

# Accession and Documentation of Artifacts at the National Museum of Ethnology, Japan

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In this session, I would like to explain the workflow at the National Museum of Ethnology from the accession of newly collected artifacts to shelving at the storage room via summarizing information about the artifacts.

## Workflow of Accession of Newly Delivered Artifacts

<b>Works</b>		<b>Descriptions of Main Works</b>
1. Accession, unpacking and verifying newly delivered artifacts	-----▶	Accession of artifacts from a transporter Unpacking Confirmation of the number of artifacts
↓		
2. Preliminary documentation	-----▶	Provision of a collection number Taking measurements Photography
↓		
3. Pest control: fumigation/carbon dioxide treatment	-----▶	Artifacts from overseas: Fumigation Artifacts from domestic sources: Insecticide treatment using carbon dioxide
↓		
4. Registration	-----▶	Determination of a specimen number given to each single specimen artifact
↓		
5. Marking	-----▶	Applying registration number to artifacts
↓		
6. Condition check	-----▶	Making of inspection cards through careful observation of artefacts Input above data into database
↓		
7. Storing	-----▶	Allocating artefacts in storage areas
↓		
8. Information management	-----▶	Keeping and managing all written data

## 1. Accession, packing and inspection

### [Descriptions of the work]

The work of accession, unpacking and inspection includes: (i) unpacking the artifacts newly collected by a researcher abroad or within Japan, and removing the artifacts from cases; and, (ii) confirmation on whether or not all artifacts have been carried in, and about the state of the artifacts when carried in (confirming they are not damaged, and all parts are complete) by inspection information described in the collection information card received from the researcher in charge of such collection and the actual artifacts carried in.

### [Work progress]

#### (i) Preparation before accession

- Inform the researcher in charge of the collection of such information given by a carrier in advance as an arrival date, size and quantity of the artifacts, etc.
- Receive the collection information card that describes what and how many artifacts were collected where including the quantity of parts, names of collection place/area, etc. from the researcher in charge of the collection who collected the artifacts.
- Plan a schedule for fumigation or carbon dioxide treatment in advance.
- Prepare tools for unpacking such as utility knives, scissors, and a crowbar for pulling out nails from wooden boxes, as well as an information sheet, on which the names of collection place/area and researcher in charge of the collection are entered, to be stuck to mobile shelves for storing the collected artifacts, together with curing tapes to stick such the information sheet to the mobile shelves.
- Prepare mobile shelves to load the artifacts beforehand. Prepare, if necessary, pallets and those with universal casters, a pallet jack, and an electric forklift to load large artifacts at an unloading/packaging place (bellow photo).



**(ii) Carry in**

- Receive the artifacts from the carrier.

**(iii) Unpacking**

- Unpack the boxes/cartons in which the artifacts are packed by using utility knives, scissors, crowbars, etc.



**(iv) Allocation to mobile shelves**

- After unpacking, put the artifacts onto the mobile shelves, and stick the information sheet onto which necessary details were entered.



**(v) Relocation of mobile shelves**

- Move the mobile shelves holding the artifacts to a temporary specimen stockyard.

## 2. Preliminary documentation

### [Descriptions of the work]

The preliminary documentation includes taking measurements of, photographing, and preparing basic information about the artifacts when accepted.

### [Work progress]

#### (i) Preparation

- Prepare an accepted-artifact inspection list to record the size of the artifacts, whether or not parts or accessories exist, etc.
- Prepare a digital camera and background sheet for photographing artifacts, number plates for indicating the collection numbers of the artifacts when photographing, writing implements, and a tape measure.



#### (ii) Inspection between artifacts and list

- Verify the descriptions on the collection information card received from the researcher prior to the accession of the artifacts and actual artifacts carried in. At that time, verify the collection numbers and the artifacts, and confirm the quantity of the components of an artifact (main body, parts, and accessories). Describe, if any, such matters as whether or not parts and/or accessories exist, information from a section to accept the artifacts, and materials used for wrapping the artifacts in the accepted-artifact inspection list.

#### (iii) Checking the conditions and the number of the components of the artefact

- Take an artifact out of a box to confirm that it is not damaged, and is complete. If you find any damage/parts missing from the artifact, describe it in the accepted-artifact inspection list.
- Enter the quantity of the components of an artifact (e.g. a pot with a lid is described as “main body: pot; parts: lid; quantity of artifact: one; quantity of parts: one) in the accepted-artifact inspection list.

#### (iv) Taking measurements

- Take measurements of the artifacts in accordance with the procedures below:

[Procedure to take measurements]

- (1) Determine the lengthwise and crosswise directions of the artifact in the light of the state under which it is normally used.
- (2) Take measurements of “width x depth x height” or “diameter  $\phi$  x height” along the shape of an artifact while paying careful attention that the tape measure does not make direct contact with the artifact during measurement.
  - \* In case there are some accessories such as strings, ornaments, etc., measure them also for supplementary information.
  - \* Clothes should be measured in the form in which both sleeves are spread horizontally.
  - \* Long artifacts including swords should be measured in the form in which the longer side is laid horizontally.

#### **(v) Photography**

- Photography is done using a digital camera, tripod, and lights.

### **3. Pest control: fumigation/insecticide treatment using carbon dioxide**

#### **[Descriptions of the work]**

Fumigation or carbon dioxide insecticide treatment is to destroy pests or fungi which may inhabit an artifact in order to prevent further biological damage.

#### **[Work progress]**

##### **(i) Formation of treatment plan**

- Make a plan for the treatment schedule when a accession date for artifacts is fixed. At that time, for artifacts newly delivered from overseas, the plan for fumigation treatment is made; meanwhile, for those newly delivered from a domestic source, the plan for carbon dioxide insecticide treatment is made.

##### **Relocation of artifacts (before treatment)**

- Move artifact shelves from the temporary specimen stockyard to a fumigation chamber or a bag for carbon dioxide insecticide treatment, depending on the contents of each treatment.

##### **(ii) Carrying out fumigation or carbon dioxide treatment**

- Carry out fumigation for the artifacts newly delivered from overseas, and carbon dioxide treatment for those newly delivered from a domestic source.
  - \* Fumigation treatment in practice should be undertaken after consultation/confirmation of details of such work with a specialist company.
  - \* Carbon dioxide insecticide treatment is to be undertaken by in-house members of staff. To this purpose, in accordance with the carbon dioxide insecticide treatment manual, more than one staff member should undertake this work.

In addition, in some cases, high temperature or low temperature treatment may be undertaken.

##### **Relocation of artifacts (after treatment)**

- After such treatment, make a visual inspection of the artifacts to check whether or not any treatment failure/accident has occurred to the artifacts; and, if not, immediately relocate them to a storage room.

### **4. Registration**

#### **[Descriptions of the work]**

Registration includes the work to enter information relating to the artifacts into the specimen artifacts management system, and to provide specimen numbers to the artifacts.

#### **[Work progress]**

##### **(i) Receipt of collection-artifact information**

- Receive the collection-artifact information sheet (Excel file) from the researcher in charge of the collection.

##### **(ii) Input of information about collected artifacts**

- Confirm the contents of the collection-artifact information sheet (Excel file) you received. Then, enter the basic information related to an artifact including the quantity of parts and the names of the overseas/local place of origin, collection place/site, and the place where the artifact was used into the specimen-artifact management system.

##### **(iii) Uploading to the specimen management system**

Make entry of the artifacts after sufficiently confirming the contents to be registered.

##### **(iv) Provision of specimen number**

- Input necessary matters into the specimen number management list (Excel file) to determine a specimen number.

## 5. Marking

### [Descriptions of the work]

Marking is the work of writing a specimen number on each single artifact.

### [Work progress]

#### (i) Preparation of marking

- Prepare tools and materials necessary for marking.

Select marking materials, depending on the materials and colour of an artifact.

\* A white acrylic paint is used for blackish artifacts including charcoal. On the other hand, for clothes, no direct marking is made. Instead, a cotton tape on which the artifact number is written is sewed in order to minimise load on the artifact.

#### (ii) Marking

- “NME” (stands for the National Museum of Ethnology) is placed in front of the specimen number.

Examples: In the case that the specimen number is H12345 → NME12345

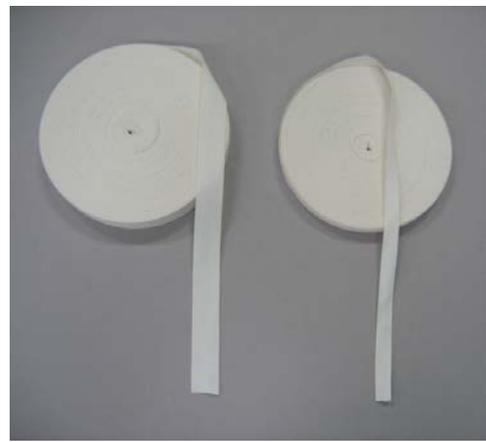
In the case that a branch number follows: NME12345-1/2



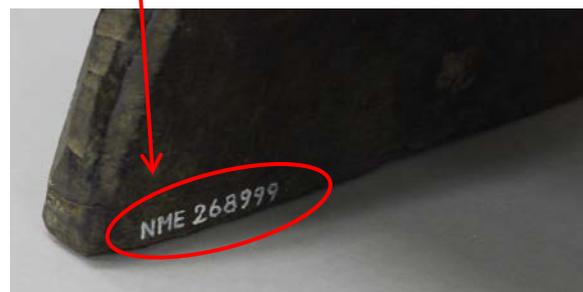
Chinese ink



Acrylic paint



Cotton tape





## 7. Storing

### [Descriptions of the work]

Storing is the work of arranging artifacts on fixed shelves in a storage room. After marking of numbers and inspection, artifacts are to be stored on the fixed shelves in the storage room.

### [Work progress]

#### (i) Determination of shelved location of artifacts

- As a basic principle, in order of increasing specimen number, artifacts are to be located from the left back to the front on the lower column of a fixed shelf. First, determine a storage location; then, shelve an artifact thereon.

\* Depending on the characteristics of an artifact, you may have to shelve it in a special storage room after consulting with the researcher in charge of storage for confirmation.

Currently, there are five categories of special storage rooms, respectively for carpets, lacquerware, furs, swords and clothes.

#### (ii) Input of shelved location of artifacts

- Additionally enter the shelved location of an artifact thus determined into the specimen-artifact management system.

#### (iii) Filing to accession number-indexed list

- Print out a list into which the shelved location has been entered; and, create an accession number-indexed file into which the list is filed.

## 8. Information management

### [Descriptions of the work]

Information management is the work of saving information related to artifacts into the accepted-artifact management folder for future confirmation.

### [Descriptions of the work]

#### (i) Summarisation of information related to artifacts

- Summarises information related to artifacts compiled to date.

#### (ii) Preparation of accepted artifact management folder

- Prepare an accepted-artifact management folder by using a hanging folder (*Kokuyo* A4 size compatible).  
- The title of the file shows the accession number, accession category (e.g. purchase, donation, etc.), an accession title (in many cases, this title is represented with the name of nations or ethnic groups such as “Peruvian artifact”, “Ainu artifact”, etc.), and the name of the researcher in charge of such collection.

\* Images are printed out, and stored in the accepted-artifact management folder.

#### (iii) Storage of accepted-artifact management file

- The accepted-artifact management file should be stored and managed in a prescribed place.