

## Keynote Address : The Comparative Study of Collection and Representation

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## **Keynote Address: The Comparative Study of Collection and Representation**

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Welcome to this Taniguchi International Symposium, “Japanese Civilization in the Modern World—Comparative Studies of Collection and Representation.” This is the seventeenth time the Civilization Studies Division of the Taniguchi Symposium has met. The symposium is organized through the sponsorship of the Taniguchi Industries 45th Anniversary Commemorative Foundation. In December 1999 this foundation will complete its work. Thus this is the last time that this international symposium is being held.

Eighteen years ago, in June 1980, a symposium was held on the occasion of my sixtieth birthday, with the title “Toward the Creation of Civilization Studies.” In my keynote address, I called for the formation of civilization studies as a science. I proposed that, in contrast to culture, understood as a value system formed within people’s minds, we understand civilization as a system composed of people, the institutions which they create, and the material apparatus which supports these—that is, as a complex of people and institutions. I conceived of civilization studies, or comparative civilization studies, as a way of creating a theoretical framework that would enable mutual understanding by comparing the various civilizations in the world, in terms of their past condition, their present circumstances, and their future prospects [UMESAO 1981]. From this, we devised a plan to hold a new series of symposia at the National Museum of Ethnology. Luckily, thanks to the understanding of the late Taniguchi Toyosaburō, this plan received the assistance of the Taniguchi Foundation, and thus the series of international symposia of the Civilization Studies Division came into being.

This series of symposia has the common theme of “Japanese Civilization in the Modern World.” Comparative civilization studies has been the framework for all the symposia, but Japanese civilization has always been the object of comparison. In Europe and North America, there has been a debate about comparative theories of civilization from the beginning of this century, starting with Spengler and Toynbee, but the discussion has always been centered on the West. In our symposia, in contrast, by adding a Japanese “card” to the pack, we have tried to understand the world’s structure and history in a quite different way.

In past symposia, we have focused each time on a different institutional and material complex, and used this as an opening through which to consider the question of civilization. The themes of the symposia have been as follows: Life and Society; Cities and Urbanization; Administrative Organizations; Economic Institutions; Culturedness; Religion; Language, Literacy, and Writing; Domesticity; Tourism; Technology; Amusement; Social Ethics; Transportation; Information and Communication; Alcoholic Beverages; and the Formation and Transformation of the Nation-State. In other words, we have considered the various systems which surround us in our daily life.

For this last symposium, our theme is collection. Human beings collect and surround themselves with natural and man-made objects. This activity of collection forms the starting-point for all intellectual activity. For this reason alone, the institutional and material complex which surround this activity of collection have played an extremely important role in the development of civilization.

One hardly needs to note that collecting on a global scale during the age of exploration became the starting-point for the creation of the modern world system. And as we all know, the public museums and art museums which were built throughout the world, beginning with the British Museum in 1753 and the Louvre in 1793, and expositions, beginning with the Great Exhibition in London in 1851, played an important role in the formation of the nation-state. Of course, collection is not only found in the modern West. One might say that wherever there is intellectual activity, there has been collection. On the other hand, it is a widely acknowledged tendency that, regardless of time and place, wherever there is power, the ruler and the powerholders build collections as proof of their wealth and control of territory. This last symposium of the Civilization Studies Division is an attempt to reconsider this activity of collection and its related institutional and material complex from the perspective of comparative civilization studies, and so to produce a sketch of the working of civilization. It also signifies an attempt to summarize the significance of this series of symposia on civilization studies, held at the National Museum of Ethnology, by reexamining the site of the museum itself.

## **2. COLLECTION AND EXHIBITION**

When one looks at collection as an institutional and material complex, one immediately becomes aware of the work of exhibition — that is, the work of

organizing the objects assembled through the activity of collection in order for them to be seen. Knowledge is formed and then disseminated through this activity of exhibition, whether or not the exhibition itself is open to the public. In thinking about collection, one should consider it as an amalgam together with this activity of exhibition. For simplicity's sake the Japanese title for this symposium is "Comparative Civilization Studies of Collection," but the English title, "Comparative Studies of Collection and Representation," makes this point more clearly.

However, to note that one should consider collection and exhibition as an amalgam, or as a sequence, is not to claim that one should not distinguish between them. Although they form a single system, one cannot rule out the possibility of each generating its own particular set of institutions. In fact, from the viewpoint of comparative civilization studies, the distinction between them — that is, the differences in the development of the two sets of institutions, due to differences in civilization — is extremely significant.

The institution of the museum, produced by western modernity, is one which unifies collection and exhibition. The exposition, too, is another such institution. Botanical gardens, zoos, even libraries, are institutions for collection and exhibition. Seen historically, and beginning with Japan, how did these institutions develop in regions outside Europe? Where can one find regional differences? And how will they develop in the future? Further, what role have these institutions of collection and exhibition played in the formation of civilization, broadly understood? In this symposium, I hope that we will discuss these questions from a broadly comparative perspective.

### 3. COLLECTION IN EUROPE

*Mouseion*, said to be the origin of the word "museum," was the name for institutions of education and research in ancient Greece. They were called this because they were sites blessed by the Muses, the nine goddesses who ruled the arts and sciences, such as poetry and music. They were thus not institutions for collection. As regards collection, from ancient times there have been collections of religious relics and gifts in churches; for the immediate forerunner of the contemporary museum, however, one has to turn to the rooms known as "cabinets of curiosities," "*Wunderkammer*" and "*Kunstammer*," which the royalty and nobility competed in building throughout Europe from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries. Examples include the Duke of Württemberg's *Wunderkammer* in Stuttgart, established in the sixteenth century, and the *Kunstammer* of the Hapsburg Archduke Ferdinand II, governor of Tyrol, built in Ambras castle in Innsbruck. These rooms, as their names suggest, were spaces for collecting the curiosities of the world, objects which would provoke surprise and wonder. By bringing together in one room things produced both in nature and by people, one brought into being a world in miniature, or a microcosmos. This is eloquently expressed by the fact that the collection built up in England at the beginning of the seventeenth century by the

John Tradescants, father and son, was known as “The Ark.”

From the second half of the seventeenth century, however, there were changes in this idea of collection as a reproduction of the whole world. With the spread of a set of values which esteemed “works of art,” there also began to be a separation between collections of art and collections of natural products; there was a noticeable tendency for royalty and aristocracy to collect art, and for scholars and doctors, with their interest in *materia medica*, to collect natural specimens or genuine “curiosities.” With the establishment of modern civil society, the general trend in subsequent years was for art museums to be established—beginning with the Louvre—with the aim of liberating the former kind of collection for the nation, while natural history museums were established—beginning with the British Museum—with the aim of opening the latter kind to the nation. Of course, in order for these museums and art museums to be established it was first necessary for natural history to emerge as a system of knowledge.

Natural history, which came into being during the eighteenth century, was an attempt to uncover a system which already existed in nature, as the title of Linnaeus’ magnum opus, *Systema Naturae* (1758), suggests. By taking a diverse set of objects and placing together those with common characteristics—that is, by classifying the world—natural history sought to reveal the systematic nature of that world. Museums, botanical gardens, zoos, aquaria, libraries, and even encyclopedias, can be understood as sites for collections and exhibition according to this system of classification, drawn from natural history.

It was expositions, or fairs, held throughout Europe and North America from the middle of the nineteenth century, which massively expanded the activities of collection and exhibition along the lines of the principles of natural history. Expositions applied natural history’s system of classification both to the products of “other cultures,” acquired in massive quantities as a result of the advance of European imperialism, and to the products generated as a result of the progress of the industrial revolution. Then, from the latter half of the nineteenth century, ethnological museums were established throughout Europe as permanent collections of and a means of display for the products of “other cultures” which had been displayed at these expositions. The process leading from expositions to ethnological museums is a recurrent pattern in the history of modern civilization. Perhaps one can say that in the modern period, natural history has come to function as a science for managing the vast increase in objects and information.

#### 4. COLLECTION IN JAPAN

How did collection and exhibition develop in Japan?

Perhaps the earliest example of collection that comes to mind is the imperial treasures of Shōsōin. These began as a memorial offering by Empress Kōmei to Tōdaiji temple, on the 49th day after Emperor Shōmu’s death. Subsequently other imperial gifts were added, as well as ceremonial utensils used at Tōdaiji, and so the

collection has come down to the present. Such gifts were preserved and handed down not only at Shōsōin, but at temples and shrines throughout Japan. Following the Heian period in particular, large quantities of arms and armor were offered at Oyamatsumi Shrine on Omishima, Ehime prefecture, in thanks to the *kami* (gods) who had ensured victory in battle. Of the medieval armor which still exists today, eighty percent is stored at this shrine. Thus one can consider shrine collections as equivalent to church collections in Europe.

Subsequently, following the medieval period, military families built collections of paintings, *noh* costumes, and tea utensils. Over time, tea collections also began to spread among the merchants. There was also an independent, long-established tradition of collecting *materia medica*. The study of such medicinal plants flourished rapidly from the middle of the Edo period. Thus, broadly speaking, one can consider the Japanese tradition of collecting as being divided into the two categories of “diversion” (*ganbutsu*, lit. playing with things) and “natural history” (*hakubutsu*, lit. surveying things). Let me now consider each of these in turn.

## 5. THE GENEALOGY OF “DIVERSION” IN JAPAN

When one compares the collections built up since ancient times by the imperial house and military families — that is, by Japan’s powerholders — to European collections, their small scale is striking. Of course in each period shogunal and daimyo families created their own collections. The size of the collections of the Edo Tokugawa, the Owari Tokugawa, and the Ii families is well known; even so nowhere is there anything on the scale of the collections of the kings of France. There are no examples of the wholesale removal of decorations from the palaces and castles of enemy countries, or of the taking of whole stone monuments.

In the Edo period, there was one Daikokuya Kōdayū who was shipwrecked and drifted ashore onto Karafuto, crossed Siberia, and went as far as Saint Petersburg [KATSURAGAWA 1988 (1794)]. At the time, Catherine the Second (1729–96) was the Empress of Russia; she gave Kōdayū a warm welcome, presented him with clothes and numerous gifts, and courteously sent him back to Japan. The clothes Kōdayū was wearing when he arrived remain to this day in the Ethnological Museum in Saint Petersburg. On the other hand, we do not know what happened to the clothes in which he returned to Japan.

To take another example, again under the administration of Catherine the Second, the natural historians Pallas and Middendorf carried out a basic survey for the development of Siberia; the objects they collected all survive to this day. By contrast, during the same period in Japan, Mamiya Rinzō and Kondo Jūzō were exploring the development of Ezochi (Hokkaido); not one of the objects they collected survives. What explains this difference?

As I mentioned above, in Europe, the royalty, aristocracy, and subsequently the state as colonial suzerain created collections as a display of their power. To own a collection was proof of possessing the world. Whether or not one used it was besides

the point. Or rather, its significance lay precisely in not using it. However, the collections created by powerholders in Japan — whether of paintings, *noh* costumes, or tea utensils — were all premised on “use.” One did not go about collecting any and everything. One did not collect things one did not use. And inevitably, since the aim was to collect objects one would use, collecting was not premised on displaying these objects in public. The limited nature of collections and the lack of exhibition are the major characteristics of collecting in Japan.

One can see the same tendency even in the collections of the merchants who suddenly rose to prominence in the early modern period. In a port town in Europe, rare objects from far-off lands would have been gathered and deposited in an ethnological museum. But in Japan, even in Sakai, no collection of this sort was created. Collections focused on tea utensils and were appreciated only among a narrow circle. In other words, the tendency was to form private associations around particular kinds of objects.

In Japan, and particularly among the *bushi* (warriors), it was widely thought that “playing with things” would lead to “a loss of will” (*ganbutsu sōshi*). This phrase comes from a line in the *Shu Ching*, one of the Chinese Classics: “to play with people is to lose one’s virtue, to play with things is to lose one’s will.” In other words, by playing with rare objects one would be deprived of spirit, and lose one’s all-important sense of resolve. The *Shu Ching* had long been widely read as a text for the education of *bushi*, and this way of thinking created a kind of taboo: a pattern seems to have been created whereby collecting was avoided, or, if indulged in, not divulged — objects were shown only to a small circle, and not displayed in public. Perhaps one can call this pattern of collecting and exhibiting — extremely limited both as to its objects and in their public display — the genealogy of “diversion.”

In the modern period, collecting bits and pieces of printed material — stamps, entrance tickets, postcards — became popular among the general public. This is known as *sunyō shumi* (lit. small leaf hobby). An example which recently surprised me is the collection of Terashita Tsuyoshi, who has collected huge numbers of posters, pamphlets, and entrance tickets relating to expositions throughout the world and in Japan, dating from the industrial promotion exhibition in London in 1756. There are any number of theme-specific, enthusiast’s collections in Japan besides this one.

As in Japan, collection also seems to have been limited in China, which generated the way of thinking of “playing with things as a loss of will.” Nowadays, the former imperial palace collections, divided between Beijing and Taipei, are massive; however, their contents are primarily the art and craft objects used within the palaces, and are quite distinct from the kind of universal, world-in-miniature collections one sees in Europe. The relative strength of this tendency toward universality is the defining difference between collections in Europe and Japan or, more broadly, the West and the East. In this respect, Turkey, which lies between the two, occupies an interesting position. The Topkapi Palace Museum comprises both treasures from throughout the Ottoman Empire and a large number of Chinese

ceramics. One can perhaps recognize in this the coexistence of a tendency toward universality and an attachment to particular utensils—the respective characteristics of collecting in the East and the West.

## 6. THE GENEALOGY OF “NATURAL HISTORY” IN JAPAN

Thus far I have looked at the genealogy of “diversion” in Japan. However, as I mentioned above, there is another genealogy of collection in Japan, namely, the long-standing tradition of *honzōgaku* (the study of medicinal plants). This developed, particularly in the Edo period, into something one can call natural history. Let me now discuss this tradition of “natural historical” collection.

The study of medicinal plants in Japan was based on the twenty-volume *Xinxiu Bencao* (J. *Shinshū Honzō*), compiled by Su Jing and others in 659 CE during the Tang period, and the *Zhenglei Bencao* (J. *Shōrui Honzō*), compiled in the Sung. Both of these works were concerned purely with materia medica, and produced for the use of physicians. This situation changed with the import in 1607 of *Bencao Gangmu* (J. *Honzō Kōmoku*) written by Li Shizhen during the Ming period. Using this book as his starting-point, and adding observations drawn from his own practice, Kaibara Ekken authored *Yamato Honzō* in 1708. This book clearly proclaimed itself to be natural history, recording in systematic fashion the wealth of nature—plants, animals, and minerals—regardless of whether or not they were effective as medicine. The *Wakan Sansai Zue* of Terashima Ryōan, begun at almost the same time, also deserves attention as a kind of natural history encyclopedia. These new developments in the study of medicinal plants, combined with movements in the bakufu and various domains to develop domestic production, were formalized as *bussangaku* (the study of products). From the Hōreki period (1751–1763), *bussankai* (exhibitions of products) began to be held as an opportunity for the display of such products and for the exchange of information about *bussangaku*.

The earliest example of a *bussankai* is a *honzōkai* (exhibition of medicinal plants) held at Yushima in Hōreki 7 (1757), organized by Tamura Ransui on the urging of Hiraga Gennai. In Hōreki 12, Gennai himself became an organizer, opening a *yakuhinkai* (exhibition of medicinal products) at Yushima; for the occasion he set up 25 product collection agencies throughout the country to systematically collect exhibits, and over 1,300 kinds of products were displayed. The following year he published *Butsurui Hinshitsu* (Catalogue of Various Products), including illustrations and explanations of 360 of the exhibits at the *yakuhinkai* [HIRAGA 1972 (1763)], thus, as it were, approximating an exhibition catalogue. *Bussankai* like this were also held in Kyoto, Osaka, and even Nagoya; during the Edo period there are confirmed records of over 300 such events nationwide. This alone suggests that *bussangaku* had spread throughout the country. Kimura Kenkadō, an Osaka sake brewer, and others were regarded as key figures in the movement. The *bussankai* held during this period were regarded as opportunities for the frank exchange of information, and participants were restricted to “researchers,” who had registered in



advance. They functioned, in effect, as a kind of association. Typical examples included the Shabenkai in Edo, formed around Maeda Toshiyasu, lord of Toyama domain in Etchū, and Kuroda Narikiyo, lord of Fukushima domain in Chikuzen, and the Shō-hyakusha in Nagoya.

The members of the Shōhyakusha included Mizutani Toyobumi, Itō Keisuke, and Nishiyama Gendō. In 1826 Itō met with Franz von Siebold, on the latter's way to Edo; following this intellectual exchange, the next year he opened the *yakuhinkai* at his own residence to the general public. The exhibits included specimens which had been appraised by Siebold. Thus "natural history" collecting, which had been practiced within closed societies, was linked through the contact with Siebold to the activity of exhibition. Even so, this did not lead to a movement to permanently preserve the exhibits at these *bussankai*. Institutions for the permanent preservation of "natural history" collections did not appear until the Meiji Restoration of 1868. Nevertheless, Tanaka Yoshio, who had studied with Itō, served in the Bakufu's Office for the Investigation of Barbarian Books (Bansho Shirabesho) and Development Institute (*Kaiseisho*), and after the Restoration was responsible for establishing museums, while working in the Product Bureau (*Bussankyoku*) on the South Campus of the Government College (*Daigaku Nankō*), and the Bureau for Natural History (*Hakubutsukyoku*) in the Ministry of Education.

## 7. EXHIBITION

Suddenly, in the Meiji period, there was an effort at the national level to promote the establishment of museums as institutions for collection and exhibition. This was enabled, however, by previous developments. Until now, whenever I have had the opportunity, I have challenged the prevailing wisdom, which claims that Japanese modernization was achieved rapidly from the Meiji period onwards, through imitating the West. The same thing can be said about museums as institutions for collection and exhibition.

First, as we have just seen, "natural history" collecting had already been established from the middle of the Edo period, within the traditions of *honzōgaku* and *bussangaku*. On the other hand, even if there was no movement to open and exhibit such collections to the public, institutions for exhibition had taken root in Edo Japan. These were the *degaichō* (travelling exhibitions) of temples and shrines and the fashion for *misemono* (street entertainments).

For a *degaichō*, a temple or shrine's treasures would be taken to Edo or Osaka and there displayed to the general public. According to the *Edo Kaichō Nempyō* of Hiruma Hisashi, there were 1,565 *degaichō* held in Edo between Tenshō 18 (1590) and Meiji 3 (1870), meaning five or six *degaichō* per year [SHIINA 1993: 25]. In particular, there were numerous *kaichō* held at Ekōin temple in Ryōgoku; prints of the famous places of Edo give a sense of its lively atmosphere. It was also at Ekōin that the treasures of Hōryūji were unveiled. As is well known, these are now held by the Tokyo National Museum (Tōhaku), which clearly suggests the link between modern

museums and *degaichō*.

Besides *degaichō*, the various attractions which were laid out at temple and shrine festivals and fairs — magicians, acrobats, human oddities, exotic animals, and assemblages — became an important source of popular entertainment during the Edo period. No doubt it was the establishment in the Edo period of this custom of viewing *degaichō* and *misemono* — or, of the townspeople as their viewing subject — which became the foundation on which museums were established in the modern era.

## 8. MODERN MUSEUMS

The first person to use the word *hakubutsukan* (museum) seems to have been Namura Gohachirō, the translator on the mission headed by Niimi Masaoki which was sent to America in Man'en 1 (1860) to ratify the commercial treaties between Japan and the United States. During their stay in Washington D.C. the mission visited the Patent Office. Its members variously described the institution as, among others, a *hyakubutsukan* (lit. hall of one hundred things), a *meiki hōmotsu shūzōjo* (collection of rare treasures), and a *kikaikyoku* (instrument office); Namura used the word *hakubutsukan*, when noting in his *Akō Nikki* that “we visited a museum.” Two years later the mission led by Takeuchi Yasunori visited museums throughout Europe, beginning with the British Museum, and at this point the word *hakubutsukan* quickly became standard.

In 1872 (Meiji 5), as one element in its program of promoting industry, the Meiji government held an exposition in the Taiseiden at Yushima Seidō, using the title *Monbushō Hakubutsukan* (the Ministry of Education Museum). Some of the exhibits at this exhibition were being displayed prior to being sent to the Vienna International Exposition being held the following year; most of the remaining exhibits, however, were left on permanent display. As we know, the Tokyo National Museum considers this the year when it was founded. However, the history of the administration of this museum was anything but smooth. It was successively under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education to the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce, the Imperial Household Agency, and finally once again the Ministry of Education. Meanwhile, its name changed from *Teikoku Hakubutsukan* (Imperial Museum), to *Tokyo Teishitsu Hakubutsukan* (Tokyo Imperial Household Museum), to *Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan* (National Museum). It was only in 1952 (Showa 27) that it became the Tokyo National Museum. During this period, the Imperial Kyoto Museum and the Imperial Nara Museum were also founded, becoming what are today the Kyoto National Museum and the Nara National Museum.

Opinions differ on how to evaluate the development of these national museums in Japan; however it was much slower than the rapid establishment and progress of other institutions and systems after the Restoration. This lag is also evident when one compares it to the vigorous development of expositions. After having exhibited

in the Vienna International Exposition, the Meiji government actively promoted domestic expositions for the promotion of industry in Tokyo, Osaka, and Kyoto. This trend also spread to the regions and among private individuals, and was extremely lively through Meiji, Taisho, and Showa, with frequent expositions being held throughout the country. However it was only rarely that the various exhibits at these expositions were preserved, accumulated, and exhibited in permanent facilities. Even though expositions flourished as attractions, there was no progress in preserving the collections which they enabled. This was consistent with the trend from before Meiji.

*Bijutsukan* (art museums) were relatively well provided for. Originally, in Europe, both *hakubutsukan* and *bijutsukan* were designated by a single word—museum. In Japan, this was translated into two words—*hakubutsukan* and *bijutsukan*. And it was the latter that took hold among the general public. The three national museums eventually became predominantly *bijutsukan*. As with the Palace Museums in China, they could not escape their identity as treasure storehouses. In contrast, one has to say that still today there is hardly any inclination to preserve *hakubutsu* or *shobutsu* (a variety of objects). Art objects survive from the golden age of expositions, but other kinds of object do not. Even after the Osaka Expo of 1970, a great number of exhibits vanished without a trace. Our National Museum of Ethnology (Minpaku) only holds a fraction of them. Other than works of art, it was thought, perhaps, that even if everyday objects survived, they had no value.

Company museums are a good example. Recently, a succession of company museums have been built. Even when it is decided to build a museum, however, the company's own past products do not survive. They have not been saved. This is largely due to the fact that among both company employees and the general public, there has been next to no sense of the individual company or person as a bearer of the history of civilization. History has been understood as something created beyond one's reach. Thus until now there has been little sense that history can or should be told through the objects which surround one. The habit of throwing away old things is deeply entrenched. Perhaps one should call Japanese civilization one which discards its past.

In the last twenty years, however, the situation has changed rapidly, with Minpaku taking the lead. By having in front of them the tools which the peoples of the world use in their daily lives, people have noticed the value of everyday objects. They have come to see the importance of preserving such objects. And they have begun to think of history itself as the accumulation of everyday objects.

Since the opening of Minpaku, there has been a succession of museums focusing on non-art collections— for example, the rush of local museums and company museums established since the 1980s. These are continuing in Minpaku's footsteps. People have finally begun to notice that any and every thing can be the object of a museum collection. Museum professionals talk among themselves about "Minpaku gannen" (lit. the first year of Minpaku), meaning a new age for Japanese museums inaugurated by Minpaku. To sum up, museums are a civilization's

institutions of record. Now that we have begun to realize this, perhaps we have entered the age of the museum. I believe museum activities will increasingly flourish in the future.

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