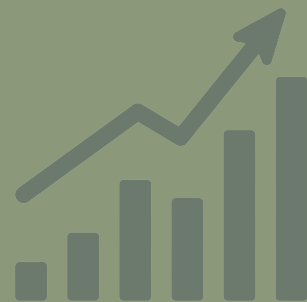


Growing Your Audience in a Crisis:

Lessons from Chinese Cultural Institutions

+50%



A Letter to Our Readers

In January 2020, Chinese cultural destinations were gearing up for busiest period of the year; the Spring Festival, weeks later, they were closed. The past months have seen organizations public and private, large and small, embrace innovative digital strategies to reach a house-bound citizenry. From virtual tours to curator-led live streams, new modes of engagement are redefining the cultural institution in China and shaping habits that will live long beyond the lockdown.


This report provides an overview of diverse digital strategies from China's cultural sphere. The forced closure currently facing global cultural institutions has been a reality in China since January and through presenting key case studies, pertinent data points, and expert insights, we hope to offer inspiration and solace in this challenging moment.

This is not an exhaustive compilation, but rather a curated selection of examples that pose vital questions and offer possible solutions in this unprecedented moment. Over the coming weeks, Jing Travel will continue its coverage of Chinese cultural initiatives and their relevance to global institutions.

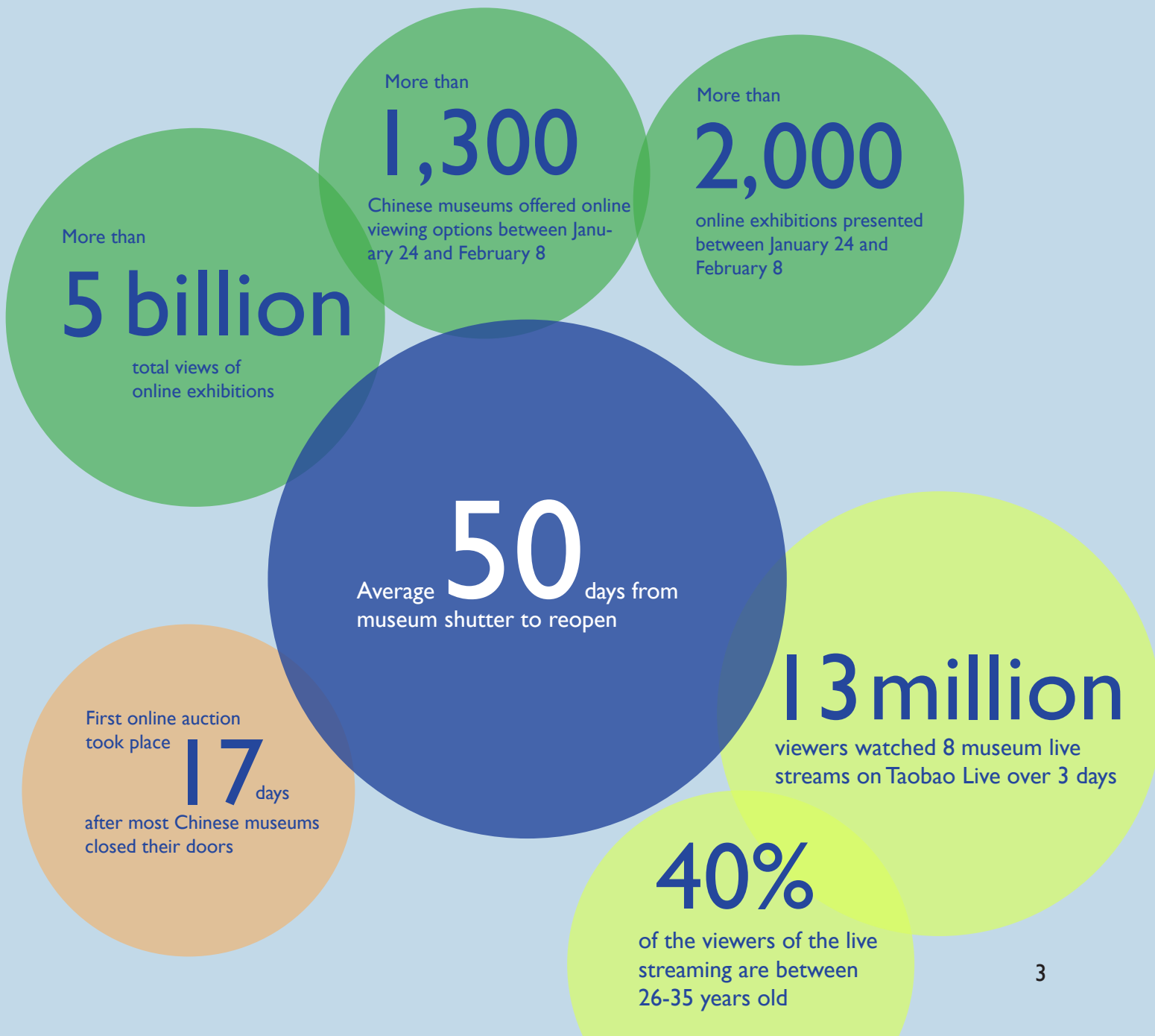
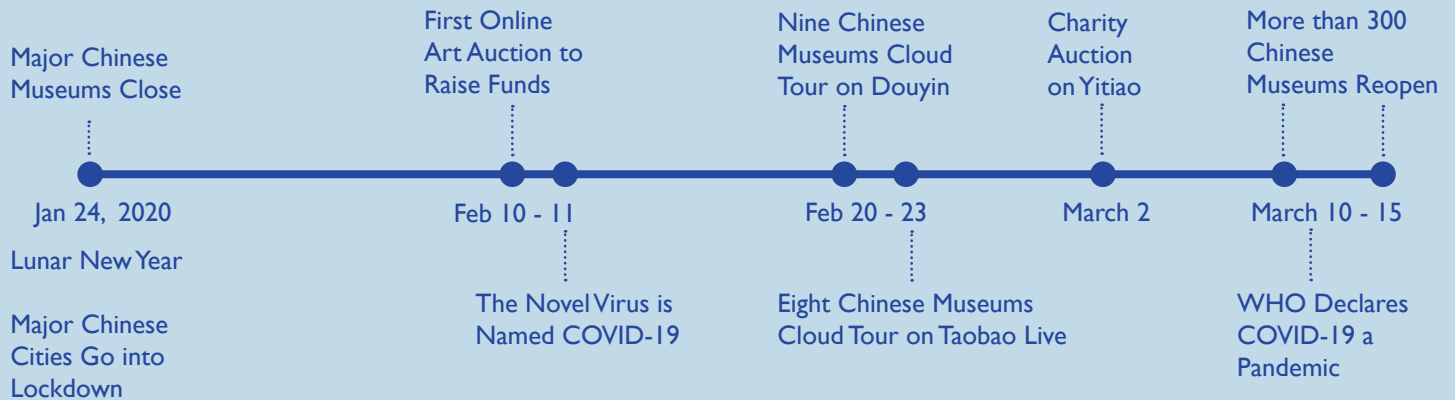
Please consider sharing the report and subscribing to our newsletter. Feedback and tips are welcome at peter@jingtravel.com.

Stay home. Stay healthy. We're all in this together.

Richard Whiddington and Peter Huang

The image shows two handwritten signatures in black ink. The signature on the left is 'Richard Whiddington' and the signature on the right is 'Peter Huang'.

AT A GLANCE



Four Key Takeaways For Cultural Institutions In A Crisis

DON'T STOP, INNOVATE

Engage your audience through online exhibitions, virtual reality, and gamification.



p7

2 p10

FIGHT COLLABORATIVELY

Build cross-industry partnerships to expand reach and deepen impact.

3_{p15}

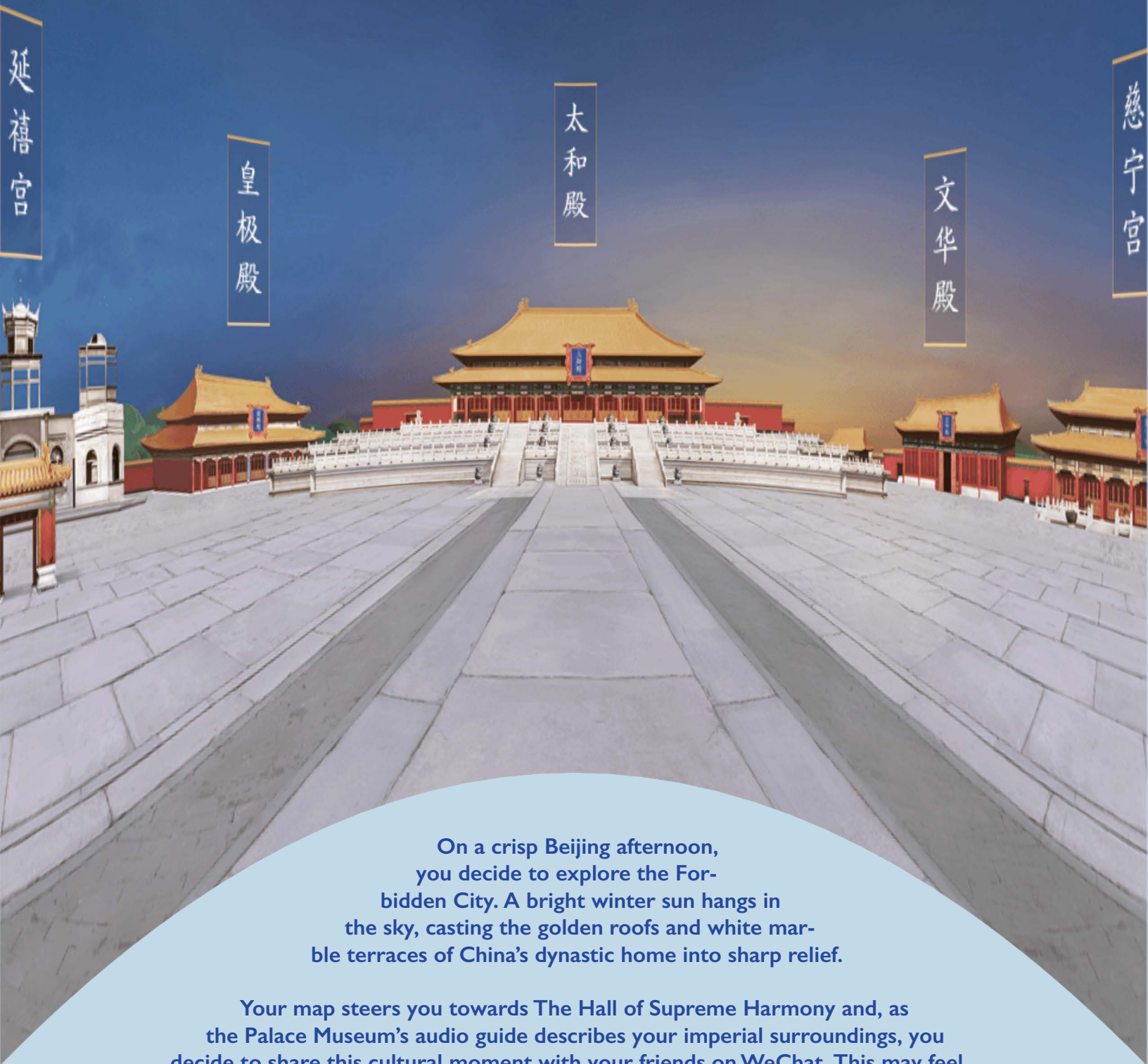
THINK VIDEO. THINK LONG-TERM

Express brand personality to attract your future audience through live-streaming.

4_{p19}

REFLECT AND ACT

Consider expert advice from museums, DMOs, and China-focused consultancies on how to navigate the coronavirus.



On a crisp Beijing afternoon,
you decide to explore the For-
bidden City. A bright winter sun hangs in
the sky, casting the golden roofs and white mar-
ble terraces of China's dynastic home into sharp relief.

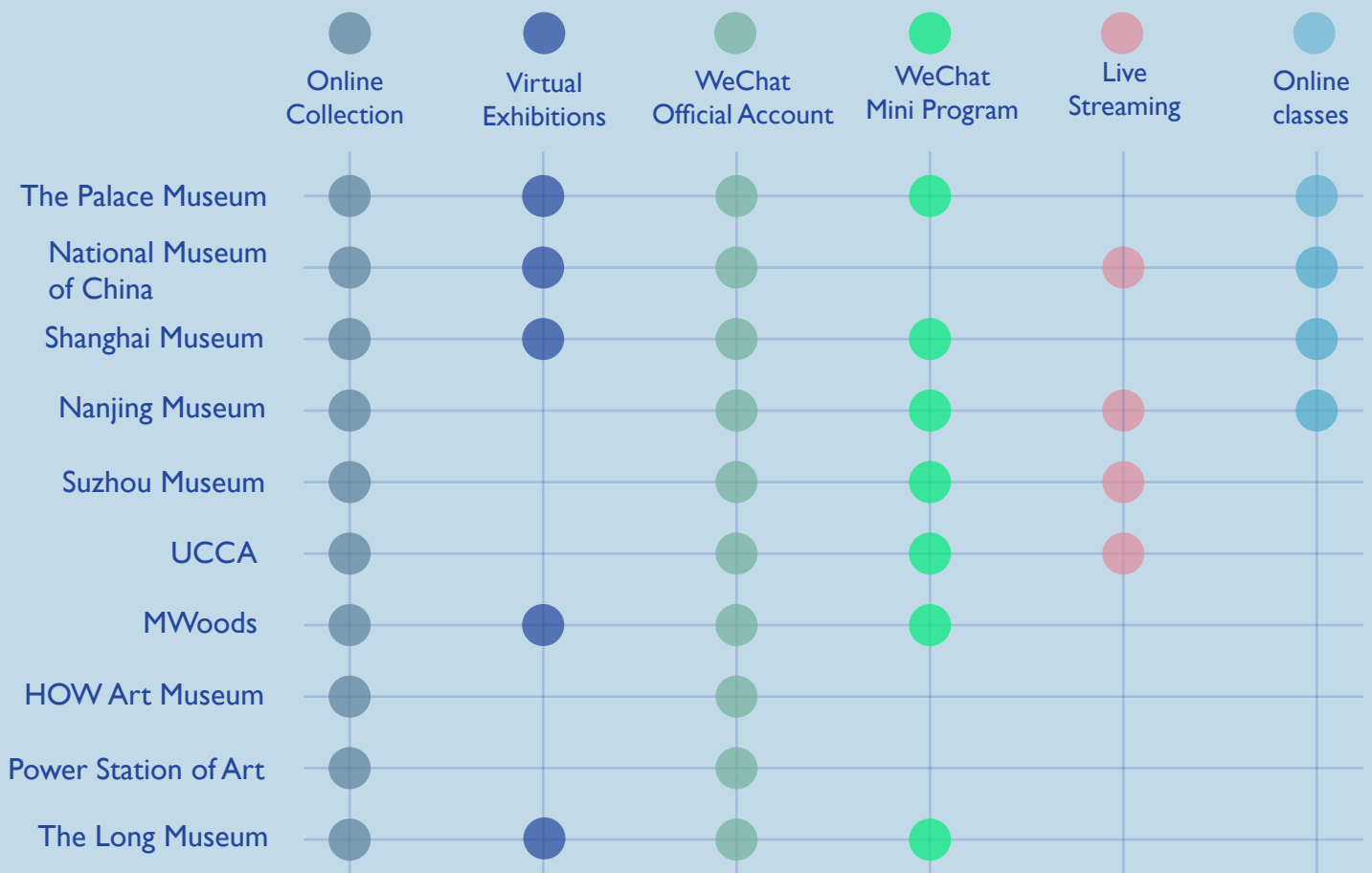
Your map steers you towards The Hall of Supreme Harmony and, as
the Palace Museum's audio guide describes your imperial surroundings, you
decide to share this cultural moment with your friends on WeChat. This may feel
like a typical museum visit, but the experience has been entirely virtual.

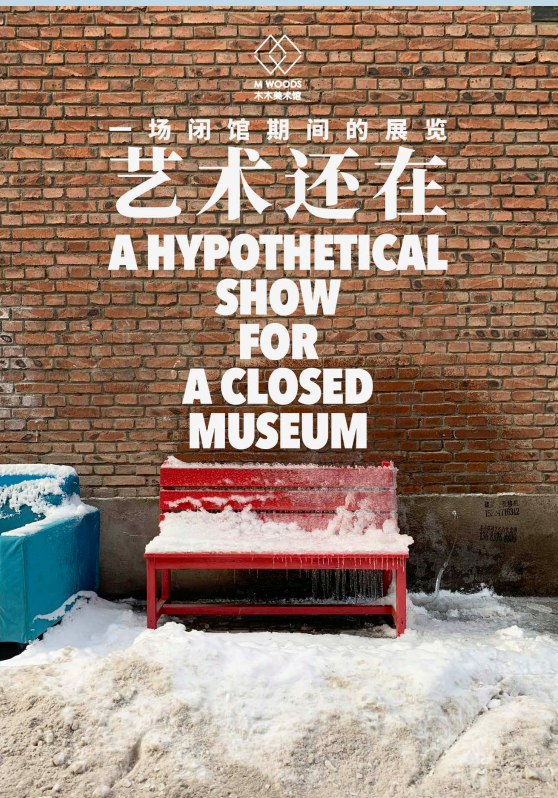
DON'T STOP, INNOVATE

“The Panoramic Palace Museum” program, accessible through WeChat, a downloadable App, and computer, was launched in 2017 to promote and explore the museum’s vast collection. It exemplifies a broader push by Chinese cultural institutions to digitize their collections and reach tech-savvy Chinese audiences.

When, in late-January, the National Cultural Heritage Administration (NCHA) implored Chinese institutions to “promote new technology and inheritance of our country’s cultural heritage” these efforts gained newfound importance to reach a citizenry whose primary connection to the outside world was the smart-phone.

Digital tools deployed by Chinese Museums to embrace audiences during the Coronavirus





Beijing's M Woods has created an interactive exhibition that releases thematically organized artwork on a weekly basis. Image: mwoods.org

Online Exhibitions

From Karamay Museum in far western Xinjiang province to Shanghai's Museum of Revolutionary History, 100 Chinese institutions responded to the encouragements of China's cultural administration by uploading online exhibitions onto a central portal. Originally developed by Tencent, the site has a back catalogue dating to 2015 and therefore offers an impressive range of experiences.

The two main templates used by museums are virtual tours and itemized photographic exhibitions. Virtual tours offer a click through of museums and users can read museum labels and zoom in on artefacts to better understand, for example, the history of competitive fishing at Zhengzhou's Chinese Sports Heritage Exhibition.

The other, photographic exhibitions, while not as immersive as virtual tours, frequently provide objects in 3D, allowing visitors to inspect treasured objects on their screens such as Neolithic pottery at Shaanxi History Museum or an East Han jade screen at Hebei Provincial Museum.

To date, more than 700,000 people have browsed NCHA's catalogue of online exhibitions. While Western museums and cultural institutions cannot upload their content on this platform, they should prioritize making their collections and ongoing exhibitions digitally available to Chinese audiences.

Independent arts institutions have also responded proactively to the situation. One strong example is M Woods Museum, a Beijing-based contemporary art institution. Located in the city's 798 art hub, the institution has long held a strong online presence and has launched an experimental online exhibition "Art Is Still Here: A Hypothetical Show for a Closed Museum".

In remaining "virtually open", M Woods's Chief Curator Victor Wang selects artwork, video, photography, and poems that are uploaded in a 'continuous' exhibition. The homepage presents a video which imagines the visitor stood at the exhibition's entrance reading wall text. Before clicking through to different rooms, browsers get an exhibition overview through an interactive pin board of featured artworks.

Each room presents the work of international artists organized around a theme such as 'co-existence between humans and animals' or 'ecology, nature, extinction' and imagines them occupying one of M Woods' galleries. Artist work is presented alongside biographies and synopses. The exhibition is updated on Weibo daily, WeChat on Thursdays, and on Instagram on Thursday and Friday.

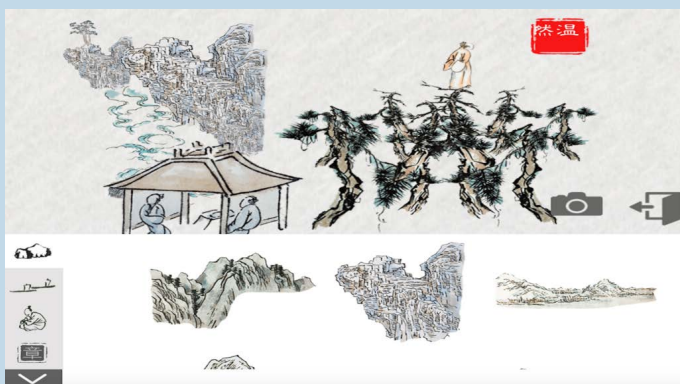
Online Games

The Lunar New Year period typically represents a peak in annual online gaming, but coronavirus beamed this trend to a new level. The iOS app store saw a 27.5 percent year-on-year increase in downloads and the Douyu Streaming Index showed leading names such as Honor of Kings and League of Legends more than doubled viewership from 2019.

Chinese cultural institutions have followed the trend by releasing educational games and interactive digital artworks. One leader is Suzhou Museum which promoted four mini games through its WeChat and Weibo accounts. The digital engagements reflect the museum's status as a home of traditional Chinese art and painting. They include a game in which users assemble Ming style furniture as well as a digitization of a 16th century scroll by Qiu Ying, which slowly pans to reveal the accompanying poem line-by-line.

Most immersive, however, is “DIY Landscape Painting”. Scroll painting devotees can create digital masterpieces by arranging classic motifs such as sweeping rivers, rudimentary huts, and circling herons before signing off with a personalized red seal. They can then send it to a friend or share on social media.

Mobile-friendly and accessible through connecting QR codes, these mini games may lack the finesse and complexity of major online games, but they are a playful means of reintroducing collections to audiences.



Conclusions

Western institutions should look to China's example in this moment of uncertainty. The minimum commitment should be uploading past and ongoing exhibitions with supporting text and audio resources.

Next, cultural institutions should consider innovative ways to reach audiences on the platforms they use. Chinese efforts on WeChat and Weibo should translate to similar initiatives across Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. While M Woods' online exhibition may seem an extreme example, the digital representation of offline exhibitions and spaces represents the future of audience engagement. As VR and AR technologies evolve, launching 'virtual exhibitions' will become the norm for cultural institutions. Investing time and resources in this developing trend now will create a solid blueprint to work from in the coming years.

(Left) Suzhou Museum is promoting online games including “DIY Landscape Painting”, which allows users to create classical paintings digitally. Image: szmuseum.com/ 温然

Fight Collaboratively

How Cross-industry Partnerships
Propelled Online Auctions

BUILD

cross-industry
collaborations.

USE

the unique strengths
of various social me-
dia channels to maxi-
mize reach.

CHOOSE

a live stream platform that
inspires interactivity and
expands your audience.

“Many of those involved in the auction are not art professionals, but members of the public and so perhaps in some small way the auction can bring these two poles closer together.”

Echo He, FOU Gallery

As China's coronavirus epidemic deepened in early February, public gatherings were prohibited and cultural destinations closed as the government mandated a nationwide quarantine.

While millions stayed home and worked remotely, medical workers and volunteers continued to make great personal sacrifices. In response, Chinese museums, art institutions, and media organizations rallied together to raise funds for those on the frontline.

Fundraisers took the form of art auctions, which were executed entirely online; promotion occurred rapidly across social media platforms, donated works were photographed and uploaded, and the events were held on live streaming platforms. The auctions not only demonstrated a broad institutional familiarity with innovative technologies but furthermore the ability of art to engender meaningful action.

Here, we analyse two prominent examples.



A CHARITY AUCTION TO COMBAT THE EPIDEMIC

ONLINE AUCTION PLATFORM: **Yitiao** AUCTION TIME: **2020.3.2 - 3.5**
80+ Int'l Art Organizations **100+** Int'l Charitable Artists **100+** Contemporary Art Lots
 All benefit will go to the Shanghai Soong Ching Ling Foundation
 In order to purchase epidemic prevention supplies for primary school students
 at the **80** schools situated in the affected area

Organizers



Beneficiaries



The digital poster for "Standing Together Through Thick and Thin". Image: HOW ART MUSEUM

"Standing Together Through Thick and Thin"

Shanghai's HOW Art Museum led a campaign to raise funds for primary school children and women: a group that makes up the majority of nurses and volunteers battling coronavirus. "In light of the outbreak, we vow to take responsibility in protecting children from the virus," the museum stated in a press release pledging all funds to Shanghai Soong Ching Ling Foundation, an organization focused on the welfare of women and children.

First and foremost, an auction needs desirable products. HOW Art Museum and the HOWStore donated 30 items worth an estimated 1 million RMB (\$143,000), which encouraged prominent names in the Chinese art world to follow suit.

Among the international respondents was New York's FOU GALLERY, a space for contemporary Chinese art. The gallery's founder, Echo He, stressed the art world's responsibility to unite and collaborate. "Information about the virus has traveled as fast as the virus itself and ultimately affects everyone," said He, "our fates are entwined with China's, and the spread of this epidemic connects the whole of humanity."

The auction exemplified cross-industry collaboration between museums, media organizations, cultural institutions, and online platforms. Modern Media Group promoted the event across its arts, culture, and news publications including The Art Newspaper, iWeekly, and Art Weekly. On the social media front, news of the event spread among arts-related WeChat groups and later through official WeChat accounts.

The auction itself was held on Yitiao, a short-form video platform.

“Life is Priceless and Art is Powerful”

Another way for an auction to gain online traction is through celebrity endorsement. Yao Chen achieved stardom for her role in 2000s martial arts TV show “My Own Swordsman”, but her campaigning for social issues has made her equally famous in China.

Yao regularly harnesses the power of her 83 million Weibo followers through direct engagement, including reposting messages of fellow citizens in need. When Yao focused a post on the charity auction “Life is Priceless and Art is Powerful”, it played a significant factor in the auction’s campaign hashtags being used more than 6 million times.

Spontaneous celebrity endorsements and the speed at which customized hashtags (#lifeispriceless, #artispowerful) can become trends is a great strength of Weibo. While WeChat functions as a closed platform (meaning official accounts can only reach and engage directly with followers), Weibo is an open network platform that offers greater reach as users see trending content, even if they don’t follow the accounts.

Aside from organic social media traffic, organizers including auction house Beijing Council International Auction, independent bookstore One Way Street, and lifestyle magazine Sanlian Lifeweek created 15 posters of auction artworks which included QR Codes directing users to the auction site. Users were incentivized to share the posters across social media, which were awarded ‘combat points, equal to 1-10 RMB’ per share, which helped increase the final auction price.

Staged on Beijing Council International Auction’s App and WeChat Mini Program from February 14 to 15, the auction accepted 117 artworks, and saw tens of thousands of netizens follow the bidding process.



Digital posters for “Life is Priceless and Art is Powerful” included QR Codes linking to the auction page. Image: iCouncil WeChat.

Results

“Standing Together Through Thick and Thin”

By the auction’s conclusion, 12.2 million RMB (\$1.7 million) had been raised with more than 400,000 people tuning into the Yitiao live auction.

Such success was the result of the extremely high-calibre lots on offer — close to 90 percent of which sold. Cai Guoqiang offered a signature gunpowder drawing specifically for the auction and established Chinese painters Yue Minjue and Zhang Xiaogang donated paintings which together raised more than \$500,000.

“Life is Priceless and Art is Powerful”

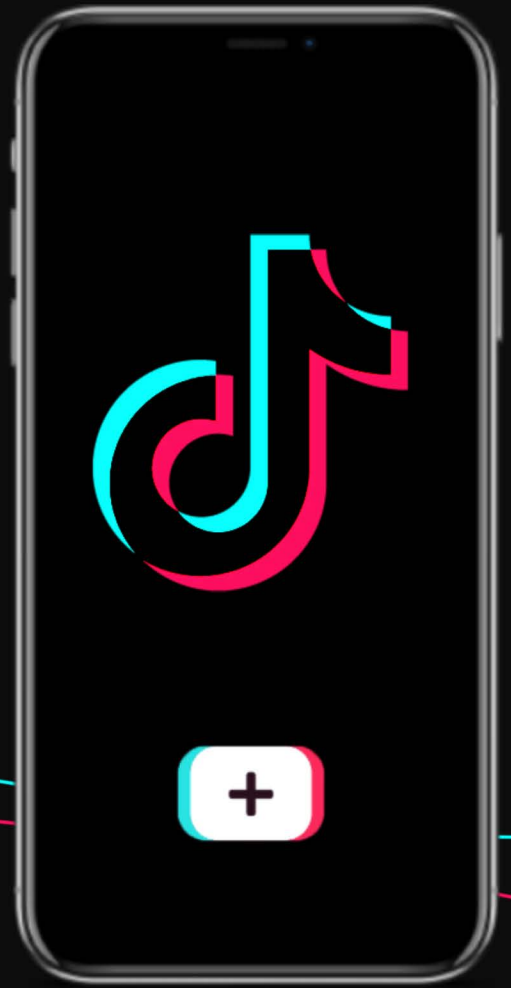
In total, 1.3 million RMB (\$185,000) were raised with donated artworks spanning generations and including painting, calligraphy, and sculpture. Notable highlights were a handmade leather jacket from designer Ma Ke which raised 27,000 RMB (\$3,844) and a Franz Liszt manuscript that sold for 32,000 RMB (\$4,556).

All proceeds were donated to the Beijing United Charity Foundation, which bought supplies for front-line medical staff in Wuhan.

Conclusions

The world of high art can often seem detached from the day-to-day reality of the general populace. Online auctions are a powerful means of demonstrating support (beyond merely offering consoling words) and disproving this perception.

While China’s digital landscape is a world unto itself, the broader tactics of launching online auctions remain relevant to Western organizations.



THINK VIDEO

THINK LONG-TERM

The need for cultural organizations to master social media channels is more pressing than ever. Short-video platforms, such as TikTok/ Douyin, help engage audiences and express personality.



Duoyin is the Chinese version of short-video platform TikTok. The current darling of China's social media landscape may be famous for teenage lip-sync routines and idiosyncratic pet videos, but it's also become a hub for art and culture. The evidence? There were 543 billion art-related plays in 2019, with China's national cultural heritage sites receiving 3.33 billion likes.

Launching on Douyin may be a big step given it requires working with a local Chinese partner, but it's an incredibly effective platform to showcase institutional personality and connect with young audiences, particularly in a time of crisis.

Chinese Museums on Douyin

Chinese museums have been harnessing the power of Douyin for several years. Compelling evidence of their ability to succeed on the platform first came on International Museum Day in 2018. Seven state-run museums gained national attention by turning Tang dynasty figurines and Shang dynasty bronze cauldrons into choreographed relics that danced in time to contemporary beats.

The videos tapped into Douyin's "challenge" feature in which users are encouraged to respond to trending hashtags with their own interpretive posts. The result saw thousand-year-old objects mimic popular dance moves including the ash-sweeping dance and the 98K electric eyes (don't worry, we're equally clueless). Participating museums received millions of plays and gained 360,000 followers in a single day according to China Daily.

Beyond simply emphasizing millennial tastes for humorous dance videos, the campaign showed the strength of how Douyin operates within China's expansive social media ecosystem. Douyin hashtags cross onto other platforms, such as Weibo, thereby greatly expanding the potential reach of trends.

Live streaming on Douyin

In late-February, nine Chinese museums welcomed millions of housebound citizens into their closed institutions with live stream tours. Organized collaboratively, the tours were led by museum professionals and included a live Q&A feature that fostered lively discussion.



China's national heritage sites received 3.33 billion likes on Douyin in 2019. In China many major arts institutions use the short-video app to engage and educate. Image: Weibo

Recorded over the course of a weekend, the live streams covered a broad range of interests from a deep dive into the Tang Dynasty at Liaoning Museum to an exploration of the Great African Wildlife Shandong Museum to a survey of Oracle Bones at the Chinese National Museum. By working collaboratively and staggering the live streams, users could “pick museums best suited to their interests and embark on individual tours,” as Douyin noted in a press statement.

The initiative was organized under the label “cloud tour” (云游) with an accompanying hashtag that spread across Weibo and created awareness as the event approached. Some of the hour-long tours used 360-degree virtual tour software to walk users through the nation’s most prestigious repositories of culture — further proof of widespread institutional embrace of modern technology. In the short term, “cloud tour” was a smart way for museums to support audiences during a time of need. More broadly, Douyin allows cultural destinations to showcase institutional personality and entertainment value. Indeed, netizens who tuned into “cloud tour” experienced a synergy of Chinese tech and culture that brought new meaning to the cherished expression “intangible cultural heritage.”

Sparkling Audience Engagement

“For cultural destinations, Douyin could play a critical part in reaching China’s younger generations,” says China Skinny’s marketing manager, Alexander Hefel. “The Douyin Challenge feature is a great way for cultural destinations to generate positive word-of-mouth recommendations via user-generated content...providing a hashtag essentially gamifies the post for users to compete who can get the most post views.”

This touches upon another advantage of using Douyin; encouraging people to connect to your institution through posts. At present, this means enabling audiences to share experiences from home, but post-virus will allow visitors to connect directly while onsite. Most visitors are already using smart phones during their visits, why not capitalize on an already engaged audience by providing them with a hashtag? Douyin saw 660 million user check-ins at cultural sites in 2019 with China’s national heritage sites receiving 3.33 billions likes. The numbers illustrate the trend of creating impromptu culture-focused videos and a Chinese audience back home that is receptive to such content.

This engagement goes deeper than a passive “play”. Posts made at museums and cultural attractions typically geolocate automatically, meaning envious Douyin users at home can click onto to



Hashtags for “Cloud Tour” were shared on both Weibo and Douyin. The platforms supported one another with Weibo growing audience and Douyin platforming live streams hosted by museum curators.
Image: Weibo



The MET is one of the few western cultural institutions attempting campaigns on both TikTok and Douyin. This has been achieved through a partnership with Chinese licensing and branding experts Alfilo Brands. Image: Tencent

an organization's Douyin page. Once there, users can learn basic information, join a discussion board, browse video content, and shop on an integrated e-commerce page. Browsers may be thousands of miles away, but the majority of engagements on Chinese social media platforms should be made with a long-term vision of growing institutional awareness.

MET Success on Douyin

The Metropolitan Museum of Art (The Met) isn't known for being a marketing innovator, but when it comes to capturing the attention of Chinese consumers, the storied institution is increasingly embracing unorthodox strategies. It held a successful Douyin campaign prior to their MET Gala 2019.

Guided by local China partner, Alfilo Brands, it tasked 36 Chinese influencers to get dolled up as if attending the Fifth Avenue Fête and post their interpretations of the theme, "Camp: Notes on Fashion". It created two hashtags for the purpose, the first, "A Tribute to the Classics" (致敬经典), received 130 million plays in five days and the second, "Met Gala Wave" (Met Gala风潮), outdid expectations and dominated Douyin during the first weekend of May.

Conclusions

More than simply an app for twerking teens, Douyin has become a hub for art and culture content and Western cultural institutions should consider launching on it, or its international equivalent TikTok.

In this moment of increased social media usage, releasing short-videos is a strong way of connecting to trends and sharing collections on a platform that rewards creativity and honest expressions of personality. In order for cultural destinations to attract audiences during this period of closure, live streaming needs to become a primary mode of communication. Douyin offers this possibility. The ability for users to engage directly with institutions through the app can foster connections that will live far beyond the current situation.

REFLECT AND ACT

**CONSIDER
EXPERT ADVICE
FROM MUSEUMS
DMOS
CONSULTANCIES
HOW TO
NAVIGATE
THE CORONAVIRUS**

Jessica Dai
Senior Account Manager
China Luxury Advisors

“It takes time to work out the correct tone. You don’t want to focus on the negative but for museums there is an opportunity to create compassion and use your artwork to calm and support during this time.

We want to focus on being a compassionate, soothing voice. It’s a good time to release video content or in-depth story telling.”

Sienna Parulis-Cook
Director of Communications
Dragon Trail Interactive

“Offer unconditional refunds – this kind of action can create a lot of goodwill with partners in the long term.”

Jimmy Robinson
Director
PingPong Digital

“Use social media to express support for China and outline any measures that should be taken.

Preparing statements to respond to negative sentiment... educating non-Chinese staff on this to avoid any internal insensitivities.”

Tony Ellwood
Director
National Gallery of Victoria,
Australia

“We will do our best to offer the community access to the NGV collection virtually, much of which is available online, where our audiences can still benefit from one of the world’s best collections of art and design.”

Carly McCloskey
Assistant Director
Tourism Sales and Marketing
MoMA

“We’re shifting our content from newer, site-specific special exhibition awareness to general museum content that allows our followers to virtually visit the museum, We’re planning historical exhibition information and lots of audio programming to help people stay connected, informed, and entertained.”

WeChat Message
Shanghai Power Station of
Art (PSA)

“We offer special programs across a range of themes and orientations. These activities aim to enrich our audiences’ daily life during this time and expand the popularity and imagination of art among art-goers and children.”

HOW Art Museum

“At this moment, small efforts have the potential to spark a fire that burns out this epidemic, the art industry should step up to the plate and shoulder its responsibility. We hope to contribute and show that in troubling times art has the power to inspire courage.”

Echo He
Founder
FOU Gallery

“The one thing I’ve been repeating to myself is: we are all in the same boat. Our fates are entwined with China’s, and the spread of this epidemic connects the whole of humanity. Information about the virus has traveled as fast as the virus itself and ultimately affects everyone. As such, the art world’s response must reflect this.”

Victor Wang
Chief Curator
MWOODS

“MWOODS will present ‘Art Is Still Here: A Hypothetical Show for a Closed Museum’, an online exhibition of moments and happenings – contributions of artworks, videos, photographs, words, poems, instructions and thoughts – by artists and thinkers around the theme of ecology, nature, extinction, isolation and kinship.”

Mei Fang
Age 17
Student

The virtual exhibitions serve as a great complement to the physical exhibitions. I would still go back to the museums once the Coronavirus is over. I used to hangout with my friends in the museum cafe, and as great as some of these virtual exhibitions are, I missed doing that a lot.

Li Xiaoting
Age 25
School Teacher

I love the idea of museum live streaming on Taobao Live. As a regular museum goer, I am impressed by the speed that these Chinese museums came together and work across a wide range of social media platforms. Will the Coronavirus fundamentally change how we engage art in the museum context in the future? I think so.

Wang Chen
Age 32
Airline pilot

The first couple of weeks of the lockdown was hard; I was trying to find things for my stay-home son to do. We watched one of the museum livestreams together and he enjoyed the exhibition interpretation by the tour guide. He said she did a better job at explaining the art objects than his own teacher at school.