

# Career Transitions for Museum Curators in Japan: A Case Study

Mari Watanabe

## Keywords:

*Museum curator; Career transitions; Interview; Qualitative and quantitative research; Museum Act*

## ABSTRACT:

The aim of this study was to identify the actual conditions and factors of career transitions in the career development of Japanese museum curators. Questionnaires (135 respondents) and semi-structured interviews (52 respondents) were conducted with experienced curators, and SCAT analysis was used to examine the structure of career transitions. The interviews revealed that many of the narratives were based on self-efficacy, «don't give up», and showed autonomous career restructuring due to professional identity and psychological capital, even under institutional constraints. On the other hand, the 'lack of room' symbolised by 'lack of time, manpower and budget' constrains curators' competence building and training opportunities. Curatorial career stability is essential for maintaining the quality of museum activities, suggesting the need for redesigning institutional support and ongoing research.

L'obiettivo di questo studio è identificare le condizioni reali e i fattori che caratterizzano le transizioni di carriera (career transitions) nello sviluppo professionale dei curatori museali giapponesi. Sono stati somministrati questionari (135 rispondenti) e condotte interviste semi-strutturate (52 rispondenti) a curatori esperti; l'analisi SCAT è stata utilizzata per esaminare la struttura delle transizioni di carriera. Le interviste hanno rivelato che molte delle narrazioni si fondavano sull'autoefficacia, sulla volontà di "non arrendersi", e mostravano una ristrutturazione autonoma della carriera grazie all'identità professionale e al capitale psicologico, anche in presenza di vincoli istituzionali. D'altro canto, la "mancanza di spazio", simboleggiata da "carenza di tempo, personale e budget", limita le opportunità di formazione e costruzione delle competenze dei curatori. La stabilità della carriera curatoriale è essenziale per mantenere la qualità delle attività museali, suggerendo la necessità di ripensare il supporto istituzionale e promuovere una ricerca continua.

## Mari Watanabe

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## I. Background and Purpose

### I-1. Research Background

I am interested in the career design of curators working in museums.<sup>1</sup> This is because, even during the period when lifetime employment was common in Japan, curators were observed not only building their careers within a single organization but also moving to other museums or transitioning to other professions—such as university faculty, —by leveraging their curatorial experience. This represents a unique approach to career formation compared with typical workers in for-profit organizations. It contrasts sharply with the career path of university faculty as professionals, for whom it is common to complete a doctoral program, obtain a degree, and then proceed directly into teaching. The fact that some individuals become university faculty in specific fields after gaining experience as curators is also distinctive from the perspective of university academic career formation.

Thus, curatorial career development is distinctive not only compared to typical workers in for-profit organizations but also with other professional roles (research positions). It is characterized by frequent occurrences of what management studies terms “career transitions.”

“Transition” denotes a “turning point,” “pivotal moment,” or “shift.” Research on “career transitions” focuses on these pivotal moments or milestones occurring during the transition process in professional life, examining the nature of decision-making involved in such choices.<sup>2</sup> Management studies pursue

ways to effectively manage organizations in changing environments using the four resources of people, materials, money, and information. Within this field lies the research domain concerning human resource management and careers. Therefore, this study adopts museum studies as its primary disciplinary framework and incorporates concepts from career research in management studies as an analytical lens, thereby taking an interdisciplinary approach.

The total number of curators in Japan, as well as those assigned to individual institutions, remains small.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, research on their careers has not been sufficiently accumulated, and there is a pressing need to visualize the current situation.

Japan’s Museum Act, which defines museum activities, was enacted in 1951. Over 70 years have passed since then, and as societal conditions have changed, the roles and functions expected of museums have diversified and become more sophisticated. Particularly since the 2017 amendments to related laws<sup>4</sup> and the 2022 revision of the Museum Act (effective 2023), emphasis has been placed on advancing the digital archiving of museum materials and utilizing museum collections in line with the spirit of the Basic Act on Culture and the Arts.<sup>5</sup> The scope of museum activities has broadened, and the capabilities required of curators have changed and expanded. Conversely, a fundamental review of the curator system itself has been postponed.

Meanwhile, a review of the curator system itself has been postponed, and structural issues have been

identified, such as unclear appointment and positioning, and an increase in non-regular employment. In this environment, it is important to visualise curators' career paths, prevent mismatches after employment, and attract talented individuals.

According to the 2019 Comprehensive Survey of Japanese Museums, 43.9% of museums employing full-time curatorial staff hire fixed-term employees.<sup>6</sup> One reason for this practice is the introduction of the Designated Manager System.<sup>7</sup> When museum operations are managed by a fixed-term designated manager, employment under that arrangement must necessarily be time-limited. Additionally, the recent trend of raising the mandatory retirement age has led to cases such as the re-employment of retirees, which also involves fixed-term contracts.

Analysis indicates that 41.8% of full-time curatorial staff at public museums are fixed-term employees, with directly managed museums employing 14.1% and designated management museums employing 33.6%—indicating a higher proportion of fixed-term employees at designated management museums.<sup>8</sup> This represents a decline in the stability of professional positions.

Furthermore, non-regular curators predominantly hold short-term contracts ranging from one to five years. Such brief employment periods make it difficult to accumulate expertise and to undertake continuous specialised tasks within museum operations.

These changes in the employment structure may foster a tendency to undervalue curators' expertise. In recruitment for non-regular staff,

there is a strong emphasis on “immediate contribution” and “work experience.” Among curatorial duties, exhibition planning and educational outreach activities require continuous project development and relationship-building with diverse stakeholders such as owners and local communities. Short-term contracts for non-regular staff may hinder their ability to undertake such responsibilities effectively. If this situation persists, there is a significant risk of undermining the fundamental functions of museums.

Furthermore, the treatment of non-regular staff, including retirement benefits, tends to be inferior to that of regular staff. This makes it difficult to maintain motivation as professionals, raising concerns that the loss of talented and enthusiastic personnel will accelerate. Particularly concerning is the decline in motivation among younger generations, which could lead to insufficient personnel for shaping cultural society in the future.

This situation also poses significant challenges from the perspective of curatorial career development. It involves a disruption of professional expertise due to shortened contract periods and the lack of a promotional system. Being employed on a year-to-year contract renewal basis makes long-term career development difficult. Furthermore, many curators have no guarantee of re-employment after the termination of their contract, resulting in fragmented opportunities to accumulate expertise. This necessitates additional effort to deepen their skills as curators.

This issue affects the reliability and sustainability of museums as public

institutions and requires resolution. Naturally, this demands systemic responses rather than relying solely on individual efforts by each museum.

## I-2. Research Objectives

This study aims to clarify how curators navigate their career paths when facing turning points in their professional lives, and what factors influence their decision-making. This revision aims to clarify why curators are able to reconstruct their careers even under challenging working conditions. Specifically, it involves conducting semi-structured interviews with experienced curators to gather insights on career transitions. Additionally, a questionnaire survey was administered to former curators. This survey was conducted prior to the symposium “Curator Career Transitions: Cases and Their Merits and Demerits” (February 11, 2024, Osaka City University), organized by the Japan Art History Society’s Museum Committee, which the author helped plan. This study analyzes the interview and questionnaire surveys conducted with former curators. Through both surveys, it depicts the characteristics of curators’ career development from its early stages to turning points, their approach to dealing with contingency, and the influence of employment status and systems. In Japan, the curator training system has been administered in accordance with the Enforcement Regulations of the Museum Act, established in 1955.<sup>9</sup>

## I-3. Prior Research

Career studies developed interdisci-

plarily, tracing their origins to early 20th-century economic psychology. Research intensified from the 1970s onward, driven by growing organizational demand for human resources and expanding individual employment opportunities. For a long time, stable careers based on mutual loyalty between organizations and employees were assumed. However, following economic crises and environmental changes, theories focusing on individual careers have expanded.<sup>10</sup>

Specifically, regarding curators, one study examined the developmental process of curators in early adulthood through interviews, building on Levinson’s theory of life-span development.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, research papers on curators’ careers are scarce, with only scattered studies on training programs and students’ career perspectives.

Regarding career transitions, numerous studies have examined the transition from student to working adult. Research limited to specific occupations includes studies on career transitions for doctors and nurses,<sup>12</sup> and studies on career transitions for athletes like J-League players when they retire from competition.<sup>13</sup>

On the other hand, boundaryless careers<sup>14</sup> and protean careers,<sup>15</sup> positioned as new career theories, explain the contemporary tendency to autonomously shape careers across organizational boundaries. Toshihiro Kanai advocates for the simultaneous consideration of both the awareness of pivotal moments in Japanese career design and the utilization of serendipitous opportunities through drift.<sup>16</sup> He integrates this with frameworks such as Kran-

ner's planned serendipity theory, Nicholson's transition cycle, Bridges' three-stage model, and Schlossberg's 4S model. This study draws on these theoretical perspectives to depict, through curators' narratives, the interplay of concrete turning points and preferences, institutional constraints, and serendipity.<sup>17</sup>

## II. Research Methods

### II-1. Research Design and Approach

The study adopts a mixed approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research. In this study, quantitative and qualitative approaches are employed in a complementary manner. Quantitative methods are used to analyze questionnaire survey data in order to identify overall trends, while qualitative analysis based on interview surveys examines how individual curators experienced career transitions within specific contexts shaped by values and constraints. Through this process, the meanings of career development and turning points are analyzed, and the underlying structure of career transitions is elucidated. However, qualitative data analysis (SCAT) is the main focus, while quantitative results are positioned as supplementary. Regarding mixed research methods, Fujita (2021) points out that quantitative and qualitative research have traditionally been divided, with qualitative research tending to be criticised from the perspective of scientific rigour. However, he states that no particular research method should be regarded as absolute, but rather that it is preferable to adopt mixed

research methods that use multiple methods.<sup>18</sup>

As mentioned above, the survey was conducted in February 2024 and targeted curators and former curators across the country, with 135 valid responses. The questions asked covered a wide range of topics, including working patterns, experience of changing jobs, career satisfaction, evaluation of the curatorial system and future intentions. Simple and cross-tabulations were used for quantitative analysis.

For the qualitative research, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 52 respondents. Diversity in age group, gender, building type (public, private, university-affiliated, etc.), work history and experience of changing jobs were ensured and was based on theoretical sampling principles. With regard to the research participants, the primary focus was on curators or former curators who had experienced job changes—either transferring to another museum or moving to a different occupation. In addition, curators (and former curators) who had not changed jobs were also included. This design was adopted in order to compare differences in responses and coping strategies at moments of transition between those who changed jobs and those who did not. Interviews lasted 60–90 minutes and were recorded and transcribed verbatim, after which semantic units were extracted and conceptualised through SCAT analysis.

### II-2. SCAT analysis

SCAT (Steps for Coding and Theorisation) is a qualitative analysis method by Hisashi Otani (2019) and is

characterised by its ability to visualise the process of leading textual data to a theoretical description.<sup>19</sup> In this study, utterances related to career transitions were extracted from verbatim data and analysed in the following four stages:

1. extracting the words of interest from the text
2. paraphrase the word or phrase in other expressions
3. abstracting the paraphrase and organising it as a concept
4. integrating the relationship between multiple concepts into a theoretical description.

SCAT has an explicit, step-by-step analytical procedure, can be applied to relatively small data sets and is accessible to beginners. Another advantage is that the analysis process is visualised,<sup>20</sup> which encourages reflection by the researcher and facilitates third-party verification of the validity of the interpretations. In ensuring reliability and validity, emphasis was placed on ensuring procedural transparency through the SCAT table and the possibility of revisiting the analysis process.

The results of the analysis were organised around three main axes: 1) institutional constraints, 2) social contingencies and 3) personal values. The three analytical axes—institutional constraints, social contingency, and individual values—are not directly embedded in the procedural steps of SCAT itself. Rather, they were employed as an analytical framework at the stage of interpreting and organizing the results. It was found that the interaction

of these factors shapes the turning points in curatorial careers.

### III. Results

#### III-1. Questionnaire survey

As mentioned above, this survey was conducted on the occasion of the Symposium of the Japan Art History Society's Museums Committee, with the aim of ascertaining the current situation of how curators think about their career paths. The target group was those with experience of working as curators at museums in Japan.<sup>21</sup> An online questionnaire (Google Form) was used, and a link was sent by email to members of the society, and sponsoring organisations were also notified of the link. Responses were unsigned and email addresses were not collected; the survey was launched in January 2024 and as of 7 February, 135 had been collected.

#### III-2. Questionnaire Survey Results

##### (1) Sample Characteristics

[Age]A wide range from their 20s to 60s, with the largest group being those in their 30s at 32%. Others were 17% in their 20s, 23% in their 40s, 17% in their 50s, 10% in their 60s, and 1% in their 70s. This aligns with the fact that many curators hold graduate degrees and typically join institutions in their late 20s to 30s upon graduation.

[Gender]Male: 33%, Female: 66%, Other/No Response: 1%. This generally aligns with existing surveys on the gender ratio of museum curators (Male: 26%, Female: 74%).

[Institution Type] Public institutions accounted for 58%, private institutions 18%, national institutions 11%, and others 13%.<sup>22</sup> While public institutions constitute approximately 75% of Japanese museums, this survey also reflects the high proportion of public institutions.

#### (2) Key statistical findings.

[Intention to change jobs] In the question ‘Have you ever thought about changing jobs (e.g. to another museum or university)’, 81% of respondents answered ‘Yes’ (Figure 1). The results suggest that changing jobs is a familiar option for curators, rather than a special one.

[Time of intention] The age group that considered changing jobs was concentrated in the 20s-30s, with 43 respondents in their 20s, 41 in their 30s, 17 in their 40s, 3 in their 50s and 1 in their 60s. In terms of length of service, a certain number of respondents were seen every year

up to the fifth year, with the next peak in the tenth year. This concept can be interpreted in relation to the “exploration” and “establishment” stages in Super’s theory of career development.

In the cross section by age group, those in their 30s had the highest level of intention, followed by those in their 60s. However, those in their 60s were more likely to be influenced by retirement planning, with younger people more likely to consider a career change. The impact of reality shock is also suggested.<sup>23</sup> However, attention should be paid to the reasons for having to move due to fixed-term employment.

In the question ‘After thinking about changing jobs, did you actually change jobs or conduct a job search’, 75% said yes and 25% said no (Figure 2). The rate of transition to actual action is high.

The proportion of respondents who

### Have you ever thought about changing jobs?

n=135

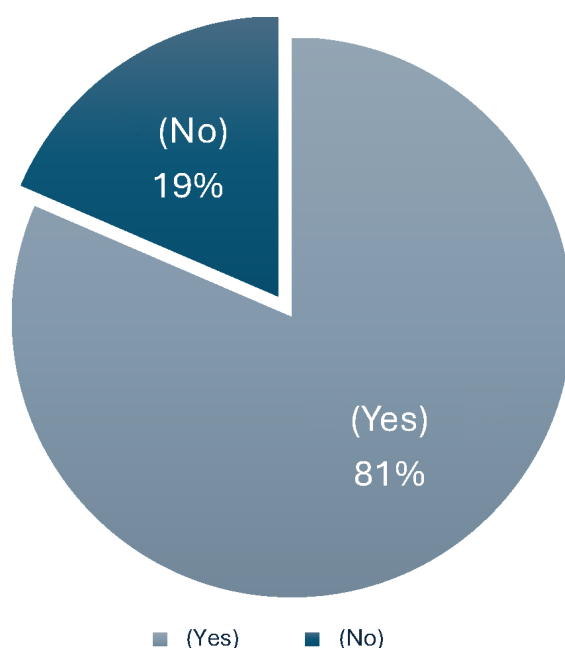


Fig. 1

**After thinking about changing jobs, did you actually change jobs or conduct a job search?**  
n=110

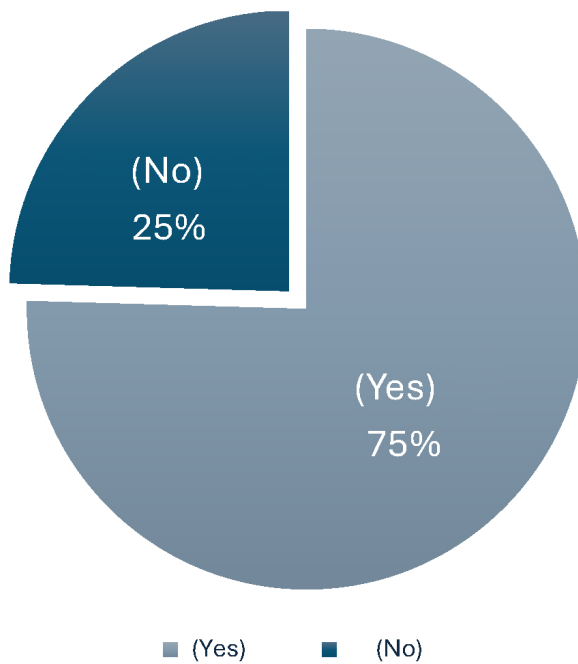


Fig. 2

**whether they would consider changing jobs again if the opportunity arose?**  
n=110

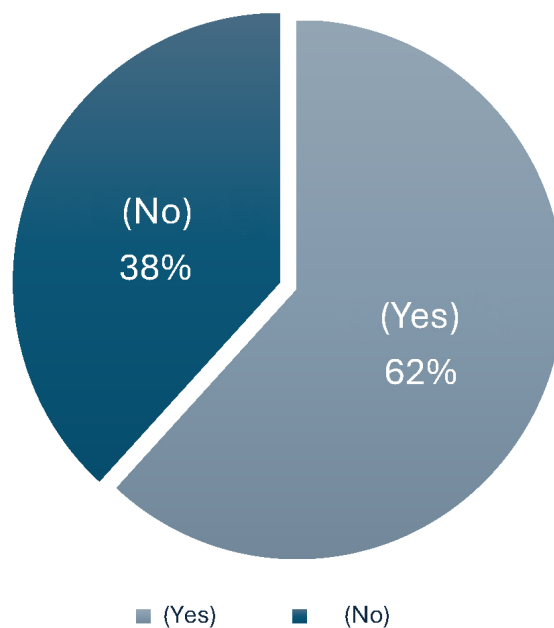


Fig. 3

had changed jobs was 62% (yes) and 38% (no) when asked ‘whether they would consider changing jobs again if the opportunity arose’ (Figure 3).

### (3) Analysis of free-text statements

To analyze the content of free-text responses, a co-occurrence network analysis was conducted as a method for visually representing which words tend to be used together within the textual data.

[General arrangement] The most common reason for changing jobs was “job content”, followed by “human relations” and “research”,<sup>24</sup> and then “contract (non-permanent and fixed-term)”, “workload”, “family”, “benefits” and “local reasons”, among others. On the other hand, the reasons for non-replacement were “satisfaction/satisfaction”, “shallow tenure”, “family”, “satisfactory treatment”, “local” and “research-enabling environment”. With regard to the working environment of curators, the analysis identified several structural issues: (1) employment instability, (2) mismatches in job assignments, (3) the structure of workload burdens, (4) difficulty in securing time for research, and (5) challenges in balancing professional roles with everyday life. Through this analysis, the realities of non-permanent employment became clearly visible.

This study has limitations in that certain aspects could not be addressed in sufficient depth. These limitations are positioned as objectives for subsequent stages of research.

## IV. Interview Survey

### IV-1. Interview Survey

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to clarify the individual realities of curators’ career development and career transitions. The perspective of critical realism was used as an aid, and transparency of reporting was ensured by referring to SRQR (Japanese version).<sup>25</sup> The main subjects were those who had changed jobs from museums to other museums, universities or other industries, including some who ‘did not change jobs’. The fields of specialisation and types of museums were not narrowed down to ensure comparability.

Data collection began in December 2021 and ended on 21 July 2023, with a total of 52 cases. The interviews were conducted in meeting rooms or online, for 1-1.5 hours each time, and were recorded with consent. The language was Japanese. An interview guide was prepared in advance and validated in several pilots. The implementation of the study was not guided by the guide but respected the spontaneous speech of the participants. In terms of ethics, the purpose, scope of use, anonymisation, data management and erasure policies were explained and free-will consent was obtained.

For analysis, the recorded data were verbatim and entered into the SCAT table after a process of immersion in the data through repeated reading.

## IV-2. Interview findings

After extracting each utterance and paraphrasing / conceptualising it, patterns of career transitions were examined. The analysis resulted in the following five types of curatorial careers:

1. continuity type (continuing to work at the same museum while adapting to changes in duties)
2. Transitional (changing jobs to other industries or fields)
3. trans-boundary type (activities that span multiple fields, such as university, government, private sector, etc.)
4. value shift type (redefining roles and attitudes within the job)
5. family factor type (change of career due to marriage, childbirth, nursing care, etc.)

The analysis was organised from three perspectives: institutional and industry trends, socio-economic background and individual career events.

### IV-2-1. Case study 1: Continuing careers: a fusion of ideals and autonomy

The woman had been familiar with the arts since childhood and wanted to become a curator at an early age, but as there were no curatorial courses at university, she devised a way to obtain a qualification. Par-

ticipation in study groups of active curators led to networking and job opportunities. She went on to a master's degree while working part-time amidst family opposition and financial constraints and was employed after publishing in academic journals. After employment, she was approached by several people to change jobs but chose to continue in her current position after comparing research freedom, job satisfaction and compensation. In the future, she has plans to set up an organisation to support curators from the outside.

As an analysis, this is an example of a highly self-directed protégé career, combined with a boundary-less orientation that is willing to change jobs if the conditions are right. The characteristics of the Japanese curatorial system, where academic achievements are linked to employment, can also be confirmed.

### IV-2-2. Case study 2: Transitional careers: redefining expertise

Through her experience as an educator, she was oriented towards museums as a place where she could utilise her own expertise. She emphasised access to job information and the use of her network and made the transition when the contingency opportunity of a vacancy due to her predecessor's illness coincided with a non-institutional scouting opportunity. After the transfer, he focused on on-the-job training, exhibitions, educational activities and the formation of a research infrastructure.

As an analysis, a career development at the intersection of insti-

tutional opportunities (municipal appointment system) and contingencies/networks can be confirmed. Career persistence was observed, as the participants continued with related activities after retirement.

#### IV-2-3. Case 3. (Hybrid)

Cross-Border Career: Multiple Affiliations and Knowledge Circulation

Value Transformation Career: Process of Setbacks and Reattempts

Family-Factor Career: Balancing Life Events

The five types of curatorial careers identified in this study represent diverse forms of adaptation selected under conditions of institutional constraint, and not all interviewees fit neatly into a single type. Moreover, multiple states were often observed within the career of a single curator. In Case 3, for example, three types were identified concurrently.

Pursued undergraduate and graduate studies focused on contemporary art, but after experiencing rejection in job applications, followed her advisor's advice to gain experience at overseas museums. While enrolled in a doctoral program, she accumulated practical experience through museum part-time work and involvement in community art projects. However, she experienced a long hiatus due to dropping out, childbirth, and childcare. After returning to the field, shifted focus to education and outreach, pioneering a new specialized domain.

Analysis reveals: setbacks and interruptions became catalysts for creating new directions; self-direction and adaptability were exercised

based on psychological success; psychological boundary-crossing occurred with role and domain transitions.

#### IV-2-4. Case 4: Value shift type

This case involves a transition from a different industry into a curatorial position. Subsequently, as the individual moved step by step across several roles within the same museum, a shift in work-related values was observed.

#### IV-2-5. Case 5: Family factor type

In this case, family-related factors were found to have influenced the timing and nature of a career turning point.

#### IV-2-6. Themes common across cases:

*“Don't give up” and “No margin for error”*

Many narratives repeatedly conveyed the message “Don't give up” to those following in their footsteps. This stems from a foundation of attachment and pride in their work, where professional identity is established through job experience. Conversely, the common refrain of “no leeway” (regarding time, personnel, or budget) highlights persistent organizational and systemic challenges that individual effort alone cannot overcome amid diversifying work demands. Insufficient training opportunities,<sup>26</sup> lack of research time, and difficulty accessing recruitment information amplify career fluidity and instability.

## V. Discussion

The quantitative–qualitative synthesis of this study reveals that curators' career transitions emerge from the interaction between external environmental factors (informalisation of employment, diversification of work, small organisational size, and dispersion of recruitment information) and internal factors (valuation of expertise, psychological capital, networks, and cross-border learning).

The intention to change jobs was as high as 81%, with actual job changes reaching 75%, and 62% expressing an intention to change jobs again. The main factors were job content, human relations, research opportunities, and the fixed-term nature of employment. This shows that job content and research environment carry greater weight among curators, while working conditions and human relations are common leading factors in the general labour market.

Free-text responses indicated structural problems such as non-regular, single-year contracts, non-specialist assignments, work overload, difficulty in securing research time, and challenges with work–life balance. On the other hand, the rationale for remaining in non-transferable positions was strongly linked to satisfaction, potential for professional growth, and regional orientation.

In the qualitative case study, curators demonstrated the process of developing new directions following setbacks and interruptions in their careers, revealing that psychological capital—hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism—was crystallised in the narrative of “don't give up.” Academic achievements,

knowledge gained through practice, and professional networks supported curatorial activities, and boundaryless movement across organisations, professions, regions, and employment statuses was observed. This illustrates how curators form self-directed careers within current institutional constraints. It became clear that curators, as professionals, undergo a competence-building process that serves as a driver for career transitions.

Conversely, the narrative of “not being able to afford it” referred mainly to a lack of time, lack of manpower, and lack of budget. Some interviewees described being assigned to curatorial posts and having to tackle a succession of tasks before they had acquired sufficient knowledge, skills, or information.

One expected outcome of improving the “can't afford it” situation is the implementation of initiatives to enhance the professional skills of curators. In museums with few staff and small budgets, it is difficult to release curators—who are among the few responsible for museum operations—for training courses. Financial constraints also make it challenging to fund such training. Nevertheless, some curators reported that participation in training fosters personal networking and creates horizontal links among curators. We believe that improvements to the “can't afford it” situation and increased opportunities for training could lead to a more comprehensive training programme, thereby supporting the acquisition of field-related skills.

As Conclusion, recognising the importance of curatorial career stability for maintaining the quality of museum activities—particularly in light of the changing and diversifying roles required of museum research has been conducted to visualise the reality of curatorial careers. The emphasis has been on capturing and analysing how experienced curators perceive their careers as a series of transitions, and how they cope with them. It has been shown that curators shape their careers according to their individual professional identity and psychological capital, even within institutional constraints. Career transitions were categorised into five patterns.

Today, with increasing labour market mobility and the declining ability of organisations to fulfil their functions adequately, individual careers have become highly unstable. Precisely because of this situation, it is desirable to conduct further research on the careers of curators, who form their careers in a self-directed and independent. As a future task, this study should be expanded to examine the institutional nature of curatorial work and to promote a bridge between practice and policy.

**Endnotes:**

1 In this study, the term curator refers to professional staff members of museums as stipulated in Article 4 of Japan's Museum Act. According to the Act, curators are defined as those who are responsible for professional matters related to the collection, preservation, exhibition, and research of museum materials, as well as other activities associated with these functions.

2 Bridges 1980. Bridges' theory of transition is regarded as one of the foundational theoretical contributions to career transition studies and therefore serves as a key theoretical framework for this research. It is evident that career transitions have become increasingly common over the course of an individual's working life, and research on this topic remains active today. In a review of 93 academic articles, Jos Akkermans, Serge P. da Motta Veiga, Andreas Hirschi and Julian Marciniak point out that studies on career transitions have tended to focus theoretically on normative transitions, while paying limited attention to atypical or non-standard transitions, and that much of the existing literature concentrates on single, discrete transition events. In contrast, this study aims to carefully examine the multiple transitions that a single curator may experience over the course of a lifetime and to construct a coherent and integrative understanding of these processes. See Akkermans et al. 2024.

3 *From the Results of the 2021 Comprehensive Survey of Museums: The Actual Management Situation and Issues of Japanese Museums, 2021*, pp. 1-11. [https://www.bunka.go.jp/seisaku/bunkashingikai/hakubutsukan/hakubutsukan01/05/pdf/92826001\\_02.pdf](https://www.bunka.go.jp/seisaku/bunkashingikai/hakubutsukan/hakubutsukan01/05/pdf/92826001_02.pdf).

4 *Law Partially Amending the Basic Law for the Promotion of Culture and the Arts*, Agency for Cultural Affairs website, [https://www.bunka.go.jp/seisaku/bunka\\_gyosei/shokan\\_horei/kihon/geijutsu\\_shinko/index.html](https://www.bunka.go.jp/seisaku/bunka_gyosei/shokan_horei/kihon/geijutsu_shinko/index.html).

5 *Agency for Cultural Affairs, Museums Comprehensive Website - Outline of the Amendment to the Law*, <https://museum.bunka.go.jp/law/>.

6 *Report on the Comprehensive Survey of Japanese Museums*, p. 80. <https://www.j-muse.or.jp/02program/pdf/R2sougoutyousa.pdf>.

The fixed-term employment refers to employment arrangements in which the labor contract specifies a termination date and does not guarantee continuation beyond the following fiscal or academic year, even in cases of renewal. In the context of curatorial employment, such arrangements typically take the form of non-regular, term-limited, or part-time positions. In public museums, a high proportion of curators are employed as fiscal-year-based contract staff.

7 The Designated Manager System is a system under which the management authority of public facilities established by local governments is delegated to private entities designated by those governments, with the aim of improving public services through the utilization of private-sector expertise. This system forms part of broader administrative reforms influenced by the global trend of New Public Management (NPM) and was implemented following revisions to the Local Autonomy Act in 2003. As a result, the diversification of managing bodies has progressed, leading to substantial changes in the employment structures of professional staff and in the underlying conditions for career formation. The system has also been introduced in museums, with around 27% of all public museums continuing to use the designated manager system. See *Report on the Comprehensive Survey of Japanese Museums*, p. 45. When operations were shifted from direct municipal management to private operators, personnel costs were curbed and the expansion of non-regular employment became widespread in some aspects.

8 Suginaga 2015, p. 12.

9 There are currently several means of obtaining curatorial qualifications. One is to complete credits at a university or junior college, or to pass the qualification certification conducted by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. Since the 1970s, the number of museums has increased as the Japanese economy has grown.

The number of curatorial qualifications obtained through curatorial training courses has also increased considerably. Students who follow the curriculum and receive a specialised education obtain the qualification of their dreams, but only a limited number are able to pass through the even narrower gate and obtain a curatorial position. These curators become valuable human resources who can play an active role in museum activities or continue to transmit information as cultural workers even after leaving the museum. The author is involved in this training system as a part-time lecturer.

10 Komatsu 2017.

11 Kanayama 2010; Levinson et al. 1962.

12 Yoshida 2010.

13 Kiyoshi, Kozaburo 2010; Ogawa 2009.

14 Arthur 1994.

15 Hall 2004.

16 Kanai 2010. Kanai, while influenced by Schein's career theory, developed his own unique theory depicting the transformation of labor in Japanese society. For Schein, see Schein 1991-

17 The following theoretical literature may also be consulted: Tsuruta 1980; Ishiyama 2024.

18 Fujita 2021, p. 55.

19 Otani 2019.

20 In SCAT, visualize refers to the structured process by which concepts are extracted through a step-by-step analytical procedure. In this sense, SCAT enables the visualization of career transition analysis.

21 In this study, the term museum refers to institutions as defined in Article 2 of Japan's Museum Act. According to the Act, a museum is an institution whose purpose is to collect, preserve, and exhibit materials related to history, art, folklore, industry, natural science, and related fields; to make these materials available to the general public with appropriate educational consideration; to carry out activities necessary to contribute to public education, research, and recreation; and, concurrently, to conduct research on these materials. This definition is also consistent with the internationally accepted definition of museums articulated by ICOM International Council of Museums.

22 In this study, the term public museum refers to museums established by local governments and includes both municipally operated museums and those managed under the Designated Manager System. By contrast, national museums refer to museums established by the national government and currently operated as Independent Administrative Institutions. The transformation of employment structures examined in this study has occurred most prominently within the public museum sector.

23 Reality shock refers to a phenomenon that anyone may experience shortly after entering employment. Although individuals begin their professional careers with ideals and expectations, they may encounter disappointment when the reality of work differs from what they had anticipated, or experience shock at the severity of conditions that do not align with their ideals. Ogata 2007, p. 14.

24 Research activities undertaken by curators can be broadly divided into two categories: research conducted as part of museum operations, such as studies of materials held in museum collections, and research in fields specific to curators that may have originated during their student years. In some cases, these two forms of research coincide, while in others they diverge.

25 SRQR (Standards for Reporting Qualitative Research) is an international guideline that specifies how qualitative research—such as interview studies, participant observation, and document analysis—should be reported in terms of structure and content. The

Japanese version is a translation of the SRQR prepared for Japanese researchers and is commonly used as a checklist when writing qualitative research articles. In this study, Section 2 was developed in accordance with the topics addressed by the SRQR.

26 With regard to the training of curators, responsibility lies primarily with individual museums. After completing formal coursework in curator training programs and entering curatorial positions, curators may participate in training opportunities offered by the Agency for Cultural Affairs, prefectural museum councils, or museum-related professional organizations. However, participation in such programs is limited due to restricted capacity, resulting in relatively few opportunities. Furthermore, interview data revealed that curators are often overwhelmed by day-to-day museum operations, leaving them with little or no time to participate in external training programs.

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