

&lt;page 1&gt;



## The globalization of Japanese museums and revitalization of regional museums

**1. Kyoto was elected to host the 2019 General Conference**  
On June 3rd this year, the advisory committee of the International Council of Museums (ICOM), which was held at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris, elected Kyoto to host the General Conference in 2019. It will be held with 3,000 museum specialists from all over the world from 1st to 7th of September.

Japanese National Committee for ICOM (chairperson: Dr. Tamotsu Aoki, Director General of National Art Center) had established a bid committee and a working group to support Kyoto's bid to host the General Conference of ICOM, which is held once every three years. Hosting a general conference in Kyoto is expected to contribute to the globalization and promotion of all of the Japanese museums. Now that Kyoto has been officially elected as the host, we are at the stage where we establish a management board and team-Japan will be preparing for the conference.

Although ICOM and the General Conference itself is for museum specialists and is a place where common understanding about museums is developed at an international level, the conference in Korea (2004) and China(2010) showed us that it can increase the public awareness of the host country's museums and their policies. I think that it is important to take this opportunity to act so that ordinary people will have deeper understanding of museums.

### 2. Why am I engaging in an international activity?

Why would a curator of a regional museum engage in an international activity like this? As a person who works for a regional museum, I think that we should go back and forth between "locality and internationality." In other words, we should be closely rooted to the community, and through research of the documents and field studies, penetrate deeply into the modern Japanese system and the way the people in the community live their lives. At the same time, by trying to take a holistic approach to grasp the society and history through international activities, we should be able to share the objects and the wisdom of our museums in such a way as to broadly affect citizens' intellectual lives.

Through the activity like this, I think I will be able to know my position and role as a curator and to comprehensively understand the history of the community as well as my work at the museum.

### 3. Merits and Risks

There are other merits to get involved in ICOM. Participating in ICOM activities means we can take part in the forming of common understanding among museums at an international level, and be part of the process in establishing related rules. In addition, through the international network, there will be opportunities to join various collaborative research and projects. On the other hand, as you can see from the problems surrounding dolphins in aquariums, diplomatic problems concerning the registration of the world heritage of Gunkanjima Island, and the repatriation problem of materials stored in museums, hosting ICOM General Conference, i.e. internationalization of Japanese museums, has risks, too.

"Globalization" is "rationalization and modernization," and it also means "breaking away from tradition and our own sense of values." Once we rowed out to a rough sea called the "international standard," we should be prepared to squarely face various discussions. It is very important to be open-minded about those discussions even if they are inconvenient for us.

### 4. What I learned from the experience at IAC

How I came to think this way is based on the experience at the International Artist Center (IAC) 15~16 years ago. I still treasure the things they taught me; the importance of making local, traditional performing arts into theatrical arts and introducing them to the world, and the underlying wish towards permanent peace. Museums are similar in the way we make the result of the research into exhibition and let many guests see and enjoy them. From now on, we need to do more than traditional museum activities rooted in preserving and utilizing tangible things. We should also work more aggressively on preserving and utilizing intangible things such as intangible cultural properties or people's experience and thoughts. For that, I would like to make the most of my experience at IAC.

### 5. The importance of activities to nurture communities.

When you work for a regional museum, you encounter various kinds of request from the community as well as offers for donation. A condominium community union requested me to give them a lecture on Expo '70 held in Suita, and a library asked us to talk about "Suita during the wartime" for their lecture course for the general public. When we got the information that one of the oldest houses in the Senriyama residence area in Suita, which was built more than 90 years ago, will be torn down, we carried out an on-site investigation. Someone offered a donation of military swords that belonged to his late grandfather and also his huge collection of electrical home appliances dating back to 1930s and 1940s. There are all kinds of requests.

It is a great challenge for curators to add historical values and meanings to the familiar objects and information that belong to the regional museums and to come up with the ideas to present them more effectively and uniquely so that they become "treasures" that are close to the general public.

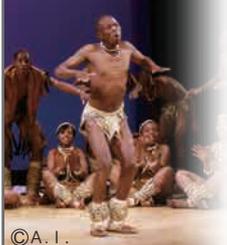
I think that it is important to make a system of placing the local history into the context of Japanese history and World history, or to find a way to present the local history as part of people's own history. By providing relative meaning to local history and also personalizing and broadly surveying local history, each citizen shall acquire the strength to create the future for their community.

Kenji Saotome

Curator, Suita City Museum (modern history•museology)  
Former member of ICOM General Conference bid committee  
working group

(translated by Keiko Hori, IAC)

Dancers from Botswana



## Join the IAC!

International Artists Center (IAC) is a non-profit organization. It was established in 1960 and has been doing its activities in the aim to contribute to the international understanding and the world peace through cultural exchanges programs.



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&lt;page 2&gt;

## ARMENIA CULTURE WEEK



**A**RMENIA CULTURE WEEK was held in Hillside Terrace, Daikanyama from May 19 to the 24th. The Culture Week was a major one in the series of events, which the Embassy of the Republic of Armenia organized this year to commemorate the Centennial of the Armenian Genocide.

A great tragedy fell upon the Armenian people a century ago. It affected 1.5 million victims, and made almost every Armenian alive today a genocide survivor's descendant. Such mass killings of innocent people, like the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki 70 years ago, leave a deep scar in the hearts of many generations to follow. Thus, it is very important to remember and commemorate such dates in order to prevent future occurrences of such crimes against humanity.

In this event, we introduced some aspects of the Armenian culture in cooperation with our Japanese friends, who have interest in our country and its ethos. Besides exhibiting rudiments of Armenian arts, crafts and history, we made an attempt to demonstrate some crossovers between the Armenian and Japanese cultures. For instance, the exhibitions of

“Khachkars” (Armenian cross-stones) and “Church Architecture” were organized by Japanese researchers, who are specialists in these fields related to our long history and reach traditions. We also wanted our visitors to see how nicely Armenian cuisine and beverages match the Japanese ones in the special project “Cross-Tasting of Food & Drinks” performed with the help of IAC – our long-time collaborator.

We will certainly continue introducing our arts, music, history and traditions to the people of Japan, as we are convinced that such cultural exchanges help develop better understanding of each other, promote friendship between our people, which indisputably contributes in peace and prosperity of our nations.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all our friends, partners and supporters who contributed in successful implementation of this event.

(Dr. Grant POGOSYAN  
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary  
Embassy of the Republic of Armenia to Japan)

&lt;page 4&gt;

## Hello, dear embassy vol.20 Turkmenistan



### Keeping peace by declaring permanent neutrality. Abundant natural gas is the lever of the economy. From doctor, to minister, and then to ambassador.

**I**n a quiet residential area, a few blocks from Meiji Dori, is where the Embassy of Turkmenistan is located. The person who welcomed us was H.E. Mr. Gurbanmamet Elyasov, the Ambassador of Turkmenistan. His perfect smile made me think that he was a pure diplomat, but I found out he was originally a doctor. His specialty is gastrointestinal medicine. “I treated many patients and many of them expressed their gratitude toward me.” Why did you become an ambassador? “When I was a doctor, I was appointed to the Minister of Sports, and then, the Minister of Healthcare and Medical Industry. After that, I came to Japan as the Ambassador.”

Doctor, politician, and ambassador; Ambassador Elyasov must be a man of great capacity.

“Hearing the name, Turkmenistan, the Japanese people are reminded of Turkey, which is geographically close to Turkmenistan. Ambassador: “We think that the Turkmen people are the ancestors of the Turkish people. Turkmen language and Turkish language are very much alike. We can master Turkish if we study them for three months.”

Turkmenistan, which is located in central Asia, became independent from the Soviet Union in 1991. In 1995, they declared to become a country of permanent neutrality, which was formally recognized by 185 countries of the United Nations.

“When we became independent, we wondered what kind of foreign policy we should adopt to defend our country. After much deliberation, we came to a decision to declare permanent neutrality. We will never go into war with other countries. We will never intervene in the affairs of another country. Our aim is to make the world a place with no weapons.” Historically,

Turkmenistan, a country with small population that is surrounded by powerful countries, had been invaded by foreign countries from ancient times; Sassanian Persia, Mongol, and Imperial Russia-Soviet Union. When the Islamic forces invaded them, pressing them to convert their religion to Islam, the political leader at the time decided to convert, “rather than paying a large sacrifice by entering into war”. They abandoned the existing Zoroastrianism (fire worship) and the whole population became Muslim. Since then, Turkmenistan has been an Islamic country.

Becoming a permanently neutral country at the end of the 20th century might be wisdom of a small country with a population of 5.2 million in order to survive among the powerful countries. “United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia,” a center to study ways to eliminate regional conflicts in the world, is located in Turkmenistan.

For Turkmenistan, natural gas is expected to be the center of economic growth. Its natural gas reserves are the fourth largest in the world. Because of the natural gas, its annual economic growth is as high as 10 percent.

“In 2013, our President visited Japan and signed an agreement with Japan on economic cooperation projects that amount to one billion US dollars. One of its projects, a fertilizer manufacturing plant started operating in 2014. I think that Turkmenistan, a resource-rich country, and Japan, a developed country can further cooperate with each other.” The Ambassador must be looking far into the future.

(Yasunori Yamashita, IAC)  
(translated by Keiko Hori, IAC)