

30

# A TOUCHABLE EXHIBITION

AUDIO DESCRIPTION ASSOCIATION (HONG KONG)  
– LEUNG HOI CHING DAWNING

“ After a long night of darkness, the first ray of sunlight splits the night sky — we call this “the dawning of a new day”. Leung Hoi Ching Dawning has been working as an audio description volunteer for years. Her voice, like rays from the morning sun, guides the visually impaired into the world of films. Now, it even guides them through exhibitions in museums. People with normal vision can see, but it does not mean they can appreciate, because appreciation is not done by the eyes, but by the heart and imagination. ”

Two days before the interview, Dawning sent us her profile; the academic section includes Master of Professional English, Bachelor of Communication, and Certificate in Interpretation — all related to language and interpretation. Her professional training and interests set her on the path of audio description. “Audio description is a means of communication. Without it, how can you tell the visually impaired about any visual elements?” After attending a workshop in 2011, Dawning’s interest in audio description grew; besides participating in

volunteering activities, she also started doing research on the development of this field in Hong Kong and Asia. She found out that there was a lack of related information. “I discovered that no one has done research on Chinese audio description, and very few studies have been done on the visually impaired in Asia. Therefore, I decided to study for a doctorate degree in Audio Description.”

## AUDIO DESCRIPTION IS NOT AN AUDIO GUIDE

Words, images, and graphics are all symbols. Audio description is a form of translation that converts images and graphics into words, involving basic skills like tone and intonation, rhythm, and word usage. While the method is important, so is the attitude. Dawning would stand in the shoes of the visually impaired, and never skip any scenes in her description, even for love scenes.

**“If we give vague descriptions of love scenes out of shyness, they won’t know what’s happening. Of course, we don’t need to be too explicit, but whether the clothes are removed slowly or violently already changes the atmosphere of the scene.”**

Dawning is concerned about helping the visually impaired “see”, but this attitude is lacking in many other organisations. A visually impaired friend of Dawning once asked if audio description service was available for an exhibition in a museum; despite the staff claiming that the service was available, he only got an audio guide.

“My friend responded, ‘You know, I can’t see. An audio guide is useless for me. I’ll just leave.’” Audio guides only introduce the background of the exhibits and the creators; they do not give descriptions of the exhibit’s appearance, patterns, or texture. “For example, the recent exhibition on mummies was beautifully arranged, but the most common sight was the “No touching” sign. Dawning’s friends said, “If that’s all, what’s the point of visiting the exhibition instead of listening to the information at home?”

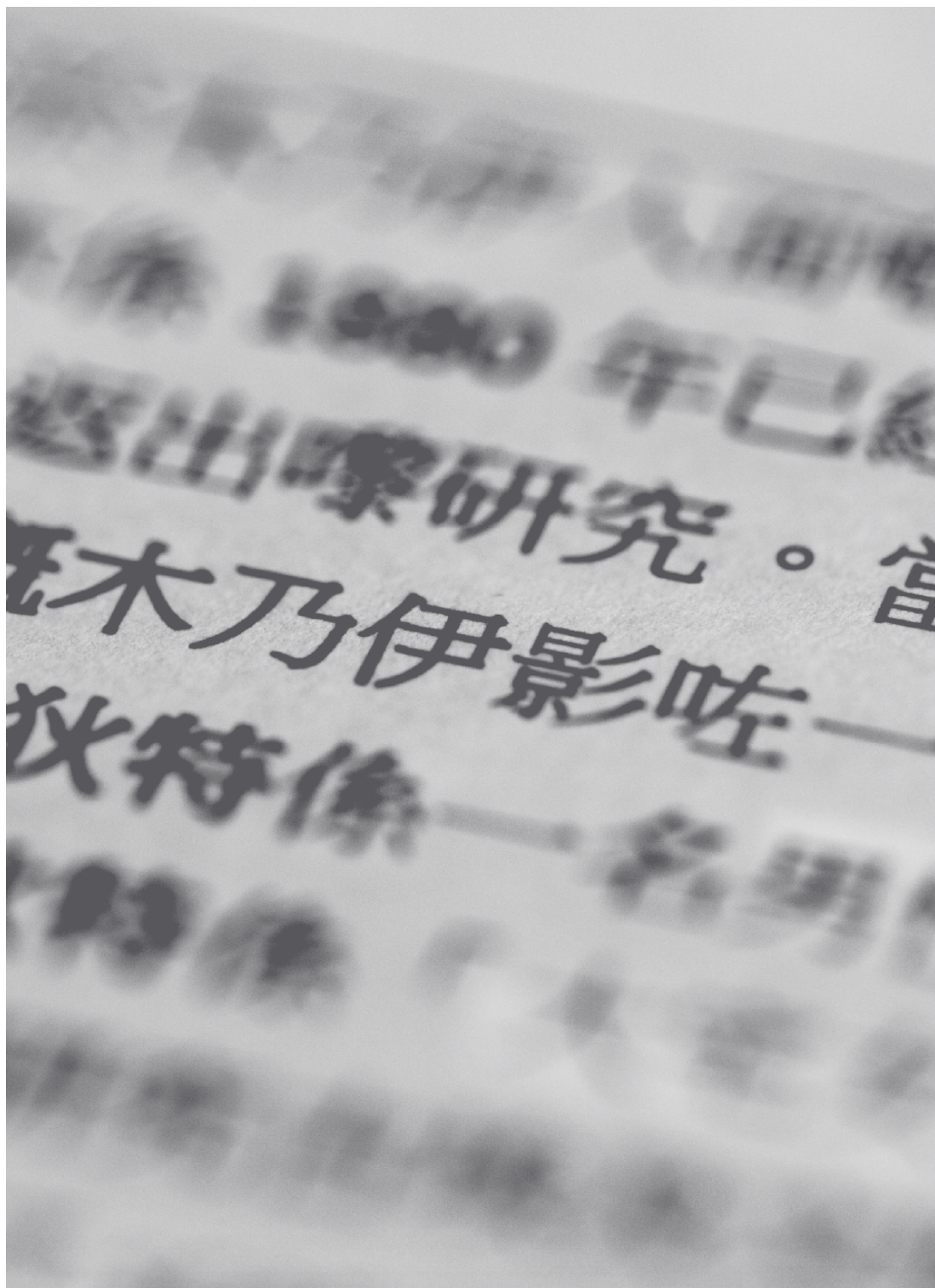
## HANDMADE “MUMMIES”

Inspired by her friends’ experience, Dawning realised that audio description can be applied to museum exhibition appreciation. In her office, she has a few models of coffins for mummies, eyeballs, as well as Tang Sancai. Even though the coffins are only palm-sized, the patterns and royal symbols carved on the surface are delicate. Inside each coffin is a handmade “mummy” wrapped in layers of gauze. Besides word descriptions, touch can also enhance the imagination of the visually impaired.

**“A visually impaired friend of mine loves to feel the coolness of the glass display cases by leaning close to them, because the coolness enhances the feeling of being in a museum,”**

Dawning smiled. Her props looked intricate; she pointed at the “Tang Sancai camel”, which had some clay stuck to its humps, as if it was freshly dug out from the ground. “This is real ceramic that some friends of my friends found in Mainland China. I don’t know where they bought it,” she laughed.





## HUSBAND AS THE “GUINEA PIG”

To ensure that visitors will enjoy the exhibition, Dawning is involved in every step, from preparing props and scripts to training audio describers — this has much to do with her personality.

**“I am an achiever. Once I set a target, I must achieve it.”**

Therefore, when she decided to start working in audio description, she resigned from her position as a university lecturer without a second thought, and enrolled in related courses. The real struggle at that time, however, was choosing between marriage and further studies. “I faced a dilemma between marriage and further studies because the courses would last three to five years. My boyfriend suggested getting married first, and then he could accompany me to the UK for my studies. We even attended an audio description event the day after our wedding!” She smiled radiantly. Without her husband’s support, Dawning would not have been able to fully concentrate on promoting audio description. “Before I do an audio description for a film, I often ask my

husband to be the “guinea pig”. He would close his eyes and listen to me, and then open his eyes and compare the description to the scene in the film. If he says something like ‘Good, that feels right,’ then I would continue.”

## UNFORGETTABLE SATISFACTION

From the world of films to the museum, not only does an audio describer broaden the horizons of the visually impaired, but also create opportunities for communication. “The biggest difference from film description is that we end each section by asking for questions and feedback from the visitors. Once, after a visitor saw the ‘camel’, they said, ‘It’s a Bactrian camel. I had seen one before I lost my eyesight.’” Evoking memories through touch and provoking imagination through colourful descriptions – to Dawning, the smiles of satisfaction and praise on the visitors’ faces are her greatest motivation.

“After watching a film, they can discuss the plot with us. After seeing an exhibition, they say it was great. These simple gestures and praises are more than enough,”

Dawning smiled with satisfaction.

Dawning’s personality and professionalism have guided her through her career in audio description. On the way, she discovered an unexpected talent, like the

visually impaired. “When I was a teacher, I never imagined that I could establish an association. Despite their visual impairment, these people have a lot of creative ideas and can achieve a lot. The problem is whether we assume that they cannot see or cannot do something. Why can’t we just have faith in their ability and possibility?”



# 31

## PIONEERS OF TRANSFORMING THE “INDUSTRY OF HUMANS”

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