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Museums and Visitors as Yin and Yang

Applying Taoist Philosophy to Museum Studies

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ABSTRACT

A frequently asked question in the museum field is how to attract more visitors. As there are more and more educational programmes and interactive projects, museums start to ask the second question, which is how to get the participants involved. The two questions are deeply related, and both of them lead to the third question: how to find the balance in the relationship between museums and visitors?

After the analysis of these questions, the thesis turns to Taoism for the answers. According to philosophical Taoism, the two parties of any relationship can be seen as Yin and Yang. When there is an imbalance between Yin and Yang, conflicts appear in the relationship. Taoism provides both the philosophical guidance and the practical methodology to solve the problems. Three of the most important Taoist concepts are Equality, Experience, and Wu Wei. After introducing the concepts, this thesis explains how they can be applied to the relationship between museums and visitors. The two case studies provide examples of the application of the three concepts in museum issues.

Key words: philosophical Taoism, museum, museum visitor, Yin Yang, Wu Wei, relationship

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on reconsidering the relationship between museums and visitors using fundamental principles of philosophical Taoism. Museums worldwide have put great effort in developing educational programmes or improving the overall visiting experience, hoping to attract more visitors. However, the effort does not always pay off. Various factors may influence the balance in the relationship, among which the disagreement over the role of museums stands out. Since the 1970s, the museum world has been going through radical changes. The role of museums as “exclusive and elitist” institutions educating people, which derives from the Age of Enlightenment in the 18th century, has been questioned (Ross 84). The 21st century has seen an “immense increase in the literature and debate that have attempted to address museums and their roles and aspirations in relation to community and communities” (Crooke 170). When considering this relation, there are still a large number of scholars and practitioners who claim that the major role of museums is to educate the community, because they believe museums have the responsibilities and abilities. For instance, George E. Hein, a leading authority on museum education declares, “museum education is at the centre of museum activities. Museums are primarily educational institutions; what makes them public institutions for the preservation of culture is their educational work” (358). However, the visitors’ opinions on the role of museums are thought-provoking. A study by New York-based research centre Reach Advisor: Museum R+D shows that only “12% of the general public perceive museums as being educational” (“*Do Museums Matter?*”). Similarly, the data released by IMPACTS on the visitors’ overall satisfaction reveals that the education experience weighs only 4.77% (Dilenschneider). This disagreement on the role of museums may answer the question of why some of the museums’ attempts to interact with the audiences fail.

Stephen E. Weil provides an inspiring definition of the role of museums for this study. “In everything museums do, they must remember the cornerstone on which the whole enterprise rests: to make a positive difference in the quality of people’s lives. Museums that do that, matter – they matter a great deal” (Weil 74). Therefore, this study is to inspect the relationship between museums and visitors with the hypothesis that museums are not primarily educational institutions. Education can be a broad term. According to the Oxford Dictionaries, education is the process of receiving or giving systematic instruction. Therefore in this research, education at museums refers to providing knowledge related to certain artworks, artists, art history or observation skills in appreciating art, which is described by Philip Yenawine, former education director of MoMA, as the “viewing skills”

(289). Though museums use various definitions of education and may even design the educational programmes with a focus on the interactive experience, without a clear analysis of the relationship and visitors' needs, it is difficult to provide effective programmes. To explore the balance of the relationship between museums and visitors, the Yin Yang principle of philosophical Taoism provides a proper guidance. Instead of seeing the two parties as teachers and students, considering them as Yin and Yang in one balance chart may bring new inspiration for museum professionals to expand their audiences. As written in *I Ching*, one of the oldest Chinese classics, the Tao lies in the interaction between Yin and Yang, and only when there is a balance will positive energy be produced (Huang 15). Chapter Two provides more details about this harmonious relationship described by Taoism.

Methodology

The research for this study is primarily qualitative. Secondary data from the researches conducted by Reach Advisor, IMPACTS, and the Danish Agency for Culture are used when analysing the demographic composition of the visitors and their expectation of the museums. This study also includes two case studies - the Museum Night in the Netherlands and the virtual museum by the Google Art project.

Since 2002, more than six Dutch cities have worked with more than 50 museums all over the country to offer a new perspective on what museums can provide for the visitors.

Throughout the year, each of the Museum Night events chooses one night to present diverse programmes including exhibitions, workshops, performances, live music, parties, urban interventions and more. With an extension of opening hours to 2 am, visitors have plenty time to explore the various cultural experience in different museums in the city ("*Rotterdam Celebrates Museum Night*"). The unconventional museum experience offered by the annual event attracts not only the regular museum-goers but also occasional participants or non-participants. Therefore, it is an appropriate case study for this research to get a better picture of the role of museums and the relationship between museums and visitors.

In 2011, Google launched its Google Art Project. Now known as Google Arts & Culture, the project serves as an online platform for virtual museum tours and high-resolution images of art pieces. It works with more than 17 museums all over the world, including the Rijksmuseum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Tate Gallery (Waters). The project allows visitors to stay at home and visit the museums in front of their computers. This

controversial way of experiencing museums and providing free high-resolution images of artworks offers a new angle on how museums can interact with their visitors.

The Taoism concepts used in this thesis are mainly from *Tao Te Ching* written by Laozi and *Zhuangzi* written by Zhuangzi, which are the two most important texts for philosophical Taoism. The original text is in ancient Chinese, and there are different translation versions in modern Chinese, as well as in English. There are differences among different translation versions because of different translators' interpretation. The popular versions by Feng Gia-Fu, Jane English, and Tolbert McCarroll are used in this thesis as the terms applied in analysing the museum issues are explained more explicitly by these three Taoist scholars.

CHAPTER 2 THE PROBLEMATIC RELATIONSHIP

In March 2017, during a conversation about how to design the educational programmes for the upcoming exhibitions, Hilde van der Heijden from the Communication and Education department of the Van Abbemuseum explained her concerns to me. The question that has long been troubling this contemporary art museum in the Netherlands is how to get more people involved in their elaborately prepared educational programmes for the visitors. Hilde said to me, "though we have devoted much effort, it seems that our programmes are under-appreciated by the participants." The Van Abbemuseum is not the only one facing this problem. Various museums world-wide have started designing interactive programmes in order to keep a positive relationship with their visitors. The first question for many museums is how to attract more people to get involved. The problem becomes tougher when the overall number of museum visitors declines.

In 2016, the UK's major museums suffered a first decline in visitors in around a decade. According to a report by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) of the UK government, between April 2015 and April 2016, 47.6 million people visited the museums that DCMS sponsored, including the Tate Modern, the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum, which was 1.4 million less than the previous 12 months. "One of the most significant declines was in the number of young people visiting these museums for educational purposes, which dropped by over 6% from the previous year" (Ellis-Petersen). Apart from the Netherlands and the UK, other countries have been in the same situation. The Louvre had a dramatic decline of 15 percent in 2016, compared to the previous year (Abrams). The Berlin State Museums, including a number of popular art institutions - such as the Pergamon Museum on Berlin's Museum Island, and the Hamburger

Bahnho - reported that the number of their visitors fell by nearly 150,000 in 2016 (Perlson). There can be various explanations. However, it is clear that when one tries hard to attract the other and fails, there are problems with the relationship. A closer look is necessary. So what is going wrong in the relationship? Why are the museums' efforts under-appreciated by the visitors?

2.1 Museums: Why are our efforts under-appreciated by the visitors?

Museums that open to the public have a relatively short history starting in the 18th century during the Age of Enlightenment (Ehrmann 492). Novel ideas were born in the Age of Enlightenment about the “absolute character of the knowledge discoverable by the methods of rationalism” (Ross 90). Originally, museums were operated as “exclusive and socially divisive” cultural authority for the classification of artefacts, culture, and knowledge (Hooper-Greenhill 224). This authority position in the community had been raising many debates in the field until a radical change occurred in the museum world in the 1970s. The “new museology” is a discourse about rethinking the social and political roles of museums, in which the core is the “access” to museums for a wider public (Barrett 167). However, what has not been questioned deep enough during this movement is the mainstream idea that museums are primarily educational. As a matter of fact, “the idea of the museum as an agent of education has been so pervasive that some American art museums set up their education programs even before buildings were built or collections were in hand” (Silver 13). In Jem Fraser’s summary of the Visitors’ Studies Conference of 1999, he declares that museums are educational institutions and yet have the difficulty in demonstrating educational effectiveness (“*Visitor Studies Conference*”). George E. Hein agrees with Fraser by explaining that “museum education is at the centre of museum activities. Museums are primarily educational institutions; what makes them public institutions for the preservation of culture is their educational work” (358). Hein also believes that the educational theory consists of two components: a theory of knowledge and a theory of learning (73). The theory of knowledge shows that the museums are the cultural authority, which resembles their position in the Age of Enlightenment, and the theory of learning focuses on how to teach the audience, for instance, what Philip Yenawine describes as “viewing skills.” He further explains that museums should teach the visitors various abilities, including “the observational skills, the ability to probe and find a variety of possible meanings” (Yenawine 289). Therefore, museums devote much effort to developing educational programmes for the visitors, but as Fraser puts it, it is difficult to demonstrate the effectiveness, and as Hilde complains, sometimes

their efforts are under-appreciated. To answer the question, the museums should pay more attention to who the visitors are and what the visitors are looking for.

According to John H Falk and Lynn D Dierking, after many years of research, they have discovered that worldwide, museum visitors are disproportionately more affluent and well-educated than the general public (61). Take the survey conducted by the Danish Agency for Culture as an example - the distribution of the educational background of visitors has been stable between 2009 and 2012. The latest result shows that 59% of museum-goers have the two highest Danish education levels, but they make up only 21% of the whole population in the country. Visitors of the two lowest education brackets compose only 17% of the museum users, but they make up 42% of the population. Another underrepresented group is the group with vocational education. They make up 33% of the population, but they compose only 15% of the museum visitors (Jensen and Lundgaard 17). The report explicitly shows that people with high education are massively favoured by the museums (see TABLE 1).

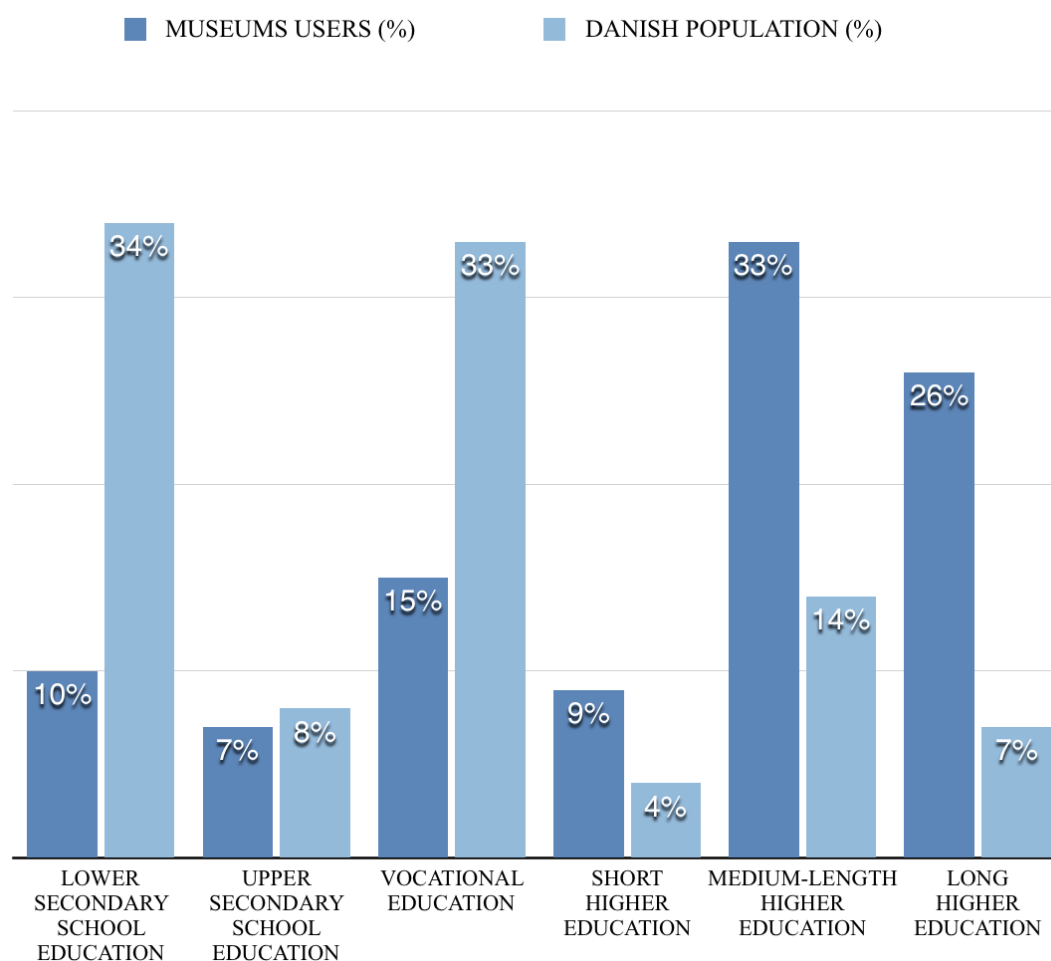


TABLE 1 MUSEUM USERS DISTRIBUTED ACROSS EDUCATIONAL LEVELS (2012)

This survey also reveals that the age distribution remains the same during the three-year period. 66% of the museum goers are older than 50, whereas the users in the age group of 14 to 29 are the most underrepresented. The latter group makes up about 13% of the number of users, but it makes up 23% of the whole population. This survey is a traditional demographic analysis of the visitors with the traditional categories of education and age. It provides basic information for understanding who the visitors are, but there is not enough investigation of the motivation of the visitors and non-visitors.

A study by New York-based research centre Reach Advisor: Museum R+D shows that only “12% of the general public perceive museums as being educational” (“*Do Museums Matter?*”). This is a striking number for people who believe that the educational function is at the core of the museum role. Marilyn G Hood concludes six major attributes that underlie adults’ choices of using leisure time, which helps understand why only 12% of the general public hold this position. According to Hood, a review of 60 years of literature in museum studies, leisure science, sociology, psychology and consumer behaviour identifies the six attributes, and they are,

- being with people, or social interaction
- doing something worthwhile
- feeling comfortable and at ease in one’s surroundings
- having a challenge of new experiences
- having an opportunity to learn
- participating actively (51).

Instead of separating the public into museum participants and non-participants, Hood believes they should be divided into three segments based on their leisure values, interests and expectations: frequent participants, occasional participants and non-participants. Based on the frequently quoted research project conducted by the Toledo Museum of Art in Ohio in 1981, Hood explains that the frequent participants are the ones who visit museums more than three times a year, and they account for 45% to 50% of museum visitation, but they only constitute 14% of the community (54). The three attributes which this group value the most are: having an opportunity to learn, having a challenge of new experience and doing something worthwhile. The opposite of this group - the non-participants - value the other three attributes: social interaction, feeling at ease in the surroundings and participating actively, and this group makes up 46% of the population in the community.

Though some may assume that the occasional participants who visit museums once or twice a year and constitute 40% of the community share more similarities with the frequent participants, the data show that they resemble more the non-participants regarding common values, interests, and characteristics. For the occasional participants and non-participants, 86% of the community, the formal and formidable atmosphere in museums make it difficult for them to find the three leisure attributes that they appreciated the most. Portraying museums as educational institutions does not encourage the majority of the community to pay frequent visits, especially for the ones who “have had negative experiences with formal education” (Hood 56).

Similarly, the data released by IMPACTS in 2013 show that the education experience weighs only 4.77% among the ten criteria which constitute visitors’ overall satisfaction (Dilenschneider).

IMPACTS is an American organisation that provides predictive intelligence to inform development, economic, marketing and policy strategies for visitor-serving organisations, such as museums and theatres. The research covers 224 visitor-serving organisations, and the results show that the weights of different evaluation criteria vary little among different organisations. The calculation of the weight of each criterion involves multiple factors, including the frequency of mentioning and the strength of conviction. Among the ten evaluation criteria, the entertainment experience weighs the most, which is 20.83% of the total, and the lowest is the retail service, which is 3.12%. Right above the retail service is the educational experience, which only weighs 4.77%. This number may not be too surprising after going through the survey conducted by the Danish Agency for Culture, the data released by Reach Advisor and the research project at the Toledo Museum of Art, but it is still thought-provoking for museum managers.

Regarding Hilde’s question, it is important to figure out what makes museums feel that their efforts are under-appreciated by the visitors. The two situations that normally discourage the project managers are: not enough visitors participating in their educational activities and the feedback being not as positive as the museums assume. The explanation for the first situation becomes clearer thanks to the survey conducted by the Danish Agency for Culture. When museums are aiming at serving a minority of the community - people with higher education or relevant knowledge, there won't be enough visitors for the exhibitions, let alone the educational projects. The data released by Reach Advisor and IMPACTS and the project at the Toledo Museum of Art explain the second situation. When wrong dishes are served, it is unlikely to get positive feedback. However, the fact that most people appreciate the entertainment experience most is not entirely discouraging for the educational project managers at museums. The seemingly wrong dishes may be right dishes served in the wrong ways.

Therefore, museums that want to reach a wider audience should bear in mind the majority of the public do not look forward to being primarily educated at museums. The way museums portray and promote themselves directly influences the kinds and numbers of visitors that are attracted. For many museums, this is not a piece of advice that can be easily put into practice, mostly because of the deeply rooted belief of the cultural authority in museums.

2.2 Power and Inequality

We have witnessed the transformation of museums from privileged clubs which “distinguish the bourgeois public from the rough and raucous manners of the general populace by excluding the latter with rules and proscription” (Bennet 28) to educational institutions where all communities are welcome to come and learn. According to a survey conducted by Ginsburgh and Mairesse in Belgium, the majority of the curators that are asked to rank the missions express that “education and permanence” are the highest rated missions of their organisations. Meanwhile, missions that are required by the New Museology, such as “quality of life” and “social role” are not completely ignored, but they are given relatively low priority (21-22). Claire Fox, director of the Institute of Ideas, explains that,

Since the educational remit of museums had been propelled to the top of the agenda, a sense of perspective had been lost which had seriously undermined the other functions of the museum...The whole of museum life is being reorganised around educational ends...learning is no longer to be intermittent, instead it is to be relentless. For some curators, consulting the National Curriculum had become a regular practice before they decided on forthcoming exhibitions. For others, whole sections of collections were never used because they did not fit into the suggested units prescribed by the curriculum's schemes of work...museums and galleries are in danger of prostituting their exhibitions and their work to closed educational and political ends (Ovenden).

What has not changed much during the transformation is the position of museums as cultural authority, which is due to the nature of museums and their claims to a particular status in civil society. The notion of the museum as an authority and the visitor as the learner should be questioned as this imbalance position inevitably produces a power structure. The problem of power

is central to French philosopher Michel Foucault's theories on the relations between individuals, groups, institutions, and society. In Foucaultian terms, museums are institutes of disciplines "which indoctrinate appropriate behaviour in the viewer" and places where cultural values are authorised and specific behaviours encouraged as a means to produce socially acquired knowledge" (Valerie). Eilean Hooper-Greenhill refers to Foucault when she explains how museums contribute to the imposition of order on society, which leads to a monologic rather than a dialogical expression (Akman 191). With the built-in cultural authority, museums uphold and communicate truth, whereas the visitors are receivers of knowledge. The museum as a recognised safety zone in the community creates an unequal relation which is complicated by the visitors' own cultural context and self-awareness inspired by the sacred museum space (Valerie). The deep-rooted impression that museums only serve elites may be incorrect nowadays as most museums are working on providing easier access for the public. However, the image of them portrayed as educational institutions does not help in attracting a wider audience as shown in the data in the previous chapter.

Therefore, the questions are what is the essential role of museums that help eliminate the inequality and become more inclusive, and how to make good use of the power that is everywhere to create a more balanced relationship. Regarding the role of museums, there is no doubt that museums can help to build the community and serve the public. According to Stephen E. Weil, "the positive difference in the quality of people's lives" that museums can make should guide the direction of museums' missions (74). The evaluation standard that United Way Worldwide uses for programmes that build on community strength and assets is: what positive difference can they make in the quality of people's lives. Weil believes that this standard in the health and human-service field can be borrowed by the cultural field, "especially museums" (60). In response to George Brown Goode's early appeal for an educational museum, Benjamin Ives Gilman, the then assistant-director of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, argues that "because of the special nature of art objects and the significance of their communication at the level of sensation and feeling, they must not be treated as scientific specimens to be dissected, analyzed, and interpreted before they are enjoyed" (Tonelli 41). Therefore, Gilman concludes that "a museum of art is primarily an institution of culture and only secondarily a seat of learning" (38), and that "enjoyment is the chief aim of museums of art, instruction a secondary aim" (Zeller 29). Moreover, the claims to truth and beauty made by museums and their staff should be questioned. In the groundbreaking book *Museums and Communities*, Ivan Karp observes that "when people enter museums they do not leave their cultures and identities in the coatroom. Nor do they respond passively to museum displays. They interpret museum exhibitions through their prior experiences and the culturally learned beliefs, values, and

perceptual skills that they gain through membership in multiple communities” (3). Therefore, museums should not be the educational institutions where people learn how to enjoy the experience which is often intensely private and self-transforming. Museum professionals are not primarily teachers, and what the communities need from them is an environment where people can be engaged in different topics, which creates different experience for different individuals.

There is now increasing recognition that “a museum can act as the catalyst for positive social change” and deliver a range of social outcomes, “at both individual and community levels, aimed at tackling social inequality, discrimination and disadvantage” (*“Museums and Social Inclusion”*). To reach these goals, museums themselves should not serve as tools to identify different classes in the community. Museums must become more inclusive to remove the physical and mental barriers that keep many groups away from museums. Emphasising the cultural authority that lies in museums does not help during this process. Instead, according to museologist Duncan Cameron, there should be a change in the museum which is metaphorically a shift from the authoritative “temple” of learning and culture to the contextualized “forum” where multiple voices and perspectives happen for experiments and innovation (11-24). Similarly, the Declaration of Caracas called upon the acknowledgment of museums as “means of communication in the service of communities” (Dos Santos 6). This “forum” serves as a meeting place where everyone is welcome. Lise Johansen argues that the parties in a conversation must have a neutral meeting place as the “common arena” (Akman 190). Moreover, the meeting should be examined regarding the power balance between parties. Only dialogues may provide possibilities for new thinking and syncretism.

Johansen refers to Paulo Freire when she explains that the meeting place can be turned into an open arena where “situations in which knowledge is used to exercise power can be avoided.” If the balance can not be achieved, according to Freire, a situation of “anti-dialogue” which does not serve as a door-opener but as a tool to obtain power over the conversation through your own argument, knowledge, and understanding” (Akman 191).

Regarding the question of how to make good use of power to create a more balanced relationship, we need to explore the possibilities for the audience that is often considered as a passive entity to become active agents. Power is everywhere. However, only when the power of every party involved reaches a balance, will there be positive outcomes. The next chapter explores the answer to the question of balance using the ancient oriental philosophy - Taoism.

Despite the fact that the roots of Taoism go back to the pre-Qin period (2100 BC-221 BC) in ancient China, the philosophy has a worldwide influence on difference subjects. In China, the Tao (“道”, literally means “the Way”) is a basic notion for various philosophical schools. Meanwhile, in the Western world, there are more than 250 translated versions of *Tao Te Ching*, one of the fundamental texts for both philosophical and religious Taoism. According to UNESCO statistics, *Tao Te Ching* is the second most translated world cultural classic (Cao 78). The Tao helps people to understand the order of nature and the power that is everywhere. The order and the harmony of nature are “far more stable and enduring than either the power of the state or the civilized institutions constructed by human learning” (Berling 9). The Tao is widely used in explaining the relationship between human beings and nature. However, it also provides inspirations in understanding relationships between individuals, or between individuals and organisations. The philosophy was widely used by ancient Chinese emperors when they established political, cultural and military policies. Taoism calls on inclusive cultural and political policies, which resonates with more and more people in today’s world which is full of tension. Therefore, the Taoist philosophical terms, especially the notion of Yin and Yang can provide new angles to understand the relationship between museums and visitors and the power that is involved.

It is impossible to include all philosophical terms in this thesis as Taoism comprises numerous schools in its twenty-two-century-long history. The three most important stages of the development of Taoist philosophy are Pre-Qin Lao-Zhuang philosophical Taoism (before 222 BC), Qin and Han dynasty Huang-Lao philosophical Taoism (221 BC - 220 CE), and the mystical Taoism of the Wei and Jin dynasties (220 CE - 420 CE). Pre-Qin Taoist philosophy serves as the conceptual foundation for difference schools in the later stages. Therefore, this chapter mainly focuses on the key concepts of *Tao Te Ching*, and *Zhuangzi*. For some people, it is easy to confuse philosophical Taoism with religious Taoism. However, they are different in many aspects, and it is essential to understand the differences before applying Taoist concepts to any topic.

3.1 Differences between Philosophical Taoism and Religious Taoism

For some westerners, Taoism is a myth from the remote Orient. However, even for some Chinese people, it is difficult to identify the differences between philosophical Taoism and religious Taoism.

Because some of the terms are widely used in their daily life, most Chinese people get used to them and ignore the importance of seeking the origin of these concepts. Through analysing the historical background, key characters, and social impact of philosophical Taoism and religious Taoism, the similarities and differences between the two become less obscure.

The Chinese term for philosophical Taoism is Taojia (道家), which consists of concepts including advocating naturalness, dialectics ideology and the tendency of atheism (Tan 18). Based on archaeological findings at Guodian in 1993 and Mawangdui in the 1970s, it is speculated that there have been several simultaneously circulating versions of *Tao Te Ching*- the fundamental text for Taoism- since as early as 300 BC. The Tao, which is literally translated as the Way, and Wu Wei (literally means non-doing or letting things go their own way) are defined by Laozi (c. 571 BC—471 BC) and Zhuangzi (c. 369 BC—287 BC) as the two most important core concepts of philosophical Taoism. The two concepts will be explained further in Chapter 3.2.

The rise of Taojiao (道教) -religious Taoism can be traced back to various religious movements in the Han dynasty (206 BC–220 CE). The religious practices include both worshipping the Taoist Gods inside the Taoist temples and a collection of body-mind techniques for preserving health to achieve immortality (Guo 28). Comparing to philosophical Taoism, religious Taoism provides more practical guides for its followers. Qi (vital energy) is the fundamental element for religious Taoism followers, as they believe the right daily practice with Qi can lead them to good health and eventually reach eternity and became one of the Gods (Lv 50).

Zhang Daoling (34 CE - 156 CE) is a vital figure in the history of religious Taoism as he is the founder and first patriarch of the movement called the Way of the Celestial Masters - the first school of religious Taoism (Zhang 16). Zhang claims to have received a revelation from Laozi and begins to prophesy the coming of time called Great Peace, and Zhang promises physical immortality and longevity to his followers who are required to contribute five pecks of rice per person annually, which is the reason why the movement's initial name is The Way of the Five Pecks of Rice (Zhang 14). Its faith-healing method is particularly attractive for the public as he claims that illness is a result of sinful-mindedness which can be cured by confessing, and through purification, one can achieve the physical health (MacHenry 84).

Back to philosophical Taoism, there are several key figures, among whom Laozi is the most important one, for he is considered as the first known philosopher in China, and his renowned work *Tao Te Ching* is recorded as the first philosophical text that has influenced numerous schools, including Confucianism and Chinese Buddhism (Liu and Wang 104). Laozi tries to build a theory

that explains the natural order of the universe. He believes that everything follows a law which is called the Tao (the Way). Though the law is esoteric, it is worth exploring and studying as it can help to answer the essential questions of life and bring the ultimate inner peace and happiness.

During the East Han Dynasty (25 CE--220 CE), Laozi gradually becomes a mythical figure who is worshiped by the public and most emperors.

Zhuangzi is another key figure in Taoism, as he is one of the most crucial successors of Laozi. His Taoist text *Zhuangzi* is considered one of the definitive texts of Taoism and his poetic, humorous and mythical writing style and rich imagination has deeply influenced the styles of prose and poetry in Han, Tang, and Song Dynasties (Huang 153). Though Zhuangzi is seen as a follower of Laozi, he has a different attitude towards the nation's rulers and some alternative explanations for the major Taoism concepts due to his unique personal background. One of the major differences between the thoughts of Laozi and Zhuangzi is how to interpret the concept of Wu Wei (non-action), which is described and compared in the next chapter.

Besides the two Taoist masters who are worshiped by religious Taoism followers as deities, there are various other figures in the history of philosophical Taoism. The famous Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove have been associated with the new Taoist way of life which is to express themselves in art and culture. The Seven Sages are a group of poets, musicians, and scholar-officials in Shanyang (now in Henan province) around 240-250 CE. The group includes the famous musicians Xi Kang (223-262) and Ruan Ji (210-263). The other members of the group are Shan Tao (205-283), Wang Rong (234-305), Ruan Xian (234-305) Xiang Xiu (221-300), and Liu Ling (225-280). The Seven Sages' concepts are often cited as Taoist or 'Neo-Taoist', and the group is involved in a philosophical movement derived from classic Taoist texts including *Tao Te Ching* and *Zhuangzi* called Dark Learning (Xuanxue). The aim of the movement is to question social conventions and seek the understanding of the Tao to reach spiritual freedom (Little and Eichman 185). The Seven Sages live at around the same time when religious Taoism begins to spread in Sichuan Province, but the group has a tenuous connection to religious Taoism.

Unlike philosophical Taoism, as an indigenous religion in China, religious Taoism has a clear hierarchical and well-organized structure with special headquarters, rules, guidelines, ordination rites and registration procedures like most religions ("*Religious Taoism traditions*"). Philosophical Taoism and Religious Taoism are always intimately related, but the value orientations of the two are fundamentally different. "there is no reason to see Taoist religion as a product of the degeneration and corruption of a pure Taoist philosophy. The relationship between the two should be seen in a different light" ("*Similarities and differences between*").

Philosophical Taoism is not strictly institutionalised, and it passes down from generation to generation using different channels. As it is deeply rooted in Chinese culture and various philosophical schools have been influenced by it, most Chinese people learn from it without specific studies. For people who follow and practice philosophical Taoism, the ideal life is living in harmony with others and the nature, whereas the religious Taoism followers seek extreme longevity or even immortality.

Though philosophical Taoism has existed for more than two thousand years, and religious Taoism more than one thousand years, they still have great practical significance to today's society. Taojiao as a religion is beneficial for its followers to find hope and answers for life through the religious rituals and practices. Some of the taoist theories and practices have greatly influenced the traditional Chinese medicine on the understanding of the positive influence of the daily practice of Qi (vital energy) on health. On the other hand, philosophical Taoism has larger influence since it provides the theoretical framework for religious Taoism. The study of philosophical Taoism has become more valuable especially in today's world where conflicts are disturbing people's life, because it provides tools to reach harmony. The concept of harmony in philosophical Taoism includes the harmony between people, the harmony between people and nature, and the harmony between people and society (Zeng 362). Therefore, it can also be applied to understanding the relationship between museums and visitors. Where there is a relationship, there can be realisable harmony according to the Tao, and Taoism provides a methodology on realising it. The vital part of the methodology is the concept of Yin Yang.

3.2 Yin Yang and the Relationship

Yin Yang has been integral to Chinese culture for thousands of years and has been seen as a unique way to understand the world and the greater universe. The extensive and profound explanations of Yin Yang provide the fundamental elements of Chinese culture and philosophies. The concept of Yin Yang "lies at the origins of many branches of classical Chinese science and philosophy, as well as being a primary guideline of traditional Chinese medicine" (Guimaraes 163). The original concept of yin and yang came from the observation of nature and the environment. In ancient China, people were greatly interested in viewing the world as a "harmonious and holistic entity" instead of studying isolated things. "In their eyes, no single being or form could exist unless it was seen in relation to its surrounding environment. By simplifying these relationships, they tried to

explain complicated phenomena in the universe” (Zhang 6). According to the current documented records, Bo Yangfu was the first person in Chinese history that used the concept of Yin Yang in the late Zhou Dynasty (1015 BC-771 BC) (Wu 55). Bo believed that earthquakes were caused by the disorder between Yin and Yang in nature. However, the concept of Yin Yang in Bo’s articles was only applied to nature matters. It was Laozi who firstly expanded Yin and Yang into the philosophical field (Qiang 50). In *Tao Te Ching* Chapter 42, he wrote, “Everything carries Yin and embraces Yang. They achieve harmony by combining these forces” (Feng and English). This original thinking inspires numerous philosophy schools in China as well as in the Western world. So what exactly is Yin Yang? An easier way to understand it is to start from recognising its symbol (FIGURE 1).



FIGURE 1 YIN YANG SYMBOL

The symbol of Yin Yang is also called Taijitu which literally means the diagram of the supreme ultimate. The symbol is made of four parts: the white side (Yang), the black side (Yin), the black dot inside the white side (Yin in Yang), and the white dot inside the black side (Yang in Yin). The Chinese characters for Yin are 阴 (simplified Chinese) and 陰 (traditional Chinese). The two characters literally mean the shaded area or the female principle. The Chinese characters for Yang are 阳 (simplified Chinese) and 陽 (traditional Chinese). Both characters mean the sunny area or the male principle. All four characters share the same radical 阝 which means “hill”. Therefore, the original description of Yin Yang is the movement of sunlight over a mountain. Yin is the dark area, while Yang is the sunny spot. As the sun moves across the sky, Yin and Yang change the position with each other. That is why Yin and Yang are used to describe how seemingly opposite forces may give rise to each other in an interrelated relationship. Though it may seem that Yin and Yang are two matters or forces, they are considered as interacting to form “a dynamic system in which the whole is greater than the assembled parts” (Shasho 152). It is impossible to talk about Yin or Yang separately, as they appear as interdependent parts of a mutual whole. The same principle can be

applied to museums and visitors. When talking about the influence or social role of museums, they can not be seen as separated parties, because only the interaction of Yin and Yang can give birth to new things, and the new things here refer to the positive influence that museums can have in the community or every individual visitor. The idea that museums hold the cultural authority that has the responsibility of teaching others shows that museums are the Yang in the relationship, as Yang means masculine, dominant and active, while visitors as learners are the Yin - feminine, submissive and passive. However, the Taoist philosophy believes that Yin and Yang are neither absolute nor static. Instead, they are relative (Ohsawa 48). The Yin Yang symbol shows the seed of Yin in Yang and the seed of Yang in Yin. The two may change into each other in different situations with a dynamic flow. A relationship of harmony can be reached during the movement when the two are equal and balanced, in which the two blend into a seamless whole that resembles the swirling Yin Yang symbol (FIGURE 2).

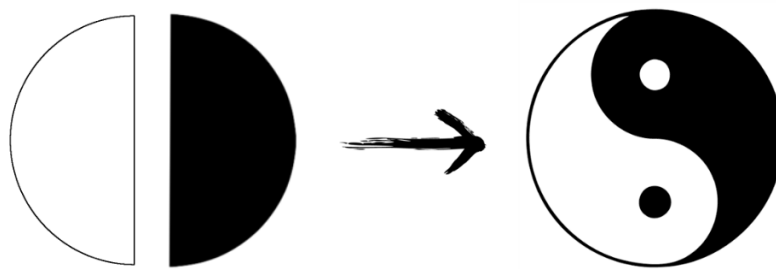


FIGURE 2 THE MOVEMENT OF YIN AND YANG

The catalyst for positive social change is not solely created by museums. Instead, it is a product of the harmonious interaction between museums and visitors. This ceaseless movement between Yin and Yang causes the balance, imbalance and rebalance in the relationship. Generally, there are four kinds of imbalance: deficiency Yang, deficiency Yin, excess Yang and excess Yin (Men and Guo 74). Since the two are in one energy zone, the imbalances can appear in pairs. For example, an excess of Yang can simulate a Yin deficiency. An absolute authority may cause resistance because “things will develop in the opposite direction when they become extreme” (Hou 20). Laozi writes in *Tao Te Ching* Chapter 55, “Whatever has been forced to a peak of vigor approaches its decay. This is not the way of Tao. And that which goes against the Tao will quickly pass away” (McCarroll). If this is not the way of Tao, then what is Tao? An explicit understanding of Yin Yang requires looking back into the Tao. Therefore, another question is: what is the relation between Yin Yang and the Tao?

The first paragraph in the first chapter of *Tao Te Ching* says: “The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao” (Feng and English). However, this does not stop people from trying to find the explanation. For thousands of years, there has been endless debates and discussions on the relation between Yin Yang and the Tao.

For instance, the Chinese philosopher Cheng Yi from North Song Dynasty (960 CE-1279 CE) believes that the transformation between Yin and Yang is the movement of Qi, which should not be called the Tao. The Tao is the reason that of the existence of Yin Yang and the movement. However, Wang Pang (from the same era) clearly puts forward the idea that Yin Yang is the Tao. The two have different understandings of the Tao, which are two mainstream interpretations. (. . .) Cheng Yi separates the body of the Tao and the application of the Tao, and he believes only the body of the Tao can be called the Tao, whereas the application of the Tao (for example, the changing patterns of Yin Yang) should not be called the Tao. Wang Pang explains that the body of the Tao and the application of the Tao are both the forms of the Tao (Yin).

Though Wang Pang’s concept of Tao is broader than Cheng Yi’s, he admits that Yin Yang is a way to apply the Tao, which accords with the original text written by Laozi. The beginning of Chapter 42 in *Tao Te Ching* says, “The Tao begot one. One begot two. Two begot three. And three begot the ten thousand things” (Feng and English). Most scholars believe that the “one” means Qi, “two” means Yin Yang, and “three” is the different proportions of Yin and Yang that give birth to all kinds of things (Lin 46). However, in this part, Laozi only talks about Yin Yang from the angle of the origin of the universe, and it is not directly about the definition of Yin Yang. What is clear here is that the influence and effect of Yin Yang are the fundamental rule of how everything works and the driving power of the changes of things. As it is not easy to directly explain what is Yin Yang, an alternative way to understand them is to see how they are applied in real life. The two most obvious examples are traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) and Tai Chi (Taijiquan). TCM sees a healthy human body as a well-balanced whole, which may suffer imbalances (diseases) when Yin and Yang of the person are not in a harmonious state.

Tai Chi is a kind of Chinese martial arts, which is practiced not only for its defence function but also for its various health benefits for human bodies. It was created by a Kung Fu master in Henan province in China in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties (1644-1912) (Shapira 124). The principles of Yin Yang and Taiji (the supreme ultimate) are Tai Chi’s fundamental philosophical

guidance. There are different styles and branches of Tai Chi, and altogether there are around forty steps of treating Jin (energy), among which the most important three that can be applied to the relationship between museums and visitors are Ting Jin (sense energy), Dong Jin (understand energy) and Hua Jin (absorb or redirect energy). The first two are easy for museums to understand, which are listening to the visitors and understanding their need. There are plenty of data that show what frequent visitors, occasional visitors, and non-visitors need or may not need from museum visiting, as shown in the first chapter. For museums that are willing to try to understand their visitors and attract more of them, the most important point is to comprehend the third step of treating Jin in Tai Chi - Hua Jin. The Chinese character hua (化) literally means to absorb. Taoists believe that applying brute force to defence can only cause both sides injured. Instead, the force of the opponent should be borrowed and used in a soft way, which is to “follow its motion while remaining in physical contact until the incoming force of attack exhausts itself or can be safely redirected, meeting Yang with Yin” (Baofu 114). Laozi also explains this in Chapter 78 in *Tao Te Ching*: “Nothing under heaven is softer or more yielding than water. Yet it has no equal for attacking things that are hard and stiff. Nothing can withstand it. The yielding overcomes the stiff, and the soft overcomes the hard” (McCarroll). If the unwillingness of the non-participants is seen as the opponent, museums should understand the energy and guide it the way they want it to be. Apparently, showing the authority at this stage will only do the opposite, as the three attributes of quality leisure time that the occasional participants and non-participants value the most are: social interaction, feeling at ease in the surroundings and participating actively, and these two kinds of people constitute the majority of the community. The coincidence is that the oriental Taoist philosophy has direct answers to the questions of how to satisfy each of these three needs.

Equality

Equality is a fundamental rule in Taoist philosophy. Among the Pre-Qin schools, Taoism represents the intellectuals, whose social status and mentality are different from ruling classes that follow Confucianism and the business people who follow Mohism (Li 81). Therefore, the Taoists hold a more open and inclusive attitude which leads to the ideas about equality. For thousands of years, the Taoism has been introducing the equality between individuals, the equality between individuals and institutions and the equality between human beings and all the other creatures (nature) as the Tao is found in everything. The Taoist master Zhuangzi explicitly expresses the idea of equality in his renowned work *Zhuangzi*. The most famous story in *Zhuangzi* is “the Butterfly Dream” in *Chapter*

2: the Equality of Things. “Once Zhuangzi dreamed he was a butterfly, a fluttering butterfly, contented and at ease with no awareness of being Zhuang. Suddenly awake, he is stiffly Zhuang. Was it Zhuang who dreamed of being a butterfly or the butterfly who dreamed of being Zhuang?” (Chong 46) This story explains Zhuangzi’s idea of transformation between things whose positions are seemingly explicit, which leads to the ultimate equality that lies between any living beings. It is essential for museums to see the equality between the institutions and the visitors. It is easier to understand the importance if they realise that the art and culture that are shown in the museums are created by people who are the visitors at the same time. The artworks, the artists, and the curators are not the supreme ones, as they come from the community, the same community where the visitors are from. They are the Yang that can change into Yin in different contexts. Indeed, it is crucial for museums to understand this logic, but it is of greater importance for the non-participants, the majority of the community, to realise this truth, which can help them to enjoy freely the social interaction, relaxing feeling and active participation that they long for at museums.

Experience

Comparing to Confucianism’s emphasis on rational knowledge, Taoism focuses more on sensible experience (Peng 540). Laozi indicates that the way to understand the Tao is through experiencing with a direct feeling, instead of relying on speculative logic, which is similar to the aesthetic appreciation of artworks (Mou 52). Ji Kang, one of the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove introduces the famous theory of “music has no emotions”. He believes that there is no sadness or happiness in music itself, but it can trigger different feelings (Li 22). It is not the objects but the interaction between viewers, artworks, and the museums that creates meanings, and it is the subjective feelings which are unique for different people that should be appreciated. The non-visitors or occasional visitors who spend most of the time at museums wandering around or taking selfies may not be interested in the objects or artworks per se, but should they be criticised, scorned or educated because they lack relevant knowledge and are inferior to the frequent visitors? According to the Confucian doctrines which focus on the development of rational knowledge, the answer may be yes. However, Taoism respects the individual mental experience more because it leads to the real Tao. The tourists may feel relaxed and content after the selfie tour with the artworks as background. The couples who come to the museums for romantic dates may finish the day with more love in the heart. These are also the positive changes that museums can trigger in community beside the knowledge that they provide. Once they feel comfortable and enjoy the visit, the

occasional visitors can become frequent visitors, and they may bring more non-visitors. Think of the influence of the selfies that the tourists post on social media platforms.

Wu Wei

One of the most easily misunderstood concepts of Taoism is Wu Wei because the two Chinese characters “无为” literally mean “non-action”, which makes some people think that Wu Wei is a form of passivity or laziness. Apart from the literal meaning of Wu Wei, different theories of this concept from different schools of Taoism also help to cause the misunderstanding. The explanation of Wu Wei by Laozi differs from that by Zhuangzi and Liezi. *Tao Te Ching* Chapter 2 explains that “the True Person acts without striving and teaches without words”, and Chapter 2 says “practice action without striving and all will be in order ” (McCarroll). Wu Wei by Laozi is far from doing nothing or encouraging passive bystanders. In fact, Laozi’s concepts have enlightened numerous emperors on how to rule a prosperous country and enlightened people to be active members of the society. However, Zhuangzi and Liezi from the Warring States Period (475-221BC) had different opinions. In that era, the wars and conflicts that lasted three-hundred years made some people believe that any reform within the government would be useless, and Zhuangzi and Liezi were among them (Wong 26). Wu Wei for them is more about noninvolvement, as both of them regard “social conventions as the greatest enemy of personal freedom and integrity” (Wong 27). Therefore, this concept becomes less of a definitive philosophical idea comparing to Laozi’s, but more of a living instruction to participate less in social affairs. Zhuangzi and Liezi’s lived as hermits in their later life, wandering freely in nature and absorbing the direct energy from the natural world, which is greatly honoured by religious Taoism.

Wu Wei here refers to the concept in *Tao Te Ching* as it has more realistic significance on the museum issues. Wu Wei by Laozi means to act after analysing the trends and the natural laws to reach the state of “action with non-action” - an action that does not involve struggle or excessive effort (Sheng 115). People or organisations who follow the Tao should not interfere with or force things, and what they should do is to let things come and go their own way following their natural tendency, like practicing Tai Chi. This is also explained in *Tao Te Ching* Chapter 64 - “the True Person acts without striving and does no harm, avoids grabbing and never loses hold,” and he or she “assists the ten thousand things to find their own natures; all without daring to

interfere” (McCarroll). Therefore, the state of Wu Wei seems like a situation with non-action, but in fact, it is a state of harmonious Yin and Yang, a desired state of any relationship.

The community made up by people is the natural environment for museums, as it is where museums are created. Hence, museums should understand the natural rules of the community and what the public really want. The opposite of Wu Wei is to ignore the natural tendency of things and the subjective initiative of people, which may be the reason why some museums feel exhausted and under-appreciated after all the effortful attempts to attract more visitors. At the same time, there are institutions and projects that are aiming in the right direction. The next chapter explains the Tao that lies in the projects of Dutch museum night and Google Art.

CHAPTER 4 THE CASE STUDIES

4.1. The Museum Night in the Netherlands

“No Shouting!”

“No Drinking!”

“No Running!”

“No Photos!”

“Open Until 5pm. ”

...

These are common museums rules. It is difficult for most people to imagine museums without these rules unless they have been to one. The Museum Night (Museumnacht) in the Netherlands provides the chance for people to enjoy an almost rules-free moment at various museums all over the country till 2 o'clock in the morning. The events have been held in different cities in the Netherlands. Till now, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, Utrecht, Leiden, Delft all have their own annual Museum Night events. During the night of the events, each city combines diverse city facilities to let visitors get involved with the Museum programmes. The Museum Night collaborates with museums, various sources of art events such as live DJ performances, theatre plays, films, entertainment zones, experience booth, food corner, and parties. Using their collections as the background, museums offer entertainment experiences on those occasions. Visitors are able to buy one ticket to get access to all the museums that participate in the particular city. Jan Willem Sieburgh, former Managing Director of the Rijksmuseum and former Chairman of the Board of the Museum Night

believes that museum is a place where people get away from the hectic pace of everyday life and see things in a different perspective (Wesseling). In this sense, museum visiting becomes “the new recreational shopping”, which attracts more visitors with performing arts, media arts and films (Council for Culture 33). The Museum Night brings people together and creates a special showcase for visitors, performers, painters, poets, historians, scientists, lecturers and other creative personalities to participate interactively. People who hear about this event for the first time may question its practicality and worry about the safety of the artworks and objects, as we are used to the regular museum rules. However, the Museum Night has already had an obvious positive effect by attracting more visitors to the museums. Including the people who participate in the museums’ programmes for the first time, during the thirteen years, more than 160,000 visitors have been attracted by the Rotterdam Museum Night, and more than sixty different institutions have participated with attractive themes (“*Rotterdamse Museumnacht*”).

Among the various Museum Night events in the Netherlands, one of the most famous events is the Amsterdam Museum Night, which has been on since 2003. Around 45 museums in Amsterdam participate annually. The museums open from 7 p.m. until 2 a.m. on the first Saturday of November. The Museum Night wants to get the museums familiar with the world that young adults live in and vice versa. According to Geer Oskam, previous director of Stichting Museumnacht Amsterdam, the original purpose of the Museum Night is to “engage a new and young audience (18-35 years old) with the museums of Amsterdam,” regardless of their background and education levels (“*Bringing young people*”). Taoism may not be at the core of the Museum Night founders’ thoughts when building up the project, but their attempts to bring things to a cohesive equal position are in accordance with the Taoist philosophy. It pushes museums from their sacred position which is similar to a religious rite, and redundant rules are abandoned. When young people are drinking and dancing to the latest electro music, or cooking and drawing inside the museums, the authority of museums disappears, and the top-down relationship vanishes. Museums are no longer the dominant educator, nor are visitors receivers. The visitors become active and creative. The masculine and dominant Yang position which museums always take is shaken; the visitors who used to be feminine and subordinate Yin start to take charge. The communication and the connection between the visitors and the museums become equal. The various themes and the change in the relationship are appealing to many new audiences as museums become more accessible for them. “People who do not ordinarily visit museums but who are interested in the issue being discussed will be drawn to the museum” (Versloot 33). This new state of relationship resembles Tai Chi in Taoism. With museums backing off, visitors become dominant, but at the same time, museums are not absent.

Museums still guide the visitors through different events and provide opportunities for visitors to communicate with different forms of art. The invisible energy created by this back and forth movement in the relationship is vital for the creation of positive changes - the inspiration, the communication, the enjoyment and finally, the wish to come back.

Another common ground between the Museum Night and philosophical Taoism principles is the emphasis on good experience. During the night, museums try their best to let visitors have memorable experiences. For instance, traditionally, the primary role of security guards is to protect the objects and artworks. They usually stand still in police-like uniforms providing strict reminders for visitors not to touch the art or, in some cases, even get too close to it. During the Museum Night, some of the security staff even dress up in different themes and interact with the visitors. Their most important duty is still to protect the objects, but the changes in their dressing and attitude help a lot in creating a more comfortable and at ease environment. Nowadays, the visitors' desire for "intense experiences, 'atmosphere' and excitement is increasing. (...) And the need for experience is reflected in the growing number of activities during the visit: package deals with several cultural activities, preferably with a dinner and after-party" (Council for Culture 34). The sensible experience indicated by Laozi explains that the way to understand the Tao is through experiencing with a direct feeling, instead of relying on speculative logic. On appreciating the artworks, the sensible experience at the Museum Night is more beneficial and less stressful for the visitors to enjoy art. The theory of "music has no emotions" shows that the interaction among the visitors, the artworks and the museums can create meanings, comfort or relief, and the Museum Night provides a proper platform for this. For most of the museums, the Museum Night gives a good opportunity to conduct in-depth research on existing and potential audiences for future strategies on attracting a new audience and keeping current visitors. "Through this effort, museums have discovered that audiences have much of value to tell them, and that by using a variety of formal and informal methods to gather information; they can improve the visitor experience" ("*Service to People*"). Every individual has his or her own talents and characters. The interaction between individuals and artworks may contain diverse ways of appreciation. The artworks themselves have no "melody", and it all depends on the visitors' own understanding combined with their personal experience. Let them take selfies or wander around, because they may get as much inspiration as the ones who come to obtain art knowledge. Instead of being "conveyors of information", museums during the Museum Night "invite people to share in thinking and doing, and in dialogue. Museums are not only a place of contemplation and 'serious pleasure' for the visitors but also a platform and meeting place" for people and ideas to be connected through culture experiencing (Versloot 15). "This connection is no

longer established through traditional presentations or at the same cultural institution like the museums, but at the festival, around a music genre or as fans of an artist” (Council for Culture 35). The meaning, comfort or relief created in this harmonious relationship may turn occasional visitors into regular visitors in the (near) future.

The Museum Night project is also an excellent example of applying the concept of Wu Wei. When the founder of the Museum Night talks about the process of organising the project, ‘the challenge for the museum is to let it go. (...) It’s a Friday evening in a museum from 8:00 until midnight. This is the biggest challenge I think, letting the museums back off. (...) The good things are a new audience in the museums. The bad thing is sometimes museums act like politicians’ (*“Bringing young people”*). The “politician” or authoritative act is the opposite of Wu Wei. The traditional relationship between museums and visitors lacks fluency of connection and communication. Wu Wei by Laozi means to act after analysing the trends and act following the natural laws to reach the state of “action with non-action”. Since the purpose of a museum is attracting more visitors to create positive energy in the community, the trends of what the visitors are willing to experience should get deserved attention. The Museum Night helps museums to reach the state of Wu Wei by providing the buildings, the collections, and various interactive programmes. However, the stars in the spot light are no longer the collections, but the visitors. No more forcing to learn; no more exhausting attempts. Younger people or people with lower education levels may feel that they are welcomed at the Museum Night when they see that their culture is also accepted by museums and they themselves can create art inside the museums. Though the Museum Night in each city is only once per year, there are gradually more and more similar programmes that can help museums to achieve Wu Wei. For example, there is the annual Museum Weekend, which is organized by Nederlandse Museum Vereniging (Netherlands Museums Association), an organisation that is committed to promoting the image of museums and increasing the public interest in museums. Museums participating in the event provide discounts or free entrance to visitors and organize special activities. “The purpose is to attract occasional museum visitors; people who might visit a museum while on holiday, but rarely or never on other occasions” (DSP-groep 11). These projects are leading museums to the right direction, as they are considerate of the occasional visitors and non-visitors who look for social interaction, comfortable surroundings, and active participation. When their needs are met, visitors are no longer staying in the shade of Yin, but becoming active characters. If you walk into one museum during the Museum Night, you will see that visitors are making art. After all, the public is the both the object and subject of our culture. Of course, the purpose is not to turn museums into playgrounds with no rules, as they still have the responsibility

to take care of the collections. Also, the diverse entertainment experiences are not going to replace the educational programmes at museums. The needs of the frequent visitors should still be well considered, as well as those of the occasional visitors and non-visitors.

4.2. Google Art Project

Most of the time, museums appear to be a sacred place full of strict rules, and some are even located in solemn and majestic buildings with lots of stairs for visitors to climb. Moreover, normally the opening time is between 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. For some people, there's no chance in their whole life to travel to another continent to visit their long-dreamed museums. All of these conditions cause barriers for people with physical disabilities, people who cannot spare time during the day or people who are not rich enough to travel the world. Many people have imagined a museum "without walls" that can be visited anywhere and any time. Digital museum projects like the Google Art Project create such an extra option.

The original idea of the Google Art Project is to provide the opportunity to millions of people to have access to a large number of prestigious museums in the world. Amid Sood, the head of the project expressed in TED TALKS, grew up in India, which made it difficult for him to visit institutional museums when he was not living close to a cultural centre or museum zone (*"Building a Museum"*). Google Art & Culture is an online platform that provides diverse functions to the online visitors around the world, and they also provide an APP that can be used on mobile phones. The website and APP help you explore thousands of artworks from more than 17 of the world's top museums. By using Google's "Street View" technology, the online participants can take virtual museum tours when they are at any place with the internet at anytime. When the visitors click on the floor plan of galleries and museums, they can "walk" freely in the virtual reality. The project provides high-resolution images that can be zoomed in and out.

From a distance, the painting titled *Violin and Guitar* looks abstract. But when you get closer, this painting by Juan Gris at the Museo Reina Sofia in Madrid has recognizable parts of the two musical instruments. You can read the notes and see the painting -- from a distance and up close, very close -- on the Web site for the Google Art Project (Pack 42).

While taking the virtual tour the visitors can stop in front of any object or artwork, and zoom in with Picasa, a technology providing the online visitors with the microscope view to zoom in on images for details which are almost impossible to see in a real museum setting as most of the time people cannot get close enough to the paintings with a magnifier (FIGURE 3 &4).

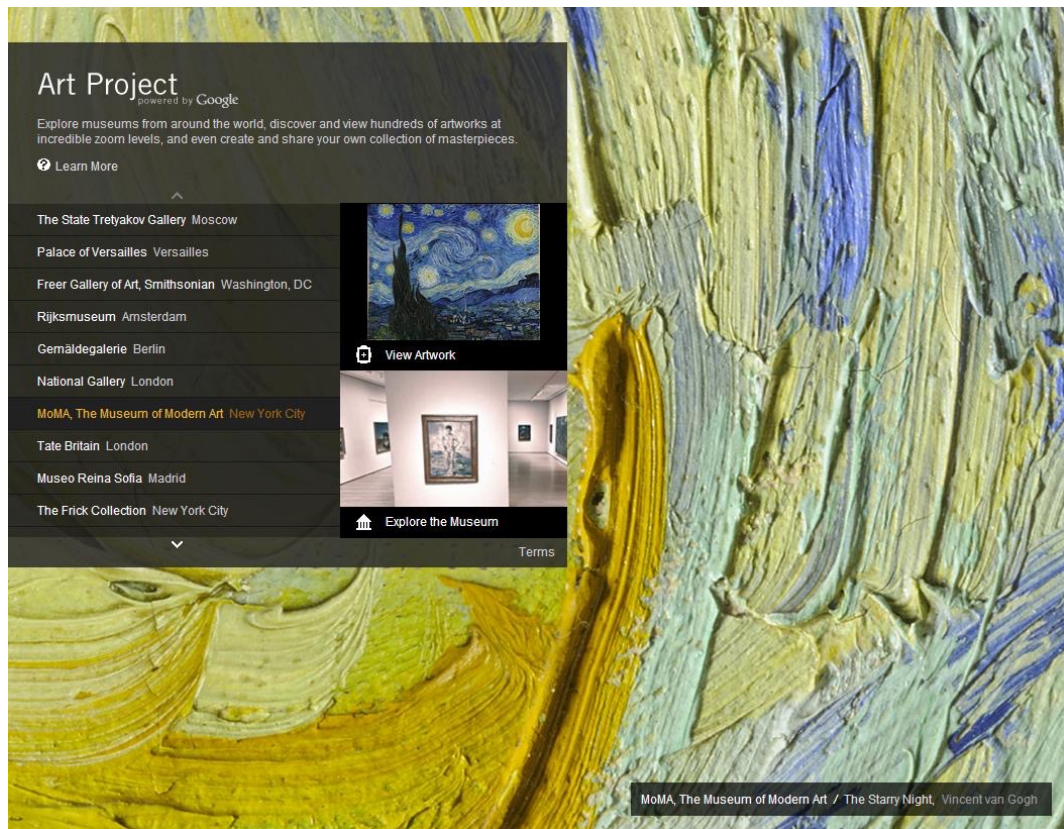


FIGURE 3 Google Art Project featuring Vincent Van Gogh's The Starry Night

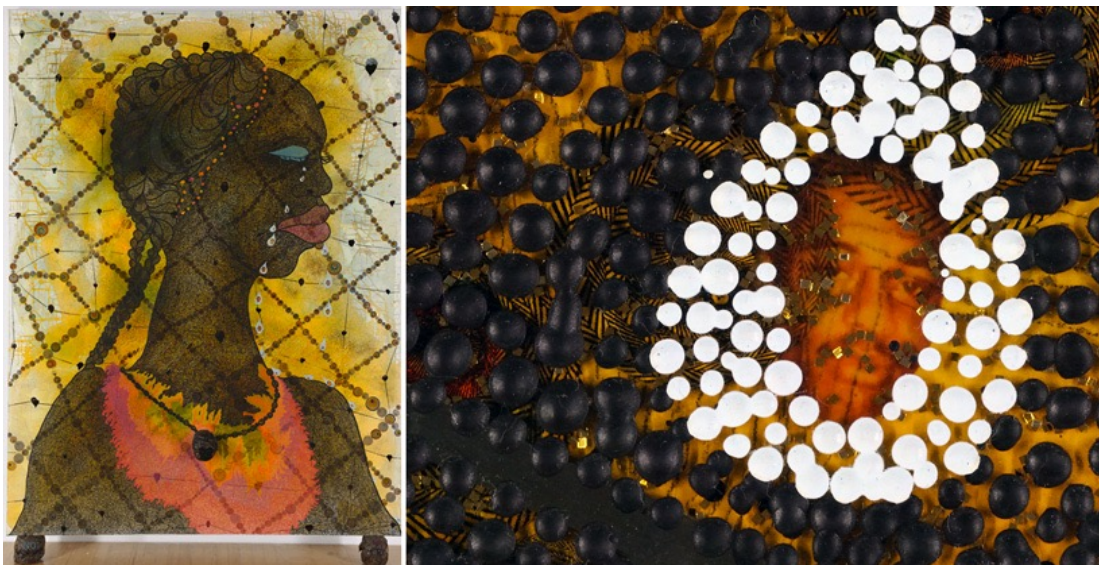


FIGURE 4 full and 3/4 zoom views of Chris Ofili's 'No Woman, No Cry'

Moreover, online visitors can comment on the artworks, share them with friends or create their own collections. If the visitors want to get more information about the artworks, they can always find out the details using Google Scholar, Google Docs, and YouTube on the same page.

However, there are always people who become conservative in front of new things, which is understandable. There are people, including researchers holding a wait-and-see attitude on the trends of digitalisation. For example, they think “although the Google Art Project provides visitors virtual 3D museum environment to browse and view the works of art, the experience of standing in front of the real works still cannot be replaced by browsing works in a virtual environment” (Mediati 16). However, the visual museums are no competitor or threat for the traditional museums. The aim of the Google Art is not to replace the experience of being in the real museums, and “standing in front of the real works” is the only way to appreciate art. When the geographical distance is a difficulty that is not easy to overcome, the digital method provides us an alternative option which costs less and is more efficient. The audience of a museum is no longer limited to the city inhabitants or tourists, but consists of visitors around the globe. What’s more, people who get inspired by the digital pictures are more likely to generate the desire to visit the museums and see the paintings in reality. This desire helps visitors to get out of the zone of Yin and become active. Think of the millions of people who come to the Rijksmuseum to see Rembrandt's Night Watch which is first seen by most people in a text book at school.

This is not the first time that people show fear of new technology in the art field. The history dates back to the time when photography was invented. In 1947, Malraux - an art theorist, novelist and France’s first minister of culture - presented his “museum without walls,” “where works were not nailed to walls but rather released into the hands of people through photographic reproductions. For Malraux, reproducing art in books dissolved the restrictive walls of the institutions that housed the world’s cultural treasures” (Maddison). On this new page of history, we are living in the era of digitalisation. “Being online has evolved from an exotic experience to an ‘anyplace, anytime’ reality, and it has done so in less than a generation. (...) The emergence of tablets and smartphones is creating new forms of interaction that play out before a potentially worldwide audience” (“*National Digital Heritage Strategy*”). Digital methods have significantly increased the number of visitors for many museums. According to the Netherlands Museums Association, the sample taken in 2010 shows that “museums annually attract approximately 3.8 more virtual visitors than physical visitors” (DSP-groep 27). The director of the Van Gogh Museum, speaks in a newspaper interview: ‘through the website, social media, and now, the Google Art Project, we have opened up our museum, our collection and our knowledge to a wide audience. People all over the

world share our passion for the life and work of Vincent van Gogh” (DSP-groep 27). Nowadays, more and more people become aware of the inevitable development of digital technology and the positive influence it can have on people’s daily life. It is a ‘Way’, not a threat.

“People ask me what our biggest competition is,” says Sree Sreenivasan, former chief digital officer at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, “It’s not the Guggenheim; it’s not the Museum of Natural History. It’s Netflix. It’s Candy Crush” (Gilbert). Clare Brown from the George Washington University even combines the word physical with the word digital into a new hybrid: Phygital. She explains that the future of the museum should bridge the digital with the physical world. Moreover, “museums will not lose their valuable role in providing the essential analog experience of direct access to real collections” (Brown). When policy makers and museum directors talk about how art can be more accessible for everyone, they should first face the fact that the Internet surfing and mobile phone usage have already largely changed people’s life style. According to Internet World Stats, the data released on March 31, 2017 show that there are more than 3.7 billion internet users all over the world, which is almost half of the total population on earth, and the growth rate between 2000 and 2017 is 936% (“Internet Usage Statistics”). The Global Web Index shows that in 2015, people in the age range from 16-24 spent 3.26 hours on mobile internet surfing per day (Cohen). However, in 2017, along with the massive social media growth, “Teens now spend up to 9 hours a day on social platforms, while 30% of all time spent online is now allocated to social media interaction. And the majority of that time is on mobile - 60% of social media time spent is facilitated by a mobile device” (Asano). The population of online surfers around the globe is so large that even a small percentage of them turning into physical visitors is a huge number for the museums.

The integration of digital and physical life is a fact and the natural law in today’s society, and the Way is to understand it and make good use of it. For museums, going online is the practice of Wu Wei. The Google Art is a platform where an almost equal relationship between museums and visitors exists. For almost the first time, visitors are in control of the time and place, and even the way of how to appreciate art. Apart from all the disappeared physical barriers, they feel relaxed and comfortable because they do not have to worry about their performance in the museums. Without the feeling of being looked down upon since they do not understand the art pieces, the mental barrier also starts to vanish. This is the time when Yin starts to transfer to Yang, on their own initiative. However, the aim is not for Yin to replace Yang. Though there are projects like the Museum Night trying hard to provide an equal situation, it is impossible to totally erase the cultural authority in traditional museums. In fact, the right level of cultural authority is beneficial, since

there are a lot of experts and artists who are working hard and they can give the public proper guidance when needed. The cultural authority pushes museums to the position of Yang, and the right level prevents the imbalance of Excess Yang. Online projects like Google Art are more efficient in creating an equal relationship, as it provides the opportunity for visitors to take the position of Yang. The balances that should be achieved include the balance between traditional museums and online museums, the balance of the right level of cultural authority, and eventually, the balance between museums and visitors. When the balance is reached, new things are created - inspiration, empathy, compassion and finally, action.

CONCLUSION

Chinua Achebe, one of Africa's best-known novelists, said in 1997 that,

the only place where culture is static, and exists independently of people, is the museum. (...) even there it is doubtful whether culture really exists. To my mind it is already dead. Of course a good curator can display the artefacts so skilfully that an impression of completeness or even of life can be given, but it is no more than the complete skin which a snake has discarded before going its way (28).

In 2017, two decades later, this seemingly pessimistic statement is still true to some degree in some museums. There is no mentioning of the visitors in this statement, simply because even in reality they can be absent. When museum directors and policy makers are thinking hard of attracting more visitors, the first two questions should be what their roles are and which position the visitors should take. The role of encouraging positive changes in the community shows the major direction, and the position of the two parties explains what should be done. There are more and more museums trying various interactive programmes, hoping to get more participants involved. However, if they only see visitors as passive participants, the visitors will not show the real initiative. The interactive programmes are not separated events. Rather, they belong to a larger discourse of equality. The equal state can be well explained using the philosophical Taoism concepts.

Though Taoism is an ancient oriental philosophy, the Tao can be found everywhere. Taoism provides not only a philosophical guide but also a methodology. The philosophical guide and methodology are not only applicable in the museum field but in various cultural institutions. In this

thesis, the relationship between museums and visitors is seen as Yin Yang in Taoism. The essential goal of any relationship is to find the right balance. Any kinds of imbalance can cause conflicts, which are the opposite of positive energy. The relationship with museums standing high with authority and visitors standing low and looking up is a typical Excess Yang state. If the position of Yin and Yang is static, positive energy can hardly be generated. Three Taoist principles can be applied to the problematic relationship: Equality, Experience, and Wu Wei. All these principles should be considered when designing the museum programmes, and imagining museums and visitors practicing Tai Chi is a good way to do so.

The two case studies - the Museum Night and the Google Art Project - are proper examples of applying the three principles. Both of them emphasise the experience for visitors, especially for younger visitors or non-visitors. Moreover, they provide the chances for visitors to be at an equal position with museums. By following the natural law in society, both projects understand the true needs of the audience and allow them to have maximised freedom. This backing up strategy actually stimulates the subjective initiative inside the audience, which leads to the state of Wu Wei. If Achebe could be dancing in one the museums during the Museum Night, or sharing with friends the great details of the texture of Van Gogh's brush strokes, maybe he would change his statement on the dead culture in museums.

Though the major issue here is the relationship between museums and visitors, this research mainly focuses on the museum side, since the institutions should be proactive in changing their long-established image. Further research is needed on the visitors' side. As more and more museums and projects are following the Taoist way, they are moving away from the Yang position, leaving room for the visitors to take control. Only museums playing the role of a catalyst is not enough for positive changes in communities. The task is on both parties' shoulders.

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