

National cultural strategy and the new visions of the local museums management- Assessment of the implementation of the “Regional Cultural Museum Plan” funded by the Council for Cultural Affairs (CCA), Taiwan

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Abstract

The roles and missions of museums evolve as the society transforms. The changes in the political and economical environment are among the most significant drivers behind a society's transformation. During the past 30 years, museums in Taiwan have been under the direct influence of the central government's cultural policies and plans. Social economical development on the island and globalization of the world economy also impacted the ways museums are managed.

The main focus of this paper is to discuss the alignment of the over two hundred local museums' operations to the goals set forth in the “Local Cultural Museum Plan.” In order to stimulate the growth of a local culture, the Council for Cultural Affairs, Taiwan has been very active behind a six-year “Local Cultural Museum Plan” since 2002.

The primary goal of the plan is to develop the local community culture. In order to achieve this goal, grants have been provided for infrastructural improvements, as well as the development of local cultural programs. The final goal of the plan is to introduce aesthetics in people's daily lives so that cultural development is equally balanced between urban and rural areas. The funding also encourages the participation of non-profit and for-profit organizations, local cultural workers and performance art groups. The local cultural museums need to demonstrate creativity, characteristics pertaining to the local community and to be financially self-reliant. These museums ought to showcase the dynamics of Taiwan's multi-cultural society. The ultimate goal is for them to become the focal point of the local cultures and tourism attractions and bring in economical gain for the community. Over two hundred local cultural museums have been funded by this Plan since the inception. The main themes of these museums include local history, industries, arts, local celebrities and performance art. They have also shown significant impact on the operation of the municipal cultural space. The “Local Cultural Museum Plan” has indeed become one of the most influential policies in the development of local cultural institutions.

This paper discusses the achieved results of the “Local Cultural Museum Plan” that is going to end in 2007. The author is the chairperson of the study of the “Results of Local Museums Plan” commissioned by the Council of Cultural Affairs. This study represents a full assessment on the goals set by the Plan, the execution by the municipal governments and the actual operational results of the local museums.

Introduction

The roles and missions of museums evolve as the society transforms. The changes in the political and economical environment are among the most significant drivers behind a society's transformation. During the past 30 years, museums in Taiwan have been under the direct influence of the central government's cultural policies and plans. Social economical development on the island and globalization of the world economy also impacted the ways museums are managed.

1. The changing roles of museums and the mission

The 21st century museums are rapidly developing a new relationship with the society. The roles for museums are no longer mainly the mere management of cultural relics. The research on cultural relics and the way of preservation and display have been changing with the ages. Influenced by the movement of the New Museology of the past twenty-odd years, museology scholars carry out the idea of community museums and stress the idea of people-centeredness in transforming the way of management and operation. Museums used to be led by scholars and take the attitude of knowledgeable authorities to face a limited number of middle and upper class visitors. In the 1970s, the idea was to serve the masses of the society with the emphasis on public and community education. With the global trade surge and economic order transformation in the 1980s, museums needed to develop more potential visitors and increase financial resources, to go the way of museum marketing and mass propagation and some museums also expand operations in collaboration with other enterprises. Today, in the face of torrential all-electronic development, in which scientific and technological development in the field of information and resources has transformed the traditional market channels, museums

must attract and invite the masses to participate. Museums must also be suited to the psychology and consuming behavior of users in the age of Internet, and, through the Internet, use museum information resources and its functions to open a new situation. Society is undergoing quick changes, so museum management and operation must keep up with the pace of the time. Museum professionals, in addition to being closely connected with the society, must train to acquire a perspective for future development and the ability to meet changing challenges of change.

In the age of globalization, the cultures of mankind are rapidly developing and the multicultural aspect is recognized and valued. Yet precisely because of this, preserving the individuality of each culture is becoming increasingly important for identity preservation. Inevitably, sifting through our fading cultural elements in search of new and creative wisdom and thoughts has become a major endeavor. Therefore places for cultural preservation are becoming important learning environments for public lifelong education. The roles of today's museums are changing, from conservation of cultural relics and objects to interpretation of cultural issues, from static display to the exhibition design with international cultural exchange, activity and communication issues. The museum has become a carrier for cultural heritage and propagation, and is becoming a guiding factor for mass education, cultural recreation and tourism. Political figures regard these kinds of cultural places as important platforms for policy implementation, and also the key to their political performances and achievements. Some business organizations such as chain enterprises and mass media enterprises have already extended their business to the field of museums. They take advantage of it to elevate their corporate images. For instance, some enterprises collaborate with museums to hold large-scale

international exhibitions on special subjects; some tender to BOT-run museums for business projects, some even invest in setting up their own museums. The corporate multi-level marketing way has greatly enhanced the interest of the masses to visit museums, which results in enterprises' achieving both fame and wealth. Even, some catering businesses, theme parks and, traditional industries in transforming systems, promote sales by packing products in the way similar to that of museum, thus winning more customers' hearts.

The way of management and operation for museums is affected and made to change by developing economic, political and humanistic values. In the background of market economy and consumer cultural trends, the operation of museums are no longer limited to internal management of people and objects, instead, outward facing endeavors, such as marketing, propagation and public relations are increasingly stressed for creating conditions needed for community and supporters. It is difficult for museums with old system of organization to cope with the social need for rapid change. Some large museums or museums with sufficient financial resources cooperate with organizations in related professional fields, or entrust part of their service and sales-related businesses externally to make up for the lack of human and professional resources.

Museums develop from a closed environment into multi-functional cultural spaces, from being government-run to BOT-run. Director positions of some museums are changing from scholars to those of public and financial management specialists. The function of museum collections is expanding from internal exhibition to Internet, publication, and creative design application. The display of the museum pieces is designed increasingly to be experiential and interactive, and electronic science and technology is used a lot as a medium to give

visitors more fresh stimulus and feelings. Under the social pressure of corporate cultures and political power, museums need to change with flexibility, but at the same time, hold with caution and care, the ground of taking cultural education as the essential mission. Cultural education and commercial entertainment have different life cycles. The former can keep running long, but the latter will be on the decline with the sales cycle. The commercial marketing cannot be applied mechanically to museums since commercial consumption is a process, at the end of which, the value also decreases. However, the service and consumption provided by museums should enable visitors to enjoy experientially and be left in the memory, and even satisfy visitors' spiritual and knowledge-seeking desire. Therefore, the cooperation between museums and enterprises cannot be solely guided by commercial means. The "products" of museums must be planned according to the specialized field of museums so that the "brand" properties can be maintained.

2. National cultural policy and development of the museum

The role and mission of the museum has been changing along with social development. The transition of the society is always influenced by politics and economic changes. The stages of Taiwanese museum development in the recent 30 years have been influenced vigorously by political change and resulting cultural policy programs. For private museums, the leading factors for change were multiple, including the ups and downs of economy, investment environment, the trend of private collection, religious influence and international cultural exchanges. The cultural policy of the central government is the major driving force behind museum development. County and municipal governments greeted the central government's assignments with reciprocal

seed funds in order to obtain provisions from the central government budget. The following were important government policies that have far-reaching influences on Taiwanese museum development in the past 30 years.

2.1 The policy of balanced urban and rural cultural development with museums development

The period of the 70s and 80s in Taiwan ushered in economic growth and people enjoyed their richest livelihood. But knowledgeable people found that rural people have flocked to metropolitan areas and rural societies suffered a loss of original cultural simplicity. Local historical cultural sites were demolished and were replaced with poorly designed new buildings. Both rural and urban environments had suffered and the rural and urban disparities widened.

In 1973, when Mr. Chiang Ching-kuo headed the Administrative Yuan, there was a program of “Cultural Construction” among his 12 Programs of Construction. This was the initial endeavor for nation-wide museum development that emphasized the balance between rural and urban cultural development. This grand plan had been responsible for the creation of the 8 national and special municipal museums in big northern, central, southern and eastern cities, and the 21 County and Municipal Cultural Centers (each of which has its own exhibition hall of cultural relics) all over in Taiwan. The Council for Cultural Affairs was established in the Executive Yuan in 1981, responsible for managing all culture affairs in Taiwan. This program had helped improving the exhibition and performing conditions in rural areas, and therefore the balance of the rural and urban disparities. Time has proved, that the Cultural Centers, once ridiculed as “vacuum halls,” have turned into Bureaus of Culture. Each has developed into thematic museums with local themes, following the Regional Specialty Halls Program.

2.2 Community infrastructure establishment planning with the development of the local museums

The martial law ended in 1987 and ushered in a rise of social movements, regional identity consciousness and people's power. Political power was handed downstream, according to people's wishes. The traditional local policy did not answer the needs and demand for community development of the villages and towns. The Council for Cultural Affairs, Executive Yuan, announced in 1994 the “Community Infrastructure Establishment Planning” program. The purpose was to provide guidance, assistance, resources to people in local communities and inspire them to work and build their own communities. Mainly, it encouraged active participation in managing the community's planning, construction and development, and to avert people's habit of ignoring the public and community affairs and business.

This policy has four guidelines: *From bottom to top, Resident participation, Community independence* and Sustainable development and were responded warmly by the people. At the time, the programs relevant to the “Community Infrastructure Establishment Planning” was the Cultural program and facility for the provincial, municipal, towns and village level of community. And during 1995-2001, programs and sub programs introduced were: Town and country exhibition and performance facility enhancement, Assisting establishment of county and municipal thematic museums and its collection acquisition, Assisting beautification of local traditional cultural architectural spaces, Community arts and cultural development program, etc. This was to encourage private citizens to make use of unused storerooms and buildings for local arts and cultural exhibitions and performances. A total of over \$2 billion had been spent to subsidize 158 community exhibitions and performances.

2.3 The goal of local cultural museums planning

Year 2002 was the 3rd stage of the “Community Infrastructure Establishment Planning” which contained several new challenges:

The County and municipality specialty museum, the Town and rural exhibition and performance facility, County and municipality thematic museums, Utilization of unused spaces, etc. In 2002, the Council for Cultural Affairs initiated the 6 year program (2002 to 2007) of “Regional Cultural Museums Planning” program with a budget of 38 billion. The purposes were to utilize local resources to fulfill the goal of city and rural equilibrium and achieve fresh cultural vitality.

There were four indicators of the plan:

- a. Creativity and local characteristics - For example, exploring the local humanity, art, history and culture, folk custom, craft, scenery, ecology, and industry resources.
- b. Ability to manage with sustainability - For example, manpower, such as to develop volunteer programs etc. And financial resources, such as to develop creative industries programs.
- c. Multiple culture characteristics - For example, record, collect, research, advocate ethnic, regional and international cultural and arts festivals.
- d. Cultural stronghold and tourism resources - For example, the investigation and arrangement, promoting cultural and arts activities, providing education for arts and cultural talents, provides in depth information for cultural tourism.

Implementation of the plan: Subsidize local government and folk groups to utilize existing unused spaces for rooms and studios; providing assistance to existing halls of performance and exhibition (hall of culture), improve hard facilities and soft content, and encourage professional groups, local cultural and historical workers or performing groups to participate in management. Emphasis were

that the applicant should show promises in promoting local cultural activities, traditions, talent cultivation and has merit in sustainability and contribution for local economy.

Since the initiation of this program four years ago, over 280 institutions from all locations of Taiwan had been subsidized by the Council for Cultural Affairs. Their specialties and themes included local relics, industry, art, personage, performing, etc. The multiple facets exerted an important influence in operating cultural spaces in all counties, cities, villages and towns. And this program has been proven to be most influential in local museum development in the past five years.

3. The local cultural museums program and its developmental relationship with other national policies

The local cultural museums program was part of the Council for Cultural Affairs five target programs, including:

- put Taiwan culture achievement in order; set up people's cultural consciousness
- building and activate the cultural facility and organization mechanism; support long-term cultural development
- developing the cultural variety of Taiwan and preserve multiple types of cultural heritage and enrich cultural characteristics and contents
- strengthening the public field of culture; realize the values of cultural independence, sharing, and participation
- promoting the strategy of creative cultural industry; establishing visions of cultural life

The local cultural museums program and other national policies such as:

- Community development policies
 - Cultural industry policies
 - Cultural creative industry
 - Assisting arts and cultural festivities and tourism development policies
- were related and parallel to each other. Its role and mission were mainly promoting

community development, and its function was to promote community cultural development through exhibition and performance, and in doing so became the driving force behind other related policies.

4. The evaluation for the Regional Cultural Museums Program

After 8 months (2006.5~12) research and investigation, our panel of experts¹ have done the evaluation for 279 museums which has accepted subsidy from CCA, we obtain the following conclusion and Suggestions:

4.1 Value of Regional Cultural Museum Program

Regional cultural museums can serve as a staging ground for governmental policies of cultural and economic development and therefore can be instrumental for carrying out various governmental policies. Yet the other governmental plans rarely include any concrete steps to make use of the regional cultural museums. Therefore, governmental policies should include the regional cultural museums as one critical component in order to facilitate the integration of all functions into one complete network of cultural environment.

Each museum has attempted various approaches with limited degrees of success. Yet long range effort is required for cultural work development. Regional populace is responsible for their own cultural life, and must be encouraged to engage in local cultural discoveries, research, and display, and to master skills for solving local problems.

4.2 Roles of Regional Cultural Museums

The role of regional cultural museums is dictated by the three participating parties: the administration, the professional organizations and the regional populace. And their roles are:

1. government administration: from administer to supporter ;
2. the non-governmental: from the promoter to mediate facilitated to cataract;
3. Neighborhood organizations or community citizens: from recognizer to learner to activator;

The administrators distribute resources to each local cultural museums, to facilitate the normal professional museum operation and furthermore to promote maximum efficiency in using the resources to achieve sustainability. Proper training programs and maintenance of high professional museum culture will therefore become the big challenge.

4.3 The innovation of inspection mechanism

1. Regional cultural museums should be administered and regulated with classifications (township class, municipal class, or Administrative Yuan class); and categories (local specialty, local produces, private or public owned). Cultural museums should be provided with adequate resources and budgeting.

2. Next stage of CCA support should emphasize on local special features, coordinated community cultural facilities development, and cross county and municipality theme museum alliances.

4.4 Museum professional training development

The high turn over rate of local government officers in cultural bureau and museums personals without adequate professional training have prompt the CCA to strengthen its effort to develop museum professional training. Professional workshops are proven useful. Other alternatives include university programs offered for long range professional careers or short term internships.

About the author

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Professor Chen is a Standing Board Member of Chinese Association of Museums, Taiwan, ROC. She has been a member of the American Association of Museums (AAM), and the AAM/ICOM since 1975.

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Professor Chen has taught Museology, Arts Management and Chinese Art History in universities since 1975; and has organized many conferences and workshops on museum management and cultural heritage preservation. She has written numerous articles, papers and books on museology, museum exhibition and planning. She has inspired a lot of her students who eventually have become leaders in art/cultural institutions and museums in Taiwan today.

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