



Shopping for Vice

By Jeffrey Ludlow

*A notice to all fickle shoppers and planner:
Between our professional lives as creators of space and our personal lives as shoppers exists our contradictory moods towards consumerism and the consumer environments. While our imagination has been led to exile by the generic terms of shopping ubiquity, our self-image is awaiting the next purchase to wash itself anew.*

We all have read No Logo and The Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping with the same intensity that we scan the perfumed pages of glossy fashion magazines. All in hopes to find our ideal image that reflects our scepticism, creativity, and defeat. An image that says, I have intellectualized shopping as public space, yes I detest it on an individual level and yes I did pay a lot for this Prada item. As this conflicting cycle repeats, the antipathy and energy we have devoted to shopping as planners and consumers, is beginning to wane.

"Whoever said money can't buy happiness simply didn't know where to go shopping" Bo Derek

Counterfeiters of the world unite

At this moment, there is an economic war engaged in China whether, computer chips, auto-parts, or retail items, everything and anything is being forged, modified and repackaged. It is estimated that companies in the US, EU and Japan lose \$50 billion a year to Chinese counterfeiters and that multinational corporations lose at least 20 percent of the value of all sales within China to counterfeiters. This small task of copying in the production factories of our global economy has escalated to the point of questioning the very laws and morals we have on production, shopping, and our individual purchasing habits.

Leaving the debatable and moral questions aside of piracy and intellectual property, the Chinese impulse to counterfeit is an economic stimulus towards creative/flexible products and distribution models. As this impulse undermines established brands, it does more than challenge the status quo of the business world, but also questions the mundane shopping experiences we call malls, department stores, etc.

A budget tells us what we can't afford, but it doesn't keep us from buying it. William Feather

Judging Counterfeits

From the vast and growing range of counterfeit products, only the retail sector of luxury and name-brand counterfeits are having a direct affect on the shopping environment of Chinese cities. Media propelled luxury items have created a fetished demand amongst the shopping public. A demand that is either un-matched by production means, un-accessible financially, or a disposable novelty to the shopping Chinese majority. Yet this very craving of elite commerce is the very drive for producers of simulated goods to undermine the original products of luxury citizens. Within the mainland, counterfeit producers go to any length to hurdle and surpass legal trademark barriers all at a fraction of retail cost. This legal maneuvering in trademark laws, has resulted not only in replicated items of luxury, but also close approximations, un-apologetically fake items, to truly original items of consumerism. The following are three of our commercial desires' illegitimate offspring.

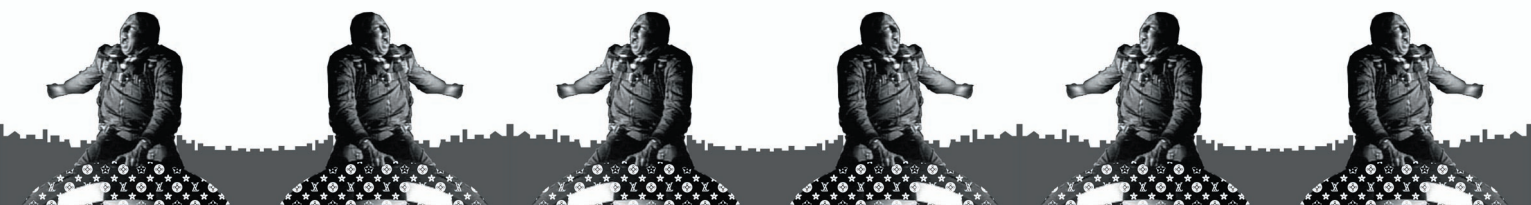
Replica Items: The first tier of counterfeits is the smallest of the three products groups yet the most secluded and trademark sensitive. A result of a legitimate manufacturing boom in China, Replica products can be tailored to exact proportions, materials and styles. Their release often coincides with the authentic product or even earlier. The best examples of this can be found in luxury goods of high quality rather than cultural icon value. However being the nearest approximation of luxury has its price, for this product range is the most prosecutable to a vendor of counterfeits.

Fake Items

The second tier of counterfeits is the most iconic novelty item of counterfeit shopping yet the most dangerous to legitimate productions of the retail market. Fake items simulate luxury good or name brand in image but are made in bulk with inexpensive materials and labour. This cheap imitation craftsmanship allows Fake products to spawn and flood the market in large quantities. These items litter our pop culture and are currently appearing in every major metropolis to torment branding corporations.

Phoney Items

The third tier of counterfeits is a unique grey area, where manufacturing distorts logos and product styling





to create similar yet unique goods. In doing so, these mutant brands toe trademark legal limits while tailoring near products aligned with the current trends. These fashion anomalies are the local resonations of global branding trends, distilled and distorted by adhering to trademark limits. Phoney items are the legal spoofs of the brand empire and indicate an impending sophistication and creativity of counterfeit productions toward originality.

"I am not a business man, I am in the business, man." Jay Z

How to sell your counterfeits

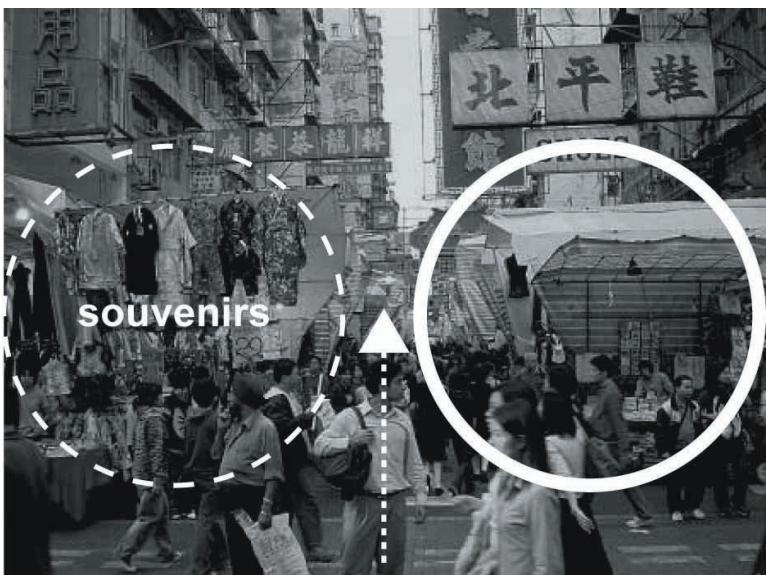
From 1949 to 1979, China scarcely maintained commercial law and had no provisions for foreign entities to do business. The legal and regulatory environment was, and still is, characterized by competing and often contradictory provincial and local laws, regulations and powers. These provincial variations on the laws of vending counterfeits within Chinese cities has created three vice shopping forms that are determined by the

In the flow

Lodged within congested, urban arteries of Chinese cities there exist temporary merchants of Fake products. Armed with display counters that easily put away, hawkers advertise their wares to the flows of mass pedestrian traffic. Without an official legal presence, bustling sidewalks turn to ad-hoc markets of pirated DVDs and forged goods. Yet with the presence of the law, or rain, these floating stores fold to disappear as merchants melt into the crowds.

In the know

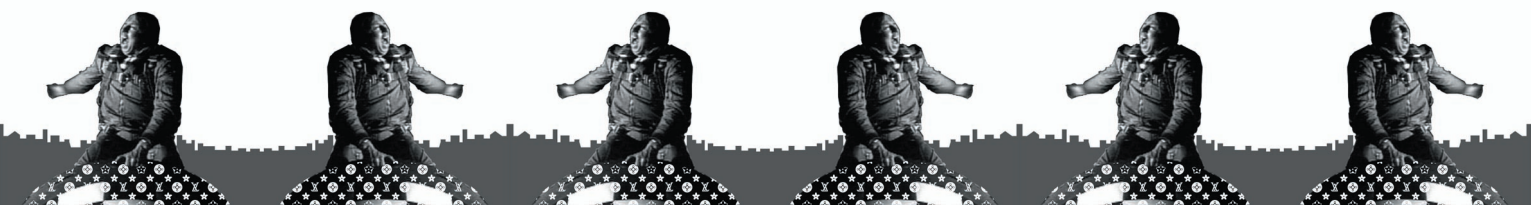
Detail orientated shoppers yearning for Replica items of luxury must trek to secluded and covert stores to find their near perfect approximations. Due to the high risk and low production volume of these goods, vendors of Replica goods buffer their stores from the general shopping public with an imitation store. This store, a vacant restaurant or boutique, gives way to a bustling room of products and picky shoppers. The locations of these shops are kept discrete by hushed information passed on by word of mouth.



legitimacy of the forged product sold. These Chinese shopping forms vary in discretiness, proximity to shopping masses, and isolation. Although these shops are a common Chinese occurrence, these vice shopping forms also exist in other Asian countries and are appearing more and more in cities around the world.

In the show

Tolerated by opportunistic local government officials, these open-air markets pair Fake, and Phoney goods with tourist souvenirs. This passive government acceptance of counterfeit goods is profitable, but also used as a measure of segregating and controlling the local counterfeit industry.





These markets sell their provinces sponsored counterfeit goods with the same enthusiasm that they would sell regional souvenirs and handicrafts.

form, like the Las Vegas strip, we must champion the subject for what it can do for our polarized shopping moods. It can satisfy the dichotomy that we as shop-



How We Should Learn to Stop Worrying and Love the Chinese Counterfeit Bomb

As imitation designs become more intelligent in dodging, stricter trademark laws, the counterfeit market will continue to persist and thrive. The question of Chinese counterfeits disappearing from the market is muted when considering the large income differences in the Chinese economy, between poor and nouveau-riche, is far from stabilizing. Therefore the aspiration for luxury goods is inherent but so is the want for the quick monetary rewards of these pirating productions and vending. So as long as this illicit activity is generating income and avoids damaging the internal Chinese economy, central authorities will continue to turn a blind eye.

However, what will affect the counterfeit market is the external economic pressure from those negatively affected by it, namely large corporations and their government sponsors. This pressure will result in a restructuring of the legal framework of trademarks within China and the world. However rather than stopping counterfeiting and piracy, these laws will only mould the next generation of forgeries and their corresponding distribution models.

Counterfeit shopping is similar to gambling in that legal boundaries and a compulsive activity shape both. This petty vice has the same urban potential, as gambling, to develop networked oddities of merit and intrigue within our cities.

Yet before vice shopping reaches a stabilized urban

pers and planners cycle around. It can return shopping to the city streets, as networks of vice shopping sell globalization's illegitimate products. It will return shopping to being more than an opportunistic excuse to design luxury flagship stores. Shopping will be reflected back on to our cities, not into our architecture. Products will once again have a relationship with how and where they are sold. We will get our name brand goods for cheap and we will feel good about it.

Shopping is Dead, Long Live Shopping

Jeffrey Ludlow is the founder of sLow. A collaborative research group based on Urban collections and observations. Currently working as an architect in Hong Kong.

- Sources:
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