Gender, History Education, and Museums: A Focus on Experiences in Taiwan

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In 1985, Taiwan began to develop policies on gender equality following the official introduction of the gender mainstreaming approach by the United Nations. One such policy was the Gender Equality Education Act, established in 2012, which requires public museums in Taiwan to promote awareness and the principles of gender equality with respect to their collections, exhibits, research, visitor services, and human resources and is regarded as a key principle in museum management.

However, national policy on gender equality was not the main reason behind why Taiwan’s museums sought to reflect on and address stereotyped social values and historical ideologies relating to gender equality. As history scholars enthusiastically search for a new paradigm in historical interpretation from the perspective of gender, gender issues surrounding the National Museum of Taiwan History have begun focusing on questions such as “how should women be portrayed in public history?” and, in particular, “how should items be collected and displayed nowadays?” For example, following the introduction of the Research Plan for Taiwanese Women in 2003, the Taiwanese Women Video Recording Project, which ran from 2008 to 2011, used the method of collecting, recording, and exhibiting personal experiences of the lower-class and disadvantaged women society through oral history, while also recording the scenes and processes described by them in the interviews, as a historical record. Although such efforts are not limited to women, they were in line with women-centered narratives, pluralistic views of history, and arguments such as those emphasizing women’s existence in history—aspects that foregrounded gender issues—and have led to the development of a new method in which museums collect a pluralistic variety of historical materials.

Emphasis on the democratization of historical interpretations is a characteristic of social development in Taiwan ever since the martial law was lifted. It was against this social background that importance was placed on public history. With regard to exhibits and gender, the subject of taking previous achievements from the “private” domain and returning them to the “public” domain should be considered in the future.

Key words: Gender and museums, National Museum of Taiwan History, Gender Equity Education Act, oral history, public history