Schizoid creators

Creative work and subjectivity in the Chinese cultural economies

Lin, J.

Link to publication

Creative Commons License (see https://creativecommons.org/use-remix/cc-licenses):
Other

Citation for published version (APA):

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 precariouslyness, 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).
Schizoid Creators:  
Creative Work and Subjectivity in the  
Chinese Cultural Economies

ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor

aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam

op gezag van de Rector Magnificus

prof. dr. ir. K.I.J. Maex

ten overstaan van een door het College voor Promoties ingestelde

commissie, in het openbaar te verdedigen in de Agnietenkapel

op dinsdag 17 september 2019, te 10.00 uur

door

Jian Lin

geboren te Anhui
Promotiecommissie

Promotores
prof. dr. ir. B.J. de Kloet
prof. dr. N. Rossiter

Copromotores
prof. dr. E. Peeren
prof. dr. D. Stevenson

Overige leden
prof. dr. M. I. Ang
prof. dr. D. J. Hesmondhalgh
prof. dr. M.J.P. Deuze
prof. dr. S.R. Landsberger
dr. S. Lan
dr. J.C. Hermes

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.

Het proefschrift is voorbereid in de Faculteit der Geesteswetenschappen van de Universiteit van Amsterdam en het Institute for Culture and Society van Western Sydney University.

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.

This research was supported by China Scholarship Council and European Research Council (ERC consolidator grant no. 616882, ChinaCreative).
Table of contents

Publication history............................................................................................................... iv

Author contributions........................................................................................................... v

Acknowledgement................................................................................................................ vi

Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 1

Creative labour and China ................................................................................................. 5

Schizoid creators ...............................................................................................................13

Methodology......................................................................................................................21

Chapter outline..................................................................................................................26

Chapter 1 Understanding ‘cultural industries’ in China: History, policies and institutions............................................................................................................................33

Introduction .......................................................................................................................33

The advent of the ‘cultural industries’ in China................................................................36

Developing strategies ........................................................................................................40

The state discursive formation ..........................................................................................45

Institutional deficiencies and the potential for flexibility and agency...............................50

Conclusion ........................................................................................................................56

Chapter 2 Being creative for the State: Creative workers in Chinese state-owned cultural enterprises..........................................................................................................................58

Introduction .......................................................................................................................58

Autonomy, self-realisation and the creativity dispositif ....................................................61

From ganbu to employees: cultural system reform and Chinese SOCEs..........................64
The crippled system and contested autonomy .................................................................66

Being creative for the state: benefiting from the system and self-realisation ..............71

Loafing on the job and the ‘resignation wave’ ............................................................74

Conclusion ....................................................................................................................78

Chapter 3 From independent to art film and back again: Independent film, precarity
and creative labour .........................................................................................................80

Introduction ..................................................................................................................80

Precarity, precarisation and Chinese independent filmmaking ...................................85

Independent cinema as a way to counter personal and social discontent ....................88

Precarising Chinese independent cinema ...................................................................94

A community based on difference ............................................................................101

Conclusion ..................................................................................................................106

Chapter 4 (Un-)Becoming Chinese creatives: Transnational creative labour mobility in
global Beijing .............................................................................................................108

Introduction .................................................................................................................108

Creative labour, mobility and precarity ......................................................................111

Method ........................................................................................................................114

Why come to Beijing? ...............................................................................................116

Precarity: Unbecoming Chinese creatives .................................................................120

The production of cosmopolitan subjects in Beijing ..................................................127

Conclusion ..................................................................................................................133

Chapter 5 The unlikely creative class: Kuaishou and Chinese digital cultural
production ....................................................................................................................135

Introduction ...............................................................................................................135

The platformisation of cultural production in China ..................................................138
Chapter 2 Be Creative for the State

Status: published


Chapter 4 (Un-)Becoming Chinese Creatives

Status: Published


Chapter 5 The Unlikely Creative Class

Co-authored with Jeroen de Kloet

Status: Under review

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.
Acknowledgement

The finishing of this dissertation is an incredibly fruitful experience. I am so fortunate to have received extraordinary support and kindness from so many people and institutions.

Prof. Jeroen de Kloet, my supervisor and my ‘academic captain’, I thank you for your initial kindness to let me pursue a PhD in Amsterdam. It was a cold winter morning when we first met in Shanghai. Your wit, criticality, humour and fashion style immediately fascinated me and has continued to inspire me in the entire PhD trajectory. I am sincerely grateful for your trust, generous support (both financial and academic) and friendship. Your unorthodox approach to knowledge and passion for life have deeply influenced me as an academic and a person. You have not only given me advice on research and writing, but also trained me as an independent scholar who can be ready for future challenges in academia. I have been enlightened by you to always keep a balanced view on our research subjects and stay buoyant about life and future.

I am also greatly indebted to my co-supervisor Prof. Esther Peeren. It is your insights, patience and efficiency that has driven me to where I am. Though we work in different fields with different methodologies, your comments and suggestions are always pertinent and constructive. More importantly, besides the excessive workload you already have, you have been willing and managed to spend time on editing every sentence of all my drafts often replete with mistakes and sloppiness. I feel guilty, but faithfully lucky. Your efforts and encouragement have not only given me confidence and capability, but also motivated me to be a responsible university teacher like you.

I thank Prof. Ned Rossiter and Prof. Deborah Stevenson for joining as my supervisor and co-supervisor since 2017. The discussions we had and your
suggestions on my work have tremendously benefited my research. Ned’s theoretical acumen and profound knowledge are marvellous and has coached me how to dialogue with theories and develop original and creative ideas. It’s a true luxury to have you all in my supervisory team!

I am sincerely grateful to the members of my doctorate committee: Prof. Ien Ang, Prof. David Hesmondhalgh, Prof. Mark Deuze, Prof. Stefan Landsberger, Dr. Lan Shanshan and Dr. Joke Hermes. It is my greatest honour to have you in my committee and thank you for reading my thesis and sharing valuable insights.

I thank the University of Amsterdam and Amsterdam School of Cultural Analysis for accepting me as PhD candidate and providing sufficient facilities. China Scholarship Council and European Research Council have offered generous funding. I’m especially grateful to Prof. Ien Ang and the Institute for Culture and Society at Western Sydney University for collaborating with Jeroen on initiating the joint-PhD program, which provided a one-year scholarship for my stay in Sydney.

I heartily thank all my informants in China who helped me during my fieldwork and kindly sharing their experiences. I thank Hu Yang, Ling Xianjing, Wu Yuwen, Cheng Yaobin, Yang Yiwen, Anouchka van Driel and He Yang for their generous help during my field research.

In the past years, Chow Yiu Fai has been a wonderful mentor and caring friend. Not only has his pioneering work on creative labour in Asia inspired my research, his suggestions on life and work also benefit me vastly. I am so privileged to meet scholars in the Netherlands and across the world helping and supporting me: David Craig, Stuart Cunningham, José van Dijck, Brett Neilson, George Morgan, Anthony Fung, John Erni, Leonie Schmidt, Thomas Poell, Murray Pratt, Pedram Dibazar and Zeng Guohua. I thank Eloë Kingma for her always professional work and warm support at ASCA.

This PhD journey could be gruelling if without friends. My huge pleasure to have Rowan Parry and Penn Tsz Ting Ip as my paronymphs. I thank you for helping
with organizing my PhD defense. Laura Vermeeren has helped to translate my dissertation summary into Dutch. Heartfelt thanks to my dearest friends Jang Lina, Chew Jern Ken, George van Wetering, Cheng Haoran, Zhang Wei, Wang Zhiyong, Sun Bin, Xiao Jun, Liu Xiaolong, Penn Tsz Ting Ip, Xiaoxiao Xu, Mu Xue, Alexandra Filius and Xu Ruowen for your companionship and forgiveness. All the drinks, food, parties, joys and sorrows we shared are the best gifts I received from the Netherlands. My gratitude also goes to my colleagues in our ERC ‘ChinaCreative’ team: Wang Shuaishuai, Laura Vermeeren, Chen Siyu, Zoénie Deng Liwen, Arjen Nauta, Penn Tsz Ting Ip and Rowan Parry, same as to my academic fellows Anoud Arps, Jori Snels, Evelyn Wan, Henry Chow, Vincent So and Chamee Yang. I thank my fellow PhDs in Sydney for their friendship and support: Pryor Placino, Vanicka Arora, Ha Hoang, Fan Xuegang, Yinghua Yu, Christopher Cheng, Amrita Limbu, Anisah Madden, Gina Gatarin, Andrea Pollio, Karen Sy de Jesus and Alejandra Villanueva. All these experiences we had make my PhD study such a fantastic journey.

I thank the Department of Media Studies and Journalism at the University of Groningen, especially Marcel Broersma and Robert Prey, for offering me the new job, which enables a smooth post-PhD transition.

Last but definitely not least, I thank my parents for their selfless care and love. Their unconventional way of parenting has always encouraged me to be a better person with independence, integrity and dignity. Though you still don’t understand my research, these merits I got from you have guided me through the entire process of study. I was so lucky to have my older sister, who has cared for me since I was very young. In the gloomy winter days in Amsterdam, your cheerful words and the radiant smiles of Yiyao and Siqi (my niece and nephew) through the screen always give me strength and hope.