

Comment

KITSUKAWA Toshitada

I am director of Kanagawa University's Institute for the Study of Japanese Folk Culture and secretary-general of the Kanagawa University 21st Century COE Program. I specialize in the history of political thought, and truth to tell, I'm a mere beginner in the field of nonwritten cultural materials. Yet, I accepted the role of commentator for this session because I thought a layman might be able to provide a more comprehensive view than an expert. The reports by the three panelists in this session covered a fairly wide range of studies, and I must admit I sometimes found myself out of my depth. Nevertheless, they gave me food for thought, and I would like to present my comments and questions.

First, Mr. Bai reported on the conservation and restoration of cultural heritage in China. With the Cultural Revolution still fresh in my memory, I was impressed that China was now struggling to protect its culture at the national level. Times change, indeed. At the same time, as a citizen of Japan which ruined Chinese cultural assets during the war, I would like to express my sincerest remorse for the atrocities and genuinely appreciate the efforts of those who are facing up to the arduous task of conserving and restoring cultural heritage.

I have a question for Mr. Bai. As part of my studies, I have toured China from time to time, mainly Zhejiang Province on the eastern coast of the country. I had some opportunities to observe cultural preservation projects, including the landscape restoration and conservation in Wuzhen and Zhujiajiao, which are scenic towns marked by crisscrossing canals and rivers. Each time I visited there, I could see the remarkable progress of the projects, and today, these towns have become magnets for tourists.

Yet, a question arose in my mind: what has been accomplished in these towns, conservation or restoration? Conservation means to preserve the present landscape and keep it as unchanged as possible. On the other hand, in restoration, we must consider to what point in the past we want to restore the landscape, and moreover, ensure that the restoration is supported by solid evidence about the period.

It seems to me that China mainly promotes restoration. If so, I would like to know how information about these past landscapes is obtained.

Meanwhile, listening to Ms. Gallot's presentation, I was amazed at how fortunate French curators were. In Japan, getting a curator's license is not difficult and requires university students to complete just a few dozen study units. Unlike in France, there is no distinction between curators and conservators, and having a curator's license does not mean that a person is an expert in his field of study. In contrast, as Ms. Gallot pointed out, different qualifications are required for curators and conservators in France. Trainees are educated to the level of graduate-school, which provides different courses for curators and conservators. The curricula are specifically designed to foster professional skills, and six-month or one-year on-the-job training is also offered. Moreover, qualified curators and conservators are well-regarded in society. I must say Japan has much to learn from France.

Now, I'd like to ask a question. I heard that the concept of the term "museum" is broader in France than in

Japan, as suggested by the fact that the Japanese language has different words for “art museum” and “natural history museum.” Visiting museums in various regions of France, I felt that so-called ecomuseums, which specialize in local folklore, were in full swing in the country. I think ecomuseums and museums of fine arts are different in many ways, including their mission in society, how their collection is formed or handled, and how the museum is managed. So, I would like to know how curators are trained to cope with situations unique to each museum.

Prof. Noto’s presentation was about information technology, which is Greek to me. Yet, I felt that the concept of ontology may be of great help in establishing a database of nonwritten cultural materials.

When we build a database of photographs, for example, such information as when and where a picture was taken, who took it, or what the person wanted to photograph is insufficient to make the database valuable for research. Researchers must accumulate information beneficial to research, observing what is pictured in each photograph. Moreover, since each person has different research interests and goals, cooperation between researchers is crucial in boosting the study of nonwritten cultural materials.

Meanwhile, when digitizing nonwritten cultural materials, we need to define objects at different levels, such as their material and shape, function and usage, and relationship with people, because a pointed stick, for example, can be a chopstick, a nail, or a weapon. As a layman, I have no idea if it is feasible to create a database of nonwritten cultural materials containing such hierarchical definitions. Yet, I feel we are on the cusp of a new era which is being ushered in by completely innovative ideas.

Thank you for your patience with my amateurish comments. I hope they were somewhat helpful.