

World Heritage

Pure Land Hiraizumi





Chūson-ji

Chūson-ji was built over a period of 25 years in the early 12th century by the first Ōshū-Fujiwara lord Kiyohira, who wished for the repose of the souls of all who had fallen victim to the mayhem of war in Tohoku, and to recreate on this earth a Pure Land in accordance with the Lotus Sutra. Over 40 temples and pagodas, as well as over 300 monks' residences were built. However, as Hiraizumi declined after the 13th century, many of Chūson-ji's buildings were lost, until finally, the fire of 1337 destroyed the last of them apart from the Konjikidō.

Temple conservation measures implemented after the 17th century established temple estates and prompted the maintenance of the temple approach and the reconstruction of temple buildings which we see today. In the temple precincts there are over 3000 National Treasures and Important Cultural Properties of various genres, such as paintings, sculptures, and buildings, including the Konjikidō, the first structural National Treasure in Japan. In addition, ancient foundations from Hiraizumi's heyday have been found underground in good condition. The entire temple precincts are designated as a Special Historic Site.

Chūson-ji Konjikidō First Structural National Treasure

Chūson-ji Konjikidō was built in 1124 by the Ōshū-Fujiwara clan. The principal image of worship enshrined in the center of the hall is Amida Nyorai, the Buddha of Infinite Light. To represent Amida Nyorai's radiant palace in the Pure Land, the entire building is ornately decorated with gold leaf and inlay of lustrous shell. The only remaining temple built by the Ōshū-Fujiwara clan, the Konjikidō is a valuable structure which tells us of the splendors of Hiraizumi's Buddhist culture.

The hall, in which the remains of the four Ōshū-Fujiwara lords are resting, is also worshipped as their mausoleum.



Sutra Repository Important Cultural Property

Located next to the Konjikidō is the Sutra Repository, which was rebuilt using timber salvaged from the fire that destroyed most of the original building. It used to contain Chūson-ji's treasures and beautifully decorated sutras made in the 12th century Hiraizumi.



Former Sheath Hall Important Cultural Property

A Sheath Hall was built in the 13th century and the present one, built in the 15th century, continued to cover and protect the Konjikidō until 1962. It was relocated upon the construction of the new Sheath Hall.



Chūson-ji Main Hall

Most of Chūson-ji's ceremonies are held in the Main Hall. The principal image of worship is Shaka Nyorai, created in 2012.



At Chūson-ji there are over 3000 works of 12th century Buddhist art such as beautiful sutras and statues.



Chūson-ji Mandala National Treasure

The letters of a sutra form a pagoda, around which the teachings of the sutra are depicted. These works are renowned as some of the greatest masterpieces of Japanese pagoda mandalas.



Mōtsū-ji Garden

Special Historic Site; Special Place of Scenic Beauty

Mōtsū-ji, built in the 12th century, faced a pond called Ōizumi ga Ike. The pond represents the sea, with the shore designed to resemble various coastal landscapes. The temple garden, a fusion of the Buddhist ideal of Pure Land and unique Japanese gardening style, is a true masterpiece and very important for understanding Hiraizumi's culture.



A garden representing the Pure Land ~ Pure Land Garden ~

In the heyday of the Ōshū-Fujiwara clan, there were numerous temples and shrines in Hiraizumi. In temple precincts, it was common to find a garden with a pond at the center, designed to represent the world of Buddha; such gardens are called Pure Land gardens. The garden of Mōtsū-ji is a classic example of a Pure Land garden, having maintained its original form in almost perfect condition. The Pure Land gardens of Hiraizumi have gained world recognition as a uniquely-developed style of Japanese gardening culture.

Gokusui no En

During the repair and reconstruction works of the garden in the 1980s, the original *yarimizu* or feeder stream for the pond was discovered. The meandering channel is designed to resemble a natural stream that flows from the mountains to the sea.

Here, a poetry event called Gokusui no En, believed to have been popular in the 12th century, is held on the fourth Sunday of May every year.



Mōtsū-ji Jōgyōdō (Circumambulation Hall)

A structure that constitutes a Historic Site

Mōtsū-ji's structures, originally built in the 12th century, were all lost by the 16th century. Jōgyōdō was rebuilt in the 18th century, because the hall was necessary for performing Jōgyō Zammai-ku (meditation by constant walking) the most valued ceremony held at Mōtsū-ji.

Kanjizaiō-in Ato

Special Historic Site; Place of Scenic Beauty

The temple, with Amida Nyorai as the principal image of worship, was built in the 12th century. Like Mōtsū-ji, a pond was built to face the temple building. The temple was lost after the 15th century, and the entire precinct, including the pond, eventually became rice paddies. The garden site was repaired and restored to its present state based on the findings of excavation in the 1970s. Like the garden of the adjacent Mōtsū-ji, the restored garden of Kanjizaiō-in Ato shows the sophisticated gardening style developed in Hiraizumi.



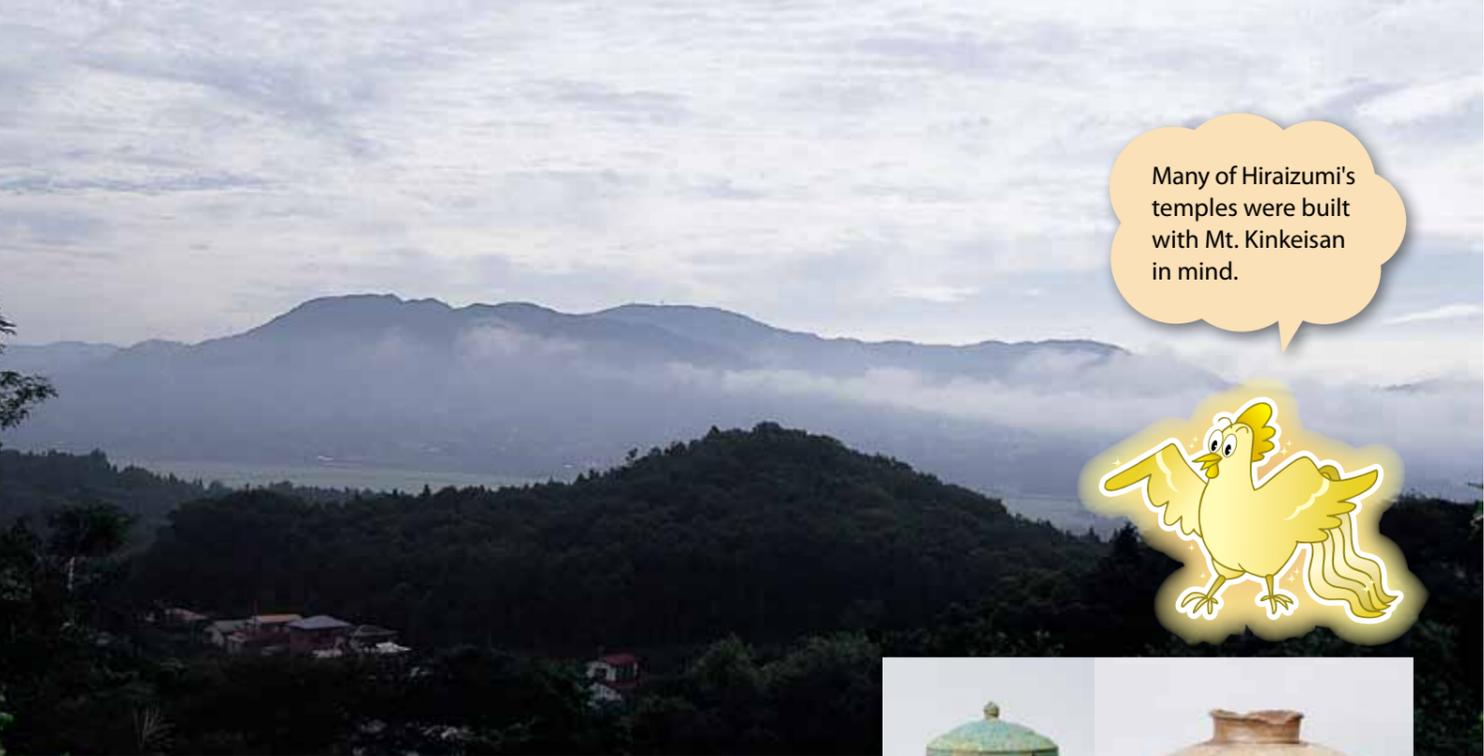
Mōtsū-ji Ennen (Longevity Dances)

Important Intangible Folk-Cultural Property

This performance, part of an important ceremony at the Jōgyōdō, has been handed down through the generations, giving us a precious insight into medieval Japanese performing arts.

In Hiraizumi there are many other folk-cultural performances and arts which have been kept alive.





Many of Hiraizumi's temples were built with Mt. Kinkeisan in mind.



Bronze sutra container and earthenware pot to hold the sutra container, unearthed from the peak.

Mt. Kinkeisan Historic Site

When constructing the government center and temples, the Ōshū-Fujiwara clan made Mt. Kinkeisan the focal point of their town planning. At the top of the mountain, they built sutra mounds in which Buddhist sutras were buried. Mt. Kinkeisan is an important site for its role as the foundation for urban development and as a mountain of worship that symbolizes Hiraizumi.



Muryōkō-in Ato Special Historic Site

After the temple was lost, the pond site became rice paddies. Further archaeological research is planned to restore the site to its original state. The garden of Muryōkō-in is believed to have been the most developed form of Hiraizumi's Pure Land gardens.

Pure Land Hiraizumi

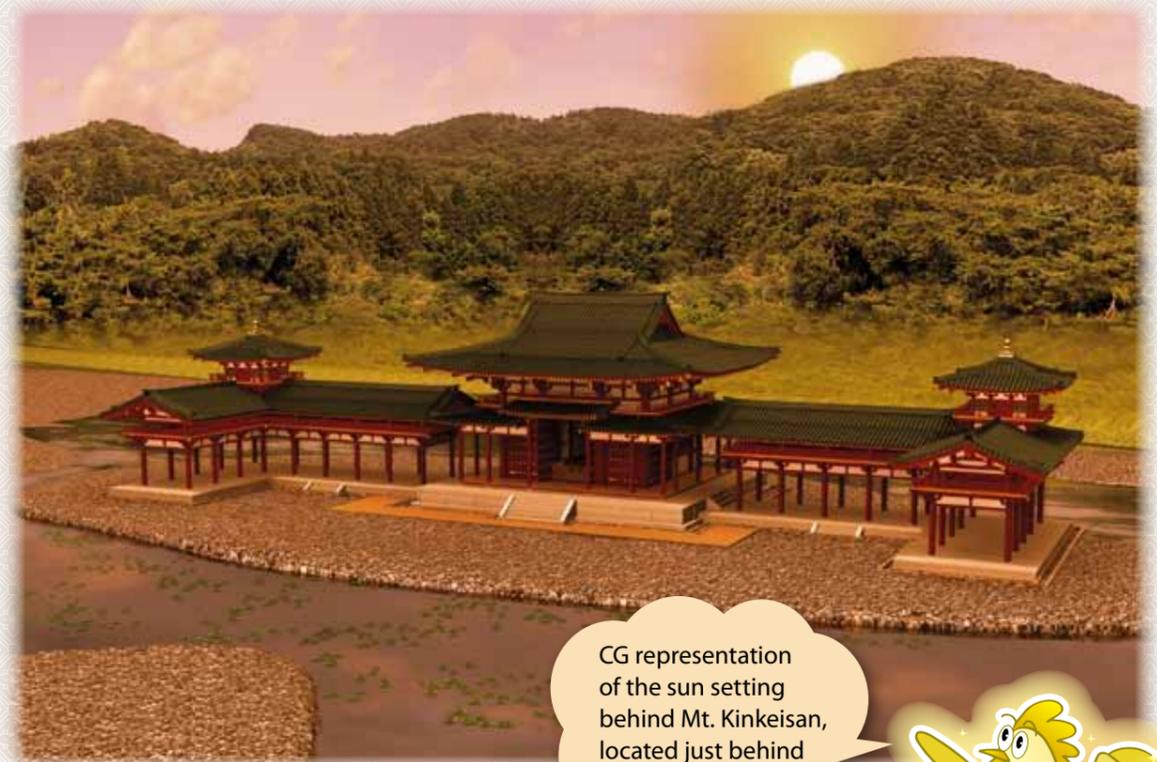
The Pure Land is the world of Buddha; the Pure Land may also be understood as a world created by the vows and discipline of Buddhist saints seeking enlightenment.

In Buddhism, which is widely practiced throughout Asia as well as in other parts of the world, it is believed that Buddha's eternal world of enlightenment, the world of Bodhisattva or saints who support Buddha, and our earthly world are all one, and that all can be viewed as the Pure Land.

In Japanese Buddhism which developed from the 6th to 12th centuries, it was believed that the Pure Land or Buddhist utopia could be realized on this earth; at the same time, reaching the Pure Land of Amida Nyorai in the afterlife became a popular religious theme.

Throughout the 12th century, Hiraizumi's temples and gardens were carefully positioned and designed to represent the Buddhist ideal of the Pure Land.

Hiraizumi's Pure Land structures, gardens, and archaeological sites are found within a relatively small area, about 1.5 km across, forming a group around the peak of Mt. Kinkeisan.



CG representation of the sun setting behind Mt. Kinkeisan, located just behind Muryōkō-in.

CG restoration of Muryōkō-in.

Muryōkō-in, together with the surrounding natural landscape, represented the Buddhist Pure Land. As the sun set beyond the mountain behind the temple, one could feel and experience the Pure Land of Amida Nyorai





The Value of World Heritage Hiraizumi

In Hiraizumi there are still remains of temples and gardens built upon the Pure Land beliefs of Buddhism, a worldwide religion. They show the efforts in the 12th century to create the Pure Land or Buddhist utopia on this earth.

The refined artistry and skills that enabled this creation were uniquely developed and perfected based on Japanese faith and beliefs, incorporating influences from India, China, and Korea.

At the 35th World Heritage Committee in 2011, the temples, gardens, and sites of Hiraizumi were inscribed onto the World Heritage List, for their value as an excellent and unique example of an earthly representation of the Pure Land.

The outstanding universal value of Hiraizumi, recognized as a World Heritage Site, can be summarized as the 'exchange of beliefs and culture'.

Buddhism, a worldwide religion which was introduced to Japan through China and Korea, continued to develop in a uniquely Japanese style. The designs and techniques used in the construction of Hiraizumi's temples and gardens reflect such exchange and fusion of cultures.

In particular, Buddhist Pure Land beliefs greatly influenced the creation of Hiraizumi's temples and gardens. Furthermore, the Buddhist culture that uniquely developed in Hiraizumi would later have a significant influence on the construction of temples in Kamakura.

In addition, beliefs in the Pure Land can be found widely throughout Asia, evidence of the outstanding universal value of Hiraizumi. The structures and gardens of Hiraizumi are highly evaluated for their concrete and visible representation of the Pure Land.