


THE news that has most surprised and delighted museum officials throughout Japan lately is that the number of visitors to the Kyushu National Museum in Dazaifu City, Fukuoka Prefecture, reached 890,000 in the first half-year since its opening last October. This is more than five times the original target of 170,000. The ripple effect on the local economy brought by the opening of the museum has reached ¥12.3 billion, according to one estimate. This shows that museums can exert an unexpected influence.

Local Dream

The Kyushu National Museum is the 4th national museum in the country, with three others in Tokyo, Kyoto and Nara. They have a history of more than 100 years each and have vast collections of historical objects of art, including those designated as national treasures or important cultural assets. They are favorably positioned to attract visitors, in that Tokyo is the national capital with a huge population, while Kyoto and Nara, as old capitals and tourist spots, bustle with a large number of tourists.

Given its lack of such favorable conditions, the new Kyushu National Museum's ability to attract visitors is tremendous. This is evidenced by the fact that the number of visitors to the Tokyo, 

Kyoto and Nara national museums in FY 2005 totaled 1,440,000, 330,000 and 440,000, respectively.

Establishing a national museum in Kyushu had long been a dream for a region with a long history and cultural heritage. But, it took a long time for the plan to come to fruition, because there already existed three national museums and some argued there was no need to build another one. Kyushu finally prevailed on the central government to establish a national museum in the region, asserting that it would take advantage of its geographical proximity to the Chinese continent and the Korean peninsula and study the formation of Japanese culture from the viewpoints of Asian history.

In a speech delivered at the opening ceremony for the museum, Fukuoka Prefectural Governor Aso Wataru said, "The dream Kyushu had entertained for a century has finally come true." This was no overstatement. The unexpected large number of visitors to the Kyushu National Museum apparently reflected local enthusiasm.

Various Events

National museums and art galleries were transformed into administrative agencies independent from the central government in April 2001, whereby they are required to set targets on the number of vis-

New Regional Museum Sees Big Visitor Turnout — A Sign of Change in Museum Management Style —

By Kurosawa Tsuneo

itors and gate revenues, and achieve satisfactory results.

Accordingly, they have begun to hold various events in addition to exhibitions. For example, the Tokyo National Museum regularly holds classical music concerts in cooperation with the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music. The Kyoto National Museum sponsors operas. The Nara National Museum stages concerts of ancient Japanese court music befitting a former national

Photo: Kyushu National Museum



Kyushu National Museum in Fukuoka Prefecture, attracting an amazing number of people since its opening

capital. They also offer their buildings for fashion shows and as locations for TV dramas. In this way they are trying to shed their formal images and open them up to the public.

Efficiency Questioned

Apart from national museums, all public museums and art galleries in Japan are now required to transform themselves. The most closely-watched scheme is a new "designated manager system," which calls for their management and maintenance to be commissioned to business corporations or private-sector organizations in order to make their operations more efficient and more vital.

Yet, there are concerns over such excessive efforts because they may tend to focus on exhibitions of works of popular artists or artist groups and to cut corners in planning exhibitions. They might also tend to put less focus on unprofitable sectors, such as research, education, preservation and repair of cultural assets, which are important roles in addition to the holding of exhibitions.

Museums and art galleries are an important base of the nation's cultural administration. It is hoped that they will do their best to maintain their level of quality. **JS**

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