Exhibiting a Corpse: Considering the Various Issues of Exhibiting Jomon Human Bones

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This report adds analysis on museum exhibitions of human remains, in particular, human bones of the Jomon period (hereinafter Jomon human bones) as to in what situations their exhibition can be considered permissible, and, in such cases, what care must be taken in exhibiting them.

First, the report provides an overview of exhibitions of human bone resources in museums throughout Japan and indicates that the exhibition of human bones is a sensitive topic. Then, keeping in mind the debate about the Body Worlds exhibition which exhibited corpses in a direct way, the report provides an overview of the Vermillion Accord and the Tamaki Makau-rau Accord, which govern the handling of human bones as archeological resources and set general rules for their exhibition, and examines in what situations the exhibition of Jomon human bones can be considered permissible, and, in such cases, what care must be taken in exhibiting them.

The report concludes that, for Jomon human bones, 1) it is impossible to trace the direct blood relatives and descendants, 2) the cases are over one thousand years old and personal memories and social personas can be deemed to have been lost, and 3) it has been long used as a resource for research. From such points, the conclusion reached is that it is permissible to use human bones of the Jomon period as exhibition resources in the absence of other special circumstances.

Key words: exhibition, Jomon human bones, Vermillion Accord, Tamaki Makau-rau Accord, Ainu human bone repatriation issue