

Leeds  
Industrial  
Museum

## Song: The Future Showcase

17-18 Feb, Thoresby Room at Leeds City Museum

Refreshments and Panel discussion: Fri 17 Feb, 4-6pm

A showcase to celebrate the completion of the UK-China collaborative project, Song: The Future, which explores the shared cultural heritage of the two nations in a post-industrial landscape, and display the outputs of the project.

Come along, explore the room and discover the exciting world of Song: The Future!



Arts and  
Humanities  
Research Council



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# **UK-China Textile Industry In/tangible Cultural Heritage**

Venue: Leeds City Museum, Thoresby Room

## **Friday 17<sup>th</sup> February (10am-6:30pm)**

Open Exhibition: 10am-4pm

- An interactive mobile performance Song: The Future (bring your mobile phone and earphones to play the performance at any time)
- A series of documentary films on the history of UK-China textile industry and share post-industrial revival process (on display in rotation)
- New digital creative display using audience response collected from Song: The Future (on display in rotation)
- Song of the Female Textile Workers Film Screening: 3:30pm

Refreshments: 4pm-6:30pm

Panel Discussion: 5pm-6pm

## **Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> February (10am-3pm)**

Open Exhibition: 10am-3pm (same as Friday)

Song of the Female Textile Workers Film Screenings: 11am and 2pm

The UK-China collaborative project Song: The Future aimed to probe and understand the shared cultural heritage of the UK and China, through the lens of the post-industrial evolution and creative transformations that the two countries underwent following the closure of the textile mills. Through the use of innovative interactive and extended reality performance, the project encouraged participants to share their stories of industrial change and consider the commonalities of this shared heritage with China. This showcase, celebrating the conclusion of Song: The Future with a series of the project's outputs, affords us a moment to reflect on its goals in bringing together communities across the UK and China.

Song: The Future is the follow-on project of Song of the Female Textile Workers (2020-2021), a mixed reality performance that tells the story of three generations of women, and how their passions intertwine with the rapidly shifting socio-political background of Shanghai, China throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century to date.

Both projects are funded by UKRI (UK Research Innovation) AHRC (Arts and Humanities Research Council) and led by Dr Haili Ma, Associate Professor of Performance and Creative Economy at University of Leeds, in partnership with Shanghai Yue Opera House, Shanghai Textile Museum, Leeds Industrial Museum and two Yorkshire based digital companies: HUMAN and Megaverse. Both projects were developed across the UK and China entirely via digital platforms during the COVID lockdown.

The Open Exhibition will include an interactive mobile performance, a new digital creative display using audience responses collected during Song: The Future (on display in rotation), as well as a filmed version of mixed reality performance Song of the Female Textile Workers. Throughout the day a series of documentary films made by the research team will be on display, highlighting commonalities between

the UK-China textile industries, and in the post-industrial digital era. There are distinct links to the city of Leeds and Armley Mills, once the world's largest woollen mill and now Leeds Industrial Museum.

We will also be hosting a panel discussion with the project lead, Dr Haili Ma, and our project partners Chris Sharp from Leeds Industrial Museum and Nick Bax from HUMAN, at 5pm on *Friday 17<sup>th</sup> February*. Feedback provided across UK-China during the event will form the basis of the panel, so stick around on Friday afternoon for some refreshments and join what is sure to be a lively discussion about the creative industries and the future of UK-China connectivity!

### **Song: The Future**

Song: The Future is an interactive mobile performance, featuring Lu, a UK-based game designer originally from Shanghai. Lu is exploring UK-China textile heritage in memory of her mother, a Shanghai mill worker who passed away suddenly during COVID whilst Lu was in the UK. Filled with guilt and in memory of her mum, Lu is searching for the parallel development of UK-China textile heritage. She will ask you for help.

Song: The Future builds on Song of the Female Textile Workers (2020-21), a mixed reality performance that tells the story of three generations of women, and how their passions intertwine with the rapidly shifting socio-political background of Shanghai, China from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to date. Using this tale as a base, Song the Future further develops the story to engage communities across the UK and China, gathering their stories and evidence of the shared commonalities across UK and China, its the past, present and the future.

So come along, explore the room and discover the exciting world of Song: The Future!

### **Evening refreshments and panel discussion**

#### **Friday 17<sup>th</sup> February:**

Refreshments: 4pm-6:30pm

Panel Discussion: 5pm-6pm

We would love to hear any thoughts you have about the project and there will be opportunity throughout the event to submit your questions and feedback.

Here are some key concepts the panel will discuss that may be used as prompts for questions:

- What are cultural and creative industries?
- Thoughts behind the creation of Song of the Female Textile Workers and Song: The Future,
- Shared (textile) in/tangible cultural heritage across UK and China, including - music and singing, fashion, design, museums, creative clusters, and digital products,
- Commonality of communities across UK and China, past, present, and the future.

## *Displays*

### *Song: The Future, an interactive performance*

The centrepiece of Song: The Future, the web app is an interactive, digital avatar-led performance designed to bring together audiences in China and the UK by exploring the shared history of their industrial evolutions. Avatar Lu recounts to the visitor the story of her family, its once important standing in the textile industry of Shanghai, and its travails during the mass factory closures and redundancies of the 1990s. From the death of heavy industry, new creative sectors blossomed, and Lu's family moved with the times into these exciting new ventures.

Through conversation with the visitor, Lu aims to discover whether the closures of the UK textile mills decades earlier followed a similar trajectory, and how the creative industries in the UK have evolved as a result. Video calls, text message conversations and extended reality flourishes are woven into the Song: The Future performance, to engage audiences across the continents and build together a shared identity that can be pursued into the future.

Designed as a site-specific performance for Leeds Industrial Museum, UK, the Song: The Future interactive performance has been run successfully with audiences in China and beyond. With the provided audience feedback, future interactive performances featuring Lu and her story will continue to test UK-China connectivity.

The performance will be available during the exhibition through the QR below; if you missed it the first time around, now's your chance to take part and experience Lu's story!



*Scan the QR code to  
experience Song: The  
Future!*

*Headphones are advised  
for the best experience!*



### **Shanghai Yue Opera House original composition – Song of the Female Textile Workers**

Throughout the project, the University of Leeds has been working closely with the Shanghai Yue Opera House to produce works of original Yue opera and include in them novel technologies and visualisations. In collaboration with UK SMEs, they created the mixed reality performance ‘Song of the Female Textile Workers’, which tells the story of Lu – played by national star performer Wang Rousang - as she remembers her family’s struggles in the changing economic and industrial climate of Shanghai. The performance – created, composed and performed remotely during the Covid-19 pandemic – is enhanced by mixed reality animations.

Song of the Female Textile Workers was originally presented in early 2022 and was on display during the run of Song: The Future at Leeds Industrial Museum. It will be shown during the showcase, in the lead up to the panel discussion on Friday afternoon at 3:30pm, and again at 11am and 2pm on Saturday.

### **Digital displays**

We learned much from the data collected during the Song: The Future performance. Did you know that pigeon racing boomed amongst the working classes of the UK during the 20<sup>th</sup> century? And that this was reflected by a similar trend in China? Despite the closing of the industries that sparked it, the sport of pigeon racing continues strongly to this day in both regions.

Around the room you will find odes to this and other fascinating tidbits that were uncovered during the performance, in the form of animations and stills. Which one is your favourite?

This piece of digital art work is created by our project post-doctoral Fellow Dr Duncan Leggat, utilising players’ response gathered via the mobile app and applying his expertise in quantum physics!

## **Documentaries**

A number of documentaries will be screened throughout the event. The six films described below were created specifically for the Song of the Female Textile Workers project, and tell the story of the industrial and cultural evolution of Shanghai. Through these, the viewer is invited to reflect on post-industrial change in the UK and consider the range of commonalities to be found between the two cultures. Full documentary films can be accessed and viewed on Leeds Industrial Museum website.

These will be interspersed with documentaries from the Song: The Future performance, including audience visits and feedback.

### **From textile mill to digital theatre**

This historical and contemporary footage identifies the connection between the Shanghai textile industry and Shanghai's all-female yue opera. The female textile workers formed China's first ever female working class and developed their local entertainment, from a rural male sing-song to an urban all-female theatre form. Following mass redundancy in the 1990s, Shanghai's all-female yue opera lost its main audience and has since embraced new digital technologies and a fusion of performing styles, to rejuvenate and maintain popularity across both Shanghai and China.



### **New fashion and technology**

The all-female yue opera entered Shanghai as a migrant culture from Zhejiang province. The entertainment form developed and prospered alongside the textile industry, becoming a way of life for the industrial workers. Reforms in the 1990s saw the dismantling of the textile industry across Shanghai, resulting in mass redundancy and staff redeployment. As the textile industry focused on new fashion and technology, and established old factory premises as contemporary arts clusters, Shanghai all-female yue opera also adapted. Whilst maintaining traditional performance training, Shanghai all-female yue opera is appealing to a new audience through new fashion and technology.



### **Shanghai story: 20 years of Aunt Stewardesses – part 1**

In the early 1990s China was moving from 'made in China' to 'created in China' and Shanghai was being transformed from the heart of textile industry of China to the new centre for finance and international trade. 500,000 female workers were made redundant.

In 1994, Shanghai Airlines advertised for 14 air stewardesses to be recruited exclusively from the textile industry. Over 50,000 women applied and 18 were recruited. They became known as 'Aunt Stewardesses'. The interviews and selection became national news and the successful candidates became celebrities.





### **Shanghai story: 20 years of Aunt Stewardesses**

The original Shanghai TV footage from the 1994 selection process is updated with interviews from the 2014 reunion of the 18 celebrity Aunt Stewardesses. The women tell stories from their recollection of the interview process and their subsequent training and service with Shanghai Airlines.



### **Shanghai all-female yue opera, a feminist perspective**

A student attends her first Shanghai all-female yue opera performance, the immersive show Fate of Love, and explains her interest in the all-female performance. Socio-political changes in the early 1900s allowed an all-male entertainment to develop into an all-female performance, with support from Shanghai textile workers, was developed for the new urban working women to date.



### **Story of Shanghai yue opera with Wang Rousang**

Shanghai all-female yue opera is traced from its roots to its current position amongst the most popular entertainment forms in China. In the exclusive interviews, Shanghai all-female yue opera star performer Wang Rousang explains her love for yue opera and how she has witnessed the decline of the traditional art form in the 1990s before its revival in the new millennium. In the all-female yue opera productions, Rousang is famous for her xiaosheng (male role).

Wang Rousang has starred in Song of the Female Textile Workers as Lu. The one-actor performance, in collaboration with the project partners across UK and China, devised and produced entirely online between 2020 and 2022. The digital avatar version of Wang Rousang continued to star Lu in our follow-on mobile interactive performance Song: The Future.



