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Development with Chinese Characteristics: A Case Study of China's Shanzhai Culture

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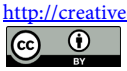

Abstract

Shanzhai (山寨) can be understood as a Chinese neologism for "fake". Even though the origin of the word seems blurred, with studies associating it with at least three possible complementary origins, the concept gained notoriety through the popularization of the shanzhai products, counterfeits or copies of products, normally mobile phones (*shanzhaiji*) from well-known brands, with the characteristic of a low production cost from both material and incremental innovation perspectives. Although several authors have studied the concept through different perspectives, it can be observed a lack of studies presenting how the shanzhai phenomena serve as instrument to better understand the concept of "Innovation-driven National Development Strategy" proposed by China. This article fills this gap, approximating both concepts and demonstrating how shanzhai's phenomena serve as a way to better understand the "Innovation-driven" strategy from China. Methodologically, this article presents an exploring review of the shanzhai literature, presenting its origins through both philosophical and economic lenses, as well as uses the instruments presented by the fields of Public Policy Analysis and Social Studies of Science and Technology (STS) to propose a dialogue of shanzhai with the "Innovation-driven" strategy. The conclusion demonstrates how shanzhai embodies China's self-strengthening and development by borrowing Western technology while retaining cultural and philosophical core principles, a different movement from what may be observed in other countries of the global south.

Keywords

Shanzhai, Innovation System, Technology, Development, Social Studies of Science and Technology, China

1. Introduction

China went from being a peripheral country to becoming the world's second larg-

est economic and technological power in the space of four decades. Strengthened by its state's capacity for planning and articulation, high innovative capacity and rapid adaptability and gaining great international influence through bilateral trade contracts, the country has consolidated its position as the world's largest exporter of high-tech manufactures from domestic companies (Sly & Liaudat, 2021).

The country's expansion didn't happen randomly: it concerns long-term planning that takes into account the promotion and articulation of policies from different spheres in search for the consolidation of a harmonious society through the promotion of a "scientifically based development", as promoted by its "Innovation-Oriented National Development Strategy" (Center for Security and Emerging Technology, 2022).

The development of China's "Innovation-Driven National Development Strategy" emphasizes the role of Science and Technology (S&T) as a basic instrument for, economically, the production of innovations and technologies of high complexity and added value and, socially, in the quest to achieve objectives aimed for the country's social development in medium to long term. This emphasis on S&T has made Science, Technology and Innovation Policies (STIP) fundamental for the consolidation of its development proposal and an indispensable political instrument for its ruling party, the Communist Party of China (CPC).

This article proposes a discussion between shanzhai, a "umbrella" concept associated with creative and ironic "copies", mimics or imitations of economic, social and cultural activities and products with China's "Innovation-Driven National Development Strategy". The intention is to demonstrate how both concepts appropriate structures and values developed by western societies, but adapt them for their own necessities and culture through a process of "appropriation" and "hybridization".

This proposal emancipates itself from the gap identified in a exploring review of the literature realized in the metasearch engines of Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus[1]. The word "shanzhai" was searched in both metasearch engines without the use of filters, indexes, topics or categories, providing a total of 163 articles. Those articles were then analyzed and selected through the following criterias: 1) articles written in English, Spanish or Portuguese; 2) articles published in open access; 3) articles that delimit shanzhai as the main object of the study[2].

This process provided a total of 30 articles that were subsequently critically analyzed through Severino (2021)'s methodologies of thematic and interpretative analysis and utilized in the development of this article.

What was perceived is that, despite the literature consulted has highlighted advanced discussions around the content of the social and cultural origins of the phenomenon, as well as its innovative structure and economic impacts, few have brought this concept closer to what China has proposed as a "Innovation-Driven National Development Strategy".

[1]Research was realized in March 2025.

[2]This last step was carried out through the utilization of the software *Raayan* for the analysis of the title, abstract and keywords and the subsequent validation of the criteria.

In this sense, this article does not intend to close the discussion or exhaust the subject, but propose a approximation of those two concepts by 1) use a interdisciplinary approach to present the shanzhai concept and 2) utilize instruments from the areas of Public Policy Analysis and Social Studies of Science and Technology (STS) to analyze the rhetoric presented at the concept of "Innovation-Driven National Development Strategy".

The structure of the article is as follows: the first secession presents the Chinese model of Science, Technology and Innovation Policies (STIP) and how it is instrumentalized by the Chinese State and CPC in the concretization of their objectives for the country for the next years. The Second and Third sessions present the concept of shanzhai through both economic and philosophical perspectives, promoting the approximation of the concept with the concept of "Innovation-Driven National Development Strategy". The last section summarizes the discussion and points directions to improve the reflection proposed.

2. Science and Technology through the Lens of the Chinese State

In this article, STIPs are understood both as the set of legal aspects—laws, rules and practices—that guide the way in which and the purpose for which scientific research is conducted (Neal et al., 2008), and as the product resulting from the tension between the scientific and social agendas (Dias, 2011). Although it is often associated with specific types of policy, such as industrial and innovation policies, its characteristics are not limited to them and come from the interaction of various actors beyond the state and companies.

STIPs can have different perspectives and orientations (arms, development, social, sustainable, among others) depending on the political objectives and specific interests linked to the agendas of the country that conceives them (*ibid*, 2011). The tension between these objectives and interests in relation to the arrangements and instruments characteristic of Public Policy Analysis consolidate different STIP models and guide the study of researchers who focus on exploratory and descriptive analyses of these models, associating them with their countries of origin or with the academic work (both theoretical and practical) that constituted them.

The advance of the institutionalization of Science, Technology and Innovation (ST&I) and different future models of STIP is directly associated with the publication, in 1945, of the report drawn up by Vannevar Bush, then director of the Office of Scientific Research and Development for the United States of America (EUA). Entitled "Science: the Endless Frontier", the report is responsible for consolidating not only the state's role in activities related to ST&I in the country, but also the rhetorical basis that would largely sustain the conception of ST&I in contemporary society as a whole.

The Report formalizes the Institutional Linear Offertist (ILO)[3] model as the

[3]Although there is a debate, in the academic literature, about whether the Bush's report actually created the Institutional Linear Offertist model and its respective rhetorical and conceptual burdens, there is a consensus around the social, political and economic impacts of this report in relation to both the propagation and consolidation of the model itself and its respective conceptual basis.

main basis for S&T production in the country. At once descriptive, normative and institutional (Dias & Dagnino, 2006), this model separates basic research from applied research, naturalizes the correlation between scientific progress and social development and defines the roles of the state and the market in promoting and consolidating a linear ST&I model.

The main ideas behind the Report, according to Dias & Dagnino (2006), are that basic research is "essential for modern states to achieve their national goals" (p. 52) and that there is a linear path from basic research to technological innovation. The first idea is responsible for marking out the importance of science as a fundamental element in solving modern social problems, stigmatizing the notion that scientific progress and the subsequent application of the knowledge they consolidate generates, in an almost procedural way, social progress.

The second idea, in turn, is directly related to the first, as it synthesizes the thinking behind the model called ILO. The conception of the linear path taken by ST&I underpins the productivist view of both science and technology and operationalizes the conception of science as the means to social progress, translating in a model from the main elements conceived by the deterministic view of scientific production identified in the report.

The ILO model is also responsible for translating the separation, from a temporal dimension and a spatial vision, of basic research in relation to applied research. Bush's Report encourages the understanding of basic research as that developed within universities and research institutions, at which point the state participates by promoting and strengthening research with financial support and the development of public policies, while applied research would be developed within companies and based on the concepts and achievements presented by basic research (Dias & Dagnino, 2006). This model promotes great importance to the private sector in the production of ST&I, giving its Research and Development (R&D) sectors a prominent role in realizing, together with innovation and the promotion of experimental development, the "product" initially conceived by the linear vision that guides the Report.

The ILO model and Bush's Report perceive and promote science through what Sarewitz (1996) called, in his book "Frontiers of Illusion: Science, Technology and the Politics of Progress", as being the five myths that sustain modern science and technology policy: the myth of infinite benefit; the myth of unfettered research; the myth of accountability; the myth of authoritativeness and, for last but not least; the myth of the endless frontier.

Sarewitz calls them "myths" because, although they serve as foundation to the political rhetoric used to support this type of policies and, for that, widely reinforced and repeated as a kind of "common sense", they lack a "well-developed empirical or theoretical foundation" (*ibid*, p. 10). They are, in this sense, an expression of ideology and serve as tools to political advocacy and coalition, being perceived and perpetuated as "a truth" to the society.

Every myth not only synthesizes, but also analyzes one of many dimensions of the perception and rhetoric promoted by politicians, science peers and by society

itself about the benefits of investing in science and technology in the modern era. Both those myths and their rhetoric are the materialization of what Sarewitz calls as being the "leap of faith": the fundamental idea that the "transition from the controlled, idealized, context-independent world of the laboratory to the intricate, context-saturated world of society" will, necessarily, create social benefit (*ibid*, p. 10).

China is a country that has been gaining prominence and generating influence because of the way it structures its STIP. Among the various characteristics of the model, we can highlight: its 1) capacity for long-term planning, which takes into account the promotion and articulation of policies from different spheres around the achievement of objectives delimited by plans and normative political guidelines of the state, 2) mobilization and training of public and private companies in the production of highly complex technologies and international competitiveness, and 3) a characteristic system of governance which finds at its base structure the so-called "party-state system" (Zhou, 2022; Lisheng, 2004), that takes into account the relationship between the country's state structure and the Communist Party of China (CPC).

All the characteristics listed above have, at some level, a major influence of the Chinese state, and so, from the CPC. This condition makes it a key actor for an in-depth understanding not only of its STIP model, but also of other areas tangential to the model in question, such as the country's socio-political constitution or its model of contemporary economic organization.

CPC influences the STIP policy cycle, mainly, by holding the National Science and Technology Conferences and drawing up its characteristic Five-Year Plans. The National Conferences were conceived by Deng Xiaoping and are organized by the then top leader of the current CPC, with the purpose of discussing the role of ST&I for China and delimiting the objectives and cut-off points on which policies will be based, defining at the national level the direction that will be adopted (Szapiro, 2017).

The Five-Year Plans, on the other hand, help to define political goals and prospects in which the STIPs play a fundamental role. It is through these plans that the country's medium to long-term socio-economic and political objectives and goals are identified, as well as the rhetoric that underpins not only the justification for choosing these objectives, but also the most appropriate methods and instruments for formalizing the proposed realization, a segment in which ST&I are given fundamental prominence.

It should be emphasized that the CPC's great influence on the decision-making process regarding the definition of scopes and objectives for STIP in China, whether through its administrative structure or through the directions and guidelines consolidated at the National Science and Technology Conferences and in the government's Five-Year Plans, is not random.

Taking the CPC Constitution as an example, direct references to the role of ST&I as a basic instrument in the country's socio-economic development process

are recurrent. In its General Program, the document refers to the CPC's commitment to the economic development agenda as the central task of the socialist cause in the country, where the main strategy is to "reinvigorate" China through science and education. In order for this to be possible, the role of the innovation-oriented development strategy is highlighted as crucial to the implementation of the pre-established guidelines, alongside topics tangential to STIP such as regional development coordination strategies, sustainable development, among others (National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, 2022).

In a subsequent passage, they emphasize the need to give "full play to the role of ST&I as primary productive forces" and the need to transfer the role of "main driving force of development" to innovation, basing the advances of ST&I derived from it on the improvement of the national workforce, equitability, sustainability, increased economic and political effectiveness and efficiency (*ibid*, 2022: p. 7). Likewise, they mention the need to promote the achievement of "a new level of industrialization with Chinese characteristics", building China's path as a country of innovation and a global leader in terms of ST&I (p. 8).

The need to transfer to innovation the role of "the main driving force of development" and to direct "full performance to the role of science and technology as the primary productive forces" (*ibid*, 2022: p. 8) exemplifies the conception of ST&I as the main instrument in the consolidation of a national strategy that solidifies, from a "scientific perspective of development", as a key to the construction of a "harmonious socialist society" with Xi Jinping's vision of "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era" (Center for Security and Emerging Technology, 2022).

The concept of "Innovation-Oriented National Development Strategy" itself is the manifestation of the rhetoric presented above. It formalizes the instrumentalization of ST&I as the core element of China's overall goal of modernization and development. This term it's mostly presented on the characteristic country Five-Year plan's, where is unraveled into the respectives goals and objectives—but remaining it's core foundation intact: the promotion of China's ST&I self-reliance and self-improvement act towards China's national development as defined by Xi Jinping's vision of "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era" already mentioned.

As we see in China's 14th Five-year plan, the most recent until the publication of this article, objectives as 1) "Strengthening the nation's strategic S&T power"; 2) "Improving the technological innovation capability of enterprises"; 3) "Raising the levels of production chain and supply chain modernization"; as the list goes on promotes the instrumentalization and reinforcement of China's ST&I as one of it's main necessities—if not the most valuable. The need to reinforce S&T and promote a strategy of innovation-driven development crosses through almost every statement and goal proposed, as perceived in above cited passages of the Constitution of CPC and reinforced by Bush's report on the necessity of ST&I policies for United States of America development.

The structure of governance of the STIPs and the political and administrative capacity of the CPC under these politics serve to highlight that the emphasis placed by the country on the role of the STIPs under its contemporary regime 1) is aligned with the Sarewitz's concept of "leap of fate", perpetrated through the idea of ST&I as the means to social progress; 2) is in alignment with the rhetoric presented in Bush's Report and continuously perpetrated in STIPs models such ILO and 3) proposes the instrumentalization of these STIPs and, consequently, of national ST&I by the CPC as mechanisms for achieving its political objectives and its development goals for contemporary China.

It can, therefore, see that the Chinese STIPs show not only the existence of western socio-technical values shared through the conception ST&I as key elements in promoting socio-economic progress, but also the incorporation of these values and perceptions into the country's objectives as a nation. The Chinese STIPs are, therefore, not detached from the political and social perspectives that underpin the vision of the CPC and its respective leaders regarding the role played by ST&I in the realization of its development perspective, as well as the country's own conception of development.

This movement of appropriation, however, is done to ensure the concretization of China's objective as a cornerstone of what is defined as his "Innovation-Oriented National Development Strategy", prioritizing the reproduction of the structure and instruments characteristics of the STIPs develop by western societies in their own structure of State and govern, as delimited by their characteristic "party-state" system.

This same movement of understanding, appropriating and readaptation of western constructs and values is what will be presented at both next segments through the study of shanzhai products and culture.

3. The Shanzhai Products: Imitation, Copycat or Innovation?

The term Shanzhai, in contemporary China, can be comprehended as a "umbrella" concept associated with creative and ironic "copies" (Steinmüller, 2020; Han, 2017), mimics (Qin et al., 2019; Yu & Kwan, 2019) or imitations (Qian et al., 2021) of economic, social and cultural activities and products, usually developed in the western society.

The origin of the word seems blurred, with at least three possible references emancipated by the literature—often in a complementary way. The first one points out that the original meaning of this concept is "mountain fortress" in reference to the Wa State of Myanmar, recognized by some people as the "cheap copy of the People's Republic" (Steinmüller, 2022: p. 2; Page, 2019). The second one references the origin through the confused pronunciation of the word Shenzhen, name of the city recognized as one of the most successful Special Economic Zones (SEZ) early promoted by China, in cantonian dialect (Liu & Xie, 2013; Fan, 2016). The third and last one associate the origin of the term with the characters "山寨", referring to "bandit stronghold outside government control" or "mountain hide-

away for outlaws" (Tse et al., 2009; Noh, 2020; Qin et al., 2017; Keane & Zhao, 2012; Yu & Kwan, 2019), often associated with the chinese novel "Outlaws of the Marsh" (水滸傳).

Every origin correlated to the term helps to translate one or more dimensions associated with his contemporary meaning. The first one is linked with the notion of shanzhai as a "cheap copy" of other brands and products, normally associated with the economic aspect of the phenomena. The second one is correlated with the locality where the popularization of the concept mainly occurred and emancipates the notion of shanzhai as a grassroots model of production, knowledge and innovation in China. The last one not only provides a complement to both perspectives presented previously, but also highlights the revolutionary and contra-normative aspect of the concept, its actions and products derived.

Despite the existence of different dimensions and nuances associated with the shanzhai phenomena, we can say that the shanzhai products it's one of the earliest and, probably, the most famous forms of it's manifestation. Shanzhai products can be comprehended as imitations of brand products with visual or functional proximities and low production cost from both material and incremental innovation perspectives, sold primarily to low and median incomes in China.

Shanzhai products first appeared in the mobile phone industry, manufactured by private small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in China's Pearl River Delta in 2000 (Qin et al., 2019). This movement gained force by the introduction, in that period, of a single-ship by the Taiwan Region's microprocessor manufacturer MediaTek (MTK), that "integrated several modules, including baseband communication and Bluetooth, into a single component" (Dong & Flowers, 2016: p. 239).

The introduction of MTK in the handset industry led to the emergence of the so-called "Independent Design Houses (IDHs)", firms specialized in the process of integrating MTK chipsets and peripheral functions to the motherboard before selling the motherboard as a whole to handset firms (*ibid*, 2016). This movement enabled medium-small mobile phone handset producers firms entering the industry by purchasing those single-chip motherboards from an IDH and acquiring the other necessary components from others firms, focusing majorly only on assembling the handset.

From the popularization and market dissemination of those cell phones, other product categories such as fast moving consumer products, fast-food operations and fashion accessories started to increasingly appear as varieties of shanzhai products, fomenting a characteristic consumption culture associated with the phenomena.

The shanzhai phenomena itself, however, do not restrict itself only to those shanzhai products: studies from other authors complement this dimension demonstrating the effects of the concept in areas such as, for example, architecture (De Kloet & Scheen, 2013; Moreno, 2024) and internet and media (Chubb, 2015; Xu, 2017; Noh, 2020), like presented in the **Figure 1**. This diversification led to the development of what Chubb (2015: p. 261) calls shanzhai culture: a process of

"hybridization of China's economic life and cultural consciousness, highlighting the interplay between local purposes and desires, and global and national economic and cultural authorities".

Figure 1. International brands "shanzhaied": KFG.

As occurs in counterfeit markets, shanzhai products exist to fulfill consumers' desire to own products of well-known brands, allowing them to be competitive in their markets by resembling the genuine product as much as possible and sell at a much lower price. As Qin et al. (2017) highlighted, the major benefit of fake products is the opportunity to own a famous brand product without paying the, normally, high price they are associated with.

For this to happen, shanzhai products have to promote shorter production cycles and lower production costs compared to the originals because they imitate leading brands' designs (Dong & Flowers, 2016; Qin et al., 2019). Trough this, they can promote 1) high and rapid quality and public acceptance tests through segmentation strategy of differentiation market and marketing strategy provided by the shanzhai's low cost of production, 2) rapid and flexible integration of knowledge and technology provided by the advantages of latecomers in use technological research paradigms previously established by the brands and R&D researches they copied, 3) rapid and flexible process of incremental innovation through the use of modularization , reverse engineering and the integration of SME's in China's Pearl River Delta and, finally, 4) a concrete business model with vast knowledge of consumers necessities, market positioning and cultural trends[4].

On the other hand, different from counterfeits, shanzhai is made with the appearance and functionalities as close as possible to the authentic brand that they are based on, but not trying to disguise their origin or conception as "equal but

[4]Other authors, such as Keane & Zhao (2012) and Kao & Lee (2010), develop their own synthesis of what can be understood as the main core structures that sustains the business model behind the shanzhai products in China and can be consulted through a complementary view with the one presented here.

different" of those original products. They have elements to resemble them enough to the authentic product, exposing sometimes obvious visual similarities, but allowing their consumers to notice enough differences between the shanzhai product and the product based on.

Other specificity of shanzhai products is that, unlike counterfeits, they do not limitate themselves by replicating every technological aspect of the origin product—they also aggregate new functionalities to attend to their consumer requests or necessities, like the Shanzhaiji products presented in **Figure 2** below. As a shanzhai manufacturer from Fujian province enunciates in Qin et al. fieldwork, "What we make depends on the order" (Qin et al., 2019: p. 307).

Figure 2. *Shanzhaiji* products.

In this sense, there are two layers in the conceptual aspect of shanzhai products that allowed them penetrate the already existing and, at the same time, create their own niche market (Qin et al., 2019; Dong & Flowers, 2016): the process of mimic the original brand/product through visual or functional similarities and the offering of additional product benefits and complements unobservable in those original products.

Labels as *Nokir*, *Samsing* and *Anycat*, just for exemple, do not try to hide their origins of design, concept or even functionality—on contrary, take advantage of the social and economic values and status of those brands and products to, through and from this starting point, promote their own special features, components and designs—normally based on the consumer necessities, economic capacities and China's cultural values.

Yu & Kwan (2019) associate the process of mimic or imitation of a brand or product as a viable process of learning in developing countries, where the action of imitation or replication of a specific foreign product or brand made possible by

lower production costs and emerging market opportunities eventually, if the signs were properly identified and the opportunities were taken, could evolve to a process of learning and promotion of incremental innovation. Argyris (1993) refers to this process as a "double-loop learning", where the mixture of different products, technologies and knowledge eventually become a new unique product scarcely recognizable as an imitation.

By gaining experience in the process of producing pure imitation or "copycats" products, shanzhai firms increasingly use their expertise to aggregate new aspects by adding innovative features and improve already existent aspects of the "original" by attending the demand of their consumers (Liu et al., 2015). Chinese shanzhai firms produce and improve the mobile phones, as exemple, by understanding and attending local consumers demands and desires—sometimes very simple when compared with the propositions of the originary product, like more slots for more SIM cards or waterproof features (Qin et al., 2019).

Qin et al. (2018; 2019) and Jiang & Shan (2016) works demonstrate that, even though shanzhai products communicate better with a specific niche with socioeconomic and consumer preferences well delimited, it takes most advantage of the incremental innovations than the process of "copying" itself.

Jiang & Shan (2016) use the term "Face-conscious consumers" to define consumers that attach lot of social and emotional importance to theirs perceptions of social self and, thus, take regarded great importance on name-brand consumption to validate their own and others perception about themselves, normally attached with the social perception and values associated with the product or brand they are using. Because of this, "consumers who intend to construct self-image in interpersonal relationships tend to pay more attention to the brand names" (p. 186).

Face-conscious consumers normally resort to counterfeits or copycat products when the product or brand they want to be associated with are too expensive or exclusive for them to buy, certifying demand as one of the main key drivers to the production of those types of product. Therefore, counterfeit production and consumption tends to represent not just a choice of product or brand over others, but a process of brand decision and association of their own perception of personal self.

Shanzhai products consumers, different from average face-conscious and counterfeits consumers, tend to give priority to functional values and benefits more than those who purchase counterfeits (Qin et al., 2019; Jiang & Shan, 2016). Some even associate the consumption of shanzhai products as a contracultural action based on the subversion of the economic and sociological structure largely associated with monopoly capitalism seen, as exemple, in the phone industry itself—a process that will be better developed in the next secession of this article.

By this, we cannot associate shanzhai products only to copycats, mere reproductions of already existing products that violate patents and transgride—explicit and implicit, economic and entrepreneur normatives and laws to take advantage of the competition with transnational brands and industry. It also involves a com-

plex process that utilizes consumer perception and necessities, marketing strategies, flexible use of capabilities and resources associated with national enterprises in China's Pearl River Delta, decentralization and modularization and, at last but not least, generation of commercial and technological knowledge.

Despite all the marketing, innovation and creative merits highlighted until now, it's also necessary to underline counterparts: the shanzhai phenomena and specially the shanzhai products it's not perceived only through positive lenses nor can be comprehended as a academic consensus for grassroots innovation in China.

Page (2019) associates the proliferation of shanzhai products to protectionism and the failure of China's State in the promotion and enforcement of intellectual property (IP) laws, creating an ecosystem that reinforces the production of replicants and copycats such as shanzhai[5]. The author also emphasizes the socio-cultural influence of Chinese tradition and philosophy, such as Confucianism, in the process of observation, learning, repetition and imitation in China's history—something that will be properly unraveled in the next section.

Those elements, as comprehend Page, not only foment the structural economic and social foundations that sustains this phenomena, but also highlights the "blurred line between individual and public property" as the heart of "shanzhai" (Page, 2019: p. 187). For it's point of view, the shanzhai phenomena and, especially, the shanzhai products would be more properly understood as a negative externality of China's failure in assert proper capitalist and market competitiveness, further intensified by the country socio-cultural bias, than a merit of its own capacity to innovate.

It's fair enough to say that Page's (*ibid*) recognizes counterfeiting, mimicry and appropriation associated with shanzhai culture not only as a survival tactic of small and medium enterprises in China—a tool for "resistance to the abuse of corporate and governmental power" (p. 190). It also highlights phenomena potential in taking advantage of loopholes in IP laws to promote innovative aspects through imitation of western brands such as other authors presented before. Its point, however, is to emphasize counterfeit culture as inherently harmful to the process of economic development and modernization for promoting piracy and replication as roots of the system, promoting restrictions on China's ambition to become an innovation powerhouse. We see, as example of this process.

Even though Qin et al. (2018) do not share the perception of shanzhai products as counterfeit such as Page, it promotes possible ways in addressing its threats over competition and consumption, encouraging, as exemple, 1) Promote ethical concerns campaigns on buying imitative products and the importance on original and non derivative innovation; 2) The promotion of emotional need for self-actualization and the engagement on ethical and sustainable practices, elements that are little, or not at all, promoted to the debate in the shanzhai innercircle; 3) The

[5]Paige's work does not differentiate shanzhai products from counterfeits, imitations and piracy—position that help to translate its critical perspective over the production and consumption of those products.

promotion of product's integrated benefits in holistic-thinking cultures such as China and Brazil, offering benefits and gifts to incentive the consumption of other brands over shanzhai brands.

Although the debate around shanzhai products do not end with what was presented until here, with, for example, authors giving different classifications to shanzhai products by differentiating those who only reply already existing products, noninnovative shanzhai or knockoffs—from those who, in fact, aggregate new technological and design aspects, what we do in the next section is propose the complementation of those economic perspectives already exposed by addressing the **intention** behind the action of replication, while also emphasizing different social and cultural perspectives that emancipate shanzhai concept in China[6].

4. Shanzhai Beyond Economics: China's Socio-Cultural Characteristics

As mentioned before, shanzhai products are part of a broader phenomenon of shanzhai culture: the active reappropriation of economic and cultural events for diverse local purposes (Chubb, 2015). Through this perspective, the act of production by creative appropriation (*Shanzhaiism*), as we will see next, is not only a basic economic movement influenced by China's integration and collaboration in the global economy, but also denotes a characteristic Chinese-style innovation with socio-cultural influences.

Han (2017) defines shanzhai as a neologism for "fake". Han, as Chubb, emphasizes the subversive and creative process of taking advantage of economic powers and monopolies to produce products that, at the same time, references western brands while also emancipates a process of "subversion and creation" characteristics of Chinese culture.

According to Han, the act of imitation itself always takes place within a constellation of unequal power relations—in the context of shanzhai products, the existence of brand and industry monopolies, modes of production and reproduction of economic models and western colonial culture itself. These unequal power relations serve as a background of shanzhai practices and culture, promoting a movement that embodied itself as a defensive imitation: a process of creative appropriation.

To contextualize this process of subversion and creation, Han and Chubb take different but complementary approaches: Chubb (2015) reflects, through the concept of grabism, how shanzhai appropriated Western economic process and readapt it for China's socio-cultural needs. Han (2017), on the other hand, explores the philosophical-ontological perspectives of originality and reproduction in Chinese culture.

[6]Complementary to the conceptual-analytical discussion proposed in the section of the article, we recommend the reading of empirical researches conducted within economic and marketing segments over the proliferation and impact of shanzhai products in Chinese market and consumption, such as Jiang & Shan (2016), Kao & Lee (2010), Liu et al. (2015), Qin et al. (2017; 2018) and Qian et al. (2021).

With Han we see that, in China, the concept of "originality" or "original" does not adhere to the same normatives derived from the Western societies (2017). The idea of "original", in China, is defined not by the act of creation itself, but by an unending process where its identity is configured by its constant act of change. Something "original" does not maintain its "originality" by remaining the same and reaffirming the attributes associated with its creation, but recognizing the constant path of changin without "beginning or end, without birth or death" (*ibid*, p. 12).

The western concept of "originality" and the idea of "original" itself shares its roots from the aristotelian concept of "substance" developed principally in his Book IV of Metaphysics. The concept of "substance" it's nothing more than the fundamental idea of an essence that is the principle of all things, of something that isn't submitted to the principle of movement—putrefaction and death (Aristotle, 1966).

As described by Han (2022), the aristotelian substance is defined by something that reaffirms itself by the difference from the other. It recognizes itself through alterity: it is what it is because it is not like the other. It is something that is defined by remaining the same.

At the same time, the notion of a substance that puts everything in motion sustains the idea that nothing can be equal to it. It is something that reaffirms itself by being unique and does not altern, remains the same forever and, because of it, it it's not subject to movement, to transformation.

The idea of aristotelian substance grounds the existence of the first fundamental axioms of the western thought: the principle of noncontradiction (Florentino, 2020). This principle foments that nothing can be and not be at the same time, presuppose the existence of a thing that, as mentioned before, is unchangeable and puts everything else in motion.

"Originality" and "original" in western thought, in these sense, are almost the manifestation of the axiomatic principle of noncontradiction grounded in the aristotelian substance: a thing can be called "original" because it is the first one, it is the model, the "substance" that puts everything else that is a derivation of it in motion and, at the same time, cannot ever be fully replicated or imitated. A copy of something original is, through this perspective, a simulacrum, something that aspires to reproduce or replicate the original but without never being the same.

The principle that foments the notion of "original" in China, on contrary, does not emancipate itself from the axiomatic principle of noncontradiction nor the conception of an ultimate essence that is permanent. It's more appropriate to understand its meaning through the zen-buddhist notion of "emptiness".

Emptiness, in zen-buddhism, can be understood as the negativity of decreation, absence (Han, 2022). While the aristotelian substance its grounded on the reaffirmation of itself and the principle of noncontradiction, emptiness can be comprehended as something that "demonstrate the inexistence of an ultimate substance, an essence, a nature of its own that is the unshakable guarantee of the possibility

of the permanence of something" (Florentino, 2020: p. 1126). It's a movement of expropriation where you detach from the idea of a substance, of "what it is" and "what it's not", and assume a process of co-origination (Han, 2022).

Co-origination is the notion that nothing exists independently or in isolation: everything arises in dependence. It's a movement that emerges from the concept of emptiness, of the absence of a substantiality. It does not adhere to a concept that foments a idea if immutability, of something that differentiates itself from everything else by reaffirming what it is and what it's not.

"Original" and "originality", in China, it's not about remaining the same. It does not perceive its identity by denying the other and reaffirming the intrinsic characteristic of itself. It's perceived as the eternal process of transformation, where something is consecutively changing and derives its originality from it: a complete lack of aristotelian substance; absence.

A shanzhai product, in this sense, is as original as the product on which it was based. More than that: it is not satisfied only in "copying" the original, in replicating the main factors that emancipate its substantiality. It improves it, creating a new product, with new functionalities, while also manting resemblance enough to the consumer comprehending its origin.

Through this perspective, we can comprehend the shanzhai process of "copying" and "innovating" and the shanzhai culture *per se* as a process of creative appropriation: it appropriate the western concept of a product and it's process of development and commercialization, but re-adequate it to its own cultural and philosophical epistemology.

In a complementary way, the notion of "copyright" and "patent" shows more approximation to the concept of "originality" and "original" from western thought, directly related with the notion of private monopolies and different from the notions of co-origination and absence conceived in eastern. Shanzhai products, in this sense, oppose themselves from the western concept of "identity" and choose a way where the core of the movement is not necessarily the product derived from it, but the movement itself. There, says Han, is where the shanzhai manifest a "genuine chinese spirit" (Han, 2017: p. 88).

Shanzhai products do not have, as mentioned before, the proposal to deliberately deceive their buyers, on contrary, the people who demand this kind of product, as we seen in the section before, search for the qualities, both technological and conceptual, of the shanzhai, perpetuating "deconstructive energies". Their alure does not reside in the complete rupture through the process of a new creation, but in the "the playful pleasure of modifying, varying, combining and transforming the old" (*ibid*, p. 87).

It's because of that movement of creative appropriation that shanzhai products and culture can be perceived as a grassroots knowledge and technology: it produces products, commercial or cultural, that derive directly from China's sociocultural traditions and epistemology. It adheres to the capitalists logic but, at the same time, subvert its modes of operation, promoting a "intensive hybridization"

of its own culture with the capitalist structure proposed by the west. It's like playing by the rules proposed by the game and its creators, but not so.

The same act of "intensive hybridization" of the shanzhai can be seen in China's economic model. The characteristic "socialist market economy" of China clearly doesn't see a contradiction between Marxism and Capitalism, tradition as itself, enunciates Han (2017), it's not a Chinese concept and, therefore, cannot overlap the epistemic logic of "or this, or that". In fact, the Chinese thought is more appropriately approximate to a "both-and" logical structure.

"Chinese communism", as Han refers to, and the act of "intensive hybridization" presented before are, therefore, not only structural to understanding shanzhai as a concept, but also as a Chinese phenomenon that reinterprets, recontextualizes and adapts a pre-existing process or concept to its own culture and, why not, its own needs.

In this sense, both shanzhai and the "Innovation-driven National Development Strategy" share the same movement of understand and replicate a process or a product conceived in western countries and, therefore, with western values and appropriate it by recontextualizing them in their own culture, readjusting for its own necessities.

We call this process, here, as the promotion of a "Development with Chinese characteristics": a framework in which western techniques and instruments are used for practical purposes, while also preserving Chinese culture as the core. This framework does not neglect or deny the theoretical-rhetorical values or the individualist-capitalist structure associated with concepts like "innovation" and "development" or their promotion, with a deterministic presumption, by western society. Nor does he question the status of science and technology as required instruments for promoting, and achievement, of innovation and development. On the contrary, it comprehends those frameworks deep enough to the point of subverting the power relations, whether their are explicit or implicit, associated with adopting it while also promoting China's own socio, economic and cultural values through it. As we said before, a movement of creative appropriation.

This process can be seen, in the case of shanzhai, by the learning of the ways to produce, the process of fabrication, the logic of the commercialization and the deficits of the product to, after, improve by promoting innovations that attends their own necessity markets and groups niches while, also, aggregate Chinese cultural and philosophical value to those "Western products" concepts. In the case of the Innovation-driven strategy, it is promoted by the process of learning the ways, values and conceptions perpetrated by western culture about science and technology, comprehends the logic, structure, arrangements and models of governance of this policy structure to then, adapt for their own needs, objectives and vision of "harmonious society", even if it appears to contrast with the conception of society of the creators of those instruments.

This framework proposed and its association with shanzhai is reaffirmed by Chubb (2015) perspective of grabism utilized to analyze the shanzhai culture.

Grabism refers to the process of active and judicious taking of foreign things for pragmatic Chinese purposes. Through the lens of Chubb:

> "(...) shanzhai's contemporary Grabism takes from both home and abroad, for the satisfaction of consumer desires and use values that are themselves deeply codetermined by the authorities of 'global modernity' in China, international capitalism and the Communist Party". (p. 262, 2015)

The firms who produce and the people that consume China's shanzhai products and culture are "influencing the development of the emergent global industrial and cultural economy", at the same time that reinforced practices, needs and desires redefined by the Chinese characteristics economics and necessities (Qin et al., 2019: p. 309).

Chubb emphasizes that the shanzhai economy and products are led by both Chinese characteristic economic system and entrepreneurship and a global hegemonic perspective of capitalism, with emphasis in the mobile communications technologies (Chubb, 2015). The enthusiastic 'grabbing' of already existing and consolidated designs and the act of discarding or, at least, negligence with the global intellectual property regime provides, like emphasizes the author, an illustration of (re)interpenetration of global and Chinese capitalism as shanzhai's products expand abroad the market and economy of the Chinese country.

Towards the end of the discussion proposed, Chubb (2015) also proposed that the shanzhai culture as a space of hybridity between "Chinese online popular culture and the state-led cultural order" (*ibid*, 2015: p. 270). Not only the act of hearing and attending the public demand, but also the ways that the shanzhai products and culture engage with the Chinese notion of other countries, brands and products relies with the core of the shanzhai notion.

5. Conclusion and Further Perspectives

This paper proposes an approximation of the concepts of shanzhai with the "Innovation-driven National Development Strategy" proposed by China. As argued through the curse of the article, both concepts realize the process of "appropriation" and "hybridization" of core concepts and values from the western society: shanzhai through the replication of brand products with adaptations to promote innovative aspects while also attending socioeconomic necessities of their population, economic model and cultural manifestations, and the "Innovation-driven" strategy by adaptin rhetoric, structural and epistemic values associated with already consolidated STIPs models while also reinforces their own policy governance and socio-cultural reality in way to address the State and the CPC vision for contemporary China.

This approximation opens space to reflect, among other subjects, if it's possible to affirm that China has specific model STIPs capable of conjugating elements of already consolidated STIPs models, as ILO mentioned in this text, and readapt so they could be instrumentalized and operationalize under China's sociocultural,

philosophical and economic realities and necessities—a "Development with Chinese characteristics".

This process of imitation and adaptation of instruments and politics from other countries, although, not restricted to China, has happened in other nations—as we can see in experiences promoted by the global-south. This statement complexifies the proposition of a "Development with Chinese characteristics" since this could be a movement that is not restricted to China itself.

As such, two questions are proposed from the reflections promoted in this article: did this process of hybridization and appropriation of western values and instruments to promote China's own cultural aspects and perspective of socio-economic development enough to propose and sustain a theoretical framework that foments what we called here as being a "Development with Chinese characteristics", different from other development strategies adopted by countries in both western and eastern societies? How does this theoretical framework and its elements dialogue with other countries of the global south?

The first possible movement to promote such a comparative study between China's model and other countries is looking at Brazilian socio-economic and cultural movements, like anthropophagism and tropicalization, to see theoretical and empirical approximations or differences with the Chinese shanzhai phenomena. Another possible approach is to focus more on empirical-documental analysis, diving into the operationalization of China's "Innovation-driven National Development Strategy" to better understand how it happens in practice.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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