

# Ethical Guidelines for Museum Activities of the National Museum of Ethnology<sup>1</sup>

## Preamble

The National Museum of Ethnology (Minpaku) collects and provides tangible and intangible materials and information (hereafter “materials”) about the cultures and societies of peoples of the world, and its mission is to deepen understanding and awareness of them. “Ethical Guidelines for Museum Activities of the National Museum of Ethnology” is intended as a set of guiding principles that those involved in Minpaku’s activities should be aware of and comply with for the fulfillment of its mission—It has been prepared in accordance with the spirit of the “Code of Ethics of the National Institutes for the Humanities”<sup>2</sup> and “ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums” published by ICOM (International Council of Museums), of which Minpaku is a member. Minpaku’s research and education staff, teachers and students involved in its research activities (hereafter “researchers”), as well as its clerical and technical staff (hereafter “staff”) should abide by these guidelines when engaging in its activities, and strive to fulfill Minpaku’s mission to be a museum that accumulates and publishes results of research in cultural anthropology and ethnology.

## (Minpaku’s Mission and Responsibility)

Article 1. Minpaku undertakes the collection, preservation, management, exhibition and publication of materials and their information based on research in anthropology, ethnology, and their related fields, and has a mission and responsibility to safeguard all aspects of societies and cultures of peoples of the world, as well as deepen understanding and awareness of them. As a general rule, Minpaku endeavors to make the materials it collects, preserves, and manages as widely and freely available as possible, while respecting any individual or collective rights invested in those materials.

## (Collection)

Article 2. Minpaku undertakes the collection of materials for not only preserving and utilizing but also contributing to the future succession of culture, scholarship, and natural heritage. Collected materials are public heritage, and hence, should be managed appropriately, with academic information provided to enable their use in various ways.

2. Materials are collected by purchasing or recording (in the case of audio or video

information) them, as well as through donations, deposits, bequests, or exchange (hereafter “acquisition”). The acquisition and subsequent transfer of rights vis-à-vis the materials to Minpaku must take place with the consent of the original owner or user (including individuals and organizations). When collecting materials, researchers and staff must be aware that the legal rights of ownership valid in a particular country may not necessarily be considered valid when seen in the context of social norms and cultural customs.

3. Due diligence must be performed in respect of any materials requested for acquisition by Minpaku to confirm that they have not been obtained or imported illegally from their country of origin or intermediate country that possesses them legally (including the country where the museum in question is located). Researchers and staff must endeavor to clarify basic information about the materials, such as their historical and cultural background and production techniques, as well as the user and method of use.

4. In collecting tangible materials, if it becomes clear that any part of them or the location where they were stored has sustained unauthorized, unscientific, or intentional damage or destruction when they were originally obtained, researchers and staff must not proceed with the acquisition. Similarly, acquisition should not be done if it transpires that the owner or occupant of the land where the materials were discovered was not informed of the discovery, the appropriate legal process was not followed, or the relevant government agency was not informed.

5. Due care and respect should be shown to religious or other culturally sensitive materials. These should only be collected once a storage environment, in which they can be stored safely, has been secured.

6. Biological specimens must be collected in compliance with laws or treaties governing the natural or social environment they inhabited, and any local, national, regional, or international laws or treaties governing the conservation of wildlife or preservation of natural history materials. No materials should be acquired from any third party that has violated such laws or treaties during the materials’ acquisition process.

7. Collection of materials in the field must be done in compliance with academic regulations as well as any local and international laws and treaty obligations. Furthermore, any on-site fieldwork or other studies conducted during the collection of

materials should be undertaken with respect and consideration for the views of local communities and their cultural and environmental resources, as well as any efforts to enhance the cultural and natural heritage.

8. When collecting materials related to a contemporary local community or its heritage, acquisition should be based on mutual consent, after the sincere provision of academic information to the owner or informant. Respect for the wishes of the communities involved should be paramount.

9. Researchers and staff should proactively seek opportunities to cooperate with other museums and research institutes in the collection of materials, to share research interests and collection practices.

#### (Collection Management)

Article 3. The preservation and management of materials should ensure that the materials and any properly recorded information about them can be used appropriately as well as passed on to future generations in the best and most secure condition possible.

2. The preservation and management of religious or other culturally sensitive materials should not violate the interests or beliefs of the members of the local community, ethnic group, or religious group to which the materials originally belonged.

3. When preserving and managing materials, all their basic information should be recorded by entering it into Minpaku's database using the designated input fields. Due consideration should be given to the security of this data, which should be accessible only to Minpaku's researchers and staff and other authorized users via systems designated for that purpose.

4. To safely preserve and manage materials, researchers and staff should exercise utmost care when performing any duties that involve the handling of materials. Disaster prevention and mitigation measures should be implemented for collected materials, and researchers and staff should be constantly alert to the possibility of natural disasters.

5. When storing, exhibiting, or transporting materials, a suitable storage environment must be prepared and maintained.

6. The condition of materials that may require conservation-restoration work should be constantly and carefully monitored, and the best possible method for that work determined. The principal goal in the conservation-restoration of materials is to stabilize their condition—all procedures and items used for this should be as reversible as possible, and all alterations should be clearly distinguishable from the original parts of the materials. Any conservation-restoration procedure carried out must be documented, and the records stored.

7. Collected materials should be disposed of in accordance with “Rules for Disposal of Ethnological Materials of the National Museum of Ethnology”<sup>3</sup>, as well as in adherence to any applicable laws or other requirements or procedures demanded by society or customs.

(Research)

Article 4. Research on materials at Minpaku must be conducted according to “Ethical Guidelines for Research of the National Museum of Ethnology”<sup>4</sup>

2. When destructive analytical techniques are used in research on tangible materials, the materials, analysis results, and subsequent research outcomes (including published works) should be treated as part of the materials’ information and made available to the public.

3. Research on religious or other culturally sensitive materials should not violate the interests or beliefs of the members of the local community, ethnic group, or religious group to which the materials originally belonged.

4. When conducting research on materials at Minpaku, due consideration should be given to any rights pertaining to the materials, and the National Museum of Ethnology’s Guidelines for Use of Ethnological Materials should be complied with.

5. Researchers and staff should endeavor to share the results of research on Minpaku’s materials with the research community in related fields. While respecting and acknowledging those who have provided information, they should pass on any techniques or experiences that may be beneficial to others.

6. Researchers and staff should strive to share knowledge and information about

collection materials, derived from the research conducted at Minpaku, with the materials' country of origin, or local museums and cultural institutes. Through research using materials, researchers and staff should seek to build partnerships with countries that have lost an important part of their cultural heritage, or with local museums and research institutes.

(Exhibition and Publication)

Article 5. Minpaku's function as a museum is to contribute to the research community and play a role in educating the general public; thus, it has a duty to make the results of research available as widely as possible using methods such as exhibitions and dissemination to the public via the internet (hereafter "exhibitions etc.").

2. The publication of research through exhibitions etc. should be carried out in accordance with Minpaku's mission, policies, and objectives. The preservation and management of materials should be conducted in a suitably safe and secure manner, and academic information should not be compromised in any way.

3. The information provided by exhibitions etc. should be well-founded and accurate, and give due consideration to represented groups or faiths. Information published at Minpaku must not compromise Minpaku's research standards.

4. Publication of religious or other culturally sensitive materials through exhibitions etc. should not violate the interests or beliefs of the members of the local community, ethnic group, or religious group to which the materials originally belonged. Exhibitions etc. should be undertaken with profound awareness of and respect for the dignity of all peoples.

5. When there is a request from the local community, ethnic group, or religious group to remove any religious or other culturally sensitive materials that originally belonged to them and are now publicly available through exhibitions etc., the request should be responded to swiftly and with empathy and respect.

6. When publishing replicas, reproductions, or copies of materials through exhibitions etc., due respect should be given to the complete form of the original. Replicas, reproductions, or copies of materials must be clearly indicated as such.

7. Publication of academic information about Minpaku's collection materials via the internet must be done in accordance with Guidelines for the Publication of Academic Information via the Internet of the National Museum of Ethnology.”<sup>5</sup>

(Relations with Source Communities)

Article 6. When collecting materials, utmost importance must be given to the wishes of the source communities such as related peoples or local societies of materials and collection activities should be conducted on a basis of mutual understanding between Minpaku and the source community. Furthermore, the exhibitions and publication of materials and their information should be done with respect for the dignity, traditions, and culture of the source community.

2. Researchers and staff should strive to share knowledge and information about the collection materials derived through research with museums and cultural institutes of the relevant source communities.

3. Requests from the source community for the repatriation of materials in Minpaku's collection should be responded to swiftly. If there is an opportunity for dialogue with the source community, the same should be undertaken in an impartial manner, based on scientific, legal, and humanitarian principles, and giving due consideration to the customs and desires of the source community in question.

4. When a country or its people seek/s the restitution of materials that have been exported or transferred in violation of the regulations of any national or international agreements, or have been shown to be a part of that country or its people's cultural or natural heritage, the request should be complied with in the same manner as set out in Article 6.3.

(Compliance with Laws and Regulations)

Article 7. Researchers and staff should strive to uphold the trust of society, and all museum activities should be undertaken in compliance with internationally recognized norms, agreements, and treaties. In addition to domestic laws and guidelines, as well as regulations set by Minpaku and the Inter-University Research Institute Corporation National Institutes for the Humanities, researchers and staff must abide by the regional laws and regulations of the countries or nations that are the subject of the museum's activities, and the ethical guidelines of any related academic societies.

Supplementary provisions: These guidelines are effective as of November 24<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

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<sup>1</sup> This is an English translation of the original Japanese guidelines (国立民族学博物館・博物館活動倫理指針). The Japanese version is solely original and officially approved one.

<sup>2</sup> 大学共同利用機関法人人間文化研究機構職員倫理規程

<sup>3</sup> 国立民族学博物館民族学資料廃棄規定

<sup>4</sup> 国立民族学博物館研究倫理指針

<sup>5</sup> 国立民族学博物館 インターネットによる学術情報公開のための指針