



## **A Mini Review of Museum Literature and Museum Development in Southeast Asia**



Siew Siew Yong<sup>a</sup>; Choi-Meng Leong<sup>b\*</sup>; Lauannah Ebeo Maningo<sup>c</sup>; Mia Bella R. Fresnido<sup>d</sup>; Muhammad Ashoer<sup>e</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Faculty of Business, Curtin University, Malaysia; <sup>b</sup>UCSI Graduate Business School, UCSI University, Malaysia;

<sup>c</sup>Faculty of Economics and Management, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Malaysia; <sup>d</sup>Central Bicol State University of Agriculture, Philippines; <sup>e</sup>University of Muslim Indonesia, Indonesia

\*Correspondence: [leongcm@university.edu.my](mailto:leongcm@university.edu.my)

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**ABSTRACT:** This study aims to provide a review of previously conducted research studies about museums and their recent development in Southeast Asia. The bibliometric analysis of Web of Science database revealed that the number of publications related to museum was in an increasing trend and majority of the studies focusing on museums are publications from and within the context of the People's Republic of China. The visualization of similarities viewer software analysis showed that China is the most relevant keyword with the highest occurrence. It further revealed that museums are understudied in Southeast Asia. Basing on the number of museums and their cultural offerings in Southeast Asia, museum visitors are foreseen as a potential market for heritage tourism development. While the pandemic forced the closure of a number of museums globally, the industry rebounded quickly by establishing a digital presence, thereby offering new opportunities for those in the heritage tourism industry.

**KEYWORDS:** national museum; bibliometric; publication; development; Southeast Asia

### **Introduction**

Heritage tourism brings positive economic impacts through high tourist arrivals and receipts; multiplier effects; and employment opportunities (Chong & Balasingam, 2019). Museums and arts centers are categorized as part of cultural heritage tourism in Malaysia. In 2019, the country received 2,782,578 tourist visits to 23 museums which included visitors, both local and international, some of which were students and delegates of inreach and outreach programmes (Department of Museums Malaysia, 2019). Aside from Malaysia, museums play a significant role in the cultural tourism sector of Southeast Asia (ShawHong, 2020).

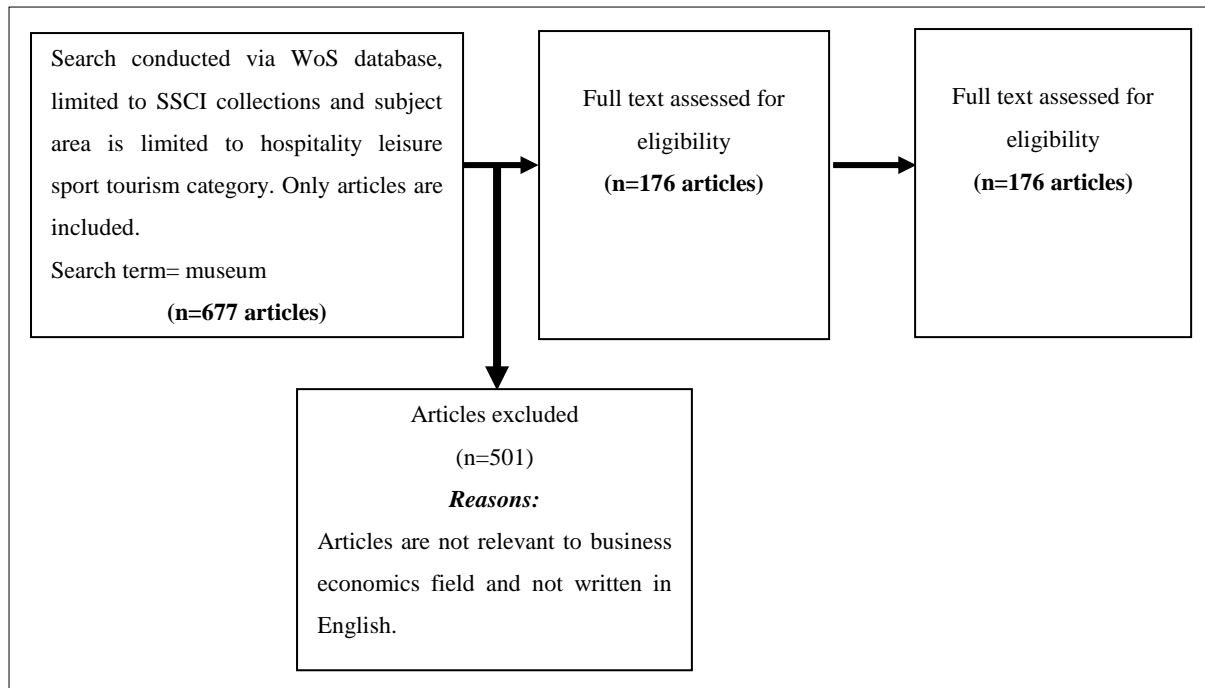
National museums provide an avenue to understand the history and culture of a country and these can be found in Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam in the region of Southeast Asia (Southeast Asia, 2021). Frommer's (2021) suggests 5 best museums in Southeast Asia, such as National

Museum (Thailand); Vietnam National Museum of Fine Arts; Cham Museum (Vietnam); National Museum (Cambodia); Tuol sleng, Museum of Genocide (Cambodia); and Peranakan Museum (Singapore). The same author also recommends other museums in addition to the national museums. National Geographic (2012) recommended Top 10 Museums and Galleries highlighting the main attractions of each one. To enrich visitor experience of audiences in the entire visiting process, heritage organizations need to take visitors' motivations, barriers, interests, and sustained benefits into consideration (Ayala et al., 2020).

Falk (2013) revealed the importance of knowing the profile of museum visitors as well as four critical factors to enhance museum visits through what people remember. These factors are needs & interests, novelty, emotional content and later, experience support. A study was conducted to investigate family visits, which revealed the challenges in satisfying different needs of mixed ages, education and interests and that family visits can be programmed to address common interests and create collective memories (Zhou, 2019). Another study was also conducted to investigate the perceived benefits of visiting museums (Zhou, 2019) as well as the barriers that prevail in museums such as digital trend, communicative barriers, social barriers, and sensorial barriers (Papadimitriou et al., 2016). Another recent development is social inclusion such as the approach towards disability (Zakaria, 2020). In view of the wide variety of areas in investigating museums, bibliometric analysis will be appropriate in exploring the areas of research in museum.

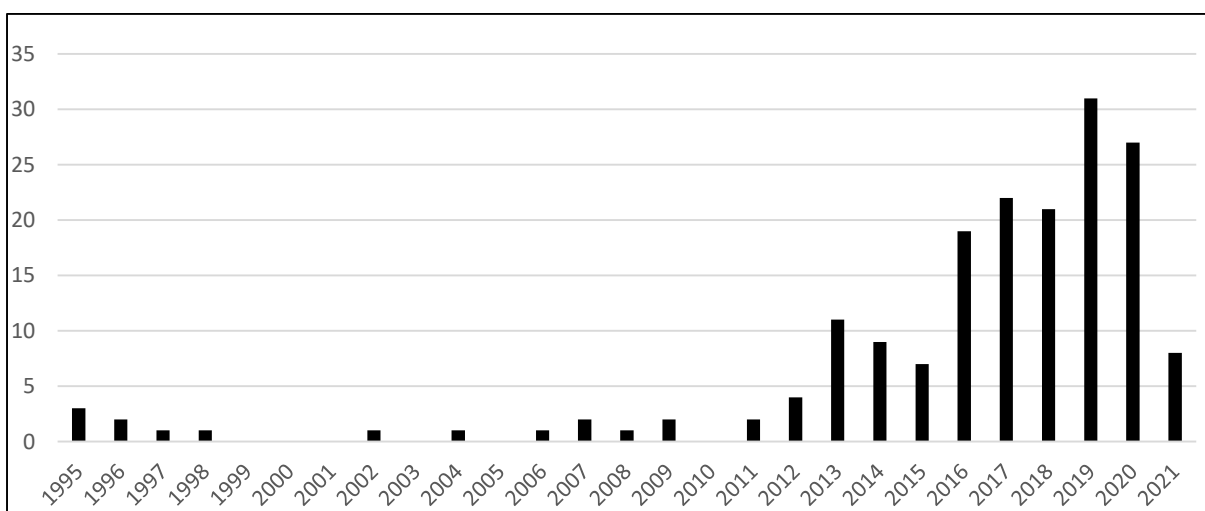
## Overview of Museums

The researchers employed bibliometric analysis, the appropriate mechanism for analyzing and representing the data used (Merigó and Yang 2017). The search process for the bibliometric analysis is presented in Figure 1. The search is conducted on 10th March 2021 via the Web of Science (WoS) database. We concentrated the data provided by WoS as they include the most influential journals with the highest standard (Merigó and Yang 2017) and researchers who conducted previous bibliometric analysis studies in the tourism field did the same (Garrigos-Simon et al. 2018; Merigó et al. 2020; Jiménez-García et al. 2020). As far as quality management is concerned, we adopted the selection parameters used in the study by Paul and Rosado-Serrano (2019) by only including studies published in academic journals with an Impact Factor (IF) in the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) collections from the year 1972 to 10th March 2021. The keyword "museum" was used for the search. Since we aimed to explore the articles about museum in the tourism aspect, the subject area is limited to hospitality leisure sport tourism category. Subsequently, 677 articles were found in the WoS. A total of 501 articles are excluded as they are not written in English and were not relevant to the business economics field. As a result, 176 publications matched the criteria and were included in this examination.



**Figure 1: Process and criteria in choosing articles from the WOS database**

Figure 2 shows that the first article related to the museum appeared in the WoS dated back in 1995. Prior to 2013, there were less than five articles published yearly. This topic gained attention from the researchers as publications increased to more than five articles published yearly from 2013 to 2015. The number of publications surged from 7 to 19 from 2015 to 2016. With the substantial increase in the number of related publications, the publishing rate was maintained to at least 20 articles published annually from 2017 to 2020. Based on the publishing rate, the number is expected to rise considerably by the end of 2021 since there were already eight articles published by 10<sup>th</sup> March 2021. Figure 2 illustrates the annual trend of publications relevant to the museum.



**Figure 2: Number of articles published by year**

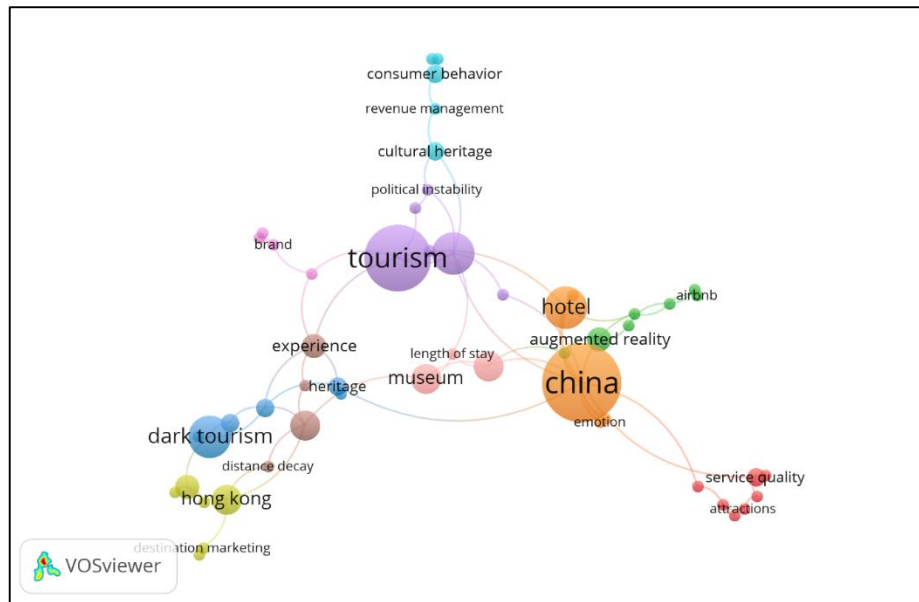
We also looked into the countries where the researches were carried out. These are presented in Table 1. Among the top five countries with the most relevant articles, 61% of the

researches were conducted in the People's Republic of China numbering 108 out of the total 176 articles. Thereafter, there are 30 articles from England, 24 articles from the United States, 15 articles from Australia and 11 articles from Italy. Only 7 of the 176 articles are from Southeast Asia, with Indonesia, Singapore and Thailand having two articles each while only one article is from Vietnam. Hence, we conclude that museum research is understudied in the Southeast Asian region.

**Table 1: Publications by country**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Publications</b>
People's Republic of China	108
England	30
United States	24
Australia	15
Italy	11
Spain	10
South Korea	8
Scotland	7
Taiwan	7
New Zealand	6
Canada	5
Turkey	4
Indonesia, Ireland, Israel, Japan, Netherlands, Portugal, Singapore, Thailand	2
Belgium, Chile, Croatia, Denmark, Egypt, Fiji, Finland, France, India, Iran, Norway, Oman, Qatar, Romania, Switzerland, Uruguay, Vietnam, Wales	1
<b>Total Publications</b>	<b>176</b>

Next, the researchers employed visualization of similarities (VOS) viewer software to recognize the most relevant research topics in the museum area. VOS viewer software can help the reviewer visualize by interpreting the keyword's occurrence and investigating the cluster of study fields concerned (Vallaster et al., 2019). To deeply investigate and analyze the theoretical foundations of this study, we conducted a visual analysis on the co-occurrence of author keywords through VOS viewer (Callon et al. 1983). Two keywords were used as the minimum criterion to the analysis and a total of 53 items were obtained. According to the graph shown in Figure 3, the relationships between the keywords can be divided into ten major clusters. Meanwhile, table 2 illustrates the top 30 keywords with the frequencies and total link strengths.



**Figure 3: Co-occurrence of Keywords**

**Table 2: Occurrence of Most Relevant Keywords**

Rank	Keyword	Occurrences	Total Link Strength
1	China	13	14
2	Tourism	11	6
3	Museums	7	8
4	Hotel	7	7
5	Dark Tourism	7	4
6	Hong Kong	5	6
7	Motivation	5	5
8	Cultural Tourism	5	4
9	Museum	5	3
10	Experience	4	5
11	Social Media	4	4
12	Augmented Reality	4	2
13	Interpretation	3	5
14	Heritage	3	4
15	Consumer Behavior	3	3
16	Cultural Heritage	3	3
17	Service Quality	3	3
18	Management	3	2
19	ADR	2	6
20	Full-service Hotels	2	6
21	Goppar	2	6
22	Limited-service hotels	2	6
23	Cultural Values	2	4
24	Hospitality	2	4
25	Acceptance	2	3
26	Airbnb	2	3
27	Attractions	2	3
28	Brand	2	3
29	Commitment	2	3
30	Destination	2	3

## Museums in South East Asia

### *Brunei*

Negara Brunei Darussalam is situated on Borneo Island and neighbors East Malaysia. The country is popularly known for its pristine rainforests and vivid Islamic structural designs.



**Figure 4: Brunei Museum. Source: Asia-Europe Foundation (2012).**

Precolonial Brunei had strong trade relations with China and was significantly guided by Hindu beliefs; the country eventually conceded to British rule in 1888 but gained independence in 1984 (Britannica, 2022). During her reign, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II inaugurated the Brunei Museum, which overlooks the Brunei river and showcases emblems of Bruneian culture and history (Asia-Europe Foundation, 2012).

### *Cambodia*

The Kingdom of Cambodia, locally known as Kampuchea, lies in the Indochinese peninsula and shares a border with Thailand, Laos, as well as Vietnam. It is home to the famous Angkor Wat Temple, a UNESCO World Heritage site, and the largest religious monument in the world (Chander, et al., 2021).



**Figure 5: Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum. Source: BBC News (2015).**

In 1975, the Communist Party of Kampuchea, also known as the Khmer Rouge, took over the country and marked the four-year suffering of more than two million Cambodians. Khmer Rouge Leader, Pol Pot was inspired by the communist philosophy of Karl Marx and coerced "millions of people from the cities to work on communal farms in the countryside" (BBC News, 2018). Remnants from this brutal chapter of Cambodia's history are displayed at the

Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum in Phnom Penh City, which previously served as an interrogation and detention center; although its archives have attracted researchers interested in the event, family members refer to the collections to acquire information about the victims (Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, n.d.).

### ***Indonesia***

Indonesia is an island country located off the coast of mainland Southeast Asia in the Indian and Pacific oceans. Currently, Indonesia is the most populous country in Southeast Asia and the fourth most populous in the world (Wolters, 2022). Indonesia is generally known for a rich diversity of cultural practices and history with a complex cultural mixture that differs significantly from the original indigenous cultures. Furthermore, one of the best sites to explore Indonesia heritage is its varied world-class museums.



**Figure 6: The National Museum of Indonesia. Source: Wira (2016).**

The Museum of Indonesia (popularly known as the Elephant Museum) is an archeological, historical, ethnological, and geographical museum located in Central Jakarta. The museum has endeavored to preserve Indonesia's heritage for more than two centuries by storing and exhibiting 160,000 objects of historical value consisting of 7 types of collections namely Prehistory, Classical Archeology or Hindu-Buddhist; Numismatics and Heraldry; Ceramics; Ethnography, Geography and History (Parinduri, 2021). There are also collections of plates, bowls, bottles, jugs, and jars made of ceramic (porcelain) originating from China. There are likewise several collections of paintings, such as those of Raden Saleh, Affandi, Basuki Abdullah, and other foreign painters. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the management successfully innovated by providing a virtual tour to bring back the museum to the community. This can be accessed through the following link (<https://museumnasional.iheritage-virtual.id/public/>).

### ***Laos***

Laos (Lao) is a landlocked country in Southeast Asia, surrounded by Myanmar, China, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Thailand. This country was known as Lan Xang or "Land of a Million Elephants" (Stuart-Fox, 1998). Laos is also famous for having the tallest treehouse in the world, the oldest human fossil in Southeast Asia, and the unique national flower called Dok Champa (*plumeria alba*) (Savvyglobetrotter.com, 2021).



**Figure 7: The Royal Palace and Museum. Source: Mekong Moments (2019).**

The Royal Palace and Museum is very popular among tourists. Located in a small town called Luang Prabang, this museum provides a mixed history showcased in French colonial buildings. This museum also represents the history of Luang Prabang city through a collection of gifts from other countries, such as a collection of antique cars used by Luang Prabang officials and their drivers (Savvygloбетrotter.com, 2021).

### ***Malaysia***

The Federation of Malaysia is composed of two regions. Peninsular Malaysia, also known as West Malaysia, shares a border with Thailand, Singapore, Vietnam, and Indonesia. On the other hand, East Malaysia is situated on Borneo Island and neighbors Brunei, Indonesia, Philippines, as well as Vietnam. As a multiracial nation, it is a melting pot of Malay, Chinese, and Indian cultures.



**Figure 8: Muzium Negara. Source: Maganathan (2020).**

The public is made aware of the country's heritage through the Muzium Negara, located in the capital city of Kuala Lumpur. Inaugurated in 1963 by His Majesty Tuanku Syed Putra Ibni al-Marhum Syed Hassan Jamalullal, the Third Yang di-Pertuan Agong, it displays artifacts from the prehistoric era, Malay Kingdoms, colonial period, and present-day Malaysia (Muzium Negara, n.d.).





**Figure 9: Borneo Cultures Museum.**

Sarawak is the largest Malaysian state and is one of three found in Borneo Island. Its lush nature tourism sites have long been attracting foreign and local visitors. Recently, however, the state has gained popularity because of the newly-built Borneo Cultures Museum. This world-class museum is set to be the largest in Southeast Asia and is a hub for individuals interested in Sarawakian and Bornean heritage. With four years in the making and a budget worth 308 million RM, the museum is noticeable for its unique "golden arched roof", as well as its architectural design that manifests the state's culture and history (Sarawak Museum Department, n.d.).

### *Myanmar*

Myanmar (or Burma) is a country located in the western part of mainland Southeast Asia. Myanmar is often referred to as the "Land of Gold" because of the abundant use of the gold leaf in its temples and shrines (Steinberg, 2021).



**Figure 10: National Museum of Myanmar. Source: Myanmar Business Directory (n.d.)**

The National Museum of Myanmar (Yangon), located in Dagon, Yangon, is one of the most famous national, archeological, regional, cultural, and memorial museums for Burmese (Zan, 2016). Founded in 1952, this five-storey museum has a wide variety collection of ancient artifacts, ornaments, art, inscriptions and historical memorabilia, culture, and civilization of the Burmese people. What attracts people the most is the iconic Lion Throne of the king of Burma, King Anawarahta who was a great king and founder of the famous kingdom of Bagan.

### *The Philippines*

The Republic of the Philippines is an archipelagic country with more than 7,000 islands. Its rich heritage can be attributed to the country's prehistoric trade relations, foreign occupations, and numerous ethnic groups.



**Figure 11: National Museum of the Philippines. Source: De La Cruz (2020).**

The National Museum of the Philippines situated in Manila is uniquely a large complex of different national museums, each with its own purpose. These include the National Museum of Fine Arts, National Museum of Anthropology, National Museum of History and the National Planetarium.

### *Singapore*

The Republic of Singapore is a city-state situated in the Malay Peninsula, known for its clean and safe environment, as well as thriving economy.



**Figure 12: National Museum of Singapore. Source: Halpern (2021).**

The National Museum of Singapore is the country's oldest museum and an iconic landmark on Stamford Road with an architectural design dating back to the 19th Century; it is known for giving visitors an interactive experience with its year-round innovative events, modern facilities, resource center, as well as cafes and restaurants (National Museum of Singapore, n.d.).

## ***Thailand***

The Kingdom of Thailand, historically known as Siam, is widely known for its warm beaches, iconic palaces, and modern landscapes. Interestingly, it is the only Southeast Asian nation that was never colonized by any European country.



**Figure 13: National Museum of Bangkok. Source: Thaizer (n.d.).**

The National Museum Bangkok was built in 1887 and is one of the largest in Southeast Asia. It is home to collections from the country's array of historical kingdoms (Museum Thailand, n.d.).

## ***Timor Leste***

Timor Leste is an island country in Southeast Asia which is located north of Australia and in the eastern part of the island of Timor (Britannica, 2021). According to Skyticket.com (2021), Timor Leste is known for its unique art, cuisine, and many beautiful tourist sites.



**Figure 14: Timorese Resistance Archive & Museum. Source: Thorpe (2020)**

Located in the capital city of Dili, The Timorese Resistance Archive & Museum (*Resistência Timorese Arquivo & Museu*) provides an extensive historical overview of the Timorese resistance from Portuguese colonial rule, to the Japanese occupation in World War II, the resistance of Australian commandos assisted by the huge Timorese population, and Indonesian occupation. In addition, it also presents timelines, information, videos, interactive displays, photos and a great deal of historical information offered in three languages including English (Timorleste.tl).

## Vietnam

Vietnam is a country that occupies the eastern part of mainland Southeast Asia. Vietnam is known for being a land of stunning natural beauty and cultural complexity, dynamic big cities and hill tribe villages (Turley, 2021). Vietnam is also famous for the Vietnam War, and its French colonial architecture. Additionally, the country is also known for the universal appeal of its rice noodles (Pho) and cultural experiences such as the ritual involved in preparing a cup of Vietnamese coffee, as well as its beautiful national costume, *the Ao Dai* (Alden, 2020).



Figure 15: War Remnants Museum. Source: Declercq (2019).

The War Remnants Museum in Ho Chi Minh City was first opened to the public in 1975. Once known as the “American War Crimes Museum”, it is a striking reminder of the long and brutal Vietnam War. Graphic photos and American military equipment are on display. There are helicopters with rocket launchers, tanks, fighter planes, and single-seat attack aircraft. You can also look at the conventional bomb which weighs 6,800kg (Warremnantsmuseum.com). The most talked about exhibit at the War Remnants Museum is the “tiger cage” (Vietnam-Guide.com).

## Recent Development in the Museum Industry

COVID-19 has left an indelible mark in the museum industry. Since 2012, UNESCO in a report claims that the number of museums had been on the rise pegging a 60% increase until recently (UNESCO, 2020). The pandemic brought all this to a halt. Of the 95,000 museums in 2020, the same report states that about 90% have ceased operations because of the global health crisis. This is corroborated by information collected by the International Council of Museums (ICOM) in 2020 which reveal that only a mere 3.7% of Asia’s museums remain operative at the time. Both the UNESCO and ICOM Reports disclose that those that remain operational have resorted to the internet and have been experiencing success in launching profit-driven virtual events. Museum-related activities such as exhibits, conferences, webinars and extension activities have gone online. Popular social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram have been tapped to reach out to their home-confined audience. The Museum Innovation Booster 2021 likewise states that Zoom and Youtube have been among the more useful platforms. On the part of on-line visitors, social media events, video content and virtual tours are, in that order, considered as most interesting (NEMO Report). But this success has been limited to countries that enjoy a high level of digital connection thereby bringing into focus the digital divide between these and the developing nations. The ICOM Report and the Museum Innovation Booster 2021 further state that this innovation

unwittingly revealed shortcomings in most museums' digital and communication resources, both material and human. This is also echoed by the NEMO Report in 2021. In fact, the latter report further shows that aside from augmenting their online offers, respondents felt that improving flow of information and internal communication as well as a flexible work arrangement would be successful strategies that can be employed once museums reopen.

One of the primary concerns is social distance and, in the future, this will impact most on museum designs which will emphasize more open spaces and floor markings indicating six-foot intervals (Billock, 2020). Museum gift shop designs and operations will likewise undergo innovation with management most likely to encourage contactless purchases by displaying merchandise and having the buyers order them by phone or having areas where these can be picked up, all done without touching the merchandise or exchanging cash on the spot (Billock, 2020). Exhibit designs and layout will also be impacted with social distance as the main consideration. A one-entrance, one-exit path that does not double back seems to be the solution for this (Billock, 2020). The visitor goes through an entrance and follows a path which only allows them to pass through one area once and, all along leading to the exit. Wall text may also be replaced with digital means such as digital pamphlets or videos (Billock, 2020) since visitors tend to crowd around wall texts in their attempt to contextualize the exhibits on display. With the rapid technological development, virtual experiences may eventually be featured as main exhibits (Billock, 2020). This technological adoption is one insurance of the safety of both the staff and public. Unfortunately, the downside of employing technology, asserts Billock, would be lesser dependence on human labor which, in turn, will result to the unemployment of workers once museum operations are normalized. Downsizing will be another factor which will threaten the long-term employment of the museum personnel (ICOM, 2020).

While large museums that have a more stable source of funding through the patronage of individuals or organizations are expected to stay afloat longer, smaller museums must be creative in diversifying their revenue streams. Hence, there is a call for exploring new business models with a clear focus on profitability particularly for small institutions that do not receive donations (Tallant, 2020). Small museums, according to Tallant, must reinvent themselves and one way of doing so is to focus on education and work closely with local artists in the community and, through them, communicate their culture to a wider global audience.

COVID-19 has reshaped how the few remaining museums all over the world are designing their offerings, their physical structures, and their way of communicating with their market. But they need to update their digital know-how and fast track the retooling of their personnel if they wish to stay in operation longer. What is expected to carry them through the pandemic and beyond are technological innovation and adoption.

## **Conclusion**

Museums are repositories of a people's culture and history. For this reason alone, many visitors are drawn to these historical and cultural institutions to further enhance their experience in their host destination. Despite this and despite the number of museums scattered widely in Southeast Asia, museum research remains understudied. Even though museums attract tourists and generate tourist receipts and provide employment, interest

among researchers in this region is low. In contrast, China leads the world in museum research, followed by mostly countries in the west. With lockdowns being implemented all over the world because of the health crisis, majority of the museums have been forced to close and those that remain open needed to be creative to avoid closure. Use of digital technology, online offerings such as virtual tours and webinars, going back to the community's roots and cooperating with local artists are some of the innovations of these remaining few museums to stay open. Despite this, many cultural institutions, particularly the small museums struggle to survive. With the COVID-19 pandemic forcing the closure of museums all over the world, information from reliable research is vital to the survival of the remaining few that continue to be in operation. It is, therefore, imperative that museum research interest, particularly here in Southeast Asia, be ignited and museum studies be conducted to arm these institutions with information that they can use to effectively manage the operational threats resulting from the COVID-19 crisis.

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