

Fujiwara Palace

The Fujiwara Palace site is the remains of an ancient capital city located in the environs of Takadono-chō and Daigo-chō in the city of Kashihara, and according to the *Nihon shoki* chronicle the move to Fujiwara from the Asuka palace was made in 694, and it was used until the capital moved to Nara in 710. Fujiwara was the first capital city built in Japan following the Chinese model, and was also significant as the capital where the Taihō Code of criminal and administrative law was drawn up and enacted.

In excavations conducted between December 1934 and August 1943 by the Nihon Kobunka Kenkyūjo (Japan Ancient Culture Research Institute), the location and scale of the State Halls Compound, including the feature known as Ōmiya dodan as the remains of the Imperial Audience Hall, were basically ascertained. In March 1952 it was nationally designated a Special Historic Site, although the area of the entire palace was still unconfirmed, and when a plan was drawn up for a bypass of national Route 165 to run through the inferred area of the Fujiwara Palace, an investigation by the Nara Prefectural Board of Education centering on the proposed roadway was conducted from December 1966 to March 1969 in order to confirm the palace district. In this excavation of the Fujiwara Palace site, rows of embedded pillars (features SC175, SC258, SC140) and outer moats (SD170, SD145) delineating the palace district to the east, west, and north were detected, and a square area approximately 1 km on a side and centering on Kōmon, the south gate to the Imperial Audience Hall compound, was ascertained as the palace district. Further, based on the determination of the palace district, the area of the Fujiwara Capital was inferred to have been established as bounded by the roadways of Shimotsumichi, Nakatsumichi, Yoko Ōji, and Abe Yamadamichi (known as the “Kishi theory” of the capital). That the development of the ancient capital in the seventh–eighth centuries from Asuka through Fujiwara to Nara was becoming concretely understood was a tremendous academic achievement.

The recovery of wooden documents (totaling approximately 2,100 items) in excavations at the Fujiwara Palace is worth special mention. The first discovery of a wooden document in Japan was at the Nara Palace site in 1961, and as the wooden documents of the Fujiwara Palace are one stage earlier than those of the Nara Palace, they are valuable historical materials for studying conditions prior to the enactment of the Taihō Code.

Subsequently, as investigations of the capital district centering on the Fujiwara Palace site were carried out, results came forth which substantiated the Kishi theory of the Fujiwara Capital. On the other hand, road features on the same plan as within the capital have been discovered repeatedly in areas lying beyond the inferred capital district, and it has become certain that the actual Fujiwara Capital extended over a wider area than held by the Kishi theory. With detection of the western limit of the capital district at the Tsuchihashi site in Kashihara City, and the eastern limit at the Kaminoshō site in Sakurai City, at present the Fujiwara Capital is regarded as having been a square district centered on the palace and consisting of a grid of 10 × 10 east–west and north–south major avenues.