

Kurume History Walks

No.38 Cultural Properties of the Zendo-ji Temple 1 善導寺の文化財1



Main Hall

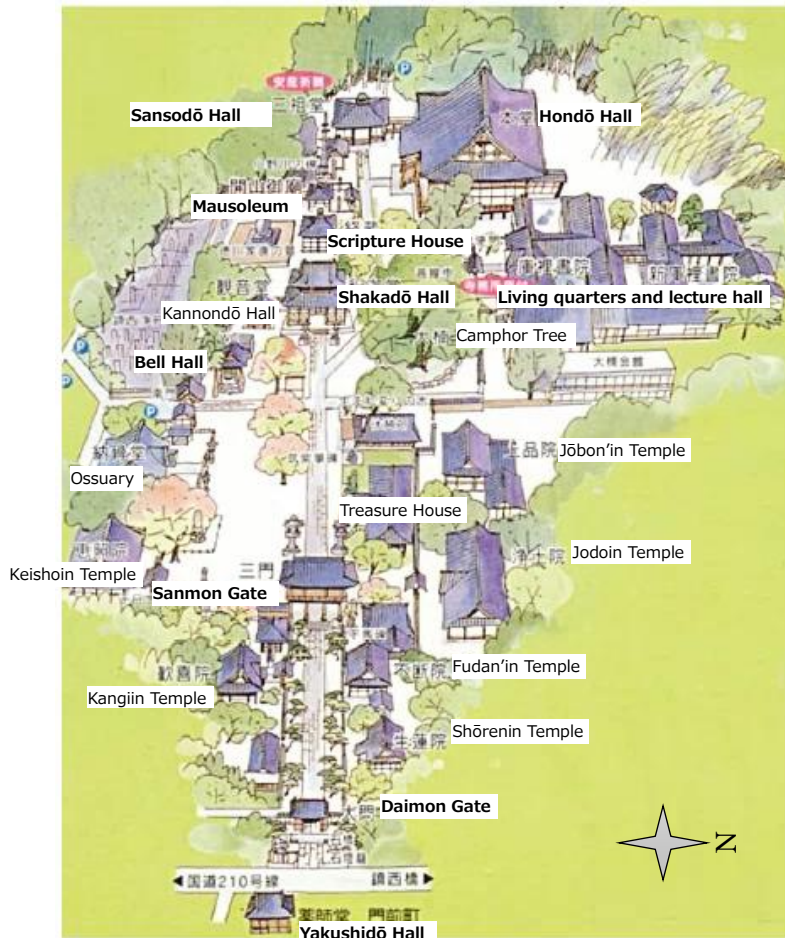
The Zendo-ji Temple was established in 1208 by Shoko (monk) under the patronage of the Kusano clan, a local ruling family. Shoko was a high-caliber disciple of Honen (great monk) who founded the Jodo-shu school, one of the most widely practiced branches of Buddhism in Japan.

In these eight hundred years, lots of things – both good and bad – have happened to the temple. Among these events, the worst was that in 1584, the head monk and thirty-seven subordinates were killed by a hostile clan of their patron, the Kusano clan by the reason of the latter's betrayal. Three years later, they were defeated by Toyotomi Hideyoshi, who is regarded as the second "Great Unifier" of Japan. The temple lost its patron, and that brought them to the brink of extinction.

However, in later years during the Edo period (1603-1868), the temple was revived with the support of the new lords of Chikugo Province, and then those of Kurume Domain.

When the new government was established in 1868, all domains were abolished. Then, the temple lost its support again. But the temple survived the economic difficulties and today it is known as one of the representative temples of Jodo-shu school in Kyushu.

The Zendo-ji temple has about 15,000 square meters of land on which there are many wooden buildings including eight designated National Important Cultural Properties, and one designated Prefectural Cultural Property.



Yakushido Hall (薬師堂 *yakushidō*)

This hall is thought to be built in the late Edo period. It is the easternmost of all other buildings and houses a wooden seated statue of Yakushi Nyorai.

Daimon Gate (大門 *daimon*)

It is the oldest building among the others and was built in 1651. It has a gable roof with tiles and four legs. Designated a National Important Cultural Property in 1988.

Sanmon Gate-main gate (三門 *sanmon*)

This gate is a two-story building with a hip-and-gable roof.

Bell Hall (鐘堂 *shōdō*)

It was built in 1791 and houses a bronze bell, which was cast in 1661 with 1.88 meters high, and 1.23 meters across at the base. Designated a Cultural Property by the prefecture. On New Year's Eve, many worshipers come to strike it.

Shakado Hall (釈迦堂 *shakadō*)

It was built in 1927 and houses a wooden statue of standing Shaka Nyorai, which was designated a Municipal Cultural Property.

Scripture House (経蔵 *kyōdō*)

This building was donated by a person from today's Kitano Town. It is equipped with a



Daimon Gate

revolving sutra storage shelf: a central pillar revolves and an octahedral case surrounds it. Pushing the shelf around the pillar is believed to have much the same effect as orally reciting the sutras. (Today, it cannot be moved due to its age.) Designated a Cultural Property by the prefecture on February 23rd, 2005.

Mausoleum (御廟 *gobyō*)

It was built in 1854 and houses the tomb of Shoko (monk), the founder of the temple. Its tombstone takes



Scripture House



Sansodo Hall

the form of the five-ring pagoda. Each ring represents the element of the Universe – (from the bottom) sky, wind, fire, water, and earth.

Its basement bears an inscription of the words for praising the monk.

Sansodo Hall (三祖堂 *sansodō*)

This hall houses the wooden statues of three high monks: Honen who was the founder of Jodo-shu school, Zendo who was a Chinese high monk and had a great influence on Honen and Shoko. Among these three, that of Zendo and Shoko were designated National Important Cultural Properties.

Hondo Hall (本堂 *hondō*)

The Hondo Hall, main hall was rebuilt in 1786 after having burned down by the fire in 1773. It measures 771 square meters and one of the largest Buddhist

halls in Kyushu.

There are 5 ornaments of the hollyhock pattern which is the Tokugawa family—the Shogun’s crest on the roof-ridge. It is said that the temple received 500 *kokus** from the Shogun.

Also, its entrance was built with four pillars in anticipation of the visit by an imperial envoy with the Minister of the Right and the Left. They would pass side by side separately between pillars for entering the hall. This building was nationally designated an Important Cultural Property on December 19th, 1988.

**Koku* 石 was a volume unit for measuring the rice quantity and for evaluating the income of a samurai in feudal Japan. One koku is about 180 liters of rice, enough to support one person for a single year.

The following six buildings were all designated Important National Cultural Properties on December 27th, 2000.

Hall (広間 *hiroma*)

It measures about 24.9 meters in length and 7 meters in width with a hip-and-gable roof. It is surrounded by a mud wall and a gate is roofed with copper plates. Then, there is the main entrance, reserved for special visitors, which has a curved bargeboard with a dragon, a tiger, flowers, etc.



Lecture Hall

Lecture Hall (書院 *shoin*)

Its thatched roof can be seen between the Hondo Hall and the Hall. The building measures 11.8 meters in length and 7.9 meters in width. In the garden, there is a “*suikinkutsu*”, a type of garden ornament and music device (literally, water lyre cave: an upside-down buried jar with a hole at the top makes sound by water drops).

Residence of the chief priest and Meeting Place (役寮・対面所 *yakuryo, taimenjo*)

These buildings are connected to the Lecture Hall and the Hall. The residence measures 8.9 meters by 6.9 meter, and the meeting place does 8.0 meters by 5.9 meters. A part of these had been sold to a branch temple in Kitano Town in 1872 after having lost their patron. However, during the renovation in 2005, it turned out that that building surprisingly remained. Then, that was removed to the original location.

Large living quarter (大庫裏 *ōguri*)

It measures 15.9 meters by 12.0 meters and consists of a large earthen floor and a board floor. It was rebuilt after the old one was burned by the fire in 1748.

Kitchen (釜屋 *kamaya*)

It is located on the north side of the large living quarter and measures 11.9 meters by 8.0 meters. There is a large cook stove with three holes at the top to put pots (*kama*), an earthen floor, and a board floor. It is a rare case that a kitchen is independently built, because the cook stove is usually placed in the living quarter. As a result of excavation and research before the renovation, it was unveiled that a large stove used to be in the former living quarter before the fire in 1748 and that when they rebuilt it, they separately built a kitchen.



Inside Storehouse (中蔵 *nagagura*)

This two-story building is 11.9 meters in length and 4.2 meters in width and was constructed as a miso storehouse in 1794.

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