

An Exploratory Study of Chinese Gen Z Students' Attitudes and Perceptions of Second-Hand Fashion after Studying in the UK and Its Implications for Market Development in China

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RESEARCH QUESTION

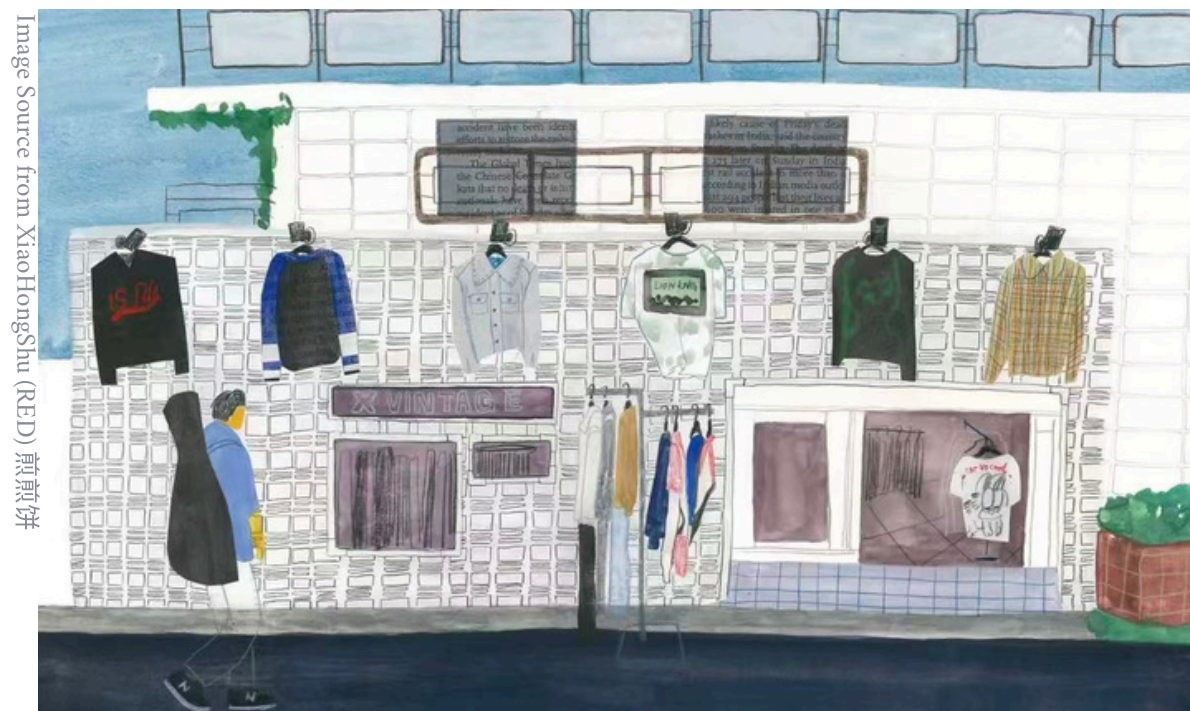
What factors shape Chinese Gen Z international students' perceptions and attitudes toward second-hand fashion (SHF) while studying in the UK, and how can these insights inform strategies to grow China's SHF market?

ABSTRACT

Aim
Explore how cultural exposure and other possible factors influences Chinese Gen Z students' SHF attitudes and derive recommendations for China's market.

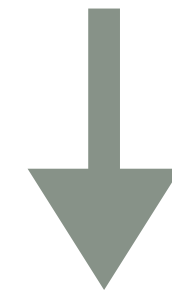
Method

- Qualitative narrative inquiry.
- 13 Chinese students (ages ~18–29, ≥24 months in the UK) were interviewed (~45 min each) with open-ended questions.
- Interviews were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2020)

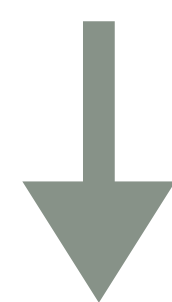


LITERATURE REVIEW

Circular Economy



Circular Fashion



Second-hand Fashion



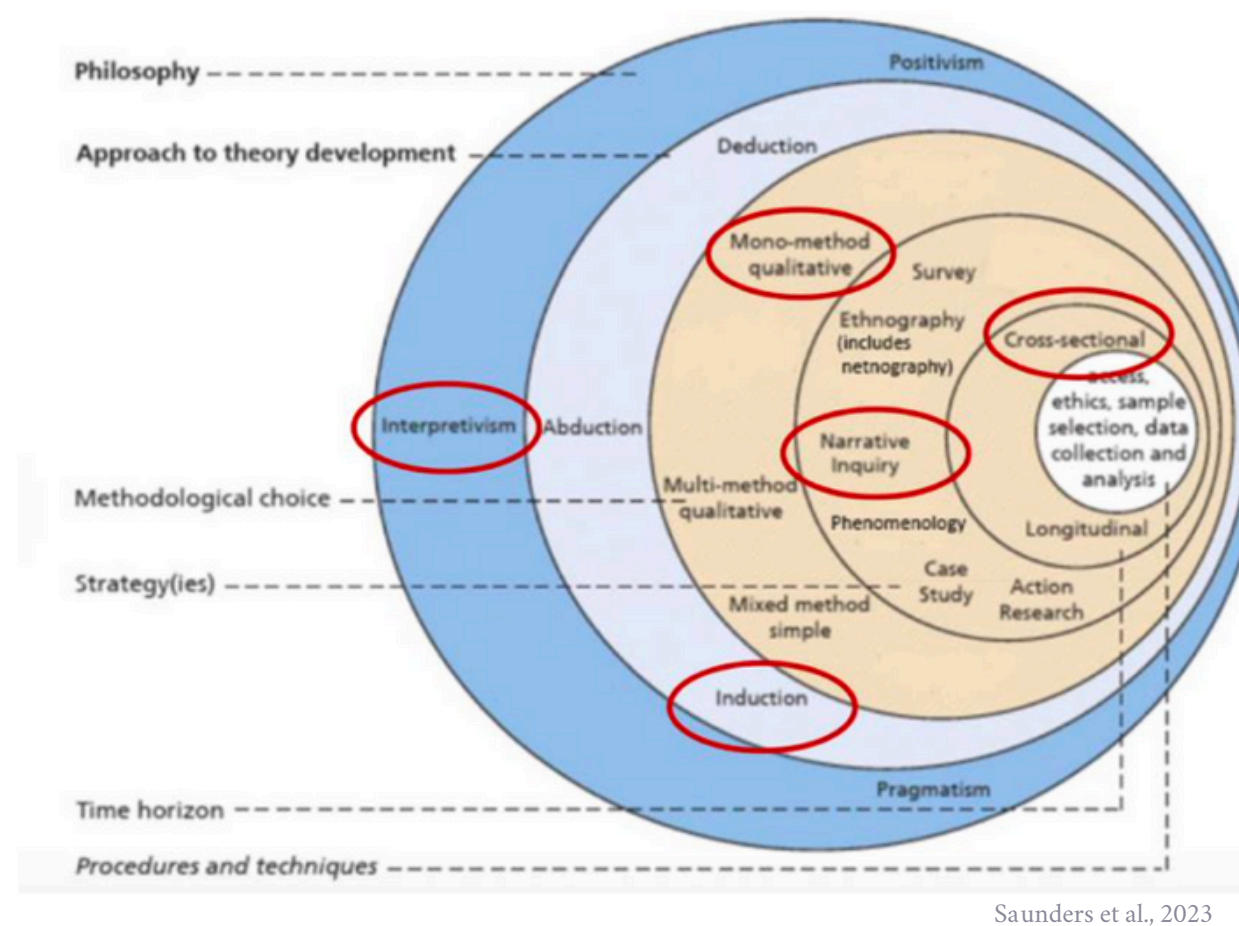
Fashion's shift to a circular model positions SHF as a key reuse strategy. Extending garment life reduces environmental impact (e.g., a 9-month life extension cuts carbon/waste by ~20–30%).

Western markets treat SHF as mainstream, but China's SHF market is expanding from ¥954 bn (2019) to ¥1,320 bn (2023) yet remains stigmatized (associated with "dirty" or "inferior" goods).

Integrating TPB/VBN, UK cultural exposure reframes norms while peer influence, price consideration, sustainability consciousness jointly shape attitudes toward second-hand fashion.



METHOD



Sampling

- Type: Purposive + self-selection
- Criteria: Chinese Gen Z in the UK, ≥24 months study, familiar with SHF
- Sample: n = 13 (mixed gender)

Data Collection

- Instrument: Semi-structured interviews (~45 min), in-person or online
- Guide topics: Price, peers/subjective norms, cultural background, sustainability
- Ethics: Sign consent forms; and audio-recorded

Coding

- Braun & Clarke (2020) reflexive thematic analysis
- Process: Open coding → categories → coherent themes



FINDINGS

Cultural Exposure

- UK Everyday Context
- NO SHAME
- Buying attractive unique clothes

Price/Value Perception

- Must be cheaper to consider
- Higher price for scarce items
- Cost-effectiveness as primary criterion
- Condition before price

Subjective Norms & Peer Influence

- Non-Pressurizing
- Encouragement from friends
- Adoption was self-directed, not about group belonging.

Attitude
-From rejection to acceptance
-Autonomous choice

Sustainability Awareness

- Good for environment but not main reason
- Style, uniqueness, and affordability are the priority.

Existing Barriers

- Trust & authenticity issue
- Hygiene & quality concern
- Unfair pricing
- Low availability
- Platform experience
- Social stigma
- Unprofessional "curator culture"

- Normalization vs. stigma: In the UK, high visibility great exposure of second-hand shops and professional procedures (clear labelling, pricing, and grading) alleviated cleanliness and authenticity concerns while demonstrating TPB's descriptive norms at work.
- Pragmatism over morality: Participants prioritised autonomy and value ("looks good and costs less") over environmental virtue; SHF was a personal preference rather than an identification signal.
- Theoretical insight: In this cross-cultural environment, TPB/VBN pathways are context-dependent; attitudes (uniqueness/value) and perceived control (ease of access) trumped injunctive moral standards.
- China translational gap: the domestic SHF scene is viewed as niche & performative with elite-marketing undertones; trust, opaque pricing, and a lack of offline experience remain hurdles, explaining why UK-formed favourable views may not easily convert at home.

DISCUSSION

Recommendation

Value Perception

Focus on fashion/uniqueness/treasure-hunt and smart spending rather than just sustainability

Implement standardised authentication and grading, defect disclosure, and consistent pricing.

Sustainability Awareness

For the rising eco-aware segment, give quantified impact (emissions reductions) and develop social acceptability

Increase offline visibility (pop-up vintage markets, curated stores); replicate the UK charity-shop experience

Trust

Availability

