Concept of Cultural Properties or Kultur Güter, 
and Historical Materials or Quellen

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The term “Cultural Properties” existed before the establishment of the Cultural Properties Protection Act (1950), but it came to be used widely after the establishment of the Act.

At first, its contents were understood mainly with regard to the artistic value of properties. Partly because of the general indifference of historians to cultural history in a narrow sense, their concern with cultural properties was not sufficient. However, some have felt a growing need for the preservation of our predecessors’ traces, mainly archaeological and folklore materials, as properties apart from their artistic value. On the other hand, some became aware of the greatness of things which are being lost by development accompanying economic growth, and movements for their preservation have become wide-spread. In addition, there is a growing tendency to see culture as existing not only in narrow domains such as studies and arts, but as a concept which includes business, food, clothing, and housing. In this context, in the field of history, which has strengthened its posture of putting importance on materials other than documents, there has appeared a movement promoting a campaign for the preservation of cultural properties, supported by concern with the history of people’s daily lives. The definition of cultural properties in the Cultural Properties Protection Act is shifting in the direction of cultural inheritance in this wide sense.

The concept of cultural properties, and that of materials for research in various studies such as history, archaeology, and folklore, or historical materials, seem to approach each other, and to play an important role when considering a common ground for various studies: but if cultural properties are regarded only as cultural products to be inherited, they are incompatible with historical study, which is a study of reflection. Past human lives did not leave only good things to our age. There are many things, like traces of wars, which should not be inherited but never be forgotten. Some of objects which are understood as excellent works of art hide a history of humiliation of a certain era, or they once played a role in depressing new departures for artistic creation. When these points are
considered, it is necessary to take the view that cultural products which should not be inherited are also cultural properties. This point should be taken into account in exhibitions at historical museums.