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Bulletin

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My Trivial International Exchange

Kazuko Okumura, Vice President, Minato UNESCO Association

I enjoyed strolling around such cities as Firenze, Arezzo, Monterchi, Perugia, Assisi and Ancona in central Italia with three friends of mine back in May of 2016. One of them loved the paintings of Piero della Francesca, an artist of the fifteenth century Italian Renaissance, and strongly requested to visit the sites where his paintings are displayed. The rest of us accepted her request as we all agreed to the trip with the firm objective.



On the second day of our trip, we had a day trip from Firenze to Bologna where we visited Università di Bologna established in the eleventh century and were deeply moved by the history-laden lecture theater of anatomy as well as bibliotheca of those days. From the third day on, we started to visit paintings that was the central part of our objective. “Leggenda della Croce” was the great work painted by Piero della Francesca on the wall of Basilica di San Francesco and was really spectacular exhibit.

We visited a small art museum in Monterchi on the next day and were moved by “Madonna del parto” which shows Madonna in beautiful blue outfit escorted by two angels. We could not find a return rout from the museum located on the top of hill. As a woman of class passed by with her dog, we dared to ask her about the way to the bus route in clumsy Italian we just learnt. We finally managed to make her understood and, then, she kindly led us to the bus stop. On our way to the bus stop, she talked to us that she visited Japan before and, also, the people in the city she lived were proud of the paintings of Piero della Francesca. There was a small grocery store beside the bus stop. As we told the storekeeper our destination, she anxiously looked up in the time table. She was kind enough to stay with us until the bus arrived. We enjoyed the heartwarming hospitality in a small village where you seldom see a passerby.

As I have enjoyed independent tours so far, I have been helped by many people of the countries visited. It might be quite different from the international exchange which Minato UNESCO Association sets out, but I believe that local people naturally extend hospitality to visitors from Japan for which I am really thankful. We also try to extend a helping hand to visitors to Japan which shall eventually be a token of our appreciation for their kindness.

I once was not interested in overseas tourism at all. My two years' experience in South African Republic where my husband was transferred to apparently altered me to an overseas tourism lover. As the racist doctrine prevailed in the country then, I encountered with various electrifying occasions far beyond my knowledge previously acquired in my schooldays. I realized how big a difference between the reality and the book knowledge. There were some occasions when I sensed the discrimination befell to me. Such experiences became the catalyst for me to be much more interested in the international exchange.

(To be continued on P. 9)

World Heritage in Afghanistan: The past and present status of Bamiyan

Date: December 14, 2016

Place: Minato City Life-long Learning Center

We had the pleasure of having Mr. Kosaku Maeda, Director General, Japan Institute for the Studies of Cultures of Afghanistan. He is also Special Advisor of Tokyo University of the Arts, Vice-Chairperson of Japan Consortium for International Cooperation in Cultural Heritage, Fellow of Hirayama Ikuo Museum, Professor Emeritus of Wako University, and majors in Asian Culture and History of Thought. He has long been involved in the preservation work of Afghanistan cultural heritage centered around Bamiyan Buddhist heritage. He published a book entitled “Thinking of Afghanistan” and many other books.



The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (hereinafter referred to as “Afghanistan”) is located in Central Asia surrounded by the Republic of Tadjikistan, the Republic of Uzbekistan, the Republic of Turkmenistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Bamiyan is located on the highland at an altitude of 2500 meters among Hindu Kush mountains which range from Pamir. It is one-day-walking distance from Kabul, the capital city of Afghanistan.

Bamiyan in the past is described in “The Great Tang Dynasty Record of the Western Region” written by Xuanzang or Genshousanzou, a Buddhist monk of China. Xuanzang traveled to Gandhara, India in search for Buddhist sutra in the year 627 or 630 to 645. Upon his return home, he compiled his experiences during the trip to Gandhara in the book mentioned above. A part of his name “Sanzou” indicates three studies of Buddhism, i.e., Scripture House, Vinaya Pitaka and Abhidhamma Pitaka. As he studied and mastered these three, he is called “Genshousanzou”.



“The Great Tang Dynasty Record of the Western Region” describes that Bamiyan is located in the snowcapped mountains. There exist the great snowcapped mountains in the North, Hindu Kush mountains, and snowcapped mountains in the South. Bamiyan is the gorge that extends long distance from east to west wedged between these two large mountainous areas. There were tens of temples and thousands of monks there. They studied Lokottaravada of Theravada Buddhism. It seems that people of Bamiyan deeply believed in Buddhism as the national creed while honoring the older religious faith.

Western Buddha is described in the book as the standing image with the height of 140 to 150 shaku, i.e. 42.7 to 45.75 meters and glowed gold in the light. The current height of the image is 55 meters. Thus, the description of the image in the book is quite close to the data we currently have. It seems that the entire image was carved out of the wall of gravel, then daubed mud on it, adorned with ruffles, encased in plaster, and colored at the end. While it is not certain if the description of “the jewelry glittered” meant that accessories attached on the image glittered or it was only reflection of sunlight, the image must have been very colorful and beautiful, in any case.

Eastern Buddha, on the other hand, is described in the book as the standing image made of brass with the height of 100 shaku, i.e. 33 meters. As it should not have been possible to build a huge brass made image all at once, however, it is widely understood that it must have been misperception of Xuanzang. There was a splendid wall painting above the head of Eastern Buddha. Xuanzang did not mention about the wall painting in his book, but described that there existed the heavenly gods there which traders who wandered back and forth gave a prayer to. It is considered that it was the sun god Mithras which has been widely worshiped in central Asia or Iran. The blue sky in the background was colored by lapis lazuli. On the side walls of Eastern and Western Buddha, you can see people standing in line who are considered to be royalty and the aristocracy donated a lot of money to the temple. You can also see high officials attending a ceremonial gathering painted beneath them.



Eastern Buddha and Western Buddha were both destroyed in the spring of 2001 at the end of civil strife. The Taliban regime demised a year after the destruction of the images. UNESCO and Afghanistan Government started a talk on the reconstruction of the cultural heritage in 2002. Utilizing the fund established by the Japanese Government in UNESCO, Japan team started the reconstruction of the wall painting, Germany the conservation of standing images and Italia the prevention against the collapse of small shrines in 2003.

A round metallic plate with floral motif inscribed, debris of Buddhist sutra, mud balls and leaves of lime tree which were portrayed as bones of Buddha were discovered from the body part of Eastern Buddha. They are considered to be a part of sutra secretly embedded in the wear of Buddha, i.e. hidden Buddhist sutra. A tricolor cloth bag was discovered at the base of right elbow as well. It was an unopened sutra berried in the Buddhist image.

A small amount of paint was obtained from some pieces of wall painting which was made available for the analysis of pigment. It was then found out that what was thought to have been Fresco actually was Fresco Secco. The finding that the oil paint used in Europe in eleventh century was used in this area as early as seventh century surprised researchers quite a lot. All these facts were known only after the blast of the Buddhist image.

Afghanistan cultural assets flew overseas due to plunders from museums or theft from remains. The master artist Ikuo Hirayama gave UNESCO a suggestion that such cultural assets be treated as “cultural asset refugees”. His suggestion was accepted. Salvation and preservation activities started in Japan as well and paved the way to have them returned to Afghanistan as soon as the situation there is stabilized. Some of them were restored by Tokyo University of the Arts and returned to Afghanistan in the end of 2016.

There was a plate hung at the entrance of Kabul Museum almost damaged to ruin by the war that carried the following words:
 “If culture is still alive, the nation should survive.”
 “Peace resides only in human mind.”

His enthusiasm to protect and reserve valuable cultural assets was evident in each word he uttered.

(Written by T. Isobe, the International Science & Culture Committee, and translated by Y. Suda, the PR, Bulletin & Internet Committee)

Workshop on Tea Ceremony

Date: November 26, 2016

Place: Minato Life-long Learning Center

We had the pleasure of having Ms. Soukou Matsumura as the instructor for this workshop. She belongs to the Ura Senke school in the tea ceremony circle in Japan. It was a lovely day and a total of 20 people, including foreigners from China, Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand, attended this event. In a most friendly and pleasant atmosphere, Mr. Kiichiro Tanabe, an MUA auditor, worked as interpreter.

The workshop proceeded in the following order:

- ① Mini-lecture on the history of tea ceremony
- ② Exercise in greeting manners and walking on tatami mats
- ③ The instructor's demonstration of the expected procedures
- ④ Practice of the procedures by each participant
- ⑤ Self-introductions by each participant



Major comments we received from the participants were as follows:

- It was fun to know that you have to go through so many procedures, even for fixing a cup of tea.
- I felt exposed to the core of Japanese culture, thanks to the instructor's comprehensive explanation.
- It was a most intriguing experience. It made me a great fan of the Japanese tradition.
- It was interesting to know that the Japanese tea ceremony is different from the Chinese tea ceremony.

All of us wish to express our sincere thanks to Ms. Matsumura's demonstration and guidance.



(Written by K. Hirakata, Vice President, the Hands-on Cultural Workshop Committee, and translated by S. Tanahashi, the PR, Bulletin & Internet Committee)

Workshop on Japanese Calligraphy

Date: December 3, 2016

Place: Minato Life-long Learning Center

We had the pleasure of having Ms. Suimu Kanada as the instructor for this workshop. Ms. Kanada is a member of the Mainichi Shodo Kai, a professional calligraphers' association in Japan. A total of 21 people, including foreigners from Indonesia, the Philippines, Romania and Thailand, participated in this event.

The workshop proceeded in the following order:

- ① Explanation of the history of calligraphy as well as the necessary tools, including ink sticks, ink stones, brushes and Japanese writing paper.
- ② Exercise according to copybooks.
- ③ Fair copying of favorite Kanji characters on a standard fancy paper.



Let me introduce major impressions received from the participants:

- ① It was very useful as the New Year season was drawing near when we exchange greeting card.
- ② I found it very difficult. How I wish I could write Kanji letters as beautifully as I want.
- ③ It was so delightful that I want to continue practicing on my own.
- ④ Somehow those characters, which seemed easy to write, turned out to be difficult.

We at MUA were very happy to know that all participants, including foreigner guests, enjoyed the workshop thanks to Kanada-sensei's skillful instructions. At the end of their practice, all participants had a red "Rakkan" seal stamped on their final pieces. As usual, commemorative photos of the participants in groups were taken.



(Written by M. Kasahara, Chairperson of the Hands-on Cross-cultural Workshop Committee, and translated by S. Tanahashi, the PR, Bulletin & Internet Committee)

The 2017 MUA New Year Friendship Party

Date: January 11, 2017

Place: Shiba Club in NEC's Mita House

A total of 33 people, including MUA members and guests, gathered at NEC Corporation's fancy Shiba Club, located close to JR Tamachi Station. It was a regular annual event to promote friendship and kick off the New Year. President Nagano gave an opening remark, "Let's act keeping in mind the UNESCO mission to promote world peace, being aware of the accelerating globalization in Japan toward the 2020 Tokyo Olympic & Paralympic Games." It was followed by a proposal for toast by Vice President Hiroshi Matsumoto.

This time we invited for attraction a group of students who belong to the Indonesian Dance Club of the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. Our objective was to provide a good opportunity to learn a bit of traditional Asian culture. The students were Ms. Mika Endo (Italian major), Ms. Anna Ikeda (Spanish major), Ms. Chiharu Ota (Thai major) and Ms. Risako Takahashi (Malaysian major).

Their presentation was titled "Enchanting Indonesian Dance." They were dressed in authentic Indonesian costumes and had traditional facial makeup. The first dance was "Sekar Jagat" – a dance of welcome in Bali. The second was "Bhayang Kari" – a dance representing the gallant scene of female warriors engaged in training in Java.



For our background information, the group explained that Indonesia is a country, comprising over 13,000 islands, which are often cited collectively as the "Necklace of Emeralds hung over the equator" because of the fascinating beauty and diversity in the nature and culture they have. The group members share the motto to learn traditional dances in Bali, Java and Sulawesi and to present to their audience the charms and diversity of different dances.

Mr. Tomogane, Director in charge of the Membership Committee, has a belief that man is a being which discovers something new and exchanges mutual stimulations through social interactions. Based on this creed, he started to facilitate from last year MUA members' exposure to a variety of performing arts and culture of the world, involving university students who specialize in such activities. This year's attraction was again made possible thanks to the networking power of Mr. Tomogane who was also instrumental in securing the comfortable place for the gathering.



(Written by T. Kobayashi, Standing Director, the Membership Committee, and translated by S. Tanahashi, the PR, Bulletin & Internet Committee)

MUA members visited the Austrian Embassy

Date: February 14, 2017

Place: Moto-Azabu, Minato City

It has been customary for MUA to visit once a year one of the embassies of foreign countries located in Minato City. This year we visited the Embassy of the Republic of Austria, located in Moto-Azabu, in a group of 22 people, including MUA members and their families. The neighborhood district is well-known for slopes, including Kurayami-Zaka, Daikoku-Zaka and Torii Zaka. Those names remind us of the traditional culture of the Edo period.

The district also abounds in the remains of old Japanese houses, stores, temples and shrines. This particular embassy visit was a follow-up of MUA's lecture program, held last July, where Mr. Akihiro Nakajima, a conductor and architect, gave a very interesting talk on the cross-cultural experiences during his stay in Vienna as a student.

Our hostess was Ms. Akiko Soga, an embassy staff in charge of cultural affairs. She has supervised various cultural events, including opera, art exhibitions and movie screening, which have typically synchronized with the visit of related Austrian artists to Japan. She gave a comprehensive and very interesting audio-visual presentation on Austria.

The following is a summary of major topics she has touched upon:

The Republic of Austria at a glance:

Austria is located at the center of Europe. Its territory, about the size of Hokkaido, is surrounded by the Alps and stretches long in the East and West axis. The long history, climate and environment have nurtured diverse culture. Austria is entirely surrounded by eight neighbor countries, with the longest border facing Germany as shown in the map.



The official language in Austria is German. The country's origin dates back to the era of the Roman Empire. It underwent the rule by the Barlenburg clan which was succeeded by the Hapsburg clan. During the process the country grew into an extensive empire, dominating almost all Europe.

In modern history, Austria took part in WWI and experienced its defeat, which resulted in the shrinkage of its territory into the current size. Austria experienced another defeat under the German Nazi's invasion during WWII. In 1955, the country declared itself as a permanent neutral state. In 1995, Austria was accepted as an EU member. Today the country is a federal republic, with the president at the helm.

Austrians of international recognition:

Major figures include Freud (scientist), Porsche (car manufacturer), Schlesinger (scholar in physics), Victor Frankl (psychologist who published "Man's search for meaning"), Alfred Adler (psychologist), Peter Drucker (scholar of management), and Bertha von Suttner (novelist and world's first woman recipient of the Nobel Peace Award).

Austria abounds in musicians:

In addition to big names such as Mozart and Haydn, talented musicians such as Beethoven and Brahms, who were German, accomplished their status of fame in Vienna. Austria is well known to have the Vienna Boys' Choir. It actually comprises four groups in which one or two Japanese boys regularly participates. Each year one group, in rotation, always visits Japan. Likewise, the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra has also made an annual visit to Japan regularly. However, this year is exceptional because of the refurbishing underway at the Suntory Hall.

Sports:

It was an Austrian by the name of Theodor Edler von Lerch who came to Japan during the Meiji Restoration and taught skiing to the Japanese for the first time. Skiing is indeed a national sports in Austria. Many Japanese citizens recognize Toni Sailer as the Austrian skier who won three gold medals, the first record in history, during the Winter Olympic Games held in Italy in 1956. He later became a movie star and was hailed as a popular hero of the times internationally.

Taste of food:

Austria has been a crossroad of different European tastes. The Wiener schnitzel, a cutlet of calf meat, has been an internationally popular treat. Viennese coffee has been another treat, thanks to the good quality of the local water. Austrians typically spend weekends leisurely at their favorite coffee shops. Those who love sweets won't miss the world famous Sachertorte, a chocolate cake with apricot jam, offered by Hotel Sacher Wien.

World heritages:

Austria currently has a total of nine cultural heritages registered at UNESCO. Thirteen additional sites are in the process of application. The nine sites include:

- Historic district in Salzburg street region.
- Schonbrunn Palace in Vienna (right photo)
- Hallstatt, a town of salt production, which was once isolated and accessible only by a boat on the lake. That explains why the attractive natural beauty and historical setting have been preserved.
- Dashstein offers a spectacular view from the ropeway. It was made possible by the accumulation of related technologies developed in Austria. The country has the world's oldest mountain railway. Austria boasts the highest level internationally in railway technology and has also contributed to the development of Japan's railways.
- Graz, the second largest city in Austria, is known for the Eggenburg Castle. In recent years, an old Japanese folding screen was discovered in the castle. The screen portrays the Osaka Castle and the neighboring towns at the beginning of the 17th century when Japan was ruled by Tycoon Hideyoshi. It is regarded as a precious art piece of that particular period.
- Wachau Valley is known not only for vineyards and quality wine but also for the production of apricot jam.
- Vienna boasts historic districts for sightseeing.



Intangible cultural assets:

Austria is known for high equestrian skills taught at horseback riding schools. The Hapsburg clan once dominated Spain and started to breed military horses. This tradition has been maintained and is today counted as an intangible cultural asset.

During the Q&A session, many questions were raised concerning different subjects, including the following:

① National flag

The colors in the national flag derive from a historical episode. During the period of the crusaders, the white military uniform of the Austrian grand duke was stained red with the blood of the slain enemy. Only the waist portion remained white as it was covered with his belt. In addition to the national flag, Austria also has a governmental flag. In the center, we can see a national emblem in the image of a hawk, with a broken chain around its feet, as a symbol of freedom.



② Education

The compulsory education in Austria lasts eight years. The first four years are spent for primary education and the following four years are spent for considering one's future course after graduation – either enrolling in universities or pursuing professional skills in vocational schools.

③ Republic as a polity

Autocracy is nowhere to be seen in today's Austria and so are the aristocratic family names.

④ Industries

Major industries in Austria are tertiary, especially tourism.

⑤ Energy

In Austria, hydraulic power generation is the primary source of energy where dams also help with the flood management. Austria outstands in Europe in the use of renewable energy. Renewable energy accounts for 67% of the country's entire energy consumption, exceeding substantially the relevant average figure, 17%, in EU. Also active is lumber-based biomass power generation. Austria once built a nuclear power generator in the 1970's but has never put it into operation, due to protesting votes which won by a slight margin. However, there are many nuclear power generators which are operated by neighbor countries. This environment continues to be a concern for Austrians.

⑥ Neutral country status

Austria has declared to stay neutral toward any warfare waged between or among other countries. Still, the country requires its people to engage in a 6-month military service for national defense. It is allowed to avoid the said service by undertaking a 9-month civil service.

⑦ Population

Like Japan, the Austrian society is also characterized by decreasing birthrate and aging population. The issue of immigrants will continue to be a challenge to be considered.



(Written by T. Kobayashi, Standing Director, the Membership Committee, and translated by S. Tanahashi, the PR, Bulletin & Internet Committee)

(Continued from P. 1): My Trivial International Exchange

As per the saying which goes “seeing is believing”, I really value the real-life experience. I have had various experiences during my travels abroad. Hospitalities extended to me still stay deep in my mind. I will enjoy my foreign travel making “seeing, feeling and finding” my motto.

(Translated by Y. Suda, the PR, Bulletin & Internet Committee)

Japanese Calligraphy Workshop for Temple University's Japan Campus

Date: January 18, 2017

Venue: TUJC's Azabu Campus in Minato City

MUA held a hands-on Japanese calligraphy workshop in response to a request from Temple University Japan Campus, which has been a corporate MUA member. This type of on-demand program was the first experience for MUA. Our instructor was Ms. Suimu Kanada, a member of the Mainichi Shodo Kai which is a professional calligraphers' association in Japan. The workshop proceeded in the following order:

- ① Brief explanation about the history of calligraphy as well as the basic tools, including ink sticks, ink stones, brushes and paper.
- ② Practices according to the copybook of Kanji & hiragana characters.
- ③ Wrap-up by producing a fair copy of favorite letters on fancy paper or square "Hanshi" paper.



Major impressions we received from the students included, "Very enjoyable," "Difficult," and "I became very interested in calligraphy." We felt much rewarded in the workshop, after seeing the happy faces of the participant students and receiving favorable comments from the university secretariat. It was amazing to see the visible improvements the students made within the limited time. We hope that the students' participation in the workshop will remain as a fond memory of Japan.

(Written by K. Hirakata, Vice President, the Hands-on Cross-cultural Workshop Committee, and translated by S. Tanahashi, the PR, Bulletin & Internet Committee)



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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