



Technology, Representation, and Governance: a Century Review and Outlook of the Creative Industry

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Abstract

This article reviews the century-long development history of creative industries, analyses the interaction between underlying technologies and representations of creative industries, and explores the inevitability of the cultural field of creative industries influencing the government's mode of social governance. Through historical facts and generalization, the article reveals how technological innovation reshapes creative expression while analyzing the impact of governance strategies on the industrial ecology, with the aim of providing strategic suggestions for the development of creative industries in the new era.

Keywords: Creative Industry; Technology; Representation; Social Governance

The creative industry is a new form of social production constructed by technological progress, and this concept gained global recognition with the coming to power of the Labor Party in the United Kingdom in 1997, which took the “creative industry” as an essential national industrial policy and achieved good results. For more than two decades, research on creative industries has mainly focused on the policies of governments and their impact on macroeconomics, while the specificity of the nature of creative industries - that is, the change of social consciousness triggered by the production of meaning and how this change potentially affects the structure of the national economy - has not yet been explored. -has not been explored enough. This has left the operating mechanism of creative industries in a state that cannot be accurately described. In the perception of experts in economics or management, creative industries seem to be a black box: only from the perspective of data analysis, the ratio of inputs to outputs of creative industries shows a high degree of uncertainty, and the large amount of cultural value generated by creative industries cannot be quantified because of the nature of cultural sharing; likewise, due to the nature of cultural sharing, creative industries are inevitably closely connected with social governance and national politics, and are deeply affected by social opinion, conceptual orientation, and national economic structure. Such “difficult to quantify” and “uncertainty” further aggravate the risks of creative industries at the investment and management levels.

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Cultural studies scholars, originated by the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies, have made specific observations and elaborations on creative industries and cultural representations and social governance in the last two decades, such as *Be Creative: Making a Living in the New Culture Industries* by Angela McRobbie (2016), and *The Cultural Industries* by David Hesmondhalgh (2018). With the rapid development of mobile Internet and e-commerce, especially the rapid rise of China's Internet ecosystem, the creative industry has experienced the iteration of brand-new models. For example, the success of mobile e-commerce platforms such as Taobao and Pinduoduo has not only changed consumers' shopping habits but also fostered a close connection between the creative industries and the economy, culture, and social governance, making these relationships more visible and clearer. Scholars living in the West have not felt this enough, lacking relevant experience and contemplation. Starting from the idea of cultural research, this paper tries to sort out the inner logic of the development of creative industries in the past hundred years from the perspectives of technological history and cultural history and make a preliminary inquiry into the law of movement of creative industries.

"Creative industries" is a concept whose scope has changed little but whose name has changed many times. It has been called "cultural industries" (Adorno, 1947), "copyright industries" (USA, after 1950), "creative industries" (UK, 1998), "cultural industries" (China, 2000), etc., and now it has been called by the Chinese mainstream. "Cultural industry" (China, 2000), and nowadays it is called "cultural creative industry" by Chinese mainstream media. The differences in concepts show the multidimensionality and ambiguity of the category in different times and countries, as well as the intensity of the movement within the category. To facilitate the research and discussion, this paper takes the least controversial "creative industry" as the unified title of this category.

1. Technology and Representation in the Creative Industries

It is not easy to understand the underlying motivation for the rise of the creative industries without a deeper look into the rise of the industrial revolution.

Take the "fashion design and fashion" sector (DCMS, 2001) of the creative industries as an example. The origins of the fashion and design industry can be traced back to the Industrial Revolution in the 18th and 19th centuries when the garment manufacturing sector experienced a qualitative leap. In terms of raw materials for garments, John Kay invented the flying shuttle in 1733, James Hargreaves invented the multi-shaft spinning machine in 1764; James Watt was awarded the first patent for the steam engine in 1765, and this epoch-making machine thus stepped from the experimental stage to the practical application; the steam engine was applied to a large number of textile mills after 1785, which liberated humanity from the repetitive labor of weaving; in terms of garment production, on 10th September 1846, the American inventor Elias Howe obtained the first patent for a sewing machine, marking the birth of the sewing machine. Subsequently, in 1889, the Singer Sewing Machine Company introduced the first motorized sewing machine, which further contributed to the substantial increase in garment production efficiency. In terms of clothing pattern making, in 1863, Butterick, who is American, began to sell paper samples so that the style of popular clothing could be sold from the court to the people. 1850-1879 s, with the invention and application of organic chemistry and chemical dyes, colorful and inexpensive clothing fabrics appeared in large quantities so that the production of clothing was gradually transformed from the traditional handmade custom to a large-scale standardization; during the two world wars in the first half of the 20th century, a large number of people entered the relevant units of the national war machine. The demand for standardized professional clothing with uniform specifications and only different sizes to choose from increased dramatically, and the clothing industry gradually evolved into a tight and complete production system under the catalyst of the wars.

However, human society's need for clothing is not only to cover the body but also to characterize the social identity, manifest their will, self-pleasure, and other functions. With the advent of the era of peace, these cultural and functional needs attached to the body of clothing began to revive; the public urgently needed to differentiate and standardize the production of clothing; the standardized mass production of the clothing industry has been challenging to meet these diversified needs.

With the booming of the clothing industry, Haute Couture, designed for the elite of the upper echelons of society, came into being. In 1858, Charles Frederick Worth opened the first Haute Couture house in Paris, introducing innovative concepts such as "couturier" and "catwalk"; and in 1868, the *Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture* was founded in Paris, defining the definition and standards of haute couture. These regulations closely linked haute couture to superior craftsmanship, unique design, and luxury quality, making haute couture, fashion designers, and fashion shows at the top of the clothing industry chain gradually become the focus of public aspirations.

In terms of guiding public opinion and pushing up the value of fashion, the first fashion magazine "Harper's BAZAAR" appeared in the United States in 1867, with 52 issues per year, providing fashion information, literary stories, and life guides for the American high society at that time; the fashion magazine "Vogue" was published in the United States in 1892, and it quickly became a global trend-setter for high society in the early 20th century. In these fashion magazines, woven with exquisite images and fantastic texts, fashionable clothing was characterized as an essential part of the lives of the elite, a dream to be admired and followed by the lower and middle classes. Thus, the earliest creative industries were born: firstly, fashion magazines constructed the "meaning" of life through the production of elaborate graphics and texts - which included the superiority of money and power, the pursuit of a large number of members of the opposite sex, the freedom to do whatever one wanted, etc. - and implied that in order to obtain these meanings, one had to be able to do whatever one wanted. --and implied that these meanings could be achieved by owning the same fashionable clothes. Next, fashion magazines work closely with the apparel industry to achieve the industrial chain production from "value" to "profit." Through the integration of holdings, some fashion magazines even lead the next season's fashion trends by virtue of their accurate grasp of the fabric production capacity of the upper reaches of the apparel industry chain.

After the 1950s, the industrialized mass-produced Ready-to-Wear and Prêt-à-Porter industries emerged, and the creative industry chain of fashion apparel became even longer: at the head of the chain was the haute fashion industry, followed closely by branded apparel and ready-to-wear for mass consumption. The former pours much effort into the design and display of the link, with the influence of celebrity designers, the catwalk display of the fashion week, and the interviews of magazines and media, fully demonstrating the unique ability of clothing to lead the fashion trend, reflecting the identity of the community, manifesting the will of individuality and bringing self-pleasure and so on. On the other hand, the latter, relying on the social attention and reputation accumulated by high fashion under the banner of "keeping up with the fashion trend," launches standardized products of different styles to the market in batches on an annual or seasonal basis. As fashions are constantly iterated with regular releases from the head fashion industry, consumers' desire to buy is continually stimulated. Overall, the demand in the apparel market has been dramatically expanded, and the creative industries have thus succeeded in alleviating the problem of overcapacity.

As an essential part of the creative industry, "fashion design and fashion" now drives the global apparel industry market of 1.7 trillion yuan per year and the production of nearly 100 billion pieces of apparel per year (GLOBAL INFO RESEARCH, 2024). The Industrial Revolution solved the technical problem of repetitive labor in the garment industry, greatly expanding the market and consumer base; however, the standardized production model led to overcapacity after the market demand reached its ceiling. How to sell the piles of garments? In the creative industry, through the form of representation, clothing products contain

meaning implanted in the minds of consumers, suggesting that owning a particular product can automatically obtain a specific precious meaning in life to stimulate consumers, triggering new needs. This approach has become a tried-and-true shot in the arm in times of weak consumption and overcapacity. It is thus clear that the creative industry, which is known as “popular design and fashion,” is an essential tool for “consumption-led production” in the post-industrial era. Therefore, the GDP created within the creative industry does not fully reflect its actual value, and we need to consider the overall GDP of the global apparel industry in close connection with the creative sector.

It is important to note that because the “fashion and design” industry has long been in the public spotlight, it is easy to “deify” the prominent figures in the industry, believing that these elites created the industry. However, when we look back at history, we can see that the formation of the “fashion and design” industry is the inevitable result of social labor. The inventors of haute couture and fashion magazines are no “greater” than the inventors of the flying shuttle or the sewing machine. Still, each of them just “accidentally” did the right thing in the trial-and-error practice of peer competition. There is, therefore, no overarching designer of the creative industries, and similarly, there is little government intervention in the sectors.

2. Representation and Governance of Creative Industries

Unlike “fashion and design,” which is closely linked to the global garment industry, “film and video,” as one of the representatives of the creative industries, is itself a substantial cultural consumption industry. In contemporary times, the film industry has not only become an essential force for socio-economic development due to its vast economic scale but also has become increasingly influential in terms of the ideology it conveys through its visual representations. In the eyes of the rulers, this kind of influence is like a “grey rhino” lurking in national life, which may lead to unpredictable consequences if not properly guided and controlled. They have issued relevant policies and decrees, treating it as an essential part of social governance.

On 28 December 1895, the Lumière brothers made the first public showing of the films they had produced in the basement of the Grand Café at 14 rue Capucine in Paris, including short films such as *Train in the Station* and *Factory Gates*, which marked the beginning of the age of cinema and were a great success. Cinema broke the monopoly on the perception of classic arts such as painting and music, allowing people to experience the world through moving pictures and sound and greatly enriching people’s entertainment lives. Seeing hope in the box office success of the Lumière Brothers, the film industry attracted more and more investors and creators and also gradually developed a number of segments, such as production, distribution, and screening, and developed into a vast industry.

Based on the booming film industry, in 1913, the Hungarian theorist Balázs (1884-1949) put forward his insight that the emergence of cinema was the beginning of a new culture in his book *The Visible Man - Cinema Culture*. He argued that the spread of print culture had gradually shifted human culture from a “visible culture” to a “conceptual culture” and that the abstract nature of words and symbols made ideas complex and challenging to popularize. The emergence of film is a rebellion against print culture, which returns to ancient visual art, making thoughts and emotions intuitive and visible through visual images (Chen & Fang, 2015). The theory of “visual culture” put forward by Balazs profoundly reveals the changes in the cultural landscape of the emerging modern society: culture is no longer confined to the ivory towers of a few elites, but rather, through the medium of visual culture, such as cinema, it has achieved true popularity among the public and shifted the dominant power.

After Balazs, European elite intellectuals pondered over the essential differences between film art and traditional art. In 1935, Walter Benjamin pointed out in his book “*The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical*

Reproduction” (1936) that, unlike theatre performances, the process of film production separates the actor’s performance in front of the camera from the post-production editing process and that the aura, which exists in the specific temporal and spatial fields of traditional art, has disappeared in film works, that has vanished from film productions. In other words, the perfect character that fascinates the audience on the screen is not the same thing as the actor himself, and even the actor himself does not know what image of himself he will end up having in the film. This gave filmmakers a great deal of creative freedom, allowing them to reconstruct the storylines and characters of their movies as they wished and to present these fictional stories and images on countless giant screens through mass reproduction of film, convincing the audience of their true nature.

Benjamin’s close friend, Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno (1903-1969) of the Frankfurt School in Germany, was deeply disturbed by this phenomenon. After in-depth consideration of music, radio, film, and other mass culture, Adorno “Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception” in 1944, pointing out that the culture industry is centered on profit-making, wrote the article and uses mechanical reproduction as a means of mass production of cultural products. According to Adorno, the culture industry replaces beautiful art with formalized, scientifically abridged, instrumental rationality to create a false sense of satisfaction through the provision of standardized cultural products, making popular culture a depthless, thoughtless object of consumption. The cultural industry has transformed works originally rich in artistic value into mere commodities, excessively highlighting their exchange value while neglecting their intrinsic use value. This logic of commodification leads to the alienation of culture, making cultural products a tool for capital appreciation, while individuals are further alienated in this consumption process. Further, the culture industry becomes a means of ideological manipulation in a capitalist society. It uses cultural products to control and domesticate the masses subconsciously, making them unconsciously submit to the established social order. In response to the seemingly diverse “personalities” produced by the culture industry, Adorno bluntly denounced them as “pseudo-personalities,” writing: “Personality is reduced to a universal capacity, a contingency, which can exist only if it is completely universal. The absolute rule of the cultural industry no longer has anything in common with freedom. What it proclaims is that you should follow the rules, even without being told any of them, and that you should conform to whatever already exists. You cannot think like anyone else. (Adorno & Rabinbach, 1975)”

Adorno’s left-wing position and stance in defense of classical art reflect the reflection and rejection of the modern mode of cultural production based on standardized reproduction by the elites of modern society. However, Adorno was hesitant to consider whether the “popular culture” that emerged in the era of mechanical reproduction was equivalent to “popular culture” and continued to be opposed to “refined culture.” After all, the culture industry has provided the masses with more knowledge about the world and a variety of value choices, thus freeing them from the marginalization of pre-modern society due to illiteracy. With the help of cultural products such as films, the masses have been able to develop a specific understanding of the workings of society; the commodity nature of the cultural industry has enabled consumers to “vote” through their purchases and, to a certain extent, to gain a voice in the cultural arena. In addition, as a free and competitive cultural market, capitalists with different goals can freely enter and exit the market. Left-wing culture and subculture can also appear in front of the public with the power of capital, such as the French New Wave films of the 1950s and 1960s (Marie & Richard John Neupert, 2003). Therefore, although cinema is essentially regarded as “an ideological tool of capitalist society” from a micro level, it still retains the spiritual flame of Enlightenment to a certain extent. The opposition between “popular culture” and “refined culture” no longer seems to be appropriate for “popular culture.” Because popular culture, which enjoys the fruits of the culture industry, has become a cultural field where all social classes compete for symbols and obtain temporary social consensus (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).

Symbolic competition in this arena will undoubtedly alert the ruling class. Suppose the film industry is allowed to develop in free market competition. In that case, it is likely that certain products that are harmful to the maintenance of social order, such as uncontrolled promotion of violence, pornography, and ideological propaganda that is detrimental to the government, will win the competition. Governments have, therefore, intervened in the cultural arena through various means to regulate film production.

The origins of film censorship in the United States date back to the early 20th century, to *People v. Doris* in 1897, when films were banned because they were deemed to be “beyond the bounds of public decency,” and to Chicago in 1907, when a bill was passed allowing the government to censor the content of films. In 1930, the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association of America (MPPDA) enacted the Motion Picture Production Code (Hays Code), the first censorship of film content in the U.S., which set out a range of prohibited content from appearing in films. In 1968, the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) formally introduced the film classification system, which was introduced to address the limitations of film censorship and to satisfy the audience’s demand for diversity in film content. The classification system divides films into different grades, providing viewers with suggestions on how to watch films while safeguarding the freedom of film production. The specific classification system is as follows: G (suitable for all ages) → PG (parental guidance recommended) → PG-13 (parental discretion strongly advised) → R (restricted) → NC-17 (adults only).

France also has a film classification system, which has been in place since 1961, with 13 and 18 years of age as the age criteria for classification, with the aim of protecting minors from objectionable content. The classification system is managed by a censorship committee set up by the French National Cinema Centre (CNC), which ensures that the content of films is appropriate for children. In addition, the French film classification system stresses the protection of children while respecting the freedom of expression of film creators. The French government supports the development of the film industry through a variety of policies, such as the distribution mechanism by line, the film quota system, industry protection, and international cooperation, especially for art films and independent films. The rest of the countries, such as the United Kingdom, Germany, and Japan, have similar policies to regulate and support the film industry, which will not be mentioned in this space.

Looking at the regulatory policies of governments, the core idea is a film classification system. That is, the consumer market for films is subdivided according to the age and stage of psychological maturity of the audience, and creative freedom is encouraged in different tracks, thus protecting the overall diversity of social cognition. This system is similar to the spatial setting of a modern hotel: the hotel lobby is open to all guests, but their behavior is more strictly regulated; residents who have been given a room card can only go to the corresponding floor and are subject to the more relaxed supervision of the administrator of that floor; access to the interior of the room protects the privacy of the residents, and is not subject to supervision in the absence of extreme circumstances. Such a setup ensures that each resident has complete freedom while not interfering with the freedom of others. The way modern countries think about the film industry’s classification system can also be seen as a holistic approach to the cultural sector: culture is a whole, but the governance of the government’s cultural sphere requires a reasonable slicing and dicing of that whole. This covers a wide range of audience considerations in terms of education, economic status, interest preferences, and the needs of special groups while considering the harmonious symbiosis between public culture and private communication needs.

At the turn of the century, when the British Labour government listed the “film and video” industry as one of its 13 key creative industries, the film industry had just raked in \$351 million at the global box office with the latest installment of the “James Bond” franchise, *Goldeneye* (1995). Since the release of the first

James Bond film, *Dr No*, in 1962, and the latest, *007: No Time to Die*, in 2021, the 007 franchise has grossed more than \$7.6 billion worldwide. Thanks to the film classification system that has been in place since 2002, the British film industry has not only managed to maintain the vitality of the culture and industry chain but has also maintained consumer viewing habits. This accumulation has fed into the production of large-scale films for all ages, resulting in high-quality, highly profitable films.

The film industry's impetus to the real estate industry as well as business is also apparent. The construction of cinemas has not only led to the prosperity of the surrounding catering and retail companies, but the demand for on-site locations for film shooting has also further boosted the development of the tourism industry. In addition, film peripheral products such as toys and games have also brought lucrative revenue to the relevant sectors. All these factors will ultimately be transformed into considerable fiscal revenue for the Government through the channel of taxation.

Looking back at the history and current situation of the film industry, film, as a symbol of visual culture, has become the focus of symbolic competition among social groups in the field of popular culture, with far-reaching effects on the shaping of social ideology. Driven by both economic and political interests, governments are bound to include film in the category of "creative industries" as a key tool for social governance. This is true of the film industry, as well as many other areas related to popular culture, such as music, performing arts, publishing, radio and television broadcasting, advertising, design, art, and antique markets. However, they are less influential than the film industry.

3. Current Situation and Prospects of Creative Industries

By 2025, with the rapid development of artificial intelligence technology, the creative industry has undergone profound changes, and human society has entered a completely new stage of development. AI and robots will replace a large amount of repetitive labor, and creativity will become the core work and core value of human beings in the future. Over the past century or so, the creative industry has grown with the Industrial Revolution, from being a small part of the upstream of the industrial chain to becoming the heart of the whole industrial chain. With the robotization and intelligence of industrial production in the future, creative industries will increasingly highlight their core position and become a key engine driving economic, cultural, and social progress.

From the three keywords above - technology, representation, and governance - it is possible to see the basic laws governing the operation of creative industries at the micro, meso, and macro levels of society: mechanical reproduction technology pushes the creative industries to develop on a large scale; the creative industries have become the focus of competition among social groups because they represent cultural values; and the government guides and controls the creative industries through governance means to ensure that they continue to play a central role in the dual benefits of economy and culture. Based on these three levels of analyses, looking into the future of creative industries, we should not limit ourselves to their direct economic value and regard them as increasing income in the national economy; instead, we should pay more attention to their great potential in shaping social culture and guiding consumption. In addition, we should look at the creative industry from a dynamic and developmental perspective. After all, the core force driving its development - mechanical reproduction technology - has quietly stepped into the new era of digital intelligence technology, bringing about changes and impacts on the creative industry that far exceed those of any time in the past.

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