

# Meeting for Japanese Art Specialists

February 10 (Thu.), 2022  
Online Meeting



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### Summary

Curators of Japanese art and museum staff from related departments within Japan and overseas held discussions and shared information about operational difficulties and other issues. New participants this year included specialists affiliated with museums in Asia and Oceania.

**Venue:** Online Meeting

**Chair Parson:** Mr. Matsushima Masato (Tokyo National Museum)

**Facilitator:** Ms. Kito Satomi (Tokyo National Museum)

### Participants

North America: 14 people; Europe: 15 people; Asia/Oceania: 3 people; Japan: 15 people

### Conference Outline

As with the previous fiscal year, this year's conference was held remotely using web conferencing software. The meeting was shorter than usual owing to the participation of people in several different time zones. However, with face-to-face meetings difficult due to COVID-19, the event provided a valuable opportunity to exchange information and build networks.

### Discussion Topic 1. Digitizing Vocabulary for Japanese Art Wibke Schrape, MK&G

#### Introduction

Vocabulary thesauri are vital for cross-database searches and trans-lingual searches, but the thesauri used by European museums and galleries are Eurocentric, sometimes even racist, and unacceptable from a specialist's point of view. For example, one database of religious art iconography only has two categories: Christianity and non-Christian religions. As such, it doesn't allow for distinctions between Hinduism, Buddhism or Jainism, for example, nor the naming of specific deities in a picture. There is also a lack of suitable vocabulary when categorizing Japanese art, so objects are categorized under different names. Changing the names at a later date involves a lot of time and discussion.

National libraries have joined forces to establish a shared web portal. Another promising project is the Chinese Iconography Thesaurus. I would like to ask whether any museums or galleries are using or developing an iconography thesaurus suitable for Japanese art. I would also like to discuss how can we improve the digitization of vocabulary thesauri for Japanese art.

#### Discussion Points

- Tokyo National Museum (TNM) is preparing a Japanese/English translation guide that aims to streamline English translation work, boost foreign visitor satisfaction levels, and produce translations that are easy to understand for regular non-specialist visitors.
- Other museums outside of Japan are also preparing translation glossaries for Japanese art terms, so it might be beneficial to share these lists and exchange information.
- The digitization process will also require suitable categories for art from other non-Western regions.
- Though Chinese and South Korean museums are in a different situation from their North American and

European counterparts when it comes to translating Japanese art terms, they still face translation challenges and they would be interesting in sharing lists.

## **Discussion Topic 2. The Changing Approach to Loan Exhibitions**

**Jeannie Kenmotsu, Portland Art Museum**

### **Introduction**

Exhibitions have been cancelled or postponed and transportation costs have risen during the global spread of COVID-19. How should the approach to loan exhibitions change in the wake of the pandemic? One potential strategy involves a new approach to couriers. Couriers are quite expensive for a loan exhibition's bottom line. Though there are pros and cons, more museums are using 'virtual couriers' amid pandemic-related restrictions on mobility. Other strategies involve reducing the number of exhibits, reducing costs by borrowing proportionally more from private collections, or working with regional partner institutions. In these ways, museums could reduce costs and become more resilient to sudden exhibition cancellations or postponements. Human relationships will be critical whatever approach is taken. I would like to share information about approaches adopted by museums in the wake of COVID-19 and how exhibitions have changed.

### **Discussion Points**

- There are times when loans are approved using only virtual couriers, but there are pros and cons to this approach. The approach reduces costs and enables loans even during pandemic conditions, but it takes a long time to set up displays or make small adjustments, so it is easier to dispatch people. Even with virtual couriers, manpower will still be needed to operate cameras and so on.
- Trust and transparency between participating museums is vital when using virtual couriers.
- Museums should review their collections, but the utilization of objects from these collections will sometimes require considerable time and money for repairs and research.
- Given the uncertainties involved with shipping and transportation during pandemic conditions, museums will probably build up more regional partnerships going forward. This could provide an opportunity to forge new relations.