Art and power in the new China: An exploration of Beijing's 798 district and its implications for contemporary urbanism

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.3828/tpr.79.2-3.6 Language: English Pages: 29

Abstract
This article explores urban change in the Chinese context, specifically in terms of the creation of Beijing's Dashanzi Arts District, also known as 798. As the fusing of the cultural and economic now defines cities within the post-industrial economy, Beijing is recognising the symbolic importance of the arts within its financial system and urban image construction. The campaign for and establishment of the arts district demonstrates not only a political awareness of the economic power behind cultural districts, but also the increasing pluralisation of power within Chinese society. This paper will focus on how the 798 Arts District has been branded, first unofficially by its original artists to preserve the industrial area and then officially to promote Beijing as a global city. In relation to the cultural shift in Chinese urban policy and the global utilisation of arts districts in urban image construction, it will discuss how the area is both a result of and an influence on China's contemporary culture. It also explores the possible gentrification consequences of the area's establishment and places such a scenario within the increasingly global (yet still overwhelmingly Eurocentric) reach of gentrification research.

References

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Art and Power in the New China: An Exploration of Beijing’s 798 District and Its Implications for Contemporary Urbanism. The Town Planning Review. 79 (2-3), 237-265. Networked Authoritarianism in China and Beyond: Implications for Global Internet Freedom. In Liberation Technology in Authoritarian Regimes. Stanford University. http://rconversation.blogs.com/MacKinnon_Libtech.pdf. The 798 Art District is currently located in the 718 Joint Equipment Factory that was created in 1952 and went into operation in 1957 after costing over 145 million Yuan with over 1000 sleepless nights under the belts of the Chinese construction workers ("798: Upgrading Factory 718"). The factory began as a project a by Chairman Mao with the assistance of the Soviet Union who were looking to create an electronic enterprise, expand social order, while subsequently revitalizing a small portion of the city (Chan). "Art and Power in the New China: An Exploration of Beijing’s 798 District and Its Implications for Contemporary Urbanism." The Town Planning Review 2008: 237. JSTOR Journals. China’s urbanisation transformation has brought enormous opportunities and challenges. China’s leadership has made great efforts to promote urbanisation as a priority for economic development. Obviously, the potential for extensive industrial expansion is very limited, and urbanisation shall be a strong and lasting driving force to boost China’s economic growth in the future. The inception workshop was held on April 9 in the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS). At the workshop and in the process that followed, a number of experts and scholars have actively participated in the discussion of the report both for the framework and contents and provided many constructive suggestions.