

Culture in Display

Empowerment and Politics in University Museums: Art Museum, the Chinese University of Hong Kong

LAM Ka Ki

The Chinese University of Hong Kong

The Art Museum of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, which researched, exhibited and promoted ancient and pre-modern Chinese arts, was the oldest university museum in the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Examining the establishment and development of Art Museum can reveal distinctive features of university museums, such as its being a research-based scholarship and teaching museum. Moreover, analyzing its collections and exhibitions exemplified how Art Museum and its prominent donor, Dr. Lee Jung Sen and his Bei Shan Tang Foundation, and the closely collaborating Fine Arts Department of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, manipulated each other to empower themselves.

Based on the above analysis, the Art Museum despite its Chinese name wenwu (artifacts) Museum which promoted both Chinese cultures, arts and allowed interpretations of objects from various perspectives; rather than Yishu (art) Museum that of aesthetic perspective; appeared to position and imagine itself as a university art museum. The above collaborations hence empowered the Art Museum to strengthen its collections and academic importance, while at the same time also possible to create academic and social boundaries. Concrete research data had been gained through researcher's museum internship and voluntary experiences, and in-depth interviews conducted with curators of Art Museum and Fine Arts students of the Chinese University of Hong Kong. This study of university museum in Hong Kong from anthropological perspective could therefore reveal distinctive features of, and empowerment and politics in university museums.

Making Jokes With(out) Bodies:

"Truthiness" and "Authenticity" of Stand-up Comedy in Contemporary China

AN Jianghong

Stanford University

Based on three-months of ethnographic fieldwork in Beijing and Shanghai, this paper examines the culture of stand-up comedy, a popular culture introduced into Mainland China in the past several years. Extralinguistic components are indispensable to all performing arts so that the bodily representation of every comedic "bit" should be just as important, if not more so, as the scriptwriting. Yet in practice, many Chinese comedians and aficionados dismiss the performative aspects as undermining the "truthiness" of stand-up comedy but meanwhile they could never agree upon what constitutes "authenticity". In order to understand how this ideological dilemma came into place, I first explore how the traditional Chinese form of comedy, xiangsheng (crosstalk), historically and aesthetically "haunts" the young performers' embodiment of a "verbal art". Then I take a closer look at the practices through which comedians adapt to, connect with, and cultivate the audience and the social milieu, which hinge upon the physical "spontaneity" and the idea of "truthiness". Finally, I argue, in search for "authenticity", bodies are intertwined with the mediation of economic, technological, and political forces that render the search ironic and problematic.

Popular Culture as Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism: Village Bar Culture in a Socialist State

Larry ROBINSON
University of California, Los Angeles

Yangshuo, a mostly agricultural county located in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region of southern China, has boasted a major international travel industry since the late 1970s, and has had over seven million annual visitors since 2000. The central narratives of cultural tourism industry in Yangshuo town, an urbanized area of 76.5 square kilometers, include the region's natural scenery (karst mountains and bending rivers), West Street, and folklore-based performances. Based on fieldwork conducted in Yangshuo over a seven-month period, this paper examines popular music culture on West Street. This marble, 1180-meter long, 8-meter wide, S-curved street has a thirty-year history of entertainment; and today it is packed with over 100 stores, mobile vendors, restaurants, and performance venues. Taking Bronislaw Szerszynski and John Urry's conceptualization of aesthetic cosmopolitanism, generally defined as a stance of "openness" towards different people, cultures, and places, I argue that musicians and audience members negotiate and strategically express local, regional, and national identities through music in Mandarin, Cantonese, and English. I demonstrate this by exploring Yangshuo's auspicious cultural-geographical position as a tourist destination, the versatile usage of performance spaces in daily life, the interior design and classification of bars, and the use of various popular music genres. I find that combining virtual ethnography with traditional fieldwork and library research provides insight into the ways culture barriers comment on, critique, and re-present contemporary aesthetic experiences in real time. My discussions will provide an example for anthropologists exploring the tactics digitally and physically sustaining contemporary practices in popular culture.

Entertainment, Consumption, and Feminine Figure: Imagination Engineering of 'Heavenly Kingdom on Earth' in Fo Guang Shan Buddha Memorial Center

SHIH Yi-tzu
National Tsing Hua University

This paper aims to discover how religion in modernity lead its followers back to sacredness through experience of individual physical senses. Since capitalism has commodified religion and rolled into competitive market mechanism, religion has undergone various processes of secularization. In this research, I demonstrate how Fo Guang Shan Monastery (FGS, 佛光山) has conducted its imagined engineering of Heavenly Kingdom on Earth (人間佛國) through Buddha memorial Center BMC) park by using modern entertainment, consumption and feminine figures to attract Buddhist followers into a sacred experience. BMC park is built according to the landscape of Heavenly kingdom described in Buddhist scripture, which then became Taiwan's hottest Buddhist pilgrimage spot for international worshipers and tourists. The main Buddha hall and towers may appear extremely solemn from outside, however, inside the buildings are interactive electronic games, coin-operated machines to purchase blessings, and 4D movie theater that never loses its audience. International chain stores like Starbucks, Seven Eleven and fancy restaurants have changed its menu to accommodate a Buddhist vegan diet. Furthermore, Fo-Guang ladies (佛光小姐), who were trained to be dignified, feminine yet non-sexually desirable figures, are the main workers in the park

whose job not only include customer service but maintenance of imagination of Heaven on Earth. Therefore, this paper illustrates how commodified religion attracts followers and in the end, still approaches the experience of sacredness.