

A Tale of Two Nations-A Comparative Study into the Evolution of National Museums in the UK and Taiwan

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It goes without saying that national museums lead a nation's cultural life. They contribute not only to preserve national collections but also to build national identity and to provide life-long learning opportunities. The significance of national museums has gained more and more attention in recent years.

National museums in the UK have the longest history in the world while national museums in Taiwan are still growing in number. This research uses a historical review to investigate the development of national museums in the UK and Taiwan. A product life cycle (PLC) method helps to explain the situation of their evolution. Several influential factors provide some more insights of how these national museums were created and transformed.

Some similarities and differences between national museums in the two nations are depicted for further understanding of the present situation. Consequently, the result has shown that national museums are deeply embedded in the outside environment and need to observe changes and respond to challenges. It is the key point for their sustainability for the future.

The Significance of National Museums

National museums are the symbol of a nation, particularly in its culture and power. They enrich, educate and entertain the public. It is important that they have led the development of other museums in the nation. What is even more significant is that they usually help to build the nation, shape national identity and uplift cultural life for the public. As a result, each nation has several national museums of its own.

Many of the most famous and popular museums in the world are easily recognised as national museums, for example, the British Museum in London, the Louvre in Paris, the Prado in Madrid and the National Palace Museum in Taipei. National museums have played a key role in society, contributing to the political, economic, social and cultural developments in the lives of citizens (AEA, 2004).

National museums, both in the UK and Taiwan, obtain their national status by the passing of a regulation or an act of Parliament. They are the custodians of the collections of national and international significance. They are also the gatekeepers of the information delivered through exhibitions and educational programmes.

However, what is a 'national museum'? According to a research report published in the UK in 1988, a national museum 'has national collections' and 'always has its funding provide by the Exchequer' (MGC, 1988). Four characteristics of national museums listed in the report were: their collections being of national importance, being held in Trust on the nation's behalf, being funded directly by the Government, and able to provide the Government with expert advice. In Taiwan, any museum with the term 'national' in its name and funded by the central government is a national museum. They traditionally have most resources required and perform much better than other museums.

Basic Background

The historical development of national museums is deeply embedded in its context, intertwined with its political, economic, social and cultural backgrounds. How a national museum evolves has mirrored the changes of its environment, from the museum building to different functions added. The political devolution both in the UK and Taiwan for the last two decades has marked a new age for shaping national identity while economic liberalisation in both countries has diversified and increased cultural growth. It is therefore meaningful to compare their development in the two nations.

Museum development in both the UK and Taiwan has similarities in several aspects. In both countries the government has been the major sponsor in the forming museums during the early stages, and after experiencing a great economic growth, museums became more popular, many of them being privately founded. In the last two decades of the twentieth century, they faced challenges from the outside, because both their governments started to reduce their sponsorship of museums. The United Kingdom has the first national museum and the longest museum history in the world. The British Museum, founded in 1753, has witnessed many changes for more 250 years. Since then, there have been more than twenty national museums established and now there are eighteen of them in the UK after some amalgamations. The number reaches sixty-seven if their branch museums are included. The situation in Taiwan is somewhat different. Its history of national museums is shorter of only 100 years and there are sixteen of them being established so far. Almost all of them have no branches except one. The latest development is that two national museums are still under planning and they are estimated to open in 2008.

However, there is a basic difference of national museums in both counties: their governance system. In the UK, national museums are governed by boards of trustees and at "arm's length principle". This board governance means that the board has the power in

making decision and also has the advantage of keeping its autonomous status. In Taiwan, on the contrary, national museums are governed directly by the government. In many occasions, they are influenced easily by the central government or political climate changes. For example, the appointment of directors could be affected by the results of political election. Another difference of them is that the admission of museums in the UK, particularly national ones, are free of charge. In Taiwan, based on 'use and pay' concept, people are used to pay their admission fee, but could exclude some minority and their usage. The tradition of collecting as the core function in national museums in the UK is not common in Taiwan. Most national museums in Taiwan had no or few collections when they were founded.

Research Method and Design

This research aims to understand how the evolution of national museums is influenced by the outside environment and how significant these museums play their role in society. There are eighteen in the UK and sixteen in Taiwan. According to the purpose of this research, a historic review is therefore adopted.

Through literature reviews, an investigation of their developments both in the UK and Taiwan is conducted to gain a historical holistic insight. By establishing a timeframe of development of national museums in both countries, some influential events are pointed out for marking their importance, for example, the Great Exhibition 1851 in London and the Twelve Achievements in the 1980s in Taiwan.

Another analysis is by setting up the product life cycle (PLC) to see how the development changes with time. Product life cycle is a concept borrowed from marketing, usually illustrates different stages of the product/service to assist to find strategies (Hannagan, 1992). This is particularly helpful for national museums to understand which strategies they should adapt in the present stage. The last strand of result is to compare different type of national museums through the time frame to find out why certain type of national museums was set up in certain periods of time.

National Museums and their Development in the UK

Table1 shows these eighteen national museums in the UK and their founding years in a chronicle order. Only two of them were established before the 19th century, nine of them in the 19th century and seven in the 20th century. They are mainly located in the capital cities except the National Museums Liverpool in Liverpool.

Table 1. List of National Museums in the UK

Name of Museum	Year Founded
Royal Armouries	1680
British Museum	1753
National Gallery	1824
National Galleries of Scotland	1850
Victoria & Albert Museum	1852
National Museums Scotland	1854
National Portrait Gallery	1856
National Museum of Science and Industry	1857
Natural History Museum	1881
Tate	1897
Wallace Collection	1897
National Museum Wales	1907
Imperial War Museum	1917
National Maritime Museum	1934
National Army Museum	1960
National Museums and Galleries of Northern Ireland	1961
Royal Air Force Museum	1963
National Museums Liverpool	1986

Why were these national museums established? There are several explanations for their establishment:

1. government initiative to preserve and make public important collections, e.g. the British Museum, the National Gallery;
2. the influence of the Great Exhibition of 1851, e.g. the Victoria and Albert Museum and the National Museum of Science and Industry;
3. the commemoration of military history, e.g. the National Army Museum and the Royal Air Force Museum;
4. the fruit of political devolution in the UK, e.g. the National Museums Liverpool and the National Museums Scotland.

Some were established from the outset with national status, e.g. the British Museum and the National Gallery; others were granted that status much later, e.g. the National Museums Liverpool. Many of them have changed their names as they have evolved and developed over time, e.g. the National Museum of Science and Industry was named the Science Museum for almost a century, the National Museums and Galleries of Northern Ireland was the amalgamation of the Ulster Museum and Ulster Folk & Transport Museum in 1998.

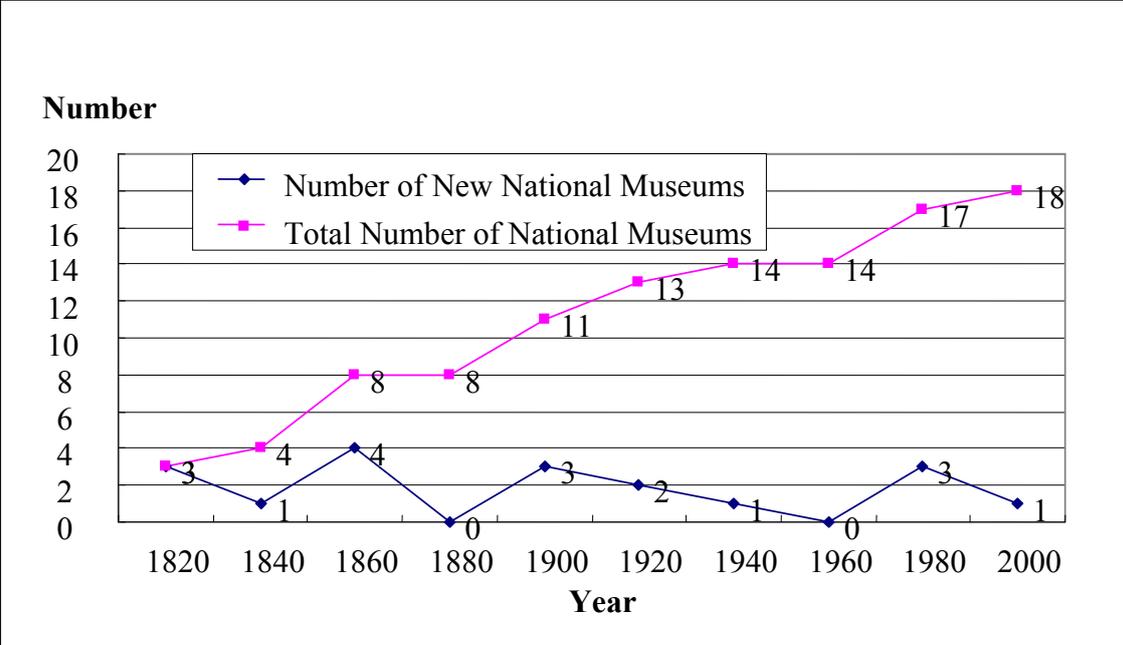
The oldest collection is that of the Royal Armouries founded in 1680, but the British Museum is the oldest public museum organisation (Wilson, 2002). The last one to gain its national status was the National Museums Liverpool in the 1980s. Most of the organisations, thirteen, are located in the capital, London. Outside London, there is one in Liverpool, two in Scotland, one in Wales and one in Northern Ireland.

The size and scope of national museums varies greatly. They cover a wide variety of subjects and areas: universal human creativity, art, craft, science, natural history, the armed forces, and special subjects such as armouries and maritime history. The history of the national museums in the UK extends over a very long period (see Figure 1). Figure 1 demonstrates how the number of national museums in the UK has increased, and, with branch

museums, the total number rises to sixty-four and is distributed nationwide. Some national museums only has one site, e.g. the British Museum, Wallace Collection and the National Gallery, others have many branches up to seven, e.g. the National Museum Wales and the National Museums Liverpool.

From the blue line in Figure 1, it is noticeable that there are three peaks in the establishment of national museums in the UK: 1840-1860, 1880-1900 and 1960-1980. The first peak was motivated by the Great Exhibition in 1851 in London, as a result of which four new museums were built to house the exhibits and further the principles of the exhibition. The second peak resulted from private bequests to the nation to build art galleries for Tate and the Wallace Collection, it was also exemplified the economic power of the British Empire in the 19th century. The third peak was due to the building of museums to preserve the country’s military legacy, with the two examples of the National Army Museum and the Royal Air Force Museum in the 1960s. In addition, the political climate was also affecting the growth in national museums, for example, the promotion of the local authority museum service in Liverpool to national museum status in the 1980s, as well as the amalgamation of two national museums in Scotland the mid-1980s.

Figure 1. Development of National Museums in the UK.



If we look to the future of national museums, according to Figure 1, the growth of national museums was slowing down at the turn of century. There are two factors influencing this: the first is the political devolution with amalgamation of two national museums in Northern Ireland on 1st April, 1998. The second factor is economical influence with a decline in the founding of new branch museums¹. This may be an indication that national museums are turning away from setting up their own branch museums, to establishing partnerships with local authority and independent museums (AEA, 2004). It is expected that there will be more competition in the cultural heritage industry in the new century, from other museums, cultural institutions, educational organisations and leisure activities (Kotler & Kotler, 1998).

National Museums and their Development in Taiwan

In 2007 there are sixteen national museums in Taiwan, two of which are still under construction and aim to open in 2008. Table 2 shows the founding years of these national institutions. Seven among the sixteen national museums in Taiwan are concentrated and located in the capital city, Taipei, and were established in the early stage before the 1980s. The other nine were spread into different regions around Taiwan, including several in rural places, such as the National Museum of Marine Biology and Aquarium in Pintung. It reflects the political influence and the need to balance the gap between cities and rural counties.

Table 2. List of National Museums in Taiwan.

Name of Museum	Founded Year
National Taiwan Museum	1899, 1908
National Palace Museum	1925, 1965
National Museum of History	1955
National Taiwan Art Education Centre	1956
National Science Education Centre	1956
National Dr. Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall	1972
National Feng Huang Ku Bird Park	1975
National Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall	1980
National Museum of Natural Science	1986
National Taiwan Museum of Fine Art	1988
National Science and Industry Museum	1997
National Museum of Marine Biology and Aquarium	2000
National Museum of Prehistory	2002
National Museum of Taiwan Literature	2003
National Museum of Marine Science & Technology -Provisional Office	2008
National Museum of Taiwan History -Provisional Office	2008

All their budgets come from the central government: one from the Executive Yuan, ten from the Ministry of Education and five from the Council for Cultural Affairs. In Taiwan it is not unusual for a new museum to start its operation without any collection (Ken, 2004). One explanation is that museums, especially the national ones, are traditionally regarded as social educational institutions.

The discussion of the foundation of the national museums can be summarised under their various purposes.

1. The first purpose is for the preservation of the collections from the previous regime. For example, the National Taiwan Museum owns the most important collections of natural history and anthropology from more than one hundred years ago. Another two examples include the National Palace Museum and the National Museum of History, both of which have significant collections transported from Mainland China and the Nationalist Government moved to Taiwan.
2. The second purpose is for public education, to enhance citizens' rights for the pursuit of knowledge and to supplement the formal education in schools. Museums in this category were created mainly in the 1950s. The National Taiwan Art Education Centre and the National Science Education Centre are two outstanding examples.

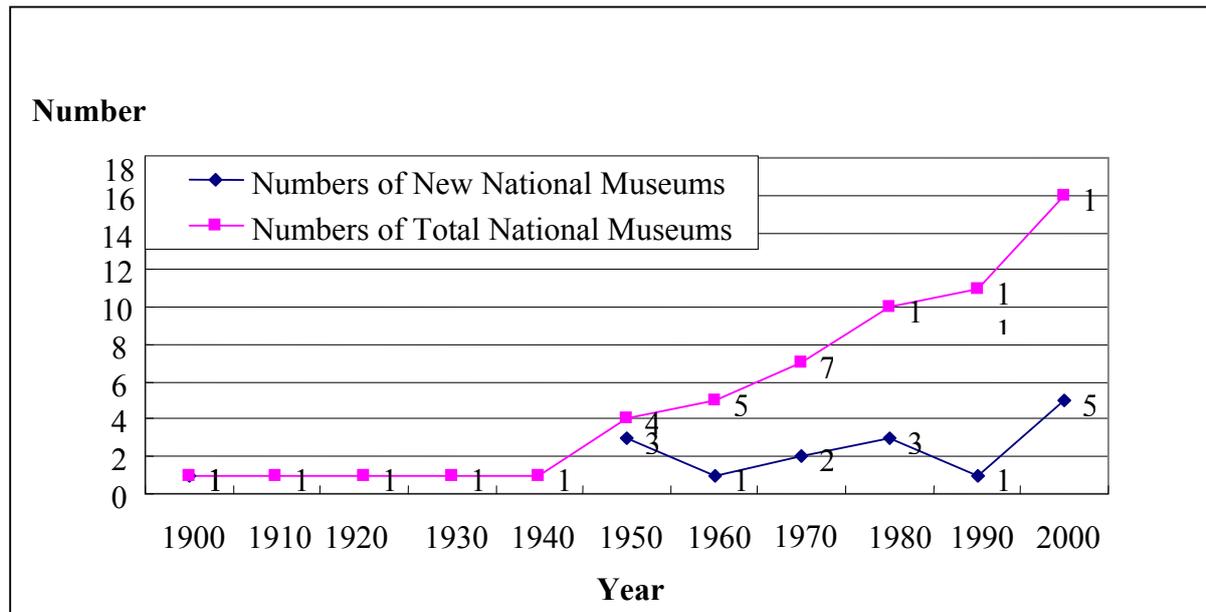
3. The third purpose is for political reasons, in remembrance of political leaders, for example, the Dr. Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall and the Chiang Kai-sek Memorial Hall. Both have collections relevant to political leaders but also become a cultural complex providing exhibitions, theatre and music performance.
4. The fourth purpose relates to the policy of the Twelve Achievements, which planned to set up four national museums and ended with five. They are also supposed to promote scientific education. The museums are the National Museum of Natural Science, the National Museum of Science and Technology, the National Museum of Prehistory, the National Museum of Marine Biology and Aquarium, and the National Museum of Marine Science and Technology.
5. The fifth purpose is that under the influence of the political climate, some museums gained national status from regional roles. For instance, the National Taiwan Museum, National Feng Huang Ku Bird Park, and the National Taiwan Museum of Fine Art were provincial before the 1990s and uplifted to gain national status later. Another political influence is because new government agencies have been established and want to show some form of achievement, like the National Museum of Taiwan Literature and the National Museum of Taiwan History. These are the latest museums, with new emphasis on the identity of 'Taiwan'.

With the beginning of the new century, the number of national museums in Taiwan is still increasing. This is due to the economic boom and political influences since the 1980s. The burgeoning of economic in Taiwan has not only increased people's income but also living standard. Cultural activities have been promoted since the 1980s, resulting in emergence of exhibitions, performance and cultural awareness. New national museums have been an index of government achievement since then. Figure 2 shows the development of national museums chronologically. The blue line shows the establishment of new national museums and three peaks can be identified in this Figure: in the 1950s, the period 1970-1990 and after 2000.

The first peak in the 1950s relates to rationalisation of social education. Educational programmes and exhibitions have been two long traditions in these museums since their foundations. After 1970 the number of new national museums kept growing, partly because of the economic boom and partly because of the democratic political climate. The government found that museums can educate, entertain and enrich the life of the people (Pao, 1964) and as a result created five of them in two decades. They are all on a huge scale with spectacular buildings and space for exhibitions, but without any or with few collections at their inceptions. This signifies the second peak in the 1980s. In the first decade of the 21st century, there will be at least five more national museums opening to the public; in the meantime, the National Palace Museum is expanding to set up a new branch museum in the south of Taiwan. The third peak is in the 2000s.

However, the economy of the government is not as strong as it was in the 1980s, which explains the attitude of government in adjusting its policy towards decreasing the direct funding of museums. Instead, there is consideration of the privatisation of national museums; alternatively, museums are being requested to seek more partnership and sponsorship from the private or third sectors. The likely outcome of this may be either complete success, or absolute failure for the museums. The National Museum of Marine Biology and Aquarium has proved to be a great success after it adopted the BOT model (Build, Operate and Transfer).

Figure 2. Development of National Museums in Taiwan.



It contracts out its operation to a private company and the company has to make the profit not only to keep its operation, but also to invest for further building and exhibitions (Fang, 2002). On the other hand, the National Museum of Prehistory has tried to follow the same route, to contract out its operation twice, but without success. The differing fortune of these two examples may result from the location and the attractiveness of the museums. The National Museum of Marine Biology and Aquarium is possibly perceived as being more attractive than the archaeological exhibitions in the National Museum of Prehistory because it exhibits both live marine animals and specimen. Also, the former is on the main route to Kenting, the most popular resort in Taiwan; while the latter is in a remote location.

Perspective of Product Life Cycle

Product life cycle is usually used in the profit making sector, particularly in marketing. It divides life cycles of a product or service into four or five stages: the product development, introduction, growth, maturity and decline (Kotler & Armstrong, 1991). Hannagan proposed different five stages: introduction, growth, maturity, saturation and decline (Hannagan, 1992). This research uses a simplified concept, with the four stages mentioned in both books to explain the situations in national museums in both countries. The introduction stage is when the idea of national museum was introduced and somewhat unfamiliar to most people. The growth stage describes the period of time museums were burgeoning and caught more attention from the public. The maturity stage explains the situation that more museums being set up to form the competition and to provide homogeneous services. The decline stage would be the result of some museums being closed due to the competition and lack of support.

From Figure 1 and Figure 2, as the pink line illustrating the number total of national museums in the UK and Taiwan, they have both reached to the maturity stage. It means that there are more competitors in the sector to seek for similar support, for example, the visitors, funding bodies, donors and sponsors. They even have to face the competition from other sectors for the attention and time of the visitors, such as the sports games and theme parks. Another issue is that when more and more museums join the market, the later and new museums often imitate the old and existing institutions for developing their product and services. It causes the problem because services provided are normally homogeneous and

sometimes confuses customer's awareness. Also, as the market becomes mature, it is getting more difficult to attract new visitors. Therefore, the most important strategy in this stage is to establish the distinctiveness of the product/service and find the niche in the market. In this way, the museum can distinguish itself from others and to retain its visitors and supporters. Cultivation of customer loyalty is commonly used in the private sector. Once the institution can not cope with the challenge from its environment, it might go to the decline stage very soon.

Findings and Further Suggestions

By comparing the evolution of national museums in two nations, this research has found that the shaping of national museums is heavily influenced by the outside environment, particularly the political and economic climates. Planning a new museum or a branch requires more efforts on understanding how these environments interact to find more support and resources. For example, the success of the National Museum of Marine Biology and Aquarium in Taiwan is based on its strategy in creating the BOT model and its advantage of location.

Another new trend in recent year is that national museums help to shape the national identity. The new branding strategies of national museums in the UK and Taiwan have witnessed the change of political ideology, such as the National Museums Liverpool. It is remarkably strong in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland; it is also similar in these newly established museums in Taiwan. For instance, the National Museum of Taiwan History was proposed for even though there was a museum called the National Museum of History; the former emphasises 'Taiwanese identity' while the latter is based on 'Chinese identity'.

As the developments of national museums in both countries both reach to their maturity stage, it is important for them to set up their strategy for further their sustainability. One key aspect is to find its uniqueness of its services and reinforce it, in order to increase its competitiveness and to retain customer loyalty. It will also help to attract more resources and support for the long term survival.

Does a nation need a museum policy? When national museums were mainly sponsored by the government, it seems that any policy is unnecessary. However, as museums enter the maturation period, they have to face more and more competition. A museum policy is therefore urgently required to set a clear direction and create a better future. It will help national museums to seek sustainability, to shape their national identity, to attract more visitors and to better contribute to the society. In the knowledge era, national museums are able to input their information into the knowledge economy.

Museums in the twenty-first century are facing a multitude of changes. How museums could respond to the changing world depends heavily on their ability to understand their environments and their resources. From the historical review of museum development in both countries, it is easy to recognise that museums in a modern society have to develop a plurality of supports from the government, the private sector, and from the public as well. National museums in both countries have confronted the decrease of funding from their governments during the last decade, and the increase of competition in the second half of last century up to the present day. It is clear that any national museum has to prepare for these challenges and to create their future.

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