

Integrated Anthropology: a dialogue between subdisciplines and museums

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ABSTRACT

The international project "Integrated Anthropology" allowed opportunities for anthropologists from different fields to meet twice in Japan, in 2019 and 2020 to participate in symposiums and workshops. An important part of the project was to provide opportunities to visit exhibits, deposits and library of Minpaku (National Museum of Ethnology) and have numerous meetings and dialogues with colleagues. In this article we intend to focus on the interaction between two museums: the museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Florence, Italy, and the National Museum of Ethnology, Minpaku, located in Osaka.

Key words:

ethnology, collaborative museology, Minpaku, best practices.

RIASSUNTO

Antropologia Integrata: un dialogo tra sottodiscipline e musei

Il progetto internazionale "Integrated Anthropology" ha offerto ad antropologi di differenti campi di ricerca e diversi Paesi di incontrarsi per due volte in Giappone come ospiti di importanti istituzioni, nel 2019 e nel 2020. Le attività sono culminate ogni anno con simposi e workshop. In questo articolo intendiamo approfondire l'interazione favorita dal progetto tra due musei: il Museo di Antropologia e Etnologia di Firenze e il National Museum of Ethnology, Minpaku, di Osaka. Il progetto ha offerto la possibilità di visitare allestimenti, depositi e biblioteca di Minpaku e di sviluppare numerosi momenti di incontro e dialogo fra colleghi delle due diverse istituzioni.

Parole chiave:

etnologia, museologia collaborativa, Minpaku, buone pratiche.

INTRODUCTION

In Europe the high technical/scientific level of Japan and the refined quality of its humanistic traditions is well appreciated. However, many Japanese museums are still relatively unknown to many Europeans and Italians in particular. Here we report on an international project that had, among various results, established a dialogue between two museums focused on ethnological collection: The Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology of Florence and the National Museum of Ethnology located in Osaka. During a meeting in Japan in 2018, Prof. Hideyuki Tanabe suggested the possibility to an international project on Integrated Anthropology. The organizing concept was based on the holistic view of anthropology

as "a comprehensive academic field that encompasses humanities and natural sciences". Although anthropology was originally a unified field, historically it became divided in many countries into two distinctive fields: physical/biological anthropology and cultural/social anthropology. It was thought that much would be gained from reviving the original intention of anthropology to encompass all aspects of anthropology to better understand the human phenomenon. It was also stressed that the development of a disciplinary integrated vision was a necessary task to deeply understand and communicate ethnological and anthropological museum collections. Internationally was also considered fundamental to share different national experiences and to find common grounds for eventual collaboration.

The financing for the project was obtained from the Sokendai Institute. Sokendai is a Graduate School which fosters Doctoral Researchers at 18 Research Institutes located in different Japanese locations. A Graduate University is a university providing doctoral programs only, without undergraduate courses, and is called an independent university. Sokendai Graduate University for Advanced Studies was founded in 1988 and pioneered such academic institutes in Japan. Sokendai is unique in concept in the world as a university affiliated with research institutes and museums administered by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (called Inter-University Research Institutes, or IURIs). Sokendai has been active in promoting joint study programs and academic exchange programs between these institutes to integrate academics and create cross-border and innovative projects of study. Two departments of the School of Cultural and Social Studies are based at the National Museum of Ethnology located in Osaka which are also under the Sokendai umbrella. This was the perfect context to develop our project, and it was an extraordinary opportunity for Italian scholars to experience the academic and the museum realities of Japan. The hope was that from the talks, discussions and informal meetings and research programs could emerge elements that might combine the various perspectives and expertise of the participants.

A first approach allowed opportunities for anthropologists from different fields of contemporary anthropology to meet twice in Japan, as guests of important institutions in 2019 and 2020. There was the possibility to visit the exhibits, deposits and library of Minpaku and have numerous meetings and dialogues among colleagues. Every year the project culminated with symposiums and workshops.

In 2019, a day long international symposium was held at the campus di Shonan-kokusaimura (Hayama, Miura District, Kanagawa Prefecture), where the administrative home of the Sokendai Institute is located (fig. 1). The title was "Integrated Anthropology from genetics to ecology, biodiversity-Conservation of organisms, cultures, and ethnicities" and the speakers were carefully chosen to represent diverse areas of anthropological research from Japan, Italy, Taiwan. Comments and discussion arose from scholars who attended also from China and other nations. In 2020 two workshops were held, in Tokyo University (Hongo campus) and Minpaku museum in Osaka. The framework "Integrated Anthropology" involved a Research Plan conducted in collaboration by three groups focused on three areas with overlapping zones:

- primatology, from cytogenetics to ecology;
- molecular anthropology and evolutionary genetics;
- ethnology and museology, physical anthropology.



Fig. 1. Poster of the symposium held in 2019.

THE ETHNOLOGICAL MUSEUMS LOCATED IN OSAKA AND IN FLORENCE: DIALOGUE BETWEEN TWO INSTITUTIONS ENGAGED IN PROMOTING BEST PRACTICES

In this report we intend to focus on the interaction between two museums: the museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Florence, Italy, and the National Museum of Ethnology, Minpaku, located in Osaka. During the encounters, seminars and discussions points of similarity in the formal division between biological and cultural anthropology under both the Italian and Japanese education systems emerged. In Italy after the second World War, the division was also a dramatic reaction to nazi-fascism, and the process of specialization developed quickly. The result was a strong gap between biological and cultural anthropology delineated with diverging methodologies, languages and aims, and academic affiliations, a gap which perhaps more strongly affected the Anthropology Museum in Florence due to its 150 year history. The Florentine museum holds a vast assemblage of ethnological objects collected over a period of five centuries. The original core derives from the House of Medici, and later from Grand Duke Peter Leopold. The actual museum was founded in 1869 as the National Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology, at the time when Florence was the capital

of the newborn Italian State. It moved to Palazzo Nonfinito during the fascist/colonial period from which the current exposition stems. It presents a case study of the challenges faced by many European ethnological museums such as decolonization, a delicate and meaningful task. In modern times it became part of the Natural History Museum of the University of Florence, that recently was included in the newly founded Museal System (Moggi Cecchi & Stanyon, 2014).

The National Museum of Ethnology, in Japanese referred to as Minpaku, was founded in 1974, starting from a core of collections already present in various Japanese academic institutions (Nobayashi, 2020). Approximately 345,000 specimens and objects have been collected at Minpaku, constituting the world's largest ethnographic collection accomplished after the second half of the 20th century. It opened to the public in 1977 at the site of the 1970 International Exposition located in Senri, Osaka. It was conceived as an Inter-University Research Institute in the field of cultural anthropology and ethnology, equipped with one of the world largest museum facilities. In terms of collections making, the history of the Minpaku can be traced back to the late 18th century. One of Minpaku's oldest collections is that entrusted by the Department of Anthropology at the University of Tokyo. The collection mainly contains objects from East Asia and the South Sea islands, collected before the World War II. Among the notable materials are those collected by the anthropologist Torii Ryuzo, relating to the Ainu of the Kurile (Chishima Islands), the indigenous people of Sakhalin and of Siberia (Sasaki, 1993).

In the museum are based two departments of the School of Cultural and Social Studies of the Graduate University for Advanced Studies (SOKENDAI) which has a School of Cultural and Social Studies based at Minpaku. The school includes a Department of Regional Studies and a Department of Comparative Studies and accepts Ph.D. students from Japan and abroad.

The Department of Regional Studies focuses on the individual cultures of ethnic groups in Asia, Europe, Africa, the Americas, and Oceania. It considers the characteristics and history of each culture and focuses on describing a culture and understanding its structure using ethnographic methodology. The Department fosters researchers who have high expertise and actively promote the descriptive study of individual cultures based on fieldwork. The Department of Comparative Studies is designed for students interested in the comparative and cross-cultural study of social systems, religion, technology, languages, arts, and cultural resources. Through the comparative study of ethnic cultures, students are expected to identify the cross-cultural aspects of their research subjects and to develop theoretical interpretations

of the comparative data. To foster researchers with high expertise, new research methods integrating relevant information technology and interdisciplinary approaches with the traditional anthropological methods are encouraged.

The National Museum of Ethnology is regarded as a unique anthropological institution, able to combine research, education and museum facilities. Each researcher at Minpaku engages in fieldwork in various parts of the world to promote investigative study of the diversity and commonality of human culture and the dynamic state of society on a global scale. Even if starting from a core of colonial collections, the institution had developed from the beginning a very energetic and innovative approach: curators were sent to different part of the world to collect items representative for different cultures and to engage in collaborative projects with various indigenous people. It is a comprehensive research museum with academic staff specializing in ethnology and related fields, aiming to provide the general public with accurate and current information on societies around the world, in order to facilitate mutual understanding among all people.

Minpaku can be defined as a research institution with a museum. Besides creating exhibits, members of the staff conduct fieldwork, and other research, collect and preserve materials, and provide open access to research results and other information. Good questions to engage the public and to build a culture of critical thinking welcome visitors and create a connection with the exhibit: "Are these artifacts... or artworks? An object reveals the creative power of its maker. Whether you see it as an artefact or an artwork depends on your point of view".

MULTI-ETHNIC JAPAN AT MINPAKU

Creating empathy and an open mind towards other cultures is well expressed in this text: "Funerary customs differ from one culture to another, but we all cherish the memory of the deceased and value life". For the Italian curator it was impressive to observe that Minpaku dedicates a wide space to exhibits that communicate contemporary, real view of valuable diversity in society: "It has become an everyday occurrence for Japanese to encounter non-Japanese on the street, when traveling on buses or trains, or at their schools or workplaces as colleagues or friends. As of the early 2010s. two million individuals with foreign passports live in Japan, to which we can add large numbers of people of non-Japanese origins, who have acquired Japanese citizenship. After several generations, the descendants of immigrants adapt to Japanese lifestyle, language and culture, while at the same time preserving their own traditions and languages. As members of Japanese society, they bring new diversity and vitality to Japanese culture".

A SHARED INTEREST: AINU COLLECTIONS IN OSAKA AND IN FLORENCE

One important result of the symposiums of 2019 and 2020 was to establish a dialogue between the Florentine museum of anthropology and ethnology and the National Museum of ethnology in Osaka. Apparently these two museums have vastly different locations and histories, but discussions between participants revealed that they actually share many points of contact and mutual concerns.

"The Ainu People: In the Ainu language 'Ainu' means human. They have lived in Hokkaido, the northern part of mainland Japan, the Kurile Islands and southern Sakhalin, but now they are primarily in Hokkaido. They developed cultures adapted to each of these environments. Ainu history is that of interactions with neighbouring peoples. Their descendants now live alongside other peoples in Hokkaido and other places both inside and outside Japan. It is difficult to determine the exact population of the Ainu, but several thousands of individuals identify themselves as of Ainu descent". The Ainu exhibit in Minpaku is extraordinary. Objects are put in context in a real size traditional home (fig. 2), with every possible details.

The museum in Florence hosts a room dedicated to a precious and wide Ainu collection.

Fosco Maraini (Florence 1912-2004) was a very well-known ethnographer, photographer and writer. After the second world war he became very influential in communicating his fascinated view of Japanese

culture in Italy with a book titled "Ore giapponesi" (1957), but also in Europe and in North America. The English version "Meeting with Japan", was successfully published in Great Britain (1959) and in the United States (1960) where it became an international best seller.

But Maraini's ethnological work started before the war and was especially focused on Ainu culture. In 1938 he arrived in Hokkaido to study the Ainu. During his visits he collected more than 450 objects. The collection miraculously survived the war and later was donated by Maraini himself to the Museum in Florence along with a rich documentation of photographs and films. Maraini's particular interest of research was the study of ikupasuy (fig. 3), which is a wooden object used in Ainu rituals (Maraini, 1942, 1994). It was fascinating for the Italian curator to observe in Minpaku the same kind of artifacts that we have in Florence (fig. 4), and this was a possibility to better understand their story and contemporary presence in Ainu communities. As an example, it was important rediscovering the necklaces called *tamasay* or *shitoki* passed down from mother to daughter (Saito, 2020). "...there are currently few women wearing a *tamasay* in rituals. There may have been people who gave up them because their unique culture was denied by assimilation during the Meiji Era [...]. Some of them were handed to collectors or researchers and thereafter stored in museums" (Saito, 2018: 80).

The role and symbolism of beads in human cultures is important and unique (Ikeya, 2018, 2020).

Minpaku has been digitising its collection of aca-



Fig. 2. The Ainu house (cise) in permanent exhibit of Minpaku.

demographic materials, including those related to the Ainu, and created the multilingual database. This whole project, called the "Info-Forum Museum" project, aims to promote international sharing of academic information and joint research (see website 1). For example, a database of Taiwanese materials in Japanese, English and Chinese has been completed and is available online (see website 2), and a multi-lingual database of Ainu materials is under construction and will be available soon (see website 3).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Museums can be important cultural institutions with contemporary pertinence, but only if they evolve dynamically. This project had positive and interesting repercussions, and proved to be very stimulating in new processes of sharing experiences. The two museums cited in this article are far away only geographically. Their content and especially their mission are very similar and a great start to exchange ideas and inspiration. From the ancient showcases of Palazzo Nonfinito, and from the very modern exhibition halls of Minpaku, the artifacts speak to us. They tell us about traditional but living cultures, about their struggle to survive and their irreplaceable role in defending the natural environment, a theme that urgently touches all of us and future generations.

The thread connecting Florence-Osaka was important to start sharing strategies to address ethical issues related to research, documentation and representation of other cultures. A particular focus of

the dialogue was dedicated to collaborative anthropology activities in which the Osaka museum is very active. Collaborative anthropology is today an essential approach for tackling the previous and present contradictions involving any museum dealing with ethnological and anthropological collections.

In the vision of the museum as an area of contact and dialogue, the collections become a living heritage through which reflections on biodiversity and sustainability emerge. Ethnology museums are the ideal space to develop good practices of social inclusion and dissemination of well-being. The construction of an extensive network is fundamental also to share experience and open new insight.

Overcoming the disciplinary barriers that normally keep studies of ethnology and cultural anthropology to proceed on trajectories distant from those of physical anthropology, it has proved to be a useful method for the production of innovative cultural contents with positive effects on research, cataloging, conservation and communication activities. A project of "Integrated Anthropology" has been launched in Florence within the Museum itself, which preserves both ethnological and anthropological/biological collections, and therefore represents the perfect playground for developing this innovative perspective. The project involves the presence of two young researchers from different backgrounds who collaborate, under the guidance of tutors, to develop integrated research interventions on the anthropological and ethnological collections of the Natural History Museum of the University of Florence.



Fig. 3. Displaycase of ikupasuy in Florence (Fosco Maraini collection).



Fig. 4. A detail of the special exhibition "Treasures of Indigenous Peoples" held from Oct 1st to Dec. 15th, 2020 in Minpaku.

Finally, we managed to publish a special volume of the "Archivio per l'Antropologia e la Etnologia" (Hideyuki et al., 2020) entirely dedicated to "Selected papers from symposia" from the project, and mark in this way the 150th volume of this historical journal, founded by Paolo Mantegazza in tight connection with the Florentine Museum.

SYMPOSIUM AND WORKSHOPS 2019-2020

- **Symposium 2019 "Integrated Anthropology: From Genetics to Ecology, Biodiversity, Conservation of Organisms, Cultures and Ethnicities"**
February 1st, 2019, Soken-dai Institute Campus di Shonan-kokusaimura (Hayama, Miura District, Kanagawa Prefecture)
 - Roscoe Stanyon, "In the new generation sequencing era is there utility for cytogenetics?"
 - Kazunari Matsudaira, "Molecular ecology and social evolution of gibbons"
 - Takahiro Yonezawa, "Global dispersal process in goats"
 - Wen-Ya Ko, "Genetic origins and ancestry characterization of the Japanese people"
 - Kazunobu Ikeya, "Hunter-gatherers and beads in Africa and Asia"
 - Francesca Bigoni, "Rethinking ethnological collection of the University Museum of Florence"
- **Research Seminar 2020 "Integrated Anthropology"**
January 27th, 2020, Faculty of Science Building No. 2, The University of Tokyo (Hongo Campus)
 - Prof. Dr. Hideyuki, Tanabe Opening Remark
 - Takafumi Ishida, "Viruses in Anthropology"
 - Nobuyuki Kutsukake, "Phylogenetic comparative analysis on fundamental questions in human behavioral ecology"
 - Francesca Bigoni, "The Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology of Florence: four centuries of collections from South America"
 - Yoko Satta, "A new detection method of selective sweeps"
 - Kazunari Matsudaira, "Hybridization and introgression in primates"
 - Oronzo Capozzi, "Independent evolution in one chromosome homolog of the 20/21 syntenic association in Cercopithecini monkeys"
 - Roscoe Stanyon, "Tempo and Mode in primate chromosome evolution"
 - Hideyuki Tanabe, "Chromosome territories as a functional unit and their role in chromosome evolution"
 - Discussion
- **Research Seminar 2020 "Minpaku Seminar on Integrated Anthropology: Contribution of the Museum Collection to the Study of Integrated**

Anthropology" - The SOKENDAI Advanced Sciences Synergy Program (SASSP)

January 31st, 2020, Lecture room 3, National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, Japan

- Hideyuki Tanabe (The Graduate University for Advanced Studies) Introduction
- Presentations (25 minutes talk and 5 minutes Q&A):
- Roscoe Stanyon (Università degli Studi di Firenze)
- Hideyuki Tanabe (The Graduate University for Advanced Studies)
- Atsushi Nobayashi (National Museum of Ethnology, Japan)
- Kazunobu Ikeya (National Museum of Ethnology, Japan)
- Francesca Bigoni (Università degli Studi di Firenze)
- Discussion

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We appreciate the grant support from the SOKENDAI Advanced Science Synergy Program (SAPPS) for International Collaboration in 2018-2019. This paper partly includes results of the following research projects at Minpaku; Info-Forum Museum (Grant No. M331021518), the Inter-University Research Project (Grant No. M311271617) and the special exhibition (Grant No. M350101820).

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Submitted: June 14th, 2021 - Accepted: August 21st, 2021

Published: December 10th, 2021