AHRC Collaborations in China

Driving growth and innovation in the creative industries
“The rapid growth and vibrancy of the creative industries in the UK and China presents an unparalleled opportunity to build new research and innovation partnerships between our two countries. AHRC’s ongoing commitment to promoting R&D in this dynamic sector of the economy has demonstrated that by bringing together world-leading researchers and our pioneering creative businesses in both countries we can drive growth and innovation in a sector that is vital to mutual future prosperity.”

Professor Andrew Thompson, Executive Chair of the Arts and Humanities Research Council
Context

Over the past five years, the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) – a part of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) – has developed an extensive portfolio of activity building new research and innovation partnerships between the UK and China. This activity has focused on the growing importance of the creative industries in both countries and the great potential enhanced collaboration in the sector offers as a means of delivering sustained economic, cultural and intellectual benefits.

Similarly, in China, fast economic development has resulted in booming demand for creative and cultural products and services. Within this national picture, Shanghai – the focus of AHRC’s collaborations – has established itself as China’s creative and cultural industries powerhouse. The Shanghai government has committed to ensuring that the cultural and creative industries account for 18% of the city’s GDP by 2030, and to develop the city into a cultural and creative centre with international influence by 2035.

The AHRC has made major investments in the creative industries in recent years. Notably, the £80m Creative Industries Clusters Programme (CICP), has brought together world class researchers and creative businesses to drive growth and innovation across the sector in nine Creative R&D Partnerships and an independent Policy and Evidence Centre. In collaboration with Innovate UK, AHRC is also delivering the Audience of the Future programme which aims to bring creative businesses, researchers and technology experts together to create new immersive experiences and develop immersive technologies.

This context has provided the basis for AHRC to build an evolving and ambitious initiative focused on Shanghai, with a commitment to date of approximately £7million, augmented by a range of partner organisations. This pamphlet highlights the work undertaken through these partnerships to date – the International Placement Scheme with the Shanghai Theatre Academy; the Newton-funded ‘Development through the Creative Economy in China’ projects; and the new ‘UK-China Collaborations in the Creative Industries’ programme supported through the UKRI Fund for International Collaboration.
Developing the next generation of researchers
The success of the AHRC’s partnership with China has been driven by the strength of links built between people and institutions. AHRC’s International Placement Scheme (IPS) allocates fellowships which provide doctoral students and early career researchers with dedicated access to internationally renowned collections, programmes and expertise at eight of the world’s leading cultural institutions. The Shanghai Theatre Academy (STA) has been an IPS host since 2015, welcoming researchers from eight Universities across the UK. Fellows have explored topics ranging from the interpretation of culture and the creative economy through Chinese opera to community-based art as a tool of empowerment, and from the growth and development of China’s musical theatre industry to the investigation of historically-responsive theatre practice in Shanghai.

Case study

Dr Haili Ma – Interpreting Culture & Creative Economy through Chinese Opera

Dr Ma was one of the first AHRC Fellows to be hosted by STA in 2015. Dr Ma credits the fellowship for significantly broadening her research horizons due to the access it provided to a dynamic performing cluster, local communities and key data sets. The fellowship has played an important role in the development of Dr Ma’s career. She is now an Associate Professor in Performance and Creative Economy and International Director at the School of Performance and Cultural Industries, University of Leeds. Dr Ma is the author of ‘Urban Politics and Cultural Capital, the case of Chinese Opera’ (Routledge 2015) and is currently completing her second monograph ‘Understanding Cultural and Creative Industries through Chinese Opera’, contracted by Palgrave Macmillan Publisher. Dr Ma has also been successful in securing further AHRC funding through a Newton award on ‘Popular performance for new urban audiences’ and a Fund for International Collaboration Partnership Development grant ‘Bridging the Gaps: mixed reality performance of Chinese Opera in Shanghai’s rural and urban heritage sites’.

International Placement Scheme

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Building new UK–China collaborations in the creative industries
Development through the Creative Economy in China

Funded through the Newton Fund and co-ordinated by the AHRC in co-operation with the UNESCO Creative City (Shanghai) Promotion Office, the ‘Development through the Creative Economy in China’ programme supported projects exploring the potential of the creative economy to drive sustainable and inclusive growth in China.

Following a joint UK-China panel, the first of its kind for the AHRC, eight projects were funded through the programme. These explored topics including the co-creation of historical research and co-development of visitor experiences; the fostering of creative citizens through public makerspaces; and unlocking the potential of cultural heritage by design. The projects brought UK-based researchers together with a diverse group of academic and cultural institutions in China including the Palace Museum, Beijing; the Luxun Academy of Fine Arts; the Chinese Academy of Sciences; and the Chinese National Museum of Ethnology.

Case study

Digital Platforms for Craft in the UK and China

This project, led by Professor Nick Bryan-Kinns at Queen Mary University London and Professor Hao Tan at Hunan University, explored the potential for digital platforms to generate revenue growth and sustainable employment by providing routes to better utilize digital platforms in the creative economies in China and the UK. The project specifically focused on the under-explored potential for digital platforms in the craft sector and sought to benefit people such as inheritors of intangible cultural heritage working in this sector through the dissemination of best practice in how to use digital platforms to grow and sustain their businesses. The project uses mixed research methods including desk research, workshops, surveys, researcher immersions and interviews with stakeholders. The final outputs will be web resources and written reports. In particular, the web resources will include an open directory of digital resources, case studies, and routes to market which provide a living legacy for the project.

This award provided a platform for subsequent collaboration and Professor Bryan-Kinns has since received a Partnership Development Grant through the Fund for International Collaboration focused on ‘AI for Music in the Creative Industries of China and the UK’.

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1 The Newton Fund builds research and innovation partnerships with 17 active partner countries to support their economic development and social welfare, and to develop their research and innovation capacity for long-term sustainable and equitable growth.
Scaling up the partnership and ambition – Fund for International Collaboration

The work undertaken by AHRC with STA and through the Newton Fund provided the foundation for AHRC’s successful bid in 2018 to the UKRI Fund for International Collaboration (FIC)\(^2\). This £5 million programme, matched by Chinese partners, will develop more ambitious research-industry partnerships between the UK and China in the creative industries.

The programme will be delivered over 4 years in partnership with Innovate UK; the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council of the UK; the Shanghai Theatre Academy; the Shanghai Economy and Information Technology Commission; and the Science and Technology Commission of Shanghai Municipality. By supporting the rapid scaling up of engagement between the UK and China – with a specific focus on Shanghai – the programme will enable long-term collaboration, create the conditions for growth and innovation and catalyse a broad range of economic, academic, cultural and societal benefits in both countries.

It is being delivered through two main routes:

1. **Partnership Development Grants:** delivered between February and August 2019, these seed-corn projects were designed to support the development of new or fledgling research-industry partnerships with a view to creating a basis for longer-term collaboration.

2. **UK-China Research-Industry Creative Partnerships:** through this scheme, £500k per project on the UK side plus equivalent resource in China will be available for new Creative Partnerships bringing together Research Organisations, creative industries businesses and other partners from both countries. Delivered over three years, the Partnerships will be based around an area of thematic focus such as creative design; theatre and the performing arts; fashion and textiles; story-telling and animation; the use of interactive and immersive technologies in cultural institutions; and gaming.

This dynamic and fast-moving sector will continue to present new challenges and opportunities for future collaboration within and beyond the AHRC’s current programmes. Future investment through the FIC programme, focused on supporting activities that will maximise the impact of the programme, will secure an enduring legacy beyond the funding period, as well as catalysing new, exciting opportunities to explore.

\(^2\) The Fund for International Collaboration aims to enhance the UK’s excellence in research and innovation through global and strategic engagement, forging new bilateral and multilateral research and innovation programmes with global partners.
FIC Partnership Development Grants

**Shaping the Connected Museum**, University of Nottingham and University of Nottingham Ningbo with Tate galleries, Factory 42, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Hangzhou Normal University, UNUK, UNNC, China Academy of Arts, Shanghai Museum, Power Station of Art, Shanghai Science and Technology Museum.

**Bridging the Gaps: mixed reality performance of Chinese Opera in Shanghai’s rural and urban heritage sites**, University of Leeds with, Shanghai Tong Ji University, Shanghai Pudong New District Municipal Government, Shanghai Theatre Academy, University of Exeter, Xiuyi Culture Development Co. Ltd., Shanghai Dramatic Arts Centre, Viridian FX, Human VR, Slung Low, Human Studio Ltd., and Leeds Playhouse.

**From Augmented to Authentic, Weaving the Past into Future**, Robert Gordon University with Donghua University, Shanghai Promotion Centre for City of Fashion, Bailian Group's Fashion, Cindy Soong, Moodbox, Uliaobao, Yanyue, Harris Tweed Hebrides, Shetland Museum and Archives, Nielanell Design Studio, University of the Highlands and Islands, Soluis.
Shaun the Sheep in Shanghai: A Location-based, Mixed Reality Cinema Experience, University of Liverpool with Aardman Animations, China Media Capital, Shanghai Theatre Academy and Digital Fun Shanghai.

Stage Worlds: A UK - China Innovation Partnership, Newcastle University with Northern Stage, 59 productions, PROTO, BusyBackpack, Shanghai Theatre Academy, HDZ Culture and Shang Yan Cultural Investment Company.


AI for Music in the Creative Industries of China and the UK, Queen Mary University of London with Tongji University, CBI China Bridge, Dogma Lab, Hangzhou Alibaba Music Technology Co., Ltd., Shanghai Media Bank technology Ltd and MXX.

CreAD: UK-China Partnership on Creative Advertising, University of Leicester with Fudan University.

To Search for a Sustainable UK-China Film Collaboration Model: Unlocking Issues Around Film Distribution Mechanisms, Cardiff University with Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, Shanghai Film Distribution and Exhibition Association, Next Day Agency Ltd., Trinity Filmed Entertainment Ltd., Clipper Media Capital, Curzon.

Supporting Young People to Become International Creative Talents: Educational Enterprise Collaborations between Shanghai and Liverpool, University of Edge Hill with Tongji University, Creative Industries Federation, FACT Liverpool, Wright Consulting Ltd., Modern Sky UK, Liverpool’s Royal Court, Tongji University College of Design and Innovation, Shanghai Zhida Technology Development Co., Ltd.

Innovation in live performance: developing interactive technologies for opera and theatre productions, Birmingham City University with Shanghai Conservatory of Music, Shanghai Theatre Academy, Holosphere and Full Dimension.

The UK-China Creative Challenge: Co-Designing a Hybrid ‘Creature’ as an Asset for Shanghai’s Performing Arts and Screen Industries, University of Nottingham with Shanghai Jiao Tong University, University of Nottingham Ningbo, Shanghai Theatre Academy, Zhejiang University, Dolby, Ryan Rowe, Falmouth University, Lakeside Arts, Nottingham Trent University, Birmingham City University, Communication University of China, BLAAD CHINA – Black Nomad, FF, Future Media Convergence Institute, Shanghai Grand Theatre, Shanghai Children’s Theatre, Institute for Screen Industries Research.

Spatial Audio in Virtual and Augmented Reality Technologies, Bangor University with Leeds Beckett University, Shanghai Normal University, Music King Shanghai, M7 Media and Metakey Acoustics.

Art Fair Innovations (AFI), Royal College of Art with University of Shanghai, West Bund Art & Design Fair, Scottish Gallery of Modern Art and Sotheby’s.