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Preservation of historic
and cultural assets

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DEMİRBAŞ NO. 2452

SINIFLAMA NO. 711.4 | TSL

BAĞIŞCI

İLKAY BALIÇ

GELİŞ TARİHİ 15/09/2001

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The Japanese has possessed animistic religious ideas since prehistoric era and has believed in the existence of God in nature such as the mountains, rivers, rocks and trees and worshipped the God in every occasion, and thus Ancient Shintoism emerged.

In the Middle of 6th century Buddhism was introduced from the Asiatic Continent via the Korean Peninsula. From 10th to 12th century, Japanese way of interpretation of Buddhism created a philosophy that all the things on earth, from the mountain to the tiny insects, has its respective God. Not only in the Buddhist philosophy but also in the arts, we can find close relationship with nature. Early in the 10th century, books of short poems, such as *Kokin Wakashū*, the sights of which nobles admired already appeared in the poem, and it was a fashion to paint the famous sights on the walls of the palace and the houses of nobles. The poet Saigyō, who thought the life mingled with nature an ideal, appeared in the 12th century. Saigyō made sightseeing of places of interest of various provinces and read them in his poems. The successors of the school of Saigyō were the school of poetic dialogue (*Renga*) of 15th century, and the *Haikai* poets of 17th century who set up a style of short poem now known as *haiku*. These poems had much influenced on the idea of the people of Japan about nature and the famous historic places of the land.

On the other hand, since 14th – 15th century the influence of Chinese culture in Japan, mostly through the medium of Zen priests, brought about the great popularity of the Chinese literature centering the Chinese poetry and of the monochrome painting. As a consequence, new ways of designating fine scenic sites became popular throughout the country such, for instance, as the Eight Views of Lake Biwa (*Omi-hakkei*) after the fashion of the eight views of Hsiao-Hsiang near the Tungting Lake of China (*Shosho-hakkei*).

Admiration of the sights and sites centered around Ancient nobles disappeared completely after the battle within the city of Kyoto in the 15th century. By the restoration after the end of the battle, the admiration of sights and sites was inherited by the new sponsors Samurai and merchants and they came to be inherited by increased numbers.

In the 16th & 17th centuries, the economic and political cities (castle towns) came to be managed by feudal lords: citizens composed of Samurai, artisans and merchants went on holiday-making (Yusan) to admire the places of scenic beauty and ruins of the neighbourhood, which became more and more popular along with the custom of religion pilgrimage from Ancient times.

A guide book for the sightseeing of the places of interest and ruins was published and in the first half of the 18th century, the books on traditional gardens of temples in Kyoto City was published. Later in the same century, Akizato-Rito, a landscape architect of Osaka, then cultural center, published a guide book of the place of interests of the entire land of Japan, the book was well read by the general public.

In the beginning of the 18th century, the Edo government bought the neighboring private land, planted cherry-trees and opened the land for the citizens. The Edo government also planted cherry-tree avenues along both sides of the waterways which supplied water to the people of Edo, thus creating new places of recreation. Citizens fully enjoyed them, as well as other year round popular places and historic sites in and around the city.

With the change from the feudal system to the modern state which took place at the Meiji Restoration of 1868, the traditional old places were destroyed. The new government, while planning to take in some systems of the western countries, started in 1871 a system somewhat like a park land, but most of the notable scenes and historic sites were not included in it. As the Meiji Government gained its position, they reconsidered their iconoclastic policy, and the Tentative Bureau for Investigating the Country-wide Treasures was set up in 1888, and by 1902 some 215,000 items of movable & immovable cultural properties owned by old temples were registered. In accordance with this inventory, Law for the Preservation of Ancient Shrines & Temples was set up in 1897. This law was amended in 1929 to become National Treasures Preservation Law, which was finally succeeded by Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties of 1950. Thus the way was opened for the preservation of the tangible cultural properties like the works of fine and applied arts & buildings. However, the famous places and historic sites, as well as the primeval forests, the giant or famous trees were destroyed one after another in the wave of modernization. Preservation movement thus started among the citizens since the end of 19th century, and in 1919, Law for the Preservation of Historic Sites, Places of Scenic Beauty & Natural Monuments was established.

After the end of war, it was combined with Laws for Preservation of State Treasures

to form the Law for Preservation of Cultural Assets. The outstanding characteristic of Law for Preservation of Cultural Assets is that while the law before the war emphasized on the preservation, the new law stresses on the practical uses of the items under preservation, and it is regarded as a democratic law emphasizing on the public nature of the cultural assets. However, during the post-war period after the establishment of the law, the reactionary tendency to destroy anything old again appeared, and brought a crisis for the designated immovable cultural properties. In this crisis, National cultural assets were disregarded, and were destroyed unlawfully. These cultural assets in various parts of the country were affected to a large extent by the steep economic growth of 1960's. To cope with the situation, Agency for cultural affairs (National Commission for Protection of Cultural Properties) promoted the designation and encouraged making public the private properties of the local administration of which the maintenance has become a great problems. The Agency has succeed in making public some 600 hectares of land in the country during the past ten years.

The Cultural Agency has designated 1034 historic sites to come under the care of State. As of the present (1976), the breakdown is as follows:

prehistoric sites	392
palace sites	23
municipal buildings sites	9
fortification sites	122
battle field sites	6
Shrine & temple sites	201
sites related to education & arts	24
sites of charities	6
sites related to industry, traffic & public works	98
tombs	54
gardens of houses	79

The Agency has also appointed 260 scenic beauties, and 951 natural monuments to come under the care of State, as follows:

gardens	119	springs	1
public gardens	4	lakes	2
bridges	2	rocks & caves	11
rivers	1	falls	9

spit	1	animals	188
isles	9	plants	536
beaches	25	geological features and minerals	205
mountains	15	nature reserves	22
valleys	34		

As the custom to obtain specific technical guarantee of the designated items was strictly required after the law was put into operation, some weak points of the law have become evident. For instance, the law cannot control the erection of highrise buildings in the urban area lying between the designated garden and the distant hill which is serving as an important part of the view of the garden itself. The discussion about these weak points has led to the present law, so-called Law for Preserving the Ancient Capitals. Concerning the historic sites, establishing wider areas became in practice, such as setting aside of about 30 hectares for "Park of historical surroundings" (Fudoki-no-oka), for each prefecture of the country. Up to now 10 such areas have been opened, and establishing of wide historic remains areas of 100 to 200 hectares each have been planned which are to be executed from the coming fiscal year.

As for the structural objects, a total of 1,857 items with 2,953 building units have been designated as Important Cultural Assets up to this time. Of this total, temples and shrines occupy the great majority (2,378 buildings out of 1,518 items). Of the 8,000 items found in country-wide investigation of Vernacular Houses, 268 items having 468 buildings have been designated. Since these buildings are designated individually, the method does not answer the need of preserving an entire street lined by historic vernacular houses. Therefore a part of the Preservation Law was amended in 1975 under the name of "Preservation district for the groups of historic buildings." So far 7 such designations have been made covering 5 prefectures. This form of designation will be encouraged in the future.

From the standpoint of the preservation of cultural assets, we are planning to designate beautiful gardens which are the works of the past. As for the places of natural scenic beauty, we are planning to designate those having cultural relations of the past, even including the items of ecological significance such as spectacular pieces of rocks and gigantic trees. As for natural monument, we will designate regions rather than huge rocks and trees, and are also planning to preserve historic buildings with the region where they exist.