

ANYTHING COULD HAPPEN – A PRIME MINISTER’S SCHOLARSHIP, ASIA FASHION STUDY TOUR

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The Prime Minister’s Scholarship for Asia (PMSA) is a programme for study and work abroad in Asia funded by the New Zealand government and administered by Education New Zealand. Ten PMSA recipients from Otago Polytechnic’s School of Design spent six weeks in China immersed in a collaborative project that centred on sustainability and fashion.



Figure 1. Eight of the ten 2017 PMSA recipients. Photograph: Megan Martin.

The project was appropriately called “Anything Could Happen” (ACH), sharing a name with an exhibition of Dunedin fashion designers and artists in Shanghai and evoking the lyricism of Dunedin Sound band The Clean. The project was multifaceted and the outcome undefined, and the students were selected from the Polytechnic’s communication and fashion design programmes. These young designers and the accompanying fashion faculty split their time between the “Anything Could Happen” exhibition, held in Dunedin’s sister city Shanghai within the walls of Yu Gallery in Yuyuan Garden; working collaboratively on a fashion outcome with students from three Shanghai fashion institutions; and building relationships with various tertiary education providers in Shanghai, Shenzhen, Hong Kong and Beijing.



Figure 2. Students, faculty and printer selecting paper stock for the catalogue at New Zealand Central, Shanghai, China, May 2017. Photograph: Margo Barton.



Figure 3. Students hang the work of Anita de Soto at the Yu Gallery, Shanghai, China, May 2017. Photograph: Margo Barton.



Figure 4. "Anything Could Happen," Yu Gallery downstairs gallery, Shanghai, China, May 2017.
Photograph: Margo Barton.



Figure 5. "Anything Could Happen," Yu Gallery upstairs gallery, Shanghai, China, May 2017.
Photograph: Margo Barton.



Figure 6. Yuyuan Garden, Shanghai, China, May 2017. Photograph: David K Shields.



Figure 7. The "Anything Could Happen" curatorial team: Dr Margo Barton, Antony Deaker and Dr Jane Malthus. Photograph: Joyce Huang.

ANYTHING COULD HAPPEN – CONTEMPORARY ART AND FASHION FROM DUNEDIN

The project both began and ended at Yu Gallery. The "Anything Could Happen" exhibition acted as bookends for the project and reflected the essence of the project as a whole. A collection of works from 45 Dunedin artists and designers was exhibited for a brief but valuable month in the metropolis of Shanghai, and garnered much media attention in China. Students and faculty worked on the exhibition, including preparing the catalogue and posters for print, and carefully unpacking, displaying and later packing away the artefacts which showcased contemporary art and fashion from Dunedin. "Anything Could Happen" was curated by Dr Margo Barton, Dr Jane Malthus (both from the School of Design at Otago Polytechnic) and Antony Deaker (Dunedin City Council).



Figure 8. Students speed-design-dating to form groups. Photograph: Margo Barton.

ANYTHING COULD HAPPEN – SUSTAINABLE FASHION DESIGNING

The Otago Polytechnic students worked closely with students from International Fashion Academy (Paris) in Shanghai, Shanghai University of Engineering Science, and Shanghai College of Art and Design over three weeks on the “Anything Could Happen” cross-cultural sustainable fashion designing project.

The project built on the Shanghai Dunedin Sister City Fashion Communication Project, which has been operating yearly in October and November since 2012, in addition to the 2008 Ute Shoot, a one-off project which also explored fashion communication. These previous projects have enriched the fashion design, fashion communication and cultural understanding of the participants – students, staff and their respective institutions. Problem Based Learning (PBL), a learner-centred strategy applied notably in medical teaching, was utilised as the project structure for both the Shanghai Dunedin Sister City Fashion Communication Project and the Ute Shoot. PBL was selected as the learning methodology for ACH, as it offered participants flexible application of knowledge, experience and collaboration.¹

At the beginning of their fashion design study journey, emerging fashion designers are often individualistic in their approaches, as opposed to designers in fashion businesses who predominantly work in teams. The Shanghai Dunedin Sister City Fashion Communication Project highlighted a model of individuals defining their goals and working as individuals within a team. By contrast, the ACH Fashion Designing Project was designed to be truly collaborative, utilising face-to-face interaction from the outset; participants experienced the entire design process together physically, from the brief development stage through to presenting the designed outcome. According to Cheng and Kvan: “Successful collaboration is characterized by a high quality of interaction that advances joint objectives. This requires careful scheduling so that time is allotted for developing rapport.”²

Students from the four institutions collaborated, conceived and created to devise three quite different cross-cultural design solutions together. Studio sessions were planned to bring fashion and communication designers and faculty together to work collaboratively on fashion designing a product (for example, a fashion or accessory collection or textile design) or a service (for example, a fashion show, fashion app or fashion consultancy). The design outcomes included reusing materials to create accessories, zero-waste patternmaking for jackets, and an ethically conscious fashion application. Most importantly, Barton correctly anticipated that “our connectedness within China and Shanghai will result in exchanges of ideas and expertise, and will present our students and staff with opportunities to learn overseas and become culturally aware.”³



Figure 9. Discussing design. Photograph: Margo Barton.



Figure 10. Corey Adams presenting his app concept to the panel, Shanghai, China. Photograph: Margo Barton.



Figure 11. New Zealand and Chinese-based students work together in the textile studio, Shenzhen Polytechnic, June 2017. Photograph: Morgan Yang.

Through this project, students gained new knowledge of sustainability and culture. Taylor Pearce (Fashion Design) stated that she had gained “new understanding, I've realised a new importance on sustainability. I've realised how important it is and how you can do little things, and how subconsciously we do little things that are a more ethical practice without realising [that sustainability is] a bigger part of what I do than I thought.”

VISITING CHINESE DESIGN SCHOOLS

The groups visited the following institutions: Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology, Donghua University (Shanghai), Shanghai College of Art and Design, Shanghai University of Engineering Science (SUES), International Fashion Academy Paris in Shanghai (IFA Paris), Shenzhen Polytechnic and Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

The students and faculty from Otago Polytechnic visited campuses in Shanghai, Beijing, Shenzhen and Hong Kong and attended the China Graduate Fashion Week in Beijing. For Holly Kumberoff (Communication Design), the universities she particularly enjoyed were “Shenzhen [Shenzhen Polytechnic] and Hong Kong [Hong Kong Polytechnic University] – but more so Shenzhen, because we gained such an in-depth understanding of their polytechnic and I felt like I learned the most there – not just about arts but about China and the history.”

CROSS-CULTURAL FASHION PHOTOGRAPHY SHOOT

The students and staff on this trip always needed to be agile and responsive to the various opportunities that came their way. One opportunity was a cross-cultural fashion photography shoot undertaken with one of the exhibiting artists from the “Anything Could Happen” exhibition. David K Shields (<http://www.davidkshields.com/>), a notable international fashion photographer, undertook a collaborative fashion shoot for Black Magazine Online (<http://www.blackmagazine.co.nz>) that focused on collaborating with and promoting emerging talent from China and New Zealand. The shoot crew included fashion designers from Shanghai University of Engineering Science (SUES), IFA (Paris) in Shanghai and Otago Polytechnic, with models from SUES, as well as Otago Polytechnic photography assistants and fashion faculty.



Figure 12. Cross-cultural fashion photography shoot in Xinzha Road area, Shanghai, China, May 2017.
 Designer Taylor Pearce, Otago Polytechnic; model Han Zhuhui from SUES.
 Photographer David K Shields; photography assistant Holly Kumbaroff.



Figure 13. Cross-cultural fashion photography shoot in Xinzha Road area, Shanghai, China, May 2017.
 Designer Guan Xin, SUES; model Li Zhenfeng from SUES.
 Photographer David K Shields; photography assistant Holly Kumbaroff.



Figure 14. Cross-cultural fashion photography shoot in Xinzha Road area, Shanghai, China, May 2017. Designer Corey Adams, Otago Polytechnic; model Li Zhenfeng from SUES. Photographer David K Shields; photography assistant Holly Kumbaroff.



Figure 15. Cross-cultural fashion photography shoot in Xinzha Road area, Shanghai, China, May 2017. Designer Li Dan, SUES; model Han Zhuhui from SUES. Photographer David K Shields; photography assistant Holly Kumbaroff.



Figure 16. Cross-cultural fashion photography shoot in Xinzha Road area, Shanghai, China, May 2017. Behind the scenes with Photographer David K Shields. Photograph: Margo Barton.

The fashion shoot occurred within a block between Xinzha Road and Suzhou Creek, the area surrounding the youth hostel where the PMSA team and David K Shields stayed. To our eyes, this district seemed authentically urban Chinese, unspoilt by the overt Westernisation apparent in the busy tourist areas of Shanghai. The authenticity of the surrounding environment was a key element in the imagery that resulted, and the interaction with the local Xinzha Road residents while the shoot was underway added to this unique experience.

Corey Adams (Fashion Design), one of the designers featured in the fashion shoot, stated:

(I) had always wanted to launch my own business within Eastern Asia, and I feel like the six weeks that I have spent here has given me a larger understanding of how it operates and how to set myself up better than if I was coming in blind. It's also given me first-hand knowledge of how different trends operate here. It helps me have a business model that is more successful and sustainable than going in with just the thoughts of what works in New Zealand.

Through participating in the Anything Could Happen project, emerging fashion and communication designers, and the students and colleagues of the participating design schools, will be better placed to become active participants in a culturally savvy global community of fashion professionals. We see this entire programme of six weeks as providing students and staff with a window into Chinese fashion design practices, as well as a mirror to reflect on their own. The students agreed that the experience was invaluable for their education and development as young designers, in ways that will profoundly affect their designs and careers.

Margo Barton is Professor of Fashion at the School of Design, Otago Polytechnic, Dunedin, New Zealand. Her teaching practice draws on her research with a focus on fashion communication, fashion events and exhibitions, design projects and cross cultural collaborations at undergraduate and post graduate levels. Margo is actively involved in the wider fashion communities in New Zealand and internationally in her roles on the iD Dunedin Fashion Week executive board, and as a member of the executive committee of the International Foundation of Fashion Technology Institutes.

Jane Malthus is a part-time senior lecturer in the School of Design at Otago Polytechnic, New Zealand, an independent dress historian and curator and a part-time professional practice fellow at the University of Otago. She has qualifications in Clothing and Textile Sciences, History and Fine Arts. Her research focuses on social, cultural and historical questions about nineteenth and twentieth century dress, often involving material artifacts in the Otago Museum collection, where she has been an honorary curator for over 30 years, or in the Eden Hore Collection.

Annette Cadogan is a senior fashion academic and designer at the School of Design, Otago Polytechnic, Dunedin, New Zealand with a research and teaching focus on the development of prototypes for both fashion & product design. Annette teaches pattern & garment technology, product development and production planning in the Bachelor of Design program often focussing on underwear, swimwear and accessories. Annette's research is focussed on collaborative projects with researchers and external stakeholders on a diverse variety of projects such as Cactus Outdoor; Innovation Workspace OP; NOM*d, Shocktop and Jane Venis (performance artist).

Erin Broughton is a final year Bachelor of Design student studying communication design at the School of Design, Otago Polytechnic, Dunedin, New Zealand. Erin is also the Music Director at Radio One 91fm, Dunedin; and has a Bachelor of Art majoring in English from the University of Otago.

- 1 CE Hmelo-Silver; "Problem-Based Learning: What and How do Students Learn?" *Educational Psychology Review*, 16 (2004), 235-66; Henk G Schmidt, Sofie MM Loyens, Tamara Van Gog and Fred Paas, "Problem-based Learning is Compatible with Human Cognitive Architecture: Commentary on Kirschner, Sweller, and Clark," *Educational Psychologist*, 42:2 (2007), 91-7.
- 2 Nancy Cheng and Thomas Kvan, "Design Collaboration Strategies," paper presented at the Fifth International Conference on Design and Decision Support Systems in Architecture, 2000.
- 3 Margo Barton, "Prime Minister's Scholarship Asia application", 2016.