みんぱくリポジトリ
国立民族学博物館学術情報リポジトリ National Museum of Ethnolo

Introduction

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Introduction

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The National Museum of Ethnology, Japan started in 2012 the three-year project "New Horizons in Asian Museums and Museology", supported by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS), in order to strengthen the international cooperation and network on museology, and more particularly to promote joint research between Japan and Asian countries, especially Myanmar, Thailand, and Mongolia.

This project can be considered as a new international network initiative for the National Museum of Ethnology, Japan. That is, the National Museum of Ethnology, Japan has been conducting training courses on museology since 1994, in collaboration with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). From 1994 to 2003, it was a six-month course and out of this, two weeks was entrusted to the museum. After 10 years, it became an intensive course (three and a half months) and the operation, planning, and training were the total responsibility of our museum and the Lake Biwa Museum. Thus, with Myanmar, Thailand, and Mongolia, we have more than 20 years of friendship and cultural exchange concerning museology and museum activities.

As part of the project, the International Research Meeting on Museology was held in Myanmar from September 22nd to 28th, 2013 (see the Appendix: Program), following the one organized in Mongolia in 2012. The International Research Meeting on Museology in Myanmar was composed of a joint research meeting using two venues, Bagan Archaeological Museum on September 23rd and the National Museum (Yangon) on the 26th, followed by a Public Seminar at the National Museum (Yangon) on the 27th.

Joint research meeting

The joint research meeting in Bagan and in Yangon was for specialists in museology, museum staff, and museology students. They were both composed of two sessions, "Museum Exhibition" and "Conservation and Documentation for Museums".

- The Bagan meeting -

For the session "Museum Exhibition", the presentations focused on the problem of how to represent culture in museum exhibitions.

Daw Marlar Aung (Lashio Cultural Museum, Myanmar) presented "Regional Museum Exhibitions Applying Intangible Cultural Heritage". Based on her experiences from other regional museums displays in Myanmar, she explained how she started making an inventory of the intangible cultural heritage of northern Shan

State, the region having eight ethnic group organizations in the locality. She noted that, by preserving the cultural heritage within one's region, it becomes possible to cherish with value the cultural heritage of the nation and preserve it. She pointed out the importance of research to create an informative display, and this was done in collaboration with the leaders of the respective ethnic organizations.

Prof. Kenji Yoshida (National Museum of Ethnology, Japan), in his "Museum Exhibitions Today, 2013", reported recent movements in the field of cultural exhibition in the museum world, focusing on the field of ethnographic exhibitions. He explained how the 1984 exhibition "Primitivism in 20th Century Art" at the Museum of Modern Art in New York expanded the discussion of primitivism, which had been treated only within the art world, to include anthropologists and historians. It resulted in various alternative display strategies such as revisionist representation focusing on global modernism, reflexive representation problematizing the politics of representation itself, and self-representation. He stated a further option, dialogical approach for a joint exhibition organized by those exhibiting and those being exhibited. He took several examples, and at the end, he introduced briefly the refurbishing project of the National Museum of Ethnology, Japan. Based on the key concept that the exhibition should be realized through collaboration with those who are being exhibited (= owners of the culture represented), museum professionals from seven African countries were invited as advisors to realize the new exhibition considered as a platform of the academic network.

For the session "Conservation and Documentation for Museums", the center of attention was on the problem of conservation.

Daw Baby (Bagan Archaeological Museum, Myanmar) gave a talk on "Conservation of Archaeological Findings from their Site to Museum Display". She noted that archaeological conservation includes excavation planning, to actual excavation works, until arrival of the objects at the museum. She discussed in detail, from a technical point of view, the conservation of metallic objects, stone, pottery, terracotta, stucco, and clay objects, as well as of organic objects such as wood, paper, leaves and leather, painting, and bone and ivory materials. And more importantly, she stated that "prevention is better than cure".

Prof. Shingo Hidaka (National Museum of Ethnology, Japan) presented "Conservation and Restoration of Tangible Cultural Properties: Rescue Operations Related to the Great East Japan Earthquake". To organize rescue operations on a nationwide scale, the Cultural Agency established the "Committee for Salvaging Cultural Properties Affected by the 2011 Earthquake off the Pacific Coast of Tohoku and Related Disasters". In this framework, objects eligible for rescue were not only the cultural properties that had obtained designated status but also included non-designated objects, thus expanding the scope of operations. Rescue operations consisting of three actions (rescue, temporary storage, and emergency treatment)

were described taking the example of folk objects. He added that, in order to restore the value of folk objects, further implementations such as recording of the rescued objects, conservation and repair by specialists, permanent storage, research, and disaster prevention are indispensable.

- The Yangon meeting -

For the session "Museum Exhibition", the problem of museum exhibition was dealt with from the perspective of the relationship between museum users and a museum.

Daw Mie Mie Thet Nwe (National Museum (Yangon), Myanmar), in "Museum Education Using Exhibits as Tools: Experience at the National Museum of Myanmar", stated the importance for school teachers and museums to work together to provide the most beneficial experience to students. She commented that exhibits at museums play an important role not only as cultural tools but also as learning tools, and that the museum needs to overcome its weaknesses and requirements such as lack of an audiovisual unit, constraints of annual maintenance and holding special exhibitions, lack of staff and trained curators, and lack of museum facilities. She showed examples of special exhibitions held at the National Museum (Yangon) with strong themes and selected exhibits that came to be credited with reaching a wide public and being educational and informative.

Prof. Shigeki Kobayashi (National Museum of Ethnology, Japan) noted in "Museum Exhibitions as the Place for Creativity in the National Museum of Ethnology, Japan" that the museum has two different roles: one for learning, and the other for inspiring users. A museum is a place where users can learn, enjoy, and be excited and inspired. Taking the example of the National Museum of Ethnology, Japan, he discussed the current condition of the museum as a field of creativity. He emphasized the importance of developing exhibitions as forums and the museum as a forum. The museum is a place and time where the researchers creating exhibitions, people presenting cultures, and exhibition users can enlighten each other through interaction.

For the session "Conservation and Documentation for Museums", in addition to the problem of conservation, the issue of documentation with its related considerations was within the scope.

Daw Aye Aye Thinn (National Museum (Naypyitaw), Myanmar) described "The Process of Conservation and Documentation at the National Museum (Naypyitaw)". The National Museum (Naypyitaw) has been under construction since 2010. The Museum has been collecting display objects made from different materials. Each object arriving at the Museum is systematically documented. Cleaning the dirt is the main conservation work at the Museum and is performed according to the object type.

Prof. Masatoshi Kubo (National Museum of Ethnology, Japan) presented "Problems in Managing Cultural Resources: Resource Sharing, Protecting Intellectual

Properties, and Ethical Consideration". He noted the concept of forum-type collaboration among people needed to be introduced in managing cultural resources, which would necessitate several requirements such as management literacy and specialized archivists, sustainable conservation, and balance between sharing cultural resources and protection of various related rights. He gave an example of managing photographs and moving images donated to the National Museum of Ethnology, Japan. The Museum attempts to persuade the copyright holder to transfer the copyright to the Museum together with ownership.

Public Seminar

The JSPS Core-to-Core Program Public Seminar "Social Roles of the Museum and Human Resource Development" was open to the public. In organizing the pubic seminar, support was extended by the JICA Myanmar Office. The main theme of the Public Seminar, as suggested in the title, is the relationship between "people" and "museum".

Dr. Yasushi Kusuoka (Lake Biwa Museum, Japan) held a talk on "Cooperation between Museums and the Local Community". One of the major aspects of the Lake Biwa Museum in Shiga Prefecture is indeed the extensive cooperation between the Museum and the local community. Local people get involved and participate actively in museum activities. Examples of exchange were shown taking those of programs for schools and for the general public, and those conducted in cooperation with the local people. Moreover, for high-end users or people wishing to utilize the Museum to further their interests in their natural surroundings or traditions, other programs are also provided. The Lake Biwa Museum thinks of these activities as a tree. The Museum hopes that this tree will spread its seedings throughout Shiga Prefecture and that the museum will have ever more active cooperation with the local people.

U Kyaw Shin Naung (National Museum (Naypyitaw), Myanmar), in his presentation "Capacity Building for Museums in Myanmar", considered the quality of museum staff and the necessity of capacity building. For capacity building in a nonprofit organization such as a museum, he pointed out innovation to be one of the key strengths, and suggested that the nonprofit sector and business sector can work together to strengthen community life.

Prof. Tsuneyuki Morita (Professor Emeritus, National Museum of Ethnology, Japan) gave a presentation entitled "Social Function of the Museum". In addition to the basic functions of a museum (collection or acquisition, conservation, exhibition, and museum education), he proposed that the museum have other functions, e.g., as a social system, educational institution, tourism resource, and communication tool. Among the assets composing the social system, attention was drawn to the notion of "fail safe". He expressed that the museum can provide an invaluable resource for

our memory of "how to live". For the museum as an educational institution, what is important is to help users to reveal something by themselves. For the third point, the museum as a tourism resource, he proposed to use the museum as an introduction spot to start tourism and not as a visiting target. For the museum as a communication tool, visual language will play an important role. Finally, he concluded that the advantage of museums lie in the collections of objects and proposed that future generations reconsider the functions of the museum.

In summary

From the International Research Meeting (two research meetings and one public seminar), some key concepts for the museums of our era can be drawn.

A museum today has not only the classic basic functions of collection, conservation, exhibition, and museum education, but larger potential as suggested by Prof. Emeritus Tsuneyuki Morita. And, for this, as U Kyaw Shin Naung stated, an organization is only as good as the individuals it employs, where we remark the necessity for capacity-building.

The notion of the museum as a forum was frequently mentioned during the Meeting. The importance of mutual communication and collaboration with the people being exhibited was emphasized in making exhibitions, taking the example of regional museums in Myanmar by Daw Marlar Aung and the example of representation in ethnographic museums worldwide by Prof. Kenji Yoshida. Prof. Shigeki Kobayashi also considered exhibitions as forums. The presentation of Daw Mie Mie Thet Nwe arguing for the necessity of school teachers and museums to work together was also in the same line. This trend also concerned the field of documentation, and Prof. Masatoshi Kubo stated that the concept of forum-type collaboration among people played an important role in managing cultural resources. Prof. Kenji Yoshida underlined in his presentation with reference to an art historian Duncan Cameron's discussion that museums in our era are required to be a forum where people can have encounters with the unknown that generates discussion and debate, and no more as a temple where people come to worship "treasures" with pre-established value.

The concept of the forum-type museum leads us to develop a further, advanced relationship and cooperation between the museum and the local community. A good example of the involvement of the local people in museum activities was given by Dr. Yasushi Kusuoka. We realize that the relationship between the museum and the local community is capturing increased interest not only in Japan but in the world of the museum today, as it is connected with museum education and lifelong education and can also contribute to the economic and cultural development of local communities.

Prof. Emeritus Tsuneyuki Morita stated well one very important fact. The

strong point of a museum lies however in possessing collections of objects. Here, whatever may be said, we come to the consideration that, even for a museum of the 21st century, the basic functions of a museum remain and cannot be ignored, as shown the presentation of Daw Baby on the conservation of archeological objects and that of Prof. Shingo Hidaka on the rescue operations of objects in case of emergency, as well as that of Daw Aye Aye Thinn dealing with the documentation and conservation of objects after their arrival at the museum. Access to the collections and moreover the realization of the forum-type museum only becomes possible when a museum properly performs its fundamental functions.

This book retraces the contents of the presentations given at the International Research Meeting of Museology in Myanmar. The illustrations and photographs used at the time of the lectures are included. The translation was wholly revised by the editors responsible. It is a book that helps Japanese and Myanmar researchers and specialists to understand the museum activities of a country that has had little information until now. We hope that it can also serve as a reference book for young museum staff to deepen their knowledge and experience. At the same time, we believe that it is one of the first steps to creating new horizons in Asian museums and museology, based on its respective cultural and historical background.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge with gratitude the assistance of all the organizations and individuals who exerted their best efforts to realize the International Research Meeting on Museology in Myanmar and this publication.