

terra-cotta warriors

In 2007, when it became known that the terra-cotta warriors flown in from China were copies, the Hamburg Museum für Völkerkunde decided to close the exhibition completely. The museum's director, who was apparently acting as the advocate of truth and truthfulness, said at the time: "We have come to the conclusion that there is no other option than to close the exhibition completely, in order to maintain the museum's good reputation." The museum even offered to reimburse the entrance fees of all visitors to the exhibition.

From the start, the production of replicas of the terra-cotta warriors proceeded in parallel with the excavations. A replica workshop was set up on the excavation site itself. But they were not producing "forgeries." Rather, we might say that the Chinese were trying to *restart* production, as it were—production that from the beginning was not creation but already reproduction. Indeed, the originals themselves were manufactured through serial mass production using modules or components—a process that could easily have been continued, had the original production methods been available.

The Chinese have two different concepts of a copy. *Fangzhipin* (仿製品) are imitations where the difference from the original is obvious. These are small models or copies that can be purchased in a museum shop, for example. The second concept for a copy is *fuzhipin* (複製品). They are exact reproductions of the original, which, for the Chinese, are of equal value to the original. It has absolutely no negative connotations. The discrepancy with regard to the understanding of what a copy is has often led to misunderstandings

etc. as source of ideas. energy

and arguments between China and Western museums. The Chinese often send copies abroad instead of originals, in the firm belief that they are not essentially different from the originals. The rejection that then comes from the Western museums is perceived by the Chinese as an insult.

In spite of globalization, the Far East still seems to be the source of a great deal of surprise and confusion, which could release deconstructive energies. The Far Eastern notion of identity is also very confusing to the Western observer. For the Japanese, the famous Ise shrine, the supreme sanctuary in Shinto Japan to which millions of Japanese make pilgrimage every year, is 1,300 years old. But in reality this temple complex is completely rebuilt from scratch every twenty years. This religious practice is so alien to Western art historians that after heated debates UNESCO removed this Shinto temple from the list of World Heritage sites. For the experts at UNESCO the shrine is twenty years old at most. In this case, which is the original and which the copy? This is a total inversion of the relationship between original and copy. Or the difference between original and copy vanishes altogether. Instead of a difference between original and copy, there appears a difference between old and new. We could even say that the copy is more original than the original, or the copy is closer to the original than the original, for the older the building becomes the further it is from its original state. A reproduction would restore it, as it were, to its "original state," especially since it is not linked to a particular artist.

be 100%

copy
Original

Not just the building but all the temple treasures too are completely replaced. Two identical sets of treasures can always be found in the temple. The question of original and copy does not arise at all. These are two copies that are at the same time two originals. It used to be that when a new set was produced, the old set would be destroyed. Flammable parts were burned and metal parts were buried. As of the last regeneration, however, the treasures are no longer destroyed but put on display in a museum. They owe their rescue to their increased exhibition value. However, their destruction belongs to their cult value itself, which is clearly disappearing more and more in favor of their museum exhibition value.

In the West, when monuments are restored, old traces are often particularly highlighted. Original elements are treated like relics. The Far East is not familiar with this cult of the original. It has developed a completely different technique of preservation that might be more effective than conservation or restoration. This takes place through continual reproduction. This technique completely abolishes the difference between original and replica. We might also say that originals preserve themselves through copies. Nature provides the model. The organism also renews itself through continual cell replacement. After a certain period of time the organism is a replica of itself. The old cells are simply replaced by new cell material. In this case, the question of an original does not arise. The old dies off and is replaced by the new. Identity and renewal are not mutually exclusive. In a culture where continual reproduction represents a technique



The old shrine.



Recently cloned.



Which is the original and which the copy?



One of the treasures of the temple:
beyond original and copy.

for conservation and preservation, replicas are anything but mere copies.

Freiburg Minster is covered in scaffolding almost all year round. The sandstone from which it is built is a very soft, porous material that does not withstand natural erosion by rain and wind. After a while it crumbles. As a result the Minster is continually being examined for damage and eroded stones are replaced. And in the Minster's dedicated workshop, copies of the damaged sandstone figures are constantly being produced. Of course, attempts are made to preserve the stones from the Middle Ages for as long as possible. But at some point they too are removed and replaced with new stones. Fundamentally, this is the same operation as with the Japanese, except in this case the production of a replica takes place very slowly and over long periods of time. Yet ultimately the result is exactly the same. After a certain period of time one effectively has a reproduction. However, one imagines one is looking at an original. But what would be original about the Minster if the last old stone were replaced by a new one?

The original is something imaginary. It is in principle possible to build an exact copy, a *fuzhipin* of the Freiburg Minster, in one of China's many theme parks. Is this then a copy or an original? What makes it a mere copy? What characterizes the Freiburg Minster as an original? Materially its *fuzhipin* might not differ in any way from the original that itself may someday no longer contain any original parts. It would be, if at all, the place and the cult value related to the practice of worship that might differentiate the Freiburg

imaginary original

Minster from its *fuzhipin* in a Chinese theme park. However, remove its cult value completely in favor of its exhibition value and its difference from its double might disappear too.

In the field of art as well, the idea of an unassailable original developed historically in the Western world. Back in the seventeenth century, excavated artworks from antiquity were treated quite differently from today. They were not restored in a way that was faithful to the original. Instead there was massive intervention in these works, changing their appearance. For example, Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598-1680) arbitrarily added a sword-hilt to the famous statue of Mars, *Ares Ludovisi*, which was itself a Roman copy of a Greek original. During Bernini's lifetime the Colosseum itself was used as a marble quarry. Its walls were simply dismantled and used for new buildings. The preservation of historical monuments in the modern sense of the term begins with the museumization of the past, whereby *cult value* increasingly gives way to *exhibition value*. Interestingly this goes hand-in-hand with the rise of tourism. The so-called Grand Tour that began in the Renaissance and reached its apogee in the eighteenth century was a precursor of modern tourism. In the eyes of tourists, the exhibition value of ancient buildings and artworks, which were presented to them as attractions, increased. In the same century as tourism was beginning, the first measures to preserve ancient structures were undertaken. Now it seemed imperative to preserve ancient structures. The onset of industrialization further increased the need for the conservation and museumization of the past. In addition, the burgeoning fields of art history and archaeology discovered the *epistemo-*

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fuzhipin
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Old
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Tour
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tour

museumization & exhibition value

logical value of old buildings and artworks and rejected any intervention that might alter them.

A prior, primordial positing is alien to Far Eastern culture. It is probably this intellectual position that explains why Asians have far fewer scruples about cloning than Europeans. The Korean cloning researcher Hwang Woo-suk, who attracted worldwide attention with his cloning experiments in 2004, was a Buddhist. He found a great deal of support and followers among Buddhists, while Christians called for a ban on human cloning. Hwang legitimized the cloning experiments through his religious affiliation: "I am Buddhist, and I have no philosophical problem with cloning. And as you know, the basis of Buddhism is that life is recycled through reincarnation. In some ways, I think, therapeutic cloning restarts the circle of life."¹ For the Ise shrine, too, the technique of preservation resides in allowing the circle of life to begin anew over and over again, maintaining life not *against* death but *through and beyond death*. Death itself is built into the system of preservation. In this way *Being* gives way to the cyclical process that includes death and decay. In the unending cycle of life there is no longer anything unique, original, singular, or final. Only repetitions and reproductions exist. In the Buddhist notion of the endless cycle of life, instead of creation there is decreation. Not creation but iteration, not revolution but recurrence, not archetypes but modules determine the Chinese technology of production.

As we know, even the terra-cotta armies are manufactured from modules or stock components. Production in modules is not consistent with the idea of the original, as

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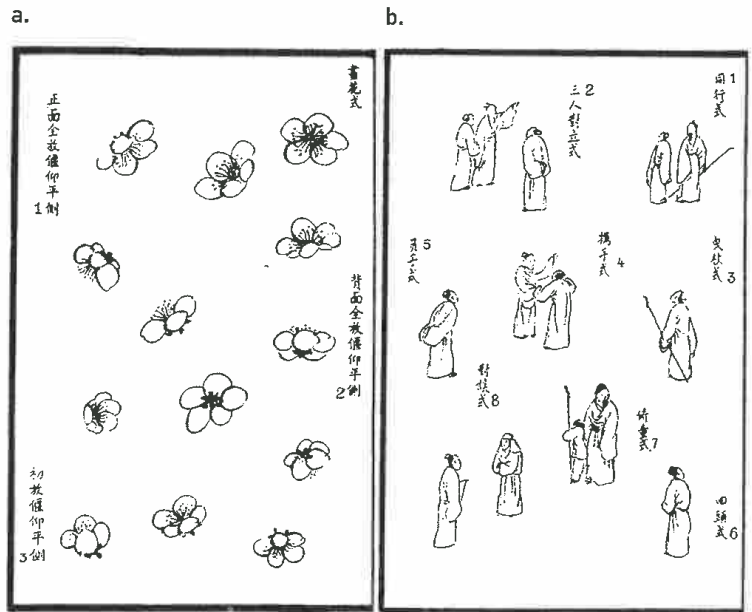
modular prod.

from the outset these are stock components. Foremost in modular production is not the idea of originality or uniqueness, but *reproducibility*. Its aim is not the manufacture of a unique, original object but mass production that nevertheless allows variations and modulations. It *modulates* the same, thereby creating differences. Modular production is modulating and varying. Thus it allows for a great deal of variety. However, it *negates* uniqueness in order to increase the efficiency of reproduction. For example, it is not by chance that printing was invented in China. Chinese painting too uses modular technology. The famous Chinese treatise on painting, the *Manual of the Mustard Seed Garden*, contains an infinite row of component parts from which a painting could be composed or indeed assembled.

The question of creativity arises once again in light of this modular type of production. Combining and varying elements become more important. Here Chinese cultural technology works like nature: "Chinese artists ... never lose sight of the fact that producing works in large numbers exemplifies creativity, too. They trust that, as in nature, there always will be some among the ten thousand things from which change springs."² Chinese art has a functional relationship with nature, not a mimetic one. It is not a question of depicting nature as realistically as possible but of operating exactly *like nature*. In nature, successive variations also produce something new, clearly without any kind of "genius": "Painters like Zheng Xie strive to emulate nature in two respects. They produce large, almost limitless quantities of works and are enabled to do so by module systems

Chat d'après...

of compositions, motifs, and brushstrokes. But, they also imbue every single work with its own unique and inimitable shape, as nature does in its prodigious invention of forms. A lifetime devoted to training his aesthetic sensibilities enables the artist to approximate the power of nature."³



From the *Manual of the Mustard Seed Garden*.

SHANZHAI: FAKE

山寨

Shanzhai (山寨) is the Chinese neologism for “fake.” There are now also expressions such as *shanzhaism* (山寨主義), *shanzhai culture* (山寨文化), and *shanzhai spirit* (山寨精神). Today *shanzhai* encompasses all areas of life in China. There are *shanzhai* books, a *shanzhai* Nobel Prize, *shanzhai* movies, *shanzhai* politicians, and *shanzhai* stars. Initially the term was applied to cell phones. *Shanzhai* cell phones are forgeries of branded products such as Nokia or Samsung. They are sold under names such as Nokir, Samsing, or Anycat. But they are actually anything but crude forgeries. In terms of design and function they are hardly inferior to the original. Technological or aesthetic modifications give them their own identity. They are multifunctional and stylish. *Shanzhai* products are characterized in particular by a high degree of flexibility. For example, they can adapt very quickly to particular needs and situations, which is not possible for products made by large companies because of their long production cycles. The *shanzhai* fully exploits the situation’s potential. For this reason alone it represents a genuinely Chinese phenomenon.

The ingenuity of *shanzhai* products is frequently superior to that of the original. For example, one *shanzhai* cell phone has the additional function of being able to identify counterfeit money. In this way it has established itself as an original. The new emerges from surprising variations and combinations. The *shanzhai* illustrates a particularly type of creativity. Gradually its products depart from the original, until they mutate into originals themselves. Established labels are constantly modified. Adidas becomes Adidos, Adadas, Adadis, Adis, Dasida, and so on. A truly Dadaist game is being played

quick adapt.?
big shanzhai

best copies

becoming original



a.



b.

Forgery or original?



a.



b.

Who is who?



Does it make the product a fake if it shows the Apple mutating into incredible shapes, people growing wings, or the Puma learning to smoke?

[Handwritten note]

with these labels that not only initiates creativity but also paradoxically or subversively affects positions of economic power and monopolies. This is a combination of subversion and creation.

The word *shanzhai* literally means "mountain stronghold." The famous novel *Water Margin* (*shui hu zhuan*, 水滸傳) tells how, during the Song dynasty, outlaws (peasants, officials, merchants, fishermen, officers, and monks) would hole up in a mountain stronghold to fight the corrupt regime. The literary context itself lends *shanzhai* a subversive dimension. Even examples of *shanzhai* on the Internet that parody the Party-controlled state media are interpreted as subversive acts directed against the monopoly of opinion and representation. Inherent in this interpretation is the hope that the *shanzhai* movement might deconstruct the power of state authority at the political level and release democratic energies. However, if we reduce *shanzhai* to its anarchic and subversive aspect, we lose sight of its playful and creative potential. It is precisely the way in which it was produced and created, not its rebellious content, that aligns the novel *Water Margin* with *shanzhai*. In the first place, the authorship of the novel is very uncertain. It is presumed that the stories that form the heart of the novel were written by several authors. Moreover, there are many very different versions of the novel. One version contains 70 chapters, while others have 100 or even 120 chapters. In China, cultural products are often not attributed to any one individual. They frequently have a collective origin and do not display forms of expression associated with an individual, creative genius.

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They cannot be unequivocally ascribed to one artist who would emerge as their owner or even their creator. Other classic works, too, such as *Dream of the Red Chamber* (*hong lou meng*, 紅樓夢) or *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (*san guo yan yi*, 三國演義), have been rewritten time and again. There are different versions of them by different authors, some with and some without a happy ending.

fake
with
&
replace
In the Chinese literary world today we can see a similar process. If a novel is very successful, fakes immediately appear. They are not always inferior imitations that simulate a nonexistent proximity to the original. Alongside the obvious fraudulent labeling, there are also fakes that transform the original by embedding it in a new context or giving it a surprising twist. Their creativity is based on active transformation and variation. Even the success of Harry Potter initiated this dynamic. There now exist numerous Harry Potter fakes that perpetuate and transform the original. *Harry Potter and the Porcelain Doll*, for instance, makes the story Chinese. Together with his Chinese friends Long and Xing, Harry Potter defeats his Eastern adversary Yandomort, the Chinese equivalent of Voldemort, on the sacred mountain of Taishan. Harry Potter can speak fluent Chinese, but has trouble eating with chopsticks, and so on.

deep
Shanzhai products do not deliberately set out to deceive. Indeed, their attraction lies in how they specifically draw attention to the fact that they are not original, that they are *playing* with the original. *Shanzhai's* game of fakery inherently produces deconstructive energies. *Shanzhai* label design also exhibits humorous characteristics. On the *shanzhai* iPhone cell phone, the label looks like an original iPhone

label that has slightly worn away. *Shanzhai* products often have their own charm. Their creativity, which cannot be denied, is determined not by the discontinuity and suddenness of a new creation that completely *breaks* with the old, but by the *playful* enjoyment in modifying, varying, combining, and transforming the old.

Process and change also dominate Chinese art history. Those replicas or persisting creations that constantly alter a master's oeuvre and adapt to new circumstances are themselves nothing but superb *shanzhai* products. Continual transformation has established itself in China as a method of creation and creativity.¹ The *shanzhai* movement deconstructs creation as *creatio ex nihilo*. *Shanzhai is decreation*. It opposes identity with transformational difference, indeed working, active *differing*; Being with the process; and essence with the path. In this way *shanzhai* manifests the genuinely Chinese spirit.



Zhang Bin, *Harry Potter and the Porcelain Doll*.

Although it has no creative genius, nature is actually more creative than the greatest human genius. Indeed, high-tech products are often *shanzhai* versions of products of nature. The creativity of nature itself relies on a continual process of variation, combination, and mutation. Evolution too follows the model of constant transformation and adaptation. The creativity inherent in *shanzhai* will elude the West if the West sees it only as deception, plagiarism, and the infringement of intellectual property.

Maoism
as
Shanzhai
Marx

Shanzhai operates through intensive hybridization. In China, Maoism was itself a kind of *shanzhai* Marxism. In the absence of a working-class and industrial proletariat in China, Maoism undertook a transformation of Marx's original doctrine. In its ability to hybridize, Chinese communism is now adapting to turbo-capitalism. The Chinese clearly see no contradiction between capitalism and Marxism. Indeed, *contradiction* is not a Chinese concept. Chinese thought tends more toward "both-and" than "either-or." Evidently Chinese communism shows itself to be as capable of change as the oeuvre of a great master that is open to constant transformations. It presents itself as a hybrid body. The anti-essentialism of the Chinese thought process allows no fixed ideological definition. As a result, we might expect surprising hybrid and *shanzhai* forms in Chinese politics too. The political system in China today already reveals markedly hybrid characteristics. Over time Chinese *shanzhai* communism may *mutate* into a political form that one could very well call *shanzhai democracy*, especially since the *shanzhai* movement releases anti-authoritarian, subversive energies.

hybrid takes after Maoist China
Maoist take after
class in China
- ed by shanzhai democracy