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The Chinese Concept
of Face -
An Exploration of
Conceptual Fashion
as a Means of
Critiquing the
Social Phenomenon
of *Lian/Mian*

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2021

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Thesis Declaration

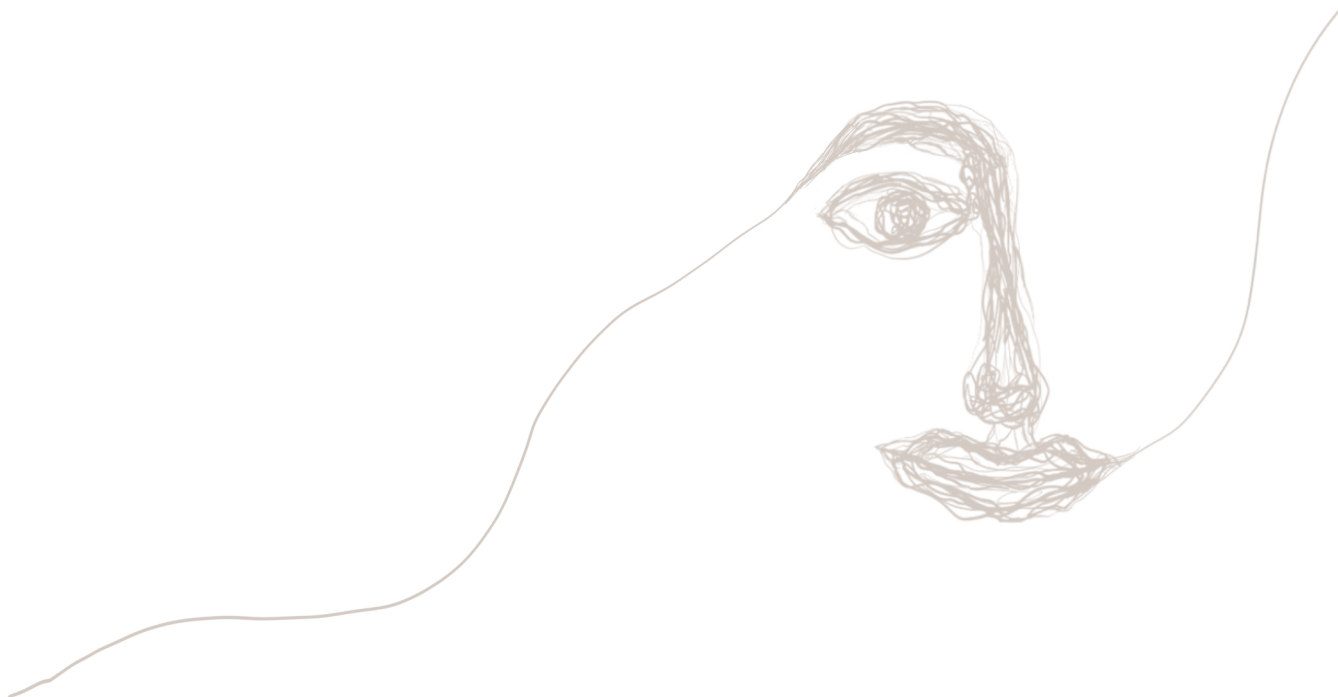
A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a Master in Design at Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand.

Qinglin Chen
2021

Abstract

Radu Stern mentioned in his book *Against Fashion* (2004), that fashion is the “sign of class ambition”, the weapon of capitalism, demonstrating that fashion has an inseparable relationship with society. The Chinese concept of face (*lian/mian*), in sociological terms, broadly represents the prestige and reputation of people, having similar but not exactly the same functions as fashion. The social effect of the Chinese concept of face is not all positive, indeed it leads to many social issues, so my aim is to use fashion to reflect on *lian/mian* in a global society. Furthermore, I will use experimental and conceptual fashion as my practice method to demonstrate the collaboration between culture and fashion. Conceptual fashion is a derivative of conceptual art defined by Hazel Clark as innovative and experimental, and as an idea and a self-reflection (67). Examining case studies of how other fashion designers communicate cultural concepts through fashion has provided opportunities for analysis, and comparison with my own experience.

Keywords: Conceptual Fashion, Conceptual Art, the Chinese concept of Face, *Lian/Mian*, ‘Gain Face’, ‘Loss Face’



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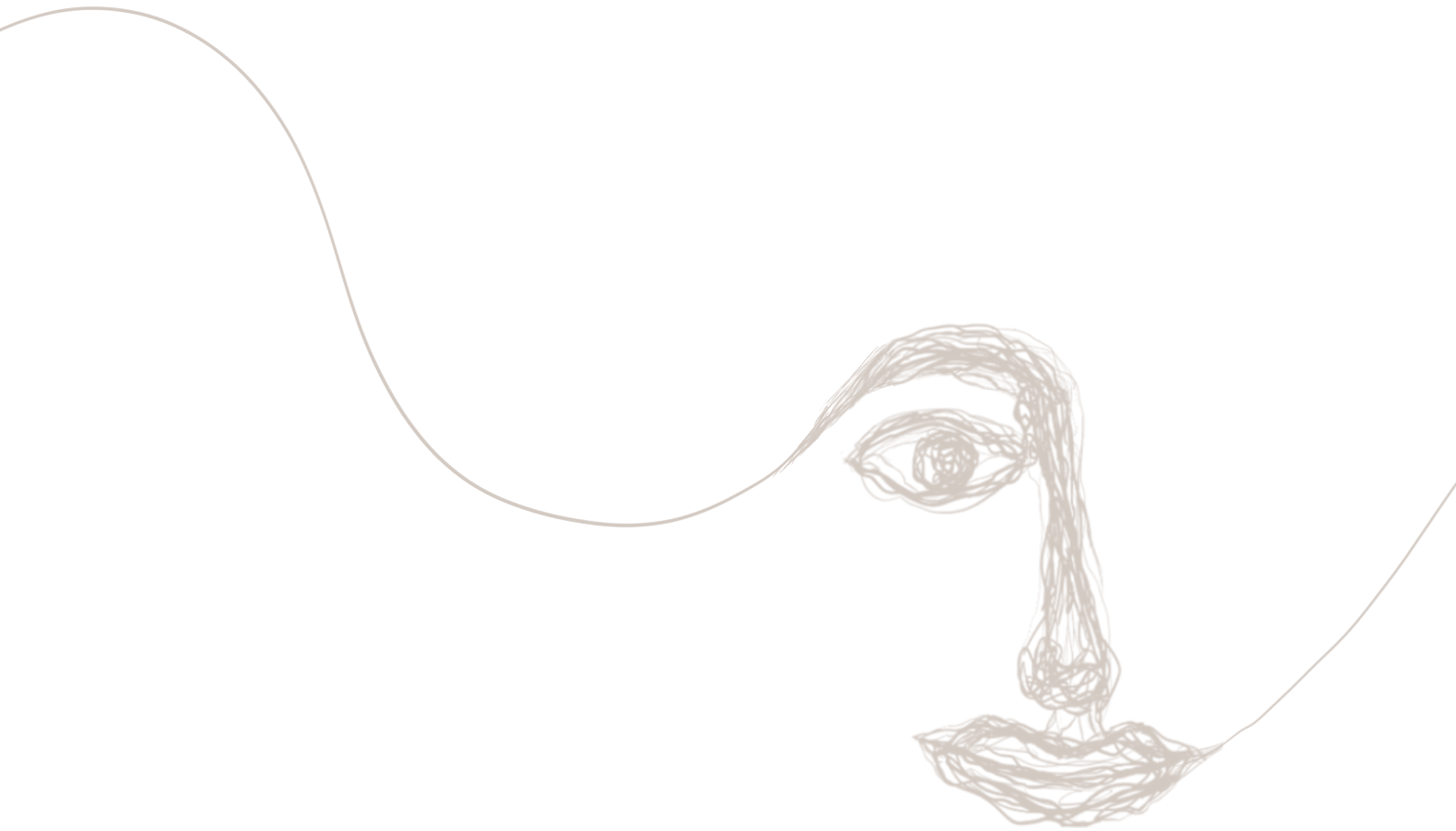
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Introduction



Radu Stern mentioned in his book *Against Fashion* (2004) that fashion is the "sign of class ambition" (2), the weapon of capitalism, which demonstrates that fashion has an inseparable relationship with society. The Chinese concept of face, in a broad sense, represents the prestige and reputation of people, but in sociology, this concept has a much more in-depth meaning behind it, and fulfils a similar function as fashion. The significance of the exploration of the social phenomenon of *lian/mian* as my conceptual fashion design issue is due to my Chinese cultural background.

Lian/mian is a common concept for Chinese and more broadly speaking, Asian people. However, this concept is still hidden as it is not acknowledged or taught openly, I am familiar with this concept through my own experience in Chinese society. This shows that *lian/mian* can be an unspoken and implicit concept for many people. My exploration of this concept through my creative practice, is to analyse and communicate a better understanding of *lian/mian*. *Lian/mian* relates to class and social ambition, in parallel to the function of fashion brands, where people may fall into this capitalist trap in order to 'gain face'. Furthermore, conceptual fashion is based on culture, an idea or a self-reflection, to create something innovative and experimental. As a fashion designer and an emerging practitioner, this led me to research how the social concept could be presented through conceptual fashion and to reflect *lian/mian* through my own fashion practice.

Conceptual Fashion and Conceptual Art

The history of conceptual fashion begins in the twentieth century and has numerous definitions. Hazel Clark (2012) identifies that conceptual fashion practice involves: "Ideas over appearance, self-reflection over resolution, innovation and experimentation, and statements that posed questions but that rarely provided clear answers" (67). From this quote, she clarifies the importance of the process of conceptual fashion as a way of thinking, rather than providing the answer. In this way, it inspired me to focus on the procedure, reflection and exploration of *lian/mian* through conceptual fashion, not just through my creative fashion practice.

In addition, fashion and art have an enduring relationship, while conceptual fashion may be said to represent this hybridity. Simon Swale (2017) argues that "conceptual fashion can be understood as a sometimes contentious relationship between art and design" (176). Likewise, Hazel Clark talked about the relationship between conceptual fashion and art in the book *Fashion and Art* (2012). Her opinion is that conceptual art is the ground of conceptual fashion, as long as there is a reference to critical fashion, it will immediately lead to art (67). Author Tony Godfrey (1998) defined conceptual art in the book *Conceptual Art*, as "conceptual art is not about forms or materials, but about ideas and meaning. It cannot be defined in terms of any medium or style, but rather by the way it questions what art is" (4).

In conclusion, conceptual fashion and conceptual art are both created by ideas, and conceptual fashion mirrors a confluence of art and design thinking. Therefore, research into conceptual art can help to gain a deeper understanding and expand the conceptual fashion elements, creating a more effective practical result.

Fashion and the Chinese Concept of Face

The general idea of the Chinese concept of face is to represent a person's reputation, and feelings of prestige within multiple spheres (Hu 45). The Chinese concept of face in Chinese is called *lian/mian* or '*Mian zi*' (Chinese: 面子), which is a virtual homonym of '*Mian ju*' (Chinese: 面具), which means 'face tool' or 'mask' (Yi 127). This concept originated in the Confucius period (800-200 BCE) and its function was to maintain harmony and the order of sociality. Confucius institutionalized the *lian/mian* concept, to become fully ethicalized and ritualized (Jia 18). After over one thousand years of historical changes, between the 1880s and the 1970s, *lian/mian* became an old-fashioned view of personhood. Eventually, the concept of 'face' evolved to the definition as explained previously, and this is what most Chinese people are familiar with.

In the history of fashion, clothing represents social worth. Radu Stern argues that fashion is the "sign of class ambition" (2), and it helps to affirm an individual's identity in capitalist societies. Even now, many people still use fashion as a tool to show their social status (such as people wearing luxury brands to demonstrate their financial position). From the books *Fashion as Communication* (2002) and *The Remaking of the Chinese Character and Identity in the 21st Century* (2001), I have deduced that the function of fashion in society closely relates to *lian/mian* in Chinese culture. Fashion and *lian/mian* both represent an individual or a group identity, they both relate to being judged by others through clothing or *lian/mian*.

As I will discuss, fashion is a "sign of class ambition" in western culture (Stern 2), and *lian/mian* has a similar function in Chinese culture. The reason is, *lian/mian* can be a reputational loss or gain resulting from an individual's behaviour. Jia (28) argued that, in the Chinese culture, loss of *lian/mian* means loss of this person's personhood. On the contrary, when one gains *lian/mian* one gains respect from other people, and this enhances a person's reputation. *Lian/mian* is valuable for people who have a high social status, and it becomes an aspirational necessity for people who want to elevate their class status.

Conceptual Fashion Designers

I will mainly analyse Hazel Clark's argument of conceptual fashion, and then, from there, discuss the emphases of the conceptual fashion designers. Thus, in my case study, I will primarily discuss the pioneering conceptual fashion designers in different cultural spheres, the East and the West, such as Rei Kawakubo, Guo Pei and Viktor & Rolf.

Japanese fashion designers are the pioneers and cross-cultural influencers of Eastern conceptual fashion. The 'big three' Rei Kawakubo, Issey Miyake and Yohji Yamamoto's fashion philosophy are all profoundly influenced by the Japanese kimono and they believe that the most important thing is the space between the fabric (English 125). I will discuss Rei Kawakubo's belief of the purpose of fashion design through her collection 'Lumps and Bumps' as my focus study, and also reflect on my own practice. Additionally, I will discuss Guo Pei's practice, as a Chinese fashion designer-driven more by Chinese cultural elements than fashion trends. This is for the purpose of considering how Chinese culture cooperates with fashion, and how to interpret my thinking on *lian/mian* through my fashion practice.

Additionally, I will discuss Martin Margiela and Alexander McQueen in the West, as they continued the Japanese pioneers' conceptual approach by criticizing the traditional fashion system, gender boundaries, and highlighting the structure of the garment. Later, Dutch conceptual fashion designers Viktor Horsting and Rolf Snoeren, creators of the brand 'Viktor & Rolf', communicated ideas with visual symbols. Viktor & Rolf blurred the edge between fashion and art, and created a new fashion form to critique the fashion industry.

Methodology

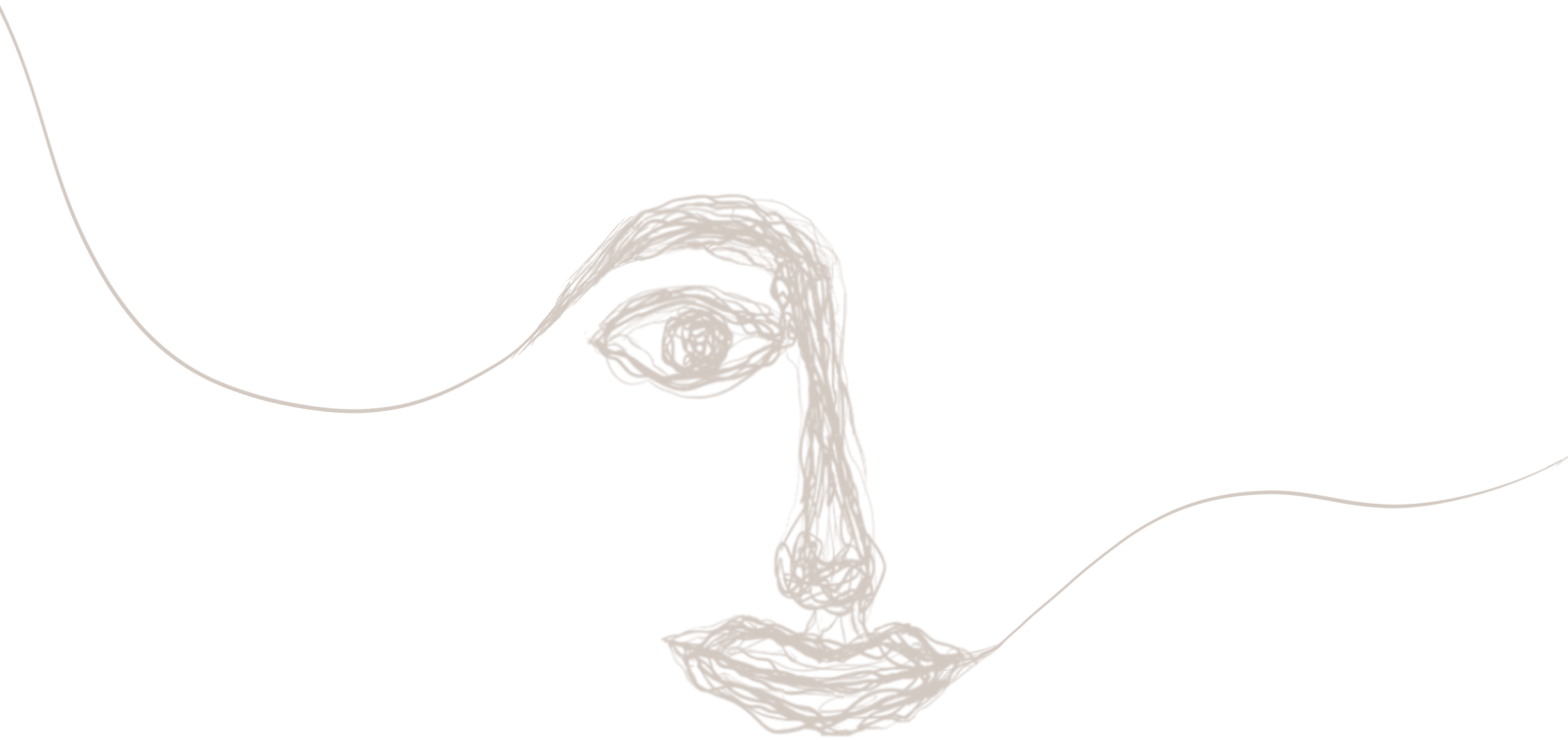
In this project, my aim was to have an equal weighting between exegesis writing and creative work. I engaged in practice-led research, using the double-diamond method of design enquiry. My design process included the use of Subtraction Cutting, drape, moulage and flat pattern-making methods to achieve my final garments. Additionally, I used elements of autobiographical design work to refer to my personal cultural experience, for additional research evidence for my design practice.

I focused on creating four garments to express my research outcome. My four garments are as follows; *identity of face*, *sentiment of face*, *perception of face* and *protection of face* to represent the key factors of losing and gaining face through my creative fashion practice. I have chosen to avoid the actual human body in my practice, yet create the foundation shape to represent the body. The body foundation shapes use negative and positive shapes to refer to the key characteristics of *lian/mian*, which is 'lost face' and 'gained face'. I will use knit fabrics for the body foundation shapes, referring to the skin, and as the flexible moving body.

I argue, *lian/mian* as a research object-subject in conceptual fashion study is not commonplace, so I believe my study will influence other researchers working in this area. In addition, the key contribution of this project will be the demonstration of the translation of the cultural idea to the visual symbol in fashion practice, using a fashion designer's self-experience and self-thinking. I hope my approach will inspire both conceptual and conventional fashion designers to explore more cultural concepts that may not have been openly discussed.

Chapter 1

Conceptual Fashion and the Chinese Concept of Face



1.1 Conceptual Art Versus Conceptual Fashion

Fashion and art have an enduring relationship, and conceptual fashion is a derivative of conceptual art. I will clarify the history and the definition of conceptual art at the beginning, in order to understand conceptual fashion profoundly.

The term 'conceptual' was first used by Ed Kienholz in the late 1950s in visual arts (Newman and Brid 3). Tony Godfrey explains in the book *Conceptual Art* (1988), that since 1967, conceptual art became a general term to be used, and during the years 1966 to 1972, it experienced its apex (Godfrey 6). For example, Lawrence Weiner in 1968 abandoned his physical artwork, and he started to use language to present his thinking. His resulting famous "Declaration of Intent" became one of the most important statements in conceptual art history, his work characterized by "a radical dislocation of the notion of sign", instead of "functioning as a general sign" (Alberro and Stimson 22).

The artist Sol LeWitt argued in a 1967 edition of the magazine *Artform* that:

In conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art (Godfrey 12).

Godfrey supported LeWitt's statement, and he defined conceptual art as constituted in ideas and meanings, rather than the form or materials, and this type of art cannot be defined by any particular medium or style (Godfrey 4). LeWitt and Godfrey explained the essential ideas of conceptual art, and also clarified the unique character of it, which is different from other types of traditional arts, such as commercial art or fine art. Because conceptual art does not use a conventional presentation form, it is vital to have active participation with viewers. Thus, conceptual art produced various types, such as videos, photographs, charts, everyday objects or even languages, like signs. Accordingly, conceptual art fuses art practice, theory and criticism, and is transformed into a meaningful and a self-reflective form through art history. In conclusion, the conceptual approach changed the methods of art, as art came to represent and signify itself rather than imitate life.

The history of conceptual fashion began in the twentieth century and does not have one standard definition. For much of fashion history, fashion and art have had an enduring relationship, yet conceptual fashion may represent this hybridity more knowingly. The line between fashion and art is blurred by conceptual fashion (Spilker et al. 20), and so conceptual fashion may also be called 'the edge of fashion' (Evans 5).

Yet, conceptual fashion also describes a "contentious relationship between art and design" (Stupples and Venis 177). The reasons are that fashion can be described as "art's other" in some cases, and fashion has always been discussed as to whether it can actually be part of art (Swale 177). However, conceptual fashion exists at the edge between fashion and art, which demonstrates fashion and art also can be compatible.

Hazel Clark clarifies the relationship between conceptual fashion and art in the book *Fashion and Art* (2012). Her opinion is that conceptual art is the ground of conceptual fashion, and as long as a work refers to critical fashion, it will immediately lead to art (67). In addition, Clark clarifies that the conceptual fashion approach needs to involve ideas, self-reflection, innovation, experimentation and the question of the issue, rather than the answer (67). Clark's manifesto for conceptual design thinking shows conceptual art and conceptual fashion share the same definition, which is driven by ideas related to issues of history, culture and identity. The only difference from conceptual art is that conceptual fashion also mirrors a confluence of art and design thinking.

Thus, researching the definitions and differences of both conceptual art and conceptual fashion helped me, as an emerging fashion designer, to gain essential knowledge and a clear direction, allowing me create more effective practical results in keeping with this artistic philosophy. Clark's conceptual fashion statement, highlighting the importance of the conceptual fashion process and emphasising modes of thinking, rather than providing answers, has been especially influential. As such, my exploration of the Chinese concept of face focused on the social phenomenon behind this concept, and my reflection on it, rather than finding a definitive answer as to "what the Chinese concept of the face is" through my practice.

1.2 The Shift From Nature to Culture

The interesting position of conceptual fashion (as it exists between fashion and art) gave me a strong motivation to research conceptual fashion, especially how conceptual fashion changes the "standard rule" of fashion in the design position, the 'standard rule' is that designed clothes have to be worn by the human body.

In most instances clothing is designed for the human body. It's design should be intimate with the body, and function to cover the body, not obliterate its lines (qtd. Stern 5). Radu Stern explains the stereotypes of fashion in history, in the book *Against Fashion* (2004). He argues that the dressmaker usually is called a "slave of fashion" (8), because clothing design should be based on the human's body rather than on the fashion designer's whimsy (5).

However, the arrival of conceptual fashion reflected a significant cultural shift, which changed the relationship between body and cloth. Conceptual fashion completes the shift from nature (body) to culture (idea), with the intimate relationship transferred to the garment and culture as the body becomes secondary or disappears (Steinberg 84). Thus, conceptual fashion provides an opportunity for fashion designers to use garments as separate or independent objects to show their thinking. In other words, conceptual fashion became a tool for fashion designers to express their emotions or articulate questions about contemporary society (Debo et al. 27). It also shows that the difference between commercial fashion and conceptual fashion is a question of wearability versus the inspiration of critical thinking. Therefore, the relationship between conceptual fashion and culture motivated me to abandon the human body and use only mannequins in my design process, which helped focus on creating artworks in my design, as well as reflect on the issue itself, rather than the body.

1.3 The Chinese Concept of Face

In 1944, Chinese anthropologist Hsien Chin Hu first explained and attempted to define the *lian/mian* concept in Chinese culture. He defined it as representing a person's reputation and associations of prestige within multiple spheres (45). Also Hu discussed the distinction between '*lian*' and '*mian*' in that *lian* represents morality, which relates to "the enactment of 'correct' behaviour", and *mian* means the society, which refers to "an outcome state of social interaction" (45). It shows *lian/mian* is a multi-part concept because it relates to an individual's or a group's identity and their social orders. After Hu (1944), many sociologists also defined *lian/mian*. Ming He and Shao Jie Zhang explain in their 2011 academic journal *Re-conceptualizing the Chinese concept of Face from a Face-Sensitive Perspective* (2011) that, aside from Hu's explanation, the definition of *lian/mian* also means "respectability and/or deference", "public self-image" and "self-evaluation and psychological position in other's mind" (He and Zhang introduction). Accordingly, like conceptual fashion, there is little consensus on a singular definition for *lian/mian*. Indeed in different historical periods the meaning of *lian/mian* also changed. In the book *The Remaking of the Chinese Character and Identity in the 21st Century* (2001), author Wenshan Jia explains that, *lian/mian* emerged during the Confucius period (800-200 BCE) (17). Its function was to maintain harmony and the order of society. After over one thousand years of historical changes, between the 1880s and the 1970s, the Chinese concept of face became an old-fashioned view of personhood (18). Until now, *lian/mian* evolved to become the general idea in Chinese understanding which closely related to Hu's definition of *lian/mian*.

As a Chinese person who has *lian/mian* cultural experience in society, and who has faced a lot of *mian zi* experiences, I think Hu's definition is very accurate. Although times are changing, and *lian/mian* will mean somewhat different things to different generations, prestige and reputation are still the key ideas. Therefore, I will use Hu's definition as a basis to develop my question and reflect on *lian/mian* through my practice.

1.4 Fashion Versus *Lian/Mian*

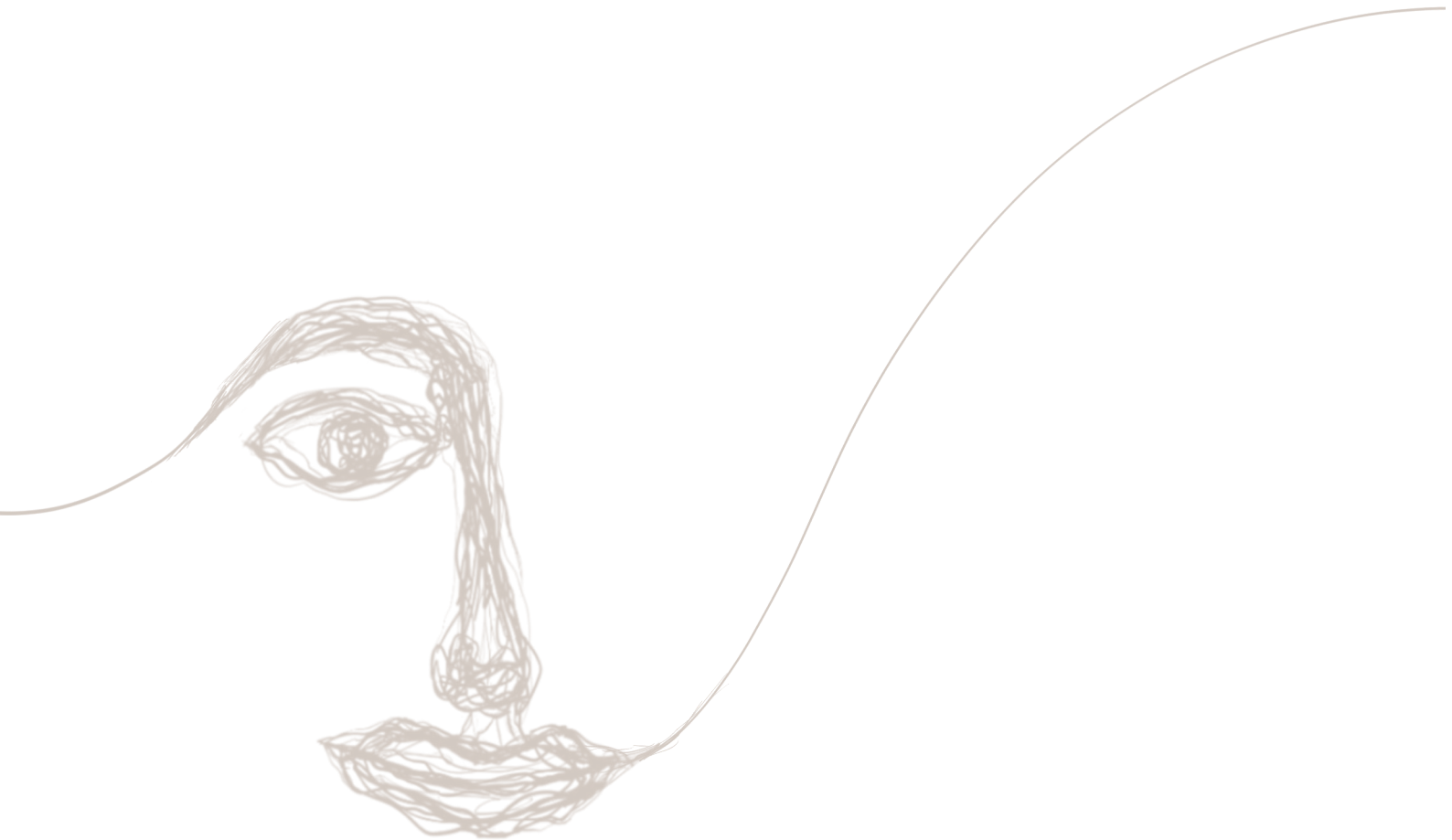
Throughout the history of fashion clothing has represented social class or worth. Stern argues in the book *Against Fashion* (2004), that fashion is the "sign of class ambition" (2), and it helps to affirm an individual's identity in capitalist societies. Fashion writer Jennifer Craik also clarifies clothes' function in stating that clothes are symbols to indicate status, social group, personality etc. (5). In addition, Vicki Karaminas and Adam Geczy explain in the book *The End of Fashion* (2018) that while clothing has gradually become a "mode of personal expression," there are exceptions, meaning that clothing's function is still a symbol of social status for some people (2). My argument is that fashion can operate as a vehicle for personal expression and have an association with class at the same time.

In this section, I argue that *lian/mian* in Chinese culture has similar functions to fashion in society, which makes the latter a perfect artistic vehicle to reflect on this social concept. This is because *lian/mian* can represent a reputational change resulting from an individual's behaviour, and fashion choice can also have the capacity to instigate a reputation change. Jia (28) argued that, in the Chinese culture, loss of face means a loss of a person's personhood. On the contrary, when one gains face one gains respect from other people and this enhances that person's reputation. Martin C. Yang also discussed the social phenomenon behind the concept of *lian/mian* (which is losing face or gaining face) in the book *A Chinese Village* (2007). I drew the conclusion from Yang's discussion that the key factors of losing face or gaining face are related to one's age, sensitivity, social value, prestige, social status and perception of equality with others (167 - 170). It shows *lian/mian* is a complicated social concept, and it is very valuable for people with an elevated social status, while also an aspirational necessity for those who aspire to upper class or middle class status.

Accordingly, the function of fashion in society closely relates to *lian/mian* in Chinese culture. Fashion and *lian/mian* both represent an individual or a group's identity, they both can be related to other people's judgment, which can occur through clothing or *lian/mian*. Therefore, using *lian/mian* as my research issue not only gave me a better understanding of Chinese culture, but also shows that fashion and *lian/mian* touch on the same core issues.

Chapter 2:

Conceptual Fashion in the East and the West



Fashion authors Geczy and Karaminas argue in their book *The End of Fashion*, that since the 1990s, fashion has become a "contemporary culture phenomenon", with its signifiers of gender, ethnicity, social class and generation permeating into people's daily life (158). Fashion is not just a sign of social status anymore, it has become a dominant form to express variations in personal identity (Geczy and Karaminas 2). At the same time, the clothed body's performance emerged to become the central tenet of the fashion runway in the early 2000s (Bugg 12). Clark argues that the role of successful conceptual fashion is to transmit the designers' ideas, innovation, experimentation, and also challenge the viewers and wearers (Clark 74). Fashion designers use their work to communicate with their audiences, rather than speak about their ideas, which makes successful communication more challenging. Clark also discusses the benefit of using different spaces for designers to show their work, as it helps the work to "reflect on itself, and on people, bodies, identities, ethics, aesthetics, and notions of beauty"(74). Accordingly, conceptual fashion designers display their works at galleries, and other non-traditional and emergent fashion spaces. Especially for conceptual fashion designers, communicating the design idea through the assistance of space is fundamental.

Therefore, the value of discussing Clark's conceptual fashion statements in relation to this project is the way in which the idea is more prominent than the visual or the aesthetic in the conceptual fashion system. The form of presenting work is also a crucial consideration for the conceptual fashion designers. In this project, I am expressing the notion of *lian/mian* in my conceptual fashion practice. Clark's statement above is reflected in my own practice where the conceptual fashion designer draws on cultural background and concepts shifting the focus to the method of conceptual expression rather than the function and aesthetic of the final creative outcome.

2.1 Eastern Conceptual Fashion

Japanese fashion designers are the pioneers and cross-cultural influencers of Eastern conceptual fashion, introducing a unique street style infused with Japanese culture (English 125). The beauty of their works lies in simplicity and naturalness, it is less affected by fashion trends, and more created based on an individual stylistic philosophy. Issey Miyake, Rei Kawakubo and Yohji Yamamoto's works support Clark's definition of conceptual fashion, which is that the culture, the concept and the experimental can be integrated into fashion design.

In the 1980s, the Japanese fashion designers Rei Kawakubo of Comme des Garçons, Issey Miyake and Yohji Yamamoto started to introduce their distinctive fashion philosophy into the Western fashion market (Clark 68). Kaye Durland Spilkler (16) argued that these three Japanese fashion designers used a different vision of dressing the body, to challenge the old standards of construction and fitting from Western mainstream fashion, leading to the biggest fashion market, Paris, falling due to an identity crisis.

They challenged the relationship between the garment and body and created a new aesthetic to cover the outline of the body, rather than following the Western fashion aesthetic of emphasising contours of the body. These three Japanese fashion designers work within a postmodernist visual art framework, and they developed the traditional Japanese clothing characteristics, such as draping and wrapping, to create new technologies and methodologies in textile and fashion design (English 125). This culture-based fashion philosophy influenced my creative practice and inspired the fusion of my Chinese culture and personal creative practice, to build my own design philosophy.

2.2 Rei Kawakubo and Her 'Actual' Concept

Rei Kawakubo is a conceptual fashion designer who focuses on the exploration and communication of ideas rather than garment aesthetics. Kawakubo, insists that the kimono influenced her design philosophy profoundly, and she believed that the most important thing is the space between the fabric (English 127). This design philosophy starting from the kimono garment, demonstrates the importance of this cultural blend in conceptual fashion, inspiring my own reflection on my Chinese culture and its impact on my creative practice.

In addition, Kawakubo believes that, "fashion design is not about revealing or accentuating the shape of a woman's body, its purpose is to allow a person to be what they are" (qtd. in Mackie 52). Her beliefs of the purpose of fashion design also resonate with the purpose of self-reflection of *lian/mian* in my practice, as we both promote feelings of self-worth by reflection on an issue, in her case gender norms. Based on this, she created the most famous collection 'Lumps and Bumps' in her 1997 spring/summer collection, which abundantly expresses this idea (Fig.1).



Figure 1: Kishin Shinoyama, *Six Magazine*, 1997, photograph, *AnOther*, <https://www.anothermag.com/fashion-beauty/8174/lumps-and-bumps-at-comme-des-garcons-s-s97>

Bonnie English analysed this collection in the book *Japanese fashion designer* (2011), she argued that this collection critiques the "notion of the perfect female shape" (52). Kawakubo distorts the shape of the female body, by padding the parts of the body people typically care about, such as the hips, shoulders and back. Bonnie English also argues that the distortion in the collection transformed the "natural" to the "actual", and by following Kawakubo's philosophy, "the body becomes dress becomes body" (Mackie 53). Kawakubo's works demonstrate her self-critique and societal self-reflection, which is the primary definition of conceptual fashion practice and which resonates with my own work.

Furthermore, Rei Kawakubo expanded Lumps and Bumps (Fig. 2) into performance art in a collaboration with the choreographer Merce Cunningham in 1997 (*Vestoj*). The dancers wore garments from the collection and danced and jumped freely on the empty stage, which breaks the rule that traditional dance should be elegant and harmonious. The collaboration between fashion and performance art gives the audiences more flexibility to look at and understand the work.



Figure 2: Get a first look at the exhibition exploring the collaboration between legendary choreographer Merce Cunningham and Japanese fashion designer Rei Kawakubo, founder of Comme des Garçons. 4 Oct. 2012, photograph, Medtronic Gallery, <https://walkerart.org/calendar/2012/dance-works-iii-exhibition-opening>

2.3 Anti - Aesthetic

Fashion writer Bonnie English, argues that Kawakubo and Yamamoto practises are anti-aesthetic, which is characterized by "torn, ripped and ragged fabric, and uneven and unstitched hemlines - a disarray that was quite subversively calculated" (126). In fact, the characteristics of anti-aesthetic are closely related to the Japanese Harajuku street culture which involves ripped clothes, T-shirts with punk bands' advertisements and studded accessories (Fig. 3). This street fashion style shares its own DIY philosophy, and it is not confused by mainstream trends from designers (English 139). Therefore, the works of anti-aestheticism based on the Japanese street culture from these two Japanese designers, build a stark contrast to haute couture in modern Western fashion.



Figure 3: Marc Bain, *Japan's wild, creative Harajuku street style is dead. Long live Uniqlo*, 23 Feb. 2017, photograph, QUARTZ, <https://qz.com/909573/japans-wild-creative-harajuku-street-style-is-dead-long-live-uniqlo/>

English (127) argues that the new form of anti-fashion, which is the anti-aesthetic created under the new culture by Kawakubo and Yamamoto, mocks the exclusivity of the Western modernist fashions. This is because they dominated the aesthetic market in the early 1980s. Accordingly, the anti-aesthetic style from Kawakubo and Yamamoto exemplifies a fusion of culture and conceptual fashion, and is a demonstration of protest against mainstream fashion. Even though, my research project does not involve a critique of Western fashion's exclusivity, the 'anti-aesthetic' helped me to understand how a specific culture develops into a characteristic fashion philosophy, such as, how should I develop the character of *lian/mian* into my fashion practice as my design element.

2.4 Guo Pei's "Made in China"

Chinese designer Guo Pei rose to stardom when pop singer Rihanna wore her dress 'Yellow Queen' to the 2015 Met Ball (Fu 1). Her works, unlike other haute couture designers, are more driven by Chinese cultural elements than fashion trends. Her creative practice demonstrates how Chinese culture can integrate with fashion, and her works led me to develop my interpretation and thinking on *lian/mian* through conceptual practice (Fig. 4). Guo Pei was born in Beijing, a city of royal history, which affected her interest in Chinese cultural history and became her inspiration to create her unique Chinese fashion. Thereafter, she married the Chinese cultural history with this priceless personal experience to create imaginative garments (Wallace 7).



Figure 4: Amanda Greene, "I think this piece is iconic," says Guo of the gown inspired by Chinese ceramics. She used broken fragments of blue and white porcelain to make the headpiece. 29 Sep. 2017. photograph. *The New York Times Style Magazine*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/29/t-magazine/fashion/guo-pei-scad-show.html>

Guo Pei mainly uses high quality satin and lace fabrics, with complex beading and embroidery to express her concept of China. She also uses ancient Chinese symbols such as the lotus flower, which signifies the pure mind and spirit; clouds and thunder to represent the rain and abundance; the dragon representing royal status and power, which is also a connection to her childhood memories in Beijing (Yaeger 9). Her expression of Chinese culture in her fashion practice redefines the old stereotype of "Made In China", which indicated low-quality and factory-made products, as she used her works to express that "Made in China" should also indicate high-quality design (Yaeger 9). Even though my practice focus is the social phenomenon of *lian/mian* through conceptual fashion, this differs from Guo Pei's practice; she does not call herself a conceptual fashion designer. However, exploring her design philosophy provides insight to fashion integrated with Chinese culture.

2.5 Western Conceptual Fashion

Following the Eastern avant-garde conceptual fashion designer Rei Kawakubo, Issey Miyake and Yohji Yamamoto started their exploration of conceptual approach in the 1980s. A group of Western designers also started their conceptual practice at the same time. Martin Margiela in the 1980s, part of the *Antwerp Six* in Belgium, has had his work characterised as a "parading of anti-fashion" (Spilker 17). Hazel Clark explains that Martin Margiela's works not only underline the craft skills and express an understanding of garment and the body, but also disturb fashion norms by exposing the seams and outgrowing the human form's garments (69). His works fuse Eastern and Western fashion, and also have a similar design emphasis as the pioneering Japanese fashion designers, which criticize the traditional fashion system, gender boundaries, and highlight the structure of the garment (Walker and Dell 48-59).

The British fashion label Alexander McQueen also continued the Japanese pioneers' conceptual approach by exploring various issues through runway performance. Alexander McQueen primarily questions and critiques the fashion industry, but also other issues relating to gender, class, history and nationality (Gleason 7-18). For instance in Alexander McQueen's summer collection in 1999, a lone model on the stage is wearing a white dress and as she is turning, black and yellow graffiti is added to the garment using industrial painting equipment. McQueen used this surprising and thrilling performance to express the idea of nature versus the machine, fear, and sensation. Fashion researcher Jessica Bugg (12) explains that in this runway performance, Alexander McQueen conveyed the ideas behind the collection through fantastic narratives and clear characters. He created a drama around the collection. Analysing Martin Margiela and Alexander McQueen's practice helps me to clarify the relationship between Western and Eastern conceptual fashion, and the cultural influences in the conceptual fashion.

2.6 Viktor & Rolf's Critical Fashion

Dutch conceptual fashion designers Viktor Horsting and Rolf Snoeren, creators of the brand 'Viktor & Rolf', communicate ideas with visual symbols. In their work, the edge between art and fashion is blurred, and fashion becomes a form of "critical inquiry steeped in irony" (Molly 52). For example, in their autumn/winter 1996-1997 collection, instead of making clothes, they distributed 'Viktor & Rolf on strike' posters in Paris streets (Fig. 5). Caroline Evans argues that Viktor & Rolf's collection critiques the fashion industry, and underlines the "consumption at the expense of production" (83). This method of critiquing and questioning the fashion industry has informed my critical thinking of *lian/mian* and how to integrate this into my practice.



Figure 5:Viktor & Rolf,Viktor & Rolf on strike, 1996 - 1997, Centraal Museum, 31461

Furthermore, Viktor & Rolf's runway performances are central to their conceptual fashion practice. Garments, however, are secondary. In this way, they used their design concept to criticize various aspects of the fashion system. For example, Viktor & Rolf's 'Black Hole' collection in 2001 breaks the rules of the traditional catwalk (Fig. 5). The models in the Black hole collection's runway, wore black make-up faces and all-black outfits, downplaying spectacle. Viktor Horsting and Rolf Snoeren, who appear at the end of the catwalk show, are dressed the same. Bonnie English argues that, in Black Hole, they highlighted the relationship between designer and clothing and "ironically challenged" the definition of the garment, which is associated always with the image of the designer (157). English's discussion of Viktor & Rolf further supports the argument that their physical garment is the tool to express their ideas, rather than a tool to explore beauty or the fashion trade. Accordingly, Viktor & Rolf's visual creations blurred the boundaries between visual and conceptual ideas. Viktor & Rolf's practice gave me a new method of conceptual thinking, which is to translate ideas into symbols, and then weave them into the designs that lead to self-reflection and the rejection of mainstream fashion.



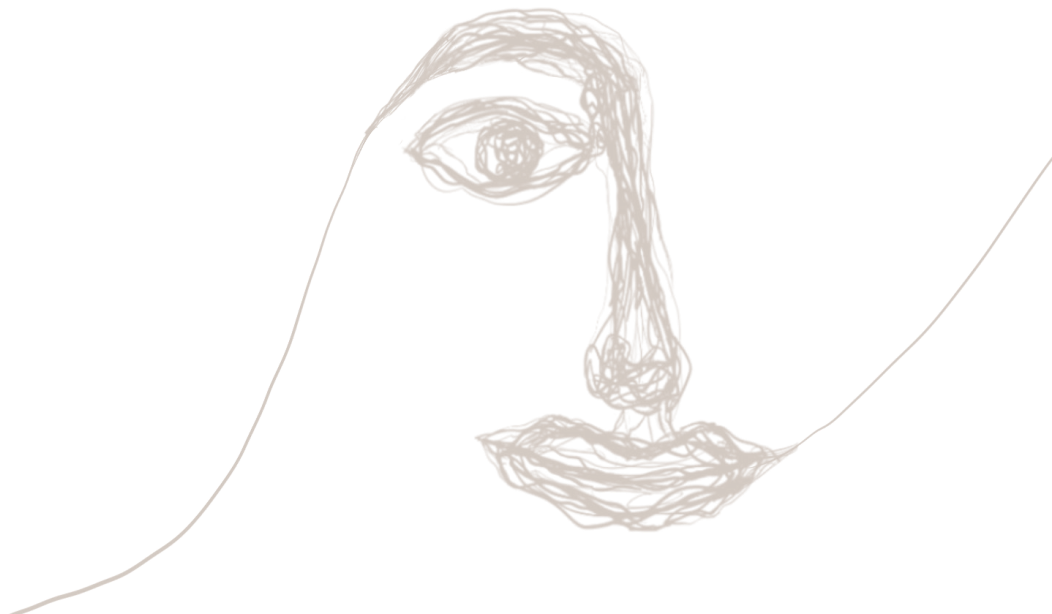
Figure 5: Viktor & Rolf, *Black hole* (15:13), 2001. <http://www.viktor-rolf.com/fashion-artists/fashion-archive/f2001rtw/>

2.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I analysed conceptual fashion designers in different cultural spheres, the East and the West, and how they express their critical thinking in their practice. Based on my research, I suggest that the key characteristic of Eastern fashion designers is that they are strongly influenced by their culture, and they build their design philosophy on their cultural background. However Western designers, compared to Eastern conceptual fashion designers, tend to be more focused on idea-driven practices. Cultural influence does not disappear from their practice, but they develop cultural ideas into design issues, rather than using culture as the key element in their design. The designers discussed in this chapter not only question and critically analyze the fashion system, but also society itself.

Chapter 3:

Method and Creative processes



3.1 Research Approach

During my practice-led research, using the double-diamond design method I have analysed the meaning and the social phenomenon of *lian/mian* through conceptual fashion. The Double Diamond design method was created by the United Kingdom Design Council and involves the process of exploring an issue divergently and then converging the thinking (*Design Council*). The different stages are discovery, definition, development and delivery (Fig. 7).

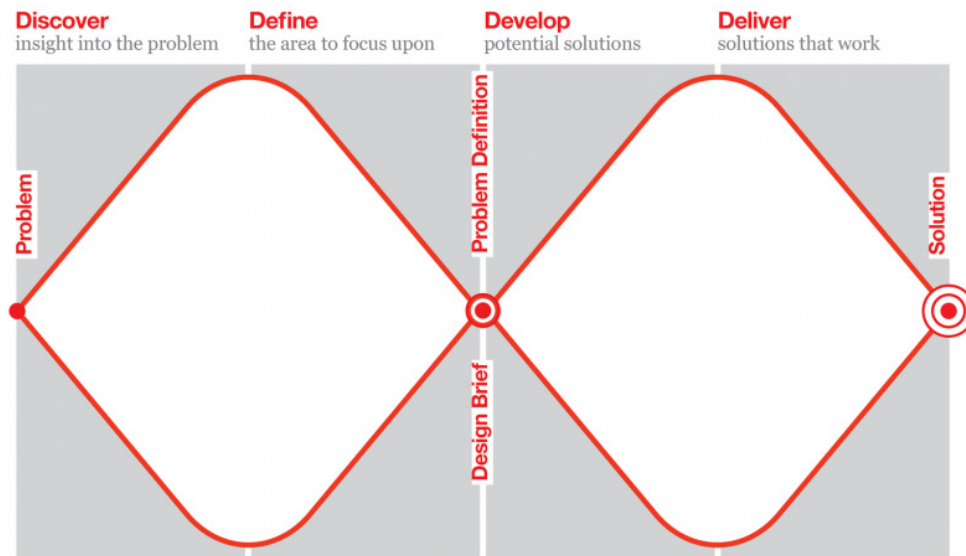


Figure 7: Maciej Lipiec, *Beyond the Double Diamond: thinking about a better design process model*, 22 March 2019, digital diagram. UX Collective, <https://uxdesign.cc/beyond-the-double-diamond-thinking-about-a-better-design-process-model-de4fdb902cf>

Through this investigation I was able to discover the meaning behind lost face and gained face in some depth, using my own cultural experience, and research, to understand this concept profoundly. Furthermore, I explored different issues of *lian/mian* with conceptual design thinking, such as psychological issues, social issues, and capitalism. After my initial exploration, I focussed on the social phenomenon of *lian/mian* for my design practice as this opened wider issues, such as psychological well being. During my design phases, I created multiple prototypes to explore my thinking. However, the design journey was not a linear process, and the underlying social issues became more evident. The design outcomes and final prototypes went through multiple reviews and refinements, and this design method helped me to more effectively achieve my aim, encouraging a more innovative and optimistic outcome.

In addition, I aimed to create the prototyping process alongside Subtraction Cutting, drape, moulage and flat pattern making to achieve my final outcome. These techniques assisted my exploration of the three-dimensional aspects, and I made further iterations through two-dimensional drawings. In order to achieve my research aim, the major issues I focused on in my creative practice are the influence of lost face and gained face in society. Additionally, I used elements of autobiographical design work to refer to my personal cultural experience through my creative practice. Autobiographical design is "intensive self-usage as part of design research" (Neustaedter and Sengers 29). *Lian/mian* as a research object-subject in conceptual fashion study is not commonplace, so I believe my study will influence other researchers working in this area. In addition, the key contribution of this project will be the demonstration of the translation from the cultural idea to the visual symbol in fashion practice, using a fashion designer's self-experience and self-thinking.

3.2 The 'Mask'

Originally, *lian/mian* was a virtual homonym of *mian ju*, which means "face tool" or "mask" (Yi 157). Jia (17) gave a further exposition based on Yi's discussion. In Chinese history, *mian ju* was a medium to communicate between the tribal leader and spirits or gods, and Jia suggests that a long time ago *mian ju* already is a symbol of power and status, which is the same as *mian zi* in current times. Furthermore, in different primitive tribal societies, the *mian ju* represented the tribal member's identity; if a tribal member lost the *mian ju*, they might be seen as a spy or traitor, and might face the risk of being killed. Therefore, the loss of *mian ju* led to the feeling of fear in primitive tribal society, and evolved into the later idea that loss of *mian zi* will lead to the feeling of shame in society (18).

My understanding and interpretation of *mian ju* is that, in the Chinese language, it refers in particular to the full face mask, which includes most of the eyes, nose and mouth, rather than the soft cloth half-face mask people use for protecting their face. Therefore, *mian ju* is an extra layer on top of the face, and *mian ju* also can be considered as a 'choosable face'. Accordingly, *mian ju* also refers to one's gained face in that one is able to choose an extra identity. Thus, the indivisible relationship between *mian ju* and *mian zi* led me to consider the *mian ju* as my major design element, and to experiment with the face mask in my creative practice.

In order to outline that which is intrinsic to conceptual fashion, I innovated the method to create the fabric face mask. The innovation of this method helped me to understand the importance of being experimental in conceptual fashion's journey. I started with a full-face mask to test the gain face idea by stretching and setting knit fabric over the mask to represent the texture of the skin, and define the shape of the 'human face' (Fig. 8).



Figure 8: *Fabric face mask prototype one*, personal photograph by author, 20 April 2020.



Figure 9: *Fabric face mask prototype with textures*, personal photograph by author, 30 April 2020.

I then explored different face shapes to represent *lian/mian*. As this has become a global concept, rather than exclusively Chinese or Asian, I therefore created the face mask form to demonstrate the international expansion of the idea.

In the beginning, I used air dried clay to create a 35 cm high half-face shape as the face mask base, based on a European face shape. (Fig.10).



Figure 10: *Fabric face mask base in the European face shape*, personal photograph by author, 25 October 2020.

Following this, I created the face mask samples with a range of fabrics to achieve the desired outcome (Fig. 11).



Figure 11: *Fabric face mask final prototype with the European face shape*, personal photograph by author, 4 November 2020.

Using gold coloured and metallic fabrics better represented the concept of gaining face. As discussed, *lian/mian* and fashion are both “signs of class ambition” (Stern 2), therefore gained face may correspond to gained fortunes and subsequently improved reputation, happiness and other forms of value. As such, I used the colour gold to express the value of the concept as gold has a long historical association with luxury and class privilege.

3.3 The 'Body'

In my creative practice, I expressed my ideas related to the body through the use of knit fabrics. Tulle, mesh and knit fabrics refer to the colour tones and textures of human skin, mimicking flexibility like the moving body. Additionally, the fabrics represent a porous layer of skin. Meanwhile, I used fabrics of different weights to allude to the skin as the metaphor of psychological states, such as ‘thin face-skin’ (Chinese: 薄脸皮 Pin Yin: *Bao Lian Pi*), which usually represents weak psychological endurance in the Chinese language. On the contrary, Chinese people call someone who has stronger psychological endurance, ‘thick face-skin’ (Chinese: 厚脸皮 Pin Yin: *Hou Lian Pi*), which generally holds a negative connotation.

In addition, for the purpose of implying the place of origin of *lian/mian*, which is specifically Chinese, I used a slightly more yellow skin tone as the main colour palette. Referencing skin colour and texture through the fabrics helped represent the human body. I later reduced the visibility of the actual human body in my creative practice, to blur the wearer identity and thus the viewers' attention. This helped me to focus on communicating my message through the garments. Furthermore, *lian/mian* is a Chinese concept, but its influence is international, hence avoiding a limited cultural appeal through my creative practice was important. However, *lian/mian* is related to the humanities, so I created the foundation shape as the base to represent the body.

3.4 Foundation Shapes

As discussed in Chapter 1, *lian/mian* can be lost and gained, and the key factors of losing face or gaining face are related to one's age, sensitivity, social value, prestige, social status and perception of equality with others (Yang 167-170). According to the autobiographical design method, I used my own social experience in a Chinese cultural setting. Lost face typically arouses negative feelings in the person, as, in most situations, people will feel embarrassed or anxious when they lose face. On the contrary, gained face can give one positive feelings, such as honour, pride and pleasure. In addition, lost face and gained face are psychological effects, rather than physical. I also used the body as a foundation shape to express the ideas in a manner that was not restricted by bodily form, inspiring the negative spaces and positive shapes as my foundation shapes, the ensuing Subtraction Cutting pattern-making method. Later I augmented this method with padding to emphasise the key characteristics of *lian/mian* on the body.

3.4.1 Negative Space

Subtraction Cutting is a pattern-making method, originally devised by fashion designer and academic, Julian Roberts. His method uses negative spaces to remove the fabric to create the final garment silhouette (Fig. 12). The reason for using Subtraction Cutting to represent the negative space is that this method takes fabric out of the two-dimensional space, leading to 'losing space' on the garments, reflecting 'losing face'. Roberts explained that this method uses the removal of fabric to control the draping of the fabric and also give more space around the body at the same time, hence the experimental garments have unpredictable outcomes (*The Cutting Class*). This resonates with *lian/mian*, and relates to one's behaviour and has an unpredictable result. It might cause one to lose face or gain face.

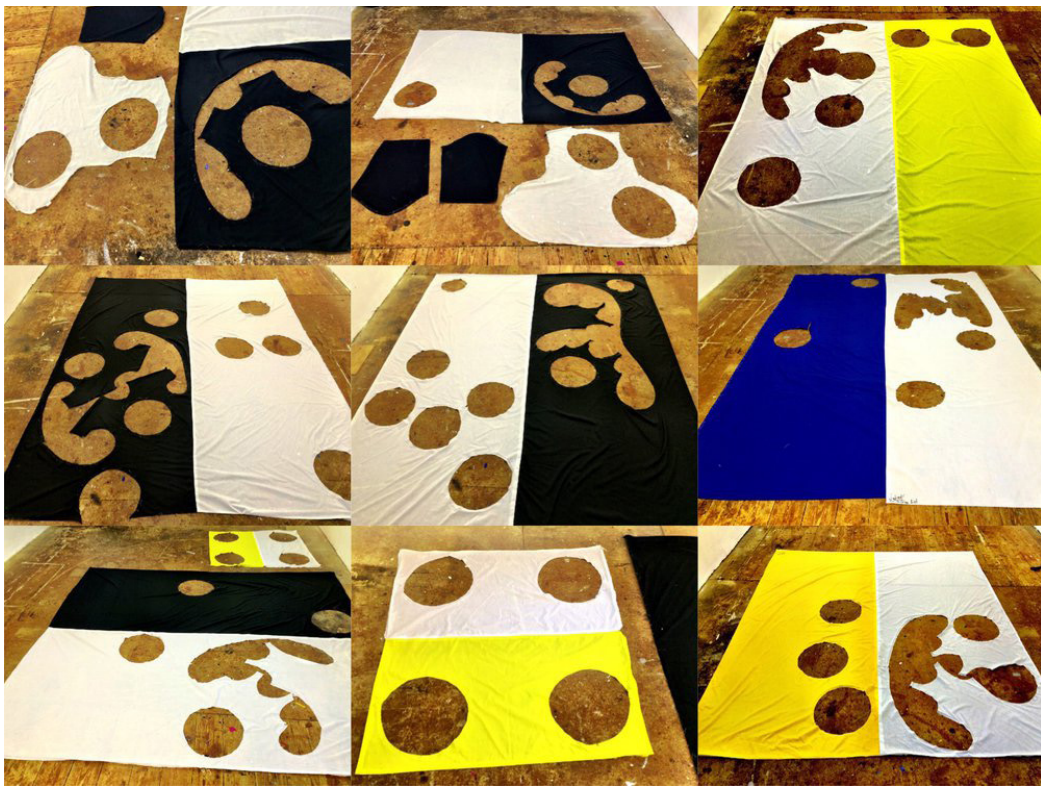


Figure 12: Julian Roberts, *Flattened Subtraction Cutting prototypes at Julian's cutting workshop in Brighton, 2015*, photograph, Royal College of Art, <https://www.rca.ac.uk/more/staff/julian-roberts/>

Subtraction Cutting requires two pieces of fabric of the same size with three edges sewn together, and one edge open. On one side of the fabric, the front and back shoulder lines, necklines and connected armholes need to be removed, but this can have multiple cut-out circles to create the volume in the garment. During my iterative design process, I produced multiple half-scale garments and toiles (Fig. 13) to experiment with placement of the negative spaces through variations to the method of Subtraction Cutting by adding volume and additional accessory pieces (Fig. 14).



Figure 13: Part of the *Subtraction Cutting* prototypes, personal photograph by author, 30 November 2020.

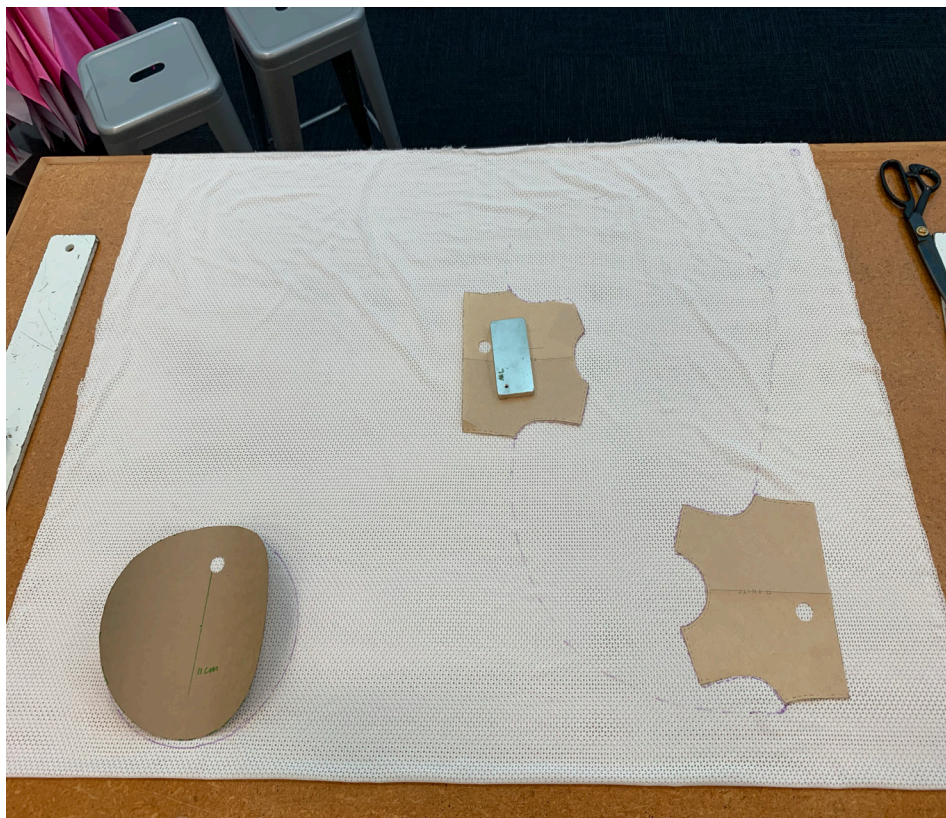


Figure 14: Example of *Subtraction Cutting* process, personal photograph by author, 25 November 2020.



Figure 15: *Subtraction Cutting prototypes with fabric Face One*, front view, personal photograph by author, 30 November 2020.



Figure 16: *Subtraction Cutting prototypes with fabric Face one*, side view, personal photograph by author, 30 November 2020.



Figure 17: *Subtraction Cutting prototypes with fabric Face Two*, personal photograph by author, 30 November 2020.

3.4.2 Positive Shape

As discussed in Chapter two, Rei Kawakubo's Lumps and Bumps collection used padding on the bodies to 'ruin' the original body shape, to mirror the social issues around body shape and size. Kawakubo's practice inspired the investigation of the relationship between face and body. The following toiles explore the face emanating from the body (Fig. 18) using padding, hand sewing, layering and the addition of texture. The half-face shape created by padding and fabrics presents the identity 'face' from the body, whereas the thread on top represents the complexities with thoughts and feelings relating to *lian/main*. The exploration of padding face shapes on the 'body' led me to create positive shapes in my creative practice.



Figure 18: *Positive shape - padded face final prototype*, personal photograph by author, 15 August 2020.



Figure 19: *Positive shape - padded face toile one*, personal photograph by author, 6 June 2020.



Figure 20: *Positive shape - padded face toile two*, personal photograph by author, 20 June 2020.

3.5 Design Practice

Using the double diamond design method, I explored the in-depth definition of conceptual fashion, as well as reflected on the social issue of *lian/mian* with conceptual design thinking. Thus, for the last step of the double diamond design method, I used my creative practice to deliver the final outcome with my experimental process (Fig. 21). Because the design methods used have unpredictable outcomes, such as Subtraction Cutting, working on the three-dimensional form helped control the outcome in part. Draping and flat pattern making methods were not the main focus in my design process but the journey between two and three dimensional design methods determined my final outcome.

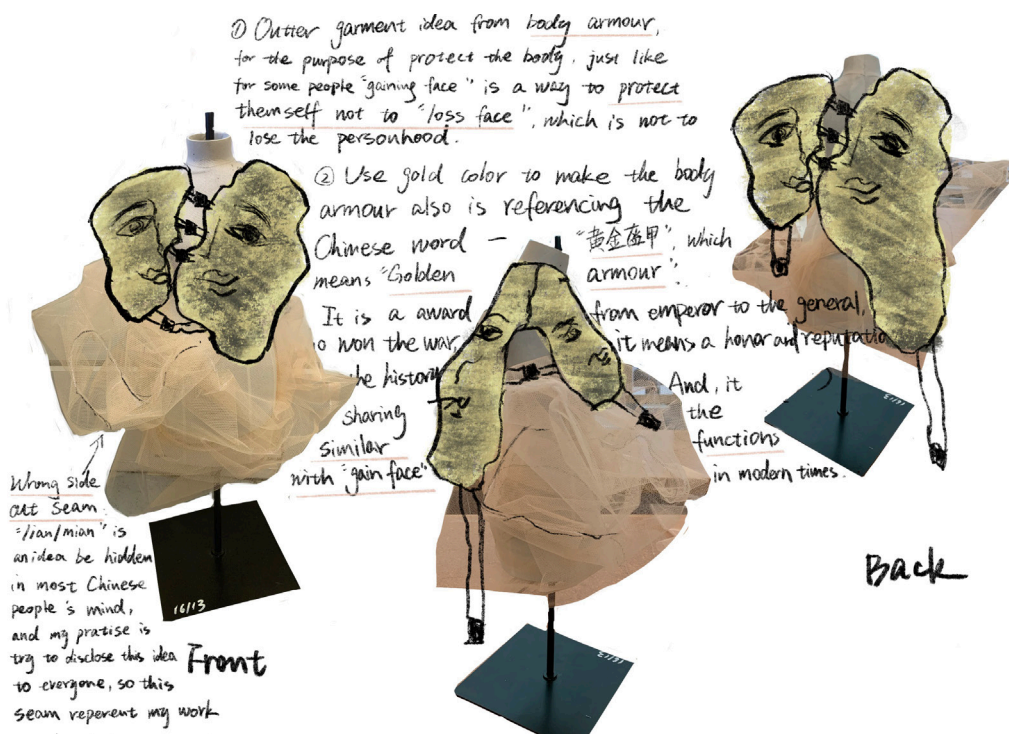


Figure 21: Example of design development from subtraction cutting prototype, personal drawing by author, 20 August 2020.

3.6 Creative Research Outcomes

In order to achieve my aim, which is to use conceptual fashion to reflect on the Chinese concept of face in a global society, I created four garments which present the *Identity of Face*, *Sentiment of Face*, *Perception of Face* and *Protection of Face* (Fig.22 to 24). The garments are symbolic as the number 'four' suggests stability and order in semiotics (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 402). For example, the cross (four points), the square shape, four seasons and four directions. Meanwhile, as I discussed in Chapter 1, Confucius originally created *lian/mian* to stabilize and maintain the social orders, which resonated with the meaning of the number four. Thus, I am aiming to use these four garments to offer my viewers new insight into this Chinese cultural concept *lian/mian* to encourage self-reflection.



Figure 22: *Identity of Face*, *Sentiment of Face*, *Perception of Face*, and *Protection of Face*, front view, personal photograph by author, 16 April 2021.



Figure 23: *Identity of Face, Sentiment of Face, Perception of Face, and Protection of Face, back view*, personal photograph by author, 16 April 2021.



Figure 24: *Identity of Face, Sentiment of Face, Perception of Face, and Protection of Face, details*, personal photograph by author, 16 April 2021.

I used adjustable systems to attach the fabric face masks to the garment, through the use of silver D rings and skin tone webbings. This helps *lian/mian* be understood as an additional concept to one's identity, enabling changeable and removable aspects to the person. The use of silver offers the viewer a chance to see their face and reflect upon themselves. In addition, I disclose *lian/mian* through these four garments by using one exposed seam on each outfit, to emphasise how hidden *lian/mian* has been in most Chinese people's minds.

Outfit 1 - Identity of Face

In order to convey the general meaning of *lian/mian* to the viewers, outfit one portrays the identity of face (Fig. 25 to 32). The padded face that comes out from the body to represent the identity face, which may be a person's traits, belief and personality. Natural brown coloured thread highlights the face shapes to express the complexity of the meaning behind *lian/mian*. Furthermore, the extension of thread on the side of the face represents the integration of *lian/mian* into a persona and how this is sometimes confused with reputation and prestige. *Lian/mian* in modern society can be understood as "public self-image, respectability and/or deference or self-evaluation and psychological position in other's mind" (He and Zhang introduction).



Figure 25: *Identity of Face*, back view, personal photograph by author, 16 April 2021.



Figure 26: *Identity of Face*, front view, personal photograph by author, 16 April 2021.



Figure 27: *Identity of Face, details one*, personal photograph by author, 16 April 2021.



Figure 28: *Identity of Face, details two*, personal photograph by author, 16 April 2021.

Fullness and volume have been introduced to the garments to augment the Subtraction Cutting method, referring to wrinkled skin. This design element points to the key factors of loss/gain face from author Martin C. Yang, which is age. In particular, middle-aged people, who already have certain social status, will need to safeguard their high social reputation and prestige (169). I used the gold fabric face masks to accessorise the body, to illustrate how *lian/mian* is related to other people's judgement, rather than a person's real identity.



Figure 29: *Identity of Face with other face masks one*, personal photograph by author, 25 April, 2021.



Figure 30: *Identity of Face with other face masks two*, personal photograph by author, 25 April, 2021.



Figure 31: *Identity of Face with other face masks three*, personal photograph by author, 25 April, 2021.



Figure 32: *Identity of Face with other face masks four*, personal photograph by author, 25 April, 2021.

Outfit 2 - *Sentiment of Face*

In this outfit, I explored the feeling of losing face (Fig. 33 to 42). I mainly referenced my own experience of *lian/mian* to create this outfit, as part of the autobiographical design method. The body part consists of three layers, with the two inner layers created by the Subtraction Cutting method, with fullness added to the waist and chest lines with gathers at the seams. These design elements express the feeling of embarrassment and losing face, the two inner layers have different starting points (waist and chest) and lengths, to exemplify the different levels of intensity this feeling has. In addition the outer dress layer has no gathers or added fullness as this outer layer refers to the shell of the human body, and the two inner layers are human feelings. Another detail to underline this concept is the two inner layers both have exposed seams to expose inner feelings. From my own experience of losing face, my strongest feeling was that I wanted to hide my face to escape the embarrassment. The multiple gold face masks express the consequences of losing face. In most instances, people will want to regain face or even gain more faces in order to find a sense of security.



Figure 33: *Sentiment of Face*, details, personal photograph by author, 16 April, 2021.



Figure 34: *Sentiment of Face*, front view, personal photograph by author, 16 April, 2021.



Figure 35: *Sentiment of Face*, side view, personal photograph by author, 16 April, 2021.



Figure 36: *Sentiment of Face, inner garment*, personal photograph by author, 16 April, 2021.



Figure 37: *Sentiment of Face with other face masks one*, personal photograph by author, 25 April, 2021.



Figure 38: *Sentiment of Face with other face masks two*, personal photograph by author, 25 April, 2021.



Figure 39: *Sentiment of Face with other face masks three*, personal photograph by author, 25 April, 2021.



Figure 40: *Sentiment of Face with other face masks four*, personal photograph by author, 25 April, 2021.



Figure 41: *Sentiment of Face with other face masks five*, personal photograph by author, 25 April, 2021.



Figure 42: *Sentiment of Face with other face masks six*, personal photograph by author, 25 April, 2021.

Outfit 3 - Perception of Face

I explored the perception of *lian/mian* which can be understood as what one person wants others to see (Fig. 43 to 48). This outfit is also similar to *Sentiment of Face*, and reflects my personal experience of losing / gaining face. When people gain face, the face is already part of the person. Therefore, when they gain reputation, prestige or any other valuable things from face, they will show this to others. The gold fabric on the front of this garment has a face moulded in which becomes part of the body. The back of the garment is explicit in the communication of an identity face sometimes being hidden while showing one's gained face. Multiple threads falling from the sleeve in this garment represent how easily a gained face may become lost in multiple other situations. For the people who have higher social status or reputation will be easier to lose their face (Young 169).



Figure 43: *Perception of Face*, front view, personal photograph by author, 16 April, 2021.



Figure 44: *Perception of Face, back view*, personal photograph by author, 16 April, 2021.



Figure 45 *Perception of Face*, side view, personal photograph by author, 16 April, 2021.



Figure 46: *Perception of Face, details*, personal photograph by author, 16 April, 2021.



Figure 47: *Perception of Face with other face mask one*, personal photograph by author, 25 April, 2021.



Figure 48: *Perception of Face with other face masks two*, personal photograph by author, 25 April, 2021.

Outfit 4 - Protection of Face

This outfit represents the gaining of face, hence retaining their personhood. In my personal experience, gaining face is a method of self-protection however, Yang's discussion of gaining and losing face indicates that it is easier for those who have gained face to lose it as they hold a higher prestige than others and so have further to fall (169). Thus, this garment conveys the complex and transient relationship between gaining face and losing face.

The outer face mask garment is referencing body armour, for the purpose of protecting the body from outside influences. The use of gold fabric references the Chinese word '*huang jin kui jia*' (Chinese: 黄金盔甲), which means 'golden armour' (Fig. 49). It is a decoration of emperor *Qianlong* in the *Qing* dynasty, the general who won the war, and it is a symbol of honour and his reputation lives on in history. Thus, it shared a similar meaning with gaining face in modern times. The inner garment integrated the layers of tulle using the Subtraction Cutting method, with triple the volume. The transparency of this garment, is a visual depiction of losing face (Fig. 50 to 58).



Figure 49: Dragon's Armory, *QING DYNASTY QIANLONG EMPEROR'S ARMOR* 乾隆大帝甲, 10 April 2018, photograph, Dragon's Armory, <http://dragonsarmory.blogspot.com/2018/04/qing-qianlong-emperors-armor.html>



Figure 50: *Protection of Face, front*, personal photograph by author, 16 April, 2021.



Figure 51: *Protection of Face, details*, personal photograph by author, 16 April, 2021.



Figure 52: *Protection of Face, inner garments*, personal photograph by author, 16 April, 2021.



Figure 53: *Protection of Face, back*, personal photograph by author, 16 April, 2021.



Figure 54: *Protection of Face with other face masks one*, personal photograph by author, 25 April, 2021.



Figure 55: *Protection of Face with other face masks two*, personal photograph by author, 25 April, 2021.



Figure 56: *Protection of Face with other face masks three*, personal photograph by author, 25 April, 2021.

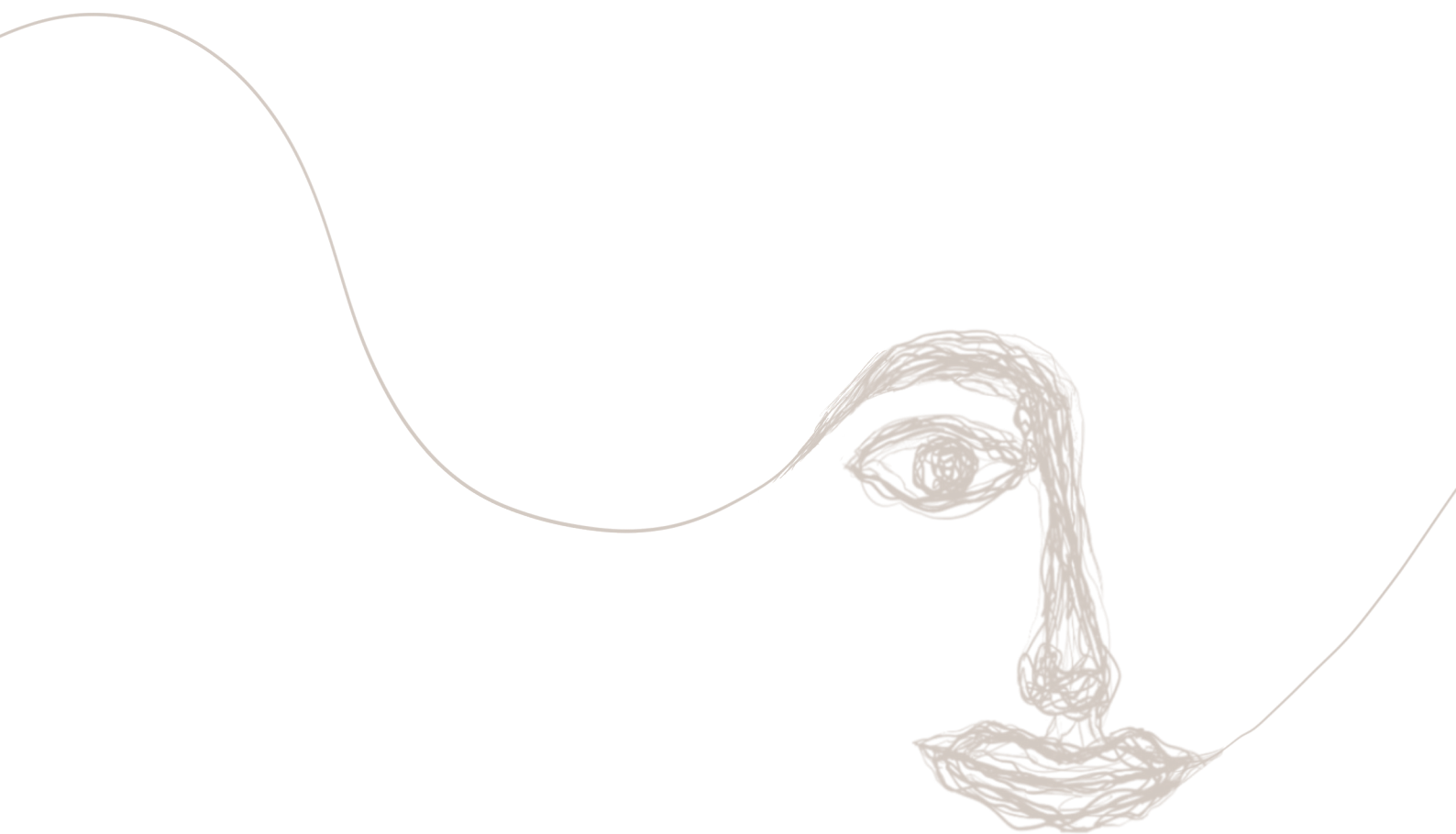


Figure 57: *Protection of Face with other face masks four*, personal photograph by author, 25 April, 2021.



Figure 58: *Protection of Face with other face masks five*, personal photograph by author, 25 April, 2021.

Conclusion



In this project, I expanded my exploration of the Chinese concept of face *lian/mian* through conceptual fashion through research and my creative practice. I began by exploring the relationship between conceptual fashion and conceptual art. The former is a derivative of conceptual art, and the latter is the ground of conceptual fashion. Conceptual fashion ultimately blurs the line between fashion and art, so it also is understood as the 'edge of fashion' (Evans 5). The manifesto for conceptual design thinking, conceptual art and conceptual fashion share the same definition, and are all driven by ideas, relating to issues of history, culture and identity. Meanwhile, the experimental process of self-reflection and innovation are characteristic of conceptual thinking. A defining difference between conceptual art and conceptual fashion is that fashion also includes design thinking (Swale 181). A combination of both art and fashion design thinking led my creative practice, alongside my research and reflection of the social phenomenon of *lian/mian*.

Additionally, conceptual fashion created a new rule of fashion, transferring culture knowledge into the garments, meaning fashion designers were no longer "the slave of fashion" (Stern 8). This intimate relationship between culture and garments rendered the body less visible. Also conceptual fashion is driven by ideas thus the aesthetic outcome should not be the main focus of conceptual fashion. Thus conceptual fashion gave me the chance not only to shift the focus from the bodily form to my design idea, but also to communicate my design philosophy to the audience without any bodily interference. In my creative practice, I removed the human body in favour of mannequins to express the critique of *lian/mian*.

Regarding my focus on the social phenomenon of *lian/mian*, I argue that this concept has not been formally defined, due to it being a multi-part phenomenon. The understanding of *lian/mian* relates to an individual or a group identity and the inherent social orders. Following Chinese societal change the meaning of *lian/mian* became further varied, and included public self-image, self-evaluation and respectability. However, in this research and with my personal cultural experiences, *lian/mian* is understood as a main representation of prestige and reputation in multiple spheres. Additionally I argue that fashion and *lian/mian* have similar functions in society, in that they both associate with class, status and capitalism. Fashion has a variety of functions, for some people it becomes a "sign of class ambition" (Stern 2), and clothes can function as showing one's status, personality and social orders. Meanwhile *lian/mian* can be affected by one's behaviour, and it can be lost and gained, which will be related to one's personhood and reputation. Both *lian/mian* and fashion have the capacity to instigate a reputational change by personal behaviour. Therefore, the core issues shared by fashion and *lian/mian* is central to my focus in this creative practice and research.

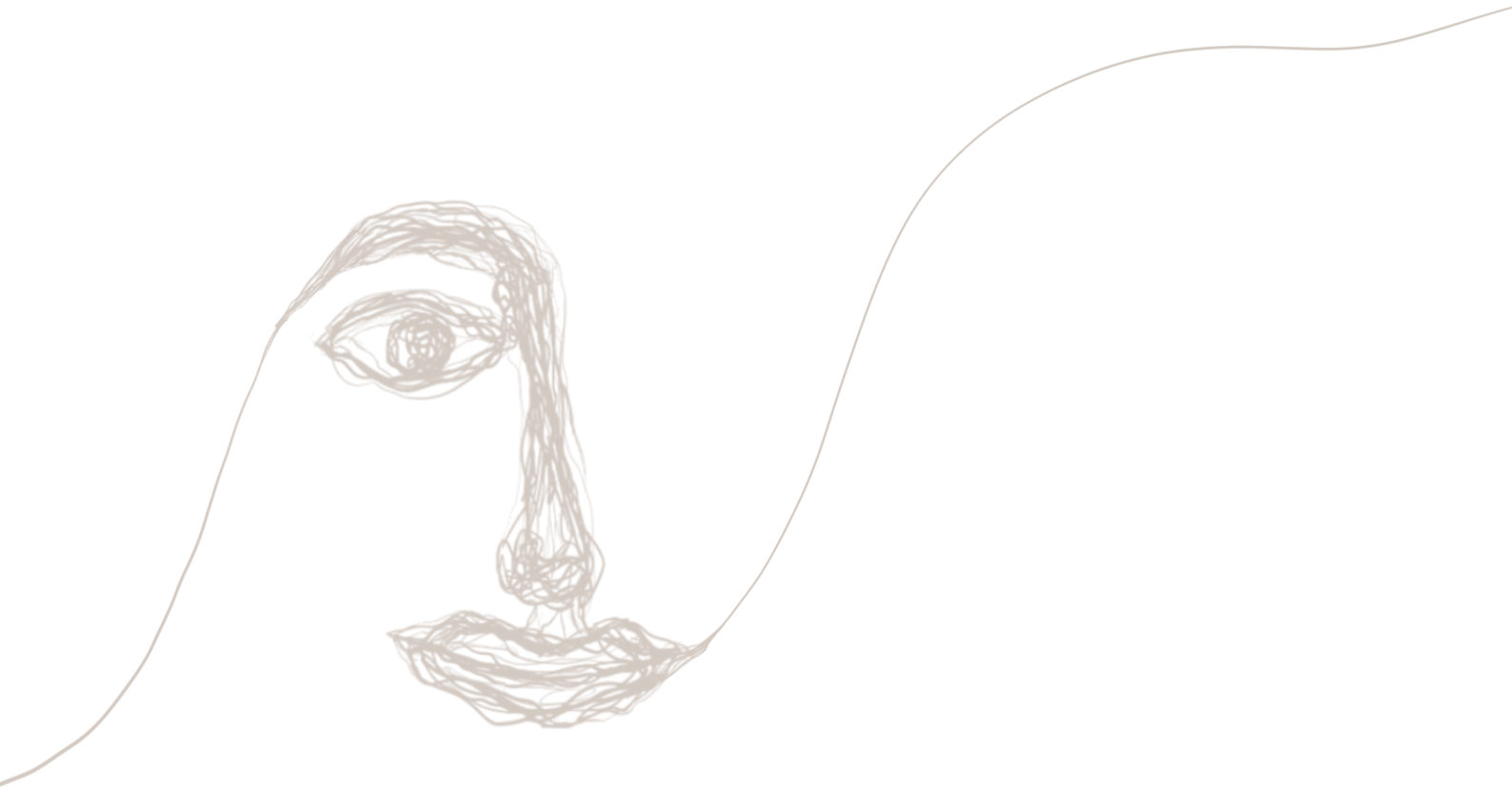
Furthermore, by analysing conceptual fashion designers from different cultural environments, I argued that Eastern and Western conceptual fashion designers have different characteristics based on their cultural backgrounds. The pioneering Eastern conceptual designers, Yohji Yamamoto, Issey Miyake and Rei Kawakubo, challenged the Western aesthetic of emphasising the body's contours, and created a new aesthetic to blur the outline of the body. In addition I argue the innovative Japanese fashion designers' philosophies demonstrate the importance of cultural blending in conceptual fashion, key characteristics of Eastern conceptual fashion designers. I also contend that the pioneering Western fashion designers within the labels Martin Margiela, Alexander McQueen and Viktor & Rolf are mainly idea-driven practitioners when compared to Eastern fashion designers, who are not only led by ideas but also by cultural references. I have not argued that cultural influence disappeared entirely from the Western designers' practice, but neither has it been underlined.

I therefore explored conceptual fashion through my own creative practice, which relates to my research of conceptual fashion and *lian/mian*, the design process and my self-reflection. I used practice-led research, with the double-diamond design research method, alongside prototyping using Subtraction Cutting, drape, moulage, and flat pattern-making, in an interplay of two and three dimensional design and production processes. I created four garments in total, using experimental and innovative processes, to produce *Identity of Face*, *Sentiment of Face*, *Perception of Face* and *Protection of Face*. In order to present the key characteristics of *lian/mian*, lost face and gained face, the foundation shapes share a similar function as the body, with negative and positive shapes, from skin toned and textured fabrics. Face masks were a key design element to represent the value of gaining face, and the consequential gains to people, which can be reputation, fortune and happiness.

My practice presented my reflection after exploration of the deeper meaning of *lian/mian*. *Lian/mian* is a complex phenomenon, and while it could be problematic to publicly endorse this concept, it has become evident that the purpose of *lian/mian* has shifted in contemporary times to now becoming double-edged. On the one hand, it might create a disproportionately large number of people becoming vain, and over emphasise the idea of face, thus losing personal identity. On the other hand it may also affect social order in restraining people's individualistic thinking, in favour of community perceptions around one's behaviour. Thus, I used the key characteristics of losing face and gaining face as the main foci to reflect this social phenomenon in regard to the wider community, and to encourage people to reflect on themselves to find the balance between *lian/mian* and their true self. I suggest that my practice has similar critical thinking to the conceptual fashion designer Rei Kawakubo's Lumps and Bumps fashion collection. I argue that Kawakubo's critical thinking of society promotes feelings of self-worth by reflection on an issue, which resonates with the purpose of my creative practice.

The conclusion of this project is that conceptual fashion is the bridge to connect the fashion designers and the idea, no matter what form, materials or mediums are used. Using *lian/mian* as my research focus, I learned that a cultural or social concept can be a weapon or a shield depending on the person. So as a fashion designer and a Chinese person with direct experience of *lian/mian*, I used conceptual fashion in this direct and critical way to encourage not only Chinese people, but everyone in society to engage in self-reflection. Thus, conceptual fashion connected me as a fashion designer with *lian/mian*, and enabled me the chance to review and reflect on my process. The contribution of this project is to give people a new insight into *lian/mian* - to create visibility and encourage debate. My project demonstrates the collaboration between culture and fashion, which translated the cultural idea to the visual symbols in my fashion practice, and included self-experience and self-thinking from the perspective of the fashion designer.

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