**Weaving Fashion Stories in Shanghai: Heritage, Retro and Vintage Fashion**

**in Modern Shanghai**

Chapter submission

Dr Natascha Radclyffe-Thomas, London College of Fashion

Key words: Shanghai, fashion branding, heritage, retro, vintage, place marketing

*‘The most powerful successful brands have stories attached to them’*

Lindstrom 2010:134

Opening with an old-time newsreel countdown, the promotional fashion film for the relaunched Chinese beauty brand Shanghai VIVE transports viewers back to Shanghai’s golden era. Two *qipao*-clad beauties wander through sets populated with sepia images of 1930’s Shanghai while the voiceover reminds us of Shanghai’s cosmopolitan history and the iconic Shanghai *Xiaojie* (Shanghai Miss) who populated the city and set the Shanghai style that is still so familiar to international fashionistas today. In emphasising the provenance of the brand and its association with one of the most iconic fashion cities Shanghai VIVE is complicit in the practice of city branding evident in fashion marketing practiced in the historic fashion capitals of Europe: Paris and London.

Shanghai’s identity as a fashion city is inexorably linked to its past, both real and imagined. The growth of international trade due to its geographic position and the resulting confluence of cultures put Shanghai at the forefront of China’s development in the early twentieth century and the city became a fascinating destination for international travellers. Its iconic architecture, particularly the Bund, featured in images seen around the world and the city spawned its own modern it-girl identity (Dong, 2008) in the form of the Shanghai *Xiaojie* or Chinese flapper, whose likeness continues to be referenced in fashion shoots today. Writing in *Fashion’s World Cities* (Breward & Gilbert 2006) David Gilbert asks whether its twenty-first century renaissance might see Shanghai develop an alternative fashion city identity to those established in the West, yet contemporary evidence is to the contrary. This chapter is based on fieldtrips to Shanghai to investigate the fashion retail market, observations and interviews with retailers, focusing especially on how heritage, retro and vintage are evidenced in product and promotions, and puts the evidence collected in the context of recent literature on Shanghai’s fashion identity.

A brand’s history is key to its claims for authenticity and credibility ‘which is one of the reasons why a brand’s background and the stories swirling around it are so important’ (Lindstrom 2010:133). Heritage has been seen as a key driver for differentiation of international fashion brands, especially in the luxury segment (Okonkwo 2007) and has been a popular strategy for Western brands’ entry into the Chinese market (Lu 2008). The domestic Chinese fashion market is also adopting this marketing approach with the relaunch of heritage brands, or *laozihao* (time-honoured) brands. Brands such as Shanghai VIVE have relaunched themselves with a brand identity firmly situated in pre-1949 Shanghai. Brands such as Shanghai Tang, although founded in Hong Kong and now part of the Richemont Group, bases its entire brand identity on the celebration of Shanghai’s opulent era designing product, interiors and brand marketing communications that exploit customers’ interest in *fugu* (retro). Many Western luxury brands have used retro-Shanghai as a backdrop to their fashion shows and marketing campaigns e.g. the fashion film that accompanied Dior’s handbag launch: *Lady Blue Shanghai*, (Lynch 2010). Similarly Shanghai Tang has recently held its catwalk shows in Shanghai, affirming the authenticity of the brand identity. The city of Shanghai itself has emerged as the driver of China’s retro brand renaissance including both brands that celebrate the early modern period but also those that reference Mao-era aesthetics such as fashion brand Ospop whose classic *jie fang jie* (liberation) shoes are ‘proudly Made in China’.

Fashion consumers make positive associations with brands that mediate the brand experience through storytelling (Hancock 2009; Lindstrom 2010) and whilst the interest in heritage and retro brands and their associated fashion stories appears common to both Western and Chinese fashion consumers, it has been commonly stated that for Chinese fashion consumers vintage was a stylish step too far; Confucian cultural beliefs associating pre-owned clothes with death and economic austerity (Palmer & Clark 2005) precluding a market for vintage fashion. Yet Shanghai now boasts a burgeoning vintage fashion scene with clothing and accessories sourced overseas and sold in boutiques like Lolo Love Vintage, vintage fairs, luxury vintage consignment stores as well as snapped by Shanghai Streetstyle bloggers.

**Heritage fashion in Shanghai**

*‘The curtain of the golden era of Shanghai has never fallen’*

(Shanghai VIVE fashion film)

It is a feature of the contemporary fashion industry that fashion brands leverage the provenance of their brand story and heritage in order to differentiate themselves (Kapferer & Bastien 2012). Many historic brands have opened their archives and the development of digital marketing has enabled fashion houses to share their fashion histories online. Many of the prestige fashion marques of Europe have enjoyed unprecedented success entering China and storytelling based on their heritage has been central to their marketing. Along with excellent quality, high prices, uniqueness, superfluity, aesthetic and emotional content, a brand’s heritage is cited as one of the six attributes necessary for success in the Chinese luxury market and consumers have been particularly interested in histories of the luxury firms (Lu 2008). This interest has enabled international brands to introduce consumers to the founders of fashion houses, to the stories of their brand’s developments, to foster brand loyalty and thus to promote new products and services. Due to the fact that China was closed to Western fashion for several decades and brands could not rely on established brand recognition and customer loyalty, several European houses have moved beyond traditional marketing campaigns and used exhibitions to educate and engage consumers about the history of their brands. *Esprit Dior* held in late 2013 at Shanghai’s Museum of Contemporary Art was representative of recent collaborations between luxury brands and cultural institutions in showcasing historical garments, fashion photographs and archival materials in exhibitions designed to educate and inspire visitors who can then more fully appreciate shopping the brand. These fashion exhibitions are also coming out of museum and art gallery spaces and into the fashion retail environment. During my fieldtrip to Shanghai the atrium of Shanghai’s Plaza 66 was hosting the Berluti *Heritage Exhibition*; an interactive exhibition previewing a new store and showcasing the French custom shoemaker’s brand history and artisanship. Digital screens and a history-wall traced the development of Berluti since its founding in Paris in 1895, accompanied by display cases showing artefacts such as design sketches and samples of the ‘emblematic Berluti knot’ and a display of Rainbow shoes: the classic Alessandro in a range of fabulous colours and finished with the ‘art of patina’.

Another aspect of heritage is that the fashion system has established a hierarchy of fashion cities (Breward & Gilbert 2006) and place marketing leverages the power of particular geographic locations to imbue certain cities with the cachet of chicness or innovation with respect to those brands founded or operating within them. A significant part of Shanghai’s aesthetic appeal is in its architecture and many of its neo-classical and art deco buildings have been repurposed for office or retail space. Construction and modernisation are evident all over Shanghai and the Shanghai Municipal government has enacted building preservation measures since the 1990s that cover more than 2000 buildings with varying levels of classification that restrict alterations. Bi-lingual Chinese-English Heritage Architecture plaques adorn many of the buildings I pass; heritage buildings appeal to developers as they are likely to be well-situated ‘near the heart of the city and offer interesting spaces and architectural details, and have more soul than newer places’ (Warr in Lim, 2008:29). Brands like Dunhill have very much embraced the use of Shanghai’s heritage architecture with their Dunhill Home situated in a renovated 1920’s neoclassical style villa on Huaihai Road in the former French concession. Mixed office and retail space at the Shanghai Central Plaza occupies the 1909 former Municipal Council Building of the French Concession also in the Luwan District on Huaihai Middle Road. Just South of Huaihai Road and also within the former French concession is one of Shanghai’s most successful and well-known heritage complexes: the commercial restorations that is Xintiandi (new heaven and Earth). A 30,000 square metre site of renovated and reconstructed Shanghainese *Shikumen* houses arranged over two blocks (North and South) of retail, restaurants and apartments, symbols of Shanghai’s consumer culture that sandwich the First Congress Hall of the Chinese Communist Party.

Authenticity is a valuable asset for fashion brands in their drive for customer engagement and it is relatively straightforward for Western fashion brands to revisit their archives, to revive former design classics, to host physical or virtual exhibitions that ground their current products and promotions in the vestiges of their past. This is a much more complex position for Chinese fashion brands to take. China has a disjointed fashion history and in Lu’s words: ‘The last vestiges of the old-wealth heritage of lifestyle and thinking were removed by the Cultural Revolution (1966-76)’ (Lu 2008:11). Fashion marketers seek to reinvent the past through claims on Shanghai’s past; for example Tian Zi Fang, which is a newer development than Xintiandi, trades on the evident nostalgia for Shanghai’s golden era. Another *Shikumen* redevelopment, the ‘Culture Industry Park’ throngs with tourists who are greeted by a history of the area complete with diorama, images of *Yuefenpai* (Shanghai calendar girls) at every turn, as are multiple stores selling *qipao* with names that reference Shanghai’s past but are in fact recent ventures e.g. Shanghai Lady and Shanghai 1936 (founded in the 1990s).

The *qipao* remains the most iconic of Chinese garments, the fashion embodiment of golden-era Shanghai and escaping the tourist trap of Tian Zi Fang it is the *qipao* tailors of Changle Lu (or cheongsam street) who in fact continue the traditions of the 1920’s Shanghai tailors, craftsmen who became world-renowned through their amalgamation of Chinese aesthetics with Western cutting. Tailor-made *qipao* can still be commissioned in multiple glass-fronted stores that use their windows to display their credentials through fine work, press cuttings and images of famous clients. Each with their own speciality, brands like *Dun Lin*, *Han Yi* Garments, *Hangzhou Zhujun* and *Li Gu Long* claim a genuine fashion heritage and much as in London’s Savile Row it is the skills and experience of their tailors that give authenticity to the brand stories; it was *Han Yi* Garments’ *sifu* Chu Hongsheng, then in his eighties who made one of the most recognisable film costumes: Maggie Cheung’s series of *qipao*. For Wong Kar Wai’s 2000 film *In the Mood for Love*.

Walking on Changle Lu, in the footsteps of novelist Eileen Chang it is easy to romanticise the golden era of the Shanghai tailor yet coming under the shadow of the many modern retail developments springing up around Shanghai, one wonders to what extent Chinese fashion brands are able to capitalise on their traditional heritage brands. Certainly in the era of fast fashion and made-in-China, European brands have felt confident in the superiority of their artisanship and mocked the idea of China having fashion craft traditions that could rival their own. UNESCO recognises craft knowledge and skills in its global system of listing ‘Intangible Cultural Heritage’ traditions, and the Shanghai Municipal Government has designated *qipao* tailoring as amongst Shanghai’s Conservation List of Intangible Cultural Heritage traditions. Several Chinese heritage fashion brands have been accorded this title along with the Ministry of Commerce’s endorsement of *laozihao*. Close to Changle Lu, Shaanxi Bei Lu is identified by a brass plaque designating it ‘China Time-honored Brand Shanghai No.1 Street’. Stores endorsed by central and local government for their brand heritage display bilingual Chinese-English plaques and itemise their many heritage and craft recognitions.

Perusing the plaques adorning the storefronts along Shaanxi Bei Lu I uncover several heritage brands. Established in 1936 the Shanghai *Ka Ka* Department Store Co Ltd, known for its shirts and woollen sweaters, was one of the earliest to be designated as a *laozihao*. The Shanghai *Xinda Meihua* Shoes Co Ltd established in 1940 specializes in women’s embroidered shoes. The Shanghai Baromon Suit Companyestablished in 1928 claims over forty honours issued by the Municipal and District Governments. The Shanghai Wings Garment Co Ltd. established in 1917 is endorsed as a China Time-honoured Brand and its women’s tailoring or according to the plaque’s English translation ‘Wings Lady-style Garment Craft’, have been added to the Shanghai Conservation List of Intangible Cultural Heritage as have the skills of the *qipao* makers of the *Long Feng* Chinese style Garment Company Ltd,established in 1936 and one of the earliest brands to be listed (in 1993), which has had to relocate its flagship store from Nanjing Road due to increasing retail rents.

However despite government recognition and media interest in the stories of these Chinese heritage brands, it is estimated that only 1500 of the 15000 traditional Chinese brands (across all industries) are still in business and only ten are doing well (Lin 2012). With Shanghai’s rapid expansion, and in common with other major fashion capitals, there is enormous pressure on retail space and Nanjing Road East, which in its heyday boasted more than sixty time honoured brands is now home to only twenty, retail spaces being dominated by Western multinational fashion brands. According to Shao Yuling Secretary (General of the Shanghai Time-honored Brands Association): ‘There used to be a lot of time-honored brands along Nanjing Road and they were the symbols of the street. But now, when you look around it’s all foreign brands. The old days now exist only in memory’ (Liu 2012).

A few of the Chinese *laozihao* heritage brands are adopting new brand strategies and attempting to establish themselves in the international market. A Chinese brand formerly located on Nanjing Road and using its heritage as a marketing strategy is Humsuit, the tailoring firm established in 1929, whose tailoring techniques have been placed on the Shanghai municipal government designated Shanghai Intangible Cultural Heritage Listof157 traditions. Apparel brands such as *Heng Yuan Xiang*, a luxury woollens producer established in 1927, has rebranded itself, raised brand awareness and aims to establish itself as a key international player in luxury branded goods (Bevolo, Gofman & Moskowitz 2012).

FIGURE 1: The Shanghai VIVE boutique in Shanghai’s Peace Hotel.

One of the most high profile relaunches of a *laozihao*, with a marketing strategy by the French company *Cent Degres*, is beauty brand Shanghai VIVE, a brand whose name combines one of fashion’s fantasy cities with an allusion to the golden era of Shanghai’s French concession. Relaunched in 2010 with a branch in Tian Zi Fang nestled amongst the nostalgia retailers, the brand’s flagship store is consciously situated within one of Shanghai’s key heritage buildings, the Peace Hotel (formerly Sassoon House) just off Shanghai’s famous Bund. Its styling and promotional materials very much associate Shanghai VIVE with recollections of 1930’s Shanghai. A section of the building’s exterior windows feature Shanghai VIVE promotions and reinforce its associations with the city through photographs of the product against a backdrop of Shanghai architecture and with actual product displayed amongst installations of Shanghai’s architecture reproduced in paper sculptures. The store itself is styled in slick black and pink with an art deco sensibility. The beauty line has been extended with art deco bags and silk scarves illustrated with stylised 1930’s modern women; product is displayed in glass-topped counters and visual references to the Shanghai calendar girls are presented along with the modern but retro-styled beauty images - the two girls of the original marketing rebranded for the 21st century, and attention drawn to the brand’s long history which the saleswomen are happy to recount.

According to the brand’s promotional materials *Shuang Mei* (two sisters) perfume and beauty products was founded in Hong Kong in 1898 by the Feng family, and had its first retail store on Nanjing Road. It launched its iconic *Radiance Restorative Cream* in 1915 and this product raised the brand’s international profile being awarded a gold medal at the Panama-California Exposition in San Francisco. At the Tian Zi Fang branch a fashion film runs on an in-store screen setting its appeal with a throwback to 1930’s glamour and establishing its pedigree by taking consumers through the brand’s history, telling the Shanghai VIVE story. The film shows how the brand became associated with the modern Shanghai of the 1930s and its celebrity culture, and how its international reputation and accolades from the Parisian beauty industry led to its nickname Shanghai VIVE. The film underlines Shanghai VIVE’s association with the city which is described as ‘the most open, dynamic and glamorous city in China’, showingsepia-tinted images of its art deco architecture followed by a snapshot representation of the Shanghai’s it-girls’ lifestyle: residing in the chic art deco apartments of Eddington House (Shanghai storyteller Eileen Chang’s former residence on Hart Road (now Changde Road)), shopping on Xiaofei Road (now Huaihai Road), and dancing at the ultra-moderne Paramount dance hall. The film establishes historical brand ambassadors by featuring legendary and accomplished socialite beauties of the 1930s: Tang Ying (fashion designer), Lu Xiaoman (artist), Zhang Ailing (Eileen Chang) and Zhou Shuping (translator). Shanghai’s identity is firmly linked to the image of these modern women and we look over the shoulders of two representative retro-styled beauties at a clock face with hands whizzing, fading out to show the modern Pudong skyline before a change in soundtrack and shots of red carpets and ribbon-cutting announce Shuang Mei’s 2010 rebirth as Shanghai VIVE: ‘the legendary beauty story of Shanghai aristocratic ladies’.

**Retro fashion in Shanghai**

*‘The objects we consume can be seen as a live information system, through which cultural messages are conveyed and contested.’*

Gabriel & Lang 2006:44

The fashion system constantly reinvents the past and an abiding trend in Western fashion has been the reviving of recent fashion history through retro. The relatively recent past is trawled through by trend agencies and fashion magazines and presented for fashion consumers through increasingly visual fashion media communicated through print, digital and social media. This practice is amplified by multiple nostalgia-driven trends e.g. *down aging* (faithpopcorn.com) and fuels the current upsurge in retro. Shanghai has been the inspiration for and site of several Chinese retro brands; designers in Shanghai, both natives and newcomers plunder personal memories and/or imagined histories of the city creating new fashion lines for consumers with an appetite for Shanghai stories.

As stated earlier, brands such as Shanghai Tang have built a brand identity based on consumers’ obsession with retro, in their case basing product, in-store environment and marketing on the glamour of 1930’s Shanghai. Launched in 1994 in Hong Kong by Sir David Tang aimed at an expat and tourist market the brand is currently celebrating its 20th anniversary, targeting international expansion, attempting to maintain associations with Shanghai’s golden era glamour but avoiding *cheongsam* clichés. The rebrand is evident in its Shanghai flagship store located in the renovated Cathay Mansion at the junction of Huaihai Middle Road and Maoming South Road; the world’s largest Shanghai Tang fashion flagship is housed in a 1932 art deco heritage-listed building it shares with Shanghai’s second oldest cinema. The mansion offers several different zones that encompass the womenswear, menswear, childrenswear, accessories and lifestyle ranges. Located in an area renowned for tailoring, the importance of Shanghai tailoring to brand identity is shown in the Imperial Tailoring boutique that displays antique sewing machines, bolts of fabric and Chinese knot fastenings in a 1930’s Shanghai salon atmosphere, where I sit and enjoy Chinese tea. The tea is served in delicate turquoise teacups decorated with the brightest orange goldfish on saucers decorated with stylised Chinese cloud patterns and I briefly remind myself how much I regret not having bought this particular crockery whilst it was still in production, as the Marketing team start to talk me through recent brand developments.

Figure 2: Shanghai Tang’s Cathay Mansion flagship store.

Whilst the Shanghai Tang *cheongsam* remains a core product in honour of Sir David Tang, the brand is expanding its fashion lines and increasing its product offer capitalising on increased domestic interest in Chinese history and products. The accessories and women’s fashion lines have been extended, as has the menswear. Whilst the womenswear still references Chinese design aesthetics if not so much in silhouette but clearly in the print designs, the menswear references the leisure wardrobes of the Western expats who inhabited Shanghai in the 1920s and 1930s. The polo shirt has been a core product for Shanghai Tang who have recently collaborated with the Shanghai Rugby Union Football Club and issued a series of rugby polo shirts featuring the logos and in the colours of the pre-war interport clubs: the Hankow 1921 Historical Collection.

Retro is not just about style and reliving history; it can be about reviving past craft skills. Founded in 1998 by Shanghai native Denise Huang Mengqi Suzhou Cobblers is situated just off the Bund; its core products are hand-sewn embroidered Chinese slippers with designs featuring classic Chinese motifs e.g. cherry blossom, birds and fish in a rainbow of colours in ‘100% Chinese silk, the kind that long made Shanghai tailors the envy of the world’ (suzhoucobblers.com). There is also a small collection of high-heels and reticule-style embroidered silk bags and a selection of 1930s’s Shanghai fashion illustrations on display. Suzhou was and remains a centre of embroidery and Suzhou Cobblers employs quality and artisanship as a differentiator for the brand, one that obviously appeals to the international luxury shopper (the brand is featured in the *Shanghai Luxe* shopping guide). The brand’s website gives an insight into the design strategy of Suzhou Cobbler, linking the style back to its founder’s idea of what her ‘style-conscious grandmother’ would have worn and revealing that the ‘colors and patterns reflect Shanghai’s grandest era, when my hometown was a fashion capital’ (Huang, 2014).

A bilingual Chinese-English display in the window of Shanghai Trio’s Xintiandi store explains the philosophy behind the brand and their design inspiration: ‘Breathing in and experiencing the smells of the marketplace that permeates the streets and lanes of Shanghai’. Shanghai Trio is another retro brand whose design ethos is based on an appreciation of Shanghai’s past, but counter to much of the Shanghai-inspired fashion brands, the past they are reviving is not the exclusive after-dark one of dance-halls and *qipao*, but the commonplace one of workers, bicycles and markets: ‘our ideas transpire from personal memories and wandering around China’ (Notes on Design 2014). Their website front-page proclaims: ‘Details have a story’ and Virginie Fournier founded Shanghai Trio in 1998 to create fashion products that celebrate the traditional arts and crafts of China, and promote the luxury of hand-made products inspired by the traditional artefacts of Chinese daily life (<http://www.shanghaitrio.com>). A key product is their post office bag, elevating the everyday to the designer it is made from the original fabric used by the Chinese Post Office but produced in revamped colours. Electrician’s bags and vintage ‘Shanghai street’ bags are also inspirations for accessories as well as rice-measures which are reimagined as a series of vanity cases. Customers are increasingly interested in the story of how their products are made and Shanghai Trio is keen to promote its socially responsible production. Although mainly known for its accessories Shanghai Trio also produces high quality garments based on the simple shapes of Chinese scholar robes.

Another retro brand born from a fascination with Chinese workwear is the online retailer Ospop (One Small Piece of Pride) whose key product is the canvas *jie fang xie* (liberation shoe) that harks back to the footwear of the Mao era. Ospop’s founder Ben Walters has taken this classic shoe adorned each pair with the Chinese character *gong* (labour) and referencing the Shanghai construction workers who were the brand’s inspiration, produces them in a rugged colour palette of cement, slate and brick. Ospop has leveraged the world’s interest in China and produced memorable marketing campaigns like its Proudly Made in China series to take the brand global before trying to develop in the domestic market (Jing Daily 2011). Ospop uses its website to spread the brand story and uses its ethical domestic production- the shoes are made in Henan - to proclaim that they are proudly made in China.

Figure 3. Retro store 1691.

Although one feels that Shanghai’s past is very much alive in the modern city, not all the retro stories told in Shanghai are Chinese ones. Behind its commune grey exterior adorned with a large communist red star, ‘1691’ on Changle Road is very much a celebration of US retro. The stock of denims, flight jackets, khaki flying suits and rucksacks are displayedagainst a rugged interior of exposed brick and wood panelled walls and stripped floorboards reminiscent of a hunting lodge. With references to Western pop culture throughout the store including the Route 66 Hi-Way café, this store could be anywhere.

**Vintage fashion in Shanghai**

*‘Secondhand used to mean less value’*

Julia, Founder Annata Vintage

The appeal of dressing-up in someone else’s history has been popular in Western fashion since at least the 1960s, but more recently what had traditionally had an underground appeal has been established as a key fashion trend with specialist second-hand clothing stores like Beyond Retro expanding from its base in London’s hipster favourite Shoreditch to several retail stores and a website claiming to feature more than 25,000 vintage pieces. Vintage has moved from an underground to a mainstream trend in the West yet fashion commentators have repeated the commonly held belief that Chinese consumers eschew vintage fashion due to its associations with poverty and cultural superstitions around wearing a dead person’s clothing. However there is also a Chinese saying: ‘There is nothing the Cantonese will refuse to eat and nothing the Shanghainese will refuse to wear’ and there has been a lot of press about vintage stores opening in China and the final act of this story sees me wandering up *longtangs* (alleys) and stairwells and peeping behind hidden doorways to explore vintage fashion in Shanghai and discover the stories of their collections.

Figure 4. Lolo Love Vintage.

One of the features common to Shanghai’s vintage stores is that they rarely seem to stay in one place. Lolo Love Vintage is one of Shanghai’s highest profile vintage stores, founded in 2010 and already in its third location, close to the former French concession in Xuihui district. A sign illustrated with a line drawing of a stylised vintage beauty with blue eyes, rose-bud lips and a hairdo that features a prominent strawberry hangs above the blue door which marks the store’s location; it is notable that the sign is only in English. The blue door, itself also decorated with a 1920’s fashion illustration, opens onto a garden courtyard featuring real palms, fake cacti, indoor furniture outdoors, a vintage pram and life-size animal sculptures- a giant rabbit welcomes you at the entrance to the store. In common with current practice in many designer retail spaces, the store is not designed for purely transactional purposes, but rather as somewhere to spend time; the previous incarnation of Lolo Love Vintage had a coffee shop and although this store does not, it has a relaxed salon atmosphere and the garden encourages customers to hang out. The whimsy of the courtyard is continued in-store with an interior featuring antique furniture, crystal chandeliers and satin evening shoes displayed in a birdcage. It is quite a large store with several rooms over one floor, every surface of which are covered in garments, accessories and vintage illustrations and photographs. As testament to the growing interest in vintage a flier for an upcoming Shanghai vintage fair is on the counter next to a vintage till.

Lolo Love Vintage was founded in 2009 by fashion stylist Lolo and the stock covers the 1920s to 1980s. The garments are overwhelmingly womenswear although there is a collection of childrenswear and a selection of men’s ties, all sourced from France, Germany, the United Kingdom and Los Angeles. The store reminds me of any fabulous vintage emporium anywhere with day dresses and separates, lingerie, and evening and wedding dresses, handbags, shoes and costume jewellery, silk scarves, hat boxes, and sunglasses. The majority of clothing is Western, but there are a few Chinese fashion items including a 1960’s beaded *qipao*. Shanghai is destination shopping and as the popularity of vintage spreads tourists come from all over China to buy vintage at Lolo and according to the shop assistant range from high school students to fifty year olds. Additionally stylists and fashion magazines raid the cornucopia of fashion finds for use in fashion shoots.

A more recent addition to the vintage retail scene and also located in Xuihui is Annata vintage. Peering doubtfully down a *longtang* I spy a hand-painted sign which informs me the store is to be found 89 steps from the entrance of lane 316- and it is, behind a green door which leads into a small courtyard across which is the entrance to the store. The founder Julia tells me that Annata is Italian for ‘years’ and invites me to sit and enjoy tea while she tells me her vintage story. The small one-room store has an antique hospital bed at its centre; the deco bedside table beside it has a pair of antique cups and saucers on it and a novel with a pair of vintage spectacles placed casually on it. The bed is made up and has a sleeveless vintage top and full skirt laid out on it along with a handbag and a couple of vintage magazines, giving the impression that a fashionable 1950’s young woman is about to re-enter and dress for the day. Surrounding the bed are racks of vintage pieces, and above those shelves of vintage handbags, magazines and ephemera which also spill out from vintage suitcases on the floor.

Figure 5: Annata Vintage founder Julia

I am served flower tea in another exquisite porcelain tea-cup, but this time it is a vintage one, one of Julia’s first collectibles, a souvenir brought back from a trip to Europe. The concept behind the Annata vintage store is one of collating memories: ‘old things have a story and memory’. Julia talks enthusiastically about the stories behind the vintage pieces on display, notably an unworn silk blouse with embroidered panels, made in China but sourced in Japan. Julia studied marketing and then fashion and her appreciation of construction informs her choices for the store as she focuses on workmanship, materials and has a keen eye for zips, buttons and stitches. Although she herself sports a 1920’s gamine bob and bee-stung red lips she says that as women’s bodies have changed, pre 1940’s clothes look gorgeous but do not fit and furthermore her customers are modern women who appreciate vintage clothes but do not want to ‘look vintage’.

The majority of the clothing and accessories in the store are Western fashion- I spot a Schiaparelli hat and a Liberty print day dress on the racks. They were initially sourced from Japan but sourcing has expanded to Korea, the United Kingdom, Holland, Italy, Ireland and the United States - taking advantage of friends’ and relatives’ travels. According to Julia vintage is a very new but upcoming trend in Shanghai, the majority of local fashion consumers are not interested in vintage, second-hand was deemed of less value and locals would rather shop at H&M and Zara. Annata was only founded in 2013 but has already become a destination shop - Julia proudly tells me about a group of fashion students from Northern China who made Annata the first stop on a three-day cultural trip to Shanghai. *China Vogue* also keeps an eye on the store’s inventory in order to borrow pieces for fashion editorials- notably 1970’s pieces, and last year a lot of evening styles to complement a Great Gatsby story. Although considerably smaller than Lolo Love Vintage, the Annata is also intended as a salon store and a few regulars pop by and partake of tea and conversation during my visit. Customers are Western and *haigui* (Chinese who have studied abroad) and who are familiar with vintage fashion from their overseas’ experiences and whose mini Polaroid photos decorate the walls of the changing room.

Whilst these vintage stores are reminiscent of vintage stores in the United Kingdom and the United States, Old Lyric found down a *longtang* and up the staircase of a period building in the Luwan district, is a different type of vintage fashion store altogether. In contrast to the other Shanghai vintage stores the environment at Old Lyric is reminiscent of an upmarket boutique. Brushed concrete walls, an antique dressmakers’ dummy and sparse merchandise; the atmosphere is also notably cooler (in both senses). The vintage pieces - both womens and menswear - are curated luxury from key international avant-garde fashion designers, pieces selected to represent the highpoints of the careers of 16 designers including Ann Demeulemeester, Comme des Garcons, Dries Van Noten, Yohji Yamamoto and Jean Paul Gaultier. Another recent addition to Shanghai’s vintage retail scene, Old Lyric- its logo is a bass clef- was only founded in 2013 by Zephyrance Lou but has already received a lot of fashion media attention, especially for the way it uses social media to educate consumers about the designers and products it features **(**Jing Daily 2013).

US writer and New Yorker columnist Emily Hahn lived in Shanghai in the late 1930s and her observation that ‘Shanghai is always changing’ is quoted in many pieces on modern Shanghai. Fashion marketers have discovered the power of storytelling and these vintage stores are the newest chapter in Shanghai’s fashion story. Lindstrom argues that consumers are ‘entranced by stories (particularly ones they can complete with their own imaginary endings, or meanings)…’ (2010:134), and it is interesting to imagine, as David Gilbert did, what the future of Shanghai’s fashion will be. Will there be more brand relaunches as is happening with European fashion houses? Will time-honoured brands be able to capitalise on their heritage? Will the retro brands be able to develop wide product-bases will their customers allow them to move beyond their imitative styles? How are the cultural associations of vintage changing and will the Chinese fashion tourist continue to want to dress up in somebody else’s fashion story? But that’s another story…

References

Bevolo, M., Gofman, A., and Moskowitz, H. (2012), *Premium by Design: How to Understand, Design and Market High End Products,* Farnham: Gower.

Breward, C. & Gilbert, D. (eds.) (2006), *Fashion’s World Cities.* Oxford & New York: Berg.

Dong, M. Y. (2008), Who Is Afraid of the Chinese Modern Girl? In A. E. Weinbaum, L. M. Thomas, P. Ramamurthy, U. G. Poiger, M. Y. Dong and T. E. Barlow (eds.) *The Modern Girl Around the World*, Durham and London: Duke University Press pp194-219.

Faithpopcorn (2014) *17 Trends* <http://www.faithpopcorn.com/trendbank/> Accessed 3August 2014.

Gabriel, Y. and Lang, T. (2006), *The Unmanageable Consumer*, London: Sage.

Hancock, J. (2009), *Brand Story*, New York: Fairchild Books.

Huang, D. (2014), *My Chinese Slippers*, <http://www.suzhou-cobblers.com/about_us> Accessed 1 May 2014.

Jing Daily (2011), *A conversation with Ben Walters of Chinese sneaker brand Ospop*, 18 January 2011 <http://jingdaily.com/a-conversation-with-ben-walters-of-chinese-sneaker-brand-ospop/> Accessed 1 May 2014.

Jing Daily (2013), *Old Lyric: A Shanghai pioneer of ‘timeless’ vintage*, 2 December 2013 http://jingdaily.com/old-lyric-a-shanghai-pioneer-of-timeless-vintage/ Accessed 1 May 2014.

Kapferer, J. N. and Bastien, V. (2012), *The Luxury Strategy: Break the Rules of Marketing to Build Luxury Brands*, London: Kogan Page.

Lin, L. (2012), *Top 10 time-honored Chinese brands*, 8 November 2012 <http://www.china.org.cn/top10/2012-11/08/content_27046348_3.htm> Accessed 1 May 2014.

Lindstrom, M. (2010), *Brand Sense*, New York: Free Press.

Lu, P. X. (2008), *Elite China: Luxury Consumer Behavior in China*, Singapore: Wiley.

Notes on Design, (2014), *Virginie Fournier: Founder of Shanghai Trio*, <http://www.sessions.edu/notes-on-design/virginie-fournier-founder-of-shanghai-trio> Accessed 1 May 2014.

Okonkwo, U. (2007*), Luxury Fashion Branding*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Palmer, A. and Clark, H. (eds.) (2005). *Old Clothes New Looks: Second-Hand Fashion.* Oxford and New York:Berg.

Sin, L. H. (2008), *Preserving the Past*, Insight, March 2008 pp27-30 <http://www.amcham-shanghai.org/amchamportal/InfoVault_Library/2008/Preserving_the_Past.pdf> Accessed 1 May 2014.

Suzhoucobblers.com, *Hand Made*, available at <http://www.suzhou-cobblers.com/hand-made> Accessed 1 May 2014