



United Nations educational, scientific and cultural organization  
Organisation des nations unies pour l'éducation, la science et la culture

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**UNESCO International Congress  
“Culture: Key to Sustainable Development”  
Hangzhou, China  
15 – 17 May 2013**

**Panel Discussion “How does culture drive and enable social cohesion  
and inclusion”**

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I would like to start by saying:

**Art transcends nationalism and cultural borders.**

I believe the shortest route to the hearts and minds of people from different nations, traditions and backgrounds is through art and culture. At the end of the day, the language of art is universal. There has never been more need for this universality than in our complex world today. There would be a great void in our lives without art and culture. Respect for culture creates respect within and amongst nations. I salute your nation for cherishing and promoting your own great culture and tradition and simultaneously not neglecting the art and

culture produced by other nations around the world. It is an enduring way of cementing the understanding of art and culture and diluting ignorance.

Your country should be praised for its long-term forward thinking and planning which has been a hallmark of Chinese innovation throughout the centuries.

As a humble collector, being driven by the same dream, I assembled and published in 40 volumes to date eight of the largest and most comprehensive art collections in the world totalling 25,000 objects, including the largest private collection of Islamic art. The rules for my life were simple: I went to sleep dreaming about my passion and woke up in the morning pursuing it. I believe that life without passion is like fire without a flame.

Your forward thinking and planning is clearly evident in your own support of the arts. You already have 2,000 museums across your country and you are planning to build another 3,000 by the end of 2015, which I see as an incredible challenge but, knowing you, I have no doubt you will exceed your cultural dream and astound the world.

By comparison, during the last 300 years, European countries combined have built over 19,000 museums and the US over 17,000, representing local and international art and culture. I won't be surprised to see China exceed these numbers in the not too distant future.

Allow me to give you an example of what is happening culturally in my home country: the cultural and creative industries contributed £12.4 billion to the UK

economy in 2011. The industry supports 260,000 full-time equivalent jobs, which indirectly means one million people, when you take into account the families of those employed. Using the above simple model and applying it to your museum building project means that by the time you finish in 2015 the contribution to your economy will hopefully be £223 billion per annum which will directly and indirectly benefit approximately 20 million of your people. Knowing your system and the way you go forward, I am almost sure these numbers will be far higher than my simple calculation.

If this does not exemplify your dream, what else can?

Can you imagine the impact on tourism, economic gain and the prestige of your nation as a consequence of your ambitious art and cultural projects. In short, every year you will have millions coming to your country as visitors and leaving as ambassadors, a principle that applies in most of the major cultural centres of the world. I don't know of any amount of money that can be spent on publicising any project that would have a fraction of the effect that culture will have. These visitors would come from all over the world with a view that is already formed about their artistic preferences. Having 5,000 museums throughout your nation displaying a diversity of objects from your own and other cultures will open their minds, widen their knowledge and satisfy any artistic taste and preference they may have. This illustrates the power of art and culture which I always believe to be irreplaceable and unparalleled. With this in mind, I wish you tremendous success in this important and far-sighted endeavour.