

'Muse therapy' as a new concept for museums

MAMORU ADACHI*

Resumo

Este artigo traça em linhas gerais a história e a missão do Museu da Universidade de Nagoya (Japão). Apresenta igualmente o conceito de 'Muse-terapia' e explica como o Museu tem tentado, através do manuseamento de objectos da colecção, da música e da pintura, implementar uma série de programas 'minds-on', especialmente dedicados a visitantes com problemas de stress – um problema de importância crescente nas sociedades urbanas do século XXI.

Abstract

The history and mission of the Nagoya University Museum are outlined and the new concept of 'Muse therapy' is emphasized to be important for museum activities. Since real specimens, as well as music, painting and so on, may be able to heal mentally stressed people, minds-on displays will become more and more important in the twenty-first century.

Introduction: University museums in Japan

Since a Science Council's report on the foundation of university museum was presented to the Ministry of Education in 1995, university museums have been formally established at several national universities in Japan. The first was the University Museum of the University of Tokyo, which was founded in 1996, although its initial organization and building was established in 1965.

At present there are nine university museums in Japan (Fig.1). Except for the University Art Museum at the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and

Music, each museum possesses more than two million pieces of specimens, mainly related to natural history.

Brief history of the Nagoya University Museum

The Nagoya University Museum (NUM) was established in 2000 as the sixth university museum in Japan, but the initial plan for our university museum was proposed more than 30 years ago. Many years of effort were rewarded by the establishment of the Furukawa Museum in 1982. Until 1981, the Furukawa Museum building, donated to Nagoya

* Mamoru Adachi is Director of the Nagoya University Museum. Address: Furo-cho, Chikusa, Nagoya 464-8601, Japan. E-mail: adachi@num.nagoya-u.ac.jp.

University Museums in Japan and some future plans for the Nagoya University Museum

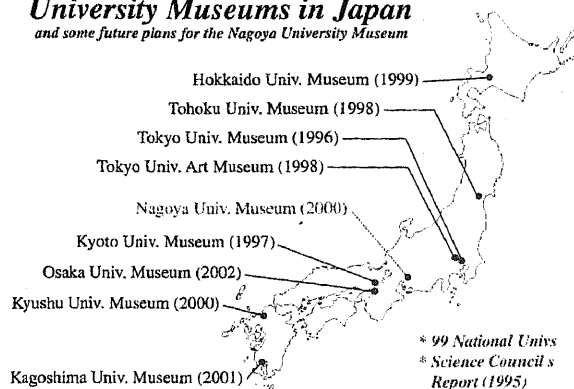


Fig. 1 - University museums in Japan (in April 2002).

University by Mr. Tamesaburo Furukawa and his wife Shima in 1964, had been used as a university library. After construction of a new university library in 1982, the Furukawa Library building was taken over by the Furukawa Museum and the Chubu Natural Disaster Data Station. From June 1990 to March 2000, part of this building was also used by the materials research section of the Nagoya University Dating and Materials Research Centre, which became the NUM and Nagoya University Centre for Chronological Research in April 2000.

The main purpose for the establishment of the NUM was to promote the feedback of specimens and relevant data for further research and education, to develop new methods for analysis and preservation of specimens and to encourage the public understanding through display of the research results.

Role and mission of the NUM in the twenty-first century

The NUM consists of three sections: Research/International Collaboration Section, Curation/

Conservation Science Section, and Public Education/Exhibition Section (Fig.2). This style of organization shows that the NUM regards public understanding and international cooperation as important missions in addition to the general mission, such as education of the next generation, effective management of scientific resources, and preservation of the cultural and technological heritage. Since public interest and understanding is essential to the survival of universities in the twenty-first century, research results as well as on-going experiments and expeditions of the university will be displayed at the NUM, which acts as an interface between university and public. Another important aspect of the NUM for education and research is the building of international partnerships through cooperation with overseas sister university museums and also with UMAC.

In the last two and half years five special exhibitions, one special display, eighteen museum lectures and five museum concerts have been held in the NUM. Of these, the Nagoya University Museum Concert (NUMCo), performed in the exhibition hall, had an artistic impact on the university members as well as citizens. The fundamental idea of NUMCo is essentially the same as the 'Muse therapy' outlined below (Fig. 3).

'Muse therapy'

According to the recent report of the Ministry of Education of Japan, more than 130,000 students in Japanese primary and secondary schools do not attend schools or refuse to attend schools due to mental problems. Another report on such students outlines that some of them recovered from the problems after regular museum visits. Perhaps their five senses were

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Role and mission of the Nagoya University Museum

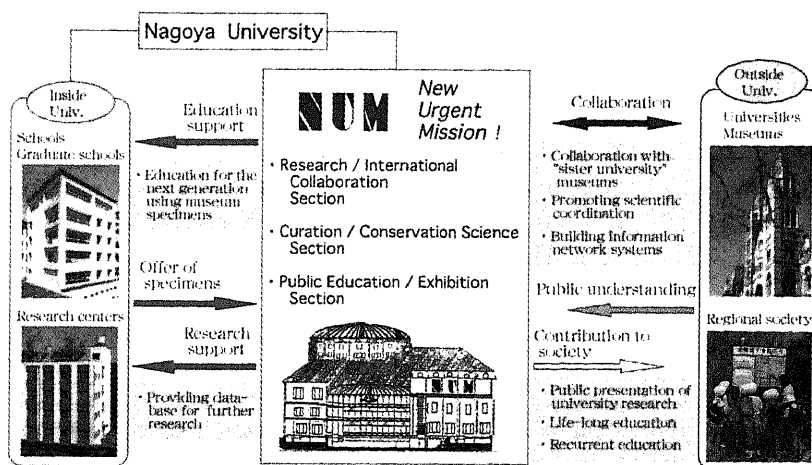


Fig. 2 - Role and mission of the Nagoya University Museum.

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Concept of "Muse therapy"

"Muse therapy"

- Display of real specimens of importance
- Music, painting, calligraphy, photography, pottery, etc.

Both appear to have a significant effect on the human mind and may be able to help mentally stressed people. Museum specimens as well as artistic and cultural displays can be useful in terms of therapy.

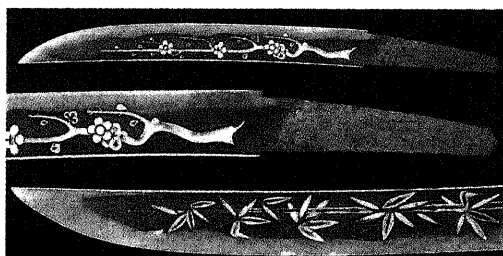


Fig. 3 - Basic concept of 'Muse therapy'.

stimulated through the observation and touch of real specimens. Real specimens appear to have a significant healing effect on the human mind and, therefore, museum displays have to be not only hands-on but also minds-on.

Both real specimens and music, painting, calligraphy, photography, pottery, and so on may be able to help people in mental stress. Thus, museum pieces as well as artistic and cultural displays can be useful in terms of therapy. From this viewpoint, I first proposed the

term 'Muse therapy' at the NUM international symposium 'Search for a new concept in education and research through cooperation with sister university museums' in June 2002 and in more detail at the UMAC conference at Macquarie University in September 2002.

Doubtlessly, the concept of 'Muse therapy' will become more and more important in the activity of museums in the twenty-first century.

Acknowledgements

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