

THE INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF MUSEUMS // CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES MUSEES

**NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUMS  
IN ASIA**

**REPORT AND  
RECOMMENDATIONS**

**NEW DELHI, 1976**

**NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUMS  
IN ASIA**

**ICOM MEETING  
OF EXPERTS**

**NEW DELHI  
February 2-7, 1976**

**CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL  
DES MUSÉES**

## FOREWORD

This meeting, designed to identify and examine conditions affecting Natural History Museums in Asian countries, was organized as the result of suggestions made at the meetings of Asian members of ICOM at the 10th General Conference, Copenhagen, June, 1974. It was there pointed out that "there is need for subject meetings, such as 'Natural History Museums in Asia'...as.....in most of the ICOM Committees only European and American problems were discussed". The wish was expressed "to see more emphasis placed on Asia. Regional Committees and regional meetings could contribute to exploring themes of interest to Asia and problems of concern to Asian museums". The meeting may, likewise, serve as a preparatory review of the subject, possibly leading eventually to a Regional Symposium on this and related matters.

The ICOM Regional Agency in Asia is sincerely grateful to the Experts for participation in this Meeting, but also for their generous and helpful cooperation in preparing it. They took time in their busy lives to consider the subject proposed, to comment on it from their national viewpoints and, when the comments were circulated among them, to review and amplify. This preliminary consultation by correspondence proved invaluable as ground work for discussions when the Meeting could finally take place in New Delhi in early February.

The Agency appreciates greatly the cooperation of the Natural History Museum, New Delhi, which shared costs, provided a convenient and agreeable meeting place and gave generous assistance.

The Ford Foundation, Jakarta, must receive warm thanks for its travel grant, enabling Indonesia to be represented at the meeting.

Finally, the Agency takes pleasure in acknowledging its gratitude to the National Gallery of Modern Art, the National Museum, the Bal Bhavan and National Children's Museum and the Crafts Museum, New Delhi, and to the Delhi Zoo, all of which welcomed warmly the Experts on their brief visits.

GRACE MORLEY

ICOM Regional Agency in Asia  
New Delhi, May, 1976.

## FINAL REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### INTRODUCTION

The need for attention to natural history museums in Asian contexts had been for some time of concern to the leaders of the few public museums of this subject in Asian countries, and had been expressed informally in recent years at ICOM and other meetings attended by museum experts from some of the Asian countries. However, the desire to examine and discuss natural history museums and their value to the Asian region, the form they should take there and the part they should play in the rapidly developing nations found in Asia, was precisely formulated only in the second session of the meeting of Asian members of ICOM, within the framework of ICOM's 10th General Conference, in Copenhagen, in June, 1974.

There a representative of the Japanese National Committee for ICOM, a senior staff member of the National Science Museum, Tokyo, stated that in his long experience with international meetings on natural history museums and on subjects related to them, the exclusive preoccupation with matters of interest to museums of the western world gave little opportunity for discussions helpful to Asian specialists. He pointed out, that, though natural history museums are few in Asia outside Japan, they have an especially important contribution to make to developing societies. He added that a general movement to found such museums where they do not yet exist and to render more effective, for public service, older museums of the type, was evident at present in Asia. He pleaded, therefore, for consideration of some way to encourage and assist natural history museums in Asia at a period when they may be considered of special value to the region.

Other Asian museum leaders present, though representing for the most part other museum types, recognized the problem and endorsed the request of their Japanese colleagues. The recommendation for a meeting on "natural history museums in Asia" was accordingly included in ICOM's Triennial Programme for Asia, 1974-1977, *Asia*, page 3.

### PREPARATION

The ICOM Regional Agency, recognizing the importance of the recommendation, accepted it, and began, in the autumn of 1974, preparation for a meeting by an exchange of correspondence and direct consultations, when possible, with Asian leaders in the subject. They agreed that the meeting should be small, but should include a representative cross-section of the natural history museum movement in the region. Fortunately, earlier reviews of conditions in the Asian countries and visits to museums, including those of natural history, in all countries having

examples, as reported in the *Survey and Report*, 1971, and the *Supplement*, 1974, had provided for the Agency a great amount of basic information on the natural history situation in the region. Precise current information and suggestions now were received from the prospective participants.

As a result of the consultations, an ICOM Meeting of Experts on "Natural History Museums in Asia" was planned for New Delhi, in 1975. New Delhi was selected as a central location, but also as particularly apt at the time, because of the recent founding in the city of a National Natural History Museum, beginning to be prepared for opening within the next few years.

Participants to be invited were easily identified on the basis of representation of natural history museum development in the region: Japan, not only because the proposal was made by a leader of the natural history museum movement in that country, but also because of the importance of natural history in the National Science Museum, Tokyo, and of departments of that subject in many provincial museums, together with the widespread influence of natural history education in the country; India, because of the few good natural history sections found in several museums there, the new National Natural History Museum, New Delhi, in preparation, expected to assume leadership in public service, and the Anthropological, Botanical, Geological and Zoological Surveys and their large collections in their respective subjects, even if defective in exhibition presentation, which represent a long tradition of scientific research; Indonesia, because of its Museum Zoologicum Bogoriense, now more than 150 years old, and celebrated for its scientific contributions, the Herbarium and Botanical Garden in Bogor, the Geological Museum, in Bandung, several excellent Zoos, representing the field with distinction in a typical tropical setting; and Iran, up to the present without a public natural history collection, currently planning a major natural history museum, thoroughly scientific in standard, in association with an ecological setting and other adjacent facilities in the project of Pardisan, representing the most important new development in the subject in the region. (Singapore's new Science Centre, which includes life sciences as well as technology, being prepared for inauguration at this date, might properly have been represented also, except for the fact that in the rush for completion of its exhibitions no one competent could be spared for meetings, as had been discovered at the time of the Indian National Committee for ICOM's invitation for the regional Symposium on "Museums and Cultural and Scientific Exchanges", held in Calcutta in early December, 1975).

In August, 1975, it became necessary to change the proposed date of the Meeting from early October to the beginning of the following February in consequence of the unexpectedly modified schedule of a key participant. Fortun-

ately, the other participants could accept the alteration in dates, to February 2-7, 1976.

The reports on conditions in regard to natural history and to museums of the subject, existing or being prepared, sent to the Agency, were reproduced and circulated among all the potential participants, for comment, suggestions and additions. Thus a considerable amount of factual information, opinions and suggestions, based on it, was assembled. This preparatory documentation was augmented by further reports brought to the Meeting in February. This reference information proved of the greatest value as the basis and guide for the discussions.

In summary, the following facts were brought to attention during the preparatory period:

(i) natural history museums have an important contribution to make to rapidly developing countries, in general, but particularly for public education on nature, its conservation and the protection of wild life, preservation of the environment, information about natural resources and guidance for their wise use and development, under careful controls, for the good of citizens in the respective countries;

(ii) in the absence of natural history museums in some countries, specimens collected by foreign scientific missions, welcomed by the nation concerned, for lack of any repository in the country where they could be preserved and used for research and exhibition, had been exported by the scientists of the respective foreign missions, and were preserved and studied abroad, even reports or other publications based on them often failing to reach the competent authorities in the nations of their origin, so that basic natural history reference material was lacking in the source country, to the loss of the growth of scientific knowledge and of public education;

(iii) by contrast, in countries where natural history museums and related services had existed for a long period (India, Indonesia, and Japan, for example), specimens were preserved in the countries of origin, research was carried on by specialists of the country, even when valuable work in collection and study had been contributed by foreign scientists, and libraries and other reference resources, even if not always adequate, existed and were used for the public good;

(iv) text books available to students of natural history in many countries of Asia tended to be based on species and environmental conditions of the western world, with rare, or no references to indigenous material and to local conditions, so that knowledge gained by students of natural history in Asia tended in many countries to remain theoretical and alien to their own experience;

(v) in some countries cooperation among universities, other organizations and services concerned with natural history and existing natural history museums was not adequately developed;

(vi) trained technical personnel for museum work (for example exhibit preparators, taxidermists, educators for instruction of the general public and for services to schools and colleges) was lacking, or inadequate in the region in general, and facilities for their training were insufficient or entirely absent;

(vii) agreement on museums' obligation to carry on research was unanimous, but public education was accorded high priority, even when conceded to be still insufficiently developed;

(viii) planned collecting, emphasizing interpretation of facts and phenomena rather than mere accumulation of specimens, defining areas of collecting, the value of thematic exhibitions, and possibilities of specialization and of sharing research among institutions of the region were points brought to attention and in general recommended;

(ix) lack of information on natural history museums and collections in the region and on scientists concerned with natural history subjects was noted, and proposals to improve the present situation were discussed.

## THE MEETING OF EXPERTS

Reports and other documents brought to the Meeting by the participants amplified the earlier information and suggestions, and brought into focus many of the points touched on in the preparatory exchanges of views.

It opened with a review of the terminology applicable to natural history museums in order to make sure that there was agreement on their meaning and use. The participant from Japan then presented to his colleagues "Fundamental Problems to be discussed". Among them, as a basic rule, it was explained that "natural history museums in the Asia-Pacific area should not be museums of the western-style directly imported from Europe and America, but should be the most appropriate to the area", being suitable "for the developing stages of developing countries", and in general emphasizing "the relations of nature and man". He suggested practical means to realize these aims. In the discussions following, these proposals were in general accepted, expanded by the suggestions of others, and illustrated by examples cited, and are reflected in the *Recommendations* which follow.

A formal report on the project of the Natural History Museum, Tehran, and on Pardisan, its ecological and architectural setting, as a new concept in popular education on all aspects of Iranian topographic, environmental, and wild life

conditions, with references to comparable areas in the world at large, was contributed by the Director of the Environment, Government of Iran, and was explained in detail by the two experts from the Museum in attendance. A resolution of appreciation and commendation of this imaginative project was passed at the end of the Meeting.

The National Natural History Museum, New Delhi (in preparation), cooperating with the Agency in the organization of the Meeting, was visited by the experts and provided fruitful suggestions for discussion in relation to the themes of the Meeting and to the specific situation and actual needs of India. The Zoological Park, New Delhi, and museums and monuments of the city were also visited.

The Meeting of Experts was considered by those in attendance as a preparatory consultation of qualified leaders in the region, on the needs of natural history museums in Asia, their potential services for their respective countries, and for the region in general, leading eventually, it was hoped by all present, to a fully representative ICOM Regional Conference, on invitation of an ICOM Asian Member Country, at an appropriate time, possibly following ICOM's next General Conference in May, 1977.

With that prospect in mind, and expecting in the meantime to be able to begin some action as suggested, the Meeting of Experts drafted and approved the recommendations listed below.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Experts, meeting to study NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUMS IN ASIA, and to give advice on them for the benefit of ICOM's Regional Agency in Asia, to be transmitted to ICOM, Unesco and other pertinent organizations,

*discussed* their role in Asia as "museums of nature and man",

*reviewed* the documents circulated in preparation for the meeting and those brought to it to amplify the earlier suggestions,

*considered* natural history museums in the Asian context, those of long history and firmly established policies, those under preparation at this time, and those likely to be founded in the future, possibly in some cases where no such museum or collection open to the public had previously existed, their adaptation and potential services to this part of the world, their demonstrated importance in contributing to the wise development of their respective countries and to others of the region, and, above all, to the welfare of the peoples of Asia,

*defined* ways in which natural history museums have particular value in this area under current conditions (for example: for education of the public about nature; for nature conservation; for protection of the environment and of



wild life; for use of natural resources under suitable controls), by providing guidance to citizens of each country and by securing understanding, support and assistance, as appropriate to conditions in each country, from national and international organizations and agencies,

#### RECOMMEND TO ICOM:

1. that formation of a regional committee representing natural history museums in Asia be encouraged in order to promote the creation of additional museums in this field in Asia, and to provide guidance for their development;
2. that this regional committee eventually be considered for incorporation in ICOM's International Committee of Natural History Museums, or for suitable affiliation with it, in order to give particular attention to Asian problems and needs, to give advice on conditions in the region, and to contribute, under ICOM's leadership, to natural history museums' development for Asia;
3. that it study the problem of ensuring adequate representation by competent Asian natural history museum leaders in ICOM International Committee Meetings, and particularly in its International Committee of Natural History Museums' meetings, and give advice and assistance on possible sources of travel grants and maintenance subsidies, when Asian countries at present are unable to provide such funds;
4. that ICOM urge Unesco to consider with it means of providing training of staff for natural history museums in Asia, especially of technicians (for taxidermy, modelling of specimens for exhibition, and educational use, etc.), but also specialists for administration and for public education in natural history museums;
5. that natural history museums' importance for developing countries, especially those of Asia, of which the present Meeting of Experts has defined some aspects, and the Indian National Committee's "Museums and Cultural and Scientific Exchanges" Regional Symposium, December, 1975, suggested means for development through exchanges with one another, be brought to the attention of pertinent international and national organizations, as contributions to their meetings on museums in Asia, such as the Unesco Regional Seminar on "Adaptation of Museums in Asia to the Needs of the Modern World", Tokyo, March, 1976;
6. that means be sought to strengthen the Regional Agency in Asia, in order to ensure its continuing its present activity, but likewise, with additional personnel and financial resources, to increase its present programme of coordination, and to contribute still further to encouraging cooperation among the National

Committees and museums of the region, in tasks helpful to its museums, as indicated below:

#### **RECOMMEND TO NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUMS IN ASIA:**

7. that efforts be made for compilation of: (i) a directory of Asian Natural History Museums, with information on their collections, policies, programmes and activities; and (ii) a directory of natural history personnel in Asia, connected with museums, but also in universities and other organizations as well, to the extent possible;

8. that they establish themselves as appropriate centres of documentation, information and advice to official governmental leaders, legislators and policy makers so as to provide a rational framework for regional and national planning and development;

9. that development of new natural history museums in Asian countries currently lacking them be encouraged, provided that competent personnel and appropriate means exist, assuring these new museums that the collective abilities of older and well established museums of the region may be made available to them on request, and, further, that these new institutions be encouraged to adapt their growth in accordance with the principles recommended throughout this document;

10. that they establish international cooperation among themselves for the purpose of organizing joint research on various branches of natural history, and museum methods and, likewise, exchange results of research on community needs in Asia;

11. that they recognize their responsibilities as guardians of the total natural history wealth of their countries, and, accordingly, ensure proper care and use of collected specimens, establish guide-lines for fair and honourable distribution of material among the cooperating institutions, whatever their origin, and promote responsible scientific research on this material;

12. that they, realizing their vital role in nature conservation, (i) assume the responsibility of dissemination of information on this subject in order to develop ethics in relation to the environment, both by collaboration with other agencies involved in implementing conservation projects, and by projection of their own work for conservation through museums' exhibitions; and (ii) give prime importance to high-lighting the endangered species of plants and animals in their respective regions, by means of exhibitions and in their other programmes, thus providing guidance to the public at large for their protection;

13. that they have as far as possible: (i) a setting emphasizing nature; (ii) develop a few "live corners"; (iii) when pertinent and appropriate, have for the use

of the public, particularly young people, "field stations" and "nature study centres", representing different ecosystems;

14. that they be concerned with the problem of indiscriminate commercial exploitation of natural history material, and especially, with the illicit export and import of wild life items, such as animal skins, and take necessary measures, within their legitimate powers, to combat these abuses, and develop a code of ethics in regard to these matters;

15. that they strive to develop in a way to serve as instruments of educational communication, through dissemination of information, by imparting instruction and providing interpretation, thus combining enjoyment and enlightenment, according to the concepts of nature and man as inter-related phenomena;

16. that they undertake to survey community needs in order to determine appropriate aspects of presentation and interpretation, and attempt to adapt their responsibilities to the needs of the local population;

17. that they be encouraged to include in their public exhibitions some information concerning collection, preservation and preparation of the exhibits, in order to provide general ideas of the techniques used in natural history museum work, and, especially, to make policy statements to the effect that the museum strongly discourages indiscriminate destruction of animals, plants and geological structures (to avoid disruption of ecosystems), and, furthermore, that the specimens used in the museum are the result of selective sampling from nature, as well as from sources where preserved material is already available, such as assemblages of trophies or animals dying naturally in zoological parks;

18. that research in museums be encouraged according to local resources and needs, as determined by the relevant authorities in the respective countries;

19. that they establish close cooperation with appropriate university departments and other agencies, and organize their collections, exhibitions, activities and educational programmes, as far as possible, in cooperation with these departments and agencies;

20. that they attempt to promote the use for illustrations, and to include as reference examples, local forms of flora, fauna, rocks and minerals, in educational texts designed for national distribution;

21. that they take into account the Recommendations of the Regional Symposium on Museums and Cultural and Scientific Exchanges, organized by the Indian National Committee for ICOM, in Calcutta, December 4-9, 1975, and improve their own inter-communication and inter-action among themselves in their natural history field, as may be practical and pertinent, to their own development.

## AGENDA

Meetings took place in the Committee Room, Natural History Museum, FICCI Building, Barakhamba Road, New Delhi-1, February 2-6, 1976.

- 1 Discussion of terminology and definition of themes.
- 2 Review of the reports on conditions and problems of Natural History Museums in Asia, sent in by participants or brought with them to the meeting: India; Indonesia, Iran and Japan.
- 3 Discussions; proposals for improvements; drafting of Recommendations.
- 4 Recommendations debated and adopted.

Study visits to museums of New Delhi: Natural History Museum (in preparation); National Gallery of Modern Art; National Museum; Crafts Museum; Bal Bhavan and National Children's Museum; Zoo.

### **Cultural programmes:**

*Odissi dance*, the classic dance tradition of Eastern India, lecture-demonstration of poses, as introduction to a performance, February 4.

Light and Sound programme, on history, Red Fort, Delhi, February 5.

Final study tour for participants from abroad, to Agra, by road, February 7.

## PARTICIPANTS

### *Committee of Experts:*

- Japan — Mr. Soichiro Tsuruta, Director, Department of Programmes, National Science Museum, Tokyo.
- Iran — Mr. Robert G. Tuck, Jr., Curator/Adviser, and Mr. Paul Housh-mast, Administrator, Muze-ye Melli-ye Tarikh-e Tabi'i (National Museum of Natural History), Department of the Environment, Tehran.
- Indonesia — Mr. Pranowo Martodihardjo, Chief of Exhibits, Museum Zoologi-cum Bogoriense, Bogor.
- India — Dr. S.M. Nair, Planning Officer, Natural History Museum, New Delhi; and  
Dr. S.T. Satyamurti, Director of Museums of Tamil Nadu, Govern-ment Museum, Madras.

### *Observers (invited), some working sessions:*

- Mr. Mahtab Singh, Deputy Secretary, Ministry of Science and Technology, Government of India, New Delhi.
- Mr. A. Bose, Director of Museums, Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, c/o Birla Industrial & Technological Museum, Calcutta.
- Dr. (Mrs.) Kapila Vatsyayan, Joint Educational Adviser (Depart-ment of Culture), Ministry of Education and Social Welfare, New Delhi.