The Nissan Institute/Routledge Japanese Studies Series

Other titles in the series include:
The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness, *Peter Dale*
A History of Japanese Economic Thought, *Tessa Morris-Suzuki*
The Establishment of the Japanese Constitutional System, *Junji Banno, translated by J.A.A. Stockwin*
Industrial Relations in Japan: the Peripheral Workforce, *Norma Chalmers*
Education Reform in Japan, *Leonard Schoppa*
How the Japanese Learn to Work, *Ronald P. Dore and Mari Sako*
Japanese Economic Development: Theory and Practice, *Penelope Francks*
Britain's Educational Reform: a Comparison with Japan, *Mike Howarth*
Language and the Modern State: the Reform of Written Japanese, *Nanette Twine*
Industrial Harmony in Modern Japan: the Invention of a Tradition, *W. Dean Kinzley*
The Japanese Numbers Game: the Use and Understanding of Numbers in Modern Japan, *Thomas Crump*
Ideology and Practice in Modern Japan, *Roger Goodman and Kirsten Refsing*
Technology and Industrial Development in Pre-War Japan, *Yukiko Fukasaku*
Japan's Early Parliaments 1890–1905, Andrew Fraser, *R.H.P. Mason and Philip Mitchell*
Japan's Foreign Aid Challenge, *Alan Rix*
Emperor Hirohito and Showa Japan, *Stephen S. Large*
Japan: Beyond the End of History, *David Williams*
Ceremony and Ritual in Japan: Religious Practices in an Industrialized Society, *Jan van Breman and D.P. Martinez*
Understanding Japanese Society: Second Edition, *Joy Hendry*
Militarization and Demilitarization in Contemporary Japan, *Glenn D. Hook*
Growing a Japanese Science City, *James Dearing*
Democracy in Post-war Japan, *Rikki Kersten*

Architecture and Authority in Japan

William H. Coaldrake

ROUTLEDGE
London and New York

3 Great Halls of Religion and State

Architecture and the Creation of the Nara Imperial Order

As both a city and a centre for national government, Nara was based on a architectonic vision of the human order embracing a symbiotic relationsh between imperial authority and the built environment. There was a speci relationship between place and purpose at Nara, with a concerted policy b the political leadership to apply Chinese planning and architectural princ ples to Japanese political needs. The emperor may have been robed with t mantle of the mandate of heaven, derived from Chinese concepts of imper authority, and the organisation of Nara government may have aspired to t balanced and symmetrical order of the Tang dynasty governmental mod but equally important to the creation and character of authority, emperor a government were accommodated in a monumental palace and city where ritu and ceremony provided tangible evidence of the ideological assertion of th authority.

For most of the eighth century in Japan the planned capital city known Nara was the focus of church and state, culture and technology.[1] Nara w officially established in AD 710 as the 'capital city of peace'. Here the sc of urban planning and architectural construction undertaken by the Japanes state was to reach new and unprecedented proportions as it strove to emula in its institutions and their physical setting the example of its illustrio contemporary, the Tang dynasty, then at the height of its power and glo in China. Nara was the locus of imperial government based upon the Tan inspired penal and administrative codes (the *Taihō ritsuryō* codes), the cent of state religion and the matrix of a classical court culture. It was equally th cradle of new technologies, particularly in city planning and in the creati of monumental architecture, exemplified by the Daigokuden (Imperi Audience Hall) at the palace and the Daibutsuden (Great Buddha Hall) Tōdaiji which, although later reconstructed on a more modest scale, is st reputed to be the largest timber-frame building in the world.

Little of the original eighth-century city stands today. Scholarly attenti has therefore been concentrated on the painstaking archaeological task of establishing the physical form of the city and of its architecture from beneat the mud of the paddy fields which spread over the ruins of once proud pala and halls of state after the capital was moved to a new site in 784.[2] Ne studies have been the province of the archaeologist and historian specialise in interpreting the official history of the era, the *Shoku Nihongi*, covering th years 697–792. Second only to the *Nihon shoki* in the *Rikkokushi* or 'S

why such an import? New Trend?

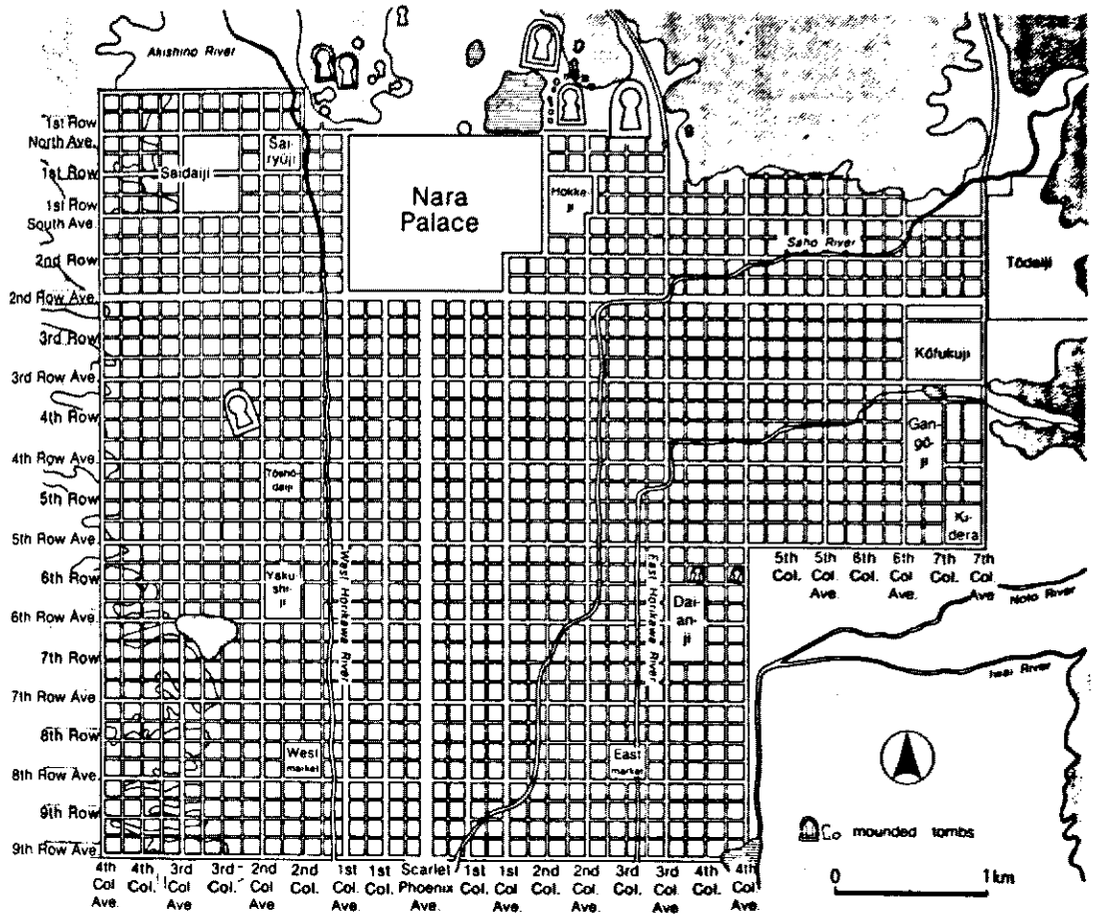


Fig 3.1 Plan of the city of Nara (Heijō-kyō) in the eighth century (Scale: 1:450,000)
(Source: Tsuboi Kiyotari and Tanaka Migaku, *The Historic City of Nara. An Archaeological Approach*)

National Histories', it is more reliable as an historical source because it largely dispenses with mythology and concentrates on contemporary events, recording decisions of the day and activities of the court.[3]

Considerable progress has been made in archaeological endeavour and documentary analysis, but the fruits of these endeavours have not as yet been integrated in order to recreate the entirety of place and purpose which is the focus of this study. It is particularly important that this integrated approach should be applied to Nara because place and purpose were not related simply by coincidence: there was a deliberate, concerted and sustained government policy to link the two as an organic whole. Central to our historical perspective on the entire Nara period is an understanding of the relationship between the principles and processes of government on the one hand, and the principles and processes of city building on the other. Two important questions must be addressed. Firstly, what was the relationship between Nara as a place and Nara as the centre of imperial government? And secondly, how did government policy and concepts of authority dictate the form of the city and its architecture of state?

The Relationship between Place and Political Purpose at Nara

The relationship between architecture and authority has special importance in the case of cities planned primarily as government capitals. Throughout history cities have expressed the power of ruling classes or factions. The careful structuring of a built environment according to an overall conception of human relations has definitive psychological and behavioural effects on a community. This makes cities effective tools for social engineering, especially through class-determined zoning of the populace, and by regulation of architectural style according to status. Cities have also acted as unrivalled symbols of authority, partly as a result of the opportunity they afford to give physical expression to an all-encompassing vision of the human order, partly because of their functional efficacy as organisational tools, and finally as a consequence of the symbolism of the architecture itself.

The city of Nara exemplifies all these characteristics of the wilfully ordained built environment. Its creation was the consummation of the process of remodelling Japanese institutions of government and society on the Chinese Tang dynasty model of a symmetrically ordered, centralised, bureaucratic state focused on a virtuous emperor reigning with the mandate of heaven. The *Taihō ritsuryō* codes of 701–702 were created to form the basis of government administration, while the city and architecture of Nara were to become the immediate physical matrix of the new order.

The *Shoku Nihongi* declares that in the second month of 707 Emperor Mommu announced to the assembly of the highest ranking courtiers his intention to abandon Fujiwara-kyō, the short-lived predecessor to Nara established in 694, and move the capital to Nara.[4] The Fujiwara-kyō site had proved too confined to accommodate the ambitious scale of the new institutions of government and court. Within three years the new capital was fully operational. Within a decade it had so grown in size and sophistication that it had become a city of international standing in East Asia. Construction and maintenance of the myriad palace buildings, from the most spectacular ceremonial structure to the most mundane latrine, were the responsibility of the Timber Construction Department (*Mokkōryō*) within the Imperial Family Ministry (*Kunai-shō*).[5] This department was charged with the daunting responsibility of obtaining the high-quality lumber, particularly Japanese cypress (*hinoki*), needed for the official building work.[6] Other government departments were responsible for the decoration of buildings, and for special building projects as the need arose. The most significant of these was the Bureau for the Construction of Tōdaiji (*Zōtōdaijishi*), the construction of which preoccupied the Nara state throughout the middle decades of the eighth century. By mid-century, also, the task of maintaining the hundreds of different palace buildings necessitated the establishment of a new department solely responsible for repairs. Elsewhere in the city, temple construction was proceeding apace under the auspices of the six major Buddhist sects, while the aristocrats and court officials busied themselves with creating mansions and gardens befitting the dignity of their status, on sites granted to them in accordance with their court rank. Not a few of the religious and residential structures were

transported to Nara from their original locations at Fujiwara or elsewhere in the Asuka region and re-erected at sites in the new city, a process which saved time, cost and timber.[7]

Nara ranks in the history of civilization with other planned cities of the ancient world such as Ionian Miletus, Nineveh in Mesopotamia and the Tang capital of Chang'an. All three utilised an orthogonal grid plan which, as an urban planning device, is singularly arbitrary and prescriptive, making it well-suited to the purpose of imposing order by government. The Nara grid consisted of carefully standardised blocks (*jōbō*), defined physically by a system of major avenues (*jō*) running east–west and north–south (*bō*) (Figure 3.1). The city was 4.8 kilometres north–south and 5.7 kilometres east–west, making it four times larger than its immediate predecessor Fujiwara-kyō. The plan was characterised by a north–south axis composed of the grand Suzaku Avenue, 74 metres in width, which ran from the towering south gatehouse of the city, the Rajōmon, to the Suzakumon, the two-storey gatehouse guarding the principal entrance to the imperial palace complex at the central north.

The palace was virtually a city in its own right, measuring some 1,000 metres north–south and 1,200 metres east–west. It was enclosed by a wall 3 metres thick and guarded by gateways of imposing character. Within the palace were several precincts. The State Halls Compound included the offices of the eight government ministries and the two supreme government organs instituted under the *Taihō ritsuryō* code, namely the Council of State (Dajōkan) and the Department of Religion (Jingikan), which was responsible for the Shinto rites and observances of the emperor and court. To its immediate north in a separate compound were ceremonial halls used for state occasions, of which the Daigokuden, the 'Imperial Audience Hall' or 'Great Hall of State', was the most important. The imperial residence was housed within its own compound, probably to the east of the State Halls Compound in the early Nara period, and to the immediate north by the late Nara period (Figure 3.2).[8]

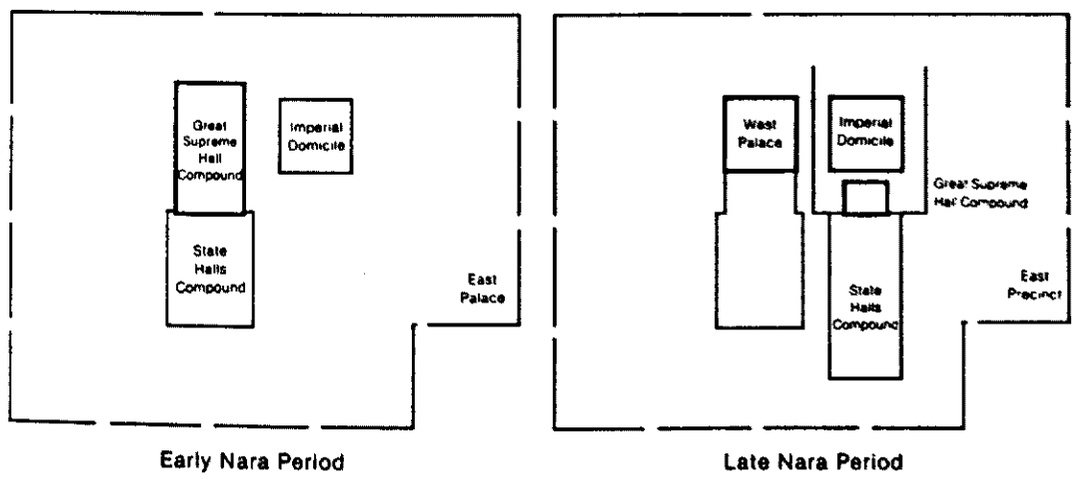


Fig 3.2 Conjectural plan of the Nara Palace compounds in the early and late eighth century
(Source: Tsuboi Kiyotari and Tanaka Migaku, *The Historic City of Nara. An Archaeological Approach*)

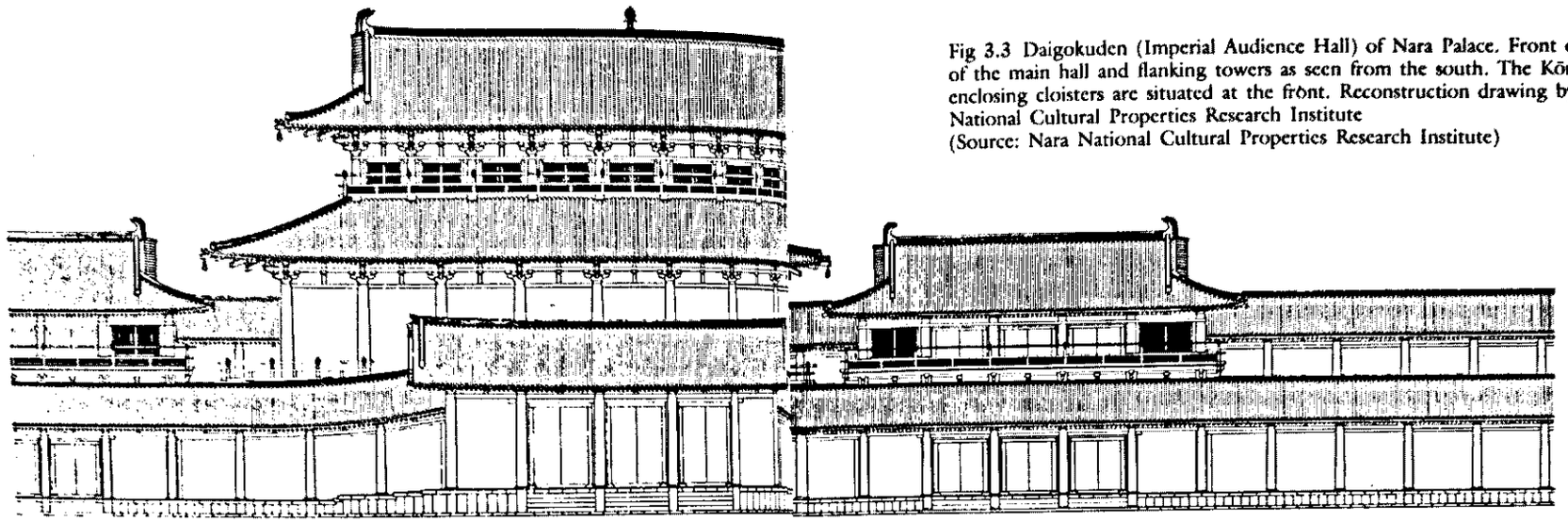


Fig 3.3 Daigokuden (Imperial Audience Hall) of Nara Palace. Front elevation of the main hall and flanking towers as seen from the south. The Kōmon and enclosing cloisters are situated at the front. Reconstruction drawing by the Nara National Cultural Properties Research Institute
(Source: Nara National Cultural Properties Research Institute)

As a result of recent archaeological excavations the architectural form of the Daigokuden of the western precinct has been reconstructed (Figures 3.3–3.5). Referred to in the archaeological reports as the 'First Daigokuden',[9] it was a long, narrow, two-storey building set on a high stone podium and orientated east–west across the main axis of the palace site. The structure was nine bays east–west and four bays north–south, with an impressive span of slightly more than 5 metres between the pillars. This gave it a total width of 51.48 metres and a depth of 21.20 metres. The first floor of the building above the podium was open at the front to provide a good view into and from the interior and was entered via three formal stone staircases. The Daigokuden was a building of overpowering size, approaching the dimensions of the Daibutsuden of Tōdaiji in width and height, although considerably narrower. It would have been a commanding presence in the palace compound, befitting its role as the formal centre of imperial authority and court ritual.

The *Shoku Nihongi* establishes that the Daigokuden and the State Halls Compound were the focus for New Year ceremonies, horse races and mounted archery contests, as well as for the official reception of ambassadors and their retinues from the Korean kingdoms.[10] The court records also reveal that imperial edicts were delivered by the emperor while standing on the podium of the Daigokuden above the central stairs.[11] The most important ceremony of all, that of imperial accession (*Sokui-no-shikiten*), was also performed at the Daigokuden, when, as on other important state occasions, the entire court assembled in front of the emperor, who was seated on the imperial throne (*takami-kura*) placed above the central stairs facing south. The emperor and the immediate imperial retinue were separated from the rest of the court by the southern wall of the Daigokuden compound. Ministers would pay obeisance to the emperor by approaching the entrance to the Kōmon, the gateway separating the southerly compound from the Daigokuden compound, and there bowing deeply. However at the time of the accession ceremonies, the highest-ranking courtiers and officials were permitted to enter the courtyard itself directly in front of the Daigokuden. When Emperor Shōmu ascended the throne in 724, seven temporary flag-poles were erected transversely across the Daigokuden compound and the senior courtiers and ministers, ranked in lines behind them, paid their obeisance.[12] At other times the emperor or empress advanced to the Kōmon to view activities such as musical performances presented in the State Halls Compound.[13] Later in the Nara period, the Daigokuden compound became smaller but the scale of the building increased in size so that the emperor or empress could see the events in the State Halls Compound 'without leaving his (or her) seat in the Great Supreme Hall (Daigokuden)'.[14] Tsuboi observes that 'these developments surely reflect a change in the emperor's status'.

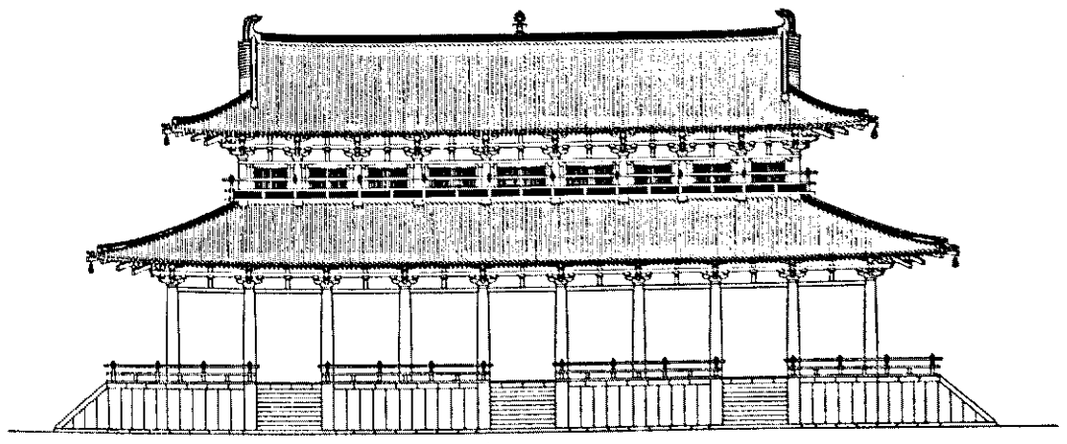


Fig 3.4 Daigokuden (Imperial Audience Hall) of Nara Palace. Front elevation. Reconstruction drawing by the Nara National Cultural Properties Research Institute. (Source: Nara National Cultural Properties Research Institute)

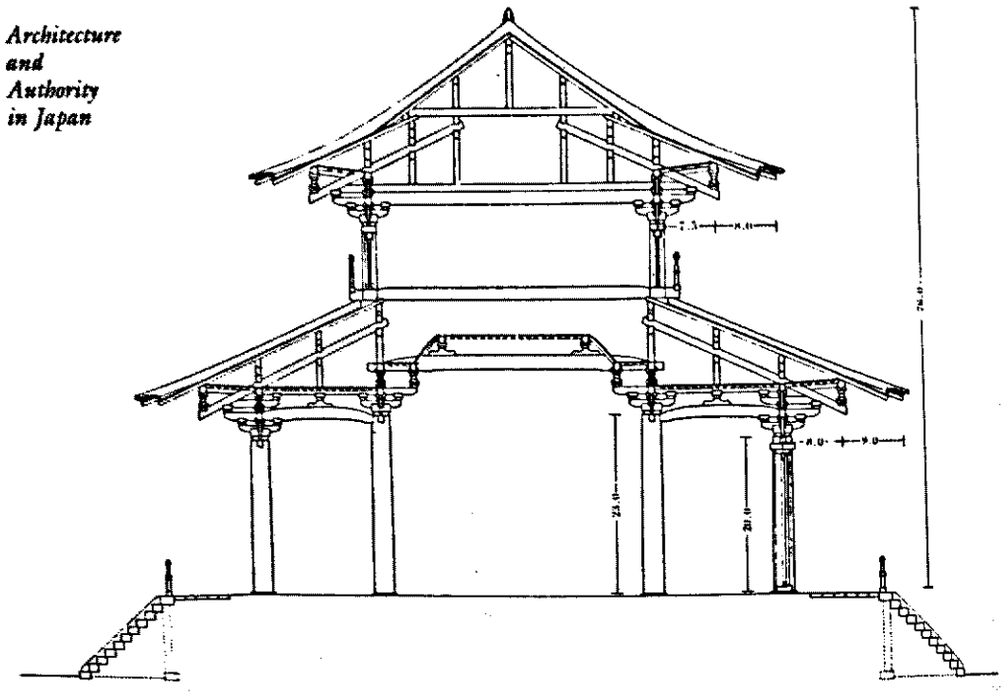


Fig 3.5 Daigokuden (Imperial Audience Hall) of Nara Palace. Transverse section. Reconstruction drawing by the Nara National Cultural Properties Research Institute
(Source: Nara National Cultural Properties Research Institute)

Notwithstanding its lofty ceremonial functions, the Daigokuden was similar in architectural form to the lecture halls of the great Buddhist monasteries of Nara and its environs, such as the Daikōdō of Hōryūji, which was added to the main western precinct of the temple in the ninth century. Although the Daigokuden was a two-storey structure and the Kōdō of Hōryūji single-storey only, both buildings were long and narrow in plan, orientated east–west across the main north–south axis of their respective sites, and mounted on a stone-faced podium (Figure 3.6). At Hōryūji the chief abbot stood at the top of the central steps of the Kōdō to address the monks assembled in the forecourt, in much the same manner as the courtiers would have gathered in the forecourt to the Daigokuden and the adjacent administrative precinct for imperial audiences. The Hōryūji building shows how the Nara palace hall would have framed the focal ceremonial figure during these rituals, providing a dramatic setting to enhance his or her authority (Figure 3.7). A shared architectural strategy for both religious and governmental authority at Nara is hardly surprising in view of the theocratic pretensions of the court. Shared architectural form was also to be found in the castles and cathedrals of medieval Europe, where Gothic vaults sanctified the authority of kings as well as crowned the majesty of the church.

From such evidence of urban planning and palace architecture at Nara it is clear that the built environment was more than just an incidental setting for the character and conduct of government. It was part of the very nature

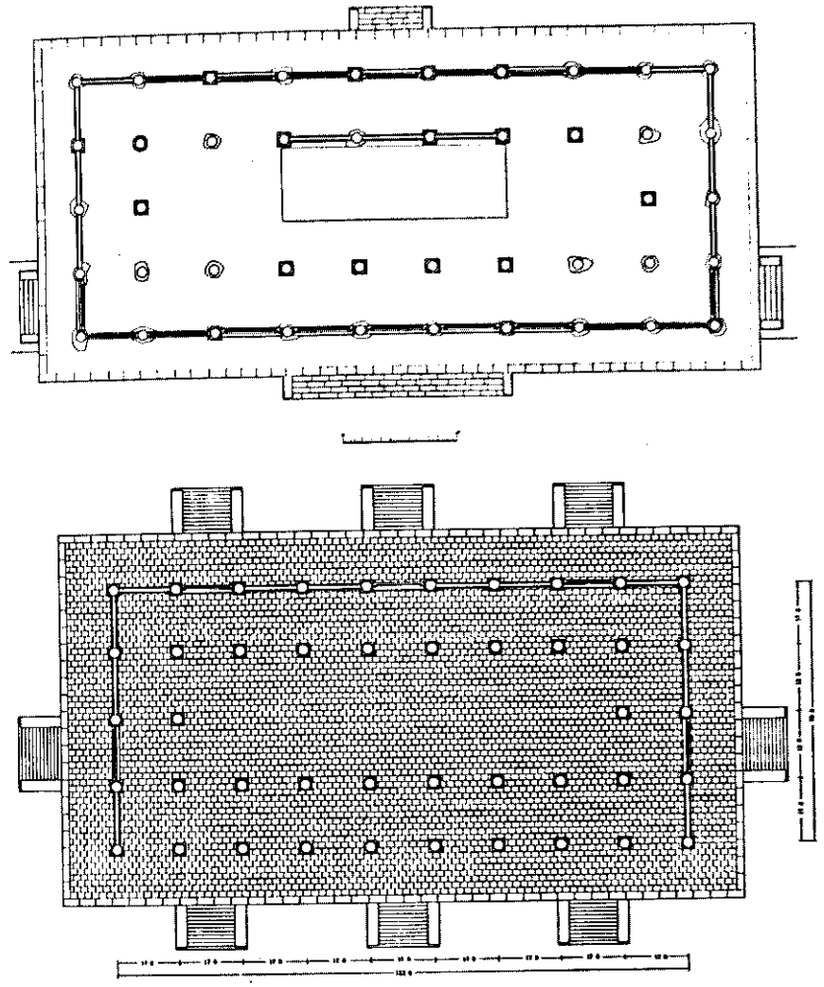
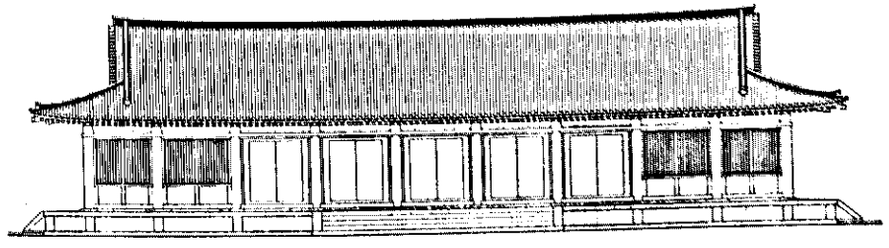


Fig 3.6 Plans of Daikōdō (Great Lecture Hall) of Hōryūji (top) and Daigokuden of Nara Palace (bottom)
(Source: Bunka-chō, *Kokuhō jūyō bunkazai [kenzōbutsu] jissoku zushū* and Nara National Cultural Properties Research Institute)

Fig 3.7 Daikōdō (Great Lecture Hall) Hōryūji. Front elevation
(Source: Bunka-chō, *Kokuhō jūyō bunkazai [kenzōbutsu] jissoku zushū*)



of government, inherent and indispensable to the definition of authority and the exercise of power.

The Adoption of Tang City Planning and Architectural Principles

A mainstream issue in Japanese historical enquiry is the relationship between foreign ideas and technology, and indigenous institutions and culture. The striking scale and sophistication of the city and palace of Nara are evidence of a deliberate and concerted attempt to apply Chinese planning principles and architectural practice to the perceived needs of the Japanese state. Two questions claim our attention at this point: how effective was the Nara government in implementing the Chinese ideal of a planned city with monumental buildings? What was the effect of deliberate adoption or even imposition of foreign models of state and civilization on indigenous traditions of government, building and belief?

City Planning

The Nara plan conformed with general principles of Chinese planning as propounded in Confucian philosophical writings and understood by the scholars of the Nara court in the eighth century. This of necessity was based on an ideal concept. As a tangible model of this ideal form, the Tang dynastic capital of Chang'an exerted a powerful influence. Our understanding of the extent of Nara's specific indebtedness to Tang Chang'an is hampered by limitations in understanding Chang'an itself. Exactly the same scholarly contretemps pertains to the study of Chang'an as to the study of Nara; at both sites there has been vigorous archaeological exploration but little systematic synthesis with documentary sources.[15] Moreover, early Chinese city planning was inconsistent with theory so that there was not a single authoritative urban realisation of Chinese conceptions of place and purpose.[16] Tang dynasty Chang'an itself lost its symmetrical perfection when the Daming Palace was located as a trapezoidal accretion at the northeast corner of the urban grid (Figure 3.8).

Whatever the realities of balancing unanticipated growth with an inflexible planning device like the grid pattern, or the limitations of our understanding of Tang Chang'an, it is universally accepted that the architectural philosophy of Chinese cities was based on the principle of correspondence between the terrestrial and the celestial orders, a correspondence which permeates the classical Confucian texts formulated in the Zhou dynasty, particularly the *Book of Documents* (*Shu Jing*) and the *Book of Rites* (*Li ji*).[17] Acceptance of the importance of this principle led to the adoption at Nara of the generic morphological features of Chinese cities, especially the north–south grid plan governed by axial symmetry and a spatial hierarchy coinciding with the status hierarchy of the court. This planning strategy was similar to the one which had been employed at Chang'an. Similarly, the seat of government and the residence of the emperor at Nara stood at the centre north, while an axial processional avenue bisected the city in the manner of the grand avenue at the centre of Chang'an.

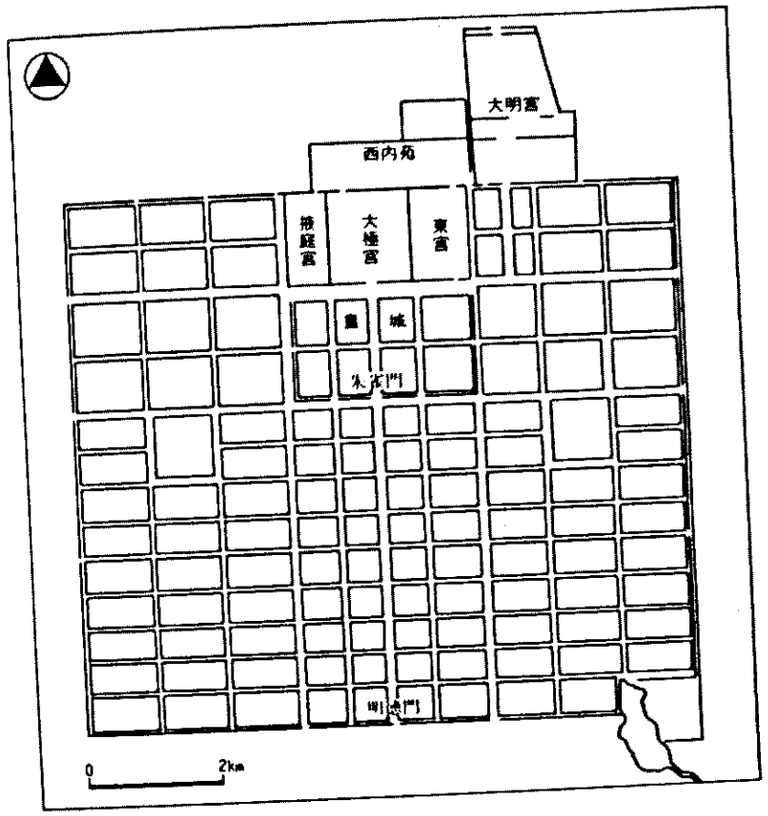


Fig 3.8
City Plan of Chang'an during Tang Dynasty (Source: Okayama Shigehiro (ed.) *Tojō to kokufu, Fukugen Nihon taikan*, vol. 3)

Chinese influence is also clear in the siting of Nara. The site selected for the city satisfied geomantic criteria similar to those which permeate Chinese civilization. Specifically this meant having high ground to the north and east of the area of human habitation, to protect against the flow of the malevolent forces in the universe and the cold northerly winds, and low ground and water to the south of the site, coinciding with the direction of the benevolent forces and the sun, an eminently practical arrangement for locations in the northern hemisphere. The confluence of ancient geomancy with formally articulated Confucian philosophy interposed the palace of the ruler between the malevolent forces of the north and the habitations of people in the south over whom benevolent rule was to be exercised. The Chinese geomantic doctrine of the Four Deities was also applied in part to the plan of the city of Nara. The well-preserved seventh-century Takamatsuzuka tomb, richly decorated with paintings of the Scarlet Phoenix, Black Warrior, White Tiger and Green Dragon on its four walls, establishes beyond doubt that this doctrine was already understood in Japan by the time of the building of Nara.[18] However, of the Four Deities, only the Scarlet Phoenix (*suzaku*) is actually employed at Nara, revealed in the name of the Suzakumon, the two-storey scarlet-lacquered gatehouse guarding the entrance to the Nara Palace. The comprehensive application of all the Four Deities to city planning had to await the building of Heian-kyō, or Kyoto as it is now known, at the end of the eighth century.

The Official Architectural Style

The architectural form of the first Daigokuden at Nara Palace is another example of the close conformity in general style and specific system of mensuration with Chang'an palace architecture, in this case the Hanyuan Dian or main hall used for state ceremonies at the Daming Palace of Chang'an. Archaeological work carried out on the site in the late 1950s established that the hall had been a spectacular structure with red timbers, white walls and gold ornaments. The hall itself was flanked by towers.[19] It has been possible for archaeologists to reconstruct accurately the plan of both the Hanyuan Dian and that of the first Daigokuden. Comparison of the two buildings shows that the Japanese building was four bays shorter and two bays narrower (or 15.85 metres by 8.00 metres smaller) than was the hall of the Chang'an building, but pillar placement and the length of intercolumnial span were identical.[20] The two plans may be transposed upon one another, so similar is the structural organisation and the measurements of the two buildings.[21] We may conclude, therefore, that the Daigokuden at Nara was modelled directly on the Hanyuan Dian in both style and scale. Flanking towers were even added in the 720s to complete the re-creation of the architectural form of the Chang'an palace.

Precise numerical correspondence between the two buildings highlights the lengths to which the Nara government was prepared to go to standardise Japanese measurements on the basis of Tang mensuration. A major responsibility of government is to impose order by regulating the spatial quiddity of a society. As in both ancient Rome and medieval Europe, early Japanese measurements were subject to considerable variation as a result of different workshop traditions. Such diversity presented serious problems to a government intent on extending control over the whole nation, conducting international trade, and building a new capital city rapidly and efficiently. Close coordination through use of standardised measurements was essential for the veritable army of surveyors and builders coopted into government construction service from many different regional traditions including the famous master carpenters of Hida province.

The *Taihō ritsuryō* codes officially adopted the long-established Chinese system of a 'short foot' (*shōjaku*) and 'long foot' (*taijaku*) as part of the comprehensive attempt to remodel the Japanese governmental system along the lines of the Tang administrative and legal system. The larger measure was approximately 1.2 times greater in size than the smaller unit and is generally thought by mensuration specialists to have been the same length as the *Komajaku*. This 'Korean foot' was 35.45 centimetres in length, and had been in widespread use in Japan for building the funeral mounds of the fourth to sixth centuries when influence from the Korean kingdoms was strong.[22] In the final analysis Korean usage was based upon Chinese practice because of the general Chinese influence in the Korean kingdoms, largely as a result of the presence of Han commandaries in the north of the peninsula.

The increased tempo of capital city construction, first at Fujiwara-kyō, and then at Nara itself, necessitated immediate modification to official mensuration policy. In 702, the year after the Taihō Code, the government announced

that the long foot would be used exclusively for land surveys and the short foot for all other purposes.[23] This important modification to the Tang-inspired standard was made under Emperor Mommu in response, no doubt, to specific but now undocumented problems encountered during building operations at Fujiwara-kyō.

Detailed information about government regulation of measurements during the first stage of the building of Nara was obtained from the excavations carried out in the 1970s at the site of the western Chōdōin precinct. This proves that the modified system of two different foot measures was still in operation when the palace was built between 708 and 712. On the one hand the Taihō long foot is used as the land survey unit for determining the dimensions of the excavated precinct and for positioning the buildings within it. These measurements are all rounded out to the nearest long foot units, an expedient which made surveying more simple. On the other hand in the Daigokuden building a short foot measure of 29.45 is used.[24] Like the land survey long foot, it is used as a rounded unit for simplicity and speed, particularly important as customary building practice seldom relied on detailed working drawings. From this archaeological evidence we may conclude that for the first decade of its rule, the Nara government was effective in bringing order to measurements on the basis of applying Tang principles modified in the light of Japanese experience at Fujiwara-kyō.

This Tang dual system of measurement proved cumbersome in operation and further rationalisation of building standards became necessary for the orderly coordination of work being carried out simultaneously at construction sites throughout the city. Builders no doubt found two standard measurements confusing, doubling the number of measuring rods and marking ropes required to no advantage other than to satisfy some arbitrary rule of government for reasons of modernity on the Chinese pattern. Accordingly in 713, the year after the first Daigokuden was completed, an edict was issued which stated that henceforth 'each and every government ministry shall use the short foot for all purposes'.[25] A short foot approximately 29.5 centimitres in length now became the official standard. This is a further indication of the niceties of government policy bowing before the practical demands of large-scale construction.

The case of mensuration reveals a familiar pattern of initial conformity with Tang principles yielding to the pressure of actual building practice in Japan. A similar conclusion may be reached regarding the stylistic features of some of the important buildings constructed by the Nara establishment, by comparing written documents with archaeological and architectural evidence. The *Shoku Nihongi* records a request made from the Dajōkan to Emperor Shōmu shortly after his accession to the throne in 724:

> . . . the capital is where the emperor lives and every province comes to court but it does not possess the magnificence needed to express virtue (*toku*). Its wooden shingled roofs and thatched dwellings are relics of the past. They are difficult to build and easily destroyed, exhausting the people's resources. It is requested that an order be issued that aristocrats of the Fifth Rank and above, and those commoners able to do so, should build tiled-roof houses and paint them red and white.[26]

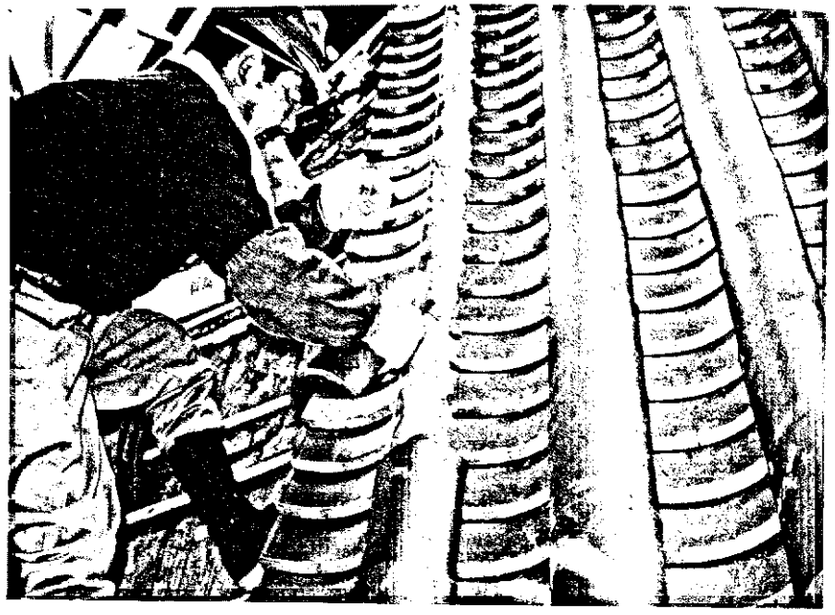
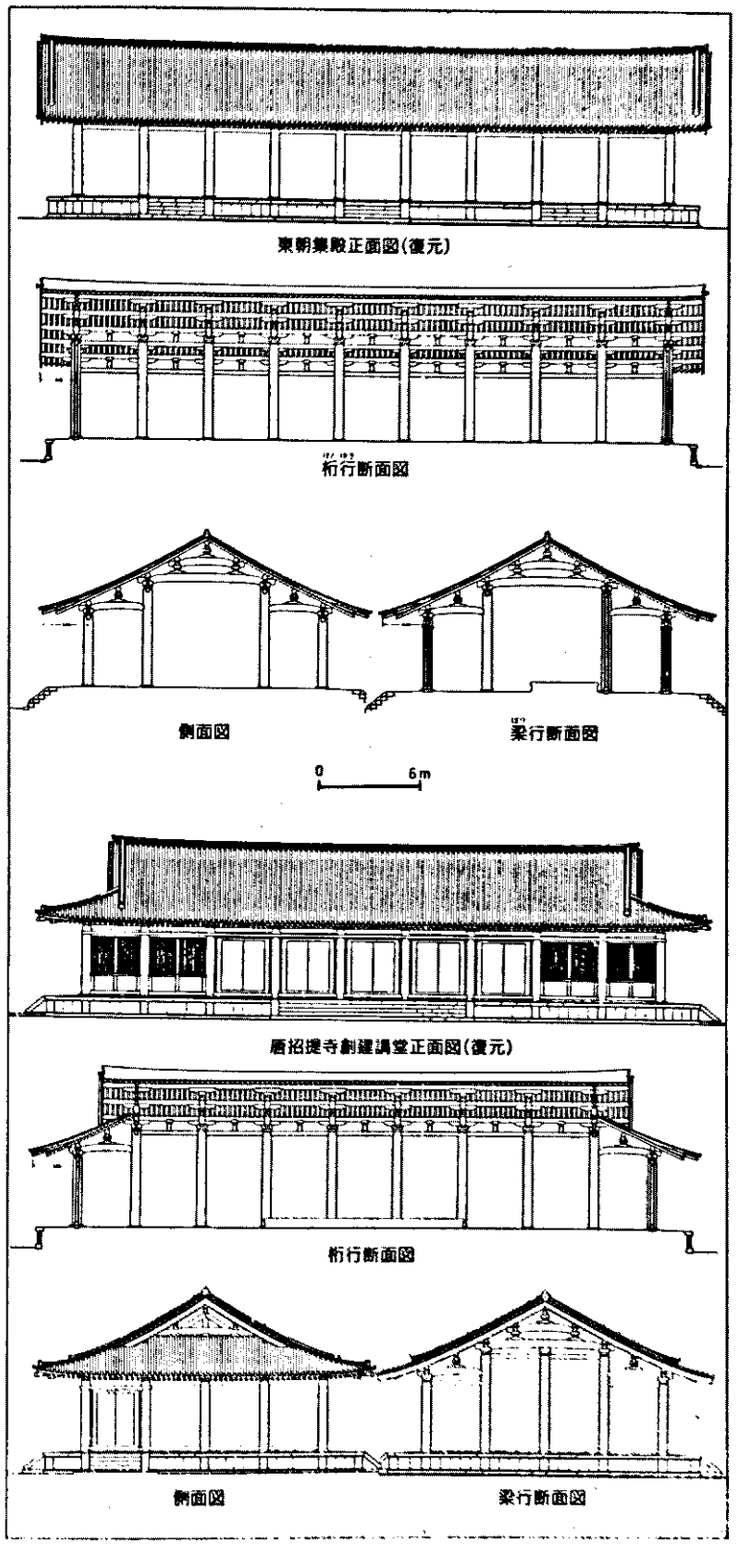


Fig 3.9
Terracotta tiles being laid on temple roof (Enryakuji restoration, 1980)

Although couched in the circumspect language of supplication to the emperor, this document is nevertheless a statement of official policy for the Nara political order formulated by the emperor in consultation with his chief Dajōkan officials.[27] It reveals the adoption of an official architectural vocabulary based on Tang usage, and makes an equation between government by virtue, a fundamental Confucian tenet, and appropriate physical form. It is the same type of equation that we accept exists between democratic governments and Greek Classical architecture. In the Japanese case this equation would be realised through tiled roofs and polychrome decoration. Terracotta tiling is one of the most durable of all building materials and its adoption indicates a dramatic change from reliance on different types of thatch and wooden shingles for roofing purposes (Figure 3.9). The Daigokuden excavations show that in the year of promulgation of the Dajōkan document the official architectural vocabulary was used for the most important ceremonial building of the palace complex. Here the excavations of the site have uncovered monumental stone foundations, traces of brightly painted timber-framing and triple-glazed terracotta tiled roofs.

The most tangible evidence of architectural form within Nara Palace is the Higashi Chōshūden, or Eastern Morning Waiting Hall, of the State Halls Compound. This is the only extant building of the Nara Palace and is one of a pair originally erected on either side of the north–south axis of the State Halls Compound of the palace site after rebuilding in 747. These two buildings, located in a small courtyard to the immediate south of the main State Halls precinct, served as the place where courtiers and other visitors awaited their morning audiences with government officials.

Fig 3.10
Higashi Chōshūden (Eastern Morning Audience Hall) of Nara Palace (above). Reconstruction drawing by Nara National Cultural Properties Research Institute. Kōdō (Lecture Hall) of Tōshōdaiji (below) (Source: Okayama Shigehiro (ed.) *Tojō to kokufu, Fukugen Nihon taikan*, vol. 3)



The survival of the Higashi Chōshūden is fortuitous for the historical record, but it also highlights some of the difficulties associated with the use of buildings as historical evidence because it has been rebuilt on a new site. The building now serves as the Kōdō (Lecture Hall) of Tōshōdaiji, the temple founded by the Chinese monk Ganjin (Jian Zhen) (Figure 3.10). Ganjin had reached Japan from China in 754 after five unsuccessful attempts to complete the journey. He was brought to Japan by the government for the purpose of conducting ordination rites and thereby legitimising the Japanese Buddhist priesthood in the international Buddhist order. Five years later, in 759, he was granted by imperial decree a site on which to found the Tōshōdaiji. Eighth- and ninth-century temple records note that one of the Chōshūden buildings from the palace was donated to the temple.[28] At the time extensive rebuilding was being carried out at the Heijō Palace, so extensive in fact that, according to the *Shoku Nihongi*, no New Year ceremonies were held for the year 761. The waiting hall structure probably became redundant as a result of these rebuilding activities. The foundation of the new temple provided a perfect opportunity to demonstrate imperial largesse and, at the same time, dispose of a surplus structure. Archaeological excavation of the Higashi Chōshūden site and examination of the Kōdō of Tōshōdaiji have confirmed unquestionably that the extant temple building was the former Higashi Chōshūden of the palace. The base dimensions are identical. Moreover the pillars, beams and truss of the Kōdō still carry the identifying numbers and letters (*bansuke*) inscribed on them at the palace prior to the structure being dismantled and reassembled at its new home.[29]

The present-day Kōdō of Tōshōdaiji is a single-storey structure nine bays wide and four bays deep surmounted by a hip-gable terracotta tiled roof. It is some 27 metres long and 12 metres wide and is similar in plan to the Daigokuden, although significantly smaller in size. The palace excavations disclose that, like the Daigokuden, it had three sets of stone steps at the front and was open there to entry and egress. The truss which supports the roof of the extant building has the gracefully curved pairs of tie-beams typical of the High Tang style in China. However, analysis of framing of the extant hip-gable roof has established that it was originally a simple gable form, a style used for less important buildings at the Nara Palace and, one would think, unsuitable for the important new temple. When the building was re-erected at Tōshōdaiji a lattice ceiling was suspended from the roof, altering the spatial dynamics of the interior, while, in the Kamakura period, straight penetrating tie-beams were added to strengthen the structure.[30] The original red paint of the pillars and beams has now worn away, leaving the timber exposed in its natural state. The roof was originally covered with exotic triple-glazed green, white and brown tiles in the Tang mode favoured for important political buildings, lending it an elegance and decorative brilliance far removed from the present sombre hue of its grey tiles. We may deduce something of its original visual impact from a description after its removal to Tōshōdaiji: 'It was magnificent with gold, silver, vermilion and jewels, and, so to speak, like a heavenly palace, but with the passing of years it became dilapidated . . .'.[31]

The extant Tōshōdaiji hall, therefore, supplemented by archaeological evidence and written records, allows us to recreate the appearance of official

Nara buildings. It illustrates the type of building specified in the 724 Dajōkan document as essential to the state order, and provides additional information about the use of curved tie-beams and glazed tiles as part of that visual order. These features would have added significantly to the powerful impression created by the building on all who viewed and visited it.

Divergence from the Tang Model

Thus far we have been concentrating on the way much of the city plan and the official buildings of Nara reflected Chinese planning and architectural principles but significant differences were also indicated when the mensuration of the first Daigokuden was considered. In fact by the middle of the eighth century there seems to have been a complete breakdown of authority over length measures despite the early efforts of the government. Twenty-six *shaku* rulers are preserved in the Shōsōin where personal treasures of Emperor Shōmu were collected after his death in 756. Among them there are no fewer than 13 different lengths, ranging from 29.42 centimetres to 31.21 centimetres.[32] It is clear that official control over builder workshop practice had been lost once the frantic rush to establish the new city was past.

As the Nara period progressed we find there are other significant departures from the principles of Tang imperial architecture. Even at the outset, for example, the plan of the first Nara Palace buildings did not adhere to the strict axial alignment evident at the Chang'an palaces, although some rebuilding in the middle of the eighth century did bring them closer in organisation to the Chinese pattern. Nara lacked impressive city walls like those of Chang'an and other important Chinese cities, although the palace complex was set apart from the rest of the city by tiled-roof walls in the Chinese manner. There is much speculation as to why the Japanese never developed a tradition of walled cities. It may have been a result of the absence of outside threat coupled with the need to impress those living within the city with the authority emanating from the palace, or simply that the Japanese desired the closer communion with nature afforded by an uninterrupted view of fields, trees and mountains.

More important than these differences in detail was a mid-century crisis of confidence in the Chinese ideal of a monumental and enduring capital – the rationale for the very founding of Nara – precipitated by factional struggles at the Nara court. Power politics impinged upon the definition of authority expressed by the creation of a monumental city. This resulted in a brief revival of the indigenous Japanese notion of the impermanence of all things, not least the capital city itself. There had been no fewer than 17 movements of palace and capital from one site to another in Japan from the time of the Empress Suiko, who ascended the throne in 592,[33] until the establishment of Nara in 710. This practice had its basis in both religious belief and political pragmatism. It was carried out to satisfy Shinto requirements for ritual purification of a site following defilement caused by death. Equally important, however, it addressed the pragmatic needs of court politics by allowing a new ruler to be housed in a fresh architectural setting, dissociated from the

Shinto rites new palace for new leader

visible accomplishments of the preceding ruler and, more often than not, at a site deep in the heartland of his or her own local power base.

In sharp contrast to this tradition, the principle underlying the founding of Nara was the creation of a city which would both impress and endure, to borrow again J.J. Coulton's definition of the monumental. Tension between the Chinese notions of a permanent capital and the Japanese custom of establishing a new palace and government headquarters at the death of each emperor culminated in a remarkable interregnum in the Nara period when Nara itself was completely abandoned as the capital. At the end of 740, a mere 30 years after its official foundation, when the Herculean tasks of construction were barely completed, the capital was moved to Kuni, a site some 20 kilometres to the northeast on the Kizu River. That great edifice, the Daigokuden, together with its flanking cloisters, was dismantled and transported to Kuni for re-erection at the site of the new capital.[34] The *Shoku Nihongi* notes that it took four years to complete the rebuilding of the Daigokuden and its corridors.[35] Shortly afterwards Kuni itself was abandoned in favour of a new capital at Naniwa. By the end of the same year, 744, large-scale construction work had begun on a temple at Shigaraki, 35 kilometres to the northeast of Nara. The idea of moving the capital to Shigaraki seems to have taken firm root because the New Year Ceremonies for the year 745 were held there. At the very time the possibility of moving the capital to Shigaraki was being considered, however, an inauspicious earthquake devastated the region. The ministers of the Dajōkan voted unanimously to 'move back to Nara'. After some vacillation by Emperor Shōmu the capital was re-established at Nara.[36] The versatile Daigokuden, however, was left behind at Kuni: the court had learnt from painful experience that it was easier to build a new one than move the old.

This reversion to what can only be described as the peripatetic palace syndrome was precipitated by the powerful Tachibana clan employing the ancient expedient of trying to break the power of a rival, in this case the House of Fujiwara, by disrupting its power base through moving the entire capital. The movement of the capital to Naniwa and eventually back to Nara itself was the Fujiwara response and a successful strategy to reassert their authority.[37]

Inconsistencies are evident not only in the application of Chinese city planning to Japanese circumstances: similar tensions between foreign and indigenous ways can be seen in the style of the buildings constructed in Nara. There was, for example, an important difference in the style and materials used in the construction of the most important gatehouses which protected the entrances to the palace compounds in the two cities. Excavations of the Chengtian Men, at the main palace entrance of Chang'an, revealed that the lower storey was of brick and masonry construction with three arched entrances, similar to the monumental barbicans of later Beijing and Nanjing but very different from the more modestly proportioned timber frame Suzakumon of Nara. This gatehouse may have observed the official architectural style as prescribed in the 724 proclamation, but it would have been strikingly different in appearance from the Chengtian Men of Chang'an.[38]

The most dramatic evidence of inconsistency between stated policy objectives and actual architectural practice is to be found in Nara Palace itself. The Dajōkan document of 724, it will be recalled, criticised indigenous building

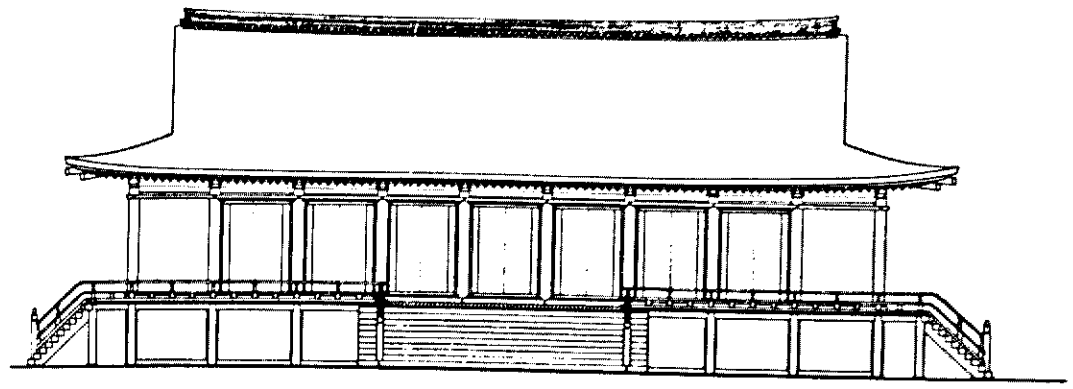


Fig 3.11 Seiden (Main Hall) of Dairi (Imperial Residence) of Nara Palace. Front elevation. Reconstruction drawing by the Nara National Cultural Properties Research Institute (Source: Nara National Cultural Properties Research Institute)

practices as outmoded, wasteful and inappropriate for the architecture of imperial order. It referred specifically to the practice of covering roofs with straw or reed thatch, or with wooden shingles. By implication it also criticised strongly the long-established practice of erecting buildings with unpainted pillars set directly in the ground, exactly the same method of construction we have seen was employed for the shrines at Ise and Izumo.

Despite the official pronouncements and the enthusiastic application of Tang principles to buildings such as the Daigokuden and Higashi Chōshūden, the archaeological record tells a very different story about the authority of foreign models. The chemical composition of the paddy fields which later covered the abandoned Nara Palace site preserved the lower section of most of the pillars of its buildings. Excavations show conclusively that most of the buildings of the palace complex had pillars set directly into the ground in conformity with native custom. Further, the Imperial Residence itself was an elegant version of the raised-floor timber dwellings of the earlier era criticised in the 724 document, not the polychrome and tiled-roof structure set on stone foundations sanctioned in the official document (Figure 3.11). Although the residence was rebuilt at least three times during the Nara period, archaeologists have found no evidence whatsoever at the site of the use of terracotta tiles, the most durable of all building materials. Moreover the excavated pillars were unpainted and were set directly into the earth in the long-preferred Japanese manner.[39]

Thus the emperor continued to live in a building of the very style that the government was proscribing as unsuited to the dignity of the imperial capital. It may have been deemed necessary to adopt foreign architectural forms for some of the most visible buildings used for government business and ceremony, including the largest of them all, the Daigokuden. When it came to satisfying the requirements of daily life the authority of indigenous custom remained preeminent, even for the residence of the emperor under whose rule virtue was to be expressed through appropriate physical form. If the commitment to a permanent capital was not firm in practice, as we have seen, then the continued use of sunken pillars with a life-span equivalent to that of most imperial reigns is not surprising. The same may have been the case in regard to the ephemeral thatch and shingle roofs but for these another practical reason dictated continued use: they were quieter than tile under which to sleep during the heavy rains of the wet season and typhoons. No-one enjoys sleep disturbed by the cacophony of rain drumming on hard baked-clay surfaces.

It would have been like trying to sleep during the furious storm under the great tiled roof of the gatehouse featured in Kurosawa's film *Rashōmon*. And the unpainted timbers, in the pristine purity in which they were undoubtably used for the palace buildings, would have struck that deep note of resonance with nature and the world of indigenous belief that was still at the heart of the Japanese sense of self and purpose, despite all the public and official posturing to the contrary.

Nara Palace is not an isolated example of the continuing indigenous preference for cypress shingles in aristocratic architecture at Nara. The Denpōdō of the Eastern Precinct of Hōryūji was originally a residential structure built in the early 730s for the powerful Tachibana family. It was donated to Hōryūji in 739 and substantially altered to suit its new role as a sacred structure, a situation similar to that of the Higashi Chōshūden at Tōshōdaiji.[40] It originally had a cypress shingle roof which was replaced with tiles when the building was moved to the temple, the heavier tiling requiring strengthening of the roof truss.[41] The villa built for Fujiwara no Toyonari at Shigaraki in 743–44 also had a wooden shingle roof. In the 740s Toyonari was the most powerful member of the Fujiwara family during the struggle for dominance against the Tachibana, rising to the office of Minister of the Right under Tachibana no Moroe in 749.[42] Reconstruction of the appearance of the villa shows the untroubled persistence of indigenous building modes at a site which was then being considered for a new capital. The villa had a shingled roof, pillars which were sunk into the ground, and a raised timber floor built in the manner of the *haniwa* house models of the pre-Buddhist period.[43] It was far-removed ideologically from the kind of architecture sanctioned in the Dajōkan edict of less than two decades earlier.

The urban and architectural records also proffer special insight into the uncertainties of direction experienced mid-way through the process of adoption of foreign models. The adoption and adaptation, as well as the rejection, of some of these foreign forms of city planning and architectural order – from style to mensuration – parallel a similar accommodation of the adopted *ritsuryō* system to Japanese circumstances, notably in the insertion of the Jingikan on equal standing with the Dajōkan at the top of the bureaucratic structure of government. This amounted to nothing short of a collision between the new authority of foreign models of government, social order and their built environment, and the old authority of long-established custom in government and building.

Religious Piety and Political Power: Tōdaiji and the Unity of Church and State

During the second half of the Nara period the authority of the state was projected with renewed vigour and certainty through the creation of Tōdaiji. Tōdaiji was a vast cathedral of state religion, acting as the headquarters for the *kokubunji*, the nation-wide system of regional monasteries and nunneries.[44] These religious foundations extended the central authority of Nara to each and every province using the vehicle of sophisticated buildings in the official style. As well as serving as an enduring reminder of central authority, these

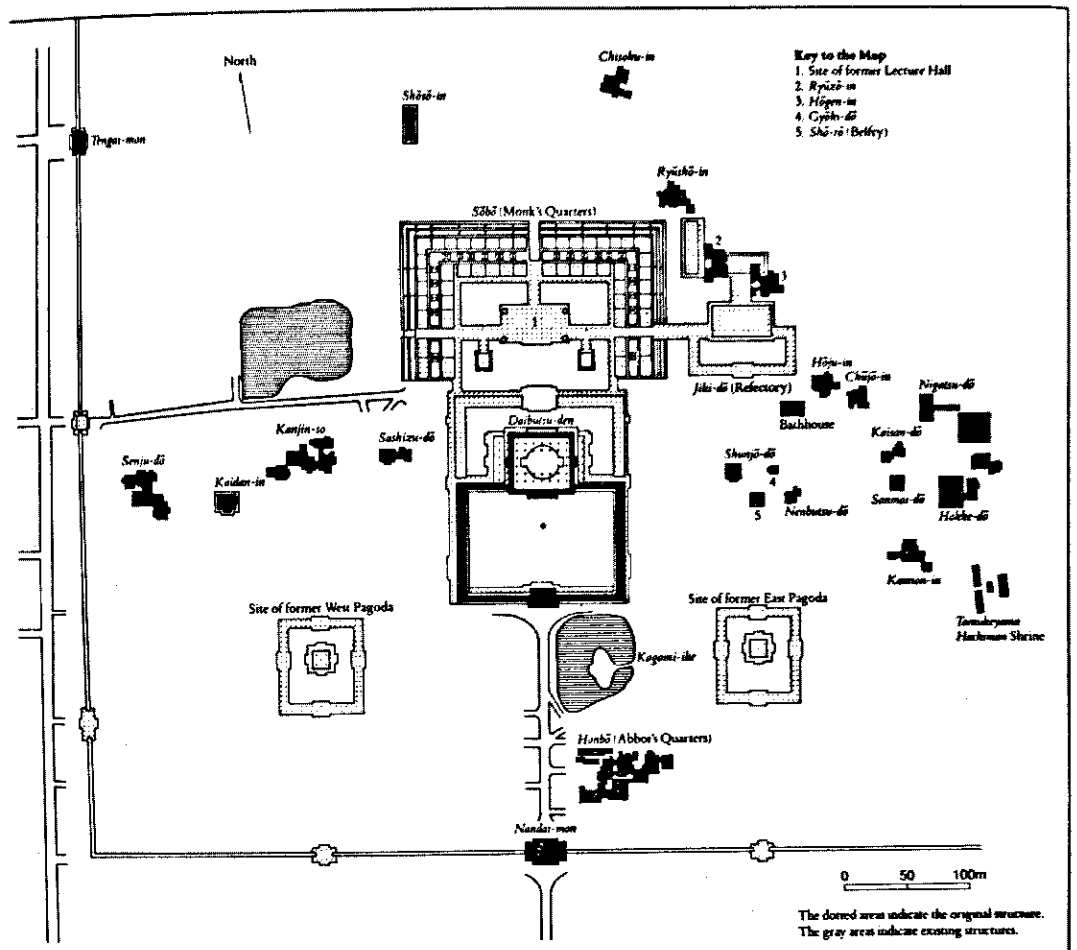


Fig 3.12 Plan of Tōdaiji (Courtesy: Chicago Art Institute. Source: John M. Rosenfield *et al.*, *The Great Eastern Temples. Treasures of Japanese Buddhist Art from Tōdai-ji*)

temples and religious houses became the source for advanced building technologies and sophisticated capital culture in even the most remote regions.

Ranked chronologically, Tōdaiji was the second major building project of the Nara period after Nara Palace itself. The construction of the 'Eastern Great Temple', with a Great Buddha or *Daibutsu* as its spiritual and spatial focus, directly paralleled the establishment of Nara Palace with the Great Audience Hall or Daigokuden at its centre. Tōdaiji was conceived under the direct patronage of Emperor Shōmu and its construction preoccupied the highest levels of government during the middle decades of the eighth century after the return from the uneasy experimentation with other capitals in 745. Tōdaiji therefore reveals as much about the political priorities as the spiritual concerns of national government at Nara.

Tōdaiji has lost most of its original buildings to natural disasters and to the civil wars of the twelfth and sixteenth centuries, but archaeological investigation and early descriptions and maps have established beyond doubt that the present layout of buildings reflects the original eighth-century plan (Figure 3.12). The generously scaled site, some 900 metres east–west and 800 metres

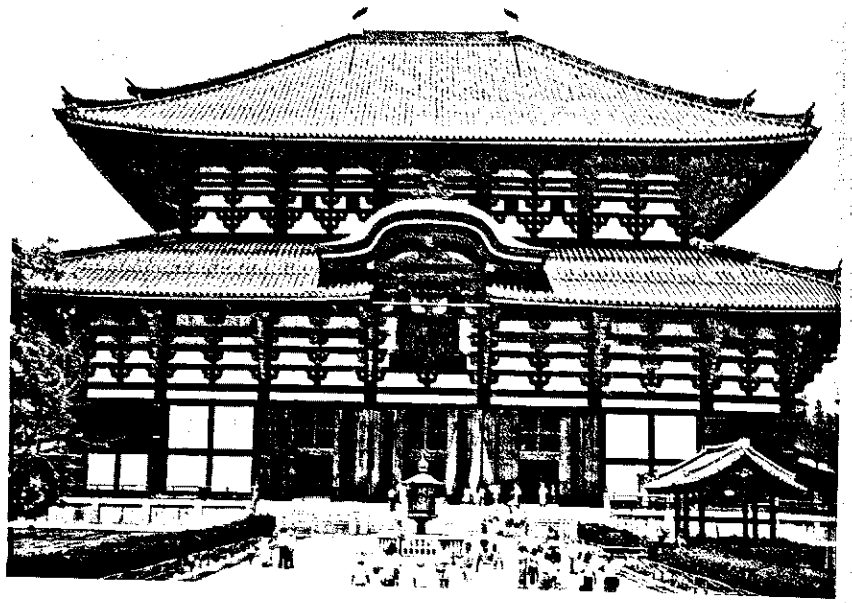


Fig 3.13
Daibutsuden, Tōdaiji, Nara. As reconstructed 1688–1707

north–south, is level on the western side but on the eastern side rises 50 metres up the slopes of Mount Wakakusa in a series of terraces. The disposition of the temple buildings on this site shows the same considerations of axiality, order and monumentality as does Nara Palace. The temple is oriented approximately north–south along a central axis, in the best continental tradition, delineated by the approach avenue running from the Great South Gate (Nandaimon) towards the main precinct 230 metres away. The main precinct is enclosed by a covered cloister 110 metres north–south and 170 metres east–west. Entry is via the Inner Gate, Chūmon, and the enclosed area is dominated by the Daibutsuden, much in the way the Daigokuden dominated the inner precinct of Nara Palace (Figure 3.13). In the eighth century there were two smaller compounds immediately south of the Daibutsuden precinct, enclosing a pair of matching pagodas, each over 100 metres in height (Figure 3.14). These towering build-

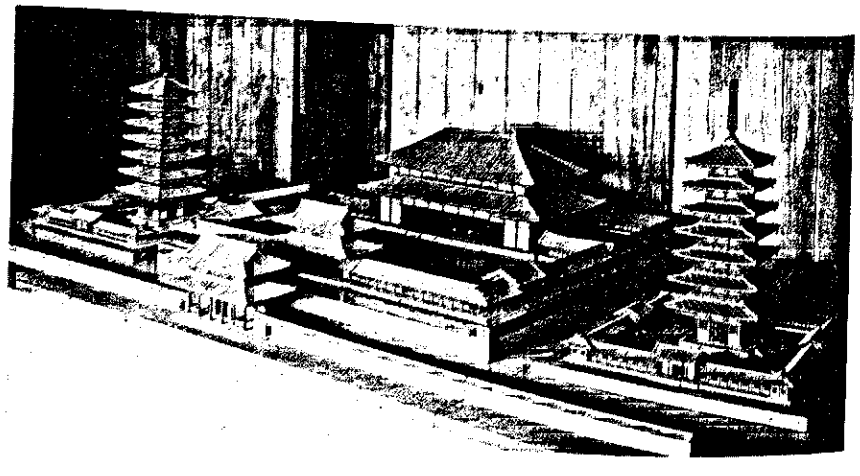


Fig 3.14
Tōdaiji. Model by Amanuma Shun'ichi reconstructing the appearance of the Nara-period buildings (property of Tōdaiji)

Fig 3.15
Daibutsuden, Tōdaiji. Interior of extant building showing Great Buddha

ings, capped by their bronze finials, were amongst the tallest structures built in ancient East Asia. The symmetrical east–west placement of a pair of pagodas across the primary south–north axis of the temple is based on customary Chinese temple planning practice at the zenith of the Tang dynasty in the eighth century. Finally, like Nara Palace, the entire Tōdaiji complex was enclosed on the south and west sides by walls, each with three gateways.

Tōdaiji served as the setting for the grandest religious ceremonies of the Nara state, as befitting its exalted role as the centre of state Buddhism. On such occasions high-ranking members of the court and government officials approached the monastery from the south. After passing through the imposing Great South Gate, they would proceed down the long pathway to the more modest Inner Gate, and thence to the vast open courtyard of the inner precinct. There they confronted the Daibutsuden, with its soaring grey-tiled roofs and cinnabar-red pillars and beams from which an aura of enormous power and serene confidence emanated. Inside the hall stood the statue of Vairocana, symbolic core of the monastery, soaring high in the darkened, incense-laden space. The colossal gilt-bronze image, framed by the geometry of great timber pillars and beams, shimmered in the light of flickering candles. The form of the Daibutsuden was closely determined by its function as a setting for the Great Buddha. Its interior was planned around the central bronze figure and even today it dominates the space of the interior (Figure 3.15). The surrounding bays of the building permit worshippers to view the sculpture from all four sides. Originally the plan was rectangular, with an additional two bays on each side of the main figure to house the attendant bodhisattva sculptures. In both the original plan and the present-day version, therefore, the interior of the Daibutsuden was designed to create a focus on a sculptural core.

Eighth-century records and archaeological evidence have together permitted reconstruction of the appearance of the original Nara-period building (Figure 3.16).[45] The original Daibutsuden differed from the present-day building in several important ways. It was over 30 per cent wider than today's building, measuring 86.1 metres across as compared with the 57.1 metres of the extant building. More significantly, this made the Daibutsuden almost one-third wider than the Daigokuden, which maintained a width of approximately 50 metres throughout the Nara period. The first storey was divided into twelve bays, three more than were used in the Daigokuden, and the lower roof of the original building was stepped up over the central seven bays of the façade both for visual emphasis and for relief from the sense of massive and overpowering weight generated by the heavy grey roof-tiles. The Nara-period Daibutsuden was imbued with a much stronger sense of harmonic proportion than is found in the current building, whose ungainly upper storey is a mere five bays wide in contrast to nine bays in the original structure.

The present Daibutsuden is, in fact, the fourth structure to be built on this same site. Completed in 1707, it is 47 metres high, 57 metres long and 52 metres wide and is still reputed to be the largest timber-framed building in the world, indicating the immense scale of construction of which the Japanese were capable in the eighth century. The statue has suffered considerable damage, like the building around it, but its massive 10.82 metres indicates the monumentality of conception of sculpture and building alike. Their scale rivals in size and splendour many of the most impressive works of monumental architecture and sculpture in the known world. They may be placed with confidence beside not only the great Tang monuments but also the Colossus of Rhodes and Phidias' Olympus.

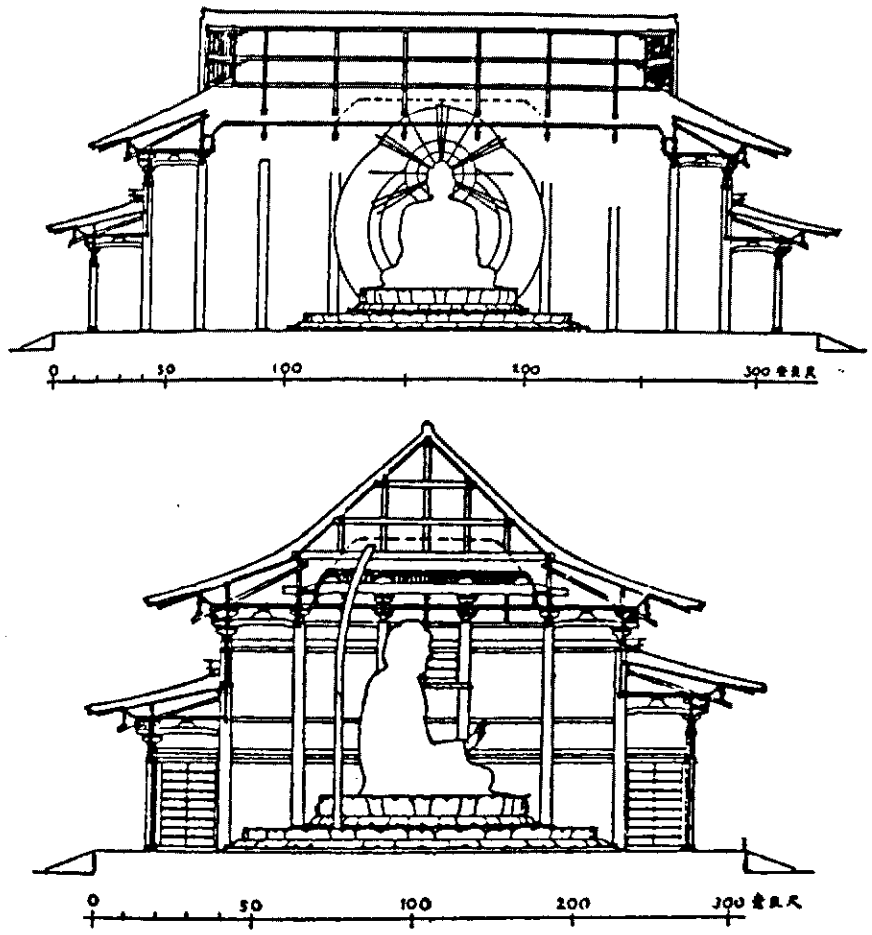


Fig 3.16 Daibutsuden, Tōdaiji. Reconstruction drawings of Nara-period building by Fukuyama Toshio (Source: Tōdaiji Daibutsuden Shōwa daishūri iinkai (ed.) *Kokuhō Tōdaiji Kondō [Daibutsuden] shūri kōji hōkokusho*)

The building of Tōdaiji was very much the personal initiative of Emperor Shōmu, particularly after his earlier plans to build a Great Buddha and Hall first at Kawachi (740), then at Shigaraki (743) and finally at Kōga (744), were thwarted by the insistence of the court under Fujiwara dominance to return to Nara, as already discussed. In 743 Shōmu announced to his court the reasons for the founding of a great temple dedicated to the Vairocana Buddha of the Kegon sect:

> Our fervent desire is that under the aegis of the Three Treasures,[46] the benefits of peace may be brought to all in heaven and on earth, even animals and plants sharing in its fruits, for all time to come. . . . We take this occasion to proclaim Our great vow for erecting an image of Locana Buddha [Vairocana] in gold and copper. We wish to make the utmost use of the nation's resources of metal in the casting of this image, and also to level off the high hill on which the great edifice is to be raised, so that the entire land may be joined with Us in the fellowship of Buddhism and enjoy in common the advantages which this undertaking affords of the attainment of Buddhahood.[47]

The pious language of Shōmu's proclamation masked reasoning which was unmistakably political, namely sponsorship of the Kegon sect and its focal

deity, the Vairocana Buddha. It was a strategy adopted by Shōmu to assert his personal control in the arena of factional feuding within the court. The Kegon Sect, at that time only a recent arrival in Japan, was based on the *Avatamsaka Sutra* or 'Flower Garland Sutra'.[48] It had been translated from Sanskrit into Chinese as recently as 695–99 under the sponsorship of the Empress Wu (655–705).[49] Its textual complexity and convenient ambiguity gave Shōmu ample scope to construe its spiritual message of a centralising spiritual force in the universe into an expedient religious justification for tightening imperial authority. This was based on the precedent furnished by Empress Wu herself. In order to strengthen her authority she sponsored Buddhism in general and the Huayan (Kegon) sect in particular. Buddhism with its equitable view of women rulers, and the Huayan sutra with its principal notion of a centralising deity, provided powerful religious underpinnings for her position in the Tang court, dominated as it was by male-orientated Confucian and Daoist ideology.[50] In 691 under Empress Wu, Buddhism was officially ranked above Daoism. She was patron of the monk Fa Zang who systematised the doctrine of the Huayan sect, and she herself acted as a copyist in the daunting task of translation from the Sanskrit of the Flower Garland Sutra. Empress Wu sponsored the creation of at least 380 Buddhist images at the cave temples of Longmen, near the second Tang capital of Luoyang, more than twice the total number of such images produced at these cave sites during the other 240 years of the Tang dynasty.[51] The most dramatic of these images was a massive figure of Vairocana, the central deity of the Flower Garland Sutra, carved out of the sheer rock face and flanked by guardian kings and bodhisattvas of almost equal size and expressive power. Today this Great Buddha, some 13.37 metres in height, and its monumental attendants, stand exposed to the elements. Deep mortise holes cut neatly into the cliff face behind the sculptures show where sturdy wooden beams were once anchored in the wall to help support the great hall which enclosed the sacred figures.

The construction at Nara of the Great Buddha, complete with its attendants and housed within a vast hall, was in conscious emulation of the architectonic strategy employed by Empress Wu to consolidate her imperial authority in the Tang dynasty. In a broader sense, the creation of Tōdaiji amounted to the physical consummation of an ideology of state which reiterated, in new theological guise, the placement of government under the aegis of Buddhism as formulated in Prince Shōtoku's Seventeen Article Constitution of 604. However there can be little doubt that Shōmu was also appropriating temporal power when we read the conclusion to his announcement concerning the founding of Tōdaiji: 'It is We who possess the wealth of the land; it is We who possess all power in the land. With this wealth and power at Our command, We have resolved to create this venerable object of worship'.[52] By the expedient of patronage of the recently arrived Kegon sect, with its convenient theology of a centralised universe and great capacity for grandiose representation in sculpture and architecture, the attention and energies of the court were diverted, and the potential of monumental architecture used in concert with monumental sculpture to proclaim authority was fully exploited.

The overt affirmation of the importance of Buddhism to the state was accompanied by a pragmatic accommodation with Shinto. All the public avowals of the importance of Buddhism, and the specific benefits which the Three Treasures offered to high and low alike, did not negate the importance of Shinto to the authority of the imperial institution. In fact, the institutionalisation of Shinto in the Nara state, in which the Ise shrines and their periodic rebuilding were placed under formal imperial protection, assigned the foreign gods to the protection of the native ones. It was the Shinto deity Hachiman whose divine aid allowed the construction of the Daibutsu to be completed against all adversity, thereby helping to consolidate the imperial significance of Shinto.[53] The *Shoku Nihongi* takes pains to explain the important role played by Hachiman in travelling to Tōdaiji from his home at the Usa Shrine in Kyushu in order to worship before the Great Buddha.[54] In so doing Hachiman became the guardian or tutelary deity of Tōdaiji. Thereafter a Hachiman shrine was established at each *kokubunji* throughout the country to provide similar protection to the Buddhist gods.[55]

The enormity of the Tōdaiji building enterprise is a measure of the seriousness of its political purpose. Its construction paralleled in scale and complexity that of Nara Palace itself and was supervised by an administrative apparatus of the state. Construction was under the control of a specially created government department presided over by a senior monk, as well as by high-ranking officials of Shōmu's court. The government department was divided into nine separate sections, each responsible for a different part of the project. A timber collection section dispatched lumbermen west to Harima on the Inland Sea to obtain the 48 principal pillars, each 30 metres long and 1.5 metres in diameter, needed for the Daibutsuden. The forested mountains around Lake Biwa, north of Nara, provided the smaller timbers necessary to complete that hall and the many other worship and residential structures in the temple complex. A transportation section floated the timbers from the mountain forests to collection points along local rivers, while the building section was responsible for the prefabrication and assembly of all the structures. This was, of course, the most labour-intensive aspect of the entire project, employing 227 site supervisors, 917 master builders and 1,483 labourers. At peak periods in the construction, over 1,000 cooks prepared meals for craftsmen and labourers employed at the site. This undertaking would have exceeded in scale that of the construction work for Nara Palace.

The most ambitious and arduous section of the Tōdaiji construction project is the least visible to the eye today. This was the excavation and landscaping of the western slopes of Mount Wakakusa to a depth equivalent to the height of the upper eaves of the present Daibutsuden. This project had been announced as part of Shōmu's proclamation of 743. Commencing in 745, half the side of the mountain over a distance of 700 metres was excavated to a depth of 10 to 30 metres, transforming the slope into four terraces. The most westerly terrace held the Ordination Hall and West Pagoda. On the second terrace, some 10 metres higher and immediately to the east, was the main precinct, containing the Daibutsuden. On the third terrace, 15 metres further up the site, was the East Pagoda, while on the highest and eastern-most level stood the Sangatsudō and a number of other buildings. Even close

scrutiny of the temple site today gives little indication of how radically it was landscaped in the eighth century.

Preparation of this site was followed by the casting of the 16-metre high Great Buddha. Now considered to have been the largest bronze casting project undertaken in the ancient world, it was a difficult trial and error process. It involved possibly as many as seven separate smelting furnaces.[56] The great hall was then erected around it. Meanwhile work was proceeding on the myriad of other buildings which were an essential part of the temple complex in its role both as a religious centre and a living community. This work was to continue for more than a decade after the completion and dedication of the Daibutsu itself.

The building of the temple may have been an official state project but ultimately the cost proved too great a strain on government finances seriously depleted by the abortive and costly movements of the capital in the early 740s. Shōmu may have declared in 743 that he wished to make the 'utmost use of the nation's resources of metal in the casting of this image'. This did not necessarily mean that he expected the cost to be so great, however, and it was only the timely discovery of gold in 749 for the first time in Japan, in the remote northern province of Mutsu, that permitted the completion of the gilding of the Great Buddha.[57] This fortuitous coincidence, construed at the time as nothing short of miraculous, only added to Shōmu's prestige and authority. Ultimately, the general financing of the project took the form of what would, in modern terms, be described as 'public subscription'. Significant support was generated by the ardent nationwide fund-raising efforts of the monk Gyōki who had been appointed chief solicitor for Tōdaiji. Temple tradition holds that Gyōki elicited contributions of timber for construction from 50,000 people, received donations of gold coins, copper goods, and other valuable objects from 370,000 others, and mobilised as many as 1.6 million volunteer labourers over the course of the project. A vast army of administrators, site supervisors, skilled master builders and labourers participated in the construction process.

This prodigious expenditure of wealth and energy in the service of the centralised imperial state was consummated at the official completion ceremony for the Great Buddha, the 'Eye-Opening Ceremony'. This lavish and spectacular rite was conducted in the fourth month of 752 under the direction of the Indian monk Bodhisena before a vast host of courtiers, monks and foreign envoys. The elaborate ceremonies involved in this rite were performed on special stages erected in the expansive grassed courtyard in front of the Daibutsu which still stood starkly exposed to the elements prior to erection of the great hall planned to house it. Over 10,000 monks, arranged in groups around the courtyard, joined in the solemn chants of Buddhist sutras. Four thousand court musicians performed Bugaku music accompanied by dancers dressed in flowing saffron and gold-threaded robes and wearing masks of the divine countenance of the Buddha. The consecration of the new cathedral of Salisbury in 1258, attended by Henry III of England and his court, as well as the Archbishop of Canterbury, bishops, clergy and a vast congregation, would have been a ceremonial occasion of like grandeur and spiritual and political significance in the western world. Protracted feasting,

performances of court dance and music, and the Eye-Opening Ceremony itself, when the hoods covering the Buddha's eyes were pulled away by means of long ropes held by all members of the congregation, may have been of avowed religious purpose. In reality they were remarkably like many of the ceremonies performed in the courtyard of the State Halls Compound of the palace whose configuration was similar. These great ceremonies, with their pageantry and ritual, pomp and circumstance, transcended the boundaries of sacred and secular, highlighting the authority of their sponsors.

Tōdaiji, like Nara Palace, is the manifestation of the symbiosis between architecture and authority, each essential to the other and mutually sustaining. In the case of Nara Palace, the establishment was dominated by the ideology and rituals of an emperor whose power was based equally on secular prerogatives and divine association, architectural style and technology being the shared province of both. At Tōdaiji a similar situation prevailed, but in reverse. It came into existence as a great religious establishment intended to further the ends of the state while pursuing the goals of religious fulfilment with a rare zeal and vision. Conceived at a crucial moment in the power struggle for dominance at court which had already led to the undignified and abortive attempts to establish new capitals between 740 and 745, Tōdaiji achieved its political purpose for several decades. It provided a bulwark for Shōmu's personal authority, and through the ***kokubunji*** system, furthered the end of projecting capital influence in the regions of Japan.

Ironically it was to be the very strength of this association of the state with Buddhism which precipitated the sudden demise of Nara as the national capital. At Nara the peculiar dynamism of the new urban environment became an arena for competing interests of church and state, a conflict focused on the influence of the clergy on the imperial court, and of the priest Dōkyō on the empress. Dōkyō, a handsome monk and brilliant political tactician, was in highest favour with the Empress Shōtoku. Warning bells sounded about the Buddhist church's challenge to the power of the state when the empress issued two edicts in 764 and 766 respectively, naming Dōkyō Chief Minister and Ruler of the Law. It was rumoured Dōkyō had aspirations to the very throne itself. The aristocratic families at court, moving to protect their own power, had the Dajōkan forbid further female accession to the throne pleading its vulnerability to such intrusion. There had been four female sovereigns during the Nara period and Shōtoku had reigned previously (749–758) under the Empress Kōken.

The ultimate solution was a reversion to those long-established peripatetic and historically acceptable practices – to abandon the city as a centre of government and build a new capital. After one false start the site of Kyoto, some 40 kilometres to the north, was selected and named optimistically as Heian-kyō, 'Capital of Peace and Tranquillity'. The logic of this decision was impeccable. It was designed to separate church from state physically by excluding the major Buddhist temples from within the boundaries of the new city precincts, except for the controlled presence of an East Temple and a West Temple. This solution is a further demonstration of the homology between authority and the architecturally created environment.

The architecture, archaeological and written records together demonstrate that Nara was a seething vortex of instability despite the pretensions to stability and order of its public buildings. The factionalism of the court and tensions between church and state were directly reflected in the built environment even as political will sought unequivocal expression in monumental architecture and city plans.

Heian Palaces and Kamakura Temples

4

The Changing Countenances of Aristocratic and Warrior Power

The 700 years from the establishment of a new capital city of Heian in 794 to the outbreak of the Ōnin War in 1467, which destroyed much of the city, was an epoch of profound change in both authority and architecture. It covers the three historical periods of Heian (794–1185), Kamakura (1185–1333) and Muromachi (1333–1467). The general historical framework of these periods is well known and need be mentioned only briefly here. The Heian period saw the flourishing of indigenous forms of government and culture under the civil aristocracy in the Heian capital, now generally referred to by its modern name of Kyoto. The centralised authority of aristocratic government based in Kyoto was eroded by the growth of private land holdings in the provinces, and by the creation of warrior bands to protect and promote these landed interests. Political and military turbulence reached its culmination with the defeat of the Taira forces by those of the Minamoto in 1185 and the establishment of a warrior government at Kamakura. Minamoto Yoritomo assumed the court title of shogun, setting the precedent of using this imperially conferred office to sanction ***de facto*** warrior power as ***de jure*** government. The succeeding period witnessed an uneasy balance between the civil power of the court in Kyoto and the military power of the warrior class at Kamakura.[1] By the end of the fourteenth century the balance had shifted decisively towards the military. The overthrow of the Kamakura shogunate by a coalition of disaffected warrior and aristocratic interests under the leadership of the Ashikaga family saw the destruction of the city of Kamakura, and the establishment of warrior government in Kyoto itself. The warrior class was gradually absorbed into the cultural milieu of the old capital. The confluence of warrior and aristocratic culture transformed the high culture to create many of the characteristic features for which Japanese civilization was henceforth known in architecture, theatre, religion, literature and painting. The authority of the Ashikaga shogunate, however, was still vested in the formal authority of the imperial institution. The Ashikaga presided over a loosely controlled system of national and regional government in which the regional was once again to triumph over the central. The eventual breakdown of Ashikaga control over regional lords at the time of the outbreak of the Ōnin War in 1467 precipitated nearly a century and a half of civil wars which devastated the cities, ruined the economy but, paradoxically, stimulated religious and artistic expression.