

A Comparative Study of Museum Governance of National Museums in the UK and Taiwan

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Abstract

This research is a pilot study into the museum governance of national museums in the UK and Taiwan. Firstly, it examines the development of museums and growth of national museums in both countries. Secondly, by reviewing the literature from the private, public and non-profit sectors and focusing on the museums governance throws some lights on the possibility of the systems. After conducting in-depth interviews and data-gathering in both countries, a situational analysis has been discussed in this study to find the difference of their systems. In the twentieth-first century, the museums governance changes in various way according to their contexts and needs further examination to understand its potentials and possibilities.

Keywords: national museums, museum governance, product life cycle, Taiwan

Introduction

Highlighted on the front page of the latest issue of Art Newspaper is the impact of semi-privatisation of all State-run museums in Japan in 2001 (Itoi, 2005). It has made Japanese museums move to two extremes: live or die. Long before the Japanese national museums adopted the concept of privatisation, the Netherlands allowed autonomy to twenty one national museums in the 1990s (Netherlands, Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 1994). Privatisation of public museums in Taiwan has been widely discussed since the 1990s and gradually different models of governance have been developed. In the UK, after some national museums had been charging admission fees for nearly twenty years, the new Labour government in the late 1990s abandoned this policy in order to increase social inclusion. It seems that privatization and plural funding are becoming more and more popular in the museum sector and has made a dramatic impact in different countries.

Governance has become an important issue in the last two decades of the twentieth century (O'Sullivan, 2000). Successful governance is not only highly respected in the private and public sectors but also has great influence in the third sector¹, in which museums are categorised (Cornforth, 2003). The academic study of concept of governance in museums is still somewhat new and underdeveloped. There is not as much attention centered on it as on management or marketing, although these two fields only became prominent in administration of museums in the last decade of the twentieth century (Fopp, 1997; McLean, 1997). The concept of museum governance has until now focused largely on trusteeship and the responsibilities of boards

(Malaro, 1994), but new evidence has been provided to supplement this basic concept in modern society. Good museum governance helps to attract resources, to keep operations and management under control and to direct the museum towards a successful future.

National museums in the UK, as well as in Taiwan, have been playing a significant role in society, i.e., contributing to the political, economic, social, and cultural lives of the citizens of these countries (AEA, 2004). Yet information about how these museums are governed, who governs them, how museum governance occurs, when this process is executed, and why museums are governed is not readily available to the public. A systematic study of museum governance systems should address all these questions. It is also hoped that this study will delineate specific elements of the museum governance systems, highlighting processes and their interaction with other institutions. Following patterns and developments in private sector governance, issues of museum governance are closely linked to accountability and sustainability at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

This study will focus on the above questions and will aim to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the museum governance systems in both countries. This will help them improve their relationships with external influences. The objectives of this research are as follows:

1. To understand the implementation of governance in museums;
2. To compare the museum governance systems of national museums in both countries;
3. To examine the patterns and methods of museum governance;
4. To propose a future vision for museum governance.

The study starts with a review of museum backgrounds in both countries by applying the perspective of Product Life Cycle from marketing. Through an understanding of the development of national museums in both countries, it will be possible to draw a holistic profile. The research then continues with a brief review of governance theories and their impact on museums. In order to obtain in-dept data, several interviews and data collections have been undertaken *in situ*.

The Development of National Museums in the UK and Taiwan

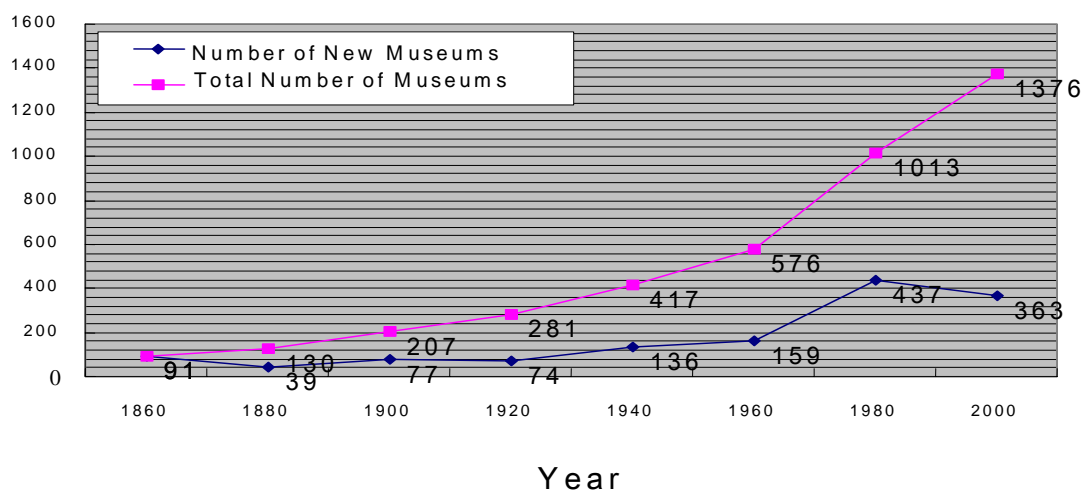
The rapid growth of museums was a significant cultural phenomenon world-wide during the second half of the twentieth century. It was estimated that there were at least 15,000 museums in the United States and 2,500 in the UK alone (Thomson, 2002) by the beginning of the twenty-first century. At the same, with the increase of their countries' economic power, there have been more than 7,800 museums established in Japan (Yoshiaki, 2003) and 232 in Taiwan (Independent Museum League, 1998). The increase is not only in quantity but also in quality. Anyone who wants to visit a museum would find himself facing many choices, from national to local authority museums, from large to small size, from art and history to science and technology. Traditionally, a museum has five basic functions: collecting, conservation, exhibitions, interpretation and as a social instrument (Alexander, 1979). However, in order to respond to the constantly changing world a modern museum becomes an important symbol to its community: it plays a role in improving a country's image, spurring economic growth and providing the public with educational opportunities (Huang, 1997). At the same time, increasing attention has been given to the management and marketing over the last ten years.

It goes without saying that most famous and popular museums in the museums sector are easily recognised as national museums, for examples, the British Museum in London, the Louvre in Paris, the Prado in Madrid and the National Palace Museum in Taipei. National museums both in the UK and in Taiwan obtain their national status by the passing of a regulation or act in

Parliament and often have to play a significant role in society. This research first examines the development of museums in the UK and Taiwan, and then compares their development to obtain a clearer concept of their background. By applying the PLC (Product Life Cycle) in marketing it is easier to understand their characteristics.

The history of museums in the UK is one of the longest in the world. According to the 1998 DOMUS survey by the Museum and Galleries Commission² in the UK, there were 1,376 museums providing data on their years of foundation (Museums & Galleries Commission, 1998). After transferring the data into Product Life Cycle, Chart 1 shows that most of the museums existing in the UK in 1998 were established after 1960.

**Chart 1:
Product Life Cycle of Museums in the UK**

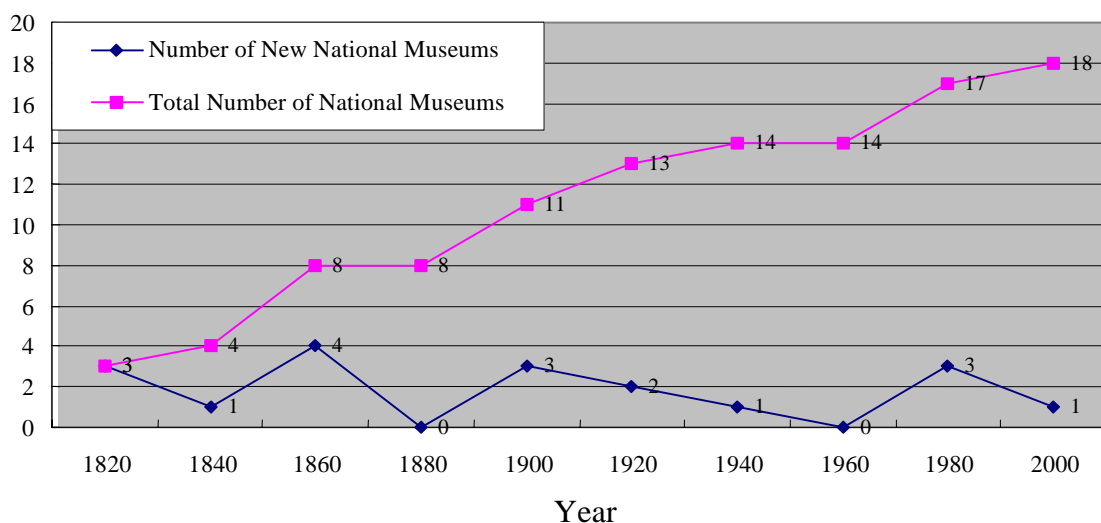


During the 1960s and 1970s, the museums increased in number as well as in various types (Lewis, 1984). Middleton once explained nine reasons for this prosperity; they are economic and technology factors, collapse of the Victorian infrastructure, political influences, unemployment measures, crisis for local government, optimism in leisure and tourism schemes, concern for the environment, the nostalgia boom and an attractive organisational model (Middleton, 1990). In the UK, museums are categorised according to funding sources into three main divisions: national, local authority and independent museums (Tait, 1989). Among these local authority, and independent museums are some of the highest quantity, but the national museums are general the most significant. The Product Life Cycle of museums in the UK can be divided into three stages: introduction, growth and maturity. The introduction stage is from the 17th century to the 1940s, when the increase in new museums was still slow. Since the Victorian times, the reasons for establishing new museums have been mainly for collecting and preserving valuable artifacts, and also for public benefit. After World War II, the economy in the UK started to grow and more cultural relics and industrial sites were preserved by the means of museums. This period of time can be called the growth stage. However, more and more museums being established results in more competition. In the 1980s and 1990s, the rate of new museums opening slowed down and those in the market found themselves in a very competitive environment. Therefore, museums started to incorporate management into their organisations to make them more competitive.

The British Museum was the first national museum in the world (Burnett and Reeve, 2001). It has had an influence in museum systems world-wide, probing a precedent for putting into the

stewardship of trustees the museum's 'public trust' responsibilities. Since the establishment of the British Museum in 1753, there have been a further seventeen national museums established in the UK by 2005 (See Appendix I). They cover topics from natural science to art, from universal to local collections and from ancient artifacts to modern devices. Chart 2 demonstrates how the number of national museums in the UK has increased. However, with branch museums, other sites or outstations, the number rises to sixty-four and is distributed nationwide. The main reason for their foundation is to house collections and serve the public. Chart 2 shows there are three peaks in the establishment of national museums in the UK: 1840-1860, 1880-1900 and 1960-1980.

**Chart 2:
Development of National Museums in the UK**

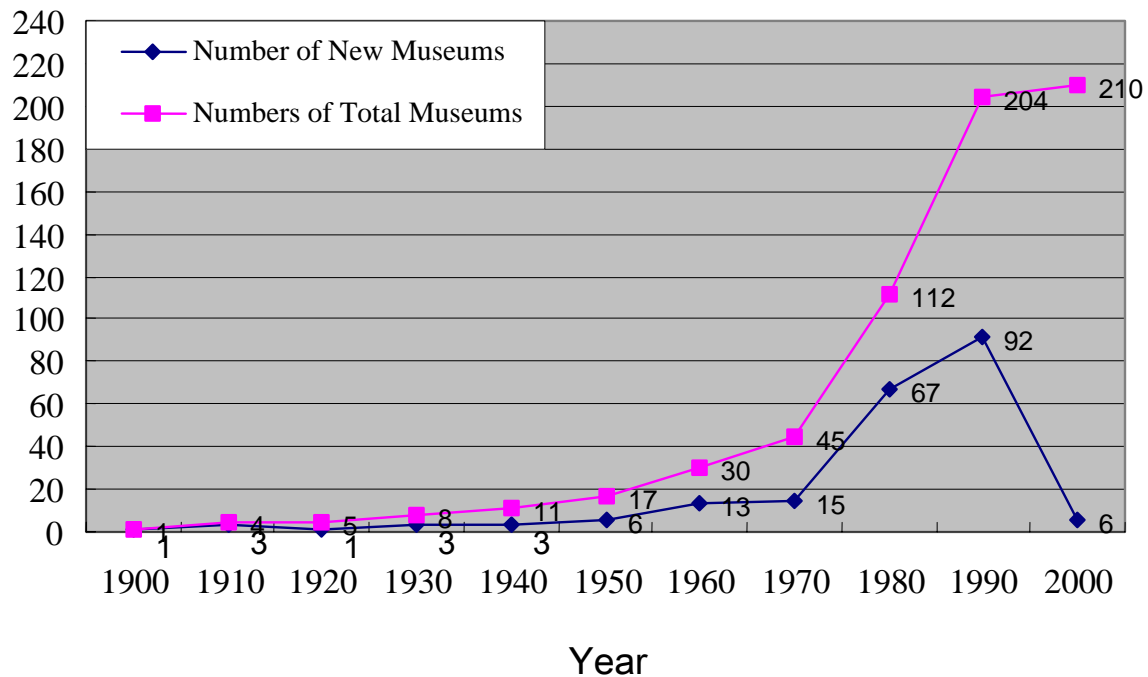


The first peak was caused by the Great Exhibition in 1851 in London, as a result of which four museums were built to house the exhibits once the exhibition was over. The second peak was due to the private bequests collections to the nation to build museums for the Tate and Wallace. The third peak was due to the building of museums to preserve the military legacy. In addition, political change was also affected the growth in national museums, for example the promotion of the local authority museum service in Liverpool to national museum status.

Compared to the history of British museums, the history of museums in Taiwan is much shorter. However, within one hundred years since the first museum was established, there are now more than 230 museums, sixteen of which are national museums. From the perspective of Product Life Cycle, the development of museums is summarised in Chart 3. It is similar to the development of museums in the UK; there are three stages: introduction, growth and maturity (Tzeng, 1998). The introduction stage is from the inception of the first museum in 1908 in Taiwan to 1970. During this stage the growth of new museums is less than ten per decade. Museums were established for the purpose of education and preserving collections from previous periods. The rapid increase of new museums started from the 1970s and 1980s when economic growth in Taiwan was too fast to be ignored. Two main reasons explain this trend: one comes from the government policy to establish cultural facilities all over the country; the other comes from the rise of private wealth for collecting and setting up new museums. After two decades of prosperity, the market faced pressure of competition and started to slow down in

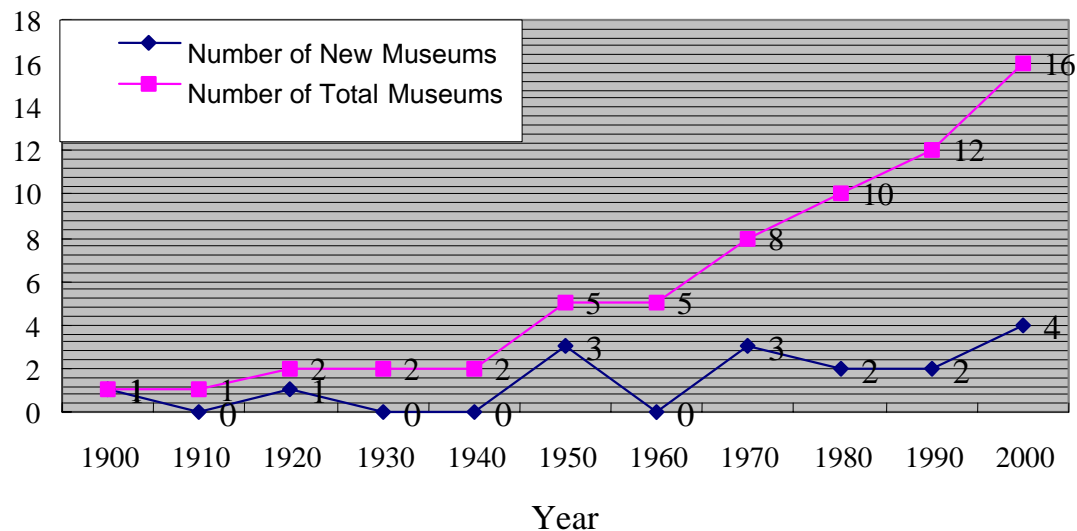
the late 1990s, which is the third stage: maturity.

Chart 3:
Product Life Cycle of Museums in Taiwan



In the beginning of the new century, the number of national museums in Taiwan is still increasing (See Appendix II). This is due to the economic and political influences from the 1980s. Since the 1980s, new national museums have been an index of government achievement. In Chart 4 the mission of public education made the first peak in the 1950s. After 1970 the number of new national museums keeps growing partly because of the economic development and partly because of democratic policy. The government found that museums can educate, entertain and enrich the life of the people, therefore there are two more national museums under planning and the National Palace Museum is establishing a branch museum for its expansion.

**Chart 4:
Development of National Museums in Taiwan**



The development of museums and national museums in the UK and Taiwan has several similarities: firstly, most of them are founded between the 1960s and 2000 when both countries were undergoing rapid economic growth. Secondly, both their national museums networks are funded directly or indirectly from central government. Political devolution has an impact on museums development and has helped to build many local authority museums. Lastly the number of independent museums has increased rapidly. However, in the 1980s in the UK and in the 1990s in Taiwan both countries faced an economic recession and looked for change in museum management. The former started privatisation in many public institutions and pressured national museums that had previously been free to the public to charge admission, while the latter asked national museums to adopt a semi-privatisation model called BOT (build-operate-transfer). The future of museums is still uncertain even though it is widely accepted that national museums should play an important part in life-long learning, leisure activities and social life. Therefore, this study will try to review the governance of national museums in both countries to understand their situation and propose a solution for the future.

The Incorporation of Governance Theories into the Museums Sector

Governance in the private sector began with ideas of management in the first half of the twentieth century (Heinrich, c2002). These concepts were somewhat underestimated during most of the last century. The situation began to change in the 1980s and 1990s when managers realised the significance of corporate governance. Re-examination of decision-making was significant, as well as the importance of the relationships between the owners, the boards of directors and the managers. Much attention was paid to the performance of organisations and to corporate takeovers. New theories were proposed in order to create more effective operations and to build more responsive organisations. The idea of governance in the private sector has also influenced the public sector since the 1990s (Cornforth, 2003). Many government agencies have adopted new concepts to decrease bureaucracy and inefficiency, setting up quasi-government agencies, for example. It has been especially important for the public sector to establish an interaction with governmental departments, the general public and other

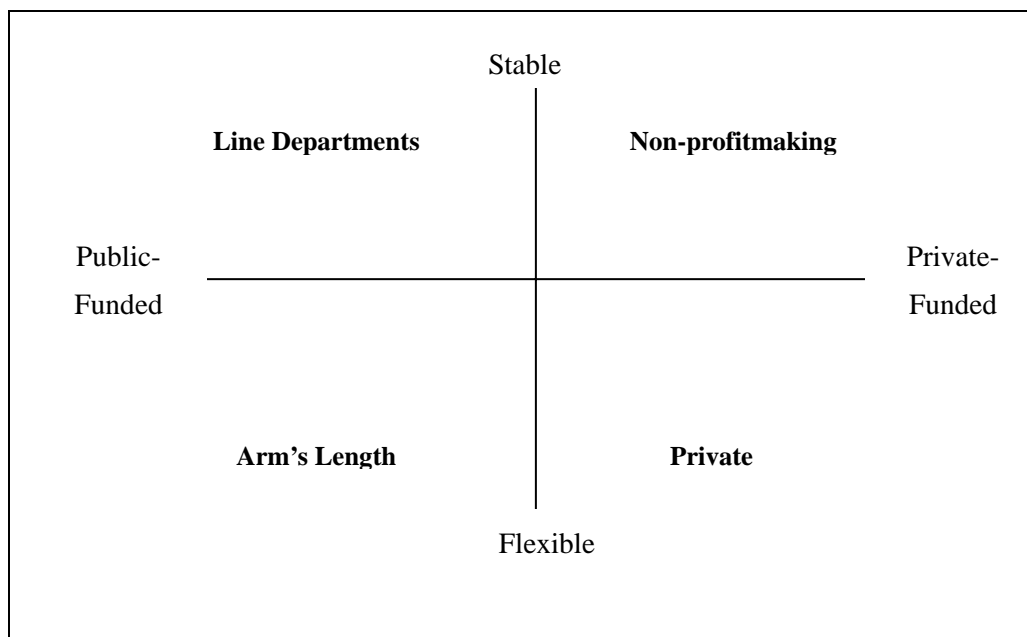
institutions. Since the fiscal crisis of the 1980s and 1990s, the state has developed a strategy to share the responsibility for funding museums with private sector to provide public service (Pierre, 2000).

Most of the literature on governance in museums puts an emphasis on the trustees, especially in the United States and United Kingdom. In *Museum Governance: Mission, Ethics, Policy*, Malero explains how trustees play a significant part in both a nonprofit organisation and museums. However, she focuses more on the ethical and missionary aspects rather than providing a practical insight into a systematic mechanism for governing museums (Malero, 1994).

Later Lord proposed modes of governance with four principles: line departments, arm's length institutions, non-profitmaking or charitable organisations and private ownership (Lord and Lord, 1997). These modes of governance are divided by ownership and financial sources and could apply to any museum in the world. Figure 1 shows the differences of these modes: line departments are directly funded by the central government and enjoy stability while the private museums are funded by private companies or individuals and have more flexibility. According to ICOM's definition of museum, a museum is "...a nonprofit making, permanent organisation...", therefore the private ownership is not a proper museum and these modes are defeated. By the same token, it seems that there is not such a great difference between the arm's length institutions and nonprofitmaking or charitable organisations, both of them have boards of trustees and same source of finance.

Bieber has conducted practical research to investigate the governance in the independent museums in England and proposes a tentative model (Bieber, 2003). His result shows that the composition of the boards is similar and there has to be a good relationship between the board and the senior management. He also proposes that mutual trust and respect is the key to successful governance.

**Figure 1:
Modes of Governance (Lord and Lord)**



In brief, museum governance needs more research to build a systematic understanding. From the literature review it is obvious that recent researches tend to pay attention to trustees and their background. Some areas, such as how museums are governed and how to make museum governance more successful need further examination.

Situational Analysis of the Museum Governance in both Countries

One of the main areas of discussion in national museum governance in the UK has been the relationship between trustees governance and government policy (Museums and Galleries Commission, 1988). In Taiwan museum governance has experienced dramatic changes since government policy was shifted toward multiple patterns of governance (Huang 2003). From these examples little could be distinguished as to a clear picture or a holistic perspective on how museums are governed. This ambiguity could lead museums towards an uncertain future and damage their advantageous positions in society.

The governance of national museums in the UK has a long tradition of using boards of trustees. Trustees are the representatives of the public and have the responsibility to make decisions, to monitor the performance of senior staff, to attract more resources from outwith museums and to help the museum its aims. Trustees gain their power from status and execute their task voluntarily. It is widely recognised that to be a trustee is a great honour. Since most trustees are appointed by a minister or prime minister, they are more or less under the influence of political power. Yet it is traditional that the trustees of national museums are at arm's length. The government sponsorship of museums in the UK has decreased since Thatcherism in the 1980s (Wu, 2003), even in national museums the funding provided by government could not keep pace with general inflation or public expenditure (Glaister, 2004).

The non-profit sector in general, including museums, has also faced decreased resources and even more competition since then. What is even more troubling is a lack of expertise among museum trustees (Pybus, 2002) in accounting issues and external audits (Babbidge, 2002). Museum governance has thus become a serious issue since it may provide direction, build institutional control and address the issues raised above.

On the contrary, national museums in Taiwan are traditionally governed directly by the central government: the Executive Yuan, the Ministry of Education and the Council for Cultural Affairs. Therefore, national museums are directly influenced by the political and economic climate. By the end of the twentieth century, and due to rapid expansion of museum numbers, the development of museums in Taiwan reached a saturation point and they were facing stiff competition from one other and from the rest of the tourist sector. The museums in Taiwan are also now experiencing the same changes as those in the UK in the 1980s and 1990s. The most significant change is the decrease in support from government. Many alternative strategies have been proposed since the late 1990s; among them, the most widely discussed are establishing the BOT (Build, Operate and Transfer) model and incorporating an administrative agency (Chiang, 2003). The former has been applied in several museums while the latter is still under discussion. The first national museum to adopt BOT model has been proved a huge success after it opens its doors to the public in 2000. The government asked other new national museums to adopt the same system, but in vain. Because each museum has its own context. However, it is possible that museum governance will be diversified in Taiwan in the new century.

In comparison the general situation of national museums in the UK and Taiwan, it is clear that both governments have reduced their support gradually in the last decade, however it is intriguing to find that privatisation has become more accepted in Taiwan than in the UK. This research aims to establish a systematic understanding of museum governance and make a comparison between the UK and Taiwan in order to consider possibilities for future application.

Because the concept of museum governance has gained an increase in an attention since the leadership and the trustees have been considered more seriously, especially since museums faced the financial difficulties of the 1990s, it is urgent that a governance system for museums is understood so as to contribute to better management. The need for successful governance of national museums is particularly important because these institutions have always been in the forefront of museum development, leading in professional direction and embodying the policies of the government. Also important is the understanding that good governance will contribute to museums being managed in a suitable and successful way.

Methodology and Research Findings

The research is based on the belief that national museums need more systematic governance, to build good relationships with society as well as to respond to and to incorporate resources from their environment. Under this premise, the method of research is by qualitative data collecting for both the in-depth interviews and data-gathering. There test cases have been selected in each country because of their characteristics, background as well as geographical distribution. Three in-depth interviews in the UK have been conducted between November 2004 and February 2005 simultaneously gathering data from the publication of three cases in Taiwan.

Some of the research findings of the case studies in the UK are listed in Table 1. These three national museums have collections of national or international significance and cover a wide range of subjects. The visitor numbers show that all of them play an important role in attracting visitors, therefore they can obtain more financial support from the government (from two-thirds to nine-tenths). All have a board of trustees consisting of fifteen to twenty-five members. The frequency of trustees meetings differs from every two months to every three months. Most of the trustees are appointed by the government ministers or the secretary of state for Culture, Media and Sport except in Museum C which can appoint some of its trustees. This means that the composition of trustees might be influenced by political power, even though the museums still have the right to recommend members.

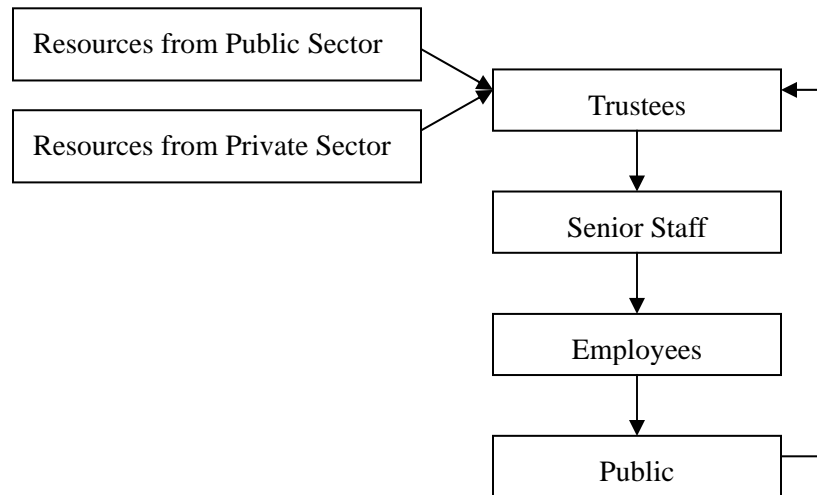
Table 1:
Basic Characteristic of Case Study Museums in the UK

	Museum A	Museum B	Museum C
Collection	A wide range of subject	A universal range	Full culture of the world
Annual visitor numbers	1,330,000	1,500,000	5,500,000
Annual budget (£)	20,858,000	14,013,000	78,700,000
Board of Trustees	15	18	25
Frequency of meeting	6 times a year	5 times a year	4 times a year
Financial resource	Government grants (85%)	Government grants (90%)	Government grants (66-75%)

Since the trustees are the people who govern the museums, they make the most important decisions and appoint the senior staff in the museums. They also have the responsibility to monitor the performance of the museum. In all three cases, trustees are provided with information by museum staff before they make any decisions. If there is an emergency, a special meeting of the trustees could be called. In brief, the trustees and senior staff normally keep a harmonious relationship. The relations between trustees, museums and their public is like a communication flow: trustees are like the gatekeepers of public trust to help supervise the museum's performance, the senior staff follow the decisions of the trustees and give orders to

employees, employees provide the services to the public and the public offer their opinions to the trustees. Nowadays museum governance has to deal with external relationships with both the public and private sectors. Some have to build partnerships with other institutions while others tend to look for sponsorship and support from society.

Figure 2:
Communication Flow in National Museums in the UK



From the cases studies in the UK, one of them shows that community relations have become an important issue. All of them express the view that to keep a good relationship with government is also significant because most of their funding comes from central government. It is also becoming a trend to bring external resources from society into museums, especially when museums are embarking on major capital projects. Education is also one of all the museums' fundamental missions. None of these museums had any interest in establishing branch museums. Instead, they have more plans to build partnerships with other institutions.

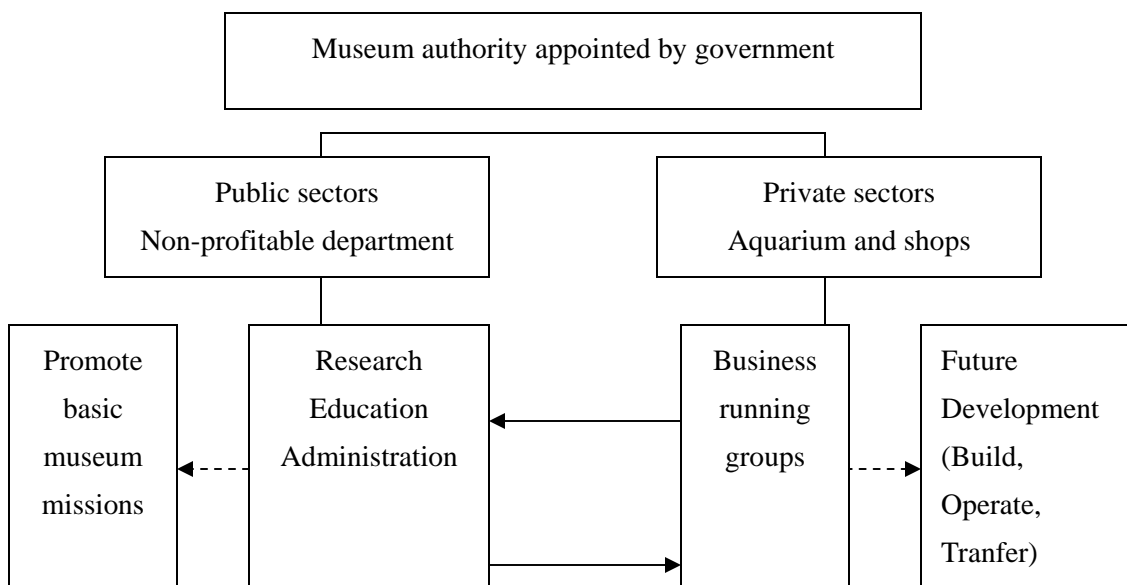
Table 2:
Basic Characteristic of Case Study Museums in Taiwan

	Museum A	Museum B	Museum C
Collection	Chinese art	Natural science	Natural science
Annual visitor numbers	1,327,727	2,551,866	1,747,566
Annual budget (£)	23,006,333	10,093,916	3,020,033
Board of Trustees	n/a	n/a	n/a
Frequency of meeting	n/a	n/a	n/a
Financial resource	Government grants	Government grants	Government grants and Private Partner

Table 2 lists some basic characteristics of the case study museums in Taiwan. Even though all of them have put emphasis on collections, two among the three were established without any collections as a result of government policy at that time. However, they have all become visitor

attractions in different regions of Taiwan and support from government depends greatly on the visitor numbers during the fiscal year. The danger of this type of governance is that it lacks flexibility and has to obey government policy. In Taiwan, there is no tradition of a board of trustees in national museums. Those who govern national museums are from the central government, for example, the Executive Yuan, the Ministry of Education or the Council for Cultural Affairs. Therefore, when the government decides to stop its full support for national museums and wants them to be privatised, museums have no option but to obey this policy. Museum C successfully adopted the BOT model (figure 3), showing that it would share the responsibility and economic pressure with the central government. Even more, it provides an example of greater flexibility for museums to gain financial resources and to employ staff (Fang, 2002).

**Figure 3:
The Schematic Structure of Museum C**



Conclusion

The future is still uncertain. The competition for resources, support and visitors has gradually pluralised the cultural market. There are different experiments taking place in different countries: in the Netherlands a more democratic model was been constructed, involving more resources in the museums' governance because each national museum has set up its own foundation; the semi-privatisation of national museums and establish 'incorporating administrative agency' to own more autonomy.

Governance in museums takes in various forms in the twenty-first century. From the experience of national museums in the UK and Taiwan, the former tend to keep their traditional pace but make information much more transparent to the public while the latter are still looking for a better model to adapt to the changing environment. The information about the governance of national museums in the UK has become easily accessed by the advance of information technology and

publication. Some of the museums have also been more open when recommend trustees and people can find related information on the internet. In Taiwan during the last five years there has been a great debate on the BOT model and on the alternative model 'incorporating administrative agency' being considered for those establishing museums. Some museum staff have worried about change and fear that it will lead to a privatised direction and decrease the quality of the public service. Some findings of this study still need more examining by conducting more cases studies and finding the generalisation. It is the hope that there will be more research on this topic and make more contribution to the governance of museums. In the era of globalisation, good governance system will help museums to obtain competitiveness in the future.

Pierre and Peters once proposed three possible scenarios of models in the developing governance system: the first one is to maintain the traditional governance; the second one is to let another regime rule, while the last one is to build a democratic model involving more resources (Pierre and Peters, 2000). From the this study it seems that some examples matched these scenarios. Most national museums in the UK are similar to traditional governance with boards of trustees, new BOT model in Taiwan (Museum C) is a good instance of the second one to let out its operation to a private company. Yet most of national museums in the UK and Taiwan are more or less moving towards democracy and attracting more resources from the society. Is it possible that there will be another scenario, or these will emerge into another form? Also, are these scenarios fit into the cultural sector? These are the issues needed exploring in the near future.

Acknowledgement

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Notes

- ¹ The third sector is distinguished from the public sector and the private sector, it is also called the non-profit sector.
- ² The data is based on the survey; therefore, the number of museums is not as many as being mentioned before. They are from different sources. The population of this survey is based on the museums joining the Registration Scheme in the UK.

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Appendices

Appendix I The List of National Museums in the UK

Name of Museum	Founded Year	Note
Royal Armouries	1680	The date given for the collections.
British Museum	1753	The first national museum in the world.
National Museums of Scotland	1854	
National Gallery	1824	
National Galleries of Scotland	1850	
Victoria & Albert Museum	1852	
National Portrait Gallery	1856	
National Museum of Science and Industry	1857	
Natural History Museum	1881	
Tate Gallery	1897	
Wallace Collection	1897	
National Museums and Galleries of 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 Museum Liverpool	1986	Originally founded in 1851 as the Liverpool Museum (local authority).

Appendix II
The List of National Museums in the Taiwan

Name of Museum	Founded Year	Note
National Taiwan Museum	1908	Japanese Colonial Period
National Palace Museum	1925, 1965	Collections moved from China
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 and Technology -Provisional Office	Planned to open in 2006	
National Museums of Taiwan History-Provisional Office	Planned to open in 2006	