



World Cultural Heritage

Nara Palace Site

Suzaku Gate

平城宮

朱雀門

Nara National Research Institute for Cultural Properties



Location of the Suzaku Gate in the Nara Palace

Suzaku Gate and Suzaku Boulevard in the Nara Capital

At the northern end of the ancient Shimotsu-michi Road, established in the seventh century, extending north in a straight line from the Fujiwara Capital, rose the Rajō Gate, the main entrance of the Nara Capital. Going through it, the Suzaku Boulevard extended straight northward at a width of 75 meters. Willows were planted on the both side of the road. Some 4 kilometers distant stood the Suzaku Gate, the main entry to the Nara Palace.

A great earthen wall 6 meters high extended left and right from the Suzaku Gate, encircling the 1 kilometer square of the palace precinct.

Emissaries from foreign countries such as Silla Kingdom and Tang Dynasty were welcomed and sent off from in front of the Suzaku Gate, and occasionally large crowds gathered there for love-song festivals (Utagaki). At New Year's the emperor sometimes came out to this gate and conducted celebrations.

The Suzaku Gate was protected by Palace Guards, and it was not open at all times. We can imagine that as the main entrance to the palace it stood with an authority and majesty.



Love-song festival (Utagaki) in front of the Suzaku Gate (illustrated by Kazuko Hayakawa)

Excavation of Suzaku Gate

The position and extent of the Suzaku Gate was firstly ascertained by the excavation in 1964. Several excavations had been conducted since then, and the entire part of the feature was re-excavated in advance of the reconstruction of the building in 1989.

Excavations revealed that the center-to-center distance of each pillar measured 17 shaku in ancient scale (approximately 5 meters), and the building measured 5 bays long in width (ca. 25 meters) and 2 bays long in depth (ca. 10 meters).

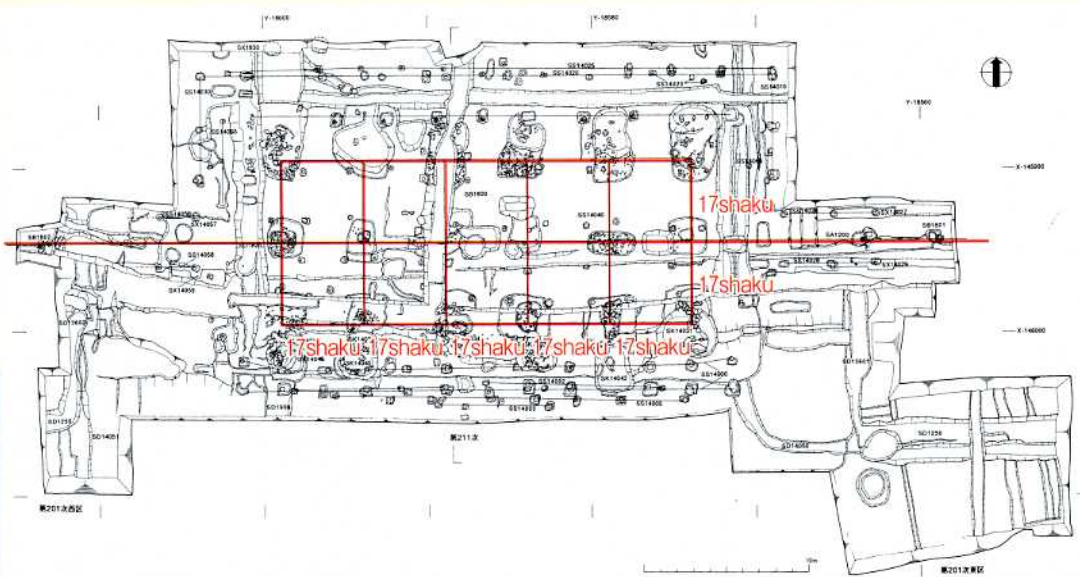
It was also revealed that the foundation of the gate platform was carefully made by trench foundation method filled by rammed earth, and natural stones were used as the foundation stones. The excavated roof tiles suggested that they were reused ones from the Fujiwara Palace.



Excavation in 1990
(from the east)



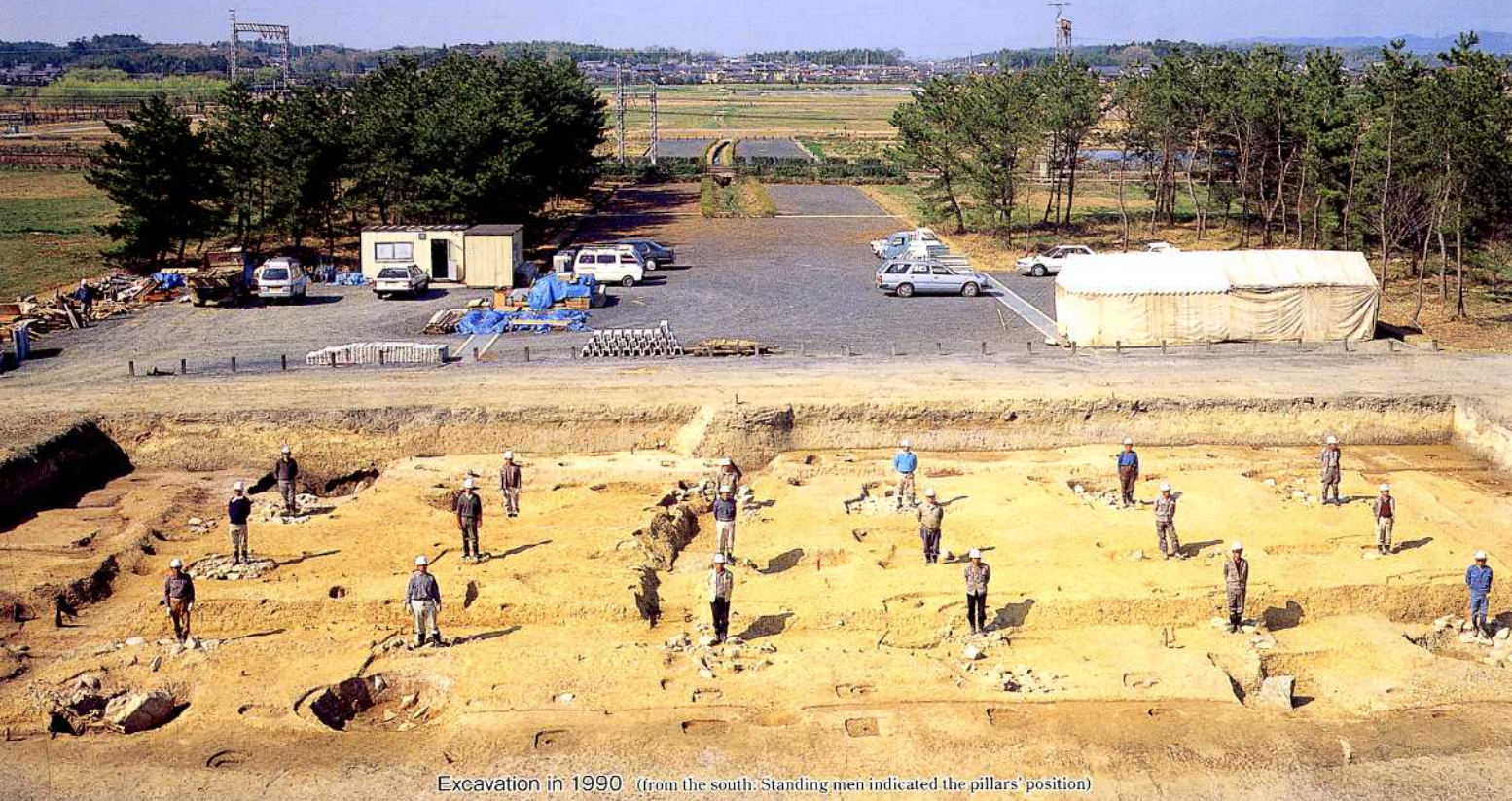
Excavated fragment of a foundation stone
(Length: 2m; Width: 1.3 m; Height: 0.6 m)



Plan of archaeological features
(Documentation of the excavation result)



Excavated eave tiles
(Recycling tiles from the Fujiwara Palace)



Excavation in 1990 (from the south: Standing men indicated the pillars' position)



Picture of Suzaku Gate at Heian Palace depicted in "Ban-Dainagon Ekotoba"
(Referred to for the reconstruction of the Suzaku Gate in two stories)



Middle Gate of Horyu-ji temple
(erected in the late seventh century)



East Pagoda of Yakushiji temple (erected in AD 730)
(Referred to for designs and techniques)

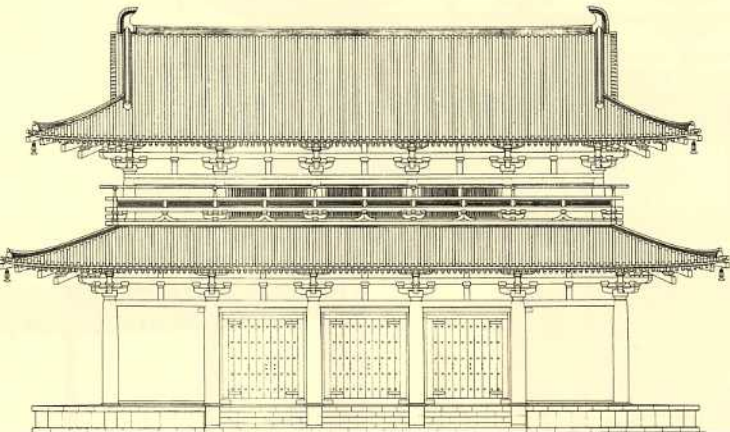


Tegai Gate of Todaiji temple (erected in the middle eighth century)
(Referred to for the size and proportions of the separate components, as an example of large building in the Nara period)

Research toward the reconstruction of Suzaku Gate

There are no materials directly related to the structural form of the Suzaku Gate. As the Suzaku Gate of the Heian Palace was a two-story gate this reconstruction was also made in two stories, and the basic structure was modeled after the Middle Gate of the Horyu-ji temple, the only surviving example from the ancient period. Since the Suzaku Gate was a building of the first half of the Nara period, the contemporary East Pagoda of the Yakushiji temple was referred to for style. Further, as the Suzaku Gate is large in scale, the Tegai Gate of the Todaiji temple, which is close to it in this regard, was referred to for the size and proportions of the separate components.

In advance of the reconstruction, a draft plan was drawn and a scale model based upon it was made for further consideration of the reconstruction plan. Then the preparation of the full-scale reconstruction was completed.



Reconstruction plan in front view
(Based upon archaeological data and modeled after existing buildings)



1:10 scale model made in 1965
(Scale model was made for further consideration of the plan)

Reconstruction of detailing

The detailing was also considered along with the structure. While some detailing such as designs of eave tiles were reconstructed modeled after the excavated materials, many other detailing still remained unknown in detail. They were referred to existing buildings and excavated materials from other sites, such as the five-story pagoda of the Kairyu-ji temple for the fine details of the roof, finds from the Lecture Hall of the Shitenno-ji temple for the wind bells, finds from the Yakushiji temple for the decorative metal plates on the ends of tail rafters, and example of the Main Hall of Toshodaiji temple and findings from the Taiheiji temple site of Kashiwara city and the Naniwa Palace Site for the ridge end ornaments.



◀ Reconstructed wind bell for the Suzaku Gate



▲ Excavated material from the Lecture Hall of the Shitenno-ji temple



▼ Making original model
Under review ▲



◀ Completion
Reconstruction of the ridge end ornament
(Referred to the example of the Main Hall of Toshodaiji temple)

Reconstruction of Suzaku Gate

Reconstruction of the Suzaku Gate began with the rebuilding of the platform in 1989. The reconstruction of the platform was finished in 1992, and the reconstruction of the building began in 1993. After five years, the gate was totally reconstructed in 1998.

In the reconstruction of the Suzaku Gate, the total amount of used timbers reached approximately one thousand cubic meters, including eighteen pillars (70 centimeters in diameter and 5.3 meters in length), which were logged at Yoshino, Nara Prefecture. The roof was covered with approximately forty-two thousand roof tiles.



Reconstruction of platform



Construction of shelter building
(For scaffolding and weather protection)



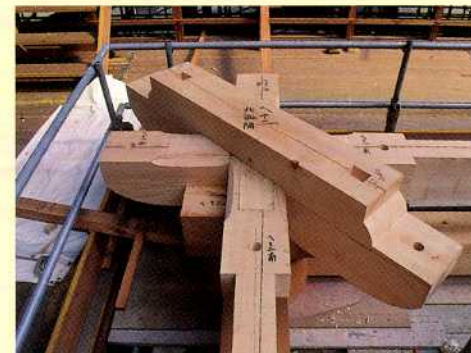
Timber processing factory
(The timbers were processed at Sakurai City, Nara Prefecture)



Commencement ceremony



Erecting pillars and jointing them by pillar-top brace



Building up bracket complex upon the pillar



Completion of building of the first story



Building the second story



Ceremony for completion of framework



Ceremony for completion



Covering with roof tiles



Lacquering in vermilion
(Overpainting three times)



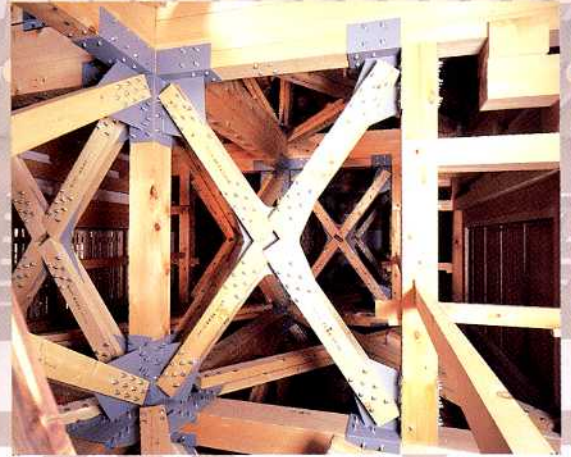
Building up rafters and constructing roof

Design and structural reinforcement of the reconstruction

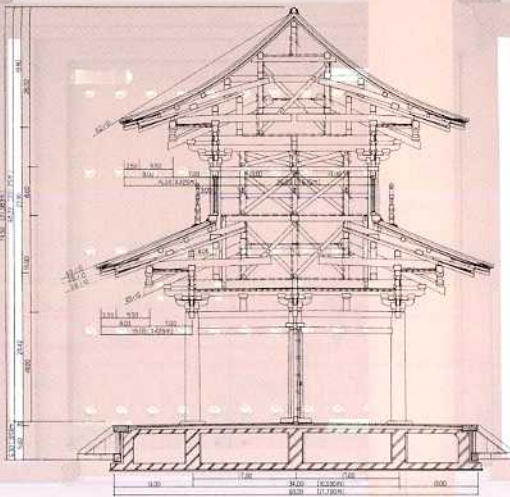
Nara period buildings had a structural fragility peculiar to that era, and structural safety was not checked according to modern standards. Modern building standard was to be applied for the reconstructed Suzaku Gate. In this regard, while first designing it purely as a piece of Nara period architecture, reinforcement was added as necessary in order to reconstruct it as an actual building.

In this reconstruction, it was hypothesized that the building had survived from the Nara period to the present, to be preserved as a traditional wooden structure with all of the modifications that may have been added, using construction methods newly developed in the Medieval and Early Modern periods, hidden from view.

For example, diagonal bracing was added to the roof truss, and walls for the first story were strengthened with wooden frames and metal fittings.



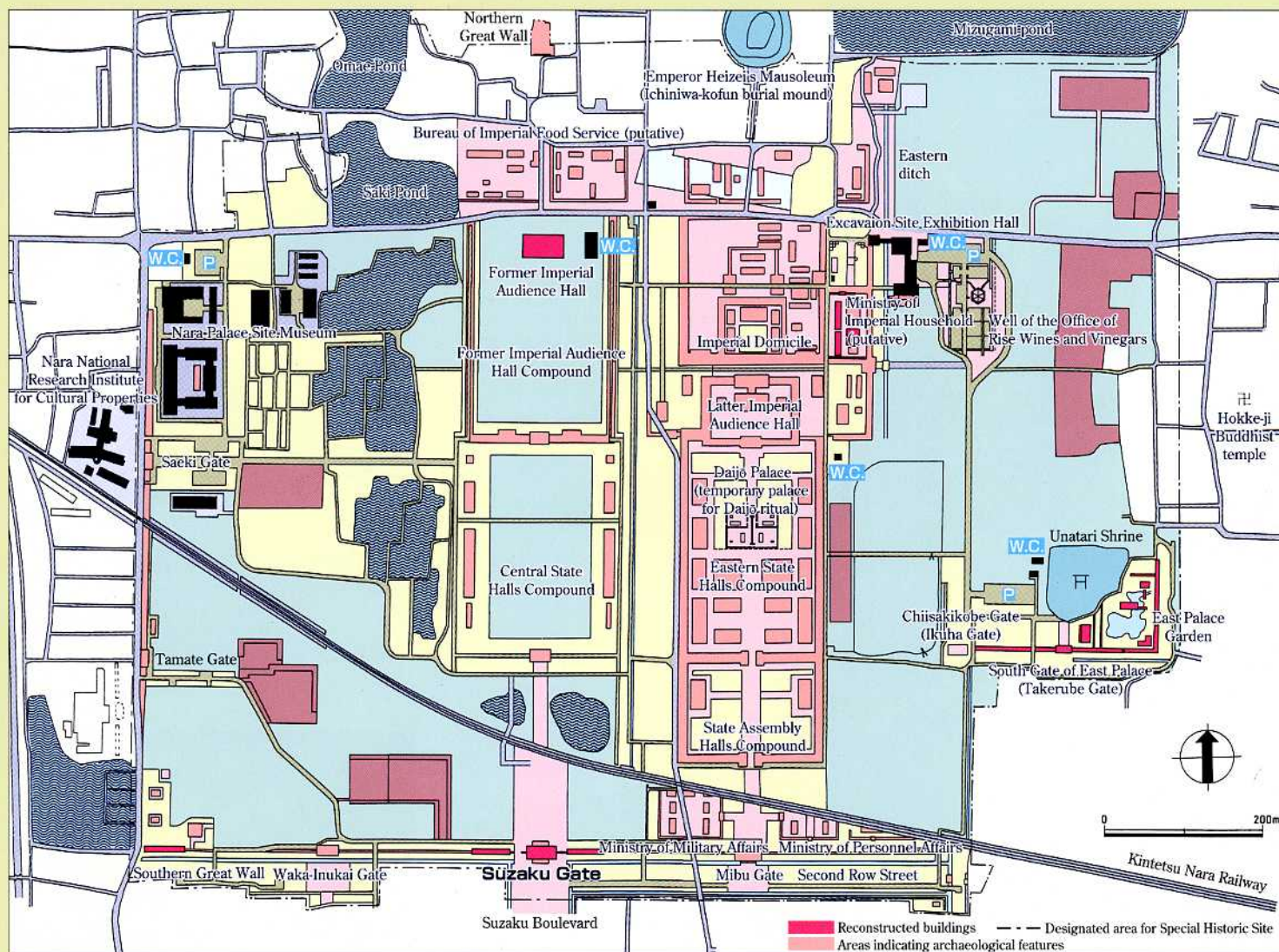
Installed reinforcement materials inside the second story



Cross-section view of the reconstruction plan
(For safety, reinforced materials were installed in hidden parts)



Inside the walls for the first story
(Strengthened with wooden frames and metal fittings)

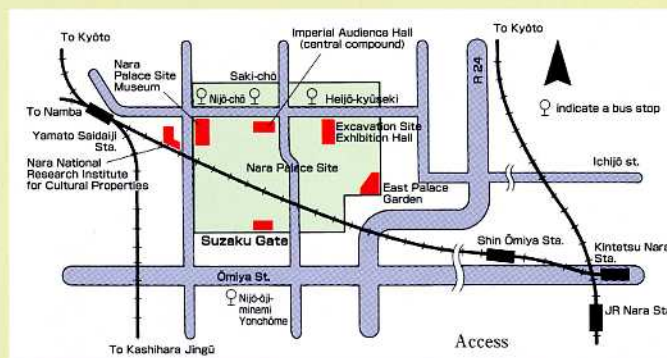


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The course of research and reconstruction

Year Item

- 1964 Excavations in the northern part of the Suzaku Gate were conducted (16th and 17th investigations), ascertaining the position and extent of the gate.
- 1965 A 1:10 scale model of the Suzaku Gate was made.
- 1979 Excavation at the southern end of the gate was conducted (112-11th investigation).
- 1980 A full scale model of bracket complex was made.
- 1981 Excavation of the Great Wall in the west side of the gate was conducted (130th investigation). The Great Wall in the west side of the gate was reconstructed.
- 1982 Excavation of the Great Wall in the east side of the gate was conducted (143rd investigation). The Great Wall in the east side of the gate was reconstructed.
- 1986 "Research on the Design and Structure of Suzaku Gate, Nara Palace" began.
- 1989 Funds were allocated from this fiscal year for reconstruction of the platform of the Suzaku Gate. Re-excavation and ground preparation began. The east and west corners of the area in front of the gate were excavated (201st investigation).
- 1990 Re-excavation of the entire feature of the Suzaku Gate was conducted (211th investigation).
- 1992 An experimental trial of earthquake resistant wall was conducted by a full scale model. Reconstruction of the gate's platform was completed.
- 1993 Reconstruction of the gate building began.
- 1994 Commencement ceremony was conducted.
- 1997 Topping-out ceremony was conducted.
- 1998 Reconstruction of the Suzaku Gate was completed.
- 2000 Both sides of the Great Wall connecting with the gate were reconstructed.



30 minutes walk from Yamato Saidaiji station of Kintetsu Railway
 Or, take a bus to Saidaiji from JR Nara station and Kintetsu Nara station, or to JR Nara station from Yamato Saidaiji station, and get off at Heijō-kyūseki bus stop, and walk for 20 minutes
 Or, take a bus from JR Nara station and Kintetsu Nara station and get off at Nijō-Ōji Minami-Nichōme bus stop, and walk for 3 minutes.
 Free admission
 Open daily 9:00-16:30
 Closed on Monday (except for National Holidays on Monday, in which case the museum is open on the holiday and closed the following Tuesday instead), year-end holidays, and other dates for temporary closing.

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