A Study of Urban Life Rituals Seen in Museum Collections
KATO Shinobu

Many museums have examined and analyzed life rituals. Despite featuring the same theme, their exhibitions vary in concept and structure, especially in the case of local museums, probably because they are based on the results of studies focusing on life rituals.

However, in Tokyo, where the high mobility of populations has made it difficult to account for local characteristics, not enough data has been collected to draw a clear picture of life rituals or entire lifestyles. Moreover, effective approaches to collecting information on and analyzing the current phenomena resulted from the commercialization of life rituals have yet to be developed.

This paper provides a basic examination of the approaches taken by local museums in the cities to data collection for, and analysis of, life rituals as well as their use of the analysis results for exhibitions by drawing lessons and insights from the special exhibition “Lives of People: Life Rituals in Chiyoda Ward” organized by the author at the Chiyoda Ward Yo-bancho Museum of History and Folklore in 2008.

This paper uses a collection of photographs belonging to a family that ran an iron shop in Nishi-Kanda, Chiyoda Ward. The pictures are of a funeral held in 1939. Although they were later reorganized and filed in albums by the owner, the chronological rearrangement of the photos, as well as an interview survey, can reveal how and in what order the funeral rituals were performed at that time. The collection also indicates that a then eight-year-old girl acted as chief mourner at the funeral of her grandfather and that only she put on white mourning clothes. Although the mourning attire itself has not survived to the present, this collection is valuable evidence that shows an example of funeral attire in cities.

Due to the Great Kantō Earthquake and the Second World War, it is difficult for museums in Chiyoda and other wards in the center of Tokyo to collect and archive information on daily necessities. The situation has become even worse recently because there is a tendency even in the case of ceremonies that have survived to the present day for ceremonial goods to subsequently be used in the course of daily life. For example, the dishes used in weaning ceremonies and the red clothes gifted to celebrate the 60th birthday are then used in daily life as well. In other words, it is difficult to preserve the goods used for ceremonies as research materials since they will be consumed and disappear. Therefore, there is a need to develop a perspective to analyze local communities from accumulated individual data while taking these lifestyles and social values into consideration.

Key words: Local museum, city, life rituals, exhibition, a collection of photographs