

Nikko (Japan)

No 913

Identification

Nomination Shrines and Temples of Nikko

Location Tochigi Prefecture

State Party Japan

Date 30 June 1998

Justification by State Party

Each building included in the nominated property represents outstanding artistic value as a masterpiece created by some of the earliest architectural geniuses in Japan.

Criterion i

The two mausoleums included in the nominated property - Tōshōgū and the Taiyū-in Reibyō - embody complete forms of the architectural style known as Gonzen-zukuri, the most advanced style of religious architecture in Japan at that time. Indeed, this style had great influence upon the architects of shrine buildings and mausolea in succeeding generations. The buildings vividly illustrate the collective ingenuity and creativity of the architects involved in the production of this architectural landscape; the extent of decoration introduced here had never been thus far in the history of Japan and buildings were arranged and coloured deliberately and effectively to produce an impression of integration. At the same time, they best represent the Japanese architectural style of Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples in the Edo period, the style characterized by mausolea. In particular, the buildings of Tōshōgū are an important, eloquent source of abundant information on this early architectural style used in Japan. The nominated property illustrates a significant stage in the history of architecture in Japan.

Criterion iv

At the same time, the nominated property, including the surrounding setting as well as the group of religious buildings, is a typical example of traditionally observed religious space in Japan, directly associated with Shintoist attitudes toward nature, ie the Japanese indigenous religious belief, in which specific mountains or forests are deified as subjects of reverence.

In addition, Nikko is still an active religious place where rituals and other traditional events are so frequently held as to be a living tradition rooted in the daily lives of people at their spiritual level.

Criterion vi

Category of Property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the World Heritage Convention, the Nikko shrines and temples are a *group* of buildings in a natural setting laid out by man to form a *site*, with the value of a *cultural and associative landscape*, as described in paragraph 39 of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* (1998).

History and Description

History

The cultural property proposed for inscription is linked to a cult that goes back to the end of the 8th century, when a Buddhist monk, Shodo, erected the first buildings on the slopes of the Nikko, which had been worshipped as a sacred mountain since time immemorial. Certain buildings in the Futarasan-jinja and Rinnō-ji groups belong to this period.

At the end of the 12th century, the Kamakura Shogunate established itself in the region of Kanto. This enabled Nikko to strengthen its position further as a major sacred site in Kanto, not only because of its mountainous situation but also because of its religious edifices. However, the site was more or less abandoned owing to the upheavals of the Muromachi period, in the 16th century.

The temples were rehabilitated at the beginning of the 17th century. Nikko was chosen as the site for the Tōshōgū, a sanctuary composed of several buildings erected to house the mausoleum of Tokugawa Ieyasu, the founder of the Tokugawa Shogunate. This regime was in power for over 250 years in the history of Japan. Since this period, Nikko has played a very important role as a symbol of national sovereignty, not only in the eyes of local authorities but also those of leaders of neighbouring countries who sent their emissaries to pay tribute to Ieyasu, a deified personage.

In 1871, the Meiji government decided to divide the site and its religious buildings, which came under one religious authority, into three groups entrusted to three separate religious organizations: Futarasan-jinja and Tōshōgū for the Shinto cult, and Rinnō-ji for Buddhism. This reorganization entailed moving and restoring certain buildings. The sacred and prestigious character of the site made it possible to guarantee the preservation of Nikko which was placed under legal protection as of 1897, a measure subsequently reinforced on several occasions.

Description

- The Futarasan-jinja

Devoted to the three divinities of Mount Nantai, it forms a complex of buildings, 23 of which are listed as Important Cultural Properties under the Law Protecting Cultural Properties. Most of them were restored or built in the 17th century, following old traditions, and they exerted a general influence in the layout of shrines throughout Japan.

Among the most remarkable buildings, mention should be made of the Honden and the Haiden, the heart of the shrine, the Betsugū Takino-o-jinja Honden, with a construction plan dating back to the year 825, and the Shin-yosha, the oldest example of an architectural style which was to inspire the first construction phases of the Tōshōgū.

The Shinkyô is also part of the Futarasan-jinja. This sacred bridge, straddling the river Daiya, appears to belong to the Muromachi period. Its present configuration, a vermilion lacquer bridge resting on massive stone pillars, goes back to 1636. The roadway of the Shinkyô was swept away by a disastrous flood in 1902, but it was faithfully restored in 1904 and is undergoing major restoration work which is expected to finish in the year 2001.

- The Tôshôgu

This shrine, founded in the first half of the 17th century, comprises a large number of buildings, including 37 which are listed as Important Cultural Properties, the others being listed as National Treasures.

A suite of three sacred chambers is a perfect illustration of the H-shaped architectural layout known as Gongenzukuri, in which the Honden, the principal chamber, is linked to the Haiden, the oratory, by a stone-paved corridor called the Ishinoma.

The Shômen Karamon and the Haimen Karamon, a masterpiece of craftsmanship and decoration, is inspired by a foreign style, hence the common name of "Chinese door."

The Yômeimon, erected in 1636, is probably the most well known example of the architectural style of Nikko. It is covered in a profusion and infinite variety of decoration.

The Tôzai Sukibe, also dating to 1636, is a wall about 160m long, surrounding the Honden, Ishinoma, and Haiden group.

The Tôzai Kairo, a corridor 220m long, with a southern section formed of 25 sculpted panels, surrounds three sides of the same Honden, Ishinoma, and Haiden group.

- The Rinnô-ji

The origin of this Buddhist temple goes back to the 8th century, and it has always remained a place of worship. Major constructions were added at the beginning of the Edo period, especially in 1653 for the mausoleum of the third shogun, Tokugawa Iemitsu. It is composed of many buildings, including 37 listed as Important Cultural Properties.

The group, in the Gongenzukuri shape and style and composed of the Taiyû-in Reibyô Honden, Ainoma, and Haiden, is listed as a National Treasure. It is a pure masterpiece of architecture and decoration.

- The site

Thanks to centuries of landscaping, the temples and shrines blend harmoniously in their natural setting. The buildings are arranged on the mountain slopes in such a way as to create different visual effects. The perception of the views and scale of the edifices is conditioned by the carefully studied proportion of the stairs, the supporting walls, and the walls enclosing the area. The result is a striking impression of harmony and contemplation.

Thousands of Japanese cedars were planted during the Tôshôgu construction period in the early 17th century. They are at present at the peak of their growth. This cryptomeria forest provides an exceptional natural bower for the shrines and temples, adding considerably to the beauty and sacred character of the site.

Management and protection

Legal status

The buildings inscribed as National Treasures (9) or as Important Cultural Properties (94) by virtue of Article 27 of the Convention on the Protection of Cultural Heritage come under legal protection as well as strict management and conservation measures.

In view of its value as natural heritage, the entire site falls under different protection systems. Some of them were introduced a long time ago, as far back as the 17th century through statutory measures, and before that time through customary arrangements. Special schemes cover the various areas, sometimes in a concomitant manner. In addition to the 1950 Law on the Protection of Cultural Properties, which protects both the buildings and the area around them, mention should also be made of the Law on Forests, the Law on Rivers, the Law on Sand Control, the 1957 Law on Natural Parks (which identifies four categories with their own level of protection), as well as the different municipal directives on the specially assigned areas. Together, they form a comprehensive set of protective measures, and serve as the foundation for a carefully developed management plan.

Management

The perimeter round the site proposed for inscription on the World Heritage List corresponds to the boundaries of the property owned by the monks in charge of its daily management. It is controlled by special regulations which, depending on the specific areas, are combined with the different protective measures mentioned above. The perimeter has an irregular shape, mainly due to the narrow excrescence in the south-east, near the sacred bridge (Shinkyô). A tiny separate plot of land, on which a very old religious building stands, has also been added to the perimeter. The reasoning behind the definition of the perimeter is based on the religious character of the site as well as a concern for clarity in the everyday management tasks carried out by the religious authorities.

The buffer zone also contains several areas which come under specific protection plans. Its demarcation follows the ridges of the hills surrounding the historic site, except in the south-west, where it follows the boundaries of cadastral plots of land and areas protected by the Law on Natural Parks.

The preservation of the entire site, including the buffer zone, is subject to a precise definition of responsibilities, from the religious authorities in charge of the everyday management and regular maintenance of the site to the National Bureau of Cultural Affairs responsible for the general supervision and financing of the most expensive operations, based on a plan covering several years. At intermediate levels, special responsibilities are carried out by the Nikko City Council in the areas of town planning, traffic and control of the buffer zone, and by the Tochigi Prefecture in the areas of education and public awareness, particularly the handling of tourists.

A large number of visitors frequent the shrines and temples of Nikko. In 1996, out of a total of about 1.7 million visitors, 550,000 were students on educational trips and 20,000 were foreign tourists. Strict measures are being applied, especially with regard to the parking of cars and coaches. Given the large crowds on national public holidays or at the beginning of autumn, the religious

authorities take action to control the flow of visitors; these measures can even go as far as fixing quotas in order to preserve not only the physical integrity of the buildings and the natural site but also the sacred character of the place.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation History

The conservation of the Nikko shrines and temples is the outcome of a respect for age-old traditions of conservation and restoration as well as the preservation of religious practices linked to a site considered as sacred.

A methodical approach was adopted at a very early stage. A remarkable manuscript written in 1753 contains many comments on the works undertaken during the 17th century, which the monks concerned recorded in writing. The very precise descriptions of the architectural structures and the decorative works contained in this manuscript make it a very precious reference work, which is frequently consulted even now. The manuscript, for example, sets out the traditional directions for the use of colours, with accurate references to the pigments and their place of origin.

This practice of keeping meticulous records has been respected up to the present time.

The Decree of 1871 relating to the separation of the Shinto and Buddhist cults was adopted under the Meiji Restoration. In Nikko, two Shinto shrines and a Buddhist temple were entrusted to three distinct religious organizations. Within this framework, a few buildings, fortunately few in number, were demolished, transformed, or moved elsewhere. These breaches to the integrity of the historic site came to an end with the setting up in 1879 of the Association for the Conservation of the Shrines and Temples of Nikko, called Hokokai, which is still active today, and by the adoption in 1897 of a Law on the Preservation of Shrines and Temples.

Authenticity

There is no doubt that this historic site has suffered from difficulties over the centuries. Buildings were burnt down or damaged by falling trees or earthquakes. Each time, the damaged building was restored faithfully, following rigorously the original plans and techniques, using the original materials whenever possible, and keeping detailed documents about these operations.

This fidelity to the initial model and the significance of the religious buildings reveals a determination to respect their authenticity. In general, the management of the site aims at preserving the rich harmony of the cultural landscape which unites natural features and buildings.

Risk prevention

Right from the start, preventive measures and emergency plans were adopted to cope with the dangers of fires and earthquakes. This has always been a constant preoccupation. In the course of this century, in particular, every new prevention technique has been adopted immediately. Thus, a sophisticated system of water jets, fed by huge underground reservoirs, was installed in the fifties. The latest teledetection techniques have been incorporated unobtrusively to monitor any sign of possible danger from a central observatory.

The forest of cryptomeria is also controlled regularly and the trees are strengthened to prevent them from falling over the buildings.

Training

General maintenance and restoration projects are looked upon as a "school of application" enabling artists and craftsmen to teach themselves. High-level proficiency courses are organized in Nikko, in the form of residential seminars lasting several months, for about fifteen craftsmen selected from all over the country. The most frequently practised specializations are the ones using decorative techniques (colours, lacquers, and varnishes) which have received the highest degree of application in Nikko. These training programmes are supervised by Master Hokusai Yoshihara, one of the two most famous artists in this discipline who are recognized as Living Cultural Treasures.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS expert commission visited Nikko in December 1998.

Qualities

The Nikko shrines and temples form a group of religious buildings, in an outstanding natural setting, testifying to a centuries-old tradition. It has been a sacred place for centuries, and it still continues to be a centre of religious practice. The site also evokes the glorious chapters of Japanese history, especially those relating to the symbolic figure of the great Shogun, Tokugawa Ieyasu.

Comparative analysis

The unusual character of the Nikko shrines and temples is due to a combination of very strong values: a long tradition of worship, a very high level of artistic achievement, a striking alliance between architecture and the development of a natural setting, and a repository of national memories. Other sites can reflect one or another of these values, but it is this particular combination which makes Nikko such an outstanding cultural property.

ICOMOS recommendations for future action

- Despite protective measures and a management system of the historic site which are exemplary in many respects, three suggestions can be put forward:
- With respect to Tōshōgu, the documents supporting the request for inscription should fill in the lack of information on two buildings: on the one hand, the Kyozo, with its revolving library containing thousands of volumes of sutras, some of which date back to the early 17th century, and on the other, the Honkido, well known for its Weeping Dragon, a remarkable ceiling painting. These two buildings come under the responsibility of the Association for the Conservation of the Shrines and Temples of Nikko.
- Signs should be improved so as to be in line with the cultural importance of the site. The signs should be made in more unobtrusive materials and have clearer graphics for the directions (in one or more foreign languages) and the information panels should be better positioned. The provisions of the Management

Plan for the Nikko National Park, adopted in 1996, point the way.

- Controlling the buffer zone requires special attention for two reasons. First, the south-west border does not follow the ridge-line and crosses an area which could give in to pressure from real-estate promoters. Secondly, the capacity to handle the growing numbers of visitors will continue to be a permanent challenge.

Brief Description

The Nikko shrines and temples, together with their natural surroundings, have for centuries been a sacred site and the home of architectural and decorative masterpieces. They are closely associated with the history of the Tokugawa Shoguns.

Recommendation

That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria i, iv, and vi*:

Criterion i The Nikko shrines and temples are a reflection of architectural and artistic genius; this aspect is reinforced by the harmonious integration of the buildings in a forest and a natural site laid out by man.

Criterion iv Nikko is a perfect illustration of the architectural style of the Edo period as applied to Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples. The Gongenzukuri style of the two mausoleums, the Tōshōgū and the Taiyū-in Reibyō, reached the peak of its expression in Nikko, and was later to exert a decisive influence. The ingenuity and creativity of its architects and decorators are revealed in an outstanding and distinguished manner.

Criterion vi The Nikko shrines and temples, together with their environment, are an outstanding example of a traditional Japanese religious centre, associated with the Shinto perception of the relationship of man with nature, in which mountains and forests have a sacred meaning and are objects of veneration, in a religious practice that is still very much alive today.

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