



A Study on the Application Strategies of Museum Education from the Perspective of Public History: A Case Study of the Macao Museum

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Abstract. With the rise of the concept of "Public History" globally, the role of museums is undergoing a profound transformation, gradually shifting from traditional symbols of knowledge authority to spaces for public cultural participation and dialogue. As a historic city where Chinese and Western cultures converge, Macao possesses a unique diversity in its historical narratives. Museum collections are not only carriers of historical knowledge but also embody the construction of Macao's social identity. This paper, from the theoretical perspective of Public History and combined with an empirical survey of museum education activities in Macao, explores the application and innovation of this concept in Macao's museum education practice. Through literature analysis and case studies, this paper finds that Macao museums are undergoing a transformation from a "one-way communication" model to a "multi-participation" model, initially forming a public history education path with local characteristics. However, the research also reveals challenges such as uneven resource allocation, the need to improve public participation, and a relatively singular historical narrative dimension. Based on this, this paper proposes strategic directions for future development, including deepening community cooperation, constructing diversified educational models, and developing digital public communication platforms to promote the co-construction, sharing, and dissemination of Macao's diverse culture.

Keywords: Public history; Macao Museum; Educational innovation; Public participation

1 Introduction

Museums in Macao are deeply rooted in its unique historical context. During the Portuguese rule and under the "One Country, Two Systems" framework after the handover, they have long existed within a context of interwoven diverse historical narratives, playing a crucial role in showcasing local history and constructing social identity. With the rapid development of Macao's socio-economic development and tourism industry, the educational function of museums in cultural dissemination and exchange has become increasingly prominent.

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However, despite the increased popularity of cultural activities in Macao, there is still significant room for improvement in the effectiveness of museum education and public participation. According to a 2024 survey, 91,000 Macao residents visited museums or World Heritage sites, a 15.8% increase year-on-year, with the average number of visits increasing slightly by 0.1 to 3.2. Among them, visits to World Heritage sites (65,400) and museums (57,300) increased by 10.0% and 14.7% respectively [1]. With a total population of approximately 680,000 in Macao (2024), the proportion of residents visiting museums was only about 8.4%. Data from the second quarter 2025 survey on public participation in cultural activities shows that only 93,500 people visited museums or World Heritage sites. While the growth trend is positive, the overall participation base remains limited. Traditional museum education models often focus on the one-way transmission of knowledge and explanation of exhibits, resulting in insufficient public participation and experience, leading to low interest, a lack of interaction and agency, which to some extent restricts the deepening of educational effects.

The social education role of museums has been widely recognized. Gong Qinghua (2024) points out that museums occupy an important position in cultural inheritance and education, and their role has evolved from the initial collection and static display of treasures to an active platform for social education and knowledge interaction, dedicated to promoting cultural exchange [2]. The educational function of modern museums aims to break through the traditional "knowledge transmission" model, emphasizing the subjectivity and experience of participants. As a meeting point of Chinese and Western cultures, the Macao Museum needs to pay special attention to multilingual expression and cultural respect in its educational practices to achieve inclusive historical dissemination.

Against this backdrop, this study attempts to introduce the theoretical perspective of public history to explore pathways for reform and innovation in the educational aspects of Macao museums. The core questions addressed in this study are: How can existing educational activities in Macao museums effectively promote public participation in historical narratives? How can the concepts of public history influence and optimize the teaching models and cultural dissemination methods of Macao museum education? This study aims to expand the practical application of public history theory and provide sustainable development solutions for museum education in different regional contexts, thereby stimulating the inherent educational potential of museums and contributing to the sustainable development of the entire social education system.

2 The Integration of Public History and Museum Education

Yang Junjun (2025) emphasizes that "social education is one of the basic functions of museums, a distinctive feature and key identifier of modern museums [3]. It not only responds to the public's spiritual and cultural needs but also establishes museums as a core venue and important medium for the transmission of regional culture, making them an effective way to promote regional culture." In contemporary museum education, historical collections should not be regarded as static material evidence but ra-

ther as carriers capable of dynamically conveying historical information. Taking the Sanxingdui cultural site as an example, the "Bronze Sacred Tree" is not only exquisitely crafted but also embodies ancient bronze smelting technology, religious belief systems, and even possible exchanges and interactions with distant civilizations. Public history provides an innovative theoretical perspective and support for examining museum education.

2.1 The Concept and Development of Public History

Public history emerged in the United States in the 1970s, one of its initial motivations being to open up employment opportunities for history graduates outside of academia. It is not confined to the "ivory tower" of academia, but emphasizes the social and public value of history, focusing on the profound connection between historical research and contemporary society, and the important role of the public in shaping historical memory and participating in social governance. Public history is no longer viewed merely as a single discipline of "history," but rather places greater emphasis on the subjectivity of the "public." Michael Frisch proposed the concept of "shared authority," introducing public history into the public sphere, emphasizing that the right to interpret history should not be exclusively enjoyed by professional historians, but should be shared with the public. Consequently, museum education is no longer a sole publisher of truth, but becomes a vehicle for dialogue between historians and public memory. This helps guide the public to understand the historical responsibility and cultural mission embodied in museum collections and to put this understanding into educational practice.

The exploration of public history in Chinese academia originated in the 1980s, spearheaded by scholars such as Jiang Dachun, who propelled the field's development domestically. In recent years, many universities in China have established public history research centers and offered affiliated public history courses. The academic community is committed to connecting public history concepts with the dissemination of Chinese culture, heritage preservation, and the construction of collective social memory. This trend has made museums one of the venues for public history practice. On the other hand, museums across China have also begun to explore localized paths for public history through models such as "participatory education" and "volunteer training."

Compared to domestic research, international research has developed systematic experiences in areas such as community participation and urban memory. Domestic research, on the other hand, currently focuses primarily on heritage preservation, revolutionary cultural tourism, and museum curation, aligning with national cultural strategies such as cultural confidence and cultural tourism integration. However, it lacks independent development models, particularly in the area of museum-school education integration.

Unlike traditional history, public history transcends the confines of a single discipline, emphasizing a public-oriented form of communication and social responsibility, and advocating for the democratization of public participation in the interpretation of history. It focuses on cross-cultural and interdisciplinary exchange, as well as the

application of diverse research methods and teaching tools. This concept helps us understand the multidimensional role played by the Macao Museum in the local context and is of significant value in enriching students' interdisciplinary knowledge and meeting diverse learning needs. Enhancing public participation in museums not only promotes their sustainable development but also strengthens their cultural influence and social benefits.

2.2 The Value of Public History in Macao Museum Education

Firstly, it offers an innovative perspective for museum education. Traditional museum education often views museums as static "temples of knowledge," where exhibits themselves cannot actively "speak." The Macao Museum, however, possesses a rich historical heritage, with its collections encompassing Chinese, Portuguese, and Macanese cultures, reflecting the governance context of different periods. By exhibiting the life stories of ordinary people and their immigration journeys, and utilizing representative artifacts from both China and the West, the Macao Museum can create an immersive cultural atmosphere, stimulating visitors' sense of cultural identity. For example, the Macao Museum's permanent exhibitions are presented in layers, showcasing Macao's early history, Sino-Western trade and religious exchanges, traditional arts and folk customs, and contemporary life. This narrative approach connects Macao's culture with different social groups. The numerous local altars dedicated to the Earth God and the folk beliefs found in every household in Macao are vivid manifestations of public historical memory. Public history advocates returning ownership of history to the public, enabling everyone to find their place in history and understand the connection between the past and the future. Cao Yiran and Ren Yujie (2023) pointed out that "museums are physical institutions with natural and human cultural heritage at their core [4]. They bring together the results of multidisciplinary expansion and are interconnected to form an organic system." Broad public participation injects vitality into museums, making them a cultural link connecting the public and demonstrating their social value and cultural vitality.

Secondly, it expands new resources for museum education. Wang Xinguo (2025) proposed that "public history advocates the use of diverse historical materials and interdisciplinary methods, including digital resources, oral history, and video materials, to enhance the attractiveness and richness of history teaching [5]." The scope of public history covers the entire process from cultural practice to social participation, encouraging the public to actively participate in historical interpretation. It breaks the tradition of confining museum education to a specific field and expands its vision to the entire social field. Through relevant research, the author found that public history encourages the perception of authentic historical memories and emotions through interviews with historical witnesses and in-depth visits to historical sites. Its research objects span the past and present and advocate understanding history from multiple perspectives. These rich resources provide diversified references for museum education, transforming it from a passive process of receiving knowledge to a process of active public participation in construction, making the learning experience more three-dimensional and complete.

Finally, museum education has become an important practical vehicle for public history. Li Xixia (2025) emphasizes that "the deeper purpose of secondary school history education lies in 'historical education,' which is different from the general 'imparting of historical knowledge [6].' It focuses more on guiding students to examine history from a developmental and interconnected perspective, deeply understand the driving forces behind historical evolution, and thus cultivate critical thinking skills." Museum education provides a physical platform for public history that integrates communication, memory, and display. It integrates and mediates resources such as oral history and community memory advocated by public history. For example, the Macao Museum once held the "A Cross-Era Marching Horn—"Tian Han and the National Anthem" Photo Exhibition," which showcased the process of the creation of the national anthem through multimedia [7].

Analysis of surveys on citizen participation in cultural activities in 2024 and 2025 reveals that in the second quarter of 2024, 57,300 citizens participated in museum activities, accounting for 63.0% (57.3/91.0) of the total participants. In 2025, 62,600 citizens participated, representing 67.0% (62.6/93.5), a year-on-year increase of 4.0 percentage points. Among these, 26.6% (2024) and 28.4% (2025) participated in three or more types of activities, a year-on-year increase of 1.8 percentage points. This indicates that over a quarter of the public is willing to participate in cultural activities, forming the foundation for museum education and highlighting the public's high interest in interactive and participatory cultural experiences. Museum education aims to popularize public history concepts and methods, cultivate cultural identity, and thus promote the broader role of public history in social education.

In conclusion, a profound symbiotic relationship exists between public history and museum education. Public history nourishes museum education with its theoretical perspective, while museum education provides the former with crucial practical fields and media for dissemination. This mutually reinforcing synergy drives the improvement of museum education quality and promotes the popularization and in-depth dialogue of history and culture.

3 Application Strategies of Macao Museum Education from the Perspective of Public History

With the policy support of the Cultural Affairs Bureau of the Macao SAR, the Macao museum system is gradually being improved. Major institutions under the Cultural Affairs Bureau include the Macao Museum and the Maritime Museum, which not only undertake the core functions of cultural relic protection and display but also increasingly emphasize the expansion of their educational functions, conducting diverse cultural exchange activities through online and offline channels. In recent years, incorporating museum education into core cultural policies has become an important strategy for Macao to connect the public with historical memory.

In the practical phase, the practical teaching framework, which links on-campus and off-campus practice platforms, drives the improvement of students' applied skills by citing real-world examples and projects (Xiaoyan Li, 2024) [8]. As a representa-

tive comprehensive history museum of the city, the Macao Museum is a key venue for practicing the concept of public history. For example, the museum's "Second Classroom" educational activities, launched in 2025, aim to encourage students to express independent opinions through carefully designed interactive sessions, achieving the educational goal of moving from passive "learning" to active "understanding".

However, this study, through field research, reveals that Macao museums face a low rate of visits from local residents. Surveys show that the general public's interest in participating in museum activities is low. Furthermore, according to data from the Macao Government Tourism Office in 2024, non-mainland Chinese tourists accounted for approximately 30% of visitors to Macao, while the coverage of multilingual guided tour equipment in museums is inefficient, and in-house service facilities are inadequate. For example, there is a lack of self-service electronic guide machines, making it difficult for individual visitors to easily access exhibit information without a guide. At the same time, the informational labels on some collections are too brief, lacking in-depth interpretations such as the excavation background, dating, and craftsmanship techniques. Coupled with insufficient multilingual support in educational materials and cultural dissemination, this leads to difficulties in understanding for visitors whose native language is not Chinese. Therefore, how to effectively translate public history concepts into practical applications under existing resources is a key issue that requires further consideration in the future.

3.1 Reshaping Educational Practices with the Concept of Public History

The value of a museum lies not only in the quantity of its collections, but also in how it utilizes limited resources to create public cultural value. The ultimate goal of collecting is to share the achievements of human civilization with the public, thereby shifting from an "object-centered" to a "people-centered" approach, allowing collections to realize their social value through sharing (Tang & Wang, 2011) [9]. Since 2023, the Macao Museum has been actively inviting residents and tourists to participate in special events on commemorative days such as April 18th (International Day for Monuments and Sites) and April 22nd, including "Family Workshops" and "Land Religion Experiences," proactively embodying this concept.

According to 2023 cultural industry statistics, Macao's total cultural industry service revenue reached 8.72 billion patacas, a year-on-year increase of 47.9%, of which the service revenue from cultural performances reached 2.35 billion patacas, a significant increase compared to the previous year. More systematically, the Macao Museum's "Second Classroom" community education program designs differentiated guided tours and field trips for different age groups, connecting museum collections with the historical context of the community, significantly strengthening the museum's educational function. The key to history education lies in helping students understand abstract historical content through concrete and tangible practice. Through this museum-school integration model, the Macao Museum allows students to participate directly, effectively stimulating their interest in learning history.

Therefore, the Macao Museum is systematically deepening its existing educational practices to implement the concept of "people-centeredness and shared participation."

Firstly, it transforms traditional commemorative days into interactive activities, such as themed events and traditional handicraft workshops, held on commemorative days like the International Day for Monuments and Sites, allowing the public to understand Macao's cultural memory through interaction. Secondly, it improves its "second classroom" system, setting up age-appropriate modules and tailoring learning processes to different age groups, such as story-guided tours, thematic study tours, and community history exploration, to increase the complexity of learning. Through collaboration between the museum, schools, and communities, it connects museum artifacts with historical memories. Finally, it enhances the historical experience for visitors by conducting digital activities and 3D artifact displays, breaking geographical limitations and expanding the reach of education.

3.2 Exploring Public History Teaching Content at Historical Sites

The richness and practicality of museum resources necessitate the implementation of specific historical teaching objectives in educational activities, organically integrating museum collections into the teaching system (Zhang Yankui, 2024) [10]. As a core venue carrying Macao's profound history and culture, it is crucial to deeply explore the teaching content of Macao museums from a public history perspective. Interactive experiential projects can be designed to allow the public to learn historical knowledge through participation and stimulate their interest in inquiry. Furthermore, regularly holding academic lectures and exchange activities, inviting experts and scholars to share cutting-edge findings, can provide a high-level platform for the public to understand museum culture. Integrating resources from the Cultural Affairs Bureau, universities, and the community, and utilizing digital technology to innovate teaching methods for different audiences, is an effective way to improve the effectiveness of public history education [11].

In teaching practice, the key to exploring public history teaching content lies in establishing connections between museum collections and urban public civilization [12]. When conducting teaching, the Macao Museum extracts themes of social memory value from specific exhibitions, such as "Maritime Trade" and "Religion and Folk Beliefs," and designs corresponding teaching tasks based on these themes, allowing students to understand the historical context through observation, discussion, and experience. Furthermore, the museum can organize visits for students or museum visitors to old neighborhoods, providing an important supplement to classroom content through community history. Simultaneously, in academic lectures, digitalization can serve as an extension, combining the impact of old neighborhoods with oral history, extending learning beyond museum visits. By integrating museum collections, community resources, and digital resources, the museum can construct teaching content that is more relevant to public life within the framework of public history.

3.3 Innovating Teaching Methods with Public Participation as the Guiding Principle

Traditional teacher-led teaching methods often neglect student agency. Bruner once pointed out, "We teach a subject not to cultivate a small living library of that subject, but to teach students to think systematically like experts in that subject." Public history emphasizes active public participation and advocates for research-based learning through teamwork. Museum education in Macao should not be confined to the museum; it should guide students to "go out," engage with "community history," "exhibition curation," and "oral history," encouraging them to actively collect data, analyze issues, and complete research reports. This process not only cultivates their systematic thinking but also deepens their sense of social participation in history. Simultaneously, conducting trilingual (Chinese, English, Portuguese) teaching activities and recruiting student volunteers to receive visitors from different countries and regions, sharing history through exchange, is also an excellent practical approach. Enabling students to participate in historical activities in various forms aims to stimulate learning interest, promote active learning, and enhance practical skills and historical thinking (Wang Xinguo, 2025) [5].

In addition, museums can organize individual curatorial activities, allowing students to choose their own themes and design displays based on their collections or community artifacts. Simultaneously, under the guidance of teachers and museum professionals, students can conduct oral history interviews and compile video footage into concise community history archives. Through social investigation, they can understand the connection between history and life, enabling them to gain a proactive, open, and diverse understanding of history in rural areas through practical experience.

3.4 Conclusion

In summary, the Macao Museum's educational strategy from a public history perspective revolves around three key transformations: first, a shift in educational philosophy, moving from being a custodian of cultural relics to an activator of cultural memory and a co-builder of public history; second, a transformation in teaching methods, shifting from one-way knowledge transmission to two-way and multi-way interactive participation and experiential inquiry; and third, a transformation in resource integration, moving from the limitations of museum space to an open ecosystem that connects the community, schools, and digital platforms.

Looking ahead, Macao's museum education needs to further broaden the practical dimensions of public history. Its core objective is not only to train students' historical thinking skills but also to cultivate their understanding of multiculturalism in order to address the challenges of globalization. Simultaneously, it should actively leverage digital technology to systematically collect oral histories and video materials, constructing an online "digital public history platform" to encourage broader public participation and cultivate citizens with critical thinking and cultural literacy. In this process, public history provides solid theoretical and methodological support for museum education and injects continuous momentum into its teaching innovation.

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