

## Pure Land Gardens in the Nara period – Amida Jôdo-in Temple and Its Predecessor Kanmuryôju-in Temple –

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### 1. Temples and ponds

Buddhism was introduced to Japan during the Asuka period. While Asuka-dera Temple, Daikan Daiji Temple and other temples were built during the Asuka/Fujiwara-kyô periods, no temple from those days has been confirmed to have had a pond on its grounds. Later in the Nara period, however, some temples started to incorporate these water features. An existing example is the Sarusawa Pond at the Kôfuku-ji Temple, which is one of the best known sightseeing spots in Nara. It should be noted, however, that the Sarusawa Pond is located in a low-lying zone, which was originally called Nanka-en (Southern Flower Garden), outside the South Gate of the main temple. It is reasonable to believe that the pond, which took advantage of a marsh along what used to be a valley, was intended to grow greens as indicated by the name of the zone, and concurrently served as a regulating reservoir in the event of a heavy rain. Naturally, it is also imaginable that the Sarusawa Pond served as a Hôjô-ike pond for holding *hôiôe* religious ceremonies, given the fact that the pond is located on the temple's precincts. According to a historical document, the Daian-ji Temple, another temple built in the Nara period, had a pond in its precincts. In the north-eastern part of the Daian-ji Temple grounds lies the Sugiyama Tumulus, a keyhole-shaped tumulus (total length: 154 m) with a moat around it. In the History of the Daian-ji Temple with a List of its Treasures, written in 747 (14th year of Tenpyô), the moat and the grave mound are described as "a pond and a hill." It is conceivable that they were used as a garden on the temple's precincts. It is therefore clear that this pond existed when the Daian-ji Temple was completed. Given their location, the moat and the grave mound were not considered as part of the Buddhist hall. By contrast, it is

certain that the Buddhist hall and the pond constituted an integral unit at the Amida Jôdo-in Temple.

### 2. Amida Jôdo-in Temple and its predecessor

The Amida Jôdo-in Temple was built in 761 (5th year of Tenpyô-hôji) on the premises of the Hokke-ji Temple, for the first anniversary of the death of Dowager-Empress Kômyô (a daughter of Fujiwara Fuhito, the most influential aristocrat in the early Nara period, and the wife of Emperor Shômu). The principal image of the Hokke-ji Temple was Amida Nyorai. The temple's former site, which is located on the east side of the Tô-in Garden of Nara Palace, Heijô-kyû, retains standing stones (granite) on the ground. As described in Discussion on Historic Spots in *Washû-Kyûseki-Yûkô*, a topographical document written in the Edo period, this has long been considered the former site of the Amida Jôdo-in Temple. An excavation survey conducted by the Nara National Cultural Properties Research Institute in 2000 (12th year of Heisei) led to discovery of the relics of a curved pond with a central island, a building with stone foundations in the pond, and a roofed bridge. Although the survey fell short of revealing all the details, there is no doubt that the relics belonged to the Amida Jôdo-in Temple as far as the excavated items and the like are examined. In addition, the relics of a dug-standing pillar building, which is considered to be the predecessor of the building with stone foundations, were found in the pond. It is reasonable to believe that this building was part of a zone where the Kanmuryôju-dô Hall (which appears in the afterword of the Nyoirin Dharani Buddhist Scrolls owned by the Ishiyama-dera Temple) was located. The Kanmuryôju-dô Hall was built by Agata no Inukai Tachibana no Michiyo, mother of Dowager-Empress Kômyô (Fuhito's wife),

(hereinafter referred to tentatively as the Kanmuryôju-in Temple). Obviously, the name of the Kanmuryôju-dô Hall is derived from Kanmuryôju-kyô (Meditation on the Buddha Infinite Life Sutra), which is one of the Three Pure Land Sutras (the other two are Amida Sutra and Buddha Infinite Life Sutra) and describes the 16 methods of contemplation required to be reborn in Amida Buddha's Pure Land Paradise. A Transformation Scene of the Pure Land, which depicts the Meditation on the Buddha Infinite Life Sutra in the form of a painting, has an image of the Pure Land Paradise in its center, with illustrations of the 16 methods of contemplation arranged around the Pure Land image. It is highly likely that Transformation Scenes of the Pure Land were hung inside the Kanmuryôju-dô Hall. It is of interest to note that the fifth and sixth methods of contemplation represent the Contemplation of the Jeweled Ponds (viewing jeweled ponds in Paradise) and Contemplation of the Jeweled Pavilions (viewing jeweled pagodas in Paradise), respectively. The 14th through 16th methods of contemplation represent the Section of Nine Grades, depicting the conduct of people reborn in the Pure Land, in nine stages.

### 3. Kanmuryôju-in Temple modeled on Fuhito's residence

As discussed above, when one considered that the Kanmuryôju-dô Hall was a Buddhist hall rooted in the faith of the Meditation on the Buddha Infinite Life Sutra as its name represents, one could well understand the reason why the Kanmuryôju-in Temple consisted of a Buddhist hall and a pond — to embody the Pure Land Paradise depicted in the Transformation Scenes of the Pure Land. The question is whether the pond on the premises of the Kanmuryôju-in Temple was newly-created when Michiyo built the temple. It is safe to say that the pond was originally a garden pond on the premises of Fuhito's residence. The Shôsôin-monjo (the Documents Preserved in Shôsôin) contain descriptions about two sutra hand-copying zones (Nakashima-in (Inside Island Building) and Sotoshima-in (Outside Island Building)) on the premises of the Hokke-ji Temple modeled on Fuhito's

residence. It is believed that, by inference from their names, these zones had a garden pond. In my view, the garden pond zone on the premises of Fuhito's residence was turned into the Kanmuryôju-in Temple, and probably came to be called Sotoshima-in (Outside Island Building) during the days of the Hokkeji Temple, where the Amida Jôdo-in Temple was eventually built. If one saw the pond as a garden pond inherited from the era of Fuhito's residence, one would understand the reason why the pond on the premises of the Kanmuryôju-in Temple did not have a geometrical contour like the jeweled ponds in the Pure Land Paradise, as depicted in the Transformation Scenes of the Pure Land. This is because the garden pond on the premises of Fuhito's residence was designed in line with the court/residence style featuring a curved pond and scenic stones. Originating in the Tang dynasty, this style became increasingly popular after the capital was transferred to Heijô. It may have been possible to modify the curved pond into a pond with a geometrical contour when building the Kanmuryôju-dô Hall. I would conjecture that people at that time did not feel it necessary to take the trouble of modifying the pond inherited from Fuhito's era, and instead appreciated the landscape of the garden pond created with the highest level of design at the time. The same applies to the buildings. As discussed above, the site of the Kanmuryôju-in Temple was used for the Sotoshima-in (Outside Island Building) of the Hokke-ji Temple, which served as a model for the Amida Jôdo-in Temple. While the dug-standing pillar building was replaced by a building with stone foundations, it is presumable that the garden pond was inherited without major modifications. Given the fact that the garden pond initially created for Fuhito's residence survived construction of the Amida Jôdo-in Temple, which was, so to speak, a national project for the first anniversary of the death of Dowager-Empress Kômyô, it can be inferred that this type of garden pond was clearly intended to symbolize the Pure Land Paradise.

#### 4. Forerunner of Pure Land gardens in Japan

Thus far, I have illustrated my point with some considerably bold hypotheses. If my discussion is not way off the point, however, the Kanmuryôju-in Temple, the predecessor of the Amida Jôdo-in Temple, can be seen as the forerunner of Pure Land gardens, i.e., an outdoor space comprising a Buddhist hall and a garden pond to represent the Pure Land. Here, I would emphasize the two important points: i) the space arrangement of the Kanmuryôju-in Temple / Amida Jôdo-in Temple was based on the image of the Amida Buddha's Pure Land Paradise, and ii) the garden pond was designed in line with the court/residence style in the Nara period. These are considered key points which should not be overlooked in discussing Pure Land gardens in Japan, because they were behind the concept of building Pure Land gardens in the Heian or later periods.

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\*Translation's Notes

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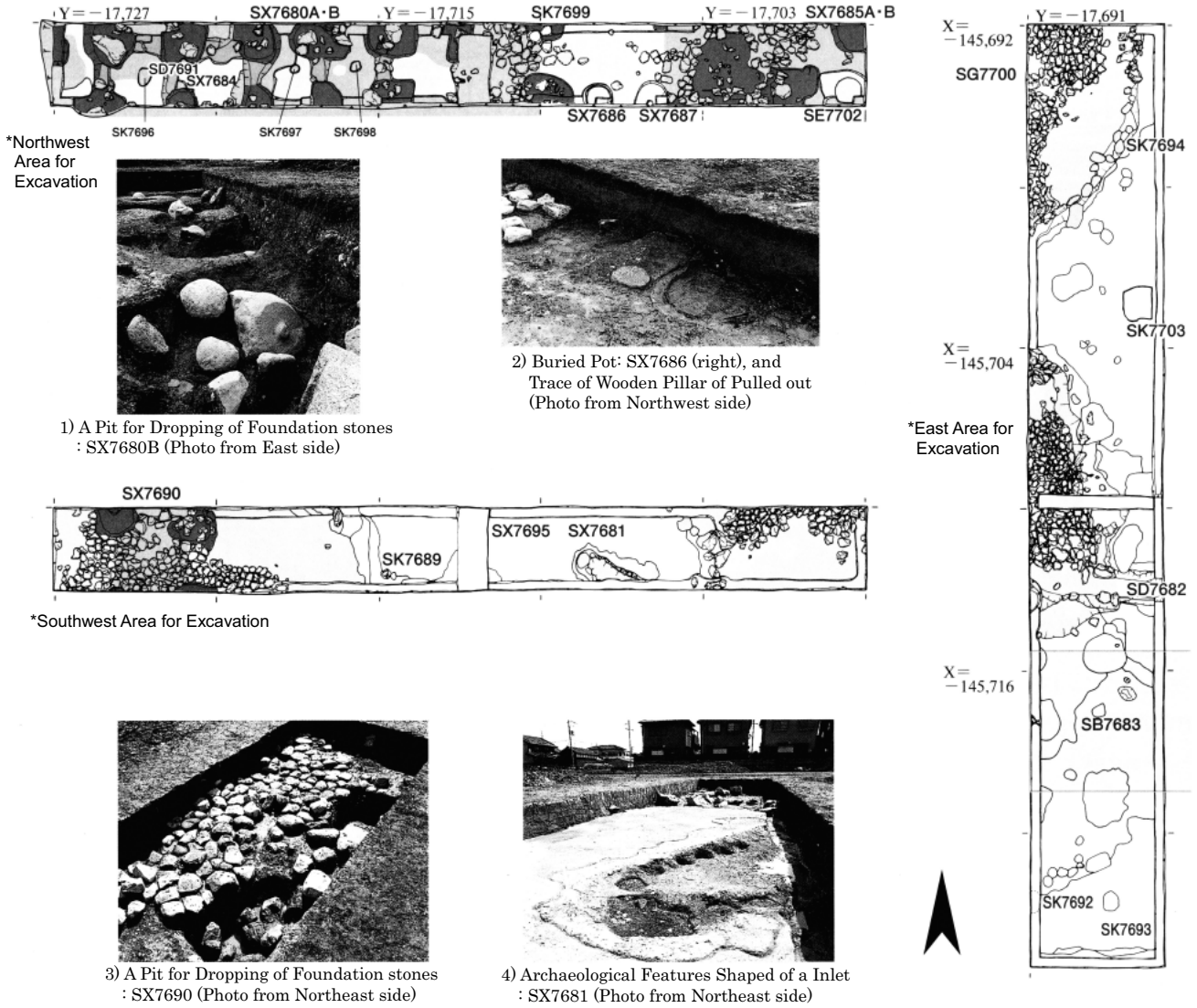


Fig. 1 Plan as result of Excavation, and Photos of notable Archaeological Features

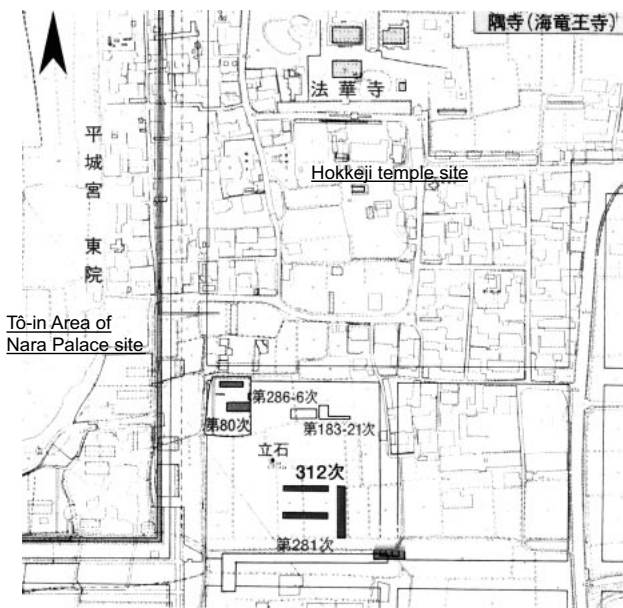


Fig. 2 Map of the site excavated

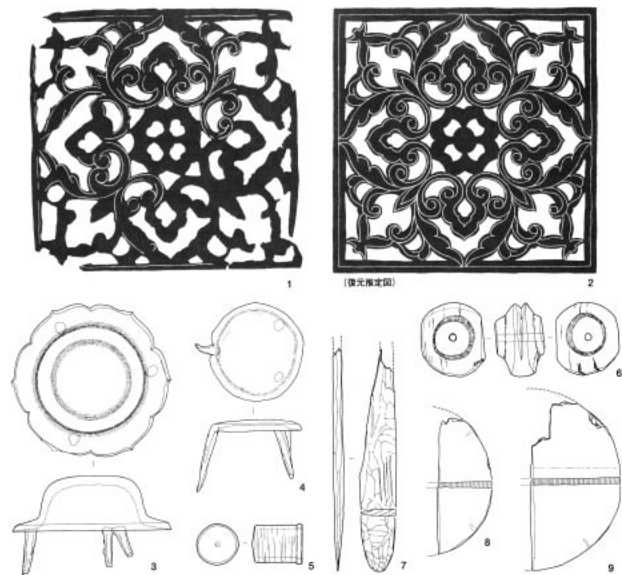


Fig. 3 Excavated Artifacts

\* All Figures of this page due to "ANNUAL BULLETIN of Nara National Cultural Properties Research Institute, 2000"