

Advisory Opinion

On the Preservation and Utilization of Cultural Properties to Support the Continuation and Development of Local Communities



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Science Council of Japan

**Subcommittee on Protection and Utilization of
Cultural Properties
Committee on History**

This Advisory Opinion summarizes and publishes the results of the deliberations of the Subcommittee on Protection and Utilization of Cultural Properties, Committee on History, Science Council of Japan.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

I Background

The cultural properties that have been nurtured in various parts of Japan over many years and handed down to this day are irreplaceable national assets. Inheriting, protecting, and passing on these cultural assets to the future will also lead to the inheritance and development of the local communities that have created them.

However, in the 21st century, the future of cultural property protection is becoming uncertain due to the frequent occurrence of large-scale disasters and the decline of local communities due to population decline.

Additionally, revision of the Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties in 2018, which was the biggest change since its enactment, aimed at improving the social and economic value of cultural properties through their use, including tourism, against the background of the country's policy to boost cultural GDP. On the other hand, it poses a new challenge: how to ensure an appropriate and sustainable balance between preservation and utilization. Furthermore, in recent global trends, there is a growing understanding that cultural properties and heritage are the resources that contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In the light of the situations surrounding cultural properties which have been undergoing major changes, we will examine current urgent issues related to the protection of cultural properties and propose effective improvement measures.

II Current Status and Issues

There are three issues that need immediate improvement:

The first one concerns disaster prevention and mitigation of cultural properties. Amidst the increasing loss and damage of cultural properties due to the large-scale disasters that have occurred in recent years, it is a major problem that the perspective of disaster prevention of cultural properties is weak in the "Disaster Management Basic Plan" which constitutes the national disaster prevention action plan. In addition, there are some cases where disaster prevention plans are insufficient in the "Regional Plans for the Preservation and Utilization of Cultural Properties" formulated by municipalities. Furthermore, Japan's permanent disaster prevention system for cultural properties finally took its first step with the establishment of National Institutes for Cultural Heritage, Cultural Heritage Disaster Risk Management Center in 2020; however, when considering the role that the Center should play in the future, it is difficult to say that the current organizational structure is sufficient to fully demonstrate its

capabilities.

The second concerns policies to realize the purpose of the revision of the Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties. A major point in the 2018 revision of the law is the legalization of the formulation of "Regional Plans for the Preservation and Utilization of Cultural Properties" in municipalities. It is a system to enhance understanding local cultural properties and their utilization including tourism use, in a planned manner, which is a prerequisite for achieving both preservation and utilization of cultural properties. However, it still accounts for only 5.5% of local governments that have formulated such plans. In order to create a virtuous cycle of cultural property protection and the inheritance and development of local communities, it is important to accelerate the formulation of the regional plans and to enrich their content.

The third concerns development of specialists who will lead the future of cultural property protection. The latest law revision calls for cultural property protection to be carried out "with the whole region involved", including cultural property owners and protection organizations. Therefore, the role of local government officials specialized in cultural properties as key players in this, is very important. However, one-third of local governments nationwide does not have such specialized staff members. Furthermore, there is a concern that the number of students aiming to become cultural property specialists at universities that provide specialized education in history, archeology, and cultural properties is on the decline. Thus, for the sustainable protection of cultural properties, there is an urgent need to train successors as such specialists at universities.

III Main Points of the Advisory Opinion

(1) Promoting active efforts for disaster prevention and mitigation of cultural properties

①The government (Cabinet Office in charge of disaster management) needs to enrich the descriptions related to cultural properties in "Disaster Management Basic Plan", such as disaster prevention measures for various cultural properties, emergency disaster countermeasures and plans for the protection of cultural properties during the process of disaster recovery and reconstruction. It is also important for local governments to create regional disaster management plans that fully reflect such perspectives on disaster prevention for cultural properties. Furthermore, it would be effective to include the Commissioner for Cultural Affairs and academic experts related to cultural properties as members of the national Central Disaster Management Council or the Disaster Management Implementation Committee under the Central Disaster Management Council.

②Local governments need to take measures for disaster prevention of cultural properties during normal times in their administration. Specifically, it is effective to clarify cooperation between local governments and private cultural property rescue organizations in the "Regional Plans for the Preservation and Utilization of Cultural Properties" which is the basis of cultural

property policies of local governments. It is also helpful to create a cultural property disaster prevention manual and hazard map. At the same time, in order to smoothly rescue and preserve cultural properties, it is important to systematically secure storage locations for disaster-affected cultural properties and to establish a system of collaboration in advance with those organizations that have conservation and restoration technology.

③National Institutes for Cultural Heritage, Cultural Heritage Disaster Risk Management Center, which was established in 2020, is highly expected to play a central role in disaster prevention for cultural properties in Japan. However, when viewed as the only one national organization responsible for disaster prevention of cultural properties in Japan, an "advanced country in disaster prevention", there are currently some deficiencies in its organizational structure and contents of operation. In order to create a system for disaster prevention of cultural properties throughout Japan and promote international cooperation in the field of disaster prevention of cultural properties, it is necessary for National Institutes for Cultural Heritage and Agency for Cultural Affairs that has jurisdiction over Cultural Affairs Agency and cultural property disaster prevention center as their umbrella organization to further strengthen the functions of Disaster Risk Management Center, including increasing the number of full-time staff members.

(2) Accelerating protection measures under the revised Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties

For the Agency for Cultural Affairs, which is in charge of "Regional Plans for the Preservation and Utilization of Cultural Properties", it is required to strengthen support for the formulation of the plans, including the enhancement of government subsidies, and guide municipalities, under the cooperation of relevant divisions within the agency, so that the content of their "Regional Plans" fully takes into account the historical and cultural environment of each municipality. For the Prefectural governments it is required to provide strong guidance and support so that as many municipalities under their jurisdiction as much as possible have "Regional Plans", and municipalities should formulate "Regional Plans" that take advantage of the characteristics of cultural properties in their area and conduct the projects of their preservation and utilization including tourism use. It is necessary both for prefectures and municipalities to accelerate implementation of the above-mentioned measures.

(3) Strengthening the development of specialists responsible for the future of cultural property protection

In order to strengthen the training of the next generation of specialists in cultural property protection, the Agency for Cultural Affairs is required to design a new system that bridges expert training and administration of cultural property protection, and universities and local governments should promote joint planning for cultural property protection projects which serve as a place for training specialist for both. It would also be effective for both the university

and the government to consider interdisciplinary education and staff recruitment methods that would allow for specialized staff to be obtained from students majoring in fields other than those related to history, archeology and cultural properties.