

Is Nature a Museum?

Is nature a museum? This is the first thing that comes to mind when it comes to cross-cultural exchange for me. In the summer of my second year of high school, I visited the UK to learn about the differences in nature conservation activities between Japan and foreign countries.

England is well known as the birthplace of the National Trust for Places of Historic Interest and Natural Beauty. The National Trust, as it is commonly known, is a charity that organizes citizen activities, and negotiates the purchase of properties and land with local governments in order to protect them and their natural environment from unreasonable development for economic reasons.

I actually spent seven days in the Lake District where the Trust was actively working. On the last day, I attended a

lecture from John, one of the employees of an organization that works closely with the National Trust. At the beginning of his presentation, he posed the question, 'Is nature a museum?'. It occurred to me that the ideas of nature conservation in Japan and those of the British National Trust are a little different.

It seems that the aim of nature conservation activities in Japan is to preserve nature as it was. Emphasis is placed on sustaining the nature of an era when people and technology did not change much.

On the other hand, the British National Trust tended to view conservation as a more dynamic process. For example, in Japan observers such as myself would be discouraged from making any change at all to the natural landscape, while in England, I planted trees on National Trust property that

could adapt to the area with consideration to future environmental challenges. These adjustments would be made by future visitors again depending on the environmental challenges of the day.

In a sense, one can consider the conservation activities of the National Trust as a kind of innovation. If conservation, as it is thought of in Japan, requires us as citizens to do nothing, to not come into contact with the environment at all, then we cannot innovate. So, we have two conflicting approaches to conservation. However, both are necessary for our physical and mental health. I realized that the National Trust thinks that these two things are not mutually exclusive, but can coexist. My trip to England has also allowed me to conclude that the approach of the National Trust was important to achieve the realization of a sustainable world. Nature and technology change with the times. And for a sustainable society, nature and technology

may have to change. Just as nature and humans change and evolve over time, so should our approaches to conservation and preservation of natural and man-made treasures. At the end of my trip, I reflected on the question, 'Is nature a museum?' If nature cannot be touched, only observed then yes, it is. However, as I experienced, we can have a positive impact on nature by interacting with it. As a result of my trip, I have changed my approach on the impact that we as humans can have on nature.