

Creative Market: A Gathering Place for Folk Creative Forces in Contemporary Cities

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Abstract

The theme of this paper is to develop Creative Market and promote the development of folk creative forces in contemporary cities. Creative Market refers to such fair that displays and sells small creative objects for everyday use within a given time and venue. This paper expounds on the emergence and development of Creative Market, as well as overall development and main features of Creative Market in China. The paper holds that Creative Market is a “Chinese-style creation” by creativity of the common people in the tide of creative economy, with originality as its core value and individuality, small production size and handmade crafts as its basic features. Creative Market is constructive for contemporary consumption culture, which, with a passion for creative and knowledge of design, is willing to pay for creative ideas and “created in China”. Creative Market is a mass creative space integrating creative, design and manufacturing, where creative people are maker-designers who transform creative ideas into products. It is also an innovation platform for grass root design and mass art, where maker-designers represent a new lifestyle and way of work. The paper suggests that the government and society should support the development of Creative Markets so that they can play a greater role in the construction of Contemporary urban culture and the creation of urban creativity and artistic atmosphere.

Keywords: Creative Market, creative forces, folk

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Creative Market is a “Chinese-style creation” by creativity of the common people amongst the tide of creative economy as well as a new creative space in the diversified contemporary urban culture eco-system. Creative Market refers to such fair that displays and sells small creative objects for everyday use within a given time and venue, where products sold on such fair mainly features originality, individuality, trendy style and handmade production. In short, Creative Market is where participants take what they have created to the fair. The organizers would provide or apply for the venue from authorities and determine the time, and openly solicit creative works from the public and accept registration. Sellers and shoppers would discuss face to face during the fair and make the deals.

Creative Market is a new form of traditional fair in the contemporary context; yet what differentiates Creative Market from conventional fair is that most of the products on the Creative Market are characterized by individuality and originality. Integrating lifestyle and art and accessible for all, Creative Market is an experimental stage of creativity of the common people and a creative space for mass design and grass root design.

The idea of Creative Market was first proposed in 2005 in *Creative Market* by Wang Yiying, a Taiwanese designer pursuing her studies in UK. The phenomenon that London designers took their creative works to the market for sale was described in the book and referred to as “Creative Market”. In fact, no specific market in either UK or other countries is operating under the name of Creative Market. With the publication of this book, the concept of Creative Market was responded with much enthusiasm among creative people, especially the young generation in China, Imart Creative Market, which was the first Creative Market in mainland China, was held in Guangzhou in July, 2006, followed by the emergence of new markets named Creative Market in large and medium-sized cities in China, and the concept of Creative Market was truly materialized in reality.

Creative Market is a mass creative space integrating creative, design and production, and the creative people in the market are maker designers who transform creative ideas into products. Maker designers on the market offer handmade products with artistic, individual and little technical element, they translate personal interest, inspiration and talent into reality through individual manufacturing. The creativity displayed by Chinese Creative Market is making it a living carrier of contemporary urban creative spirit and a part of new urban culture.

I. Current Development of Creative Markets in China

From 2006 to now, the Creative Market with a history of 10 years has developed from the original several cities, scattered and intermittent state to the large and medium-sized cities across the country, presenting a trend of sustained and stable development. Creative markets are organized in a variety of ways, from indoor to outdoor.

The scale is from a few stalls to 200 or 300 stalls. The initial Creative Market does not have many sessions each year, but it is relatively large. In recent years, the host frequency is much, the scale is small. In many cities, such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen, there are dozens to hundreds of fairs held every year. After

years of development, some cities have formed some influential Creative Market brands. Such as iMART Creative Market in Guangzhou, Firefly Creative Market in Shanghai, T Street Creative Market in Shenzhen, West Lake Creative Market in Hangzhou, etc. Many of the small studios that participate in the Creative Market are composed of young creative people, some one or two person, some three or five.

The modes of Creative Market are divided into three types: stall, physical store and online store.

Most Creative Markets are in the form of stall, which is the most basic and most widely seen so that Creative Markets mainly refer to creative stalls. Yet rather than randomly arranged like normal street peddlers, such stalls are organized events with organizer, co-organizer and in many cases, specified theme. Usually the organizer must follow certain procedures to acquire a permit for holding the event, and post related information about the stall as well as the conditions and procedures for application on certain media (internet or posters); participants therefore may bring their goods for selling at the given time and venue after being noticed by the organizer for approval through certain procedures. It is normally for the organizer to determine where or not stand fees should be paid by participants and the payable amount. Such stalls can be categorized into ground stalls and stand stalls. In the former case, no material support is provided by the organizer and participants may place their goods directly on the ground while in the latter case, the organizer usually provides tables and stools, cartons, slipcovers, parasols, tents, etc., and participants may place their goods on the table for shoppers to choose.

Online Creative Market refers to the model where a certain number of creative brands agglomerate on an online platform for buyers to place their order online after making a choice based on the text and image information of the products. As online Creative Market offers more convenience and efficiency, some creative people would advertise and sell their products simultaneously in stalls, physical stores and online markets. Wowsai.com and nuandao.com are two online creative platforms functioning as online Creative Markets where creative designers and their studios gather together. While many market participants also set up online stores on ordinary online platforms, such as taobao.com, selling online is the main sales way when they do not participate in a live Creative Market.

Physical store Creative Market refers to such a model where the creative people sold their products in a fixed physical market space. Some stores are independent boutiques while others might be chain stores or shoppes in department stores. This model is characterized by fixed venue and daily business operations. Creative Market of Fengguo.com is represented by physical stores. Compared with the stall market and network market, brick-and-mortar stores account for a small proportion in the model of Creative Market due to their high operating costs.

Products on Creative Markets include a wide variety ranging from handicrafts and paper art to accessories and clothing, mostly small products for everyday use featuring individuality and creativeness. The vast majority of these products are handmade in small batches. These products come from small studios that participate in the market. With the development of Creative Market, some Creative Market brands with their own ideas, features and styles have emerged, including Happy Chen, Jing

Maomao, and Beauty Original, etc.

Young people aged between 20 and 35 constitute the mainstream of Creative Market participants. Although Creative Market still sounds unfamiliar for many people, its awareness among young urban residents proves quite high. These young people are both producers of the goods sold on the market and mainstream consumers. The vast majority of these brands are run by small studios of one, two or three designers, who have just graduated from university or fresh in the professional world, and most of these young people have an education background in design or art, in addition to participating in the Creative Market, they mainly sell their products online or consignment in stores. Consumer groups of Creative Markets are mainly young urban residents and university students.

Organizers of Creative Markets include a wide variety of social entities such as media, companies, governmental agencies, schools, non-profit social organizations, etc., among which three types are relatively more active and influential: companies, governmental agencies and media.

The May Day holiday, National Day holiday and summer vacation from July to August constitute the peak seasons for Creative Markets, which are mainly held outdoors in spring, summer and autumn and indoors in winter. Usually lasting for one or two days, and normally not exceeding three days, most Creative Markets are held in venues with many visitors, recognized and frequented as trendy landmarks or those with historical and cultural richness. Shopping malls and featured stores are the most common places for Creative Markets, also major parks, art zones, stadiums and squares and street blocks. After more than ten years of development, some cultural creative spaces that support and suitable for development of the Creative Market have been formed.

2. Core Values of the Creative Market: "Creativity", "Individuality" and "Fashion"

Creative Market is a result of the overwhelming era of creative economy. Since the late 1990s, the concept and practice of creative industry and creative economy has been sweeping across the world, as gaining driving force for enterprise and social economy through individual or collective creativity became widely accepted, and Creative Market was born in such social atmosphere that values and respects creativeness. Though the concept of Creative Market is originated from Creative Markets was born in London, yet its concrete form and massive practice are taking place in contemporary China, It can be safely stated that Creative Market is a type of "Created in China" by grass root creative talents amongst the tide of creative economy.

Originality is the core value of Creative Market while individuality, small scale and handmade production constitute its basic characteristics. the pursuit for originality is the most precious and most valuable content of the Creative Market, Participants in Creative Markets have always followed the principle of originality, which is manifested in the themes and mottos of some of these markets, including "Small Design and Big Idea", "Creative Ideas Generate Wealth", "Support Original Design and Discover the Beauty of Originality".as the novelty, fun and uniqueness of the

products on the Creative Market are all related to originality; while sustainable innovation capacity is the fundamental driving force for contemporary creative urban development.

Creative Market is where creative and unique products are valued and appreciated while profit-seeking “wholesale goods” with little originality are despised by creative people participating in the market and are constrained in various ways. In some Creative Markets, once organizers spot goods procured from wholesale markets, such booth or stand would be immediately suspended. Many organizers clearly state the requirement for originality when calling for product entries for the Creative Market, and participants must submit images of their products. After examination and approval, these participants are required to sign a letter of commitment with the organizer, promising that the certain level of similarity between goods sold on the market and the images submitted. As the commonly acknowledged fundamental principle of Creative Markets, originality is what essentially differentiates Creative Markets from general markets or flea markets, making the former a newly emerged contemporary form of market and a new creative space in the contemporary city.

Compared to industrialization, batched production and high- and new-technology integrated in contemporary products, the goods sold on Creative Markets show opposite characteristics: hand-made production, small batch and little technical element yet showcasing the core essence of creative products, i.e. “emphasis on creativeness”, “individuality” and “fashion”. Here the value of products is a result of individual inspiration, talent and creativity, which is core to the emergence of market and social influence. The characteristic of handmade and small-scale production reflects the contemporary trend for consumption featuring niche market and customization. Products on the Creative Market are an integration of design and production, conveying a multi-layered connotation which encourages creativeness, emphasizes handmade crafts and expresses individuality and an attitude towards life that is different from traditional values of industrial products. Besides, these creative products also echo with a low-carbon and environmentally friendly modern lifestyle.

The products of the Creative Market conform to the current high-quality and personalized consumer demand. The products on the market are not pure artworks, the products need to have the potential to be “purchased”. The fact that the Creative Market develops mainly in cities, especially in large and medium-sized cities, shows that a certain consumption environment is a necessary condition for the development of the Creative Market. The pursuit for individuality, uniqueness and creativity as reflected in the products on Creative Markets illustrates the consumer preference of the contemporary market which has lost interest in the mechanical, massive and stereotyped industrial goods. Creative Market, on the other hand, encourages quality products and quality consumption, which means creative, individualistic, interesting and inspired products rather than necessarily expensive, premium or luxurious consumption. Creative Market is consistent with the demand of niche market as well as the development trend of contemporary consumption which values individuality. With the development of Creative Markets in China, new consumer groups who are enthusiastic about creative, knowledgeable of design and tasteful about life have emerged. Developing Creative Market helps to encourage awareness and consumption of creative products, individualistic products and quality products of consumers in Beijing, while helping to cultivate a diversified consumption market and consumer

group and developing a contemporary consumption culture featuring passion for creativeness, understanding of design and willingness to pay for “Created in China”.

3. Creative Market Is A Gathering Place for Folk Creative Forces

Maker refers to those transforming various creative ideas into reality as an interest or hobby. Creative people active in Creative Markets are maker designers who translate their creative ideas into products on the market. Unlike the mainstream of makers—the “geek makers” working with hardware installations and open source coding among other high technologies as their platform, maker designers on the market offer handmade products with artistic and little technical element; yet they do possess the core characteristic of makers: translating personal interest, inspiration and talent into reality through individual manufacturing. Maker is a representative of contemporary folk creative power, maker designers in the market is a unique type of maker. In the cultural construction of contemporary cities and the cultivation of creative resources, cities needs not only glamorous brand designs and maestro designers but also grass root creative talents providing long-term and sustainable support for the development of creative city. In the Creative Market some maker designers won the market, gathered consumers and venture capital, launched the brand, and eventually left the Creative Market to open stores independently; some have been active in various types of Creative Markets for several years; some people disappear after a while at the Creative Market, and meanwhile new people keep coming in, there are many young people looking for opportunities to join in. These fledgling designers in Creative Markets in Beijing are the grass root foundation and reserve forces indispensable to the goal of building a creative city and “Capital of Design” of Beijing.

Creative Market is a creative space for grassroots design and civilian art. A brand may possibly be born from a computer, several rough sketches and some feet of dyed textiles. The idea of Creative Market was originated on the grass root level rather than the top design, hence spontaneously developing in echoes with the times. Without any subsidy from the government, its survival depends on the market from the very first day. At a Creative Market, everyone can be a designer or an artist. The first Creative Market in mainland China was named after iMART, which means I am art (everyone is an artist). On Creative Market characterized by low threshold and easy accessibility, the only criterion is the creativeness of products. This design by the masses on grass root level reflects the enormous cultural creativity of the populace, and practice the spirit of The Times of mass entrepreneurship and innovation.

The Creative Market is the reflection of the folk creative power in contemporary China, and the identity of the creative person in the market is folk. In the social structure of China, they are independent non-institutional (group) individuals with high degree of freedom and belong to freelancers. For some of them, entrepreneurship starts immediately after they graduate from university, or even before graduation; while others, including those well paid, quit their jobs after some time and start their own enterprises, for example, Gao Xinyue, a girl from Beijing, quitted her job as assistant manager of a TV & media company to pursue her career as an independent maker designer. The younger generation enthusiastically involved in Creative Markets are creators of a new generation of culture characterized by the era. They tend to integrate work and fun, life and art, and pursue a lifestyle with more independence

and less constraint in creating culture and life. Creating in freedom and fun is the lifestyle advocated and followed by maker designers involved in Creative Markets who arrange their own schedules for work, life and leisure. Enjoying what they do and living a carefree life in freedom is what they have chosen. The work and life style of creative people in the market reflects a kind of individualistic culture with the characteristics of The Times, which is part of the process of social diversification and democratization.

Creative Market is the living carrier of contemporary creative city. China's Creative Market is dominated by young urban people. In one city's Creative Market, a lot of people are from the local area, but some people are from other cities, and young foreigners are seen engaged in such markets from time to time. With youthful passion and dream to create, these people take Creative Market as their stage and testing ground, where they test, revise and materialize their creative ideas. The Creative Market gathers the scattered and weak forces of the folk and strengthens them, thus becoming the most vigorous and energetic part of the modern urban creative spirit. The Creative Market integrates the new connotation of "having dreams, loving creativity and daring to venture" into the creative spirit of contemporary cities.

The development of Creative Market will contribute to the construction of urban creative atmosphere and new urban culture, the culture of a city is by no means limited to its history. All new cultural phenomena and new accumulation are possible to be part of the urban culture. All healthy and positive cultures should be included in the urban cultural spirit. The spirit of innovation embodied in the Creative Market has injected new connotation and vitality into the contemporary urban culture.

4. Suggestions for the Future Development of Creative Market

Considering that the development of Creative Market contributes to the creation of urban creative atmosphere, the formation of new creative space and the construction of creative city, the governments and official institutions of various cities should pay attention to and support the development of Creative Markets to make the development of contemporary cities more dynamic. For this purpose, the following recommendations are made:

A. Provides a fixed space for the Creative Market and fosters a new urban public creative space.

As a flexible and convenient platform for demonstration and circulation of creative products, Creative Markets Participants remain undimmed in their enthusiasm for Creative Market. Yet the constantly expanding demand of such enormous creativity has not yet been fully satisfied, Creative Market participants are looking for more opportunities for involvement and more convenient space for events and activities, therefore, it is suggested that: First, It is suggested to set up the Creative Market section in various large-scale social and cultural activities, such as art festival, cultural festival and cultural forum, hence building a consistent and representative brand of Creative Market. Second, the experience of Shenzhen and Taiwan in involving Creative Markets in the construction of urban leisure space as well as cultural and tourism landmarks can be borrowed in terms of providing a fixed venue and space, to provide a permanent place and space for long-term activities to the Creative Market in

a city with conditions, to cultivate the city's new fashion and creative landmarks and cultural tourist attractions. During a survey for consumers of Creative Market in Beijing in 2013, over half of the recipients gave the answer of “monthly or biweekly” to the question “what do you think is the most appropriate frequency of Creative Markets”, accounting for 54.7% of the total. For the construction of modern creative cities, this innovative folk aspiration should be answered.

B. Develop Creative Market, attract designer-makers to gather and boost the development of grass root creative.

Creative Market is a gala of designer makers. It is therefore recommended to guide the spontaneous impulses to create to transform from purely “creative for fun” to creative-based entrepreneurship so that Creative Market would truly function as an experimental stage and starting point for young entrepreneurs in design and creative as well as a maker space nurturing and maintaining young design talents. Dynamic efforts in developing grass root design including Creative Markets would improve the social awareness and perception for design and creativity, hence forming a favorable social atmosphere of valuing and understanding design. It is suggested to organize design contests and awards on various levels and of different types, especially those for young designers, and to support small and micro enterprises established by makers, including those on Creative Markets, by providing favorable conditions or fee reduction in terms of enterprise creation, loans and patent application, in an effort to boost the grass root creative power.

C. Strengthen attention and research on Creative Markets

Rather than labeling such Creative Markets as young people having fun or acting on youthful impulse, the ideas of “emphasis on creativeness”, “individuality” and “fashion” reflected in these Creative Markets should be guided as a driving force for advocating innovation spirit and constructing a new urban culture. In this sense, social understanding and support of Creative Market as grass root creative resource are far from being sufficient. In the media reporting of the Creative Market in the past year, fewer than a few cases can see the attention of mainstream media, the media focus on emerging media such as civil websites and Internet groups. Besides, in the study of the contemporary urban cities little attention is shown to Creative Markets and grass root creative resources. It is therefore suggested that the government should engage in and support Creative Markets through organizing, co-organizing, media support, project research, etc. so as to strengthen the research on grass root creative activities such as Creative Market and to explore deeper into the relationships between Creative Market and cultural & creative industry, between Creative Market and grass root creative resources, between Creative Market and urban youth culture as well as new urban culture, hence making Creative Market a new highlight showcasing the urban dynamism and creativity.

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