

A Few Good Men : Identity and Representation of Museum Volunteer

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The Asian Conference on Cultural Studies 2016
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

Most people usually value benefaction of donating to the temple, only a few appreciate to do in the museum. Being museum volunteer is another kind of donation. This article aims to answer two questions: 1) How museum volunteers define and value the goodness? 2) How museum volunteers present the goodness through museum activity? The research applies Jean Baudrillard's concept of "consumption of sign" as a conceptual framework. The data collecting methods are focus group discussion and in depth interview of museum volunteers. The research finding shows that the identity of 'good people' is people who like to do social goodness that returns them sentimental values especially in educative merit making and delightfulness. The representations of good people are donation, labor dedication and knowledge providing. These identity and representations can transform to the valuable cultural and social capitals of the museum. Therefore museum is an ideal type for cultivating community of goodness.

Keywords: museum, volunteer, donation, fund-raising, capital, goodness, identity, representation, sign consumption

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Introduction

Museum is the institution which starts from antique storage and turns into learning center. The place that we can discover the various and deep meaning of the story in the limited time and conditions. Museum is the place that you can get at least a little inspiration, discover something new or at most you can get the wisdom from the main point of museum story. So we can state that now the essential of the museum is providing the life-long knowledge.

Aside from the main role of museum as a wisdom place, museum is also have a role as a non-profit organization or social enterprise. They have duties of managing and developing their organization for providing products and services to the public.

The type of museum can be defined by its administration such as national museum, local museum, organization museum, private collection museum.

We can claim that now fund-raising is a core function in museum administrations. Because museum cannot working without the amount of money and the quality cooperation. To earning more administration capital.

Fund-raising is a profitable strategy of the non-profit organization. Besides, museum can reach more target in public by fund-raising activities. The raising funds are not limited only the money or in-cash capital, but there are included the in-kind capitals. So museum not only pursues profits but also networks of stakeholders, these networks can be the alliance for sustainable operation and interesting or acceptable activities that can apply to actuate museum mission and goal.

This study has the specific assumption that museum is a few good men or philanthropists community. The museum is connected to the alternative community in contemporary world.

Volunteering and donation in museum are also the terms of goodness, most of people always do the goodness to temple, disadvantage people or other urgent issue. But only a few will do in museum. Museum can turn crisis into opportunity since Museum philanthropists can be defined as the community of the alternative contemporary lifestyle.

Since an important mission of the museum is providing knowledge, participant in museum donation and volunteer activities to support activities such as educational programs for people, is also the goodness. Accordingly, museum is a place of goodness and the people who do good things in the museum is a good men community.

The network and relation formation must be generated by attending the trends of social interests, behaviors and values that always change by context and time. Doing goodness in museum is corresponded with lifestyle of people who is concerned with supporting money and labor for education or other goodness in museum. This is the fact of the sample of philanthropists that museum practitioner should understand their way of life and cultural practice.

This article is a part of the individual study “An action research for museum fundraising of Cultural Anthropology Museum, the research institute for languages and cultures of Asia (RILCA), Mahidol University” which is supported by The Thailand Research Fund (TRF). The study aims to understand condition in practices of a group of people who identify and represent themselves through the museum. The synthetic extents for perspective summarization to answer the research questions are the representation of goodness through capitals (economic, cultural, social and symbolic), the identity of good men (museum donor and volunteer) and the representation of good men through the museum activities.

This article aims to analyze and prove identity and representation of the community of goodness through examples of fund raising activities. As donation and volunteering activities are the satisfied exchange of both museum and participants. Consideration of fund (in-cash) and capital (in-kind) raising with Boudrillard’s concept of “consumption of sign”. This is the cultural performance that reflects shared values, tastes and sentiments of people and museum as the community of goodness

Cultural Anthropology Museum

Cultural anthropology museum or RILCA museum is an interactive university museum of RILCA, the museum opened since 24th December 2001. The Research Institute for Language and Culture of Asia and ASEAN Institute for Health Development have a responsibility to research and promote knowledge in social and public health. As a result, the two Institutes have cooperated to set up Cultural Anthropology Museum and Public Health Project in order to present information on geography, civilization and public health in South East Asia.

SEA is one of the most important regions because of its abundant natural resources and biological diversity enabling its habitats become economic producers and consumers. Also, a variety of ethnic groups have also settled around the region whose cultures and lifestyles are based on traditions handed down through time. We research South East Asia in many fields including archeology, anthropology, history, culture, medicine and public health in order to obtain new knowledge. This Museum is the first educational resource for Thais in geography, civilization and public health in SEA.

Now, the museum will open only for appointment or special occasion. The content of museum is about history and mission of the Research institute for languages and cultures of Asia, Mahidol university in the issue of ethnicity languages and cultures research and museum also exhibit the story of minority groups in Thailand through the imitate ethnic village and the visitors can interact with every museum objects and details.

Now this museum do not have sufficient facilities and staff to take and run this museum. So this museum is running by the Cultural division, the special cultural places-caring unit of the RILCA. The cultural division initiate to do the meta-plan for developing the museum to be the learning and participatory activity center of university and school student in local area.

The most important mission of the cultural division is museum fund-raising for improving and developing the museum and uprising the RILCA to be the center of research and study about museum studies, and also furthering to be the center of public services as museum clinic.

To pacing along this mission, the museum have to earn more budget. Fund-raising is the main role in museum potential budgeting and operation. Cultural anthropology museum must to create the fund-raising activities, including in-cash fund and in-kind capital such as relations, partners, and network to support running effective social activities and can be the cultural entrepreneur. So the fund-raising activity is the challenged step for adaptation and working within limited conditions of governmental organization.

Museum funds and sponsorship

Funds is the important part of museum budgeting. According to Genoways and Ireland (2003), funds are used to separate revenue and resources within an organization for certain activities and objectives and museum can separates funds into 5 types as

- *The general fund* which may also be called the “current” or “operating” fund that holds the money used, at the museum’s discretion, to provide activities related to the organization’s primary mission.

- *Capital funds* are designated for the purchase of fixed assets, such as equipment and building. This fund may also be called “fixed asset” or “plant” fund in some organizations.

- *A restricted fund* designated the revenue or investment income earned from revenue that must be spent according to stipulations placed on the income by a donor or a governing body. Another fund, the *debt fund*, donates money set aside to retire debts such as bond issues or mortgages.

- *Acquisition fund* refer to the amount reserved for the purchase of objects for the collection or for expenses associated with acquisitions such as shipping, insurance, and appraisal.

- *Endowment fund* are donated monies that are invested; the income from unrestricted endowment funds may be used for operations or other legitimate purpose, whereas earning from restricted endowment funds are earmarks for specific aims, such as acquisitions, exhibits, or seminars. The *endowment principal* is that portion of the fund that remains invested and untouched and continues to earn income. Only the interest or other income earned from the principal should be expended for appropriate purpose. (p. 92-93)

According to Genoways and Ireland (2003), The private sector is also a potential source of revenue. When museum interests individual giver, museum also have to interests in a potential donor’s interests and match them to the appropriate exhibition or program. A careful consideration of the museum’s mission and it’s commitment to intellectual integrity will ensure an appropriate mesh of donor wishes and museum need. Museums that offer donors significant input into program content will find themselves subject to constituent criticism at the least, if not editorial castigation in the media. And the similar consideration should occur when approaching foundation. Actually, local foundation will be more interested in the activity of the local museum than foundation in other area. (p. 285)

As capital fund and acquisition fund are the kind of capital that museum can derive from donor, volunteer, participant in museum activities. When the partners correspond with the museum, they can support the operation even using no money.

Consumption of sign

According to Baudrillard (1981), consumption as a logic of significations, the empirical “object,” given in its contingency of form, color, material, function, discourse and aesthetic if it is a cultural object, is a myth. The object is nothing but different type of relations and significations that coverage, contradict themselves, and twist around it, as such the hidden logic that not only arranges this bundle of relations, but directs the manifest discourse that overlays and occludes it.

Value of symbolic exchange, in symbolic exchange of which the gift is our most proximate illustration, the object is not an object but it is inseparable from the concrete relation in which it is exchanged, the transferential pact that it seals between two persons. The object given has symbolic exchange value. The paradox of the gift is relatively arbitrary of the given object, it can fully signify the relation. On the other hand, once it has been given, the gift is unique, specified by the people exchanging and the unique moment of the exchange, it is arbitrary and absolutely singular.

As distinct from language, whose material can be disassociated from the subjects speaking it, the material of symbolic exchange, the objects given, are not autonomous, hence not codifiable as signs. Since they do not depend on economic exchange, they are not amenable to systematization as commodities and exchange value.

What constitutes the objects as value in symbolic exchange is that one separates himself from it in order to give it, to throw it at the feet of the other, under the gaze of the other; one divests himself as if of a part of himself, an act is significant in itself as the basis, simultaneously, of both the mutual presence of the terms of the relationship, and their mutual absence or distance. The ambivalence of all symbolic exchange material such as looks, objects, dreams and excrement, derives from this: the gift is a medium of relation and distance; it is always love and aggression.

From symbolic exchange to sign value, the moment when the exchange is no longer purely transitive, when the material of exchange is immediately presented as such, can be reified into a sign. Instead of abolishing itself in the relation that it establishes, and thus assuming symbolic value for example the gift, the object becomes autonomous, intransitive, opaque, and also begins to signify the abolition of the relationship. Having become a sign object, it is no longer the mobile signifier of the lack between two beings, it is ‘of’ and ‘from’ the reified relation as it is the commodity at another level, in relation to reified labor power. As symbol refers to lack or absence as a virtual relation of desire, the sign object only refers to the absence of relation itself, and to isolated individual subjects.

The sign object is neither given or exchange: it is appropriated, withheld and manipulated by individual subjects as a sign as coded difference. As the object of consumption, it is always of and from reified, abolished social relationship that is “signified” in a code.

What we perceive in the symbolic object such as the gift, tradition, ritual and artisanal object, is not only the concrete manifestation of an ambivalent and total relationship of desire; but through the singularity of an object, the transparency of social relations in a dual or integrated group relationship. In the commodity, in contrast, we perceive the opacity of social relations of production and the reality of the division of labor. The object of consumption is revealed in the contemporary profusion of sign object, is precisely this opacity, the total constraint of the code that govern social value: it is the specific weight of sign that regulates the social logic of exchange.

The object-become-sign no longer gathers its meaning in the concrete relationship between two people. It assumes its meaning in its differential relation to other sign. Somewhat like Levi-Strauss' myths that sign-objects exchange among themselves. Thus, only when objects are autonomized as differential signs and thereby rendered systematizable can one speak of consumption and of objects of consumption.

And also the leisure, "conspicuous abstention from labor becomes the conventional index of reputability." Productive labor is degrading, it is the reinforcement as social differentiation increases in complexity. In the end, it takes on the axiomatic authority of an absolute prescription of reproach, even alongside the moral probation of idleness and the reactive valorization of labor so strong in the middle classes. The affected servitude of devotedly worked is the reaction-formation proves, to the contrary, the power of leisure-nobility value as deep-seated, unconscious representation.

Leisure is thus not a function of a need for leisure in the current sense of enjoying free time and functional repose. It can be invested in activities, provided they do not involve economic necessity. Leisure may be defined as any consumption of unproductive time. This is an activity, an obligatory social phenomenon of the moment of a production of value, of an invidious production of status, and the social individual is not free to escape it. No one needs leisure, but everyone is called upon to provide evidence of his availability for unproductive labor. The consumption of empty shows that free time is a material of exchange and signification. Then the leisure is the locus of this symbolic operation.

The style of contemporary leisure provides a kind of experimental verification, the conditions for creative freedom at last realized, the man of leisure looks desperately for a nail to hammer, a motor to dismantle. Outside the competitive sphere, there are no autonomous needs. Spontaneous motivation doesn't exist. But for all that, he can't permit himself to do nothing. At a loss for something to do with his free time, he nevertheless urgently "needs" to do nothing or nothing useful, since this has distinctive social value.

Even today, what claims the average individual, through the holidays and during his free time, is not the liberty to fulfill himself. He must verify the uselessness of his time, temporal surplus as sumptuous capital, as wealth. Leisure time, like consumption time in general, becomes emphatic, trade-marked social time, the dimension of social salvation, productive of value, but not of economic survival.

"The canon of honorific waste may, immediately or remotely, influence the sense of duty, the sense of beauty, the sense of utility, the sense of devotional or ritualistic fitness, and the scientific scene of truth."

Sign exchange and the twilight of value can generalize that everything is “recuperable”, but at first there are needs, authentic values, etc., and later they are alienated, mystified, recuperated or what have you. If everything is recuperable, it is because everything in monopoly capitalist society such as goods, knowledge, technique, culture, men, their relations and their aspirations, is reproduced, from the outset, immediately, as an element of the system, as an integrated variable.

The truth is and this has been recognized for a long time in the area of economic production that use value no longer appears anywhere in the system. The determining logic of exchange value is recognized as the truth of the sphere of “consumption” and the cultural system in general. In other words, everything even the artistic, intellectual, scientific production, innovation and transgression, is immediately produced as sign and exchange value (rational value of the sign)

A structural analysis of consumption is possible to the extent that “needs” consumption behavior and cultural behavior are not only recuperated, but systematically induced and produced as productive forces. Given this abstraction and this tendency toward total systematization, such as analysis is entirely possible, if it in turn is based on an analysis of the social logic of the production and generalized exchange of signs. (p. 63-87)

The consumption of sign portrays the general concept of need and exchange of the sign through the product or even the service. As in this case we can critique the museum activities as the productivity of the value and sign exchange among the specific group of people. And this exchange can operate the museum volunteering and donating activity to be the effective action and stakeholder can achieve things more than money and labor.

Hunting a good men

This study has two methods to gather the good men and goodness from museum activities

1) Focus group discussion: museum volunteer, museum practitioner and museum activity participant brain storming to gather the information, ideas and experiences about participation, education, fund raising activities to do the better museum activities in the future.

2) Participatory activities: fund raising and volunteering activities. Running the little tour guide training project at Tai Dam Na Pa Nad Community, Loei province.

this project is a part of the research and RILCA museum activities to train the children of Tai Dam community to be the presenter of best their culture through the eyes of youth and to raise awareness and pride of their culture and to preserve the unique ethnic culture in Thailand as long as we can. And also creating the fundraising product such as iculture T-shirt to represent the unity of the culture-lover volunteer with the best contemporary letter - I. And more products are the ethnic handicraft such as Karen bag, paper doll in ethnic dress to represent their simple but precious way of life.

Findings

The study of action research: focus group discussion and participatory action activity justify the identity of good men, that the “Good men” the people who willingly do goodness with no returns. A few good men is not the sense of an individual but togetherness. Actually, the good men can do goodness only in the appropriate situation such as only in the limited condition such as right time, right place, and right job with right partner. Museum volunteer and donor is also the identity of the well-educated upper and middle class in the society who show their specific identity as their duty for society.

The representations of goodness are goodness is the defining of a good action with on returns but happiness or good feeling. Goodness can be done by many ways such as giving money, things, labor, knowledge, inspirations or good feeling. Providing knowledge or education is one of the most valuable giving, since knowledge or education can become the wisdom of the lifetime. Goodness is also the representation of the leisure to people, who always separate their free time from their working time. As they devote their leisure time to do the public services.

Museum as the community of good men can summarize from the fact that “a few good men” can make “a lot of good good men” by the good process such as good invitation, good story telling and good investment. Museum volunteers will not get only happiness but good relationship, good connection and the good society in return. Even museum volunteers do not want something in return, but museums should give them some privilege. a little pay-off is still the great encouragement for everyone to be the better men.

Conclusion

Museum fund-raising is the relation and negotiation between individual and institution. Donator and volunteer can consume the sign from museum product and service that can return museum the capitals. Identity is a meaning that transform into sign and representation is an action that transform into capital

The concept of consumption of sign is the explanation of the alternative community that adhere the shared internal value than the external factor in contemporary lifestyle. But in some aspect the consumption of sign cannot explain some value in the sense of the museum progression. Because the correspondence of museum stakeholders with their little of returning or benefit is rarely appear in the contemporary capitalism world, especially in the place that not directly concern with the main factors of human living (food, cloth, home and medicine) as the museum. Apparently, museum volunteer is a kind of good men, who do goodness as giving good attitude, inspiration, knowledge and wisdom or even at the least as only good feeling.

Sometimes the in-kind capital is quite important in running creative and valuable museum activities not less than the in-cash fund. The in-cash fund or money seems to be the equipment and the in-kind fund or partner seems to be the labor. It is hard to work without either one or another. But sometimes people said that you can work with no money but a lot of friends as the quote “Volunteer will get you through times of no money better than money will get you through times of no volunteers.”

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นักเรียนในโรงเรียนสังกัดกรุงเทพมหานคร. วิทยานิพนธ์สังคมสงเคราะห์ศาสตร์
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กลุ่มภารกิจวัฒนธรรมสถานบริการ สถาบันวิจัย
ภาษาและวัฒนธรรมเอเชีย มหาวิทยาลัยมหิดล ครั้งที่ ๑/๒๕๕๘ วันพุธที่ ๒๑ มกราคม
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