



平泉

平和の願いで築かれた理想郷

HIRAIZUMI

A Utopian City Built from a Desire for Peace

Oshu Hiraizumi, which once boasted a sparkling prosperity on a par with that of Kyoto, is situated in the southern part of Iwate Prefecture. Today, a peaceful rural landscape spreads out on a plain surrounded by verdant hills and traversed by the gently flowing Kitakami River. In the past, though, this was the site of a large city with a population of 100,000 people. Visitors to this district are sure to wonder what kind of people passed through the town at that time and what kind of lives the citizens lived. So let us now introduce Hiraizumi, the capital of Oshu and the historical stage for four generations of the powerful Oshu Fujiwara family. (Oshu refers to the northeastern part of Honshu, Japan's main island.)

金色堂。内部は夜光貝(やこうがい)の螺鈿(らでん)細工、蒔絵、そしてアフリカ象の象牙で装飾され、当時の交易の広さがうかがえる。(写真提供：中尊寺)

The interior of the Konjikido is decorated with turban-shell mother-of-pearl work, gold-sprinkled lacquer, and ivory of the African elephant, suggesting the wide scope of trade at that time. (Courtesy of Chusonji)



かつて、京の都に比肩するほど輝かしい繁栄を誇った奥州・平泉は、岩手県の南部に位置しています。緑豊かな丘陵に囲まれ、北上川がゆるやかに流れる平野には、現在のどかな田園風景が広がっています。が、ここにはその昔 10 万もの人口を抱える大都市が存在していました。どんな人々の往来があり、暮らしがあったのか——この地を訪れる人の誰もがそんな思いをはせることでしょう。今回は、奥州藤原 4 代が栄華を極めた歴史の舞台、奥州の都・平泉を紹介します。

The Foundation of Hiraizumi Culture

About 900 years ago, in the latter part of the Heian period (794–1185), a culture blossomed in Japan under the Oshu Fujiwara family. That was Hiraizumi culture.

At the end of the eleventh century Oshu Fujiwara Kiyohira set up his base in this area. Since his childhood Kiyohira had survived many battles and skirmishes. He had witnessed fighting between relatives, and his wife and children had been killed. Having experienced this unfortunate and gruesome destiny, Kiyohira understood the preciousness of life and devoted his efforts to building a peaceful society without war—in other words, a utopian Buddhist city that replicated the Pure Land. This ideal was carried on by the generations of his son Motohira, grandson Hidehira, and great-grandson Yasuhira, and for about a century, while being influenced by Kyoto culture, Hiraizumi developed its own indigenous culture against the background of trade extending over a wide area.

平泉文化の礎

今からおよそ 900 年前の平安時代後期、奥州藤原氏のもとで花開いたひとつの文化がありました。それが平泉文化です。

11 世紀末、奥州藤原氏初代清衡はこの地に本拠を構えました。幼いころから幾度の戦乱をくぐり抜け、肉親同士の戦いや妻や子までも殺される数奇で凄惨な運命をたどった清衡は、命の尊さを実感し、戦争の無い平和な社会、つまり極楽浄土の世界をそのまま形にした理想の仏教都市建設に力を注ぎました。その思いは二代基衡、三代秀衡、そして四代泰衡の時代へと受け継がれ、およそ 100 年間にわたり、京の文化の影響を受けながら、広い地域との交易を背景に独自の文化として発展していきました。

「奥州の都」と呼ばれた理由

奥州藤原氏の理想とする都市とは、現世に仏国土を造るということでした。いくつもの寺院仏閣を建てることにより都市を浄化させ、また周囲の山々や川などを借景として利用することにより、平泉は歴代当主によって徐々に整えられていきました。

さて、奥州は京から遠く離れた地でありながら、平泉が経済、文化ともに大きな発展を遂げた背景には、良質で豊富な砂金、そして絹、漆、馬などが産出されたほか、水・陸ともに交通の要衝として交易が盛んに行われていたからだといわれています。中尊寺金色堂をはじめとする寺院建築や平安美術を鑑賞していると、かつてここで国内外の多くの人や物が往来し、人と文化が交流し合う、まるで都のような繁栄をした痕跡を見つけることができます。

それでは、それらの痕跡をたどりながら中尊寺と毛越寺を巡ります。

平安美術の宝庫・中尊寺

中尊寺は、平泉の中心部から北の関山丘陵に位置します。比叡山延暦寺を総本山とする天台宗で、850 年に慈覚大師円仁によって開山されたと伝えられています。12 世紀のはじめ、奥州藤原氏初代清衡が、奥州をめぐる幾度の戦いで命を失った多くの人々を敵味方関係なく供養し、浄土へ導くために造営した寺院です。

「月見坂」と呼ばれる杉並木の表参道を登っていくと、右側に中尊寺本堂が現れます。そしてさらに進むと左手に宝物館である讚衡蔵が見えます。ここには平安時代後期の仏教美術など 3,000 点以上の国宝、重要文化財が収蔵されています。

Reason for Being Called the “Capital of Oshu”

The Oshu Fujiwara family envisioned building the Pure Land of Buddha in the real world. Hiraizumi gradually took shape under the four lords as they constructed several temples to cleanse the city and made use of the surrounding mountains and rivers as background scenery.

Although Oshu was situated a long way away from Kyoto, Hiraizumi achieved remarkable economic and cultural development thanks to its abundant supply of good-quality gold dust, its production of silk, lacquer, horses, and other items, and the lively trade that flourished as a result of the city's prime position on water and land transportation routes. Viewing the temple architecture, such as the Konjikido (Golden Hall) at Chusonji temple, and the Heian art that remain today, one can glimpse traces of Hiraizumi's capital-like prosperity of the past, when many people and goods from both Japan and overseas passed through the city and cultural exchange was lively. Chusonji and Motsuji temples are good places to see these vestiges of a glorious past.



Chusonji: A Treasury of Heian Art

Chusonji temple is situated in the surrounding hills to the north of central Hiraizumi. Belonging to the Tendai sect of Buddhism, the headquarters of which is Enryakuji temple on Mount Hiei in Kyoto, Chusonji is said to have been founded in 850 by the Buddhist priest Ennin (given the posthumous title of Jikaku Daishi). At the beginning of the twelfth century Oshu Fujiwara Kiyohira further built it as a temple for the repose of the souls of the many people, both friend and foe, who had lost their lives in battles over Oshu and to guide them to the Pure Land.

Climbing the cedar-lined approach to the temple, known as Tsukimizaka (Moon-Viewing Slope), you can see the main building of Chusonji on the right. When you go a little farther, you come to the Sankozo museum on the left. This museum houses more than 3,000 national treasures and important cultural properties, including Buddhist art from the latter part of the Heian period.

月見坂。江戸時代、平泉を治めていた伊達藩によって植樹された樹齢 380 年を誇る杉並木。

The Tsukimizaka slope is lined with 380-year-old Japanese cedar trees planted by the Date family, which ruled Hiraizumi during the Edo period.





金色堂新覆堂 The outer building of the Konjikido

境内唯一、創建当時の姿を残す金色堂

中尊寺境内にある建造物の中で異彩を放つのが金色堂です。1124年初代清衡によって建立されました。現在は、雨風から守るために1968年に新たに建てられた覆堂おおいどうの中にあり、金色堂内外に貼られた金箔が神々しいまでの輝きを放っています。大きさは、5.5メートル四方とやや小ぶりながら、その荘厳な存在感に圧倒させられます。ご本尊の阿弥陀如来をはじめとする、いくつもの異なる仏像が並ぶ珍しい堂で、平泉文化の粋を集めた工芸技術で彩られています。また、初代の清衡、二代基衡、三代秀衡の遺体と四代泰衡の首級が安置されている霊廟でもあります。

それでは、続いて平泉を代表する寺院のひとつで現存する日本最古の浄土庭園を擁していると知られる毛越寺を案内します。

日本最古の浄土庭園・毛越寺

まるで一幅の絵画のような美しい浄土庭園が広がる毛越寺。二代基衡と三代秀衡によって造営された寺院です。周囲の山々を背景として取り入れ、浄土を表現した庭園は、四季折々の花々と草木の色の移り変わりを楽しむことができます。度重なる火災により、40以上あった堂塔はすべて焼失し、残念ながら今ではその建造物群を見ることはできませんが、その遺構がほぼ完全な姿で残っていることから、高い文化価値を認められています。

また、この境内には池に水を引き入れるために造られた水路「遣水やりみず」があり、毎年5月には、遣水に盃を浮かべ、流れに合わせて和歌を詠む優美な平安

Konjikido: Only Building Remaining in Original State

Among the buildings in the precincts of Chusonji, the one that stands out is the Konjikido (Golden Hall), which was constructed by Oshu Fujiwara Kiyohira in 1124. Today, to protect it from the elements, the Konjikido is covered by an outer structure erected in 1968. The gold-leaf decorating the inside and outside of the Konjikido emanates an almost divine brilliance. The hall is quite small, measuring just 5.5 meters square, but its majestic presence is overwhelming. It is an unusual hall featuring several different Buddhist statues, including the principal image of Amida Buddha, and decorated with craftsmanship that brings together the essence of Hiraizumi culture. The Konjikido is also a mausoleum for the mummified bodies of the first- to third-generation lords of the Oshu Fujiwara family (Kiyohira, Motohira, and Hidehira) and the decapitated head of the fourth-generation lord Yasuhira

Next, let's visit Motsuji temple, one of the representative temples of Hiraizumi and famous for having the oldest Pure Land Garden still existing in Japan.

中尊寺本堂
The main building of Chusonji



Motsuji: The Oldest Pure Land Garden in Japan

The beautiful Pure Land Garden at Motsuji temple, which was built by the second-generation lord Motohira and third-generation lord Hidehira, is truly picturesque. Making full use of the surrounding mountains as background scenery, the garden, which expresses the Buddhist Pure Land, has flowers, plants, and trees that give enjoyment throughout the four seasons. As a result of repeated fires, the more than 40 temple buildings at Motsuji have all been burned down, so unfortunately they cannot be seen today. However, the remnants remain in almost perfect condition and are recognized as having enormous cultural value.

In the grounds of Motsuji there is a feeder stream that carries water to the garden's pond, and every May a festival called the Gokusui no En is held. In a reproduction of an elegant Heian-period pastime, people write short poems while a sake cup floats down the stream. Other traditional events of Hiraizumi are also continued to this day and can be enjoyed throughout the year not only at Motsuji but across the whole city.

Transmitting Dreams into the Future

Hiraizumi culture, which for a century achieved great prosperity and development under the leadership of the Oshu Fujiwara family, came to a close in the era of the fourth-generation lord Yasuhira.



毛越寺浄土庭園 The Pure Land Garden at Motsuji



毛越寺本堂 The main building of Motsuji



5月に毛越寺で催される「曲水の宴」(ごくすいのえん)
The Gokusui no En festival is held at Motsuji every May.

時代の遊び「^{ごくすい えん}曲水の宴」が催されます。また、そのほかの平泉の伝統行事は現在に受け継がれ、毛越寺をはじめ平泉の至るところで一年を通してそれらに触れることができます。

夢の跡を未来に伝える

100年にわたり、奥州藤原氏が繁栄と発展を遂げた平泉文化は、ついに四代泰衡の時代にその幕を閉じます。奥州藤原氏の滅亡を語るには欠かせない人物、それは源義経——兄の鎌倉幕府初代将軍源頼朝に追われ平泉で三代秀衡の庇護を受けた義経は、秀衡の死後、その後ろ盾を失い、ついに四代目泰衡の裏切りによりこの地で終焉を迎えます。そして、奥州藤原氏の力を恐れた頼朝は、義経をかくまったことを大義名分に平泉に大軍を送り、栄華を極めた奥州藤原氏を滅亡させました。その後、平泉は衰退の一途をたどり、500年後、この地を訪れた俳聖松尾芭蕉が『夏草や兵どもが夢の跡』と人の世の栄華をはかなんでこの句を詠んだほど、平泉は荒れ果てた時期もありました。しかし、悠久の時を超えてさまざまな人々から保護された文化の痕跡は、平泉の文化遺産として今に残り、現在、中尊寺や毛越寺そして周辺の遺跡



高館 義経堂(たかだち ぎけいどう)。頼朝の圧力に耐えかねた四代藤原泰衡が追い詰めた義経の終焉の地

The Gikeido hall at Takadachi, where Yoshitsune, driven by Oshu Fujiwara Yasuhira, who could no longer withstand pressure from Yoritomo, ended his life.

群は世界遺産暫定リストに既に掲載されており、近い将来に世界遺産として登録される日を待っています。



Access

- 東京駅から一ノ関駅まで東北新幹線で約2時間10分
- JR東北本線で一ノ関駅から平泉駅まで8分
- 平泉駅から中尊寺まで1.6km
- 平泉駅から毛越寺まで0.7km

- 中尊寺 Chusonji temple: <http://www.chusonji.or.jp/> (Japanese only)
- 毛越寺 Motsuji temple: <http://www.motsuji.or.jp/>
- 社団法人平泉観光協会 Hiraizumi Tourism Association: <http://hiraizumi.or.jp/>

The great historical figure who cannot be left out when talking about the fall of the Oshu Fujiwara family is Minamoto no Yoshitsune, whose elder brother, Minamoto no Yoritomo, was the first shogun of the warrior government in Kamakura. Hounded by Yoritomo, Yoshitsune received protection from Hidehira in Hiraizumi but lost that support when Hidehira died. Betrayed by Hidehira's successor, Yasuhira, Yoshitsune committed suicide in Hiraizumi. Nevertheless, still fearful of the Oshu Fujiwara family's power, Yoritomo sent a large army to Hiraizumi on the pretext that the Fujiwaras had given shelter to Yoshitsune, and the once mighty Oshu Fujiwara family was crushed

After that, Hiraizumi fell into a state of continuous decline and even for a time ruin. Visiting the district 500 years later, the haiku poet Matsuo Basho wrote:

*Natsukusa ya
tsuwamono domo ga
yume no ato*

The summer grass
'Tis all that's left
of ancient warrior's dreams

Protected by various people over the ages, however, vestiges of Hiraizumi culture still remain as the city's cultural heritage, and Chusonji, Motsuji, and surrounding ruins have already been placed on UNESCO's tentative list of World Heritage Sites. It is hoped that they will be officially registered as world heritage in the near future.