The Weft of Shanghai Fashion
Economic Networks in Shanghai’s Modern Fashion Industry

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ABSTRACT: Shanghai’s modern fashion industry developed between the last decades of the nineteenth century and the 1930s and was an important step in China’s industrialisation. The present article aims to define the relationship between production and consumption in Shanghai’s modern fashion industry. One of the main characteristics of modern fashion is its ability to innovate by creating new and distinct trends while absorbing different influences. Shanghai modern fashion was an original mix of Chinese and foreign styles. The second determinant of this phenomenon is its capacity to be distinctive and reproducible at the same time. Shanghai’s modern fashion therefore only emerged when the city was able to innovate and produce goods on a massive scale that were adapted to consumer tastes. To prove this relationship, the present article establishes concrete links between traders, industrialists, and retailers. The textile industry benefited from the outcome of a complex network that linked foreign trade, cotton mills, retail shops, and mass publicity. This paper analyses how this economic network was developed.

KEYWORDS: Shanghai modern fashion, textile industry, Chinese networks, garment industry, industrialisation of China.

Introduction (1)

What is modern fashion? It is believed that modern fashion appeared in the late eighteenth century, and what distinguishes it from past dress styles is the velocity by which modernity is able to transform and change. (2) The speed of the industrial spindle and the mechanical loom of the Industrial Revolution disrupted the production and price of garments in a way that had no parallel in history. The supply of textile products was radically altered by the factory system and further expanded through foreign trade. (3) Meanwhile, the patterns of consumption underwent a state of permanent transformation. (4) This article aims to identify the networks that enabled the mass reproduction and consumption of clothes in China between the late nineteenth century and the Republican era. (5)

According to the classic German sociologist Georg Simmel, two seemingly contradictory concepts, imitation and delimitation, define modern fashion. (6) On the one hand, fashion appears when an innovation distinguishes itself from any other past or present trend. The individual or social group that invents a new style is aiming to be distinctive and unique. On the other hand, a fashion is only successful when it is imitated by others and becomes that invents a new style is aiming to be distinctive and unique. On the other

1. The writing of this chapter was made possible through a post-doctoral grant from the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation, European Program 2012-2014. I wish to express my greatest appreciation for the generosity of this organisation, without which this project would not have been possible. I would also like to thank Professor Gilles Guexheux for organising a workshop on the Chinese textile and garment industries in Shanghai and this special issue.
chents bought cotton yarn to weave domestically and grey and white foreign cloth to dye in urban workshops. The foreign cloth had to be adapted to Chinese tastes. Later, Chinese weavers and tailors used foreign intermediate products – mercerised yams, iron gear looms, and chemical dyes – to create new clothes that mixed Chinese with Western and Japanese styles. But these innovations only became widespread in the 1920s, when Chinese industry was ready to recreate and reproduce these goods on a massive scale.

This article therefore defends the hypothesis that Shanghai’s modern fashion emerged when modern industry was able to reproduce the innovations that adapted mass industrial products to the Chinese market. Only then did these innovations – which delimitated new urban and modern social classes in China – become truly popular. It also demonstrates that there was an intimate connection between the Chinese foreign cloth traders, the industrial entrepreneurs of the 1920s, and the tailors who invented the new styles of dress, a relationship that has not previously been observed, even though the circularity between production and consumption is fundamental to the fashion theory. This relationship was discovered by looking at the archives of the first foreign cloth association of Shanghai, the business documents of the first finishing textile industrial group, and several textile and fashion publications. This article therefore looks at the different layers of the textile economy of Shanghai, considering the big mills, the small and medium workshops, and the retail shops, a relationship that has not attracted much academic interest. Cloth traders, cotton mill owners, retailers, tailors, and managers of department stores were in close contact, creating a complex network that determined the rise of Shanghai’s modern fashion.

The beginnings: Zhenhuatang and the foreign cloth traders

In 1842, when Sir Henry Pottinger signed the Treaty of Nanking as envoy of Great Britain and put an end to the First Opium War, Lancashire’s cotton industries expected profits proportionate to the population of China. Even though commercial data soon demonstrated that this optimistic vision was exaggerated, trading companies kept considering China one of the world’s most promising markets. Western firms that arrived in China tried to sell opium and textiles in the open ports, mainly in Shanghai. British cotton firms sold the stock to their own Chinese staff (compradors) or at auction near the harbours. Cotton goods were thus purchased by Chinese merchants, who would distribute and sell them to the final consumers. These merchants established the first wholesale and retail shops of "foreign cloth" (yangbu 洋布) in the centre of the International Concession, near the Bund, where stock was unloaded from ships.

At the outset these stores sold all kinds of products and were run by Guangdong merchants who arrived with the British settlers, so they were called Cantonese shops (guanghuodian 广货店). Meanwhile, other shops started selling luxurious Chinese products from Beijing’s imperial tradition, and they were called Beijing shops (jinghuodian 京货店). Soon, Ningbo merchants, a community that had always been active in the maritime trade, as well as local merchants from Shanghai and Jiangsu, also joined the business, creating a mix of different origins and cultural influences that converged in Shanghai. The first stores specialising in foreign cloth appeared in the 1850s at the Eastern gate of the old city, where the cotton trade was traditionally undertaken, and in the newly built Nanjing Road. That was the centre of the foreign settlement, where Western exotic industrial products were first showcased beside traditional Chinese goods, which in fact looked exotic to Western settlers. It was in the intricate and cosmopolitan "chessboard alleys" (qipanjie 棋盘街) that separated the International Concession, the French Concession, and the Chinese territories that Shanghai’s modern fashion emerged.

One of these stores was Dafeng 大丰, created in 1853 by Weng Nianfeng (翁年丰), a merchant from Ningbo. It started out as a wholesale shop specialised in British imported fabrics and was managed by a Huzhou merchant, Xu Chunrong (许春荣) (1839-1910). Xu had worked as a comprador for a foreign company that imported textile products from England (Reiss, Bradley & Co.), and was also involved in the flourishing business of traditional local banking (qianzhuang 钱庄), which was controlled by Ningbo merchants. In 1889 he joined a modern foreign bank, the German Deutsch-Asiatische Bank, but continued working with the foreign cloth trade through Dafeng. It was common for compradors to work and invest in different companies, Chinese and foreign-owned, and in different sectors such as textiles and banking. Under the management of Xu Chunrong, Dafeng was transformed into a big cloth distributor (zhao 季) and one of the biggest sellers of foreign cloth in China, making a profit of up to 40,000 taels of silver a year. Xu Chunrong became a successful member of the emergent comprador class, the first to adopt a Western lifestyle in China, such as wearing Western suits. In 1905, at age 66, Xu left Dafeng to work for Shao Qintao (邵琴濤), also a comprador and an early member of the Shanghai Chamber of Commerce.

13. Quoted archives are available at the Shanghai Municipal Archives (hereafter SMA), and are mainly related to the Zhenhuatang archives, from the Shanghahish hipu shangye tongye gonghui (Shanghai Cotton Cloth Trading Association) with the code S231, and the Dafeng company archives, from the Shanghai fangzhi xitong gechang quanzong huiji (Compiled Fonds of All the Enterprises of the Shanghai Textile System), with the code S199-3.
16. Shanghai shihua miandu shangye (The Business of Cotton Cloth in the City of Shanghai), Beijing, Zhonghua shuju, Zhongguo ziben shiyue gongshangye shiliao congkan, 1979, pp. 8-14.
17. ibid., pp. 6-8.
18. Regarding the role of Ningbo merchants in Shanghai, see Li Jian, Shanghai de Ningboren (The Ningboese of Shanghai), Shanghai, Shanghai remin chubanshe, 2000.
20. Shanghai qianzhuang shiliao (Historical Materials of Shanghai’s Traditional Banks), Shanghai, Shanghai remin chubanshe, 1961, pp. 74-77.
21. Zhang Xiuli, "19 shiji Shanghai waishang qiyezhong de dongshi" (Board members in foreign companies in nineteenth century Shanghai), Shilin, No. 4, 2004, p. 7. See also Shanghai daicai, op. cit., p. 1688.
22. Shanghai miandu shangye, op. cit., p. 25 and p. 36.
23. Ma Xueqiang and Zhang Xiuli, Churuyu zhongxi zhijian. Jindai Shanghai maiban shehui shenghuo, (Shanghai’s History of Foreign Trade), Shanghai, Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2005, pp. 278-289.
Between 1854 and 1855, new stores for foreign cloth were opened and spread to both sides of Suzhou Creek, as well as in the American Concession near what is now Sichuan Road. They sold all kinds of Western imported products, such as woollens, printed fabrics, shirts, handkerchiefs, umbrellas, neckties, and collars. (23) The new shops – like Hengxing 恒兴, Zengtai 增泰, and Xietai 协泰 – had a similar structure to Dafeng: a predominance of Ningbo merchants and an average capital of less than 5,000 taels, built up by Chinese gentrty, traditional bankers, and compradors. Meanwhile, in the old city, the traditional associations of Shanghai – the Traditional Cotton Cloth Association (tubu gongsuo 土布公所) and the Raw Cotton Association (mianhua gongsuo 棉花公所) – continued dealing with the domestic trade of raw cotton and traditionally-made fabrics, as usual. (39) These associations played a key role in the politics of the city, as they represented the public dimension of the professional and economic sectors. (27)

Foreign cloth sellers established a new association in order to represent their companies in Shanghai and to regulate the trade of foreign cloth sales under the name of the Zhenhuatang Foreign Cloth Association (Zhenhuatang yangbu gongsuo 振华堂洋布公所). (26) It was founded in 1858 by integrating a dozen foreign cloth shops and had a structure similar to the traditional associations that had been established in Shanghai since the Ming dynasty. All of them contained a temple, an office, a courtyard, and a set of rules written into a charter. Price negotiations, the establishment of fabric standards, fixed margins, and tax collection for the local government (as well as negotiations over the transit tax, or lǐjīn) were among the most important functions of Zhenhuatang. (30) It performed the function of a market regulator and had a quasi-democratic structure, with a board of voluntary directors elected from among its members. Zhenhuatang had a set of rules that clearly delimited the authority and powers assigned to the board, which governed for a period of two years. They also organised traditional rituals during festivals, as well as funerals and other services to the community. (39)

Xu Chunrong, who was a member of the board, managed a reform of the association in 1885, constructing a new building in the small alley of Nanjing Road. (31) Zhenhuatang was reformed again in 1912 to adapt to the new laws of the Republic of China, and a new school was added. Xu Chunrong was elected an honorary member of the board. In 1914, the Shanghai Municipal Council decided to enlarge the streets and buy properties in the centre of the city. The association benefited from the rising price of real estate in the heart of the International Concession by selling part of their property. With the earnings, the board member Li Baibao 李柏葆 managed to purchase a new property and build a new central office. (32) The reassessment of the real estate in the centre of the International Concession of Shanghai and the rising price of foreign cloth during the First World War drove foreign cloth traders to become investors in the Shanghai’s modern fashion industry in the years that followed.

Despite having inherited the tradition of the old merchant associations, Zhenhuatang was a modern institution that was intimately connected with the opening of Shanghai as a treaty port. According to the North China Herald, it was the most influential association, as far as foreign intercourse was concerned, with the bankers and the silk producer associations. (39) Zhenhuatang participated in the semi-colonial and cosmopolitan life of the International Concession, such as the Silver Jubilee of 1893, organised by the Shanghai Municipal Council. (34) Shao Qintao, a member of Zhenhuatang, represented the interests of this association in the board of directors of the Shanghai Chamber of Commerce in one of the earliest meetings of this institution in 1905. (39) From that year until the late 1920s, every annual session would have at least two members of Zhenhuatang in the Chamber. (36) The trading network of Zhenhuatang extended far beyond Shanghai, even reaching the Japanese ports of Kobe and Yokohama, where foreign cloths merchants from Ningbo were established and textiles were re-exported from Shanghai. (37) In short, Zhenhuatang was an early product of the cosmopolitan city of Shanghai that absorbed multiple cultural elements, even though its structure resembled a traditional Chinese guild.

In 1918, a stone pillar was erected in memory of the association, explaining how it was founded in the British Concession and how it was reformed. (38) It was one of the first civil associations of Chinese origin that appeared in the British Concession of Shanghai. (39) Zhenhuatang survived without change until the generalisation of the boycotts against foreign products and the establishment of the Nanjing government. The association had strong ties with foreign companies and the trade blockades affected the foreign clothing business. (40) In order to avoid the boycotts and take part in the official registers of national associations under the new laws of the Nanjing government, the director Yu Baosan 余葆三 suggested changing the name of the company to “Zhenhuatang Cotton Cloth Association” and registering it with the Shanghai Cotton Cloth Trading Association (Shanghaishi mianbu tongye huiyuan 市上海市棉花同业协会).

25. Li Jian, Shanghai de Ningboren, op. cit., p. 120.
30. Ibid., p. 3.
32. Ibid., p. 7.
35. See the member list of the board of the Shanghai Chamber of Commerce in Shanghai zongshanghui lishi ziliao (Catalogue of the History of the Shanghai Chamber of Commerce), Shanghai, Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2001, p. 24; for more detailed minutes, see Shanghai zongshanghui zuzhi shiliao huiyan (Compilation of Historical Materials of the Shanghai Chamber of Commerce), Shanghai, Shanghai guji chubanshe, Vol. 1, 2004, p. 16.
36. Shanghai zongshanghui zuzhi shiliao huiyan, “Zhenhuatang yangbu gongsuo 增华堂洋布公所.”
The rise of the modern fashion industry in Shanghai

At the outset, the members of Zhenhuatang sold bulk fabrics in bales of folded pieces without adding value to them. The evolution of these merchants from trading to manufacturing took decades, as they had to gain the know-how of modern manufacturing. In 1912, the Chinese textile industry was still very underdeveloped. The cotton sector had not reached 1 million spindles, while British India reached 2.3 million and Japan 6.1. Throughout China there were only 32 cotton spinning mills, 24 Chinese-owned and 8 foreign-owned, mainly in Shanghai. In weaving figures were even weaker; China had only 5,000 industrial looms for cotton weaving (not counting workshops), which was totally insufficient. The 70 silk filatures in Guangdong and the Yangzi Delta produced silk yarn mainly for export.

At the time, the industries of wool, linen, dyeing, shoes, underwear, shirts, leather, and artificial fibres were non-existent except for some workshops. The majority of the population of China produced their clothes domestically following traditional practices.

First some technology had to be imported: industrial spindles, automatic looms, sewing machines (the famous Singer, which entered China in the 1860s), chemical dyes, needles, dyeing machinery, etc. In the beginning, white foreign cloth was dyed in traditional workshops with chemical dyes. But in the 1890s, Ningbo merchants who had been active in the port of Yokohama imported the first wooden and iron Japanese looms that would be used in small workshops to manufacture wider cloth with imported high-count yarns. The import of textile technology gained momentum just after the First World War, allowing the take-off of the Shanghai’s modern fashion industry.

Meanwhile, small and medium weaving workshops flourished, profiting from the expansion of the electrical grid and other facilities in Shanghai. The Japanese wooden and iron gear looms were useful for weaving a wider cloth that could be patterned using dyed or mercerised yarns. In 1912, dozens of workshops that experimented with these new technologies produced new kinds of fabrics that were called “improved cloth” (gailiang tubu,改良土布), such as the “Ningbo fabric” (yongbu 雲布), referring to the region of origin of the owners of these workshops. These garments were a mixture of Chinese, Japanese, American, and European styles and used intermediate products (high-count yarns, machinery, etc.) from various countries as well. Because the most fashionable products were made of high-count yarns that had to be imported from abroad, the weaver still had to wait around six months to receive orders.

Even though big cotton and silk mills that used Chinese cotton and silk have received most of the academic attention, by the mid-1930s, workshops with fewer than 30 workers still represented around 60% of the industries of Shanghai. China’s workshops played a prominent role in the development of a textile industry that reached the capacity to produce all kinds of products. Big mills mainly produced coarse yarn, while very few of them had weaving and dyeing departments. In fact, some of the first integrated mills that appeared in the 1920s and 1930s begun as workshops. And because these workshops began working with imported high-count yarns and cloths, traders and industrialists forged an intimate collaboration.

One of these workshops was Dafeng 大丰, not to be confused with the foreign cloth firm in Nanjing Road that had the same Romanisation but not the same Chinese characters (大丰). The similarity of names may not be a coincidence, as the new industrial workshops copied the names of the trading pioneers that had been lucky enough to sell the foreign products they now wanted to copy. A good range of names referred to the first foreign cloth firms, such as Dafengheng 大丰恒, Renfeng 仁丰, Meifeng 美丰, etc. Dafeng was founded by the Ningbo merchant Wang Qiu 王起宇 (1883-1965), whose partners included four members of Zhenhuatang: Yu Baosan, Li Baobao, Zhou Xingbo 周幸伯, and the traditional banker, also from Ningbo, Xu Chengxun 徐承勋. The members of Zhenhuatang and the traditional bankers raised capital to transform the workshop into a big integrated industrial group.

Dafeng appeared in 1912 in the International Concession as a workshop with fewer than 30 workers. The workshop dyed and mercerised imported cotton and silk, spinning and weaving them into medium-count yarns and cloths, and selling the products under the label “Dafeng” (大丰, Dafengheng 大丰恒). The workshop was not part of the Zhenhuatang group, but it was one of the first workshops in Shanghai to use chemical dyes and to import new machinery. The Dafeng workshops were located in the International Concession, which was the center of Shanghai’s textile industry.

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high-count yarns with two dyeing vats imported from Japan. They experimented with mercerisation (siguang 丝光), a process that brings brightness into the cotton yarn and makes it look similar to silk. This product was sold in Shanghai to tailors and other weaving workshops (especially stocking workshops). Short afterwards, Dafeng also started to dye fabrics, and in 1916 it became the first company in China to use chemical dyes to produce khaki cloth, a technique that became famous in the renovation of men’s attire under the influence of Western and Japanese military uniforms. 

With the First World War, textile imports ground to a standstill, causing a sharp increase in the price of textile goods and bringing high profits to Chinese workshops and traders that kept or could produce a provision of high-count yarn and cloth. The drop in imports combined with high demand also created strong incentives for industrial investment. Under these circumstances, some members of the Zhenhuatang network decided to invest in an industrial undertaking. The business was expanded by building a new spinning mill, the Zhentai Spinning Mill (Zhentai fangzhi chang振泰纺织厂), and a new weaving and dyeing mill beside the spinning factory, Dafeng Weaving and Dyeing Mill (Dafeng ranzhichang达丰染织厂). The two mills, placed one beside the other, were inaugurated together in November 1922. 

The first meetings of the shareholders of Dafeng took place at the head-quarters of Zhenhuatang, in the old chessboard alleys near Nanjing Road. The relationship between Dafeng, Zhentai, and Zhenhuatang was therefore very intimate. The much older Zhenhuatang association gave Dafeng a kind of institutional protection during its first years. Yu Baosan was the first director of the board of Dafeng and its largest investor. Meanwhile, Li Baibao became the director of the board of Zhentai, while also being in charge of Zhenhuatang. Both Li Baobao and Yu Baosan assumed executive positions in Zhenhuatang as well as in Dafeng and Zhentai during the 1920s.

In 1927, Dafeng was one of the first companies to use a modern printing machine imported from Great Britain. At the time, they were at the forefront of the technological process and had a massive production. Dyed and printed fabrics in silk and cotton, as well as mercerised yarns, became fashionable with the rise of the qipao 旗袍, a type of dress that emerged around 1926. Although the best qipao were made of silk, cheaper versions in cotton and cotton-silk blends were produced for mass consumers. American publiclist Carl Crow, with long experience in Shanghai, provided one of the best descriptions of the fashion for qipao. He wrote that Shanghai tailors used to buy calicos (printed cotton cloth) from Manchester to manufacture this new kind of dress, as well as Japanese saten as a substitute for silk. However, because both British and Japanese products were affected by the nationalist boycotts, Chinese producers ultimately gained the advantage in the business.

In 1929, Gu Zipan 季振平等 joined Dafeng and was elected supervisor in the Dafeng shareholder meeting. Gu Zipan had worked at the older Dafeng, the foreign cloth shop run by Xu Chunrong that was behind the founding of Zhenhuatang. In 1929, Gu Zipan also became the president of Zhenhuatang’s board of directors, just as Xu Chunrong had done 50 years earlier with the association and the trade firm. Gu Zipan had worked as a copromator for the British firm Reiss, Bradley & Co., the same company that had given Xu Chunrong his start, and he was the younger brother of Shao Qintao’s wife, the successor of Xu Chunrong at the Dafeng foreign cloth shop. This relationship demonstrates the intimate connection between traders and industrialists.

In 1934, there were more than 1,000 textile mills and workshops in Shanghai, with 250 big cotton and silk spinning mills (the ones that have attracted the attention of scholars), while the rest were smaller factories and workshops focusing on finishing processes such as weaving (without spinning), dyeing, printing, and knitting. Small industries and workshops were even more dominant in the clothing industry, especially in hosiery, hats, umbrellas, underwear, handkerchiefs, towels, and all kinds of modern garments and accessories. This mixture of various production sizes allowed the market to constantly innovate and adapt to consumer tastes, not only because production and consumption were in close contact, but also because a complex network linked small workshops with the big mills.

### From mass production to mass retail

During the 1920s, even the vertically integrated factories did not sell directly to the final consumers but rather to other distributors, retailers, and tailors. The first tailors who could make foreign-style clothes in Shanghai appeared just beside the Zhenhuatang headquarters. In fact, some of these tailor shops were originally cloth shops that had learnt the art of cutting and sewing. At the end of the nineteenth century, a group of tailors from Fenghua 奉化—a county in Ningbo—established new stores in Nanjing Road. They cut and sewed modern Western garments by using imported cloth delivered by the importers of Zhenhuatang. Most of them opened during the first decade of the twentieth century, including Wangxingchang.

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55. Dafeng Archives, "Dafeng ranzhi gufen yuxian gongsi, gufen diling congsheng shiliao," (Shareholder meeting minutes of Dafeng Weaving and Dyeing Company, regular and temporary sessions), June 1921, SMA Q199-3-8, pp. 1-7.
60. Yan Zhongping, Zhongguo mingliangfang shijie, op. cit., p. 357.
64. Dafeng Archives, “Dafeng ranzhi gufen yuxian gongsi, dongsan huiji shiliao,” op. cit., March 1929, SMA Q199-3-8, p. 66.
65. Gu Zipan worked for the original Dafeng cloth distributor in 1916, according to Shanghai zongzhi shiliao huibian, op. cit., p. 169.
67. Shenghuatang miatao shangye, op. cit., p. 34.
Following their Zhenhuatang predecessors, the majority of tailors came from Ningbo Province, and even from the same town, and some even shared the same surname. In 1910, Wang Caiyun 王才运 (1879–1931), a former student in Japan, opened a store in Shanghai's Nanjing Road called Rongchangxiang 荣昌祥. It sold all kinds of Western men's clothes and accessories to final consumers. As with the foreign cloth sellers, the tailors of foreign clothes also created their own professional associations.（72）

Sun Yat-sen's Republican Revolution radically changed the speed of fashion, accelerating the mixtures of styles between East and West (the so-called zhongxi hebi 中西合璧). And just as the Chinese referred to Westerners as “red haired people,” tailors who made Western clothes in Shanghai were called “red gang tailors” (hongbang caifeng 红帮裁缝). In fact, among the theories of the origins of Sun Yat-sen’s famous jacket, one traces its origins to Rongchangxiang. Apparently, in 1916 Sun asked Wang Caiyun to create a jacket that was a mixture of suit and British uniform. The revolutionary leader already knew the reputation of Ningbo tailors after meeting them in Yokohama, where he travelled around 1905. Sun Yat-sen’s suit was made by Wang Caiyun, and it was inspired by European uniforms that had previously been copied by Japanese tailors, although the traditional Chinese round collar made it original and Chinese as well.（74）Innovations such as the qipao and the Sun Yat-sen jacket came from this particular mixture of influences and adaptations to Chinese tastes.

After Sun Yat-sen’s Revolution, professional tailors were in high demand. According to the Shanghai Municipal Council, in 1921, the price of uniforms rose 20% due to the increasing demand for tailors all over the city.（75）The Shanghai Municipal Council had problems securing tailors to produce official uniforms, as the tailors tended to establish their own businesses and leave.（76）Tailors and retail shops typically attached the character ji 记 to the name of the owner and were small establishments.（77）In 1933, there were approximately 2,000 tailor shops in Shanghai and about 40,000 professional tailors registered in the professional associations.（78）

The relationship between small tailoring and retail companies and the big weaving and dyeing mills was also close and shaped by the same networks. The investors in the Dafeng Weaving and Dyeing Mill, Yu Baosan and Li Libaiji, were from the same town, and some even shared the same surname. In 1910, Wang Caiyun 王才运, a former student in Japan, opened a store in Nanjing Road called Rongchangxiang 荣昌祥. Some of their dyes and didn’t allow other brands to use the slogan.（81）

A conflict emerged, and ultimately I.G. Farben was granted exclusive rights to the so-called “Indanthrene trade-marks”（or “I.C.”）, which included the blue dye that imitated indigo, one of the most popular. Its products were advertised with a simple drawing of sun and rain（one of the most recognizable trademarks in China at that time）.（82）No matter which dyeing company finished the cloth, the product was to be labelled as I.G. Farben’s Indanthrene cloth, and the textile company could not design, print, advertise or use the Indanthrene name for any other product.（83）Some dyeing companies, such as Dafeng, bought dyes from other European companies and made their own brands（such as the famous Peacock [kongque]孔雀 brand of Dafeng）, and advertisements referred to Dafeng as the original and unique Chinese pioneering brand.（84）In 1937, research carried out by the registrar’s office of the Nanjing government compiled 6,487 industrial trademarks in China. One third of them（2,173）came from the textile and garment industries, which gives an idea of the importance of this sector in the Chinese economy.（85）These brands were advertised in newspapers as well as in publications for textile experts, tailors, and textile students.

### Notes


72. These associations were the Sanruanting gongxu (Sanruanting Association), the Shanghai shizhuan shangye tongye gonghui (The Association of the Fashion Trade of Shanghai) and the Shanghai chengshi shangye tongye gonghui (The Association of Shanghai Cloth Shops), see Chen Wenfeng, Zhongguo hongbang caifeng fazhanshi (The History and Development of the Chinese Red Tailors), op. cit., pp. 79-82, pp. 224-229.

73. See Chen Wenfeng, ibid.


75. “Shanghai gonggong zujie gongbuju zongbanchu guanyu wanguo shangtuan zhifu caifeng de fuyong, 1921-30” (Shanghai Municipal Council, regarding the cost of tailors), SMA U1-3-1159.

76. “Shanghai gonggong zujie gongbuju zongbanchu guanyu wanguo shangtuan zhifu caifeng de fuyong, 1921-30” (Shanghai Municipal Council, regarding the cost of tailors), SMA U1-3-1159.


78. Quoted in Chen Wenfeng, Zhongguo hongbang caifeng fazhanshi (The History and Development of the Chinese Red Tailors), op. cit., p. 8.


84. See Zhang Zhenhui, “Ranliao hangyehua dangnian” (The days when the dystone business was transformed), Shanghai, Shanghai wenshi ziliao congaz, Vol. 7, 1965 (re-ed. 2001), pp. 70-81.

85. See the report of the Shanghai Chamber of Commerce in Gongshang Shiliao (Historical Materials on Industry and Trade), Shanghai, Shanghai Zongshanghui bian, 1935, p. 191; See also Ranzhihfang Zhoulan, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1937, p. 1853. See also a recent explanation on the dispute between Dafeng and I.C. Farben by the granddaughter of Wang Qiyu, see Zuo Xuchu, Bainian Shanghai minzu gongye she, 2012, pp. 42-45.
Finally, the communication between production and consumption culminated in the establishment of department stores by the textile firms that jammed Nanjing Road. These big retailers appeared right next to the “red tailors” of Nanjing Road, and allowed Shanghai fashion to become even more mass-oriented. The whole street was totally transformed with neon lights and entertainment venues such as the Wing On Department Store (Yong’an), founded in 1918 by the Guo brothers from Guangdong Province. The company had textile mills and a tailoring department in its department stores. However, this company did not initially have a finishing department and was a customer of Dafeng Weaving and Dyeing Mill. In 1927, more than 10,000 pieces of cloth were dyed, bleached, and patterned in Dafeng for the Wing On department stores. Finishing companies such as Dafeng also produced goods for other firms for a fee or commission. In 1928, the price for this service could range from 1 tael for bleaching 40 yards of shirting to 2.1 taels for dyeing 40 yards of shirting in Indanthrene blue. However, in the next decade Wing On developed its own dyeing department and even published its own fashion journal, the popular Wing On Monthly (Yong’an yuekan). Wing On was therefore the first business to integrate the entire modern fashion business.

**Conclusion**

This article aims to shed new light on the relationship between production and consumption in the study of Shanghai’s modern fashion. The most visible aspect of Shanghai’s modern fashion—the dazzling clothes that cinema stars wore during social events and in jazz ball rooms—is one of the most popular images of the city. Shanghai became the “Paris of the Orient,” and the momentum of fashion, modernity, and transgression was revealed in the national and international press, cinema, music, and a rich literature. Today, the visitor can still find the modernist architecture that testifies to this amazing period. However, the rise of Shanghai’s modern fashion industry was determined by a complex economic network of businesses and entrepreneurs that have remained relatively unknown.

From the mid-nineteenth century, the foreign cloth traders of Shanghai introduced new and distinctive styles of clothing by mixing different traditions and by experimenting with modern methods of production, while keeping alive traditional forms of organisation such as small and medium workshops and regional associations. These traders turned to industrial entrepreneurship during the First World War and built integrated textile factories that could produce new goods on a massive scale. It was a cosmopolitan network, but also a local one, where the community of Ningbo merchants played a dominant role. The present article identifies and explains how trade networks participated in the industrial and consumption booms that took place in Shanghai and the Yangzi Delta during the 1920s and 1930s. The strong ties that existed between producers, traders, and retailers allowed the city of Shanghai to constantly innovate and adapt new technologies to local consumer tastes.

These interactions between the supply side, the retail world, and the consumer markets also reflect Shanghai’s late industrialisation and its problems, such as long gaps between the importation of foreign products and the consolidation of a domestic mass production system. It was only after 1920 that a complex network of traders, producers, and retailers developed integrated companies that could adapt their production capacity to the new urban consumption demands. These delays may be attributed to difficulties of technology transfer, especially in the last stages of the production process (dyeing and printing), which developed later than spinning and weaving.

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89. Dafeng archives, “List of the dealers piece goods sent us to be dyed” (original in English), 1924, in Maoli Yanghang you guan dianji deng baojia jishu ziliao (Documents and technical reports between Dafeng and the foreign company Maoli), 1925-1947, SMA, Q199-3-213, pp. 94-95.


91. Yong’an Yuekan, No. 1, 1937, available in SMA, Q225-2-68.