Treasure of Humankind: "World Heritage"

"NIKKO": Sanctuary of Syncretism of Shinto and Buddhism

~ History of Harmonization of Cultural Assets and Nature ~

The history of Nikko originates from the foundation of Toshogu Shrine (the origin of Nikko-shi, Nihonshu) by Holy Priest Shodo, who decided to climb Mt. Nantai, crossing the Daisyo River. After failing twice, Priest Shodo finally achieved his long-coveted hope of constructing a small shrine on the top of the mountain (the origin of the Inner Shrine of Nikko Futarasan Shrine). In addition, he built Jingoji Temple (later called Chuzenji Temple) on the northern shore of Lake Chuzenji, and others. Consequently, Nikko prospered as a sanctuary of religion. "Nikkoku", under "the syncretism of Shinto and Buddhism", where the worship of gods in high mountains smoothly harmonized with the concept of a sacred place at the Pure Land of Samun. During the Warring States period, many of Nikko-sen territories were confiscated by Lord Hideyoshi Toyotomi, resulting in its fall. In the Edo period, however, the first shogun, Lord Ieyasu Tokugawa, authorized the return of the Nikko-sen territories. Later, Tenkai Daiso (Buddhist priest of the highest order) was appointed as the head priest of Nikko-san, and devoted himself to its restoration. Following Lord Ieyasu’s will which stated his desire to be "enshrined at Nikko-san and become a tateyama deity of Oku-Nikko" the second shogun, Lord Hideyoshi, constructed Tozukuba Shrine. The third shogun, Lord Ieyasu, renovated it into an exquisite shrine using the best techniques of the time. This resulted in the current Nikko Toshogu Shrine which is internationally well known today. Nikko flourished as a temple town surrounding the Toshogu Shrine. Then, after the construction of Tajiin as the mausoleum for Lord Ieyasu, the shrine and its location prospered further under the protection of the Toshogu Shogunate. Since the Meiji period, Nikko has been regarded as an international tourist site, where cultural assets harmonize with rich nature. In 1999, the shrines and temples of Nikko were registered as a World Heritage site.

Cover Photos
1. Three Shrines (Important Cultural Properties) of Nikko Toshogu Shrine: Important Cultural Properties
2. Nikko Shrine (Important Cultural Properties) of Nikko Toshogu Shrine: Important Cultural Properties
3. Sacred Bridle of Toshogu Shrine (Important Cultural Properties)
4. Sanjusangendo of Nikko, Tochigi Prefecture: Important Cultural Properties
5. Estate of Nikko, Tochigi Prefecture: Important Cultural Properties

[Diagram of Nikko National Park and surrounding areas, including World Heritage "Shrines and Temples of Nikko" and Ashio Copper Mine as an Industrial Heritage]

Village of the Heike Family
Ramsar Site "Wetland in Oku-Nikko"
Hot Springs Village
Cedar Avenue of Nikko

Nikko during the Edo Period

Estate of Nikko

Hanging by the period of the Nikko Seaside, the Toshogu Shrine received 10,000 burak (20,000 tons) of rice and the Toshogu Shrine received more than 5,000 burak. These were collectively called the institutions owned by the Nikko shrine and were managed by the Toshogu Shogunate. The city area was almost equal to that of the current city of Nikko. The total quota of rice received 18,000 burak, which is to be divided by a local and
Nikko Toshogu Shrine
Yearning for Peace over 400 Years

Detailed Sculptures Exceeding 5,100

Yomei-mon Gate, which may be the best-known structure in Nikko, was built in 1636. It is not an exaggeration to say that all the techniques and decorative patterns used in sculpture, decorative fittings, and colors at the beginning of the Edo period are concentrated here. This national treasure gate is also called "Higureshin-mon," meaning you will never get tired of looking at this all day long. Many more than 500 items are carved on this gate, including imaginary animals such as Chinese unicorns, dragons, dragon horses, Chinese lions, and other sacred beasts. The gate is colorful yet detailed, and includes people, chrysanthemums, and patterns. Even the pillars and beams supporting the structure are carved with pentagonal shapes and carved with swirling patterns called gusu-case. Only the left pillar situated past the gate has a reverse swirling pattern, which is called "the reverse column against evil."

In 1650, Tadakatsu Sakai, Lord of the Obama Domain in Wajima Province (known today as Fukui Prefecture), donated a five-story pagoda. However, it was destroyed by fire in 1815 and then rebuilt in 1818. The interior is designed upon ceiling style. The center pillar is suspended from the fourth story using chains. Accordingly, the bottom of the wall is located about 10 cm above the base foundation. This mechanism prevents the center pillar from piercing the roof even if the timber shrinks due to aging or the heavy roof sinks. In addition, by separating the central pillar from the pagoda body, a systematically isolated structure is achieved. This traditional structure is unique to Japan, and is said to be applied to the Tokyo Skytree as well.

Karamon Gate is located at the front gate of the main shrine. During the Edo period, this gate was opened only to dignitaries retained in feudal lords ranked high enough to be granted an audience with the shogun called "Omote." Even today, this gate is used on certain special occasions such as New Year holidays and grand festivals. A wall stretching to the right and left from this gate surrounds the main shrine. This surrounding wall totals 160 m and is entirely carved. Large-scale repairs were made to the Karamon Gate in the Heisei period (1989-2019) and the carved surrounding wall has been completed with its beautiful colors restored.

Sacred Stable "Three Monkeys" (Important Cultural Property)

"Sacred horses serving the deity stay in the sacred stable. This is the only natural wooden building among those at the Toshogu Shrine. Its composition follows the style of a stable attached to a mansion of a samurai at that time. The sculpture of the three famous monkeys that "speak no evil," "hear no evil," and "bear no evil" are carved in a beam running between the columns. These depict the life of the monkey, preaching the morality one should follow."

Behind the front gate, there are three buildings, the upper, middle, and lower sacred storehouses. In these storehouses, which form the ancient square log architecture called "Sakuma-zenkaku," costumes are used during the "Tagya Festival held in spring and autumn (a parade of 1,000 warriors in 100 kinds of armor), as well as arms and horse riding gear for horsetrack archery called "Yabusame," are stored. On the side of the upper sacred storehouse, two "elephants" are carved. These sculptures, which are called "Imaginary Elephants," are said to have been drawn by the imagination of the famous artist, Toyotaro Kato.

This well-known sleeping cat is located at the entrance approaching the Inner Shrine in the east corridor, and is said to be the work of the legendary sculptor, Jingoro Hidari. Another sculpture of Sparrow is on the opposite side, and it is said to imply the peace of a cat and sparrows living in harmony.
Nikko-zan Rinnoji
~ Old Nikko-zan ~ History Shaped the Syncretism of Shinto and Buddhism

~ Three Buddha Hall ~
Symbols of the Sacred Nikko Mountains are Enshrined

Rinnoji Temple began with the Shihan-in Temple built by Holy Priest Shodo, who founded many temples in Nikko. Rinnoji was developed as the core temple at Nikkouzan. When Taiyuin was constructed as the mausoleum for the third shogun, Lord Iemitsu in 1653, the temple gained profound reverence from the Tokugawa shogunate. Although the Ordinance Distinguished Shinto and Buddhism issued by the Meiji government caused some confusion, the temple overcame this to exist until the present day.

~Taiyuin~ Mausoleum for Lord Iemitsu~

Taiyuin Mausoleum is the burial place of the third shogun of the Tokugawa shogunate, Lord Iemitsu. The mausoleum contains the mausoleum of the third shogun and his ten great discipies. The mausoleum is located in the Musashi-ken region of the United States, where the Meiji government issued the Ordinance Distinguishing Shinto and Buddhism. The mausoleum is currently under repair.

~ Kannon-do Hall (Important Cultural Property) ~

This is the burial place of Holy Priest Shodo, who founded many temples in Nikko. This temple, consisting of three mountains, is known for its beautiful cherry blossoms and Mount Rushmore. The structure is dedicated to the memory of the third shogun. The structure is dedicated to the memory of the third shogun and his ten great discipies. The mausoleum is located in the Musashi-ken region of the United States, where the Meiji government issued the Ordinance Distinguishing Shinto and Buddhism. The mausoleum is currently under repair.

1. Three seated statues of Buddha in Three Buddha Hall: the identity of the three thousand gold Buddha statue. Kannon (Buddha of the Western Paradise), Amida (Buddha of Infinite Life), and Vairocana (Buddha of the Ultimate Reality).
2. Main Hall of Taiyuin Mausoleum: the interior of the main hall is full of many gold foil-covered sculptures.
3. The partially dismantled upper roof is visible from the corridor on the 7th floor of the temporary roof during the maintenance period.
4. Yusaemon Gate: This vertical staircase gate attracts much attention due to its vivid coloring.
5. Kannon Gate: The entrance to Lord Iemitsu's mausoleum is located in the entrance area of Taiyuin behind the main hall. It is not open to the public.
6. The encasement of forced rising traces back to Shogen-ji in the mountains. A funerary hall is held on April 2.
Conservation of World Heritage

Deliver to the future


The Constant Challenge of Conserving World Heritage

In order to hand down the precious cultural heritage of Nikko to the coming generations, conservation, preservation, and conservation efforts are indispensable. The shrines and temples of Nikko have been registered as a world heritage site and have been properly managed since their construction in the earlier period. They are well maintained in an excellent condition, ensuring they can be enjoyed by future generations. However, with time, the buildings are subject to age-related wear and tear, and their original state and materials may deteriorate. Therefore, it is necessary to maintain and preserve these cultural treasures for future generations.

Regarding registration, the UNESCO World Heritage Committee has expressed concern over the condition of the shrines and temples in Nikko, particularly regarding the conservation and management of the structures. The Committee has recommended that efforts be made to address the issue of decay and deterioration, and that measures be taken to ensure the long-term preservation of these cultural heritage sites.

Conservation Work Flow for the Middle Sacred Storehouse

1. Recording
2. Cleaning
3. Scratch Adjustment
4. Textile and Paint Cleaning
5. Realigning and Reinforcing
6. Conservation Coating
7. Reconsolidation and Protection
8. Reinstallation
Selected Nikko Brand
"Natural Ice of Nikko"

Japan has a surprisingly long history for using natural ice, with it being a favorite of the people from bygone eras. The source of natural ice in Japan was obtained from the Tonoike Pond (13th century) to date. Today, natural ice still holds a special place in Nikko. The natural ice of Nikko has been certified as a Natural Brand by the Mint Bureau of Japan. The practice of using natural ice in Nikko continues to this day.

Selected Nikko Brand
"Handmade Soba(Buckwheat Noodles) of Nikko"

"Handmade Soba (Buckwheat Noodles) of Nikko" are produced under excellent natural conditions such as blessed morning and night mists, and clean and abundant natural water resources. As a result, the high quality of Soba gained international reputation. The Soba of Nikko is now considered a national treasure, and the "Soba of Nikko" brand has been certified as a selected Nikko brand. This practice continues to be an important part of the cultural heritage of Nikko.

Selected Nikko Brand
"Yuba (Bean-Curd Skin) of Nikko"

Yuba, also known as "Dried-Yuba of Nikko" or "Yuba of Nikko," is a traditional Japanese food made from milk curds. It is often used as a topping for soups and salads.

The Wonderful Food Culture held by the World

Blue-Ribbon Nikko Brand Selection

Selected Nikko Brand
"Exquisite and Well-Conserved Water of Nikko"

There are five headwaters of the City of Nikko: The Kegon, Yutaki, Kegon, Dake, and Watara rivers. The "Water of Nikko" has been verified as a natural water, which is so unique that it is registered as a natural resource. The water of Nikko is not only a source of life but also a symbol of the city. The "Exquisite and Well-Conserved Water of Nikko" is a reflection of the city's natural beauty and rich cultural heritage.

Heritage Site

Techniques and Tastes Unique to Nikko.

Enjoy the Exquisite and Carefully Selected Products.

Clean water and a productive land are the natural blessings of Nikko. A variety of foods and a rich dietary culture have been created under the historical background. The unique and top products are selected from the food domain of Nikko, which are collectively called "Selected Nikko Brand Products."

Selected Nikko Brand
"Association of Long and Well-Established Stores in Nikko"

Nikko has been visited by persons of high rank and by cultural figures throughout the ages. Nikko-soba (bean-curd skin) and Nikko-yuba (yuba) have been highly prized by many as specialties of Nikko for many years. The "Association of Long and Well-Established Stores in Nikko" was set up by 17 long and well-established stores which support the regional economy and strengthening the Nikko brand. This association has also been certified as a selected Nikko brand, and is expected to further develop the "Selected Nikko Brand" and further develop the "Selected Nikko Brand" and strengthening the Nikko brand. This association has also been certified as a selected Nikko brand, and is expected to further develop the "Selected Nikko Brand" and strengthening the Nikko brand.