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**Is Creativity Emerging  
As China's Greatest Resource  
For Leading Business In The 21st Century?**



**Eight Key Lessons  
From Leaders in China**

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# “Creativity is often synonymous with innovation”

## Executive Summary

Innovation is going through the roof in China, and it's time the rest of the world wakes up and learns from China - fast. It is through accessing and applying our creativity to solve complex problems and meet customer needs that real innovation is possible in business. However, creativity is often not articulated, recognised and valued in the same way as innovation is in China. This is changing and creativity is definitely emerging as a more valued resource for leading in the 21st century. With China stepping up into a leadership role on the world stage, **a creative confidence is rising and the time is ripe to harness this creativity, which we believe is China's greatest future resource.**

### Research Aim and Methodology

The aim of the research was to explore the role of creativity for leading business and innovation in China in the 21st century and to:

1. Challenge the assumptions that China is not creative
2. Understand what creativity means for business in China
3. Explore the rise of creative confidence in China
4. Learn how Chinese leaders will navigate the future through creativity and innovation

We set out to explore creativity in business in China through a blend of interviews with leaders from different disciplines in China and through reviewing a selection of online articles research and reports. The combination of desk research and qualitative interviews helped us build a rich picture of China as it leads the way in innovation, digital and mobile technology, and bets big on AI and Robotics.

### Research considerations

We reviewed articles, reports and research written in English, many of which were written through a Western lens. It was important for us to balance this “Western narrative” about China with a “straight from the horse’s mouth approach” through our interviews with leaders in China. As interviewers we hoped to have our own assumptions challenged and to learn how to see creativity and innovation through an “Eastern perspective”. The stories, examples and viewpoints shared by our generous and open interviewees helped us see the world through their eyes. This experience for us was surprising, inspiring and challenging.

### Overall conclusion: Is creativity emerging as China's greatest resource?

Our biggest surprise was discovering that **creativity is often synonymous with innovation**. Some of our interviewees argued that creativity was less valued in business compared to innovation and others believed that Chinese business leaders simply didn't equate what they were doing as creative. From our perspective, looking in from the outside, what we saw was creativity being put to work in China businesses through innovating at speed and scale, meeting customers' “hunger” for new products and services and leading the way with new technology.

### What inspired us was the new brand of creativity emerging in China that is potentially redefining creativity in business for the rest of the world.

This is summed up by one of our interviewees as the “hack, combine and share” approach to creativity, driven by the shared economy, social media and new technology.

And finally, what challenged our thinking was learning about a way forward for leading creativity and innovation in business in the 21st century. We realized that Western leaders are locked into a mindset which values left brained, analytical, rational and logical thinking, whilst Chinese leaders think more dialectically, intuitively and holistically. What we learnt from our conversations with Chinese leaders was a re-mixed approach for leading creativity and innovation in business that balances western methodologies with a Chinese visionary pragmatism: The Yin Yang of Leadership.

### Structure of the report

The report covers 6 key topics:

1. Why Creativity Matters
2. What Does Creativity Mean In China?
3. The Rise Of Creative Confidence In China
4. China Is Redefining Creativity
5. The 8 Lessons For Leading Creativity And Innovation In Business
6. Leading Creativity In Business In China



**A creative confidence is rising and the time is ripe to harness this creativity, which we believe is China's greatest future resource.**

# Eight Key Lessons: Leading Creativity And Innovation In Business For The 21st Century.

The culmination of our research is 8 Key Lessons that crystallize the Chinese way of leading creativity and innovation in business. These are the lessons we learnt from our conversations that we hope will inspire business leaders seeking fresh ways of thinking and new ways of meeting the opportunities and challenges for global businesses in the 21st century.

- 1 Have A Total Focus On The Customers - "The Ground"**  
**Lesson:** To have a total focus on the customer means providing customised solutions at scale and at speed whilst closely monitoring the competition and continuously improving.
- 2 Put A Value On Creativity And Innovation**  
**Lesson:** Chinese businesses succeed through applying a different kind of creative thinking and mindset and by placing a high value on innovation.
- 3 Don't Think Big: Think Huge And Think Holistic**  
**Lesson:** Chinese business leaders think huge: Huge goals, at scale and set within the even bigger picture of wider social, cultural and historical contexts.
- 4 Radical Open Source: Hack, Combine And Share**  
**Lesson:** Learn from the maker culture, open sourcing and hacker spaces: Creativity in the 21st century is about combining existing ideas to create something new.
- 5 Serve The Community And Humankind**  
**Lesson:** "Dig back" to old, ancient and traditional methods and apply them in service of solving some of the modern day challenges we face as a global community.
- 6 Everything Goes Digital And Mobile**  
**Lesson:** Digital and Mobile technology is not a "nice to have" but an absolute must for the future of every business. China leads the way in this hyper-connected digital world.
- 7 Betting Big On Technology: The Future Is AI And Robots**  
**Lesson:** AI can be a stimulus for creativity and empowers leaders to think differently to solve complex problems. China is investing big in AI and Robots as a catalyst for growth.
- 8 Shared Economy - The New Collectivism**  
**Lesson:** Creativity is social in China: It's all about co-creating, collaborating and sharing. The shared economy alongside new technology is providing the fertile ground for creativity.



## **Thank you**

This report was researched, developed and produced by Artgym with Louise Austin and Christian Kuhna as the Lead Researchers and Authors. A very special thank you to the 15 Leaders who contributed their time and wisdom to this report, without whom it would not be possible.

## **About Artgym**

Artgym is a change agency with offices in London and Shanghai. We work with people around the world who want to create the new and shape the world around them. Creativity drives innovation and transformation. That's why we believe by releasing your creativity, you have the power to create an extraordinary tomorrow. We're a team of passionate game changers from the fields of psychology, leadership coaching, facilitation, innovation, sociology and, of course, the arts. We've worked in 33 countries, so far, and won multiple awards for our groundbreaking work. As well as having clients such as Adidas, E&Y and Sony Music, we've worked with thousands of amazing individuals.

## **Artgym Productions Ltd.**

info@artgym.com  
+44 (0)20 7033 3777

3rd Floor  
17 Willow Street  
London  
EC2A 4BH