



Steven Back delivers a lecture on digital exhibitions. — Ti Gong

Hungarian lives and breathes museums

Yao Minji

Steven Back, a Chinese-speaking Hungarian who has lived in Shanghai for nearly two decades, has visited more museums in China than most Chinese.

"I don't remember the exact count, but it is definitely over 1,000," he told Shanghai Daily after returning from a tea museum in Lishui, east China's Zhejiang Province.

"Lishui is the second tone rather than the fourth tone commonly pronounced with the character Li. Did you know that?"

Back's frequent visits to museums throughout China stem from his role as CEO of Shanghai-based Back & Rosta, which specializes in cultural digitization and intelligent museum solutions. He is also the Hungarian National Museum's general representative in China.

These two roles have given him the unique opportunity to see, and in many cases participate in, the development and growth of China's museums while also working with many others across the country.

"Chinese museums have developed so fast in the last 10 years or so, and they have a very high standard and

requirement for digitization since they launched the Smart Museum initiative in 2012," he said.

"China is very much at the forefront of museum digitization."

He has also worked on numerous international collaborations with Chinese museums, including an ongoing exhibition at Hungary's Móra Ferenc Museum in Szeged.

"The Jade Armor of Immortality — Treasures of Han Period China" exhibits 111 fine artifacts from the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220), including a full-body jade armor used in emperors' burials, as well as other jade objects, lacquerware, ceramics, bronze wares, seals, stone carvings and coins.

When the exhibition opened at midnight on Hungary's Museum Day in the summer, it drew about 10,000 people on the first day.

The exhibition will travel to another Hungarian city after Szeged, with more European cities planning to host it.

"Han Dynasty marked a period of remarkable economic and cultural prosperity and the birth of the ancient silk road," Back said. "It was also a time for lavish funeral rituals."

The exhibition is an international



Móra Ferenc Museum has created many activities about "The Jade Armor of Immortality — Treasures of Han Period China."

collaboration that includes several Chinese museums and institutes, including the Shanghai Museum.

Shanghai Museum "is the best professional museum in China in terms of international collaboration, international reach and research," he said.

"It has very deep knowledge and years of scientific research on preservation. It also has many creative artifacts in the museum shops — among the earliest to have creative souvenirs in the shop. Now there are many great ones across the country."

It was at the 2010 World Expo Shanghai that Back created an early version of a smart guide to museums for mobile phones.

"It was so crowded, and all the countries wanted to show their best cultural products to the visitors in a short period of time," he said.

"So it had to be very efficient. We worked with many national pavilions to create a smart guide."

The Hungarian first visited Shanghai in 2004 for a research project on intercultural relationship — why culture differs from each other. Without much knowledge about China, he stayed for a few months, only to find the country more mysterious and intriguing.

"I lived close to the Hungarian National Museum, so it was natural for me to be interested in history and culture. You can explore so much in China and for the many similarities and differences we have. I never get bored," Back said.