BRITISH COUNCIL



China's 15th Five-Year Plans on Culture (2026-2030): National Priorities and International Collaboration

3 November 2026



Written by Enke Huang,
Daylight Perspective Ltd



Executive summary

Project background

Commissioned by the British Council, this review analyses China's 15th Five-Year Plans, published in 2026, to identify priorities shaping China's cultural sector and international collaboration over the next five years, and their implications for UK cultural organisations.

Methodology

This is a selective desk review of six national plans, with comparisons to the preceding Five-Year Plans to identify continuity and changing emphasis.

Policy highlights

- **Culture is expected to play more explicit economic and social roles.** Amid domestic pressures, culture and tourism are expected to stimulate spending, support livelihoods and improve wellbeing.
- **Quality and long-term viability gain emphasis alongside growth.** Innovation and production remain priorities, with more detailed measures to support high-quality content, sustained use of facilities, talent and sector development.
- **China signals further opening and more active cultural diplomacy.** Amid global uncertainty, China seeks a more proactive role through sustained bilateral, multilateral and city partnerships, while extending Chinese culture's international reach.

Opportunities for the UK

- **Strong potential for quality UK content to inspire new experiences and co-creation.** Explore digital formats, cross-city tours, linked cultural, retail and travel offers, and new ways to experience traditional cultural spaces.
- **Shared priorities create room for deeper exchange.** Areas such as festival economies, heritage, cultural data, public engagement and sustainability offer scope for learning across different contexts and build trust for deeper institutional and city partnerships.

Practical implications for the UK

- **Position UK expertise in relation to China's priorities.** Support for domestic production and closer ties with Global South and Belt and Road partners invite UK organisations to consider how UK expertise complements local strengths.
- **Content regulation remains a practical consideration.** Clarify creative scope with partners; discuss ownership and data use, particularly in fast-developing areas such as AI where the plans give little detail.

Limitation: policy priorities indicate direction, not confirmed funding or guaranteed outcomes. Culture sits within a wider national policy framework, and delivery depends on local implementation.

Policy context

About China’s Five-Year Plans

China's Five-Year Plans have set national economic and social priorities since 1953. The national plan is proposed by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, drafted by the State Council and the National Development and Reform Commission, and approved by the National People’s Congress. It defines priority policies and major projects and guides public resources, supported by sectoral and regional five-year plans at national, provincial and local levels.

The 15th Five-Year Plan: 2026-2030

Published in March 2026, the national plan spans 62 chapters, 20 key indicators and 109 major projects across six areas. It balances confidence in China’s strengths with recognition of domestic pressures and international uncertainty.

“...超大规模市场优势、完整产业体系优势、丰富人才资源优势...同时，发展不平衡不充分问题仍然突出，周期性、结构性、体制性问题相互交织；有效需求不足，供强需弱矛盾突出...就业和居民收入增长压力较大...人口结构变化给经济发展、社会治理等提出新议题...房地产、地方政府债务、中小金融机构等风险任务繁重” - 总规划

“...the advantages of a vast domestic market, a comprehensive industrial system and abundant talent resources... At the same time, unbalanced and insufficient development remains a prominent challenge, with cyclical, structural and institutional problems intertwined; effective demand is insufficient, and the imbalance between strong supply and weak demand is pronounced... Employment and household income growth face considerable pressure... Demographic changes raise new questions for economic development and social governance... The task of addressing risks in the property sector, local government debt and small and medium-sized financial institutions remains demanding.” - National Plan

“世界百年变局加速演进，国际力量对比深刻调整，新一轮科技革命和产业变革加速突破...同时，世界变乱交织、动荡加剧，地缘冲突易发多发，全球治理赤字加重，安全问题凸显...世界经济增长动能不足...大国博弈更加激烈复杂...” - 总规划

“Profound global changes unseen in a century are accelerating, the international balance of power is undergoing profound shifts. A new wave of technological revolution and industrial transformation is advancing rapidly...At the same time, global instability is intensifying, geopolitical conflicts are increasingly frequent, gaps in global governance are widening, and security challenges are becoming more pronounced... Global economic growth lacks momentum... Competition between major powers is becoming more intense and complex...” - National Plan

Against this backdrop, culture is given broader economic and social roles, expected to drive spending, support livelihoods and contribute to wellbeing.

“把文化产业和旅游业培育成支柱产业、民生产业、幸福产业” - 文旅十五五
“Develop the cultural and tourism industries into pillar industries, industries that support people's livelihoods and industries that contribute to happiness.” - Culture and Tourism Plan

Internationally, China seeks a more proactive role in response to greater global uncertainty, supporting sustained partnerships and helping Chinese culture reach global audiences.

“推动政府间双边合作机制项目化发展，建立常态化磋商推进机制” - 文旅十五五
“Translate intergovernmental bilateral cooperation mechanisms into concrete projects, and establish regular discussion and consultation mechanisms to advance their implementation.” - Culture and Tourism Plan

For UK stakeholders, showing an understanding of these priorities can help identify shared interests, signal good faith and open informed, mutually beneficial dialogue.



Key priorities for cultural industry development

What are the key priorities shaping China's cultural sector over the next five years?

1. Culture is expected to support wider economic goals.

Cultural products and experiences are expected to stimulate spending across tourism, retail, hospitality and transport. Building on the 14th Five-Year plans, the 15th Five-Year plans place greater emphasis on high-quality development and give more detail on audience segments, including older people, young people and families. Measures such as subsidies, linked offers and longer opening hours aim to extend cultural events into a wider event economy, with creative content inspiring new artistic forms and in-person experiences.



发展数字动漫、沉浸式展演、线上演播、短视频、微短剧等新型文化业态 - 总规划
"Develop emerging forms of cultural activity, including digital animation, immersive exhibitions and performances, online performances and broadcasts, short videos and micro-dramas." - National Plan

以优质动漫、演艺、影视、文学作品等带动线下场景创新 - 文产十五五
"Use high-quality animation, live performance, film and television, literature and other creative works to inspire innovative in-person experiences." - Cultural Industry Development Plan

推广"跟着演出去旅行"、"跟着影视去旅游"、"跟着非遗去旅行"、"跟着名著去旅游" - 文产十五五
"Promote 'travel inspired by live performances', 'travel inspired by film and television', 'travel inspired by intangible cultural heritage' and 'travel inspired by literary classics'." - Cultural Industry Development Plan

积极培育银发族、青少年、亲子家庭等细分市场文化消费，满足群众体验式、个性化消费需求 - 文产十五五
"Actively develop cultural consumption among specific market segments, including senior people, young people and families with children, meeting demand for experiential and personalised offerings." - Cultural Industry Development Plan

2. Cultural technology policy gives more detail on applications and data.

Building on existing digital priorities, the plans encourage the use of frontier technologies in the cultural industries, closer collaboration between cultural and technology companies, and activities that integrate content, technology and traditional cultural spaces. Cultural data and AI receive particular attention. The plans aim to turn data into an asset that can be used, shared, traded and traced, and to develop sector-wide AI models, though these mechanisms are still developing.

支持新能源、新材料、量子科技、具身智能、脑机接口、6G在文化产业的应用 - 文产十五五
"Support the application of new energy, new materials, quantum technology, embodied intelligence, brain–computer interfaces and 6G in the cultural industries." - Cultural Industry Development Plan

支持文化企业和科技企业信息共享、产品共研、场景共建 - 文产十五五
"Support cultural and technology enterprises in sharing information, jointly developing products and jointly creating settings for their use." - Cultural Industry Development Plan

推动内容、技术、与空间融合。沉浸式业态培育：利用空间型虚拟现实、全息互动投影等技术，与文博场馆、公共空间、公共景区、城市综合体等结合- 文产十五五
"Promote the integration of content, technology and space. Foster immersive experiences by integrating technologies such as location-based virtual reality and holographic interactive projection into museums and heritage venues, public spaces, public scenic attractions and mixed-use urban complexes." - Cultural Industry Development Plan

挖掘文化数据要素价值...推动文化数据产业化利用...有序、规范、集约推进文化产业领域垂直大模型建设...增加文化数据可用、可流通、可追溯水平...加快文化数据资源体系、高质量文化数据集建设，推动文化数据与产业发展、公共服务、内容创作深度融合。 - 文产十五五
"Unlock the value of cultural data as a factor of production ... promote its use in industry ... advance the development of sector-specific large AI models for the cultural industries in an orderly, regulated and coordinated manner ... improve the usability, circulation and traceability of cultural data ... accelerate the development of cultural data resource systems and high-quality datasets, and promote closer integration of cultural data with industry development, public services and content creation." - Cultural Industry Development Plan

3. A more patient approach to sector development.

The industry plan explicitly supports 'patient capital', a relatively new policy term for longer-term investment, alongside wider financial support for cultural enterprises. Measures to prevent idle investment suggest more emphasis on sustained use and benefits throughout a project's lifecycle. Skills priorities link education more closely to industry. Content oversight continues, with a 'tolerant and prudent' approach to new formats and a firm commitment to uphold ideological security.



培育文化领域耐心资本，扩大长期投资 ...避免低效无效投资和闲置浪费，分类施策盘活存量设施和闲置低效项目 - 文产十五五
"Cultivate patient capital in the cultural sector and expand long-term investment... Avoid inefficient and ineffective investment, idle assets and waste; adopt tailored measures to bring existing facilities and idle or underperforming projects into productive use." - Cultural Industry Development Plan

支持文化金融服务：鼓励银行金融机构加大对文化企业信贷支持力度; 鼓励有条件的文化企业通过上市、股权、债券等方式融资... - 文产十五五
"Support financial services for the cultural sector: encourage banking institutions to increase lending to cultural enterprises; encourage eligible cultural enterprises to raise funds through stock market listings, equity and bonds..." - Cultural Industry Development Plan

加强数智化文化产业管理等学科体系建设和人才培养、推进产教结合...支持文化企业稳岗扩岗...实施高素质文化产业人才培养计划，围绕人工智能、创意设计、经营管理、文化金融、国际合作等重点领域，培养兼具文化素养、专业水准、创新能力的复合型人才 - 文产十五五
"Strengthen disciplines and talent development in subjects such as digital cultural industry management, and promote closer integration between industry and academia ... support cultural enterprises in retaining and creating jobs ... a supportive programme to develop highly skilled cultural industry professionals, focusing on AI, creative design, business management, cultural finance and international cooperation, and cultivating interdisciplinary talent combining cultural knowledge, professional expertise and the capacity to innovate." - Cultural Industry Development Plan

包容审慎监管文化新业态，加强文化产品内容监管。深入推进文化市场综合执法改革。推动形成优质优价、良性竞争的市场秩序。落实意识形态工作责任制，及时应对和化解危害文化安全的风险挑战，守牢意识形态安全底线 - 文产十五五
"Take a tolerant and prudent approach to regulating emerging cultural activities, while strengthening oversight of cultural product content. Further advance reforms to consolidate regulatory enforcement functions across the cultural sector. Foster a market environment in which quality commands an appropriate price and competition is healthy. Ensure the accountability system for ideological work is put into practice, responding promptly to and addressing risks and challenges to cultural security, and firmly uphold the bottom line of ideological security." - Cultural Industry Development Plan

4. Culture's growing role in public life.

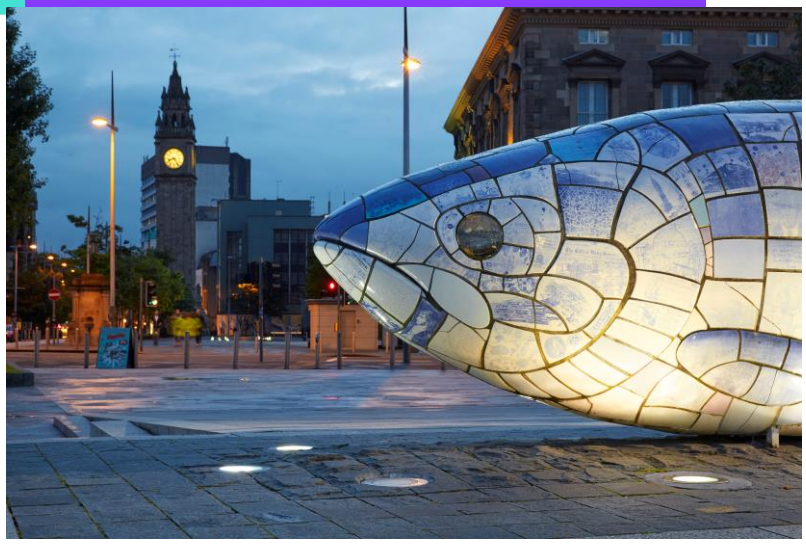
The new plans repeatedly emphasise bringing culture into everyday settings such as community reading spaces, libraries, and smaller museums, with public cultural spaces hosting a wider range of activities for residents and visitors.

依托城市书房、社区文化驿站、文化长廊等发展新型公共文化空间 - 总规划
"Develop new forms of public cultural space through urban reading rooms, community cultural hubs, cultural corridors and similar facilities." - National Plan

提升智慧博物馆、智慧图书馆、公共文化云服务效能。全民阅读活动，书香社会建设 - 总规划
"Improve the effectiveness of smart museums, smart libraries and cloud-based public cultural services. Promote reading for all and build a society that values reading." - National Plan

健全社会力量参与公共文化服务机制 - 总规划
"Strengthen mechanisms for non-governmental organisations, businesses and individuals to participate in public cultural services." - National Plan

主客共享的优质公共文化空间 - 文旅十五五
"High-quality public cultural spaces shared by residents and visitors." - Culture and Tourism Plan





Opportunities for the UK

- **Strong potential for quality UK content.** China's emphasis on consumption and quality creates scope for UK partners to develop engaging in-person experiences and joint creative work from high-quality screen content. UK partners can connect events across venues and cities with retail and travel offers, and explore emerging forms such as digital animation, immersive exhibitions, and short videos, including fresh ways to experience museums, libraries and other traditional cultural spaces. Viability will depend on audience demand and partners' capacity.
- **Shared challenges offer scope for exchange beyond content.** China's priorities in cultural tourism, consumption, heritage conservation and innovation offer common ground for exchange on wider sector questions both countries face, such as how cultural spaces support local economies and everyday social life. Exchange on festival economies, cultural data, public programming and sustainability offers UK organisations fresh perspectives across different contexts, scales and paces of environment, and builds trust for deeper institutional collaboration.

Practical implications

- **Understand content regulation early.** Content regulation remains clearly stated, with wording consistent with the previous plan, and will shape the scope of touring and joint work. Early, open conversations with Chinese partners about themes can help projects develop smoothly, particularly for organisations newer to working in China.
- **Clarify rights and data use.** Fast-developing areas such as AI and cultural data raise questions around rights, ownership and use in cross-border activities. The policies do not set out this level of detail. Partners can navigate this by agreeing these points early in project discussions.



Key priorities for international collaboration

What do the plans signal about China's approach to international collaboration?

1. International engagement is framed within a more proactive strategy.

Responding to global uncertainty, the plans focus on strengthening China's own development to maintain autonomy in international relationships, including its four Global Initiatives.

落实全球发展倡议、全球安全倡议、全球文明倡议、全球治理倡议，积极推进中国特色大国外交，为构建人类命运共同体作出中国贡献- 总规划
"Implement the Global Development Initiative, Global Security Initiative, Global Civilisation Initiative and Global Governance Initiative; actively advance major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics, contributing to building a community with a shared future for mankind." - National Plan

集中力量办好自己的事，统筹布局、精心安排，巩固拓展优势、破除瓶颈制约、补强短板弱项，在激烈国际竞争中赢得战略主动，以高质量发展的确定性应对各种不确定性 - 总规划
"Concentrate efforts on managing our own affairs well, with coordinated planning and careful preparation; consolidate and extend strengths, overcome bottlenecks and address weaknesses; secure the strategic initiative amid intense international competition; and respond to uncertainty with the certainty provided by high-quality development." - National Plan

2. Bilateral projects and cities take on a stronger diplomatic role.

The plans support head-of-state diplomacy, joint projects and regular intergovernmental dialogue. Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) partners, the Global South and neighbouring countries receive particular mention, though the plans also commit to UN-centred multilateralism and exchanges with partners worldwide. Capable cities and international gateway cities are encouraged to host international events and attract international organisations.

高质量服务元首外交，跟进落实元首外交重要成果。推动政府间双边合作机制项目化发展，建立常态化磋商推进机制，办好中外文化和旅游年（节）。用好金砖国家、二十国集团、文明古国论坛等多边机制平台。深化与共建"一带一路"国家、全球南方国家、周边国家对接合作。加强与世界各国艺术机构、艺术家交流合作 - 文旅十五五

"Provide high-quality support for head-of-state diplomacy and follow through on its key outcomes. Translate intergovernmental bilateral cooperation mechanisms into concrete projects, establish regular consultations to advance implementation, and deliver successful bilateral culture and tourism years and festivals. Make effective use of multilateral platforms such as BRICS, the G20 and the Ancient Civilizations Forum. Deepen cooperation and coordination with Belt and Road partner countries, countries of the Global South and neighbouring countries. Strengthen exchanges and cooperation with arts institutions and artists worldwide." - Culture and Tourism Plan

倡导践行真正的多边主义，坚定维护以联合国为核心的国际体系、以国际法为基础的国际秩序、以联合国宪章宗旨和原则为基础的国际关系基本准则，拓展全球伙伴关系网络，引领国际秩序朝着更加公正合理的方向发展 - 总规划

"Advocate and practise genuine multilateralism; firmly uphold the international system centred on the United Nations, the international order underpinned by international law, and the basic norms governing international relations founded on the purposes and principles of the UN Charter; expand the global network of partnerships; and guide the international order towards greater fairness and equity." - National Plan

支持有条件的城市承担重大外事外交活动，吸引有影响力的国际组织落户。建设一批国际门户枢纽城市和区域性开放节点城市。发挥世界城市日、全球可持续发展城市奖（上海奖）等作用，加强在联合国人居署等多边合作框架下的城市更新国际交流合作 - 城市更新十五五

"Support capable cities to host major foreign affairs and diplomatic events and attract influential international organisations to establish a presence. Develop a network of international gateway and hub cities, alongside regional centres for international engagement. Make use of platforms such as World Cities Day and the Global Award for Sustainable Development in Cities (Shanghai Award) to strengthen international exchanges and cooperation on urban renewal within multilateral frameworks, including UN-Habitat." - Urban Renewal Plan

3. Culture is supported for further opening.

The national plan lists culture alongside telecommunications, the internet, education and healthcare as sectors for orderly further opening. Heritage is a key area for engagement: the plans support research and conservation of Chinese objects in overseas museums, high-quality exhibitions abroad, joint World Heritage nominations and archaeological projects, and mechanisms for recovering and returning cultural objects lost overseas. Meanwhile, outward reach also gains attention, with support for Chinese cultural enterprises overseas, and a target of around 14,000 book rights licensed abroad each year by 2030.

推动电信、互联网、教育、文化、医疗等领域有序扩大开放 - 总规划

"Expand opening-up in telecommunications, internet services, education, culture, healthcare and other sectors in an orderly manner." - National Plan

实施海外博物馆藏中国文物研究保护项目。办好文物出境展览精品项目，加强亚洲文化遗产保护联盟建设...深化文化遗产国际交流合作，推进联合申遗、联合考古、文物援外、健全流失文物追索返还机制 - 文旅十五五

"Implement research and conservation projects for Chinese cultural objects held in overseas museums. Deliver high-quality overseas exhibitions of cultural objects and strengthen the Alliance for Cultural Heritage in Asia...Deepen international exchanges and cooperation on cultural heritage; advance joint World Heritage nominations, joint archaeological projects and assistance to other countries in cultural heritage conservation and restoration; and strengthen mechanisms for recovering and returning cultural objects lost overseas." - Culture and Tourism Plan

推动中华文化更好走向世界，协同推进符号传播和品牌建设，形成国际文化交流品牌集群。鼓励文化企业国际化经营，推动优质动漫、演艺、展览等出海 - 文旅十五五

"Help Chinese culture reach global audiences more effectively, coordinate the promotion of cultural symbols with brand development, and establish a portfolio of recognisable international cultural exchange brands. Encourage cultural enterprises to operate internationally and support high-quality animation, performing arts, exhibitions and other cultural offerings in reaching overseas markets." - Culture and Tourism Plan

到2030年，图书版权年输出规模达14000项左右。 - 出版十五五

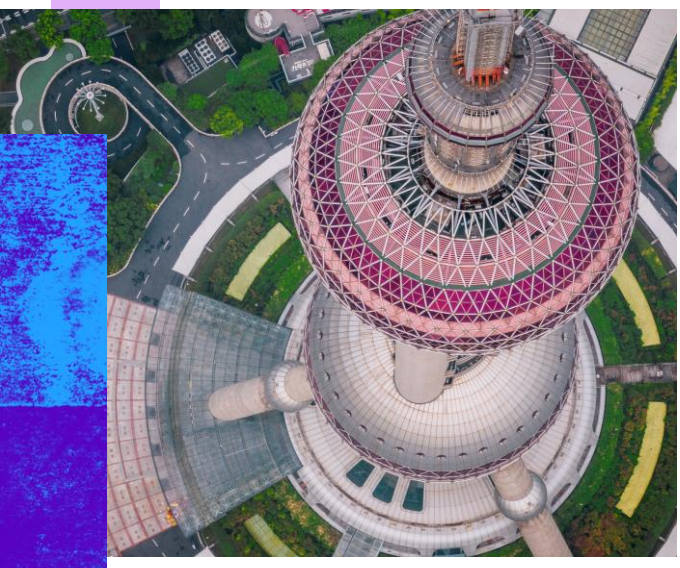
"By 2030, increase the annual number of book rights licensed overseas to approximately 14,000." - Publishing Industry Development Plan

4. Inbound tourism receives practical support.

Alongside outward reach, the plans aim to make China easier to visit, through improved visa, stay and residence policies, more accessible digital services for overseas visitors, and inbound cultural tourism promotion.

优化签证和停居留政策、提高境外人员数字化服务便利性，以及实施入境旅游促进计划 - 十五五总规划
"Improve visa, stay and residence policies, make digital services easier for overseas visitors to use, and implement an inbound tourism promotion programme." - National Plan

中华文化走出去成效更加显著，旅游国际影响力、入境旅游便利化国际化水平明显提升，入境旅游达1.9 亿人次 - 文旅十五五
"Achieve greater impact in bringing Chinese culture to global audiences, significantly enhance tourism's international influence and the ease and international accessibility of inbound travel, and reach 190 million inbound tourist visits." - Culture and Tourism Plan





Opportunities for the UK

- **Develop city and institutional partnerships through projects.** China's further opening-up and more proactive approach signal openness to sustained bilateral exchange. UK organisations can explore city and institutional partnerships where capacities align, around shared interests such as heritage, sustainability, and social change. Joint research, exhibition programming and professional exchange can then build deeper, long-term relationships. For larger or more strategic initiatives, there is an opportunity to present a more distinctive UK cultural offer.
- **Help Chinese culture to connect with UK audiences.** China's goal of international reach creates scope for UK partners to support touring exhibitions, performances, and publishing through translation, interpretation, local programming and audience engagement, giving practical expression to mutual appreciation.

Practical implications

- **Understand the wider partnership landscape and position UK expertise thoughtfully.** The emphasis on domestic production and on partnerships with the Global South and Belt and Road countries invites UK organisations to consider how UK expertise can complement China's development priorities and build momentum with Chinese partners and audiences over time. Where possible, senior-level engagement can help signal long-term commitment to major partnerships.

Documents reviewed

This review focuses on six national and sectoral plans that are the most relevant to cultural industry development and international collaboration:

1. *The 15th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development. (March 2026)* *https://www.ndrc.gov.cn/fggz/fzzlgh/gjfzgh/202603/U020260317369114704096.pdf*

2. *The 15th Five-Year Plan for Culture and Tourism. (September 2026)* *https://zwgk.mct.gov.cn/zfxxgkml/ghjh/202609/P020260916577426568038.pdf*

3. *The 15th Five-Year Plan for Cultural Industry Development. (September 2026)* *https://zwgk.mct.gov.cn/zfxxgkml/ghjh/202609/P020260918685021784481.pdf*

4. *The 15th Five-Year Plan for Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection and Inheritance. (September 2026)* *http://zwgk.mct.gov.cn/zfxxgkml/ghjh/202609/P020261006456823575515.pdf*

5. *The 15th Five-Year Plan for Publishing Industry Development. (September 2026)* *https://www.nppa.gov.cn/xxfb/tzgs/202609/P020260921397882970543.pdf*

6. *The 15th Five-Year Plan for Urban Renewal. (September 2026)* *https://www.ndrc.gov.cn/fggz/fzzlgh/gjjzxgh/202609/t20260928_1407863.html*

Note: The English translations are by the author; ellipses indicate omissions.

BRITISH COUNCIL

arts@britishcouncil.org.cn

www.britishcouncil.org