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Regional Museum Exhibitions Applying Intangible Cultural Heritage

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Regional Museum Exhibitions Applying Intangible Cultural Heritage

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1 Introduction

Exhibitions play an important role in attracting the attention of the public, which is one of the main functions of museum works. When we conduct exhibition work, we have to consider the conservation, aesthetic, and security perspectives, as well as the historical sequence and subject-matter oriented philosophy. However, understanding the nature of the type of museum is the most important point. For example, one national museum has to display all of the national culture properties and regional level museums in particular have to display each of their regional cultural artifacts. Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) is defined by UNESCO in the following domains:

- Oral traditions and expression, including language as a vehicle of the ICH (folktales, manuscripts, traditional games)
- Performing arts (including visual arts, theater, vocal arts, music and film)
- Social practice, rituals and festive events (including social customs and traditions, traditional economic systems, systems of social organization, traditional ceremonies)
- Knowledge and practice concerning nature and the universe (including traditional knowledge, local genius, traditional medicine)
- Traditional craftsmanship (including painting, sculpture, architecture, dress, clothing, traditional food and drinks, traditional modes of transportation)

2 Museum renewal survey trip

Regarding the renewal of regional museums in Myanmar, I first got the idea that regional ICH should be included as one of the display booths of regional museums through the guidance of our group leader in my first experience of renewal at Kayin State Cultural Museum. I was assigned as one of the members of the display committee on the renewal work of Kayin State Cultural Museum, led by Daw Nu Mra Zan, who was working as a museum expert after her retirement. Firstly, our group conducted a survey trip to three regional museums including Hpa-an Cultural Museum (Kayin State), Mawlamyaing Cultural Museum (Mon State) and Patheingyi Cultural Museum (Ayeyarwady Region) starting on August 2011, for 10 days (figure 1). After completing the trip, our group submitted the condition survey report to the Director-General of our head office that detailed ways to conduct renewal work in Hpa-an (Kayin State), Mawlamyaing (Mon State) and Patheingyi (Ayeyarwady Region)



Figure 1 Museum renewal survey trip.

regional museums.

2.1 Kayin State Cultural Museum display of ICH

As a result of the report, we were assigned to start our renewal work at Kayin State Cultural Museum, located at the corner of Zweekabin Street and Khyebin Street near Kan-tharyar-Lake of Hpa-an. Our group leader decided to collect the objects related to Kayin regional ICH. Therefore, before starting renewal, the Hpa-an inventory work of regional ICH or research work on ICH was started from the first week of November 2011. That research allowed us to study the traditional semi-precious stone painting work included in the traditional craftsmanship in Hpa-an city. After that, we were able to display semi-precious stone paintings inside the exhibition room of traditional earning. During our stay, we got the chance to participate in their traditional festivals such as Kayin National Day, New Year Festival and *Pi Bu Yaw* Spirit worshipping (traditional ceremony of the First Crop Feeding) related to the performing arts. Moreover, we modified the display of their traditional musical instruments and various bronze drums, which were played at their *Done* Dance booth with complete descriptions and photographs. We studied their social practice, rituals and festive events so that the traditional Kayin Wedding, *Aw* Festival, which mentioned love songs between unmarried young boys and girls could be added to our display booth.

Not only did we take our research trip to Talaku village near Hpa-an, that has a special practice for worshipping a hermit, but we also invited the villagers to the museum and interviewed them about their religious beliefs, taboos and their traditional dress. We set up the exhibition room for Talaku beliefs as a result of our



Figure 2 Talaku belief.

research. The Leke belief, which is the practice of worshipping the *Arimeteya Bodisattav*, or Buddha-to-be of the last five Buddhas of *Badda kappa* or this world, was also on display together with Talaku belief (figure 2).

2.2 Mon State Cultural Museum display of ICH

Next in arranging the Mon Cultural Museum, we added the booth of traditional earning that contained items such as pottery, weaving, pipe industry, sun-dried salt enterprise, slate and slate pencil industry and fisheries. At the booth of traditional festival and customs, we displayed the Mon traditional oil offering ceremony and traditional wedding with vinyl-inkjets showing the photographs and descriptions. Thus, industries, festivals, rituals and craftsmanship of the region were also displayed. For the survey work or research work, the officer-in-charge of the Mon Cultural Museum had already completed it to assist our renewal work.

A moon-shaped gong set, fiddle, crocodile skin musical instrument, and a set of bamboo flutes are displayed in the musical instruments booth, which is related to the performing arts of ICH.

2.3 Ayeyarwaddy Cultural Museum display of ICH

The Patheingyi Cultural Museum represents the Ayeyarwaddy Region. Hence, an inventory of noted intangible cultural heritage assets of the Ayeyarwaddy Region was initially conducted, such as principal industry of umbrella-making as well as distinctive industries of cane, thin bamboo strips, mats, etc. As there is a long coastline bordering the region, the sea-shell necklace industry is also well known. Furthermore, there are traditional food stuff industries such as the *halawah* industry

as well as dried fish industry, and pottery industry that includes the glazed ceramic industry. All of their step-by-step productions were observed and exhibited. In addition, the ceremonies of the preordainment of the events of Buddha called *Byar Deik Pwe* (preordainment of events made by Buddha), which is particular to Patheingyi, were documented and all the relevant information was collected. In this way, noted and creative intangible cultures, traditional industries and references concerning festivals were explored and exhibited.

To my mind, in one way ICH is based on natural geology. For instance, many cane trees are grown in the Ayeyarwaddy Region, so local people make rattan ware by using those raw materials. Therefore, we displayed the flora and fauna booth including the trees and plants that grow in this region.

3 Northern Shan State Cultural Museum display of ICH

3.1 Inventory or Research

The opportunity to establish museums in the states and regions around the country has provided me with a lot of experience. Based on my experiences from other regional museum displays, when I arrived at my mother department, the Lashio Cultural Museum (figure 3), I started making an inventory of the Intangible and Tangible Cultural Heritage of Northern Shan State (figure 4). I was fortunate enough to learn that my senior officer and the staff happened to be local residents who know the region well and their knowledge of the territory was significant in making the inventory. Moreover, help from other Ministries is also crucial. For example, the Immigration Department issued a list of ethnic groups within the area; the Agriculture Department and the Land Records Department helped identify the types of soil; the District General Administrative Department informed us on security conditions of the locality; and subject matters on caves and fossils were simplified by the Geology Department of Lashio University.

According to the inventory format, it was conducted in a step by step manner acquiring information about the intangible culture by asking what, why, when, where and how in Lashio.

An advantage of the region is that there are eight ethnic group organizations in the locality, with which we were able to link up and make inventories on intangible and tangible cultures of the ethnic groups. They are Shan, (Ta-Ang) Plaung, Wa, Kachin, Kokang, Myaung-Zee (Hmong), Lahu and Lisu.

Shan ICH inventory

Additionally, we began to make an inventory on major ethnic groups and lesser-known groups that exist only within the region.

Firstly, we went to the house where the Shan pot drums (traditional Shan

drums) were made and sold; we researched the family and made records by taking photos and video footage of the process of making Shan pot drums. Unexpectedly, in the process of this, we learned about the traditional industries of *khawpoat* (a kind of Shan traditional food) and pickled pork from the same household. Likewise, we visited homes where more intangible cultural industries were explored. (*kinnari/kinnara* (mythical bird) and *toenaya* (mythical animal like lion) costume industries).

Furthermore, we explored the *haw* (former Shan chieftains' residence) in Northern Shan State. They are Thein-ni and Thi Baw (Hsipaw) *haws*. We met relatives of Shan *Sawbwa* and we learned about the history of the Shan palace from them. Moreover, the customs of Shan and information about the pagodas that were built by Shan *Sawbwa*, such as Thein-Ni, Kyaung-Kone, Sibaw-Bawkyo and Lashio, Man-su pagodas, were documented.



Figure 3 Northern Shan State Cultural Museum (in Lashio).



Figure 4 Inventory of ICH.

Then we went to the office of the Shan Cultural Organization, where we learned about the Intangible Culture of Shan races. Therefore, we made an inventory of Intangible Culture, such as Shan history, language and literature, proverbs, festivals (New Year festival, ceremony of eating the first crop, *htamane* (food of glutinous rice) festival, offertory of lighted tiered-spire festival, water festival, novitiation ceremony), culture and traditional house construction, and preparation of Shan food (fermented soya-bean, small jaggery-stuffed glutinous rice dumplings, packed-and-steamed glutinous rice stuffed with banana, Shan noodles).

Wa ICH inventory

As my senior officer is a Wa national, we went to meet his friends and relatives in Lashio, Hopeik and Maingmaw villages, in order to get information on the intangible cultural heritage of Wa, the history and traditional proverbs as oral traditional and expressions, including language, traditional craftsmanship such as the back strap-loom weaving industry, traditional dressing, traditional buffalo horn, traditional rice gruel, *khawpoat* (mentioned in Shan culture), performing arts, social practice, ritual and festival events such as Wa festivals and dances, wooden drum and musical instruments, and traditional house construction.

Kokang ICH inventory

When we met the leader of the Kokang Cultural Organization and told him that we wished to make an inventory on Kokang cultures, we were introduced to a teacher who is an expert in the field. Thereafter, we went to meet the people who are actually associated with intangible culture and conducted explorations. Thus, we learned about the bonfire festival, traditional beliefs, *pan paunk pwe* (an occasion where a maiden throws a small packet of flower seeds wrapped in a piece of cloth at the man she loves), and traditional industries (pickled tea leaves, *khawpoat*, shoes made of cloth and thin strips of bamboo, banjo, wind musical instrument *shanmae*).

Ta-an Plaung ICH inventory

We explored the ancient cave of Nat Pya and Bat Cave and the rocky mountain where a fish fossil was found. By chance, on the way to Nat Pya Cave, there was a wayside public rest house of Ta-an family where we were able to learn about sand pagoda festivals usually held in the month of Tagu, because we saw a sand pagoda, built in front of that public rest house.

We went to villages of the Plaung ethnic group, such as Kaungkhar and Mae Han villages, where are close to the Lashio township, within the Northern Shan State for collection of museum objects and making inventory of Intangible Culture.

Lahu ICH inventory

Accompanied by the secretary of the Lahu Cultural Organization, explorations were made in Enai, Lwae tauk and Nammabawda villages. The design of traditional houses, traditional festivals, hand-washing ceremony, *pan pauk pwe* (mentioned in Kokang culture), top-spinning ceremony and handicrafts were studied and documented. Moreover, as a custom, a hen-nesting basket is kept in almost every house.

Kachin ICH inventory

Together with the leaders of the Literature and Cultural Organization of Kachin national, we went on an expedition to Kout-khai township where we observed the construction of a *Manaw* pole in its initial stages. Additionally, there is a Kachin custom that whenever a child is born to a family, the elderly grandmothers shared pounded ginger and dried beef.

3.2 Display

3.2.1 Meeting with ethnic group leaders for collection (figure 5)

All the organizations of the ethnic groups in the region were invited to the museum, and information concerning the organizations and interpretation of their symbols were documented. As there were meetings with the cultural organizations in succession, some of the leaders donated items they had collected such as musical instruments and tribal dresses, and the information on them was documented.

Meanwhile, a government budget was given to our head office, and a meeting was held on collecting artifacts, among the team leader who is the museum expert, the Director of Taunggyi, Lashio staff and the leaders of the Cultural Organization of ethnic groups for the purpose of museum object collections. Our exhibition team leader decided the category titles of museum artifacts for leaders of the Cultural Organization of ethnic groups, such as traditional house, traditional dress, everyday utensils, kitchen utensils, traditional weapons, traditional musical instruments, costumes, weaving and earning utensils, with the request to collect the ethnic items under those subjects. In this way, we collected ethnic artifacts, which were supported by leaders of the Cultural Organization of ethnic groups.

Furthermore, a meeting was held for the second time, and discussions were made on the conditions of the collection of artifacts and their evidence, and, the need to meet experts at the museum, who would give presentations on skills and knowledge of various processes of traditional industries and musical instruments.

Myaung-Zee (Hmong) nationals as well as professionals in the weaving industry and music, who were later interviewed and documented, brought a documentary Video CD of the process of the weaving industry to the museum. As it was not an easy task to wear the tribal dress which is worn layer upon layer, only



Figure 5 Meeting with ethnic group leaders.

the outermost layer was recorded.

For the third time, we and the leaders of the Cultural Organization of eight ethnic groups held a meeting for ethnic groups and main characteristics; we deliberated on how to describe the main characteristics of each ethnic group in each exhibition room and we also asked about ethnic taboos.

3.2.2 From viewing to new creation in display

When we arrived at one Plaung house, we got display ideas from a soot-stained shelf at that house. This is a very useful item for keeping dried meat, roasted fish, packets of salt and other things to be dried. Therefore, we made a replica of the soot-stained shelf in the Plaung exhibition room. Through further exploration into one novitiation ceremony, we learned about the custom of inviting people to an occasion such as a charity event of some kind. Instead of an invitation card, a handful of popcorn packed inside a piece of locally-made Shan paper is used for the invitation. The invited person, in return, gives a packet of dried tea leaves or some salt at the ceremony. Therefore, we displayed the pack of popcorn in the Plaung exhibition room.

Another example of viewing concerns the VCD of the Lisu New Year festival, which was brought by the leader of the Cultural Organization of Lisu ethnic groups. Through this we learned about the Lisu traditional stepping on swords festival and bathing with fire. Therefore, we displayed a miniature model of a Lisu man stepping on swords at the swords festival.

We went to Einine, Lwe-tauk and Nama-Bawda villages with the leader of the Cultural Organization of the Lahu ethnic groups and we discovered their system for naming individuals, New Year festival and custom of pounding glutinous rice,

playing with tops and the traditional custom of paying homage to elders by washing hands. By seeing these with our eyes, we could display many photographs of those unique customs in the Lahu exhibition room.

3.2.3 Displaying the main characteristics of ethnic groups

The fiberglass sculptures to be displayed was made by the Sculpture Department of the Mandalay National Culture and Arts University, Ministry of Culture. And as the area of the exhibition room is 15 feet by 16 feet, with a 14-feet ceiling, it was decided that the statues should not be taller than 5 feet. We show their main characteristics with a panoramic view of their locations in the background. For example, Lisu people are famous for hunting, so we made a model of a Lisu man such as a hunter coming back from the jungle and a woman carrying a sling basket with bamboo water containers. Behind the Lisu couple, the panoramic view of the jungle and the route to their traditional house are described in the vinyl-inkjet, so the Lisu couples look very life-like.

Similarly, we displayed the main characteristics of ethnic groups whereby a Shan couple such as *kinnari* and *kinnara*, and Ta Ang Plaung woman pick the green tea leaves with a panoramic view of green tea cultivation in the background and a Ta Ang Plaung man hand-making green tea leaves. We displayed the model of the Wa woman weaving on a back strap loom and Wa man playing a wooden drum with the Wa Village panoramic view highlighting their traditional house. While the Kokang couple were displayed as throwing a flower- knot to each other with their festival panoramic view, the Kachin couple were participating in a wedding ceremony, the Lahu couple were pounding glutinous rice against a panoramic view of the New Year festival and a Myaung-Zee (Hmong) couple were dancing against a panoramic view of their house and village (figure 6).



Figure 6 Myaung - Zee (or Hmong) couple.

3.2.4 Conservation for the purpose of replacing the display (figure 7)

The artifacts are made of organic materials and they are prone to deterioration. To delay the process, the conservator suggested that ethyl alcohol be applied to drums and some other items, bamboo articles be treated in the traditional way, such as applying oil dregs, drying in the sun and before making baskets, steaming all the strip bamboo wares.

However, before display, some of the artifacts were kept in storage as the museum was to be rearranged in exhibiting the existing items and replacing the new collection once within nine months.

3.2.5 Dividing Exhibition Rooms

The museum can be divided into nine exhibition rooms; they are the Introduction to Northern Shan State, Shan Culture, Wa Culture, Ta- Ang (Plaung) Culture, Kachin Culture, Kokang Culture, Myaung-Zee or Hmong Culture, Lahu Culture and Lisu Culture exhibitions.

In the Introduction to the Northern Shan State exhibition room, there is a display of soil formation of Northern Shan State, flora and fauna, as well as fossilized fish and other fossils from the rocky mountain in the east of Lashio, stalactite from Nat Pya Cave, distinctive places in the region, and a map showing



Figure 7 Conservation for the purpose of replacing the display.

the locations of native lands of the eight ethnic groups that are exhibited at the museum (figure 8).

Likewise, the Shan Culture exhibition displays objects of veneration and beliefs, household utensils, a small model of a house, festivals and musical instruments, festive traditional sporting equipments, daily utensils and Shan literature (figure 9).

In the Ta-ang (Plaung) Culture exhibition, we display a model house made of bamboo, household utensils as well as a soot-stained shelf, musical instruments, festivals, traditional invitation cards, a talisman made of bamboo in the shape of a fish tail-bone, ways of wearing traditional dresses of thirteen Plaung groups and



Figure 8 Introduction to the Northern Shan State Culture exhibition.



Figure 9 Shan Culture exhibition.

tribal dress of Namhsan Plaung. Plaungs believe that they are descendants or children of the Sun and the Dragon. Someone who has seen the father at sunset wears a dark-coloured dress, and the person who has seen the mother wears a dress with a design resembling the shiny scales of a dragon, and a crest-like headdress. The main attraction of the Plaung exhibition is the diorama of the dried tea-leaf industry (figure 10).

Wa traditional ceremonies, traditional dance of moving hair from side to side, customs of Wa, (for example, brief history of the headhunting custom of Wa ethnic group), the sacred symbolic buffalo horn, traditional jewelry, model of a traditional house, household utensils, system of giving Wa traditional names, traditional calendar, process of making traditional Wa liquor and a representation of a traditional back-strap loom in action are displayed in the Wa Culture exhibition room (figure 11).



Figure 10 Ta-ang (Plaung) Culture exhibition.



Figure 11 Wa Culture exhibition.

The exhibitions in the Kachin Culture exhibition room are the full-dress celebration of the *Manaw* festival, traditional musical instruments, calendar, household utensils, costumes, traditional house, medicine, traditional weapons and *Nat* shrine (a kind of deity) (figure 12).

In the Kokang Culture exhibition room, traditional utensils, weapons, house, musical instruments and flower-knot throwing festival are shown (figure 13).

The Myaung-Zee (also known as Hmong) exhibition room displays traditional weapons, weaving, musical instruments as well as festivals (*pan pauk pwe*, top-spinning ceremony), a dancing model of a Hmong couple, plan of a traditional house and utensils (figure 14).

Lahu traditional utensils, model of a traditional house, *khawpoat*-pounding ceremony at New Year, and other items relating to New Year Festivals such as *pan*



Figure 12 Kachin Culture exhibition.



Figure 13 Kokang Culture exhibition.



Figure 14 Myaung-Zee or Hmong Culture exhibition.



Figure 15 Lahu Culture exhibition.



Figure 16 Lisu Culture exhibition.

pauk pwe and top-spinning ceremony, playing games and musical instruments are displayed in the Lahu exhibition room (figure 15).

At the Lisu Exhibition, there are displays of the New Year festival, fire-bath festival and items relating to *dan tet pwe* (climbing a flight of stairs of knives) festival, diorama representing a hunting trip, articles of hunting equipment and household utensils (figure 16).

4 Conclusion

According to my experience, good exhibition display is based on research because museum exhibitions present their respective cultures to the people. Without conducting research, we cannot create an informative display of the artifacts.

In order to cherish the cultural heritage of the ethnic groups and save them from extinction, and also to realize the changes in the course of time, investigations were conducted and recorded. Then, keeping in mind the implementation of exploring and revealing cultural heritage, collections were made available in museums for public (local as well as foreigners) viewing through exhibits. By preserving the tangible and intangible cultural heritage within one's region, we can cherish with value and preserve the cultural heritage of the nation. Accordingly, regional museums have implemented the aforementioned objectives.

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