China's Skateboarding Youth Culture as an Emerging Cultural Industry

By

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the skateboarding industry in China as both a youth subculture and a cultural industry. I am investigating the transition between the two and examining how the emerging skateboarding industry operates through detailed analysis of the feelings, motivations and meanings attributed to it by its participants and the emerging strata of cultural workers. In order to achieve this research objective, this thesis has positioned the analysis in a triangle of forces between the development of Chinese skateboarding culture, the emerging skateboarding cultural industry and government interventions.

This ethnographic study takes into account distinctive characters in the development of Chinese skateboarding communities that signify continuities inside contemporary Chinese youth cultures. I argue that such continuity is still embedded in the organisation of the Chinese skateboarding industry as a cultural industry, in both subcultural and corporate entrepreneurial practices. Moreover, this thesis contributes to ongoing discussions in the field of not only cultural studies but also of the political economic analysis of cultural/creative industries by examining the dynamic incorporations at play between the commercial and governmental forces at the centre of current debate around the inclusion of skateboarding in the Olympic Games, and the consequences of the sportisation of skateboarding in mainstream economic structures. Last but not least, this research captures the working conditions of the cultural labourers who are at the forefront of shaping and reshaping the Chinese skateboarding industry.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Focus of the thesis: Chinese skateboarding

The investigation of youth subcultures has a long history inside social sciences research. Attention has focused particularly on street subcultures and later on urban youth music, from the hooligans (Pearson, 1973), to punk (Hebdige, 1979), hip hop (Dedman, 2011) and graffiti (Mcdonald, 2001). Skateboarding on the other hand, though long recognised as a subculture with a strong cosmopolitan visual presence, particularly in the United States and in Europe (Lombard, 2010; Wheaton and Beal, 2003 Borden, 2001), has received comparatively little academic attention.

Similar to many Western youth subcultures such as hip-hop and graffitti, skateboarding culture walked into the Chinese 'open door' in the late 1980s. Unlike Western music youth subcultures, however, which were soon targeted by the Chinese government as carrying ideological baggage (Jones, 1992), it developed relatively unnoticed amongst Chinese youth and was left largely free to grow organically via its participants, and to expand commercially with the arrival of transnational corporations after China joined the World Trade Organisation.

The potential of skateboarding to be included as an Olympic sport brought skateboarding to the notice of Chinese officials around the time of the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008 and prompted Chinese central and local governments to recognize the need to react to this global

trend. The result was an active push to manage the development of the Chinese

skateboarding industry as a sport industry and to reincorporate it into the commercial sports

sector.

Chinese skateboarding as a youth subculture

Anglo-American academics have produced well-tested accounts of subcultural theories that

have retained dominance in the study of subcultures around the world. However, in the

Chinese context we can identify two tendencies that reflect the country's specific trajectory.

On one hand, scholars who look at continuities in Chinese youth subcultures have focused on

literature produced around politically turbulent periods. On the other hand, contemporary

youth subcultural scholars have emphasized the discontinuities manifested in cyber

subcultures (see Lu, 2009; Ma, 2016), as if Chinese youth had abandoned offline spaces.

Both tendencies provide useful insights into social formations and resistances in Chinese

youth cultures but offer problematic foundations for providing a comprehensive

understanding of skateboarding as a subculture.

In this thesis, I argue that, in order to understand Chinese youth subcultures, it is important to

look at the different ways in which continuities and discontinuities are entangled and

manifested. In contemporary Chinese skateboarding culture, it is not hard to find continuities

embedded in recent communist social histories and images documented from films and

popular literatures. Nonetheless, as Cockain (2012, p. 165) has rightly pointed out, while

continuities form the social foundation for youth communities, Chinese youth also seek new

conventions drawing from different resources to live their present lives. Solely focusing on either continuities or discontinuities in the contemporary Chinese youth subculture can therefore result in misleading interpretations that contradict the lived experiences and meanings of subcultural participants.

Transition into cultural/creative industries

There is another general pattern within the study of contemporary Chinese youth subculture that sees subcultural participants as primarily consumers. As a result, very few attempts have been made to explore either the cultural production processes of subcultural participants, or the dynamics of workplace and subcultural careers. There are, for example, scholars (see Lu, 2009; Ma, 2016) who look at 'Singles' Festival' (A festival shared among particularly Chinese youth for being single, mainly celerbrated in forms of consumption) on Alibaba and Chinese youths' appropriations of such discourse and products. The generic emphasis of this line of argument is on how subcultural participants customise and individualise standardised products and exercise their creativity. These researchers 'overstate the cultural power of youth in the sphere of consumption' (McGuigan, 1992, p.89), where subcultural participants have no opportunity to become potential producers who could generate an income and earn a living from their subcultural participation.

There is a missing link in understanding the transition between subcultures and cultural/creative industries. Little is known about the subcultural entrepreneurs who seek to pursue careers and capitalise on the culture they experience. Both transnational

conglomerates and SMEs (small and medium sized enterprises) are left unexamined. Questions such as those that address the strategies employed to capitalise popular subcultures and how they are currently organised remain absent in studies of Chinese youth subcultures.

The Chinese skateboarding industry

In the discussion of skateboarding culture, a number of commentators have focused on its commercial incorporation and issues concerning subsequent tensions around cultural identities and issues of authenticity. During the late 1990s and the 2000s, the skateboarding industry expanded rapidly because of increased media coverage (especially ESPN and later FOX Sports) and the emergence of action sports mega events such as the X Games. Skateboarding became one of the best-selling sports among Western youth (Beal, 2004; Wheaton, 2004; 2010; Thorpe, 2014).

Other scholars have looked at the official incorporation of skateboarding culture. Thorpe and Wheaton (2011, p. 832) argue that the inclusion of action sports in the Olympic Games has led to 'complex power struggles between key agents – the IOC and associated sporting bodies, media conglomerates (e.g. NBC), and the action sport cultures and industries', which can only be understood by paying attention 'to the particularities within each specific historical conjuncture'. Sedo (2010) has documented the resistance of participants in skateboarding culture to the official incorporation of the culture in China, echoing the argument of Thorpe (2014, p. 8/ p.52) that action sports participants have been actively protesting against the 'nationalist approach' to incorporate skateboarding culture and the

'institutionalization' of action sports in global events such as the Olympics. However, this line of argument needs updating with recent empirical evidence since it either relies on outdated material or relies too much on secondary data.

Moreover, governmental incorporation of skateboarding culture works not only on the global and national scale, but also at the local level. However, there is little research in this area. The cultural/creative industries literature is capable of providing useful insights into the local incorporation of culture, but a productive conversation between skateboarding culture studies and the cultural/creative industries literature has yet to be established, especially in the Chinese context. Oakley and O'Connor (2015, p. 208) have observed that 'smaller-scale, place-based' initiatives, along with 'committed arts organisations' and 'broad-based local governance', might encourage more beneficial cultural development than Florida's (2008) concept of creative cities, which has been implemented in many Western contexts.

Gu (2015, p. 246) argues the Chinese model of creative clusters is generally underpinned by the 'authorisation of the use of inner city spaces by creative industries and to use this as a model to regenerate other parts of the city'. The skateboarding industry witnessed a similar trend when local authorities implemented policies hand-in-hand with national authorities in building skateboarding infrastructures.

To work towards my general goal of linking the different areas of study to provide a critical overview of Chinese skateboarding culture, I have positioned my study as an examination of

the triangular relations between three forces – governance, cultural industries, and subcultures (see diagram below) .The aim is to provide a grounded understanding of skateboarding culture which places it within a broader context and the interplay between forces of commerce and governance.
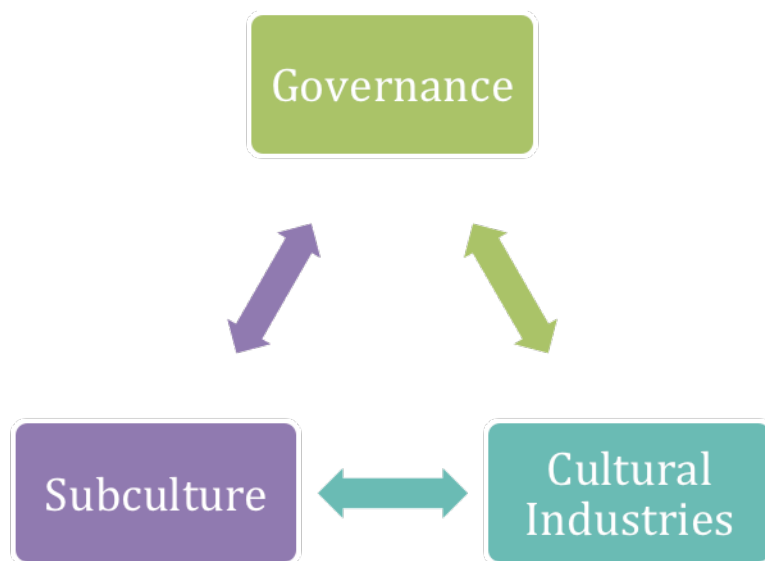
(Diagram 1)

Methods

My research focuses on the skateboarding industry in China as both a youth subculture and a cultural industry. I am investigating the transition between the two and examining how the emerging skateboarding industry operates through a detailed analysis of the feelings, motivations and meanings attributed to it by its participants and the emerging strata of cultural workers.

The core activity of skateboarding as a cultural industry is to produce visual contents through the sponsorship of professional skateboarders and videographers. As a consequence, sponsorship has a different set of requirements than conventional sports sponsorships. Despite expectations from their sponsors and the economic benefits, most professional skateboarders' passion lay not with winning institutionalised contests, but in producing skateboarding videos with their team riders.

To address the current gaps in academic knowledge, my research draws on two main sources of original data: interviews with participants in skateboarding culture and cultural workers in the Chinese skateboarding industry, and an insider ethnography with observation conducted in different cities in China and at skateboarding culture gatherings such as competitions and commercial events, as well as other casual gatherings such as daily skateboarding sessions and social activities that happen in-between. I aim to fill in the research gaps in the different areas of studies relevant to the development and operation of the Chinese skateboarding culture and the Chinese skateboarding industry.

Many researchers (McRobbie, 1989; Thornton, 1995; Muggleton, 2000) have highlighted the weaknesses of the earlier, seminal subcultural studies conducted at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS). Even though work in this tradition has provided ethnographic accounts of a range of youth subcultures (Willis, 1978; McRobbie, 1989, 2002; Thornton, 1995), there remains a lack of empirical studies of action sports cultures not based on the methodological and theoretical underpinning of the CCCS tradition (Beal and

Wheaton, 2003; Lombard, 2010; Wheaton, 2010; Thorpe and Wheaton, 2014) that focus primarily on consumption and resistance.

My decision to employ an ethnographic approach is based on my commitment to updating the existing literature on skateboarding culture (eg. Beal, 1995; Wheaton and Beal, 2003; Howell, 2004; Lombard, 2010; Dupont, 2014), particularly existing research on Chinese skateboarding culture (Sedo, 2010). Accessing and understanding insider perspectives (Bennett, 2002; O'Reilly, 2009) and taking into account the voices and experiences of Chinese participants in skateboarding culture as both cultural consumers and producers during the three decades of evolution of Chinese skateboarding culture and industry, forms the essential basis for the analysis presented here.

Structure of the thesis

The thesis is structured as follows:

First, Chapter 2 looks at the shifting theoretical foundations of the long tradition of youth subcultural studies and the transition into new areas of academic conversation that draw on the tradition of critical political economy. By connecting dialogs between subcultural literatures from different perspectives, this chapter provides the conceptual foundation for the later analysitical chapters that examine Chinese skateboarding culture.

Chapter 3 opens up space for contextual discussions of Chinese youth subcultures. I draw together literature on Chinese youth subcultures to look at continuities and discontinuities

and their relevance to the contemporary social formations of both old and emerging Chinese youth subcultures. One particular purpose of this discussion is to provide a contextual background for many of the characteristics that Chinese skateboarding manifests.

Chapter 4 details the general development of skateboarding culture. By looking at the most celerbrated version of the history of skateboarding, it traces its movements from the concrete evolution of the Californian surfing subculture to its current status as a current multi-billion global industry. Themes identified inside the body of literature concerning skateboarding will be carefully presented. At the same time, it connects literature concerning only skateboarding to other areas of academic debate, such as the discussion of commercial incorporation and cultural labour in subcultural and cultural industries literature. Moreover, it goes on to examine how existing research and popular debate over the inclusion of action sports in the Olympic Games has helped us to understand the current tensions within the skateboarding industry around the world.

Chapter 5 explains the methodological considerations of this thesis. I will explain how semi-structured interviews and ethnographic methods are applied in my research. Considerations and reflections on my personal involvement in the Chinese skateboarding industry and how it has influenced different stages of my research will also be presented.

Chapter 6 explores the introduction and early development of Chinese skateboarding culture. To date, there is only one other academic documentation of Chinese skateboarding culture. Conducted by the Canadian historian Tim Sedo (2010), it investigates the early development of skateboarding culture in China, providing a snapshot of the very early introduction of

skateboarding culture but with little recognition of the context of its emergence. My own observations focus on the socio-economic backgrounds of Chinese skateboarding culture's early participants and the meanings they attribute to their early passions and involvement. In contrast to the more frequently studied music subcultures, this chapter provides alternative insights into the continuities and discontinuities that have shaped a Chinese youth subculture with Western cultural origins.

Chapters 7 and 8 focus on the commercial development of the Chinese skateboarding industry. From the early subcultural entrepreneurs who actively capitalised on Chinese skateboarding culture by mobilising different social, economic and cultural resources, to the later arrival of transnational corporations after China joined the WTO, it investigates how the industry emerged and how it is currently organised, as well as what strategies have been utilised in its operations, while also exploring the tensions created between small and medium sized enterprises and transnational corporations on issues such as representations and cultural identity.

Chapter 9 moves on to governmental incorporation of Chinese skateboarding culture. There are two perspectives involved in this analysis. Firstly, to understand the central government's involvement in the incorporation process, this chapter provides an analysis of first-hand ethnographic data collected at and around the period of the 2014 Nanjing Youth Olympic Games, where skateboarding was part of the four featured sports. Secondly, it looks at two case studies of the Beijing Daxing Xingminghu Skatepark (previously called Beijing Woodward Skatepark, a franchise of the American Skateboarding Camp company) and the

Shanghai Yangpu SMP skatepark and how these cases illustrate local government's

commitment to incorporating the skateboarding industry into its policies in urban planning.

Chapter 10 investigates the working conditions of the cultural labourers inside the

skateboarding industry and explains different levels of influence, as well as the importance

of emergent strata. From an investigation of working conditions and detailed interviews with

participants occupying key positions inside the industry, this chapter offers insights into what

opportunities are available to these individuals, how sustainable these career pathways are

and how young people could mobilise different sets of capital to pursue subcultural careers.

In Chapter 11 provides a conclusion to this thesis. It summarises the discussions of the

research questions with particular attention to reflecting on the thesis's theoretical

contribution. More importantly, it connects the findings of the previous chapters and returns

to the triangle of forces introduced at the beginning of the thesis. Last but not least, the last

part of the thesis looks at the new challenges and opportunities that have emerged after the

official announcement of the inclusion of skateboarding in the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games,

and goes on to suggest future research directions.

Chapter 2 Subcultural Studies

The invention of 'subculture'

The Anglo-American debate concerning youth subcultures has taken different forms in the 20th century in order to investigate the youth cultures which emerged post World War 2. Early American academic attention to youth cultures involved theorists associated with the Chicago School (see Thrasher, 1929; Cohen 1955; Becker, 1963). Many of the works associated with the Chicago School, such as Thrasher's (1929) ethnographic study of gangs in Chicago, represent street youth cultures mainly as 'deviant groups' that create 'underworlds' in cities' poorly organised areas. Two main themes in Thrasher's understanding of gang culture were carried forward into later studies – a micro-culture existing both underneath and seperate from mainstream culture ('sub' as in subterranean) and in opposition to it (as in subversive). Cohen's (1955) study of the 'Delinquent Boys' (which first introduced the term 'subculture') is one of the later works that expanded Thrasher's analysis by explaining the function of a subculture as a solution to social problems – 'one solution is for individuals who share such problems to gravitate towards one another and jointly to establish new norms, new criteria of status which define as meritorious the characteristics they do possess, the kinds of conduct of which they are capable' (p, 56 - 66).

The post-war economic recovery in Britain encouraged scholars to examine new patterns of subcultural activities. Mark Abrams' study of *The Teenage Consumer* (1959), suggests that 'affluent teenagers' may provide a useful point of entry into how subcultural studies can

approach the new patterns of youthful activities and the emerging youth market organised

around the distinctive tastes of working-class youth in industries such as fashion and music.

Coleman (1961) also extended Thrasher's (1929) theme of a 'separate youth culture', and

argues that American high school students built up their own adolescent spaces that are 'cut

off' from adult culture and hence constitute the basis for their rejection of the school system.

This line of research lays the foundation for later subculture studies in understanding

subcultural styles and expressions.

Subcultures and the persistence of class

In responding to increasing class inequalities in post-war Britain, the Centre for

Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University (known as the CCCS), in their

well-celebrated edited collection *Resistance Through Rituals* (1976), offered a classic

account on subcultural formation. Drawing on the theoretical framework of Gramsci's

hegemony with a semiotic approach from Roland Barthes, the CCCS theorists shifted

attention away from urban sociological studies to readings of the symbolic forms of

subcultural expressions and styles, re-asserting the theme of class into the centre of a cultural

reading of subcultures in post-war Britain. By forming or joining style-based subcultures,

young people worked through their class experiences and negotiated a collective identity

expressed through symbolic resistance to the dominant culture (Clark et al, 1976, p.35). In

contrast with the Chicago School's youth cultural theories, here continuities were given more

attention by looking at the social locations and styles of subcultural expressions in relation to

their parent cultures. Taking the Skinheads as an example, John Clark et al argue that 'The

adoption by Skinheads of boots and short jeans and shaved hair was "meaningful" in terms of the subculture entirely because these external manifestations reflected and articulated Skinhead conceptions of masculinity, "hardness" and "working-classness"' that were central to the general culture of manual labour (1976, p.44). Another landmark study is Hebdige's (1974) reserach of the Skinheads and Mods. Hebdige (1974) argues that by assigning subversive meanings to working-class consumables, subcultural participants 'triumphed with symbolic victories' (p. 93). 'Stylisation' (Clarke et al, 1976, p.42) was seen as a magical solution to resolve the contradictions they experienced in their subordinated social and economic conditions laid out by the dominant culture.

After class

However, the CCCS approach has been subjected to a number of criticisms from both inside and outside the work related to CCCS. In their contribution to *Resistance Through Rituals*, Murdock and McCron (1976, p.172/174) call for a more comprehensive analysis of subcultures, underlining the need to focus on the way in which the shared social experiences of adolescents in particular class locations are collectively expressed and negotiated "through the construction of a range of possible leisure styles". They argue that taking already constituted subcultural groups and going backwards to their class locations is problematic and have suggested the opposite direction by starting with particular class locations and examining how they negotiate identities and respond to their specific class contradictions.

Later criticisms come from post-subcultural scholars. Hodkinson (2002, p. 11) summarised this line of criticisms as focused on a 'theoretical emphasis on the solving of status problems in one case, and on symbolic structural resistance in the other', since 'both traditions present an overly simplistic opposition between subculture and dominant culture'. Gelder (1997, p. 143) claims that post-subcultural studies, in comparison to the CCCS approach, 'increasingly respond to postmodern forms of sociality' and are less concerned with the 'discrete extraordinariness of subcultures', but rather 'treat them (subcultures) as symptoms of the fractured and fragmented – but no less social – nature of contemporary life'. Emphasising the fluid memberships of the post-modern subcultures, Maffesoli's (1996) concept of 'neo-tribe' became one of the most popular alternative terms in a collective attempt to re-negotiate terminology. Scholars such as Bennett (1999, p. 600), in support of the term 'neo-tribe', assert that subcultures can be 'better understood as a series of temporal gatherings characterized by fluid boundaries and floating memberships'. In comparison, Bourdieu's (1984; 1985) work has enabled concepts such as 'taste', 'distinction' and 'cultural capital' to be incorporated into the subcultural analysis of contemporary youth subcultures. Muggleton (2000) for example, revisited the CCCS's analysis of subcultural formations, arguing they are voluntary and dynamic associations bound by 'socially acquired tastes and preferences' (p. 92). Sarah Thornton's analysis of *Club Cultures* (1995) has looked at the dynamic activities in which subcultural participants accumulate and mobilise 'cultural capital' and negotiate subcultural hierarchies inside subcultures, without ignoring the importance of media and commerce in the dynamic negotiation of such themes.

Another line of criticism of the CCCS approach has focused on their over-reliance on the semiotic 'decoding' of subcultural styles and their lack of sustained empirical evidence of subcultural practices. Interestingly, one of the pioneering early British ethnographies of subcultural practices was conducted by another member of the Birmingham Centre, Paul Willis, and published as *Profane Culture* (1978). Willis' work, including his later book *Common Culture* (1990), shifted attention away from 'spectacular' subcultures and discovered the significance of subcultural participants' creative use of profane materials to articulate subcultural meanings. It is argued that this line of criticism towards the CCCS's semiotic approach prompted 'a turn towards immersive ethnography within youth subcultural studies from the 1990s onwards', and a wealth of 'insider' ethnographic studies of youth subcultures were generated as a result (Hodkinson, 2016, p. 637; 2005).

Jim McGuigan (1992, p. 118) criticised Willis' alignment with 'agency' over 'structure', arguing such emphasis on the 'very specific practices and meanings' ignores the economic pre-condition that provides such materials for their creative use. Later subcultural studies have developed richer ethnographic accounts of participants' subjective appropriation of subcultural styles and their routine practices, but have continued to position subcultural participants primarily as consumers of style choices that can be accessed through the market (McGuigan, 1992; Hodkinson, 2004), a view that reduces subcultures into market niches. McGuigan (2016, p. 49) pinpoints this general limitation of such tradition of cultural studies, that has 'a misguided tendency to neglect economic factors and to exaggerate the role of ideology in relation to consumption'. To read the politics of subcultural style more

comprehensively however, requires an analysis of subcultural participants not only as cultural consumers but also as potential cultural producers, operating within the economic context of the cultural industries.

From cultural studies of consumption to the political economy analysis of production

As Murdock noted, writing at the end of 1980s:

> The need for cultural studies to take the insights of critical political economy seriously is clearly signalled by the popularity of the notion of 'cultural industries' which is now to be found peppering the speeches and reports of politicians and policy-makers as well as academics (Murdock, 1989, p.68).

The transition between the two approaches can be found in the focus on subcultural career and cultural labour. Bennett and Hodkinson (Bennett, 2013; Bennett and Hodkinson 2012; Hodkinson, 2011; Hodkinson, 2016), in their revision of subcultural studies and post-subcultural studies, addressed the significance of examining the life trajectories and careers pathways in aging subcultural participants. Hodkinson argues that this line of research, although in its 'infancy', has potential in providing 'greater conceptual working through of how material, institutional, social and subjective factors work together in the ongoing development of cultural journeys and the continuing role of communities' (2016, p. 641). In a much earlier attempt to link up consumption and production in subcultural practices, Angela McRobbie, a member of the original group within the Centre for

Contemporary Cultural Studies whose early work focused on the role of popular cultural artefacts in the lives of teenage girls, argues that 'very little, if anything, was known about the working lives or careers' of cultural labourers (McRobbie, 1998, p. 1). Her work on fashion pioneered the studies of the emerging strata of the cultural labours, focusing on self-employed young women working in small and medium sized enterprises in the British fashion industry.

The transition of focus on cultural labour within the contexts of cultural industries resonates with what Bourdieu categorised as the new *petite bourgeoisie* or 'cultural intermediaries', taking up 'all the occupations involving presentation and representation and in all the institutions providing symbolic goods and services' (1984, p. 359). Such institutions form the new cultural economy that has gained permanence in the later discussion of the cultural/creative industries research, a new aspect of capitalism that 'incorporate subcultural styles' (Hebdige, 1974) into the capitalist structure, a description advanced by Jim McGuigan as 'cool capitalism' that 'incorporation of signs and symbols of disaffection into capitalism itself' (2016, p. 76; 2009). The 'cultural intermediaries' concept (Hesmondalgh, 2006; Gu, 2016; Smith Maguire, 2014; Smith Maguire and Matthews, 2010) became one of the key elements in later cultural/creative industries research. This term marks the point where one separates the subcultural forms of cultural production from the corporate form of cultural production (Ryan, 1992). Hesmondalgh argues that the umbrella of '"cultural intermediaries' should

include primary creative personnel such as musicians, screenwriters and directors; technical craft workers such as sound engineers, camera operators, copy editors, and so on; owners and executives; marketing and publicity personnel; and, crucially, creative managers, who act as brokers or mediators between, on the one hand, the interests of owners and executives, and those of creative personnel. Examples of such creative managers include A&R staff in the recording industry, commissioning editors in the book industry, magazine editors and film producers (2006, p. 227).

The phrase 'cultural industries' however, dragged a significant ideological baggage in its wake, carried over from its origins, baggage that was increasingly at odds with the rising rhetoric that redefined the 'cultural industries' as 'creative industries'. This shift in terminology signalled a sea-change in thinking. Whereas discussion of the 'cultural industries', being conducted primarily in a critical voice, highlight the increasing reach and power of the leading multi-media corporations and the intensification of commercial imperatives, in contrast, discussions around the 'creative industries' grew out of positive advocacy of the commercialisation of cultural production, although a critical literature has developed subsequently, emphasized the key role of small and medium sized businesses as sites of innovation and the move towards 'co-creation' which incorporated consumers into production processes as active participants, contributing ideas and expertise to the generation and modification of cultural commodities and activities.

The rise of cultural industries and the traditional critical political economy analysis

Writing in exile in California during the second world war, Adorno and Horkheimer (1979), the leading figures in the Frankfurt School of Marxist scholars, coined the term 'culture industry' to describe the paradoxical relationship between 'culture' and 'industry' in the commodification of culture as well as the alienation in the work situations within the cultural production system. The major Hollywood studios dominated film, the leading leisure activity of the time, while domestic recreation was increasingly commandeered by commercial radio services offered by the three leading broadcast networks. They emphasise the power of cultural producers over the consumption of culture, as they argue 'there is nothing left for the consumer to classify. Producers have done it for him' (1979, p.125). Their perspective on the problematic relationship between cultural producers and consumers is key to understanding the top-down power of the ideological manipulation of the society.

This general emphasis on the cultural power of the leading communications companies signalled an array of academic interests in the perspective of the critical political economy tradition in their analysis within the cultural industries framework. Leading figures of this group include for example, Herbert Schiller and Vicent Mosco in the United States, Graham Murdock, Peter Golding and Nicholas Garnham in Great Britain. Garnham argues that 'this group took the term "industries" seriously and attempted to apply both a more detailed and nuanced Marxist economic analysis and more mainstream industrial and information economics to the analysis of the production, distribution and consumption of symbolic forms' (2005, p. 18). In their academic response to the changing economic conditions in the 1970s,

they have produced a wealth of knowledge about how the changing conditions of cultural production give rise to the 'cultural industries' led by media conglomerates. This has led to a new current of research on cultural policies that are largely associated with political intervention from the Thatcher government in abolishing local institutions that argued to have positive policy impacts on cultural development such as the Labour controlled GLC (Greater London Council), and later the New Labour government's embracing of the policy rhetoric of the 'creative industries'. While 'cultural industries' research put emphasis on critical 'top-down' approaches to examining market dynamics led by de-regulation and privatisation in the media sector, 'creative industries' research has provided a 'bottom-up' reflection on 'creative industries' policies – conditions of cultural work and cultural labour and the debate around the construction of 'creative cities' and 'cultural quarters'.

Inquiries that aim to 'do justice' (Banks, 2017) to cultural work, update 'culture industry' theory's limitations in looking at alienation in the more industrial workflow of cultural labour in the context of cultural/creative industries. Murdock (2003, p.31) argues that moves in the cultural industries 'toward outsourcing production, relying more on freelance labour, and assembling teams on a project-by-project basis, have combined to make careers in the cultural industries less secure and predictable'. Angela McRobbie's research for example, updates knowledge on the working lives and careers of cultural labourers who are self-employed in small and medium sized enterprises in the fashion industry, while Hesmondalgh and Baker (2010) expand the empirical lens to look at the lived experiences and emotions of cultural workers in 'the television industry, the recording industry and the

magazine industry'. This trend of research investigates many problematic yet ambivalent situations in the lives of workers within cultural/creative industries. The other line of research challenges the creative cities policies utilised by local city authorities in post-industrial urban renewal (Banks, 2007; O'Connor, 2010) against its econometric evaluation system. Recent strands of this area of research have expanded their interests in the implications of such policies in other geographical settings (O'Connor and Gu, 2012; Fung, 2013). Collectively, they have urged the re-insertion of "cultural values" into cultural/creative economy policies (O'Connor, 2016; Banks, 2017)

Drawing the various threads of argument outlined in this chapter together poses five major questions for further investigation, which I will pursue in the remainder of this thesis through detailed research on one sector of cultural production in one national setting, the skateboarding industry in China, bringing together evidence on both the development and organization of the industry and the lived experience of participants.

(1) What strategies have the major conglomerates and small and medium sized enterprises developed to capitalize on the grassroots popularity of skateboarding? How is the industry currently organized?

(2) How do skateboarders respond to the business strategies of companies. How do they see themselves – as members of a subculture, as participants in sports and leisure?

(3) What new career pathways does the skateboarding industry offer, and how sustainable are they?

(4) How have local governments and economies responded to the emergence of skateboarding?

(5) What are the roles of cultural intermediaries in facilitating the transition of skateboarding subculture into a cultural industry?

Chapter 3 Continuities and Discontinuities in Contemporary Chinese Youth Subcultures – From the Red Guards to the Singles Festival

Introduction

This chapter aims to build up connections between studies of Chinese youth subcultures to assist understanding of the socio-economic context for the emergence of Chinese skateboarding culture. By looking at literature on other youth subcultures in China in a historical context, particularly contemporary Chinese music subcultures that emerged during the 1960s with Western origins, this chapter explores the continuities and discontinuities that manifest in similar ways in Chinese skateboarding culture. Starting with the social formations of contemporary Chinese youth cultures (particularly those which emerged from the 1960s onwards), I look at the persistent class divisions from the culture of the Red Guards and its popular representations in literature and films, followed by an examination of the forms and institutions in which resistance is practiced and articulated. Last but not least, I will look at how market reforms and the arrival of consumer society have influenced the above themes in Chinese youth cultures.

The term 'Red Guards' commonly denotes the student social movement initiated during the Cultural Revolution in the late 1960s. With the later personal support of Chairman Mao, it rapidly grew into a popular Maoist weapon of ideological control with distinctive violent characheristics. The movement grew out of control very quickly and was purposely dissolved by the authorities by the end of 1968. For more discussion on this movement, I

refer to Xu (2002), Clark (2012) and Cockain (2012)'s work on the topic. Many attempts to capture Chinese youth culture have begun from discussion of the Red Guards (for example, Clark, 2012; Cockain, 2012; de Kloet and Fung, 2017), most of which shares a viewpoint similar to Clark's (2012, p. 2), namely that it was a point of reference for the emerging discontinuity in Chinese youth cultures at a very unique period of contemporary Chinese history; however, others argue that these historical moments are strongly associated with the de-politicising trace of Chinese youth cultures (de Kloet and Fung, 2017).

The class division within the Red Guards is often neglected. For instance, Clarke (2012) argues that the Red Guards had become the 'Sent-down Youth' (or in his term, 'educated youth') without acknowledging the divisions between the university Red Guards in the outskirts of the city, where universities such as Peking University are based, and the school-based Red Guards, who were typically teenage students living in the city centre of Beijing. Jiang and Ashley (2000, p. 6) pointed out the different ways the two groups ended their experience in the Red Guards: the teenage students and the working class Red Guards who returned "to their schools or units, and the older students, normally university students who were 'sent down' to 'learn from the peasants' and "became village teachers, 'barefoot doctors' or propagandists' and 'local cadres'".

The post-Mao era and Deng Xiaoping's Open Door Policy, economic reform and the Four Modernisation process have marked a clear disjuncture between the 'old' China and the 'new' China. The focus on Chinese youth subcultures has also taken a turn from the political past

in the 1970s and 1980s toward the commercial transition in the 1990s and 2000s and then the online present after the 2000s. For example, Jiang and Ashley (2000, p. xv -xvii) describe the Red Guards (also referred to by the Chinese public as 'The third generation') as a sector of the population that 'accepted main stream state ideology unquestioningly', whereas Zhang and Ong (2008) see China's new individual as 'the product of the pull between the deregulated neoliberal market and the controlling impulse of the socialist state'. Clark (2012) then claims that because of the "always present state, Chinese youth could only carve out their real and virtual spaces for their identities".

Methodologically, however, there is still a lack of ethnographic resources with regard to participants in youth culture. Research that relies too much on poetry and literature (Lu, 2009), even though it may be well-documented, highlights the political past but fails to explain the cultural legacies of popular images from films and novels. Some exceptions, such as Clark (2012, 192) claim that 'the transformations in the life of all Chinese, including youth, cannot be understood through mapping phenomena according to grid patterns of simple binaries: Chinese and Western, local and global, or traditional and modern' and deploy an ethnographic approach in capturing the complexity and fluidity of influences over the development of Chinese youth cultures in the transition between the political past the commercial present. De Kloet and Fung (2017, p. 197) are also 'committed to an ethnographic approach' to examining the 'experiences, thoughts, hopes, and aspirations' that differs from many other textual analyses of contemporary Chinese youth. However, they still ignore the offline activities of marginalised Chinese subcultures and focus on textual analysis

of the 'mediated expressions of youth', which constitutes the majority of current research trends regarding contemporary Chinese youth cultures.

I argue instead that, in order to understand the continuities and discontinuities inherited and generated from the biggest socio-economic transition over the past three decades of Chinese society and their influence upon Chinese youth, we also need to take seriously offline activities and marginalised subcultures and their development. Rather than looking for continuity in the more politically orientated literature and poetry from these turbulent periods, if we examine the entertainment resources that both the middle-class and working-class Chinese youth actually consume, such as novels, reality shows and popular images in films and TV series, we might be able to observe and better understand the resources that have had a lasting influence on Chinese youth's values, attitudes and behaviours, especially from the transitional period in which new ways of thinking are being shaped.

The Red Guards and the question of class

Western literature on the subject of the Red Guards raises important insights into the transformation of Chinese youth in the turbulent era of the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s and 1970s. However, it often fails to place sufficient emphasis on the complexity embedded in the class divisions among the different groups within the Red Guards. I argue that by recognising this class division within the Red Guards, we could adopt an analytical lens that helps us to understand the distinguishable characteristics initiated during the Red Guards era,

many of which can still be observed but remain largely misunderstood in contemporary

Chinese youth cultures, especially in urban youth subcultures.

Jiang and Ashley (2000, p. xiii) have pointed out that 'In most accounts of the Red Guard

generation, including many written by participants, the Red Guards appear as thugs and the

Sent-down Youth are portrayed as victims' based on 'the restrictions that limit a thorough

investigation of this complex and tumultuous era, [and a] lack of understanding of the

broader political context within mainland China, particularly among the younger generation'.

Many of these commentators tend to ignore the class divisions within the Red Guards groups,

which has led to the confusion mentioned above about the Red Guards and the Sent-down

Youth. Walder (2009), unlike most of the accounts of the Red Guards, explicitly sets out to

tackle this confusion by looking specifically at the divisions within the Red Guards in

Beijing by separating the Red Guard groups into university students and high school students.

Moreover, Walder examines the group that received much less documentation than the

university students, the high school Red Guards:

> Events in the high schools cannot be documented to the degree possible for universities.
>
> High-school students wrote much less about their experiences, and the work groups did
>
> not play an important role in defining their political viewpoints (Walder, 2009, p. 125)

Though less thoroughly documented by the existing literature, the high-school Red Guards

played a highly visual role in the Red Guards Movement in the urban neighbourhoods of

Beijing, where several major high schools were based. The leaders of the high school Red

Guards normally had a very high rank in the Party, to the point that even the officials in the

work teams assigned by the Party to work with the Red Guards were less willing to confront

them: 'lower-ranking officials were more cautious about committing political errors and

were wary of clashes with students whose parents outranked them' (ibid, p. 124-125). Such

complex class division within the high-school Red Guards formed tensions and subcultural

hierarchies, not only between the elite high schools but also within the general population of

the Red Guards between the students with 'red' backgrounds and those without (ibid, p.

137-142).

Jiang and Ashley (2000) conclude from their interviews of the ex-Red Guards that, despite

these contradictions, the violence and the political orientations within the Red Guards, it was

a period of nostalgia for many of participants, due to reasons similar to those that Clark

(2012) also observed—a sense of solidarity and purpose. Clark's (2012) account of the Red

Guards and the Sent-down Youth, though it dismisses some important issues such as class

division, acknowledges the lasting influence of the Red Guards on the later development of

contemporary youth cultures.

Leaving the Red Guards?

In 2015, the Chinese film *Mr.Six* or *Lao Pao Er* (directed by famous film director, Guan Hu,

who was born in 1968, stars many popular actors and actress, including the even more

famous director Feng Xiaogang, born in 1958) enjoyed massive box office success and was

the closing film for the 72nd Venice International Film Festival. The film tells the story of how the generation who experienced the Cultural Revolution when they were young copes with a economically and socially transformed China, contradicting to the values established during their youth. Under the heavy influence of the high school Red Guards in particular, who were highly visible in the urban neighbourhoods in Beijing, the generation portrayed in *Mr.Six* was the generation of youth during that time period , who had to cope with the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution and the economic and social reforms that took place after Deng Xiaoping came into power. What is more important is that this generation consists of the parents of the 'post 80s' and 'post 90s generation that was born after the 'one-child policy' was introduced in 1978—that is, the current generation of Chinese youth. Consequently, the stories portrayed in *Lao Pao Er* could still have a cultural influence ovoner the current generation of youth, especially the 'post-80s' generation who grew up in neighbourhoods where their parents' culture still lingered on, as many of their parents' generation, like the characters in *Mr.Six*, still hold tight to the values formed during their youth.

Mr.Six was not the first nor the most popular documentation of this generation. The conflicts between the 'red class', or the political elites (Goodman, 2014), and the '*laobaixing*' ('the masses'), became dominant, especially in the urban neighbourhoods of Beijing, have been documented and presented by novels and films that flourished in the late 1980s and have remained popular among Chinese youth up to today, Wang Shuo's novels and films are exemplary of this. The culture of '*wan zhu*' or '*lao pao er*' (some call it hooliganism—see,

for example, Clark, 2012), is the culture of class struggle and tensions that belie the continuities of the Red Guard generation and the discontinuities of the socio-economic context in which they currently live. In the post-Mao era, the tensions and conflicts between youth groups living in army compounds with 'red' class backgrounds and those living in Hu Tongs (small valleys) in Beijing with mostly working class parents have reflected the class struggles experienced among Chinese youth after the Red Guards movement. The two groups often fought violently against each other, and loyalty to their collective groups and defense of their class background and values have been of the utmost importance to many of the individuals in these two groups.

Growing resistance towards social institutions

Moreover, more continuities have remained from the Red Guards' cultural legacy than just class struggles. These include rebellious attitudes towards school systems and the collapse of the Confucian family culture, which is reflected in Cockain's (2012, p. 166) observation of contemporary Chinese youth cultures: 'Chinese youths today are not completely compliant with the demands made of them. Unlike the "unreflected first loyalty" (Tu 1994, p. xvi) to the Party, and unquestioning loyalty to the family displayed by youths in the past, there is now negotiation and also creative responses and reactions to rules'. The collapse of institutions such as the school system, along with the absence of parents because of the 'sent-down' youth and 'up the mountain, down to villages' movements, have provided a breeding ground for this youthful, rebellious spirit to continue, like the groups of young people portrayed in the popular film *In the Heat of the Sun* (1994), based on Wang Shuo's

novel *Wild Beast* (1991). Clark (2012, p. 147) describes the story as portraying 'a gang of young teenagers spending their days during the 1970s getting into trouble and chasing girls in an army compound … youthful readers of the novel and watchers of the film were attracted by the extraordinary freedom the young men and women enjoy in the story despite the heightened political tensions of the Cultural Revolution that form a mostly unseen background to the story'. Nonetheless, the nature of the rebellion expressed by this gang of teenagers has a vastly different and more discursive outlook than the Red Guards' revolutionary orientation and explicitly violent actions. Kloet and Fung (2017, p. 21) recently commented on this contemporary youthful resistance:

> Youth in China are not actively pursuing democracy, as their counterparts did in Hong Kong in the fall of 2014, nor do they aim to topple the system, as was the case in the Arab Spring, nor do they publicly fight against corruption, as their predecessors did in 1989. They are indeed quite different from the generation that grew up in the 1980s … today's youth are in search of small interventions, piecemeal changes, occasional resistance and locally specific alternative subjectivities

We can see continuities here that parallel the resistance of youth groups in the 1970s in Wang Shuo's novels and films, which has extended into current youth cultures. Such a culture of rebelliousness should not be simplified as a nostalgic longing for a past that has lost its cultural currency in contemporary Chinese youth cultures, but rather as historic contexts which encourage interest in Western subcultures that share this orientation, such as

hip-hop, rock or, in the case of this thesis, skateboarding culture. The famous rap group In3 has almost all of their songs on their first album included in the list of 120 songs banned by the Ministry of Culture. 'Of a list of 120 tunes forbidden by the Ministry of Culture last year – songs which "trumpet obscenity, violence, crime or harm social morality' – "7 were by In3' (Fullerton, 2016). Among these 17 songs is one of the popular, 'Hello Teacher', which topped the list. The first minute and 50 seconds of this song features an audio clip from the film *I'm Your Father*, based on Wang Shuo's 1991 novel. The teenager character in the film criticizes his teacher, which makes the whole class laugh at her and he is asked by the teacher to leave the classroom, however, the character refuses to leave, claiming he has already paid fees to be in the class. Then the lyrics describes how to rebel against teachers within the school system, as 'I am doing mathematics homework during Chinese classes whatsoever' and 'I will listen to music during your class regardless'. Here, the student's resistance towards the school system resembles de Kloet and Fung's description of 'feigned compliance' (2017, p. 56). This song and the audio from the film resonate with contemporary Chinese youth, both those who are still inside the school system and those who have graduated but experienced the same school system before. Consequently, In3 became tremendously popular before they were banned by the Ministry of Culture and were even featured on mainstream radio and foreign media, especially around the time of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, primarily because of their more politically correct song 'Beijing Welcomes You Back'.

Collapse of the old collective class identities and the rise of 'new' individual distinctions?

In popular films and novels that described the youthful rebellions of the 1970s, no matter how rebellious the urban Chinese youths were or how fierce the fight between the two classes was, there was always a hierarchy between the two groups. This is illustrated in *Mr.Six* and many other films before it, and both of the two youth groups still honoured the very specific red class styles. It was regarded as a badge of honour to be able to wear a Russian-style military coat or to be able to fight with a Japanese officer's sword (most of which were confiscated during the Second World War). They would hold their biggest celebrations at the 'Old Mo' (Moscow Restaurant in Beijing), the first foreign restaurant in Beijing, designed by Russian architects, which symbolised high social status because of its high prices. Hence, between the groups, the collectively valued distinction has always been consistent with regard to their parents' culture. However, these values started to shift by the end of 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s. Xu (2002, p.114) argues that: 'Compared to what they had thought and done four or five years previously, Chinese youth in the mid-1980s were prone to be less idealistic and more utilitarian. They were concerned less with social issues and more with their personal lives. They depended less on authorities (organizations and parents) and acted more on their own' (p. 114).

There is no doubt that the Party deployed a market-oriented development strategy after late 1978, introduced by Deng Xiaoping. In the process, the old class system among Chinese youth started to corrode. However, the process of the rapid economic development in China generated a nuanced and complicated class system in which class is seen by Goodman (2014, p. 5) as 'socio-economic structure', a 'performance (the rehearsal of identity)' and 'as

ideological formulation'. In the endings of those films, such as *In the Heat of the Sun*,

typically one of the characters moves on from their youth group to succeed in the booming

market economy, and the ones who hold tight to their old class values always end up in a less

'desirable life', such as in *Mr. Six*. Entrepreneurial culture was promoted by the state during

the 1990s not only to the populace but also within its own system. Government officials were

encouraged to '*Xia Hai*' ('go into the sea') and were provided with three years of unpaid

leave and a saved position for their entrepreneurial attempts. 'By the 1990s, the whole

country started a *Xia Hai* (going into the sea) trend. According to statistics by the Ministry of

Human Resources and Social Security of the People's Republic of China, there were 0.12

million government officials who quit their positions and "went into the sea", 10 million

government officials had unpaid leave' (Wang, 2014). Pan Shiyi, the Chinese real-estate

magnate who owns SOHO China Limited, was among the 0.12 million who quit their

positions in government institutions, and thus he built his business empire (Sohu.com, 2017).

For the first time in contemporary Chinese history, facing unprecedented entrepreneurial

opportunities, being an entrepreneur has become considered not only accessible but also

desirable. Popular among contemporary Chinese youth because of his talk shows, famous

cultural critic and musician Gao Xiaosong, when discussing the changes before and after the

Deng period, asserts that a change took place over the 30-year period of economic

development initiated in the late 1970s and early 1980s, that before, 'making money' was

considered shameful until this development overthrew such values so that now it is almost

considered a virtue to be able to make a lot of money (2013). This transition in values in

China laid the foundation for the emergence of Chinese cultural entrepreneurship, from music labels to skateboarding companies.

However, more than this new age of accumulation of economic capital, socio-economic reform also brought about the second function of class, which is, as Goodman (2014, p.5) sees it, 'class as performance (the rehearsal of identity)'. One of the earliest and most well-known markers of this trend is Chinese rock music. Much of the discussion about the origin of rock music in China begins with Cui Jian (for example, Lu, 2009; Clark, 2012; de Kloet and Fung, 2017) and his concert at the Beijing's Workers' Gymnasium in May 1986. Wang (2007) sees the period of rock music's introduction into China as a time when the Chinese music industry had reached the peak of its early development (roughly between 1979 and 1991) and had started to diversify. In Wang's (2015, p. 113) view, Chinese rock music did not function as a vehicle for working-class youth to challenge mainstream Chinese culture, as many Western academics observed at the time. On the contrary, it was a tool for expression accessible only to privileged minorities such as the children of the 'red class'. Wang utilises Bourdieu's (1993) concepts of cultural capital and symbolic capital, and asserts that the practice of Chinese rock music requires a high level of cultural capital, which explainw Cui Jian's success, building on his previous education in traditional Chinese instruments and classical music. De Kloet and Fung (2017, p. 74) rightly point out that Cui Jian's popularity as a 'godfather of Chinese rock culture' builds on 'his husky voice, metaphorical lyrics, and cool appearance struck a chord with the youth of the 1980s and 1990s' and rejects any reading of Cui Jian 'in an overtly political way'. Many   observations

of Cui Jian agrees that Cui Jian's image and his songs also are nostalgic for the spirit of the

1980s (Xu, 2002; Clark, 2012; De Kloet and Fung, 2017):

> Cui's style was resolutely that of a countercultural rock singer. He often wore a Mao
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> jacket on stage, sometimes with a 'Mao cap', complete with red star. In an age of
>
> forward thrusting economic growth and modernisation, this was a deliberate harking
>
> back to roots and a collectivist ethos that was being lost (Clark, 2012, p. 107)

Cui Jian has influenced over a generation of Chinese youth, with songs like 'Nothing to My

Names', which became the anthem of the 1989 student movement, and had a profound

impact on students' attitudes from a collective Confucianism to the accelerating process of

opening up to Western culture. During this process, this generation of Chinese youth started

to negotiate their collective identities and tried to find their own. This identity has certainly

become one that marks individual distinctions during a certain period in time in China

because of its participants' privileged access to and ability to perform such identity. Lu

(2009, p. 150) argues that Chinese rock music was, at least during the period between 1986

and 1990, seen as 'avant-garde rebellion' that only served the purposes of educated youth in

universities. Cui Jian has publicly acknowledged that his upbringing in the air force

compound in Beijing has influenced his music and style, but more importantly that it gave

him exposure to Western cultures and rock music. Dou Wentao (2014), a TV host and

cultural commentator, said in his interview with Cui Jian, 'during that time (late 1970s and

early 1980s), the Chinese youth who lived in army compounds hac much greater access to

Western culture, such as films and rock music, than those who live in residential neighbourhoods in the city'.

Arrival of the era of consumption

The arrival of the rapid economic development initiated by Deng Xiaoping's economic reform made Western subcultural styles more available to the mass youth market rather than just upper-middle class Chinese youth, with their privilege to experiment with and perform. 'By 1988, after ten years of "reform and opening up", the range of choices available to Chinese youth had expanded enormously. This was particularly the case for urban youth with money' (Clarke, 2012, p. 198). Along with economic reform and opening up to Western culture, the first generation of Chinese mass youth has arrived at the point where they began to have access to what had previously been a privilege only of the 'red class', namely the ability to experiment with different Western cultures, identities and lifestyles, such as pop and rock music cultures, Western fashion, and Western sports cultures like skateboarding. Many, like Lu (2009), have argued that rebellious rock music belongs not only to cultural elites but also to the past (meaning previous to 1990 or 1992, using Deng's visit to the south as the dividing line between old rock and new rock) Chinese rock music continued to develop in the 1990s, but the aspect of resistance has gradually faded and turned towards commercialisation. Lu (2009, p. 82-83) concludes that in the 21st century, rock music has been marginalised and replaced by pop rock music. Gao Xiaosong (2013) agrees and, regarding Cui Jian's influence on Chinese youth, remarks that "the things that Cui Jian 'screamed about' only influenced our generation of Chinese youth, it belongs to that decade

only. However innovative in its formality and loud in the cultural sphere during that generation, it did not bring social progress as was expected from its influences". 'Rock music under heavy Western ideological influence has gone "out of fashion". For contemporary Chinese youth, 'rock music can be serious, political, but it can very well be a lifestyle, a way to express identity or just to entertain' (Wang, 2015, p. 72 - 73). Lu (2009, p. 82) argues that Chinese youth culture has been controlled by consumerism and pop culture, and its influence has focused primarily on the domain of consumption. Xu (2002, p. 25) also points to a similar argument about middle-class youth in China: 'What is central in the formation of middle-class subjects in China is the cultivation of a distinct "cultural milieu" based on the past, judgement, and the acquisition of cultural capital through consumption practices'.

Authenticity

With the arrival of the era of consumption, Chinese youth have been influenced by external cultures, like when the 'red class' experimented with rock music culture in a more complicated context. The assumption that Western subcultures travelled in a homogeneous form has been challenged. Many commentators (Chow and de Kloet, 2013; Wang, 2015; Clark, 2012; de Kloet and Fung, 2017) have rejected this binary opposition between the Chinese and the Western. Clark (2012) has analysed how cultural flows from Korea and Japan have influenced popular youth cultures in China, particularly focusing on the 'Korean wave' (Han Liu) that has been at the centre of cultural consumption by Chinese youth. Other academics have also elaborated cultural influence from the music industries in Taiwan and Hong Kong (Moskowitz, 2010; Chow and de Kloet, 2013). Gao Xiaosong (2013) also shares

the industry viewpoint that the cultural influence and competence of the mainland Chinese music industry has always been subordinate to Taiwan's and Hong Kong's cultural influences: 'there were only moments in the mainland Chinese music industry when we have "cultural" songs such as Cui Jian's that can be compared with the music from Hong Kong and Taiwan. From the industry side, it was never anywhere near the level of Hong Kong's or Taiwan's music industry'.

De Kloet and Fung (2017) draw on Diana Crane's (2002) four models of globalisation to analyse the reception of different cultural flows that influence Chinese youth, and they argue that the new generation of Chinese youth is less concerned with authenticity than previous generations, such as in the 1980s (see de Kloet, 2010). Instead, they are interested in the new spaces created from and influenced by the 'regionalisation of global culture' that is less concerned by the state. Even though de Kloet and Fung (2017, p. 121-122) claim that we should resist the 'temptation to frame Chinese youth practices with perspectives of consumption culture and materialistic desires', they argue that 'the logic of play and the plurality of cultural practices among young Chinese incubated under the invisibility of new emergent spaces is a political act in its own right, when we consider the intrinsic value of youthfulness and the strategy to preserve it, to enjoy it the same ways as other youth populations in the region, in the world', thus failing to provide convincing evidence similar to Clark's observation form the same "spaces and practices develop primarily online" (de Kloet and Fung, 2017, p. 122):

By the twenty-first century, Chinese youth cultures seemed all-consuming. The majority of urban youngsters were from one-child families … The Internet gave many of these youth a powerful means to connect with others, to perform, create, and show off. (Clark, 2012, p. 193)

I posit that this argument is conveniently supported mostly by evidence found in online subcultures but also that this line of argument ignores existing continuities that hold important cultural currency for subcultural participants in groups that are less active online, such as skateboarding culture. Discussions (Ma, 2016) of the Singles Festivals, show that the celebration of youth resistance to mainstream culture and the manifestation of class struggle are considered to be only solvable through consumption. By creating new semiotic means to create their own subcultures, Chinese youth face the reality that the semiotics they have appropriated from mainstream culture constitutes its own biggest weakness - an easy target for commercial incorporation. The result of the economic boom and a more fluid flow of information on the internet, presents a problematic optimism with regard to subcultural participants' cultural power, which, under such a framework, is only apparent in the sphere of consumption (McGuigan, 1992).

Resistance and distinction in the age of consumption

Lu (2009, p. 129-131) argues that in highly developed Chinese consumer society, Chinese youth seek resistance through creating 'online youth discourses' such as the 'singles' festival' mentioned in the previous section, as their weapon for this 'symbolic warfare' towards

mainstream culture. He picked up 'cool' as an example in his research into the meaning of 'cool' among Chinese youth. He found out that there are mainly three meanings attributed by Chinese youth to the image of 'cool': (1) people who have distinctive character and higher expectations in their lives (64.6%); (2) people who are 'cold' and talk very little (45.6%): (3) people who perform better in extreme sports such as skateboarding and sports climbing (39.1%). However, his research also shows that even though the majority of Chinese youth admire those who are 'cool', many would not actually participate themselves (21%). Lu (ibid, p. 131) concludes that contemporary Chinese youth desire 'cool', alternative identities and resistance, but only on the level of online discourse, mainly because of a lack of the economic capital necessary to consume particular lifestyles. However, this strand of research ignores offline discourse and the insights of the actual participants who were deemed 'cool'.

Even if those who merely admire such 'cool' images can actually afford to participate in alternative lifestyles and subcultures, it does not necessarily make them 'cool'. Hence, I argue it is also important to look at the micro levels inside subcultures, their subcultural capital (Thornton, 1997) and the power hierarchies inside subcultures. In doing so, the argument about the disjuncture between the 'old' and 'new' Chinese youth could be challenged, and it could also help to explain what in the age of consumption constitutes markers for distinction, apart from the difference in economic capitals that differentiate different youth participation in different youth subcultures. The practices of different youth groups mobilising and transforming capital, can still be traced in the imaginations, formed in the late 1980s and 1990s, of the Chinese youth of the era. Returning to the discussion of

Wang Shuo and the characters in his novels and films, 'the language used both by the story and by the characters in it, and the attitudes and lifestyles of the protagonists … chimed well with the attitudes and aspirations of his young readers … the Beijing slang in the stories chimed perfectly with the fashion of students in the city to adopt the local, informal language as a marker of their distinction' (Clark, 2012, p. 146 -149). Although the Lao Pao or Wan Zhu culture has lost its dominance in the cultural sphere, this distinction has retained its cultural currency in contemporary Chinese youth cultures:

> Wang Shuo is particularly popular among the younger generation especially those who consider themselves 'modern'. These middle class youth are mostly urban young men and women, including high and college students, white and blue-collar workers, and small entrepreneurs. Not only do they enjoy reading Wang Shuo's stories, watching his television series and movies, but some of these middle class youth openly imitate the lifestyle and speech of Wang Shuo's or hooligan (pizi or liumang) characters. Indeed, Wang Shuo has become 'the idol of rebellion for the youth' (Yao, 2004, p. 432)

Unlike what De Kloet and Fung (2017) argued in the previous section, namely that authenticity is less of a concern for the new generation of Chinese youth, subcultural participants place great value on authenticity in their subcultures, particularly in an age when Western youth subcultures are little more than the available choices of different subcultural styles appropriated for a youth market with differing class backgrounds. However, they assign value to authenticity not necessarily by appropriating Chinese styles into their practice,

but by performing a particular local habitus and rebelliousness with Chinese characteristics, of which can have distinctive traces from the previouse Chinese youth cultures.

Discussing the 'cultural north' and the 'commercial south' (Wang, 2015, p. 89-96; see also de Kloet, 2005, p. 233), Wang rejects de Kloet's idea about the difference between the north and the south, claiming that even though Beijing has undoubtedly been the centre of Chinese rock music until the late 1990s, Chinese youth in the southern regions have also developed their own styles of rock music. However, what Wang does not discuss, was that since rock music has been incorporated into mainstream pop rock culture, Chinese youth from both the north and the south have not stopped looking for the spirit of rebellion elsewhere. In the north, Wang Shuo's films and novels have occupied the cultural sphere that showed Chinese youth a new generation of rebelliousness. Nonetheless, it might have had less influence on Chinese youth from the south due to cultural differences and language barriers. Another film series from Hong Kong, *Young and Dangerous* (1995 - 2000), however, has been massively popular among Chinese youth from the north and south alike. Based on a popular comic book series called 'Teddy Boy', *Young and Dangerous* presents several stories about gang members in Hong Kong and their violent adventures as well as their love interests. Because of its enormous popularity in Hong Kong and in mainland China, nine sequels and spin-offs were made after the first installment appeared in 1995. The main actors of this film are still cultural icons and active in the Chinese entertainment industry and have also appeared in the 2014 and 2016 New Year's Eve Gala Show on national TV.

To a certain extent, both Wang Shuo's films and novels and the *Young and Dangerous* film series reflect Confucianist and collectivist values regarding family, schools, and brotherhood. Chinese traditional concepts ,such as *guanxi* and *mianzi* are central to the characters' story lines. *Guanxi* refers to interpersonal connections and relationships in Chinese culture. *Mianzi* is defined as the recognition by others of an individual's social standing and position (Lockett, 1988, see also Buckley et al, 2006). Good *guanxi* is the foundation for the smooth operation of business in Chinese society, and it also constitutes an important infrastructure in Chinese youth subcultures. In these subcultures, participants are not only expected to maintain good relationships with each other but also 'to protect a person's *mianzi* or dignity and prestige' (Buckley et al, 2006, p. 276), especially for opinion leaders. Both concepts knit together the relationships within the subcultures presented in the films and novels and thus form the foundation for understanding the relationships and what Thornton (1997) calls subcultural capital and hierarchies within these subcultures. The importance of human relationships in the operation of Chinese subcultural industries suc,h as the skateboarding industry, is crucial, and parallels can be found in research such as in Redding's (1990) on the importance of networks in organisations in east Asia and on how managers mobilise their different forms of capital on an operational level. But more importantly, the literature on the 'production and reproduction of human relationships' (Kipnis, 1997, p.7), by utilising different forms of capital, should also be read in connection with subcultural literature such as Thornton's (1997) work on the concept of subcultural capital. In *Young and Dangerous*, *guanxi* and *mianzi* are crucial to participants regarding how their businesses run and how they develop their careers and climb the ladder in their

gangs. In Wang Shuo's films there are parallels showing how these two concepts interact within youth groups, especially when economic capital is not central in determining subcultural hierarchy. Different stories have described how *guanxi* and *mianzi* were built through doing favours for other members of the group and displaying certain habitus and acquiring symbolic capitals through performance.

Regardless of the series' popularity, the gang values and violent behaviours of the characters from *Young and Dangerous* are hard for mainstream Chinese society to accept. On the other hand, Yao (2004, p. 463-464) argues that Chinese youth can easily relate to the counterculture Wang Shuo represents, and that   Wang Shuo 'appeals to a wider audience because his riffraff philosophy of hedonistic individualism reflects a need of an emerging commercial society to legitimize carnal and materialistic desires' and even though he documents and shar the experiences of older generations of readers, Wang Shuo 'is a master of language and satire [and]still possesses a magic power to attract readers across lines of generation, sex, and education. Because of his ability to entertain, and because the major object of his satire -hypocrisy in Chinese politics, society, and culture - is still very much alive'. Moreover, because almost all of the films from Hong Kong were translated into Mandarin when they were broadcasted on Chinese national TV, a big part of the subcultural expressions and meanings in the *Young and Dangerous* were lost in translation, whereas the language used by Wang Shuo is much easier for other contemporary Chinese youth subcultures to inherit.

Conclusion

The world has witnessed a striking social transition over the last three decades in China. Along the way, there have been points at which significant change has occurred due to interactions with local and international factors, which has had a long lasting influence over Chinese society, including Chinese youth cultures. Understanding Chinese youth cultures is one way to understand Chinese society in general. However, it is equally important to understand not only discontinuities but also, and perhaps more importantly, the continuities in the particular context of Chinese youth subcultures. This complex entanglement of continuities and discontinuities in Chinese youth is well-summarised by Cockain (2012, p. 165):

> Chinese youths seek secure and coherence in older traditional forms. They seek unity in such notions as 'a cultural heritage, a language, a memory', and seek support in the past (see also Touraine, 1997, p. 57, cited in McDonald, 1999, p.7) while simultaneously drawing from those sources which are new to the present.

In the attempt to understand change and continuity, both the macro relationship between youth and mainstream culture and the micro level of interactions within youth cultures should be both given careful attention. In this chapter, I have explored the class relationship within the Red Guards and its cultural legacies, which influenced the later development of contemporary Chinese youth cultures and was largely ignored. For example, the inequality manifest in forms of different levels of access to information has been observed in Chinese

rock music culture in the late 1980s and the early 1990s. Chinese youth subcultural

participants, particularly those involved in subcultures with Western origins, are mostly from

upper-middle class backgrounds (Jones, 1992). However, Wang (2015, p. 107) argues that

many rock music subcultural participants gave up on Chinese rock music fairly quickly.

Because of the higher social and economic statues they achieved in their adult life, they no

longer experienced the same resistance to mainstream society in a rapidly developing market

economy. This trend is widespread in many of the Western subcultures localised in China,

and a parallel trend also can be found in the development of Chinese skateboarding culture.

After upper-middle class Chinese youth had experimented with Western subcultures in the

late 1980s and the early 1990s, Chinese society witnessed the arrival of a rapidly developing

market economy and consumer society, while at the same time subcultural styles from both

the West and Asia were becoming more and more visible to the mass youth market.

Regardng the Singles' Festivals, Ma (2016) argues that the celebration of youth resistance to

mainstream culture is manifested in the form of consumption in the hope that it might

resolve their class struggles. The rising affluence of Chinese youth and the arrival of the

internet has in part caused youth resistance to deviate towards consumption. One significant

segment of youth consumption is the consumption of 'coolness' (McGuigan, 2009). De

Kloet and Fung (2017, p. 93) argue that the emergence of such youth markets demonstrates a

'production of diference' as a youthful response to the economic and political contexts - the

'proliferation of difference in Chinese youth culture as this production of difference

(expressed in style, expressed through consumption) has not only a commercial logic

underpinning it, but also a governmental one'. This argument, combined with the discussion

of authenticity, serves as the foundation for understanding (1) the conflicts between

consumption and production in the Chinese skateboarding industry, (2) the divisions between

consumers and 'core' participants and (3) how the intrusion of 'outsiders' into the Chinese

skateboarding industry signals continuities in Chinese youth subculture in historical context.

It is also important to look at how production is practiced, especially in offline subcultures,

in comparison to the shift in focus within the Chinese skateboarding industry from marketing

cool, that is, to marketing lifestyles. All of these questions will be explored further in the

analysis of chapters six through nine.

Finally, the practices of youth groups mobilising different capitals in contemporary youth

subcultures is crucial to understanding continuities in Chinese youth cultures. By examining

different markers of distinction, not only with regard to different styles but also to their

habitus, as well as how subcultural capitals are accumulated, helps us to understand the

development of power relations within subcultures.

Chapter 4: Skateboarding's Transition from a Subculture to a Cultural/Creative Industry and a Lifestyle Sport

Introduction

The skateboarding culture has gone through different stages in its development, from its origins as a grass-roots subculture in southern California, to a multi-billion industry across the globe. During its development, many issues have arisen, for instance, the commercialization of skateboarding culture and the resulting cultural resistance to it. However, in China, there is also resentment not only towards the commercialisation of skateboarding culture but also towards different forms of local and central governmental incorporation. At the centre of governmental incorporation, two themes stand out: firstly, local governments' ambition for urban development aligning with the creative clusters policies that see the skateboarding industry as another potential implication to boost local economies; secondly, the greater rhetoric of the sportification of skateboarding as part of the Olympic Games has attracted national governments' desire to regulate and organise national and transnational skateboarding infrastructures. In this chapter I will introduce various aspects and developments of such trends in the history of skateboarding culture at different historical conjunctures.

Ups and downs of early skateboarding subculture and Dogtown/Z-Boys

The most commonly celerbrated and referenced version of the history of skateboarding, not nessasrrily the truth of what has happened in history, begins as a creation of the Californian

surfers in the late 1940s and early 1950s when they had the idea to surf on the land out of

surfing seasons. With roller-skate wheels attached to wooden planks, skateboarding in its

origin, performed as an alternative sport for surfers with similar tricks derived from surfing

techniques.

In the 1960s, skateboarding gained popularity including via mainstream media coverage on

ABC TV channel. This popularity soon died down in the late 1960s as most of the

skateboarding manufactures were shut down and enthusiasts had to make their own

skateboards. The technological reinvention in the manufacturing of the skateboarding wheels

in the early 1970s that made skateboarding much safer and more accessible ('The History of

Skateboarding,' n.d.) assisted skateboarding's comeback from the crisis in the late 1960s.

Most noticeably, Cadillac Wheels was one of the pioneers of this trend. With a US$700

investment by Nasworthy, a former engineering student and Californian surfer, urethane

wheels purposely designed for skateboarding replaced clay wheels (Borden, 2001, p. 18).

In the spring of 1975 in Del Mar, California, the Zephyr team (also known as the Z-Boys)

boosted the popularity of skateboarding by combining a strong counter-cultural style and

image with exciting skateboarding techniques during a freestyle contest held as part of the

Ocean Festival. The Zephyr team invented their distinctive style - including blue Vans shoes,

Levis jeans, Zephyr shirts and long hair. The Z-boys and their style proved to be

extraordinarily popular, and they attended 'Hollywood parties and [got] to hang out with

rock stars' (Peralta, 2001). Since then, skateboarding has gained much greater cultural

legitimacy in mainstream media: 'There were articles on him (Tony Alva, Vans rider and an original member of the Z-Boys) in People magazine and US magazine and Rolling Stone' (Friedman, 2002).

This era of skateboarding was well documented by the film *Dogtown and Z-Boys*, by Stacy Peralta, a key member of the Z-Boys who later remained active in skateboarding culture and co-founded the next generation of skateboarding super stars - the Bones Brigade, members of which include well-known names in contemporary media such as Tony Hawk. This documentary, featuring the voices of the skateboarders themslves, tells the story of the Z-Boys, who are still regarded as skateboarding legends to this day. including Tony Alva, Jay Adams and Stacy Peralta. It is the story of a group of adolescents in an economically depressed area - Venice Beach, also known as Dogtown, who came from broken homes, and who found a collective cultural expression through skateboarding, which they used to negotiat and construct an identity, taking inspiration from surfing culture. Murdock and McCron's (1976, p. 172 - 174) analysis of work and leisure in subcultures provides assistance in understanding how these skateboarders, coming from a shared class location and in response to   economic struggles, came together to form a new cultural style that provided a 'social and symbolic context for the development and reinforcement, of collective identity and individual self-esteem' (see also Murdock, 1973, p. 9).

The Ollie, the Bones Brigade, VHS and the birth of the skateboarding industry as we know it

today - 'It sounds terrible to say, and I don't want to say it this way, but our group of dudes

pioneered the way to make money at skateboarding'

After the popularity of the Z-Boys, skateboarding took a hit again in the late 1970s and early

1980s via the destruction of public skateparks due to high insurance premiums (Borden,

2001, p. 174). However, in 1978, skater Alan Gelfand invented a manoeuvre that started a

new revolution in skateboarding – the ollie, the foundation of almost all modern

skateboarding tricks. The ollie is a trick that enables skaters to jump with the skateboard and

therefore perform varies technical manoeuvres in the air. Of all the achievements this new

foundation of skateboarding tricks offers, the most significant is that it has established new

possible forms of cultural expressions distinct from surfing culture. Skateboarding thereby

created a system of performances that differed from surfing. This meant skaters did not need

pools or vert ramps to jump into the air. Combined with the reaction to the destruction of

skateparks and the invention of the ollie, skateboarding began to cross over onto urban

terrain. When street skating came along … 'It was like everything was redefined. These

(streets) weren't the things that confined and defined our lives. They were things that we

were now defining' (Vallely, 2010).

As skateboarding became more popular and mainstream in the US, subcultural participants

saw the opportunity to create businesses to cut a piece of the pie for themselves. Stacy

Peralta teamed up with skateboard manufacturer Geoge Powell to launch Powell Peralta and

the Bones Brigade team. Anyone with a basic knowledge of the history of skateboarding is likely familiar with the names of the Bones Brigade members - Tony Hawk, Steve Caballero, Rodney Mullen, Lance Mountain and many more. The team members won almost all of the titles in the skateboarding contests they went to, and they are also the creators of many of the tricks that people see as symbols of skateboarding – the ollie by Alan Gelfand; the 900 by Tony Hawk; the Caballerial by Steve Caballero; the kick flip by Rodney Mullen and so on. Glued together by their team manager, Stacy Peralta, the Bones Brigade not only became worldwide celebrities, but are pioneers of skateboarding culture who received an enormous commercial income out of the creation of a skateboarding industry: 'When we got into skating, you did not become rich or famous if you were good at skateboarding. No one did, no matter how good you were … I went from making eighty-five cents to making 20 grand a month' (Tony Hawk, 2012). By the end of the 1980s, Tony Hawk, a recent high school graduate, was making $150,000 a year (Hawk, 2010, p. 13): 'It sounds terrible to say, and I don't want to say it this way, but our group of dudes pioneered the way to make money at skateboarding' (Lance Mountain, 2012).

One of the ways in which the Bones Brigade were pioneers in the skateboarding industry, was not merely selling skateboarding equipment, but also making skateboarding videos and selling images, more specifically, moving images. At a time when VHS (Video Home System) technology gained massive popularity, their first video - *The Bones Brigade Video Show* (1984) sold 30,000 copies (Peralta, 2010): 'It was the first direct-to-video skate movie ever made, and it helped trigger a boom for the skate industry. Suddenly, I was receiving

royalty checks for $3,000 a month' (Hawk, 2010, p. 13). The production of *The Bones*

Brigade Video Show became the prototype of how the skateboarding industry works to this

day. Snyder (2011, p. 310) describes the way in which contemporary skateboarding works

as:

> 'The process and production of professional street skateboarding, which includes the
>
> need for documentation and dissemination of skateboard tricks through subculture media,
>
> as well as the need for design and distribution of skateboard products, has created career
>
> opportunities for subculture participants. The job of the professional street skateboarder
>
> is to successfully complete skateboarding tricks according to the dictates of their interests,
>
> skills and style, on urban obstacles that meet very specific criteria'

Stacy Peralta pioneered the cultural production model in the skateboarding industry, and

many subcultural entrepreneurs have followed suit. Unlike earlier skateboarders who cashed

in from skateboarding, Stacy Peralta had the 'evolutional idea' that is deemed common

practice today in the cultural/creative industries. The 'art director' of Bones Brigade - Craig

Stecyk, whom at the time could not even make sense of what 'art direction' meant,

intentionally designed a name without 'skateboard' in it, and experimented with shooting

advertisements and videos that had no direct reference to the physical object or performances

of skateboarding. 'His philosophy was, let the magazines show skateboarding. We show

ideas and images' (Stacy, 2012). The Bones Brigade and Stacy Peralta are an example of

what McRobbie (1989; 1998) calls subcultural entrepreneurs, self-generated from

skateboarding subculture within the skateboarding industry that produces and markets styles.

The golden era, and Styles, and the X-Games - commercial incorporation of skateboarding

as a cultural economy

Since street skateboarding achieved prominence, skateboarding culture began to hybridise with other urban subcultures, most notably hip hop culture and punk culture, in the centre of the cultural production of skateboarding – skateboarding videos. Skateboarding started to build connections with different subcultural music styles, but at the same time, a more complicated process of cultural fragmentation (Wheaton, 2010) began to take place within skateboarding culture. The meaning of skateboarding culture was becoming increasingly fragmented as new market niches were created under the capitalist incorporation of the culture. Several issues, such as the question of cultural identity and authenticity, began to rise.

In discussions of skateboarding culture, many have focused on the incorporation of the culture and issues around cultural identities and authenticity. During the late 1990s and the 2000s, the skateboarding industry expanded immensely because of increased media coverage (especially ESPN and later FOX Sports) and the emergence of action sports mega events, such as the X-Games, which began in 1995. Skateboarding has since become one of the best-selling sports among Western youth (Beal, 2004; Wheaton, 2004; 2010; Thorpe, 2014). Skateboarders were sceptical and resistant towards the endorsement and sponsorship of mainstream sports corporations such as Nike, especially when it first entered the skateboarding market in the late 1990s (Wheaton and Beal, 2003; Lombard, 2010). Skaters

were 'concerned about Nike's motivation because there was not a long-standing commitment to the skateboarding community' and saw the incorporation of mainstream sports corporations as the 'selling out' of the culture (Wheaton and Beal, 2003, p.169 and p. 172). Beal (2004, p. 50) argues that skateboarders 'do not like the fact that it is moving towards the mainstream, but they do take pleasure in the legitimacy they gain from its increasing popularity' from the commercial development of skateboarding culture. Hence even though there are conflicts between the commercial incorporation of skateboarding culture, which in some cultural participants' view, jeopardised the 'authenticity' of the culture, there still remains a unified cultural identity among the boarder skateboarding culture against the mainstream culture. However, Wheaton and Beal (2010, p. 172) suggest that even though the media has played a key role in constructing and reshaping sometimes fluid and contradictory subcultural identities in the skateboarding culture, there is still a 'shared imagination' of skateboarding culture that recognises the resistant nature of the subculture to the mainstream.

Nonetheless, Lombard's (2010, p. 479-480) observation of Nike's involvement in the skateboarding industry shows that after the first failed attempt to gain popularity and support within the skateboarding community, its second entry in 2000 was successful because of the shift in strategy, the incorporation of 'authenticity' and the reduction of their 'negative commercial image' in advertising campaigns. Lombard (ibid, p. 480) then argues that:

'As this account of the commercial incorporation of skate demonstrates, skateboarding

has a complex relationship with commercial culture. Skaters are not completely against

the commercial incorporation of skateboarding. At the same time there has been

resistance to some instances of commercial incorporation, although resistance is not

necessarily foremost in the minds of skaters. This resistance, however, is not outside of

incorporation but plays a formative role – shaping instances of incorporation. Thus

purely oppositional or resistive readings of skateboarding are problematic'

This position was developed by Wheaton (2010), by looking into the 'cultural fragmentation'

of action sports cultures after transnational companies started to utilise the action sports

image to target the expanding youth market. Dupont (2014, p. 564-565) also commented on

this phenomenon of cultural fragmentation by drawing on Thornton's (1999) theory of

subcultural capital. He asserts that core skateboarders were not simply trying on a subcultural

identity, rather their membership was more permanent and would have lasting effects on

their lifestyle. However, few have given attention to what Angela McRobbie argues to be the

'practices of cultural production' or 'the micro-economics' rather than 'the cultural meaning,

significance and consumption of these forms once they are already in circulation' (1989,

p.336). Snyder (2011), in support of McRobbie's (1989, 2002) approach, provides a lively

ethnographic account of the production process of the skateboarding industry. By looking at

the 'micro-economics' of the skateboarding industry and the various subcultural careers the

skateboarding industry organically offers, Snyder's (2011) research resonates with the

political economy's analysis of cultural/creative economy.

Cultural/creative labour, cultural intermediaries and forms of capitals

Snyder's (2011) study has provided a fresh perspective which departs from the cultural studies approach to skateboarding subcultures (Beal, 1995; Borden, 2001; Wheaton and Beal, 2003; Lombard, 2010). It raises questions concerning cultural/creative labour; cultural production rather than consumption; creative clusters and so on. For example, he looks at the precariousness of career pathways, but also claims that 'because skating relies so much on documentation, skaters are incredibly familiar with filming and being filmed, and in many cases this experience can be transitioned into other industries. Many skaters are able to work in film and television production as actors, camera operators, editors, stuntmen and even directors' (Snyder, 2011, p. 326). This is essentially what Thornton (1997) would argue to be the accumulation of subcultural capital. In his new book, published in 2017, after the final draft of this thesis was produced, Snyder provides a much fuller ethonographic account of the skateboarding industry, including 'behind the scenes' stories of the Street League Skateboarding contests. His vivid desctiptions of lived experiences in not only stadium-level skateboarding events but also in the everyday production of skateboarding video content has given anyone interested in the world of skateboarding a point of refrence. The following discussion of Snyder's work is mostly based on his article in 2011 rather than on his most recent book.

There are nonetheless some issues left unexamined. Firstly, though Snyder (2011) analysed the production process during a shooting session by looking at the different roles involved in this process, he largely ignored (as did his more recent book in 2017) the more ambivelent but definitely more dominant role of the team managers in skateboarding companies and

teams, individuals who work in a position similar to conventional positions in the cultural/creative industries - creative directors or PR personnel. Like the example of the Bones Brigade, Stacy Peralta is not only in charge of choosing team members, but also acts as a mentor to the team members. Like Peralta, team managers are well-respected figures inside skateboarding culture and possess much higher 'subcultural capital' (Thornton, 1997) than the other team members: 'Stacy's team was his life. It was his dream. He was their mentor. He was their brother. Their dad. And I think that was really where we started to have the central issue, probably, between us' (George Powell, 2010). This quote from George Powell, Stacy Peralta's partner who co-founded the company Powell Peralta and owns the Bones Brigade team, shows that team managers function in the skateboarding team as a key node between cultural production and the various forms of incorporation, similar to what Gu (2016) calls 'cultural intermediaries' that 'formulate' understandings of how the industry should be organised and for companies to operate. They have much more say in deciding what content is to be produced and by/with which videographers and skateboarders. Moreover there are also differences between the working conditions of skateboarders and other occupations such as the filmmakers inside the SMEs and the TNCs that are left unconsidred in his analysis. In Snyder's (2011) conclusion, he also touches briefly on the relationship between skateboarding cultural production and the labour forces it brings to cities like Los Angeles. He rejects Florida's (2003) concept of the creative city that focuses on the urban regeneration of city spaces rather than the 'real investment in the heal th and education of young people' (Snyder, 2011, p. 326). This arugment has led to the conclusion that in order to better understand Chinese skateboarding subculture and its industry, we have

to involve local and central Governments in the equation forming this triangle of forces between skateboarding subculture, businesses and government.

The private and public spaces and the Olympics - Sportisation and governmental incorporation of skateboarding

Local government incorporations and the creative clusters

One of the manifestations of unified cultural resistance in the skateboarding culture is through its practice in public space. Many skateboarding scholars assert that street skateboarding is a form of resistance and challenges mainstream understandings of space (Beal, 1994; Borden, 2001; Howell, 2004; Dupont, 2014). Borden (2001, p. 171) emphasises the spatial nature of skateboarding culture and argues that 'skateboarding subculture is enacted not as a purely socio-economic enterprise, but as a physical activity, undertaken against the materiality of the modern city'. Howell's (2004, 2005) research on the other hand relates more to the current trend in skateboarding culture worldwide especially applicable in the Chinese context, by looking at the relationship between urban renewal and the development of skateboarding culture. Howell argues that in the Western context, the process of urban renewal had a positive impact on the development of skateboarding culture. Moreover, the governmental incorporation of skateboarding culture works not only on the global and national scales, it also functions on a local scale. However, there is little research into local governmental incorporation of skateboarding culture.

The cultural/creative industries literature provides useful insights into the local incorporation of culture, but the link between skateboarding studies and the cultural/creative industries literature has yet to be established. This missing link is particularly obvious in the Chinese context. Oakley and O'Connor (2015, p. 208) suggest that the 'capital-led', 'smaller-scale, place-based', along with 'committed arts organisations' and 'broad-based local governance' might encourage more beneficial cultural development than Florida's (2008) concept of creative cities, which is widely implemented in many Western metropolitan local authorities. Gu (2015, p. 246) argues that there are two prominent models of Chinese creative clusters - the 'authorisation of the use of inner city spaces by creative industries and to use this as a model to regenerate other parts of the city', of which the skateboarding industry witnessed a similar trend when the local authorities implement policies that go hand in hand with the national authorities' desire to build skateboarding infrastructures. As O'Connor and Gu (2014, p. 5-7) observe, 'major real estate development projects, they opened up great opportunities for the local entrepreneurial state. The idea of creative industry "parks" as CICs was often called, provided traction for the new creative industries agenda amongst local authorities' in local areas like Xingming Lake Resort, where the Beijing International Fashion Sports Park is located, and the new KIC city in Shanghai that has the SMP skatepark. Both are 'officially designated, geographically bounded (usually with walls, fences and guards) spaces, CICs clearly derived administratively from these industry bases – most of which had minimal connection with the urban spaces (or in some cases rural, see Keane, 2012) in which they were situated'. Such projects provided the local governments the ticket to get on the 'CIC bus' by the construction of world famous skateparks. Even though such

facilities have positive impacts on the skateboarding industry, such as providing venues for skateboarding events and contests and as training facilities for national teams, it does not nessasarily benefit the development of Chinese skateboarding culture and its amateur participants as much as was expected - mostly due to the facilities' remote locations.

The Olympics and central governmental incorporations

On the 3rd of August 2016, The International Olympic Committee (IOC) officially announced skateboarding's inclusion in the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games, ending the long lasting debate about its inclusion. Thorpe and Wheaton (2011, p. 832) argue that the inclusion of action sports in the Olympic Games has led to 'complex power struggles between key agents – the IOC and associated sporting bodies, media conglomerates (e.g. NBC), and the action sport cultures and industries', the complexity of which must be understood by paying attention 'to the particularities within each specific historical conjuncture'. Sedo (2010) has also documented the resistance of participants in skateboarding culture towards the official incorporation of skateboarding culture in China, which echos the argument of Thorpe (2014, p. 8/ p.52) that action sports participants have actively protested against the 'nationalist approach' to incorporating skateboarding culture and the 'institutionalization' of action sports in global events such as the Olympics. However, this line of argument needs to be updated with new empirical evidence, since they are either out dated or largely dependent on secondary data. Such sweeping statement on the Chinese government's involvement in the skateboarding industry ignores the complexity of the interaction between the skateboarding community and government organisations.

'In China, creative industries are relatively new, and their development, similar to that of other industries and services, depends on foreign help, especially at the onset. At a certain historical point in their development, China's culture industries have relied on global capital, management, and imported expertise' (Feng, 2016, p. 3007). In practice, the situation is much more complex. The Chinese government's involvement with the skateboarding industry has been constantly contested and readjusted. As Lombard (2010) argues, resistance shapes incorporation to a large extent. Hence, there is an immediate need to examine the 'lived text' of the skateboarding industry in China, under the global trend of governmental incorporation of skateboarding culture.

Conclusion

The cultural studies' reading of skateboarding culture has provided useful insights into the formation, cultural meanings and resistance in skateboarding culture. However, there are many questions left unanswered - questions that have emerged during the transition of skateboarding as a subculture to a skateboarding as a cultural industry. In order to look at such more current questions, one should take the 'lived text' into account in the analysis of the conditions of change inside the skateboarding industry. Questions such as how skateboarders respond to these incorporations should not only be looked at as purly resistant, a comprehensive understanding of such a complicated relationship should also take into account of all agents of such interactions – such as the organisations and skateboarders who

embrace such incorporation, and to look at the new opportunities for cultural careers that have emerged from such incorporation. In the analysis chapters, I aim to update the body of research concerning skateboarding culture and industry, with attention to the contributions it makes to the existing literature in other fields of research, such as creative clusters/cities. With the examination of the skateboarding culture and industry in China as an emerging cultural/creative industry, I will provide useful updates into the understanding of the incorporation of skateboarding culture and the complexity of how responses and resistance are practiced in different settings where complex power structures are present and experienced by the skateboarders inside the Chinese skateboarding industry.

Chapter 5 Methodology

Introduction

This chapter will discuss the research design as well as the methodological approches employed in this thesis in order to examine skateboarding culture in China and its transition into a cultural industry, including the tensions along the way with specific attention to its Chinese context. It begins by outlining the research design of the thesis, which includes a discussion of ethnographic methods and interviews, along with data analysis. This is followed by a description of the research settings, the sampling methods, the negotiations regarding acquiring access and the ethical considerations in all stages of my research. Finally, the chapter presents a detailed reflection of my insider role and its impact throughout the research process, drawing on existing academic debates concerning reflexivity and insider research.

Research design

Research question and research objectives

The main aim of this study is to understand the uniqueness and complexity of the development of skateboarding culture and its industry in the Chinese context. It investigates not only its relations to mainstream Chinese culture, but also the economic structures shaping the skateboarding industry, as well as the complex entanglements with central and local governance. All of above aims assist in acknowledging existing Western and Chinese

cultural theories' (i.e., subcultural studies, cultural/creative industries research) contribution to the analysis of my empirical research.

In order to address this research aim, I designed a number of research objectives to be achieved during the course of my research:

1. *Part one: Development of Chinese skateboarding culture*

   1.1. To explore how skateboarding culture gained popularity in China from a grassroots Western subculture through its three decades of evolution.

   1.2. To identify the local characteristics of skateboarding culture in the Chinese context.

   1.3. To illustrate how skateboarding participants articulate resistance towards the shifting identities presented through the commercialisation and professionalisation of skateboarding culture.

2. *Part two: Development of the Chinese skateboarding industry*

   2.1. To examine what strategies the major conglomerates and small and medium sized enterprises have developed to capitalize on the grassroots popularity of skateboarding.

   2.2. To rationalise how the Chinese skateboarding industry is currently organized.

   2.3. To investigate how skateboarders respond to the business strategies of local and transnational companies.

   2.4. To reflect on the current fluid state of the participants in skateboarding culture: how do skateboarders see themselves – as members of a subculture, or as participants in sports and leisure?

3. *Part three: central and local government influence on the organisation of the Chinese skateboarding industry*

   3.1. To analyse how central/local governments and economies have responded to the emergence of the skateboarding industry.

   3.2. To examine the role of central government in the organisation of local, national and international skateboarding events.

   3.3. To review the cultural response to the organisation of the local, national and international skateboarding events from cultural participants.

   3.4. To understand the role of central and local governments in the construction of the skateboarding infrastructure – i.e., skateparks.

4. *Part four: Cultural labour within the Chinese skateboarding industry*

   4.1. To research career pathways that the skateboarding industry offers its participants.

   4.2. To evaluate the sustainability of career pathways in the Chinese skateboarding industry.

Research setting

The Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, Guangzhou, Wuhan and Nanjing Youth Olympic Games formed the settings for this study. In the first phase of my fieldwork, differences emerged between the way skateboarding companies operate, the images of skate teams and the cultural habitats of skateboarding communities, which made the comparison valuable for this research. Most of the international skateboarding clothing and accessories corporations, such as Nike SB, Vans China and Skullcandy, have their headquarters based in Shanghai.

However, so far none of the skateboarding equipment companies have established their headquarters in China, apart from wholesale distributors such as ATD Distribution. There are five Chinese deck companies that have skate teams:

- Society Skateboards from Beijing;

- Gift Skateboards from Shanghai (later in the fieldwork I discovered that Gift Skateboards has disbanded its skateboarding team);

- Vagabond Skateboards, based in Shenzhen

- Challenge Skateboards (including Justice Skateboards, Blacknight Skateboards, Symbolic Skateboards and another brand targeting girls – Psychos Skateboards) from Shenzhe;

- Shox Skateboards from Guangzhou.

The selection of the settings in the four cities was based on the geographical location of the above-mentioned skateboarding teams. Moreover, the reason for including Nanjing Youth Olympic Games was that skateboarding had been selected by the International Olympic Committee as one of the four sports (along with Kungfu, Inline Skating and Sports Hiking) as 'showcase sports' during the Youth Olympic Games in Nanjing, China, from the 17th to the 27th of August in Nanjing 2014 Sports Lab.

I was invited by the secretary of the Chinese Extreme Sports Association to participate with her in the organisingthe skateboarding showcase with the International Skateboarding Federation and to support the Chinese national skateboarding team. Later, I was also asked to be the Chinese announcer for the skateboarding demonstrations for the public and the officials from the International Olympic Committee. I belatedly decided to include Wuhan as an additional setting for my research because I was participating in an academic summer school there, and when I joined the local skateboarders I found that they had some very interesting ideas on how they perceive the skateboarding industry in China.

Sampling

A combination of purposive sampling, snowball sampling (Lee, 1993) and ongoing sampling (O'Reilly, 2009) was implemented to select respondents. Purposive sampling is a method which aims to sample according to a given criteria that fits the purpose to 'ensure that all criteria of relevance are included' and to 'access a diverse sample, as a means of testing how another given criterion varies across categories' (O'Reilly, 2009, p.197). In my research I have purposely chosen the settings of Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen and Guangzhou to ensure my sample includes different social groups of the Chinese skateboarding community.

Snowball sampling is a method that allows research participants to introduce other potential research participants to the researcher, which increases the sample to allow more data for the research. A considerable proportion of my research participants were recommended and

introduced to me from my initial contacts so that I was able to follow the emerging themes and reach different key informants for the relevant themes.

Ongoing sampling is a method that allows the samples to be 'built as the research progresses' (O'Reilly, 2009, p.199). Along with snowball sampling, ongoing sampling was the crucial part of my sampling process and continued through the research process. In different settings, there were times when I was living with many skateboarders from different cities and social groups that I did not have contact with. In order to further explore themes that emerged during the research process, I re-evaluated and continued the process of sampling new participants in almost every setting I had been to. For instance, in Nanjing, I was able to interview Che Lin, whom I did not expect to have contact with until the secretary of the Chinese Extreme Sports Association Liu Qing introduced us during the Youth Olympic Games. Some important themes emerged during our conversation on the night when we were introduced, which were then investigated further during the interview with Che Lin after the introduction.

Accessing the field

My access varied between different groups of participants and in different settings. In Beijing, where I am from, I already knew most of the participants, hence little effort was needed to build up initial access and rapport. My initial access to participants from Shanghai and Shenzhen was aided by my friends or other participants who work in the industry, such as Sun Yu, a videographer from Beijing who works closely with different groups of

skateboarders and companies; also, Liu Qing, the secretary of Chinese Extreme Skateboarding Association who has been working with the Chinese national skateboarding team in domestic and foreign skateboarding contests and events from the government administrative side for over 10 years. Sun Yu, as well as some other skateboarder friends of mine from Beijing, introduced me to their friends or teammates in Shanghai. I started snowball sampling as a result of going to social events with my participants in Shanghai. Liu Qing on the other hand, was one research participant with whomI did not have contact before. I was introduced to her by a family friend who has contacts in the General Administration of Sports of China, to which the Chinese Extreme Sports Association is subordinated. Liu Qing invited me to work as an assistant researcher and sometimes as an interpreter for the association after our first contact. This decision was influenced, as she later explained, by my understanding of the culture, but more importantly, by the sensitivity which I had developed out of my academic knowledge and theoretical understanding of cultural politics in the Chinese cultural industry. Thereafter she invited me to meetings with companies and organisations about hosting national skateboarding contests. She also invited me to the Nanjing Youth Olympic Games, where she introduced me to the Chinese national skateboarding team, formed by professional skateboarders from all over China but mostly based in Shanghai and Shenzhen. She also asked me to help her with a research trip to Shanghai and introduced me to officials in the Shanghai Sports Department and the Shanghai Yangpu District Sports Bureau. (Shanghai Yangpu District is where the X-games were held every year and where the SMP skatepark – the biggest skatepark in the world, built in 2006 – is located).

Wuhan is a setting that I decided to include unexpectedly during my visit there for an academic summer school with my supervisor. However, I had no difficulty in negotiating access to this group since I already had insider knowledge of most of the participants I was expecting to encounter in the skatepark. Moreover, Ye, one of my best friends in Beijing, knew the owner of the place very well, so I was made welcome when I explained my relationship with Ye to the owner. I also discovered when I first visited that I had met the manager of the skate shop and pub before when he was living in Beijing the summer before my fieldwork. Hence both the owner and the manager were very happy to participate in my research and also voluntarily helped me invite their sponsored skateboarders, filmmakers and employees to participate my research.

Access to the owner of Shox Skateboards and a well-known videographer in Guangzhou was also made possible because of my insider knowledge of his biography and social networks. After having looked up the address of his skate shop, I deliberately visited without prior introduction from others, and because of my previous knowledge of him I suspected that he might not be keen to accept an invitation for an academic interview. Even when I was in the shop waiting for him to come to work in the morning, his employee told me that he was probably not going to accept my interview since he does not like to do interviews. Nevertheless, after I expressed my insider 'group commitment' (Hodkinson, 2005, p.135) to the development of skateboarding culture in China, and shared with him our similar yet 'relatively distinct sets of tastes, values and activities' (Hodkinson, 2005, p. 135), he became

interested in participating in my research, and the interview went on for around three hours. It was eventually interrupted and came to an end only because my audio recorder ran out of battery power, but despite this we continued chatting casually for a while.

An ethnography of Chinese skateboarding culture

For the purposes of investigating skateboarding culture in China, ethnographic methods were employed in order to observe both organised events, such as skateboarding contests and informal skateboarding sessions. This method equipped me with the means to look at the feelings, motivations and meanings attributed to it by its participants and the justifications for their actions and participation in Chinese skateboarding culture. Ethnography:

> …usually involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, and/or asking questions through ethnographic and semi-structured interviews, collecting documents and artefacts – in fact, gathering whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the emerging focus of inquiry.
>
> |(Hammersley and Atkinson, 2001, p.3)

Each ethnographic session normally lasted no longer than two hours. It is estimated that over the course of my entire PhD research, I have conducted in total approximately 184 hours of participant observation and interviews which cover 30 organised and informal events. With the full agreement of participants, at least 10 of these events were documented via

ethnographic field notes. In these instances, semi-structured interviews were not practical

due to the spontenous nature of such events. Others field visits were combinations of

participant observation and interviews. I have also collected data via informal chats during

observation.

I attended three organised events:

- Youth Olympic Games for 8 days

    o During this event I lived with my participants, so it was a very intensive
      experience.

- The House of Vans Shanghai for 2 days, about 3 to 4 hours/day

    o This was an event held by Vans China including a skateboarding
      documentary film competition premiere.

- Hobodaze for 2 days

    o This event was held by Vagabond Skateboards, a local skateboarding
      company in Shenzhen, and event involved camping on a small island near
      Dongchong, a famous surfing location in the coastal area of Shenzhen. I
      camped with my participants during this event for one night.

In addition to the above events, I attended casual skateboarding and filming sessions two to

three times a week in Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, Guangzhou and Wuhan. Each session

involved approximately three hours of participant observation. The fieldwork also involved

socialising with my participants at different social occasions such as dinners, nights out, shop

opening ceremonies and a lot more. It was often difficult to calculate and differentiate

between the hours specifically dedicated to my fieldwork for the purpose of my research and

my own social life.

Ethnographic and semi-structured interviews

Bryman (2016, p. 468) defined the semi-structured interview as an interview process in

which 'the researcher has a list of questions or fairly specific topics to be covered … but the

interviewee has a great deal of leeway in how to reply' hence enhancing the flexibility of the

interview process and emphasising 'what the interviewee views as important in explaining

and understanding events, patterns, and forms of behaviour'.

28 Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key figures in the skateboarding

community and skateboarding companies, including participants with special experiences

inside the culture. 8 of the interviews were conducted in English and the rest in Chinese

(Mandarin). Aside from interviews with the groups involved in the emergent skateboarding

industry, interviewees also included professional and amateur skateboarders, team managers,

skateboarding or skate shop owners, videographers and photographers, and skateboarding

media personnel.

In addition to semi-structured interviews, ethnographic interviews with members of the

skateboarding communities were conducted throughout the entire fieldwork period: 'It can

be argued that in ethnographic interviewing both the time factor – duration and frequency of

contact – and the quality of the emerging relationship help distinguish this method from other types of interview projects by empowering interviewees to shape, according to their world views, the questions being asked' (Heyl cited in Lumsden, 2009, p.99). With the combination of semi-structured and ethnographic interviews, data collection was considered to contain greater details. From my first fieldwork visit I realised that conducting ethnographic interviews has helped generate greater accuracy and authenticity in the information collected from my participants, rather than employing only semi-structured interviews. Most of the participants were more comfortable without having an audio recorder pointing at them and appeared to be willing to talk more about their ideas and express their emotions comfortably and fluently. Some of my participants were willing to share insights that they considered sensitive but requested that the recorder be turned off. In other interviews, such as with the officials of the sport department in Shanghai, interviewees were not recorded because of their sensitive job positions.

By combining semi-structured interviews with ethnographic interviews, more detailed insights were achieved in both the questions proposed and the participants' own perceptions of what they deemed relevant to skateboarding culture and to their experiences as cultural participants. Hence, this approach enhanced the reflexive aspects of my research in terms of allowing participants' voices to be heard, while continuously reflecting on the researcher's role in influencing the interview. For instance, in one of the interviews with a videographer, the participant unconsciously deviates from my proposed questions into his knowledge and enthusiasm in filming equipment and techniques in filming skateboarding videos, which

generated unexpected but fruitful insights into the process of skateboarding videographers'

working processes and their working conditions in the process of cultural production. This

reflexive approach echoed time and time again during my fieldwork with the argument that

'the best way to find out about people's lives is for people to give their own analytical

accounts of their own experiences' (Stanley and Wise cited in O'Leary, 2014, p. 25).

Data analysis

Transcriptions of interview data conducted in Chinese were translated into English by myself,

in a combinition of both my English language ability (and more importantly) my previously

acquired knowledge about the topic of the interviews as well as the participants' biographies.

Whenever possible, I took the time to discuss with my participants issues related to my

translation, and most of my participants expressed their trust in my ability to comprehend

and translate our interview data.

I conducted a thematic analysis of interview transcripts and field notes. Bryman (2012, p.

578) argues that even though thematic analysis is 'one of the most common approaches to

qualitative data analysis', it is not 'an approach to analysis that has an identifiable heritage or

that has been outlined in terms of a distinctive cluster of techniques' like 'grounded theory,

critical discourse analysis or conversation analysis'. However, the need to search for themes

in the data analysis stage is common in most of the qualitative data analysis in general.

I carried out thematic analysis of my interview transcripts and field notes following the six principles listed by Bryman (2016, p. 587-589):

1. I skimmed through all the transcripts and field notes by the beginning of my data analysis process and selected a sample of materials that fit the structure that developed from my literature review.

2. I then moved on to conduct an open coding of materials.

3. After the open coding process, I assigned different sets of coding into the themes under each analysis chapter and summarised the themes according to the meanings and arguments that could be developed.

4. I then ranked the different themes into main themes and sub-themes in each analysis chapter.

5. Along with writing up the analysis chapters, I revised the different sets of themes along the way and relocated and/or filtered themes in order to fit the arguments of my analysis chapters.

6. The last step was to write up the insights from previous steps and produce a coherent narrative to illustrate answers to my research questions.

Ethical considerations

O'Reilly (2009) argues that the 'intimate and long-term nature' of ethnography 'raises important and profound ethical issues' (p.57) such as going through ethical guidelines and committees; being sensitive to the power positions between the researcher and the researched; avoiding exploitation of the participants; taking responsibility for the research in terms of the

process and the outcomes and ensuring participants' confidentiality (2009). The approach taken for my research fully adhered to the ethical clearance submitted to the Loughborough University Ethical Review Panel. This process involved in-depth reading of the literature on ethnographic research and semi-structured interview research ethics, and decisions were made which were appropriate for the communities under study. Ethnographic observations were conducted overtly throughout my fieldwork and participants were informed about my researcher role. The purpose of my research, means of privacy and data protection were explained on the consent forms (See Appendix) given to participants before interviews were conducted. Efforts were made to protect the personal information of participants, such as omission of their names in the fieldnotes and using codes to refer to participants and to ensure the protection of sensitive information provided by participants.

In the research proposal I listed the details of my research, including sampling methods, how I recruited and approached my participants, a list of my participants, the time I demanded from my participants for my interviews and ethnographic observations, potential risks to me and the measures to address the risks (such as having Skype meetings with my supervisors during my fieldwork), arrangements made to deal with issues of consent from my participants, issues of withdrawing/storage and security of data collected (for instance, data collected will fully adhere to the requirements of the Data Protection Act of 1998), and steps taken to safeguard the anonymity of participants. Full ethical clearance was granted by the Loughborough University Ethics Approvals (Human Participants) Sub-Committee.

Several ethical issues emerged during my fieldwork, such as when and where I should write fieldnotes; officials who did not like to be audio recorded; and how to anonymise participants when they have very recognisable or unique experiences within the culture. Firstly, I would only take fieldnotes when I was either in my home or in hotels. Hence there could be several days when I was living with participants during which I only took analytical field notes, as it made the participants uncomfortable when I took notes in front of them. I would compensate for this by making descriptive notes later when I was no longer in the field with them. Secondly, some officials did not like to be audio recorded and did not want to sign the consent form (English version approved by the Ethics Committee, see Appendix. During fieldwork translated into Chinese) because of their special job positions. However, these interviews were conducted with the aid and consent of the Chinese Extreme Sports Association and they were okay with me using the conclusions from the interviews with the officials without naming any of them or giving their exact positions. Finally, for those with unique experiences within the culture and industry who would be instantly recognisable from their experiences, I asked for consent to use real names in my research - Che Lin, for example, was happy to give that information in my research.

Reflexivity

This chapter raises the issue of researcher reflexivity. I will firstly provide a brief introduction to the 'reflexive turn' in the social sciences, therefore opening up debate on the importance of reflexivity in social sciences research in general, and then go on to explain how it is relevant to my own research.

Miller and Brewer (2003, p. 259) claim that:

> Reflexivity is a term that has been in currency since the 1960s and has several different
> meanings, but it has become most closely connected with the crises facing ethnography,
> where it is seen as both the problem and the solution to ethnography's difficulties. The
> 'problem' is that ethnographers are part of the social world they study and do not collect
> uncontaminated data, the 'solution' is that they should situate the data by reflecting on
> how their presence and other contingencies helped to create the data.

The reflexive turn of the 1980s and 1990s is a movement in the social sciences that 'refers to
a fairly dramatic change of perspective that occurred during the 1980s affecting many social
sciences, especially social anthropology and its main method, ethnography. The ideas behind
it came from philosophy and politics (including critical theory and feminism), and were also
being debated and having their effect in other areas like textual criticism, cultural theory, and
literary theory' (O'Reilly, 2014). The major concern of the reflexive turn here is the
researcher as part of the world that is being researched, and the research process that
produces the outcome of the research (Taylor, 2001, p. 3). As part of the reflexive turn,
feminist social scientists have contributed a great deal of discussion on the importance of
reflexivity. Mies (cited in van Zoonen, 1994, p. 129) claims the importance of feminist
researchers to have a 'double consciousness' – 'a consciousness of their own oppression as

women and their privileged position as researchers'. This self-awareness of power relations has reminded social scientists to reflect upon this issue.

Many ethnographers (e.g. Lumsden, 2013), argue that the 'reflexive turn' has had a significant effect on not only the contemporary ethnography fieldwork practices, but also writings of ethnographic studies. Reflexivity is becoming an essential part of the ethnographic research to 'think critically about the context and practice of research and writing' (O'Reilly, 2009, p.187). O'Reilly specifies the problems and issues one should bear in mind as an ethnographer:

> 'Reflexivity in contemporary fieldwork studies is the requirement to think critically about the context and the acts of research and writing, and involves thinking about what we read (and an awareness that ethnography is constructed); thinking about what we write and how; and acknowledging we are part of the world we study' (O'Reilly, 2009, p. 189).

Lumsden and Winter (2014, p. 2) also highlight the benefits of a reflexivity approach in the social sciences:

> 'reflexivity not only provides an extra layer of critical distance and engagement – one that ironically promotes subjectivity as a way of interrogating the un-interrogated hidden biases, conflicts of interest and assumptions of so-called objective scientific

research – but is a process, permeating all aspects of the research from selection of the research topic, search for funding, access to and engagement with participants and settings, data collection, analysis, interpretation, dissemination, application of findings and our theoretical and methodological location'

Hence, the next section will highlight issues in my own research which I reflected on. These centre on one of the vital aspects of my research - my insider status within the skateboarding culture and industry in China.

Insider research

Traditionally, the goal of ethnographers has been to 'gain the perspective of the insider and to render it meaningful'; however this 'raises special issues for ethnographers who are also members of the group they study' (O'Reilly, 2009, p.109). There has been an increasing trend of undertaking ethnography on a culture that the researchers are, or have been, a part of or are so-called 'insider researchers' (Hodkinson, 2005; Wheaton, 2013). This trend has highlighted criticisms and discussions of the role of ethnographers and the consequences of an insider role in ethnographic studies. The next section discusses the advantages as well as the challenges my insider-researcher status brings to the research.

Advantages of an insider status

Hodkinson claims that researchers who enjoy closer initial position of subjective proximity to their respondents have become increasingly common, especially in youth culture studies.

Moreover, this 'insider researcher' position, as he argues, 'may offer significant potential benefits in terms of practical issues such as access and rapport, at the same time as constituting an additional resource that may be utilised to enhance the quality of the eventual understanding produced' (Hodkinson, 2005, p.146). Other advantages include sharing the 'group commitment' of cultural participants. Hence, insider researchers are more likely to be accepted by participants and are politically engaged. Insider researchers are also less likely to share stereotypes with participants against whom they might feel resistant. Insider researchers also have stronger 'linguistic competence' for communicating with participants more naturally and effectively (O'Reilly, 2009; Hodkinson, 2005). They share similar sets of subcultural tastes, styles and values (Hodkinson, 2005) with the participants. Also, as O'Reilly claims, insider researchers are able to provide interpretations with more details that expressively reflect the background of the researched community, based on the 'superior insider knowledge gained through primary socialization' (O'Reilly, 2009, p. 114).

The critiques and challenges of insider research

Nevertheless, critics of insider research assert that 'going native' (O'Reilly, 2009; Lumsden, 2009) could lead to researchers finding it hard to 'step back' and retain a critical distance. Insider researchers might also be 'too familiar' with the setting and it might be difficult for them to interpret 'unconscious grammar' (O'Reilly, 2009, p.112). Moreover, insider researchers are in danger of being seen as 'biased and as beginning with political aims' (O'Reilly, 2009).

Having examined all of the advantages and criticisms of insider research, academics such as Hodkinson (2005, p.133), have reached the conclusion that 'the notion of being either an insider or an outsider in an absolute sense is inadequate'. O'Reilly also concludes by claiming that 'both insider and outsider ethnographies have their own problems and advantages. But these are more a matter of degree than a simple distinction between one or other perspective' (2009, p. 116). My own experiences during the research process resonate with Hodkinson's (2005) and indicate that in order to secure the benefits that an insider researcher role may bring to my research, it is crucial to 'utilise a careful, reflexive research approach' (p. 146) and to reflect on my dual identity and to look at the ways in which insider research has impacted my own research process.

Reflecting on the insider role

A reflexive approach and the insider role

In my research, I attempt not to delve deeply into the discussion about the distinction of the insider/outsider position which has already been well-debated (Brewer, 2000; Coffey, 1999; Hodkinson, 2005; O'Reilly, 2009; Song and Parker, 1995) but to focus on my own experiences as both a skateboarder and a part-time photographer and videographer, as well as a researcher within the skateboarding industry in China, to help illuminate research questions such as the feelings, motivations and meanings of the culture from the perspective of the participants. Also, to examine the impact of this insider researcher role on my research not only on the fieldwork but also the interpretation of my data and a series of issues it raises. In order to do so, I have adopted a reflexive approach, which recognises my role as a researcher,

and I have taken my social background and emotions during my research process into account (Lumsden, 2009). This approach requires me to value the importance of reflexivity during all stages of my research. According to Hammersley and Atkinson (1995, p. 16), reflexivity 'implies that the orientation of researchers will be shaped by their socio-historical locations, including the values and interests that these locations confer upon them'. As a result, I reflect on myself as both the research instrument (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, p. 19) and a point of reflection.

In this study, the need to reflect on all aspects and processes of my research seemed inevitable and was given great attention due to my insider researcher role in the skateboarding culture and industry. Traditionally, the goal of ethnographers for their research is to 'gain the perspective of the insider and to render it meaningful, raises special issues for ethnographers who are also members of the group they study' (O'Reilly, 2009, p.109). In the last decade, however, there has been an increasing trend of undertaking ethnography on a culture that the researchers are, or have been, a part of or of so-called insider researchers (Hodkinson, 2005; Wheaton, 2013). Hodkinson claims that researchers with their initial position of subjective proximity with relation to their respondents have become increasingly common especially in youth culture studies. Moreover, this 'insider researcher' position as he argues, 'may offer significant potential benefits in terms of practical issues such as access and rapport, at the same time as constituting an additional resource that may be utilised to enhance the quality of the eventual understanding produced' (Hodkinson, 2005, p.146). Being a skateboarding

culture and industry insider allowed me to introduce my research interest to the subjects

of my research topic; it granted me the advantage of having a high level of access and

of developing and sustaining a rapport with my participants in different settings during

my fieldwork. Compared to researchers with no insider experiences and roles, it also

gave me the advantage of actively participating in different case studies, which gave me

the opportunity to use my insider knowledge and understanding to assist my analysis

and interpretation of data and as a channel for policy applications of my findings.

However, this insider role also raised the issue of objectivity in both my involvement

within the field and my construction of ethnographic text. Criticisms have been raised

about insider research regarding the danger of 'going native' (Giulianotti, 1995;

O'Reilly, 2009). Because I was an active participant in the cultural lives of my

participants, it was harder to step back and look at the culture without overruling my

subjective insights (Giulianotti, 1995, p. 13), and this would have threatened the

authority of my production of ethnographic texts, making it even more vital to be alert

with reflexivity. Being 'too familiar' with the settings could also generate difficulties

for interpreting the 'unconscious grammar' (O'Reilly, 2009, p.112) of the social

surroundings.

Nevertheless, this insider-outsider dichotomy can also provide insightful reflections during

the research process, as long as the researcher is consciously committed to maintaining

'social and intellectual 'distance'' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, p. 115) when

producing analytical writings, both while inside and outside the field. Here I agree with Hodkinson's (2005) point that, in order to secure the benefits that the insider researcher role may bring to my research, it is crucial to 'utilise a careful, reflexive research approach' (p. 146) to reflect on my dual identity and to look at the way in which insider research has impacted my own research process.

Fieldwork

Access and rapport

The 'insider researcher' (Hodkinson, 2005) role can have many advantages in conducting fieldwork. First and foremost, acquiring access and cooperation can be an early and serious practical obstacle most non-insider researchers need to deal with, especially in marginalised groups (Becker, 1963; Hodkinson, 2005), in the case of my research - the Chinese skateboarding community. I would also argue here, even though skateboarding youth subculture, or skateboarding as a sports culture, is growing in China at a rapid speed, the core groups of skateboarders and those who work in the skateboarding industry still hold a perception of themselves being marginalised from mainstream Chinese culture. Certainly, Chinese skateboarding communities can be very exclusive to outsiders, particularly for Chinese academics. Lyrics from a song by a famous independent rap band from Beijing, In3, it's the core members of which are also skateboarders, says: 'Psychos and douchebags went to universities and became professors' (In3, 2008). I was privileged as a skateboarder to be able to compare myself to other non-insider researchers, and not be perceived as an academic. In other cases it helped that I was regarded as an academic who understands the culture, such

as when I was working with the Chinese Extreme Sports Association in Nanjing Olympic Games.

At the planning stage of my first fieldwork, I already had the insider knowledge and the theoretical base to identify the groups of participants I wanted to access and was very familiar with most of my participants' social network links with other participants. Also I already knew more than one gatekeeper who could facilitate access into various groups of potential participants in different settings. As my fieldwork progressed, some of my participants voluntarily acted as my gatekeeper, or reinforcement gatekeeper, when introducing me to other groups of participants to whom they had access. Sometimes this was because they had better relationships with the potential participants than my previous gatekeeper so that, with the help of my new reinforcement gatekeeper, I could build up rapport with potential participants more smoothly and quickly. Some of the new participants introduced by my reinforcement gatekeepers even brought new, unanticipated themes into my research data or mentioned unexpected details about existing themes. The more I entered into the field, the less I was worried about getting enough access, and sometimes I simply let the 'evolution and organic growth' (O'Leary, 2014, p.26) of access take charge. A lot of the benefits were obtained by my initial position of subjective proximity within Chinese skateboarding culture.

However, having the option of different gatekeepers also meant that I needed to be careful to choose the right one for different groups. For example, when I was trying to gain access to a

team manager during the Youth Olympic Games in Nanjing, I had skateboarder friends who hung out with him all the time in their city who could encourage him to provide more information about the social life of skateboarding communities. On the other hand, since I was invited to help with some research for the Chinese Extreme Sports Association, the secretary of the association could also help me to gain access to the manager. However, the relationship with them was completely different from my relationships with my skateboarder friends. Often, choosing the wrong gatekeeper could have negative effects on gaining access and building rapport with potential research participants. For instance, certain groups of skateboarders are very resistant to the authorities even when they need to work with them. So being introduced by the officials of the administration can be the worst thing for gaining access to certain groups of participants in particular settings. This happened in my fieldwork when I was first introduced to one of my research participants by the secretary. The participant was not a big fan of the authorities, so he did not want to offer anything more than basic information, and he would only very briefly answer my questions, in the same way he normally did in media interviews. However, soon after he realised that I knew his skateboarding friends and I was a skateboarder myself, he opened up: 'At first I thought you worked for the association, which was why I did not want to talk to you. You should have told me long before!' he said during our dinner a few weeks after we first met at the 2014 Nanjing Youth Olympic Games. After all, all this was based on my insider knowledge of the potential participants. Outsiders may not even be aware of the side effects of having the wrong gatekeeper or of the reason why their research participants seemed so 'shy'. Alternatively, they may not have the option of getting assistance from the right gatekeeper or

the ability to tell whether their gatekeeper has a good relationship with the participants, since sometimes gatekeepers might also have an inaccurate perception of their relationship with certain groups of participants. Hence, insider knowledge could in certain circumstances reduce the risk of choosing the wrong gatekeepers and enhance the chance of collecting detailed interview data.

The objectivity and positionality of the researcher

The situation discussed above has illustrated the challenges of retaining a critical distance and objective position. Sometimes, different sides of the social groups implicitly expected me to take sides with them by displaying the 'relatively distinct sets of tastes, values and activities' (Hodkinson, 2005, p. 135) shared in that particular group. Although being an insider researcher helped me to identify the tensions between different sides when it appeared very early on, whether or not to take sides and how to take sides is still very difficult to negotiate. There was only one occasion in which I could easily choose sides without jeopardizing my research when tension arose between the American associates from the International Skateboarding Federation and the Chinese skateboarders and officials who had conflicts during the Youth Olympic Games because of the tensions between the Chinese skateboarders and the American association's representatives. However, there were also difficult moments when I had to face the challenge of taking sides or at least showing my participants that I was on their side when there were conflicting ideas between CESA and the professional skateboarders, or when there were debates between the media personnel, skateboarding company employees or managers and the independent skateshop owners about

topics concerning the authenticity of Chinese skateboarding culture and conflicts between the authorities and the cultural participants. During my fieldwork, I felt sometimes that appearing to be equal, or less than neutral towards different opinions would significantly reduce the validity of the access of information I would be able to acquire. At times I have also had the internal struggle of letting go of my pre-established emotional preference for certain opinions or social groups in order to maximise the outcome of the research data, but also to defend my integrity as a researcher and the need to maintain a critical stance with my participants. Hence, for the purpose of collecting more authentic and detailed information, I inevitably had to take sides with different research participants in certain circumstances, mostly by using different sets of insider languages, displaying different habitus in social environments and agreeing to different viewpoints in discussions that I might not feel completely associated with. I would also spend more time with particular groups of research participants during my fieldwork, for example in Nanjing and Shanghai, when I stayed with my research participants in a hotel, I chose to live with particular participants. This resulted in more data, especially participant observation, being collected from certain groups than others. However, it does not necessarily produce a biased interpretation of the data since there were always key events where different groups socialised together, and this also gave me some interesting insights into the different habitus displayed by participants in different social settings. I also explored such themes in more depth in the interviews with participants when contradictory behaviours were observed and noted.

Nevertheless, careless use of the advantages of the insider role can produce problems due to the positionality of researchers. My position in the culture does not automatically translate itself into all groups within the skateboarding community. For example, the skateboarding groups and the immigrant skateboarders in Shanghai did not hold the same sets of tastes and values as the groups in Beijing, where I am from, which might set me at the same point as any non-insider researchers who are without the assistance of a gatekeeper. There were cases when my position in the culture showed negative effects even ,with the gatekeepers' help. When I went to Shanghai and Shenzhen, where the locals speak other languages (Shanghai dialect and Cantonese), my position created difficult boundaries for the smooth conduct of the fieldwork. Moreover, the cultural rivalry between cities and different teams can also be an issue in terms of building rapport, and the identity of belonging to a certain group of skateboarders can also mean less access to, and less rapport with other groups, which could also jeopardise the data collection process. Secondly, without consciously reflecting on my insider researcher role, my advantages can also lead to over-confidence in my knowledge of Chinese skateboarding culture. Without careful self-reflection, this could result in skipping basic information and leading participants during interviews because of my assumptions (Hodkinson, 2005).

Finally, in normal circumstances, one of the purposes of employing various sets of elaborate research methods techniques is to empower research participants in order to obtain better quality information. However, in my case, the power relationship is one of the most difficult issues to address during fieldwork due to my dual identity as both a skateboarder and a

researcher. Famous professional skateboarders and the older generation of skateboarders may see me as their fan initially, and some of them are trained to be interviewed by mainstream and skateboarding media as the stars or gurus of the culture. Luckily during the first phrase of my fieldwork, almost all of the older generation of skateboarders showed great support when I explained the purpose of my study to them: to promote an updated understanding of Chinese skateboarding culture with a new perspective by suggesting that the culture and industry constitute a great potential vehicle for teenagers not only to discover their own identities but also to learn about other cultures closely related to skateboarding culture, such as art, photography, videography and music etc. Most of them are also trying to contribute   to the development of skateboarding culture in China, therefore, they were mostly supportive of my research after learning that I share an insider commitment to the development of Chinese skateboarding culture.

Participation in the culture

Being an insider researcher has granted me the ability to participate in cultural practices. Being familiar with not only the history, distinct norms, values, meanings of skateboarding tricks, terms and internalised language within skateboarding culture, together with a similar age group, ethnicity, and class background, contributes not only to a 'linguistic competence with which to ask more subtle questions on more complex issues, and .[..] better at reading non-verbal communications' (O'Reilly, 2009, p. 114) and the ability to offer a 'two-way exchange rather than the usual question-and-answer format' (Armstrong cited in Hodkinson, 2005, p.139), but it also a 'cultural competence' to 'participate authentically' (Hodkinson,

2005, p. 138). These competences enhanced the quality and the effectiveness of my interviews as well as my participant observation in various aspects. To begin with, in interviews, especially because of the 'two-way exchange' conversation that I was able to practice due to the combination of insider knowledge and a theoretical understanding of the subculture and cultural industries research, I was made more welcome by the more senior members of the culture and in the industry. There were a few cases when the participants told me that they also appreciated the chance to talk about some topics that were normally not very popular or feasible to talk about with other younger skateboarder friends. As a result, I could build up a rapport with the participants and dig out more valuable information about their reflections of the development of Chinese skateboarding culture and its industry.

Moreover, equipped with an understanding of the political engagements of skateboarders, such as their struggle with public space and the authorities (Borden, 2001), I was able to avoid the temptation 'to construct stereotypes or to caricature communities' (O'Reilly, 2009, p.114), as well as avoiding 'conscious inaccuracy' such as 'exaggerations, omissions, guesses and throwaway statements' (Hodkinson, 2005, p.140) during interviews. For instance, I gradually developed an 'introduction' to start conversations with the managers from transnational corporations. I suggested that my purpose for future study was to gain support from the government, because it has always been the commercial companies in China which push skateboarding culture, but the skateboarding community is still not big enough for them to make a huge profit out of the money they invested in doing promotions and events. That is why some of the big companies like Adidas dropped out of the

skateboarding industry. Nike SB also changed their plans to hold the big event 'City Jam' in mainland China. Vans also decided to have the 'Wish You Were Here' Vans team tours and documentary film contest instead of having 'Baby Dragon' touring contests. This topic normally raised the interest in how corporations figure within my research. This approach also worked with professional skateboarders since they want to have more support due to the scarce opportunities for sponsorship, especially because such opportunities decreased considerably after the pull-backs of the transnational corporations. Hence, the government support was ever more appealing to many of them.

Interpretation of data

Arguably the more crucial benefit the insider role constitutes in my research is the ability to understand and interpret data in more depth and with greater accuracy, as well as passion. This has brought me back to the initial objective of my research: to access, understand and present the feelings, motivations and meanings from the perspective of participants in skateboarding culture.

Nevertheless, before looking at my interpretations of the data, it is equally important to reflect on earlier thoughts on and understandings of my research topic and questions. Hodkinson (2005, p.143) argues that insider researchers may have the ability to combine their academic background with the cultural experiences they have had. In this case, my cultural experiences with skateboarding stimulated critical thinking during my early academic studies. The huge body of work in the field of cultural/creative industry studies and

political economy heavily influenced my perspectives, looking back at my personal cultural

practices in the Chinese skateboarding community as well as the mechanism of the economic

aspects inside the industry. My previous cultural practices also enabled me to retain a critical

position when reading relevant literature around the topic of youth culture and skateboarding

that would at least require some careful observation, and maybe some trial and error during

the fieldwork, in order to be understood by non-insider researchers. For instance, there is a

need for updated research on the development of Chinese skateboarding culture (Sebo, 2010),

and there is a lack of empirical evidence of the views on the interactions and tensions

between Chinese authorities and Chinese skateboarding culture that is only referenced in

second hand data (Thorpe, 2015). All of these have also contributed to a more careful and

systematic 'initial awareness' (Hondkinson, 2005) of these early research design and

research questions.

Nonetheless, the decision to use ethnographic methods was also developed from my previous

cultural participation and political engagement as a skateboarder. The traditional body of the

study of youth cultures was centred on the subcultural theories associated with the

Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS). Critics of the CCCS's

approach have focused on external interpretation through textual analysis of youth culture

and the over-weighted determination of class contradictions (Hodkinson, 2005; Muggleton,

2000). Additionally, in case of studies of skateboarding culture, Lombard claims that 'a

consistent theme in the examination of skateboarding culture has been that of resistance'

(2010, P. 475). My decision to employ an ethnographic approach is based on my specific

commitment to avoid such traditions or stereotypes from the existing research. Therefore, I discovered that the objective and emphasis of ethnographic studies is about the need to access and understand the insider perspective of the culture (Bennett, 2002; O'Reilly, 2009), which would better serve the initial motivations of my research. Moreover, having the experiences of the cultural practices of a skateboarder, as well as a part-time videographer, equipped me with constructive insights. During the process of 'extensive viewing of the videos', 'immersion in specialist websites' and existing interviews of cultural participants make it possible to realise that the 'significance of image-making practices' is 'merely secondary to the primary activity of skating itself' and the 'visual representation is an indispensable aspect of the culture' and 'a form of symbolic action' (Buckingham, 2009, p.142) - a conclusion that I therefore would have anticipated before academic interrogations since it was empirically obvious to me and my participants. Hence, with a very brief introduction, my participants could move forward into discussion of the more important themes that they deemed most valuable to their experiences as cultural workers in the Chinese skateboarding industry. One skateboarding videographer told me that he was always put off by mainstream media interviewers when they asked him 'stupid questions' because of their ignorant steorotypes of skateboarding culture and its cultural practices. Although this initial awareness would be of great significance for the early stages of my research planning, perhaps the more crucial benefit of my previous cultural practice is the ability to offer a more comprehensive interpretation of the research data, which eventually led to the original knowledge produced, combining both my insider perspectives and theoretical assessments. Instead of simply being able to 'describe the unconscious grammar of the community', I may

have a better chance of providing 'expressions of it' resulting from my 'superior insider knowledge gained through primary socialization' (O'Reilly, 2009, p.114).

In the ethnographic sections, especially between chapters 7-10, I have made the decision to make use of some extensive interview extracts to serve various intentions. In some cases, such extracts help to unpack the implicit and spontaneous feelings, emotions and a clearer illustration of characteristics of certain participants, through the ways in which they construct narratives of certain key events, especially when they were talking about topics they share strong sympathies with. In such situations, I am allowing my participants to "speak for themselves, with liking material which is mainly there to ensure continuity and point up the significance of what they are saying" (Gillham, 2005, p. 160). For example, most of my participants such as Ye and P, talked extensively about their emotional bond with their early sponsors or as they would call 'brothers' or 'big brothers'. Such voices were conventionally marginalized in the commercial media representations of Chinese skateboarders, while it is at the heart of their cultural practices and a determining factor underlining many of their life dicisions such as moving to other cities or signing/resigning to and from certain companies. Additionally, there are also the largely marginalised voices from almost all media representations, such as the criticisms towards the operations of big corporations and/or the authorities, by the 'outsiders' of the Chinese skateboarding industry such as the participants living and developing the grassroots skateboarding culture in Wuhan. This particular group of interview data shows how I was communicating with my participants in order to produce "productive dialogue and action contributing to social justice goals" (Roulston, 2010, p. 221).

Hereby, the decision to present a fuller version of their interviews, shows how emotionally charged these issues are to my participants, embeded in their passionate and vivid descriptions of certain people, organisations, events or memories. By presenting how such emotions entangle with certain life events of theirs, they feel like they were finally given voices.

I have also included some of the conversational interview extracts between me and my participants, to show how my insider knowledge and the responses produced because of it, have facilitated valueable research data and also help to convey the social and historic contexts of responses. I thereby also acknowledge my contributions to the construction of the stories told from the interviews by 'being there' (O'Reilly, 2005, p. 213). Some examples, especially the interviews during the 2014 Nanjing Youth Olympic Games, show in cases including my interactions with Chai, how my insider role has helped my participants to 'take off guards' with me. A big portion of the most valuable sets of data were generated out of such situations largely based on the trust between me and my participants in addition to our shared dedications towards the development of Chinese skateboarding culture. The fuller version of the interview extracts certainly show the easily dismissed but exceptionally meaningful subtle interactions between me and my participants, thus to fulfill my aim to produce the kind of research outcomes that are "shared by the researcher in respectful ways with and for the benefit of the communities studied, and in ways that may be understood by community members" (Roulston, 2010, p. 223). Overall, as at the beginning of this thesis claims in researching the Chinese skateboarding culture, the more extensive interview

extracts place a greater emphasis on, and to capture and give voice to the feelings,

motivations and "meanings the participant/interviewee places on his or her own life story

and events" (O'Reilly, 2005, p.128).

Framing the research questions

Being an insider researcher has also influenced the foundation of the framing of my research

questions. Many research questions were formed according to my theoretical understandings

of skateboarding culture, combined with my personal understanding and experiences as a

participant in Chinese skateboarding culture. There are questions, however, which emerged

from the setting and were added during the course of my fieldwork. The insider role with

CESA during the 2014 Nanjing Youth Olympic Games granted me the opportunity to

participate intensively with key members of the skateboarding industry on the topic of the

inclusion of skateboarding in the Olympic Games. During discussions, I realised that this

issue had become of the utmost concern to many of my participants. Hence, it was only

during the fieldwork that I decided to update some of my research questions accordingly in

order to investigate the insider feelings and discussions of this topic. It was therefore as a

result of my insider position during the fieldwork that facilitated the realisation to re-frame

my research questions.

However, the insider position can also raise issues. The claim of the 'monopolistic

correctness' (O'Reilly, 2009, p.112) of insider knowledge and the exclusion of non-insider

interpretations certainly can raise scepticism. Being 'too familiar with the setting for the

unfamiliar and exotic to arouse curiosity' (O'Reilly, 2009, p.112) can result in taking

strangeness for granted or 'too much being taken as given, whether in terms of questions not

asked or information not volunteered' (Hodkinson, 2005, p.139). Some of my initial research

questions were based on the pre-assumption that the requirement for social capital (Bourdieu,

1986) is less prominent in the Shanghai skateboarding industry because of the highly

commercial environment. However, interviews and observations during the fieldwork have

proved this to be inaccurate. For instance, a participant who works in the Shanghai

skateboarding industry said in the interview that 'that company would rather sponsor the

already old and boring skaters they know and close to are than sponsoring and fostering an

extremely talented young kid'. These initial biases formed from the experiences in the

Beijing skateboarding community caused me to reflect on my insider knowledge towards

other groups in the Chinese skateboarding industry. Consequently, I tried to edit some

semi-structured interview questions to make them more open to interpretation from the

participants themselves. To that extent, I was able to minimise the initial biases that I might

still have. However, this could still potentially need careful examination during the analysis

process.

Conclusion

This chapter began with a detailed explanation of my research design by looking at the 13

research questions in the four sections of my thesis and the research objectives they were

designed to achieve. I then introduced the six settings, as well as the sampling strategies and

the reasons behind the choices being made. This was followed by explanation of the methods

used to gain access to the different settings and participant groups. In order to achieve the research objectives, the ethnographic and interview methods I used during the research process of data collection were explained. The thematic analysis used in the data analysis process has been examined, followed by the ethical considerations at all stages of my research.

Because of the insider proximity I had achieved prior to my research project, I have carefully reflected on my research processes. Firstly I introduced the reflexive approach that I employed for my research and in the process, briefly explained the theoretical debates around the topic of insider research and how it has impacted on my own research by reflecting in more detail on the insider role at different stages of my research. This includes the influences on gaining access and rapport and how I have participated in Chinese skateboarding culture before and during my research. I examined the objectivity and positionality of me being a researcher and what kind of effects it may have projected onto my research during the different phases of data collection and analysis. Finally, I also shared my reflections on the interpretation of the data and how my insider role influenced the framing of my research questions – both at the beginning and how it continued to have an effect during the research processes - but more importantly, on how I have reflected on and carefully dealt with these issues .

Chapter 6 Introduction and Early Development of Chinese Skateboarding Subculture – Continuities and Discontinuities

Introduction

In this chapter, I aim to explore the introduction and early development of Chinese skateboarding subculture, and to link cultural phenomenarelated to its introduction with the discussion in the contextual chapters about the continuities and discontinuities embedded in them. This will be presented in three chronological contexts – (1) from Mao to Deng Xiaoping, from one of the most turbulent periods of contemporary Chinese history to the foundation of how China is understood by the world today. This forms the background for the introduction of skateboarding culture in China. (2) skateboarding culture's early developments in China as a grassroots youth subculture started around the late 1980s. From the late 1980s to the early 2000s, skateboarding attracted early generations of Chinese skateboarders in major Chinese cities. However, because of the continuted relative lack of information about the outside world and the strong influence of hemogenic mainstream Chinese culture, the cultural development of Chinese skateboarding culture acquired its unique characteristics. (3) From 2003 until 2013, a period of which signifies the early decade of the emerging Chinese skateboarding industry and its exponential growth in size, in line with the underlying economic background of China's further opening up to the global economic system, marked by its inclusion into WTO.

Within these three historical contexts, I will look at themes that appeared to be most important to the early Chinese skateboarders such as the discussion about the Qinghuangdao skateboarding contexts, the subcultural membership, the commercial incorporation of skateboarding identity and authenticity. Lastly, I will discuss how these cultural reactions documented by my empirical data from participants in skateboarding culture reflect on the continuities and discontinuities of Chinese youth subcultures.

Pre-emergence political and economic background – turbulent politics and nurturing economy, from Mao to Deng Xiaoping

Contemporary Chinese history witnessed several stages of cultural turbulence during the Mao era (1949 - 1976). One of the most significant historical periods in contemporary Chinese history is the Cultural Revolution (1966 - 1976). Clark (2012, p.10) argues it was during the Cultural Revolution decade that 'distinctive modes and spheres for the assertion of youth identity' emerged. The Red Guard during the Cultural Revolution, for instance, was seen as the exemplar of the new Chinese youth who seek identity that is different from the 'old generations' (Clark, 2012, p.2). Mao's death in September 1976 marked a key point in time, which formed the cultural foundation allowing 'youth expressions of identity to emerge alongside mainstream discourse' (Clark, 2012, p.10). Fei (2003) argues that the cultural outcome of the Cultural Revolution 'damaged' Chinese traditional culture and stimulated the process of increasing acceptance of Western cultures. In 1976, the April 5th Movement as Lu (2009) argues, signalled the point of which the contemporary Chinese youth culture surfaced

from. It was when youth cultural movements start to move away from copying mainstream cultural phenomena and form a youth cultural consciousness. The April 5th Movement, as Lu (2009, p. 30) asserts, highlighted the Chinese youth's disapproval and scepticism towards mainstream politics at the time: the Cultural Revolution. The discourse around Chinese youth culture witnessed a transition from the discussion of the Red Guards to the Educated Urban Youth, signalling a cultural change in Chinese youth cultures.

Following Mao's death on 9th September 1976 and his named successor's (Hua Guofeng) effort to purge the Gang of Four (BBC, 1977), Deng Xiaoping became the real leader of the Communist Party in 1978. During his term of service, he successfully shifted the primary focus of the Chinese Communist Party away from the Cultural Revolution towards economic reform that embraced Western market economy policies. Wang (2001) argues that Deng Xiaoping's Opening Up policies in 1978 and his Southern Excursion talks have transformed China into a liberal market economy and have facilitated the material conditions for youth cultural formations. Consequently, this gave momentum to the mass adoption of the Western cultural identities flowing into the Chinese youth's world. China's Opening Up policies, the transition io a liberal market economy, the growth of GDP, increasing affluence, rises in real wages, and the arrival of a mass consumer society have all contributed to the socio-economic cornerstone of the cultural and economic development of contemporary Chinese youth cultures in mainland China, especially youth subcultures such as rock music culture, hip-hop culture, and skateboarding culture.

Conflict of discontinuities, emergence and the first decade (1989 – 2003) of skateboarding

subculture in China: 'A marriage without a romantic relationship'

'It's like a marriage without having a romantic relationship beforehand. Duang (Boom)![1]There came skateboarding. But at first, everyone only saw it was new and interesting, no one cared about the culture behind skateboarding. It was isolated from the world; it was something different from skateboarding as it was anywhere else outside China. The early participation was just scratching the surface: very limited by imitation of skateboarding tricks and later clothing styles. Gradually, as the early generation that started in the 1990s grew older, something precipitated from our culture along its decades of development, with traces of distinctive Chinese characters' (Fei, interview, 2014)

The emergence of skateboarding in China can be traced back to 1989, when a group of Chinese skateboarders in a public square in Gongzhufen (公主坟), Beijing, who called themselves 三脚猫 (cat with only three legs, a slang word for 'jack of all trades') skateboard team. This group was, at the time, the only skateboarding community in China until the 1990s. But the 1990s saw the substantial expansion of the early population of Chinese skateboarders. In the early 1990s, skateboarding culture started to spread all over China's first-tier and provincial capitals such as Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, Guangzhou, Qingdao and Zhengzhou. Many of the participants in this research started skateboarding during that period.

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[1] 'Duang' is an internet term borrowed from a famous advertisement Jackie Chen did for a shampoo product.

(三脚猫滑板队 Cat with three legs skateboarding team, Kikerclub.com, accessed 2014)

> 'My first encounter of the skateboarding image was around 1991 to 1992, when I was
>
> watching CCTV (China Central Television). CCTV broadcasted some clips of Western
>
> skateboarding, snowboarding and other extreme sports. That was when I knew there is a
>
> sport called skateboarding' (BBL, interview, 2014)

BBL recalls the excitement of his first time seeing skateboarding on TV. Many early

practitioners were influenced by such programs broadcasted on CCTV and started to find

ways to buy skateboards in their local cities. However, even in the country's capital city,

Beijing, it was very hard to find any information on where to purchase quality skateboards.

Some of them were only able to find domestic toy-skateboards in department stores and wear

Chinese sports shoes such as 回力 (Warrior Shoes) and 双星 (Double Star). It was not until 1992, when Gao Yuan, a friend of George Powell (the founder of the leading American skateboard company Powell Skateboards) founded the Golden Dragon Corporation and started selling American single kick skateboards in China by post. The Golden Dragon Corporation played 'an instrumental, if not key, role in the early history of skateboarding community formation in China', not only because 'its national distribution network provided the framework that China's youth needed to access professional-quality goods', but also due to the 'corporation's publication of the first nationwide skateboard zine - the *Ollie Newsletter* (Aoli Tongxun) in 1993' (Sedo, 2010, p. 268). This has changed the situation from one in which skateboarders can only purchase low quality skateboards made by domestic sports brands, as well as the ways in which they could exchange information and share experiences and tricks. It was from that point on that Chinese skateboarding started to speed up its advancement, shadowed by the substantial Chinese economic boost, along with the rapid global advancement of communication technologies. Apart from sharing tricks with each other in Chinese skateboarding communities, skateboarders at that time also shared foreign skateboarding videos, such as the world-famous *411VM*, an American bimonthly skateboarding video magazine started in 1993. Chinese skateboarders were sharing illegal copied of the tapes, DVDs and later files on the Internet. The founder of the *411VM*, Josh Friedberg said in our interview:

We knew the Chinese skateboarders were doing that … our whole goal was to share

skateboarding to the people who cared about it, that was the whole point. However, the

411VM video magazine production stopped 'when file-sharing picked up'.

Sharing those American skateboarding videos between each other was the only way the early

generations of Chinese skateboarders could learn and develop their skateboarding skills

before the Internet.

'I was so excited when I borrowed this tape from my friend who I use to skate with. I

was shocked to see those tricks I had never imagined to be possible on a skateboard. So

we would watch it over and over again sometimes we would slow it down to try to

figure out how they did certain tricks. And we would grab our board and go out

experiment what we have learned from the video. Before long, everybody in our group

was wearing those baggy jeans and practice the same tricks we saw on the video

together' (Ran, interview, 2014)

Because of the hugely different mainstream culture from the one from which skateboarding

culture originated in the US, early Chinese skateboarders relied heavily on foreign

subcultural media, but not entirely as a way for them to 'distinguish with the mass culture'

(Thornton, 1995). What seemed more valuable to the cultural participants was subcultural

media's formative role as a way to connect the different communities.

The unhappy honeymoon – social institutions as barriers to the early development of

Chinese skateboarding culture

Even though they have managed to form distinctions within their own community, the culture of skateboardingin China, or simply its cultural practices, was still rather alien to mainstream social conventions. Problems started to emerge very quickly from this 'marriage without romantic relationship'. Along with the development of skateboarding skills was the advancing age of the early generations of Chinese skateboarders. Some began to seek 'normal' jobs and quit skateboarding; some saw the success and popularity of Golden Dragon Corporation among Chinese skateboarders and decided to open the earliest skateshops in China. As a result, in the late 1990s, independent skateshops were opened in all major cities in China. This entrepreneurial trend made quality skateboarding equipment more accessible to Chinese skateboarders than ever before.

Despite the rising number of subcultural entrepreneurs opening independent skateshops in Chinese cities, social and economic barriers still remain that slowed down the pace of growth of Chinese skateboarding culture. First of all, the price of quality skateboarding equipment, such as Powell Skateboards, was too expensive for Chinese kids from normal family backgrounds. Secondly, it was difficult to gain approval from their parents, even for those who could afford it, to pay for their children to practice a sport with rebellious symbolic representations that contradict mainstream values. The annual per capita disposable income

of households in China in 1990 was approximately 1,510 RMB (Statista.com) and one whole

set of skateboard would cost hundreds more than this figure.

> 'My parents definitely did not support me at first. Apart from reasons such as the price
>
> of the skateboards and its potentially negative influence over my study, they were a lot
>
> more worried that I would get serious injuries. The healthcare system in China would
>
> not cover thousands of RMBs for the surgeries, if I break a bone or something. Plus,
>
> they were not able to understand within their value system, why a piece of wood costs
>
> that much money, while the best quality foreign brand bicycles only cost around 200
>
> RMB' (WY, interview, 2014)

However, WY went to art college so he did not have to take the Gaokao (University

Entrance Examination, 高考) hence his case might not be the general case for others.

> 'My parents were extremely supportive comparing to other parents, considering when a
>
> set of skateboard would cost months of their salaries. Because I have always had good
>
> grades at school, so they would support whatever hobby of mine, as long as I don't go to
>
> arcades or get involved in street fights' (BBL, interview, 2014)

BBL's case of his supportive parents indicates the paramount expectation of Chinese parents,

which also resonates with many other participants and with most of the under-18 Chinese

skateboarders today – do well in Gaokao. As Wang (2005) observes, subcultural practices

for school kids very often function as a symbol of self-expression and resistance to the

oppression they have had from their childhood under the education system, particularly the ultimate goal of getting through Gaokao. The real sense of resistance in the Western tradition of subcultural studies of skateboarding culture was similar to what Wang (2005, p. 199) describes as the 'small slice of young musical hobbyists listen to counter-culture cool music and constitute what I would call active producers and consumers of a "musical subculture"'. The majority of the early or even current Chinese skateboarders still followed the footsteps of their parents' generation, or such as BBL, being '*linglei*' (subversive) under the condition that their parents' expectations were met.

In comparison with the family, compliance to the education system is all about future employment (Cockain, 2012, p. 101). Hence, amateur skateboarders would still face the same pressure to comply with the education system until they can foresee a better chance at getting a career outside of the conventional employment opportunities. By the time of my fieldwork, only one of the professional skateboarders who were my participants had a university degree. Most of the professional skateboarders dropped out of their high school or college when they discovered they could either make a living out of their skateboarding career, or they have made promising progress in their ability to gain full-time jobs in the skateboarding industry since it does not require conventional qualifications such as university degrees. The one participant who had a university degree, after a few years of being a professional skateboarder, was offered a full-time job by his sponsor company to be chief editor of the company's skateboarding media website. Therefore, the early generation of Chinese skateboarders' practice of resistance towards social institutions appears similar to

what Kloet and Fung (2017, p. 21) describe as 'occasional resistance and locally specific alternative subjectivities', except for those who could escape the social sphere of their youth and move on into the sphere of work which was previously only viable for adults.

Subcultural membership and capital – stuck in the middle

Another significant contribution of the Golden Dragon Corporation to the development of skateboarding subculture in China is their annual competition held in Qinghuangdao, a city in Hebei province that is not far from Beijing. This annual competition is arguably more important for Chinese skateboarders than the *Ollie Newsletters*, since it built up strong physical and social connections between early Chinese skateboarders. This topic keeps coming up among the older generation of Chinese skateboarders when they reflect on the early history of Chinese skateboarding. Having been to this competition was regarded as one of the most crucial justifications for being a Laopao[2] (old master), which signifies a high status in the subcultural hierarchy. Dupont (2014, p. 564-565), drawing on Thornton's (1999) theory of subcultural capitals, asserts the core skateboarders

> 'were not simply trying on a subcultural identity; their membership was more permanent and would have lasting effects on their lifestyle. Through their positions within local shops, control over popular local skateboard websites, and their visibility within the local and national skateboard media, they had the ability to strongly influence the values and attitudes of other skaters. Their status within the scene allowed them to strongly

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[2] 老炮, a term developed from the Beijing youth cultures in the 1970s and had gained popularity even in the mainstream culture through the movie 老炮 by the famous Chinese director Feng Xiaogang.

influence the dominant understanding of 'authenticity' and maintain the dominant understanding of the hierarchy within skateboarding'.

The early Beijing skateboarders were famous for their relatively higher skill levels, which they exhibited in the competitions. Yet, what makes them 'cooler' than the other skateboarders from smaller cities that did not have a community as big as those in Beijing, is their distinctive attitude and lifestyle. At the end of almost every casual skateboarding gathering, the older skateboarders would always suggest going to an 'authentic' Beijingese noodle restaurant near the Wangfujing shopping district. It was a very small and 'ghetto looking' restaurant, like many others in Beijing's small Hutongs[3]. I have been here more times than I can remember since I started skateboarding with these older skateboarders. This particular restaurant must be the most visited restaurant by skateboarders in Beijing. In the summer, they would have tables on the street of Hutong outside the restaurant with small portable chairs. Sometimes if there were cars trying to enter the Hutong, we would have to all stand up and make way for the cars because our table was blocking the street. The older skateboarders always stuck to this kind of small, local Beijing restaurant when they were young, and this tradition was kept through generations of skateboarders as part of the authentic Beijing skateboarding lifestyle. Now the old skateboarders are all in their 30s or even 40s, with more disposable income, even the younger ones are all working and able to afford much better restaurants, but they would still prefer to come here to reminisce about the old times and have some cheap drinks in an 'authentic' environment where they are

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[3] Hutong refers to narrow alleyways in traditional residential areas in Beijing.

comfortable. One participant, a core member and 'old master' in the Beijing skateboarding community, tried to describe to me and the other younger skateboarders at the dinner table about how they had 'rocked' the skateboarding competition in Qinhuangdao in the 1990s:

> Pang is one of the oldest at this table and is very famous for his funny, talkative character. Pang held and drank right from the beer bottle and talked loudly with a very thick and distinctive Beijing accent 'Cao (fuck), do you know how NB (cool) we were when our group from Beijing went to Qinghuangdao? Nobody gave a fuck about the competition, we were all drinking until sunrise except B, who is too lame to hang out with us, so he went to bed early and practiced in the skatepark. Those younger skateboarders from smaller cities were all stunned by our attitude and lifestyle. Any one of us had the skill to win that contest but no one did, because we were all just too hungover in the morning and couldn't do shit on our skateboards'. I was sure that I had heard this story many times from different old skaters when I was younger (Fieldnote, 2014)

Debates on the authentic skateboarding lifestyle is one of the most frequent topics during this kind of after-skateboarding dinner. Pang was always proud of his long-kept rebellious and 'authentic' Beijingese 'skateboarding' lifestyle. He and his friends kept skateboarding as a hobby as they grew older into their 30s and 40s in the 2000s. There were two other ways of living among their fellow skateboarder friends – (1) keep skateboarding and try to work in the rapidly-developing skateboarding industry   as either professional skateboarders or in

other occupations such as team mangers or filmmakers; (2) stop skateboarding completely and pursue more conventional careers outside the skateboarding industry. They were happy that they did not go either direction. They think that careers within the skateboarding industry do not make as much money as they would from their conventional jobs, and they would have regretted it when they were older. Nonetheless, they are critical towards either situation their fellow older skateboarders are in, especial the ones who quit skateboarding for a conventional career, as if it were a betrayal to their old skateboarding culture.

Guo has a very clear boundary between his 'skateboarding friends' and his other friends, such as 'basketball friends' and 'pub friends', which is the biggest reason that we were never close. We (him and his other older generation skateboarder friends) always hang out together after skateboarding and have invited him to everything. But he never invites us to his other activities, such as going to pubs. Skateboarding had long become the only thing that I can grab onto to that makes my life less dull than the lives of my colleagues at work. Sometimes I feel like it wouldn't have counted as a weekend if I did not go skateboarding with my friends. I cannot imagine what I would have become if I stopped skateboarding' (FG, interview, 2015)

FG, a friend of Pang commented on another older-generation skateboarder who is less 'committed' to the subcultural membership and lifestyle. Regardless of how critical they were towards their old fellow skateboarders' ways of life, they feel lost. There is a clear sense of being 'stuck in the middle' between being fully committed to skateboarding,

perhaps working within the skateboarding industry. However, this lifestyle, according to their more 'traditional' value system, would not provide them the living standard they have and are satisfied with today; on the other hand, they are very proud that they can still skateboard in their 30s or 40s and see it as a way for them to maintain their skateboarding subcultural membership, which separates them from the mainstream. Similar to what we have discussed in the contextual chapter about the Lao Pao culture derived from the Red Guards period, the older generation of Beijing skateboarders cling to this cultural continuity that provides them a sense of collective identity within the Chinese skateboarding community. However, mainstream socio-economic conditions have shaped skateboarding culture in a direction that they either could not adjust to or have little sense of affiliation with. For some participants, skateboarding culture has become 'kids game' that they have to move on from. Like Jones (1992) and Wang (2015) observed in their studies of Chinese rock music subculture, early participants e moved on from the subculture because of their superior social and economic status, which they achieved in their adult life. Thornton (1995, p. 102) argues that:

This is one reason why youth culture is often attractive to people well beyond their youth. It acts as a buffer against social aging – not against the dread of getting older, but of resigning oneself to one's position in a highly stratified society

Aging participants and shifting identities

However, the early participants in skateboarding culture that continued to participate in it still play an important role, regardless of the varying intensity of their participation. Hodkinson (2011, p. 265) points out that, as older participants in the Goth subculture age, their experiences became more personalized, but their continued participation rate provides 'a clear collective character to their developing identities'. This also applies to Chinese skateboarding culture. Nonetheless, the older generation of Chinese skateboarders have also had a major influence on the identities of skateboarding culture, partly because of their subcultural capital accumulated from their experiences, hence their high subcultural status within the community, which is partly related to their deeper involvement within the skateboarding industry. For example, there are still norms retained from the older generations of Chinese skateboarders, such as I have illustrated in the first section. There is evidence in Chinese skateboarding culture of what Bennett (2013, p.133) calls 'mentorship and paternalism' in the involvement of older skateboarders and 'meaningful relationships'

older skateboarders constructed with the younger skateboarders.

(Bao skating near an army compound in Beijing in the 1990s)

Furthermore, transnational companies that came into China during the late 2000s started to

hire older-generation skateboarders to be their brand/marketing managers or team managers

– the knot between the corporation and the community. Nonetheless, almost all the independent skateboarding media were founded or are controlled by the older generation, such as Kickerclub.com and *Whatsup Magazine*. Similar to what Hodkinson and Bennett (2013, p. 142) discovered about the 'increasingly nostalgic feel' in the organization of the Whitby Gothic Weekend festival, the Chinese skateboarding media and events organized by the transnational corporations also have a very strong nostalgic theme. There was a series of events and exhibitions of the early generations of Chinese skateboarders, and Kickerclub.com, one of the most active skateboarding media, has a set of videos called 'oldline', each episode of whichfeatures one over 30s skateboarder filming a 'line',[4] sometimes with interviews discussing the histories of Chinese skateboarding culture. Younger generations of skateboarders still worship and respect the 'legends' or '*Laopao'* among the older generations of skateboarders because of their dedication to skateboarding culture.

> There are some really good filmmakers who has produced great videos but Yan has my most respect. When I started skating and had no idea about filming, Yan was already a very experienced filmmaker. He was also the first and even till this day, the only skateboarding filmmaker that I know who would bring out electricity generator and one or two sets of stand-up lights for a night session just to get some good footages (Sun G, interview, 2014)

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[4] Line, usually refer to a particular form of skateboarding video components which the skateboarder performs a normally planned set of tricks and route in one continuous shot.

Moreover, like one of the participants made explicit, that major shoe companies have the tendency to sponsor the 'already famous' skateboarders who are in their late 20s or early 30s. The early generations of Chinese skateboarders still have an active presence in skateboarding media and marketing videos, not least because of the 'cultural authority' (Bennett, 2013) those participants symbolise.

Another interesting theme about the older participants is similar to what Hodkinson (2011; Hodkinson and Bennett, 2013) and Bennett (2013) both observed in music-based subcultures, namely, the changing pattern of physical involvements. Similar to their observations, the decreased involvement in the punk or goth music events from older members of the subcultures, were described as 'partying softer' (Hodkinson and Bennett, 2013) and staying away from the dance floor. Hodkinson (2011, p.281) pointed out that the older goth participants have shown a pattern of 'comfortable' forms of participation which place 'emphasis on work [and] long-term friendships'. In the Chinese skateboarding community, there is a similar trend, but it is manifested in different ways. Some older generation skateboarders go skating on the streets with their friends among the older generation skateboarding community with a lot less physical commitment to performance. Their involvement emphasises the value of social interactions that normally happen in-between or after actual participation in skateboarding. This group of older skateboarders, although they have less physical involvement, still stick to the old subcultural norms and styles.

Another notable group of the older skateboarders displayed the theme of 'embracing parenthood', as Hodkinson and Bennett (2013, p.136) pointed out. They are less conformed to subcultural norms and styles, they wear protective gears such as helmets and kneepads and skate indoor skate parks with their children. The other distinctive pattern of the second group is that they also have moved towards other similar sports that require more economic capital (driving to the snowpark and purchasing more expensive equipment compared to skateboarding) to be involved in, such as snowboarding. A high percentage of the older generation of skateboarders in this group also participate regularly in snowboarding during the winter, as a new way of reproducing distinction from their previous skateboarding experiences.

Overall, the older generation of Chinese skateboarders exhibit an interesting case of the persisting continuities and emergent discontinuities of Chinese skateboarding culture. However, to fully understand the important cultural influence of the early generation of Chinese skateboarders, I need to take into account the involvement of the older generation of skateboarders in the later development of the skateboarding industry and how this generation has shaped or reshaped the process and outcome of cultural production in the next chapter. Furthermore, there are also themes that will be elaborated by looking at the current sportification process and popular lifestyle turn in Chinese skateboarding culture in Chapter 8.

The second decade 2003 – 2013 - commercialisation and professionalisation of

skateboarding

Transnational mobilities, skateboarding tours and restructured urban spaces

Another importance of the Qinghuangdao skateboarding contest is the social mobility that it

has integrated into Chinese skateboarding culture. This is the first time in the history of

Chinese skateboarding culture when Chinese skateboarders built up the connection between

skateboarding and tourism. Skateboarding tourism is still a significant characteristic of

Chinese skateboarding culture and has substantial symbolic values to its participants.

Chinese cities, especially the first-tier cities, have undergone a massive urban restructuring

process in line with China's economic development One unintended result of this is that it

produced a tremendous amount of urban spaces that are suitable for street skateboarding.

Howell's (2004, 2005) research looks at the relationship between urban renewal and the

development of skateboarding culture. He argues that in the Western context, the process of

urban renewal had a positive impact on the development of skateboarding culture. Many

other skateboarding scholars assert that street skateboarding is a form of resistance and

challenge against the mainstream understanding of space (Beal, 1994; Borden, 2001; Howell,

2004; Dupont, 2014). The Chinese skateboarding community was united by famous

skateboarding spots, such as the Wangfujing Church square in Beijing, the Shanghai Concert

Hall Square (known by the skateboarders as the Shanghai Love Park, named after the famous

Love Park in Philadelphia, US), Deng Xiaoping Square in Shenzhen and Hero Square in

Guangzhou. These spaces carry a shared subcultural history of the local skateboarding communities and are still available for skateboarding to this day. Action sports cultures have the tradition of traveling in pursuit of new terrains for their performances (Thorpe, 2015, p. 107). Skateboarders had always been trying to find new terrains to skate and skateboarding teams around the globe. It is a shared ritual for skateboarders to go on tours across regions, nations and even continents to film skateboarding videos. Sedo (2010) claims that the 'spatial' nature of the skateboarding business has demanded that professional skateboarders search out for new terrains globally. 'China skateboarding tourism' has become the latest favourite option, surpassing other famous past popular destinations such as Barcelona and Tokyo.

In response to this trend, Sedo (2010) argues that local Chinese skateboarders resisted the idea that foreign skateboarders destroyed the local spots by, for example, over-skating the marble ledges. There is little evidence I found that supports the cultural rejection to this trend that Sedo (2010) has observed. On the contrary, most skateboarders, from amateurs to professionals, embraced the opportunities to watch foreign professional skateboarders skate in person when they travel to their local spots to film content. Nonetheless, the 'spot logic' (Sedo, 2010) that Borden (2001, p.294, see also Sedo, 2010, p. 273) illustrated as 'mental knowledge composed of highly detailed local knowledge about dispersed places, micro-architectures and accessible times' has a very restricted context in Chinese skateboarding culture. Though this 'spot logic' appears useful among professional skateboarding teams, it is more or less exclusive to filming projects and some foreign

skateboarders. The 'spots' have a set of meanings that is very different from the subcultural meanings of the spots in the general Chinese skateboarding culture. These spots, though they function as both a form of resistance to the mainstream understanding of physical space for street skateboarding performances, their 'formative effect' (Sheridan, 2007) is valued more significantly by the Chinese skateboarders. Most Chinese skateboarders, even professionals, still skate regularly in certain places instead of exploring new spots.

Anthony Claravall, a well-known American professional skateboarding videographer, is one of the pioneers that mobilized this trend in China. At around 2002, Anthony started to travel to China to film content for skateboarding videos. He said in an interview that he felt that the big cities or the already established 'skateboarding cities', such as LA and New York in the US were becoming harder and harder to skate because of the restrictions on skateboarding in public and private spaces. Besides, those famous 'spots' were filmed too many times and people were getting tired of seeing the same 'spots' and obstacles over and over again. Shenzhen became a twinkle in his eyes right away. The new buildings that were newly-built or being built in Shenzhen have created a vast number of new 'skate spots' that are suitable for skateboarding. The smooth marble ledges and surfaces, which are perfect for skateboarding, can be found everywhere in Shenzhen, and they have few restrictions on skateboarding. Very soon Shenzhen, along with other first tier Chinese cities, such as Guangzhou, Shanghai and Beijing, became famous and often appeared in American skateboarding videos.

I have probably brought over 200 professional skateboarders over the years to China, to

Shenzhen and Guangzhou … I would say 90% of them went back more than once

(Claravall, VICE sports, 2015)

Overall, the new spaces generated from the urban restructuring process with few restrictions

for skateboarding has made a positive impact on the introduction of transnational

corporations in the 2000s, consequently accelerating the growth of Chinese skateboarding

culture. J is a Canadian skateboarder who came to live in China during the early 2000s and

has since become a professional skateboarder and a branding assistant in one of the major

transnational corporations in the Chinese skateboarding industry. He is known as a great

'skateboarding tour guide' for foreign skateboarding teams that want to shoot skateboarding

videos in the new marble plazas in China.

NIKE SB eventually started hearing more and more about China, about how amazing

the spots were and how it was so easy to capture content, I was at the time the only

person that was able to speak English and being like I knew all the spots, I am a

skateboarder. So, I took those guys around and they went back and made a decision to

start NIKE SB China (J, interview, 2014)

I argue that the transnational and mobile nature of skateboarding culture has made a

constructive impact on both the cultural and economic development of Chinese

skateboarding culture. In conjunction with the grand economic development of the Chinese

market economy, the later massive commercial development of the Chinese skateboarding

industry was undoubtedly fuelled by China's unprecedented transnational mobility, partly because of the introduction of the concept of making skateboarding tour videos as a tradition that continues in the operations of local and transnational skateboarding corporations and independent skateshop teams. It is also a key characteristic of the Chinese skateboarding industry to adopt and benefit from cultural/creative industry policies, which will be discussed in Chapter 8.

Expanding youth market, consumption and commercialisation of Chinese skateboarding culture– from Jiang era to Hu era

In November 1995, China formally requested to accede to the WTO. On 11th December 2001, China officially became the WTO's 143rd member. During the period of the first decade of joining the WTO, China became the fastest growing economy in the world. Along with its rapid economic growth, and perhaps more importantly for the preconditions of the commercialisation process of Chinese skateboarding culture, is that China has also joined the middle-income nations of the world, meaning that it has also nurtured a lucrative mass youth market. The Chinese 'post-1980s generation' has become a major target for international and domestic marketing strategies in the 2000s. Thorpe (2014, p.44) asserts that foreign transnational corporations have recently noticed 'the rapidly growing Chinese middle class, and in particular Chinese middle-class youth. In 2003, China's 'middle class' – people earning more than RMB 50,000 (US$6,500 per year) – accounted for an estimated 19 per cent of the country's 1.3 billion population; this class is expected to constitute 40 per cent of

the total population by 2020'. He also emphasised the importance of this Chinese youth

market, which is the first generation of the Single Child policy, which has the expectation of

greater autonomy in choosing their lifestyles.

A Decade of Growth

China's growth blisters
GDP, change from a year earlier

As GDP surges up the global rankings

And China joins the ranks of middle-income nations
GDP per capita in PPP terms, in thousands of dollars

*Forecast Source: IMF

The Wall Street Journal
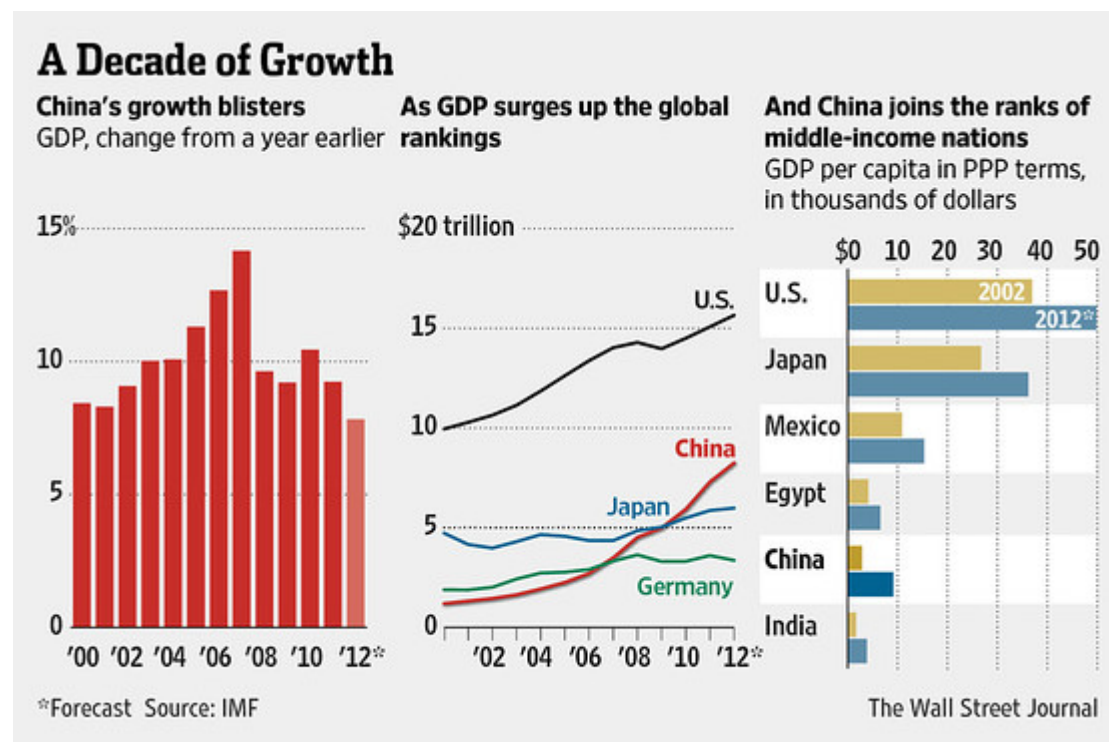
(Wall Street Journal, 2012)

In the West, researchers have identified a trend among those who marketers very quickly

classified 'teen-agers', with their high levels of discretionary spending, as a separate

consumer segment (Abrams, 1961) to be served by a distinctive array of leisure goods and

activities. For example, activities organised around the music industry, centred on rock and

pop and a fashion industry geared to adolescent tastes during the early 1990s.

Action/lifestyle sports scholars (Thorpe, 2014; Wheaton, 2010) have also observed a similar

tide. During the late 1990s, action/lifestyle sports shared the characteristics of youth market niches, and have developed a transnational and cross-generational/gender reach. Both mainstream businesses and subcultural entrepreneurs started to emerge, attempting to capitalise on action sports cultures.

> Moreover, this expansion in participation includes not only the traditional consumer market of teenage boys, but older men, women and girls. Nonetheless, these participants and consumers have a broad range of interests and experiences, from the 'outsiders' who experience activities as media consumers, or who occasionally experience participation via an array of 'taster' activities being marketed through the adventure sport and travel industries, to the 'hard-core' committed practitioners who are fully familiarized in the lifestyle, argot, fashion and technical skill of their activity(ies), and spend considerable time, energy and often money doing it (Wheaton, 2010, p. 1057).

The subcultural entrepreneurs within skateboarding culture started their businesses around the beginning of 2000s, and first-tier Chinese cities have all had at least one sometimes more skateshops were opened by early generation of Chinese skateboarders. Those skateboarders who were became adults and wanted to capitalise on skateboarding culture as a way to maintain their subcultural membership started enterprises such as Beijing's Tour skateshop, Shanghai's FLY Streetwear, Qingdao's Birdhouse skateshop and local skateboarding companies such as Beijing's Society Skateboards, Shanghai's Gift Skateboards and Guangzhou's Shox Skateboards. However, the situation changed after China joined the

WTO. International companies in the skateboarding industry, especially in the United States, noticed the Chinese skateboarding scene and more importantly the potential of the Chinese youth market and started to open their Asia Pacific or China offices in China. Initiated by Quiksilver in 2003, a major player in the global action/lifestyle industry, followed by Nike SB (skateboarding) in 2006 and Vans China in 2008 and later Converse Skateboarding and Adidas Skateboarding. The industrialisation of skateboarding culture will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7, while this section focuses on introducing the economic background and cultural conditions that facilitated its later development.

Sponsorship and professionalisation in Chinese skateboarding culture

The commercialization of skateboarding culture were at the centre of criticism by Western skateboarding communities before the transnational corporations entered China. During the late 1990s and the 2000s, the skateboarding industry expanded immensely because of increased media coverage (especially from ESPN and later FOX Sports) and the emergence of action sports mega events such as the X Games. Skateboarding has become one of the best-selling sports among Western youth (Beal, 2004; Wheaton, 2004; 2010; Thorpe, 2014). Among scholars of skateboarding, there were discussions about the participants in skateboarding culture's attitude towards commercialization. Beal (1995) argues that the ones who embraced mega events and competitions and sponsorships were called 'rats'. Her later work with Weidman (Beal and Weidman, 2003) argues that, throughout the development of the skateboarding industry, there has been a decline in critical attitudes towards sponsorship

and professionalization because of the benefits to the skateboarding community. However, this has turned out not to be the case in Chinese skateboarding culture.

Most of the early professional skateboarders during the 2000s were not very, if at all, critical towards sponsorships and professionalization. Reflecting on the situation during the early professionalization period in Chinese skateboarding culture, a great level of sympathy was given to the skateboarders who embraced competitions and sponsorships during the 2000s. By the beginning of the 2000s, sponsorships in Chinese skateboarding culture were only from subcultural entrepreneurs who had either a local skateshop or local skateboarding company that produced or distributed skateboarding equipment and clothing. All of such local enterprises supported local skateboarders with promising skills by giving them free skateboarding equipment and shoes. This process created early Chinese professional skateboarders such as Xu Ying, Che Lin, Johnny Tang, and Blackie, who were looked up to by younger skateboarders no less than the foreign skateboarding icons they saw in skateboarding videos (Sedo, 2010, p. 271). The sponsorship deals between the subcultural entrepreneurs and their sponsored skateboarders forms a very tight bond, and it has more social than economic significance for both sides. These skateshops and local skate companies were key connection points in their local communities of skateboarders. Many skateshop owners or local company owners invest tremendous amount of emotional attachment to their relationship with local communities and their sponsored skateboarders.

After the skateboarding session, we went to a very small restaurant in a Hutong in

Beijing as usual. Most people had beers after the meal and began talking about the

current situation of the skateboarding industry. One of the topics was about how

shameful it is that Beijing used to have the highest level of skateboarding but now there

are few professional skateboarders that can represent Beijing in the skateboarding

industry. One local skateboarder, Jun, who faded out from the skateboarding scene and

went to work at a normal job, was mentioned during this conversation. One of the older

skateboarders at the table, Fai, was a skateshop owner and Jun's old sponsor. However,

their relationship has gone far deeper than sponsorship. Fai was also Jun's mentor in

skateboarding if not also in life. We could discern the sadness from Fai's silence when

everyone else was commenting on how saddened they were about Jun's decision

leaving skateboarding. After a noticeable long silence, Fai said, 'you cannot imagine

how saddened I was when he gave up skateboarding. I invested not only a lot of money,

but more importantly, my faith in him. Not to mention the amount of time training him.

In the end, he just gave it all away'. The whole table went silent. (Fieldnote, 2014)

It is a tradition for skateboarding entrepreneurs like Fai to sponsor local talented

skateboarders, especially those who come from lower class backgrounds and could not

afford to skate otherwise. Although people were disappointed about Jun's sudden stop in

pursuing a skateboarding career, no one could blame him for his decision. There was just not

big enough an industry to provide sustainable careers for aspiring skateboarders who wanted

to make a living out of skateboarding. Many young skateboarders with promising talents in

skateboarding like Jun quit in the early 2000s. There was another Beijingese skateboarder, Chao, who also quit skateboarding when he was at the peak of his skateboarding career - winning national contests and being one of the most popular skateboarders nationwide.

During a night-out with some of my participants, we ran into Chao. Chao was a semi-professional skateboarder who received sponsorships from a local skateshop and skateboarding equipment from a national distributor. I asked him why he quit skateboarding completely. Chao said 'I was getting a bit older to stay skateboarding fulltime without a proper job. It was a pity because right after I quit skateboarding those international companies came in to the Chinese market and started sponsoring riders with good salaries. I think I could probably still be one of the top skaters if I had stayed, and therefore I could have made a living out of skateboarding. Bad luck I guess'. (Fieldnote, 2014)

His former sponsor, a subcultural entrepreneur who owns a national distributor for skateboarding equipment also expressed his deep regret about Chao's retirement from skateboarding during our interview:

Lian: It was such a shame! He was ahead of his time, not only in Beijing. He was already doing flip grind/slide tricks while the others were still doing flips. If he would just pick it up again after those companies came in, he would be definitely among the very best skaters in China. Such a gifted style, all-round from flat ground tricks, to rails, first class skater both in contests and on video parts. He can pull out so many tricks

from his bag unlike some of the pros nowadays, you can almost predict what they are

doing to do in their contest runs and videos. Such a shame, he was born at a wrong time

(Interview, 2014)

I have heard stories from our mutual friends that he has had some serious injuries during his

many years of semi-professional skateboarding career. That could also potentially be one of

the main contributions to his decision to quit skating.

In China, we do not have enough health care system to support committed

skateboarders to stay in the culture and really push their limits when skateboarding. So

a lot of the older ones quit because of the economic situation because they themselves

or their parents could not possibly afford the surgeries if they get hurt' (Wu, interview,

2014)

Because of the limitations of the scale of local enterprises, such as skateshops and

independent skateboarding companies, it was difficult to make a living from the free

equipment and clothing sponsorship for aspiring skateboarders. The sponsorship from

transnational corporations that came into the Chinese market after the early 2000s was the

only hope that pulled them back from crossing the thin line between staying in skateboarding

culture and going to find normal jobs and live in conformity. Even though the massive

commercialization of Chinese skateboarding culture challenged the old subcultural

entrepreneurs' model of sponsorship and cut the bond between the skateboarders and their

sponsors, they still embraced sponsorships from transnational corporations because of the

opportunity these provide for making a living from skateboarding. Chinese skateboarding

culture as a whole also did not treat transnational corporations as threats to the development

of the culture.

> The progression of skateboarding culture has been quite big because of all the support.
> Without the support all these international brands have been giving, through events,
> helping riders out, maybe some of these riders wouldn't be still skating. Because they
> would have probably been looking for jobs and make money somehow. People like
> Huifeng, Blackie, all they have had is skateboarding for their whole lives. If you ask
> them to get a job, I'm sure they just put themselves in some sort of shitty hole … if you
> look at it when skateboarding didn't have anything (international corporations). Look
> how Chelin turned out, look how Huifeng turned out, look at all the best skaters you see
> now (J, interview, 2014)

Resistance and the negotiation of authenticity

The Chinese skateboarding industry continued to expand with transnational corporations'

efforts and the much greater resources they could draw on from their global headquarters.

Skateboarding in the 2000s became one of the best-selling sports among Western youth

(Beal, 2004; Wheaton, 2004, 2010; Thorpe, 2014). Transnational corporations' commitment

to commodifying Chinese skateboarding culture into a mass market, has intensified the

process of 'cultural fragmentation' (Wheaton, 2010) inside the Chinese skateboarding

community. Beal (2004, p. 50) argues that skateboarders 'do not like the fact that it is

moving towards the mainstream, but they do take pleasure in the legitimacy they gain from its increasing popularity', and they 'continually distinguish themselves from the mainstream'. The difference between the 'core' (authentic) and the 'other' participants such as the occasional participants and the 'posers' who chase after 'cool' trends and buy into the culture by consuming skateboarding images, was not as a big theme in skateboarding culture before the market start to grow and the 'education' of Western skateboarding culture from transnational corporations became a factor.

> We were just skating and having fun, there was no difference between skateboarders, we were a big family, we were all skateboarders. It was only until the industry came in, that we started to think about skateboarding culture and our identities (Fei, interview, 2014)

Even though there is not as strong a resistance in the Chinese skateboarding community towards commercialisation as has been observed in Western subcultures, because of the contributions to the development of early Chinese skateboarding culture and more importantly, to the support of the livelihoods of those who desire to develop or maintain a career inside the Chinese skateboarding industry, resistance still remains towards the 'side-effects' of the transnational corporations' efforts to incorporate skateboarding culture into the mainstream consumer market. The strategies employed by transnational corporations, compared to those of local enterprises, were designed not for the 'core market' but rather the 'wider market' (Buckingham, 2009). Most Chinese skateboarders, however, sympathise with

the situation of transnational corporations that would not be able to receive a 'significant financial return by selling to skaters alone – they needed to reach out to a wider market, using their association with skating in order to establish their credentials as a 'cool' brand' (Buckingham, 2009, p. 135). After nearly a decade of the development of the Chinese skateboarding industry, skateboarding as a sport has grown in popularity, and the transnational shoe companies have opened their retail stores in almost every big shopping mall in the first-tier cities, making skateboarding a popular image.

On one hand, some Chinese skateboarding communities are centred around local skateboarding companies and shops, some of which still possess a very strong rebellious image and style, such as Society Skateboards in Beijing. On the other hand, there is the community of professional skateboarders sponsored by the transnational corporations. Chinese professional skateboarders are less concerned about subcultural solidarity from different groups than subcultural participants. The key debate rather is about which one of the two groups serves a better future for Chinese skateboarding. Though many Chinese skateboarders were resilient and cynical towards the non-skater-owned commercialization of the skateboarding image, the greatest resistance towards commercialization of Chinese skateboarding culture has emerged when corporations attempt to sell their association with skateboarding to the mainstream and do not 'give back to the culture':

Raysis was founded by a shoe manufacture in a small town called Jin Jiang, who probably saw the potential of skateboarding culture and he found Jeff and asked us to

help him. It was a very good intention for him to find skateboarders to help him in creating this skateboarding brand, and we have had several meetings and it happened. It was the very first company that pays skateboarders salaries. They made affordable skateboarding shoes for the domestic market at the time and sponsored many skateboarders. Although the manufacturer gave up on this brand eventually because it did not reach his expectations in financial return, it has had a very positive impact on the development of the skateboarding industry (Fei, interview, 2014)

Some participants also expressed criticism towards the skater-owned companies giving less support back to skateboarding culture compared to the support from non-skater-owned or outsider entrepreneurs and authorities for the grassroots development of Chinese skateboarding culture.

It's funny that these guys that aren't skateboarders and not in the skateboarding industry, were supporting [skateboarding], like Chen Jie, the boss at SMP, he helped to find Yang Pu government support for Tony. The same with Zhou, who doesn't skate, also supported him. They just saw 'wow, this young kid, he is Chinese'. It was more like they were just patriotic and supporting their country and supporting their local good kid. Whereas the skaters they like prefer to support *guanxi*, and whoever is cool whoever they are hanging out with, they would support that. So it's interesting like that non-skaters do some good stuff with the young skaters. For example, Feidian (Justice Skateboards), the boss of Feidian, doesn't skate. And he does so much to support young

skateboarders in China. And he is like one of the only skateboarding companies that actually would throw money at the skaters and really support them and help promote them. And he doesn't even skateboard. In the West, everyone is talking crap about these non-skateboarders, whereas in China, there are these people who don't skate and do a lot for skateboarding and a lot for the young skateboarders. Whereas the older skateboarder that own companies, they support these old skateboarders that aren't doing much now and promote them so that they are all in their 30s or even 40s and got these jobs as team managers in big shoe companies. And the people they sponsor and choose to support, are like older skateboarders that aren't doing much now, aren't progressing (Bill, interview, 2014)

As a result, the resistance of the skateboarding community towards the commercialization of skateboarding's image cannot be reduced to a dichotomy between the grassroots subculture and the commercial companies, or as the insiders against the outsiders. Neither of the two recognizes the dynamic and complexity of subcultural resistance in Chinese skateboarding culture. In order to understand the meaning of authenticity in this culture, one needs to take into account the primary concerns of the skateboarders themselves. It would seem, according to my empirical data, the somewhat desperate hope to seek financial support from commercial companies trumps the almost naïve or 'outdated' victory in the symbolic warfare on authenticity. The true authentic skateboarder or skateboarding company are those that serve the purpose of expanding skateboarding participation, with or without commercial return from mainstream 'outsiders'.

Conclusion

Skateboarding culture emerged in China in an age of rapid socio-economic transition.

Similar to many of the other Western youth subcultures that entered China around the same

period, it has exhibited an interesting entanglement of continuities and discontinuities in

culture based on various social, economic and political backgrounds. Such manifestations of

continuity and discontinuity have to different extents contributed to our understanding of

Chinese youth and China in general. The introduction of skateboarding culture in China has

in many ways offered Chinese youth new ways of expressing their youthful passions, but it

should not be read as a complete departure from the mainstream Chinese values and

traditions. Because of skateboarding's Western origin and its decades of development prior

to its introduction to China in the 1990s, Chinese skateboarding subculture exhibits strong

evidence of discontinuities and tensions between skateboarding culture and the dominant

culture. Described by its early participants as a 'marriage without romantic relationships' –

meaning a culture that was imported to China with little to no cultural foundation for its

healthy development, as was observed from the Beijing skateboarding community, cultural

continuities nevertheless certainly exist in the Chinese skateboarding community. Therefore,

an entanglement of continuities and discontinuities has quickly surfaced from my empirical

data in examining its early development. In Cockain's (2012, p. 165) attempt to capture this

entanglement, he argues that Chinese youths seek security and coherence from their parent

culture but at the same time draw on new sources from the present, in this case,

skateboarding. It is to a very large extent because of this entanglement of continuities and

discontinuities that Chinese skateboarding culture presents new and unique cultural

dynamics that cannot be easily conceptualised solely through Western subcultural theories.

Therefore, in the discussion of the formation of Chinese skateboarding culture, I have gone

deeper into the extensive debates in the youth subcultural studies over the use of terms

between 'subculture', 'tribe' (Maffesoli, 1996) or 'scene' (Bennett, 2006) for describing the

concept of youth communities. Any single term fails to capture the complexity of resistance,

for example, resistance towards those inside the community. Take, for example, the earlier

pursuit of 'subcultural style' (Hebdige, 1979) which has very limited resonance with the

Western context because the choice of subcultural style is very largely depended on

individual's economic capital during the early development of Chinese skateboarding culture.

Hence, over-analysing the style of the culture can be misleading and oversimplifying.

However, the discussion of class divisions cannot be ignoredin light of evidence such as the

location of early skateboarding practices emerging near where army compounds are located

(where the 'red class' residences were based) and skateboarders' parents' economic ability to

buy them skateboarding equipment during the particular early stage of the economic

development of the Chinese economy. All of this shows that the early generation of

skateboarders were at least upper-middle class. The post-CCCS theories can provide useful

insights into the 'fluid boundaries and floating memberships' (Bennett, 1999, p.600) which

Chinese skateboarders only started to reflect on after the introduction of transnational

corporations and the strategies they employed to target mainstream Chinese youth markets.

Therefore, later participants, who were deemed 'consumers' or 'outsiders' by the 'core'

skateboarders, brought questions of 'subcultural capital' (Thornton, 1996) and subcultural

hierarchies back into the centre of discussions inside Chinese skateboarding communities. Wang (2005, p.199-200) tries to conceptualise the Chinese music scene as a 'spectrum' between subculture and tribe, and she argues that the spectrum includes subcultural 'fans and artists, usually in their late 20s, of sub-musical cultures have [who] distinct elitist musical tastes. They constitute a tightly knit cult circle in pursuit of a spirit (*jingshen*) that "soulless" pop music is considered to be lacking. Whether their heroes are Cui Jian or some emerging electronic music bands like Panda Twin, the spirit of subculture (*ya wenhua*) is characterized by an intense desire for soul bonding. In sharp contrast, the music tribes (teens, late-teens, and mid-twenty-somethings) chase after cool fashions and revel in their skin-deep allegiance to the changing idols on the bulletin board'. Wang's idea provides a lively explanation of the question of authenticity in Chinese skateboarding culture after subcultural membership became increasingly fragmented by the commercialization process.

The second phase of the Chinese skateboarding history (2003 - 2012), I argue, marked the accelerating process of the collapse of the single 'strong consciousness of group identity, and one that tented to cut across any perceived internal differences and subgroups' (Hodkinson, 2004, p.144). This cultural fragmentation process has divided Chinese skateboarding culture, and introduced a binary opposition between Chinese skateboarding culture and mainstream culture; between those inside the Chinese skateboarding community – 'us', the committed cultural participants, and cultural producers – and 'them', the new, emerging cultural consumers. The resistance of Chinese skateboarding culture has taken a different form and also seemed as if it shifted its direction from being almost solely outwards to inwards as well.

Cultural fragmentation does support the opportunities for transnational corporations to create new niche markets in order to sustain the economic growth (Wheaton, 2010, p. 41) of the skateboarding industry, and these moments of articulation and reconstruction of subcultural identities (Muggleton, 2000) need to be further examined by taking into account aspects within the realm of cultural production in order to understand the dynamics of the cultural fragmentation process and the negotiation of Chinese skateboarding identity. Thorpe (2014, p.10) comments on the process of the dynamic process of commercialisation of action sports, saying 'a transnational imaginary has certainly developed among action sport participants around the world as a result of travel patterns, the marketing efforts of action sport companies, media coverage of global events and celebrities, and the active use of new media by various groups to facilitate inter-social linkages'. In the next chapter, I will proceed to analyse the outcome of the commercial development of the skateboarding industry,and the embedded dynamics between Chinese skateboarding subculture and the skateboarding industry that falls into the category of a cultural industry and how the 'transnational imaginary' of skateboarding, introduced by various socio-economic factors, is negotiated in Chinese skateboarding culture by turning my focus towards cultural production within the skateboarding industry.

Chapter 7 Commercial Incorporation of Chinese skateboarding Culture - Subcultural Entrepreneurship

Introduction

Hebdige (1979) argues in his study of the post-war punk subculture in Britain that, by appropriating commodities and subcultural styles, subcultural participants create meanings that are resistant to the dominant culture in a process that face the inevitable fate of incorporation:

> youth cultural styles may begin by issuing symbolic challenges, but they must inevitably end by establishing new sets of conventions; by creative new commodities, new industries or rejuvenating old ones (p. 96)

In the two following chapters, I will look at the commercial incorporation of Chinese skateboarding culture from two main perspectives –local subcultural entrepreneurship (Chapter 7), and corporate entrepreneurship (Chapter 8). Organised around the structure of the value chain, I will first look at the organization of cultural production by examining the case of the Beijing local skateboarding company - Society Skateboards - and how they have attributed subcultural meanings to their commodities. Secondly, I will look at how marketing strategies employed by such businesses , such as Bao's online and offline skateshop and the ways in which he mobilises different subcultural groups. Thirdly, I will examine how skateboarding entrepreneurs articulate subcultural meanings in their business models by

taking the examples of different conventional strategies in the skateboarding industry, such

as sponsorship of skateoboarders, joining other subcultural styles and expressions with

hip-hop culture and sharing locations with other youth subcultures in shopping districts.

Finally, a conclusion will be presented at the end of Chapter 8 to combine the two chapters'

in constructing a cohesive narrative of the commercialisation of Chinese skateboarding

culture.

Society Skateboards and the production of Beijing skateboarding culture

In order to understand the different forms of business organisations in the skateboarding

industry. I will firstly explain some basic knowledge about skateboards. There are a few

components in skateboards. There is firstly and arguably the most important, the deck, which

is the wooden deck conventionally made with 7 layers of Canadian maplewood. The

importance of the skateboard deck is that it has the best capacity to display graphic designs

on the back of the deck, hence perform as a symbolic representation of different brand

cultures. Then there is the grip tape, the sandpaper that is attached to the decks to add more

traction when doing tricks such as Ollie (jumping up with the skateboard attached to a

skater's feet). There are then two metal trucks which connect the deck and the wheels. There

are the four wheels and bearings inside the wheels. Moreover, there are specifically designed

tools to assemble a skateboard. Most of the components on the Chinese market are imported

from Western companies through different wholesale companies that were normally based in

Guangdong province in the early age of Chinese skateboarding industry. Most skateboarding

companies sell skateboard decks as their main product among other product lines with only a few exceptions that specialise in certain skateboarding components such as wheels and trucks.

The Chinese skateboarding industry shares the same structure as local skateboardi deck companies also form the majority of the Chinese subcultural enterprises. Conventionally, skateboarders share the idea that local skateboarding companies represent the local skateboarding culture better than almost any other form of business representations. There were many who attempted to start their own skateboard deck companies, but only a handful of them survived the competition over the small skateboarding market in China up until the time of my fieldwork in 2014. One of the earliest and arguably most distinctive Chinese skateboard companies is Society Skateboards (社会滑板). Society Skateboards is a local Beijing skateboard company founded by a local skateboarder and one of the most famous Chinese graffiti artists – 0528 (his graffiti nick name) –   who started skateboarding with his high school classmates, many of whom were among the early generation of Chinese skateboarders, and his friend Raph, who is half American and half Chinese, who came to China as an exchange student at the end of 1990s and was later known as a famous rapper and music producer. They became close friends and later business partners through skateboarding and going to pubs together after their skateboarding sessions. 0528 admits that he learned a lot about American street cultures such as hip-hop, skateboarding and graffiti from Raph. As a result of their enthusiasm towards street cultures, they decided to start a

skateshop together when Raph finished his degree in the States and came back to China. However, when Raph came back in the early 2000s, they realised that the skateshops were already competing against each other over a relatively small skateboarding market. Yet around the time, almost all of the skateshops were only selling American skateboards, with some exceptions, such as Chinese department stores that sold domestically made 'toy skateboards' that normally were of very bad quality, which could not meet the intensity of higher level skateboarding performances. Nonetheless, there was another crucial trend happening around the same time, that many major American and Canadian skateboard deck companies started to move their manufacturing lines to factories in Guangdong province by the late 1990s. After some market research, 0528 and Raph managed to find a factory that manufactures good quality skateboards for American skateboard companies, and this was the last push they needed to start their own Chinese skateboard company.

Society Skateboards has a very strong socialist brotherhood brand image and a distinctive resistant style. It has been praised by the Chinese skateboarding community for its consistent authenticity and its continuing effort to promote the 'core' skateboarding image. Their strategy was based heavily on the design of their products and the localised symbolic representations brand image.

(One of the earliest designs of the Society Skateboards logo. Weibo.com/u/1827922463, 2016)

0528: Raph and I had different roles in the running of Society Skateboards. Raph was in charge of managing the skate team and finding new talents. I started drawing in primary school and later became a graffiti writer, so I am in charge of all the design.

A: What was the strategy in terms of promotion when you first started Society?

0528: We started from making stickers and tee shirts with our logo and design, and chose some stylish skaters in Beijing to sponsor and give them free stickers and tee shirts. We also took products to the first National Extreme Sports Contest in Huzhou to give out to skaters and promote *Society Skateboards*. That was how we were known by skaters from all over China. After that we started making skateboard decks, taking our team to different events and made skateboarding videos. (Interview, 2015)

Not long after, Society Skateboards was embraced by the Chinese skateboarding community. Their sponsored skateboarders include already famous skaters as well as upcoming new skaters from Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou. The majority of the skater-owned skateshops in major cities took pride in retailing their products. The skateboarders who were on the Society team also soon became subcultural celebrities in Chinese skateboarding culture. The popularity of the *Society Skateboards* continued to rise within the Chinese skateboarding community. It was, as 0528 has said for a long time, the Society team was and probably still is the symbolic representation people associate with Beijing skateboarding culture. Wheaton and Beal (2003, p. 169), in their study of the constructive influence of subcultural media, argue that commitment to the activity and the community is key to claiming authenticity in action sports cultures. In the case of Society Skateboard's strategy in the commodification of Chinese skateboarding culture, the company clearly has a sense of commitment to developing the marginalised community and negotiating subcultural meanings and identities.

'Tribes' and skater-owned skateshops

The *Society Skateboards'* operation was one of the earliest representative examples of cultural production from subcultural entrepreneurs in the early Chinese skateboarding industry. However, prior to the emergence of companies such as Society Skateboards, the Chinese skateboarding industry was formed primarily by local independent skateshops, opened by respected older skateboarders. They have taken a different approach to their marketing strategies. When I first started skateboarding in 2003, there were only 5

skateshops that sold professional skateboarding equipment in Beijing - a city with a population of 14.564 million (China.org.cn, 2016). The 'skateshop' where I first bought skateboarding equipment was opened by one of the first generation of skateboarders in Beijing. He took advantage of his IT skills and started a website called *3xchina.com* in 2000, and started to sell skateboarding equipment at his home before he subsequently opened his physical skateshop almost a decade after.

Bao: I got into the Internet technologies a little earlier than most of the Chinese population. *3xchina.com* was initially a webpage that I was experimenting on, which later turned into a skateboarding website … There were many of my friends who first began skateboarding and did not know much about the equipment, and I was asked a lot and had been making recommendations to help them buy skateboards in the early days. Eventually, I decided to start my own website to sell skateboards, so that my friends and more people can buy skateboards directly from me without a lot of hassle. (interview, 2015)

I was introduced to his shop by my 'big brother' – Guang, the son of a close friend of my family, who use to skate with him. Guang guaranteed that Bao would be able to sell me the professional equipment I might be having trouble finding elsewhere in Beijing when I first started skateboarding.

I still remember vividly the first time I visited his home to buy a skateboard. After a phone call and some pointing directions and finding-door-numbers, a middle-aged man with long hairs opened his door for me with a smile saying 'you are Guang's brother, aren't you?' I nodded my head and was let in. It was a two bedroom apartment in a local residential area in the 西城 (West City) district. I was shown into his living room, of which has a computer in the centre of the room. He offered me to sit on a computer chair and asked me to wait for a minute because he was in the middle of some work. He then turned to his computer to put some online orders into an Excel form while mumbling the names of the products from the orders. It was around the time in the evening when his little daughter would go to bed, so his wife was trying to take her crying daughter into bed in the bedroom across the living room. When he finished dealing with the online orders, he showed me into the other bedroom, where piles of skateboard decks, American skateboarding magazines, bags of skateboarding trucks and wheels were laying on his sofa and scattered on floor. Then he patiently explained to me of some differences between skateboard decks, and told me what kind of trucks and sizes of wheels should I use to practice with as a beginner (Fieldnote, 2014)

Apart from the orders made via his website, almost all of his customers were either his friends or friends of his friends, who were introduced to his shop through direct social relations. I created an account on his website later after I bought my skateboards from him, and started participating on the online forum on his website. I was immediately asked by

Guang to join a 'tribe' he created on the forum, called 'The Rookies Tribe' (菜板帮). In this context, the term 'tribe' does not carry relevance from Maffesoli's (1996) term to describe fluid subcultural groups. Tribe here refers to the English translation of the Chinese word the different groups on the online forum call themselves. Then I realised there were other 'tribes' like 'The Rookies Tribe' on the online forum, such as 'The Tomb Party' (古墓派) and 'The Egg Pie' (蛋黄派). Each of the 'tribes' has a leader and members that subscribe to the group identity. For example, 'The Tomb Party' has a male leader and many female members, because the idea was based on a famous Chinese Kong Fu novel story of a male student falling in love with his female mentor. The leader of this tribe was made fun of by his friends for trying to start romantic relationships with female members who wanted to learn how to skate with him. Even though there were several 'tribes' on the forum for members to join, overall, they were in a very close social group that skates together every weekend, brought together by Bao, the founder of *3xchina.com*. Chinese skaters around that time would usually stick to one local skateshop to buy all their skateboarding equipment and clothes. Loyalty to the friendship network centred around a local shop is deemed a virtue. This loyalty is what Bao claims is a way skateboarding diverges from the commercial models of business operation. By subscribing to only one skateshop, skaters were also economically supporting independent skateboarding companies such as Society Skateboards since skateshops were the only retailers for most of the local skateboarding companies. There are many skateshops like Bao's that operate within the skateboarding niche market, and which exclusively focus on communities around skateboarders. Wheaton and Beal (2003, p. 169) describe such an

approach to maintaining authenticity is to show who their intended customers are. Businesses are given more credit if they target 'core' skaters as their intended customers. As a consequence, the survival of such a business model was almost entirely dependent on their subcultural credibility and their social relationships with the skateboarding communities. In the next section, I will look into the details of the ways in which skateshops like Bao's maintain their subcultural credibility and social relationships by mobilising the social groups such as the 'tribes'.

Sponsorship and social events - maintaining credibility and social relationships

Maintaining subcultural credibility and social relationships with skateboarding communities is the most traditional strategy of the skateboarding industry, particularly among skater-owned skateshops. One of the most essential markers for being an authentic skateshop is to sponsor local, established or upcoming talented skateboarders, in order to maintain a good local reputation within the skateboarding community.

> Bao: We do not sponsor skaters to promote our skateshop. Because skateboarding culture is still in its infancy in China, it is very difficult to find good skateboarders to sponsor. The last thing I want to see is a good skateboarder stops skateboarding because he could not afford it. So, I sponsor the skateboarders that have good personalities and are dedicated to skateboarding, and I feel obliged to support them. (interview, 2015)

Bao actied as a big brother to his sponsored skateboarders and his friends. In the Chinese context, the term 'big brother' is a commonly used term to describe someone who is older and has a strong sense of responsibility in taking care of the younger brothers or sisters (not nessasarily exclusive to siblings) of his in different communities. He hosts a social ritual each year before the Chinese New Year within the 3xchina group, in which he invites a group made up of his 'old customers', sponsored skaters and his employees to have dinner together, always paying for the dinner to 'take care' of his 'little brothers'. His 'little brothers', in return, respect him not only because of his age, reputation and personal history within the early generation of Chinese skateboarding culture, but more importantly, this tight social bond consist of different levels of social interactions. In my interview with Ye, one of Bao's sponsored skateboarders, he described his relationship with Bao:

Ye: Big brother Bao had always sponsored me long before I had the skill level of a sponsored skateboarder. He was more like a big brother to me than a sponsor. There are many other ways in which he has helped and supported me in life, apart from his sponsorship of skateboarding equipment and clothes.

A: How did it start?

Ye: We were just skating and hanging out together at first. Then one day he asked me to try some new products, some skateboard decks that had no brand names on them. Then he helped me to get a sponsorship with Justice skateboards. He also gave me whatever components of skateboards I need from his own shop. Almost all the stuff he sponsored me was coming from his own pocket. After he opened a physical shop, the sponsorship

became a bit more formal than before as it includes a certain amount of decks and wheels,

for example, for my sponsorship. But I never had to worry about not having enough stuff

because if I asked him, he would always give me extra stuff. Even the sponsorship with

DC Shoes (a transnational skateboarding shoe company) was also because of Bao, who

recommended me to DC, otherwise I would not have had that opportunity. So, I am

forever in debt to big brother Bao.

A: Is there anything that Bao would ask you to do in return?

Ye: Nothing. Bao never had asked me to do anything in return like promoting his shops

or filming videos for his shop. Even when there was a time when I had to live and study

in Wenzhou (a small city in the southern region of China) for a couple years, he always

sent me skateboarding equipment even though this sponsorship probably made no benefit

to his business. It has always been a very relaxed relationship, so I never looked at Bao

as my sponsor, but as a big brother. Unlike my other sponsors, who would have

something like an assessment of my skateboarding skills from my videos, and I have to

wear their logos in every skateboarding event I go to. It is fair but it just cannot compare

with the relationship I have with Bao.

(interview, 2014)

The example of Bao's skateshop and the ways in which he mobilises social relations with the

skateboarding community and sponsored skateboarders in his business strategy is regarded

as a typical practice among all the other subcultural entrepreneurs in the Chinese

skateboarding industry. I have also interviewed a few other current or previous skateshop

owners in various cities, and all of them seem to have the same mind-set in their business

strategies.

Society skateboards' cultural strategy and its commercial development – 'we made

skateboarding cool'

However, the strategy that local skateshops employed does not have great economic

potential in developing their businesses. Many of the early skateshops had gone out of

business because of rising rent and lack of purchasing power from the skateboarding

communities, and/or being hit by the later massive development of online shopping services.

Bao's physical shop, Tour Skateshop would have faced the same fate if not for Bao's efforts

in promoting his online shop on Alibaba. Hence, some subcultural entrepreneurs in the

Chinese skateboarding industry have employed a more cultural strategy, such as building up

links with other youth subcultural styles, hence expanding their customer base. For example,

Society Skateboards established a strong link with other Chinese street youth subcultural

styles such as hip-hop and punk cultures. Skateboarders were known to have close social ties

with hip-hop singers and punkBbands. Society Skateboarding videos were also the pioneers

in integrating Chinese hip-hop and punk songs.

> 0528: We wanted Society Skateboards to be revolutionary. So, I picked up some designs
>
> from the Cultural Revolution period because I think it fits perfectly with our core value,
>
> which is not to make money but to improve the condition of Chinese skateboarding
>
> culture, to make a difference, and we did.

A: I remember there was another Chinese skateboarding company that was based in Shenzhen that had already started manufacturing and selling Chinese skateboards in skater-owned skateshops. Where do you think the differences lie between *Society Skateboards* and other skateboard brand cultures?

0528: That's true, they were getting popular in the Chinese skateboarding community, but we were the first to really promote and to push forward the local Chinese skateboarding culture. Not only within the skateboarding community, but we were also putting a lot of effort into building that connection with other street youth cultures such as hip-hop music and graffiti. We were hoping to also bring other cultures into the horizon of skateboarders.

A: I think that is still one of the defining features of the Beijing skateboarding culture today.

0528: Exactly, the Beijing skateboarding culture is like a reflection of a society that tolerates differences. I think for a very long period of time; the Society Skateboard culture WAS THE Beijing skateboarding culture. It was not only skateboarding, but a skateboarding culture that is influenced by other cultures like the different forms of music culture, such as hip-hop and punk. The skateboarding culture in Beijing has more depth to it. Skateboarding culture in Shanghai and Guangzhou were purer but thinner in a sense, they were not integrating with other street youth cultures, whereas we were more willing to build up that bridge between different street cultures. We were the first one to do it and show it to people, then people realised that this is possible and they thought it was cool.

(interview, 2015)

Indeed, not only did Society Skateboards connect skateboarding with the 'four elements' of

hip-hop culture - break dancing, graffiti, DJ and MC, furthermore, they became a key

sponsor and organiser of the most famous and longest running underground hip-hop party -

Section 6. Section 6 is a hip-hop party happens on the last Saturday of each month since

2004, co-founded and organised by the earliest and famous Beijing rap band 'Yin Tsang' (隐

藏) and Society Skateboards. It collaborates with local live house venues to provide Chinese

and foreign rappers, break dancers, graffiti writers, DJs and skateboarders a place to perform

and socialise. During the 2000s, such street youth subcultures were not accepted by the

mainstream as much as they are now, and they did not have venues to perform in regularly.

Section 6 was the centre point for different local youth subcultures to meet each other in

Beijing. It later became a ritual for Society team riders and other local skateboarders to go to

Section 6 after a Saturday's skateboarding session. And it was definitely common to see

Society tee shirts being worn on the stage and their logos and stickers everywhere in the

venue.

It had long become a norm for my skateboarder friends to go to the Section 6 party

together. Even though they would moan about how different it is now compare to the

'old days'. They would still go to meet friends they would otherwise not going to meet. I

remember when it was a regular night out every last Saturday in the month with my

friends when we were younger. Nobody needed to call other friends to go with, because we were sure that we would run into friends there. Today was no different. We went to the famous Yugongyishan (愚公移山) live house. It still looks the same as it was before. A few more 'bombs' (graffiti paintings) in the toilet, but many of which we still could recognise by the graffiti writer friends' style. As expected, we ran into some old friends that we do not see as often as before. Even though they have stopped skateboarding, they would still go to Section 6, a familiar environment to catch up with old friends.

<div align="right">(Fieldnote, 2014, Beijing)</div>

(An old Section 6 poster designed by 0528)

This cultural strategy by Society Skateboards worked really well among both their existing skateboarder customers and the new customers from other music or skateboarding enthusiasts. For a long time, it was not difficult to see not only skateboarders but also young people who are not into skateboarding wearing their tee shirts on the streets in Beijing. When 0528 told me about how this strategy worked out for their expansion into the mainstream Chinese youth market, he said:

Both Raph and I were also into other street youth cultures. For example, I was into

Graffiti and he was into MC and making hip-hop music. So, it happened almost naturally.

Our close friend MC Webber (the main vocalist in the hip-hop band Yin Tsang, and a

veteran Chinese hip-hop musician) and Raph were making music together, then one day

we decided to organise a platform for the Chinese hip-hop musicians to perform and get

noticed by others. Some of the most famous hip-hop artists came out from Section 6,

such as In3 (a famous hip-hop band formed by three Beijing local rappers, which gained

enormous publicity recently because their lyrics were deemed politically unacceptable by

the National Cultural Department. Most of their songs ended up on top of the list of

banned songs announced by the National Cultural Department), DJ Wordy (one of the

most internationally established Chinese DJs, held many national and international DJ

contests champion titles), and many more. At that time, in Beijing there were only

commercial nightclubs that were playing foreign hip-hop music. Section 6 provided the

Chinese hip-hop musicians a place to gather and show their talents, practice,

communicate with each other and get noticed by a larger population. We started it from

scratch, I remember Raph and I were borrowing turntables for it and I was selling tickets

at the door. (0528, interview, 2015)

Society Skateboard's cultural strategy of grouping other street subcultural styles into its

brand in the 2000s, as a way to respond to the increasingly more prominent economic

rhetoric of the cultural/creative industries, had brought them a lot of mainstream media

coverage and popularity in the mainstream Chinese youth market. This transition of Society

Skateboards resonates with what McGuigan's (2009, p. 82) work on 'Cool Capitalism' and his observation of the great graffiti artist Banksy being the most rebellious and almost 'elusive', but still eventually been incorporated into the capitalist structures. Parallels can also be found in other observations of contemporary cultural/creative industry research. Justin O'Connor (O'Connor, 2016, p.21-22) comments on the shifting meaning of 'entrepreneurs' under the New Labour Government's successful brand 'Cool Britannia' - 'now culture could reappear as entrepreneurial but also cool'.

A: I noticed that later even the mainstream cultural industries had noticed Society Skateboards, and you have been all over the mainstream media, fashion magazines, online music blogs, television and so on.

0528: Yes, even *Rolling Stone* interviewed us about Society Skateboards, and we were featured in many music magazines and had a lot of interviews by the more mainstream media.

A: And I remember that series of skate girls photos went viral on the Internet, right?

0528: Yes, thanks to Raph's wife Chenman (a famous Chinese photographer), even the top fashion magazines were featuring our story and photos. Like I said, I think it all happened naturally, we did not really make that effort into going into the mainstream's eyes, it just happened.

A: How did you feel when the mainstream media were reporting on Society Skateboards and many more kids who did not skate were wearing your tee shirts? When it almost became a fashion accessory?

0528: I did hold strong resistance against the mainstream media. Because I felt like we have achieved something. It was more of a feeling of accomplishment. We have made skateboarding cool.

(interview, 2015)

Shared locations: skateshops and shopping districts

One of the other ways in which local skateshops reach to their market is through the shared locations. Many of the skateshops that were opened between the late 1990s and the early 2000s were scattered within youth shopping districts. From the late 1990s, there were shopping districts such as Xidan that transformed themselves to become more appealing to the youth market. Xidan is one of the biggest shopping districts in Beijing, located west of Tiananmen, mirroring the location of Wangfujing Mall, which is one of the other most popular shopping districts east of Tiananmen. Xidan shopping district includes a variety of shopping choices such as the Huawei shopping mall, 77th Street Plaza; Beijing Books Building, Xidan Department Store, Dayuecheng Mall and many more. Take Huawei shopping mall for example, on the first three floors, there are mainstream brands retail shops; on the 4th floor there are cheap jewelleries and fashion accessories; from the 5th to 7th floors, is the 'Beijing Strategies' where young people rent stalls to sell fashion products that were carefully selected and stocked by the owners. In general, this is a place where what McRobbie describes as 'refined economy of taste' and 'an oasis of cheapness' (1989, p. 29) is located. Different from the second hand markets McRobbie observed in London, most products sold here are manufactured by the famous Chinese factories in the southern regions

such as Wenzhou and Guangzhou, somtimes from the same manufactures of mainstream brands. On the top floor, there are food stalls and arcade games hall, where young people, shop owners and customers socialise with each other. With convenient city centre locations and public transportation links, a vast variety of fashion products and social spaces are based in shopping districts such as Xidan. Such youth shopping districts soon became some of the most attractive destinations for young people and the womb of different youth subcultures. Later online street fashion websites would send their street photographers to districts such as Xidan to shoot 'street style photos' of young people's expressive styles. Many young people dress up intentionally and go to particular districts to be photographed and to have their photos put on street fashion websites so that they could share them on their social media pages.

Like what McRobbie (1989, p. 32) demonstrates from the London rag markets, which 'retain something of the pre-industrial gathering'. Xidan serves not only the purpose of mainstream and niche consumption. More importantly, it provides the same kind of 'leisurely and unharrased' mode of shopping and the social need to 'see and to be seen' and display their subcultural styles. Furthermore, it offers opportunities for subcultural entrepreneurs to start their businesses. Some of the earliest skateshops were mingling with the youth fashion stalls and shops in those districts. At its peak, there were 3 different skateshops in Huawei shopping mall. In contrast to Bao's skateshop, they were selling primarily hip-hop style clothing or skateboarding brand clothing, as their primary business to profit from the busiest youth market spaces. One of the skateshops in Huawei shopping mall was one of the most

popular skateshop in the skateboarding community at the time, partly also because the owner was a early generation skateboarder worshiped by many young skateboarders. Similar to Bao's skateshop, it has also sustained its businesses by mobilising subcultural groups around the owner. However, it could only make profits due to its location. In the 2000s, young skaters would go skate in the square and visit his shop sometimes not buying anything but rather as a ritual to socialise with the owner and other skaters. Its main customer base is among the mainstream youth market.

This tradition of locating skateshops near social spaces or in youth districts has carried on until now. Even though shopping districts like Xidan are no longer economically viable for independent skateshops to sustain themselves, due to the increasing rent that comes with the massive development of the real estate economy in such districts, along with the competition between the increasing number of mainstream fashion retailors. Independent skateshops are now mostly located in niche youth districts, such as the Gulou area and Dongsi area in Beijing, along with a lot of other independent youth subcultural shops. Bao also opened his physical shop near the Gulou area. His shop had also become a social space or meeting point for many of his friends and customers.

> It is Saturday today, I got a phone call from my friend Ye who is a semi-professional skateboarder and he asked me to meet up in the skateshop with also other friends and then decide where to go skateboarding. The skateshop that me and my friends meet up before going to skate is Bao's skateshop on Jiaodaokou street, which is very near from the Gulou area where hundreds of independent shops, coffee bars, restaurants, pubs and

some of the most famous live houses in China are located. Bao's skateshop has two areas, the area when you first enter is the actually skateshop, where on one side of the wall is where all the skateboard decks are hung, and the other side there are skateboarding clothes. The counter is a bit further inside facing the door with other parts of skateboards such as trucks and wheels inside a big glass drawer. A TV is also hung up on the wall on the right side of the counter with skateboarding videos playing non-stop. Walking a bit further inside across the counter is a working studio for his employee Wu, who works as a shop assistant when there are customers coming otherwise would stay in the studio to take care of the online sales. There is a tea table in the middle of the room and a sofa beside it. This area is where we would hang out at before or after a skateboarding session. We would normally have some rest there and then go to restaurants in Gulou together but occasionally we would also order takeaways in the sofa area

(Fieldnote, 2014, Beijing)

Most of the surviving skateshops still hold on to this strategy of having social spaces in skateshops and/or having it located near youth districts. However, as such youth districts gain more media attention and popularity among youth shoppers, sometimes even becoming tourist destinations, they are also becoming endangered by rising rent. O'Connor's (2016, p.54) comments on the 'most dysfunctional aspects of the cultural economy' sheds light on this shared fate of many of the subcultural entrepreneurs in the Chinese skateboarding industry. He argues that it is the real estate aspect of the cultural/creative policy-making criteria by city councils, that have pre-determined the consequences of the 'net gainers from

culture-led regeneration, creative industries, creative place-making, creative clustering and the like are property developers' (p.54-55) instead of any cultural/creative enterprises based in such locations.

Nevertheless, as the Chinese economy develops and the more involved position of the Chinese economy in the world, Chinese skateboarding industry has also started to shift radically. The dominant postion of involvement from the local subcultural entrepernuers started to change in a pace that Chinese skateboarding community sometimes struggle to adapt to. In the next chapter, I will demonstrate how corporate enterprenuerial attampts in commercial incorporations of the Chinese skateboarding culture has provided new and much more controversial issues in the later development of the Chinese skateboartding industry.

Chapter 8 Commercial Incorporation of Chinese Skateboarding –

Corporate Entrepreneurship

The fading subcultural entrepreneurships – 'skateboarding company is just hard way to

make real money'

Local skateboarding companies, such as Society Skateboards, and skateshops are exemplars

of the era of insider subcultural entrepreneurs. However, even though they still have their

places in the market and still play an essential cultural role in the industry, they have

struggled to sustain their business model or develop further. 0528 for example, explained to

me why Society Skateboards stopped developing in the 2000s.

> 0528: I think I was more into my own things later. BJPZ (a Beijing graffiti group, the
>
> original members were also mostly skateboarders as well) started, it became my top
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> priority to be a graffiti artist.
>
> A: Yes I remember that point you were turning into a famous graffiti artist. Raph was
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> also becoming a well-known key figure in the Chinese hip-hop music culture.
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> 0528: I had always been really into graffiti. Even when we started Society Skateboards, I
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> felt I had more affection toward design and filming and making videos. Skateboarding is
>
> something I enjoy doing, but the ideal job in my mind has always been something about
>
> drawing, like graffiti and design. Raph was also getting more into playing music. Raph
>
> was still managing the skate team but in a very loose way. We were still having new
>
> sponsored riders like P Dan and ZZY. And other life stuff happened, I was married, Raph

was married, we both had kids and so on. At first we were doing new designs and videos every year, and then it became every other year, and now every few years until we do a new series. Most of all, doing skateboarding company is just a hard way to make real money.

A: Have you tried to expand Society Skateboards further?

0528: Yes we did. There were meetings with business people who wanted to invest in Society, but when they asked us about numbers, like how many boards we sell every year that kind of stuff, we just never really paid attention into those numbers, but it seemed that's all they cared about. None of us were businessmen and we never saw Society Skateboards as a business. So whenever the topic begins to lean towards those numbers, it ends there. I think maybe the numbers we gave them were not profit-wise worthwhile to invest in. And we did not have the funding to expand it to the next level ourselves either, so in the end we were doing just enough to let it survive underground. It has had its highs and lows, but the history is always there, I believe it will come back again. Money is an evil thing you know. Money makes things complicated. Same with BJPZ, same with Section 6, things always change when money is involved.

(interview, 2015)

Local entrepreneurship: Feidian and the Outsiders of the SMEs

As the subcultural entrepreneurs face the new challenges of the changing economy in various aspects, skateboarders started to reflect on the subcultural approach of doing businesses.

Since such business started to collapse due to reasons such as urban regeneration or the failure to adapt to the new cultural/creative economies, their sponsored skateboarders started to look to new companies for sponsorships. One of the former team riders on the Society Skateboards team told me why and how he moved to another company in Shenzhen, which was historically considered an outsider company within the skateboarding community.

P: Yeah. It was 2010 I had my kid, I moved to Yunnan in 2012. Two years now. I was skating a lot with Leo. He was on Symbolic (a sub-brand under Feidian). And I know Danny Fei (The team manager of Symbolic Skateboards and an employee of Feidian) pretty well, he's a good friend of mine you know. I knew him for a long time. And I was just skating with them for a while and at one point, Society just wasn't doing much. They weren't doing anything. They were making boards with the same graphic as four years, five years ago, you know what I mean? So I was just like riding Symbolic boards, I liked them. And I started talking to Danny Fei. And then probably about over three or four months period, I talked to Raph and told him. Like 'you know, I'm thinking about leaving Society'. He never said 'don't do it'. He was just like 'it's your choice, I'm not gonna hold you back. They are gonna pay you, you know. You get a wife and a kid you need support'. I don't want to say it's because of the money because it's not. Because I can do something else to make a lot more money than skateboarding. So, it's not about the money but it's also about Symbolic, they have good factory, they have good wood, they have good system going on, they always have some new stuff happening. You know what I mean? It's hard man, it's hard. Feidian is a little bit more *Shengyi* (business like)

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but in the end, it's still skateboarding. They are giving me skateboards to ride. (interview, 2014)

Feidian is a company based in Shenzhen, founded in 1998. The parent company of Feidian owns factories in the southern regions of China where they have been manufacturing skateboards for many of the top Western skateboarding companies. After years of manufacturing skateboards for foreign companies, its parent company decided to put its manufacture profits into creating Chinese skateboarding brands. Around the time I conducted my fieldwork in 2014, Feidian had a series of sub-brands including Boiling, a brand that makes beginner-level, ready-to-skate skateboards, in addition to its professional skateboard brands such as Justice, Black Knight, Symbolic and Psychos - a skateboard deck brand targeting the female skateboarder niche market; all of which have their own team of sponsored skateboarders. It is not difficult to reach the conclusion that Feidian is also clearly targeting the 'insiders' of skateboarding culture, and the later street youth cultures as it has expanded. At the time of my fieldwork, they had skateshops retailing their products not only in every first and second tier city, but also in many small provincial cities all over China.

I think they (*Feidian*) are doing great. They are doing a lot of promoting for skateboarding all around China in like second and third tier cities, which is amazing. I mean their strategy for sure. Their board prices are perfect for tier 2 and 3 cities, I mean that's skateboarding needs right? You can't just be all focusing on Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou. For a skater like me, I love to see the cities they have gone to. See what kind

of skate spots those cities have to offer you know? So I think its cool, if that's their strategy. For skateboard companies like Vagabond, Gift, they are targeting bigger cities I guess. Obviously, we (Nike China) want to target every city but yes, just too much to control. Too much for any brand to handle I guess (J, interview, 2014)

In addition to its skateboard brands, Feidian also owns the first paper Chinese skateboarding magazine, *Whatsup Magazine*, half selling and half giving away copies in local skateshops around China. In 2003, they started the website Chinaskateboards.cn. In 2014, after ten years of running Chinaskateboards.cn, they re-branded the website as an online version of *Whatsup Magazine* - the *Whatsup Skateboarding* website. BBL is the chief editor of the magazine, team manager of the Justice Skateboarding team and a professional skateboarder on the Black Knight team. I got to know him when I was very young, we were both on the *3xchina.com* online forum and had a mutual friend who was also an active member of the online forum. They are both from the north-east regions of China. Feidian's office is based in a very normal office building in the centre area of Shenzhen. Its appearance is much less interesting than all the other skate shops or skateboarding company offices I have been to, which were either in small Hutongs (small valleys in Beijing) or in places that look a lot 'cooler'. In the lobby, white-collar workers constitute the majority of the traffic coming up and down the lifts. The Feidian office is on the 29th floor, the top floor. Once getting off the lift, the 'skateboardness' started to emerged as stickers were on the walls and doors everywhere. Entering the office, there were skateboard decks hanging on almost every wall,

everything else looked like a conventional office, probably identical to other offices based in this building.

Feidian was always criticised by the skateboarding community for a lack of authenticity and 'coreness', mainly because of the background of the owner and the less 'skater-orientated' way of marketing strategies. Even within the company, a participant implied that some former skateboarder employees had different opinions from those of the owner of Feidian about what the marketing strategies should be for the skateboarding market, which then became the reason for their resignation. However, the current skateboarder employees and sponsored skateboarders have different opinions about how Feidian promotes skateboarding culture and has pushed its development in China.

> A: How do you see the contributions that Feidian has made throughout the years to the development of skateboarding in China?
>
> BBL: I think first of all, Feidian has invested a lot more into the skateboarding business and also Feidian is really dedicated to the quality of the skateboards. Historically people have been saying that people from Feidian are not skateboarders. Yes, the owner Jia is not. But you can't deny the contribution that Jia has made into the development of skateboarding in China. Like making *Whatsup Magazine*, it is definitely not making any money and he had to throw away a lot of money to do it in order to promote skateboarding culture. Secondly, sponsorship and endorsement of events. There are only a handful of events I can think of that Feidian did not sponsor, for example the X-Games

sponsored by ESPN, the international skateboarding contests. Basically, Feidian was the first Chinese company or the first skateboarding equipment company that ever sponsored skateboarding events. Thirdly, for the first several years, the domestic market did not make any money, it could not even break even. But Feidian kept investing in the domestic market anyway. Feidian was investing a lot of money from the other side of our office, the overseas department. A lot of money made from the overseas market went into the domestic market. If Feidian has 10 years of history, the first 7 or even 8 years was all losing money. So I think it does not matter whether or not the owner of the company is a skateboarder. What matters is what have you done.

A: I agree. I think even though people have been criticising the 'coreness' of Feidian, but very few questioned the contributions of Feidian in the skateboarding market. I think it is a well-accepted fact now in the Chinese skateboarding industry that there are very few upcoming talents that have the level of skating to be professionals. Like the Dream Season events you guys do, to support upcoming talents. Can you tell me a bit more about that? Like how many years have you been doing it? And how do you do it? What kind of support do you give to the skaters?

BBL: Yes, this is the second year we have done it. Very true there is a big gap at the moment in our industry between the professionals and the beginners. We are struggling to get new blood into our industry. So, we were wondering if it is true that there are really no upcoming talents? So the Dream Season is an event we designed to discover new talents. We ask skaters on the internet to send their videos over to us like a 'sponsor me tape' (a traditional way of seeking sponsorship in skateboarding culture; it is called

'tape' because it traces back to the pre-digital age). After we have picked the winners

from the submissions we provide them with everything like accommodations, food,

skateboarding equipment and different other products. We will also assign a filmmaker

for them to film videos, to experience what professional skateboarders' lives are like

basically.

A: How many kids did you pick from the submissions?

BBL: This year we had 12.

(interview, 2014)

A former sponsored skateboarder from Feidian approved the support they he received from

Feidian.

A: How did you get your first sponsor?

Hui: At first, I was just skating and filming videos with my friends who were on the

Feidian teams and it was them who introduced me to Feidian and later they put me on

their team.

A: I see, and at what point did you become a professional skateboarder?

Hui: At some point, I decided to quit high school because all I want to do all day was just

skateboarding, I wanted to become a professional skateboarder. When they heard that I

quit high school, in order to support me, they started paying me a salary on top of my

skateboard sponsorship. At that point, their normal sponsor policy is to give 2 decks to

each 'flow rider' every month. But, because I was skating everyday it was not enough for

me. As soon as I asked Jia (the owner of Feidian), he said 'ok, you can have as many decks as you need' without any hesitation. From that point on, I was given 5 to 6 decks each month.

A: So, what do you think about the criticism from the skateboarding community towards non-skater owned companies?

Hui: People have been criticising some outsider owners who do not understand skateboarding. That is true, they really don't understand skateboarding. For example, I use to skate 50mm wheels, but my sponsor use to give me 52mm wheels occasionally. I said this is too big for me. He asked 'why? Its only 2mm difference'. Then I explained that 2mm difference can be very crucial to skateboarders, if he skates too, he would know. Again, without second thoughts, he just agreed and started to give me what I asked for.

(interview, 2014)

Creating credibility through sponsorship

P's story at the beginning of this chapter about moving from the Society Skateboards team to Feidian has significant meanings for Feidian's effort in gaining authenticity in Chinese skateboarding culture:

BBL: The team manager of Symbolic Skateboards Danny Fei is a good friend of him. This is a very significant incident to Feidian. For the 10 years of Feidian's history, we

have always discovered young skaters, and sponsored them and supported them before they got famous. Buy once they got famous, many of them just left for other brands. There was never a skater who was famous already but decided to join us. P was the first. I was chairing our annual company ceremony, and Jia got very emotional because of this, you can even see the tears in his eyes. He thinks that this means a huge recognition from the Chinese skateboarding community, for what we have been doing for decades. For years, he was always rejected by the skateboarding community because of his outsider identity. No matter how much he has contributed toand invested in pushing skateboarding culture in China, skaters would still call him a businessman. That's why P's addition to the team means a lot to him. (interview, 2014)

BBL also told me, that Symbolic Skateboards was rewarded and named the most improved brand on that annual ceremony.

However, Feidian is a very special case for looking at the non-skater-owned companies within the skateboarding industry. Another main criticism, such as what 0528 proposed, is about the businessmen who want to take advantage of skateboarding culture and make money off of it. When I asked about the professionalisation process of skateboarding, an early generation skateboarder, a skateshop owner and a team manager in a transnational skateboarding shoe company also expressed less explicitly the same criticism.

A: From which year do you recall the invention of the skateboarding career?

Fei: The first Chinese professional skateboarder is Che Lin. I think his first sponsor was a shoe company called Raysis. The owner of the company was a shoe factory owner in a small city called Jin Jiang. He probably at that time saw the potential of the skateboarding industry and then decided to invest into a skateboarding shoe company. He first contacted Jeff (founder of the first Chinese skateshop franchise FLY Streetwear, later called the Godfather of Chinese skateboarding in an article when Nike Skateboarding made a collaboration shoe dedicated to Jeff Han's contribution to Chinese skateboarding culture), asking us to help him build a domestic skateboarding shoe brand. The idea was great, we had many meetings and then the brand was created. That brand was probably the first brand that paid salaries to sponsored skateboarders. They first signed Che Lin and Johnny Tang.

A: Isn't Xiao Feng in the team as well?

Fei: Oh yes, but I'm not sure if they were also paying Xiao Feng a salary. I am sure they pay Che Lin though.

A: I have always wondered about what happened with Raysis back then when it suddenly disappeared.

Fei: Basically, at that time all the skateshops were selling only imported clothes and shoes. There weren't domestic brands to sell. And imported clothes and shoes had one problem, sizes. We could not find all the sizes when we import them. Maybe we can get new models but we were never able to get all the sizes. So, two reasons why Raysis stood out. First, it is manufactured professionally in proper shoe factories, so it had all the sizes. Second, it was cheap, it was around 100 to 200 RMB.

A: Yes.

Fei: Though the style and functionality still had a lot to catch up with the imported shoes, it was the first shoe brand which people can get any size they want. More importantly, all the best skateboarders were wearing it at the time. Including me, I was also on the team but I was not paid a salary. So I think this is where marketing comes in. It proved that having good sponsorship skaters matters. Also it was before all the transnational shoe corporations came in to the Chinese market. I think it's a shame that it disappeared.

A: Indeed.

Fei: We were at the time thinking it was selling really well. But it did not reach to their expectations. So not after long, they thought it was not making the profit as they were expecting. Also they thought skateboarders did not have a good marketing system. So they stopped investing money into it, and it just disappeared. But still the contribution it made was that it pushed the professionalisation of the skateboarding industry. It was the first step before all the transnational corporations came in. I remember it was around 2002 and it existed for around 2 years after that. But soon after Raysis, all the international brands came in and carried on the professionalisation process in China. (interview, 2014)

FLY and the introduction of the transnational corporations

Like what Fei said, Raysis marked the end of an era in the Chinese skateboarding history and the start of a new era - the age of transnational corporations. Shanghai, being the economic centre of China, was the first milestone for the introduction of the transnational corporations.

There were also many skateshops in Shanghai before the transnational corporations came in, but the one that had most commercial potential was FLY Streetwear. FLY was the first skateshop that embraced the idea of street fashion and had the capacity to operate in a commercial system that would develop itself to adapt to the rapid economic growth of the Chinese youth market. Many of my participants acknowledged Jeff Han, the founder of FLY Streetwear and his skateboard company Gift Skateboards and skateboarding media Skatehere.com's contribution to the development of the Chinese skateboarding industry. For example, a brand manager at a transnational shoe corporation, in response to the question of who has pushed the development of skateboarding in China the most, explains:

> J: I would say Jeff Han had a really big part in it. It was the community for sure, so everybody was doing their part. But I feel like Jeff Han had really stepped it up and evolved it a little bit more than it was by really understanding skateboarding and understanding skateboarders as a skateboard company. A lot of companies in the past were not necessarily skater-owned and ran businesses. So, I felt like Jeff at that time understood what the US was doing, and kinda adapted to it a little bit to China, so I think that helps a lot. (interview, 2014)

Jeff Han, an early generation skateboarder from Shanghai, has had if not the most, a considerable amount of influence into the commercialisation of skateboarding culture in China. I have not had the contact during my fieldwork to interview himself but I have had many comments from his friends and people who have worked with him for many years.

From what emerged from the interviews, it appears that he has many abilities and has become a key player in the skateboarding industry. In addition to its insider identity and its social contacts with other older-generation skateboarders, what has made Gift Skateboards one of the key skateboarding companies in Chinese skateboarding history and has made the franchise FLY Streetwear the only skateshop that has further developed its ability to recognise the skateboarding industry as a business and the ability to run it in the way Western businessmen do, as well as a marketing technique that appeals to both insiders and outsiders. Jeff Han has opened three shops in Shanghai, Beijing and Zhengzhou, with exclusive retail rights to many shoe brands such as Nike SB (Nike Skateboarding) and Adidas Skateboarding, for example, for a very long time before these transnational brands opened their own stores. (interview, 2014)

> A: What do you think the are contributions that Jeff Han has made to the Chinese skateboarding industry?
>
> Lao: I think Jeff Han is probably the best businessman in the Chinese skateboarding industry. He was really thinking about how the skateboarding industry in China could develop. Even though he did not think about the core spirit of skateboarding, he had something else on his agenda. But he has brought in abilities from outside skateboarding culture. (interview, 2014)

Like what Fei said (and what I discussed in the previous section), one of the essential and successful strategies in the skateboarding industry is to sponsor the right people. Jeff had

done an unprecedented job within the history of Chinese skateboarding culture before the

transnational corporations came in. He has sponsored skaters not only in his home city

Shanghai, but also all of the other first tier cities and some second tier cities. Almost all the

skateboarders on the Gift Skateboards team have at least one national champion title under

their belt, all of which has contributed to the popularity of Gift Skateboards, especially

within skateboarding culture.

However, there are also criticisms of his success in the skateboarding industry. Some

participants expressed their criticism of him for his 'too commercial' way of doing business

and for monopolising the skateboarding market and national contests. One participant who is

also an owner of a skateboarding company, said:

> I realised only after so many years why they have done a good job in monopolising the
>
> skateboarding market. Conventionally, we (skateboarding companies) have done so
>
> much to promote our skateboarders, give them skateboards, help them film video parts,
>
> to promote them. But Gift Skateboards was the first one to really exploit the benefits that
>
> skateboarders could bring them. For example, they would sponsor the skaters with the
>
> best ability to win contests, and with specific training schedules for contests, so that you
>
> see at every contest, almost every time, you see only their logo on the podium, they have
>
> if not all then most trophies. Whereas companies like Society and Shox (a skateboard
>
> company in Guangzhou) or any other skateboard company actually, never ask their
>
> skateboarders to train for contest but rather to skate streets and film video parts.

Moreover, when the transnational corporations came in, you see the riders on the Gift

team taking all the sponsorships and Jeff had the power of assigning his team riders to

different brands' (Lao, interview, 2014)

A former skateboarder employee of Feidian also went to work for Jeff Han after his

departure from Feidian, realising the different visions of how they should represent the

image of skateboarding.

A: What was your job when you were in Feidian?

Bo: At first I was doing sales and marketing, it was not a clear separation between the

two jobs because of the small scale of the company. Later I was also in charge of the PR

as well on my own, I did all the business plans as well on my own. Including *Whatsup*

Magazine later. It was somebody else who was in charge of the magazine for two issues.

Initially, this guy wanted to make *Whatsup* a street fashion magazine, with a lot of 'soft

products' like clothes in it. Then after two issues and a lot of investments into making the

magazine happen, problems started to emerge and then he stopped doing it. I was

suggesting that, because Feidian is a skateboard company, it doesn't make sense when

you make a street fashion magazine, so I reformed it into a skateboarding magazine, from

the third issue.

A: How long did you workon Feidian?

Bo: From 2003 to 2006, 3 to 4 years.

A: Why did you leave Feidian after that?

Bo: Partly because I wanted to get better career prospects, and also I did not want to work at that time, so I went traveling for a while and then I went to work at AT (another skateboarding wholesale distribution company in Guangzhou) as team manager. But later they wanted me to move to Guangzhou, but I did not want to live in Guangzhou. Later Jeff Han from FLY heard about this and asked me if I want to go to Shanghai. I liked the idea of going to Shanghai and living in a different province since I have never lived outside Guangdong Province before that. It was 2008.

A: You went to work for FLY?

Bo: Yes, for two years. It was May, 2008.

A: What was your job at FLY?

Bo: It was everything.

A: Managing Gift Skateboards?

Bo: Yes, Gift, but not too much, I was mostly helping him to do sales and wholesale distribution. I had to also do events. Such as the two events for Adidas, event organisation.

A: Skate-Hype?

Bo: Yes, event managing. And PR. Also, I was consulting for Adidas for 1 year.

A: So, it seems like an executive service company?

Bo: Yes, exactly. The company has only Jeff and I. So, I did all the business plans. He was mostly in charge of meeting and negotiating with people.

A: So how many brands was FLY wholesaling?

Bo: Almost all the brands in the industry. Adidas, Nike SB, Vans, mainly, and also DC, we were the exclusive wholesale distributor in China. I worked also like a buyer as well as marketing, business planning. The first big DC Asia Tour was also organised and managed by us at the time. Many famous professional skateboarders from the International team came.

(interview, 2014)

If the Society Skateboards has shown the cultural potential of skateboarding culture, FLY Streetwear and Gift Skateboards, on the contrary, have been an exemplar of a successful business model in the Chinese skateboarding industry.

Transnational corporations – the shoe giants

While local entreprenuers were trying to develop their skateboarding companies in China, on the rise in the global skateboarding industry is a number of transnational sports corporations and their desire to make a cut capitalising on skateboarding culture. All of the transnational sports corporations, including Nike, Adidas, Converse, etc., have all expanded their skateboarding section's operations in China after China joined the WTO and the spectacular 2008 Beijing Olympic Games.

Without skateboarders working within these companies, skateboarding is never gonna be able to become better. You need to have those people, you need to have skateboarders with a lot of experiences, who love skateboarding to work for these companies because

that's the only way that skateboarding is ever gonna grow because if you are gonna do it within your little skateshop, its gonna be pretty hard, but with the help and support of big companies, you can reach to a bigger and mass audience. And really push out positive message about skateboarding. Because I definitely know that a lot of people still think that skateboarding is a child's toy or whatever, they don't understand what skateboarding can bring to people's lives (J, interview, 2014)

In the West, skateboarders have been sceptical and resistant towards the endorsement and sponsorship of major sports corporations such as Nike, especially when they first entered the skateboarding market in the late 1990s (Wheaton and Beal, 2003; Lombard, 2010). Skaters were 'concerned about Nike's motivation since there was not a long-standing commitment to the skateboarding community' and saw the incorporation of mainstream sports corporations as 'selling out' the culture (Wheaton and Beal, 2003, p.169 and p. 172). However, Lombard (2010, p. 479-480) argues that after the first failed attempt to gain popularity and support within the skateboarding community, its second entry in 2000 was, on the other hand, successful because of the shift in strategy and the incorporation of 'authenticity' and reduction of the 'negative commercial image' in their campaigns. By the time the transnational corporations entered the Chinese market, they had already gained massive popularity in Western skateboarding cultures despite the still existing but rather ambient criticisms. Nonetheless, the point of entry into the Chinese skateboarding industry is also very different from the Western model. It was first through FLY Streetwear, a skater-owned skateshop in the economic and commercial centre of China - Shanghai.

The first brand to actually to really try to coming to skateboarding it was Quiksilver. So Quiksilver at the time, they were looking for assets, they were looking for athletes, they were looking for stores, they were looking for you know, the community to connect with, so they can be AUTHENTIC you know what I mean? So, ah obviously FLY with the history behind FLY, they were the first person to contact. And FLY actually recommended the top skaters from China at the time which was Fulingchao, Chelin, and then eventually I kind of just got added on to the team. And yeah, from there on, you know, NIKE SB eventually started hearing more and more about China, about how amazing the spots were and how it was so easy to capture content, ah I was at the time I was the only person that was able to speak English and being like I knew all the spots, I am a skateboarder. So, I took those guys around and they went back and made a decision to start NIKE SB China. And I was one of the first guys to be put on to the team. I was just skateboarding one day filming tricks with Jeff, and I got a phone call, from NIKE about an offer and I was just like 'hell yeah' I'm like you know, 'that sounds good' and I took the offer, and Nike SB was created in China (J, interview, 2014)

So even though they would still acknowledge the motivation of gaining authenticity from big brands such as Quiksilver, it was seen as an opportunity for local skateboarders to get extra support. Similar to the reason why P moved from Society Skateboards to Feidian, the full-time skateboarders at the time were getting sponsorships from local skateshops and skateboard companies, but the support was restricted in most cases to sponsorship of

skateboarding equipment and clothes. After the professional salary paying model of

sponsorship was introduced to China by the negotiation between Jeff Han and Raysis, being

a full time professional skateboarder became a possible career path. Being able to offer that

career opportunity was seen as one of the foremost supports within the skateboarding

community in China. When I asked him what he thinks the progress had been after the

transnational corporations came in, he said:

> I mean, the progress has been quite big because of all the support. Without the supports
>
> all these international brands have been giving through events, helping riders out, without
>
> these supports, maybe some of these riders wouldn't still be skating. Because they would
>
> have probably been looking for jobs and make money somehow. People like Huifeng,
>
> Blackie, you know, all they have had is skateboarding for their whole lives. If you ask
>
> them to get a job, I'm sure they just put themselves in some sort of shitty hole. So I think,
>
> in that sense, these brands and the industry have helped maintain at least, the growth of
>
> skateboarding (J, interview, 2014)

Team Managers, the Connection Between the Subculture and Industry.

Team manager is a new career pathway developed by the skateboarding industry in the US.

Their job is to scout talent and manage the current team members. Depending on the cultures

in different companies, different team managers have different roles and expectations from

their team riders. It was also only popularised as a concept within Chinese skateboarding

culture when the transnational corporations came in. Conventionally, team managers are former skateboarders who have gained respect from their experiences of being   professional skateboarders themselves, such as the documentary director Stacy Peralta, who directed many well celebrated skateboarding documentary films, for example *Dogtown and Z-Boys* (2011), about skateboarders in the 70s, (2004), about surfing culture and *Bones Brigade: An Autobiography* (2012) about the Bones Brigade skateboarding team, which included many skateboarding legends such as Tony Hawk, Rodney Mullen, Steve Caballero and many more. In the Bones Brigade documentary, the team riders from the Powell-Peralta company who founded the Bone Brigade have all expressed how important their team manager Stacy Peralta was to the coming-together of the team and later the performance, relationships within the team and tutoring of the members. In the Chinese case, I argue that team managers are the most important connection between Chinese skateboarding culture as a subculture, and the commercial corporations, especially when the transnational corporations came in. Like the tribal culture and sociality within the skateshops and local skateboarding companies, team managers also function as a tie to bind the 'loose' skateboarders with the 'controlled' corporations. Here is a typical example of a former team manager in transnational corporations like Nike and his opinion on the team managers' function as scouting talent, tutoring the skateboarders (mostly about being 'professional')and managing the skate team for the company in an efficient and valuable manner.

A: As a team manager now, what's your sort of requirement for your riders? Do you ask them to film video parts? Or going to contests? What's the major, say major…

J: Major assets? So, first thing, this is for every company I would say … what a company really like to see in a rider is… to love skateboarding. If I can tell that, any company can tell that a rider when he is riding for passion … he is not chasing your tail every day to like 'hey can I get sponsored? Can I get sponsored? Can I get sponsored?'. Companies hate seeing that. For skateboarder, all you need to worry about, is how to become better and better and better. Eventually one day, when you reach that point, like I said, it will happen naturally. Companies, team managers will see it. Cause you are gonna go enter that City Jam, you are gonna go enter that Vans Dragon, you are gonna go enter that local grassroots events. And there is gonna be a lot of word of mouth. Word of mouth carries on, your video contents obviously gonna be played everywhere. Eventually, that's what will be seen by those companies. And companies will eventually tell you the team managers will help you grow as a skateboarder … What to do to make your fan base bigger … what to do as a professional skater, what ways to train, to skate to make you become better. Okay you are at this level, if you are skating by yourself, or within your small community, and you are this good? What will happen if I put you on a tour? With the best dudes? That will definitely motivate you to become even better than what you were … but what should skaters do now? Before getting sponsored and all that, it's to really care about, to love skateboarding … To compete with yourself, don't compete with the people around you, or whatever, just to make sure you are focused on yourself and that you are becoming better.

(interview, 2014)

As a skateboarder with experiences as a professional skateboarder, J's situation is similar to what Stacy Peralta's in the Bones Brigade skateboarding team. His knowledge of skateboarding skills and Western skateboarding culture had a formative effect in his role in the skateboarding team that he managed. Therefore, his role in shaping or re-shaping the understanding of what it means to be a professional skateboarder is crucial in understanding the commercial corporations' expectations from their team riders.

My job isn't a team manager, but it is more of a natural thing to me, when I am hanging out with the team. I definitely take my experience from the US, because it's a lot more mature than it is here in China. China is still, this is the first generation of Pro athletes that are getting paid. They have no idea what to do. All they know is that I'm one of the better skaters here and I'm getting paid to do it. But nowadays, there is a lot more than just being, if you are rider for a company, there is a lot more than just being able to skate good. You have to represent this company that you are getting paid by. Because you are actually getting paid pretty high salary to do, not only to skate good, which is also a huge important part, but you have to know how to market yourself. You have to know how to present yourself, to the public, so that more, the best thing is that more people look up to you like a hero, like an icon, so they learn, you are influencing everybody underneath you, so do you have, is there a specific way of why you skate so good? Reach back to the community you know. Whether it is your social posts? Talking to the community? Whether it is just contents that you are posting on your Weibo? You have to promote

yourself, you have to find ways to promote yourself, to everybody, you know what I

mean? You have to make yourself valuable. Hahaha   (J, interview, 2014)

I also asked him about his 'evaluation' of the skateboarders on his team on their 'business'

performances. When we talked about a particular skateboarder who was on his team, he

commented:

For other athletes, ALL other athletes, it is a little bit more different. You only see them

when the brand speaks, when there is a brand commercial, when there is a Converse

commercial you will see that athlete, right? But Dan, you see him in, you know, video

content, that is not just through Nike, that is not just through his board sponsor, but it's

through video projects, through independent projects, you see him ALL THE TIME.

Same thing with Zhang Ziyang, ZZY is actually doing a pretty good job (interview,

2014)

Being at the same time a respected professional skateboarder and a 'homie' with his team

members, his job also needed him to educate the skateboarders about how their value to the

corporation is as a fraction of brand image, and how they should enhance it or to meet the

requirements set by the corporations.

Another former team manager from a transnational corporation exhibits more the social function of a team manager and the role of negotiating between the team riders and the companies.

King: Being someone respected in skateboarding culture has responsibilities that comes with the respect. I don't want to criticise other people, but when I am a team manager, my priority is the benefits of my team riders, and the benefit they represent to the commercial companies comes second. For example, do you know why Tommy's (a freelance videographer working closely with different major corporations in the skateboarding industry) video is the best in the industry? It's because he communicates with his riders before they film certain lines or tricks. If the skater tells him what tricks he wants to film, he will help to film it once, twice, and again. Then he will suddenly tell the skater, I think maybe you can try another trick from another angle. I think this looks better on film. The communication is crucial, because they are friends before, so the skaters listen to him. And also because Tommy actually understands skateboarding, skaters might actually find his advice useful. But this job that Tommy does is a lot more than a filmmaker. Who needs to be responsible for such a tutoring job? The team managers. You can't just sign an athlete and tell them to go to contests or go on tours to film videos and sit back and wait. You need to teach them how to be a proper athlete, you need to teach them how to communicate with the corporation, you need to help them to be involved in the brand culture. (interview, 2014)

Whenever I write a project proposal to the company, I usually try to specify what needs to be done and what are the activities that I am taking my riders to do. If the company approves my proposal, then first thing I do is to strive for a bigger budget so that my riders can travel a bit more comfortably, eat better, sleep better, so he has more energy to film better video parts or to take part in contests. But at the same time, I will ask them in return to make sure they wear the company's logo at all events and show your logo when you are on the podium.

There is another case with BP (a professional skateboarder who was on Kang's team), because he had to travel to and live in Shanghai by himself. It was not hard to convince him to come, but it was hard to convince his parents. I was talking to his father for a long time because he was worried if there would be anyone who is going to take care of him when he gets sick or anything. I promised him that as long as I am still his manager, I will take care of him for the company plus there are his friends who are hanging out with him all the time. His initial salary was around 4500 RMB, out of which rent will cost around 2000 RMB, so only 2500 RMB left for all other living costs. It was not enough to live in a city like Shanghai. But as a team manager I felt like I have the responsibility to take care of him, a lot of the occasions I was covering for his traveling expenses. I sometimes use less money than my traveling budgets so that I can save up some money to subsidise his rent. So in practice he was getting 7000 RMB each month. This is what I mean by being a team manager. I signed this kid, so I am going to take care of him so that he will work for me with genuine motivations.

A: Yes I do recall that was the period of time when we saw most of his coverage on videos and see him in contests. But after you were gone it just never happened again. (interview, 2014)

Examples like Kang's case were very typical in skateboarding culture in the cases 'big brother' figures like him taking care of the 'little brothers' in the skateshops and local skateboarding companies. Many other participants have also highly approved the support from their 'big brother' figure managers or bosses. For example:

Zao: I remember when I was a team rider for AT, the company in Guangzhou, they were really taking care of us.

A: What kind of support did you get from them?

Zao: Actually it was mostly from 'big brother' Lao, he was giving us whatever we needed like shoes and skateboards. In principle they had rules in the company that they only give a certain amount of equipment each month, for example 3 skateboard decks every two months, and it would actually be enough for daily practices. But other times, such as when we would go on tours, he would always give us extra stuff, more than he should. Like even bearings and wheels.

A: Oh I see. It makes sense, I have heard about him being really good to his riders before many times. So does he pay for your travel expenses as well from his own pocket?

Zao: Yes, and on top of train tickets and hotels he also gives us around 100 RMB each day to subsidise food and drinks.

(interview, 2014)

Vans, the cultural approach

Another transnational corporation has had much more legitimacy within skateboarding culture - Vans. Founded in 1966 in California, Vans had 'carefully nurtured' a 'decades-long association with skateboarding' (Borden, 2016, p. 102).

By 1996, Vans had already reached an annual turnover of US$100 million, and by 2000 had shifted into extensive global non-skate markets, becoming a NASDAQ-traded company as a result. Sold again in 2004, this time to American conglomerate VF Corporation for around US$400 million, by 2014 Vans global revenues had reached more than US$2 billion, with a goal of US$2.9 billion by 2017 (Funding Universe, 2015; Mandatory Information, 1996; VFC, 2013, 2015; see also Borden, 2016, p. 102)

Despite the fact it has massively expanded into a commercial corporation through marketing commodified skateboarding culture into the mainstream market, and despite its acquisition by a transnational conglomerate, Vans was still perceived by most of the skateboarding community as an insider corporation for its support of grass roots skateboarding events and what Borden (2016, p. 104) calls a 'hybrid economy' (see also Lessig, 2008), events such as the House of Vans programme that 'operating simultaneously as a commercial economy for financial gain and as a sharing economy for collaborative and collective benefit'. The House

of Vans events have also generated a Chinese version. An action sports brand manager from Vans also expressed the significance of House of Vans events in the development of Chinese skateboarding culture.

Fei: How skateboarding was developed is quite different here in China than its US origin. We have only just starting to integrate international strategies. In the beginning it did not have the skateboarding population foundation when the companies came in. Not to mention the public, even the skateboarders in the early decade was very isolated from the international skateboarding culture. It was only when the transnational corporations came in that skateboarding culture became educated and skateboarders ourselves really started thinking about our culture. Before 2000, all over China we had only one contest every year. I went every year, it lasts only 2 to 3 days, and I was lost again every time when it finishes. It was because there was only one company that was selling skateboards so they only organised this one event each year. In the 2000s, information technology developed, transnational corporations started to come in, that is when all the things started happening, that is when we really started to think about culture.

A: How are the cultural events planned by Vans, such as the House of Vans?

Fei: This is the first year HOV entered China. It has had international success in Western cities such as London. This is a hybrid cultural event, and it includes arts, music, skateboarding and many other art-related activities and performances. This is very welcomed by the young people. If you love street youth culture, if you love arts, music or skateboarding, you can always find something here in HOV

A: It feels like Midi music festival (An annual music festival that included also many other activities outside the terrain of music).

Fei: Yes, last year we had a House of Vans stage at the Midi festival, and put a Vans mini ramp there to promote our official HOV events. This time in Shanghai was the official HOV directly from Vans. Shanghai is the first stop, there will be other stops in Guangzhou, Hong Kong and Seoul in Korea. (Interview, 2014)

Giving back to the culture? Criticisms of the impact of the transnational corporations on Chinese skateboarding culture

As much a skateboarding industry as the transnational corporations have formed in China, some older-generation skateboarders and owners of local skateshops and companies have also been resistant towards the commodification of their culture and the impact and changes that comes with the 'big money'.

> Bao: Before the big corporations came in, there was only discussions about skateboarding, about tricks, but little about what to wear. But what came along with the big corporations were choices, and more desires activated by advertisements and marketing stunts. In a way it pushed the skateboarding industry forward. They were targeting a different customer base, which has made the skateboarding population bigger. Here is when the culture makes a difference, because Chinese skateboarding culture does not have its roots here in China. When they start to be interested in skateboarding, it is the surface that attracts them, it is how cool it looks. So no doubt there are not many

requirements for professional skateboards but only style, which means shoes and clothes, mostly when they couldn't perform tricks like the ones they saw in advertisements. They have no desire to learn anything about equipment or tricks as much as they would have for style. (interview, 2014)

This illustrates ideas such as what McRobbie put forward: 'Selling goods and commodities came too close to "selling out" for those at the heart of the subculture to feel comfortable about it' (1989, p.32). When skateboarding culture was seen as a style and was being sold to people outside of the culture, many shared the feeling of resistance towards the commodification process of the transnational corporations. There are also criticisms of the support that transnational companies brought into the skateboarding industry, which has caused a big gap between people who are dedicated to skateboarding and the ones like Bao described as visiters of the culture that comes and goes. Lao's critique was about the impact of transnational corporations on the level of skateboarding .

Lao: I think it was because the bureaucracy that came with the transnational corporations ruined the level of skateboarding in China. I have seen so many good skateboarders who were sponsored by local skateshops or skateboard companies that have fallen. When they first hear that they would be given a salary of 10,000 RMB a month and 10 pairs of shoe they could not handle it, and it changed them completely, it changed their purpose for skateboarding from their initial standpoint. Like my company, when we use to take skaters out for tours and filming, we were taking trains, and staying in budget hotel

chains; whereas the transnational corporations would pay for their flight tickets, luxury hotels, they just could not make sense of what was happening. To be honest, we all came from the streets, we have never been treated like this before, and suddenly all these temptations from the transnational corporations came along, they just stopped seeing themselves as they use to be. For example, Blackie, (professional skateboarder sponsored by this participant), back then, I didn't think it was good that he rode for a big shoe company, but it was the only way for him to improve his financial situation. Because otherwise he would need to seek a job to support his skateboarding career. But this later became too money oriented, you know, changing from one company to another that kind of stuff. (interview, 2014)

The managers inside the big corporations also shared the feeling of this counter effect of sponsorship:

J: Some of the negative things I have seen is that it also spoiled the market. If you have noticed, within the past few years since I have been here, there hasn't really been any any growth from the people after that generation of riders. It seems to me for the past ten years. It's just the same skateboarders, faces that you have SEEN. There haven't been any up-and-coming skaters to take their place. Which is a big concern. You are always gonna have Huifeng, you are always gonna have Heichai (Blackie), you are always gonna have Chelin. But what about the next generation? There is nobody up-and-coming. I mean there are people like Liu Jiaming, who is killing it, but that's only one

skateboarder. So are the brands that are coming in and giving everything to these kids, is that a good thing or is that a bad thing? Because look at when skateboarding didn't have anything. Look how Chelin turned out, look how Huifeng turned out, look how Xiao Feng turned out, look at all the best skaters you see now, look how they turned out. They didn't have any support from anybody, they just skated hard and enjoyed skateboarding. Now I think a lotta kids nowadays wanna become a sponsored skateboarder, and there is a *mubiao/mudi* (target) to skate not just for enjoyment and get better nowadays. All the kids just wanna be sponsored. And when they realise that that goal is too hard to reach, they're probably just end up giving up. But we want kids to fall in love with skateboarding, not just fall in love with getting free stuff and getting paid for it. Because if you fall in love with something, eventually, if you keep doing it long enough, good things will happen. If you play music at a young age, eventually if you play long enough, it will become a career because you involve yourself so much with that culture, that good things will just naturally happen, you know what I mean?

A: It seems to me that with all the years of all the companies' support, the industry has grown bigger and bigger, but all the sponsors are sponsoring the same group of people, same group of skaters like …

J: The contests that you see every day is just 1,2,3, same people, 1,2,3, same people. You even know what tricks they are gonna do.

A: Exactly, what tricks on what obstacles.

J: And I'm not gonna lie. It's the same thing for myself. There is nobody pushing. There is nothing to drive these kids to love this sport or love the activities, love skateboarding

per se. And there are no new people giving it to the old guys, like kicking their ass. There

is nobody coming to take their piece of the pie.

(interview, 2014)

One of the essential connections, apart from retailing products, between the 'core'

skater-owned skateshops and the big transnational companies is about organising events and

event endorsements. This is also a key point of conflict in the industry between the two sides

In terms of the financial endorsement of both the grassroots and big events and contests,

skaters have also reflected on the negative effects of the sudden introduction of big

corporations and the controversial distribution of the endorsements and sponsorships:

Lao: What happened I think, is that this trend created a big bubble. Before the

introduction of the transnational corporations, skateboarding was developing slowly but

steadily. Though we did not have big events, good media communications, big video

budgets, the culture was growing. Then the transnational corporations entered the

Chinese market with their big budgets and ambitions to develop the market. So far it has

been around 8 to 10 years since all the big corporations came in. From the look of it, it

may seem like it had gotten really popular for a period. But this popularity is a bubble.

Because nobody cares to develop what is core to skateboarding culture, the real spirit of

skateboarding.

Lao: They need to help us (skateshops and local companies) so that they can develop sustainably, but they did nothing to help us. Vans put in 3 million RMB just to build the skate course in Shanghai for the City Jam final. What good will a 3 million RMB course do? What if they use that money to build some small local skateparks for at least their own sponsored skateboarders to train?

Lao: Gratitude, it is all about gratitude. If the big companies had never the little companies and skateshops, they wouldn't have had the resistance towards them. Back then when I was running my skatepark, I was trying to contact those big corporations to collaborate on running events and contests. For such big corporations, what means little to them means a lot to us. But they never shared their events budgets with us (by sponsoring local skate events). That is why now when they ask people to help them running events, they wouldn't do it for a few pairs of shoes a month anymore, they would ask how much are you gonna pay me for doing the job. They have also been asking some kids to shoot videos for them, the benefit for them is way more than a few pairs of shoes each month. It's not because no one wants to help them, it's because they were never given genuine helps from the big corporations. Who am I to give support to the Top 500 companies in the world? When I am barely making a living out of the skateboarding business? (interview, 2014)

City Jam is a big national skateboarding contest tour organised and sponsored by Nike SB. It has received international attention from international skateboarding media. But in 2014,

along with other big events organised by transnational corporations such as the Baby Dragon contest tour organised by Vans, they all stopped. The former brand manager from a big corporation also reflected on this negative effect on the skateboarding industry and culture and explained from his side why those big events suddenly stopped:

A: What happened to Nike when they stopped City Jam this year?

J: Well, we won't just say Nike, we will say the whole industry. You can notice that the industry that stopped all their big events. You could see even Converse, they stopped all their tours and their City Carnage. Vans as well, their Baby Dragon has been taken away this year. This is because all these companies are spending so much money on making skateboarding something bigger and better. But the response they got back is so little. It's just the same people every year, so why are we continuing to do this? So right now, we are taking, I think everybody else is also taking a little break, we don't need to do this every year, maybe we do something like the Olympics. We give it a little bit of time, we still gonna support skateboarding, in a grassroots way. Maybe help skateshops, let skateshops do the events. Do little events, not on such a big scale. But still show our support for skateboarding. But when that time comes, we will do that big event. To highlight the people that are coming up, not to spoil the industry so much. To me that's what I think its happening. Because if we are doing the same thing every year every year every year, it just spoils the market, it just giving those same people the opportunity to, you know. (interview, 2014)

Homies, homework and the contradictory identity of skateboarders

Many skateboarders share the same experience as Ye, the sponsored skater at Bao's skateshop, which normally had a social centre with a local skateshop or a local skateboarding company where they felt they most belonged socially and acquire identities. They would often call the others within the same social group 'brothers' or 'homies'. Many social groups are where local meanings of skateboarding are produced and reproduced. Ye was adopting the same values and identities from the other members of the international and local skateboarding culture but most essentially from the 'family'.

A: Do you think your sponsorships have influenced what kind of skateboarder you think you are?

Ye: Of course I feel like I am a skateboarder, but I also feel like within skateboarding culture, I belong to the 3x (short for Bao's website *3xchina.com*) family. I do think the terms of my other sponsorships are fair, but I felt like I was doing homework sometimes when I edited skateboarding videos and posted them onto my social media pages. For example, I felt obliged to tag my sponsors' official accounts, but tagging people from the 3x family was more natural and more like sharing than handing in a homework.

(interview, 2014)

0528 from Society Skateboards believes that skateboarders will always adopt their identity from their local skateboarding companies and social group that have supported them from the beginning.

0528: Those shoe companies gave skateboarders hope, a hope to make a living as a full-time professional skateboarder, which is something local skateboarding companies cannot afford to give them. However, they still think that they belong to our group, they will never turn their backs on us. For example, when we sponsored JB, he was 13, he was not at the level of top professional skateboarder, but we believed in him so we sponsored him very early on, and we have been hanging out all the time. The sponsorships with the shoe companies is like a job, they need to sign contracts every year and all that, like reaching job targets. They will always feel they belong to board companies. It's their identity. (interview, 2015)

Also when I was talking to a professional skateboarder and former brand manager from a big corporation, he also expressed his preference towards the 'homie' run business and their 'coreness'.

A: Yeah and what about Helas (a skater-owned company based in Shanghai)? Are you still part of the team?

J: Yes, I mean, I don't know if I am a team rider or whatever, but I would definitely support those guys because you know, it's the homies. It's a homie owned and run company. It's completely skateboarding, so for sure, I'm down to support those guys. Anything skateboarding, I'm definitely supportive. People who are supporting skateboarding, I will support them back.

(interview, 2014)

Conclusion

In conclusion, Chinese skateboarders from different contexts attribute complex and at

sometimes, contradictory meanings to the commercial incorporations of skateboarding

culture in terms of the representation of 'authenticity'. It involves complicated social,

economic and political factors in the construction of such meanings. First of all, it is similar

to the CCCS's idea of resistance towards mainstream culture in some groups, especially for

the early generations of skateboarders with little influence from the commercial

incorporation. Like what Wheaton and Beal (2010, p. 172) suggest, even though the media

has played a key role in constructing, reshaping sometimes fluid and contradictory

subcultural identities in skateboarding culture, a 'shared imagination' of skateboarding

culture still exists. In the Chinese context, there are different versions of this 'shared

imagination' of subcultural identities based on different negotiations of social, economic and

political backgrounds. The social factor, given the small size of the skateboarding population

and the reciprocally responsible relationships between members inside the Chinese

skateboarding community, has been one of the key factors when people talk about gratitude

towards the support from their sponsors. As illustrated in Chapter 7, local skateshops and

companies play a central role in constructing the collective identities of the Chinese

skateboarding community. Economically, particularly after the introduction of transnational

corporations in the Chinese skateboarding market, the meaning of support started to shift.

Although at first such 'support' from the TNCs were considered being de-socialised and seen

as 'homework' and 'jobs' compared to the support from 'homies', it still contributes to the later commercial incorporation of skateboarding identity mainly facilitated by the function and influence of the 'middle-man' - team managers, who play a central role in various stages of commercialisation of Chinese skateboarding culture. Being the big brothers at the same time as the 'middle-men', they are both implicitly and explicitly preserving this strong sense of responsibility towards their communities in different ways. Thirdly, there are still ongoing and sometimes ambient criticisms towards the political and commercial exploitation of subcultural identity by the transnational corporations, regardless of the economic failure of 'selling out' this identity in the form of consumable 'subcultural style' to the mainstream Chinese youth market. Nonetheless, the conflict of representation is still constently at play in the operations of the Chinese skateboarding industry.

Chapter 9 Governmental Incorporation of Skateboarding

From 'extreme sports' to 'creative sports cultural industry'

Based on recognition of the commercial and political potential, action sports were defined in early policy to be the 'experimental sports' (Chinese National Sports Bureau, 2007). The CESA (Chinese Extreme Sports Association) was founded in 2004 by the Chinese National Sports Bureau, Ministry of Civil Affairs and the State Council, with the promise of 'managing and promoting extreme sports'. It was founded without government funding so from the outset was 'relying on the support of society forces and the market' (CESA, 2016). To begin with it only organized one or two national contests, but CESA now organises 10-15 national to global contests and events annually. It has also evolved from having only skateboarding, inline skating and BMX (Bicycle Motocross) under its administration, to having some other popular sports added, such as longboarding, extreme street dancing, parkour, surfing, rafting, etc. Moreover, from CESA's later documents (CESA, 2016), the rhetoric 'extreme sports' was replaced by 'creative sports cultural industry' that has uniquely linked culture, spirit (Olympic) and sports into one. This change in national rhetoric shows the recognition and reaffirmation by the Chinese authorities of the nature of the skateboarding industry as a combination between a creative/cultural industry and a sports industry. This also indicates significant features in the Chinese skateboarding industry that have the potential to update the 'creative cluster' literature about the conventional creative/cultural industry debate.

The previous chapters have looked at the commercial incorporation of Chinese skateboarding culture from both the perspective of subcultural entrepreneurs and the corporate entrepreneurs. I now aim to illustrate the governmental incorporation of Chinese skateboarding culture from both national and local perspectives. Moreover, I also examine the structure of the Chinese skateboarding industry as an official attempt to combine a creative/cultural industry and a sports industry during such incorporation processes. Finally, I will look at how the subcultural participants from Chinese skateboarding culture respond to such incorporation.

The changing rhetoric and CESA's operation model is significant in understanding the relationship between the Chinese national and local authorities and the skateboarding culture and industry, with the contradictions between the two dimensions rightly pointed out by Fung (2016) - the reliance on foreign capital, management and expertise, in addition to ideological control from the authorities. In the case of the Chinese skateboarding industry, both dimensions have similar traces that can be found but with unique characters which could contribute to the updating of Fung's two dimensions model. Firstly, unlike the industries that Fung (2016) looked at, the Chinese skateboarding industry and the commercial incorporation of skateboarding culture, as I have illustrated in the previous chapters, demonstrate a reliance on the 'global capital, management, and imported expertise'. On the other hand, in this chapter, I aim to demonstrate the process of the governmental incorporation of skateboarding as a sport, with governmental support and administration from the local level and the national level greatly exceeding the global capital's capacity.

Furthermore, given the nature of skateboarding as an emerging sport and the foundation of

the national authority, CESA, as a 'conceptual sports association' (CESA, 2016) under the

National Sports Bureau, the second dimension of ideology control exhibits much more

complex and discursive strategies. As O'Connor and Gu (2012, p. 3) argue, the national

authority is restricted to embracing the creative industries' concept despite the market

potential. The CESA was therefore founded as a solution and as a body of operation for the

discursive strategy of the national authority - the National Sports Bureau - to negotiate

possible development plans with the local authorities that are able to both retain ideological

control and embrace the market potential that the creative industry discourse provides.

Sports mega events and the governmental incorporation of skateboarding in China

Though there have been many in-depth discussions regarding the commercial corporations of

skateboarding culture (see Beal and Weidman, 2003; Lombard, 2010; Wheaton and Beal,

2003), the governmental incorporation of skateboarding had primarily focused on the

policing of skateboarding in public spaces (see Borden, 2001; Chiu, 2009; Lombard, 2010).

This has changed with action/extreme or lifestyle sports research (Wheaton, 2010; Thorpe

and Wheaton, 2011; Wheaton, 2013; Thorpe, 2014), which attempts to include the discussion

of another aspect of governmental incorporation of skateboarding by looking at global mega

sports events, such as X-Games and the Olympic games. I argue that the governmental

incorporation of skateboarding in China offers an insightful case study for the current debate

regarding governmental incorporation of skateboarding culture.

The Canadian historian Tim Sedo (2010) offers a snapshot of the long standing tradition of discussion over the possibility of skateboarding being included by the Olympic Committee into the 2012 Olympic Games in the Chinese skateboarding community. However, Sedo's account needs to be updated with the new conventions in policy adopted following both the change of the Chinese leadership and the more detailed empirical research into the interactions between the national and local authorities and the skateboarding community by including both accounts in the discussion.

CESA has been organising national skateboarding contests since 1999. There are a few national events that are still being held today since the beginning of the summer of 1999, such as Huzhou National Extreme Sports Contest in Zhejiang Province. This is organized by the following:

- National Sports Bureau

- CESA

- Zhejiang Provincial Sports Bureau

- Huzhou People's Government

And co-organised by:

- Huzhou Taihu (Lake Tai) Tourism Resort Administration Committee

- Huzhou City Sports Bureau

Another example is the CX… (China X Games) National Extreme Sports Contest, held by CESA.

The sentiments from the Chinese skateboarding community towards CESA and its

governmental incorporation process are much more complicated than Sedo's (2010)

description as purely resistant. Thorpe and Wheaton (2011, p. 832) argue that the inclusion

of the action sports in the Olympic Games has led to 'complex power struggles between key

agents – the IOC and associated sporting bodies, media conglomerates (e.g. NBC), and the

action sport cultures and industries', the complexity of which must be understood by paying

attention 'to the particularities within each specific historical conjuncture'.

From oppositional to co-opted? Developing the culture and developing the sport

In the previous chapter, I illustrated the transnational corporations' commercial attempt to

develop skateboarding culture in China as it is 'bound up with processes of economic and

cultural transformation associated with the global diffusion of capitalist forms of

consumption' through the 'sponsorship and endorsement arrangements' (Smart, 2007, p. 113)

of skateboarding events and Chinese professional skateboarders. However, evidence shown

in the research data indicates the failure of transnational corporations' attempt to benefit

economically and has attracted contradictions. However, in this chapter, I aim to look further

into the more recent global trend of the incorporation of action sports cultures into the sports

mega events. In conjunction with this, I will investigate the local and national authorities'

economic and political agenda to incorporate the skateboarding industry into the Chinese

skateboarding industry, and the new sets of conventions and contradictions it has formed.

Thorpe and Wheaton (2011) argue that in the process of the Olympic Games' inclusion of action sports, even though there are cases showing resistance and opposing positions from action sports practitioners and athletes, this process does not follow the continuum of what Rinehart (2008) describes as from oppositional to co-opted (Thorpe and Wheaton, 2011, p. 842; see also Rinehart, 2008). It is also highly influenced by the market-driven motivation of the IOC (International Olympic Committee) and the 'cultural status and economic power of the action sport culture and industry during the incorporation process' (Thorpe and Wheaton, 2011, p. 842), hence generating complex mutual influence on both sides. Although this conclusion proves to be applicable in the Chinese case, the unique process of the governmental incorporation can help to offer a better understanding of the complexity this case study offers.

The foremost concern raised by all the participants in my study about the current situation of Chinese skateboarding culture was the acknowledgement of the diminishing number of committed participants, and the lack of upcoming new talents in the sport, despite the transnational corporations' attempts to develop and expand the youth market in the Chinese skateboarding industry. Even though research has shown the fast growing popularity of action sports and skateboarding, which have reached the top 10 of the most popular sports in the US (Thorpe and Wheaton, 2011, see also ESPN Event Media, n,d.), corporations are struggling to make a profit from, as what Thorpe (2014, p. 44- 45) illustrated, their huge investment into, and the expectations of, the potential of the Chinese youth market from 2003 onwards. Evidently, the commercial corporations in the Chinese context have failed to

employ the approach that has succeeded in Western countries. A brand manager assistant

from Nike Skateboarding China illustrated the frustration from the big corporations:

J: Well, we won't just say Nike, we will say the whole industry. You can notice that the

industry that stopped all their big events. You could see even Converse, they stopped all

their tours and all their City Carnage. Vans as well, their Baby Dragon has been taken

away this year. This is because all these companies they are spending so much money on

making skateboarding something bigger and better. But the response they got back is so

little. Its just the same people every year, so why are we continuing to do this? So right

now, we are taking, I think everybody else is also taking a little break, we don't need to

do this every year, maybe we do something like the Olympics. (interview, 2014)

Another brand manager from Vans China also admits the positive outcomes that commercial

incorporations failed to achieve for the development of the skateboarding population in

China:

Fei: The Olympic Games is after all, a globally celebrated sports mega event. If

skateboarding is to be included into the Olympics, it will undoubtedly facilitate the

popularisation of the sport in the world and especially in China. My opinion is that there

are many positive impacts of the inclusion of skateboarding in the Olympic Games.

Skateboarding is essentially a sport, if it is listed in the Olympic Sports list, it will finally

have its place in the sphere of mainstream sports. The public opinion towards

skateboarding when it becomes a mainstream sport will be very positively improved.

Skateboarding is still at its infancy here in China, and the public knows too little about

skateboarding as a sport, not just as a toy for kids. If skateboarding is to be perceived as a

sport not a toy, we will definitely see a huge increase in participation. Skateboarding will

finally be a legitimate participation, not just a hobby that random kids do on the street or

in a square, there will be designated skateparks for skateboarders to practice. I see only

one more option from this inclusion, as one more road for skateboarding to walk further

here in China. (interview, 2014)

Whether or not it is explicitly admitted, transnational corporations have reached to the

conclusion that the strategy for the transnational cultural development of skateboarding has

not yet been as successful as was expected in China. Compared to the fruitful commercial

outcomes from their practices in Western countries in terms of both the participation rate and

the size of the industry (Thorpe, 2014, p. 4-6), their 'cool capitalism' (McGuigan, 2009)

approach did not result in the expected commercial outcome. As a result, recognition has

been shared by many industry participants that the way forward for the development of the

Chinese skateboarding industry is to promote the sports element of skateboarding culture.

This could generate more beneficial outcomes than the previous 'cool' representations that

seemed to only work among existing cultural participants rather than the mainstream youth

market. The authorities were always in favour of the sports side of skateboarding culture and

had neglected subcultural development due to concerns that the 'cool' commercial

representations of the culture could result in a generation of counter-socialist ideology (Pang,

2012) among the Chinese youth. For this reason they have met with resistance from both corporations and the Chinese skateboarding community. However, the shifting strategy of the transnational corporations has also influenced the opposing positions within the Chinese skateboarding community. As a result of the shared motivations between corporations and the authorities, increasing cooperation and stronger connections have generated a much more nuanced situation in light of the recent development of the Chinese skateboarding industry.

Changing strategies of CESA

Before 2014, the authoritarian model

Sedo's (2010) account has documented well the historical opposing relationship and sentiments between the skateboarding community and CESA. At the time of writing, there still are people from the skateboarding community with very explicitly hostile attitudes towards CESA and the other authorities. An ex-manager of an international corporation and current manager of a local skateboarding equipment wholesale company explained his view on the historical issues that have been inherited over the years:

> Kang: In the old days they always used that bureaucratic approach to organise events and contests, to deal with skateboarders, referees, all alike. And since they have been doing it for so long, it is hard for the skateboarding communities to forget, especially those who have personally experienced it. Like what happened with the boycott of the national contest around 2002 and 2003 (see also Sedo, 2010). The Chinese system cannot be like the Western system where you can be sponsored by private commercial corporations and

go to the Olympics. Here, you have to be on the Chinese national team in order to

participate in national and global contests. But it was not fair for the commercial

companies. Why would they send their sponsored skaters to participate in contests but

wear their competitor's clothes just because their competitor sponsors the contest? I

would have done the same if I were the athlete participating in those contests. But there

were only a couple contests back then organised by the authorities, so there was no other

choice if you wanted to go to contests and meet and skate with other skateboarders from

other cities. But things have been changing; we now sometimes have more than 20

national contests each year organised by commercial corporations, so they can choose

not to go to the official competitions now. Even though the old secretary before the

current one was a typical old Chinese official that did things in a very

old-fashioned-Chinese way, we cannot deny that CESA has pushed forward

skateboarding as a sport. They nurtured talent back thenthat have become the frontier of

the Chinese skateboarding professionals today. (interview, 2014)

Several other participants have also criticised he CESA's 'nationalistic approach' in global

mega-events, taking the 'strategic decision to only allow 'national athletes' to compete in the

games' (Thorpe, 2014, p. 52). A few older-generation skateboarders have recalled that there

was a 'consent form' that every skateboarder needed to sign which somewhere down the line

says 'by participating in this contest, I hereby claim being a member of CESA athletes' and

the requirement that athletes must wear the official sponsor's tee shirt in the contest instead

of their own sponsors', which provoked a boycott against national contests held by CESA in

the past. As Thorpe (2014, p.8) argues, action sport participants disapprove of the national

identity forced upon them when action sports are faced with institutionalisation by the

authorities, 'seeing it as opposing the transnational friendships they have developed with

their fellow competitors, and the corporate (rather than nation-based) 'teams' with whom

they train and from whom they receive financial support'. The Chinese skateboarding

community has had the same issue with both these problems. Although some argue that it

was initiated and directed not by the skateboarders but others, such as skateboarding

company owners or managers of international skateboarding fashion corporations whose

commercial interest was being damaged. They further argue that the majority of the

skateboarders who participated in the boycott were under peer pressure, having no

understanding of the clash of interests between CESA and the brands they represented.

New leadership of CESA and the changing landscape of the skateboarding industry

Many commentators (e.g. Sedo, 2010; Thorpe, 2014) have documented a lengthy historic

period on the oppositional relationship between the Chinese authorities and the action sports

community. However, the situation has been shifting in recent years.

First of all, the leadership of CESA has changed. Many of the incidences documented in

Western commentaries were based on the decisions made under the leadership of the

previous secretary of CESA, who was, according to a couple of my participants, 'a typical

Chinese official' and an old man that nobody wants to talk to. Around the end of 2013 and

the beginning of 2014 the new and current secretary was appointed. Although she had been

the deputy secretary of CESA for many years and had been carrying out administrative practices under the previous secretary's directions, she was a much younger and more 'down to earth' figure between the authorities and the skateboarding community. She had been personally involved in the national and global action sports events, so she had direct social interactions with many of the older-generation skateboarders, who went on to be employed by the international corporations and local skateboarding companies as brand managers or team managers. These positions play an important role in the cooperation between the corporations and the Chinese authorities in organising events and competitions. She was much more welcomed and respected by many of the key figures within the industry compared to the previous secretary. The Action Sports Manager of Vans Shoes China, for example, shared this opinion in our interview:

Fei: It has been over a decade since CESA was founded. Until now I think they still have not received the majority of professional skaters' approval. There are many reasons, but I think the most important one is how the authorities should position themselves. The Western sports industry organisations are founded to serve the development of the industry, not to administrate. However, I think CESA is changing from my interactions with the secretary. From the early years, they have been very determined to control the skateboarders, and they eventually found out that this strategy doesn't work. But in recent years, I think the relationship has been changing. The skateboarding community is getting more mature and the same can be said about the industry and certainly about the international corporations. Both CESA and the corporations have learned how to

cooperate with each other. CESA has also learned how to communicate with the skateboarding community, so that the skaters are less resistant to cooperate. We need a bridge, a connection point to connect the skaters, the industry and the authorities to fully function so that things can move forward. CESA has its resources for approving and organising national and global events. To be honest, I think Liu Qing (the current secretary of CESA) is a lot better than the other officials. At least she had always been personally in this community, she knows about and has been known by the community for many years. But the old officials only got to know what is going on from Liu Qing's account or from what they have very occasionally seen.

(interview, 2014)

Another Manager from a Chinese skateboarding company also acknowledged the new secretary's efforts in supporting the industry and in the development of the sport:

BBL: After I have talked with Liu Qing, I had the feeling that she really is making a lot of positive efforts into promoting skateboarding in China. She has been in this industry for so many years, and in the end many don't realise her effort and misunderstand her by what she was presenting. But from what I have heard and witnessed, I believe she has actually done a great deal of positive stuff. From our company's opinion, we want to support CESA with what we can through mostly financial and technical support, for instance, sponsoring and organising events and competitions and providing media coverage. They have the resources to communicate with the government, that's

something we don't have. She is actively helping us and directs us to the right people in the government when we have problems, for example, organising events. We did not have the same support we have now, when the market was a lot smaller and skateboarding was very little known by the public, we had to survive and develop by ourselves. But now she is bringing a lot positive attention from the government, and this can't be bad. (interview, 2014)

2014 Nanjing Youth Olympics and the negotiation of skateboarding authenticity under the rubric of capitalism and nationalism

Preface

I was introduced to the secretary of CESA a couple weeks before the Nanjing 2014 YOG (Youth Olympic Games). After some explanation of what my research aims were, and my background as both a doctorate researcher and a skateboarding cultural participant, she was not what I expected from an official of the National Sports Bureau. Without preamble, she quickly invited me to a meeting with some industry partners of CESA involved in the organisation of the next Huzhou National Skateboarding Competition that was going to take place after the Nanjing 2014 YOG. In attendance at the meeting was a team from a Chinese event planning company and some older-generation skateboarders who worked for the Beijing International Fashion Sports Park, the biggest skatepark in Asia, which opened in 2010. All participants at the meeting were trying to reach an agreement on the skatepark design for the competition. After the event planning team left, I interviewed the older-generation skateboarders who shared with me their changed sentiments towards CESA.

Long: I was one of the key actors during the boycott of the national skateboarding

contest. But things have changed today. It is not only we skateboarders who have grown

up, but also CESA has changed its strategies and attitudes towards skateboarders. As you

have probably observed from the conversations just now, the secretary of CESA has been

thinking about and negotiating for the benefits of the skateboarders. She is essentially a

very thoughtful person (compared to the previous secretary). Skateboarding was

developed as a grassroots culture, so when the government attempts to manage it there

will definitely be resistance from the participants, especially those who do not know what

is really happening. Still, you can see that some of the key players in the industry who

have now grown up and are still in the industry have learned to cooperate with CESA,

because they can see or have experienced in person the benefits CESA has provided for

skateboarders. For example, CESA has been taking professional skateboarders to

compete in global contests. There would not have been the first Chinese skateboarding

gold medallist Che Lin, if CESA did not take him to compete in the first Asia Indoor

Games in Thailand. And CESA has been taking skaters to compete in other countries as

well in recent years, and people can see that they are supporting skateboarders. And now,

it is also because of CESA that those skateboarders are going to the 2014 Youth Olympic

Games in Nanjing. (interview, 2014)

Nonetheless, despite partial appreciation for the opportunities offered as a result of CESA's

endeavours to take skateboarders to global competitions, many participants have expressed

their scepticism due to their experiences of such opportunities during Youth Olympic Games.

Nanjing Sports Lab

One of the most profound manifestations of the changing strategies I observed in my fieldwork was during the organisation and operation of the Nanjing Youth Olympic Games 2014, where skateboarding was included as one of te four sports (along with Wushu, sports climbing and roller sports) that were to be considered for inclusion in the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games. These four sports had taken place in the form of a sshowcase in an experimental programme called the Sports Lab. 'The Nanjing 2014 Sports Lab itself will be a unique all-in-one venue – with Wushu mats, a skate park, a climbing wall and roller track all in the same location. There will be no competitions, just pure fun, with the emphasis on showcasing their capabilities and wowing the crowds with their extreme action' (Speed Strength, Tricks and Kicks … Check out the Nanjing 2014 Sports Lab!, 2014).

I arrived in Nanjing on the first day of the skateboarding demonstration. The secretary of CESA arranged my accommodations at the hotel where the athletes of the four sports in the Sports Lab were staying. It was a five star international hotel, and as soon as I checked in I spotted the marks of skateboarders, such as skateboarding stickers on doors of the rooms where the national team skaters were staying. There were buses every morning and afternoon taking the athletes from the hotel to the Sports Lab where the skateboarding demonstrations were held. Olympic volunteers welcomed skateboarders in the waiting rooms at the Sports

Lab where athletes of the fours sports were provided with refreshments. Afterwards, athletes were taken to the designated area for each sport to start to warm up for the day's programme.

There were three sections of activities during each day of the skateboarding demonstration at the Sports Lab:

- Warm up - during the start of the morning and afternoon, skateboarders had half an hour to warm up in the skatepark;

- Initiation - professional skateboarders were present for two half-hour slots in the morning and afternoon at the skatepark to teach the public audiences to skateboard; and

- Exhibition - skateboarders did half hour demonstrations of their skills each morning and afternoon on the street and half pipe sections.

There was a lunch break every day, when buses took athletes back to the hotel to have lunch, then back to the Sports Lab again for the afternoon programme. Official demonstration programmes finished at 18:00 every day, with occasional extra curriculum activities, such as visiting the Olympic village and doing demonstrations for other official Olympic sports athletes that only selected athletes would go. Others were taken back to the hotel to restore their energy for the next day's programme.

W= Warm up / E= Exhibition / I= Initiation / YOG A= YOG Athletes												
Skateboarding	08.00 - 08.30	08.30 - 09.00	09.00 - 09.30	09.30 - 10.00	10.00 - 10.30	10.30 - 15.30	15.30 - 16.00	16.00 - 16.30	16.30 - 17.00	17.00 - 17.30	17.30 - 18.00	18.00 - 18.30	18.30 - 19.00
Sunday 17.08	W	I	W	E	I	Break	W	I	W	E	I	YOG A	YOG A
Monday 18.08	W	W	E	I	I	Break	W	W	E	I	I	YOG A	YOG A
Tuesday 19.08	W	E	I	I	W	Break	W	E	I	I	W	YOG A	YOG A
Wednesday 20.08	W	I	I	W	E	Break	W	I	I	W	E	YOG A	YOG A
Thursday 21.08	W	I	W	E	I	Break	W	I	W	E	I	YOG A	YOG A
Friday 22.08	W	W	E	I	I	Break	W	W	E	I	I	YOG A	YOG A
Saturday 23.08	W	E	I	I	W	Break	W	E	I	I	W	YOG A	YOG A
Sunday 24.08	W	I	W	E	I	Break	W	I	I	W	E	YOG A	YOG A
Monday 25.08	W	I	W	E	I	Break	W	I	W	E	I	YOG A	YOG A
Tuesday 26.08	W	W	E	I	I	Break	W	W	E	I	I	YOG A	YOG A
Wednesday 27.08	W	E	I	I	W	Break	W	E	I	I	W	YOG A	YOG A

(Figure 9.1, Timetable for the skateboarding demonstration at the Sports Lab)

(Figure 9.2, a professional half pipe skateboarder during exhibition)

(Figure 9.3 The street skatepark during initiation, when public audiences were assigned to professional skateboarders to learn how to skateboard from them)

Cultural resistance at the 2014 Nanjing YOG

Continuing from the early tensions between the skateboarding community and CESA, the organisation of the 2014 Nanjing YOG also exhibited cultural resistance.

Thorpe and Wheaton (2014, p. 50-51) commented on the contradictions that drew the attention of the international media when Chinese officials took part in organising international action sports mega events, especially when it comes to the Olympics. They argue that the contradictions come from the 'top-down approach' of the Chinese authorities, namely the State General Administration of Sports (National Sports Bureau) and CESA, which ignores the grassroots participation philosophy of Western action sports culture. The previous secretary of CESA Wei Xing (World's Largest skatepark, 2006, para.2, cited in Thorpe and Wheaton, 2014, p. 51) has been documented admitting his plan to employ the Chinese 'top-down approach' in developing talent from young kids selected by their 'athletic ability' (ibid, p. 51). Many of my participants also shared their concerns and resistance towards this strategy, the founder of a popular skateboarding website said in our interview:

Guan: It does not matter to the current national team riders whether or not skateboarding is going to be included in the Olympic Games, because they will all be replaced by kids selected from gymnastic camps or maybe the current national junior skiing teams, like what they did to snowboarding when it was included in the Winter Olympic Games. Look how close we are now in snowboarding for China to win Olympic gold medals? They do not care about the current team or skateboarding culture at all, because they are useless to the benefits of CESA in the future if skateboarding is ever going to be an Olympic sport.   (interview, 2014)

There were also documented conflicts between action sports athletes and CESA during the Asian X-Games, which were organised by both the national authority, CESA, and local authorities, Shanghai Sports Federation and Yang Pu District Government. A BMX rider was rejected from participating in the X-Games because of the 'nationalistic approach to the Asian X Games' that 'CESA made the strategic decision to only allow 'national athletes' to compete in the games' (Thorpe and Wheaton, 2014, p. 52-53). A current national team skateboarder who was in the 2014 Nanjing YOG demonstration also experienced the same treatment and had a similar attitude towards the authorities:

Hui: These associations have interfered too much. This is why I think skateboarding isn't developing as fast as it should, because they do not know what we need. They just naively assuming that just by organising contests with crappy ramps would make skateboarders happy, but the fact is, we are not happy at all. There was one time during

the Shanghai X-Games contest, it was the one contest that I actually wanted to join

because I watched the American X-Games on TV before. But when I got there at the

contest venue, I was told that I couldn't join the contest because that I did not participate

in their previous contests before. However, when I turned around, there were foreign

skaters who have also never participated in those contests before but was managed to

sign up. That was when I decided to stay away from the system. I think skateboarding

should not about competitions of such kind, so that's why I have never like taking part in

contests. I think filming videos on the street is when I can feel the freedom that

skateboarding gives me. (interview, 2014)

Even though the national team skateboarders would skate at the Sports Lab during the day,

when they had their time off they still would not give up the opportunity to skate the 'local

spots'. Sometimes they almost felt like skating back on the street was where they belonged,

rather than at the skatepark at the Sports Lab, even though it was very well built.
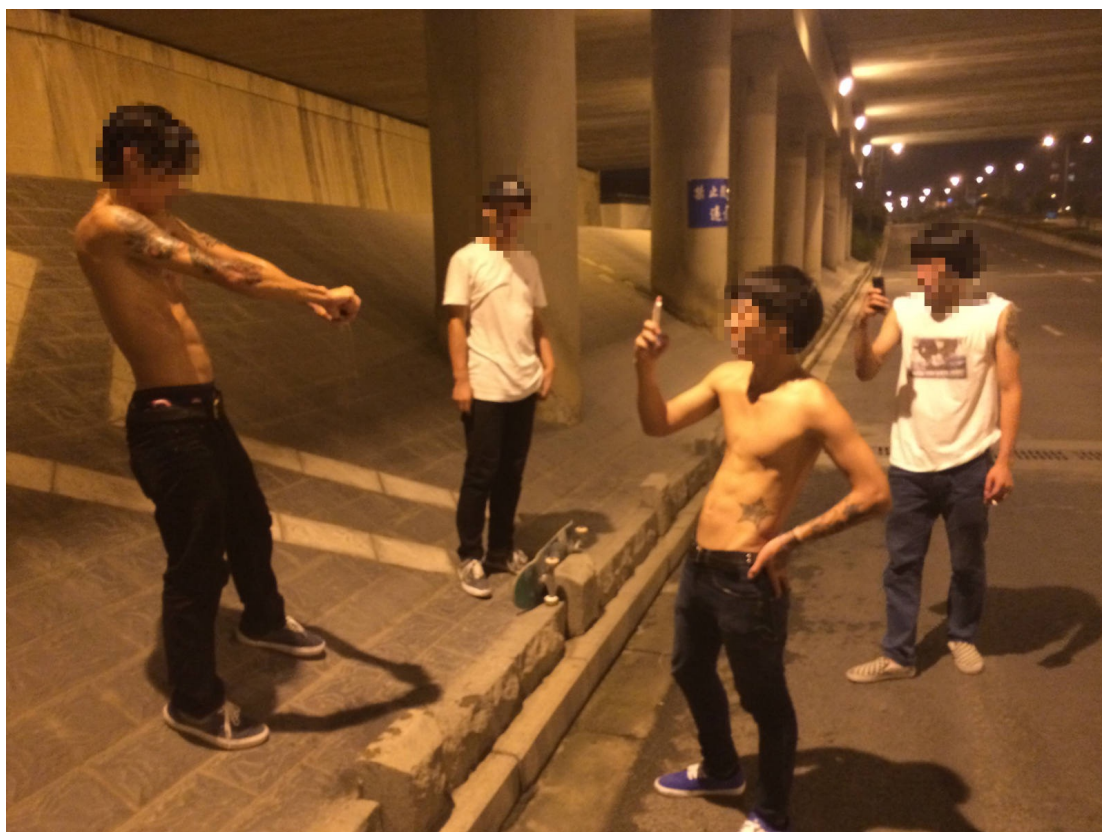
(Figure9.4, Some national team skateboarders went out at night to skate on the street in

Nanjing)

When this national team skateboarder was asked about his opinion on the organisation of the

national team, he also criticised the way it was founded and how they were forced to be a

part of it:

Hui: I actually don't know how it was organised. Nobody even asked me if I wanted to

be in it and all of a sudden, I was notified that I am a member of the national team now.

(interview, 2014)

Thorpe and Wheaton (2011) comment on this trend of cultural resistance of action sports participants who are resistant towards the 'institutionalisation' of action sports and their incorporation into the 'mainstream sporting event structures that expect and/or impose national identification' like the Olympics and the X-Games, 'thus causing some tensions for action sport participants whose transnational sporting identity takes precedence over nationality' (see also Wheaton 2004b). However, from my observations, the cultural resistance of skateboarding participants seemed only towards the very specific Chinese official institutionalisation of skateboarding because of the lack of authenticity and cultural awareness of the that person. However, they have been less critical towards the skateboarding competitions such as the X-Games that have incorporated mainstream sporting events structures because of the emphasis on authenticity in the design of the skateparks that are used in those competitions, something which the national skateboarding contests have always been criticized for by the skateboarding communities.

> Hui: What I hate the most actually about the contests in China (both organised by CESA and others by non-skateboarding companies), is that the design of the skateparks was so terrible! I think there is very little respect for the skateboarders who are expected to perform on those courses. Many years ago, there was one time during a contest when I was doing a trick on a rail and as soon as my skateboard landed on the ramp, the ramp collapsed. This could be very dangerous for skateboarders and BMXers, especially on those big ramps. I think we were treated with so little respect, that one time I exploded

and I smashed my skateboard on the floor and quit the contest immediately.   (interview,

2014)

(Figure 9.5, In the waiting room at the Sports Lab, the skateboarding athletes were the only

ones among the four sports that did not have uniforms)

The team captain and the organisation of the day-to-day practice at the Sports Lab

Team captain and cultural intermediaries

In total, 24 professional skateboarders - 16 of the top international professional skateboarders

and 8 from the Chinese national team - were invited to the 2014 Nanjing YOG Sports Lab

skateboarding demonstrations. ISF (The International Skateboard Federation) and CESA

were in charge of the organisation of the skateboarding event from each side. Contrary to the

international skateboarding team, on the official announcement from the Chinese side, there

is a team leader or team captain (领队) - Che - in the national skateboarding team. The team

leader acts like a big brother figure on the team as he was the first generation of professional

skateboarders in China and has earned respect from other professional skateboarders in the

national team over a number of decades in the history of Chinese skateboarding culture,

because of his various achievements in the skateboarding industry. At the same time, he has

been acknowledged by the officials for his achievements on the national skateboarding team

in previous international skateboarding contests.   This therefore almost functioned as a

mutual point of reference for negotiations between the agency of the national skateboarding

team and the power institution of CESA.

I argue that, in the development of the Chinese skateboarding industry, cultural

intermediaries function as key agents of the commercial and governmental incorporation

process. In the day-to-day organisation of the skateboarding demonstration in the 2014

Nanjing YOG, the team captain of the national team can be seen as an exemplar of this

argument. There has been much research undertaken by academics around the topic of

cultural intermediaries, a term developed by Boudieu (1984; 1996). Research indicates that

this term is valuable in the discussion of not only consumption (e.g. Bovone, 2005; Entwistle,

2006; McFall, 2004; Moor, 2008; Negus, 2002; Nixon and Crewe, 2004; Smith Maguire,

2008, 2012; Wright, 2005) in cultural/creative industries research, but also in terms of

cultural production. Smith, Maguire and Matthews (2012, p. 551) argue that 'cultural

intermediary research offers an important complement to the study of cultural production,

within which questions of agency are typically focused on consumers, and questions of power on institutions. The concept of cultural intermediaries usefully prioritizes issues of agency, negotiation and power, moving the everyday, contested practices of market agents to the fore for the study of the production of culture' (see also Garnham, 2005; Havens et al., 2009; Smith Maguire and Matthews, 2010). If the team managers in the previous chapter exemplified the role of cultural intermediaries in the process of the commercial incorporation of skateboarding culture, when it comes to the governmental incorporation of the culture in China and the negotiation between it and the authorities, the team captain and the 'big brother' of the national team can be seen as the frontier between the agency of the culture and the power of the institutions. In this particular cultural field, team managers could be seen as biased by their commercial interests that might tangle with the interests of the authorities, whereas the 'big brother' always stands with the skateboarders, skating with them in the field, instead of sitting in an office or a meeting room. There was an example of a team manager who was with the team riders during the YOG, but still struggled to manage some of the most rebellious skateboarders in the team and was seen as representative of the commercial interests that they were exploited by.

One of the first days during the 2014 Nanjing YOG, CESA was giving money to the skateboarders for their travel expenses to Nanjing. Most skateboarders travelled to Nanjing by themselves but the skateboarders from the Feidian team had their plane tickets bought for them by the team manager, so many of them traveled together to Nanjing. When the team manger went to collect the travel expenses to put back into the

company's account, one skateboarder refused to give the money back because that he

thinks that he worked hard for the demonstrations and he deserve to have the travel

expenses as bonus. The team manager later expressed his frustration in managing

skateboarders at the 2014 Nanjing YOG and said that he in the end, decided to let all

their sponsored skateboarders to keep the travel expenses to show equal treatment.

(Field note, Nanjing, 2014)

In contrast, the 'big brother' has a level of respect - almost obedience - that nobody else on

the team could challenge, being the first Chinese professional skateboarder, as well as the

first Chinese skateboarder to win China a gold medal in the first Asia Indoor Games in

Thailand. Che had received many sponsorships, from local entrepreneurs to international

corporations. Like many other professional skateboarders, he was an excellent example of

cultural intermediaries in terms of shaping a taste (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 365; see also 1996, p.

229) for skateboarding cultural goods, such as skateboarding equipment and sportswear

products, and more generally the image of skateboarders in China. Moreover, because of his

achievements in winning a skateboarding gold medal in the Asia Indoor Games and his

persistent appearances in national and international skateboarding competitions, and being a

skateboarding icon even in mainstream media, he is also an exemplar of cultural

intermediaries in that he employed his professional expertise to a great extent. He also

legitimised (ibid, p. 357) skateboarding culture in both of the dimensions illustrated by Smith

Maguire (2014, p. 21)   - the legitimisation of (1) professional skateboarders as an emerging

occupation, and (2) to legitimise skateboarding culture in China from a subculture to a

cultural industry and an accepted form of sports culture, through his skateboarding

performances and the texts (Miller, 2014, p. 25-26) that were generated, sometimes also with

the collaborative effort of cultural intermediation (ibid) from CESA. Many of my

participants have acknowledged Che's achievements in both dimensions. For instance, an

assistant brand manager of a transnational corporation said:

J: Yes, the reason why I said Che Lin is the best (Chinese professional skateboarder) is

because he had to work hard for everything he has. Coming from where he came from,

he never had anything handed or given to him … translating (foreign skateboarding

videos and interviews) is completely different than Che Lin saying from his mouth to the

community, you know what I mean? You need to create local content, which is gonna

help teach, which is gonna help educate and grow this market. That's the only way that

skateboarding is ever gonna grow, here in China. You need people like Che Lin, like Dan,

like Huifeng. Influential athletes. Those handful of athletes to come back to the

community and tell the people underneath, how and why they became like that. You just

need someone to create that content. (interview, 2014)

Many other participants have also expressed their opinions on how Che still deserves the top

salary among the Chinese professional skateboarders that he is paid, not only because of his

technical skills in skateboarding, but also the particular values and norms that he promotes.

Another team manager from a transnational corporation highly approved Che's professional

attitude and work ethic being a professional skateboarder and thinks that he is an example that younger skateboarders should learn from:

> King: Che is very professional compared to some of the other professional skateboarders today. There has not been a single competition where he stands on the podium and did not show his skateboard with stickers of logos of his sponsors. (interview, 2014)

Even when there were criticisms of the national team, there were very few negative comments towards Che's inclusion on the national team. For example, a local skate shop owner and a known rebel and critic towards mainstream values commented during our interview:

> Yan: Outsiders only appreciate the look of skateboarders, that's why we have now some professional skateboarders who look really cool and rebellious but with not the equivalent level of skills to be a professional skateboarder … you see criticisms towards the authorities and the skateboarders who work for CESA, but still, you can't ignore that skaters like Che who have that ability to gain acknowledgement from the authorities. The fact that Che is on the national team means that skateboarding is receiving acknowledgement in the country, and the acknowledgement from the general public will also increase with it. (interview, 2014)

Opinions from interviews have demonstrated how Che was regarded as an example of what a 'professional athlete' should be like and his role in relation to both the classical Bourdieu's (1984) idea of legitimising culture and reproducing class positions, as he became a 'well-paid' professional skateboarder 'starting from nothing', and the more contemporary idea of cultural intermediaries of 'their perceived role in promoting particular values, norms and lifestyles' (Moor, 2012, p. 564).

Managing the national team

Che is regarded by CESA as a potential leader of the national team, becoming a more professional asset for CESA in international skateboarding events. The secretary of CESA was concerned with the subcultural behaviours and lifestyles of some of the current national skateboarding team and felt frustrated about managing them because of their historically resistant attitudes. Nevertheless, she highly approved of Che's professional attitude - healthy image and appropriate behaviours when needed - when representing skateboarding in mainstream Chinese media as well as in international events like the 2014 Nanjing YOG. She also expressed her expectations that Che could be a potential national team coach to lead the team towards a healthier, positive development if skateboarding becomes included in the official Olympic Games in the future. One of the key concerns for CESA is that the national team may not display 'accepted' and 'manageable' attitudes and behaviours when representing the Chinese public in international events.

From the perspective of the national team skateboarders, everyone calls Che the 'big brother',

symbolising his high social status within the skateboarding community. This is not only

because of his cultural capital but also because of the close relationship they have with him.

They trusted Che to stand in front of the team and negotiate the benefits of the team with

CESA and so make more 'sensible' decisions for the younger brothers. The secretary of

CESA hosted a dinner on the first night when I arrived, with Che and another representative

of a domestic skateboarding company, the chief editor of a long established Chinese

skateboarding magazine, who is also an early generation Chinese skateboarder. The meeting

was held in a small restaurant near the hotel where athletes were staying. Many other

younger national team skateboarders also came to have dinner in the same restaurant, but

they were sitting at another table. While Che was having a relatively serious conversation on

our table, he was also drinking with the skateboarders at their table in between the different

topics of conversation.

During the 10 days in Nanjing, Che was always the one who organised dinners to gather the

national team riders, and he was also the one who would initiate the drinking. However, even

though Che had organised dinners and was drinking with the younger skateboarders on the

national team, he rarely went out with the younger skateboarders after midnight. During the

10 days of the skateboarding demonstration at the 2014 Nanjing YOG, he was always the

most dedicated athlete, waking early and being the first to get on the first bus going to the

Sports Lab. He was an example of what a 'professional athlete' should be like. Already in his

30s at the 2014 Nanjing YOG, Che demonstrated no less technical ability than the younger

professional skateboarders in showcasing the skateboarding skills for which he was still appraised. Moreover, his most significant role lay in his ability to manage and keep the Chinese national team working smoothly with CESA. There were many occasions when younger professional skateboarders complained, especially about the early mornings and the busy schedule of the Sports Lab skateboarding demonstration. On these occasions the secretary of CESA had to turn to Che's for help in managing and motivating the national team skateboarders to 'do their job'.

Because of the lifestyle of some of the national team skateboarders, an issue emerged during the 2014 YOG over a lack of commitment from some of the national team riders (e.g. not wanting to wake up for early morning visits to the Sports Lab). The secretary of CESA, after failing to persuade the team skateboarders herself, turned to Che for help of. To begin with, Che was waking everyone up in the mornings, but still there were complaints from the skateboarders about not being able to catch enough sleep because of the parties at night. As a consequence, Che came up with a shift table plan that assigned the skateboarders on the national team who were less inclined to have late night party habits to cover more of the morning shifts so that the ones who liked to party and drink at night could wake up later, giving those who did the morning shifts the afternoon off.

In the day-to-day management of the skateboarding national team, Che has played a crucial role and has demonstrated 'how authority and credibility are linked to the relative congruence between a cultural intermediary's habitus, and the dominant schemes of value

and appreciation at work in their particular fields and markets' (Smith Maguire and Matthews, 2012 P. 557).

In conclusion, I argue that the concept of cultural intermediaries is useful in examining the commercial and governmental incorporation of skateboarding culture in China because it provides the lens through which to look at the issues of 'agency, negotiation and power, moving the everyday, contested practices of market agents to the fore for the study of the production of culture' (Smith Maguire and Matthews, 2012, p. 551; see also Garnham, 2005; Havens et al., 2009; Smith Maguire and Matthews, 2010).

Local authorities and the skateparks

Building skateboarding infrastructure

One of the emerging themes and a popular criticism of the governmental incorporation of skateboarding, and the official and commercial organisation of skateboarding contests, is the issue of the poor quality of skateparks. The building and promotion of skateparks is also the most significant manifestation of the local authorities' incorporation of the skateboarding industry. I have looked at two cases from Beijing and Shanghai - the first case is Beijing International Fashion Sports Park in Daxing district, Beijing, previously called Woodward Beijing, an international branch of a world famous US based company, Camp Woodward; the second case I examine in this chapter is SMP International Skatepark in Yangpu district, Shanghai. I suggest that this follows some conventions in the creative industry debate and

more specifically, the creative cities and creative clusters debate in the cultural/creative industry research field. This is because skateboarding culture provides the local authorities with opportunities which are characterised by Oakley and O'Connor (2015, p. 208) as 'capital-led', 'smaller-scale, place-based', along with 'committed arts organisations' and 'broad-based local governance' that might encourages more beneficial cultural development than Florida's (2008) concept of creative cities.   This was implemented in many Western cities and was simply 'papering over urban decay, adding a glossy veneer that prepares the city for reinvestment' (Leslie and Rants, 2013, p. 85) or assisting with 'articulation of neoliberal economics with cool culture' (McGuigan, 2009, p. 298). Gu (2015, p. 246) argues that there are two kinds of the Chinese model of creative clusters - the 'authorisation of the use of inner city spaces by creative industries and to use this as a model to regenerate other parts of the city'. The governmental incorporation of skateboarding culture in both the cases I examine in this chapter seems to fall into the second model.

Beijing International Fashion Sports Park and the Daxing district

The grand opening and the Daxing district

Beijing International Fashion Sports Park is located inside the four-star tourist resort, Beijing Xingming Late Resort. Unlike the official report of an investment of RMB 21 million according to China Daily (Higgins, 2010), my participants in the industry and some who worked for the project say it was rumoured to be a RMB 40 million investment from the Beijing Daxing district and Beijing city government. With 4000 square meters indoor and another 4000 square meters of outdoor space, this resort was one of the major government

endorsed projects in the post-Beijing-Olympic era. It was selected as one of the eight Sports

Industry Concentration districts in Beijing in 2008, named by the National Sports Bureau as

the National Youth Camp. Also, in 2010 it was awarded the first set of leading sports tourism

programmes by the China National Sports Bureau and the China National Tourism

Administration (see also Beijing International Fashion Sports Park, n,d.). Along with the deal

of the construction of the skatepark, there was also a partnership deal with the NBC and the

importation of the global action sports competitions such as the AST World Professional

Extreme Sports Tournament. On 15th May 2010, the grand opening of the Beijing

International Fashion Sports Park attracted high domestic and international attention by

having the top professional athletes in the skateboarding world and industry leaders from the

global skateboarding industry in attendance.

The rebranding of the Daxing district from an agricultural district producing watermelons, to

a fashionable creative sports district was seen by Western media as a successful move

towards regeneration and a cornerstone for the Western media and Chinese authorities'

preparation for the Olympics. 'A key parcel in a development plan in Daxing, a rural district

an hour south of the city centre that's renowned for watermelons, Woodward Beijing --

officially called Beijing Fashion Skate Park for reasons lost in translation -- resulted from a

conversation four years ago in New York between a Chinese business delegation and

executives at NBC Sports preparing to broadcast the 2008 Beijing Olympics' (Higgins,

2010). Gary Ream, founder of the US company that had signed the initial contract with the

Beijing International Fashion Sports Park, Woodward is also the president of the ISF

(International Skateboarding Federation). The ISF has been one of the key forces in pushing

skateboarding in the Olympic Games - 'The International Skateboarding Federation (ISF) is

formally organised and incorporated as Skateboarding's International Federation and World

Governing Body' (Mission Statement of the International Skateboarding Federation, n,d.).

Hence, the opening of the Beijing International Fashion Sports Park painted a picture with

the future of a creative cluster and an Olympic incubator located in the political centre of

China, all of which seems promising in developing skateboarding culture with the assistance

of 'foreign management and imported expertise' as happened with 'China's culture

industries' (Fund, 2016, p. 3007). However, the local authority of the Daxing district

government seemed to be satisfied to only have the 'biggest indoor skatepark in Asia' under

their belt but did not care to keep it running, not to mention keeping some of the initial

promises that it proposed from the beginning:

> 'In 2012, Camp Woodward - a highly successful US company that provides action sport
>
> training camps for emerging athletes and passionate youth - opened its first international
>
> facility in the Daxing district of Beijing. Built on a four-stat resort property … the facility
>
> offers day and overnight programs throughout the year, including skateboarding, BMX
>
> freestyle, inline skating, graphic design, video production and digital photography,
>
> dry-land snowboarding and skiing, music lessons and a music recording studio, as well
>
> as Chinese or English language classes'
>
> (Thorpe and Wheaton, 2014, p. 49).

In reality, the company that runs the Beijing International Fashion Sports Park has less than a handful of employees and has very little ability and outside support for running anything that was promised other than as a training facility for the national skateboarding and junior skateboarding team and the national snowboarding team in the summer. Because of the skatepark's remote location outside the city centre, not many action sports participants would make the effort, apart from those who were already professionals and a couple of amateur enthusiasts. The Western commentaries that were sceptical about the promises of the Beijing International Fashion Sports Park were concerned about the 'authenticity of action sports culture' (Higgins, 2010), that the local and central authorities might diminish, but are yet to predict the miscarriage of the creative industry side of the business.

On the brighter side, since the management of the Beijing International Fashion Sports Park was left to the current management team, all of who are early generation skateboarders, these have functioned as the link to the missing dots of the Chinese CIC model - SMEs. The current team has been actively seeking collaboration with:

1. The national authorities - CESA and the national snowboarding team in training programmes for national athletes and junior teams in addition to the organic process of nurturing potential talent from the skateboarding schools;

2. The local authorities in terms of providing expertise in skatepark design for potential projects and national contests;

3. The local and national SMEs to organise cultural events both in the Beijing International Fashion Sports Park and in the central areas where they provide support for skatepark construction.

SMP skatepark and the Shanghai Yangpu district

'The world's largest skatepark' - SMP Skatepark

The same story had happened with the SMP skatepark in Shanghai before - 'In 2005, governments in China spent a reported $12 million of the $26 million cost to build a three-acre concrete skate park -- the world's largest -- in Shanghai. And on Thursday the Asian X Games begin in Shanghai for the fourth consecutive year' (Higgins, 2010). However, in comparison to the Beijing International Fashion Sports Park, it was a piece from a much bigger puzzle. O'Conner and Gu (2014, p.3) have rightly pointed out that 'Shanghai has more CICs (Creative Industry Clusters) than Beijing; they are much more concentrated in the urban centre and are thus potentially more integrated into the urban fabric than in the capital. That is, they are more akin to cluster models in developed Western countries'. This is also true about the Shanghai New KIC (Knowledge and Innovation Community) City in Yangpu district where the SMP skatepark is located.

Knowledge and Innovation Community (KIC) "is a large, mixed-use technology innovation community developed amid several of Shanghai's premier universities. Located in the sub center of Wujiaochang in Yangpu District, about nine kilometres (5.6 mi) from the city centre, KIC's 49 hectares (121 ac) and 762,217 square meters (8.2

million sq ft) of space is designed to foster creative and entrepreneurial culture. The development of this high quality mixed-use urban environment—combining office space with research and development (R&D), educational, training, investment, and incubator services—especially appeals to young people. Through design, programming, and ongoing activities, KIC brings together students, researchers, entrepreneurs, and residents in a "three-zone linkage" of urban office, retail, and mixed-use community

(Knowledge and Innovation Community, 2015)

Similarly with the Beijing International Fashion Sports Park, the SMP skatepark was also seen as a big 'achievement' for the local authorities, and to have the 'biggest skatepark in the world' was a big trophy on the table. However, in contrast to the local authority of the Beijing International Fashion Sports Park that has no part in the daily operation of the skatepark, the local authority, Shanghai Extreme Sports Association, has been partly involved in the operation of the SMP skatepark after its grand opening. A current manager of the SMP skatepark told me about its history after the opening:

Jiang: At first the Shanghai Extreme Sports Association opened the opportunities for local businesses to come in. But the early businesses run here were shops who sell action sports equipment. There were some commercial summer camps for the local kids to learn action sports, but mostly it was just renting the slots to shops that were making a little bit of profits. There were also events that the guy who use to run this place organised, but

because of his 'outsider' identity, it was hard to host big events and attract people to participate. (interview, 2015)

When the current manager was asked about the involvement and support of the local authorities, he said:

Jiang: There is not much financial support from the local authorities; the support from them was more symbolic. They would sanction our events so that we could apply for commercial funding in the name of an officially sanctioned event. The deal we have with the local authority is that we have to organise at least two contests each year. We have to find our own sponsorships for the events … It's still not easy to find enough financial sponsorships for the events. Sometimes we do events that do not make money but just to promote the skatepark as a marketing strategy such as the kids summer camps. (interview, 2015)

The main income for the SMP, as the manager explains, is from ticket sales for the skateboarding schools as there are regular visitors, including kids and their parents, who buy tickets or membership cards. The manager of the SMP also revealed that the big skateparks in China are forming a skatepark union membership partnership so that people can buy national skatepark memberships for all the skateparks in China as there are more and more parents who would like to take their kids to different cities in the summer for skateboarding

camps. There is therefore the hope of promoting further membership sales for all of the

skateparks, including Beijing International Fashion Sports Park.

I then went to the Yangpu Extreme Sports Association trying to find out the reasons behind

the lack of support for the SMP skatepark management team. At the time that I conducted

my fieldwork, the local associations seemed to have put their primary focus on the traditional

sports and the training of the junior teams of such sports. An official from the Yangpu

Extreme Sports Association explained the frustration of the local authorities in terms of

support of the action sports events:

> Hu: At the moment we can only rely on the commercial operation of the action sports
>
> events and contests because of the limitation of our manpower here in the local action
>
> sports associations. We need to find professional events management companies to
>
> operate the action sports competitions since it hasnot yet reached a professional level of
>
> organisation. At the same time, we also need to provide profit potentials for the real
>
> estate companies who might provide us with the most financial support. I think the
>
> situation could be improved if CESA and the local associations could work together
>
> towards a set of conventions and cooperation when organising national action sports
>
> contests. Youth sports industry has its very high potential for growth. At the moment we
>
> see enthusiasm from mostly parents who are spending a lot of money taking their kids to
>
> different places to take part in training and contests. This is something that I see that can

be further developed into an industry that benefits the sports culture but not the tourism

industry. (interview, 2014)

Even though there are annual mega events such as the Kia Asia X-Games that were

sanctioned and hosted by the national authorities such as CESA and local authorities such as

the Yangpu Government, Shanghai Extreme Sports Association and the Yangpu Extreme

Sports Associations in the KIC Stadium, it was also as Fund (2016, p. 3007) argues, highly

dependent on the 'global capitals, foreign management and imported expertise' in the

organisation of such mega events. The secretary of CESA invited me to the meetings during

the 2014 YOG with the transnational events management corporation that was organising the

Kia Asia X-Games. They seemed to have very little room for the Chinese counterpart to be

involved in the decision making process but only to provide 'official support', which is

limited to its performance as an official body to sanction the event. The secretary of CESA

has also claimed that there is, at the moment, a lack of professional expertise in organising

international action sports events. However, many local government representatives also

came to Nanjing during the 2014 Nanjing YOG to have meetings with CESA to discuss

potential action sports events to 'rebrand' the local city image in third-tier Chinese cities.

Many of the projects were also in partnership with local real estate corporations. However,

the officials in CESA and the local authorities in Shanghai Yangpu Extreme Sports

Association were already aware of the lack of what O'Connor and Gu (2014, p. 14-15) argue

is the 'soft infrastructure' of national action sports events and contests, to 'address their

serious underperformance' in the incorporation of the skateboarding industry into a national

and local scale, that requires the closer cooperation of the national and local authorities.

Real estate driven development of the skateparks and cultural intermediaries

There is a long history of criticisms among the skateboarding communities towards the

purpose of the real estate driven development of skateparks and the entrepreneurial interest

of the local authorities. The Beijing International Fashion Sports Park and the Shanghai SMP

skatepark are the most iconic examples of such criticisms:

> Ma: All the 'biggest skateparks' in China were built by this creative industry/sports
>
> industry/tourism industry selling point. Something that mutually benefit the local
>
> authority and the real estate companies. The local authority needed something to
>
> regenerate their district and the real estate companies want to purchase land use rights for
>
> a cheaper price. And when they have reached their goal, no one was left to care enough
>
> to run and maintain them. (interview, 2014)

The same trend can be found in the creative industry developments in China as O'Connor

and Gu (2014, p. 5-7) observe, 'major real estate development projects, they opened up great

opportunities for the local entrepreneurial state. The idea of creative industry "parks" as

CICs was often called, provided traction for the new creative industries agenda amongst

local authorities' in local areas like Xingming Lake Resort where the Beijing International

Fashion Sports Park is located, and the new KIC city that has the SMP skatepark in Shanghai,

that are 'As officially designated, geographically bounded (usually with walls, fences and guards) spaces CICs clearly derived administratively from these industry bases – most of which had minimal connection with the urban spaces (or in some cases rural – Keane 2012) in which they were situated'. However, in this case, the 'opportunity', even though it has positive commercial impacts - such as providing possible venues for skateboarding events and contests, and the benefit for the governmental incorporation of skateboarding culture in China for its training facilities - is far from being 'great' for Chinese skateboarding culture and its amateur participants.

O'Connor and Gu (2014, p.3) reached a conclusion regarding their assessment of the success of the CIC (Creative Industry Clusters) programme in Shanghai, which explained the lack of support for the operation of the SMP skatepark, because these programmes are 'heavily real estate driven with little attention to the specific requirements of the creative sector'. In addition, they have argued that, because of the limitations of the 'specific local challenges' of such CICs, 'there is a disjunction between CICs and the wider creative/cultural milieu' in terms of the intensity of cultural events (ibid, P.12-13). Even though both skateparks have hosted skateboarding contests annually, there are a lot more skateboarding events that are incorporated within other street cultures and music cultures that are held inside the city centres, such as the House of Vans events.

The same issue of a lack of attention to the requirement of the creative sector also applies to the criticisms towards the lack of maintenance of the SMP. A Chinese skatepark designer

told me that when the SMP was going to finish, the last step of the construction was to put a layer on the floors so that the floor would not crack so easily. But a rumour was around that when the investment team went to inspect progress, they refused to invest more money for the top layer, because it was good enough to just have the name of the 'biggest skatepark in the world', having it with a good quality was not their concern.

State controlled cultural intermediary

Gu (2015, p. 252-254) looks at the M50 in Shanghai as a successful example of 'a different imagery of the city' that promotes the 'Shanghai urban cultural sensibility' that attracted international attention. The M50 model, as Gu argues, displays a useful structure that CIC models can learn from, such as its close partnership with SMEs and the presence of cultural intermediaries, such as the managers of SOEs (State Owned Enterprises), who significantly facilitate the success of M50.

The story of the Beijing International Fashion Sports Park has followed a similar track. When I asked the manager of the current management team who he thinks pushed the development of skateboarding culture in China and in what ways, this interesting story came up:

Ma: The manager of the state owned company, Zhou, has been the key reason why Beijing Fashion Sports Park happened. He has a very influential social background and has close relationships with the Daxing district government. He founded a sub-company

that is under the Daxing state owned enterprise to attract investments in order to buy the

contract with the US company, Woodward, and also to import the more advanced soft

structure of the international action sports competitions, of which has a close relationship

with international media companies such as NBC. Some of the most popular action

sports contests were imported to China by the same company that Zhou had founded. He

took the officials of the Daxing district to the Woodward camp in the US and showed

them ideas that could be incorporated by the Daxing district, such as the media and art

education aspects and the potential for the future growth of the tourism industry for

Daxing district. With the investment from many of the local officials and the utmost

support of the Daxing district officials for the land use license, he pushed skateboarding

culture to a peak that national skateboarding contests never dreamed of achieving in the

last 10 years before the introduction of the international skateboarding contests imported

by Zhou. For the first time in the history of the skateboarding contests in China, we have

witnessed what the professional skateboarding contest organisation team is capable of

and the potential of mega skateboarding events that could be accomplished in

cooperation with international media corporations. (interview, 2014)

Even though the disadvantage of this model is that the Beijing International Fashion Sports

Park, like many other CICs, has 'failed to secure further investment in culture as a result of

its being too closely affiliated with urban development' (Gu, 2015, p. 254), it has arguably

stimulated the development of skateboarding culture and the level of expertise in event

management within the industry to a great extent. It has also encouraged potential guidance

for producing a soft structure for the national and local authorities to improve the organisation of national and local skateboarding contests.

Conclusion

There are two levels of government intervention in Chinese skateboarding culture, one being the central government organisations' involvement in managing national events and the organizational discourse of the skateboarding industry; the second level is the local governments' desire to regenerate local districts utilizing the image of skateboarding in their local developments.

As was observed in the 2014 Nanjing Youth Olympic Games, the new leadership of the central government organisations brought new ways of communication between the organisations and the skateboarding community. Nonetheless, the reception of such involvement is largely dependent on how well 'cultural intemediaries' work together. -In the case of the Chinese skateboarding industry, this is often reflected by the interaction and relationshop between representatives from the organisations and key members of the skateboarding community, such as the 'team capitains' or the 'big brothers' of skateboarding communities.

Previously, the desire of government organisations to promote the sport aspect of skateboarding culture resulted in an authoritarian way of organising institutionalised national skateboarding events, which caused a great level of collective resistance from Chinese

skateboarding communities (Sedo, 2010). However, the potential inclusion of skateboarding in the Olympic Games structure brought new opportunities that are embraced by the transnational corporations who now dominate the skateboarding industry. Because of the shared interest between the governmental organisations and the transnational corporations, closer cooperation was established between the two in terms of skateboarding events. Nevertheless, the Chinese skateboarding community, especially those who had previous experiences with the national authorities, have not yet recoverd trust in the authorities. Moreover, the institutional structure of national events still has very little tolerance towards disobedience in the skateboarding community. As a result, many skateboarders would rather put aside the conflicts in commercial representations of skateboarding culture to realign with commercial organisations against the authorities.

At the local level, building the infrastructure for skateboarding presents new opportunities for local government to regenerate local districts. From the two most prominent cases in Beijing and Shanghai, similarities can be found in what many scholars observed in the development of Creative Industries Clusters (O'Conner and Gu, 2014; Gu, 2015). Both cases are embraced by the local authorities as they attract real estate capital to regenerate the local districts. However, the benefits of such initiatives to the skateboarding industry and to the city is limited by its ability to sustain funding and support for the development of culture rather than urban development.

Chapter 10 Cultural Labourers in the Chinese Skateboarding Industry

Introduction

The labour conditions inside the skateboarding industry, though seemimgly central to the subcultural discourse, are left almost completely unexamnined within academia. In this chapter, I aim to explore the career prospects in the Chinese skateboarding industry and the working conditions of the current cultural workers within the Chinese skateboarding industry. I will start by illustrating one example of the typical production process in the Chinese skateboarding industry by looking at my observations of the House of Vans event in Shanghai and how the production of the skateboarding industry is organised and operated in practice. I will then move on to look at the details of each major occupation in the industry, from skateboarders to videographers and team managers, by looking at the development of their career pathways and their reflections on them. I will further examine and compare the similarities and differences in TNCs and SMEs' strategies and the role of different occupations within different settings. The different culture and economic environment has also played a role in the choices and working conditions of cultural workers in the Chinese skateboarding industry, so this will also be looked at as an embedded and more ambivalent factor. In achieving all of the above objectives, I aim to focus on question of 'subjective experiences' (Hesmondalgh and Baker, 2011, p. 50 -51) by looking into details of the interviews and observations of the cultural workers in Chinese skateboarding industry and how 'various forces … shape people's experience' and 'different factors operate in the specific field of work'.

House of Vans event

The Vans of Vans event took place from 12th - 14th September 2014 at Shanghai 央镜

(Central Studios), a photography studio that also functions as a hire venue, located in the

上海新天地创意园 (Shanghai Xintiandi Creative Park). Prior to this event, Vans had

also organised a documentary film contest, in which 10 skate shops from 10 different

cities participated. The skateshop owners, videographers and skaters from all of the

teams that participated were invited to this event, and the winner of the contest was

announced on the night of 13th September 2014. I flew to Shanghai on the night of Friday

12th with the videographer from the Beijing team. The real work began on the second

day, after catching up with each other at the venue on the first night. I followed two Vans

team riders, (one from Shenzhen and one who flew here from Hong Kong) to the venue

early in the afternoon to shoot some clips for their promotional video and to skate the

ramps designed by a skatepark designer and a local skatepark owner. Members of the

marketing team led by the Vans action sports manager were running around the venue to

supervise the event. The manager was busy either talking to people or doing interviews

with different media outlets. By the time we arrived he was at the front entrance giving

out passes to the team riders and other participants of the documentary contest. Panda

Mei, a skateboarder and graphic designer, was drawing on a white welcome wall for the

entrance. Walking into the studios, the Vans shoes that had his drawings for House of

Vans was on display. On the walls, there was a photo exhibition by the skateboarding photographer Liang Shao, displaying the photographs he took during the Vans video series Wish You Were Here - which was a skateboarding tour around China including Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong, as well as Seoul in Korea. Liang Shao was also invited to hold a skateboarding photography workshop for the crowd. There was a big hall where a series of activities were held, such as a free tattoo stall, fun zine workshops and so on. The main hall was where the skateboarding ramps were put. The stage was set up for bands to play at night and would be where the documentary film award ceremony would take place. The two team riders were already trying out the ramps, and there were also skateboarding videographers there to shoot photos and videos of them. After the ceremony, there was a big party held at the famous live house - Arkham, where a group of musicians and bands played for the fans. During the gap between the HoV (House of Vans) event and Arkham, the team manager of Vans organized all the team riders and some friends to have dinner together and reminded them of the filming plans for the following day. He also apologised that he couldn't come because of the third day event at the venue, which he would need to attend to ensure the event goes smoothly.

We were woken up by the Chinese American filmmaker that was shooting the Vans video in the morning. The riders seemed quite used to this ritual of being woken up and motivated by the filmmaker to go out and shoot videos. The filmmaker briefed the team with the filming plans of the day, and all the team set off together to head to a burger place in Shanghai where they would shoot some clips for the next Vans video and team

riders would be interviewed about their lifestyles and how they would hang out during

filming tours, as well as about the local culture of Shanghai. After lunch, we went to the

spot where they would shoot the videos. There were six Vans team riders who flew to

Shanghai from different cities such as Shenzhen, Kunming and Hongkong, along with

one American videographer who lived in Shanghai and took freelance jobs for different

companies, plus a photographer who lived in a small surfing village near Shenzhen. It

was what is called a 'ledge spot', in a small park in the centre of Shanghai, where the

team riders perform tricks that involve jumping and grinding or sliding on the edge of

marble ledges. The filmmaker would ask the skateboarders what they wanted to do, and

the skateboarders would trust the filmmaker to find a good angle to film the trick The

filmmaker would either follow them on his skateboard or find an angle to stay and shoot

the clips from. The photographer did not talk too much during the whole process but

observed the skateboarders and the tricks they were doing so he could find an angle to

shoot photos of them from.Sometimes he also shot some photos of the filming process, or

even some portraits of the skateboarders and the filmmaker.

(fieldnote, Shanghai, 2014)

Above is the production process of the Vans skateboarding team in a typical day during the

summer when the House of Vans events tour around the country. Sometimes there are also

tours where they go abroad and film in a foreign setting, normally with less team riders but

at least one filmmaker and most of time they will still hire one photographer to join the team

to document the tour and later publish photographs for their media use. In this chapter I aim

to look at the career pathways of the cultural labourers within the Chinese skateboarding industry like those in above fieldnote, and also the ones that wish to become a labourer in the industry.

Developing a skateboarding career

When examining the career pathways of skateboarders, it is important to look at the career developments and experiences of different levels of skateboarding careers in the Chinese skateboarding industry. There are conventionally four stages of sponsorship for skateboarders in the skateboarding industry: skateshop sponsorship, flow sponsorship, amateur sponsorship and professional sponsorship. In this section I will elaborate on the experiences of my research participants in the skateboarding industry from different levels of sponsorship.

Skateshop sponsorship

The first stage of almost all professional skateboarders is skateshop sponsorship. It happens when someone in a group of skateboarders in a city, centred around a local skateshop or who hangs out at the same local skateshop, shows promise, or already has an established talent and commitment to becoming a professional skateboarder in the future. However, who gets to be sponsored by the local skateshops also depends on various factors such as 'habitus' (Boudieu, 1986, 1990) - the styles and tastes in the performance of skateboarding that one skater exhibits, and it goes the other way from the skateboarder's perspective when one has the ability to choose multiple skateshops to be sponsored by:

J: I was skating a lot with the local skaters, and that obviously helped with introducing

me to the skateshop and within like a couple, a few months time, there was a little bit of

attention created, and I ended up getting to know and eventually riding for that skateshop.

As time passed, the connection between the skateshop and me just wasn't that close,

because I thought there was like a connection problem, so about half a year later, when I

started travelling a little bit more, I started meeting more and more people, and that's

when I thought like 'ummm this is where I felt like where I should be.' That's about the

time when I met Jeff and was introduced to FLY. And after getting to know them,

because they were more of a skater run and own company, I felt like communication with

them was a lot easier, so I thought like yeah, this is where I felt like I wanted to be.

Skateshop sponsorship can also be a stepping stone for the further development of a

skateboarder's career. Local skateshops function as retailers for skateboarding equipment

companies and clothing, which makes the owner of a local skateshop the middlemen

between companies and local skateboarders. Having a close relationship with the local

skateshop owner could increase the chance of being introduced to other sponsorships. For

example, Ye, a 28-year-old Beijing skateboarder who started skating at the age of 14, grew

up skating with a group of skateboarders who shop or work at Bao's skateshop:

Ye: I grew up skating with this group of friends who are all much older than I was, they

have all taken care of me as a little brother. As I was getting better at skating, Bao

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occasionally asked me to try some prototype skateboards for him and asked me for feedback. Then one day he told me that he would start sponsoring me with Justice Skateboards, a sub-brand of Feidian Skateboards. At the time they were asking Bao if there were any good skaters in Beijing that they could see, and Bao basically made the decision to put me on the sponsorship. But later he started not only to sponsor me with Justice Skateboards but also with trucks and wheels, which came out of his own pocket. Later he also introduced me to DC Shoes' team manager when they were looking for skaters to sponsor. (interview, 2014)

Flows and Amateurs - seeding the future

There are many skateboarders who are like Ye, as a Flow, who get free skateboarding equipment from the sponsor company or companies, most of the time introduced by local skateshops. There is not a clear boundary between skateshop sponsorships and Flow sponsorships in the Chinese skateboarding industry. Amateur is the next level of sponsorship above Flow. Amateurs, like Flows, get free skateboarding equipment (usually a certain number monthly, varying from company to companies) from companies, however, Amateurs are considered part of the team and will be required by their sponsors to go on some skateboarding tours or contests. For instance, BBL, the team manager of Feidian Skateboards explains how this sponsorship works for the Flows and Amateurs:

BBL: We have over 25 Flow skaters at the moment across the country. Mostly in cooperation with local skateshops. Some of them were picked directly by us and some

were picked by the local skateshops. The skateshops will give them skateboards from their monthly orders from us. Flows do not sign contracts with us but Amateurs do. There is not much difference in terms of the amount of skateboarding equipment the Flows and Ams (Amateurs) get. We do not give them extra products like we do to Pros (Professionals) unless the boards were broken or if it was necessary for filming or contests. The contract between the Ams is different from the Pros as well, if one Am signs a three year contract with us, but in the first year he shows big progression in his videos or get good, winning first place in contests, for example , we might consider upgrading him to Pro straight away. We compensate for all levels of our skaters' travel and living expenses when they go to filming tours or contests, we also give them cash prizes if they have done well in contests. We have a good budget for video productions compared to other companies, so we give our skaters a lot of financial support. The only rule is probably just that they cannot use competing companies' products. (interview, 2015)

When he was asked how he chooses skateboarders to sponsor, he said:

BBL: I normally would look for young skaters; those who are energetic, show good potential and a love for skateboarding. The younger the better. Even though it's unpredictable how they will be when they grow up, nonetheless, I think we could build a stronger bond with them like a family. If they still want to pursue a career in becoming professional skateboarders, this will show a good story when they grow up with our

company like a family. I think this is how skateboarding industry should be, not throwing money to sign skaters who are famous already … Many top professional skaters on our teams now were all sponsored by us when they first appeared in the skateboarding scene. There is another very young kid that we have just begun to sponsor, for example, who lives in Shenzhen and skates almost everyday. We think he shows good potential, so we have started sponsoring him. We will try not to sign him too soon, but just to provide him with free products and give him advice or opportunities to take part in our videos and contests when the time comes. So basically, my strategy is quite a loose one, we give them time to grow and see what happens. (interview, 2015)

Marching to Professional level

The professional level of sponsorship in the Chinese skateboarding industry is the final stage for all skateboarders who want to pursue a professional skateboarding career. The professionalisation of the Chinese skateboarding industry happened around the time when the transnational skateboarding corporations came into China. The first Chinese professional skateboarder, Che Lin, introduced me to his account of the early professional skateboarding careers in China:

Che: It was 2002, when I was sponsored by Jeff, that was when I started skating full time. I was 19 years old at the time and I quit school after my first year in university … Raysis was the first company that started to pay me a salary and made me the first Chinese professional skateboarder. Before Raysis, I only had sponsorships for skateboarding

equipment … I worked many other jobs before going pro. I have worked at restaurants, washing dishes, I have sold newspapers and many other jobs, to support myself skating full time. I could only make a living from   full-time skateboarding when I got the sponsorship from Raysis in 2002. Later I opened my skateshop … However, they found out that the profit of doing skateboarding shoes isn't as they expected, so they stopped investing in Raysis. The other reason though, was because I was signed as a professional skateboarder by Nike in 2006. While I was still on the Raysis team I also signed with Quiksilver, which made me the first Chinese skateboarder to get a sponsorship from a international corporation. Quiksilver also paid me a salary. (interview, 2014)

Che's situation before going professional is very common in the skateboarding industry. There are many skateboarders who want to pursue a career, yet to get a professional contract from big companies they still need to support themselves by doing other jobs, especially when they immigrate to big cities like Shanghai, where the headquarters of transnational corporations are based. The difference is that as the skateboarding industry has developed and more and more companies have come along, there are more jobs within the skateboarding industry, so skateboarders might need to work as a skateshop assistant, filmmaker, photographer or event organiser. It is common for skateboarders and/or videographers, to live together in the same apartment and share the rent and bills to enable them to live in Shanghai and often take on a second job. Most of the professional skateboarders who live in Shanghai are still local.

A skateboarder from Harbin, the capital city of Heilongjiang province, the most northern Chinese province bordering Russia, who grew up skating in one of the least skateboarding friendly climates, got a sponsor opportunity on the condition that he move to Shanghai:

Dao: It was 2009 when I got a sponsorship opportunity from a skateboarding company in Shenzhen. Before this I had sponsorships from a local skateshop in Harbin but it was only one pair of shoes a month. What they asked me to do is to send them a 5-minute video very three months. But it is very difficult, especially during winter. The camera battery almost dies as soon as I pull it out from my bag. So this is very difficult for me to send them videos on time. Then I knew if I wanted to become a professional skateboarder, I would have to move to Shanghai. It was 2010 when I got a chance, introduced by a friend who has contacts there in the skateboarding industry in Shanghai. I sent my videos to the skateboarding company in Shanghai and they offered my an interview opportunity. I think they thought my skill was good enough to be put on their team so they kept me. Apart from taking part in skateboarding contests and training, I needed to work skateshop shifts on Wednesdays and Thursdays, and I also needed to help teach skateboarding in an international school in Shanghai each month. I had a salary of around 3500 RMB (similar to the value of £350), and it is impossible to live in Shanghai with this salary, so a Shanghai local skater friend who helped me to get some advertising photoshoot opportunities to earn some extra money, also told me if I could do well in contests there are cash prizes as well. I have only gotten a cash prize twice, and it was the fourth place and a fifth place, so a few hundred RMB on top of my travel

expenses paid by the company. The photoshoot jobs were probably around 500 RMB

each on weekends when I was off work. During good times I could have two photoshoot

jobs a month. I paid 2400 RMB for a bed in a hostel each month, and with the rest of the

money I could barely pay for my own food. The living pressure was too much in

Shanghai, and I couldn't see a future out of skateboarding anymore so I decided to come

back, and around that time I stopped skating for a long time because I thought this is too

much. So I started working a normal job in an advertising company here. It's not as fun a

job as skateboarding, but it's enough for my living expenses at least. My life in Shanghai

was really free and fun, but it's too difficult to support myself and I had to ask for money

from my parents every month. I remember the first two months I was there in Shanghai, I

was just living as I was here in Harbin, which ended up by asking my mom for 10000

RMB each month. (interview, 2014)

SMEs, TNCs and the cities - skateboarding immigrants and the 'creative class'

However, as I dug deeper into the different stories of skateboarders, a pattern started to

emerge, as there seemed to be a big difference in the sponsorship between the SMEs and the

TNCs, and between the small cities where the majority of SMEs' were based and Shanghai

where all TNCs' were based. As articulated in many interviews, skateboarders choose the

companies that they want to work for, but the culture of the cities also constitutes a big part

of their motivation when choosing their jobs. Most interviewees (especially but not exclusive

to the ones who have not yet reached management roles) work in smaller cities, and SMEs

articulate better experiences compared to the skateboarders working for TNCs in major cities.

Dao, for example, who worked in Shanghai at the bottom of his company's employment chain, experienced the 'difficult conditions … including rising rents, low wages, and general precarity' (de Peuter and Cohen, 2015, p. 310). Likewise, many cultural workers who are still trying to make a living in the skateboarding industry, manifest Peuter and Cohen's (2015) concept of 'mutual aid' and 'counter-interpellation' to support each other through collective efforts formed by and around local skateshops and SMEs, and to 'collectively propose alternative meanings that attempt to interpolate cultural workers into a counter subjectivity that of resistant autonomous workers' (ibid, p. 315).

A Beijing skateboarder who has sponsorship from both a skateshop and a transnational corporation talked about the different requirements and support he gets from his two sponsors. When I asked him about the relationship between him and the local skateshop sponsor, he said:

> Ye: My sponsor Bao is like a big brother to me, he has never put any strings on my sponsorship. He has never asked me to go to skateboarding contests, to land tricks down big stairs, or force me to film videos. He has always just supported me in skateboarding. There was even a period of time when I went back to my father's hometown, Wenzhou, and he never stopped sponsoring me with stuff and still sent me skateboarding equipment by post … To me, this is what skateboarding means, and what I have always enjoyed in my skateboarding experience, to be able to skate with your friends and enjoy skateboarding. (interview, 2014)

But when he talked about the sponsorship from the transnational corporation, he said:

Ye: I am at the flow level sponsorship from DC. So, they don't have specific

requirements for me either like sending them pictures or videos. But they will have a sort

of assessment on me to see if I am still valuable enough to be sponsored. So, I felt like I

needed to produce videos so that I could prove myself worthy for their sponsorship, even

though I think it is very hard to present my best skills on video. The other reason is that I

get hurt a lot trying difficult and more dangerous tricks down stairs when I want to film

videos.   (interview, 2014)

Skateboarding immigrants

However, Ye has a relatively wealthy family background and has got a job in an electricity

company in Beijing as a market manager. Even though Ye had shown great potential and

talent in going further to the next level of sponsorship in the industry, he never put in his

'100%' to get a career as a professional skateboarder. Some of the younger skateboarders I

interviewed who are more committed to finding a full-time job in the skateboarding industry

tell a different story.

Before I went to the grand opening of a skateshop founded by two Shanghai local

professional skateboarders and a French ex-professional skateboarder and an

entrepreneur who also co-founded a skateboarding clothing company, I had some time to

kill so I decided to go to the famous skatespot - Shanghai LP (Love Park, named after the

famous skate spot, Love Park in Philadelphia, because of its similar diversity of different

obstacles such as stairs, ledges and big open flat ground). There were only a few

skateboarders there that night. I saw a young skater who use to lived in Beijing, where I

am from, a couple years ago. Even back then when we met in Beijing he showed extreme

potential in becoming a professional skateboarder, with his very relaxed style and big

variety of technical tricks he could consistently pull off, so when he became an Am for

Nike SB, nobody was surprised. What surprised me was when I asked him where he lives

in Shanghai and he answered that he lived in a 'skater house' with his friends. This kind

of 'skater house' is common practice in the skateboarding industry. I have known a

couple of skateboarder friends who have lived there. 'People come and go, we don't

usually have fixed tenants. At first, I slept on the sofa for a few months and now since the

guy in my room moved back home to work at a local company, I took his room … rent

here in Shanghai is too expensive and I can't afford to rent an apartment and pay the rent

by myself. I can occasionally get some photo shooting jobs for advertisements, but it is

not stable, so I am also running my Taobao shop (Alibaba's online shopping website)

selling skateboarding clothes to cover my living costs here in Shanghai', he said.

(Fieldnote, 2014)

This young skateboarder has the greatest possibility of 'going pro' (becoming a professional

skateboarder) of all the other non-pro skateboarders I know in the whole of China, but it has

taken him years waiting to become a pro, and even now he is not able to make a living in a

big city like Shanghai by being a skateboarder full time. I am somewhat familiar with this

condition and have known many people who have given up on their skateboarding career like Dao because of the lack of hope in becoming a professional and the fact that they were struggling to support themselves while their peers had gone into 'normal' industries and were capable of being financially independent. Nonetheless, I was more interested in finding out about people like this young skater's previous roommate, who failed to make a living in the skateboarding industry in Shanghai and was forced to move back to a smaller city where he was able to make a living in the skateboarding industry.

I went to Wuhan for an academic summer school with my supervisor during my fieldwork period. Even though Wuhan was not one of my original research settings, I decided to have a look at the local skateboarding scene anyway. It did not take me long to find the address of the local skatepark on their Weibo (the Chinese equivalent of Twitter) page. It was in a busy shopping area, which I was told by the local students at the summer school was a very popular shopping area for young people in Wuhan. The skatepark was located on the second floor of one of the residential blocks behind a shopping mall. It looked nothing special from the outside of the building until I came closer to the entrance, which had a dark corridor leading to a staircase, whose walls were covered with graffiti. I walked up to the second floor where there was a big balcony and the first thing I saw was seven or eight skateboarders skating the skatepark. As I was walking into the skatepark area, I saw a familiar face, Yo - a skateboarder I have skated with in Beijing before. He was sitting on a ramp, shirtless, and you could see tattoos all over his chest and arms. He recognised me as well and said 'you used to have shorter hair,

right?' Instantly, I felt like this could be a very good start for getting to know this place. 'Watch this', he said, pointing to the centre of the skatepark. There was a young skateboarder doing a 'nollie heelflip' (nollie means something like kicking a football with the weaker feet in the ball of the foot, and heelflip is a trick where the skateboarder jumps up with the skateboard and uses his/her heel to kick the board to flip the board 360 degrees and land back on the skateboard) on the ramp. From how big this guy can jump up and how relaxed his body was, I could tell that his level of skateboarding was way higher than most of the Ams, or even some of the Pros I have met in Beijing and Shanghai. 'He is sponsored by our shop, and other brands such as Vagabond Skateboards (a Shenzhen based skateboard company) and Nike SB (Nike Skateboarding) is flowing him', Yo said. This young skater was really shy when I tried to talk to him; in fact, he wasn't talking much at all to other skaters there either. Yo told me that Tian's skill level was high enough to even be a professional skateboarder, and he films a lot of crazy stuff, but he is shy about socialising with people in the industry, so he ended up here being an outcast of the skateboarding industry. 'The skateboarding industry is getting too commercial and exclusive to outsiders like Tian now'. I was surprised by how much it reminded me of the old Beijing skateboarding community and how much they would criticise the commercialisation of the skateboarding industry. So I decided to interview the owner of the place and include it as one of my research settings if the interviews turned out to be insightful.

(Fieldnote, 2014)

I went to the skatepark again on the second day. It was a lot quieter since there was a big party the previous night. It was almost lunch time when Zao, the owner of the place came along. It did not take much time to build up a rapport with him since my best friend from Beijing who is a sponsored skateboarder, used to skate with him in the same city in the province where both of their families are from. We decided to go to lunch first and then come back to do the interviews before dinner when the skatepark gets busier. I have heard about him from my friend and also seen his skateboarding videos before on the internet so I knew that he had been a sponsored skateboarder and had worked in the skateboarding industry before in different cities, including Shanghai. When I asked him why he ended up coming to Wuhan, he said:

Zao: I have been skateboarding for more than 10 years now. I became a sponsored skateboarder from around 2008 by a skateshop in Wuhan when I was in a university here. A friend of mine introduced me to the skateshop and then they thought I was good enough to represent the skateshop and push skateboarding culture here in Wuhan. So I was getting almost everything I needed from the skateshop like skateboards and shoes. Then I was sponsored by a skateboarding company based in Guangzhou called Shox, and became an Am skater on their team. Shox gave me a lot of support as well in almost all aspects. They would give me shoes, 3 skateboard decks every two months, and if we go on filming tours to different places then they would give me as many skateboard decks as I needed, including all other equipment like wheels and bearings. On top of that they would pay for all my travel expenses like train tickets and hotels and some cash every

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day for the living costs. It was a very relaxed atmosphere on the Shox team, and Yan

(co-founder of Shox) was putting a lot of energy into studying how to shoot videos and

spent a lot of money on producing skateboarding videos, including buying filming

equipment and accessories like lights and electricity generator for night filming, and he

would even DIY his own filming gadgets to get the best results he wants. I used to stay in

Suzhou for a long time, and I used to go to Shanghai to skate a lot during weekends. But

it does not feel like how it is here at all. The real reason that I came back to Wuhan and

started Your Skatehome here, is that this place has given me so much freedom to do

whatever I wanted to do with less cost compared to other big cities. It was a lot more

complicated back then (skating in big cities like Shanghai). Skateboarding is purer here

in Wuhan. (interview, 2014)

A skateboarder who comes from Shenyang, a city in the northern regions of China, has also

described his frustration in pursuing his skateboarding career:

Jiao: I had really desired to go further down in this path. My hometown does not have

skateparks. So I went to Qingdao, working at a convenient store and I would skate

whenever I got off work. But the skateboarding community in Qingdao is still very small,

and I felt like I had very limited space to improve there, so I decided Shanghai is where I

needed to be. At first I worked at a skatepark company in Shanghai. A friend who also

worked there gave me a lot of help, he let me sleep at his apartment and later introduced

me to another job at a skateboarding equipment wholesale company. They also treated

me very well, but I had too many working hours so that left me very little time to skateboard … Then I moved here to Wuhan. Shanghai is a very cosmopolitan city that has the best skaters from all over the world and all the big companies. But with my job now, even though I work for the owner of a skateshop, I have much more autonomy to design the kind of events we want to do, unlike the overly commercialised environment in Shanghai where only big companies get to design events. I have worked many other jobs to support my skating, such as fast food restaurants and convenient stores, but here is where I feel like I belong. It gives me much more freedom doing something I love doing regardless of how much money I earn. Zao (Jiao's boss) lets me live at his place with other two skateboarders he sponsors. He has been very considerate to us, he rents a bigger place than what he needs himself, because none of us is local, so he lets us live there at his place for free. Yi (Zao's skateshop's sponsored skateboarder) has been living at his place for over a year already. Also, we have the skatepark to ourselves, so I can practice almost as much as I want in our own skatepark. This is why so many skateboarders like me who come from different cities in China, immigrated to Wuhan and joined Zao. Our team has 10 skateboarders now in Wuhan alone, and we have a couple more in other cities. There is not a limited number of skateboards for example, for us to use. Zao basically support us with how many ever we need for skateboards and shoes … I think our team is not to make a brand, it's something we can do so that people can afford to skateboard together, make a skateboard brand so our friends can have skateboards when they couldn't afford the American skateboards. We are not aiming to make a profit, we make skateboards so that we can have fun skating, not to make money.

I think if you want to run a skateboarding company in China you can't only think about

making money, we need to push the culture forward first, when we are still young and

can afford to do this. (interview, 2014)

Who gets to be Professionals? Double standards between TNCs and SMEs

The Chinese skateboarders who are living their dreams making a living as professional

skateboarders are mostly the first or second generation of Chinese professional skateboarders,

people who were already famous before the transnational corporations came into China. This

becomes a problem and a point of criticism in the development of the Chinese skateboarding

industry, but the criticisms are mostly aimed at the transnational corporations, whereas the

SMEs are still being seen as supportive of new talent. A team manager of a transnational

corporation based in Shanghai shared his view on this issue:

J: The (development of the Chinese skateboarding industry) progress has been quite big

because of all the support. Without the support all these international brands have given

through events, helping riders out, without this support, maybe some of these riders

wouldn't be still skating. Because they would have probably been looking for jobs to

make money somehow. People like Huifeng, Blackie, you know, all they have had is

skateboarding for their whole lives. If you ask them to get a job, I'm sure they just put

themselves in some sort of shitty hole. So I think, in that sense, these brands and the

industry have helped maintain at least, the growth of skateboarding. Some of the negative

things I have seen is that it also spoiled the market. If you have noticed, within the past

few years since I have been here. There hasn't been any really any growth from the

people after that generation of riders. It seems to me for the past ten years. Its just the

same skateboarders, faces that you have SEEN. There hasn't been any up-and-coming

skaters to take their place. Which is a big concern. You are always gonna have Huifeng,

you are always gonna have Heichai (Blackie), you are always gonna have Chelin. But

what about the next generation? There is nobody up-and-coming. I mean there is, people

like Liu Jiaming, who is killing it, but that's only one skateboarder … The contests that

you see everyday is just 1,2,3, same people, 123, same people. You even know what

tricks they are gonna do. (interview, 2015)

The concentration of sponsorship towards the older generation of Chinese professional

skateboarders from the TNCs has brought serious concerns within the community. Local

SMEs though consistently support the up-and-coming new talents, find it difficult to

compete with the TNCs in terms of the media exploresures and the symbolic values they

brought to the skateboarders. As a result, there is a increasing number of aspiring young

Chinese skateboarders now are stuck in the position to get to the level of sponsorships from

the TNCs to be able to live off doing skateboarding.

Professionals - 'It's not just about skateboarding'

As I have seen in many places in China, having good skateboarding skills is obviously not

enough to become a professional skateboarder. Many who had the illusion that being a

good skateboarder could mean being a good professional skateboarder are frustrated by the

reality that this is not the case, at least not from many of their potential employers' perspective. I wanted to find out what the professionals and the companies see as constituting the qualities of being a good professional skateboarder in the Chinese skateboarding industry. I asked a well respected professional skateboarder the difference in being a professional skateboarder and a good skateboarder:

Che: This is a very frequently asked question. I think in terms of skating, there is no difference. But there are more responsibilities on my shoulder. As a professional skateboarder, I need to not only progress in skating, but also think for my sponsors … you can no longer do whatever you want … the relationship between sponsored skateboarders and their sponsors should be mutually beneficial. I am grateful for the acknowledgement of my value as a skateboarder from my sponsors, so in return, I think the obligation of a professional skateboarder is to return benefits to my sponsors in various means … So as a professional skateboarder, first I should keep pushing or at least maintain the level of my skateboarding skills. Secondly, filming videos and going to contests are the ways in which I could give my sponsors media exposure. There are specific terms in our contracts saying, for example, I should not wear competing brands' clothes, that is the basic requirement of course. Then there are some flexible requirements such as using online video sharing software and social networking sites to promote our sponsor, but that is all voluntary but I think it is something that we should do. Some young skaters nowadays think that because they skate a little bit better than

others than companies should sponsor them. I think they do not understand how the world works. You should return the favour when somebody helps you. (interview, 2014)

The same points have been endorsed by the action sport brand manager in the transnational corporation and Che was seen as a good example of being a good professional skateboarder:

J: The first generation of Pro athletes that are getting paid … have no idea what to do. All they know is that I'm one of the better skater here and I'm getting paid to do it. But nowadays, there is a lot more than just being, if you are rider for a company, there is a lot more than just being able to skate good. You have to represent this company that you are getting paid for. Because you are actually getting paid pretty high salary to do, not only to skate good, which is also a huge important part, but you have to know how to market yourself. You have to know how to present yourself, to the public, so that more, the best thing is that more people look up to you like a hero like an icon, so they learn, you are influencing everybody underneath you, so do you have, is there a specific way of why you skate so good? Reach back to the community you know. Whether it is your social posts? Talking to the community? Whether it is just contents that you are posting on your Weibo? You have to promote yourself, you have to find ways to promote yourself, to everybody, you know what I mean? You have to make yourself valuable … The reason why (I said Che Lin is the doing the best job on the team) is that coming from where he came from, he never had anything handed or given to him. He had to work really hard for that stuff to get it given to him. (interview, 2015)

Foreign immigrants - 'Laowai are taking all the jobs'

One of the other criticisms along the lines of the transnational corporations sponsoring the same skateboarders was the number of foreign skateboarders on their teams.

> Bobby: A lot of teams would support foreigners and support guys that were famously, like 10 years ago or 5 years ago … (Sponsorship) is the reason why they stay in China. They come here, and then they realise 'wow, I can be a professional here, that's awesome' And they will stay for two years and leave … they just come and go. they are all very good skaters but it doesn't mean they are local. But its good if they can stay. But a lot of them they just arrived here and they can be on the team. So its kinda funny that you can just arrive and like 'oh my friend he is really good, can he get on that team'? 'Yes sure'! So its kinda like that, its definitely about *guanxi*, so if you are a foreigner and you are already friends with someone on that team, (interview, 2014)

However, he also added that:

> Bobby: They get you straight on the team … cause the foreigners they will go out and film stuff, actually, the foreigners will say to (a transnational corporation), 'hey, can you give us a budget so we can go and film in USA'? and they will do that and they will go and film it. Whereas, I don't think the Chinese guys will say, or actually plan a tour for that company. Whereas the foreigners would. They are more proactive. So that's the

reason there are so many foreigners on the team. Because the foreigners would actually come up with the idea 'hey can we go to this city and film'? and that presents a really good idea, because that company has a budget that they have spend each year, so they have got the money to do it. And the Chinese guys haven't said 'oh lets do this'. So a lot of the Chinese guys would tag along with that. I think the main reason that there are a lot of foreigners on the team is because the foreigners are proactive. (interview, 2015)

One particular professional skateboarder was brought up by his team manger during an interview, and the manager talks about the good practices of a professional skateboarder and the advantages of this team riders' cultural capital displayed in his understanding of the skateboarding industry:

J: For Dan (a foreign professional skateboarder on the team), I would say, because he understands a lot of English. So he has a lot of access to global contents … because he can understand what the pros are doing and saying. For a Chinese consumer, when they read, when they go onto Street League, when they go onto *Thrasher*, all they care about is watching the skating, because they don't understand what they are saying, but what they are doing in North America, is growing skateboarding, what they are saying and doing is beyond just skateboarding skills, you know what I mean? But for China, it's very hard to adapt to that because we don't understand that language. So there is still a big language barrier … He's constantly bringing out all those video parts, he is not being lazy … he is not connecting so much to his fan base, through talking, meaning

one-to-one interaction, because there is that boundary. But do you see his content? Yes, you do. For other athletes, ALL other athletes, is a little bit more different. You only see them when the brand speaks, when there is a brand commercial, when there is a Converse commercial you will see that athlete, right? But Dan, you see him in, you know, video content, that is not just through Nike, that is not just through his board sponsor, but its through video projects, through independent projects, you see him ALL THE TIME. (interview, 2015)

The team manager from another transnational corporation also told me about the expectations the company has regarding their sponsored professional skateboarders:

Fei: We ask our skaters to post videos or photos on their social media sites like Weibo and WeChat. Actually, as skateboarders they themselves enjoy making and posting videos … About self-promotion on social media websites, I always try to reason with them, that, first of all, you are chosen to be our sponsored skateboarder, undoubtedly you have the obligation to promote your sponsors. Nevertheless, when you are promoting your sponsors, you are also promoting yourself. If you post quality photos and videos regularly, other sponsors might notice you, like soft drink or energy drink companies, earphone companies, sunglasses companies, right? They all need valuable skateboarders to sponsor, so this is mutually beneficial when you promote yourself on social media sites. I always encourage our skaters, within the years of your skateboarding career,

having more sponsors also proves that you are valuable as a professional skateboarder. So if you can, why not make yourself more valuable? (interview, 2014)

The Valuable assets to the transnational corporations

When I asked different team managers in big transnational corporations what kind of qualities they are looking for in a professional skateboarder, one of them said:

J: What a company really like to see in a rider is… the most important thing, is to love skateboarding.   If I can tell that, any company can tell that a rider when he is riding for passion, when he's riding to become better and better, he is not chasing your tail everyday to like 'hey can I get sponsored? Can I get sponsored? Can I get sponsored?'. Companies hate seeing that. For skateboarder, all you need to worry about, is how to become better and better and better. Eventually one day, when you reach that point, like I said, it will happen naturally. Companies, team managers will see it. Cause you are gonna go enter that City Jam, you are gonna go enter that Vans Dragon, you are gonna go enter that local grassroots events. And there is gonna be a lot of word of mouth. Word of mouth carries on, your video contents obviously gonna be played everywhere. Eventually, that's what will be seen by those companies. And companies will eventually tell you, the team managers will help you grow as a skateboarder, you know what I mean? What to do to make your fan base bigger. Ah, what to do as a professional skater, what ways to train, to skate to make you become better. Okay you are at this level, if you are skating by yourself, or within your small community, and you are this good? What will

happen if I put you on a tour? With the best dudes! That will definitely motivate you to become even better than what you were, you know what I mean? (interview, 2015)

Hence, what seemed at the same time both important and difficult , was to have not only the 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1986) to promote themselves - by appearing and doing well in skateboarding contests, and through making their own videos on their social media sites - but also to have the economic capital to live closer to their current or potential sponsors, who are normally based in big cities such as Shanghai. Only so, they are able to travel to big contests and be around the best skateboarders and use the best training facilities, such as Shanghai's skateparks. As a result, they achieve what Thornton (1996) concludes as 'word of mouth' socialising. A British skateboarding coach based in Shanghai told me his frustration about one of his students who became good at skateboarding but could not get sponsorships to support himself living in Shanghai where he could be 'close to the industry':

Bobby: I met Gao Qunxiang, everyone calls him Tony Gao, I met him once at SMP and he was really really good. And it wasn't like he was really good but I can just see how good he would be because he was learning so fast and his dad asked me like 'how much for skateboard lessons if I brought him to Shanghai?' I said to him 'if you are willing to move, from Xi'an to Shanghai just for skate lesson, I will teach him for free' … And when he moved to Shanghai he took his cousin with him which is Sun Kunkun, everyone calls him Simon Sun. They both moved to Shanghai, so I like everyday I went to the skatepark when I had free time I just skated with them and taught them how to skate.

And now they are like one of the best skaters in China. And I managed to, cause I am friend with the owner of the SMP, his name is CJ. And he had link with the Yang Pu government, I convinced him to talk with the Yang Pu government to support them, to find them a school to go to in Shanghai. And them managed to get them to go to a local school, so they can still have education and skateboard as well. But that didn't really go anywhere. There wasn't any more funding, none of the big brands really wanted to support the young skaters. They are too busy supporting old famous people that aren't progressing. So he ran out of money and had to move back to Xi'an, so we had a go and he was really good, and he is learning a lot more street stuff in Xi'an, he is still one of the best skaters. He got 11th I think in the CX (Chinese Extreme) Games finals. (interview, 2015)

The other problem for people like Tony, who want to look for sponsorship but are not financially able to live in Shanghai, is the lack of 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1986) to produce video content when they could not be around the industry and get noticed, As Bobby stated:

'The problem is, he doesn't have good filmmaker, so his dad films it. And his dad, wow, holds a camera in one hand and has a cigarette in the other hand. (laugh) So he had some really terrible footage with shaky hand. He is not willing to just sit there holding a good camera and just film it, and he does it really bad. So his dad, 1, cant edit and 2, cant film well' (interview, 2015)

Videographers - subcultural media vs social media

Tony's experience is not an exception in the Chinese skateboarding industry. Snyder's (2011) investigation of skateboarding career pathways of professional skateboarders showed that skateboarders acquire and sustain their careers through the dissemination of their documentation of skateboarding tricks on subcultural media. Chinese skateboarding subcultural media, however, has not reached the level of influence over skateboarders' careers compared to Western skateboarding media such as *Thrasher* or *Transworld Skateboarding*. This does not mean that the Chinese skateboarding media do not disseminate skateboarding videos in a considerable volume, but I argue that most of the Chinese skateboarding media lacks the capability of independent in-house productions to search for new blood in the upcoming talent pool, like most Western skateboarding media (*Transworld*'s *A Time To Shine* is a clear example of this, produced in-house by a major skateboarding media outlet with skateboarders who were sponsored amateurs and many of whom later directly or indirectly became sponsored pro skateboarders due to the influence of this video), and they function as a means of promotion for skateboarders to their potential sponsors, especially for upcoming talents to their first potential sponsors. Most Chinese skateboarding videos distributed by Chinese skateboarding media were produced by companies who already had a team of their sponsored professional level skateboarders. Even though there were occasional exceptions of videos of skateboarders who had not signed sponsorship deals with the major players in the Chinese skateboarding industry, most were made by the skateboarders themselves or with free assistance from their fellow skateboarders or their filmmaker friends. Most of these kinds of videos require the skateboarders

themselves to invest time and energy to acquire 'social capital' (Bourdieu, 1986) with people who then would help them with the filming and in most cases to learn video editing by themselves in order to complete the full cycle of video production. Sometimes local skateshops also have promotional videos, but most of the skateboarders appearing will already have sponsors from the shop:

> Ye: I edit my own videos and upload them on video sharing websites and finally share them on my social networking pages like Weibo. And if my video has achieved some quality, some official accounts might help you to repost my videos. I think sharing videos on social networking sites can be a very good way to promote yourself as a skateboarder and get the exposure. The other way of promoting yourself is through going to contests. Beijing has only a few spots (where there are skateboarders going to regularly), there is no way that everybody knows about you by just skating with people at those spots. But they all gather during skateboarding contests, so if you do well in contests, people will start noticing you. (interview, 2014)

Hence, in the Chinese skateboarding industry, to have a good filmmaker as a friend will boost your chance of getting noticed by your potential sponsors. As a result, I further investigated the role of videographers:

> While I was in Shanghai, Yu, a friend of mine who is now a producer in a major youth media company in the world, happened to make a business trip to Shanghai from Beijing.

We use to skate together when we were younger in Beijing so I have already known him for years. I called him up and went to his hotel to hang out with him. When I got to the hotel, he was just trying out a new very expensive camera stabiliser the company had bought for him to use. After some catching up, I told him what my research was about and how I wanted to know about the role and working conditions of skateboarding videographers. He told me the reason he went to the company he is working for now from being an independent skateboarding videographer when he had become more and more famous in the skateboarding industry as a videographer and had filmed many popular videos among the Chinese skateboarding community: 'There are two main reasons. First of all, I am getting older and my girlfriend and I are planning to get married. So I need some consistent salary to be able to support my family. With the unstable number of offers to do skateboarding projects, money wise it is very hard. And also a lot of times I am putting a considerable amount of time and energy to work for free for my friends, because they needed a dedicated good filmmaker to skate with them often so that they are able to get enough footage to put together as a video. I know how important this is to skateboarders, so I would do it for free for my friends because I know if I don't do it, they will not be able to hire a good videographer to help them and probably will end up self-teaching videography and it cost too much both energy and money to be able to produce a good video. The second reason is that I have always been self-taught as a videographer, I feel like with the job I have now, there are opportunities to work in a professional production team, get to learn and grow as a professional videographer. There is also consistent funding to support my creative work. I am still

producing many skateboarding related projects in our company because I have the social

network to explore Chinese skateboarding culture which the company is very much

interested in doing. So this does not mean that I am not filming skateboarding. But

sometimes, I have to put other projects of our company in priority so I could not have

invested the same amount of energy into skateboarding videos anymore'.

(Fieldnote, 2014)

Only a handful of skateboarding videographers are capable of making a living similar to

McRobbie's (1998) research participants as freelance, self-employed and contract creative

workers. The contracts are not stable, but the videographers are one of the key components

of the production chain in the skateboarding industry. However, like Yu, many good

videographers could not afford this career and had to find other more stable jobs . I have,

however, interviewed one skateboarding videographer who has stayed freelance:

Charlie: When I first came to Shanghai … I was working at an internet company, it was a

full time job. It was a horrible job. I was doing customer service. So you get insulted all

time in emails. So I decided when I released the (Shanghai Skateboarding culture)

documentary, I decided to quit my job and be like 'ok lets see what happens from now'. I

put it on Vimeo. I got lucky; I got picked up to be on the first page of Vimeo. So all of a

sudden I had companies like Nike calling me says 'hey we want to work with you on

some stuff and we like your documentary'. So it just happened like that, I put the

documentary online and people started to call me for jobs … it was through an

advertising agency, so was not Nike Skateboarding. My first one I did was for a different department in Nike. So I didn't fall straight away to skateboarding, but I got the chance to work on other stuff, it was nice too. (interview, 2015)

I also met a professional skateboarding videographer who traveled to China a lot and films many projects in East Asia. He started working on other projects that made him even more famous in the Chinese skateboarding community. I asked him what are the distinctive styles and desirable abilities from the labour market perspective, of different skateboarding videographers that work in China. He said:

Charlie: What I think its cool is that all those guys have different approaches. Tommy is more about pushing those guys to their limit and he gets the best (footage with the best tricks to their potential) out of people. He is very picky, he is very tough, but he gets the best out of people. Patrick is not as pushy, but Patrick is more, exploration and going places, which I really like. I'm not too much into getting a gnarly trick, and I'd rather having a guy doing cool trick in front of a beautiful background. I'm more into Patrick's approach. But when I think about it, its great to have those different personalities in filmmaking. I think it definitely influence some of the younger skaters filters here … its great to have this because we have influenced the next generation of skaters and filmmakers to get into it … Now we have like you know, Dunzi has been doing this forever he is doing well. Sunyu, killing it with *Vice*. Tianwei as well, in Guangzhou. I think Tianwei is the best cameraman in China. I have worked with him before. He

doesn't make too many videos. He is not super good at editing, but he is super good at filming. So, you can't have it both ways. Technically, in terms of shooting angles. He has really good eye to see things. And he knows how to use different tools. He has a really good eye. (interview, 2015)

Charlie's account illustrates the importance of different capitals that are required to achieve distinction as a skateboarding videographer. Many other participants have also acknowledged the importance of cultural capital - in the case of the skateboarding videographer, this is their ability to understand skateboarding tricks as a skateboarder. Also, the social capital needed to be able to work with not only other videographers, more importantly with the less managable skateboarders. An excellent example of social capital needed to work with the skateboarders is the ability to maintain close social relationships with the skateboarders in order to communicate ideas, motivate team riders to work in video projects and push the potential of their skateboarding performances. Even then, 'a bit of luck' is still needed in Charlie's formula, to have been 'picked by Vimeo to be on the first page' in order to be noticed by big corporations or advertising agencies to work for big well-funded projects.

SMEs and Chai

An exception to this is Chai, an full-time in-house videographer in Shenzhen who works for a Chinese skateboarding equipment company. He has been skateboarding for more than ten

years and was a sponsored professional skateboarder for a while. During the years of his

involvement in skateboarding, he discovered his passion for photography and filming:

> Chai: At first it was because nobody was filming anyone, so I started to become a
>
> filmmaker to help my friends document their skateboarding. At the beginning it was just
>
> messing around with the camera. I borrowed my brother's computer to edit videos, and
>
> when I edited my first skateboarding video I felt a sense of achievement. So I realised
>
> this is something I love doing … I was lucky to have been skating with Huifeng, so we
>
> always skate together and I get to film one of the best Chinese skateboarders in China. I
>
> think that's when my work was noticed by the Chinese skateboarding community. The
>
> first project I actually got paid was a project with Converse. It was an outsourced
>
> skateboarding video project produced by W+K (A famous international advertising
>
> agency). I was working with other foreign videographers some had seen my work and
>
> they were like 'oh the filming was alright but editing wasn't great', so I only worked as a
>
> filmmaker. But the professional skateboarders in that project are the skaters I have
>
> known for years and had given me complete trust in filming them so I got the chance to
>
> participate in this big project. I am very confident in filming, because I am a skateboarder
>
> myself, so I can hold the camera more steadily when following skateboarders during
>
> filming, and my understanding of skateboarding held me to capture the perfect moments
>
> with an angle that shows the aesthetic perspective of skateboarding tricks; I know what
>
> wheels to use and how lose the trucks should be to give me a steady shot when following
>
> skaters. So, after the video footage came out, I was finally acknowledged by the crew and

later by the industry. I am also very obsessed with equipment, so I know when to use what lens to capture what movements to best show the skateboarding performance. Instead of cash payment for that project, I asked for a professional camera which at the time I could not afford … After that I got more jobs offered by different companies, I started to work with Peacock for example. Even though my English is very poor, I could still work with him, and he only needed to show me what he wanted to do so I can do the rest, like finding the angle and design a route to follow him. I am confident that I can do a better job than some of the best foreign videographers. So I have worked with all the big companies in the Chinese skateboarding industry now, but I could never save any money because I will very quickly spend it on upgrading my equipment. (interview, 2015)

During our interview, I found it very difficult to navigate him to the questions I wanted to ask because it seemed that all he wanted to talk about was filming equipment. I was a bit overwhelmed, even though I was prepared from hearing from my friends who knew him or had worked with him before, he admitted himself to being a 'filming nerd' after I told him about his reputation of being obsessed with filming. When we were having lunch together, I also asked him why he stays in Shenzhen when all the big companies are based in Shanghai. Wouldn't it be easier for him to become one of the best full time freelance videographers if he wanted to in Shanghai? He responded 'as you can probably tell already, I am not a very sociable person, I prefer to concentrate on my work rather than having to socialise with people, which is inevitable if I were to work in Shanghai. Here in Shenzhen, with the job at

Feidian Skateboards as a videographer and a team manager, I can spend most of my energy doing what I love with very little complication.'

However, the director of Feidian Skateboards told me that it is increasingly difficult to afford an in-house full time videographer for small companies like them. The best videographers would actually prefer to found their own small companies so that they could make more money without having the constraint of only doing projects with the companies they are employed by. In regards to the 'increased competition in the labour market for skilled work', only the best can be 'seen as leading the way in terms of the skills required for engaging in flexible and enterprising work arrangements that will increasingly be required by the general workforce' (Brook, 2016, p. 302 - 303). So, for young videographers like Chai, who might feel less comfortable and have less cultural and social capital to compete with other skateboarding videographers in big cities like Shanghai, the choice of being a full time videographer in a skateboarding company is still very limited.

Team mangers, the 'new gatekeepers' and the 'cultural intermediaries'.
Another consistent theme throughout my research that connects different occupations in the Chinese skateboarding industry is the team managers. They perform what Bilton (2016) describes as the 'new gatekeepers' - 'Where the new gatekeepers differ from the old gate keepers (record labels, publishers, broadcasters, newspapers, film studios) is in their relationship to content and content producers' (Bilton, 2015, p. 290); and as what Gu (2016) terms as the 'cultural intermediaries', who 'formulate' understandings of how the industry

should be organised and companies should operate. They have much more say in deciding what content is to be produced and by/with which videographers and skateboarders. All the team mangers are old generation Chinese skateboarders who have gained respect and knowledge about skateboarding through their years of intense participation in Chinese skateboarding culture. I asked a team manager from a Chinese skateboarding company how he became a team manager from a professional skateboarder:

> BBL: I did English in university for my undergraduate degree, because I wanted to learn more about skateboarding when there was not much Chinese skateboarding media … By the end of my undergraduate, I was doing some freelance translation jobs for different skateboarding media in China. Then the owner of Feidian Skateboards asked me if I want to move to Shenzhen and help him with the new website they were going to do. So I took the job as both a professional skateboarder and a editor for the website in Shenzhen in 2007. I was paid 2000 RMB at the beginning along with all the sponsored skateboarding equipment … By around 2010, I realised, after almost 20 years of skating, being a professional skateboarder wasn't what I want to do as a job. I did not want to waste my education so I wanted to do something different. But my boss wanted me to remain the professional skateboarder's identity because I was the first Chinese professional skateboarder with an undergraduate degree, and instead of having tattoos all over me, I was wearing glasses and looked like a healthy athlete rather than a typical skateboarder … later, the chief editor of our magazine *Whatsup* left our company, so the boss promoted me to be the chief editor of the magazine. I was self-learning everything

but our boss trusted me and gave me a lot of support. And later I was also appointed to be the team manager of Justice Skateboards, a major skateboarding sub-brand of our company. (interview, 2015)

I have explored the views of the role of team managers in different companies in the Chinese skateboarding industry. One of the managers from a transnational corporation said:

Fei: My official title is the Action Sports Manager … but a major part of my job is to manage skateboarders like a team manager, including organising and leading tours. So, for example, when we have decided where to go for our filming tours, sometimes a few days with more then 10 people. I organise all their travel plans like flights, hotels, transportation and where to have food. Make plans for budgets, where to film contents? What to be filmed and when to film? So, a lot of planning goes into tours and I have to improvise in a lot of occasions cause things change. (interview, 2015)

His and other team mangers have also explained their responsibilities in helping and taking care of their team riders in different situations, as described by J in the previous section, to teach the skateboarders on their team how to promote themselves, how to become a better skateboarder and to give them opportunities and support to attend different filming tours and contests. But J also emphasised the importance of having skateboarders like him working within the transnational corporations:

J: I mean, don't get me wrong, there is nothing that beats being a professional

skateboarder, because all your job is, is what you love to do. You are always

skateboarding, you are traveling for free, you are, oh man, you are having fun every day

and you get to wake up whenever you want, you get to eat whenever you want, you are

getting paid to do it, you are traveling, oh man, it's like a dream come true you know?

Ever since you were a kid all that hard work paid off to get that … but I mean the best

thing about working for Nike now is that everyday you are learning something new,

something that can help improve skateboarding, something… and making things better

for skateboarding. Without skateboarders working within these companies, skateboarding

is never gonna be able to become better. You need to have those people, you need to

have skateboarders with a lot of experiences, who love skateboarding to work for these

companies because that's the only way that skateboarding is ever gonna grow because if

you are gonna do it within your little skateshop, its gonna be pretty hard, but with the

help and support of big companies, you can reach to a bigger and mass audience. And

really push out positive message about skateboarding. (interview, 2015)

In comparison, the team manager in the SME emphasised his role of cultivating new talent,

managing the best skateboarders and the conflict between SMEs and TNCs in managing

styles:

BBL: Even the top skateboarders on our team do not make huge money like the

professional skateboarders in the US, because the sales aren't as big. We also give our

team riders dividends for every signature board we sell, but it is still not enough for them

to become as rich as the American pros. Nevertheless, they are still getting paid more

than the 'normal jobs' they might otherwise get along with all the products sponsored.

Skateboarding companies make a lot less profit than the shoe companies and clothing

companies, the energy drinks companies make the most profits I think, that's why most

skateboarders are working so hard to get sponsorships from those big companies … we

are a rather small company compared to those transnational corporations. We are

focusing more on the new talent. We have an annual event called 'dream camp' where

we recruit young skateboarders from the internet and give them an opportunity to

experience the life of a professional skateboarder, to film videos everyday and have fun

for 10 days. We provide them with skateboarding equipment and all the travel and living

costs, and take them to skate with our professional skateboarders, and we will also assign

a filmmaker for them to capture videos. By the end of the camp we will put a video

together from all of the footage we filmed and will also host a contest for them and give

the winners prices. The first price is one year's sponsorship of skateboarding equipment.

(interview, 2015)

Conclusion

Even though different participants in occupations within the Chinese skateboarding industry

articulate very different experiences of their either successful or unsuccessful attampts at

developing a skateboarding career, similarities in the precariousness of the working

conditions are identified in the interviews with my participants that cover key positions in the

Chinese skateboarding industry.

The expectations and requirements for different occupations are vastly different in terms of

different forms of capital. Such requirements are especially high for positions that earn

similar wages to a normal job within the other cultural industries some participants had

experiences in or have decided to move into. A lot of times, such positions are based only in

big cities where all the transnational corporations' headquarters are located, hence they

require skateboarders to have the financial ability to cover their own living costs without any

concrete promises of getting a job. Working conditions of the professional skateboarders

vary widely due to a number of factors such as the size of the company (TNCs or SMEs) and

the rank of professional skateboarders (Pros, Ams and Flows). Most of my participants have

to take on a second job until they reach to the Pro level of sponsorship to become a 'full-time'

skateboarder.

Even though participants who had become Pros receive promising financial income as a

full-time job, they face increasing expectations to promote themselves on social media, from

their TNC sponsors. In comparison, local SMEs have demonstrated a higher level of not only

financial but also technical support (filming and media explorsure) for the lower tiers (Ams

and Flows) of aspiring skateboarders. Profesional skateboarders most times, have a much

closer social relationship with their local skateshop sponsors or smaller local SMEs

comparing to the TNCs. There are exceptions to such relationships, but they are mostly the result of their personal relationships with the team managers of the TNCs. TNCs also have the tendency to sponsor only established skateboarders, and sometimes there are concerns from the community that foreign skateboarders are taking most opportunities for sponsorship, hence it is difficult for aspiring young Chinese skateboarders to receive support to progress. Overall, the criteria for professional sponsorship is very ambiguious and is mostly based on the subjective judgement (such as the style of skateboarding performance and personality of the skateboarder) of the team managers.

Filmmakers and photographers are central roles in the production chain of cultural products (skateboarding videos and photography). However, there is very little security for such positions in the Chinese skateboarding industry. Even the most successful filmmakers and photographers have to work on contract-based projects and normally would need to support themselves with projects outside of the skateboarding industry.

Team manager is a conventional position in the skateboarding industry. There is rarely a dedicated position for team managers in skateboarding companies, though the cultural expectation exists for such a position in any skateboarding company with a professional skateboarding team (or teams). Team mangers also normally work as brand managers that help with marketing and the PR practices of their companies. Arguably, being the most important position in the skateboarding industry, team managers function as proxies between the skateboatrding communities and the commercial companies. They normally are in the

position to decide who can get on their team, when can they get on their team and what kind of projects they could be assigned. Nonetheless, having multiple committments and responsibilities, the working conditions of a team manager is often very tough. Not only do they need to maintain credibility among skateboarding communities, organising and running marketing events is also a big part of their job requirement. In conclusion, the requirements for the cultural labourers within the Chinese skateboarding industry are very high, even compared to the more established cultural industries. Skateboarders who aim to develop a skateboarding career need not only social capital to 'know the right people' but also a very ambiguous sets of cultural capital to make it into the labour force. The pressure of living costs is too high in the big cities where headquarters of TNCs are located, which forces many aspiring young skateboarders to work in smaller cities and for smaller local companies, where they receive more support but have less opportunities to progress further in their skateboarding careers.

Overall, the precarious working conditions within the Chinese skateboarding industry resonate with many of the observations made inside the cultural/creative industries (see for example, Hesmondalgh, 2010). At the moment, the Chinese skateboarding industry has benefitted very little from the broader cultural policies that cover the labour conditions in traditional cultural/creative industries. The recognition of the quality of cultural products in the skateboarding industry is growing but is still largely unknown to cultural policy producers and to the public, compared to other cultural industries. I argue that there is a need to take the labour force in the Chinese skateboarding industry as seriously as those who work

in cultural/creative industries, to acknowledge that it benefits the cultural prosperity of the

Chinese youth in areas such as art, photography, video production and so much more.

Chapter 11 Conclusion

Introduction

As this thesis has shown, Chinese skateboarding culture and its subsequent development into a cultural industry presents illuminating ideas for related fields of study. This chapter presents an overall assessment and summary of the key findings in the analytical chapters. It will address the following issues: First, the answers to the questions raised in the discussion of skateboarding as a youth subculture in China. Second, how the development of skateboarding industry contributes to our understanding of the transition between subcultures and cultural industries with specific characteristics in the Chinese context. Thirdly, how the skateboarding industry in China falls into the government agenda as a sports industry. Furthermore, working conditions of cultural labourers in the Chinese skateboarding industry as an emerging cultural industry will be summarised. Last but not least, it will reflect on how this snapshot of arguably one of the most crucial stages of the development of Chinese skateboarding industry provokes thinking and potential guidelines about future research directions.

Chinese skateboarding youth subculture

Chapter 6 shows that the social formations of skateboarding culture in China has taken a unique form different from its Western counterparts. Not necessarily by appropriating existing forms of styles available from their parent cultures, but the question of continuities should not be underestimated or reduced to its superficial forms. The Red Guards culture and

subsequent Chinese youth subcultures derived from it have created distinctive forms of

resistance and are formulated in a particular political period. The later market reform and the

arrival of a mass consumer society has no doubt influenced its apparent manifestations, while

the socio-economic struggles of Chinese youth have intensified. As a response, Chinese

youth have taken up available Western subcultural practices and styles. The culture of

skateboarding in China, for example, has provided Chinese youth with another way of

reacting to socio-economic problems. Skateboarding culture offers new spaces for its offline

practices and social interactions that give its participants a sense of community. The ways

those communities were constructed, shared and spread through the creative engagement of

skateobarders will be difficult for scholars to locate and provide explanations for if they put

their emphasis on discontinuities of Chinese online youth subcultures. Borrowing the

theoretical lens from both the CCCS's subcultural theories and post-subcultural theories, this

thesis aims to present a balanced explaination for both aspects of continuities and

discontinuities in the social formation and cultural practices of Chinese skateboarding culture.

For example, the question of class itself presents complex Chinese characteristics, but there

seems to be elements of social formation in the Chinese youth subcultures that can be

partially explained with contributions from a more systematic study of the Chinese class

system. At the moment, it is clear that class locations can be illuminating in understanding

the social formation and inner subcultural hierarchies within the Chinese skateboarding

industry, manifested in various forms at different historical conjunctures. The older Chinese

skateboarders, many of whom still play an important role in shaping Chinese skateboarding

culture, either directly as in key positions in the Chinese skateboarding industry, such as

being team managers or media personnels, or indirectly such as being 'big brothers' in various Chinese skateboarding communities. By taking into account the social locations of the early generations of Chinese skateboarders, this thesis shows how different forms of capital have formed power structures and created shared imaginations of Chinese skateboarding culture that are different from those of its Western counterparts. However, no singular theory can capture the complexity in the rather nuanced lived experiences of Chinese skateboarders. In an effort to offer empirical understandings of the complicated reality, I have drawn on ethnographic data collected to re-negotiate understandings about the feelings, motivations and meanings attributed to their subcultural participations by the Chinese skateboarders.

Development and organisation of the Chinese skateboarding industry

In the chapters on the commercial incorporation of Chinese skateboarding culture, I have elaborated on the dynamics inside the Chinese skateboarding industry, focusing on the different entrepreneurial strategies developed from both the local organic subcultural entrepreneurs and the transnational corporations to capitalise Chinese skateboarding culture. From the local level, subcultural entrepreneurs create their own businesses by mobilising their different forms of capital. One of the key ways in which they have done so is by utilising their social and subcultural capital accumulated from early participation in Chinese skateboarding culture to maintain their links and credibility within their local skateboarding communities, with both existing and new customers. Examples include mobilising local

'tribes' in participation, hosting annual banquet with key members of their communities and most importantly, by sponsoring local skateboarders.

Chinese skateboarding culture has also built up strong links to other youth subcultures in China, such as Chinese hip hop culture and graffiti culture, through shared locations where local youth hang out, such as shopping malls, and also by more direct relations, such as clubs and live houses. Such close cultural proximities have also granted Chinese skateboarding culture another strategy for maintaining credibility and authenticity with the additional leverage to capitalise skateboarding culture for new customers and markets.

In contrast, the transnational corporations' introduction into the Chinese skateboarding industry has upgraded the scales of promotion of skateboarding culture in the mainstream youth consumer market. At first, Chinese skateboarders embraced it as it was expected to help the culture gain cultural legitimacy and provide subcultural careers. However, after less than a decade's effort into organising big marketing events in China, transnational corporations realised the   unpopularity of skateboarding in China and had overestimated the numbers of skateboarding cultural enthusiasts, which constitutes a big section of its market base in Western economies. Funding started to get cut off for the skateboarding marketing budgets and certain communities of skateboarders who have not benefited from the operations of such corporations have lost their faith in transnational corporations. Meanwhile, small and medium sized enterprises in the Chinese skateboarding industry have retained their consistent support for the cultural development of skateboarding culture in China, though losing market shares to different extent in the competition with transnational corporations.

Government incorporation of the skateboarding industry

More complicated than the binary opposition in attitudes towards commercial incorporation of

Chinese skateboarding culture, Chinese skateboarders, especially those who work inside the

skateboarding industry, have mixed feelings towards the governmental incorporation of their

culture. From the central level, the skateboarders have had bad experiences cooperating with the

central government officials in organising skateboarding contests and events, claiming that such

events normally misrepresent skateboarding from an ignorant perspective. However, this negative

attitude started to shift with the efforts of the new leader of CESA, a much younger woman who

actively socialises with the skateboarding community. As opposed to scholars who have argued

elsewhere (Wheaton, 2004b; Wheaton, 2011) that action sports participants resist the process by

which government institutions 'impose national identification' on sporting events structures, my

research data shows in comparison that Chinese skateboarders are less concerned with the

national identification but are more sceptical towards the institutionalisation of skateboarding.

However, evidence has emerged from my fieldwork that the 'cultural intermediaries' play an

essential role in translating sometimes 'genuine' policies and commitments from government

organisations and in maintaining their relationship with the skateboarding community. The

smooth operation and organisation of skateboarding events and contests depends highly on the

successful involvement of 'cultural intermediaries' from the government level - the secretary of

CESA, the team managers in transnational companies and the big brother on the national

skateboarding team. 'Cultural intermediary' however, appears to be a fluid identity that shifts

positions inside different structures. The credibility needed to qualify as successful cultural intermediaries also depends on the subcultural and social capital accumulated inside Chinese skateboarding culture. However, at the moment, neither the government nor the transnational corporations attribute adequate value to the cultural intermediaries. Since CESA is under the administration of the Chinese Watersports Association, it also has important commitments to other sports, such as surfing and wind-surfing. Hence, not enough consideration or financial support were given to employ dedicated personnel to manage skateboarding. Team managers who have experiences from the skateboarding communities are normally employed by companies as branding assistants, hence not given enough authority in company strategy-making processes, whereas the big brothers on the national team are somewhere in between the two, and they have less affiliation with the government or the transnational corporations but have much stronger ties with the skateboarding communities.

At the local level, even though the local authorities have made a positive impact on building skateboarding infrastructure (skateparks), such projects are often behind real estate agendas that aim to promote local urban regeneration programmes and pay little attention to the voices of cultural participants. Problems then emerge as skateparks built from those projects, though mostly with good qualities (normally under the term 'biggest'), pose issues such as a lack of funding for maintenance and are usually located in remote districts of cities that many skateboarders have trouble to access. Interestingly, similar issues have long been recognised by scholars who study creative cities insofar as such projects normally fail 'to secure further investment in culture as a result of its being too closely affiliated with urban development' (Gu, 2015, p. 254). Managers at

the skate parks are left to themselves experimenting ways to attract funding for skateboarding events and contests.

Skateboarding career pathways

Chapter 9 provided an account of the 'subjective experiences' (Hesmondalgh and Baker, 2011) of Chinese skateboarders seeking a career inside the Chinese skateboarding industry. Apart from the few skateboarders who are considered 'valuable assets' to transnational corporations, most skateboarders seeking a career as professional skateboarders still need to face precarious working conditions. However, the SMEs show more commitment in nurturing younger talents but have complicated attitudes towards their sponsored skaters' future developments since they are likely to be bought by the big corporations once they become more successful. There is also the tendency in which big corporations that sponsor more highly skilled foreign skateboarders than aspiring local skateboarders, despite sometimes their marketing slogan of 'support your locals', hence reducing the opportunities for local skateboarders to find sponsorship support. Workers in the skateboarding industry normally need either to find a second job elsewhere or have to take on work like marketing and event organisations for their employers both at transnational corporations and the SMEs, which for some skateboarders served as training for their future careers in other cultural/creative industries.

Returning to the Triangle of Forces

This thesis set out to investigate the dialectical development of Chinese skateboarding culture, positioned in a triangle of forces interacting with each other from subculture, commerce and the state. The earlier development of skateboarding subculture demonstrates the unique Chinese cultural trajectories that exhibit continuities inside Chinese youth subcultures, and at the same time is 'lost in translation' from its Western subcultural roots.

The early commercial attempts to capitalise Chinese skateboarding culture face many problems in adapting to the later development of the economic transition in China during the 2000s. However, Chinese skateboarding subcultural participants, like their counterparts in the West, are still in a socially marginalised position, and they desire for cultural legitimacy in a highly hegemonic society. Their desperate hope to gain cultural legitimacy indirectly gave rise to the later introduction of the transnational corporations that provided fragments of hope for Chinese skateboarders who wanted to make a living while making contributions to their culture. Before long, cultural resistance towards commercial corporations started to intensify. As the commercial potential of the Chinese skateboarding market fails to meet transnational conglomerates' ultimate goal of maximising profits, such corporations have started to withdraw their commercial investment in developing Chinese skateboarding culture, while small and medium enterprises and subcultural entrepreneurs continue to support the cultural development of Chinese skateboarding culture and expand core communities.

However, as the tensions of commercial incorporation of skateboarding culture intensify, commercial forces start to encounter problems from both their underestimation of the Chinese skateboarding market and the growing interests from the Chinese central and local authorities. The interplay between commerce and state from both the central and local level demonstrate complicated versions of contradictions. As Chinese skateboarding culture became more fragmented, cultural resistance started to shift directions. The re-alignment between the subculture and commerce signalled issues arising from the largely unapproved ' involvement of authorities in Chinese skateboarding culture. Nonetheless, the dynamics of cooperation between the Chinese authorities with SMEs and TNCs make the future of the Chinese skateboarding industry difficult to predict.

What's next?

The global skateboarding industry and in China in particular witnessed sea-changing crises and opportunities after the announcement of skateboarding's inclusion in the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo. Officially, the Chinese Roller-skate Association successfully won the bid over the Chinese Extreme Sports Association for the organisation and preparation of skateboarding for the Olympic Games, which gives them primary power and authority in the future development of skateboarding as an Olympic sport. Within the Chinese skateboarding industry, outside capital started to flood in, commercial skatepark projects started to emerge at an unprecedented rate. For the skateboarders, regional skateboarding teams started to form, and they were offered jobs as regional and national athletes, which promises a much more sustainable career than their previous commercial sponsorships. Nonetheless, the

sportification of skateboarding has changed the meaning of skateboarding for a lot of the 'core' skateboarders regardless of the commercial opportunities that came in after the inclusion. One of the biggest concern from my participants over the situation of the current state of the skateboarding is the lack of committed skateboarders in this increasingly consumer based culture, and that the future of professional skateboarders are those being picked by the official Chinese sports organisations from other junior sports teams to train to be Olympic gold medallists. There are many other aspects of the Chinese skateboarding industry that I was not able to discuss in more depth, such as the rise of the female skateboarder population and its market, commercial and governmental attempts to incorporate skateboarding into education systems, transitions in symbolic representations of skateboarding in mainstream commercial industries and so on, all of which would generate a great wealth of knowledge in our understanding of the changing landscape of the Chinese youth subcultures and the cultural economy. Above topics and potentially other aspects not expected in this thesis still await to be explored in future research on the Chinese skateboarding industry.

Even though complicated relationships and power play have recently emerged in response to rather unpredictable events, such as the formation of provincial and city skateboarding athelete teams, this thesis presents a snapshot of the complex tensions between subcultural, commercial and governmental forces that are shaping China's skateboarding culture, which still has a significant influence on the operation of the Chinese skateboarding industry today.

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Appendix

List of participants information

Name	Date	Location	Event	Occupation	Audio/Fieldnote (A/F)
S1	08.06.2014	Wuhan	Casual skateboarding session	Videographer, Photographer, Shop assistant	A
L1	08.06.2014	Wuhan	Casual skateboarding session	Wuhan Skateshop and Pub owner	A, F
L2	09.06.2014	Wuhan	Casual skateboarding session	Pub manager	A
S2	09.06.2014	Wuhan	Casual skateboarding session	Sponsored Skateboarder	A

S3	09.06.2014	Wuhan	Casual skateboarding session	Sponsored Skateboarder	A
L3	31.06.2014	Beijing	Casual skateboarding session interview	Skateshop owner	A
L4	06.08.2014	Beijing	Meeting with CESA	Beijing Woodward Skatepark manager	A
L5	06.08.2014	Beijing	Meeting with CESA	Beijing Woodward Skatepark manager and early generation skateboarder	A
S4	Multiple	Beijing, Nanjing	Multiple	Skatepark designer and sponsored skateboarder	A, F
E1	Multiple	Beijing, Nanjing	Multiple	Secretary of Chinese Extreme Sport Association	F
E2	Multiple	Beijing, Shangha	Multiple	Manger of Asia Geography Magazine	F

		i			
M1	12.08.2014	Shanghai	Office visit	Owner of Skateboarding fashion brand	A, F
V1	14.08.2014	Shanghai	Home visit	Freelance videographer	A
M2	Multiple	Shanghai	Office visit	Vans marketing manager, team manager, referee and announcer of national skateboarding events	A, F
S5	Multiple	Nanjing	YOG	Professional skateboarder	A, F
S6	19.08.2014	Nanjing	YOG	Professional skateboarder	A
S7	19.08.2014	Nanjing	YOG	Professional skateboarder	A
M3	Multiple	Nanjing, Shenzhen	Multiple	Chief editor of Whatsup skateboarding magazine, team manager of multiple skateboarding brands in Shenzhen	A, F
S8	20.08.2014	Nanjing	YOG	Professional skateboarder	A
S9		Nanjing	YOG	Professional skateboarder	A

	20.08.201 4				
V2	21.08.201 4	Nanjing	YOG	Freelance Photographer	A
S10	21.08.201 4	Nanjing	YOG	Professional skateboarder	A
V3	22.08.201 4	Nanjing	YOG	Freelance videographer, founder of the first skateboarding video magazine 411VM	A
S11	Multiple	Nanjing	YOG	Professional skateboarder, Skateshop owner, Chinese national skateboarding team leader	A, F
S12	26.08.201 4	Shangha i	Home visit	Skateboarding coach	A
M4	26.08.201 4	Shangha i	Dinner	Professional skateboarder	A
M5	27.08.201 4	Shangha i	Office visit	Owner of skateboarding equipment distributor ATD, ex team manager of DC Shoes	A
L6	27.08.201	Shangha	Casual	Skatepark designer	A, F

	4	i	skateboarding session		
E3	28.08.2014	Shanghai	Office visit	Head of Shanghai Sports department	A
E4	29.08.2014	Shanghai		Head of Shanghai Yangpu district sports department	
L7	28.08.2014	Shanghai	Skatepark visit	Owner of Shanghai SMP skatepark	A
L8	28.08.2014	Shanghai	Home visit	Skateboarding Media Kickerclub.com founder	A, F
M6	31.08.2014	Shenzhen	Camping	Owner of Vagabond skateboards and team manager of Converse skateboarding team	A, F
M7	02.09.2014	Shenzhen	Office visit	Team manager of Psychos skateboards, female skateboarding brand	A
L9	03.09.2014	Shenzhen	Dinner	Founder of the Shenzhen extreme sports association, professional BMX rider	A
V4	05.09.201	Shenzhe	Office	Videographer, team manager of	A, F

	4	n	visit	Black Knight skateboards and sponsored skateboarder	
L10	06.09.2014	Guangzhou	Office visit	Owner of Skateboarding equipment distributor, videographer, Skateshop owner	A
S13	14.09.2014	Shanghai	Skateboarding filming session, Vans Wish You Were Here Event	Professional skateboarder	A
S14	17.09.2014	Beijing	Multiple	Sponsored skateboarder	A, F
L11	17.09.2014	Beijing	Casual skateboarding session	DJ, B-Boxer, old generation skateboarder, Referee of national skateboarding contests.	A

S15	multiple	Beijing	multiple	Graphic designer	F
S16	multiple	Beijing	multiple	Ex Skateshop assistant, 3xchina.com editor and graphic designer	F
L12	multiple	Beijing	dinner	Graffiti writer	F
V5	multiple	Beijing	multiple	Videographer of VICE media China and freelance skateboarding videographer	A, F
S17	05.06.2014	Beijing	Filming session	Sponsoered skateboarder	A, F
L13	multiple	Beijing	Casual skateboarding session	Ex Skateshop owner	F

List of fieldwork events

Settings	Events recorded	Mean(s) of recording (Audio, Fieldnotes, Visual notes)	Approximate time spent (hours)	
Beijing	Hang-outs and casual skateboarding sessions	F, V	30	
	Filming sessions	F, V	4	
	Interviews (7)	A	6	
Shanghai	Wish you were here Events (including documentary film competition premiere)	F, V	6	
	Filming sessions	F, V	4	
	Hang-outs and casual skateboarding sessions	F, V	15	
	Interviews (12)	A	16	
Shenzhen	Hobodaze (camping event)	A, F, V	16	
	Hang-outs and casual skateboarding sessions	F, V	6	
	Interviews (5)	A	6	
Guangzhou	AT Skateboarding competition	F, V	2	

	Hang-outs and casual skateboarding sessions	F, V	2	
	Interviews (1)	A	2	
Nanjing	Youth Olympic Games	F, V	54	
	Hang-outs	F, V	24	
	Filming sessions	F, V	4	
	Interviews (8)	A	14	
Wuhan	Hang-outs and casual skateboarding sessions	F, V	6	
	Interviews (5)	A	5	

Loughborough University

China's Skateboarding Youth Culture as an Emerging Culture Industry

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

(to be completed after Participant Information Sheet has been read)

The purpose and details of this study have been explained to me.   I understand that this study is designed to further scientific knowledge and that all procedures have been approved by the Loughborough University Ethics Approvals (Human Participants) Sub-Committee.

I have read and understood the information sheet and this consent form.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions about my participation.

I understand that I am under no obligation to take part in the study.

I understand that I have the right to withdraw from this study at any stage for any reason, and that I will not be required to explain my reasons for withdrawing.

I understand that all the information I provide will be treated in strict confidence and will be kept anonymous and confidential to the researchers unless (under the statutory obligations of the agencies which the researchers are working with), it is judged that confidentiality will have to be breached for the safety of the participant or others.

I agree to participate in this study.

Your name

_____

Your signature

_____

Signature of investigator

_____

Date

_____