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Foster the Diversification of Values to Promote a Mutually Respectful Coexistence

Shigekatsu Mineo, MUA Director

According to the 2013 summary statistics on longevity, published from the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, the average life span of Japanese male and female were 80.21 and 86.61, respectively. The expected ratio of those who will record longevity up to age 90 was 23.1% for male and 47.2% for female.

The 2014 white paper on aged society, published from the cabinet office, reported that Japan's population as of October 1, 2013 was 127.3 million. Of this total, the relative share of those aged at 65 or over accounted for 25.1% (generally termed the elderly population ratio), one percent increase over the previous year. The aforementioned two statistics clearly show that Japan is a full-fledged aged society.



On the other hand, the 2010 national census, published from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, reported that the age cohort-specific singles ratio for male was 71.8% at ages 25 – 29, 47.3% at ages 30 – 34, and 35.6% at ages 35 – 39. The corresponding figures for female showed 60.3%, 34.5% and 23.1%, respectively. The data shows a clear increasing trend in the singles ratio in the 25 – 39 age cohort of both male and female.

We have a shared concern from the above data, concerning the declining birthrate, the future of our pension system which is based on the cross-generational family support, and the shrinkage of working age cohort, among others. These issues are well known as critical challenges Japan faces today.

From the viewpoint of diversification in values, Japan is expected to enter an era where it will have to face more difference in values and more changes in life style across generations. It is characteristic of an extremely aged society.

I think that the prevalence of diversified values and our tolerance of such diversity have much in common with international exchanges. Tolerance of other people's values is by no means a yes-man attitude. It is possible only after you have established your own identity or values. In other words, it is an attitude to foster a mutually respectful coexistence.

In Japan we have good traditions and culture which have been inherited over generations. However, I have concern that these precious assets have been diluted recently, under the influence of value diversification and societal changes. I am also concerned about the decline in human interactions.

(To be continued on P. 11)

The 2014 MUA Symposium
Beyond the Road to the 2020 Tokyo Olympic & Paralympic Games

Date: February 28, 2015

Place: Libra Hall, Minato Park Shibaura

We had the pleasure of having the following distinguished panelists for our annual flagship event. The presentations and discussions were moderated by Mr. Hiroshi Nagano, MUA Vice President.

Dr. Yoshio Nakamura

Professor Emeritus, Tokyo Institute of Technology

Mr. Masatoshi Yasuda

Deputy Director, Secretariat Office of the Minato City Board of Education;
former Director, Machi-zukuri Support Office, of Minato City

Ms. Mamiko Akutagawa

Director, Hachioji-Takiyama Michino-eki Station

Opening remark by Ms. Takai, MUA president:

The Tokyo Olympiad, held 50 years ago, worked as the catapult for Japan's economic growth in the following years. It took place 20 years after Japan's defeat in the last war. We hope that the 2020 Olympiad will mark the start of Tokyo's pursuit of an ideal mature city. We also hope that today's discussion will enlighten us on the prospect of a matured city Tokyo which will be characterized by hope, peace of mind, happy life, safety and attraction under the preservation of world peace.

Congratulatory remark by Makio Koike, Director of the Minato City Board of Education:

The Minato UNESCO Association had made significant contributions to the local community by offering programs to foster cross-cultural exchange and mutual understanding. Major activities include cross-cultural awareness lectures, world cooking workshops, introduction of traditional Japanese culture, and youth forum with foreign students.

Minato City is an international community which accommodates a total of 81 foreign embassies, international organizations and foreign business corporations. Many people visit our community day after day for academic, sightseeing and business purposes. Minato City offers more hotel rooms than any other community in Tokyo. It also undertakes the hub functions in transportation, with Haneda Airport for airplanes, with Tokyo Bay for boats, and with railway stations for shinkansen. In addition Minato City is a center for information dissemination with TV and other broadcasting stations.



Mr. Koike

Minato City will be a central place during the 2020 Olympic & Paralympic Games. Capitalizing on this opportunity, we are taking measures to step up disaster prevention and multi-linguistic offering of services. We hope that those efforts will make our community further safe and comfortable for those who live, work, study or visit there, and that local citizens will take more pride in their home ground.

I trust that today's symposium will offer useful viewpoints for Minato City as well. Let me conclude my speech by wishing further success of the Minato UNESCO Association.

The following is a summary of the symposium:

Mr. Nagano, MUA Vice President and Moderator

I think that it is all the more important for citizens to think about today's theme because Minato City will play an important role in 2020. Thanks to Mr. Koike's message, I renewed my awareness of the significance to hold today's symposium on the theme.

Keynote Speech by Dr. Nakamura

Profile: Graduated from the faculty of engineering, the University of Tokyo. His professional career includes engineer for the Japan Highway Public Corporation; assistant professor at the University of Tokyo; professor at Tokyo Institute of Technology; professor at Kyoto University's graduate school. Major architectures of his design include Tokyo Gate Bridge; Haneda Esplanade; Ota River Motomachi Bank; and the Park of Koga (Melina Mercouri International Prize awarded). Major publications include *Fuukeigaku Nyuumon*, *Fuukeigaku Jissen-hen*, *Doboku-kuukan no Zoukei*, and *Toshi wo tsukuru fuukei*.

Mature City:

There could be many interpretations about a mature city. It could mean a city in an era characterized by internationalization, low-birthrate and longevity. The framework of large cities in either Tokyo or the West, was shaped in around the mid-19th century. Indispensable components for a city were created, including department stores, hotels, theaters and parks. There could be an interpretation that the frameworks and components have continued to change slightly, era by era, and are gradually heading toward an era of mature cities.



Dr. Nakamura

Parks:

Parks in major cities like London, Paris or New York originated in the mid-19th century. Formerly there weren't large-scale sites of greenery. In contrast, Japan has traditionally had park-like sites called Jinja-Bukkaku (shrines and temples) from time immemorial. These were actually full-fledged parks. Some of them even had public quarters inside.

Tokyo in olden times – a case study of the principle for city development:

From my viewpoint, the most interesting spots in Tokyo exist in its central area which corresponds to today's Minato City. We should have pride in the old town of Edo which was geographically embraced by the sea and the mountains. Our ancestors were always very mindful of the location of their dwelling. It has much to do with our love of nature in Japan.

When Ota Dokan entered the Edo Castle for the first time, he composed a poem, praising the scenic beauty of Mt. Fuji and the sea. In those days, the Tokyo Bay was indented up to today's palace-side square where pine forests grew.

People loved spots located within the central part of large cities where they could feel the close embrace of nature. They used to call such spot as "Meisho" as the term Koen or park was not yet in their vocabulary. There were many Meisho's throughout Japan which comprised greenery, scenic views of mountain or sea, as well as people's gathering quarters. We should preserve those spots as our precious assets. The site of Arisugawa Park in Hiroo used to be the Date clan's estate in the Edo period. Even today, it offers the atmosphere of a deep valley and continues to be an attraction in Minato City.

In the Edo period, there was a Shitamachi downtown with hustle & bustle at the valley location whereas there was a quiet Yamanote residential area for samurai's at the top of the slope. This downtown continues to function as the center of Azabu Juban streets. During the post-war recovery period, a small public square was formed and today you can see coffee shops and other stores opened in the vicinity. You can spend leisurely time drinking coffee in such shops as you watch the cozy square. This square is a well-known park in the history of city planning.

It is very interesting to see the coexistence of lively towns and beautiful nature, in harmony with the local topography. In particular, topography in Azabu and Roppongi areas are quite complicated. The Musashino Daichi plateau stands several tens of meters above the sea level at the high locations. Along topographical walls of the complicated border areas, we can see a variety of remains of the way of life in the Edo period. While there are old gardens at the bottom area of the valley, preserved since the Edo period, you can see today modern architectures built in the circumference. It makes a very intriguing contrast.

Concerning the Roppongi Hills, various opinions and criticism have been expressed from the viewpoint of community development. We should note that it has been a traditional method in Japan to fence in a single spacious land and develop a town inside. Therefore, Roppongi Hills may be categorized into the so-called “Keidai” town model. In a similar token, Myoshinji and Daitokuji temples in Kyoto fenced in an enormous land space, respectively, and developed a religious town where many houses were built for accommodating priests and temple facilities.

When we think of a city in an age of maturity, I’d like to propose that we review the historical process of cities’ development so that we can develop new cities in a good man/nature harmony, preserving the original topography.

Cities in the future:

The Odaiba waterfront area, highlighted by the Rainbow Bridge, is a typical example of large-scale town developments. It is a big challenge to work out good plans for the area. Odaiba and Odaiba Kaihin Park became spots of great attraction, including the scenic night view, and symbolize the image of a “New Tokyo.” About 20 years have passed since commercial facilities were newly built in the area. I wonder if they can commercially survive in the future by simply staying in the current status. When we consider parks as modern city facilities, it is very important how to arrange their surrounding environment because the future image of modern cities will be shaped thereby.

Japanese cities have had a tradition to build a kind of public verandas at the waterfront and enjoy the atmosphere. For example, Kyoto has the “Kamogawa Nouryo-doko” veranda which demonstrates a typical model of banquet places facing a river. These facilities are not parks in their function and different in concept from park models in the West. They have been popular spots, combining elements of both town amusement and natural elegance. I would call them “Town Gardens,” and hope that more facilities of this type will be built in the future.

It will be a challenge for us how to modernize these traditional models. Would it not be possible to let the Odaiba deck function as a waterfront terrace? It will be an idea to modify somewhat the current Odaiba Park, located in a mature city, into a more enjoyable spot with attractive scenery. We should also give a thought to commercial elements. Places of greenery could be combined successfully with commercial functions to be developed into sociable communities.

Agricultural regions in Japan used to have “Iriaichi” in their communities. These were the places where villagers gathered to engage in grass mowing, mushroom hunting, fishing, or festivity making, among others. In the West, these places were called “Commons.” I’d like to propose that places of greenery in Japan be developed into a kind of “Urban Commons,” similar in their nature to “Iriaichi.”

Mr. Masatoshi Yasuda:

Minato City will observe in 2016 the 70th anniversary of its municipal establishment. Today we have the following five administrative areas in the city – Shiba, Azabu, Akasaka, Takanawa and Shibaura-Kona. The Board of Education where I belong addresses not just school education but also life-long learning and sports programs for our citizens. Cities are always growing and there is no end to the growth. Therefore city building is an eternally transitional process where endless updates of service function are required.

The architectural activities in Tokyo are regulated by Building Standards Act, City Planning Act and City Parks Act, among others. In recent years, mega cities comparable to Tokyo have emerged overseas, including Singapore, Shanghai and Dubai. The Japanese government has been concerned about the ongoing trend that business activities have been shifting from Tokyo to those new cities. This is the background which motivated the government to come up with the idea of Designated Areas for Emergent City Streamlining & Renewal, as a way of mitigating the regulations which address city planning.

Let me cite an example of a park project, involving a hotel renewal, which will demonstrate Minato City's commitment to preserve, create and expand greenery in its communities. I was Director of Minato City Machi-zukuri Support Office then.

Hotel Okura is located in Toranomon, within the Designated Areas for Emergent City Streamlining & Renewal. It is an internationally acknowledged hotel in Japan, well known for its dedicated hospitality. Because the hotel stands within the city plan park area, it was imperative to design the entire hotel site as a park. The similar requirements apply to Zojoji Temple owned by a religious entity, as well as Tokyo Prince Hotel and Prince Park Tower which are owned by the Seibu Group. It is because these architectures also stand within the Toritsu Shiba Park which is a city plan park.



Mr. Yasuda

Hotel Okura stands on a site owned by the Hotel Okura Corporation. Of the total private property, a 1.33 hectare portion was designated in 1957 as Reinan-zaka Park, subject to the Minato City-administered city plan park regulation. Several years ago, the Hotel Okura Corporation came up with a reconstruction plan. Although the hotel site was a privately owned property, it was located within the city plan park area and was therefore regulated strictly by law concerning the reconstruction plan. Minato City was of opinion that the internationally renowned hotel should not be excluded from within the city plan park area but that the hotel site should be surrounded by enough greenery to avoid the emergence of a tasteless environment.

During our negotiation with the hotel management, Minato City presented its municipal vision. Our objective was to secure more space for greenery, which in turn would become not only a space for pleasant walking and environmental betterment but also a safe space for disaster evacuees. We also asked the hotel management to bear the costs for the green park management, to avoid the infusion of citizens' tax. Should Minato City be hit by a large-scale earthquake, we would expect the hotel to offer initial post-disaster support to our citizens. This is the process Minato City reached a mutually agreeable contract with the hotel management, thereby imposing necessary regulations on the reconstruction plan.

Based on the contract, Hotel Okura decided to start the reconstruction of its main building sometime this year (2015) so that the new architecture, comprising a high-rise tower and a medium-height tower, will be completed in time for the 2019 World Cup rugby games and the 2020 Tokyo Olympiad.

Community building is an endless human effort. From our municipal administrative viewpoint, it is imperative to impose certain requirements when we deal with new business projects. These requirements will secure basic public benefits while also approving a reasonable degree of free planning to applicants. This kind of negotiation would enable the preservation, creation and expansion of greenery in our community.

Mass media seldom reports on Minato City's efforts in community building but only mention the names of related developers. For example, mass media gave credit to the developer which constructed Roppongi Hills and Ark Hills when the Mori Park was rebuilt and the cherry blossoms spot was created within the sites, respectively. In each case, behind the scene, Minato City was

engaged in a hard negotiation with the developer to secure greenery for the community. I hope that our citizens will become more aware of these invisible efforts.

How would you define a city? What kind of roles should it play for the citizens? The entity which keeps a city rolling is human beings, including legal persons or corporations. They manage and administer a city. On the other hand, the driving force for human action is emotion. During the past 20 years, Japan has twice experienced large-scale disasters. These tragedies motivated us to renew our awareness of important roles which a city should undertake.

I think that city administrators should make it a policy to create a city where citizens would feel motivated to improve, renew and activate themselves. For this purpose, we should work out measures to provide necessary systems and environment for our citizens. When the public sector alone cannot provide enough financial resources, hardware or software, it is often the case that the city administrators expect cooperation from such business corporations as are keenly aware of their corporate social responsibility.

Minato City is located at the center of Tokyo, the capital of Japan. Looking to the 2020 Olympiad, I'd like to propose "Endless Renewal of City Functions" as the key word of our municipal policy. Whether the objective is greenery, facilities or culture, it is in the responsibility of a city administration to work out a framework which delivers required services to the people who live or work in the city or to those who visit the city. I believe that this policy is the key to the realization of a mature city.

Ms. Mamiko Akutagawa:

Japanese superhighways have parking areas at every 15km and service areas at every 50km, except in Hokkaido. However, once you get off superhighways, you cannot find any service facilities on the way before you reach tourists resorts. To solve this problem, a movement started in 1993 to build free-of-charge rest facilities, which are collectively called tourism-oriented "Michino-eki" or roadside stations.



Ms. Akutagawa

Autonomous local governments have to submit applications to the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism for registration to build the said Michino-eki. In most cases, autonomies own both land and buildings and manage the system in a third sector method. However, the number of a new method, called the designated operator system, has been increasing where autonomies entrust to the private sector the entire operation of their Michino-eki. Hachioji-Takiyama is a typical model of such new method.

The start in 2007 of Hachioji-Takiyama, the first of Michino-eki in Tokyo, marked the prevalence of such facility in all prefectures throughout Japan. At present there are a total of 1,040 registered Michino-eki's, which are mainly built along the way to tourist resorts. Gifu, Yamaguchi and Tochigi Prefectures are the leading owners of such facilities.

Michino-eki, as specified by the said ministry, must meet the following three requirements:

1. Serviceable 24/7 as a place for rest, with a free parking lot, lavatory and public telephone.
2. It must provide information on the local community, its vicinity, transportation, etc. How to present such information is at the operator's discretion. At Hachioji-Takiyama, we are using a large-size display panel.
3. It must promote visitors' understanding of the community through the sale of local products or otherwise. At Hachioji-Takiyama, we operate a direct sale shop of agricultural and processed products while also offering cultural information on Hachioji.

In most cases, autonomies undertakes only the care of the physical facility and outsources the remaining work to a designated operator by establishing a third sector model. The original major

objective of Michino-eki was to invigorate the dynamism of the community. However, an increasing number of autonomies started to outsource the entire operation of such facilities to the private sector.

Let me elaborate on my current position. I became a station master of the Hachioji-Takiyama Michino-eki at the request of a private company which had become a designated operator with its managerial work entrusted by Hachioji City. I am expected mainly to contribute my networking capabilities, involving various local organizations, to the regional prosperity of the entire Hachioji City, through the Michino-eki operation. The Hachioji-Takiyama Michino-eki is located in a community which was merged into Hachioji City in 1959. Although it is close to the superhighway interchange, the challenge has been the lack of local infrastructure.

During the Edo Period, Hachioji thrived as a major post town, thanks to its convenient location for travelers. It also prospered as a center of sericulture and silk textiles. Today Hachioji has a total of 23 universities, including those located in its periphery. Many citizens commute to central Tokyo from new towns. It is quite a challenge to integrate the whole Hachioji, comprising communities with varied background.

In our Michino-eki, we opened a store named “Farm Takiyama” which addresses the promotion of “Locally Produced, Locally Consumed” campaign. Thanks to its meritorious difference from ordinary superstores, the direct sales outlet has been recording gratifying sales. The store activates the community because it introduces local people and products while also providing opportunities for people to interact and have fun.

To our great pleasure, our facility has been cited as the only successful model of Michino-eki in urban areas. We look forward to welcoming your visit in the near future.

Panel Discussion:

Mr. Nagano, Moderator:

Let me explain why we selected the theme this time. The 1964 Olympiad provided an opportunity for Tokyo to undergo a drastic societal change. Likewise, we'd like to expect the 2020 Olympic & Paralympic to achieve whatever possible transformation of Tokyo in a positive way. We thought that Tokyo should seek an objective to become a more mature city and society.

During the discussion session, we'd like to invite comments from our panelists, with a focus on the following four viewpoints:

1. Future image of mega city Tokyo
2. Clues or suggestions received from the urban model of Michino-eki
3. What about Minato City?
4. Required innovations and human resources to achieve our goals



Mr. Nagano

Dr. Nakamura:

I've been interested in the following two subjects:

One is the interaction between human beings and nature, as well as the interaction between human beings and topography. Japanese people have had a keen interest in the shape of land or nature. We have maintained a religious attitude toward mountains or nature. Minato City has a very interesting topography and terrace shape. I hope that the citizens renew their awareness of the topographical characteristic of the community.

Apart from parks built on large-scale sites of greenery, we come across dense trees and beautiful flowers grown in the gardens of private homes. They present a very delightful scenery. We have a long established cultural and historical tradition not to clearly separate nature-made objects from man-made objects. I think that we can apply this mindset and perceive urban scenery as a fusion of natural and artificial objects.

The other subject which attract me is the interaction among human beings. I talked about the case of Odaiba in terms of commerce a while ago. We are no longer in an age where sales is everything. Today you must transform commercial facilities into a creative and sociable model where people can have fun simply by being there. It holds true with the case of Hachioji-Takiyama Michino-eki mentioned in Ms. Akutagawa's presentation. If you ever build a commercial facility, you should make it a fun place. If people stay long hours at the facility, they are likely to spend money for shopping. It may not be easy to introduce a Michino-eki model into a place like Odaiba but it should be feasible with committed efforts.



Mr. Nagano and Dr. Nakamura

If there was anything missing in the city of Japan, that would be a “salon” like atmosphere or setting where people can enjoy social exchanges. Many coffee shops are made chain stores, and hotel lobbies became less attractive recently. From a professional viewpoint, the number of benches is getting less and the places you can sit on at the railway platforms are also getting less.

Attractiveness and dignity of city is that you feel enjoyable only if you are there in the city, you enjoy chatting with others or enjoy meeting people.

As Mr. Yasuda pointed out, a city is where people feel a mixture of emotions, fully enjoy association with others, and it must have a place where people can relax apart from the business. Seeking a city with such a “salon” like atmosphere may be the way to a “mature city”.

Ms. Akutagawa:

A “Silk Road” in Hachioji was famous where silk fabric was transported to Yokohama and was particularly popular as “Japan Silk”. There was also a “Coal Road” where coal produced in Hachioji was shipped from Asakawa to the center of Edo via Tamagawa river, and delivered to the inner palace in Tokugawa (Edo) Shogunate. Thus, I believe that roads play very important roles.

Mr. Nagano:

The lobby of Hotel Okura mentioned before is very spacious and I often spent some time there. You need to walk around if you want to know the interesting aspects of the landscape. You may feel it's tough to do so in Minato-ku as there are many slopes there.

Mr. Yasuda:

What I would like to stick to in terms of being involved in the urban development is what are required in developing a city that makes no loser. What is important is to get rid of such conflicting concepts as people working in the city and those live in there, Japanese nationals and foreign nationals, etc. Minato City is the intersection of various things. Buildings are built in residential sections, while high-rise condominiums are built in business district. What business people feel comfortable about is the same as what inhabitants feel comfortable about. Thus, if the business districts are provided with a comfortable environment, then, people should feel comfortable in living there as well. This is the city I would like to develop.

Q & A Session with the audience:

Mr. A: I understood from the presentations that what we expect out of the city are rich natural environment, wealth of culture and plentiful amusements for people. This is the city that we expect to be built. It is also necessary to sort out the architectural structures built during the rapid growth years and became useless anymore. I feel that Tokyo is moving very dynamically toward the Olympic Games in the year 2020. I see many facilities being built in many places of Tokyo recently. However, I do not believe that what is happening right now in Tokyo is totally along with the direction that the panelists talked about today.

Mr. Yasuda: Because of the many institutional requirements on the urban development, there exist limitations on what Minato City can do. There may be a case where what Tokyo Metropolitan Government plans to do differs from that of Minato City. Those places with ample space are under the control of Tokyo and, therefore, are difficult to reflect the voices of local autonomous community. We believe that Minato City should have a control over the development of places located in the city though those places are big in size



Mr. Yasuda and Ms. Akutagawa

Dr. Nakamura: The development in Minato City is all in all along the sea. We have to admit concerns about this in terms of disaster prevention. Furthermore, we need to think about the issues associated with the water transport. In all of the traditional shopping, entertainment and residential districts of Tokyo, especially Sumida City and Fukagawa district, many canals are not fully utilized. We would like Minato City to study how to better cope with this issue. It is technically possible to make the most use of the water transport, but it requires a financial infusion. Even if pretty paths are paved along the canals, it does not fascinate people with all the buildings built facing rearward.

Urban development includes the facility building which belongs to private sectors. This makes the thing complicated. Whether we can successfully cope with this issue would be the way to the mature city. Harmonious coexistence of complex housing and the nature can technically be made possible. If Minato City could present such a model, it should serve as the precedent to other cities in Japan.

Mr. B: I visited the roadside station in Hachioji City, and found it very enjoyable. You often encounter with the shuttered shopping areas on your trip to rural areas. A traveler can never enjoy a place where local people do not enjoy their lives there.

Mr. C: We have a suburban type roadside station in my hometown. The station sells local products and functions as the place for cultural exchanges and local communications.

Mr. D: The 2020 Olympic/Paralympic Games are held in Tokyo, and Minato City shall be the core place for hosting the games. Foreign tourists visiting Minato City should increase from now on. Therefore, it is necessary to build up the infrastructure for such “soft-power” as voluntary staffs who can communicate with foreign tourists. Various kinds of people from the world come in to a big city which attracts many people from outside of Japan. We expect that such city is equipped with ample security measures through building a friendly network with foreign cities.

Mr. Nagano: I was a bit uncertain if today’s symposium would attract many audiences. I was reassured, however, that, with such a big audience, taking up today’s issue is quite important. I would express my heartfelt appreciation for all the panelists for their enlightening discussions, and the audience who took the trouble of paying a visit to this hall.

Closing remark by Mr. H. Matsumoto, Vice President of MUA:

We organized this symposium in an effort to think about the road to mature city taking the opportunity of Tokyo holding the Olympic/Paralympic Games in the year 2020. The term “Mature City” is created from the “Mature Society”. I learned from the presentations given by panelists that Mature City is realized through developing a comfortable city in view of living in which is not only provided with economic infrastructure but social infrastructure as well.

(Written by M. Takai, MUA president, and translated jointly by S. Tanahashi and Y. Suda, the PR, Bulletin & Internet Committee)

The 32nd Diplomats Lecture

Japan's Foreign Policy: Present Situation, its Risks and Potentiality

Date: March 3, 2015

Place: International House of Japan

We had the pleasure of having Mr. Kazuhiko Togo, Director of Institute for World Affairs, Kyoto Sangyo University, and the former Ambassador Plenipotentiary to the Netherlands, as the speaker of this lecture series. Mr. Togo is a Director of Minato UNESCO Association as well. He has long been with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan and has many acquaintances among ambassadors to Japan. Thus, the lecture began in a very friendly atmosphere. Then, he spoke enthusiastically about the reality of Japanese foreign diplomacy and the urgent issues.



Many questions were asked during the question and answer session. There were some diplomats who were under Mr. Togo's tutelage, and so, he showed another side of his character as an educationalist who is delighted at the success of his students. Many attendees gathered in a ring around him even after the conclusion of the lecture.

(Written by Y. Miyashita, Standing Director, and translated by Y. Suda, The PR, Bulletin and Internet Committee)

The 2015 MUA General Meeting

Date: April 28, 2015

Place: Minato Lifelong Learning Center

With the attendance of 30 people, including 25 MUA members, the annual general meeting was kicked off by Mr. H. Nagano, Vice President of MUA. It was followed by an opening statement by Ms. M. Takai, President. She stated that, over the past 34 years since its foundation in 1981, MUA has accumulated concerted efforts toward the realization of world peace and human wellbeing. These efforts were based on the UNESCO mission and local advantages which Minato City could offer. Minato City is placed at the center of holding Olympic/Paralympic in the 2020. Thus, MUA is expected to further play an active role in deepening the international exchange and understanding as well as nurturing rich culture. She also expressed thanks to Mr. Masaaki Takei, Mayor of Minato City, and all people concerned for their support and cooperation.

We had the pleasure of having Mayor Takei, along with our counterparts at the Minato City office, as guests at this annual meeting. Looking to the future, Mayor Takei stated that Minato City will play important roles during the 2020 Tokyo Olympic/Paralympic Games, offering the Daiba area for hosting triathlon competition. In this connection, the city will improve such infrastructures as signs written in foreign languages, and also step up its efforts to promote face-to-face hospitality where MUA's cooperation would be highly appreciated.



Mayor Takei

Ms. Takai was elected as the chairperson of the meeting. All agenda items were duly approved at the meeting, including the 2014 business report, financial statements, the auditor's report, and the 2015 business and annual budget plans. Though there were no major changes in the tenure of officers, it was proudly announced that Mr. Isao Kiso, Special Advisor to the Cabinet and the former ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary to UNESCO, accepted the position as the Counselor of MUA. Mr. H. Matsumoto, Vice President, closed the meeting.

(Written and translated by Y. Suda, MUA Secretary-General)

Director-General Irina Bokova expresses consternation at the destruction of the Temple of Bel in Palmyra

(01.09.2015 – UNESCOMPRESS)



© Anton Ivanov Bel Temple, Palmyra, Syria

The Director-General of UNESCO, Irina Bokova, expressed profound dismay as she condemned the destruction of the Temple of Bel in Palmyra, one of the most important 1st century CE religious monuments in the Middle East, a construction unique in its design.

“The destruction of Palmyra constitutes an intolerable crime against civilization but 4,500 years of history will never be erased,” the Director-General declared.

“It is essential to explain the history and significance of the temples of Palmyra. Whoever saw Palmyra remains forever marked by the memory of the city which embodies the dignity of the entire Syrian people and humanity’s loftiest aspirations,” she added. “Each of these attacks invites us to share ever more widely the heritage of humanity, whether in museums, schools, the media and our homes. This is the sense of the initiatives launched everywhere in the world by UNESCO and countless citizens of all nationalities, religions, and origins, particularly in the Arab and Muslim world. The power of culture is greater than that of all forms of extremism and nothing can stop it.”

In the face of this most recent war crime, UNESCO reaffirms its determination to go on protecting all that which can be saved. It will pursue its unrelenting fight against illicit trafficking in cultural objects, the documentation of sites, and the setting up of networks that link thousands of experts in Syria and all over the world, to transmit this heritage to future generations, notably with the help of modern technology.

According to eyewitness reports, confirmed by satellite images from UNOSAT, explosives were used to destroy the Temple of Bel in Palmyra, one of the most iconic monuments of the site, on 30 August. It was one of the best preserved and most impressive temples in Palmyra and represented a remarkable fusion of the architectural styles of the ancient Near East and the Greco-Roman tradition, visible in its sculptured ceilings, monumental podium and friezes, which told the story of the city and featured camel caravans and the constellations. The great temple of Bel is one of the most important religious edifices of the 1st century in the Orient. The treatment of sculptures and engravings in the monumental arch that leads from the temple to the city is an outstanding example of Palmyran art.

(Continued from P.1): Foster the Diversification of Values

In 2020, Japan will host the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games. It is reported that, thanks to the depreciation of yen, the number of inbound tourists has been increasing.

Time flies indeed. Almost a quarter century has passed since the days when I was actively engaged in the Youth Activities Committee at MUA. Looking to the future, I must ask myself whether I will be able to explain to visitors from overseas the good traditions and culture of Japan, in the true meaning of the words.

(Translated by S. Tanahashi, the PR, Bulletin & Internet Committee)

From the UNESCO Press Release

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International Literacy Day 2015: Literacy and Sustainable Societies



©De Visu- Children doing homework at Jagadguru Schoolm, Kathmandu (Nepal)

International Literacy Day 2015 celebrated around the world on 8 September to highlight literacy “as a human right, as a force for dignity, and as a foundation for cohesive societies and sustainable development” as the UNESCO Director-General, Irina Bokova, explains in her message for the Day. “Literacy is essential to reach the proposed sustainable development goal to promote ‘inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all,’” Ms Bokova adds.

This year’s main event is the Global Meeting on Literacy and Sustainable Societies. Taking place at UNESCO’s Headquarters in Paris on 8 and 9 September, it is held alongside the International Literacy Prize awards ceremony. Notably participants at the event include the Director-General of UNESCO, the Second Vice President of Afghanistan, Mohammad Sarwar Danish, the Minister of Education of Egypt, Moheb Mahmoud Kamel al-Rafei, and United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, Kishore Singh, to name but a few.

The Global Meeting brings together nearly 100 United Nations and government representatives, donors, national and international non-governmental organizations, representatives of the private sector and experts from 34 countries to promote youth and adult literacy as a key component of the post-2015 development agenda.

Despite progress worldwide since 2000 when the Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were adopted, some challenges are yet to be overcome. In 2000, the international community pledged to reduce illiteracy rates by 50 per cent by 2015 but, according to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), most countries have missed that deadline.

According to the UIS, 757 million adults worldwide, two thirds of them women, still lack basic literacy skills. The number of out-of-school children and adolescents is on the rise, standing at 124 million, and approximately 250 million children of primary school age are failing to master basic literacy skills even while at school. Challenges also exist in high-income countries. According to the European Literacy Policy Network one in five adults in Europe lacks the basic literacy skills to understand the instructions on a medicine bottle.

Participants at the Global Meeting are bringing their contribution to the 2030 vision of literacy, exploring ways to reinforce the interrelations between sustainable development and literacy in light of the Sustainable Development Goals, which will be adopted by the international community at the UN General Assembly Summit later this month. (Excerpted)

Minato UNESCO Association is a citizens’ voluntary membership organization that promotes Japanese traditional culture, holds cross-cultural workshops and presents multicultural events and international symposia for world peace. For any questions or comments about our articles, please contact our secretariat office at:

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