

Hua Dong edited a Special Issue of *Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* to disseminate the AHRC SEED Fellowship project outcome, funded by the UK Research and Innovation /Arts and Humanities Research Council (AH/Y000722/1). Three articles from the AHRC SEED fellowship team are included.

1. Editorial
2. Conversation 1
3. Conversation 2

### Article 1: Editorial

#### Citation:

Dong H (2024) Creative China in the context of UK-China Creative Industries Collaboration, *Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art*, 11.1, pp 3-11  
[https://doi.org/10.1386/jcca\\_00097\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1386/jcca_00097_2)

#### Editorial:

Creative China in the context of UK-China Creative Industries collaboration  
Hua Dong

Creative China can be explored and interpreted from different angles. This special issue focuses on the context of UK-China Creative Industries Research and Innovation collaboration. In May 2023, Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) launched the UK-China creative industries research and innovation hub fellowship, and this special issue was planned as one of its outcomes. It includes four articles addressing Creative China from top-down to bottom-up approaches, with two conversational pieces offering insights from the UK-China hub fellowship study.

The four articles were selected through an open call. The first article shows a 'top-down' approach to Creative China through the Hong Kong Government's strategic plan for a cultural complex M+ Museum. The second and the third articles reflect on observations of the grassroots' interventions to creativity: one on the streets surrounding universities which demonstrates a youth culture, and the other on water calligraphy practised by older citizens in southern China. The fourth article is an outcome of the AHRC-funded UK-China collaborative project which focused on crafts and digital technologies.

### Creative China: top-down and bottom-up approaches

The first three articles illustrate top-down and bottom-up approaches to Creative China.

Anqi Li, in her article entitled 'Bilbao Effect 2.0: The making of M+', argues that 'M+ negotiates a nuanced interplay of soft power, museum governance, collection strategy, and architectural design', manifesting what she terms as 'the Bilbao Effect 2.0', i.e. an art museum model emerged in the twenty-first century, with 'starchitecture', a collection/exhibition plan engaged with canonical art history, a focus on cultural and economic, and caught between the public and private sectors.

M+ Museum is one of the cultural facilities comprising the West Kowloon Cultural District of Hong Kong. It marked an exciting turn in Hong Kong's approach to public policy and urban

planning. 'McGuggenisation' was referenced in the article to imply the intention to replicate cultural institutions in a profit-driven manner akin to the business model of McDonald's restaurants. Such expansion was criticised as 'an instrument of cultural colonization that suggests neo-imperialism through museum making and tourism.' M+ Museum was not the result of 'McGuggenisation', instead, the Hong Kong Government adopted a new approach after a research visit to Bilbao, and developed a self-financing statutory body WKCD. M+ Museum became a limited liability company wholly owned by WKCD. Its corporate governance suggests that M+ 'neither conforms to the conventional model of a typical municipal museum nor aligns with that of a fully private institution'. Under a governmental umbrella, M+ maintains self-sufficiency and a degree of institutional autonomy. This unique legal status and governance framework emerged from a process of 'trial and error' in the planning stage. While the new approach lessened the private sector's control over cultural projects, it did not eliminate its involvement in revenue-generating activities since the statutory body's income is contingent on the successful and timely tendering of commercial lands to real estate developers. Furthermore, an 'inside-out' approach was adopted for the design of the M+ Museum: its architectural form was a reflection of its mission, shaped by the museum's vision, ideas, and future contents, all of which would be formulated in the present and modified over the ensuing years. The museum's collection and curation ensured 'global inclusivity'. As the result, the development of M+ demonstrated a method to foster collaboration between the public and private sectors - a central feature of the Bilbao Effect 2.0.

In contrast to the inclusive 'top-down' approach adopted by the M+ development, 'bottom-up' approaches to Creative China can be observed in the second and third articles.

In the second article, Xiaoyi Xu and Jieliang Xiao reviewed what was called 'Duoluojie' – streets around Chinese university campuses which are informal adaptations to serve the needs of university students and promote creative economies. As a creative approach to regenerating urban spaces with grassroots interventions from university students and local communities, Duoluojie serves as a vital connection between the university and the city, bridging the gap between campus life and the external urban environment. It has also emerged as a fertile ground for aspiring entrepreneurs seeking to launch businesses with creative minimal financial outlay and access to a sizable market. Successful cases, such as the Shapowei at Xiamen University, has demonstrated a collaborative synergy between universities, communities, and local authorities. While each of these entities fulfils distinct societal functions in the urbanisation framework, they worked together to establish a harmonious and collaborative development mechanism for the creative student-led urban transformation in China.

Federica Mirra's article addresses another form of grassroots intervention unique in China: 'Dishu' or 'water calligraphy' (writing large Chinese characters on the ground using water rather than ink), which 'falls into a crossover between the popular revival of the literati art form of calligraphy, and the craze for various kinds of traditional martial art exercise for self-cultivation'. Dishu performances were featured in the 2008 and 2012 Olympic Games. Practised by older citizens in open spaces, water calligraphy 'accentuates the sensual and aesthetic dimension' through evaporation, inviting 'both writers and observers to pause and take in the beauty of the translucent watermarks and transitory movements'. Here water

‘provides opportunities for artistic reflections on presence, absence, action, trace, and impermanence’. By being regularly performed in non-art spaces, water calligraphy is ‘easily accessible and encourages accidental interactions’. Federica argues that water calligraphy in urban China allows its practitioners ‘to regain agency over their lives and cities, especially as they retire from their jobs’. Performing water calligraphy not only ‘makes retirees feel mentally, spiritually, and socially fulfilled’, but also ‘allows them to recuperate a disappearing sense of communality’. In this sense, water calligraphy is a form of ‘vernacular creativity’; it resists the understanding of creativity as ‘merely contributing to economic and urban development, and to the idea of creativity as the property of particular individual geniuses’. According to Federica, water calligraphy proclaims an opposite narrative of everydayness, familiarity, and retirement and resists the digital celebration and reproduction of space through its on-site, lived performance. Furthermore, Federica argues that water calligraphy can be deemed as a significant case of ‘living aesthetics’; it provides aesthetic encounters that are accessible to everyone; it privileges the kinetic and bodily experience alongside the visual; it encourages the audience’s active participation and imagination.

The above papers were selected from the open call to the special issue. They were not connected to the Art and Humanities Research Council’s programmes on UK-China creative industries. The fourth paper, written by Yuanyuan Liu and Nick Bryan-Kinns on craft practice, is an outcome of an AHRC funded UK-China creative industries collaboration project.

### **UK-China Creative Industries Collaboration**

In 1997, UK became the first country to map and quantify the creative industries as a defined economic sector (DCMS, 2023). In China, ‘creative industries’ became recognised as a term in Shanghai in 2004. The categories of creative industries differ between the two countries. In the UK, creative industries are classified as nine sectors: i.e., advertising, architecture, crafts, design (products, graphics, fashion); film, TV, video, radio, photography; IT, software, computer services, video games; publishing, museums, galleries, libraries; and music, performing and visual arts. In China, ‘cultural and creative industries’ are often used to refer to the following sectors: press and information services; content creation and production; creative design services; cultural communication channels; cultural invention and operation; and cultural entertainment and leisure services.

In China, sustaining growth in creative industries is crucial to mitigating economic slowdown, helping its transition to a knowledge-based economy, and enhancing the nation’s soft power. Creative industries are also a UK priority. In June 2023, the UK’s Prime Minister said, ‘growing the economy means growing the creative industries’ (DCSM, 2023). The UK government aims to grow the creative industries in creative clusters by £50 billion and supports a million extra jobs by 2030 (DCSM, 2023). Creative industries collaborations between the UK and China have proven holding long-term impact and facilitate growth in innovations, education, skills advancement, and sustainability and well-being.

Since 2018, Arts and Humanities Research Council has funded a range of UK-China collaboration in the creative industries sector, including:

- The Shanghai workshop on the 6-7<sup>th</sup> November 2018 to explore collaboration opportunities
- The 13 partnership development projects in 2019

- The eight large-scale projects funded in 2020 (including the craft project reported in the fourth article)
- The five projects (funded in 2021) to further support the development of the UK-China hub concept
- The UK-China creative industries research and innovation hub fellowship (funded in 2023)

Figure 1 illustrates the partners involved in the AHRC funded UK-China collaborative projects (till the beginning of 2023) by types, as well as the creative industries sectors covered. Among the 288 partners identified from publicly available information, Higher Education Institutions (HEI) are by far the largest participants; in total 121 HEIs in the UK and China have participated in the collaboration. The second largest partners are businesses (in total 93), followed by Non- Government Organisations (NGOs) or charities (in total 58). A further analysis of the 151 businesses and NGOs/charities suggests that 26 were not from the cultural and creative industries (CCI), and the CCI sectors covered include 41 from performing, 21 from digital media, 20 from museums and galleries, 13 from fashion, 12 from design, and 8 from film. Advertising and architecture sectors were not included in those funded projects.

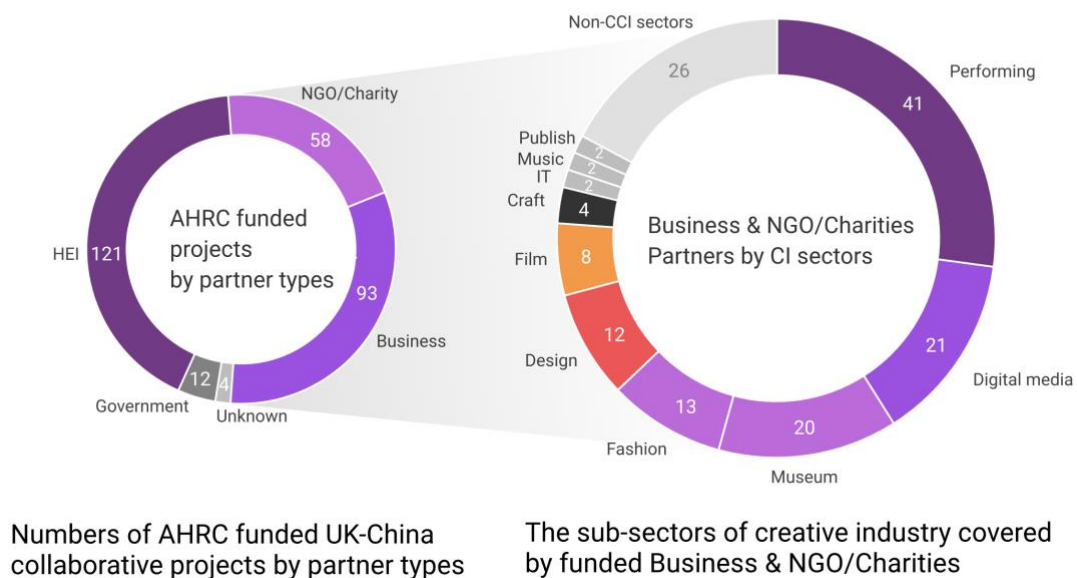


Figure 1. Analyses of the AHRC funded UK-China collaboration projects (image by Dr. Weining Ning)

Nick Bryan-Kinns received an AHRC grant in 2020. He and Yuanyuan Liu studied the role of digital technologies in contemporary craft practice in the UK and China, and they offered insights in the fourth article in this special issue.

Their research provides an account of the craft ecosystems in China and the UK as the two countries started to embrace digital technologies – ecosystems which inevitably evolved with craftmakers' enforced migration online. Yuanyuan Liu and Nick Bryan-Kinns argue that 'on the one hand, digital tools and processes of the Fourth Industrial Revolution have transformed many craft skills from making by hand to making by computer; on the other hand, social media and online marketplaces have changed the relationship between

craftmakers and consumers and may shape which crafts flourish in the future.’ Both the UK and China lacked government policies with an explicit focus on digital technologies for craft, although the two countries have initiatives to preserve traditional craft. They found digital technologies have gradually changed and enriched the ways of craftmaking, and Chinese and UK craftmakers have different access challenges. They argue that digital technologies act as a catalyst for the transformation of craft practice; there is a need to ensure that the intrinsic value of traditional, purely hand-made craft, retains its value in terms of cultural heritage in the digital era.

Craft is one of the nine sectors of creative industries in the UK; Yuanyuan Liu and Nick Bryan-Kinns’s paper in this special issue is invaluable in representing this sector.

#### UK-China Creative Industries Hub: the SEED Fellowship

At the end of 2019, the UK-China creative industries research and innovation hub concept was proposed after the AHRC’s senior official visit to Shanghai. In March 2022, AHRC, in collaboration with Innovate UK and the Shanghai Theatre Academy, convened a one-week virtual festival, further discussed and developed the hub concept. Figure 2 illustrates the initial hub concept (AHRC, 2023)



Figure 2. The initial UK-China creative industries hub concept (AHRC, 2023)

The Hub is expected to (AHRC, 2023):

- Serve as a long-term platform for enhanced UK-China Research and Innovation (R&I) collaboration in the creative industries, with demonstrable economic benefit.
- Develop effective partnerships and good communication with trusted R&I bodies, yielding high quality trusted research.
- Reduce bureaucracy and remove barriers to collaboration, making effective use of public money.

- Enable researchers and industry bodies to spend less time navigating unfamiliar funding landscapes, and more time doing research and building partnerships.

The fellowship is a 12-month project, started in May 2023. The aim is to scope and develop a strategic vision and an evidence-informed delivery plan for the UK-China creative industries research and innovation hub, to strengthen the existing partnerships and expand new R&I partnerships for the scaling up of sustained collaboration between the UK and China over the next 5-15 years. Its short name is SEED Fellowship, and SEED stands for the methodology, i.e., to '**Scope**', '**Engage**', '**Empower**' and '**Develop**'.

Scoping studies involve 1) the review of relevant projects and strategies, 2) an online questionnaire survey of existing and new partners (both in the UK and China), on their needs/experiences, perceived opportunities and barriers, and 3) interviews/focus groups in both China and the UK. The review helps identify themes, sectors, and gaps; the survey helps understand the needs and barriers in general; and the interviews/focus groups give insights into award-holders' experiences and new partners' expectations and concerns. The scoping studies help inform the strategic vision of the hub.

Engagement activities are composed of the six working groups and ten workshops for the UK and China creative industries. Each working group helps organise at least one workshop with creative industries, on a specific topic relevant to the working group theme (e.g., small and medium sized enterprises, policy, responsible research and innovation). The fellowship team and their designated partners organise four in-person workshops (20 participants in each workshop, two workshops in the UK – Birmingham and London; two workshops in China - Shanghai and Wuxi), with a focus on communicating initial proposals and getting feedback, and inviting co-creation of long-term roadmaps and future hub activities.

Empower programmes focus on supporting working group members and workshop participants to apply for seed projects. Two rounds of calls were planned, one in Month 3, and the other in Month 5. The mini projects were given four months to complete. The projects were assessed and selected by the advisors/experts who have relevant expertise and no conflict of interests; only the projects involving both the UK and China partners and meeting the minimum threshold were considered for SEED-funding. In total six seed projects were funded. They were required to produce creative outputs (e.g., story-telling videos). The fellow and the project manager met the seed grant holders on a regular basis to support them, and resources were shared to ensure smooth communication and clarify expected deliverables.

Developing studies include the iterative development of the strategic vision, the business case, the operational models, the long-term roadmap and the future hub activities. These were visualised and communicated to the advisory board and the AHRC, through regular meeting and in-person workshops for feedback and refinement.

The implementation of the SEED methodology is not lineal or rigid. It was applied with a degree of flexibility to best utilise resources available. For example, the data collected from the early workshops informed the questionnaire survey, and the survey outcome informed the design of the later workshops. The communication of the project outcome was through

the project website ([www.creativeindustrieshub.com](http://www.creativeindustrieshub.com)), two journal special issues (including this one), and a final project conference on the 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2024.

Interviews and focus groups were conducted with individuals in China and the UK, between August 2023 and March 2024. The two conversational pieces included in this special issue are based on these interviews.

The first conversation incorporated several interviews between the fellowship team and important stakeholders, i.e., Daniel Brooker, Director for UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) in China; Hasan Bakhshi, Director of the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre; Nick Bryan-Kinns, Professor at the University of the Arts London and the award-holder of two UK-China collaboration projects; Dr. Yujia Huang, Lecturer at the University of Dundee and leader of a British-Council funded Cultural Exchange project; and Jun Wang, Deputy Director of Visual China. The conversation explored how to engage creative industries, opportunities and barriers, comparison between the UK and China, functions of the UK-China Hub and its sustainable practice in the long run.

The second conversation focussed on policy making in China where Dr Sylvia Liu shared her experience of contributing to the two innovation policies in China: Made in China 2025 and the Action Plan for Digital Creative Industries. This interview was conducted by the Policy working group leader Dr Weining Ning.

In China, from 2006 and 2020, the policy discourse related to Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI) were 'economic, corporate, regional names (Beijing, Shanghai, and Hangzhou), industrial park, global, and activities' (Park, 2022). The current policy discourse related to CCIs has discussed utilizing digital technology and soft power; and the rapid progress of the integration of culture and tourism (Park, 2022).

The National Five Year Economic and Social Development Plans serve as blueprints for policies in China. Whilst Wang (2017) suggests that in the cultural and creative industries sector, decision-making power is much more concentrated in the local government, Sylvia Liu sheds light on how the central government plays an important role in shaping Creative China.

As the guest editor of this special issue, I hope the readers will enjoy reading the papers, and gain your own insight into Creative China from the articles and the conversations. I thank Professor Jiehong Jiang, The Editor-in-Chief for inviting me to edit this special issue, and Dr. Federica Mirra for assisting all the logistics throughout the process. I thank all the working group leaders of the SEED Fellowship: Dr Oscar Zhou (University of Kent); Dr Ying Jiang (Future Institute of Tsinghua University, Shanghai); Dr Shu Yuan (Donghua University); Shuo Liu (Middlesex University); Dr Weining Ning (Brunel University London); Dr Xinya You (University for the Creative Arts); Dr Min Hua (Shanghai Jiao Tong University); Dr Isobel Ward (Brunel University London); and the Project Manager Iris Tsang (Brunel University London). Arts and Humanities Council has funded the SEED Fellowship (AH/Y000722/1).

AHRC (2023), AHRC UK-China Creative Industries Hub Fellowship Call, available from <https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/AHRC-141122-AHRC-ChinaHubFellowshipCallApplicationGuidanceDocument.pdf> [accessed 8 Feb 2024]

DCMS (2023) Creative industries sector vision: a joint plan to drive growth build talent and develop skills, available from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/creative-industries-sector-vision/creative-industries-sector-vision-a-joint-plan-to-drive-growth-build-talent-and-develop-skills#fn:5> [Accessed 28 Feb 2024]

Park, S.D. (2022). Policy Discourse Among the Chinese Public on Initiatives for Cultural and Creative Industries: Text Mining Analysis, SAGE Open Volume 12, Issue 1, January-March 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440221079927>

Wang, K. (2017). The local politics of creative industries policies in China. An analysis of Chinese municipal creative industries policies from different regions. The case of Beijing, Harbin and Guangzhou. Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Leicester

### **Acknowledgement**

This work was supported by the UK Research and Innovation/Arts and Humanities Research Council [grant number AH/Y000722/1]