

Asian ©reative Encounters

Programme Outline

Introduction

It is now widely recognized that different kinds of innovation and creativity are driving new production forms that give rise to goods and services with an added value: experience. For Asian countries to operate as high growth, competitive, global leaders in the creative – or experience – economy, its government and business organizations need to develop a highly interconnected cultural and creative infrastructure.

Asian ©reative Encounters (A©E) is an ongoing development of the ©reative Encounters (CE) research programme which was hosted by the Copenhagen Business School (CBS), from April 2007 to the end of June 2012, and financed by the Strategic Research Council of Denmark (www.cbs.dk/creativeencounters). The purpose of ©reative Encounters was to redress the fact that, although the creative economy was seen at the time to be *the* key to future competitiveness, few people *really* understood its organizational dynamics. To this end, it examined the socio-economic organization of creative industries in Europe, Singapore and Japan, and published the results of researchers' findings in 69 working papers, several dozen journal articles, and more than a dozen single-, co-authored, and edited books.

Asian ©reative Encounters pursues the aims of ©reative Encounters, but focuses its attention on the South and East Asian region. Members of its research staff analyze business practices, professions, networks, and organizations in creative industries in China, Hong Kong, India, Japan and other regional centres. The programme seeks to understand, at both micro- and macro-levels, the complex interplay – sometimes conflicting, sometimes harmonious – between economic and cultural forces.

A©E is guided by three basic questions affecting the development of Asian creative economies:

- How to achieve and maintain **global competitiveness** in a changing world market. This is the economic framework within which the programme is carried out;
- How to build effective links between different creative industries (fashion, film, art, advertising, and so on), as well as between different parts of the value chain within each industry across traditional, sectoral, institutional and locational boundaries. It is in such convergences that ideas are shared, technology meets content, and commerce engages with culture;
- How to position a cultural and creative infrastructure at the heart of every place and community, providing **stimulation** for creative people whose activities enable whole cities to flourish as creative hubs that work together.

Although policy makers tend to talk in general terms about 'creative industries', what has become clear from the research conducted in ©reative Encounters at the

Copenhagen Business School is that each industry tends to be very different from other industries – in terms of their creative processes, technology adaptation, value chains, overall organizational structures, and consumer images. For example,

- In the fashion industry, everyday material products are still based on manufacturing in cheap labour markets, but in Europe the industry is almost exclusively geared to the branding and design of *immaterial* production.
- Movie/film, too, is an old industry that is part of a global production process, which is now undergoing digitalization. This is radically altering consumer practices as well as the conception of the industry as a whole.
- Just like the movie industry, art museums are actively interested in place branding, but top-down packaging clashes with the kind of bottom-up energy and creative chaos that have typically characterized the art world.

This vertical approach to the study of creative industries aims at an overall understanding of the organization of creativity and innovation, in order to learn what kind of education and knowledge will be needed by those working in Asian creative economies in the future. This is not simply a theoretical exercise. By working closely with industry and educational institutions, A@E will in the long term contribute directly to teaching programmes across Asia, as well as to change within creative sectors themselves.

Social relevance

During the past few years, scholars in Europe and the United States have begun to form a clearer idea about how creative industries function and why they do so in the ways that they do. Very little is known, however, about Asian creative industries in general and much comparative work remains to be done, since there is no *a priori* reason to believe that they differ from elsewhere. We do not know if, as in the UK, they tend to be marked by a lack of appropriate management education, by poor access to business information, and by generally weak networks, along which management information can be shared and best practice identified. If they do indeed exist, such issues would limit competitiveness and so need to be redressed. This means that we need to take particular account of the following:

- The creative milieu in which creative industries function;
- Education and training needs;
- Creative processes;
- The potential competitiveness of Asian creative industries in the global experience economy.

The research programme thus aims to contribute to a better understanding of the logic of creative industries *vis-à-vis* their geographical location. This, in turn, will create knowledge about what skills and qualifications are required for different Asian creative industries to be competitive, and therefore will help sector-based training institutions to upgrade their education programmes.

At the same time, Asian creative industries are connected to the global economy through production processes and consumer trends. Creative inputs in

fashion production, for example, are being reinterpreted, as suppliers take over more and more tasks relating to the design, manufacture, and financing of fashion and clothing. What, then, should be the core competences of a Japanese fashion company – now and in the future? How is it to adapt when its production depends on trends in emerging markets in China and the Southeast Asian region? What kind of education and knowledge will those working in creative industries need in the next generation? How can those who have been highly educated, primarily in the humanities and the soft end of the social sciences, contribute to the creative economy? *Asian Creative Encounters* seeks to answer such long-term, practical questions for industry partners. Broadly phrased, its concern is with the **creative encounters** and **engagements** that take place between people, materials, products, places, organizations, industries, nations, and the programme's own research methodologies.

Research programme

This research programme regards the empirical world of Asian creative industries as an enmeshment of economic, social, cultural and material processes. The only way to fully understand these processes is by means of **in-depth industry studies**. These give rise to the following emphases:

- **Ethnographic research methods:** The basic assumption behind the phrase 'socio-economic organization' is that, in real life, Asian creative industries are densely patterned in a manner that cannot be captured by a single disciplinary perspective (for example, economics or sociology), but must be understood in their rich empirical contexts, even (or perhaps especially) when such contexts undermine current theoretical models and call established approaches into question. *A@E* researchers use a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, but believe that the methodology, which most richly captures the multiple aspects of the socio-economic reality of Asian creative industries, together with their internal patterning, is that of ethnography. Ethnographic research methods are particularly useful, because fieldwork demands of the researcher an intensive participant observation, together with a (near) total social immersion and intimacy between researcher and informant, that is not provided by other research methods.
- **Interdisciplinary approach:** While the research team is committed to develop ethnography as a research methodology in the study of Asian creative industries, members do not hold it up as a dogma to be religiously adhered to. Rather, they believe that it should be put to the test and developed in tandem with other methods of conducting research. It is its empirical focus and commitment to empirical richness that leads *A@E* researchers to adopt what might be termed a multidisciplinary perspective on the socio-economic processes at work in different CI sectors. Nevertheless, their ultimate aim is to move beyond the merely arithmetical basis of

multidisciplinary studies and to engage in truly interdisciplinary research, where individual approaches amount to more than their sum.

- The strength of the empirical research forms the basis of **industry partnerships**. We do not hold with the notion that academic researchers are 'experts' who can force general theoretical models and received truths onto (generally unsuspecting) companies. Rather, we believe that researchers and industry partners should engage in a process of mutual learning that is open and empirical enough to take account of variation and specificity at the level of industries, companies and individuals in different Asian creative industry sectors. This is what we mean by 'knowledge-producing partnerships'.

Like *©reative Encounters* before it, *A©E* pursues in-depth industry studies in two directions:

1. **Micro-level analyses** of creative business and production processes in South and East Asia. These will include:
 - The interplay between **creative and support personnel**. Creative products – a fashion collection, art exhibition or film – are produced as a result of close collaboration between creative (e.g. designers, artists, or directors) and humdrum supporting personnel. Both are essential for the completion of a creative product, and the complex interplay between the two (e.g. between director and producer, artist and curator, and so on), therefore, needs to be understood in its organizational context and compared with findings from *©reative Encounters* and elsewhere.
 - The social networks, individual career paths, and self-identity of Asian **creative workers**. Research findings from *©reative Encounters* and elsewhere make it clear that careers in creative industries are patchy, unpredictable and poorly defined. Some successful artists have no formal training; others with all the necessary educational qualifications remain unsuccessful. Some personnel cross over from creative to support employment; others move the other way. Some are employed in companies; others are freelance; yet others start up their own companies. Many 'wannabees' never make it at all. As the creative sector of the experience economy comes to be seen as more important, it becomes imperative to develop a systematic in-depth understanding of career patterns, exit strategies, and the motivations behind them. These will be studied as part of the ethnographic research method outlined above.
2. **Macro-level analyses** of how different creative industries in the Asian region define and enforce creative standards and business models through interaction. Here a number of different themes emerge:
 - **Trade fairs and festivals**. It is essential that we do not see a creative industry as operating within a given structure, but as an evolving collectivity. This means that the macro-level of analysis is also characterized by processes and social interaction, which can be studied by means of ethnographic research methods. The questions asked here are: How does an

industry define, celebrate and reproduce itself? How does its market function? How do economic and symbolic structures interact? By way of answer, A©E researchers, following the example set by the ©reative Encounters research team, will conduct individual and joint research projects relating to a variety of trade fairs, festivals and similar industry events. In this way, they can examine, through a single event, the economic, social, cultural and material processes that underpin a whole industry and compare their findings with published results from Europe and the United States.

- **The comparative element** of the programme emerges from our original orientation concerning convergences between traditional, sectoral, institutional and locational boundaries. It addresses two questions in particular: How are creative processes organized? And how are different creative industries organized? These questions lead A©E researchers to look at the similarities and differences that exist between different Asian creative industries, companies and individuals.
- **A transnational perspective** is also important for two reasons. Firstly, there is a danger of parochialism, if researchers focus exclusively on creative industries organized at a national level in, for example, India or Korea. Secondly, increasing economic globalization, together with the development of IT and digitization, is having an impact of one sort or another on many creative industry sectors: for example, on the manufacturing base in the case of the fashion and luxury industries; on distribution profits in the case of film; and on creative labour and copyright ownership in travel guidebook publishing. This enquiry into global flows leads to the issue of how:
- **National cultural identity** is constructed and embedded in Asian creative industries. This question is repeatedly posed – first, because creative industries in general are affected by globalization processes, which change the conditions under which a national economy as a whole functions; secondly, because creativity is associated with the making of something ‘new’, whereas cultural identity is defined by the repetition of established patterns. This paradox emerges in the ‘invention of tradition’ as an ongoing process in many Asian creative industries, which actually wish to construct images that contradict the cultural identity in which they find themselves.

Knowledge Exchanges

A©E also provides a platform for knowledge exchange between researchers and industry practitioners. The programme organizes talks, conferences, and roundtable discussions through which researchers and practitioners can exchange ideas, research results, and insights about creative industries. Researchers of the programme are qualified and willing to provide consultancy services for companies of different creative industries in Asia, as requested.