
In recent years, media studies and cultural studies have drawn the attention of more and more China scholars. A slew of books have been published on Chinese film, television, Internet, and other forms of popular culture. Based on this foundation of research and forming a dialogue with it, Michael Keane’s book, *Created in China: The Great New Leap Forward,* explores new dimensions of Chinese cultural studies. Rather than deal with specific cultural products such as films and television dramas, however, *Created in China* takes a macroscopic view of China’s cultural industries. Filling a gap in the field of China studies, this is the first book-length study in English-language scholarship that analyzes the dynamic relationship between economics and culture. In short, Keane’s work contributes significantly to the ongoing debate regarding the relationship between governance, globalization, and cultural innovation.

Since the Dengist reform was launched in 1978, China has re-integrated itself into the global capitalist system and become a sort of “workshop of the world” (*shijie gongchang*). With its seemingly unlimited reserves of cheap labor, the populous country has historically earned itself a reputation for churning out massive quantities of low-cost goods. Based on his intimate observation of China’s current circumstances, Keane asserts that China now seeks to make a transition from a “made-in-China” model to a “created-in-China,” model, thereby forging a new path to more sustainable development.

Keane divides his analysis into two parts, both of which take a different approach to the investigation of an issue central to the development of a creative economy. Part I, “Culture and Civilization,” draws on secondary works across various disciplines, including cultural studies, history, and economics to provide a big picture of culture and commerce in China. This part has five chapters. Chapter one lays the theoretical foundation of the book. In this chapter, Keane criticizes traditional Sinology, which tends to view Chinese culture as a static and monolithic entity. Emphasizing cultural diversity and economic exchange, Keane uses the key term “innovation ecology” to “describe five layers of China’s interaction within the global cultural economy,” including (1) low-cost production and imitation, (2) co-production and formatting, (3) East Asian creative economy, (4) Industrial clustering, and (5) peer communities (p. 13). In the proceeding chapter, Keane suggests that to go beyond the initial development stages of low-cost off-shoring and imitation, China should embrace institutional and structural changes so that the country can become more creative and competitive on a global level.

Showing what kind of traditions and resources can be mobilized, Chapter three provides a survey of many of China’s cultural achievements and economic interactions from the Neolithic age to the Qing dynasty. Importantly, Keane’s discussion of culture includes elements of *popular* culture, such as storytelling, popular drama, and vernacular fiction, thereby expanding the narrow definition of culture often limited to the examination of religious or ethnic customs and traditions. In so doing, Keane successfully provides readers with an overview of “the culture-knowledge economy of traditional China” (p. 35). Chapter four then turns to the period of modern China between 1849 and 1978, giving a detailed account of flourishing popular culture in China’s coastal cities before 1949. He then examines the trends of the standardization and politicizing of mass culture during the Maoist revolutionary years. It should be noted that recent scholarly works such as *The Chinese Cultural Revolution: A History* by Paul Clark (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008) do challenge the conventional view of “cultural
despotism” during the Maoist revolution. Clark, for instance, argues that substantial cultural production and artistic innovation were achieved during this period. Following this examination of Chinese culture during the Maoist years chapter five surveys contemporary Chinese culture since 1978. Keane closely reviews the mid-1980s’ “High Culture Fever” (wenhua re), which centered on heated discussions of individual subjectivity, intellectual labor, and technological innovation. The author then describes the developments and limitations of China’s creative economy since 1990s.

Whereas Part I of Keane’s work provides a big-picture analysis of China’s culture and commerce, Part II, “From Made in China to Created in China,” presents explicit evidence of China’s paradigmatic shift from a “made in China” manufacturing giant to a “created in China” commerce developer. The author, “a participant observer as well as detached chronicler” (p. 6) of this paradigm shift, has collected such evidence from his fieldwork. There are seven chapters in this part. First, chapter six provides the reader with a wealth of information on the state-sponsored, market-driven and urban-based Created in China project. As a member of the “epistemic community” composed of government officials, policy makers, cultural workers, and international expert consultants, Keane composes a meticulous log of conferences, seminars, symposia, and events promoting the development of China’s cultural industries. Following this, Keane argues that “creativity” itself is a “super-sign,” or a universally recognizable symbol; the “popular currency” of a super-sign, says Keane, can work “across linguistic and cultural barriers, and across disciplinary boundaries” (p. 80). This makes one wonder to what degree the operation of the “super-sign” should also be bound by historical and socioeconomic necessities.

Chapters seven and eight further highlight the urban-centered nature of the Created in China project. These two chapters provide case studies of new models of creative economy management, i.e. “creative clusters” (chuangyi jiju) and “creative precincts” (chuangyi yuanqu) (p. 95), based primarily in big cities such as Hong Kong, Beijing, Shanghai, and Chongqing. Chapter nine makes a study of a recent trend in Chinese television production: the adaptation of Euro-American reality shows. As this is the central topic in another of Keane’s books, New Television, Globalisation, and the East Asian Cultural Imagination, this chapter briefly describes several reality TV programs currently airing in China: Super Girl (chaoji nüsheng), Into Shangrila (zouru Xianggelila), and Win in China (ying zai Zhongguo). Applying Chris Anderson’s “long tail” theory, Keane argues that these popular programs challenge the conventional top-down power distribution model, which tends to maintain the authority of experts. For instance, the rules of the televised singing contest Super Girl permit the viewing audience to determine the outcome of the program. Audience members select the winner by voting for contestants via cell phone text message and by organizing voting campaigns. This granting of authority to the everyday television viewer diverges radically from the conventional model of Chinese power distribution, in which only the well-educated or senior experts would have the authority to decide the outcome of a contest. As a result, this text message voting and the resulting expression of the “people’s will” has triggered a heated nationwide discussion with respect to the relationship among civil society, democracy, and technology.

Chapter ten examines current, specific instances of joint ventures, licensing, and franchising as effective strategies for building a creative Chinese economy. The cases of Ningbo Bird, Artkey, Sunchime, and Moli are described as being successful as a direct result of their creativity. Chapter eleven highlights the author’s visits to a few creative clusters outside urban centers. Using the Badaling Great Wall, the Shaolin Temple, and the Hengdian Studio (Chinawood) as examples, Keane explores the strategies for creatively making use of cultural
traditions and resources. Finally, the last chapter concludes the volume by re-emphasizing the importance of creativity and by pointing out structural contradictions in China’s current system that might prevent China from moving toward a model of creativity at this time, (despite Keane’s understanding of this creativity as critical to Chinese development). Specifically, Keane asks how far the *Created in China* project can go, for instance, in light of China’s heavy-handed state surveillance and frequent intervention in the public sector. The appendix, “China’s cultural and creative industries: table of regulatory powers and functions,” is useful for readers to gain an overview of China’s policymaking government offices and organizations in the realm of cultural industries.

Although one might expect Keane to have included more critical assessment of the local and national problems that may potentially impede the development of the *Created in China* project, such as the urban/rural division, a global structural inequality and imbalance, and the commercialization of Chinese culture that results from the process itself of developing the *Created in China project*, Keane’s work *is* the first comprehensive study of China’s budding creative economy. Overall, Keane’s work is a timely study contributing enormously to the growing literature on the latest development of Chinese economy and culture. It should interest primarily students and scholars in China studies, cultural studies, media studies, and globalization studies. Thanks to its multi-disciplinary approach, it will also appeal to scholars, students and general readers interested in China’s economics, international business, and industrial development.

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