The Influence of the Absence of Standards on Educational Activities of Conservation in Japan

－わが国の文化財保存修復における「標準」の不在が与える教育への影響について

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わが国の文化財は、古くから徒弟制という後継者育成方法をもった技術者集団の運営する工房で修理され、伝承されてきた。このシステムは日本文化を守る上で大きな機能を発揮してきた一方、情報や技術の非公開性、人事交流の不在などの諸点において少なからぬ問題が存在してきた。他方、最近本学芸術学科文化財保存科学コースや東京芸術大学大学院文化財保存学専攻のように美術品の保存修復を実際に学べる機関が開れてきている。わが国において、近代化した文化財の保存修復を教育した歴史は非常に短い。この浅い経験の範囲内で成熟した教育がおこなわれているとは言い難く、未だ試行錯誤の連続である。しかし、すでに明らかになった問題のなかには、わが国の文化財保存修復の歴史や現状が抱える問題と同じ原因によるものが散見される。これらの問題を熟考すると、原因が「標準」の不在に帰結することがわかった。欧米先進国と違い、わが国にはまだ倫理規定や作業指針が確立されていない。また資格制度については議論さえ始まっていない現状にある。「標準」が不在の環境は、学生の教育に大きな陰を投げかけており、彼等に種々の混乱を与える大きな要因になっている。「標準」を導入することが問題の解決につながると筆者は考えている。そのためには、1）諸外国学会や国際学会の「標準」に学ぶこと、まずは学内標準を創ったらどうか、2）国内標準を確立する気運を盛り上げ、公の場で議論を開始すること、3）他の国々の関係者とのコミュニケーションを良くし、修復の哲学や技術を積極的に理解しあうことが必要であろう。本論文は、1998年4月にフィンランドで行われた国際美術館会議保存部会保存修復教育ワーキンググループの中間会議で発表されたものである。

§.1　Introduction

In Japan, the conservation of various kinds of cultural properties has been active in recent years. Nevertheless, there are many problems within the field as well as at the interface between science and conservation (Matsuda 1997:227-230). In this paper the author discusses some recent problems that are caused mainly by the absence of standards, especially those which influence on academic educational activities. These are only case studies of the conservation field in Japan, however the author considers they bring some important and common suggestions for professionals in this field.

Firstly, the author would like to mention an incident, as an introduction of the forthcoming discussion. It took place at the 16th annual meeting of The Japan Society for the Conservation of Cultural Property in 1997. There was a lecture on restoration of wooden Buddhist sculptures by a private restorer who is a member of the Society. At the end most participants there were shocked and extremely surprised by the contents of the presentation. In his lecture, he stated frankly his theory and practice of restoration of Buddhist sculptures in his company, and in the profession of private restoration in the system of the Japanese free economy.

I suppose that the shock came from mostly these three points: Firstly, his theory and practice for restoration could not be accepted by conservators and conservation scientists

because his conservation activity is different from that of them. Secondly, this presentation revealed the economic relationship between the clients, who are almost owners of cultural properties, and the conservators or the restorers. In the relationship his attitude for restoration was considered to be extremely self-righteous as a restorer. Finally, his lecture itself was regarded as an advertisement for propaganda of his private company and as a method for justifying his business. For the Society the presentation was the first case which was made from the viewpoint of economic activity.

A few days later, after cooling off I started to receive important suggestions from the lecture. These suggestions led me to consider about the necessity of standards in conservation.

The Japanese government gives administrative guidance in conservation only for national treasures and important cultural properties. Outside of them, there is neither a regulation, nor a standard or a required condition for conservation as a business in Japan. In other words, whoever wants to be a conservator can give one's name and whoever wishes to run a business of conservation can open one's company. There is no way to certify a conservator as genuine. I was greatly shocked to discover this. Especially for us, the instructors in educational and training courses, it is important to realize this.

After that lecture most participants made various thoughts immediately, and then came a storm of criticisms and comments. Thus the incident gave rise to a lot of heated discussion. However, the author could not see any difference between the conservation philosophies and economic activities of the lecturer, and those of his critics who were private conservators, because there is no standard to distinguish what is accepted or not. The words of the criticisms sound empty.

In Japan, there are many excellent conservators, while unfortunately there are also self-styled restorers who have not had adequate training. The preservation of important cultural properties depend not only on the technology used to treat them but also on the conscience and philosophy of the conservator. I consider that this dangerous situation includes many problems and can not be set aside. Conservation has often been compared to the medical science. Just as the medical scientists need to discuss bioethics and eliminate self-righteous performance of medical treatment, conservators and conservation scientists should consider the theme of performance standards and certification.

§.2 History of conservation activities in Japan

The author mentions about the history of conservation activities and the educational system for conservation in Japan for the purpose of promoting an understanding the discussion later.

In Japan, there have been many traditional restorers of works of art such as paintings, Buddhist sculptures, lacquer (urushi) wares and wooden buildings from ancient times. The unique cultural property of Japan has been restored by their efforts in each field for a long time: these traditional restorers are called Sohkohshi, Busshi, Nurisi' and Miyadaiku, respectively. The Japanese people take pride in this traditional culture. However, there are some problems in its practice today. The restorers' practice was characterized by skillful techniques with traditional materials. They have not taken into account new developments until recently. Naturally, they have neither the knowledge nor the technology to avoid or control deterioration. The absence of scientific education, and that of theory and philosophy for conservation as an individual conservator are pointed out.

In 1949 the valuable and famous wall paintings in Kondo-building of Horyuji-temple, a World Heritage Site constructed at the end of 7th century, were burned down. In order to rescue the survived paintings some synthetic resins and traditional materials were applied, and discolored pigments were analyzed. Thereafter they were successfully conserved with the support of scientific technology. In consequence, with the fire as a turning point, research for conservation and a law for protection of cultural heritage in Japan were established.

Later around the 1960s, a Japanese chemist started to tackle scientific problems in conservation practice, by studying materials used in works of art. In the early 1970s the conservation technique for excavated waterlogged woods and deteriorated metals with utilizing synthetic materials was introduced by a Japanese pioneer of conservation scientist from Europe. This epoch-making event have changed and advanced the course of conservation in our country.

Meanwhile, in the mid-1960s, scientifically based modern restoration for oil paintings was introduced by a few restorers who had trained in Europe or the United States. Oil paintings of Japanese and European painters have been restored by these pioneers in private practice.

Few new approaches have been introduced into other fields of restoration since the mid-1960s. The necessity of a knowledge of materials science and the uses of scientific examination and analysis in conservation has only gradually been appreciated. Unfortunately, the pioneers did not emphasize the importance of theory and ethics for restoration, or establish training facilities for their successors. As a result, we still do not have neither performance standards or codes of ethics in conservation practice, and have not had a systematic training program, even for oil paintings, until recently.

§.3 The traditional training system for conservation and its circumstances in Japan

From the viewpoint of education and training, many thousands of works of art peculiar to Japan have always been restored in the traditional manner by skillful restorers who have been trained their successors, just as they were trained, in the closed apprentice system based on continued and accumulated experiences. The system has been old-fashioned because it has built the closed private community of conservation with poor communication.

Furthermore, they have had little experience of a systematic and modern training, or of collaboration with professionals in other fields such as scientists or curators. Therefore, standardization of restoration technology, a code of ethics, rules of practice, and preventive conservation have been considered unnecessary or undesirable by those in private business. The Japanese Government has supported some specific studios, and assisted grant-aided students for the training of their successors within the traditional system. It looks curious, because the Government does not understand the new features of conservation that have developed overseas.

Unfortunately, excessive and bad restoration treatments in their practice often have been identified by clients, other professionals and subsequent restorers. However, the restorers' traditional dignity and pride in the old culture have never been challenged, and as a result, the relationship between old restorers and young conservators who have trained in the new system has become worse.

On the other hand, the frantic pace of technical development in the conservation of archeological artifacts and in conservation science has attracted public attention. Traditional conservation technology in Japan is changing through gradual adoption of various scientific approaches. This is mainly due to the recent boom of archeology and ancient history as well as to the development of conservation materials and research techniques by conservation scientists.

The changing situation has brought some new developments to the field of conservation, especially in education and training. The importance of systematic training of conservators is being gradually recognized and accepted.

§.4 New academic training programs and their problems

In recent years, academic training courses for conservation of works of art with both technological and scientific programs have been set up at a couple of universities: one is at our university, which will be mentioned later, and the other is the graduate course of Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music (Tokyo Geijutu Daigaku).

This graduate course, which is the oldest in the conservation field in Japan, was established in 1965 with studios for restoration of traditional Japanese artistic works of paintings and Buddhist sculptures, and a laboratory for conservation science. Nevertheless, from the beginning to the 1980s, it has had only purposes: to make copies of objects using traditional materials and techniques, and to develop scientific approaches to the works, individually. Consequently no systematic training program for conservation has been built up.

Because the faculty of the course felt some problems in the system after the inspection for some conservation institutes in the United States the course changed its organization and training program in 1996. It now consists of 5 conservation tracks (Japanese paintings, oil paintings, Buddhist sculptures, urushi objects and old architecture) and 2 conservation science

tracks (materials science and preventive conservation), all of which are at the graduate level. The students may have studied in various academic fields in their undergraduate education, the graduate program consists of the master grade (2 years) and the doctoral grade (3 years).

Another example is our program, the Conservation Course of Tohoku University of Art & Design, established in 1992 in order to educate students who want to contribute to conservation of cultural property. This was a first attempt to establish an undergraduate program in Japan. The primary purpose of the course has been to train a specialists as conservators/ conservation scientists who have both the technology and the philosophy needed to preserve cultural property in a way that is faithful to an original. The specialist we intend to bring up is who understands not only the situation of conservation in Japan but that in other countries, especially developing nations. The secondary purpose has been to give knowledge of art history, and related backgrounds and the surroundings of works of art which are helpful to the conservation practice and museum works.

The course is taught by faculty members who are specialized in the field of conservation of oil paintings, Japanese Buddhist sculptures, historic sites, and conservation science. About 13~15 students a year have enrolled in the course each year. Its curriculum has been mainly focused on a balanced training by correlating the programs of the fields and bringing in fundamentals of art history, archeology, ancient history, and materials science. Furthermore, the main core of the training system is fixed on conservation science in addition to advanced conservation techniques. From this point of view the course is very unique and appreciated. The faculty has been seeking to build an ideal model of what university education of conservation ought to be, through a revision of the curriculum and repeated self-evaluations.

Consequently, the following important problems were made clear: (1) No educational model for conservation, incorporating both theory and practice, has been developed in Japan. This is considered to be caused by an inadequate educational concept for conservation, as well as interest and understanding for conservation philosophy and standards, until now. (2) There has been no curriculum treating with conservation ethics and rules in Japan. This is considered to be due to the same reason mentioned above. (3) No comprehensive textbook in Japanese to which educators and students can refer has been written. (4) The relationship between religious belief for some kinds of works of art and the conservation technology for them is not clear. Therefore, an excessive or strange conservation treatment, such as an overprinting on the original or the unjustified creation of a missing part, is rampant. (5) There are only a few public institutes of conservation where graduates can work or can be accepted as the intern. There is no internship system in the conservation field.

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§.5 Some problems appeared in the educational activities

In summary of the previous section, in Japan training for restorers in charge of traditional works of art has been carried out in a closed apprentice system, while that for conservators in charge of archeological objects has been done in advanced systems, or by conservators who have studied abroad. Recently, some universities have tried to organize their modern systems for conservation education. These activities have been accepted and have influenced the conservation field in Japan.

However, there have been no performance standard, codes of ethics and guidelines for practice yet. Furthermore, as far as the author knows, there has not been any public discussions concerning them. Of course no certification program for conservators have been published anywhere. Only a private card and/or a curriculum vitae made by oneself can certify one's skill. This deplorable situation brings many troubles to the practice of conservation.

Anyway, for education activities there is a more serious problem: no standard principle for conservation have been agreed among the training staffs yet. Students have been more or less confused by the problem. It is considered to be due to the total of the problems mentioned in the previous section.

The author would like to discuss some examples of the apparent confusion among students and faculty in our course: (1) In the case of removing an overpainting or patina on works, our faculty could not make a clear distinction about the end

point of the removal. The concept of removing was often different among the teaching stuffs. The students were much bewildered by the conflicting instructions. (2) There is a great variety the philosophies founded in the fields of conservation in Japan. The variety was not easily accepted by the students who learned the practice of several fields in the early stage. (3) Because the teaching staff is limited in number, the training methodology and the evaluation of students' ability must be dependent on the instructor's natural gifts, principles and experience. Furthermore, there is the danger of introducing an apprenticeship system in an academic setting, if a student approaches to a faculty member too closely. It is an important problem for students, because they must not believe that they are in the old system. (4) It is difficult for a part of the faculty to evaluate the curriculum. This is clearly caused by the absence of an educational standard of value, which can be relied upon.

The author considers that these problems depend mainly not on the faculty of our course but on the systems and backgrounds of conservation in Japan, in other words, the lack of standards and certification systems for conservation. Therefore, it will take a long time to resolve the problems.

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§.6　Conclusion

In the previous section I discuss the problems within the educational activities of conservation in Japan. As the result, the problems are due to the lack of standards for conservation. Therefore, we should start various discussions for building up national standards as soon as possible. I consider that promoting this work is not so easy, because the conservation field in Japan is conservative and unripe. However, we should accomplish it for the next generations who preserve cultural properties.

First of all, we need to refer the various kinds of standards which published from the international and the domestic institutes, such as IIC and AIC. In my advanced class we tried to translate into Japanese and study them, because they are very helpful to us. I consider that before building up the national standards we need to establish in-house standards of academic institutions and universities.

Next is to grow tendency for discussing the national standards. This is greatly owing to the domestic society of conservation. Holding symposia is needed for helping an understanding of the importance of this theme. To discuss openly is very important for Japanese conservators and conservation scientists.

Finally, we need to communicate various themes with conservators and conservation scientists of other countries. Because of the Japanese temperament and the ability of foreign languages, we are poor in communication and discussion with foreigners. In the sense, I think my country is now closed. We should change our mind and challenge to accept philosophies and technologies of conservation in advanced countries. In the activities, we can find modern styles which match the conservation of the Japanese cultural properties.

Reference

Yasunori Matsuda : Some problems at the interface between art restorers and conservation scientists in Japan; British Museum Occasional Paper (1997) ; No.114; 227~230