

## **78 Asian cultural appropriation: a search for evidence**

### **Author**

Kenneth Wilkinson  
Manchester Metropolitan University, UK

[Kenneth.Wilkinson@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:Kenneth.Wilkinson@mmu.ac.uk)

### **Keywords**

Appropriation, fashion, orientalism, social media, identity

### **Abstract**

Through analysis of over 47,200 images, this study endeavoured to obtain evidence of Asian cultural appropriation by Western fashion brands and media organisations. Findings indicated strongly that very few images can be reliably interpreted as Asian culture-appropriating. Indeed, the number of images containing any Asian elements or models was extremely small relative to the total number of images issued by the organisations whose output was investigated. Despite the increasing importance of Asian markets in the strategies of fashion brands, Asian style elements, motifs, and models remain only modestly represented, and the polysemy and interpretative possibility within the images examined by this research was such that most can be read as either culturally appropriating or appreciating.

## **1. Introduction: cultural appropriation – an evolving phenomenon?**

The fashion industry has long courted cultural controversy: the issue of ethnic diversity among fashion models is longstanding and retail label gaffs (such as H&M's 'coolest monkey' 2018) occur infrequently but are impactful. Regarding cultural appropriation specifically, recent examples include Gucci's 'Sikh' turbans on white female models (2018), Victoria's Secret's Native American headdress on a white lingerie model (2017), Chanel's Aboriginal boomerang (2017), Vogue's Karlie Kloss 'geisha' – ironically in a 'diversity' special edition (2017), and Marc Jacobs' dreadlocks on white models (2016).

According to Sherwood (2017), in fashion, a 'free culture' persists. Designers routinely plunder indiscriminately for ideas, typically without encountering copyright penalties. With regard to ethnicity, a dichotomy characterises the plunderer and the

plundered: Sherwood claims that most designers are of European heritage, so represent Western hegemony (a fashion industry enactment of Gramscian concepts perhaps), whereas the sources of their other-culture inspiration are non-European. Sherwood also claims that the usage of culturally significant apparel (such as Native American headdresses) reinforces notions of 'other' and separation.

### **1.1 Research Objectives**

**RO1.** *To ascertain to what degree cultural appropriation is evident in images produced or published by Western fashion brands and media organisations.*

**RO2.** *To reveal the nature of Asian cultural appropriation in images by Western fashion brands and media organisations.*

## **2. Literature review**

This research proceeds on the assumption that cultural products such as fashion designs and images hold meanings that are signified by their elements (hence the semiological analysis). According to Barker (2004: 45) the issue of representation occupies much of cultural theorists' attention. In media research, the social construction of perception and representation are focal concerns (Stokes, 2018). Cultural representations are conveyed through materiality: representations are powerfully expressed in language, objects, and – importantly for this research – images. Barker argues that cultural research is today indivisible from the investigation of signification and media. The methodology of this research is justified by similar assumptions (see methodology section).

Also according to Barker (2004), cultural production and consumption no longer occur within national boundaries. In the present, culture is fluid, lacks delimitation, and reflects globalizing human interaction.

Williams (1983: 90) offers three definitions of 'culture':

1. *A general process of intellectual, spiritual, and aesthetic development*
2. *A particular way of life, whether of a people, a period or group; and*

### 3. *The works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity.*

All three are useful to this study: the first because aesthetics are elemental to images, fashion, and representation; the second because orientalism/cultural appropriation involves differentiated groups (appropriators and appropriated) and time periods (several theorists believe historical *orientalism* shapes non-Asians' perceptions of Asians today); the third because fashion design and image production are artistic activities that are reaching larger audiences than ever due to social media, e-retail, and other forms of globalising technology.

#### 2.1 'Appropriation'

For Young (2010: 5), 'cultural appropriation' is challenging to define because it takes various forms. Conveniently, Young offers a general definition: 'use of something developed in one cultural context by someone who belongs to another culture.'

Young (2010: 6-9) then provides the following definitions for the forms of cultural appropriation that he identifies.

1. *Content appropriation* occurs when an artist uses ideas originally shown in work from other cultures.
2. *Style appropriation* describes the use of style features that are usual in the work of other cultures.
3. *Motif appropriation* occurs when an artist is influenced by the art of another culture, but does not work in the style of that culture.
4. *Object appropriation* occurs when an object from one culture is simply transferred to another.
5. *Subject appropriation* is the representation of a culture that is not the artist's.

Because a preliminary examination of fashion images revealed elements that complied with one or more of the foregoing definitions, Young's five became the basis of the *Relevance Criteria* used in the image selection protocol. The following definitions translated less directly into this research, but are here included for the ethical dimension that they introduce to the discussion:

6. *Debasing appropriation*: 'cultural appropriation [that] adopts elements of one cultural group, its ideas, images and styles of cultures, which debases the original significance.' (Sherwood, 2015)
7. *Uncredited inspiration*: 'inspiration without actually taking the time to invest in the cultural, political, and historical connotations of those they are inspired by.' (Hairston, 2017)

In these definitions, *debasing* and *uncredited* invoke Young's contention (2010) that appropriation is morally dubious, especially when it involves parties with unequal power.

## **2.2 Structuralism, and semiotics**

Saussure, Barthes, and Foucault, among others, provided social researchers with an analytical apparatus and conceptual framework called structuralism. Saussure (1916) and Barthes (1967) shared interest in signs and their meanings. Applying this, the analytical methodology used in this research incorporates connotation and denotation, signs and signifiers, etc.

Structuralists claim that languages and signs structure reality and meaning. Analyses of texts can expose the mechanisms that lead consumers/audiences to making sense of and deriving meaning from cultural material. According to structuralists, perceivers conceptualise their world through the languages they speak (Storey, 2012). Concepts of culture (own and others') are modulated and conditioned: the material produced and circulated about a culture influences how that culture is perceived and represented.

Although language and linguistics dominate in the semiotic theories and models developed by Saussure and Barthes, there is an uncontroversial tradition of applying the principles of sign/signifier/signified and denoted/connoted to images, e.g. Barthes' deconstruction of the tricolour-saluting black soldier (1977).

## **2.3 Contextualising and critiquing cultural appropriation**

During 2015 New York Fashion Week, London-based KTZ exhibited beaded dresses that incorporated traditional Crow Indian designs that bore strong similarity to the

Apsaalooke Nights dress by the Native American designer Bethany Yellowtail. Yellowtail stated she was 'gutted' by the close copying of her work, and also by KTZ's use of her tribe's designs (Indian Country Today, 2015). Several days later on the Milan catwalk, the Canadian label Dsquared2 exhibited designs that featured strong elements of Native American style in its Fall/Winter 2015 collection (Sikarskie, 2018). Included in their designs were beadwork, feathers, and tribal motifs. The use of #dsquaw to publicise the show was another faux pas – Native Americans consider 'squaw' a derogatory term.

According to Kaiser (2012), visual culture, which includes fashion, is especially susceptible to appropriation, particularly as the global economy opens markets, increases audiences, shrinks distances, and enables easy image acquisition and manipulation via the Internet. Indeed, variety is intrinsic to the global capitalist success formula (Harvey, 1990).

## **2.4 'Fashion' as appropriator**

To many theorists, today's fashion is postmodern, in that it refers to nothing but itself, which helps explain its repeating of retro, ethnic, and subcultural currents. In Baudrillard's view, postmodern fashion is a parade of vulgar, vapid signs, a collision of diffuse elements plundered indiscriminately from various sources in a futile effort to acquire authenticity for that which has long since lost meaning (Tseëlon, 1995). Postmodern fashion appropriates (without licence) from any sources, mashing its findings into 'ephemera of floating signifiers that are nothing but self-referential' (Falk, 1995: 103).

Contemporary fashion can be likened to a normless cauldron of stylistic and discursive heterogeneity (Wilson, 1990). Contemporary fashion is characterised by 'a blurring between mainstream countercultural fashions: all fashion has become "stagey", self-conscious about its own status as discourse' (Wilson, 1990: 222, 223). If fashion today is divested of meaning, if there are no dominant dress codes or hegemonic standards, then discussion of subcultural or countercultural styles becomes redundant (Gottschalk, 1993; Polhemus, 1994). Hebdige's concept of bricolage (1979) could be considered a desperate attempt to elevate style appropriation to the status of subculture symbol – by appending meaning to

increasingly hollow signifiers (Sweetman, 1999). This research concerns identification and analysis of particular signifiers in fashion images, signifiers that could indicate cultural appropriation or orientalism by the image creators.

### **3. Methodology**

Schreier (2013) reported that humanities and social sciences heavily endorse qualitative content analysis. Although QCA is recommended variously (e.g. Stokes, 2018), direction on the specifics of data collection and method of analysis is elusive. The protocols of collection and analysis performed in this research are transparent, algorithmic, and therefore replicable. They apply methodologies similar to that of systematic literature review (cf. Denyer and Tranfield, 2009). The protocols are credible because, like systematic literature review, the data they produce is derived from structured, theoretically informed processes, making the resultant analysis robust.

The three protocols that comprise the methodology of this research are source selection, image selection, and image analysis.

#### **3.1 Source selection**

Since fashion is a highly visual medium (Swanson and Everett, 2008), image-prioritising, image-friendly social media sites were the natural platform for this research. According to Statista.com (2018), the world's most popular image-oriented social media sites are Instagram (one billion registered users), Tumblr (426 million) and Pinterest (175 million). Due to its having the greatest popularity, Instagram was chosen as the portal through which the images issued by fashion brands and media organisations were obtained.

In this research, 'fashion brands' refers to companies whose primary commercial activity is the design, retail, or manufacture of branded clothing and/or apparel. Throughout this research, I use the term 'media organisations' to describe companies such as *Vogue*, whose traditional medium is the photographically rich printed magazine. Such companies these days describe themselves as 'fashion

media organisations'. 'Western' refers to the cultural hemisphere from which the brands and media organisations hail, i.e. Western European or North American countries.

In total, 10 sources provided the data for this research. The five fashion brands and media organisations were chosen because they are – by follower count – the most popular and, by implication, the most influential.

**Table 1 The five most popular Western fashion brands by Instagram following**

<b>Fashion Brand</b>	<b>Country of Origin</b>	<b>Market/Product (MM=mass market; FF=fast fashion)</b>	<b>No. of Instagram Followers (20 August 2018)</b>	<b>No. of Instagram Posts (20 August 2018)</b>
<i>Chanel</i>	France	Luxury	29.2 m	1234
<i>Zara</i>	Spain	Mid-range/MM	27.1 m	1982
<i>Gucci</i>	Italy	Luxury	26.7 m	4887
<i>H&amp;M</i>	Sweden	Mid-range/MM	26.3 m	4004
<i>Louis Vuitton</i>	France	Luxury	26.1 m	2829

**Table 2 The five most popular Western fashion media organisations by Instagram following**

<b>Fashion Media Organisation</b>	<b>Country of Origin</b>	<b>No. of Instagram Followers (20 August 2018)</b>	<b>No. of Instagram Posts (20 August 2018)</b>
<i>Vogue</i>	USA	19.4 m	5027
<i>Elle</i>	France	3.4 m	7392
<i>Harper's Bazaar</i>	USA	3.4 m	6468
<i>W</i>	USA	3 m	6003
<i>Teen Vogue</i>	USA	2.31 m	7281

If a brand or media organisation is fully regionalised in its Instagram presence (i.e. has no parent account representing the headquarters in country of origin), the account belonging to the Western country with the largest follower count was selected for analysis (in all cases, this was the USA).

### **3.2 Image selection**

By convention, research questions determine selection (Rose, 2016; Van Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2001). This study however needs to both identify and then analyse. Moreover, the sources represent an ever-expanding repository of images,

necessitating filtration. For this reason, every image issued by all 10 sources was subject to articulated *inclusion criteria*. Within the *inclusion criteria* were *relevance criteria*, formulated to ensure that images were selected or rejected according to theoretically derived conditions.

**Table 3 Theoretical derivation of relevance criteria**

Relevance Criteria		Form of Appropriation						
		Content	Style	Motif	Object	Subject	Debasing	Uncredited
RC1  RC2  RC3	Images [produced by Western fashion brands and media organisations] that feature ethnically <i>Asian or non-Asian models</i> with Asian costume, apparel, or other visual elements – imitative or authentic – but in <i>non-Asian settings</i> .	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Images [produced by Western fashion brands and media organisations] that feature ethnically <i>non-Asian models</i> with Asian costume, apparel or other visual elements – imitative or authentic – but in <i>Asian settings</i> .	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Images [produced by Western fashion brands and media organisations] whose <i>mise-en-scène</i> features Asian settings, behaviours, costume, or apparel – imitative or authentic – when such inclusions are <i>neither denoted nor connoted</i> by the image's focus.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓



RC4	Images [produced by Western fashion brands and media organisations] that include Asian design motifs or typographic elements – imitative or authentic – anywhere, including in products shown.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
RC5	Images [produced by Western fashion brands and media organisations] that include Asian settings, costume, apparel, design motifs, or typographic elements, including in products shown, but whose meaning or contribution to the image is ambiguous.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

The following *inclusion* and *exclusion criteria* are modelled loosely on Lee's (2009) protocol of systematic literature review.

**Table 4 Inclusion and relevance criteria**

	Inclusion criteria	Rationale
Statutory	Images [produced by Western fashion brands and media organisations] that meet at least one of the Relevance Criteria and were released between January 1 <sup>st</sup> 2013 and September 1 <sup>st</sup> 2018 through Instagram.	<p>To achieve relevance to the present; to show what fashion brands are doing today, rather than have done in the past.</p> <p>To simplify the harvesting of images by selecting a single, common online image-sharing platform that is used with roughly even intensity by fashion brands and media organisations. Instagram is also the world's most popular image-sharing social networking site.</p>
Relevance	RC1 Images [produced by Western fashion brands and media organisations] that feature ethnically <i>Asian or non-Asian models</i> with Asian costume, apparel, or other visual elements – imitative or authentic – but in <i>non-Asian settings</i> .	<p>This study is seeking evidence of cultural appropriation so must identify instances of the use of cultural items, cues, motifs, or other signifiers <i>outside their original cultural context</i>.</p> <p>Because any Asian-imitative element is arguably intrinsically appropriating, <i>any</i></p>

			<i>image containing an Asian-imitative element was included for analysis.</i>
	<b>RC2</b>	Images [produced by Western fashion brands and media organisations] that feature ethnically <i>non-Asian models</i> with Asian costume, apparel or other visual elements – imitative or authentic – but in <i>Asian settings</i> .	If non-Asian models are posed in designs featuring Asian motifs or settings, the possibility of appropriation by ethnicity exists.
	<b>RC3</b>	Images [produced by Western fashion brands and media organisations] whose <i>mise-en-scène</i> features Asian settings, behaviours, costume, or apparel – imitative or authentic – when such inclusions are <i>neither denoted nor connoted</i> by the image's focus.	This study is seeking evidence of cultural appropriation so must identify instances of the use of cultural items, cues, motifs, or other signifiers <i>outside their original cultural context</i> .
	<b>RC4</b>	Images [produced by Western fashion brands and media organisations] that include Asian design motifs or typographic elements – imitative or authentic – anywhere, including in products shown.	
	<b>RC5</b>	Images [produced by Western fashion brands and media organisations] that include Asian settings, costume, apparel, design motifs, or typographic elements, including in products shown, but whose meaning or contribution to the image is ambiguous.	If Asian elements are included to enrich or energize an image but there is no readily associable connection between them and the focus, then the ambiguity surrounding their inclusion implies appropriation. The image's Asian elements have no Asian significance.

### 3.3 Image Analysis

Images were analysed *qualitatively*. Images that passed the *inclusion* and *relevance criteria* underwent formal analysis. This was achieved via a synthesis of two near-parallel systems: Panofsky's meaning method (1955) and Peirce's sign typologies (1931). The use of semiological systems to decode commercial images has healthy precedent: Barthes (1957) and Williamson (1978).

Panofsky's three-step method (1955) begins with 'pre-iconographic' analysis, which entails description of an image's purely visible elements. This is a report of matter-of-factness, devoid of interpretation or reading beyond description. The 'iconographic' analysis follows. In this, that which is shown is identified or named. This information is not resident in the image, only recognised through the viewer's knowledge or understanding. The final step is the 'iconological', in which the viewer attaches

knowledge and concepts to the iconographic to read the greater meaning of the image.

Peirce's trinity features a similar gradation from concrete to interpretation. The *icon* is that which can be seen, i.e. the resembling visible matter; the *index* is whatever is associable with the *icon*; and the *symbol* is the meaning that the image ultimately communicates (Watson and Hill, 2000). The following table summarises the three systems.

**Table 5 Two Systems and Three Levels of Visual/Semiological Analysis**

Theorist		Panofsky (1955)	Peirce (1931)
Sequence of visual analysis/process of interpretation	1	Pre-iconographic	Icon
	2	Iconographic	Index
	3	Iconological	Symbol

#### 4. Findings and Primary Analysis

The following tables show representative images returned by the systematic search process and their primary analysis (semiological readings). If an image was part of a series, a photoshoot, or a theme – it was categorized as ‘representative’.

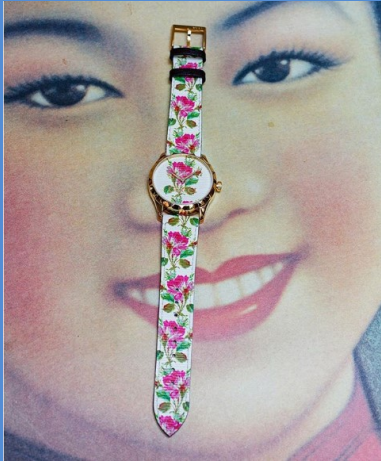

The first table shows images sourced from the Instagram postings of the five most followed Western fashion brands. The second table shows images sourced from the Instagram postings of the five most followed Western fashion media organisations. For all, semiological readings are provided. A meta-analysis of these findings is provided in the subsequent section.


Although this research is primarily qualitative, broad quantification of these findings produce an interesting picture. Figures reporting frequency, proportionality, and appearance over time are included In the *Appendix*.

##### 4.1 Representative images and their semiological readings


The following contain representative examples of the 77 images returned by the search and selection process, and their readings for each level of analysis.



**Table 6 Western Fashion Brands - examples**

Source	Date Posted	RC#	Analysis Level		
			1. Pre-icon/Icon	2. Iconogr/Index	3. Iconolo/Symbol
<i>Gucci</i>	2018, July	4, 5			
			Floral-patterned watch; smiling face picture	Old Japanese/ Chinese advertising, product in vertical centre of face; cherry blossom patterning	Pre-war Japan, femininity, delicacy, naïveté, model as context/background – product as focus
<i>H&amp;M</i>	2018, May	3, 4, 5			
			Woman in grey and bold red, in street, red and black signage	Japanese street scene, meat cuisine restaurant sign, reds-greys, strong verticals	Japan/Asia, non-west, casual chic, multiculturalism
<i>H&amp;M</i>	2018, March	3, 4			
			1. Pre-icon/Icon	2. Iconogr/Index	3. Iconolo/Symbol

Source	Date Posted	RC#	Analysis Level		
			Giant Chinese-/ Japanese-style lanterns (oversize), characters read: 'spring' (fore) and 'summer' (rear)	Typographic, visual novelty	Cultural/linguistic distance, exoticism, magnitude, subtlety in design-boldness in scope, East-West collaboration, festivity

**Table 7 Western Fashion Media Organisations - examples**

Source	Date Posted	RC#	Analysis Level		
<i>Elle</i>	2018, August	2, 4	1. Pre-icon/Icon	2. Iconogr/Index	3. Iconolo/Symbol
			Low angle shot, mixed/ ambiguous ethnicity female, looking down, arms raised; strong colours, semi-transparent sparkling fabrics covering all but face – body skin visible under fabric	Nicki Minaj (magazine cover), goddess pose, hijab-type head/neck covering, strong makeup	Powerful-but-alluring, concealment-display; seduction-intrigue; Arabia, harems, Scheherazade, genie, multiculturalism, empowerment, defiance, victory
<i>Vogue</i>	2018, Summer	1, 2, 3	1. Pre-icon/Icon	2. Iconogr/Index	3. Iconolo/Symbol

Source	Date Posted	RC#	Analysis Level		
			Three Caucasian females, various costumes	Blue head wrapping; centre model carries wax head, Chinese style top	Turban: raj, maharaja, gender fluidity, identity usurpation; Chinoiserie smock: dowager, porcelain; second head: execution, <i>budo</i> ; fusion, conflict, contrast; East-in-West
W Mag	2018, April	3, 4, 5	1. Pre-icon/Icon	2. Iconogr/Index	3. Iconolo/Symbol
			Two Caucasian females, in front of window, large Asian lettering	One masculine, one feminine; both wearing leather jackets; Chinese food shop; window lettering: 'noodles', 'congee'	Western multiculturalism, budget Chinatown food, East-in-West; gender fluidity

**Table 8 Images by Origin of Most Prominent Element**

Border Colour	Origin of Most Prominent Elements	No. of Images
	Japan	39
	Ambiguous/Extremely Polysemic	21
	South Asia	14
	Pan-Asian	14
	Middle East, North Africa, Egypt	14
	Chinatown/Little Tokyo	13
	China	13
	Russia and North East Asia (Including Koreas)	9
	South East Asia	5

## 5. Discussion

By aggregating the analyses of the images returned by the searches, the following table provides the meta-analysis of this research's findings.

**Table 9 Recurring elements, themes, and impressions**

Recurring elements	Recurring themes:	Recurring impressions
Female Caucasian models in Asian or Asian-style apparel; female Caucasian models in Asian or Chinatown settings; Asia-signifying objects and <i>mise-en-scène</i> ; Asian typographic decoration/lettering (seldom meaningful)	Geisha-look, red-white contrasts (the Japanese flag motif), 'kimono'-style garments, hybrid Chinese dress-kimono, harsh fringe haircuts/heavy eye makeup on Asian models	Exoticism; multiculturalism; hi-tech; tradition; femininity; hybridity; fusion; delicacy; contradiction

The findings of this study suggest Asian cultural appropriation exists in fashion images but is infrequent. This research challenges the assumption that cultural appropriation characterizations/images are common and easily identifiable phenomena.

In the few images identified as appropriating, an exoticised Asian 'other' was discernible. The semiological analyses indicated that signifiers of 'other' were unsubtle, clumsy, and often caricaturing; appropriated Asian style elements and motifs do however appear to provide a qualitatively attractive (not necessarily positive) property, i.e. that of *appeal by difference*.

Those elements within images that were definable by the *relevance criteria* as indicative of cultural appropriation could, with similar criteria, be considered indicative of cultural *appreciation*. The categorisation is premised on the researcher's perspectives, theoretical frameworks, and the ethical philosophies. For example, use of a Chinese 'mandarin' collar on a Caucasian model could evidence 'appropriation' or 'appreciation', depending on the framing. A research design that tests whether an image is 'appropriation' or 'appreciation' would be desirable if neutrality were sought.





Several images netted by the *relevance criteria* prompt consideration of issues *other than* cultural appropriation. In particular, the use of Asian models as canvasses for eye makeup was notable and unpredicted. A quantitative content analysis could support this researcher's suspicion that Asian models are overrepresented in promotional images that feature eyelid accentuation. If found, such evidence would support the fetishisation that some theorists (e.g. Sturken and Cartwright, 2009) claim occurs through orientalism.

Another unexpected observation concerns the popularity of what I term 'pan-Asianism' or the 'Asian portmanteau' image. These terms describe images that combine, often indelicately, motifs, mise-en-scène, lettering, models, and other signifiers from multiple Asian sources, as if to ensure the Asian otherness of the gestalt.

Such images (see the following table for an example of each), although a minority within a minority, present enticing interpretative possibilities beyond the scope of this work.

**Table 10 Examples of unpredicted categories**

The 'Asian-as-eye-canvas' image	The 'Pan-Asian' or 'portmanteau' image
	

It seems improbable that brands would produce designs intended to repel the consumer, since there is no reputational or commercial benefit to doing so (with the possible exception of a publicity piece created to generate controversy). Similarly,



fashion media organisations are unlikely to release images that feature unattractive content (again, unless provocation is intended). Therefore, designers and makers of images must be working with positive effect intended, which suggests *appreciation* more than *appropriation* describes the use of Asian style elements and motifs.

An alternative possibility exists: fashion images are simply destitute of originality. As some postmodernist theorists contend, fashion has lost meaning: designers and image makers merely scoop from any source, and Asian style is simply a source to plunder like any other. (This supposition seems somewhat improbable however, given the affluence and reputational stakes of fashion's larger entities.)

Indisputable is the globalisation that is occurring in fashion's markets, media, and consumer appetite. It seems that fashion could or would attempt to persist in occidental legacy mode into meaningful perpetuity.

## **6. Conclusions**

The overarching finding of this research can be summarized thus: very few images by Western fashion brands and media organisations can be reliably interpreted as Asian culture-appropriating; very few images contain any Asian elements or models, despite the increasing importance of Asian markets in the strategies of fashion brands.

The *relevance criteria* (RC) were largely effective, but some images (few) were includable although they were inexact fits with the RCs. Although the RCs allowed methodical, efficient selection and rejection, insensitive application would have resulted in important candidate images being overlooked. Subjectivity in the application of the RCs was unavoidable, despite the systematic, explicit nature of the process.

The scale of this investigation – parameters considered – is sufficient to claim generalisability. The image output of the world's five most popular fashion brands and media organisations was analysed and evidence of Asian cultural appropriation

was meagre. However, the possibility always exists that an examination of more brands and media organisations could reveal different findings.

Surprising was the relative *absence* of Asian style and motifs in the images examined. With Asian markets growing strategically more important, the sheer quality and variety of Asian style elements and motifs, a researcher could sensibly assume that fashion images should contain far *more* Asian style elements and motifs than this research indicates is the case.

This raises the questions of why are Asian style elements and motifs underrepresented? Is the lack indicative of hegemony? The dominance of the Caucasian model might also be questioned: a comparative study of Asian brands and media organisations could investigate the universality (or otherwise) of this phenomenon. Further research could explore such possibilities.

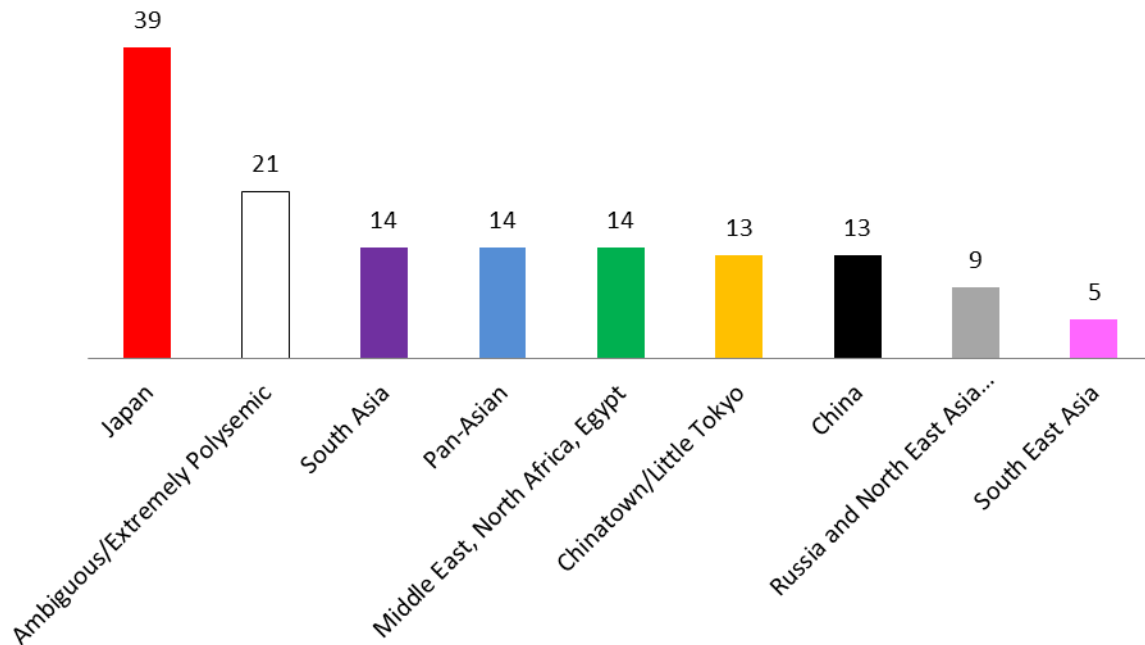
## 7. References

- Barthes, R. (1957) *Mythologies*. Translated by La Feriss, A. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1972.
- Denyer, D. and Tranfield, D. (2009) 'Producing a systematic review', in Buchanan, D. and A. Bryman, A. (eds.) *The SAGE handbook of organizational research methods*. London: Sage, pp. 671–689.
- Hairston, T. (2017) 'A message to designers on how not to appropriate', *Refinery29*, Available at: <https://www.refinery29.com/2017/09/171249/cultural-appropriationmeaning-fashion-creativity> (Accessed: 24 June 2018).
- Harvey, D. (1990) *The condition of post-modernity*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Kaiser, S. B. (2012) *Fashion and cultural studies*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Lee, R. (2009) 'Social capital and business management: setting a research agenda', *International journal of management reviews*, 11(3), pp. 247-273.
- Panofsky, E. (1955) *Meaning in the visual arts*. London: Penguin.
- Rose, G. (2016) *Visual methodologies: an introduction to researching with visual materials*. 4th edn. London: Sage.
- Schreier, M. (2013) *Qualitative content analysis in practice*. London: Sage.
- Sherwood, J. (2017) *Appreciation or appropriation?* Available at: <https://www.notjustalabel.com/editorial/appreciation-or-appropriation> (Accessed: 11 August 2018).
- Sikarskie, A. (2018) 'Thinking about cultural appropriation and indigenous fashion', in Kent, H. (ed.) *Teaching fashion students*. London: Bloomsbury, pp. 201-208.
- Statista (2018) Available at: <https://www.statista.com/topics/1267/pinterest/> (Accessed: 03 July 2018).
- Stokes, J. (2018) *How to do media and cultural studies*. 2nd edn. London: Sage.
- Swanson, K. and Everett, J. (2008) *Writing for the fashion business*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Van Leeuwen, T. and Jewitt, C. (2001) *Handbook of visual analysis*. London: Sage.
- Watson, J. and Hill, A. (2000) *Dictionary of media and communication studies*. 5th edn. Arnold: London.
- Williamson, J. (1978) *Decoding advertisements: ideology and meaning in advertising*. London: Marion Boyars Publishers.
- Young, J. (2010) *Cultural appropriation and the arts*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

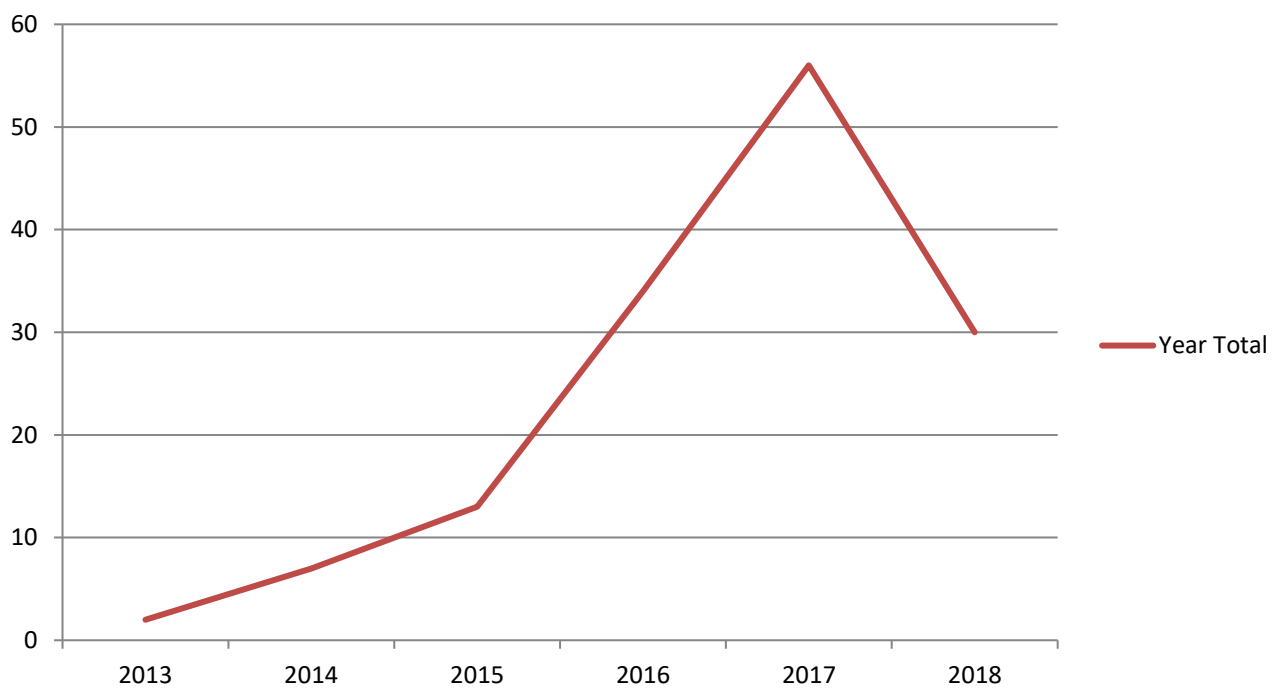
## 8. Appendix

### Quantification of findings

**Figure 1 No. of images by origin of most prominent elements**



**Figure 2 Distribution of images by year**



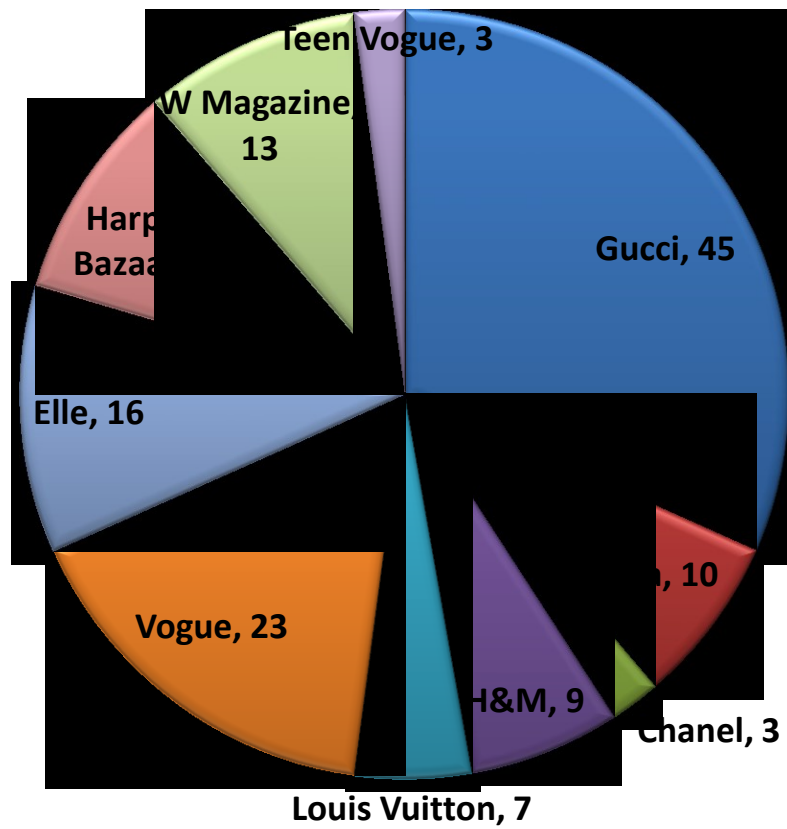
**Table 1 Sources, popularity, and image counts**

<b>Fashion organisation</b>	<b>Popularity ranking (followers)</b>	<b>Total no. Instagram images (August 2018)</b>	<b>No. Images identified as culturally appropriating</b>	<b>%</b>
<i>Chanel</i>	1 (29.2 m)	1234	3	0.24
<i>Zara</i>	2 (27.1)	1982	10	0.5
<i>Gucci</i>	3 (26.7 m)	4887	45	0.92
<i>H&amp;M</i>	4 (26.3 m)	4004	9	0.22
<i>Louis Vuitton</i>	5 (26.1 m)	2829	7	0.25
<i>Vogue</i>	6 (19.4 m)	5027	23	0.46
<i>Elle</i>	=7 (3.4 m)	7392	16	0.22
<i>Harper's Bazaar</i>	=7 (3.4 m)	6468	13	0.2
<i>W Mag</i>	8 (3 m)	6003	13	0.22
<i>Teen Vogue</i>	9 (2.31 m)	7281	3	0.04
All five brands	n/a	<b>14936</b>	<b>74</b>	0.49
All five media	n/a	<b>32171</b>	<b>68</b>	0.21
<b>All ten total</b>	n/a	<b>47,107</b>	<b>142</b>	0.3

**Table 12 Frequency of relevance criteria**

<b>Relevance criteria #</b>	<b>Frequency</b>			
	<b>Table 1</b>	<b>Table 2</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Ranking by frequency</b>
RC1	18	15	33	5
RC2	15	20	35	4
RC3	35	40	75	1
RC4	49	44	93	2
RC5	28	23	51	3
			287	

**Figure 3 Proportionality: image counts by brand/media organisation**



Most images were selected on the basis of their satisfying *multiple relevance criteria*, hence the total is not 142 (the numbers of images selected) and proportionality/percentage cannot be indicated.