

Closing Remarks for the Bagan Meeting

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journal or publication title	Senri Ethnological Reports
volume	125
page range	81-82
year	2015-02-26
URL	http://doi.org/10.15021/00000838

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This International Research Meeting on Museology is carried out as part of the project entitled “New Horizons in Asian Museums and Museology”. As Daw Nu Mra Zan said this morning, it is composed of a joint research meeting using two venues, Bagan Archaeological Museum on Monday 23rd and the National Museum (Yangon) on Thursday 26th, followed by a Public Seminar on Friday 27th at the National Museum (Yangon). The joint research meetings in Bagan and in Yangon are both composed of two sessions, dealing with two basic themes for museums: Session 1 on “Museum Exhibition”, and Session 2 on “Conservation and Documentation for Museums”. There will be two different speakers for the joint research meetings in Bagan and in Yangon.

As a closing remark, I will attempt to make a link between the meeting in Bagan and the meeting in Yangon, providing a summary of the presentations.

For the Session “Museum Exhibition”, Daw Marlar Aung presented “Regional Museum Exhibitions Applying Intangible Cultural Heritage”. She showed us how a regional museum is making exhibitions including intangible cultural heritage. Among many examples, she took the example of the Northern Shan State Cultural Museum and said that after making an inventory of the intangible and tangible cultural heritage for each group, the collection of ethnic objects is conducted in collaboration with the leaders of the respective cultural organizations. Daw Marlar Aung said that good museum exhibition is based on research, and all these preparatory works to realize regional museum exhibitions are supported by their research field trips.

Then, Prof. Kenji Yoshida held a talk on “Museum Exhibitions Today, 2013”. He related recent trends since the 1980s, showing exhibitions that can be considered as a milestone in the field of cultural exhibitions around the world, taking examples both from art museums and ethnographic museums. He took examples of ‘reflective exhibition’, dialogical approach, and self-representation. And, he pointed out that the question of ‘who has the right to represent a culture?’ still remained because usually images of their own culture held by elite people or curators are on display.

Both related the importance of mutual communication, and participation of the people being exhibited with those doing the exhibiting.

During the question and answer session, we had diverse questions and concerns, not only on the problem of representation of culture, but also technical problems or classification issues. This shows that this problem is complex and interesting, and we hope to develop this theme in Yangon.

For the Session on “Conservation and Documentation for Museums”, Daw Baby made a presentation on “Conservation of Archaeological Findings from their Site to Museum Display”. She emphasized that excavation and conservation should be considered together in order to get maximum information from the objects and for their preservation for posterity. She explained how to conserve the excavated objects composed of inorganic materials (metallic objects, ceramics, stone, and glass) and organic materials. And finally she drew attention to a very important point saying that ‘Prevention is better than cure’.

From the Japanese side, Prof. Shingo Hidaka presented “Conservation and Restoration of Tangible Cultural Properties: Rescue Operations Related to the Great East Japan Earthquake”. He related how, in Japan, the salvage of cultural properties took place after the occurrence of the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011. He explained three important operations in the rescue activities, rescue, temporary storage, and emergency treatment, taking examples of Japanese folk objects.

These two presentations complement each other. Daw Baby dealt with conservation activities under the normal regime on a daily basis, and Prof. Hidaka explained conservation activities in the case of emergency and after the disaster. It is impossible to eliminate natural disasters. But, we can mitigate the effects of destructive natural events and reduce the risk of damage or loss by developing an emergency preparedness.

During the question and answer session, we had very concrete questions such as organization and the decision making for conservation, use of traditional materials for restoration, place for temporary storage, difference of damage by sea water and river water, and so on.

These two sessions “Museum Exhibition” and “Conservation and Documentation for Museums” are two basic issues for museums. “Museum Exhibition” deals with how to make good public use of the collections, and this part of the activities is visible to visitors. “Conservation and Documentation for Museums” is somewhat invisible to visitors. Both are fundamental museum activities and we wish to have further development on these topics in Yangon.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.