



**DEVELOPING A NEW CONCEPT OF CHINESE PACKAGING DESIGN
INSPIRED BY MUJI'S CHARACTERS**

By

WANG HANG

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,
in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science**

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science

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December 2023

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In the modern competitive market, packaging is the first impression that can attract the consumers. Effective packaging design must clearly convey the product's value and unique selling points while differentiating from other similar brand products. Increasingly, the trend of integrating cultural elements into modern packaging design is gaining popularity. This research aims to develop a new concept of Chinese packaging design inspired by MUJI's characters. A comprehensive analysis of existing literature focused on the traditional cultural elements and modern design philosophies that can contribute into a new market competitive. While the quantitative method was employed to obtain the primary data through survey by questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed specifically to evaluate the MUJI's characters design from the design experts and the MUJI representatives. While the empirical analysis by sampling design is used to validate the new concept of Chinese packaging design through the users. The results acknowledged fifteen MUJI's design characters that can be inspired a new development of Chinese packaging design. A new concept of Chinese packaging design was introduced inspire by the MUJI's characters toward better value and aesthetic appearance as well as its probability to enhance the economic growth of China's packaging industry.

Keywords: New product development, Chinese packaging design, MUJI design character, Chinese traditional culture, design value, and aesthetic appearance

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Master Sains

MEMBANGUNKAN KONSEP BAHARU REKA BENTUK PEMBUNGKUSAN CINA YANG DIILHAMKAN OLEH KARAKTER MUJI

Oleh

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Dalam pasaran kompetitif moden, pembungkusan adalah kesan pertama yang boleh menarik pengguna. Reka bentuk pembungkusan yang berkesan mesti menyampaikan dengan jelas nilai produk dan nilai jualan unik selain itu membezakan daripada produk jenama lain yang serupa. Semakin hari, trend penyepaduan unsur budaya ke dalam reka bentuk pembungkusan moden semakin popular. Penyelidikan ini bertujuan untuk membangunkan konsep baharu reka bentuk pembungkusan Cina yang diilhamkan oleh karakter MUJI. Analisis komprehensif kesusasteraan sedia ada tertumpu pada unsur budaya tradisional dan falsafah reka bentuk moden yang boleh menyumbang kepada persaingan pasaran baharu. Manakala kaedah kuantitatif digunakan untuk mendapatkan data primer melalui tinjauan melalui soal selidik. Soal selidik ini direka khusus untuk menilai reka bentuk watak MUJI daripada pakar reka bentuk dan wakil MUJI. Manakala analisis empirikal melalui reka bentuk persampelan digunakan untuk mengesahkan konsep baharu reka bentuk pembungkusan Cina melalui pengguna. Hasilnya mengiktiraf lima belas watak reka bentuk MUJI yang boleh memberi ilham kepada perkembangan baharu reka bentuk pembungkusan Cina. Konsep baharu reka bentuk pembungkusan Cina telah diperkenalkan yang diilhamkan oleh karakter MUJI ke arah nilai yang lebih baik dan penampilan estetik serta keberangkaliannya untuk meningkatkan pertumbuhan ekonomi industri pembungkusan China.

Kata kunci: Pembangunan produk baharu, reka bentuk pembungkusan Cina, karakter reka bentuk MUJI, budaya tradisional Cina, nilai reka bentuk dan penampilan estetik

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter is introduced the research background followed by a statement of issue, aim, research questions and research objectives. Furthermore, the area and scope of research as well as the significance of research are also highlighted. Finally, the thesis structure is showing at the end of the chapter.

1.2 Research Overview

Packaging was developed because of its function and need. Packaging was originally developed due to preserving the food. Since prehistory, people have always had need of packaging to protect the product during their transportation and storage. The earliest forms of packaging involved the use of vines, leaves, animal skins, hides and bones. As time went on, the need to transport such as food, and water became visible, and it require to develop of different containers that were acknowledged as packaging. Modern packaging was born in the 1800s due to the high demand for better-quality products. The importance of packaging is rapidly increasing and changing with the introduction of new materials, technology, and processes.

As customers become more concerned with product safety, the packaging has changed continuously to adapt to new needs and take advantage of new materials and solutions. These may be due to the need for improved product quality, productivity, optimised logistics service, environmental performance, and profitability (Coles, McDowell & Kirwan, 2003). Packaging plays an important role in the quality of products by protecting from environmental, chemical, and physical challenges (Risch, 2009). The function of packaging is to protect the product that is packed in it and to protect the environment from the content inside the packaging (Bolanča, Mrvac, & Hajdek, 2018). The basic conditions that packaging must meet such as strength on material pressure, elasticity, plasticity, stiffness and resistance to strain, toughness, mechanical endurance, and printing (Griffey, Thurow & der Verpackung, 2019).

Packaging has changed from only being a container for protecting the product to an important part of promoting the product it contains. Today, the packaging is essential for sale and a part of the product brand. In marketing literature, packaging is a part of the product and the brand. A product's packaging represents its characteristics and communicates the product information (Ksenia, 2013). Packaging is used to identify, describe, protect, display as well as promote the product and to make it readily marketable, storable as well as to protect it against damage (Agariya et al., 2012). The development of the market economy highlights the importance of packaging. Packaging is the first impression that a consumer obtains just before they decide to purchase it

(Ahmad, Billo & Lakhan, 2012), to promote a design that is the principal axis of communication (Holmes & Paswan, 2012), and plays a big role in the market where similar items exist and it assists products with a new pack in standing out against competitors' goods (Ksenia, 2013). Good packaging can facilitate and differentiate a product from its competitors. According to Cortina-Mercado (2017), the physical attributes of product packaging can be the perfect tool to be able to achieve the desired success.

The history of packaging design continues to evolve, and it starts with the use of containers. According to Bolanča, Mrvac, and Hajdek (2018), an important part of the packaging design is the material from which it will be made. Packaging design refers to combining art and science, and then applying it in commodity package protection and beautification, and it is the multi-functional reflection of science, art, materials, economy, mentality, market, and other comprehensive factors (Ju, 2012; Fei, 2015). Packaging design includes the physical and visual aspects of a package. It is part of a creative business that combines shape, structure, material, colour, imagery, and typography as well as other design elements with product information so that products can be marketed (Budiardjo, 2016). Effective packaging design will establish a distinct identity, foster brand loyalty, and influence a customer's purchase decision on a product. Successful packaging design is the result of the involvement and the work put forth by marketers, designers, and customers.

In recent years, as the competition in society has become more and more fierce, life is moving faster and faster, and people's pressure is getting more and more intense, people are beginning to pay more attention to design that can meet the human spirit and return to the essence of life, and these days green design, sustainable development, and design that advocates for nature are also developing (Manzini & Vezzoli, 2003). MUJI's packaging is designed in a traditional as well as a modern way and fundamentally composed of environmentally friendly materials to minimise cost and conserve resources, guiding consumers to live simple and direct lives as a refresher. According to Sustainability Report, 63 percent of consumers make purchase decisions because product packaging goods will, to some degree, drive the public's concept of consumption (DuPont, 2023). From a packaging design point of view, this human-centred, back-to-life, simple, and applicable human-centred design is the future trend in packaging design and can also be described as a novel design idea for the future (Manzini & Vezzoli, 2003). The return to nature is also the inevitable path in the implementation of the packaging design of the entire product back to life. The incorporation of the concept of life into packaging design will become an inevitable trend in the future development of society, but the current field of packaging design in this area of research is lacking.

1.2.1 MUJI Brand and Packaging Design

Japanese brands have always been at the forefront of the global market. MUJI is one of the famous Japanese brands (Iwabuchi, 2002), and conveys a new way of life to the consumer (Roll, 2019). In addition, MUJI focuses entirely on not over-packaging, not over-decorating and over-decorating, and on adopting a transparent and translucent design as much as possible to get as close to customers as possible. It aims to meet

demand and reduce waste of resources, reducing product costs as much as possible, and achieving the overall design for environmental protection (Manzini & Vezzoli, 2003).



Figure 1.1: World-famous brand namely MUJI
(Source by www.MUJI.com)

Figure 1.1 shows the world-famous Japanese brand namely MUJI". MUJI is at the forefront of design, and it is unique in its ability to capture the psychology of consumers and establish a brand-free brand from the perspective of living things (Roll, 2019). Being a Japanese brand with a strong regional identity, reflects the local as well as the international, and conveys a cultural flavour without compromising commercial value. MUJI represents the antithesis of consumerism. MUJI brand was born in the 1980s Japan is most well-known for its philosophy of functional, quality design with a Japanese minimalistic aesthetic, offered at a reasonable price. The brand's relentless focus is on the product and does away with any unnecessary decoration or ornamentation. The MUJI is obsessed with minimalism, reflected in all its brand elements which embody Less is More. In terms of packaging, MUJI uses bulk, standardised packaging to highlight the natural colours and shapes of its products, while at the same time conserving resources and reducing waste. Furthermore, MUJI brand is also set up to be all about simple, functional, minimalistic, and quality design, and this is reflected in every aspect of the company's operations, from manufacturing to design to communications (see Figure 1.2).



Figure 1.2: MUJI packaging design
(Source by www.MUJI.com)

MUJI acknowledged as Mujirushi Ryohin. It referred to the "no-brand quality goods," and emphasises on the simplicity and quality of the products. From the perspective of the product packaging, MUJI represent a clean, minimalist design that focusing on functionality and product clarity. In addition, each of the package is a testament to the MUJI's philosophy of "no-brand" quality as well as the lettering of the products can speak for themselves without superfluous decoration (see Figure 1.3).



Figure 1.3: Design without superfluous decoration by MUJI
(Source by www.MUJI.com)

Furthermore, the packaging design strategy also reflected to the MUJI's philosophy of simplicity and focusing on the quality as well as the naturalness of the product rather

than elaborate the packaging. Most of the packaging design of the MUJI adheres the consistent of the aesthetic characterised such as:

A. Minimalist Design:

Each package features clean lines, simple shapes, and an uncluttered, focusing on functionality and ease of use. For example, the food product such as pasta and noodles, often packaged in clear or simple packaging that showcases the product rather than the branding (see Figure 1.4).



Figure 1.4: Minimalist design by MUJI
(Source by www.MUJI.com)

B. Neutral Palette:

The use of muted colours, such as beiges, whites, and transparent materials, creates a natural and calm visual appeal.

C. Clear Labelling:

Product names and descriptions are presented in a straightforward, legible font, with no excessive graphics or imagery. The images show a range of beverage containers from MUJI, featuring the brand's signature minimalist design (see in Figure 1.5). Each item has a clean, simple aesthetic with clear labelling. Each container's design focuses on transparency and simplicity, allowing the quality of the product inside to take centre stage.



Figure 1.5: Clear labelling design by MUJI
(Source by www.MUJI.com)

D. Visibility of Product:

Transparent sections or cutouts are frequently used to allow the product itself to be part of the visual design.

e) MUJI's packaging design emphasises the product's quality and the brand's philosophy of simplicity, embodying a less-is-more approach. For example, in the Instant Matcha Latte by MUJI (see Figure 1.6). The packaging is simple and functional as well as featuring a clear image of a matcha latte in a traditional cup to signify the contents. The text provides product information in both Japanese and English, indicating that it is a matcha-flavoured instant beverage. The overall design is clean and straightforward, aimed at highlighting the natural and pure qualities of the matcha product within.



Figure 1.6: Simple and functional packaging design by MUJI
(Source by www.MUJI.com)

1.2.2 Statement of Issues

In the process of continuous economic development, there are more and more goods of various categories, so each category of goods must be represented by packaging (Yangang, 2021). The economy in China is the backbone of the society and culture is becoming more diverse as well as more successful. In the process of acquiring goods, there is a tendency to consider the aesthetic value of packaging, rather than the practical value of the products. With the development of society and the progress of the times, the value and significance of packaging is no longer limited to the protection of commodities but has merged the meanings of natural science and social science and has become a kind of commerciality and marketability (Zhang, 2018). The new meaning of packaging makes it needs more accurate market positioning and meet the market demand of more consumers to continuously increase the sales volume of products (Qin, 2019).

The design of modern packaging, whether in the design concept or the form and practice of design, in response to visual stimulation of dazzle and gorgeous packaging designs, the whole market was awash with excess packaging, the exaggerated and bizarre pursuit of the individuality of form, the pollution of visual colour caused a waste of resources, violating the original harmonious aesthetic principles, moving away from the inherent relation between art and life (Krippendorff, 2006). To achieve the purpose of safe circulation and convenient sales of modern commodities, reflecting the form and nature of commodities, commodity packaging will make modern packaging art design more humanised, green, branded, and cultural through the integration of unique regional characters, graphics, colours and other arts and protection technologies (Peng & Zou, 2018).

Many packaging designs do not highlight the regional cultural characteristics and express the regional cultural connotation when displaying local characteristics, and sometimes the phenomenon of using wrong visual symbols due to improper understanding also occurs. Furthermore, it is not only based on aesthetically pleasing but also the material that is sturdy and feels high quality. To solve this problem, the packaging design of local characteristic goods should not only fully draw lessons from regional characteristic elements, but also further extend its cultural connotation, transform limited space into infinite imagination, and continuously expand consumers' cultural psychology and aesthetic psychology (Yangang, 2021). Based on the above statement, the research takes into consideration of MUJI design character as a reference to explore the expression of form following content within minimalist packaging to highlight the formal beauty of commodity packaging in minimalist designs.

Today, with China's concept of green development being modernised, this type of reduction design strategy is also widely used in the packaging of many products in China (Rokka & Uusitalo, 2008). In addition, it is also like the establishment of a resource-saving and environmentally friendly society advocated by China, which has a good deal of significance for China's green packaging design. It will be beneficial to delve deeply into the cultural connotations of the concept of "no brand name", learn ideas that are beneficial to Chinese packaging design, and design more high-quality work, that will be beneficial to emerge from a design path of packaging with Chinese characteristics. The

minimalist packaging with its precise message, the form follows the style of function design, human-centred design concept, eco-friendly material selection, and a unique sense of purity, simple line design has won over more and more consumers, taking a dominant position in marketplace (Krippendorff, 2006), involving food, clothing, the home, and other sectors. With the rapid development of China's packaging industry, packaging production plays an increasingly important role in promoting national economic construction and improving people's material and cultural life (Xiong, Xue & Zhang, 2021). In order to make Chinese packaging design take a place at the worldwide level, designers should understand and pay attention to the combination of regionalism and the trend of packaging design as well as its processes.

Packaging design has influenced consumers buying decisions. Packaging is a strong marketing strategy for companies since it can be used as a powerful competitive advantage tool to attract attention, describe a product, and make sales (Lundberg & Fredman, 2012). China's packaging design is also the same as other countries with experience in the development process. The emergence of a range of issues has hindered the development of packaging design. For the time being, it should learn from the experience of developed countries or commercial brands that have emerged from the various problems encountered in the development of packaging design and that have come up with new ideas that are responsive to the requirements of the day, to provide valuable references for the development of Chinese packaging designs. Although the packaging design of many local specialty goods is of good quality, it lacks innovation and cannot meet people's aesthetic needs and their psychology of pursuing fashion and individuality (Yangang, 2021). Furthermore, due to the increasingly globalised marketplace, companies are now making a huge effort to design globally desirable products (Hu & Dong, 2018). Improving packaging design is an effective way to increase the visual appeal of products within various contexts. In addition, it should fully display the advantages and image of goods, convey information accurately, be attractive, and guide consumption. Beyond aesthetics, the optimal packaging design should adeptly showcase the virtues and desired image of the goods it encases, deliver information with accuracy, captivate consumer interest, and adeptly steer purchasing decisions.

From the above problem statements, it found that the Chinese packaging design are;

- a. Lack of design innovation that can consider the value and aesthetic appearance,
- b. Not up to the trends and market demand,
- c. Less environmentally consent,
- d. Lost with the local image and identity.

Furthermore, based on the problems were identified of the current situation of Chinese packaging design, this research necessity to further investigate of the new trends or innovation in packaging design attempt to straighten it with the local culture. Hence, the MUJI brand is the good reference due to it well-known brand and successful in the global market. This research will bridge the gap of understanding on how the minimalist design

by the MUJI can be inspired in the new concept of Chinese packaging design with incorporating the local cultural values. The further research should be focused on identifying the valuable of MUJI's characters that can be employed in the new concept of Chinese packaging design that also can ensuring them to meets both the aesthetic standards and practical needs of the market.

1.3 Aim

The research aims to develop a new concept of Chinese packaging design inspired by MUJI's characters. The result of this research will facilitate the product developer and designer to promote and produce a new concept of Chinese packaging design for better value and aesthetic appearance as well as increase probability to enhance the economic growth of China's packaging industry.

1.3.1 Research Question

There are three (3) research questions listed below.

- RQ 1. What are the importance of having MUJI's characters in a new concept of Chinese packaging design for better value and aesthetic appearance?
- RQ 2. What are the most valuable MUJI's characters that can inspire a new concept of Chinese packaging design for better value and aesthetic appearance?
- RQ 3. How to develop a new concept of Chinese packaging design inspire by MUJI's characters for better value and aesthetic appearance?

1.3.2 Research Objectives

To achieve the aim of the research, three (3) research objectives are highlighted.

- RO1. To identify the importance of having MUJI's characters in a new concept of Chinese packaging design for better value and aesthetic appearance.
- RO2. To investigate the most valuable MUJI's characters that can inspire a new concept of Chinese packaging design for better value and aesthetic appearance.
- RO3. To develop a new concept of Chinese packaging inspire by MUJI's characters for better value and aesthetic appearance.

1.4 Scope and Area of Research

Chinese customer often prioritises the functionality and convenience of every product. Chinese customers strongly have a connection to culture, tradition, and festivals that will be affected by any design-related product. Understanding cultural norms and preference is essential for creating a successful packaging design for Chinese customers as well as being highly competitive in the market. Recently, most of Chinese customers love foreign products due to their high perception of quality. Chinese packaging is crucial and growing rapidly. However, to be successful in any Chinese brand in the marketplace, the packaging plays a crucial role in capturing customer attention and driving sales. Modern packaging should be lifestyle based and eco-friendly, but it can be challenging due to environmental issues.

In this research, the successful of the MUJI brand becomes an inspiration to develop a new concept of Chinese packaging design. The fieldwork of this research will further investigate the most valuable MUJI's characters that can be employed in the development of a new concept of Chinese packaging design development for better value and aesthetic appearance. The main reason chosen the MUJI brand are;

- a. Unique brand philosophy - MUJI is known for its distinctive minimalist design philosophy, which sets it apart from other brands.
 - i. Simplicity and minimalism - MUJI's design philosophy of simplicity resonates well with the contemporary minimalist lifestyle, which is also gaining popularity in China. The clean, unbranded aesthetic appeals to consumers who prefer understated quality.
 - ii. Quality over branding - MUJI's focus is on the quality of the product rather than the prominence of the brand name. This aligns with a consumer trend in China that Favors quality and functionality in products over flashy branding.
 - iii. Cultural synergy - MUJI's Japanese origin brings with it a cultural affinity that is appealing in China, where Japanese products are often associated with reliability and finesse.
 - iv. Eco-friendly approach - The brand's commitment to sustainability and reducing waste appeals to the growing environmental consciousness among Chinese consumers.
- b. Market impact and consumer perception - MUJI has a significant impact on market trends and consumer perceptions, especially regarding minimalist design. Studying MUJI's approach can provide insights into how minimalist aesthetics influence consumer behaviour and market trends.
- c. Representative of a larger trend - While MUJI is a specific brand, its design philosophy is representative of broader trends in minimalist and sustainable design. By focusing on MUJI, the research might aim to capture wider phenomena in the design world.

With the continuous development of China's economy and society and the further precipitation of excellent cultural heritage, the application of regional culture to modern packaging design can better sublimate the product characteristics and achieve better sales results and far-reaching cultural significance (Yangang, 2021). In addition, the combination of packaging and regional characteristic culture can make modern packaging design have deeper meaning and a rich visual experience. In this research, the success of the MUJI brand becomes an inspiration to develop a new concept of Chinese packaging design. Through analysis of several valuable design characters of MUJI, it will provide information that can be inspired into a new concept of Chinese packaging design development for better aesthetic appearance. In relation to the culture, the MUJI packaging design also referring into the Japanese culture as what this research looking into.

- a. Minimalism in MUJI's character has parallels with traditional Japanese concepts of simplicity and harmony.
- b. MUJI's products often incorporate elements like matcha and rice, which are also integral with the Japanese cuisine and culture.

In conclusion, the choice of the MUJI's brand in the research was likely driven by a combination of the brand's unique design philosophy, its market influence, the potential for academic contributions, practical considerations, and the broader relevance of its design principles in the context of contemporary packaging design trends.

1.5 The Significant of Research

The contribution of the research states as below.

- a. Acknowledged the MUJI design character that can be inspired into a new concept of Chinese packaging for better value and aesthetic appearance.
- b. A new concept of Chinese packaging inspired MUJI's design characters for better value and aesthetic appearance.
- c. Increase product sales through a new concept of Chinese packaging design.

1.5.1 Knowledge Contribution

This research contributes to the knowledge of a new concept of Chinese packaging design inspired by MUJI's characters. There are fifteen MUJI's characters are also identified through this research which they are most valuable in the development of a new concept of Chinese packaging design. The variables of MUJI's characters are not only contributed for better value and aesthetic appearance of new concept of Chinese packaging design as well as probability to enhance the economic growth of China's packaging industry.

1.6 The Thesis Outline

The thesis content of six (6) chapters follows and the associated thesis chapter in Figure 1.7 below.

Chapter 1 Introduction - The first chapter discusses the research background, and issue followed by underline the research aims, questions, and objectives. This chapter also explains the scope and area of research as well as the research significance. The end of the chapter outlines the thesis structure.

Chapter 2 Literature Review - This chapter provides a comprehensive review of the relevant literature on packaging design in China. It examines the main issues and challenges faced in the field as well as explored modern design characters of packaging design based on MUJI's philosophy and design. The proposal to integrate the MUJI design character with Chinese traditional culture for a new concept of Chinese packaging design is also analysed and synthesised. The GAP of research through the conceptual framework is formulated at the end of a chapter.

Chapter 3 Research Method - This chapter explains the research method, research process, data analysis, and data validation. It also explains the research work and process to collect the data and validation.

Chapter 4 Data Analysis and Results - This chapter presents the findings obtained from the research fieldwork that involved with packaging design experts. The analysis and finding are addressed from research question 1 and research question 2 of research. Several valuable characters were identified, and they can be inspired for the development of a new Chinese packaging design concepts for better value and aesthetic appearance.

Chapter 5 Develop A New Concept of Chinese Packaging Design - The chapter discusses the creative process for a new concept inspired from MUJI's design character found from finding in Chapter 4 of this thesis. A new concept of Chinese packaging is proposed based on MUJI's design character. The validation conducted to verify the Chinese packaging design aims for better value and aesthetic appearance.

Chapter 6 Conclusion and Recommendation - The conclusion is a summary of the whole thesis. Finally, the chapter concludes and summarises the research contributions followed by recommendations for future research.

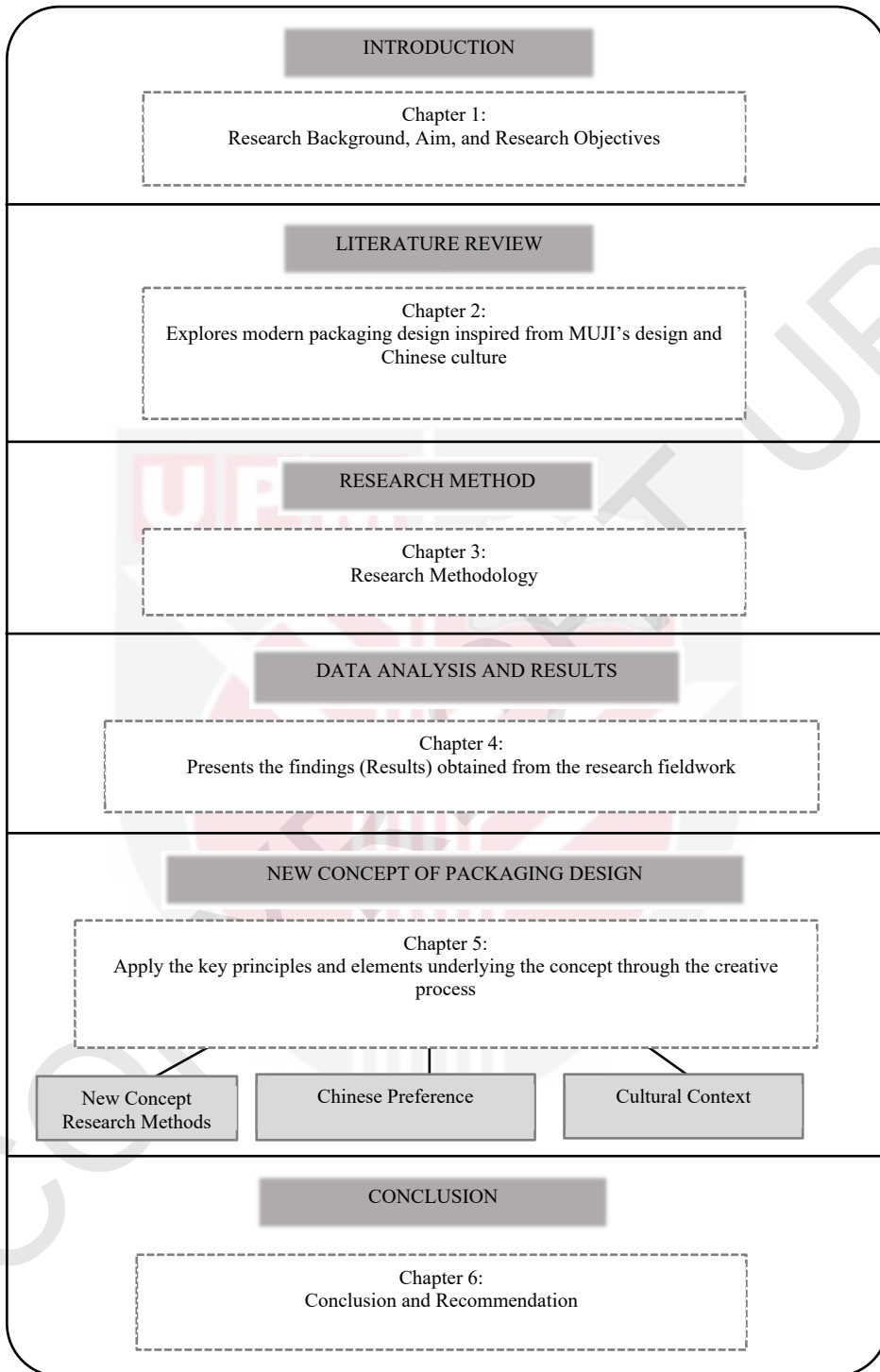


Figure 1.7: Research framework associated with the thesis chapter
(Source by Author)

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