



An Examination of Museology in Japan: Current Trends and Future Directions

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Keywords:

Museology in Japan; Museum Act; Curatorship; Social Education; Museum as Forum

ABSTRACT:

This paper explores the present state and prospective developments of museology as an academic discipline in Japan. It begins with an overview of the current conditions of museums and the field of museology in the country. Early efforts in establishing museology are examined, with particular attention to the contributions of Tanahashi Gentarō. Discussion then turns to the enactment of the *Museum Act* and related institutional developments, highlighting the work of Tsuruta Sōichirō. The unique features and ongoing challenges of the Japanese curator system and museum management are also addressed. Further, the paper considers the emergence of museology as a distinct academic field and the search for a renewed vision of the museum, referencing the ideas of Itō Toshirō. The study concludes by outlining potential directions for the evolution of museology in Japan.

L'articolo esamina lo stato attuale e gli sviluppi futuri della museologia come disciplina accademica in Giappone. Si apre con una panoramica sulle condizioni attuali dei musei e dell'ambito museologico nel Paese. Vengono analizzati i primi tentativi di fondare la museologia, con particolare attenzione ai contributi di Tanahashi Gentarō. Successivamente si affronta la promulgazione del *Museum Act* e i relativi sviluppi istituzionali, mettendo in luce l'opera di Tsuruta Sōichirō. Sono inoltre trattate le peculiarità e le sfide tuttora aperte del sistema curatoriale giapponese e della gestione museale. L'articolo considera inoltre l'affermazione della museologia come campo accademico autonomo e la ricerca di una rinnovata visione del museo, facendo riferimento alle idee di Itō Toshirō. Lo studio si conclude tracciando le possibili traiettorie di sviluppo della museologia in Giappone.

Opening Picture:

Detail from Fig. 1.

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<https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24552>

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Introduction

This paper re-examines the challenges facing Japan's museum system and museology, prompted by the 2023 revision of the Museum Act and supplementary resolutions from the Diet. The revised Act addresses key issues, including reforming the registration system, reconciling public purpose with private sector vitality, enhancing the professionalism of museum directors, redefining and improving the treatment of curators, and strengthening partnerships, funding, and public relations. These issues are not merely operational; they touch on the fundamental relationship between a museum's core philosophy and its professional structure. This paper focuses on the growing disconnect between institutional frameworks (administration and law) and foundational philosophies (educational perspectives and public purpose), a gap that has led to the fragility of the curatorial system.

To provide historical context, this paper examines the development of Japan's museum system in three phases. The first is the birth of the "social education-type" museum from the Meiji period to the pre-war era. Influenced by Fukuzawa Yukichi's enlightenment philosophy and experiences from world expositions, the experimental exhibitions of educational museums and the institutional development of the Imperial Museum advanced in parallel. This phase saw a coexistence of industrial promotion and national edification. The second phase is the establishment of the post-war social education system. The Museum Act of 1951 legally positioned museums established by local pub-

lic entities and private organizations as social education facilities, providing a theoretical foundation for the four-function system of "collection, preservation, research, and educational outreach" outlined by Tsuruta Sōichirō in his "Introduction to Museology" (1956). The third phase involves the development of regionalization and citizen participation from the 1980s onward. Itō Toshirō, in his "On Regional Museums" (1986) and *Open Up, Museums!* (1991),¹ re-conceptualized museums as sites for community learning and dialogue, advocating for the reintegration of exhibition, education, and research.

Exhibitions have long served as a nexus where educational philosophy, institutional frameworks, and professional practice converge. For Tanahashi Gentarō, exhibitions were an educational practice—a "visual educational device."² Tsuruta Sōichirō understood them as an institutional structure that integrates a museum's functions.³ Later, Itō Toshirō redefined exhibitions as a social act that fosters dialogue and collaboration within the community. Tracing the philosophical and institutional changes in exhibitions is akin to re-examining the development of museology itself. This paper connects institutional history (changes in law, administration, and management), intellectual history (transformations in educational philosophy, public purpose, and exhibition concepts), and the history of professional education (curator training and professional formation) to provide a comprehensive analysis of these three interconnected aspects: institutions, philosophy, and professionalism.

The paper is structured as follows: Chapter 1 traces the policies of the Meiji era, the experimental exhibitions of educational museums, and the institutional shift to the Imperial Museum, clarifying the philosophical transition from industrial promotion to national cultural integration. Chapter 2 focuses on Tsuruta Sōichirō's functionalist museology, organizing the philosophy and institutional framework of the Museum Act and exploring the reintegration of the curator's dual role as researcher and educator. Chapter 3 examines Itō Toshirō's theory of community museums and the concept of "co-learning and co-creation," referencing practical research. The final chapter, based on the revised Museum Act and supplementary resolutions, proposes a new operational framework centered on professional qualifications for directors, the redefinition of curatorial roles, the philosophy of the forum-type museum, and the introduction of intermediary professionals to connect directors and curators. It includes recommendations for governance, finance, and evaluation systems.

I: The Establishment of Modern Japanese Museums and the Development of Their Educational Philosophy: From Industrial Promotion to Social Education

I.1. The Reception of Museums in the Late Edo Period and the Establishment of National Museums

During the late Edo period, many Japanese who visited the West understood museums as discrete facilities like natural history or in-

dustrial halls, using terms such as *hyakubutsukan* ("hall of a hundred things") or *hakubutsusho* ("institute of natural history"). They did not fully grasp the Western concept of the comprehensive museum as an integrated apparatus of knowledge encompassing libraries, art galleries, and botanical gardens. Many travelogues described museums as "a type of medical hall," indicating that their understanding of Western science was largely limited to natural history and medicine.

This limited understanding was influenced by the exhibition culture of industrial product fairs and pharmaceutical gatherings held across Japan. These were exhibitions organized by various feudal domains as part of industrial promotion and wealth-building policies, aiming to visually share industrial knowledge. Matsumiya points out that these events were the genesis of "modernization through exhibition" and that Japan's subsequent exposition and museum policies were built on this foundation. Thus, Japanese museums began as instruments for industrial promotion and enlightenment education.

An exception was Fukuzawa Yūkichi, who saw museums as symbols of civilization and tools for disseminating knowledge. After inspecting the London International Exhibition of 1862, he understood the exposition as a social mechanism that simultaneously promoted industry and education, and museums as its permanent embodiment. This shows that Japan's museums were conceived early on as "administrative devices inseparable from expositions."

The museum policy of the new Meiji government was closely tied to its policy of “Enrich the State, Strengthen the Military” (*Fukoku Kyōhei*) and industrial promotion initiatives. Museums were positioned as places for “instruction by the eye,” where technological innovations and the achievements of civilization could be made visible to the populace. Sano Tsunetami and Ōkubo Toshimichi referenced Britain’s South Kensington Museum to introduce an exhibition philosophy that combined industrial technology and art education. However, according to Matsumiya, this “South Kensington model” was institutionalized as a state-led policy without fully understanding its private-sector origins. This “misperception” became a catalyst for the early transformation of Japanese museums into state-controlled cultural apparatuses.

This philosophy was institutionally realized by Machida Hisanari (1838–1897), a bureaucrat who had visited the British Museum and the South Kensington Museum. After returning to Japan, he established the Museum Bureau in 1871 and envisioned a comprehensive museum integrating natural history, industry, and art. The following year, the “Ministry of Education Exposition” at Yushima Seidō was the first modern exhibition to feature education, crafts, natural history, and art side-by-side. Fearing the destruction of cultural heritage, Machida also proposed the “Preservation of Old Items,” marking the beginning of cultural heritage administration. This brought the two streams of museum and cultural heritage administration together.

During the Second National Industrial Exhibition of 1881, a building designed by Josiah Conder (fig.1) was erected in Ueno and later repurposed as the main museum hall, which opened in 1882. It was placed under the Imperial Household Ministry in 1886 and renamed the “Tokyo Imperial Household Museum” in 1900. As scholars such as Matsumiya have argued, this process reflects the museum’s transformation from a “symbol of a civilized nation” to a “symbol of imperial culture.” The original concept of a comprehensive museum was reorganized into an imperial-centric one focusing on art, archaeology, and history, thereby functioning as an apparatus to visualize national identity centered on the imperial lineage.

This shift was driven by Kuki Ryūichi (1852–1931), who, drawing on his knowledge of Western art administration, systematized imperial art. Under his direction, the museum began to function as a stage for cultural policy and national ceremonies. This established a dual institutional structure in Japanese museums, combining the “system of academic knowledge” with “state authority.” The Imperial Household Museum functioned as a cultural apparatus supporting an imperial-centered nationalism, with exhibitions serving as spaces to visualize national prestige. Machida’s “place of comprehensive knowledge” was thus transformed into a “national apparatus centered on the imperial household.”



Fig.1:
Hiroshige III,
Ueno kōen naiko-
ku kangyō daini
hakurankai bijut-
sukan narabini
[shojo] funsuiki
no zu (Japanese:
上野公園内国勸業
第二博覧会美術館
ならびに猩々噴水
器之図, “Second
national indus-
trial exhibition
at Ueno Park”).
Japanese triptych
print showing
people gathered
at Ueno Park,
most of them
viewing a foun-
tain with gold-
fish, 1881.

I.2. The Establishment of Educational Museums and the Renewal by Tanahashi Gentarō

The educational museum is closely tied to the formation of modern Japan’s school education system. In 1877, the Ministry of Education’s Educational Museum was established at Yushima Seidō in Tokyo. It was initially conceived as an “educational display hall” featuring materials such as teaching aids and models. The exhibition system was organized by subject, symbolizing the dissemination and standardization of the school education system.

However, as compulsory education spread nationwide, the significance of the educational museum temporarily diminished. By the 1890s, it was integrated into the Tokyo Higher Normal School (a central institution for teacher training) as an affiliated facility, and its exhibition activities stagnated. Its renewal began when Tanahashi Gentarō (1869–1961), a science educator, was appointed as its head in 1906. With expertise in both education and natural science, he revamped the exhibitions to be more focused on materials that

would aid educational research.

Between 1909 and 1911, under the orders of the Ministry of Education, he studied in Germany and the United States, inspecting Western educational museums and science centers. Upon his return, he sought to popularize scientific knowledge through lectures and traveling exhibitions, transforming the museum from an auxiliary for school education into a hub for social education. In 1912, he established a “Popular Education Hall” within the museum to expand exhibitions for the public, introducing interactive displays such as push-button operations and experimental models to promote scientific understanding.

In 1914, the Educational Museum became independent from the Tokyo Higher Normal School, becoming the “Tokyo Educational Museum” under the direct control of the Ministry of Education. That same year, during the Tokyo Taishō Exposition, the Ministry of Education set up an “Educational and Academic Hall” to showcase achievements in education and science; after the exposition, the building was relocated



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to the grounds of Yushima Seidō to serve as a new exhibition hall. This expanded the exhibition space, and the Educational Museum was relaunched as an “educational institution open to society”. Tanahashi was appointed director of the museum in 1917.

The Tokyo Educational Museum held social education exhibitions on topics like cholera prevention and livelihood improvement, which linked the dissemination of scientific knowledge with social movements. However, the popularity of these special exhibitions sometimes overshadowed permanent displays and scholarly research, weakening the museum’s professional foundation.⁴

In 1921, the museum was renamed the “Tokyo Museum.” The Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923 destroyed the building, but after receiving a donation of natural science materials, the rebuilt museum shifted its focus to a specialized science museum. This laid the foundation for the later National Museum of Nature

and Science. After his retirement, Tanahashi summarized his findings in the 1930 book *Educational Institutions Appealing to the Eye*, positioning the museum as a “place of education that makes reason known through the eye.”⁵

The Tokyo Prefectural Art Museum, which opened in 1926, expanded public access as Japan’s first public art museum. However, it began as a rental-hall model without a permanent collection, prioritizing event-based activities over research, preservation, and education. This mode of operation spread to regional museums, promoting the commercialization of exhibitions while also giving rise to a form of urban public culture.

In summary, modern Japanese museums began with expository enlightenment, underwent imperial institutionalization, and were socially re-educated. They faced the challenges of public exhibition limits while forming the institutional foundation of the present day.

Fig. 2: Tokyo Educational Museum (Past of National Museum of Nature and Science) in 1920.

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II: Tsuruta Sōichirō and the Institutional Foundation of Post-War Museology: The Reintegration of Four Functions Centered on Exhibition

II.1. Post-War Social Education and the Framework of the Museum Act

The post-war Japanese museum system first gained a nationwide legal foundation with the enactment of the Museum Act of 1951. As part of post-war educational reform based on democratic ideals, museums were positioned as social education facilities alongside libraries and community centers.

Article 1 of the Museum Act states that “the purpose of a museum is to collect, preserve, exhibit, and utilize materials for educational purposes.” The four functions—collection, preservation, exhibition, and education—demonstrate a structure where all functions converge on education through exhibition. Exhibition is not just a display but is legally positioned as an educational tool that visualizes knowledge through materials and promotes social learning. This reflects both the continuation and renewal of the pre-war enlightenment-oriented view of exhibitions.

Behind this philosophy was a pre-war movement for legal codification, led by Tanahashi Gentarō. He redefined the museum from an auxiliary for school education to a social education institution, repeatedly arguing for a “Museum Ordinance” and founding the Japan Museum Association. His philosophy was inherited by the post-war social education system and is believed to

have directly influenced the enactment of the Museum Act.⁶

Nevertheless, the Museum Act was the first law to institutionalize exhibition as an educational tool within the social education legal framework, and it was groundbreaking in its positioning of museums as hubs for social learning. The person who academically systematized this philosophy and reintegrated the four functions around exhibition was Tsuruta Sōichirō. The following section examines how his theory inherited this institutional context and redefined the museum as a “living educational institution.”

II.2. The Establishment and Development of Tsuruta Sōichirō’s Museology

Tsuruta Sōichirō (1918–1992) was a science-educated bureaucrat and museum scholar who built the theoretical foundation of post-war Japanese museology. He learned at the Tokyo Higher Normal School and Tokyo Bunrika University, later becoming the first professor of museology at Hosei University.

In the Japan Museum Association’s 1956 publication, *An Introduction to Museology*, Tsuruta wrote the first section, “Introduction to Museology”.⁷ This book is considered the starting point of post-war Japanese museology, as it was the first systematic work to theoretically integrate museum practice and education. Tsuruta’s theory integrated Tanahashi Gentarō’s view of museums as “social education sites” with Kiba Kazuo’s theory of museums as “social tools,” forming his own system that bridged education and natural science.

In his “Introduction to Museology” Tsuruta organized the museum’s purpose into four functions—“collection,” “preservation,” “research,” and “educational outreach”—locating them relationally. He particularly emphasized “educational outreach,” defining the essence of the museum as connecting “things” and “people” through exhibitions. Tsuruta called this philosophy “functionalist museology,” perceiving the museum as a dynamic functional system. He also viewed the museum’s components as a trinity of “things (materials),” “place (facilities),” and “work (people),” defining a “living museum” as one where these elements interact organically.

The curator (*gakugeiin*, a comprehensive museum professional in Japan) was positioned at its core as both an educator and a researcher. Tsuruta pointed out that the “lack of research function” among Japanese curators was the biggest problem. He criticized the generalist approach common in post-war museums and proposed a “comprehensive curatorial profession” that would balance a specialized division of labor with organic collaboration. Here, “comprehensive” meant a collaborative professional system where research serves as the core that connects to education and exhibition.

In Chapter 4, he clarified the significance of exhibitions as an educational act that reconstructs the meaning of materials to guide the understanding of visitors. Hiramatsu Saeko and Shimizu Shū see this as the core of Tsuruta’s theory, confirming his position that “the museum lives through the activities of people.”⁸

In Chapter 5, “Museum Management,” Tsuruta distinguished between the “museum as an individual” and “museums as a collective”. For the former, he positioned the director as a manager of human resources, calling them a “fatherly figure”. For the latter, he proposed the concept of a “cluster of museums,” where multiple institutions collaborate to demonstrate their educational and social functions for an entire region.⁹ This idea is considered a precursor to later theories of social museums and the concept of eco-museums.

Yokoyama Emi positions “Introduction to Museology” as the theoretical foundation of post-war museology but notes that Tsuruta himself considered the book unfinished and later envisioned a new “systematic museology”.¹⁰ According to Yokoyama, Tsuruta’s theory, while closely tied to the educational policies of his time and having a sense of institutional and practical reality, also contained a strong critical awareness of the Japanese museum world.

From the 1970s onward, Tsuruta actively participated in the International Council of Museums (ICOM) and, feeling the limitations of the Japanese museum system, began publishing papers in English abroad. He criticized the administrative rigidity and immaturity of the curatorial system in Japan, advocating for a rebuilding of professionalism. Yokoyama positions Tsuruta’s proposal to create a “comprehensive curatorial profession” that would integrate “material specialists,” “education specialists,” and “technical specialists” as a critical suggestion in response to the institutional short-

comings of the time. Furthermore, based on his ICOM experiences, he introduced new concepts such as ecomuseums and fragmented museums, arguing for the necessity of transforming Japanese museums from “building-centered” to “social and environmental practice”.

II.3. Re-evaluating Tsuruta’s Theory in Post-War Museology

Tsuruta Sōichirō’s museology not only functioned institutionally but also formed the theoretical backbone of post-war Japanese museology. Analyses by Inuzuka Yasuhiro and Kaneko Atsushi are particularly representative of this re-evaluation.

Inuzuka positions Tsuruta as the “nexus of institutionalization and theorization.”¹¹ He praises Tsuruta for providing a theoretical basis for the museum as a social education facility as defined by the Museum Act, but also critically notes that his system tended to serve the institution. Inuzuka’s assessment is that there is a coexistence of both the achievement of ordering theory within the language of the institution and the delayed autonomy of the discipline due to institutional dependence.

In contrast, Kaneko positions Tsuruta as the sole ideologue who established post-war Japanese museology as an “autonomous theoretical system.”¹² Kaneko finds originality in Tsuruta’s development of Kiba Kazuo’s concept of the “museum as a social tool” into a system of “internal harmony” that integrates the museum’s various functions. Tsuruta’s “functionalist museology” is thus praised as the first system to autonomously theorize the functional structure of the muse-

um. Kaneko further re-evaluates Itō Toshirō’s critique of Tsuruta not as a simple conflict but as a theoretical dialogue. Itō critically inherited “functionalist museology” and developed it in the direction of social relational theory and external network theory, but his theoretical foundation lay in Tsuruta’s work. His theory still holds theoretical significance as a framework that illuminates current discussions on the publicness, professionalism, and social nature of museums.

III: Itō Toshirō and the Development of Community Museology: The Space for Social Learning through Exhibition and Participation

III.1. Itō Toshirō and the Three-Generation Model

From the 1970s onward, as post-war social education matured, museums began to be redefined from “devices for knowledge transmission” to “places for community learning.” This shift was theoretically guided by Itō Toshirō (1946–1991), who re-conceptualized museums from the perspective of pedagogy and social education.

Itō built upon Tsuruta Sōichirō’s functionalist museology but introduced the methodology of social education theory to view museums as agents of social change. His final conclusions are presented in his 1986 paper and his posthumous work, *Open Up, Museums!*. The latter, published in the year of his sudden passing, is considered his intellectual testament.

According to Kuriyama Kiwamu, Itō had already established a perspec-

tive of “reinterpreting the four functions of the museum as social activities” in the late 1960s.¹³ This early awareness became the origin of his later theory of community museums.

Itō organized the development of post-war Japanese museums into a “three-generation model”:

(1) The “state-led, institution-building generation” of the post-war recovery period (1950s–60s).

(2) The “social education generation” (1970s).

(3) The “community generation,” based on museum activities led by community agents (1980s onward).

This was a description of the shift in the social function of museums from “administration” to “education,” and finally to “citizens.” Itō also interpreted this change as a transformation in exhibition philosophy, redefining exhibitions from “authoritative presentation” to “social dialogue.” For Itō, a museum was a “place where community residents re-create their own culture through learning,” conceived as a more advanced “participatory public facility” than conventional social education centers. Exhibitions were a dialogical medium for sharing community issues and promoting collaboration.

III.2. The Connection to Social Education Theory and the Redefinition of Exhibition

A key feature of Itō’s argument is that he not only viewed the museum as a site for social education but also theorized it as a “cultural apparatus that mediates social learning.” Exhibitions were not a static device

for one-way knowledge transfer but a social act through which citizens could proactively learn about local culture and issues. Exhibitions were redefined not as “storage” but as “communication”—a “process-oriented educational activity” co-created by curators and residents.

Inuzuka Yasuhiro praises Itō for “reintegrating the three functions of exhibition, education, and research into social education practice,” calling it the “publicization of the educational act.”¹⁴ This is the vision of museum activities transforming into a space for public discourse through exhibitions. Itō linked this transformation to the concept of “citizens’ right to learn” (*gakushū-ken*, a fundamental concept in Japanese social education inspired by international movements toward lifelong learning), positioning exhibitions as a specific guarantee of that right.

By introducing the philosophy of the right to learn, exhibitions shifted from “authoritative knowledge presentation” to “the generation of knowledge by citizens.” The subject of the exhibition shifted from the curator to the residents, or to the collaboration between the two, and the museum gained meaning as a device for social dialogue. For Itō, an exhibition was the very process of visualizing and sharing the “structure of learning” within the community.

Itō’s community museum model presupposes a relationship of “co-learning” (learning together) between curators and residents, fluidifying the boundary between professionals and citizens. This perspective, which views museum activities themselves as a “social learning process,” also connects to

later trends such as Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) and constructivist educational theories.

III.3. Itō's Legacy and Contemporary Significance

Even after his death, Itō Toshirō's theory continues to be re-evaluated. His concepts of "community learning," "collaboration," and "co-creation" resonate with cultural policies from the 2000s onward, especially the trend toward emphasizing citizen participation and cultural inclusion.

Inuzuka Yasuhiro calls Itō the "completor of social education-oriented museology in Japan," while pointing out that his theory was not fully reflected in institutional reforms and curator training systems.¹⁵ For him, Itō was the person who translated Tsuruta Sōichirō's system to the practical level of the community and reintegrated the three functions of exhibition, education, and research as social education acts.

Meanwhile, Yamamoto Tetsuya regards Itō as a "symbol of the social education turn that transformed the discourse of post-war museology," positioning him as a theorist who opened up the museum from an administrative institution to a citizen-led practice.¹⁶ Kaneko Atsushi re-reads Itō from the perspective of recent cultural policy studies, positioning his "Open Up, Museums" theory as a precursor to today's "co-creation museums" and "forum-type exhibitions." According to Kaneko, Itō's emphasis on "exhibition as a place for social dialogue" should be re-evaluated as the theoretical starting point for citizen-participatory exhibitions and

community co-creation.¹⁷

The theoretical legacy of Itō lies in his shift in exhibition philosophy from "knowledge presentation" to "the medium of social learning." Exhibitions were conceived as an educational act for citizens to collaborate, share, and reconstruct community issues. This view of exhibitions anticipates recent trends such as forum-type museology and co-creation exhibitions, providing a theoretical foundation for redefining the museum as a "device for public discourse."

IV: Repositioning Museology: Towards the Integration of Institutions, Philosophy, and Professionalism

IV.1. Constructivist Exhibitions and the Museum as a Forum

The revised Museum Act includes cultural tourism as part of museum activities, encouraging institutions to collaborate with local stakeholders to promote regional vitality through cultural engagement. However, the philosophical deepening of exhibitions—the shift to constructivist exhibitions—has not yet fully progressed in Japan. A pioneer in this area is the "Gallery of Time" at the Louvre-Lens (2012), where transnational exhibitions are designed to encourage visitors to make their own comparisons and construct historical relationships. Exhibitions thus function as a device to facilitate "the construction of thought and memory" rather than "the transmission of knowledge."

The philosophy of the "museum as a forum" advocated by Itō Toshirō theoretically intersects with Duncan F.

Cameron's "The Museum: A Temple or the Forum?" (1971).¹⁸ Cameron argued that museums should be transformed from a "Temple" to a "Forum"—a place for social discourse and creation. Yoshida Kenji inherits this vision, redefining the museum as a "cultural apparatus that mediates society's self-reflection."¹⁹ The exhibition space becomes a public stage for reconstructing fragmented memories and for people from different backgrounds to converse.

The museum as a forum is a cultural institution for mediating social dialogue and reconciling values. However, in Japan, exhibitions on "negative histories" such as war and colonialism have been constrained by political and emotional pressures, with "neutrality" being equated with "non-conflict." In light of Cameron's theory, this avoidance leads to the stagnation of public culture. An exhibition should not seek consensus but be a place for society to reflect on itself amidst the intersection of different perspectives. As Yoshida argues, the museum must be a "device for social discourse" and a space where silenced memories can be voiced once again.

Constructivist educational philosophy is a learner-centered approach that builds meaning through dialogue. A practical example is VTS (Visual Thinking Strategies). Developed by Abigail Housen and Philip Yenawaine, VTS nurtures observation skills and critical thinking by having viewers share "what they see," "why they think that," and "where they find evidence." The curator is no longer a knowledge transmitter but a facilitator who mediates questions, and exhibitions shift from "knowledge sharing" to

"meaning co-creation."

IV.2. Institutional and Operational Challenges for Japanese Museums

The supplementary resolutions accompanying the 2023 Museum Act revision explicitly point out the lack of legally prescribed qualifications for museum directors. Article 4 states that "the role of the museum director, who has sufficient insight, is important" and calls for "the appointment of curators with advanced and specialized knowledge and the enrichment of their training." In Japan, it is common for administrative officials to be appointed as directors, which has created a disconnect with curatorial staff. The resolutions aim to rectify this structure, moving toward a framework where the director is positioned as a professional who integrates education, research, and cultural management.

Under the current system, major special exhibitions are often funded by media corporations, which act as sponsors. Koga Futoshi's book *The Inconvenient Truth of Art Exhibitions* (2020) calls this an "unhealthy codependency," revealing the reality of museums being incorporated into the entertainment business of corporate capital. Koga emphasizes that collection exhibitions are the true purpose of a museum, advocating for financial independence and ensuring the authority of professional judgment.²⁰

Furthermore, a 2023 statement by the Science Council of Japan noted that national museums are exempt from the law, that the registration system and the professional system

are disconnected, and that the curatorial research function is undervalued.²¹ These issues, in light of Tanahashi Gentarō's philosophy, Tsuruta Sōichirō's functionalist system, and Itō Toshirō's community theory, highlight the need to reconstruct institutions, philosophy, and professionalism as a unified trinity.

Additionally, it is crucial to establish an intermediary professional role to actualize the "promotion of collaboration" stated in the revised Act. Liaison and coordinating professionals (e.g., Certified Social Education Specialists) would serve as a bridge to related fields such as education, welfare, and tourism. By institutionally arranging a triangular structure of "general affairs—liaison—curatorial," governance can become more transparent and sustainable.

IV.3. Repositioning Museology

From the educational museums of the Meiji period to community museology, Japanese museology has developed into a "discipline of public dialogue and co-creation." The "curator as a mediator" envisioned by Itō Toshirō was a practitioner of co-learning and empathy in the community. This philosophy has been inherited by today's "museum as a forum" theory and has evolved into a philosophy of "co-creation"—the collaborative construction of knowledge.

Based on this analysis, four key directions are proposed:

- **Repositioning Institutions:** Establish a unified legal framework, including for national museums, and secure the professional system and research foundation for directors and curators.
- **Repositioning Philosophy:** Conceptualize exhibitions as forums to share social memories, including negative histories.
- **Repositioning Finance and Professionalism:** Shift away from media dependency and build autonomous cultural management centered on collections.
- **Repositioning Personnel:** Cultivate and deploy liaison personnel who complement directors and curators, taking on roles of collaboration and coordination.

Through this four-pronged repositioning, the museum will be reborn not as a mere educational or tourist facility but as a forum of knowledge for society to reflect upon itself. Integrating the philosophies of Tanahashi's "education that appeals to the eye," Tsuruta's "living museum," Itō's "open up, museums!," and Cameron/Yoshida's "forum theory" and reconstructing each layer of institutions, philosophy, professionalism, and personnel is the task for museology in the 21st century.

Endnotes:

- 1 Ito 1986; 1991.
- 2 See Yajima 2009.
- 3 See Hamada 2010.
- 4 See Kubouchi 1996.
- 5 Tanahashi 1930.
- 6 See Handa 2021.
- 7 Tsuruta 1956.
- 8 Hiramatsu 2010; Shimizu 2010.
- 9 Hashiba 2010.
- 10 Yokoyama 2010.
- 11 Inuzuka 2009.
- 12 Kaneko 2010.
- 13 See Kuriyama 2012; 2019.
- 14 Inuzuka 2008.
- 15 Inuzuka 2008.
- 16 Yamamoto 2011.
- 17 Kaneko 2010.
- 18 Cameron 1971.
- 19 Yoshida 2013.
- 20 Koga 2020.
- 21 Science Council of Japan 2023.

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