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Cultural and Creative Industries in China: challenges to the top- down model

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前言

在工业革命之后，人们生活水平的提高，为了更加满足人们精神文化需求，文化产业由此诞生。

文化产业是一个新兴产业，国际上将其称为朝阳产业、黄金产业。虽然法兰克福学派的霍克海默（M.Horkheimer）与阿多诺（Theodor Adorno）在1947年才首次提出文化产业（又称文化工业）概念，但文化产业活动自古有之。特别是在20世纪70 | 80年代的快速发展时期，文化产业迅速成为西方发达国家的新兴支柱产业。

文化产业在英国被称为创意产业，这一名称的首次出现是英国创意产业特别工作组提出的，并被政府所采纳。它是指“源于个体创造力、技能和才华的活动，而通过知识产权的生成和取用，这些活动拥有创造财富和就业的潜力”，主要是由出版、音乐、表演艺术、电影、电视和广播、软件、广告、建筑、设计、艺术品和古董交易市场、手工艺品以及时装设计等行业组成。文化产业是一个非常广泛的概念，给它下一个精确的定义是一件很困难的事情。一直以来，不少哲学家、社会学家、人类学家、历史学家和语言学家都试图从各自学科的角度来界定文化的概念。然而，迄今为止仍没有获得一个公认的概念，有文化工业、文化产业与文化创意产业。由于定义的多样性，以及经常出现的问题和困惑，我将在第一章的第一部分对这一领域的学者和组织提供的定义进行解释。

在此之后，研究重点放在中国。中国对文化产业的重视肇始于2000年“十五”计划当中，中国共产党的十六大首次区分文化事业和文化产业，把发展文化产业作为市场经济条件下繁荣社会主义文化、满足人民群众精神文化需求的重要途径；十七届六中全会在建设社会主义文化强国的目标下，明确提出推动文化产业成为国民经济的支柱产业，十八大再次强调了文化产业的地位和作用。在国家政策和文化和文化体制改革的带动下，中国文化产业连续保持了快速增长势头，年均增长速度达到20%以上，2012年中国实现增加值16000亿元人民币，占GDP总量的3%。

随着中国文化产业的发展，文化产业作为一个独立的产业门类越来越得到社会各界的认同和肯定，国家将其纳入国民经济核算体系，同时还建立了文化产业的统计指标体系，进一步提出要推动文化产业成为国民经济支柱产业。

20 世纪 50 年代的第三次技术革命以信息技术为标志，以生物工程技术为主体，把人类推进到了知识经济时代，使微电子技术、信息工程技术等在 20 世纪 70 年代得到全面发展，形成了一批知识密集型和技术密集型产业，文化产业也迎来了蓬勃发展的大好局面。特别是数字技术和网络技术日新月异的变化，把人类由文本文化时代推进到了视觉的读图文化时代。计算机、电视、手机、PDA（掌上计算机）、MP4 等设备为终端的新媒体通过互联网、无线通信网、数字广播电视网和卫星等渠道，实现了个性化、互动化、细分化的传播方式。数字文化产业和网络文化产业成为当今世界占主导地位的文化产业。

中国共产党自 1949 年成立以来，一直试图通过集中权力来加强控制，为此，我们通常称之为自上而下的政策实践。这意味着某些东西是由最高层制定的，就像在政府或国家中央机关一样，而地方行动者必须按照上面给出的指示按原样执行。自从中国共产党执政以来，这一直是中国政治生活各个方面的首选模式，因为它给不稳定和可能出现的混乱提供了更少的空间，相反，它可能发生在相反的模式，即所谓的自下而上。自底向上模型出现在流程不遵循上面强加的命令或指导方针，而是在本地级别生成的时候，在本地级别，我们可以引用不同的独立参与者，比如：企业家、艺术家、公民等等。

中国政府认为文化创意产业与经济中的其他产业同等重要，因此必须遵守中央政府的行政法规。据中国官方文件报道，自上而下的政策方法应用于创意和文化领域最常见的产品之一就是集群创造。在越来越多的城市中，许多地区正在举办各种各样的活动，有些是艺术类的，有些是创造性的，有些是创新性的。但这些集群在多大程度上真正有效地创造了创新？它们是如何工作的以及自顶向下自底向上的动态是如何影响这些组织的？这就是我的分析重点，事实证明，在大多数情况下这是失败的。西方文学和中国文学在集群中创造的物质文化和创新领域评估许多问题特征在中国这种情况，什么是创意产业集群的核心的核扩散仅仅是他们提供盈利的机会，而不是将实际上促进文化和文化和创意工作者交流。这主要是由于中央政府通过不允许价值创造和创新的政策制定的自上而下的方法，政

府当局也认识到这一问题。在下一分章中，我将分析这种自上而下的方法如何受到挑战，并能导致文化和创造性领域的价值创造活动。

然后我去分析一些实例，主要从文化产业领域，发达国家和开始从底部的现象，导致自底向上流动，导致广泛的提到的现象，以这种方式，构成了一个有趣的挑战规则的自上向下的趋势在中国每个行业，尤其是文化和创意。因此，分析这一现象最初是如何在中国这样一个自上而下的统治环境中开始，然后传播开来的，是一件有趣的事情，因为这种情况使创意制作人更难从事风险更高的项目，因为它没有中央权力的支持。

在最后一章中，我通过定性研究的方法研究了中国地下艺术场景的一个新现象——独立艺术图书出版，特别是在今年 5 月上海艺术书展期间所进行的相关采访。

1. Creative Industries

1.1 Creative Industries in the West

1.1.1 Complexity of the definition

John Hartley (2013:5) describes the Creative Industries as:

[...] the conceptual and practical convergence of the Creative Arts (individual talent) with Cultural Industries (mass scale), in the context of new media technologies (ICTs) within a new knowledge economy, for the use of newly interactive citizen-consumers.

Most of the scholars in this wide field of study have tried to provide their own version of the definition of Creative Industries, some of them are more economic oriented, others have a strong anthropology side to them, others clearly come from a sociological background.

Despite the variety of definitions and the problems and confusion that often arise because of it, it's important to notice, as Hesmondhalgh (2013: 17) stresses, that the term "cultural industries", compared to "creative industries" has a much more delimited meaning.

Flew (2004: 192) argues that creative industries cannot be considered anymore a mere niche field within the domain of cultural policy and that instead they have become a central issue to the development of the 21st-century culture and policy, therefore it is important to analyse what's behind this definition.

Many researchers and scholars in this field have proposed their own definition of the creative industries, but an agreement is hard to reach and what remains even nowadays extremely problematic in public discourse and public opinion upon this matter is, in fact, the definition itself. The main issue in defining the creative industry comes from the fact that its field of research and study is an interdisciplinary amalgam that unifies different domains, each of which has its own specialist language and each of these specialist languages is essential to advancement and development of the studies in this field. It's almost like a mosaic, with many different tiles: cultural, political, artistic, scientific, economic and technological studies and it's indeed its interdisciplinarity that allows enriching e mutual learning, even if it constitutes at the same time the origin of challenges, difficulties and sometimes confusion, but there still is not a prevailing field.

Hartley (2013) argues that the problem arising from creative industries definition it's mainly a matter of historical definition, rather than a categorical one. Since the creative industries concept came to life after the recent changes brought upon the world economy by the technology around the 1990s, he believes that it's the idea itself of creative industries that changes based on the country, because of its strict correlation to the local cultural heritage. For example in the USA creativity is perceived in a market-oriented perspective, whereas in Europe it is linked with national culture and citizenship, in the UK and other Commonwealth countries the idea of creative industries has merged this two key concepts together, linking consumer with culture and market with citizenship, in mainland China creative industries have flowed into other development policies (Hartley: 2013).

Therefore Hartley et al. think that it's important to contextualize and analyse the historical background of each of the concepts linked to the creative industries. It's important to notice that all of these concepts are "in flux" (Hartley et al., 2013), which means they are dynamic, both in terms of time and in terms of context and fields. Therefore to grasp the actual meaning of these concepts would almost be a belittlement of it instead, it's important to put these concepts in relation to the discipline, methodology and propositional content, as suggested by Hartley (2013) who argues that "recognition of historical and contextual contingency is irreducible".

Since creativity and innovation are becoming more and more necessities for the economy, because knowledge and ideas drive both wealth creation and social modernization, as Howkins (2001) argues, therefore we must now face a challenge in which creativity constitutes the main driver of social and economic development.

So it is of crucial importance to understand the premises of the definition of creative industries and try to explain it as clear as possible and try to understand what's the history behind the many expressions that are used to define creative industries nowadays.

One of the oldest expressions used to define what we would nowadays call creative industries is the so-called "cultural industries", in plural form, a term produced by The Great British Council. It refers mainly to a policy intervention of the late 1980s, emanation of the Greater London Council (GLC)¹. GLC promoted public funding in two

¹ Institution led by social democrats (Labour administration), first elected on 9th April 1964, responsible for the establishing many public owned houses in Europe, road-building, later abolished in 1986.

main environments: cultural industries and urban regeneration; policies were issued on one hand to invest in libraries and museums, public education, performing arts, crafts and literature and on the other hand capitals were invested in reconstructing cities. The rise of such policies led many rulers in Europe, but not only, to believe that they could get a return from the investment of capital in art and creative fields. The concept of ‘cultural industries’ is usually preferred by political economists such as Miège and Hesmondhalgh (Hartley et. al 2013)

Keane (2013: 40) notices how the definition of creative industries that later spread to China and the consequent policies have their origin in this specific UK concept.

For what concerns the terminology “culture industry”, in its singular form, instead, it has its theoretical origin in the ideological critique of art and culture, called “cultural theory” developed by the neo-Marxist philosophers of the Frankfurt School², Adorno and Horkheimer. Even if it had already been used before, the term “culture industry” is part of the title of one chapter in their work *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, written in the 1940s during their exile in the US. Some elements of the aforementioned analysis are still echoing in nowadays debates regarding creative industries and most importantly the core of their thesis that mass culture and commercialization led to a debased form of culture that affected the consequent development of arts and cultural policies in many countries (Flew, 2002).

The culture industry they defined in 1947 consists of a sphere of art unscrupulously unified within the capitalist society, they believe that the once autonomous sphere of art has now entered the dynamic of capitalism and consumption behaviour and that the distinctions within the cultural industry itself, which are minor differences in cultural products, are made only with the precise purpose of classifying and organizing consumers, so that no one can escape the industry mechanism. Differences inside the industry are artificially created so that everyone directly and voluntarily and spontaneously turns to the category of mass products created specifically for him. Consumers become merely statistical material; they constitute different groups based on different income. All

² With the expression Frankfurt School we refer to a group of authors and philosophers originally associated with the Institute for Social Research (*Institut für Sozialforschung*) at the University of Frankfurt, then after the Nazis came to power in Germany in 1933, the group was forced to leave Europe and was then restored at Columbia University in the United States. The group includes members such as Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Erich Fromm, Walter Benjamin and Herbert Marcuse (Flew, 2002: 62)

products of the culture industry are the same, the differentiation of the offer is an illusion, used only to create another illusion: the competition in the market and subsequently the possibility of choice.

Adorno and Horkheimer (1947) claim that the products of the culture industry because of how they are constituted paralyze the imagination and spontaneity of the culture consumer, they are wasting diseases for the mental activity of the viewer/audience. And most important the products of the Culture Industry can be consumed even if there is a lack of attention, each one of these products constitutes a model of the gigantic economic mechanism that keeps everybody under pressure. It's an industry characterized by an intrinsic contrast between the specialist artist and the producer, the sponsor and the censor, they express two diverging interests. They claim that the culture industry has reduced at mere style, its core lies in imitation mechanism, style is a promise, through it what is expressed enters the dominant form of the universality, in the language. The culture industry is described by Adorno and Horkheimer as the destination and goal of liberalism, and that is why the culture industry system came to life in the most liberal industrialized countries, where all of its means, such as cinema, radio, jazz and magazines triumphed; such means development, they argue, is originated from the general law of the Capital.

Moreover they assert that the culture industry transposed art in the sphere of consumption, its core ideology is mere business and its products prescribe the public's reactions, they differ from work of art that are ascetic, while the culture industry is pornographic and prude at the same time, what the culture industry proposes as heaven is actually daily life. They insist in their analysis of the culture industry arguing that it made the man become a "generic" being, since movies and culture industry products underline chance as the decisive element, instead of hardship and effort, chance grants everybody merely formal freedom, while they are actually constrained in an institutions and relations system, which constitutes a hyper sensible instrument of social control (Adorno 1947).

In Adorno and Horkheimer's conception, culture and industry are opposite, antagonistic, whereas in the modern capitalist democracy they have merged together.

The culture industry concept was later further inquired by Marcuse³ (1964), who made a strong critique to the capitalist industrialized society, by arguing that society led individuals to become a part of the system, through the promotion of false needs and under stimulation of critique and alternatives, thus establishing a ‘one-dimensional’ thought and behaviour.

Nowadays the critique made by the Frankfurt School continues to influence some critical scholars or activists in the field and it also played a shaping role in the policymaking process of the twentieth century. Hartley et al. (2013), for example, argue that we can see this in some official document, in which the strategy is clearly differentiated into ‘core arts’ that require direct public funds and ‘creative industries’ that are more market-oriented.

1.1.2 Origin of the concept

Hartley et al. (2013: 124) refer that the term ‘creative industries’ was first used in the Australian national policy in the 1990s, before being transplanted to the UK in 1998. As Keane (2013) explains, the definition of such industries was given by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS⁴) in the UK Blair Labour government and Minister Chris Smith, that adapted an already used definition of the cultural industries including also copyright industries and design, he said: “*those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent which have a potential for job and wealth creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property*” (DCMS 1998:3). The DCMS definition utilized standard industrial classifications (SIC)⁵ and nominated a list of thirteen sectors: advertising, architecture, art and antique markets, crafts, design, designer fashion, film and video, interactive leisure software, music, performing arts,

³Herbert Marcuse, philosopher and sociologist (Berlin 1898 - Starnberg 1979), together with Horkheimer and Adorno he was one of the most prominent representatives of the “Critical Theory of the Society” elaborated by the School of Frankfurt.

⁴ Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) is a ministerial department, supported by 45 agencies and public bodies, it is in charge of promoting Britain’s cultural and artistic heritage, help businesses to invest in innovation.

⁵ System of classification used in industrial sectors in the United States, introduced in 1997, it was later substituted by the NAICS (North American Industry Classification System), nevertheless it is still used in some governative agencies. They are composed by 4 numbers (so-called digits), grouping sectors in a progressive hierarchy of subcategories, in order to indicate a progressive detail regarding the type of product or production.

publishing, software, and computer services and television and radio. Garnham (2005) has analysed the policy implications intrinsic in the terminology shift that the UK Labour government made from cultural to creative industries in the late 90s and he argues that:

it is not just a mere neutral change of labels, but that there are both theoretical and policy stakes involved in this shift. [...] it serves as a slogan, as a shorthand reference to, and thus mobilizes unreflectively, a range of supporting theoretical and political positions. This lack of reflexivity is essential to its ideological power. It disguises the very real contradictions and empirical weaknesses of the theoretical analyses it mobilizes, and by so doing helps to mobilize a very disparate and often potentially antagonistic coalition of interests around a given policy thrust (2005:15-16).

Both Garnham and Hartley define this process of shift in the definition in the same way: a “redrawing” (2015: 16) or a “reconceptualization”, as Hartley (2013: 18) argues, was indeed made by high-level public policy-making with the specific intent of benefit from the IT and stock-market boom of the 90s. Players of this hard to define industry had no active role in the production of this definition and the definition itself helped spread the concept that culture, media, and design have an economic value, and also helped bring together a range of sectors that are usually very distant from each other.

Much criticism aroused towards Britain, because it seemed like it wanted to excel in a field “it had defined for and by itself”, as Hartley (2013: 59) argues, but at the same time the DCMS definition was of great value, since it allowed the sectors within creative industries, including creative arts, traditional media, new media, architecture, and design to be recognized as commercial, high-tech sectors.

1.1.3 Creative industries: methodologies and definitions

Since its first appearance, the idea of the innovative industry has been broken down and created from multiple points of view, demonstrating that the enthusiasm towards the theme was distinctly to increment. Between the other definitions of creative industries, it’s interesting to notice that institutions and researchers came up with models, often with graphic exemplifications.

One of the first was David Throsby (2001), who came up with a so-called ‘concentric-circle’ model, that has at its core creative arts, such as literature, music, performing arts, visual arts; while outside ‘cultural industries’, such as film, museums,

and libraries. This model is said to have an ‘intrinsic hierarchy’(Hartley et al. 2013) because it suggests that the traditional arts are the most important driver of development in creative industries.

A later attempt in defining creative industries was made always in the UK but later in 2006 by the UK National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA⁶). NESTA’s new definition model is based on the critique that the DCMS approach was insufficient in many ways, the definition was too broad, it did not differentiate between the industry sectors listed so that it was impossible to differentiate between industries with a commercial dynamic and industries that rely on public subsidy. NESTA’s definition also consists of a model, a tool to be used in policy-making along with the definition. The model is economically oriented, focused on the commercial growth potential of creative businesses and innovation and it consists of four overlapping sub-groups, identified based on the differences in business models, value chains, market structure, in which the groups are distinct but interlocking (NESTA 2006:55):

- Originals: i.e. crafts makers, visual artists and designer-makers, producers of physical artefacts, the value of which derives from their perceived creative or cultural value, exclusivity and authenticity. No mass or industrialized production.
- Content: i.e. film, television, theatre production companies, computer and video game development studios, music labels, book and magazine publishers, fashion designers. These enterprises produce IP, usually copyright protected.
- Services: i.e. advertising agencies, architecture practices, design consultancies, new media agencies: enterprises that provide creative services for clients.
- Experiences: i.e. theatre, opera, dance production companies, live music organizers and promoters, an enterprise that the right to a consumer to experience something in a specific moment.

⁶ Autonomous English philanthropy which provides reports regarding art, science and innovation

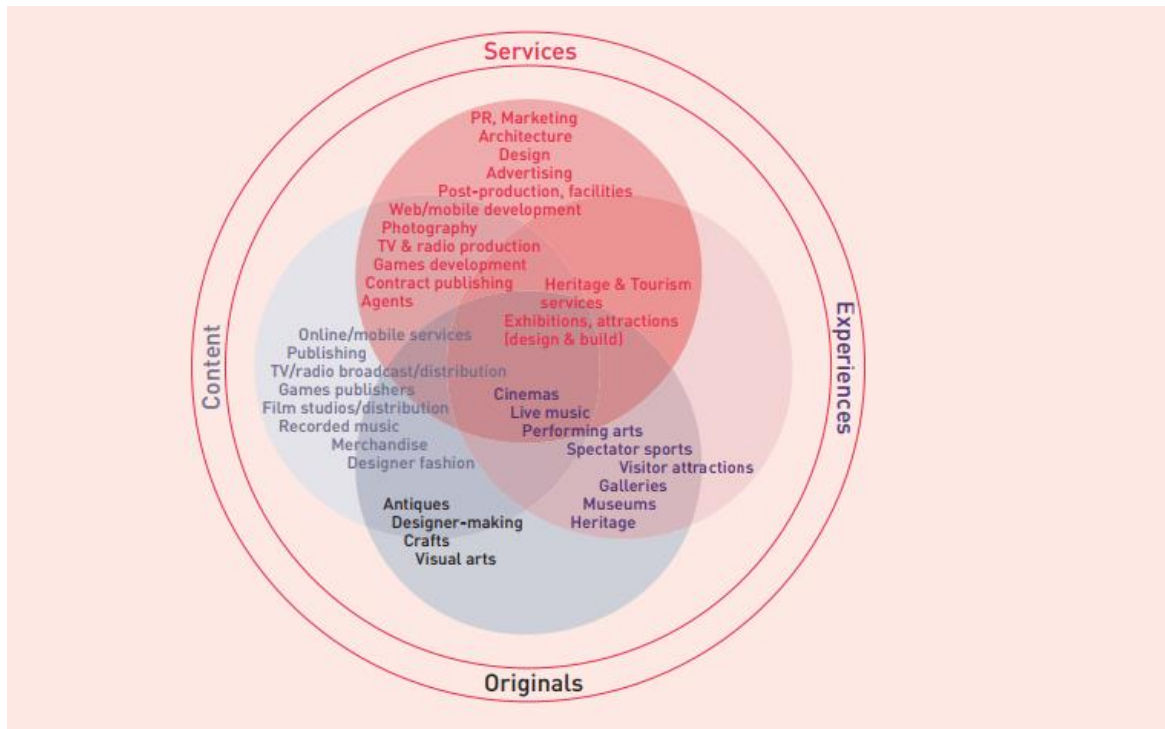


Figure 1: NESTA model of the creative industries (NESTA, 2006).

Another definition of ‘creative industries’ later given by the investigation led by The United Nations Conference of Trade and Development (UNCTAD) had a strong impact on the globalization of the CCI (Creative and Cultural Industries) concept. In its study called *The Creative Economy Report 2010— Creative economy: A feasible development option* CCI are defined as ‘heritage, arts, media and functional creation’.

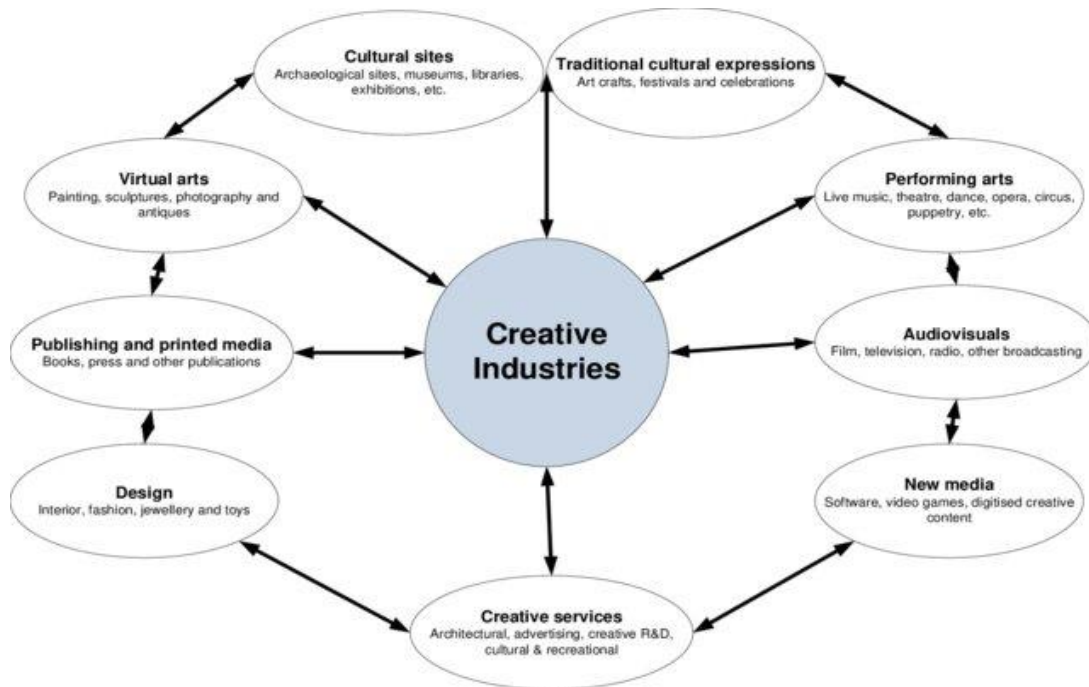


Fig.2 UNCTAD classification of creative industries. (Source: UNCTAD, 2010)

This pragmatic definition broadens the range of creative industries to traditional arts and tourism services, because it focuses more on knowledge-based activities, rather than, as DCMS' definition did put the emphasis on information, knowledge and communication sectors (Garnham 2005).

Critics were made on the UNCTAD definition, Keane (2013) i.e. criticized the logic behind UNICTAD's classification system, according to which China is ranked first as a creative exporter country, followed by Italy. This is possible due to the fact that many industrial activities and products end up being considered as part of the creative goods, such as the production of *empty* CDs, which is not exactly something that could be defined as a creative activity.

Scholars in this field also gave their own definition of "creative industries", i.e. Keane (2013) categorizes creative industries in three clusters: art, design and media, as reported in the Research Council of the National Academies in the US Beyond Productivity: Information Technology, Innovation and Creativity, where art constitutes the visual arts, performing arts, literature and publishing, photography, crafts, libraries, museums, galleries, archives, heritage sites, and arts festivals; electronic and new media includes broadcast, film and television, recorded music, software and digital media; while

design-related activities are represented by architecture, interior, and landscape design, fashion, graphics, and communication design and product design.

UNESCO also provided its definition of culture in order to create a common international framework, that could be useful for internationally comparative assessments. In order to register the process of value creation within the culture domains UNESCO developed the so-called “culture cycle”. The model is an abstract analytical aid for thinking about cultural production and it should be seen as a sensitizing model, it includes:

- 1) Creation: origination and authoring of ideas and content;
- 2) Production: the making of cultural works and manufacture of goods required for the production of cultural works (i.e. paintings, sculptures, books, movies, TV shows, musical instruments, etc.).
- 3) Dissemination: distribution of cultural products (i.e. film and video distribution, music, and computer games retail, etc.)
- 4) Exhibition/reception: live or unmediated experiences for audiences to which participation is granted or sold through tickets
- 5) Consumption/participation: the consumption of cultural products by the audience (i.e. dancing, reading, watching movies, listening to the radio, visiting museums, etc.)

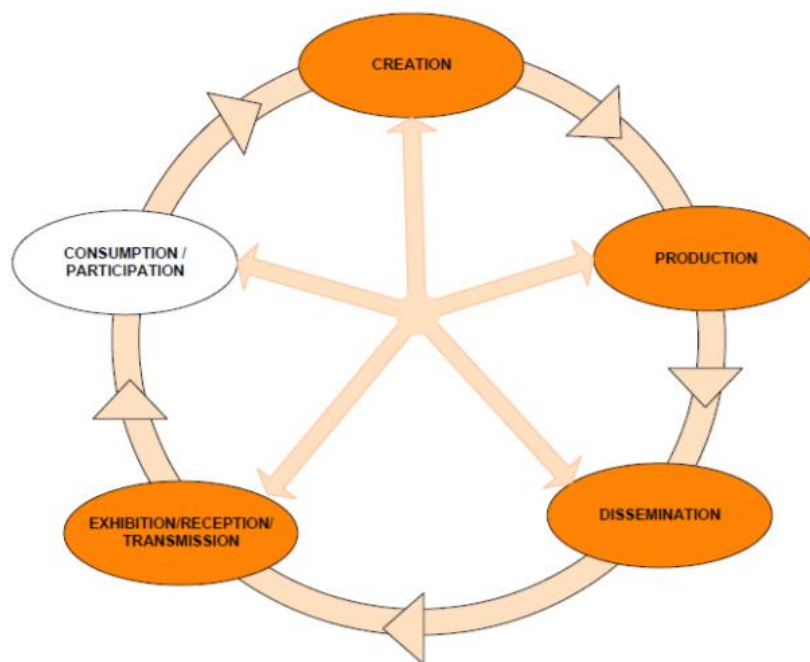


Figure 3: UNESCO Culture Cycle (UNESCO, 2009:20).

The shape of a cycle chosen by UNESCO stresses the fact that when dealing with culture domain, policymakers must be aware that any intervention may have repercussions within the whole cycle (*ibid*, 2009: 19, 21) and it also draws attention to the interconnection that is characteristic of these activities, so much that the feedback of the consumer can constitute the basis of a new production in content. The culture cycle also makes explicit the fact that production and distribution of cultural products are less and less a prerogative of a small group or elite of intellectuals, but, mainly thanks to the digital media technology it's becoming more and more part of everyday life.

The definition 'creative industries' was early adopted also in other countries, it was diffused from its UK home country, first to all former British colonies, such as Singapore, where a Creative Services Strategic Business unit was already created in 1990 (Kong et al. 2006) and Hong Kong, where the DCMS model was adopted to develop strategic industries such as cinema, together with New Zealand and partially also in Australia and Taiwan, that switched from a technology industry based society to a creative industry value society.

While the DCMS articulated the standard creative industries definition, this has undergone considerable adaptation globally, as well as encountered rejection in some regions and countries. Creative industries policy is currently based on a few seminal studies, the core ideas of which have been taken up by city and district officials.

As Hartley et al. claim (2013: 124) creative industry policies have flourished all over the world, starting from the late 1990s, because:

[...] district, city, regional and national governments throughout the world have accepted the prescription that the creative industries are fast-growing, value-adding, and essential to economic development, and that creative classes need special environments to flourish and therefore special policy assistance.

Also, Kong et al. (2006) believe that the driving force behind the huge diffusion of policies on creative industries is the belief that these types of industries have huge transformational capacities, through which they can change and transform the society and population's mentality as well.

Keane (2013) argues that there are two main reasons why cultural and creative industries policy grew all over the globe, in spite of the difficulties in its definition: domestic focus and cultural export. In fact, these kinds of industries promise a shift from traditional manufacturing systems to services and knowledge-based activities, and usually, these policies' main output are local development agencies, or regional clusters or again, zones. Cultural export is linked with nationalism: starting from John Howkins' definition of Creative Economy (Howkins 2001).

1.1.4 Key concepts in creative industries

In several strategies all over Europe, both nationally and locally, various words linked to the creativity idea were implemented starting from the 1998 DCMS Report.

Creative Economy

This concept came to life after the discourse about creative industries started to spread and analysts began to realize that creativity could have an impact on the economy itself. Problems and critics arose because of the broad and not really delimited definition of creative industries, some argue that inclusions in the industries were made in order to boost its size (Hartley et al. 2013). The concept of 'creative economy' was first created by John Howkins in his work *The Creative Economy* (2001) and following his lead later became popular worldwide. He argued that the creative economy was controlled and dominated by information and communication technologies and his definition was often used as an alternative to 'creative industries' because it was more appealing for policymakers in terms of nationalism. The report made by UNCTAD worked as a major promoter of the creative economy idea on a global level since more than a hundred countries have signed to its idea (UNCTAD 2008,2010).

Creative Class

The Creative Class is a concept developed by Florida (2002). The new economic class, he believes will be the dominant one in the coming century, as did the working class and the service class in the later, in the early decades of the twentieth century. Even if the creative class is not quite big as the service class, Florida (2002) believes that it constitutes the dynamic and for the economic progress for the entire economy. The research of Florida and his team is centred on the use of empirical indexes and research methods to examine the connection between regional economic development and human capital productivity. He categorizes the creative class as including “creative professionals”, a broad group, that also comprehends “knowledge-intensive workers” (Keane 2013: 157).

Florida (2002) asserted that if towns would like their competitiveness to be increased, they need more creative class representatives to be attracted to them. His main argument is that locations with a thriving cultural and artistic setting produce financial results and financial general development, to exemplify he argues that there is a greater amount of economic development in the metropolitan areas with a strong presence of performers, musicians, and technology employees. Florida’s Theory is based on a key notion: technology, talent and tolerance constitute what he calls the 3Ts of economic development. These three variables are not supposed to be isolated, but each must be interrelated and developed according to the others. What Florida suggests is a circular model, in which creative experts are drawn towards a particular place if the 3Ts are well established there, by doing so the place becomes a creative city and therefore becomes a high-tech centre, and creative and innovative sectors will attract creative individuals and so on.

Florida models were implemented onto various towns over the years, first in the U.S. then in Europe as well as to developing economical environment such as India and China, with the objective of establishing a Global Creativity Index (GCI). It’s interesting to notice on this topic Keane’s (2013) critique of the Tolerance notion proposed in Florida’s theory, which constitute an issue by itself if used in the Chinese context, he believes therefore that these indexes are merely “meaningless proxy”.

Creative Cluster

In the research linked to cultural industry, creative economy and creative cities, the notion of creative clusters has been a critical problem. Marshall launched the concept of groves as businesses in "manufacturing counties" at the beginning of the 19th decade. This idea was created by Michael Porter and converted into a business cluster concept designed as a geographical region where companies from the same sector came together to achieve a competitive advantage (Evans 2009).

The advent of the creative industry and then of the idea of "creative city" in our society implied the upgrade from cultural quarters to creative clusters – creative spaces in the new city economy (Porter, 1990).

Clusters have become a main instrument to stimulate development and economic growth. Clusters facilitate achievement profitable benefit by gathering understanding in these fields. They provide connections to faraway economic systems, promote global alliances, and recruit as entrepreneurs global executives (KEA, 2011).

1.2 Creativity Discourse in China

1.2.1 Origin of the Chinese concept and history

The history of China in the twentieth century is made up of extraordinary waves of radical change: the collapse of the last dynasty; the first experiences of democracy; the Japanese invasion; World War II; the creation of the Republic; the complicated history of Maoism, from his initial alliance with the USSR at the great leap forward, and later the cultural revolution; the new wind of the post-Mao "gradual revolution" (Wang, 1994), and the last thirty years, from the Open Door Policy. The Open-Door Policy is generally studied from the viewpoint of the creation of the "socialist market economy", product of a process of de-statization of activities that were directly managed by the state through the planned economy. It consists in fact in a shift from the former planned economy towards a differently driven growth, led by consumption and high value jobs, that include also the creative and cultural sector. Even if the leading rationale of the Open Door Policy is that of writing a new chapter in Chinese economy and give life to the new economy of the market, the state is yet still very present and the activities that remain under the public domain are still very relevant (Zan, 2017). The general political climate has decisive

effects on structure and functioning of the economy, the administration is still a crucial aspect. Therefore, it's interesting to study what sort of consequences this change in the economic policy brought onto the cultural and creative field in China.

Generally speaking, China has become one of the most decentralized countries of the world: most of the expenditure in the public sector takes place at provinces level or lower (Zan, 2017). The same process of radical decentralization also characterizes the cultural sector. In fact, 90% of the costs for culture takes place at levels lower than the provincial one; in terms of employment, only a few hundred of the 77,000 people employed in the sector work in the central offices in Beijing (OECD, 2005). What characterizes China is the radical decentralization of China institutions and funding. Few institutions are managed centrally, instead, the activities are structured, financed and managed at municipality level, also in the case of sites or collections of national importance, the higher levels play an intermediary role in terms of development of projects, with a widespread use of more economic incentive mechanisms instead of direct power (Zan, 2017).

Research on the creative, culture and media field is still a rather fresh field of studies in China, from the 1940s until the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, culture and media were 'closed' domains according to socialist values, and especially defence of socialism value (Keane, 2013). When China was still an orthodox socialist system⁷, in fact, the concept of culture was intended in its Marxist connotation, that is a 'superstructure' that merely mirrored the economic situation (Keane, 2004).

When China ventured into opening up and reform in 1978 culture industry started to come to light as a commercial activity, but it was only officially put into concept in 1991, when it was acknowledged as an industry and used in its definition in Chinese governmental documents (Qin et al., 2009). For the first time the culture industry played an active role in the economic reorganization and cultural products were ruled by the competition of the market's principles. This era from late 1978 on to the last years of the century has been centred around the expansion of the market and if with Deng Xiaoping it was mostly focused on rural production market, with the advent of Jiang Zemin the

⁷ From 1949 to the first years of 1990s.

reform was further expanded to the whole society, until China was merged in the capitalist system through admittance into the World Trade Organization (WTO) (Mcgrath, 2008).

China joined the WTO in December 2001. In that year, policy leaders had concurred on the term ‘cultural industries’ (*wenhua chanye* 文化产业). It was the fourth session of the Ninth People’s Congress, that took place in 2001, through which the concept of “cultural industries” was recognized by the authorities, along with the so-called Blue Books of China’s Cultural Industries, official documents that gather information about cultural industry development, from report materials, to evaluation and best practice (Keane, 2007). Instead, Jiang et al. (2019) argue that the year 2000 constitutes the real start of cultural industries in China, and the most important document to prove that is the ratification of the Suggestions of the CPC Central Committee on Formulating the 10th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development, ratification that took place during the Fifth Plenary Session of the 15th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China.

In 2004 the concept of creative industries (*chuangyi chanye* 创意产业) at last also reached China, after having become already integrated in national policies both in Singapore⁸ and Hong Kong⁹ (Keane: 2013). The opening door for the diffusion of this concept was Shanghai, China’s most creative city and the most important political figure, that helped pushing the creative industries in China was Li Wuwei¹⁰, heavily influenced by the English discourse about creative industries. He saw in them the future of China’s economic growth and the opportunity for China to move to a “Created in China” model, in which intellectual property and innovative technology can become the core of Chinese economy, because he believes that creative industries provide an effective roadmap to economic transformation in China (Li 2011). In fact, already since 2005 the term ‘creative

⁸ The notion of creative industries started to spread in Singapore since 1985, when, in order to fight the economic recession of those years, the government started to foster the development of cultural and entertainment service to create new economic growth and specific units and organizations were established to support a proper national policy for creative and cultural capital (Hui, 2007).

⁹ The concept of creative industries was introduced in Hong Kong in 1999-2000 by some cultural NGOs, it later become spread around 2002, when Hong Kong government started a similar research and report activity in the cultural and creative field as it was going on in the UK (Hui, 2007).

¹⁰ *Li Wuwei* 吴启迪 is the Research Director of the Industrial Economics Unit at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences and vice-chairman of the National Committee of the Central Committee of the Chinese Revolutionary Guomindang (China’s main opposition party). Subsequently elected as vice-chair of the National Committee of the 11th Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), the most senior policy advisory body in China (Li 2011).

industries’ was adopted in Shanghai municipal government’s economic development strategy (Connor & Gu 2014).

Since then creative and cultural industries have developed pretty fast in China and have been used in national measurements as a proper index, similar to other important industrial classifications, for example, development and real estate, finance and insurance, and manufacturing. Many aspects (even if not all) of the creative industries agenda (defined as ‘cultural creative industries’) have been adopted by the Chinese government as part of the new policy of modernization, both in its economic and symbolic meaning (Pang 2012).

The National Bureau of Statistic of China defines cultural industries as “those activities which provide cultural products, entertainment and related services & jobs” (Yang, 2011:90) and groups them into three: the core part, the periphery part, the related part.

The Core Part	1. News services
	2. Publishing and Copyright Services
	3. Radio, TV and Film
	4. Art Service
The Periphery Part	5. Internet Service
	6. Leisure and Entertainment Service
	7. Other Cultural Services
The Related Part	8. Cultural Product, Equipment and Other Related Production
	9. Sale of Product, Equipment and Other Related Production

Fig. 4: The categories of cultural industries (Yang, 2011:90).

According to the EU SME Center’s Report (2014) in China the creative industries are considered to be a branch of the cultural industry, we can see that i.e. because the government set up a cultural research group in 2003 and categorized the cultural industry into three fields: 1) press, media and publication, 2) television, movie and radio, and 3) the arts. These three fields if compared to the western counterpart also include industries that are usually considered to be creative industries. So already in the definition we can see that the Chinese situation has differed because of some particular characteristics it has.

Already in 2006 during one Beijing Forum, the at that time Vice-Minister of Education Wu Qidi¹¹ explained that the creative industries constitute a great development opportunity for China because they do not require much consumption of material resources in order to create value. She sees the growth of creative industries in the west, especially the role they play in western industrial strategy as a model that also China can follow in its run towards modernization. She believes that in China there are two main forces promoting the creative industries: the society's need for new knowledge and fresh ideas and, at the same time, the increasing competition caused by the globalization, that, she argues, can be faced with advancement in the industrial field. Wu further argued that this enhancement will be fostered by the government through implementation of educational measures specifically aimed towards creation of creative personnel, such as establishment of specific courses, innovating the learning methods and the teachers training and also through promotion of international cooperation. Wu's discourse about creative industries is always inserted into the 'harmonious society' framework and is seen as a mean through which "beautify people's lives" (Wu, 2006). As O'Connor (2006) notices the cultural and creative industries discourse arrives in China in a moment in which it is strategically used in policies texts in a long-term prospective and to promote China's new development agenda, in fact China is not threatened by the global market, it rather offers an opportunity. The industry for cultural consumer goods is therefore a key point for the upcoming economic and social advancement phase, now the goal of growth is cultural production, since recreation business, recreation consumption and retail and advertising infrastructure have already been implemented.

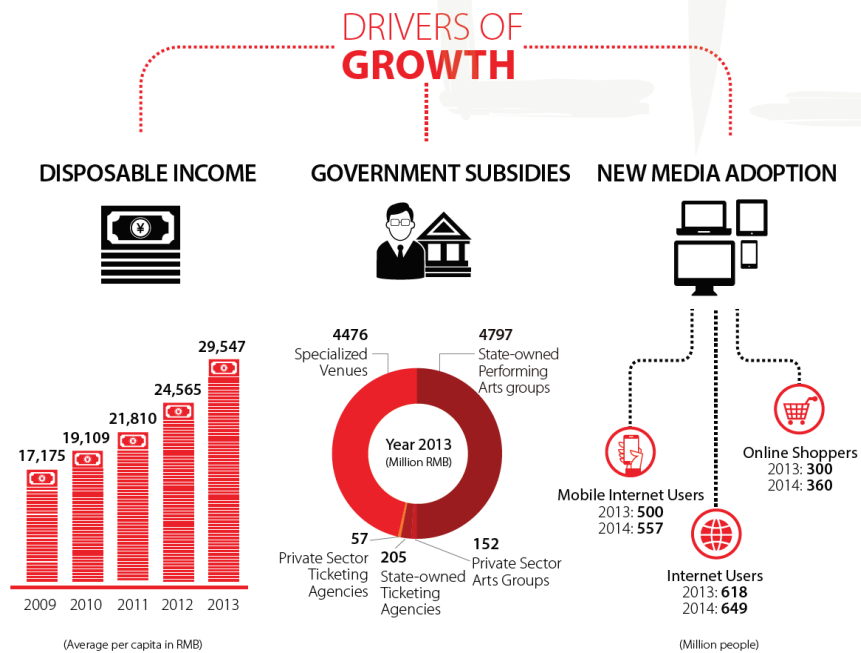
Rosenthal et al. (2017) argue that starting from 2008-2009, along with the first signs of the global economic crisis, the Chinese government has developed and implemented policies aimed at supporting the diversification of the economy at national level and driven by the intention of reducing the country's strong dependence on exports. In addition to promoting high tech sectors and progressively overcome the traditional low value-added industrial productions, the government has begun to stimulate the cultural and creative industries sector (CCI). The latter is progressively taking on the role of propeller of competitiveness and innovation in other strategic sectors of the Chinese economy. All areas related to the CCI are involved, by a turmoil that involves both

¹¹ Vice-minister of Education (MOE) from June 2003 to 2008 during Hu Jintao's presidency.

domestic development, and overseas expansion. According to recent data, growth is expected to be, according to a compound annual rate (Cagr) of 8.8%. Compared to a growth rate of 4.4% worldwide, dynamism is expected over the next years, in particular for internet advertising, cinema and video games, that until 2020 should have expansion rates respectively of 13.9%, 18.9% and 7.4%¹.

Another document considered by Jiang et al. (2019) as a milestone for cultural industries development in China is the 2011 Decision of the CPC Central Committee on Major Issues Concerning Deepening Reform of the Cultural Sector and Bringing about its Great Development and Enrichment (referred to as ‘the Decision’) that, he argues, gave start to the golden era of Chinese cultural industries. The relevance of the CCIs is evident also in their rehabilitation in the plans of Chinese economic development. The XII Five-Year Plan¹² (2011-2015) has explicitly listed the CCI among the priority industries for the country. In this regard, Hou Xiangua (2012), director of the external relations office of the Chinese Ministry of culture, highlighted that “between all that needs to be strengthened, cultural and creative enterprises will have to play a dominant role”. The Chinese government chose to reform the regime to support and grow the cultural sector in October 2011. Data from the China Statistical Yearbook in fact highlighted the increase in volume from Chinese exports, which rose from 762 billion US dollars in 2005 to 1,430 milestones of 2008, with an increase of 17% compared to 2007.

¹²The national FYP is drafted by the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) and lays out specific economic targets like GDP growth rates as well as major policy initiatives, that work as a framework for policies and local government plans.



Note: For the purpose of consistency, all figures have been converted to USD at an exchange rate of US\$1 = RMB 6.24

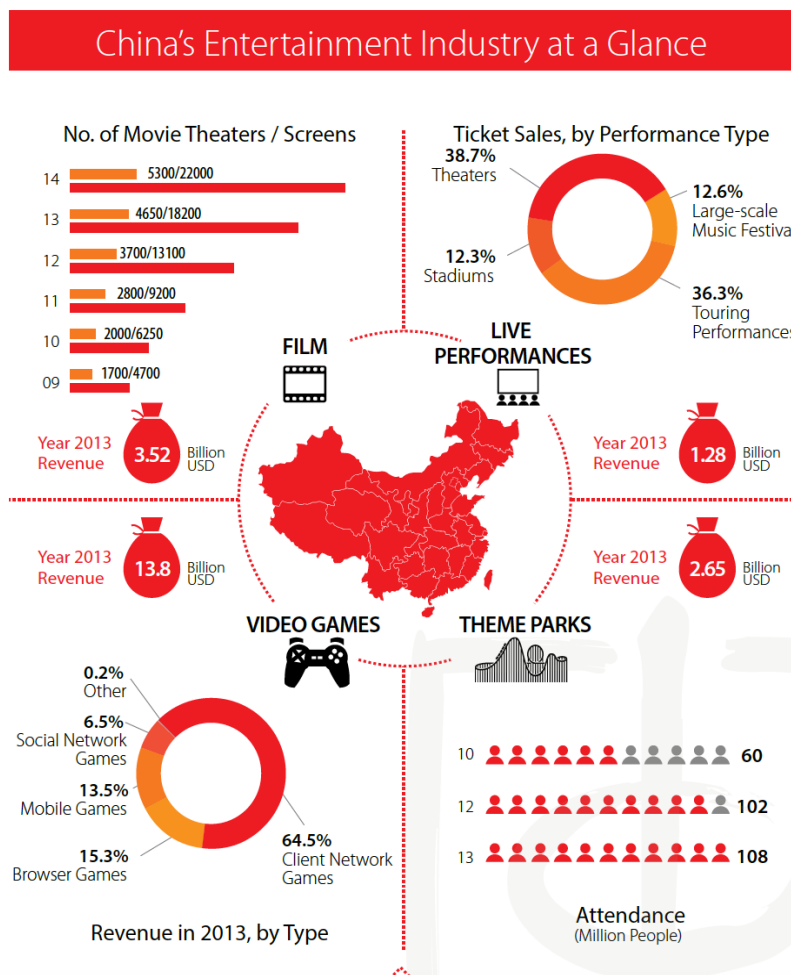


Fig. 5 and 6: Dezira and Associates, China Briefing, p.5

Under the XII Five-Year Plan the government also promoted many creative clusters across China, because the government tried to attract foreign investment in the creative and cultural fields. Therefore, these specific areas can enjoy favourable conditions, such as favourable tax policies. The main cities for cultural and creative industries policies refer to are Beijing, Shanghai, Hangzhou, Shenzhen, Qingdao, Fuzhou, Chengdu, Ningbo, Kunming, Xiamen, Nanjing and Changsha (EUSME 2014).

Creative Clusters in Major Chinese Cities			
Name	City	Industries	Website
798	Beijing	Design, Art, Crafts	www.798space.com/index_en.asp
Beijing Software Industry Base	Beijing	Software	www.zpark.com.cn/en/
Cable 8	Beijing	Media, Art	www.cable8.cn/en/
Caochangdi	Beijing	Art, Architecture, Design	caochangdi.org/
Dashilar	Beijing	Art, Crafts	www.dashilar.org/
MOMA	Beijing	Architecture, Film	www.bc-cinema.cn/
DRC	Beijing	Design, Innovation, Industrial design	
East Village	Chengdu	Design	
Redtory	Guangzhou	Design	www.redtory.com.cn/english/
TIT Creative Park	Guangzhou	Fashion, Design	www.cntit.com.cn/
Creative 100	Qingdao	Media, Fashion, Painting, Art	www.qingdaochinaguide.com/listings/art-books-antiques/creative-100.html
800 Show Creative Industry Park	Shanghai	Design, Luxury Brands, Fashion, Media, Entertainment	www.800show.net/
Creative Warehouse	Shanghai	Architecture, Urban planning	
Highstreet Loft	Shanghai	Fashion, Cosmetics, Luxury brands, Clothing	www.highstreetloft.com/
M50	Shanghai	Art galleries, Advertising, Film, TV, Industrial design	www.m50.com.cn/
Shanghai Fashion Hub	Shanghai	Fashion, Photography, Animation, Game design.	www.creativecity.sh.cn/en/creativeshanghai2a.aspx?id=112
The Bridge 8	Shanghai	Architecture, Interior design, Fashion, Consulting, Film and TV	www.bridge8.com/website/htmlcn/index.htm
OCT Loft	Shenzhen	Art	

It may be said that the XII Five-Year Plan formally launched a transition strategy for Chinese economy of production to a more innovation-oriented one, that can make China become a leading country in the field of innovation and capable of develop its own products of excellence. In this context the creative and cultural industries play a central role in the government plan to move from manufacturing-based economy to innovation and knowledge based one. Furthermore in putting the cultural and creative field at the center of their discourse, chinese officials want to offer an alternative model to the

dominating ones of US, UE and Japan, and promote exploration of the international cultural and creative industries market, innovating culture following the "go out" policy, as well as strengthening the soft power and its influence a global level (Rosenthal et al., 2017). It is no coincidence that in 2012 the volume of private investments in Chinese CCIIs reached 500 billion RMB.

The assumptions of the XII Plan have been recalled and further articulated in the following XIII Five-Year Plan (2016-2020), which qualifies CCIIs as one of the pillars of Chinese economy. The new plan aims at facilitating and accelerating the transfer of good practices and talents from the cultural sector towards other strategic sectors, in particular, manufacturing, real estate, tourism and the organization of sporting events (Gang 2015). The choice to make the creative and cultural industries a basic and competitive part of the domestic economy by 2020¹³ was made by the CPC Central Committee at the Sixth Plenary Session. China has since then declared a will to pursue the change from "made in China" to "created in China" (EUSME 2014). Chapter 68 of the XIII Five-Year Plan highlights a series of actions aimed at expanding the offer of cultural products and services, while chapter 69 tends to favour the degree of cultural openness towards foreign countries.

Chapter 68 entitled "Provide More Cultural Products and Services" says:

We will strengthen the development of both cultural initiatives and the culture industry by implementing projects to develop culture and help people emerge as eminent cultural figures so as to give an extra touch of colour and vitality to people's cultural lives (XIII Five-Year Plan (English translation by me).

It's interesting to notice in section three the attention and care that the government will have towards the so-called "Modern Cultural Industries":

We will accelerate the development of emerging industries such as online audio and video, mobile multimedia, digital publishing, animation, comics, and games, in addition to transforming and upgrading traditional industries such as publishing, film and television production, and arts and crafts. We will advance the development of new forms of business in the cultural sector, develop creative and cultural industries, and integrate the development of cultural industries and the science, technology, information, tourism,

¹³ The so-called "Made in China 2025" is a strategy promoted by Premier Li Keqiang since 2015, it aims at guiding the country's industrial modernisation, pushing for the replacement of technology provided by foreign countries with innovation produced in the mainland.

sports, and financial industries. We will encourage mergers and restructuring of cultural enterprises and support the development of micro, small, and medium cultural businesses. We will step up the pace of nationwide cable TV network integration as well as the application of smart technologies. We will expand and guide cultural consumption (XIII Five-Year Plan, english translation by me).

Confirming the lines drawn from the XIIIth floor, China is investing resources to support, also in terms of infrastructure, the growth of an industry with high added value in the cultural and creative sector. These are not simply actions aimed at fostering economic development and employment of a country that has over 1.3 billion inhabitants. Indeed, according to the Chinese government's agenda, the strengthening of CCIs should act as a driving force for the internationalization of the Chinese mass media. China intends to strengthen soft power and influence at the global level, trying to offer an alternative model to countries and continents which are traditionally considered innovators, i.e. USA, Japan and Western Europe (Fung, 2016).

On the one hand, the global economic and financial crisis has led the government to elaborate policies aimed at supporting the diversification of the national economy and reducing the country's strong dependence on exports. In this context, in addition to promoting high tech sectors and progressively overcoming the traditional low added value industrial productions, the Government has begun to explore and stimulate the cultural and creative industries sector. On the other hand, in the last decade, the inability to innovate has emerged as one of the main critical points of Chinese companies. Indeed, beyond of the explosion of patents and inventions, China has often been considered unable to generate radical or truly incremental innovation, in favour of mere imitation processes¹⁴. So, the government effort in promoting the revival of culture and creativity, even through industries related to this sector, can be read as the government's attempts at triggering a dynamic driving force of competitiveness and innovation in the entire Chinese economy. The goal of the government is therefore to leave behind the idea of Made in China, from the "factory of the world" country, and look ahead, promoting the

¹⁴ Keane (2013) argues that imitation has been inherited by the socialist cultural policy from the revolutionary time around 1940s, that promoted model's reproduction. To exemplify how imitation tendency is eradicated in the Chinese society Keane refers to the widespread phenomenon of *shanzhai* 山寨.

concept of “Created in China”. The government has launched a complex of policies that, affecting the cultural sector, training and development of the artistic heritage, has embraced the economy and the various segments of the CCIs sector: art and culture; news and advertising; broadcasting, TV and cinema; software, internet and computer service; live performances and exhibitions; art trade; services of design; up to tourism, entertainment (football included) and fun.

In addition to supporting government policies, the CCI boom also has to be analysed in light of further factors. Advertising, video games, software, music, publishing, radio and TV are driven by progressive digitalization of the Chinese economy, from the growing quality of digital infrastructures of the country, as well as the high share of web connections that consumers register (Rosenthal et al., 2017). Architecture, art, fashion, industrial design and the performing arts expand as a reflection of very strong growth both in urban consumption and in the demand for entertainment by the Chinese citizens.

The development of ICCs in China is taking place in different forms and more levels. Not only that of industrial plans and economic development. Among the initiatives to indirectly support the ICCs is the process of rehabilitation that is affecting the figure of Confucius. This action at institutional level is conducted globally and is implemented through openness of institutes and university centres that bear the name of the philosopher and spread it the work. The presence of Confucius institutes in Europe is significant, where there are even 169. They follow the American continent e the Asian one that hosts 157 and 1107 respectively. The teaching of the Chinese language and culture, through these institutions, it tends to value them the role in an international context favouring its integration. The fact that they typically operate in collaboration with universities of the host countries ensures a rooting in the foreign educational and training processes (Rosenthal et al., 2017).

At the domestic level, Chinese philosophy and literature are enhanced by Ministry of Education, which envisaged them as compulsory courses in the study paths of primary and secondary schools. The same ministry has also changed the criteria for financing cultural projects, favouring those with social advantages, high standards artistic, aesthetic taste and public consensus. The State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film

and Television regulator (Sapprft¹⁵), is following the same line which promotes Confucian morality, political stability and social harmony. The authority sanctions those contents that are considered in contrast or offensive to the values of traditional Chinese culture. Among the issues targeted by Sapprft are extramarital affairs, sexual abuse, prostitution and gambling. Not even banal content related to the supernatural world is approved, such as time travel, ghosts and zombies (Zhang, 2017).

Finally, among the most significant internal initiatives, the phenomenon that Jeffrey Johnson identified with the expression "The Museification of China" can be cited. This phenomenon is the result of a nearly thirty-year policy implemented systematically both by central and local state authorities. Memory rehabilitation is a cornerstone of this project, which has led to an average of one hundred new museums each year in the last three decades in China (Rosenthal, 2017). In 2011 386 museums were opened.

1.2.2 Cultural and creative industries' current situation in China

The official term used by Chinese central government is still 'cultural industries', this term works as a framework for cultural policies at national level. However, there are some more business-friendly cities in which the term 'creative industries' is also used. Most of the time the two terms can be used interchangeably, or even together as 'creative cultural industries' (i.e. those in Beijing) (Michael, Weihong 2009).

Today Chinese discourse about cultural industries seems to be pretty positive, Jiang et al. (2019) argue that these industries are able to enjoy support from the government and gain attention from the public, more vigorously than any other industry can do. They believe that China's culture industry is one of the "most dynamic emerging industry" (2019: 6) and that its main two drivers are the expansion of market economy and strong competition from overseas. The most recent available comprehensive report provided by China Cultural Industry Association (2017) also reports a pretty flourishing situation, based on the data of the national bureau of statistics (NBS) on China's cultural industry in 2016: the added value of China's cultural and related industries in 2016 was 3078.5

¹⁵ Sapprft was created in March 2013 with the merger of the General Administration of Press and Publication 新闻出版总署 and the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television 国家广播电视总局.

billion RMB, accounting for 4.14% of GDP. Data show that China's cultural and related industries have maintained a steady and rapid growth, with a steady increase in the proportion, playing an important role in promoting economic transformation and upgrading, as well as stable, healthy and sustainable development.

The report clearly suggests that such an achievement cannot be separated from the CPC central committee and the state council's effort in promoting the development of cultural industry and further says that since the eighteenth congress, ministry of culture comprehensively implemented the party's 18 sixth plenary session of 3, 4, 5, spirit, in-depth study practice of Xi Jinping about cultural work important speech spirit, making a series of innovative initiatives to promote the cultural industry in China and make it enter a new stage of innovation and development, moving towards becoming a pillar industry of national economy development.

According to the report of iresearchchina (2018) the core culture industry's income in China in 2017 exceeded 4.4 trillion yuan with a YoY 18.9 yuan development, and in 2019 it is anticipated to reach 5 trillion yuan. Given Chinese economy's good growth, individuals today have a greater desire to consume cultural content. The improvement of copyright protection regulation and the growth of online payment method, more and more consumers are willing to pay for digital content consumption. The market is said to be educated on those more traditional content, such as online gaming, video and music, and can work as base for potential spread of VR content.



Fig. 7: Revenue of China's Core Culture Industry 2016-21 (ireseachchina 2018).

文化	1990	2000	2010	2017	2018
公共图书馆(个)	2527	2675	2884	3166	3176
省、地市级群众艺术馆(个)	366	390	374	390	390
博物馆(个)	1013	1392	2435	4721	4918
艺术表演团体(个)	2805	2619	6864	15742	17123
艺术表演场馆(个)	1955	1900	1461	1253	1236
广播节目综合人口覆盖率(%)	74.7	92.5	96.8	98.7	98.9
电视节目综合人口覆盖率(%)	79.4	93.7	97.6	99.1	99.3
图书总印数(亿册(张))	56.4	62.7	71.7	92.4	95.0
期刊总印数(亿册)	17.9	29.4	32.2	24.9	24.0
报纸总印数(亿份)	211.2	329.3	452.1	362.5	340.0
创造世界纪录(次)	14	22	15	2	
获得世界冠军(个)	54	110	108	106	118

Fig. 8: Numbers of public libraries, museums, cultural institutions for the public and state-owned

film studios (National Bureau of Statistics. China Statistical Yearbook on Cultural and Related Industries 2013. China Statistics Press. December 2013).

As reported by the National Bureau of Statistics in the last report (2019) with reference to year 2018, in art. 11 the current situation of Cultural tourism, health and sports is reported: there were 2,075 art performance groups and 3,331 museums in the national cultural system. There are 3,173 public libraries in China, with a total circulation of 845.29 million person-times. There are 3,326 cultural centers. There are 214 million actual cable TV users, among which 202 million are digital cable TV users. By the end of the year, the comprehensive coverage of radio programs was 98.9%, and that of television programs was 99.3%. The production of 323 TV series 13,726 episodes, television animation 86,257 minutes. Throughout the year, 902 feature films were produced, and 180 science, education, documentary, animation and special films were produced. It publishes 34 billion copies of newspapers, 2.4 billion copies of periodicals, 9.5 billion copies of books, and 6.85 copies of books per capita. By the end of this year, there were 4,210 archives nationwide, with 14,016 million volumes and pieces of archives of various kinds open to the public.

The aforementioned graphic and the constant increase in the cultural sector makes us understand an aspect still often overlooked or ignored when talking about the Chinese change. This is a change increasingly oriented towards a “new normal”¹⁶ in which sustainability, well-being, creativity and culture always seem more aligned and interconnected. China changes and evolves further and incessantly. Obviously, it is a complex process, full of contradictions and shadows, challenges for the government, for artists and businesses. Interference is still strong of national authorities; whose censorship has a significant impact on the contents. This limits the development of many cultural industries and creative ideas and their openness abroad. Often, domestic businesses they are unable to adapt their products to the needs of international markets and remain marginal on the world stage. On foreign companies, instead, it weighs the control of the authorities, which tend to exercise directly its influence making it particularly complex

¹⁶ Concept introduced by President Xi Jinping around 2015 to propose a new model, in order to deal with the slowdown process on the Chinese economy. The nation needs to adapt to a “New Normal” with the aim of focusing on the quality of growth, rather than on the speed of growth (Amighini, 2015).

operating in the country. What is certain is that the ICC sector remains central and strategic in development of the Chinese new normal (Rosenthal et al., 2017).

1.2.3 Chinese official cultural and creative industries discourse: issues

The official discourse in China dwells nowadays with ‘creative and cultural industries’ (CCI) and Chinese experts in this field speak about its development almost as a miracle, as Jiang (2019) reports, the fast and prosperous development of such industries is celebrated and put in comparison to that happened in western countries which instead has a longer history. It’s also interesting to notice that also when it comes to CCI they are also referred to as possessing ‘Chinese characteristics’ and therefore Chinese official discourse puts them in a Chinese model of development framework. Jiang (2019) explains these peculiarities as:

(CCI) is considered a pillar of the economy, the government plays a leading and supporting role, public ownership is the mainstay and entities of diverse ownership develop together, there is good interaction between the cultural industry and cultural programs, and the reform of the cultural system and cultural and technological innovations are promoted to build a modern cultural industry system (2019: XV).

In addition, the role of the government in the CCI is also told through a positive narrative and is defined as a “unique strength”, something that is impossible to happen in Western countries (Jiang, XVI). Government participants according to Jiang (2019) “include the publicity authorities and governments at all levels and cultural authorities at all levels (e.g. Ministry of Culture, provincial departments of culture, and municipal bureaus of culture) as well as various radio and television organizations, newspapers and publishers affiliated with the government.” The government role, as explained by the official discourse is multifaceted, it can be summarized into three main tasks: it leads the path for production of culture, ameliorates the cultural industry environment, invests in research projects and cultural facilities that can give rise to cultural production.

The and creative and cultural industries are also inserted into the broad socialist discourse, since according to that conception they help to build an harmonious socialist society. According to socialist values, in fact, promotion of creative and cultural

industries has many elements central to the CCP agenda of harmonious society: the promotion of cultural, economic, political, social and ecological progress together with the protection of people's rights to spend on cultural products and services and their participation in cultural projects.

With regard to the latest development of the creative and cultural industries the Chinese discourse has shifted towards the so-called "new normal" framework (as explained before). In fact, the development of those is narrated as always increasing and healthy, because it's seen as a reflection of China's "new normal" transforming economy and its shift to new growth factors.

For the sake of clarity in my elaborate, when speaking about the Chinese situation I will make use of the broad definition of CCI (Cultural and Creative Industries), since it vehicles more flexibility and complexity in the discourse.

Also, in China as in some other parts of the world the official policy discourse refers distinctively to culture industry (media, publishing, propaganda) and creative industries (small to medium enterprises SMEs) (Han 2006).

With regard to culture industry's conception in China Wang argues that in its Chinese connotation it is a "different kind of animal" (2004: 8-9) because when compared to its western counterpart, which sticks to its simple meaning, the term cultural industry in Chinese (*wenhua chanye* 文化产业)

contains within itself at least three subtexts - a state-owned sector undergoing the rugged process of partial commercialization; the tenacious hold of state monopoly even while it is pushing an agenda of commodifying public cultural goods; and the thorny issue of mixed ownership and the debate over the hidden process of privatization (Wang, 2004:9).

This happens because in the Chinese political system's conception culture is viewed as a public resource and therefore gives life to issues of 'national cultural security' (*guojia wenhua anquan* 国家文化安全) (Keane 2013).

The creative industries discourse in China has divided political groups, on one hand conservatives and the government prefer the definition of cultural industry, since they frame creativity as a "Trojan Horse", a potential cause of destabilization coming from overseas, a foreign idea that has the potential to destabilize the order imposed from Beijing. Conservatives, in fact, play on the Chinese traditional culture richness and wealth

embedded in socialist culture to tone down the craze for creativity. At the same time the innovation craze has created an entry way for creative industries appealing to the creative mind of businesspeople, researchers, reformers government and authorities (Keane 2013).

Since the mid-2000s, when the cultural and creative industries (CCI) have turned into a catchword in China and became spread both in academic and policy circles, the blending and coordination of wordings in the round of political convenience has certainly constituted a diversion from the genuine difficulties China is dealing with. Some believe that innovativeness is related to radicalism; for other people, it is demonstrative of neo-progressivism. Yet the state keeps a deciding role. Arrangement authorities proclaim the need to keep up *shiye* (public institutions) while giving help to *chanye* (businesses) and *qiye* (ventures). Gatherings, expos, and discussions keep multiplying. Then organizations have difficulties in adding value because of political obstacles and an absence of a push to share learning. The Chinese government favours culture in its big declarations however enables creativity only enough space to add value, to assist in ‘upgrading’ in order to develop ‘talent’ (Keane 2013:48).

Keane (2013) also argues that ‘cultural creative industries’ work in China as “instruments of national cultural policy” and in the context of local and regional government they constitute “means to generate investment and employment”.

Considering some Chinese cultural norms such as *shangshi* (going public for stock market listing), *zhuada fangxiao* (securing the big and letting go the small), Wang (2004) argues that such a scenario does not accommodate the vision of creative industries from the West, rendering creative industries discourse of practically no value to China. She further suggests that, regardless of the differences in the many definitions, the most important condition that cultural industries require in order to flourish is a “free- market economy that takes the competition, intellectual property rights and, most importantly, a commercialized culture industries sector [...]” (Wang 2004: 12). She believes that in China, this condition, which is simply a prerequisite in the rest of the world, still lags far behind. In her strong critique Wang argues that since the mid-1990s, administrative orders have been driving media in Mainland China instead of market principles, and most importantly, the commercialization of state-owned cultural industries (such as television and news media) is still a problematic issue and at the same time an attracting goal.

2. Top-down model in China

2.1 Top-down model of policymaking in China: overview and recent developments

Since its beginning in 1949 the CCP has always tried to centralize the power to grant a better control and in order to do so, the practice enacted concerning policy was the one we commonly refer to as top-down. This means that something is enacted from the top, as in government, or state central organs, while local actors have to apply it as it is, following instructions given from above. This has always been the preferred model in every aspect of political life in China, since the CCP came to power, because it gives less space to instability and possible disorders, as instead could happen from the opposite model, which is the so-called bottom-up. The bottom-up model arises when a process does not follow a command or guideline imposed from above, but is instead, produced at local level, where with local level we can refer to different, independent actors, such as: entrepreneurs, artists, citizens and so on. Compared to other countries China has a tendency towards top-down processes, but during the years and different administration this tendency has shifted back and forth from the top-down, more centralized model to the bottom-up, more localized one, with a recent strong shift towards top-level design (in Chinese *dingceng sheji* 顶层设计) (Schubert 2019).

Many scholars have done research in the Chinese policy system field and according to Schubert (2019) the current literature regarding the process of Chinese policy making can be split into two categories: on one hand, there are researches centred around case studies on different policy-making fields (Hammond 2013; Hillman 2010; Kostka et al. 2012; Mertha, 2009; Teets, 2015; Zhu 2013); on the other hand, there are research works that try to come up with a bigger framework starting from single case studies, in order to create models or general concepts about the Chinese policy process (O'Brien and Li 1999; Ahlers 2015; Deng et al. 2018; Schubert 2019).

I will now focus on the work of Chen (2017) which I found really useful, since it provides an overview on the current situation and historical changes in the policy making process in China. In her analysis Chen divides Chinese history into different phases based on the characteristics of the governing style at that time, that she illustrated clearly

in an original Table, through which she has identified three different dynamics in China's Political Reform history.

Actors		Activities	Reform Priorities	Monitoring	Rewards	Risk
Two-ways in Deng Era	Central	Directions Setting	Socioeconomic	Loose	High	Low
	Local	Highly Autonomous to strategy seeking	Socioeconomic	Loose	High	High
Bottom-up in Jiang/Hu Era	Central	Boundaries Setting	Socioeconomic & social policy	Loose	High	Low
	Local	Autonomous strategy seeking	Development & local conflicts	Loose	High	High
Top-down in Xi Era	Central	Boundaries and path setting	Political Power Restructuring	Tight	High	High
	Local	Following	Problems Solving/Technical Part	Tight	Low	Low

Table 1 Reform characteristics under different central administrations (1978-2016) (Chen, 2017: 670)

From 1949 to 1978 during the first years of the CCP, the power was centralized in order to control and at the same time mobilize the state, to consolidate the party's power and pursue social reform, with the help of ideological and political campaigns and furthermore allowed the promotion of industrialization with the first five year plan. The same centralization defined by Chen (2017:656) as "over-centralization" caused as a downswing the progressive reduction of creativity and productivity by the society. The Deng Xiaoping Era¹⁷ with the reform and opening up of the late seventies is considered by most of the scholars as a turning point in policy making in China, because it allowed for the first time the decentralization of power, since the CCP came to power. The decentralization scheme proposed by Deng, that can be applied in most of the administration fields such as party, government and agencies, provides transfer of power to local government, enterprises and society, thus enabling a wider range of labour division (Chen, 2017). After thirty years of tight control, though, decentralization could not happen easily, and it required time and experimentation in order to allow the country to enter a trial and error phase. It was a completely new process and therefore specific academic bodies aimed at offering guidance to the local level were created, such as the

¹⁷ China Reform Era started officially in November 1978 with the Third Plenary Session of the 11th CCP Central Committee, when the most important political reforms started coming to life (Chen, 2017).

NCRES in 1980, (*guojia jingji tizhi gaige weiyuanhui* 国家经济改革委员会, in short *Tigaiwei*). The *Tigaiwei* was the most important promotion and reform agency in 1980-98 and its activity was mainly that of researching framework theory to lead reforms. Some argue that even during the Deng Xiaoping Era the actual reform agenda was not a product of the local authorities, but, instead, it was still pushed by the central government. Anyway, the whole atmosphere during the Deng period seemed to be well disposed towards novelty and experimentation. Deng Xiaoping himself in his speeches often promoted and tried to push for pursue of “new ways” (Chen 2017). The *Tigaiwei* was also the most important body in charge of reforming China’s economy, in order to help it transition from a planned economy to a market economy. Along with the gradual development towards a market-oriented economy, which became pretty stable around the mid-1990s, the relevance of the *Tigaiwei* started to sink down more and more, to the point that in 2003 it was merged into an office of the National Development and Reform Commission¹⁸, previously established in 1998.

One of the most important projects implemented by the Chinese government during this era is the so-called ‘Torch Program’ of 1988. It is a plan on national scale that aims at developing new technologies in China, that deals mainly with four categories of structures: Technology Business Incubators (TBIs), Innovation Clusters, Venture Guiding Fund and Seed Funding (China Torch). This plan is based on the notion that innovation requires many people and can be achieved through collective work and therefore it has been using mainly clusters in order to reach innovation and deal with competition on an international scale (Zhang Li 2012). Another very important reform of this time is the Rural Household Responsibility System Reform¹⁹, that was first introduced by peasants and later improved, enacted and even promoted at central level by the government. So, this shows that during Deng Xiaoping era experimentation and

¹⁸ Agency of the Central Administration responsible for overall socio-economic reforms and relative creation of policies (Chen, 2017).

¹⁹ One of the most important agriculture reforms introduced by the Chinese government since 1978. It re-establishes the individual household as the production unit (*danwei* 单位) in rural areas, after years of dominance of the production system based on team. At first the change to private household was prohibited by the government, because it was considerate a destruction of the socialist principles, but it was later accepted and enacted also by central authority. First experiments with private household started in Anhui province, where groups of farmers independently tried leasing and dealing with private household, after sometime this practice gain territory far from Anhui and HRS got accepted also officially in 1981, when 45.1% of the Chinese *danwei* had already changed to the private household system (Lin, 1987).

integration between local and central authorities were highly encouraged for the creation of the whole process of policy making.

After Deng, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao continued encouraging the previous administration's innovation and experimentation promotion approach (Chen 2017). Hu Jintao's conception of Scientific Outlook on Development²⁰ (科学发展观 *kexue fazhanguan*) continued setting economic development as the prime concern for society, while, at the same time cultural and political growth also started being acknowledged as important factors. During the Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao era the administration conception of reforms and input from local saw some changes, because of some major political events that occurred during that time, such as the 1989 Tiananmen massacre. In general Chen suggests that the tendency under Jiang Zemin has been that of strengthening control, trying to prevent reform from compromising stability, hindering local authorities from making rules that are not in line with the central government policies, therefore innovations such as direct election in Yunnan, Sichuan and Shenzhen, were stopped in 2004 (Chen, 2017). The following administration of Hu Jintao further endured a legalization campaign, affirming the need for the CCP's governance for formalization and consolidation through procedure. What happened during Jiang and Hu's time was a progressive shift from accommodation of innovations and experimentation at local level towards a progressively more centralized authority, except for the projects considered by the central government as key pilot (*shidian*) (like the efficiency improving administrative reform), the rest were all abandoned. Local players involved in those projects became more and more afraid that their experiment could result in a backfire and have a negative consequence on their political career, therefore many scholars believe that the reforms of the Reform Era were not only later blocked but even inverted (Chen 2017).

Moving on to the situation under the leadership of Xi Jinping, the conception towards reform and innovation saw further changes: as he came to power Xi promoted

²⁰ The Scientific Outlook on Development appeared for the first time in PCC's official documents in October 2003, in the "Resolutions" of the 3^o Plenum of the XVI Central Committee. It gained a central space in the political program of the leadership only after the report presented by the Prime Minister Wen Jiabao during the 2^o session of the X National People's Congress in March 2004. The Scientific Outlook on Development refers to the economic development as valuing the human factor, that has to therefore be well coordinated with the social development (Miranda, 2007).

“the comprehensive deepening of reform” (*quanmian shenhua gaige* 全面深化改革) and during the Third Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee the Central Leading Group for Comprehensive Deepening of Reforms (*zhongyang quanmian Shenhua gaige lingdao xiaozu*, 中央全面深化改革领导小组 *i.e.* *Shengaiizu*) was established as the central organization responsible for designing reforms, supervising and organizing them, its aim is to promote reforms in political, cultural and socioeconomic field. Chen (2017) puts the Central Leading Group in comparison with the previous *Tigaiwei* in terms of their functions. The Central Leading Group is though more powerful than the *Tigaiwei* first of all because Xi Jinping himself is the director and furthermore, most of the members of the *Shengaiizu* are also part of the Standing Committee of the Politburo. As the editors of *China File* Conversation argue, the "top-level design," the strict top-down strategy developed under Xi Jinping threatens inhibiting development and decreasing efficient leadership. Xi's aggressive and strong anti-corruption campaign is said to have played an important role in diminishing local authorities' power and creating immobility at local level.

Chen (2017), further argues that since Xi came to power the reform space allowed to local authorities is more and more tight and they have mainly stayed inactive, this, Chen says is an unwanted consequence of the political changes brought on by Xi's administration. These changes are analysed by the author and can be summed up as: political ideology, upgrade in the ruling strategy. Chen refers that Xi Jinping political ideology approach is different from the ones of previous administration, that tended to keep to the minimum discussions about ideological issues. He instead stood up for “socialism with Chinese characteristics” (2017: 662) right after he came to power. In addition to this, he also started promoting the concept of “Four Consciousnesses” (*sige yishi* 四个意识), that basically promoted the ideal that every Chinese official should be ideologically, politically and physically follow the Central government. This proves how the ideological framework under Xi administration undertook a rigid turn towards regulation, therefore the author believes that is the main reason why local actors are no longer willing to pursue local initiatives, since they may lead to risks, and instead mainly implement policies that are instructed by the central government.

For what concerns ruling strategy, new regulations have been introduced under Xi Jinping's administration, which caused a strong impact on local officials' attitude towards

experimenting with reforms. These new regulations, in fact, provide stronger punishment if guidelines provided by the central government are not met, also these regulations account for changes in the evaluation criteria for Officials promotion. If before, under Deng, Jiang and Hu local actors were rewarded according to their success in meeting local problematics, now, under Xi administration, local officials are no longer evaluated based on a objective system, instead their promotion depends mostly on their superior’s subjective evaluation, which can easily be influenced by other political factors, to the point that Che (2017) argues funds for innovation or experimentation are almost eliminated. Yu et. Ahlers (2016) argue that the growing centralization bears both economic and political problems, such as the increased cost of mistakes in policymaking, more personal involvement by Xi’s establishment and last, if policies fail to meet local needs this may cause the rise of demonstrations.

Chen (2017) further puts at the centre of her analysis the change in the topic of the policies. During the two eras, Jiang-Hu and Xi, in fact, not only a change in the degree of centralization took place, but also an interesting change in the topic that these policies address. Through her research Chen found out that the majority of the reforms that took place at local level before 2014, so during Jiang and Hu era mainly deal with two themes: ensure social stability and how to solve social conflicts in a way that grant more direct public participation.

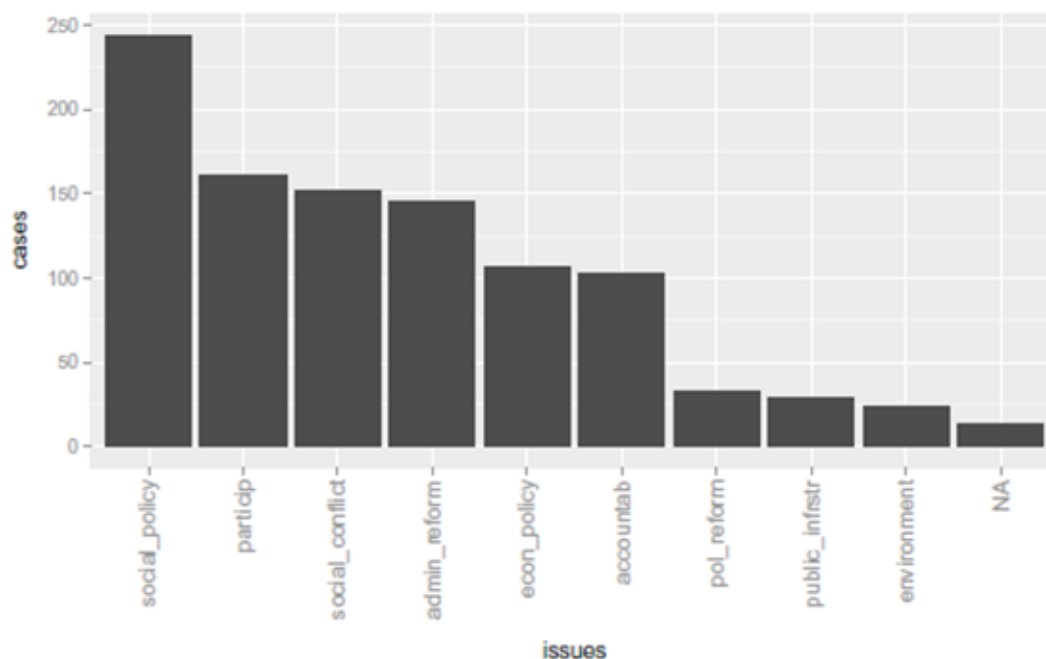


Table 2 Types of local-initiated innovations (1990s-2013) (Chen, 2017: 667)

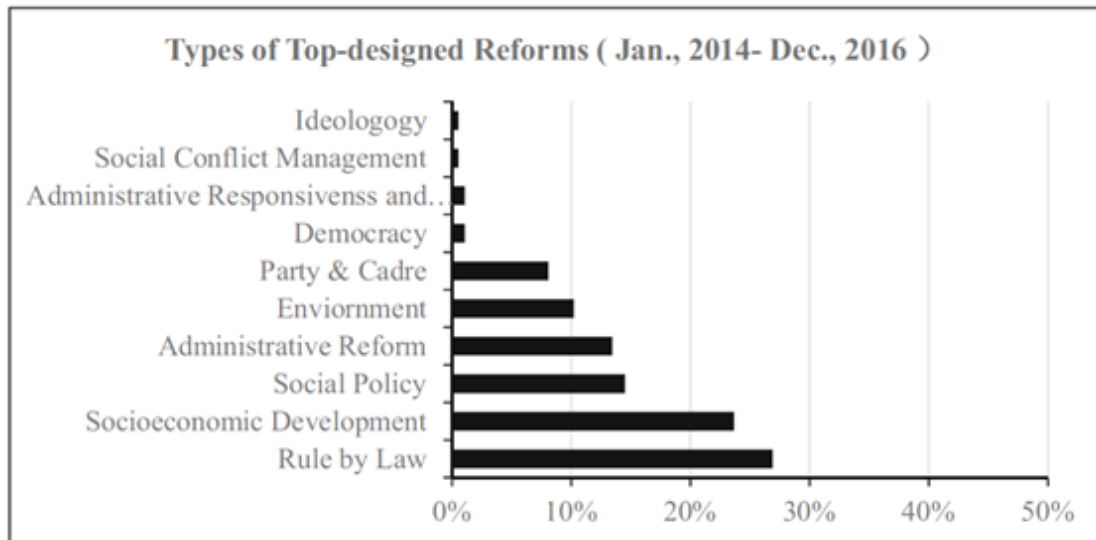


Table 3 Types of central-led reforms (2014-2016) (Chen, 2017: 668).

Instead what characterized the following era, after 2014, under the strengthening discipline of the party under Xi Jinping administration, is that the priority of reform’s topic became the Rule of Law, together with socioeconomic development, mainly environmental protection. This change in the agenda of the state is significant of a tension between top-level reforms which design happens at central level, and the need for a strong coordination and control system to vigilate local adaptation and the consequent lack of attention towards local specificities. The system’s change under Xi administration, the pressure pushed onto party members discipline, onto the Four Consciousness, caused local cadres to make self-protection their priority and merely enact policies as ordered from the top, their spirit of initiative is now ruled by the saying: “it is better to do nothing, rather than incurring any incident (*zhiyao bu chushi, ningyuan bu zuoshi*)” (Chen, 2017: 669). Moreover Teets (2016) analysis explains that the job of most of the local cadres under Xi administration requires more paperwork, they are required to fill out reports for their supervisors more often than what used to happen before, because now the entire apparatus has become more complex and the central supervision is tighter and is melted together with the anti-corruption mission.

To conclude, centralization of power and direct control onto policies has of course the direct effect of strengthening the administration power, but at the same time it massively reduces something vital for institutions survival, which is the capability to

address and adapt to local needs, causing in this way a drastic reduction of the bottom-up flexibility.

Economy (2018) also argues that under Xi Jinping administration centralization has become key, because he is pursuing a way that is opposite to the more liberal one pursued by the former administrations. Xi has centralized the power more and more, leaving behind collective leadership, he has deepened the anti-western values campaign and has reformed the legal framework to make the party-state even more stable and powerful (Guo 2019).

2.2 Top-down model in creative and cultural industries: analysis of problems, failure of clustering projects.

As reported in Jiang et al. (2019) the cultural and creative industries are considered by the Chinese administration equally important as every other industry in the economy and therefore, they have to abide to the administrative regulation imposed from the central government. It is stressed that enterprises working in this field, just as the ones working in other fields, have to be competitive on the market. The Chinese Government advocates for a deeper administrative reform in the cultural and creative field, since now a macro-regulation system is ruling.

In Jiang et. Al is said that:

The cultural industry within a region should be developed through industry agglomeration and industry chain operation, from which high value added should be obtained. High value-added means that creativity and technology should always play a part in the industry (2019: 24).

And on this theme one of the most important initiative of the Chinese Government regards facilitation in land policy to promote creative and cultural industries, together with facilitation for what concerns taxation issues. In fact, it is said:

Land is one of the basic factors of production and has direct bearing on the cultural industry. The Chinese government has formulated a series of preferential land policies to boost the growth of the cultural industry, including reducing the limitations on land use by cultural enterprises, discouraging the transfer of land for cultural enterprises to non-cultural enterprises and supporting the U.S. and

development of barren land, desolate beaches, and abandoned factories and mines by cultural enterprises. With such policy support, large-scale cultural industry parks have been erected in China. [...] State-owned assets should be thoroughly assessed and can be used for commercial purposes. In the meantime, policies should be adopted to attract foreign investors to the cultural industry. International exchanges should be boosted to help Chinese cultural enterprises enter international markets and achieve better growth (*ibid*).

As reported by Chinese official documents, one of the most common products of the top-down policy approach, applied to the creative and cultural fields is that of cluster creation. Many areas in more and more cities are hosting clusters of every sort, some artistic, some creative, some innovative. But to which extent are these clusters really effective in creating innovation? And how do they really work and how does the top-down bottom-up dynamic affects such organizations? To give some background on this matter I will firstly briefly review the literature on this matter.

Clusters were created by Alfred Marshall, with his ‘industrial district’ and later became more and more important thanks to Michael Porter’s work “*The competitive advantage of nations*”, in which he defines clusters as the coming together in one place of competitive success in a specific field (1998). Porter (2000) argued that bottom-up is the best way to build a cluster, that is how it usually happens in the private sector, which is not as politically impacted as the institutions and governmental sector, which instead suffers under the pressure of politics and does not allow professionals to see and grasp opportunities. He further argues: “Cluster initiatives should be as nonpartisan as possible and should remain independent of any party or administration’s political agenda” (2000: 31). Of course Porter is not the only one expressing such a reasoning, also Bajmócy (2009) supports the same stream of thought, that clusters should entail a bottom-up structure and differentiate themselves through their local specific resources, since only by doing so, they will be able to play a distinctive role in interregional competition.

Engel (1995) identified the key elements that can give birth to innovation and dynamism inside a cluster structured environment; first of all, the cluster has to involve many different players, from entrepreneurs, to investors, corporations, universities, R&D departments and government as well. On top of that, all the actors should be acting in a so-called ‘mobility perspective’, whether it’s capital, information, people, they all should be aligned on the same path. It was thanks to this type of culture that the Silicon Valley

was created and able to thrive and offer a model for every following cluster-structured type of project.

So, according to the literature in this field clusters are the preferable structure because they allow value creation, which, ultimately translates into innovation. And since China has been trying to shift its economy from a low value based into a high value-based economy, innovation is the key of this process and is what pushed, according to the political discourse, the continuous clusterization in the creative and cultural field. The importance attached to culture and creativity by the government and the central role they play has to be seen in this economic transition perspective. This transition becomes instrumental not only for training, development and promotion of cultural industries, but also as a construction of cultural soft power. In the last decade the promotion of cultural industries finds its physics transposition in the formation of clusters, that are highly profitable and specialized in sectors related to the economy and the culture. Often working as an effective means of reactivating the voids left behind from production, creative clusters²¹ are emerging as an innovative device for the conservation and enhancement of physical heritage and culture in the main Chinese cities. Indeed, the solution to inject "new ideas into old factories" ensures an immediate use and radical transformations, which also causes gradually increase of land rent. As a result, new real estate investments like shopping malls, recreational services, multifunctional buildings take up the space in or around these areas. Hundreds of creative clusters like art centres, new districts, incubators and parks for cultural industries are multiplying, leveraging the conversion of industrial heritage to promote the image, the brand of the city and a new identity of urban spaces, but also to experiment innovative models for flexibility of use and distribution.

Abrami, Kirby and McFarlan (2014) argue that even if in China innovation policies seem to be thriving and carefully planned, innovation policies are yet far from delivering a nice performance, because there is a big governance issue in China, that does not allow workers the chance to get to their full potential, since in the decision-making process, which is over governed by the state, there are not enough people engaged in it. This way of organization causes a limitation to the ideas and creativity flourishing (*ibid*). Keane

²¹ The expression Creative cluster (*chuangyi jijuqu* 创意集聚区) was introduced in China only in 2006.

(2011) seems to be agreeing, since he also argues that the majority of such clusters are underperforming and are in reality real estate development plans.

But what do mean when we speak on innovation? The word itself is self-explanatory, it has a Latin origin “res novae”, which means “something new” or “revolution” (Frankelius, 2009). Most of the research on innovation were introduced by Schumpeter (1942), in particular the notion of creative destruction.

The need for innovation is increasingly becoming a pressing issue for the Chinese government the more as the industrial model is forced to face new difficulties, posed, one above all by technology, which is going to replace the manufacture workers job. As reported in Jiang et al. (2019) in fact

While China’s cultural industry has developed rather quickly in the last few years, the lack of innovation is a widespread problem. The cultural industry’ innovation capacity must be increased for the quality of their output to be improved.

And the search for a higher degree of Chinese soft power nourishes the government push for tech innovation to become the key element in the cultural industry (Keane 2013). Here lies one of the main challenges that the government is facing, according to Keane (2013) analysis, the clash between the humanities and sciences, not creating more or better technology.

Some (Breznitz and Murphee 2011) instead believe that China should continue innovation on its own way, in which, in their opinion it excels, and that they defines as ‘strategic adaptation of existing technology’, which is also differently developed in different areas on the mainland, in some places the attention is put on the addition of new features, in others on improvement of the already existing ones.

Many researchers and analyst in the creative and cultural industry field (Keane 2013; Wang, 2004) argue that what China was actually able to get, after already years and decades of policies directly assessing this fluid field of industries, is not really innovative, even if the government tried to promote it and push it towards international standards, because of the relentless rush and ultimately clash with the US. It can be somehow considered innovative if we refer to the innovation concept in a Chinese way, which is consistently different from the Western one. The word innovation in Chinese is *chuangxin* 创新 and conceptually it mainly stems from “improvement or modification” (Keane 2013: 109) or, as other argue, imitation and adaptation, which is what also lies at the core of the

shangzhai phenomenon for example. Therefore, as Keane (2013) argues, the majority of top-down imposed structure, one above all, cluster, do not get the results hoped by administration, because they are embedded in an institutional framework that restricts innovation and inhibits experimentation.

An interesting research on this topic is the one conducted by He (2017), which addresses the development of creative and cultural industries in Shanghai and proposes the notion of “creative spatio-temporal fix” to interpret it. In Shanghai creative and cultural clusters have been constantly spreading since the beginning of the new millennium, because of the city’s advanced development and globalization. This phenomenon took place mainly through use of flexible land policies and because of land interests. Pushed by the pressing need for results after years of official discourse and following policies regarding cultural and creative industries in China, started with the 11th Five Year Plan, the clusterization of disused industrial places offered an interesting solution and, most importantly, a tangible one (Keane, 2013). This phenomenon took place in many cities, under influence of successful experiments such as Beijing’s 798 and Shanghai’s Tianzifang, and got spread in other cities: Creative 100 in Qingdao, Qinghai Creative Island in Dalian, Creative Warehouse in Shanghai, Hengqing Creative Island in Macau, Creative Industries Ideas Warehouse in Tianjin, Xixi Wetlands Creative Park in Hangzhou, Nanjing City of Stone Creative Park in Nanjing, Foshan Creative Industries Park in Foshan and East Chengdu Creative Music City in Chengdu, Shenzhen F518 Creative Fashion Park in Shenzhen. The clusters dimension varies a lot, they can be big or small, they can comprehend from 30-40 to 100 companies, and they can be more organically organized, or based on a single sector. So much attention and effort were invested in creative clusterization in an attempt to transfer and apply to the cultural field the framework that shaped the industrial and manufacturing previous era, in order to obtain fast results (Keane 2013).

Many researchers (Wang 2007; Wang and Mei 2009; Zheng, 2010, 2011, 2016; Keane, 2011) have stated that what lies at the core of creative industry cluster’s proliferation is merely the chance they offer for profit-making, instead of the will of actually promoting culture and cultural and creative workers communication. As Repellino (2017) argues about 786 zone in Beijing, the formalization of the area has radically changed the meaning of the place: the consolidated imagination of the disused and reused factory by the artists was commodified in a theme park. The atmosphere and

the notoriety of the creative centre have been exploited to transform the space into a market model based on recreational services (bars, restaurants, bookstores, souvenir shops). With the increase in the popularity of the site and consequent increase in rents cost, many artists decide to transfer their studios elsewhere and maintain some spaces within 798 to exhibit and sell their own works. Therefore, it is clear how the imaginary of 798 was conceived long before the bottom-up development of the area and that the formation of artistic centre was not so spontaneous, as it is known. Despite that, the artists that have created the 798 brand, today have permanently lost control of it. The neighbourhood is officially protected by the authorities but in turn it is under strict surveillance of urban projects and the promotion of Beijing's image. The authorities use 798 as a business card to promote creativity and a more open image of the city, with the hope of profiting from it in terms of international prestige and economic investments. The authorities are able to influence not only exhibitions and shows, but also to define which individuals or which organizations can move in the area. In its history, therefore, 798 continues to be an instrument of power and propaganda for the Chinese government (Repellino2017).

He (2017) sees the development of creative clusters areas as a “the end products or the means of urban entrepreneurialism” (2017:2). The concept she uses in her analysis of ‘creative spatio-temporal fix’ has its origins in Harvey’s (1982; 2003) study, in particular his concept of ‘spatial fix’, with which he refers to the build environment, the spatial reorganization and geographical expansion, while ‘temporal fix’ stands for temporal halts of crises. He (2017) argues, analysing Shanghai’s case, that these creative zones are deeply commercialized and, in most cases, have an opposite consequence than what they “advertise” and result in the removal of real artists from the scene. Chou (2012) research, in fact, demonstrated that constant intervention on the administration in the creative and cultural fields has been harmful and destructive to its development, small dimensions creative industries have failed to succeed while bigger ones have been trapped in the excessive formalization imposed from above (He 2017). The core of the problem seems to be the land interest, which is at the core of the developmental policies in China, so basically what happened in Shanghai was that thanks to CCIs developmental policies, industrial spaces empty for years were available at a competitive low price, after the shift towards a more tertiary and services based economy.

Culture plays a rhetoric role, while gentrification of these areas takes place, pushing the ‘new economy’ forward, stockholders and players of the property market take advantage from culture and creativity and ultimately capitalize on them (He 2017), basically through what the author defines as:

[...] reinvention of land policy through the operation of entrepreneurial governance that turns the constraints of land right complexity and deindustrialization into an advantage for low-cost CCIs development (2017:8).

In this way the cultural and creative industries assessed the vacant land problem, momentarily postponing the problems arising from deindustrialization. Cultural and creative industries development, furthermore, had a branding effect for the city, consequently leading to a real-estate development of these areas that speculates on the name and success of such brands. He defines this as a “crisis management strategy”, an “economic response to post-industrialization and land deficit”.

As Keane (2013) argues, most of China’s cultural and creative industries products (output) are not creative, mainly due to three reasons: workers in this industry are reluctant to take risks; second, the intellectual property right system is still weak and therefore not able to grant enough reward, and, third, there is a tendency to stretch the boundaries to its limit when measuring creative and cultural industry’s products, meaning that often products not strictly ‘creative’ (like manufacturing of CDs) are used in industry data collection and measurement to increase the allure of these industries both in the country itself and towards the global environment. What lies at the core of Chinese high-tech industries, in fact, is not innovation of the production.

In conclusion, it seems that both western and Chinese literature on the matter of cluster creation in the cultural and creative field assesses a number of problems characteristic to this situation in China. This, I argue, is mainly due to the top-down approach enacted through policies by the central government that does not allow value-creation and innovation, a problem recognized by the governmental authorities as well. In the following subchapter I will analyse how this top-down approach can be challenged and can lead to value-creation activities in the cultural and creative field.

2.3 Challenges to the top-down model: boy love, independent documentary filmmakers

In this subchapters I try to take as a reference some examples, mainly from the cultural industry field, of phenomena that developed and started from the bottom, giving rise to a bottom-up flow that resulted in the widespread of the upon mentioned phenomenon, and that in this way constitute an interesting challenge to the top-down tendency that rules every industry in China, especially the cultural and creative one. Therefore, I argue, is interesting to analyse how this phenomenon first started and later got spread in such a top-down ruled environment like China, since this situation makes it harder for creative producers to embark on riskier projects, since it is not supported by the central power. At the same time, in pursuing their own projects from the bottom-up, these actors were able to bypass many obstacles that the usual top-down logic entails, such as censorship, which has allowed them to explore their creativity to the fullest, allowing them to reach innovation in their field. When I speak about innovation I mean it in a broad sense; especially when making reference to the creative and cultural field it is difficult to give a definite definition of what innovation is, but when the product of such creative expression crosses geographic boundaries or anyways reaches a constantly increasing number of people, I argue, can be seen as innovation.

Since China has been deeply addressing, especially in recent years, its lack of soft-power and cultural diffusion around the globe and has tried to pursue such goal by applying its top-down approach also to creative and cultural fields, the traditional road has proved to have been unable to fill that void, because, differently from what is more easily to happen in other fields, creativity and culture, as argued by many (Wang, Keane etc) need freedom to prosper and therefore to innovate and that is difficult to achieve in a strictly controlled environment that is directly control by the central government.

Anyways especially the underground scene and independent production environment in China has proven itself to be a fertile soil for cultural innovation, in many different fields, from movies, to novels and art and book production in general. What makes these processes productive and worth researching is their ability to generate innovation in the creative and cultural field in a bottom-up perspective, that, I argue, constitutes a challenge to the model proposed and imposed by the government. This does not always happen in a conscious way, meaning sometimes (as for the case of independent

art book publishing further analysed in chapter three) creators and artists are not fully aware that their activity constitutes an alternative path compared to the official one and this happens mostly because these productions are often very limited in size and hardly ever reach the “mainstream” and official channels of distribution. Nonetheless I argue that this field is worth researching, since it has been gaining increasing attention and success in the public during recent years, and this, in my opinion entails a double value, when analysed in the perspective of nowadays Chinese controversial society.

In the following subchapters I will provide to the reader overviews and analysis of the cases of bottom-up production in creative and cultural industries that I believe constitute an interesting example to better understand this growing phenomenon.

2.3.1 The case of Chinese Danmei Fandom

What is generally referred to as *Danmei* (耽美)²², or Boys’ Love (BL) is defined by Yang and Xu as “a specific type of genre of male-male romance created by and for women and sexual minorities” (2017: 3). This genre can be found on different media and comes in different forms, such as “fiction, manga, anime, games, audio drama, MV, songs, and cosplay”(ibid). It has originated in Japan in 1970s and later gained success in whole East Asia pushed by the triumph of Japanese ACG²³ culture abroad.

Danmei reached China in the early 1990s, mainly through pirated, not legal channels and Yang and Xu interestingly notice that just like it happened in the US, in China as well, its development was pushed entirely by the demand of the fans, as

Through utilizing new media technologies, exploiting regulatory loopholes, and evading or flouting the restraints of censorship, a spectrum of actors, including fan communities, small businesses, and big corporations, has been able to construct a transnational distribution network that encompasses both digital and print media, retail and wholesale channels, as well as face-to-face trading (2017: 4).

²² *Danmei* (耽美), literally “addicted to beauty,” is the most common name for BL in China. It is borrowed from the Japanese word *tanbi*, which reminds of an original Chinese term to Chinese speakers (Zhang, 2017:16).

²³ ACG stands for anime, comics, and games.

What is interesting to notice from Zhang (2017) analysis is that the Chinese *danmei* phenomenon pushed by fans, so from the bottom, from consumers, has transformed into a transnational culture, and could ultimately constitute a model of globalization from below, while overturning heterosexual standards, encouraging alternative social and economic systems and deepening the cultural dialogue between East and West.

The three conceptual frameworks that Zhang and Xu make use of in their research are drawn by Mizuno's research and are firstly the infrastructure that makes the distribution of *danmei* possible, both online and offline; secondly what they define as "danmei circles" that gave rise to an international online realm where women can freely discuss different topics. *Danmei* writers except for commercial websites, can use open-access forums for free, simply using the platform Baidu Post Bar, provided by Baidu itself. Many also make use of Sina Microblog mainly in order to communicate with their fanbase. Despite Chinese editorial harsh environment, some *Danmei* printed magazines and book have been printed, mainly illegally, using borrowed or fake permits.

As Wei (2004) reports, since early 2011, news reports on arrests of erotic BL fiction writers came out, they and the owner of a BL Website together with a young woman who shared such content online were charged with obscenity. After April 2014 the authorities implemented a new harsh plan to purify the Internet, as a consequence more BL writers got arrested and many websites were closed or forced to eliminate some content. This all happened because the Chinese government has a zero-tolerance policy for pornography and homosexuality depiction and artistic representations, therefore *Danmei* magazines and writers often took advantage of Taiwan's more liberal policies²⁴ on this matter and published materials via Taiwan.

Since 2011, following the success of the comic market, more and more *Danmei* writers were able to self-publish their work, in this way overcoming the issue and constraint of the official censorship. In addition to this, self-publishing, according to Zhang and Xu (2017) research is far more convenient for content producers since it allows them to gain more revenue, compared to what they would get as common commercial published writer, selling 1,000 self-published copies in fact, would grant authors a greater profit than selling 5,000 commercial copies, because royalties for published authors are

²⁴ In Taiwan publishing and viewing of sexually explicit content is legal for adults over eighteen years old (Zhang and Xu, 2017).

usually only the 8 per cent, while non official writers can get until 50 per cent of sales in royalties and no taxes. And in addition to this, readers are aware of the situation and they prefer the self-published version because they know it is uncensored and that is the most profitable for the writer and in buying them they can show their support to the artist. Even if it seems that the self-publishing higher rewarding system could be the reason behind its proliferation lately, Wei argues that the *Danmei* works are “far from profit-driven commercial publications” (2014: 2.9), and instead characterized by a “commercial/gift culture that is in itself heterogeneous”.

Another interesting point that Zhang and Xu make is that *Danmei* products entail a high value in terms of IP. Since 2014, in fact, Tencent, Alibaba and other tech giants have been expanding into entertainment sectors, therefore the demand for good content has risen enormously and the adaptation rights of a good original *Danmei* novel can be sold for millions of yuan and can be adapted into tv series, manga and anime.

Zhang and Xu (2014) refer that the *Danmei* fandom is made up of three circles: the one of original Chinese-language novels (*yuandan quan* 原单圈), the Japanese circle (*rixiquan* 日系圈), and the Euro-American circle (*oumeiquan* 欧美圈). Each one of these three circles is different from the others because of specific characteristics and according to the authors analysis the majority of the fans are constantly changing and moving from one circle to another, this “cross-fertilization” (2017: 8) has helped enrich Chinese *danmei* culture and create a transnational community.

The first websites that came out in the late 1990s as a platform for the original *danmei* circle is called Jinjiang. It’s interesting to notice that thanks to the experimentation and constant confrontation between readers and writers online (not so common at the time on commercial book website), authors on Jinjiang played with different styles, mixed genres and touched upon different themes and this creativity leap has made Jinjiang a trendsetter in the growing industry of web literature.

Xianqing is the most renowned *danmei* discussion forum, it was created in 2003, in order to avoid censorship discussion on such forum makes use of *danmei* special code of communication and this requires a pretty long time, according to Jiang research to be assimilated by a common reader, and become in this way able to fully understand the content of such forum.

The informal economy *Danmei* works give birth to is analysed by Zhang and Xu in a globalization from below²⁵ perspective, in fact, she argues:

[...] in many ways, *danmei* is also a form of low-end globalization that involves numerous semi legal or illegal transactions of information, works, goods, and money across the Taiwan Strait and in East Asia, even though it also thrives on the Internet and through other advanced communication technologies. But unlike those developing-country traders who are motivated mainly by financial gain, the informal economy of *danmei* is “an imbricated commercial/gift culture that is in itself heterogeneous (2017: 7).

and again, she argues that this informal economy is constituted by a

[...] thick mesh of non-profit fan communities, semicommercial fan producers, corporate-owned but fan-managed commercial websites and magazines, and semilegal family wholesalers and retailers [...] (2017: 7).

So the phenomenon of *danmei* shows us how powerful the bottom-up process can be, and how easily something can spread, through use of the internet. As Keane said:

Creative communities represent the untapped creative potential of China. It is the informality of this stage that renders it so powerful. Many participants operate on the edge of state regulation (2013: 94).

Creative innovation, as he defines it is ‘creative destruction’ Chinese style and he argues ‘the effects include wider social dialogue and learning-by-participation’. Only time will tell if this will be the case also for *danmei* fans.

2.3.2 Independent Cinema

The group of filmmakers generally associated with the term *underground* mostly refers to students who were trained at the Beijing Film Academy - BFA (*Beijing dianying xueyuan* 北京电影学院²⁶). This group of students stands out for its production ‘out

²⁵for further explanation on this matter see Chapter Three.

²⁶It was founded in May 1950 and called the Performance Art Institution of the Film Bureau of the Ministry of Culture. During its first years it counted about 38 students. The school changed its name 3 times until it reached the current nomenclature on the 1st June 1956. The Beijing Film Academy is the institution where the main directors of the fourth, fifth and sixth generations studied, among its most famous alumni we find Tian Zhuangzhaung, Chen Kaige, Zhang Yimou, Wang Xiaoshuai, Zhang Yuan and Jia Zhangke.

of the box', their works are rarely subjected to the normal bureaucratic process to obtain the Chinese distribution visa and this is one of the reasons why their movies soon got the connotation of underground films. Because of their underground and independent characteristic, they do not find a specific numeric connotation, as instead happened for the previous fourth and fifth generations of filmmakers (Chen; Shi, 2003).

In the case of Chinese films, the term "independent" indicates a different degree of effective autonomy from state studies and therefore, implicitly, from the censorship that the organs of control of the Party Chinese Communist exercise on cinema. Chinese film critics sought valid alternatives to the *underground* term in an attempt to avoid the potential subversive value implicit in the term, the debate around the denomination and the actual acceptance of the works of this generation, is still ongoing. The debate focuses on the use of two terms: underground and independent. The term "independent filmmakers" (*duli yingren* 独立影人) was accepted by many film critics as they could recognize this group merits artists in exploring experimental cinematographic techniques outside of what was learned in the academy and taking the initiative in an independent way.

The exploration of unconventional subjects, the choice of narrative structure, the interest in the social aspects and policies not endorsed by the government, the obsession with the psychological deepening of the characters, it dealt with themes and common techniques that clearly differentiated their films from the mainstream canon established by the fifth generation. Being innovative in technique and themes is one of the main concerns of these directors. Underground films in China have the cultural merit of having brought individual subjectivity back to the screen by breaking with the previous generation that. The research that these film makers do is centred around experimental freedom in the movie making field and does not have to be interpreted in a western perspective as subversive towards the government (Chen and Shi, 2003). Huan Shixian notes as one of the main thrusts of underground directors is a humanistic search for the meaning of life, a youthful will which has very little to do with a subversive and revolutionary spirit. The contrast with the fifth generation focused on the National and the historical allegories is clear. In this group of filmmakers, we find a sincere interest in the immediate social realities and the affirmation of the importance of the individuality of being human.

During this time another stream of cultural creativity arose and took the form of the so-called New Documentary Movement²⁷, which was born around the 1990s. The growth of the movement was pushed by the growing use of digital video cameras which with its facility and distribution allowed this movement to bring new life to the cinematographic discourse. Non-governmentally produced documentary became available, during these years, in many different not strictly official places such as bars, artists' private circles and art galleries (Lu 2003). These new productions differ from the previous ones and are considered innovative for what concerns their narrative style, subject of the story, style of expression, and even technology used in the production. Wu Wenguang with his *Bumming in Beijing* (1990) is considered to be the first independent documentary producer in China, and after him many other followed. All of these filmmakers produced their work independently, at their own expenses and because of the tight control system and small margin for profit, these documentaries are rarely screened in China and are instead much appreciated in foreign festival, where sometimes they also win prizes.

Shu (2011) research shows a new perspective on the independent documentary issue in China. She specifically analysed female independent documentary makers from China, and conducted an in-depth research, based on interviews with seven female independent Chinese filmmakers. She noticed that differently from what happened in the West, where female independent documentary makers were pushed by the 1970s feminist movement, in China the rise of such phenomenon has non-gendered roots.

In general, the independent cinema movement in China also qualifies as a bottom-up challenge to the top-down system, since filmmakers were in most cases self-produced and thanks to that they were able to experiment and create innovation in the cinematographic field, exploring themes and techniques totally different from their predecessors.

2.3.3 The case of reconstruction of places through art

It is a new art trend that emerged in China during the first years of 2000s, it involves place-making and society building through art (艺术乡建), especially in rural areas and

²⁷ Expression coined by Lu Xinyu (2003).

has been named “Rural Reconstruction through Art Movement”. This phenomenon was analysed by Wang (2018) echoing previous researches about place and place-making importance in a globalized and fast-paced urbanized world. She argues that through this type of artistic work, artists are able to provide “bottom–up alternatives” to the common discussion about social development, while broadening the role of the arts as actively involved in social issues, society and culture building. In fact, the cultural projects enacted by these artists gave rise to a less capitalistic-oriented society and allowed, instead, the rise of a more community-oriented lifestyle in the rural areas involved. Wang also registers through her research an increasing interest of Chinese artists towards what is usually referred to as ‘socially engaged art’²⁸ during the last decade, a growing tentative of make art more socially involved and more public. Art is not conceived as the product of the artist and his team, but instead is intended as a social interaction, therefore it happens and deals with social spaces, in order to facilitate this exchange in relationships.

This type of art’s purpose is not to end up in a museum, but to engage the public and stimulate dialogues and eventually raise awareness towards issues of the society.

The movement of rural reconstruction through art has become increasingly important since 2011 when museums in the main cities started hosting and promoting events and exhibitions regarding this matter.

Between the most influential artists that unofficially operated in the deeply in crises rural countryside there are Li and Wen. Different types of activists, researchers and artists with various initiatives were then grouped under the name of New Rural Reconstruction Movement (Day 2008). (New to differentiate it from a previous one of the 20s during the Republican Era) It is a grassroots movement that groups together intellectuals from different fields, also academics, and what they try to do, as Wang (2018: 249) says is

[...] Through various art projects and drawing on their resources in the urban-based cultural field, they hoped to revitalize the social, economic, and cultural life of rural China and shape the direction of rural reconstruction towards a more participatory, sustainable, and local tradition-sensitive approach.

The panorama of artists engaged in the rural areas is complex but Wang (2018) dwells with some specific artists, such as Hu Xiangcheng (b. 1949) who started the Jinze

²⁸ The expression ‘socially engaged art’ usually refers to ‘participatory art’, ‘dialogical art’, and ‘social practice’.

Project (金泽计划) in a rural area outside of Shanghai. His aim with this project was to try and give new life to the traditional rural architecture. The project took ten years to be fully realized and saw a 40000 square feet area was renewed and has become a multi-function space for artists and not only, a new community centre, it has been designed as a place that allows people to host events and celebration to connect back with their roots. Side project that took place while Jinze Project comprehend also sustainable agricultural methods and farms that use traditional methods along with workshops for the community to learn how to realize objects and clothes that entail a traditional style, furthermore it has also been used as a platform for scholars to do research in the rural field.

Another interesting project it the one pursued by Jin Le (b. 1966) in Shijiezi village in the mountains in the province of Gansu. In 2005 she started creating some site-specific installation in the village, during the years he was also able to involve some village citizens into his project. In 2008 Jin organized a performance during the Spring Festival with the Group “Panda Art Troupe” (founded by another famous contemporary Chinese artist, Zhao Bandi), during which also villagers performed on stage. After continuously putting effort in trying to bring back culture and art to the village, Jin was eventually elected by the citizen as chief of the village and this partnership and cooperation between the artist and the villagers led to the establishment of the Shijiezi Village Art Museum (石节子美术馆) in 2009. The Museum is basically the entire village and every villager is directly involved in the art and culture exchange since every house has some objects or something to exhibit. In this way cultural exchange is promoted, artists can reside in the village and come in contact with local culture, one above all the Fly Together: Shijiezi Village Art Practice Project (一起飞 - 石节子村艺术实践计划) promotes cultural exchange between 25 artists and 25 villagers, it is self-sponsored by Jin himself and has been started in 2015. Some of the products of this project are street-lightening, roads, very practical and concrete outcomes. In a remote small and declining village in the mountains called Xucun in Shaanxi, the artist Qu Yan has worked together with local actors of various type, cadres, artists and so on since 2009. The village is situated in a beautiful environment rich in historic relicts, so the artist created the Xucun International Art Commune, a non-profit association whose mission consists in renovating local public and private architecture and create exchange opportunity for artists. Moreover, the Commune also organized the International Art Festival (和顺乡村国际艺术节), an event that took place every two years, respectively in 2011, 2013 and 2015. Also in this occasion, the

artist's effort was actually aimed at the local villagers, with this project he tried to prove that the narrative that does not see rural areas as feasible for art and culture is not necessarily true and local folk art and culture can become a resource for the society.

Another initiative that gained extensive publicity from arts and social spheres ever since it began was the Bishan Project (碧山计划), a rural region in Anhui Province renowned for the historical Hui housing structures. In 2011 artists Ou Ning²⁹ and Zuo Jing³⁰ (born 1970) co-founded this initiative after several years of studies and training. With this initiative their aim was to address the growing rural – urban divide through the use of art and social programmes. The Bishan Harvestival was initiated in 2011 directed at stimulating the countryside's government social lives. The festival featured different personalities from the art world, engaged in different types of artistic production, from movie screening, to exhibitions, to... In 2012 the Festival was suspended by local authorities, but the two artists kept being involved in the rural village and promote reconstruction and re appropriation of culture through sub-projects until 2016 when the two artists were abruptly discouraged by authorities in continuing their activity.

What makes these projects an example of a bottom-up initiative is that they are not imposed by the central administration, but individually pursued by artists, with their multifaceted characteristics and artistic interest, therefore they do not follow a governmental official plan, and can adjust and be shaped onto local specificities. Even if still small in size as a phenomenon is growing more and more in the last years and can be seen as a model for every rural areas' development in China. These projects not only grant historic sites protection, but they provide villages with tools for their future development, contrary to what the top-down model would require for them: demolition.

Wang (2018) underlines that this artistic movement of rural reconstruction cannot be labelled as dissident, since artists and actors involved do not possess a strong anti/government connotation, instead it is a “soft form of social intervention and cultural activism” (2018: 262) since artists need to engage in dialogue with local officials to enact their projects.

²⁹ (*Ouning* 欧宁) born in 1969 is a multi-faceted artist, he has worked as filmmaker, curator, writer and publisher, he graduated in 1993 from Shenzhen University

³⁰ Born in 1970 in Xuancheng, Anhui, he works as an artist and curator (<http://www.artlinkart.com/en/artist/overview/b46atuqq>).

So yet once again this artistic movement shows an independent and deliberate interest from the artists side towards rural areas. They got involved and planned and realized projects by themselves, using only their resources, which qualifies, I argue, as a bottom-up process. In this way they challenged the top-down system, with which they eventually had to come to terms with, in order to see their projects realized. Is interesting to notice that the top-down nature of the Chinese environment does not seem to be entirely stopping artists, filmmakers and simple consumers from trying to explore alternative ways to what is the common trend. In the last chapter I will provide an extensive analysis of another bottom-up phenomenon that has been growing more and more in these last years.

3. Case study: independent art book publishing in China

From the broader cluster of creative industry, I now try to focus my research on a much smaller, almost “niche” field in China, independent publishing, that is ascribable to creative industries.

The aim of this chapter is to research the phenomenon of independent art book publishing in China, which has started to flourish in recent years, thanks to the development of fairs and events promoting the culture associated to it. I started reviewing the literature on this matter and I reckoned a lack of academic sources about this specific field. So, in order to gain insights in this field I conducted a qualitative research based on in-depth direct interviews, which aim was to identify and analyse current trends, topics and themes related to this specific environment.

In this chapter I use the expression “independent art book publishing” or “independent publishing” in its broader sense. Since literature on this matter is scattered between researchers of zines and more art-field oriented about artist-books, I decided to use this kind of definition to support and express my argument, that first I want to briefly clarify for the sake of the research’s consistency. In using such expression I make reference to any type of self-published art product, ranging from zines, to art books, photography books, artist books, without excluding all other types of printed products that allow expression for an artist, designer, photographer, also magazines, comics and so on. Already from the definition of this expression the reader can sense the complexity in trying to put definite delimitation to this field, which I believe has to be considered taking into account a great extent of flexibility, since it gathers many different forms of creative expression, that can all be considered together because, I argue, they all share a common principle, they do not rely on mainstream, official media for distribution, they do not go through the official process of creative production, and instead they rely on the artist, the content producers itself, to actually produce and distribute the products.

The data for this chapter are drawn from face to-face interviews that I personally conducted in Shanghai at the Unfold Art Book Fair in May 2019, in addition to this method I also made use of online ethnography of independent publishers websites and social accounts, and reviewed the literature about independent media and independent production, even though this material is usually based on research mainly conducted in the United States or England.

With this research I am interested in finding out how the independent publications phenomenon can flourish in a repressive environment like China, what sort of value artist and creators attribute to their work and if there is an intrinsic cultural and political significance to such phenomenon and how to evaluate it, and why is the content of these publications for the most part lacking a political connotation.

My argument is that the independent art book publishing as a form of creative and self-production process challenges the top-down model of creativity development imposed by the government, giving life to a flow of creativity that has the possibility to reach other places and go beyond the national culture, economy of origin, constituting a new way of cultural exchange that takes place outside the institution, away from the soft-power competitiveness and that therefore can be analysed in a perspective of globalization from below.

3.1 Independent Art Book Publishing: overview

To begin with, I quickly go over the independent publishing context, illustrating in particular theoretical issues derived from zines field of study, since there is not much material regarding Chinese production and I argue, even if the most of the researches in this field dwell with Us and UK creative scene, it can constitute anyway a theoretical framework applicable to the Chinese scene.

One of the most important and more comprehensive work of study in the field of underground culture about independent publishing is “Notes from Underground” by the American professor Stephen Duncombe. He detailly researched zines and gave a comprehensive background as well, explaining zines origin in twenty-century science fiction and counterculture of the sixties and later growth, following the influence of punk-rock culture spread. Usually independent art books are defined as those books that are self-published, ranging from art, photography and artist books and zine-theorists usually collocate zines in the tradition of self-publishing (Duncombe 1997).

Literature on zines provides different definition, i.e. O’Reilly defined them as “small, independently made amateur magazines”, Bartel (2004: 24) defines zines as “a small, highly personalised subset of the alternative press”. In spite of the differences in the different versions that literature offers, a central theme happens to be common to all of them, that is, that they are and have been a core part of alternative media (Duncombe 1997).

And as Jaskulski (2010) argues, despite a big quantity of internet-based options, the zine medium continues to be popular, thanks to the eclectic elements intrinsic to this form of media, that are not to be found in other type of underground/alternative media.

Jaskulski, thanks to his alternative perspective in analysing the zines phenomenon in underground culture, identifies three specific features that allow zines endurance and constitute its specific cultural value, that is

The political underpinnings of the medium such as self-empowerment through Do It Yourself (DIY), production; [...] zine-makers’ affinity with counter-cultural themes such as anti-establishment and modern-day Samizdat; [...] the connection of zines with craft practice, particularly the use of manual labour in production.

Broadening the discourse from zines to independent media in general, the research conducted by Jeppesen (2016) dwells on the different connotation that scholars in this field have attached to their different understanding of ‘alternative media’ concept, and tries to shed a light on the literature in this field, with the intent of better and more in depth understanding of the production of alternative media. Following the previous different analysis, Jeppesen then argues that in the landscape of alternative media four different categories can be mapped out, based on “content, processes, and social movement actions” (Jeppesen 2016). Following an extensive analysis of the entire literature and theoretic background on the matter, she synthesizes alternative media as represented in the following table, and then specifies the different features and intent linked to them in the second table.

Four Theoretical Foundations of Alternative Media

	DIY media & Culture	Community & Citizen Media	Critical Media	Autonomous & Radical Media
Theoretical foundation	Birmingham School; Subcultural studies	Development Communication; Communication for Social Change (CfSC)	Frankfurt School; Critical Theory	Anarchist theory; Social Movement theories
Key text	Dick Hebdige <i>Subculture, the Meaning of Style</i> (1979)	Clemencia Rodríguez <i>Fissures in the mediascape: An international study of citizens’ media</i> (2001)	Christian Fuchs <i>Foundations of Critical Media and Information Studies</i> (2011)	John Downing <i>Radical Media</i> (1984, 2001)

Table 1. Theoretical Foundations of the Four Types of Alternative Media

Jeppesen (2016: 57)

Criteria	DIY Media & Culture	Community & Citizen Media	Critical Media	Autonomous & Radical Media
Content (politics, goals)	Self-representation of individuals; Subcultural identity; The personal is political	Self-representation of communities; Engage civil society	Anti-capitalist counter-hegemonic; Create counter-public sphere	Self-representation of movements; Anti-oppression politics
Processes (organization, structure)	Individuals or small loose-knit collectives; Do It Yourself; Amateur; 'nano' scale	Participatory media; Community involvement; Skill sharing	Vertical or horizontal; Professional; Preferably large scale	Horizontal; Prefigurative; Skill sharing; Quasi-professional; Small to large scale
Social movement actions & interactions	Engaged in cultural citizenship	Represent the community's issues for the community's benefit	Report on anti-capitalist and anti-corporate social movements; Organic intellectuals of social movement	Support and report on a range of interrelated anti-authoritarian social movements; Media in action

Table 2. Mapping the four types of alternative media

Jeppesen (2016: 66)

With Jeppesen's framework in mind, I argue that we can collocate the independent art publishing scene in China into the DIY category, since, as Jeppesen (2016) defines it, this type of productions are centred around one core characteristic, that is the representation of self (both of the individual and of small groups).

I would argue that the Chinese independent art book publishing scene, in spite of the differences that can be seen in the content of the products and in the many different products themselves (from comics, to printing experiments), can all be considered as one, because it is the result of the same method of media production, which core values happen to be, according to my analysis, the same ones as the ones used in the discourse about DIY media.

Jeppesen (2016) argues that DIY media, for what concerns its decision making and production process is characterized by the lack of a definite and formal structure, the media producers are likely to be non-professional and amateurs and the production quantity tends to be quite limited and locally distributed (even if this does not affect its potential diffusion). Another trait that Jeppesen outlines regarding DIY media is that it "tends to create a specific scene or alternative community based on identities, which may be subcultural [...] and may also exist on a national or international scale" (2016:68). It's also interesting to notice that in her analysis Jeppesen identifies the ideology behind DIY media in the so-called "Left Libertarian", centred on the self-empowerment of the individual, the rhetoric behind it is "nobody is gonna do it for you", and in the case of

Chinese independent publishers I argue that to this basic concept we can add the importance and influence of the state in the creative production process.

In the case of DIY media the cultural production happens between a small, enclosed group, giving rise to a “safe” space, that allows creativity to flourish, allowing self-empowerment thanks to what Jeppesen defines as “subcultural belonging” (2016: 70), something that can be synthesized as a sense of inclusion into a certain scene that is not usually free to express its voice in the society, and therefore offers possibility of novelty and creativity in contrast to the mainstream production of society (J. 2016).

Another interesting argument posed by Jeppesen (2016) in her analysis is that “small-scale or nano-media can be crucial to large-scale social movements”. In order to reach this statement, she draws on previous literature on the matter, specifically Downing (2003), which takes into account Todd May’s anarchist reconceptualization of Foucault’s notion of power³¹.

Having cleared this theoretical premises, I aim to argue that they contribute to the political connotation that is deep into the independent art book publishing in China, which does not necessarily have to be evident in the content, but it’s instead intrinsic in the media itself, which I argue can be classified as DIY media, and therefore politically connotated.

Taking as a reference the definition of the concept of alternative media provided by Mike Gunderloy, the former editor of Factsheet Five, he defines zines as: “The real thing, before it gets slick, co-opted, and profitable. The underground press comes out in small quantities, is often illegible, treads on the thin ice of unmentionable subjects, and never carries ads for designer jeans”. (Gunderloy & Goldberg, 1992) Gunderloy set a strong distance in his definition between underground press and the for-profit, mass-media (Jaskulski 2010). China’s zines production seems to collocate itself somehow in the middle between alternative production and for-profit.

What independent art book publishing in China is according to Millichap (2014) writes: China’s publishing landscape is still a harsh environment, governed by the state and hostile to outside intruders, a difficult environment to work in, even for big players such as Penguin or Harper Collins. This has an important consequence, a sort of double protective effect towards Chinese publishing industry, since such strict regulation allows

³¹ Foucault dismantles the modern conception of power, which cannot be studied starting from its institutional and juridical forms, the concepts of sovereignty and law, but must be understood in the everyday life of the effects it produces in the social world. Foucault overturns the perspective from which to look at power, his conception is an analysis from below.

the state to prevent foreign companies to take advantage of the Chinese market. But in recent years few small independent arts books publishers, design studios and self-publishing artists have appeared, especially in big cities such as Beijing, Hong Kong, Shanghai and Guangzhou. Usually, because of difficulties in getting the domestic book registration number, which is controlled by the government-owned publishers, these self-publishing works cannot get distributed in regular bookshops, and not even abroad, because International Standard Book Number (ISBN) is also almost impossible to get. That is why this phenomenon usually takes place on a micro level and is mainly the result of the work of individuals or small groups working in small studios with common interests.

Some of them have now a set structure, they became real cultural companies, some other are recently graduated or soon to be students with a background in the arts field that take advantage from the benefits of the self-publishing process: low cost, easy to do, no need for specific machinery. In recent years, in addition to the flourishing of self-publishing, exhibitions such as Unfold Shanghai Art Book Fair, or abC Beijing Art Book Fair have become more and more popular, attracting a large number of visitors. The reason why I personally believe this phenomenon is extremely interesting and worth researching is perfectly expressed, once again, by Millichap. As he underlines (2014:14),

[...] in a country where the printed page is closely policed, [...] books possessed a novelty and edge that did not seem lost on the crowd of young students and artists [...], Despite the formidable obstacles, however, for a new generation of artists, designers, writers and publishers, the indie book is a real-world assertion of potency and intent as well as being a heavily loaded symbol of creative independence.. [...].

With the aforementioned premises I started to draw my research question, wishing to figure out how was it possible for events that promote independent art book publishers and independent artist to attract such a broad audience in China, where usually publishing is strictly controlled, and how come conducting a first literature research about this field, with specific focus on China situation, I was faced with a rather big lack of literature about this specific niche field of creative production.

3.2 Unfold Shanghai Art Book Fair: a case study

3.2.1 Research Method

The aim of this research is to examine the phenomenon of independent art book publishing in China, to contribute broadening the debate about independent media towards China direction.

To answer the research questions, I have chosen to conduct field research, using semi-structured interviews as my primary research method, I preferred face to face interviews to surveys or questionnaires, which is a research method that largely relies on self-reported data, because this qualitative method approach is good at answering not only ‘what’ but also ‘how and why’ types of questions³² and because of the characteristic of the independent art book publishing sector. Since it is mainly a product of a small production team, it’s usually difficult to get in touch with them, they’re often pretty busy working at the same time on multiple projects and do not have to time to dedicate to filling out surveys and so on; therefore, taking part in an event such as Unfold Shanghai Art Book Fair I thought was the perfect opportunity to get directly in touch with them and avoid the time waste that often comes from communication mediated by computer or surveys or questionnaires can cause. The interviewees can be categorized into two different representative samples, on one hand the Chinese exhibitors, which mainly gathers urban young adults and mostly from Tier 1 and Tier 2 cities of China (Smith 2018) with a university degree in the arts field and often experience studying abroad; on the other hand the other sample includes more traditional western exhibitors, that have broader experience abroad and are currently working in China, usually of a more mature age and which have more years of work experience in the field.

This research method based on in-depth interviewing allowed me to conduct a qualitative research, coming in direct contact with the players and content creators of this field, and turned out to be an effective method to have a direct and immersive insight into this world and later allow me to conduct a better analysis of the themes that came up from the conversations I had. As a complementary method of research, I used social media profile (both in their western and Chinese versions) and websites analysis of the artists and independent publishers that took part at the event. In doing so I was able to gather

³² Chen Zhen (2018)

more reliable data and combining this with in-depth interviews, and literature review, it allowed me to have a broader understanding of the phenomenon, have richer information while keeping a flexible approach towards my interviewees. Such results would have been much more difficult to reach using a strict and standardized method of research as surveys or questionnaires.

The interviews were conducted based on a set of questions written by me, after review of the literature and assessment of the lack of literature on the matter of art book independent production in China.

3.2.2 The fair

In order to offer a more comprehensive understanding of the whole research to the reader I will first provide some information about the fair itself and the organization that is behind it.

As reported on their website, UNFOLD Shanghai Art Book is an exhibition featuring about 190 art publishers, independent bookshops, zinesters, artists and graphic designers from around the globe, offering to its visitors an international and leading publishing scene by its rich variety for Chinese audience, working at the same time as an exchanging platform between local and international publishers/artists. It will show books from all fields of visual arts, including contemporary photography, illustration, comic and design. The fair is also filled with events such as talks, special exhibitions, installations and workshops. UNFOLD 2019 Shanghai Art Book Fair was held from May 17 to May 19 at the M50 Creative Park in Shanghai, with an entrance ticket of 10 Yuan/Day. The fair was organized by Bananafish Books in collaboration with M50 Creative Park. The 2019 committee members were: Bananafish Books and Jiazazhi Press/Library

The Shanghai Art Book Fair's 2019 edition working team includes:

Art Director: Wei Guan

Curator: Qing Zhou, Yanyou Yuandi

Event Coordinator&Supervisor: Shushu Miao

Design Director: Guang Yu/ablackcoverdesign

Catalogue Design: Qing Zhou, Wei Guan

Web Design: Guangyu, Wei Guan

Web Coding: Jin Liang

Web Editor/Translator: Qing Zhou, Shushu Miao

Venue Space Design: Wei Guan, Gao Han

Fair Photographer: Fantom

Venue Volunteers 2019: Cai Fan, Fang Xin, Gao Jia, Hong Rui Shen , Hu Xue Fei, Huang Xiao Yong, Lu Ruo Ci, Qian Yu Chen , Shen Ling, SI Nian, Tang Han Fei, ang Ling Song, Tie Meng Ran, Wang Yu Hui Zi, Wang Mu Lan, Wang Yi Ting, Wu Bing Qian, Wu Zhi Wei, Xie Yu Xin, Yu Hong Bo, Zhang Yue Han, Zhao Yu Zhi, Zhen Ke Ren, Zhu Jun Wen, Zuo Shu Wen.

The exhibition saw the contribution of a partner: LBY Paper/Paper Live, and has attracted attention of media, that worked as a support for the event, such as: Design 360° Magazine, VICE CHINA, Q Daily, Lujunyi_Design Live, BranD Magazine, Hiiibrand, Zui Bi She. According to SHABF official communication, this year's visitor's number reached more than 15000 people, and saw the participation of 190 exhibitors from 59 cities. Last year the record of visitors was around 8000, so in only one-year time the number has almost doubled.

Chinese media opinion on UNFOLD is overall positive: “UNFOLD is no longer a mere bazaar, but a collection of paintings that refresh and enhance public understanding of art reading, book design, art publishing, and printing culture. To sort out and present for the public to understand the history of artists' letters and the important influence of artists' letters/personal handmade book creation concept on the creative young people at present. Art books and art reading can be integrated into the daily life of the public through the events of the book fair and the communication between people.”

The main organizers are Bananafish Books, registered as 上海版语文化传播有限公司, they define themselves as “ a shop, zine and artist's books publishing house and social space that is unique to the Chinese young people in providing a platform for zines, artist's books, journals, poetry, art writing and unique magazines from independent publishers and artists who do self-publishing and love zines!”

Besides being a multifunctional space, Bananafish Books also hosts a programme of monthly workshops, mini exhibitions, design projects, talks, and small art book fairs, “providing a stimulating context in which to exchange ideas and spread the culture of zines in mainland China”.

Under the brand Bananafish Books, they also provide Risograph printing services (called Pausebread Press) for different clients, since they currently stock two risograph³³ machines in house and 15 risograph colors.

Bananafish Books was founded in 2010 by Qing Zhou and Su Fei, before that, in February 2008 *Su Fei* 苏菲 opened a blog that she used to record, take notes from her visits to independent libraries in Europe (while she was studying there). At that time, she started to get interested in the independent publishing and zine world. Then, in July 2009, *Su Fei* 苏菲 and *Guan Wei* 关暉 respectively returned from studying abroad in Britain and Germany and started working in Shanghai. In December 2009, the Bananafish was chosen as a name for the store, and the website domain was registered at: www.a-perfect-book-for-bananafish.com. In August 2010 the website was completed. In July 2011 the bookshop was relocated from Shanghai to Dalian³⁴, On December 1, 2011, bananafish 1.0 book store, a small blue house of 16 square meters, was opened in Dalian. Address: 53 wenhua street, zhongshan district, dalian city. In June 2012, they decided to stop working at the physical store and started all over again, turning the bookstore into an online one and opening a studio; the bookstore was then moved to Nanchang³⁵ following working relationship. In July 2014, after a two-year rest in Nanchang, Bananafish moved back to Shanghai once again, in order to start a new business from scratch: bookstore - publishing - risograph printing - sales - exhibition activities etc. In October 2014, they started to contribute to their second business through the Risograph printing brand established by *Guan Wei* 关暉, called 加餐面包印社 Pause Bread Studio, whose printing website is www.pausebread.com. In March 2015, 香蕉鱼 Bananafish found a new home in Shanghai with the launch of bananafish 2.0: no. 475 shiquan road, in putuo district. A small space with glass walls. Based there together with Zines culture, Riso machine, ink and paper, they are gradually trying to expand the independent publishing culture advocated by banana-fish into a creative production space and cultural and creative product production and design studio integrating experience and feeling, perception and trial.

³³ Risograph: usually refers to a brand of digital duplicators manufactured in 1986 by the Riso Kagaku Corporation (Japan), designed especially for high-volume photocopying and printing.

³⁴ City in Liaoning province

³⁵ City in Jiangsu province

In November 2015, Bananafish launched the 小豆本 xiaodouben project. This small book publishing plan and xiaodouben box product later became the most famous and most important studio project of Bananafish, more than 2,000 people took part in the project so far. Project record: www.minizine.net. In September 2017, Bananafish launched and organized the first edition of UNFOLD Shanghai Art Book Exhibition, which was successfully held from June 22 to June 24, 2018 at M50 Art Center in Shanghai. In October 2018, Bananafish bookstore, located in a glass room on the first floor, located at no. 475 of shiquan road in Shanghai, was completely upgraded. An exhibition space was added to the original area, for the opening exhibition was held 服部一成 book design exhibition.

In addition to all this, since 2017 Bananafish Books also organizes design printing workshops for students. Many students from art and design colleges and universities have come to Shanghai from all over the country to take part in their printing training class, and often later applied for foreign colleges and universities with their carefully printed portfolio, and later received ideal offers from the universities they were applying to.

Recently Bananafish Books also started a collaboration process with universities, they hold Risograph lectures and workshops and they are also hosting the “art book resident plan” 艺术书驻地计划, the artists that take part in this project have the chance to stay in the bookstore place and complete a RisoBook publication plan in 7-14 days.

In one interview (Bran, 2019) one of the founders of Bananafish defines the printing industry as 夕阳产业 the sunset industry, of the declining ones and that's why he believes that the future value of printed products will go towards a more diverse and artistic direction, and he believes also that Risograph can fully satisfy and nicely fit this future needs. In the interview he also raises another point that support my argument, which is that commercialization is not everything to this specific industry. He hopes that in the future more and more cities will see the rise of Risograph studios, because, he says, to open a risograph studio, does not require a big investment and it's affordable for young creatives and designers. He hopes that in China they will be able to promote the niche print culture and see it flourish.

3.2.3 The Space M50

M50 creative park, former factory of 莫干山老 moganshan, is a place that sums up the development history of Shanghai's urban and industrial civilization from the late 19th century to the 1930s. Since November 1999, when the main business of Shanghai Chunming factory 上海春明纺粗厂 plant shut down, this place with an area of 41000 square meters of industrial buildings went through many transformations is the first from industrial park of the city, to transition into an art industrial park, founded in 2005 by the Shanghai economic commission and listed as one of the first batch of creative industry zones in Shanghai. It was a historic sense of factory space and China's whole head-on collision of contemporary art, M50 became the first contemporary art community in China.

More than 800 art exhibitions and activities are held in M50 every year, making it one of the most active cultural and art parks in Shanghai and even in all China. M50 art industrial park has introduced more than 140 artists' studios, galleries, higher art education and various cultural and creative institutions from 20 countries and regions. These institutions have created a strong atmosphere of artistic creativity, attracting numerous collectors, media, celebrities, art lovers, citizens and tourists at home and abroad.

In 2015 the "M50 art season" “M50 艺术季” started, it was held with the mission of creating art and cultural innovation in Shanghai throughout the development of the M50 brand, meaning "the world sees China, China sees Shanghai, Shanghai sees M50". From the moment the old factory door was opened, the M50 was nurtured by Shanghai culture and became a new landmark of Shanghai. Through art exhibition, joint opening, art education experience, imagination practice and creative competition, the activities with Shanghai cultural landmark characteristics have been designed to build a service platform for art and design exchange, trading and exhibition at home and abroad, and expand the international influence of M50 brand. UNFOLD art book exhibition project is also one of the most characteristic exhibitions of the M50 art season.

M50 creative park is adjacent to the Suzhou river and runs on the beautiful Suzhou river. On both sides of Suzhou river, from huacao down to the estuary, there are numerous old industrial buildings and related commercial logistics service buildings. In their functional layout, architectural form, engineering materials and detailed decoration, they all contain rich information codes and values of economy, science and technology, society and other

aspects, showing the history and culture of Shanghai to present and future generations. Many of the industrial buildings built in the early 20th century and even the previous century are still intact. In addition to industrial and commercial buildings, there are a large number of social service complex buildings. According to the information provided by relevant departments, there are more than 40 listed cultural relics protection units above the municipal level and excellent modern protection buildings at the municipal level along the Suzhou river, and hundreds of other buildings have been recognized as having reserve value.

In UNFOLD art book fair, the organizers invited the archaeological urban team of Shanghai city in order to promote "Suzhou river - Riverside City Search" walking around the city is the main theme in the book fair exposition section, here experts from the archaeological team will lead visitors to the exhibition to find out more about Shanghai's mother river, get to know the river course, and do activities to enjoy Suzhou river at dawn and at night.

UNFOLD art fair started in 2018, in 2018 June 22 - June 24 in the M50 creative garden zero successfully held the first art centre, art fair for three days festival project planning content, from manual book display art artistic, paper and printing the diverse union, the popularity of the art diversity and professional knowledge lectures, and other aspects of communication to the public good of printing, art reading in edify sentiment, enjoy the art popularization and drive the importance of the derivatives industry.

The success of UNFOLD 2018 opens a window on how many creative, passionate, and motivated crewmen are producing perceptive and creative prints, as traditional print media is far from everyday life. The creators and producers of new content are still supported by a group of readers who have personal memories attached to the reading medium, and like the feeling of the paper, the unfolding of the book.

The site of an art book fair, focusing on book design and handmade paper culture, is a perfect place to communicate creative and writing achievements with everyone who meets here. Each city's art book fair has become one of the city's art and culture places, promoting the development of art publishing, showing the vitality of a city's visual culture and the creation status of young artists, visual designers and illustrators.

3.3 Analysis

I interviewed both Chinese exhibitors and western exhibitors, of different age and gender, and already about the difference between interviewees a theme arises, in fact interviewees can be grouped into two main subgroups: Chinese exhibitors and Western exhibitors. The first were for the most part younger, usually around 25-30 years, instead the western exhibitors tend to be older, with a medium age of 40 years.

3.3.1 Impressions from my visit

The place was crowded, I went to visit the exhibition on a Saturday, had to wait in line for about 40/45 minutes before entering the first exhibitors' space. Once entered, the space was filled with people, both visitors and exhibitors. Most of the visitor were young people, aged between 20/35 years old. About the visitors, one of my interviewees raised an interesting observation, she noticed a big difference in the Chinese participants comparing them with her European experiences. It was her first time attending such an event in China, and her first time in China in general, so has a strong western view on the current scene. She said

I usually take part in similar events in Germany and Belgium (she lives in France), I usually stay in Europe, but I was amazed by the young public here, most of them are Arts students and they're interested in the technique I use for my pieces, I like to explain it to them, I worked as an art teacher in Florence [...]. I mainly do unique pieces, so usually my buyers and my public are collectionists, while here also young people bought my pieces, it's a different kind of public, they buy smaller things. (Personal communication, informant 7, 2019)

This is an interesting point already, and I believe it constitutes one of the reason why independent art publishing has been flourishing in the recent couple of years, the spread of such productions is strictly linked with the young generation and its characteristic: always connected, online, and with an high education background, mostly in the field of arts or design, all of these characteristics together concur to the spreading interest towards independent production.

3.3.2 Theme Analysis

During the fair I interviewed around 8 exhibitors, asking more or less the same set of questions, using a “tell me your story” sort of approach, and starting with that seeing how the conversation naturally developed.

A number of common themes about independent art book publishing emerged from my interviews, that I would like to group up into five categories: first the discourse about the political connotation of this specific type of production, a theme strictly linked to the infrastructure that is behind this type of production; secondly the role of internet in the promotion and spreading of such a phenomenon, in particular of social media, used by artists to self-promote their work, thirdly the challenge of commercialization and the relationship between cultural value of independent publication and commercial value of them and last I tried to make an attempt to analyse this phenomenon in a Globalization from Below perspective, arguing that even if independent publishing in China is not merely a commercial activity it can constitute an example of a phenomenon that has not been developed in a top-down direction, but instead bottom-up that allows China to be part of a global scene.

In order to make the analysis as clear as possible, I will now take into consideration the different themes one by one, even though they can overlap with each other and often converge and flow in and out of each other, therefore a flexible mindset is always to be kept when dealing with the following concepts and themes embedded in the interviews and the material I analysed.

3.3.3 Infrastructure and Values

An interesting report commissioned by NESTA in order to analyse the Chinese book market situation and identify opportunities for the English publishing industry in China, dwells with and thoroughly analyses the barriers to entering and operating in such a market. As many other industries nowadays in China, the publishing landscape is undergoing deep transformation, both under the push of opening-up, globalization and technologization. (NESTA 2015)

Chinese book market in its print and digital form is stated to have a value of €15,3m and according to NESTA’s research a fruitful opportunity in business terms. An important

change in the industry happened in 2009, when the “Go Out Policy” (also called Going Global Strategy) ³⁶pushed state-owned publishers to work more closely with international players, engage more and more in the rights-dealing world and broaden business contacts even to small independent publishing companies. Another change was registered in 2013, when the merger of GAPP and State Broadcasting Film and Television Administration (SARFT) took place, the two organization’s merger gave life to the State Administration of Press, Publications, Radio, Film and Television (SAPPRFT), broadening its responsibility to “promoting the digitalization of publications and supervising online and mobile publication, including books’ placing ‘a greater emphasis on promoting Chinese press and publications, radio and television abroad”(NESTA 2015: 11). The report differentiates between two levels of state-owned publishers, the so-called “central” publishers, Beijing-based and incorporated into a governmental institution or ministry and “regional” publishers, for the most part located in provincial capitals (Nesta 2015). The report then examines the barriers to entry to the Chinese book market,

Chinese publishers now have to deal with the regulation of the new government agency SAPPRFT, which regulates publications both in print and internet form, and also controls radio, film and television. So, the biggest obstacle independent publishers have to face in China is the grant of ISBN and ISSN, that are the instruments used to control the industry by the government. As Rochester (2015) reports, ISBNs in China have traditionally only been granted, in a limited number, by the government publishers of the state, with these publishers in turn granting ISBNs to smaller publishers. Government control of Chinese publishing is heavily criticised by freedom of expression organisations and constitutes a big barrier to entering the Chinese market for international players. About how difficult the situation of the publishing industry is for independent bookstores and publishers I would like to exemplify it reporting what Yi Ming 一鸣 the owner of a small independent book shop named 木鸟 in Beijing said in an interview:

[...] It's not easy for independent bookstores in China, so they are willing to give discounts. Some authors, too, are keen to sell their books, and will ask if they want to order more next month. It feels smooth! On the contrary, books from domestic publishing

³⁶ One of the major initiatives of this policy is executed by GAPP (General Administration of Press and Publication), and consists in the creation of China Classics International (CCI) to ‘bring Chinese culture to the world’ (NESTA, 2015)

houses are sometimes more headache than books from abroad, especially chaotic, often very unprofessional, an old system, that doesn't really care about small bookstores³⁷.

With such strong political premises, deeply embedded in the entire Chinese publishing industry, I would like now to reflect on the political value of independent publications, based on the academic literature about independent media. Reviewing the literature on zines³⁸ and DIY art production it's almost impossible not to end up arguing that an intrinsic political value always lies in the background of such kinds of art productions. In particular Duncombe's (1997) work mapped out the theoretical framework for zines, placing them into a cultural and political discourse. According to him they constitute a true political act, whereas Bartel (2004) centres her research around the role of DIY in zines production, they both argue that zines allow the creator to feel empowered while in a society permeated within passive consumerism. Jaskulski (2010) claims that the politico-economic core of the philosophy behind producing "one's own material is taking control of a small section of the means of production", having control on each stage of the production, from conceptualisation, to content development and finally, distribution. As Jaskulski (2010) argues, based on Poletti (2008) research, the practice of zines making is highly affected by DIY³⁹ and because of it allows artists to express their identities and political self, artist are not bound by editorial or official standards, they don't have to respect any set format, shape, or colour, they can freely choose and mix them at their own will. Furthermore Poletti (2008) also states that is a common practice in this field to produce content strictly related to the artist own private life. Instead Duncombe (1997) argues that zine producers are aware that their work constitutes a challenge to the commercial culture and to capitalism in general, he believes it is a creative practice that draws from DIY alternative media roots, that allows them to give voice to their political individuality.

In the case of China, I argue that we can broaden the aforementioned discourse about zines to the majority of the art book independent production, though it is not only

³⁷ 中国独立书店不容易的，对方就挺愿意给折扣，哈。包括有些作者推销自己书的也很上心，下个月有新书就会主动问要不要再订点儿。感觉挺顺的！反而从国内出版社订书有时比订国外的书头疼多了，特别混乱，经常很不专业，体系落后，看不上小书店 (Personal communication, informant 1, 2019)

³⁸ Duncombe (1997) defines *zines* as little pamphlets, little independent and localized publications, defining themselves against a society based on consumption.

³⁹ DIY implies using material that is easily available, simple and requires low tech production techniques.

about zines, the independent art book publishing is more broad in this sense, it also includes small studio design experiment and creation, that do not necessarily possess any narrative to them, sometimes they are also merely printing experiment, that allow designers to explore new ways of production or new printing machines. Anyway, as it is for the case of zines in the rest of the world (literature refers for the most part to US and UK) also in China it is an artist-driven industry, which, I argue, has a sort of political plus value, originated by the fact that artist that independently publish their work, do that illegally, to some extent, because they do not make use of an official ISBN or ISSN code, therefore, creative work does not have to undergo official censorship, and will be able to bypass the official control.

On this matter the Chinese part of the informants expressed a pretty uniform opinion, they all positively assessed and recognized that there is a political value to what they are doing.

Amy the Chief Editor of Waterjournal Magazine also believes there's a strong political connotation intrinsic to independent publishing, mostly concerning the critical thinking process that creative production enacts. She said:

Of course independent publishing in China has a political connotation, I think the official people they are just quite sensitive, because now a lot of people just draw their own pets, with no political connotation, our magazine as well, totally focuses on creativity, so there's a critical thinking problem. [...] Because they're sensitive, they're afraid of something uncontrolled, so creativity is something uncontrolled, are major or public their own life, and publish their creativity products, I think they're becoming a whole person, with critical thinking. If you don't have critical thinking you can't be independent, you can't be creative, so I think it's quite cool that more people know about this type of art, more about creativity and creative product, and for more people to come in contact with fresh stuff, like our magazine (Personal communication, informant 2, 2019).

Another interviewee also expressed a similar idea, recognizing the political value to independent publishing, she said:

I think independent publishing in China has a politic sense to it, because we are independent and don't have the ISBN, so it's hard to sell out works in the bookstore, it's almost impossible (Personal communication, informant 1, 2019).

And again, another one, also recognized the political connotation that independent publishing in China has:

[...] Actually, I'm just expressing my personal opinion: I think if now the situation is already like this, I think we will continue doing some independent publishing in the future, we actually treat it as a work of art, express an own effort, if there are some even small rise in the demand for our works, has been more and more people have the possibility to see and eventually like them as a public, several works could be published, and even if our books number is still small, or it has some of each factor, and doesn't reach a wide audience, let's say one hundred to three hundred, I would feel, I think is still enough, If you think there are is some valuable content, of course, it will interest more people, a wider audience, then I think it in the long run is actually quite good. I really believe that if our organization could get the official number for publishing would be the best, is would be our dream⁴⁰ (Personal communication, informant 4, 2019).

Also in another interview by Huo (2019) which reports about what independent publishers think about this process of production is useful to notice the level of awareness that creatives in this field have of what they are doing and how politically connotation their work is:

[...] You can do a lot of things on your own, without relying on a rule or a system to spread it, and that in itself is a very creative and unique thing.

Although the book fair always brings people a relaxed and happy appearance, we have a very strong sense of mission to promote self-publishing in China. It is the subtext of our undertaking to let art creation from different backgrounds inspire each other to a certain extent and break the original system barriers.⁴¹

⁴⁰ 其实，我在说各人的观点：我觉得如果现在听环球已经是这样的话，然后我们再做一些独立出版，我们其实说实话把它当作一个作品的心情，表达一个自己的突击么，那如果有一些向我们疏疏，然后觉得它是可以是被，就他亦有之后，被需求量，被更多人看到的可能性，会很喜欢他们作为一个公开的，有数号的出版，如果假设我们的书本很小，或者它有一些各人的因素吧，我觉得可能大家，就是受众上没有什么广，它其实一百到三百本，就是这个限量的感觉我觉得也够了，如果觉得有哪些内容吧，像工具啊，我觉得它更多的人会，就受众更广，那我觉得它在书钉其实也挺好的。不然任何但是我真的是我们机构有数号是最好的，就是有数号的话，就美梦更好的。(Original text)

⁴¹ [...] 你自己一个人可以完成很多事情，可以不依赖一个规则或者一个系统去传播，这本身就是一个非常有创造力和非常独特的事情。虽然书展永远给大家的是轻松+愉快的表面，然而在中国推动自出版这件事我们是非常有使命感的，让不同背景的艺术创作在莫种程度上互激发，打破原有的系统壁垒，是我们在做着这项事业的潜台词。

Analysing this first theme of infrastructure and political value, I would like to then briefly move the focus to a subtheme strictly and directly linked to the one of political value: censorship. According to my analysis, what makes Chinese independent publishers more politically connotated than independent publishers in other countries, is the fact that self-publishing their own material in China, artists are able in way to bypass and get around the official censorship, that usually mainstream publications have to go through.

One of the interviewees spoke pretty bluntly about political implications and actually expressed some concerns about the relationship between the independent art book publishing and censorship that, I argue, clearly reflects what happens in Chinese society in general, the phenomenon of self-censorship⁴². She said:

We are trained to be so shy to talk about it (political values), to talk about or being political. [...] we're so afraid to do that (use political content in art), and if we're too political people will think that we're naïve, we're not doing it the mature way, so it's quite hard. Actually, I have a talk tomorrow and the title of my talk is somewhat, you know, it involves some characters that have sexual implications, but I didn't mean it that way, just more like a metaphor, but the organizers kind of censored it, they didn't publish the title of it. Sometimes the censorship comes from the government but sometimes it comes from ourselves, we're just being afraid of getting in trouble. (Personal communication, informant 6, 2019).

The censorship themes arises also from the interview to the art director of SHABF, in an interview he explains: “censorship from the government is always there, the bigger the fair gets, the longer the process of organizing the festival takes as there is more dealing with the governmental departments” (2019)

In conclusion I argue that the political value to independent art publishing is intrinsic in the media form itself and therefore, even if the content of Chinese production in this field is not highly politically connotated, we must take into consideration the political value that comes along and hopefully further deepen the argument towards this matter, because Chinese participants in the independent publishing scene are aware of it, and as reported in a recent interview made at the abC Artbook Fair in Beijing, when asked

⁴² Bar-Tal (2017) defines it as “an act of intentionally and voluntarily withholding information from others in the absence of formal obstacles, serves as an obstacle to the proper functioning of a democratic society, because it prevents free access to information, freedom of expression, and the flow of information”.

about what is the opinion toward independent publishing, the answer was: “我觉得这其实是一种具有放抗性的行为”(Huo 2019).

3.3.4 Role of Internet

Since it is mainly a community composed by independent artists the first and easiest way to spread and share their work is, naturally, through Internet, especially through social media. In my research I found that almost every artist has a double set of accounts, one (or more) on Chinese social platforms, mostly Weibo and WeChat, and one on their “western” counterparts, one above all Instagram. This practice allows artists work, which is mainly illustrations or design, the media form that better suits these types of socials’ content, to be spread possibly worldwide, crossing the countries of production borders. Many interviews to independent publishers and bookstores deal with the internet matter, especially they often say it constitutes a low-price way to promote their work and consequently allows them to dedicate more resources to other parts of the production and distribution process. To exemplify, in a recent interview, the founders of IFP short for The Institute for Provocation, in Chinese 激发研究所 report:

Only a small percentage of our visitors and audience are people who have stumbled across this space. The rest of the audience learned about The Institute of Provocation mostly through the Internet. In addition to having an artistic background, there are sociologists and anthropologists. Each event has a different audience. We didn’t spend too much time promoting the organization⁴³.

On the same theme, the interview to the publishing platform Tria’s creator Anna also provides testimony of a similar situation:

We will do some activities for books and go to book fairs as often as possible. They are mainly sold through online channels in China, but hopefully they will appear in more Chinese bookstores! To tell you the truth, we don’t do much marketing, the main promotion is to participate in the exhibition. Now there are websites, WeChat accounts

⁴³ 我们的访客和观众只有一小部分是偶然发现这个空间的人。另外的观众大多是通过网络所了解到激发研究所。除了拥有艺术背景之外，也有社会学者和人类学者。每次活动的受众不太一样。我们没有花太多的精力为这个机构做推广。

and Facebook pages and managing so much social media at the same time means a lot of repetitive work, which is annoying, you know⁴⁴ (Zhou, 2018 translated by the author).

3.3.5 The challenges of commercialization

Taking as a reference Gunderloy's (1998) definition of underground and alternative media there is usually a strong differentiation in the literature on alternative media between that and mass-media, that is usually oriented to profit.

On this matter the interviews showed an interesting development of the theme, on one side informant expressed a more orientalist point of view, stemming from a western perspective.

With concern to the current independent art book publishing scene in China, one informant argued:

[...] I think it's about commercial, because I think it's about a very strong commercial passion. [...] It's kind of my impression, people are trying to make a bit of a broadcast for themselves, so that they can leverage into some kind of creative career, but inevitably that's kind of commercial, whether it's in TV, or in advertising, or magazines, that kind of thing, because I think that everybody's aware that's a lot of money in there, but you gotta get a hedge, you gotta get a profile to leverage that and go to a certain level. (Personal communication, informant 6, 2019)

I find this critique to be problematic and not really be representative of the actual situation. I would like to argue that this view is too negatively connotated, maybe influenced by previous negative experiences of the interviewee, and lacking the context in the analysis of nowadays scene. Not taking into consideration the commercialization side to everything that is produced in China nowadays, would not really make sense.

It's indeed a complex scene, that reflects the complexity of nowadays Chinese society in general, but yet ascribing the flourishing of such scene merely to its commercial success is maybe too simplistic, and does not take into account the broader picture, that from my

⁴⁴ 我们会为书做一些活动，尽可能地多去书展。在中国主要通过网络渠道销售，但希望它们能出现在更多中国的书店里！说实话我们没有做太多营销，最主要的推广还是参加展览。现在有网站、微信公众号和 Facebook 主页，同时打理这么多社交媒体意味着大量的重复工作，这很烦，你懂的。

analysis, I argue to be a collective growing interest towards independent publishing and the will to promote it beyond the safe-zone of the participants of such scene.

Even acknowledging the commercial success of such creative products, I find to be an interesting element, worth researching, that concurs to positively support my argument, that is, this phenomenon is worth researching and observing. Considering consumers as not possessing free will and power of choice is, in my opinion, a too simplistic idea to analyse such phenomenon. Therefore, the interviewees critique may also have its origin in commercial reasons, because he reckons the big possible revenues that could be unload from this specific field, but yet fails to grasp the complexity of this aspect.

It's also interesting to notice that most of the Chinese counterpart of the interviewees, when faced with such commercialization issue questions, all expressed a pretty uniform, contrasting view:

(on why she started independent publishing) because we love book, and we have so personal work to show to the public, and I always think that the book and publishing is the better way to show our possibilities. [...] I don't really think is a commercial thing. For us it's not about getting money, here we don't get much, for us it's more a space: for us, for the artist to show our works.

And again, another one said:

Maybe it's because I'm in the fine arts field, so I think of my friends that are doing independent publishing, the reason behind that is that we don't have any other official platform [...] we don't really have any publisher that's focused on photography or focused on art, so, they have to do it on their own, and then it becomes their way of earning money, when they become successful. But I'm doing it only as a side project, I'm not counting on it to make money or anything, in fact I'm losing my money in this, but that's fine for me, it's just out of passion.

Generally speaking, I believe that even if the commercial side of the scene, seems to play an important role in China, this does not constitute the core value that keeps pushing the scene forward, instead, the proliferation of exhibitions and events in this field, allowing of course commercial revenue to happen, but also cultural and creative exchange to have a free space is notable. Comparing this year edition of the SHABF and the previous one, the collateral and side events, talks and workshops have increased, along with art exhibitions and performances, giving life to an all-round creative environment,

where the commercial side is present, but, I argue, not at its core. Artist from all over the world took part in the many collateral events, involving also official embassies cooperation and promotion, gathering architects, designers and different art world related professionals.

In a recent interview, following the end of this May's event in Shanghai, Wei Guan, art director of SHABF said:

The fair is a powerful place to show the alternative beauty of publications, print, posters and zines [...] the slogan for the book is *Unfold* as the unfolding of a book and the unfolding of a new stage for young creatives in China. [...] The art of book design is still underestimated here. We hope the Shanghai Art Book Fair can be encouraging and inspirational to the traditional publishing industry.

Furthermore an interview to the publishing platform Tria's creator Anna also provides testimony of a similar situation

if we talk about the situation of self-publishing in China, I think there is a long way to go. In general, no matter where you are, self-publishing is never easy and requires a lot of effort and long-term persistence. A lot of people come and go: it's not uncommon to see good publishers do it for a few years and then stop doing it -- because it takes too much time and energy. Fortunately, there is always someone to take the baton. I know a lot of people are pushing this, like abC; It's amazing to see so many of you giving so much love and time.⁴⁵

Both testimonies recognize that what pushes them forward in creative production is passion for what they do, and even if it do is common for a lot of people to give up independent publishing, this is not due to a search for success or glory, is just because it is indeed a difficult to not lose money in it and be able to be economically independent while doing it.

Another development in the scene that I believe to be representative of the non-commercial value that is at the core of the Chinese scene, is that, since 2018 abC (art book fair in Beijing) has created the non-profit ABCA, which stands for Art Book in China Archive, a project to gather Chinese independent creative production, in order to help

⁴⁵ 如果说中国自出版状况，我认为来日方长，有很长的路要走。总的来说，无论在哪里，自出版从来不是一件容易的事，需要付出大量的努力和长期的坚持。很多人来了又去：常常会看到一些优秀的出版人做了几年，然后停止了活动——因为需要消耗太多时间和精力。还好的是，也总是有人能够接棒。我知道很多人在推动这件事，就像 abC；很惊讶看到你们这么多人投入热爱和时间。

better organize and keep track of the development of the Chinese independent publishing industry and to also offer a tool to researchers in this field, and allow academic research interest in this area to flourish.

3.3.6 Low-end Globalization

Following the many analyses conducted by scholars in recent decades, such as Hart (1973) Portes, Castells, Benton (1989) and Neuwirth (2011) Matheus (2012) defines the concept of Low-end Globalization as “the informal economy”, typically involving “self-employment, small-scale operation, labour intensiveness, skills obtained outside the formal educational system, and unregulated markets.” The informal economy is to the formal economy as low-end globalization is to high-end globalization. Thought he believes that in today’s world, the latter terms are more appropriate than the former terms because the world is becoming increasingly linked, and national economies cannot be seen as separate entities anymore. Therefore, Matheus argues that we should use the expression “low-end globalization” which actually encompasses all societies, instead of “informal economy” that needs to be further referenced to different societies. In his analysis Matheus then goes on explaining that low-end globalization can be found across the globe, but it is appearing to be most clearly apparent in the developing countries and in many of those, it is the only existing form of globalization.

I argue that we can analyse the Chinese independent publishing scene using the framework of thought provided by Ribeiro’s (2006) research about globalization “from below”. His reasoning mainly draws on examples from Paraguay and Brazil and stems from a more economic perspective, which, I believe can be valuable also to broaden the discourse about independent publishing in China to more vast realms of research and prove its value as a specific and relevant outcome of contemporary Chinese society. Giving the reader this additional framework, allows my argument to gain comprehensiveness and extensiveness that will hopefully lead to further analysis in the future.

Ribeiro (2006) poses at the centre of his article the notion of non-hegemonic globalization, which contrasts the official discourse regarding globalization, usually described in a top-down perspective. He defines it “non-hegemonic” not because the actors have a specific intent of disrupting the norm of capitalism, or impose their alternative way, but simply

because their existence challenges the official economic structure and therefore, this type of globalization is usually negatively depicted. To clarify, here Ribeiro refers to street vendors, that work and live outside of official work norms. What appears to be crucial in Ribeiro analysis is the connection between two sides, on one hand the “non-hegemonic” which can be defined in this way because it deviates from the hegemonic norm, and the power itself which in labelling these activities as illegal, is at the same time trying to make them conform, “Non-hegemonic and hegemonic processes thrive on each other”.

The same framework is applicable to Chinese situation, since the government is pushing for creativity and for a change in the perception of the country abroad, but at the same time does not allow free creative expression tout court, since creative products have to undergo official censorship scans. The small space of freedom that independent publishing allows, always considering the extent to which censorship can have influence (self-censorship), allows for creativity to be in a flourishing status right now, in this specific niche field of the arts, so it will be extremely interesting to see, through time, how this relationship with official power will develop. Already now, following the constant increase in visitors to the two major exhibitions/events in the field, the require amount of time to deal with governmental offices in also increasing (Huo 2019), it will be crucial to keep track in the next few years of how this will develop.

3.3.7 Cultural Convergence

Since it is mainly an artist-content-oriented business, centred around creative expression, at its utmost free degree as possible, this allows Chinese artists’ creative productions to be exported and appreciated in other parts of the world, and the same phenomenon happens the other way around, I noticed in fact that in the last years the number of participants to these kinds of exhibitions is constantly increasing, as well as the number of foreign exhibitors.

The media and the organization of events that allow cultural flows, make it possible for ideas and creativity to spread from the corner to peripheries. As reported in one interview:

Several overseas art gallery bookstores have recently started selling our books, which have attracted them because of their Chinese background and received some enthusiastic mail feedback⁴⁶ (2018).

So this demonstrates how a niche scene, such as the one of independent art book publishing, can collocate itself in a much broader context, involving producers and artists from all over the world and enhancing actual creativity exchange in a space that is not (yet) under direct control of the government or anyway regulated by official policies. That's why, I argue, true innovation can flourish and work as a platform for connecting China and broadening overseas creative interest towards China.

⁴⁶ 最近几个海外的美术馆书店也开始卖我们的书，书具有中国背景这一点也吸引了他们，还收到了一些热情的邮件反馈。

Conclusion

In this thesis, the area of bottom-up initiatives in the culture and creative field in China is investigated. First, I provided a general overview on creative and cultural industries in general and explaining how they spread to China and their characteristics in the Chinese context, since they have been at the centre of the political discourse. I later tried to explain how the policies process in China is based on the notion of top-down, and how the centralization of power has shifted under different administration during the years. In the second chapter, in fact, I analysed the cultural and creative industries' policies under a strong top-down approach, in particular the use of the cluster model, which according to the literature on this matter, is lacking innovation. This, I argued, is caused by the rigid top-down approach. Therefore I moved the centre of the analysis to bottom-up projects in the field of cultural and creative industries, that challenge the top-down system and to a deeper analysis in the third chapter, in which the independent art book publishing phenomenon in China is taken as a case study in order to demonstrate that even if small in dimension, these bottom-up initiatives are able to create innovation and allow creativity to be expressed.

In this last chapter I investigated the phenomenon of independent art book publishing in China, which has registered a growing interest in the public in recent years and a growing number of participants in events that promote this specific "scene". Specific theoretical framework and political assessment of the current state of publishing were critically analysed, and an attempt was made to highlight how complex and diverse the scene is.

To sum up, the observations stemmed from the qualitative research based on direct interviews I conducted can be divided into four groups according to the themes that arise during the interviews. First I tried to understand how and if this type of scene is politically connotated, then I analysed how the relationship between independent art book publishing and its commercialization works in nowadays Chinese society permeated with capitalism and at last I tried to put the discourse about independent art book publishing into a globalization from below perspective, because, I argue it constitutes a chance for creative globalization in a non-official space, free from direct authority control.

My argument is that this phenomenon of independent art book publishing in China is worth researching because it is a cultural phenomenon that gives voice to contemporary

artists that want to freely express themselves through the media of printed books, it has been well received by the public and it enables connection with many different publishers and independent artists abroad and in China.

Furthermore, it is a recent process, currently still shaping itself in nowadays China and therefore interesting to observe and study, since there is a lack in literature on this matter, which I agree could be considered a small niche, but, nonetheless does this prevent it from being valuable in helping to understand how creativity is changing in China and it also provides an additional viewpoint that can be of interest to researchers in the broader field of creative studies and creative industry studies.

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