

Applications and testing of a modified cross-cultural product design model:
The case of the Althea Goddess Headdress

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Large scale immigration has necessitated the need to understand the multidimensionality of acculturation. Acceptance of cross-cultural products will be influenced by individuals' acculturative experiences (Zakian, 2009). Armenian American women belong to a cultural group that understands the importance of cross-cultural products that successfully incorporate heritage. The Armenian people have preserved their rich culture in the midst of immigration, war, genocide and political strife (Takooshian, 1995).

The purpose of this research is to present and test a modification to the design process proposed by Lin (2007) for the creation of cross-cultural products in the context of an original Armenian headdress designed by the researchers. The modified Armenian headdress was designed to meet the headdress needs of Armenian women acculturating to United States culture.

Three designers collaborated to develop a modified headdress, referred to as the Althea Goddess Headdress (AGH). The design was informed by scholarly research regarding traditional Armenian culture. The inspiration for the AGH came from Armenian wedding headdress designs and Western body jewelry trends. The five piece AGH (see Figure 1) rests securely on the circumference of the head at the temple level. A blue jewel is featured in the center of the forehead. The back of the headdress includes an intricate horizontal chain with cascading chain links that drape downward approximately 1.5 inches apart. These chain links are adorned with faux diamonds or pearls, silver coins, red beads, or Swarovski crystals.

The researchers followed a design process informed by the future research suggestions of Lin (2007) who recommended that field investigation be incorporated into the cultural design process. Nine participants participated in a focus group to contextualize the findings from the literature review that initially informed the AGH design. Data was analyzed using the constant comparative method.

The analysis of focus group responses yielded four distinct themes related to feedback of the AGH design: recognition of design as "Armenian," addition of materials, shifting focus, representation of heritage in design. When shown the design, all of the participants exclaimed that the AGH design did not look Armenian; this could be remedied by adding a greater quantity of coins and silver chains around the forehead and chin. The participants expressed that the design would reflect Armenian culture if the focus was brought to the front. An unexpected behavioral benefit of the design was that it could be worn for a wedding and represent heritage upon subsequent wears for wedding anniversaries.

Using the design and assessment of the AGH as a case study, the researchers propose a modification to the cultural design process. The modified design process is titled the Reflective

Pyramid Process (RPP) and consists of the following steps (see Figure 2): (1) Broad research of culture; (2) Design focus; (3) Create design; (4) Field investigation; (5) Information analysis; (6) Connection between literature and field investigation findings; and (7) Design modification. The vague nature of the CDP proposed by Lin necessitated the development of a modified cultural design process. In the process of further understanding Lin's design process, several differences between the two design processes were identified.

Cross-cultural design often asks for a successful merging of cultures to take place in the form of a product, but the findings of the present study found that Armenian heritage was predominantly indicated at the visceral level in the case of the AGH. The RPP assisted in the collection of these findings and, in so doing, takes into account the various components of culture (including heritage). Future research may include further testing of the Reflective Pyramid Process in the context of other cultures.



Figure 1. Back view of the Althea Goddess Headdress.

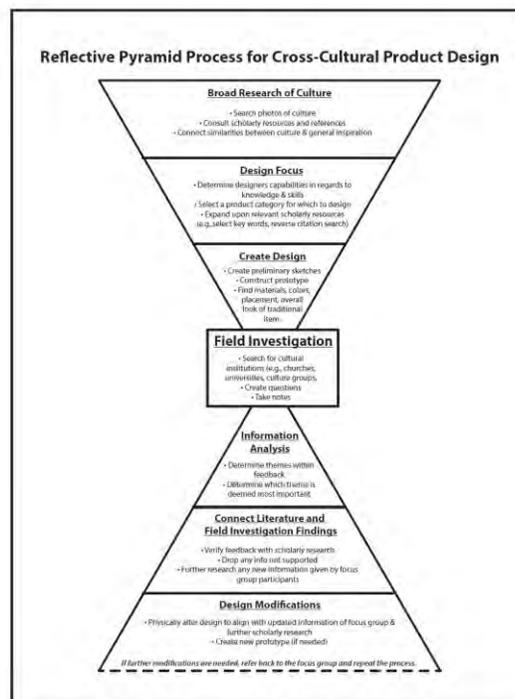


Figure 2. The Reflective Pyramid Process for Cross-Cultural Product Design

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