The Shape of Me:

Design as a site for Self Realization through
Embodied Practices of Observation, Making and Performance

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觀制空藝

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觀制
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Observation

Making

Performance

Abstract

We all experience various changes and uncertainties in our lives in both positive and negative ways. This thesis validates different fields of study, interests and lived experience. The Chinese Daoist concept of Zi Ran, a transcultural identity, and an interest in Japanese culture, inform a series of design actions that apply embodied practices of observation, making and performance. This mix of design actions, informed by a particular lived experience, are used to consider western discursive and ontological design theory as well as ArturoEscobar's call for a pluriverse of design. The Communication Studies term *thin-slicing* is developed in relation to time and as a means to sort through and validate how past and present personal experiences inform the intuitive actions of a designer. Means for transcultural identity and different cultural perspectives to be applied to approaches and concerns in the design field are explored. This body of work upholds the uniqueness of life experiences as a key contributor to designers and their designs/design(ing). Overall, the intent is to share and validate what others of different experience and non western backgrounds have to offer.

Keywords

Acknowledgements

Glossary

Ontological Design - As defined by Anne-MarieWillis (2006), "Ontological designing is a way of characterising the relation between human beings and lifeworlds."

Discursive Design - As defined by Bruce M. Tharp and Stephanie M. Tharp (2013), "Discursive design refers to the creation of utilitarian objects/services/interactions whose primary purpose is to communicate ideas—artifacts embedded with discourse."

Transcultural identity - As defined by Christin-Melanie Vauclair et al. (2014) in Transcultural Identity The Future Self in a Globalized World, "Individuals who have grown up under the exposure of two cultures may develop a bicultural identity." The study also mentioned "transculturalism can be seen as an extension of biculturalism in that it refers to individuals with multicultural experiences." A person who has a transcultural identity "does not have to be raised in two cultures since birth."

Thin-Slicing - Originally derived from the field of psychology. As defined by Mark Andrejevic (2013), "Thin-slicing is referring to the idea of as human beings we are capable of making sense of situations based on the thinnest slice of experience."

Uncertainty - As defined by Yoko Akama (2020), "Uncertainty is a field of study that aims to address the particularity of change and crisis theoretically, but not interventionally. It is also a viable element of ways of knowing."

Intuitive - The dictionary definition notes that intuitive refers to being used or based on what one feels to be true without conscious reasoning.

Ryokan - Ryokan is a traditional Japanese style hotel. The western style hotel is called Hoteru in Japanese.

Maiko - A Maiko is a traditional Japanese female performer whose job is to sing, dance, and play the Samisenn (a traditional Japanese instrument with three strings). Maikos are apprentices who later become Geisha.

Preface

I was born and raised in China. At the age of fifteen I moved on my own to study in North America. Over time, in this foreign context, I gradually became drawn to Japanese culture. My personal affinity with Japan is situated within a period of time made up of many official cultural exchanges between China and Japan. Chinese - Japanese relations during this time (1970-2019) have not, however, been entirely smooth.[1] This thesis draws on my lived experience of circling away from East Asia to the Western cultural context and back again. My life experiences act as one of the essential pieces of my research. Coming to Design from an undergraduate background in Communication Studies and Art practices I applied familiar, learnt methods of observing and making throughout my Masters studies. As an individual with a relatively sensitive personality I am often confronted by uncertainty both in my everyday life and my practices of making.

I am deeply interested in design and the research of this field. I came to Emily Carr University of Art + Design with the intention of studying textile design, two years later, I no longer find myself concentrating on the design of textiles. Rather, I have come to the realization that I have consistently used textiles (among other things) as a tool to explore design theory and its connections to Asian philosophy and lived perspectives. Exploring design theory and (a) state of being[2] has helped me rationalize and understand that my creative practice always draws on cultural contexts and my own personal experiences.

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[1] Jin, Xide, *Making New Partnership: A Rising China and Its Neighbors,* ed. Zhang, Yunling, vol. 2 (Beijing; Reading: Social Sciences Academic Press; Paths International, 2011), 24-26.

[2] **State of being**: speaks explicitly about the state of being for both humans and the everyday objects around humans.

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Introduction: Informed by Identity

The Shape of Me: Design as a site for Self-Realization through Embodied Practices of Observation, Making and Performance details an individualistic practice of catching the shadow of the past to inform and apply identity construction to an ever-changing global society. Shadows of the past and identity construction are a lens to consider transcultural identity and Chinese philosophical perspective applied to design theory. Past experience and current context work together to inform intuitive acts (of observation, making and performance). The work described below, which can be thought of as thin-slicing of time, provides a framework that has helped me to sort and better understand how past and present experiences inform my intuitive actions.

I was born and grew up in Xi'an, China. One month after my fifteenth birthday, I moved on my own to the United States of America to study abroad. For the past ten years, I have moved around North America with the official status of a temporary resident in both the United States and Canada. My sense of identity has shifted and my experiences have been marked by this. During this time, I have experienced some unpleasant situations connected to this label of temporary. At the age of seventeen, two years after arriving to study in the United States, I was socially isolated and shunned by a group of Chinese students who were new to the high school I attended. At the time, I blamed myself for not being friends with those students. I thought the reason that they did not like me was because of my personality. This situation marked me. I became particularly sensitive and began avoiding other Chinese people my age. When faced with the opportunity to attend a university known for having a small population of Chinese (and Asian) students, I took it. This, however, did not resolve my issue. Disappointingly, I again faced the problem of being isolated by other students from China. At the age of twenty-three, I moved to Vancouver, Canada, to attend Graduate School and study a Master of Design. Within half a year in this new place I, once again, had problems communicating with people who, like myself, were from China. These uncomfortable/traumatic situations with Chinese people were perplexing. I easily made friends with people from many different countries but I could not connect with people of my own culture. I wondered about this. Am I the problem, or is there something else that they are having a hard time accepting? Moreover, I wondered if my case was a unique or perhaps something also experienced by others. This became a starting point for me to think about my identity, identity formation and its connection to design.

Identity issues are prevalent in the contemporary global context. A study of transcultural identity(ies) states, "individuals who have grown up under the exposure of two cultures may develop a bicultural identity."[3] Although transculturalism is slightly different from biculturalism, "transculturalism can be seen as

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[3] Christin-Melanie Vauclair et al., "Transcultural Identity The Future Self in a Globalized World," *TRANSCULTURAL Revista Semestral Da Associação Portuguesa de Psicologia e Psiquiatria Transcultural*, Associação Portuguesa de Psicologia e Psiquiatria Transcultural, Volume VI, no. No.1 (2014): 10.

an extension of biculturalism in that it refers to individuals with multicultural experiences."[4] A person who has a transcultural identity "does not have to be raised in two cultures since birth."[5]

A recent study on Asian American Identity Development notes that "second-generation East Asian Americans experience unique challenges of identity development and navigating between two cultural contexts which have implications for mental health."[6] People in these situations have transcultural identities because they "experience two or more cultural contexts in daily life."[7] For instance, they might speak one language at school and another with family members. This challenge due to lived experience in two or more cultural contexts also extends to people like myself who have moved at a formative age. Transcultural "youth experience identity confusion if they are unable to reconcile conflicting values."[8] As a transient person who was not born in North America, I have lived experience inside two linguistic contexts: Chinese and English, as well as three cultural contexts: China, the United States, and Canada. Experiencing identity confusion in a multicultural environment is familiar to me. I am an individual with a transcultural background. I have struggled to recognize this as part of my identity.

Having lived and observed experiences described above starting at a relatively young age, has drawn a line between myself and other Chinese students who have arrived in North America later on in their lives. I stand in a liminal zone between people born in the United States or Canada with Chinese heritage and mature students from China studying abroad in North America. I am not accepted, and am misunderstood by both groups. It was not until embarking on my Master's studies that I began to think about what this meant to me. While I cannot change what I have experienced, I have been able to use and incorporate these experiences with insights from design theory and Chinese philosophy through a series of embodied practices.

I am not solely interested in identity formation. My work draws on past personal experiences as a means to explore how transcultural identity might be applied to incorporate different cultural perspectives to approaches and concerns in the design field.

Prior to entering the interdisciplinary master of design program at Emily Carr University of Art + Design I was not fully exposed to the field of design. I had, however, always been interested in cultural and

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[4] Vauclair et al., *Transcultural Identity The Future Self in a Globalized World*, 10.

[5] Vauclair et al., *Transcultural Identity The Future Self in a Globalized World*, 9.

[6] Christopher W. Cheung and Jacqueline M. Swank, "Asian American Identity Development: A Bicultural Model for Youth," *Journal of Child and Adolescent Counseling* 5, no. 1 (January 2, 2019): 90, https://doi.org/10.1080/23727810.2018.1556985.

[7] Vauclair et al., *Transcultural Identity The Future Self in a Globalized World*, 9.

[8] Cheung and Swank, *Asian American Identity Development*, 92.

identity related topics. I came to the program to conduct design-based research into traditional Chinese Textile Design. As I began to take on a series of design explorations (actions), my research shifted from traditional Chinese textiles to the philosophical relationship between myself and clothing in design practice. Later, my work developed into an exploration of the role and potential of transcultural experiences applied to the embodied, performative practices that reflected on Chinese philosophical Daoism in relation to the discourse of design. I have always been interested in philosophy. This, combined with my Chinese identity, led me to consistently circling back, considering and viewing my work through a lens of Chinese philosophical Daoism.

In the following chapters, I will discuss the methods and process of my practice-based design research that applies to three forms of Zi Ran. Zi Ran, a term derived from Chinese philosophical tradition of Daoism, will be explained in The Grounding chapter below. Further along in the document, each of the three Zi Ran chapters contain reflections of my personal experiences and foreshadows issues around transcultural identity and cultural appropriation that I found myself exploring and considering throughout. Through a series of projects described in the chapters below, I explore recognition of self and attentiveness in everyday life to consider Columbian anthropologist, Arturo Escobar's term, the "pluriverse of design"[9].

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9 Arturo Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse: Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds*, New Ecologies for the Twenty-First Century (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 135.

Beginning to Frame the Work

Cultural Legacy (Philosophy)

My practice-based design research is heavily informed by the Chinese philosophical concept of Zi Ran[10] This connection to Chinese philosophy turned up midway through my Masters studies. In summer 2019, I had a chance to visit the Netherlands with my fellow candidates; Japan with my friends, and my hometown in China alone. While visiting, I found myself continually drawn to water and mountain elements. When I returned to Vancouver, I struggled to find an appropriate explanation for my intuitive connection to these aspects of the environment. My father suggested I read some books about ancient Chinese philosophy. Later, I realized, through travel and a series of observations of natural environments and reflection on my experiences in different countries, that I had attained a better understanding of the concept of Zi Ran.

Lived Reality (Transcultural Experience)

During my travels, I also participated in activities that deepened my perspective of cultural specific artifacts. Wearing a Kimono and then later a Yukata, while visiting Japan later led me to wearing a Yukata in an entirely different cultural context, during an evening out with friends in Vancouver. Taking on these activities furthered my design practice from a transcultural perspective. I considered issues of cultural appropriation. I began to view/observe designed objects in my home as well as the things I wore from a discursive design[11] perspective – I began to consider "their discursive voice in everyday life and reason of being."[12]

Japan has become a place I find myself increasingly drawn to. As a consequence, my design interventions, during my Master's studies, have been primarily influenced by a mix of Chinese culture (where I am from) and Japanese culture (where I am drawn to). Consciously aware that I was approaching Japanese culture as an outsider, and to better understand the cultural contexts I was drawn to, I started studying the Japanese language in spring 2018, six months before starting at Emily Carr University of Art + Design. Two full years later and drawing to the end of my master studies, I can read Japanese cultural related texts with little support from the dictionary. Learning about the culture and being able to speak

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[10] A Chinese philosophical term representing the notion of nature. This will be explained further in the sections below.

[11] Discursive Design: As defined by Bruce M. Tharp and Stephanie M. Tharp (2013), "Discursive design refers to the creation of utilitarian objects/services/interactions whose primary purpose is to communicate ideas—artifacts embedded with discourse."

[12] Bruce M. Tharp and Stephanie M. Tharp, "*Discursive Design Basics: Mode And Audience*" (Nordic Design Research Conference, Copenhagen-Malmö, 2013), 2.

Japanese has helped me recognize *why Japan? Why would a person born in China with ten years of lived experience in North America have a huge interest in Japan before having visited it?* The chapters below will detail how, through the intervention of ontological design[13] methods and performative embodiment practices, I was able to begin to better understand this draw to a foreign culture and place. In the multicultural context of the Emily Carr Masters Studio I was also able to consider cultural appropriation and how to approach these concerns from the perspective of a transcultural individual in design.

New/Unexpected Situations (COVID19)

I am a newcomer to design and a person who has a transcultural identity. Caught in self-isolation due to COVID-19 I began to reflect on this and to identify the conditions that limit or affords a material making-performative practice in relation to the ongoing present people are experiencing. Wearing the hat of an outsider/transient/in-betweener in multicultural environments, creative based self-exploration affords me access to my previous knowledge studied outside of the design context. Reviewing and revisiting past my projects and experiences has helped me to categorize and better understand the role of the intuitive approaches I have used in my embodied design explorations. The philosophical notion of Zi Ran has informed and been in dialogue with my making practices in the studio and the home environment. I have considered it in relation to ontological and discursive design theories. Looking into the discourses of design has led me to listen to the "discursive voices in everyday life,"[14] to recognize and understand objects around me in a philosophical way, and reflect and offer up an approach to design that encompasses a plurality made up of both eastern and western perspectives.

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[13] Ontological Design: As defined by Anne-Marie Willis (2006), "Ontological designing is a way of characterising the relation between human beings and lifeworlds."

[14] B. Tharp and S. Tharp, "*Discursive Design Basics*," 2.

Grounding: Chinese Philosophical Daoism of Zi Ran

In the article, The Social Construction of the Personal Past written by Monisha Pasupathi suggests "the social shaping of the past, in turn, may both influence and be influenced by the unfolding of the future."[15] Your past experiences and memories are intertwined with one another and enable us to consider the coming events. Pasupathi also states that "because memory and identity are intimately connected, the social shaping of memory may also be a process by which the self is socially shaped."[16] This insight that past experiences influence the way we perceive the world reminds me of a Chinese term - Zi Ran (figure 1.1.1).

From a philosophical perspective, Zi Ran is associated with the Chinese Philosophical Daoism. In book *Dao De Jing*,[17] the founder of Chinese philosophical Daoism, Lao Zi,[18] stated that "Zi Ran is the Dao, and the Dao is the Zi Ran."[19] Further, Lao Zi noted that Dao is greater and equal to Zi Ran. Therefore, *Zi Ran* refers to something similar or equal to the "nature". Moreover, *Dao* can be understood as an unseen order that all beings exist under. In Lao Zi's interpretation Zi Ran not only refers to natural environments like forests or mountains. It is also a suggestion of one's conceptual state of being. Related to this, Zhuang Zi[20] (369BC - 286 BC) , another Daoism philosopher who was born after the period of Lao Zi, also suggested that "one is immersing in the thing[21] unconsciously and comfortable with the state of being, and this is Dao."[22]

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[15] Monisha Pasupathi, "*The Social Construction of the Personal Past and Its Implications for Adult Development*.," Psychological Bulletin 127, no. 5 (2001): 661, https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.127.5.651.

[16] Pasupathi, *The Social Construction of the Personal Past and Its Implications for Adult Development*, 661.

[17] "*Dao De Jing* 道德经," a Daoism book conduct by 老子 Lao Zi, the founder of the Chinese Philosophical Daoism.

[18] Lao Zi 老子 (601 BC - Unknown), the author of the Daoism literature Dao De Jing, the earliest Daoism philosopher in China.

[19] Ren Farong 任法融, *Daodejing Shiyi* 道德经释義 [The Book of Daodejing and its Explanation in Modern Chinese] (Beijing: Zhongguo Gongshang Lianhe Chubanshe, 2017), 106.

[20] Zhuang Zi 庄子 (369 BC - 286 BC), Chinese Daoism philosopher, author of the Daoism literature *Zhuang Zi*.

[21] The Thing, in this quote means the Dao, which is an unseen thing, a conceptual state of being.

[22] Zhuang Zhou 庄周, *Zhuangzi Quanshu: Caihui Quanzhu Quanyi* 庄子全书: 彩绘全注全译 [The Book of Zhuang Zi: Illustration and Explanation in Modern Chinese], ed. Si Lv 思履 (Beijing: Beijing Lianhe Chuban Gongsi, 2014), 23.

自然

Zi

Ran

Figure 1.1.1

Following Lao Zi's perception of Dao, Zi Ran is the Dao, and "all things have their place to be, to become; there are no things that have no place to be, and nothing to become."[23] Paring the concept of Zi Ran, which is a part of my cultural heritage, with my past lived experience (living in different cities and locations outside of China). I have drawn on Zi Ran to consider three-forms: The first Zi Ran is referring as nature (environments); the second Zi Ran is a state of being foreshadowing what one has experienced; the third Zi Ran is also a state of being but one is naturally accepting and comfortable welcoming its existence into life. I use these to evaluate and draw out my personal lived experience, interest in design, and cultural impacted identity to serve as a means to explore making an object through textiles. Moreover, through a series of embodied mindful practices of observation, making and performance to address transcultural identity issues in life-experiences.

The First Zi Ran stands for the natural environment. Here, Zi Ran is an umbrella term for nature. Zi Ran can be found in a forest; in a lake; on a tree; and even inside city parks. Nature is so broad it is everywhere on earth, yet nature is so small you can find it in your flower pot on your balcony. I will describe how observation of nature has led me to link Daoism philosophical views to perspectives and concerns in design research in the chapter *The Ziran* 自然: *Thin-Slicing Related to Environments We Find Ourselves In*.

The Second Zi Ran emphasizes a state of being that is based on an individual's past experiences and current lived environment. Unlike the first Zi Ran, the second Zi Ran takes place unconsciously. Most individuals are not aware of changes made in their life and how they affect current actions unless they purposefully take the time to review and reflect on themselves. This Zi Ran is a philosophical approach that emphasizes a state of being where we are immersed in experience but not entirely aware. Arguably, this process is one aspect of identity formation. In the chapter *The Ziranerran* 自然而然: *Thin-Slicing Related the Circumstances That Influence Us*, I will briefly explain how I pair this philosophical notion through intuitive making to define discursive design in research. Understanding intuitive making as a vehicle to uncover identity issues and its relationship to design.

The Third Zi Ran is also a state of being. Different from the second Zi Ran, the third Zi Ran is a state of being that an individual chooses to become. It also refers to feeling comfortable from within oneself. In 2015, in a MUJI talk show, Japanese designer Kenya Hara spoke about the philosophy of MUJI. Hara mentions one of the design concepts MUJI is trying to embrace is to create "the style that suits you perfectly as an individual."[24] This aspiration illustrates an intention in design that has an affinity with the essence of this third meaning of Zi Ran. From a theoretical perspective, the third Zi Ran is the most difficult

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[23] Zhuang Zhou 庄周, *Zhuangzi Quanshu: Caihui Quanzhu Quanyi* 庄子全书: 彩绘全注全译 [The Book of Zhuang Zi: Illustration and Explanation in Modern Chinese], 23.

[24] Kenya Hara, "Visualize the philosophy of MUJI," December 12, 2015, MUJI flagship store, Shanghai, China, Video, 37:07, https://www.muji.com/us/flagship/huaihai755/archive/hara.html.

form of Zi Ran to achieve. It requires a strong acceptance of our surroundings, place in life, and who we are. It is a state of being present and in the moment. In the chapter *The Zizaierran* 自在而然: *Thin-Slicing and Finding the Rhythm of Oneself* I will discuss how I discovered my identity through a series of performative practices that included unexpected responses from others including being misunderstood as a non-Chinese. Part of this process involved accepting who I am, and "understanding how we, as modern subjects 'are' and how we come to be who/what we are in the modern world."[25] Having confronted and recognizing the past shadows that turned up and drove my intuitive designerly actions, I wondered. *"What is next, how do I utilize this recognition of self?"*

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[25] Anne-Marie Willis, "Ontological Designing — Laying the Ground" (Design Philosophy Papers, 2006), 80.

Grounding: Thin-Slicing of Time

In Communication Studies, there is a term called *thin-slicing*. This term, which has been borrowed from the field of psychology, comes from the observation "that as human beings we are capable of making sense of situations based on the *thinnest slice of experience*."[26] In Communication Studies , "thin-slicing" is used to suggest that people sometimes do not overthink the problems they face; that instead, through a thin-slicing effect, they generate responses based on past experiences. Interestingly this has a tie to intuitive approaches in the design. Intuition is not something that just drops in front of you. Rather it is a perception that shifts "how we engage with the world" moving us away "from an analytical, sequential, and logical mode of consciousness."[27] Through my design actions, I have come to realize that intuitive approaches in the design process could be understood as a process of drawing on thin-slicing through one's life. The attuned designer is able to draw on and apply single or multiple slices to help develop and move designs propositions forward.

Observation, making and performance actions have been key to my conceding the concept of *thin-slicing of time*. Observation helps me to embed past experience in my making. Performance helps me to embed the past experience in living. Melding of experiences both past and present is vital to the concept of thin-slicing of time. Time does not just stand for the time we live through; time, it seems to me, is also a space where all beings (human and the more than human) exist. The list below marks out my feelings towards time experienced in the present, and informed by the past, through observation, through making, and through performance. Each of my design actions undertaken during my Master of Design studies are a representation of a thin-slice of my experience, my time.

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[26] Mark Andrejevic, Infoglut: How Too Much Information Is Changing the Way We Think and Know (New York: Routledge, 2013): 79.

[27] Yoko Akama, "Surrendering to the Ocean: Practices of Mindfulness and Presence in Designing," in *DRAFT for Routledge Handbook for Sustainable Design*, ed. Rachel Beth Egenhoefer, 2017, 222.

Time was swift, winding, dense, carrying and enlightening.

Time was intuitive, uncertain, attentive, and isolated.

Time was traceable, repeated, tentative, interdisciplinary, and intuitive.

Time was versatile, a toolbox, a mirror maze, a reference book - renewable, cumulative.

Time was tedious, heated, repetitive, repetition, and aromatic.

Time is intricate, tangle-some, overlapping, periodic, and unforeseeable.

Time was slow, heavy, laden, thick. It felt hard to walk through . . .

Time was implicit, complicated, long-tested, gorgeous, inherited, and impressed.

Time was inclusive, empathetic, acceptable, lightsome, and relaxing.

Time was anxious, worrisome, interactive, thick, and detached.

TIME WAS

WINDING

DENSE

CARRYING

ENLIGHTENING

Sorting things out:
自然 Thin-Slicing Related to Environments We Find Ourselves In …

The Chinese word "**自然**" is pronounced "Zi Ran." For the purpose of this text the English translation of this word is nature, the natural environment that humans have – long occupied and engage in – that is integral to our experience and our histories.

Observing Rivers

Time was swift, winding, dense, carrying and enlightening.

I have noticed that flows of water always/invariably connect with others. From June to August in 2019, I visited the Netherlands, Japan, and returned to my hometown Xi'an, China. While in the Netherlands, I spent time in Amsterdam and Rotterdam. This summer trip aimed to research and document the ancient building structures in this area of Europe and to create designs afterward as a tool for reflecting on the experience. I hoped that I could answer the questions people had asked of myself based on a previous project I had conducted in the Master of Design studio "*Beyond the conversation you had hoped to intimate with others; What did/do you want to show them?*" Instead, however, I kept finding myself staring at the water. Whenever I saw a waterway my steps would just stop. I would stand and watch and watch and watch. There are many rivers in the Netherlands, so I spent a lot of time standing still. This behavior continued when I arrived in Kyoto, Japan, one month later. The Kamogawa River caught my attention. I found myself leaning, alone, on the side of the Shijo bridge, three mornings in a row. During a subsequent visit to Kyoto in January 2020, I paid a visit to the river again.

As my behavior - of watching rivers - happened persistently and often, I began to re-organize my thought process. *Why am I drawn to water; why does it attract me?* With these questions in mind, I returned to my home in Xi'an, China, where I grew up. I drew diagrams of the cities I have lived in and visited: Boulder, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Kyoto, and Xi'an (Figure 2.1). Doing so, I began to realize that all of these places share a common characteristic, they all have lots of inland water (rivers, canals, creaks, streams, lakes, reservoirs…). The waterways I mapped out, spread like spider webs on my screen. I began to realize that my attraction to water had been with me for a long time, that it came from my early childhood experiences in Xi'an.

Sorting Things Out: 自然

The shape of water or, more accurately, the geography that holds water for each city I visited is notably unique. Water, I reminded myself, does not have a set shape/form. Instead, it is determined by the shape/form of the thing that contains it. In other words, water will fill/fit/mold itself to the space it finds itself in. It is hard to speak of the three characteristics of Zi Ran separated. Nature, in itself, is the best performer of Zi Ran philosophy.

While mapping the bodies of water my mind regularly shifted between observations of water and my interest in textiles. Before a flat piece of cloth is manipulated through craft, either by hand or tools and turned into a clothing form, it is like water. Full of possibility, it could be anything. The moment cloth/a textile touches an individual - covering the human body, it becomes a part of that person. Particular styles of clothes invariably become a supplement to support this person's character (this observation links to design actions that I would develop later and discuss in the *Third Zi Ran* chapter below).

Sorting Things Out:
自然而然 Thin-Slicing Related the Circumstances That Influence Us

The word *Ziranerran* **自然而然** is a Chinese idiom that means "naturally" in English. *Ziran* **自然** here means *naturally*, and *Erran* **而然** means to become(ing). *Ziranerran* **自然而然** is used to describe an environment that one is immersed in and naturally influenced by, both unconsciously and consciously.

As noted in the *Grounding* chapter, this form of Zi Ran is a state of being shaped by things other than ourselves: by people, by objects, by experiences. We do not always have control over these things.

In late 2019 COVID-19[28] came from nowhere and swept across the world swiftly: China in early January 2020, Vancouver, by mid-March. Public gyms, restaurants, government buildings, retail stores - any location where people gathered - were forced to shut down to reduce the virus's spread. By the time this document will be complete, it will still be a present threat to humanity. In mid-March Emily Carr University's campus also shut down, I could not access my studio, so I worked from home. Faced with self-isolation due to this sudden change I was hyper-aware of the changes happening around me and the society as a whole. While I could not change the situation, I was able to adapt to this new environment. Finding thoughtful ways to make and pass the time alone in my home became a means of embracing discursive design.

Discursive design refers to the "creation of utilitarian objects/services/interactions whose primary purpose is to communicate ideas—artifacts embedded with discourse."[29] People who practice/research discursive design are "looking to communicate ideas through their objects that are provocative on psychological-, sociological-, and ideological-levels."[30] Discursive design also suggests that designers "listen to the discourse voice of the everyday world objects and surroundings, and their reason for being."[31] The COVID-19 situation forced me to recognize and accept the things I own in the space around me, and as well as understand their reason to exist and to connect with me.

The projects described below were created during the quarantine period (March - June 2020). Everything I made was done using previously owned objects or materials.

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[28] COVID-19, stands for Coronavirus disease 2019.

[29] B. Tharp and S. Tharp, "Discursive Design Basics," 1.

[30] B. Tharp and S. Tharp, "Discursive Design Basics," 3.

[31] B. Tharp and S. Tharp, "Discursive Design Basics," 2.

TIME WAS

INTUITIVE

UNCERTAIN

ATTENTIVE

ISOLATED

Sorting Things Out: 自然而然

Making One: The Textile Pattern Cards

Time was intuitive, uncertain, attentive, and isolated.

"Embracing uncertainty involves acknowledging that we do not and cannot know exactly what will happen next and engaging with the possibilities that this affords."[32]

Faced with the March quarantine situation, my first project was a set of textile pattern cards hand-painted on paper using watercolor paints. Drawing on observations of nature while traveling, being able to move from place to place uninhibited[33] through multiple countries in summer 2019 and January 2020. I initially tried to digitally 'paint' my patterns using digital software. I quickly rejected this solution when I realized I could not generate the same effects on screen as I would by drawing with dye directly onto fabric. Realizing this while also facing a lack of supplies, I switched to using a pack of watercolors and watercolor paper that I had in my home. I began to mimic the process of dye on fabric, on small pieces of paper that had been soaked in water and dried. This making process[34] took six to ten hours, depending on the room's temperature, and the layers of paints applied. In total, I made twelve patterns (Figure 3.1.1).

As I did this work, I had plenty of time to think about my Chinese ancestors, who, when they initially discovered natural dyes, must have faced many difficulties as they figured out the proportions of color to use and best temperatures to create the effects they sought. I began this pattern painting project with uncertainty, not knowing where it would lead me. And eventually, it was taking me away from the situation of making things alone, to connect my works with others through a digital format.

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[32] Yoko Akama, Sarah Pink, and Shanti Sumartojo, *Uncertainty and Possibility: New Approaches to Future Making in Design Anthropology*, vol. Chapter 2, 2020, 22.

[33] Definition of Uninhibited according to the Oxford English Dictionary is "expressing one's feelings or thoughts unselfconsciously and without restraint."
Oxford Dictionaries, s.v. "uninhibited," accessed October 10, 2020, https://www.lexico.com/definition/uninhibited

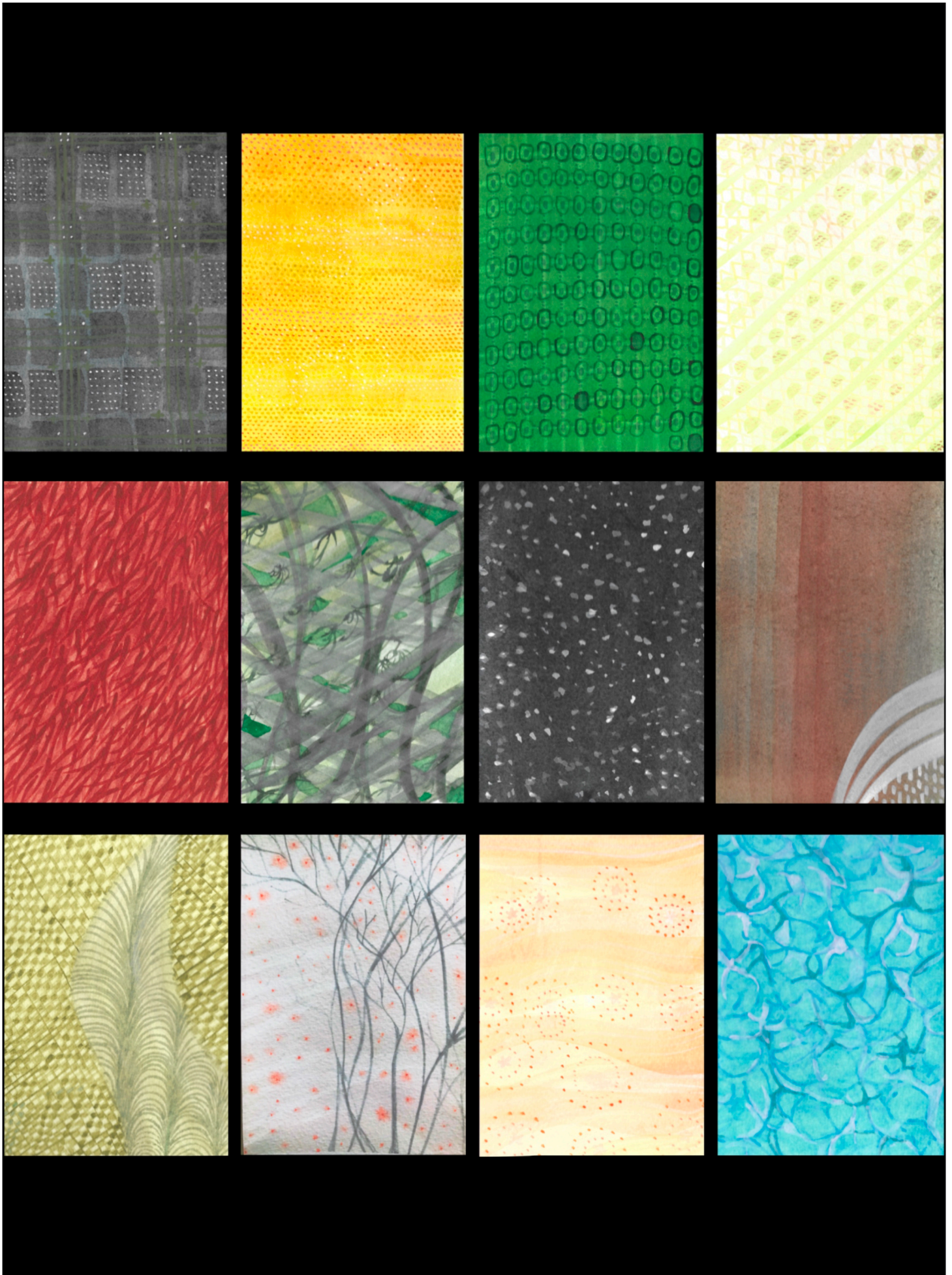[34] Please see the appendix for the detail processes.

Figure 3.1.1

TIME WAS

TRACEABLE

REPEATED

TENTATIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY

INTUITIVE

Sorting Things Out: 自然而然

Making Two: The Paper Dolls

Time was traceable, repeated, tentative, interdisciplinary, and intuitive.

When COVID-19 first hit, many people thought the situation would get better after a month or two. It was not. By mid-April, my earlier plan of taking my pattern cards to a fabric printing service was no longer an option. When I first created my patterns on paper, I did not decide what textile application I was designing them for. Realizing this, I decided to scan my physical pattern cards and work in *Procreate* (an app on my iPad) to help me see how my patterns might translate to a garment form. Remembering my travel photographs of people in Japan (Figure 3.2.1) I drew a character wearing a Yukata and layered my scanned pattern onto the figure. I created pattern combinations for the Yukata as I went. I worked intuitively and followed my instincts. Remembering my recent travels to Japan and the warm acceptance of me (an individual of Chinese origin, see *third Zi Ran* chapter for detail). I created nine designs for Japanese Yukata (Figure 3.2.2).

Pleased with my work, I reached out to a mix of female and male friends who are all Japanese and shared my paper doll illustrations with them online. Sharing and discussing what I had drawn with friends felt good. They wanted to know if I could make the patterns into actual Yukata. They told me they wished they could just try my drawings on, wear my Yakuta designs and go out in the real world with them on – "someday soon!" we agreed (we were all stuck on screens - the choice to go out was not an option). These were very cheerful moments filled with the pleasure and delight of meeting with people and discovering they liked my work. Something in this experience exemplified qualities of the *second Zi Ran-Ziranerran* 自然而然.

The second Zi Ran speaks about an environment where people immerse themselves in and are influenced by their surroundings. In this state of immersion some people are capable of noticing change, while others are not. Arguably, this eastern philosophical perspective connects to the (western) world of design that calls for designers like myself to be able to produce outcomes that adapt and respond to the changes the world brings to us. The expected COVID-19 pandemic is a good example of this sort of catalyst. Faced with the circumstances of Spring 2020 I realized that this Chinese philosophical notion that I grew up with, had a connection to my design actions. I had become aware and had begun to listen to the "discursive voice"[35] embedded in the things I already owned and in the design actions I attempted. Gaining the ability to consciously survey the objects filled in my surroundings and make the most use of them, through design actions, became a way of connecting myself to the second Zi Ran.

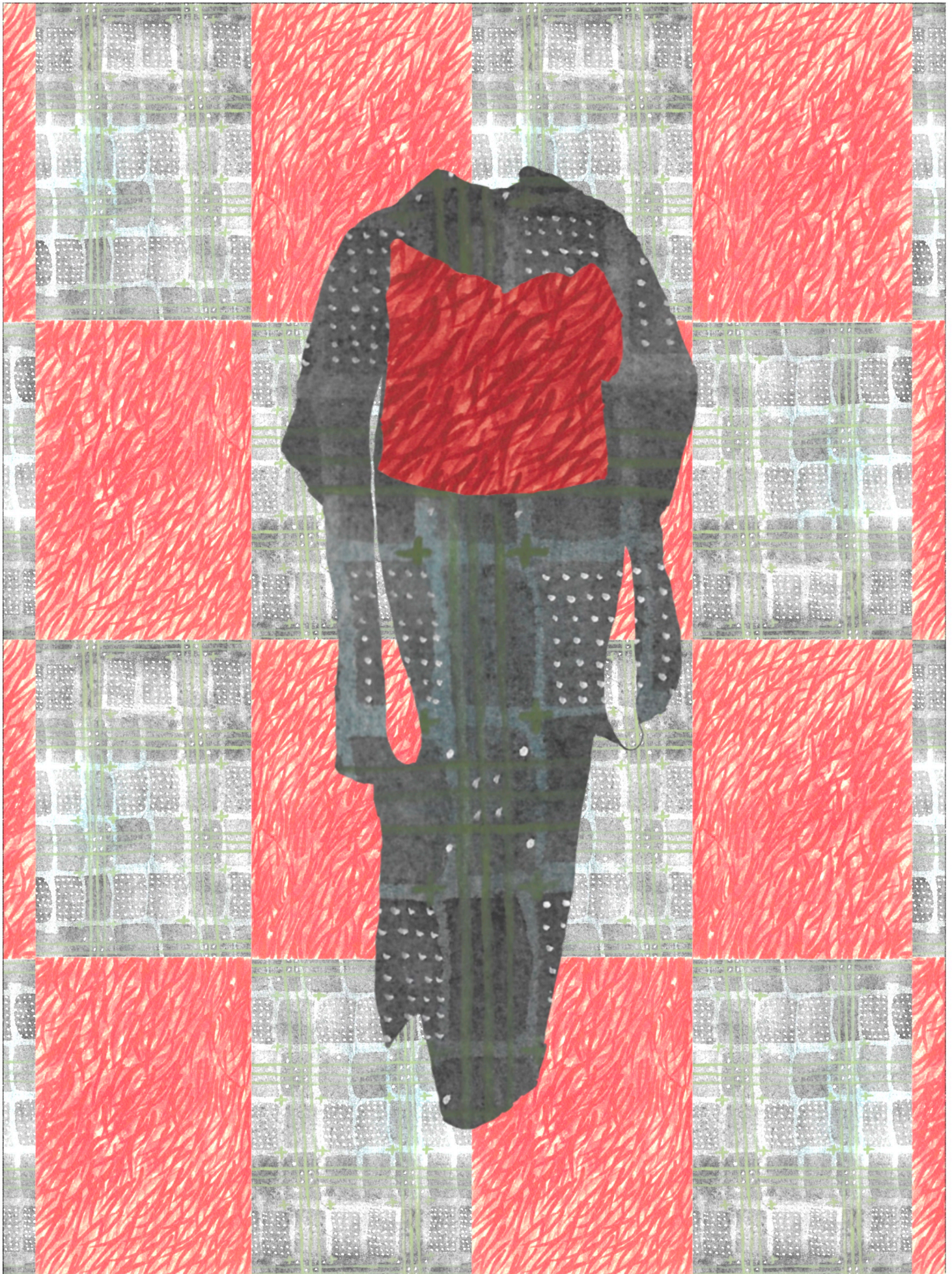[35] B. Tharp and S. Tharp, "Discursive Design Basics," 2.

Figure 3.2.1

Figure 3.2.2

TIME WAS

VERSATILE

A TOOLBOX

A MIRROR MAZE

A REFERENCE BOOK - RENEWABLE

CUMULATIVE

Sorting Things Out: 自然而然

Making Three: Pixelated Textiles

Time was versatile, a toolbox, a mirror maze, a reference book - renewable, cumulative.

In March 2020, Nintendo released a social simulation game *Animal Crossing: New Horizons*. At the same time, coronavirus was raging around the world. In *Animal Crossing*, players are invited to develop their isolated island and 'live' with animals. In the game, there is a function called "*My design*." "*My design*" allows players to apply their pattern designs onto surfaces, clothes, and furniture in the game. Not only can players use "*My design*" to decorate their floors and walls, but they can also sell "*My design* clothes" at a tailor shop located in the game space. Players can also gift embedded clothes provided by the system to animals living on their island.[36] When players upload their designs to the tailor shop, animals can purchase and wear these "*My design* clothes" in the game (Figure 3.3.1).

Stuck in isolation, I discovered *Animal Crossing: New Horizon* by coincidence[37] and began to play it with friends online. While playing, I realized that this game platform could be a way for me to present and promote my textile patterns to others.

The "*My design*" function in this game is an interesting one, as it challenges the idea of where and how to present textile designs. Through this function, the process of making and consuming becomes an entirely digital one. Players inside the game can be seen wearing a "*My design*" shirt with *Louis Vuitton* logos or equally homemade patterns. The concepts of what is the design, and who is the designer seems to shift. Rather than consumption, the "*My design*" function is embedded with the notion of sharing. Through the internet, through this game, many other people and I are connecting. Digitization not only enables textile designs to be shared cross-platforms (physically and digitally) but also helps to connect and promote human relationships.

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[36] Players cannot give their "*My design* clothes" to animals.

[37] *Animal Crossing: New Horizons* is going to be abbreviated as *Animal Crossing* in the following writings.
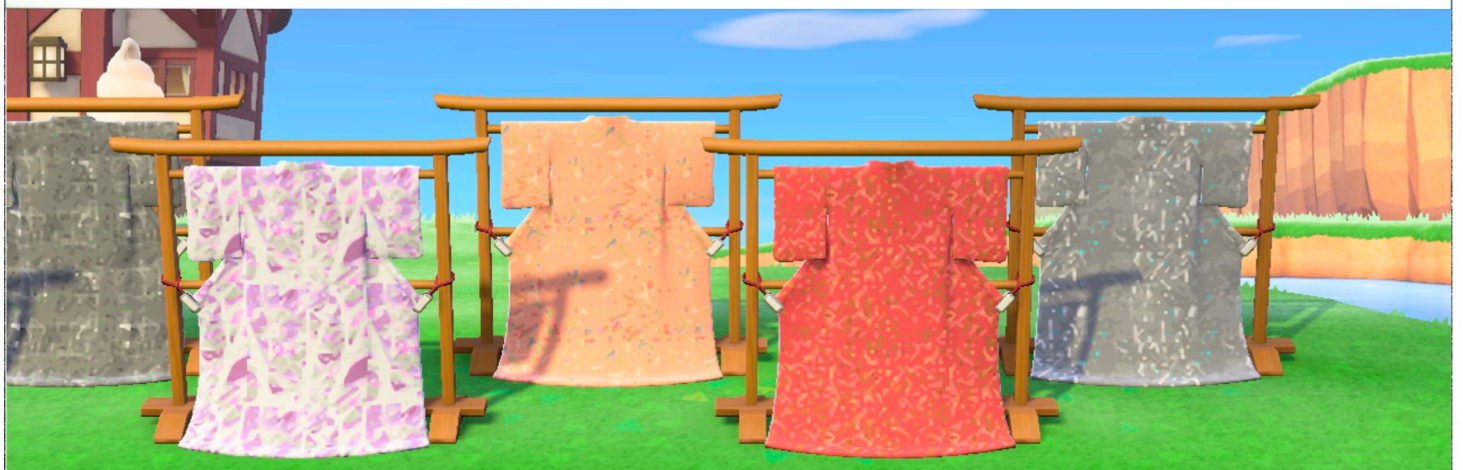
Figure 3.3.1 Top three (my character with brown hair);
Figure 3.3.2 Bottom two

Sorting Things Out: 自然而然

Realizing the possibility within Animal Crossing as a mechanism to cope with the constraints imposed on me, such as lack of access to studios/workshops/supplies, I decided to engage with the tailor shop option in the game. I made fifteen Kimono racks in this game and gifted them to friends who also play the *Animal Crossing*. I used the Paper Doll project designs that I had not been able to actualize on fabric to make Yukata in the real world and applied them to the game. My friends were able to use those Kimono racks to decorate their island (Figure 3.3.2).

The reality of isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic did not stop me from making and seeking connections with people. Arturo Escobar states that, "digital design cannot operate outside its social context because files, systems, and media only gain meaning as part of a community's practice."[38] *Animal Crossing* provided me a platform to share and to connect with other individuals, known and unknown. Through this platform, as part of this ongoing social community that servers the purpose of making connections, my design actions, and perhaps myself as a designer, gained meaning. The development of technology and the internet creates many possibilities for people to engage pluralistically across multiple platforms. Ontologically design(ing) is activated through embodied practices that "characterize the relationship between human beings and lifeworlds."[39] In addition, when we want to communicate, "artifacts embedded within discourse; allow these to become tools for thinking and to raise awareness."[40] Also, to acknowledge "the things we design, and things that are designing us,"[41] in other words, I was not able to be fully embodied as a designer until I was connecting to other individuals and sharing my works on the internet, digitally.

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[38] Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse*, 41.

[39] Willis, "Ontological Designing," 80.

[40] B. Tharp and S. Tharp, "Discursive Design Basics," 1.

[41] Willis, "Ontological Designing," 80.

TIME WAS

TEDIOUS

HEATED

REPETITIVE

REPETITION

AROMATIC

Sorting Things Out: 自然而然

Making Four: The Tea Dye Fabric Samples

Time was tedious, heated, repetitive, repetition and aromatic.

Making does not always happen in sequence. Sometimes things run parallel with one another and inform each other as well. While working on my *Paper Doll* explorations, I was also dyeing fabric in my kitchen using tea that I had on hand. Out of necessity (forced on me by the pandemic) and because I had become interested in playing with the idea of using and making the most of what I had close at hand I took advantage of my kitchen and experimented with the tea I have in stock. Compared with other natural dye processes, tea dying is relatively easy to work in home settings. Using 4.5 x 6.5 inches of muslin fabric, I conducted two sets of tea dyeing color tests using English Breakfast tea and Tie Guan Yin[42] (Figure 3.4.1, Figure 3.4.2).

The color of the cloth barely changed.[43] The green and black teas I sampled resulted in similar color shades. While these tea dyeing attempts were exciting, I was also a little disappointed and could not see how they related to my other work. I set them aside - stacked them on the edge of my sewing table.

Figure 3.4.1

Figure 3.4.2

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[42] Tie Guan Yin, one kind of the Chinese green tea.

[43] See appendix for detailed procedures.

TIME WAS

INTRICATE

TANGLE-SOME

OVERLAPPING

PERIODIC

UNFORESEEABLE

Sorting Things Out: 自然而然

Making Five: Tea Dyed Table Mat

Time is intricate, tangle-some, overlapping, periodic, and unforeseeable.

One afternoon during the pandemic, after eating my lunch on my low wooden coffee table. I noticed that my hot cup of tea had left a mark on the table. The mark was obvious even from a distance. I figured I might need something to put under my cups to prevent the heat from further damaging the tabletop. Not wanting to go out to purchase a new one - the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic had made me anxious and uneasy with trips outside too close to strangers - I decided to make a table mat using leftover fabrics I have at home. The notion of being in the present came to mind. Being in the present in a situation, accepting the new norm surrounding me, and working with (not against) it. The earlier Phase One Isolation that had been enforced in British Columbia[44] forced me to enter the second state of Zi Ran. My habit of making what I started as a way to cope through that first uncertain period had not stopped. I wanted to craft something that would use the materials I had around me.

I collected all my leftover thinly sliced, weird shaped pieces of fabric but soon realized that they were too hard to sew together. While I was struggling to figure out how to make the table mat my table needed, I received a phone call from my mother. Aspects of our conversation gave me the clue I needed. I suddenly thought, why bother with the scraps of odd-shaped fabrics prices when there are some regular modular pieces (my test samples) right in front of me? Yes, the tea dye samples I made had no other use. The muslin fabric I had used for dying samples was cut into a similar size, and it would be easy to work with. I just need to put them in order and sew them together, and then I would have a table mat. I set to work, and in only twenty minutes, I finished my needed table mat (Figure 3.5.1).

Something in this process reminded me of Ranru (or Boro), a technique that is used in Japan. The Boro textile is also called Ranru in Japanese. A Boro textile or Ranru is a textile sewed together by many old used fabrics. Originally, this process of sewing another piece of cloth on a garment was used when clothes were broken and needed repair. These days, some designers gather vintage jeans and turn them into a Ranru jackets. The concept of the Boro textile was based on recycling and saving of cost from old periods.

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44 CBC News, "What you need to know about COVID-19 in B.C. on March 31, 2020," *CBC News*, March 30, 2020, British Columbia, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/coronavirus-update-what-you-need-to-know-march-31-1.5515687.

Sorting Things Out: 自然而然

The process of finding individuals' Zi Ran can also be seen as a way of sorting personal experiences/surroundings. There is a rhythm within the process of sorting that varies from one individual to the next based on lived experience. Designers like myself need to discover our unique rhythm to understand and acknowledge the intuitive acts in design making. The making of this simple table mat derived from the notion of the second Zi Ran. When I made the table mat, I was engaging in design as ontological; I recognized myself "being designed while designing/making"[45] by my surroundings. Not only did I recognize the environment I was situated within, but I also actively engaged with it and the objects around me through my design action: creating a table mate. To make, and to make use of what I made. The social change, COVID-19, forced me to look around, and eventually, I became able to manage - to live along with what was happening around me and accepting the new norm then enjoy it.

Design Researchers Bruce Tharp and Stephanie Tharp assert that design that is discursive communicates "ideas through objects in the everyday world offering utility."[46] Through my design actions I have attempted to embody observations in everyday discourse and make through ordinary objects that generate other possibilities outside its original utility. By doing so, the second Zi Ran is embedded within the process of making those design actions described from Making One to Making Five.

Figure 3.5.1

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[45] Willis, "Ontological Designing," 80.

[46] B. Tharp and S. Tharp, "Discursive Design Basics," 2, 3.

TIME WAS

SLOW

HEAVY

LADEN

THICK

IT FELT HARD TO WALK THROUGH . . .

Sorting Things Out:
自在而然 Thin-Slicing and Finding the Rhythm of Oneself

The Chinese word, *Zizai* **自在**, most directly relates to words such as "free" or "comfortable" in English. *Erran* **而然** as noted earlier means "to become." *Zizaierran* **自在而然**, then, is a suggestion for individuals to live and embrace themselves/their identities - essentially to feel comfortable with oneself. According to Claude Pineau, "how people embody sense of self varies from one individual to another and sometimes dependent on their lived experiences."[47]

Performative Act One: The Wedding

Time was slow, heavy, laden, thick. It felt hard to walk through . . .

The Wedding was one of my earliest explorations that considered identity construction through the making and performance. This project helped me review my past and assess what I carried with me as a hereditary and culturally Chinese person. Revisiting this project later - after a series of reflections on my travels - I was able to identify further performative opportunities. During my work on this project, I moved towards the conceptual idea of the Chinese philosophical Daoism of Zi Ran. Later I would come to recognize a correlation between experiencing uncertainty while observing, intuitive making in design explorations and performative acts with clothing - all of these embodied practices act to help sort through things and to discover the rhythm embedded within intuitive making in design.

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[47] Pineau, Claude. "The Psychological Meaning of Comfort." *Applied Psychology* 31, no. 2 (April 1982): 271–82. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-0597.1982.tb00097.x.

Sorting Things Out: 自在而然

The Wedding was precipitated by both my past and my present. First, my past, the stories that my father had read to me when I was a child had a huge influence on me. As a child, I developed a deep interest in traditional Chinese history and culture from my hometown - one of the oldest cities in China, Xi'an. Later, after moving to the United States, this interest persisted. I researched Chinese artifacts while an undergraduate, oriented around the Chinese artifacts collected in the on-campus museum at the university I attended. Second, my present, I was experiencing a challenge in my relationship. I wanted to create a project that spoke about my perspective on women in contemporary relationships. Drawing on my own lived experience and secondary research into traditional Chinese wedding ceremonies I developed a speculative wedding outfit made of red satin and black organza and consisting of two parts: a veil and a dress. Rather than use Western wedding elements, I drew from traditional Chinese weddings for the foundational concepts of my exploration, circling myself back to where I came from, East Asia (Figure 4.1.2, Figure 4.1.3). The veil was my means to explore and consider notions and implications of hidden identity (Figure 4.1.1). The dress was my means to follow my ancestors' lead - to apply their tactics for crafting garments. "People in ancient China used ropes to connect pieces of fabric and ensure the clothes do not fall off from the human body."[48] The construction of my garment did not use any zippers or hooks.

While my intention and inclination to produce/create *The Wedding* was purely intuitive, it did come from - was part of - a personal lineage of interest and life experience. This design action, which sought to invite conversation with others, was also a site for self-interrogation.

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[48] Shen Congwen 沈从文 and Wang Xu 王预, *Zhong Guo Fu Shi Shi* 中国服饰史 [The History of Chinese Clothing] (Xi'an, 2004), 80-86.

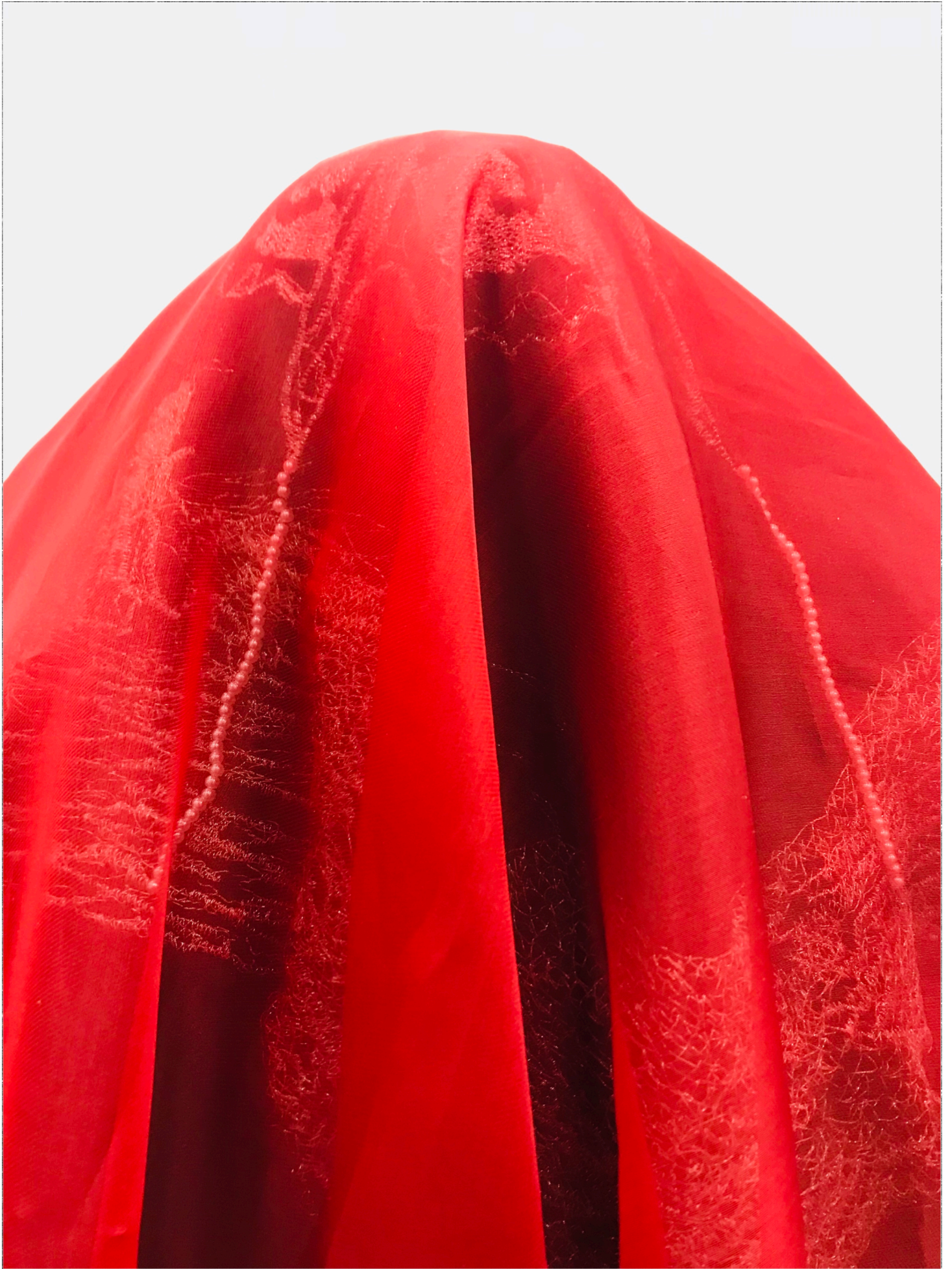Figure 4.1.1   41

Figure 4.1.2 Left; Figure 4.1.3 Right

On the performance day, I wore the dress and veil I had created, I felt my sense of time slow down. I became aware of it (time) as I listened to my peers present their work at a distance and from under my veil. My first engagement with others occurred when I entered the Master of Design studio. I sat in my dress and veil at the back of the room, waiting for other people to interrupt/engage with me. This performative piece was my opportunity also to observe my colleagues from many different cultural contexts. My day, wearing this outfit in the studio, however, did not occur as I had hoped. None of my colleagues (I was in a crit space with twenty-one of them) came to interact with me. I sat in the corner, all alone, by myself, for two and a half hours. Before entering the room and taking on this performative act, I had anticipated that at least one or two people might come up to me and strike up a conversation, but no one did. While I sat alone, I took photos of what I could see from inside the veil (Figure 4.1.4). My view was limited, and my ability to sense the time was laden because I was hardly experiencing the flow of time under the veil. Initially I thought this project was a failure.

One month later, I had two separate conversations with two of my professors. Both of them asked me, "*But why in the form of performance? Beyond the conversation, you had hoped to be intimate with others. What did/do you want to show them?*"

I decided I needed to figure out how this (performance) related to my work in design. *Why did I make this decision to involve identity and background in design making; why am I interested in certain things, and not others, and where are these unconsciousness decisions leading me?* In summer 2019, I began a series of observation practices (refer to the first Zi Ran chapter). I also (unintentionally) shifted to a practice of embodied performative acts. I will describe these below.
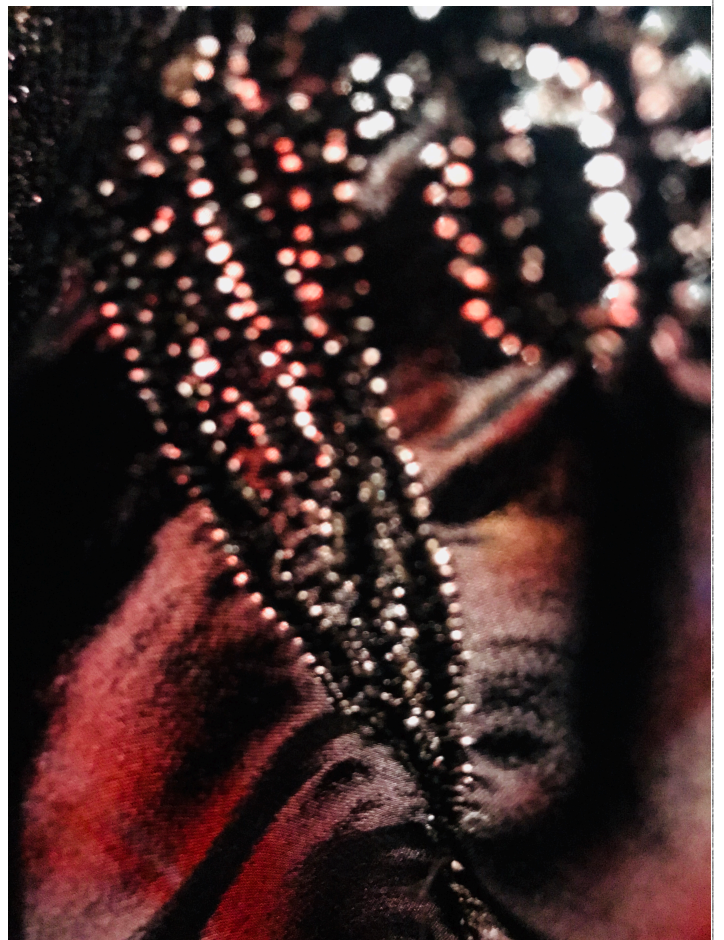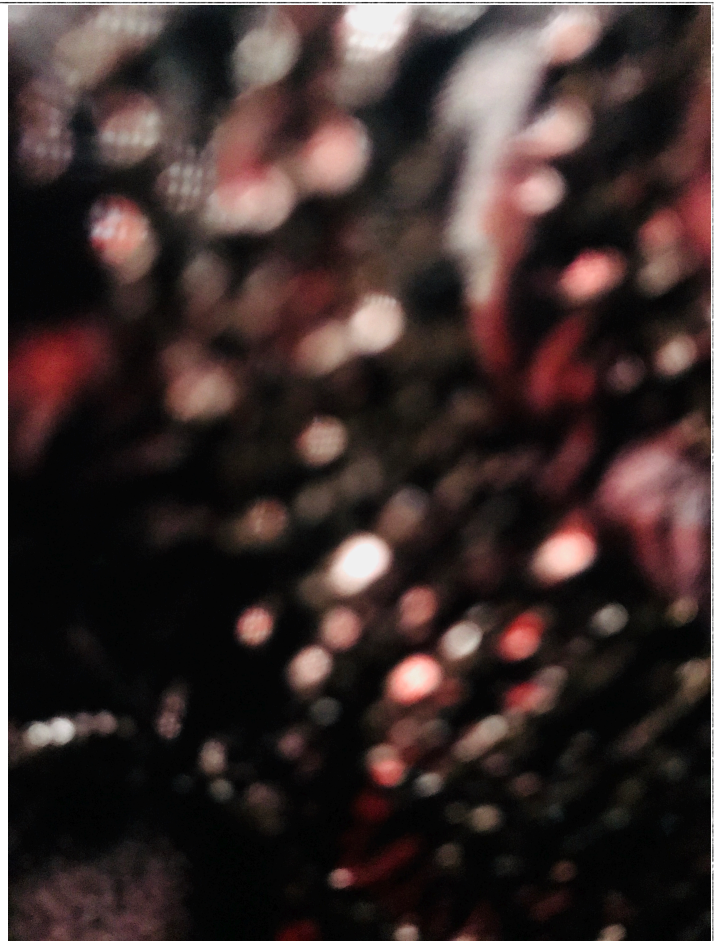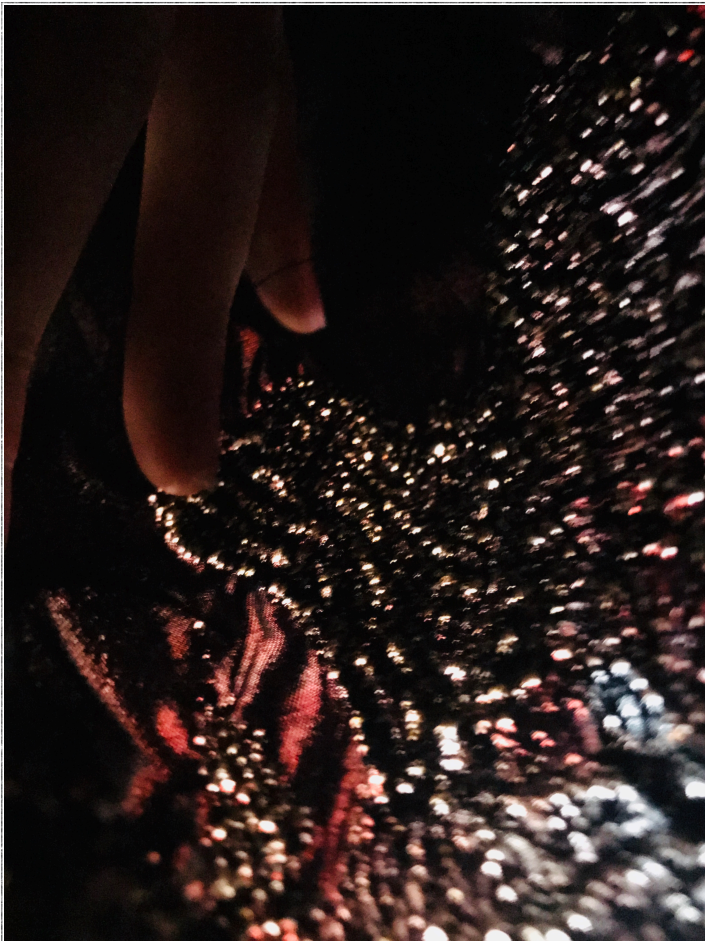
Figure 4.1.4   44

TIME WAS

IMPLICIT

COMPLICATED

LONG-TESTED

GORGEOUS

INHERITED

IMPRESSED

Sorting Things Out: 自在而然

Performative Act Two: Myself as Maiko and time spent in a Kyoto Ochaya Ryokan

Time was implicit, complicated, long-tested, gorgeous, inherited, and impressed.

I am drawn to Japan.

I have visited Japan three times. In May 2018, two former roommates invited me to join them in Tokyo for a one-week trip. It was short but enlightening. As a transcultural individual I grew up watching Japanese animation and dramas in both China and the United States. In my undergraduate studies my Japanese friends had introduced me to their culture. Despite the persistent thread of Japanese storytelling that I had consumed via anime and friends I was not conscious of being drawn to Japan. This first trip was a typical visit to a foreign country. I enjoyed myself but there were no significant incidents that made me think I would return. In July 2019, I visited Japan for the second time with a Chinese friend. Unlike my first trip, this time I was there for research purposes. My trip lasted eleven days. I visited three cities in the following order, Osaka, Kyoto, and Tokyo. In December 2019 I made my third trip to Japan. This time to celebrate new year. On this trip, with a Japanese friend I returned to Kyoto.

Sorting Things Out: 自在而然

In July 2019, for my second visit to Japan, I booked accommodation at an old Ochaya[49] style Ryokan[50] located in the Gion area[51] of Kyoto. My room was on the third floor and only accessible by a set of steep wooden stairs. While it did not have a TV, there was a wifi connection so I was not totally cut off from my normal world. At night, I could hear music being played in the building next door. It was an intriguing experience - to lean up against the wood sliding door in the middle of a rainy night and listen to a beautiful piece of music produced by a foreign instrument I could not name.

My Chinese friend was eager to try a Maiko experience workshop. Curious too, I joined her. Dressing up as a Maiko is a lengthy process that takes over an hour. It involves choosing the Kimonos, applying thick layers of white paint, detailed Maiko facial makeup (with the help of a makeup stylist), putting on a Maiko wig[52] (to cover my short hair) and then finally being dressed by one of the workshop employees in multiple Kimono layers. Going through this process left me feeling transformed. How incredible to look like a real Maiko! Faced with the weight of my new attire I marveled at the grace of Maikos. To move smoothly in these clothes was no small task. Once I was all dressed up I was invited into a photo studio, which featured a miniature Japanese tea room with a rock garden and a range of props. I was given a rattan basket and directed to hold it in one hand, lifting the Kimonos' hem, up to my waist with my other hand.[53] In that moment of being photographed, I thought about other "traditions" in other places that were lost in time. In China, "many traditional textiles are getting lost due to globalization."[54]

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[49] Ochaya is a Japanese tea house.

[50] Ryokan is a Japanese style hotel.

[51] This area of Kyoto is well known for its Maiko performances.

[52] A real Maiko's elaborate hair arrangement is their own, they do not wear wigs.

[53] I posted photos taken during my Maiko experience on Instagram. Surprisingly instead of commenting on my attire, my Japanese friends asked me if I went to see Maiko's performance - they did not recognize me. (Figure 4.2.1.1, Figure 4.2.1.2).

[54] Li Nan 李楠, *Fu Shi Wen Hua Lun* 服饰文化论 [The Cultural Aspects of Clothing] (S.l.: E-CONTENT GENERIC VENDOR, 2017), Chapter 2.3.

Sorting Things Out: 自在而然

My Maiko experience reminded me of my cultural traditions, while also making me think about the future. *Could activities such as my Maiko experience act as a tool to motivate new ideas (bring connections between western design theory and Asian cultural context), and perhaps reveal important insights from the cultural heritages?*[55]

Figure 4.2.1.1

Figure 4.2.1.2

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[55] Later during COVID-19 pandemic, I began to apply these practices that embedded with East Asian cultural heritages, especially Japanese culture (see the *second Zi Ran* chapter) to my design actions that practices Chinese Philosophy of Zi Ran.

TIME WAS

INCLUSIVE

EMPATHETIC

ACCEPTABLE

LIGHTSOME

RELAXING

Sorting Things Out: 自在而然

Performative Act Three: Wearing Yukata in public spaces in Japan

Time was inclusive, empathetic, acceptable, lightsome, and relaxing.

     After my Maiko experience I decided to try wearing another traditional Japanese outfit: the Yukata.[56] I wore Yukata during a visit to the Fushimi Inari shrine and at a Tokyo firework festival. At the Fushimi Inari shrine, I saw people wearing a mix of traditional and contemporary western clothing. People mixed up time periods - wearing traditional Kimonos[57] with contemporary dress shirts underneath. This capacity to absorb and adopt foreign cultures within traditional ones inspired me. Later, during my stay, I purchased a set of Yukata. I wore my new Yukata on the subway, on the streets of Tokyo, and while purchasing food from a convenience store. No one looked at me oddly. The acceptance and tolerance of me wearing traditional clothing that was not of my own heritage was refreshing.

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[56] Yukata, one of the styles of the Kimono; originally was meant to be worn at home or in public baths, though time development, people now often wear Yukata in summer seasons.

[57] With my knowledge learned from Japanese textile books, I assumed the Kimonos I saw at the time were reasonably traditional.

Sorting Things Out: 自在而然

 Wearing my Yukata in an everyday setting made me feel more alive than ever before. I could sense Japan's summer spirit through the Yukata. It dawned on me that Kimono and Yukata are not just clothes, they are a compression of history and time (Figure 4.2.2.1).

Figure 4.2.2.1

TIME WAS

ANXIOUS

WORRISOME

INTERACTIVE

THICK

DETACHED

Sorting Things Out: 自在而然

Performative Act Four: Wearing Yukata in Vancouver

Time was anxious, worrisome, interactive, thick, and detached.

In October 2019, three months after returning to Vancouver, I wore the Yukata again. This time to have dinner with a Japanese friend. On my way to the Japanese restaurant I was complimented for my outfit and mistaken as Japanese by a stranger. Despite this I was very self-conscious. While at the restaurant I had a pleasant time, but the gazes from strangers were hard to bear. I remember wishing time would move faster. Unlike the experience of wearing the Yukata in Japan I feel nervous and uncomfortable. I thought of the Hanfu[58] wearing community in China[59] and the negative responses they often receive.[60] I also thought about language.

Intent on better understanding Japanese culture I joined Vancouver based Japanese-English language social group that meets twice a week. And was established for two groups of people: those like myself who wanted to learn Japanese, and for Japanese who recently arrived in Canada to practice their English. Experiences while being introduced to people of this community reminded me of my in-between identity that people often have a hard time situating. Living in North America for ten years, I am familiar with people mistaking individuals from different areas of Asia. Still, I was surprised in my Japanese-English language social group that even native Chinese and Japanese speakers would confuse me as a Japanese. As with previous experiences during my travels to Japan. As long as I did not speak, I was easily mistaken for being Japanese.

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[58] Hanfu, is a traditional clothing for Han ethnicity in China.

[59] MO Zhi Ying, "The Hanfu Movement and Intangible Cultural Heritage: Considering the Past to Know the Future" (University of Macau, 2017), 12.

[60] In recent years, in China, there has been a growth of Hanfu movements in many cities. Wearing Hanfu in China, however, unlike the Kimono and Yukata in Japan, brings strange gazes and comments from strangers. I have tried wearing Hanfu a couple of times while visiting family in China. The response from fellow Chinese has made me feel uncomfortable and sad. While the Hanfu is the traditional clothing for people of the Han ethnicity, historical and political reasons have meant that there is a disconnect for most Chinese with this heritage.

Sorting Things Out: 自在而然

And while this can be convenient to be seen as a Japanese, it is in these instances that I am aware of losing my identity as a Chinese. I am living in a cross-cultural environment. My past experiences tell me I am not accepted on either side by either group of people. While I am a person with "more than one cultural identity;"[61] The Chinese community living in North America also share a transcultural identity (due to their living environment). However, "individuals differ in regard to their choice of cultural elements they want to integrate into their selves."[62]

The sense of loss belonging from these language experiences made me wonder where I can situate myself and my practice as a designer. I have been irrigated by both eastern and western cultural contexts. China has immersed me with rich historical and philosophical traditions of its culture. Living in North America has offered me an open mind to think and accept in a multi-cultural context. And my trips to Japan have offered a glance at a place of adaptation - of cultural/traditional acceptance and relevance in contemporary society. Reflecting on this, I finally found the clues that I consider relevant to design practice. Japan itself is an example of a place where both non-western and western ways are drawn on to live "in and through transitional times."[63] It seems to me that Japan's rich grounding and acknowledgment of its past, combined with a level of acceptance and tolerance towards new things, demonstrates qualities advocated by Arturo Escobar: "openness, mindfulness, a willingness to collaborate."[64] Drawing on my own Chinese philosophical, transcultural perspective Escobar's call for a pluriverse of design resonates. Plurality in design offers up the possibility to grow, share and validate what others of different experience and background have to offer.

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[61] Gundula Lücke, Tatiana Kostova, and Kendall Roth, "Multiculturalism from a Cognitive Perspective: Patterns and Implications," *Journal of International Business Studies* 45, no. 2 (February 2014), 170.

[62] Vauclair, Christin-Melanie, Justine Klecha, Cristina Milagre, and Bárbara Duque. "Transcultural Identity The Future Self in a Globalized World." *TRANSCULTURAL Revista Semestral Da Associação Portuguesa de Psicologia e Psiquiatria Transcultural*, Associação Portuguesa de Psicologia e Psiquiatria Transcultural, Volume VI, no. No.1 (2014): 12.

[63] Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse*, 153.

[64] Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse*, 153.

Sorting Things Out: 自在而然

　　Applying elements from Japanese culture to design practice has made me wonder what is the appropriate use of cultural content outside my own? How do I situate myself if I am in the culture that I am borrowing? Broega et al., in Reverse Design notes that "cultural appropriation is generally understood as an expression of colonialism as opposed to the ways of cultural borrowing and cross-fertilization which imply mutual exchange."[65] Further, this article states that cultural misappropriation involves acts of "comparison of a dominant culture's adoption of elements, ideas, images, art, and styles originally created by minority culture."[66]

　　"Uncertainty as a transformative force might offer different routes, intervention, and forms of change-making."[67] After visiting cities in three countries in the summer of 2019, I began to introspectively review myself: the spaces I have lived in; the languages I am able to speak; my education in multiple different geographical and cultural contexts. Having done this self-scan, I returned to the work I had created previously, especially those that were intuitive and full of uncertainty. I began to see that behind my uncertainty, my instinctive acts and years of experiences (both positive and negative) shape the conceptual standing of the work I create. This enabled a significant shift in my perspective. For years, I did not know my identity and struggled to make others accept who I am. Over the past two years, I have come to recognize and acknowledge the things I had, the things I have, and the things I hope to have in the future.

　　The performative acts described above are based in both my culture and another's. Through them I have come to contend with my cultural heritage and my transcultural identity. This process has allowed me to discover a state of comfort while also accepting uncertainty. Through my performative acts I became aware of issues of cultural appropriation. On one hand, I realized that some of my work could be taken as an inappropriate use of a culture that is not my own. On the other hand, as a transcultural individual, I have found myself drawn to Japan, a culture that has offered me a sense of acceptance I have not found elsewhere. By stepping into clothing that was not my own, and often out of its' original context, I have had to deal with unease. Carrying this uncertainty while embodying performative practices, my cultural appropriation concerns, dissolved in the process of self-identity recognition.

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[65] Broega, Ana Cristina, Helder Carvalho, Manuel Blanco Lage, Guillermo García-Badell, and Diana Lucía Gómez-Chacón. Reverse Design: *A Current Scientific Vision from the International Fashion and Design Congress*, 2019, 192.

[66] Broega et al., Reverse Design: *A Current Scientific Vision from the International Fashion and Design Congress*, 2019, 192.

[67] Akama, Pink, and Sumartojo, *Uncertainty and Possibility*, 7.

Sorting Things Out: 自在而然

The essence of the Third Zi Ran is immersive comfort with ourselves and the environment we live in. The key to comfort suggested in the Zi Ran philosophy is discovering/finding one's unique comfort/settlement. This is translatable, I think, to design, and the role of designers. When we draw on places and cultures that are not our own, this must come with a personal connection. Only when designers situate themselves within the context we are engaging, with sincere admiration and respect, and our design outcomes appropriated both inside and outside the cultural context they are derived from. As designers, we will invariably face obstacles at some point in our research or design process. I see this phenomenon as a positive growth. Designers who work specifically with cultural-related content will face some barriers that are particularly hard to contend with, ones that arise due to unfamiliar contexts and new encounters connected to another culture. In my mind, our job in these contexts is not to break the barriers but rather to build windows and possibilities for people from both sides to be able to see and experience aspects of a culture other than their own.

Sorting Things Out: 自在而然

Rhythms: Finding and applying them

Everyone has a different rhythm and these rhythms are constantly changing due to our own personal circumstances. Given my work over the past two years, I am of the mind that designers need to find their own presence and rhythm through sorting and acknowledging their own life experiences. They need to feel free to extend this into their design actions/design making. My research has a cadence - a rhythm that has been set by identifying the *thin-slicing of time* that connects my life experiences and has helped me form an understanding of design actions/design making. My practice orients itself around the act of sorting. As a design novice, I have continuously tried to appropriate my uncertainty and intuition and apply this to my design making. Without having sorted my experiences, I would not have understood, or come to see, how all the decisions I made before, during, and after my design actions correlate with the thin-slices of my own lived experience.

At this juncture I see applying and tracking *thin-slicing of time* as a method that has helped me better understand the role of intuition in design practice. Through sorting personal experiences, I have come to understand the rhythm of my intuitive acts in design making. My work incorporates and makes connections between my eastern cultural heritage and western design practices. This correlation and active integration of a Chinese philosophical perspective with design is productive. It allows uncertainty and respect towards other cultures to thrive.

I have identified four primary points that have been useful to disassemble my process of sorting and that have led me to have a better understanding of intuitive processes in design(ing) (see figure 5.1.1, figure 5.1.2). First, my background or past experiences have influenced who I am as an individual and a creative. Second, my field of study and interests plays a role in how I perceive design. Third, my preferred methods act as a means to ground my work. Fourth, my results or outcomes are framed by the previous points as a whole to interpret the act of making in design. In this document, each of these points inform a role in my intuitive responses to design(ing). My *transcultural identity* and deep interest in the Chinese philosophical Daoism of Zi Ran are based on my lived experience in four different cultural contexts and my own cultural heritage. Textiles and intuitive acts in design making is my field of interest. The series of projects that apply embodied practices of observation, making, and performance were used to explore discursive and ontological design as methods to ground my acts of design(ing). Personal experiences, field of interest(s), design method(s), have been considered in relation to one another using *thin-slicing of time* as a method of sorting. Doing so I have grasped the uniqueness that life experience offers to designers and consequently to their designs/design(ing).

Top diagram (Figure 5.1.1):

BACKGROUND, PAST EXPERIENCES, AND THE THINGS ES YOU

YOUR FIELD OF STUDY/INTEREST

METHOD(S) & DESIGN GROUNDING

OUTCOME/RESULT(S)

Bottom diagram (Figure 5.1.2):

POETIC OF DESIGN (PHILOSOPHY + DESIGN)

WESTERN DESIGN THINKING VERSUS EASTERN DESIGN THINKING

WHAT ELEMENT COULD COME BEFORE DESIGN MAKING?

DESIGN OUTSIDE OF MAKING PRACTICE

BACKGROUND, PAST EXPERIENCES, AND THE THINGS ES YOU

YOUR FIELD OF STUDY/INTEREST

METHOD(S) & DESIGN GROUNDING

OUTCOME/RESULT(S)

TRANSCULTURAL IDENTITY

ONTOLOGICAL DESIGN

DISCURSIVE DESIGN

TEXTILE DESIGN + INTUITIVE ACTS IN DESIGN MAKING

A WAY OF SORTING THINGS FOR DESIGNERS WHO ARE EXPERIENCING INTUITION IN DESIGN MAKING

CHINESE PHILOSOPHY DAOISM

OBSERVATION

PERFORMATIVE EMBODIMENT

DESIGN MAKING

CULTURAL INFLUENCES ON DESIGN MAKING

TO START WITH "NOT TRY TO SOLVE PROBLEMS OR CHANGE THINGS."

WHY DO YOU MAKE/DESIGN?

*Inside the YELLOW blocks are this document's point of views.

*The PURPLE and RED boxes represents the possible approaches for "SORTING."
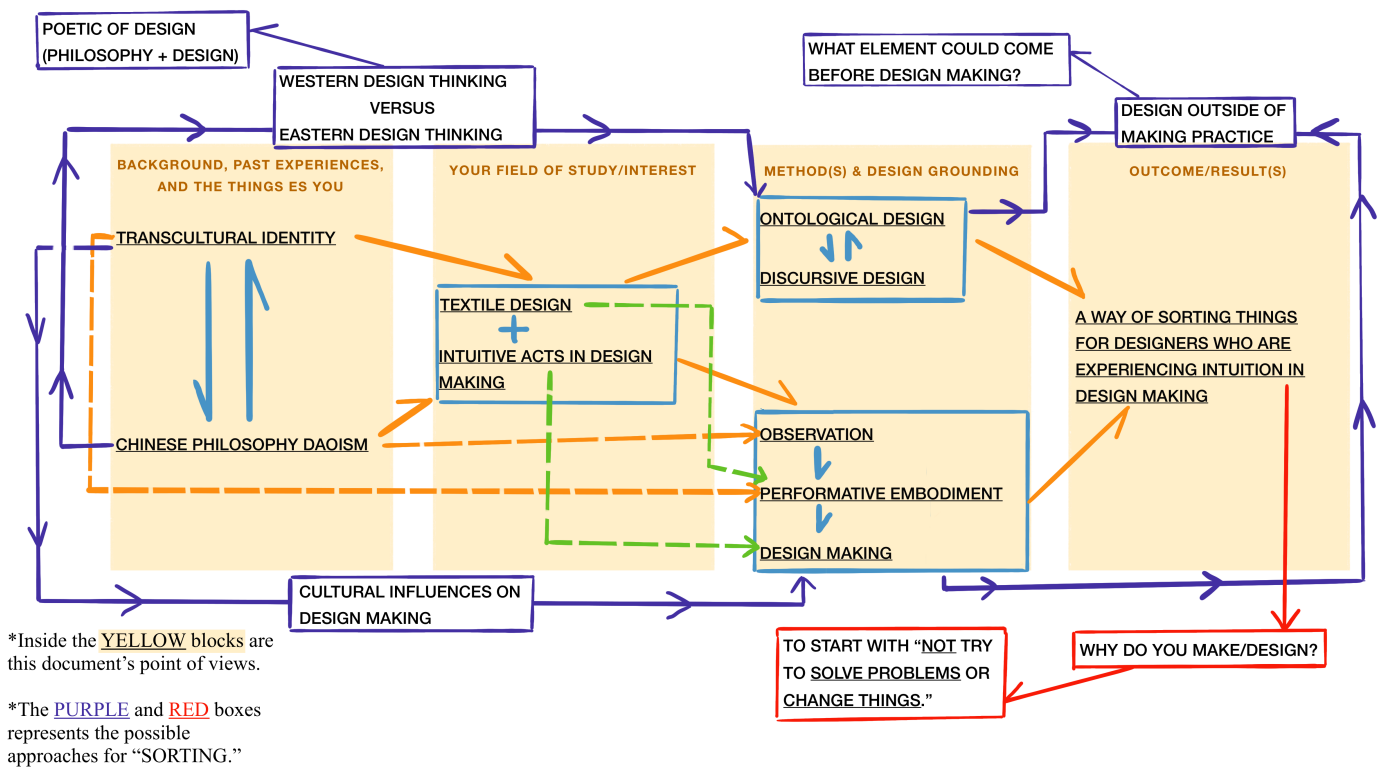
Figure 5.1.1 Top; Figure 5.1.2 Bottom   58

Conclusion

This thesis document is a piece of cloth that is sewn together with many little blocks that represent the different parts of me. It covers me and shapes me. It has helped me become who I am today and has become the driving force of my research in design. In the past two years of research, I have reflected on my background and the shadows of my past to break through and come to have a better understanding of ongoing difficulties related to identity and belonging. This document introduced a process of sorting. It assesses and considers past experiences and current actions and incorporates this with discursive and ontological design theories made tangible through making. I have merged my interest in cultural contexts into my studio design practice. As I have done so, I have worked through and considered ways of appropriately immersing myself in foreign cultures through making and performative embodiment.

This document shares my process of discovering possible approaches for contending with experiencing uncertainty through a design approach that embraces intuition. Here, experience is more important than the title of designer. My work acknowledges that as designers, we collaborate and innovate with the world surrounding us. I see this as a circling motion of fusion and exchange between ourselves (who we are) and the things surrounding us (things influencing us), that design(ing), becomes a flow of streams always/invariably connecting with others. This flow communicates and transmits inside the field of design, and (in an interdisciplinary setting) outwards, to other fields of research. Design that has the ability of "connect" ensued from the structure sort out of the intuitive actions.

The work described in the *First Zi Ran* emphasizes the embodied practices of observation of nature. In the *Second Zi Ran* work is discussed and connected to elements of discursive design. Here designers are considered in terms of their capacity to shape a perspective that considers everyday norms connected to the objects surrounding us (as normal individuals or designers who practices making) and "reason for being."[68] Discursive design helps us to see the world through a different lens, a lens that allows us to see the links between different design actions and envisage other possible functions and forms. Intuitive acts of making are understood as means to reveal identity issues and its relationship to design. Last of all, the *Third Zi Ran* describes performative embodiment and identity recognition connected to ontological design perspectives and a personal reckoning of cultural appropriation. Today, we live in a complex world; a world experiences transitional changes, "a world where many worlds fit."[69] The plurality in the ever-changing society allows me as a designer to "realize that design situations always involve encounters between human and nonhuman actants of all kinds."[70]

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[68] B. Tharp and S. Tharp, "Discursive Design Basics," 2.

[69] Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse*, 52.

[70] Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse*, 133.

Coming from outside of the design field and having a transcultural identity enables me to offer a particular perspective. I acknowledge that my work understands design as not only a means for solving problems but also something closely related to being and becoming. Design(ing) is a lens to look into the world which we design "and acknowledge our world is acting back on us and designing us."[71] Through a thoughtful intertwined relationship between the philosophical approaches of design thinking and series of design interventions designers have the opportunity to gain a better understanding of their surroundings, and perhaps themselves. Taking this approach, it seems to me, enables the designer the possibility to cross over cultural barriers, offering up interventions that allow people to see and acknowledge multiple perspectives and ways of engaging in our world.

Over the past two years I have embodied the practice of making through a series of projects. Taken together as a whole along with my lived experience, observation, making and performance serve to explain a process of *sorting*, through design. Moving forward, I want to apply the sorting method to the design of textiles. In particular, my intent is to explore, and modify traditional Chinese and Japanese textiles approaches so that they remain or become understood as increasingly relevant to our ongoing present.

This research ends here. My journey of discovering other approaches for design making, however, will never stop. I am looking forward to reacting with and responding to our ever-changing society from an East Asia perspective, to beginning to learn and include Japanese philosophical aspects along with Chinese ones as I move forward and onto new design endeavors.

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[71] Willis, "Ontological Designing," 80.

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Appendix

English Breakfast tea samples procedures:

(Takes up to ten hours to complete)

- Four regular size tea bags with 2160 ml of water.

- Sample cloth: seven square cut muslin cloth.

- Pre-boiling the tea bags for thirty minutes in a pot and take out the tea bags.

- After bringing the tea to boil, keep the stove at low heat.

- Pre-wash all the cloth in cold water, and then put them into the pot boil with tea.

- Take out one piece of cloth every thirty minutes.

- And then wash the cloth in cold water, lay flat to let it dry in the shade.

- Turn the cloth over every thirty minutes.

- Repeat the previous steps until all seven pieces are completed.

Tie Guan Yin samples procedures:

(Takes up to seven hours to complete)

- Two packs of Tie Guan Yin with 1080 ml of water.

- Sample cloth: seven square cut muslin cloth.

- Pre-boiling the tea bags for thirty minutes in a pot and take out the tea bags.

- After bringing the tea to boil, keep the stove at low heat.

- Keep the heat at low for thirty minutes.

- Pre-wash all the cloth in cold water, and then put them into the pot boil with tea.

- Take out one piece of cloth after an hour, and wash it in cold water.

- Then lay flat to let it dry in the shade.

- Repeat the previous steps until all seven pieces are completed.

觀制衣藝

呂周成夏