



An aerial view of Bangkok at night, showing the vast city lights.

Far Eastern Travels

Assistant Editor Sarah Cullen sat down with Women in Lighting to discuss their recent trip to Asia

For this instalment of Women in Lighting (WiL), I travelled across the world to the Far East from the comfort of my desk, in a time when travel is not permitted due to the Covid-19 pandemic. We worked closely with the WiL team to create an article that coincides with the release of their Asian interviews, conducted at the end of 2019 in a whirlwind five-day trip that covered four cities. I sat down with Sharon Stammers and Martin Lupton to discuss the trip: “Eight months after the WiL project began and in-between our lighting projects, we found a small window, mid-November 2019, of five days in which to cover four cities in Asia – Hong Kong, Bangkok, Singapore and Shanghai,” she explained. “We knew this would be a unique opportunity for us to expand the online interviews and cover a completely different continent. Since formalighting has its Asia headquarters in Hong Kong, their team organised this whirlwind trip to Asia, which feels like a lifetime ago – even though only a few months have passed.” Whilst traveling across these four cities, Light Collective completed thirteen interviews with sixteen female designers, as well as

attending two WiL specific evening events with “extraordinary members of lighting design”, all with the help of formalighting’s Hong Kong based team.

“In Hong Kong we interviewed Isabella Cheung from Inverse Lighting, Wendy Mak from Arup, Meike Goessling (Hong Kong’s WiL Ambassador) and Joy Wong from Light Links,” explained Stammers. “In Bangkok, we spoke with Tippaya Prasertsuk from Be Lit, Dr. Vannapa Pimviriyakul from With Light and Rinnin Kositanont from DJ Coalition. We also caught up with Thailand’s WiL Ambassador, Pilasinee Rattarangsi, at the WiL evening event hosted by formalighting.

“In Singapore, we interviewed Cherylina Chua from KLD Consulting, Josephine Dimalibot Schneider from Bo Steiber Lighting Design and Phaphorn Kasemtavornsilpa, SunYoung Hwang, Mayumi Banno and Angkana Kongchatri from Lighting Planners Associates. We also heard from Singapore’s WiL Ambassador, Yah Li Toh from Light Collab, and designer Anna Kadurina from Booms Lighting, at the WiL Singapore evening event where the two lighting designers shared presentations about their work.

“In Shanghai, we interviewed Jenna Liu (Shanghai’s WiL Ambassador)

from Uno Lai, Phoebe Yu from Lighting Images and Lisa Wei from ATL. The last two of these interviews were in Chinese!” she added. “We were welcomed into all the offices above and given language support from the local formalighting team when needed. “The WiL evening events created the opportunity of meeting other local designers (both male and female) on this short trip. The Bangkok WiL dinner, held at the top of the highest building in Thailand (where we walked across the roof’s outdoor glass floor...), the WiL dinner overlooking the Bund in Shanghai, and the networking event in Singapore – again up at the top of the Altitude roof bar – were all well attended. It was great to meet up with Hong Kong WiL ambassador Meike, Thailand WiL ambassador Pilasinee Rattarangsi and Ya Li Toh, the WiL ambassador for Singapore in their respective countries.

“The response and feedback we have received from the WiL project has heightened our sense of responsibility to ensure that designers feel comfortable to reach out to us and to offer their ideas of how this platform can better support and inspire them.

“This trip resulted in a strengthening of the project in Asia and an expansion of the WiL community. It was good to be able to explain



1. Joy Wong having her interview conducted in Hong Kong.
 2 & 3. An evening event held in Bangkok where women in lighting and male supporters come together.
 4. A relaxed snapshot of Isabella Cheung having her interview with Sharon Stammers of Light Collective.
 5. A round table interview with the female colleagues of Lighting Planners Associates.
 Photography: IVANSEASON

the origins of the project in person and to get opinions from other parts of the world. It was also a pleasure to personally connect with the women we interviewed and to hear their stories.

“The outcome will be 13 brand new interviews being released on the website to tie in with this article.

“Our brief immersion in the Asian culture, eating great food and appreciating amazing architecture, will not be forgotten as Asia clearly offers dynamic opportunities in lighting design. It was our first time in Shanghai, and we met with members of formalighting’s Shanghai office team, so our overnight visit introduced us to lots of new lighting professionals and we hope to return for another visit one day and reconnect with all these new WiL supporters.”

arc sat down with a number of WiL Ambassadors across South-East Asia to discuss their experiences as women in design as well as their roles in their lighting communities and how they became ambassadors for the WiL project.

Ya-Hui Cheng is the ambassador for Taipei as well as Founder and Design Director of Light Poetic International. She holds an undergraduate degree in Interior Design from CYCU in Taiwan, a Daylighting Design postgraduate qualification from KTH in Sweden and a Master’s degree in Architectural Lighting Design from Hochschule Wismar in Germany. She has delivered speeches at multiple PLDC events and received an IALD award in 2016. In 2017 she received both IES International Illumination Award of Merit and Excellence in USA,

and in 2019 she was the on the judging panel for the [d]arc awards.

When asked about her experience as a woman in the lighting and design industry, Cheng commented: “I was once asked by a male manager about my future plan to have a baby, so the office knew how to plan my future opportunities and position – this is kind of discrimination. A lot of women hide their baby plans, so they still get fair chances at work. I believe the fact that having a baby and taking care of a newborn should be a plus for the women’s professional experience. Such experience makes them more caring, open minded, tolerant and resilient.”

At the time of writing, the majority of the world is in lockdown amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. As such, we asked the WiL ambassadors what their experiences were in Asia during this time. Cheng added: “The lockdown has proved that work can be conducted at home. That makes it possible for women or couples to work at home while children are around, and it promotes a work/life-balanced lifestyle.

“Together with the ambassador in Shanghai, we had spoken with formalighting at the end of last year to make plans for an event in February this year. However, the pandemic has delayed this plan. I have also talked to local lighting art and culture foundations, as well as a few Women in Lighting entrepreneurs at various lighting occasions, and they are fully aware of the WiL movement. Once the social distancing period is over, we will resume planning of the event.



Shanghai's skyline illuminated in an array of bright lights and colours.

"I am also planning to work with a group of women in architecture so we can share more insight and experiences.

"It is very exciting to see more and more women make their voices heard in many professional and public occasions. However, we hope to see louder voices from men to support their partners and wives to carry out their professional dreams."

Meike Goessling is the ambassador for Hong Kong. With a background in Architecture, Goessling made the common step into Architectural Lighting Design. "I trained in Germany, the UK and the US, and then worked for Lichtvision in Berlin until relocating to Hong Kong to set up their local office there. It has been exciting, challenging and also a rewarding time working with a great crowd of people on projects ranging from bespoke installations to large-format and technical developments. Having recently changed my role, I am an independent lighting consultant today. It is a privilege to be part of Women in Lighting and based on some feedback I got throughout the last months, I hope to be able and share some of this experience so far," she told arc.

When asked about her experiences as a female designer, she

reflected on how WiL was the reason she paid attention to the role her gender had played throughout her career so far. "I did not think about the 'female' aspect of my work as something particularly unusual until WiL approached me. From day one of my education, as well as during work life, I experienced a high percentage of female students, architects and designers. Looking back, I approached most challenges with a pragmatic 'how to...?' mindset and a variable degree of stubbornness, finding a solution.

"The lighting world is very well connected, whether across countries or markets, and I think the high number of women in lighting supports this collaborative aspect. Living in an environment that involves people from different backgrounds and parts of the world, I experienced that eventually how you do your work and what you do matters most."

Reflecting on her experiences during lockdown in Hong Kong, Goessling commented: "At the moment, there is a lot of attention on the direct consequences of lockdown. The impact on people and societies varies a lot, it materialises in different aspects of life or at another time. Whenever my thoughts go spinning, I try to remind

myself of the perspective beyond and those things that don't change. Yet, there are new experiences and lessons learned. For lighting design, the long-term change in living and working environments requires attention, just like our exposure to different light sources. Think about the efficiency of virtual meetings weighed against the value of personal meetings and observing light with your own eyes. This will impact how we develop a design within the team and how we specify our designs, eventually having an effect on the process and the outcome.

"Gatherings in Hong Kong have been impacted by recent events, but this allowed us to connect with another woman in lighting, which is Sharon Maghnagi. She has been incredibly helpful and thoughtful no matter what.

"Physical meetings are of high value here and I am still not a keen user of social media, but with more and more people becoming used to virtual socialising, I would throw some previous hesitation overboard and think this can be an opportunity, not just locally. "With the idea to create awareness and improve visibility of the many Women in Lighting, I hope to share experience and learn

from each other. Maybe this can be an opportunity for younger designers to raise their questions, which they may not want to in their daily environment. Ambition is not a negative thing to have and should be used as a positive drive. But getting back to your previous question about my personal experience, eventually there should be a 'normality' where a person's individual abilities and attitude are relevant."

Yah Li Toh is the ambassador for Singapore and Principal at Light Collab. After completing a degree in Architecture, like many others she was inspired to venture into Architectural Lighting and went on to complete a Master's in the subject at Hochschule Wismar, quickly followed by accepting a role in Singapore with the Lighting Planners Associates.

"I did not think of starting a practice, but I went along with whatever came my way, so I started freelancing for a residential project and things became busier as more projects came in, which is when I decided it was a good time to start Light Collab properly in 2010. Of course, it has been a challenge for ten years now – from starting a practice, getting clients, hiring your first staff, your first office



1. The Singapore skyline is brightly illuminated with the Marina Bay Sands hotel in the centre, dominating the horizon.
 2. (Singapore) & 3. (Shanghai) Light Collective with Sharon Maghnagi of formalighting at the evening events in Singapore and Shanghai. Crossing your finger and thumb together represent a 'tiny heart' - a thoughtful symbol of care, much like the peace sign.



rental, a bigger team, mentoring staff and business continuity, branding and having a competitive edge,” she explained.

“Things started to change in 2015 when I became a professional member of the IALD and also one of the first five people in the world, and the first woman, to be recognised as a Certified Lighting Designer (CLD). Doors started opening and clients had more confidence in my, and Light Collab’s, competency and were willing to give us a chance to embark on projects. With more projects completed, we were also able to submit for awards such as LIT and IES Awards and finally the practice and its work are bearing fruits.

“In 2018, I was also very honoured to be one of six to be shortlisted as Designer of the Year for the Singapore President’s Design Awards and the only one to receive commendation from the Jurors. 2019 was a really memorable year as I was also named in the top 40 under 40 lighting designers by Lighting Design Awards 2019 and also a Generation T Honouree for List 2019 for Asia Tatler, one of the 20 future-shapers honourees by the Peak magazine and recipient of the Skillsfuture Fellowship Award 2019.

“My profession allows me to explore different

facets of myself, being a design-preneur, to grooming the next generation of lighting designers, to bringing together the industry as the regional coordinator for IALD SEA. The IALD also gave me lots of opportunities to grow professionally; being an advisor to the CLD Board and serving as a judge for the 36th IALD Lighting International Awards in 2019. I am also very grateful for the chance to be able to have various opportunities to spread the love of light and awareness of our profession through documentaries for national TV and radio stations.” Speaking from her experiences as a female designer, she added: “Generally in Singapore, it is still fine. Many of the competitors are led by male figureheads and designers in the design industry. In the lighting industry, sometimes there is also a slight stereotyping that women are not hands-on enough, or their technical knowledge is not as strong. There is also some preference for foreign talent too in Asia. Thus, it is important for a local female lead designer to have a voice and presence in order to lead the company locally and internationally.”

Kaori Hiroki is the Japanese Ambassador for WiL and Founder of Lyshus. She has experienced an

A selection of the interviewees that Light Collective met and conducted interviews with as part of their trip around Asia.



Rinnin Kositanont
Thailand // DJ Coalition



Wendy Mak
Hong Kong // Arup



Cheryline Chua
Singapore // KLD Consulting



Meike Goessling
Hong Kong // Lighting Design Consultant



Isabella Cheung
Hong Kong // Inverse Lighting



Joy Wong
Hong Kong // Lightlinks



Vannapa Pimviriyakul
Thailand // With Light



Jenna Liu
China // Unolai



Josphine Dimalibot Schneider
Singapore // Bo Steiber



Lisa Wei
China // ATL



Phoebe Yu
China // Lighting Images



Tippaya Prasertsuk
Thailand // Be Lit



Lighting Planners Associates
Singapore

equal gender balance in the lighting industry in Japan, claiming a 50% male/female split. However, when working on a current series of interviews with fellow Japanese female designers, she has uncovered opposing views. “I heard a lot of great stories from each woman I interviewed. However, I found that many women have struggled with ‘old-fashioned gender roles’ and sometimes constrained themselves. I think now is the time to realise the bias and improve circumstances for our future generations.”

Pilasinee Rattarangsi is the Ambassador for Thailand and is the Founder of Rangsi Atelier. Rattarangsi graduated with a Bachelor of Architecture and a Rector Certificate of Honours, before continuing her studies with a Master’s of Architectural Lighting Design at Hochschule Wismar. In 2005, she completed her Theatrical and Architectural Lighting Design apprenticeship with Jesper Kongshaug, Scenograferne, Det Kongelige Theater (The Royal Danish Theatre), Lundgaard and Tranberg Architects in Copenhagen, Denmark. Speaking of her experiences as a female designer, she said: “It has been a great experience for 16 years in lighting so far. Nothing to complain. Ok, maybe a little bit... We work with light and darkness, so sometimes being woman and working late could be difficult in some contexts.

“We are big ‘family’ here; lighting designers in Thailand. So many of us are friends on Facebook. We share ideas, projects and also our personal life. We have a very friendly atmosphere and it’s very Thai also, I would say.

“Women make up the majority of lighting designers in Thailand and we all are in the spotlight and receive mutual respect. We have had a Facebook group for Thai Lighting Designers since around 2006 and we share knowledge etc. on there, and once a year we come together to create a lighting installation piece at Bangkok Design Week.

“I would like to acknowledge the WiL team and their dedication. It has been growing beautifully, and I am happy to be a part of it. It is great if I can be a small connecting point for Thai lighting designers and the other designers elsewhere. When I talk about this project to suppliers, universities, professional friends, they also appreciate it a lot - and they really like the name ‘Women in Lighting’, they said it is such a powerful name.”

When asked about her perspective of women in lighting and business and her time living in Hong Kong, Sharon Maghnagi of formalighting, said: “In my case I am grateful for the childcare infrastructure in Hong Kong that helped me to seamlessly return to work after only a few weeks of having my second child, which then allowed me not to lose momentum on the projects I was in the middle of developing, before I gave birth,” she explained. “Hong Kong really has a cultural mindset of enabling a woman’s participation and productivity in the work force and I consider myself very fortunate to work here and contribute as a result of the opportunities afforded to me by this great city.”

Upon reflection on their trip, Light Collective received a huge amount of feedback that brought with it a sense of responsibility to “ensure that designers feel comfortable to reach out to us and to offer their ideas of how this platform can better support and inspire them”.

Stammers added: “This trip resulted in a strengthening of the project in Asia and an expansion of the WiL community. It was good to be able to explain the origins of the project in person and to get opinions from other parts of the world. It was also a pleasure to personally connect with the women we interviewed and to hear their stories.” Looking back at their trip, we asked Light Collective if they had witnessed any interesting comparisons with other international trips they had conducted as part of the WiL interviews. “The interviewees in Asia appeared to be more confident. Even speaking in English as their second or third language, the interviewees were very composed and confident in their delivery. They proudly shared their portfolio of projects but remained so humble notwithstanding the impressive scale of their projects and significant impact of their work,” explained Lupton.

“The main difference seemed to be the approach to design - there is a softer approach to the application of light, which would appear to come from cultural reasons. Vannapa, for example, talks about Buddhism and how it inspires her work in her interview.

“Tippaya literally took us on an idyllic journey of a prestigious resort with the images of her lighting design scheme for the project. We felt so tranquil watching the project on the slide show, that we all longed to experience an actual stay there. The scheme she created was conscious of light pollution in this luxurious sanctuary, yet she upheld the prestigious standard of the renowned hospitality brand. “Lighting design in Asia has its own identity and high emotional intelligence, which the women we interviewed were strongly connected to.

“It seems incredible now that we were able to easily fly to all these places and meet all these women in their offices, given how much the world has changed since. We couldn’t have foreseen the importance of this connection now, but to have this digital library - which is not on any time schedule, and communicates inclusivity - has allowed us to build on actions, which are more relevant to our circumstances today - like the WiL in Lockdown initiative [a collection of submitted snapshots of WiL and supporters from their homes during lockdown], which is so uplifting to read during a period of isolation. “It may not be directly related to our recent trip to Asia, but it was very exciting to see that recently a lighting designer from Beijing submitted her own interview on the website. We also received three more interviews from designers in Japan. We hope this will continue and that the WiL movement will reach other areas of Asia and engage designers through our inviting community.”

To coincide with the publishing of this article, Light Collective have published the first set of four interviews. “The digital world has recently seen a tsunami of webinars, chats, panels and interviews and our concern was that if we released them one at a time, they would get lost. Over the next two months, we plan to release a set of four interviews every two weeks. Each set will include an interview from one of the four cities we visited in Asia. They will all be available on the Women in Lighting project website and on some of our partners sites.” ■

www.womeninlighting.com