

# みんなくりポジトリ

国立民族学博物館学術情報リポジトリ National Museum of Ethnology

## SES no.023; INTRODUCTION

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## INTRODUCTION

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*National Museum of Ethnology*

The ethnologist or cultural anthropologist often makes a clear distinction between the words "ethnographic" and "ethnologic" (or ethnological). Germain Bazin [1974: 238], a French museologist, explains clearly the differences as follows: "In French it has become a custom to refer to European popular cultures as *ethnologie*, and foreign popular culture as *ethnographie*. In English, *ethnography* refers to the purely descriptive treatment of peoples and races while *ethnology* denotes their comparative study and analytical classification." In Japanese "民族学 *minzokugaku*" means ethnology in English, and "民俗学 *minzokugaku*" is given to studies in Japanese popular cultures. (The pronunciation of both is the same, but one Chinese character is different.) The latter corresponds to *ethnologie* in French and *folklore* in English.

Such a distinction might be of use for the identification and comparative analysis of cultures, but it is less important for material classification and for conservation of museum artifacts. Objects of ethnographic, ethnologic and folkloric collections in museums are quite similar to each other. Besides this, in historical and agricultural museums, and in parts of open-air museums, many collections have also a close relation to those of ethnographic museums. Added to this, excavated archaeological objects themselves are, in principle, not part of an ethnographic collection. However, after having been suitably treated, such as by consolidation or freeze-drying, they can be regarded as being a part of the latter group. As a result, ethnographic objects are apt to contain items belonging to various kinds of interrelated fields. Therefore the term *ethnographic* is used here in a broad sense to include both fields.

As many museologists claim, it might be difficult to deny that most ethnographic museums before the first half of this century were a by-product of European colonial expansion, and that those collections were established to satisfy an intellectual curiosity of non-European cultures and exoticism. That is, visitors to such museums at the time were mainly intellectual elites and often disposed to appreciate highly selected objects such as artistic decorations, skillfully made artifacts, elaborate religious masks and statues, and so on, which do not exist in European cultures.

In the early 1930's George Henri Rivière, then vice-director of the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro (later the Musée de l'Homme), protested about a contemporary double formula for an ethnographic museum as "*musée des chefs-*

*d'oeuvres*" or "*musée scientifique*" and proclaimed to be "*un établissement consacré à l'étude des civilisations matérielles*", saying that his words were a personal opinion. He continued: "*En fait, ce champ immense se limite d'une part aux civilisations des peuples dits primitifs et, d'autre part, en ce qui concerne les civilisations plus évoluées, aux phénomènes de survivance caractérisés par les arts et métiers populaires. Un ethnographe, —frémissez, collectionneurs,— traite avec une égale considération les objets courants et les objets exceptionnels*" [RIVIÈRE n.d. (1930?): 280].

The validity of his opinion has been widely admitted only in the past two decades. Recent advances in mass communication, in particular visual media such as color photographs, television and video-tapes, has allowed many people to appreciate the existence of curious items of former days. Also, the development of safe and rapid transportation has provided great opportunities to visit previously exotic places. Even very ordinary citizens now can feel close to different cultures, and the focus of our interests has moved from exoticism to the life and culture of quite ordinary people with different cultures. The recent increase in amateur ethnologists is also notable. As a result we know that an important role of the ethnographic museum today is to increase the consciousness and interest of such amateurs, as well as to enable people to know more about other cultures.

There are three important characteristics of objects collected by ethnographic museums. First, the number of objects tends to be immense, and, second, the materials vary so widely. This is a natural result of the inclination to collect everything related to our life. Therefore, thirdly, accidents or damage to objects, including natural disfiguration, are not uncommon. Close attention could be paid to the kinds of accidents (or disfiguration) that can possibly occur, as well as their possible causes. At the same time it may be necessary to also give priority to the installation of equipment to treat materials at high risk of disfiguration, and for large numbers of artifacts.

In the initial stage of development of ethnographic museums, attention was paid mainly to the aesthetic (or historical, in some cases) and rarity value of artifact. It was, therefore, appropriate that much money and effort was also spent on conserving such value. Granular paint layers, naturally dyed textiles, leather and skin, beautiful featherwork or straw rope are good examples of the kind of value which were rarely used for other artistic or historical artifacts, although perfect methods of treatment for such materials are still not well known.

Modern ethnology or cultural anthropology emphasizes the importance of studying all aspects of everyday life. It is asserted that the understanding of a culture starts from the common place and everyday aspects of life. While acknowledging that a collection of "all kinds of objects" is practically impossible, an ethnographic museum rich in all kinds of objects used in daily life would be an ideal place to begin the study of material culture. Too selected a collection can cause misunderstanding or distorted interpretation of cultures. Thus the method of selection becomes of paramount importance, but in the final analysis it can be said that

the more emphatic the function of an ethnographic museum, the larger the number of artifacts required, owing to the comparative method adopted in ethnological studies of material culture.

However, less interest seems to have been paid to artifacts used in everyday life. To the Japanese useless and old objects are said to be those fit "for a museum". Similarly the expression "museum pieces" is used in English. Most dirty "museum pieces" are useless and abandoned everyday articles. But sometimes the dirt and marks of usage are important, since they can not only reveal the method of use but also much about the lives of those who used them. They can constitute an important aspect of ethnographic documentation. Ethnographic artifacts can be, therefore, fresh and fragile, or dirty and old. Thus based on this recent change in the concept underlying ethnographic collections, I feel a need to establish a particular ethics and methodology of ethnographic conservation.

Ethnographic conservation is still undergoing development, and the goal remains far away. The bringing together of ethnographic conservators from different countries and from a variety of ethnic groups, as well as those having had different experiences is one means of addressing some of those problems. New solutions and new conservation treatments cannot be devised immediately. However, by meeting together at this Symposium the participants were able to understand differences in the philosophy of conservation and methodology of treatment of a wide range of cultural objects. This is a good beginning. It is to be hoped that the information presented in this volume will lay the foundation for a better and worldwide understanding of ethnographic conservation.

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