



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Innovating China: governance and mobility in China's new economy

Tan, Y.

Citation

Tan, Y. (2022, June 29). *Innovating China: governance and mobility in China's new economy*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3421000>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3421000>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Innovation China: Governance and Mobility in China's New Economy

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van
de graad van doctor aan de Universiteit Leiden,
op gezag van rector magnificus prof.dr.ir. H. Bijl,
volgens besluit van het college voor promoties
te verdedigen op woensdag 29 juni 2022
klokke 13:45 uur

door

Yujing Tan

geboren te Hunan
in 1990

Promotor: Prof. dr. Frank N. Pieke

Copromotor: Dr. Ratna Saptari

Promotiecommissie: Dr. Florian Schneider

Prof.dr. Cristina Grasseni

Prof.dr. Gordon Mathews (The Chinese University of Hong Kong)

Prof.dr. Margaret Sleeboom-Faulkner (University of Sussex)

Dr. Anne-Christine Trémon (University of Lausanne)

Table of Contents

Abbreviation	i
Acknowledgement	ii
Summary	iv
Samenvatting	vi
 Chapter One Introduction	1
1.1 Background: Trade War and the Great Transformation of “Mass Entrepreneurship and Innovation” in China	4
1.2 Research Questions and Rationale.....	8
1.2.1 Research Questions	8
1.2.2 Research Rationale: <i>Chuangxin</i> as Social Movement in Urban China	10
1.3 Policy Reform and Its Organizing Effect on Entrepreneurship and Innovation: 1978 Onwards.....	12
1.4 “Innovation” in Capitalism and the Methods of Conceptualizing Late-socialist China in the Global Innovation.....	17
1.4.1 Innovation as Solution in Capitalism.....	17
1.4.2 Innovation as Anti-capitalist Social Movement.....	19
1.4.3 The Consent and Dis-consent of “Innovation China”	20
1.4.4 Towards the Political Anthropology of “Innovation China”: The State-society Revisited in the <i>chuangxin</i> Movement	23
1.5 Methodologies and Fieldwork Site	26
1.5.1 Shenzhen as the Fieldwork Site	26
1.5.2 Who did I interview? Who and what did I go to observe? How did I conduct my interviews?	27
1.6 Precis of Thesis	28
Chapter Two The Global City and Its Contents	32
2.1 Borderland Formation: Space and Power Intertwined.....	32
2.1.1 Making Shenzhen: The Rise of the Socialist Frontier and Its Population	32
2.1.2 Shenzhen SEZ, Market Reform, and Industrialization: The <i>Waidiren</i> and the Rise of the “World Factory” in China.....	36
2.1.3 Shenzhen, De-industrialization, and State-led Urban Renovation: The Rise of the Chinese Market in the World Economy	40
2.2 Innovation in China: Late Capitalist Activity and Its Chinese Metamorphosis	41
2.2.1 “Maker-Innovation is a new business in China!”: Nationalizing the Grassroot Innovation Movement in China’s Urban Economy.	42
2.2.2 Maker Activity in Shenzhen: The Recognition of Individuality	44
2.3 Innovation in Transition: New Market, New Code, and New Division of Labor.....	46
2.3.1 Market Shift	46
2.3.2 From “Copycat Production” to the “China-innovation”	49
2.3.3 The Division of Labor in the Innovation Economy	51
2.4 Conclusion	54
Chapter Three Towards an Innovation-Society in Shenzhen Networking “Chinese Innovation” Through Associations	55
3.1 Old Network, New Association in Shenzhen.	57

3.1.1 The Decline of <i>Diyuan</i> (地缘) and the Rise of Inno-association in Shenzhen.....	57
3.1.2 The Expectations for Inno-Associations: Authorizing “Princes” by Making “Peddlers”.....	58
3.2 Making Associations: Convergence of the Civil and the Market.....	61
3.2.1 “We work together but in separate bodies”: Government-run Inno-associations in Shenzhen.....	67
3.2.2 “We unified into a swarm of bees”: Grouping “Peddlers” through Organizing Offline to Online <i>shequn</i> Associations.....	69
3.3 “Innovation Can Make Us Hug the World, Technology Can Incubate Our Dream”: Anxiety of Mobility and the Local Internationalization of Innovation.....	73
3.3.1 Internationalization as a Strategy: “ <i>We must go out!</i> ”.....	75
3.3.2 “Worlding” Shenzhen, and China.....	77
3.4. Conclusion.....	81
Chapter Four Governing Innovation in Shenzhen - Talent Absorption and Social Training in the Building of Innovation Infrastructure.....	82
4.1 The Marketization of Infrastructural Power in the Innovation Economy.....	83
4.1.1 The Territorialization and Infrastructuralization of Mass Entrepreneurship and Innovation.....	84
4.2 “We Let the Right Person Go to the Right Space”: Manipulating Mobility Through Individualized Life Passage.....	87
4.2.1 Talent Attraction as Social Engineering.....	87
4.2.2 Inventing the Talented Subject in the New Economy: The Use of Male Youth.....	91
4.3 The Social-Training of the Entrepreneurial Subject: Producing the New Mentality and Order in the Innovation Economy.....	94
4.3.1 <i>Jianshe tuandui</i> (建设团队 organizing teams): Manufacturing Consent through Anxiety-based “Solidarity”.....	100
4.3.2 Exploring the Market: Creating Consciously Desirous Consumers-Producers to Invent the Niche Market.....	103
4.3.3 Linking Venture Investment): “Pitch” as a Rite of Passage.....	106
4.4 Conclusion.....	109
Chapter Five Why Do These Young Professionals Go to Shenzhen? —The Rise of Middling Migration.....	111
5.1. The Fear of Suspension: Middle Classes in Post-industrial Urban China.....	111
5.2 The Coming of New Migrant Professionals/Workers in the Innovation Economy.....	114
5.3 Producing Migrant Professionals through Family.....	122
5.3.1 “Going out” from One’s Comfort Zone: Forging Individualistic “Entrepreneurial Spirit” through Family.....	124
5.3.2 “Be successful, otherwise I will not come back”: Making “the successful subject” through Familial Recognition.....	127
5.4 Conclusion.....	130
Chapter Six Living a Better Life in the Chinese Silicon Valley? Spatial Mobility and Housing Strategies in the Urban Renovation.....	132
6.1 In the Shadow of the Urban Renovation: Land, Mobile Life, and Urban Informality Under (De-)industrialization.....	133
6.2 Formalization of the Informal.....	137
6.2.1 Renovating the City Milieu in Shenzhen.....	138

6.2.2 “Not so easy, but free”: Deconstruction and Reconstruction	139
6.2.3 “Anxious but full of opportunity”: Location and Relocation.....	143
6.3 Mobilizing Life in Shenzhen	146
6.3.1 “Work as white-collar professionals, live like ‘peasant migrant workers’”: Locating Life in Shenzhen	146
6.3.2 Escape from Suspension: Renovating the Meaning and the Strategy of Mobile Life	148
6.4 Conclusion	152
Chapter Seven Learning Not to Labor: Manufacturing Consent in the Innovation Economy	153
7.1 “Doing Work For Others, At the Same Time, Building a Career (边打工, 边创业 <i>Bian dagong, bian chuangye</i>)”: The Rising Work Load in Shenzhen.....	154
7.2 The Creation of a New Economic Labor Force: Making Identity and Organizational Discipline	158
7.2.1 “We are creative entrepreneurs, not bosses!”: Combining <i>Qinghuai</i> (情怀 emotion or affect) with Professionalism in Identity Making.....	159
7.2.2 Enterprising or Laboring? — The Increasingly Flexibility and Reorganization of Work From <i>waipin</i> (外聘 informal employment) to <i>waibao</i> (外包 outsourcing)	163
7.3. Manufacturing Consent in Space-Making	165
7.3.1 Building Informal Working Spaces	166
7.3.2 Formalization: “Re-creating the Space for Creative Entrepreneurs!”	169
7.4 Conclusion	172
Chapter Eight Conclusion: “Innovating China” in the Domestic and Global Political Economy.....	175
8.1 What does “innovation” mean for China? —— The “New Walking on Two Legs”	176
8.2 The Making of New Society, New Subject, and New Space in “Seeking Innovation”	179
8.2.1 The Infrastructural Power of State on Society-making: Seeking Like a State, Performing Like an Investor	181
8.2.2 “Innovating China” As a Practice of Subject-making: Expectations of Mobilities from Individuals	183
8.2.3 The Spatial Politics of Innovation: Space-making as a Strategy	185
8.3 “Sample Bias” and the Dilemma of “Structure/Agency Relationship”: Some Self-reflections.....	186
References.....	189
Curriculum Vitae.....	210

Abbreviation

B2B	Business to Business
B2C	Business to Customers
CSOs	Civil Society Associations
CCP	Chinese communist party
DIY	Do-it-yourself
IT	Information technology
LLP	Limited liability partnership
NGO	Non-government organizations
OEM	Original equipment manufacturers
PPP	Public private partnership
SEZ	Special Economic Zones
TSC	Tech-entrepreneurship Service Center
WFOE	Wholly foreign owned enterprises
VR	Virtual reality

Acknowledgement

The completion of this thesis has been a fruitful as well as long journey. I started my Ph.D. research in the winter of 2012. I still remember the first day I met with my supervisor, Professor Frank Pieke, in his office. The first question he asked me was “what do you want to ask in this Ph.D. research?” I answered him in seemingly non-fluent English: “I want to know how the state penetrates society in China after the reform.” He said “Penetrate is a good word.” I appreciate that he did not laugh at me for asking a large, uninformed question. He never judged when I changed my research topic in my third year. He carefully co-thought with me and astutely pointed out my problems through the long journey. He always encouraged me to ask questions based on my own discoveries and insights, and he believed in my research capability.

Unlike most of my peers, who received several years of training in social or political science in preparation for their Ph.Ds., I was prepared with just passion and curiosity. At the very beginning of my Ph.D., I actually did not know how to ask questions that would be appropriate for Ph.D. research. (And I eventually found out that any confidence in “asking a good research question” would be definitively “ruined” by the experience of fieldwork.) Professor Pieke guided me towards joining classes in Anthropology and Political Science, and he pushed me to write up three field-statements to prepare for my research proposal in 2013 and 2014. It was not until the spring of 2015 that I submitted my final research proposal and went back to China to do my fieldwork.

I thank my co-supervisor Dr. Ratna Saptari, who brought her sense of investigation from Indonesian Studies and Developmental Studies to my research field. Though we work in different fields, her comments and suggestions were pertinent and helped me to position my research. In addition to her excessive teaching workload, Dr. Saptari willingly spent time reading and commenting on each chapter of my thesis. She also motivated me to be a good instructor once I received my first teaching contract.

In the past years, I am fortunate to have received generous support from so many people and organizations.

I want to thank the people whom I met in Shenzhen and Hong Kong. They gave me selfless help and advice during my long-term fieldwork. Without their encouragement, I would not have been able to conduct my research. I heartily thank all my informants in China who trusted me and shared their stories and experiences with me. I thank Dr. Huang from Shenzhen University, Mr. Wang, Mrs. Huang, Xiaowei, Xing, Mr. Ye, Qin Chen, Chanmin, and Xiaojing Li for their generous help during my fieldwork. Their warm company helped me to quickly adapt to my work and life in Shenzhen. Hans, Jim, and Ryan trained me to be a “innovator” in startups, but they found that their efforts were in vain. Many scholars from other universities and research institutes have been generous in giving their advice and support regarding my research. They listened to my research questions and facilitated my interviews in many ways. I

especially thank Dr. Mary Ann O'Donnell, an anthropologist working and living in Shenzhen for more than twenty years. She funded me to join a short-term research project, and this helped me to critically rethink my research agenda. I am also privileged to have met scholars in conferences and online who gave me insightful comments: Jonathan Bach, Biao Xiang, Jun Wang, Zhao Zhou, Patrick Neveling, Luigi Tomba, and Chadwick Wang.

I received three-year funding from the China Scholarship Council between 2013 and 2016. I am grateful for this financial support. I thank the Institute for Area Studies at Leiden University for providing research facilities. I thank researchers from the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies who offered me funding for a short stay at the beginning of 2019. Leiden University Fund offered generous funding for my travel to Sydney and fieldwork to further my Ph.D. research in 2019 and 2020.

I am very grateful to all the staff and colleagues working in the Institute for Area Studies at Leiden University whom I got to know over the years. More particularly, I would like to thank Jue Wang and Florian Schneider for their support during the final stage of my thesis writing. I thank my new colleagues, especially Paula Esteves dos Santos Jordao, from International Studies at Leiden who trained me as a junior teacher. I thank Xiao Ma, Xinrong Ma, Wenxing Wang, Jifeng Liu, Zhongyuan Wang, Shuqi Jia, Tianmu Hong, Tabitha Speelman, Mark van der Water, Saeedeh Shahnahpour, Ka-Kin Cheuk, Ning Wei, Liangyu Chen, Xiaoling Chen, Guanmian Xu, Irna Hofman, Jiayi Xin, Zexu Guan, Yixiu Jiang, and those who are not in Leiden: Shu Zhou, Liqiu Wang, Benmo Jiang, Xiao Ma, Yitian Xia, Fengming Lu, Yizhi Mao, Lai Pik Chan, and Qinyuan Lei.

I especially thank friends who gave me insights outside of academia: Hugo, Jie Xue, Qing Wang, Jingshu Zhu, Dongshuo Cai, Karman Lee, Yiyun Huang, and Xiaojing Cai. I thank them all for their long-term encouragement and friendship. We eat, read, think, cry, and laugh together outside of academic circles. Several of them read my manuscript and gave key advice. In the final stage, I feel honoured that Florian Schneider, Cristina Grasseni, Gordon Mathews, Margaret Sleeboom-Faulkner, and Anne-Christine Trémon joined my Promotiecommissie. Their critical and constructive comments about the thesis encouraged me to turn this into a book.

Last but definitely not least, I thank my parents and grandparents for their endless support and love, especially during the Covid-19 lockdown. It was only after I had finished writing the main part of my thesis that I realised I had misjudged my father, who I thought did not care about my academic career. After reading a fieldwork research note that I published about new migrants in China's metropolitan cities, he shared many of his insights about grassroots governance in China from his thirty years as a policeman with me. My mother, an engineer, has always encouraged me to be brave enough to express myself and to do what I love. I am fortunate to have received encouragement and love from Haoqi Meng towards the final period of my thesis writing. He made efforts to read my whole dissertation and gave comments on every chapter (although I did not take them all in). His remote companionship made my work and life much easier during the lockdown.