

The Business of Culture

Cultural Entrepreneurs in China and Southeast Asia, 1900-65

Edited by Christopher Rea
and Nicolai Volland

FOREWORD BY WANG GUNGWU



UBC Press · Vancouver · Toronto

Sample Material © 2015 UBC Press

Contemporary Chinese Studies

This series provides new scholarship and perspectives on modern and contemporary China, including China's contested borderlands and minority peoples; ongoing social, cultural, and political changes; and the varied histories that animate China today.

A list of titles in this series appears at the end of this book.

© UBC Press 2015

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without prior written permission of the publisher.

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

The business of culture : cultural entrepreneurs in China and Southeast Asia, 1900-65 / edited by Christopher Rea and Nicolai Volland ; foreword by Wang Gungwu.

(Contemporary Chinese studies)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Issued in print and electronic formats.

Co-published by: Hong Kong University Press.

ISBN 978-0-7748-2780-5 (bound). – ISBN 978-0-7748-2782-9 (pdf). –

ISBN 978-0-7748-2783-6 (epub)

1. Cultural industries – China – Case studies. 2. Cultural industries – Southeast Asia – Case studies. 3. Businesspeople – China – Case studies. 4. Businesspeople – Southeast Asia – Case studies. 5. Entrepreneurship – China – Case studies. 6. Entrepreneurship – Southeast Asia – Case studies. 7. China – Economic conditions – 20th century – Case studies. 8. Southeast Asia – Economic conditions – 20th century – Case studies. I. Rea, Christopher, author, editor II. Volland, Nicolai, author, editor III. Series: Contemporary Chinese studies

HD9999.C9473C45 2015

330.951

C2014-906931-6

C2014-906932-4

Canada

UBC Press gratefully acknowledges the financial support for our publishing program of the Government of Canada (through the Canada Book Fund), the Canada Council for the Arts, and the British Columbia Arts Council.

Financial support from the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation and the UBC Hampton Fund is greatly appreciated.

UBC Press

The University of British Columbia

2029 West Mall

Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z2

www.ubcpress.ca

Sample Material © 2015 UBC Press

Contents

List of Illustrations / vii

Foreword / ix

Wang Gungwu

Acknowledgments / xiii

Introduction / 3

Christopher Rea and Nicolai Volland

1 Enter the Cultural Entrepreneur / 9

Christopher Rea

PART 1: CULTURAL PERSONALITIES

2 Between the Literata and the New Woman: Lü Bicheng as Cultural Entrepreneur / 35

Grace Fong

3 The Butterfly Mark: Chen Diexian, His Brand, and Cultural Entrepreneurism in Republican China / 62

Eugenia Lean

4 Culture by Post: Correspondence Schools in Early Republican China / 92

Michael Gibbs Hill

PART 2: TYCOONS

5 Aw Boon Haw, the Tiger from Nanyang: Social Entrepreneurship, Transregional Journalism, and Public Culture / 121

Sin Yee Theng and Nicolai Volland

Sample Material © 2015 UBC Press

- 6 One Chicken, Three Dishes: The Cultural Enterprises of
Law Bun / 150
Sai-Shing Yung and Christopher Rea

PART 3: COLLECTIVE ENTERPRISES

- 7 Local Entrepreneurs, Transnational Networks: Publishing
Markets and Cantonese Communities within and across
National Borders / 181
Robert Culp
- 8 Cultural Consumption and Cosmopolitan Connections:
Chinese Cinema Entrepreneurs in 1920s and 1930s Singapore / 207
Chua Ai Lin
- 9 Cultural Entrepreneurship in the Twilight: The Shanghai Book
Trade Association, 1945-57 / 234
Nicolai Volland

Epilogue: Beyond the Age of Cultural Entrepreneurship,
1949-Present / 259
Christopher A. Reed and Nicolai Volland

Glossary / 283

Bibliography / 295

List of Contributors / 317

Index / 320

Illustrations

Figures

- Cover illustration of *Hong meigui* [Red Rose] 2, 24 (4 April 1926) / 2
- 2.1 Photo captioned “Photograph of Lady Scholar Lü Bicheng” / 40
 - 2.2 Lü Bicheng and her sister Lü Meisun are welcomed in Beijing / 40
 - 2.3 “Educator” Lü Bicheng and “Sportswoman” Tang Jianwo / 41
 - 2.4 Back view of Ms. Lü Bicheng / 42
 - 2.5 Lü Bicheng and her sister, Lü Meisun, with Liu Qianzhi / 42
 - 2.6 Photo of Lü Bicheng taken in a New York studio, 1929 / 49
 - 2.7 Photo of Lü Bicheng in *Meilijian jianguo shigang*, 1925 / 55
 - 3.1 “Peerless Toothpowder,” carton and logo / 69
 - 3.2 “Peerless Toothpowder,” colour logo / 70
 - 3.3 “Peerless Brand,” registered trademark / 71
 - 3.4 “Butterfly Cream” ad, *Shenbao*, 1932 / 72
 - 3.5 “Butterfly Cream,” bottle and carton / 73
 - 3.6 Butterfly in “Peerless/Butterfly” logo / 73
 - 3.7 “Peerless/Butterfly” brand, registered trademark, ca. 1933 / 74
 - 4.1 Illustration of the ICS phonographic method / 97
 - 4.2 Advertisement for National Language Phonograph Records / 113
 - 5.1 Advertisement for Tiger Balm featuring Dorothy Lamour / 140
 - 6.1 Cover of the second issue of *Martial Arts World*, 1959 / 153
 - 6.2 Law Bun’s movie magazine, *Universal Screen*, 1958 / 155
 - 6.3 A 1970s advertisement for the male virility pill Golden Balls / 156
 - 6.4 The inaugural cover of the Hong Kong edition of *Blue Cover Detective Magazine*, 1950 / 157
 - 6.5 Cover of the inaugural issue of *Literary New Wave*, 1956 / 160
 - 6.6 A neighbourhood book and magazine rental stall in Singapore / 169

- 6.7 Tung Pui-sun's cover illustration for *Blue Cover Detective Magazine* 4 / 170
- 6.8 Publicity artwork for *Six-Fingered Lord of the Lute* / 170
- 6.9 Cover of *Her Love Tears*, artwork by Tung Pui-sun / 170
- 6.10 Cover illustration from *Scenes from Jin Yong's Novels*, by Tung Pui-sun / 172
- 7.1 The cover of *Tingzhou Quarterly* / 194
- 8.1 Stills from Samarang, *Alhambra Magazine* / 221
- 8.2 The Alhambra and Marlborough cinemas, 1947 / 224

Tables

- 5.1 Number of Aw Boon Haw's donations to charity organizations, 1929-39 / 128
- 5.2 Aw Boon Haw's donations to schools, 1929-39 / 129
- 5.3 Frequency of SCJP and NYSP news and illustrations quoted by English-language newspapers before World War II / 133
- 5.4 Frequency of SCJP and NYSP news and illustrations quoted by English-language newspapers after World War II / 133
- 5.5 Newspapers established and owned by Aw Boon Haw / 134

Foreword

WANG GUNGWU

In an age when education authorities encourage students to learn entrepreneurial skills as well as develop their knowledge and thinking capacities, everyone has the opportunity to be a cultural entrepreneur. This is no less true in China than anywhere else, although the phenomenon in China was long muted when compared to its East Asian neighbours. Transnational publishing, media and entertainment, schools and colleges have now provided us with outstanding success stories. With the Chinese market in cultural services so large, it would be surprising if Chinese entrepreneurs did not turn these services into dynamic and profitable industries.

This volume of essays examines the modern business of culture in the first two-thirds of the twentieth century. The essays provide new material and interesting insights about how this branch of business took its modern form and how various people with education turned to the market for profit, including those steeped in traditional learning who adapted quickly to new kinds of enterprises. The editors, in their introduction, identify three types of entrepreneur: the cultural personality, the tycoon, and the collective enterprise, each of which Christopher Rea theorizes in Chapter 1, “Enter the Cultural Entrepreneur.”

I was familiar with the careers of creative individuals like Zhang Yuanji, who made full use of his traditional literati background to make the Commercial Press a business success. I was particularly struck by how one of his successors, Wang Yunwu, proved, by his exceptional entrepreneurial talents, that a little education can go a long way in the world of business. The difference between the two men marked a remarkable transition for the Commercial Press, but it could hardly reflect the broad nexus between business and culture that this volume of essays explores. The editors, by conceptualizing the cultural entrepreneur as they have, set the stage for a comparison of individuals coming from strong cultural backgrounds with tycoons who plunged into the business of culture, men like Aw Boon Haw and Law Bun. Furthermore, by examining both the close-knit groups that churned out

books and magazines and the loosely structured ones that ventured into the new world of cinema, the essays illuminate the commercial dynamism that enabled so many of the educated to master new business challenges.

These essays will encourage others to examine further the historical change in attitudes towards learning, a change that provided opportunities for entrepreneurs to turn to Confucian learning to gain respectability. At the same time, there were initiatives that enabled the less successful literati to approach the margins of commerce with a clear conscience. Some of the strands explored in these essays suggest continuities traceable to the Ming and Qing dynasties, and even to pockets of business during the Song and Yuan dynasties.

The editors are conscious of the importance of pursuing the phenomenon to recent generations of cultural producers, and they contrast the achievements of those in post-1949 Mainland China with those in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and abroad, notably in cities like Singapore and San Francisco. The epilogue tantalizingly brings the story to the present and points to areas for future research. The campaigns after 1949 to eliminate capitalist commerce were accompanied by revolutions sans culture that held sway for over thirty years. After 1978, entrepreneurship was redefined. Following the policies of reform, there was an explosive return of business energy that reconnected with the well-established networks of Chinese outside the People's Republic of China (PRC), and the results have astonished the world. Of course, constraints remain, and the social and political tensions arising from rapid development now go beyond issues of culture and business. In this respect, the editors raise cogent questions and rightly argue that these essays provide clues about where new thrusts of entrepreneurship may lead and how they may impact future Chinese cultural activity.

The interstices between state-guided enterprises and their cadre-capitalist partners have produced innovations in business forms. Many stories wait to be told. Reading about the people who built cultural enterprises under the harshest conditions before and after World War II, I am reminded of Wang Guangya, the young audit official from Henan Province who went to work in Taiwan in 1947. When he saw the hundreds of thousands who followed the Nationalist government to cross the Straits, he saw the potential for an accountancy school. From very trying beginnings, he went on to build colleges of commerce, management, and technology. With his profits, he set up a foundation dedicated to higher education. After a visit to the Mainland in 1993, he established similar colleges in Inner Mongolia and Beijing, as well as back in his home province. Today, his college in the provincial capital of

Zhengzhou has become independent and is about to be raised to a full-fledged university. Despite its higher fees, thousands of students seek to gain admission every year. Now in his nineties, Wang Guangya still oversees its development and visits it from Taipei every month. His only daughter, who grew up in the PRC, manages the university and is interested in expanding links with similar institutions overseas.

The field of education, of course, has strong cultural content that is unlike most other kinds of business. I am nevertheless impressed by the transnational urges that are growing more ambitious each year. These urges spring from the many ways, described vividly in this volume, in which cultural entrepreneurs of the twentieth century were adapting to modernization. These essays provide valuable pointers to future developments, and I congratulate the authors for bringing their insights to our attention.

Acknowledgments

Many individuals and institutions contributed to this intellectual venture, and we take great pleasure in thanking them. Our greatest debt is to our fellow authors, who contributed their groundbreaking research to this volume and who patiently laboured through round after round of revisions. This project was conceived and initiated by Christopher Rea and developed in collaboration with Eugenia Lean and Nicolai Volland, as well as numerous colleagues whose invaluable input made this volume possible. Apart from the contributors to this book, these include Huang Jianli, I Lo-fen, Sara Kile, Kenny K.K. Ng, Soon Keong Ong, Eric Tagliacozzo, Jing Tsu, Yu Chien-ming, and Zheng Yangwen. Their scholarship has helped us to test and refine the notion of cultural entrepreneurship. We also want to thank Bao Weihong, Hsu Hui-Lin, Adam McKeown, and Pan Shaw-Yu, who have shared invaluable insights with us. A special thanks goes to Professor Wang Gungwu, who graciously agreed to contribute a foreword to this volume.

We are fortunate to have enjoyed the support of the Weatherhead East Asian Institute at Columbia University and the Department of Chinese Studies at the National University of Singapore (NUS). In both New York and Singapore, a team of graduate students helped us to take care of the myriad issues involved in planning and implementing what turned out to be a multi-stage project. In particular, we thank Elizabeth Lawrence, Ji Xing, Phoon Yuen Ming, Yang Yan, and Zhu Yi.

We thank the organizations whose generous funding made this research possible: the Weatherhead East Asian Institute at Columbia University, the American Council of Learned Societies, the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange, the Hampton Grant Fund at the University of British Columbia, the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at NUS, and the NUS Department of Chinese Studies.

We are especially grateful to Emily Andrew at UBC Press for her enthusiastic support of this project; to our production editor, Megan Brand; and to

our meticulous copy editor, Joyce Hildebrand. Our thanks also to Rich Carkeek, Kathryn Leonard, Alan Presley, and Zhijia Shen at the University of Washington Libraries, as well as to Liu Jing at the UBC Asian Library, for their assistance in obtaining the cover image.

The Business of Culture



Cover illustration of *Hong meigui* [Red Rose] 2, 24 (4 April 1926). From the collection of the East Asia Library of the University of Washington Libraries.

Introduction

CHRISTOPHER REA and NICOLAI VOLLAND

“No man but a blockhead ever wrote, except for national revolution.” Or so Samuel Johnson might have written, had he been a historian of modern Chinese culture. For most of the twentieth century, the Chinese writers, poets, playwrights, and artists of the history books were invariably ascribed high-minded motives such as patriotism, social justice, or national salvation. Shunted to history’s margins were figures like the gentleman who adorns the cover of this book. “The Author” (as he is identified) is a profit machine, a commercial mechanism for effortlessly churning out reams of written product for mass consumption. Appearing on the cover of a 1920s popular fiction magazine, The Author stood for an industry that had grown into one of the most profitable sectors of the modern cultural economy, not just in his native Shanghai but all over the world.¹ Just as Dr. Johnson, writing in eighteenth-century London, tarred all writers as money grubbers, so his Chinese counterpart in early-twentieth-century Shanghai reduced modern scribblers to mechanized hacks. Yet, the cartoon caricatures not just people but processes. It condenses into one image the complex ways in which entrepreneurship was changing how culture was being produced and consumed in the modern age.

This book explores how the rise of entrepreneurship transformed the cultural sphere in China and Southeast Asia during the period of rapid modernization stretching from the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. In particular, it highlights patterns of *cultural entrepreneurship*, an analytical category that helps to explain new practices of individual and collective agency characterized by mobility between cultural professions and modes of cultural production. This concept takes for granted that the motives and material conditions that shape cultural production are more complex than either Dr. Johnson’s quip or “The Author” cartoon suggest. An author in 1920s Shanghai, for instance, was unlikely to be just a writer; he or she might also have been making a living as a stage actor, radio

personality, advertising artist, or filmmaker. How do we account for this type of pluralistic and self-reinventing behaviour? In developing the notion of “cultural entrepreneurship,” we draw attention both to the social and political changes that facilitated newly flexible approaches to the business of culture and to the transformative roles of modern mass media, communication, and transportation technologies, which reduced costs and encouraged experimentation in various cultural fields.

We argue that pluralistic approaches to cultural production represent a major shift in Chinese attitudes towards culture, one that historians have only begun to explore. We do not argue that cultural entrepreneurship was an exclusively Chinese practice; indeed, a key goal of this book is to prompt new inquiries into its global dimensions. But as a start, this book focuses on a Chinese cultural sphere stretching geographically from Beijing and Shanghai to Hong Kong and Singapore and temporally from the late Qing dynasty to Singapore’s independence. This transregional nexus was of undisputed importance to the development of Chinese cultural modernity. It has been equally important in fostering a myth identified by Wang Gungwu, one that holds every overseas Chinese to be “a tycoon and a millionaire” and the Chinese as a race to be entrepreneurial “geniuses.”²

The ten interlinked studies in this volume offer an antidote to such hagiography. Christopher Rea’s chapter lays out the theoretical considerations that gave rise to this collective exploration of cultural entrepreneurship as a historical phenomenon. Rea analyzes the historical contours of Chinese cultural entrepreneurship and lays out some basic conceptual foundations as a tool for historical, biographical, and textual analysis. In addition to demonstrating how this framework sheds new light on cultural institutions, agents, and artistic trends, the chapter introduces the three models of cultural entrepreneurship that shape this book’s basic structure: the *cultural personality model*, the *tycoon model*, and the *collective enterprise model*.

The following chapters test this tripartite paradigm against a number of specific cases. Each analyzes the activities of an individual or collective agent and probes their particular type of cultural activity. Some are familiar names. Chapters discussing Lü Bicheng, Chen Diexian, Lin Shu, Aw Boon Haw, and Jin Yong reveal their careers to be more dynamic and fluid than the familiar labels of poet, writer, translator, businessman, or publisher suggest. Other chapters highlight transformative agents who have been largely overlooked. These include individuals such as Law Bun, a Hong Kong pulp fiction and film magnate, as well as collective enterprises, such as the film distributors

working in the early Singapore/Malayan motion picture market, and the not-for-profit civic organizations based in Republican-era Guangdong. They also include entrepreneurial models that blend the individual brand with the authority of the corporation, as did Shanghai-based correspondence schools of the 1910s and 1920s.

Part 1 focuses on the agency of cultural personalities, individuals who built their own personal brand of creativity as a cultural authority and leveraged it to create and sustain various cultural enterprises. Grace Fong's chapter examines the remarkable career of Lü Bicheng, who, on the eve of the 1911 Republican revolution, parlayed her literary prestige as a talented classical-style poet into roles such as newspaper contributor and principal of a Beijing girls' school. Fong goes on to show how Lü then used her business fortune to build a high-profile persona as a globe-trotting "new woman" who relayed her overseas experiences – auditing classes at Columbia University, dancing with foreign men – through literary dispatches mailed home to eager readers. Lü's case reveals the constraints and societal expectations faced by career-minded women during this transitional epoch, as well as the new opportunities available to talented, wealthy, and resourceful agents of an emerging modern culture.

In Chapter 3, Eugenia Lean profiles the activities of Chen Diexian, who merged his enthusiasms for science, technology, fiction, and publishing into an array of mutually reinforcing pharmaceutical and literary ventures based in Hangzhou and Shanghai. Lean focuses on how Chen transferred his personal brand as the "Butterfly Immortal" of the fiction world into a corporate "Butterfly brand" of consumer products – how he built this brand through celebrity endorsements and defended it against industry competitors. Through a sophisticated analysis of Chen's brand and his deployment of it, Lean highlights not only the close attention that Chinese cultural entrepreneurs paid to the symbolic power of the individual persona but also the tenacity with which they fought to protect their interests in China's evolving intellectual-property-rights regime.

Michael Hill analyzes the politics and promise of a distinctly modern entrepreneurial institution – the correspondence school – which began pitching to China's would-be self-improvers in the 1910s. The English-language course offered by the Commercial Press, and the Course in Chinese Literature headed by the renowned translator and writer Lin Shu, both presented linguistic competence as the key to becoming a modern Chinese subject. Hill delves into these schools' use of gramophone technology to

promote new learning methods and the roles of cultural personalities such as the ardent traditionalist Lin Shu and the English-teaching impresario Fong F. Sec, who embodied the values idealized in the schools' promotional materials. Filling a market niche, these enterprises appealed to reader-students' self-consciousness as cosmopolitan subjects and offered them a new entrepreneurial approach to self-fashioning through language.

Part 2 of this book focuses on tycoons, entrepreneurs who built substantial clout in the Chinese cultural sphere by forging synergies between their industrial, cultural, political, and philanthropic interests. This section takes us from China to Hong Kong and Singapore, which served as bases, refuges, and markets for Chinese entrepreneurs. In Chapter 5, Sin Yee Theng and Nicolai Volland examine the entrepreneurial career of Aw Boon Haw. From his base in Singapore, Aw expanded the traditional-medicine business that he had inherited into a transregional pharmaceutical empire, centred on the Tiger Balm brand, and used the profits to become a major philanthropist. At the same time, he invested in newspapers across Southeast Asia and China and ventured into the realm of public culture. Aw leveraged experiences and capital – financial, social, and cultural – across his various investments, and these manoeuvres helped to shape the broader cultural marketplace. Sin and Volland argue that new technologies and social practices not only allowed the appearance of new players within the cultural field but also expanded the definition of culture at the turn of the twentieth century.

Sai-Shing Yung and Christopher Rea compare the intertwined but differing fortunes of two post-1949 émigrés from the Mainland who became Hong Kong media moguls: Law Bun and Jin Yong. Law, a pioneer in “pulp culture,” published a variety of magazine, book, and newspaper franchises and founded a film production company, cross-selling stories through a strategy he termed “one chicken, three dishes.” Jin Yong – the famous martial arts novelist, founder of the *Ming Pao* newspaper, and political commentator – combined literary talent and business acumen to become one of the best-selling Chinese writers of all time. In considering these two influential figures' differing levels of popular prestige, Yung and Rea draw attention to genre hierarchies, illustrations as a mechanism for cross-selling literary works, and points of divergence between the cultural personality and the tycoon.

Part 3 shifts the focus from individuals to cultural institutions and their entrepreneurial activities across borders – provincial and national – and across political epochs. In Chapter 7, Robert Culp highlights a not-for-profit publishing model pursued by civic, cultural, and local government organizations in Guangdong Province that reached out to Cantonese readers in

diaspora during the first third of the twentieth century. Culp shows that the practices, motivations, and target audiences for these groups' cultural production were starkly different from the high-capital, for-profit activities of the big Shanghai commercial publishers. To underscore the difference, Culp introduces the concept of "social productivity," in which the goal is not accumulating capital or bolstering the prestige of an individual but, rather, the fostering and sustaining of "social persons, organizations, and communities" – in this case, through hometown-oriented journals.

Chua Ai Lin's chapter offers the first ever in-depth study of Chinese entrepreneurs in the early Singapore cinema industry. Chua argues that during the 1920s and 1930s, distribution, exhibition, and promotion (particularly advertising), rather than film production, offered the greatest opportunities for local entrepreneurs, who helped to shape consumer culture by leveraging international networks. Highlighting the cosmopolitan nature of these collective enterprises, she depicts the landscape of Singapore's pre-war cinema industry as a contest between big players, such as Shaw Brothers and Cathay, and smaller exhibition-distribution ventures, which were often run by anglo-phone Straits Chinese. Multi-ethnic networks, Chua demonstrates, were key for coping with challenges such as the Great Depression, the introduction of the talkies, and the logistical challenges of mounting roving exhibitions and establishing movie house chains across the region's varied cultural topography.

In Chapter 9, Nicolai Volland documents the decline of cultural entrepreneurship as the dominant paradigm of cultural production in China after the Communist revolution in 1949. Focusing on the example of the Chinese publishing industry, Volland shows how shifting market dynamics and the cultural policies of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) combined to weaken the leverage of the sector's main agents, the large publishing houses – collective agents, represented by their trade association in Shanghai. Their efforts to find a new role proved futile as the CCP redefined the nature and function of culture and began a gradual transition to socialist forms of production and management of creative labour. Once the CCP pushed ahead to rebuild the cultural sector along these lines, the "cultural worker" replaced the cultural entrepreneur as the foremost agent of cultural production in the People's Republic of China.

The epilogue, co-authored by Christopher Reed and Nicolai Volland, reaches beyond the early twentieth century to explore how the concept of cultural entrepreneurship can be adapted and applied to other historical and geographical contexts. Reed and Volland argue that this analytical

category helps us to understand patterns of cultural agency even in environments hostile to entrepreneurship. To this end, the chapter examines two more-recent cases: entrepreneurial behaviour by academic painters in the command economy of the Mao era and the resurgence of commercial cultural production in China since the late 1980s. Looking at these starkly different socio-economic climates side by side reveals how cultural entrepreneurship adapts and entrepreneurial agency mutates as a result of new constraints and opportunities in the cultural arena.

We now live in an age that takes for granted the mutual integration of various media of cultural creation and transmission. This book opens up a new paradigm for explaining the roles of the various agents involved in these exchanges and the reasons that they have had such a profound impact on the business of culture in the modern world.

Notes

- 1 Cover illustration of *Hong meigui* [Red Rose] 2, 24 (4 April 1926).
- 2 Wang, *Chinese Overseas*, 100.

1 Enter the Cultural Entrepreneur

CHRISTOPHER REA

In “Inspiration” (1946), a short story by Qian Zhongshu (1910-98) published in postwar Shanghai, the ghost of a deceased cultural entrepreneur appears as witness against The Writer, who is in Hell facing the final judgment of his literary career. The entrepreneur, we learn, made his fortune with such health products as Brain-Boosting Hair Tonic (*bunao yizhi shengfayou*), Cod Liver Gum (*yuganyou kouxiangtang*), and Vitastick (*weitaming chungao*).¹ With earnings from these products as his capital, he went into business with The Writer, commissioning the latter to adapt several of his novels into “healthy dramas” meant to nurture audiences’ physical and psychological well-being. Unfortunately, The Writer later pens a tribute to his business partner so elegiac that it kills him.

This episode is a minor digression in a story that satirizes numerous aspects of contemporary Chinese culture, taking to task, among other offenders, an author guilty of market opportunism and a businessman who condescends to dabble in art. Qian found both entrepreneurial approaches to culture distasteful and directed his sharpest irony at the figure whose occupation most closely approximated his own. (The Writer’s artistry is revealed to be questionable, as audiences sleep through his comedies and laugh at his tragedies.) Its sarcasm aside, Qian’s caricature reads as a wishful epitaph for a figure that for decades had been a conspicuous presence in Chinese cultural life: the cultural entrepreneur.

A New Paradigm of Mobile Cultural Agency

Qian’s story condemns a type of cultural practice that many scholars have observed but none have theorized. Historians typically identify the creators of modern culture by discrete occupational categories – novelist, playwright, translator, filmmaker, actor, editor, journalist, artist, musician, intellectual, and so on – subdividing the cultural sphere into specific types of creative labour. The discrete occupational category is an epistemological cornerstone of cultural history. Individuals whose knowledge, capabilities, and activities

span multiple categories might be called polymaths, Renaissance men or women, or jacks/jills-of-all-trades. Then we have producers and impresarios, enablers who procure project financing and artistic patronage so that the show may go on. Yet, none of these categories encompasses all of those who engage in a variety of cultural enterprises or pursue multiple occupations in the cultural sphere. They also leave out institutions, which can be similarly dynamic creative agents.

In this chapter, I propose “cultural entrepreneurship” as an analytical concept for explaining a particular form of cultural agency that arose in early-twentieth-century Asia: a pluralistic approach to the art and business of culture characterized by active participation in multiple modes of cultural production. Its leitmotif is mobility in a dual sense: between physical places and between occupations. It is entrepreneurial because it involves the investment of both talent and capital in new enterprises. Modern forms of cultural entrepreneurship became possible thanks to new communication and media technologies – one could work in radio and cinema as well as newspapers, which themselves became cheaper to produce. These technologies also encouraged experimentation with a variety of media and genres.

As a sensibility, cultural entrepreneurship represents more than a sum of discrete occupations. Consider one example far removed from sinophone East and Southeast Asia (the focus of this book): P.T. Barnum was a circus promoter, and his name still travels the globe today as part of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum and Bailey Circus. Yet, his work for the Greatest Show on Earth drew on his earlier experience with museums, menageries, publications, politics, travelling exhibitions, advertisements, gadgets, curiosities, and various forms of public pageantry.² Cultural entrepreneurship also describes the behaviour of organizations that are entrepreneurial in their approach to culture – such as Shanghai newspapers of the 1890s encouraging readers to elect their favourite courtesan “Queen of the Flowers,” or Hong Kong newspapers of the 1950s staging kung fu matches to draw new readers.³

Entrepreneurs have entered and exited the Chinese cultural sphere at different historical moments. Their presence, like their absences, is, I argue, emblematic of major shifts in the material and psychological environment of the cultural sphere. I mention Barnum because these patterns may be found in many global contexts, some pre-dating the twentieth century. Cultural entrepreneurs have driven changes, not just reflected them, and this calls for a methodological framework for understanding, in functional terms, how entrepreneurship has affected the business of culture.⁴

“Cultural entrepreneur” can be translated into Chinese as *wenhua qiyejia* or *wenhua getihu*, the latter of which gained currency during the economic liberalization of the late 1970s and 1980s. Another possibility is *wenhuaren* (person of culture), an expression used in the early twentieth century to denote public figures whose cultural influence was not limited to a single arena. The target of Qian Zhongshu’s 1946 caricature was literally “a capitalist who promotes cultural enterprises” and whose behaviour is analogous to that of what I will call a tycoon.⁵ Using “cultural entrepreneurship” as an analytical lens allows us to see these various terms (each with its own specific historical connotations) in relation to a broader history of cultural discourse.

Below, I outline three models of cultural entrepreneurship: the *cultural personality* model, the *tycoon* model, and the *collective enterprise* model.⁶ I arrived at this taxonomy inductively from my own research and revised it following discussions with my co-editor, Nicolai Volland, and other scholars. This conceptual paradigm informed, but did not dictate, how chapter authors developed their analyses.

My focus here is on how the concept of cultural entrepreneurship can be used for three types of historical analysis. The first (*long durée*) identifies long-term patterns of cultural production and reception from a bird’s-eye view; the second (enterprise case study) distinguishes archetypes of entrepreneurial behaviour within the cultural sphere; and the third (textual analysis) shows how entrepreneurship influences artistic standards and tropes.

Cultural entrepreneurship compels us to revise a familiar narrative of Chinese cultural agency in the age of capitalism, which might be termed “from scholar-officials to businessmen” (*shi* to *shang*) or “from literati to businessmen” (*wenren* to *shangren*). As I have argued elsewhere, the Chinese cultural entrepreneur of the Republican era (1912-49) “differed fundamentally from the traditional cultural icon of the ‘man of letters’ (*wenren*), who disdained commerce and concerned himself exclusively with aesthetic and moral matters, as well as from the ‘cultural worker’ (*wenhua gongzuozhe*), the Mao-era model of an ideologically driven cultural laborer working within a state hierarchy.” I argued further that these figures “thus may be seen as symbolizing the epoch of cultural capitalism that stood between the bookish culturalism of the Qing dynasty and the ideological-bureaucratic cultural paradigm of the Mao era.”⁷ Below, I place these arguments within a longer historical outline and a geographic purview that includes Southeast Asia. This schematic account, though written in broad strokes, is by no means comprehensive.

Chinese Cultural Entrepreneurship in Historical Perspective

The *wenren*, for much of China's dynastic period, was an influential producer of culture and authority on what was culturally legitimate. The literate elite categorized social classes according to a Confucian "rectification of names" (*zheng ming*) world view, using such normalized categories as merchant (*shang*), soldier (*bing*), peasant (*nong*), and scholar-official (*shi*). The *wenren*, for the most part, either belonged or was an aspirant to the latter class. He wrote to "transmit the Way" (*zai dao*) of Confucius, and his career ambition was to serve in the imperial bureaucracy.⁸ He funded his cultural activities through some combination of the rewards of office, land rents, patronage, tutoring, or, if he could not avoid it, commerce.

This influential paradigm – based on an idealized, hypothetical social structure – did not match the actual practice or self-identification of all cultural agents in the dynastic period, of course.⁹ (Not all literati were enamoured of Confucianism, for one thing, and many wrote for pleasure.) Historian Wen-hsin Yeh notes that by the fifteenth century, "the rich and the learned became entangled in kinship networks and material connections," which "elevated the social standing of the merchants and broke down the age-old divisions" between scholar-officials and merchants.¹⁰ Natascha Vittinghoff describes a similar blurring of the lines between literati and merchants in nineteenth-century treaty ports.¹¹ One synthetic category that has been proposed to characterize this conflation of roles, emerging from Kai-wing Chow's study of the Ming-Qing transition, is "literati-merchant" (*shishang*).¹² That term's dualism nevertheless understates the multiplicity of cultural activities of figures like Feng Menglong (1574-1645), a late Ming poet, editor, compiler, author, and publisher of vernacular stories, songs, histories, almanacs, and jokes.¹³ Feng's contemporary, Li Yu (1610-80), was similarly entrepreneurial. He wrote plays, fiction, aesthetic treatises, and a painting manual; ran a publishing house; toured with an all-female drama troupe; and designed gardens, all the while conducting a never-ending search for patronage.¹⁴

When the Opium Wars (1839-42, 1856-60) and the Taiping Rebellion (1850-64) crippled the Qing dynasty in the mid-nineteenth century, the moral authority of the *wenren*, particularly those who had become the scholar-officials who ran the government, began to erode.¹⁵ Long before the Qing court abolished the civil service examinations in 1905, many *wenren* found it necessary to seek other employment. Some in the Jiangnan region turned to Shanghai's rapidly growing publishing industry, which had become

a new refuge for literate men. At the same time, new forms of social organization and hierarchy emerged in Chinese communities beyond the reach of the Qing government, notably in Southeast Asia, known in Chinese as Nanyang (the South Seas). Émigrés to Nanyang found themselves in cosmopolitan cities under colonial administration that conducted long-distance commerce and maintained extensive trade networks.¹⁶

New technologies – lithography, photography, cinema, and the gramophone, to name just a few – drove increasing specialization within the Chinese cultural sphere and created new professions therein.¹⁷ Chinese people began to talk about culture in new ways, using the “new ethnographic notion of *wenhua*” (culture), which re-entered the Chinese language as a return loan word from Japan (*bunka*).¹⁸ In the 1920s, Shanghai’s publishing district became known as Culture Street (*Wenhuaajie*), and its main artery, Fuzhou Road, as Culture Boulevard (*Wenhua dajie*).¹⁹ The district was populated by professional “people of culture” (*wenhuaren*). New cultural spaces appeared too. In the 1910s and 1920s, entrepreneurs in Shanghai and Singapore introduced cabarets, dance halls, and amusement parks, all of which were to become popular fixtures of urban entertainment culture for decades.²⁰ Despite the social progressivism of China’s New Culture Movement (*Xin wenhua yundong*, ca. 1917 to mid-1920s), access to new vocations remained for decades less available to women than to men.²¹

Occupational specialization grew with the size and influence of culture industry sectors such as publishing and journalism.²² The new professional category of *baoren*, which emerged during the late Qing, encompassed publishers, editors, reporters, advertisers, writers on retainer, and freelance contributors. Many *baoren* were more than just newspapermen. Journalists for the influential newspaper the *Eastern Times* (*Shibao*, 1904-11) engaged in education, artisanship, and political activism as secondary occupations, thereby helping to create what historian Joan Judge calls a “new middle realm” that both supervised the upper and official classes and spoke for the lower classes. Their members included Qing civil service degree-holders such as Di Baoxian (1873-1921) – who co-founded the *Eastern Times*, established Shanghai’s first publishing house to use collotype printing, and founded a photo studio – and Bao Tianxiao (1875-1973), who taught middle school prior to joining *Shibao* as an editor-contributor and later became a famous translator, novelist, and screenwriter.²³ Shanghai’s three biggest commercial textbook publishers, according to Reed, helped to transform “a generation of would-be scholars” into “hard-nosed businessmen.”²⁴

These various industry and market forces encouraged not only occupational specialization but also occupational crossover. Indeed, China's Republican period might be called – to reinterpret the Maoist slogan – the era of “a hundred professions contending” (*bai jia zheng ming*). Now, in addition to latter-day *wenren* like Zhou Zuoren and Qian Zhongshu, China had *zuo jia* (authors), *xiaoshuo jia* (fiction writers), *yishu jia* (artists), *fanyijia* (translators), *guwen jia* (masters of ancient-style prose), *manhua jia* (cartoonists), and *qiye jia* (entrepreneurs), as well as new-style educators, editors, radio broadcasters, musicians, composers, advertisers, and filmmakers.²⁵ Cultural entrepreneurs appropriated and inhabited these categories (sometimes several simultaneously) as they saw fit.

Qian Zhongshu's fictional assassination of the cultural entrepreneur in 1946 turned out to be prescient: only three years later, the founding of the People's Republic signalled the eclipse of entrepreneurship in all areas of mainland Chinese cultural and economic life. In the 1950s, the Communist government endeavoured to bring the entire cultural field into the fold of a new cultural bureaucracy, stripping it of its entrepreneurial autonomy in the process. Every individualistic “person of culture” was to be refashioned as a “cultural worker” (*wenhua gongzuo zhe*) in a state-run enterprise.

The psychological and artistic implications were tremendous. As Shuyu Kong writes, the term *cultural worker* “precisely defines most writers' self-identity and social function in the literary system” of the following decades.²⁶ Within the Maoist system, authorial agency was subordinated to the top-down mandate of the Party, which was to promote socialist values.²⁷ Writers, thespians, filmmakers, and other artists were organized into professional associations, headed by a Party representative. As in the Soviet Union, the most talented “workers” were salaried and were expected to “produce,” but without market incentives. Amateurs and aspirants were encouraged through a “hierarchical system of patronage” headed by cultural celebrities such as Mao Dun (1896-1981), Guo Moruo (1892-1978), and Xia Yan (1900-95).²⁸ The process by which cultural entrepreneurship was suppressed in the PRC – as well as how it survived and re-emerged in new guises – is further discussed in Chapter 9 and in the Epilogue.

Following the Chinese Civil War (1945-49), many Chinese cultural entrepreneurs from the Mainland moved to Hong Kong and overseas. Émigrés included Law Bun (Luo Bin, 1923-2013) and Jin Yong (b. 1924), both discussed in Chapter 6, who set up rival sinophone publishing ventures in Hong Kong, which later evolved into diversified global media empires. On a smaller scale,

Eileen Chang's (Zhang Ailing, 1920-95) move from Shanghai to Hong Kong in 1952 heralded perhaps the most entrepreneurial chapter in that celebrated writer's career: over the next dozen years in the colony, the United States, and Taiwan, she wrote a novel on commission from a US government agency and at least ten screenplays for the Malayan-Chinese-owned, Hong Kong-based film studio MP&GI. The Shaw brothers, émigrés from Zhejiang Province and long-time Singapore residents, also vastly expanded their Hong Kong and Southeast Asian film production and distribution networks during the postwar period.²⁹ Cultural entrepreneurship in postwar Taiwan lagged until the Nationalist government abandoned its ambitions to recapture the Mainland and started investing in cultural infrastructure such as the film industry, which soon forged links with Hong Kong.

Entrepreneurship as Cultural Agency

Joseph Schumpeter famously defined the entrepreneur as someone who carries out a “new combination of means of production”: it is innovation that distinguishes the entrepreneur from the manager or the businessman, who merely *runs* a business.³⁰ Other economic theorists define entrepreneurship as the pursuit of opportunity.³¹ Elizabeth Chell, departing from the economic viewpoint, has surveyed sociological approaches to defining entrepreneurship as the product of various personality traits, such as a need for achievement, risk-taking propensity, inclination to act autonomously, proactivism, self-efficacy, intuitive decision-making style, and perseverance.³² She acknowledges that personal qualities are only part of the equation, since entrepreneurship is also shaped by external factors. Scholars seeking specifically to pinpoint “the spirit of Chinese capitalism” have cited paternalism, personalism (the trustworthiness of the individual), insecurity, and a host of other values as among the social legacies shaping entrepreneurial behaviour among overseas Chinese.³³

For our purposes, several modifications to these ideas are necessary. First, while an entrepreneur is typically understood to be an individual, this book acknowledges that collective entities such as corporations, civic bodies, and even states can engage in entrepreneurial behaviour.³⁴ Second, Pierre Bourdieu's distinction between economic capital and cultural capital (which sometimes accrue in inverse proportion) helps us to recognize that one can be entrepreneurial in pursuit of non-cash rewards.³⁵ As Robert Culp notes in Chapter 7, some social organizations are best “considered entrepreneurs of social identities and networks rather than commercial entrepreneurs in

a conventional economic sense.” Philanthropy, as Sin Yee Theng and Nicolai Volland point out in Chapter 5, can be entrepreneurial, too.

A third point is that for cultural enterprises, the risk may be financial or symbolic (in Bourdieu’s terms).³⁶ Some cultural entrepreneurs push the cultural envelope; others give consumers what they’re used to. Some bet big; others work with small capital. The test of what constitutes cultural entrepreneurship is thus not whether the agents involved achieve financial success – or even pursue monetary gain – but whether they take a substantial role in creating (rather than merely running) a cultural enterprise.

Fourth, what constitutes entrepreneurial activity is historically variable. In the contexts discussed in this book, cultural entrepreneurship was a response to the new venture-creating possibilities afforded by advances in communication and media technologies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This enabled a sea change in the way agents in China and overseas approached cultural production. But, as pointed out in the Epilogue, entrepreneurial behaviour can be detected even in cultural environments hostile to entrepreneurship, such as the command economy of the Mao era. Entrepreneurship is thus a useful lens for examining the changing practices and ethics of “self-making” (David J. Davies’s ingenious rendering of *zuoren*) by individuals and organizations operating in a variety of cultural environments.³⁷

This book’s working definition of *entrepreneurial*, in sum, encompasses attitudes, activities, and behaviours that contribute to the creation, development, and sustaining of an enterprise. The *entrepreneur* is the agent (individual or collective); *entrepreneurism* denotes the attitude, outlook, guiding principle, or ethos; *entrepreneurship* refers to the condition or state of engaging in entrepreneurial activity; and an *enterprise* is an undertaking, business, or venture that involves considerable initiative and risk.

Chinese cultural entrepreneurs may be understood more precisely in relation to other boundary-crossing cultural agents. The broker, for instance, has long been acknowledged as a crucial figure in cross-cultural economic transactions and the globalization of knowledge.³⁸ As translators, interpreters, network-builders, right-hand women and men, and double agents, brokers transgress boundaries and make connections across them. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Europeans satirized such go-betweens as akin to the matchmaker, procurer, and pimp but also valued them as indispensable to the economic and ideological imperatives of the age of colonial expansion.³⁹ Linguistic competency, native-place ties, and facility in navigating different cultural conventions were also acute issues for entrepreneurs

moving in linguistically stratified societies such as colonial Singapore, semi-colonial Shanghai, and postwar Hong Kong.

Compradors, who helped to transact commerce between Western and Chinese parties, were especially prominent during the nineteenth century. As Wen-hsin Yeh points out, they represented a new type of agency that superseded the “virtuous merchant” model of the late imperial period.⁴⁰ But one needed significant financial capital to be a comprador. In late Qing Shanghai, *wenren*-turned-*baoren*, as Catherine Yeh writes, “having neither the financial capital of the compradors and merchants nor the entertainment skills of courtesans ... banked on their cultural capital and their literary skills” to exert influence in the city’s entertainment industry.⁴¹

In Southeast Asia, anglophone Chinese participated in a range of ethnic, economic, and governmental cultures in places such as the Dutch East Indies, British Malaya, and, later, independent Singapore. They were particularly successful in enhancing their economic and social capital through colonial bureaucracies. Some sinophone clans sustained a version of the *wenren* tradition centred around Chinese philosophical and literary classics but without the same path to scholar-officialdom in a vast bureaucracy. More traded for themselves than acted as compradors.⁴²

Cultural entrepreneurs are no mere intermediaries. Like brokers, they leverage their economic or symbolic/cultural resources, conduct transactions, and are mobile, but rather than simply mediating for others, they build their own ventures. They are not “one step removed from final responsibility in decision making,” as are brokers, since it is often their own capital and reputations on the line.⁴³ Unlike compradors, not all cultural entrepreneurs interacted with Westerners, and they did more than just execute capital transactions. Individual cultural entrepreneurs include the promoter and the tycoon, whom Schumpeter calls, respectively, “the entrepreneur by profession” and the “captain of industry.”⁴⁴ And whereas brokers are invariably individuals, enterprises can be collective entities.

The entrepreneur, furthermore, is a cultural trope with a unique array of cultural resonances. The entrepreneur is, for example, a symbol of modern capitalism; a cliché of the wily Chinese businessman (especially in Southeast Asia); and a cautionary figure, like Wu Sunfu, the industrial capitalist of Mao Dun’s 1933 novel *Midnight (Ziye)*, who is undone by his own market speculations. Cultural entrepreneurship thus denotes a broader spectrum of agency than brokering, one spanning the creative and the transactional, the market-meeting and the market-making.

Three Models of Cultural Entrepreneurship

Cultural entrepreneur is not a new term, as I acknowledge above, but it has to date been taken for granted as self-explanatory. The three models I discuss below, which underpin the structure of this book, represent my preliminary attempt to create a scalable framework for analyzing different archetypes of cultural entrepreneurship. My examples are brief and, necessarily, schematic. Each of the agents (two individual, one collective) discussed here began in a certain field and then, having established a reputation (and in two of the three cases, a capital base) through one venture, switched to, or layered on, others. Such transitions do not involve a clean break: sensibilities, professional reflexes, and artistic habits developed in one venture typically carry over, to some degree, into the next.

Cultural Personalities

In the cultural personality model, a personal brand attracts consumers across multiple cultural spheres. A cultural personality is an individual who creates his/her own cultural products rather than just hiring others and who uses these artistic talents to develop and promote a personal brand, style, or persona. Unlike stars, whose celebrity is usually tied to a single area of cultural production, cultural personalities are distinguished by having a personality that is portable.⁴⁵ They are distinguished by their inclination and ability to leverage their persona as, say, an actor to colonize – or at least dabble in – other cultural professions. Their professional trajectories may be linear or circular, involving the revisiting, extension, and renewal of earlier careers. This dynamic capacity for mobility, in turn, often becomes part of the “personality,” which is maintained through extensive self-promotion.

Xu Zhuodai (1880-1958) was an outstanding cultural personality of Republican China. One of the first Chinese to study physical education in Japan, Xu founded, and served as principal of, Shanghai’s first gymnastics academy and authored textbooks on sports physiology. He also established drama troupes, hosted radio programs, and co-founded two film companies, all the while sustaining a successful writing career as a short story writer, translator, screenwriter, and editor. He recorded an LP of comic routines and compiled half a dozen joke anthologies. In the 1940s, Xu adapted several stories based on his fictional character Li Ah Mao into feature films, at least some of which were distributed in Hong Kong. During the war, Xu and his wife set up a home business selling artificial soy sauce, a move into industry that recalls Chen Diexian (discussed in Chapter 3), who had earlier taken advantage of a nationwide boycott of Japanese imports to corner the market

for tooth powder. In his later years, Xu wrote guides to garden design and penned memoirs about old Shanghai's theatre scene.

Xu Zhuodai invented alter egos for each of his professions. He converted his original name, Xu Fulin, into Zhuo Fuling, "Dim-witted Chaplin," which punned on Charlie Chaplin's Chinese name, Zhuo Bielin, and bolstered his own reputation as an "Oriental Charlie Chaplin" (Dongfang Zhuo Bielin). As a writer, he went by Xu Zhuodai, pairing two characters (*zhuo*, literally "outstanding" but also a homophone for "clumsy" [*zhuo*], and *dai*, "stupid") into a name that was at once absurdly self-deprecating and a covert hint that he was "above the common herd" (*zhuo er bu qun*). In the theatre and film worlds, he went by Xu Banmei ("half plum"), a visual pun on "plum" (*mei* 梅), which was originally written as two *dai* 呆 characters (*mei* 呆). His many other pen names included Li Ah Mao, a character who appeared in an advice column, stories, and film scripts. In the 1940s, when he ventured into the soy sauce business, he adopted the pen name "Soy Sauce Seller" (Maiyou Lang). Many of these alter egos alluded to his other cultural personae, thus encouraging readers/audiences to consume his other products. The story of this last epithet, which I discuss below, illustrates how entrepreneurship fed back into Xu's reputation as a cultural personality.

Tycoons

The tycoon appropriates multiple modes of cultural production to sell commercial products on a vast scale. Whereas the cultural personality tends to be an artist for whom cultural production has intrinsic value, the tycoon treats culture primarily as a means to an economic end, such as capital accumulation or the expansion of market share. The tycoon hires others to create cultural products, outsourcing much or all of the artistic creativity. He or she is always a dominant figure within the enterprise, but unlike the cultural personality (whose enterprises are always dependent on his or her personal brand), the brand of the individual may or may not be as important as that of the corporation or product. As we will see in Part 2, for Aw Boon Haw (Hu Wenhu, 1882-1954), the "Tiger" symbolized both the man and the Tiger Balm brand, whereas Law Bun was content to remain in the background of his publishing and film companies.

Huang Chujiu's (1872-1931) professional biography is that of a man who mustered a wide array of cultural resources to sell medicinal products. He earned his first fortune by aggressively promoting a medicine with a Western-sounding name through ingenious and sometimes deceptive advertising.⁴⁶ Active as early as the late 1880s, he made a fortune exploiting not only

Chinese consumers' faith in Western panaceas but also intermittent "buy domestic" movements.⁴⁷ Sandwich-board men paraded along river towpaths advertising his "Human Elixir" (*rendan* 人丹, an imitation of the best-selling Japanese drug "Humane Elixir," or *rendan* 仁丹), while ads for "Ailuo Brain Tonic" appeared in a variety of newspapers. Bottles of tonic were packaged in a bilingual narrative attesting to the tonic's efficacy and claiming that it was the invention of a certain "Dr. T.C. Yale."

Like Aw and Law, Huang accrued substantial economic clout through his enterprises. Part of his pharmaceutical earnings he invested in building an amusement hall in Shanghai, The Great World (Da shijie, built in 1917), a multi-storeyed "proto-mall."⁴⁸ This complex had multiple interior spaces for shopping, browsing, watching performances, and eating, and, following a trend imported from American vaudeville, it boasted a rooftop garden.⁴⁹ In design, The Great World was a testament to Huang's belief that there is more than one way to catch a consumer – and the more ways the better. Its interior was rented out to vendors, and stages were made available at no cost to a rotating assortment of performers from around the country. Its myriad attractions featured restaurants, tea houses, photographers, jugglers, acupuncturists, fortunetellers, Japanese circus performers, flower-drum balladeers, novelty exhibitions, and moving pictures. Advertisements for Huang's medicinal products blanketed its walls and dominated the airwaves of a radio station he founded.

In the 1920s, Huang expanded his enterprises into even more industries, including tobacco and glass (both in 1923) and a philanthropic hospital (1927), before he overextended his capital in real estate just as the Depression hit Shanghai. Huang has been duly acknowledged as an advertising innovator, but new lessons may be drawn from revisiting his sprawling cultural business apparatus through the lens of cultural entrepreneurship. Culture was the spoonful of sugar to help Huang's medicines go down consumers' throats. While he drummed up and deployed capital, a staff of advertising copywriters and illustrators created the actual texts, and entertainers working on contract put on the performances. Huang's enterprises had unintended effects on popular culture. In employing the talented painter Zheng Mantuo (1888-1961) to design advertising posters of beautiful women, for instance, Huang indirectly helped to popularize a new form of commercial art, the calendar poster, inspiring innovations in painting and graphic design – a partnership model later repeated in Hong Kong by Law Bun and the painter Tung Pui-sun (Dong Peixin, b. 1942). Xu Zhuodai penned print ads for Huang, an experience Xu later drew on in writing numerous parodic

advertisements for popular magazines. By creating The Great World, Huang also helped to foster a decades-long culture of urban variety amusements that inspired amusement parks in other places such as Singapore, including the eponymous park (built in 1929 and sold to the Shaw Brothers in 1941) known in Hokkien as Tah Seh Kai.

Collective Enterprises

Though a tycoon's enterprises employ many people, business decisions are dictated by an individual. In contrast, institutions operating according to a collective enterprise model of cultural agency are more egalitarian in that their leadership and membership structures are relatively fluid. In the private sector, such enterprises may be run by partners, investors, and employees; not-for-profit civic associations and for-profit industry associations are often staffed by volunteers. Governmental agencies and clan associations with entrepreneurial aspirations can be more rigidly hierarchical. What collectives operating in the cultural sphere have in common is that while they may highlight or suppress individual identities, their existence, brand, and creative vision are rarely defined by a single member. What unites them is their joint entrepreneurial pursuit of a common goal that would be hard for any single member of the collective to attain solo.

The Shanghai Cartoon Society (Shanghai manhuahui) is one collective enterprise that had a dramatic influence on the development and popularization of an art form. Founded in 1927, the society was Shanghai's earliest cartoonists' organization and followed a precedent set by Republican China's *littérateurs* and journalists, who also tended to form social organizations.⁵⁰ Though begun as a collective enterprise of its six founders – Zhang Guangyu (1900–65), Zhang Zhengyu (1904–76), Ye Qianyu (1907–95), Wang Dunqing (1910–90), Huang Wennong (1903–34), and Lu Shaofei (1903–95) – it convened the talents of many more individuals. Within this ensemble idiom, a group of artist-entrepreneurs pooled their capital and co-founded, ran, and contributed content to several small-scale cultural enterprises, particularly pictorial magazines. Magazines carried advertisements for their peers, and contributor moonlighting was expected, even encouraged. The society was based on voluntary participation and held together by mutual artistic and economic interests, a sum greater than its parts.

The Society popularized the cartoon in China and even influenced the style of modernist writers.⁵¹ Its founders' first venture was *China Camera News* (*Sanri huabao*, 1925–27), a two-page broadsheet. Each issue featured on its front page a large photograph of a female movie star or female impersonator

from Chinese opera, flanked by advertisements for films, shows, medicines, and other consumer products. Its second page contained political cartoons, photographs of women (some naked), theatre and film reviews, and short pieces of political news and celebrity gossip.⁵² Its producers experimented with formats, layouts, and visual styles, such as art deco and cubism, that were to become even more popular in the 1930s.

The story of the society's best-known publication, *Shanghai Sketch* (*Shanghai manhua*, 1928-30), illustrates the resourcefulness required to run such small-scale enterprises and the way in which trial-and-error operations could give rise to improvements in form and content.⁵³ The publication of the first issue was helped by Wang Dunqing's connections in the publishing world, but the single-sided format proved to be unmarketable, prompting the group to redesign the magazine's visual layout. The revised version featured four pages of colour lithographed *manhua* (cartoons) and four pages of monochrome photos, essays, and reprints of Western paintings. This new version fared much better, selling approximately three thousand copies per issue and achieving a distribution network that reached Southeast Asia.⁵⁴ The journal, operating for three years out of a rented room in a church, was a humble capitalist enterprise funded by 120 yuan pooled from the six contributors.⁵⁵ When, after one hundred issues, *Shanghai Sketch* folded because of a dispute with its Singaporean distributor, it was immediately replaced with *Modern Sketch*, staffed by the same team.⁵⁶

This particular collective enterprise thus made use of industrial capital (in this case, corporate salary), the availability of low-cost print technology, and socio-professional networks, while contending with market tastes and government censorship.⁵⁷ Although their collective model was an effective means of pooling talent and dispersing liability, it never grew to become a high-capital business. *Manhua* publishing entrepreneurs typically operated on a shoestring and had to adapt their product design and distribution to ensure survival. (On the postwar cartoon business, see Chapter 9.) Furthermore, unlike larger collective enterprises examined in this book, *manhua* enterprises were often short-lived and had uneven production values. Free contributions from amateur reader-artists helped to keep the enterprise going. Quickly established and quickly replaced, these low-cost/low-margin collective enterprises contrast with the big-capital/high-margin model of the tycoon.

These three models of cultural entrepreneurship have several things in common. All three types of agent establish multiple cultural enterprises, whether

simultaneously or consecutively. All invest both capital and creativity (be it artistry or business savvy) in those enterprises. And all take financial, creative, and/or reputational risks, the payback for which may be cultural capital, social capital, financial capital, or some combination thereof.

Cultural Entrepreneurship as Artistic Trope

New entrepreneurial opportunities in the cultural sphere changed not only professions and institutional behaviour but also artistic norms. Thanks to their transnational orientation, sensitivity to the market, and willingness to experiment with new media, cultural entrepreneurs played an important role in circulating aesthetic experiments and promoting stylistic innovations. As early as the 1910s, the popular Shanghai writer and film enthusiast Zhou Shoujuan was “translating” films he had seen from the screen to the page as “shadowplay stories” (*yingxi xiaoshuo*).⁵⁸ Three decades later, Xu Zhuodai, who had long been active in the drama world, wrote “playscript-style stories” (*jubenti xiaoshuo*) comprising dialogue and stage directions.⁵⁹ Other stylistic changes were not so clearly advertised and can only be detected through analyzing texts themselves.

Literary works from the first two decades of the twentieth century, for example, attest to the precipitous decline in the moral authority and cultural status of the *wenren*. In both Wu Jianren’s (1866-1910) novel *Strange Events Eyewitnessed over Two Decades* (*Ershinian mudu zhi guai xianzhuang*, serialized 1903-10) and Lu Xun’s (1881-1936) short story “Kong Yiji” (1919), the *wenren* appears as a degenerate figure whose anachronistic sensibilities leave him ill-equipped to cope with modern problems. Among his alleged shortcomings, the *wenren*’s technological and financial illiteracy limit his capacity to participate in China’s modernizing cultural economy. Meanwhile, other cultural archetypes were beginning to appear. Alexander Des Forges argues that beginning in the 1890s, “the business of the cultural entrepreneur” became a literary trope in the genre of the Shanghai novel. Des Forges highlights the fictional representation of the professional novelist as an example of a shift in cultural attitudes towards the practice of novel writing from a “heartfelt life task that aims to transcend the ages” to “a routine practice.”⁶⁰ Wu Jianren’s science fiction novel *New Story of the Stone* (*Xin Shitouji*, 1905) transformed Jia Baoyu from the “virtual model of the *wenren*” that he was in *Story of the Stone* into a *wenhuaren*, which Theodore Hutters translates as “critical intellectual,” while resurrecting the boorish Xue Pan as the stereotypical comprador: flush, vulgar, and happy with a modern commodified culture that supports his dissolute lifestyle.⁶¹ In the 1920s, entrepreneurial

figures started to make an appearance in Chinese cinema productions such as *Laborer's Love* (*Laogong zhi aiqing*, 1922), in which a resourceful carpenter-turned-fruit seller from Southeast Asia uses the tricks of his trades to court a young woman in Shanghai.⁶²

Xu Zhuodai and Qian Zhongshu's polar attitudes towards cultural entrepreneurs illustrate the ambivalent reception of this figure. Xu Zhuodai's stories present cultural entrepreneurs – himself included – as the figures best suited to navigating Shanghai's increasingly diversified media environment.⁶³ “Woman's Playthings” (1928) concerns a mysterious woman of culture, Miss Qiu Suwen, who has been making a splash in Shanghai society with her poems published in the newspaper and her paintings at art exhibitions.⁶⁴ When a notice appears in the newspaper that Miss Qiu is seeking a husband, more than a thousand eager male readers write to volunteer themselves, enticed by Miss Qiu's talented woman (*cainü*) aura and a photograph of an attractive young woman that she mailed to each of them. In the end, the men are duped thrice over, taken for their money, and publicly exposed as fools. Miss Qiu is then revealed to be an aging widow who has constructed a sensational self-image through her cultural products (poems, paintings), a misleading photograph, and the newspaper genre of the classified advertisement. The story is a modern parable about the fantasy-generating capacity of the media and the power of the media-savvy cultural entrepreneur.

Xu also represented himself as a cultural entrepreneur. In his essay “Marvelous Soy Sauce!” (1947), Xu tells the story of how he came to adopt the pen name “Soy Sauce Seller” (Maiyou Lang).⁶⁵ He describes how he had been experimenting with producing artificial soy sauce for his own consumption and had found the results to be better than most of the soy sauce sold in stores. Encouraged by friends' praise, he began giving it away until doing so started to cost him too much. At that point, Xu writes, “I copied the technique that calligraphers and painters use to curb sponging from friends and family members by setting a fee for service and started selling soy sauce to recoup my costs.”⁶⁶ His move into industry, he explains, was driven in part by economic necessity:

During the War of Resistance, I just couldn't continue making a living by writing alone, so in this age in which everyone is a businessman (*wuren bu shang de shidai*), I had to take a stab at business myself. Having nothing else to sell, I started making and selling soy sauce. That's how I ended up living

the inescapably vulgar life of a soy-sauce seller. Just as the second wives of men who re-married in the Greater Rear Area during the War were known as “wartime wives,” so I could be called a “wartime businessman.”⁶⁷

Xu casts his entrepreneurship as accidental or opportunistic. Though he anticipates his reader’s objection that he is simply writing an infomercial, he goes on to promote his product as an alternative to other modern flavour enhancers, advises readers on how to choose their soy sauce, outlines four methods of making it, warns consumers to beware of bogus products like dyed salt water, and laments shoppers who doubt the quality of his product because its price is so low. He then enumerates his misfortunes: some customers buy too much soy sauce at once and then blame him when it starts to mould, when in fact the culprit is their unsterile storage containers; others borrow his soy sauce jugs and don’t return them; and maids and cooks sometimes sabotage his product in retaliation for him not giving them kickbacks for their patronage. He then appeals to the customer’s self-regard: his Good Wife Brand (*liangqi pai*) is only for wives who are diligent about running their household. He concludes by noting that the previous summer, numerous ignorant soy sauce manufacturers requested a copy of his free pamphlet for housewives titled “How to Keep Soy Sauce from Going Mouldy.” Buyer beware!

The essay brings together Xu’s multiple cultural personae as writer, educator, entertainer, and entrepreneur. While it does market a commodity, Xu’s literary product is also for readers who will never buy his soy sauce. He delights in sharing his insider knowledge of food science and business and in advertising his integrity as a businessman who keeps his prices affordable for low-income customers.⁶⁸ Two decades earlier, Xu had entertained readers with an account of his experiences co-running two failed film companies. Here, he again brings his journey from writer to entrepreneur full circle by turning his business foray into an engaging story, treating writing itself as an entrepreneurial activity.

Yet, it would be wrong to say that cultural entrepreneurs were purely self-made men and women *rhetorically*, because non-entrepreneurs like Qian Zhongshu also had plenty to say about them. Qian’s short story “Cat” (1946) contains a sarcastic description of how members of the elder generation might transform from *wenren* “relics” of the Qing dynasty to cultural entrepreneurs of the Republic. Having lost his government post as a result of the 1911 revolution, the protagonist’s father eventually hits on

the retired gentleman's road to riches. Today, some nouveau riche would be seeking an officiant for his son's wedding; tomorrow, a comprador banker would be looking for someone to preside over his mother's funeral ... His writing was unremarkable and his calligraphy undistinguished, but he discovered that so long as he affixed the seals from his several official titles, "Presented Scholar of Such and Such a Year" or "Governor of Such and Such a Province," there would be people willing to pay big money for both.⁶⁹

In Qian's view, then, a cultural entrepreneur may be either born or made. In "Cat," a traditional *wenren* turns into a man of the market by converting his cultural capital into real capital; in "Inspiration," the scion of a nouveau riche family is simply responding to the awakening of his "inherited business instincts" and partnering with a content provider. Whereas the entrepreneur of healthy dramas in "Inspiration" is a fictional version of the "brain-boosting" Huang Chujiu, his partner, The Writer, is like the market-savvy Xu Zhuodai. China's tycoons and cultural personalities not only were selling literature but had become the stuff of literature themselves.

Qian's caricatures confirm that the phenomenon of cultural entrepreneurship was conspicuous enough to provoke the antagonism of latter-day *wenren*, who used the cultural entrepreneur as a foil to their own identities.⁷⁰ In other writings, Qian attacks the writer Lin Yutang (1895-1976) for turning the avocation of humour (through his magazine *The Analects Semi-Monthly* [*Lunyu banyuekan*, 1932-37, 1945-49]) into a profession and for being a phony cross-cultural authority on East and West. Qian, in effect, accused Lin Yutang of being a cultural entrepreneur – of turning culture into a saleable product and of being a "man of culture" motivated not by truth but by profit.⁷¹ Qian thus chose a commercial metaphor to express his verdict on Lin: "In the long run ... bogus goods cannot pass as the real thing."⁷²

The Business of Culture

The effects of cultural entrepreneurship, I have argued, extended beyond entrepreneurs' own agency. They transformed China's cultural landscape not just by creating and distributing cultural products but also by supplying new literary tropes (sometimes unwittingly) and provoking others to reflect on cultural practice itself.

Cultural entrepreneurship was a global trend. As subsequent chapters reveal in greater detail, cultural entrepreneurs of the era created institutions, producers, texts, and audiences that shaped cultural modernity within and across national boundaries. They initiated and adapted to cultural trends,