

General Observations and Recommendation

Based upon this observation tour and other previous experience of the symposium participants, it is possible to note that the Philippines is not far advanced in museum development despite its potentials for achieving progress along this line of educational and cultural endeavor. National interest, support and action have not come up to the level similar to the governmental and private devotion accorded to other educational and cultural institutions and scientific laboratories. Yet the museum is a complimentary organization to these institutions whereby they should develop altogether at equal pace.

Museum development is mostly concentrated in Manila, although public and private agencies in other large towns and cities throughout the nation are capable of organizing regional, provincial and town museums. A similar if not a stronger interest than is now devoted to the development of moviehouses, cockpits, parks, other recreational centers and marketplaces should be accorded to establishing and maintaining provincial, municipal and school museums.

Besides the general public, domestic and foreign tourists patronize museums which are effective tourist attractioners. Conscious about the role of the museum in the promotion of tourism, the Board of Travel and Tourist Industry (BTTI) helped establish the new Iloilo City Museum which could serve as a pilot or experimental project for organizing similar institutions in other tourist cities. It is our own experience that the Aga Khan Museum, new and relatively small as it has only been recently started, is helping accelerate the number and frequency of tourists visiting Marawi City and its Lake Lanao sceneries.

Some individual museums in Island Southeast Asia have tremendous general collections such as the Singapore National Museum, Malaysia Muzium Negara, Indonesia National Museum, Sarawak State Museum, Muzium Brunei and Santo Tomas Museum. But the whole region compared to other regions in Asia and the Pacific, not to speak of Europe and America which first introduced the museum idea, needs stimulation along museum consciousness, movement and development.

The museums in the Southeast Asia Region are capable of collecting and exhibiting, aside from objects of natural history, those artifacts and relics of history and civilization that have similarly affected the land and various peoples. Such influence taken as a whole or individually are the Three Great Traditions of Asia - China, India and Arabia - and the Western Traditions diffused into the region notably by the Portuguese, Dutch, French, English and American. Indeed, with the indigenous traits as a base of common characteristics, the various cultural groups in this region have been affected by these two distinct types of Eastern and Western civilization. Inside and outside the museums, this hybridization of civilization, or society and culture taken together, is evident in the past and contemporary life in Southeast Asia.

Students of comparative history and civilization will find this phenomenon of hybridization of cultures and societies interesting and stimulating for their investigation, especially in the presence of evidence comprising the exhibits found inside museum display galleries and stockrooms. But the average individual who is not involved in a direct people-to-people contact in the region is not well-informed of the similarity and connection of their historical and contemporary life with that of their neighbors - a knowledge which could be the basis of understanding and cooperation among societies and governments in Southeast Asia.

The results of comparative studies in history, society and culture in the region could further result to better people-to-people contact among the citizens of such country or sub-region who for centuries have been isolated from each other resulting from relatively divisive effect of past colonization programs.

In the Philippines, where only few museums and museologists are members of the international museum association, there is not a national organization which can stimulate a nation-wide museum consciousness, cooperation and development. Thus, the National Museum of the Philippines in Manila may be expected to furnish the leadership in initiating a national organization with the cooperation of other government and private museums inside and outside the national capital.

In turn, there is a good reason for the emergence of a regional association of museums in Southeast Asia or even the larger region

of East Asia to include Pakistan, India, China, Korea, Japan and Mainland Southeast Asia. One way of starting this movement is to consider the suggestion of holding an Asian or Southeast Asian regional museum exhibition of comparative collections in order to invite the interest of different countries and their governments.

At the time of our visit to the Muzium Negara at Kuala Lumpur, there was a special exhibition of international currencies, especially those of Asia. It was drawing thousands of local and foreign visitors. Similar exhibitions of selected interest in museum affairs in Southeast Asia may result to greater effect in museum consciousness, interest and development and as a bridge of regional understanding and cooperation.

On the local lower but significant level, our Aga Khan Museum can gradually be developed for its collection of historical and cultural artifacts which are evidently of Southeast Asian diffusion from Islamic and non-Islamic sources. Most of its collection which still could be enriched is a tangible evidence of the historical movement of peoples and their cultures from Malaysia and Indonesia to this southern sub-culture area in the Philippines.

In order to stimulate one another's growth, the small museums in Visayas and Mindanao should organize into some kind of cooperation necessary for their development. They should help one another in enriching their individual collections, in the procurement and exchange of exhibits, in inter-museum regional exhibition, in the exchange of information and publication, in producing coordinated guidance and information to museum visitors in the southern region, and in stimulating public interest in museums.

Thanks to the Ford Foundation for enabling Mindanao State University to be represented in the recent Traveling Symposium for Museum Development. This report should prove useful if it could contribute ideas to the needed interest and action to improve museums in the Philippines and Southeast Asia.