How Do Museums Progress with Time: Experiences of National Museum of History

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Abstract

National Museum of History, with its classical building and natural environment, has been an important venue for artistic and cultural activities in Taipei. NMH is located in the Nan Hai Compound with neighbors like National Taiwan Arts Education Center, Yu Yu Yang Museum, Guling Theater, Nan Hai Gallery, Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall, and Chien Kuo Senior High School. The entire area has become a social education park with rich resources in arts, culture, and natural history.

As time changes rapidly, NMH in the last sixty years has devoted itself to enhancing its services in terms of artifact collection, academic research, exhibition, and educational promotion. We have accumulated fruitful results. In this speech, I will focus on the five aspects of collection, exhibition, educational activities, cultural creative marketing, and future prospects. I will describe to you how NMH progresses with time, keeps creating charms, responds to the needs of society, and becomes a competitive museum. I hope I can share with you some experiences of NMH through this speech and I sincerely welcome your feedback.
I. Introduction: Historical Background and Mission of NMH

National Museum of History is located in the Nan Hai Compound with neighbors like National Taiwan Arts Education Center, Yu Yu Yang Museum, Guling Theater, Nan Hai Gallery, Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall, and Chien Kuo Senior High School. It has a classical building and quiet and natural environment. It provides a beautiful and relaxing environment for people of Taipei.

NMH and Taipei Botanical Garden

Founded in 1955, NMH is the first museum that focuses on collecting and showing Chinese cultural artifacts and artists’ works in Taiwan. The original site was the “Taipei Merchandise Display Hall” during period of the Japanese rule. After 1955, ROC government changed it to “Gallery of Historical Artifacts,” which was renamed to National Museum of History in 1958.

The mission of NMH can be summed up in this way: we aim to cultivate citizen's historical and aesthetic awareness and to develop a Chinese culture with Taiwan spirit through the collection, research, exhibition and education of historical artifacts.
II. NMH Collection

Collection of NMH comes in several sources and have wide range of variety. Currently, there are more than 60,000 pieces in NMH collection.

i. Chinese Historical Artifacts

Between 1956 and 1957, the Ministry of Education gave to NMH artifacts from the previous Henan Province Museum and artifacts returned by Japanese Government after the War. They formed two pillars of NMH collection of historical artifacts.

Henan artifacts in NMH collection include 1,086 pieces and are primarily bronze wares, tri-color pottery, earthen wares, and jade artifacts. They are special highlights of the Museum. Henan bronze wares were excavated in An Yang, Xin Zheng, and Hui Xian. With clear archeological records, they become important resources for study. Currently, three pieces of Henan bronze wares are declared to be National Treasure, namely Bronze ritual square wine vessel with interlaced dragon design, Bronze dagger with golden hilt, and Bronze animal figurine stand.

*Bronze ritual square wine vessel with interlaced dragon design* was excavated in 1923. It was a ritual wine vessel for nobility during the Spring and Autumn period and represents the entire bronze era of Eastern Zhou. This vessel was originally part of a pair. The counterpart of this Fang-hu is currently in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing.
Bronze dagger with golden hilt was excavated in Hui Xian, Henan. It might be a personal weapon of a king of Wei Kingdom in Spring and Autumn period.

Bronze animal figurine stand was excavated in Xin Zheng, Henan. It was found in the Tomb of Duke of Zheng, which dated back to middle of Spring and Autumn period. It has a strange animal face and humanoid body.

Artifacts returned by Japanese government after the War consists of 181 pieces, including the Nine-storied Stone Pagoda. This Buddhist tower was built around 466 A.D. and represents the golden age of Buddhist stone carving. It is an important object of study in terms of Buddhist history, cultural history, and social history. This artifact has been declared to be National Treasure by the Ministry of Culture, ROC.
ii. Works by Artists Coming to Taiwan after the War

In 1961, the Ministry of Education selected NMH to establish “National Gallery” on the second floor of the Museum. Since then, it has become a national venue for exhibition for half a century. This decision makes NMH the most important institution for Taiwanese art after the War. Because of this, NMH acquires many works of art in its collection, including ink painting, Western painting, print, calligraphy, and seal carving. NMH witnessed an important section of Taiwanese art history.

The primary types of this category of NMH collection are ink painting and calligraphy, about 3,600 pieces and 2,700 pieces respectively. They include works by artists from Ming, Qing, Republican periods. The number of works by modern and contemporary artists is the highest among Taiwan museums; this collection has become an important resources for the study of painting and
calligraphy in Taiwan.

The NMH collection of Chang Dai-chien (1899-1983) includes 140 pieces of painting and a dozen pieces of calligraphy. They form the core collection of modern and contemporary paintings and calligraphy of the Museum and make NMH one important institution of Chang Dai-chien collection in Taiwan, along with National Palace Museum.

NMH collects 203 art works by Pu Xin-yu (1896-1963), including 142 paintings and 61 pieces of calligraphy. Unlike Chang Dai-chien’s works, Pu’s works are smaller in scale. As Huang Jun-bi, another important painter, points out, Pu’s works are better and more delicate when they are smaller. Many works of Pu Xin-yu in NMH collection represent his vivid and elegant style.
Pu Xin-yu (left) and his Vase Flower (center) and Zhong Kuei (right) in NMH collection.

There are 49 paintings by San Yu (1900-1966) in NMH collection. They are shown in three retrospective exhibitions in 1978, 1984, and 1990. In 2001, NMH presented these paintings again in an Centennial Anniversary Exhibition of San Yu.

San Yu went to study in France in early Republican years. He was close with Xu Bei-hong (1895-1953) and Chang Dao-fan. Throughout his life, he had been an expatriate in France and never had formal artistic education. However, he established a personal style of simplicity. In his paintings, we see simplified contours and pure colors. His images transmits a sense of loneliness. While his style is influenced by Henri Matisse (1869-1954), his sensibility is completely Chinese.
In terms of calligraphy, NMH collects 42 pieces of calligraphy by Yu You-ren (1879-1964), ex-president of the Control Yuan, ROC. Yu was famous for his invention of standard cursive script. His works of cursive script have simple brushstrokes and elegant lines, transmitting the vitality and strength of his personality.
Yu You-ren’s *Inscription on the Guai Zhi Ma Painting* in NMH collection.
III. International and Chinese Exchange Exhibitions

Each year NMH presents about 30 exhibitions which cover various subject. I will give you some examples of our popular exhibitions.

In the summer of 2011, NMH presented a Picasso exhibition, showing works from Picasso National Museum in Paris. The 62 works include Picasso’s oil paintings, sculptures, and prints. The exhibition also show 50 pieces of photos of Picasso. The exhibition is designed to introduce Picasso’s growth as an artist and as a person.

The Picasso Exhibition in NMH in the summer of 2011.

In the spring of 2013, we presented the Divine Michelangelo exhibition. The exhibition introduced the personal life of Michelangelo, showcased the reproduction of his sculptures and fresco paintings, illustrated his architectural designs and poetry, and told the legendary stories regarding his artistic duel with Da Vinci. The exhibition also included authentic manuscripts of Michelangelo from Casa Buonarroti. The design of the exhibition is to lead audience into the Michelangelo’s intertwined world of life and art.
The Divine Michelangelo exhibition in the spring of 2013.

The special exhibition *Joan Miró: Women, Birds, Stars* in the summer of 2013 presented 86 works by Joan Miró from Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona and the Miró family collection. These works show the fundamental elements of Miró, namely women, birds, and stars.

The Joan Miró special exhibition in the summer of 2013.

In the winter of 2013, NMH presented the exhibition *Monet: Landscapes of Mind*, showing 55 authentic paintings from the collection of Musée Marmottan Monet, Paris.
The exhibition *Monet: Landscapes of Mind* took place in the winter of 2013.

The special exhibition *The Golden Age of the Qing: Treasures from the Shen Yang Palace Museum* opened in the spring of 2011 and presented artifacts from Shen Yang Palace, the first imperial palace of the Qing dynasty. The Shen Yang Palace Museum collects tens of thousands of artifacts, preserving the Manchurian customs before and after the Manchus unified China. This exhibition showed 120 sets of artifacts, including 24 sets of first degree artifacts. They showed the vitality of early Qing emperors and the beauty of court artifacts.

In the spring of 2014, we presented *Xu Bing and Children’s Forest Project: A Special Exhibition in Taiwan*. This exhibition has four sections. Section I shows the paintings by school children who participated in the “Forest Project: Taiwan” as well as Xu Bing’s large-scale landscape paintings of forest. This section also illustrate the growth of trees planted for this Forest Project in Pintung, Taiwan. Section II is based on ten artifacts from NMH collection and aims to show the relation between words and images as well as the purpose of the Forest Project. These
artifacts are re-interpreted by Xu Bing and acquire new connections to contemporary society. This will make NMH closer to audience. Section III shows the Forest Project in Kenya in 2008 with images and texts. We also show video recordings about Kenyan children who participated in the Project and their thoughts on its influences. The last section shows school children’s paintings for charity sale which was for raising funds to plant more trees, creating a cycle of human, fund, and trees, and “transforming trees on paper into trees on soil.”

*Xu Bing and Children’s Forest Project: A Special Exhibition in Taiwan* took place in the spring of 2014.

Opening ceremony for *Xu Bing and Children’s Forest Project: A Special Exhibition in Taiwan.*
IV. Diversified Educational Activities

i. Exhibition and Educational Activities for Children

In the spring of 2012, NMH presented the special exhibition *Dreams Come True: The Art of Disney’s Classic Fairy Tales*, showing story sketches, concept art, backgrounds, character designs, marquettes, production notes, movie clips, and an original animator’s desk from Walt Disney Animation Research Library.

*Dreams Come True: The Art of Disney’s Classic Fairy Tales* and the opening ceremony.

For the summer vacation of 2012, we presented the special exhibition *The Stunning Pop-up Books*, showing 160 sets of pop-up books from international authors and some pop-up books designed and manufactured in Taiwan.

The exhibition *The Stunning Pop-up Books* and a corner of the gallery.
The exhibition *Petit LOUVRE* opened for the winter vacation of 2012. The galleries were designed as a miniature Louvre museum, showing its essential collections of paintings and sculptures, 120 pieces in total, also in miniature scale. Visitors could walk through the heart of the Louvre Museum in one and half hours. The exhibition also included the art of Taneda Yohei in other fields, including installation arts, stage design, exhibition design, animation, and illustration.

The special exhibition *Petit LOUVRE* for the winter of 2012.

The pyramid and gallery designs of the *Petit LOUVRE* exhibition.

ii. Mobile Museum

1. Mobile Museum Trucks

NMH has two mobile museum trucks. Their dimensions are 12.5x2.5x2.4m. The first truck began to function in 2001, the second one in 2008. They are designed to serve people in faraway regions of Taiwan. Each year, they can serve 100,000 high school teacher and students and 60,000 community members.
NMH’s first mobile museum truck showing *Chinese Ancient Coins and Stamps Featuring Historical Artifacts*.

NMH’s second mobile museum truck showing *Digitalized Cultural Artifacts of Taiwan*.

2. Students from Faraway Regions Visiting NMH

NMH has been cooperating with social benefit institutions to invite students from faraway regions to visit the special exhibitions of NMH. We also organize educational activities to bring these students closer to art and culture.

Student groups from faraway regions visiting *Petit LOUVRE* exhibition.
3. Cooperation Program with Nan Men Junior High School

Located near the NMH, the Nan Men Junior High School has been using the Museum as one of its core teaching arena. Our rich collection and exhibitions have been very appealing to both its teachers and students. To enhance their utilization of NMH’s teaching resources, NMH has been cooperating with Nan Men Junior High School in the Mobile Learning Program since 2012. In our model of cooperation, the school will plan courses and assign teacher and student participants. The Museum will provide the venue and relevant information of artifacts. Jointly, both will work together to develop new courses. This model of combining school and museum is aimed to establish a closer connection between museum education and formal education of schools.

4. NMH Junior Correspondent

Museum is a place for historical artifacts and artworks. To bring NMH closer to children, the Museum planned spring and winter camps for school children. These camps, *NMH Junior Correspondent: Museum and Children*, gives them perspectives so they can share their museum experiences with their classmates.
Winter camp of NMH Junior Correspondent

Director Chang and participants of NMH Junior Correspondent winter camp.
V. Cultural Creative and Promotional Programs

i. Website of Cultural Creative Resources

NMH’s Website of Resources for Cultural Creativity provides licensing know-hows and introduces collection highlights, models of cooperation, museum brands, case studies, and FAQs.
ii. Border-crossing and Value-added Cooperation

1. Public Art of the Hsin-chen Railway Station: the new Hsin-chen station, built in 2014, on Hualien-Taitung railway will use Ma Pai-sui's Taroko Gorge for its public art project in the station hall.

![Taroko Gorge by Ma Pai-sui](image)

**Taroko Gorge** (a set of 24 painting) by Ma Pai-sui in NMH collection.

The Taroko Gorge in Hualien, Taiwan, has a world-class natural environment of canyons. Many artists are attracted by its beauty and attempt to capture its many faces with various forms of art. Ma Pai-sui’s great work, **Taroko Gorge**, consists of 24 paintings; they can been seen independently or together. It creates a new possibility of modern watercolor painting and provides a sublime version of the landscapes of Taroko Gorge.

Ma Pai-sui (1909-2003) is respected as one of the three masters of contemporary watercolor painting in Taiwan, along with Lan Yin- ding and Li Ze-fang. On the basis of Chinese ink painting, Ma added techniques of Western watercolor painting and utilizes large blocks of color to create his personal style of watercolor painting. **Taroko Gorge** consists of 24 paintings and was completed in 1999 when Ma was 90 years old. The work was presented in a retrospective exhibition for him in NMH and was praised as the most representative of his art. It is also the largest watercolor painting in NMH collection.

2. On March 20, 2013, NMH cooperated with Chunghwa Post Co. Ltd. to release a Qing Embroidery Stamp featuring the **Qing Lateral Curtain with Embroidery of Flowers and Birds Textile** in NMH collection. This red silk lateral curtain, stretches nearly to five meters long. On the textile we see meticulously stitched embroidered flowers, birds, grass, trees, clouds and rocks that simply burst with color. The overall effect is sumptuous and elegant. One of the greatest embroidered works of art of the Qing Dynasty, this embroidery, with its glorious and colorful vista of blooming flowers and songbirds, represents that all is flourishing. This set of stamps features the most prominent sections of the embroidery in the Qing dynasty. Traditionally, this type of embroidery were mostly used to decorate the central hall of a house for a wedding or other celebratory occasion.

![Qing Lateral Curtain with Embroidery of Flowers and Birds Textile](image)
The five postal stamps, each with a NT$10 denomination, feature the following: (1) peacocks and scholar’s rocks; (2) a snow crane, a bat, mynahs and reishi mushrooms; (3) a snow crane, a pine tree and orchids; (4) paradise flycatchers, plum blossoms, bamboo, and magnolia flowers; (5) a pair of Mandarin ducks, a kingfisher and lotus flowers.

The Qing Embroidery Postal Stamp Set

The souvenir sheet includes a single NT$100 denomination stamp. The stamp features a spectacular peacock, yuhinas, peonies and scholar’s rocks. The sheet selvage features a snow crane, mandarin ducks, butterflies and plum blossoms. To highlight the exquisite beauty of the piece, the souvenir sheet is printed on silk paper plus partly embossed and hot stamped with gold foil.

In addition to the sheetlet format, two fold-out collectible sets for the Qing Embroidery Stamp Set were also released on the same day to show the complete view of Qing Lateral Curtain with Embroidery of Flowers and Birds.
3. **Bronze ritual square wine vessel with interlaced dragon design** is declared to be National Treasure by the Ministry of Culture. This wine vessel, or *Hu*, dates back to Spring and Autumn Period and has great artistic value. Its shape and surface patterns can be used as design motifs. Kinmen Kaoliang Liquor Company cooperated with NMH and utilized the external shape of this vessel to create a collectible set of Kinmen Kaoliang liquor.

NMH and Kinmen Kaoliang Liquor Company cooperate to release a collectible set of Kinmen Kaoliang liquor inspired by the *Bronze ritual square wine vessel with interlaced dragon design*. 

iii. NMH Cultural Creative Shops in Airports
NMH Cultural Creative Shop in Taipei Taoyuan Airport

One of the NMH Shops in Kaohsiung Airport

One of the NMH Shops in Kaohsiung Airport
VI: Conclusion: Prospects for NMH

In every capital city of all nations in the world, there can be found a space that integrates history, culture, and nature, that provides leisure and learning to their citizen and tourists. Museum Island in Berlin, Museum Quarter in Vienna, Museum Mile in Kensington, London are some important examples of this concept.

Greater Nan Hai Cultural Park: the prospects for NMH (museum underwater and aero-museum)

Nan Hai Compound and the nearby Taipei Botanical Garden are among the earliest developed areas in Taipei City. This area has the densest historical buildings and museums in Taiwan; its development reflects the history of Taipei’s development. Taipei Botanical Garden, besides having a rich diversity of plants, has a long history: it is an archeological site for Taiwan’s prehistory; it served as Taiwan Provincial Administration Hall in Qing dynasty; it was transformed into a garden for cultivation and experimentation of tropical plants during the Japanese colonial rule. It witness the convergence of natural and human history.

In 1955, Chang Chi-yun, Minister of Education at the time, went to visit the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C. After his return, he proposed a plan to establish a museum section in the Nan Hai Compound, combining the human and natural landscapes. Step by step, National Central Library, National Museum of History, National Arts Education Center, National Science Education Hall, National Education Resources Center, and National Education Radio were founded in the Nan Hai Park. From today’s museological perspective, these institutions, while small in scale, enjoy convenient location and transportation and can serve great purposes in education, art, and culture.

After half a century, National Science Education Hall, National Central Library, and National Education Resources Center have moved out of the Nan Hai Compound. Their old buildings have been taken by National Arts Education Center and National Taiwan Craft Research and
Development Institute. Located in the heart of Taipei City, Nan Hai Compound requires substantial overhaul to meet the changes in time and society. The space of the compound is no longer suitable to receive the increasing number of visitors. Therefore, it is urgent to plan and rearrangement the buildings and open spaces within the Nan Hai Compound.

Therefore, NMH is currently working on the project of Greater Nan Hai Cultural Park; we try to coordinate cooperation from all institutes and Taipei Botanical Garden in the Nan Hai Compound. The principle of the project is to connect history and culture to nature and ecology. The project hopes to integrate resources of the Compound to increase its cultural energy while satisfying the needs of citizens and the entire Taipei City.

This project will rethink the public space of Nan Hai Compound and Taipei Botanical Garden. The goals of this project include enhancing the efficiency of general administration, the utilization of cultural heritage, the establishment of new images for capital city, and the increase of tourism and economic gains. The substantial aims of the project can be summed up in the following:

i. Founding an ideal human and natural space and increasing the general administrative efficiency of the Greater Nan Hai Compound.

ii. Activating the Greater Nan Hai Compound and nearby communities to establish new images for Taipei as the capital city.

iii. Producing cultural and creative values for the Greater Nan Hai Compound and nearby buildings to increase Taiwan’s competitive energy.

iv. Solving the spatial issues of NMH and elevating the brand image and administrative efficiency for a national museum.