

Reintroducing Taiwanese Literature in Museums: Museum Atmospherics for Enhancing Visitor Learning and Engagement

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Abstract

Taiwanese literature embodies rich historical, linguistic, and social memory, yet its marginalization in education and public culture has limited public understanding and engagement. Literary museums therefore serve as vital platforms; the third-phase permanent exhibition of the National Museum of Taiwan Literature (2020–2030) attracts 330,000–690,000 visitors annually, demonstrating its potential for cultural promotion. However, research on audience perception remains limited. Given that atmospherics shape perception and meaning by guiding experience, this study uses the exhibition as a case study to examine the strengths and limitations of its atmospheric design and to propose recommendations for the fourth-phase permanent exhibition to enhance public interest and understanding. Data include curator interviews, alongside structured observation and semi-structured interviews with 15 “literary youth” target audiences aged 18–44, a culturally interested non-academic group, analyzed through thematic analysis to explore how four atmospheric cues—spatial design, learning experience, lighting, and staff interaction—shape experience. Results show that in spatial design, bright colors and background sound help deformatize literature, yet repeated blue and yellow tones blur narrative shifts; greater variation in materials, colors, and sound across periods is needed. In learning experience, personality-revealing objects enhance interest. Personally designed games should be streamlined and visually enhanced to prevent being overlooked; while games with unpredictable outcomes are already popular. Although short texts suit fragmented reading, excessive content causes fatigue; QR codes can reduce overload. Lighting builds emotional tension but is often unnoticed; varying tone and intensity can strengthen narrative-emotional connections. As visitors prefer self-guided exploration, staff should shift toward experiential facilitation.

Keywords: museum atmospherics, literary exhibition, visitor experience

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Introduction

Scholars have emphasized the close relationship between language, literature, and culture, viewing literature as a medium that conveys cultural meanings and emotional experiences. It functions as a form of cultural encoding, embedding social values, historical contexts, and affective dimensions within texts, evoking emotional responses through its narrative and stylistic elements (Shanahan, 1997). Beyond individual reading experiences, literature also transmits memory across communities and generations (Rigney, 2004): unlike fixed physical monuments, texts circulate across regions and time periods, enabling broader cultural transmission, while poetic and narrative forms shape which memories are preserved or forgotten (Rigney, 2004).

Together, these perspectives position literature not merely as a vehicle for meaning, but as an active force in shaping cultural understanding across time and space. How such potential is realized, however, depends significantly on how literature is transmitted—through education, institutions, and public culture.

Museums and Public Engagement With Taiwanese Literature

Taiwanese literature embodies this potential richly, reflecting the island's diverse cultural memories, historical narratives, and literary techniques. While postmodernism and postcolonialism arrived alongside Western developments, their local expressions differ: postmodern works often blend transnational and popular culture and commodification, whereas postcolonial literature explores diverse identities—including women, LGBTQ+ communities, Indigenous peoples, and military dependents' villages—through historical memory, urban experience, and science fiction (Liu, 2006). Despite this richness, Taiwanese literature often lacks a concrete image for the general public, sometimes perceived as “rustic, emotional, and politically tinged” (Lin, 2023).

This unfamiliarity is partly rooted in educational history: after 1945, high school curricula primarily emphasized Chinese literary works, largely excluding Taiwanese literature, and it was not until the 1970s that Taiwanese texts began to appear in textbooks (Chen, 2020). Although later reforms expanded content diversity, Chinese authors still account for about 63% of readings compared to 33% related to Taiwanese contexts (Li, 2023), leaving Taiwanese literature in a relatively peripheral position.

Against this backdrop, museums have emerged as important sites for public engagement with Taiwanese literature. Korff (1999) characterises museums as sites where visitors encounter unfamiliar objects and cultures, bridging experiences across temporal, cultural, and social contexts, and providing learning that extends beyond factual knowledge to include emotional and aesthetic experiences (Falk & Dierking, 2000).

Exhibitions serve as the primary medium for conveying knowledge and meaning. Kember et al. (2010) note that they offer alternative perspectives, manifest through historical practices, and bring audiences into direct contact with cultural narratives. Established in 2003 (Lin, 2004), the Taiwan Literary Museum archives literary works from various historical periods (Zhang, 2010) and has continuously organized exhibitions. Its third permanent exhibition, *Literary Power* (2020), reflects a shift toward making literary themes accessible to diverse audiences, strengthening the link between heritage and public cultural experience (Chien, 2023).

Research Gap in Audience Studies of the Exhibition

Given the shift in curatorial strategy, it is important to assess how effectively these exhibitions engage audiences. While annual visitor statistics cannot isolate attendance for a specific permanent exhibition, they offer a useful reference for gauging the communication of Taiwanese literature to the public. Visitor numbers for the *Power of Literature* exhibition increased steadily between 2020 and 2024, indicating growing public interest. Growth was relatively gradual between 2020 and 2022 due to COVID-19 restrictions; however, attendance increased more rapidly as restrictions eased, reaching approximately 330,000 visitors in 2022, 410,000 in 2023, and 690,000 in 2024.

Despite these strong figures, research on audience experiences remains limited. Most existing studies focus on curatorial concepts and exhibition design (Chien, 2023; Qi & Wu, 2020; Su, 2020; Wu, 2020; Zhu, 2020), with only one study addressing visitor responses—and it examines a temporary, rather than permanent, exhibition (Gao & Zhao, 2024). This gap underscores the need to better understand how visitors experience permanent exhibitions, which is the focus of the present study.

Museum Atmospheres and Museum Visitor Experience

To address this gap, this study adopts an atmospheric perspective to examine visitors' exhibition experiences. Previous research suggests that atmosphere underpins museum experience, emerging from the relational space between objects and subjects (Bjerregaard, 2015), and functions as a mediating force that bridges spatial distance (Dorrian, 2014). Studies in the commercial sector further show that atmospheric elements—such as color, lighting, and signage—can significantly influence visitors' behavioural intentions, including revisitation and recommendation (Bonn et al., 2007).

Building on this perspective, atmosphere has become an important framework in museum visitor research (A. N. Kartal & H. B. Kartal, 2026). With the development of digital technologies, it has also been applied to virtual museum contexts to examine cognitive and emotional responses (Loureiro & Rato, 2024). In this study, four key atmospheric factors are identified: design, learning, lighting, and staff (Loureiro, 2019).

In light of this perspective, this study adopts an atmospheric approach to examine visitors' perceptions of the third-phase permanent exhibition, *The Power of Literature*. By analyzing its strengths and limitations in terms of atmospheric qualities, the study aims to provide insights that may inform the design of the fourth-phase permanent exhibition and contribute to enhancing overall visitor experience. To this end, the following research questions are proposed:

- Q1. From the four elements of museum atmosphere—design, learning, lighting, and staff—how are the exhibition design and planning of the National Museum of Taiwan Literature's *Literary Power* exhibition reflected in each element?
- Q2. Considering the four components of museum atmosphere—design, learning, lighting, and staff—how do visitors experience each element during the exhibition?
- Q3. From the visitors' perspective, what are the strengths and weaknesses of the four elements of museum atmosphere mentioned above, and how could they be optimized or improved in the future fourth permanent exhibition?

Museum Atmospheres

According to Loureiro (2019), museum atmospheres can be categorized into four main atmospheric cues: design, lighting, learning, and staff. The detailed definitions and explanations of these elements are as follows.

Element 1: Design

Museum atmosphere is shaped by visual and spatial elements—such as colors, displays, décor (Loureiro, 2019), and spatial qualities like orientation and visitor flow (Baker, 1987)—which influence visitor responses (Bonn et al., 2007).

Element 2: Lighting

The adequacy and appropriateness of illumination throughout the exhibition, influencing visibility, mood, and focus (Loureiro, 2019).

Element 3: Learning

Learning reflects visitors' cognitive and emotional engagement, encompassing interest, novelty, enjoyment, and knowledge acquisition during the exhibition experience. Among the four atmospheric cues, it has been identified as the most influential factor, carrying the highest weight and playing a dominant role in shaping visitors' overall perceptions of the museum experience (Loureiro, 2019).

Element 4: Staff

Museum personnel—through their appearance, friendliness, empathy, and professional knowledge (Loureiro, 2019)—can strongly influence visitors' comfort, satisfaction, and overall experience (Huang & Hsu, 2009). Visitor expectations vary: children and older adults often need more support, while parents prefer staff who are calm, attentive, and ready to assist without being intrusive. Clear, friendly uniforms can also enhance trust and safety (Brown et al., 2019). Conversely, rigid enforcement of rules may disrupt engagement and diminish the visitor experience (Henry, 2000).

Methods and Procedure

This study adopts a multi-phase qualitative research design combining semi-structured interviews, on-site observation, and document analysis to examine how the four elements of museum atmosphere—design, learning, lighting, and staff—were conceptualized and experienced in *The Power of Literature* exhibition at the National Museum of Taiwan Literature (NMTL).

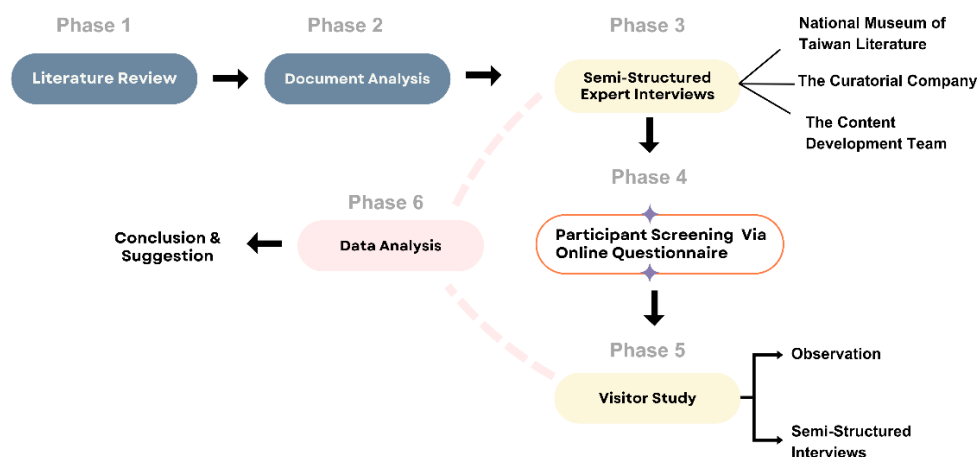
Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including Mr. Jian from the NMTL curatorial team, Ms. Chen from the exhibition contractor *Art Happening Company*, and writer Chu Yu-hsun, who collaborated on content development. These interviews explored the curatorial decision-making processes, design rationales, and intended visitor experiences associated with each atmospheric dimension.

Parallel to this, visitor experiences were investigated through observation and interviews with recruited participants, focusing on their interaction with exhibition spaces and their perceptual responses to the same four dimensions. The primary visitor group consisted of “wenqing” (Close equivalent terms in English include “hipster” and “young literati”), identified by the curatorial team as a key target audience encompassing individuals with sustained interest in literature and the arts, non-mainstream cultural preferences, and integrated aesthetic sensibilities in daily life (Deng, 2015; Xu, 2018). Drawing on Yang's (2019) definition of young literati in the Taiwanese context, this study adopts an age range of 19 to 44. Positioned between the general public and academic specialists, this group acts as an interpretive bridge, extending literary narratives to wider audiences.

From thirty online questionnaires, fifteen visitors whose characteristics most closely aligned with this profile were selected for in-depth interviews. To ensure transparency, participants are referred to by pseudonyms V1 through V15, assigned in interview order. As illustrated in Figure 2, they are also broadly distributed along a spectrum of literary engagement: those positioned toward the inner range demonstrate deeper personal investment in literature, while those toward the outer range show stronger affinity with cultural activities—such as lectures, exhibitions, and arts festivals—but relatively lighter engagement with literature itself.

All qualitative data were coded and comparatively analyzed to identify consistencies and differences between curatorial intentions and visitor perceptions. Findings are structured around the four thematic components of museum atmosphere—design, learning, lighting, and staff—each discussed in relation to (1) curatorial strategies, (2) visitor experience and interpretation, and (3) recommendations for the National Museum of Taiwan Literature’s upcoming fourth permanent exhibition (scheduled for 2030 onward).

Figure 1
Research Method



Source: The researcher

Figure 2
Distribution of Visitor Types



Source: The researcher

Result

Design: Curatorial Strategies and Visitor Perception

Color: Symbolism and Emotional Tone

Color plays a crucial role in shaping both the atmosphere and meaning of exhibition spaces, influencing thematic expression and emotional response. Highly saturated hues tend to evoke excitement and visual complexity, while less saturated tones are generally perceived as more calming (Mahnke & Mahnke, 1987). Beyond these psychological effects, color also carries symbolic meanings that vary across cultural contexts, as Van Leeuwen (2011) notes, color could operate as a socially coded semiotic resource.

Drawing on these principles, the curatorial team regarded color as a narrative device. Ms. Chen explained that “blue is used in the first zone to convey the early stage of Taiwanese literary history, drawing on the imagery of the sea as a symbol of origin,” while brightness gradually increases toward yellow, “a color symbolizing hope.” This palette was designed to express both historical progression and emotional transition—from beginnings shaped by constraint to the eventual sense of openness and optimism (Figure 3 & 4).

Figure 3

Blue



Source: Art Happening Company

Figure 4

Yellow



Source: Art Happening Company

Visitor responses confirmed the emotional success of this approach, though they also revealed a gap in symbolic recognition. Participants consistently described the palette as bright, vibrant, and comfortable. One noted that the use of yellow and blue—highly contrasting colors—gave the space a lively quality (V8), while another observed that the brightness of both text and visuals made them easy to notice and engaging to look at (V10). The sense of clarity was equally appreciated: respondents found the predominantly white background, accented with yellow and blue, simple yet visually inviting (V11). As one participant put it, the colors felt balanced—varied enough to be interesting, but not overwhelming—with the contrast between white, blue, and yellow reading as comfortable rather than busy (V13).

Despite this positive reception, none of the respondents recognized the curatorial intent behind the palette: a gradual brightening designed to symbolize temporal change. Most interpreted the colors simply as zone markers. This suggests that while the color scheme succeeded in creating visual comfort and approachability, its narrative dimension remained below the threshold of conscious perception.

Such divergence suggests that color alone cannot fully communicate complex historical transitions. Integrating other sensory cues—such as changes in texture, sound, or light temperature—could make the temporal progression more legible, contributing to more memorable experiences (Gamal et al., 2023). As Pallasmaa (2005) suggests, vision carries a tactile dimension—surfaces and textures are perceptually “felt” even at a distance, shaping

one's sense of comfort or unease. Applying some strategies could help reinforce the link between chromatic change and historical narrative in future exhibitions.

Spatial Rhythm: Metaphor and Interpretation

In spatial design, the curatorial team sought to translate Taiwan's literary rhythms into architectural form. As Mr. Jian described, the exhibition panels were intentionally non-planar—layered like sedimentary rock—and the visitor path was made slightly irregular, deliberately departing from a conventional two-row layout. Wide, open passages were meant to evoke periods of cultural openness, with the expansive space of the Japanese colonial era gesturing toward the broadening intellectual outlook of that time. Conversely, narrowed corridors were designed to embody the sense of constriction felt during the martial law period.

Visitor perception, however, tended toward spatial comfort rather than metaphorical reading. No participant identified the variations in width or ceiling height as representations of historical rhythm; instead, these physical shifts were interpreted largely as functional or aesthetic choices. This disjunction points to the limits of purely spatial symbolism when interpretive cues are absent. Subtle interventions—decoration, shifts in lighting, changes in texture or ambient sound—could render the metaphor more legible without sacrificing the poetic quality of the space. Sound, in particular, carries atmospheric potential: as Locker (2010) notes, auditory cues alone can evoke spatial moods as distinct as the oppressive chill of an enclosed dungeon and the open ambience of a seaside environment, suggesting that carefully chosen soundscapes could meaningfully reinforce the exhibition's historical narrative.

Multimedia and the Feeling of Familiarity

A key design strategy was to situate literature within everyday life through four media walls combining images, sound, and text. As Ms. Chen noted, “we start from things close to daily life—shop signs, newspapers, and songs—to remind visitors that literature is already around them.” This approach aimed to replace distant textual authority with intimacy and recognition.

Visitors responded strongly to this strategy. The large multimedia wall at the entrance was repeatedly described as “memorable,” “nostalgic,” and “inviting.” One interviewee recalled childhood advertisements and background music from the space, noting that the familiar sounds “made me stay longer” (V10)—suggesting that emotionally resonant content not only attracts attention but extends engagement. This effect was particularly evident in intergenerational connections: one participant noted that the screen featured old Taiwanese songs with audio, songs their parents had listened to and that they themselves had grown up hearing (V11), illustrating how shared musical memory can bridge generational experience within a single visit. Several participants also remarked that playful textual elements—such as local slang and colloquial phrases—broadened their understanding of what literature could be, helping to “break the assumption that literature must be highbrow” (V1) (Figure 5).

Figure 5
The Opening



Source: Art Happening Company

These responses demonstrate a close alignment between curatorial intention and visitor experience. Multimedia not only attracted attention but also eased cognitive entry into literary themes by grounding them in shared cultural memory. Through this translation of literature into the language of everyday media, the exhibition successfully lowered interpretive barriers and expanded its reach beyond habitual readers.

Synthesis

Comparing curatorial strategies with audience experience reveals a consistent pattern: formal design elements—color, spatial rhythm, and multimedia—were all effective in creating comfort, accessibility, and affective engagement. Yet the more abstract symbolic intentions (e.g., color gradation as historical metaphor or circulation as narrative rhythm) remained largely unnoticed without interpretive support. The findings suggest that while visitors value atmosphere and emotional coherence, curatorial meaning requires reinforcement through multimodal cues—light, texture, sound, or brief contextual texts—to transform perceptual comfort into narrative understanding.

Lighting: Curatorial Intentions and Visitor Perception

Brightness and Accessibility

From the curatorial perspective, brightness formed the foundation of the exhibition's design philosophy—one rooted not in curatorial preference alone, but in the building's original architectural intent. As Mr. Jian explained, this was a guiding principle established by the architectural team from the outset:

the historic building itself is inherently beautiful—not only in its lines and brickwork, but also in the way sunlight enters the space. This became a matter of setting the overall tone, shaping not only the exhibition content and intended effects, but also the architectural aesthetics.

In practice, the team adopted an open lighting strategy with minimal shading, allowing natural light to enhance the visibility of the architecture and inform display decisions throughout.

This exhibition's achieves full illumination by using reproductions rather than originals—freeing the space from conservation constraints while enabling visitors to move comfortably and read textual material with ease. As Mr. Jian noted, this brightness was further reinforced through “highly saturated colors (e.g., yellow, blue, and green), resulting in a combined effect of light, architecture, and visual design.” The curatorial team thus understood brightness not simply as an ambient condition, but as a symbol of openness and accessibility—and as the medium through which architectural heritage and exhibition narrative become one.

Visitor responses closely aligned with this intent. Participants consistently described the exhibition as bright, comfortable, and easy to navigate, with responses including “clear and comfortable” (V1, V6, V11), “warm and approachable” (V2), and “soft and warm-toned” (V9). One visitor elaborated that “the light feels warm and clear—it makes the displays friendly rather than distant” (V2), suggesting that the curatorial goal of balancing visibility and approachability was effectively achieved.

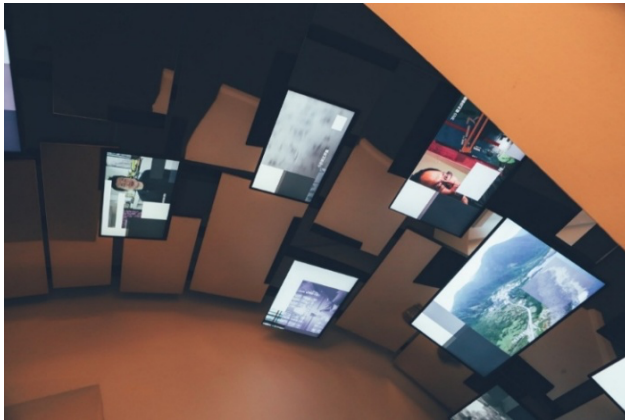
Nevertheless, the consistent illumination also yielded a visually uniform environment. Without sufficient contrast or localized focus, the lighting lacked expressive variation, which limited visitors' sense of spatial rhythm. While functionality was ensured, the aesthetic potential of lighting as an interpretive tool remained underutilized.

Variation and Immersion

The curators acknowledged that lighting adjustments across zones were minimal. As Mr. Jian noted, “there was no special lighting for each section; only projection areas were darker to suit the screens.” The plan prioritized even illumination for cohesion rather than narrative differentiation.

Visitors consistently identified one notable exception—the dark corridor lined with illuminated screens (Figure 6). Described as “distinctive and immersive,” it stood out as a deliberate contrast to the otherwise evenly lit space: “a transition, like lights coming on after a film” (V1), with others noting its sense of depth and visual intensity (V2, V8). One participant called it the most memorable section of the exhibition, observing that “the darker lighting and visual atmosphere created a very strong and effective ambiance” (V9, V14, V15). This interplay of darkness and light intensified focus and produced the exhibition's most viscerally engaging moment—an observation further supported by behavioral data: all 15 visitors paused for an extended period in this section, and three were observed taking photographs. This reaction underlines the spatial and emotional power of lighting contrast. As Gobbato (2021) observes, selective illumination in darker environments heightens attention, stimulates imagination, and transforms exhibition rhythm.

Figure 6
The Dark Corridor



Source: Art Happening Company

Several visitors expressed a desire for greater lighting variation across the exhibition. V3 noted that the current reliance on warm lighting, while effective in preserving the historic ambiance, may limit expressive possibilities; V6 & V15 similarly anticipated feeling a sense of change between historical periods as they moved through the space. These responses align with established curatorial thinking: Dernie (2006) argues that artificial lighting can redefine spatial boundaries akin to film, while Gobbato (2021) similarly contends that lighting guides the visitor's gaze and communicates meaning as part of the exhibition's narrative.

Building on these principles, subtle variation in brightness, tone, and color temperature could be introduced to visualize the exhibition's historical progression—from repression to openness—while sustaining emotional engagement across zones. Lighting, in this sense, functions as both an atmospheric and narrative instrument, transforming practical illumination into a central dimension of curatorial storytelling.

Learning: Curatorial Strategies and Visitor Experience

Interactivity and Participation

The curatorial team envisioned literature as a multisensory and participatory experience. As Mr. Jian explained, activities such as typing or pressing buttons allow visitors to generate personalized content, “transforming them from passive recipients into active participants”—in contrast to the one-way communication of watching or listening alone. Interactive installations such as Poetry in Play and Poetry Fortune were designed with this principle in mind.

Visitor responses confirmed the approach's effectiveness. Most participants, totaling 13, were drawn to interactive zones and reported longer dwell times: “fun and motivating—interactive exhibits make me want to understand more” (V2, V5). The element of comparison proved particularly engaging: V8 noted that seeing their own writing alongside the original author's “made me feel quite involved,” while V1 highlighted its accessibility—“for people who are not familiar with literature, it feels very fun.” Even visitors with little prior interest in literature found interactivity a welcoming entry point: V9 noted that while literature was not a personal interest, interactive sections would still draw them in if visiting with friends—suggesting that interactivity plays a meaningful role in lowering participation barriers and broadening audiences. Overall, the interactive displays succeeded in shifting visitors from passive

recipients to active learners, echoing Hein's (1998) concept of discovery-based learning, where hands-on and minds-on engagement fosters more meaningful knowledge construction.

However, engagement was concentrated in Poetry Fortune and Poetry in Play, while other installations saw limited use—likely due to low appeal. As one participant observed, some interactive designs felt “a bit too old-fashioned” to attract younger audiences (V3 & V15). Future exhibits should reduce redundant interactive games and replace them with more contemporary modalities, such as gesture-based controls and refreshed visual design, to broaden cross-generational appeal.

Clipboard Displays: Aesthetic Appeal and Reading Challenge

The clipboard installation was conceived as a bridge between literary depth and contemporary reading behavior. As Ms. Chen explained, short excerpts were designed to spark curiosity “similar to how modern readers share notable sentences on social media, which may lead them to check the book, borrow it from the library, or revisit the exhibition panels.” Writer Chu described the selection principle as “first based on aesthetic quality, then on historical significance,” aiming to present excerpts that were both beautiful and meaningful. The semi-transparent surfaces and luminous display were further designed to elevate text into an aesthetic object in its own right.

Visitors responded strongly to this aesthetic dimension. Several were immediately drawn to the installation's visual quality: “I think it's very beautiful and has a strong sense of quality—I was immediately drawn to it, and it also feels very suitable for taking photos or sharing online” (V5). Others noted its departure from conventional text formats: “It transforms text into light and form, which is very appealing” (V7), while one participant admitted, “Its appearance is quite beautiful—because it looks aesthetically pleasing, I would want to take a look, though not necessarily to read the text” (V8). Together, these responses suggest that the material and lighting effectively extended the medium of textual display, fostering initial attention, aesthetic engagement, and willingness to photograph or share (Figure 7).

Figure 7
Clip Holder



Source: Art Happening Company

However, observation revealed a gap between visual attraction and content engagement. Although 12 out of 15 visitors stopped at the clipboards, 8 of those 12 did not clearly understand their purpose. With approximately 18 clipboard stations each displaying 2–3 excerpts, the zone contained over 50 passages in total—a volume that appeared to compound visual fatigue.

Feedback consistently pointed to text volume as a barrier: “At first glance, it's just a lot of text—I didn't read every single one” (V7); “There's so much text—who could finish reading it?” (V3). Content relevance and the literary aesthetic of the texts also emerged as a concern: “It looks kind of boring, all modern poetry” (V9); “I'm not sure why this passage was selected” (V1, V14, V15); and “If you're not very familiar with the authors, you wouldn't read it carefully unless a particular line catches your attention” (V8).

This tension reflects a common challenge in literary exhibitions—balancing beauty with readability. While the clipboards effectively visualized textual culture, the sheer volume of material and the absence of interpretive framing limited their function as learning tools. Reducing the number of passages, selecting two or three concise sentences per station, applying more rigorous criteria for literary and aesthetic merit in text selection, and adding brief contextual notes or QR references could strengthen comprehension while preserving visual impact.

Objects as Connectors: Imagination and Resonance

Personal artifacts of writers were curated as tangible mediators linking literary ideas with everyday life. The curatorial team explained that “we use these objects to tell stories; they are more vivid and relatable.” Items such as Liu Na’ou’s mahjong set, Lin Hai-yin’s elephant figurines, and a writer’s wedding dress were selected to reveal individuality beyond textual identity.

Visitors responded strongly to this strategy, emphasizing how material presence stimulated imagination and emotional connection. Personal objects proved particularly effective at humanizing literary figures: one participant noted that seeing Lin Hai-yin's wedding and tennis dress made her feel she could “imagine her life” and understand her better (V8), while another found that her figurines evoked a sense of ordinariness, “seeing Lin Hai-yin’s elephant figurines reminds me that my uncle also likes collecting elephants, it makes writers feel like ordinary people” (V6) (Figure 9). Distinctive and appealing resonant objects drew similar responses: V13 remarked that encountering a qipao and mahjong set felt striking enough to “stop and read the descriptions.” Such comments illustrate how everyday objects personalize literary figures and reduce the perceived distance between artist and audience.

Figure 8

Lin Hai-Yin's Elephant Figurines



Source: Liu, T.

For some, the objects opened broader historical insight: V10 observed that Lin Hai-yin's elephant collection illuminated the relatively open and diverse status of women at the time, reflecting Western cultural influences and more progressive thinking on gender equality. Everyday artifacts also bridged temporal distance: V5 remarked that San Mao's license plate sparked an imagining of her daily life, “forming a connection with the writer even though I've never met her.” Across these responses, material culture consistently functioned as a point of entry—transforming biographical detail into personal resonance.

At the same time, these responses were most prominent among visitors already familiar with Taiwanese literature. Those with limited prior knowledge seldom mentioned the collections, suggesting that personal artifacts are powerful for deepening engagement but less effective as entry points for unfamiliar audiences.

Staff: Non-intrusive Guidance and Independent Exploration

The curatorial strategy emphasized a non-intrusive mode of visitor support in which floor volunteers act primarily as quiet observers rather than active guides. As Mr. Jian explained, “Under normal circumstances, visitors explore and interact on their own, while I simply watch to ensure nothing is damaged, without stepping in unless necessary.” Volunteers were seated on unobtrusive black chairs positioned to cover the widest possible area, ensuring supervision without drawing attention. This arrangement aimed to preserve both order and autonomy, allowing visitors to navigate freely through the exhibition.

Visitor feedback confirmed that this passive presence aligned well with their preferred style of engagement. Most participants described the atmosphere as relaxed and pressure-free, appreciating that staff remained available but unobtrusive. One visitor noted, “When people needed help with an interactive display, a staff member came over gently and assisted me, but otherwise they didn't interrupt my experience” (V8, V9). Another remarked that this quiet support “let me stay immersed and explore at my own pace” (V4).

This congruence between curatorial design and visitor expectation underscores the suitability of low-intensity social interaction within contemporary exhibitions. In this exhibition, the volunteers' silent guardianship functioned as a subtle framework that maintained both spatial care and emotional comfort. Their restrained assistance model exemplifies an effective balance between safeguarding the exhibits and fostering a reflective, self-directed visitor experience.

Conclusion

The Power of Literature demonstrates both the strengths and limitations of atmosphere-driven exhibition design. Across the four dimensions of design, lighting, learning, and staff, the exhibition largely succeeded in creating a welcoming, accessible, and emotionally engaging environment. Color, materiality, and interactive elements fostered comfort and personal resonance, while the non-intrusive staff model supported autonomous exploration.

However, a recurring gap emerged between curatorial intent and visitor perception: spatial metaphors, chromatic symbolism, and lighting narratives were rarely decoded without explicit interpretive cues. These findings suggest that poetic design strategies, while affectively effective, benefit from supplementary framing to communicate their deeper meaning.

Visitor responses also point toward an underexplored opportunity. Despite the exhibition's limited use of artistic media—currently comprising a single metal sculpture depicting literary gatherings and writers' food culture—13 out of 15 participants expressed clear interest in cross-media interpretations of literary themes, such as oil paintings and photography, with V9 and V12 noting that visual representations make literary content more memorable, and V11,13, 15 adding that such formats spark curiosity and encourage visitors to read the accompanying interpretive texts. Incorporating such works into future exhibitions would diversify the visual language and offer multiple entry points for visitors with varying degrees of literary familiarity.

As the National Museum of Taiwan Literature prepares its fourth permanent exhibition, integrating multisensory layering, cross-media artworks, and contextual signage could strengthen the bridge between literary heritage and public experience—ensuring that atmosphere functions not only as aesthetic backdrop, but as a legible narrative in its own right.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

During the writing of this study, the researcher made use of Claude and ChatGPT to assist with content organization, the refinement of academic expression, and the improvement of overall textual readability. These AI tools were primarily employed to support sentence fluency, provide suggestions for academic terminology, and summarize relevant literature. All outputs generated by these tools were individually reviewed, revised, and expanded upon by the researcher to ensure the accuracy, originality, and academic integrity of the thesis. The researcher assumes full responsibility for all content presented in this work.

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