

9 August 2019

**Statement on the Cancellation of ‘After Freedom of Expression?’ at the Aichi Triennale: From Repression of the Freedom of Expression and Art to a More Developed and Mature Democracy**

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The Japan Association for Cultural Policy Research is an academic society comprised of researchers and practitioners interested in cultural policy.

Article 21 of the Constitution of Japan guarantees “freedom of expression” and prohibits censorship. According to the preamble to the Fundamental Law of Culture and the Arts, culture and the arts “provide a ground for people to connect, understand and respect each other.” They “create a spiritually rich society where people can accept diversity, [and] contribute to world peace.” In addition, it is claimed that “in order to promote culture and the arts, the importance of freedom of expression, which is the foundation of culture and the arts is strongly recognized. Furthermore, the independence of practitioners who engage in arts and cultural activities is respected.”

“Freedom of expression” and “prohibition of censorship” have long been protected as the foundation of a democratic nation, through cultural legislation such as the Constitution and the Fundamental Law of Culture and the Arts. “Freedom of expression” is a principle which works to prevent public authorities from intervening in the independent expression of individuals and groups. It is also a concept aimed to prevent inappropriate political involvement in projects that receive subsidies from the government. From the perspective of arts and culture promotion policy, it is never desirable for political intervention to demand changes to any project. Nevertheless, the reality is that intervention and self-restriction are common in the case of art that contains political messages. Artists and the curators who support them engage in self-censorship. Since it is essential to keep a certain distance between their activities and government policies and perspectives, as well as to ensure freedom of expression and artistic autonomy, it is important that evaluation of content and quality should be entrusted to arts and culture professionals.

On 3 August 2019, the exhibition “After ‘Freedom of Expression?’”, which is a part of the 2019 Aichi Triennale, was canceled. We would like to clarify our position on the following three points related to this incident.

(1) The exhibition stirred up an avalanche of protests by phone, including threats, which disrupted the work of the project office in a way not dissimilar to terrorist threats. No matter how incompatible the exhibition might be with one’s beliefs, the attempt to deal with it by resorting to violence is despicable and cannot be tolerated. Our Association thoroughly rejects the violence and intimidation that have given rise to this situation. We demand that all such threats of violence and intimidation be properly investigated and punished accordingly.

(2) High-ranking government officials, as well as leaders and other members of the local legislature, have made a number of public statements against the contents of the exhibition. The government must recognize that careful consideration is required to guarantee that diversity and autonomy of expression is maximized, regardless of the political stances involved. Moreover, it is not an exaggeration to say that the government officials and local legislators--who should be devoting all of their energies to preventing violence--are in effect encouraging those who threaten violence.

(3) The exhibition was forced to close because the organizer decided to self-restrict and self-censor. If the cancellation is due to administrative challenges we believe it should resume as fully as possible after those challenges have been overcome and when safety can be ensured.

The Japan Association for Cultural Policy Research is concerned that freedom of expression and the arts is being exposed to serious crisis at the site of this cultural venture, which is attracting attention not only inside Japan but around the globe. At the same time, we are deeply concerned that the space for freedom of speech in art festivals, public museums, cultural facilities, etc. that receive public funding will shrink even further, and that this may further limit the freedom of expression and the arts from different political and social positions.

The Japan Association for Cultural Policy Research is not focusing on a problem limited to a single art festival. We, together with the government, citizens, artists, and arts and culture professionals, are devoted to creating a place for wide-ranging dialogue and discussion. As long as they contribute to democracy, the arts and culture should be a field where a wide variety of opinions and expressions are respected, even though they may be contrary to those of the majority. The Association sees this incident as an opportunity to deepen discussions of freedom of expression and the arts, and to build a more developed and mature democracy in Japan through academic research on cultural policy, and practice.