

The Co-creation and Circulation of Brands and Cultures:
Historical Chinese Culture, Global Fashion Systems, and the Development of Chinese
Global Brands

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Abstract

This dissertation is a study of the possibilities and processes of constructing strong Chinese brands in the global marketplace. It investigates conceptual and strategic relationships between brands and cultures, focusing specifically on the issue of the unprivileged position of Chinese brands vis-à-vis that of other famous global counterparts. Accordingly, it deploys three illustrative cases from the Chinese context – Jay Chou (a successful Chinese music artist), the 2008 Beijing Olympics opening ceremony, and Shanghai Tang (a global Chinese fashion brand). In so doing, it moves away from the general trend to study the managerial aspects of Western brand building in Chinese contexts, and instead examines how Chinese brands express cultural aspects of their own well-known brand development models in the global marketplace. In short, this study uses a Chinese vantage to examine the emergence of cultural branding (using historical culture and global fashion systems to develop global brands), and its capacity to function as a useful complement to existing models of brand globalisation and global brand culture.

The function of the three cases is illustrative and analytic. Collectively, they serve as a lens through which to study Chinese brand development in the global marketplace and examine global brand culture. Each case was fleshed out through various multi-sited ethnographic studies, which consisted of interviewing and observing consumers and managerial workers, the results of which shed light on several important but under-studied aspects of global brand culture. These include Chinese cultural branding in the global context, the cultural approach to branding among various brand actors, and relationships between brands and cultures across branding cultures. Drawing on these examinations, this study not only demonstrates ways in which brands and cultures circulate and construct each other in global brand culture. It also uses these insights to argue for the development of Chinese culture or Chinese-ness into a global brand resource by Chinese brand builders.

Contents

Chapter One: Introduction--A Cultural Approach to Chinese Branding across the Globe ----- 8-15

1. A Cultural Approach to Branding in the Global Marketplace ----- 8
2. The Problems of and Approaches to Chinese Brand Development in the Global Marketplace ----- 10
3. Thesis Organisation ----- 13

Chapter Two: the Representation of Historical Culture, Fashion Systems, and Global Brand Culture ----- 16 - 58

1. Managerial Perspective of Global Branding ----- 16
 - 1.1. The meanings of international or global branding ----- 17
 - 1.2. Global brand standardisation/adaptation ----- 18
 - 1.3. The managerial perspective of global branding in the Chinese context ----- 19
2. Brand Culture ----- 20
 - 2.1. The use of historical culture and mythmaking in global brand development -----20
 - 2.1.1. The use of historical culture in global brand development ----- 21
 - 2.1.2. Myth development in global brand development ----- 24
 - 2.2. Brand identity and consumer identity ----- 27
 - 2.3. Brand image, aesthetic branding, and the imagined community ----- 30
 - 2.3.1. Brand image and aesthetic branding ----- 31
 - 2.3.2. The imagined community ----- 32
 - 2.4. Brand culture in the Chinese context ----- 33
3. The Cultural Approach to Global Branding ----- 37
4. Global Consumer Culture and Fashion System ----- 40
 - 4.1. The history of consumer culture ----- 41
 - 4.2. Global consumer culture ----- 42
 - 4.3 The role of fashion in the development of global consumer culture ----- 43

- 4.3.1. Fashion systems -----43
- 4.3.2. Fashion discourse, symbolic production, and consumption of fashion goods ----- 45
- 4.3.3. Fashion systems used in each case study ----- 50
- 4.3.4. Global consumer culture in the Chinese context ----- 56

Chapter Three: The Multi-sited Ethnographic Study and the Interpretive Method ----- 59-83

- 1. Multi-sited Ethnographic Studies, Methodological Individualism, and Interpretive and Visual-analysis Method ----- 60
- 2. The Emergence of Three Cases and the Employment of the Multi-case study ----- 64
- 3. The Multi-sited Ethnographic Study for Each Case ----- 71
- 4. Methodological Individualism and the Interpretive Study Approach for Each Case ----- 72
- 5. An Interpretive Logic and Visual-Analysis Approach to Multi-sited Interviews with Observations on Each Case ----- 75

Chapter Four: A Case Study of Jay Chou, a Successful Chinese Music Artist ----- 84- 100

- 1. The Significance of Jay Chou ----- 84
- 2. Jay Chou, Chinese Music Artist and Marketing----- 85
- 3. The "Imagined China" as Modern-cultured Chinese Features----- 86
 - 3.1. The "Imagined China" via the representation of historical Chinese culture to represent sacred meaning----- 87
 - 3.2. The "Imagined China" via the representation of historical Chinese culture and the help of global fashion resources to develop a hybrid image ----- 89
 - 3.2.1. The sacred features of Jay Chou's hybrid image ----- 89
 - 3.2.2. The fashionable features of Jay Chou's hybrid image ----- 91

3.3. The "Imagined China" via the representation of historical Chinese culture and the help of global fashion resources to develop brand mythology across the globe ----- 94

3.4 The "Imagined China" via the role of global actors in the creation of Jay Chou's global hybrid image----- 97

Conclusion ----- 99

Chapter Five: A Case Study of the 2008 Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony ----- 101 - 126

1. The Significance of the Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony ----- 101

2. The "Imagined China" via International Narratives of the Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony to Develop China's Identity ----- 102

2.1 The "Imagined China" via the representation of historical Chinese culture and the help of global fashion systems to target myth markets -----103

2.1.1. The "Imagined China" as authentic identity through the use of nostalgia ----103

2.1.2. The "Imagined China" as a fashionable identity -----106

2.2. The "Imagined China" via the representation of historical Chinese culture and the help of global fashion systems to create identity myths pertaining to Chinese identity anxiety -----107

2.2.1. Chinese identity anxiety deriving from backward images of an old China (1840-present) -----107

2.2.2. The "Imagined China" as a less-democratic entity ----- 108

2.3. The "Imagined China" via the representation of historical Chinese culture and the help of global fashion systems to construct the new China's identity and address Chinese identity anxiety ----- 110

2.3.1. The "Imagined China" as unique historical cultural identity ----- 110

2.3.2. The "Imagined China" as a modern cultured Chinese identity -----
112

3. The "Imagined China" via the Representation of Historical Chinese Culture and the Help of Global Fashion Systems to Extend the Global Myth Market----- 115

3.1. The "Imagined China" through the use of Zhang Yimou to capture global myths----- 115

3.2. The "Imagined China" as representative of global harmony and peace to express global myths----- 120

3.3. The "Imagined China" in public discourses of the opening ceremony----- 121

3.4. The "Imagined China" as a fashion community through the global attention of fashion discourse to express the global myth----- 123

Conclusion ----- 125

Chapter Six:: A Case Study of Shanghai Tang ----- 127 - 165

1. The Significance of Shanghai Tang ----- 127

2. The "Imagined China" via the Discourses of Fashion, Historical Chinese Cultural Codes, and Brand Culture from Consumer Viewpoints ----- 128

2.1 Distinctive cosmopolitan identity projection through Chinese cultural codes and global fashion resources ----- 129

2.2. Fashion and brand codes as a ladder for success ----- 134

2.3. A function-seeker via anti-fashion and anti-brand activities ----- 137

2.4. A reflective and authentic reservoir of historical Chinese references ----- 138

2.5. The dialectic ambivalence of the erotic and the chaste ----- 140

2.6. A reservoir of Chinese meanings ----- 143

3. The "Imagined China" via the Discourses of Fashion, Historical Chinese Cultural Codes, and Brand Culture from the Managerial perspective ----- 145

3.1. Global high-end luxury position and global market-oriented creativities within Chinese-ness ----- 146

3.2. Strategically satisfying global consumers for various occasions ----- 149

3.3. Top-end global store and service cultures ----- 151

3.4. Workers as consumers ----- 153

4. The "Imagined China" as a Global Brand via the Mythic and Stylistic Modern Chinese Lifestyle -----	154
4.1. The co-creation and circulation of brand meanings and culture via fashion systems -----	154
4.2. The "Imagined China" via Fashion as a System to Connote the Myth of Chinese Modern Life (or "Chinese-ness") -----	158
4.3. The "Imagined China" via fashion to express dynamic and stylistic modern Chinese life -----	160
Conclusion -----	164

Chapter Seven: the Co-creation and Circulation of Brands and Cultures ----- 166 - 180

1. Global Ethnic Diaspora Market Reach as a Strategic Global Branding Approach -----	166
2. The "Imagined China" Reconstructing the Identity of Modern Chinese Lifestyle or Culture and Exploring the Myth of Historical Chinese Culture or the Myth of Modern Chinese Culture -----	171
3. The Circulation and Co-creation of Brands and Cultures -----	173
4. From an Aesthetics Perspective of Chinese-styled Global Branding using a Cultural Approach -----	174
4.1. Aesthetics in Chinese-styled global branding using a cultural approach -----	174
4.2. The authenticity of the Chinese-styled global brand or branding approach -----	176
4.3. The use of global fashion resources for brand fashioning through the three case studies -----	176
5. Implications of the Culture Approach to Chinese-styled Global Branding -----	176
6. Conclusion -----	178
7. Further Research Orientations -----	179

References ----- 180 - 205

Tables and Figures ----- 206 - 216

Table 1.1. Participant descriptions of the problems of Chinese brand

globalisation----the first stage of my study ----- 206

Table 1.2. Websites observed to examine the problems of Chinese brand globalization

----- 206

Table 2.1. Profiles of participants in the Jay Chou case study--the second stage of my

study ----- 207

Table 2.2. Statistics of Jay Chou concerts attended--the second stage of my study -----

207

Table 2.3. Description of Jay Chou websites that were observed ----- 207

Table 3.1. Profiles of participants in the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony case

study—the third stage of my study ----- 208

Table 3.2. Material pertaining to the 2008 Beijing Olympics gathered from official

websites—the third stage of my study ----- 208

Table 4.1. Profiles of managerial participants in the Shanghai Tang case study—the

fourth stage of my study ----- 209

Table 4.2. Profiles of consumer participants in the Shanghai Tang case study ----- 209

Table 5.1. Consumer participant interpretations of Shanghai Tang ----- 210

Table 5.2. Managerial participant interpretations of Shanghai Tang ----- 211

Table 5.3. Signs used in Shanghai Tang products and their meanings ----- 212

Table 5.4. Brand literacy levels pertaining to Shanghai Tang gained from accounts by

of Chinese consumer participants ----- 213

Figure 1: Nun-Chuks ----- 213

Figure 2: Chrysanthemums Terrace ----- 215

Figure 7. The first image shows the "*fou*" in the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony;

the second image shows the *ding* from Zhang Yimou's movie *Hero* -----

216

Figure 8. The left image shows the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony; the right image shows a still from Zhang Yimou's movie *House of Flying Daggers*

----- 216