



BRITAIN



Sharing the best of Britain

Consul General John Edwards is eager to promote his country's unique strengths in culture, trade, investment and innovation with China.

Yao Min-G

John Edwards, the British consul general in Shanghai who arrived last summer, is no stranger to China. He visited Beijing in 1998, only two years after his career in the Foreign Ministry began.

"I always wanted to travel, to live somewhere else and to see the world; and I have been doing that as a diplomat, but also I seem to keep coming back to China," he told Shanghai Daily.

"Coming back to Beijing in 2012, and to Shanghai last year, was like coming to a completely different country, compared with when I visited in 1998, when the Terminal 2 of Beijing airport was not even built."

He was standing in front of a bronze sculpture painted in the style of the British flag — "MBLEM" by artist David Begbie. The 2014 art work is the first item that greets guests at the entrance of the British Consul General's office.

It presents the United Kingdom in a style slightly different from what many older Chinese might expect. The sculpture is energetic, contemporary, exciting, creative and thoughtful, while at the same time slightly humorous — much like the young diplomat.

On the day he met with Shanghai Daily, Edwards jogged to the office in shorts and was changing into formal wear just before a photographer arrived to take his portrait in front of the sculpture. A dedicated runner, Edwards plans to start a costume marathon in Shanghai to raise money for child-related charity causes.

In recent years, British actors like Benedict Cumberbatch and Tom Hiddleston, among many others, have captured the hearts of young Chinese and shattered their stereotypical views. Not that long ago, many in China associated the UK



(Photo by Wang Rongjiang)



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British Consul General in Shanghai

with Jane Austen novels, stern gentlemen in top hats and other dated cultural depictions.

"Image has to be based on reality, and the reality is that the United Kingdom is a cutting-edge innovative country," the consul general said proudly. Edwards named Adele, Hugh Laurie, Damian Lewis, Dominic West and others to his list of brilliant artists who have helped promote Britain's image in China.

He also pointed to the self-deprecating and irreverent nature of British humor, another export for which the country is well known.

"British people are very good at lots of things," he explained, "but we don't take ourselves too seriously."

Talking about playing around with innovative ideas, he reminded Shanghai Daily not to forget to mention the upcoming cream tea party the consulate office will be throwing to celebrate the Queen's 90th birthday. The theme of the celebration will be "Alice in Wonderland."

"We will have 800 people for the tea party, and we will break — no, we will smash — the current Guinness Record of 600," he said excitedly.

Compelling culture

The consul general added that many young Chinese people appreciate the culture and innovative spirit of the UK because they have been to the country, whether to study or travel, and are aware of UK cultural products.

Currently, as many as 125,000 Chinese students are studying in the United Kingdom. What's more, the country's well-respected education system has been attracting Chinese students at increasingly younger ages.

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