

## **The Guest House: A new find that highlights Dazaifu's abundant hospitality**

Between the seventh and ninth centuries, Dazaifu was a major center of international diplomacy. Foreign dignitaries and their entourages would sail into Hakata Bay and be escorted to Dazaifu before traveling on to the capitals of Kyoto or Nara. Much is known about the palatial government offices at the heart of the sprawling administrative complex, but archaeologists have only recently discovered the remains of the Guest House used by visiting foreign dignitaries.

Excavations have revealed lodging facilities suggesting that the Japanese concept of *omotenashi*—the highest form of hospitality—was prevalent at that time. Fragments of high-quality tableware—including a lacquered plate of Japanese origin, Chinese ceramics, and a set of nested Korean-style metal bowls—have also been found. The use of such articles implies that guests were treated with the utmost care and courtesy.

Chinese influences can be seen in the ancient city of Dazaifu, from the grid-like formation of the city to the south-facing administrative buildings hinting at the role of *wuxing*—a Chinese philosophy based on the interconnection of five phases or five elements. Historians surmise that in ceremonies held inside the recently discovered Guest House, foreign dignitaries were positioned to the east, facing their Japanese counterparts to the west. According to the principles of *wuxing*, the east side was reserved for the host, meaning that foreign visitors played the role of host at the Guest House. Thus, the house was considered an extension of the visitors' home territory—much like diplomatic embassies in today's world.

Excavations in Dazaifu have been in progress for decades and are ongoing. Discover more about the rich history of Dazaifu at the Dazaifu Exhibition Hall.