

Mekong-Japan Symposium on Ancient Capitals
(Summary Report)

I. Session 1: Issues concerning Protection of Cultural Heritages and Regional Administration

1. Keynote speech by Prof. Kunikazu Ueno, Professor Emeritus of Nara Women's University

As time goes by, cultural heritages are increasingly subjected to destruction, degradation, and abrasion caused by natural and man-made disasters. Conversely, the number of cultural heritages increase when new value is discovered within something which has never been considered as culturally valuable before. In recent years, cultural heritages in our immediate surroundings or are very closely related to our daily lives in particular have received wide-range attention. Given that it is people in local communities who inherit cultural heritages, it is advisable that administrative bodies, which bear a responsibility over the inheritance of cultural heritages, gain the people's understanding and support in making preservation efforts. Indeed, efforts to preserve sceneries and townscapes in Nara and Takayama have been made with the understanding of the people in the local communities. What makes authentic cultural heritages different from replicas is that the as time goes on, people pay greater and greater respect to those heritages, and we begin to see the creation of value which cannot be measured in monetary terms. Nara has many cultural heritages, and the values of these heritages are shared when they are maintained and many people come to see them. If people not only see cultural heritages but also participate in excavation activities and actually touch the heritages, that is, engage themselves in actual activities, the values of cultural heritages will be better inherited, leading to the protection and maintenance of cultural heritages in the future and thus halting the destruction of cultural heritages. It is important that we understand and respect the significantly differing cultural values of nations and practices.

2. Presentation by Mr. Takanobu Hirono, Director General, Culture and Tourism Bureau, Nara Prefectural Government

Nara Prefecture, a small inland region accounting for approximately one percent of both the total area of Japan and its national population, held the capital of Japan, known as “Heijo-kyo,” 1,300 years ago. It has many temples and shrines within its rich natural environment. Three World Cultural Heritages out of the 14 in Japan are located in Nara