

New Museum Practice in Asia

Edited by Caroline Lang and John Reeve



First published in 2018 by Lund Humphries

Lund Humphries
Office 3, Book House
261A City Road
London EC1V 1JX
UK

www.lundhumphries.com

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ISBN: 978-1-84822-256-4

A Cataloguing-in-Publication record for this book is available from the British Library.

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Cover: The gallery, Children's Art Education Centre. Photo: Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taiwan.

Set in Arnhem Pro
Printed in China

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Caroline Lang worked in the (then) Far Eastern Section at the Victoria and Albert Museum before moving into museum education. She has experience of policy and practice in a number of UK museums and as Head of Audience Development at the V&A, contributed to British Council training in Asia, ran a course for Indian museums, and taught international museum students at UCL/IOE. She has travelled widely in Asia, was based in Hong Kong for 5 years, where she set up a public programme department at the Hong Kong Maritime Museum, and contributes to museum projects in India, Hong Kong, China, Taiwan, Thailand and elsewhere in the region. Caroline co-edited and contributed to *The Responsive Museum* with John Reeve and Vicky Woollard.

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Preface

This book is based on our experience of working with museums, museum professionals and museum studies students across Asia, in China, India, Japan, Korea, Taiwan and Thailand, and visiting others in Singapore, Vietnam and the Philippines; as well as in London on museum training courses and at University College London Institute of Education on the MA course 'Museums and Galleries in Education'. We soon realised that the assumptions, case studies and teaching material we brought with us from the UK were only part of the answer to the challenges of change. One size of museology does not fit all. We felt there was a need for a book by our friends and colleagues in Asia about their experiences: this book is an attempt to help fill that gap. It concentrates on the public roles of museums and galleries, including exhibitions and education, digital and outreach, publishing, programmes and facilities; and on prioritising the needs of museum users.

This book is intended as an inspiration and guide for museum professionals and others who are responding to institutions and colleagues resistant to new practices and new demands and above all responding to the needs of users and of society in the 'interesting times' in which we live. Museum creation and transformation is now happening across Asia, often on an ambitious scale, and we have tried to capture this change on the wing (as with our earlier book *The Responsive Museum*.)¹ The scope is clearly vast and we can only try here to give a flavour of what is happening with examples and perspectives we have come across. We hope to explore this further in the future.

Asia is, of course, an enormous and diverse arena and its museums likewise vary enormously. We sample that variety here, ranging from China's National Museum (in chapters by Huang and Zhao) to new and revitalised museums across China in Beijing, Dunhuang, Hong Kong, Guangzhou, Nanjing, Shanghai; a women's museum in Hanoi (Thuy), and museums in Singapore (Chin, Chen, Ee, Tan, Viswani and Ye). We

hear from Korea (Baik, Cho, Kim and Kim, Won and Woo), Taiwan (Liu and Kuo), India (Jain and Punja), Japan (Inaniwa) and the Philippines (Colayco). Today, as well as prestigious contemporary art galleries, public and commercial, in booming modern cities like Shanghai, Mumbai, Tokyo and Hong Kong, there are special interest Asian museums of bricks, toilets and railways and also traditional museums lovingly preserved almost in aspic, but still providing a valued public service, such as at Itanagar in remotest north eastern India.²

We are very grateful to all our contributors and to the many people who have helped us, particularly Jane Weeks, Helen Thomas and their British Council colleagues in many Asian countries. Our thanks go to all our numerous colleagues who offered advice and contacts and especially our editor Val Rose for all her encouragement and support, and to Josephine Borradaile for producing the immaculate final typescript. We are grateful to our families for putting up with yet another museum project.

Introduction

‘Whose museums are they anyway?’

Caroline Lang and John Reeve

In 2007 a pan-Asian British Council project to which both editors contributed in Thailand and London was appropriately entitled ‘Whose museums are they anyway?’. This book is an attempt to give a platform for pioneering work in Asian museums that answers that question; work which may be well known to some, but not widely, and which has not, so far, impinged enough on patterns of global cooperation, practice and teaching. It is an attempt to present, accessibly in one place, recent and potentially transferable good practice from across Asia, to inspire all of us to be more creative and ambitious. Many voices are heard as practitioners describe their projects from their own unique perspectives.

As the chapters and case studies that follow make clear, the challenge may sometimes be *how* to make changes to Asian museums, to organisations, mindset, purpose, profile, advocacy, collecting, displays or target audiences, in some countries on limited resources and with limited or no government support. It is often a matter of *who* is in control of a museum; it may be the dead hand of generalist bureaucrats (see Jain chapter) or conservative curators. It may also be an entirely private initiative, such as Samsung at the Leeum in Seoul, encouraging visitor participation through new media (see Kim and Kim case study); a Jain philanthropist in Delhi (see Punja chapter); an open-air museum near Chennai;¹ or the Guangdong Times Museum, designed by Rem Koolhaas in a high-rise residential building in Guangzhou (see Wong case study). Today there is a museum boom in China and much new thinking and activity² (see Huang, Ting, Wang and Chen, Wang and Duan, Knothe, Zhao, Wong and Lang). Many parts of Asia do not share that ambition, or those resources. In south Asian museums people may need to be

reminded not to touch, spit or pray,³ while others are developing major international exhibitions, social media and programming for growing audiences, as in Mumbai for CSMVS's 2017–2018 exhibition, *India and The World: A History in Nine Stories*.⁴

The selection of essays here blend public and private, national and local; and also wider ranging issues of training (Rodewald), advocacy (Jain) and policy (Baik, Chin and Huang), the beginnings of evaluation cultures and visitor research (Loeseke) and strategic partnerships, both local (Inaniwa) and international (Rodewald). Museums can play a key role in developing urban identities, for example, in China (see Wang and Chen, Wong and Ting); as in nineteenth-century Europe and the twentieth-century Americas and Australia; and in state building and redefinition whether in Singapore, Taiwan or Korea, Vietnam or China. Socio-economic factors will, of course, also feature in what follows: new opportunities provided by disposable incomes for leisure (for some); family and social learning in museums or just enjoyment;⁵ consumption and the creation of cultural capital (see Cho and supporting modern art rather than traditional culture at M+ in Hong Kong; see Ting); and the involvement of local or global companies and entrepreneurs as sponsors and donors.

Debates have raged about whether art history is global,⁶ but it is only more recently that questions about the global nature of museology have arisen. New books, conferences and papers suggest a new articulation of more 'glocal' museologies that combine an understanding of the global with roots in the local.⁷ Organisations such as ICOM Asia-Pacific, ASEMUS (Asia-Europe Museum Network) and the Inclusive Museum Research Network bring professionals together to share ideas and practice. The museologist's impulse may be to say that all traditional museums need modernisation, a new design, shops, cafés, bright lights, education centres and marketing. This may often be true, but it may ignore the character of a museum and what local users or non-users expect or feel they need at the moment, and what kind of museum-going skills and experience they may have. Museum and heritage education are underdeveloped in many parts of Asia,⁸ but often so too are expectations, arts education and the use of museums and heritage in mainstream education. How can this be changed? One

obvious answer is policy change or innovation from the top as discussed in Section A (see both Huang and Zhao's chapters on new cultural education policies in China). Later in the book, Karen Chin shows it is possible from her experience in Singapore. Tejshvi Jain describes new policy moves in India (where museums are 'at a very interesting crossroads'), the need for greater professionalism and training; and for individual grassroots advocacy initiatives like ReReeti. The relation of museums to the outside world, to life on the street, to nation, to narratives of a tangled past and present, are discussed by Appadurai and Breckenridge,⁹ among others for India, at recent conferences in China, Taiwan and elsewhere, and here in chapters by Baik, Ee, Cho, Thuy, and Wong for example.

The assumption behind the export of museum experts to Asia and elsewhere has often been that there is a global museology that may be North American or European or Australasian, and that the rest of the world needs to catch up with it – the usual deficit model. That has begun to change. The so-called 'universal museums' like the British Museum, V&A and Louvre are heavily involved in China. Also the Gulf, like China, is a scene of massive museum development (see Erskine-Loftus for a parallel attempt to survey a rapidly emerging museum scene)¹⁰ Western museums are adjusting to a new world order, cultural as well as political and economic. Their 'postcolonial' role now is more that of a lender, consultant and partner, though not always on equal terms or as part of a two-way process of sharing. Museum cultures are highly culture-specific even in the west. Attitudes to the public, assumptions about funding, use of volunteers, types of text, the role of educators, control over collections knowledge, even conservation practice can change quite radically from one country to another in Asia too.¹¹ Museum histories in Asia are no more uniform or universal.¹² A number of collections of essays have begun to compare case studies from across the world including Asia.¹³

LEARNING AND OUTREACH

Sections B (Practice and Provision) and C (Developing Audiences) include many educational and audience initiatives, in particular for

early years and the third age. Pedagogies and target audiences too are highly culture specific:

Museum and gallery learning therefore thrives where culture and learning are not just the preserve of the privileged, where the curriculum is not rigid and creativity is actively encouraged, where lifelong learning is an established concept in an ageing society, and where experiment and reflection are a normal part of professional life. Within the institution, it is vulnerable to changes of director, direction, and policy; from too much interference, but also from indifference.¹⁴

In the past 20 years there have been major changes in the contexts for museum learning; Anna Cutler of Tate has summarised current shifts in practice (from a UK perspective) as:

From the passive to participative; From standardised delivery to personalisation; From the didactic to co-learning; From knowledge acquisition to knowledge application; From a single authorial voice to plural voices; From private knowledge to public access (Cutler 2010).¹⁵

A recent conference report from Taiwan shares some of these ideas and is entitled *From Transmission to Interaction: Museum Education Spaces*.¹⁶ It looks at the need for new learning and activity spaces in museums (cf. Kuo and Punja) and also at new types of exhibition practice (cf. Wang and Chen) and the development of digital applications (cf. Jung, Kim and Kim). As the global balance of political, economic and cultural power shifts, where will Asian museums be in this new world? What can we learn from what is already happening in museums across Asia? This book aims to make examples of good practice in Asian museums more accessible, enabling new practice and ideas to be shared more widely in Asia, but also by all of us in the museum world.

Challenges for Indian Museums

Education and Advocacy for Change

Section A

Policy and Purpose

There has been an explosion of museum and heritage activity across Asia, especially in China, where audience development and public education have been made a government priority for museums. Public participation is already well established, for example in Singapore, Korea, Taiwan and Japan, but is little documented and reviewed for a wider audience in Asia and beyond. This book examines and critiques these developments and asks how best practice can match the specific needs of diverse Asian cultures and societies.

Written by practitioners, this book brings together a range of regional examples of innovative practice and new initiatives, which address shared themes and challenges for museums, galleries, community projects and heritage sites across Asia. It focuses on public programmes, exhibitions, education and media and seeks to provide a critical framework that is both sensitive to Asian contexts and alert to western museologies and critical practice.

Caroline Lang was Head of Communities and Audience Development at the V&A until 2012 then Head of Education and Public Programmes at the Hong Kong Maritime Museum until 2016. She has taught international museum students and professionals with the British Council, at UCL Institute of Education and in India, China, Taiwan and Thailand and contributes to museum projects across Asia.

John Reeve was formerly Head of Education at the British Museum working especially with its Asian collections. While there and subsequently, he has worked for the British Council training museum professionals in Asia. Until early 2016, he also lectured in museum studies at UCL Institute of Education, training museum and heritage educators from all over the world and increasingly from Asia.

Published by:
Lund Humphries
Office 3, Book House
261A City Road
London
EC1V 1JX

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ISBN: 978-1-84822-256-4



9 781848 222564 >

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Printed in China