

# **MUSEUM AND EDUCATION IN HONG KONG**

**Term Paper for the M.A. in Comparative and Public History**

**Course HIS 5514A Museumology: Culture, Interpretation  
and Knowledge Transmission**

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## **Preliminary**

In connection with the MA course HIST 5514A on the Topic Studies in Public History: Museum and Historical Interpretation, this term paper is prepared to discuss the relationship between Museum and Education, in particular the local education in Hong Kong.

## **The Background**

We understand from the history and development of museum, the responsibility of the museum was mainly responsible for acquisition, conservation, research and display of different art, archaeological, ethnographical, scientific and technological objects. But in the modern world, responsibilities of museum have much wider role for the visitors. The visitors not only look at the objects and admire and enjoy them, but also learn from them and pass them to the succeeding generation. (prabhas kumar singh) Museum can no longer stand aloof from the major issues of time i.e. the many changes in the world order, such as political, social, cultural, education and human. Changes in its functions and responsibilities are evident in the past decades. So what is museum today and what is their purpose? (UNESCO) This can best be seen from the following definition on museums-

The definition of museums has changed course in the two centuries since they came into existence. Today they are a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment (ICOM Statues, adopted by the 22nd General Assemble (Vienna, Austria, 24 August 2007)).

## **Why we need museum**

Museums are centres for conservation, study and reflection on heritage and culture. Collections of objects can be found in most cultures. They bear out a relationship with the past that attaches value to tangible traces

left by our ancestors, and aim to protect them and even make them essential to the functioning of human society. Besides enjoyment, we can learn the history from the collection and pass them to the succeeding generation.

### **Function of Museum**

A museum works for the endogenous development of social communities whose testimonies it conserves while lending a voice to their cultural aspirations. Resolutely turned towards its public, community museums are attentive to social and cultural change and help us to present our identity and diversity in an ever-changing world.

A museum presents the interactions between culture and nature. The varieties of museums become diverse. The advance in science and technology in the past centuries had fostered the establishment of an increasing number of museums that are focus on science, natural science and technology, in addition to those focus on art, history and heritage.

A museum's primary purpose is to safeguard and preserve the heritage as a whole. It carries out whatever scientific study is required to understand and establish both its meaning and its possession. In this sense, it helps in the preparation of a global ethic based on practice for the conservation, protection and diffusion of cultural heritage values. A museum's educational mission, whatever its nature, is as important as its scientific work. Hence, in addition to acquisition, conservation, research and display of objects, museum plays a vital role in education.

The change in educational model is also a salient factor in making the education role more important for a museum. In the past, students were receiving education through classroom teaching. It was mostly one-way communication. However, in the recent decades, the learning process changes. Students are receiving knowledge in an active way. In this sense,

### **Why is museum important in playing the role of education**

The educational activities within the museum should be ready to provide a great variety of methods through which people can receive insights into and enjoyment of collections. The presence of objects that do not know

the boundaries of language and literacy helps museums to be on advantageous position compared to other public service agencies, to serve as socially relevant agency for the education and development of the community.

Let's see how museum perform the role of education

Firstly, we have to define learning and education

### **Definition of Learning**

Learning means the action of receiving instruction or acquiring knowledge; a process which leads to the modifications of behaviour; the acquisition of new abilities or responses, and which is additional to natural.

### **Definition of Education**

Education means learning that takes place in schools or school-like environments or in the world at large; the transmission of the values and accumulated knowledge of a society.

### **Is museum educational institution?**

#### **MEANING OF MUSEUM EDUCATION:-**

A Museum is not an educational institution in the formal sense of the word. Museum education is the education in its broader sense. Eileen Hooper Green Hill (1988) considers museum in the context of education, as an institution that can offer an educational experience across a wide range of variables and in relation to a wide range of institutions and organizations. The meaning of museum education is that museums provide a learning situation in which the visitors experience learning. A learning situation is a condition or environment in which all the elements necessary for promoting learning are present. Learning experience is the mental or physical reaction or makes through seeing, hearing or doing the things to be learnt and through which one gains meanings and understanding of the materials to be learnt.

Museum in its actual function is an educational institution. It provides an environment where visitors can have

- (a) direct encounters with objects
- (b) lifelong learning for people of all ages and backgrounds
- (c) forums for new ideas
- (d) self-directed and voluntary learning

Education is one of the primary functions of museums. Let's see how museum can contribute in education.

Prabhas Kuman Singh in his article Museum and Education (CHRJ, Vol XLVII No.1) emphasized museum's contribution to education. His research are quoted below.

Museums foster an integrated approach to cultural heritage as well as the links of continuity between creation and heritage. They also enable various publics, notably local communities and disadvantaged groups, to rediscover their roots and approach other cultures.

#### EDUCATION THROUGH OBJECTS

Museum objects are important part of the cultural and natural heritage of a country. They act as important means of work and represent the basis of work, an object of research for various technical, social and natural science branches such as botany, zoology, history, history of art, archaeology, ethnography, etc. Objects can make unique contribution to our understanding of the working of individuals and societies. In short, it can tell us more about ourselves. Hence, we collect objects to show illustrative examples of societies and individuals. Learning directly from the objects provide an first hand experience to the learners. For example an individual who has seen and handle few fossils or examined an exhibit showing how fossils are formed would have a better knowledge about fossils then those who have only read about them. Sensory experiences form the basis of museum education.

Sensory exploration is one way to begin working with objects:

The foremost function of a modern museum is, therefore, to utilise the objects of the past as tools to generate knowledge and there by enlighten

the minds of the public. The museums of modern times act as an academy and a school for the people at one and the same time. Hence, the educational work of a museum today, directly involves research scholars and educationists on the transmitting end and the people in general at the receiving end. The museum professionals and the educationists, who are responsible for the educational activities, should use their knowledge in the framework of the educational programs and present them to the people for their understanding, debate and adoption. Of course, the research scholars, museum educationists and the public have to be directly involved with the museum materials. Thus the museum collections are the central point around which all interest and activities of specialists, educationists and the public revolve.

## **MUSEUMS IN SCHOOL EDUCATION**

Museum provide learning situations is quite different from those provided by formal educational institutions like schools.

- a) Museum provides free choice learning situations devoid of verbal instructions, assessment and other types of controls that exist in schools.
- b) Learning in museums is a spontaneous process, a personal experience not imposed on the visitor.
- c) Museum provide open communication of ideas, concepts and information involving exploration and discovery, and
- d) Class rooms in schools are home for 3R's: reading, riting and rithmetic, where as museums are home for 3A's: the authentic, the aesthetic and the accessible. The authenticity as revealed by real objects and phenomena exhibited in museums, communicates with a powerful clarity to visitors. Museums are compelling aesthetic environments: they engage the senses, stimulate, inspires and some times even overwhelm. A museum makes the whole world, the past, the present and the imagined; accessible to the visitor. (Voris, H. H.

Sedielarh, M. C. , Blockrnom, C. P. 1986)

## **COMPAIRISON OF LEARNING IN SCHOOLS AND MUSEUMS**

Subject	School	Museum
1. Free choice	No	Yes

2. Instruction based on	Text	Object
3. Senses most used	Oral	Visual
4. Syllabus-Oriented	Yes	No
5. Formal assessment	Yes	No
6. Time Schedule	Yes	No
7. Learning	Linear Non-	Multi-Faceted
Spontaneous	Spontaneous	

## **SCHOOLS TO MUSEUMS**

The potential of museums as institution that could implement and supplement School education has been organized all over the world. Programmes for School children have always been among the most frequent educational offerings of museums. The frequent visits of young pupils to museums, not only supplement their classroom teachings, but also create a love of beauty in many forms; which if properly absorbed in this formative stage of mind, will lead to a wider understanding and sometimes create specialized interest for the future. Museums could contribute to School education in many ways, the most important being, visual communication through objects and materials. Subjects like History, Geography, Art, Physics, Chemistry, Astronomy, Health and Hygiene, Natural Sciences and even Mathematics could come alive more vividly and effectively through exhibits in museums representing the disciplines. Educational experiences obtainable in museums for school children may fall into two categories, experiences directly relevant to the school curriculum and experiences that provide a broader perspective for improving the general knowledge of students in different areas of humanities and sciences. To achieve these objectives of museum education relevant to school children, museum authorities should make conscious efforts in providing these required medium of communication.

It is agreed that museum indeed play an essential role in education. However, in effectively delivering the function, amongst other, we consider that government policy, resources allocation, museum professionals, other entertainment are important factors that hinder the development of museum into an educational institution.?????

government policy

resources allocation  
museum professionals

## **Museums in Hong Kong and how they perform/achieve the function of education**

In Hong Kong, the public museums are operated as public service under the Leisure and Cultural Services Department of the SAR Government. According to the Department, the setting up of museums is to “acquire, conserve, research on, exhibit and communicate for the purposes of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of people and their environment. Museum collections form a composite picture of our cultural, historical and natural heritage, and the preservation of such collections represents a long-term commitment to existing and future generations. The following roles are performed:

1. To present and sponsor exhibitions on the visual arts, history, culture, archaeology, and science and technology for the enjoyment of the public;
2. To promote an interest in and better understanding of the visual arts, science technology and the history and culture of Hong Kong through a balanced range of museum educational activities and sharing of experience with local artists, scholars and experts in the fields;
3. To support and promote contemporary Hong Kong art and encourage artistic creativity;
4. To support research on local heritage, history and the visual arts;
5. To provide and operate venues for hire for the presentation of exhibitions, lectures and film shows and studio facilities for artistic creation;
6. To acquire and conserve local films and related materials and provide facilities for film research and educational activities for film appreciation.”<sup>1</sup>

There are over 30 museums in Hong Kong, of which 18 are under the operation and management of the Leisure and Cultural Services

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<sup>1</sup> LCSD Homepage, [http://www.lcsd.gov.hk/en/cs\\_mus\\_intro.php](http://www.lcsd.gov.hk/en/cs_mus_intro.php), 2.4.2009 There

Department (LCSD) of the HKSAR. According to the information provided by the LCSD, there are 7 major museums in Hong Kong, namely-

Hong Kong Museum of Art  
Hong Kong Science Museum  
Hong Kong Space Museum  
Hong Kong Heritage Museum  
Hong Kong Museum of History  
Hong Kong Museum of Coastal Defence  
Dr Sun Yat-sen Museum

In addition, there are eight smaller museums - the Flagstaff House Museum of Teaware, the Lei Cheng Uk Han Tomb Museum, the Law Uk Folk Museum, the Sheung Yiu Folk Museum, the Sam Tung Uk Museum, the Hong Kong Railway Museum, the Hong Kong Film Archive and the Fireboat Alexander Grantham Exhibition Gallery. The Department also operates two heritage centres - the Hong Kong Heritage Discovery Centre and the Ping Shan Tang Clan Gallery cum Heritage Trail Visitors Centre.

Of the seven major museums, the [Hong Kong Museum of Art](#) plays an important role in preserving the cultural heritage of China and promoting art with a local focus. The [Hong Kong Science Museum](#), with its predominantly interactive exhibits, illustrates various scientific principles and the ways technology is used to improve the quality of life. The [Hong Kong Space Museum](#) serves to popularize astronomy and space science. The [Hong Kong Heritage Museum](#) features a variety of specially designed exhibition possibilities to cover different aspects of history, the arts and culture. The [Hong Kong Museum of History](#) collects, conserves, processes, studies and displays cultural objects which are closely related to the archaeology, history, ethnography and natural history of Hong Kong and the South China area. The [Hong Kong Museum of Coastal Defence](#) features Hong Kong's coastal defence history in the past 600 years. The [Dr Sun Yat-sen Museum](#) gives a comprehensive overview of the life and career of Dr Sun, and Hong Kong's vital role in the reform movements and revolutionary activities in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Since late 80's/ early 90's, the government put more resources in development museum in Hong Kong. With the opening of xxx museums in 1991xxxx, the public awareness of museum as enjoyment, xxx, education has come into effect.

Today, museums under the operation and management of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, museums acquire, conserve, research on, exhibit and communicate for the purposes of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of people and their environment. Museum collections form a composite picture of our cultural, historical and natural heritage, and the preservation of such collections represents a long-term commitment to existing and future generations.

That more resources are put to museum services in the 80's and 90's evident the Government's efforts in strengthen museum services for the public. The Government also keeps its pace with the development in the aspects of social, cultural and technology (the opening of the Hong Kong Science Museum in 1991 and xx of the permanent premises of the Hong Kong History Museum).

The variety and nature of museums in Hong Kong become diversified, which cater for the public of different age, background and interest. While we recognized the efforts, enthusiasm and insight of the Government in the development of museum services, we try to examine to what extent does the Government perform the role of education in the operation of its museums, in terms of lifetime learning for people of all ages and backgrounds, direct encounters with objects, forums for new ideas and self-directed and voluntary learning.

The Government operates and manages 18 museums. These 18 museums focus on different aspects, such as art, science and technology, space, heritage, history, coastal defence and prominent elite (Dr Sun Yat-sen), teaware, railway, etc. Details are at appendix 2.

The different nature of museum is able to accommodate the needs and interest of people from different walks of life (such as people with different interest, backgrounds and educational level) these museums not only serve as an educational institutions for students, but also provide

a learning environment for adults, the elderly and the disabilities, in addition to enjoyment.

In terms of admission fee, it is particularly encouraging the cost of admission fee in Hong Kong is at a low cost. Both students and the public can afford it. For instance, for museum pass, family pass (a maximum of 4 person with kinship) with which holders can make unlimited visits to the 7 major museums within 12 months from the date of issue cost only \$200; museum pass for individual with the same terms cost only \$100 and \$50 for 12 months and 6 months respectively. Concessionary at half-price is offered to the disabilities, senior citizens and full-time student. On standard ticket, it costs only \$10 while concessionary at half price is also offered for the disabilities, senior citizens and full-time student. Besides, schools, charitable or non-profit-making organizations registered in Hong Kong with a visiting group of 20 or more can apply for free admission.

The 7 major museums in Hong Kong have built up a sizable collection of material and objects on individual fields. Each museum has its permanent exhibitions and special exhibitions. For instance, the Hong Kong Museum of History has made commendable efforts in collecting and preserving culture objects with which are closely related to the history of Hong Kong and the South China area. The museum has built up a collection of historical objects and materials for over 90,000 items, which are classified into 3 major areas of interest, namely, natural history, ethnography and local history. Visitors will have a clear picture on the objects, which facilitates their learning process. For exhibition, the museum had staged more than 100 special exhibitions which cover a wide range of topics on Hong Kong, the Mainland and international aspects.

The permanent exhibition on “the Hong Kong Story” is particularly impressive. The display of over 4,000 exhibits, the use of graphic panels, multi-media programmes, special audio-visual and lighting effects provide visitors with a direct encounter with objects as well as a free environment for self-directed and voluntary basis learning. The exhibition also provides a comprehensive development history of Hong Kong. This exemplary exhibition, provides an environment balancing enjoyment

and education.

The Dr Sun Yat-sen Museum can best perform the role of education in supplementing the formal schooling. It introduces Dr Sun's life history and the relationship between Hong Kong and the 1911 Revolution. Talks on Dr Sun is offered in two versions, one for primary school students while the other for secondary school students, which caters for students at different levels.

Similarly, other major museum also serve as an educational institution. For example, some museums employs interactive displays, hands-on exhibits or interactive games to meet the educational needs of the students and the public. It is worthwhile mentioning that these major museums usually provide a comfortable and relaxing environment (some are equipped with children's corner). These facilitate the learning process and the exchange of ideas and views among the visitors through casual discussions.

These museums also organized talks, seminars, guided tours and school and group visits. Audio and visual material, exhibition panels, teaching kits and some exhibits are also made available for loan to schools and organizations for use in the classroom. These services further enhance the effectiveness of museums on education.

In recent years, it is noted that a number of outreaching activities are organized by the museums. Exhibitions in schools, shopping malls are in place.

To keep pace with the society, museums, performing the role as an educational institution, organize activities such as talks and DIY workshops for the students and families.

It is worthwhile mentioning that the websites of the major museum are rather user-friendly and informative. Highlights with pictures and explanations are presented. This will help attract more visitors to the exhibitions.

The above discussion evident that the major museums in Hong Kong

have, to a large extent, performed the role of education.

## **Limitation**

Education is an important issue in society. The success of a museum as an educational institution to supplement the formal schooling hinges very much on the Government's policy on education, on museum services and the resources allocation, and other public entertainment in the society, apart from the long-term strategy of the museum.

long-term strategy of the museum

museums should have long-term strategy on its policy and operation. This is important for the measure of its performance. This also facilitates the acquisition of resources from the Government.

Government's policy on education and on museum services and the resources allocation

It is understood that resource allocation is never an easy task for the Government. Given that the Government has to attend to other major services such as housing, welfare, health and medical, resource allocated to museum services is relatively limited. Coupled with the education system in Hong Kong which emphasize on formal school training, museums may not serve the community as an educational institution at its full swing.

## **Conclusion**

Museums have to a large extent perform the role of education. Given the limitations discussed above, the museums should try to utilize its limited resource to promote their services.

What museums can do?

- launch more promotion to attract visitors. It is noted that the number of visitor does not have a significant growth in the past years (Appendix 3).

- More new exhibitions to attract visitors
- Attach importance to students in particular primary school students (for them to cultivate a habit of visiting museums)
- Put more efforts on design of exhibits so as to compete with other public entertainments
- Cannot ignore the life-long learning of adults, the elderly and the disabilities.

What Government should do?

- education is a major issue. Amongst formal schooling and the ever-changing education policy
- though museums are running at a deficit, the benefit of museum education can only be realized in the long run. Children who have cultivated a habit on visiting museums and involve in museum activities may have their knowledge base widened. It also helps them to establish their identity and social values,etc. this is important for the community and the Government, especially admist the rapid changing of society, in terms of technology, social and cultural.

Given the rising expectation of the public, museums are expected to become a place of knowledge in addition to enjoyment. Being more custom-oriented and more aware of the visitor's needs and expectations, museum will play a more proactive and pre-emptive role in serving the community. (article from a curator of LCSD). However, the success of a museum as an educational institution to supplement the formal schooling hinges very much on the Government's policy and direction.

Without museum, education is never said to be complete and comprehensive. We hence conclude that education is the primary function of museum, in addition to acquisition and research.

(A) handout

Museums have different characteristics and objectives. They are professionally managed to provide the ideal environment for the conservation and display of collections. Large-scale thematic exhibitions are held every year to add variety to the permanent exhibitions with the ultimate goal to attract more people to visit museums. Extension activities such as lectures, classes, film shows, guided tours, demonstrations, workshops and travelling exhibitions are organized to stimulate interest and popularize museum services. Some of the facilities in museums are open for public hiring. (LCSD)

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