

## **Making Places: Creativity, Craft and Manufacture in Shanghai**

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### **Introduction**

From the 1980s European and North American cities engaged in a process of ‘urban regeneration’ involving the displacement of manufacturing by finance, insurance and real estate (FIRE), cultural and creative industries, and tourism (Bluestone and Harrison 1982; Zukin, 1995; Tallon, 2010). Henceforth developed economies would produce ‘creative’ or ‘knowledge’ intensive services and developing countries would provide outsourced manufacturing along global supply chains (Leslie and Rantisi, 2012; Oakley, 2012). In Australia the dismantling of trade barriers and the entry into global markets was also based on positioning of manufacture as backward and protectionist; in particular the resources boom has strongly contributed to the anti-manufacturing case (Gibson, 2012). In Shanghai, the economic capital of the world’s leading manufacturing nation, ambitions to become a global, cosmopolitan city have been linked to a similar agenda (Wu and Yeh, 2007). Being an advanced global city means re-locating ‘dirty’ manufacture out in the far suburbs or to the country’s huge interior. In its place will be FIRE, business services, up-market retail, creative industries and a swathe of ‘iconic’ art and cultural ‘precincts’ in a familiar model of ‘culture-led regeneration’ (Wu, 2004; Zhong, 2009; 2011; O’Connor and Gu, 2012).

This opposition between manufacture and creative industries has caused many problems. Firstly, the disappearance of manufacturing from European, North American and Australian cities has not been followed by employment in creative industries, which remain at around 6/8 percent of total employment and highly concentrated in a few large metropolitan centres (Oakley, 2004). In addition, they have not provided significant access to employment to those in disadvantaged social, gender or ethnic groups who traditionally worked in manufacture (Oakley, 2011; 2012). Second, this opposition downplays the craft and technical skills involved in manufacture in favour of creative conception and design, leaving a ‘disembodied’ creativity (Banks, 2007; Sennett, 2008). This tends to socially exclude those in possession of these skills, dispenses with some key local assets and, in fact, make many of these creative industries less able to innovate. Third, there are consequences for place when all of its material culture is produced elsewhere; that is, when identities based on making things are replaced by those derived from consuming things (Edensor et al, 2009; Gibson, 2011; Warren, 2012). Fourth, though manufacture has long been associated with an immediate environmental impact, the almost total replacement of local for imported material products has more damaging, though less visible results.

A rethinking of the relationship between ‘making’ and ‘creating’ is necessary if we are to overcome the problems stated above. First, manufacture should not be exclusively defined as cheap, low-skilled production available for global out-sourcing but can also involve high-quality, high-skilled products located near their markets in order to facilitate complex feedback along the supply chain (Gibson, 2012). Second, creative industries – visual and performing arts, film, TV and radio, recorded and live music, new media, computer games, design, fashion (DCMS, 1998) – do not just benefit by co-location of their ‘creative core’ but also from that of technical, craft and manufacturing services. Becker (1982), for example, noted the strong presence of specialist craft and technical services within

the New York ‘art world’; these services remain crucial for film (e.g. sets, lighting, sound), music and performing arts, and visual (especially public) art practices. In the field of fashion and designer-led products however, these are more crucial and they are also closely related to (and dependent on) manufacturing sectors (Scott, 2000; Rantisi 2002; 2012). Indeed, evidence suggests that in these last sectors the lack of connection to manufacturing seriously hampers their ability to bring a finished product to market. This is because, third, rather than simply providing service or manufacture inputs to a ‘design’, the interactions, feedback loops and formal/ informal knowledge exchanges between these two provide a vital context in which innovative, commercial products can be developed. Fourth, cultural planning approaches in developed countries including Australia have emphasised the input of arts and culture to local place-making but have overlooked both the vernacular creativity embodied in craft skills and the contribution of local manufactured products to cultural identity (Stevenson, 2005; Gibson, 2011).

Such deliberate avoidance of ‘manufacturing’ by policy makers and urban planners has caused even more problems in developing countries where the manufacturing remains to be one of the core urban industries. Shanghai, for example, has an emergent creative industries sector side-by-side with an economically vibrant manufacturing and craft sector. In adopting the term ‘creative industries’ in 2005 the Shanghai government also separated these two sectors, encouraging the creative industries to move into the refurbished ‘creative clusters’ and removing manufacture from the urban core (Keane, 2007; O’Connor and Gu, 2012).

Investigating links between these two sectors through an ethnographic study of designers, craftspeople and manufacturers in the fashion, accessory, and interiors (furniture, ceramics, glassware, carving etc.) sectors of Shanghai suggested a rather different urban development pathway – that of a ‘maker’ led revolution in cultural economy. This paper will assess the extent to which these connections involve informational as well as economic transactions, and the formal/ informal, social, cultural and urban spatial context of these exchanges. It situates emergent links and synergies in relation to current creative industries and cultural planning policies in Shanghai and suggests where they might contribute to a more innovative and sustainable approach. These connections of creative sector, craft and manufacture represent not only new, more sustainable economic possibilities but also a new approach to making places – the production of a local material culture in an age of climate change.

Such alternative development possibility is not welcomed by policy makers and urban planners. Connections between the making industries and the core ideas industries developed at an informal level does not attract government support and in fact goes against current models of creative industries-led development in the city (Gu, 2012). This paper intends to explore some of the tensions between a powerful, though declining manufacturing and a weak, emergent creative sector as they develop in the metropolitan area. It will draw lessons from the Shanghai case to inform on-going debates in Australian cities about creative industries, manufacturing and sustainable local development.

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### **Theorization of ‘maker culture’ in the context of Chinese fashion clusters**

Independent small scale fashion designers have frequently been studied in developed countries (cf. McRobbie, 1998). There is a growing literature on accessories and other interior crafts (jewellery, ceramics, furniture) as part of the commodified symbolic economy of cities (Scott, 2000; Banks, 2007). However, few of these literatures explore the connection between ‘making’ and ‘creating’. The only exception of this is urban sociology that studies social networks in creative industries. One of their most important claims has been that these emerging connections between ‘creatives’, manufacturers and craftspeople are not merely economic transactions. They involve exchanges of knowledge and information, but these exchanges are embedded in a local socio-cultural context (McRobbie, 2002; Grabher, 2004; Drake, 2003; Shorthose, 2004; Banks, 2007). This has been a key claim of the more recent ‘cultural economy’ discipline (O’Connor, 2004; Gibson, 2011) on which this paper builds. However, this literature has focused on embedded knowledge exchange between creatives, it does not touch on those with craftspeople and manufacturers. My work on fashion designers in Manchester suggested a deliberate exclusion of manufacturers from designer networks (Gu 2014). The powerful presence of manufacture and craft in Shanghai suggests that the socio-cultural and spatial context in which these exchanges are set up and maintained might be key to understand this aspect.

The second area of literatures concerns manufacturing as a periphery creative industries’ sub-sector which is also very much focused on policy and urban regeneration issues (Keane, 2007; 2011). My research into creative clusters identified a growing number of small creative businesses and freelancers who were finding connections with manufacturing and craft sectors both in order to make their final product and to acquire knowledge of its feasibility. As these designers intensified their connections to the manufacturer/ makers – around materials, technical and craft processes, as well as related inputs such as packaging, they acquired more knowledge of how to bring product to market.

On the other hand, manufacturers in these sectors have been encouraged to access global markets through price competition. There has been very little investment in design-led innovation. Even at the luxury end of the market the tendency has been towards imitation rather than innovation (Chevalier and Xiao, 2010). Recently scholars have talked about adaptation rather than innovation (Keane 2009) but it has been very difficult for manufacturers to access the information required for such. My initial research has suggested that manufacturers that have come into contact with these designers –mostly through informal contact arising from purchase - have begun to innovate in their products. It seems a knowledge exchange has taken place in rather informal or accidental circumstances.

These are key processes of the reorganization of fashion industry in Shanghai. Craftspeople with high-level traditional skills in clothes, footwear, jewellery and interior artefacts have, in the specific case of Shanghai, come into contact with demanding urban consumers. No longer able to compete on price (as Shanghai costs of living rise rapidly) they have identified a higher-value bespoke market which demands rapid learning if they are to succeed. In order to do this they have begun informal collaborations with creative designers; but the how these two groups find each other and the socio-cultural context within which they collaborate is still unclear.

The issue of ‘creative entrepreneurship’ is also central to the understanding of ‘maker culture’. Creative entrepreneurs cannot so easily be assimilated to entrepreneurs *per se*. The creative entrepreneurs’ socio-cultural embedment in local production culture has not been researched at depth. Researches of this underdeveloped theme of relations both in the context of China (where it has not been studied) and in Australia are only currently emerging (Gibson, 2011; Warren, 2012). In

Australia, for example, most of the works extend scholarly work around the contribution of cultural production to local identities and place-making (Stevenson, 2004; Wait and Gibson, 2009; Gibson, 2011). Internationally, works emphasising the material and everyday cultures of small craft and manufacture are most relevant here (Drake, 2003; Edensor et al, 2009; Warren, 2012). There has been little sustained study of entrepreneurs within the creative industries in China (Zhong, 2012; O'Connor and Gu, 2006; Gu, 2012). This paper tries to emphasise the links between local production cultures and changing metropolitan identities in the city through fashion manufacturing. Furthermore, it takes an emerging concern with creative industries and sustainability generally (Wright, 2009; UNCTAD, 2010) and in fashion in particular (Fletcher, 2008; Gwilt and Rissanen, 2011). By doing so, it challenges the received idea that the creative industries are 'clean' industries' that can replace 'dirty' manufacture by suggesting that this undermines local production cultures (skills, networks, economies) in ways that can exacerbate the problem. This paper looks for synergies between the two in ways that can enhance both and contribute to the social and environmental sustainability of the city.

I have chosen a local fashion market composed of large scale manufacturing factories, an official 'creative cluster' and an informal alleyway cluster of small craftspeople to explore these different dimensions. These place-based case studies will allow us to explore how local cultures of making might be emerging in a city that is trying to separate creative industries from manufacture and older crafts. As the cultural planning literature has emphasised, the cultural economy might be valued not simply for its employment effects but also as part of a local vernacular material culture (Stevenson, 2004).

### **Creative Industries vs. Manufacturing**

The restructualisation of Chinese textile and apparel industry in recent years is not hard to understand. The declining of export figures, rising labour cost and increasing competition from cheaper labour countries in China's immediate Asian neighbourhood has necessarily led to more stringent push towards high value added production and expanding domestic consumption (Lu and Dickson 2015)

Despite Shanghai's history as China's largest textile and garment manufacturing city, its manufacturing industry witnessed a significant decline since the 1990s when they were shifted to cheaper labour locations in nearby Zhejiang and Jiangsu province (Zhang 2013). In its place, the intention was to build 'creative clusters' with a focus on the core, value-added creative services. Shanghai's textile and garment manufacturing industry witnessed a rapid emptying out of traditional industries from the inner city to the urban fringe. As mentioned before, innovation in the fashion industry is closely related to (and dependent on) traditional making sectors (Rantisi 2002). The lack of connection to manufacturing could seriously hamper designers' ability to innovate. Crucially, the connections between designing and making in these sectors are not merely economic transactions but are embedded in a local socio-cultural context. It has been increasingly played down by the one-dimensional emphasis on creative inputs and economic outputs in Chinese creative industries policies (O'Connor and Gu 2012).

As in the West, the rise of the 'creative industries' narrative provided an opportunity for a career in which self-expression and economic independence could be achieved together (McRobbie 1998). The rise in the social status of the independent fashion designer in Shanghai attracted many aspirants

who had limited connections with either the global fashion network or the local supply chains. The contemporary fashion sector emerged from a declining textile city, but their relationship to this sector was limited (Banks 2007). The current policy settings at municipal and local district levels in Shanghai tend towards a deliberate separation of creative and manufacturing aspects. For Shanghai, becoming a cosmopolitan city meant relocating an economically vibrant (but ‘dirty and unsightly’) manufacturing further inland leaving a service-sector oriented Central Business District (CBD) marked by a ‘disembodied’ creativity (Gu 2012).

The special feature of ‘creative field’ (Scott 2010) is the social networks that creative people develop with others who share the same values and identities, especially the importance of social and cultural values in doing businesses as central to the creative character of their work. In the West this sets independent fashion at a distance from ‘high street’ design and the traditional textile sector. As we will see from the case study below, the exclusion of manufacturing from the local fashion networks has more complex reasons and is by no means a fixed status. In Shanghai, designers and makers are actively seeking out services from each other in a highly confluent global fashion trade.

This idea of a ‘scene’ or field has been often projected onto the city in the form of a wider creative milieu. Like the fashion scene centred around the notion of ‘Madchester’ in 1980s England (Haslam 1999), the fashion industry in Shanghai has clearly co-evolved with the city’s ambitions to become a preeminent global city. From the first modern fashion icon of the 1930s *cheongsam* and *qipao*, to *Shanghai Tang*’s contemporary global stardom, there is a sense in which the promotion of the city and the fashion’s economic success go hand in hand - an instrumental relationship promoted through ‘urban boosterism’ and growth coalitions. The local fashion industry clearly benefits from the economic advantage this brand of ‘Shanghai modern’ would bring. In the West, it is commonly acknowledged that creative spaces are not simply ‘business parks’ in which entrepreneurs do their work; these are also cultural spaces which contributing to the identifiable local character of the product. These socio-cultural benefits have been called ‘untraded interdependencies’ or even ‘public goods’ (Pratt 2004). This has evolved very differently in China - making has been linked to a mixed agenda of promoting the core creative industries (fashion design).

### **Independent fashion sector in Shanghai**

The informal market of clothing and accessory manufacturers in the outer suburbs of Shanghai is a reminder of Shanghai’s 150-year textile manufacturing tradition. These clusters have begun to attract small fashion designers looking to source fabrics and making-up skills. These informal markets have increasingly become sites for social exchanges between designers, makers and manufacturers.

For many locals, *Qipu* market is the real hub of fashion in Shanghai. Although it might resonate many negative values associated with ‘Made in China’ – poor quality and ‘copy’ of global brands, *Qipu* market has been a main source of inspiration for local fashion industry. Design student Yvonne came here frequently to spot new global fashion trends. She knew a few suppliers in the market who have been manufacturing for well-known fashion brands and explained how China’s manufacturing industry became a key player in the global cultural flow,

‘Chinese manufacturers are better placed than anyone else in the industry to know what’s in and what’s out for the coming season. They receive orders directly from the European and North American fashion houses.’

Manufactures in this case are not just copying ideas. The industry is now so sophisticated that it is able to translate ideas from global fashion industry to the local fashion market. The velocity of ideas trespassing *Qipu* was important for local designers who would otherwise be excluded from the global fashion industry. The role of trend setting played by *Qipu* market was extremely influential on local designers' work. Many young fashion designers are now working for the manufacturing factories to re-design clothes for the domestic market. Here the manufacturing industry has replaced major retailers in shaping 'tastes'. Wholesalers will deliberately over-produce the order they receive from brands and sell them directly at *Qipu* market as 'tail order'. Based on consumer response, the factory will change the design and re-sell them at the market within days.

The domination of the making led creativity in Shanghai's fashion scene was further evidenced by the clustering of tailor made micro fashion businesses in the inner city. These are small-scale alleyway shops in which tailors and shoemakers, long used to providing traditional made-to-measure to local residents now reside. *Yongle Road*, a cluster of over twenty boutique shops, is an important place to start thinking about how making plays an essential role both in the production of material goods and in its contribution to alternative aesthetic values in the production of fashion and style. The front of the shop is the retail space and the back is where making takes place including measuring, pattern cutting, sewing and ironing. These shops employ two to three makers and are making one off clothes for their design conscious customers. In order to keep up with global fashion trend, these boutique fashion shops have also begun to make connections with the huge reservoir of traditional craft skills that still exist in Shanghai, though often marginalised. Here makers are not just making clothes but also playing a role of stylists similar to those in the Parisian couture houses. Unlike the tailor shops in the past, these maker spaces are shaped by the most current urban cultures and are key to the development of 'bohemian' culture in Shanghai. As one customer commented, these fashion boutiques are reminiscent of an old Shanghai when *Qipao* and *Zhongshan* cemented the city's global reputation for fashion. The revival of fashion boutiques boasting their high quality craftsmanship has achieved more than providing an alternative avenue for local designers to sustain their presence in a highly competitive market. It has contributed to the symbolic capital of Shanghai – its aura as a global cosmopolitan city.

A third dimension of the making led creativity takes place in official creative clusters that are (usually) converted industrial buildings aimed at promoting local talents. These clusters tend to attract product designers who have adapted many of the older craft skills around furniture, ceramics, carvings and other interior decorations in one place (Zheng, 2011; Zhong, 2009; 2012; Gu, 2012). *Shangjie* was one of the most high profile fashion clusters in the city, located in the former textile factory Southwest of Shanghai. Since its opening in 2010, Loft has hosted many high profile industry events including the launch of an incubator style retail space for young designers. It also hosted the launch of the Enjoy Young brand, a label designed exclusively by local emerging designers. The management company aims at connecting young independent designers' creativity with makers within the cluster. Such thinking was based on an understanding of the unique problem of nurturing local creativity – it is unlikely for 'creativity' to grow in isolation from related industries and skills. By locating in arms length with the makers, designers are able to learn crucial knowledge ranging from bring a finished product to the market, to maximising the profit margin of their design products.

## Conclusion

This paper presents a challenge to one very prevalent approach to the creative industries which positions them as ‘knowledge industries’ in opposition to outmoded, manual, low-skilled, ‘dirty’ manufacture – suitable only for developing countries. Using Shanghai as a case study – a ‘global capital’ in a developing economy – this paper explores emerging links between creative industries and small-scale manufacture and craft production in the city. It investigated the actual and potential synergies between these sectors and how they have contributed to a more sustainable and socially cohesive process of urban development.

This paper starts from our understanding of how creative industries might contribute to sustainable urban development through the creative industries development strategy, which placing the arts and creative industries concerns at the heart of the urban regeneration policy. Instead of focusing on the core creative industries, this paper suggests ways in which creative industries and small scale manufacture might be approached from the perspective of synergy, in order to enhance the competitiveness of both and to contribute to local cultural identities of making things.

It shows how complex the relationship between making and creating is. Such interaction can be observed in the process of global cultural trade; in the evolution of urban cultural legacy; and in the formulation of new urban cultural economy. This paper exploring the interchangeable nature of ‘creativity’ and ‘making’ argues that the development of urban cultural economy needs to take into account their making industry for good reasons:

Firstly, as cities are increasingly deindustrialized, we need to think about material production in a broader and more progressive sense in relation to other value added inputs. The potential for the creative core to connect with the skills embodied in the manufacturing industry is shown through the case studies above. And we need to pay more attention to how these connections might be updated.

Secondly, it is also important to note that culture-led urban regeneration does not just imply replacing the material with the immaterial industries but also a co-creation of values. Local production ecologies have to rely on the nurturing of local talent and the development of social networks amongst them.

Since as early as 2000, the Shanghai Municipal Government invested in the development of fashion clusters in order to exploit the economic potential of the fashion industry. Such developments, as with the explosion of such creative clusters after 2005, were conceived as purely business ventures with no connection to the wider cultural system of the city. There are different views as to the success of these clusters. Some argue that the proliferation of these fed into the burgeoning images of Shanghai as a global cultural city and helped to launch the city’s global status (Greenspan 2011), others questioning how sustainable is this strategy and most importantly to what extent can we assess their contribution to the development of the local creative industries such as fashion (O’Connor 2011).

I argue that each of these economic, social and culture dimensions assessed in this case shall be considered in the development of a sustainability urban cultural economy. Australia is facing an ‘Asian century’ in which China will be a dominate power and Shanghai is one of our nearest global cities. Instead of focusing on the ‘core’ creative industries, this paper tried to understand an alternative creative industries development strategy based on the ‘periphery’ industries – the

manufacturing industry and its connections with the small scale cultural production in Shanghai. This alternative development pathway will have implications for Australian cities like Melbourne and Sydney. Small-scale cultural production has to face increasing financial pressure for sustaining in the inner cities as a result of high property prices. By viewing making as high quality craftsmanship that is key to the innovative process within cultural production, it allows the debate around ‘creative cities’ to be more about what the city has, than what the city needs to become.

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