Museum Activities in Ordinary and Extraordinary Times Against Earthquake and Nuclear Disaster: A Focus on Fukushima Prefecture’s Disaster-Affected Cultural Assets and the Disaster Heritage

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The accident suffered by Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant of the Tokyo Electric Power Company as a result of the off the Pacific coast of Tohoku Earthquake and large tsunami created a large area on the Pacific side of Fukushima Prefecture to which residents are not permitted to return. Many cultural assets telling the history of the land were left behind, and all items having to do with life were abandoned in the towns left quiet by the absence of people. In response to this situation, Fukushima Prefecture has perpetuated a two-fold resource preservation activity, of disaster-affected cultural assets and of earthquake disaster resources which tell the story of the earthquake disaster itself (disaster heritage).

The preservation of disaster-affected cultural assets met with many challenges due to the effects of the nuclear power plant accident, however, it developed from individual activity to an organized endeavor, and is now shifting to an activity led by individual municipalities in coordination with universities and the prefecture. Further about three years after the earthquake disaster, the preservation of earthquake disaster resources also began, concurrently with the debate on how the earthquake disaster and the nuclear power plant accident should be relayed to future generations.

How the region is portrayed and how it is relayed to the future by the resources preserved by these activities has become the responsibility of museums of the disaster-stricken area. The history of the region can no longer be told without the earthquake disaster and the nuclear power plant accident, but one major duty must be to refrain from cutting out only the disaster and damage and isolating them from the story of the region but to position them relative to the long history of life there. Another requirement would be to allow the maturation of the value of the preserved resources to be opened to the public, not limiting it to the museum or researchers. Should the museum become a place of two-sided communication through objects and not merely a place of one-sided announcement of resource collection or investigation and research results, it would be able to safeguard and relay varied views of the earthquake disaster and of the region.

Key words: Great East Japan Earthquake Disaster, nuclear power plant accident, cultural asset rescue, earthquake disaster heritage, museum activity