Check for updates

RESEARCH ARTICLE

REVISED The cultural sector in China through the lens of cultural policies concepts

[version 2; peer review: 3 approved, 2 approved with reservations]

Dorota Ilczuk, Marcin Jacoby, Tamara Kaminska

Faculty of Humanities, SWPS University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Warsaw, Masovian Voivodeship, Poland

v2 **First published:** 04 Aug 2025, **5**:217
https://doi.org/10.12688/openreseurope.20127.1
Latest published: 22 Oct 2025, **5**:217
https://doi.org/10.12688/openreseurope.20127.2

Abstract

Background

The cultural policies of Mainland China have been subject to fascinating changes in the last forty years, influenced by politics and ideology on the one hand, and market forces on the other. The article provides a preliminary outline of the main traits of the system, analysed from the perspective of contemporary cultural policies theory and international practice.

Method

The authors examine how the cultural sector of the People's Republic of China (PRC) is organized and financed, including its governance, funding, copyright, basic cultural providers and consumers. The methodological approach used adopts the analytical framework of the Compendium of Cultural Policies & Trends, and includes analyses of statistical data, primary and secondary sources.

Results

Data and source information show that cultural policies of the PRC are a function of central-level political policy-making of the party-state. Cultural activity at all levels is subject to strong political control. At the same time, there is visible tension between central-level general policy guidelines and local level implementation, and between the mission of the state to ensure wide cultural participation, and the market economy incentivization of public cultural organizations.

Conclusions

Open Peer Review

Approval Status ✓ ✓ ? ? ✓

	1	2	3	4	5
version 2 (revision) 22 Oct 2025	✓ view	✓ view	? view	? view	✓ view
version 1 04 Aug 2025	? view	✓ view			

1. **Michael Keane**, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia
2. **Andrew White**, King's College London, London, UK
3. **Daniela Jelincic**, Institute for Development and International Relations, Zagreb, Croatia
4. **Chiara Burlina**, University of Padova, Padua, Italy
5. **Carole Rosenstein**, George Mason University, Arlington, USA

Any reports and responses or comments on the article can be found at the end of the article.

The authors conclude that the sector exhibits a dual characteristics, with market-insulated public services on the one side, and the market economy Cultural and Creative Sectors (CCS) on the other, where state-owned enterprises compete for services, customers, and profits with private entities. Faced with numerous challenges and new developments, the sector also witnesses dynamic changes of its legal environment.

Keywords
Cultural and Creative Sectors, CCS, Chinese cultural sector, creative industries, Chinese cultural policy



This article is included in the Horizon Europe gateway.

Corresponding author: Marcin Jacoby (mjacoby@swps.edu.pl)

Author roles: Ilczuk D: Conceptualization, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Supervision, Validation, Writing – Original Draft Preparation, Writing – Review & Editing; **Jacoby M**: Formal Analysis, Funding Acquisition, Investigation, Project Administration, Writing – Original Draft Preparation, Writing – Review & Editing; **Kaminska T**: Formal Analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – Original Draft Preparation

Competing interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Grant information: This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101061700 (Dealing with a Resurgent China [DWARC])
The funders had no role in study design, data collection and analysis, decision to publish, or preparation of the manuscript.

Copyright: © 2025 Ilczuk D *et al*. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

How to cite this article: Ilczuk D, Jacoby M and Kaminska T. **The cultural sector in China through the lens of cultural policies concepts [version 2; peer review: 3 approved, 2 approved with reservations]** Open Research Europe 2025, **5**:217 https://doi.org/10.12688/openreseurope.20127.2

First published: 04 Aug 2025, **5**:217 https://doi.org/10.12688/openreseurope.20127.1

REVISED **Amendments from Version 1**

Following very valuable comments by the two reviewers, we have made the following changes to the paper:

- we have added a paragraph on Leninist determinants of P.R.C.'s understanding of culture with parallels in other countries of the socialist bloc prior to 1989/1991
- we have added information on Deng Xiaoping's Southern Tour and on non-economic reasons for marketisation of the cultural sector after 1992
- we have added a mention of the media reforms with a new bibliographical reference
- we have added a separate paragraph and expanded several other references to the importance and scope of digital cultural content in China
- we have added a new paragraph on tourism and intangible heritage
- we have added a paragraph on creative clusters
- we have fundamentally re-edited the paragraph on intellectual property protection
- we have added new bibliographical references and made several minor text adjustments in the main body of the text.

Any further responses from the reviewers can be found at the end of the article

Introduction

Aim of the paper

This paper presents the results of research addressing the issue of how the People's Republic of China (PRC), excluding Hong Kong and Macao, shapes its cultural policies within the framework of contemporary cultural policies theory and international practice. The authors apply the concept of cultural policy to identify the specifics of the cultural and creative sectors (CCS) in Mainland China. The focus is on identifying issues that directly relate to how the CCS are organized and financed, including their governance, funding, copyright, basic cultural providers, and consumers. Research outcomes are presented in the form of a structured profile of China's cultural policies and include the first publicly known organigram of the country's cultural sector organization and management.

In this article, we employ the term "cultural and creative sectors" as understood within the concept of the creative economy. The concept was presented by John Howkins in 2001 in his book, *The Creative Economy. How People Make Money from Ideas*[1]. Broadly speaking, this economy refers to activities that stem from individual creativity and talent, and which also have the potential to create GDP and jobs through the creation and use of intellectual property rights. Goods and services of subjective importance are then produced, whose symbolic value is higher than their use value. There are many definitions of the creative economy and its "mapping", i.e. indicating industries and types of activity included in it. The definition we adopt for our research is related to its cultural component that links non-industrial areas of culture (major fields of culture) with cultural and creative industries – with the word "sectors" denoting both. In 2022, the collective term "cultural and creative sectors" (CCS), or simply "sectors of the creative economy", was accepted by the expert authorities of the European Commission and UNESCO.

In the present paper, we pose the following research questions: how, if at all, does a mix of harsh market economy mechanisms and the politicization of administration and management processes affect the formation of the country's cultural policies? If yes, how are we then, from the perspective of European researchers, to understand the effects of combining the state's tight control and responsibility in China for fostering cultural development with market reality and the digital revolution? These questions are even more viable as China exhibits full autonomy in designing its cultural policies, strictly in line with the political program of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and as yet no comprehensive overview of the sectorial policy environment in China has been published.[2]

Literature review

There is a significant body of research on different aspects of Chinese CCS, both in China and abroad. Most publications concentrate on what in Chinese is called *wenhua chanye* – the cultural industries. Early studies on this subject in English include, most notably, several publications by Michael Keane, between 2000 and 2014[3]. Other, more narrowly framed studies include a brief investigation of the Shanghai cultural industries by White and Xu in 2012[4] or a focus on the film industry by Antonios Vlassis in 2015[5]. Yi, Throsby and Gao[6] in their research published in 2020 provide details on the effects of central policies on cultural industries development between 2008 and 2015. More recently, Park Sang Do has provided interesting data mining research results on Chinese discourse on CCS[7]. These publications by Yi, Throsby and Gao as well as Park are surprisingly unapologetic in their enthusiastic

[1] John Howkins, *The Creative Economy: How People Make Money from Ideas* (London: Allen Lane, 2001).

[2] There are no Chinese country profiles in databases on national cultural sectors such as the Asia-Europe Foundation (https://asef.org) or the WorldCP-Asia.

[3] Most notably: Michael Keane, *Created in China: The Great New Leap Forward* (London & New York: Routledge, 2007), Michael Keane, "From Made in China to Created in China". *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 9.3 (2006), 285–296; Michael Keane, *Creative Industries in China* (Cambridge and Maldon: Polity Press, 2013).

[4] Andrew White and Sujing Xu, "A Critique of China's Cultural Policy and the Development of its Cultural and Creative Industries: The Case of Shanghai", *Cultural Trends* 21.3 (2012), 249–257. https://doi.org/10.1080/09548963.2012.698558.

[5] Antonios Vlassis, "Soft Power, Global Governance of Cultural Industries and Rising Powers: The Case of China", *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 22.4 (2015), 481–496. https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2014.1002487.

[6] Yi Xin, David Throsby, and Gao Shusheng, "Cultural Policy and Investment in China: Do They Realize the Government's Cultural Objectives?" *Journal of Policy Modeling 43*.2. (2021), 416–432. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpolmod.2020.09.003.

[7] Park Sang Do, "Policy Discourse Among the Chinese Public on Initiatives for Cultural and Creative Industries: Text Mining Analysis", *Sage Open* 12.1 (2022), https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440221079927

endorsement of policies and changes in the field in Mainland China. An excellent, and more balanced study of the cultural sector is provided in Wu Kejia's book *A Modern History of China's Art Market*.[8] A very good study of changes in Chinese intellectual property law issues if offered by Filippo Gilardi *et al*. in 2023[9]. Among a very high number of Chinese-language publications[10], a good overview of the CSS policies is offered by Ma Kexin[11], while Zhao Kaiqiang and Fan Zhou sketch an accurate picture of the principal directions of sectorial development under the 14th Five-year Plan[12].

While a number of scholars tackle the issue of cultural industries in Mainland China, there is far less research available on overall, governmental policies directed towards the entire CCS. Michael Keane's 2007 monograph, Ben Garner's 2015 paper on the UNESCO Convention on Cultural Diversity[13], and Hu Huilin's historical overview of 2019[14] are some of the very few examples of research on the subject available in English. Among Chinese-language publications which in any way tackle the issue of the Chinese CCS general policy and management, one can mention publications by Wen Jiaohui[15]; Chen Xiyan and Chen Lixu[16]; or Xiao Bo and Ning Lanyu[17], all quoted in this paper. There is even less information available on the way the cultural sector in China is funded and managed at the central level, a fact that we find quite striking. This is coupled with the scarcity of publicly available data on governmental and other official portals devoted to the field of culture in Mainland China, which also includes the National Bureau of Statistics of China. To our knowledge, no attempt at describing the general characteristics of the sector from the point of view of policy management and funding has been published to date. This paper aims at helping to bridge this gap.

Methods

In the present research, we used mixed methods typical of the paradigms of the humanities and social sciences. This interdisciplinary approach stems from the very concept of cultural policy, in which various disciplines, from cultural studies to political science, management and cultural economics are interconnected. We used a proprietary research method, which is largely based on desk research analyses of primary sources (legal acts, statistics), and secondary sources (literature, reports) in Chinese and in English, supplemented by media content analysis, and consultations with experts[18].

The issue of China's cultural policy was tackled using the Compendium of Cultural Policies & Trends[19] grid of issues, positively validated by the creation of European country profiles, as well as a modified version of the profiles of selected Asian countries. For the present analysis, the following list of issues from the Compendium grid was selected:

i. cultural policy system;

ii. domestic governance system;

iii. cultural and creative sectors - institutional landscape;

iv. copyright or intellectual property protection;

v. cultural participation and consumption;

vi. financing and public support.

The authors did not attempt to create a full China country profile as featured in the Compendium. Given the complexity of the cultural policy of such a large country as China, only selected issues were taken into account. It was also challenging to reflect, using the Compendium framework, the dynamic nature of the digital cultural market which in recent years has grown in

[8] Wu Kejia, *A Modern History of China's Art Market* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2023).

[9] Filippo Gilardi, Andrew White, Zhen Troy Chen, Shuxin Cheng, Wei Song and Yifan Zhao "From copycat to copyright: intellectual property amendments and the development of Chinese online video industries" *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 29:2. (2023), 152-168, DOI: 10.1080/10286632.2022.2040494

[10] For an analysis of publications on the CNKI portal between 2012–2018 please see Zhao Junyi and Li Shaohui, "Cong gonggong wenhua fuwu dao gonggong wenhua zhili" (From Public Cultural Services to Public Cultural Governance), *Tushiguan zazhi* (Library Journal) 41.3 (2022), 4–11.

[11] Ma Kexin, "Xin shidai Zhongguo wenhua chanye gongji ce jiegouxing gaige fenxi" (Analysis of Supply-Side Structural Reforms in China's Cultural Industry in the New Era), *Xiandai yingxiao xiaxunkan* (*Modern Marketing Biweekly*), 2022.08, 123–125.

[12] Zhao Kaiqiang and Fan Zhou, "Zhongguo wenhua chanye 'Shisi wu' shidai de jige zhuanxing" (Several Transformations During the "14th Five-Year Plan" Period of China's Cultural Industry), *Dangdai Dangyuan* (*Modern Party Member*), 405.3 (2022), 16–20.

[13] Ben Garner, "The New Cultural Revolution: Chinese Cultural Policy Reform and the UNESCO Convention on Cultural Diversity", The Political Economy of Communication, 3.1 (2015), www.polecom.org/index.php/polecom/article/view/52

[14] Hu Huilin, "Chinese Cultural Policy: History, Formation and Characteristics", *Journal of Forensic, Legal & Investigative Sciences* 5.2 (2019), 1–9. https://doi.org/10.24966/flis-733x/100030.

[15] Wen, Jiaohui, "Dang de shiba da yilai zhongguo wenhua guanli tizhi gaige yanjiu. Jinzhan yu qushi" (Research on China's Cultural Management System Reforms Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China. Progress and Trends), *Lingdao Kexue Luntan. Guojia Zhili Pinglun (The Forum of Leadership Science. Assessment of National Policy Management)*, 2020(04): 88.

[16] Chen and Chen, "Gaige kaifang yilai woguo wanshan wenhua zhengce de shijian yu lichen".

[17] Xiao and Ning, "Zhongguo wenhua zhili yanjiu sanshi nian: lilun, zhengce yu shijian".

[18] The authors wish to thank representatives of the Chinese cultural sector and employees of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the PRC for the information they provided to the authors (2023). These contributors do not wish to be named. The authors thank also members of the Beijing EUNIC Cluster: dr. Bart Hofstede (EUNIC President and Cultural Counsellor of the Netherlands), and Jan Jerzy Malicki (Director of the Polish Institute in Beijing) for the internal peer review of the first version of the present paper (2023), and their valuable suggestions.

[19] For more information on the project's scope, methodology, and results see the official website: https://www.culturalpolicies.net (accessed: 8 June 2024).

importance in China. Governmental policies, which we only mention briefly, technological and market developments, and the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic have all contributed to a surge of artistic activity in the digital sphere, and the embrace of digital art by audiences in the country in the last five years.

We are well aware of the specificity of the Chinese party-state, with total control exercised by the CCP at all levels of government. We also acknowledge the CCP's understanding of culture as a tool serving political goals of the party-state. This, however, does not devaluate research of the country's cultural policies using the framework described above.

The concept of contemporary cultural policies

Contemporary cultural policy can be understood as an intentional and systematic intervention of central and local governments in the field of culture and its industries.[20] The extent of state interventionism varies: it can occur in a limited formula, typical of the neoliberal approach (where sometimes the cultural policy is to not have any policies), or in a social democratic one, which follows the principle of "the more state presence in culture the better".[21] The goals, principles and priorities of cultural policies also differ. Commonly shared current goals of cultural policy are:

i. preservation of national and cultural identity;

ii. assurance of equal access to culture;

iii. promotion of creative output and high-quality cultural goods and services;

iv. diversification of cultural offer that recognizes the variety of social groups.[22]

The principles of cultural policies are:

i. right of freedom of artistic creation, education, research and use of cultural assets;

ii. decentralization of decision-making processes regarding the organization and financing of cultural activities;

iii. fostering community participation in decision-making processes by organizing expert panels and initiating public discussions regarding possible solutions for key problems;

iv. ensuring the transparency of decision-making processes;

v. applying the principle of subsidiarity: decisions concerning culture are made by those, to whom they pertain. Central authorities should not make decisions concerning local affairs instead of local governments unless they have been specifically authorized to do so.[23]

There is common agreement on the necessity that under state interventionism, public funding for culture should be directed to organizations and institutions, artists and creators, and projects. Countries should be free to develop cultural policies in their own way, setting their own goals, principles and determining priorities, without uniformization of cultural institutions and organizations, and operational models.[24] A good example of that practice is the fact that all EU member states are setting up their own cultural polices, based on the principle of subsidiarity. As is shown in this paper, while China shares the general goals of cultural policies, its understanding of the principles of these policies is quite different, especially in the field of artistic freedom, and decentralization and transparency of the decision-making process.

Cultural policy system in the PRC

Historical background

Culture for the CCP is understood predominantly as one of the management tools in internal politics and public diplomacy, very much in line with the famous Mao Zedong's 1942 Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art speech in which he likened writers and artists, following Lenin, to the cogs and wheels of the revolutionary machine.[25] And while China has transformed itself since that time into a modern country, even today, it is difficult to underestimate the role of politics in the Chinese party-state's approach to culture. In 2014, Xi Jinping produced a very important address at the Forum on Literature and Art (or rather the Work on Literature and Arts Forum) which as Yang and Jiang[26] rightly point out: "demonstrated a strong resemblance to the latter [Mao's Yan'an speech] in both organization and rhetoric". While Yang and Jiang attempt to show that Xi's reiteration is primarily: "a vehicle of the country's cultural soft power"[27], it is much more than this. The speech calls

[20] J. Mark Schuster (ed.), *Mapping State Cultural Policy: The State of Washington* (Chicago: Cultural policy center at the University of Chicago, 2003).

[21] Tony Bennett, *Differing Diversities. Cultural Policy and Cultural Diversity* (Brussels: Council of Europe Publishing, 2001).

[22] Danuta Glondys, *Europejska Stolica kultury: Miejsce Kultury w polityce Unii europejskiej* (*European Capital of Culture: The Role of Culture in European Union Policy*) (Warszawa: Attyka, 2010).

[23] Dorota Ilczuk, *Polityka Kulturalna w Społeczeństwie Obywatelskim* (*Cultural Policy in Civil Society*) (Krakow: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2022).

[24] Dorota Ilczuk, *Cultural Citizenship. Civil Society and Cultural Policy in Europe* (Amsterdam: BOEKMANstudies/CIRCLE, 2001).

[25] Mao's exact words were: *Proletarian literature and art are a part of the whole proletarian revolutionary cause; as Lenin said, they are „a screw in the whole machine," and therefore, the party's work in literature and art occupies a definite, assigned position within the party's revolutionary work as a whole!* See Bonnie S. McDougall, *Mao Zedong's "Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art": A Translation of the 1943 Text with Commentary* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, the University of Michigan, 1980), 75.

[26] Yang Jiangang and Jiang Gongyan, "Reflections on Political Policies and Statements in Arts and Literature in PRC", *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* Vol 22 (2020) Issue 5, https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.3827.

[27] Yang and Jiang, "Reflections on Political Policies and Statements in Arts and Literature in PRC".

the artists "engineers of the souls" who "wave high the banner of core socialist values" and are burdened with the task of "telling people what should be affirmed and praised, and what needs to be opposed and condemned"[28]. Later party documents and Xi speeches are less explicit as to the expected role of artists in strengthening socialism with Chinese characteristics. However, documents such as *Xi's Work Report to the 20th Party Congress* of October 25th, 2022, and most importantly *Xi Jinping`s Thought on Culture* (October 2023) make it clear that in the party-state ideology: "culture is seen as foundational to the Party's legitimacy and to the cohesion of the state"[29]. This shows that the understanding of the role of culture in the P.R.C. despite dynamic changes of the country since the beginning of the 'Reform and opening up' period in 1978 has in principle remained in line not only with Mao-era ideology, but more broadly speaking with Leninist principles from the Soviet Union. It is in the USSR, and the whole Communist bloc that culture was perceived as a tool of propaganda and governance, with artists expected to fulfil their political role of motivating the populace to embrace socialist values, and popularising the achievements and benefits of the system. Cultural production was supposed to reflect the tastes, needs and expectations of the masses, as interpreted by the communist rulers. Social realism as the dominant style in literature, art and architecture, was the apotheosis of this theoretical and political framework.

What makes the Chinese cultural model very different from its Soviet benchmark is the early adoption of the economic component in its policy-making and management. According to Hu Huilin,[30] cultural policies of the PRC since its establishment in 1949 went through four stages. Until 1956, all private cultural enterprises were nationalized, and what Hu calls the 'New Democratic' model of cultural management was terminated. Between 1957–1978 socialist cultural policies with an ideological focus on class struggle were implemented, and the period was marred by the 1966–1976 'Cultural Revolution'. The years 1978–2000 mark the market economy transition period, while the years starting from China's accession to the World Trade Organization in 2001 are the times of the full establishment of market economy policies.[31] Hu's economically focused classification can be supplemented with a culturally focused perspective. This calls for the inclusion in the historical classification of the stage of close copying of the Soviet cultural management system by China until the Sino-Soviet split of 1960, the period of indigenous adaptations within the closed, ideologically-driven system of total state control between 1960–1978, a decade of unprecedented policy liberalization from 1979 to 1989, and the years 1990–2012 as a time of commercialization and marketisation of culture, bold investments in infrastructure, and impressive internationalization, as part of the "Going Global" (*zouchuqu*) strategy initiated in 1999, and effectuated during Hu Jintao's term in office (2002–2012). Since the 1990s, and especially following Deng Xiaoping's famous Southern Tour in 1992, the P.R.C. embraced the path to gradual, free-market economy transformation of the cultural sector. This was caused not only by the general direction of economic reforms in China, but also by the fear that the country's opening up to global markets and later its WTO accession would cause full domination of the sector by Western influences. Public cultural institutions of the P.R.C. were forced to become industries (the marketisation process – *chanyehua*), so as to make them competitive and more resilient in contact with Western cultural industries. And so the driving force behind the marketisation of the sector was not only an ambition for economic efficiency but also cultural protectionism and concerns of political nature. And so since the 1990s, state-run cultural organizations have been pushed to generate income from ticket sales, establish their own artist management companies, provide services to corporate customers, introduce merchandise, and capitalize on the high-performance fees of the artistic groups they were running. This orientation is observed also in media reforms of the period which, according to a 2016 study by Guosong Shao *et al.*[32] were both economic and political in nature: reducing the burden of the sector on the government, incentivising free market economy developments, pushing for profits, and at the same time maintaining political control of the content. This market orientation of the CCS has been coupled with a strong conviction among the CCP decision-makers that culture, in line with Leninist ideology, is an important tool of social education and political power, as well as a source of social cohesion and stability.[33] The use of culture for political and economic purposes was underpinned by major reforms in China's cultural policy.[34] The Xi Jinping era (2012 onwards) has been a time of continued market related and modernization efforts, coupled with an increasing role of party-state ideology. An ever-tighter grip of the state on the sector aims at the ideological alignment of cultural contents with the official party line, while a gradual restriction of international, mainly Western cultural influences in China[35] is paired with a drive to promote Chinese nationalistic narratives home and abroad.

[28] Xi Jinping, *Zai wenyi gongzuo zuotanhui shang de jianghua* (*Speech at the Forum on Literature and Art*), https://news.12371.cn/2015/10/14/ARTI1444837266615525.shtml (accessed: 21 June 2024)

[29] Arran Hope, "Thinking About Xi Jinping Thought on Culture", *China Brief* Vol.23 Issue 19 (2023).

[30] Hu Huilin, "Chinese Cultural Policy: History, Formation and Characteristics", 1–2.

[31] For a detailed description of market-oriented policies from 1983 onwards see Chen and Chen, "Gaige kaifang yilai woguo wanshan wenhua zhengce de shijian yu lichen", 82–84.

[32] Guosong Shao, Jiayin Lu, Ye Hao "Assessing China's Media Reform" *Asian Perspective* 40 (2016): 27–50.

[33] White and Xu, "A Critique of China's Cultural Policy and the Development of its Cultural and Creative Industries: The Case of Shanghai"; Hye-Kyung Lee and Lorraine Lim, "Cultural Policies in East Asia: An Introduction", *Cultural Policies in East Asia,* 2014, 1–14.

[34] Hardy Yong Xiang and Patricia Ann Walker, *China Cultural and Creative Industries Reports 2013* (Heidelberg: Springer, 2014).

[35] This is a selective policy, subject to changes of China's international relations. For example, presently, Hungarian or Serbian cultural productions are welcome in the PRC, while Lithuanian culture is effectively banned from reaching PRC's audience.

Cultural policies: goals and principles

In the PRC, the contemporary understanding of cultural policy includes the following principal areas: protection of cultural heritage, development of public institutions devoted to the cultural sector, development of various cultural fields, organization and development of cultural productions, cultural diplomacy, research on culture, development of the cultural industries, and other tasks, addressing the foreign and domestic policy goals of the PRC.[36] The cultural fields included in the cultural policy are performing arts, music, visual arts, cultural and creative industries, folk arts, and national heritage (including intangible heritage). According to Wen Jiaohui, the principal areas of interest in cultural policy include: 'socialist market economy, political ideology, and the system of public services'.[37] To this, one could add that 'political ideology' includes both moral education of Chinese citizens at home and public diplomacy abroad.

The concepts behind the cultural policy system in the PRC seem to be an amalgamate of a planned economy based on single-party rule and a strong market-oriented approach, in which state-owned entities compete with private enterprises, and which allows for the survival of those creators, performers and products which can economically sustain themselves without much help from the state. It is important to stress the duality of the Chinese system. This dual reality results in a constant push and pull between the ways and means of top-down governance with Chinese characteristics, and market economy entrepreneurial policies and approaches.[38]

The principles of the formation and implementation of China's cultural policy stem from the broader context of the functioning of the country's state mechanisms. The CCP has the capacity to override most executive structures and procedures. It can enter and regulate the system at any point, either from the very top (the Central Propaganda Department) or through the local Publicity Departments, which are required to approve cultural policies, projects and events from the ideological perspective at their corresponding levels (see Figure 1). The CCP provides general guidelines, leaving the specific administrative policies to the local authorities, while also incentivizing the private sector (including state-owned enterprises).[39] Owing to the fact that all decision-makers in the Executive are CCP members and the CCP has the power to interfere at any level, there is no discrepancy between the Party line and the policies enforced by local authorities. While there is the central-local tension (or "experimentation under hierarchy", as described by Sebastian Heilmann)[40], there is no Party-non-Party tension, as no "non-Party" actors exist in the decision-making system. Ministries often jointly propose bills, and various issues are typically tackled by different configurations of ministries with CCP committees, working groups, and other bodies.[41]

The legal bases of China's cultural policy are set at the two top levels of strategic planning (national and ministerial) and expressed through two documents:

(1) "Five-year plans" (presently: 14th Five-year plan for 2021–2025) by the National Development and Reform Commission, endorsed by the National People's Congress, formally known as the Plan for National Economic and Social Development (*Guomin jingji he shehui fazhan guihua*)[42]

(2) Cultural Development Plans (*Wenhua fazhan guihua*) – presently, the Cultural Development Plan of the 14th Five-year plan, published in August 2022.[43]

The Cultural Development Plan relates closely to the corresponding Five-year plan, showing the importance of culture in achieving strategic goals of the Five-year plan. All provincial, municipal and other local policy documents are expected to stem from and relate to these guidelines.

According to the latest Cultural Development Plan, adopted in 2022, there are five main, official objectives of the cultural policy in the PRC which could be paraphrased as:

i) increasing cultural and ideological confidence of the Chinese people, as well as their motivation and proactive attitude towards further development of China;

ii) increasing the level of cultural refinement of society, understood as proper behaviour, adhering to moral standards, and exhibiting proper ideological attitudes;

iii) developing the cultural sector as far as the cultural offer to citizens are concerned in cities and the countryside, increasing heritage protection, further integrating culture and tourism, etc.

iv) increasing the international outreach and influence of Chinese culture;

[36] *Wenhua he lüyoubu zhuyao zhizeze* (*Main Responsibilities of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism*), https://www.mct.gov.cn/gywhb/zyzz/201705/t20170502_493564.htm, (accessed: 21 June 2024)

[37] Wen Jiaohui, "Dang de shiba da yilai zhongguo wenhua guanli tizhi gaige yanjiu. Jinzhan yu qushi", 88.

[38] Zhao Junyi, Li Shaohui, "Cong gonggong wenhua fuwu dao gonggong wenhua zhili", 8. See also Guosong Shao *et al*. 2016, 37–39.

[39] Park, "Policy Discourse Among the Chinese Public on Initiatives for Cultural and Creative Industries: Text Mining Analysis", 7.

[40] Sebastian Heilmann, Policy experimentation in China's Economic Rise. Springer Science and Business Media, *Studies in Comparative International Development* 43, 2008, 1–26, quoted after White and Xu, "A Critique of China's Cultural Policy and the Development of its Cultural and Creative Industries: The Case of Shanghai", 253–254.

[41] A good example of this is the *Opinion of 27 departments including the Ministry of Commerce on promoting the high-quality development of foreign cultural trade* (商务部等27部门关于推进对外文化贸易高质量发展的意见) issued in July 2022 under the number 2022/102. It is no longer available on the Ministry of Commerce website.

[42] https://www.ndrc.gov.cn/xxgk/zcfb/ghwb/202103/t20210323_1270124.html (accessed: 21 June 2024).

[43] http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2022-08/16/content_5705612.htm (accessed: 21 June 2024).

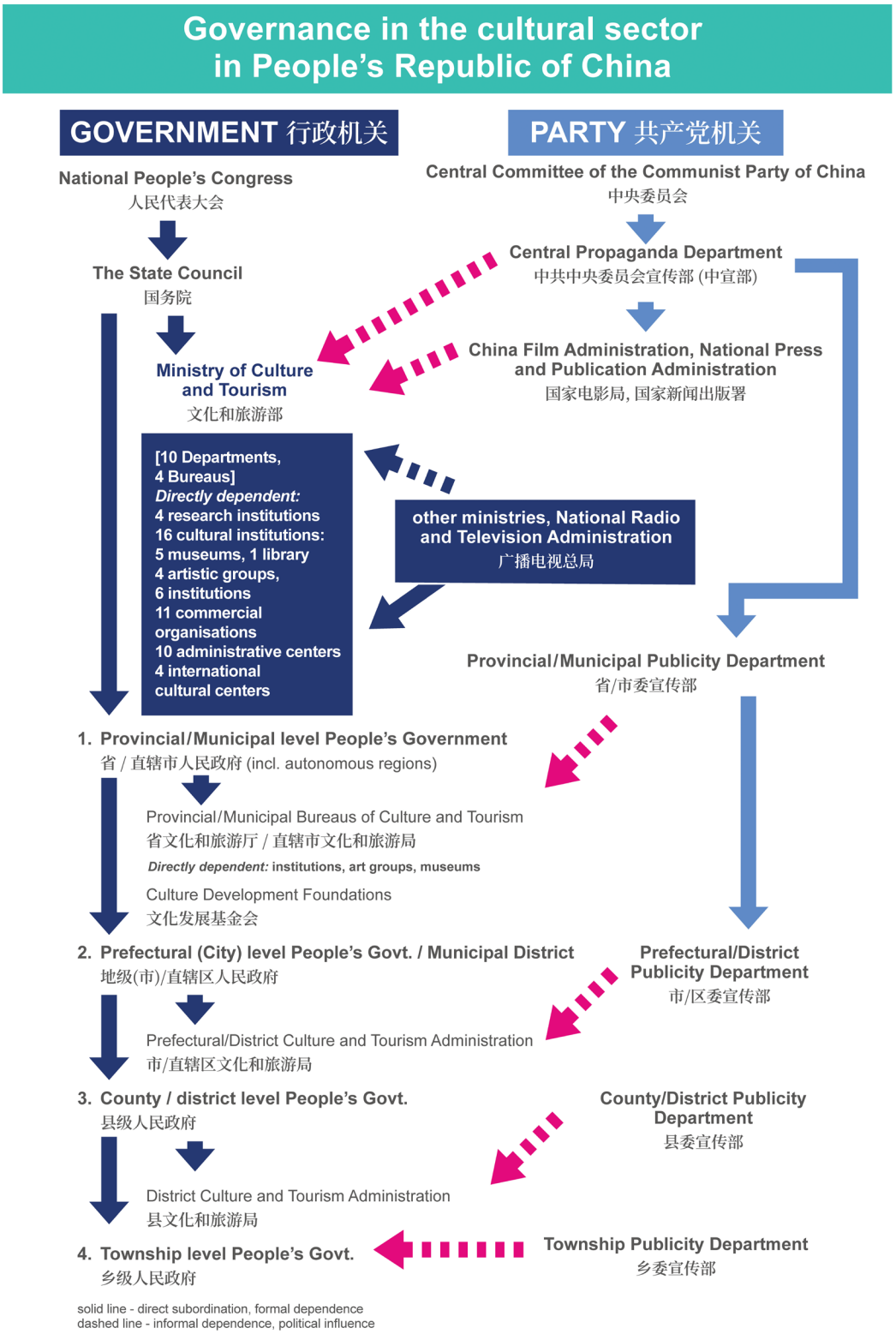


Figure 1. Organigram of the Governance in the cultural sector in the PRC. The Organigram shows in graphic form the organisation of governance of the cultural sector within the Executive branch (labelled "Government") and the direct subordination dependencies within the Executive on the central and at local levels. It also shows the structure of the Central Propaganda Department branches within the Communist Party of China (labelled "Party") and their political influence on the Executive. Formal dependencies are marked in solid, blue arrows. Informal dependencies and political influence of the Party on the Executive are marked in dashed, red arrows.

v) continuing the regulation of the cultural sector through the introduction of new laws, and through organizational reforms; increasing overall efficiency.[44]

An important direction of changes, especially since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has been on digitalization of the CCS. While culture and digital technology integration was already mentioned in the 12th Five-year Plan (2011–2015), later strategic documents only strengthen the central and local government's resolve to focus on empowering the development of the CCS through new digital technologies.[45]

An essential principle in the implementation of China's cultural policies is the recognition of censorship as an integral part of the production and presentation process of cultural projects in China. All word and visual content of a given cultural production is screened to determine if the production conforms with the official guidelines before it is allowed to be made public or disseminated.[46] Censorship focusses on social norms (restriction of nakedness, sexual content, vulgarity, anti-social behaviour, etc.) and political issues. This holds true both for domestic cultural activity and for those productions from abroad which are allowed to be presented in China. Censorship control is performed by designated bodies in governmental institutions, usually within the Municipal/Provincial Bureaus or at the National Radio and Television Administration, as part of the event acceptation process (the so-called *shenpi*), on the basis of existing legislation such as Regulations on the Administration of Movies (2002), Regulations on the Administration of Commercial Performances (1997), Regulations on the Administration of Audiovisual Products (2002),[47] to name a few. No public cultural event can be legally organized without going successfully through *shenpi*, with the exception of events carried out by and on the premises of officially recognized Culture Centres of foreign countries operating in China, such as the Goethe Institute or the Danish Cultural Centre. In the *shenpi* process, financial contracts with artists, details of presentations (times, dates, audiences, etc.), verbal and visual content, as well as legal documentation of the event organizer are examined. The organiser is also required to sign a statement pledging strict adherence to the event plan and to general regulations. Chinese artists, producers and cultural managers usually practice self-censorship in order to avoid having their productions cancelled, removed or in other ways prevented from reaching the audience. As the interpretation of the rules is flexible and exhibits strong regional variations (Beijing as the centre of political power is usually the most restrictive), there is some room for manoeuvre on the fringes of what is allowed. At the same time, approval can be withdrawn without notice, which adds to the uncertainty of the sector (in the past, numerous rock concerts and other popular events were cancelled at the last minute because of such decision shifts).

Intangible heritage – exemplary priority

On December 2, 2004, China became a signatory to the UNESCO Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage, and in 2006, the China Centre for the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage was established and became the main body responsible for matters related to the protection and development of China's intangible culture. The tasks of the China National Centre are also carried out at the local level by specially established institutions, responsible for implementing protection measures in specific communities.

From 2017 to 2021, China served its fourth term as a member of the World Heritage Committee since its accession to the Convention. During this latest term, China has adopted a more active attitude in its engagement in world heritage affairs and towards reform of World Heritage mechanisms. Two lines of action in this area are particularly evident. Firstly, the organization of the Youth Forum on Creativity and Heritage, an attempt to integrate the issue of creativity with the preservation of cultural heritage, and secondly, the establishment of the China - Africa Cooperation Initiative for World Heritage, which aims for China to play a guiding role for African countries in the creation and implementation of heritage regulations.

At the same time, increasing globalization and the dynamics of introducing new technologies, as well as China's buoyant economic development, have been contributing to the disappearance of the country's traditional culture not only of ethnic minorities, but also the Han majority, despite all the countermeasures being implemented.[48] As early as 2013, the Chinese government has been promoting the convergence of culture with new technologies, expecting that Chinese culture will benefit from the use of new media, in large part by transforming traditional culture into commercialized forms (such as attempts to digitize traditional Chinese calligraphy or a push towards utilizing the NFT[49] and the NFT trading market, e.g. by the Poly Auction). This trend is seen more and more each

[44] This is a summary of the main sections of the document. For a more detailed analysis of the implications of the policy guidelines for the CCS please see Zhao and Fan, "Zhongguo wenhua chanye "shisiwu" shiqi de jige zhuanxing", 16–20.

[45] See for example *Opinions on Promoting the Implementation of the National Cultural Digitalization Strategy* (关于推进实施国家文化数字化战略的意见) by the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council issued on May 22 2022: https://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2022-05/22/content_5691759.htm, (accessed 24 September 2025) or the *Beijing Cultural Industries White Paper* (北京文化产业发展白皮书) published in 2021: https://share.google/XV5T3e1PjcWZSVFiU (accessed 24 September 2025).

[46] Lu Chen, *Chinese Fans of Japanese and Korean Pop Culture: Nationalistic Narratives and International Fandom* (London: Routledge, 2018), 28–44.

[47] All of these laws are available both in Chinese and in English at the official State Council portal: https://www.gov.cn and https://english.www.gov.cn.

[48] It should be noted that the weakening of ethnic variety in China is yet another process, heavily influenced by party-state policies, including mass migrations of Han Chinese into areas inhabited by ethnic minorities, standardization of language through education and media, or actions to reduce ethnic and religious identity of peoples such as the Tibetans or the Uighurs.

[49] Non-Fungible Token - a Blockchain-based cryptographic token.

year in legislation favouring the implementation of projects combining art and science or heritage and virtual reality.[50]

Another dimension of finding a role for intangible heritage in modern CCS is tourism. China identified tourism as a promising part of the CCS early on in the "Reform and opening up" period (1978–2012). While richer cities invested in so-called highbrow culture infrastructure and content, less-developed areas of the country with smaller potential for building audiences for more sophisticated cultural events were incentivised to strengthen their local economies through tourism. Intangible heritage, especially that of ethnic minorities was viewed as a way to draw in domestic tourists from metropolitan areas, looking for new and exotic experiences. Ethnically-focused tourism became a powerful driving force for many local economies, such as Yunnan Province's Dongba villages, Guizhou Province's Miao villages or specific, recognisable locations (Yunnan Shangri-La City, Hunan Phoenix Ancient City), etc., creating jobs and generating revenue. Chinese authorities have thus incorporated tourism into their understanding of the CCS, a process symbolically reinforced by the integration of culture and tourism under one Ministry, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (MOCT) in 2018.

Domestic governance system

Governance of the cultural sector in the People's Republic of China can be viewed as a complex interplay between the executive branch institutions and the organs of the Communist Party of China. This decision-making structure is shown in a simplified graphic form in Figure 1. *Organigram of the Governance in the cultural sector in the PRC.*

National authorities

Major laws regulating the cultural sector are enacted mostly at the central level: this was the case in 19 out of a total of 27 such laws put into force between 2014–2021.[51] The main administrative body producing the majority of specific policy documents is the MOCT, but many national guidelines originate at other institutions, sometimes created in collaboration with the MOCT, and sometimes independently. These include the powerful Central Propaganda Department of the CCP, the National Development and Reform Commission, the Ministry of Commerce (especially CCS-connected legislation), the National Radio and Television Administration, and many others. However, there is considerable freedom at local levels to reinterpret the laws, guidelines and regulations produced at the central level and introduce their own initiatives.

There have been many recent changes to the system. In 2018, as part of a major governmental reshuffle, the all-powerful State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT, *Guojia xinwen chuban guangdian zongju*) was downsized and renamed the National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA, *Guojia guangbo dianshi zongju*), and all responsibilities other than the supervision of the radio and the national television were moved directly to the Propaganda Department of the CCP. As already mentioned, also, in 2018 the Ministry of Culture was renamed the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (MOCT), and the scope of its activities was thus enlarged. The Confucius Institute system (under the Ministry of Education) in 2020 was also reconfigured, with its leading institution, the Office for Chinese Language Council International (*Hanban - Guojia hanyu guoji tuiguang lingdao xiaozu bangongshi*) downsized and renamed the Centre for Language Education and Cooperation (*Zhongwai yuyan jiaoliu hezuo zhongxin*), and the modus operandi of the entire system changed.

Considerable stress is put on the development of the CCS, therefore within the MOCT there are not only separate Departments responsible for cooperation with the market, but also four MOCT direct subsidiaries. These are large-scale and influential state-owned companies operating in the CCS market: the China Culture Media Group Co. Ltd., the China Oriental Performing Arts Group Co. Ltd., the China Digital Culture Group Co. Ltd., and the China Animation Group Co. Ltd. Each of these four companies has numerous other subsidiaries.[52]

Local authorities

The local level includes provinces and municipalities; prefectures, municipality districts and cities; counties; and townships. The Chinese administrative system at the local level replicates the national system, with four major players: the local CCP Committees, the People's Congresses (elected, legislative bodies), the People's Governments (at Provincial/Municipal and lower levels – the main executive body), and the local Committees of the Political Consultative Conference. And so, while the local legislation may come from the CCP Committee or the local People's Congress, the main institutions responsible for the implementation of national cultural policies at local levels are the People's Governments. They act through the Provincial Bureaus of Culture and Tourism (*Sheng wenhua he lüyou ting*), or the Municipal Bureaus of Culture and Tourism (*Zhixiashi wenhua he lüyou ju*) which are separate administrative bodies (public institutions), directly responsible to the People's Governments, with an annual budget allocation from the People's Governments. They also receive funds directly from the MOCT, usually on targeted subsidy programs or specific projects. The Bureaus typically have numerous subsidiaries, e.g. in Beijing there are 13 such institutions (including a library, orchestras, and theatres), and administrative centres, which are separate administrative entities devoted to a certain sphere of activity under the responsibility of the Bureau, for example: Promotion Centre, Cultural Exchange Centre, etc. The Bureaus also actively engage with private or commercial state-run actors, such as the SOEs which run theatre and concert halls belonging to local authorities (e.g. the Poly Group) or organize large-scale festivals (e.g. the China Arts and Entertainment Group).

[50] Sabine Chrétien-Ichikawa and Karolina Pawlik (eds.), *Creative Industries and digital transformation in China* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 1–10.

[51] Xiao and Ning, "Zhongguo wenhua zhili yanjiu sanshi nian: lilun, zhengce yu shijian", 48.

[52] Each of these organisations and their subsidiaries are registered as commercial entities. Their legal status can be verified using one of the available Chinese company registration engines, such as the GWBMA Registration China: https://www.registrationchina.com/.

Districts in major cities, as well as prefectures and townships have some influence on the specific ways policies are implemented locally, but their financial means are limited. They operate local Bureaus of Culture or Cultural Centres, with activities mainly meeting the needs of smaller, local communities. Some bigger and more affluent districts organize larger cultural events (e.g. Chaoyang district in Beijing), but most large-scale support and policy implementation is concentrated at the provincial or municipal level.

Non-governmental actors

According to Chinese law, private non-profit organizations (NPOs) can be established either as social associations (*shehui jituan*), social service organizations (*shehui fuwu jigou*) or foundations (*jijinhui*)[53]. All need to be approved by the local Civil Affairs Bureau (*Minzhengju*). In general, small NPOs operating on a local scale are common, while larger, private not-for-profits active in the field of culture are rare.

There is another type of a "non-profit organization" operating under Chinese law - public institutions (*shiye danwei*). This is the legal status of most public cultural entities, such as museums, theatres or concert halls. While defined as not-for-profit organizations, they are nevertheless allowed, with the local government approval, to invest and create commercial entities (e.g., subsidiary companies). Profits thus generated - according to the principle of non-distribution constraint - must be redistributed to the statutory purposes of the public institution in question.

A player on the scene enjoying special status is the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles (CFLAC, *Zhongguo wenxue yishujie lianhehui*). It is composed of field-specific associations, such as the China Artists Association, the China Writers Association, the China Film Association, the China Television Artists Association, the Chinese Musicians Association, the China Theatre Association, the China Photographers Association, etc. These associations have branches at provincial and municipal levels, and while they do not have big budgetary means, they still exert a strong influence on artists and creators in their given fields, especially through their personal ties and the institutional leverage of their members. The Federation is a member of the Political Consultative Conference.

Cultural and Creative Sectors (CCS) – Institutional Landscape

In China's cultural sector we can distinguish two types of activities:

i) cultural services provided by public institutions, and;

ii) cultural and creative industries (state-owned and private).

Together, they form a part of the creative economy – the CCS.

Cultural services provided by public institutions are not-for-profit oriented, they are publicly funded, non-competitive and occasionally available to the public free of charge (such as museum entries or community artistic performances), especially in smaller cities and towns. These services are designed to meet the basic cultural needs of citizens. Institutions operating in this area are primarily television, radio, public libraries, state museums, art galleries, cultural centres, and in a limited capacity also theatres, concert halls, opera houses and other venues.

Public institutions in the field of culture, although they receive basic operational budgets, are strongly incentivized to generate profit through various activities: ticket sales (season programs and festivals), private sponsorship, venue rentals, commercial events, publications, gifts and souvenirs, etc. To this end they typically establish separately registered, various commercial entities functioning as their commercial subsidiaries. Profits thus generated are redistributed towards the statutory goals of the cultural organizations. All cultural organizations (especially venues) are under this financial pressure to perform economically, including even the MOCT-run or co-run institutions, such as the National Museum of China (NMC), or the National Center for the Performing Arts (NCPA). At the same time, the central authorities initiate various non-commercial programs aimed at increasing citizen participation in culture. These programs include free distribution of tickets for selected performances to local communities, free performances by state-run artistic groups and the like. These programs very often have a negative influence on the market and run against local policies and the commercial performance needs of the venues. Therefore there is strong tension between the pressure to generate profits at the local level, and the public mission of the central authorities.[54]

Cultural and creative industries are profit-driven and competitive (regardless of whether they are state-owned or fully private). They include publications, certain performing arts, music, film, video and photography, broadcasting, visual arts and crafts, advertising, design and fashion, interactive media and web content, and games.[55] Central and local governments have introduced a number of forms of financial support (tax incentives, subsidies, low-interest rate loans) to promote the development of cultural industries. The central government has also initiated major projects such as cultural clusters for specific industries, supporting leading companies and strategic investors, and promoting investment in high-tech cultural assets.[56] Local governments have followed these policies with numerous initiatives of establishing cultural innovation industry clusters

[53] https://cof.org/country-notes/nonprofit-law-china (accessed 21 June 2024).

[54] Zhao Junyi and Li Shaohui, "Cong gonggong wenhua fuwu dao gonggong wenhua zhili", 8.

[55] Vicky Ho and Anthony Fung, "Cultural Policy, Chinese National Identity and Globalisation" In Terry Flew, Petros Iosifidis and Jeanette Steemers (eds), *Global Media and National Policies,* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 106–121. Anthony Fung and John Nguyet Erni, "Cultural Clusters and Cultural Industries in China", *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies,* 14(4), 2013, 644–656.

[56] Michael Keane, "Brave New World: Understanding China's Creative Vision", *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 10(3), 2004, 265–27. Michael Keane, "Understanding the Creative Economy: A Tale of Two Cities' Clusters", *Creative Industries Journal* 1(3), 2009, 211–226. Terry Flew and Stuart Cunningham, "Creative Industries After the First Decade of Debate", *The Information Society* 26(2), 2010, 113–123. White and Xu, "A Critique of China's Cultural Policy and the Development of its Cultural and Creative Industries: The Case of Shanghai", 249–257.

(*wenhua chuangyi chanye yuanqu*), aiming at fostering close cooperation between technological service providers and content creators in the CCS. Such creative industries clusters are operating in many major cities, such as the OCT Loft Creative Culture Park (Huaqiaocheng) in Shenzhen or the M50 Creative Space (50 Moganshan Road) in Shanghai, which in recent years has become less of a contemporary art gallery hub, and more of a location for creative content companies. Beijing's Chaoyang District alone boasts no less than 59 cultural industry parks[57] differing in scale and focus. Some real-estate developers, such as Shanghai DOBE Cultural & Creative Industry Development or Shang 8 Culture Group in Beijing specialise in building and running such clusters.

With the push for market reforms of the cultural sector in the last thirty years, much of the market has been taken over by big companies, most of which are state-owned. Poly Group has by far been the most powerful player on the cultural scene for years, with a country-wide network of theatres and concert halls, artistic agencies, productions agencies, touring agencies, one of China's biggest art auction houses (Poly Auction), an impressive art collection, etc. Originally, Poly Group's main field of activity had been the military sector (international sales of weapons), from which it moved to the real estate sector, and culture. Other state-owned actors include the Beijing Gehua Cultural Development Group and the China Arts and Entertainment Group (CAEG) – the commercial arm of the MOCT.

The division between public and private actors in the field of culture is very much blurred. Therefore, in Table 1 below showing the number of different types of cultural organizations, we do not take their ownership nature under consideration.

The infrastructure understood as a venue base is in general excellent. The last 20 years saw massive investments in cultural infrastructure at all levels, with hundreds of new venues (museums, libraries, theatres, concert halls, multi-purpose cultural centres, etc.) being built across the country. Investments in buildings and equipment have not been coupled with investments in human capital – many of the venues have been affected by professional staff shortages, and the equipment is often not used to its full capacity (especially lighting and sound equipment). There have also been many challenges in filling the venues with content – project budgets have been too small, the profit-generation pressure too big, and audience-building is lagging behind especially in second and third-tier cities. The COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, in force until the end of 2022, influenced these processes to a degree that has not yet been assessed, an influence that certainly deserves a separate study.

There are significant differences between the three tiers, into which cities in China are unofficially classified. First-tier cities (*yixian chengshi*) - Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen - typically have excellent infrastructure, mature audiences, leading festivals, and world-class artists performing there on a regular basis[58]. The cultural calendars are saturated with events, competition for audiences among venues, and managers

[57] Beijing Chaoyang District official website: https://english.bjchy.gov.cn/cultural-and-creative-parks (accessed 27 September 2025).

[58] The three COVID-19 pandemic years (2020–2022) have significantly eroded the confidence of many international artists in performing in China. It might take several years for leading venues to reach the pre-pandemic levels of internationalization.

Table 1. Public and private cultural organizations by sector in 2021.[59]

Domain	Cultural institution	Number (2021)	Trend (last 3 years)
Cultural heritage	Cultural relics reservation institutions	2257	-35%
Museums	Museum institutions	5772	+15%
Archives	National Comprehensive archives	3320	flat
Visual arts	Art galleries	682	+c. 15%
Performing Arts	Theatres (general performance venues)	2335	+c. 15%
	Concert houses, music halls	758	+c. 5%
	Performing groups	18370	+c. 5%
Audio-visual	Cinemas	14235	no comparable data
	Radio and TV channels	6554	no comparable data
Interdisciplinary	Cultural centres	43531	flat
Literature	Libraries	3215	flat
	Publishing houses (2020)	586	flat

[59] The table combines the data from the National Bureau of Statistics (data.stats.gov.cn), *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo wenhua he lüyoubu 2021 nian wenhua he lüyou fazhan tongji gongbao* (*2021 Cultural and Tourism Development Statistical Bulletin of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the People's Republic of China*), https://zwgk.mct.gov.cn/zfxxgkml/tjxx/202206/t20220629_934328.html, accessed 15 April 2023) , and the 2021 report of the China Film Administration communicated in the Renmin Ribao (http://finance.people.com.cn/n1/2021/1017/c1004-32255699.html, accessed 15 April 2023).

is fierce, and the market is very difficult and volatile. Second-tier cities (such as Tianjin, Wuhan, Chengdu, Hangzhou, Ningbo, etc.) typically have good infrastructure, but the audiences are not very mature, and the degree of exposure to world-class culture varies between cities and venues. Third-tier cities are places where international cultural projects are rarely seen, and the quality of the infrastructure base varies from good to very modest. There are some stunning, modern venues, and there are some reputable cultural festivals, but in general, these are the cultural backwaters of China. This division runs parallel with the East-West and the city-countryside income discrepancies. Rich, big cities of the East are contrasted with the poor countryside of central and Western China.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and nearly three years of partial or total lockdowns enforced through the zero-COVID-19 policies from January 2020 to December 2022, digital culture initiatives have been on a sharp rise. But the pandemic has only sped up the changes already happening with the advent of a platform economy. China is world No. 1 in e-commerce, and culture is one of many areas in which products are not only sold through Internet platforms but much of the content exists only in digital form. The streaming market in China experienced significant growth during the pandemic, with more than 660 million users utilizing streaming, live-streaming, short film platforms, and apps in 2022. This growth was seen across all age groups and in both first tier and lower-tier cities. The market is projected to maintain a monthly growth rate of approximately 5% in 2022.[60]

It's important to note that Western video platforms such as Netflix do not operate in China. Instead, the domestic market is dominated by three major online video platforms: iQiyi, Youku, and Tencent Video, which are controlled by the "big three" Internet companies in the country: Baidu, Alibaba, and Tencent (the so-called BAT). Other competitors, such as ByteDance (the parent company of Douyin and its international version - TikTok) have also made great advances on the market. Live streaming platforms are a key sector, with 464 million users and a value of nearly $34 million in 2022.[61]

The gaming industry is an important part of the digital CCS. Its domestic revenue in 2024 was estimated at almost 40 billion EUR, which makes China the world's largest gaming market.[62] But not only computer games industry and video creators and streaming services embraced the new technological era. Visual artists have used digital tools to find new means of expression[63] and communication with their audiences. Virtual and augmented reality, AI content generation, audience participation and co-creation methods are now commonly encountered in works at dozens of art exhibitions across China. Artists and curators broadly use social media channels such as WeChat Moments, Douyin, RedNote (Xiaohongshu) or BiliBili to promote their projects and build connections with their audiences. Cultural content on social media platforms is on a rapid rise. Public institutions are also trying to keep up with the pace of change: museums digitalize their collections, libraries offer new digital services, cultural institutions try to provide new content online.[64] This is clearly a visible, long-term trend.

Copyright or intellectual property protection

General assumptions

China is a member of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and a party to the Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works. Copyright law in the country is governed by the Copyright Law of the People's Republic of China, adopted and promulgated in 1990 and revised in 2001. The law protects nine categories of works in China:

i. written works;

ii. oral works;

iii. musical, dramatic, folk, dance and acrobatic works;

iv. works of fine art and architecture;

v. photographic works;

vi. audio-visual works;

vii. graphic and model work, such as engineering design drawings, product design drawings, maps, schematics, etc.;

viii computer software;

ix other intellectual achievements that meet the characteristics of a work.

Copyright registration is currently handled by the Copyright Protection Centre of China (CCPC, *Zhongguo banquan baohu zhongxin*), making the system comparable to the US model, where the US Copyright Office plays a similar role. Registration of rights is not mandatory, but is considered proof of copyright ownership, as well as confirmation of the time of the work's creation.

Collective Management

The activities of collective management organizations (CMOs) are supervised by the relevant state copyright department.

[60] Yi Wu, "China's Livestream Industry: Market Growth, Regulation, Enabling Technology, and Business Strategies", *China Briefing*, 1 September 2022, https://www.china-briefing.com/news/chinas-livestream-industry-market-growth-regulation-enabling-technology-and-business-strategies (accessed 21 June 2024).

[61] https://www.chinatradingdesk.com/post/2022-china-s-entertainment-live-streaming-market-analysis (accessed 21 June 2024).

[62] "China's gaming market sees 14-pct sales revenue growth in H1", *Xinhua News* 2025.07.31, https://english.news.cn/20250731/b24caaf11adf4b2ea258f9e50b8eb0fd/c.html (accessed 25 September 2025).

[63] Amic G. Ho explores some of the aspects of using technology in artistic practice in the 2022 study „'Techspressionism' of Digital Art in Contemporary China" Chinese CHI October 22, 23 2022, doi.org/10.1145/3565698.3565780 (accessed 24 September 2025).

[64] Park, "Policy Discourse Among the Chinese Public on Initiatives for Cultural and Creative Industries: Text Mining Analysis", 8

The most important CMOs for collective licensing are:

i. The Music Copyright Society of China (music);

ii. The China Audio-Video Copyright Association (audio-visual works);

iii. The China Written Works Copyright Society (written works);

iv. The China Photo Copyright Association (photographic works);

v. The China Film Copyright Association (films).

According to the report by the International Confederation of Societies of Authors and Composers[65] the value of all royalties collected in 2021 was 54.3 million EUR, which ranks China merely 23rd in the world (by comparison, much smaller Poland ranks 19th with a collection of royalties almost twice as large as China's – 96.7 million EUR). The issue of sending collected royalties that are due to creators from other countries remains unclear. The Music Copyright Society of China declares that 80% of music consumption in China is in Chinese, 10% is by creators coming from Korea and Japan and another 10% from the rest of the world. According to data presented in the organization's annual reports, about 15% of revenues are shipped overseas, 5% short of the declared collection.[66]

Unauthorized use of content

A major challenge to copyright compliance, in China as in other countries is the high level of unauthorized use of cultural content. In its 2021 *Special 301 Report on Copyright Protection and Enforcement*, the U.S.- based International Intellectual Property Alliance (IIPA), pointed out that in the case of China, legislative shortcomings, persistent and growing practices of unauthorized use hindered or completely blocked the ability of rights holders to distribute copyrighted content and prevented rights holders from seeing their investments reach their full potential.[67] Contrary to the findings of that report, a study by Giraldi *et al*. 2023 has shown dynamic, positive changes in the way IP protection is viewed and treated in China. IP courts have been opened in Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou, handling ever-increasing numbers of IP rights registration applications, and civil and administrative IP violation cases, most of them internet-related. Chinese internet platforms and new media companies generate substantial income from copyright, and so they are instrumental in these changes. As the authors conclude: [in China] *there has been a significant move away from a copycat model to one in which the protection of copyright is ever more important in the Chinese creative industries, a trend which should be viewed within the context of … China's obligations as a full member of the WTO*.[68]

Further development of digital technology and the Internet, big data, artificial intelligence and other cutting-edge technologies will continue to have a far-reaching impact on Chinese society and copyright law. In recent years, copyright issues surrounding artificial intelligence and NFT infringement have brought challenges to existing legal frameworks around the world. China is at the forefront of the process of adjusting the legal system to fit these new challenges and developments, and effective IP protection is in the interest of domestic new media companies and streaming services.

Cultural participation and consumption

The National Bureau of Statistics of the PRC does not provide any data on household expenditure on culture. Available data shows only expenditure on culture, education and leisure as a single figure, with no further breakdown. A national survey on cultural participation has not yet been conducted in China. Nevertheless, in 2015, a partial survey was conducted by the National Institute for Cultural Development at Wuhan University, with support from the Ministry of Culture, in 13 different Chinese cities (all were important political, economic and cultural centres representing different regions of China)[69]. The survey used a face-to-face interview method, however, the sample was not representative of the Chinese population, which makes the study different from most national surveys of cultural participation. Courty and Zhang[70] undertook an analysis of the results of the Wuhan University study and pointed out that education is crucial in increasing cultural participation. Income has a smaller but noticeable impact on the frequency of cultural consumption. In their assessment, strong evidence can be found in support of the elitism hypothesis for the so-called highbrow culture (library, museum, gallery and art performance). This suggests that cultural participation in China fits the patterns observed in high-income countries. There are essential differences in cultural participation across surveyed cities for all cultural indicators. For all non-public indicators excluding art performance, city differences do not appear to be correlated with income. For highbrow culture (art performance and public cultural activities) however, the plots display a U-shape dependence on development in relation to urban growth. Middle-income cities tend to have lower levels of cultural participation. This is true for highbrow culture, and also when one latent variable affects all indicators of cultural participation. The impact of education, and to some extent income, is weaker in wealthier cities whereas data on cultural participation in rural areas is still lacking.

Trends and figures in household expenditure

From 2005–2013, culture consumption increased in absolute values as well as a fraction of total consumption in both rural and urban areas. At the same time, cultural consumption was significantly higher in urban areas, both in absolute and percentage terms (see Table 2 and Table 3).

[65] CISAC 2022 Global Collections Report https://www.cisac.org/services/reports-and-research/global-collections-report-2022 (accessed 21 June 2024).

[66] MSCS Annual Report for 2021 https://www.mcsc.com.cn/upload/other/20220905/6c53b006f23b468dc49e245f44842e57.pdf (accessed 15 April 2023).

[67] https://www.iipa.org/files/uploads/2021/01/2021SPEC301CHINA.pdf (accessed 15 April 2023).

[68] Giraldi *et al*., p. 156.

[69] The survey only covered the urban population and did not include rural areas. Meanwhile, this study was the only one found in the desk research on cultural participation.

[70] Pascal Courty and Fenghua Zhang, "Cultural Participation in Major Chinese Cities", *Journal of Cultural Economics*, 42(4), 2018, 543–592.

Table 2. **Urban vs rural cultural consumption: 2013–2015[71].**

Year	Urban households			Rural households		
	Per capita annual cultural consumption (RMB)	Per capita annual cultural consumption (EUR)*	Share of total consumption (%)	Per capita annual cultural consumption (RMB)	Per capita annual cultural consumption (EUR)*	Share of total consumption (%)
2013	945.7	135,60	5.1%	174.8	25,06	2.3%
2014	1087.9	155,99	5.4%	207.0	29,68	2.4%
2015	1216.1	174,37	5.7%	239.0	34,27	2.6%

*Based on the average RMB – EUR exchange rate in 2015 (1 EUR = 6.9743 RMB)

[71] Based on the China Statistical Yearbook 2016, National Bureau of Statistics of China, http://www.stats.gov.cn/sj/ndsj/2016/indexeh.htm.

Table 3. **Income and Expenditure of Urban and Rural Households in 2021.**

ITEM	Absolute Value (RMB)	Nominal Increase Y/Y (%)	Absolute Value (EUR)
Total Per Capita Expenditure of Urban Households Grouped by Consumption Category	**30307**	**12.2**	3969,85
Food, tobacco and liquor	8678	10,1	1136,71
Clothing	1843	12,0	241,41
Residence	7405	6.4	969,96
Household facilities, articles and services	1820	11.0	238,40
Transportation and telecommunication	3932	13.2	515,04
Education, culture and recreation	3322	28.2	435,14
Health care and medical services	2521	16.1	330,22
Miscellaneous goods and services	786	21.7	102,96
ITEM	**Absolute Value (RMB)**	**Nominal Increase Y/Y (%)**	**Absolute Value (EUR)**
Total Per Capita Expenditure of Rural Households Grouped by Consumption Category	**15916**	**16.1**	**2084,80**
Food, tobacco and liquor	5200	16.1	681,14
Clothing	859	20.6	112,52
Residence	3315	11.9	434,22
Household facilities, articles and services	900	17.3	117,89
Transportation and telecommunication	2132	15.8	279,26
Education, culture and recreation	1645	25.7	215,47
Health care and medical services	1580	11.4	206,96
Miscellaneous goods and services	284	26.5	37,20

Based on the average RMB – EUR exchange rate in 2021 (1 EUR = 7.6343 RMB)

Source: National Bureau of Statistics of China

In 2013–2021, the upward trend was maintained, with the exception of 2020 when cultural participation was significantly reduced, due to the pandemic and the zero-COVID policy lockdowns (see Figure 2). It is expected that a similar reduction will be shown for 2022, once the data is available.

In 2021, as reported by the National Bureau of Statistics of China, compared to 2019, the average growth rate of per capita spending on culture, education and leisure for Chinese residents was 1.7%. As the three types of expenditures are grouped together, it is difficult to estimate what part of these figures represents expenditure on culture. Based on the experience of European countries, it can only be assumed that a significant proportion of this amount is spent on education and leisure, while culture accounts for a much smaller proportion. Figure 3 shows the average growth rate of eight categories of per capita consumption expenditure of residents in China between 2019–2021. Education, culture and recreation data is bound together, and shows a 10,8% growth – significantly higher that the growth in household goods and services, and two percentage points higher than the growth in health care and medical services.

Financing and public support

Although China has seen strong economic and social development over the past 40 years, growth in the cultural sector is relatively recent. Accordingly, the added value of culture grew at a rate of about 15–20% in the decade, 2004–2014.[72] The major indicators for culture are difficult to determine using the National Bureau of Statistics data, as it provides public expenditure in culture combined with sport and media. And so, in 2021, public culture, sport and media expenditure per capita was 282.24 RMB (38.67 EUR calculated at 07.01.2023 mid-market rates). Public culture, sport and media expenditure in percentage of GDP stood at 0.34% and amounted to 1.62% of total public spending.

The amount of public subsidies funded by the central government exhibits strong geographical variation. In the case of museums, for example, which have been built on a massive scale in China in recent years, the level of public support is usually lower in richer Eastern provinces (20%), average in central provinces (60%) and highest in less rich Western provinces (80%).[73] Both central and local governments are committed to providing free cultural services through the development of cultural infrastructure.

Local authorities are powerful players in the cultural sector with public spending levels reaching 94% of total spending in 2021 (see Table 4). The metropolitan areas' budgets for culture are unusually high. For example, in 2021 the Beijing municipal budget stood at 75 billion EUR, and the budget for culture, tourism, sport and the media amounted to 1,4 billion EUR (1,87% of the total budget).[74] Major municipalities run Culture Development Foundations, which allocate budgets to artistic groups, cultural institutions, and projects. In general, the specific amounts allocated to individual applicants are not disclosed, the exception being, e.g. the Shanghai Culture Development Foundation.[75]

Expenditure per sector

The MOCT budget provided on the official MOCT website has a very general cost breakdown, providing little about specific budget allocations across different categories (see Table 5 below). The MOCT can apply for additional special program budgets to the Ministry of Finance, and the funds thus

[72] The Economist, *Cultural revolution*. https://www.economist.com/books-and-arts/2014/05/23/cultural-revolution (accessed 21 June 2024).

[73] Courty and Zhang, "Cultural Participation in Major Chinese Cities", 5.

[74] https://www.ncsti.gov.cn/kjdt/ztbd/2022bjlh/2022top/202201/t20220119_56428.html (accessed 21 June 2024).

[75] https://www.shcdf.org.cn/ (accessed 21 June 2024).

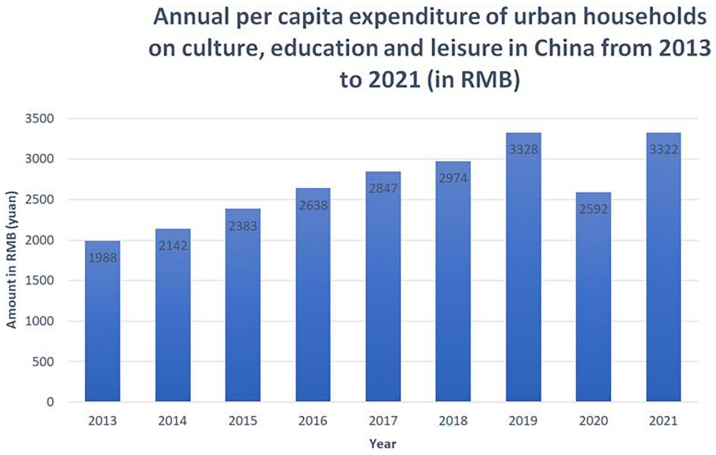


Figure 2. Annual per capita expenditure of urban households on culture, education and leisure in China from 2013 to 2021 (in RMB). The Figure shows gradual increase of per capita expenditure between 2013 and 2019, a drop in 2020 attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic, and a recovery trend in 2021. Source: National Bureau of Statistics of China.

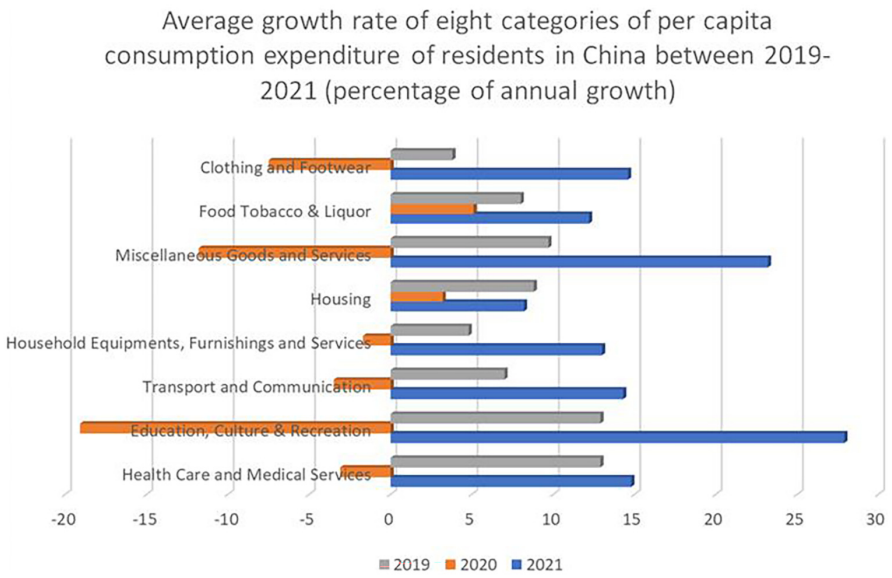


Figure 3. The average growth rate of eight categories of per capita consumption expenditure of residents in China between 2019–2021. The Figure shows the average growth rate of eight categories of per capita consumption expenditure divided between the years 2019, 2020, and 2021. The Figure shows the biggest decrease in consumption in 2020 in the "Education, Culture & Recreation" category (-19,1%), presumably due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and also the biggest recovery in 2021 (+27,9%). Source: National Bureau of Statistics of China

Table 4. Public expenditure on culture at the central and local levels in 2021.

Level of government	Total expenditure in RMB	Total expenditure in EUR*	% share of total
Central	21,113,000,000	2,892,500,000	5,3%
Local	377,410,000,000	51,731,436,199	94,7%
TOTAL	398,523,000,000	54,625,386,578	100%

**Based on the RMB – EUR mid-market exchange rate as of 2023.01.07 (0.137)*

Source: National Bureau of Statistics

Table 5. The Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2022 budget.

	Amount in thousand RMB	Amount in thousand EUR*
Administration	202,414.7	27,730.8
Daily administrative management costs	14,246.0	1,951.7
Performing groups	20,256.9	2,775.2
Cultural events	173,605.8	23,783.9
Cultural creativity and protection	37,938.0	5,197.5
Management of CCS and tourism industry	28,029.0	3,839.9
Management of culture and tourism	156,847.8	21,488

**Based on the RMB – EUR mid-market exchange rate as of 2023.01.07 (0.137)*

Source: Ministry of Culture and Tourism[76]

[76] https://zwgk.mct.gov.cn/zfxxgkml/cwxx/ysjs/202204/W020220427412350465576.pdf (accessed 15 April 2023).

obtained are redistributed to local authorities at proportions predetermined by the CPC.

Conclusion

The PRC is a country deserving special attention in cultural policy research due to its sheer size, rapid modernization, sui generis political system, and increasing global influence. This paper aims to outline a general picture of the Chinese cultural policy environment, as such a picture seems to be lacking in scholarly publications on China. The outcomes of the research presented here alongside the practical knowledge provided by experts working in China, show several main characteristics. Firstly, the cultural policies of the PRC are a function of the central-level political policymaking of the Chinese party-state. Culture is highly politicised, being understood as one of the tools the CCP used to cement its power and ensure social stability. Secondly, the cultural sector is subject to total control by the party-state through the CCP Propaganda Department, and the censorship system. This not only affects the sector domestically but hinders China from a fuller and successful engagement with the international cultural field. Thirdly, the PRC's cultural sector exhibits dual characteristics, with market-insulated public services on the one side, and the market economy CCS, where state-owned enterprises compete for services, customers, and profits with private entities on the other. Furthermore, the policy and domestic governance systems show incoherency, exhibiting tensions between central-level general policy guidelines and local-level implementation; the mission of the state to ensure wide cultural participation and market economy incentivization of public cultural organizations. Numerous policies foster robust participation of private enterprises in cultural and creative sectors, while the cultural market is dominated by an intricate network of state-owned players, such as the Poly Group, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and local authorities' commercial subsidiaries. Lastly, the legal environment in the PRC is dynamically changing, as shown by the recent introduction of comprehensive IP protection policies. Changes are also visible in the broad digitalization of culture, a trend greatly accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Due to the scarcity and poor quality of statistical data, it is difficult to fully assess culture expenditure and consumption trends in the PRC. Available data hints at surprisingly modest public expenditure on culture at the central level, and large public expenditure at the provincial and municipal level, cascaded to lower-level local authorities. The overall view of the sector shows a very dynamic and unique system constantly redefining itself to cater for ambitious, and often conflicting goals set by the central authorities.

Ethics and consent

Ethical approval and consent were not required.

Data availability

The statistical data used in this paper is available in Open Access under CC 4.0 license at Zenodo: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15376612

This project contains the following underlying data:

- Data/Material file 1. (Central Expenditure Statistics - *National Bureau of Statistics of China*)
- Data/Material file 2. (General Data of Cultural Institutions - *National Bureau of Statistics of China*)
- Data/Material file 3. (Local Expenditure - *National Bureau of Statistics of China*)
- Data/Material file 4. (Museums - *National Bureau of Statistics of China*)
- Data/Material file 5. (National Expenditure - *National Bureau of Statistics of China*)
- Data/Material file 6. (Performance Groups - *National Bureau of Statistics of China*)
- Data/Material file 7. (Education, Culture & Recreation Expenditure of Urban Households (yuan) - *National Bureau of Statistics of China*)
- Data/Material file 8. (Per Capita Expenditure of rural households 2021- *National Bureau of Statistics of China*)
- Data/Material file 9. (Per Capita Expenditure of urban households 2021- *National Bureau of Statistics of China*)
- Data/Material file 10. (The average growth rate of eight categories of per capita consumption expenditure - *National Bureau of Statistics of China*)

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank representatives of the Chinese cultural sector and employees of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the PRC for the information they provided to the authors (2023). These contributors do not wish to be named. The authors thank also members of the Beijing EUNIC Cluster: dr. Bart Hofstede (EUNIC President and Cultural Counsellor of the Netherlands), and Jan Jerzy Malicki (Director of the Polish Institute in Beijing) for the internal peer review of the first version of the present paper (2023), and their valuable suggestions. Lastly, the authors cordially thank professor Andrew White of King's College London, UK, and professor Michael Keane of Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia, for their detailed peer review and a series of valuable comments which helped us improve this paper.

Open Peer Review

Current Peer Review Status: ✔ ✔ ? ? ✔

Version 2

Reviewer Report 22 November 2025

https://doi.org/10.21956/openreseurope.23281.r62817

© **2025 Rosenstein C.** This is an open access peer review report distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

✔ **Carole Rosenstein**
George Mason University, Arlington, USA

This article offers a profile of the cultural policy system in place in China, providing valuable information that is not readily available to cultural policy scholars in other parts of the world. Using the established Compendium of Cultural Policies & Trends template, the authors describe key priorities, components, and characteristics of the Chinese system and map this system in a useful organigram.

A strength of the article is that, like other profiles produced for the Compendium, its careful design enables detailed and deep description that provides real insight into the case. Particularly in its revised form, the article is notably comprehensive in regard to expressive forms. One place where information remains lacking is the system for arts education and professional certification, and a description of how that system intersects with the cultural bureaucracy lain out here. It would be a great benefit to include that component.

Another strength of the article is that enables valuable conceptual comparisons between China and other nations that are similarly described in the Compendium. For example, the article maps the high degree of vertical centralization that characterizes the Chinese cultural bureaucracy, while noting its bifurcated decentralization along the horizontal dimension. It is interesting to think about how aspects of culture are hived off in national cultural bureaucracies, and what such structural patterns can tell us about the cultural ideologies at play. As the authors note, this pattern reflects the primacy of classic Marxist ideologies about the role of culture in social and political technologies.

The authors' discussion of the ways in which the public priorities of democratizing the arts and culture and monetizing and profiting from cultural activities clash in this case is most interesting. I would have appreciated more analysis of what lessons this might lend to cultural policymakers in other nations.

I will take advantage of the unusual opportunity this platform affords to "cross talk" with our fellow peer reviewers to say that I disagree with Dr. Jelincic's suggestion that this piece does not

deserve the status of “research article” because it fails to adequately formulate hypotheses or research questions and test them using a defined methodology. In my view, the article engages in research by framing this case using the Compendium template (that is its method), enabling descriptive and comparative analysis such as the examples I mention above.

While it is important to maintain research standards in our still emerging field, I see over the past few years a disturbing trend of making a fetish of methods. The article is a valuable inquiry into this case, the driving principles that make this system work, and the contradictions it poses when faced with politics IRL. Scholarly inquiry need not be explanatory to be recognized as and earn the honorific of research. If we demand that, we will curtail the strength cultural policy study draws from our interdisciplinarity.

Is the work original in terms of material and argument?

Yes

Does it sufficiently engage with relevant methodologies and secondary literature on the topic?

Yes

Is the work clearly and cogently presented?

Yes

Is the argument persuasive and supported by evidence?

Yes

If any, are all the source data and materials underlying the results available?

Partly

Does the research article contribute to the cultural, historical, social understanding of the field?

Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: Cultural Policy, Arts Policy, Arts Management

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard.

Author Response 18 Jan 2026

Marcin Jacoby

Dear Professor Rosenstain, Thank you very much for your positive review, this means very much to us. It is very motivating to see that our work makes sense and may prove useful to other academics in the field.
Marcin Jacoby

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Report 06 November 2025

https://doi.org/10.21956/openreseurope.23281.r62821

© 2025 Burlina C. This is an open access peer review report distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

?

Chiara Burlina
University of Padova, Padua, Italy

Comments to the Authors

I thank the Editors for the opportunity to read the reviewed version of the manuscript “The cultural sector in China through the lens of cultural policies concepts.”.

The paper addresses an important topic — the development of cultural policies in China — with a focus on how these policies are perceived domestically and internationally, among practitioners and academia. The topic is relevant to current academic and policy debates. I acknowledge the Authors for the intensive revisions after round 1, the paper has significantly improved with respect to its initial version. Yet, in my opinion, it requires some additional minor adjustments before final publication.

I would suggest to the Authors to define in the Introduction which are the creative and cultural sectors they are looking at. They report them clearly in Table 1 at p.12, however I think that is more straightforward to have a brief definition at the very beginning of the paper.

Secondly, the sentences that explore two Research Questions at p.3 are quite too long to be followed. I would rephrase them in a shorter and more immediate manner.

Third, in the Conclusions, I do appreciate how the Authors highlight the main policy implications for the development of Chinese cultural policies. However, I would add a small paragraph to future research opportunities for example including a comparison between China and the rest of the World. Meaning, how China could improve/change its policy environment with respect to Europe or other developed countries?

Is the work original in terms of material and argument?
Yes

Does it sufficiently engage with relevant methodologies and secondary literature on the topic?

Yes

Is the work clearly and cogently presented?
Yes

Is the argument persuasive and supported by evidence?
Yes

If any, are all the source data and materials underlying the results available?
Yes

Does the research article contribute to the cultural, historical, social understanding of the field?
Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: Cultural and Creative Industries, Institutions, Social Capital

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however I have significant reservations, as outlined above.

Reviewer Report 04 November 2025

https://doi.org/10.21956/openreseurope.23281.r62822

© **2025 Jelincic D.** This is an open access peer review report distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

?

Daniela Jelincic
Institute for Development and International Relations, Zagreb, Croatia

The article deals with the cultural sector in China through the lens of cultural policies concepts. It mainly does so by focusing on the CCS, which is why the authors may consider putting it into the title. The method applied relies on the desk research (available statistics and descriptions) pertaining to the Compendium structure. While application of this method results with a text which is highly informative for a reader (especially non-Chinese ones), it still remains within the confines of a report. It is clear that preparing such a report was not easy due to a number of justified reasons (e.g. lack of readily available statistics, non-English sources, etc.). However, to be able to differentiate a report from a research article, additional work is required. This primarily entails formulating a valid hypothesis or research questions (RQs). While the authors have formulated RQs, they neither seem to be clearly answered in the text, nor is the methodology clear enough in explaining how the methods applied have helped in replying to those questions.

Namely, the 2 RQs are the following:
1. how, if at all, does a mix of harsh market economy mechanisms and the politicization of administration and management processes affect the formation of the country's cultural policies? (minor suggestion: reformulate the question in a way that it first asks, "Does a mix of..." and then "if, so - how?")
2. If yes, how are we then, from the perspective of European researchers, to understand the effects of combining the state's tight control and responsibility in China for fostering cultural development with market reality and the digital revolution?

Although the RQs are present, we do not learn much about the answers, especially related to the 2nd RQ. It is therefore suggested to provide clear answers to them and to explain how methodology supported the process in revealing the answers to those RQs.

Further on, if selected chapters from the Compendium grid were used for the analysis (6 of them), the authors should explain why those chapters were used to justify the selection, and how each of the topics selected relates to the RQs.

As said, the text is highly informative, but some parts seem to be overwhelming and draw the reader's focus away from the main topic (RQs) of the article. E.g., while it is really interesting to read about the historical background of the cultural policy system in China, it is not necessary for performing the focus of the research.

Similarly, when explaining the aim of the article, the authors are not clear enough claiming the aim being the following:
1. how the People's Republic of China (PRC) shapes its cultural policies within the framework of contemporary cultural policies theory and international practice
2. To our knowledge, no attempt at describing the general characteristics of the sector from the point of view of policy management and funding has been published to date. This paper aims at helping to bridge this gap.
3. This paper aims to outline a general picture of the Chinese cultural policy environment, as such a picture seems to be lacking in scholarly publications on China.

In 1. it seems that the goal is on detecting the modality of shaping PRC cultural policy/ies within the framework of contemporary cultural policies theory and international practice (not much is said about international practice).
In 2. and 3. the aim is to offer a general overview of the PRC cultural policy environment (in 2. the focus is on policy management and funding, although other topics are also analyzed, e.g. cultural participation and consumptions). This requires further clarifications.
Further on, the expressed aim is not totally in line with RQs.

When it comes to the structure of the article, the authors state that they used methods usually applied in the humanities and social sciences, which may explain the unusual, rather descriptive style and pertaining structure, lacking the sections of Results and Discussion. While it may be acceptable to a point, the suggestion is to either add the Discussion section or reinforce the Conclusion section putting the findings in the relation with the existing theoretical works cited in the introductory parts of the article. This would possibly offer some insights and answer the RQs, especially RQ2.

Finally, I would like to say that, especially from a European point of view, the article offers extremely valuable data (although incomplete due to the objective reasons), and as such may serve as an important point of entry not only for understanding the PRC cultural policy but also having implications on further research, policy (cultural, economic, foreign...) as well as managerial implications. This is why the authors should understand these suggestions as a motivation for the enhancement of the article since it may have very important implications.

Is the work original in terms of material and argument?
Yes

Does it sufficiently engage with relevant methodologies and secondary literature on the topic?
Partly

Is the work clearly and cogently presented?
Partly

Is the argument persuasive and supported by evidence?
Partly

If any, are all the source data and materials underlying the results available?
Yes

Does the research article contribute to the cultural, historical, social understanding of the field?
Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: Cultural policy, cultural/creative industries, cultural heritage, cultural tourism

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however I have significant reservations, as outlined above.

Reviewer Report 30 October 2025

https://doi.org/10.21956/openreseurope.23281.r62619

© 2025 Keane M. This is an open access peer review report distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Michael Keane
Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia

With regard to endnote 29, the report is not refeered to officually as "Xi's report". It should read as "The Report to ....by Xi Jinping on behalf of the 19th CCP Central Committee". The quote in the sentence comes not from Xi but from the author of China Brief, so this could be made clearer

With regard to the statement "The National Bureau of Statistics of the PRC does not provide any data on household expenditure on culture', it would be better to rephrase as "does not provide differentiated or itemised household expenditure ..." or words to that effect

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: Cultural and media policy in China

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard.

Reviewer Report 30 October 2025

https://doi.org/10.21956/openreseurope.23281.r62618

© 2025 White A. This is an open access peer review report distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Andrew White
King's College London, London, England, UK

No further comments as I am satisfied with the changes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: Chinese cultural policy; Chinese creative industries

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard.

Version 1

Reviewer Report 02 September 2025

https://doi.org/10.21956/openreseurope.21771.r57869

© 2025 White A. This is an open access peer review report distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Andrew White
[1] King's College London, London, England, UK
[2] King's College London, London, England, UK

This is a well-structured paper whose arguments and working definitions are clearly laid out in the opening sections. The paper refers to an impressive range of academic scholarship on the cultural and creative sectors (hereafter the CCS) in China. While there are disadvantages to presenting a overview of the sectors rather than a study with a narrower focus, the dearth in the existing literature of a comprehensive analysis of this kind justifies this approach. Another original aspect of this paper is its utilization of a number of Chinese language sources. Significantly, this included information given to the authors by those working in the Chinese CCS as well as employees of the People's Republic of China's Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Given the difficulty of eliciting candid comments in an increasingly politically restrictive environment, the authors are to be commended for their success in generating meaningful insights from their interlocutors.

The authors provide a good historical analysis of the development of the Chinese economy since the creation of the People's Republic of China. This enables them to outline their main argument about Chinese cultural policy: that it is increasingly restrictive with regard to the CCS's content while being largely hands-off in terms of ownership of the means of production of that content. While I would agree with this general argument, I think that a more detailed analysis of the market reforms in the Chinese media sector in the 1980s and 1990s would have bolstered the authors' stance (Akhavan-Majid 2004; Hong & Cuthbert 1991).

The organigram that the authors devised is very effective in giving the reader a sense of how Chinese cultural policy actually operates. This is augmented by a critical analysis of this operational structure. This is an important section in that it highlights the limitations of earlier literature which emphasised the constraints on the national government's capacity to impose its blueprint throughout the country. That is not to say that literature written around 10-15 years was necessarily wrong at that time; rather, it demonstrates the profound tightening of central government political control in the Xi era. This is something that is often under-played in analyses that over-rely on those older sources and thus illustrates the importance of this paper in updating our understanding of China's cultural-policy-making process.

The authors sometimes find official statistics on China's CCS of limited value in terms of the overall analysis, a methodological point that is often missing in many analyses of the country's cultural policy. This is often because of the amalgamation of distinctly different activities into one category; an example of this is the grouping together of education, culture and leisure (p. 15) which makes it virtually impossible for researchers to make precise assessments of each sector. The authors might have expanded this into a more philosophical discussion about the place of CCS in the Chinese economy and society. Despite the market reforms from 1978 onwards, early approaches to the development of CCS in many cities and regions of China focused heavily on tourism (Keane 2007), a category that is often missing from CCP mapping documents in other countries. This is partly because the national governments desire to promote the type of intangible heritage outlined in this paper as an antidote to the more politically subversive forms of creativity that are de rigour among many 'western' artists (O'Connor and Gu 2006; Keane 2006). As important to this is the Chinese state's reluctance to produce the kind of national mapping document that is a feature of cultural policy in many other countries. The reason for this is that the country's diversity, not least in levels of development between the provinces on the eastern seaboard and those in

the western interior, renders this a largely futile exercise (White & Xu 2012). This enables the poorer provinces free to focus on intangible cultural heritage and the tourism that goes with it at the expense of the CCS that predominate in the first-tier cities. This is a discussion which the authors might have developed in their own section on intangible cultural heritage and tourism.

I will finish by focusing on a couple of areas where China has had some success in the development of its CCS. The paper argues that online piracy of CCS content, including from overseas sources, is rampant. However, the main source for this assertion is an International Intellectual Property Alliance (IIPA) (2021) report whose evidence for this is unconvincing. In particular, the lack of comparative figures for other countries is a significant omission. This is important because it under-plays the extent to which piracy still continues to be a problem even in those countries that have put robust technical and legislative systems in place to deal with it. To give one example, a UK House of Commons Select Committee report on music streaming in 2021 highlighted the continuing piracy of songs by UK users. What we do know about China is that significant efforts have been made in recent years to curtail the circulation of pirated CCS content in online spaces. This includes the opening of courts specifically devoted to IP violations in 2014-15 in Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou. This built on the increasing assertiveness of Chinese courts in the 2010s in prosecuting not only copyright infringements related to domestic content, but also a considerable number of cases where the plaintiffs were from overseas (Thomas 2017). (A summary of all these developments can be read in a paper that I co-authored in 2022 (Gilardi et al. 2022)). These developments should be considered by the authors in their future research on the Chinese CCS.

Finally, it is worth noting that the increasing censoriousness of Chinese society has not stopped the country's CCS professionals from flourishing on the world stage. At the time of writing, Pop Mart's Labubu dolls are taking the world by storm. Similar to the way in which the censorship regime in Elizabethan England did not prevent Shakespeare and other writers from weaving their magic, we should take heart from the way in which contemporary Chinese creatives too can subvert the dead hand of the censor.

References

1. Ilczuk D, Jacoby M, Kaminska T: The cultural sector in China through the lens of cultural policies concepts. *Open Research Europe*. 2025; **5**. Publisher Full Text
2. Akhavan-Majid R: Mass Media Reform in China. *Gazette (Leiden, Netherlands)*. 2004; **66** (6): 553-565 Publisher Full Text
3. Gilardi F, White A, Chen Z, Cheng S, et al.: From copycat to copyright: intellectual property amendments and the development of Chinese online video industries. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*. 2023; **29** (2): 152-168 Publisher Full Text
4. Junhao Hong, Cuthbert M: Media reform in China since 1978: Background factors, problems and future trends. *Gazette (Leiden, Netherlands)*. 1991; **47** (3): 141-158 Publisher Full Text
5. Keane M: From made in China to created in China. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*. 2006; **9** (3): 285-296 Publisher Full Text
6. Keane, M. (2007) Created in China: The great new leap forward. London & New York: Routledge.
7. O'Connor J, Xin G: A new modernity?. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*. 2006; **9** (3): 271-283 Publisher Full Text
8. Thomas, K. (2017) Assessing intellectual property compliance in contemporary China: the World Trade Organisation TRIPS Agreement. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan.
9. White A, Xu S: A critique of China's cultural policy and the development of its cultural and

creative industries: the case of Shanghai. *Cultural Trends*. 2012; **21** (3): 249-257 Publisher Full Text
10. Keane, M. (2007) Created in China: The great new leap forward. London & New York: Routledge.

Is the work original in terms of material and argument?
Yes

Does it sufficiently engage with relevant methodologies and secondary literature on the topic?
Yes

Is the work clearly and cogently presented?
Yes

Is the argument persuasive and supported by evidence?
Yes

If any, are all the source data and materials underlying the results available?
Yes

Does the research article contribute to the cultural, historical, social understanding of the field?
Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: Chinese cultural policy; Chinese creative industries

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard.

Author Response 27 Sep 2025

Marcin Jacoby

Dear Professor White, Thank you very much for your very fast and thorough review of our paper and for providing us with so many suggestions on how to improve our text. We have tried to address all of the issues you pointed out, introducing the following changes:

- we have added some information (and a reference to a useful paper) on media reforms
- we have added some new content on the understanding on CCS in the P.R.C., drawing some parallels with the USSR and the Soviet bloc
- we have added a new paragraph on tourism and its relation to heritage protection and the CCS - your suggestion and explanation was very insightful indeed
- after reading the suggested paper (Gilardi et al. 2023) we have thoroughly revised the section on IP protection
- we have added new references to publications and materials connected with the

changes to the paper
- we have introduced other edits to the paper, following suggestions of Professor Michael Keane who was also kind enough to review the paper and provide his valuable comments.

We are very grateful for this opportunity, hope the paper is a little better now.

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Report 02 September 2025

https://doi.org/10.21956/openreseurope.21771.r57868

© 2025 Keane M. This is an open access peer review report distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

?

Michael Keane
[1] Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia
[2] Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia

The paper looks closely at cultural policy in the PRC, namely the outlines of the system, depicted as an organigram. This delegation of policy from the top and its interpretation at local levels will be useful to readers. The paper is well written and covers a lot of issues pertaining to the governance of the traditional cultural policy sphere. The paper largely seeks to map China's cultural policy initiatives and regulations on to a mostly European policy template. As such, the paper focuses mostly on non-digital production, which is perhaps a legacy of the UNESCO categorisation. In some respects, this doesn't really capture the state of dynamism across cultural domains in China. See my notes below about the burgeoning digital economy. The data discrepancy on cultural consumption between urban and rural is not surprising although the data classifications are a bit broad. It is hard to calculate per capita online cultural consumption from this. It is also hard to know how these figures are derived in China.

The literature review section is okay but probably requires more clarification. The authors have brought together several examples of Chinese and international scholarship in the literature review section. There is in fact a great deal of work on cultural, media and film policy in China, in Chinese, much of which is presented in The Blue Book series published annually by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences since the late 1990s. However, as the paper notes, there are few if any attempts in existing books or reports to explain the governance system, rather it is about noting policies and speeches, and providing data.

It is important to note the Marxist-Leninist relationship pertaining between cultural production and ideology in the PRC from the Yan'an Forum to the 1990s. Culture was a component of the superstructure, which was prioritized in the Cultural Revolution. The early 1990s saw an acceptance of the market mechanism under Deng Xiaoping, the Southern Tour in particular, and

this ‘reform of the cultural system’ was extended to public cultural institutions (shiye) which were forced to become industries (chanye/qiye). WTO accession and fear of western culture was thus the driver of marketisation (chanyehua). This theme appears regularly in documents and speeches of the period and is mentioned only in passing once in the paper. As a result of competition, China sought to incorporate cultural models from the west into its system, particularly adding copyright statutes to its system. Scholar-consultants from the west have introduced many ideas over the past two decades.

As noted in the paper, the ideological nature of culture is more evident since Xi Jinping came to power i.e. the superstructure/ ideological function has strengthened, and censorship has affected the confidence of many writers and artists, similar to the late Maoist period. As the paper is written from a European perspective it would be useful to note similarities with Soviet cultural policy, notably the emphasis on the Leninist theory of reflection which was subsumed into socialist realism as the template for narrative forms.

It is important to mention more about the digital cultural/creative economy and its regulation and governance. This is hinted at on p. 2 with the research question but digital creativity is only really mentioned on p. 12, which is surprising as Chinese people produce and consume culture online, and Chinese culture is now distributed internationally online.
The following statement on p. 13 therefore requires more attention “However, it can be assumed that the development of digital technology and the Internet, big data, artificial intelligence and other cutting-edge technologies will have a far-reaching impact on Chinese society and copyright law”. *This is not an assumption*. It is also important to cite Bytedance as a key player in the online video space as well as the predominance of the creator economy, namely the wanghong phenomenon, spurred by Internet + in 2015. Local governments have sought to monetize the e-commerce/creator economy sector. It is also necessary to note how local governments have incentivized cultural production through clustering of creative workers and the Maker Movement There is a sense that challenges to cultural production are coming thick and fast from AI.

Is the work original in terms of material and argument?

Yes

Does it sufficiently engage with relevant methodologies and secondary literature on the topic?

Partly

Is the work clearly and cogently presented?

Yes

Is the argument persuasive and supported by evidence?

Yes

If any, are all the source data and materials underlying the results available?

Yes

Does the research article contribute to the cultural, historical, social understanding of the field?

Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: Cultural and media policy in China

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however I have significant reservations, as outlined above.

Author Response 27 Sep 2025

Marcin Jacoby

Dear Professor Keane, We are very grateful for your timely and very detalied review of our paper. We have prepared an amended version which, as we hope, includes all the changes and adjustments you proposed:

- we have added a separate paragraph and expanded several other references to the importance and scope of digital cultural content in China
- we have added references to digital culture regulation in China
- we have added a paragraph on creative clusters
- we have mentioned Deng's 1992 Southern Tour and used your interpretation of the additional reasons for market-directed reforms of the cultural sector of the period (WTO, fear of Western culture)
- we have noted parallels between P.R.C.'s understanding of culture and that of the Soviet bloc + added references to Leninism and social realism.

We do hope that the paper looks a little better now!

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.