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Nara (Heijō) Palace Site Excavation Report XVII

**Investigations of
The First Imperial Audience Hall Compound 2
Carried Out 1965-2005**

English Summary

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Nara Palace Site Excavation Report XVII

Investigation of the First Imperial Audience Hall Compound 2

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Summary

This volume is the second report on excavations in the precinct of the First Imperial Audience Hall at the Nara Palace site.

The quest toward reconstruction of the Nara Palace's central portion had already begun in the mid-nineteenth century, with Kitaura Sadamasa's "Heijōkyū Daidairi ato tsubowari no zu" (Map of Land Divisions of the Greater Imperial Palace at the Nara Palace Site), which indicated in 1852 the results of his research on the Nara Capital. On this map, drawn with extreme accuracy from the perspective of surveying precision, an area 8 *chō* square (1 *chō* = 133.1 m) corresponding to the remains of the Nara Palace is outlined with an extra thick red line, and labeled "Heijōkyū" (Nara Palace) in red. Place names evocative of palace facilities, such as "Daikokuden," "Ōmiya," and "Dairi no miya" are clearly marked, showing that Sadamasa was cognizant of the location of not only the palace, but also its key components.

Research on the Nara Capital experienced a hiatus around the time of the Meiji Restoration, but was re-initiated by Sekino Tadashi toward the end of the first decade of the twentieth century. With regard to the central portion of the Nara Palace, while it was unavoidable for a stage in which research had to stand upon the forms of surviving building platforms, plus land divisions and place names, Sekino developed his understanding of what today have been clarified as the Second Imperial Audience Hall and the State Halls Compound of the eastern sector as the sole precinct of central palace facilities. At that point, the precinct of the First Imperial Audience Hall, the subject of this volume, was inferred as possibly the Nan'en garden seen in historical documents.¹

From the 1960s on, archaeological investigation of the central portion of the Nara Palace has been carried out continually by the Nara National Research Institute for Cultural Properties, and it has been shown that precincts of the State Halls Compound existed at two locations, a central one and another to the east. This was perceived to be the result of a move from the central to the eastern sector, and they were labeled the "First State Halls Compound" and the "Second State Halls Compound," while a similar understanding formed of the "First Imperial Domicile" and the "Second Imperial Domicile."

Meanwhile, from excavation in 1970 to the north of the "First State Halls Compound," a foundation platform was ascertained having a scale greater than that of the Imperial Audience Hall surviving in the east, at a spot which had been referred to from the past as "Daikoku no shiba" and "Daikokuden." As it was then recognized that the horizontal dimensions of the newly discovered platform matched those of the Imperial Audience Hall which remains at the site of the Kuni

Palace, in addition to validating the *Shoku Nihongi* account of the Imperial Audience Hall being moved from Nara to Kuni, the fact of the initial Imperial Audience Hall at Nara standing due north of the “First State Halls Compound” was clearly established.

In a 1978 excavation at the Second Imperial Audience Hall, the one situated to the east, remains of a large-scale embedded pillar building were discovered in the strata below the foundation platform. From the 1980s, excavation of the “Second State Halls Compound” proceeded, and it became clear that for all six buildings in the eastern half of the precinct, the strata beneath the foundation platforms had embedded-pillar buildings of nearly the same scale as the overlying State Halls buildings. In other words, the central and eastern State Halls Compounds existed in parallel from the start of the Nara period, and as the previous explanation of a change from a “first” to a “second” compound was not appropriate, the labels were subsequently changed to “central State Halls Compound” and “eastern State Halls Compound.”

The Second Imperial Audience Hall, which occupies the position of main hall in the State Halls Compound of the upper strata in the eastern sector, is regarded as having been newly built during the Tenpyō Shōhō era (749–757), after the return of the capital to Nara in 745. The view that the embedded-pillar building in the strata below the Second Imperial Audience Hall was the Daianden is thought most plausible, and it is regarded as having been planned and built along with the State Halls Compound of the eastern sector’s lower strata to its south, and the Imperial Domicile to its north, at the start of the construction of the Nara Palace. The Imperial Domicile was maintained throughout the Nara period at the same spot, with revisions in the layout of buildings within the precinct dividing broadly into six phases. In contrast, after the return of the capital to Nara, in the precinct where the First Imperial Audience Hall had stood a group of embedded-pillar buildings, inferred to consist of about 27 items including the largest one in the palace site having pillars within the core, was built with precisely laid symmetry.

According to documentary materials of the Nara period, as names related to the residences of the emperor, the three principal consorts, and the crown prince that were maintained within the precincts of the Nara Palace, there are Dairi, Chūgū, Chūgūin, Tōin, Tōgū, Saigū, and so forth, and debate regarding the determination of times and places for the existence of each has been conducted repeatedly from the past. Discussion of this topic has developed based on the latest results of archaeological investigations not only at the Nara Capital, but at every royal palace and capital city of ancient times, and various new facts and perspectives have been presented. In the current volume as well, based on new results from

excavations of the Imperial Audience Hall Compound cloister and environs, which have proceeded since the publication in 1982 of vol. XI of *Heijōkyū hakkutsu chōsa hōkoku* (Nara Palace Site Excavation Reports) (hereafter *Heijō hōkoku XI*), the initial report on the First Imperial Audience Hall, it has been possible to take the above-mentioned research on ascertaining the residences to a much deeper level. The details are covered extensively in this volume's Chapter V, under Section 1 "Ikō hensen to chikei fukugen" (Changes in features and reconstruction of topography) and Section 2 "Shiryō kara mita dai ichiji Daigokuden'in chiku" (The First Imperial Audience Hall Compound as seen from historic materials), but an outline will be given here, along with comments on tasks for further research and on the overall changes in the central portion of the Nara Palace.

Phase I

Phase I was the time of the start of construction of the Nara Palace, when the First Imperial Audience Hall was raised, which together with the tamped-earth wall cloister formed the First Imperial Audience Hall Compound. It divides into four subphases.

Subphase I-1 (Wadō 3.3 to Reiki 1 [710–715]). This is assessed as the time of construction of the First Imperial Audience Hall Compound. The first stage was completed around the end of 714, with the erection of the First Imperial Audience Hall (SB7200), the south gate (SB7801), and the tamped-earth wall cloister (SC5500, SC5600, SC7820, SC13400, SC8098). At this time, construction in the central State Halls Compound precinct had still not begun, with the first ground preparation thought to have been conducted around 715. At the surface of this ground preparation, excavations had been made for a north-south fence (SA8410) and for laying down a pounded layer of groundwork (SX9199), but both were reburied in an unfinished state. The ditch SD3765 functioned as a main route for drainage.

In this manner, in the several years starting from the move to the capital in 710, palace facilities to the north of the central entrance on the Nara Palace's southern side, the Suzaku (Ōtomo) Gate, remained in an undeveloped state. It is not possible to tell immediately whether this was because the urgent reason for the move to the Nara Capital bore no direct relation to these facilities of the central sector, or whether it was because the construction of the set of large-scale palace structures standing on pillar base stones, beginning with the Imperial Audience Hall, took a long period of time, but this remains an important task for future analysis.

In the eastern sector at this time, the Imperial Domicile, the Daianden, the State Halls Compound of the lower strata, and boundary fences surrounding each of

these were built as embedded-pillar structures, sharing an axis extending north from Mibu Gate. The eastern sector State Halls Compound of the lower strata was completed by 713 or 714 at the latest. The Imperial Domicile of this period was the first phase for that structure, which served as the residence of Empresses Genmei and Genshō.

Subphase I-2 (Reiki era to Tenpyō 12 [715–740]). This is the phase when the State Halls Compound of the central sector was constructed, and preparations of the environs of Saki Pond (SG8190) on the west side of the First Imperial Audience Hall Compound were begun, and the East Tower (SB7802) and West Tower (SB18500) were added on the southern side of the compound's tamped-earth wall cloister. From the Reiki (751–717) into the Yōrō (717–724) eras, a second ground preparation was conducted at the State Halls Compound and the boundary fences SA5550A, SA9201A, and SA9202 were erected, but at this phase there were no facilities for closing off the compound such as a gate. In conjunction with this, the main drainage route was changed to ditch SD3715. Next, a third ground preparation was conducted, and the State Halls SB8400 and SB8550, and a gate (SB9200) on the south side of the compound were built. In this interval, in Yōrō 1 (717) the central sector State Halls Compound was called Saichō. This was the second phase of the Imperial Domicile, and as the residence of Emperor Shōmu for the first half of his reign, a considerably richer complement of facilities had been built in comparison with the first phase. To the west side of the First Imperial Audience Hall Compound, Saki Pond (SG8190) was readied around the end of the Yōrō era. The East (SB7802) and West (SB18500) Towers were subsequently added to the southern side of the tamped-earth wall cloister, and judging from the date of a *mokkan* (wooden document) recovered from a pit (SX8411), it is highly likely this was around Tenpyō 3 (731).

For the East Tower, a slight discrepancy has been pointed out for this inferred date of construction and the age of the eaves tiles of the roof belonging to it, but as discussed in Chapter V of this volume, in Section 4 “Nokigawara kara mita dai ichiji Daigokuden'in chiku no hensen” (Changes of the First Imperial Audience Hall Compound: view from the analysis of roof tiles), a further deepening of analysis is felt necessary for eaves tiles regarding the question of how to assess the ending dates for the style 6304C flat eaves tile and the 6664K round eaves tile.

The East and West Towers were added by tearing down portions of the tamped-earth wall cloister's southern side, indicating they were not part of the initial design of the Nara Palace construction. Such a pair of multistoried buildings, while differing in terms of their positions, were in existence near the Imperial Audience Hall Compound of the Fujiwara Palace, and as they are thought to have functioned

to manifest the dignity of imperial authority as tall buildings in the central portion of the palace, then their absence at the start of the Nara Palace's construction can only be regarded as somewhat difficult to understand. Perhaps it was a bit of trial and error in the division of the unified central portion of the Fujiwara Palace into the central and eastern sectors at Nara.

Subphase I-3 (Tenpyō 12-17 [740-745]). This is the period when Nara temporarily lost its function as capital, with the repeated relocations to the Kuni Capital, Naniwa Palace, and Shigaraki Palace. The Imperial Audience Hall (SB7200) and the eastern and western sides of its tamped-earth wall cloister (SC5500, SC13400) were removed to the Kuni Palace, with the missing portions of the cloister at Nara closed off with north-south running fences (SA3777, SA13404). The central State Halls Compound was also provided with temporary partition fences (SA550B, SA12950).

Subphase I-4 (Tenpyō 17.5 to around the end of Tenpyō Shōhō 5 [745 to ca.753]). In Heijō hōkoku XI it was considered that after the return of the capital to Nara in 745, there was a period in which the First Imperial Audience Hall area was revitalized, with the eastern and western sides of the tamped-earth wall cloister rebuilt. At present, from re-examinations based on the results of subsequent investigations, it has become clear that the cloister was not rebuilt, and rather that by the first half of the Tenpyō Shōhō era (749-757) following the return, palace facilities which subsequently functioned in Phase II were being built in the area formerly occupied by the First Imperial Audience Hall, and it has been judged that from around Tenpyō Shōhō 5 (753) the southern part of the tamped-earth wall cloister (SC5600, SC7820), the South Gate (SB7801), and East and West Towers (SB7802, SB18500) were dismantled.

Phase II

(From around the time of the Tenpyō Shōhō to the first year of the Hōki eras [ca.749 to ca.770].) This is the period when the area in question functioned as an additional imperial residence, from the middle to the latter part of the Nara period. Over this time it was frequently called Saigū, and it is almost certainly the Saigū of Empress Shōtoku's reign in the latter half of this period. Empress Shōtoku died in the shinden (main hall) of the Saigū in Jingo Keiun 4 (770).

While it is very likely that a portion of the buildings remained from the Hōki through the Enryaku eras (770-806), their manner of use is not concretely known. In the central State Halls Compound to the south, the boundary fence was rebuilt as a tamped-earth wall (SA5550C).

Parallel in time with Phase II, in the eastern sector State Halls Compound the 12

State Halls were rebuilt as tile-roofed structures standing on pillar base stones, and came to be called the Daijōkan'in. The Daianden, which had been an embedded-pillar building, was remade as a tile-roofed building in the same manner as the State Halls. This renewal of the building was carried out in the Tenpyō Shōhō era (749–757). This was now the Second Imperial Audience Hall. In the precinct of the Imperial Domicile the construction of the third phase of structures was conducted. The large embedded-pillar tamped-earth wall which served as boundary partition up through the domicile's second phase was taken down, and a tamped-earth wall cloister built in the same position. For both the time when this area was the First Imperial Audience Hall Compound, and for Phase II of that structure's precinct (namely, when it was the Saigū residence, as the third phase of the Imperial Domicile precinct), a double-corridor tamped-earth wall cloister was used as the boundary partition. For government office and palace area boundary partitions at the Nara Palace, there were embedded-pillar fences, tamped-earth walls, single-corridor cloisters, and double-corridor cloisters, with the latter being superior among these as the highest status boundary partition. Subsequently the Imperial Domicile precinct underwent a fourth phase of rebuilding by Retired Empress Kōken, then a fifth phase when it served as residence of Emperor Kōnin who ascended the throne in Hōki 1 (770), followed by a sixth phase as Emperor Kanmu's domicile, coming thereby to the end of the Nara period. In that sixth phase, buildings corresponding with structures such as the Shishinden, Jijūden, and Jōneiden, which comprised the Imperial Domicile of the Heian Palace, were present at the Nara Palace for the first time, establishing the framework for the Heian Palace.

Phase III

(First half: Daidō 4.11 (809) to Tenchō 2.11 (825). Second half: from Tenchō 2.11 thereafter.) The first half of this phase was the time of Retired Emperor Heizei's palace (Heizei Saigū), but apart from the structure SB7803 which stood to the south of the palace, no prominent features can be ascertained in the State Halls Compound.

The great majority of structures of Phase II are regarded as having continued their existence after the abandonment of the Nara Palace in conjunction with the transfer of the capital to Nagaoka in Enryaku 3 (784). In Daidō 4 (809), the Heizei Saigū palace was built by Retired Emperor Heizei, and an attempt was made to return of the capital to Nara, but whether up to the time just prior to its construction the structures of Phase II remained or not is a matter that cannot be determined at present. One reason is that typological research on the recovered ceramics, and especially the work of ascertaining absolute dates, is not yet up to the level of providing precise answers to this debate. It remains a task for which further

research should be undertaken.

In the second half of this phase, from Tenchō 2 (825) on, the palace was maintained by a royal prince who was a son of Retired Emperor Heizei, but it cannot be ascertained in detail from documentary sources whether it was actually used as a residence, and it likely became more and more solely a base for managing the former Nara Capital estate.

A half century has already passed since the start of programmatic and continuous investigation of the Nara Palace site through archaeological excavation by the Nara National Research Institute for Cultural Properties. During that time, research on the central portion of the Nara Palace has been undertaken as a priority, and academic reports have already been made public on the research results for the precincts of the First Imperial Audience Hall, the Imperial Domicile, and the Second Imperial Audience Hall Compound. The current volume has attempted an examination of the entire precinct of the First Imperial Audience Hall and its Compound. While it can be believed that the historical course of this precinct, which changed its aspect so strikingly from the first to the second half of the Nara period, has been made clearer, many tasks still remain. Henceforth, along with advancing analysis of results from research on the central and eastern sector State Halls Compounds, by promoting the investigation of areas not yet excavated which unfold from the periphery of the central portion of the palace, it is necessary pledge further clarification of the history of Nara Palace, and that of the Nara period itself.

1 Sekino Tadashi, *Heijōkyō oyobi Daidairi kō* (Considerations on the Nara Capital and the Greater Imperial Palace) (Tōkyō Teikoku Daigaku, 1907).