Significance of Expo'70

Historical Significance and Objectives

Historical Significance  Since the first Great Exhibition in London in 1851, a World Exposition has been held more than 20 times in various countries of America and Europe. With an illustrious history of 120 years, it is now a major international event.

When we consider the fact that the Modern Olympic Games were revived in Athens in 1896, we can understand the great scope of contributions which universal and international exhibitions, 45 years longer in existence than the modern Olympiad, have made to the advancement of human civilization and international goodwill.

The first international exhibition in which Japan participated was the 1867 World Exposition in Paris, where the Tokugawa Shogunate and the two feudal clans of Satsuma and Saga displayed their exhibits, at the invitation of Napoleon III. Since then, Japan has always been an active participant in World Expositions held in various parts of the world.

The early expositions provided Japan, which had long been “an orphan of the world” due to the isolationist policy of the Tokugawa Shogunate, with opportunities to absorb the advanced civilizations of the world as well as to introduce Japan to the international community. That Japan was able to realize rapid modernization and development was due considerably to its positive participation in World Expositions which were the stage for the revelation of new inventions and discoveries.

It had been a dream cherished by Japan over the three eras of Meiji, Taisho and Showa to host a Universal and International Exhibition.

Plans to host a World Exposition in Japan were drawn up twice in the past. The first proposition to host an exposition in 1890 did not materialize because it was claimed the time was not yet ripe for Japan to hold such an event. The next occasion was the World Exposition planned for 1940 as one of the events to commemorate the 2,600th anniversary of Japan’s national foundation. Preparations were made, and reservation tickets were even sold, but the holding of the Exposition along with plans to stage the Tokyo Olympics had to be given up as Japan entered a state of war.

A World Exposition is a large-scale international event where peoples from all the world meet and communicate with each other. It lasts for a period of six months and entails huge expenditures. But to satisfy the financial requirements is not the only factor necessary for the holding of a World Exposition.

The host country is not only required to be financially capable of laying out the enormous sums involved in the preparation and holding of such a major international event but must possess wide-ranging and advanced technology as well as a liberal social system that guarantees the maintenance of a highly developed civilization and its further progress. Because invitations to foreign countries are sent out through the government channels, the host nation must have diplomatic relations with the majority of world nations. Peace must be prevailing in the world for the successful holding of the Exposition.

After the end of World War II, Japan made a fresh start as a peace-loving nation. With her attainment of high economic and cultural standards, and with a rise in her position in the community of nations, Japan became qualified 20 years after the close of the war to host a universal and international exhibition.

In 1964, Japan successfully staged the Olympic Games in Tokyo, and plans were drawn to host a universal and international exhibition in Japan in 1970. Expo'70, which, under the theme of “Progress and Harmony for Mankind,” expressed aspirations for “eternal peace” and was intended to build “a bridge spanning the 20th and 21st centuries,” took place about 100 years after the Restoration of Meiji, when Japan started striding toward modernization.

It was the first universal and international exhibition ever held in Asia. Never before had World Expositions left the continents of Europe and America. In this connection, we cannot overlook the backdrop of the time, the worldwide trend towards political and economic independence of developing nations and the development of their national resources which was starting to bear fruit in the form of international cooperation through the United Nations.

Expo'70 also manifested the people’s wishes for a solution of the contradictions confronting the present-day society, where scientific developments as exemplified by space exploration are pregnant with the threat of nuclear warfare; where high economic growth entails aggravating public health hazards; and where the rationalism of Europe and differing values based upon different streams of thought, war and peace, and affluence and poverty chaotically coexist. Prime Minister Eisaku Sato declared in his speech at the Opening Ceremony that “the Japan World Exposition will have a paramount significance in the annals of human civilization.”

Objectives of Holding Expo'70  Inheriting the brilliant traditions of past exhibitions, the Japan World Exposition aimed at making its contribution to the harmonious development of society by exhibiting man’s achievements in every sphere of his creative activities—in industries, economy, science, technology, culture and the arts—and promoting the mutual exchange of national traditions, based on the spirit of mutual understanding and tolerance.

The Japan World Exposition was not only intended to be a mere display of scientific civilization but was designed to be an “exposition for mankind.” This was
expounded by President Taizo Ishizaka of the Expo Association, who declared in his opening address that "our desire is to make Expo'70 perform the function of an observation platform, from where we can survey the path along which mankind shall travel in quest of a solution for those difficult problems confronting us today."

The development of scientific civilization has realized all that was expected or more than what was dreamed of a century ago. These achievements are benefiting mankind in its daily life and have enabled us to expand the scope of our activities even into space. But, on reflecting upon the conditions of the planet we inhabit, we find ourselves to be standing at the most crucial turning point in the history of our existence.

Scientific civilization, which once seemed to promise a bright future for mankind, has caused a rapid progress in war technology, exposing us to the threat of nuclear weapons we ourselves have invented. Ironically, mankind has become a slave of its own scientific civilization, from which we must now seek emancipation. To attain this end, mankind should endeavor to restore humanity in the true sense of the word.

This need to recover the lost humanity was felt keenly after the end of World War II. Mankind began to re-assess the worth of developments made without humanitarian consideration, and began to care for different standards of value.

In contrast to the past universal and international exhibitions which were markedly Occidental in character, the Japan World Exposition was designed to be Oriental. This Oriental character was embodied in the concept of "harmony," adopted in the main theme of Expo'70 — "Progress and Harmony for Mankind" — and clearly manifested that the Exposition stood in a new historical dimension.

The Japan World Exposition unfurled the banner of "progress in harmony" and called on people to understand and tolerate the co-existence of multi-civilizations in this world and to aspire to achieve progress, while maintaining harmony. In other words, Expo'70 was an attempt to bring back to the present the spirit of "Wa (oneness)" of Oriental philosophy, and to develop it into a bridge linking East and West.

The spirit of "progress in harmony" should rest upon respect for the life of man. Moreover, there should be "dynamism of life" that makes it a pleasure to live a human life. Without these, there will be no solid foundation upon which a great future for mankind can be built. In this contemporary world of ours, progress cannot be expected if culture is confined within the boundaries of one nation or an area. Mankind can attain progress only when different races of the world understand and pay mutual respect to the uniqueness and merits of the cultures of other ethnic groups.

In this sense, today more than at any other time, the importance of worldwide cooperation and understanding, the harmony of mankind — that is, the peaceful development of the world — should be more strongly emphasized.

It goes without saying that a world exposition is neither a conference hall for philosophers nor a trade fair where merchants seek profits. It is a forum where people who love peace congregate and communicate with one another through the exhibits of their cultural heritages and creative activities. Expo'70 was true to this spirit, enhancing hopes for peace and marking a turning point in the history of mankind.

Neither is a world exposition a place where attempts are to be made to effect an immediate reformation of the world status quo. But Expo'70 has succeeded in providing a clue to bridging the present and the future, by paving a way toward a new era and offering a guideline to tomorrow and a model for future society. This does not mean a solution has been found to existing problems, but Expo'70 has raised questions and opened a prospect for their solution.

A world exposition is not a Utopia. It cannot stay outside the influence of the actual state of things. The Japan World Exposition suffered troubles, contradictions and shortcomings. However, its historical significance was not lost as a consequence. It became, so to speak, "a station for the transmission of hope" which relayed to coming generations our efforts, in the midst of the agonies and confusions dominating the world today, to make this planet a place where "complete peace," as enunciated by the Japanese National Constitution, reigns, and where the happiness of man can truly be praised.

This hope was not a mere dream, but a desire based upon reality. It was a hope, supported by historical reflection with which human beings could re-examine the civilization they had created.

Expo'70 in Japan was the third World Exposition after the end of World War II, following those held in Brussels in 1958 and in Montreal in 1967. There was a common thread in the two preceding expositions, both drawing attention to human society. The Brussels Exposition was held under the theme "The Balance Sheet for a More Humane World — Scientific Civilization and Humanism" and the theme of the Montreal Exposition was "Man and His World," as an extension of the two Expo'70 manifested the wish to pursue what is more basically human, irrespective of differences between East and West.

The Japan World Exposition set new records in the number of participating countries and public attendance. But what Expo'70 could truly be proud of were not the record figures but the fact that the world exposition was held for the first time in Asia, that the active participation of developing countries made it a place for people of the world to congregate and communicate with one another, and that it set a new example for posterity to follow in organizing world expositions in the future.

Seventy-seven countries, including the host country Japan, four international organizations, one territory, six states and provinces, three cities, public autonomous entities of Japan, two foreign enterprises, and 28 domestic private corporations and organizations took part in Expo'70. Through their exhibits, the people of the world experienced a common joy. Scenes of the Exposition were transmitted to various parts of the world via communications satellites, making the Exposition truly a "forum of the world," and materializing a brilliant "Exposition of Man." People were able to realize to the full the importance of international
cooperation.

Mr. Patrick Reid, Commissioner General of Canada stated in his address at the Closing Ceremony "The Japan World Exposition will be remembered as perhaps the greatest of the traditional World Expositions, and indeed we may never see its like again. It has symbolized for all the magnificent result that can be achieved when nations and men are given the opportunity to cooperate, and compete, peacefully." These words reflected the lofty ideal of the Japan World Exposition — "Progress and Harmony for Mankind." We cannot ignore the fact that the recent World Exposition gave the Japanese people an opportunity to look back on the state of their country, and provided a great stimulus to the Japanese society in every field, social, economic, cultural, technological, educational and so on.

We do not claim that everything was satisfactory with the Japan World Exposition. Despite its ideal, the world was burdened with a mountain of problems. The fire of war was still burning in Southeast Asia. There were countries such as the People's Republic of China, with which Japan had not yet established diplomatic relations. High economic growth cast a shadow on Japan where there was deterioration in natural environment and commodity prices continued to rise.

Such is the situation in which we still find ourselves. We must keep exerting ourselves to improve our society, encouraging ourselves by remembering what we could achieve in Expo'70 and stimulating ourselves with the invaluable experiences.

In his address at the Closing Ceremony, His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince, Honorary President of the Japan World Exposition, declared: "We all hope that the fire of the ideal of Progress and Harmony for Mankind will long be kept burning in the hearts and minds of everyone." We might say that the real significance of Expo'70 will be determined by those who will come after us.

Overview

Site Plan and its Significance The Japan World Exposition was a General Exhibition of the First Category in accordance with the Convention regarding International Exhibitions. This determined the basic characteristics of Expo'70.

First of all, a general exhibition of the first category is larger in scale than the exhibition of the second category and special exhibitions. Its huge site becomes a place where for the duration of six months cultural and industrial achievements of men are exhibited by participating countries and programs of events turn it into a forum for mutual understanding and friendship.

Secondly, the participating countries are obliged, in principle, to construct and operate their own pavilions and display exhibits in their names and on their own account. They play the main roles, whereas the host nation is responsible for preparing a stage for the successful holding of the exposition true to the spirit and traditions of international exhibitions.

The location and topographical features had important bearings upon the planning of the site of Expo'70 and its related projects.

The Senri Hills, where Expo'70 was held, is easily accessible from Kyoto, Osaka and Kobe, the three largest cities in the Kansai district, and was served by highway networks extending to Nagoya and Tokyo to the east and the Chugoku district to the west. It was also near to major railway and air transportation junctions. Despite such a favorable location, the area remained undeveloped because of a poor water supply and hilly terrain. The overall development of the area as well as the construction of a railway line and highways were necessary to the holding of the World Exposition.

The site of Expo'70 lay on hilly terrain, which was 20 meters above the sea level in the eastern section, from where it gently sloped to the west. The highest point was 80 meters above the sea level. Several dales fanned out like a spread hand from the eastern part. There were difficulties in developing the area for the construction of the site for the Japan World Exposition, because of the lack of facilities. However, the vast unoccupied area gave a free hand to its planners and enabled them to construct the Expo'70 site as a single entity.

The basic characteristics of the Japan World Exposition and the topography of its site set forth the conditions under which the blueprint of the site was drawn.

The guideline for the plan-makers was the spirit of the theme that called for an exposition deserving to be an industrial and cultural festival of the world by embodying in it the characteristics of universal and international exhibitions — progressiveness, integrity and popularity.

The primary objective of site planning was how best to manifest the concept of the theme "Progress and Harmony for Mankind" in shaping the form and creating the atmosphere of the Exposition. The most significant achievement of the Expo'70 site planners was their success in making it enjoyable and well balanced. Emphasis was put on turning it into a "forum for human communications and on abiding by "human condition" in its designing. This made Expo'70 unique.

The two major principles followed in drawing the site plan were:

First, the site was spatially arranged in such a way that it directly developed the Central Theme. For this purpose, the Symbol Area was provided in the center of the exposition site and the important facilities were assembled there to make a core. The gigantic Symbol Area having a width of 150 meters stretched for a distance of 1,000 meters down the middle from north to south, dividing the site into two sections. It was intended to be a meeting place for people from all over the world and simultaneously an area where the theme was intensively visualized. Along the moving walks that extended in four directions from the Symbol Area, the subject themes were exhibited on panels.

The Theme Pavilion with the Tower of the Sun standing in its center was constructed to give direct expression to the theme. The Symbol Area was often referred to as the trunk, the Moving Walks as "boughs and branches, and the foreign and domestic pavilions