I will think there must be many people who see this item on other sellers' web pages. I don't want to buy something which is obviously bought from an online auction. I will buy some basic clothes if I do an online auction, like bandeau, layering and leggings which people cannot tell where you got it. (Hsiao-Han, aged 22)

While Hsiao-Han was open about shopping online, she will only buy certain products that way to avoid them being recognised as online products. Buying highly recognisable clothes is seen as shameful consumption. Being different is, in fact, one of the components of doing online shopping, as I proposed above, although women often seek

---

[12] Shida night market: located right beside National Taiwan Normal University (NTNU). The streets and alleys are packed with small shops and stalls, combining food, shopping and entertainment.
[13] Ximending: located in West Taipei, which is considered to be the Mecca of youth culture, characterised by narrow streets packed with small shops.

alliances with their peers in shopping. They also define the self, showing individuality through the process of surfing online. While some of the younger women suggest a strategic attitude to shopping, most are still frequent shoppers and regard this as unavoidable.

> I want to go shopping whether I am in a bad mood or a good mood. Anyway I want to go shopping on any occasion. However, recently I've been thinking I used to go shopping in certain places and the stuff I bought was in a certain price range. If I want to buy something better, I cannot really go shopping at any time, like department stores, I have to wait until they're on sale. So I would rather give up than spend time on shopping, anyway I only get a few days off. (Jessie, aged 24)

Jessie (aged 24) continually refers to her wilful shopping behaviour but justifies it at the same time. Likewise, although she is careful about online shopping, on some occasions Hsiao-Han (aged 22) still indulged in buying products (whether online or on the street). She told me: 'What can I do? I see it! I can't help it.' In many cases the younger women simply could not get away from 'buying'. Sherry said she enjoyed both street shopping and online shopping.

> I like street shopping very much, actually [I] don't really have to buy something, just like looking around. Before, I liked taking photos of windows, I often go along a street taking some photos. Since my third year at uni, I've fancied online auctions very much, until now. My classmate and I, both of us are addicted to online auctions…..Online auctions are more convenient. Even though they're cheaper, the quality is not that good, I can throw things away after three or four washes. Therefore, I can always have new clothes to wear. Now I prefer it this way. Before I always bought expensive clothes so I didn't want to buy new stuff often. Now I often discuss with my friend that we like checking how different online sellers do clothes matches, I like it very much. (Sherry, aged 23)

Street shopping is more than just 'shopping'; it turns out to have become a pastime. The demand for constant change and new clothes has a radical impact on the nature of consumption. Therefore, the expansion of everyday fashion, with the popularisation of the idea of having different clothes to wear every day, dominates the current perception of consumption. Most of my interviewees are aware of the idea of rapidly obsolescent fashion. Instead of buying expensive clothes, demand has increased for wearing

different clothes that can be bought cheaply and frequently. The potential risk of shopping online seems not to be a priority concern in the younger group.

What is clear is that online shopping is obviously a product of globalisation but it is not a substitute for street shopping. Street shopping in daily life remains significant. Most of my interviewees are willing to separate street shopping and e-shopping in order to satisfy different demands and most, in both age groups, adopt both approaches. They are not oppositional to each other and both remained integral parts of young women's perceptions of shopping.

The dominant idea about the consumption of fashion products has changed from idealised consumption to rational consumption. The young women in my interview continue to be sophisticated in their shopping. In many respects these young women do not conform to the stereotypical notion of consumerism, where people are somehow driven to buy things they do not need (Fischer, 2003). Most participants told me that, after having shopped online, they would buy less impulsively. Tiffany (aged 19) says, '…I will go back online to see whether it's online. Now that I've bought more things I know that their [salespeople] technique is mostly just making stuff up, like something is the last one of a limited run, I will ask them to hold on to it, I wouldn't buy it then and there.' Judy (aged 22) also feels that she is 'better at comparing prices and wouldn't go to the department store on an impulse, like I would buy something right away when I feel like it, but will look to see whether there are other channels, or if the retailer has other promotions.' Sandy (aged 31) goes a step further, saying that, aside from price comparisons, she would also look for cheaper substitutes.

The choice between buying online and buying in-store is arguably the most rational component of shopping – where the same commodity is merely being offered at different venues and for different prices. At the same time, the interviewees expressed reasons other than convenience and price for their choice of shopping online or in-store. Many women identified shopping online as a form of impulse control, which recognises that shopping is a less than rational experience. For other women, however, the act of buying online feeds into their self-recognition as savvy consumers – an identity distinct from (and perhaps in conflict with) the various images a young woman seeks to present in the act of dressing up.

6.5 I am a Clever Consumer

From the discussions in previous sections, it can be seen that young Taiwanese women demonstrate ambivalent attitudes towards fashion products, brand purchasing and street/online shopping. I identified seven elements of fashion products that participants take into account when making a purchasing decision. These are: price, practicality, brand, design/appearance, right for me?, materials and country of origin (COO). Tables 6.1 and 6.2 below provide a summary of the concerns expressed by the participants and their priorities in sequence (the degree decreases from left to right), which reveals young women's perceptions of fashion product choices.

Table 6.1 Priorities in Fashion Product Choice, 19-24 age group

Chrissy	price	practicality	Right for me?	design/ appearance	brand	materials	COO
Waverly	price	design/appearance	practicality	right for me?	materials	brand	COO
Tiffany	brand	design/appearance	right for me?	practicality	price	COO	materials
Vanessa	design/appearance	right for me?	practicality	price	materials	brand	COO
Mandy	design/appearance	right for me?	price	brand	practicality	materials	COO
Anita	design/appearance	price	brand	practicality	materials	COO	right for me?
Judy	price	design/ appearance	brand	right for me?	materials	practicality	COO
Hsiao-Han	design/appearance	right for me?	materials	price	practicality	brand	COO
Felicia	right for me?	design/appearance	price	practicality	materials	brand	COO
Sherry	right for me?	design/appearance	price	practicality	brand	materials	COO
Angel	price	design/appearance	right for me?	practicality	materials	brand	COO
Jessie	right for me?	practicality	price	design/appearance	materials	COO	brand

Table 6.2 Priorities in Fashion Product Choice, 25-31 age group

Yo-Hsuan	design/appearance	practicality	right for me?	brand	materials	price	COO
Yumi	design/appearance	right for me?	price	practicality	brand	materials	COO
Nini	right for me?	design/appearance	practicality	materials	price	brand	COO
Violet	design/appearance	right for me?	brand	price	practicality	COO	
Shirley	design/appearance	practicality	right for me?	price	materials	brand	COO
Nancy	design/appearance	right for me?	brand	materials	price	practicality	COO
Sharlene	materials	right for me?	practicality	design/appearance	COO	price	brand
Shelby							
Sappho	right for me?	design/ appearance	materials	price	brand	practicality	COO
Justine	right for me?	practicality	price	design/ appearance	materials	brand	COO
Sandy	right for me?	practicality	design/appearance	price	brand	COO	
Helen	design/appearance	right for me?	practicality	materials	price	brand	COO

Violet and Sandy did not mention 'materials' when they were talking about their priorities in choosing a fashion product. Also, Shelby did not complete this question because of time limitations (see Chapter 3).

19-24 age group, the top two priorities

reason	count
design/appearance	10
right for me?	6
price	5
practicality	2
brand	1

25-31 age group, the top two priorities

reason	count
right for me?	9
design/appearance	8
practicality	4
materials	1

The frequency of the first two priorities appears to be a product's 'design/appearance' and 'is it right for me?' Comparing the two age groups, the first two priorities for buying fashion products show similarities. The younger women tend to take 'price' into account while the older women show more concern about 'practicality'. The reason that 'practicality' shows up less frequently in the younger group is their preference for buying various fashion items which they intend to replace speedily. Therefore, younger women are not concerned about the lifespan of fashion items or how often they will wear them. Likewise, these younger women with limited income or without income pay more attention to the price of fashion items.

19-24 age group, the lowest two priorities

reason	count
COO	12
brand	6
materials	4
practicality	1
right for me?	1

25-31 age group, the lowest two priorities

reason	count
COO	10
brand	5
practicality	2
price	2
materials	1

From the tables above, 'country of origin' and 'brand' are the lowest two concerns in both age groups when making shopping decisions. However, some participants did report that certain manufacturing countries would slightly affect how they perceived the

value of products. The data reported here add to the growing body of evidence on the active role of consumers in consuming fashion products. These young women suggest a strong person-product relationship that is directly linked to the product itself, and whether it suits them, rather than the added value of a brand or country of origin.

6.6 Summary

Fashionable clothes and cosmetics have been a familiar and intimate part of many women's lives. In my research, although most women place different levels of importance on clothes and cosmetics, they generally recognise the essential nature of these commodities. They variously link these items and the appearance they represent to a woman's own individuality, mood, confidence, or sense of security. Maintaining one's own appearance through these products will generate greater added value than the merchandise itself. Even so, some participants prioritise spending on fashion behind other forms of consumption that are seen as investments in the individual self, such as travelling and hobbies, rather than spending much on appearance.

Advertising and branding have been seeking to capitalise on, or even construct outright, young women's self-image. Yet consuming luxury branded products in Taiwan has carried a stigma for young women. Those who defend this behaviour are immediately tagged as being under the influence of commercial manipulation or as symbolic of the general collapse of social values. Although the women interviewed reveal a number of contradictions in the pursuit of fashion trends, these interviews suggest that brands are not the major concern in young women's consumption behaviour; rather, they have had very unique definitions attached to their perceived values. Consequently, the sign value of brand logos is trivialised when facing cultural features (*Jhong Yong Jhih Dao* in Confucianism) and the social environment (the widespread existence of counterfeits). Young women thus prefer the variety and creativity afforded by many pieces of unbranded fashion to a few pieces of high-end fashion. Yet, Taipei women are also unwilling to use second-hand products or counterfeits, even those that are indistinguishable from the genuine item to the beholder, arguing that using fakes degrades them as individuals. All of this presents a consistent narrative that fashion purchases are strongly linked to seeking social identity.

The commercial modality of shopping suggests that the emergence of internet shopping (particularly advanced in Taiwan) is unable to replace in-store shopping, in spite of its practical advantages. It was further evident that the very act of shopping was an identifying act in itself, with young women attaching significance and even pride to being a savvy consumer. Even in the most commercial and non-social aspects of shopping – the choice between buying online and buying in-store – fashion consumption remains intricately tied to a woman's self-identity. These concepts and at times clashing preferences coexist in the context of young women seeking to become idealised versions of the 'cosmopolitan'. This entails a set of self-imposed norms (such as not buying counterfeits), pursuits (travelling and other hobbies) and identities (a sharp dresser and savvy shopper). Fashion consumption, both in its product and its process, manifests this cosmopolitan ideal.

Chapter 7 Fashioning Identities

7.1 Introduction

When talking about their appearances, participants often expressed ambivalent views regarding the self and multiple identities. As analysed in the previous chapter, in Taiwan's cultural context, fashion goes beyond the interaction between the commodity and the individual to encompass the tension between self expression through clothing and fashion and the desire to remain within the context of the group. This chapter focuses on these contradictions as I attempt to uncover the significance of appearance in the lives of young women today. The relation between the self, or individual expression, and the judgements (or imagined judgements) of others (cf. Cooley 1902) is particularly complex in relation to how women use 'choice' about their appearance to define their relationships with both men and other women. As Barnard (2002) notes, fashion is a means of communicating one's place in the social order. The women I interviewed tried to convey through their clothing both their individuality and belonging to particular social groups, leading to tensions and ambivalence in their accounts of themselves.

This chapter starts with a discussion of a woman's self expression in social situations, which I consider via an analysis of what they wear with familiar friends and unfamiliar 'others'. Although participants continued to stress their unique appearance, they usually react differently according to different social groups and social situations. The arrangement of their outfits and the process of dressing before and after facing the public is also discussed. I continue with an examination of the struggles expressed by my interviewees between maintaining the self and their relationships with partners, together with the role of the dominant Chinese idea of 'nyu wei yue ji jhe rong' (女為悅己者容)[1], meaning 'women dress up to please those whom they like' in everyday life. We will seek to examine this in the following chapter.

---

[1] This proverb is from the Chinese historian SimaQian's book 'Shi Ji': (Assassins), written two thousand years ago. This is the most classical phrase presenting women and beauty. The original quote is 'Shih wei jhih ji jhe sih, nyu wei yue ji jhe rong,' which means, 'men devote themselves to those who admire them, Women dress up to please those whom they like.' Women dress up by choosing outfits not only to attract people or to present the most beautiful part of themselves, but also for the purpose of glowing in various ways for people they like.

7.2 Great minds think alike

As Turner (1987) notes, group formation arises from social attraction between people and self-categorisation, which is also associated with inducing the perception of shared social identity. He further argues that the idea of attractiveness goes beyond personal likability but is inseparable from one's awareness of one's own identity. Among my participants, Sharlene (aged 29) was the only one who explicitly mentioned physical attractiveness. She considers people's appearance to be the pre-requisite for her company, saying, 'I'm probably a member of the *wai mao*[2] association. I need someone who is handsome or beautiful. That is the only way I can… speak… with him. If I think he's too average, like he feels unpleasant to my eyes, I really can't speak to him.' For Sharlene, making friends with 'beautiful people' has been a feeling-driven preference since she was a young girl, an attitude expressed by the repeated statement 'at least I have to feel they're good looking.' Her subjective belief implies that self-categorisation or belongingness could be generated through interpersonal attraction. As noted by Langlois and Stephan (1977), physical attractiveness in peer preferences and peer interactions is a powerful force driving individuals' evaluations of each other.

Other interviewees did not mention physical attractiveness as such but commonly did place considerable weight on appearance in general in making friends or in the early stages of a relationship. A number of participants discussed the idea of group belonging with reference to appearance and outfits.

Sherry (aged 23) and Sappho (aged 30), for example, clearly state that their close friends are those who take care of their appearance or want to dress up most of the time. Sherry has liked designer branded items since high school, even if they are not expensive. She described how, in their class, it was only her and her best friend who liked to dress up. The other girls 'would leave the house without dressing up at all…quite terrible.' Sappho made a similar statement but added that she 'didn't really want to dress up as much when one of my close friends moved to Vancouver and the other from San Tseung to Tamshui.' For Sappho, the effort she put into her appearance was reduced when her friends 'who liked dressing up and got along well,' left. Thus, just as the desire to dress up could be strengthened by the influence of close friends, the opposite is also true.

---

[2] *Wai mao* refers to appearance. However, it also sounds the same as the term for external trade.

Of the various available ways of categorising individuals in their social circles, the subjects interviewed classified those who also liked to go shopping or liked dressing up as the friends who were 'closer' and those who did not dress up as 'the other group'. In talking about dressing differently or similarly in a familiar group, ambivalent attitudes could be identified in most participants' accounts in relation to exercising individuality and fitting in with others. Shirley (aged 27) told me that she feels making up is vital for her, stating that she was the only one putting on heavy make-up in her workplace, but 'I just feel that it doesn't matter, I feel that I just need to dress up, so that I have some energy.' However, she added that both when she was studying and now that she is working she would always influence a few good friends to dress up and put on make-up like her. 'I would influence them, to encourage them to also wear skirts. [Others] would feel I'm weird [if I wear this alone], so I get them to wear it too.' Purposefully creating similarities among in-group members creates a new 'normal' image that counteracts differences between the in-group and out-groups. If a given image is presented by more than one person, at least the potential social pressure is shared and they feel more secure, more accepted, and might possibly avert judgements of being different. As Violet (aged 27) commented, 'I hope that, through others, I wouldn't stand out.' Moreover, the make-up on their faces or the clothes on their bodies can stimulate others to fit in with them and possibly create a new 'in group'. People are often concerned about the messages or the images delivered to other people; likewise, they worry about social and peer judgements based on what they are wearing. Therefore, how something is perceived in a social group may affect an individual's uniqueness. This anxiety is a common theme throughout my interviews.

Waverly gave another example to describe why she finds it difficult to choose her clothes freely in Taiwanese society. She usually prefers wearing mini-skirts with sleeveless tops, which is different from most of her friends.[3] She stated that she does not worry about being judged by her close friends, feeling more at ease with them, but she worries more about what unfamiliar people would say behind her back. Although she would insist on wearing the same style, she admits to a compromise:

> If [acquaintances] really feel weird, I would feel uncomfortable in front of them
> and I would try to avoid them if I could. But I would still [wear what I like]. I
> would be influenced by them a little and think sometimes I would wear something

---

[3] It is unusual to wear sleeveless clothes in Taiwan – except on the beach. This is a social norm followed by many of my participants.

with sleeves. It's only for the occasions when I would meet them, I would wear something with sleeves. (Waverly, aged 19)

Waverly's account highlights the contradictions experienced by young women trying to construct a desired impression. Waverly (like many others) seems to be more comfortable exercising her individuality in a familiar social group. And while expressing their individuality in the broadest context (e.g. in general society) would be an ideal performance for the young women, it does make them feel insecure or embarrassed. The fragility of this kind of confidence is revealed when examining being visible in public, especially when interacting with unfamiliar others. 'Feeling right' in appearance still does not make them feel empowered to face unfamiliar people. Waverly's emphasis on 'worrying' about their 'criticisms' indicates that a firm sense of individuality can still have a fragile base. Anita, for example, admitted that her dress style varies, depending on whom she will be joining socially, whether it is her parents, her boyfriend, male acquaintances, friends from dance clubs, or even depending on whether the person is currently studying law, management or communications.

Anita (aged 21) may be an extreme case but others also changed their appearance in different social contexts. Women's varied descriptions of how they dress for different groups are reflective of their different definitions of the self. The balance between conforming to society and preserving the self is a recurring challenge. In the face of different groups, this balance is not always attained or even possible. As a consequence, the self reflected by dress is a flexible one.

Unlike those discussed above, Chrissy (aged 19), Jessie (aged 24), Judy (aged 22), Sandy (aged 31) and Nancy (aged 28) put less emphasis on being unique, preferring to be 'inconspicuous' or 'not special' in terms of appearance, no matter who they are with. Judy and Chrissy were worried about being different from others so that they tried to be 'about the same' in style as their friends. However, Chrissy also told me that she would want to convince others, but only after convincing herself, if she thinks a piece of clothing looks good. Jessie had a particular reason for wanting to be inconspicuous because she was self-conscious about her body shape, and said, 'I see my classmates dress quite fashionably… I don't follow it because I feel that I'm very fat.' Consequently, she chooses dark colours in order to avoid being noticed. Sandy once tried on pieces she thought looked good in a magazine, but had a strong response from

her friends – 'my friends said, "are you crazy, why are you dressed like this?" [If I wore this] my friends would just bring me down [chuckles].'

From these statements, the risks of deviating from peer norms are apparent. It can draw attention to one's perceived body flaws or lead to ridicule, while the simple act of not blending in creates tension in and of itself. The differences in appearance represent a trade-off between the loss of approval from other friends and the loss of one's uniqueness and individuality. This trade-off occurs in the context of the conformity or the middle-way stressed in Confucian societies, especially for women, who should not have any provocative opinions. Participants also tended to fit in with the expectations of gendered others. As Nancy said:

> My dress shouldn't let others, especially other women, feel that we're dressed to be purposefully seductive or something. I don't want that to happen. Boys would at most think whether something looks good or not, but girls would feel that something is intentional. Like it's to be different from us… so you avoid this, you try to keep yourself from standing out. (Nancy, aged 28)

According to Nancy, she is fully aware that a woman in her outfit is closely scrutinised by other women who are seen as more judgmental and more difficult to appease than men. Nancy's belief in intra-gender scrutiny was echoed by all the participants, except Judy, who was less confident about 'passing' men's standards of 'looking good or attractive'. Therefore, women's pleasure in dressing up is not only circumscribed by the male gaze but also by female monitoring. Justine also indicated that women have a 'competition mentality' which necessitates adjustments in appearance. These concerns, especially the 'possible' comments from other women, could affect participants' preferences about dressing up, as if women facing other women require greater finesse and sophistication. This possibly runs counter to the common view that women are primarily concerned with pleasing men – a view endorsed by some academics. Sandra Bartky, for example, argues that in contemporary culture 'a panoptical male connoisseur resides in the consciousness of most women' (1990: 72). Bartky does admit that women judge each other, asking 'who but someone engaged in a project similar to my own can appreciate the panache with which I bring it off?' Ultimately, though, the 'project' for Bartky is to attract and keep a man (ibid). This may be an issue for Taiwanese women, but those I interviewed seemed genuinely more worried about the judgement of other women than men's opinions (see also the discussion about boyfriends, below).

Concern about the opinions of others occurs in spite of the self-proclaimed principle of 'being myself'. The choices made here are reflective of how young Taiwanese women ultimately avoid conflicts and achieve compromise between modern ideals of individuality and their cultural backgrounds (See Chapter 4). Other than the general style of dress, the specific items worn in public can also be a point of contention for participants in particular contexts or with particular groups. Shelby talked about her experience of dressing differently depending on the occasion, describing her anxiety when, on a whim, she wanted to wear a skirt on a 'normal occasion' and then felt she was overdressed:

> You get this feeling when you wear a skirt, because you feel that you are obviously different from other people when you wear a skirt… other people would think 'why are you so dressed up today?' but after a while I started feeling that it's not that different, I would just feel a bit formal compared to other people – like 'why would I wear a skirt today? Everyone else is wearing trousers.' I would want to change back into trousers then. (Shelby, aged 29)

Wearing a skirt in this context apparently represents formality, or being 'too dressed up' or too different. It becomes a tricky decision to wear a skirt as it is both a provocation and a self-categorisation against group norms if no one else is wearing one.[4] For Shelby, conforming to a clothing norm formed in a social group is easy and comfortable for her and for other people too. As Barnard argues, agreement on standards of dress is itself a social bond that can reinforce other social bonds and 'serves to communicate membership of a cultural group both to those who are members of it and to those who are not' (2002: 69). Not to conform can mean not belonging.

Group belonging, then, can be enhanced or diminished by one's choice of dress – and this can change over time, reflecting the groups one belongs to. This change is highlighted by Mandy (aged 21). She described the climate of her department in college as being focused on appearances, commenting, 'It's just that it's kind of inappropriate sometimes. In the winter, more senior students would go to class in knee-high boots and mini-skirts, it sometimes isn't even appropriate for the weather.' However, Mandy also told me that she wanted to be like her friends. She felt she was normal because 'it felt all right then, quite normal, like "isn't everyone like this?" You wouldn't say that it's winter and we should wear warm clothes, the focus is still on dressing up.' For Mandy,

---

[4] For more on wearing skirts, see Chapter 5.

conforming to this shared style shaped her decision to dress like others even though she felt it was not suitable for going to class or even for winter weather. At that time she might be seen as a passive victim of fashion, dressing against her own concerns and wishes in order to conform to the social norms.

She went on to point out, however, that her choice of dress and its relation to others has changed over time – '[when I was young] I would do something because everyone else was doing it.' Mandy further explained that now she wouldn't especially want to be different from other people, either, but claimed that she is now less influenced by others: 'it depends on my mood… I wear what I want to wear on a given day.' She therefore asserts her individuality not only by 'pleasing herself' in what she wears but also by distancing her present self from her past self (who 'did something because everyone else was doing it').

Sharlene (aged 29), Yo-Hsuan (aged 25) and Helen (aged 31) also claimed a similar distance from their past selves, saying that they are now more immune to the influence of others. Relative to other participants, their descriptions tended to focus more on their own feelings, paying less attention to others – but paradoxically they do so by *not* striving to be different from other people, even if their friends dress similarly or even wear the same pieces. Sharlene said, 'because I don't care about others, I just don't care about how other people think… as long as I think it's good then it's fine.' Similar appearance does not, for them, affect their individual uniqueness. Hsiao-Han (aged 22), from the younger group, thinks that it is acceptable for a few friends to dress similarly, commenting – 'It's okay as long as I feel that it's okay, everyone's bodies and faces are different anyway.' A similar issue that was often mentioned in the older group is feeling comfortable about what to put on. Nini (aged 26) explained that sometimes she wears something that would be 'over-the-top' to other people, but: 'it could be that I feel okay about it, but because I wouldn't feel uncomfortable, so I feel all right. Really, I feel that one should be at ease when wearing clothes, if you're not at ease, you would feel weird whatever you wear. Yeah… you have to accept it yourself first.' For Nini, being different in appearance is another way to reinforce her sense of self and is a result of the increased confidence that she has gained as she matured.

The younger women often discussed change through comparing their present selves with their schoolgirl selves. They pointed out that, as school students, they spent most of their time in uniform and did not care about whether what they wore was unique. In

Yumi's case, however, she felt that because it was so rare to be out of uniform, she would carefully plan what to wear. As she explained, being different needed tricks:

> It doesn't need to be different… um, [I] would want it to be more attention-grabbing. … I wouldn't wear something really weird. But… when I was younger, I would think about putting on some accessory, like putting up my hair or something, just making myself 'different'. I'll stand out a bit more. Or when I was younger, I would like to wear some… eh… brands that were rare in Taiwan, but a few good friends would say 'isn't this such and such a brand' and I would feel quite pleased [chuckles]. (Yumi, aged 26)

Yumi, from a young age, went to Hong Kong or Japan once or twice a year with her mother to shop. Sometimes she also went to America. Even though most of those interviewed stressed their uniqueness in their appearances and the way they dress, they would still express their appearance differently when they face groups they define differently. There is a fundamental contradiction here: while they want to be different and unique they also want the affirmation of others. On the one hand, Yumi wants to distinguish herself from most of the girls in her group by using brands that are hard to find in Taiwan, as a way of demonstrating her own taste and independence. On the other hand she wants these brands to be recognised and appreciated by her friends. The contradiction between distinguishing oneself from others and gaining the appreciation of friends was expressed by Tiffany, aged 19. When she uses uncommon items, she does not expect most people to recognise them or even approve of them. Rather, these items are a way for her to maintain her uniqueness – she wants her uniqueness to be recognised by close friends, but is unconcerned about 'most people' – those outside her friendship group.

Nevertheless, in Yumi's description, she would only use certain accessories or a different hairstyle to make herself 'a bit' different, but not 'entirely' different. The words these women use to describe their efforts express a great deal of moderation, again representing a compromise with the cultural/societal expectations. Angel, however, gave an example of how she would try to look 'entirely' different when going to class:

> For example, even if it's just an eight o'clock class, I would still dress up. I would dress up and wear heels, click and clack to class. Everyone has the same eight o'clock class, but everyone is casual, wearing slippers. (Angel, aged 23)

Angel emphasised the importance of dressing up by telling me that she has always wanted to look pretty before going to class, yet she does not care how other people look at her. According to Angel, what matters is whether her own appearance pleases her, not other people's view of her. She said that because she really liked dressing up at university and would dress carefully before going to class, she would often be late. Because of this, she would have to sit in the front row where no one else sits and sometimes she would feel embarrassed. (Later on, she added that since she spent most of the time in class napping, she would not feel the stares of her classmates.) So even though Angel would dress very differently from her classmates, she was nonetheless affected by perceived glances from other people. Although she enjoyed her dramatic entrances into class that highlighted her distinction in the early morning, she was not always comfortable with making such a visible impression.

In recent years, the Taiwanese media has repeatedly stressed the need to 'be yourself' to young and adult women alike. For example, one of the most popular bloggers in Taiwan (and author of several best-selling books) writes under the *nom de plume* 'The Queen' and urges her readers to be 'a confident woman, unabashed in loving herself and wanting to be beautiful' (女王/illyqueen, 2011). This message has since become ingrained as part of the cosmopolitan lifestyle. To an extent, this 'love yourself, express yourself, be yourself' message resonates with urban women of all ages and is embodied in the way in which they dress. If young women were to practice this new, assertive message, they should try to ignore other people's gazes or even actively defend their own appearance when facing unfamiliar peer groups. However, they can still feel embarrassed when they realise this ideal of being themselves, and therefore being too different from others, a conflict that is apparent in these young women's statements. On another level, being an individual does not just come from within themselves but requires affirmation by others. For example, as Yumi (aged 26) described, her happiness originated from her uniqueness being recognised and identified by her 'good friends'. She also explained that there were quite a few students from high-income families in the private school she attended and that friends from similar backgrounds would recognise the brands she brought back from abroad. Therefore, it seems unlikely that it is purely individual satisfaction and happiness that confirmed the individual's uniqueness in dress.

I argue that this uniqueness relies on gaining identity from the very groups that individuals identify with. Simultaneously, these young women are also afraid of being marginalised if they are 'too' unique. The ideas and notions of uniqueness may seem empowering but ultimately cannot fully liberate women from the stereotypes they are bound to. Cultural contexts aside, these interviews found that women worry about posing a threat by being different from other women in the group. Therefore the balance between conforming to society and preserving a sense of self-identity for these participants is conditional on facing different social groups. In fact, women's emotional fulfilment from their appearance comes from wearing what is perceived as 'a part of us', not incompatible with us. Selfhood always depends on others (Mead 1934, cited in Rahman and Jackson 2010).

Another aspect of the balance between uniqueness and belonging is indicated by Yumi's (aged 26) point that 'good friends' can buy clothes of the same colour or different colour clothes of the same make, as long as they do not wear them at the same time. Shirley, aged 27, explained that 'this is what a group feels like yep, [like] budd[ies].' They feel that, since friends influence each other, the similarities in style are not a major source of concern. These young women feel that, among friends within the group they recognise, their dress styles should not be too different. However, if two group members know that they have identical pieces of clothing, they will reach an implicit agreement not to wear them at the same time. This was highlighted by Vanessa (aged 20) and Felicia (aged 23). Felicia added – 'My friend and I can buy the same clothes but we cannot wear them at the same time. We should have a deal to not wear them together or it would be so embarrassing.' Although similarity prevents a given group member from being marginalised, there remains a well-established boundary. Strong internal allegiance between members of the recognised social groups makes them accentuate their individuality inside a norm of acceptable appearance within the group. What my data does indicate is that what makes these young women distinctive is that uniqueness in appearance is not independent, but is entangled with social identity characterised by belonging to particular social categories. While they do not mind having the same clothes as their friends, it appears that most young women cannot tolerate wearing the same shirt or carrying the same handbag as a 'stranger on the street'. This is referred to

as *Zhuangshan* (clothing clashing) or *Zhuangbau* (Handbag clashing)[5]. However, this situation can be interpreted differently according to each person's self-identity.

The attitude towards 'wearing the same thing' is the other side of the desire to be different. Although it is clear that most participants believe that wearing similar or even identical items to those of close friends can be a positive addition to group identity, there are complicated emotions towards strangers who wear the same items.

7.3 Zhuangshan/Zhuangbau

As a result of globalisation, the flow of fashion information has increased in speed and the consumer can purchase diverse goods through diverse channels. In this process of consumption, interpersonal interaction entails emotional links, information exchange and cultural sharing (Zhou, 2008). Seeing other people wearing the same item or accessorising similarly can elicit a strong negative emotion. Ten of the participants from both the younger and the older groups basically do see *zhuangshan/zhuangbau* as unacceptable, indeed wearing the same clothes as someone else can be regarded as a disaster for various reasons. Among those interviewed, women who were concerned about *zhuangshan/zhuangbau* were predominantly from the younger group. Angel (aged 23) and Shelby (aged 29) stated that they used to not mind *zhuangshan/zhuangbau* but it has gradually come to bother them. Shelby commented, 'It was very exciting to see someone wearing the same thing as yours, I wanted to say hello to her every time, but now I just feel uncomfortable and embarrassed.' Angel's account is more typical, she described how on one occasion; she was 'going out to dinner with friends, one friend brought his girlfriend and everyone noticed that both she and I were wearing a shirt with red squares on it and I felt bad.' In these cases, wearing the same clothes arguably diminishes the unique appearances of young women and detracts from their individuality. In young women's narratives about not wearing the same clothes, they focused on the high risk of buying inexpensive clothes. As Felicia said:

> And if I see a person on the street dressed the same as I am I would feel like going home right away... it's just that I would feel 'hey, this is so inexpensive, what about buying it...' and then I would wear it once or twice, and then I would discover that 'ehh, there's so many people wearing this,' and feel that I can't wear

---

[5] These terms are used both as nouns and verbs.

that piece any more, afterward I will give it to mom. Haha, yeah, because mom doesn't care, she doesn't care as much about whether it would look the same as others. I guess it's because of moving in different circles. Yeah, if [she] went shopping in more metropolitan areas, it would be easier to *zhuangshan* with others. (Felicia, aged 23)

On the other hand, she also explained the relationship with mom as a matter of reciprocity in personal relations. Because Felicia's mother is very fond of her clothes, giving her an item that is *zhuangshan* could both solve her problem and please her mother. Drawing on a common theme of *zhaungshan*, Jessie and Justine also stressed the embarrassment of wearing the same clothes as someone they do not know, as Felicia did. Jessie said, 'I would think I should avoid buying such things next time…' Judy (aged 22) also commented, 'I would think about it very carefully, for example, I saw a pretty branded bag in the shop and then I thought I would see it [counterfeits] again in the night market, so I would never consider buying it.' Uniqueness is often perceived as the priority. At the most basic level, the young women seem to affirm their self-identity through managing their appearance; individuality comes from distinctiveness. Even their own friends are somewhat diminished if they are seen wearing the same clothes. In this way, the clothes would lose their value and function of impressing people.

All of my participants claimed that they are less than 100 per cent fashionable people as they consider they are very aware of the fashion trends but only follow them a bit by choosing and coordinating the right clothes for themselves. They ranked themselves as around 70 to 90 per cent fashionable women. They all think that blindly following the fashion is a way of losing their individuality and somehow a symptom of a lack of unique taste in appearance. Tactically using fashion products and basic products at the same time is a common means by which the young women maintain their uniqueness in the face of common trends.

While some, like Felicia (aged 23), react strongly to *zhaungshan*, Sherry has a more moderate view:

I've [clothing] clashed several times… but I feel that [clothes] on different people will make different impressions. I'm okay, I wouldn't care very much. Like, before in school I *zhaungshan* once, like wearing the same, but afterwards I would never wear that piece to school but I would still wear it going elsewhere…

for handbags, I wouldn't carry it again. Like for handbags, I have several types that I carry often, if, say I see someone at school with the same, I wouldn't want to carry it again. I would still use it to go out, but I wouldn't carry it to school again. (Sherry, aged 23)

Although Sherry claimed that the same item would have different effects when worn by different people, in practice she avoids the potentially unfavourable comparison of herself with other people. She chooses not to take the risk. It is interesting that the ambivalence arises throughout her narrative. She went on to say:

 If it's someone I don't know at school then it's more okay, but if it's someone in class using the same as me, I wouldn't use it. Because we all know each other, I wouldn't want to let someone else feel that you are imitating her or something. I feel that if I had heard that, I wouldn't feel comfortable. If it's someone I don't know, just walk faster, it's not that bad. But if it's a classmate, I feel that I might… (So it's worse with handbags than with clothes?) Yeah, clothes I feel alright with. (So you're more confident in this area?) Yeah, I really feel that it depends on the person, maybe when she wears it, it might not necessarily look bad, but it would look different. (Sherry, aged 23)

From the account above, it is clear that Sherry more finely categorises the social groups she considers 'unfamiliar'. One includes those totally unknown, the stranger on the street, the other includes acquaintances, such as unfamiliar classmates. Building on her self-confidence in her own taste and the way she coordinates her clothing, she claimed that the same item would look different and, she implied, better when she was wearing it. This sentiment was echoed by Hsiao-Han (aged 22), who said, 'I feel it looks better on me…'when talking about *zhuangshan*. Sherry simply considered wearing the same clothes as an open call for comparison; however, this can only be acceptable when she encounters a total stranger since they do not inhabit the same social space. Even though wearing the same clothes occurs by accident, individuality would then be represented by the comparison of how the two wearers present themselves. On the other hand, when Sherry has to spend time at the same place with her classmates, she starts to worry about 'real' comparisons. She still worries about the possible gossip that would arise from wearing the same thing in the same place and being seen as an imitator. From this point of view, uniqueness in appearance is evaluated by social judgement and social identity.

Whereas Sherry and Hsiao-Han see potential comparisons with others as likely to favour them, Violet (aged 27) and Nini (aged 26) both illustrate potentially negative self-evaluations. Violet comments, 'If the other one's body shape is slim but yours is chubby, it will be awful that you two wear the same clothes. What upsets me is if she looks slimmer and prettier.' Similarly Nini, says, 'I'll see how she looks, it's fine if she looks worse than me but if she looks prettier than me, I'll leave that spot immediately.' It could be argued that individuality here is manifesting through competition among personal characteristics.

A number of participants were aware of changes in their attitudes and the importance of distinctive clothes for their identities. Four participants stated that their attitudes towards 'being different' in a group had changed as they got older. Violet told me that, in a previous job, women would rank people depending on how they were dressed and then discuss it. As a result, she would take extra care in selecting what she wore to work. However, she then added, 'sometimes I just think to myself, "what was I thinking then?"' feeling now that her competitive mentality then was absurd. This was echoed by Justine (aged 30) and Nancy (aged 28), who said that when they were younger, they would compare how they looked with others. Many participants distanced themselves from their past concern with being different from others, implying that it was immature.

Sappho pointed out another reason for standing out in a group, commenting, '…so sometimes it's like you're a leader, so you would feel that you should or you're more likely to care about how you look. Then you feel that you have to wear something different every time you make an appearance, like you can't wear it again when you have worn it once.' She admits that it 'used to be' an exercise in vanity. Sappho's emphasis on the changes from her past to her current attitude is related to her experience of dressing differently when she was younger. However, she had a change of heart while at university, saying:

> We used to study at [elite school], quite frankly, we didn't understand the
> hardships of our world, we didn't know that people struggle just to live. After
> starting university, when I learned that many classmates would have to take out
> loans for tuition, just having something to wear would be good enough. Is it so
> important that it has to be different from others? I started caring less about
> [*zhuangshan*] because my classmates pointed out, 'please, it's not possible to
> have a unique pair of shoes in the world, they make thousands of them. It's usual

to have someone wear the same thing.' At that time I woke up and realised that this was a valid argument and I shouldn't think this way. That was how I changed – 'why should I care this much?' (Sappho, aged 30)

Sharlene (aged 29) emphasised her indifference to other people's opinions. She commented, ' …what's the difference? It just means that we all have equally good taste… I wouldn't [not wear something because of *zhuangshan*], because I don't care, I don't care about how others think. Like an LV bag is the same all over the world.' Yumi (aged 26), Sandy (aged 31) and Tiffany (aged 19) also said that *zhuangbau* is inevitable if you use a classic branded bag. Waverly (aged 19) said that she only focuses on whether she likes the bag or not. Even so, some participants showed less tolerance towards *zhuangshan* than *zhuangbau*. Shirley (aged 27) explained that 'I bought this branded bag because of its practicability, I can carry a lot of stuff and the weight is light enough. Thus it is all right to *zhuangbau* for a NTD3000 bag.' Interestingly, the level of tolerance for identical items shifts with their value.

7.4 Repeating outfits

The desire for uniqueness is something that motivates young women in their search for self-identity. In my interviews, the younger participants said that they tend to frequently buy cheaper clothes in order to embrace the diversity of everyday fashion, while practical concerns about limited fashion clothes seem to be addressed more in the older group. Appearance to them is a relatively low priority in life, even though they agree that it is important for all women. For Helen (aged 31), as long as appearances are neat and clean, it is acceptable and this is the basic public image she would like to project. Therefore, there is always a tension between the utility of clothes and engagement with others. In addition, some participants indicated that they divided their wardrobe for use in different situations to make sure that the same clothes would not repeatedly appear among the same group of people. This is particularly evident in the older group. From my own experience, and participants' accounts, obviously these women are engaged in 'impression management' (Goffman, 1959), purposefully creating alternative impressions when rearranging and recombining their clothes. The concern about repeating clothing in the same setting was expressed by most of the older participants interviewed. The strategy to deal with this situation was also highlighted, in particular, by Justine (aged 30) and Shelby (aged 29). Justine commented:

For each time they [cousins] get married I have an outfit and that outfit won't be worn again. For example, I would wear something one time, like for their wedding. It's my cousins, then, at another of their weddings, I wouldn't wear it again. Then my other friends' party, friends who have never seen it or never seen pictures of it, I would wear it again. I wouldn't really wear it a second time with the same group of people. (Justine, aged 30)

Barnard (2002) points out that individuals will combine different items to create a unique image, to make either 'syntagmatic' or 'paradigmatic' differences[6] meaningful (2002: 61). Justine's comments above reflects a paradigmatic shift – avoiding wearing the same whole outfit in front of the same people. Justine's narratives suggest that making differences meaningful must occur not only through rearranging clothing but that the rearrangement must occur in relation to different occasions and people. She further expanded upon how she manages her outfits in the workplace:

As for the clothes I wear to work, I wouldn't spend much on them, because colleagues wouldn't really compare these things with you… sometimes I would like to wear a uniform, because with uniforms you wouldn't have to spend money on meaningless clothes. You can just wear something casual and change into the uniform at the company. (Justine, aged 30)

Different values are placed on outfits, reflecting shifts in identity among the different social groups and at different times in their life – especially as women mature and acquire new responsibilities. For example, Helen, aged 31, says that when she was single, she would buy a new dress for every wedding she went to, so her friends would all see different clothes. After getting married, she spends more money on household electrical appliances than on personal adornments. Now, even though she still wears dresses, she would take special care that the same piece of clothing will only be repeated in front of different groups of friends. This phenomenon is borne out in many older participants' accounts. For these women, the increase in age introduces other priorities and shifts in identity, and they pay more attention to other things or start thinking about saving money. Buying clothes to adorn themselves recedes in importance. For example, Justine, aged 30, spends a lot of money on learning to belly dance and on travelling; Yumi, aged 26, has started running her own nail salon, and Shelby, aged 29,

---

[6] Syntagmatic difference is the difference between items that form a sequence or whole. Paradigmatic difference is the difference between items that can be replaced by another.

is saving money to furnish her own house. Hence, fashion and clothes are re-interpreted at different ages. The slightly older participants in this group exhibit greater heterogeneity in fashion due to having more things to spend their money on. While both age groups see fashion and beauty as ends in themselves, older participants more frequently contextualised these ends in the context of other pursuits. They are arguably more pragmatic in this pursuit, focusing on the 'impression' fashion creates in its viewers rather than a more hedonistic consumption of fashion. The struggle at this stage, between beauty and other ideals, forces creative solutions to try to satisfy both. Sharlene, aged 29, described how she makes syntagmatic changes, mixing-and-matching the same, relatively limited, set of clothes in different ways to 'make it look like I have a lot of clothes.'

Through impression management, people seek to create a particular desired image for various audiences (Tseelon, 1995). By constructing an impression for the public, Sharlene (aged 29), Helen (aged 31) and Justine (aged 30) consciously project themselves as stylish women who fit into the modern world and realise the spirit of fashion. Regardless of whether the impression created is genuine or false (Tseelon, 1995: 42), it reveals a desire for the power that appearance can confer but also highlights the constraints and burdens that fashion creates. As noted by Hung (1997), fashion is serially and rapidly evolving, it is fleeting in its nature. Thus, women seeking to embody (or at least trying to fake) the 'spirit' of fashion must constantly change and update their appearance. The matching of clothes remains a source of appearance insecurity for modern women and a source of concern about social judgement from familiar and unfamiliar groups. The control women have over their own appearances and the commodities they purchase are in fact constrained or even driven by the images they wish for and must construct in front of other people. Creating their social appearance not only enables women to appear as idealised, stylish women but allows them to experience themselves as idealised, stylish women.

Compared with older participants, who carefully arrange their clothes, younger women simply say that as long as there are new clothes to wear, there is no point in worrying about how to arrange a limited wardrobe. Eleven of them frankly admitted that they are fickle in appearance, always favouring the new over the old. Judy, aged 22, however, feels that she is not that extreme, but many people have told her she is. She simply feels that she really wants to buy new clothes but is constrained by the fact that her closet still contains many pieces that are entirely brand new. So she will still get to wear different

clothes every day, not repeating the same pieces over one or two weeks. Waverly commented, 'when I'm a little tired of what I have been wearing, when I want to change… I see in magazines really nice-looking styles, I would want to buy them… when it repeats [something she already has], I would just want to replace it.' Similar descriptions of both the desire to buy and a desire for variety are repeatedly presented in many young participants' statements. This self-centred 'need' to buy (which still interplays with elements such as magazine advertising) contrasts with the older participants' audience-driven impression management. Women *wanting* variety in clothing choices is evidence of the expectation that women should be fashionable. They reiterate the idealised look of 'fashionable women' or project the essential traits of modern women through fast-changing and high-variety wardrobes. According to Evans and Thornton (1989), fashion is an essential articulation of the ideology of femininity, a manipulative discourse about what women are, should be, or might become. Younger participants, influenced by this ideology, thus do not really project an image of a 'real' self but consciously conform to the image of what modern women should be – hence the need to constantly consume new fashions. In contrast, older participants are more liberated from conforming to a certain image constructed by the media. They are more inclined to consciously organise their outfits to create a distinct image.

7.5 Facing the public

As noted by Davis (1992), dress is a significant symbol that has meaning for others and consequently draws appropriate reactions. Managing appearance becomes a continuous process, from preparation before leaving the house to the reaction received when facing the public. The complexity and ongoing nature of the process originates from the interrelationship between the self and the (imagined) other. Young women perceive that the clothes they choose will signal how they manage not only their appearance but also their own life: 'the woman I want to be' (Guy and Banim, 2000: 316). Their appearance becomes symbolic of autonomy of the self and control over their lives. In keeping with this self management, the outfits they wear in front of the public are very important to young women. From my interviews, most participants saw this process as an opportunity to demonstrate self-management, 'appropriate behaviour' and as a crucial part of delivering an expected image.

However, there is sometimes a disjunction between the preparation before facing the public and reactions to the response afterwards.

7.5.1 Before going out

When participants were asked if they would decide what to wear the night before, some of them replied positively, but cited different reasons. Some see preparing clothes as an aspect of daily self management, symbolic of discipline. Their reasoning for preparing clothes the night before is rooted in time management. For example, Sharlene (aged 29) explained that 'I would always think of it first. From when I was a student, I would put the next day's uniform out before going to bed. It's just a habit, I don't want to rush the next day.' For Sharlene, the focus here is on her own behaviour rather than thinking about negotiating the images she would like to construct in front of other people. She added that 'I take about an hour or so [before going out]… because that's the time I need… so I try never to make appointments to go out during the morning, I always make appointments for night time.' Time and necessity dominate in her narrative. It is as if not being able to manage this well would diminish her as a powerful, in-control woman. This was echoed by Waverly (aged 19), Mandy (aged 21) and Tiffany (aged 19). Aside from sharing the concern with time management, these younger participants would frame the next day's image in advance. Waverly said, 'otherwise, every time I pick out clothes I think about it for a long time, I feel that it's faster to think of it the day before.' Mandy said, 'I might want to wear one piece in particular, the things that go with it I'll decide the next morning,' and Tiffany answered, 'I would always quickly say that this piece matches that piece and I would lay it out before going to bed the night before… if I don't and I oversleep it would be trouble.' However, choices of outfits could be altered even if they were well prepared in advance. Hsiao-Han (aged 22) pointed out that she would sometimes change her mind suddenly, 'sometimes I would wake up and just space out, thinking about what I would wear and what I picked out the night before doesn't feel too good.' In Hsiao-Han's case, this also implies that appearance presentation sometimes relies only on emotional reaction rather than a rational evaluation of possible judgements by other people.

The kind of presentation needed for everyday life and special occasions differs. For special occasions, individuals construct an image they wish to present to gain confidence in that image, to distinguish the self from others. However, in everyday life, these participants are likely to conform to a generic, or 'appropriate' image constrained

by certain social standards, one that demonstrates discipline and stability and conformity to group or workplace norms. Even so, compared to preparing clothes for special occasions, the preparation for what to wear on a daily basis seems to come laced with anxiety. As Shirley (aged 27) pointed out – 'you have to think about it first, once you go out in it you can't change, there's nothing that can salvage it… I would have to be okay with the matching before going out of the door.' Thinking through what to wear in advance reflects the hopes, fears and beliefs of the wearer. Perception of appearance, therefore, is clearly a significant aspect of identity for some and not so important for others. Jessie (aged 24) said, 'I would never plan for something like this. On the night before, it's best to just throw aside everything having to do with the company.' For Jessie, her workplace outfit is a tool for her job. The identity and the image projected there are separate from the one in her private life, arguably the self closer to what she would like to be. As a result, she extends the work-life demarcation even to something as intimate as dressing herself.

Yet, Angel (aged 23), Helen (aged 31) and Shelby (aged 29) stated that it is only when there is a special occasion or meeting a special person that they would prepare what to wear in advance. Angel said, 'only if there's a really important date or an important job would I plan ahead. But the point of thinking ahead is just to save time.' Helen similarly said, 'if it's a very special occasion that I must go to I would wake up extra early. I need to wash my hair, put on my make-up, I may have to take out my clothes and prepare first. Otherwise, [her daily preparation] it's just five or ten minutes.' Shelby also said, 'only if the dinner is very special or the person I'm meeting is very special would I think ahead of time. I wouldn't if it's just an ordinary occasion or person.' Thus, clothing is expected to make them look slightly, or even very, different for special occasions or in front of special people. They are particularly concerned with their physical appearance if they feel they will be on display, where there is a potential audience and they will be the centre of attention (or seek to be).

Sappho (aged 30) and Justine (aged 30) give other reasons for not thinking through their appearance in advance. Sappho commented, 'because I'm just about like this, so I can just look or think at it and know. There're only those several pieces, I roughly know what it's going to be like.' Justine said, 'no... occasionally I would think about it [laying out clothes the day before] because it would save time in the morning from thinking about it… but because I just don't have that many clothes to wear to work, it's the same pieces time after time.' She added that she spends more time preparing clothes for going

out with friends because 'what I wear to work is different from what I usually wear.' She is less concerned about the opinions of her workmates than her friends, therefore categorising some audiences as less important than others. Sappho, however, related a lesser attention to dress with change over time. She explained that she used to think a lot about how to coordinate her outfit before walking out of the door. Now, she simply pays less attention to her appearance. Therefore it is difficult to uphold the idea that there is always a meaning attached to what they usually wear. On the other hand, Judy assumed that being slimmer would probably be a reason why women need to prepare their clothes in advance and when questioned further on this she expanded:

> My classmate will [plan what to wear], sometimes she will be wearing something more revealing. Because I'm not as skinny I wouldn't dare to. And so she might have to think about how to reveal herself tomorrow, like she can't show some straps on some underwear and then she has to think about what underwear to wear [laughs]. I think she always thought of it ahead of time.' (Judy, aged 22)

Although Judy began by talking about her friend, this extract illustrates her sense of body dissatisfaction, which is not only related to appearance but also culturally dependent. In Taiwan, it can seem that only people with slim figures have the right to exhibit themselves, to dress the way they like and not to be judged. Body shape thus seems to be another essential element in deciding whether to give significant attention to preparing clothing before going out. According to Goffman (1959), the individual may create a non-present audience, who can be himself/herself, in accordance with incorporated moral standards – or, in this case, aesthetic standards. Helen envisaged a much wider, or at least a more detailed, feeling of self as audience and facing a public audience:

> That's a matter of self-confidence… you have to feel okay about yourself to be this way… because if you're not okay yourself, you would shrink when you meet other people. They would look at you weird and then you would feel weird yourself… so it's only when it feels okay [when you can walk out the door]. (Helen, aged 31)

Helen is acutely aware of the interplay between the self and appearance. Feeling good about what you are wearing is seen here as a pre-requisite for communicating with and impressing others. The way a woman dresses can deliver different messages, or can be

179

interpreted differently by others, but if 'you're not okay [with] yourself' it is imagined that others will make negative judgements. Therefore, self-identity is articulated through this experience-related description. This is apparent in all participants when talking about what they would wear for mundane tasks such as taking out the garbage or going to the grocery store nearby.

Goffman's (1959) concept of private and public could be further referred to as the experience of being visible or invisible (Foddy and Finighan, 2007). Some participants divide their spheres of activity into the public/outside home and the private/home, where they either dress up to be observed by others, or dress down as no one will see them in private. All the younger participants agreed that just going out of the door requires 'appropriate' attire. Whether it is going downstairs to take out the trash[7] or shopping at a nearby convenience store, they cannot accept wearing their house clothes outside. Judy (aged 22) says – 'no, no, no. It's too scary. No. Like even taking out the trash, I would run out and run back in. I have to change, I'm afraid I would run into someone I know…' Hsiao-Han (aged 22) agrees, 'like I can't just wear random clothes when I take out the trash, my hair can't be too messy either. I wouldn't put on anything special, just a nicer t-shirt. At home I wear the really washed-out T-shirt and in the winter I would wear my athletic pants from high school, they're really comfortable. But they can't be worn outdoors.' As noted above, how the self is presented produces a 'better' (or more considered) appearance in public places. Even 'displaying' in public places for an extremely short time would be considered embarrassing if the message were to reach longer-term contacts, or people they consider themselves being 'visible' to. Thus, it is not the length of time of being out of the house that decides whether they would dress up, the line is drawn depending on whether or not they expect to be visible. This visibility mirrors (at a more mundane level) the distinction the interviewed women make for 'special occasions', where they expect to be especially visible.

In addition, most participants indicated that 'feeling okay' is the final arbiter of whether they can be visible, which suggests the internalisation of the standard. This separation of

---

[7] From 1996, Taipei city started its 'keep trash off the ground' (垃圾不落地) policy. The city government removed garbage dumpsters located in neighbourhoods and instead employed garbage trucks to collect trash along fixed routes and at a designated time to collect city residents' trash. Should citizens dispose of trash outside of regulation hours or use garbage bags not approved by the city government, the fine ranges from NTD1200 to NTD6000. This system means that you are likely to at least meet your neighbours when you take out the trash.

the self from space is apparent in many women's discussions of the divide between the public and the private, where the standard does and does not apply. As Sappho said:

> Because I feel that this is me in another way… I'm in my room, I'm in the living room, I'm watching TV alone. This isn't how I look when I take out the trash and so many people see me. It feels like something very private, to expose that in front of other people? I can't stand it. (Sappho, aged 30)

Sappho makes it clear that the private self cannot be presented in public places; this would be 'intolerable'. Participants who worry more about their public appearance implied that clothing is the only way they are perceived by others and will play the most significant part in their concerns about being in public space. On the other hand, the fear of bumping into someone they know is the second reason for dressing up when going out of the door. It seems that the trouble with being recognised in public places when not dressed up is their insecurity about the crumbling of their public image. For some participants, the non-self becomes the gauge for maintaining a certain impression. Guy and Banim (2000: 321) suggest that there are tensions between 'the woman I am most of the time' and 'women attempting to achieve satisfactory images without too much effort.' I would like to further argue that young women also make much effort to preserve the image of 'the woman I am most of the time.' This is particularly evident in Waverly's (aged 19) account; she pays a great deal of attention to her appearance. Aside from insisting on putting on make-up when going out, the clothes worn must also be proper, even if it's only for a few steps in time and distance. Waverly comments that 'otherwise, it feels too casual. What if you run into someone you know just when you're not looking good? I feel that I shouldn't give someone a bad impression.' This wariness around public appearance is usually related to eagerness to gain positive evaluations, which are expected to generate positive benefits in other social situations.

According to Snyder et al. (1988), high self-monitoring individuals are typically sensitive and responsive to interpersonal and situational specifications of behavioural appropriateness. Many of my participants engage in a high degree of self-monitoring to control the image of self that they are attempting to project to others in public places.

However, a small number of participants construct a grey zone where they are neither in public nor in private. Justine (aged 30) and Shirley (aged 27), for example, feel that they can accept not dressing up within a given time or distance from home. For Shirley, this

means anything under 30 minutes, although make-up is still necessary because 'I have to look energetic, I just don't want other people to see me barefaced. Perhaps it's because I always put on make-up? So I don't want there to be a big discrepancy, other people might think… "eh… what's with this girl?" this discrepancy is just too big.' The insecurity of not dressing up or making up usually reflects a self-disapproval or anticipated disapproval from others. Angel (aged 23) stated that she can stand going out without dressing up if the distance is really close, but that she would cover herself up – 'if this was the case, I would wear a hat, use an umbrella, I feel that I'm such a mess and so I will cover up a bit.'

In contrast, although Jessie (aged 24) agrees with the idea of location-based dressing up, she feels more comfortable in a certain area around her house if she does not dress up, commenting, 'because our house is near the market, so everyone is pretty casual. Our neighbours are like teachers and staff, they just wear something really casual to go to the market to buy groceries.' Her account here defines the location and public place by means of social status and occupation. In this case, she does not seek to be visible to the people in her immediate environment (thus not calling for making-up) while dressing very casually can make her invisible to the wider public. The act of not dressing up becomes acceptable here when people of higher social status also behave similarly and she does not have to worry about standing out or being rejected by other members of the social group. So, just as dressing up is motivated by others, the choice of dressing down is also externally motivated, with the norms and values of appearance being defined by the behaviour of others with higher social status. Although the impact of fashion can trickle down or bubble up (Trigg, 2001), the absolute, binary choice of dressing up (or not) is based on direct, simple observation of other people, with social status and location providing the context for this observation. In sum, in the choice of dressing up in public, the self, the non-self, and social situations form loops that affect each other and lead to different preferences. As another example of presenting appearance in public places, Tiffany, who does not take space into account but only the presence of others, anticipates that others can tell the difference between dressing up and non-dressing up wherever she is. She also sees herself reacting differently in accordance with others' comments:

> When you're dressing up, other people can tell. When you haven't dressed up, other people can also tell. At that point, I wouldn't really care either way. But if I look like I took care in dressing up but other people think I don't look so good,

then I would care… In that case, when you just dress casually, no matter what they say, like 'you look nice today,' then I would feel happier. (Tiffany, aged 19)

7.5.2 After going out

When I asked about the feeling of wearing uncomfortable clothes or items that caused self-consciousness after going out, a few participants did show a high level of confidence over what they had chosen, even though they struggled with it before going out. Sharlene admitted to hesitating in the process of dressing up, only to assert her confidence in her appearance later on. She said that if someone were to be critical of her appearance:

> I will tell him that everyone has different opinions on beauty. You may feel that it doesn't look good. But as long as I feel that it looks good then it's fine… I wouldn't care about what other people think. I think as long as I'm fine with it then it's fine… because… um, you have a perspective then it's… today I have ten friends and ten people would have different perspectives. I can't just [change] to accommodate you. With ten different people, who would I accommodate? Yeah… I would die of exhaustion…(Sharlene, aged 29)

Sharlene also shows strong individuality when criticised about her appearance. She further explained, 'before I go out, I would have looked first. I have a full body mirror there and I would check. Once I go out, I wouldn't [regret my choice], because I've hesitated long enough at home. It's only then would I walk out of that door.' The assertion being that going out comes only after internal struggle and scrutiny, from which participants wish to feel approved of and accepted in their chosen outfits. Some older participants gave a different reason for not going back to change even in the face of criticism or when they do not feel comfortable. Helen (aged 31) said, 'it can't be helped, I just have to accept it.. it's just clothes….' Here, clothes are reduced to a commodity to be operated on, for specific functions in daily life such as keeping warm, rather than as a reflection of personal performance such as for self expression. Convenience and occasions are also important factors for many older participants when deciding if they want to go home to change their clothes. Shelby (aged 29) said, 'I would look at the occasion. I should say that the case where I would go home to change is when… for example we dress quite casually for work, but if there are other functions after work and there's enough time in the middle, I would go home to change before

183

leaving again…' Sappho (aged 30) explored the possibility of going back to change outfits, which has never happened to her:

> I think it's an awkward situation that comes from not knowing what you want. If you feel that your outfit has a major problem, you should know what it is yourself and then what it feels like for it to be laid out. So when other people comment on it, you will still feel confident, that it's alright, that I know what I am like… (Sappho, aged 30)

In comparison, more of the younger participants admitted that they occasionally went home again after going out because of feeling self-conscious or being criticised. Mandy (aged 21) said – 'like it's too short, or the colours don't match well, or it's too cold and I'm wearing too little…' Judy (aged 22) said, 'one time I wore something tighter and the tummy fat was accidentally showing. My classmates pointed that out – "your tummy fat is showing," and then I couldn't stand it, I went straight home after class [laughs].' As noted by Tseelon (1995), 'Women care about their appearance when there are important things at stake, when being judged or when feeling unsure and anxious' (1995: 55). For younger participants, appearance-concern after entering the public space apparently represents a more meaningful part of being visible, while for most of the older participants this is relatively unimportant. For those who commented that they would not mind if they were criticised by other people, what they wear was largely explained as a part of the day that couldn't be changed. They suggested that they would defend themselves against the way other people judge their appearance. A few of these participants did, however, notice the self-judgement that usually comes even with the defence. Tiffany (aged 19) noted this, commenting, 'one time I was wearing a sweater with horizontal stripes, [my friend] asked if I put on weight recently. I said no, it's probably because of the horizontal stripes but I was self-conscious about it for a whole day and I never wore it again.' While she was able to defend herself against the accusation of having 'put on weight', nonetheless that accusation still had an impact and changed her subsequent behaviour ('I never wore it again').

7.6 Negotiation with men

> … in daily life I still feel it's about being comfortable and at ease with yourself, because if you can live like yourself, it's truly fortunate. If someday you get to a

certain age, a certain social level, when you can't be so easy, it's better to hold on to the present self, really. (Sappho, aged 30)

A wide range of contradictory narratives were evident in my interviews, including women's concerns about their appearance in terms of their self-identity and the judgements of other women. Attitudes to men's opinions are different. Most of the older participants are more assertive when it comes to men's opinions about clothes. When I asked Shirley (aged 27) about her boyfriend's influence on her clothes she said, 'I would only ask if I look fat in it. I wouldn't ask if it's good or bad looking. I feel that this is something I feel okay with, it's just if I'm worried about looking fat that I would ask him.' The male gaze is regarded only as a mirror to reflect herself in. This is echoed more strongly by Yo-Hsuan (aged 25), who commented, 'this is not his business!' She further explained that she always laughs, joking that 'she didn't think about it and didn't notice it', and moves on when her boyfriend complains that her clothes are too short or expose too much. She would not go home to change because of what he says. However, in the same situation, Nancy (aged 28) would avoid wearing mini-skirts or other clothes that can be considered 'too revealing' because she 'just doesn't want to listen to people nag me, because my mom already nags enough.' This represents a different response to social pressure. As opposed to a self-reinforced conformity to social perception, Nancy's statement represents a pragmatic response to the annoyance caused by her boyfriend's perception.

The responses of these women demonstrate a range of adaptations to their boyfriends' demands. Shirley (aged 27) would listen to her boyfriend's opinion if he insists upon it, but would 'still do as I like, later, in places he doesn't see.' Yo-Hsuan used strong words to assert her independence from her boyfriend in the manner of her appearance ('it's none of his business'); but she backtracked from this confrontational statement by pretending not to notice his disapproval. On the other hand, Nancy and Shirley had clearer opinions on this issue as a result of prior conflicts. In order to maintain harmony and avoid direct confrontation, they choose to comply with their boyfriends' demands superficially but exercise their own prerogative privately. Sandy (aged 31), however, would fight back when her boyfriend asked her not to wear yoga trousers out. In talks with older interviewees, it became apparent that they would most often react circumspectly when facing conflicts, even though they may strongly disagree with their partners.

When asked about her opinion of dressing up in a way her partner likes but she does not like, Anita (aged 21) said, 'sometimes I'll go along for a bit, wear it when I go out with him, make him happy. At worst it's something that I don't like as much, but if it's something I really don't want to wear, I wouldn't. If it's acceptable then I feel it's okay.' Tiffany (aged 19) commented, 'he feels putting my hair up in a ponytail would give a cleaner look. To be honest I don't like wearing it in a ponytail that much. But if it's mentioned, I'll wear it more.' Sharlene's boyfriend prefers her to wear skinny jeans but for herself, she prefers wearing skirts as she feels that she has a large bottom. However, she would wear jeans occasionally to please him:

> I would, for something like Valentine's Day, cooperate with him for a day. 'Fine, I'll wear it', but afterwards, I wouldn't care. Afterwards, I would go back, as long as I'm happy… 'But I have responded to your demands, I did it, like on Valentine's day.' … sometimes he would feel that I'm [dressing] too comfortably…'I wear something very pretty when I go on dates with you, but other times, you should leave me alone.' So it wouldn't be like… he wouldn't say that I don't care about him. (Sharlene, aged 29)

Obviously, compromises about appearance take different forms among different couples. Sharlene quickly moved to her own perspective, explaining why dressing up is sometimes so important:

> So, a change of mood… these are all important things. I would feel that, if it's all the same, I would get tired of it too. Because he would do quite a bit… he would do his hair, or put on earrings, or necklaces, present himself nicely. It can't be that he's always so well done and I would be next to him like this [not dressed up]. I would feel that not even I could stand myself like this. (Sharlene, aged 29)

Sharlene clearly stated that her own feelings are important in terms of dressing up. The ideal image of a good-looking couple is also a reason to dress up. On the other hand, some older participants suggested that if they get compliments for certain styles, they might wear more of such styles, the styles their partners like, when going out with them. Yumi (aged 26) said, 'but I wouldn't buy more of a style because of this [compliments]… I wouldn't always dress this way, I would still wear other things.' Helen (aged 31) commented differently, explaining that her husband said she looked prettier in dresses or skirts when they were still dating, but her motivation for wearing

skirts recently is different – 'too fat, the pants wouldn't fit.' Some younger participants would avoid wearing things their partners dislike. Hsiao-Han (aged 22) commented, 'He thinks that girls wearing hair bands are pretending to be cute. He doesn't like them, so I don't look at hair bands. And then he says he hates high heels with bows on the front. I feel they're cute, but I still wouldn't buy them.' Judy, who pays more attention to men's opinions than women's, gave an example to show how she responds to her boyfriend's opinion:

> One time, I wanted to buy winter boots with fur trim on the side, so I asked him if they are cute…And then he said that he felt it was very ugly, sort of like something a dumb little girl would wear, and that it was very thick and heavy. So that quickly put away any thoughts of buying snow shoes [laughs]. I was thinking that I really can't buy such things from this point on. (Judy, aged 22)

Instead, she bought a pair of boots that her boyfriend liked. Judy is the only one from the younger group who changed her wardrobe because of her boyfriend's or male friends' thoughts. It seems that she better embodies the male spectator's gaze and his expectations of women. Such a keen sense of the male gaze and its support and confirmation could drive them to value their own body and appearance, even self-worth, in his terms. Judy, however, was unusual in being so strongly influenced by her boyfriend.

Unlike Judy, Sappho (aged 30) suggested that she will decide whether to listen to a boyfriend or not according to his credibility, to see if he is being reasonable or demonstrates good taste when he talks. She explained that, even though her ex-boyfriend was four years older, what he said had little to no impact on her, but she can better agree with what her current boyfriend says. She will also listen to everything he has to say before selecting a few points. 'If I'm okay with it, then I'll try to accept it and make appropriate changes according to my ability. I can't change everything, because sometimes if I don't like it then I can't accept it. If your idea is better, then I will try to adopt it.' Sappho feels she is being respected in this process because her boyfriend would always 'suggest' but he would not say 'I think you should do' this and that. She remains the one who makes the decision. Vanessa (aged 20) also said, 'within acceptable limits, I can make changes for him.'

Shelby (aged 29) mentioned that she would not mind dressing up in a style her boyfriend likes as long as he pays, even though she strongly disagrees with her boyfriend's fashion taste. She said that their fashion taste is so far apart that he would 'always pick out the pair of shoes that he thinks is pretty but I would consider the ugliest ones on the shelf.' However, sometimes she feels it is not that bad if she switches to another style because it is simply a change in clothes, but later on she told me she was mocked by her girlfriends when she wore the clothes he picked out for her. Angel (aged 23) also told me that there is a possibility she would try something her boyfriend recommends. Women retain a sense of autonomous selfhood through trying out what is acceptable rather than simply accepting everything that is asked of them.

When asked about their responses if their appearance was challenged by their boyfriends, a few participants, however, demonstrated a high level of assertiveness on principle. Sappho (aged 30) commented, 'if you change yourself because of this, then you're truly and utterly unoriginal.' Yo-Hsuan (aged 25) agreed, saying, 'if you want to criticize what I wear, then let's just not stay together. Right? Because I can't really change just because of how he is.' However, she went on to say: 'It's not like I dress strangely. I always dress up, but I dress up the way I want. At least I'm not looking very *Tai*,[8] or, what else do you want?' It is important to negotiate with a partner but equally important not to lose a sense of self in the relationship. Although Yo-Hsuan feels offended if her boyfriend criticises her appearance, she does examine herself to see if there is something 'wrong' with her appearance while she argues with him. In addition, she assumes that most men like girls to put on make-up and dress up, so she feels that she has satisfied those criteria and is not 'going against' societal and her boyfriend's demands. To an extent she is constrained by social expectations, which give weight to appearance, and thus can defend her compromise in relation to accepted norms of appearance.

The defence also went in the other direction, causing different kinds of conflicts. Helen (aged 31) and Nancy (aged 28) do not even include their partners in their buying decisions, and Helen said, 'I don't like going shopping with him, I want to pick out the clothes I like and he doesn't have much patience waiting for me. And when I go shopping, I don't like having other people around to influence me.' Nancy indicated that she has stopped going shopping with her boyfriend because 'it's annoying to go

---

[8] Tai means old-fashioned, rural, like a 'country bumpkin'.

shopping with him, because he just doesn't want you to buy. One time we argued, I said "you shouldn't think you can change me, I would want to do this even after marriage. I might do a little less, but you wanting me to not buy at all is impossible"'. It seems that shopping alone is a way to avoid argument as well as to maintain the self. In this respect the assertiveness of young women in choosing their own clothes is usually enhanced to some extent by this. Tiffany (aged 19), from the younger group, has a different reason for not going shopping with her boyfriend, commenting, 'I'm worried that he might say – "how can you possibly spend so much?" or something like that. Actually, I've always been a little… about this, just not that secure. Maybe he would think that I'm materialistic. It just feels a little scary.' On the other hand, Angel (aged 23), when buying clothes, often asks for her boyfriend's opinion. However if there was a disagreement, she would first check if she agrees with him: 'If he says it's not good, I would see if I really like this thing. If I like it one hundred per cent and I must have it, I would still buy it if he says it's not good.' For Angel it is clear that her own opinion is the main factor in deciding her appearance. To some extent, even though this inclusion of her boyfriend's opinion shows her intention to advance her relationship, the sense of controlling 'my own appearance' obviously takes priority over compromise. A majority of participants are aware of the possible conflicts with boyfriends but find ways round them.

When asked about whether they would abandon make-up or dressing up in a relationship or after marriage, many women fiercely rejected this idea. Shirley (aged 27) commented, 'if you don't dress up, you lose entirely.' This rejection by participants not only suggests a defence of women's 'rights' over their own bodies and appearance, but also the reluctance to lose a 'weapon' in the competition with other women. Therefore, dressing up is likely to be non-negotiable in a relationship as it is about women's 'own business', not a matter that would affect the partner or the relationship. Many older participants believe that their partners would not love them if they stop making up or dressing up. Sharlene (aged 29) stated that her ex-boyfriends and current boyfriend never meddle in what she wears. 'Because they like me, so no matter what I wear, they like it all. They feel that as long as I'm happy, it's all right.' However, she does not actually believe it when they tell her that they like her no matter what she looks like. 'He may say this now, but it's all bullshit. After a while he won't love me anymore, it's all lies. This I am clear about. Because they're all lies, I can discern lies. Truly, this is all fake.' Shirley (aged 27) also agreed: 'It's words, just lies. In the case of an affair, it's

always the other person who's pretty. It's because of her looks that he would like her. Or else, when you see a yellow-faced hag every time you come home, you lose interest after a while. There are too many people who are unfaithful.' Justine (aged 30) simply said, 'No, I don't want to be a doll!' In other words, she does not want to just give in to a partner's demands about how she should look.

In their accounts, several interesting issues are present. Firstly, my participants express an awareness that they face a reality where appearances decide everything. The women's understanding of this reality in turn dominates the effects of romance. Secondly, appearances will always be advantageous to retaining the relationship, or are even a pre-condition. Conversely, when a woman cannot retain a relationship, she blames herself for not taking care of her appearance, for being a 'yellow-faced hag'. Thirdly, as Justine suggested, letting go of one's own preferences in a relationship makes one a doll, something to be manipulated or to be displayed at home. Their aversion to forfeiting their own interests by neglecting their appearance, or, in Justine's phrase, to be deprived of their own rights, can be seen in participants' repeated assertions of the importance of maintaining their beauty. Sharlene (aged 29) said, 'my appearance will always be first and foremost, my kids and my husband come second… don't let me lose what I feel is the birthright of a woman.' And Shirley (aged 27) said, 'I don't want to [compromise]… I can't go without make-up. And dressing up is for his benefit, it's for him to look at. [Once] married, [if a woman] becomes a yellow-faced hag then it's impossible.' As we can see here, to these young women, retaining their beauty is seen as a 'win-win' situation. Therefore, for most of the participants, instead of devoting their whole life to looking after their family, staying beautiful while dating or during marriage is absolutely the priority to ensure that they retain the advantage in a relationship. This is perhaps a reaction to the assumption that a woman will lose her power if she becomes a 'yellow-faced hag'. Many women believe that not all girls are born beautiful, but the effort they make, meaning making up and dressing up, is something they do have control over. They are expected by men, too. All participants believe that dressing up is necessary, whether they are single or in a relationship, because 'everyone likes beautiful girls' (Shirley). Thus, asymmetrical power relationships still persist and women remain concerned with their perceived images, unable to escape from the male gaze. Women still experience unwanted judgement for not dressing up and anticipate that they will be criticised if they do not dress up or make

up. Many of these concerns seem to be self-reinforced as opposed to enforced by external feedback, but also indicate that they have internalised certain social standards.

There were some participants who believed that it would not be possible to change their fashion consumption habits, or who would do so only if their partners would pay a similar price, for example, to stop spending money on a car.[9] Shirley (aged 27) commented, 'but for my face, I really can't accept not putting on make-up… so… the money for this isn't too much, it's not enough to affect things like car payments or a house mortgage. So I would argue with him about it – there's nothing like this for him? So maybe he shouldn't spend so much on maintaining his car. I feel that if he really likes me, then he has to tolerate this part of me. [Spending only] 3,000 NTD[10] [a month on cosmetics] is already very sad for me, he should try to earn more to pay for this.' When it comes to reducing the attention they pay to their appearance, there is always a bargaining process within the conversation. In addition, beauty is felt to be a component of love, and so staying beautiful is something that should be understood and supported. However, many participants also offer compromises as a way to maintain harmony within relationships. For example, Judy (aged 22) 'shops online, for the lower-priced items', Hsiao-Han (aged 22) 'just buys one piece a month', and Sharlene (aged 29) 'takes the cosmetics or pieces that my sisters and good friends don't want.' In contrast, Angel (aged 23) made a definite statement – 'then I won't be with him!' Tiffany also said, 'this is just a small thing that I insist on', but later added that she might change her mind if she feels that her partner is worth making this sacrifice for.

7.7 Summary

For young Taiwanese women, dressing up is not only an expression of social status, but also an opportunity to realise the self, to demonstrate their own uniqueness. This is evident both in the conscious choices made to wear unique clothes and from the feeling of embarrassment when '*zhuangshan*' happens (when someone else is wearing an identical garment).

---

[9] Some past Western research found that in marriage men spend proportionately far more on themselves than women do and that women rarely spend on themselves without guilt (Pahl, 1989). These women, however, do not seem willing to let go of spending on themselves – possibly because of the strong tradition of women as workers and earners in Taiwan.

[10] 1 NTD = 0.021GBP

All interviewees also expressed a reluctance to wear outfits repeatedly. This phenomenon is more prominent in the younger group, perhaps because they place greater emphasis on using clothes as a display of uniqueness and individuality. They continue to reiterate the model of 'fashionable women' and project the essential traits of 'modern women' through having fast-changing and highly-variable wardrobes. However, a distinction can be drawn in the means to accomplish these goals – the older women would tactically use a limited set of clothes to create different looks while the younger participants tend to present uniqueness with the latest fashionable pieces.

Even though the old Chinese proverb: *'nyu wei yei ji jhe rong'* (女為悅己者容)[11] remains a relevant motivation for dressing up, the audience for a woman's dress sense is now generally agreed to be broader, more segmented and more nuanced. There is a distinct difference in wardrobe choice for a private and public occasion. The private/public distinction is further complicated by the complex distinction between friends/acquaintances and by gender. The young Taiwanese women interviewed try their best to manage 'choosing suitable clothes for the proper occasion.' A majority of participants not only believe in having different appearances for different occasions and audiences but consider it to be ideal. This impression management is well contextualised in social groups and is less concerned with appearing 'weird' in public places.

From my interviews, it seems that only a few participants are concerned about or comply with their boyfriends' opinions. Rather than compromise in favour of maintaining harmony, the desire to please their own idiosyncrasies and the self seems to be more important, even at the expense of their partners' approval and praise. This also represents a significant change in the notion of 'modern fashionable women'.

In conclusion, I found that most of my interviewees are always in the situation of wrestling or competing with their peers in relation to 'beauty, clothing, and taste'. This competition takes place against the pursuit of the self and individuality and requires compromises between tradition and contemporary social expectations. This contributes to participants' concern that 'different appearances when facing different people' would obscure their sense of self. Participants demonstrate a shifting self with some agency, which suggests that they have found a way to present an appearance that is a mixture of compromise and resistance.

---

[11] See description in introduction.

Chapter 8 Images, Nationalities and Localities

8.1 Introduction

While images of Western and other East Asian women were often viewed as influential in fashion consumption in Taiwan, every participant I spoke to drew clear distinctions between Western and East Asian women, frequently in opposition or contrast. The notion of 'West is best' is one of declining currency amongst young Taiwanese women. This chapter attempts to explore this issue further, focusing on the ways in which the generation's self-identity and self-image have been influenced by the media and by stereotypical images of other nations and localities. I define self-image as an individual's perceptions of themselves in relation to others. More specifically I look at how images of other women (Western women, women from other Asian countries and provincial Taiwanese women) have been translated into specific categories, and how they influence the way in which participants perceive their own looks.

Differences in body image and the formation of self-identity are discussed alongside young women's experiences, expectations and fantasies of Western women's bodies and lifestyle. By analysing their narratives, I aim to unravel the process by which the meanings of bodies become embedded in women's constructions of self-image. I am concerned not with a general interest in fashion products, but with how these young women translate the Western images from different perspectives and use aspects of them to construct a unique image.

Likewise, attitudes towards ethnicity-based fashion images reveal which current stereotypes are held by Taiwanese women. The national identity of Taiwanese people has traditionally been a complicated and contentious notion in many respects, not the least of which is political. The conflict comes not only from the issue with China but also the tension between Mainlander Taiwanese and the offspring of those who immigrated to Taiwan prior to 1940. However, it seems that the younger generation pays less attention to the political issue of national identity. In relation to fashion, this chapter attempts to explore how my participants define themselves in relation to Western, Japanese and Korean women before moving on to consider the wearing of traditional Chinese dress, *qipao*, and its meaning in terms of identity, image and femininity.

Apart from the perception of images of Western and Eastern women, my participants seem to want to break away from the stereotypes assigned to Eastern and Western women; they want to create an image that is not merely Taiwanese but one that is representative of the Taipei metropolitan ideal. They discuss their subjective experience of being a Taipei woman, or their pursuit of the ideal. By illustrating the metropolitan lifestyle, I investigate participants' own interpretations and the ways in which Taipei women interpret other women who live outside Taipei city, which operates to create a fundamental sense of the image of metropolitan women. This chapter seeks to determine how such exclusion works in constructing a unique image.

8.2 The Influence of the Media

During the early years of social and economic change in Taiwan, the older generations tended to believe that Westerners and the Japanese were better than Easterners. Growing up more affluently and in a more globalised context, young women have more avenues available to encounter actual Westerners, rather than learning from limited sources. I begin by discussing images of westerners and other foreigners in general before moving on to fashion.

8.2.1 Images of Westerners and other Easterners

Among younger Taiwanese women, different perceptions exist of Western women, perceptions based on the Western women they see in Taiwan, in their travels to Western countries, or just the information they receive from the media. For example, Anita (aged 21), who works part-time in an English cramming school, explains a general (mis)perception of Westerners among Taiwanese, saying that the Taiwanese consider foreigners to be more handsome, more beautiful, as if even the 'moon is rounder abroad.' She, however, disagrees after getting to know some foreign friends. Anita ascribes this change to her experience with her foreign friends – she feels that most foreigners who come to Taiwan are people who would not be doing well elsewhere, with the exception of those who come to work for a multinational firm. Originally, she had a more idealised image of foreigners in Taiwan, believing that they were 'tall and handsome' with more general expectations of the men being perfect overall. She goes on to describe how she became more disillusioned generally, repeatedly stating that 'it's not all that' and giving this example:

Really, when they talk amongst themselves, there's not that much grammar, it's still with curse words and things, just like in the movies. It's not that much better, perhaps their accent and pronunciation are better. (Anita, aged 21)[1]

In this context, a bias against foreigners becomes a significant tool to enhance a sense of national and ethnic identity, which is clear when Anita describes Western foreigners in Taiwan as people who could not find proper jobs in their own countries. Working in an English cramming school provides Anita with the opportunity to know 'real' Westerners. Sappho has had a similar experience with foreigners. In terms of fashion tastes, there was a moment of realisation as she found her perception of foreigners turned upside down when studying in Australia on a language exchange. She picks up the difference between reality and her expectations after actually meeting with foreigners, saying:

This was a first for spending a prolonged period of time with foreigners. I met more Italians and would talk to them. For one person from Milan, I asked – 'how do you all look at brands?' The Italians are not that fashionable themselves. The Italian told me that if she went to China, the first thing she would do is to buy a whole set of Prada rip-offs to take to Italy. So it was quite fun. (Sappho, aged 30)

Sappho defines her understanding of foreigners as an interesting experience, and in distinguishing among different nationalities challenges the myth of the fashion conscious Italians.

Sharlene, on the other hand, did not draw on her own experience but on what she had been told about westerners. She defined the difference between Westerners and Easterners in terms of bodily appearance by quoting her teacher:

Because we Chinese had a faster evolution, we are more rounded. 'Don't you think they look a lot like chimpanzees?' the teacher said. They really do look a little alike, with more hair and such. Caucasians, their evolution is really not as fast as Orientals; their features are not as rounded as ours. I felt it made a lot of sense. (Sharlene, aged 29)

---

[1] In Taiwan, using poor grammar and frequent curse words can be seen as a generally inappropriate act that signals poor education, which in turn represents low social standing. Among people where English is their first language, poor English grammar is all the more blatant and can shatter the "Prince Charming" image that is prevalent among some Taiwanese women.

Interestingly, two main elements seem to be influencing how and why these women describe their feelings towards foreigners in negative terms – self-identity and globalisation. Although Anita (aged 21) and Sappho (aged 30) tried to verify their impressions of foreigners with their own experiences, it remains the case that only a minority of Taiwanese people will have had more than a fleeting encounter with foreigners and that prevailing stereotypes persist and self-perpetuate. This is particularly the case with the contrasting self-identities that are adopted in their interpretation of Westerners. My participants do not primarily see themselves as being the same as Western women. Rather, they focus on the consciousness of a sense of self gained from observation of perceived difference in physical characteristics. Globalisation has been important in influencing fashion cycles in Taipei city and is part of the backdrop of adopting Western culture. Therefore the bias against Westerners can only be described as a reaction of the younger generation against the older stereotypes as they learn more about Westerners through their own avenues.

Yo-Hsuan provides an alternative point of view towards Westerners and Western fashions and lifestyles. She is very interested in the lifestyles in Western countries and gives an example of being a waitress in the West and in the East, saying that people would look at her or judge her differently, which would lead to women seeing themselves differently.

> ….Americans and Europeans don't really care – 'Oh you're a waitress, that's nice. Do you meet difficult customers? Are they a pain? Do they tip well?' They would talk about this, they wouldn't think inside 'oh they're thirty years old and still working in a coffee shop.' I think Easterners tend to do this….. I really admire their way of life [Westerners]. I feel that they're truly themselves…. And they're really happy….But that's not how Taiwanese would feel. (Yo-Hsuan, aged 25)

Unlike most women in this study, Yo-Hsuan shows great admiration for Western culture. In her narrative, conservative Taiwanese culture has not enabled her to live happily and present the 'real me'. Her account, however, is based on media representations of life in the West, not on her own experience. Although she is aware that the image or the information the media conveys are exaggerated, she is still very keen on a life in which she could present herself without thinking about judgements from other people. Yo-Hsuan went on to talk about western actresses who are unique in

their looks. These reflect her aspirations of being a unique woman but at the same time highlight her disappointment with the conservative ways of Taiwanese culture.

Yo-Hsuan's account is unusual. Asked about her opinions of Westerners, she could quickly think of examples of how Western women have gained happiness by freely following their own desires. She also explained the possibility of earning more money from a pleasant job instead of doing something that people might not gain happiness from. She believes that if she could live in a Western society, she would be happier than she is now. Many women are eager to have personal control over their own lives and greater power in making decisions. These days, young women are no longer expected to stay at home, a practice condemned by feminists as patriarchal subordination (Greenhalgh, 1994; Hsiung 1996). Rather, their opportunities have expanded to the point where women can satisfy their basic needs and gain achievement and happiness. Although most of the women I interviewed described themselves as happy in their jobs, Yo-Hsuan implied that she has no control over her situation no matter how free she is in her mind. Perhaps this unsettling conviction stems from her lack of information about what life is like in the West (for example – people working in low-wage service jobs are arguably more denigrated in the US than in Taiwan).

On the other hand, Jessie raises rather complex issues surrounding her changing perceptions of foreigners, in her case, the Japanese. Initially her perceptions were shaped by the unfairness she had experienced in her home, particularly her grandfather's sexist attitude. She formed her own opinions by reacting against her grandfather, which led her to reject his positive attitude to Japan earlier in her life:

> I used to always dislike Japan, because my grandpa, grandma, really like it, and then I really hate my grandpa [laughs]. Because he's one of those people who valued boys over girls…Every time he says that Japan is good I would go 'meh' inside. And then he would say that when you grow up, you should go to Japan, to study abroad in Japan, to learn Japanese. When I hear this, I just feel that I would never go to Japan in my life and never learn Japanese. (Jessie, aged 24)

This narrative has given her considerable reasons to reject what her grandfather has told her. She also categorises him with those who 'value boys more than girls', which suggests a solution used to deal with long-term repressed emotion. Although the cultural attitude is something she cannot change or fight against, she can face it indirectly,

feeling empowered by 'thinking' not to accept Japan. In this case, passively avoiding direct conflict remains the main component of maintaining harmony in the family. This is especially typical in the extended family.[2] Later on Jessie explained the difference between her grandfather and her mother regarding Japan. Her mother graduated from the faculty of Japanese when studying, and she enjoyed learning Japanese. After her children grew up, when she had more free time and started learning Japanese again. Jessie said, 'I wasn't compelled to know that Japan is very interesting, she [Jessie's mother] does not just say that everything about Japan is good.' By implication, the conclusion is that being freely acquired, and having choices is not the same as being forced or manipulated. Being able to choose is the main component of Jessie's account of her transformation from rejecting Japanese style to beginning to be attracted to it:

> It's totally different than right now. And then that is something you explore on your own. In college, you started watching Japanese shows, especially the year abroad….And then my classmates would say that 'this is good', I would watch it out of curiosity, and then would just get into it.…That was when I started becoming more and more interested, and I felt that I needed to learn Japanese. And then if it's not something other people would say but I was told so by elders, the more I couldn't accept it. (Jessie, aged 24)

From her own perspective, Jessie emphasises that her acceptance of Japanese culture began with her mother's gentle influence and her own exploration. Studying abroad has allowed her to further develop her interest in Japan. It also granted her an opportunity to escape from the unpleasant strictures, when her grandfather used his authority and influence to persuade her. It also allows her to avoid the pressures of living in an extended family where she and her brother are expected to respect their elders and any 'wilful' behaviour is forbidden. It has permitted her to freely choose information, rather than being forced to accept things, and it has also enabled her to think through her preferences in a way that demonstrates her control over her own life. She defines her 'real self' as formed through her own experience and sums it up by saying that she would not accept anything her elders told her – she has to think things through and make decisions on her own. Jessie's account is in keeping with Giddens' (1991) contention that life decisions in post-traditional contexts are freed from tradition and hierarchical domination and flow from processes of self-actualisation, where

---

[2] In the extended family children are expected to respect grandparents. They are taught by parents not to fight back even if you know they are wrong as they are aged, not easily changed and deserve respect.

198

globalisation interacts with the reflexive project of the self.

8.2.2 Fashion images of Western and Eastern women

Even though most participants identified themselves as fundamentally different from Western women, the influence of Western celebrities and models remains apparent amongst young Taiwanese women, especially in fashion. As Evans and Thornton state, 'fashion images at the same time prescribe women's fantasies or desires and permit women a free space in which women map them for themselves' (1989: 83). This is particularly evident in Yo-Hsuan's account. Yo-Hsuan constructs her images of Western women through subjective interpretations of celebrities and models. She admires one particular US actress/singer because of her diverse fashion styles, and comments, 'Sometimes you see her in casual clothes, sometimes she is quite lady-like and sometimes she wears something quite wild. She will follow almost every fashion style. I like it very much….She is very unique.' Indeed, Yo-Hsuan continued to demonstrate her admiration of how Westerners present themselves with clothes by comparing them with Japanese and Taiwanese women:

> Actually what's really the best, what I like the most, are the Euro-American styles. If you look at them, they're really… truly matching… And for Japan, it's really easy for one thing to become a fad and everyone would be the same. Europeans and Americans, they're more… I just really like it. Perhaps if they have a get-together among friends, they would all dress up. But it's not the same in Taiwan, they would just come in t-shirt and jeans. I think Europeans and Americans really place importance on this—if they're having a party, they would put on cocktail dresses. I don't know if it's really this way, or it's just exaggerated in the movies. I really like this sense where – 'even the sales staff dress up.' (Yo-Hsuan, aged 25)

Yo-Hsuan explains the differences in fashion styles between the Easterner and the Westerner by comparing her own experiences in Japan and Korea with media images of Western women. She claims that uniqueness and trying new things are traits that Easterners lack in most contexts.

Waverly expresses her fantasy desire for a western designer dress, which is clearly influenced by the media:

> I think *Vogue* is really amazing, I can find out many things about designers and brands, I've learnt a lot about the designs of clothes, how they did design and what the trend is this season, what are their [designers'] styles and which is which…I do want to buy something from those designers but I know I can't afford it. I hope I can buy a Valentino's dress in the future, if I get chances, it's a dream. (Waverly, aged 19)

Waverly concluded with a keen and hopeful tone at the end of our conversation. She told me that in all practical ways this is still a dream and that she does not aspire to achieve it currently. She emphasises this again, saying, 'I like watching European-American advertisements on TV or in the movies. Recently they rebroadcast Chanel's ad. I want that kind of classic dress….in the future….now I still wear clothes in Japanese styles mostly. Those [Chanel's clothes] are only for rich people who can afford them. I don't want them at all, or any branded bag, for now.' Thus images of women in the media, which are tailored to impress the modern woman, can construct a space which allows her to pursue fantasy or information, but at the same time reinforces the distance between her own reality and fantasy.

Before deciding to study fashion design, Waverly read lots of Japanese fashion magazines, imitating the ways in which models dress. Her attitude towards Western fashion designers, moreover, indicates an aspiration towards European-American based visions of fashion and modernity. She also reads *Vogue,* which is marketed to a very wealthy audience (Scott, 2005), but which also weaves dreams for prospective young consumers. Waverly is well aware of the fact that she cannot afford any of those luxury products. Therefore, through the information she gains, Waverly uses *Vogue* as a stage to enact her own identity – she likes to read the magazine but she knows that the things she reads in Vogue are not things for who she is right now. It is for this reason that she contrasts her own lifestyle so clearly with those of the people constructed in *Vogue*.

Even though most young women understand the distance between images constructed in high-end fashion magazines and what is possible in real life, imitating the dress styles of actresses from famous TV programmes could inspire their dress styles. Young women discuss the outfits and accessories used in films and then look for similar products in the market. The collective imagination may turn itself into reality by making people 'fit' into a fashion frame. One should note here that the faces or the body shapes or the personality of those stars are usually dismissed in these conversations.

Women do not shop because they are shopping addicts narcotised by the media (Radner, 1995). However, they do idealise the Western images conveyed by the media that are enabled through consumption. By creating a vivid dream, women illustrate their dissatisfaction and frustration relative to their present lives. In this case, the media make women not only monitor themselves constantly, but also self-reflexively draw a contrast between the ideal and the reality. Yo-Hsuan draws attention to the contrasting experiences of Westerners and Taiwanese by giving an example of what the actress wore in the famous US TV series *Sex and the City*:

> Carrie wore a dress with a ginormous flower perched on the shoulder in the first scene. I think it's fabulous! But don't you think wearing that in Taiwan you would be reckoned as a nut? Have you ever seen anyone in the UK wearing something similar? Very common, isn't it? No one would think she is insane or [3]*'A-hua'*. That is a world that I am very keen on. (Yo-Hsuan, aged 25)

Yo-Hsuan imagines that Western women are freer in their lifestyles, and that the act of dressing up itself becomes an appropriation through which she constructs a space for her ideal self. Eastern women's behaviour is based on a passivity that is the result of traditional collectivism, not of individualism. Yo-Hsuan is seeking an alternative lifestyle. In her narratives, she repeatedly sought my affirmation for how she thinks about Westerners. Yo-Hsuan attaches her expectations and emotions to this desired lifestyle and so hopes that it really exists. Taiwanese fashion norms, as she sees them create a constraint on her desire to be unique.

8.2.3 The truth behind the scene

Even though images of Western women have strongly affected Asian styles for two centuries, there is a sense of disillusionment when it comes to discussing Western fashions with most of my participants. Shirley, aged 27, and Vanessa, aged 20, explain the reality of dressing up like Westerners, saying, 'The ways of dressing up are too over the top in the films *Sex and the City* and *Gossip Girl*, they are more likely only for rich women. I have no aspiration towards it and in reality there is no way to dress up like that.' Rather, Shirley prefers imitating the ways the stars dress up when they are not in

---

[3] *A-hua*, which literally translates as Miss Flowers, is used colloquially to refer to someone who is unfashionable and oblivious. With *A-hua* tending to be a stereotypical name for a 'country bumpkin', it is used in this case to refer to girls who dress in gaudy colours and mis-matched styles.

the spotlight. Such styles, and what she wears in her leisure time, working time and dining time are felt to be closer to reality.

A strong sense that came out of the interviews I conducted was that the women conceptualise Western women as a distant group in terms of body shape, dress styles and cultural expectations. Lennon and Rudd (1994) argue that young women's style decisions appear to meet cultural ideas of beauty. It is certainly true that women's concerns about appearance are dominated by different cultures. This is why the young women vigorously create unique images that are distinct from Western women, and even from other East Asian women. While western actresses and models have had an influence their perceptions of fashion, this was mediated by their awareness of what was realistic for them. Shirley realised that it is not possible to wear sexy dresses in daily life:

> When I look at magazines like *Vogue*, I can see them looking so sexy. Usually, it's impossible to dress so sexily, I mean like in formal dress, because they all photograph the people in Hollywood, dressed up for the red carpet. So I feel that it's not possible, there's not really an occasion to dress this way. (Shirley, aged 27)

The choice of fashion clothing and the meanings they represent are understandably complex. Also, the limited range of clothing for only a few occasions presented by Hollywood stars or Western models presents an unrealistic dream. Evans and Thornton (1989) state that women look at or read fashion images for different reasons, such as for the clothes, the 'look' or the information. However young women modify their desires for what is conveyed by the media and focus more on realistic beauty, which is associated with utility and practicality. These should satisfy not only the practical function but also their everyday presentation of self. The idea of clothes as social props for acting like someone else has been supplanted by a concern with clothes as the packaging of the self. Nancy emphasises the realistic part of reading fashion magazines:

> Like *Vogue*, I don't really read that kind of magazine much because they contain too many words, and actually I don't like those [magazines] whose information on fashion is something you cannot reach at all. Like *VIVI*, it has a Chinese version and a Japanese version. I read the Chinese version mostly. I don't like something in the magazine which I cannot buy. European American magazines, most of them photograph passers-by so that you don't even know where to buy [the clothes/accessories on them]. (Nancy, aged 28)

202

In addition, throughout the accounts there is an explicit emphasis on reality and dream as a pivotal aspect of dressing up like Western women. This is made explicitly clear and discussed directly by most participants. In Nancy's account above, she describes her desire to live in reality with something reachable, rather than reading or looking at something untouchable. In a sense, she focuses on whether the products or images in the magazine can be realised instead of as something from an unfamiliar world. Western fashion magazines are totally alien to her. In addition, finding the exact same product introduced in the magazine, rather than looking for a substitute, indicates a lack of confidence in imitating products that are showcased by Western models. Sherry has similar reasons for wanting fashion that is close to her real life:

> The European and American brands, the ones in the magazines, are all the more expensive ones, so I think they are not too helpful to me. I think I read magazines to let myself know ways to mix and match. Like the items in European and American magazines have high prices, I feel that I have few of these things, it's almost pointless to read it. (Sherry, aged 23)

How they present their self in everyday life is more attractive for these young women. Indeed, it is noticeable that this occurs within a globalising society where, as I have emphasised, there is the increasing salience of the production of everyday fashion, images and information. Thus there is a connection here between the declining influence of high fashion in contemporary culture and the way in which the discourse of everyday fashion constructs the world.

8.2.4 Mapping the Body

Differing cultural norms are applied to the anatomical differences between Easterners and Westerners. Shirley (aged 27) used a gently worded account to illustrate this and how this affects what it is possible to wear. Shirley says 'I feel that Europeans and Americans are maybe too…. they strike me as burlier, a little bit chubby, and of course buffer. There are thin ones, but most of them still have a burly feel, I don't think it's good for dressing up.' Fundamentally, this reflects a different ideal of beauty, with significant implications for the different gender expectations ascribed in Taiwanese and Western societies. The Taiwanese's sense of beauty reflects a more 'bony feel', skinnier, wanting to be thin. It is more difficult for young women to accept the European and American way. But given the limited interactions these young Taiwanese women have

with Europeans and Americans, these concepts may again be externally driven – returning to Wolf's (2002) proposition of the body image being a product of social standards of a male-dominated society, strengthened and reinforced by the large number of media images.

In the majority of participants' accounts, Westerners are perceived as aliens rather than other women just like them. This works against the view of 'Western is Best.' Almost every participant emphasises that Westerners are different from Taiwanese in every aspect. Anita, for example, articulates various differences between Westerners and Taiwanese:

> They are white, so many colours are better on them, which is easier in matching clothes. Probably the contours of the face and height are better as they have a kind of momentum if they stand up, like a model. But it would not be that suitable if they wear Japanese styles. I think they find something that belongs to them, we find ours. Perhaps there is something which is suitable for Asians, and they, Westerners are suitable in some 'hanger' clothes, like cocktail dresses. Their stuff on me may not be good but would be another different presentation. They have their super models, we have ours too. (Anita, aged 21)

Another young woman, Hsiao-Han, aged 22, also echoes the sentiment that it's not an inherent cultural difference, but simply different aesthetic situations. 'Some colours suit them [Westerners] very well. Like a brown t-shirt would look great. But if an Asian wears it, I see how when some people put them on it will look dirty, because they are a little bit yellow. Like some clothes are better suited for skinny people while other clothes would not look good on big breasted people…' In all of these cases involving comparisons between Easterners and Westerners, they are presented as two radically different groups to whom are attached different characters in terms of dressing up.

Western people are addressed, interpreted, as a distinct subject that is contained through the young Eastern women's gaze. Tiffany (aged 19) and Sharlene (aged 29) suggest that Easterners and Westerners are so different that they might as well be entirely different species; as Sharlene says, 'we really are different, it is just like comparing cats and dogs, the two are different from the start, how can you compare?' Most interviewees were not that extreme but still indicated some differences in terms of body appearance.

Yeah, the styles are different. Perhaps in terms of body figure, I don't feel that they have much larger advantages. I still feel that we are better. Perhaps the styles are different. Westerners take a more athletic or sexual style. We are a little bit more conservative here. We can present that… the Westerners are more open I guess, more daring to dress confidently, more able to present their speciality. We have a harder time doing that. We are more shy, the feeling is different…. Taiwanese have their own styles, but we can't dress in the same style as them, or the ability to present confidence will be different. (Shirley, aged 27)

Most participants admitted that Western women have a stronger nose and more accented facial features. They admire this and find it beautiful. Yo-Hsuan (aged 25), however, explains that this ideal is too distant, 'because I'm not going to have that depth [of facial features] and I'm not going to do anything, I'll just look at it. If I really want to shape it [meaning plastic surgery] into that, it would be difficult.' Another older woman, Sharlene (aged 29), explains the differences: 'There are advantages for each. There are good things about each. Like we'll look younger than our age but they'll look old quickly. I feel that there are advantages to each.'

However, these young women do not hold Western body figures in especially high regard. As stated previously, even though Western women are taller than their Asian counterparts, they are also considered to be on the heavy side. Meanwhile, the shortfall in Asian heights could be made up with some effort. Waverly was a student at a fashion design college. Considering that many fashion designers have started to use Eastern-looking models, she thinks there is no saying that Westerners definitely wear designer clothes better; this should depend on the designers' theme in each season. As to the common weakness of Eastern women being shorter, some compensation could be easily made for this.

Some evening dresses are good on Eastern people…. I think wearing high heels could solve the problem. Except the more aristocratic-looking styles, those are only good on Western people. Their height is really an advantage but if we want to do it we can use anything to make it up. (Waverly, aged 19)

Similarly, Felicia also points out the way images are manipulated in fashion magazines:

But I feel it's because it's the photographers who are really good. They are pretty, but I feel their body figure really isn't that great, I think it's the product of the

205

stylists…. because they're not especially tall. I feel that the Japanese magazines are just different from the European-American ones, it's not those people who naturally look good in clothes. I think for Orientals, it's more about paying attention to the way you dress and then showing off your strengths while hiding your weaknesses. (Felicia, aged 23)

On the whole, the confidence presented in Waverly's and Felicia's accounts is derived from accepting perceived bodily disadvantages, rather than blindly imitating Western women's outfits. Clothes are becoming weapons against dissatisfaction. However, the realisation of bodily difference as well as the idea of making efforts about the appearance is based on the fundamental aesthetics of an ideal beautiful woman. In other words, I argue that superficially my participants seem to have developed another way to defend themselves against the images of other women, but they still fall into the stereotype of beauty conveyed by the media.

As a result, most participants state that wearing Japanese-style clothes is a safer and less troublesome option because of the similarity in body shapes and ideals. Anita (aged 21) also points out that she could not wear most Western clothes because they would still be too big for her even if she chose the smallest size. Thus the clothes for Westerners would style differently when they are on her. Shirley (aged 27) makes similar claims about dressing up in Western-style clothes, which she identifies as something for Westerners' body shape. They all use the term 'different' to describe the possible outcome if they wear Western-style clothes.

Jessie further explained that the difference is not only in body figures but also in Westerners' attitudes towards the body, which she feels is so 'distant'. When asked about her impression of Western women and the ways they dress, she replied:

I would say that it doesn't really feel like they care. Of course, it's always pretty in the movies, but they don't really care about body figure. They would wear thin strap [tank tops] even when they're chubby. [laughs]…wear really short shorts…(Jessie, aged 24)

Jessie describes Western women's unmindful attitude by pointing to the way in which they dress, regardless of the fact that they have 'chubby bodies'. Taiwanese women believe that for a presentable appearance what really counts is not just the face but also a slim body figure. Based on the experience of studying in the UK and the acquisition of

Japanese information, Jessie precisely indicates her preference after comparing Westerners and Japanese, saying, 'when you look at girls in Japan, you would feel that because they're paper thin, no matter how they dress it would look good.' In response to the question about the process of accepting Japanese fashion styles, she describes it as largely slim body-dominated. The idea of different body figures and attitudes towards them creating associations of ethnic differences with the self and these associations, as well as the notion of a presentable appearance in Taiwan as a slim body figure, mean that a different body in different clothes represents more than just a social and cultural performance.

How well the body matches up to cultural ideals becomes an issue in this research. The image of Japanese or Westerners suggests a body that should be represented coherently, either in the nature of the body or in the sense of cultural function. Following this thread, Yumi (aged 26) points out the other cultural significance by saying, 'I don't really like Westerners, they're more portly… it's quite okay…but I just feel that their body shapes… don't have a real sense of shame. Like if they have a large tummy they would still have open midriffs. I just feel that I don't get it.' This statement points to a sense of self-awareness/shame that Yumi feels is not as acute in most ordinary Westerners. The alternative interpretation of women's appearance is developed through self-examination and then reflected onto other people. For Yumi, wearing appropriate clothes to cover disadvantages and making other people comfortable about one's appearance are about more than how well women maintain their body figure. The other two cases regarding Japanese women emphasise the significance of presenting a pleasant appearance, which rather contradicts the idea of individuality. Shirley (aged 27) and Sharlene (aged 29) share a similar idea of Taiwanese women having a better body figure compared with Japanese and Korean women. Shirley provides an opposing observation on Japanese women:

> Japanese, I don't think their body shapes are good, I had this thought recently, but they are really good at body-shaping. On average they are generally slim but they don't have a good leg-shape. However they know how to hide their disadvantages…I think Japanese are shorter than Taiwanese, which is worse than us. Koreans…I think they in fact are not really slim…and then they really fancy plastic surgery. Actually they are not better than us. I think Taiwanese women are much better. (Shirley, aged 27)

Similar to Shirley, Sharlene, who lived in Japan for a year, has developed an image of the Japanese as having a worse body shape and relying on makeup to keep pretty. She gives Taiwanese women higher credit in terms of body image, commenting, 'In terms of basics, Taiwan is much better off. The Taiwanese have skinny legs, thin bodies, and good skin…. if they [the Japanese] beat us on one point, it is that they know how to dress up. I feel that Taiwanese are good. Taiwanese women are really good.' Here, whether or not a woman is slim is a crucial element in determining 'beauty'. Being paper thin seems to be seen as a normal model of corporeal development and, if they are not, women will fail to fit into the category of beautiful[4]. The need to appear paper thin is thus driven by both the overwhelming social expectations as well as the rapid circulation of symbolic goods that cater to the thin ideal. The image of a thin body is in turn connected with one's self-consciousness, self-worth, and a fulfilling lifestyle. Within these 'well-defined boundaries of the body' (Hudson, 2006: 5), young Taiwanese women develop culturally specific ideas of beauty and identity.

8.3 National Image

> I think Taiwan is a really unique country. I don't know how to describe it. You could say it has tradition and that would be true; you could say it has no tradition and that would be true too…. (Yo-Hsuan, aged 25)

Throughout the interviews and throughout this analysis, it has become apparent that the appearances of Taiwanese women and women of other nations are explicitly and subjectively defined by young Taiwanese women and are less subject to equivocation and ambivalence than other aspects of dressing up. In view of the transformation in young women's perceptions of appearance, this section examines their grounding perceptions through longstanding conceptualisations of Chinese *qipao*.[5] Of note here is

---

[4] See Chapter 5 for more on the slim body as beautiful.

[5] Also interesting is the evolution of the identities of the *qipao* throughout history. Originally referring to a style of dress worn by the ruling Manchurians in the Qing Dynasty, it was forced upon the majority Han population as a part of population and ethnic control. The modern, slimmer cut that reveals more curves came to prominence in Shanghai at the turn of the 20th century, possibly developed in interaction with Western fashions (Shanghai was China's most metropolitan city at the time). It became adopted as the dress of choice for high society in Shanghai and was brought from there to Taiwan. It remained the dress of choice for Taiwan's high society well into the 1970s (though increasingly in a formal setting as time passed), worn not only by the *waishen* (outer-province) political elite but also publicly by movie stars and singers. And while younger Taiwanese today associate the *qipao* with mainland China, it has actually experienced a greater fall in popularity in China than in Taiwan – during the Cultural

how a single piece of clothing provokes and reflects the nuanced national identity that young Taiwanese hold today – the simultaneous alienation from the China they see today and the undeniable cultural linkage they possess with historical China. This is further complicated by the history of Taiwan, where a rift existed (or continues to exist) between the *waishen ren* (outer province people) and *benshen ren* (native province people). *Waishen ren* refers to those whose families migrated during the 1940s from the Chinese mainland and thus share a stronger cultural identification with China. *Benshen ren* refers to those whose families migrated and settled during the previous three centuries, mostly from the Fujian Province of China. The ways in which Taiwanese under-30s have positioned iconic Chinese clothing labels to represent feelings of nationhood are unpacked in order to include the wearers' reflexive awareness and identity ambivalence. The *qipao*, now visible on global fashion stages, represents far more than the emotional appeal of gaining nationhood, it has been revised and revived by fashion designers to simply imply a kind of beauty.

In describing how the *qipao* is used as national dress, 22 of my participants would love to dress up in the *qipao* as a national dress. Only Felicia was aware that the *qipao* belongs to 'China':

> …but I am thinking the *qipao* is more like *waisheng ren's* dress? I think so, because native Taiwanese don't really wear that, which is more like Shanghai women's….If I have to choose one dress to represent Taiwan, I think I would choose the *qipao*…well, is there any other option? Ummm, there seems to be none, it seems only the *qipao*, well because I have no other options in my head now. I am quite unsure, I instinctively think it belongs to Shanghai, I have this feeling. Wearing the *qipao* will slightly cause misperceptions, I worry about appearing like a Mainlander. (Felicia, age 23)

In terms of collective identity (Davis, 1992), Felicia's identification of ethnicity was particularly salient when I asked her opinion on wearing the *qipao*. She was outspoken and pointed out the difference in clothing between native Taiwanese and Mainlanders. By the end of the narrative, she had made it clear that her worry about wearing the

---

Revolution, it was labelled a 'reactionary' and 'bourgeois' form of clothing. In recent decades, the *qipao* has indeed made a return to China's fashion scene. However, it is no longer the sole dress of choice among Chinese women as it was in the 1930s and remained so in Hong Kong and Taiwan until the 1970s. Rather, it is only one alternative among the range of fashion labels available to them – an alternative more frequently chosen in circumstances where they feel that a more traditional and nationalistic dress is called for.

qipao was that other people might mistake her for a Mainlander. Despite the confusion about national identity in choosing a certain dress to represent Taiwan, Felicia stressed that she would introduce herself as Taiwanese in front of foreigners. Recalling her mother's and grandmother's clothing, she has no memory of any of them wearing the *qipao*. Therefore, ethnic Taiwanese nationalism is less fractured and more solid in Felicia's case. Probably because of the visibility and identification of the *qipao* in the world, today's young Taiwanese women often carefully mould their ethnic identities. This is echoed by Jessie (aged 24): 'I feel that it looks awkward, and that I feel that it's not Taiwan's, I feel that it's the Mainland's… But I really want to distinguish… *that I'm different from them.* To be honest, I don't feel like there is much that represents Taiwan, but if I want to wear a traditional dress I would want to wear a kimono. Yeah, I think it's totally not a big deal'. Thus it seems that the ethnic symbolism of the *qipao* persists even amongst younger women. Political conflict between the two countries may be reflected in Taiwanese reluctance to wear the traditional *qipao.* Simultaneously, due to the Japanese occupation and the Japanese fad of the 1990s, Japanese culture and goods continue to have a strong influence on Taiwanese people. Jessie clearly states that a kimono would be her preference for traditional dress. The symbolism of wearing the *qipao* also goes beyond simply demonstrating national traditions, it also represents the personal image someone would like to project. In Jessie's case this shared traditional symbol cannot be an option for presenting national identity because 'I am different from them'. Although ethnic conflict between *waishen ren* and *benshen ren* has long been observed by anthropologists (Hsiau, 1997), the other participants do not distinguish between *waishen ren* and *benshen ren* in this context, but feel quite simply that the *qipao* is a dress representative of Taiwan and are not sensitive in presenting a nationalist appearance. Yo-Hsuan (aged 25) comments, 'If today I were in a foreign country and they ask us to dress for our own country for a party I will wear the *qipao*, or even the *du duo*[6] [laughs]. I'd love to wear it.' Sherry (aged 23) says, 'I don't think we need to separate them, it's all Chinese culture.'

Most participants have positive impressions of the *qipao*, admiring how the curvilinear cut represents women's beautiful figure and oriental femininity. When Angel (aged 23) was asked about her willingness to wear the *qipao* in public she replied, 'I feel that [the *qipao*] represents the classical and classy Chinese woman, I would want to try it, I wouldn't feel that it's weird.' This view was echoed by Sherry (aged 23) and Chrissy

---

[6] A Chinese undergarment.

(aged 19). Sherry says, 'I feel the *qipao* is very pretty… because I really like its collar, I feel that it's very sexy.' Chrissy says, 'I really want to wear it… it's beautiful… it's an Oriental type of woman… very beautiful for a Chinese woman… if you are pretty and it looks nice on you then it's okay.' Anita (aged 21) further praised the design in making women look more elegant – 'because the *qipao* is a narrow cut, so your feet can only be so far apart. So women can't run around and have to walk slowly. It forms class and elegance, it's nice.' The *qipao* is here further conceived as a way to cultivate femininity. Many of these young women seem to be self-oriented to a traditional (and even western-based) stereotype about Asian women. Sappho, however, has a different opinion. While she said that, in the future, when she is older or if it is necessary, it would be acceptable to wear the *qipao,* this point she resists the stereotype of traditional Chinese femininity:

> I feel that the *qipao,* it represents some kind of meaning, it's something similar to what traditional Chinese women would wear. Right now, it's not something I would want to put on my body. I feel that it's a stereotype about traditional women, that Chinese women should wear the *qipao*. I don't want something like that put on me. I don't want to be someone else's stereotypical Chinese girl. (Sappho, aged 30)

According to Yang (2007), the *qipao* is a highly gendered and sexualised object. For most participants, the *qipao* definitively outlines a body figure and represents unique looks to Eastern girls, even though Western dress codes have been an influential factor in contemporary fashion. On the other hand, there are restrictions inherent in the *qipao* that are apparent to the women interviewed. Not only does the *qipao* restrict a woman's bodily and physical freedoms, it also implies ideological bounds. By repeatedly protesting against the 'stereotype', Sappho positions herself as separate from this category. She creates this separation of the real self from the traditional image in a more obvious way when she further says:

> Then when you open your mouth to speak, [other people would think] 'how do you speak like this? Wearing this type of clothes, how are you like this? Multiple personalities?' I wouldn't feel comfortable either. Other people would look at me and they would think – 'Huh, that's strange. Wearing this, how can you speak like this?' Why would I want that kind of trouble for myself? (Sappho, aged 30)

For Sappho, the image presented by wearing the *qipao* is one that does not match what she sees as her 'true self'. The concern about presenting a false impression reflects the significance of individuality in the younger generation. Younger women tend to be more inclined towards expressing their true self with appropriate clothing, rather than taking risks to deliver an image that could be interpreted as deceptive. In addition, the *qipao* has become reduced to just a daily outfit when taking into account the younger participants' discussion of the meaning of the *qipao* for them. Mandy (aged 21) told me that those *qipao* that are 'too long and too formal might be weird. But the modified ones are okay.' She goes on to point out that 'I just feel it's sort of a set, I just think of it as something I would wear for a day, and I wouldn't worry about not daring to wear it, I just think I would try it.' Hence, the *qipao* becomes one option among many.

However, of the 24 women interviewed in both age groups, some participants suggested that they would love to wear the *qipao* if there were appropriate formal occasions but they remained concerned about how it would present their body figure. They recognise that wearing the *qipao* requires a very idealised and specific body figure. Hsiao-Han (aged 22) feels that the *qipao* looks beautiful on other people but is reluctant to try it herself, saying, 'but I just get afraid, and, it's just that it takes a really good body to wear the *qipao*. Like around the stomach, you'll have some flab, or you need to be like 170 [centimetres] or something.' Chrissy (aged 19) concurs, saying, 'I think something like that takes a tall person to pull off, like with long legs and the side slit really high. I want to try it very much, really, but, I'm afraid to try it, I feel that I'm too short It's just that if I'm wearing heels and the *qipao* is still too long then it's really embarrassing.' Anita (aged 21) and Waverly (aged 19) also admire the *qipao* but at the same time give subjective sensations of the body. Anita – 'It's really quite pretty, but wearing it now is very weird, because it makes your body figure very obvious. Fat people wouldn't think about it, but skinny people would feel good about it, because it's a narrow and close fitting cut.' Felicia (aged 23) considers whether the *qipao* would emphasise her advantages, commenting, 'Because my advantage is my legs, if they are covered it would be too bad. Even the sexy long *qipao* which is split from the thighs, the wearer's face should be sexy too. I think I am the cute type, just not for that.' Waverly thinks that 'a higher opening slit looks quite good, but I feel that wearing that takes a really good body.' She further comments on the uniqueness of the dress and how she would enjoy freely mixing and matching with it: 'it's when so few people wear it that I would like to wear it. I would say that this is what makes it unique. I would prefer the top half only,

because the whole body [style] feels a bit restricted, I would like to match things with it myself.' However, even though she says she would like to try wearing it, she has not bought a *qipao*, '[I] don't have the courage, I'm afraid I won't end up wearing it, I feel that I should only buy it if I would wear it.'

The younger participants indicated that they might be unable to pull off the elegance and form of the *qipao* because it may accentuate, or at least hide less well, parts they considered imperfect. They were aware of the ethnic undertones represented by the *qipao* but were more concerned about its sheer aesthetics and style. Two reasons for this neglect of ethnic concerns in favour of aesthetic ones may be suggested here. Firstly, young Taiwanese women may be engaged in body shaping, which is seen as a more profitable form of activity. Looking good here takes priority over ethnic identity, which in turn reflects a triumph of individual-based identity over the group-linked identity of ethnicity. Secondly, the contradiction between expressed attitudes and actual purchases of the *qipao* to a large extent reflects worries about the peer group judging the wearer poorly. Self-originated individuality here concedes to an external locus of identity. This view is most clearly expressed by Waverly (aged 19), who comments, 'it would be strange wearing that in class, even though it's cool, but I still worry about how other people would think about it.' Tiffany also agrees about how beautiful the *qipao* is but she also worries about how other people would see it – 'if I were to wear it, I would try it. But I can't wear it just normally, other people would think that I'm weird. I wouldn't do it… just wear it and take a picture or memories.' Vanessa (aged 20) sees it as, 'if it's for a party then it's okay, but I wouldn't wear it on the street normally. I feel that I wouldn't now. There are some clothes that I feel are very good looking but I just feel don't fit myself.' Anita (aged 21), who wore it once as an usher for the National Day celebration at the President's office, says 'it has to be when everyone is wearing it when I will dare to wear it. Unless it's for a party, a party at night. Something I would wear for a little bit but take off and change back. Or else, during the light of day, I wouldn't even dare to take the metro.' Judy (aged 22) also says that she would not wear the *qipao* in her normal life because 'it's so over the top to wear the *qipao*, I can see this when my classmate wears it. She really has clothes like that, aside from the formal *qipao*, she also has the type with the top only, it's so over the top.' In the older age group, only Justine (aged 30) worries about other people's opinions; when I asked if she would wear the *qipao* normally, she said, 'I'll probably get laughed at.' Compared with older participants, younger participants tend to be more concerned about how other people

would look at them. The social performance of the *qipao* represents a more meaningful part of their social identity.

Furthermore, repeated mentioning of the right place and time are the main concerns about wearing the qipao, rather than the meanings attached to it. Yo-Hsuan (aged 25) answered in a frustrated tone when I asked why she has not had a qipao, saying, 'because there is no chance to wear it ordinarily. If I was abroad today, everyone might joke around, have a party that has a theme, then I would have one tailored just in case. But in Taiwan, there's just no need….because there's no occasion and not many opportunities.' Other older participants, seeing it from a different perspective, can better see a point where this fashion is for them the presentation they would like to make with the appropriate opportunity and in the right place. Sharlene (aged 29) described how she had worn it for pictures in the studio and as a cocktail dress to go to weddings. Helen (aged 31) also wore it for a graduation ceremony.

Sharlene stresses, 'What I wear depends on the occasion. If I go to the park for a bit of exercise, how would it look wearing a *qipao*?' Shelby (aged 29) comments, 'it needs to be a special occasion, not something in daily life. If I really felt that it looks good and it fits the occasion, I would do it. The occasion has to be fitting, because I don't want to wear the wrong clothes on an inappropriate occasion.' Helen (aged 31) agrees, commenting, 'you have to have that kind of occasion to wear the *qipao*, because now the average person wouldn't wear it on the street.' As a result, the *qipao* is classified by these women as 'occasional fashion'. They are different from the other younger participants in how much they value how others think and their own body figures. Older participants are more concerned about whether a piece of clothing is correct for an occasion. Both groups demonstrate the phenomenon of the instability of traditional meanings attached to the *qipao* and its relation to national identity.

On the other hand, Yo-Hsuan (aged 25) suggests that it is a common phenomenon for Taiwanese women to take nations as a symbol of fashion styles, like Japanese style, Korean style and European-American style. She takes Korea as an example, explaining, 'Korea is that kind of feminine dressing, sometimes it is casual but feminine…there are many one-piece styles in Korea. They love one-piece dresses and must wear high heels.' Interestingly, this adoption of 'national fashions' can be regarded as a means to reinforce self-identity. In other words, young women usually extend the impression of national dress styles to include other positive stereotypes about the nation (e.g.

American-styles as associated with casualness and freedom), which are used to develop self-identity. The symbolic representations of such nations are culturally reinforced through the careful utilisation of these fashion trends.

8.4 Metropolitan Lifestyles

It has been suggested that there is a general place-identity for each individual that reflects his or her unique socialisation in the physical world (Proshansky, 1978). This place-identity is especially strong in capital cities across the world, which represents the cultural, economic and political locus for a population sharing common values and perceptions.

> Now they call us Taipei nationals, like it's a country to itself, the classmates from the south would tease that they need to be passport holders to enter, and once they graduate from college, the passport expires… unless you want to spend more money and go to graduate school. (Judy, aged 22)

Both in and out of Taipei, it is not uncommon to find people echoing sentiments such as the one above. For the Taiwanese living out of Taipei, the city and its residents evoke various descriptions of crowded, haughty or resourceful. Taipei residents, in turn, often consider themselves as different from other residents of Taiwan, usually in that they consider themselves a cut above. What everyone agrees is that Taipei, its citizens and the things they do are different from the other parts of Taiwan. In turn, some participants reported that they were criticised by non-Taipeiers with the term 'dammed Taipeiers' because of the sense of superiority and self-inflated identities that were felt to be prevalent among Taipeiers.

In many ways, the 'concept' of Taipei is not unique to itself, but bears similarities with those of many other capital cities. Much like London, Taipei is the type of capital city that that combines the country's political, cultural and economic centres. While this does not preclude the significance of other cities, Taipei's hegemony over Taiwan's economic and cultural scenes thus results in it having greater weight in Taiwanese women's perceptions. Throughout the interviews, it was common to find the participants (all Taipei residents) singling out the city as unique, consigning non-Taipei areas generally to the 'south' or 'rural areas' and similarly non-Taipei residents were seen as 'country people' or as 'southerners'. For example, Judy (aged 22) was only

slightly joking when she said, 'I really felt that the south was just fields…. I remember in my second year of uni I asked a classmate from Tainan whether there are cows where she lives.' In this regard, this binary division of Taiwan into Taipei and out-of-Taipei is somewhat similar to the relationship between Paris and the provinces (Berry, 2008).

A number of participants also link the familiar environs of 'Taipei County' with their sense of security. Sherry (aged 23), when describing 'going abroad' (from Taipei) commented – 'Three days, that would be enough, and then I would have to come back quickly, because I feel insecure when I'm away.' Vanessa (aged 20) has a similar feeling and compares other cities in Taiwan with Taipei: 'The buses are inconvenient and all over the place, the traffic is messy, like everyone doesn't follow the signals, there's a lot of *Tai-ke*[7] and such [laughs]. It's just that public order is bad, almost as if the law only applies in Taipei and once you're out of Taipei, there's no helmets [for motorcyclists], people making right turns on the red. It just feels better to stay [in Taipei].' Similar stereotypes are prevalent in most participants' accounts.

From my participants' accounts, even Taipei City and Taipei County are associated with different local identities, even though most participants would agree that these are minor differences, especially with the start of the MRT. Judy's (aged 22) parents moved from Taipei County to Taipei City years ago and have told her that people living across any of the bridges[8] are poorer. Violet's (aged 27) parents also drew contrasts between Taipei City and County residents – on a drive to TuCheng (a district of Taipei County), her father said 'look at the people in Taipei County, TuCheng is even more like this [referring to the cars driving out of order], so you see, Taipei City is better.' Like many Taipeiers, she uses this narrative to create and justify an identity that is distinct from the residents of Taipei County. Comparing her boyfriend's house in SanZhong (a district of Taipei County) and her parents' house in Taipei City, as well as the ways in which their mothers do housework, Justine (aged 30) complained to her boyfriend that 'your family is so SanZhong'. Not only does the younger generation of Taipei residents identify

---

[7] *Tai-ke* was traditionally used as a derogatory term for ethnic Taiwanese considered to be rude/inappropriately dressed. Since the 50s, *waishen ren* used this term to describe *benshen ren* who are barbarous, with the meaning of group discrimination. After the 90s, it applies to people whose appearance and behaviour are improper and vulgar, those with no class among Taiwanese. *Tai-ke* is probably originated from the English term 'Tike'. Since the early 2000s, it has been used in a way that is somewhat synonymous with the term chav as used in England but with a more affectionate and amused overtone.

[8] Taipei City is separated from the most densely populated parts of Taipei County by Danshui River and its tributaries. To travel from Taipei City to Taipei County thus usually requires crossing a bridge.

strongly with Taipei City, but most interviewees pointed out that this place identity is strongly reinforced by their parents. This place-based meaning (McCarthy, 1984) seems to be passed down through the generations.

There is an image of how Taipeiers see Taiwan which has been widely circulated around blogs and websites. It caricatures how Taipeiers look at the rest of Taiwan.
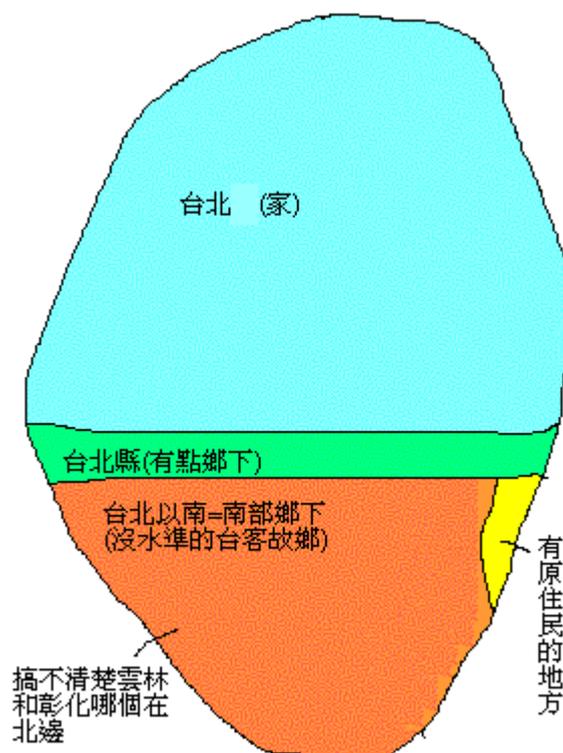
blue- 'Taipei (home)';
green- 'Taipei County (slightly rural)';
orange- 'South of Taipei=Rural South (home to *Tai-ke* with no class)';
yellow- 'place where there are indigenous people'

In addition to the prejudice of Taipeiers, place identity is not only restricted to contrasts between Taipei City, Taipei County and the rest of Taiwan, but can also be applied on a smaller scale within Taipei City itself. Similar to Parisian *arrondissements*, Taipei's mosaic makeup is identified and formalised through its administrative divisions, with significant connotations carried by each district. A few participants (Shirley, Judy, Jessie) point out that there are obvious differences between districts in Taipei City. Judy comments:

Those living in Da'an District would feel that they are highly cultured Taipeiers[9]; those living in Xinyi would feel that they are rich[10], and those living in Tianmu[11] would feel that they are Westernised to a degree… I think what they say is really true. (Judy, aged 22)

Judy's statement also highlights the mosaic makeup of Taipei and the subtle identities the different districts engender. To an extent, the identity of each district is a product of the built environment in each district and the social classes embodied by the built environment. For example, with four major universities and a concentration of religious, government and other educational institutions in Da'an District, it is likely that the area simply contains more professionals and academics, and the identity associated with Da'an is a reflection of the social classes and occupations present. But Judy's observation of a more general identity for each district implies that this association spreads beyond the core (and ultimately minority) groups that define each district. For example, while Tianmu does house a significant expatriate minority, the average resident has little to no interaction with the expatriates, and has little claim to the feeling of 'Westernisation'. Indeed, for Judy's age group, this is even more pronounced as expatriate children keep to themselves within designated and exclusive schools. Nonetheless, the identity of being more Westernised has spread to Tianmu residents who are likely to have never spoken with a foreigner and a feeling of being more cultured has spread to Da'an residents who do not read regularly. For Da'an residents, it is likely that the daily sight of bookstores and universities in their built environment contributes to this identity. However, the fashion choices and thus the group identity among each district's residents can be similarly infectious both in the more intimate peer group setting and in the more general social recognition from daily passers-by. This sense of superiority of the residents in some districts is echoed by Jessie (aged 24),

---

[9] Da'an district is a mixed district of Taipei that arguably provides the best living amenities as a district. Within its boundaries are a bustling night market and restaurants, many high street and brand name fashion retailers, the city's largest park and a number of universities.

[10] Xinyi district is the most recently developed area of Taipei, with a number of exclusively high-end retail complexes and newly constructed high rises with property values that have made the headlines. It is also the seat of city government and home to most financial services companies as well as Taipei 101 (the tallest building in the world when it opened in 2004).

[11] A neighbourhood of Taipei where significant expatriate enclaves have been established since the 1950s (when the US increased aid to Taiwan and posted a large number of technical and military advisors). Today, it is still home to many diplomatic embassies and two schools exclusive to expatriate children, and has traditionally had some of the highest property values in Taipei. However, with the continued redevelopment of Taipei's core over the past two decades and the opening of Taipei Metro (which does not stop at Tianmu), it has seen increasing marginalisation in recent years.

218

who lives in Zhongzheng district[12] and comments, 'Now I work in Muzha[13] [another district in Taipei City], and then I get a sense of the district. It's kind of embarrassing to put it this way, but my younger brother would also say that they are "people behind the mountain", that they would have to "come out of the mountain to go shopping."' Among the districts of Taipei, the built environment, the lifestyle decisions of its residents and a neighbourhood mentality can thus form a self-reinforcing cycle of district level identities.

Interestingly, except for the distinctions between Taipeiers and non-Taipeiers, residents of Taipei City and Taipei County, and residents within districts in Taipei City, there are also alternate place identities among these Taipei women who all define themselves as Taipeiers. Shelby draws a contrast between her own family and other Taipeiers who have a stronger sense of place superiority:

> My parents' parents are all in Taipei, so we are Taipeiers through and through, not later immigrants. Because some people come to Taipei because the jobs are better, because there are more job opportunities here, because they make more money here, so they want to come to live here. These are the people with a stronger sense of superiority. Or their quality of life is better here than in the South or they are looking for a better quality of life, so they come to Taipei. We're not like that. We're people who have been here, we're simple Taipei-folk, so I actually don't like Taipei so crowded [laughs]. (Shelby, aged 29)

For Shelby, those who stay in Taipei during Chinese New Year are the real Taipeiers. This symbolic representation of the city is often related to different social groups' battle over 'whose city?' (Zukin, 1996). Shelby's description is also evident in Violet's narratives. In order to hear people say 'look at those kids from Taipei, you see how well they are dressed!' Violet's parents would take them shopping before going to visit her grandparents who live in the South. This is so that 'we have "face" when we go back, this way we can hold our heads high when in front of relatives and friends.' Thoughts like these seem to pressure Taipeiers into dressing well.

---

[12] Zhongzheng district is an older district of Taipei and is home to the Presidential Office, the Legislative Yuan, most cabinet ministries, the National Theatre and Concert Hall, as well as other large cultural institutions.

[13] MuCha is a sub-district in the southernmost district of Taipei City. It contains the mountainous formations that form part of the geological Taipei Basin. It is traditionally seen as a more remote portion of Taipei, a place people would go to "get away from the city".

8.4.1 Taipei Women and Their Lifestyle

Taipeiers physically possess a space they identify as their own, they develop social identities that give them connections. This space enables them to redefine the terms of identity rather than pursuing it. Therefore, as a lifestyle choice, urban superiority should not be perceived as merely another form of self-worth development among many. When asked whether she is willing to leave Taipei, Sharlene replied:

> No, I've never left Taipei City before in my life and I wouldn't want to afterwards. I wouldn't even want to be in Taipei County. I only make friends with Taipei City people, if a new friend who lives outside Taipei City, even Taipei County, I wouldn't want to hang out with her/him as it just wastes my time. (Sharlene, aged 29)

19 out of 24 participants said that they have no intention of leaving Taipei or living in another city/county of Taiwan for long, citing a constellation of reasons. There's a palpable sense that participants do not just see Taipei as the best part of Taiwan, but that it is the only meaningful part of it. All participants see the city as a social entity in itself (Wirth, 1938). In Sharlene's case, she not only values every aspect of Taipei City, but narrows down her opportunities of making friends to certain people. The real question, of course, is what contributes to this perception. Contrary to the popular belief that the network of social relations is a key determinant of consumption processes in Taiwan, the network of Taipeiers seems only to create material or symbolic exchanges among network members. Although urban consumption involves everyday needs, leisure, travel and culture, many Taipei women show that modern consumption relates to new patterns of social networks. Likewise, interpersonal relationships facilitate the process of mechanisms that create or reinforce particular connections between Taipeiers and non-Taipeiers. Sharlene points out the realistic aspects which mean that social networks can be only conditionally established in this context. Sherry (aged 23) has a milder description about the reasons why she does not hang out with non-Taipeiers. She said, 'because they're just more… more simple, and then they're not like me much in character, but then they would be more shy.' Most interviewees indicate that they feel barriers in their interactions with non-Taipeiers, both in appearance and values. With the Taipei-centredness of Taipei City residents in mind, it can be imagined how such a locality's mindset might influence consumer behaviour. Anita gave an example to illustrate the differences between how Taipeiers and non-Taipeiers spend money:

I feel that [Taipeiers] are more willing to spend money, more willing to spend on things they like themselves.… Or like sometimes if we go out, if taking the MRT is NTD20 a person and taking a taxi there would also be about 20, say 30. Us Taipeiers would say let's take a taxi, non-Taipeiers would want to take the MRT. Those ten bucks, we feel that those ten bucks don't matter, why not take a taxi? They also feel that since those NTD10 don't matter, so why not take the MRT?...they would rather walk those few steps to get there…(Anita, aged 21)

Separately, Anita points out the different willingness to spend money between Taipei residents and non-Taipei residents, implying different attitudes towards consumption and savings. Part of this may be due to the higher levels of disposable income enjoyed by Taipei residents. Shelby (aged 29) also pointed out that Taipeiers have a higher propensity and willingness to spend even on trivial expenditures, which is indicative of an attitude difference independent of income. In the case of the MRT, Anita feels that Taipeiers are more nuanced in their spending decisions, able to weigh the costs against the benefits even with trivial expenditures, as compared to what she implies as non-Taipeiers' simple-minded drive to save money. This stands in contrast with what she suggests is a more instinctive constraint in consumption displayed by non-Taipeiers. The difference in values between Taipeiers and non-Taipeiers is also discussed by Yumi (aged 26). She feels that non-Taipeiers are too concerned with money – she said, 'I always felt that some people don't like to spend money on clothes, and I'm okay with that. But to be so petty even when it comes to food, I feel that it's too much.' Sharlene (aged 29) concludes that Taipei women are more likely to spend money on themselves and are more pampered. In the context of Taipei women's more assertive individuality and 'knowing what they want', this may mean a fundamentally different approach to spending, where money is more of a means to an end to achieve personal wants and to achieve an expression of individuality than it is a good in itself.

Sappho (aged 30) and Anita (aged 21) repeat the belief that Taipei women have more 'daring' personalities and are more willing to 'speak up' and 'go after the things they want', meaning a stronger sense of individuality and greater assertiveness in exercising it. This greater confidence, she argues, is apparent in daily discussion when Taipei women are more willing to clash in opinion with their peers. What is also of note is the fact that Shelby (aged 29) directly links confidence to the different social dynamic observed, which affirms the higher degree of individual self-awareness, matching the self-awareness in consumption objectives.

221

The convenience of urban life and the accessibility of the latest fashions and trends are common reasons for participants to be proud of living in Taipei and similarly to be reluctant to move away from the city. A number of participants felt that it would be very hard for them to leave Taipei. Justine (aged 30) simply said, 'it's just hard to survive.' Nini (aged 26) and Mandy (aged 21) described leaving their comfort zone as 'too risky'.

The other reason cited for not leaving Taipei is family. Many participants indicated that they do not want to be apart from their parents. Waverly (aged 19) said, 'I don't want to be too far from mom and dad.' However, she wants to go abroad but has no will to move to another city/county in Taiwan. It can be seen that while the women of Taipei can be bold in their appearances and lifestyle choices, it is almost as if it were an experiment undertaken in the 'safe' environs of Taipei. In contrast, they express considerable risk-aversion towards venturing outside.

8.4.2 Fashion and dressing up in Taipei

As with the previous section, participants tended to contrast Taipei and its women's fashion choices with those of non-Taipei residents. This link between local identities and choice of dress is one that most participants address. Each participant was able to pin down local characteristics, mostly based on stereotypes, with a greater degree of detail than in their contrast between Taipeiers and non-Taipeiers. In the following discussions on Taipei women's identity and fashion, it should be kept in mind that Taipei remains the most densely populated part of Taiwan and is the area with the highest disposable income with a relatively equitable distribution of this income in comparison to other capital cities. As a result of these characteristics, the built and socio-economic environment, this consumption space (Thomas, 2005) is truly unique relative to the other parts of Taiwan and is likely to account for some of the visible uniqueness of the fashion decisions of Taipei women. More interesting, however, is how these external aspects of Taipei return to shape the identity and fashion choices of Taipei women.

While the sartorial choices of non-Taipeiers are thus held up as examples of fashion faux pas, most of these young women were also able to present a coherent ideal of appearance and style for a Taipei woman. For many, the most visible part of this difference is the clothes that people wear. As in previous chapters, clothes are seen as a reflection of people's individuality and identities. Here, we will focus our discussion on

how the fashion choices of Taipei women are grounded in their identity as residents of the city, which in turn reflects their conceptions of Taipei as a unique place and emphasises the exclusion of non-Taipeiers.

All participants express varying degree of disdain about how non-Taipeiers dress and look. Justine considers non-Taipeiers to be 'country people', saying:

I feel that some people, you can just see that they look like country people, it could be like how they look or something. And what they wear or… Like some people just look darker, or a bit vulgar. It just feels like people down country. Taipeiers are generally paler and… umm… more… I feel that they're cleaner and country people are dirty. (Justine, aged 30)

Justine's description clearly states her stereotypical perceptions of non-Taipeiers' appearance. Sappho agrees with Justine by giving an example of what non-Taipeiers would do when dressing up:

I feel that some people, when you look at them, you can just tell they are country people... it's the way they dress. Perhaps it's because Taipei is your home, so you'll dress more casually. But you'll find that some classmates from the central and southern parts purposefully try to hide that they are not Taipeiers, so they try too hard. Like just going to class, it looks as if they are going out clubbing tonight or something. It's a daytime class! (Sappho, aged 30)

'Pretty', 'likes to dress up', 'pays attention to appearance', 'looks good when she goes out' are the most common phrases used in participants' descriptions of Taipei women. Yet acceptance of preening behaviour differs when facing two different groups. It is likely that all participants take the stance of insiders. From Sappho's perspective, it seems that there are superior attitudes involved in the claim that how Taipei women dress up keeps pace more with the current fashion style. They uphold the ways in which they dress up by comparing them with non-Taipeiers. According to Sappho's account, she did not mean to distinguish between Taipeiers and non-Taipeiers. Instead, the comparison was generated from non-Taipeiers' failure in the sense of fashion and their efforts to become Taipeiers. For Sappho, how people dress up is about far more than where they are from. It is a sign of whether they can communicate with the index of belonging. Thus, this metropolitan identity will be reinforced by looking at other people's appearances.

Following this sense, dressing up may indicate a similar way of conceptualising individuality. For Sharlene, being pretty is also a means of exercising individuality, and to have more choices:

> Girls in Taipei are more pampered, because in this environment, Taipei girls are better at dressing up and so they are prettier. If it must be compared, it would be that there higher numbers of men pursuing [girls] – because when the numbers are greater, then you have the power of choice, and once you have more choices, you become more and more pampered, there's a connection, and you won't appreciate the sacrifices that guys make. Or that's how it feels. Because she feels that if you [the guys] don't have it, I can look for someone else, as long as I am pretty. (Sharlene, aged 29)

As Sharlene explained, the greater willingness to spend money among Taipeiers may also be due to their different notions of self. Throughout her description, she repeatedly points out that the girls in Taipei are more 'pampered' and attributes this to the greater number of potential suitors available, which is in turn made possible due to the high population density of Taipei and the metropolitan social life it enables. As someone who sees herself and her friends as relatively desirable/attractive, Sharlene felt that she and her peer group can leverage this competition to their advantage and that they are deserving of the pampering they receive as a result. And as a result of the greater pampering they receive as Taipei women, they assign greater value to themselves as a group. Conversely, when their consumption is justified by the sense that they are deserving of it, a lower level of consumption or attention from suitors indicates a failure compared to their peer group.

Sharlene's description hints at another interaction between the built environment of a locality and the self-perceptions of its residents and how this feeds into consumption decisions. In her statement, she points out that there are more *men* pursuing *girls* in Taipei, which is a product of the higher population density in Taipei and the greater social interactions this density results in. Yet, the higher population density also implies a greater degree of competition among women for men. In her statements, she curiously describes Taipei women as more likely to 'invest' in themselves, suggesting a notion of

224

erotic capital,[14] where greater levels of investment are needed in the more competitive environment of Taipei City. As Collin (1975: 281) noted: 'Attractiveness is a social role as much as a state of appearance; learning to play it with self-confidence results in a self-fulfilling prophecy.' Another cycle can be seen to be forming here, where the high-density environs of Taipei requires greater competition amongst the girls, necessitating greater investment.

8.5 'Us' vs. 'Others'

Bourdieu's (1984) conceptualization of distinction highlights the association of taste with class and the ways in which acquired, class-based taste acts as a filter through which individuals distinguish themselves from others of different classes. Appearance is therefore a surface, a key mechanism through which class is embodied, represented and recognised by others. Following Bourdieu, Skeggs (2004) argues that excess is usually associated with the sexuality of working-class women, which is seen as vulgarity (Skeggs, 2004). This can also be applied to the ways Taipeiers describe non-Taipeier's dress. According to Sappho (aged 31), non-Taipeiers are usually associated with 'trying too hard' in their appearance. Being 'over the top' in daily dress is clearly seen as vulgar. Although Sappho does not label overdressed women as working class, she does locate those women as 'others', as non-Taipeiers. Appearance is therefore a means for individuals to categorise others. The display of distinction seems to be produced through constant surveillance of individual selves and others. How we behave or what we wear provides grounds for judgement, as well as the basis for distancing Taipei women from non-Taipeiers.

When Justine (aged 30) insinuates that people from the south of Taiwan have inferior appearance to Taipeiers, her concrete expression of disgust at their 'vulgar' appearance is a claim to her positive identity as a Taipeier. 'Disgust helps define boundaries between us and them, me and you. It helps prevent our way from being subsumed into their way' (Miller, 1997: 50). Skeggs (2005) also argues that middle-class women usually position the working-class as tasteless and attribute negative value to them, so that they could accrue value to themselves. A similar process is evident in my

---

[14] 'Erotic capital is … a combination of aesthetic, visual, physical, social, and sexual attractiveness to other members of your society, and especially to members of the opposite sex, in all social contexts.' (Hakim, 2010: 501).

participants' descriptions of Taipeiers and non-Taipeiers. These Taipei women attempt to consolidate their metropolitan identities and social position by distancing themselves from others. Apart from women's appearance, my participants' descriptions of Taipei women, such as 'daring to speak up' and 'pampering themselves more', which are considered as values a modern woman should possess, are also a way to attribute positive values to themselves, but position non-Taipeiers as vulgar or tasteless.

In discussing the differences between Taipeiers and non-Taipeiers, participants often consider many aspects, from individual characteristics to fashion taste, that lay claim to the uniqueness of Taipeiers. The theme of 'distinction', which emerges in this area of metropolitanism, is reflected in most of my participants' accounts. Distinction is defined by the "taste" demonstrated through an individual's language, actions, and mode of consumption. As Bourdieu comments,

> 'Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed.' (Bourdieu, 1984: 6).

In defining non-Taipiers as lacking in taste, Taipei women classify themselves, confirming their own metropolitan identities and tastes as superior. Taste is the outcome of the ongoing interactions of individuals and their external social environment. My participants' descriptions of non-Taipeiers indicate that these Taipei women usually look at how people dress to distinguish Taipeiers from non-Taipeiers. This would imply that it is an individual's taste which is (or is not) identified with Taipeiers. However, these distinctions are social in origin. Bourdieu (1986) points out that the distinction of classes rests on the shared habitus and values of the class members, that people sharing a social space develop cultural idiosyncrasies that distinguish them from others. Cities, which provide social spaces for people who share similar positions to interact, become natural units for each individual to belong to and 'develop his or her habits therein" with the resulting habitus manifesting 'many group specific characteristics' (Crossley, 2001:84).

Bourdieu (1986) further discusses how some judgments of taste come to be dominant over others. The judgment of non-Taipeiers as 'lower' in fashion tastes or other aspects is then an important part of the process of distinction. Taipeiers cultivate distinguishing

features and signs of superiority. Attributing negative value to non-Taipeiers also maintains 'the position of judgement to attribute value, which assigns the other as immoral, repellent, abject, worthless, disgusting, even disposable' (Skeggs, 2005: 977). The sense of distinction relating to fashion tastes, lifestyle and any aspect of individuals (personal characteristics, lifestyle and financial management etc.) is then sustained.

While Bourdieu's theory of distinction was developed in relation to class, I am arguing that it can also be applied to other ways in which individuals identify themselves. Of note, while none of my self-defined middle-class participants distances themselves from others in class terms, they did speak at length about the differences between themselves and non-Taipeiers. The boundaries of the capital city thus define the shared values, consumption behaviour, and even fashion styles of these women – Taipei offers these women a space of identification and basis for distinguishing 'us' and 'others'. Moreover, the ways in which the women interviewed talked about their identification with different districts of Taipei city, as well as their overt criticisms, highlight an interesting disposition of classes in social space. The distinction between Taipeiers from different districts, between Taipei city and Taipei county[15], even between the 'real' Taipeiers who have been living in Taipei for generations and the immigrant Taipeiers, what *we* do and how *they* behave, may be a result of reflexivity invoked by interaction. Classification is implicitly operated within different areas. According to some of my participants' narratives, people living in different districts are associated with different backgrounds and professions. The association between different districts and different classes is not specifically indicated by these young women, but they describe it in implicit ways. For example, people living in Xinyi district are usually taken as wealthy and posh (upper class) while those from Wanhua district[16] could be opposite. Appearance might be a visible marker of classification while 'where you live' could simply be another symbolic recognition, the mechanism of knowing our place and their place. Individuals in a social space form preferences through socialisation, preferences that are subsequently internalised as ways to evaluate other individuals and events. These internalised preferences form personal frameworks for conceptualisation and judgment and are exercised in daily life. Therefore some participants form their own groups through judging others to be tasteless. Fashion taste becomes a critical and

---

[15] Taipei county was upgraded to a special municipality in 2010, now known as New Taipei City.
[16] Wanhua district is the oldest district of Taipei. It was characterised by licensed prostitution in the 70s (which had been cleaned up by Taipei city government in 1997) and the market served snake delicacies, but now is famous for historical sites and night markets.

powerful form of cultural capital that distinguishes different groups. This division enters the consumption system to amplify social status and power disparities through the proxies of fashion and taste. The notion that cultural capital consists of knowledge and judgment possessed by certain classes makes it a capital that can be accumulated. It also justifies particular consumption patterns and cultural norms.

In this context, although these young women (who self-define as 'middle-class') do not possess significant economic capital, they seek to leverage their limited funds for a larger cultural return in terms of looking good and developing a metropolitan aesthetic. Therefore my participants' views and evaluation of non-Taipeiers contain the biases inherent to the cultural capital of the self-defined metropolitan 'middle class' – they not only define the required fashion but also determine associated areas of lifestyle and taste. This is a cultural hegemony not shared by working-class women (Bourdieu, 1986). According to Bourdieu (1986), taste is always defined by differentiating and appreciating, is ultimately based on distinction – distinctions in class, in identities, in social recognition, etc. Although these young metropolitan women do not explicitly tag women outside of Taipei as working-class, they nonetheless implicitly ascribe a higher social class and taste to Taipei women through descriptions of Taipei women as 'better at dressing themselves', 'having fairer skin', or even 'better at following traffic rules'. They also ascribe a subordinate status to non-Taipei women by describing how they would over-dress to hide their identities, creating an awkward situation of 'drawing a tiger but ending up with a dog'.[17] Women, through their clothes, seek to display their differences and position themselves in a certain place. From my participants' accounts, it becomes clear that fashion consumption may not be seen as an indicator of class, but remains a clear identifier of cultural group and metropolitan identity. Women, through their evaluation of others' appearances, then identify and place others, as well as further distancing themselves from them (Skeggs,1997).

8.6 Summary

To recapitulate, the approach taken in this chapter attempts to ground the struggle over Western, Eastern and local images in an investigation of the women's adoption of fashion and their sense of identity against Westerners, Japanese, Koreans and Mainlanders, as well as provincial Taiwanese. It examines the factors that inhibit

---

[17] This is a classical saying that means a poor imitation produces an inferior product.

women from appearance imitation, such as body differences and access to fashion products, as well as other factors that prompt women to imitate, such as lifestyle and widespread fashion information and the promotion of celebrities. The inhibitors generally represent a realisation of the differences in physical shape and appearance while the promoters represent a desire to diversify and globalise one's appearance.

Historically and culturally, Taiwanese people have experienced cultural influences from the West and East Asia, with the most prominent influences coming from Japan, the US and inherited Chinese norms. The imposition of these norms through overwhelming media coverage and expectations from elders has further elicited a new form of resistance as young women seek to assert their individuality. Even though fashion information has become globalised and perpetuated through mass media, young Taiwanese women rely on their own experiences and reflections to reject total conformity with any of the projected ideals. This enables participants to assert that there are different fashion presentations based on different facial and body features, even on different ethnic characteristics. Western and other East Asian women are always viewed as different from the perspectives of the participants. Also, a majority of participants feel that Taiwanese women are endowed with better physical attributes than women from other countries, which directly flies in the face of older stereotypes of the 'West or Japan being better'.

However, the way in which the Western image is considered is distinct from the national image is not driven by nationalistic expressions but by aesthetics. The interpretation of wearing the traditional costume '*qipao*' and the role it plays in influencing national identity illustrates Taiwanese women's ambivalence in their perception of being traditionally Chinese. About half of my interviewees are willing to take the *qipao* as national dress and wear it on formal occasions such as a wedding party. However, the association with Mainland China could be a barrier for some young women to wear it comfortably. Actually, almost all the interviewees have a longstanding feeling of alienation from, as well as an undeniable cultural linkage with, Mainland China. The national discourses may be regarded as a source of fashion decisions, since they galvanise Taiwanese people into defending their identities. This, however, rests on deeply nuanced national/cultural issues that are beyond the scope of this discussion.

What is certain is that no matter what images these young women face, the identification with Taipei (Taiwan) is dominant over images from the 'outside'. It became clear that, although images of 'Western' and 'Eastern' women are used in Taiwanese fashion or body fantasies as conveyed by the media, they are, in fact, fragmented reflections from which young Taiwanese women construct their own images.

None of the participants struggled to identify themselves as Taipeiers and they criticised non-Taipeiers not only on their appearance but also other aspects. This strong place-identity presented by participants magnified the level of resistance, which, I believe, demonstrates Taipeiers' connectedness but excludes non-Taipeiers (probably including other women all over the world). Identity with Taipei and images of Taipei women have become easier to articulate than national identity. In addition to representing a unique appearance, it seems to remain extremely important to all participants and vital to their distinction between themselves and women from outside Taipei. Such a view sees identity as a dynamic construction made through comparison, in which young women think about what makes them unique, but also members of a particular collectivity – Taipei women.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the self-identity of young Taiwanese women in their consumption of fashion goods, how fashion goods/brands are defined and how fashion goods/brands relate to their evaluation and perception of appearances. As my interview subjects were all raised in the Taipei metropolitan area, this study further examined their identification with fashion merchandise in the context of the modernising metropolis. I examined how the female consumer can separate herself from traditional expectations of feminine appearance through her consumption. I further explored the roles and impact of consumption in distancing consumers from their other roles and associated expectations– can consumption separate the woman consumer from her role as a daughter and girlfriend, such that her self-expression is no longer regulated by her family and her boyfriend?

In the hope of gaining a better understanding of the transformation of young Taiwanese women's lives, I wanted to study how individuality might be enacted to negotiate for a woman's autonomy and the consequent effects on self-identity, especially in the context of modernity and its supposed gains for women. The consumption of fashion merchandise is then a prism through which to study how and whether identity changes and how identity interplays with and can be constructed through consumption.

Although Asian women have been long influenced and constrained by Confucian patriarchy, the growing and transforming agency of women is visible in the changes in fashions and styles of the last century. The sheer diversity and vibrancy of fashion illustrates the liberation of women, representing their greater power to choose their own lifestyles beyond the management of men and the interference of society at large. However, through my interviews and analysis, it became evident that others exercise a strong influence in young women's decisions about their own appearance, that young women are consistently mindful of external constraints and influences.

While the parent-child relationship has indeed changed in the modern family, for many, the patriarchal dynamic persists and young Taiwanese women must still rely on various tactics to avoid parental monitoring and management of their appearance. My interviews show that the exercise of individuality occurs against potential discipline and requires tactical manoeuvring that falls into three general patterns: 1) obedience/pretending to be 'good'; 2) obedience/confrontation; 3) negotiation &

compromise /education ('this is what the young girls are wearing today')/leading ('Mom, you can wear this piece when I'm done with it').

Young women choosing to be obedient would seek to meet parental expectations about their dress and appearance. However, many young women did not fully comply with their parents' wishes and resorted to hiding their cosmetics or 'smuggling' newly-bought clothes home in separate trips. These young women wanted to preserve the acceptance and recognition of their more conservative parents as well as the capital of being a 'good' and 'nice' girl. In exchange, they surrendered parts of their individuality.

Faced with similar parental opposition, some young women would choose to rebel against their parents' instructions. These young women have generally been 'obedient' and 'nice' in almost all other respects (such as helping around the house) in exchange for total autonomy over their own appearance. Frequently, they would pair this demand with a threat of moving out, arguing that they want to have total control over how they dress themselves.

Finally, some young women would choose to 'negotiate' with their parents about the way they dress, taking a less confrontational approach and even making efforts to 'educate' their parents about how the standards of dress are different from era to era. I argue that, in some families, the parent-child relationship has evolved from the trickle-down mode of influence to a bubble-up pattern – in some cases, the daughter would strongly influence the mother, such that she would want to imitate her daughter's apparel and accessories or even wear her daughter's clothes. In general, these interview subjects would profess a strong desire for total agency over their clothes and appearance – many would freely assert that this is what they have achieved. However, many of these interviewed women still had strong inter-dependencies with their parents, especially with their mothers, and would seek to exercise their individuality under these more implicit and negotiated confines.

The sense of self was also constrained by their desire to choose something 'not too over the top' or their shame about their body's 'defects'. It is clear that, for all groups, a general respect towards tradition and their elders remained and was central to how they managed their appearance.

With this understanding, I examined the relationship between young women and other social actors in a patriarchal society using three case studies – concerning weight,

wearing dresses/skirts and applying cosmetics. The female body plays a central role in modern fashion culture, described both in terms of the 'reflexive project of the self' (Giddens, 1991: 77) and as 'a text of femininity' (Bordo, 2003: 168). Body awareness plays an especially prominent role for young Taiwanese women – almost all the interviewed subjects expressed dissatisfaction with their own bodies. This dissatisfaction and lack of self-confidence became self-limiting to varying degrees in how they dressed and presented themselves. Notably, while all participants are intimately aware of and recognise the trend towards thinner bodies in Taiwanese fashions, a minority of those interviewed saw this as 'abnormal'. These participants also expressed a general dissatisfaction with this trend and a reluctance to sacrifice other priorities in pursuit of the prevalent feminine ideal. For example, one participant enjoyed playing basketball – however, most Taiwanese women feel that exercise would result in a more masculine body shape and would keep women from achieving the feminine ideal of a slender body.

In many other ways, most participants also conform strongly to patriarchal social expectations of feminine appearance such that, in spite of the diversity and variety of modern fashions, most of them saw feminine elements in both dresses and trousers as essential, feeling that the femininity provided them with self-confidence and security. They felt that feminine appearances would help them achieve better recognition in the workplace and other public spaces while providing them with an advantage in various social interactions.

Among the interviewed subjects, some sought to redefine the traditional ideals of femininity, arguing that the 'new sexy' is a face that looks the same before and after the application of make-up. Regardless of the type of femininity presented, the participants were subjected to a regulated femininity under tradition and convention, becoming self-limiting in the process. Because they could not move beyond this self-limiting ideology, their presented self-identity and body image was ultimately limited as well, reflecting the expectations of others and society in general.

With the advent of globalised information and consumption, Taiwanese women are now aware of and enjoy access to more diverse and expressive fashions than ever before. Yet, through my questions on the consumption of fashion goods and brands, I found that young women were not fully utilising the opportunities afforded by this consumption culture to explore their own appearances – available fashion choices that these women

find appealing or attractive are being actively rejected due to perceived/internalised constraints. Notably, this contradicts research that assumes women's strong, individualistic intentions to retain agency over their own bodies and appearances.

I argue that the emergence of individuality and the self in modern Taiwan creates a certain degree of ambivalence for young women. My interviews demonstrate that, aside from considering their own preferences or how certain fashions can help them to create their own uniqueness, they must also consider potential criticisms from families, friends and other social actors. They worry that if they use high-end branded products, they will be labelled *bai-jing* (literally translated as 'worships money', generally used to describe someone who is materialistic and shallow). At the same time, they worry that if they wear garments bought at small stores or street-stalls, they will look 'cheap' overall.

It is evident that these young women exercise self-surveillance to dictate or maintain equilibrium among competing demands from social groups and cultural expectations. This contrasts with consumer theory's explanation of consumption as the direct result of external forces such as advertising, product displays and budget constraints. These interviews show that interpersonal influences play a much stronger role than commercial factors in affecting young Taiwanese women's consumption of fashion. While they are influenced by the media, especially in chasing ever-changing fashions, this is mediated through their relationships with others.

Within the same cohort of 'Generation Y', there were subtle, yet significant, differences in apparel choices and consumption attitudes by age. This represents shifts in underlying values around consuming fashion products and demonstrates different constraints and priorities faced by the younger group of subjects compared with other interviewed women, who were just a few years older. For example, almost all the women in the younger age group agree with the importance of consuming fashion items and feel that it is the more important part of their appearance. In contrast, the older group emphasised facial attractiveness and said that cosmetics would take precedence over clothes and accessories. Interestingly, some participants clearly stated that they would rather spend on other things that are seen as investments in the individual self, such as travelling and hobbies, rather than spending much on appearance. These women are thus able to consciously act as 'smart consumers' within given constraints (e.g. financial) in order to meet social expectations. Even in the *process* of consumption, the young women assert their individuality through decisions such as the place and method

of consumption or the conscious and selective purchasing/non-purchasing of forged or second-hand goods.

According to Goffman (1959), the front stage is where the individual presents an image, expressively conducts interactions, and suppresses actions that deviate from the impression that they desire to put forward. Chapter Seven employs Goffman's concept of the front- and back-stage and his theory of impression management. In this case, young women use the dressed body as their method of self-presentation and the public as the front-stage for their performance. They will adjust their dress through repeated interactions with others, while the audience and their gaze persist throughout the day and exert an effect. While all my participants saw 'uniqueness' and individuality as desirable traits, they are inevitably compromised as young women consider the external gaze.

On the other hand, these young women have managed alternative impressions to face different situations and audiences – e.g. close friends, acquaintances, strangers and boyfriends. These four groups of people have different demands and expectations that the interviewed women seek to meet. For example, a young woman would seek to wear similar styles as her friends in order to gain their acceptance but could not tolerate wearing the same thing as a stranger on the street. For her acquaintances, she would wear 'appropriate' clothes to avoid potential criticism and judgement. Interestingly, the boyfriend's opinion was generally considered relatively unimportant by most participants.

This repeated discipline is created by constant self-monitoring, active in all the spaces of a young woman's social world. In other words, young women encounter different social strictures in different social spaces and must imagine all possible encounters and their consequent monitoring. Through encountering repeated criticism (real or hypothetical), they develop self-discipline to deploy their dressed bodies as performances in constructing the desired public images. Ironically, other women, rather than men, appear to be the greatest sources of concern that drive dress behaviour. The act of dressing and shopping thus takes place against the pursuit of the self and individuality and requires compromises between tradition and contemporary social expectations.

In contrast to the ambivalent identities in other aspects of their dress, my interviewees associate strongly with their identity as a Taiwanese and Taipei residents, using repeated contrasts with other locales and cultures to assert their individuality. This assertion allows them to escape from the stereotype of the *qipao*-wearing Chinese woman as well as stereotypes of East Asian women in general (e.g. Korea and Japan). Meanwhile, they take a distant stance to Western women's physical shape and appearance. What was especially striking was how all the interviewed subjects agreed on the uniqueness and superiority of Taipei women, both in physical shape and dress. It became clear that, in spite of the large influx of foreign images and bodily ideals, young women retain a dominant identification with their role as young, Taipei women. Thus, the images of Western and other Eastern women, associated with prevalent Taiwanese fashion or body fantasies as conveyed by the media, are, in fact, fragmented reflections from which young Taiwanese women construct their own images.

During the past century, the position of Taiwanese women has generally changed beyond recognition while at the same time, in many curious aspects, it has hardly changed at all. My study has demonstrated how the contradictions between maintaining individuality, meeting social expectations of the feminine ideal and embodying traditional Chinese values (e.g. respecting elders and consideration for others) have been prominent in the transformation of Taiwanese women's self-identity in modernity. Young women remain in many ways trapped when they are managing their appearance. Furthermore, since these competing influences exert almost constant pressure on the dress and appearance of young women, it is possible that my participants' responses reflect an alternative and more inclusive form of modernity. This is a modernity that seeks to build self-identity without violating traditional and social restrictions, with these young women seeking to express themselves through their interactions and relationships with others. What is especially interesting is how they are able to exercise this social form of self even in the face of the mass media's message that women should 'love themselves' and that self-expression is best conducted through the consumption of fashion that creates uniqueness and differentiation.

Due to limitations in both interview time and sampling size, I was unable to explore whether fashion consumption or dress creates temporary or more lasting changes in the formation of self-identity. This should be an area for future research. All the interviews were conducted with young women from the Taipei metropolitan area – capital cities tend to contain a greater velocity and variety of information and higher levels of

disposable income. Accordingly, most of the interviewed subjects came from middle class or higher income families. Together, this meant greater access to and awareness of consumption goods and fashions and the ambivalence women experience with fashion on full display (albeit with a less representative sample group). It is also possible that, compared to women from other parts of Taiwan, Taipei women express a greater degree of individuality. It is likely that if I were to talk to women from different age groups or areas, or even men, it would make for a very different story of fashion consumption. Finally, this study focused on the consumption of fashion goods and was unable to contrast this form of consumption with others and is thus limited to exploring how young women choose between different categories of spending and how self-identity is created or reflected in this process of allocation and in other areas of consumption and use. These ideas could be expanded into areas for future research or publications.

Within these limitations my research has made a number of contributions. There have been numerous studies of fashion in Western social contexts, but few in Taiwan and none (to my knowledge) that have investigated Taiwanese fashion choices in relation to women's bodies, appearance, identity and consumption. My study has challenged some of the stereotypes of Taiwanese fashion choices, in particular the idea that young Taiwanese women seek to consume prestigious Western brands. I initially shared this preconception. I came to this research to explore the phenomenon of luxury consumption among modern women. My participants' accounts, however, revealed a more complex picture. Challenging my original expectations, I found that young women today, in expressing their own preferences for an item and an item's ability to express their 'individuality' involves far more than the conventional value of a luxury brand.

By locating my research in the context of globalisation and modernisation, I have made a contribution to the literature on modernity and individualisation in Asia. Individualisation in the context of Asian modernity takes a different form from that proposed in the West. Various authors have suggested that individualisation in East Asia has occurred differently because of the strength of the family and the legacy of Confucianism (Yan, 2010; Chang, 2010). Through the lens of fashion I have portrayed some aspects of an Asian form of individualisation, in which women demonstrate strong attachment to their families through frequent interaction and a degree of deference to their parents. Although individualisation has changed women's life choices (e.g. in terms of education, work, later marriage), the family system has a great impact on the presentation of individual self and of appearance. The tension between the ideal of

being individual and social conformity, influenced by peers and the 'generalised other', is evidence of the way in which individualised choices are made under conditions of women's limited individualism (Chang and Song 2010). Whereas Chang and Song rely on demographic data, my study illustrates how these processes are played out in one aspect of everyday life – fashion and appearance.[18]

My research has also highlighted the Asian context of consumption and the awareness of Asian-ness. Through their sense of fashion, my participants are able to construct an idea of their distinctive quality as Asian women that has emerged from the interplay between modernity and tradition and the local and the global. Although Western fashion has been playing a considerable role in influencing fashion consumption, an Asian aesthetic as a new norm is manifested through the investigation of young women's perceptions of appropriate dress. Even within this Asian-ness, women make distinctions between Asian countries and also, within Taiwan, between Taipeiers and non-Taipeiers, thus illustrating the importance of taking account of the relationship between the global, the regional and the local.

Overall, then, my research demonstrates the need to think of fashion (like any aspect of life) not only in terms of gender and/or the global fashion industry, but also to take account of local conditions, practices and traditions and how these enable and constrain the choices women make.

---

[18] Chang and Song (2010) note that their study is limited by reliance on quantitative, demographic data and call for qualitative research on these issues.

Appendix A

Comparison of the development of contemporary costume

Period	The development of contemporary Western costume	The development of contemporary Taiwanese costume
~ the19th century	Social class dictated dress codes. Dress acted as a symbol to separate the privileged classes from the 'masses'.	(same as left)
1900 ~ 1909	The emergence of 'fashion designers' who focused on newer designs and would use their own names and brands to launch modern fashion. The shift from traditional, more restrictive clothing (e.g. corsets) to more freeform and liberal designs, e.g. unfussy and tailored fashions The emergence of haute couture	During the period of revolution and reform, the clash of ideas between the new and old made a strong impression on women. Despite this, not much changed in women's appearance, traditional clothing remained dominant.
1910 ~ 1919	Women began participating in athletics, triggering changes in the design of clothes. In the period after the First World War, there was a greater pursuit of the liberalised human body. Clothing for mass consumption began to take root; trousers became acceptable as formal wear for women.	A minority insisted on strictly traditional Chinese clothing while another group had started to accept Western-style clothing. Some even experimented with hybrids of East and West, marking a transition during a conflict between Eastern and Western styles.

1920～1929	The youth pursued trends, fashion, and the icons they admired. *Chanel*'s image and fashion swept the 1920s.	Taiwanese culture continued to experience shocks from the West. Fashion displayed elements of Chinese, Japanese and Western dress. With the women's movement spreading, some women displayed more masculine trends in appearance – short hair, long trousers, etc. made their debuts.
1930～1939	Hats, gloves and sunglasses became hallmark accessories. Movie stars and the images they projected drove fashion design. Feminine curves and more traditional cuts returned to style.	Fashion remained predominantly Chinese, but presented a dynamic equilibrium between Chinese, Western and Japanese styles. The *qipao* grew in popularity and women used it as a starting point to introduce Western fashion elements such as split sleeves and flowing collars.
1940～1949	The Second World War affects fashion – stress on practicality, convenience and durability.	The concept of 'men should wear suits, women should wear dresses' became popular. The Westernisation of Taiwan overtook the influence of the Japanese colonisation and cultural assimilation attempts.

1950 ~ 1959	The return of fashion, driven by Dior's 'New Look'. Haute couture reappears. Teenage style and mass consumption continues to drive fashion. Movie stars such as Grace Kelly, Audrey Hepburn and Marilyn Monroe become idols of affection and emulation.	The *qipao* evolved as a symbol of class and status. Taiwan under martial law, social and economic circumstances were especially constrained with fashion styles trending conservative. Most women preserved styles from the pre-war era, notably the one-piece dress. Younger men and women were influenced by the styles of Hollywood movie stars, Western styles spread.
1960 ~ 1969	The street cultures, along with rock and hippy styles, emerged. The mini-skirt made its debut.	The pursuit of Western styles accelerated in the mid-sixties, e.g. A-line dresses, mini-skirts. The world entered the 'mini-skirt craze', Taiwan joined in.
1970 ~ 1979	The trends for free form, frugality and anti-fashion made flared jeans an accidental sensation. Japanese fashion designers and brands (Kenzo, Hanae Mori, and Issey Miyake) made their international debut.	The rise of mass-produced clothing made fashion trends more accessible. The prevailing fashion at the time stressed a return to simplicity, clothing matches became simpler. Flared jeans and platform shoes continued to be fashionable.

| 1980 ~ 1989 | The 'yuppie', more materialistic trend made a return.

The influence of mass media grew.

Male and female dress moved towards more unisex styles – e.g. power. dressing. | Increased emphasis on domestic brand development and a perception of personal taste.

Foreign brands started entering Taiwan on a large scale.

Fashion was increasingly seen as a symbol of status and power, the pursuit of the new and different marked the era. |
|---|---|---|
| 1990 ~ 2000 | Grunge and the simple, 'unkempt' became fashionable.

The revival of more traditional clothes and vintage styles, notably the 1960s and 1970s. | 'Vintage' fashion became fashionable.

The establishment of personal style, meaning that the individual made their own choices for matching clothes as a display of personality.

The stressing of the synchronisation with global fashion.

Through the influence of mass media, consumer culture has become dominant. |
| 2000~contemporary | Fashion moves on multiple fronts. The fusion of previous styles, global and ethnic clothing, a large-scale revival of 1930s, 1940s, 1950s, 1960s and 1980s fashions. | |

Sources: Mendes and De La Haye (2010); Yeh (2000); Yeh (2005); Wilson and Taylor (1989)

Bibliography

Arthur, L. B. (1997) 'Clothing is a Window to the Soul: The Social Control of Women in a Holdeman Mennonite Community', *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, 15(1): 11–30.

Arvidsson, A. (2006a) 'Brand Management and the Productivity of Consumption' in F. Trentmann and J. Brewer (eds.), *Consuming Cultures, Global Perspectives: Historical Trajectories, Transnational Exchanges* (pp. 71–94). Oxford: Berg.

------- (2006b) *Brands: Meaning and Value in Media Culture*. New York: Routledge.

Ash, J., and Wilson, E. (1992) *Chic Thrills: A Fashion Reader*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Bakewell, C., and Mitchell, V. W. (2003) 'Generation Y Female Consumer Decision-Making Styles', *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 31(2): 95–106.

Barnard, M. (2002) *Fashion as Communication* (2nd edition). London: Routledge.

Barnes, R., and Eicher, J. B. (1992) *Dress and Gender: Making and Meaning in Cultural Contexts*. London: Berg.

Barthes, R. (2009) *Mythologies*. (D. A. Lavers, Trans.). London: Vintage Classics.

Bartky, S. L. (1990) *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*. London: Routledge.

Baudrillard, J. (1975) *The Mirror of Production*. (M. Poster, Trans.). St. Louis: Telos Press.

Baudrillard, J. (1994) *Simulacra and Simulation*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Baudrillard, J. (2002) *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings: Second Edition*. (J. Mourrain, Trans., M. Poster, Ed.) (2nd edition). Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Beck, U. (1994) 'The Reinvention of Politics: Towards a Theory of Reflexive Modernization' in U. Beck, A. Giddens and S. Lash (eds) *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order*, pp. 1-55, Cambridge: Polity.

Beck, U. and Beck-Gernsheim, E. (2001) *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and its Social and Political Consequences*. London: SAGE.

Berger, P. L. and Huntington, S. P. (2002) *Many Globalizations: Cultural Diversity in the Contemporary World: Cultural Diversity in the Contemporary World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bernstein, H. and Campling, L. (2006) 'Commodity Studies and Commodity Fetishism I: Trading Down', *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 6(2): 239–264.

Berry, B. J. L. (2008) 'Urbanization' in J. M. Marzluff, E. Shulenberger, W. Endlicher, M. Alberti, G. Bradley, C. Ryan and C. ZumBrunnen (eds.), *Urban Ecology* (pp. 25–48). New York: Springer US. Available at http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-0-387-73412-5_3 [Accessed 10/12/2012]

Biernacki, P. and Waldorf, D. (1981) 'Snowball Sampling: Problems and Techniques of Chain Referral Sampling', *Sociological Methods & Research*, 10(2): 141–163.

Bih-Er, C., Clark, C. and Clark, J. (1990) *Women in Taiwan Politics: Overcoming Barriers to Women's Participation in a Modernizing Society*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner.

Blacking, J. (Ed.). (1977) *The Anthropology of the Body*. London: Academic Press.

Bocock, R. (1993) *Consumption*. London: Routledge.

244

Bordo, S. and Heywood, L. (2003) *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1984) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. (R. Nice, Trans.). Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1986) 'The Forms of Capital' in J.G. Richardson (ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (pp. 241–258), New York: Greenwood.

Bourdieu, P. and Thompson, J. B. (1991) *Language and Symbolic Power*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Bourdieu, P. and Wacquant, L. J. D. (1992) *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. London: University of Chicago Press.

Brewer, J. and Trentmann, F. (2006) *Consuming Cultures, Global Perspectives: Historical Trajectories, Transnational Exchanges*. Oxford: Berg.

Bryman, A. (2008) *Social Research Methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Buckley, C. and Fawcett, H. (2002) *Fashioning the Feminine: Representation and Women's Fashion from the Fin De Siècle to the Present*. London: I.B.Tauris & Co.

Burkitt, I. (1994) 'The Shifting Concept of the Self', *History of the Human Sciences*, 7(2): 7–28.

Bustelo, J. (1986) 'The Fetish of Cosmetics' in J. Hansen and E. Reed (eds.), *Cosmetics, Fashions, and the Exploitation of Women* (pp. 75–94). New York: Pathfinder Press.

Butler, J. (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.

Butler, J. (1993) *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. London: Routledge.

Caputi, J. (1983) 'One Size Does Not Fit All: Being Beautiful, Thin and Female in America' in J. G. Nachbar (ed.), *The Popular Culture Reader* (pp. 186–204). Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press.

Cash, T. F., Ancis, J. R. and Strachan, M. D. (1997) 'Gender Attitudes, Feminist Identity, and Body Images among College Women', *Sex Roles*, 36(7-8): 433–447.

Chan S. H. (2009) 'Politics of Female Subjectivities and the Everyday: The Case of the Hong Kong Feminist Journal Nuliu', *Feminist Review*, 92(1): 36–53.

Chang, C. F. (張瓊方) (2012, April) Smart Shopping as Financial Management - the Consumption Views of the "Collapsed" Generation (聰明購物即理財 ──崩世代消費觀). *Taiwan Panorama (台灣光華雜誌)*, p.80.

Chang, H.C. and Holt, R. (2007) 'Symbols in Conflict: Taiwan (Taiwan) and Zhongguo (China) in Taiwan's Identity Politics', *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 13(1): 129–165.

Chang, H. H. (張小虹) (1993) *Post Modern/Women: Power, Desire, and Gender Performance (後現代／女人：權力、慾望與性別表演)*. Taipei: UNITAS Publishing Co. (聯合文學). Available at http://www.books.com.tw/exep/prod/booksfile.php?item=0010338668 [Accessed 10/12/2012]

-------(1995) *Gender, Across the Boundary (性別越界)*. Taipei: UNITAS Publishing Co. (聯合文學).

-------(2001) *Absolute Love of Clothes(絕對衣性戀)*. Taipei: China Times Publishing Co. (時報出版).

Chang K. S. (2010) 'The Second Modern Condition?: Compressed Modernity as Internalized Reflexive Cosmopolitanism', *The British Journal of Sociology* 61(3): 444–464.

Chang, K. S. and Song, M. Y. (2010) 'The Stranded Individualizer under Compressed Modernity: South Korean Women in Individualization without Individualism', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 61(3): 539–564.

Chen, F. L. (2000) *Working Women & State Policies in Taiwan*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Chen, H.P. (2008) *A Comparative Analysis of Higher Education Attainment and Employment in Teaching between Sexes in Taiwan, Japan, And Korea (台日韓三國女性獲得高等教育學位暨擔任教職之性別差異分析)*. Taipei: Directorate of Statistics, Ministry of Education, Taiwan (ROC). Available at https://stats.moe.gov.tw/files/analysis/femalehigher.doc [Accessed 10/12/2012]

Chen, K. H. (陳坤宏) (2005) *Consumer Culture Theories (消費文化理論)* (2nd edition). Taipei: Yang-Chih Book Co. (揚智文化).

Chen, L. J., Fox, K. R. and Haase, A. M. (2010) 'Body Image and Physical Activity among Overweight and Obese Girls in Taiwan', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 33(3): 234–243.

Chiou, L. Y. (邱莉雲) (2005) *Exploring The Characteristics of Fans of Prestigious Brands (名牌服飾「迷」探索)*. National Chengchi University. MA Dissertation. (國立政治大學廣告研究所碩士論文). Available at http://thesis.lib.nccu.edu.tw/record/#G0914520011 [Accessed 10/12/2012]

Chiu, R. K. and Babcock, R. D. (2002) 'The Relative Importance of Facial Attractiveness and Gender in Hong Kong Selection Decisions', *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 13(1): 141–155.

Chou, C. Y. (周群英) (2005) The Appearance and Disappearance of Consumption: Changes in Western Society and Evolution in Sociological Theory (消費的隱匿 與浮現：西方社會變遷與社會學理論的變革). *Cultural Studies Monthly (文 化研究月報)*, (52). Available at http://www.cc.ncu.edu.tw/~csa/journal/52/journal_park394.htm#b9 [Accessed 10/12/2012]

Collins, R. (1975) *Conflict Sociology: Toward an Explanatory Science*. New York: Academic Press.

Comer, L. (1974) *Wedlocked Women*. Leeds: Feminist Books.

Conboy, K., Medina, N. and Standbury, S. (1997) *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Cooley, C. H. (1902) *Human Nature and the Social Order*. New York: C. Scribner's Sons.

Cotterill, P. and Letherby, G. (1993) 'Weaving Stories: Personal Auto/Biographies in Feminist Research', *Sociology*, 27(1): 67–79.

Cox, C. L. and Glick, W. H. (1986) 'Résumé Evaluations and Cosmetics Use: When More is Not Better', *Sex Roles*, 14(1-2): 51–58.

Craik, J. (1994) *The Face of Fashion: Cultural Studies in Fashion*. London: Routledge.

Crane, D. and Bovone, L. (2006) 'Approaches to Material Culture: The Sociology of Fashion and Clothing', *Poetics*, 34(6): 319–333.

Crossley, N. (2001). The Phenomenological Habitus and its Construction. *Theory and Society*, *30*(1), 81–120.

Davis, F. (1992) *Fashion, Culture, and Identity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Dellinger, K. and Williams, C. L. (1997) 'Makeup at Work: Negotiating Appearance Rules in the Workplace', *Gender and Society*, 11(2): 151–177.

Diamond, N. (1973) 'The Middle Class Family Model in Taiwan: Woman's Place is in the Home', *Asian Survey*, 13(9): 853–872.

Dickey-Bryant, L., Lautenschlager, G. J., Mendoza, J. L. and Abrahams, N. (1986) 'Facial Attractiveness and its Relation to Occupational Success', *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 71(1): 16–19.

Dittmar, H. (1992) *The Social Psychology of Material Possessions: To Have Is to Be*. Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Dolfsma, W. (2004) 'Paradoxes of Modernist Consumption – Reading Fashions', *Review of Social Economy*, 62(3): 351–364.

Douglas, M. (1997) 'In Defense of Shopping' in P. Falk and C. Campbell (eds.), *The Shopping Experience* (pp. 15–31). London: SAGE.

Douglas, M. and Isherwood, B. C. (1996) *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption: With a New Introduction*. London: Routledge.

Entwistle, J. (2000) 'Fashion and the Fleshy Body: Dress as Embodied Practice', *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture*, 4(3): 323–347.

Entwistle, J. and Wilson, E. B. (2001). *Body Dressing*. Oxford: Berg.

Estrich, S. (2000) *Sex and Power*. New York: Riverhead Books.

Evans, C. and Thornton, M. (1989) *Women & Fashion: a New Look*. London: Quartet.

Fallon, A. (1990) 'Culture in the Mirror: Sociocultural Determinants of Body Image' in T. F. Cash and T. Pruzinsky (eds.), *Body Images: Development, Deviance, and Change* (pp. 80–109). New York: Guilford Press.

Faludi, S. (1991) *Backlash: the Undeclared War against American Women*. Crown: New York.

Farris, C. S., Lee, A. and Rubinstein, M. A. (2004) *Women in the New Taiwan: Gender Roles and Gender Consciousness in a Changing Society*. Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe.

Featherstone, M. (1982) 'The Body in Consumer Culture', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 1(2): 18–33.

Featherstone, M. (1991) *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*. London: SAGE.

------- (Ed.). (2000) *Body Modification*. London: SAGE.

Felski, R. (1995) *The Gender of Modernity*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Fischer, C. S. (2003) Succumbing to Consumerism?: Underlying Models in the Historical Claim. Presented at *the American Sociological Association Meetings*, Atlanta.

Foddy, W. H. and Finighan, W. R. (1980) 'The Concept of Privacy from a Symbolic Interaction Perspective', *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 10(1): 1–18.

Foucault, M. (1977) *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*. New York: Pantheon.

-------(1984) *The Foucault Reader*. (P. Rabinow, Ed.). New York: Pantheon.

Fournier, S. (1998) 'Consumers and Their Brands: Developing Relationship Theory in Consumer Research', *Journal of Consumer Research*, 24(4): 343–353.

Gallin, R. S. (1994) 'The Intersection of Class and Age: Mother-in-Law/Daughter-in-Law relations in rural Taiwan', *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology*, 9(2): 127–140.

Gamman, L. and Makinen, M. (1994) *Female Fetishism: A New Look*. London: Lawrence & Wishart.

Gao, X. K. (高小康) (2003) *Fashion and Image Culture (時尚與形象文化)*. Tianjing: Baihua Literature and Art Publishing House (百花文藝出版社).

Gecas, V. and Schwalbe, M. L. (1983) 'Beyond the Looking-Glass Self: Social Structure and Efficacy-Based Self-Esteem', *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 46(2): 77–88.

Giddens, A. (1991) *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (1st edition). Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Goffman, E. (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1st edition). New York: Anchor.

------- (1977) 'The Arrangement between the Sexes', *Theory and Society*, 4(3): 301–331.

------- (1979) *Gender Advertisements*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Gold, T. B. (1993) 'Go With Your Feelings: Hong Kong and Taiwan Popular Culture in Greater China', *The China Quarterly*, (136): 907–925.

Goon, P. and Craven, A. (2003) 'Whose Debt?: Globalisation and Whitefacing in Asia', *Intersections: Gender, History and Culture in the Asian Context*, (9). Available at http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue9/gooncraven.html [Accessed 10/12/2012]

Graeff, T. R. (1996) 'Image Congruence Effects on Product Evaluations: The Role of Self-monitoring and Public/Private Consumption', *Psychology and Marketing*, 13(5): 481–499.

Graham, J. A. and Jouhar, A. j. (1983) 'The Importance of Cosmetics in the Psychology of Appearance', *International Journal of Dermatology*, 22(3): 153–156.

Green, A. I. (2008) 'The Social Organization of Desire: The Sexual Fields Approach', *Sociological Theory*, 26(1): 25–50.

Greenhalgh, S. (1994) 'De-Orientalizing the Chinese Family Firm', *American Ethnologist*, 21(4): 746–775.

Guy, A. and Banim, M. (2000) 'Personal Collections: Women's Clothing Use and Identity', *Journal of Gender Studies*, 9(3): 313–327.

Guy, A., Banim, M. and Green, E. (2001) *Through the Wardrobe: Women's Relationships with Their Clothes*. Oxford: Berg.

Hakim, C. (2010) 'Erotic Capital', *European Sociological Review*, 26(5): 499–518.

Hansen, K. T. (2004) ''The World in Dress: Anthropological Perspectives on Clothing, Fashion, and Culture', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, (33): 369–392.

Harrison, K. and Cantor, J. (1997) 'The Relationship between Media Consumption and Eating Disorders', *Journal of Communication*, 47(1): 40–67.

Hayami, Y., Tanabe, A. and Tokita, Y. (2003) *Gender and Modernity: Perspectives from Asia and the Pacific*. Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press.

Haye, A. D. L. and Wilson, E. (1999) *Defining Dress: Dress As Object, Meaning and Identity*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Hedrick-Wong, Y. and Master Card. (2006) *Holding Up Half of the Sky: The New Women Consumers of Asia*. Singapore: John Wiley & Sons.

Heine, S. J., Kitayama, S., Lehman, D. R., Takata, T., Ide, E., Leung, C. and Matsumoto, H. (2001) 'Divergent Consequences of Success and Failure in Japan and North

America: An Investigation of Self-Improving Motivations and Malleable Selves', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 81(4): 599–615.

Hess, J. and Story, J. (2005) 'Trust-Based Commitment: Multidimensional Consumer-Brand Relationships', *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 22(6): 313–322.

Heyn, D. (2011) *Marriage Shock: The Transformation of Women into Wives*. New York: Open Road.

Holland, S. (2004) *Alternative Femininities: Body, Age and Identity*. Oxford: Berg.

Hsiao, C. H. (蕭清華) (2006) *At the Border of Real and Unreal: An Anthropological Reflection on the Consumption of Luxury Brands and Their Counterfeits in Taiwan (真亦假時假亦真:談台灣名牌精品與仿冒品消費的人類學反思)*. National Tsing Hua University. MA Dissertation. (國立清華大學人類學研究所碩士論文).

Hsiao, H. H. (1990, January 7) The Character of Consumption Culture and Its Reconstruction (消費文化的特性與重建). *Independent Evening News*. Taipei.

Hsiau, A. C. (1997) 'Language Ideology in Taiwan: The KMT's Language Policy, the Tai-yu Language Movement, and Ethnic Politics', *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 18(4): 302–315.

Hsiung, P. C. (1996) *Living Rooms as Factories: Class, Gender, and the Satelite Factory System in Taiwan* (1st edition). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Huang, L. L. and Chang, C. H. (2005) 'Body Image and Its Predictors in Taiwan: Interpersonal Pressure and Media Agreement as Mediators', *Chinese Journal of Psychology*, 47(3): 269–287.

Huang, Y. Y. (2001) 'Women's contradictory roles in the community A case study of the Community Development Project in Taiwan', *International Social Work*, 44(3): 361–373.

Hudson, K. (2006) For The Sake Of Beauty: Becoming Ornament And Other Guilty Pleasures. In *Refereed Proceedings of UNAUSTRALIA*. Presented at The Cultural Studies Association of Australasia's Annual Conference, Canberra, Australia. Available at http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/66241/20070423-0000/www.unaustralia.com/electronicpdf/Unhudson.pdf [Accessed 10/12/2012]

Hwang, K. K. (1998) 'Guanxi and Mientze: Conflict Resolution in Chinese Society', *Intercultural Communication Studies*, (7): 17–42.

Illyqueen(女王). (2011, February 14). Being Pretty with Complete Confidnece (理直氣壯愛漂亮). *I am Queen*. Available at http://www.wretch.cc/blog/illyqueen/13313935 [Accessed 10/12/2012]

Ishii, K., Su, H. and Watanabe, S. (1999) 'Japanese and U.S. programs in Taiwan: New patterns in Taiwanese television', *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 43(3): 416–431.

Ito, M. (2004) 'The Representation of Femininity in Japanese Television Dramas of the 1990s' in Kōichi Iwabuchi (ed.), *Feeling Asian Modernities: Transnational Consumption of Japanese TV Dramas* (pp. 25–42). Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

Iwabuchi, Koichi. (2005) 'Discrepant Intimacy: Popular Culture Flows in East Asia' in J. N. Erni and S. K. Chua (eds.), *Asian Media Studies: Politics of Subjectivities*. Oxford: Blackwell.

------- (Ed.). (2004) *Feeling Asian Modernities: Transnational Consumption of Japanese TV Dramas*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

Jackson, S., Ho, P. S. ying, and Na, J. N. (2013) Reshaping Tradition? Women Negotiating the Boundaries of Tradition and Modernity in Hong Kong and British Families'. *The Sociological Review*, forthcoming.

Jackson, S., Jieyu, L. and Juhyun, W. (Eds.). (2008) *East Asian Sexualities: Modernity, Gender & New Sexual Cultures*. London: Zed Books.

Jackson, S. and Scott, S. (2010) *Theorising Sexuality*. Maidenhead, Berkshire: Open University Press.

Jamal, A., and Goode, M. M. H. (2001) 'Consumers and Brands: A Study of the Impact of Self-Image Congruence on Brand Preference and Satisfaction', *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 19(7): 482–492.

Jenkins, R. (2008) *Social Identity* (3rd edition). London: Routledge.

Johnson, D. C. and Foster, H. B. (2007) *Dress Sense: Emotional and Sensory Experiences of the Body and Clothes*. Oxford: Berg.

Johnson, K. K. P. and Lennon, S. J. (1999) *Appearance and Power*. Oxford: Berg.

Jones, S. (2003) 'Depth Interviewing' in C. Seale (ed.), *Social Research Methods: A Reader* (pp. 257–260). London: Routledge.

Joy, A. Sherry, J. F. Troilo, G. and Deschenes, J. (2010) 'Re-Thinking the Relationship between Self and Other: Levinas and Narratives of Beautifying the Body', *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 10(3): 333–361.

Kampmeier, C. and Simon, B. (2001) 'Individuality and Group Formation: The Role of Independence and Differentiation', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 81(3): 448-462.

Kao, P. (高本莉) (2012, April 15) Taiwan (Han) Traditional Clothing [台灣（漢人）傳統服飾]. *Taipei Digital Archives Exposition Project (數位典藏觀察室)*. Available at http://content.teldap.tw/index/blog/?p=3626 [Accessed 10/12/2012]

Kawamura, K. (2002) 'Asian American body images' in T. F. Cash and T. Pruzinsky (eds.), *Body Image: A Handbook of Theory, Research, and Clinical Practice* (pp. 243–249). New York: Guilford Press.

Keenan, W. J. F. (2001) *Dressed to Impress: Looking the Part*. Oxford: Berg.

King, A. D. and Zukin, S. (Eds.). (1996) Space and Symbols in an Age of Decline. In *Re-Presenting the City: Ethnicity, Capital and Culture in the 21st-Century Metropolis* (pp. 43–59). New York: New York University Press.

Kleine, S. S., III, R. E. K. and Allen, C. T. (1995) 'How is a Possession "Me" or "Not Me"? Characterizing Types and an Antecedent of Material Possession Attachment', *Journal of Consumer Research*, 22(3): 327–343.

Kressmann, F., Sirgy, M. J., Herrmann, A., Huber, F., Huber, S. and Lee, D. J. (2006) 'Direct and Indirect Effects of Self-Image Congruence on Brand Loyalty', *Journal of Business Research*, 59(9): 955–964.

Kung, L. (1976) 'Factory Work and Women in Taiwan: Changes in Self-Image and Status', *Signs*, *2*(1): 35–58.

Kunzle, D. (1982) *Fashion and Fetishism: A Social History of the Corset, Tight-Lacing, and Other Forms of Body-Sculpture in the West*. Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield.

Langlois, J. H. and Stephan, C. (1977) 'The Effects of Physical Attractiveness and Ethnicity on Children's Behavioral Attributions and Peer Preferences', *Child Development*, 48(4): 1694–1698.

Lee, P. (1997, September) *The Modern Women's Movement in Taiwan: The Changing Role of Taiwanese Women in a Conscious and Collective Struggle towards Equality*. St Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia. Available at http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/obj/s4/f2/dsk2/ftp04/mq22801.pdf [Accessed 10/12/2012]

Lee Y.Y. (2006) 'Shopping Studies: A Review Essay', *Taiwanese Journal of Sociology*, (37): 207–236.

Lennon, S. J. and Rudd, N. A. (1994) 'Linkages between Attitudes toward Gender Roles, Body Satisfaction, Self-Esteem, and Appearance Management Behaviors in Women', *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal*, 23(2): 94–117.

Leung, K., Koch, P. T. and Lu, L. (2002) 'A Dualistic Model of Harmony and its Implications for Conflict Management in Asia', *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, 19(2-3): 201–220.

Levy, A. (2005) *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture.* London: Free Press.

Liang, X. and Huang, H. (梁小島、黃海榮) (2007, May) Clothing Love - a Research Who Is More than Skin Deep: an Interview with Professor Chang Hsiao-Hung (「衣」戀一個不膚淺的學者 -- 與張小虹教授訪談). *Culture Studies @ Lingnan (文化研究@嶺南)*, (5).

Liao, T. J. and Bei, L. T. (2012) 'The Impact of Media and Culture on the Consumption Values of Women in China and Taiwan' in L. R. Kahle and C. H. Kim (eds.), *Creating Images and the Psychology of Marketing Communication* (pp. 331–349). London: Psychology Press.

Lin, C. H. (林志鴻) (2002) *The Symbolic Production／Consumption of Fashion Magazines: Take the Local Fashion-Consciousness of Chinoiserie as Example (時尚符號的媒體產製與消費：以中國風流行風潮下的本土時尚意識為例).* Fu Jen Catholic University. MA Dissertation. (輔仁大學織品服裝研究所碩士論文). Available at http://ndltd.ncl.edu.tw/cgi-bin/gs32/gsweb.cgi?o=dnclcdr&s=id=%22090FJU00525017%22.&searchmode=basic [Accessed 10/12/2012]

Lin H. C. (林歆婕) (2011, January 1) *From being Weeds to being "Makeinu": The Gender Ideology and the Construction of Women Images in Taiwan's Idol Drama (從雜草到敗犬：台灣偶像劇中的性別意識與形象建構).* National Chung Hsing University. MA Dissertation. (國立中興大學台灣文學研究所碩士論文). Available at http://www.airitilibrary.com/searchdetail.aspx?DocIDs=U0005-2701201123431500 [Accessed 10/12/2012]

Lin, S. (林思雲) (2004, November 20) Thinking of How Women Use Cosmetics in China and Japan (從中日兩國女人的化妝想起). *Epoch Times*. New York. Available at http://www.epochtimes.com/b5/4/11/20/n723752.htm [Accessed 10/12/2012]

Liu, C. L. J. and Regehr, C. (2006) 'Cross-Cultural Application of Self-in-Relation Theory The Case of Taiwanese Young Women', *International Social Work*, 49(4): 459–470.

Longhurst, R. (2010) 'Semi-Structured Interview and Focus Groups' in N. Clifford, S. French, and G. Valentine (eds.), *Key Methods in Geography* (pp. 103–115). London: SAGE.

Lorde, G. A. (1984) *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Trumansburg, New York: Crossing Press.

Lu, H. Y. (2004) 'Imagining "New Women," Imagining Modernity: Gender Rhetoric in Colonial Taiwan' in C. S. Farris, A. Lee, and M. A. Rubinstein (eds.), *Women in the New Taiwan: Gender Roles and Gender Consciousness in a Changing Society* (pp. 76–98). Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe.

Lu, L. and Yang, K. S. (2006) 'Emergence and Composition of the Traditional-Modern Bicultural Self of People in Contemporary Taiwanese Societies', *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, 9(3): 167–175.

Lury, C. (1996) *Consumer Culture*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

------- (2004) *Brands: The Logos of the Global Economy*. Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge.

Markus, H. R. and Kitayama, S. (1991) 'Culture and the Self: Implications for Cognition, Emotion, and Motivation', *Psychological Review*, 98(2), 224–253.

Marsh, R. (1996) *The Great Transformation: Social Change in Taipei, Taiwan Since the 1960s*. Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe.

Marshall, C. and Rossman, G. B. (2006) *Designing Qualitative Research*. London: SAGE.

Mason, J. (2002) *Qualitative Researching*. London: SAGE.

Maynard, M. and Purvis, J. (1994) *Researching Women's Lives From A Feminist Perspective*. London: Taylor & Francis.

McCarthy, E. D. (1992) 'Toward a Sociology of the Physical World: George Herbert Mead on Physical Objects' in P. Hamilton (ed.), *George Herbert Mead: Critical Assessments* (pp. 215–236). London: Routledge.

McClintock, A. (1993) 'Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism and the Family', *Feminist Review*, (44): 61–80.

McCracken, G. D. (1988) *Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Mead, G. H. (1967) *Mind, Self, and Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*. (C. W. Morris, Ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Mendes, V. D., and De La Haye, A. (2010). *Fashion since 1900*. London: Thames & Hudson.

Miller, W. I. (1997) *The Anatomy of Disgust*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Miller, J. (2002) 'Beauty and Democratic Power', *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture*, 6(3): 277–297.

Mulvey, L. (1988) 'Afterthoughts on Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' in C. Penley (ed.), *Feminism and Film Theory* (pp. 69–72). London: Routledge.

------- (2009) *Visual and Other Pleasures* (2nd edition). Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

Nava, M. (1992) *Changing Cultures: Feminism, Youth and Consumerism*. London: SAGE.

Nava, M. and O'Shea, A. (1996) *Modern Times: Reflections on a Century of English Modernity*. London: Routledge.

Ng, C. B. (吳振邦). (1998) *History of Chinese Women's Costume: Transition and Liberation, 1911-1935 (中國婦女服飾史: 演變與解放 (1911-1935))*. The Department of Chinese, Faculty of Arts. University of Hong Kong. PhD Thesis.

Pahl, J. (1989) *Money and Marriage*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan.

Parker, A. (1992) *Nationalism & Sexualities*. New York: Routledge.

Parkins, I. and Sheehan, E. M. (Eds.). (2011) *Cultures of Femininity in Modern Fashion*. Lebanon, New Hampshire: University of New Hampshire Press.

Plummer, K. (1983) *Documents of Life: An Introduction to the Problems and Literature of a Humanistic Method*. London: Allen & Unwin.

Pope, N. (1998) 'Consumption Values, Sponsorship Awareness, Brand and Product Use', *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 7(2): 124–136.

Prendergast, G., Ng, S. W. and Leung, L. L. (2001) 'Consumer Perceptions of Shopping Bags', *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 19(7): 475–482.

Proshansky, H. M. (1978) 'The City and Self-Identity', *Environment and Behavior*, 10(2): 147–169.

Radner, H. (1995) *Shopping Around: Feminine Culture and the Pursuit of Pleasure*. London: Routledge.

Rahman, M. and Jackson, S. (2010) *Gender and Sexuality*. Cambridge: Polity.

Rampal, K. R. (1994) 'Post-Martial Law Media Boom in Taiwan', *International Communication Gazette*, 53(1-2) : 73–91.

Reekie, G. (1991) 'Impulsive Women, Predictable Men: Psychological Constructions of Sexual Difference in Sales Literature to 1930', *Australian Historical Studies*, 24(96): 359–377.

Regan, P. C. (1998) 'What if You Can't Get What You Want? Willingness to Compromise Ideal Mate Selection Standards as a Function of Sex, Mate Value, and Relationship Context', *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 24(12): 1294–1303.

Reinharz, S. and Chase, S. E. (2002) 'Interviewing Women' in J. F. Gubrium and J. A. Holstein (eds.), *Handbook of Interview Research: Context & Method* (pp. 221–238). London: SAGE.

Rotundo, E. A. (1985) 'American Fatherhood A Historical Perspective', *American Behavioral Scientist*, 29(1): 7–23.

Rubinstein, M. A. (2006) *Taiwan: A New History*. (M. A. Rubinstein, Ed.). Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe.

Russo, M. (1997) 'Female Grotesques: Carnival and Theory' in K. Conboy and N. Medina (eds.), *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory* (pp. 318–336). New York: Columbia University Press.

Sanders, N. M. and Heiss, C. J. (1998) 'Eating Attitudes and Body Image of Asian and Caucasian College Women', *Eating Disorders*, 6(1): 15–27.

Schiffman, L. G. and Kanuk, L. L. (1978) *Consumer Behavior*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

Schippers, M. (2007) 'Recovering the Feminine Other: Masculinity, Femininity, and Gender Hegemony', *Theory and Society*, 36(1): 85–102.

Schroeder, J. E. and Salzer-Morling, M. (2006). *Brand Culture*. Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge.

Scott, L. M. (2005) *Fresh Lipstick: Redressing Fashion And Feminism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Shanahan, M. J. (2000) 'Pathways to Adulthood in Changing Societies: Variability and Mechanisms in Life Course Perspective', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26(1): 667–692.

Shih, M. Y. and Kubo, C. (2005) 'Body Shape Preference and Body Satisfaction of Taiwanese and Japanese Female College Students', *Psychiatry Research*, 133(2-3): 263–271.

Shu, S. D. (蘇少荻) (2006) *The Rise and Decline of the Garment Industry: A Cultural-Economic Analysis (成衣產業的興衰: 一種文化經濟學的分析)*. National Tsing Hua University. MA Dissertation. (國立清華大學經濟學系碩士論文).

Simon, S. (2003) *Sweet and Sour: Life-Worlds of Taipei Women Entrepreneurs*. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield.

Skeggs, B. (1997) *Formations of Class & Gender: Becoming Respectable*. London: SAGE.

------- (2004) *Class, Self, Culture*. London: Routledge.

------- (2005) 'The Making of Class and Gender through Visualizing Moral Subject Formation', *Sociology*, 39(5): 965-982.

Slater, D. (1999) *Consumer Culture and Modernity* (1ˢᵗ edition). Cambridge: Polity.

Smith, G., Warwick, A. and Cavallaro, D. (1998) *Fashioning the Frame: Boundaries, Dress and the Body*. Oxford: Berg.

Snyder, M., Berscheid, E. and Matwychuk, A. (1988) 'Orientations toward Personnel Selection: Differential Reliance on Appearance and Personality', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 54(6): 972–979.

Spitzack, C. (1990) *Confessing Excess: Women and the Politics of Body Reduction*. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press.

Steele, V. (1998) *Paris Fashion: A Cultural History*. Oxford: Berg.

Stets, J. E. and Burke, P. J. (2000) 'Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory', *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 63(3): 224–237.

Szalay, L. B., Strohl, J. B., Fu, L. and Lao, P. S. (1994) *American and Chinese Perceptions and Belief Systems: A People's Republic of China–Taiwanese comparison*. New York: Plenum Press.

Tang, K. (2009) 'Women's Working Lives in East Asia; Media Ideologies of Gender in Hong Kong', *Social Work Education*, 28(5): 573–575.

Terry, D. J., Hogg, M. A. and White, K. M. (1999) 'The Theory of Planned Behaviour: Self-identity, Social Identity and Group Norms', *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 38(3): 225–244.

Terry, R. L. and Doerge, S. (1979) 'Dress, Posture, and Setting as Addictive Factors in Subjective Probabilities of Rape', *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 48(3): 903-906.

Thomas, M. E. (2005) 'Girls, Consumption Space and the Contradictions of Hanging out in the City', *Social & Cultural Geography*, 6(4): 587–605.

Thornton, A. and Lin, H. S. (1994) *Social Change and the Family in Taiwan*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Trigg, A. B. (2001) 'Veblen, Bourdieu, and Conspicuous Consumption', *Journal of Economic Issues*, 35(1): 99–115.

Tsai, C. L. (2006) 'The Influence of Confucianism on Women's Leisure in Taiwan', *Leisure Studies*, 25(4): 469–476.

Tseelon, E. (1995) *The Masque of Femininity: The Presentation of Woman in Everyday Life*. London: SAGE.

------- (1992a) 'Is the Presented Self Sincere? Goffman, Impression Management and the Postmodern Self', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 9(2): 115–128.

------- (1992b) 'Self Presentation through Appearance: A Manipulative vs. a Dramaturgical Approach', *Symbolic Interaction*, 15(4): 501–514.

Tseng, Y. M. (曾義明) (2002) 'How Symbolically Female Brands Influence the Types of Product Development - The Effects of Product Involvement (女性化符號品牌在產品開發類型上的問題--產品涉入效果分析)', *The Journal of Advertising and Public Relations (廣告學研究)*, (19): 89–112.

Tu, W. M. (1996) 'Confucian Traditions in East Asian Modernity', *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences,* 50(2): 12-39.

Turner, J. C. (1991). *Social influence*. Pacific Grove, California: Brooks/Cole.

Turner, J. C., Hogg, M. A., Oakes, P. J., Reicher, S. D. and Wetherell, M. S. (1987) *Rediscovering the Social Group: A Self-Categorization Theory*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Turner, J. C., Oakes, P. J., Haslam, S. A. and McGarty, C. (1994) 'Self and Collective: Cognition and Social Context', *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *20*(5): 454–463.

Veblen, T. (1912) *The Theory of the Leisure Class: an Economic Study of Institutions*. London: Macmillan.

Vulliamy, G. (1990) 'Research Outcomes: Post Script.' in G. Vulliamy (ed.), *Doing Educational Research in Developing Countries* (pp. 7–25). Taylor & Francis.

Wallendorf, M. and Arnould, E. J. (1988) '"My Favorite Things": A Cross-Cultural Inquiry into Object Attachment, Possessiveness, and Social Linkage', *Journal of Consumer Research*, *14*(4): 531–547.

Ward, M. R. and Lee, M. J. (2000) 'Internet Shopping, Consumer Search and Product Branding', *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 9(1): 6–20.

Wark, M. (1991) 'Fashioning the Future: Fashion, Clothing, and the Manufacturing of Post-Fordist Culture', *Cultural Studies*, 5(1): 61–76.

Warren, C. A. B. (1988) *Gender Issues in Field Research*. Newbury Park: SAGE.

Watts, J. (2006) '"The Outsider Within": Dilemmas of Qualitative Feminist Research within a Culture of Resistance', *Qualitative Research*, 6(3): 385–402.

Wen, P. Y. (溫佩妤) (2003, May) New style women across the Straits -- Shanghai chili versus Taipei apple (兩岸新派女人-上海小辣椒 vs. 台北紅蘋果). *Cheers (快樂工作人雜誌)*.

Williams, R. H. (1982) *Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth Century France*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Williams, S. J. and Bendelow, G. (1998) *The Lived Body: Sociological Themes, Embodied Issues*. London: Routledge.

Wilson, E. (1985) *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

Wilson, E. and Taylor L. (1989) *Through the Looking Glass: A History of Dress from 1860 to the Present Day*, London: BBC Books.

Wirth, L. (1938) 'Urbanism as a Way of Life', *American Journal of Sociology*, 44(1): 1–24.

Wolf, N. (2002) *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are Used against Women*. New York: Perennial.

Wolff, J. (1990) *Feminine Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Wong, N. Y. and Ahuvia, A. C. (1998) 'Personal taste and family face: Luxury consumption in Confucian and western societies', *Psychology and Marketing*, 15(5): 423–441.

Wong, Y. and Huang, Y. C. (1999) 'Obesity Concerns, Weight Satisfaction and Characteristics of Female Dieters: A Study on Female Taiwanese College Students', *Journal of the American College of Nutrition*, 18(2): 194–200.

Workman, J. E. and Freeburg, E. W. (1999) 'An Examination of Date Rape, Victim Dress, and Perceiver Variables Within the Context of Attribution Theory', *Sex Roles*, 41(3-4): 261–277.

Wu, T. J. and Zheng, Y. (吳廷俊、鄭玥) (2004, April 7) 'Analysis of Female Stereotypes in Television Advertisements (電視廣告中女性刻板印象解析)', *Modern Communication (當代傳播)*, (2).

Yan, Yunxiang (2010) 'The Chinese Path to Individualization', *The British Journal of Sociology*. 61(3): 489-512.

Yang, C. C. (2007) *The Meanings of Qipao as Traditional Dress: Chinese and Taiwanese Perspectives*. Iowa State University. PhD Dissertation.

Yang H. Y. (楊欣怡) (2005, January 1) *The Tribe of New Luxury – Deciphering Luxury Consumption among Taiwanese Women Born in the 1970s (新奢華部落－解讀台灣六年級女生的名牌消費文化)*. National Taiwan University. MA Dissertation. (臺灣大學國家發展研究所碩士論文).

Yang, M. M. H. (1999) *Spaces of Their Own: Women's Public Sphere in Transnational China*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Yeh, L. C. (葉立誠) (2000) *History of Costume and Fashion (中西服裝史)*. Taipei: Shinning Culture Publishing Co. (商鼎文化出版社).

------- (2005) *History of Taiwanese Costume and Fashion (台灣服裝史)*. Taipei: Shinning Culture Publishing Co. (商鼎文化出版社).

Young, I. M. (2005) *On Female Body Experience:"Throwing Like a Girl" and Other Essays: "Throwing Like a Girl" and Other Essays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Yu, W. H. (2009) *Gendered Trajectories: Women, Work, and Social Change in Japan and Taiwan*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Yuan, C. (袁青) (2003, October) Taipei walking -- the dressed history of Taipei women in the past decade (台北散步 - 台北女人十年衣史). *Taipei Public Library*. Available at http://blind.tpml.edu.tw/sp.asp?xdurl=superxd/PictorialContent.asp&icuitem=543829&mp=10 [Accessed 10/12/2012]

Yuh, S. M. (喻夏美) (2005) *Women Oppression and the Taiwanese and Korean Oppression Originated by Patriarchy and Imperialism through the Study and Analysis of "The Orphan of Asia" and "Dictee"(從亞細亞的孤兒及聽寫者兩本小說中探討女性被壓迫的現象)*. Providence University. MA Dissertation. (靜宜大學英國語文學系研究所碩士論文).

Zeithaml, V. A. (1988) 'Consumer Perceptions of Price, Quality, and Value: A Means-end Model and Synthesis of Evidence', *Journal of Marketing*, *52*(3): 2–22.