

# Nonwritten Heritage in France :

## History, Training Methods and New Challenges

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### INTRODUCTION

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to thank the organisers of this Symposium for the kind invitation extended to me. It is a great honour and a privilege to be present at this meeting on nonwritten cultural materials.

Heritage has been considerably extended in recent times. The supports and materials of heritage have been diversified and the tasks of the people in charge of preserving, enhancing and disseminating written and nonwritten, material or non material heritage to future generations, have become more complex.

To cope with these evolutions, an innovative agency was created in France in 1990 – the Institut National du Patrimoine – to train future heritage professionals for the increasingly difficult exercise of being a curator or a conservator. At the time, practice and theory mainly emphasised material heritage. Fifteen years later, the INP must now face new challenges related to the rise of "living" heritage and must deal with its urgent needs.

I shall first talk about the history of nonwritten heritage in France and the challenges encountered today. Second, I would like to tell you about the Institut National du Patrimoine, the training courses offered and the new competencies heritage professionals have to acquire to meet the demands of modern times.

### 1. NONWRITTEN HERITAGE : History and New Challenges

#### (1) The invention and development of museums

Museums are particularly representative of nonwritten heritage in France. The modern museum is a fairly recent invention which we owe to the Italian Renaissance. The concept appeared in the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century in connection with the Medici collections and the word derives from the Greek *mouseion* which means "temple of the Muses".



Photo2 La pyramide de Pei du Grand Louvre



Photo1 Château de Chambord

In the course of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, "collections of curios" brought together unusual and precious objects, coins and medals, naturalia, minerals, shells, measuring instruments such as compasses and telescopes, as well as paintings which had been specially commissioned. Some of the greatest collections, which have become the core of a number of modern museums, were assembled over the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries : the collections of the popes in Rome, those of the Medici of Florence, the Habsburg of Vienna, the Wittelsbach of Munich, the Bourbon-Parme of Naples, the Romanoff of Saint-Petersburg and the Valois and Bourbon of Paris... The first French museum was founded at Besançon, in East France, in 1694. The

Central Museum of Arts, ancestor of the Louvre Museum, was opened after the French revolution, on August 10<sup>th</sup> 1793.

The museum became the embodiment of a "republicanism of the Arts". " The Museum should be a school where teachers lead their young pupils and the father takes his son" declared painter David. The mission of the museum as a place of learning was therefore one of its founding principles.

Over the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, new categories were introduced : industrial and decorative arts, science and technology, ethnography and popular art, modern art... There are over 1200 state acknowledged museums in France today. Some even refer to this trend as "museomania". The Louvre Museum receives approximately 6 million visitors each year and the Pompidou Centre 5 million.



Photo3 Centre national d'art et de culture Georges Pompidou

The law of 4<sup>th</sup> January 2002 gave a new legal framework to French museums and established the demands of the state in matters of conservation, presentation to the public and proficiency of museum workers.

## (2) Historic monuments

In France there is also a strong tradition of protection of historic monuments. Over 40,000 monuments benefit from some form of protection and 15,000 are listed as "historic monuments". Different types of buildings are included : palaces, religious, military, industrial or farm architecture, gardens, engineering artefacts, contemporary villas... The Ile de France region, around Paris, has the highest number of listed monuments with 3,800.



Photo4 Les Jardins du Château de Versailles



Photo5 Ancienne chocolaterie Meunier - Noisiel

The law of 30<sup>th</sup> March 1887 first laid down the protection of historic monuments in France. The system as it stands today was set up by the law of 31<sup>st</sup> December 1913 and although it has been modified on several occasions it is still valid.

## (3) Heritage professionals

The taste for heritage built up slowly in France and became firmly entrenched in the national conscience after the Revolution. Afterward, constant efforts were made to protect the symbols of our history. Heritage

curators, who had long been volunteers, became professionals in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Ecole Nationale des Chartes, the Ecole du Louvre and later, the Institut du Patrimoine would each contribute significantly to the endeavour.

Today, curators are requested to list, preserve, document, enhance and make accessible monuments and collections which are entrusted to them. They disseminate as widely as possible the wealth of this heritage. They guide their teams, manage budgets, find sponsors and ensure that their agency has a local, national and international reputation. They also establish contact with other heritage professionals such as conservators. From now on, both curator and conservator, jointly, guarantee the safeguard, sharing and transmission of our heritage.

#### **(4) A new challenge : Living heritage**

It would be impossible not to talk about non material heritage in the pioneering country which is today hosting us, Japan, where a law was passed in 1950 to protect non material cultural heritage and where the concept of national living treasure was created.

The museum must now reach beyond its collections. It should free itself from the pressures and shackles of visible and tangible artefacts. It should be more responsive to oral traditions, linguistic and musical, customs and know-how, communal rituals and ceremonies. The immaterial must not be considered as distinct from "worked matter". They are of one substance.

We thus come to the "total social factor" of which Marcel Mauss spoke. It is no longer a question of studying and presenting matter, but the motions which made it, the context in which it was produced. The important thing is to express the relation of man to his environment and to reality. This brings us back to the principles which were expressed by Georges Henri Rivière, the founder of the Ecomuseum in France, who hoped to turn the museum into an active centre to promote recognition of the cultures of daily life.

Today, the new Quai Branly Museum, under construction in Paris and which will be dedicated to the arts and cultures of Africa, America and Oceania, will have to accommodate the declarations of Mario Humberto Ruz Sosa: "*The Maya world should be visited with open nostrils... One should breathe in the smell of cocoa... or that of the marrow of the coconut exuding its oil under the burning sun of Tabasco...*" And he added : "*How can one confine so many perfumes within the display case of a museum ?*"<sup>1</sup>

The Quai Branly is therefore counting on a "museum revolution", an interactive, vibrant and multidisciplinary movement which will open new directions for the exploration and communication of an exceptional heritage.

It is to enable future professionals to meet the requirements of these diverse evolutions that the French Government set up the Institut National du Patrimoine fifteen years ago. I shall now turn to its activities.

## **2. THE INSTITUT NATIONAL DU PATRIMOINE : Training Methods and New Stakes**

The Institut National du Patrimoine is a state agency which is governed by the Ministry of Culture. It has the dual mission of training curators and conservators of heritage. It has two different locations, at the Galerie Colbert in Paris and at Saint-Denis la Plaine, in the near suburbs.

**(1) Heritage curators**

Each year, some 40 applicants are selected by a highly competitive entrance examination and are trained for one of these specialities : *Museums, Historic monuments, Archives, Archaeology, Inventory, Industrial, Technical and Natural heritage*. The INP trains conservators mainly in the diverse fields of nonwritten heritage but also in the field of written heritage as Archives - but not Libraries .



Photo6

The 18 month training course at the INP includes lectures, seminars and placements. This professional course comes as a complement to the specialist training received by the student prior to joining INP. Trainees are required to have undertaken a complete course of higher studies in History, History of Art, Archaeology, History of Sciences or Natural Sciences. They may also come from a totally different field such as Law, Economics or Political Sciences. All trainee curators are expected to hold at least a Master's degree before being admitted to the INP.

The syllabus at INP includes topics such as the law and economy of heritage, public management, management of human resources, preventive conservation and restoration, building and fitting heritage premises, cultural mediation and foreign languages. Students are also requested to undertake placements in heritage agencies in France and abroad. Further to the programme, students are expected to pursue their personal research (Ph. D.). At the end of the training course, trainees are awarded the diploma of curator of heritage and become civil servants in the employment of the state or regional governments.

**(2) Heritage conservators**

This completely different 5 year training course is undertaken at the second educational department of the INP. It is open to those who have passed the competitive examination in one of seven specialities : *Metal/ Ceramics/Glass/Enamel, Textile arts, Graphic arts and Books, Painting, Sculpture, Photography, Furniture*. Approximately twenty applicants are selected each year.



Photo7

The training programme includes lectures, field work, placements in heritage agencies in France and abroad and endeavours to provide a balance between theory and practice, science and art. Foreign languages are also taught. Students are trained in state of the art workshops and practice on artefacts which have been entrusted to the INP by public institutions. Prior to the conservation of an artefact, analyses and tests of

materials are conducted at the department laboratory. A well provisioned library is also at the disposal of students.

At the end of their training course, students are granted the diploma of conservator of heritage (Master's degree). In France, conservators are independent practitioners who can work for private or public patrons.

### (3) International co-operation

As can be seen, INP provides diverse training programmes. Drawing upon its many-sided experience, INP is engaged in a number of co-operation projects with international partners. Seminars addressing museum



Photo8

directors have been organised in China, seminars on the relation between cultural and natural heritage have been set up in Africa, a field work project on the conservation of the mural paintings of an 18<sup>th</sup> century church has been carried out in Albania, a training course devised for conservators in Morocco as well as a seminar on the safeguard of heritage in Venice.

International co-operation is extremely beneficial for the development of heritage professions in France and abroad and also helps to measure the extent of the challenges which face all heritage workers.

### (4) An urgent need for new competencies

Professionals must be able to adapt. In ethnology museums they have to be made aware that non material collections deserve full recognition as collections which require attentive care. In a museum of modern art they have to take account of new "materials" such as performance, voice, body and strange and living elements ranging from milk, wax, honey, fats to meat or salad leaves. The curator is now faced with material heritage which knows no boundary, ephemeral at times, and with non material heritage in continual expansion.

Curators and conservators must be ready for these new challenges. At the INP, we constantly try to encourage curiosity and increase proficiency, especially through intensive access to new technologies. We have also increased our efforts in the field of continuing education programmes for confirmed professionals. Each year, approximately 1,000 heritage professionals attend the seminars organised by the INP on a variety of topics directly related to the changing needs of heritage professions.

## CONCLUSION: Towards a New Approach of Heritage ?

The time has come to overcome the differences traditionally ascribed to western processes of thought and to reconcile, within a single intellectual, scientific and professional approach, the values of material and immaterial heritage and the wealth of written and nonwritten heritage. Heritage cannot endure or survive unless its many facets and dimensions are all taken into account. Division and its perverse effects must be abolished and replaced by a logic of globalised active synthesis.

"People with no memory have no future" said the philosopher Paul Ricoeur. This future must be guaranteed to all by these irreplaceable disseminators of memory who are heritage professionals. It is in large part due

to them, to their knowledge, their research but also the force of their humanist convictions, their will to share and pass on that our cultures will preserve and renew their universal ambitions.

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- 1 Quoted by Aurore Monod-Becquelin, in " Quelques réflexions sur l'immatériel : la parole et le musée du Quai Branly ", ICOM, Letter of the French National Committee.