

Brief overview of Minpaku Collection and Foresight : Greetings

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Brief overview of Minpaku Collection and Foresight: Greetings

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Good morning, everyone. Thank you so much for participating in this international workshop, “Re-Collection and Sharing Traditional Knowledge, Memories, Information, and Images: Problem and the Prospects on Creating Collaborative Catalog”. We would like to express our sincere gratitude for there being so many attendees, particularly the three presenters coming all the way from the United States of America.

I am Ken'ichi Sudo, Director-General of the National Museum of Ethnology. Please allow me to make a few words of greeting before opening the workshop. I would like to refer to the possibility of utilizing the ethnological materials taken care by this museum known familiarly as Minpaku, and Dr. Atsunori Ito, organizer of this workshop, will explain the objectives of this workshop.

Minpaku was founded in 1974, and opened to the public three years later in 1977. Along with its functions as a museum, Minpaku is also a graduate school and an inter-university research institution. It is a cultural anthropological research institute unprecedented in the world. The faculty, consisting of 60 researchers, not only conducts research surveys at sites worldwide but also organizes a variety of projects to proceed with comprehensive studies on humans and cultures by inviting many researchers from Japan and abroad.

This fiscal year (2013), 46 international and national joint researches have been organized while holding 23 different international symposia and workshops of this kind. We are greatly honored that the number of researchers who make good use of Minpaku, such as members of joint research, participants in the symposia and the workshops, guest professors and visiting researchers at home and abroad, totals 1,200.

Through our museum activities, Minpaku collects, stores, and exhibits a wide variety of ethnographical materials from various parts of the world while shooting, recording, editing and releasing visual and audio materials. At present, we have 340,000 items of ethnographical materials, 70,000 items of visual and audio materials, and 650,000 items of literature and book materials. Last year, 210,000 people visited our museum.

At its foundation, Minpaku had approximately 30,000 items. Since then, the researchers of Minpaku has been practically collecting ethnographical materials to understand the lifestyles, cultures and worldviews of the people living in the study regions. Collection approaches include direct collection by the researcher, package purchases from other institutions (such as Luongo Collection (NY State, U.S.A)),

donations from individuals and groups, and transfers from public institutions. Only Minpaku has a huge collection covering the material culture under which people living in every part of the world have made and used since the second half of the 20th century. To our regret, only a little more than 10,000 items are on exhibition, and most of our collection slumbers in the repository.

Forty years have passed since the start of our collection. Over these four decades, lifestyles have dramatically changed globally. The materials we collected are now disappearing without being locally produced or used any more. In recent years, I have realized that our materials have significant value as “Cultural Property” on the sites. The “Assets” of Minpaku are having new relationships with the source communities of their origin. Here I’ll describe some cases I have experienced.

The first case is that of the canoes being lost. The canoes I collected from Yap Island in Oceania in 1977 are no longer found there. In order to recover the art of traditional navigation and construct a museum in Yap Island, they asked us to reconstruct their traditional canoes based on the ones stored by Minpaku.

The second case is our contribution to local communities with “Recognition of Ethnic Groups” and “Cultural Renaissance” through homecoming exhibitions and collection review. In 2009, we lent to the Shung Ye Museum of Formosan Aborigines in Taiwan approximately 200 items from the Taiwanese aborigine’s materials collected 100 years ago by Japanese ethnologists. At the opening ceremony of the exhibition, an elder of the aborigines expressed his gratitude to Minpaku, saying, “What foresight that you have carefully maintained such rubbish (we regarded articles of daily use as worthless with no value to be maintained) until today!” Now, the Taiwanese aborigines are working to restore their ethnic pride by “reappearing” their cultural assets not by replicating them.

In addition, the Ulsan Museum in Korea held a special exhibition using 250 items of our “Ulsan Collection” in 2011. The exhibits are livingware and farming tools collected in Ulsan by a Japanese ethnologists 70 years ago. During the modernization process in Korea, all are now gone from the communities there. Young people visiting the exhibition thanked us, saying, “We are fortunate that you have carefully stored everyday items our grandparents used in the past!” It is said that this special exhibition was visited by 100,000 people, 20% of the Ulsan citizens. We helped Korean people recognize their history and understand their culture through utensils for everyday use.

The third case is interaction with the people of the source communities. Minpaku has been maintaining a close relationship with Japanese indigenous people, the Aynu, for many years. We invite Aynu people to enable them to conduct “*Kamuynomi*, Ceremony offering prayers to Gods” and for sufficient storage and secure handing down of 5,000 items of Aynu materials stored by

Minpaku to the coming generations. Ritual utensils used for this ceremony store in the repository as academic materials. This ceremony makes the Aynu materials re-animate. In other words, this is one of the activities for renewing their cultural lives. Minpaku also accepts Aynu traditional craftsmen as artist in residency every year. They stayed in the repository of Minpaku for about three weeks to review the Aynu collection. They learned techniques and designs used to produce such old materials for utilization in their modern craftwork. This program aims to help Aynu people revive their culture with the materials stored in Minpaku.

The last case is collaboration with the Zuni Museum: the A:shiwi A:wam Museum and Heritage Center, New Mexico, in the United States. In June 2012, we established an academic agreement with Jim Enote, Executive Director of the Zuni Museum located in the Zuni Reservation in New Mexico. Executive Director Enote has repeatedly visited Minpaku since February 2009 to review 31 items of the Zuni materials we stored for correction of errors in the material information. He has also told us how to store the materials in accordance with the cultural context of the Zuni tribe together with other useful advice. These are meaningful experiences for us to gain deep knowledge about the Zuni materials. I suppose that these experiences were also meaningful to Zuni people who could confirm the location, number, storage conditions, and information of their materials as good opportunities to be directly involved in the management of their materials.

Since 2009, the Zuni Museum has been constructing a database to consolidate information about Zuni materials owned by domestic and overseas museums. They are collaborating closely with Mr. Robert Breunig, Director of the Museum of Northern Arizona, who is here today, as well as other institutions. For the database built by the Zuni Museum and the relevant museums, checking by a leader of the Zuni traditional religion, Mr. Octavius Seowtewa, who is here today, and other religious leaders will be conducted along with the work to determine the adequacy of disclosure or non-disclosure of their traditional knowledge. That will be a practical study for integrated management of cultural heritage information on the Zuni people, which is scattered worldwide in various museums.

The four cases I have just referred to demonstrate that museums in developed countries are now expected by source communities that provided their ethnic materials not to physically return their materials but to commonly use the materials through homecoming exhibitions and collection review, as well as through sharing of information. Later Dr. Nobuhiro Kishigami will report to you, but Minpaku is preparing to establish the “Info-Forum Museum” for ethnographic materials stored in Minpaku in response to such requests. The Info-Forum Museum is a database of cultural information and will be accessible to culture-bearers; researchers, media, teachers, students and the general public through the internet and other means. We also aim to promote interactive and reciprocal utilization with people of resource

communities and local museums.

This workshop is a precious opportunity for us to exchange opinions about how to newly collect and share the material information stored by Minpaku. We are looking forward to hearing about activities at the Zuni Museum and the Museum of Northern Arizona, as well as opinions from a religious leader of the Zuni people. Besides the cases of Native Americans, the Hokkaido University Center for Ainu and Indigenous Studies and Minpaku will make meaningful presentations. I expect fruitful discussions about what Minpaku can contribute to ethnic groups in the world, new opportunities for Minpaku to develop cultural anthropological studies as a research institute, and so forth. Through such discussions, I hope the prospects for future missions and practices as an ethnological museum will be brightened.

Lastly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to everyone attending the workshop here today. I would like to come to the end of my speech by requesting your continued cooperation and support, as well as your critical engagement with Minpaku. Thank you for your kind attention.