



Learning from the past to build the future

China's growing affluence and emergence from decades of cultural isolation promises to provide a vibrant future of artistic vitality

China is an economic powerhouse, a market for the world and a source of economic productivity. It's also earning a reputation as a cultural powerhouse, art market and source of artistic contribution – particularly in classical music, dance, theatre and fine art.

Its potential is vast. There are some 40 million students of piano and violin in the country. Museums and opera houses are being built not only in first-tier centres but also in second- and third-tier cities. Creative schools search for talent nationwide, drawing from the vast population and training them intensively from a young age. Chinese talent has started to infiltrate the West, as evidenced in numbers of Chinese musicians in Western organisations and the impact of Chinese art in Western markets. With greater interest in China's 5,000-year culture, more Chinese-arts festivals are appearing in the West: the Kennedy Center's Festival of China, the Year of China in France and China Now in London.

China's growing affluence and emergence from decades of cultural isolation promises to provide a vibrant future of artistic vitality. How it develops will be important not just for China but the rest of the world as well. Yet with the speed of global communications, it is likely China's arts will face many of the challenges the West has contended with. Pop culture and commercial art will compete with the classical arts. Market-economy thinking will challenge government support for the arts.

Many Chinese leaders have expressed an interest in learning from the West to help guide cultural development in China. This interest has led to a series of China Cultural Summits.

The summits involved interviews with cultural officials, thinkers and arts practitioners from both China and the West. Participants then assembled to discuss the knowledge gleaned. Seed funding is available for future mini-summits and interviewees are being identified to provide insights into lessons both sides can learn.