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How Does Culture Become an Asset? Property Rights Design and Internalised Governance on China's Urban Peripheries

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Abstract

Research on culture-led urban change in China has shifted from inner-city clusters to peripheral zones where formal planning meets managed informality, yet two gaps remain. First, artistic production continues to be interpreted through a leasing lens that positions artists as temporary occupiers. Second, land is analysed largely at the macro scale of municipal supply and branding, while internal property rules and meso-level governance are overlooked. This paper mobilises the concept of assetisation to show how precarious cultural spaces become rule-bound assets through property-rights design. Fieldwork in Chengdu's Blue Roof Art District draws on qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews, policy and registration documents, and on-site observation. We examine which resources are assetised, how this occurs, and with what effects on publicness and spatial form. Our findings show that planning endorsement, the transfer of collective construction land for cultural use, and title registration with mortgageability codify eligibility, use and transfer. Studios are converted into owner-occupied assets tied to land value. Governance shifts from direct administrative control to asset management by owners and the site operator. While production stabilises and overt conflict declines, public interfaces narrow and enclave risks intensify when city priorities change. Empirically, the paper demonstrates how property-rights design operates as a meso-level governance tool that sets explicit trade-offs between stability and openness. Theoretically, it links producers to land value, bridging macro land regimes with micro political practice in urban peripheries and informing urban policy-making that prioritises sustainability.

Keywords: urban transformation; multi-scalar interaction; peri-urban governance; art districts (China); state entrepreneurialism

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1. Introduction

Over the past three decades, culture has repeatedly been used for urban regeneration [1,2], place branding [3,4] and economic repositioning [5–9]. The academic work that followed, and the policy frameworks it inspired, have largely concentrated on inner-city cultural districts and flagship projects, where artistic activity is closely tied to gentrification, property valorisation and urban competitiveness [10–12]. Yet the geography of cultural production has shifted. In China in particular, experimentation now gathers at the urban fringe. Here, state-owned urban land meets collectively owned rural land, and planning tools are flexible. In this setting,

improvisation, regularisation and displacement can occur in quick succession [13,14]. These peripheral environments are generative for cultural practice but remain under-analysed.

Two research gaps are significant. First, artists are still too often cast as permanent tenants (e.g., [15–17]), either as pioneers who open rent gaps or as flexible occupants in operator portfolios. As a result, the institutional design of land and property rights for cultural space rarely becomes an object of explanation in its own right. Second, even when land does enter the frame, especially in debates on state entrepreneurialism and land finance, analysis tends to remain at the macro level of municipal land supply, platform companies and branding [18–20]. This work pays little attention to the micro-level foundations of regional governance. Studio ownership, contractual arrangements, and transfer rules, along with their everyday effects on order, publicness and power, are often implicitly overlooked.

To address these gaps, this paper develops a meso-level analytical framework centred on the establishment phase of assetisation and applies it to Chengdu's Blue Roof Art District. We pose three core questions. First, how are property rights designed to assetise studio space on the metropolitan periphery, including lawful enclosure, qualification screening, and restrictions on use and transfer? Second, how does ownership redistribute governance functions and turn potential conflicts into matters of contract and compliance? Third, what spatial consequences arise when government strategies are reallocated elsewhere, especially regarding trade-offs between stability and enclave formation?

Chengdu provides a revealing context. As a leading inland metropolis and cultural hub in Southwest China, its status rivals that of metropolises such as Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou. With a population exceeding twenty million and a GDP exceeding USD 300 billion (2024), it ranks seventh among China's 297 cities. This status is largely attributable to decades of strategic national policy, such as the "Go West" strategy, which designated Chengdu as a pivotal anchor for development in China's vast interior.

Chengdu also has a mature and systematic trajectory of cultural-industry development. Its policy style, however, has long been characterised by a pragmatic experimentalism. It is neither vertically integrated and centralised in the manner of Beijing, nor laissez-faire and market-liberal in the manner of Guangzhou. Chengdu municipal government adopts a selective intervention strategy: managing cultural districts through government-backed "platform companies" that provide targeted incentives to attract artists and creative enterprises, thereby maintaining policy flexibility while ensuring effective state oversight. This configuration is well-suited to observing the implementation of national strategies. It operates not only through macro instruments such as land supply and branding, but also through the micro-engineering of property rights in specific cultural sites.

The Blue Roof Art District offers a concrete setting in which to examine the governance effects of assetisation. This art district is located near Sansheng Flower Village on the south-eastern urban edge of Chengdu, close to the administrative boundary with Shuangliu District and Jinjiang District. It occupies a suburban landscape historically characterised by a hybrid form of collective land ownership and tourism-oriented development. It combines the bottom-up integration of artists, producer ownership on collective land, and a subsequent ecological reconfiguration. This sequence is uncommon and makes the effects of rights design clearly visible.

Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative case-study design. Evidence comes from multiple field visits, on-site observation, semi-structured interviews with artists, operators and officials, and a close reading of policy, planning and registration documents. The analysis is deliberately confined to the establishment of assetisation. It does not follow later rent extraction or financial layering. This scope allows a clearer identification of how rights design reshapes governance and produces spatial outcomes.

The case evolved in several phases. At first, the "Old Blue Roof" comprised low-cost but precarious rented workshops in fringe industrial sheds, exposed to rent volatility, environmental hazards and eviction risk. Later, with a government-backed platform, the district was restructured into new areas via transfers of collective construction land. Artists purchased long-term studio rights on collectively owned land. Studios became registrable units within cultural-use zoning; Eligibility, use and transfer restrictions were clarified. Registration and mortgage frameworks were extended to creative space. District authorities coordinated festivals and public projects, but daily curation, order and compliance were increasingly internalised by owners and the operator. This marked a shift from administrative dominance to asset management. After 2018, as the city prioritised ecological regulation, surrounding retail and leisure facilities were scaled back. The Blue Roof core persisted as a legally protected production enclave. Stabilised production and thinner public interfaces were not incidental; they were endogenous outcomes of a rights regime that secured artists' tenure.

Although our evidence is China-based, the mechanisms we identify have wider relevance. Many cities must govern cultural uses in tenure-hybrid settings shaped by flexible zoning, rising land values and delegated administration. This study argues that transforming studio assets into rule-bound, producer-controlled spaces can stabilise production while reducing public interfaces. This outcome depends not on national context, but on the framework of rights design.

There are three contributions. First, it recentres analysis on producer ownership rather than tenancy, and specifies how rights bundles reshape identity politics, collective agency and the everyday publicness in peri-urban arts districts. Second, it defines assetisation as a constitutive, meso-level process of rights engineering, distinct from later financial layering. Temporal expectations (such as durations, holding periods and mortgage terms) are encoded into spatial rules (such as boundaries, zoning and eligibility territories). Third, it refines state-entrepreneurial governance by identifying a portable micro-mechanism: property-rights design combined with selective allocation to producers, which explains both stability and exclusion.

Taken together, these points clarify why similar policy tools can yield different spatial outcomes. They also suggest practical levers for striking a balance between keeping production secure and ensuring openness, informing sustainable policy in cities facing similar pressures.

2. Culture-Led Urban Regeneration: An Actor-Centred Perspective

Since the late twentieth century, culture has occupied a central place in urban regeneration strategies [6,21,22]. Florida's creative-city paradigm has framed talent, technology and inclusivity as drivers of regional competitiveness and has urged cities to attract a "creative class" through placemaking, amenities and cultural vitality [7]. Building on this idea, related research has translated the paradigm into operational policy toolkits, accelerating the global diffusion of the creative-city agenda [8,23,24]. The approach has faced sustained criticism for its assumed portability and limited analytical grounding. Among critics, scholars have highlighted the distinct labour politics of artists and the limited explanatory power of a universalised "creative class" formula for urban development outcomes [25–27]. Culture-led inner-city regeneration serves both as a growth strategy and a vehicle for socio-spatial restructuring, yet it often produces unequal effects [28,29]. Cultural production has also moved in parallel with waves of gentrification: artists' occupation of industrial lofts has converted derelict spaces into symbolic and financial assets, laying the groundwork for subsequent property valorisation [11,12,30]. In various cities, cultural districts, festive events and brand promotional activities underpin redevelopment cycles. In some cases, the

reappraisal of heritage sites driven by cultural preservation has similarly catalysed retail expansion and displacement dynamics (e.g., [31,32]). Purpose-built "cultural districts" and curated creative clusters, combining studios, galleries and consumer services, have been closely tied to tourism and city branding [33–35].

Post-reform Chinese cities absorbed these ideas, but their translation has relied on distinctive institutions and state capacity [36,37]. The notion of "cultural industries" entered Chinese policymaking in the early 1990s and quickly shifted from "culture serving politics" to "culture serving the economy" [36]. In the early 2000s, entry barriers were eased and management authority was devolved, allowing greater non-public investment and formalising sectoral planning. This was not a neoliberal imitation. Regulation did not recede; it was redirected to support broader urban strategies and priority sectors. Clusters linked to economic growth were actively promoted, while core fields such as publishing and media remained tightly regulated [36].

Within this framework, the first cultural-industry clusters emerged in megacities such as Beijing and Shanghai [38–40], where policy recalibration intersected with state-owned enterprise property legacies and international cultural markets [41,42]. Adaptive governance and bottom-up negotiation have been significant, as researchers have examined how artist networks, platform operators and officials co-produce cultural space [43,44]. On the one hand, local authorities and platform companies have tested time-limited incentives, flexible zoning and selected tenant mixes [43,45]. On the other hand, artist communities responded to shifting rules through informal renting, strategic visibility and alliance-building [43,44,46]. In the case of the 798 Art District, artists mobilised symbolic capital and global discourses to resist demolition and gained temporary leverage; subsequent institutionalisation folded the area into a bureaucratically managed, curated art brand [35,41]. This trajectory is well captured as "branding through resistance", followed by the consolidation of operator-led control. Within this model, technocratic and hybrid governance are key. High-profile actors attract attention, while non-commercial practices are often marginalised.

3. Cultural-Space Production: A Land-Institutions-Centred Perspective

Another strand of research places land institutions and agencies at the centre of analysis. It treats land as a foundational structural factor that displaces attention from stakeholder groups. This work explains outcomes through the macro framework of land politics and land-based political economy [18–20], altering the development pathways of cultural industries under liberalised planning regimes. From this view, China's dual land regime—state ownership in urban areas and collective ownership in rural areas, together with the marketisation of land-use rights since the late 1980s, is seen as a set of basic structural conditions shaping cultural-industry trajectories. Scholars widely observe that local governments are not deregulators in a neoliberal sense. They act as "state entrepreneurs" [44,47,48]. By monopolising the primary land market, assembling public–private redevelopment coalitions, and using planning and leasing tools flexibly, they steer capital into flagship projects such as creative-industry parks, thereby driving urban growth. This model of state entrepreneurialism has deeply influenced the governance of cultural space. A large body of work argues that cultural parks are essentially extensions of land and property strategies rather than the outcome of independent arts industry policies [18,49]. Studies of areas such as the 798 Art District in Beijing show how the re-use of state-owned factory legacies can be reclassified as "cultural real estate" through area planning and national branding [20]. The core logic serves municipal fiscal extraction and symbolic capital, rather than the building of producer-owned infrastructure. Artists and cultural

organisations are cast mainly as "temporary" or "pioneer" tenants whose role is to catalyse rent gaps and warm up the market for subsequent commercial development [35].

As cultural clusters have shifted beyond traditional cores to seek lighter regulation and affordable workspace, such as post-industrial suburbs and rural zones, research has linked land institutions to suburban and peri-urban governance. These areas are marked by informal renting, partial self-governance and non-agricultural uses. They underpin the production of "urban villages" and hybrid peri-urban landscapes of mixed land rights where cultural activity can cluster rapidly [50–52]. Yet studies also note that when municipalities channel growth to the fringe through selective land-use conversion and quota management, culture again shifts from a site of creative labour to a programmable land asset [49]. Symbolic imagery can be mobilised to integrate centre and periphery, or repositioned as priorities change.

Across this literature, cultural production spaces play three recurring roles within land-centred narratives. First, they absorb and rework deindustrialised or collectively managed fringe land, converting low-yield spaces into rent-bearing assets and narrative anchors for regional branding [53]. Second, they operate as flexible tenants within municipal toolkits. Through time-limited incentives and curated leasing portfolios, city and regional authorities can turn cultural visibility on or off to match shifting goals [49], without altering underlying property control. Third, they serve as policy-readable nodes for planning techniques, which helps fold peri-urban belts into metropolitan strategies while retaining options to repurpose land as fiscal or regulatory conditions change [54]. These dynamics are not confined to early inner-city heritage districts. They have been reproduced at the urban edge, aligning with logics of clustering, festivalisation and scenic development, and with land-use conversion instruments, to form new modes of suburban governance.

Based on the above literature, significant gaps are evident. The concrete design of land and property rights within cultural spaces seldom becomes a primary object of analysis. Actor-centred studies have detailed the micro-politics and negotiations associated with art districts, yet remain constrained by a rental paradigm. Artists are cast as pioneer tenants temporarily occupying urban space. This perspective systematically obscures the more fundamental institutional question of property rights. In the Chinese literature, rich descriptions of cluster promotion, state entrepreneurialism, urban-village governance and land finance are largely "top down". Ownership allocation over studios and workspaces, especially at the junction of collective rural land and urban planning boundaries, is often regarded as technical background. In Beijing, relocation is traced to rent shocks and clearances [55]. In Shanghai, interventions and investment mechanisms are detailed [56]. In Shenzhen, industrial-chain formation and labour dynamics take centre stage [57].

To bridge this gap, we turn to recent debates on assetisation. This work conceptualises how diverse resources are converted into tradable assets through legal enclosure, standardisation and collateralisation. It offers a bridge between macro land-finance regimes and operator-led clustering on the one hand, and the micro politics of property rights inside cultural space on the other.

4. Assetising Space: A Meso-Level Framework

Assetisation theory arises from political–economic insights into changing modes of capital accumulation. It describes how non-commodified elements such as land, natural resources and data are transformed into capital assets capable of generating sustained future income through social, legal and technical processes [58]. This is not simple commodification governed by labour time and market exchange. Rather, it signals a shift from a logic of production to a logic of rent [59]. The core mechanism is enclosure and the creation

of exclusive property rights. Value no longer rests on embodied labour but on expectations of future revenues and their capitalisation [60].

This perspective supplies a meso-level analytical lens for urban geography. It links micro-level financial devices to macro political–economic arguments, while revealing "the degree of control over society that the asset secures" and its spatial effects [61]. Swyngedouw and Ward describe land's "asset condition" as a real abstraction [62]. Land has use value, yet it becomes a tradable asset only through property law, planning regimes, valuation methods and accounting conventions [62]. Within this frame, rent is not merely a drain on productive capital. It is a coordinating mechanism that steers spatial allocation and investment. Empirical work shows how firms use debt and planning to reorganise moribund industrial property and to build regional growth models based on rent capture [63].

Assetisation typically unfolds through a recognisable, non-linear sequence. It begins with enclosure and property formation, which transform shared or productive spaces into transferable rights. It proceeds through commensuration and calculation, using "highest and best use," appraisal techniques and accounting rules to render heterogeneous spaces comparable across portfolios. Its core lies in capitalisation: discounting expected future rents into present value, typically on the basis of planning gains, redevelopment or proximity to infrastructure, and supporting these projections with legal, planning and market narratives [60]. It culminates in governance realignment and socio-spatial reterritorialisation. Urban policy pivots to entrepreneurial, asset-led governance. Labour geographies and community networks are reshaped. Gentrification and working-class displacement frequently follow [62–64].

Assetisation is often entangled with financialisation, but the two should be analytically distinct. A "financialisation turn" in recent work tends to treat assetisation as a mere prelude to securities, derivatives, and other financial techniques (e.g., [60,65]), or as the machinery that converts future rents into fictitious capital through risk pricing and valuation models [30,66]. This move has two limitations. First, assetisation is broader than financialisation [67]. Any resource can be recorded as an asset. Some are capitalised without deep integration into liquid markets, such as pension-fund infrastructure or land held for planning uplift [60]. Financialisation is one possible trajectory, not the essence of assetisation. Second, a narrow financial lens tends to obscure the political and social foundations of assetisation. Assetisation is a socio-political process. The notion of the "asset condition" makes this clear: it installs a political logic that defines who benefits, how they benefit and which rights structures exclude other democratic or social claims [68]. Kaika's historical analysis places class relations, labour territoriality, and civic mobilisation at the centre of land's re-signification and redevelopment [64]. Ward and Swyngedouw trace how "insurgent capital" forges alliances with local states to remake regional governance around rent extraction [63]. Gagnon, drawing on Veblen, shows that asset values rest on institutionalised control over knowledge, technology, and social resources, not on productive contribution alone [61].

Building on these insights, this study applies the assetisation framework to cultural production spaces in China, defining its core as a perspective and analytical tool for spatial governance. Against the backdrop of China's dual land system and locally embedded forms of state entrepreneurialism, the assetisation of cultural production spaces presents a distinctive model of government-market collaboration. This represents far more than mere physical space development or cultural content cultivation; it constitutes a profound process of spatial value creation and governance. Local governments use planning approvals, land transfers, infrastructure investment and branding to deliver an initial "value endorsement" for targeted areas, markedly raising their rent premium [69,70].

This initiates an assetisation sequence: the diffuse "atmospheric value" generated by artist communities and cultural practice is systematically converted into priced, and potentially financeable, spatial assets. Land-use controls, planning adjustments and the legal definition of title then translate ambiguous cultural spaces into assets with clear property rights and capitalisable qualities, thereby completing a process of lawful enclosure. Finally, government-backed platform companies integrate, package and operate these assets, turning cultural space into a manageable and controllable policy or fiscal instrument (e.g., [20,35,41]). In this way, local governments combine the soft governance of cultural policy with the hard demands of land finance. Culture is no longer an autonomous domain. It is drawn deeply into a machine of spatial value production as a lever for enhancing land assets and serving urban growth objectives.

Therefore, the focus of analysis lies not in whether financialisation occurs after assetisation, but rather in how local governments proactively apply assetisation as a sophisticated governance technique. Assetisation reconfigures social relations among artists, residents, developers and the state. Artists move from users of space to payers of rent or provisional generators of asset value, and their practice faces the risks of domestication and alienation. Only by focusing on the governing practices, power relations and spatial reorganisation embedded in asset formation can we better reveal the complexity and tensions of cultural space production in Chinese urbanisation, and provide a more comprehensive framework for understanding the governance in urban peripheries.

5. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design, conducted in three phases (literature collection, field research, data analysis). Details of the research design and data limitations are outlined below.

The literature review focused on the evolution of core theories (cultural clusters, assetisation) and their alignment with China's political-economic context. Peer-reviewed academic literature was the primary data source, supplemented by "grey literature" (official documents, planning schemes, and public data from case cities/projects). Grey literature was screened using three criteria: official release channels (government agencies or project leaders); inclusion of specific data or operational details; and preference for the latest versions.

From mid-February to late March 2022, fieldwork was conducted at the Blue Roof Art District in Chengdu, involving semi-structured interviews with 10 artists (8 in the core area, 2 in the Youth Art Village), 5 policymakers, and 5 on-site staff. We also consulted the Chengdu Urban Planning Exhibition Hall to verify the updated overall urban planning, ensuring accuracy. To ensure currency, supplementary interviews and a full register of spatial uses were completed at Blue Roof in October 2025 (see Figure A1).

Collected data (interview records, policy documents, field notes, annotated maps, on-site photos) were subjected to manual, structured qualitative analysis using Microsoft Word and Excel (version 2408 Build 16.0.17932.20252). On-site images and maps were archived by "location-theme" in Microsoft OneNote. Field maps were edited in Photoshop (version 25.7) to overlay notes and delineate spatial boundaries, informed by interviews with artists, planners, and residents.

First, China's political context limited access to additional official interviews, constraining perspectives. Second, the initial study occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic; related impacts were mitigated through the 2025 supplementary research. Third, the specific trading arrangements of cultural land rights limited housing-price transparency, preventing clear observation of the full assetisation process via online data. Fourth, gaps in

terminological precision when translating Chinese interviews into English were addressed through adaptive linguistic adjustments.

6. Beyond China: Asset-Based Governance for Global Cultural Production Spaces

Although our empirical material originates in China, we treat assetisation and the associated property-rights-design mechanisms as a generalisable governance paradigm rather than a context-specific phenomenon. To test external validity and delineate scope conditions, we conduct a structured comparison of cases from internationally prominent cities, sampled on a most different-systems basis with respect to property rights regimes. This design assesses the framework's transferability beyond China and identifies sources of outcome heterogeneity linked to differences in rights architectures and management arrangements.

The projects listed in Table 1 are drawn from cases with many years of mature operation. Most are important cultural projects included in government planning documents. At least six distinct urban models can be identified. They all contain three key elements in the assetisation phase. The first is enclosure, meaning clear ownership and boundaries. The second is conversion into monetary value, including rent policy, title, and value-capture measures. The third is covenants, covering duties on use, transfer, and operation.

Table 1. Property-rights design, operating models, openness and assetisation across international cases.

Type	Project Location	Property Rights	Operating Model	Openness	Assetisation Degree	Outcomes
Public leasehold with delegated stewardship	NDSM Wharf, Amsterdam [71]	Municipal freehold with long ground leases, conditions and resets [72]	Foundation stewards site, curates programming and maintenance [73]	High. Open campus and waterfront public realm	Low to Medium. Leaseholds, few unit-titled assets, large open land	Durable cultural activation; mixed uses with regular public access
Planning obligations for affordable workspace	Hackney Wick and Fish Island, London [74]	Section 106 [75] obligations naming provider, rent and service caps, lease terms, fit-out triggers	Affordable-workspace operators inside private mixed-use blocks	Low to Medium. Tenant interiors; public access mainly via street edge or events	High at unit level. Financeable leases and fit-outs in private schemes	Provision secured; under-letting where units are mis-sized and fit-out costly [76]
Trust-based holding of cultural assets	Creative Land Trust [77] (London); Community Arts Stabilization Trust [78] (San Francisco)	Trust holds freehold or long lease; in SF a municipal head lease to the trust	Vetted studio providers (CLT) or trust-run activation (CAST)	Medium for CLT; Medium to High for CAST with regular public visitation	Medium. Capitalised buildings under trust; residual public control in SF	Stable sub-market studios; large public-facing hub on SF waterfront
Public and civic cooperative development	Haus der Statistik, Berlin [79]	Public ownership with cooperation agreements and codified allocation [80]	Joint governance by state entities and civic cooperative; transparent room allocation [80]	High. Common-good ground floors; strong street-level interface	Medium. Substantial built assets; non-market allocation; no private unit trade	Mixed cultural and social programme; durable public interface
Municipal programmes with public or peppercorn leasing	Fàbriques de Creació (Barcelona) [81]	Public ownership or head lease;	City departments or specialist operators manage portfolios and calls	Medium to High	Medium. Capitalised buildings; not unit-titled or freely tradable	Stable below-market workspaces; adaptive reuse at scale
Non-profit developer owner	Artspace PS109, New York City [82]	Non-profit ownership or long ground lease; deed and regulatory covenants	Non-profit owns and manages live/work and cultural space	Low. Public entry mainly through programmed events	High at building scale. Permanent financeable real-estate asset	Permanently affordable units plus community cultural space

Notes: Openness scale: High = freely accessible public realm most of the time; Medium = mixed regime with regular programming; Low = tenant-only by default. Degree of assetisation: High = private or mission-vehicle ownership or financeable leases at unit or building scale; Medium = public title or head-lease retained with significant built assets under licences; Low = municipal freehold predominates with large open land and few financeable units. Abbreviations: CLT = Creative Land Trust; CAST = Community Arts Stabilization Trust; SF = San Francisco.

This comparative study highlights two points. First, the choice of property rights is itself a policy. Public freehold with leasing, trust-held title, and non-profit ownership

are all viable options to secure cultural production space. Second, later affordability and financial dynamics depend on many factors. These include rent, service charges, unit size, and the stability of nearby land prices. If any element is missing, the results can diverge into gentrification, enclave formation, or vacancy.

The comparison also reveals an important link between openness and assetisation. Residual ownership, capital structure, and return targets are the main drivers. In NDSM, Amsterdam, and Haus der Statistik, Berlin, when the municipality keeps residual land ownership and sets public access duties in leases or cooperation agreements, the assetisation degree tends to be lower and the public interface is larger. As land and buildings move into privately financed, yield-oriented systems, operators face tighter revenue and risk limits. They adopt access control, add more security, and reduce open public space. Affordable workspace in London's private mixed-use projects shows this enclosure trend. Ownership by trusts and non-profit developers offers a middle option in the "enclosure-to-assetisation" process. They often stabilise housing affordability, but they do not by themselves guarantee openness. Openness improves when leases and charters include clear public interface duties and provide project funding. CAST in San Francisco, under a municipal lease, is one example. If the goal is tenant stability or live-work integration, openness is limited to scheduled activities. Artspace PS109 is an example.

Based on the above literature and cases, we find it very rare for governments to convert cultural spaces into private assets owned by artists. It usually requires a land-use change, legislation or expropriation, and direct sale to artists. Whether in China or abroad, such measures are uncommon. The Blue Roof case follows this path and adopts a distinctive rights design. As our subsequent analysis shows, these arrangements indeed reshape openness and internal governance. Therefore, this framework has exploratory potential beyond the local context and offers practical applications for supporting the sustainability of cultural production and urban governance.

7. Chengdu's Blue Roof Art District: From Spontaneous Aggregation to Assetisation Enclaves

7.1. Bottom-Up Cohesion: The Emergence of the Old Blue Roof (1994–2005)

The origins of the Blue Roof community can be traced to a series of small moves made by a group of Chengdu painters in the 1990s. In 1994, artists including He Duoling and Zhang Xiaogang (representative painters of contemporary art in Chengdu) relocated their studios from cramped domestic rooms to a modest shared space at Shaziyan on Yulin Road. The decision was pragmatic rather than strategic: the site was relatively quiet, close to the city centre, and large enough to accommodate work on big canvases.

> *"Our choice of this place was largely coincidental. We were simply drawn to its proximity to the city centre and the quieter creative environment compared to the urban area. We hadn't anticipated such a significant impact, but our friends still look back fondly on those days. We discussed art exclusively, nothing else."* (Interview with Artist A)

By the early 2000s, the group began searching for more space. In 2003 they acquired several units in a rural industrial estate near Tuqiao Airport Road, close to the Taipingsi military airfield. The sheds there were topped with distinctive blue corrugated roofs. The artists rented a number of courtyards and gradually converted them into studios. By the end of 2003, five clusters known locally as A to E had become active, with close to sixty artists in residence. The term "Old Blue Roof" later came to refer to this period. Working conditions improved markedly compared with the earlier inner-city sites. The generous floor plates and flexible layouts suited painting. Rents were low. The semi-rural setting offered a pastoral Chinese aesthetic. During the same period, several exhibitions, including "Living

in Chengdu" and the 2004 Shenzhen Contemporary Oil Painting Exhibition, featured works by Chengdu artists and drew wider attention. Distance from the political centre made local media unusually receptive to contemporary art, while the city's market for cultural consumption continued to expand. Following Beijing's successful bid for the 2008 Olympics in 2001, the central government shifted from opposition to support for the cultural industries, viewing them as a new engine for growth. Chengdu rapidly followed trends seen in Guangzhou and Beijing. Real estate projects proliferated and commercial galleries multiplied. This phase also brought the first signs of differentiation within the artist community. Some artists achieved high sales and gradually formed an "elite" cohort. Yet the group shared a common priority for the period: securing a stable place to work.

However, the essence of the Old Blue Roof was the temporary occupation of disused fringe space by artists acting as "tenants". The model was fundamentally fragile. Artists continually faced rent volatility, environmental deterioration (such as the severe dust pollution caused by neighbouring shoe and furniture factories in 2006), and the constant risk of eviction. They lacked long-term control and security over their living spaces, their existence rested on informal, unstable rental arrangements. This condition characterises the majority of arts districts in China, where artistic production is treated as a short-lived, transitional urban activity. At the same time, citywide reforms were redirecting planning and investment towards peripheral tourism and cultural facilities. In this emerging policy environment, the Old Blue Roof's predicament intersected with Chengdu's broader urban strategy. The result was the birth of the "New Blue Roof", whose core was the assetisation of the means of artistic production.

7.2. Top-Down Restructuring: The New Blue Roof and the Assetisation of Artistic Production (2006–2012)

Chengdu's shift from tourism-led brand development in the first five years of the twenty-first century towards driving economic growth through cultural industries has provided the policy foundation for Blue Roof's transformation. The municipal government retained national-level content review but avoided adding extra layers of control. It adopted selective and time-limited promotional instruments: municipal financing platforms, state-owned enterprises to build and manage projects, and later, wider access for non-public capital to support cultural initiatives expected to enhance the city's reputation or catalyse emerging sectors.

> *"We cannot possibly have the multi-tiered cultural regulation seen in Beijing, nor do we have the same number of officials to conduct reviews. Our primary concern is whether it demonstrates innovation and can generate new commercial value, rather than debating cultural merits and justifications… We have also expanded the scope of loans available to non-publicly owned cultural entities, including land use rights, trademark rights, intellectual property rights, and patent rights, all of which can now receive financial support."* (Interview with policymaker A)

Within this pragmatic hybrid of state entrepreneurialism, institutional engineering was deployed where markets were thin and routine regulatory tools proved inadequate. A key driver was Chengdu's designation as a "National Pilot City for Urban–Rural Integration". This opened a legal pathway to restructure and circulate collectively owned construction land for specified cultural uses.

The transition from Old to New Blue Roof originated in Sansheng Flower Village. Located on Chengdu's south-eastern edge, this floral belt was being developed by the municipality and Jinjiang District as a comprehensive scenic area (see Figure 1). Within this zone, the "Hetang Yuese" themed area was envisaged as the principal attraction (the term is a phonetic transcription of the Chinese, its meaning is a large lotus pond; see Figure 2).

Since tourism struggled to generate distinct content, Sansheng officials proposed building a higher-value cultural ecosystem by introducing a renowned artist cohort. Initial efforts followed conventional templates. In 2005, Sansheng funded several "painters' buildings" within a planned community and invited artists to lease units. Take-up was poor. The standardised layouts failed to meet studio practice requirements: ceiling heights, north light and clear spans were all unsuitable. By the end of 2006, the street altered its strategy, transferring control over studio design to the artists.

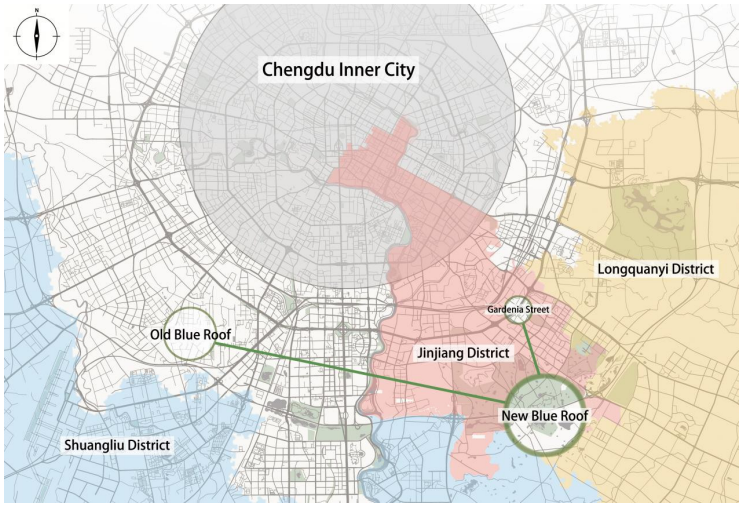

Figure 1. Location of the Blue Roof Art District. Data Source: Google maps, drawn by authors.

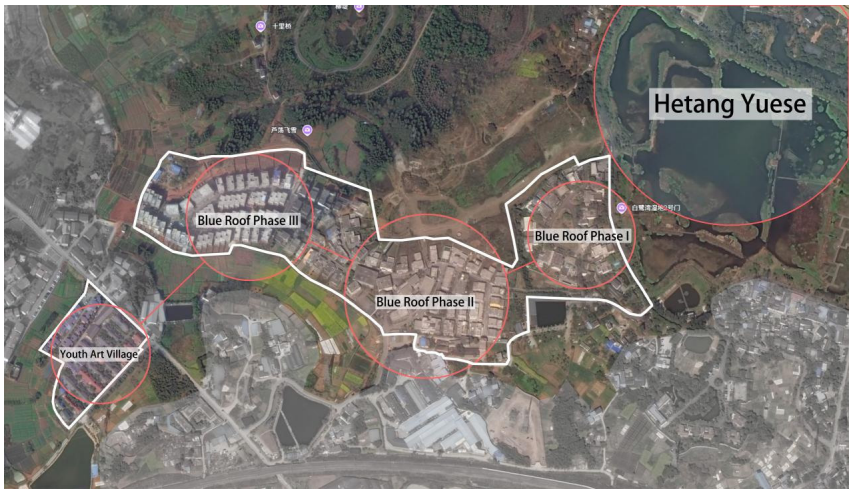

Figure 2. The spatial configuration of the Blue Roof Art District and surrounding areas. Data Source: Google maps, drawn by authors.

The institutional core relied on the transfer mechanism for collectively owned construction land under Chengdu's urban–rural integration reforms (see Table 2). Once the pilot status was secured, Jinjiang District, neighbouring Shuangliu District and local rural collective economic organisations could lawfully restructure collective construction land and transfer use rights for cultural purposes. The government established planning boundaries, consolidated and provided land-use indicators, and ensured legality through registration. In 2009, Blue Roof Development Co., Ltd., Chengdu, China was established as the operating platform. Under a memorandum with Shuangliu District, it introduced local non-public capital. Established artists were invited to purchase studios directly within the cultural-use zoning of collective construction land, gaining long-term use rights. For those unable to buy, particularly early-career practitioners, the developer worked with

the government to assemble idle plots in surrounding villages. Through a similar transfer mechanism, this land was converted to lawful cultural use and refurbished into clusters of small studios. The operator leased these spaces in batches to recent graduates and early-career artists, forming what became known as the "Blue Roof Youth Art Village".

Table 2. Land transfer mechanism of Blue Roof.

Process	Core Mechanism	Specific Details
Land Classification and Acquisition	Collective construction land marketed	Pilot policy for integrated urban-rural development; Tand status transferred from collective construction land in Sansheng Township to state ownership; For artistic development purposes only.
Village residents and collective income	Sustained rent and employment	Stable land rental income (exceeding £50,000 annually); Employment opportunities within the arts district's operations; Surrounding entrepreneurial income; Collective share dividends
The role of government	Policy formulation and service provision	Planning and approval for agricultural land conversion (with the right to bypass certain approvals); Investment in surrounding infrastructure; Supervision and regulation of land use.
Art District Operations and Impact	Market-oriented operations and industrial ecosystem structuring	Professional platform company operations; Artist residency vetting; Comprehensive art industry ecosystem; Property and land value appreciation

The entire arts district was constructed in phases. In January 2009, the first dedicated complex opened, comprising fourteen studio buildings (mainly for invited renowned artists) arranged around a central art museum and a clubhouse. The second phase of development primarily created so-called "self-owned studios", with units sold to individual artists. This project started in 2011 and was largely completed by 2012. A third phase added mixed-use cultural venues, complementing the core area and linking it to the adjacent Youth Art Village (see Figures 2 and 3b). The main site straddled the administrative seam between Sansheng Subdistrict in Jinjiang District and the edge of Shuangliu District. Smaller spillover clusters emerged nearby, including Hexiang Ruiyuan, a residential complex near Gardenia Street that attracted many young artists (see Figure 1). A torrential downpour in 2011 severely damaged the leased workshops at the Old Blue Roof, while artists at the New Blue Roof were unaffected. The event precipitated a mass exodus from the old site. By June 2012, the last long-term tenant had left, bringing an end to the informal art district, known as Old Blue Roof.

The New Blue Roof was revolutionary. First, it achieved the assetisation of artistic production. Artists could purchase studios and obtain registration certificates aligned with collective construction land use rights. Creative spaces shifted from recurring rental expenses to legally recognised assets that can be inherited, mortgaged and appreciate in value (50-year commercial property rights designated for cultural use, subject to annual urban land-use tax). Creative space no longer depended on informal agreements or short-term leases; it became part of capital. Second, practitioners were invited to design or specify their spaces within agreed parameters. Where government prototypes fell short, experienced artists revised the standards. Third, cultural-use zoning restricted conversion to non-art purposes. Units could not be sold as housing, and sales were limited to artists or cultural institutions. Access, however, was selective. It was not a universal entitlement for all practitioners. High purchase prices for property-rights studios—typically RMB 600,000 to 1,000,000 with no loan options (the average property price in the surrounding area was less than ¥3000/m^2), naturally filtered in artists who had already achieved market success and had the capacity to accumulate assets. Many held significant economic and cultural capital, for example, university positions.

> *"The majority of artists residing in the Blue Roof Core Area are easel painters, most of whom are also faculty members within the university system, whilst professional painters (those who earn their living from selling paintings) constitute less than one-tenth of the total."* (Interview with Artist B)

Selectivity thus functioned as a finely tuned governance strategy. It pre-screened and secured the "reliability" of future core actors, reduced ongoing management costs and political risk, and formed an "elite alliance" partnership.



(**a**) (**b**)

Figure 3. (**a**) Blue Roof Art Museum; (**b**) Youth Art Village. Photos by authors.

7.3. A Shift in Governance: From Administration to "Depoliticised" Rule

Assetisation brought a profound change in the mode of governance. In the first five years, government worked with the operator to coordinate public projects. Following the opening of the new Blue Roof Art Museum (see Figure 3a), exhibitions were held on a regular basis. Municipal and district departments continued to support major events such as city-level arts festivals, positioning Blue Roof as a flagship for contemporary art in Southwest China. Blue Roof Development Co. retained a cultural division alongside its development and property functions and collaborated with public bodies to organise Biennials (one of China's most renowned art exhibitions). On site, a balanced mix emerged between studios, semi-galleries and service businesses catering to artists and audiences. Established artists remained central figures and collective activities such as public lectures and charity performances took place from time to time.

Gradually, however, the role of government shifted. It moved from direct administrative intervention to setting rules and maintaining boundaries, while the complex routines of operation, management and order-keeping were internalised by asset owners—the artists, and Blue Roof Development Co. Specifically, the municipality expanded collateral frameworks so that cultural intellectual property and land-use rights could secure credit, while maintaining a streamlined content review rather than tiered approvals. Where the scenic-area rationale called for public events, the subdistrict helped to organise festivals; where private initiative was sufficient, it stepped back. By 2014/15, core construction was complete and selective ownership had reshaped the site's physical form and its community structure.

A multi-layered Blue Roof ecosystem took shape. Phases I to III formed the core property zone, comprising studios with collective land certificates, a functioning gallery and museum platform, and a suite of supporting cultural enterprises. Roughly one third of visible frontage consisted of artist-run studios or semi-galleries (see Figure 4a,b). A smaller share housed institutional galleries and non-profit spaces. Overall, about one third of the

visible space comprised the artist's own open studio or semi-gallery, while more than half of the ground-floor, street-facing units supported for-profit cultural enterprises such as furniture workshops, photography studios and design firms serving the cluster. On the periphery, the Youth Art Village operated as a rental zone for early-career painters and designers. Further out, places such as Gardenia Street evolved into an informal satellite network, where interactions with the main site relied more on non-geographical, internal community connections (see Figures 1 and 2).



(**a**) (**b**)

Figure 4. (**a**) Some public art spaces; (**b**) The interior of an artist's studio. Photos by authors.

7.4. After 2018: Ecological Reorientation and the Consolidation of an "Enclave"

Tensions were present from the outset and surfaced as policy priorities shifted. Property prices in Blue Roof reached their peak during this period, having risen by more than fourfold, with rents increasing in tandem from an initial ¥10/m^2 per month to over ¥50/m^2 per month (according to interview notes). Although the land-use commitments for cultural production were clear, in practice, faced with enormous financial incentives, enforcement was uneven. As the operator, Blue Roof Co. was essentially a property company, and its commercial imperatives sit uneasily with artists' desire for a pure creative environment. The actions of property owners were more difficult to control. Some studios were resold or leased to commercial entities operating "under the guise of the arts industry", in exchange for increased rental value while evading punishment.(see Figure 5a,b).



(**a**) (**b**)

Figure 5. (**a**) Numerous commercial enterprises moved in, such as wedding photography companies; (**b**) Some artists sold their studios and moved away. Photos by authors.

Elsewhere, artists informally converted parts of their studios into live–work spaces, reducing shared open areas and altering footfall patterns. Proposals emerged to formalise artist-led rules, including advisory committees for programme curation and tenant review. Artists voiced similar concerns in interviews and informal meetings, but these rarely escalated into collective action and binding mechanisms did not materialise.

> *"If I were merely renting a studio, I could be more forgiving of it, as I'd have no grounds to demand anything of others. If one day this arts district becomes too commercialised and I can't accept it, then I'll choose to leave and live elsewhere—that's not uncommon for artists. But since I bought a property here, I can't bear to see the place where I've lived long-term gradually overtaken by all sorts of tourists and shops."* (Interview with Artist C)

Within the operating company, disagreements grew after most unit sales had been completed. Managers debated how long costly cultural programming could be maintained and to what extent stricter tenant vetting would dampen returns.

> *"Our company incurred exceptionally high operational costs for the Blue Roof Art Museum and the entire district, with a very difficult return on investment. Consequently, these departments have now been largely disbanded, retaining only essential liaison personnel."* (Interview with Staff Member A)

At the same time, the artist community itself fragmented along generational lines, degrees of market dependence and institutional affiliation. Established artists enjoyed stable property rights. Younger practitioners struggled to remain in the Youth Art Village as rents rose and leases shortened, leading to high mobility. The absence of effective collective consultation diminished the ability to forge shared values or joint negotiating power, and a pyramid-like internal structure became more pronounced.

More decisive change came from the top-down. On the one hand, from 2019 onwards, local government departments (primarily the Propaganda Department, Cultural Industry Office, and Financial Regulatory Bureau) collaborated with locally partnered financial institutions and park management to establish a cultural and creative financial service station within art districts. These stations offer Blue Roof residents services including asset valuation and intellectual property pledge loans. While this initiative partially addressed the core challenge of "art studios and similar specialised assets struggling to secure financial backing," it also intensified the assetisation of the entire space. On the other hand, Chengdu recalibrated its citywide strategy by prioritising ecological protection and drawing tighter green-belt lines at the urban edge. In this adjustment, the municipal government's active promotion of Blue Roof gradually diminished. The Chengdu Biennale secured a new primary venue under fresh administrative sponsorship. Blue Roof hosted several parallel exhibitions, but the intensity of official support declined. The operator scaled back its cultural division to the minimum needed for venue management and liaison. The cumulative effect was an inward turn: studios remained occupied, private shows continued, and small exhibitions circulated through local networks, but the outward-facing pulse slowed (see Figure 6).

> *"Blue Roof was once very busy, but things are different now. In fact, after 2015, a series of curated events and related activities largely disappeared. There are still some professional curators and associations within the art district, and private exhibitions continue to take place."* (Interview with Artist D)

The surrounding landscape changed more visibly. During the tourism-led phase, the "Hetang Yuese" scenic area had been densely packed with cafés, teahouses and leisure businesses. With the ecological turn after 2018, many such structures were demolished for

non-compliance and parts of the area reverted to agriculture. The lotus ponds that had given the theme park its name were filled in or reduced, as farmland reclaimed the ground (see Figure 7).

By 2022–2023, the core Blue Roof cluster remained intact and continued to house established and mid-career artists. Many no longer relied primarily on local sales, and instead placed greater emphasis on ties with leading markets in Beijing and Shanghai. A small amount of galleries and cultural enterprises still operated on site, but most activity moved into private spheres. Artists who had once rented affordably in Youth Art Village were displaced by shorter leases and higher rents.

> *"Over the past few years, our rent has multiplied several times over, and many former friends have moved away. Presently, fewer than 20 tenants at Blue Roof Youth Art Village are engaged in the arts, with perhaps no more than five artists in the traditional sense… Simply relying on the sale of artworks to sustain this place is unrealistic."* (Interview with Artist E)

> *"A nursery previously offered a substantial sum to purchase one of Blue Roof's spacious buildings, but our company declined their proposal as it lacked artistic merit."* (Interview with Staff Member B)



Figure 6. Some private art exhibitions. Photos by authors.

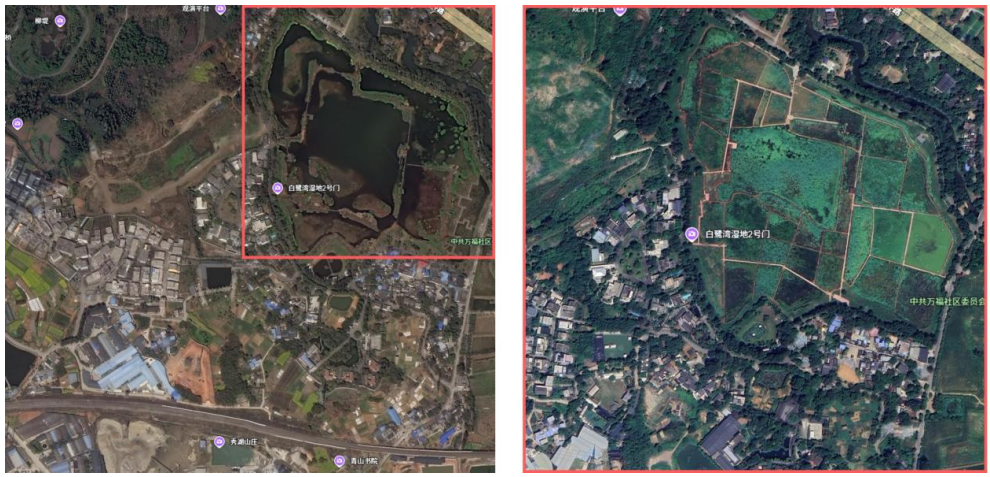

Figure 7. Following ecological regulation, extensive surrounding areas were reconverted into agricultural land/ecological woodland. Data Source: Google maps, drawn by authors.

Blue Roof Company's screening of commercial tenants within the art district persisted, and non-art proposals were rejected, while the broader retail and leisure belts beyond the boundary had largely been removed. Internal commercialisation driven by property owners continued to intensify. The entire area came to resembled an island of studios (reduced) and art-related commercial entities (increased) set within an increasingly green matrix. Consequently, both the rental rates (approximately ¥50/m^2 per month) and sale prices (around ¥13,000/m^2) across the entire area experienced a slight decline, though they remained several times higher than at the time of its establishment.

The present configuration is the joint outcome of its assetised origin and the subsequent policy shift. Legal property rights gave artists valuable, stable assets. These insulated the core area from stronger policy and market swings in adjacent neighbourhoods and protected the district's physical fabric, but the actual use of internal spaces remains less controllable. At the same time, the rights hardened physical and social boundaries and cut many of the spillover channels that had once surrounded it. Retail and entertainment belts that formerly amplified its influence were displaced by new urban priorities, further lowering public visibility and internalising transformation. What remains is an enclave for stable production and small-scale exchange, extending outward mainly through non-geographical networks rather than acting as a driver of spatial change.

8. Discussion: Asset-Based Governance at the Urban Fringe

The Blue Roof case shifts focus from creative districts or land finance to the practical dimensions of governance: the design and distribution of rights within cultural spaces. Interpreting the research through this lens reveals that assetisation is not a by-product of finance, but an independent governance process. What matters is the establishment work whereby production spaces can be legally defined, allocable to selected producers and subject to contractual conditions [61,62]. This enables future users to transfer rights in accordance with stipulated terms. Once established, this framework of rights not only stabilises spatial occupation but also reconfigures daily norms, channelling conflicts towards institutionalised forums. Ultimately, it transforms the spatial form of the entire area.

A sequence becomes visible in Table 3. Rights are dispersed to producers under cultural-use zoning on collective construction land. Titles are long and transferable, with eligibility screens and covenants. The operator manages order and reputation, echoing findings on platform-led governance in Chinese cultural parks [35,41,49]. Residual public control is expressed through planning and registration, not municipal freehold. The observed outcomes match the expected position. The production core is resilient through shocks. Public interfaces thin when city priorities shift. Programming replaces default access. Liquidity tools after 2018 have raised asset intensity without funded interface obligations. Selection concentrates curatorial voice in the core and increases churn in rental peripheries. The case therefore confirms the comparative inference: stability follows enclosure and screening, while openness requires explicit, resourced covenants. Stability and enclave formation therefore appear not as external shocks but as consequences internal to the property regime that secured tenure.

The temporal and spatial effects of this design are emphasised. Temporally, anticipated returns are written into present rules on duration, resale and collateral, thereby disciplining current actions and expectations [60]. Studios hold a 50-year commercial leasehold, legally transferable but with annual ground rent payable. Property values across the entire area peaked at 8–10 times their original purchase price. Spatially, the same design determines the thickness of public interfaces through boundary setting, zoning and eligibility territories.

Table 3. Timeline—analytical dimensions for Blue Roof.

Phase (Years)	Policy or Trigger	Land/legal Status	Rights Design and Eligibility	Governance Trajectory	Openness /Public Interface	Assetisation–Timeline Relation
1994–2005 Old Blue Roof	Bottom-up site search	Informal rentals in fringe industrial sheds	None; short leases; open entry	Ad hoc tenant–landlord relations	Porous and informal	Pre-assetisation baseline
2005–2008 Transition in Sansheng	Scenic-area plan; cultural-industry support	Collective construction land inside scenic boundary	Pilot leases; invited artists; design misfit noted	Experimental approach	Tourism-facing	Preparation and standard-setting for enclosure
2009–2012 Establishment (Phases I–II)	Urban–rural integration pilot enables lawful transfer	Collective land restructured and registered for cultural use	50-year studio ownership; cultural-use only; eligibility screens; transfer within rules	Platform company and owners' committees; rules on use and mix	Managed interface; museum and curated events	Enclosure and property formation; initial capitalisation via sales
2013–2018 Consolidation	Branding and events continue under stable rules	Registered ownership is valid within the core area; secondary transfers occur	Covenants enforced; core owners stable; periphery rental for early-career artists	Owner-led asset management; operator routines	Visible but curated interface; semi-galleries and service firms	Commensuration and governance realignment; value appreciation
2018–present Inward shift	Ecological reorientation; green-belt tightening; cultural-finance station (from 2019)	Core area is protected; uneven enforcement at margins	Covenants persist; some live–work drift; proposals for stricter vetting	Cultural programmes liaison duties; compliance-focused management	Public interface thins; programming replaces default access	Liquidity deepening and selective enclosure; resilient core, thinned edges

This meso-level account refines state entrepreneurialism by identifying the micro-mechanism through which governing through the market actually operates. Existing narratives emphasise municipal land supply, platform companies and branding [18–20,47–49]; the Chengdu sequence adds the rights engineering that pre-structures the market order in law before transactions occur. Predictability, fewer frictions and lower coordination costs, often celebrated as virtues of entrepreneurial governance [18–20], appear here as products of this rights mediation. So do the drawbacks: selective exclusion, a contraction of public interfaces and a narrowing of experimental practices at the margin. Events persist, but they are increasingly calibrated to protect asset value and manage risk. What had been an expansive claim on urban space becomes a managed interface that can be tuned up or down as conditions change. This shift is reflected in the artists' strategies of moving from protecting spaces to defending boundaries. Crucially, both advantages and costs stem from the same institutional source, namely the selective empowerment of property rights.

Bringing producer ownership into cultural geography also clarifies the internal social field of art districts. In the Chengdu case study, title-holding artists have acquired voice and authority over curation, norms and reputational thresholds; younger or more precarious practitioners in rental peripheries have experienced higher turnover rates and diminished bargaining power. This is similar to prior literature [44], yet such stratification is not simply a socio-economic gradient. It is a constitutional effect of the rights architecture that defines who counts as a member with standing, who participates conditionally and who is relegated to the position of visitor or audience, thereby echoing the political-economic geography perspective emphasised earlier [61,68].

Moreover, combining the above discussion with the international cases cited in Section 6 offers a complementary perspective on the structural relationship between assetisation, capital structure, and openness. Whilst this relationship is not deterministic, its directionality remains similar across diverse contexts. First, openness increases when the public sector retains residual ownership of land, whereas it diminishes when land is commoditised into private perpetual property rights or highly leveraged leasehold rights (see [71–73,79,80]). Second, openness is inversely related to expected returns and leverage at the asset level, as heightened financial pressures tend to drive public domain closure and restricted access (see [74–76]). Third, the relationship between high assetisation and closure

is not absolute; openness can be maintained if the public domain is protected through ownership arrangements, lease conditions, and allocation procedures.

Therefore, we contend that the key to enhancing openness without compromising stability lies in a more diverse rights bundle: setting aside some titled units for early-career artists and non-profit institutions; introducing an equity-sharing operational model; and establishing dedicated budget for public access, accompanied by clear objectives and reporting mechanisms.

9. Conclusions

Through the case of Blue Roof, this paper argues that where urban production spaces are assetised under selective entry, governance is likely to move from administrative steering to owner-led asset management with a reduction in visible contention. Where title security coincides with strong boundary rules, a stability–enclave trade-off can be expected, visible as resilience of core functions and a diminution of spillovers. Where title is concentrated in established cohorts, internal stratification solidifies and experimental practices become more fragile.

When this outcome is combined with the international case studies presented earlier, it points to a governance mechanism for asset-based cultural production spaces with empirical relevance beyond specific national contexts. The spatial outcomes depend on a series of design choices within this process: residual control, covenant strength, operator mandate, stakeholder selection and liquidity rules. This mechanism can help anticipate when stability will come with enclosure and shows how openness can be secured without abandoning producer ownership. This framework thus provides a reference for sustainability in production-space design, rights-structure review, public-interface cost assessment and adjustments to access rights and mobility, especially within peri-urban spaces characterised by complex mixed rights structures.

The analysis has limits. It is a qualitative case study that focuses on the establishment phase of assetisation rather than later financial layering or welfare outcomes. This scoping isolates causal mechanisms but calls for broader tests. Comparative work across cities could incorporate quantitative data analysis. Mixed methods, such as registry and covenant analysis paired with ethnography and programme data, can show how publicness is made and remade under different rights mixes.

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Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted according to the guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki, and approved by Cardiff University's Ethics Committee (date of approval: 11 October 2021).

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Appendix A

Blue Roof Art District – Buliding Use Register

Blue Roof Phase I

Building Number	Institution/Studio Name	Program/Use
A1	蓝顶1号艺术空间	Public Art Space
	热蔻摄影	Commecial Photography
	承色空间	Coffee Shop
A2	No signboard	Residential (converted)
A3	Hoho工作室	Studio
A4	No signboard	Residential (converted)
A5	No signboard	Residential (converted)
A6	No signboard	Residential (converted)
A7	唐可工作室	Studio
A8	No signboard	Studio
A9	No signboard	Vacancy
A10	成都罗师兄家公寓	Airbnb
A11-12		
A13	罗发辉工作室	Studio
	延边朝鲜美食	Restaurant
A14	No signboard	Vacancy
A15-16	No signboard	Studio
A17	No signboard	Residential (converted)

Blue Roof Phase II

Building Number	Institution/Studio Name	Current Use
1	蓝顶美术馆	Public Art Space
2-202	拾星史艺术	Studio
2-203	田亮工作室	Studio
3-101	旧物煮	Coffee Shop
3-102	空间设计工作室	Studio
3-104	萌宠文化传播公司	Commercial Corporation
3-106	元渡工作室	Studio
3-206	张力维工作室	Studio
3-111	张琳莉陶艺工作室	Studio
3-112	田也空间设计	Commercial Corporation
3-113	廖涛工作室	Studio
3-116	同理心空间	Commercial Corporation
4	No signboard	Residential (converted)
5-3	马力工作室	Studio
6-3	李熙工作室	Studio
7-1	曾妮工作室	Studio
7-3	大象摄影	Commecial Photography
8-1	夏科工作室	Studio
9-1	朱峰雕塑工作室	Studio
9-2	徐泽工作室	Studio
10-1	李耕燕工作室	Studio
10-2	宠物店	Commercial Corporation
11 1	舒昊工作室	Studio
12-1	casa moss	Commercial Corporation
12-2	天珠联盟交流中心	Commercial Corporation
13	NFD ART花植艺术中心	Commercial Corporation
14	No signboard	Residential (converted)
15	No signboard	Vacancy
16	锐上工作室	Studio
17	莫赛空间文化公司	Commercial Corporation
18	圣威隆供应链管理有限公司	Commercial Corporation
19	No signboard	Residential (converted)
20	张晓刚工作室	Studio
21	尤是非处书院	Commercial Corporation
22	青少年创新中心	Commercial Corporation
23	No signboard	Residential (converted)
24	No signboard	Vacancy
25	柠檬艺术庄园	Commercial Corporation
28	候鸟	Commercial Corporation
29	唯心藏文化影像馆	Commecial Photography
31	予柒书婚纱摄影	Commecial Photography
32	如意相馆	Commecial Photography
33	佛止杰工作室	Studio
34	No signboard	Residential (converted)
35	No signboard	Residential (converted)
37	章智男工作室	Studio
38	罗中立工作室	Studio
39-40	家琨建筑设计事务所	Commercial Corporation
41	AND画廊	Public Art Space
42	柚子树下	Commercial Corporation
43	郭燕工作室	Studio
45-4	启航木子李传媒	Commercial Corporation
46-1	焦兴涛工作室	Studio
46-2	朱沙工作室	Studio
47	铁墩墩工作室	Studio
48	木格堂	Commercial Corporation
50-1	11之岛	Commercial Corporation
51-1	喜乐影像工作室	Commecial Photography
51-2	邱岸雄工作室	Commercial Corporation
52	筑森设计	Commercial Corporation
55-2	佛正泉工作室	Studio
56-1	董蓓绯艺术工作室	Studio
57	与文里57艺术书廊	Commercial Corporation
58	汪喵/太医堂（宠物）	Commercial Corporation
59	方力钧工作室	Studio

Youth Art Village

Building Number	Institution/Studio Name	Program/Use
1	继续写涂鸦仓库	Studio
2	No signboard	Residential (converted)
2-2	工作室	Studio
3	大自然垂钓休闲中心	Commercial Corporation
4	No signboard	Vacancy
10	铂光镜影设计工作室	Commecial Photography
9-6	咖啡馆	Coffee Shop
8-15	大胡子咖啡/面包店	Coffee Shop
12	No signboard	Vacancy
Left ones without accurate numbers	No signboard	Residential (converted)

Blue Roof Phase III

Building Number	Institution/Studio Name	Current Use
62	家庭美术馆	Public Art Space
63	Sukoon 63 Gallery	Public Art Space
65-3	甲空间	Coffee Shop
66-1-1	茶空间	Coffee Shop
66-2-1	钢琴工作室	Commercial Corporation
66-2-4	No signboard	Vacancy
66-3-2	朱可染艺术工作室	Studio
66-3-4	杨巍工作室	Studio
67-1-2	艺术工作室	Studio
67-1-2	室内设计公司	Commercial Corporation
67-1-4	王小双工作室	Studio
67-2-3	宋杨空间设计	Commercial Corporation
67-2-4	蜗牛独立设计工作室	Studio
67-3-2	自然营地	Airbnb
67-3-3	栖居民宿	
68-2	图林影调科研究室	Commecial Photography
68-4	茶工作室	Coffee Shop
69-2	李典/李晖艺术工作室	Studio
69-3	以今服装艺术空间	Commercial Corporation
69-4	黄明进工作室	Studio
70-1	鹿岛儿童摄影	Commecial Photography
70-2	花奈尔花艺	Commercial Corporation
70-3	吕康佑工作室	Studio
71-1	No signboard	Residential (converted)
71-2	葫芦文化	Commercial Corporation
71-3	徐牧原工作室	Studio
72-2	板衍家居	Commercial Corporation
72-5	五彩基金	Public Art Foundation
73 1	操控植物	Commercial Corporation
75	何多苓美术馆	Public Art Space
78	鼻树摄影	Commecial Photography
79	No signboard	Public Art Space
81	No signboard	Residential (converted)
82-1	中医/艾灸馆	Commercial Corporation
82-2	蒋兴工作室	Studio
82-4	2、工作室	Studio
82-6	汤宇工作室	Studio
82-8	墨名堂工作室	Studio
82-11	素派创意设计	Commercial Corporation
82-13	许永康工作室	Studio
82-14	张偌铭工作室	Studio
82-17	花艺设计	Commercial Corporation
83-1	胡铭文艺术工作室	Studio
83-4	空谷绘画工作室	Studio
83-6	二十一工作室	Studio
83-7	陈青工作室	Studio
83-8	古琴/绘画工作室	Commercial Corporation
83-10	赵敏艺术工作室	Studio
83-11	阿嘉娜工作室	Studio
83-12	蒋国菅工作室	Studio
83-17	宋永兴工作室	Studio
83-19	欧阳雪竹工作室	Studio
83-20	邓先志工作室	Studio
83-21	郭建婷工作室	Studio
85-1-1	D空间	Commercial Corporation
85-2-2	珂嘉花园	Commercial Corporation
85-2-4	曼达印刷工作室	Commercial Corporation

Notes

Layout: the site's spatial arrangement is irregular; list/numbering is for reference only and may contain minor inaccuracies.
Access: some buildings were not accessible; uses were inferred when needed (e.g., laundry visible → residential conversion; incomplete windows/doors with no activity → vacant).
Categories: cafés and restaurants are listed separately; other art-related shops and non-art firms are grouped as Commercial.
Mixed use: some buildings host multiple tenants or sublets; noted where observed but coverage may be incomplete.
Currency: uses verified October 2025; later changes may differ.
Naming: building names keep on-site designations (mostly Chinese).

Colour key:
Green = Art studio; Light brown = Commercial; Grey = Public art space; Blue = Vacancy; White = Residential (converted)

Figure A1. Building Use Registration for Blue Roof Art District.

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