



Whom to Serve?

How the CCP censors art in Europe

November 2022

#BannedbyBeijing

INDEX
ON
CENSORSHIP
A VOICE FOR THE PERSECUTED

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Why does the CCP censor art? “Telling China’s story well”

IN A 2014 speech to some of China’s most prominent artists, President Xi Jinping instructed them to ask “whom to serve”⁰¹ when creating their work. Under Xi’s rule, this question has taken on an outsized importance. Tibetan artists Tenzing Sonam and Ritu Sarin told Index that “the relatively freer artistic climate that existed before Xi Jinping took power ... has largely disappeared. Art in China today is being used specifically as a tool of the CCP to propagate its vision of the world at large.”⁰²

Xi has stated that art should serve a “nationalistic purpose”⁰³ by promoting “correct viewpoints of history, nationality, statehood and culture.”⁰⁴ Art and culture are

an inherent part of Xi’s project of national rejuvenation; Xi once commented that “the strength of a country and a people is underpinned by a vigorous culture.”⁰⁵

“The CCP is interesting in that it’s one of the few governments that has co-opted its whole culture through the claim that you can’t talk about Chinese culture without talking about the CCP”, Sam Goodman, the Director of Policy and Advocacy of Hong Kong Watch, told Index.⁰⁶ As a result, “if you want to promote or celebrate Chinese culture you can’t do that without celebrating the CCP”, according to the CCP.⁰⁷

Art can serve the interests of the state in two ways. Firstly, in lieu of Maoism as a



Art that does not toe the party line is seen by the state not only as a betrayal of the party but of Chinese society at large

unifying ideology, art and culture can be used to delineate and define what it means to be Chinese in the 21st century.

Secondly, art and culture can “tell China’s story well” internationally. This phrase has entered the lexicon in China to reflect the growing anxiety about how the world sees China. According to Xi, China’s poor reputation internationally is merely a result of

misinformation and confusion so can be easily corrected by patriotic artists.⁰⁸

Art that does not toe the party line is seen by the state not only as a betrayal of the party but of Chinese society at large. Since the CCP sees no borders concerning who classifies as Chinese, even art that is produced by individuals who are not based in the country can be subject to censorship. ✘

01: Jiang, J. (2014) ‘Art should serve the people: Xi’, The Global Times (16 October). Available at: <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/886572.shtml> [Accessed 24 July 2022].

02: Sonam, T. and Sarin, R. (2022). Email correspondence, to Merlin, J. (16 August 2022).

03: USCNPM Translations. (2022) ‘Translation: Xi Jinping on Literature, Art, and Politics after Tiananmen’, USCNPM (7 October). Available at: <https://uscnpm.org/2022/10/07/translation-xi-jinping-on-literature-art-and-politics-in-1989/> [Accessed 11th October 2022]; WSJ. (2015) ‘A Year After Xi’s Landmark Speech on the Arts, Some Things Get Left Out’, WSJ (15 October). Available at: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/BL-CJB-27898> [Accessed 20 March 2022].

04: Jiang, J. (2014) ‘Art should serve the people: Xi’, The Global Times (16 October). Available at: <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/886572.shtml> [Accessed 24 July 2022].

05: Lam, W. (2016) ‘Xi Jinping uses “traditional culture” to launch a new Cultural Revolution’, PIME Asia News (2 November). Available at: <https://www.asianews.it/news-en/Xi-Jinping-uses-traditional-culture-to-launch-a-new-Cultural-Revolution-36661.html> [Accessed 23 October 2022].

06: Goodman, S. (2022) Interview with Index on Censorship, by Merlin, J. (9 August 2022).

07: Ibid. (Goodman, S., 2022).

08: Ibid. (Davis, R., and Freedman, J., 23 March 2021).

Direct and indirect censorship

“The Emperor is Far Away”

THE PHRASE – “The Emperor is far away” – has long been spoken by those under Chinese rule to imply that various freedoms, such as that to freely express oneself through art, are more accessible for those living far from Beijing.

Janet Marstine, a professor of museum studies, formerly at the University of Leicester, told Index, “It is now critical to examine how the CCP may be attempting to control artistic expression abroad and also how artists and curators in exile and their supporters are anticipating and/or responding to pressure”.⁰¹

Lumli Lumlong (pseudonym), a husband-and-wife painting duo, left Hong Kong for the UK in the summer of 2021 after they were accused by the press of promoting Hong Kong independence.⁰² They told Index, “If the

According to Freedom House “China conducts the most sophisticated, global, and comprehensive campaign of transnational repression in the world”

government wants to arrest you, the pro-CCP newspaper will write about you first”.⁰³ Their urgency to leave was bolstered by harassment by someone claiming to be a police officer. Lumli Lumlong told Index, “One of our relatives is National Security Police so it would have been very dangerous to tell people that we were leaving.”⁰⁴ Their book, *Liberarts*, has subsequently been banned in Hong Kong.

Exiled artists confirmed to Index it would be naive to assume that the idea of “The Emperor is far away” is still the case in an increasingly globalised world. According to Freedom House “China conducts the most sophisticated, global, and comprehensive campaign of transnational repression in the world”.⁰⁵ As previously documented by Index, its long arm reaches →



ABOVE: Thousand Hands Man by Lumli Lumlong

01: Marstine, J. (2022) Interview with Index on Censorship, by Marks, F. (10 October 2022).

02: Hong Kong News. (2021) “Bao Du” Gallery will launch its partners tomorrow, claiming that it will be careful not to “step on the world”, Dot Dot News (October 5). Available at: https://www.dotdotnews.com/s/202105/10/AP60991621e4b0dcb7f69bcf41.html?fbclid=IwAR0jHrWqTydnIAwF8IZoXHEeqHtcO_4ghoQ5K_6hjSm2-6SYs2gAWMaRPgs [Accessed 5 March 2022].

03: Lumli Lumlong. (2022). Interview with Index on Censorship, by Marks, F (3 March 2022).

04: Ibid. (Lumli Lumlong, 2022).

05: Schenkkan, N., and Linzer, I. (2021) ‘Out of Sight, Not Out of Reach’, Freedom House. Available at: https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/Complete_FH_TransnationalRepressionReport2021_rev020221.pdf [Accessed 24 February 2022].

→ into Europe attempting to stifle all criticism of the party and country.⁰⁶

Chiang Seeta, an exiled Chinese artist living in France, told Index, “France is of course much freer than China, but it is less ideal than I thought. How to protect the freedom of the individual, including that of the artist, when the limits of government power are ever expanding, is a question for the whole world.”⁰⁷

With the CCP aiming to censor art subversive to state interests, they have developed a system of mechanisms to target artists in Europe. This has largely taken two forms: direct censorship (bullying to pressure artists and institutions not to exhibit) or creating a climate of fear that pushes artists to self-censor. While examples of self-censorship are more pervasive, if harder to monitor, in Europe, this does not prevent CCP trying to exert itself more overtly.

In October 2021, the Chinese government

ordered an exhibition by well-known dissident artist, Badiucaio held in Brescia, Italy to be cancelled. The Chinese Embassy warned that if it was shown it would “endanger the friendly relations between Italy and China.”⁰⁸ Posters advertising the event were vandalised across Brescia.⁰⁹ Badiucaio told Index he believes this may have been a coordinated campaign by United Front groups organised by the Chinese government in Italy.

However, the city’s Mayor released a statement stating that Brescia has “always championed freedom of expression and would continue to do so. Art should never be censored”.¹⁰ The exhibition went ahead but not without consequence.

There were security concerns for Badiucaio and others in attendance. A Hong-Kong artist and curator told Index, “during the performance there were Chinese individuals taking videos. They don’t just take videos of



After refusing to accept the bribe, Abhishek was beaten and forced to watch a documentary about the Dalai Lama’s supposed terrorism

the artists but people who were there.”¹¹ They continued, “There was a middle aged-guy who was trying his best to film me, film my face. He would pretend to film the performance, but he definitely was not”.¹²

Secondly, the CCP’s actions sent a clear message to other curators and galleries: you will face serious issues if you try to put on a show with Badiucaio. He told Index, “I think that the threat is actually working because I was planning to take the show to more places but we’ve hit a wall again”.¹³

Another artist who has experienced direct

attempts of censorship is the Indian playwright Abhishek Majumdar. His play Pah-La follows the experiences of Tibetans during the 2008 Lhasa Uprising.

While rehearsals were taking place at the Royal Court Theatre in London, Abhishek noticed that he was being stalked by individuals he assumes were linked to the Chinese government. Eventually, he agreed to meet with them. He told Index, “they wanted a Shanghai theatre to buy the rights, and of course, it would mean I would sell it and then they would never stage it.”¹⁴ After refusing to accept the →

06: Marks, F., and Ní Mhainín, J. (2022) ‘China’s Long Arm: How Uyghurs Are Being Silenced in Europe’, Index on Censorship (February 2022). Available at: <https://www.indexoncensorship.org/2022/02/landmark-report-shines-light-on-chinese-long-arm-repression-of-ex-pat-uyghurs/> [Accessed 7 July 2022].

07: Chiang Seeta. (2022). Interview with Index on Censorship, by Marks, F (9 September 2021).

08: Cascone, S. (2022) ‘Beijing Attempted to Shut Down This Artist’s International Art Exhibition. Here’s How He and a Small Italian City Fought Back’, Artnet (15 November). Available at: <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/italy-anti-chinese-government-badiucaio-show-2034812> [Accessed 4th September 2022]; Povoledo, E. (2021) ‘The Show Goes On, Even After China Tried to Shut It Down’, The New York Times, (12 November). Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/12/arts/design/badiucaio-brescia-china.html> [Accessed 10 November 2022].

09: Redazione. (2021) ‘Brescia, the posters of the Badiucaio exhibition “China is not nearby” vandalized’, Quibrescia (30 December). Available at: <https://www.quibrescia.it/citta/2021/12/30/brescia-vandalizzati-i-manifesti-della-mostra-di-badiucaio-la-cina-non-e-vicina/603942/> [Accessed 7 November 2022].

10: Ibid. (Povoledo, E., 12 November 2021).

11: Anonymous (2022) Interview with Index on Censorship, by Marks, F. (3 October 2022).

12: Ibid. (Anonymous., 2022).

13: Badiucaio. (2022) Interview with Index on Censorship, by Williams, N. (10 October 2022).

14: Majumdar, A. (2022). Interview with Index on Censorship, by Marks, F and Merlin, J. (1 November 2022).

A marker of the CCP’s strategy is the difficulty in tracking its interference

→ bribe, Abhishek was beaten and forced to watch a documentary about the Dalai Lama’s supposed terrorism.¹⁵

Elsewhere in Europe, exhibitions featuring controversial artworks have been unexpectedly shut down for unclear reasons, often citing bureaucratic or technical issues. Despite being shown with widespread success in Lithuania and Estonia, in August 2021 the Hong Kong Way exhibition was cancelled days before it was set to open in the Museum of Occupation of Latvia in Riga. It was a photography exhibition that drew on the parallels between the 2019 Hong Kong protests and the 1989 Baltic Way, a human chain connecting the Baltic countries to protest the Soviet regime.¹⁶

While the press and politicians reported it was cancelled due to organisers not fulfilling their contractual obligations, a representative

of the Museum told the exhibition’s lead curator, Iverson NG, that the exhibition did not align with the Museums’ values and that “this is not the time to bring other issues to the fore when using the museum premises.”¹⁷ Iverson presented Index with correspondence, demonstrating the museum’s satisfaction with his team’s progress, undermining the claim that they did not abide by their contract.¹⁸

Iverson strongly suspects, although he admits he cannot prove, that the museum had succumbed to pressure from the CCP. A marker of the CCP’s strategy is the difficulty in tracking its interference.¹⁹ Did the CCP directly interfere with this exhibition as was attempted in Brescia, did a climate of fear towards putting on events that are critical of the CCP encourage the organisers to step away, or was it for totally unrelated issues? We may never know and perhaps this is the point. ✘

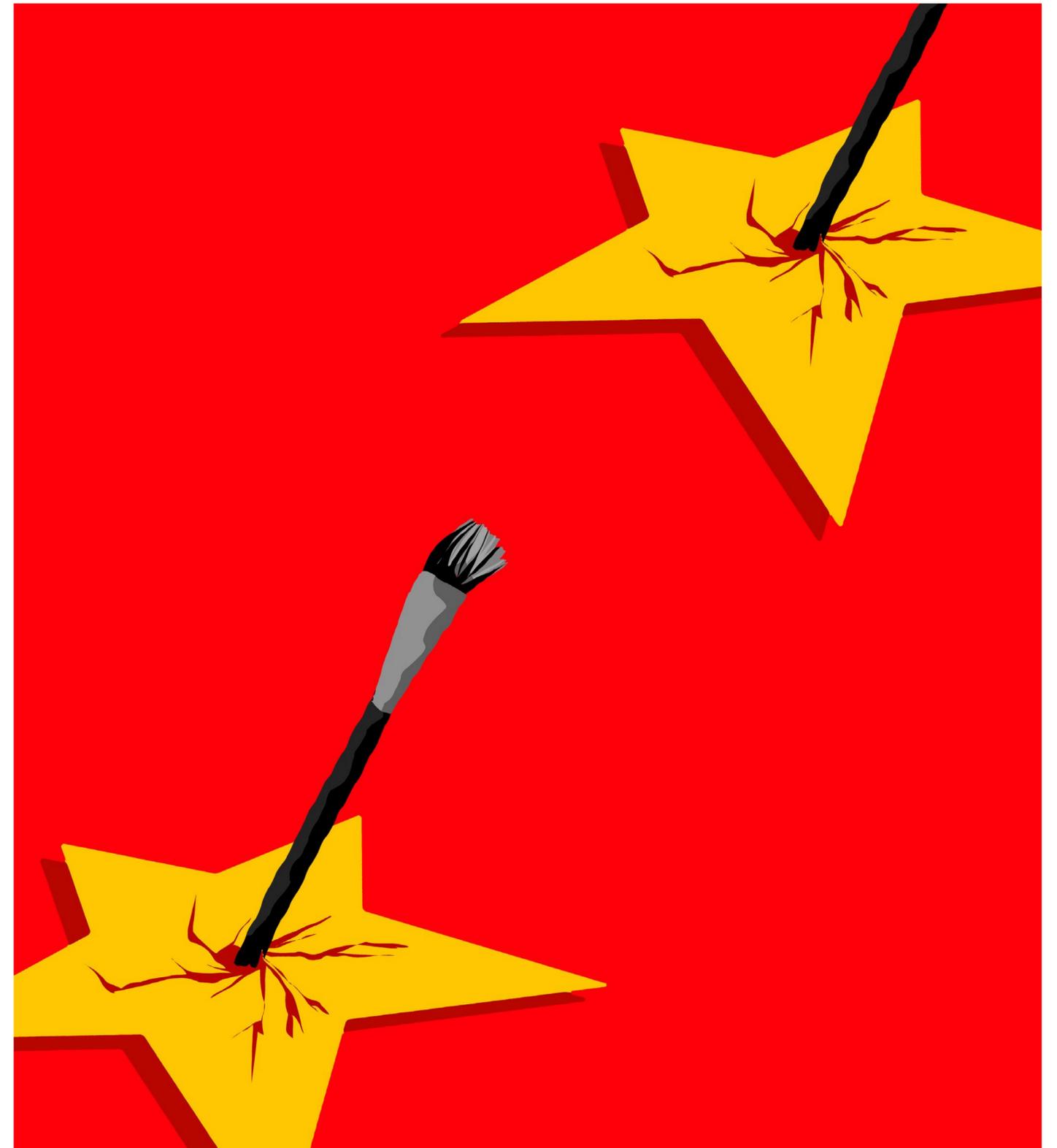
15: Ibid. (Majumdar, A., 2022).

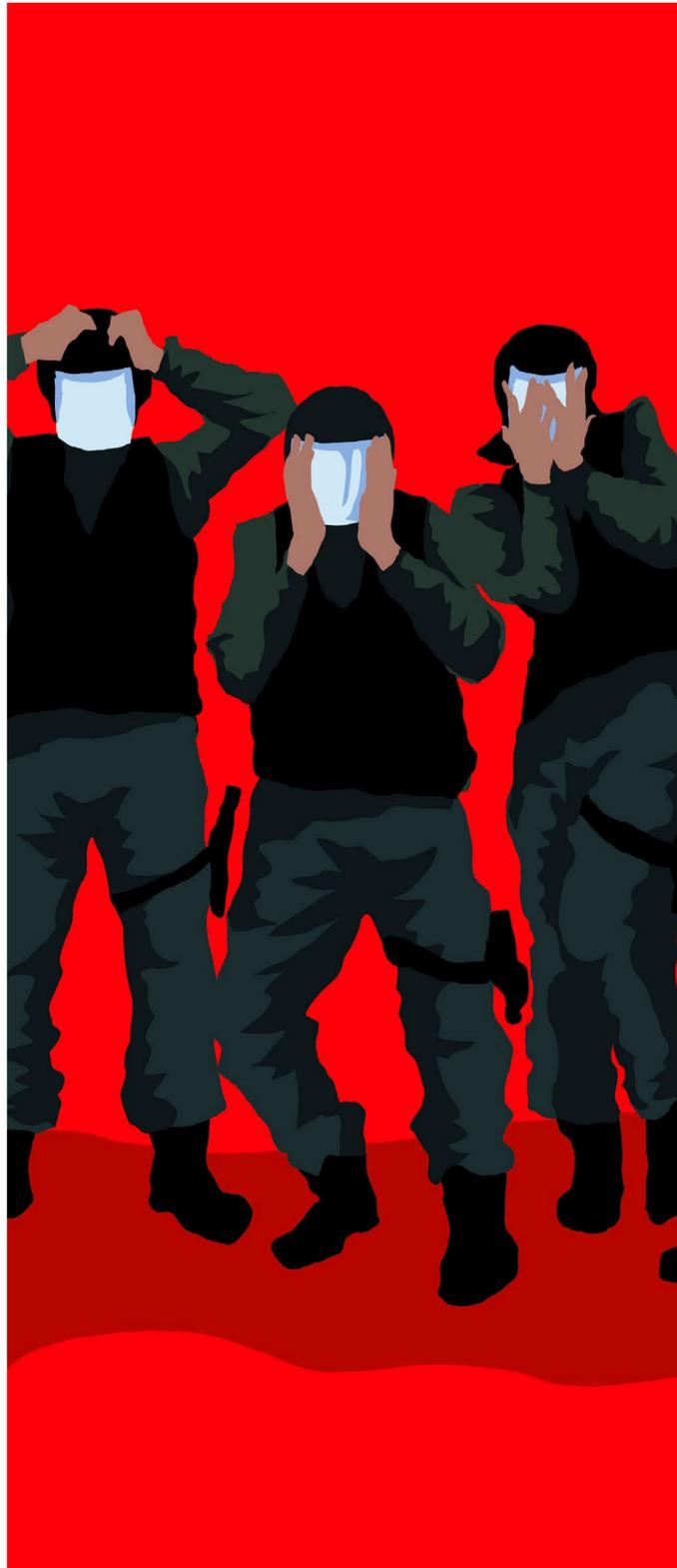
16: Kwan, R. (2021) ‘Two Years on From the ‘Hong Kong Way,’ Latvian Museum Pulls Exhibition on 2019 Pro-Democracy Demo’, Hong Kong Free Press (25 August). Available at: <https://hongkongfp.com/2021/08/25/two-years-on-from-the-hong-kong-way-latvian-museum-pulls-exhibition-on-2019-pro-democracy-demo/> [Accessed September 15 September 2022].

17: NG, I. (2021). Email correspondence with the Museum of Occupation. (17 August). [Forwarded to Marks, F. on 9 April 2022].

18: NG, I. (2022). Interview with Index on Censorship, by Marks, F. (29 March 2022).

19: Briefing. (2021) ‘How China’s “sharp power” is muting criticism abroad’, The Economist, (14 December). Available at: <https://www.economist.com/briefing/2017/12/14/how-chinas-sharp-power-is-muting-criticism-abroad> [Accessed 30 March 2022].





Self-censorship

WHILE OVERT STATE-CENSORSHIP is normalised in China, it is not as prevalent in Europe. Instead, another form of censorship is common: self-censorship. Individuals or institutions internalise threats to modify their own behaviour or actions, such as avoiding certain topics to escape undue attention or potential retaliatory actions.

The National Security Law (NSL) passed by the Hong Kong government in 2020 has detrimentally impacted artistic expression even in Europe. Article 38 of the law says that it applies to offences committed against the “Hong Kong Special Administrative Region from outside the Region by a person who is not a permanent resident of the Region.”²⁰ This extraterritorial reach has led artists and curators in Europe to self-censor, fearing harm will come to them or their loved ones back home.²¹

The possibility of endangering those close to you is a constant worry for many artists

Artists from the diaspora, who continue their work in Europe, are forced to do so in the grey areas of the NSL. A UK-based Hong Konger emphasised to Index, “the biggest problem is that we don’t know where the red lines are.”²² Another Hong Kong artist based in Germany told Index, “It is kind of trial and error. We must ‘keep testing the temperature’, as we say in Cantonese.”²³

Lumli Lumlong told Index, “We worry about our families. Because we know that some of our siblings, even those living in the UK, have family in Hong Kong are still within reach of the informers or pro-CCP newspapers. We

don’t want our family to become hostages.”²⁴

Similarly, Chiang Seeta told Index about the impact his work was having on his friends and family: “Some of my friends who had graduated in France and returned to China were interrogated by the [secret police] ... they asked my friends if they knew me and if they knew what I was doing. My parents also get calls asking if they know what their children are doing in France.”²⁵ The possibility of endangering those close to you is a constant worry for many artists. A similar tactic has been deployed against the Uyghur diaspora in Europe.²⁶

20: Xinhua. (2020) ‘English translation of the Law of the People’s Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region’, Xinhua (7 January 2020). Available at: http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-07/01/c_139178753.htm

21: Safeguard Defenders. (2022) ‘China uses National Security Law to threaten British NGO in further escalation’ (15 March 2022). Available at: <https://safeguarddefenders.com/en/blog/china-uses-national-security-law-threaten-british-ngo-further-escalation> [Accessed 30 March 2022].

22: Anonymous (2022) Interview with Index on Censorship, by Marks F. (23 February 2022)

23: Ibid. (Anonymous., 3 October 2022).

24: Ibid. (Lumli Lumlong., 3 March 2022).

25: Ibid. (Chiang Seeta., 9 September 2022).

26: Ibid. (Marks, F., and Ní Mhainín, J., February 2022, Index on Censorship).

→ One artist was forced to cut off links with their family and the possibility of returning home. “For me, as I never intended to go back to Hong Kong, I already gave up the link with my parents ... So, I can do more things and have less censorship. But for an average Hong Konger who intends to go back to Hong Kong, then the red line is anything from the 2019 protests, criticising the NSL, or protests in general as in secession of the state.”²⁷

Another reason for self-censorship is concerns for artists’ careers. Chiang Seeta told Index, “On the one hand, many artists have to maintain their cooperation with Chinese institutions in order to keep their income and influence. On the other hand, if they offend the Chinese Communist Party, the creative and personal freedom of artists will be affected, especially for those who also have to travel between China and Europe.”²⁸

However, these fears are not universal. Yang Weidong was jailed in China for using nude performance art to protest the CCP. Following a series of heart problems he developed while imprisoned, he was allowed to travel with his mother to Germany for treatment. After

applying for asylum, he was stalked and intimidated by Chinese spies. Now that the Yang family has been granted the right to reside in Germany, he is finally free to produce his artwork.²⁹

Uyghur artist Nijat Hushur told Index that he initially self-censored when he moved to Germany, aiming to act as “a bridge between my people and the Western free world” rather than engaging in activism against the CCP.³⁰ During a Frankfurt exhibition, a suspicious man, who gave Nijat the impression he was there to monitor the event on the Chinese Embassy’s behalf, approached him. As a result, he declined to answer questions about the political situation in his homeland when approached by journalists. He now sees his attempts to act as a bridge as “naive”. Like Yang, Nijat only feels comfortable expressing himself freely now that his family have moved to his new home in Sweden. ✘

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 RIGHT: Yang Weidong was jailed in China for using nude performance art to protest the CCP. On 21 July 2019 he posed outside the International Olympic Committee (IOC) office in Lausanne, Switzerland



27: Ibid. (NG, I., 29 March 2022).

28: Ibid. (Chiang Seeta., 9 September 2022).

29: Yang, W. (2022) Written Interview with Index on Censorship, by Marks, F (24th March 2022).

30: Hushur, N. (2022). Interview with Index on Censorship, by Merlin, J. (13 July 2022).

Tactics to limit censorship

DR JANET MARSTINE, who specialises in curation in authoritarian countries, explains that for Chinese and Hong Kong artists, “the goal across cultures is not to eradicate self-censorship – which is neither realistic nor desired – but, rather, to accept that curating involves a delicate dance between resisting and exercising self-censorship.”³¹ She told Index, “in this context, self-censorship is not a passive stance. It requires strategic thinking, or what one of my Hong Kong informants refers to as a kind of ‘craftsmanship’.”³²

In Europe, producing work anonymously or pseudonymously is the most common form of craftsmanship for artists to protect themselves. However, exposure by the authorities is a constant risk. One artist told Index, “the scary thing is that I don’t know, I have no idea if they know my identity or anything until I go back to Hong Kong ... So that’s a shadow in my heart

... I never know what information they have.” The artist plans to return to Hong Kong soon.³³

Others respond by avoiding explicit connections to political events. One anonymous artist told Index, to navigate around censorship artists “focus on the things the people who are affected need mentally. Almost art therapy in a way.”³⁴ Other artists seek to reframe taboo subjects, producing artwork inspired by local issues the diaspora faces in Europe. One artist elaborated to Index, “if you are talking about new arrivals from Hong Kong, then you are talking about what is happening back at home. We are living in a world that is linked.”³⁵

Another tactic is producing art that is intentionally abstract. One anonymous artist from Hong Kong told Index, “If I think there is something that needs to be said, I will still try to find a way. But nowadays we say we need to find a more wise or clever way to make political art.”³⁶

The scary thing is that I don’t know, I have no idea if they know my identity or anything until I go back to Hong Kong

One technique is to “write less, paint more”. Lumli Lumlong told Index, “It is harder to censor a painting, rather than words on the internet.”³⁷

Despite the range of tactics employed by artists, many are still concerned that they are putting themselves or others at risk. One anonymous artist told Index, “if they really want to make your life hard, they can use any reason, excuse to put me in jail.”³⁸ ✘

31: Marstine, J. and Mintcheva S. (2020) ‘Curating Under Pressure: International Perspectives on Negotiating Conflict and Upholding Integrity’. Routledge.

32: Ibid. (Martine, J., 10 October 2022).

33: Anonymous (2022) Interview with Index on Censorship, by Merlin, J. (9 August 2022).

34: Anonymous (2022) Interview with Index on Censorship, by Marks, F. (1st March 2022).

35: Anonymous (2022) Interview with Index on Censorship, by Marks, F. (3 March 2022).

36: Anonymous (2022) Interview with Index on Censorship, by Merlin, J. (19 July 2022).

37: Ibid. (Lumli Lumlong., 3 March 2022).

38: Anonymous (2022) Interview with Index on Censorship, by Marks, F. (1 March 2022).



Telling China's story well

ALONGSIDE CENSORING DISSIDENT artists, the Chinese government also seeks to project its own counter narrative to ensure art serves a “nationalistic purpose”. Laura Harth, campaign director of Safeguard Defenders, explained to Index that “defining certain things in a certain way through culture, through art ... is central to conveying political messages that slowly then make their way into the minds of the people.”³⁹

Tibetan DPhil student at the University of Oxford, Thupten Kelsang told Index that the CCP has made extensive efforts in “museumising” Tibetan culture and controlling “authorised heritage discourse”. This comes directly from the colonial playbook: “settle an area, extinguish the local language, declare their culture obsolete, put it in a museum and produce knowledge about

39: Harth, L. (2022). Interview with Index on Censorship, by Merlin, J (1 August 2022)



LEFT: National Education Girl by Lumli Lumlong

it.”⁴⁰ Thupten remains concerned as to how ownership of Tibetan heritage by the CCP is ‘exhibited’ through state-sponsored exhibitions in European museums. He argues that this threatens to make these institutions complicit in the dissemination of state propaganda and reinforces the idea that the CCP is the custodian of Tibetan culture.

Nijat Hushur was dismayed to discover that a collection of Uyghur art work and historical artefacts he often visited in Berlin was amended so that all references to ‘East Turkestan’ on maps were changed to the CCP’s preferred name, ‘Xinjiang’.⁴¹ Similarly, in 2020 the Beijing authorities attempted unsuccessfully to censor an exhibition hosted at Château des ducs Bretagne in Nantes, France by removing the words ‘Genghis Khan’, ‘empire’ and ‘Mongol’ to rewrite history in line with the CCP’s worldview.⁴² By quietly redefining the narrative, including history and geography, the CCP homogenises how its preferred history is represented elsewhere.

Beyond artists, a wide number of groups have been co-opted to help “tell China’s →

40: Kelsang, T. (2022) Interview with Index on Censorship, by Merlin, J. (15 August 2022).

41: Ibid. (Hushur, N., 13 July 2022).

42: Kabir, J. (2020) ‘Chinese interference derails Genghis Khan exhibition in France’, The Art Newspaper, (14 October). Available at: <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2020/10/14/chinese-interference-derails-genghis-khan-exhibition-in-france> [Accessed 18 July 2022]

By quietly redefining the narrative, including history and geography, the CCP homogenises how its preferred history is represented elsewhere

→ story well”. A key example is the Hanfu clothing movement. Followers don traditional Han clothing as an alternative to Western styles of dress. Hanfu followers in Paris and London have protested against Dior for cultural appropriation.⁴³ While cultural appropriation is a legitimate concern, the movement has a strong political element. Kevin Carrico, an expert in the movement, claims that “the majority of Hanfu enthusiasts I met characterised themselves as Han nationalists advocating for a greater role for China in the world.”⁴⁴ Carrico is concerned that this ahistorical focus on Han culture as the root of

Chinese civilisation flattens ethnic diversity. For example, there have been reports that Uyghurs in Xinjiang have been forced to wear traditional clothing.⁴⁵

The Hanfu movement demonstrates how traditional culture, which was dismissed in the Mao era as bourgeois, has been embraced as a tool of party loyalty. This repackaging of traditionalism has also necessitated censorship to ward off ‘foreign’ values. This is exemplified by the editing of movies for release in China such as ‘Minions: the Rise of Gru’, for which an alternate ending was included where one of the minions serves a prison sentence.⁴⁶ ✘



Financial ties and censorship

FINANCIAL TIES ARE a major source of leverage that the CCP holds over some sections of the European art world.

Loten Namling is a Tibetan musician and activist. In 2013, he dragged a coffin labelled ‘Tibet’ from his home city of Bern, Switzerland to the UN headquarters in Geneva to protest the inaction of the international community. When a sister-city (Shanghai-Bern) cultural exchange event was being organised, Loten was contacted by the Swiss organisers. Fearing that Loten might make an appearance, they informed him that their partners in Shanghai had warned that if a Tibetan flag was spotted at the art festival, they would pull the \$1 million in funding they had pledged to give the Swiss city. Loten agreed not to attend, telling Index “I’m not a destructor, I’m only a messenger.”⁴⁷

Badiucao is aware of how financial ties to →

- 43: Hu, D. (2022) ‘Hanfu Supporters Protest Outside Dior Over Disputed Skirt Design’, WWD, (25 July). Available at: <https://wwd.com/fashion-news/fashion-scoops/hanfu-supporters-protest-outside-dior-disputed-skirt-1235261542/> [Accessed 1 August 2022]
- 44: Bannerman, F. (2020) ‘The Hanfu Revival Movement: Fashion Trend or Political Statement?’, The Culture Trip, (23 April). Available at: <https://theculturetrip.com/asia/china/articles/the-hanfu-revival-movement-fashion-trend-or-political-statement/> [Accessed 1 September 2022]
- 45: Yeung, J., and Lee, L. (2019) ‘Wearing pride: Centuries-Old Chinese Fashion is Making a Comeback’, CNN (17 October). Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/style/article/hanfu-rise-intl-hnk/index.html> [Accessed 10 October 2022]
- 46: Reuters (2022) ‘Chinese censors alter ending of Minions: The Rise of Gru film’, Reuters (22 August). Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/22/chinese-censors-alter-ending-of-minions-the-rise-of-gru-film> [Accessed 1 October 2022]

- 47: Namling, L. (2022) Interview with Index on Censorship, by Merlin, J. (26 July 2022).

→ China impact his ability to exhibit in Europe. “It’s very hard to find a commercial gallery to represent me which is quite fatal for artists’ practice because usually the way we survive and thrive is that we have a gallery or multiple galleries representing you and giving you space for exhibition”, Badiucao told Index.⁴⁸

Similarly, in 2017, Abhishek Majumdar’s play about Tibet was cancelled by the Royal Court theatre in London after three years of preparation.⁴⁹ The play had been delayed previously following advice from the British Council that it would jeopardise an arts programme in Beijing.⁵⁰ While it eventually went ahead, the controversy in London harmed the play’s prospects of being performed elsewhere. Abhishek told Index, “Everywhere I’ve tried to take the play, it is a yes, and then a no, followed by citing financial difficulties or something similar.”⁵¹

As these experiences attest, even when censorship fails, it still sends a powerful message to other venues - if you host

48: Ibid. (Badiucao., 10 October 2022)

49: Quinn, B. (2018) ‘London’s Royal Court theatre in row over shelving of Tibet play’, The Guardian, (4 February). Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/feb/04/royal-court-theatre-row-shelving-tibet-play> [Accessed 3 July 2022]

50: Quinn, B. (2018) ‘Royal Court dropped Tibet play after advice from British Council’, The Guardian, (4 April). Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2018/apr/04/unseen-letters-shed-light-on-royal-court-censorship-row-british-council> [Accessed 3 July 2022]

51: Ibid. (Majumdar, A., 1 November 2022).



LEFT: Jens Galschiøt and his installation, the Pillar of Shame

CCP-critical artworks, it may impact your funding. “So in a way, it works what China are trying to do. In another way, it does not work,” Danish artist Jens Galschiøt told Index.⁵²

Jens Galschiøt is best known as the creator of the Pillar of Shame, a monument commemorating those who died in the Tiananmen Square massacre. The Pillar was erected at the University of Hong Kong in 1997 but it was removed in 2021. But Jens has not only faced censorship in Hong Kong. He was invited to give a speech in Denmark but it was unexpectedly cancelled. He later discovered that the town’s mayor had personally intervened because it “sent the wrong signal to China” who had made substantial investments in the town.⁵³

In another example of this financial censorship, Tibetan artists Tenzing Sonam and Ritu Sarin had arranged with a prominent Berlin-based curator to screen their film exploring the early Tibetan resistance and its betrayal by the CIA. However, the subject material proved too sensitive to their Chinese investors who cut off contact with the artists.⁵⁴ ✘ →

52: Galschiøt, J. (2022). Interview with Index on Censorship, by Merlin, J. (30 August 2022).

53: Ibid. (Galschiøt, J., 2022).

54: Sonam, T. and Sarin, R. (2022). Email correspondence, to Merlin, J. (16 August 2022).



An assessment of financial ties with the European art industry

THERE IS GROWING scrutiny of the CCP's ties to strategic industries like telecoms, but a similar conversation about art and culture is far less developed. Laura Harth told Index, "when you talk to Western counterparts, be it museums, be it journalists, they don't understand this and so that's why it can be very successful" - they may say "it's just culture, it's just art" and therefore it's not a problem.⁵⁵

To broaden our understanding of financial →

55: Ibid. (Harth, L., 2022).

→ ties between the Chinese market and the European art world, Index worked with local partners to issue Freedom of Information (FOI) requests to major galleries and museums. We also relied on existing investigations⁵⁶ carried out by others.⁵⁷ Since most access to information laws only allow for FOI requests to be issued to public bodies, the scope of our investigation was inevitably restricted. Nonetheless, we uncovered evidence of substantial financial ties and profits accrued from the Chinese market and organisations linked to the CCP. The Chinese art market continues to grow and in 2022, was ranked second largest, behind the US.⁵⁸

This flow of capital travels beyond China's borders. According to Index's FOI requests, Tate Modern was the British institution that received the most direct funding from the

Chinese market between 2018 and 2019, when it received 18% of all its corporate sponsorship from Chinese sources.⁵⁹ Index also found that in 2019/20 the British Museum received 8% of all its donations from Chinese sources.⁶⁰

But Index's FOI requests found that few British institutions take substantial direct funding (such as donations or corporate sponsorship) from Chinese sources. Indirect ties (such as partnerships with Chinese companies or cooperation agreements with Chinese government bodies) are more common and profitable.

For example, European galleries frequently partner with Chinese state-owned development firms like the West Bund Group (WBG)⁶¹ or the China Merchants Group.⁶² These deals are lucrative. For example, France's Pompidou's partnership with WBG involves an annual lump



The Chinese art market continues to grow and in 2022, was ranked second largest, behind the US

sum payment of €2.75 million.⁶³ Partnerships with other Chinese art galleries can also be extremely lucrative. It is estimated that the Uffizi's partnership with the Bund One Museum in Shanghai will generate €6 million in profit once it has concluded.⁶⁴

Other European galleries and museums also have substantial ties with private Chinese companies. The British Museum and other European galleries⁶⁵ have deals with Alfino Brands,⁶⁶ an Alibaba-linked company, granting it the exclusive right to sell its branded merchandise to the Chinese market. Most institutions Index contacted via FOI requests

declined to disclose the profits accrued from these relationships but in 2018 alone, the British Museum made \$30 million from its partnership with Alfino Brands.⁶⁷

The huge profits generated from these relationships has raised concerns among staff. One British Museum insider stated, "My concern is that our leading museums and institutions become reliant on income from a place like China to the extent that they might begin to fear its disapproval. Would there be a chilling effect if an exhibition on Tibet or Xinjiang were proposed?"⁶⁸

Researcher Paola Rosa, on Index's behalf, →

56: Milmo, C. (2021) 'British museums warned over China influence amid growing 'reliance' on commercial links', inews (31 June). Available at: <https://inews.co.uk/news/long-reads/british-museum-museums-china-revenues-threats-beijing-1127727> [Accessed 29 October 2022].

57: Ruiz, C. (2020) 'Museums grapple with ethics of China projects', The Art Newspaper (1 September). Available at: <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2020/09/01/museums-grapple-with-ethics-of-china-projects> [Accessed 29 October 2022].

58: McAndrew, C. (2022) 'The Art Market 2022', UBS & Art Basel. Available at: <https://www.ubs.com/global/en/our-firm/art/collecting/art-market-survey/download-report-2022.html?campID=PR-ANY-GLOBAL-ENG-ANY-ANY-ANY> [Accessed 10 October 2022].

59: FOI by Index on Censorship. The Tate Modern, (2022). Chinese Funding to UK Art Industry. Date received: 28 April 2022.

60: FOI by Index on Censorship. The British Museum, (2022). Chinese Funding to UK Art Industry. Date received: 18 August 2022.

61: Centre Pompidou (2019) 'Centre Pompidou x West Bund Museum Project Shanghai'. Available at: <https://www.centrepompidou.fr/en/the-centre-pompidou/international-offers/centre-pompidou-x-west-bund-museum-project-shanghai> [Accessed 14 September 2022]

62: Feltham, L. (2014) 'V&A and China Merchants Group announce first major museum of design in China', The Glass Magazine (21 June). Available at: <https://www.theglassmagazine.com/va-and-china-merchants-group-announce-first-major-museum-of-design-in-china/> [Accessed 14 September 2022]

63: Amy, Q. (2019) "Museum Diplomacy" as New Pompidou Center Opens in Shanghai', The New York Times (5 November). Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/05/arts/design/pompidou-center-shanghai.html> [Accessed 14 September 2022]

64: Imam, J. (2022) 'Uffizi loan of self-portraits to the Bund One Art Museum opens ten-exhibition series in Shanghai', The Art Newspaper (8 September). Available at: <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2022/09/08/uffizi-loan-of-self-portraits-to-the-bund-one-art-museum-opens-10-exhibition-series-in-shanghai> [Accessed at: 14 September 2022]

65: Li, C. (2020) 'Louvre Joins Forces with Alibaba to Bring Great Works of Art to Chinese Consumers', Alizila (12 October). Available at: <https://www.alizila.com/louvre-alibaba-tmall-alifish-art-to-chinese-consumers/> [Accessed 4 September 2022].

66: Ruiz, C. (2022) 'Meet the man making millions for Western museums in China', The Art Newspaper (5 January). Available at: <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2022/01/05/the-man-making-millions-for-western-museums> [Accessed 29 October 2022].

67: Ibid. Ruiz, C. (2020).

68: Ibid. Milmo, C. (2021).



Would there be a chilling effect if an exhibition on Tibet or Xinjiang were proposed?

→ conducted a series of anonymous interviews with individuals closely involved in the Italian art scene. Many acknowledged that back-door pressure from Chinese investors and the authorities plays a role in curation. For example, a Taiwanese artist was forced to remove any reference to their home country from their work.⁶⁹ One anonymous source told Paola, “pressure from authorities is there, for sure, but no one has ever admitted it, except for cases that have raised public attention.”⁷⁰

Finally, many European galleries and museums have partnership or cooperation agreements with Chinese organisations and sub-national governments. These include the Chinese Ministry of Transport⁷¹, the State Administration of Cultural Heritage⁷² and the Hong Kong Leisure and Cultural Services Department.⁷³ Others also have partnerships with United Front organisations like the Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries.⁷⁴

In November 2019, the British Museum

signed a memorandum of understanding with the Hong Kong government with the aim of fostering “cultural exchanges and cooperation”.⁷⁵ It is unclear whether this will impact curation. For instance, to maintain the partnership, would the institution avoid sensitive topics such as the protests in Hong Kong that were ongoing when it was signed?

Earlier this year, the British Museum Friends, a charity that provides grants to the British Museum, appointed Weijian Shan to its board of directors and a trustee of the museum.⁷⁶ Weijian works in private equity and has written extensively in support of China’s treatment of Uyghurs⁷⁷, the NSL⁷⁸ and the CCP’s territorial claims in the South China Sea.⁷⁹

Index questioned the British Museum on the selection process for Weijian’s appointment. No application or minutes were provided and the museum held no information regarding financial contributions by Weijian to the museum, but stated the department that manages philanthropic contributions was “not aware” of any. The museum has no ethics committee to evaluate appointments.⁸⁰

While they assured Index that “directors do not generally participate in any decisions regarding the curatorial content of Exhibitions”, meaning Weijian should not be able to veto exhibitions, this answer suggests there may be few, if any, formal processes in place to prevent such intervention.⁸¹ ✘

69: Anonymous (2022) Interview with, by Rosa, P. (9 August 2022).

70: Ibid.

71: FOI by Index on Censorship. The Victoria & Albert Museum, (2022). Funding of UK Galleries/Museums from Chinese Sources. Date received: 31 August 2022.

72: ArtForum. (2019) ‘Musée Rodin Expands to Shenzhen, China’ (8 October). Available at: <https://www.artforum.com/news/musee-rodin-expands-to-shenzhen-china-80985> [Accessed 1 November 2022].

73: Whiddington, R. (2019) ‘Uffizi Galleries Partnering With Hong Kong For Exhibitions’, Jing Culture & Crypto (3 December). Available at: <https://jingculturecrypto.com/uffizi-galleries-partnering-with-hong-kong-for-exhibitions/> [Accessed 1 November 2022].

74: Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale. (2022) ‘Shanghai, the marvels of Italy on show at metro station’ (20 September). Available at: https://www.esteri.it/en/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/retediplomatica/2022/09/shanghai-meraviglie-dellitalia-in-mostra-nella-metropolitana/ [Accessed 1 November 2022].

75: The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. (2019) ‘LCSD signs MOUs with British Museum and Italy’s Gallerie degli Uffizi’ (28 November). Available at: <https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201911/28/P2019112800242.htm> [Accessed 5 September 2022].

76: The British Museum. (2022) ‘Meet the Trustees: Weijian Shan’. Available at: <https://www.britishmuseum.org/about-us/governance/trustee-weijian-shan> [Accessed 21 August 2022].

77: Weijian, S. (2021) ‘Xinjiang: what the West doesn’t tell you about China’s war on terror’, The South China Morning Post (14 April). Available at: <https://www.scmp.com/comment/opinion/article/3129325/xinjiang-what-west-doesnt-tell-you-about-chinas-war-terror> [Accessed 28 September 2022].

78: Weijian, S. (2020) ‘What the national security law has done for Hong Kong’, The South China Morning Post (20 October). Available at: <https://www.scmp.com/comment/opinion/article/3106115/what-national-security-law-has-done-hong-kong> [Accessed 28 September 2022].

79: Weijian, S. (2022) ‘Beijing and Taipei are united – in their South China Sea claims’, The South China Morning Post (9 Jan). Available at: <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/opinion/article/3162508/beijing-and-taipei-are-united-their-south-china-sea-claims> [Accessed 28 September 2022].

80: FOI by Index on Censorship. The British Museum, (2022). Inquiry into the Appointment of Weijian Shan. Date received: 24 October 2022.

81: Ibid.

Do ties with China have a real impact?

DESPITE RECEIVING EXTENSIVE funding from China, galleries such as the Tate Modern in London freely exhibit the works of dissidents like Ai Weiwei and Badiucao, with few noticeable repercussions. Other institutions, such as the Château des ducs Bretagne have responded boldly to threats of censorship, closing the exhibition “in the name of the human, scientific and ethical values that we defend.”⁸² However, the lack of transparency as to the financial or

institutional ties between Chinese entities and art galleries or museums in Europe make it difficult to ascertain the full extent to which these ties impact artistic freedom in Europe.

As a result, there are likely many cases of censorship that are hidden from view. Tenzing Sonam and Ritu Sarin told Index that “there must be so many other cases like [their experiences] that we simply do not know about.”⁸³ Additionally, Abhishek Majumdar emphasised, “A lot of CCP critical artworks do not get as far as my play did. It is cut out much earlier. If they had not printed the poster of my play, and they had taken it out, I would have had no way of proving the play was actually programmed ... a lot of material about China is censored in this way in Europe.”⁸⁴ ✕

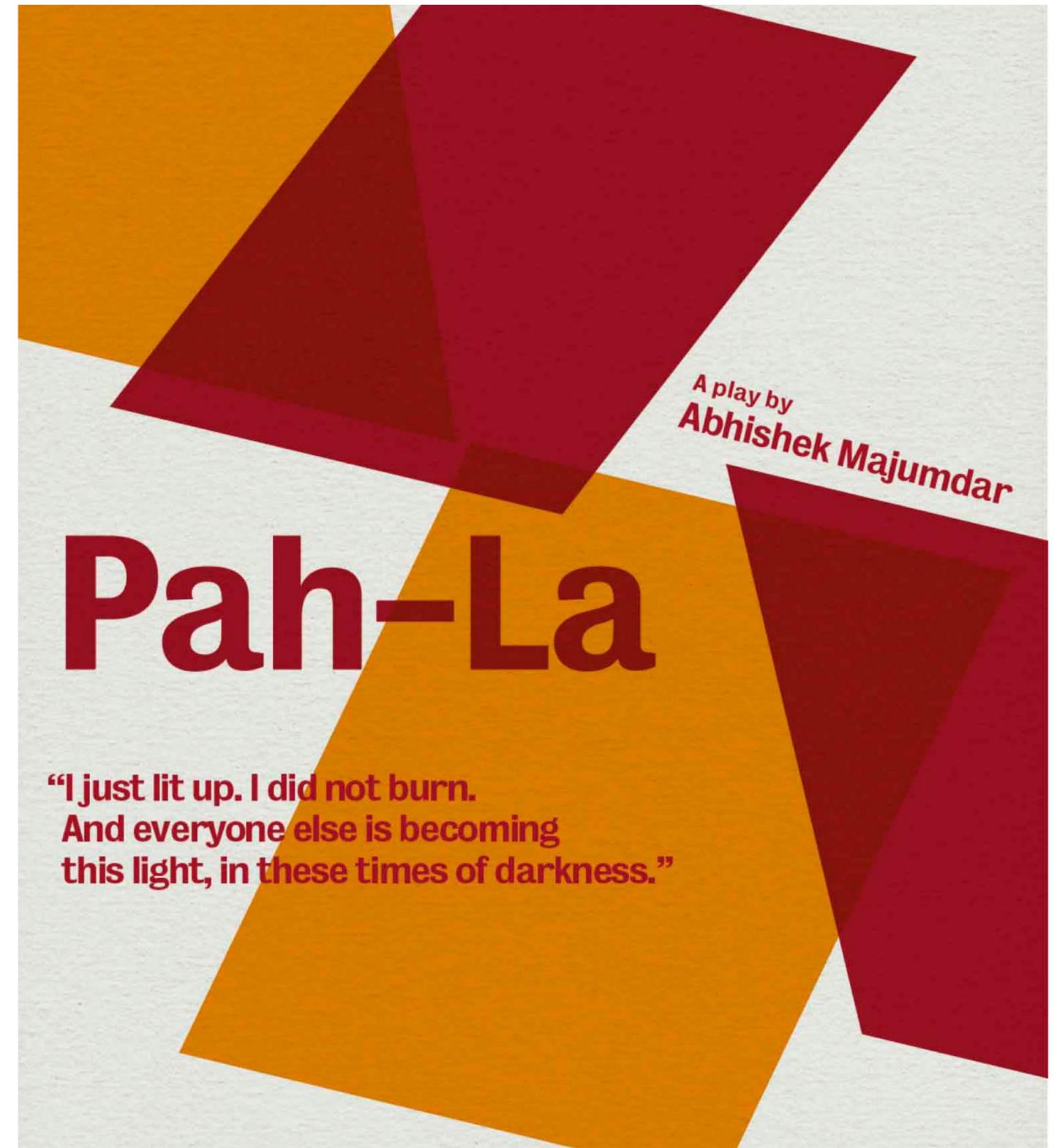
RIGHT: According to Abhishek Majumdar, if the poster of his play, Pah-La, had not been printed it would have been hard to prove that the play was actually programmed

There are likely many cases of censorship that are hidden from view

82: Ibid. (Kabir, J., 18 July 2020).

83: Ibid. (Sonam, T. and Sari, R. 2022).

84: Ibid. (Majumdar, A. 2022).





What is to be done?

SOME PRACTITIONERS INDEX spoke to argued that ties with the Chinese market should be severed because they are immoral, they boost CCP propaganda and allow censorship in Europe. Loten Namling told Index that “any kind of funding from China, especially the government, is harmful to the principles of art ... I think it should be totally banned.”⁸⁵ Tenzing Sonam and Ritu Sarin also stated that: “As long as we are not on a level playing field with the CCP, they will always call the shots to their advantage. So, yes, we should have a total economic boycott of China, insofar as today’s intertwined global economy permits.”⁸⁶

Others were concerned that cutting ties may foster xenophobic narratives that brand all Chinese people as CCP agents. Sam Goodman told Index that a boycott would “not [be] very helpful in the current mood in Europe where populism and the far right is on the rise.”⁸⁷

Others argue that an indiscriminate cutting of ties could disempower dissenting voices. Maria Repnikova, an expert in Chinese soft power, expressed to Index her concern that “this idea of merging everything into this government basket basically declines or denies agency for some more independent voices within those countries.”⁸⁸ For example, in 2022, the Times Art Centre in Berlin, which had exhibited Wong Ping, a Hong Kong artist whose previous work has protested the demolition of homes in China, closed referencing funding issues alongside “growing cultural and political disparity” between the EU and China.⁸⁹

Others believed a boycott might unfairly discriminate against apolitical Chinese artists. A Hong Kong artist, based in the UK, told Index, “It is still valuable for people to show their emotions and feelings. It doesn’t need to be everyone shouting the name of the dictator.”⁹⁰ ✘

85: Ibid. (Namling, L. 2022).

86: Ibid. (Sonam, T. and Sari, R. 2022).

87: Ibid. (Goodman, S. 2022).

88: Repnikova, M. (2022) Interview with Index on Censorship, by Merlin, J., (8 August 2022).

89: Batycka, D. (2022) ‘Citing a ‘Growing Cultural and Political Disparity,’ a Chinese Museum Is Pulling the Plug on Its Outpost in Berlin’, Artnet (6 July). Available at: <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/times-art-center-berlin-closes-2141452#:~:text=The%20Times%20Art%20Center%20Berlin%2C%20a%20privately%20funded%20art%20space,as%20reasons%20behind%20the%20decision> [Accessed 10 October 2022].

90: Anonymous (2022) Interview with Index on Censorship, by Marks, F. (8 March 2022).

A hopeful note: The limitations of CCP soft power and censorship

FORMER PRESIDENT HU Jintao stated in 2006 that China must “vigorously develop the cultural industry” and “lead the industry as a whole”.⁹¹ How successful has China been in achieving this goal?

Maria Repnikova told Index that, “it seems that those investments that they’ve put into diplomatic and soft power channels haven’t been really fulfilling in improving China’s image”. China lags behind traditional cultural hubs like a number of European countries, while it’s been surpassed by new artistic powerhouses like South Korea.

It has been argued that CCP’s soft power

is limited because it’s too conservative and centralised. The focus is mostly on traditional forms of art because the CCP believes that “it’s too sensitive to export contemporary culture, it might be running into some political risks”, Repnikova told Index.⁹² The close management of culture by the state also inhibits China’s strategy. Joseph Nye, the scholar who first pioneered the concept of soft power, has noted that successful soft power requires autonomous civil society →

RIGHT: Brainwash Girl by Lumli Lumlong

91: Bandurski, D. (2007) ‘Hitting hard with “soft power”: China explores macro-measures to bolster its global cultural prowess’, China Media Project (19 December 2007). Available at: <https://chinamediaproject.org/2007/12/19/hitting-hard-with-soft-power-china-explores-macro-measures-to-bolster-its-global-cultural-prowess/> [Accessed: 11 November 2022].

92: Ibid. (Repnikova, M. 2022).



The signal censorship sends may be as powerful as the attempted act of censorship itself

→ actors taking initiative⁹³. Genuine creativity requires freedom of expression, meaning there are inherent limits to the effectiveness of propaganda.

Poor implementation of soft power operations is another hindrance. For instance, French filmmaker Benoit Lelievre's film *Spring, Seeing Hong Kong Again*, following Hong Kong's 'recovery' from the protests and COVID-19 pandemic, allegedly won Best Documentary Award at the Prague Film Festival.⁹⁴ Yet, local reporting suggests the festival does not exist.⁹⁵ Very few of those credited were involved in the film's production and images giving the impression that the film's

screening had a high turnout were revealed to be photoshopped, with the real attendance figures down to single digits.

Moreover, following recent events, soft power operations have struggled to reconstruct the Chinese government's crumbling image.⁹⁶ Businesses have become increasingly concerned about backlash from the European market if they are seen to kowtow to Beijing and many political elites are even calling for Europe to decouple from China.⁹⁷

The turning of public opinion against China also helps explain why attempts by the CCP to pressure European governments into censoring artists more often than not fail in

their direct goal. Although as noted previously, it is important to note that failed attempts at censorship can still inhibit artists' ability to exhibit elsewhere.

However, Europe should not be complacent. For instance, galleries in Prague and Brescia who hosted Badiucao's exhibition resisted CCP pressure to ensure the exhibition continued. In this manner, the central objective of CCP soft power failed. However, no other institution came forward as a potential host to continue the exhibition's run. The signal censorship sends may be as powerful as the attempted act of censorship itself.

The failure of the CCP's soft power is even more glaring when contrasted with the prominence of artists critical of the CCP. Despite the removal of Jens Galschiøt's *Pillar of Shame* from HKU, he has erected new statues in campuses across the world. One was erected in Hungary to resist the construction of a branch

of Shanghai's Fudan University in Budapest, which activists fear could further contribute to the erosion of academic freedom in Hungary.⁹⁸

Samantha Culp, a writer and filmmaker, told Index that the effectiveness of art lies not just in the messages it conveys, but in its ability to bring activists together. She was often told by dissident film makers in China that the CCP's primary concern is often not the artistic event itself but what it facilitates. Art "becomes the catalyst for people to come together, for communities and scenes to form, for people to exchange ideas and become bonded to each other - those are the things that I think are the most powerful and that's why they're the most threatening."⁹⁹

To flip the concept of soft power on its head, art is usually more powerful as a tool against authoritarian regimes than in support of them. Jens sums this up succinctly: the CCP has "created their own movement against them."¹⁰⁰ ✘

93: Nye, J. (2015) 'The Limits of Chinese Soft Power', Belfer Centre for Science and International Affairs (10 July). Available at: <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/limits-chinese-soft-power> [Accessed 10 November 2022].

94: GlobeNewswire. (2022) 'Documentary "Spring, Seeing Hong Kong Again" Shines in Cannes, on Touring at European Film Festivals' (1 June). Available at: <https://www.globenewswire.com/news-release/2022/06/01/2454821/0/en/Documentary-Spring-Seeing-Hong-Kong-Again-Shines-in-Cannes-on-Touring-at-European-Film-Festivals.html> [Accessed 10 November 2022].

95: Slezáková, M. and Prchal, L. (2022) 'Čínský film plní v Praze sály a sbírá ceny, líčí propaganda. Festival neexistuje a diváci přišli dva', Deník N (14 June). Available at: <https://denikn.cz/897302/vymysleny-festival-lzivny-clanek-a-obri-uspech-ktery-nebyl-stopovali-jsme-cinskou-propagandu-v-cesku/> [Accessed: 10 November 2022].

96: Kaczynski, P. (2022) 'How China Lost Europe', Balkan Insight (15 August). Available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2022/08/15/how-china-lost-central-europe/> [Accessed 10 November 2022].

97: Hong, J. and Saito, Y. (2022) 'Brands Apologize Quickly to China Consumers, Except on Xinjiang', Bloomberg (11 July). Available at: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-07-11/brands-apologize-quickly-to-china-consumers-except-on-xinjiang?leadSource=verify%20wall> [Accessed 20 September 2022].

98: Harris, G. (2022) 'Pillar of Shame sculpture honouring Tiananmen Square victims shown in Budapest after Hong Kong removal'. The Art Newspaper (7 March). Available at: <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2022/03/07/pillar-of-shame-sculpture-is-shown-in-budapest-after-its-removal-in-hong-kong> [Accessed 10 November 2022].

99: Culp, S. (2022) Interview with Index on Censorship, by Merlin, J., (17 August 2022).

100: Ibid. (Galschiøt, J. 2022).

Recommendations

- Authorities in European countries must ensure that artists are protected against all threats or intimidatory acts that could risk their safety or threaten their ability to work. This should include a specific focus on members of the diaspora from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and members of the Uyghur community.
- European countries must establish meaningful protections for artistic freedom, in line with international human rights standards. This should include support for any art institution that is being threatened or coerced through diplomatic pressure to cancel or modify any exhibition, event or initiative.
- Public art institutions in Europe should be more transparent in reporting their funding, partnerships and relationships with Chinese companies and state institutions.
- More in-depth research of direct and indirect relationships between European arts institutions and Chinese companies and state institutions is needed to gain a clearer and more detailed picture of Chinese soft-power deployed through the arts.





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