

Nara Prefecture

Thinking deeper about World Heritage

World Heritage Journal

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Nara Prefecture, Japan

Talking about World Heritage

Part 2

(Moderator: Tateishi Toru, Deputy Director General of Culture, Education and Creative Living Department, Nara Prefecture (title at that time))

Dr. Matsuura Koichiro, who promoted the inscription and conservation of many World Heritage properties as the 8th Director-General of UNESCO, and Dr. Aoyagi Masanori, who launched Japan's World Heritage as a researcher and Commissioner of the Agency for Cultural Affairs, were invited to talk with Governor Arai about World Heritage including "Asuka-Fujiwara: Archaeological Sites of Japan's Ancient Capitals and Related Properties", which is on the Tentative List.

1. Is it possible to testify the story of "Asuka-Fujiwara"?

Tateishi: Now, I would like you to talk about "Asuka-Fujiwara". Currently, we are making headway with our study of the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV). We should be conscious of the global value, as Dr. Matsuura pointed out. In "Asuka-Fujiwara", one of the values is the establishment of the state based on *ritsuryo* (the legal code of ancient Japan enacted under the influence of the Chinese law) in Japan, but the challenge is how to position it in the context of "global" value instead of something within Japanese history.

Matsuura: This is an extremely important point. Prior to the "Asuka-Fujiwara" period, Japan was a confederation of powerful families. The most important key is to select strong components of "immovable heritage" that attest to ancient "Japan"'s *ritsuryo* state that was centred on the Emperor. For example, in the first half of the 19th century, US President Monroe freed slaves and sent them back to Liberia (explanation 1). There is a place where the first freed slaves arrived in Liberia. There were people who proposed to make this place a World Heritage property. However, when we visited this place, there was nothing but just a wharf. For them, it might be indeed the most important starting point of Liberia; however, that was not enough to make it a World Heritage property.

Arai: Stories like this are very valuable. I sometimes wonder how the criteria of World Heritage can be applied to "Asuka-Fujiwara". We always discuss the values of "Asuka-Fujiwara", but it is difficult to understand them, because the original materials have not remained aboveground. I feel that history is amazing, but it is also difficult to pinpoint what constitutes history. However, if you do not attempt to make a story understandable, it will not work. Having said that, if we look at the interpretation of the *Nihonshoki* (literally, "chronicles of Japan") and its consistency with Chinese and Korean history books, we can say that this is where history took place.

It can be said that one of the great values of "Asuka-Fujiwara" is related to the Japanese envoys who went to the Sui (589-618) and Tang (618-907) Dynasties of China and introduced Buddhism to Japan. The history books say so, and you can also see it, as there are archaeological sites. If it is possible to say that its influence has been continuing up to the present, it must be a highly remarkable aspect. We need to raise awareness of ourselves to such a level that the property can be recognised worldwide as possessing such value. To raise awareness of ourselves means to thoroughly discuss and strengthen it, which is what we are doing now. It is no good if we are not certain of the value ourselves, is it?

For example, in the *Nihonshoki*, it is written that the *daijosai* (explanation 2) was held as a ceremony for accession to the



Matsuura Koichiro

The 8th Director-General of UNESCO

Born in 1937. Dr. Matsuura Koichiro began his career at the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1959. He served as Ambassador of Japan to France from 1994 to 1999. He also served as the Chairperson of UNESCO's World Heritage Committee for one year, until November 1999. Then he became the Director-General of UNESCO until 2009.



Aoyagi Masanori

Director of the Archaeological Institute of Kashihara, Nara Prefecture (2019-)

Born in 1944. Researcher on ancient Greek and Roman art history. Dr. Aoyagi served as Commissioner of the Agency for Cultural Affairs from 2013 to 2016.



Arai Shogo

Governor of Nara Prefecture (2007-)

Born in 1945. He joined the Ministry of Transport in 1968. He served as the Japan Coast Guard Commandant from 1999 to 2001. He was elected to the House of Councillors in the Diet of Japan (national legislature) in 2001.

throne. It is still held at the Imperial Palace in Tokyo, isn't it? It is still going on in a remote place. It's no longer held in the "Asuka-Fujiwara" area, but it started there and it's still going on in Japan. Can the accession ceremony serve as a testimony to the story of "Asuka-Fujiwara" ?

Matsuura: I think that is where there is difficulty. Today, it is true that the area covered by World Heritage has expanded very broad. However, the testimony to be included must be immovable, tangible properties. The *daijosai* is a story, which might be a candidate for intangible cultural heritage. On the other hand, as far as World Heritage is concerned, you need corresponding immovable properties as tangible evidence. It is no good if there is a story alone. I had an opportunity to visit the sites last year, and found, from this perspective, it is a pity that no focus is being placed on the imperial mausoleum, because it is only the imperial mausoleum that has remained up to the present in its original form.

Arai: Moving on to the topic of murals of the Takamatsuzuka Tomb and the Kitora Tomb. If it has been proved that the skirts of the Sogdian people that are depicted in murals of Chang'an of Tang Dynasty China and Uzbekistan are the same skirts of the female figures that are depicted in the murals of the Takamatsuzuka Tomb, could it be considered outstanding?

Matsuura: That relates to a story of cultural interchange. The change from a federate state to a centralised *ritsuryo* state is at the core of "Asuka-Fujiwara". What you have just mentioned is interchange of human values under criterion (ii). Of course, the basic story about "Asuka-Fujiwara" is that it was created based on various interchanges. "Asuka-Fujiwara" was a direct effect resulting from interchange with China, which led to the creation of the Fujiwara Palace. However, it is unfortunate that the Fujiwara Palace, which has a pivotal importance, no longer remains aboveground.

Arai: We know that the Fujiwara Palace was square-shaped. Square was a Chinese idea. The fact that the Daigoku-den (imperial audience hall, symbolizing the Polaris at the centre of the sky) was built in the middle of the three mountains of Yamato, based on the Taoist ideology, means that they tried to build a palace and a capital, based on the ideas that had been introduced. Because the building was moved to the Nara Palace, only traces of it remain. Even so, perhaps could this be testimony?

Matsuura: One of the categories of cultural heritage under the World Heritage Convention is "sites".

Aoyagi: There is a term, "law-governing state". There is a broader concept than this. It is called "legalisation". This is the broadest concept meaning that everything in the social system is decided by law. In the "Asuka-Fujiwara" period, they tried to create a whole social system by law, such as so-called Buddhist laws and *ritsuryo*. It was an amazing experiment from a global perspective. As Dr. Matsuura says, I think that anything is fine — for example, the beginning of rectangular layouts — if it can prove that. The concept is great and big. Therefore, if you can



Takamatsuzuka Tomb and Mural Paintings
(Photo courtesy of Asuka Village Board of Education)
One of the components of "Asuka-Fujiwara", and is well known for the colourful mural paintings that were discovered during archaeological excavations in 1972. The mural painting depicting men and women, which is similar to a mural painting from Tang Dynasty China, is a valuable source in understanding the dress and manners of that time and is designated as a national treasure.

only prove it — for example, if you can prove that it was brought from China — I think it can be a quite promising proposal. It does not matter if individual components do not look so good as their counterparts in Chang'an of Tang Dynasty China. What really matters is the fact that Japan transformed itself into a truly modern state at that time by Buddhist laws and *ritsuryo*. This is an amazing thing.

Arai: Did Japan really become a *ritsuryo* state? I have a slight doubt, because it might have been only appearances on the surface that changed. They might have been only imitators who were good at introducing shapes and forms.

Aoyagi: I wish the Governor could believe it really happened. Christian missionaries continuously came to Korea and Japan around the Meiji period (1868-1912). At that time, Japan

was still under the regime of the Tokugawa family and Meiji government and therefore was not influenced significantly. However, the government of the Joseon Dynasty of Korea at the time was dysfunctional, and therefore Christianity functioned as a kind of governing system, instead. Difference in the spread of Christianity between Japan and Korea can be ascribed more or less to the difference in the state of the existing regimes at that time.

Arai: I think it's interesting to compare Japan and Korea. In Korea, the influence of the studies of Zhu Xi is dominant, whereas in Japan the studies of Wang Yang-Ming is dominant (explanation 3). Wang Yang-Ming studies are very flexible, rationalistic and practical. It helped Japan achieve the Meiji Restoration (political revolution in 1868). To return to the topic, what helped ancient Japan make a similar transformation? It was a modernization, or transformation, of ancient society to, for example, a centralised power. To be specific, it started with the Taika Reform (a series of political reforms in 645) and achieved the establishment of the emperor system. In addition, the Nihonshoki was also created. These few examples alone are enough to show that Japan transformed into a very large, centralised state.

2. Forms of accepting foreign culture: "introduction" or "invitation"?

Aoyagi: In Japan, people have tendency to accept what is good without fear or doubt, including social system of China or Buddhism, among other things. It has long been a traditional characteristic of Japan, running through the Heian (794-1185), Kamakura (1185-1333) and Muromachi (1336-1573) periods. Flexibly, they were incorporated into the country's culture with adjustments to fit Japanese culture. And when the growing force of the country waned, various things were brought in from abroad, notably from China.

Arai: As for the envoys to the Chinese Sui Dynasty, other countries tied suzerain-tributary relations with the Sui Dynasty (explanation 4). On the other hand, Japan defied being a tributary to China. What is written in the Suishu (book of the Sui Dynasty) and the Nihonshoki are different in terms of whether Japan paid tribute to China or not. The second envoy from Japan to the Sui Dynasty brought an official letter from the Japanese ruler who called himself "emperor" and was rebuked by the Chinese emperor: "What do you mean by emperor?" This episode is written in the Suishu, but not in the Nihonshoki. This discrepancy perhaps indicates a double tongue. Keeping a distance from and smartly evading a powerful country—this tactfulness may be something we should highlight. I mean the tactfulness with which exchanges were made in a struggle to save Japan.

Aoyagi: Is it an "introduction" or an "invitation"? It's a normal form of cultural propagation that the one that is greatly influenced is willingly tugging in the culture of the other. In the case of Japonisme (explanation 5), France, the UK and Germany "invited" *ukiyo-e* from Japan into their cultures, which they had

never heard of before, at a time when their own cultures were losing creative power and were entering an impasse. In other words, it was not Japan giving influence to them; it was rather these countries inviting Japanese culture.

Arai: It was because of uniqueness. I guess it was probably because it contained inspiring elements.

Matsuura: After all, in Japan, there has been a cultural background to accept new things out of curiosity and create a new culture. This is how the Japanese people and their distinctive culture have developed. For example, as it happened repeatedly before the Meiji Restoration, what is good was tactfully absorbed, while the basis was firmly maintained.

Arai: That way of life seems to me as if it were a culture itself. The flexible way of living provided a cushion. Even though people might forget whether it's original or not, they can live without remembering whether it's from abroad or original. There is no country that is made up of original elements only. It is an interesting, unique culture, in a way, to keep them adeptly or digest them.

Matsuura: As the Governor mentioned earlier, I think the Nihonshoki was written above all to justify the emperor system of Japan and therefore is quite different from Chinese history books. It is essential to look at the history of Japan objectively by carefully examining Chinese culture, the Kojiki (literally, "records of ancient matters") and the Nihonshoki, and archaeological findings.

Aoyagi: Speaking of the envoys from Japan to Tang Dynasty China, recently a tombstone inscribed with words written by Kibi no Makibi (explanation 6) was found in Sichuan Province, China. It says: "Nihonkoku Ason Bi" (Japanese courtier Bi). The text is said to have been composed by a Chinese, but the characters were written by Kibi no Makibi, because he had excellent handwriting that was admired even by the Chinese people. To name other Japanese similar to him, Abe no Nakamaro, Sei Shinsei (explanation 7), Fujiwara no Kiyokawa, who became the Chinese emperor's secretary over there, and Buddhist monk Kukai, who is said to have been admired as a great genius as soon as he arrived in China. In that sense, there were quite a few individual Japanese who were capable.

Arai: I think the presence of people who moved from China and Korea to Japan is also of value. The fact that people such as Bodhisena, Phật Triết and Jiàn Zhēn came to Japan in the Nara period (710-794) is evidence of high-level cultural interchange. When Baekje (one of the three kingdoms of ancient Korea) fell, many people from Baekje moved to Japan, including to Nara. These people were involved in making roof tiles, mountain fortresses and many other things.

Aoyagi: Toyotomi Hideyoshi brought potters from Korea to Japan when he attempted invasions of Korea in the late 16th century. The potters subsequently developed pottery industry in Saga and Kagoshima prefectures with tremendous success. On the other hand, pottery industry of the Korean peninsula did not



Asuka Palace Site (On the left) and Fujiwara Palace Site (On the right)

The two major components of the property. The Fujiwara Palace was the first palace in the history of Japan to adopt Chinese architectural style, such as the 1-km square layout and the tile-roofed Daigoku-den hall. The comparisons between these two palace sites enable us to understand the development of the country's political system. The archaeological sites of these two palaces are preserved in good condition underground, but there are no remains of aboveground structures, posing challenges to on-site presentation and interpretation.

develop so much. Korea was a country of *Yangban* (part of the ruling class during the Joseon Dynasty), particularly the literati. In comparison, craftsmanship is fairly respected in Japan. On the other hand, goodwill missions from Korea to Japan, called Joseon Tonsingsa, were travelling in Japan, it was very popular for Japanese people on their routes to have Korean visitors correct their Chinese writings at their lodgings. Until then, the envoys from the Korean peninsula had better knowledge of Chinese culture.

Arai: In the Asuka period, if you were going to deliver diplomatic documents to China, it was necessary to write them in Chinese so that they could be understandable to Chinese people. If you ask, "we have history books, can you read?", they couldn't read the Kojiki, but they could read the Nihonshoki, as the latter was written in Chinese characters. I think that the diplomatic documents were also written by interpreters who were capable of writing excellent Chinese texts. I suspect they were those people who had moved from China and Korea to Japan. In the Asuka period, there were people not only from Korea, but also from Tang Dynasty China, I guess.

Aoyagi: In the case of envoys from Japan to Tang Dynasty China, which I mentioned earlier, Abe no Nakamaro passed the Kakyō examination (explanation 8) in Tang Dynasty. It was amazing enough that he passed the examination, but he rose through the ranks and even reached the rank of vice-minister. He became so important that Emperor Xuanzong told him not to return to Japan, and indeed he ended up being unable to come back to Japan. Japan produced those kinds of people. It is clear that the level of Japan was very high at that time.

Arai: Tang Dynasty China was very global. The Sogdians, such as An Lushan (explanation 9), in the western regions, also took high positions. Perhaps, it was one of the reasons of its prosperity that the Tang Dynasty treated foreigners, not just from Japan, but also from other countries, on their merits.

Tateishi: Let's return to the topic of "Asuka-Fujiwara". We have been talking about cultural relativity, flowing all the way in history, and also about how to show and conserve the archaeological sites of Japan, including "Asuka-Fujiwara". The challenge is how to present places that at a glance appear to

be just fields or rice paddies. The Nara Document addressed the issues of wooden buildings in East Asia, which are different from the stone culture of the West. In "Asuka-Fujiwara", underground archaeological features may still contain unknown important information, including those pieces that could testify the events written in the Nihonshoki and/or the Shokunihongi (sequel to the Nihonshoki). It is an issue how to present a group of components that comprise mainly buried cultural properties.

Matsuura: The Nara Document is indeed a historic achievement that was projected from Japan about "culture of stone" versus "culture of wood". On the other hand, buried cultural properties are not unique to Japan and East Asia, but are found all over the world. In Asia, Mohenjo-Daro is an example of heritage you can see and understand, because it comprises archaeological sites that remain aboveground too.

It has a strong historical story, and of course, in addition to that, there remain things that have been excavated. "Asuka-Fujiwara" has both of archaeological sites and the story.

Again, since there remain archaeological sites centring on the imperial mausoleum, it would be a good way forward to combine them with other components in a manner that you can tell a story of an especially important stage in the history of Japan. I really hope that it will be inscribed on the World Heritage List. I think it would be an incredibly good thing for the Japanese people if it becomes possible to understand the history of Japan through World Heritage properties.

In this respect, "Asuka-Fujiwara" sits between the recently-inscribed "Mozu-Furuichi Kofun Group: Mounded Tombs of Ancient Japan" and the long-inscribed "Historic Monuments of Ancient Nara". Although I really want "Asuka-Fujiwara" to be inscribed to fill the gap, it is necessary to find a good way to connect the quite disparate components to realize that. A good story alone is not enough to make it a World Heritage property. There must be immovable heritage to back it up. You also have to adjust the story according to the immovable heritage. This iterative process will be more difficult, but you need to continue to work hard.

Arai: I understand very well. One of the works to do is to make the story a bit bolder. For example, we make a somewhat straight argument that the theme relates to the establishment of a political centre, the government or the emperor system. Then,

we explain the story of what the process was or how it was established, using testimony both in Japan and abroad. One way to do this might be to collect things that can reinforce the story, such as the articles about the arrival of envoys from Japan to the Sui Dynasty China in the Suishu. If we don't do that kind of work, we will not be able to construct history.

3. Focus should be placed on the imperial mausoleum

Matsuura: In order to meet criterion (iii), I really want focus to be placed on the imperial mausoleum. When they first contacted me at UNESCO regarding the Mozu-Furuichi Kofun Group and told me that they wanted to make the Nintoku-tenno-ryo Kofun (Tomb of Emperor Nintoku) a World Heritage property, I said: "It is true that the Nintoku-tenno-ryo Kofun alone was certainly valuable. But, you should bring together the mounded tombs of "Mozu and Furuichi" as one whole into a tumulus group. Although you need to persuade the Imperial Household Agency, I hope you include the whole range of mounded tombs dating from the mid-Kofun period of Japan. Aren't there many other mounded tombs, including the imperial mausoleum?"

You make a story, see the site again, and revise the story accordingly. I am happy that Mozu-Furuichi was inscribed as proposed by Japan.

Before the inscription of the "Mozu-Furuichi Kofun Group", those working for nomination were worried that their property might not be inscribed on the World Heritage List, unless you allow people to enter the property. I was not sure about that myself, but I encouraged them to try, and UNESCO approved it. Therefore, there is already a precedent.

Tateishi: In the sense that the imperial mausoleum is essential, the mausoleum of Emperor Temmu and Empress Jito, who were buried together in the same tomb, is located on a line extended south from the central axis of the Fujiwara Palace. We have consulted with the Imperial Household Agency and decided to include this as a component of the property. They started to build octagonal tombs exclusively as imperial mausolea, beginning with the tomb for Emperor Jomei and completing with the mausoleum of Emperor Temmu and Empress Jito.

Matsuura: It bears testimony not only to the imperial mausoleum, but also to the creation of octagonal mounded tomb. It is a very important point.

Aoyagi: Also, you showed us the reconstructed pillars at the Fujiwara Palace Site the other day. You should consult with architects or use proper stone materials. Although very difficult, those things must not be visually disturbing, while they need to be noticeable for interpretation purposes. On that basis, hopefully, it would be good if they can visually prove, or help visitors understand, the physical characteristics of the ancient capital city, such as the straight alignment of the Daigoku-den (Polaris hall) and Suzaku-mon (red-bird south gate), even if they are not original, needless to say.

Arai: Yes, only if they could visualize ideas or philosophy somehow, such as the philosophy of capital city, the first capital

city of Japan. Only if we could successfully prove what the capital city was like. Only if we could say that this capital city was built based on this philosophy or that. Isn't it a great thing that we still have the remains of the actual thing there?

Aoyagi: Besides, there is a water clock at the Asuka Mizuochi (literally, "water dropping") Site, and a pond garden at the Asuka Palace Site. They attest to the developments of the on-going formation of a big state.

Tateishi: Thank you very much for the long discussion. We will continue to work to brush up on the content of the nomination dossier. On the other hand, we have been facing challenges, including how to make on-site presentation and interpretation of archaeological sites. We will have to prepare for the on-site mission by ICOMOS, and we are also thinking beyond that about medium-term and long-term interpretation and conservation. I hope that, the next time you visit the sites, I can hear you say you are impressed with great progress we have made.

(The round-table discussion was held in July, 2020.)

Explanations

1. Liberia: A country located in West Africa. Liberia was founded in 1847 by freed slaves from the United States, who started to return to their homes in 1822. The name of the country is derived from the word 'Liberty'.
2. Daijosai: The first ceremonial offering of new grain to the gods after the Emperor/Empress's accession to the throne to pray for national peace. It is said to have been established around the time of Emperor Temmu and Empress Jito. In recent years, the ceremony was held at the Imperial Palace on the 14th and the 15th of November, 2020.
3. The studies of Zhu Xi and Wang Yang-Ming: The two studies of Confucianism. Zhu Xi was established around the 12th century and was used as the governing principles of the Joseon Dynasty of Korea. The study of Wang Yang-Ming, which started as a criticism of Zhu Xi study, emphasized knowledge and action as one and the same and more focus was placed on action.
4. Tribute and document bestowing peerage: Document bestowing peerage was a system of diplomatic relations in which the emperor of a Chinese dynasty (the Son of Heaven) was at the head of a nominal relationship with neighbouring countries and peoples through titles and seals (e.g., King of the Han Empire and gold seals). Under this system, neighbouring countries and ethnic groups offered gifts to the emperor out of respect for his virtue, and it was called tribute.
5. Japonisme: A boom in interest of Japanese aesthetics in Europe during the late 19th century. The influence of *ukiyo-e* prints by Katsushika Hokusai, Kitagawa Utamaro and others on artists such as Van Gogh and Monet is well known.
6. Kibi no Makibi: 695-775. Japanese scholar and politician during the Nara period. During his first 18 years in Tang Dynasty China, he studied astronomy, music, military science and many other subjects, bringing back a great deal of knowledge to Japan. An epitaph with the inscription "Nihonkoku Ason Bi", which is believed to have been written by Makibi during his studies, was discovered in Luoyang, China in 2019.
7. Sei Shinsei/Ino Manari: 699-734. Believed to be a Japanese student; his tombstone was discovered in Xi'an (Chang'an), China in 2004. His tombstone bears the country name of "Japan". After his death, the Tang Dynasty bestowed upon him the title of managing the emperor's clothing.
8. Kakyo: An examination for the promotion of officials that continued for 1,300 years from the Sui Dynasty to the Qing Dynasty. The examinations were open to anyone regardless of family background or status, and attracted talented people with outstanding abilities.
9. An Lushan: 703-757. His father was Kang, a Sogdian, and his mother was a Tujue. He was a Tang Dynasty soldier. He was highly respected by Emperor Xuanzong, but he was at odds with the prime minister and started the "An Shi Rebellion," which led to the fall of Luoyang and Chang'an and the collapse of the foundation of the Tang Dynasty. He was assassinated by his son during the rebellion.

How is a property inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List?

A World Heritage property must be of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) to the world and to humankind. It must meet one or more of the ten criteria set out by the World Heritage Committee. There must be sufficient elements to testify OUV and unnecessary elements must not be included (integrity), attributes such as material and design must be authentic (authenticity), and protection must be assured.

The property must be on the Tentative List, which is submitted by the national government to UNESCO as a future candidate for World Heritage nomination. It is necessary to submit a nomination dossier that explains the OUV and specifies the components that testify the OUV, and the boundaries of the property to be inscribed, together with a management plan. The World Heritage Committee examines the nominations (once a year; in general, one State Party can submit only one nomination in one year).

Criteria for the assessment of Outstanding Universal Value Except for four natural criteria

- (i) represent a masterpiece of human creative genius;
- (ii) exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design;
- (iii) bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared;
- (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;
- (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;
- (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);

(Criteria for inscription are taken from the Operational Guidelines)

Process of World Heritage Inscription

Submission of the Tentative List to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre
(Government of a State Party to the World Heritage Convention)

Official nomination of properties from the Tentative List that are ready for inscription
(Government of a State Party to the World Heritage Convention)

ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) and
IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) carry out on-site evaluation missions.

UNESCO World Heritage Committee decides whether to inscribe the property or not.



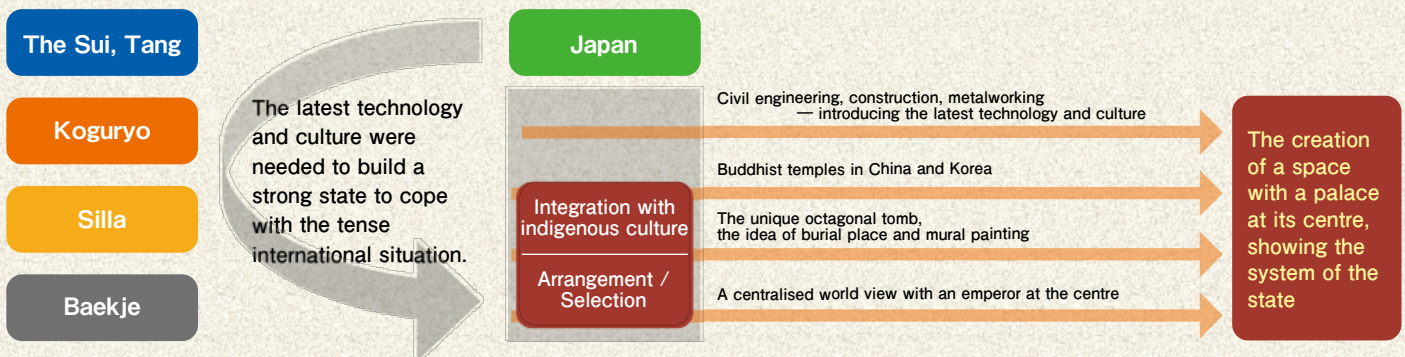
Making “Asuka-Fujiwara” a World Heritage Property!

What is the value of “Asuka-Fujiwara” as a World Heritage property?

“Asuka-Fujiwara” is an important property in the history of Japan. But, for inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List, it is necessary to testify that it possesses Outstanding Universal Value (OUV). Let’s take a look at the potential OUV of “Asuka-Fujiwara”.

Criterion (ii) It exhibits an important interchange on technology and culture in East Asia from the end of the 6th century to the beginning of the 8th century.

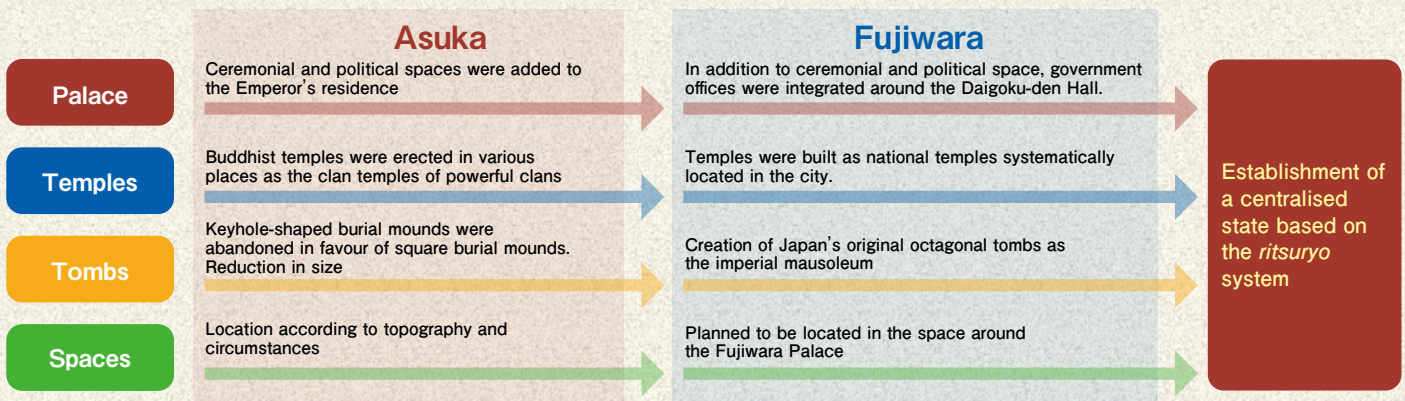
During the “Asuka-Fujiwara” period, the Sui and Tang dynasties were established in China, which had long been divided before, and their influence on neighbouring countries increased. In the midst of a tense international situation, Japan sought to build a strong state by adapting the latest technology and culture acquired through interchanges with China and Korea. “Asuka-Fujiwara” exhibits an important interchange on technology and culture that gave birth to the spatial and visual representation of the state structure, centring on the Fujiwara Palace, as well as many elements that constitute it.



Criterion (iii) It bears a unique testimony in East Asia as a series of archaeological sites that can attest to the formation of an ancient state in the region through their transition.

Before the “Asuka-Fujiwara” period, local powers built large burial mounds to show their authority. In the Nara period (710-794), which followed the “Asuka-Fujiwara” period, government offices and Buddhist temples were built side by side within the orderly subdivided capital. Between these two periods, there were major changes in political system, thought and technology.

“Asuka-Fujiwara” shows changes in the structure of the palace, the layout of Buddhist temple buildings, the shape of mounded tombs, and their locations through the transition of the corresponding archaeological sites. By comparing them, it can provide a unique testimony to the process of the formation of an ancient state on the model of China.



Criterion (vi) It is associated with the Man’ yoshu, the origin of Japanese poetry such as waka and haiku, vividly describes the feelings and scenes of various people of the “Asuka-Fujiwara” period.

The existence of the Man’ yoshu, which is still widely loved today, is a driving force for us to visit the “Asuka-Fujiwara” areas and think about those days.