

A Comparative Study of the Educational Role of Public Art Museums in Three Asian Cities: Taipei, Singapore, and Shanghai

ANNE S. H. LAM

Faculty of Education, The University of Hong Kong

In order to explore the possibilities and effectiveness of art education in local museum context, three Asian cities (Taipei, Singapore, and Shanghai) were selected and major public art museums there had been visited from 1999 to 2003. For the educational role of those public art museums in these three Asian cities, it is obvious that art education is agreed to be one of the main duties of public art museums. By applying appropriate education methodologies and taking into consideration local situations, public art museums such as the Taipei Fine Arts Museum and the Singapore Art Museum were successful in organizing various art education activities for different types of visitors. Compared to the Hong Kong Museum of Art and the Shanghai Art Museum, in which art education activities tended to be exhibition-related programs, museum activities in the Taipei Fine Arts Museum and the Singapore Art Museum were more related to school curriculum and comprehensive in nature. Indeed, how to provide a continuation of school art education and give people of all ages with a place for study and appreciation of art is a mission of most public art museums. Although many newly established art museums in these three Asian cities are still unable to achieve this ideal, this is a firmly held view in the museum circle.

In Asia, there has been a significant growth in the number and type of museums during the last decade of the 20th century. In order to explore

the possibilities and effectiveness of art museum education in local context, three Asian cities (Taipei, Singapore, and Shanghai) were selected and major public art museums there had been visited from 1999 to 2003. To know and understand their concepts and achievements in art museum education, museum staff such as directors and museum educators had been interviewed in three different museums (Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Singapore Art Museum, and Shanghai Art Museum) respectively. It was found that such a comparative study in Asia context is valuable for Hong Kong's art museum education in two aspects: (1) it throws light on the present situation and future trends, and (2) it suggests possible solutions to the current problems.

Except for Shanghai, both Taipei, Singapore and Hong Kong have been labeled as the "Economic Dragons" in Asia. With rapid economic growth in the late 20th century, people in these places have begun to expect for a better cultural life, which resulted in significant growth of museums. This is a natural outcome of social development: human requirements have already expanded from material satisfaction to spiritual needs, from simply trying to feed oneself to wanting to put one's ideals into practice. In other words, human desire are no longer limited to basic needs, but having a growing demand for a higher level of self-fulfillment in cultural life. Museum as a symbol of advanced cultural development therefore has become one of the major developments of cultural life in the 21st century in these Asian areas.

Under this trend, besides the demand that a museum should be as large as possible, the process of establishing a museum also tends to mean that the hardware facilities such as the building appear first, and only after that does work begin on building up the museum's collection. This case is similar to the establishment of the Hong Kong Heritage Museum. It had created great difficulties in the implementation of museum education programs, especially in the early stage. For example, more funding and human efforts needed to be allocated in gathering collection for the newly established museum and relatively limited resources were available for developing related educational activities; this caused inaccessibility of museum collection to visitors.

Problems are not confined only to public museums. Huang (1997) found that although private museums in Asia have more autonomy in their operation, the funding and operational mechanisms are also subject to the whims of particular individuals. For example, private museums in Taipei may come to serve as a vehicle for corporate image building or

profit making, or as a means of benefiting some particular interest parties. There may be an excessive emphasis on the founder's personal interest, or on putting a more acceptable veneer on business activities rather than educational activities (pp. 10–12). Though these phenomena are still uncommon in Hong Kong and Singapore, it is observed by the researcher that it has become popular in Shanghai.

Educational Role of Art Museums in Taipei

Compared to Hong Kong, museums in Taipei are relatively numerous. Taipei currently has over 100 museums, of which some are attached to county and city cultural centers, and many are private institutions. It is apparently from the magnitude of this figure that the people in Taipei are demanding a better cultural life than Hong Kong people. Moreover, the number of museums is also one of the indicators of a nation's or city's level of cultural development. As society has developed, Taiwan has made impressive achievement in this area (Table 1).

Table 1. Museums in Taiwan

I. Attributes of Museums in Taiwan

	Provincial/County/ Municipal, etc.	Private/ Independent	National	University/ College, etc.
No.	81	98	23	30
%	35	42	10	13

II. Types of Museums in Taiwan

	Art/ Folk art	History/ Historical sites	Natural history/ Ethnology/ Anthropology	Science/ Technology	Natural park/ Theme park/ zoo, etc.
No.	81	57	49	21	24
%	35	25	21	9	10

Source: Huang (1999), p. 250.

Table 1 also indicates that there are different types of museums of a cultural nature in Taipei, including museums of history, folk art, contemporary art, and so on. Some of these institutions do not have all the facilities that one would expect from a museum. However, as non-profit-making cultural institutions, they are still under the same category of "museums" and are classified as "social education institution" by the Social Education Law in Taiwan (Huang, 1997).

Taipei Fine Arts Museum

If visitors want to see the art of China in the past, they would probably go to the National Palace Museum in Taipei. As regards art for the present and the future, the place to go is the Taipei Fine Arts Museum. As Taiwan's first contemporary art museum, Taipei Fine Arts Museum was officially open to the public in 1983. Located in Taipei's Yuanshan district, the Museum is fulfilling its mission "to promote contemporary art in Taiwan by planning exhibitions, by collecting artwork from Taiwan and abroad, and by encouraging art-related education and research" (Taipei Fine Arts Museum, 2004). Taipei Fine Arts Museum also promotes international exchange, providing a point of contact with the international art scene through its outreach programs within Taiwan and its sponsorship of Taiwanese art exhibitions abroad.

Under the "Grand Museum" project, the Taipei Fine Arts Museum, while welcoming the advent of the second and third branch museums in Taipei, is itself confronted with the mission of transforming itself to meet the need of a diversified society in Taiwan today. Partially utilizing the old colonial-style building of the former Taipei City Government Offices, the second museum is located in an old

Figure 1. Taipei Fine Arts Museum



community and emphasizes community educational programs so as to distinguish itself from the Taipei Fine Arts Museum, and the third museum focuses more on multimedia and technological arts (Taipei Fine Arts Museum, 2004).

According to Mr. Huang Tsai-lang, Director of the Taipei Fine Arts Museum, the Museum also served to provide art education to all levels of society and for all members of the community. What made art museum education different from school art education was that the former took its collection of original objects on display as its primary source for teaching. The Taipei Fine Arts Museum, as a museum of modern art, particularly revealed that art was no longer confined to the traditional media of painting and sculpture, but also included many others, such as words, sounds, ready-made objects, figures and images of all types.

Mr. Huang also stated that many education programs had been developed for different ages and groups in the Museum over the years, including tours, art camps, parent-and-child activities, lectures, symposiums, study groups, films and many others. Over the past two years in particular, increased attention had been paid to planning quality tours designed around certain exhibitions, including tours according to age, hands-on studio activities, and the creation of various supplementary materials, such as study manuals, audio guides, and computer-aided tours that allowed audiences to share the experience of modern and contemporary art. Here are some innovative examples observed during the author's visit to the Taipei Fine Arts Museum in 2002:

1. *Art Studio for Children* — This program allowed youngsters of all ages to create artwork in a space that was free, open and all their own, for the exploration of the visual world of modern art. Classes were aimed at combining the psychological, intellectual, and emotional aspects of children, thus breaking through the traditional modes of education, and allowed children to use their individual approach. By encouraging children to explore various aspects of life and thought, such a program tried to plant the roots of art in children's everyday activities.
2. *Wednesday Teachers' Day* — By providing free admission, the Museum encouraged teachers to come on Wednesdays and used its artifacts to help them plan art programs for students. The Museum provided opportunities for art appreciation and study for teachers,

- and designed many kinds of art teacher camps to provide them with training about how to use the techniques of object learning for cultivating a complete appreciation of visual arts.
3. *Saturday Study Day* — Based on classes that emphasize observation, experience, and creative ideas on visual arts as planned by teachers during their “Wednesday Teachers’ Day,” the Museum allowed teachers to bring students to the Museum, again free of charge, on Saturdays and provided them with a place to appreciate and create art, aiming at fusing school and museum art education while forming a mutually beneficial relation between the two.
 4. *Reformed Art Courses and Guided Tours* — The Museum reformed its art courses provided to the public from the formerly practice-oriented studios to the ones that put greater emphasis on introducing the trends and concepts of modern art. In conjunction with the children’s studio, the Museum was expected to fulfill its function in learning, leisure, and entertainment for the community. Besides, tours and gallery talks had been designed for different target groups of visitors, such as children, youth, family, the aged, and the disabled. A more integrated and vivid tour design was also provided in order to make the Taipei Fine Arts Museum more accessible to all types of visitors.

Besides object learning, how to provide a continuation for school art education and give people of all ages with a place for study and appreciation of visual arts was also a focus of the Museum’s education department. In fact, according to the Social Education Law in Taiwan, art museum education is one of the duties of social education, the substance of which differs from school education.

According to Mr. Huang, there were three main characteristics of art museum education in the Taipei Fine Arts Museum: (1) experiential in nature — just like traveling to a new place and experiencing it first-hand, emphasizing direct feeling and appreciation; (2) self-motivated and multifaceted — the multiple visual impressions allowed one to freely associate, compare, and feel the personal experience of life; (3) for all ages — different designs and outlooks of exhibitions along with various tour approaches could satisfy the needs of different age groups and audience background.

With this thought in mind, the education department of the Taipei Fine Arts Museum had combined the art resources of the community and that of the Museum itself, and from the inception of the Museum,

had planned and organized various education and extension activities for different visitors of different levels. Compared to other museums' activities, the aim of their activities was educational in nature. As transformed and explained by the museum educator, Ms. Chan Yuk-ling, the free and open space in various art studios at the Taipei Fine Arts Museum had produced an active learning environment that encouraged direct participation. People can "touch," "create," and "play" as they learned and experienced.

According to Ms. Chan, "touching" allowed people to satisfy their sense of curiosity. For instance, comparing original works of art with reproductions through the sense of touching allowed for an experience not usually possible in the display area. "Creating" allowed people to understand art through active, individual, and direct participation, which thereby enhanced their degree of appreciation for art. "Playing" made the work of art more personal in nature and allowed people to learn as they enjoy. In addition to providing education activities for school groups, the Museum also began the "Parent-Child Program," offering a space for interactive learning on the part of both children and adults.

Educational Role of Art Museums in Singapore

Similar to Hong Kong, Singapore had been the colony of the United Kingdom until 1956. Singapore currently has 16 museums, of which most are national museums and others private institutions (Table 2). Some of these private museums do not have all the facilities that one would expect from a museum, but they are still considered as "museums" under the classification system of the International Council of Museums. Moreover, all the national museums in Singapore are under the management of the National Heritage Board formed in 1993.

The Public Education Department of the National Heritage Board aims to "promote an awareness and appreciation of the cultural and historical heritage of Singapore to schools and the general public." The educational programs offered by the department cater for people from the age of five to adults and senior citizens. Some of their popular programs include guided tours for schools and the public, traveling exhibitions, talks and seminars. Furthermore, the department also organizes workshops such as the "Heritage Kids" for students and training sessions for teachers that help to make history and art come alive for them. In short, these public education programs are intended to

Table 2. Museums in Singapore

Museum	Categories of collection					Museum converted from monument
	History	Art	Folk	Science	Others	
Singapore History Museum	✓	✓	✓			
Singapore Art Museum	✓	✓				✓
Asian Civilisations Museum	✓	✓	✓			
National University of Singapore Museum	✓	✓				
Tan Swie Hian Museum	✓	✓			Private	
Singapore Air Force Museum	✓				Air force	
Singapore Navy Museum	✓				Navy	
Singapore Philatelic Museum	✓				Stamp	✓
Maritime Museum	✓				Maritime	
Sports Museum	✓				Sports	
Singapore Science Centre				✓		
Singapore Discovery Centre		✓		✓		
Raffles Hotel Museum	✓				Hotel	
Fort Siloso	✓				Fort	✓
The Battle Box	✓				Military	✓
Images of Singapore	✓		✓			

Source: Compiled by the author from the information obtained during her visit to Singapore.

encourage creativity and infuse thinking skills in order to prepare the present generation for the future challenge (National Heritage Board, 2003).

Singapore Art Museum

The Singapore Art Museum is housed in a historic building that was a Catholic boy school until 1987. The Museum is the realization of plans to meet expanded spatial and institutional needs that had outgrown the facilities of the former National Museum Art Gallery, which was established in 1976 as an annex of the National Museum. The new art museum is devoted to the study and preservation of the contemporary art of the Southeast Asian region. With more than 10,000 square meters

Figure 2. Singapore Art Museum

of floor space, visitors could expect to view one or more on-going exhibitions at the Museum (Singapore Art Museum, 2003b).

At the national level, the National Heritage Board tries to explore and present local culture and heritage through a network of three national museums. In the area of art museum education, what the Board is experiencing is a constant search for new perspectives and possibilities of integrating the educational role of museums into its core identity. This is spelled out in the mission statement of the Singapore Art Museum: “to preserve and present the art histories and contemporary art practices of Singapore and the Southeast Asian region so as to facilitate visual arts education, exchange, research and development” (Singapore Art Museum, 2003b).

To achieve the educational mission of the Singapore Art Museum, Mr. Ahmad Mashadi, Assistant Director of the Museum, expressed that the museum staff had developed both exhibitions and specific educational programs to highlight the artistic context of Singapore. This two-fold focus aimed at: (1) promoting awareness and appreciation of 20th-century art practices in Singapore and Southeast Asia through exhibitions, publications, and public education programs for local and overseas audiences; and (2) encouraging an active and stimulating

cultural environment in Singapore through public educational programs and exhibitions on a diversity of art trends and practice.

Furthermore, according to Ms. Jean Wee, the manager of public program division in the Singapore Art Museum, community outreach was an increasingly important area of the Museum's function. The Museum aimed to promote awareness and appreciation of art within the local and regional context and was so doing, hoping to encourage the growth of an active and stimulating cultural environment in Singapore. This was done not only through the Museum's exhibition programs but also through its education and public programs that covered a diversity of art trends and practices, fringe activities, and public lectures, aiming at reaching the local community as well as regional and international visitors.

At the school level, educational programs were developed to enable schools to use the Museum as a resource center for developing their art curriculum. In recent years, the Singapore Art Museum had adopted the multi-disciplinary approach by encouraging children to study art exhibits in their cultural context through making links with history, literature, drama, and religion. Some of the recent workshops for school children involved art production techniques as well as developing critical and analytical skills through art writing. Furthermore, teacher-training workshops, art camps, and art competitions were among the proactive ways of involving schools in the museum education programs (Singapore Art Museum, 2003a).

In order to ensure that museum visitors established a level of active engagement with the Museum's exhibitions and related programs, and to maximize the potential of the Singapore Art Museum as an educational resource by reaching out to a wide spectrum of the population, the mission of the public program division was "to enrich, to entertain and to wholly enforce the museum experience," in spite of the fact that art was a non-core subject and thus was paid low attention in curriculum planning in schools. During the author's visit to the Singapore Art Museum in 2002, the museum educators there employed various new strategies to attract schools, such as:

1. Introduction of *multi-disciplinary approaches to add value* to art education in schools — These involved the combination of art appreciation with critical thinking skills and creative writing, elective music and art programs with input harnessed from the Museum's exhibitions, and other enrichment possibilities such as

- the pilot project “Mathematics in Art” exhibition-cum-special education corner.
2. *Active collaboration with schools* through course-based project works — With the aim to extend close collaboration with all schools within its cluster grouping, this project involved creative writing in respect of the year-long landscape exhibition, with sessions to introduce museum personnel, career guiding, and the offering of research facilities for teachers’ use.
 3. *Special programming* — This involved identifying school curricular needs and scheduling programs to meet those needs at opportune periods during the school calendars, taking into account pre-primary, lower and upper primary, secondary and junior college internal programming and examination periods.

Besides, the public educational programs of the Singapore Art Museum also aimed at nurturing a wider range of audiences by raising their awareness of the artistic heritage of Singapore and the Southeast Asian region. The concept of “edutainment” (education through entertainment) is often used by integrating elements of education, engagement, and entertainment in programs such as the community outreach program of “Family Day” and the annual Museum Festival. According to one of the museum advisers of the Singapore Art Museum, Jane Leong of the Nanyang Technological University, the ideal of museum educational programs in helping the public to realize the concept of life-long learning was implicitly suggested in all these programs and remained a key issue for further exploration (Leong, 2000).

Educational Role of Art Museums in Shanghai

Similar to Hong Kong, Singapore and Taipei, Shanghai has speeded up the construction of cultural facilities since the 1990s as a result of economic growth. Many of these facilities have already been completed and put into operation, such as the Shanghai Museum, Shanghai Art Museum, Shanghai Urban Planning Exhibition Centre, Shanghai Science and Technology Museum, Shanghai Library, and Shanghai Grand Theatre. By the end of 2003, the city had 36 cultural premises, 45 archive halls, and 23 museums (Shanghai Municipal Government, 2003).

Currently, there are over 20 museums in Shanghai (Table 3). Compared to the other cities in China, Shanghai now possesses a high number of museums relative to its population and area. In fact, the Chinese government has long regarded museums as an important part of people's cultural and educational undertakings. According to Mr. Zhang Wenbin, Director-General of the State Cultural Relics Bureau, the primary responsibility of museums in China is:

Table 3. Museums in Shanghai

Museum	Categories of collection					Museum converted from monument
	History	Art	Folk	Science	Others	
Shanghai Museum	✓	✓	✓			
Shanghai Art Museum	✓	✓				✓
Liu Haisu Art Museum		✓				
Zhu Qizhan Art Museum		✓				
Shanghai Natural History Museum	✓			✓		✓
Shanghai History Museum	✓					
Shanghai Children Museum		✓	✓	✓	Children Literature	
Lu Xun Memorial Museum	✓					
Ng Chang-shi Memorial Museum	✓	✓				✓
Soong Ching-ling Memorial Museum	✓					✓
Former Residence of Sun Yat-sen	✓					✓
Song Kong Museum	✓				Community	
Qing Pu Museum	✓	✓			Community	✓
Jin Shan Museum	✓				Community	
Jia Ding Museum	✓	✓			Community	✓
Song Ming Museum	✓		✓		Community	✓
Feng Xian Museum	✓		✓		Community	
Shanghai Science and Technology Museum				✓	Technology	
Shanghai Urban Planning Exhibition Centre				✓	Urban planning	
Museum of Tea Ware and Containers	✓		✓		First private museum	
Museum of Medical History of the Chinese Medical Association	✓		✓		Chinese medicine	
Aquarium Yuyuan	✓			✓	Aquarium Garden	✓

Source: Compiled by the author from the information obtained during her visit to Shanghai.

To collect, store and protect cultural relics and specimens, carry out scientific research activities, hold exhibitions, disseminate historical, scientific and cultural knowledge, propagate patriotism, socialism and the revolutionary traditions among the broad masses of the people, enhance the level of understanding of science, culture and moral ethics among the whole nation, increase the nation's self-confidence and cohesive force, and contribute, by the way of intellectual support, to the great cause of building socialism with Chinese characteristics. (Zhang, 2002, pp. 5–6)

Shanghai Art Museum

The Shanghai Art Museum is the foremost contemporary art museum in China. Established over 40 years, the Museum, through continuing expansion, gradually becomes an important space for the social and cultural exchange in Shanghai and a focal point of the city's cultural life. Responding to the need of a rapidly developing cultural environment as well as a growing artistic community, its staff look to the new millennium with great ambition. They hope the Museum will become a world-class establishment in terms of its exhibition facilities

Figure 3. Shanghai Art Museum



as well as resources and collections, and also a center for cultural exchanges and intellectual discussions in Shanghai's contemporary art scene (Shanghai Art Museum, 2003).

According to Mr. Li Shen-yang, Director of the Shanghai Art Museum, the Museum aimed to achieve its objective of "abundant collection, integral functions, advanced facilities, first grade staff and ... the center of Shanghai modern and contemporary art on collection and preservation, academic research, display and exhibition, art education, art exchange and art information" (Shanghai Art Museum, 2003). Indeed, the success of the Shanghai Biennale exhibition launched since 2000 has witnessed their enthusiasm in making Shanghai Art Museum the center of contemporary art development in China.

Before relocating to the new premise, Shanghai Art Museum was mainly an exhibition venue with limited collections. In 1998, an education department was set up in the Museum, which was the first art museum in China to have such a functional division at that time. Generally speaking, the educational activities of this newly re-established museum were mainly related to its permanent collections and blockbuster exhibitions (such as the Shanghai Biennale), catering for local citizens and tourists, with schools and art lovers being the principal targets. In addition, there is a multimedia art library on the top floor where visitors can learn about art in Shanghai and the rest of the world (Shanghai Art Museum, 2003).

Compared to Hong Kong, Taipei and Singapore, relatively limited amount of education and extension services such as guided tours, lectures and workshops were provided in Shanghai due to resource constraint. During the author's visit to Shanghai in 2003, the Shanghai Art Museum only arranged some lectures and workshops to supplement its exhibitions, and organized a training course for related museum professionals to explore the direction for future art museum development in Shanghai. In order to promote Shanghai's development in visual arts education, the Museum also held an essay competition for children in 1999. According to Ms. Ma Chu-hua, former head of the education department in the Museum, it was hoped that through the "Friends for Museum," the education circle and citizens of Shanghai could pay more attention to the related museum exhibitions, hence enhancing their level of appreciation in contemporary visual arts in the long run.

Moreover, it was found that children's art was one of the key areas

identified by the Shanghai Art Museum's educators as focus of development. According to Ms. Gao Qian, one of the museum educators, the education of children's art was an inspiring process in which children drew their mental images consciously and developed their interest of and attitudes toward the sense of beauty. By doing so, children developed their ability to observe, create, and think independently. During the process of creation, children would also become more confident because of accompanied acknowledgement. Moreover, viewing that children are one of the main source of museum attendance at present and in the future, the education department of the Shanghai Art Museum particularly took children aged 5 to 16 as the target group for their educational activities in the near future as a kind of audience-building programs.

Although both the variety of educational activities and visitor services of the Shanghai Art Museum may not up to the standards of those in Hong Kong and other developed Asian cities, it was found that the drive and determination of museum staff in improving their educational services to visitors in the Shanghai Art Museum were far more encouraging than some Asian museums with longer history. The author believes that the success of a museum in terms of its educational role depends on a number of factors, with the involvement level of museum staff and their passion in museum works being one of the crucial human factors.

Discussion and Recommendation

Generally speaking, art education in public museums can be achieved in a number of ways, but the most common method is through artifact study by viewing exhibitions. In fact, using objects as part of the learning process has a long history in the West. According to Hooper-Greenhill (1996), the purposes of artifact study are to develop all the visitors' faculties in the acquisition of knowledge, rather than to merely impart facts or information; learning from objects also enable the development of sense-perception, which, combining with reflection and judgment, leads to meaningful mental activities based on existing knowledge and competencies of the visitors (pp. 121–123).

Besides artifact study, art education in public museums has also been achieved through provision of various public programs. They

include a variety of activities such as guided tours, workshops, demonstrations, and lectures provided either inside or outside the museum premises by museum staff. Good public programs can equip the museum visitors with the basic knowledge of art and the confidence to approach art in order to break the gap between museums and the public. In the past, art museum education was understood narrowly as provision of services such as guided tours and workshops for school children. Nowadays, art museum education includes services for a much broader range of audiences both in the museums and in the community (Lam, 2003b).

Current Approach in Art Museum Education

It is found that besides similarities in economic and cultural background, there is also similarity in the way to achieve the major educational role of public art museums in these Asian cities — cooperation with school groups and related education institutions. Art museums have become an educational resource for teaching many school subjects, and students in return contribute nearly 30–40% of the annual attendance of the museums in these Asian cities. For the community and the general public, art museums in these cities also provide a place where they can get in touch with art. It is hoped that a desire to know more about art can be cultivated. Recently, the growing interest in promotion of community art in various Asian art museums is a good evidence of serving this kind of informal learning need for the general public.

To meet the need of informal education in society, art museums in these cities have provided a variety of programs for the participation of visitors from different segments of society. These programs include exhibitions, workshops, gallery talks, guided tours, lectures, seminars and so on. Indeed, art museums in the 21st century are no longer only repositories and conservators of cultural objects; instead, making them accessible and understandable by educating the general public about the relevance and meaning of art has become an increasing responsibility of Asian art museums. As the boundaries between education, high culture, and entertainment have become blurred, active reaching out to the community has become a trend instead.

Furthermore, it is obvious that art education is generally agreed to be one of the main duties of these public art museums. By applying appropriate art education methodologies and taking into consideration

local situations, public art museums such as the Singapore Art Museum and the Taipei Fine Arts Museum are successful in organizing effective art education activities for different types of visitors. Compared to Hong Kong and Shanghai, in which art museum educational activities tend to be exhibition-related programs, art museum activities in Singapore and Taipei are relatively well-organized and more related to formal education.

For instance, the significance of art museum education in Singapore was affirmed by the Committee on National Arts Education in 1996. According to Leong (2000), a three-pronged approach was proposed as an effective way in implementing national arts education at the levels of the school system, the community at large, and tertiary arts education. Moreover, museums can provide resource for the intellectual capital of the nation and can further their potential for seeking partnerships with industry and formal education establishments to form a network of centers of life-long learning (Leong, 2000).

In addition, during the author's visits to various public art museums in Asia, it is found that these Asian art museums no longer confine or define themselves as pure art or history museums. Few of them promote art for art's own sake. Instead, many museums in Asia use their resources creatively to explore social, cultural, or even political issues. In fact, in the postmodern society, we have already witnessed the blurring of disciplines in museums. Like the Singapore Art Museum and the Taipei Fine Arts Museum, many museums in Asia have made use of their strengths and produce truly interpretative exhibitions using all of its collections and expertise of staff across different disciplines.

Analysis of Different Art Museum Education Activities

Generally speaking, there are three main types of art museum education activities provided in these Asian art museums: (1) in-house programs such as guided tours, workshops, lectures, audio-guide; (2) outreach programs such as traveling exhibitions, art camps, cultural tours; and (3) other activities such as publication, Internet access, and symposium. With reference to Hooper-Greenhill's (1996) model, these educational activities involve three different modes of learning, namely symbolic, enactive, and iconic modes (p. 111).

For the in-house programs in these Asian art museums, lectures and audio-guide services mainly involve the symbolic mode which tends to

take verbal form. It sometimes requires more sophisticated skills and understanding, and generally operates at a higher level of language use. Long-established museums such as the Hong Kong Museum of Art tend to rely more on this mode. Text is often used extensively in exhibitions and related exhibition pamphlets. According to Hooper-Greenhill (1996), this mode of learning is inevitably a “cultural bound” process and also a “class bound” process, to a certain extent (p. 112). The way museum staff represent the world can be an expression of their social and cultural identity, which may not be a universal representation. For casual visitors without the presupposition toward art may not share the same position as museum staff and thus find the language adopted in these programs difficult to understand (Hooper-Greenhill, 1996).

On the other hand, in-house programs such as guided tours and workshops tend to involve the enactive mode. By identifying the uniqueness of different target groups, this mode of learning demands active involvement. Visitors at different levels of ability and experience may find this way of learning inviting and enjoyable (Hooper-Greenhill, 1996). Taking the Taipei Fine Arts Museum as an example, tours and gallery talks were designed differently for different groups of visitors such as children, youth, family, the aged, and the disabled; the “Art Studio for Children” allowed youngsters of all ages to create artwork in a space that was free and open for them to explore the world of visual arts. As for adult and college students, art courses with the emphasis on introducing the modern art trends and concepts had been provided.

Compared to Hong Kong and Shanghai, in which in-house educational activities tend to be piecemeal and exhibition-related programs, similar activities in Taipei and Singapore are more comprehensive and related to the need of different target groups. Activities such as “Wednesday Teachers’ Day” and “Saturday Study Day” provided in the Taipei Fine Arts Museum, “Family Day” and “Museum Festival” provided in the Singapore Art Museum are among the proactive ways of involving different segments of society in the museum education programs.

Moreover, a comprehensive approach to art education advocated recently by various scholars in the education field requires the critically look at art and the understanding of its meaning in a broader cultural context (e.g., Boughton, 2000; Fehr, 1994; Hamblen, 1993). It has become common knowledge in museums now that visitors bring a whole range of interests, needs and goals to museums, and museum staff

in the West have accordingly broadened their notions of what constitutes education and learning, by including those affective experiences like past memories (e.g., Roberts, 1997). For example, it sounds sensible to organize some educational activities by taking the long Chinese cultural traditions into consideration, such as the monthly outreach cultural tour “A Journey through 7,000 Years of Chinese Culture” provided by the Taipei Fine Arts Museum.

As a matter of fact, art museums in these Asian cities still put more emphasis and resources on their in-house activities rather than outreach programs. Newly established art museums such as the Shanghai Art Museum in particular still depend on exhibitions as the main mode of communication with visitors. On the other hand, art museums with longer history and bigger budget such as the Taipei Fine Arts Museum have put more effort in producing publications, both general and specialized, to disseminate cultural knowledge and their fruits of research works. In recent years, such specialized knowledge could also be accessed easily through the museums’ Web site or through participation in their international symposium.

Recommendation

With the blurred boundaries among different disciplines, it is observed that multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches have become more and more popular in designing various art museum exhibitions and educational activities in these Asian cities. In this connection, public art museums in Hong Kong are in a very desirable position to follow this trend with regard to the diverse disciplines that their collections cover. For example, Chinese art and culture could be promoted not only through display of artifacts in a gallery setting, integration of other disciplines such as Chinese literature and Chinese history could also be considered in planning and designing various education and extension services.

Moreover, for the Asian museums the author have visited, they have ceased to play the mere role of a temple showing treasures. Some of them have now evolved to incorporate various roles in one like a cultural center. This helps the museums to expand the spectrum of the public it serves, from the middle-class and well-educated group to the real general public. In this connection, public art museums in Hong Kong could consider to develop unique educational programs so that

while providing entertainment for the public, it can still stand as an academic institution and differentiate itself from the rest of the showbiz counterparts.

In order to expand its educational role, public art museums in Hong Kong also need to establish a stronger tie with schools and various educational institutions. Apart from putting into consideration the school curriculum in interpretation of exhibitions, they could tie in the public program schedule with the academic year. Many museums in Taipei and Singapore have already been planning their public programs in line with the school year. Usually, they have programs for tourists and family during the summer and fall, and special school programs in the winter and spring.

Because art education in Hong Kong is still at a primitive stage of development, it is here that local art museums can play their roles to fill up the gap at this opportune period. Without sufficient training in art appreciation for many local art teachers, especially for those non-art major graduates from the Hong Kong Institute of Education, art museum can be a valuable source for them to acquire such skills and experience. By providing suitable activities such as art teacher training courses or workshops on art appreciation, art teachers can also be a valuable source of volunteers for museum activities such as docents.

Indeed, based on the findings of Lam's (2003a) evaluation exercise on various public programs provided in local public art museums, it is found that there are substantial educational values in museum docent programs, and their effectiveness can also be enhanced by applying appropriate teaching methods by experienced teachers. Such exhibition-related guided tours normally explain the background and concepts behind the exhibitions being displayed, so that the visitors can have a better understanding of the exhibits.

To conclude, through the empirical study on the art museum education in three Asian museums, it is found that these museums today are undoubtedly striving to develop a new relationship with their audience. New ways of working and revised staff structure are being negotiated in order to reform museums to appeal to those who do not normally visit museums. Indeed, museums all over the world are endeavoring to increase their market share in both leisure and education industry. Such a move has been underpinned by a new perception of the educational role for museums. Many museum workers now have a new vision of museum more closely linked to their communities.

References

- Boughton, D. (2000, December). *Prospects for arts education viewed from above and below*. Paper presented at the Asia-Pacific Art Education Conference, Hong Kong Institute of Education, Hong Kong.
- Fehr, D. (1994). Promise and paradox: Art education in the postmodern arena. *Studies in Art Education*, 35(4), 209–217.
- Hamblen, K. (1993). *The emergence of neo-DBAE*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Atlanta.
- Hooper-Greenhill, E. (1996). *Museum and their visitors*. New York: Routledge.
- Huang, K. N. (1997). *Museum marketing strategies*. Taipei: National Museum of History.
- Huang, K. N. (1999). *New visions for museums*. Taipei: National Museum of History.
- Lam, S. H. (2003a). Evaluation of the effectiveness of public programs in art museums of Hong Kong. *Asia Pacific Journal for Arts Education*, 1(2), 22–36.
- Lam, S. H. (2003b). The Effectiveness of artifact study in art museums of Hong Kong: An evaluation exercise on art museum experience by secondary school students in local context. *Educational Research Journal*, 18(1), 57–72.
- Leong, J. (2000). *Singapore's visual arts education for museum and galleries*. Paper presented at the Asia-Pacific Art Education Conference, Hong Kong Institute of Education, Hong Kong.
- National Heritage Board. (2003). *Who we are*. Retrieved October 29, 2004, from the National Heritage Board's public education Web site: <http://www.nhb.gov.sg/pe/who/>
- Roberts, L. C. (1997). *From knowledge to narrative: Educators and the changing museum*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Shanghai Art Museum. (2003). Shanghai Art Museum. Retrieved November 4, 2003, from Shanghai Art Museum Web site: <http://www.cnarts.net/shanghaiart/>
- Shanghai Municipal Government. (2003). *Shanghai in brief*. Retrieved October 29, 2004, from the official Website of Shanghai: <http://www.shanghai.gov.cn/shanghai/node2314/node3766/node3869/index.html>
- Singapore Art Museum. (2003a). *Singapore Art Museum education services*. Retrieved October 29, 2004, from National Heritage Board Web site: <http://www.nhb.gov.sg/SAM/education>
- Singapore Art Museum. (2003b). *Singapore Art Museum profile*. Retrieved October 29, 2004, from National Heritage Board Web site: <http://www.nhb.gov.sg/SAM/Profile>
- Taipei Fine Arts Museum. (2004). *About*. Retrieved October 29, 2004, from Taipei Fine Arts Museum Web site: <http://www.tfam.gov.tw/english/visit/about.asp>
- Zhang, W. B. (2002). China's museums in full bloom. In X. M. Xiao (Ed.), *Museum: Treasure Houses of History* (pp. 5–6). Beijing: Foreign Language Press.