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Assembling UK-India Relations through the Cultural and Creative Industries

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Culture and the creative economy reflect inherently ideological interpretations and meanings when embedded within policy agendas. We situate culture and the creative economy within contemporary UK-India relations by specifically charting the rise of the CCIs as a policy agenda. Utilising the notion of *assembling futures* (Harrison 2015), we argue that the rise of CCIs reflects wider currents and processes of marketisation and neoliberalism alongside more hard power strategies pertaining to the uses of culture within areas of trade, security and defence by respective UK and Indian governments. By analysing the 2030 Roadmap for UK-India Future Relations, we highlight how culture and creativity have been hardwired into the construction of a narrative for strategic UK-India relations precisely as definitional, regulatory, trade and policy terms of the CCIs are being assembled.

Keywords: creative economy; cultural and creative industries; cultural policy; UK-India relations

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Introduction

The publication of the UK government policy paper *2030 Roadmap for India-UK Future Relations* in 2021 signalled a shift in the UK's policy towards India. The '2030 Vision' articulated the UK's strategic agenda towards India with explicit mention of culture, technological collaboration and connectivity. In the report, culture is harnessed as a tool to 'enhance collaboration to support the development of our Creative Economies to create wealth and secure livelihoods' (5.3) with an emphasis on digital innovation and entrepreneurship. The prioritization of the 'creative economy' in this UK-India policy report emerged out of a broader backdrop; the last decade has seen a scaling up of UK-India bilateral relations around trade, investment and technological collaboration. In the wake of Brexit, these areas have increasingly been emphasised in the formation of a 'new India-UK relationship'. This shift needs also to be placed within broader global discourses in which 'creative industries' is increasingly being used interchangeably, or even as a replacement for 'creative economy' in ways that reflect neoliberal and nationalising strategies.

Furthering the argument that culture and the creative economy play an ideological role within any given context in *assembling futures* (Harrison 2015), this article aims to unpack the acronym CCI derived from the concept of cultural and creative industries and to explore the significance of its rise in the forging of a 'new India-UK relationship.' We argue that CCIs as a distinctive area is a recent development and that it can only be understood within a critical analysis of how cultural policy has been assembled. For the global South or countries deemed to be 'developing' or 'emerging economies', the creative economy has been poised as a policy agenda which will facilitate their transition from developing to developed status. This has been highlighted within the burgeoning literature on the cultural and creative industries in India which has embraced the term within different teleologies of historical, sectoral, market, and regulatory infrastructures. This has overarchingly seen an emphasis towards analyses of commercialization in deriving economic value from cultural value (Dasgupta and Clini, 2023; Dasgupta et al 2024; Shaban, Vermeylen and Handke, 2023) and CCIs as garnering outcomes of social and economic development (Malik and Dudrah, 2016), all of which uphold an underlying status quo of capitalist penetration in which arts, crafts and technology have all been strategically positioned within frameworks and policy agendas of the cultural and creative

industries. In this article, we are critical of the neoliberal and national policy framings which are often assumed within this literature and thus approach our analysis of the rise of the CCIs within this light. In particular, we argue that the interpretation and embedding of cultural heritage and digital technology within the CCIs inflect respective UK and India national policies as well as shifting UK-India bilateral political and economic relations within changing global economic and political processes.

Reading CCIs as an assemblage

The term CCIs itself reflects a complex assemblage which welds together heritage (history, culture, communities and symbols which reflect back) and creative manufacturing or creative industries (commodified modern innovations which look to the future) for the purpose of constructing visions of CCI futures. The idea of *assembling futures* is inspired by assemblage theory which recognises that social complexity constitutes the component and interdependent parts of a unit (here, CCIs) which are neither stable nor static and never operate in isolation (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Latour 2005; DeLanda 2016). As an assemblage, we posit that the CCIs mark not only a policy agenda, trend, 'flow' or a particular moment, but the conjoining of history, culture, creative economy, and digitalization within a neoliberal framing of industries. Thus, more than finding a singular definition of CCIs, there is much to gain from looking at the particular assemblage of specific 'CCI' initiatives, to understand how culture is framed in the initiative, what are its component parts, what kinds of audiences or publics it is seen to serve, and the nature of 'value' or growth it generates, and for whom.

The term 'cultural and creative industries' and its hitherto acronym CCIs is a neologism coined relatively recently after more than two decades of debates around the relationship between cultural policy and creative and cultural industries. The idea of cultural and creative 'industries' was inserted into cultural policy debates due to forces of neoliberalism through which interpretations of cultural policy were extended beyond systems of cultural governance and the influence of government action (Hesmondhalgh and Pratt, 2005) to also focus on intellectual property, copyright, e-commerce and regulatory frameworks.

The ascent of CCIs within contemporary cultural policy has a specific rooting in the political and economic context of the global North, and the UK has played a particularly formative role in the inception and coining of the terminology. The UK has even claimed to have defined the term (Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2023) of this nascent field whose emergence has coincided with the UK's economic and political position vis-a-vis Brexit. However, the term, as well as its component parts 'cultural industries' and 'creative industries', is by no means stable, as is reflected in ongoing debates and disagreements about definition (Markusen et al. 2008).

Thus, despite a seemingly apolitical appearance, the CCIs illustrate the inherently ideological function that cultural policy plays within any given context in *assembling futures* (Harrison 2015). The principal aim of this article is not to engage in the definitional debate around the CCIs but rather to reflect on its historical and policy emergence in order to understand the different, often contradictory, ideas, forces and imaginaries which it brings together.

To examine the field of CCIs we suggest several questions be asked in relation to broader political, economic, social and technological/digital processes:

- *How and where is culture being drawn upon and shaped in the telling of the past for assembling futures for whom and by whom?*
- *What does the policy interpretation of the creative economy reflect about the deepening of neoliberal processes across national economies and the global economy?*
- *What constitutes the area of CCIs as a policy agenda and what are the networks and platforms which are being used to drive and enable its ubiquitous positioning in the production of particular futures?*

We argue that the UK-India CCI narrative and agenda reflects assembling futures structured through three central principles: a) the commodification of culture, b) ideological and territorialising framings of national culture, and c) bilateral relations within a global context of technology, trade and growth. The political forces most invested have been those which have explicitly utilised culture and creativity within market-oriented terms as a means to attract capital and encourage trade and investment

within their national policy strategies. The late nineties UK New Labour and post-2010 Conservative governments and in India the BJP government from 2014 to present are cases in point. It is precisely at the juncture of the post-2010 UK Conservative government and post-2014 BJP Indian government's mobilizations of the CCI agenda within UK-India bilateral relations where this article focuses its attention. We examine how, and with what consequences, the language and framework of CCIs is being mobilised as a key vehicle through which to negotiate UK-India relations in the 2020s.

Assembling CCI global trade and market futures

The emergence of CCI as an object of policy has been the subject of much scholarship and debate. It is widely agreed that the concept is a recent one, taking shape in initiatives adopted by global north governments, and particularly the UK, in the final decades of the twentieth century. It is also commonly agreed that the term brings together a variety of different, even antagonistic, frameworks and approaches. Yet, such analysis has not, so far, stretched to consider what this complex history has meant for how the CCI term has been taken up beyond the global north beyond its adoption within economic growth strategies. Harrison (2015: 27) offers a dialogical model for thinking about heritage practices as 'connectivity ontologies' which are structured across contexts, domains, and fields '*from* the past, *in* the present, *for* the future' and thus constitute assembling futures in relation to our above stated questions.

We argue here that a deeper understanding of the different politics and agendas shaping the assemblage of CCIs in the global north, and particularly the UK, is critical to understanding how this term has rapidly proliferated and now operates internationally and across contexts.. Our enquiry here is an attempt to examine the past and present of the CCIs agenda as an assembling future.

The term cultural industries is usually traced back to the early Frankfurt School whose reflections on the rise of America as an economic and cultural superpower during the post-war period expressed deep concern about the industrialization of creative production and the alienation of the artist to the position of a wage-laborer (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1944). As commercial cultural production grew in scale and complexity, debates about culture and its relationship to economic modes of production took on a wide variety of

forms (see O'Connor 2010). The emergence of the field of cultural studies brought with it a focus on culture as a site of hegemony and power (Hall and Jefferson 1976). There were also increasingly sophisticated studies of the political economy of culture that scrutinised the processes, infrastructure and politics which shaped the production of different cultural outputs (Garnham 1990; Curran and Seaton 1991; Murdock and Golding 1977).

With the ascent of neoliberal ideology in the 1970s and 1980s, discussions of culture and creativity also began to influence business and management literature, with discussions about 'creative leadership', 'creative workers' and 'business culture' (Leadbeater 1999; Tepper 2002). This period was soon followed by the rapid proliferation of the 'information age' and the 'network society' (Castells 1996) through the constant flows of information and increasing connectivity through technology. Castells highlighted this period as being defined by 'a culture of real virtuality' in which technology and new media were forming and formed around emerging information networks. This time period, understood through the lens of post-industrialism (Bell, 1976 and others), saw a rise of information economics, theories of the firm and market, and a turn towards the service economy (Garnham 2005).

The evolution of CCIs as a policy concept is bound up with governments in the global north working to harness the political advantages of these different understandings of culture and creativity against the backdrop of expanding digital capacity. The Australian government's 1994 'Creative Nation' policy, which combined a programme for national expansion in information and technology together with support for 'national culture' is seen as an important landmark in the evolution of the CCIs, though its history is most closely associated with the cultural policy of the New Labour government in the UK in the late 1990s (DCMS, 1998). Bringing together concerns about how to manage the demands of new information and communication technologies with concerns about culture, New Labour sought to put 'arts and culture' and their funding centre stage in politics framing them as a driver of social renewal, public service and even social justice on the one hand, and of economic prosperity and innovation on the other (Pratt 2005; Garnham 2005). This was a symbolic move politically but, as critics have argued, lacked clarity about the different types of cultural outputs encompassed by this term. Further to this, the structure and nature of the industries and relationships producing them has

created situations in which arguments about economic growth and public welfare/goods and democracy are quickly put into tension (Pratt 2005; Garnham 2005).

This tension has become increasingly apparent in the context of the austerity economic politics adopted by UK Conservative governments since 2010. Cuts to arts and culture funding have been significantly severe in the UK through more than a decade of austerity towards public spending, though the spread and extent of these cuts have not been even (Rex and Campbell 2022). Broader social and educational inequalities have been reflected in inequality of access to the arts which is now 'baked into the structure of Britain' (Higgins 2024).

In this context, arts and culture organizations and initiatives that have managed to generate independent revenue streams have been able to operate more easily than those which cannot do this. It has also put constraints on projects that seek to address questions of inequality and marginalization that may generate discomfort for fee paying audiences. Arnold de Simine (2013) has noted how this has shaped the formation of 'memory museums' that on the one hand seek to grapple with uncomfortable pasts while remaining vigilant of the importance of framing their work in commercialised terms of customer satisfaction. Digital creative work[1], still in its relative infancy in the late 1990s, has subsequently shown an agility to thrive in these conditions due to having the advantage of consumer novelty, customer appeal as well as having potential to generate visitor data and even metrics for evidencing user experience and frequency. There is also an efficiency argument around digital industries requiring little physical infrastructure if software and data processes are bought in or if work is outsourced.

The rapid cuts in UK public funding for arts and culture have also shaped how CCIs have been framed in relation to global trade. From the early 2000s onwards, the CCI language was used to pitch British culture as a global commodity but in the last decade, the UK's creative sector has come to be framed as a lucrative market that can offer promising returns for global capital. The positioning of the CCIs as a tradeable UK export has informed a very particular interpretation of culture and creativity as a service or commodity with monetary value and potential national economic gain. It is significant then, that, despite long historical connections to South Asia as a whole, it is in its

relationship with India, the largest market in the region, that UK policy approaches towards CCIs have come to take centre stage.

CCIs across North-South 'Development' Trajectories

While the early 2000s saw CCIs being positioned within the global North and the UK in particular with a growth and trade-oriented trajectory, in the global South, CCIs were being placed within the evolving terminologies on a different footing but across parallel agendas harnessing growth, modernization and development. The publication of *The Creative Economy Report 2013: Widening Local Development Pathways* by the UNDP/UNESCO followed two preceding creative economy reports (2008 and 2010) and was viewed at the time as a milestone for its agenda-setting tone and purpose within debates around priorities and signals within post-2015 development goals. Whereas the 2008 and 2010 reports spoke from an analytical voice 'in part motivated by a frustration at how developing countries found it almost impossible to construct independent creative industries and compete in international markets' (Vickery 2015), the 2013 report was more forthcoming in presenting short localised case studies and illustrations and a proposal for orienting development from a cultural and humanistic set of values, thus presenting an argument for cultural analysis promoting local development pathways. The 2013 report argued against a patronage-based global North-global South flow of development thinking and policy generally associated with UN-led initiatives and presented a case for recognising local culture within conventionally economistic concerns of development by arguing "what we refer to as the 'economy' is bound up with processes of social and cultural relations...the economy itself is a part of culture' (p. 24).

The term CCIs is now widely used by government policies and bodies, large and small companies, arts institutions including galleries and museums, and other stake-holding organizations. The 'creative economy' (also referred to as the 'orange economy') became inscribed as a strategic sector of the global economy when the UN General Assembly declared the International Year of the Creative Economy for Sustainable Development, 2021. This followed the fifteenth session of UNCTAD out of which the Bridgetown Accord called upon UNCTAD to 'place greater emphasis on the social and developmental benefits of the creative and technological sectors, as well as commit and contribute to the

centering of culture as a driver of trade, development and national and regional systems of innovation' (UN Economist Network 2021).

National creative economy strategies reflect both cultural heritage as an inheritance passed down from *previous* generations and national cultural and economic policy as *looking forward* towards creative economy futures. Consequently, national constructions, narratives and contestations on cultural heritage have been subsumed within the creative economy agenda in charting out ongoing and evolving negotiations about how the past is narrated for the future. For instance, 1997 in the UK was a political moment when the creative industries were being propped up in a conscious narrative shift to move away from the cultural significance of the UK's imperial cultural past to 'Cool Britannia' as contemporary cultural future with popular culture, music and creative industries at the centre of this projection of the UK's vision of its past and future. From the early 2000s onwards, the idea of the 'creative sector' in the UK continued to evolve through this prism which aimed to 'showcase the *Best of British* [emphasis ours] across all creative sectors on the world stage, opening new markets and opportunities for exporters to thrive in' (DTI, 2021). The UK government's establishment of the Creative Industries Task Force (CITF) in 1997 and its successor the Creative Industries Council (CIC), the government body which liaises between the DCMS and the creative industries, highlight the increasingly nationalising framework within which the creative industries have been positioned in looking towards 2030.

In the Indian context, since the 1950s cultural policy emerged somewhat differently out of its postcolonial project of asserting and forging national identity (Vatsyayan 1972). The promotion of India as a 'crafts nation' through the establishment of a number of state institutions such as the All India Handicrafts Board (AIHB) and the Central Cottage Industries Emporium (CCIE) in the early years of independence (see McGowan 2021) accompanied a national promotion of cultural heritage seeking to both construct a unified, shared notion of cultural heritage while also accentuating the vastly diverse, regionally defined and fragmentary cultural, social and creative/crafts landscape.

Alongside agriculture, crafts in India are considered a livelihoods-based primary sector of the Indian economy associated with economic and social marginality. In a country where the developmental state has historically viewed the 'traditional crafts' sector as a

means to alleviate poverty and to create 'safety net' employment where agricultural employment, the base of the economy, which has lagged, the 'creative economy' has now, in some senses, been elevated beyond the primary sector to being firmly placed within the tertiary sector. Still being a part of India's broader development discourse, craft traditions (including handloom, textiles and other forms) continue to be highlighted in addressing poverty while simultaneously being embedded within schemes for commoditization, marketization and expansion of the creative economy within a modernizing, digitizing and industrializing India.

The prioritization of private capital investment over public investment and ownership can be seen in the market-orientation of social enterprises emerging in this era of CCI expansion. Despite this, a report by 200 Million Artisans estimates that 78% of handmade and craft-based MSMEs have difficulty in accessing capital (2023) in the creative and manufacturing handmade (CMH) sector. The report aligns its findings with 10 SDGs while simultaneously claiming that the CMH, as a subset of the creative and cultural economy, can "build a climate smart future while also driving inclusion for India's informal and differently-skilled, first mile communities — mostly youth, women, marginalised groups, rural creative producers" (p. 3).

The promise of the livelihoods potential of CCIs posits that they can act as a safety net for the poor as well as presenting alternative or additional sources of wealth creation across society and economic sectors. The strategy of transforming the economy from reliance on agriculture to becoming an advanced economy is an argument which sits firmly within the CCI assemblage with livelihoods at its core. According to Mubayi (2015),

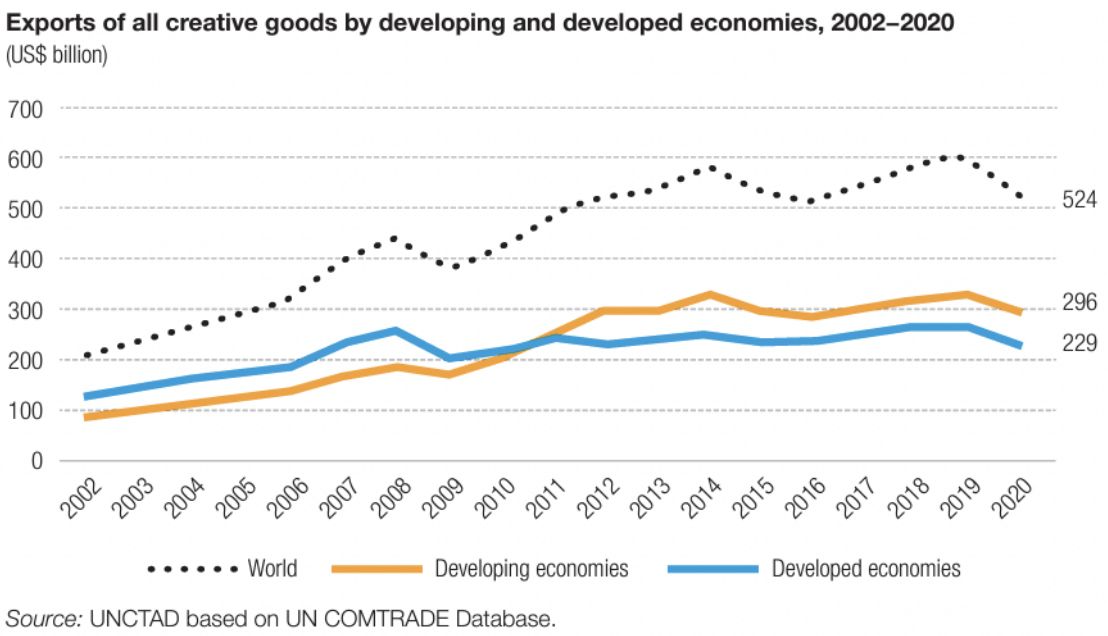
> *Livelihoods development and the provision of social security and services are urgently required to meet the need for survival of large sections of the country's population. This is a gap that can be addressed by crafts, which has an established skill and manufacturing base across the country* (p. 6).

This embracing of culture through a perceived economic growth potential has continued across the UN system to the present. Culture has been embedded within the global economy's explicit promotion of and commitment to the expansion of trade and financial flows and the reliance on markets for economic governance. However, the intangibility

of culture as data for analysis or as an actionable agenda towards development goals has remained a challenge. In attempting to fill this gap, UNESCO's (2009) Framework for Cultural Statistics (FCS), following on from the 1986 FCS, was developed as a classification system derived from the measurement of economic data and various classifications based on economic dimensions of culture as well as social aspects of its production, consumption and distribution. Firmly positioned within the neoliberal global order, this market-oriented approach has prepared fertile ground for culture and the creative economy to morph into the term 'cultural and creative industries'.

The reports by different UN agencies reflect the early stages of the UN system's adoption of the creative economy and industries in its development activity, namely through UNCTAD's Creative Economy and Industries Programme established in 2004 and the work of the UN Office for South-South Cooperation. The shift from the early reports to the 2013 report to "elevate(d) the 'creative economy' on the world economic and development agenda," enabled the use of contemporary CCI terminology and policy in relation to the global South by international institutions such as UNCTAD, UNESCO and UNDP which have been driving growth-orientation with social development goals. Subsequent tracking of trends, magnitude and flows of creative economy goods and services has shown a steady rise of 'developing' economies in the orange economy (Figure 1) and that too in crossing the divides of 'goods'-'services' and 'exporters'-'importers' which traditionally have distinguished the categorical status of economies within global rankings in terms of levels of industrialization and economic structure.

Figure 1.



Source: UNCTAD, 2022

The main distinction used to categorise countries or economies as 'developing' or 'developed' has hinged on whether economies are reliant on primary sectors, such as mining or agriculture, or secondary (manufacturing), tertiary (services) or quaternary (intellectual or knowledge-based). UNCTAD's (2024) revised framework for the creative industries perhaps most poignantly signals how the framing of CCIs within trade and economic growth terms across 'developing' and 'developed' speaks to the broader reshaping of this dichotomy with 'emerging economies' presenting a supposed bridging or transition across it. CCIs embody this supposed transition and encompass the primary, manufacturing, tertiary and knowledge economies. The CCIs present an enabling agenda for 'developing' economies to show diversification of economic activity across the four sectors while providing 'developed' economies with opportunities and markets for the extension and expansion of trade, manufacturing and export. There are also a number of policy convergences which connect the CCIs with other agendas, such as inclusive growth, clean growth, sustainable livelihoods, the circular economy, and zero-carbon targets in addressing climate change. There are a number of initiatives which highlight attempts to build on these convergences, such as the UK AHRC and the British Fashion Council's establishment of the Institute of Positive Fashion in 2021 in addressing excess inventory and eliminating waste in the fashion industry at a time post-Covid when fashion sales had fallen and inventory stocks were in excess supply.

A report by the British Council and Fashion Revolution India (2023) argues the case to weave indigenous knowledge and labor into both the SDGs and supply chains of craft. Significantly, this is proposed through technology and innovation as a means to situate craft within strategies to recognise craft's vulnerabilities within the climate crisis (p. 36).

The CCI agenda has shown an ability to speak across the economic structure. CCIs enable the diffusion of neoliberal principles and processes across the four sectors of the economy (ranging from crafts, manufacturing and industries, digital services to the knowledge-based economy) and have also been promoted as a panacea during moments of crisis, such as after the 2008 financial crisis, during the Covid-19 pandemic and most recently amidst the three-fold food, energy and finance crisis. However, this has not been without challenges of producing and showing demonstrable data with regards to culture or the value and magnitude of the CCIs across sectors and forms (UNCTAD 2024).

Assembling CCI futures across UK-India relations

Between 2010 and 2023 there was an estimated 36.7% decrease in funding in the UK in real terms for museums and galleries from Arts Council England (Sawa 2024). This is indicative of the wider cuts to public spending over fourteen years of austerity under UK Conservative governments. It is precisely at this time that the 2030 UK-India Roadmap was published. In the Roadmap, culture and the creative economy are earmarked as a strategic means 'to encourage connection' between India and the UK as well as a means for achieving the UK's ambitions of increasing its GDP in a post-Brexit context of national economic strategy.

The UK Department for Trade and Investment's (DTI) proposal for a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with India highlights this most succinctly by proposing to 'send a powerful signal to the rest of the world that the UK is an independent trading nation' and goes further by identifying India as a strategic trading partner. The *2030 Roadmap* positions the creative economy 'to support the development of our Creative Economies to create wealth and secure livelihoods... Work together to better understand the value and impact of the formal and informal creative economy through research and policy dialogue for long-term impact on GDP.' The presentation of the CCIs across contemporary trade and economic policy, such as the UK-India 2030 Roadmap, shows

that neoliberal drivers of growth and marketization are informing how CCIs are being positioned both as areas of innovation and expansion as well as tradeable goods and services with tangible economic benefit. This positioning is what has informed the assemblage of CCIs which underlies the acronym's policy significance.

The timely commissioning of two scoping studies on India's cultural heritage and creative industries by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) provides a contextualising moment for the UK-India CCI assemblage formation. These followed several previous UK-commissioned arts and humanities mapping and landscape reports over the previous two decades which sought to identify trends and patterns within India's cultural and creative economy. The first report, *Creative Industries in India Mapping Study* (Hitchen et al. 2022), estimates and attempts to identify the scale, size and growth of the creative industries in India. In building a case for fore fronting the CCIs for UK-India trade and investment relations, the study highlights three 'deep dives' in mapping India's CCI landscape: design for sustainability, AVGC (animation, visual effects and games) in bridging creativity with technology, and geography in terms of regional and locational spread of CCI activity and clusters of concentration across India. The report's discussion and analysis champions the CCIs in India for growth, innovation, and marketization of creativity while identifying challenges for the CCIs within India's policy and governance framework.

The second report, *Tracing the Digital Thread: A Scoping Report of Cultural Heritage Practise in India* (Sutton 2023), analyses project awards under three Newton Fund programmes: Cultural Heritage and Rapid Urbanization in India (2015 and 2017) and Cultural Heritage, Migration and Indian Diaspora (2019). As a point of departure from the Creative Industries report, which has a more economic sector orientation, this report is more focused on learning from and building on the history of critical academic engagement with cultural heritage policy, practice and critique in India. *Tracing the Digital Thread* outlines the policy importance of fostering an 'eco-system' for the CCIs which is attuned to the complex and changing environment of contemporary India. It also points to the importance of the existence and survival of different types of organizations and partnerships, particularly in light of funding constraints for cultural heritage activity, and central government levels of regulation and controls on cultural policy. While Hitchen et al. (2022) reveal a more 'industry' vision of the CCIs and Sutton (2023)

outlines an ‘eco-system’ approach, what bridges the two reports is how digital and technological innovation within the creative economy are identified as important areas for cultivation and incubation within broader visions for CCI future agendas.

We argue that the hardwiring of the CCIs into the 2030 UK-India Roadmap has occurred precisely as the definitional, regulatory, trade and policy terms of the CCIs is being formulated through mutually aligned neoliberal and national (majoritarian) principles. To surface the assemblage of interests at play here we restate the three questions earlier posed in this article to better understand the forces shaping the rise to ubiquity of the CCIs (in general but also more specifically at this moment of UK-India strategic relations).

(1) *How and where is culture being drawn upon and shaped in the telling of the past for the shaping of UK-India futures for whom and by whom?*

Culture is selectively drawn upon in the development of a centralising narrative for India’s cultural and creative landscape. ‘Unity in diversity’ has been a hallmark of Indian nationalism since the independence movement and subsequently in postcolonial India and has been one of the most enduring and recurring themes within Indian social and cultural policy over time. National political parties in India, namely the Congress Party and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), have utilised centralising discourses by instrumentalising cultural policy through the telling of the past and the shaping of cultural institutions as a vehicle for mobilising popularity and shaping national identity, the outcome of which has been a continual gravitation of cultural policy towards majoritarian themes The overtly Hindu majoritarian rhetoric of the BJP’s 2014 election campaign culminated in the party’s landslide electoral victories in 2014 and 2019 and, though with less popularity, in the 2024 election. Culture and heritage as pasts and futures have been actively invoked by central political parties, with the BJP being the most overtly active with ‘tried and tested tactics and themes and Hindu nationalist overtones where and when they were relevant’ (Jaffrelot 2015). However, the telling of cultural pasts in the shaping of futures cuts across Indian mainstream political divides and the ‘unity’ angle has provided a standard script across decades in postcolonial India’s social and cultural policy and is thus not something new. What is distinctive since 2014 is the saffronization of the public sphere which is an outcome of the reshaping of cultural institutions towards centralising principles directed by the state, explicit majoritarian rhetoric based on the scripting of identities to religion,

and the acceptance and acceptability of assertively Hindutva cultural production (see Purohit, 2023). Approval of the Indian government's introduction of further measures of certification and censorship on the film industry was passed in 2023 through the Cinematograph Act (2021) which appeared to be primarily focused on piracy. It notably states that a film's certification can be revoked based on viewer complaints even if the content has been approved by the Censor Board of Film Certification (CBFC). As an example of the saffronization of public culture, the Act has been widely understood to be a threat to artistic freedom. The accelleraton of India's CCIs agenda since 2019 has notably occurred during this time of centralising political power and deepening majoritarian government directives within India's economic, political and cultural landscape.

Prior to 2019, previous UK governments had only tacitly accepted or showed lukewarm commitment to pronouncing India as a potential bilateral partner, in part due to global criticism of the role of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, then Chief Minister of Gujarat, in the anti-Muslim pogroms in 2002. The post-2019 UK Conservative government has openly accepted the BJP Indian government's majoritarian agenda enveloped within its commitment to make India a priority trade and investment bilateral partner as it devised its post-Brexit strategy of Indo-Pacific and India-UK relations. This strategy is outlined in the 2030 Roadmap as a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP), with principles and areas of mutual interest:

> Both [*India and the UK*] are suitably placed to bring their respective strengths to address global challenges with regard to climate, security, terrorism and pandemics and believe that democratic norms and principles are the mainstay for maintaining a rules based international system and respect for universal human rights (UK Government, 2021).

Defense, security and counter-terrorism are situated at the centre of *The 2030 Roadmap*, framing the 'hard power' which underlines its territorialising unity narrative while culture and the creative economy reflect what Nye (1990) argues to be an illustration of strategic uses of 'soft power' showing that 'as the instruments of power change, so do strategies' (p.158). While acknowledging its limitations, Nye's largely Westphalian/Eurocentric understanding of international relations and strategic power asks an important question

relevant to our enquiry here: 'Power for what?' Commenting on the shifts that took place at the end of the Cold War and predicting new modes of strategic policy, the insight that 'power is now passing from the capital-rich to the information-rich' predicted the ways in which the diffusion of power through new modes of communication, information and technology would operate as a form of soft power alongside and in tandem with the use of military force, economic coercion and other forms of hard power.

Setting a national narrative requires a tightly controlled and targeted public and international relations projection in order for soft power to be effectively tailored to the publics it seeks to appeal to. In 2023 the Indian Government granted a contract to Oglivy and Mather (the India-based design and media company which created the 2002 Ministry for Tourism's Incredible India! Campaign) who were tasked with 'build[ing] a brand for India'. The result was the Visit India campaign which coincided with India hosting the G20 summit in New Delhi, showing how the representation of India's cultural heritage and past was being actively mobilised in representing futures for India's national image but also for its positioning in international, including UK-India, futures.

Cultural and political institutions became oriented towards overtly Hindu majoritarian institutional and ideational directives during the 2014-19 BJP government which took a significant turn towards heightened controls and censorship over film, media and journalism, and academic expression in shaping the parameters of cultural production. In the following period (2019-2024), this majoritarian orientation was diffused through an active promotion of majoritarian discourse and a parallel growth strategy which drove this narrative across a range of different economic and cultural agendas and institutions.

National narratives on British-India imperial pasts in assembling futures have generously drawn upon independence and respective post-colonial national sovereignty. This was most evident at the 70th and 75th anniversaries of Indian independence when cultural institutions embraced India's emergence from a colonial past into a modernising future (see for example the British Council programming in 2017 and 2022). In 2021 the Indian government announced *Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav* translated by the Government of India as 'elixir of energy of independence') a programme to commemorate '75 years of independence and *the glorious history of its people, culture and achievements*' (our emphasis) in promoting India 2.0 ahead of its hosting of the G20 in September 2023. This

‘festival’ spanned 75 weeks beginning 12 March 2021 and ending on 15 August 2023 and was framed around five organising themes or ‘panch pran’ (pran meaning breath or life force): Pran 1: Goal of developed India; Pran 2: Remove colonial mindset; Pran 3: Take pride in our roots; Pran 4: Unity; Pran 5: Sense of duty in citizens (https://amritmahotsav.nic.in/). As a programmatic state-driven agenda to frame national culture through a narrative on independence and national identity, Azaadi ka Amrit Mahotsav’s ‘panch pran’ created a platform through which government policy and ideological visioning could be funnelled.

A joint cultural exchange programme ‘India-UK Together’ (Saath-Saath in Hindi) to mark the 75th anniversary of independence was launched in 2022 to ‘work towards creating a vibrant arts and culture programme together in 2022 to strengthen artistic collaboration, skills and networks for the creative economies of both countries as part of UK and India’s Living Bridge.’ Diaspora communities of Indian origin are referred to explicitly in the policy plan as a ‘living bridge’ across the two countries in providing and evidencing deep-rooted connection:

> *The India-UK relationship has at its heart shared history, values and culture, with the strong understanding of each other that it brings. This has created a highly educated, and economically dynamic living bridge, with 1.6m Britons of Indian origin. This inherent strength means our relationship is already broad, with cooperation everywhere from agriculture to space, but we believe it has great potential to grow further.*

This framing of the Indian diaspora has created new platforms and prominence for the community and its creative outputs to be recognised in wider British cultural debate. The emphasis on CCIs has created space and funding opportunities for artists, designers and creatives in India and the UK to work together and amplify awareness of the social and economic contribution of their outputs across the two contexts (Dudrah et al. 2022). Such projects have been important for supporting marginalised communities, particularly the LGBTQ+ and other communities, across intersectional understandings of society and cultural production (GRID Heritage, 2021). Significantly, while many funding initiatives have been organised to commemorate dates of Indian independence, they tend to frame

culture as apolitical in ways that avoid, and can even actively shut down, engagement with wider forms of social and political exclusion.

Large sections of the UK Indian diaspora have been supportive of post-2019 UK Conservative governments, not least for the explicit embracement that the party has shown of India's BJP government. Meanwhile, Rishi Sunak, UK Chancellor of the Exchequer 2020-22 and then Prime Minister 2022-24, embodied UK-India bilateral relations at the critical juncture when the *2030 Roadmap* was released. The links between Indian and UK global capital and the governance of trade relations were championed by the Conservative government through t*he 2030 Roadmap*. This has now been passed on to a Labour government under Keir Starmer which has publicly stated its intentions to roll back the party's earlier critical approach towards India in terms of state-sanctioned violence and exclusionary political discourse towards minorities, particularly Muslims and Christians. In 2024 the Labour Party leadership rolled back the party's earlier calls for international intervention on the Indian state's abrogation of Kashmir and attention to anti-Muslim rhetoric by stating its commitment to 'stamping out anti-Indian sentiments' and 'building a strong strategic partnership with the Modi administration' (Economic Times 2024). Economic drivers for neoliberal economic relations and mutual political agreement are an integral part of the *2030 Roadmap*.

The mobilization of culture in the telling of UK-India futures has been generative for the CCIs agenda in serving a mutually agreed and streamlined bilateral narration. We therefore ask, which pasts are being told and not told (we mentioned the 2002 Gujarat pogrom example as a case in point)? We also ask *whose and which futures are not being served by these visions?* India's majoritarian political agenda positions minorities in India and the diaspora in the UK as both a bridge and a threat to security, and this is wedged at the centre of UK-India cultural connection. The marginalising and targeting of communities deemed to be in dissonance with UK-India policy shows how the *Roadmap* instrumentalises culture as creativity while simultaneously signalling culture as threat when communities either in India or in the diaspora challenge national visions of 'unity.'

(2) *What does the policy interpretation of the creative economy reflect about the deepening of neoliberal processes across UK-India national economies and the global economy?*

The creative economy is largely referred to in the 2030 UK-India Roadmap in economic terms, emphasising the 'industries' dimensions of cultural production through 'the value and impact of the formal and informal creative economy through research and policy dialogue for long-term impact on GDP' (UK government 2021). While promising to deliver on diversifying the economy beyond predominant reliance on the primary sector, there are large questions around how this will impact on people and fields of creativity without access to technology, capital or training/education. Neoliberal processes entrench the logic of profit through all stages of production, and it is those whose livelihoods are most reliant on the creative economy at its 'primary' end in terms of labor and therefore potentially at risk of being further marginalised or squeezed out of production chains.

The informal economy's prevalence within the core of the crafts and artisanal economy in India continues to be structured by 'conjugated oppression' based on the co-constitution of class and other systems of oppression such as caste, gender, region and tribe (Lerche and Shah, 2018). The deepening of capitalism in the twenty-first century has resulted in sometimes 'harder-to-detect ways that caste identity shapes modern opportunity at every level' (Mosse, 2018) with a distinctive persistence of caste-related structures of labor within the liberalisation of artisanal activity. This has seen, for instance, the use of caste to distinguish roles based on skilled (non-dalits) and unskilled (dalits) within the textiles and garments industry (Carswell et al, 2017; Carswell and De Neve, 2018). This points to the importance of any UK-India policy agenda to be attentive to the labor dimensions of the CCIs not merely as a domain of 'potential,' 'innovation' or 'modernisation' but rather a matter which signals the importance of social protection for the most vulnerable workers in the informal economy. One aspect of the creative industries is the potential replacement and/or displacement of human labor with machines, automated technologies, apps and devices (Bouquillion and Ithurbide 2023). There are new models seeking to promote, include or integrate artisans into the CCI agenda. One such example is 200 Million Artisans which is a high-profile Indian NGO that advocates the reframing of the handmade sector to attract investors and venture capitalists. By using digital technology to integrate artisans into a supply chain that connects to markets, it positions crafts as an enabling force for advancement and modernization of India's economy. As an example of articulating the CCIs as an assemblage, 200 Million Artisans conjoins the primary sector (crafts), manufacturing (scaled-up production systems), service sector and knowledge-based economy (platform

building) as an example of the previously mentioned bridging of the four sectors of the economy. Rather than being a story of modernization of the economy through crafts, this can also be understood as a deepening of market principles in artisanal practices and cultures. The India policy context, however, contrasts to neighboring Bangladesh, where the International Accord for Health and Safety in the Garment and Textile Industry, in response to the 2013 Rana Plaza collapse, applies. The International Accord is voluntary and thus only enforced by signatories, limiting its influence globally. The example of the readymade garments (RMG) sector in Bangladesh, despite achieving a binding agreement for worker health and safety compliance, highlights a negative side of automation on labor through expectations and targets for increasing outputs (GIZ, 2023), on the one hand, and predictions for a replacement of 60% of the workforce due to automation by 2040 (a2i, 2019) on the other. Interpretation of the CCIs in terms of labor implications in India will need to remain alert rather than acquiescent to the incorporation of automation and its effects on different areas within the CCIs.

New kinds of partnerships across different types of organizations and economic and social activity operating in different areas of the economy are also being introduced (Sutton, 2023). Kosha, which is a tech start up based in Bengaluru, was founded in 2021 and received investment from the Centre for Innovation Incubation and Entrepreneurship, a spin out of the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Ahmedabad. It offers to build a digital supply chain with authentication technology from the artisan to the customer and thus offers to 'leverage technology to unleash the potential of the craft sector' through product digitization, brand protection and supply chain visibility (https://www.kosha.ai/services). The policy interpretation of the CCI agenda thus can be seen as embedding neoliberal principles across all aspects of its constituting areas, from craft to trade, which is likely to see more examples of organizations, SMEs/MMEs, and partnerships seeking to drive market principles at all levels. However, the market orientation of digital and tech influences on the CCIs in public-private partnerships, while appearing to show an openness of the Indian market to innovation and trade in this sector, has a monopolistic character which can be seen in the rise of a few large Indian global corporations who have risen to dominance through government 'partnership' across multiple CCI areas such as data analytics (Infosys), internet and mobile technology (Reliance Jio Infocomm Ltd.), and infrastructure (Adani Group), to name a few.

(3) What constitutes CCIs as a policy agenda and what are the networks and platforms which are being used to drive and enable its ubiquitous positioning in the production of particular futures?

The CCI agenda seeks to collapse the four sectors of the economy into a particular interpretation of CCIs as having 'economic potential' with the digital turn adding another dimension to India's projection and ambitions towards being a modern, capitalist economy. In many ways, this foregoes the handmade, artisanal end of the crafts spectrum while emphasising the technological end. The paradoxical relationship between the state and culture in both the UK and India shows both a reliance on culture for a narrative on national identity while also showing lagging direct state financial support for the CCIs. This is met with a 'public apparatus of cultural intervention' 'being transformed with the importance of ICT in the public agenda, revealing new relationships and power relations between actors, notably large Indian or transnational industrial actors' (Bouquillion and Ithurbide 2023: 327-328).

The emergence and cultivation of the GLAM sector (galleries, libraries and museums) as a particular framing of cultural institutions is one assembling future of the CCI agenda. It not only reflects a convergence (or interdependence) of culture, technology and commodification processes but also a particular neoliberal moment in India in which certain kinds of partnerships and institutions are being encouraged and shaped to deliver on this agenda of growth and expansion in promoting national political narratives on culture. However, this option is open only to specific organizations who either have sufficient institutional weight or international presence, or who can access funds beyond the central government, to operate in ways that do not appear to challenge centralising cultural narratives being wielded by India's national majoritarian project. Such organizations have either embraced, navigated or survived increasing controls within the narrowing remit of the post-2014 context of cultural policy in India by not taking government funding, developing their independent channels for philanthropic support, or devising strategies of operating within the CCIs agenda which appear innocuous.

The shaping of the GLAM sector within the contemporary CCI agenda in India has shown tactical avoidance of themes and critiques of economic and social marginalization due to government directives. This has been actioned and enforced through heightened controls

on NGOs and, more specifically, financial auditing due to the Foreign Contributions Regulation Act 2019, to curb dissent, and censorship of cultural and social commentary in all its forms. In 2024 Freedom House's *Freedom in the World Report* (https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world) ranked India 66 out of 100 countries, being deemed 'partially free' based on indicators of civil liberties, freedom of the press and political rights. Recent years have seen older more established institutions being censored, defunded, or curtailed as well as the rise of new foundations and other philanthropic organizations which have shown a responsive approach to engaging with India's grooming of its nascent GLAM sector. The shaping and censoring of GLAM sector organizations and spaces by government policy in India is likely to be an ongoing dynamic and tension, as long as penalties and surveillance exist.

While the CCI agenda in India has actively encouraged a strategic alignment of cultural and heritage institutions with government discourse and policy, there is also a growing influence of the tech industry with increasing digitalization at all levels of activity in the creative economy. Google Arts and Culture is a digital platform that aggregates content and offers partner organizations a number of services, ranging from archiving to virtual reality, and only accepts copyright-free or copyright-cleared content. It currently has over 100 partner organizations in India and notably launched the *India Ki Udaan* campaign in 2023 to commemorate 75 years of Independence with a video '75 years in 2 minutes'. The platform economy, through which 'value capture at the transactional level' (Athique 2019) is becoming a model for CCI financial flows and activity, seems likely to continue to expand and deepen digital models of marketization and profit. The rising influence of digital platforms and the platform economy more broadly is revealed in the shifting profile of the largest corporations in the world with more technology and internet services corporations such as Alphabet (Google's parent company), Microsoft, Apple, and Amazon topping the list of the largest global corporations. As is represented in this shift, large platform companies have benefitted from decades of neoliberal governance in terms of tax relief and incentives presented by deregulation while building platforms with underlying data-gathering activities and finding new 'creative' ways of operating beyond the purview of regulation. Big-tech corporations closest to governments in power will be well placed to create profit streams within the CCIs field across the UK and India, which we predict will be one of the hallmarks of this era.

Conclusion

The CCIs policy agenda shows an ideological and strategic use of cultural policy in assembling UK-India futures. The terminological slippage across culture, creativity, economy and industry within the CCI term and acronym is indicative of the assembling processes which constitute it. Our intention in this article has been to examine the CCIs agenda in terms of the historical, political and economic policy backdrop out of which it has emerged. in doing so, we addressed three key questions around the uses of culture in the telling of pasts and futures, the neoliberal policy interpretations of the creative economy, and networks and platforms driving the CCI agenda.

Culture has been selectively drawn upon in the crafting of centralising narratives for the UK and India's respective cultural and creative landscapes as well as their bilateral relations. In India, the ruling party has sharpened its majoritarian nationalist narrative since 2014, openly instrumentalising cultural policy through the telling of the past and the shaping of cultural institutions and notions of national identity. The 75th anniversary of Indian independence from British colonial rule was a pivotal juncture for the CCI agenda to conjoin India and the UK in the forging of a new narrative of bilateral understanding and cooperation.

The policy interpretation of the creative economy implicit in the CCIs reflects a deepening of neoliberal processes which entrench the logic of profit across all stages of production. For India, the CCIs provide the promise to diversify the economy from being predominantly reliant on the primary sector (developing) by boosting the manufacturing, services and knowledge-based economies (developed/advanced). However, the impacts this will have on people and fields of creativity without access to technology, capital or training and education is likely to create further marginalization, on the one hand, and profit streams benefitting those with capital and privileges of access, on the other.

The CCIs as a policy agenda is creating and utilising new networks and platforms to bolster its influence and positioning in relation to the state's regulatory frameworks, digital platforms, and the growing presence of corporations and big-tech companies in this field. Crafts, arts and culture more broadly are likely to continue to be viewed as a primary or raw resource meant to not only service the rest of the economy but also to

‘make other sectors more creative’ (Banks and O’Connor 2009). This particular juncture shows the ‘creative’ means by which respective UK and Indian national economies are harnessing the CCIs as a vehicle for aligning their ambitions for advanced status, in the case of India, and charting out a plan for economic recovery and knowledge economy leadership in a post-Brexit context, in the case of the UK.

Significantly, however, the 2030 *Roadmap* also makes clear use of the language of defense and security in stating larger claims for India-UK leadership ‘as a global force for good.’ This reveals how the CCIs agenda strategically straddles both soft power in its pitch towards values, culture and people as well as seeking to align UK-India relations in terms of geopolitical influence. As can be seen in examples where digital models of marketization and profit are being introduced, digital platforms are a prevalent feature of the growing platform economy which brings with it new sites of data-gathering, information sharing, and centralised knowledge systems which can feed into systems of surveillance more closely associated with hard power.

The CCI agenda and its assembling futures in UK-India relations seem set to continue to promote the creative economy through deepening and tightening national and neoliberal logics. Reading between the lines of the *2030 Roadmap*, in its uses of culture and the creative economy, alerts us to how culture as a seemingly innocuous area can be brought into the fold of national and bilateral economic strategy. The promises of the CCIs are manifold. In terms of economic development agendas, the commitment of a strategic UK-India partnership contains elements of ‘re-energised trade, investment and technological collaboration’ between the two countries to deliver on India’s national ambitions to transition from a developing to a developed/ advanced economy. It also contains opportunity for the UK to rebrand its national economic goals in relation to its own post-Brexit, post-pandemic economic recovery goals. Underlying this, however, is how the *Roadmap* ‘creatively’ stretches its remit from the soft power edges of crafts and culture to the hard power edges of national and regional security.

Creativity, culture and industries have been welded together through a range of converging agendas in the acronym which has now become common parlance. There is much to be sought from analysing the CCIs as a future for cultural and creative activity. However, in order to retain social justice and equitable principles amidst the

neoliberal drivers of CCIs, there is perhaps more to be gained from asking more penetrating questions about what preceded it, where its origins lie and what constitutes it as an assembling future in order to be prepared for what lies ahead in this era of the cultural and creative industries.

Notes

[1] For a timeline of computer art and generative graphics, see Micro Arts Generative Computer Art archive, https://microartsgroup.com/1980s-computer-digital-art-music-timeline/

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