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# Cheap Rubbish From China Is A Myth

By David Mantey, Editor, PD&D

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**“There is no correlation between the price and quality in China.”**

Star Prototype China is owned and run by Gordon Styles, British businessman and engineer.

In 1993, Styles began building what became the U.K.’s largest rapid prototyping technology (RPT) company, which he later sold.

Styles then founded Star Prototype — a full service RPT bureau that specializes in rapid prototyping, urethanes, CNC machining, rapid tooling and molding — in 2005 with the intention of offering western clients the opportunity to use a reliable and high-quality rapid prototyping and rapid manufacturing supplier in China.



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I recently had the opportunity to speak with Styles in the latest *PD&D Electronic Fireside Chat* to discuss some of the myths regarding manufacturing in China.

**PD&D: What is the biggest myth regarding manufacturing in China?**

**Gordon Styles:** The biggest myth is “Cheap Rubbish from China” — the correlation between the price and quality in China.

I have spent top dollar for rubbish; and equally I have received best quality for prices so low they make your eyes water. In fact, I say that the 80/20 rule applies, inversely.

In developed countries, 80 percent of suppliers are good-to-excellent quality; whereas in China it is only 20 percent. This is usually driven by inefficiencies in a particular niche.

**PD&D: Why do companies choose to move to China instead of continuing work in the U.S.?**

**Styles:** For the last 40 years in the U.K., and to a similar degree in the U.S., industry and manufacturing have been ignored and allowed to wither on the vine.

In the U.K., manufacturing went below critical mass in the last 10 years, and is now gasping its last breaths; U.S. manufacturing doing the same.

The blame for this can be laid at the feet of successive governments of all persuasions. Many companies go to China and can't get the capacity anymore at home. It is a vicious cycle that will need some serious political leadership to reverse. In the U.S. and U.K. emerge from recession the move to China will actually accelerate. This is because of the "Last Man Standing" survived get to feast as the economy starts to grow again — lead times go out and prices go up — ipso facto, more business.

**PD&D: In your opinion, how would you describe Chinese working conditions?**

**Styles:** In China, you have the whole spectrum. Generally the foreign owned enterprises offer better working conditions than the Chinese; Taiwanese; Japanese and, of course, the "Westerners."

My own business partner James Li Xue Zhong previously worked building ships. He could go a whole month without entering the hull of a ship — breathing welding fumes; no masks; minimal ventilation; a bowl of rice twice a day (much less comfort). At the end of three months the company refused to pay him.

When we recently installed a new paint booth, we were required by the government to insist that our workers wore active respirators. We fit an active carbon exhaust filter. All the factories in the area were forced to do this. Health and safety at work in China is at a pace that I would put it on par with the U.S. and U.K. of the 1980s.

**PD&D: To what do you attribute the rapid expansion of the Chinese manufacturing industry?**

**Styles:** Here come two completely unexpected and extremely controversial answers:

1) The entire Politbureau [The executive committee and chief policymaking body of Communist China] including Premier Wen [Jiabao], he is a geologist — earth Engineering, same thing.

China is run by Engineers that understand the importance of manufacturing and construction as the major wealth creating society.

2) The Chinese Government does not have to answer to the masses and can therefore make bold and very long-term decisions for the country long-term. Deng Xiaoping laid out a long-term plan for China in the 1970s, and the government of today continues original goals. In my opinion, Western-style democracy in China would have led to a much less potent manufacturing sector.

**PD&D: Why is Star Prototype based out of China? You state that you're "western owned, and managed in China."**

**Styles:** I couldn't make money as an engineer in the U.K. anymore. I also love the feeling of working in a country where you are an engineer. I feel special in China. I felt professionally worthless and unwanted in the U.K.

**PD&D: How did you get into the business?**

**Styles:** I started out in precision engineering in 1983, and in 1993 I started what became the U.K.'s largest RPT Bureau guys, and in 2000 I sold STYLES RPD to **ARRK**. After a number of years out of the industry, I decided to go for the China market opportunity.

**PD&D: How has your life changed since you relocated from Britain?**

**Styles:** I am a very proud and patriotic Briton. I love my country; I love my Queen; I love the great spirit of the British working class. The career politicians have done to my country.

The greatest change for me after relocation was to regain my self-respect as a businessman and as an engineer. Not to mention playing blues guitar again after a 14-year break.

I miss my kids, but they love to holiday here in Zhongshan. Great beer! Great music! And the nightlife is great. Not as good in San Diego – but not far off.

**PD&D: In the current economic climate, what keeps you up at night?**

**Styles:** I did my personal recession between 2002 and 2006. I was running on financial fumes at that time.

In that period, I used to hate guys telling me how much money they made each week from the increase in the house price and keeping a roof over my family's head kept me awake back then.

I sleep pretty well nowadays as we were almost untouched by the recent economic recession and have continued to do

For more information on Star Prototype, visit <http://www.star-prototype-china.com/>.

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**Scott Randall**

Cheers, Mr. Styles. I agree that Chinese manufacturing has surpassed old stereotypes of "cheap" quality. \ manufacturing must accept this is a real issue.

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