



POLITECNICO DI MILANO  
FACULTY OF DESIGN  
MASTER IN PRODUCT SERVICE SYSTEM DESIGN

### Chinese Craft Project

a Product service system for traditional craftsmanship  
recognition inside Shanghai

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## 谢谢你

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## Abstract - Chinese Craft Project

The project aims to identify opportunities for promotion and preservation of Chinese ICH, in order to **create a bridge between traditional craft expressions and modern Cultural System**, operating inside Shanghai area. While UNESCO and Government policy focus on grand artistic traditions, this project will operate to a local level in order to give special recognition also to minor or less-known crafts. Moreover it will see the involvement of key individuals and partners in order to better connect with the territory.

Going through a better understanding of the context in which the project will be operating (field research, interviews, UNESCO and Government policies, current preservation), and broadening the comparison to include inspiring solutions all over the world (trends and case studies), the creative phase will lead to a final proposal to answer the problem of traditional craftsmanship awareness and trigger new dynamics between typical knowledge and local Shanghai community.

## Abstract - Progetto sull'Artigianato Cinese

Il progetto vuole identificare opportunità per la promozione e la preservazione dei beni culturali intangibili cinesi, creando un ponte tra espressioni di artigianato tradizionale e sistema culturale moderno nell'area di Shanghai. Mentre l'UNESCO e le politiche del governo si concentrano principalmente sulle tradizioni artistiche più prominenti, questo progetto vuole operare a livello locale in modo da dare un particolare riconoscimento anche a quelle forme di artigianato minori o meno conosciute. Inoltre verranno inclusi soggetti chiave e partner locali così da stabilire una connessione più forte con il territorio.

Partendo da una miglior comprensione del contesto all'interno del quale il progetto si muoverà (ricerca sul campo, interviste, politiche del governo e dell'UNESCO, preservazione attuale), ed aprendo un confronto più ampio per includere esempi e soluzioni da tutto il mondo (trend e casi studio), la fase creativa porterà ad una proposta finale per rispondere al problema relativo al riconoscimento dell'artigianato tradizionale ed innescare nuove dinamiche tra *typical knowledge* e la comunità locale di Shanghai.



## 摘要 - 中国手工艺设计

该项目旨在促进和保护中国非物质文化遗产，以创建一个传统的工艺表现形式和现代文化之间的桥梁，上海区域内寻找机会。虽然教科文组织和政府政策的重点在盛大的艺术传统，该项目将运行到地方一级，也给予特别的重视未成年人或不太知名的工艺品。此外，它会看到关键的个人和合作伙伴的参与，以更好地与境内。

和扩大的背景下，该项目将工作（实地调研，访谈，教科文组织和政府的政策，目前保存）通过更好地了解，比较世界各地的包括令人振奋的解决方案（趋势和案例研究），创意阶段会导致一个最终的建议，以传统工艺的认识和回答的问题，增加了新的活力，传统知识和上海本地社区。



*Heaven has its times,  
Earth its weather,  
bamboo its beauty,  
and work its craftsmanship;  
combine these four and you can achieve the good.*

-Kao Gong Ji

(China's earliest written record on handicrafts)





## Preface

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Introducing how the Chinese Craft Project started while giving an exhaustive overview of the context and conditions that are part of its DNA.

# Jamming the Idea

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## The Service Design Jam

I feel it necessary to introduce how the whole idea of promote and protect Chinese craftsmanship started, and to give proper space and recognition to the people who triggered and fostered the early project.

My whole research together with my interest and concern about traditional craftsmanship were born inside the dynamic and amazing vitality of the Shanghai **Service Design Jam**, hosted by China Bridge in February 2012. I was expecting it to be a normal workshop like any other, but I found something more: the enthusiasm, the openness and co-operation together with the friendly competition between people coming from completely different backgrounds who don't know each other at all. All of them jamming to create in 48 hours a brand new service inspired by a theme shared by everyone around the globe.

*"Imagine a Jam session in music. You come together, bringing your instruments, your skills, your open mind. Someone sets up a theme, and you start to Jam around it. You don't overanalyse it, you*

*Figure 01. Old Town, Shanghai, China. Photograph by Francesca Terzi / 2011*

*don't discuss it to death, you Jam. You bounce your ideas off other people, and play around with what comes back. Together, you build something which none of you could have built alone. And at the same time, you are learning new ideas, discovering more about how you work and whom you best work with, sharpening your skills, and having a great time. And who knows, maybe there are one or two ideas there which might make it to the next album. Or maybe you Jammed so well, you decide to form a band...*

*The Global Service Jam works in just the same way. But it's not music you are Jamming – it's ideas. Working with people you might never have met before, bouncing ideas off one another and building on what bounces back. And it's not just talking - you can turn your ideas into a concrete design, prototype and plan of action which you or somebody else might want to make real. Can you prototype and plan it in a way that someone could go out and make it real, knowing what resources they would need, what they should do, and who they should talk to? That's the challenge of the Jam."*

#### ArtiSino Project

The theme chosen for this session was: **hidden treasure**. Many ideas came out around the topic, but the one that fascinated few of us the most was the opportunity to promote the “holders of the tradition”: skilled Chinese craftsmen around the city hidden like treasures about to be lost inside the chaotic and fast process of modernization that invested the big city.

Our aim was to develop a solution that would give the right visibility together with recognition and promotion of their job in order to foster the awareness and help these people pass along their knowledge. Our case study, Mr. Little Carpenter, was the starting point of a two-day design process which led us to the development of the final idea of **ArtiSino: Celebrating Chinese Artisans 赞美中国手艺人**.

The Chinese carpenter we included from our field research is a traditional artisan who, just like many others around the city, works in the streets of SH. Despite his skills and the uniqueness of his job, he's not proud of what he does since it's not what modern society value as achieving and he doesn't want to pass it along. In the past he used to produce fine wooden birdcages, different pieces of furniture and miniature objects, but along time his work lost importance and now

## *Evaluation*

## *Improvements*

*Topic with high potencial and content relevance*

*Missing research on the heritage issue and a better definition of the matter*

*Good field research and target focus*

*Missing case studies compatible with the project and current situation analysis*

*Detection of primary customers and possible users of the service*

*Identify key individuals, define roles and priorities*

*Online platform-based service*

*Product service system*

*Unique solution definition*

*Broaden the opportunities in order to increase feasibility and success*

*Clusterization of artisans according to craft typology*

*Better definition of traditional artisans in respect to the original Chinese Arts&Crafts history and techniques*

*Financial plan*

*Identify organizations and further partners that can be involved to better ensure the project realization*

*Graphic 01. ArtiSino's evaluation and improvements for future development.*



he's just producing plain-wood stools.

ARTISINO's goal is to create a mobile/online directory of Shanghai's artisans, provide relevant information for locating and understanding them, promote their work and help establish quality standards of local hand-made goods and art products. We developed a system to individuate local artisans and connect them with people interested in original crafts and quality goods, hoping in this way to trigger a new behavior and interest towards different forms of craftsmanship threatened by the growing consumerist attitude.

#### Further considerations

The topic selected for the 48-hour Jam, including the elaboration and solution that followed, were incredibly interesting and once this whole experience ended I felt like we were still missing something.

The importance of the subject, the feasibility and simplicity of the solution made me think that it was definitely worth to keep working on it in order to develop a better defined project. Moreover I was fascinated by the depth of the subject, so ancient, so complicated and so entwined with tradition and everyday life. I wanted to understand if the solution proposed was really helpful or if it would have been better to face the problem with a different angle.

That's why I asked my mates the permission (and blessing) to take ArtiSino first idea, develop a better understanding of the context and a more detailed research in order to shape a new personal solution.

A due consideration is that ArtiSino service was already highly feasible, especially thanks to the consistency of the matter we were trying to face. UNESCO defines *"traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe, or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts"* as Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) with particular attention on traditional craftsmanship, *"perhaps the most tangible manifestation of intangible cultural heritage"*.

Starting from UNESCO definition, I moved my focus from ArtiSino's first idea trying to understand the priorities and define the real needs around the preservation issue.

## Meet Chinese Culture

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Perhaps the first thing to say is that many of us experience present-day China as a dynamic and exciting society, a world with many vibrant corners and niches. There is a lot of life in the arts; there is a great deal of initiative and real inventiveness, a perpetual urge towards change and renewal. Matters can move surprisingly fast in China.

Every time you re-enter this country, it appears to have completely re-invented itself. Roads are paved as you cross over them. Buildings constructed as you walk into them. New music and new theaters are being created on the spot in a matter of days or weeks. Speed is of the essence, and I often cannot avoid getting the impression that short-term cultural memory reigns supreme, in close partnership with a spirit of bold enterprise. The overall motto frequently seems to be: "First do the job, and then do the planning."

It's easy to find innovative ideas, enterprising minds and adventurous initiatives side by side with China's cultural traditions, popular beliefs and ancient habits.

It's not easy for a stranger to understand the complexity of such a country, you always feel like something is missing or is eluding your sight, leading you to frustration and misunderstanding.

Cultural events are usually not planned years ahead, more often they are scheduled only months or weeks (or even just days) in advance, which obviously limits the possibility to publicize or frame events in any substantial way, or to realize technical and organizational demands in a satisfactory manner. In China culture industries, collaborations and exchanges do not always take place, or need to take place, through official channels. It is often the determination and perseverance of individuals that determines whether a cultural event actually happens or not<sup>1</sup>. That's why the first interest and assignment must be to build relationships and links, create a good net of local partners (Chinese or Western) based in China for logistic matters and support. Most of the time it's a matter of constancy, patience and stubbornness.

This attitude has to compete fiercely with the practical demands and exigencies of an economical system in transition. China's move towards capitalism has resulted, amongst many other things, in a policy of privatization of state-run companies. The consequences of this organizational shift are so drastic for many people that – understandably – there often remains little time for cultural reflection. If an initiative takes place it's usually coming from a private interest, and it needs to be either profitable and self-sustainable or sided by a lucrative activity that can support it. If it comes to developing criteria for art judgment or deciding what kind of performances require support, it is obviously not the big stage productions with lush lighting, colorful movements, splendid costumes and drum-beating that anyone would need to worry about: such productions will take care of themselves.

In a country where culture is quite explicitly associated – in philosophy – with virtue, with moral principles and values, with beauty and goodness, policy makers cannot very well avoid asking what forms of cultural expression they need protect and to stimulate, how to judge quality. It is clear that arts and crafts in China should not be left entirely to the mechanisms of the market, and no one would like to see it depend for its survival exclusively on foreign investors, foreign audiences or foreign praise.

Independent judgment, proper management and a competitive field

<sup>1</sup> *A Summary of the Cultural Mapping Reports: Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou*, by Peter Micic, a report of the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to China / September 2009



are all necessary inside China, to secure the long-term survival of a native sector of high quality art and traditional goods. Effective new criteria can only be developed from within Chinese society. Many traditions in this country are rural and connected to peasant society and local religious practice, which may not exactly fit the bill of 'modernity'. The answer in the past has been to folklorize rural culture, to dress and speed it up in the form of dashing shows, in which the religious element was suppressed. Today, there is a more varied response to China's rural traditions. Rural artists are now being given some room in the media, which is a major development of the last three or four years. Moreover a big involvement of UNESCO has been required (especially during 2009) to start recognizing and protecting those major forms of cultural heritage, firmly placing China on the international cultural map; but still a lot of work is needed to extend the operation also to minor and local art.

An important initiative was the recent founding of the 'Center for the Preservation of Intangible Cultural Heritage' (北京非物质文化遗产保护中心) in Beijing, with support from the Chinese Government and UNESCO. This organization essentially contributes to – and continues – the work of China's governmental cultural bureaus of collecting, documenting and publicizing traditional culture, but its methods mark an important shift: from quantity to quality, from mere data-collecting to genuine interest in the nature and meaning of local traditional art forms, and from the overall tendency to 'modernize' rural art towards more practical questions about how local traditions and local performers can best be served and helped. A complete return to the traditional past is not possible. But a stronger commitment to tradition is gaining a foothold.

In summary, it appears that the past contains many vital ingredients for the future of China's arts and crafts, both as an inspiration and as one possible anchor point for developing new criteria and new tools for judging and stimulating 'non-commercial' arts and crafts in China.

A reconciliation of the old and the new seems possible if the old 'wholesale view' of Chinese art and cultural history is dropped: 'the only way out is through', artists and craftsmen need to take their own responsibility; they are obliged to 'talk shop', become representative of themselves and give a live proof of the incredible value they're ambassadors of.

*Figure 02. Sculptural installation inside 798 Art Zone, Beijing, China. Photograph by Giulia Barra / 2011.*

Westerners can perhaps offer marginal support and play a constructive role here. China inspires numerous foreigners to come back here time and again, or even to live here permanently. We will gladly take the air pollution and the traffic jams into the bargain, because we like all the rest of it!

#### Fast facts<sup>2</sup>

- Shanghai is one of the cities with the highest percentage of international residents in China. There are nearly 500,000 foreigners in Shanghai, and over 78.59% are foreigners working in Shanghai with their family. Shanghai has established sister city ties or friendly exchange relationship with 70 cities in 52 countries all over the world.
- There are 10,950 persons with college education or above in every 100,000 persons in Shanghai, ranking second in China.
- Shanghai is the largest port in China, and a well-known international transit port, with 27 container piers and 133 deep-water berths. In 2008, the throughput of Shanghai port reached 582 million tons, ranking first in the world for 3 consecutive years. The top 20 large-scale shipping companies in the world have all opened their route with Shanghai.
- As an international metropolis with cultural diversity, Shanghai inherits and absorbs the various elements from the folk custom of the Yangtze River Delta, the western classical style, the village style of Europe and America, the traditional residence buildings of China, and the new trend of 21st century architecture, forming a city landscape of multi-cultural charm and prospective energy.

#### Shanghai duality

Shanghai wants to be a model city, and promises, according to the municipality, to show how the city of the future should be shaped. This cosmopolitan port city is the most important 'bridge' between China and the rest of the world since the late nineteenth century. Shanghai holds an exciting mix of oriental and western architectural styles, a cosmopolitan mix of east and west, tradition and futurism, rich and poor. As a result of the economic boom many are attracted to this 'New York of the twenty-first century' to try their luck<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> From *Shanghai UNESCO City of Design, Creative Cities Network / 2011*

<sup>3</sup> From *Shanghai New Towns - Searching for Community and Identity in a Sprawling Metropolis*, by Harry den Hartog, the 4th International Conference of the International Forum on Urbanism (IFoU), Amsterdam, Delft / 2009.

*Figura 03. Traditional lane, Shanghai, China. Photograph by Giulia Barra / 2011.*



Very different from Beijing, which ran for low-building policy and specific urban plans in order to partly keep its traditional character, Shanghai is a vertical city, layers and layers of modernity pulling up towards the sky, always changing and always looking towards the next opportunity.

The contrast between skyscrapers, monumental buildings and old lanes with their shikumen houses, creates an amazing blend between two different worlds, two different societies, range of values and habits. The coexistence of these two main realities is one of the fascinating characters of Shanghai, but also the source of many problems and debates.

So often people say that Shanghai is not real China, too melted with west, too keen to compromise and run for modernity and change, to leave everything else behind. It's unfortunately true, but the city still hasn't given up all of its old and original identity, it has hidden and denied it maybe, relegated it to the edges of beautiful new compounds and downsized traditional old districts to leave room for new constructions. This is the price Chinese decided to pay in order to bring their country to the modern level that West imposed them, to show how fast and forward they're able to move and adapt.

It's inside those winding lanes where the "real China" lurks, the China still tied to its traditions, last holder of something that is rapidly vanishing without any safeguarding plan or any recognition for what has been the real face of this city until few years ago, before skyscrapers started imposing their arrogant impressiveness.

There you can find shoemakers side by side with old people playing Majong (麻将), crickets shops, craftsmen making birds' bamboo cages, blacksmiths and tailors who, with unchanged simplicity, keep alive the last evidence of traditional activities almost killed by pressing consumerism.

Shanghai forgets its roots and its double character unless it turns into a convenient and attractive solution for those tourists and upper-class citizens who want to indulge in a traditional and fashionable atmosphere. That's how district like Xintiandi (新天地) or Tianzifang (田子坊) were born.

Houses and architectures are the physical translation of the society and people using them, they reflect dynamics and habits. It's the most tangible way we have to see the duality of this city which we



often miss out of fear of getting lost inside the network of narrow alleys, exploring without directions. Here's where the local friend or personal curiosity brings you to see what you're still ignoring of the multi-faceted city you're living in and here's where you get back every time you're looking for some good street food or a handy cobbler for your pretty shoes that just broke.

You might think it's just western people ignoring their neighborhood and the most colorful part of the shanghainese life, but unfortunately also many Chinese people (coming from other parts of China) do not know the city they moved in.

Unawareness is the first problem when coming to cultural heritage issue and traditional art promotion, but this amazingly ever changing city is offering all of this everyday without asking anything back, we just need to turn the corner.





## Declaration of Intent

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Explaining what **Chinese Craft Project** aims to research and achieve in order to improve the current situation of Chinese craftsmanship and traditional art.

## Chinese Craft Project

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The project aims to identify opportunities for promotion and preservation of Chinese ICH<sup>1</sup>, in order to **create a bridge between traditional craft expressions and modern Cultural System**, operating inside Shanghai area.

While UNESCO and Government policy focus on grand artistic traditions, this project will operate to a local level in order to give special recognition also to minor or less-known crafts. Moreover it will see the involvement of key individuals and partners in order to better connect with the territory.

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When we take into account traditional craft as an important cultural heritage to keep alive, the first step to take is to understand the priorities and define the real needs around the preservation issue. Many times people concentrate their attention on the final artifact, the last result of craft expression and therefore they think of protecting the knowledge behind it by preserving the object itself. This is how

*Figura 04. Stools outside street shop, Shanghai, China. Photograph by Tian Wei / 2012.*

<sup>1</sup> *Intangible Cultural Heritage, for a deeper understanding see **Intangible Cultural Heritage** chapter.*

we end up with museums and collections of beautiful objects that we can admire while reading a hardly fulfilling explanation on the side.

The final artifact is simply the ultimate step of a very long process in which the artisan performs techniques acquired along years of practice. It's this ability the real essence of craftsmanship and traditional art, the empowering force leading to the final output and infusing it with such importance and meaning. This knowledge and techniques are the real treasure, the so-called Intangible Cultural Heritage that needs to be preserved, while questioning ourselves how to keep them alive and functional in an ever-changing reality like the one we're taking into consideration.

Traditional craft and culture are the lifeblood of a society, its identity, its living connection with the past as well as with the future. They are the expression of the time and needs of people, sustaining them in everyday life and rituals. Through this strong binding traditional craft reflects and affects its surroundings becoming an active part of the local Cultural System.

Recognizing this reality gives a whole new meaning and weight to the preservation issue. Now it's not just a matter of saving a single activity, it's a matter of safeguarding sustainable behaviors, cultural dynamics together with the people depending on them.

Only a more concerned and more differentiated attitude towards China's regional and historical cultural treasures can help China's traditions to survive and to live on in contemporary culture. Folk-oriented and minor crafts related to the territory are the most penalized and less considered by big organization since they don't count enough representatives and they're not relevant enough to be included inside big cultural channels.

An attitude of genuine respect and of inside knowledge of specific traditions is needed, and there are growing signs of fertile soil in policy-making and personal people's interest. The real challenge is to create new opportunities and occasions to bridge tradition into modern life, to re-invent the Cultural System in order to keep its identity and sustainable dynamic safe and active without letting commercial interests in.

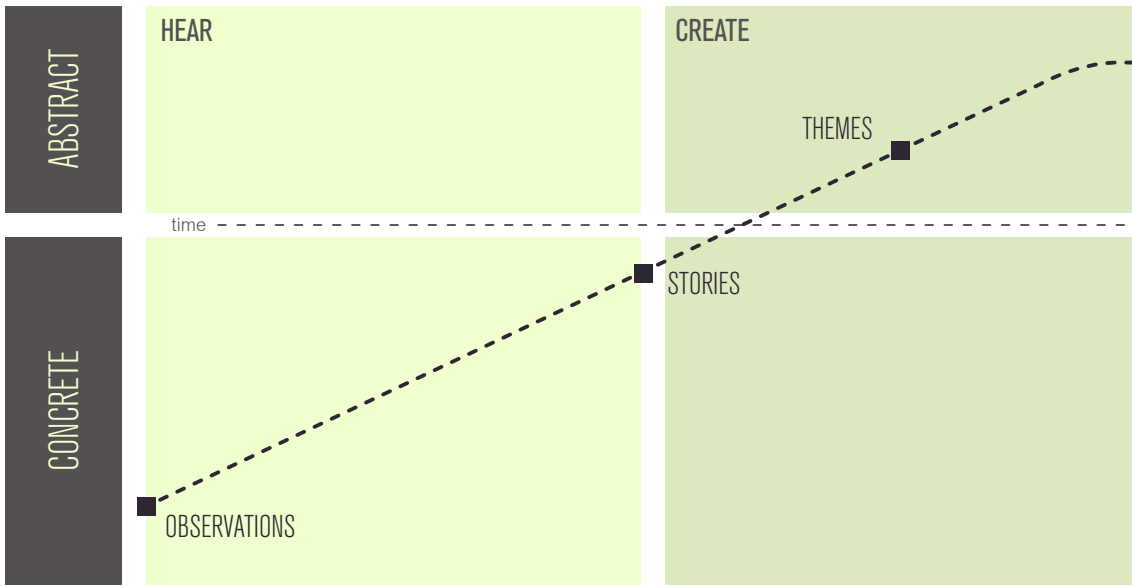




## The Process

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Display of the methodology used to lead the project along the different design steps in order to achieve a final developed solution.



## Human Centered Design

Many different methodologies have been developed during the years, according to multiple disciplines and design necessities, so that now we can count on many different interpretations of what a design process should be.

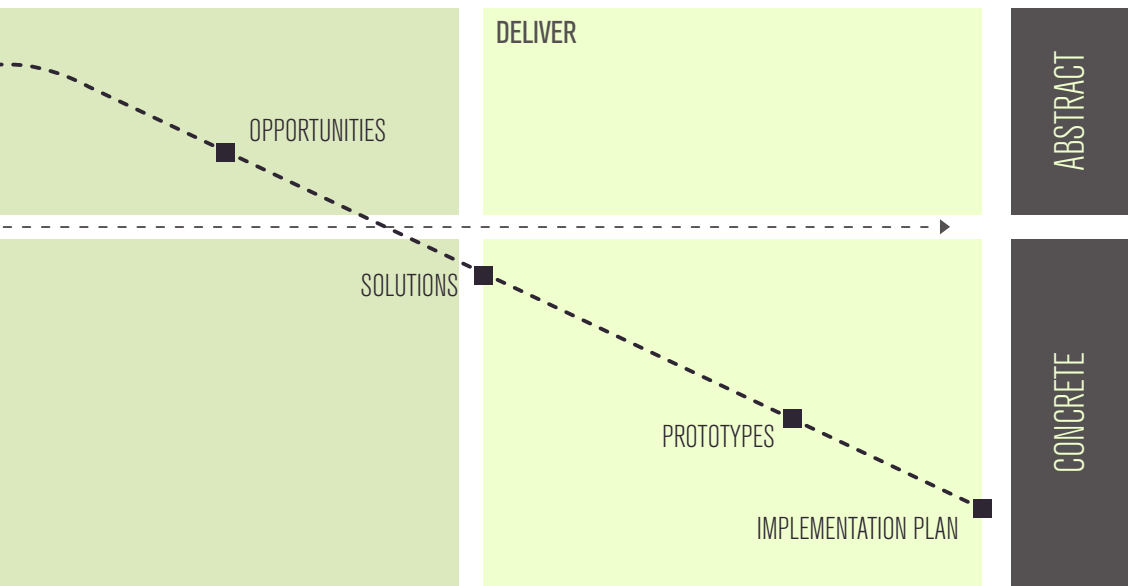
When designing a Product Service System we don't just deal with a specific product, graphic solution or limited event, we actually have to face an interconnected situation that calls in people, services, environment, policy-making and many other variables. That is the reason why I believe Human Centered Design is the most suitable process to lead a PSS project, thanks to its iterative and sensitive approach.

The process of Human-Centered Design<sup>1</sup> starts with a specific Design Challenge and goes through three main phases: Hear, Create, and Deliver. It moves from concrete observations about people, to abstract thinking while uncovering insights and themes, then back to the concrete with tangible solutions.

<sup>1</sup> From *Toolkit HCD* by IDEO / 2009.

*Figura 05. Lotus flower, Nanjing, China. Photograph by Diletta Barra / 2011.*





Hear

During the Hear phase, it's necessary to collect stories and inspiration from people. Prepare for and conduct field research in order to gain as much knowledge and experience as possible.

Create

In the Create phase, what have been heard from people will be translated into frameworks, opportunities, solutions, and prototypes.

During this phase there will be a change from concrete to more abstract thinking in identifying themes and opportunities, and then back to the concrete with solutions and prototypes.

Deliver

The Deliver phase will see the realization of a final solution through rapid revenue and cost modeling, capability assessment, and implementation planning. The result will be the launch of new solutions into the world.

Graphic 02. HCD process.





## Research Focus

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Define what need to be researched, the amount and the format of the material, the scope and the informants of the research.

## Objectives and Parameters

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A first step to take in order to better address the HEAR phase, it's to define a research focus in order to set both objectives and parameters which will be shaping the data collection. Both secondary research and field research will be used, together with other tools in order to obtain crossed and exhaustive data.

The main outcome is the description of the actual situation with a wide mapping of Chinese crafts, the production of new information and the identification of opportunities.

What do we need to know<sup>1</sup>?

- Define the elements of culture identity, demonstrating the breadth and variety of cultural activity in the local area, compared to a larger scale overview (the whole country).
- Gain objectivity and overview going from intuitive and anecdotal information, from the “worm’s-eye view” on the ground, to a broader, more concrete view.
- Get a fresh perspective looking at data from a cross-cultural point

<sup>1</sup> *Objectives and Parameters has been set using the Cultural Mapping Toolkit, a partnership between 210 Legacies Now & Creative City Network of Canada.*

*Figura 06. Chinese Art Brushes, Old Town, Shanghai, China. Photograph by HighlanderImages / 2011.*

of view, opening a comparison with other Asian countries with similar situation; collection of case studies and existing solutions operated in other areas.

- Identify previously unknown resources and activities (tourist groups, cultural events, stakeholders, organization branches).
- Identify key individuals, holders of information and connections, how they live the community, the local craft products and initiatives.
- Identify networks and hubs where people obtain traditional hand-made goods (distribution channels), how they communicate and inform (communication channels) and what are the liaisons.
- Is the distribution of the resources effective? How far a population group has to travel to find traditional craft goods? Where can be found qualified instructors?
- Locate gaps, needs and overlaps; how much duplication or scarcity is there in a given sector or area of the city?

What kind of material are we looking for?

The material collected will have a more subjective, qualitative character rather than just quantitative. Apart from data necessary to describe the current situation and to give a general overview, the aim is to end up with meaningful insights and sensitive content to understand the real opportunities, possibilities and interest in the given sector.

What is the scope of the study?

The intervention area for the final solution will be just the city of Shanghai and its immediate surroundings, since one of the intentions is to develop a local system. However the research phase will present a broader scope in order to create a fruitful comparison and collect a larger point of view, highlighting the differences between communities and cultural dynamics in distinct influential areas.

Principal respondents and informants

Experts, individual craftsmen, workers involved in the craft sector, representative of cultural organizations, Western and Chinese audience.

## Communicating the project: the Blog

Right after I started with my research, reading interviewing and exploring, I decided to open a blog constantly updated with news and information about the progress of my project.

The topic I was trying to face has (still) nothing to do with technology, and the people around it are not technological educated: craftsmen don't usually possess a computer, local art and craft community use very little internet and networking tools.

By opening and updating this little blog I wanted to address the other side of the target, those people who could have been interested in traditional craft together with experts and designers. I considered it useful to better explain what I was trying to do: many times when talking to people it's difficult to convey the idea and make clearly understandable what your goals are. With an open tool of communication, any time I was contacting someone to interview or someone who could have helped me with new information, I just included the link to the Chinese Craft Project, to make sure that my contacts could explore it and better understand what my research was all about. I also made sure to have little business cards with a brief introduction to the project, my contact and the one of the blog in order to give it around anytime I found someone related or interested into the topic.

Thanks to this simple connection I met (first just by mail, and after few weeks in person) Yolanda Von Hagen, the one person sharing my same interest and willing to do something more than just talk about it. She gave me the great opportunity to prototype the final scenario, collecting valuable data and feedbacks.

...ION OF THE ICH IN CHINESE CRAFTSMANSHIP  
**Find a possible solution to the matter of preservation  
and promotion of traditional Chinese crafts  
and techniques together with the Cultural System  
surrounding them.**

chinesecraftproject.weebly.com | giulia.barra@hotmail.it

RAFT PROJECT

CHINESE CRAFT F...

SE CRAFT PROJECT

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**Find a possible solution to the matter of preservation  
and promotion of traditional Chinese craftsmen's skills  
and techniques together with the Cultural System  
surrounding them.**

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## Chinese Crafts

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Introduction to Chinese craftsmanship, its major forms of expression, its history, the UNESCO selection of Intangible Cultural Heritage elements together with the current actions of preservation.

# Craftsmanship, History and Society

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## Ancient Times

Traditional craftsmanship moves hand to hand with China long history, dating back to 7000 years (if not even more), a vivid reflection of Chinese history and culture, inspired by people's daily life and traditional rituals.

Every great invention or discovery, like ceramics or silkworm, has been turned into an impeccable art thanks to Chinese craft masters. Crafts wisdom and elaborated techniques has been refined through thousands of years reaching amazing levels of knowledge and perfection, and becoming the main source for innovation and progress.

Due to the high quality and difficulty in Chinese crafts, a skillful craftsman is often trained for more than 10 years (depending on the craft the training can go from 5 to 15 years). Many of the master artisans have had their skills handed down one generation to another so that only the offspring of such an artisan could learn the necessary skills required. As a result they are the most valuable treasures both

*Figura 08. One of the Cen brothers while making a wok, Shanghai, China. Photograph by Giulia Barra / 2012.*

for a family and for the nation.

Different periods saw the flourishing and development of different forms of arts and crafts, often depending on the dynasties following one another, the geographic areas peculiarities or the discovery of a new material or technique.

The earliest recording of Chinese craftsmanship is the **Kaogong Ji** (考工记) or *The Records of Examination of Craftsman*, sometimes translated as *Book of Diverse Crafts*, a classic work on science and technology written near the end of the Spring and Autumn Period<sup>1</sup> (from 771 until 476 BC). It's an important work among the classics before Qin Dynasty. Although the author is unknown, this book was an official document of the Qi state and it was used to define and guide the handicraft industry, including the examination and assessment of craftsmen. Different categories are included such as carpenters, metal workers, leather workers, porcelain makers, carvers. The book presents also the six carriers of the country, with artisans at the third place, after the prince and the scholar-officials.

Another division is presented by the Fengjian social structure (1046-256 BC). In ancient Chinese society, the Confucian or Legalist scholars' classified Chinese people into four broad categories (士农工商). From highest to lowest social strata, the categories were: the shi, or gentry scholars; the nong, or peasant farmers; the gong, artisans and craftsmen; and the shang, merchants and traders. It often happened that the farmer category merged with the craftsmen one, since historically handicraft activity had been a subsidiary occupation of the Chinese farmer during his spare time.

The four basic classes were broad categories, more ideal than real, a mere rhetorical device that had no effect on government policy. However, Anthony J. Barbieri-Low, Professor of Early Chinese History at the University of California, Santa Barbara, notes that although no statute in the Qin or Han law codes specifically mentions the four occupations, some laws did treat these broadly-classified social groups as separate units with different levels of legal privilege.

### The gong (工)

Artisans and craftsmen — their class identified with the Chinese character meaning *labor* — were much like farmers in the respect

<sup>1</sup> *The Spring and Autumn Period* (春秋时代) has occurred from 771 until 476 BC in the alluvial plain of the Yellow River, the Shandong Peninsula and the river valleys of the Huai and Han. It roughly corresponds to the first half of the Eastern Zhou Dynasty. Its name comes from the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, a chronicle of the state of Lu between 722 and 479 BC, which tradition associates with Confucius.



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that they produced essential goods needed by themselves and the rest of society. Although they could not provide the state with much of its revenues since they often had no land of their own to be taxed, artisans and craftsmen were still given a higher place than merchants. Since ancient times, the skilled work of artisans and craftsmen was handed down orally from father to son, although the work of architects and structural builders were sometimes codified, illustrated, and categorized in Chinese written works. Artisans and craftsmen were either government-employed or worked privately. A successful and highly skilled artisan could often gain enough capital in order to hire others as apprentices or additional laborers that could be overseen by the chief artisan as a manager. Hence, artisans could create their own small enterprises in selling their work and that of others, and like the merchants, they formed their own guilds.

Many other occupations and social categories were excluded by the Confucian scholars, like soldiers, eunuchs and religious leaders, because not morally acceptable, easily corruptible or holders of too much power and influence and thus threatening the social balance. Therefore the position given to craftsmen since Ancient times it's an important one. Great respect and consideration has always been reserved to skilled masters and such importance increased eventually, when many handicrafts perfected ascending to the level of art, entwining with Chinese philosophy and culture (although the people mastering traditional craftsmanship to an artistic level has always been just a few).

One important character is **Lu Ban (鲁班)** (507–440 BC) a Chinese carpenter, engineer, philosopher, inventor, military thinker and statesman, born in the State of Lu, and honored as the ancestor of craftsmen and the God of Protection in the industry.

According to the tradition, he was responsible for several inventions such as the *cloud ladder* (a mobile counterweighted siege ladder), the *grappling hooks and ram* (boat implements used during naval warfare) and the *wooden bird* (a non-powered flying wooden bird which could stay in the air for three days, and had been suggested to be a proto-kite).

There were also others inventions attributed to him, woodworking that can be seen from various texts which led Lu Ban to be acknowledged as a master craftsman<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> *The Book of Lineages* (世本), written in about 3rd century BC.

*The Tales of the Marvellous* (述异记), written in about 5th century by Ren Fang.

*The Records of Origin on Things and Affairs* (事物纪原), written in about 11th century by Gao Cheng.

*The Origin on Things* (物原), written in about 15th century by Luo Qi.

*The Treatise of Lu Ban* (鲁班经), an attributed texts to Lu Ban written between 13th to 15th century.

Figure 09. Sculpture of Lu Ban, Chinese carpenter, engineer, philosopher, inventor, military thinker, statesman, Weifang, China. Photograph by Rolfmueller / 2010.

## Beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century

Along time no major changes occurred, so that in the 20<sup>th</sup> century handicraft industry kept on being next to agriculture in importance, in the value added to net national product, the amount of employment, and the contribution to export trade.

The data found cover the first half of the century<sup>3</sup>, a period that can really show us the structure and the position covered by Chinese crafts before the big changes that operated in the last years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the opening to West market and the amazing development of modern industry.

Many of this considerations and dynamics are still valid nowadays. The big economic jump of the last decades, its rapidity and the limited geographic interest, left different social situations unchanged. Especially when taking into consideration the craft sector, highly traditional and with the only masters left growing older and older, many realities are still operating inside socio-economic dynamics similar to the past ones. New ones developed eventually within the economic growth, due to the emergence of new professions and economic opportunities.

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century we find three broad classes inside the Chinese handicraft industry:

- Handicraft subsidiary to agriculture;
- Individual shops;
- Workshops.

Handicraft workshops came into being only in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and did not develop greatly until the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, becoming the most important around the middle 20<sup>th</sup> century in terms of contribution to the gross value of handicraft output (see graphic ##). Quite different from the Western reality, were workshops could be found as early as Middle Ages. We've already mentioned how common was for Chinese farmers, when not taking care of their land, to perform handicraft activities as subsidiary occupation. Individual craftsmen also had a long history, but gained momentum in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

### Handicraft subsidiary to agriculture

In the first case the output from the land became so small that farmers

<sup>3</sup> Data from *The Chinese Economy Under Maoism: The Early Years, 1949-1969*, by Nai-Ruenn Chen, Walter Galenson.

frequently could not depend solely upon it for subsistence, and had to seek supplementary income among which handicrafts were the most widely pursued.

Another reason was also the seasonal character of farm operations. The Chinese farmer was unoccupied on the land from four to six month a year, except in double-cropping areas.

The handicrafts which the farmer practiced usually were not highly specialized, performed inside home by him and his family. Techniques of production were primitive, only crude and simple tools were employed and the quality resulted pretty low. The variety of goods produced was large: hand weaving, shoe and rope making, charcoal and paper manufacturing, pottery, carpentry, and tailoring. Many of the products were made for personal use of the farmer, inside the house or in the fields.

#### Individual shops

Individual craftsmen could be found both in rural and urban areas. In the rural areas, they were engaged primarily in subsistence industries like smithery, carpentry, weaving, pottery-making, and tanning. They sometimes manufactured also relatively luxurious products: silk cloth, shoes, metal utensils, and furniture. These craftsmen, by catering to the needs of the peasants, contributed significantly to the economic life of the villages.

By far the largest number of individual craftsmen worked in cities. Chinese urban craftsmen often attained a high degree of skill and artistic excellence, and their products became highly prized in distant markets. Well known to the West were such products as silver, jade, ivory, embroidery, silk, cloisonné, porcelain, bronze, enamel, lacquer, and furniture.

The characteristic organization of labor in the handicraft urban industry was a form of the master craftsman system, with dependent journeymen and apprentices usually related by family and neighborhood ties. Three major categories can be distinguished, despite frequent overlapping. First, the craftsman dealt directly with the consumer and worked with his own materials and equipment. Second, while the craftsman dealt directly with the consumer, he was provided with materials and was paid for his work in processing them. Finally, the craftsman was supplied with credit and raw materials by a middleman who marketed the finished products.

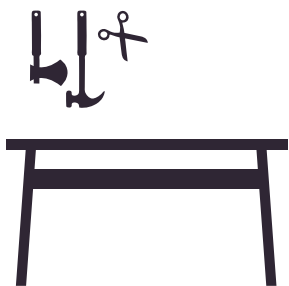


60% CITIES



40% VILLAGES

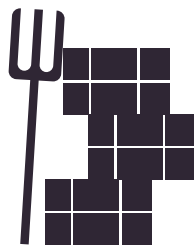
1949 / Gross value  
Product of Individual  
Craftsmen



48% WORKSHOP



39% INDIVIDUAL CRAFTSMEN



15% FARMERS

1949 / Gross value of  
Handicraft Products



72% HANDICRAFT INDUSTRY



28% MODERN INDUSTRY

1933 / Net value of  
Manufactured  
Products





## Workshops

Handicraft workshops represented the highest stage of development in the traditional industry of China. They were a transitional form of organization, eventually leading to large-scale capitalist factory production. They normally possessed a greater amount of capital, a bigger number of workers and a higher degree of skill, with the opportunity of dealing with the creation of complex and specialized products (like in the case of the Nanjing Yunjin Brocade). Mechanical power was sometimes employed, but the main production was carried on by hand. Usually the workshop owner and his family members did not participate in the manufacturing process.

The differences among the various categories in structure and organization were inevitable, with the handicraft workshops showing the highest degree of development and the farmer crafts the lowest. But all categories lacked of capital and abounded of labor, leading to the use of labor-intensive methods and destroying the incentive to introduce labor-saving improvements. Nowadays traditional crafts performance keeps on being supported by the same heavy-labor method, not many changes has been addressed to “modernize” the process, sometimes due to the complexity of the tasks which either cannot be reproduced by a modern machine or would loose quality if mechanized. Other times for the same reason as a century ago, no capital but abundance of workers. Such methods are commonly found and deep-rooted in Chinese mentality of doing things, and must not be confused with extreme work conditions carried out inside “modern factories” following a capitalistic production.

Tawney’s description of Chinese workshop is worth quoting:

*“There is little subdivision of labor or specialization of functions, and, in the majority of cases, no machinery or power. Work is heavy; craftsmanship fastidious; methods patient, laborious and slow; discipline slack or absent. Relations are human, not mechanical. There is much physical exertion and little nervous strain.”* (Tawney, 1964, p.114)

The birth of modern industry was the source of some difficulties for handicraft production due to the competition to obtain raw materials and the final prize set on the product. Moreover Chinese artisans were illiterate and conservative in nature, not always able to appreciate the need for introducing design and quality more in accord with

*Graphic 03. Handicraft production in China during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Data from The Chinese Economy Under Maoism: The Early Years, 1949-1969, by Nai-Ruenn Chen, Walter Galenson.*

contemporary taste. They could not count on a good network for marketing and sale, and they lack of sufficient contacts with the consumer. Despite these difficulties, handicraft industry continued to operate side by side with modern industry, as reported by Hou “*the traditional sector existed quite well alongside the modern sector of the Chinese economy*” (1965, p. 178). This dualistic development can be seen not only in China but also in other under-developed economies, leading the two realities to be complementary rather than competitive. Some of the main reason were:

- There were a large number of products, artistic or decorative in nature, such as painting, embroidery, ivory-carving, lacquered ware, and gold and silver ware, which could not be produced with automatic machinery or on a large-scale basis;
- There were craftsmen manufacturing products to suit personal taste, as in tailoring;
- Farmers who engaged in handicraft work as subsidiary occupation employed only simple implements and the raw materials at hand; their products were largely for their own consumption, with any surplus sold in the local market;
- There were a large number of craftsmen who supplied materials or components to modern factories;
- Some handicraft workshops carried out certain processes incidental to large-scale methods of production;
- A large number of services followed in the wave of large-scale industries and became ancillary to them, such as repair services.

Many of these last considerations keeps on being valid nowadays.

Current days

*‘On 11 Nov.2010, a 18<sup>th</sup> Century Qianlong porcelain vase in London was sold for £43m with an additional premium of £8.6m. This 16in high vase is yellow and sky blue in color with a fish motif on the front and a perforated outer wall. It was estimated to fetch up to £1.2m. Thus, most people were extremely surprised by the final deal price, which thought to be a record for any Chinese artwork.’* (BBC news, 12 November 2010).

Due to the reform and open-door policy in China, more and more high-technical machines have been imported inside the country

and have influenced every aspect of daily life (agriculture, mining, transportation, manufacturing, etc.). Designers create ideas, scientists solve problems, engineers make machines, while workers only need to press buttons or pull switches to produce commodities. The whole production process is easier than before. People don't need to worry any more if their hands have enough power to conquer nature, if their heads have enough strong knowledge to make objects, or their behaviors and thoughts can follow their hearts properly. Human power is replaced by advanced machines<sup>4</sup>.

The sphere of 'crafts' persist but it's becoming thinner and thinner. In *The Fate of Crafts*, Larry Shiner mentioned that, although many people have praised traditional crafts for its visual, tactile, and useful features, well-designed industrial objects (by *Computer Aided Design* and *Computer Aided Manufacture*) also have their advantages.

Many people around the world is asking the same question, is there any place left for traditional craftsmanship?

Similarly, China faces the same impending crisis for maintaining craftsmanship as well, since industrial goods can bring many more economic benefits, with a growing trend that focuses on a materialistic approach. Consumerist attitude has become the normal behavior, with shopping malls growing everywhere, even underground side by side with new metro lines. Easy to get, small price, guilt-free trashing included.

This leads to ignoring traditional craftsmanship with a general lack of education about traditional Chinese culture. The message that handicraft was carrying and transmitting, the thousands of years of knowledge, social dynamics and folk, are getting lost with it or relegated to museums' care.

When the 14<sup>th</sup> Century Yuan blue and white porcelain jar got the highest price of Asian objects ever received at auction, many ceramists started to produce the Yuan dynasty replicas for profits. Copying existing products and styles directly from books, as mass-producing traditional goods to be sold as handmade products it's a well-known and spread activity.

Even those claiming to do real handmade crafts lack the techniques and knowledge required to fully control the material and the final output. Many thinks they should be '*following their own feelings and inspirations*', consequently the skills and knowledge of craftsmanship

<sup>4</sup> From *The importance of craftsmanship: the case of Chinese ceramics*, paper by Lili Jiang, Association for Cultural Economics International Kyoto, Japan / June 2012.

are getting less attention and importance. No one wants to study for ten years and exercise a lifetime to become a real master when they can study just one year instead and sell their works in artistic ways, with modern elements and design ideas from others, making profit and not having to undergo the functional side of the object.

Generally, 'crafts' is a term which was used to describe all handmade works in ancient China, 'crafts' were 'arts'. 'Crafts' included all the skills and forms of 'arts'. In 1893 'arts' was first introduced in China (Huang, 1893)<sup>5</sup>. Ironically, 'arts' as a foreign term, has replaced 'crafts' in most Chinese minds. They unreasonably thought 'arts' should obtain more honor and respect than 'crafts', making the latter become the outdated term in China.

In modern society, some new breed artists emerges in crafts sphere, who only produce non-utilitarian object (eg. Zhang Jingjing). This creates a pretty confusing situation, while trying to mingle two disciplines that are different in every way, from the knowledge required, to the process of creation until the final use of the object produced and its meaning. More and more space is given to individualism: while in the past handicraft was almost never related to a single person and the majority of the works of craftsmanship don't have a known author (like it the case of the Qianlong porcelain vase), nowadays it's all about having ones name recognized.

A parallel situation is the design landscape in China. When looking at Chinese craft expressions and the great culture behind them, we can easily convey that design has always been part of such a world, answering both functional and aesthetic requirements. Nevertheless design in its contemporary meaning is seen as a recent discipline, coming from the Western culture and gaining more and more importance and consideration. We don't see new craftsmen, we witness more and more young designers turning traditional craftsmanship into design objects to be sold as pieces of art. Some of them are actually what they claim to be, but many others just recall some traditional shapes and motifs to give deepness to their creations.

Also design firms follow the same trend, providing customers with beautiful high-quality designed objects created by well-named designers and unnamed craftsmen.

Stefano Micelli in his new book *Futuro artigiano* evokes a beautiful

*Figure 10. Zhang Jing-jing "Six Arc Series". Photograph by Chen Jing-jing / 2010.*

<sup>5</sup> Qingcheng Huang kept a detailed record of his journey and first mentioned the term of 'arts' in his book. Actually, also Japan was influenced by the ideology of Arts and Crafts Movement, which happened in Britain.





Figure 11. (next page)  
Some creations from Chinese product designer Wu Zhuoyang. He uses traditional craftsmanship to inform contemporary design ideas. The results are not necessarily "Chinese", but he adopts "the old way of doing things" - traditional techniques and skills - during the process.

<sup>6</sup> Craftsmanship in general' is the collective wisdom and experience of generations. During a long time (after the selection, addition, reduction and replacement processes), craftsmanship is continually improved and perfected from generation to generation. This sort of craftsmanship is open to public, anybody can know it, learn it, and control it.

<sup>7</sup> Craftsmanship in specific' is the secret and personal wisdom and experience of groups. It means knowledge and skills specific of the craftsman, like 'special secrets'. If you are an outsider of the family, clan, tribe, or club, you will never be able to master these secret skills, and never get to know the secret knowledge.

<sup>8</sup> 'Guanxi' represents the basic dynamic inside a personalized network of influence, which refers to the benefits gained from social connections, usually extended from family, friends, workmates and members of common clubs or organization.

similarity between the craftsman situation and the mythological figure of Hephaestus: just like the ancient Greek God relegated inside his workshop crafting much of the magnificent equipment of the gods, craftsmen don't see their ability praised for its real value. It's never the weapon getting the glory, but the hero who draws it while gaining the battle (Micelli, 2012).

While new heroes are popping out, taking traditional craftsmanship and turning it into some valuable piece of art or amazing new piece of design, traditional craftsmen lose recognition and appeal, threatened by modern society ideals. Many of those people who could learn traditional craftsmanship and carry it on as an occupation, they leave rural areas and migrate to big cities looking for job opportunities and easier money.

In *The Conservation and Development of Traditional Crafts*, Li addressed that, commercial market and industrial society will inevitably bring a lot of problems and contradictions in the process of craft development (Li, 2006). Whereas in *Change of traditional crafts culture*, Qiu stresses the importance of 'core technology' in Chinese crafts. He explains 'craftsmanship in general'<sup>6</sup> and 'craftsmanship in specific'<sup>7</sup> should incorporate with advanced knowledge and modern equipment in the development of creative crafts, but the 'core technology' needs to be kept forever. It reflects traditional wisdom, public emotion, and balanced relationships between nature and human, material and spirit, utilitarian and decorative. In other words, if 'core technology' changes, the quality of Chinese crafts will decrease, and Chinese crafts will disappear (Qiu, 2011).

Today, in China, many people cannot differentiate high and low quality crafts. Most young people are not able to appreciate craftsmanship at all, not understanding the history and culture behind it. Chinese consumers often prefer to buy objects that look like antiquities or handmade, without caring about the process behind them, fueling the boom in copying and counterfeiting. Otherwise they will pay attention to an artist with a remarkable title, instead of his/her knowledge and technical skills. In order to better identify craftsmanship and help consumers to further recognize the ability of craftsmen, Chinese government introduced the 'Chinese Crafts Master'. But still many unknown artisans would use "Guanxi"<sup>8</sup> power to get the title, completely nullifying the effectiveness of the initiative.







*Figure 12. Kung Fu Six  
Forms, by Spin (a collective  
of designers and artisans  
producing original pieces of  
ceramics in Jingdezhen).*

# Intangible Cultural Heritage<sup>1</sup>

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The term 'cultural heritage' has changed content considerably in recent decades, partially owing to the instruments developed by UNESCO. Cultural heritage does not end at monuments and collections of objects. It also includes traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts.

While fragile, intangible cultural heritage is an important factor in maintaining cultural diversity in the face of growing globalization. An understanding of the intangible cultural heritage of different communities helps with intercultural dialogue, and encourages mutual respect for other ways of life.

The importance of intangible cultural heritage is not the cultural manifestation itself but rather the wealth of knowledge and skills that is transmitted through it from one generation to the next. The social and economic value of this transmission of knowledge is relevant for

<sup>1</sup> Directly from the "Intangible Cultural Heritage" manuals developed by UNESCO.

minority groups and for mainstream social groups within a State, and is as important for developing States as for developed ones<sup>2</sup>.

Intangible cultural heritage is:

- **Traditional, contemporary and living at the same time:** intangible cultural heritage does not only represent inherited traditions from the past but also contemporary rural and urban practices in which diverse cultural groups take part;
- **Inclusive:** we may share expressions of intangible cultural heritage that are similar to those practised by others. Whether they are from the neighboring village, from a city on the opposite side of the world, or have been adapted by peoples who have migrated and settled in a different region, they all are intangible cultural heritage: they have been passed from one generation to another, have evolved in response to their environments and they contribute to giving us a sense of identity and continuity, providing a link from our past, through the present, and into our future. Intangible cultural heritage does not give rise to questions of whether or not certain practices are specific to a culture. It contributes to social cohesion, encouraging a sense of identity and responsibility which helps individuals to feel part of one or different communities and to feel part of society at large;
- **Representative:** intangible cultural heritage is not merely valued as a cultural good, on a comparative basis, for its exclusivity or its exceptional value. It thrives on its basis in communities and depends on those whose knowledge of traditions, skills and customs are passed on to the rest of the community, from generation to generation, or to other communities;
- **Community-based:** intangible cultural heritage can only be heritage when it is recognized as such by the communities, groups or individuals that create, maintain and transmit it – without their recognition, nobody else can decide for them that a given expression or practice is their heritage.

<sup>2</sup> For a better understanding refer to the original text of the 2003 Convention.

<sup>3</sup> A Convention is an agreement under international law entered into by States and that establishes rights and obligations between each party and every other party.

As a driving force of cultural diversity, intangible cultural heritage has received international recognition and its safeguarding has become one of the priorities of international cooperation. The Convention adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO in 2003<sup>3</sup> is the first international treaty to provide a legal, administrative and financial framework to heritage safeguarding issue.



## Traditional

*(Chinese Art of Seal Engraving)*



## Community-based

*(Mongolian Art of Singing, Khoomei)*



## Inclusive

*(Chinese Calligraphy)*



## Contemporary

*(Longquan Celadon Pottery)*



## Living

*(Dragon Boat Festival)*



## Representative

*(Chinese Opera)*

The Convention is concerned with processes and conditions rather than products. Nevertheless inside the definition of intangible cultural heritage are included the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated with it.

The Convention proposes a set of measures to be implemented at the national and international level, aiming to:

- **Safeguard** intangible cultural heritage that is in step with international agreements on human rights and that meets requirements of mutual respect among communities and of sustainable development.
- **Ensure** respect for the intangible cultural heritage of the communities, groups and individuals concerned;
- **Raise** awareness at the local, national and international levels of the importance of the intangible cultural heritage, and of ensuring mutual appreciation thereof;
- **Provide** for international cooperation and assistance.

At a national level, the Convention calls for the safeguarding of the intangible heritage present on a State's territory. Among other things, it also asks each State to identify and define such heritage with the participation of communities, groups and relevant non-governmental organizations.

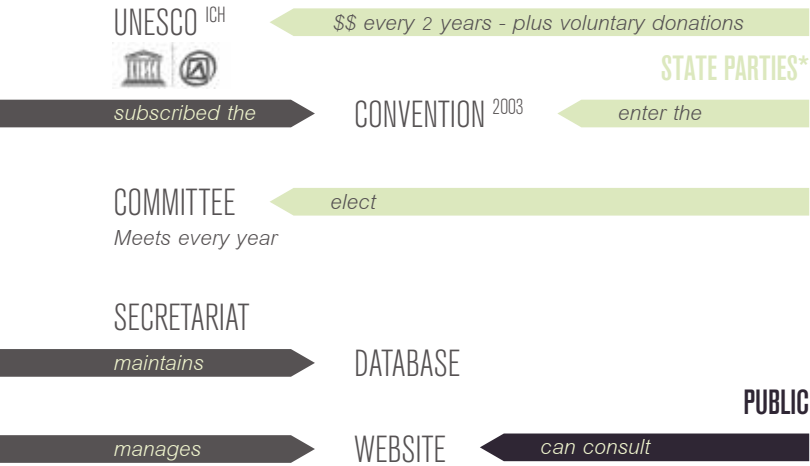
At an international level, the Convention establishes two Lists, the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding and the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The goal of these Lists is to ensure visibility and awareness of its elements significance and to encourage dialogue, thus reflecting cultural diversity worldwide and testifying to human creativity. Inventories of the intangible cultural heritage should include all kinds of expressions, no matter how common or rare they are, how many or how few people in the community take part in them, or how much of an effect or influence they have in that community, with special priority to those most under threat.

#### Criteria for inscription on the Representative List

In nomination files, the submitting State(s) Party(ies) is (are) requested to demonstrate that an element proposed for inscription on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity

*Figure 13. Collage of Chinese intangible cultural heritage elements.*

## Intangible Cultural Heritage General System



## Representative List Submission System



\*State Parties are represented directly by the Government of a Country, any submission must be presented by the Government itself in order to be considered by the Committee.

Graphic 04. UNESCO system on how the 2003 Convention is managed, how the intangible cultural heritage elements are identified, evaluated and maintained.

satisfies all of the following criteria:

R.1 The element constitutes intangible cultural heritage as defined in Article 2 of the Convention.

R.2 Inscription of the element will contribute to ensuring visibility and awareness of the significance of the intangible cultural heritage and to encouraging dialogue, thus reflecting cultural diversity worldwide and testifying to human creativity.

R.3 Safeguarding measures are elaborated that may protect and promote the element.

R.4 The element has been nominated following the widest possible participation of the community, group or, if applicable, individuals concerned and with their free, prior and informed consent.

R.5 The element is included in an inventory of the intangible cultural heritage present in the territory(ies) of the submitting State(s) Party(ies), as defined in Article 11 and Article 12 of the Convention.

Timetable and procedure for inscription (*2 years are needed*)

- Phase 1: preparation and submission
- Phase 2: examination
- Phase 3: evaluation

#### Intangible Cultural Heritage Domains

UNESCO's 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage proposes five broad 'domains' in which intangible cultural heritage is manifested:

- Oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage;
- Performing arts;
- Social practices, rituals and festive events;
- Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe;
- Traditional craftsmanship.

Instances of intangible cultural heritage are not limited to a single manifestation and many include elements from multiple domains. Some complex expression may include singing, dancing, feasting, oral tradition, displays of craftsmanship, sports and other entertainments. The boundaries between domains are extremely fluid

and often vary from community to community. While the Convention sets out a framework for identifying forms of intangible cultural heritage, the list of domains it provides is intended to be inclusive rather than exclusive.

### Traditional Craftsmanship

Traditional craftsmanship is perhaps the most tangible manifestation of intangible cultural heritage. However, the 2003 Convention is mainly concerned with the skills and knowledge involved in craftsmanship rather than the craft products themselves. Rather than focusing on preserving craft objects, safeguarding attempts should instead concentrate on encouraging artisans to continue to produce craft and to pass their skills and knowledge onto others, particularly within their own communities.

There are numerous expressions of traditional craftsmanship: tools; clothing and jewellery; costumes and props for festivals and performing arts; storage containers, objects used for storage, transport and shelter; decorative art and ritual objects; musical instruments and household utensils, and toys, both for amusement and education. Many of these objects are only intended to be used for a short time, such as those created for festival rites, while others may become heirloom that are passed from generation to generation. The skills involved in creating craft objects are as varied as the items themselves and range from delicate, detailed work such as producing paper votives, to robust, rugged tasks like creating a sturdy basket or thick blanket.

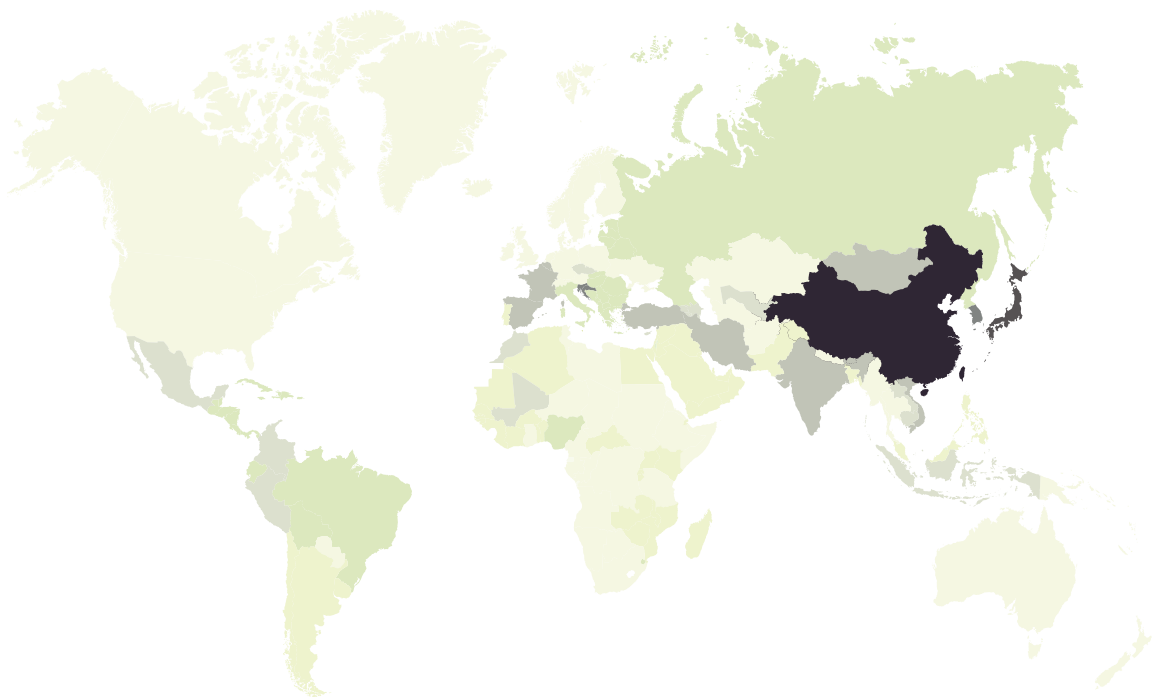
Like other forms of intangible cultural heritage, globalization poses significant challenges to the survival of traditional forms of craftsmanship. Mass production, whether on the level of large multinational corporations or local cottage industries, can often supply goods needed for daily life at a lower cost, both in terms of currency and time, than hand production. Many craftspeople struggle to adapt to this competition. Environmental and climatic pressures impact on traditional craftsmanship too, with deforestation and land clearing reducing the availability of key natural resources. Even in cases where traditional artisanship develops into a cottage industry, the increased scale of production may result in damage to the environment.



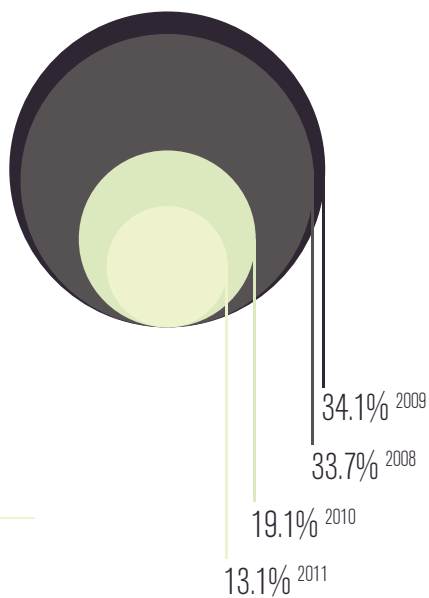
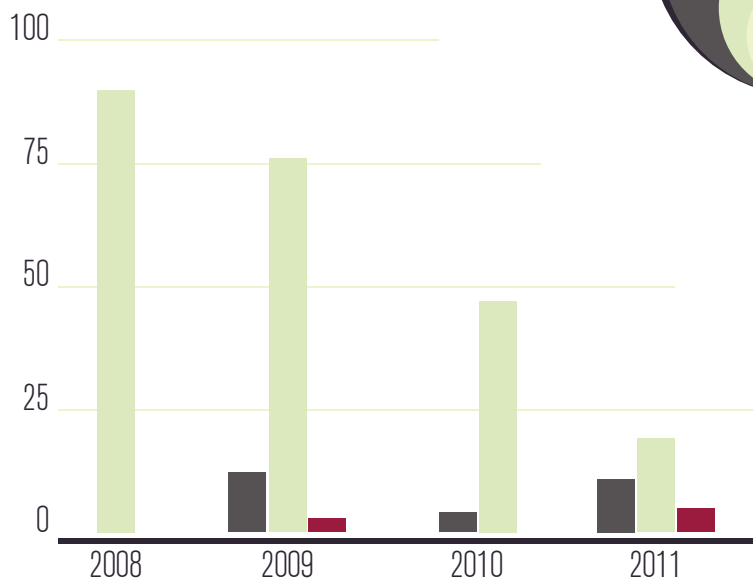
As social conditions or cultural tastes change, festivals and celebrations that once required elaborate craft production may become more austere, resulting in fewer opportunities for artisans to express themselves. Young people in communities may find the sometimes lengthy apprenticeship necessary to learn many traditional forms of craft too demanding and instead seek work in factories or service industry where the work is less exacting and the pay often better. Many craft traditions involve 'trade secrets' that should not be taught to outsiders but if family members or community members are not interested in learning it, the knowledge may disappear because sharing it with strangers violates tradition.

The goal of safeguarding is not to fix or freeze intangible cultural heritage in some pure or primordial form, but to ensure that the knowledge and skills associated with traditional artisanry are passed on to future generations so that crafts can continue to be produced within their communities, providing livelihoods to their makers and reflecting creativity. An opportunity could be to strengthen and reinforce the diverse and varied circumstances that are necessary for the continuous evolution and interpretation of intangible cultural heritage, as well as for its transmission to new artisans.

Many craft traditions have age-old systems of instruction and apprenticeship. One proven way of reinforcing and strengthening these systems is to offer financial incentives to students and teachers to make knowledge transfer more attractive to both. Local, traditional markets for craft products can also be reinforced, while at the same time creating new ones. In response to urbanization and industrialization, many people around the world enjoy handmade objects that are imbued with the accumulated knowledge and cultural values of the craftspeople and which offer a softer alternative to the numerous 'high tech' items that dominate global consumer culture. In other cases, trees can be replanted to try and offset the damage done to traditional crafts reliant on wood for raw materials. In some situations, legal measures may need to be taken to guarantee the access rights of communities to gather resources, while also ensuring environmental protection. Further legal measures, such as intellectual property protections and patent or copyright registrations, can help a community to benefit from its traditional motifs and crafts.



Number of Elements



- Urgent Safeguarding List
- Representative List
- Register of best Safeguarding Practices

Graphic 05. World Intangible Cultural Heritage overview: elements recognized and progress over the years. Data from UNESCO.

## Intangible Heritage Lists

Every year the Committee meets to evaluate nominations proposed by States Parties to the 2003 Convention and decide whether or not to inscribe them on the Convention's Lists. The Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity is made up of those intangible heritage practices and expressions help demonstrate the diversity of this heritage and raise awareness about its importance. The Committee incorporated **90 elements** in 2008 (items formerly proclaimed Masterpieces) and inscribed **76 elements** in 2009 and **47 elements** in 2010. In 2011, **19 new elements** have been added to the list.

China has an amazing geographical extension and cultural diversity (56 ethnic groups are officially recognized and used to organize the ICH inventory) resulting in a wide range of different intangible heritage expressions. Thanks to this factor, plus the high commitment and active interest taken in the intangible cultural matter, is the country in the world with the largest number of Intangible Cultural Heritage elements recognized by UNESCO and included inside the Representative List. Of the **36 elements** included in the List, 14 can be mainly grouped under the Traditional Craftsmanship domain (with a certain flexibility), each of them documented with videos, photos and description accessible by everyone on UNESCO website.

Inside the Traditional Craftsmanship Representative List<sup>4</sup> we can therefore include:

- Art of Chinese seal engraving
- China engraved block printing technique
- Chinese paper-cut
- Chinese traditional architectural craftsmanship for timber-framed structures
- Craftsmanship of Nanjing Yunjin brocade
- Regong arts
- Sericulture and silk craftsmanship of China
- Traditional firing technology of Longquan Celadon
- Traditional handicrafts of making Xuan paper
- Chinese shadow puppetry
- Watertight-bulkhead technology of Chinese junks\*
- Wooden movable-type printing of China\*

\* These elements were inscribed inside the Urgent safeguarding List.

<sup>4</sup> For a deeper understanding please refer to the Appendix with the description of each elements in at the end of the chapter.

- Traditional design and practices for building Chinese wooden arch bridges\*
- Traditional Li textile techniques of spinning, dyeing, weaving and embroidering\*

Many craftsmanships are representative of minorities cultures, religions and territories, and often cannot be moved from their context otherwise they would lose their identity and meaning. The interest taken by Chinese Government in order to identify the intangible heritage elements of its country is impressive, just in 2009 **25 new elements** were inserted (22 in the Representative List and 3 in the Urgent Safeguarding List), 12 of which related to traditional craftsmanship domain. The commitment taken keeps going, but sometimes the attention of big organizations concentrate on those manifestations that are more unique or that require a higher set of skills and therefore the transmission and learning process is more complicated and in danger to get lost. Nevertheless there are still a lot of minor and folk expressions of intangible heritage which needs to be protected, fostered or inserted inside a system that may renew their dynamics and keep them alive. Some of lesser-known or lesser-considered forms of craft are threatened to disappear due to social changes and competitive industrial production, some others are still flourishing as in the past thanks to the live tradition related to them.

For instance *laran* or batik printing can be found throughout China, and uses natural indigo to beautifully decorate cotton fabric, that will be used to make dresses, stuffed animals for kids and other everyday life objects. This activity is usually carried on by families without letting anyone else know the details of the techniques used. They apply natural resist agents, such as bean paste, lime mortar or wax, on the fabric to create a pattern using stencil technique (in the past, ceremonial bronze drums were used to transfer the decorated reliefs) and block the color. The fabric is then dyed and left to dry until a final boiling in clear water removes all traces of the resist agent, revealing the final design.

Also bamboo weaving and carving is a well-spread craft activity, providing people with objects for everyday use, but slowly disappearing since youth leave the country and move in the city to look for better opportunities.

*Figure 14. Thangkas (Regong art) carried in procession by buddhist tibetan believers. Photograph by Mario Biondi / 2006.*



Bamboo and wood, thanks to their flexibility, are the source for many different folk objects such as fans, umbrellas, decorated combs, traditional masks, musical instruments, pipes, bird cages, all of them reaching high levels of decoration and beauty, and common objects such as baskets, brooms, pans, steamers and chairs.

Then we can find the famous and ancient Chinese laquer, a real form of art that creates precious patterns on crafted objects following different techniques. The complexity of this craftsmanship have always made it an impractical medium for the single artisan, so that it needs a group workshop to be carried on. In the *Discourses on Salt and Iron*<sup>5</sup> it is noted that a single laquered cup or bowl might require the skills of a hundred artisans and be worth ten times than of a similar vessel in bronze.

Finally, clay processing leads to unique and representative results, thanks to the different composition of the earth according to the region, and the nature of the shapes given. Clay figurines are a common folk production representing gods in many different forms, some even hand-molded by residents and brick factories workers during their free time. Such objects are given away or sold for tiny sums to safeguard the home, entertain the kids or they are offered as prizes in simple gambling and festival games. The most popular toys are small dolls known as *Mohele*, dressed in tiny handmade cloths and sold in high quantities during the festivities to support popular beliefs and superstition. Other popular objects are festival whistles, molded in many different shapes and given away for the “Granma Temple Fair” in Shaanxi and Hunan Provinces.

These are just few of the many more craft expressions that can be found around the country. Even if they haven't attracted the attention and the interest to be recognized and safeguarded (yet), a solutions is required in the meanwhile to promote these jobs, raise people's awareness and genuine respect towards them in order to keep the traditional knowledge alive.

China is an incredibly big country, with an even more incredible amount of people, cultures and costumes. Due to this reality, the slowness of the international mechanism (2 years are required before an element is completely evaluated and can be inserted in the Representative List) and the lack of proper organizations and individuals present locally to identify and collect these craftsmanship

<sup>5</sup> *Book of the Han Dynasty* (80 BC).

manifestations around the country, there is still a long way to go.

Shanghai gave up a lot in its run for the future and its eagerness to be westernized, but fortunately there are still manifestations, inside the city and in the surrounding region, to be appreciated and in need of recognition. People show interest in such craft expressions, but no proper organization is available on the territory to foster such interest involving the community and the craftsmen, and if such organization exists its not known and active enough in order to produce tangible results<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Tian Qing is a scholar of Buddhist musicology and the Chinese zither, or guqin. The sixty-four-year-old now heads the Chinese Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Center and was interviewed by Ian Johnson for the NYRblog / 2012.

<sup>6</sup> During my research inside the city I never found and nobody mentioned to me any kind of organization that could be associated to the one of Beijing for the Intangible Cultural Heritage recognition, promotion and safeguarding. I've lately come across the possibility that such organization exists, but further investigation didn't lead to any results, it doesn't seem to be active (no website and no news related to it for several years) and there are no signs of its presence that can be seen on the territory.

## China Current ICH Preservation

*"It's true. Every county chief began to want to get his local music or dance troupe on the list. It's seen as a national honor to get on the U.N. list. But this new category is more than face. It gave Chinese society a new way of looking at culture. In the past, no one paid attention to intangible heritage, but suddenly now society does. We wondered why it was like this. It's because for thirty-five years we have opened our doors and studied foreign things with the aim of modernizing China. That became our top priority, our national priority. But modernization is a foreign concept, it's a Western concept. We did whatever the West did, that was modernization for us. And then there was the speed. When you run so fast you can only look ahead, you can't look back. But after a while we realized that the little treasure my grandfather had left for me was falling out of my pocket. I'm not saying there haven't been huge advantages but people are wondering what they've lost."* (Tian Qing<sup>1</sup>, 2012)

Since entering the Convention in 2004, Chinese government has adopted various measures, conducted a series of safeguarding activities throughout China, excluding Taiwan, and has won wide

acclaim for its impressive achievements.

Different projects have been sponsored, like the “*Chinese Folklore Heritage Preservation Project*” and the “*China Ethnic and Folk Culture Preservation Project*”. The *State Center of China Ethnic and Folk Culture Preservation Project* was established in the Chinese Academy of Arts (Ministry of Culture) together with a *Founding of the Inter-ministerial Joint Committee on the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage*, composed of nine different ministries and the State Cultural Heritage Protection Leader Group, led by State Councilor, Chen Zhili.

Tradition was officially reintroduced in people’s daily life with the adding of three ancient festivities as public holidays: the *Tomb-sweeping Day* (清明节), the *Dragon Boat Day* and the *Mid-autumn Day*. In order to adapt to the new arrangement, on Jan 30, 2008 General Office of Ministry of Culture issued the *Circular on Taking Advantage of Traditional Festivals to Develop Excellent Traditions of National Culture*. Moreover the second Saturday of every June was named “*National Cultural Heritage Day*”, the first of which was celebrated on June 10, 2006.

The effort to recognize the holders of such intangible cultural heritage passed through the nomination of 161 “*masters of folk arts and crafts*” by the National Development and Reform Commission (providing financial support for activities to pass on their knowledge) and the designation of the first 165 “*outstanding holders of folk cultural heritage*” by the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles and the China Association of Folk Writers and Artists.

Finally on February 25, 2011, China’s National People’s Congress Standing Committee adopted a law on intangible cultural heritage (ICH) designed to preserve traditions considered to have historic, literary, artistic, or scientific value, including those traditions of the various minority ethnic groups in the country. It also extends protection to material objects and physical locations that are connected with ICH. In addition to reinforce safeguarding actions, the law promotes the transmission of ICH traditions to new generations through training of personnel and funding of special programs for those designated as “heirs” to ICH. It is the first legislation to cover ICH and went through three revisions before passage.

The enforcement of protection of intellectual property rights is



particularly difficult in China. Without adequate education with regard to IPRs, there is little awareness that infringement is a crime. Moreover local governments might not want to genuinely support the work of anti-piracy supervisors, creating obstacles during investigations and assisting local counterfeiters by letting them hide their production lines in safer places. When counterfeiters have good connections with local governmental or law enforcement officials, they may find an umbrella for their activity.

Nevertheless big efforts have been addressed to raise the general awareness and save the genuineness of traditional crafts and art production. The Ministry of Culture arranged a survey in June 2005 in order to obtain a clear picture of the country's intangible cultural heritage, surveying the types, amounts, distribution, conditions for survival, state of preservation and current problems for the intangible cultural heritage of all ethnic groups in the country. This was the first nationwide survey ever taken of the country's ICH and the starting point for the collection of physical material.

*"We had to train people at the national level, provincial level, city and county levels. Our first thought was we should do a survey of every tradition in every county of China. But local officials didn't know how to do this. So we actually produced a handbook—for example how to record a theater piece, how to survey it. Or vital questions like who the art form's master is, who the disciples are, and how it's transmitted. Or even simple things like how to properly use video recorders. We've also set up Intangible Cultural Heritage experimental zones. We've found that you can't separate the cultural product from the environment. But I agree that all of this is too little. The difficulty is that China is too big. There are fifty-six ethnic groups and each one has its own special culture. Some art forms are very different—for example, Peking Opera but also local oral histories. So we have to keep changing how we do things."*(Tian Qing, 2012)

The collection of material involves all the latest technologies such as digital technology, multi-media, audio-recordings and video recordings for the compilation of databases, the passage of orally transmitted literature into a written one, and the transmission of knowledge through mass media. The State Council approved the publications of the first and second national catalogs of intangible cultural heritage in 2006 and 2008 that contained 1,028 items in total and were grouped in ten categories. Each province, autonomous

region and municipality directly under the central government created a catalog of ICH of their own, and these contained 4,315 items in total.

After the technique for producing Fujian's Wuyiyan tea was entered in the national catalog of intangible cultural heritage, sales volume increased more than 10-fold. The many troupes from Huanxian County, Gansu that put on shows with leather silhouette figures are now making a good income performing across the country, and production of fragrance pouches in Qingyang County has given a boost to the local economy. Moreover the cultural departments of local governments across China have worked with educational departments to incorporate Chinese folk songs and music in music classes and paper cutting, traditional New Year's pictures and other traditional Chinese folk arts into art classes in primary and secondary schools.

One of the most active organizations is the **Association of Folk Writers and Artists** which has established 123 folk culture home towns, protection stations, transmission stations, research centers, expert committees and museums specializing in folk culture in various areas. National membership is increasing at a pace of approximately 100 persons a month. The same association through the *Chinese Folklore Heritage Preservation Project*, conducts emergency restoration works on three levels: national (publishing such works as the *Encyclopedia of Chinese Folk Tales* and the *Publication of Records of Chinese Folklore*, as well as conducting national surveys on folk cultural heritage), regional (special projects set up mainly for folk literary phenomena) and local (specific projects developed according to the situation in each area). Under the *Chinese Folklore Heritage Preservation Project*, a total of 17 series 15,000 works are scheduled for publication, which eventually will become one of the greatest cultural collections in the history of China since the *Siku Quanshu* (Imperial Collection of Four). The model-version of the *Collection of Chinese Wooden Print New Year Picture "Shantung Yang Ja Pu"* (Chung Hwa Books, 2005) won a publisher's award in the United States, while the model-version of the *Collection of Chinese Paper-cuttings "Hebei Yu Xian"* (Hebei Education Press, 2006) won three awards in Hong Kong, including the King of Kings Award.

"On one hand everyone says yes, yes it's great, wonderful, let's do it. But you say, for example, to a Miao woman, "Your clothes are

*beautiful,” but she says, “No, I want to wear jeans”. Or you say to a Dong person “Your homes are great—wow, it’s made of bamboo, it’s great!”—and they say, “I don’t want it. It’s cold and there’s no running water”. People want modernization. Your modernization took two hundred years. For us it’s been thirty years. You went step by step. We ran. So a lot of the experience that you had isn’t applicable here. Humanity hasn’t ever experienced such sudden change, where such a large number of people are going through modernization at such a fast pace. No one before us has had that.”(Tian Qing, 2012)*

China, Japan and the Republic of Korea had all proposed to UNESCO establishing centers to facilitate the preservation of ICH in the Asia-Pacific Region. In 2008, the three countries signed a memorandum of understanding, agreeing that the center in China be devoted to training, the center in Korea to the building of a database and network, and the center in Japan to research. The **Asia-Pacific Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Center** located at the Chinese National Academy of Arts was inaugurated in Beijing on May 18, 2010, and it organizes regional and international training activities for the protection of ICH.

Moreover, **Cultural Ecology Protection Zones** have been created by the Government, starting from four pilot cultural ecology zones: the Southern Fujian Pilot Cultural Ecology Protection Zone, the Huizhou Pilot Cultural Ecology Protection Zone, the Regong Pilot Cultural Ecology Protection Zone and the Qiang Nationality Pilot Cultural Ecology Protection Zone. These are specific areas set up for the core purpose of protecting places rich of well preserved intangible cultural heritage, with a strong local cultural flavor of high value. It is worthwhile to preserve the entire area intact in order to promote balanced and sustained economic and social development. Infrastructures for storing, displaying, studying and teaching the general public about intangible cultural heritage has also been built.

All the initiatives above listed have been taken and supported by Chinese Government. Anyway there are also independent organizations working on intangible cultural heritage. The most active and committed is the **Beijing Cultural Heritage Protection Center** (CHP), an independent Chinese grassroots non-profit organization, supporting local communities across China to protect their cultural

heritage with a small professional staff and a large number of volunteers to fight for the protection of China's tangible and intangible cultural heritage. In 2003 was legally registered with the Beijing Bureau of Civil Affairs as a non-governmental organization.

If the Government's interest is mostly addressed to the development of proper laws, the collection of data, the creation of catalogs and museums, and the recognitions and supporting of the masters, CHP develops local projects involving the communities to directly preserve and promote their heritage in a creative way and raise the visibility of heritage protection in government planning and in media coverage. CHP is now broadening its urban programs through a "Cultural Action Network" of strategically placed volunteers to monitor the urban heritage situation in major cities and towns around China, and to coordinate CHP's heritage protection efforts with local governments, communities, and media. We must take note that even if it's present throughout China, CHP is mostly active inside Beijing area.



## Traditional Craftsmanship Elements

### Art of Chinese seal engraving

The Seal Engravers' Society of Xiling in Zhejiang Province, central China, which was founded a century ago, preserves the art of seal engraving along with approximately a hundred other specialized institutions. The design is first sketched on paper, and then engraved on stone, in reverse, with a knife. In addition to mastery of traditional calligraphy, the art of engraving requires a high degree of virtuosity, since the artist works on a tiny surface area where every curve, every thickness of line counts. The very diverse motifs are the fruit of the artist's imagination and culture, a work of art in itself. Today the art of seal engraving is still practiced by both professionals and amateurs.

### China engraved block printing technique

This traditional printing technique requires the collaboration of half a dozen craftspeople possessed of printing expertise, dexterity and team spirit. The blocks themselves, made from the fine-grained wood of pear or jujube trees, are cut to a thickness of two centimeters and polished with sandpaper to prepare them for engraving. Drafts of the desired images are brushed onto extremely thin paper and transferred onto blocks. The inked designs provide a guide for the artisan who cuts the wood, producing raised characters that will eventually apply ink to paper. A number of printing workshops continue this handicraft today thanks to the knowledge and skills of the expert artisans.

### Chinese paper-cut

Present throughout China and in various ethnic groups, paper-cut is a popular art integral to everyday lives. A predominantly female pursuit, it is transmitted from mother to daughter over a long period of time, and is particularly common in rural areas. The paper can be cut or engraved with a chisel, colored or left blank. Motifs, which vary greatly and are often devised by the artist, depend on the region of origin and the purpose of the product (décor, festivities or prayers). As a key part of Chinese social life in all ethnic groups, paper-cut expresses the moral principles, philosophies and aesthetic ideals of its exponents.

### Chinese traditional architectural craftsmanship for timber-framed structures

Standing as distinctive symbols of Chinese architectural culture,

timber-framed structures are found throughout the country. The wooden components such as the columns, beams, purlins, lintel and bracket sets are connected by tenon joints in a flexible, earthquake resistant way. The architectural craft also encompasses decorative woodworking, tile roofing, stonework, decorative painting and other arts passed down from masters to apprentices through verbal and practical instruction. Employed today mainly in traditional style structures and in restoring, it remains a central visual component of Chinese identity and an important representative of Asian architecture.

#### Craftsmanship of Nanjing Yunjin brocade

This Chinese tradition of weaving needs two craftspeople operating on a large, complicated loom to produce textiles made out of silk, gold, silver and peacock feather yarn. The technique was once used to produce royal garments such as the dragon robe and crown costume; the method comprises more than a hundred procedures (looms manufacturing, patterns drafting, jacquard cards creation for programming weaving patterns, loom dressing, etc.). Today, it is still used to make high-end attire, souvenirs and to replicate ancient silk fabrics for researchers and museums.

#### Regong arts

In monasteries and villages along the Longwu River basin in Qinghai Province in western China, Buddhist monks and folk artists of the Tibetan and Tu ethnicity carry on the plastic arts of painting thangkaand (religious scrolls used to venerate Buddha, painted using a special brush and natural dyes), crafting patchwork barbola (employing plant and animal forms cut from silk fabric to create soft relief art for veils and column ornaments) and sculpting (wood, clay, stone or brick sculptures decorating wall panels, tea tables and cabinets) known collectively as the Regong arts. The technique is passed strictly following ancient Buddhist painting books that provide instruction on line and figure drawing, color matching and pattern design.

#### Sericulture and silk craftsmanship of China

Traditionally an important role for women in the economy of rural regions, silk-making encompasses planting mulberry, raising silkworms, unreeling silk, making thread, and designing and weaving fabric. The whole process is cyclic and sustainable and it has been handed down within families and through apprenticeship, with





techniques often spreading within local groups. The cultural system includes the performing of the story of the Goddess of the Silkworm, to ward off evil and ensure a bountiful harvest, the adorning of women with colorful flowers made of silk or paper and harvest offerings as part of the Silkworm Flower festival.

#### Traditional firing technology of Longquan Celadon

The city of Longquan in the coastal Chinese province of Zhejiang is known for its celadon pottery and the traditional firing technology that imparts its distinctive glaze. Compounded from violet-golden clay and a mixture of burnt feldspar, limestone, quartz and plant ash, the glaze is prepared from recipes that have often been handed down for generations by teachers or within families. The glaze is applied to a fired stoneware vessel, which is then fired again in a repeated cycle of six stages of heating and cooling where precise temperatures matter a great deal. It is a proud symbol of the cultural heritage of the craftspeople, their city and the nation.

#### Traditional handicrafts of making Xuan paper

The unique water quality and mild climate of Jing County in Anhui Province are two of the key ingredients in the craft of making Xuan paper. Handmade from the tough bark of the Tara Wing-Celtis or Blue Sandalwood tree and rice straw, Xuan paper is known for its strong, smooth surface, its ability to absorb water and moisten ink, and fold repeatedly without breaking. The traditional process still followed today proceeds strictly by hand through more than a hundred steps such as steeping, washing, fermenting, bleaching, pulping, sunning and cutting – all of which lasts more than two years. The craft is taught in local schools and true mastery of the entire complicated process is won only by a lifetime of dedicated work.

#### Chinese shadow puppetry

Chinese shadow puppetry is a form of theatre acted by colorful silhouette figures made from leather or paper (which can have between twelve and twenty-four movable joints), accompanied by music and singing. Traditional plays are orally transmitted or found in written form and can be performed by large troupes with seven to nine performers and smaller troupes of only two to five, primarily for entertainment or religious rituals, weddings and funerals and other special occasions. It's used to pass on cultural history, social beliefs, oral traditions and local customs.

*Figure 15. A silhouette figure cut out from leather and used for Shadow plays. Photograph by Mountain Folkcraft / 2011.*

### Watertight-bulkhead technology of Chinese junks

Developed in South China's Fujian Province, this technology permits the construction of ocean-going vessels with watertight compartments: if one or two cabins are accidentally damaged in the course of navigation, seawater will not flood the other cabins and the vessel will remain afloat. The junks are made mainly of camphor, pine and fir timber, built by applying traditional key technologies and assembled through use of traditional carpenters' tools. Local communities participate by holding solemn ceremonies to pray for peace and safety during construction and before the launch of the completed vessel. Today only three masters can claim full command of this technology.

### Wooden movable-type printing of China

One of the world's oldest printing techniques lives in Rui'an County, Zhejiang Province, where it is used in compiling and printing clan genealogies. Men are trained to draw and engrave Chinese characters (which can be used multiple times), then set them into a type-page and print. This requires abundant historical knowledge and mastery of ancient Chinese grammar. Women then undertake the work of paper cutting and binding, until the printed genealogies are finished. A ceremony marks the completion of the genealogy, and the printers place it into a locked box to be preserved. At present, only eleven people over 50 years of age remain who have mastered the whole set of techniques.

### Traditional design and practices for building Chinese wooden arch bridges

Wooden arch bridges are found in Fujian Province and Zhejiang Province, along China's south-east coast. The traditional design and practices combine the use of wood, traditional architectural tools, craftsmanship, the core technologies of 'beam-weaving' and mortise and tenon joints, and an experienced woodworker's understanding of different environments and the necessary structural mechanics. The craftsmanship is passed on orally and through personal demonstration by masters teaching apprentices or relatives within a clan in accordance with strict procedures. These clans play an irreplaceable role in building, maintaining and protecting the bridges.

Traditional Li textile techniques: spinning, dyeing, weaving and embroidering

These traditional techniques are employed by women of the Li ethnic group of Hainan Province, China, to make cotton, hemp and other fibers into clothing and other daily necessities. The techniques involved, including warp ikat, double-face embroidery, and single-face jacquard weaving, are passed down from mothers to daughters from early childhood. Li women design the textile patterns using only their imagination and knowledge of traditional styles. In the absence of a written language, these patterns record the history and legends of Li culture as well as aspects of worship, taboos, beliefs, traditions and folkways. They also distinguish the five major spoken dialects of Hainan Island. The textiles form an indispensable part of important social and cultural occasions such as religious rituals and festivals, and in particular weddings, for which Li women design their own dresses.





## World Trends

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Introducing some of the main trends going on around the craftsmanship world, presentation of case studies and introduction of the craft relationship between China and Italy.

## Trends

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The trends presented have been personally defined through the interpretation and understanding of multiple readings about current craftsmanship situations (i.e. Stefano Micelli, *Futuro Artigiano*), by following recent events and projects (i.e. Stefano Maffei and *ANALOGICO/DIGITALE*), and by collecting direct information during the primary research, interviewing and talking with experts and customers. A lot of things are happening around the world concerning craftsmanship and there has been a lot of talking about it too. Individuals on their own, notorious brands and unknown ones, public interest and design world, everyone have moved somehow their attention back to traditional knowledge, either because it's a good and economic source for making things, or because they are looking for some of that magic and added value that got lost in the ocean of mass-production objects surrounding us.

More and more initiatives are coming from everywhere trying to rescue what is left of the "old-school" heritage or reinventing the concept of craftsmanship from scratches. Even if some of these events have nothing to do with Chinese traditional craftsmanship, because they're

*Figura 19. Tikau homes, Birdscushions, Foldibasket, Stripecarpet / 2009.*

inscribed inside a different situation, born from a different culture and society, it's still necessary to see what is going on in the rest of the world in order to better understand where are the changes leading, what good examples can help us and what opportunities we should be taking. Moreover a comparison between China and the western world can explain why certain solutions wouldn't be possible or not suitable in our context.

The rediscovery of manual labor is an answer to the big economic crisis that fell upon the western countries, especially the United States during these last years, and it's at the base of the **Makers** movement. People that, due to their economic situation, or their personal passion for making things with their hands, discover a *do-it-yourself* way of life. The aim of all these so-called *makers* is not about mastering a specific skill, but more about gaining back the material culture that surrounds us, experimenting with practically anything that comes to their hand, in order to grow in autonomy and individual freedom (Micelli, 2012).

It's a sort of challenge against the modern culture, which provides us with any sort of good, but not with the knowledge to make any of them ourselves, turning us into dependable consumers. In the western world, especially in those countries without a manufacturing history or a culture of making things (like the USA), some people are trying to gain back the connection with the objects of their life embracing a new attitude. An army of *do-it-yourselfers* is raising, the makers movement is enlarging more and more, willing to share everything with the rest of the people. Frauenfelder, one of the "founders" of this movement, has started the magazine "Make", a referring point for many lovers of *making*. Even a *vimeo* channel has been opened: *Made By Hand* is a collection of incredibly well-shot video-documentaries telling stories of ordinary people who, for a reason or another, had to start making things with their hands, achieving something new and eventually making a job out of it.

Rather than rescuing traditional skills, most *makers* foster innovation and tech-based products, creating a new combination of home-made solutions and latest software development, home-made modifications on ordinary mass-production objects, or original products that follow a personal taste. A big help to this *do-it-yourself* initiative is the **going on-line** opportunity that is spreading around the world with websites such as Etsy, featuring handmade and vintage items and letting





anyone with manufacturing skills go on the market.

A trend that actually involves traditional craftsmanship and calls in true artisans, is the search for **uniqueness** pursued by many people and brands. Design firms and fashion brands are giving more and more importance to the crafted side of their products, trying to prove the quality and value of what they give to their customers. Many people on the other side, wants to buy objects that apart from their beauty and efficiency, have a story to tell. This desire to go beyond ordinary products has proved a new opportunity for craftsmanship, recognizing the value of traditional know-how and putting artisans on the first line. Designers use traditional craftsmanship to ensure/justify the consistency of their creations, whereas design firms involve artisans in order to give a new authenticity to their offer. A top example on this side is Tikau, a Finnish company, which is sided by the NGO Tikau Share to combine Scandinavian design with Indian handicraft traditions. Rural people from Odessa (India) are trained and instructed in the production of handmade home décor and clothing accessories for everyday wear. Raw materials include bamboo, organic cotton, non-dyed wool, banana fiber, cashmere and recycled sari fabrics. Most of the products are non-dyed or use natural dyes, while the use of hand-made processes minimizes energy consumption. The collaboration with 120 artisans in their home villages in India, ensures Tikau with the uniqueness and quality of its products.

Even Ikea, which offers accessible products to a large scale market, decided to collaborate with Yii, a Taiwanese craft and design brand, in order to create Ikea Plus: a collection of ordinary pieces of furniture (the same that we can buy in any Ikea store) modified by traditional craftsmen who apply their knowledge and skills to enrich those simple objects turning them into art pieces.

As pointed out by Micelli in his latest book *Futuro Artigiano* (2012) more and more companies are collaborating with skilled artisans in order to provide the customers with new and efficient solutions. When coming to quality matters and product innovation the know-how coming from masters' expertise can lead to results that are simple and amazing at the same time (as usually tradition does).

In Italy this commitment to traditional craftsmanship is kept in strong consideration, due to the long manufacturing culture and handmade production of the country. During *Fuori Salone 2012*, seven different

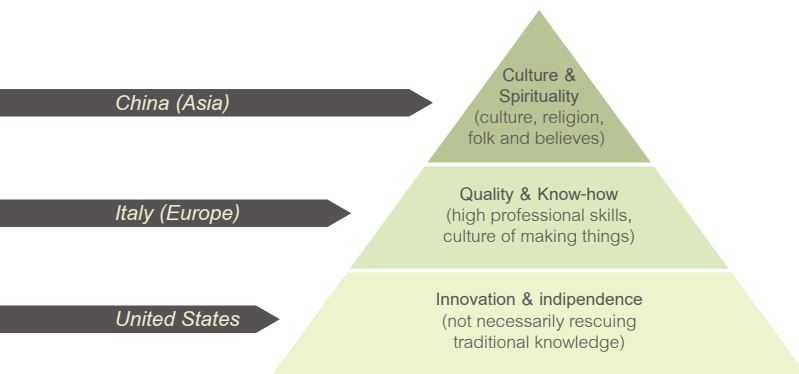
*Figura 20. Writer turned into knife maker Joel Bukiewicz of Cult Brooklyn, portrayed in No2 video of Made By Hand, photograph by Cory White / 2011.*

projects carried out with the collaboration of designers, artisans and local companies, were presented under the name of Analogico/Digitale by Subalterno.

Craftsmanship started to prove its flexibility and innovative side, borrowing tools from design and marketing to reinvent itself with originality. A collection of enthusiastic examples were staged in may 2012 inside the event *Nuovi Italiani Crescono*, during which different stories were shared to show the real potentiality of **entrepreneurial craftsmanship**. This third trend is the latest and most interesting movement inside the craft world, seeing artisans putting themselves on the stage, something that usually has never happened before, apart from few masters. Follow the teaching of design, listening to people's taste and answering the latest requests of a niche market, craftsmen reaffirm their position of original quality producers.

These trends need to be inscribed in the context that originated them in order to understand the motivations leading to a certain result. While in the United States the *makers* movement and the return to handicraft in general can be seen as a seeking for innovation and independence, not necessarily rescuing traditional knowledge, in Italy craftsmanship is strongly related to quality and know-how. It's not a self-taught achievement but the result of years of practice linked to high professional skills that have been at the base of a certain culture of making things, becoming our distinctive feature and ensuring the mastering of an art. There is no need to create a new way back to handicraft like the *makers* do, but to find new dynamics to introduce craftsmanship inside modern market, enabling it to develop autonomously.

The situation presented by China is even more complex, for them craftsmanship is not just the guarantee for quality, the mastering of a



*Graphic 06. Levels of craftsmanship meaning according to context and trend analysis.*

*Figura 21. Making of La Ribella, one of the bike models by Italia Veloce. This Italian workshop manufacturing handmade luxurious bikes was presented during the event *Giovani Italiani Crescono*, photograph by Sand People Communication / 2012.*



profession that translates people's ability and pursue for perfection, but it's first of all the tangible expression of their culture, of local folk and believes. It belongs to an even higher level of commitment, infused with spirituality and cultural value before than beauty and quality. Bounded with thousands of years of history, it needs to be carefully managed inside modern dynamics in order to not loose its meaning and integrity; the preservation of the ability goes hand to hand with the genuineness of its meaning.

Still many aspects of Chinese craftsmanship can be pooled and compared to the Italian one, giving good examples of what paths could be taken.

## Case Studies

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### ANALOGICO/DIGITALE (Italy)

SUBALTERNO1 presented during the Fuori Salone 2012 ANALOGICO/DIGITALE, a meeting between artisans businesses, designers and fablab to create a culture of original and local making. New connections and new ways of working are introduced to produce experimental results, full of manufacturing quality, know-how and hacker spirit of discovery. Curated by Stefano Maffei and Stefano Micelli, the aim of the different projects was to connect the local crafting experience and knowledge with the extraordinary opportunities given by new technologies for digital manufacturing, and with the fabbing culture. A group of brave artisans together with a group of designers chosen by SUBALTERNO1, a gallery specialized in self-production. All of this, enhanced by Tecnificio, a maker facility. A rediscovery of craftsmanship knowledge melted with the latest production technologies, an oxymoron at the heart of an open culture that takes the best of both worlds and tries to start a new path. The final projects were presented in SUBALTERNO1 Design Gallery, through an exhibition set up by the craftsmen + fabbers together with

the designers. The initiative embraces the concept that we can create our own traditions and adapt them to a new set of products that meet the expectations of a modern market. What is proposing is more of a concept than a final solution though. The topic of the exhibition is the relationship between the idea of a perfectly finished and refined crafted object and the idea of an experimentally unfinished object united by a thought about its construction, finishing, integration with other manufacturing processes, components. There is a change of the aesthetic level: well-finished and raw, minimalist and full of details, standard and ultracustomized. Everyday life structures and materials which respect the labour process and the idea of transforming instead of replacing, through ongoing research, design and infinite perfectionism.

#### DOMO (Italy)

There are many fairs in Italy and around Europe presenting the creations of traditional artisans, but not always highly recognized, risking to face a folk reproduction of the past. Sardegna has staged a renewing operation about traditional craftsmanship, taking a long standing event, the *Biennale dell'Artigianato* and turning it into a contemporary proposal after 12 years of inactivity. The people behind it, in collaboration with Domus, faced the hard work of turning an obsolete institution (I.S.O.L.A. L'Istituto sardo Organizzazione Lavoro Artigiano started in the postwar period) into a huge breaking initiative. Promoted by the Regione Sardegna and the Assessorato al Turismo e Commercio, DOMO wants to creatively rethink the craft production, making a tribute to the symbolic center of Sardegna culture: the home. More than 250 objects, proposed by the island artisans, 32 designers and 60 workshops: a complex job of mediation, comparison, knowledge, graft and contamination that should be fostered to enable a deeper change.

The commitment taken by the organization and the participants, has been rewarded by the International jury of XXII Compasso d'Oro ADI with two *compassi d'oro 2011* for DOMO, one for the Ilisso organization and another dedicated to all designers who took part to the event, recognizing "the critical reinterpretation of the craftsmanship role in a specific context".





## Yii (Taiwan)

A permanent crafted-design solution is the one proposed by Yii, a Taiwanese design project conceived by NTCRI (National Taiwan Craft Research Institute) and TDC (Taiwan Design Center). It aims to transform traditional craft in the contemporary context through design, in order to bring extraordinary objects to our immensely impersonal environment. In the first Yii collection, the intuitive wisdom of ancient culture is morphed into the design and production of exceptional objects. Focus is placed on skillful craftsmanship and manufacturing processes that are deeply rooted in a harmonious relation between Man and Nature, to finally propose a way of life that is both intelligent and moral. "Yii"- pronounced as the letter E – is derived from three Chinese characters. The first represents the central idea in Eastern philosophy: the rotation between the sun and the moon, yin and yang- the changing and unchanging laws of nature. The second one represents exquisite craft, and the last one stands for ideas and creativity.

All designers and craftsmen involved in the development of Yii collections are Taiwanese people. They took directly from traditional culture and combine it with contemporary solutions, giving a deeper meaning to every object.

## Etsy (Worldwide)

The best known of its kind, this e-commerce website focuses on handmade or vintage items as well as art and craft supplies. These items cover a wide range including art, photography, clothing, jewelry, food, bath and beauty products, quilts, knick-knacks, and toys. Many individuals also sell craft supplies such as beads, wire, and jewelry-making tools. The site follows in the tradition of open craft fairs, giving sellers personal storefronts where they list their goods for a fee of \$0.20, and getting 3.5% of every sale.

The site was launched in 2005, by iospace, a small company, and it's now a popular side-business as well as a place to buy goods made from recycled and upcycled materials, along with less expensive or more unusual versions of mass-produced items. The unique nature of many of the items for sale is part of their appeal to some shoppers. Sellers range from hobbyists to professional artists who use the site to make a living.

*Figura 22. Panlong Vase by Chen-hsu Liu (designer) and Shi-ren Lu (artisan), Yii Design, Taiwan, photograph by Designboom / 2010.*

*Figura 23. One of the creation presented inside DOMO, Sassari, Italy, photograph by Pietro Paolo Pinna / 2009.*



It's a platform to support small businesses and value authorship and provenance as much as price and convenience, it has been compared to "a crafty cross between Amazon and eBay," and to "your grandma's basement."

### Slow Food (Worldwide)

Slow Food was founded in 1989 to counter the rise of fast food and fast life, the disappearance of local food traditions and people's dwindling interest in the food they eat, where it comes from, how it tastes and how our food choices affect the rest of the world. Even if this movement has nothing to do with the topic that we're facing, the case of Slow Food is an incredible example of preservation and promotion. There is nothing as diverse, local and culturally based as food, nevertheless this no profit organization which started years ago in Italy, has now spread all over the world, thanks to a solution easily reproductive and flexible.

It counts with supporters in 150 countries around the world who are linking the pleasure of good food with a commitment to their community and the environment. Over **100,000 members** joined in **1,300 convivia** – local chapters – worldwide, as well as a network of **2,000 food communities** who practice small-scale and sustainable production of quality foods.

Slow Food develops projects, events and activities all around the world and at all levels - by convivia at the community level and by Slow Food offices at the regional and global level. They've developed different approaches to meet the complexity of their mission:

- **Defend Food Biodiversity:** Through the *Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity* they build the capacity of producers and protect food biodiversity and traditions. New economic models are being put into practice all around the world: 300 Presidia - sustainable food production - projects, 900 Ark of Taste products and Earth Markets.
- **Develop Networks:** Through the *Terra Madre* worldwide network they give a voice to small-scale farmers and food producers and bring them together with cooks, academics and youth to discuss how to improve the food system collaboratively. Meetings are held at the global, regional and local level and resulting projects are promoting knowledge exchange around the globe.

- **Food and Taste Education:** All over the world, Slow Food, its convivia and the Terra Madre network are joining forces to carry out pioneering taste and food education projects at events and with schools, hospitals, canteens and other community institutions. These projects help people to understand where food comes from, how it is produced and by whom, thereby creating awareness, new markets, and positive social change.
- **Connecting Producers and Consumers:** Slow Food organizes some of the world's major food events - Salone del Gusto, Cheese, Slow Fish - as well as many smaller fairs, to showcase sustainable agriculture and artisan food production and connect producers with consumers that want to be aware of the impact of their food choices (we call these consumers co-producers). It also develops the Earth Market project, where producers sell their products directly to consumers and can explain first hand it's qualities and production method.

#### Ecomuseum (Worldwide)

The ecomuseum paradigm, its origins, development and diversity has been described by Davis (1999). In 2004 the 'Long Network' of ecomuseums developed in Europe defined the ecomuseum as '... a dynamic way in which communities preserve, interpret, and manage their heritage for sustainable development. An ecomuseum is based on a community agreement' (*Declaration of Intent of the Long Net Workshop*, Trento (Italy), May 2004). Davis (2007, 119) further simplified this definition, stating that an ecomuseum is 'a community-lead heritage or museum project that supports sustainable development'.

Essential ecomuseum features are:

- The adoption of a territory that may be defined, for example, by landscape, dialect, a specific industry, or musical tradition.
- The identification of specific heritage resources within that territory, and the celebration of these 'cultural touchstones' using in-situ conservation and interpretation.
- The conservation and interpretation of individual sites within the territory is carried out via liaison and co-operation with other organizations.

*Figura 24. Mercato della Terra by Slow Food at La Fabbrica del Vapore, Milano, Italy, photographs by Giulia Barra / 2012.*



- The empowerment of local communities – the ecomuseum is established and managed by local people. Local people decide what aspects of their 'place' are important to them.
- The local community benefits from the establishment of the ecomuseum. Benefits may be intangible, such as greater self-awareness or pride in place, tangible (the rescue of a fragment of local heritage, for example) or economic. There are often significant benefits for those individuals in the local community most closely associated with ecomuseum development (Corsane, 2007).

Ecomuseums can be found everywhere in the world, and it's an alternative solution identifying tangible and intangible heritage through a territorial approach.

#### Local Cultural Workshops<sup>1</sup> (Taiwan)

In 1993, the Council for Cultural Affairs (CCA), Taiwan's central government agency in charge of cultural issues, published a report on Taiwan's contemporary cultural services and facilities, and addressed the issues of the lack of local community involvement in cultural development and the failure of the authorities and local communities to co-operate. The report proposed a stronger link between the local cultural authorities and local people in order to integrate and make best use of existing cultural resource (CCA, 1999). The CCA then (1993) introduced the *Community Renaissance* scheme, aspiring to encourage residents' involvement in local affairs through group discussion.

The rise and development of local cultural workshops in Taiwan was such a response, promoting the development of a sense of cultural ownership. 'Workshop', in Mandarin Chinese, means that an individual or a group of people, with the same interest and target, involved in work which require professional knowledge and skills (MoE 1997).

While it is similar to the use of 'workshop' in the English language, it implies a long-term and distinct organization, rather than a short-term exercise that feeds into other, more major activities. Local Cultural Workshops are defined here as voluntary community groups that operate over a long period to deal with cultural issues at the grassroots level. However, not all the local cultural workshops adopt

<sup>1</sup> from "Heritage, Local Communities and the Safeguarding of 'Spirit of Place' in Taiwan" by Peter Davis, Han-yin Huang International Centre for Cultural and Heritage Studies, Newcastle University, and Wan-chen Liu Graduate Institute for Museum Studies, Fu-Jen Catholic University, Taipei, Taiwan / 2008.

the title 'workshop'; some larger groups with better financial and personnel support use the terms 'associations' or 'foundations'. The ways workshops are managed also vary hugely depending on their financial situation. Income is derived from membership fees in the case of larger groups, or they receive funding from different levels of government. Such support can come from workshops proposing their own projects or by taking advantage of an existing government scheme.

There are several dimensions to the term 'local cultural workshop'. 'Local' does not always refer to the workshops' geographically defined locations, but more often indicates the level of issues dealt with by the local cultural workshops, 'which is native, emotional, grassroots, and nongovernmental' (Chen, quoted in Ting 2001, 10). 'Cultural' describes the type of activities involved, but these can be very varied.

One example is the Sin-hua Local Cultural Workshop, whose director, Mr Jhong, is a retired school headmaster. He started doing fieldwork in relation to his teaching roles and developed a great interest in local history. He started organizing day trips for local residents to interpret different aspects of the heritage of the town. *"Although they are local people, frankly speaking their understanding of Hsin-hua is limited to the town center... they've never paid much attention to other parts, even when they walk past, they've never paid any attention"* (Jhong, 2006). The tour includes historic streets, local temples, and the scenic areas on the outskirts of the town that are rich in wildlife. The participants, Jhong described, 'were surprised that "why haven't I seen these before?"' These activities engage local residents with knowing and learning about their own place and promote a sense of pride in their town.

*"That was to make up for the problem resulted from the long-term loose attachment to place and the issue of place identity. As soon as such motivation appeared, there were more or less a thousand workshops at its peak"* (Jhiang: Kia-a-tao Association, 2006)

Local Cultural workshops are able to capture a more democratic definition of heritage, one that may not represent the grandeur and magnificence of elite society, but does have significant associations with local life, the local heritage that people can easily relate to from their own life experiences.



## Artigianato del Pinerolese (Italy)

The fair hosted annually inside the town of Pinerolo (Turin) started 36 years ago thanks to an initiative of Giovanni Vicentin and Ezio Giaj in order to trigger new commercial and promotional opportunities around the local craft production. The event, organized by CAN, Confartigianato, CasArtigiani and sponsored by different local partners, has reached more and more success in the area, turning the medieval buildings and historic parts of the town into a stage for two generations of artisans. The entire layout winds through narrow streets, assigning spaces to different craft typologies, with not just the goal of displaying the artifacts, but also the techniques used to make them, while combining supply and demand. Artists of craft, innovative craftsmen, specialists, hobbyist and craft schools, all the actors have a dedicated area where to perform or sell their creations, surrounded by food and wine booths from local producers. Every edition presents an artistic contest with different guests, Italian and foreign, according to a specific skill (this year was *wood carving*). Moreover each time an important reality is hosted to present its traditions and tastes to people's attention (this year was the *Evançon Mountain Community*, Valle D'Aosta).

The event lasts four days and involves a large portion of local community thanks to a broad offer: from performances, markets, educational offers (for anybody who would like to become an artisan) and contests during the day, up to entertainments and concerts during the evening, becoming an appealing attraction for visitors of every age. It's interesting to see how old artisans work side by side with 16-year-old kids still learning the craft, or how middle-age people approaches the craftsmen while working and ask them about their job and the techniques they use. Every moment of the day sees different visitors: families during the day to buy local food and show traditional craft to their kids, youth in the afternoon and during the night looking for original products and waiting for the upcoming concert.

Figura 24. Artista Pierre Varesano (from France), 36° Artigianato del Pinerolese, Italy, photograph by Giulia Barra / 2012.

## China-Italy

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The similarities that intervene between these two countries, especially if we consider the manufacturing industry and the craftsmanship knowledge, create a challenging pool of opportunities that more and more often are fostered by both sides.

Italy, a bit late on the other countries, has seized the opportunity presented by an open Chinese market, but with a different approach. While many foreign countries move their production inside China subcontracting Chinese factories to do the job and lower the prices, Italy has a strong concern about quality issue and a specific idea of what manufacturing means, which brings Italian companies to open their own factories in China, with Italian standards and Italian machinery (which are often the only ones able to reach the quality needed). Chinese manufacturers, on the other hand, came to learn from Italians in order to improve their skills and reach new levels of competence, creating collaborations with Italian companies and buying Italian machinery.

The project *Cento Finestre*, promoted by Confartigianato Ancona and



other institutions, started in 2008 with the idea of promoting small manufacturing businesses which can offer important services to those brands and companies that want to qualify their production on the international market (Micelli, 2012). The internal Chinese market is growing, free from the competition of foreign companies, and the best opportunity is to sell qualified consultancy services to Chinese businesses, enabling them to create an offer suitable for the domestic market. Since it started *Cento Finestre* brought over a hundred Chinese entrepreneurs interested in Italian competencies, giving them the opportunity to use the label *Concept by Italy* (the official Italian contribution to the manufacturing of the final product).

This is one of the solutions found by Italian artisans to promote their job and keep on making a living out of it despite the increasing loss of work due to market changes and globalization. But we cannot see the same happening the other way around: the know-how and the skills of Chinese craftsmen doesn't seem to be required yet by big companies, remaining strongly linked to a cultural background and often to a popular use.

Inside the Italian context, traditional craftsmanship is slowly finding a new way of expression, it's reinventing itself in order to use its techniques and know-how to respond new challenges. As in the case of DOMO, many other examples can be found with the same goal of combining artisans' skills with designers' fresh approach; Fabrica, the international education facility sponsored by Benetton, has sent few talented artists and designers in Puglia, to work with the ceramic artisans of Grottaglie. Interpersonal communication hasn't been easy to manage, but 50 projects came out from this meeting, 7 of them became real products manufactured with the collaboration of local artisans.

The same concept was promoted by the Can of Vicenza with the project *AAA Cercasi Nuovo Artigiano*: a group of designers from the Royal College of Art together with Italian designers lived one month in Vicenza, in deep contact with local artisans involved in different kind of craftsmanship, from glass to goldsmith handicraft, from paper to marble, with the aim of producing different prototypes for the attention of the medias and the industry.

There are also craftsmen who operate individually, opening their activity to a new level of entrepreneurship and adapting their

knowledge in order to create high-end products for a niche market. For example **W-eye**, wooden glasses developed by Dorianò Mattelone, a thirty-year experience carpenter, in collaboration with the designer Matteo Ragni.

In Italy craftsmanship means first of all quality, and modern artisans are the key for innovative solutions infused by traditional knowledge. They might be part of big brands and firms teams, such as Geox, Bottega Veneta, Armani, they might be included inside temporary projects like DOMO, AAA Cercasi Nuovo Artigiano, ANALOGICO/DIGITALE, or they might find their own way individually, with a strong entrepreneur initiative. But in any case the solution is always the same: high-quality luxurious products for niche markets with specific requests or with a particular attention to the handicraft background.

During Shanghai Expo, Davide Rampello and Beniamino Quinteri put together a big exposition space dedicated to craftsmanship work which hosted, during six months of opening, different experiences, from Cremona's luthiers to Ferragamo's shoemakers, from the Florentine restorers to the artisans of Frau. Chinese people who entered the Italian Pavillion during Expo, witnessed with huge curiosity and interests the work of craftsmen while stuffing armchairs or manufacturing shoes behind the glass separating the lab from the visitors. *"For once we've been able to stage the link between our crafts and the capitalist industry facing globalization. No folk breaks. No costume representations or barbecue areas. Just the craft production as the special ingredient of a modern Made in Italy."* (Micelli, 2012).

China is not there yet, and has a huge culture to face before "selling" its craftsmanship to contemporary use. Certainly a different approach is needed, a new way that can recognize the value of centuries of history delivering solutions for a modern society. The philosophy and the meaning hold by Chinese handicraft expressions must remain intact, must keep delivering to the people the same message and feeling, but it's not an easy challenge. The moral that has been the essence of many ancient activities is getting weaker in a globalized world, unless it finds the right context to keep flourishing.







## Field Research

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Presentation of the field research (place, people) and the data collected. Identification of Cultural Systems and Territorial Capital together with a complete Mapping of Shanghai craftsmanship panorama.

## Cultural System and Territorial Capital

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*For intangible to be kept alive, it must remain relevant to a culture and be regularly practiced and learned within communities and between generations. Communities and groups who practice these traditions and customs everywhere in the world have their own systems for transmitting their knowledge and skills, usually dependant on word of mouth rather than written texts. Safeguarding activities must therefore always involve the communities, groups and, where appropriate, individuals that bear such heritage. Safeguarding means making sure that intangible cultural heritage remains an active part of life for today's generations that they can hand on to tomorrow's. (UNESCO)*

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One of the main characteristics of ICH is its inclusiveness, and the fact that it grows and develops contributing to the cohesion of the local community, providing continuity to its identity (Valsecchi e

*Figura 16. Woman in the street, Shanghai, China. Photograph by Francesca Terzi / 2011.*

Pollastri, 2012) and creating a strong relation with the place. The territory itself is recognized to have a peculiar value that in literature can be addressed as the concept of “territorial capital” (Villari 2005; Zurlo 2003). Such territorial capital describes the place as an articulated set of material resources and immaterial values, physical goods, human resources, activities, habits, know-how, expertise, cultural forms and identity governance structure, externalization and communication. The territorial capital is the synthesis of all the values and resources that characterize a territory. It is described as a multi-layer structure, on which design intervention can drive innovation by integrating these resources.

In the case of traditional craftsmanship, the immaterial heritage of knowledge produces artifacts that are functional and practical, it takes local stories and identity and translates them into tangible objects used to support the community in their activities, becoming a resource of the territorial capital of the area. The elements included in the territorial capital actively interact with the local community, following certain dynamics that define a *cultural system*<sup>1</sup> based on tangible and intangible elements.

The showcase of Chongming island<sup>2</sup>, with its bamboo masters and the rural community is a natural example of territorial capital inserted inside a cultural system. The bamboo growing on the island is the primary tangible resource used by bamboo weavers like Mr. Shi. Thanks to his intangible knowledge, he reshapes the raw material and produces tangible artifacts able to support people’s activities. The local restaurants are provided with bamboo steamers to cook, local peasants use special bamboo baskets to dry the rice, and a countless of other bamboo items are produced for everyday use.

As pointed out inside “Design Entwines” (project by Francesca Valsecchi and Serena Pollastri, 2012) the intangible heritage of bamboo masters can be associated with the concept of “typical knowledge” (Lupo, 2008), because it represents a kind of distributed heritage that is not manifested in distinctive spectacular creative forms but rooted in activities, places and history. This typical knowledge embodies the social fabric because it can represent *productive* knowledge (the ability of a community to make, like the traditional crafts), but it’s also *relational*, (because it includes social habits, rituals, customs within the community), and *re-productive* (when defined as the identity of a place by the external communication of

<sup>1</sup> A cultural system is the interaction of different elements of culture that act together following unwritten rules that are naturally perceived by the actors of the system.

<sup>2</sup> Included inside next chapter *Craft Hunting*, where different craftsmen are presented along with their stories.

the community, languages and all the forms of expressions, or the “way to represent” a community). In the UNESCO definition typical knowledge is a crucial factor for local cultural identity and a key issue for sustainable development. Artifacts that embody cultural meaning are “open-ended knowledge system” (Sennett, 2009), a repertory of forms and processes that can be used as a source and raw material to be manipulated and adapted to local evolution.

The cultural system that starts with a typical knowledge is made out of connections, that are at the base of its survival and the passing over of the knowledge and cultural value of the intangible heritage. One of the aims of design is to create such connections, and therefore trigger a cultural system to foster the preservation of the intangible heritage. The task, is to sustain the whole system as a living entity and not just to collect ‘intangible artifacts’. According to Wang Yuan “historic areas are the most suitable places to conserve the intangible”.

Dongguan area, inclusive of the Paper-cutting Museum, in the city of Yangzhou, Jiangsu province, is an interesting case study of an intervention aimed to reestablish a local cultural system already present in the past and lost during the modernization of the city.

*“The history of Dongguan street can date back to Tang Dynasty. At that time, Yangzhou was the economic center of China, while Dongguan street was the economic center of Yangzhou. The Grand Canal passed through here and the wharf for disembarking was just located at the beginning of the street. Until the end of Qing Dynasty, it had always been flourishing except for being deserted for a short period. Such long history makes Dongguan street embody so many cultural heritages. The material features are not in fact our main concern on this occasion, but rather the intangible characteristics of the historic area. The determinant character of a historic area is its intangible value which is the spirit of it. Any tangible culture must be supported by intangible value and any intangible culture must rely on the tangible to be visualized.” (Wang Yuan, 2008)*

This area was identified as an historic heritage and restored not just in its physical appearance but also in its cultural dynamics, enhancing a new cultural system that supports the tangible and intangible resources of the territorial capital.

Inside this new context, with the collaboration of UNESCO, has been inserted the Museum of Paper-cutting ICH, which is itself a little



system on its own with tangible and intangible elements:

- Museum of paper-cutting (presenting a collection of artifacts together with the history behind the origin of this craft expression);
- Store inside the museum (where the items can be purchased);
- Events and festivals held inside the Museum for special occasions (involving other cultural forms, like the guqin performance);
- Internal school and workshop (where the paper-cutting knowledge is transmitted and practiced, to ensure its continuity);

and, in the background, all the traditional meaning related to the art of paper-cutting and its use inside the house. The actors of such a system have different roles.

#### **The users**

- Visitors (they come to see and learn about this intangible cultural heritage)
- Customers (people who buy the paper-cutting produced by the museum's masters, to bring home as a gift or for personal use)

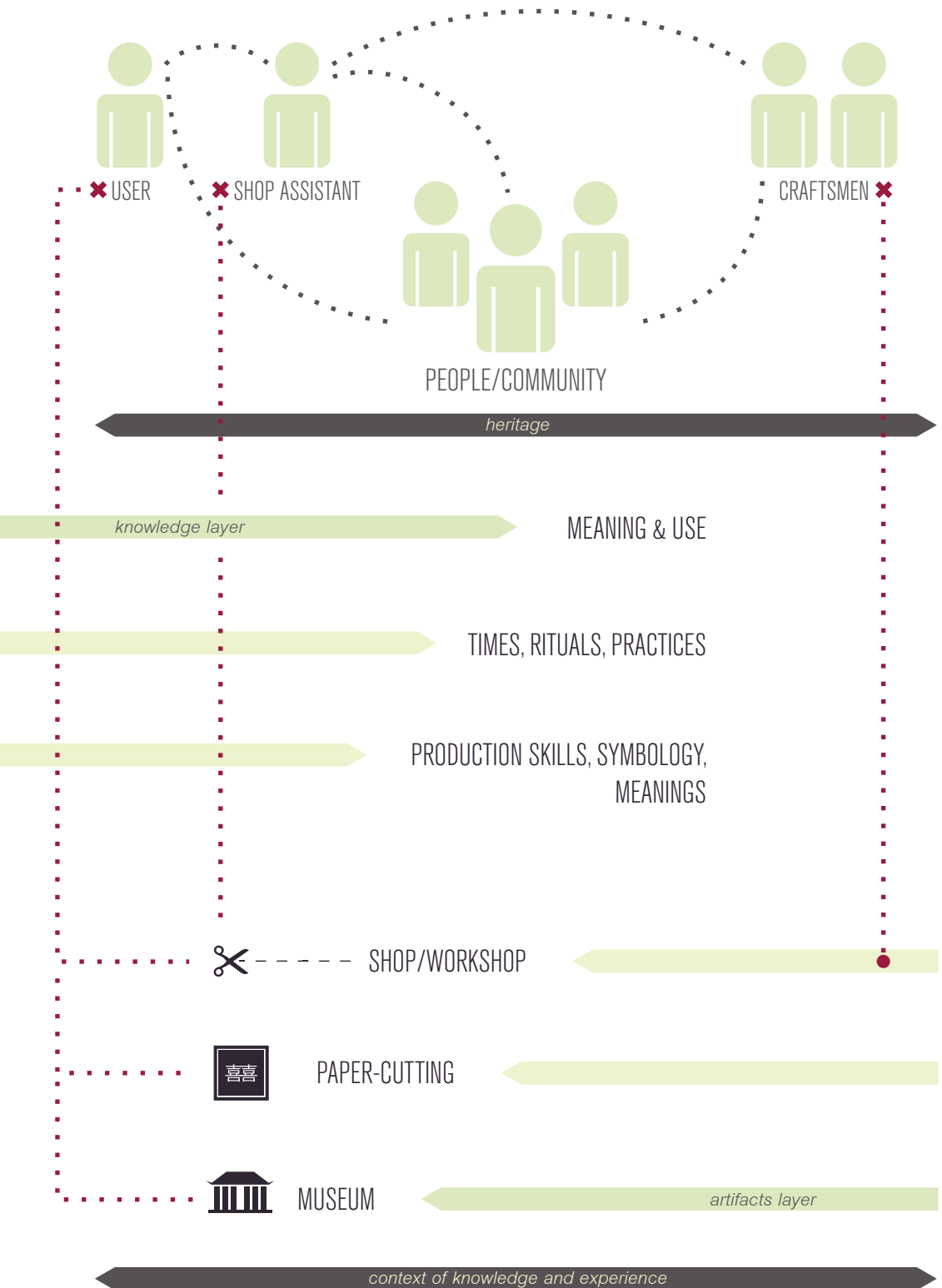
#### **The craftsmen**

- Masters (they use their expertise to produce fine paper-cutting for sell, and they educate other craftsmen inside the museum's school)
- Students (they come to learn and keep alive the craft production)

**The shop assistant/museum employee** (they have broadened knowledge about paper-cutting and rituals, they usually are the reference point for customers to decide which kind of paper-cutting is more suitable for a certain occasion in relation to Chinese tradition);

Two main relations can be identified: artifacts exchange and knowledge exchange (Lupo, 2008). This establishes strong connections and ensures the system with continuity. The production of goods, representing the local culture and used by the community to keep alive tradition, together with the transmission of the knowledge maintain the intangible cultural heritage active and meaningful inside its context.

Intangible Cultural Heritage System



## Craft Hunting

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### The places

SHANGHAI: since the final solution is going to have a local scope, I concentrated most of my research inside the city and immediately around it in order to collect the real experience of craftsmen operating in the area, the dynamics and the channels together with the opportunities and gaps. I talked to craftsmen, experts and designers to get a more complete perspective on the matter.

NANJING: just a bit less than two hours of train away from Shanghai, I visited the Nanjing Yunjin Brocade Research Institute (Unesco Intangible Cultural Heritage) to get in direct contact with an example of current preservation and understand better the working path of their solution.

YANGZHOU: four hours of bus away from Shanghai in the Jiangsu province, Yangzhou is a completely different reality, with its specific cultural area and its identity. There I had the opportunity to visit Mr. Sun business of handmade lanterns, the Paper-cutting ICH Museum (created with UNESCO support) and the Dongguan historic area, embodiment of many cultural heritages.

The people<sup>1</sup>

In order to get a complete and exhaustive view, the interviews and researches included craftsmen, experts and designers with different knowledges and experiences to bring in. Moreover a survey has been conducted (during a prototyping session) among people interested in traditional arts & crafts in order to get a feedback about their perception and interests.

Experts

YOLANDA VON HAGEN: a German photographer who's been living in China for several years, with a good knowledge of Chinese culture and language. She works inside *Shanghai Flaneur* and she's an associate professor of the *Institut of Photographic Education*. She gives photographic workshops and walking tours in Shanghai, with the opportunity to get in touch with local culture. She's the organizer of the first *Arts & Crafts Market* held in Shanghai on June 9, 2012 and meant to become a fix appointment every six months.

*"In Shanghai there are usually a lot of fairs, but you always see the same people around, and 90% of them are foreigners. It's like having the same community moving from fair to fair with the same things."*

*"There are a lot of westerners staying here, but most of them live in some kind of bubble. They can spend 3-4 years in this city and all they do is related to foreign things."*

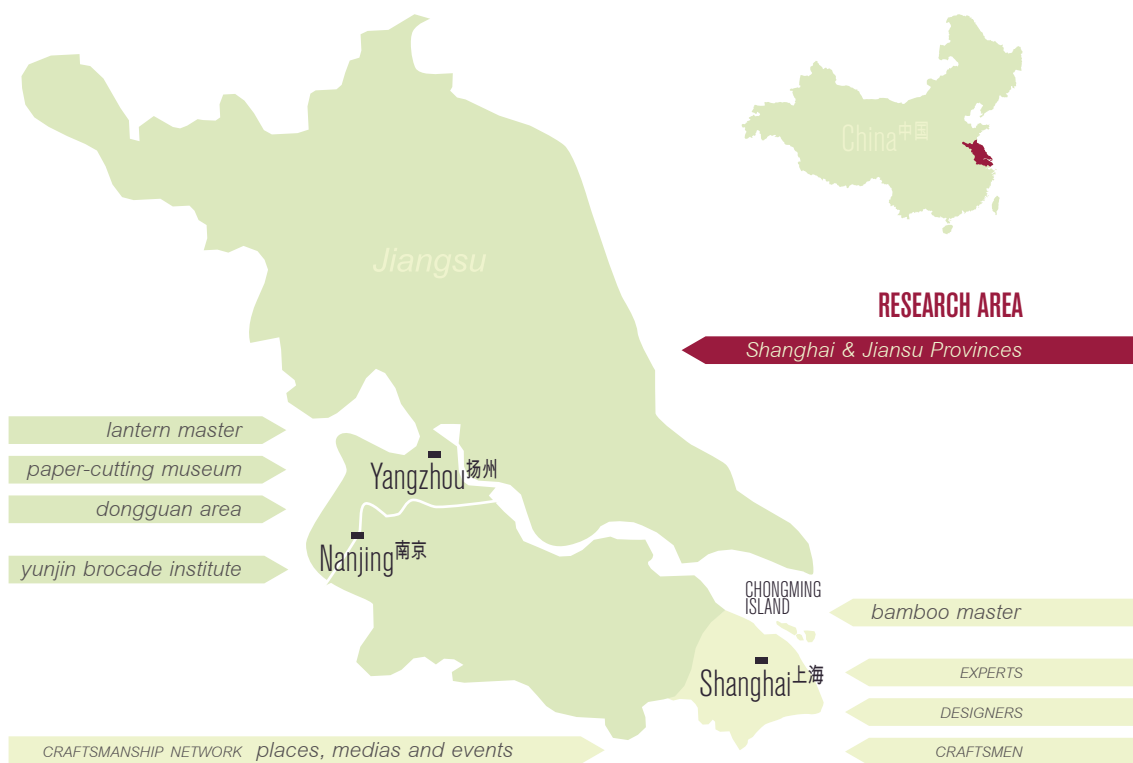
*"In Shanghai is very hard to get in contact with the local culture, they are so used to the foreigners. I lived in Beijing before and it was much easier"*

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MRS CATHY: she's working at the *Nanjing Yunjin Research Institute*, which is also a Museum and a private company for brocade production. She guided me through the discovery of one of the intangible cultural heritages officially included in the Representative List of UNESCO, helping me understand the history, the components and the system behind it.

*"This is not a public museum, it's a private company. We sell what we produce in the store downstairs or in the fabric-shops around the city, in order to sustain*

<sup>1</sup> For complete interviews, videos, pictures and links, please visit the blog of the project at [www.chinesecraftproject.weebly.com](http://www.chinesecraftproject.weebly.com).



#### EXPERTS

Yolanda Von Hagen (Shanghai)  
Mrs. Cathy (Nanjing)  
The Pottery Workshop (Shanghai)

#### DESIGNERS

LuRu Home (Shanghai)  
Nicole Teng (Shanghai)  
Yun Peng (Shanghai)  
LK (Shanghai)

#### CRAFTSMEN

Benny Peng (Shanghai)  
Cen Brothers (Shanghai)  
Mr. Sun (Yangzhou)  
Mr. Liu (Shanghai)  
Mr. Shi (Congming Island, Shanghai)  
Yunjin Brocade Weaver (Nanjing)

Graphic 06. Field research overview: places visited and people interviewed.

*ourselves and the research institute.”*

*“Everyone knows about our brocade, people will come directly here to buy, even Western people, there’s no need to export.”*

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THE POTTERY WORKSHOP: established in Hong Kong in 1985 and counts now with two shops based in Shanghai and four workshops (Hong kong, Jingdezhen, Shanghai, Beijing). The workshops are spaces serving both as Ceramic Art Education and Communication Center, where people can take classes or directly rent the space to work on their own creations. The shops sell the creations of master craftsmen based in Jingdezhen (the city dedicated to ceramics creation).

*“Half of our students are Chinese and half are Western. They need space and someone who can instruct and follow them in order to produce their own creations.”*

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#### Designers

LURU HOME: two American girls who just began with their wholesale business presenting a fresh collection of pillows, napkins and dish clothes, all using a traditional hand-made Chinese fabric that follows a 3000-year-old technique, and combining it with a western taste. They started with personal objects to decorate their house, but the increasing requests of people to get similar products put them in business with a family of craftsmen outside Shanghai who produce the batik that is the main character of their creations.

*“Chinese folks are a lot more familiar with the fabrics and therefor it’s not that exciting to them, but we saw this great opportunity to sell outside of China to people who would have found it new and interesting and really special.”*

*“There’s a lot of global trending happening, people are interested in getting products with a story that came from somewhere else and put it in their home. You can find a lot of stuff from India, but folk Chinese craftsmanship is not on the market place yet!”*

*“It was thanks to a sourcing agent that we could find the artisan families to work with. Everything happened by chance.”*

*“The artisans are very very concerned about keeping their knowledge, we really wanted to make a video to show how the fabric is done so that people could connect a little bit more with what they were buying and how it’s made, but unfortunately they didn’t let us do it. We also deal with privacy concerns on our hand so we understand them. We don’t show them the final product, cause at the same time it’s our intellectual property.”*

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NICOLE TENG: Taiwanese designer who moved to Shanghai 4 years ago and became gallery curator at *Plum Gallery*. Last year she started *Brut Cake*, her first brand, producing original cups and other handmade ceramics accessories in Jingdezhen workshop. She also renews pieces of old furniture and makes bags out of original 20-year-old Chinese fabrics.

*“I believe only HAND-MADE products can deliver the genuine heart of the “Maker”. That’s why I devote myself to handcrafted, useful and functional objects of art, hoping more people will be moved by and treasure the essence of raw materials.”*

---

YUN PENG: a Chinese product designer who guided me through the discovery of problems and dynamics in order to have a prototype made. Starting with a craftsman and finally ending up to a rapid prototyping company in Shanghai, cost and timing are usually the main leading reasons, with consequent disadvantages.

*“I tried to collaborate with an artisan but it’s just too expensive and he doesn’t have any more the right tools for this kind of job. ABS prototype is the fastest and “cheaper” way to do it.”*

*“I have no insurance they won’t copy my product and reproduce it, the only way is to move fast and sell enough pieces by the time someone else comes out*

*with the same solution.”*

---

LK: he has been studying fashion design at Shanghai University and got accepted at Central Saint Martins College. Through the reinterpretation of traditional costumes from the south of China he creates futuristic collections. He's looking for visibility inside design fairs in order to get access to more important events, such as the *Shanghai Fashion Week*.

*“I take Chinese tradition to give a certain feeling to my creations, but then everything is reproduced using technology”*

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#### Craftsmen

BENNY PENG: head of the *A&B Studio*, since 15 years he's been making fine quality silk albums and boxes all by hand. Before that he was already famous for his frames, then he simply took interest in this new kind of craftsmanship and started self-teaching himself. Four other people decided to follow him in this little business and they've been working together for the last 10 years, making silk-covered boxes of any sizes and colors while Mr. Benny takes care of special requests, customized products and new designs, selling both to Chinese and western people.

*“I don't have many Chinese customers, most of them are Western people interested in Chinese products and tradition, they want to bring back home a piece of our culture and they come here for our quality.”*

*“We don't do any kind of advertisement, it's mostly word-of-mouth.”*

*“No one ever asked me to teach him/her, just sometimes kids want to try, but if someone ever asked me to learn I would charge quite a lot. I wouldn't just teach how to do this job, but how to start the whole business and that would take a lot of time away from my own business!”*

*“In Western Universities you have a lot of workshops where you can learn how to do mock-ups and other manual stuff, but in China is very bad, it's just theory*



*and Chinese students don't learn how to physically make things."*

---

CEN BROTHERS: these two Shanghainese brothers (respectively 60 and 52 years old) are the only one left in the city who can make traditional woks by hand, from a slab of carbon-steel to a perfect shaped product, recognized as Model Workers of the Communist Party. Their business is officially called *Xinyi Iron Wok Shop* and almost all of their sales goes to restaurants and hotels, but also curious foreigners and ordinary Chinese people. One of their handicraft appear on the cover of *"Breath of a Wok"* by Grace Young, "treat a good wok well, and it'll last 20-25 years, or longer". Cen's son went to college, graduated with a physics degree, and now works for a big company, thus there's no one left to teach.

*"The business is very good, but I'm tired. The work is too hard and I'm too old."*

*"It's not about whether I like it or not, it's what I do for a living."*

---

MR. SUN: after taking his diploma and working for a while, he started this craftsmanship business 15 years ago, producing handmade lanterns and sets for traditional celebrations. They take care of the whole process, starting from the design, going through the realization of the skeleton and the inner mechanism animating the biggest items, until the final fabric covering, everything handmade. They are now requested for important events all around the country, and they also organize workshops and public demonstration to inform people on what they do. Inside nursing homes, disables hospitals, hotel lobbies, they take materials and tools and show how they work.

*"I decided to start this activity because I was very much interested in traditional Chinese stuff. There are not many people around China doing the same job as we do."*

*"We have people who want to learn, students coming here who wants to start."*

*"The design starts with Photoshop and other computer*



*modeling to have a previous view of how the final set will look like. Then we start making everything by hand.”*

*“The design follows the tradition, because every symbol has a meaning in Chinese culture.”*

*“The lowest salary inside our workshop is 300 yuan per day. During the high season we have a maximum of 15 craftsmen.”*

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MR. LIU: he's a native 62-year-old Shanghai carpenter with a small workshop on the street. He's been open for 18 years and he mainly produces stools and plain-wood furniture sets. In the past he used to create also miniature furniture and bird cages, but the market changed and he didn't sell them anymore. He's happy with his customers, they're enough and good, and he can sustain his family, but anyway he wouldn't pass the activity on to his children.

*“I don't make all the things I used to produce in the past. People don't buy them anymore”*

*“My customers are good. The bad customers won't buy, my prices are very high!”*

*“I don't need to explain my customers the product, they are regular, they already know.”*

*“Once they put me in a promotional catalog, but I don't need more promotion, the customers I have are enough”*

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MR. SHI: an old craftsman living on Chongming Island and sustaining the local community's needs and traditional lifestyle with bamboo weaved products for everyday use such as baskets, rice containers, steamers and more. He's been doing this job for 50 years and loves his job. It takes 3 years to learn and his mother was the one teaching him. He usually works inside his house, people ask him for specific products, size and quantity or he manufactures ordinary products to sell at the local market. Since the new bridge was built also Chinese tourists are coming to take a piece of his original craftsmanship home with them.

*“ After the bridge was built more and more people*

*Figura 17. Mr. Shi preparing the bamboo to weave one of his beautiful baskets, Chongming Island, Shanghai, China. Photograph by Giulia Barra / 2012.*

*are coming. Many tourists find out on the internet that Chongming island still has these kind of craftsmen so they come here and ask the people on the island where they can find these handicraft and they lead them here. Once they go back they'll tell their friends and new people will come."*

*"There is no one following this craft. Only me and several other old people are left to do this kind of work, no young people!"*

---

YUNJIN BROCADE WEAVER: she's been working inside the *Nanjing Yunjin Brocade Institute* for seven years and she's still learning. Her sister checks and advises her while she's weaving, and her husband operates the upper part of the loom. She doesn't particularly enjoy what she does, it's just a job to make a living. The salary is based on how much they weave, so they can manage their schedule freely.

*"It's very tiring and I don't want my children to do the same."*

*"There is no certificate or qualification, I've simply learned how to do it."*

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### The survey

A written survey was conducted during an Arts & Crafts event in order to get the right audience. While the interviews were addressed to those people directly involved in the craftsmanship field, the survey was used to understand better the knowledge level, interests and priorities of the people looking for local craftsmanship, and what sort of network they use. The results were very useful for a previous evaluation of possible ideas and scenario building, highlighting gaps and anticipating failing solutions.

Being the survey in English, the majority of the people who answered it were expats, but also many Chinese took part in it. The majority of the respondents (61.1%) have been living some year in Shanghai, so they should have developed a good knowledge of the city and get sufficiently in touch with local Chinese culture (78.8% have seen

a Chinese craftsmanship performed). Regarding possible networks used to get to know about local arts and crafts, no one was able to provide any satisfactory answers, there doesn't seem to be any specific channel addressed to the local culture, and if present it's not sufficiently known. Often the information passes through informal channels, such as the **word-of-mouth**.

Regarding the handicrafts purchase, people usually go to markets, fairs and exhibitions to look for them. Right after there are little shops in the French Concession, followed by artisans workshops or artists studios. Finally we find touristic places related to the design field such as Tianzifang and M50, commercial places like Yuyuan or cultural ones like Museums. When asked where they would trust better to buy, almost half of the people chose **workshop**, living behind shops, street sellers and museums. The fact that they trust workshops better, but usually go to fairs or little shops when looking for local crafts could be due to a gap of information about existing workshops around the city and therefore the necessity to look for a link: local markets and little shops often refer directly to a workshop inside the city (Pudong in most of the cases), where things are designed and manufactured, keeping everything local and giving a better sense of trust to the customers. The decision leading to the purchase is often the **handmade** aspect of the product, followed by the fact of being a traditional piece or an innovative one. This actually means that people is concerned by the manufacturing process and the inner value of the product, which is the reason why they look into craftsmanship and local art.

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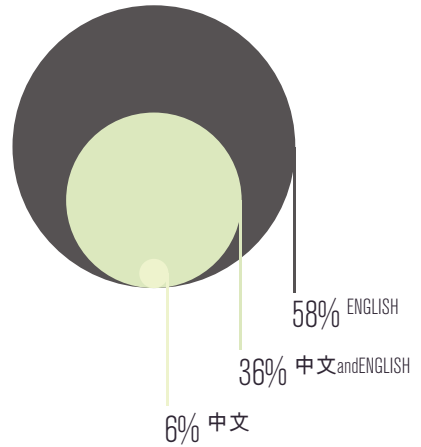
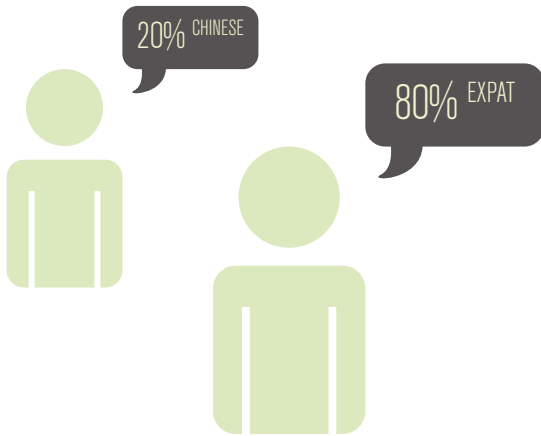
*I'm interested in traditional craftsmanship because I want to blend in with local environment*

*I have a high interest – if it's something original and not mass production or fake*

*I like it as a gift for friends as gift or to learn doing it myself*

*I love the mix of traditional and modern, taking old and making it new*

*I do care a lot about traditions and cultures. It's a souvenir and a way to push Chinese to not forget their roots, China is evolving too much!*



61.1% SOME YEARS

27.8% SEVERAL MONTHS

11.1% 1-2 MONTHS

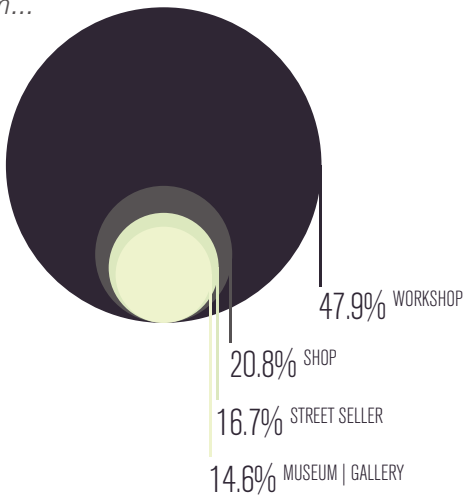
*I've been living in SH for...*

78.8% YES

21.2% NO

*I've already seen Chinese craftsmanship performed*

*I trust better to buy from...*

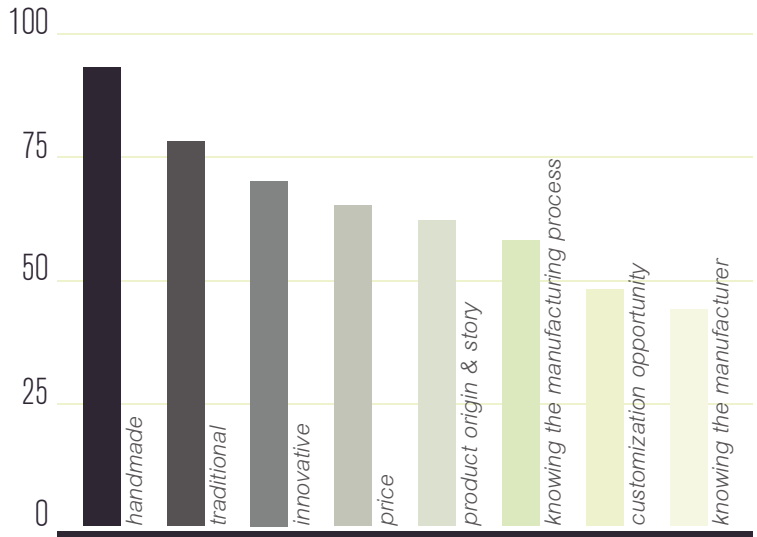


53.6% YES

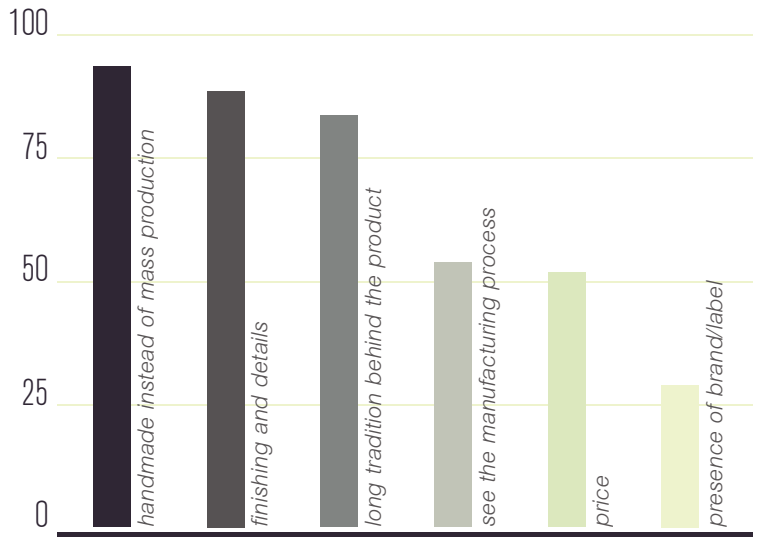
46.4% NO

*If there was a label certifying the quality of the product, would you trust it better?*

What makes you buy a product over another?



What affects your quality perception?



To buy a piece of original Arts & Crafts I usually go...



1<sup>st</sup> MARKET|FAIR|EXHIBITION



2<sup>nd</sup> LITTLE SHOP



3<sup>rd</sup> WORKSHOP



4<sup>th</sup> TIANZIFANG



5<sup>th</sup> M50



6<sup>th</sup> YUYUAN|LOCAL AREAS| MUSEUM

*I want to be different from the masses*

*It mostly depends on the price*

---

A very interesting point is the quality perception. When asked if a label certifying the quality of the product would make them trust it better, the answers were almost half and half, with a little advantage for the yes (53.6%), but when asked to put in order what affects their quality perception, the presence of a brand/label got the last position, which means it's not so important after all. The first guarantee keeps on being the handmade aspect, followed by finishing & details, and the long tradition behind the product, which probably ensures the efficiency of its realization.

Very interesting are the insights motivating whether or not a quality label makes a product more trustworthy.

---

*Yes, there should be an org. behind taking care/control of quality standards (although labels can be copied/faked as well...)*

*Yes, it should be a proof of commitment to certain standards*

*The name and contact information is enough, you trust people if you get to know them*

*No, who certify the certifier?*

*No, certifying labels can also be fake*

*No, I trust face value*

*No, this is China*

*No, sometimes real quality cannot be certified and my quality perception is different from others'*



# Mapping

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Apart from the collection of opinions and living experiences, the field research led to the drawing up of a complete mapping about distribution channels, events, media, connectors, etc in the city of Shanghai around the handicraft and creative world.

## Distributions channels

Inside the city we can identify three main channels that put us in touch with handmade products and original craftsmanship. We can choose to address to **TOURISTIC AND NOTORIOUS PLACES**, especially created or developed in order to meet the tourists expectations and needs. This places are mainly situated downtown, easily accessible and well known by both the local community and the tourists coming to shanghai (Chinese and Western).

- **Tianzifang (田子坊)** is an arts and crafts enclave that has developed from a renovated Shikumen residential district in the French Concession area. It comprises a neighborhood of labyrinthine alleyways off Taikang Road (泰康路) and its popular

for the small craft stores, coffee shops, local merchants, trendy art and design studios. Usually the handicraft products are produced inside workshops in Shanghai (Pudong) and then sold by third parties.

- **Xintiandi (新天地)**, situated in Shanghai downtown near Huai Hai Road (淮海路) is an affluent car-free shopping, eating and entertainment district composed of an area of reconstituted traditional shikumen houses on narrow alleys, which now hosts book stores, cafés, restaurants, and shopping malls. The redevelopment was designed by Benjamin T. Wood and Nikken Sekkei International and it is considered one of the first lifestyle centers in China. Here is possible to find many lifestyle stores or little shops with high quality handmade products manufactured directly inside workshops in Shanghai (Pudong) and then sold by third parties.
- **Old Town**, also known as Yuyuan (豫园), centered between Renmin Road and Zhongshan Road, it is located southeast of the city center and presents ancient but renovated features (most of it has been renewed for commercial purposes). It is the kingdom of souvenirs and touristic stores presenting all sort of Chinese craftsmanship and folk art, often with problems to understand what are really valuable handmade products and what are cheap touristic solutions. Inside Old Town is also possible to find the Folk Handicrafts Performance Team established by the Shanghai Yuyuan Culture Promoting & Publicizing Co., Ltd to maintain and sponsor traditional handicrafts among Chinese folks.
- **Fuzhou Road (福州路)** known as a cultural center by most Shanghai residents, is a street of bookshops, paper stores and engraved seals, where everything related to Chinese calligraphy and its art can be found. Handmade engraving is still performed by most of the shops according to customers requests.
- **M50** at 50 Moganshan Lu, is one of the most well-known creative spaces in Shanghai, it's a thriving hub of galleries and studios with exhibitions from both up-and-coming artists and established names in Shanghai's art world. Handicraft products can be found mainly in the sector of ceramics and pottery manufactured in the famous town of Jindezheng.
- **1933** is a massive solid concrete maze slaughterhouse built in early

20th century and renewed to be used as creative space, hosting restaurants, creative retails, design companies, artists, galleries and design and exhibition spaces across four heritage-listed building. Even if it cannot be directly linked to local craftsmanship, this interesting location is still developing, and in the near future could become another channel for local handmade design or creative products involving traditional craftsmanship and Chinese culture.

- **Famous stores** can be found downtown, presenting high-quality traditional Chinese craftsmanship modeled into modern design objects. Two interesting examples of such stores are *ShangXia*, which proposes fine manufactured products made by handicraft masters whose name is well known, and *Spin*, a collective of designers and craftsmen who work together to create beautiful ceramic items for the house.

In alternative **CULTURAL PLACES** are other channels connecting directly with traditional arts and crafts world, educating through history and exhibitions, and selling original pieces of Chinese art.

- The **Shanghai Museum** located in People's Square present different forms of ancient Chinese art such as Chinese seals, Lacquer furniture, Chinese ceramics, etc.
- The **Nankeen Exhibition Hall** is hidden inside a lane in Changle Road, French Concession area. This museum and shop, started by Japanese artist Kubo Mase, displays and sells items made by hand, providing explanations as well as samples of traditional Nankeen cloth.
- **Liuli China Museum** located in Taikang Road, is the first museum in China that features a comprehensive contemporary collection of liuli (glass works) art from China and overseas, founded by renowned glass artist and sculptor Loretta Hui-shan Yang and her husband Zhang Yi.
- **Shanghai Art Museum** located in the former clubhouse building of the Shanghai Race Club, in People's Square, is the home to the Shanghai Biennale (started from 1996). The Shanghai Biennale is considered one of the most important cultural events in Shanghai.
- The **Shanghai Exhibition Center** (Middle Yan'an Road, between

People's Square and Jing'an Temple) was realized in 1955 and offers a large-scale conference and exhibition services for important political, economic, science & technology and cultural activities, like the 100% Design-Shanghai.

Finally, thanks to friends, to the word of mouth and local medias is possible to find **LESS KNOWN OR UNCOMMON PLACES** that sometimes present a more genuine and traditional face than others.

- **Private workshops** on the street or hidden inside traditional lanes. Inside this workspaces is possible to find the craftsmen intent to work, manufacturing traditional objects for the local community and the foreigners interested in Chinese culture (i.e. Benny Peng or Cen Brothers).
- **Street sellers** can be found around the city, inside parks or simply moving in the streets with their handicraft. Some perform their work directly outdoors, others come to sell their products from outside the city (even from other regions like Jiansu or Zhejiang).
- **Chongming Island** is the third biggest island of China and present a community of farmers, local producers and craftsmen realizing traditional handicraft for the people of the island (i.e. Mr. Shi).
- **Pudong warehouses** were is possible to buy handicraft retail. This places have different craftsmen manufacturing high-quality handmade goods to sell inside Shanghai stores (Xintiandi, Tianzifang, etc.).
- The **Antique Market** officially known as the Liuhe Road Old Handicraft Market (Dongtai Road, near Xintiandi), is a narrow street featuring a limited number of genuine antiques mixed in with healthy portions of fake antiques, vintage items, handicrafts and miscellaneous artifacts and ornaments.
- **French concession and Jing'an district** have many little shops of traditional craftsmanship, in the most bustling streets. Despite not being notorious as others, these shops usually offer good-quality products realized according to traditional craft.

### Creative Events

There are not specific events in Shanghai related to traditional arts and crafts or local handicraft production, apart from exhibition hosted

*Figura 18. Tianzifang shops, Shanghai, China. Photograph by Ashley / 2009.*

Tai Thai  
Restaurant & Bar



BOX



by private and public cultural places. Nevertheless there are several creative events worth considering.

- The **Shanghai International Creative Industry Week**: It has been held with success for five years. As the first creative industry week in China, and also the most influential creative event in China, it receives the participation of creative and design enterprises from many countries and regions, with worldwide attention.
- The **Shanghai eArt Festival**: first launched in 19 October 2007, Shanghai eArt Festival is the first of its kind in China, and the largest e-art festival in the world.
- The **Shanghai Design Biennale**: it has been held with success for four times. With the creative themes, content and format, it has become a large platform for the people in the design industry on both domestic and international level.
- The **Shanghai International Art Festival**: first launched in 1999, Shanghai International Art Festival is held as an annual event, with the principle of absorbing good cultures from the world, promoting the arts of the Chinese nation, and encouraging the exchange between Chinese and western cultures.
- The **D.A.F.F (Design Art and Fashion Fair)**: started in 2011 is the first Design, Art & Fashion Fair presented as a community event to give China's rising design, art, and fashion talent a platform to interact, share ideas, and promote new projects while connecting with and inspiring the public at large (LuRu home took part as pop-up shop).
- The **Spring Fair**: hosted by *Central Studios* in South Huangpi Road it's an annual spring fair on the second Sunday in May, collecting fashion designers, artists and textile people selling or simply showing their goods (i.e. Brut Cake) together with second-hand books, fashion remainders and vintage wear.

Even if it doesn't take place in Shanghai, it's important to take note of the **BMW Culture Journey**, a national event sponsored by the luxury car maker together with the *Protection Center of Intangible Cultural Heritage of China*, that aims to raise heritage preservation awareness. Started in 2006, with annual editions, the BMW China Culture Journey has travelled over 12000 kilometers, visited six *National Cultural Ecological Protection Zones* in China and protected

more than 120 intangible cultural heritages.

It's a good example to explain what kind of initiatives and collaborations can be done in China that would very unlikely take place in a western country, since western people would never associate culture, intangible cultural heritage and history with a brand like BMW.

### Media

In Shanghai a wide range of medias can be used to keep oneself updated with latest news, events and activities taking place inside the city. First of all we must consider at the top-list the **word-of-mouth** as one of the easiest and most common ways to get to know things and to let people know things. With word-of-mouth I mean also all kind of social networks and micro-blogging (facebook, renren, weibo, twitter) that are used to get in touch with friends and spread the word about anything that interests us or we feel like sharing. Word-of-mouth sometimes counts more than any other media, and is usually taken into consideration. Moreover we can count on:

- **Internet** is so far the most used media to spread the information about opportunities around the city. Apart from social networks (facebook and renren) and micro-blogging (twitter and weibo), we can find constantly updated websites about everything that is going on inside the city, news and events, restaurants and entertainment together with cultural articles. The top-one website is *Smartshanghai.com* (also app available), used by all the expat community and different Chinese. *Cityweekend.com* is another good source of information, available in Shanghai, Beijing and Guanzhou. Then we find *Global Times Community*, *Shanghai List* and *Shanghai Talk* (website versions of paper magazines). Regarding the opportunity to get in touch with Chinese craftsmanship and local art, there doesn't appear to exist such a network, but one website is to be pointed out: *Nicelymadeinchina.com* presents news on quality products, lifestyle, design and services from all over China, including Chinese craft.
- **Magazines** can be easily found, also in English, to buy inside Western stores or for free inside downtown restaurants and cafés. The best known is *That's Shanghai*, followed by *City Weekend*, *Time Out Shanghai*, *Shanghai Talk*, *Shanghai Family*, *Community Center*, *Global Times* (Newspaper). As in the case of the websites, these magazines presents articles with stories of the city and its

community, news, events, etc.

- **Public transportation** is a big media of communication, thanks to televisions and screens positioned almost everywhere inside public buses and on the metro, proposing advertisement, news and stories. Also taxi are provided with a little touchscreen on the back seat, where is possible to see the latest adv related to Shanghai, check locations and stores, learn about new services and answer surveys.









## Intervention Plan

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Considerations over the research and introduction to the creative phase approach, together with the opportunities presented by the subject of the study.

## Active-action<sup>1</sup>

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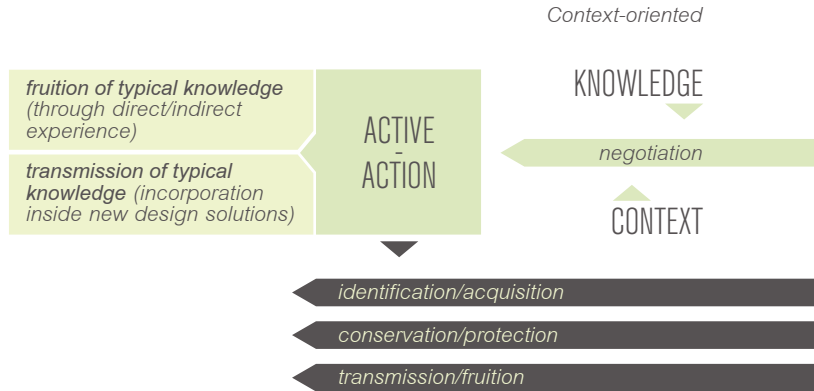
The research phase provided us with the necessary information to fully understand the current situation and move forward into the creative phase.

Due to the nature of the topic, its cultural relevance and its need to be constantly performed in order to be kept alive, the design will have to move in two directions, from documentation and preservation to fruition and experience, leading to an “active-action” of typical-knowledge (Lupo, 2008). On one hand, design works to create experiences of fruition of the typical knowledge, making it accessible and understandable inside and outside the community of creation (process that is referred in literature as “*by storytelling of the distinctive resources by means of a coordinated brand policy*” (Parente, Villari 2010). On the other hand, design enhances the value of local culture through new design solutions that can include products, services or strategies, that respect the connection with the tradition and empower new knowledge uses. Design action focuses on the territorial capital in order to highlight feature and implement strategy for an appropriate competitive positioning.

<sup>1</sup> Active-action is the design process identified by Eleonora Lupo to operate on ICH.

Figura 25. Chinese Arts & Crafts Fair, Shanghai, China, photograph by Giulia Barra / 2012.

## Active-action of Typical Knowledge



The first condition set since the beginning of the research focus is the local dimension of the project. More than being a scale or ambit, it's a design goal for a context and its community in order to create a replicable approach that will never lead to the same result. This because when talking about intangible heritage, a *context-oriented* approach is needed: the relation with a local context is, for the cultural heritage, a dimension of sense making and value generation. The need to preserve its specificities has to be integrated within the changed context or embed directly in a new context. This is what is called *active-action* of a typical knowledge: it's a *negotiation process*, that considers the typical knowledge a *living entity* that can be *activated in continuity* with its traditional features and meaning, but enabling it to dialog with the contemporary context and innovative applications, finding a new balance between uniqueness and repeatability of its skills, practices and techniques, in forms and numbers of relations which the heritage can face, avoiding any compromising distortion of its nature and the loss of its inner and symbolic value (Lupo, 2008).

The process developed for the active-action by Eleonora Lupo is defined in three different activities:

- Identification/acquisition;
- Conservation/protection;
- Transmission/fruition;

The sustainability of such activation is defined according to three "bonds":

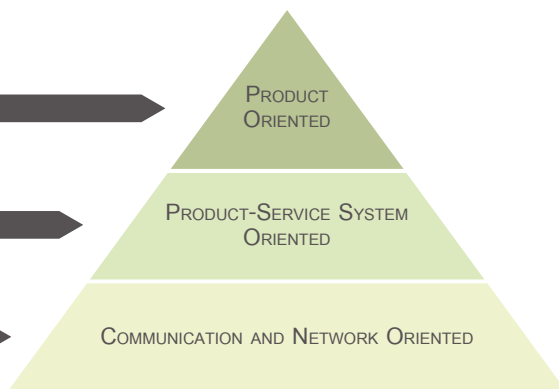
- The *ownership* factor defines how much the depositary of the

knowledge undergoing the exploitation is involved in the process;

- The *control* factor estimates the capacity of the owner to manage and decide how and when to use its knowledge;
- The *impact* factor evaluates the amount of the benefits that the owner receive back (directly or indirectly) by the exploitation process.

The impact is not supposed to be measurable economically: it's possible to foster a development in terms of identity awareness strengthening, or knowledge upgrading and exploitation and these impacts are only indirectly connected to an economic development. These three factors needs to be sided by the two different but synergic paths that we've already presented for the *active-action* process: by one hand there is the experience or fruition of the typical knowledge, which have the objective to make the knowledge accessible and understandable through direct/indirect experience and fruition to a meaningful amount of people aiming at raising its awareness among individuals and communities. By the other hand the transmission of this typical knowledge can be achieved through the incorporation of such heritage characteristics in new design solutions that include products, services, strategies: this should be designed preserving the knowledge specificities but putting it in a new context of use or application taking in account the continuity with its "tradition".

Three strategies can be followed: a) *communication and network oriented*, focused on branding and distribution for the local products aimed at effectively embodying the final product's knowledge format and contents from the immaterial heritage and the place; b) *product-service system oriented*, that envisions market based



Graphic 09. The three intervention strategies by Eleonora Lupo / 2008.

services between city and rural, allowing fair and direct exchange of resources and facilitating dialog; c) *product oriented*, that focuses on direct interaction between designers and craftsmen and enhances cooperation between professional creativity and experiential creativity. This strategy is based on the idea that one asset of heritage preservation relies on a living use of knowledge and the production of a new one.

Following the creative phase there will be a deeper development of such possible strategies, throughout the definition of personas, the building of scenarios and the consequent prototyping leading to the final solution.

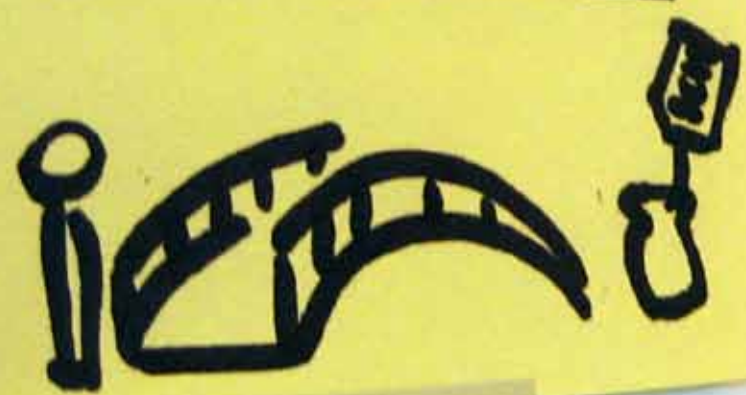
CRAFT  
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ARTISANS C

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PROMUOVERE  
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SIANI

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## Opportunities & Solutions

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Creative phase inclusive of personas development, customer's journey, scenario building, evaluation and final selection.

# Personas

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One of the main steps inside the creative phase is the development of fictional characters representing the different user types we're addressing to. *User Personas* incarnate the motivations, goals and desires of end-users identified during the research phase, and they are an effective tool leading the proposals design before the prototyping phase.

The six *User Personas* presented here were synthesized from the data collected inside the field research, through observations and interviews. Along with the description and goals of each character, the three "bonds" (Eleonora Lupò) are introduced inside the *personas* evaluation, showing the *ownership*, *control* and *impact* factor as they have been previously defined.

Considering the complexity of the craftsmanship system, the main *User Personas* are sided by *partners* and *customers* that are interacting with them inside the craft process.

*Figura 26. Brainstorming,  
photograph by Giulia Barra  
/ 2012.*

# The Employee

AGE: 40 years old

HANDICRAFT: Lacquer

PLACE: Pudong, Shanghai

## BOND FACTORS:



Ownership



Control



Impact



## Description

She works for a Shanghainese company, producing original lacquer inside a workshop with other 30 craftsmen. She's been doing this job for 15 years after learning and training. She doesn't have any certificate, but her experience. For her it's a job like any other, she doesn't follow the whole handicraft process, she's highly specialized in one step and paid depending on how much she produces. It's very tiring and she wouldn't like her son to have the same occupation.

## Goals

She wants to reach the master level to get better paid and have more responsibilities with less work load. She also wants her son to study and get a good job, so he can take care of her when she'll be old.

*Figura 27. Master craftsman carving a large vase in Yangzhou Lacquerware Factory, Jiangsu Province, China, photograph by TAO Images Limited.*



## The Entrepreneur

AGE: 50 years old

HANDICRAFT: Lanterns

PLACE: Pudong, Shanghai

### BOND FACTORS:



*Ownership*



*Control*



*Impact*

### Description

He opened his business 10 years ago, after working for a long time as craftsman and acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills. He likes his job and keeps on following the whole process personally, especially the creative and design phases, without taking part into the handicraft final performance. He has few craftsmen working inside his workshop, up to 15 people during high season. Employees are satisfied and well paid. The market he's serving is quite big and includes cities all over China. He's been portrayed and interviewed by local newspapers and he's involved in social activities to promote traditional craftsmanship knowledge.

### Goals

He wants his little business to have public recognition and become a distinctiveness of traditional handicraft. He hopes his son will take over the business.

*Figura 28. Man at Drum Bell Tower, China, photograph by Shannon Fagan.*

# The Master

AGE: 58 years old

HANDICRAFT: Jade carving

PLACE: God's Temple, Old Town, Shanghai

## BOND FACTORS:



Ownership



Control



Impact



## Description

He's been doing this kind of handicraft for 40 years and he's now a recognized master performing inside the God's Temple, training new students and exposing in several national craft exhibitions. He's been recognized by the government and included among the ICH masters, but the fundings he's been promised with haven't arrived yet. For him Jade carving is like an art, starting from the preparatory sketches arriving to the final details, everything needs to reach a perfect harmony.

## Goals

He would like to exhibit his works outside China and create new collaborations. He would also like to create some kind of craft guild together with other masters.

*Figura 29. Jade Carving Master, Yangzhou, Jiangsu Province, China, photograph by Yangzhou Arts and Crafts Magazine / 2012.*



## The Local

AGE: 61 years old

HANDICRAFT: Bamboo weaving

PLACE: Chongming Island,  
Shanghai

BOND FACTORS:



Ownership



Control



Impact

### Description

She's been doing this job for 50 years, since she learned it from her mother, but she didn't find anybody to pass her knowledge along. She's one of the few left doing this kind of craft. She likes her job and the customers are good, the revenues are enough to support her family along with a modest lifestyle. She's a widow and her son is grown up and working inside a company in Pudong. Her workshop is part of the house she owns and lives in. Customers usually go there for specific requests or to the local market for ordinary items.

### Goals

She doesn't have any specific desire, she has a quite life and hope to keep on living healthy in her house.

*Figura 30. Elderly lady fashioning straw hat, Guizhou province, China, photograph by Yann Layma.*

# The Family-based

AGE: 30 years old

HANDICRAFT: Nankeen cloth

PLACE: Shanghai Province

## BOND FACTORS:



Ownership



Control



Impact



## Description

She lives in the countryside of Shanghai province, with her relatives, working in the family business that has been passed down from generation to generation. She started working 17 years ago, helping her parents and siblings while gaining more and more expertise. Now she's completely autonomous, taking care mainly of the initial creative phase, where she uses her imagination and taste to create new patterns inspired by Chinese tradition and history. While working she's also teaching her little daughter who will follow the family business one day. Revenues are quite good and expenses low due to their traditional lifestyle. They have local recognition and sometimes they're invited for demonstrations and small workshops inside local schools.

## Goals

She would like to see the family business grow and enter a bigger market, creating new collaborations and solutions, but she's mainly concerned about their intellectual property.

*Figura 31. Batik cloth production, China, photograph by baliziyouxing.com.*



## The Enthusiast

AGE: 53 years old

HANDICRAFT: Wood carving

PLACE: French Concession, Shanghai

BOND FACTORS:



Ownership



Control



Impact

### Description

He's a middle age artisan working and living in his little workshop situated in the city center. He loves what he does, works with passion and gives to each of his pieces a unique character. He's been doing this job since he learned it from his master 38 years ago, and he's very skilled. Each of his creations has quite a high price, he doesn't sell many of them and live modestly among his handicrafts. He's willing to teach anybody who would be interested in learn, but he would charge for that.

### Goals

He would like to collaborate with young designers and artists to get fresh ideas, try innovative solutions and reach a new market.

*Figura 32. Closeup shot of man carving wood, China, photograph by Nugene Chiang.*



## Partners

- China-Creative (25-30 years old, Chinese): He has artistic or design background with good knowledge about traditional craftsmanship, but not enough skills and preparation to perform it. He looks at tradition to inspire his creations.
- Cultural Association: Grassroots organizations and official associations committed in the preservation and promotion of Chinese cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible.

## Buyers

- Locals: They know very well the neighborhood and the community activities.
- Traders: They look for original craftsmanship to sell inside their shop in the city or wholesale outside China.
- Hunting Tourists: They look for uncommon souvenirs and local crafts with a story behind.
- Professionals/Businesses (Chinese): They need crafted and custom solutions to trust and use inside their job performance.
- China-Lovers (30-40 years old, Western): Expats with an artistic background or creative attitude, they are fascinated by Chinese culture and eventually interested to use it as inspiration.

# Customers Journey

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In order to better understand the behaviors and choices of the *User Personas* presented, a Customer Journey Map has been developed. The three main phases are *acquisition* (including how the job has been chosen and through which kind of training the artisan went), *performance* (considering both the design and the labor) and *exchange*, making a clear distinction between *artifacts exchange* and *knowledge exchange*. Along the different paths, *partners* interact with the *user personas* to create alternative solutions. *Buyers* are also shown at the end of each journey, to better understand the current area of interest.

## Problematic Areas

During the *Customer Journey* we can identify different gaps and problematic steps where new design opportunities are possible and necessary in order to improve or innovate the whole process.

- Missing new learners: One of the main problems is the lack of young generations willing to learn and preserve traditional craft.

*Graphic 10. Complete Customer Journey.*

Often the reason is because a long training is needed and many people prefer to start working immediately in order to gain money. Loose time in preparation and commit to a job which is often not officially recognized by modern society, is not a convenient choice. Exceptions are made for those traditional handicrafts recognized at national level, through which a good master can acquire importance and acknowledgement all over the country, together with supporting funds.

- **No official craft networks:** The research didn't show any official channel or recognized network dedicated to craftsmanship activities. There are no artisans guilds or associations supporting all artisans' categories, that can be consulted when looking for a job or in case of need.
- **Traditional design vs. Modern society:** The handicraft design keeps on following the tradition, often without conforming to modern needs and taste. The survival of traditional knowledge depends on the context, if such context changes a new design is required in order to adapt the traditional knowledge and keep it going. Often preservation is hard due to the refusal of traditional culture by the modern society or the difficulty of traditional culture to follow up the context changes.
- **No official promoting events:** Inside the cultural panorama of Shanghai there are no events dedicated to traditional cultural expressions such as traditional craftsmanship. In a field where the performance and the storytelling are two of the major components of the product value, the lack of any event doesn't allow the creation of living networks, where is possible to share and promote local craftsmen and artists.
- **Missing new bridges:** Since the cultural system is changing according to a new modern context, many of the dynamics around the transmission of traditional knowledge are losing importance and eventually disappearing. It's necessary to create new bridges in order to link sensitive categories to traditional artisans and therefore foster new collaborations and transmission of intangible cultural heritage.
- **Selective communication:** Communication is not usually comprehensive of all traditional craftsmanship, it follows more the market taste and the personal interest of the moment, helping

commercial solutions over traditional and sustainable ones or promoting what is already well-known.

- **No distinctive mark:** It's always difficult to understand what can be taken as original and what not, and the buying system works mainly on trust. There is no visible distinction between a traditional handicraft and a mass-production one, unless the buyer gets to know the producer, which is a quite difficult mission to accomplish.

## Scenario Building

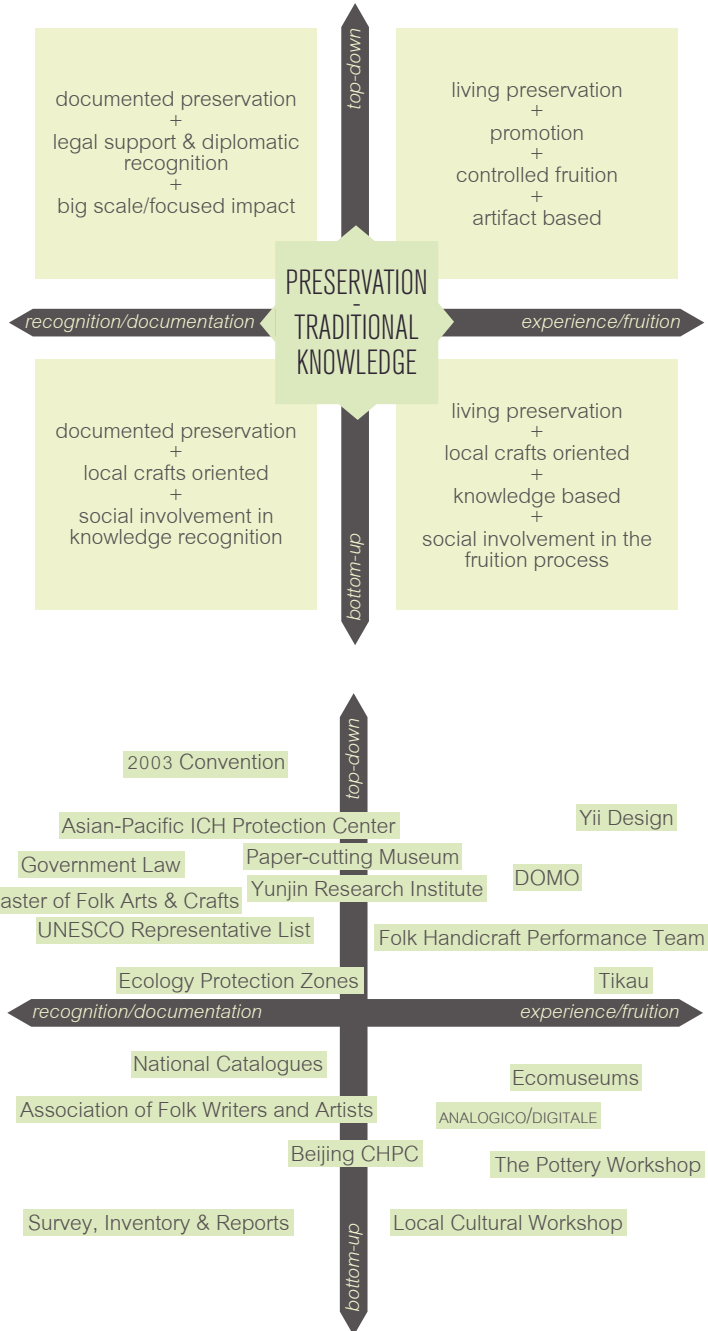
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The development of scenarios has been guided by the research outputs and the intervention plan that is applicable on the specific topic of traditional craftsmanship and intangible cultural heritage. The first polarity considers the two main approaches related to ICH preservation, on one side the **recognition** and **documentation** of such elements in order to transcript traditional knowledge and create a database to preserve together with laws and organizations to protect it (i.e. Asian-Pacific ICH protection centre, National catalogues, UNESCO representative list). On the other side the creation of situations related to **fruition** and direct **experience** of traditional knowledge by a certain public (i.e. ecomuseums, design products inspired by tradition, handicraft performance).

The second polarity refers to the origin of the preservation initiative and therefore the kind of involvement played by people, a **top-down** intervention usually comes from governmental institutions or private companies and brands, meaning that the result will be addressed to specific areas, whereas a **bottom-up** community-based action consider a deeper involvement of people and a different scale of

intervention, usually smaller but more embedded.

The resulting scenario matrix shows four different situations, each of them hosting case studies and current initiatives explored during the research in order to get a visual distribution of the intervention areas up to now.



Graphic 10. Scenario matrix.

Graphic 10. Case studies and interventions positioning.



The upper-left cluster is the one presenting more interventions, crowded by initiatives mostly coming from the government or international organizations. During the scenario building this area has been voluntarily excluded since it covers a field that doesn't reflect the project interests and it includes already a wide range of interventions. Further projects wouldn't bring anything more to the recognition/documentation area, but rather improve existing solutions already available on the territory.

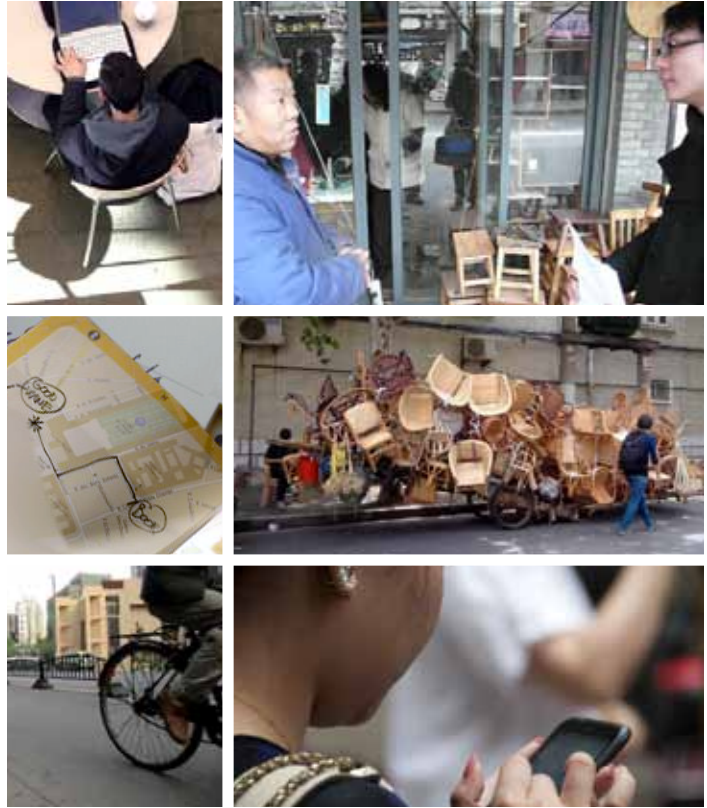
The four scenarios developed are therefore concentrated in the other areas of the matrix, envisioning different opportunities adapted to the context of use and the cluster they're inscribed in.

*Graphic 10. Scenarios positioned inside the matrix.*

# Craft District

## SCENARIO #1

Figure #. Scenario 1  
moodboard



### Description

This mapping service includes different craft examples all over the city, displaying the location of such activities together with a description, comments, videos, pictures and any evidence collected by people. Maps and content are constantly updated thanks to a community-based system that grows through people's contribution, creating a network of shared and viral knowledge about craft manifestations inside the city.

### Actor

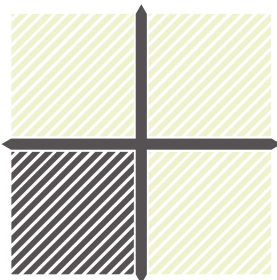
SmartShanghai.com

Touchpoints

Website platform

Smartphone Application

Map Guides



Recognition/documentation  
Bottom-up



# Crafted Design

## SCENARIO #2

Figure #. Scenario 2  
moodboard

### Description

A physical platform to enable the exchange between design and craft world in order to create fruitful collaborations and start new dynamics. The lack of practical experience inside design education and the difficult adaptation of traditional craftsmanship to modern market could be solved by a new fruition system that combines the respective strengths and traces a new path to a crafted design, where modern taste is combined with traditional knowledge. Designers and creative people will have a space to interact and work side by side with local artisans.

### Actor

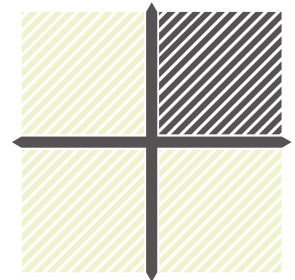
Tongji University

Touchpoints

Website platform

University

Labs



Experience/fruition  
Top-down



# Open Craft

## SCENARIO #3

Figure #. Scenario 3 moodboard



### Description

A short trip outside Shanghai, to visit a real handicraft workspace, learn about Chinese tradition, get involved in a small workshop and take a souvenir back. People will have the opportunity to take away from the city and learn something more about traditional knowledge, whereas creative people and designers will be able to experience and get in direct contact with craftsmen as a starting point for future cooperation.

### Actor

Yejo Circle

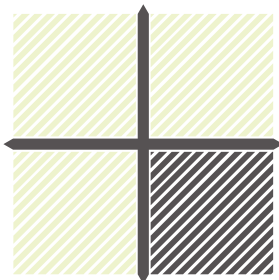
Touchpoints

Website

Newsletter

SMS platform

Craftsmen workshop



Experience/fruition  
Bottom-up



## Craft Live

### SCENARIO #4

Figure #. Scenario 4  
moodboard

#### Description

Two days market, during which traditional craftsmen and creative people working with traditional techniques, are at visitors disposal to show, share, answer and teach about the traditional activities they keep alive while selling handicraft artefacts. Inscribed inside a quite and stimulating atmosphere, the event includes live performances of intangible cultural heritage in order to create a more inclusive experience.

#### Actor

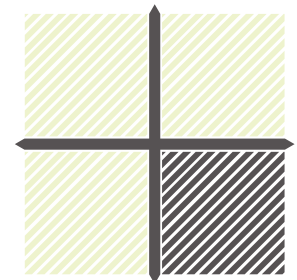
Jiashan Market

#### Touchpoints

Website

Market place

Catalogue



Experience/fruition  
Bottom-up

# Scenario Analysis

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The evaluation of the scenarios goes through different aspects, including the level of participation (of the people involved in the experience), the level of awareness raised (about intangible cultural heritage preservation and traditional craftsmanship existence), the preservation value (how much the scenario will foster the preservation of traditional knowledge), the networking value (the capacity of creating connections around the craft topic), the level of flexibility (how much the scenario can adapt and decline itself in order to create a multifaceted offer), and the level of feasibility (according to the complexity of the scenario realization).

## Craft District

This on-line platform allows a very flexible level of participation depending on the users interest, which can be either a very good opportunity or a problematic source if the scenario doesn't trigger the community involvement. The decision to visit and discover new craft elements listed on the map relays entirely on the personal initiative. The level of awareness raised is not very high, neither the preservation

value, but the viral information exchanged by the community can create new ways of fruition. This information and the collection of data from multiple sources enable the creation of an efficient network of local craft expressions, becoming a starting point for any further initiative. The scenario can adapt to different situations and can be expressed through multiple tools, either digital or analogical, to reach also not technological educated users. People can share the information by using different medias, from pictures to videos and written descriptions, creating a multifaceted and everchanging mapping which can lead to the final decision of visiting the places and people presented on the platform.

The feasibility and success of the service is quite uncertain, again since it's a community based service, it needs to have a good start-up in order to involve as many people as possible and communicate the initiative in the right way. Moreover the interest shown by people should take into consideration the times and needs of local craftsman, whom cannot be disturbed at any moment to talk and explain their job to random visitors, since they need to work. Also the language issue can be a further problem: people who cannot speak Chinese (or Shanghainese in some cases) should have someone to translate and facilitate the experience in case of visiting a local artisan, since the service provided by Craft District is mainly informative.

#### Crafted Design

This scenario is the one showing the highest level of commitment among the participants, since it calls in for initiative, creativity and cooperation to trigger innovative solutions. This ensures a high awareness on the matter of traditional knowledge preservation. Even if such knowledge cannot be completely integrated in a modern context, most of it can be preserved by becoming the starting point for new design products. The networking activity coming out from this scenario is more limited than the previous one: it should be managed by the main actor who's providing the service and it would involve just certain realities, reaching only the direct users of the system. Even if such network will be less broaden and multifaceted than the one of the first scenario, it'll start from a stronger base leading to more reliable connections and the involvement of professionals. Nevertheless this solution is mainly centred on the creation of artifacts combining traditional knowledge with modern design, which could limit the involvement of certain categories leading to a selective

preservation system that consider just the craft expressions that can apply the case. The flexibility is therefore quite low and doesn't allow the declination of the scenario in other opportunities. The feasibility is quite complex too, it requires the commitment of a strong organization and the realization of physical touchpoints where the activities can be carried forward.

#### Open Craft

The participation of the users doesn't just involve the exchange of information and education about traditional craftsmanship, but also physical performance and typical knowledge transmission, making the experience more complete and increasing the awareness and understanding of local craftsmanship reality. People can apply what they learn and produce something on their own to take back, while professionals can see it as a starting collaboration for possible initiatives. The preservation is therefore triggered and partly carried out inside the scenario thanks to the knowledge transmission. The network activity is not very strong and involves just the people getting in direct contact with the system. Moreover the communication channels needed to promote the scenario are still very limited since no proper craft network or cultural association is efficiently active inside the city. The participants could be difficult to find and a tourist aspect could be wrongly associated to the initiative (which is more of a cultural trip).

The scenario can easily adapt to different situations and actually aims to deliver new experiences every time, even if the fruition system remains quite the same during every trip. The feasibility concerns mainly the lack of effective cultural networks to address the right audience for the scenario to start, and the intellectual property issue. Whereas in the previous scenario the involvement of users into a permanent commitment and the presence of a formal institution behind worked as a guarantee for the right managing of the intellectual property, in this case the temporary aspect of the service and the typology of visitors involved (anyone who's interested in the experience) could limit craftsmen cooperation or raise concerns about the protection of typical knowledge in case it was used for new activities which could compete with theirs.

#### Craft Live

This last scenario presents a good level of involvement. The

	Participation	Awareness	Preservation	Networking	Flexibility	Feasibility	
CRAFT DISTRICT	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	17
CRAFTED DESIGN	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	21
OPEN CRAFT	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	19
CRAFT LIVE	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	23

engagement of the participants include promoting, performing, selling and educate the visitors who are led to the event by a high interest on the topic. The awareness raised is pretty good, mostly related to the market experience, pointing out the existence of certain intangible expressions, showing them to the public and starting a dialogue around traditional crafts. The preservation is triggered by the creation of new dynamics, enhancing a possible cultural system around the event itself as long as the cultural aspect is properly conveyed in order to not let in commercial and marketing interests. The network activity is one of the best since the scenario collects different craft manifestations operating under the same philosophy and criteria. It becomes a good promoting tool, unifying local artisans and making them available to a wide range of visitors willing to find and meet local craft expressions. The scenario is highly flexible, both in the event output which can present different solutions and a wide system of related services, both in adaptability to different contexts other than Shanghai. The feasibility is good, the organization is pretty demanding, but the costs are small and easily covered by local sponsored, while the participation of people can be ensured through social media and communication channels used inside the city for events and entertainment.

The **Craft Live** scenario is the one with the highest rate, showing a well balanced solution with a good feasibility level. This scenario will be the one selected to carry forward into the prototyping section and eventually become the final product service system.

Graphic 10. Scenarios evaluation and selection.





WORLD  
LIVE





## Product Service System

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Implementation of the final solution, starting with the concept, going through the services provided, the stakeholders involved, the place, the dynamics of the system and the touchpoints required.

## The Concept

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The concept, inspired by examples of western exhibitions and fairs, provide a general solution to be adapted inside multiple contexts, and a specific solution fitting the case of Shanghai city.

*CraftLive* it's not a fair but more of a multi-experience market, it's a two-day local event to present and promote traditional knowledge through craftsmen and artists operating inside Shanghai area. Stepping aside from simple commercial interest and pursuing cultural involvement, we want visitors to explore and experience the intangible value of traditional craftsmanship and not just it's final product. That is why at the centre of the event won't be artifacts but typical knowledge: the people, with their stories and skills, will convey the quality of narrative enclosed inside each piece of craft.

*Craftlive* aims to become a bridge between local artisans and the city community, it also aims to raise awareness by attracting a sensitive public genuinely interested into original craft expressions. The event will be inclusive of different services, in order to provide a more diverse experience to the visitors and better adapt to artisans profile and needs. Following a strict criteria of evaluation (that

ensures a qualitative and sustainable approach), it gathers multiple local realities under the same philosophy and values, creating a recognizable network, enabling visibility, encouraging dialogue and trustworthy relationships.

## The Event

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### The Participants

The people who will take part into the event are local artisans and artists operating inside Shanghai area and related to traditional craftsmanship and typical knowledge as we've presented it until now. The inclusion inside the event undergoes the definition of handicraft provided by UNESCO, which needs to be satisfied by all participants.

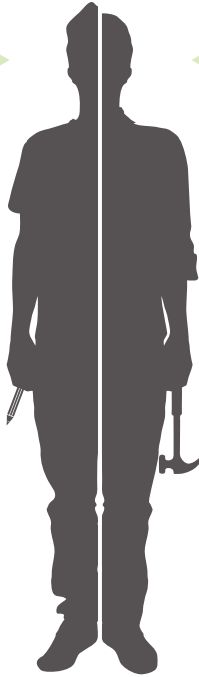
*“Handicrafts can be defined as products which are produced either completely by hand or with the help of tools. Mechanical tools may be used as long as the direct manual contribution of the artisan remains the most substantial component of the finished product. Handicrafts are made from raw materials and can be produced in unlimited numbers. Such products can be utilitarian, aesthetic, artistic, creative, culturally attached, decorative, functional, traditional, religiously and socially symbolic and significant.”*

The realities included inside the event will be quite diverse, with two main categories of participants: traditional artisans and creative people. The involvement of two profiles, one more traditional and one

*creative people*

*traditional artisans*

*Designers, artists and people with creative attitudes inspired by typical knowledge for the production of new handicrafts or engaged in the restoration and reinterpretation of existing pieces of craft*



*Local craftsmen engaged in the production of handicrafts with cultural, religious or traditional meaning, realized following the typical knowledge that is part of the intangible cultural heritage*

THE - PARTICIPANTS

more contemporary, aims to create a more diverse exchange and a broader view of the craftsmanship panorama available in the city. Still traditional craftsmanship and intangible cultural heritage will have a dominant part, especially thanks to the live performances included in the event.

The Crafts

The event will involve every craft category available on the territory and satisfying the UNESCO definition. For design purposes two main categories were identified to lead the development of the final services: **bounded** and **not-bounded crafts**.



*not bounded*



*bounded*

THE - CRAFTS

In the first case crafts are bounded to the place where they are usually performed, due to the techniques, the tools or the number of people

involved in the process. They cannot be moved, therefore they'll need a suitable solution to be included inside the event without consistent restrictions in respect to the other participants. On the other hand not-bounded crafts are crafts free of demanding techniques and involving a limited number of people, who can perform in any place using tools they've carried with them. This category can be easily included inside the main event with live performances.



### Core Services

The event offers four different ways of fruition. The **market** provides space to the artisans to show the public their works and expertise, and eventually sell them. The live **performances** include intangible cultural heritage performances, with traditional music and other intangible heritage expressions to create a lively experience and entertain the visitors, and craft performances to show and educate about typical knowledge. The performances inscribed inside the market place are the ones including *not-bounded* crafts, whereas for the *bounded* crafts a **tour** service is provided: a small number of people will be taken to few spots around the city to see different kind of craftsmanship performed in the place they belong. The craft workshops participating will give the availability and be prepared to host the visitors while explaining and showing their work. On the other hand visitors will discover new places around the city and be enticed to go back and explore more.



*catalogue*

COMPLEMENTARY - SERVICES



*business card*

### Complementary Services

Two different complementary services are provided inside the event. A small **catalogue** will be distributed inside the market place and around the city, presenting the people and the works included inside each edition of *CraftLive*, informing the people who didn't attend the event and becoming a memory for the ones who did (both artisans and visitors). Moreover each artisan and performer will be provided with a personal **business card** to exchange with visitors and colleagues, in order to strengthen the network and the connections among the community.

## The System

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### The Actors

Different actors are required for the correct development of the event and the interaction inside the system. The main actor is the **organization** taking care of the event which should be a local association with already a general knowledge of the territory, or key individuals already involved in cultural activities, familiar with the creative and artistic field. The organization will have to find and select the participants, cooperate with the location hosting the event to set the spaces and create the experience, find related sponsors to support the event and take care of part of the communication. The **location** selected for hosting the event must not have a strong commercial connotation or be a tourist spot in order to not compromise the credibility and the identity of the event itself. Places with an historic relevance or generally used for community events are to be preferred. The event will be promoted and supported by several **sponsors** interested or related with the topic of intangible cultural heritage. Sponsors will also include food and beverages stands inside the event in case the location won't be able to provide such services. One more actor to

be included is a **media partner** which can associate the event with the right network and identity to communicate the initiative. Therefore it needs to be a well-known local media, widely spread and already familiar with cultural topics.

#### Craftlive Actors

##### The Organization - The Chinese Folk Literature and Art Association

Established in March of 1950, it's one of the 12 associations operating under the CFCA (China Federation of Literary & Art Circle). It now has nearly 4,000 members. Its subordinated organs include the Chinese Story Society, Chinese Fairy Tales Society, Chinese Ballad Society, Chinese Proverb Society, Chinese Folk Art Society and the Chinese Paper-Cutting Society. It publishes different magazines and it's directly involved in the intangible cultural heritage preservation and promotion.

This association has already been mentioned inside the research as an active actor in the preservation and transmission of intangible cultural heritage and, consequently it's the most suitable to set up an event centred on this topic. Moreover, being under the Government and operating all over China, it has sufficient connections to facilitate the success of the event.

##### The Location - Jiashan Market<sup>1</sup>

The final location for Craftlive remains the one selected during the prototyping phase, being the best combination of urban and local community, an hidden and bustling reality with no strong commercial or tourist connotations. The plane-tree lined streets of the area surrounding Jiashan Market are home to a vibrant mix of the local and international, with scores of cafes, tea houses, shops and restaurants. Street-side vegetable markets and old shikumen lane house blocks stand side by side with contemporary art galleries and trendy boutiques. At its root lies the vision of Brearley Architects and Urbanists (BAU). Long-time advocates of creating mixed-use spaces that smoothly integrate the commercial, residential and recreational, BAU views a healthy urban community in terms of natural systems. Jiashan Market, as a community space, already hosts the Shanghai Eco Design Fair, creates a fun space for play and learning at

<sup>1</sup> [jiashanmarket.com](http://jiashanmarket.com)

the Jiashan Market Kids' Club, hosts community outdoor films and events, prepares a Farmer Market every month, and books out the courtyard Jiashan Barbecue Pavilion for cookouts and private events.

#### The Media Partner – That's Shanghai<sup>2</sup>

That's Shanghai magazine is one of the most notorious urban medias and can be found for free in different locations or downloaded from the website. It's a monthly edition and provides listings of cultural events and entertainment calendar, together with articles about Shanghai city and community. It's provided by Urbanatomy which also includes That's Beijing, That's PRD, Urban Eyes, Urban Family and Orbital.

#### The Sponsors – Jiashan Market Businesses

The main sponsors of Craftlive are going to be shops and other small businesses around the event location. They will be directly involved inside the organization and they'll provide the services related to food and beverages during the whole event.

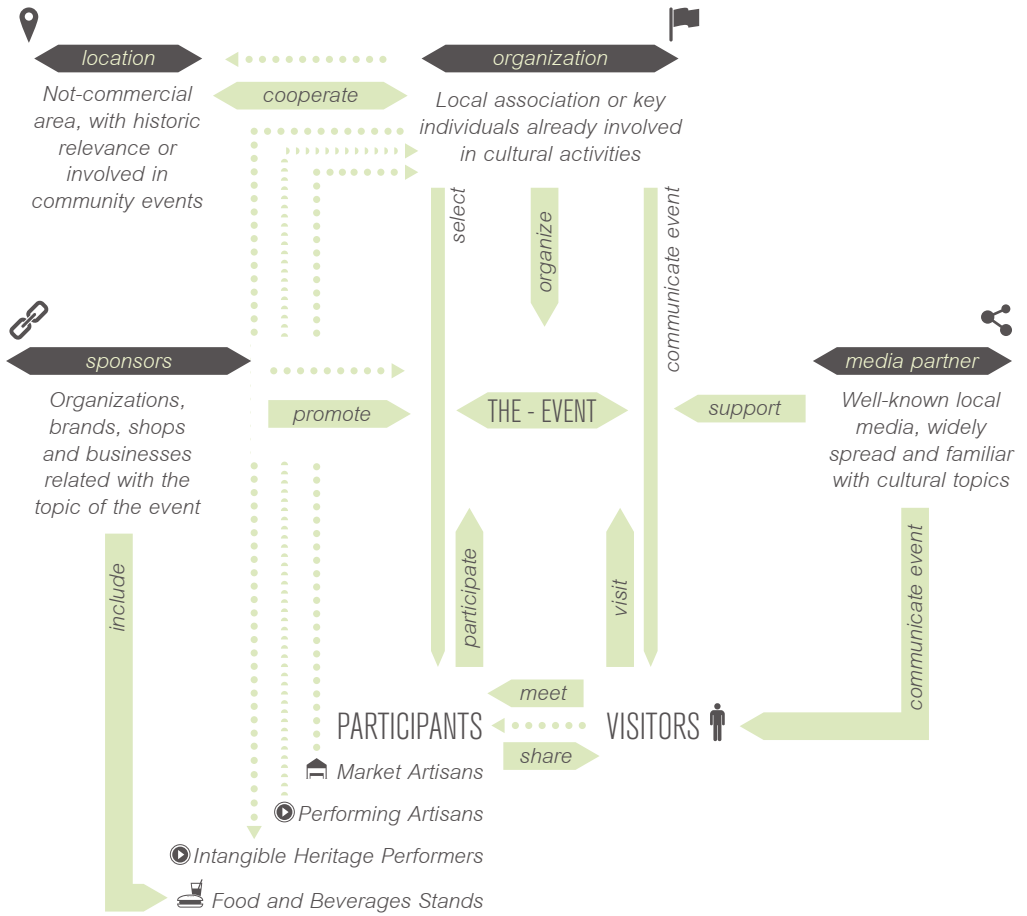
#### The System

The generic system and the Craftlive system show the competences and the interaction among actors and activities. The first case is the system in its original status, which can be eventually declined and adapted according to the situations and places. The second case shows the final actors involved inside Shanghai with the detail of the tour organization: by subscribing to the tour with a donation, a small group of visitors is guided to see different realities around the city.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.thatsmags.com/shanghai/>



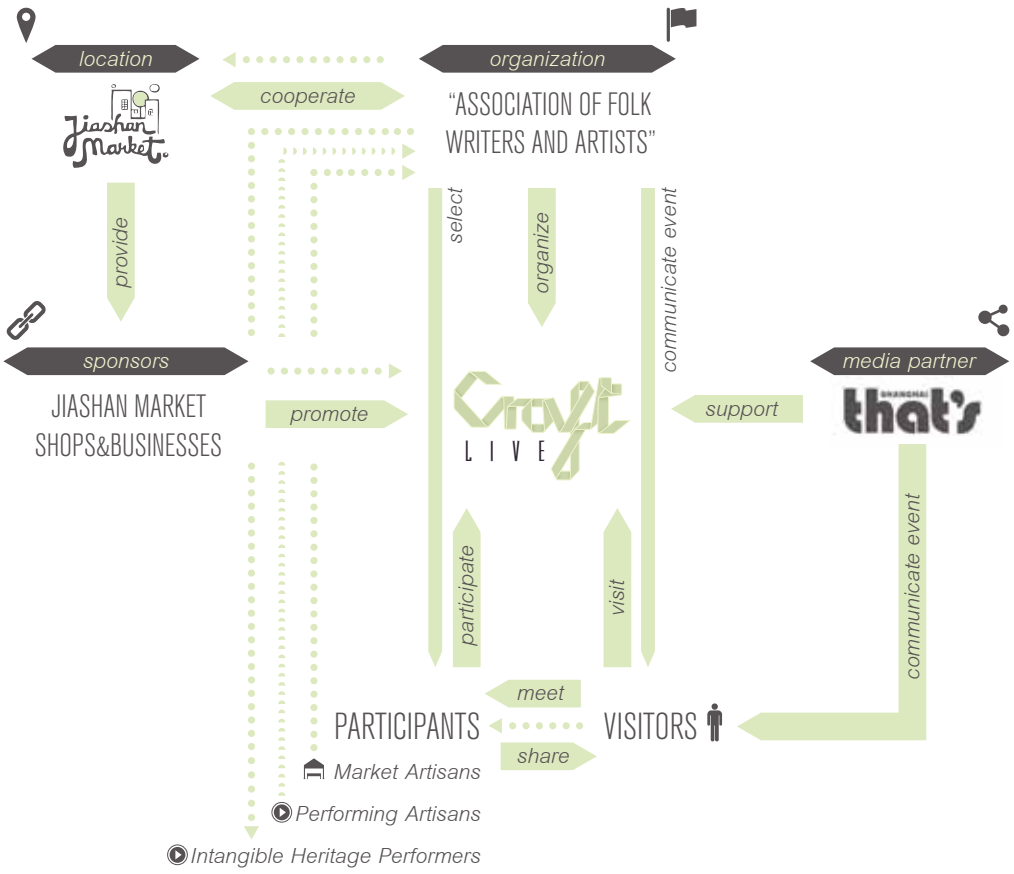
# Generic System Map



## Legend

- Actors
- Activities
- Money flow
- Money flow (reduced amount)

## Craftlive System Map



## Craftlive Tour System



# The Layout

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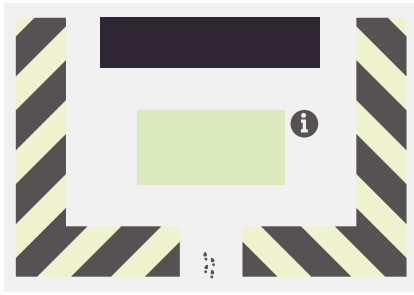
## The Event Layout

The disposition of the different services provided is important for the final experience resulting from the event. The layout presented is a general disposition which needs to be adapted to the final location, while trying to respect the general concept as much as possible. Being a broad overview of how the event should look like, no measures or strict conditions are imposed, but general guidelines to follow when disposing the different services of the event in the space.

A circular solution is preferred, with stands all around the place and a central area for live performances, in order to create a sense of community and sharing, trying not to lose the consistency of the atmosphere thanks to a compact disposition. Three sides are presented with the market and the craft live performances together, to create a dynamic situation where the focus is on the experience rather than just the purchase, providing a direct link between typical knowledge and final handicrafts. The central area is the one dedicated to entertainment and temporary performances of intangible cultural heritage along the day. Being right in the centre it can be followed

## General Space Layout

### Legend



- Market Artisans
- Performing Artisans
- Live Market
- ICH Performers
- Food and Drinks
- Entrance & Tours

by both visitors and participants, by people going through the market and the one sitting to have a break and eat something.

The fourth side is dedicated to food and beverage stands, where people can sit down, relax and chat without isolating from the event. In fact visitors can go on following the entertaining performances and keep a sight of the people and the activities around the space. Finally at the entrance of the location there should be a meeting point for the tour service scheduled inside the event.

The information point will be inside the event space, located where it can be easily spotted by visitors, but not at the very entrance, where the flow of people and the rush to get in and out could overrule it and make it unnoticed.

### Craftlive Layout

The disposition inside Shanghai location takes into consideration the general layout and adapts it to the specific solution of Jiashan Market. According to the space availability three sides of the place are dedicated to the live market, together with the narrow street leading to the central square. This “corridor” has to attract the visitors inside by showing the main service and letting catch a glimpse of the live performance going on right in the centre of the inner space. On the other side of the live market, right after the entertaining area, dehors and cafes are available for people to have a break, drink or eat something before go back to the event.

