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Kyoto. The restoration of the Imperial Gateway at Nijo Castle (2012-2013)

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Introduction

Since its establishment in 794, Kyoto, the ancient capital of Japan, has set the cultural tone for the nobility, the Imperial court and eventually the nation at large. The cradle of Japanese culture, Kyoto has a brilliant history of more than 1200 years beginning with the establishment of the Heian-kyo capital and is characterized by a perfect combination of culture, architecture, landscape and ancient traditions. The varied components that form the attractive landscape of Kyoto are the mountains, temples and shrines, gardens, residential areas and the configuration of the ancient city. In December 1994 several historical monuments of the city of Kyoto were included in the list of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites. In addition, Kyoto was recognized to be an outstanding example of traditional human settlement and land-use, represented by the culture and relationship with the environment. In addition as the centre of Japanese culture for more than 1000 years, Kyoto illustrates the development of Japanese wooden architecture from the Heian period (794-1185) to the Edo period (1603-1867) as seen in the religious architecture and the art of Japanese gardens, which has influenced landscape gardening all over the world.

Kyoto pays attention also to the protection of the Japanese National Heritage property. There are many examples of which the most important is the restoration of the Imperial Gateway of the Nijo Castle. The restoration began in February 2012 and was completed in July 2013. With the support of the General Director Kozo Hiratake, we were fortunate enough to visit the restoration site of the imperial gateway in Nijo Castle on June 25, 2013.

The restoration of Imperial Gateway (Kara-mon) at Nijo Castle

The World Heritage Site of Nijo Castle in Kyoto, an architectural treasure not only for Japan but the world as a whole, was built in 1603 by Tokugawa, the most notable member of the Tokugawa clan and founder of its shogunate. Built as Tokugawa's residential palace, the castle was completed in 1626 by the third Tokugawa shogun, Iemitsu, with the addition of structures transferred from Fushimi Castle. Nijo Castle is one of the finest examples of architecture of the Azuchi-Momoyama Period (1573-1603) and Edo Period (1603-1867) in Japan, as it makes wonderful use of early Edo period building designs (shoin-zukuri architectural style), and lavish paintings and carvings that Iemitsu generously commissioned. In 1884 the Castle became the property of the Imperial family. It was donated to the City of Kyoto and renamed Nijo Castle in 1939. In 1994 the castle was designated as an UNESCO World Heritage Site. The Honmaru Palace was destroyed in a large-scale fire in 1788. During the fire of 1788 the Imperial gateway to the palace, built in 1626 for an Imperial visit, and Ninomaru Palace were saved. This gateway (Kara-mon) or Shiyaku-mon gate

serves as the entrance to the Ninomaru Palace. The gateway and the Ninomaru Palace are authentic of the year 1626.



Fig. 1 Kyoto. The Imperial Gateway in Nijo Castle before the restoration (2008 © Olimpia Niglio)

With the collaboration of the Architect Tamaki Goto, Director of the architectural restoration of the gateway, we visited the site. This gateway has four important characteristics: 1. *hiwadabuki*, a roof covered with layers of Japanese cypress *hinoki*; 2. *shikyaku-mon*, structure composed of two large, main pillars, centered in line with the roof and of four pillars of support, two in the front and two in the rear; 3. *zengonokikarahafutsuki*, two main sides with similar formal characteristics; 4. *kirzuma-tsukuri*, construction with gable roof.

The Kara-mon is characterized by a particularly configured curve called *kara-hafu* that we find in many temples in Japan. The outer panels of the gate have carved cranes, butterflies and flowers, while the inner panels offer Chinese lions, tigers and a dragon. These panels are bas-reliefs in wood and they are painted with typical colors.



Fig. 2 Kyoto. The restoration site of the Imperial gateway in Nijo Castle. June 25, 2013
Details of the bas-reliefs in wood and of the decorations with typical colors, during restoration.
(2013 © Olimpia Niglio)

The natural properties of materials require a restoration every 30 years. This time cycle is strongly linked to the nature and to the transmission of ancient building traditions. This time cycle is a fundamental part of the culture of restoration in Japan and its cultural roots are very deep and not always easily explained. The restoration of the National Heritage property of Japan is done according to the transmission of ancient knowledge and the establishment of a harmonious dialogue between *tangible* and *intangible* heritage, a common characteristic of the Japanese culture of the restoration.



Fig. 3 Kyoto. The restoration site of the Imperial gateway in Nijo Castle. June 25, 2013
Details of the copper and gold decorations, during restoration. (2013 © Olimpia Niglio)

The direct observation of the restoration work has made it possible to evaluate many cultural aspects that are the basis of the architectural conservation in Japan: in particular the ancient techniques of execution and the carpentry of wood. With the last major restoration of Kara-mon in Nijo Castle carried out in 1975, the works planned between 2012 and 2013 have primarily concerned the restoration of the painted wooden parts, the copper decorations and the wooden sculptures in accordance to an ancient Japanese technique. After careful analysis of the state of conservation of the cypress bark roof, the works management has established a partial restoration of the roof. The Scientific Committee, appointed by the Ministry of Culture, has also approved the partial restoration; which effectively restored only the most damaged areas leaving visible the parts of the roof that have been restored and those that have been conserved. This methodology of restoration was applied to the gateway only after assessing the conservation status of the materials. Only the degraded materials have been replaced. It is fundamental to note that the choice of the restoration method is evaluated on case-by-case.



Fig. 4 Kyoto. The restoration site of the Imperial gateway in Nijo Castle. June 25, 2013
Detail of the *kara-hafu*. The dark area does not restored. (2013 © Olimpia Niglio)



Fig. 5 Kyoto. The restoration site of the Imperial gateway in Nijo Castle. June 25, 2013
The Architect Goto describes the restoration of roof with bark of the cypress. (2013 © Olimpia Niglio)

The architect Goto explained the difficulties in finding the natural materials and the technique for extracting the bark from the cypress tree. Today in Japan there are only 10 companies working in the specific field of finding, removing and correctly working with the wood and bark of the cypress for the restoration of ancient architectures. Subsequently we have analyzed the technical execution of the restoration and we have observed the excellent state of conservation of wooden structures that are original to the seventeenth century. The decorative parts in copper and the wooden sculptures were disassembled and restored in the laboratory. On the restoration site it is possible to observe drawings showing the assembly stages of these works of art. The restoration work will be inaugurated September 30, 2013.



Fig. 6 Kyoto. The restoration site of the Imperial gateway in Nijo Castle. July 30, 2013
Detail of the *kara-hafu* after the restoration (2013 © Olimpia Niglio)



Fig. 7 Kyoto. The restoration site of the Imperial gateway in Nijo Castle. July 30, 2013
The copper decorations and the wooden sculptures (three-dimensional) after the restoration (2013 © Olimpia Niglio)



Fig. 8 Kyoto. The restoration site of the Imperial gateway in Nijo Castle. July 30, 2013
Detail of the wooden sculptures (three-dimensional) after the restoration (2013 © Olimpia Niglio)