

# A new era for Taiwanese museums: Opportunities for the future

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## **Abstract**

In March 2006, the UK Trade and Investment (UKTI) and the British Council sponsored a team of consultants and academics from the UK to visit Taipei on a trip to explore opportunities for partnerships between UK and Taiwanese museums. The team travelled to Taipei, Taichung and Kaohsiung visiting museums and meeting with staff. They also facilitated a workshop in Taipei that more than fifty museum professionals attended where the key issues facing Taiwanese Museums was discussed. The consultants found many examples of good practice in the areas of collections and conservation management, visitor research and interpretation and exhibition development in the museums that they visited. However they found that museums also face challenges such as the current funding and legal structures that inhibit forward planning and income generation. This encourages museums to rely on government funding and temporary exhibitions to encourage new and repeat visitors. Other issues include loans into and out of Taiwan, how to balance the needs of different stakeholders, the absence of a formal training structure across the profession, and a lack of awareness of Taiwanese museums outside of Asia. This session will highlight the key findings of the consultants' report and draw on good practice from the UK to put forward proposals for the development of the Taiwanese museum sector in the future.

## Introduction

In March 2006 the UK Trade and Investment (UKTI) and the British Council sponsored a team of British consultants and academics, including myself to visit Taiwan for a week. The purpose of this trip was to explore opportunities for partnerships between UK and Taiwanese museums. The British Council organised our visit and hosted a workshop, with the assistance of staff and students of the Tainan University of the Arts. We went on a whirlwind tour of Taiwan, visiting Taipei, Ying-ge, Taichung and Kaohsiung returning to Taipei all in just one week. During our trip we visited the Taipei County Ying-ge Ceramics Museum, the National Museum of Natural Science, National Science and Technology Museum and the National Palace Museum. We viewed exhibitions, stores, conservation studios, conference facilities, and shops and met with staff from these museums. We were also privileged to meet with staff from the Ministry of Education and the Council for Cultural Affairs to discuss the current situation in Taiwan and future developments that might affect museums. Some of us also managed to fit in visits to the National Chiang Kai-Shek Cultural Centre, Building 101, a natural spring and night market making a few purchases along the way! At the end of the week we facilitated a workshop in Taipei that more than fifty museum professionals attended.

This paper highlights the key findings of the consultant team, and some of the suggestions they put forward to assist the Taiwanese museum sector in the transition period that faces the sector as changes are made at the Central Government level. It also presents a number of examples of good practice and opportunities for Taiwan and the UK to develop closer relationships.

## The Taiwanese museum sector

I apologise to those of you in the audience who are familiar with the structure of the

museum sector in Taiwan, but for those who are not, I feel it is important to provide a brief overview in order to put my paper in context. The Taiwanese museum sector dates back to the late nineteenth century when cultural institutions including museums were founded. One of these was the Taiwan Governor's Mansion Museum that opened in 1908 in Taipei, now known as the National Taiwan Museum. Another landmark in the history of Taiwanese museums was of course the opening of the National Palace Museum in 1965. For nearly 80 years the pace of growth of museums in Taiwan was slow, with probably no more than 40 by the end of the 1970s. However the 1980s saw a surge of new developments reflecting buoyancy in the economy and the Government's commitment through its 12<sup>th</sup> major cultural construction plan to balance development between rural and urban areas. This momentum has not subsided. Between 1990 and 2004 more than 300 new museums were established and there are now more than 400 public and private museums in Taiwan, of which approximately two thirds are supported by local and central government. As in the UK the museum sector is diverse, in terms of the subject matter of these museums, their scale, governance, facilities and focus.<sup>1</sup> The most recently published directory of museums in Taiwan (Chinese Association of Museums, 2004) grouped Taiwanese museums into 18 categories. As figure 1 illustrates more than half fall into the four largest groups, natural history, folk collections and culture, industrial, and arts and crafts museums.

Like many countries the funding and responsibility for museums in Taiwan falls to a number of different ministries. At a national level the Executive Yuan is the highest administrative body in Taiwan overseeing more than 34 agencies including 8 ministries. Some of these are delegated responsibility for museums, whilst one museum, The National Palace Museum has equal status.

Figure 1: Categorisation of Taiwanese Museums

Category	Number	Category	Number
Natural history museums	74	Memorial museums	14
Folk collections and cultural museums	63	Historic sites and architecture	12
Museums of different industries	59	Religious museums	10
Arts and Crafts museums	52	Science museums	7
Art museums	49	Theatre museums	7
Anthropology museums	27	Other	7
Theme museums	22	Image and sound museums	5
History museums	17	Music museums	4
University museums	14	Archaeology museums	3

The Council for Cultural Affairs (CCA), formed approximately 25 years ago has a number of responsibilities. They work with local authorities at a community level to assist museum developments and administer grants and scholarships via the National Culture and Arts Foundation's endowment. They are also responsible for the National Taiwan Museum and National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts. The CCA also have ten major construction projects that will have a massive impact on their budget. The Ministry of Social Education supervises museums such as the National Museum of History, National Museum of Prehistory and the National Museum of Natural Science in Taichung on behalf of the Ministry of Education and staff are civil servants. Their focus on formal education reflects the ministry responsible for them and in 2006 museums accounted for 45% of the National Institutions of Social Education budget. As in the UK, other Government ministries are also concerned with museums: the Agricultural Council with the development of rural culture and the Ministry of the Interior for Heritage Conservation and Community Culture. However, new models are emerging. In 2004, the National Chiang Kai-Shek Cultural Centre was restructured, and became an administrative corporation making it a semi-private organization. There are of

course private and local authority museums as well, some of which are independent due to their funding from corporations.

The Taiwanese Government recognise that having a number of departments responsible for culture may not be the most efficient method of operation and have proposed under an institutional reform to unify them in a new Ministry of Culture and Tourism. It is hoped that this freedom will give museums the opportunity to be more autonomous and self sufficient (CCA, online). Museums are also part of Taiwan's development plan. Their power as flagship attractions to attract tourists and develop cultural tourism, in cultural regeneration projects, as agents of social change and as part of the cultural and creative industries are clearly understood. Our visits showed numerous examples of good practice in the sector but Taiwan's museums are facing similar challenges to those experienced in the UK and other countries twenty years ago when national museums were no longer run by civil servants and had to begin their journey of becoming

<sup>1</sup> The team drew heavily on Aven Kuei's doctoral thesis to better understand the development of museums in Taiwan, *A Brief History of Taiwan's Museum Enterprises*. The author would like to acknowledge our appreciation for sharing this with the original consultant team.

more self sufficient.

During our trip we saw numerous examples of good practice, too numerous to mention today. However, I would like to highlight a small selection, and of course this was just in the four museums that we visited. They tended to be in areas of 'mission-related activities' including:

- The quality of breadth of collections, the exhibits, permanent, temporary and interactive exhibitions.
- The educational programmes.
- Curatorship including collections and conservation management, research and scholarship.

And to a lesser extent 'mission-supporting activities' such as sponsorship and docent programmes.

For example *The Glamour of Gilt White* at the Taipei Ying-ge Ceramics Museum that had drawn objects from international collections. The collection at the National Palace Museum, the exhibition about the Human Body and the animatronic dinosaurs that were clearly delighting the school children at the National Museum of Natural Science. And at the National Science and Technology Museum in Kaohsiung, the temporary exhibition on arms and armours which the consultants believed could have toured internationally. In the Taipei Ying-ge Ceramics Museum we saw the specialist interactive area where pre-schoolers can work with clay. At the National Science and Technology Museum in Kaohsiung the new Treasure Island exhibition where visitor studies were used extensively to test the exhibits. In the National Museum of Natural Science a diverse range of interactive exhibits that were grouped according to age appropriateness.

At the National Museum of Natural Science, themed classrooms have props to allow children to participate in shows, debate and use low-tech exhibits to explore topics. In Kaohsiung the staff has developed their own

exhibits that they use to explain scientific concepts to schoolchildren. At the National Palace Museum guided tours are offered in eight languages.

At the National Science and Technology Museum in Kaohsiung, curators were conserving one part of an object and restoring the other half, an approach that the team believed should be written about. The volume and quality of academic scholarship, the strong research tradition and museological and curatorial publications astounded the team. Museums were producing numerous catalogues and in-house journals as well as participating in conferences focusing on areas such as visitor studies.

The Taipei Ying-ge Ceramics Museum like both the National Science and Technology Museum and National Museum of Natural Science had secured sponsorship from private companies. The National Palace Museum have developed partnerships with internationally renown companies such as Alessi and sell products on-line as well as having professional retailing outlets that offer high quality gifts appealing to a range of different audiences.

The team also saw docent programmes developed around USA models and were inspired by the enthusiasm, motivation and open-mindedness of staff. I think one of the team's most lasting memories was realising what curators do in Taiwan - the number of exhibitions they curate and catalogues that are published. Some curators take responsibility for developing exhibitions including testing exhibits, researching and writing text.

### **Developing partnerships between Taiwanese and UK museum sectors**

During discussions with the Ministry, CCA and staff in the museums it became clear that the UK and Taiwan could work much more closely together, and that both countries

could benefit from such a relationship. Whilst Taiwan might look to Japan, the USA and European countries for models of good practice, there is a lot that can be learnt from Taiwanese museums, particularly in terms of exhibit development and programmes for schools.

One of the issues that the team identified was the need for Taiwanese museums to develop relationships to raise their own profile. Of course, this conference demonstrates the sector's commitment by hosting this international conference. Another was the need for changes in the current legal status of museums to enable staff to become more entrepreneurial. The National Palace Museum model has shown how one organisation has developed partnerships with the private sector to produce merchandise for sale at premium prices. Museums generally lack marketing and fundraising expertise. There is an over-reliance on school markets and expensive and time-consuming temporary exhibitions are over-used to draw back repeat visitors. Taiwanese museums also need to address the challenge of engaging with a broader audience, drawing on local, regional, national and international audiences. Many of these issues are due to one year funding agreements and procurement regulations that do not enable forward planning, encourage continual refurbishments and temporary exhibitions and discourage museums from generating income. There is also a lack of a unified policy, no accreditation system such as the Museum Registration Scheme in the UK and no one organisation lobbying for museums or their employees. And, for example the Immunity from Seizure Clause discourages loans from outside of Taiwan.

The Government has a critical role in overcoming some of these issues, but there are opportunities for Taiwanese museums despite them. The team focused on three areas where they believe the Taiwanese and

UK museum sectors can develop fruitful relationships. These were:

- Loans and touring exhibitions.
- Research.
- Leadership, training and continuous professional development.

### **Loans and touring exhibitions**

As I have highlighted through my presentation today, the quality of temporary and permanent exhibitions that we saw during our trip was very high. In recent years the British Council have also supported arts based exhibitions including *Vivienne Westwood* at the Taipei Fine Arts Museum and the *Magic Pencil* touring exhibition that toured to venues such as the National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts and the Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts. They have also supported a series of science-related museum based projects, *Science Alive*, *DNA 50*, *Science Magic*, *Future Face* and *Swinhoe*. One of the barriers to touring exhibitions in the past has been the cost of loans to Taiwanese museums that have in some cases been prohibitive. Curators have used their own objects instead. There are two ways of overcoming this, National Museums in the UK could become more sympathetic and an agreement about affordable rates be negotiated. However, the team also suggested that museums consider developing links with regional and independent museums in the UK which will broaden the range of partners and hopefully overcome this barrier. These collections might be equally appropriate. There is also an opportunity for touring exhibitions between Taiwan, the UK and other third parties. The benefits of such collaborations are shared costs and sponsorship for all of the partner countries. An in-direct effect would be raising awareness of Taiwanese museums and Taiwan as a tourist destination.

## Research

Taiwanese museum professionals demonstrated high levels of scholarly activity and a commitment to disseminating their research, with some museums producing their own museological and curatorial journals. There are opportunities for broadening the audience for this research by sharing the findings with Western as well as Asian readers. Potentially there are opportunities for developing joint studies between museum professionals and academics, to make joint applications for research grants and raise the profile of working being undertaken in Taiwan.

## Leadership, training and continuous professional development (CPD)

One of the key areas the team recognised as underpinning the future of Taiwanese museums was the lack of an integrated programme of continuing professional development for staff. In particular there appeared to be a lack of training relating to:

- Mission-supporting activities, such as marketing, fundraising and retailing
- Leadership training
- A lack of accredited training programmes
- Limited dissemination of good practice with regard to training and professional development.

The British museum sector have faced similar challenges with national museums no longer being part of the civil service, but separate organizations with trading companies and Trustees and competitiveness for survival due to the rapid expansion of museums over the last 30 years. In recent years the public and private sectors including universities, the Museums Association, Arts Council, Department for Culture Media and Sport and the Clore Duffield Foundation have come together to put in place a number of initiatives to encourage high quality graduate training, CPD for museum professionals, leadership training and diversification of the

museum workforce. I would now like to share some of these initiatives with you.

Entry level jobs in the UK tend to require postgraduate qualifications. Over the last decade there has been an expansion in provision so that the established Museum Studies course at Leicester University has been joined by masters in Museum and Gallery Management, Museum Management, Art Gallery and Museum Studies, Museum and Collections Management, Heritage Education and Interpretation and Heritage Exhibition and Design. This reflects a demand from students and universities' recognition of the need for specialist training in the numerous areas of museum management. To assist potential applicants with their selection, universities can apply for accreditation for their course, so that it receives a 'tick mark'. In the past this has been undertaken by CHNTO, the training organisation for the heritage sector. CHNTO has recently been replaced by the newly created Creative and Cultural Skills Council and the accreditation is likely to be re-launched in the near future. This accreditation of masters' programmes is important for both universities and the sector as it validates the quality of the programme that is being offered.

It has also been recognised in the UK that specific sectors of the population were under-represented in curatorial and managerial positions. Supported by Government, persons from black and minority ethnic groups can apply for either a bursary to support them on a recognised master's programme, or they can apply for a Positive Action Traineeship that combines work based learning with a part time place on a recognised master's programme.

For those already working in museums The Museums Association has developed the Associateship of the Museums Association (AMA) and the Fellowship of the Museums Association (FMA). Both are Continuing

Professional Development (CPD) programmes for the work place recognised by peers. They combine personal development, for example, attendance at conferences, involvement in networking groups and also a mentoring programme. So, for example when you are applying for jobs, it will state that potential applicants should have the AMA. The Museums Association also run a programme of short courses on topics such as volunteer management, licensing, visitor studies and ethical issues to respond to changes in policy or the sector (Museums Association, online). There are other less formal modes of development available, some of which have been initiated by museum professionals. For example, paid membership managers running Friends and membership schemes have set up the Membership Management Forum to network, share ideas and join together as a collective once a year for a Conference. Similar groups exist for other specialisms for example the Group for Education in Museums, the Visitor Studies Group, and e-learning group for museums and galleries, libraries and archives.

One of the key areas where it was recognised there was a gap in training was leadership. Initially the Clore Leadership Programme addressed this, backed by Chris Smith, a former minister. Each year a number of Clore Fellows undertake an individual programme of learning, work, research, training, and secondment, designed to develop their leadership skills and experience. Supported by the Clore Duffield Foundation, this is now becoming one strand of a larger project (Clore Leadership Programme, online). In 2005, the Government pledged £12 million over two years from 2006/07 to the Arts Council England and others to promote excellence in management and leadership within the cultural sector. The Cultural Leadership Delivery partnership will compliment the Clore

Leadership Programme. Six strands of work that combine training for individuals at different stages of their career, a portal that will be an information gateway, diversification of the workforce and raising the profile of leadership have been identified.

1. Strand one focuses on opportunities for people emerging or in the middle of their career. This will be a work-based learning initiative, encouraging participants to become involved in networks and involving mentoring.
2. The second strand is to develop a portal that people can access to identify learning resources to help make career choices.
3. The third strand focuses on leadership development. This will be a series of residential courses led by the Clore Leadership Programme for museum professionals.
4. Powerbrokers is going to specifically focus on the needs of black and minority ethnic persons to help diversify the types of people who are in leadership positions.
5. Governance development has been developed to promote best practice and spread the importance of the need for leadership.
6. The final strand focuses on defining leadership learning needs and creating opportunities (Cultural Leadership Programme, online)

City University in London has also launched a professional qualification in leadership that participants can eventually use as credits towards a masters award. They have managed to secure European funding which has meant only women were recruited at first in the summer of 2006 (City University, online). There are other initiatives happening in the sector, in response to wider changes in education and training of young people. For example, the Department of Culture Media and Sport have pledged their support for developing a Creative Apprenticeship for people aged 16 to 24

years (Creative & Cultural Skills, online)

Of course, other stakeholders also need training for example volunteers. One of the issues that came out of the visits of the consultant team was training for docents to encourage development of staff. And if Taiwanese museums adopt the UK model of governance in the future, training will be required for Trustees and other honorary positions in museums to ensure their maximum effectiveness.

I have discussed training and leadership in some depth as it underpins all the other activities in the museum. The UK example also demonstrates how it has been an evolving process with a number of partners taking the initiative, the Museums Association, universities, and Government with support from charitable foundations. What is now recognisable for museum professionals is a clear entry and development route for individuals. A similar programme would not be unachievable in Taiwan however some of the central control, appointment of civil servants to Directorships, greater support for the Taiwan Museum Associations and a move away from different contracts are essential. Taiwanese museum professionals might wish to visit the UK to explore some of these initiatives in more detail, or professionals from the UK come to Taiwan to share their experiences.

### **Conclusions and recommendations**

The purpose of the team's trip in March was to explore opportunities for partnerships between the UK and Taiwanese museum sector. As my paper highlights Taiwanese museums have much to be proud of which other professionals in the sector could learn from. However, there are weaknesses in areas of 'mission-supporting activities' such as marketing and fundraising. I would like to finish today by highlighting some of the recommendations from the team's report. These require support from central and local government and other agencies, as without a champion for museums, a policy for the

sector and a re-thinking of the way staff are employed and trained the success of such initiatives will be limited. Some will also need financial support. For example:

- UK professionals assisting Taiwan in the development of an integrated training programme for those working in Taiwanese museums. For example advising and assisting in the development and delivery of leadership training, and UK specialists in areas such as retailing, licensing and other commercial activities running workshops in Taiwan.
- Visits to the UK from Taiwanese professionals. For example to some of the national and regional museums in the UK to see how they combine 'mission-related activities' with 'mission-supporting activities' such as retailing, conference and event organisation. Visits to former industrial areas such as Liverpool and Bristol and the South Bank in London may also be useful to highlight how flagship cultural projects have led to employment and tourism in former industrial or under-developed areas. Discussions with Directors, other senior staff in the UK and also the Museums Association may be useful to raise awareness of different models of good practice.
- Staff exchanges, for example specialist British conservators (the need for expertise in caring for industrial collections was identified in the trip) training Taiwanese curators on-site.
- Raising the profile of UK consultants, suppliers, designers and architects amongst Taiwanese museum professionals by hosting a trade fair in Taiwan.
- Collaborative touring exhibitions.
- Partnerships between Taiwanese and British Universities. For example giving guest lectures, exchange programmes, assisting each other in overseas placements, writing and publishing collaboratively and undertaking joint research projects.

## Acknowledgement

I would like to thank Dr. Vicky Cave, Marilyn Scott and Tim Ambrose who made up the rest of the team in March 2006. Thanks also go to the staff from the museums we visited, to staff and students from the Tainan University of the Arts and the British Council who organised the trip and workshop.

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## About the author

Ms. Alix Slater (MA PGCE FRGS, Principal Lecturer (Cultural Industries Management), Business School, Univ. of Greenwich, London UK.) has some 15 years experience as an academic and consultant. Prior to joining the University of Greenwich in 1996, she spent internships at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, Canada, and was employed as a Promotions Officer at the National Museum of Wales and as Senior Consultant and UK Manager for LORD Cultural Resources.

At Greenwich, Ms. Slater has been actively involved in the development of the MA Heritage, MA Museum and MA Arts Management degrees, accredited qualifications for museum professionals and specialist undergraduate degrees in Tourism, Events and Arts Management. She has taught across these programmes for the last decade, specialising in fundraising, interpretation, learning, audience development and the management of museums. She has also contributed to courses on leadership, policy and politics.

Alongside her teaching, and responsibilities as Programme Area Director for the current undergraduate and postgraduate suite of programmes she has also published a number of papers on audience development, visitor behaviour and membership schemes in the heritage sector. Recent articles have appeared in publications including the American journal *Curator*, *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, *Managing Leisure* and *International Journal of Non Profit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*. Ms. Slater has just completed a chapter in a new book on museum marketing. She is in the middle of a jointly funded project with a colleague focusing on social capital, volunteering and supporter groups at heritage sites in the UK, which is currently being developed into a pan-European project.

Ms. Slater has close connections with the cultural sector in the UK. She was invited to be part of the Membership Management Forum, a group of paid membership managers working in the cultural sector who wanted to set up a networking group. Through her marketing efforts and articles in practitioners' magazines, the group now has more than 50 members and represents 3/4 of a million friends. She co-organised their first conference at the National Maritime Museum earlier in the year and is planning a second event for 2007. Ms. Slater is also involved in a Seminar series examining Arts Marketing with a number of distinguished universities in the UK and is running the 6th International Colloquium on Non profit, Social and Arts Marketing at Greenwich in September 2007. Alongside this she continues to advise museums and galleries on lottery applications, to evaluate educational and audience development projects and to undertake visitor studies for organisations such as the National Gallery, Horniman Museum Park and Gardens and the National Maritime Museum.

Whilst these interests might first appear diverse, Ms. Slater finds that there is a common focus, museum management and their audiences.