



The Architecture of Kodokan

Kodokan was a domain school established by Tokugawa Nariaki (1800-1860), the 9th lord of the Mito Domain. In the 10th year of the Tenpo era (1839), a site was designated within the Sannomaru area of Mito Castle, and construction began the following year. The building was completed in July of the 12th year of Tenpo (1841).

Seicho (Main hall), also known as the "Gakko Goten" (School palace), was where the domain lord presided over academic and martial examinations. The Shizen-do served as the lord's personal chamber for rest. Both structures are built in the shoin-zukuri architectural style, featuring floors, shelves, cham-

(Nageshi). They are connected by a long corridor known as the Jikken-tatami Corridor. The Seicho also includes an attached study alcove (Tsukeshoin).

remain in the door of the platform.

The roofs exhibit a distinctive regional character. The entrance to Seicho has a hip-and-gable (Irimova-zukuri) roof, while the back of the Seicho and the Shizen-do feature hipped roofs (Yosemune-zukuri). All roofs are covered with sangawara tiles, incorporating decorative "wachigai-gawara" tiles into the prominent main ridge (Omune), which is noticeably large, reflecting local architectural traits. Another unique feature is the entrance eaves, where a lower roof covered with wooden shingles (Kokera-buki) fered corner pillars, and decorative horizontal beams extends underneath. This lower roof is supported by

independent pillars and additionally secured with suspended metal fittings.

By the late Edo period, many domain schools were established across Japan. Among the existing historical structures, Kodokan is one of the largest and most well-preserved. While the architecture follows the orthodox shoin-zukuri style, its grand yet simple design conveys a sense of dignity and embodies the presence of a prestigious feudal domain.

(Reference: "Cultural Properties of Ibaraki, Vol. 39")

Tracing Nariaki's Vision Embedded in Kodokan

Tokugawa Nariaki, the founder of Kodokan, had consistently conveyed his thoughts and policies to the people in various ways since assuming his role as the domain lord. Throughout Kodokan, remnants of his philosophy and ideals can still be found. As you explore the architecture, take a moment to trace the sentiments and aspirations Nariaki left

1 "Kodokan" Inscription

Written by Tokugawa Nariaki. The reverse side bears the inscription "Written on a midwinter day in the 12th year of Tenpo." Midwinter (仲 冬) corresponds to the 11th month of the lunar calen-



② Two Large Characters "Sonjo" (尊攘)

At the command of Tokugawa Nariaki, Matsunobe Sadao, the domain physician (whose artistic name was "Nen"), inscribed these characters. "Sonio" is an abbreviation of "Sonno Joi"(尊皇攘夷)(Revere the Emperor. Expel the Barbarians), a philosophy that became a defining slogan in late-Edo period Japan. Since 1998 (Heisei 10), the inscription has been displayed in its current location.

❸ "Gei ni Asobu" (游於藝) Inscription

Written by Tokugawa Nariaki, this phrase originates from a passage in the Analects of Confucius: "The Master said: Commit yourself to the Way, rely on Virtue, align



with Benevolence, and find enjoyment in the Arts. "Arts" (Gei) refers to the Six Arts:

(礼) - etiquette and ceremonial conduct Rites

Music (楽) – musical mastery Archery (射) - proficiency in archery

Charioteering (御) - equestrian skills Calligraphy (書) – handwriting and literary artistry

Mathematics (数) - numerical and logical reasoning

This phrase emphasizes a holistic approach to learning—encouraging one to engage freely and deeply with the arts, rather than being rigidly confined to scholarly or martial disciplines. It reflects an ideal of cultivating both intellectual and artistic pursuits with a sense of ease and refinement.

4 Rubbing of the Kodokan-ki Monument

Authored and inscribed by Tokugawa Nariaki, the Kodokan-ki records the founding principles and educational philosophy of Kodokan. It was publicly announced under Nariaki's name in the 9th year of Tenpo (1838). The drafting of the text was entrusted to Fujita Tōko, who meticulously refined it by incorporating scholarly opinions, ensuring that every single character was crafted with deep thought and care.

The monument is housed within the Hakke-do Pavilion in Kodokan Park.

5 Estampage du monument Kanameishi Kahi

Composed and inscribed by Tokugawa Nariaki, this poem reads:

"Yukusue mo / Fuminatagaeso / Akitsushima / Yamato no michizo / Kaname nari keru"

It conveys the guiding principles that should be followed by the Japanese people. The monument stands on the southern side of the Confucian Temple.

6 "Shizen-do" Inscription

Written by Tokugawa Nariaki, Shizen-do (至善堂) derives from a passage in The Great Learning: "The way of the Great Learning lies in manifesting bright virtue, loving the people, and resting in the highest good." The phrase "resting in the highest good" (止於至善) signifies conducting oneself based on absolute moral excellence.

Rubbing of the Shubai-ki Monument

Authored and inscribed by Tokugawa Nariaki, this text outlines the purpose behind his planting of plum trees at Kodokan and Kairakuen. The monument stands on the southern side of the Hakke-do Pavilion.

Noningyo (Farmer Doll)

This enlarged sculpture is based on the small farmer dolls that Tokugawa Nariaki personally cast and distributed to children. The original Noningyo was palm-sized, and Nariaki would place it at the corner of his dining table, offering a portion of his meal to the doll before eating as an expression of gratitude toward farmers.



Gakusei Keisho (Student Bell)

Authored and crafted by Tokugawa Nariaki, this bell bears an inscribed waka poem on its surface: "For those who seek knowledge, Loud and clear, Resounds the bell's voice at dawn."

On the inner surface, an inscription details the origins of the bell's casting. Near the upper ceiling, rubbings of both the outer and inner inscriptions are displayed. The bell tower is located west of the Confucian Temple.