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Master's Thesis of Architecture

**The 798 Art District & the Conditions for
Confluence of Politics, Art, and Architecture**

798 아트촌과 정치, 예술, 건축의 수렴을 위한
조건들

August 2016

Graduate School of Architecture & Architectural
Engineering
Seoul National University
Architecture Major
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Abstract

The 798 Art District & the Conditions for Confluence of Politics, Art, and Architecture

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In the post-industrial era, the bond between architecture and art has become more fluid and organic. Emergence of the minimalist art in the 1960's marked a moment in art history when artists actively began to form new alliances with architects, by turning their art into industrialized objects that are precisely tuned within an architectural context. Recently, the object and the context have often switched their roles, as the primary architectural background for exhibition has changed from pristine white cubes to tough and raw industrial shells. Major institutions like the Tate Modern and the Dia Foundation initially pioneered the trend in adaptive reuse of industrial architecture for art exhibitions, and the recent opening of the Prada Foundation in Milan has signaled the moment of full maturity for the phenomenon. Unlike these precedents in the West, which are mostly initiated and funded by major institutions and corporations, the 798 Art District, located in a former German industrial complex in Beijing, was originally founded

by independent artists who moved into the abandoned industrial buildings in search of cheap live-work studios, until the government gradually took control of its overall organization and operation. Now a curious hybrid of exhibition spaces, artists' studios, and commercial establishments, the 798 Art District is more deeply rooted within its cultural, economic, and architectural context than its Western counterparts. Moving beyond a static physical adaptation, it provides a new form of convergence between art and architecture, in which both are in a constant state of organic transformation. By highlighting the unique condition of organic confluence between art and architecture, as embodied in the 798 Art District, this paper will offer a new set of reasons for preserving the industrial architectural heritage in Asian cities.

Keywords: 798 Art District, adaptive reuse, convergence, confluence

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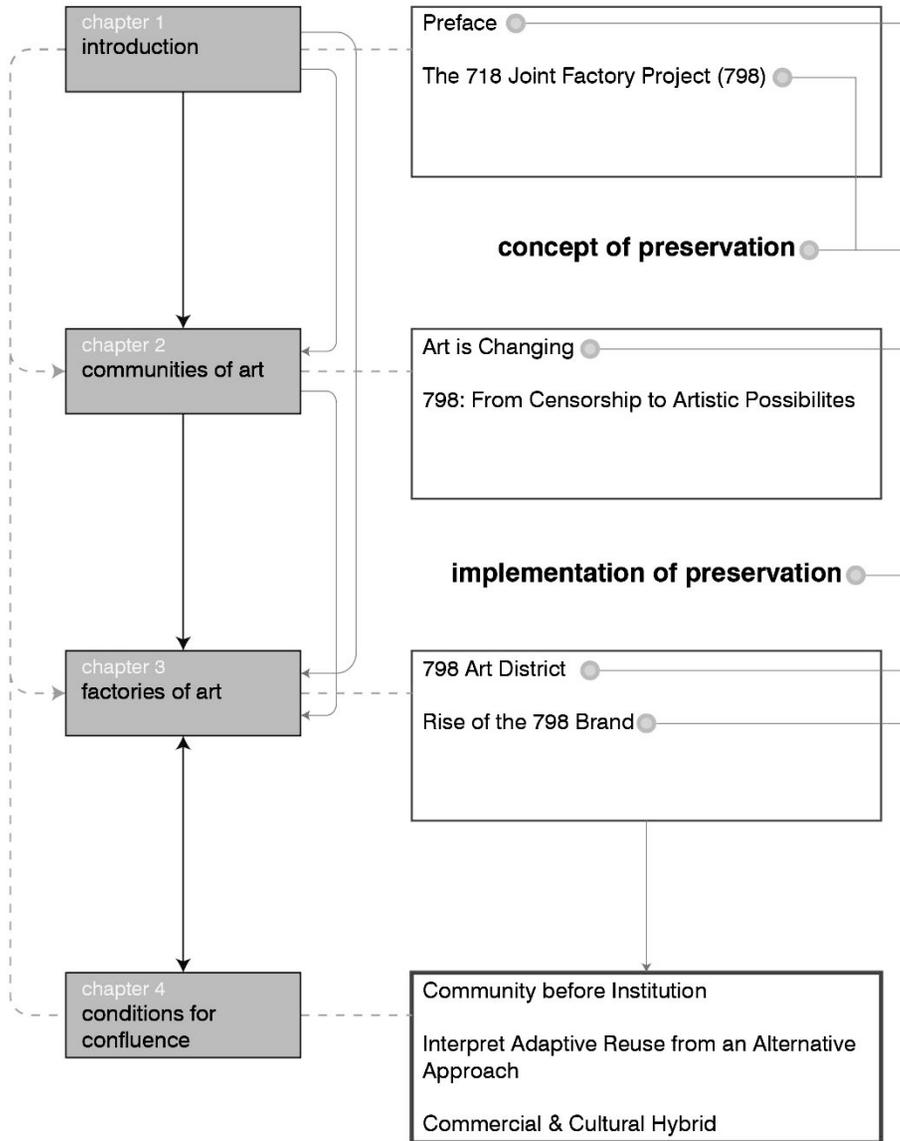
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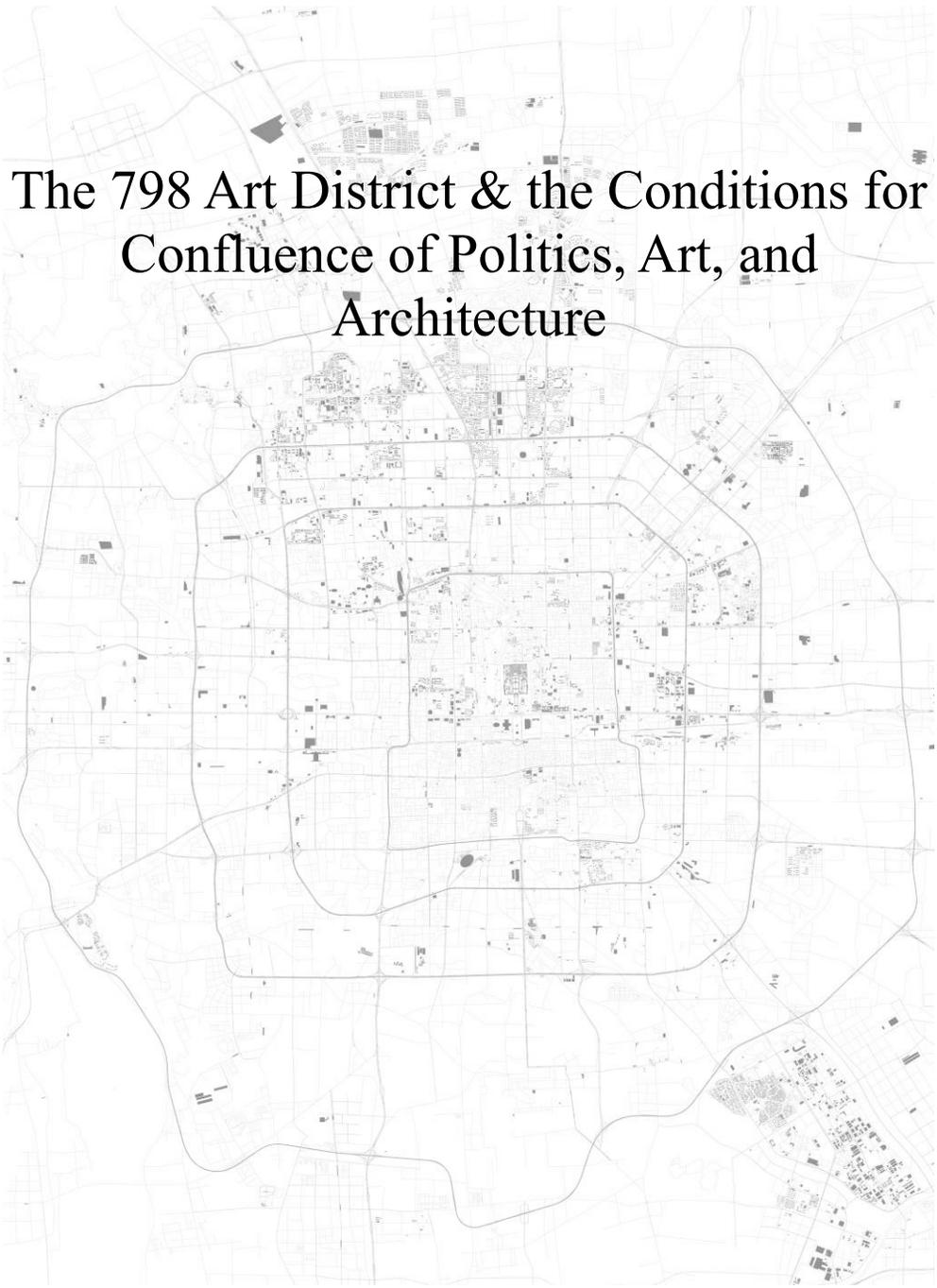
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Structure





The 798 Art District & the Conditions for Confluence of Politics, Art, and Architecture

1. Introduction

1.1 Preface

The story of preservation, in the West, has been long associated with the terminology assigned to historical *ruins*. The English word *ruin* has its origin in the idea of falling and has long been associated with fallen stones.¹ From here it has gained its primary definition as architectural remains of predominantly masonry structures.² This definition laid the basis for constructing the narrative of preservation in the West, one that altered the ways in which cultures perceived, represented, and interpreted their beliefs towards the preservation of *ruins*.³ This representation of beliefs in the West has spread globally through colonization and globalization, unknowingly inspiring a universal aesthetic appreciation towards architectural symbols.⁴ The visual representation of *ruins* depicted through art helped develop a nostalgic attitude towards architectural symbols, which later evolved into a narrative of preservation and adaptive reuse.

On the other hand, the sudden emergence of preservation and adaptive reuse ideologies, in China, were born from the political rhetoric of Chinese contemporary art in confluence with urban *ruins*. The polemics of Chinese contemporary art opposed the political façade that objectified artistic expressionism in China, and

¹ Roth, MS 1997, 'Irresistible Decay: Ruins Reclaimed' in *Irresistible Decay: Ruins Reclaimed*, ed. Micheal S. Roth, Los Angeles, pp. 1.

² Hung, op. cit, pp. 7.

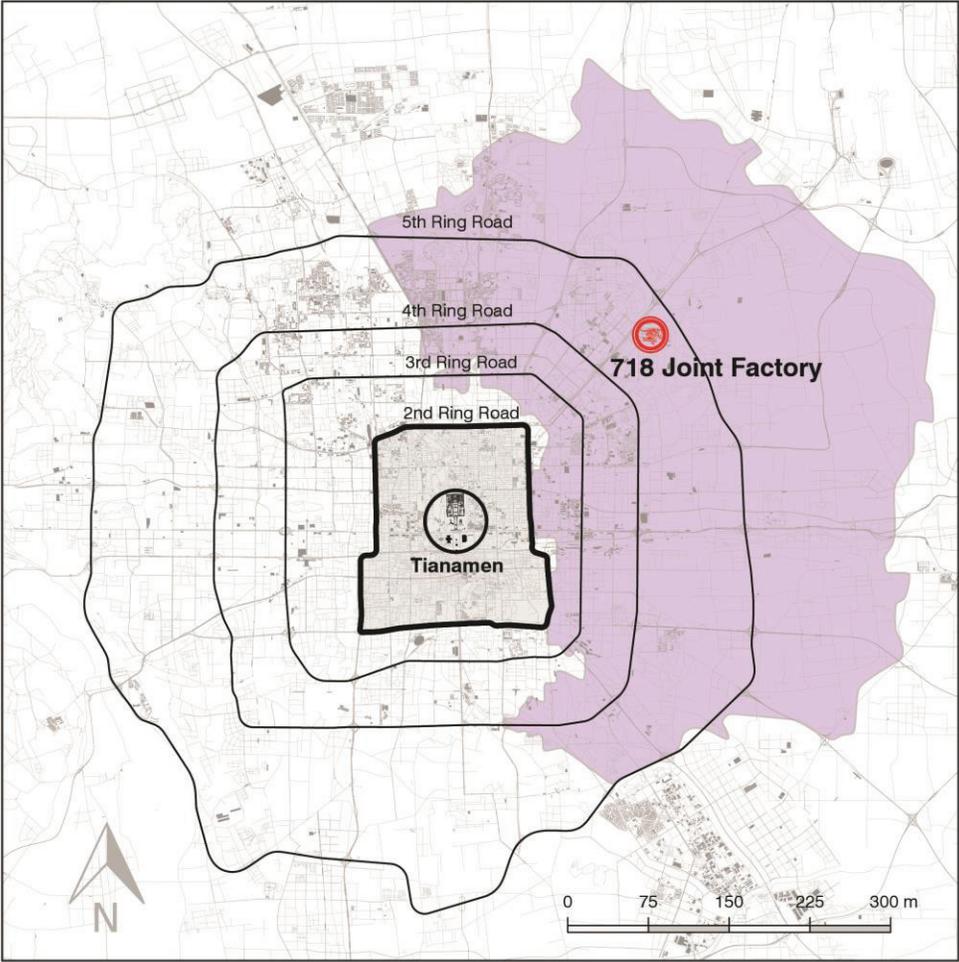
³ *ibid.*, pp. 7.

⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 7.

resulted in immense government pressure which forced artists to produce art in ephemeral spaces hidden from the public. When contemporary art emerged into the public sphere, in China, it was manifested through the convergence of artistic radicalism and industrial architecture. The political and contextual polarities of contemporary art and industrial architecture, in China, converged to form a new form of adaptive reuse, self-defined and deeply rooted in Chinese culture.

The 798 Art District, formerly known as the 718 Joint Factory Project, in Beijing, China, represents one of the first examples of confluence between Chinese contemporary art and industrial architecture, and serves as a precedent that defined cultural industrialization through the adaptive reuse of post-industrial spaces in China. This paper examines the complex historical interactions of the convergence of Chinese contemporary art and industrial architecture, i.e. the 798 Art District, and how they evolved to develop a narrative that defines creative cultural industrialization in modern China.

1.2 The 718 Joint Factory Project (798)



-  718 Joint Factory (798)
-  Tianamen Square
-  Beijing Center
-  Chaoyang District
-  Ring Roads

Fig. 1-1. Beijing – 798 Art District Map
Source: Author

1.2.1 Industrial History

Since the 1950s, China's rapid growth and reform has submerged Chinese cities in a constant cycle of economic reform. China's joint projects with the Soviet Union in Beijing saw the decentralization of industrial districts to the outer lying suburbs. The Soviet Union aided China in a total of 156 projects, varying from civil to industrious contexts, in an effort to propel China into the modern sphere of economic powers. The 157th project was subsequently mediated by the Soviet Union but was ultimately conducted under the partnership between China and East Germany.

In 1951, Prime Minister Zhou Enlai approved the preliminary plans for China to fund and construct the North China Wireless Electronic Equipment Joint Factory in Beijing.⁵ The State-owned Factory 774 and the North China Wireless Electronic Equipment Joint Factory, otherwise known as the 718 Joint Factory, which included factories 718, 798, 797, 751, 706, and 708, became the 157th project, constructed under socialist reform as well as the sole project completed between China and East Germany. The initial proposition of the 157th project was included in a five-year industrial design plan proposed by China and the Soviet Union to design and construct three industrial factories in the eastern suburbs of Beijing (Fig. 1-1). The first two factories, projects 155 & 156, were intended to manufacture electron tubes

⁵ Rui, H (ed.) 2008, '798: History', in *Beijing 798: Reflections of 'Factory Art*, eds Huang Rui, Sichuan Fine Arts Publishing House, Chengdu, pp. 164.

and automatic converters, while the third factory, the 718 Joint Factory Project, was intended to produce large scale radio electronic components⁶ to be used for atomic bomb research and development.⁷ At the time, the Soviet Union did not contain the industrial resources to domestically manufacture these large-scale wireless electronic components, and subsequently imported them from East Germany.⁸

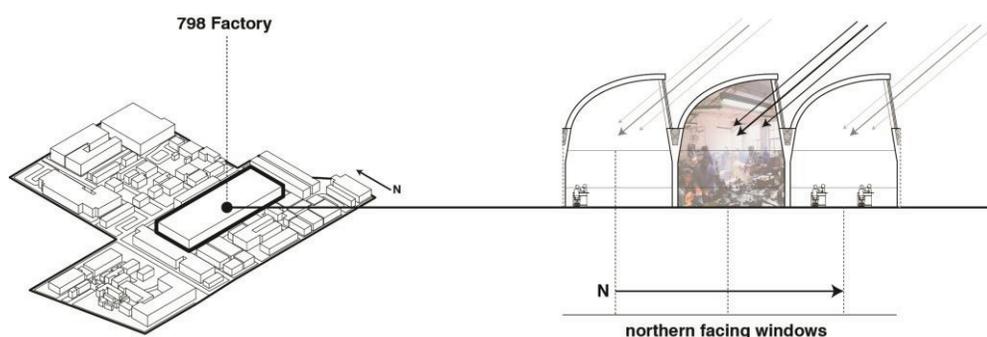


Fig. 1-2. 718 Joint Factory (798): Saw-tooth roof Section
Source: Author

This led to the beginning of the conjoined effort between China and East Germany in the design and construction of the 718 Joint Factory Project. The architectural design of the factories were entirely exported to East Germany, leaving the Chinese side to oversee finances and construction. Initial design proposals reflected Soviet styles that evoked national shapes, but were later rejected because the Chinese

⁶ Peilin, Luo 2008, 'Recollections on the History of the 718: As Recorded by Zhou Wenhan', in *Beijing 798: Reflections of 'Factory Art'*, eds Huang Rui, Sichuan Fine Arts Publishing House, Chengdu, pp. 58.

⁷ Keane, M 2009, 'The Capital Complex: Beijing's New Creative Clusters,' in *Creative Economies, Creative Cities: Asian-European Perspective*, eds L Konner & J O'Conner, Springer, London, UK, pp. 89.

⁸ Peilin, op. cit., pp. 58.

government was not convinced their domestic construction technology could execute it properly.⁹

The final design proposal was comprised of a series of large and small scale industrial factories derived from domestic precedents, i.e. Tianjin 712, but interpreted through the Bauhaus style (Fig. 1-2). The workshops reflected radically simplified forms, rational functionality, and the promotion of standardized forms of mass production.¹⁰ Saw-tooth roofs with northern facing windows were chosen over southern facing windows, which could accommodate for more abundant light, in order to mitigate shadow-cast for a more ambient distribution of light within interior spaces.¹¹ Construction began on the 718 Joint Factory in September 1954 and was completed in October 1957 (Fig. 1-3). The completion of this project marked the first and final project in collaboration between China and East Germany.

By 1961, the 718 Joint Factory had established itself as a thriving entity of the Beijing government and extended its services to assist the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in building factories for the production of wireless electronic equipment. By 1990, the 798 Factory was recognized by governing municipalities as a leading components factory, earning several awards for industrious quality and

⁹ Peilin, op. cit., pp. 59.

¹⁰ Curtis, WJR 1996, 'Walter Gropius, German Expressionism, and the Bauhaus, in *Modern Architecture since 1900*', W.J.R. Curtis (ed.), Phaidon Press, London. pp. 183-200.

¹¹ Peilin, op. cit., pp. 59.

economic profit (Fig. 1-5).

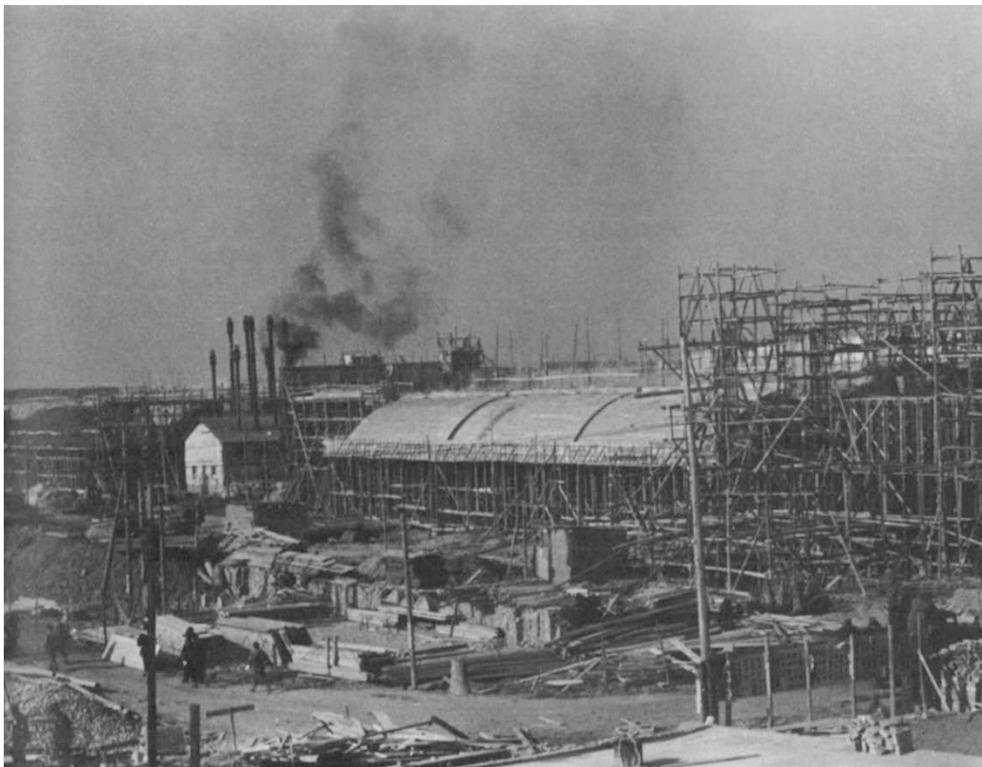


Fig. 1-3. 798 Factory under construction (1950s)
Source: Huang Rui (2008)¹²

In 1993, the Beijing Municipal Office of Electronics proposed a 10 kilometer master plan centered on Factory 798 and the surrounding Jiuxianqiao area that sought to reform and revitalize multi-scale state-owned enterprises into a high-tech electronic industrial base called *Beijing's Electronics Town*.¹³ This was a part of

¹² Note: 1950s 798 construction photo from Rui, H 2008, 'Memory Photo Album', in *Beijing 798: Reflections of 'Factory Art*, eds Huang Rui, Sichuan Fine Arts Publishing House, Chengdu, pp. 158.

¹³ Rui, op. cit., pp. 166.

China's economic reform plan that began in the 1980s under the new Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping, but was later retracted due to the onset economic crisis.

3.1.2 The Post-Mao / Post- Industrial Era

The 1980's brought industrialization into a new paradigm under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, the new leader of China. He sought to reinterpret the constructs of China's economics towards a more international and capitalistic system.

Initially, the 798 Factory thrived under these new conditions, becoming the first components factory to profit over 10 million yuan in 1983,¹⁴ but the 1990s saw the once illustrious profits of economic reform collapse and the Chinese central government support for state-operated factories began to weaken. The industrial production within the complex declined from 20,000 to 4,000 workers and rendered many factories non-functional.¹⁵ In 2001, the Beijing government reconstituted the remains of the 718 Joint Factory project to the Seven Star Group (Seven Star Huadian Science and Technology Group) to oversee the management of the remaining functioning factories as well as controlling the real-estate of abandoned factories (Fig. 1-4).

¹⁴ Rui, op. cit., pp. 164

¹⁵ Currier, J 2008, 'Art and Power in the New China: An Exploration of Beijing's 798 District and Its Implications for Contemporary Urbanism,' in *Town Planning Review*, vol. 9, no. 2-3, pp. 242.



Fig. 1-4. 798 Factory in 2004
Source: Ren Shulin (2004)¹⁶

¹⁶ Photo by Ren Shulin from Rui, H 2008, 'Memory Photo Album', in *Beijing 798: Reflections of Factory Art*, eds Huang Rui, Sichuan Fine Arts Publishing House, Chengdu, pp. 158.

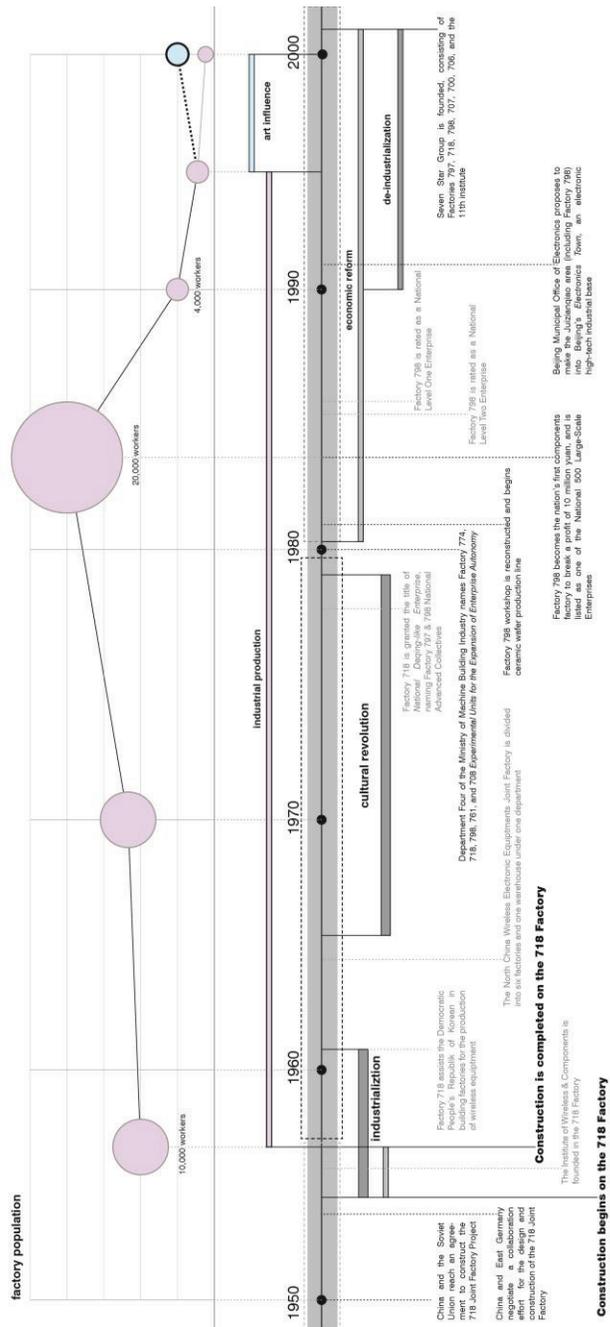


Fig. 1-5. 798 Industrial History Timeline
Source: Huang Rui (2008)¹⁷

¹⁷ Adapted from Rui, H (ed.) 2008, '798: History', in *Beijing 798: Reflections of 'Factory Art'*, Sichuan Fine Arts Publishing House, Chengdu, pp. 164.

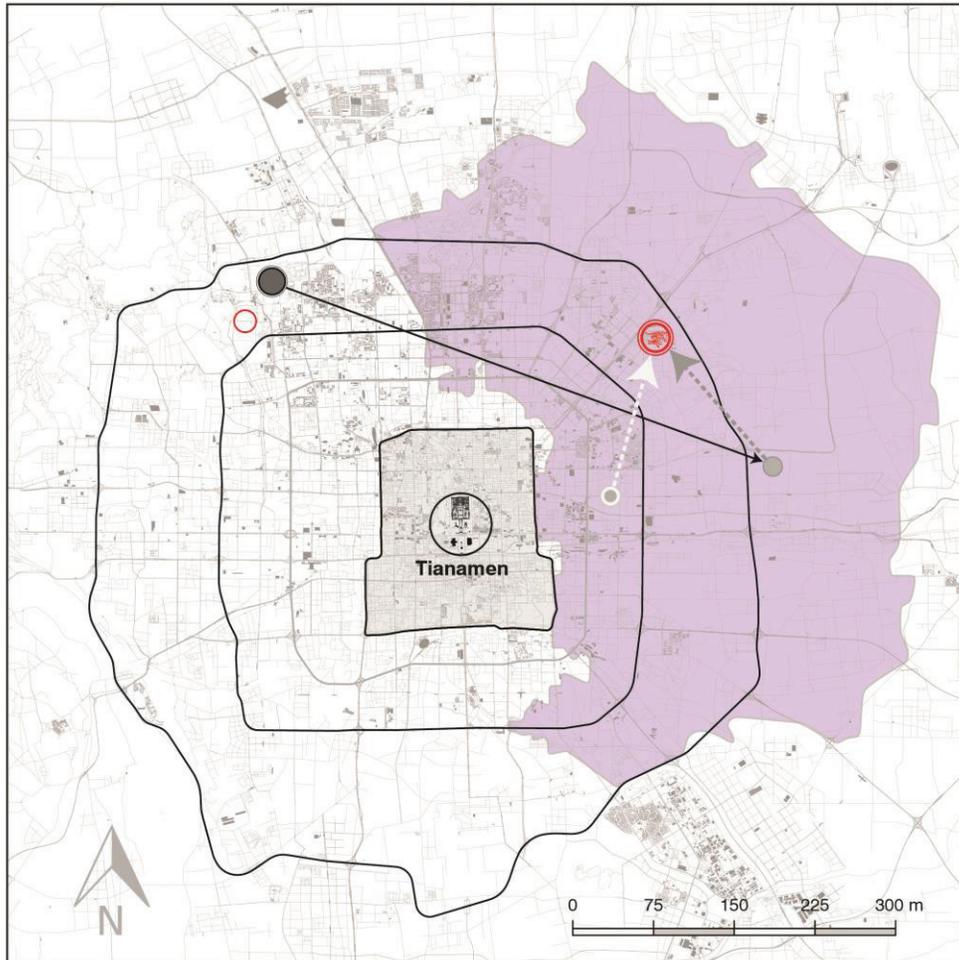
2. *Communities of Art*

In cultural terms, the crux of the 798 lies in how 'is new meaning' can be compared to: 'some old meaning.' It is when you say it is in the people's culture that hasn't been established yet in modern China, or is it the foundational framework of popular culture? If your 'new' is only according to a vertical time-frame of history, then it might very possibly float without a way of being supported by anything, in some boundless shape. Its real contrast lies in horizontal space. Without the enthusiasm and experience of small number artists, it lacks support and foundation at other concrete levels.¹⁸

-Ai Weiwei

¹⁸ Wenzhao, H 2008, 'Excerpts from an Interview with Ai Weiwei: Proving amidst Absurdity,' in *Beijing 798: Reflections of 'Factory Art'*, eds Huang Rui, Sichuan Fine Arts Publishing House, Chengdu, pp. 38.

2.1 Art is Changing in China



- | | | | |
|--|----------------------------|--|-------------------|
| | 718 Joint Factory (798) | | Tianamen Square |
| | Summer Palace | | Beijing Center |
| | Yuan Ming Yuan Art Village | | Chaoyang District |
| | Songzhuang Art Village | | Inner Ring Roads |
| | East Art Village | | Outer Ring Roads |

Fig. 2-1. Beijing – Art Village / District Map
Source: Author

2.1.1 Political Art under Maoism

Under the rule of Mao Zedong, art was obligated to strictly reflect a definitive political view. This reduced the scope of artistic expression to a mixture between Soviet socialist realism and Chinese folk art traditions. Mao wanted to destroy the *Four Olds* (四旧 *Si Jiu*) which included old culture, old thinking, old customs, and old habits.¹⁹ In the 1950s, under state patronage, an immense official network of artists' associations and art academies emerged, installing artists in a strict hierarchical structure parallel to the administrative system of the state.²⁰ The ideals of objective realism were destroyed under Mao and replaced with definitive political art mandated by the State. All artists in the political system, were essentially government employees working for a political patron. The profession of art was reduced to a socio-political educational vessel and many artists, who received bourgeois educations,²¹ were required to complete official training programs as well as participate in an artist's unions.²² The goal of Mao's new Chinese art was to infuse socialist reality with communist utopianism by combining *revolutionary realism* and *revolutionary romanticism*, and use it as a weapon of the Party,²³ leaving no place for creative subjectivism in art.

¹⁹ Jiang, J & Ashley, D 2000, 'Mao's Children in the New China: Voices from the Red Guard Generation', Routledge, Oxon, pp. 4.

²⁰ Hung, W 2012, 'A Story of Ruins: Presence and Absence in Chinese Art and Visual Culture', Reaktion Books, London, pp. 188.

²¹ Hung, op. cit., pp. 187.

²² Van Elzen, S 2009, 'Dragon & Rose Garden: Art and Power in China', Gent: Modern Chinese Art Foundation, pp. 82.

²³ Hung, op. cit., pp. 188.

2.1.2 Contemporary Art Emerges in Post-Mao China

Mao's death in 1976 and the succession of Deng Xiaoping signaled a moment in Chinese art history that allowed artists to shift their conception of art from supporting political services to more independent narratives challenging ethical and social constructs. Deng rejected the former ideals of propaganda art as means of advocating political policies, which resulted in the mass unemployment of political artists under Mao's rule. Although many artists were rendered unemployed, this created an opportunity for artists to establish a new enclave for artistic expressionism, giving birth to a new form of art in China, i.e. avant-garde and contemporary art.

Throughout the discourse of history in China, the confluence between politics and culture has continually played an intrinsic role in shaping the narrative of art.²⁴ Today, traditional painting, oil painting, engraving, sculpture and other various traditional art forms still accounts for a vast majority of art produced in modern China,²⁵ but Chinese contemporary art is entirely detached from traditional methodologies. Contemporary art in China is defined by artistic rhetoric expressed in accordance to the specific period in time following the *Cultural Revolution*,²⁶ where artists were actively engaged in the convergence of art and

²⁴ Van Elzen, S 2009, 'Dragon & Rose Garden: Art and Power in China', Gent: Modern Chinese Art Foundation, pp. 82.

²⁵ Huang, W & Cui, K 2010, '798: Inside China's Art Zone', Long River Press, pp. 56.

²⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 59.

politics asserting an identity challenging cultural affirmations and social ideology. Although, artists carried the ability to express themselves more independently, the Chinese government still continued to heavily monitor and censor art from public exposure, deeming art produced at that time as potentially subversive.²⁷ The government defined this art as *unofficial art*. As a result, from the late seventies up until the early 1990s contemporary art in China was developed on the margins of the art world.²⁸

On September 27, 1979, the Star Group (星星画会 *Xingxing Huahui*) put on the Stars Exhibition at the National Art Museum of China, the center of *official art*, marking the emergence of *unofficial art* after the Cultural Revolution.²⁹ The Stars Exhibition was organized by Huang Rui and held in the East Garden of the National Art Museum of China, after being declined access to official gallery space because it was defined as *unofficial art*. The exhibition was comprised of art hung on garden fences and ended up attracting immense public attention, inevitably resulting in police intervention and the subsequent closure of the exhibition (Fig. 2-2). The rhetoric of political art demonstrated by the Star Group marked the birth of the contemporary art movement in China. The Star Group is widely considered to be one of the first avant-garde art groups in China. The Star Group was comprised of thirteen artists, i.e. Ai Weiwei (艾未未), Huang Rui (黄锐). Many of the group's

²⁷ Van Elzen, op. cit., pp. 80.

²⁸ Angremy, B 2008, '798, A Place of Artistic Possibilities', in *Beijing 798: Reflections of 'Factory Art'*, eds Huang Rui, Sichuan Fine Arts Publishing House, Chengdu, pp. .

²⁹ Hung, op. cit., pp. 233.

members later progressed to become key figures in the emergence of Chinese contemporary art and the founding of the 798 Art District.

In the mid to late 1980s the Star Group voluntarily disbanded and many members immigrated to foreign countries to create art free of political constraints and censorship. Huang Rui was the first member to leave China, moving to Japan in 1984 where he began to experiment with different mediums of art. Ai Weiwei was the first member to immigrate to America. The Star Group members left China marginal artistic dissidents, later gaining critical acclaim exposing the international art community to the polemics of Chinese contemporary art.

Many contemporary Chinese artists that fled China to create art free from overriding governmental pressure became familiar with *yishu qu*, or art districts, in foreign countries, i.e. New York or Paris; some of them lived there as expats for a number of years.³⁰ These experiences became instrumental in formulating an enduring vision for similar spaces in China, i.e. 798 Art District. More importantly, Chinese artists gained exposure to processes that would help them develop strategies integrating the complex processes of social and economic structures into the sustenance of art districts. But the form of adaptive reuse of industrial buildings derived from these processes, in China, emerged in a different and much more organic manner.

³⁰ Hung, op. cit., pp. 242.



Fig. 2-2. Stars Art Exhibition in 1979
Source: Wenya Huang & Kaixuan Cui (2010)³¹

2.1.3 The Resurrection of Yuanming Yuan

Yuanming Yuan, also known as the Garden of Perfect Brightness, began as a famous royal park in the eighteenth century under the patronage of three Qing emperors: Kangxi (1662-1723), Yongzhen (1723-36), and Qianlong (reg1736-95).³² The Yuanming Yuan gardens consisted of a conglomeration of large and small gardens

³¹ Photo from Huang, W & Cui, K 2010, '798: Inside China's Art Zone', Long River Press, pp. 57.

³² Hung, op. cit, pp. 155.

as well as European Palaces in Rococo style with integrated Chinese elements, representing a reverse reflection of the Chinoiserie.³³ The gardens embodied a mediation between the complex historical interactions between China and the West, a symbolic utopia connecting itself with different parts of the world³⁴. The destruction of the gardens during the Second Opium War by Anglo-French troops in 1860 symbolized an end to western missionary and cultivation efforts, at that time, in China.³⁵



Fig. 2-3. *The Last Testament of Yuanming Yuan* (left)
The Rebirth of Yuanming Yuan (right)
Source: Huang Rui³⁶

The resurrection of the Yuanming Yuan emerged at the Stars Exhibition in 1979 in the form of Huang Rui's two oil paintings portraying the *ruins* of the Yuanming Yuan Garden (Fig. 2-3), titled *The Last Testament of Yuanming Yuan* and *The*

³³ Hung, op. cit, pp. 156.

³⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 155.

³⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 156.

³⁶ Note: image taken from Hung, W 2012, 'A Story of Ruins: Presence and Absence in Chinese Art and Visual Culture', Reaktion Books, London, pp. 190.

Rebirth of Yuanming Yuan.³⁷ According to Hung Wu, the two works delivered an unmistakable message: having suffered another near-death disaster in its long, tortured history, the Chinese nation had arisen again from the ruins, *fresh and robust strength emerging from ruins amidst rotten grass*.³⁸ These paintings garner significance for a number of interconnecting reasons:

First, the paintings were a part of the Stars Exhibition, which is largely regarded as the moment in modern Chinese history that announced the emergence of contemporary art in Post-Cultural Revolution China.³⁹ It also marked a shift from political service art towards a form of art that embodied a sense of political radicalism.

Second, the paintings depicted the architectural *ruins* of Yuanming Yuan symbolizing the death and rebirth of artistic expressionism. Rui's paintings reflected a sentiment among avant-garde artists and writers, who viewed themselves as survivors of a national calamity and as pioneers of a new cultural movement.⁴⁰

It is important to note that this is the first moment in contemporary art in China where the use of architectural *ruins* were used to convey political expressionism in art.

³⁷ Hung, op. cit, pp. 189.

³⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 191.

³⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 191.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 191.

Third, Rui's paintings identify an internal struggle against oppression through a discourse of destruction and reconstruction. Many Chinese contemporary artists identify themselves as victims of the government and as a part of an endangered local culture,⁴¹ developing a persistent dialogue with a rapidly transforming environment. Artists used demolished residential houses and depopulated industrial areas from the socialist era as their artistic subjects to articulate themselves as *objects of destruction*.⁴² The constructs between architectural *ruins* and artistic conceptualization, in this sense, is reduced to a minimum, to the extent that artists conceived their works as an extension of their self, collapsing the distinction between self and urban space.⁴³ This is a manifesto that has become an underlying narrative for Chinese contemporary artists, permeating beyond figurative artistic expression to the programmatic reuse of architectural *ruins*.

2.1.4 Underground Contemporary Art

From the mid-1980s up until the early 1990s in Beijing, the seat of state power (Beijing Security Bureau) exercised strict censorship on public expression, reducing contemporary art to an orphaned state hidden from the public realm. The forced closure of the China Avant-Garde Exhibition (中国现代艺术展) at the National Art Museum Beijing in 1989⁴⁴ marked the end of publically accessible contemporary

⁴¹ Hung, op. cit, pp. 238.

⁴² *ibid.*, pp. 239.

⁴³ *ibid.*, pp. 238.

⁴⁴ Van Elzen, op. cit., pp. 76.

art in China (Fig 3-2). Contemporary art produced in the 1980s was deemed by the Beijing government to be cynical in nature, reflecting on public expression and society in China.⁴⁵ This resulted in intensified censorship and forced many artists to flee the city center to more reclusive locations on the outskirts of the city. Their exhibits primarily took place in private locations; apartments, temporary galleries, or artist villages, which were often short-lived due to immense pressure from the Beijing Security Bureau.⁴⁶



Fig. 2-4. Avant-Garde Exhibition in 1989
Source: Wang Youshen (1989)

⁴⁵ Angremy, *op. cit.*, pp. 13.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 13.

The first contemporary art community to form was the Yuan Ming Yuan village (圆明园) located near the Summer Palace (Fig. 3-1). After the Yuanming Yuan Gardens were destroyed in 1860 the ruins became a symbol of the dark colonial past of official propaganda,⁴⁷ symbolizing the eroded relationship between China and the West. In the early 1990s, the ruins of the Yuanming Yuan began to be associated with an *unofficial* position: independent artists and writers gravitated to the ruins as a *wounded space*,⁴⁸ identifying themselves as objects of equal destruction. The emergence of art villages, like the Yuanming Yuan, were initially a reaction to immense government censorship but signified a deeper dialogue artists were establishing between architectural *ruins* and art. These transient art villages signified the beginning of a more complete embodiment of the convergence of art and architecture, extending beyond the role of architecture as a subject of art, and developing a new perspective artists shared towards the total use of urban *ruins*.

Artists who inhabited the Yuanming Yuan artist enclave later progressed to become key founding members of the 798 Art District. The artist commune was ultimately forced to shut down in 1992 as a result of authoritative pressure, but artists found a new home within the confines of the abandoned 798 Factory. Other contemporary art communities (the East village: 1995, the Song Zhuang village: 1995) which also resided on the outer edges of the Beijing capital, were also forced to shut down following the closure of the Yuanming Yuan village in 1992.

⁴⁷ Hung, op. cit, pp. 163.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 163.

The decentralization of art communities after the *Cultural Revolution* resulted in a fragmentation between the traditions of folk art and the conception of Post-Cultural Revolution art, cultivating a new form of expressionism in art, i.e. avant-garde, that would later evolve into contemporary art. During this time, art continued to develop under the political rhetoric articulated by earlier avant-garde artists, i.e. Star Group, towards a more contemporary movement.

The perception of avant-garde art can be considered as an act of political expressionism whereas contemporary art, in China, identifies itself as an act of expression in confluence with urban *ruins*. The narrative of preservation contemporary artists convey is a story of destruction and rebirth depicted through their art, but the occupation of architectural *ruins*, i.e. Yuanming Yuan, symbolized the beginning of a narrative of preservation, one that is deeply rooted in the discourse of the confluence between art and architecture. The representational depiction of the Yuanming Yuan, as a symbol of emerging expression, was continually transformed through the 1990's into a conventional *sheng ji*- a 'famous historical site' that incorporates heterogeneous voices into a perpetual present.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Hung, op. cit, pp. 200.

2.2 798: From Censorship to Artistic Possibilities

2.2.1 The Emergence of the 798 Art Community

*In a factory, a group arrives, then departs. A new group arrives to replace them.*⁵⁰

In the middle of the 1990s, Chinese contemporary art, which was still marginalized by the city-state government, began to gain international accreditation. The Chaoyang district, where the 798 and other associated factories were located, began to grow into a more cosmopolitan area in Beijing, largely due to its strategic position as a center for foreign embassies and many international companies.⁵¹

After the forced closer of the Yuanming Yuan village in the western suburbs of Beijing, artists began to migrate to the east side of the city.⁵² Many artists from the Yuanming Yuan moved to either the East village or the Song Zhuang village looking for cheap studio space in an increasingly expensive city.⁵³ At that time the Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA) also relocated to the district, helping solidify Chaoyang as Beijing's new art center.⁵⁴

The decline of China's industrial machine, as a result of failed economic reform, created a profit void in the state run 718 Joint Factory Project. Non-functioning

⁵⁰ Rui, op. cit., pp. 2.

⁵¹ Hung, op. cit, pp. 244.

⁵² *ibid.*, pp. 245.

⁵³ *ibid.*, pp. 245.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 246.

factories, within the 718 Joint Factory Project, began to be rented out in order to cover lost profits (Fig. 2-5). This led to a number of artists and intellectuals with no direct institutional affiliation⁵⁵, once exiled to transient artist villages (Yuanming Yuan) on the edge of the city, to rent and establish their live-work studios in the 798 Factory.⁵⁶ The first settlers of the 798 were drawn to the *romanticism of the abandoned factories*, primarily because it provided ample space at low cost⁵⁷ to pursue expressive art beyond the peripheral of government censorship.

The first artists who entered the 798 Factory, in the mid-1990s, established their studios without a clear prerogative towards the future development of the art district because, at that time, their ambitions were solely focused on developing an artistic narrative free from government constraint. The first group of artists consisted of Siu Jianguo, Lin Jing, and Liu Suola.⁵⁸ Although artists found refuge in the confines of the 798 Factory, their art was still regarded as illegal, but was ultimately tolerated because the state-owned real estate could be appropriated later to better uses.⁵⁹

In the beginning, artists viewed the 798 Factory as a sort of utopia; they lived cheap within great architectural spaces that reflected their artistic rhetoric and arranged

⁵⁵ Hung, op. cit, pp. 244.

⁵⁶ Note: The 798 Factory is one of many factories in the 718 Joint Factory Project.

⁵⁷ Angremy, op. cit., pp. 12.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 12.

⁵⁹ Ambrozy, L 2006, 'The Dashanzi International Arts Festival Branches Out from its Grassroots', *in That's Beijing*, vol. 1, May.

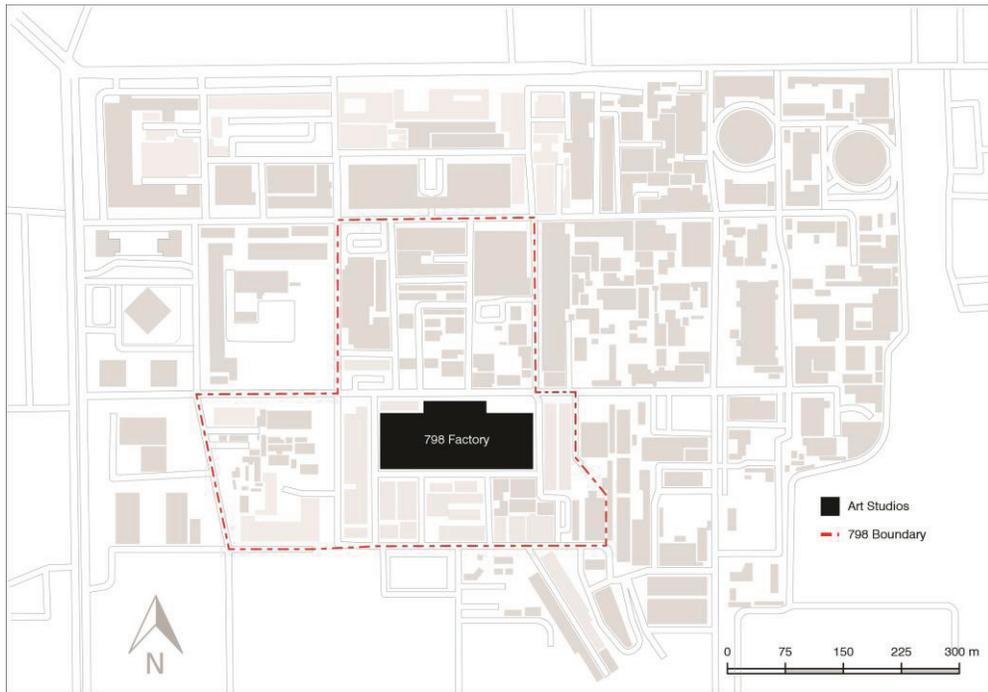


Fig. 2-5. Plan of the 798 Art District (2001)
Source: Author

exhibits to enjoy each other's work.⁶⁰ The Bauhaus style factories provided sufficient space and conditions for art production. The northern facing saw-tooth roofs provided ambient light perfect for painting⁶¹, and the large factory layouts allowed artists to create art without spatial restriction. These suitable conditions were a key factor in alluring the first artists to the 798 Factory.

At first glance, the beginning of the 798 appears to be a simple answer to a

⁶⁰ Currier, op. cit., pp. 245.

⁶¹ Ying, Y 2008, 'Weightlessness: 798 in the Present Continuous Tense', in *Beijing 798: Reflections of 'Factory Art'*, eds Huang Rui, Sichuan Fine Arts Publishing House, Chengdu, pp. 26.

discourse of problems. Artists seeking permanent refuge at low cost found a new home in spacious abandoned factories, like the 798 Factory, but the 798 embodies a deeper dialogue rooted in the complex interactions between post-industrialization and the developing ambitions of contemporary artists. The artists who first entered the 798 were members of a community struggling to survive artistically and financially, but the premise behind the founding of the 798 embodies a deeper motive, a continuation of artistic expressions evolved from one of the first forms of convergence between art and architecture, publically seen in Huang Rui's two paintings exhibited in the Stars Exhibition in 1979. The visual language of these paintings signifies the internalization of urban *ruins* with artist's struggles into the conceptualization of art. As mentioned in Chapter 2.1.3, Huang Rui's two paintings signified a shift in artistic rhetoric, self-identifying the oppression of artistic expression with the destruction of cultural landmarks, i.e. Yuanming Yuan Gardens. A narrative that self-defined contemporary artists with an endangered local culture.⁶² It was at this time, artists began to clearly articulate a position opposing large-scale demolition and redevelopment projects of post-industrial spaces and local residences. Their position saw the distinction between themselves and urban *ruins*, collapse to a minimum, to the extent that artists conceived their works – hence themselves, as objects of destruction.⁶³ Artists/observers began to merge themselves with objects of observation and

⁶² Hung, op. cit, pp. 238.

⁶³ *ibid.*, pp. 238.

representation,⁶⁴ confirming the importance of the convergence of art rhetoric and post-industrial spaces in contemporary art. Artists regularly used depopulated industrial zones from the socialist era⁶⁵ to depict the long discourse of artistic oppression in China. This is a portrayal that artists deeply sympathize and identify with, making the 798 a symbolic precedent that encapsulates a unique confluence between art and architecture and the important role architecture served in the development and the emergence of Chinese contemporary art in the public domain.

In 2001, artist Huang Rui returned to China after being exiled to Japan for over ten years.⁶⁶ He returned and established his studio in the 798 Factory with the intention of creating a contemporary art community that would permeate beyond the constructs of censorship to serve as a platform, redefining the relationship perceived between art and the public domain, including all forms of art and multi-media: painting, photography, performance art, video, dance, theater, film, etc.⁶⁷ Upon entering the 798 for the first time Huang Rui recalls:

*I felt like I was dreaming. Dust was all over the place and old machines were sitting in a room with a curved walls. I loved it, the curves looked like an arc – the most beautiful things in the world tend to have this shape. **Upon entering this space, I had no choice but to utilize this space.***⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Hung, op. cit, pp. 238.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 239.

⁶⁶ Feng, B 2006, 'Growing Bamboo on the Eaves, Planting Bamboo Upside-down: Huang Rui's Attitude and Approach', in *Hung Rui*, ed Shu Yang, Timezone 8 Limited and Thinking Hands, Beijing, pp. 9.

⁶⁷ Angremy, op. cit., pp. 12.

⁶⁸ Ying, op. cit., pp. 28.



Fig. 2-6. Huang Rui
Source: Huang Rui (2008)

From the beginning, Huang Rui understood that the closed circuits of artists and critics in contemporary art served an important role for ensuring the development of artistic rhetoric, but could not sustain itself as an established community recognized in the public domain without the necessary support and distribution networks. The concept of an artist' village completely cut off from society seemed obsolete.⁶⁹ In order for an artist community to sustain its existence in the public domain they would need to establish public appeal and gain international acclaim in order to help

⁶⁹ Angremy, *op. cit.*, pp. 13.

solidify domestic accreditation. Their initial task was not to *publicize but to communicate*⁷⁰ and gain exposure from domestic and foreign media outlets depicting the potential creative exuberance that could emerge from an art district. In doing so, they remodeled the art distribution network in China to include commercial sales systems.⁷¹ Although integrating commercialization into the 798 can be viewed as counterproductive to the artistic radicalism that it was founded upon, it was an important step in the 798 gaining public exposure and acceptance in China.

2.2.2 The First Expression of Confluence in the 798

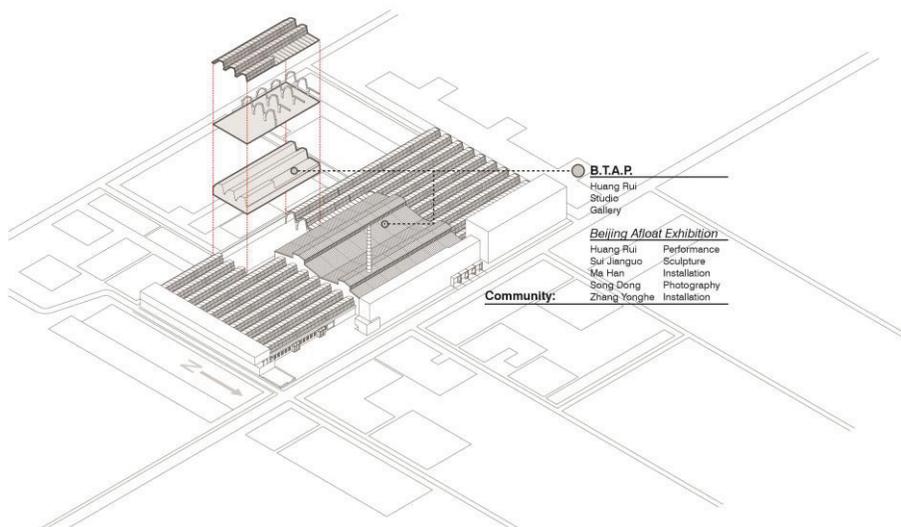


Fig. 2-7. Beijing Tokyo Art Projects in the 798 Factory
Source: Author

⁷⁰ Note: quote by Huang Rui in The Beijing News from *Ying, op. cit.*, pp. 28.

⁷¹ Angremy, *op. cit.*, pp. 12.

In early 2002 Huang Rui persuaded the Tokyo Gallery, a well-known Japanese contemporary art gallery, to rent a 400 square meter space within the 798 Factory, remodeling it into an exhibition space called the Beijing Tokyo Art Projects (B.T.A.P.).⁷² *Beijing Afloat* opened in September, 2002, marking the emergence of the 798 art community within the public scope of China. Huang Rui participated in the inaugural exhibition, which was comprised of Huang Rui's performance (Fig. 2-8), Ma Han's floating clothes, Sui Jianguo's dinosaur, Song Dong's photos of Rong Rong and Inri, and architect Zhang Yonghe's art piece inscribed on the vault.⁷³ All of these pieces of art were an extension of the artist's rhetoric derived from the politics that once regulated the industrial constructs of the 798, now converging in organic confluence. The initial opening of the B.T.A.P. gallery attracted approximately 1,000 visitors and brought together dozens of artists in the contemporary art scene in China, signaling a moment when contemporary art and independent artists surfaced from underground ephemeral spaces and settled themselves within the constructs of public society.

In April 2003, three additional art galleries opened; Long March, 798 Photo Gallery, and 798 the Space, solidifying the presence of contemporary art within Beijing's public domain. These galleries were an extension of the continued effort called *Reconstruction 798*, bringing together a community of key initiators within the 798;

⁷² Hung, op. cit, pp. 246.

⁷³ Angremy, op. cit., pp. 14.

Huang Rui,⁷⁴ Xu Yong, independent curators Qiu Zhiqian and Zhang Li, etc.⁷⁵

June 2003, saw the Blue Sky Exposure exhibit accumulate 60 independent artists in a conjoined effort that reinforced the expanding movement of the 798, from a contemporary art perspective as well as a community narrative. The cohesive communal efforts put forth by the initiators of the 798 were essential factors in reinforcing the founding principles of the 798 art district movement, redefining the perception of contemporary art viewed by the public and government in China.

⁷⁴ Note: Huang Rui helped initiate the international gallery and Beijing Tokyo Art Project to the 798 along with the larger artist organized exhibit *Reconstruction 798*.

⁷⁵ Angremy, op. cit., pp. 14.



Fig. 2-8. Huang Rui's Performance at *Beijing Afloat*
Source: Wang Youshen (1989)⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Note: Huang Rui's inaugural exhibit in the B.T.A.P. depicted four women dressed up as Qing Dynasty princesses shopping in eight public sites: Tianamen, Wumen, the Great Wall, the Temple of Heaven, Xidan, Wanfujing, Beijing Station, the National Art Museum of China, additionally documented through photographs. Photo from Yang, S (ed.) 2006, 'Huang Rui', *Timezone 8 + Thinking Hands, Beijing*, pp. 89.

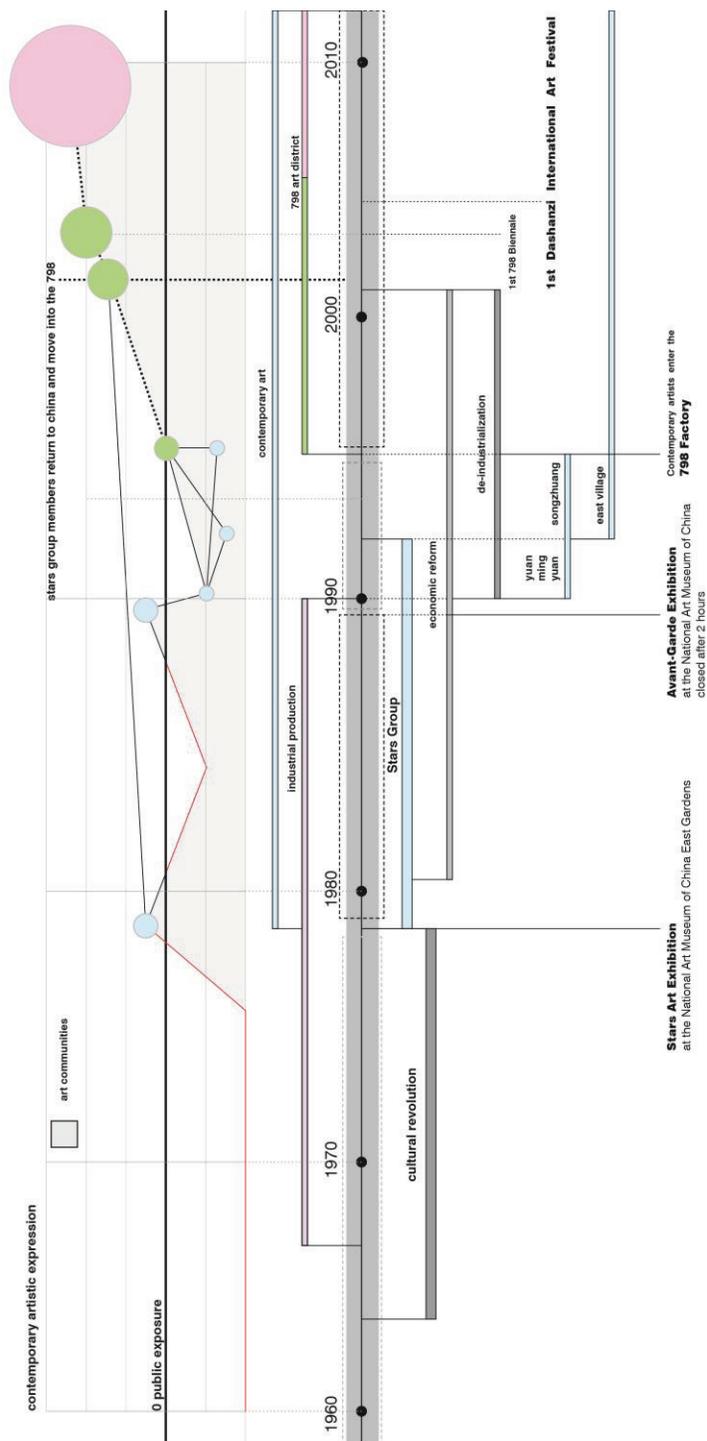


Fig. 2-9. History of Contemporary Art in China
Source: Author

3. *Factories of Art*

Industrial construction has been the most important functional activity of mankind. To build a structure with such insight becomes the most important evidence of mankind's activities. In reality, when this kind of functional activity started to take off, there was no one talking about its artistic value or meaning. Nor did they pursue it. For instance, the objects and utensils, such as axe blades made from jade, or pottery, are treated like art objects today. But, back then, they were functional vessels for social rites, a utensil with a very clear function.⁷⁷

-Ai Weiwei

⁷⁷ Wenzhao, H 2008, 'Excerpts from an Interview with Ai Weiwei: Proving amidst Absurdity,' in *Beijing 798: Reflections of 'Factory Art'*, eds Huang Rui, Sichuan Fine Arts Publishing House, Chengdu, pp. 38.

3.1 The 798 Art District

3.1.1 Reconstruction 798

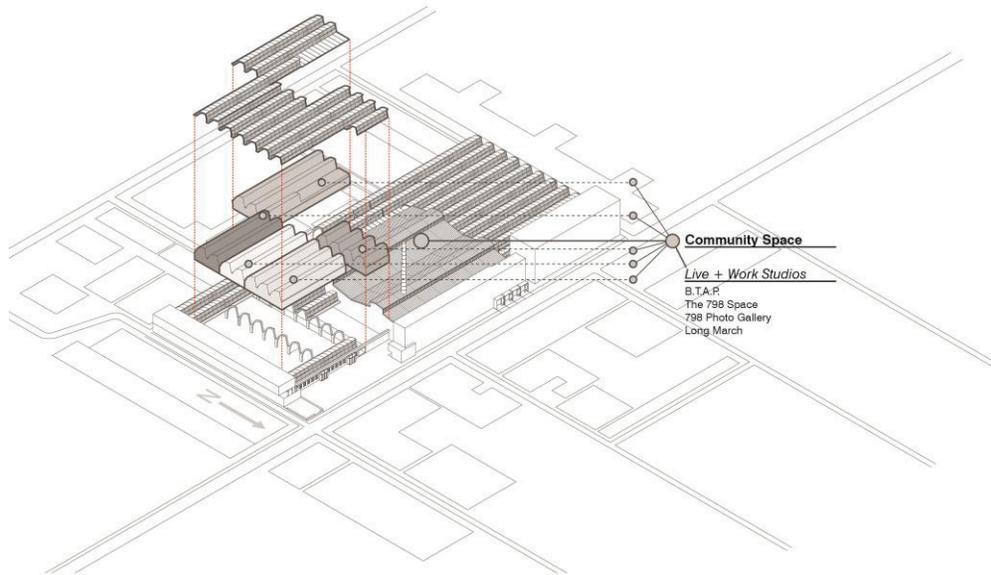


Fig. 3-1. Expanded Gallery Space in the 798 Factory
Source: Author

The rebirth of the 798, Dashanzi district, as an art community was cultivated from an accumulation of preset conditions: Beijing's shift from globalization to de-industrialization, the cosmopolitan culture of the Chaoyang district, and the concentration of independent artists in east Beijing.⁷⁸ Its development reflecting a complex negotiation between contemporary art and the city's transition from post-industrialization towards a service generated culture.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Huang, W & Cui, K, op. cit., pp. 246.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 246.

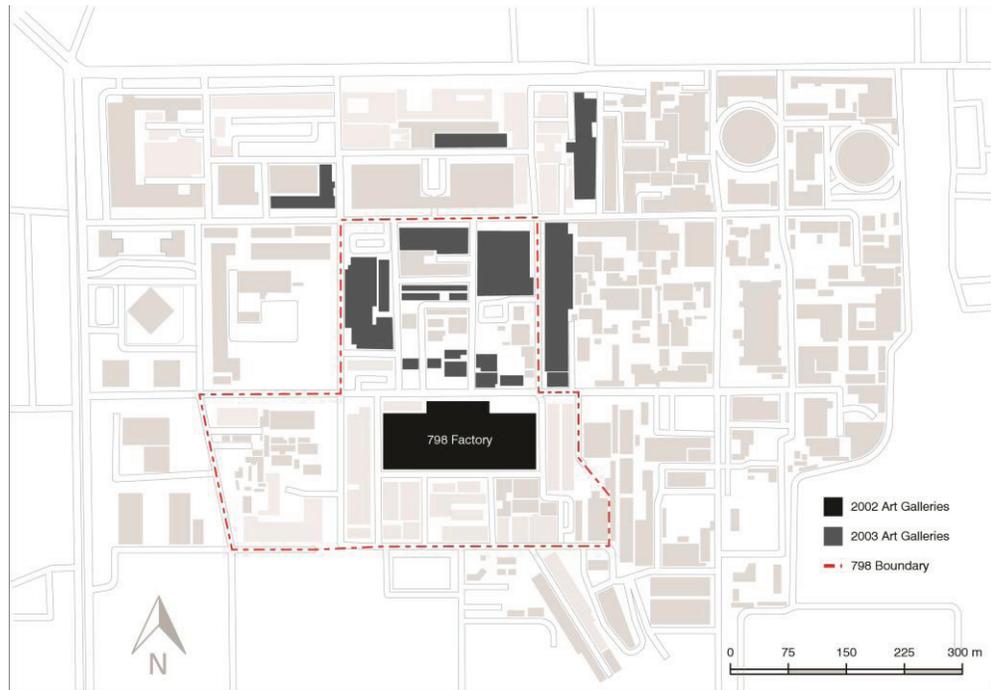


Fig. 3-2. Plan of the 798 Art District (2003)
Source: Author

According to Kong Jianhua, the development of the 798 Art District can be broken down into three discernable phases.⁸⁰ The first phase is a process of *cultivation and incubation*. The cultivation of the 798 is represented in the development of contemporary art in China and can be traced back to one of the first artistic representations of the convergence of art and architecture as depicted in Huang Rui's two paintings in the Stars Exhibition. While the incubation period of the

⁸⁰ Kong, J 2009, 'Study on the Development of Beijing's 798 Art District', *Jingji Juece Fenxi*, pp. 27-31.

798, began in the mid-1990s and lasted up until 2003, when the 798's identity had reached an artistic point of maturity in the scope of the public.

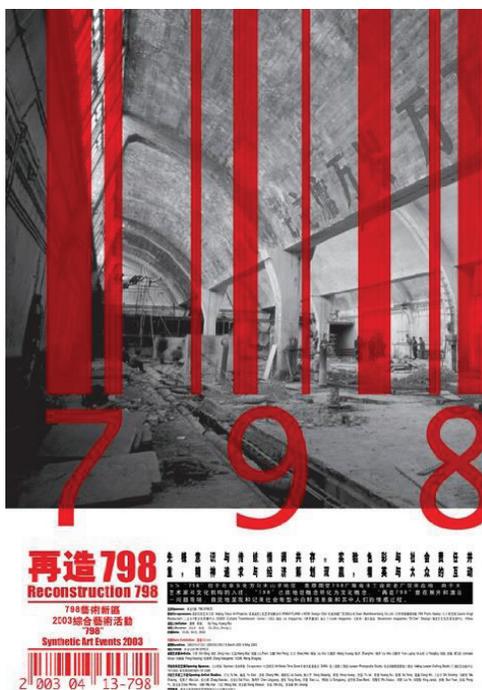


Fig. 3-3. *Reconstruction 798* Poster
Source: Wang Chao (2003)

In 2003, the *Reconstruction 798* campaign began under the organization of Huang Rui, Xu Yong, and other emerging artists from the 798. This exhibition was a continued effort to ensure the sustenance and development of the 798 as a contemporary art community. Huang Rui was quoted saying: *Our goal was to continuously find media selling points, to get more of the general public to pay attention to the 798 Art District.* Gaining more and more public exposure through the media and exhibitions in hopes to get the general public to begin to sympathize

with the artists' cause.⁸¹ Previous exhibitions, i.e. Beijing Afloat, already solidified the recognition of the presence of contemporary art in China, but now the 798 art community wanted to permeate beyond the constraints of an isolated enclave and establish a more permanent presence in the public domain. The 2003 *Reconstruction 798* encompassed the opening of several galleries within the 798 Factory as well as in other factories within the 718 industrial complex, i.e. Long March, 798 Photo Gallery, and the 798 Space (Fig. 3-1). From the inception of the 798, in 2000, to the end of *Reconstruction 798* the art district saw dramatic growth in the number of studios and galleries, six times the amount by the end of 2003⁸² (Fig. 3-2).

3.1.2 The Survival of the 798

From its initial inception, the 798 survival has constantly been in conflict with its property owners, the Seven Star Group. As previously mentioned in Section 1.2.1, the Seven Star Group began renting non-functioning factories as a temporary solution to recover lost profits, until a larger transformation of the industrial complex was approved by the Beijing Government. This was an issue that Huang Rui and other key artists were well informed of from the beginning of the 798's inception as an art district, in the early 2000s. Up until that time, the 798 art community had survived longer than any other transient art village in the past, but

⁸¹ Ying, op. cit., pp. 28.

⁸² Angremy, op. cit., pp. 14.

artists, like Huang Rui, envisioned a more permanent plan that would require integrating processes that extended beyond the threshold of art and community. A process that would require integrating institutionalized economic drivers to reinforce the sustenance of the district and produce a cultural profit that would rival the redevelopment plan outlined by the Seven Star Group and the Beijing Electronics Office.

Beginning in 1993, before the first artists arrived in the 798, the Beijing Electronics Office had submitted a proposal to the Beijing Government to transform the declining 718 Joint Factory Project into an electronics city in attempts to reinvigorate economic success paralleled to its industrial past. The premise of this proposal was to continue the proud industrial history of the district and translate it into the technology era by renovating and transforming the existing buildings and facilities into a high-tech electronic industrial base.⁸³ The 718 Joint Factory Project was the birthplace of China's first computer, first automatic telephone exchange, first electronics tube, made great contributions to the atomic and hydrogen bombs and man-made satellite, Hongqi surface-to-air missile, Dongfeng intercontinental missile, Jaguar air-to-air missile, nuclear submarines, and 44 other national projects.⁸⁴ According to the Beijing Government, the transformation of the industrial district into an electronic city was regarded as the best solution, since

⁸³ Dai, J, Huang, X, & Zhu, H 2015, 'Interpretation of 798: Changes in Power of Representation and Sustainability of Industrial Landscape', in *Open Access: Sustainability*, vol. 7. pp. 5291.

⁸⁴ Lu, XL 1997, 'The rise of Jiuxianqiao electronic town', in *Beijing Branch Life*, vol. 8, pp. 19–20.

the electronics city would reflect and extend people's memory of the illustrious industrial past of Beijing.⁸⁵ In 1996, the State Ministry of Electronics, now the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, and the Beijing Municipal Government jointly issued an overview of the *Electronic City by the Ministry and the City*, detailing the continued effort in transforming the district into a *special electronic industrial zone*.⁸⁶ The Beijing Electronics City was perceived as a key independent planning and development unit with clear boundaries, which established a long-term plan for regional economic development.⁸⁷

In 2003, the Seven Star Group stopped leasing property to the art and culture world in efforts to peruse their plans to redevelop the district into an electronics city. The Seven Star Group's plans to redevelop the district entailed the eviction and displacement of the 798 art community, regressing the efforts of contemporary artists to the primitive stage they began from in art villages like Yuanming Yuan. Kong Jianhua, regards this period of conflicting ideals as the end of *artistic cultivation and incubation* in the 798 and beginning of the phase of *development of dispute*.⁸⁸ The Seven Star Group and the Beijing Electronics Office had already established a detailed plan for redevelopment of the industrial district and viewed the continued development of the area, as an art district, as a threat towards national stability. In reaction to the Seven Star Group's condemnation of the 798 art

⁸⁵ Dai, J, Huang, X, & Zhu op. cit., pp. 5290.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 5291.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 5291.

⁸⁸ Kong, op. cit., pp. 28.

district, artists sought to publicize the imminent demolition of the art district in hopes to gain more awareness and support. Artists believed that by creating an international forum for contemporary art in China it would establish a precedence for international support which would help enlist domestic support in preserving the 798.

Reconstruction 798, which was shortly followed by the first 798 Biennale, garnered a significant response from the public, setting the precedence for the 798's first international art festival in 2004, 1st Dashanzi International Art Festival⁸⁹ (DIAF). The 1st Dashanzi International Art Festival was initiated by Huang Rui and run by Berenice Angremy, under the theme *Radiance and Resonance / Signals of Time*.⁹⁰ By this time, the dispute between the Seven Star Group and the 798 artists had intensified to a point where the Seven Star Group was attempting to intervene in the continuation of any form of artistic expression within the 798. The Seven Star Group proceeded with curtailing actions, such as preventing the entry of taxis into the area and tearing down exhibition posters⁹¹, in attempts to hinder any form of advertisement and exposure of the art festival. These actions ultimately had a polar effect and resulted in increased publication of the endangerment of the art district, furthering its image as a *trendy* contemporary enclave.⁹² The 1st Dashanzi International Art Festival opened regardless of the efforts of the Seven Star Group,

⁸⁹ Note: Dashanzi is the official name of the district which the 798 Art District resides within.

⁹⁰ Rui, op. cit., pp. 170.

⁹¹ Currier, op. cit., pp. 245.

⁹² *ibid.*, pp. 245.

consisting of a series of 30 events as well as artists allowing public access to their studios.⁹³ The festival attracted an unprecedented influx of 80,000 visitors in three weeks⁹⁴, and the 798 officially entered public consciousness, no longer regarded as an artistic vanguard area for small minorities.⁹⁵ The success of the Dashanzi International Art Festival positioned itself as an essential mediator between the contemporary art community and government interests triggering immense public support domestically and internationally in contention against the demolition of the 798 Art District. The resulting public outcry had a resounding effect transcending through the political hierarchy.

In 2004, after the 1st Dashanzi International Art Festival successfully finished, Li Xiangqun, a representative of the Beijing Municipal People's Congress and Professor at the Tsinghua Academy of Fine Arts, called for the immediate suspension of the planned dismantlement of the 718 Joint Factory Project⁹⁶, arguing that the architectural precedence of the district maintained its authentic appearance from the early 1950s and should be considered as a rare treasure.⁹⁷ He presented the Beijing People's Congress with a bill entitled *Preserve an Architectural Heritage of the Old Industry, Preserve a Thriving Art Zone*⁹⁸. He further explains that the Bauhaus design of the buildings was a result of a combined effort of 55 East

⁹³ Dai, J, Huang, X, & Zhu op. cit., pp. 5292.

⁹⁴ Angremy, op. cit., pp. 17.

⁹⁵ Dai, J, Huang, X, & Zhu op. cit., pp. 5292.

⁹⁶ Chou, op. cit., pp. 207.

⁹⁷ Dai, J, Huang, X, & Zhu op. cit., pp. 5292.

⁹⁸ Chou, op. cit., pp. 207.

German experts employing, at that time, the world's most advanced construction techniques, concluding the solid and grand architecture of the 798 is a rare treasure of modern industrialization.⁹⁹ In addition to Li Xiangqun argument, Dr. Chen Dongsheng submitted a proposal evaluating the unique advantages of cultural industry in Beijing, which became a pivotal proclamation in preserving the 798.¹⁰⁰ Later in 2004, the Ministry of Construction issued *Guidelines on Strengthening the Preservation of Valuable Modern Architecture in the Urban Area*, highlighting the 798's modern Bauhaus-styled factories as unique relics that should be protected to preserve the city's historical and cultural heritage.¹⁰¹ With the assistance of key political figures, i.e. Li Xiangqun, the 798 Art District avoided imminent demolition and in place became a precedent to municipalities, displaying the economic potential that could be profited from culture driven creative industries. By 2005 the national government indoctrinated specific policies committed towards the promotion of creative industries.¹⁰²

2004 marked the success of the 798's first international art festival but more importantly signaled a shift in government ideology and perception towards the potential of art districts functioning as cultural generators. The Seven Star Group's attitude towards the 798 drastically changed following the 798's 2004 politically led efforts to preserve the area. There are both positive and negative implications that

⁹⁹ Dai, J, Huang, X, & Zhu op. cit., pp. 5292.

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 5292.

¹⁰¹ Chou, op. cit., pp. 207.

¹⁰² Currier, op. cit., pp. 246.

resulted from the change in municipal ideologies and ultimate institutionalization of the 798. The 798 artist's helped develop politically reinforced initiatives to protect the 798 from imminent demolition and redevelopment by conducting a series of public exhibitions and performances in order to develop a stronger public voice. In doing so, enlisting the support of key political figures to ensure the preservation of the art district. In this sense, the 798 greatly benefited from government intervention, which contrasts the strong political opposition shared amongst contemporary artists during the 798's initial conception in the early 2000s. On the other hand, increased government attention became the leading catalyst in protecting the area from redevelopment, although it was primarily due to the economic potential the municipalities foresaw to exploit from cultural production. This eventually led to the implementation of official oversight in the 798, from exhibitions to advertising, subsequently restricting artistic freedom,¹⁰³ and exploiting the identity of the 798 for capital gains. The commodification of cultural generated profits led to the eventual commercialization and institutional intervention in the 798, resulting in drastic appreciation in real-estate in the 798 (Fig 3-4). The daily per square meter rental fee increased by at least fourfold, from less than 0.5 RMB in 2001 to more than 2 RMB by the end of 2008.¹⁰⁴ The dramatic increase in rental prices, especially after 2006, represents another factor connected with the commercialization of the 798 that prompted an exodus of artists, forced to

¹⁰³ Currier, *op. cit.*, pp. 246.

¹⁰⁴ Chou, *op. cit.*, pp. 213.

find another area with cheaper accommodations.¹⁰⁵

From 2006 onward, the over-commercialization of the 798 Art District has generated inflationary market pressures that increasingly have eroded its artistic uniqueness¹⁰⁶ calling into question the future of the authenticity of the 798 artistic community. One important thing to denote, is that the integration of commercialization was something that was implemented by the 798 art community from the inception of the 798 Art District. Artists first employed commercial urban branding strategies in the forms of public exhibitions and art festivals that functioned on multi-tier scales to ensure the financial survival of themselves and the art district. They were consistently engaged in the market system and commercialization of the district from the beginning.¹⁰⁷ The 798 Space, as mentioned in section 2.2.2, was founded to function as a bilateral platform, serving as an exhibition space as well as a venue for corporate events to finance its exhibitions.¹⁰⁸ So, the integration of commercialization in the discourse of the 798 can be regarded a necessary factor in its survival.

2006, also marked the first institution to enter the 798. Baron Ullens opened the Information Center of the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, with the intent to eventually transition from collecting to displaying artwork as well as building an art

¹⁰⁵ Ying, op. cit., pp. 26-37.

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 36.

¹⁰⁷ Currier, op. cit., pp. 254.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 254.

museum.¹⁰⁹ This signaled a shift towards more entrepreneurial business oriented drivers in the 798 and is what Kong considers to be the beginning of the *standard guidance* phase.¹¹⁰ It was now no longer a question of mounting an exhibition to promote dialogue on the creation of contemporary art in society, but a desire to promote artists in a purely lucrative context.¹¹¹ Large-scale exhibitions curated after the DIAF period were inextricably linked to organizing gallery's strategic and economic imperatives, which alternated between commercial exhibitions and independent ones.¹¹² The arrival of European-style commercial galleries in the district, which became pronounced after the arrival of the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, solidified the transfer from art creation to a more business oriented market system for art consumption.¹¹³ Subsequently, increased international assimilation and institutional presence led to curators developing an exhibition policy reflecting a European museum rather than a gallery; based on the loan of art works from different collections, the creation of works in situ and the long-term exhibition of works (three months instead of the usual three weeks common to most galleries in the district).¹¹⁴ The image of contemporary artists construed as the *outsiders* from the early 1990s has been replaced by that of successful artists, often turned businessman, whose works attract immensely high prices across the globe,¹¹⁵ cementing the assimilation of contemporary art into an

¹⁰⁹ Ying, op. cit., pp. 35.

¹¹⁰ Kong, op. cit., pp. 28

¹¹¹ Angremy, op. cit., pp. 18.

¹¹² *ibid.*, pp. 18.

¹¹³ *ibid.*, pp. 18

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 18

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 18.

accredited art genre in China. This was the fundamental goal of the 798, as conceived by founding artists, i.e. Huang Rui.

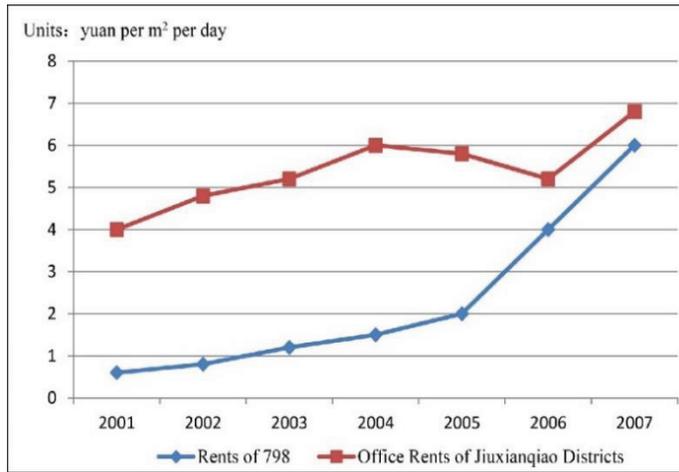


Fig. 3-4. Comparison of 798 and Surrounding Area Rental Prices¹¹⁶

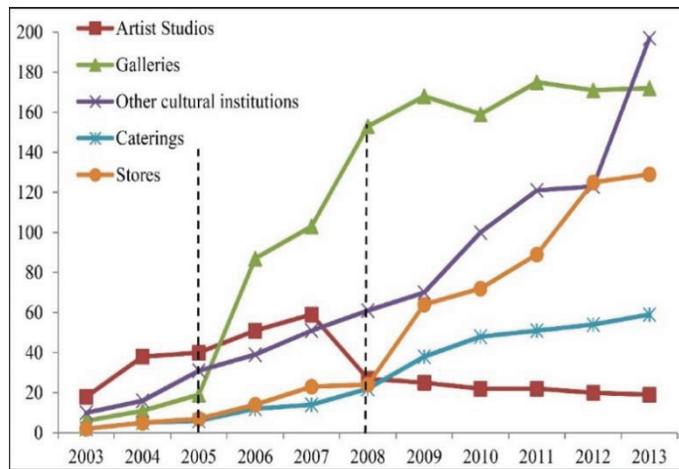


Fig. 3-5. Institutional Catalog of the 798 (2003-2013)¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Note: Data of the 798 comes from Yu Ding’s ‘Research Report of the 798’. Data of the Jiuxianqiao comes from real estate data of City RE Inc. Chart referenced from Dai, J, Huang, X, & Zhu, H 2015, ‘Interpretation of 798: Changes in Power of Representation and Sustainability of Industrial Landscape’, in *Open Access: Sustainability*, vol. 7. pp.5296.

¹¹⁷ Note: The 2003-2006 data is from Liu Mingliang’s ‘Market-Art-Artists’ in *Reflections on the 798 Art District*. The 2007 data is from the middle gatefold in *Beijing 798: The Rebuilt Factory* edited by Huang Rui. The 2008 data is from the 798 brochure edited by the 798 Management Committee. The 2009-2012 Data is from the 798 Cultural and Creative Industry Investment Ltd. The 2013 data is from the master’s thesis *Research on the Status Quo of Art District* written by Chi Haipeng from the Central Academy of Fine Arts in 2014. Chart referenced from Dai, J, Huang, X, & Zhu, H 2015, ‘Interpretation of 798: Changes in Power of Representation and Sustainability of Industrial Landscape’, in *Open Access: Sustainability*, vol. 7. pp.5290.

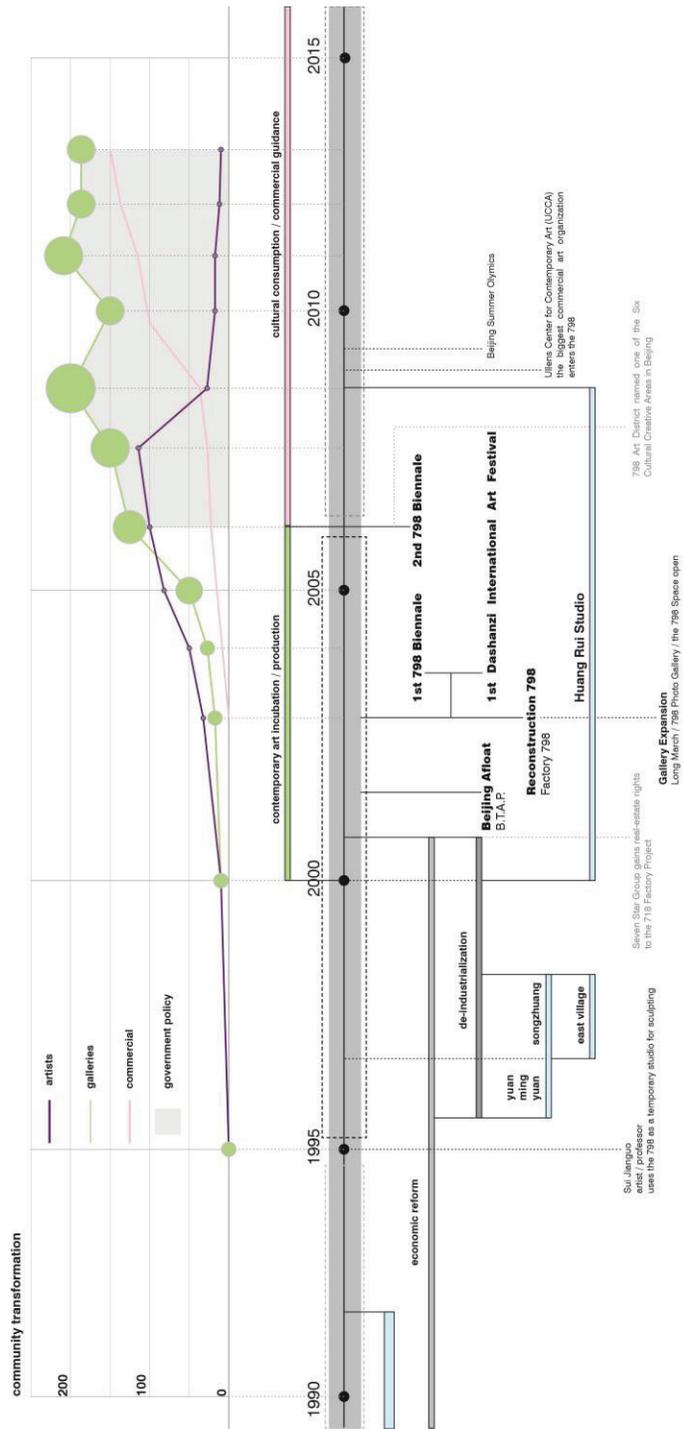


Fig. 3-6. Timeline of the 798 Narrative
Source: Author

3.2 Rise of the 798 Brand

3.2.1 Creative Industries as a Global Commodity

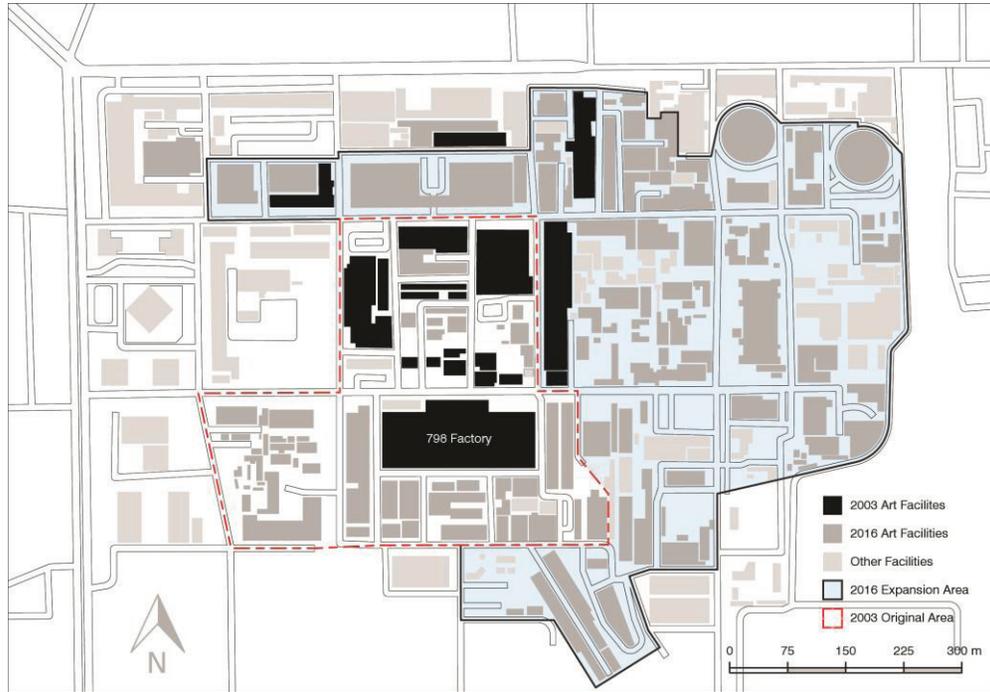


Fig. 3-7. 798 Art District Expansion Analysis (2003 – 2016)

Source: Author

Since the emergence of the 798 Art District, Beijing has become a leader in artistic cultural generation, currently exceeding 20 art districts within the city, and establishing themselves on a global scale for cities with the most urban space dedicated to art production.¹¹⁸ Following the *Cultural Revolution*, Beijing's dynamic evolution demonstrates the city's structural change from an industrial production-based economy to a cultural consumption-based economy, highlighting

¹¹⁸ Currier, op. cit., pp. 237.

the symbolic importance of the arts within the constructs of economics and urban policy.¹¹⁹

China's economic reform, after the *Cultural Revolution*, dissolved the constructs of state decision-making to provinces and city-states, retaining only policy and supervisory functions.¹²⁰ China experienced a drastic transformation from a vertically-organized system to one that increasingly exhibits the distribution of power over growth and promotions to territorial municipalities.¹²¹ As a result, there is a growing trend towards greater entrepreneurialism, increased inter-urban competition, and a more conscious promotion of place-specific developments.¹²² This is a reflection of a global shift in cultural strategies, as a policy driven endeavor, that has quickly become a model for economic growth because they provide development agendas that work alongside existing neo-liberal urban plans, focused on inter-urban competition, gentrification, consumption, and place-making.¹²³ This coincides with a global motif fusing culture and economics in a process to redefine post-industrial economies focused on more *creative* types of products.¹²⁴

¹¹⁹ Currier, op. cit., pp. 237.

¹²⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 239.

¹²¹ *ibid.*, pp. 239.

¹²² Ma, L & Wu, F (eds) 2005, 'Restructuring the Chinese City: Changing Society, Economy and Space', Routledge, London.

¹²³ Peck, J 2005, 'Struggling with the Creative Class', in *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, vol. 29, pp. 740–770.

¹²⁴ Scott, A 1997, 'The Cultural Economy of Cities', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, vol. 21, pp. 323–39.

Cultural industrialization was first listed as an official policy objective in the Chinese Communist Party's 10th Five-Year Plan in 2000,¹²⁵ as a priority in promoting and developing cultural industries by reforming cultural systems, improving cultural and economic policy, strengthening management and construction of the cultural market, and combining the information and cultural industry.¹²⁶ In 2005, the City of Beijing government adopted the term *cultural and creative industries* at the General Meeting of the 9th Party Committee,¹²⁷ and in 2006, the City of Beijing took a more active position and began to promote such industries, interpreting them as those which interact to provide cultural experiences through production, creation, and innovation, which involve cultural content, creative output, and intellectual property.¹²⁸ *Cultural and creative industries* were comprised of nine sectors defined under culture and art; publishing, radio, TV and film, software, internet and computer services, advertising and exhibition, crafts and antiques, design services, tourism and leisure entertainment, and other support services.¹²⁹ Later in 2006, the Beijing Development and Reform Commission, outlined *Several Policies to Develop Cultural Creative Industries in Beijing*, documenting policies for cultural and creative clusters, with proposals for a system to identify these, and government subsidized financial support, 500 million Yuan

¹²⁵ Hui, D 2006, 'From Cultural to Creative Industries: Strategies for Chaoyang District,' in *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 9, no. 3, pp. 317–332.

¹²⁶ Chou, TS 2012, 'Creative Space, Cultural Industry Clusters, and Participation of the State in Beijing', in *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, vol. 53, no. 2, pp. 198.

¹²⁷ Hui, op. cit., pp. 317–331.

¹²⁸ McCarthy, J & Wang, Y 2016, 'Culture, Creativity and Commerce: Trajectories and Tensions in the Case of Beijing's 798 Art Zone', in *International Planning Studies*, vol. 21, no. 1, pp. 3.

¹²⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 3.

over three years.¹³⁰ The policies also indicate government assistance in allowing factory buildings, warehouses, traditional court-yards, traditional commercial streets, and historical streets be deemed usable for *cultural and creative industries*, with impending tax advantages.¹³¹

3.2.2 Transition of the Artist Network

	Studio	Gallery	Design, advertisement, media and bookstore	Café and restaurant	Boutique	Total number
2003	18	6	10	2	2	38
2004	38	11	16	5	5	75
2005	40	19	31	6	7	103
2006	51	87	39	12	14	203
2007	59	103	51	14	23	250
2008	43	153	61	22	24	303
2009	25	168	70	38	64	365
2010	22	159	100	48	72	401
2011	22	175	121	51	89	458
2012	20	171	123	54	125	493
2013	19	172	197	59	129	576

Fig. 3-8. Establishments in the 798¹³²

The indoctrination of government policies fostering the growth of *creative culture industries*, saw a dramatic transformation of the 798 from an artistic community to a district of contemporary culture. Intensive state intervention in the 798 was intended to strengthen the hegemonic discourse of cultural consumption in the development of Beijing’s position as a world brand in preparation for the 2008

¹³⁰ McCarthy, J & Wang, Y, op. cit., pp. 7.

¹³¹ *ibid.*, pp. 7.

¹³² Note: Data provided by Factory 798 Art District Construction & Management. Table referenced from Yin, Y, Liu, Z, Dunford, M, & Liu, W 2015, ‘The 798 Art District: Multi-scalar Drivers of Land Use Succession and Industrial Restructuring in Beijing’, in *Habitat International*, vol. 46, pp.152.

Summer Olympics.

As previously mentioned, the opening of commercial galleries in the 798 attracted an onset of entrepreneurial investment. With municipalities subsidizing culturally reinforced developments, the 798 saw a drastic increase in commercial establishments beginning in 2006 (Fig 3-8). In 2006, the artistic network of the 798 transitioned from one of *cultivation and incubation* to cultural promotion and consumption, altering the organic composition the art district was originally conceived upon. Before 2006, artists jointly assumed the roles of curating and financing art festivals, greatly contributing to the consolidation of artist networks, within the 798, and introducing their own works.¹³³ This was an imperative process in fostering the cultivation of the art community of the 798 in its infancy. After the 798 Management Office was established in 2006, with the support of government funding, exhibition professionals were hired to assume responsibilities overseeing the organization and promotion of art festivals and other entailing cultural events,¹³⁴ reinforcing the Beijing government's prerogative in promoting the 798 as a collective brand for cultural tourism (Fig 3-9). In doing so, the horizontal communal governance system, managed by artists up until 2006, was superseded by a more vertical bureaucratic chain of management dictating the dependency of cultural practitioners as well as the management growth and distribution of cultural networks on government administration and funding.¹³⁵

¹³³ Chou, *op. cit.*, pp. 211.

¹³⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 211.

¹³⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 211.

	Before 2006	After 2006
Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dominated by local artists • Focus on the construction of the cultural network • With building 798 into a creative culture space as the objective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dominated by the state • Focus on commercial environment and results • To promote the development of a cultural industry cluster and build Beijing into a world city
Major practitioner and motives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Artists • To construct a cultural creation space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State, business retailers, speculative foundations and galleries, international exhibition professionals
Discourse and core values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discourse of creative culture space construction • Construction of culture production space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discourse of industrialization of culture and world city • Construction of culture consumption space
Cultural network and governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grassroots mobilization • Horizontal network, governance built on trust and cooperation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Driven by state resources • Vertical bureaucratic governance
Cultural space growth mechanism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organic, internal growth • Driven by creative cultural production 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-organic, external investment • Driven by commercial consumption forces

Fig. 3-9. Transition of the 798 Creative Cultural Network¹³⁶

Although it can be argued that state intervention significantly diluted the 798's artistic spirit to the point of extinction, Chinese contemporary art is now fully integrated into the public domain, asserting a specific identity and position. The transition of the 798 to a place of cultural consumption entails an onset of gentrification as a compounded effect from institutional presence seeking to capitalize on the districts identity. But as Lloyd argues, in the case of the 798, these places are economic locales in which the aesthetic value generated from daily cultural activates becomes embedded in property values and local entertainment

¹³⁶ Table referenced from Chou, TS 2012, 'Creative Space, Cultural Industry Clusters, and Participation of the State in Beijing', in *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, vol. 53, no. 2, pp. 212.

commerce.¹³⁷ A process of urban change that is not derived from the sale of art, but through daily transactions around drinks, food, and rent within the local entertainment economy.¹³⁸ The 798 organic emergence and integration of commercial processes, in developing a public voice, from its inception delineates that it does not cohere to common gentrification patterns, which demonstrates a clear displacement of demographics. Currier furthers this argument explaining, the discourse of the 798 presents a model of gentrifiable property and gentrifiers, through a *harmonious* class separation, with industrial workshops existing alongside contemporary art galleries and stylish cafes.

State intervention in 2006 largely contributed to the displacement of artistic value in place for cultural consumption, but this also contributed to the affluence of the 798 as a cultural icon in Beijing today. The 798 continues to emulate the organic premises of its inception today, through the continued production and consumption the 798 brand, highlighting the cultural rise of contemporary art, in confluence with architecture, within Chinese society and urban policy.

¹³⁷ Lloyd, R 2006, 'Neobohemia: Art and Commerce in the Postindustrial City', London, Routledge.

¹³⁸ Currier, op. cit., pp. 257.

4. Conditions for Confluence

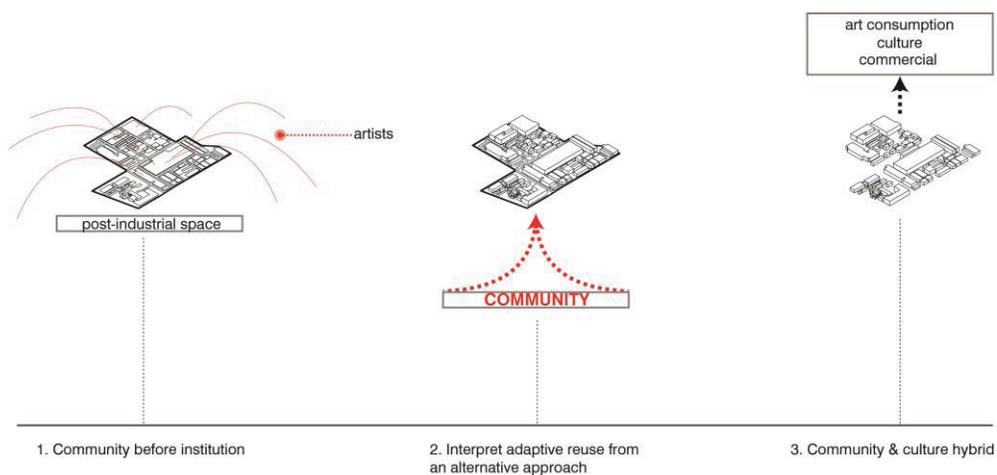


Fig. 4-1. Conditions for Confluence Diagram

Source: Author

Through the rise of the 798, organizing artists have inspired place-specific community cultivation and assisted in establishing Beijing’s professional contemporary art sector,¹³⁹ pronouncing the dichotomy between art district and art villages. Emphasizing the importance of art production in its survival and continued existence. Throughout the 798’s rise, Chinese contemporary art has gone from being unknown to being hyper-visible.¹⁴⁰ Over the years, the international critical acclaim the 798 has accumulated has aided in an economic explosion, and works have appreciated exponentially, amounting to over a million dollars in many auctions.¹⁴¹ Signifying a successful transition from industrial production to cultural production in a city that is constantly undergoing rapid

¹³⁹ Currier, op. cit., pp. 257

¹⁴⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 250.

¹⁴¹ *ibid.*, pp. 250.

transformation.

The 798 identity has found a unique niche in projecting Beijing's global image as a political and cultural capital of China. In doing so, the 798 has incorporated a new structural vocabulary for Beijing,¹⁴² providing conditions that integrate the confluence of contemporary art and industrial architecture into a development scheme that fosters the emergence and sustenance of art villages transformed into business art districts. Using the 798 as a precedent, a set of conditions for confluence between art and architecture can be extracted, providing a framework of conditions that can be applied to future art districts. There are three conditions for confluence; community before institution, interpreting adaptive reuse from an alternative approach, and a community and cultural hybrid (Fig. 4-1). These conditions provide the framework for a post-industrial space, in confluence with art, to transform into a new form of adaptive reuse that is in a constant form of transformation, informing and adapting to cultural paradigms.

4.1 Community before Institution

4.1.1 Organic Emergence

Western institutions tend to implement an institutional driven approach to adaptive

¹⁴² Currier, op. cit., pp. 255.

reuse projects. More specifically, in projects reusing industrial buildings for contemporary art museums, this approach entails an extremely high degree of management from the conception of the project to the extended life of the museum. This process in many ways isolates and deduces the confluence of art and architecture to a product imported and displayed in raw industrial containers for cultural consumption.

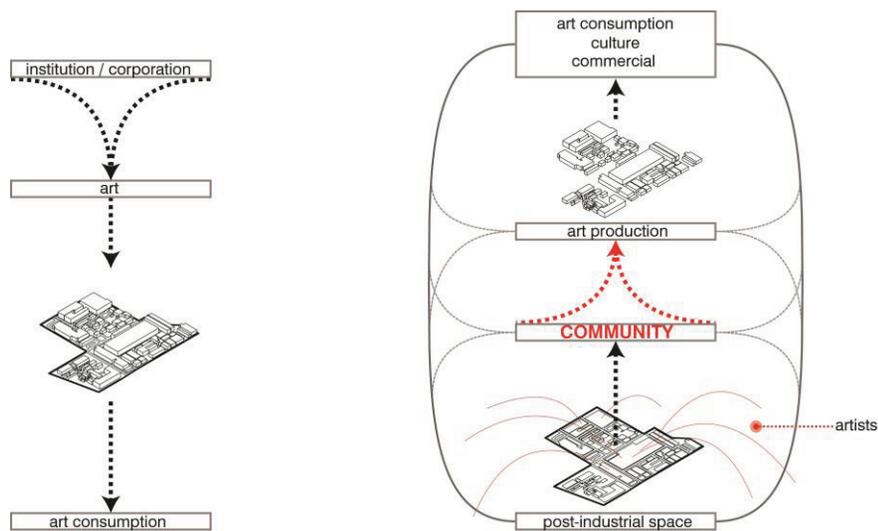


Fig. 4-2. Top-down vs. Bottom-up Approach Diagram
Source: Author

Subsequently, compartmentalizing the phase of art production to rely on external premises, reducing the convergence of art and architecture to a static process. This is a planned approach to cultural consumption that heavily relies on external distribution networks to import artistic products rather than allowing them to organically cultivate and transform from within.

The 798 contrasts many western application's to adaptive reuse in post-industrial spaces largely because it is derived from a living community deeply rooted within the art and architectural constructs of the space. In the 798, art production / consumption, live-work studios, and commercial services, all contribute to a network of contingencies permeating beyond a static physical representation of adaptive use into a new form of community, in which the convergence of art and architecture are in a constant state of confluence and transformation.

Post-industrial spaces being transformed into art districts, like the 798, are highly context driven. The emergence of cultural consumption from post-industrial spaces through an artistic narrative is largely a result of community efforts, foreign influence and bottom-up national policy which contrasts other serial replications of recycled industrial areas simulated by either market forces or top-down government planning.¹⁴³ This process of artist-led developments relies heavily on art production and cultivation. In the case of the 798, preceding art exhibitions and communities, such as the Stars Exhibition in 1979 and the Yuanming Yuan art village, promoted a form of art construed from artists self-identifying themselves with the large-scale demolition of post-industrial spaces. This form of conceptualization encapsulated bi-lateral social and political platforms converging into artists identifying their political oppression on a scale reflecting abandonment and demolition of post-industrial spaces in China. Ai Weiwei stressed the

¹⁴³ Currier, op. cit., pp. 245.

importance of community in the development of art districts in an interview saying:

If your 'new' (referring to institutional driven developments) is only according to a vertical time-frame of history, then it might very possibly float without a way of being supported by anything, in some boundless shape. Its real contrast lies in horizontal space. Without the enthusiasm and experience of small number artists, it lacks support and foundation at other concrete levels.¹⁴⁴

Community driven art production and development initiatives, like those seen in the 798, provide horizontal support and foundations fostering internal art production and distribution networks. It was a prioritized vision articulated from the 798's conception and pronounced by founding community members, i.e. Huang Rui.

This was an intrinsic process for the 798 in creating an identity of place, one that reinforced the districts marketability, development of its distribution networks, and protection from demolition. But as Currier explains, once a community has transformed from an area of production to one that involves cultural consumption, it is insufficient in sustaining the continuation of diverse cultural contingencies.¹⁴⁵

A transfer of policy and management support through government intervention, in the case of the 798, allowed for a transfer from cultural production to include cultural consumption; commercial services and tourism. Government intervention was a necessary process in preserving the 798 from imminent demolition but also

¹⁴⁴ Wenzhao, H 2008, 'Excerpts from an Interview with Ai Weiwei: Proving amidst Absurdity,' in *Beijing 798: Reflections of 'Factory Art'*, eds Huang Rui, Sichuan Fine Arts Publishing House, Chengdu, pp. 38.

¹⁴⁵ Currier, op. cit., pp. 245.

signaled a necessary shift in official identification of the 798 art community. Up until 2006, the 798 art community's experimental exhibitions and art festivals were internally funded and managed. This was a key mechanism in publically pronouncing the recognition of the 798 identity, but as Currier explains, the structural management of the art community wasn't designed to sustain multi-tier integration of additional cultural and commercial contingencies.¹⁴⁶ The transfer of policy management also signaled the full maturity of contemporary art cultivation and incubation within the 798, setting the precedence for the community to transform into one of cultural consumption, i.e. tourism.

The importance of organic emergence resides in the cultivation of place-identity creating a foundation for future cultural consumption and marketability. The 798 developed its place-identity from a unique form of dialogue between art and post-industrial spaces that transformed, today, into a place of cultural hybridity. The 798 Art District brand, highlights the increased artistic and cultural power in Beijing, through its power of marketability, first in unofficially preserving the area to officially helping promote Beijing's image as a global city.¹⁴⁷

4.1.2 Distribution Networks

Distribution networks that function on multi-tier scales are inherently important to

¹⁴⁶ Currier, op. cit., pp. 245.

¹⁴⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 238.

developing a sustaining model for artist led communities to evolve upon. Before the conception of the 798, artist villages, i.e. Yuanming Yuan, functioned as enclaves completely isolated from society,¹⁴⁸ with no established distribution networks to support them. In many instances distribution networks are contextually driven and should reflect the goals and ambitions of the community. In terms of the 798, there were no pre-existing distribution networks to support the development of the art community so it was a prioritized initiative to form an art distribution system for the 798 and growing contemporary art community. This required a distribution system integrated into the development scheme of the area that possessed the capability to cultivate internal art production at a micro and macro scale as well as to market cultural consumption in larger international constructs. Internal art production was a continuation of the medium of contemporary art, but the intensified clustering of artists in the 798 allowed artists to be engaged in continual dialogues pertaining to the development of their art works. The articulation of community led art exhibitions reinforced a conjoined expression of art cultivation pronounced in the public domain, but the success of the 798 required a distribution network to first acknowledge contemporary art as a recognized form of art, in the government's perspective, and secondly establish a domestic and international market to ensure its sustenance. As mentioned in previous chapters, both of these were accomplished, situating the 798, today, in a unique cultural niche in Beijing's art and culture world.

¹⁴⁸ Angremy, *op. cit.*, pp. 13.

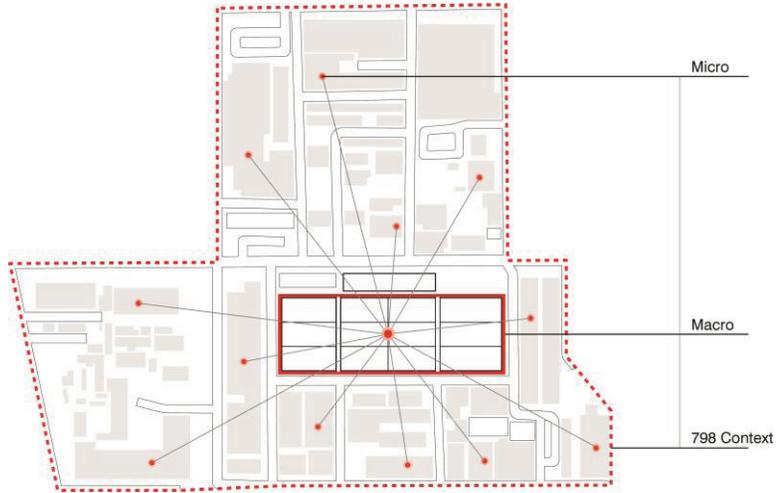


Fig. 4-3. 798 Distribution Networks Diagram
Source: Author

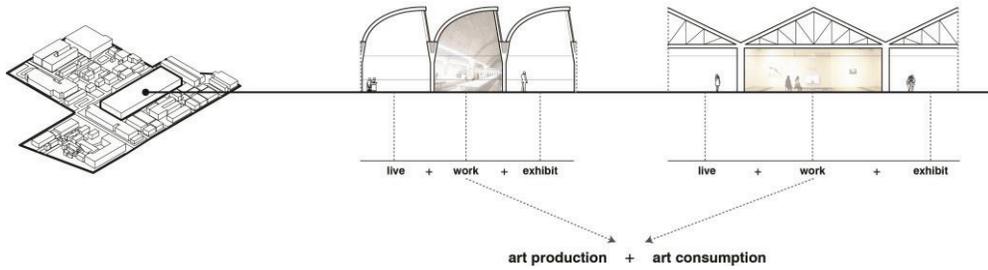


Fig. 4-4. 798 Factory Section Typology Diagram
Source: Author

Other applications of creative industry clusters, i.e. Shanghai, have seen onset problems stemming from the lack of inter-firm linkages, where cultural industry

quarter lack networking effects that are simply co-located rather than integrated.¹⁴⁹

This process is paralleled to an institutionalized approach, where the creation of works relies on external distribution networks to import art rather than internalizing the art production process, reducing the distribution network to a static linear process, i.e. museum, and not a community actively engaged in the internal production of art for external consumption.

4.2 Interpret Adaptive Reuse from an Alternative Approach

4.2.1 The Concept of Preservation (in China)

China, especially in the nineteenth and twentieth century, has seen drastic urban transformations onset by war and sociopolitical movements. This constant cycle of destruction and creation has become a familiar narrative in modern China. *Chaina* (拆呢) is commonly used as an *unofficial* name of China, referring to the character *chai* (拆 demolish), which is regularly seen painted on buildings marked for demolition.¹⁵⁰ The narrative of preservation or adaptive reuse in China contrasts the western view of aesthetic appreciation and celebration of architectural symbols because interest in urban ruins in China emerged out of the polemics of Chinese contemporary art.

¹⁴⁹ Zheng, J 2011, 'Creative Industry Clusters and the Entrepreneurial City of Shanghai', in *Urban Studies*, vol. 48, no. 16, pp. 3565.

¹⁵⁰ Lu, SH 2007, 'Chinese Modernity and Global Biopolitics: Studies in Literature and Visual Culture,' University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, pp. 167-190.

Contemporary artists developed an intimate dialogue that could be construed as a kind of internalization of urban *ruins*.¹⁵¹ This represents a collapse of the distinction of self and urban space, creating an intimate connection between the artist and the observer. The distance between architectural *ruins* and contemporary artistic rhetoric, is reduced to a minimum, to the extent that the artists conceived their work on a level where they perceived themselves as objects of destruction.¹⁵² The common subjects of inspiration for these works were often of post-industrial zones from the socialist era,¹⁵³ expanding on the conceptual representation of *ruins* as a self-reflection of artist's personal oppression, portrayed in earlier works by Huang Rui and other contemporary artists. One important thing to denote is the intimate connection Chinese contemporary art shares with post-industrial spaces. The internalized self-identification of artists with industrial *ruins* was key to artists articulating a position towards the preservation of post-industrial sites like the 798. This highlights the origins of publically acknowledged adaptive reuse for art districts, in China, as a practice contemporary artists knowingly derived from a poetic lamentation of post-industrial spaces. This agenda, in a sense, detaches itself from antiquity and art per se, and identifies with larger issues surrounding the role of contemporary art in China as well as the relationship between artists and society at large.¹⁵⁴ Architectural symbols and aesthetic appreciation of industrial *ruins*, i.e. 798, are encapsulated in the political rhetoric and representations of

¹⁵¹ Hung, op. cit, pp. 238.

¹⁵² *ibid.*, pp. 238-239.

¹⁵³ *ibid.*, pp. 238.

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 242.

Chinese contemporary art, revealing a deeply engrained image of industrial architecture in confluence with artist's conceptualization of their works. This concept of reusing post-industrial sites for artist-led art districts is and continues to set a precedent for other applications in China. Examples include the entirely planned Jiuchang, which was proposed in 2005 and now consists of 10 galleries; and Gaobeidian, which will address issues that have been identified in the development of the 798, such as providing differing rents for artists and commercial spaces¹⁵⁵ to prevent displacement in the process of artistic cultivation.

4.2.2 Context Driven Cultural Clustering

The 798 Art District manifested from a series of conditions that led to a concentrated clustering of contemporary artists in search for a *place* in society. This developed into a paradigm that was contextually driven.¹⁵⁶ The terminology of clusters, in accordance to the emergence of the 798, focuses on the transfer of ideas between artists in cultivating a distinct identity. The role of the community, in terms of clustering, is to develop an artistic language that employs creation, invention, and innovation of fundamental means¹⁵⁷ to manifest a representation of artistic conceptualization in some sort of confluence with the antiquity of its post-industrial site. The clustering of artists in the 798 resulted in an artistic language

¹⁵⁵ Currier, op. cit., pp. 245.

¹⁵⁶ Keane, M 2011, 'China's New Creative Clusters: Governance, Human Capital and Investment', Routledge, London.

¹⁵⁷ Chou, op. cit., pp. 211.

in confluence with its socialist industrial architecture, which alludes to the past while simultaneously evoking a dialogue of the present, and has become an epithet for artist-led communities in China.

Cultural clustering is highly sensitive to context and the replication and transfer of ideas and policies applied to different situations may prove to be ineffective or potentially counter-productive. So, context driven clustering of artists into a community can be construed as a vague but necessary component in providing a platform for artistic dialogue in cultivating place identity. Clustering does not necessarily entail the natural emergence of organic growth of cultural space, but instead provides a platform for multi-tier mobilization by cultural activists, i.e. art community, committed to cooperation and solidarity.¹⁵⁸ This process incorporates the expansion of distribution networks to include tangible political and economic resources because the immediate local network may not possess sufficient resources to sustain or expand its network.¹⁵⁹ Multi-tier mobilization within a community is an intrinsic strategy in expanding distribution networks to support the development and sustenance of a cultural space. At the local level, this multi-tier mobilization reinforces the cultivation of art production and internal artist networks, and at the national and international levels, this establishes the art community's place-identity as an irreplaceable symbol, i.e. Chinese contemporary art.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ Chou, op. cit., pp. 211.

¹⁵⁹ Dai, J, Huang, X, & Zhu op. cit., pp. 5299.

¹⁶⁰ Chou, op. cit., pp. 208.

4.3 Commercial & Cultural Hybrid

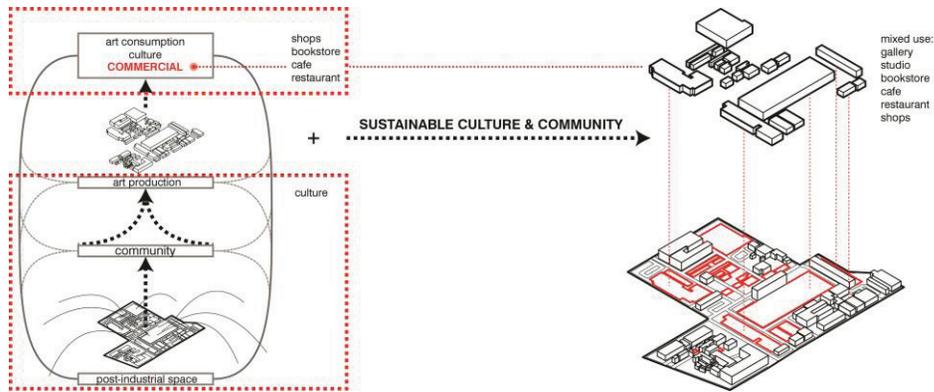


Fig. 4-5. Commercial & Culture Hybrid Diagram
Source: Author

4.3.1 Representations of Power

It is further important to mention the representations of power strongly influence the development and image of post-industrial landscapes. Doreen Massey defines this process as an ideology of *layer*, with every layer representing a typical image of industrial place constructed by different representation actors.¹⁶¹ This process calls for a methodology cultivating place images of the post-industrial space to be integrated into development contingencies through representation by different actors. In the case of the 798, the actors of representation include factory workers,

¹⁶¹ Dai, J, Huang, X, & Zhu op. cit., pp. 5287.

government, artists, media, and tourists.¹⁶² During this process, different actors should acknowledge the transition from their role as an observer to their role as an active creator, enabling their understanding and active engagement in producing a recognition correlating to the significance of the post-industrial landscape.¹⁶³

The transfer of power at different periods doesn't necessarily characterize oppressiveness, but productivity; artistic and cultural value, commercial and business value, and consumption based cultural value in relation to post-industrial spaces.¹⁶⁴ The involvement of extraneous actors, represents foreign contingencies that could potentially undermine the prerogatives of the property owner or the artist community. In the case of the 798, the pioneering artists, who instigated a re-evaluation of the areas redevelopment plan by the Seven Star Group and the Beijing Government, were the representational power challenging institutional urban policy and eventually leading to the restructuring of urban policy, specifically directed towards cultural production and consumption in post-industrial spaces.

Figures 4-6 shows the programmatic functions of buildings around Factory 798 in 2003 when the 798 artist community was beginning to garner significant public attention. Up until the Seven Star Group abandoned their redevelopment plan of turning the 798 into an electronics town, there were still industrial factories

¹⁶² Dai, J, Huang, X, & Zhu op. cit., pp. 5299.

¹⁶³ *ibid.*, pp. 5299.

¹⁶⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 5299.

functioning alongside art galleries.

The transfer of representational powers in the 798, in some retrospect, can be considered a part of the *natural* lifecycle of urban development. The commodification of cultural consumption can be construed as a form of gentrification, but in the case of the 798, Currier highlights this process did not demonstrate the classic displacement issues that generally characterize gentrification, instead presenting a *harmonious* class separation, with industrial workshops existing alongside galleries and stylish cafes.¹⁶⁵ The profits gained by the Seven Star Group, through the leasing of their properties, continues to support the coverage of the previous industrial workers pensions, so there is no conflict of displacement.

After 2006, government intervention, as a result of immense public attention in the 798, resulted in an onset of commercialization in the district. Today, the 798 has expanded to more than 150 galleries¹⁶⁶ and now includes luxury residences, offices, and commercial services, i.e. boutiques, restaurants, cafes, bookstores, etc. (Fig. 4-7). The assimilation of the 798 cultural lifestyle into the public domain represents collective lives and memories of an epitome of communist ideals¹⁶⁷ and an imprint of contemporary art that now defines the 798's identity.

¹⁶⁵ Currier, op. cit., pp. 245.

¹⁶⁶ Angremy, op. cit., pp. 13.

¹⁶⁷ Currier, op. cit., pp. 255.

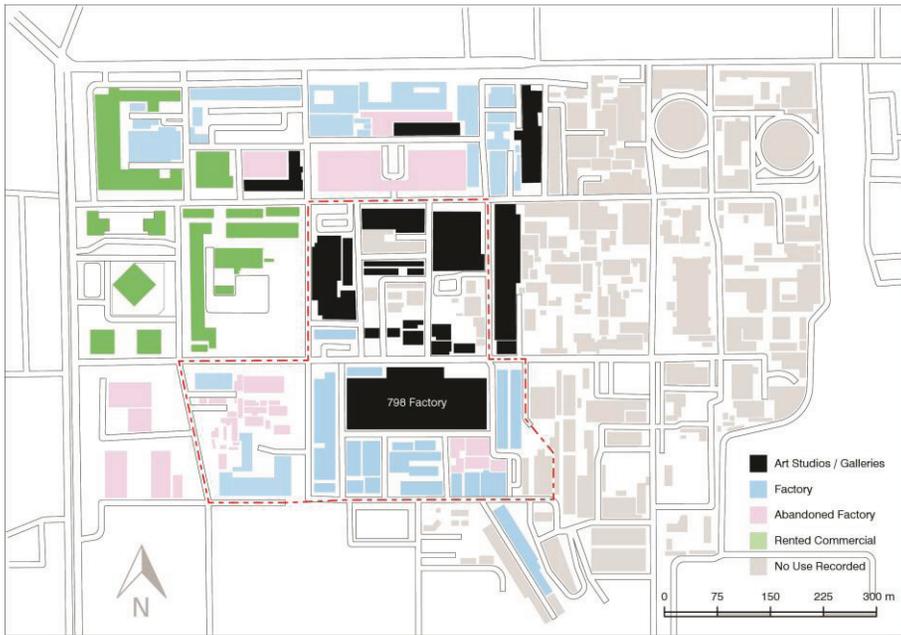


Fig. 4-6. 798 Program Analysis (2003)
Source: Author

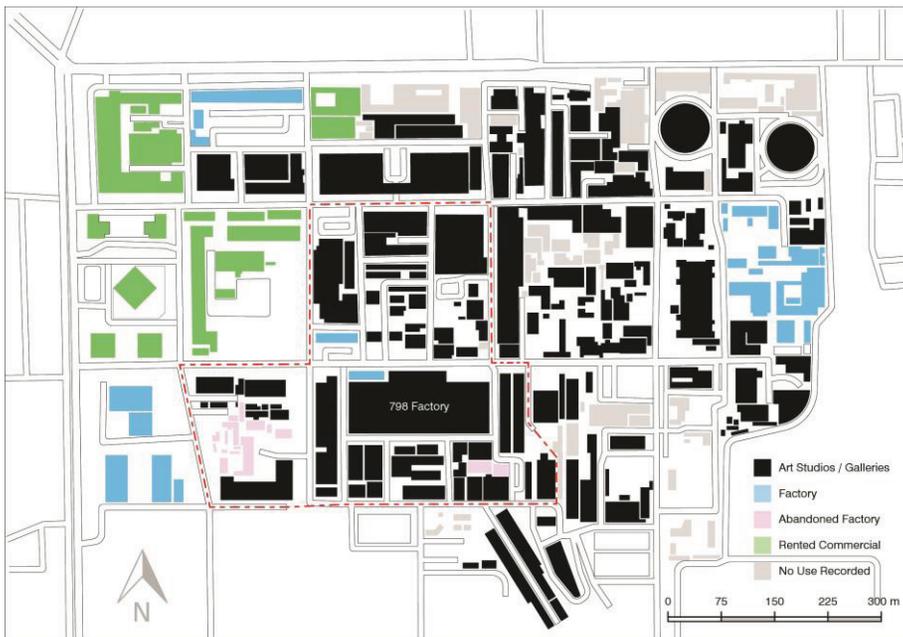


Fig. 4-7. 798 Program Analysis (2016)
Source: Author

4.4 Conclusion

The 798 Art District is a product of a specific expression of art that converged with a specific place. It emerged from a unique form of convergence between artist's self-identification of the destruction of architectural *ruins* and socialist industrial architecture. Moving beyond a static physical representation of lamenting symbolic celebration of an architectural aesthetic and deeply rooting itself in the polemics of Chinese contemporary art. A process that empowered artistic articulation through specific places and time. In retrospect, the discourse of the emergence of the 798 can be accredited to founding activists of the avant-garde and contemporary art movements dating back to 1979, when artists began developing a politically radical position articulated in opposition to government oppression. A convergence of historical precedence and expressionism led key artists, like Huang Rui, to developing a visual language self-defining artistic oppression with the destructive past of architectural icons. It was in Huang Rui's depiction of the Yuanming Yuan *ruins* that artists began to develop a pronounced artistic position in confluence with endangered architectural epitomes of the socialist era. In this sense, artists developed a sympathetic attitude towards threatened architecture, and established a foundation for artist-led architectural preservation. Before the 798 was realized, preservation, in China, was reduced to iconic imprints of the cultural past, i.e. the Great Wall and the Forbidden City, functioning as relics with static monetary agendas.

The contemporary artists of the 798 played an intrinsic role in articulating a distinct form of artistic conceptualization that integrated industrial *ruins* into their works. In doing so, developing an artistic narrative that internalized a sympathy for post-industrial space and developing a sentiment towards the preservation of these areas. This active embodiment of the convergence of art and architecture positions itself as the horizontal foundation for the creation and transformation of an artist-led community, and was intrinsic in establishing and sustaining the 798's place-identity, which enabled its economic and cultural permeability in its transformation in becoming an affluent art district.

The key conditions of confluence, exemplified by the 798 Art District, provides insight to a framework of representational actors and conditions that can foster the organic emergence of an art-led community in convergence with post-industrial architecture, transforming socio-economic voids into areas of art production and eventual cultural consumption. As seen in the 798, context driven art production and activation of a community network engaged in multi-tier mobilization processes can provide a foundation for the emergence and sustenance of an artistic community in confluence with place-specific industrial architecture.

The conditions for confluence, as previously mentioned, functions as a mediator for representational actors to cultivate art production and direct their multi-tier mobilization efforts in cooperation with mitigated institutional intervention. Art and post-industrial spaces are highlighted in this process because art driven

endeavors in reusing industrial buildings as cultural catalysts have been strongly represented recently, i.e. Tate Modern in London and the Prada Foundation in Milan. These precedents, like the 798, provides a unique form of cultural identity emerging from the convergence of art and industrial architecture, celebrating place-specific epitomes of the industrial era while simultaneously providing an outlet for artists to display their evolved artistic vocabulary. Both of the fore mentioned precedents are contextually driven, but differ from the 798 because they do not encompass art production into their exhibitory manifold, limiting their cultural production. A strong place-specific representation of art and architecture should convey an interrelated discourse depicting a narrative of confluence reinforcing the necessity of place, otherwise the value of the industrial landscape is diminished to a state of *placelessness*.

The 798 framework of confluence (Fig. 4-8) depicts the key catalytic actors and conditions that can provide guidance for other art driven community developments in post-industrial spaces. The 798's success has led to China and other international institutions interpreting the 798's organic emergence into a standardized development process in efforts of inducing paralleled success in other post-industrial spaces. But, serial applications of this institutionalized process run the risk of developing without the proper supporting urban policy and the historical or socio-political climate to foster the emergence of a unique artistic identity. My intensive analysis of the 798 has concluded that the emergence of the art district was extremely place-specific to Beijing's post-industrial era, China's socio-political

climate, and the birth of Chinese contemporary art. Without these interconnected pre-existing factors the 798 would not have emerged as an affluent art district and the discourse of contemporary art in China would also have been developed in a drastically different manner. This underlines the importance and uniqueness of the emergence of the 798 resulting from the convergence of key catalytic conditions between art and architecture.

Although, the 798's developmental process is highly context driven, key factors of emergence can be interpreted from the process creating a pattern language in relation to the conditions for confluence that can foster potential convergence between art and post-industrial architecture. These key factors provides insight into catalytic conditions that can potentially stimulate emergence, but do not directly ensure developmental affluence. These key factors can be broken down into three categories; physical, conceptual, and political. Together these processes converge into a foundation fostering the potential emergence of art-led communities in confluence with post-industrial spaces.

Physical conditions are defined by post-industrial spaces residing within urban contexts. Industrial buildings contain the physical capacity to spatially accommodate almost all forms of art production. This was clearly evident in the organic beginnings of the 798, as well as in other precedents, like the Dia:Beacon in New York. The 798's art production narrative was deeply rooted in the socio-political constructs of its industrial spaces, while examples like the Dia:Beacon

provided a narrative of artistic divergence from fundamental artistic ideology promoting fluidity between the viewer, industrial material, and post-industrial spaces. Nevertheless, post-industrial spaces have proven to be an accommodating physical precedence for art-led endeavors in shifting site-specific narratives from industrial production to art production and cultural consumption. Moving beyond a static physical adaptation of an industrial container and providing a cultural dialogue where art and architecture are in constant convergence.

Conceptual conditions provides an ideological and theological premise for coherence between art and architecture and are innate to developing a cultural narrative. Throughout the discourse of Chinese contemporary art, up until the inception of the 798, artists developed an articulated position actively engaged in the preservation of industrial architecture. This began from a theoretical premise depicting industrial *ruins* through visual representations, later evolving into a community-led movement that drastically altered the perception of preservation oriented urban policy in China. In retrospect, Chinese contemporary artist's conceptual self-identification with industrial *ruins* provided the premise for the integration of preservation into urban policy as a catalyst for artistic culture-led economic production and consumption.

Political conditions reflects urban policy in correlation to the implementation of preservation, but more importantly should represent the transparency of urban policy in cultivating the convergence of art and architecture. Political policy

oriented towards oppressing artistic expression, before and during the development of the 798, catalyzed public response amongst Chinese contemporary artists in attempts to garner public support. Pronounced public support eventually led to governing municipalities realizing the economic potential of artistic production in post-industrial spaces. Initially, the Seven Star Group rented out dormant factory properties in the 798 Factory beginning in the 1990s to recover lost profits in order to pay past industrial employee's pensions. Artists were able to peruse their visions based on the premise that they providing monetary compensation. However, their presence was perceived as a temporary solution by the Seven Star Group, but financial compensation allowed the 798's artists to curtail government censorship in what was envisioned by the government as a transitory state for the industrial complex. The increased popularity of the 798 challenged redevelopment legislation ultimately resulting in the Beijing Government to restructure their urban policy towards art and culture-led developments.

Red Town, otherwise known as the Shanghai Sculpture Space, was developed after the 798's prototypical development model was integrated into Beijing's urban policy in 2005. Institutional presence from the inception of the development polarized the process, derived from the 798, leaving no room for non-affluent artists to exist. Red Town was developed in accordance with visions of establishing affluence from the inauguration of the space instead of internally cultivating the emergence of cultural identity. Cheap rent was a key factor that contributed to the migration of contemporary artists to the 798 and can be interpreted as an opening in

policy to mitigate lost profits. Although this interpretation of policy was not directed towards cultivating artistic production, at the time, it provides insight to the importance of openings in urban policy in developing art-led communities in post-industrial spaces.

All three of these key factors of emergence work in coherence providing a platform for potential confluence of art and architecture. The 798 provides unique insight to how politics, art, and post-industrial spaces can converge into an affluent art district. The successes and failures of the 798 should be viewed as a precedence to develop urban policy and perception towards fostering the emergence of other forms of convergence between art and architecture. The challenge for future applications is identifying this unique form of convergence while it is in its infancy and implementing open ended urban policy to cultivate it to maturity. A process that should encapsulate the iconic stature of industrial past while organically transforming to embody a cultural narrative that represents present adaptations.

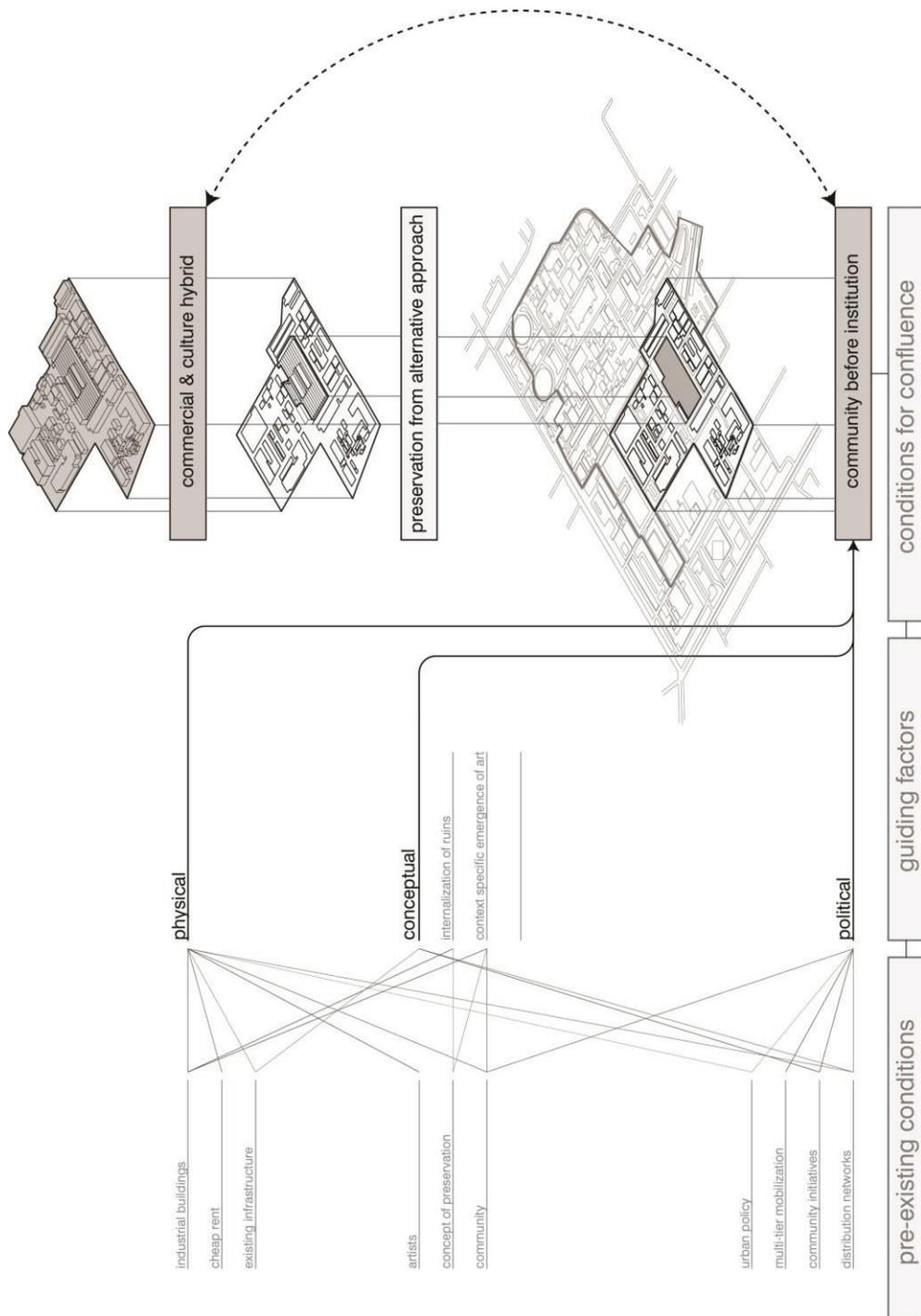


Fig. 4-8. 798 Framework of Confluence
Source: Author

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국 문 초 록

798 아트촌과 정치, 예술, 건축의 수렴을 위한 조건들

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후기 산업사회에서 건축과 예술의 관계는 더욱 상호유기적으로 변모하였다. 1960년 미니멀 아트의 등장으로 아티스트들은 건축가들과 능동적으로 동맹을 맺기 시작했고 이러한 현상은 예술사에서 괄목할 만한 의미를 가진다. 아티스트들은 그 시대의 건축 스타일을 그대로 가져와 자신들의 작품에 적용시켰고 이는 그들의 작품을 더욱 산업적으로 만드는 데 크게 기여했다. 최근에는 아티스트들의 작품과 건축 양식이 서로 영향을 주고 받으며 이전의 일방적인 관계에서 벗어나 그 역할이 변화하는 경향을 보이기도 한다. 한 예로, 많은 전시공간들은 새하얀 정사각형 모양에서 변모하여 점점 독특하고 개성 있는 후기 산업적 공간들로 변했다. 주요 미술관들 중 하나인 테이트 모던과 디아 파운데이션은 미술관 건립을 위하여 산업 건축물을 재사용하여 이러한 추세에 선구자적인 역할을 했다. 뿐만 아니라 최근에 개관한 밀라노의 프라다 파운데이션은 이와 같은 움직임이 더 이상 새로운 것이 아닌 일반 건축 양식으로 받아들여지도록 하는 데 큰 역할을 했다. 많은 산업 건축물들이 재(再)디자인 되는 데 기업의 막대한 자금이 투자된 서구의 전례와 달리, 베이징의 구 독일 산업 복합단지에 위치한 798 아트촌은 독립 예술가들에 의하여 처음 그 빛을 보게 되었다. 그들은 일하며 거주할 수 있는 저렴한 스튜디오를 찾아 방치된 산업 빌딩촌으로 밀려들어왔다. 이러한 이유로 이 지역은 점점 유명해졌고 중국 정부는 급기야 이 구역을 통제하고 관리하기

시작했다. 이처럼 전시장소, 아티스트 스튜디오, 그리고 각종 상점 등의 혼합물로
빚어진 독특한 798 아트촌은 서구의 그것과는 매우 다르게 그 지역의 문화, 경제 그리고
건축 스타일등과 뿌리 깊게 연관되어 있다. 산업 건축물 재사용은 빌딩의 단순한 물리적
역할 제공에서 벗어나 아트와 건축이 상호 유기적인 관계로 수렴하는 데 계기를
제공했으며, 아트와 건축은 꾸준히 자연스럽게 변화 하고 있다. 이 연구는, 798
아트촌에서 보여지는 것과 같이 아트와 건축 간의 자연스럽게 유기적인 관계를
고찰함으로써 아시아 도시들의 산업 건축물이 보존되어야 하는 이유를 제공하고자 한다.

주요어: 798 아트촌, 재사용, 수렴

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