

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

# 'Mao' & Me

Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Design in Fashion

at Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand

Aihua Wei  
2012





## Acknowledgements

---

My thanks to the Fashion Department staff, IDIE Postgraduate staff, colleagues and friends who have supported and encouraged me throughout my time at Massey University. A special thanks to:

My design supervisors, Deb Cumming and Jen Whitty, for their support, understanding and insight, and Julieanna Preston for her mentoring and strength – all of whom have stood beside me through the many challenging moments.

Finally, this project would not have been possible without the continuing support of my family in China. Most of all, thanks to Anthony.



#### A note on the use of Chinese in this thesis

Romanised pinyin is used for Chinese names, with the family name first, in accordance with Chinese tradition. Mandarin pinyin has been used instead of Cantonese (for example, Sun Zhongshan, instead of Sun Yat-sen); the translated quotations and proverbs have come from referenced sources.

---









fig. 2

Chinese cadres wearing  
variations of Mao's jacket.  
1951. (Huanqiu, 2010)

The intention of this narrative project is to journey through a process of practice-led design research while re-evaluating and reflecting upon my Chinese culture in New Zealand. My analysis begins with 'Mao's Jacket', which was worn by Chairman Mao Zedong during his leadership of China. It is a symbolic piece of clothing that has a cultural/political/social identity that expresses some core values and fundamental ideologies of order, harmony and power related to governance (Tsui, 2009, pp. 6-9; Wu, 2009, p. 123). This framework supports and is the agency of collectivism representing the group that the individual serves. The jacket is the agent that becomes the means of engagement, while disseminating the various voices that are speaking from a new environment.

The deconstruction exercise of this research project involves dismantling of the jacket and its parts through steps of deformation and reformation to expose a number of conflicting issues. The term deconstruction is used in the fashion world, and is associated with the theories of the philosopher Jacques Derrida (Gill, 1998, p. 35).

**Deconstruction goes through certain social and political structures...to deconstruct traditional sanctions – theoretical, philosophical, cultural – effectively, you have to displace...I would say “solid” structures, not only in the sense of material structures, but “solid” in the sense of cultural, pedagogical, political, economical structures.** (Derrida, 1988, as cited in Loscialpo, 2009, p. 2-3)

My design research will grapple with contradictions that exist in my own pursuit of individualism, while staying true to the collectivist principles that I had rigidly defended. There was a need for resolve as I continued with my search for a personal equilibrium that will assist in moving forward with my personal and cultural identity. According to Catriona Mackenzie, there are three interrelated suggestions concerning self-definition: **“Point of view”** – your beliefs, emotions and desires; **“values”** – what you care about or what really matters to you; and **“self-conception”** – how you see yourself, the ideal future self (Mackenzie, 2005, p. 284). This increased understanding of my resolve provides a greater cultural acknowledgment and design position.

fig. 1 previous page

Aihua Wei. 'Mao' & Me - Restored harmony. 2012. Silk fabric with laser cutting. Wellington, New Zealand. Photograph Mandi Lynn, courtesy of Aihua Wei.



## Table of contents

---

### Abstract

1.	Background	13
1.1	Cultural context	13
1.2	Personal context: my narrative story	25
2.	Design method and process	33
2.1	Replica of Mao's Jacket	37
2.2	Exposure	41
2.3	Childhood memories	51
2.4	Hurt to restoration	67
3.	'Mao' & me	77
4.	Conclusion	88
5.	References	92
6.	List of figures	96



fig. 3

Sun Zhongshan. (Wang, 1991)