The relationship between museums and blockbuster exhibitions: a case study of Taiwan

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Abstract
Starting in the US in the late 1970s, blockbuster exhibitions have long become a stable exhibition form among major museums in advanced economies. However, the relationship between museums and blockbuster exhibitions, and how it has changed over time outside of Anglo-American practices have yet to be discussed thoroughly. By employing features of industry addressed in industrial economics, this paper aims to examine the relationship between museums and blockbuster exhibitions in Taiwan from two perspectives: first, how blockbuster exhibitions, started in museums, have expanded and grown beyond museums to become an industry of blockbuster-style exhibitions and what the features are of this new industry. Second, with the formation of the blockbuster-style exhibitions industry and socio-economic changes, this paper examines the impacts of these developments in relation to museums in Taiwan. This paper concludes that the expansion of blockbuster exhibitions from museum exhibitions to an industry is a result of the profit-seeking nature of the private sector, and that the relationship between museums and blockbuster exhibitions in Taiwan has remained largely unchanged.

Keywords
blockbuster exhibitions, Taiwan, globalization, cultural consumption, entertainment
Introduction

Ever since the first blockbuster exhibition of Tutankhamen was held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and previously in other cities in the late 1970s, blockbuster exhibitions have defied the curse of their demise and continued to exist and even expand. In 1997, when the former director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Thomas Hoving, was asked about his opinion on the Florida International Museum's Titanic exhibition, he said it was “grotesque.” (Rosenbaum, 1997) However, the exhibition attracted 83,000 visitors over 6 months—which was quite a significant number for any exhibition held in Florida. The blockbuster exhibition’s expansion from art to entertainment went further when, in 2009, the Discovery Channel opened “Discovery Time Square”, a commercial venue for hosting only blockbuster exhibitions, claiming the space as “More than a museum.”

Not only museums in the US and Britain, but museums in other countries in Europe, Asia, and Australia have also included blockbuster exhibitions in their exhibition schedules. If we agree that a blockbuster exhibition is a special exhibition that draws a huge number of visitors, accompanied by souvenirs sold at museum shops, and employs massive marketing activities in order to attract visitors, then Monet’s exhibition held at the National Palace Museum, loaned from the Musée Marmottan and co-hosted by China Times media group, in 1993/1994 should be considered the first blockbuster exhibition held in Taiwan. Different from Western practices, blockbuster exhibitions in Taiwan were jointly hosted by media groups (who act as an agent and introduce exhibitions from abroad) and public museums (who act as a venue provider by renting the exhibition space) most of the time. In the early years when blockbuster exhibitions were starting to develop, there was one to two exhibitions held a year and most of them were held at museum venues. However, when

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1 Prior to its exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the pioneering blockbuster exhibition Tut had already been exhibited in several other museums, such as the British Museum in 1972, and drew huge numbers of visitors. However, substantial marketing and commercial activities were not employed then. For a chronology of exhibitions related to Tut, see http://www.kingtutart.com/ (accessed 2014/11/29)
3 Apparently, there are disagreements on the definition of blockbuster exhibitions and some authors only take visitor numbers into account when defining them. For example, Pergam claims “Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition” in 1857 as the first blockbuster exhibition. In addition, the “Berlin Treasures” exhibition held at the National Gallery in Washington DC in 1948, and Mona Lisa’s exhibition held in 1962/1963, drew a record number of visitors respectively. Both were considered to be the first blockbuster exhibition by the following respective authors. See (Conforti, 1986; Davis, 2008; Pergam, 2011)
4 Prior to Monet’s exhibition, Miro’s exhibition held at Taipei Fine Arts Museum also drew large crowds and the organizer also produced some souvenirs for the exhibition. However, heavy promotional activities and advertisements accompanying the exhibition had yet to happen.
cultural and creative parks were set up in the late 2000s, they joined museums as new venues for holding blockbuster exhibitions. Each venue, including museums and non-museum venues, now holds blockbuster exhibitions all year round. In addition, apart from two media groups, i.e. China Times Group and United Daily News\(^5\), there have been newcomers in the private sector joining the market to co-host blockbuster exhibitions with public museums and other venue providers. Also, in the early days of blockbuster exhibitions held in Taiwan, it was common to see visitors lined up outside of the exhibition entrance. However this has not been the case for most blockbuster exhibitions held nowadays unless it is a weekend, holiday, or when the exhibition is approaching its end. That is, the number of visitors that any successful exhibition draws has become much smaller than before.

Most literature on blockbuster exhibitions in English is based on the practices of Anglo-American museums. There have been doubts and criticisms about blockbuster exhibitions since the 1980s; and the doubts and criticisms were rising significantly in the 1990s. A series of four articles titled “Special Section: Museum Blockbusters” (Elsen, 1986), published in Art in America, is perhaps the first set of articles to focus on blockbuster exhibitions as a new cultural phenomena bringing much attention to the art circles in the US. An article which appeared in Art Bulletin in 1986 (Editorial, 1986) saw blockbuster exhibitions as unnecessary while only museum exhibitions aiming to advance scholarly research were deemed worthwhile. In 1996, Csaszar (1996) raised the point that blockbuster exhibitions as a new form of exhibitions not only established a new relationship between culture and commerce, but also influenced our way of looking at art history. In addition, in “The Blockbuster, Art History, and the Public”(Tinterow, 2003), rather than condemning blockbuster exhibitions’ existence and popularity, the author discussed how museums have been seeking a fine balance between scholarship and public tastes. Around 20 years later, McClellan revisited blockbuster exhibitions and saw them as part of the museum’s commercialization (McClellan, 2008, pp.210-207)\(^6\). The above literature mainly reflects discussions over the past three decades. In the contemporary museum world, most practitioners have come to terms with the commercial aspects of museums and these commercial aspects are often in parallel development with the museum’s traditional functions.

Literature on blockbuster exhibitions in Taiwan are abundant in Chinese (for example,  
  \(^5\) Media Sphere Communications, Ltd. is the offshoot of China Times Group that is in charge of blockbuster exhibitions; United Daily News group’s offshoot is Gold Media group.  
  \(^6\) McClellan considers the commercialization of museums refers to the expansion of museum shops, the emergence of blockbuster exhibitions, corporate sponsorship, and the increase of a museum’s marketing and fundraising staff. See p. 193, in (McClellan, 2008)
Chen, 2011; Chiang, 2009; Hsu, 2003; Lai, 1995; H.-M. Wang, 2000; Y.-L. Wang, 2002). Based on single case studies, most authors criticize blockbuster exhibitions from the perspectives of cultural consumption and the Frankfurt School’s culture industries as heavily commercialized and commodified. The media groups’ involvement in co-organizing blockbuster exhibitions is considered by most authors as highly problematic, interpreting the way they promote exhibitions as a manipulation of power (for example, Kuo, 2000; Y.-L. Wang, 2002). Some recent discussions emphasize blockbuster exhibitions (for example, Lien, 2010, pp.264-319; Lien, 2011) as an “unequal” exchange of resources between Taiwan and museums abroad as museums in Taiwan often pay handsome fees only to receive exhibits of lesser quality. However, if we apply Appadurai’s (1990) idea of seeing cultural globalization as fluid flows/exchanges between “people, finance, media, technology, and ideology” to blockbuster exhibitions in Taiwan, the exhibitions that Taiwan has received are indeed determined by the globalized market mechanism. Through a combination of factors including cultural, economic, or political assets, the party with more resources can exchange for exhibitions of better quality than the party with fewer resources.

Apart from the above discussions on blockbuster exhibitions in Taiwan, there has yet to be a discussion of how blockbuster exhibitions, starting in museums, have developed to become increasingly diverse. They indeed have formed a new industry, in which companies produce blockbuster-style exhibitions (i.e. products) as their main source of revenue. This new industry sometimes integrates and extends its parameters to other areas such as sports events, pop concerts, and entertainment-oriented activities such as circuses or manga expositions. By looking at the current development of blockbuster exhibitions as a new industry, this paper discusses how they have developed to their present state by taking ideas from Porter’s structural analysis of industry (Porter, 1998) and the Structure- Conduct-Performance (SCP) paradigm used in industrial economics (Waldman & Jensen, 2001, p.7) (See Appendix 1). Porter identifies five competitive forces—entry, threat of substitution, bargaining power of buyers, bargaining power of suppliers, and rivalry among current competitors as key structural features to understand the industry. Similar to Porter’s, the SCP paradigm divides the analysis of an industry/market into market structure, conduct, and performance; under each of the three categories, there are elements of analysis that are included to better understand various dynamic between the three

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7 On the other hand, there are some museum professionals who worked with hosting museums that loaned objects for blockbuster exhibitions, that considered the collaboration between the public and the private sectors as positive. For example, see (Lin, 2003).

8 Appadurai uses the terms ethnoscape, finanscape, mediascape, technoscape, and ideoscape to denote each group respectively.
categories such as how they influence each other directly or indirectly. As the formation of the industry is a relatively new development, the following discussion on industrial features will be focused on the number and the variety of exhibitions, competitors in the industry, the profit pattern, and marketing activities.

From blockbuster exhibition to the new industry of blockbuster-style exhibitions

As previous authors have argued, most blockbuster exhibitions that Taiwan has received are of lesser quality compared to those held in major museums in the West. Disregarding the issue of quality, by reviewing the themes/subjects of the blockbuster exhibitions held in Taipei⁹, one can see that dinosaurs, civilizations, household names related to art such as Da Vinci, Michelangelo, Van Gogh, Monet and other Impressionist artists have remained popular and many of them were exhibited more than once. Among them there have been five exhibitions about dinosaurs, three about Egyptian civilization, four about Leonardo Da Vinci, three of Monet, three about the Terracotta Warriors, and two exhibitions of Mucha (Table 1). These recurring themes/subjects show that certain subjects and artists are universal while exhibitions about Chinese civilization have a local appeal.

Table 1 Blockbuster exhibitions of recurring themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes/subjects of exhibitions</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Exhibition Venue in Taipei</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Monet</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>National Palace Museum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monet</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Taipei Fine Arts Museum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Chagall</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>National Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Memorial Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chagall</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>National Palace Museum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Picasso and Chang Da-Chien</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>National Palace Museum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From Manet to Picasso:</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Taipei Fine Arts Museum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>collections from Philadelphia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museum of Art</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picasso</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>National Museum of History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Culture from Sanxingdui</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>National Palace Museum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ruins¹⁰</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture from Sanxingdui and</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Mitsukoshi Department store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jinsha ruins</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Egyptian civilization</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>National Museum of Natural Science</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

⁹ Taipei is the city where most blockbuster exhibitions are held. A blockbuster exhibition often takes place in Taipei first before traveling to another one or two venues in Kaohsiung or Taichung.

¹⁰ Sanxingdui ruins are archeological sites found in Sichuan province, China, and are considered highly important to Chinese civilization.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes/subjects of exhibitions</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Exhibition Venue in Taipei</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Egyptian civilization</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Chiang Kai-Shek Memorial Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egyptian civilization</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Chiang Kai-Shek Memorial Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Da Vinci</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>National Museum of History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Da Vinci</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>National Taiwan Science Education Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Da Vinci</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Chiang Kai-Shek Memorial Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dinosaurs</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>National Museum of Natural Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dinosaurs</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Taipei Children’s Transportation Museum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dinosaurs</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Taipei Children’s Transportation Museum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dinosaurs</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Chiang Kai-Shek Memorial Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dinosaurs&lt;sup&gt;12&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Songshan Creative Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terracotta Warriors</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>National Museum of History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terracotta Warriors</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>National Museum of History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terracotta Warriors</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>National Taiwan Science Education Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mucha</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>National Museum of History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mucha</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>National Palace Museum</td>
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</tbody>
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Revised and amended from (Huang, 2013)

Themes related to pop culture and entertainment

One recent development about blockbuster exhibitions is that those related to popular culture have been successful. Themes from animations/cartoons are particularly popular among the exhibitions held in the past five years, particularly those imported from Japan such as Doraemon, Hello Kitty, Crayon Shin-chan, Naruto. Non-animation but popular themes include those that already have a large fan-base or number of followers such as Titanic, the Art of Brick, and Pop-up books. Some themes that capture visitors’ curiosity such as Trick Art<sup>13</sup>, Museum of Bad Art, Photographs from National Geographic are popular as well. A highly popular recent exhibition showcased LINE cartoon figures<sup>14</sup>.

Venues and frequencies of the exhibitions held

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<sup>11</sup> Although called as a “museum”, the venue did not have a collection and was a poorly managed playground. It was closed in 2008.

<sup>12</sup> There were many more smaller-scale exhibitions about dinosaurs held in the past 10 years. However, among all the dinosaur exhibitions including blockbusters, only a few of them showed original fossils and many of the exhibits exhibited models or T-Rex dinosaurs.

<sup>13</sup> Trick Art exhibition was introduced to Taipei in 2010 from Japan; it has been held every year since then.

<sup>14</sup> LINE is an app for instant messaging; it is widely used in Taiwan.
In early years when blockbuster exhibitions were developing, they mainly took place at the National Palace Museum and National Museum of History. Other venues such as Taipei Fine Arts Museum held some from time to time. Currently, there are at least nine venues that host blockbuster exhibitions. For major museums such as the National Palace Museum and National Museum of History, an average of three blockbuster exhibitions is held each year. Newly joined non-museum venues such as Hua-Shan Cultural Park and Songshan Creative Park can accommodate three blockbuster-style exhibitions each at any one time. Non-museum venues now host blockbuster exhibitions not only because many exhibitions do not need to be held in an environment controlled space like museums but also because they are entertainment-oriented exhibitions and are better presented in cultural/creative parks than in museums.

New types of presentation

Thanks to advancements in technology, a recent development of blockbuster exhibitions has been an increasing number of works shown that are reproductions and replicas that cannot be easily identified as such by the general public. The Michelangelo exhibition held at the National Museum of History in 2013 and the Vermeer exhibition held at the Chiang Kai-Shek Memorial Hall in 2014 are cases in point. Michelangelo’s exhibition held at the National Museum of History in 2012 and later at the Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts in 2013 were quite popular exhibitions. However, different from Michelangelo’s exhibition held in the British Museum in 2007 that consisted of original works by Michelangelo and was promoted as a “once-in-a-lifetime experience”, Taipei’s version only had fourteen pieces of original manuscripts, loaned from Casa Buonarroti. Other works exhibited included (1) high-quality computer generated prints of Michelangelo’s works that were mounted on fine frames (Figure 1); (2) life-sized 3D reconstruction of Michelangelo’s studio and reproductions of famous scenes such as The Creation of Adam on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel; (3) replicas of Michelangelo’s sculptural works. Despite the fact that most of the exhibition was not original work by the artist, the interpretation of all the works were historically accurate and written in a professional manner on the exhibition’s wall labels.
The Vermeer exhibition, claimed by the organizer as an “art educational exhibition”, consisted entirely of computer generated prints that looked very much like original works. As the sponsor that produced all the reproductions, Hewlett-Packard’s logo was on the wall label of each reproduction. How the highly convincing reproductions were produced was also explained and exhibited at the end of the exhibition to promote Hewlett-Packard’s high-end printing technology. Despite the fact that there was no single authentic work, this art educational exhibition still drew a considerable number of visitors, as there were rich images, films, texts, maps, and various other materials to introduce and explain the artist’s work, the society he lived in and the social values of his time15 (Figure 2).

Meanwhile, it is now indispensable to include models and props for visitors to take photos in the exhibition. With the ever-convenient smartphone, visitors often take a substantial number of pictures and upload them online to share with friends on various forms of social media. For example, Facebook’s “Like” sign was attached to the replica of Michelangelo’s David during the Michelangelo exhibition inviting people to take pictures (Figure 3). Also, when Monet’s exhibition was held, the museum set up a temporary replica of the footbridge in Monet’s garden in Giverny, for visitors to take pictures on as well (Figure 4).

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15 However, this kind of exhibition was heavily criticized by some critics. For example, see (Liao, 2014)
A new, if not extreme, type of exhibitions is the “photo-taking exhibition”, a new term indicating that the exhibitions are for visitors to take selfies or photographs with friends within the exhibits (Figure 5). The exhibits are often FRP or resin-made 3D models/figures, life-sized 3D reconstruction of famous scenes, or large-scale color printouts. These exhibitions are mostly developed from well-known figures in pop culture. The recent LINE FRIENDS exhibition, mentioned earlier, held at the National Science Education Center for three months in 2014 serves as a representative case. To the surprise of the museum staff, the exhibition received a record number of visitors (Figure 6).

Competitors and marketing activities
With the advantages of advertising exhibitions at minimal to no cost under their various subsidiaries, the two media groups that pioneered blockbuster exhibitions have dominated the industry to date. However, as the market of the industry expanded, there have been at least three companies who have joined, stayed in the industry, and comprised a comparatively small share of the market. Two of the three companies had other businesses before entering the market; for example, Kuang Hung Arts specialized in organizing musical events before joining the industry. With its previous experience in marketing musical events, the company stepped into the industry of blockbuster-style exhibitions several years ago and secured its position in the market by focusing on mid-scale entertainment-oriented exhibitions. With no cost advantages in advertising their blockbuster-style exhibitions, as in the case of media groups, competitors and newcomers in the industry outsource marketing campaigns to other companies to promote exhibitions.

Also, as promotional activities, ticket sales networks, and methods of collaborating with museums become standardized for competitors in the private sector, the barrier to join the industry is not very high as long as a newcomer can find a source company or a museum abroad to provide exhibits. Nevertheless, as there are quite a few exhibitions for the public to choose from at any one time, the profit pattern has changed. That is, the profit margin for each exhibition has been decreasing, creating the need for these companies to have the capacity to develop many exhibitions every year in order to stay competitive in the market. Alternatively, the company needs to have other kinds of businesses as sources of profit. For example, the two media groups expanded their businesses both vertically and horizontally. From the revenue from ticket sales, entertainment-oriented exhibitions have proven to be much more profitable than art exhibitions and thus the number of the former have greatly increased. Therefore, it is not surprising that more and more blockbuster-style exhibitions that already have a large fan base have been introduced to the market. In 2013, China Times Group held eight blockbuster-style exhibitions in total; only three of them were art exhibitions. (Table 2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme/subject</th>
<th>Venue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mammoth</td>
<td>Chiang Kai-Shek Memorial Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Da Vinci and Mona Lisa</td>
<td>National Palace Museum</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

16 These three companies are Kuang Hong Arts, Artsource Corp., and Universal Impressions Co.Ltd.
17 Including China Times Group, some local companies set up offices in China. However, as the market in China is quite different from that in Taiwan, success or development has not been widely reported.
In addition, just like any other blockbuster exhibition in the West, souvenir sales are an essential source of profit for organizers. The shop space for exhibitions have become larger than before, particularly for entertainment-oriented exhibitions featuring Hello Kitty, Doraemon and characters from “One Piece”\(^\text{19}\), etc. With the formation of this new industry, companies that specialize in developing merchandise for blockbuster-style exhibitions and planning shop spaces for exhibitions have emerged. That is to say, some organizers outsource souvenir sales to these companies and share profits with them. From more traditional items like postcards, notecards, bookmarks, key rings in early years to the contemporary variety of items spanning umbrellas, smartphone holders, custom-made souvenir coins, stuffed figurines/mascots, chocolate, desserts, and bottle waters, visitors may spend more time shopping than looking at the exhibits.

Also, with the emphasis on cross-industry alliances in the era of creative industries, there have been various strategic alliances formed to promote exhibitions along with products/service from other industries-- restaurants, hotels, wine merchants, bakeries, department stores, watch makers, film stars, just to name a few. If an exhibition draws many visitors, then the companies that joined the alliance would stand to get more exposure by having their logos appear in various promotional materials. Some companies offer purchase discounts if visitors present tickets; however, there is no research demonstrating the effect of these alliances.

**Blockbuster-style exhibitions as popular culture and a leisure activity**

Going to a blockbuster-style exhibition has now become as a popular leisure activity particularly among youngsters in urban areas, along the lines of going to the cinema. The ticket price for a blockbuster-style exhibition is also similar to that of going to the cinema.

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\(^{19}\) “One Piece” is the title for a highly popular Japanese comic series.
For many youngsters, going to the exhibition is much more about “fun” with friends and families than a pure learning activity. As mentioned earlier, photo-taking areas with props, reconstructions of scenes related to exhibits, and seal-stamping/collecting areas are almost a must for any exhibition (including art exhibitions). It is popular for friends to upload photos taken in the exhibition venue onto social media sites to share with friends. As a result, social media sites, Facebook in particular, have become a crucial platform to promote blockbuster-style exhibitions. Further, promotional pricing strategies such as “buy 1 ticket get 1 free”, or “buy 2 tickets get 1 free” are often employed in order to attract young visitors who often go to exhibitions with friends and buy souvenirs after seeing exhibitions. Also, any kind of interactive activity is always welcome—no matter how “silly” it may look from the academic’s point of view. That is, the social function of going to a blockbuster exhibition has become a much more important factor than learning; and “edutainment” has been the buzzword, if not the tenet, for exhibition organizers.

Public museums: new dynamics beyond a rented space?

Compared to the private sector that has developed blockbuster exhibitions into various forms and shapes, public museums as the other collaborator of such exhibitions have changed little over the years in their primary role as venue providers. That is, the relationship between public museums and blockbuster exhibitions has remained stable. The institutional rigidity of public museums, a longtime problem for museums in Taiwan, impedes the museums’ own professional development in organizing blockbuster exhibitions themselves.

However, public museums are not completely stagnant in the public-private-partnership dynamic. Maintaining its main role as venue provider, there are still a few museums that, from time to time, try hard to design educational programs when blockbuster exhibitions are brought in. Whether the museum develops good educational programs or not often depends on the museum’s leadership. As museum directors in the public sector in Taiwan are the key decision makers within museums, they are often the driving force behind the quality of educational programs that accompany blockbuster exhibitions.

For example, when the Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts was co-hosting Michelangelo’s exhibition in 2013/2014 with United Daily News, the museum displayed different kinds of marble in order to demonstrate the various stages of the sculpting process. Despite the fact that heavy marketing activities to promote the exhibition made the exhibition look “over-commercialized”, the museum was conscious of its educational role and made an
effort to fulfill it. However, the effort that different museums put into developing educational programs vary a great deal; and due to lack of incentives museum staff are often not always ready to contribute their time and effort.

The other development that has emerged in the dynamic between public museums and blockbuster exhibitions is that some companies from the private sector have joined blockbuster exhibitions as sponsors. Through various initiatives proposed by museums, private companies invite socially or economically disadvantaged groups to visit blockbuster exhibitions. With an increase of philanthropic activities in Taiwanese society, this recent dynamic is also a result of the increasing inequality between urban and rural areas where people living in rural areas, particularly students, receive much less resources than people living in cities.

NPM exceptionalism

However, the National Palace Museum does not fit into the above discussions. It is the only museum that has produced in-house blockbuster exhibitions itself and maintained a high level of professionalism because of its paramount collection of Chinese art and its ability to co-host blockbuster exhibitions with reputable organizations abroad. The exhibitions of “Emperor Kangxi and the Sun King Louis XIV: Sino-Franco Encounters in Arts” (held in 2011) and “Royal Style: Qing Dynasty and Western Court Jewelry” (held in 2012) co-hosted with Foundation Cartier, are both highly acclaimed examples.

Conclusion

Taking ideas from the study of industrial organizations, this paper has discussed the development of blockbuster exhibitions in Taiwan as an industry and at the same time examined the museum’s relationship and development with them. I conclude that because the development of blockbuster exhibitions has mostly been driven by the private sector, the profit-seeking nature of the private sector has enabled blockbuster exhibitions to develop into a new industry that goes beyond the museum venue and its traditional themes/subjects. This new industry has its own features, consists of different products, and has different kinds of competitors sharing the market. For much of the public, going to blockbuster exhibitions has become more of a leisure activity than a cultural/learning experience.

Meanwhile, the museum’s relationship with blockbuster exhibitions in Taiwan has

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remained stable over the years. With the National Palace Museum as the exception, few museums have acquired the capacity in organizing and hosting blockbuster exhibitions on their own. However, quality educational programs accompanying the exhibitions have been developed by museums from time to time and philanthropic activities have also emerged as a new trend.

Lastly, through the discussion about blockbuster exhibitions in Taiwan, this paper has demonstrated that Anglo-American based literature, which seeks to explain blockbuster exhibitions - a seemingly global phenomenon, is limited when applied to different geographies. As blockbuster exhibitions are heavily influenced by globalization, locality plays a crucial role when contextualizing their development.

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Appendix 1: The structure-conduct-performance paradigm

Basic market conditions
- Demand conditions
- Price elasticity
- Substitutes
- Market growth
- Type of good
- Method of purchase
- Supply conditions
- Technology
- Raw materials
- Unionization
- Product durability
- Location

Market structure
- Number of sellers and buyers
- Product differentiation
- Barriers to entry and exit
- Vertical integration
- Diversification
- Cost structure

Conduct
- Pricing strategies
- Product strategies
- Advertising
- Research and development
- Plant investment
- Collusion
- Mergers Legal strategies

Performance
- Allocative efficiency
- Production efficiency
- Rate of technological advance
- Quality and Service
- Equity

(Waldman & Jensen, 2001, p.7)