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Jeroen de Kloet and Lena Scheen

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# Pudong: the *shanzhai* global city

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**Jeroen de Kloet**

University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands

**Lena Scheen**

New York University Shanghai, People's Republic of China

## Abstract

Shanghai's Pudong financial district is known for its spectacular skyline, which Michelle Huang has referred to as 'a copy of a global city' – a reading that this article pushes further. What does this 'copy of a global city' tell us about the intricate relationships between globalisation, capitalism and urbanity? Whereas Koolhaas proposed the notion of the 'generic city' to grasp the future Asian city, this article argues that his reading reifies the conservative premise that globalisation equals homogenisation. Although Abbas' concept of the 'fake' comes closer to what we see emerging in Asia, it simultaneously reifies the problematic idea of an authentic original. Instead, the article proposes reading Pudong as a *shanzhai* version of the global city: meaning the culture of Chinese pirated, 'fake' products. By linking the notion of *shanzhai* to that of the global city, it aims to recuperate the locality, fluidity and peculiarity of the global city.

## Keywords

Ackbar Abbas, China, fake, global city, Rem Koolhaas, Shanghai, shanzhai

Shanghai is fake, Shanghai is empty, Shanghai is Pudong, you know. (Interview with Shanghai author Mian Mian, October 2005)

One might generalise by saying: the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced. (Benjamin (1999[1968]): 215)

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## Corresponding author:

Jeroen de Kloet, Amsterdam Centre for Globalisation Studies, University of Amsterdam, Turfdraggsterpad 9, 1012 XT Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

Email: b.j.dekloet@uva.nl



Figure 1. Deng Yibing painting a work based on Ai Xuan.

## Introduction

Figure 1 is taken in Dafen art village in April 2012, located in Shenzhen, right across the border of Hong Kong. A painter, Deng Yibing, is copying carefully a painting of the renowned Chinese artist Ai Xuan, the half-brother of the artist Ai Weiwei. In Ai Xuan's oeuvre we witness the life of China's minorities set in barren landscapes. In this painting we see a father enduring the cold together with his daughter. The client who ordered this replica asked the painter to change the faces of the original with those of himself with his daughter. An original is copied, but in the process of copying, we witness a slippage of meaning. It is now a rich foreigner who is enduring the hardships of life in the remote parts of China, together with his daughter, rather than one of China's minorities. This perverse translation, which reveals the attraction of the hardships of life in the rural corners of China to a privileged wealthy expat residing in Hong Kong, reflects the obscure workings of cultural globalisation today. It takes a passport and a one-hour trip from the comforts of Hong Kong to the suburbs of Shenzhen to produce a reworked imagination of one's life.

The Dafen art village (see Figures 2 and 3) is famous for its production of what is often termed *shanzhai* art. As the images show, numerous canvasses are produced as exact replicas of famous works, ranging from the *Mona Lisa* to Vincent van Gogh and Fang Lijun. The colours of these works can be altered according to the commissioner's own preferences: for example to match their sofa better. The village is also referred to as an art factory, given the fact that an estimated 60 percent of worldwide reproductions are produced and shipped from there (Henningsen, 2008; for a study of Dafen art village, see Wong, 2013). Literally referring to a fortified mountain village outside official control, the term *shanzhai* now stands for the culture of fake products that are produced in



Figure 2. Artworks on sale in Dafen art village.



Figure 3. Artworks on sale in Dafen art village.

primarily Shenzhen (Tse et al., 2009). The term evokes a sense of illegality and subversion: it is copying, but not quite, as there is more to it than just copying. In China it has become a vernacular term, not only for painting and goods, but also houses, cars, cities; even people can be termed *shanzhai*. In 2012, star architect Zaha Hadid discovered to her dismay that her Wangjing Soho complex was being rebuilt already in Chongqing.

Ironically, the *shanzhai* version was expected to be finished before the Beijing version (Hulsman, 2013). Impersonators of celebrities become *shanzhai* celebrities on the Chinese internet.

In a flagship store of the UK fashion designer Paul Smith, for example, we can buy numerous Paul Smith goods, but also goods under that label that one will not be able to find in the UK. Ai Xuan's painting is a replica of the original, *but not quite*. While we do not wish to simply celebrate the *shanzhai* culture that currently proliferates in China – the quite perverse translation of the Ai Xuan painting hints at important disjunctures of globalisation – we do not want to fall back to its inverse either. That would lead all too easily to a critique of the copy, and thereby a validation of the alleged original (Chow, 1995), as well as a justification of the global regime of copyright (Pang, 2012). Instead, we want to probe into the implications of the notion of *shanzhai* for our understanding of the global city. We will take the idea of the global city in relation to the Pudong area of Shanghai as our case study. What happens if we read Pudong as a *shanzhai* version of the global city?

Notably, although 'Pudong' actually refers to the entire area east of the Huangpu River, it is commonly used now for the Lujiazui district of the Pudong area. This is where the central business district is located, famous for its futuristic skyline of flickering, neon-lit, glass and steel skyscrapers granting the city its nickname: 'City of the Future'.

The notion of the global city is put forward by Saskia Sassen (2012): in her work it refers to the sites of global corporate capital, which are strategic nodes in the world economy. Global cities 'represent a strategic space where global processes materialise in national territories and global dynamics use national institutional arrangements' (Sassen, 1998: 478). A global economy requires local bases and organisations, and these are to be found in global cities (Robinson, 2006: 96). Sassen connects the emergence of the global city to growing disjunctures and inequalities, as for her, 'global cities are the sites for the overvalorisation of corporate capital and the further devalorisation of disadvantaged economic actors, both firms and workers' (Sassen, 1996: 206). The main cities in nation-states are eager to join the global competition to reach the status of global city. For planners and policymakers in China, Shanghai is undergoing a 'world city' formation process, as Huang quotes from a policy report:

For Pudong New Area to get as close to other super world-cities as possible so as to achieve its role as the 'dragon head' ... We attempt to present some basic defining qualities of world cities, a set of standards to evaluate world-cities for Pudong and other cities to compare with. (2004: 105)

Accordingly, the question of whether Shanghai qualifies the status of a global city still dominates discussions on contemporary Shanghai, with most studies concluding that the city is certainly globalising – 'a global city in the making' (2004: 103), in Michelle Huang's words – but not yet a global city in the full sense (cf. Sassen, 2009). Or as Fulong Wu concisely summarises the problem:

The application of the global city thesis to Shanghai is obviously a catalyst for analytical tension: on the one hand, Shanghai's renaissance cannot be understood without reference to



China's increasing integration into the global system; on the other hand, measured by indicators used to quantify global city status, such as the number of multinational headquarters and the size of the finance market, Shanghai is far from being a global city. (2009: 126)

These debates are characterised by their insistence on static and fixed parameters to define what constitutes a global city, whereas a *shanzhai* reading of the global city precisely contests these parameters, hence questioning the idea of the global city itself.

Crucially, Shanghai's march towards global city status is connected to a desire to establish an urban modernity that is on par with, if not ahead of, the main urban centres in the world. In the words of Jennifer Robinson, urban modernity refers to 'the cultural experience of contemporary city life, and the associated cultural valorisation and celebration of innovation and novelty' (2004: 710). Like the global city, the concept of urban modernity is deeply implicated in the West, as 'the "modern" has been theoretically aligned primarily with Western cities, or with the export and proliferation of a supposedly "western" modernity around the world' (2004: 710). It is our contention that Asian cities in particular may help to destabilise the primacy of the West in defining what constitutes the global city and urban modernity. In this we are inspired by the texts of Rem Koolhaas and Ackbar Abbas, who both read the Asian city as a refiguration of a future urbanity. As Abbas states:

Transformed at unprecedented speed by new forms of capital, media, and information technology, the Asian city today (more so than other cities) threatens to outpace our understanding of it. It seems likely, though, that Asian cities are where the urban experiments of the twenty-first century will take place. They are the most 'representative' urban forms because they are the most problematic. (2008: 243)

However, so far 'there has been very little reflection on exactly how we go about speaking and theorizing across the very evident differences and similarities which exist among cities' (Robinson, 2004: 709).

For this, we will align the notion of the *shanzhai* city to that of the 'generic city' as celebrated by Koolhaas, and that of the fake, as explored by Abbas. As we will argue, Koolhaas' notion of the generic city celebrates the global proliferation of a homogenised Eurocentric urban modernity, and thus will not take us very far in comparative urbanism. Abbas' theorisations of the fake inspire a more nuanced reading of differences and similarities that emerge across the globe, yet the concept of the fake itself reifies the problematic notion of the original. We aim to show that as a conceptual tool, *shanzhai* avoids the over-generalising claims implicit in Koolhaas' notion of the generic city, and also helps to avoid referring to an assumed original as evoked by the notion of the fake.

We read the emergence of different global cities, and the related multiple urban modernities, as outcomes of a complex process of translation. What is being translated is an imaginary 'global city' – itself already an amalgamation of multiple spatial arrangements, architectures, histories, and so forth, towards different localities. What such a translation does is not copying that already polluted original; rather, 'translation is a process in which the "native" should let the foreign affect, or infect, itself, and vice versa' (Chow, 1995: 189). Inspired by Walter Benjamin, Rey Chow argues convincingly that

translation is ‘primarily a process of *putting together*. This process demonstrates that “the original,” too, is something that has been put together’ (1995: 185; emphasis in original). Unlike notions of ‘generic’, ‘fake’ and ‘copy’, the notion of *shanzhai* resists invoking or reifying the idea of an original; thereby it does not reify the western city as the original or authenticator, and allows for more localised and more hybrid imaginations.

## Looking for the generic city

In his celebrated essay of 1995, ‘The Generic City’, Rem Koolhaas presents (in rather hyperbolic and utopian language) his vision for the city of the future. He poses that in a time when identities are crushed under the forces of convergence in the context of globalisation, we must ask ourselves:

[W]hat are the disadvantages of identity, and conversely, what are the advantages of blankness? ... What if we are witnessing a global liberation movement: ‘down with character!’ What is left after identity is stripped? The Generic? (1995: 1248)

As Koolhaas’ essay is inspired by a deep mistrust of identity and subjectivity, his notion of the generic city is mobilised as the future alternative. This city is amorphous, it is stripped of meaning and superficial, ‘like a Hollywood studio lot’, and ‘induces a hallucination of the normal’ (1995: 1250). Koolhaas claims that ‘some continents, like Asia, aspire to the Generic City, others are ashamed by it’ (1995: 1250).

Koolhaas blatantly celebrates the generic city, and produced a long list of its qualifications, ranging from the prominence of the airport and the move from horizontality to verticality, to its erasure of history and its fractal and multicultural composition. For Koolhaas, the generic city is largely Asian: in other words, an air-conditioned city. It is a city that, in his view, even produces a better person:

In the Generic City, people are not only more beautiful than their peers, they are also reputed to be more even-tempered, less anxious about work, less hostile, more pleasant – proof, in other words, that there *is* a connection between architecture and behaviour, that the city can make better people through as yet unidentified methods. (1995: 1262)

Although we recognise the ironic undertone and iconoclastic nature of the text, there is still something quite awkward about it. Its premises that homogenisation may be liberating, that the loss of identity is to be applauded and that the ‘theme-parkisation’ of European cities presents a dead-end sound provocative at first, yet it fails to capture the complexities of living and working in a city. Now, almost two decades after the publication of this essay, his claim that people are less anxious about work reads like an absurd statement, like many of the other qualifications. Unlike Sassen, Koolhaas blatantly ignores the role of economic-political forces at play in these so-called generic cities: global and local forces that arguably prevent the homogenisation of urban spaces. What about the negative effects of economic globalisation, such as increasing inequality? How

does this picture of individual freedom correspond with places under a repressive, authoritarian regime? These questions remain unanswered. Instead, in the words of Ellen Durham-Jones:

Koolhaas focuses on the surreal delight and wild juxtapositions produced by state-run capitalism. However, in his enthusiasm for the surreal aspects of both Generic Cities and the Pearl River Delta, he often implies a false connection between free trade, free development, and individual freedoms. (2001: 31–32)

Kelly Shannon goes even further, by stating that ‘the “liberating” aspect of Koolhaas’ Generic City is a Euro-centric, patronising claim whereas the gap between the have and the have-nots is exponentially widening’ (2001: 87). Although we refrain from the overly cultural essentialist claims in Shannon’s argument – in particular when she speaks of ‘the essential differences in Western and Eastern cultures’ (2001: 95) – we do share Shannon’s observation that the essay overlooks ‘deep-rooted cultural patterns, which continue to awe with their resistive powers to seemingly totalising global forces’ (2001: 95), as we will show later in our discussion of Pudong.

It comes as no surprise that Koolhaas is particularly interested in the Pearl River Delta, as this is where we can find places that are most emblematic as models of the generic city, such as Shenzhen and Zhuhai. These places have been erected in the space of only one or two decades; its inhabitants come from all over China, and its high-rise buildings, numerous parks, multiple highways, its subway system – all seem to mimic Koolhaas’ model of the generic city. These places seem like copies without an original: we are left with only copies, only imitations of what is imagined to be a global city, which in itself is an amalgam of imaginations of New York, London, Tokyo and the like. The city is not only home to the production of *shanzhai* goods; the city itself becomes like a *shanzhai* version of the global city. This brings to mind Walter Benjamin’s (1999[1968]) thoughts on the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction: the aura of the ‘Global City’ has evaporated, but the numerous copies that proliferate globally unleash a democratic potential. It may be this potential that Koolhaas is alluding to: for him, the global city morphs into the generic city.

However, as our opening example shows, more is happening in the process of copying. With or without a clear original, meanings are added and erased, with often-unforeseen consequences. It is the hyperbolic, and indeed generic, language that makes Koolhaas’ essay so problematic: it generalises urban experiences to a profane level of abstraction in which the architect operates as the high priest, as they are the one who is capable of baptising the city with a lush and extravagant, although generic, beauty.

While we align ourselves to Koolhaas’ mistrust of the idea of identity and history (but did others, like Benjamin and Foucault, not also do this, and in a much more subtle way?), we feel much less attracted to his erasure of urban experiences, to his erasure of the people. When looking for the generic city we are bound to get lost, as we will not find such a city – not in the West, and not in Asia. The essay feels like the building of a star architect: an innovative and thought-provoking structure, beautiful in terms of form, but quite impossible to really live in.



## Fake globalisation

The step from Koolhaas to Abbas is not that big, as both are masters of linguistic transposition. However, Abbas offers us more clues as to how to think through the production of the fake in relation to globalisation and the Asian city. As he rightly notes, the Asian city is not a homogenous city, it is clear that they are all unique. This is already an important move away from Koolhaas' idea of the generic city – but how to understand the Asian city? Abbas answers this question by mobilising different concepts (Deleuze's 'any-space-whatever', Gandelonas' 'x-colonialism' and the fake): here, we wish to focus in on the notion of the fake. For Abbas, 'the fake is a symptom that enables us to address, rather than dismiss, some of the discrepancies of a rapidly developing and seemingly ineluctable global order' (2008: 251). Abbas claims that 'the production of fakes appears only when cities are just about to enter the world economy and become exposed to media representations of global commodities' (2008: 253). Once a nation or city becomes more integrated, such as Hong Kong, fake production ceases to exist. Furthermore, 'the problem of the contemporary fake is not how close the fake is to the original, but how close the original is to the fake' (2008: 254).

This points at the problem of the notion of the fake, as it automatically conjures up the image of the original and the real. For a product such as a designer bag, this is indeed the case; one can trace the original and compare it with its fake counterpart, as is often done in the windows in airports, 'teaching' the consumer to mark those subtle differences – but what is the original of the global city? It once may have been New York, but that is an original that is somehow located in the past and has ceased to exist, in particular after 9/11. The global city is merely an imaginary construct, an abstract concept inhabited by numerous skyscrapers, preferably with a waterfront. For Abbas, Pudong 'looks like a mini-Manhattan', it is an instance of replication – but is it really? We doubt it, for the buildings are too different: just as the context marks a significant difference, it is the colonial Bund that Pudong is facing, rather than the Statue of Liberty. Where the Statue of Liberty locates Manhattan at the heart of the imagined nation of opportunity and freedom, the Bund's reminiscences of Shanghai as a cosmopolitan city of global importance signifies Pudong's ambition 'to regenerate the prestige of the past', as the municipal government's slogan has it.

As Abbas rightly notes, it does not help to bring in moral objections against the fake. Often, 'one protests loudly against the fake in order to send the message that one's product is real and authentic and valuable' (2008: 256). Often, it is European visitors who claim Shenzhen to be a fake city, or Pudong to be a fake skyline, thereby suggesting that the European city or the New York skyline is the real, authentic and valuable. Abbas warns against a celebration of the fake: after all, the global order is not disturbed by the fake, just as it is one of the driving forces of global capitalism. However, he also observes that:

The fake has to be situated not only in economics but also in culture and in design clothes. The fake is a species of *underground culture*; the underground is its ethos, is where it derives its energy and inventiveness from. (2008: 262; emphasis in original)



**Figure 4.** Pudong skyline.

This prompts us to the notion of *shanzhai*, that illegal bandit stronghold in the mountains, somehow removed from the powers of the state. What if we transpose that notion to the Asian city – what if we take Pudong as a *shanzhai* city?

## Pudong: more Manhattan than Manhattan itself?

Shanghai makes magic shows redundant. The city today is an everyday cinematic illusion, capable of conjuring whole skylines into being as if through special effects. Witness the artificial paradise of Pudong, across the Huangpu River. As for religion, foreign or homegrown, it does not hold the city together, but something else, some strong anticipation of what is about to come – the reappearance of Shanghai as China's most important international city. (Abbas, 2002: 37)

There are probably few other sites in the world that arouse more extreme and conflicting responses in its spectators than the skyline of Pudong. Perhaps this is best illustrated by the often-quoted comments by Paris Hilton and Milton Friedman, who visited Shanghai in 2007 and 2001, respectively. Looking over the visual spectacle of Pudong, Hilton exclaimed in awe that it 'looked like the future' (*China Daily*, 2007), while Friedman lamented that it 'was not a manifestation of the market economy, but a statist monument for a dead pharaoh (the late Deng Xiaoping) on the level of the pyramids' (cited in Eapen, 2006: 308). Hilton's association with 'the future' is echoed also in the numerous references to Pudong as a 'landscape of science fiction' (see Jansson and Lagerkvist, 2009) and the increasing number of science fiction films set in Pudong, such as *Code 46* (dir. Michael Winterbottom, 2003), *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen* (dir. Michael Bay, 2009) and *Looper* (dir. Rian Johnson, 2012). In a likeminded

manner, Friedman's sentiment is shared by people such as the MIT economist Yasheng Huang, who called Shanghai 'the world's most successful Potemkin metropolis' (2008: 231), referring to the myth of the Russian prince Grigory Potemkin, who supposedly built fake villages of hollow façades, made of cardboard, to impress Empress Catherine the Great during her visit to the Crimea. Whether celebrating or condemning Pudong, the striking common factor in all of these qualifications is the notion of 'fiction', or, indeed, 'fake'.

The picture of the Pudong skyline (see Figure 4) definitely looks like a fake city – a city that mimics the real, to refer back to Abbas, a real we cannot grasp. So, are we actually looking at a 'cardboard' version of a skyline? Are we all being fooled, like Empress Catherine? Again, translated to Pudong as a *shanzhai* global city: is Pudong a fake, cheap, low-quality, pirate version of the real 'Manhattan brand'? Abbas rightly notes that 'we should not be seduced by the obvious and spectacular and erroneously focus attention exclusively on impressive architecture' (2008: 248). To continue (quite wrongly in our view): 'Pudong, for example, is the district in Shanghai where the majority of new architecture is found, but Pudong is not Shanghai ... Paradoxically it is the visual that can make Asian cities invisible' (2008: 248). In our view, it is not so much that Pudong is not Shanghai – of course it is – but there is so much more to Shanghai than Pudong. Moreover, the fact that the global image of 'Shanghai' is colonised entirely by the visual spectacle Pudong, is precisely what makes Pudong such an interesting case study. How did this 'mini-Manhattan' (Abbas, 2008), this 'copy of a global city' (Huang, 2004: 103), turn into *the* image of Shanghai? How can the prime example of the generic city, at the same time, represent one specific city?

The forest of modern skyscrapers at Pudong evidently reminds one of the Manhattan skyline. In fact, in 1993, the then mayor of Shanghai, Huang Ju, explicitly stated that Shanghai was to become 'a metropolis equal to New York and London', and that the city's development plan under his direction was designed to create an 'Oriental Manhattan' (cited in Arkaraprasertkul, 2007: 39). This ambition to create 'a Manhattan' has become a disturbingly common feature in the developing world, indicating the persistent perception of the USA as the standard that needs to be matched. Nevertheless, the municipal government of Shanghai seems to have succeeded in its ambition, as foreign journalists writing on Pudong frequently make the comparison with Manhattan.

However, in their eyes, Pudong is a copy of Manhattan, but not quite: Pudong is described as 'Manhattan on acid' (e.g. Menkes, 2004) or 'Manhattan on steroids' (e.g. *USA Today*, 28 October 2004, cited in Wasserstrom, 2007: 206). The drug adjective in these qualifications strikingly reveals how the alleged 'fake' Manhattan actually has surpassed its 'real' prototype. As Wasserstrom notes, Pudong is 'a pumped up (taller new buildings) and speeded up (home to the fastest train on earth) version of its American counterpart' (2007: 215). So, if Manhattan stands for a vibrant, financial district with an ultramodern skyline of high-rises, Pudong is, in this sense, more Manhattan than Manhattan itself – confirming Abbas' assertion that the problem of the contemporary fake is not how close the fake is to the original, but how close the original is to the fake.

In this case, the *shanzhai* version of Manhattan prizes open new and different meanings of what constitutes Manhattan. The translation betrays 'the original', and this

betrayal reflects back on both ‘original’ and ‘copy’. Accordingly, some cities no longer express the ambition to create a Manhattan, but to create ‘a Pudong’, and cities such as Mumbai and Bangalore proudly proclaim to be(come) ‘the Shanghai of India’. Or as a project developer of the financial district in Wenzhou once tellingly put it: ‘America has Manhattan, Shanghai has Oriental Manhattan, and Wenzhou also needs a Manhattan’ (cited in Cao, 2011: 44).

In his article ‘Is Global Shanghai “Good to Think”’, Jeffrey Wasserstrom urges specialists in urban studies to ‘move away from presenting the route to global city status in evolutionary terms’ (2007: 230), and proposes the term ‘reglobalising post-socialist city’. Wasserstrom points out that Shanghai’s specific historical development makes it more akin to urban centres that were once part of the former Soviet bloc, such as Budapest. Like Shanghai, these cities did not follow a steady evolution toward global city status, but followed a stop and start progression. However, if we focus on Pudong, one could argue that its development is not so much characterised by stop-and-start progress, but by *reverse* progress. The skyline of Manhattan materialised out of a growing demand for bank and office buildings (in a limited space) and over a century of time. In contrast, the fast-made *shanzhai*-Pudong was developed in the period of a decade. As Non Arkaraprasertkul notes, ‘the tall buildings in Lujiazui were not built to satisfy the need for vertical expansion due to the lack of horizontal space, but for the purpose of generating monumental symbolic value’ (2008: 47). Crucially, the Pudong skyline was literally planned and designed as a skyline: one to look at from the other side of the Huangpu River. Domestic and international investors did not come to Shanghai because of its booming economy, but because of the *image* of a booming economy, an image created by the Pudong skyline; and it was these very investors that kick-started the economy. In sum, the symbol came first, then the buildings were built, after which the investors came, after which the buildings gradually filled up. This is precisely why Anna Greenspan rejects the notion of Shanghai as a ‘Potemkin village’:

In Shanghai, however, the glittering artifice is not just meant to deceive. Rather it is embraced as a show, a global attraction that ... need not interfere with the messy, vibrant entrepreneurial culture that continues to power the everyday life and culture of the street ... [In China] illusion has long functioned as a crucial currency of power ... In the case of Shanghai, and, especially Pudong, this is blatantly obvious. Shanghai may be built on hype, but the hype has produced some very real results. (2012: 87, 90)

Greenspan’s words point at critics’ failure to deconstruct the persistent, one-dimensional image of Pudong as a ‘glittering artifice’ and analyse it as a common urban environment – a neighbourhood where people live and move around. In addition, she argues that even though it is merely an empty façade, the spectacular appearance of Pudong is actually what characterises it and turned it into a success – as evidenced by the cities mentioned previously, which express the ambition to build a Pudong.

This success arguably implies a potential strength of *shanzhai* products, which Chinese economists often have pointed out. In the words of Qin Yong, professor at the Central University of Finance and Economics in Beijing: ‘*shanzhai* products are not only

about piracy and plagiarism, they contain a large number of innovative and creative ingredients' (cited in Hu, 2011: 10). Mediatek chairman Cai Mingjie (2009), known in China as the 'Father of the *shanzhai* mobiles', goes even further, famously stating that *shanzhai* products stand for 'creative destruction', the term coined by Joseph Schumpeter in his influential work *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (1943): a positive economic force of destroying the old to create the new. In this line of thought, *shanzhai* products are an inherent part of the capitalist economy whose potential to destroy the brand that they copy should not be seen as a threat to the economy, but as a vital feature keeping the economy alive, generating new products, and preventing monopolies by multinational companies. This is also one of the reasons that *shanzhai* products do not have the same negative connotation in China as fake products have in the West: *shanzhai* products make it possible for a developing country such as China to compete in the global market, and for the Chinese lower and middle classes to buy products that are otherwise beyond their reach.

Furthermore, the broader trend of *shanzhai* culture often is considered to have a democratising power, mostly overlooked by people outside of China. In a recent Chinese survey, for example, 65 percent of the respondents were of the opinion that *shanzhai* culture expresses the 'voice of the people', 40 percent agreed that it represented 'grass-roots culture', and 30 percent answered yes to the question of whether 'individuality' lay at the core of *shanzhai* culture (Hu, 2011: 10).

When applied to the *shanzhai* global city Pudong, the notion of *shanzhai* enables us to push the alleged archetypical model for the global city further to the background, and instead, to point at how the urban developers of Pudong were able to create a new global city, unique in its own right. Here, we hasten to add that this singularity does not exclude the city's claim to the global, and that Shanghai's intricate embedding in a global network of cities is driven by flows of capital. As numerous studies have shown, Shanghai's march towards the future intensifies uneven development (*vis-à-vis* its hinterland) and widens class disparity (e.g. Bao, 2001; Cai, 2005). In this respect, neither Shanghai nor Pudong are that different from other cities around the world. Therefore, care is needed: whereas the concept of *shanzhai* allows us to focus our attention on the specificity of Pudong, we do not want to celebrate this specificity. Pudong is, after all, also a key centre of global capitalism. We do want to steer away from taking cities such as New York as the yardstick of theorising the urban, while acknowledging at the same time the growing disjunctures and inequalities caused by globalisation.

Following the rule of 'the survival of the fittest', not every *shanzhai* survives in the jungle of global capitalism. Not every *shanzhai* city succeeds, as testified by China's many 'ghost towns': Chenggong is a completely newly-built city of high-rises close to the city of Kunming in Yunnan, with more than 100,000 new apartments unoccupied. Chenggong began to take shape in 2003, but by 2012 it was still empty. Driven by investment for investment's sake, to achieve a high production rate and blinded by the speculation boom of the past decade, local authorities, building companies and investors across China are involved in the construction of such ghost towns. So, why did Pudong work? That is, why did Pudong succeed in becoming *the* image of Shanghai? Interestingly, the answer lies to a great degree in that other '*shanzhai* Manhattan': the Bund boulevard that stretches along the other side of the Huangpu River, right opposite the Pudong skyline.



**Figure 5.** The Bund in Shanghai.

Built mainly by westerners in Shanghai's colonial past as a treaty port (1842–1943), the Bund houses some of the best-preserved art deco and neoclassical buildings that have been regarded as symbols of Shanghai for more than 100 years. As one can see from Figure 5, the Bund strikingly resembles the skyline of Manhattan in the 1930s: this is no coincidence. Just like Pudong, the Bund was designed intentionally on the basis of Manhattan, and just like Pudong, it was nicknamed 'Oriental Manhattan'. However, whereas Manhattan developed rapidly since the 1930s, the Bund was left undeveloped by the authorities, having undergone four decades of stifling communist rule. As such, it has turned into a nostalgic waterfront, a reminder of an alleged open, decadent and cosmopolitan Shanghai of the past, a reminder that is currently revitalised as a model for the future. The symbolic power of the location of the Bund has been famously described by Abbas, who asserted that:

Shanghai today is not just a city on the make with the new and brash everywhere – as might be said more aptly of Shenzhen, for example. It is also something more subtle and historically elusive: the city as remake, a shot-by-shot reworking of a classic, with the latest technology, a different cast, and a new audience. Not 'Back to the Future' but 'Forward to the Past'. (2000: 780)

In other words, Pudong cannot be understood without recognising its many references to the city's unique history, whether it be its colonial past (as pointed out by Abbas), or its Maoist past (as pointed out by Wasserstrom).

Looking at the collection of neo-classical and art-deco buildings of the Bund, one can wonder: is this another perfect example of a Generic City? A 'copy of Manhattan' that could be located anywhere in the world? And if so, then why do (Western) critics



univocally criticize the emptiness, the kitsch and fake character of Pudong, while equally univocally praise the Bund?

Although a full discussion of these questions and issues exceeds the scope of this article, there are two factors worth mentioning: power and time. The fact that the Bund was built by foreign powers when Shanghai was (partly) colonised raises questions about the relation between power and authenticity. The discrepancy between perception of the Bund as genuine architecture, and Pudong as a copy of western architecture, seems to imply that it is still the West who owns the 'copyright' to an alleged original. As for time, it might very well be possible that Pudong will meet the same fate as Haussmann's Paris, as described by Richard Prouty:

The construction of the great Parisian boulevards by Baron Haussmann probably would have qualified as generic when they were first built: the city's warren of narrow medieval lanes was cleared out and replaced by block after block of nearly identical apartment houses. Now Haussmann's boulevards strike us as the very essence of the Parisian. (2009: 7)

Today, the Pudong skyline is viewed already as the symbol of Shanghai, but in a paradoxical sense, since it is precisely the embodiment of globalisation that constitutes this 'Shanghai identity'. So the question is whether Pudong will ever be regarded as 'authentic' Shanghainese as the Bund. Whether it is considered to be authentic or not, the buildings that mark the skyline of Pudong have become signifiers of the new Shanghai, not of some generic idea of the global city.

In other words, the *shanzhai* global city is, above all, a rooted, local city. From this view New York is also a *shanzhai* city, it mimics the idea of a global city, *but not quite*. Not quite, as the Empire State Building or the new World Trade Centre make it so peculiarly New York – it is, at most, a global city with specific local characteristics. What we want to question is the privileging of the global over the local, and the subsequent conflation of the global with the West.

This insistence on locality and singularity, in combination with a perpetual gesturing towards the global – an insistence that comes with a desire for authentic experiences, as Sharon Zukin describes in her *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places* (2010) – makes it all the more difficult to represent a global city. Thus it comes as no surprise that the only possible representation of such a city may well be a bizarre mix of all iconic buildings that are signifiers of the local, rather than global, city. The global city as represented in many advertisements is one that is characterised by a skyline consisting of a pot-pourri of iconic architectures, a combination of signature architectures, with the London Eye photoshopped together with the skyline of Dubai, the Eiffel Tower of Paris and the Oriental Pearl Tower of Pudong in Shanghai.

As we have discussed previously, the notion of the generic city deliberately ignores differences and celebrates sameness; its rhetorical trick is a celebration rather than condemnation of homogenisation – thereby reifying the conservative premise that globalisation equals homogenisation. It is disconnected from the actual everyday experiences of living in the city. The notion of fake fares better, in our view, as it helps us to position the erection of districts such as Pudong in the context of globalisation. However, in both cases there is the assumption that an Asian city

mimics what is labelled as a global city, but whose aesthetics are imagined as western, in particular as New York-ish. A *shanzhai* city may look like a copy, *but not quite*. With each translation from an assumed original to a copy, meanings slip away while other meanings proliferate.

### ***Shanzhai* city as an ordinary city**

In our insistence on the locality of the city, and our rejection of any original, univocal or authentic model for what constitutes the global city, we hope to recuperate the specificity of Pudong. It is not a mini-Manhattan, but rather a quintessential part of the city of Shanghai: a city that is, like many other Asian metropolises, deeply connected with and tapped into a global network of cities. Its emergence tells us a tale of globalisation intermingled with the tale of the ‘rise of China’. To map out the specificity of Pudong would require an in-depth spatial and ethnographic analysis, which is beyond the scope of this article. We alluded to some differences, such as its position vis-à-vis the opposite skyline of the Bund, but there are numerous other possible angles to approach the city: its role in the post-socialist economy of China, its role as providing a home for the emergent middle class of China, its constant construction and reconstruction in which migrant workers play a pivotal role, its zoning policies that may both reflect and produce the class disparities in today’s China – all these provide angles to move away from reading Pudong as a generic, fake or global city.

Here, we align ourselves to the postcolonial turn as proposed in the work of Jennifer Robinson, who argues that:

[A]ll cities are best understood as ‘ordinary’. Rather than categorising and labeling cities as, for example, Western, Third World, developed, developing, world or global, I propose that we think about a world of ordinary cities, which are all dynamic and diverse, if conflicted, arenas for social and economic life. (2006: 1)

For Robinson, ‘[i]n a world of ordinary cities, difference can be gathered as diversity, rather than as hierarchical ordering or incommensurability, but also without any suggestion that a universal theory of urbanism is possible’ (2006: 41). Part of her research is the dismantling of modernity as a western project, by showing how that modernity is not only part and parcel of the history of urban experiences outside the West, but also how modernity in the West is always and already implicated in the global. For her, New York is as much a Mexican, Egyptian, African and Oriental city as it is an icon of the West, all cities are built from a mixture of multiple influences:

Forms of urban modernity everywhere are as likely to be borrowed as created anew; as likely to absorb or to adapt durable cultural forms as to abandon them for new ones ... The circulation of the various artefacts and practices of modernities around the globe inspires their prolific appropriation and incorporation into any number of different ways of being urban. (2006: 90)

The notion of *shanzhai*, we believe, helps to bring this point to the forefront – a point that seems obvious, yet that with the circulation of popular terms such as ‘generic’, ‘global’ and ‘fake’, tends to be ignored or dismissed.

In the end of his essay, Abbas notes that the emergence of its own design culture may help China to move away from the logic of the fake. 'The death of the fake in China will be the birth of an unrivalled economic giant' (2008: 263), he claims. A certain linear developmentism underpins his argument, in which the fake is part of a nation that is positioned at a specific stage of globalisation, assuming all nations to move slowly towards another stage. Here we would like to mobilise, as a suggestion for further studies, a rather familiar, more anthropological point (and indeed, what is always lacking from discussions on the fake are the people, as all analyses focus so much on the objects), in which we aim to recuperate the contradictory living urban experiences that *always* differ from city to city.

We are neither living in a generic city, nor in a fake environment, but we may be living in a *shanzhai* city. This is not so much a Baudrillardian environment in which everything around is a simulacrum, but more so an environment in which everything around us is a unique copy of an original that has ceased to exist as a univocal entity. Everything that seemed fake has become solid again, to paraphrase Marshall Berman (1983). To insist on the singularity of urban spaces does not equal insisting on their assumed fixed identity; rather, our plea is to take urban experiences more seriously, the practices of living in the city. The *shanzhai* city is an ordinary city, a distinctive and unique place: for those who live in them, they are special and particularly meaningful places (Robinson, 2006). The danger of reading the city as generic, copy or fake lies in the implicit validation of certain versions of the global and the modern, and its disregarding of others. As Robinson says, 'any research on cities needs to be undertaken in a spirit of attentiveness to the possibility that cities elsewhere might perhaps be different and shed stronger light on the processes being studied' (2006: 168).

What we have outlined in this article is our conceptual take on the diversity of the Asian city, and we want to mobilise the notion of the *shanzhai* city to grasp what is going on in these cities, in which the constant dialectics of difference and sameness, of gesturing towards the global while being unavoidably local, of copying and faking, create new spatial and social constellations. What remains to be done is an anthropological thickening of our conceptualisation of the *shanzhai* city, to study everyday life in the *shanzhai* city and the intricate ways in which, in the current global geopolitical conjuncture, multiple and contested urban modernities are emerging, propelling both new possibilities for living in the city, as well as new inequalities and disjunctures.

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### Author biographies

Jeroen de Kloet is Professor of Globalisation Studies at the Faculty of Humanities, University of Amsterdam, and Director of the Amsterdam Centre for Globalisation Studies. He works on the cultural implications of globalisation in China. His monograph, *China with a Cut: Globalisation, Urban Youth and Popular Music* was published by Amsterdam University Press in 2010. In 2013 his book *Sonic Multiplicities: Hong Kong Pop and the Global Circulation of Sound and Image* (with Chow Yiu Fai) was published by Intellect.

Lena Scheen is Assistant Professor Faculty Fellow at New York University Shanghai. Her research explores the social and mental impact of urban transformation, focusing on cultural production in Shanghai. She co-edited *Spectacle and the City: Chinese Urbanities in Popular Culture and Art* (with Jeroen de Kloet, Amsterdam University Press, 2013), and her monograph, *Shanghai: Literary Imaginings of a City in Transformation*, is forthcoming (Amsterdam University Press).