

c. DANGERS WHICH THREATEN HISTORIC

CENTRES IN JAPAN.

I. Characteristics of Japanese buildings.

In Japan, ancient architecture, shrines, temples, dwelling houses, are made of wood ; that is to say, whole towns and villages are made of wood. Though one of the merits of a wooden building is its strength against earthquake, it is weak against fire and its durability is inferior to stone or brick construction.

Most Japanese cities of today, large or small, the basic plan of which originated during the feudal age, developed around the castles of feudal lords approximately from the end of the 16th century to the beginning of the 17th century. Districts for the houses of the samurais (military class) and the merchants were planned either inside or outside of the moat of the castle. Whole cities had been preserved with the homogeneous style of the buildings. This condition lasted until the end of the 19th century.

In 1868, the Meiji Restoration brought the isolation of 300 years to an end. Japan began vigorously to assimilate Western civilization. She took the lead among Oriental countries in promoting the industrial revolution. In the civic centre of the capital, European-style public and civil buildings were built by foreign builders and architects until the end of the 1880's and after that by Japanese architects educated by Dr. Josier Conder who had been invited from England by the Meiji government.

At first, these buildings, though designed in the European style, were constructed in the traditional wood. Then they were made of brick and stone with the techniques of European countries. After 1910, most of the architecture was in iron and concrete, which quickly changed the sight of streets and squares.

Following the rapid progress of the industrial revolution, an immense population gathered in and around the large cities.

Factories and houses were built without order. This tendency is much stronger than in European countries because of the especially high birth rate of the Japanese population. Thus historic centres in the hearts of cities were subject to rapid change and demolition. Tokyo lost a large number of its wooden buildings in the great earthquake and fire of 1923 and in the air bombardments during World War II. Thus, in Tokyo we can no longer see the homogeneous group of houses built before the Meiji Restoration (1868). It is the same with large cities such as Nagoya, Osaka and Kobe and with many other cities which suffered air bombardment during World War II.

## II. Ancient metropolises.

Fortunately, the three ancient metropolises, Nara (capital 710-794 AD), Kyoto (capital 794-1868 AD) and Kamakura (effective capital 1185-1333 AD), remained undestroyed after the war. In these cities, a comparatively large amount of the traditional wooden architecture (shrines, temples, houses) has been preserved as well as the surrounding scenic beauty. Besides these, there are also small local cities that were saved from air bombardment. They have lagged behind economic development and their population has shown no increase. In the case of these small cities, the problem is whether the groups of traditional houses are in preservable condition.

After World War II Japanese economic and industrial restoration and rapid growth were very remarkable. The construction industry has been flourishing since about 1936; the Tokyo Olympic Games was its peak. All over Japan, modern public buildings and office buildings as well as commercial and industrial buildings have been constructed on a large scale. The widening of older routes leading in and out of cities and the construction of highways and main railroads have been strongly promoted. As a result, the preservation of cultural properties such as monuments and sites has conflicted with large works of development, both public and private, and has raised many problems. Likewise, in Kyoto, Nara and Kamakura, many serious problems arose during these years. In these ancient metropolises, most of the problems concern the preservation of scenic sites in which groups of temples and shrines constitute the characteristics of the city.

In Kyoto, "Kyoto Tower", a high-rise structure put up on the roof of a hotel in front of Kyoto Station, was completed although cultured citizens were against its construction because of its lack of proportion against the remarkable scenic beauty. In Nara, a huge modern building of the prefectural office was built adjacent to the historic site that includes shrines and temples, resulting in

a disharmony with the ancient architecture. In Kamakura, the green hills which constitute the background of the city are about to be destroyed in a short time by bulldozers in order to lay the foundations of a large housing site to be built by speculators. The problem is that, on account of the serious shortage of housing after the War, the necessity of building large housing sites results in the destruction not only of scenic beauty but also of historic sites as well as buried cultural properties.

The preservation of all Japanese monuments and historic sites is regulated by national law, although the direct environment concerned is still not under public protection. If we bear in mind that designated monuments and historic sites exist side by side forming the moderate scenic zones in ancient metropolises it would be better to preserve groups of traditional houses in connection with these zones. In order to do so, the competent authorities, architects, town-planners, archaeologists, historians, and economic planners should negotiate beforehand to examine what and how to preserve them, and at the same time a master plan of preservation should be drawn up. Last year the Japanese Diet passed a law for the preservation of scenic beauty in ancient metropolises. Nevertheless, at the present, demolition is still going on a large and on a small scale.

## III. Groups of urban and rural houses.

In regard to small Japanese cities and villages that are located in cultivated areas, in mountainous regions or by the seashore, we can see thatched or shingled roofed wooden houses built in such a way as to form harmonious groups of natural beauty or built side by side to form a small street. These groups of houses should be preserved and studied as wholes, in spite of the fact that each individual house has somewhat less value as an historic monument. After World War II, the abolition of the tenancy system, the change of agricultural production methods, and the desire for improvement and for modernization of living, sentenced the traditional wooden houses as being inadequate. Those traditional wooden houses with their ample rural colour are being rapidly replaced by the standardized houses built with modern industrial building materials. On the other hand not a few villages have been sunk under the water of reservoirs by the construction of huge dams.

Since the preservation of urban and rural houses needs immediate attention, as mentioned above, at the present time surveys are being made all over Japan. In accord with the result of each survey, steps are taken as follows:

a. A house which has the value of being a monument is designated by itself and houses which are valuable as groups are designated as such and preserved on the spot. In this case, the residents may be the custodians and their houses can be revived.

b. When the residents desire to construct new houses to live in and preservation on the spot is impossible, then each house is removed and preserved in a park or other public area; for instance, they may be used as small museums of folk culture.

c. The house or group of houses are removed and restored to be preserved as an open-air museum.

From the standpoint of historic centres, houses should be designated as a group and preserved as wholes. Nevertheless, in present-day Japan even individual outstanding houses are subject to insufficient designation and preservation. Since the Japanese Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties allows no alteration of the existing state of the house, except restoration, the owners of the houses do not like to live in them without alteration of the partitions and openings. The only possible solutions are either the purchase of the houses from the owners by the State or public bodies and their removal to another place, or the purchase of both land and houses and their preservation on the spot. The latter solution is more costly. In the case of urban or rural houses, the preservation of the whole group is much more difficult. We should also bear in mind that it is difficult to revivify a wooden house, that is to say, to alter the interior for modern living without changing its facade, while this is easily done for a stone or brick house.

In Japan there are two villages of rural houses designated as open air museums: one is in Toyonaka near Osaka, established in 1960, and the other is in Kawasaki near Tokyo, opened in 1966. Examples of groups of houses preserved on the spot are very few; there are two examples: one at Gokayama in the Toyama prefecture, is made up of groups of rural houses in the mountains; the other example is the group of houses of the samurais (military class) in the outer area of Hagi Castle in the Yamaguchi prefecture. Moreover, there is a beautiful row of completely preserved merchants' houses and warehouses alongside of a canal at Kurashiki in Okayama prefecture. Besides these, a considerable number of groups of houses of value still exist in many other parts of Japan. But if they were to be left as they are, almost all of them would be lost perhaps within ten years.

#### Early European style architecture

In 1858 Japan opened free trade with foreign countries

and provided settlement at such ports as Yokohama, Kobe, and Nagasaki, where European style dwelling houses were designed by foreigners and constructed by Japanese builders. The settlement buildings of those days have gradually been lost and were almost completely demolished by air bombardment. Fortunately, however, in Nagasaki a part of Dejima (the Dutch settlement since 1641) has been preserved as a site and a stone warehouse has been restored there after the war. As to the houses built after the opening of the port, there are the houses of the English merchants, T.B. Glover and the Linger Brothers. These houses were built in a group after 1861 and form a historic centre together with the Oura Roman style buildings in wood, or partially in stone or brick, built in the 1860's and are the only examples whose preservation is guaranteed.

After Ginza Street in Tokyo was destroyed by the big fire of 1871, the buildings on the street were restored in European style by Waters, an English builder, a part of which remained until the great earthquake of 1923. In the 1890's, in the Marunouchi area in Tokyo, three-storied brick office buildings of the same height, were constructed on the model of a street in London. In the 1920's, iron skeleton and ferro-concrete buildings were constructed nearby and the group of brick buildings was left like an island and thus formed a typical historic centre. But after the War, the street of brick buildings was demolished during the speedy redevelopment of the civic centre of Tokyo. Today we can find only the "No. 1 Building" of red brick, surrounded by up-to-date high storied buildings.

The European style buildings built during the Meiji period (1868-1912) and worthy of being designated as monuments are still found here and there and are presumed to be about a thousand in number in the whole country. These are subject to isolation in cities and will undoubtedly soon be replaced by modern buildings. The only possible protection is that each of the prominent buildings be designated and, if preservation on the spot is impossible, they should be removed. In the "Meiji Village" near Nagoya, an open-air museum of the Meiji civilization which was opened in the spring of 1965, there are more than 10 Meiji buildings that were removed before demolition. In this way, although individual buildings are preservable as monuments, it would be no exaggeration to say that, as an historic centre, the Meiji architectural group in European style has already been destroyed.

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