

Vol.5  
Feb. 2023

Nara Prefecture

Thinking deeper about World Heritage

# World Heritage Journal



## Contents

---

Special Feature: **“Historic Monuments of Ancient Nara”**

1. The Value of “Historic Monuments of Ancient Nara” as World Heritage
2. Components of “Historic Monuments of Ancient Nara”

○ **More about World Heritage Part 5**

○ **Making “Asuka-Fujiwara” a World Heritage Site! Part 5**

Nara Prefecture, Japan



Special Feature:

# “Historic Monuments of Ancient Nara”

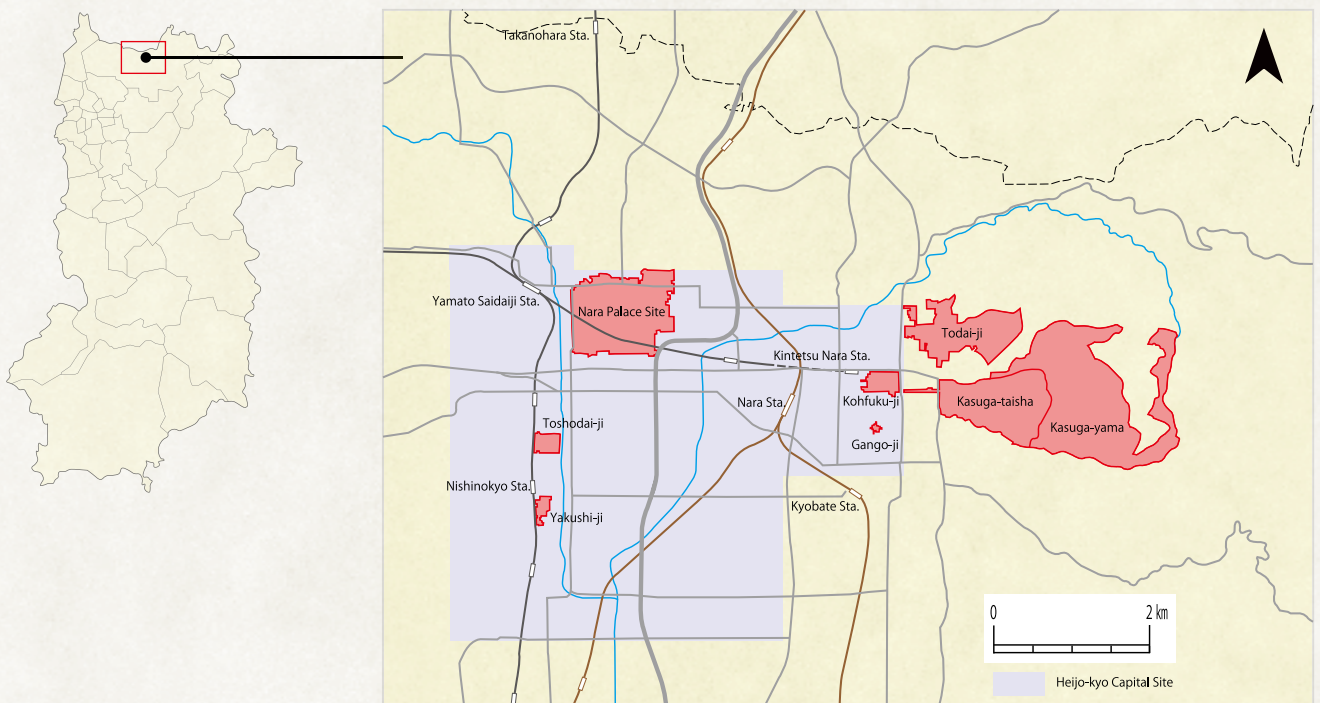
## 01 The Value of “Historic Monuments of Ancient Nara” as World Heritage

“Historic Monuments of Ancient Nara” was discussed and inscribed on the World Heritage List at the 22nd Session of the World Heritage Committee held in 1998 in Kyoto.

“Historic Monuments of Ancient Nara” show that the period from 710 to 784, when the capital of Japan was located in Nara, was an extremely important era which brought about the culture and political development of Japan.

There are eight components of the property demonstrating Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), as indicated on the map. They are truly diverse in nature, and include five Buddhist temples, one Shinto shrine, one associative cultural landscape, and one archaeological site.

This special feature will cover the World Heritage Site, “Historic Monuments of Ancient Nara”, made up of these diverse properties.



The following four criteria were applied in the case of the “Historic Monuments of Ancient Nara”.

### Criterion (ii)

The historic monuments of ancient Nara bear exceptional witness to the evolution of Japanese architecture and art as a result of cultural links with China and Korea which were to have a profound influence on future developments.

### Criterion (iii)

The flowering of Japanese culture during the period when Nara was the capital is uniquely demonstrated by its architectural heritage.

### Criterion (iv)

The layout of the Imperial Palace and the design of the surviving monuments in Nara are outstanding examples of the architecture and planning of early Asian capital cities.

### Criterion (vi)

The Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines of Nara demonstrate the continuing spiritual power and influence of these religions in an exceptional manner.



## Distinguishing Features of the “Historic Monuments of Ancient Nara”

So what are the distinguishing features of the “Historic Monuments of Ancient Nara”, inscribed on the World Heritage List? The following provides a brief summary.

- Nara Palace—which was not just the residence of the Emperor or Empress but also the centre of rites, government, and administration—and the many Buddhist temples built within Heijo-kyo, a city neatly partitioned into a grid like the board for the game of go, show how meticulous city planning was for the capital of Japan.
- The nature of the primeval forest, protected as a sacred precinct, forms a cultural landscape in association with worship at the shrine itself.
- 8th-century wooden structures—some of the oldest in the world—have been preserved with traditional techniques, and many are still extant.
- The components include not only a palace and Buddhist temples developed through interchanges with East Asia—especially Tang China, and Silla/Balhae—but also a Shinto shrine, a traditional Japanese religious sanctuary, and this shows the diversity of religion in Japan.
- Beyond the value of the components as geographic sites—an absolute condition for World Heritage—there is also the intangible element that worship and religious rites have been passed down to the present day, and this is highly praised as contributing to the value of the property.

Thus, the “Historic Monuments of Ancient Nara” include diverse components—Buddhist temples, a Shinto shrine, an associative cultural landscape, and an archaeological site—and in addition, the types of declared value are also extremely diverse.

Perhaps, then, the “Historic Monuments of Ancient Nara” can be regarded as symbols truly embodying the diversity of heritage and value which came to be widely recognised due to the international declaration on cultural heritage known as the Nara Document.\*

### \*What is the Nara Document?

The Nara Document is a declaration adopted at an international conference on the authenticity of World Heritage held in the city of Nara in 1994, four years before “Historic Monuments of Ancient Nara” became a World Heritage Site.

This document led people to emphasise not only the physical aspects of cultural heritage, but also the “meaning”, including movable properties and intangible elements. Thus, an awareness recognising the existence of diverse types of heritage and value has gained currency throughout the world.

Dissemination of the concept of cultural heritage due to this declaration has been highly praised, and even today that concept is influential all over the world.



Photo courtesy of Nara National Research Institute for Cultural Properties

At the **Nara Palace Site**—an archaeological site—excavations are carried out every year, even today. When an investigation is finished, the excavation is backfilled, but as can be partially seen in the distance in the photo, improvements are made using various techniques, such as planting vegetation, restoring stone platforms, and restoring buildings, based on the results of investigations and research, and efforts are made to publicise and utilise the resulting spaces.



Due to an order by the Emperor, the **Kasugayama Primeval Forest** was protected as a sacred precinct until the early 1920s. After designation as a Natural Monument in 1924, and as a Special Natural Monument in 1955, its natural environment has been preserved by the government. Those activities are supported by many citizen groups.



## Todai-ji Temple



Photo courtesy of Todai-ji Temple

In 742, the Emperor Shomu issued an edict to build the Daibutsu (Great Buddha) in order to protect the nation through Buddhism. In 747, casting of the Daibutsu began, and the eye-opening (consecration) ceremony for the Daibutsu was held in 752. Twenty-four properties comprising twenty-six buildings (including the Shosoin Repository and Tamukeyama Shrine), designated as National Treasures and Important Cultural Properties and located on the expansive old grounds constructed on the east side of Heijo-kyo, have been inscribed on the World Heritage List. Seven of these buildings have existed since the 8th century. The Shuni-e (“Second-Month Service”) has been held, without a break since 752, at the Nigatsu-do (Second Month Hall) and related buildings. This is a traditional rite praying for the happiness of all people, including protection of the country and a bountiful harvest of the five grains.

## Kohfuku-ji Temple

Kohfuku-ji, the guardian temple of the Fujiwara clan, was built on land on the east edge of Heijo-kyo when the capital was moved to Heijo (Nara) in 710. Due to repeated fires, no 8th-century buildings remain, but the temple follows the original layout from its founding almost perfectly. It has also been determined that old architectural styles were used in medieval buildings that still exist today like the Gojunoto (Five-storied Pagoda) and the Tokondo (Eastern Golden Hall). Six buildings, including four National Treasures, have been inscribed on the World Heritage List.



Photo courtesy of Kohfuku-ji Temple and the Nara Visitors Bureau

## Kasuga-Taisha Shrine



Photo courtesy of Kasuga-Taisha Shrine

The Kasuga-Taisha Shrine is said to have been founded in 768, and the policy of Shikinen-Zotai continues today. According to this policy, the Honden (Main Sanctuary), was rebuilt every 20 years until 1863. However, since the 20th century, the buildings have been designated as a National Treasure, and thus work is currently being done to rethatch the roof, repair the colouring, and so forth. The composition and layout of the shrine buildings is thought to be almost unchanged from the time the shrine was founded. Even today, many buildings remain which date from the late 14th to early 15th century, and from the early 17th century. These include the National Treasure Honden (Main Sanctuary) made up of four buildings, and their number is twenty-eight properties comprising thirty-one buildings. At the Kasuga Wakamiya Onmatsuri Festival, which began in 1136, there are various rituals like the Otabisho (temporary sanctuary) rite, and prayers are made for the welfare of the nation’s people.

## Kasugayama Primeval Forest

Mikasayama is an independent peak which rises behind Kasuga-Taisha Shrine. Kasugayama and other mountains stand like a folding screen further beyond that. These mountains were worshipped as sacred mountains from before the founding of Kasuga-Taisha Shrine. In 841, an order was issued forbidding tree-felling and hunting, and protecting these mountains as holy mountains. In modern times, the area was designated to be a Special Natural Monument, the Kasugayama Primeval Forest, and protected as an evergreen broadleaf forest maintained in its pristine state. This sanctuary is recognised as indispensable, not only as a natural forest, but also as a cultural landscape which retains its primeval form due to its linkage with an ancient religion unique to the Japanese.



Photo courtesy of Kasuga-Taisha Shrine



## Gango-ji Temple



Photo courtesy of Gango-ji Temple

In 718, this temple was relocated from Asuka-dera Temple when the capital moved to Heijo (Nara).

In the beginning, it was a large temple. The main buildings alone are thought to have occupied eight blocks of Heijo-kyo, but those buildings were lost after the medieval period. The temple was scaled down, and at present all that remains are buildings like the Hondo (Main Hall) and Zenshitsu (Zen Room) whose forerunner was the Sobo (priest's quarters) at the time of the temple's founding.

The roofs of the Hondo and Zenshitsu, rebuilt from the Sobo during the Kamakura period (1185–1333), still have tiles from the Asuka period (592–710), and it has been determined that many members from the Nara period (710–794) are used, so one can sense the presence of the original structure.

## Yakushi-ji Temple



Photo courtesy of Yakushi-ji Temple and the Nara Visitors Bureau

This temple was founded on a site in Fujiwara-kyo in 680, but with the relocation of the capital to Heijo (Nara), it was rebuilt at its current location in 718.

This is a classic example of a two-tower Buddhist temple, with three-storey pagodas on the east and west. Five properties comprising seven buildings are National Treasures or Important Cultural Properties, including the Toto (East Pagoda), and these have been inscribed on the World Heritage list. The Toto, the only building remaining from the original founding, is believed to follow the architectural style of the late 7th century, which is one stage older, and each storey of the pagoda has a distinctive form with pent roof attached.

The Hanae-shiki (Shuni-e), held from March to April, is a ceremony which began in 1107, in which ten kinds of flowers made of paper are offered to Yakushi Nyorai (the Buddha of Medicine and Healing).

## Toshodai-ji Temple



Photo courtesy of Toshodai-ji Temple

This temple was founded by Jianzhen, who arrived in Japan from Tang China in 759. The main buildings, the Kondo (Golden Hall) and Kodo (Lecture Hall), and two log storehouses, known as the Hozo (Treasure House) and Kyozo (Sutra Storehouse), are still extant from the original founding. To build the Kodo, a building of the Nara Palace was removed and reconstructed around 760, and this is the only example of ancient palace architecture which still exists. The Kondo, presumed to have been built after 780, is the only existing example of 8th-century kondo architecture.

The Uchiwamaki (Fan Scattering) Ceremony is held in May, and the scene of fans being scattered from the Koro (Drum Tower) is a well-known seasonal tradition.

## Nara Palace Site

Empress Genmei issued the decree to transfer the capital in February of 708. In December of that year, a ground-breaking ceremony was held, and the capital moved from Fujiwara-kyo to Heijo-kyo in March 710.



The other components of the property—temples and shrines—were constructed in a planned fashion within and nearby Heijo-kyo. The Nara Palace, on the other hand, was not just the Emperor's or Empress's residence; it was an ensemble of venues for governmental affairs, rites, and administration. The palace is recognised as the heart of Heijo-kyo, the capital at that time.

The palace structure is currently being determined through excavations. Researchers have confirmed the Daigoku-den (Audience Hall) Site, which is divided roughly into two periods. They have also confirmed many other building sites, subdivision facilities, wells, gardens, and more. The site is also currently being developed as a Historical National Government Park, and ancient buildings and other structures are being restored based on the results of research.



## What are Criteria for the assessment of OUV? &lt;Part 2&gt;

This was also presented in the previous Vol. 4, but the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention stipulate that a property is recognised as having Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) when it meets one or more of ten criteria.

In this issue, we explain and give examples of the last three of the six criteria applicable to cultural heritage.

## criterion (iv)

**be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history**

In a nutshell, properties meeting this criterion could be described as “historical or typical examples of architectural styles, or science and technology”. As noted in the beginning of this article, stages in human history are significant, and typical examples include: Frontiers of the Roman Empire (UK and Germany, inscribed in 1987, expanded in 2005 and 2008), Old Town of Segovia and its Aqueduct (Spain, inscribed in 1985), other sites of the ancient Roman Empire scattered throughout Europe, and the works of celebrated architects such as the Works of Antoni Gaudí, the Spanish architect (inscribed in 1984, expanded in 2005).

This criterion is also applied to many examples of industrial heritage from the 18th century onwards. Aside from mines and the like connected with the industrial revolution, examples include railway facilities like the Mountain Railways of India (inscribed in 1999, expanded in 2005 and 2008) as well as canals and other water utilisation facilities.

In connection with World Heritage in Japan, this criterion has been applied to valuing the gardens in the “Historic Monuments of Ancient Kyoto” (inscribed in 1994), shrine architecture of Itsukushima Shinto Shrine, and the Tomioka Silk Mill and Related Sites which show the beginnings of the modern silk-spinning industry in Japan.



## criterion (v)

**be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change**

The value in criterion (v) can be summarised as a “world-class example of a traditional settlement or landscape adapted to the environment”. This is a criterion for evaluating, in each region of the world, the distinctive styles of dwellings, the forms of villages made up of such dwellings, and the characteristics of land-use.

One example that comes to mind immediately in Japan is Historic Villages of Shirakawa-go and Gokayama (inscribed in 1995). Outside of Japan too, examples of application to traditional villages are

well-known, such as The Trulli of Alberobello (Italy, inscribed in 1996) whose pointed roofs made by stacking stones are well known, and the Konso Cultural Landscape (Ethiopia, inscribed in 2011) with distinctive mushroom-shaped dwellings made of mud walls and thatched roofs.

This criterion pertains to more than just villages. Cases of land-use as farmland and their cultural landscapes are also inscribed on the World Heritage List. These include: Rice Terraces of the Philippine Cordilleras (Philippines, inscribed in 1995) and The Climats, terroirs of Burgundy (France, inscribed in 2015).





## criteria (vi)

be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance. (The Committee considers that this criterion should preferably be used in conjunction with other criteria)

This criterion treats “connections with important historical events, or tradition, religion and art in the history of humanity” as values of a geographic World Heritage Site.

So-called “negative heritage sites” are often mentioned as typical examples, such as the Hiroshima Peace Memorial (Genbaku Dome) (inscribed in 1996) and Auschwitz Birkenau: German Nazi Concentration and Extermination Camp (1940-1945) (Poland, inscribed in 1979). However, these are not the only examples of criterion application. It has also been frequently applied to places of worship whose legacy continues today, as well as the starting points of religions and nations.

This criterion applies to many properties of World Heritage Sites in Japan. A major example is Fujisan, sacred place and source of artistic inspiration (inscribed in 2013). For this inscription, cultural elements like the ukiyoe of Katsushika Hokusai—a factor in the origin of Japonisme in modern Europe—were highly praised.



## Part 5 Asuka-Fujiwara: Archaeological Sites of Japan's Ancient Capitals and Related Properties



# Making “Asuka-Fujiwara” a World Heritage Site!

## Components of the Nominated Property (Part 3) Tombs of Asuka-Fujiwara (Part 1)

### The End of Keyhole-Shaped Tombs and Changes in Tomb Form

There are a large number of kofun (mounded tombs) in Nara Prefecture, and when kofun are mentioned, many people think of the keyhole-shaped tombs exemplified by the Mozu-Furuichi Kofun Group: Mounded Tombs of Ancient Japan, inscribed as World Heritage in 2019.

In the Kofun period, from the 3rd to the 7th century, the keyhole-shaped tomb always stood at the pinnacle among variations in tomb form.

In the Asuka-Fujiwara region, there is the Maruyama Tumulus, with a total length of 318 m, the largest in Nara Prefecture. In the 7th century, the idea was adopted of simplifying tombs due to the influence of China, and keyhole-shaped tombs were no longer built. For more than 100 years after that, Japanese tombs developed independently.

### Ishibutai Tomb

This is one of the largest flat-topped burial mounds in Japan, built in the southeast part of the Asuka basin. The tomb mound is roughly 51 m on one side, and the outer bank surrounding the dry moat is more than 80 m on one side. The exposed ceiling stones of the horizontal stone chamber located at the centre are very famous as a scene representing Asuka. The total length of the horizontal stone chamber is about 19 m, one of the largest chambers in Japan.

As a result of excavations carried out on the west side of the kofun, it was found that the tomb was built at a location prepared by filling in a number of small-scale kofun. This attests to the great authority of the person buried in this tomb. The most likely theory is that this is the grave of Soga no Umako, a member of the most powerful family in the first half of the 7th century, who died in 626.

This is a valuable example showing changes in the form of tombs of the powerful after the end of keyhole-shaped tombs.



Photo courtesy of Asuka-Fujiwara World Heritage Inscription Promotion Council



## Shobuike Tomb

This is a flat-topped burial mound with a side length of about 30 m, built on the south edge of the hill of Amakashi-no-Oka, which separates the centre of Asuka from outside regions. Excavations have confirmed that stones were placed around the base of the burial mound. Inside the horizontal stone chamber, there are two sarcophaguses with a unique shape not seen anywhere else. It has been shown through excavations that the kofun was intentionally buried just half a century after it was built.

This shows that the planar shape of the tombs of the powerful changed to a rectangle, and the size was considerably scaled down, while still maintaining a horizontal stone chamber, the style of a traditional kofun burial facility.



Photo courtesy of Kashihara City

## Kengoshizuka Tomb

When the building of keyhole-shaped tombs ended, an octagonal tomb was created independently in Japan as the tomb of the Japanese emperor, the pinnacle of all tombs.

This burial mound is about 22 m from side to side of the octagon. Excavation has determined that stones were placed on the burial mound, and other stones laid around that. In the stone burial chamber in the centre of the mound, two burial spaces were carved out in a huge stone, and from the inside of those spaces, fragments of lacquered coffins, cloisonné ware coffin ornaments, and other artifacts were unearthed.

Based on the structure and location, the leading theory is that the Kengoshizuka Tomb is the tomb of Empress Saimei, who died in 661.

Development as a historic landmark was completed in March 2022, and efforts to publicise the site have commenced. People can now see, with their own eyes, the burial mound covered with stone, just as when it was first constructed. Over a broad range of the western half of Asuka Village, one can now see the tomb rising above the plateau.



Photo courtesy of Asuka-Fujiwara World Heritage Inscription Promotion Council

## —Steps Towards Inscription of “Asuka-Fujiwara” as World Heritage—

The Asuka-Fujiwara World Heritage Inscription Promotion Council was organised by Kashihara City, Sakurai City, and Asuka Village in Nara Prefecture, and active efforts are being made to achieve World Heritage inscription for Asuka-Fujiwara: Archaeological Sites of Japan’s Ancient Capitals and Related Properties.

On 29 June 2022, Shogo Arai (Governor of Nara Prefecture), Tadahiko Kameda (Mayor of Kashihara City), Masatake Matsui (Mayor of Sakurai City), and Yuichi Morikawa (Mayor of Asuka Village) visited the Agency for Cultural Affairs, and submitted a draft recommendation.

Going forwards, the council will promote efforts to achieve early inscription as World Heritage, such as improving the content of the recommendation, and promote publicising and utilisation of property components.



The website of the Asuka-Fujiwara World Heritage Inscription Promotion Council (Japanese only) outlines the World Heritage Site concept proposal, presents candidates for components, provides information on events held by the council, and so forth.

<http://www.asuka-fujiwara.jp>

