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Peculiarities and problems of managing monetary museums from the viewpoint of the Central Bank Museum

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1. INTRODUCTION

Monetary museums have two characteristics: of a "banking museum" and of a "currency (or money) museum". A banking museum deals with its history from the establishment to the present by showing the historical items the bank has. Items include historical records, documents, books, typewriters, desks, calculators, and even old buildings. On the other hand, a currency museum tells the history of currency by showing historical currency.

Some monetary museums have both characteristics and others have only one. The combination of these characteristics greatly depends on what the museum is aiming to express.

What is the aim of banks and central banks in running museums? What is their difference from regular museums or museums of art? This is the key of this paper "Peculiarities and Problems of Managing Monetary Museums." I would like to regard bank museums as one of the museums of private companies and point out the peculiarities and problems that central banks have.

2. MONETARY MUSEUMS, AS ONE OF THE MUSEUMS OF PRIVATE COMPANIES

In general, the museums of private companies are trying to:

- advertise themselves to give a good impression,
- provide information and knowledge on their business,
- keep a good relation with society,
- offer opportunities of intellectual recreation,
- make a contribution to the development of culture in the local area.

The exhibition of museums of such companies mainly consist of the items that can provide information on goods and services of the company. For example, a steel company will show the items that will give explanations on the history, usage and features of its various kinds of products (such as iron pipes, ironwork), and manufacturing processes.

The monetary museums, which are run by banks, have the same characteristics as the museums of a private company. They have the aims of offering the information and knowledge on monetary business and

keeping in touch with society through propaganda, as well as enforcing and expanding the company's business. However, a bank's business is selling services and very close to the public and it is difficult to show the products, manufacturing machines, and processes as other businesses can. Due to these characteristics, the exhibitions of monetary museums have to focus on the history of the bank.

3. THE CENTRAL BANK MUSEUM

What do central banks have a museum for? Of course, it is necessary for central banks to inform the public of their functions and roles and it is efficient for museums to support central banks' public relations activities. In addition, central banks are required to explain the intention, logic, and effect of monetary policy, because monetary policy, which is based on the macroeconomics-viewpoint, could be evaluated variously. The central bank museum has good opportunities to give knowledge to the public on the central banks' system, history, and monetary policy with their collection.

Moreover, offering information and knowledge on the currency in circulation is quite important in terms of the stability of currency value, which the central banks have to maintain. The central bank museum is required to stabilize the value of credit money under the managed currency system, by providing information on currency, history of the currency system, the requirements for the currency, and problems of counterfeiting. It can be thought that the central bank museum will give opportunities to provide information on the above. Differing from the private banks, the central banks do not have to advertise themselves commercially. Then, it is possible for the central banks to make their museums focus on diffusing knowledge to the public for their better understanding of the currency as the medium of settlement and for higher credibility of the currency.

As mentioned above, the central bank museum has two characteristics. One is characteristic of the banking museum, which tells about its own history as well as the monetary system and finance of the country; the other is of the currency museum, which tells about the history of the currency by showing wide ranging currency of its country and the world. One of the main functions of the central banks is, however, issuing and managing currency and stabilizing the value of the currency. From this viewpoint, it is the important task of the central bank museum to make the exhibition on display diffuse information on the above and provide knowledge on the history of the currency. This is why the central bank museum tends to have the characteristics of a currency museum, not a banking museum.

4. WHAT SHOULD A CURRENCY MUSEUM BE?

What should a currency museum be? Elaborated coins and paper money, with highly developed issuing technology and material processing technology, are works of art in a sense. In this respect, a currency museum can be regarded as a regular art museum, or museum where culture and works of art are shown. But, the aims of a currency museum are diffusing knowledge on the history of currency, and providing opportunities to the public to think what currency is, through the history of currency. Therefore, it is necessary to provide information from the viewpoint of the history of economics, such as how currency has been managed and how the value of currency has fluctuated, and what kind of problems have been caused, in addition to providing the information on currency itself such as materials, shapes, history of development, and impact on and from abroad.

5. SOME ISSUES THAT MONETARY MUSEUMS HAVE TO CONSIDER

5.1 COLLECTING ITEMS WITH A LIMITED BUDGET

Currency has a long history, for example, the history of Japanese currency can date back to the 8th century AD, and it is necessary to collect currency covering about 1,300 years. If you would like to cover the history of world currency, the history dates back to the 7th-8th century BC, and the history is more than 2,500 years. Even in the recent 19th century, a lot of nations became independent and issued their own currency. In addition, many nations remodelled their currency. Then items telling the history of currency are enormous. It is obvious that the time and cost for collecting items is quite huge. There are, of course, difficulties with the museums that have been collecting currency and doing research, but there are further difficulties with the museums that start to collect totally from scratch. It is usual for bank museums to try to collect currency and currency-related items to tell their company's history. Come to think of it, however, the history of banks is far shorter than that of currency. Then there should be raised a question of how meaningful it is to display the limited collection of banks. In terms of collecting items, it is generally easy for the mint and printing organization to obtain items since they are the ones producing currency or paper money. In fact, in Japan, the Mint and the Printing Bureau of the Ministry of Finance have the museums. It is also relatively easy for the central banks to obtain items since they are the issuers of coins and paper money. With regard to collecting overseas currency, the central banks have the advantage because it is possible to exchange specimen paper money and coins with other countries' central banks.

5.2 CONSERVING AND KEEPING THE COLLECTION PROPERLY

The history of currency is so long that some items are more than 2,000 years old and precious cultural assets. Special attention should be paid to conserving, keeping and displaying them. The collection consists of various materials, for example, paper and metals (gold, silver, copper, iron,

lead, and so on). Consideration on these matters is not thought necessary for the banking business, but that these matters should be taken charge of by people with special skills. It depends on cost and benefit that the bank museum and the central bank museum have a specialized person in conservation. In the case of the Currency Museum, Bank of Japan, it is difficult to allocate specialized staff, and we cope with this problem by asking the national organization (Tokyo National Research Institute of Cultural Properties) for its advice. Generally, however, the private bank museums do not seem to pay attention to this matter enough.

5.3 COOPERATION WITH THE ACADEMIA AND MUSEUMS IN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

It is necessary too for the monetary museum to research currency in order to accomplish the aims of spreading knowledge of the history, meanings, and role of currency to the public. For these research activities, cooperation with the academia is quite important. The Currency Museum, the Bank of Japan, is part of the research institute (Institute for Monetary and Economic Studies), and the exhibition reflects research accomplishments including cooperation with the academia. Cooperation between museums in research activities should be encouraged, and it is desirable that international conferences like this will offer opportunities.

5.4 OBTAINING ENOUGH BUDGET TO AFFORD MUSEUM ACTIVITIES

Most of the museums do not charge an entrance fee to visitors and even if they charge, the budget to run the museum is too big to be covered by the entrance fee. Some museums have their own budget but others do not. The Currency Museum, the Bank of Japan, does not have its own budget. The museums that do not have their own budget are not allotted enough budget and find difficulties in enriching collections, conserving, and improving the facilities. In terms of enriching collections, however, cooperation among museums in offering information on their collections to each other with new high-tech tools might be effective. That is, the museums can provide more information to the visitors by exchanging the information on their collections. These tools enable us to make up the shortage of the budget to buy new items, although seeing collections indirectly can give less impression to the visitors. Another possibility of showing more items is to exchange special exhibition with other museums. This will create more expense for transport but less expense for purchasing new items.

6. CONCLUSION

Currency is a medium of exchange and it is indispensable to the economy. No economic activities can be conducted without currency. Managing a currency museum is difficult because currency itself has various aspects. It is quite important to understand the history of currency and to think what currency is. In understanding history, we should expand our view to the

world, not limiting to our own country. Therefore, banks, especially the central banks, should manage the monetary museums to provide the right information to society. In addition, as the use of currency is becoming international and borderless, it is necessary to expand cooperation and the network among museums in the world, in terms of exchanging various knowledge on high technology and so on, in order to provide useful information to the public.