This study investigates creative labour conditions and the formation of creative subjectivities in China. It combines a political economy of cultural production in contemporary China with four empirical case studies focusing on creative workers in state-owned cultural enterprises, independent filmmakers, international creative workers and social media creators. The study engages with questions concerning governance, precarity and subjectivity in analysing labour conditions of cultural production in contemporary China. While unveiling how specific politico-economic inequalities are concealed by the production of creative aspirations, I also attempt to affirm the experiences and agency of individuals working in a wide range of Chinese cultural sectors. This cultural economy produces space for individual agency as well as precariously, leaving open the possibility for cultural workers to become what I term ‘schizoid creators’. The vibrant network of cultural production in China both pushes and limits individuals’ aspirations to creativity and self-realisation. Expected by the state and market to ‘be creative’ in particular ways, cultural workers also find possibilities to resist this imperative, developing a schizoid subjectivity that serves the governing system but challenges it at the same time.

Jian Lin is a PhD candidate at the University of Amsterdam and Western Sydney University (joint-degree).
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Faculteit der Geesteswetenschappen

Dit proefschrift is tot stand gekomen binnen een samenwerkingsverband tussen de Universiteit van Amsterdam en Western Sydney University met als doel het behalen van een gezamenlijk doctoraat.

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This thesis was prepared within the partnership between the University of Amsterdam and Western Sydney University with the purpose of obtaining a joint doctorate degree.

The thesis was prepared in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Amsterdam and in the Institute for Culture and Society of Western Sydney University.
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Author contributions

Chapter 5 The Unlikely Creative Class

Co-authored with Jeroen de Kloet (JdK)

Both authors discussed the research topic and relevant academic literature. Jian Lin (JL) developed the research outline and collected interview and online data through fieldwork, with JdK’s advice. Both JdK and JL analysed the empirical data and JL prepared the first draft. JdK commented on and revised the manuscript.
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