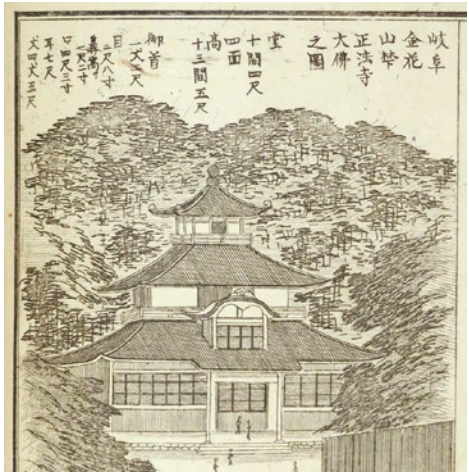


The Great Buddha Hall as Seen on Illustrations, Postcards, etc.



A Woodblock Print of Nagara River Meishichi Bridge (partial), 1874 (Owned by Gifu City Museum of History)



Mino no Sakigake, 1883 (Owned by Gifu City Museum of History)

This rare photo shows that the building was spared from collapse in the Nobi Earthquake.



Shoboji's Daibutsuden (the Great Buddha Hall), ca.1891 (Owned by Gifu Local Meteorological Office)



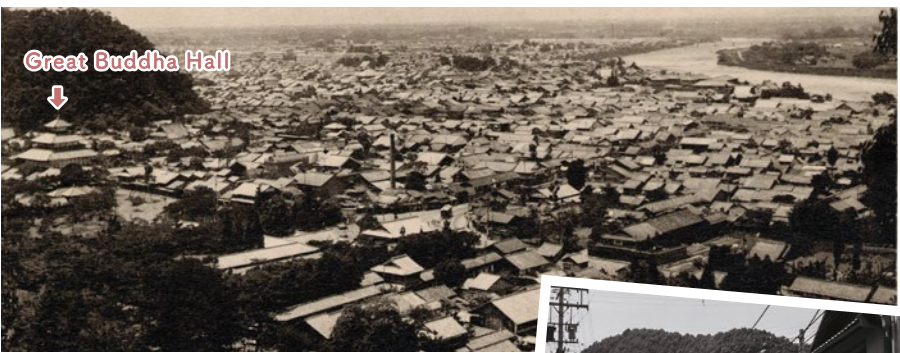
Postcard: Gifu Great Buddha Hall, 1910(Owned by Gifu Prefectural Archives)



Great Buddha Hall in snow, ca.1963 Photo by Nanichi Kitabora



Bird's-eye View of Gifu City, by Yoshida Hatsusaburo (partial), 1937(Owned by Gifu City Museum of History)



Postcard: A Partial View of the City from Maruyama, Gifu Park (Owned by Gifu City Museum of History)

Access to Shoboji's Great Buddha Hall & Gifu Great Buddha

A 3-minute walk from Bus Stop "Gifu Park, Gifu Castle"
8 Daibutsu-cho, Gifu City, 500-8018, Japan Phone: 058-264-2760

Shoboji Temple is an important component of the "Cultural Landscape of Gifu in the Midstream Region of the Nagara River" and a constituent cultural property of the Japan Heritage site "The Sengoku Castle Town of Gifu, Where 'Nobunaga's Hospitality' Lives On."

The Great Buddha Hall is designated as a municipal important cultural property and the Great Buddha as a prefectural important cultural property.



In front of the Great Buddha Hall, 1966

Kinpozan Shoboji Temple



A panoramic view of Great Buddha Hall of Shoboji Temple (from the west)

The Great Buddha of Shoboji Temple was established in around 1810 (late Edo period) at the foot of Mt. Kinka, in what was once the castle town of Gifu.

Now affectionately known as the "Gifu Daibutsu" or "Gifu Great Buddha," recent research has revealed that not only the Buddha itself but also the Great Buddha Hall in which it is enshrined holds significant historical value.

In this leaflet, we will introduce the history of Shoboji Temple, from its origins to creation of the Gifu Great Buddha, and its journey to the present day, based on the findings of recent investigations.

Gifu Great Buddha

Great Buddha Hall
Gifu Great Buddha

Kinpozan Shoboji is a temple of the Obaku school of Buddhism, which was introduced from China in the 1650s (early Edo period) and is a subordinate temple of Obaku-san Manpukuji Temple in Uji City, Kyoto Prefecture.

Its founding dates back to 1683, when the monk Ko-on established a missionary base at the foot of Mt. Kinka.

It is believed that Shoboji Temple was founded by Tokugawa Mitsutomo, the lord of the Owari domain that ruled the area at the time.

The area where Shoboji Temple was founded was once lined with castle retainer houses for Gifu Castle during the time when Gifu was a castle town. However, after the Battle of Sekigahara in 1600, Gifu Castle was abandoned, and the castle town where the retainers lived also disappeared.

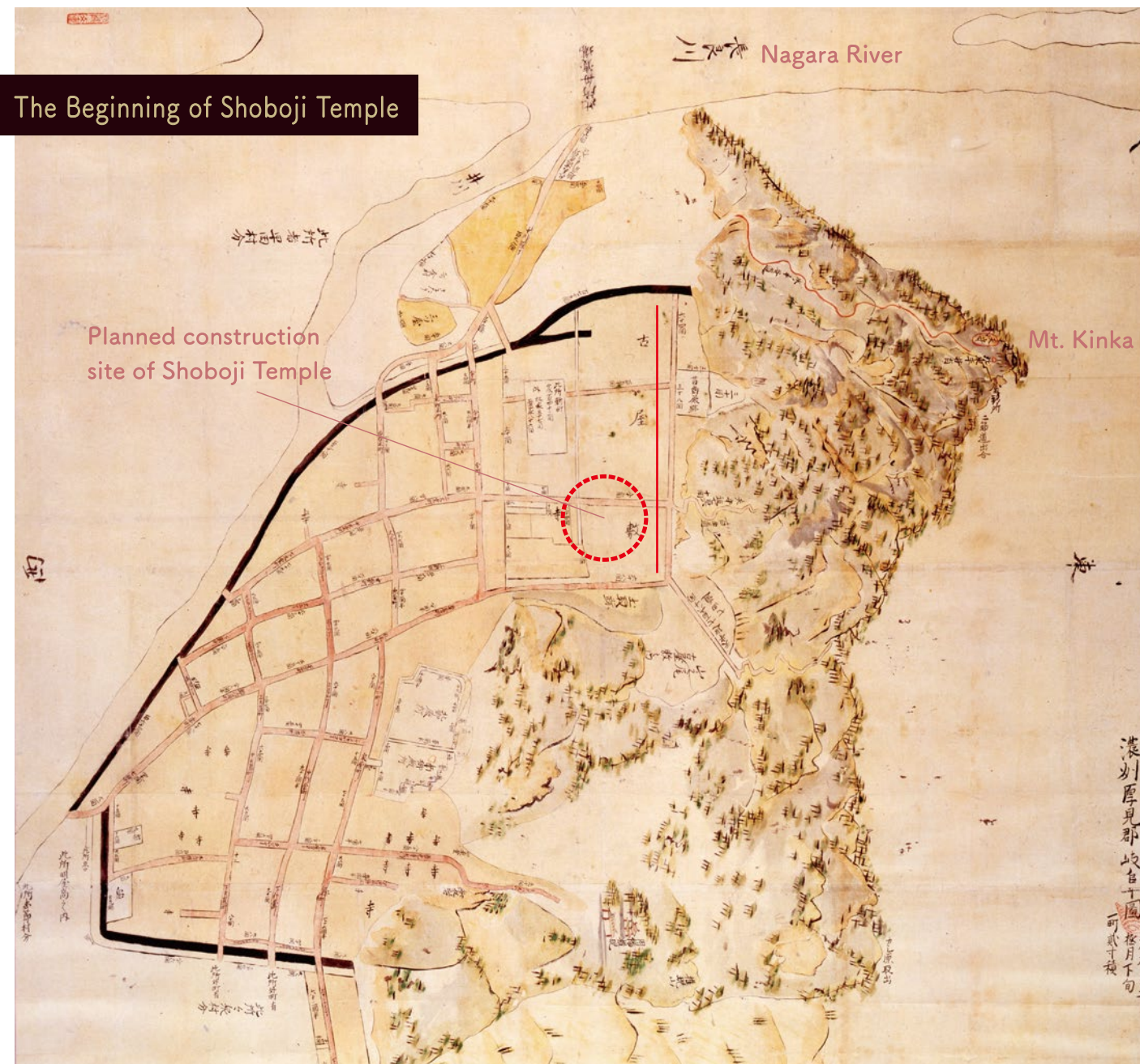
The area of the former residence at the foot of Mt. Kinka seemed to have been left untouched for some time, and was called “Furuyashiki (Old Residence area)” at that time.

In the Edo period, the area including Furuyashiki (Gifu Town) became a direct territory of the Edo shogunate before coming under the control of the Owari domain in 1619.

About 40 years later, during the reign of Tokugawa Mitsutomo, the second lord of the Owari domain, development of the previously neglected Furuyashiki area began.

Starting with the issuance of a code for Gifu Town in 1654, the Owari domain established a foundation for its control over Gifu Town, including the preparation of town maps and surveys to ascertain information about the local residents.

The foundation of Shoboji Temple was carried out as part of the development plan for Furuyashiki area.

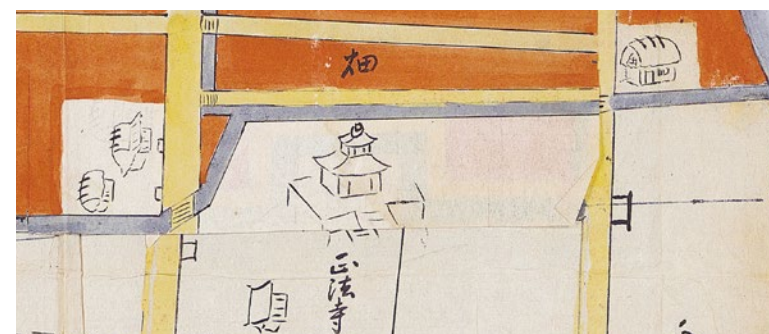


Partial Map of Gifu, Atsumi District, Noshu (present-day southern Gifu Prefecture), 1654 (Hosa Library, Nagoya)

The record of the life of the monk Ko-on describes the circumstances of the founding of Shoboji Temple. According to the record, it seems that Ko-on established a missionary base in accordance with the instruction of Daikyu (Ko-on’s teacher) that “a new temple should be established at the foot of Mt. Kinka,” and invited Sengai (Daikyu’s teacher and the 6th abbot of Manpukuji Temple) as the founder.

Shortly after its founding, Shoboji Temple was organized into its proper form as a temple. It was destroyed by fire around 1703, but was later rebuilt.

The road and waterway were replaced when the Great Buddha Hall was built.



Map of Mt. Kinka area, Gifu
(The above image is a part of the Great Buddha Hall) (Owned by Gifu Prefectural Library)



Great Buddha's Interior – Head Structure



Great Buddha's Interior –
Internal Structure of the Body

The circumstances leading up to the construction of the Great Buddha can be confirmed by various documents, including a 1794 visit to Shoboji Temple by Tanabe Seiroku, a samurai from the Kano domain. At that time, the Great Buddha Hall had not yet been built, and the head of the Great Buddha and Five Hundred Arhat statues were in the process of being constructed. It was rumored to be the third largest statue of the Great Buddha after the one at Hokeji Temple in Kyoto and the one at Todaiji Temple in Nara. He also noted the way the Great Buddha was constructed, stating that the base was assembled with baskets, covered with a thick layer of issaikyo (a collection of Buddhist scriptures and commentaries), made of washi [Japanese paper]], and then gilded.

In fact, the head is roughly shaped by weaving bamboo like a basket. The body, on the other hand, is constructed in a slightly different manner. The framework is made of wood with pillars, and the earthen wall base is made of bamboo. The bamboo is arranged vertically and horizontally to form a lattice work, and the wall is shaped with a thick layer of wall clay. A notable feature of this construction is that it employs techniques similar to those used in traditional Japanese walls.

The Great Buddha Hall, where the Great Buddha is enshrined, was built in parallel with the construction of the statue of the Great Buddha. It was discovered that the roof tiles of the hall bear an inscription indicating the year 1804.

Thus, the Great Buddha Hall and the Great Buddha took many years to complete, but an investigation of the traces remaining in the building materials of the Great Buddha Hall revealed a remarkable fact.

Although the Great Buddha Hall was completed around 1810, a major renovation and expansion took place a little over ten years later.



Gifu Great Buddha

© Tomomi Takano

The Birth of the Gifu Great Buddha

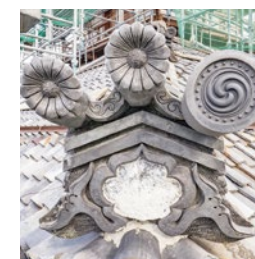
In 1787, about 100 years after Shoboji Temple was founded, the 11th abbot Ichu appealed for permission to build the Great Buddha.

Why did he want to build the Great Buddha?

There are various theories as to the reason, but it is believed that it was to offer memorial services to the victims of wars and natural disasters in various regions, and to offer memorial services to those who died in the area, which was once a major battlefield. Also, the social climate was unstable, with a series of disasters and incidents.

However, the project to build the Great Buddha was extremely difficult and took many years to complete. According to the records of Shoboji Temple, it was completed around 1810, and in 1832, the abbot of Manpukuji Temple was invited to attend the Eye-opening ceremony of the statue. At that time, an envoy from the lord of Owari domain attended the ceremony, which is said to have been the most exciting event since the entry of Oda Nobunaga into Gifu Castle.

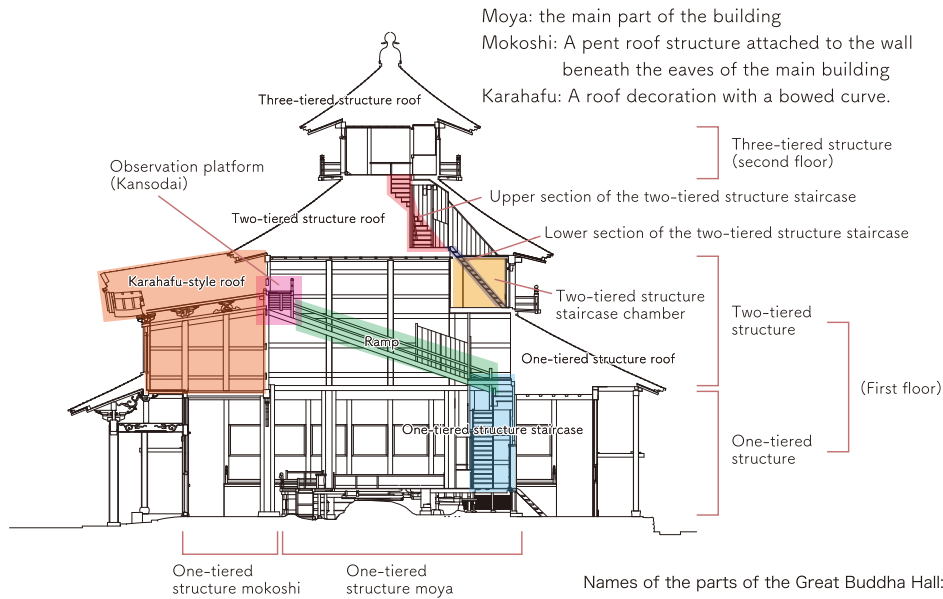
The tile is inscribed “Bunka Gan (1804)”.



Onigawara (ridge-end tile)
of two-tiered structure

It is known that the Great Buddha Hall underwent two major renovations and expansions before reaching its present form.

Analysis of traces of architectural elements in the original Great Buddha Hall, completed around 1810, indicates that the exterior was double (now triple) layered on the outside, while the interior was a single-layered structure with no ceiling. Subsequently, the first additions and alterations were made between 1823 and 1829. During that time, the interior ceiling, the karahafu-style roof on the front of the hall, and the double-rim decoration were added, as well as an observation platform (kansodai) inside the hall, making it look similar to the current Great Buddha Hall.



Renovated and Expanded Great Buddha Hall

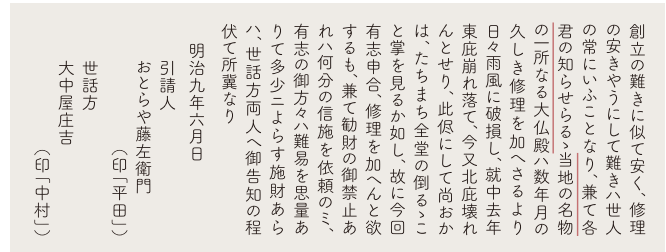


Visitation records of 1824

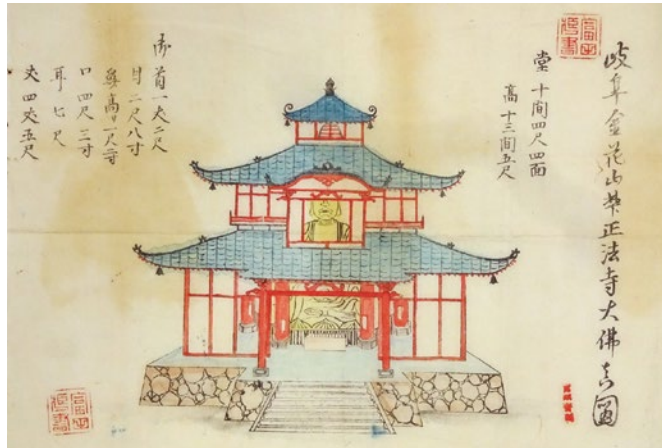


Dragon and clouds painting on the karahafu-style roofed ceiling
dragon scales in upper left, face in lower left

When was the second renovation and expansion done?



A note with Gifu Kiikasanroku Shoboji Daibutsu Shinzu: the fundraising appeal for repairs
(Owned by the Gifu Prefectural Library)



Gifu Kinkasanroku Shoboji Daibutsu Shinzu
(True image of the Great Buddha at Shoboji Temple, located at the foot of Mt. Kinka in Gifu),
1876 (Owned by Gifu City Museum of History)

There are interesting documents supporting the renovations and expansions made at this time.

One is the graffiti left by visitors (visitation records). Graffiti left by past visitors to the Great Buddha Hall are found throughout the temple. The oldest graffiti that can be found today is written on the wall of the observation platform. It was written in 1824, so it can be presumed that the observation platform was added around this time.

The other is a painting of a dragon on the ceiling of the karahafu-style roof. It is painted in ink, and although it is difficult to visually confirm due to its age, infrared photography has revealed the existence of the dragon painting. It is known that this dragon painting was donated in 1823. As with the graffiti by visitors, it is an important document for estimating the date of the renovations and expansions.



Munafuda (Building plaque) of 1876 Renovations

The second renovation and expansion took place between 1876 and 1877, alongside the repairs of the Great Buddha Hall. A fundraising appeal for the repairs, initiated primarily by local volunteers in 1876, still exists today. According to this document, the hall at the time was in a state of near-collapse. To maintain the Great Buddha Hall, which is one of the “notable landmarks” in the area, donations were collected for repairs and a new three-tiered structure was added. In addition, the ramp to the observation platform was added, and the Five Hundred Arhat statues currently housed in the hall were repaired.

Thus, after numerous renovations and expansions, the Great Buddha Hall took on its present appearance.

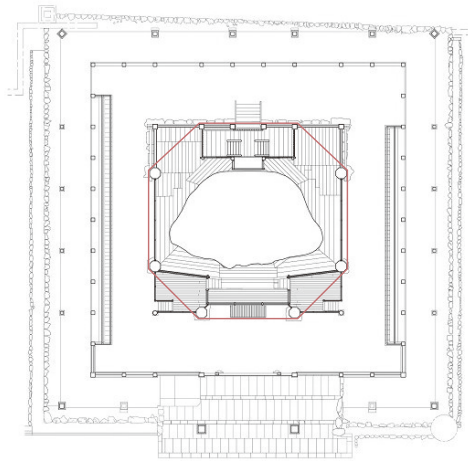
*Currently, entry to the observation platform is not permitted.

Chronological Table Related to Shoboji Temple

| Era | Year | Events | Sources, etc. |
|--------|---|--|--|
| Edo | 1654 | Around this time, the development of the Furuyashiki (Old Residence area) begins under the second lord of the Owari domain, Tokugawa Mitsutomo. Ingen Ryuki, the founder of the Obaku school arrives in Japan. | |
| | 1661 | Ingen Ryuki establishes Obaku-san Manpukuji Temple. | |
| | 1683 | Monk Ko-on establishes a missionary base at the foot of Mt. Kinka and welcomes Sengai as the founder. | The front plaque of the Great Buddha Hall, "Shishikutsu (Lion's Cave)" (1673, written by Ingen at the age of 82) |
| | | Destroyed by fire around 1703. | |
| | 1713 | Was it rebuilt around this time? | Inscription on the seated statue of Sengai Shoan inside the Great Buddha Hall |
| | 1787 | The 11th abbot Ichu appeals for approval to build the Great Buddha. | |
| | 1794 | [Records of Tanabe Seiroku, a samurai of the Kano domain] The head of the Great Buddha is built and about 200 statues of Five Hundred Arhats are made. The Great Buddha Hall is not completed yet. | |
| | | Were the road and waterway realigned or redirected at this time with the construction of the Great Buddha Hall? | |
| | 1797 | [Records of the Ishiko Family, Elders of the Owari Domain] The head and arms of the Great Buddha are still under construction. The site of the Great Buddha Hall is marked with ropes, and donated timber can be seen. Some of the Five Hundred Arhat statues have also been completed. | |
| | 1804 | | Carved inscriptions on the two-tiered onigawara (ridge-end tile) |
| | 1805 | [Records of Yoshida Masanao] Looking around at the Five Hundred Arhats. The Great Buddha Hall is halfway completed. | |
| | 1810 | Initial construction of the Great Buddha Hall is completed. | |
| | 1811 | The Great Buddha Eye-Opening ceremony is held, welcoming Tokuhon Shonin, a revered high-ranking monk of the Jodo school of Buddhism. | |
| | 1810–1811 (Initial construction) Single-tiered structure with a mokoshi (pent roof) attached (exterior with a two-tiered appearance), with a kohai (a roof structure over the steps in front of the hall), no karahafu-style roof on the front, no double-rim decoration, and no ceiling in the moya (main hall). | | |
| | 1815 | Monk Ichu (who appealed for approval to build the Great Buddha) passes away, and leadership passes to Koso's (the next abbot) hands. | |
| | 1823 | | Inscription on the karahafu-style ceiling painting (Dragon and clouds) |
| | 1824 | | The oldest visitation records to the Great Buddha Hall |
| | 1829 | The Great Buddha and the Great Buddha Hall are completed. A statue of Yakushi Nyorai (the Medicine Buddha) is enshrined inside the Great Buddha. | |
| Meiji | 1823–1829 (First major renovation) Additions of front karahafu-style roof, a staircase to the two-tiered structure at the rear of the naijin (inner sanctuary) and double-rim decoration / Openings on both sides of the rear and front karahafu-style roofs / Additions of an observation platform on the inner front of the two-tiered structure's interior, and the ceiling in the moya (main hall) | | |
| | 1832 | The Eye-Opening ceremony is held during the tenure of the 12th abbot Koso. An envoy an envoy from the lord of Owari domain also attends. | Inscription on the incense stand in front of the hall, "Year of Tenpo 3 (1832)" |
| | 1833 | Koso passes away. | |
| | 1854 | The Ansei Earthquake occurs. | |
| | 1858 | (Due to the Ansei Earthquake?) Since the Great Buddha Hall, the Great Buddha, and the Five Hundred Arhat statues are severely damaged, the Owari domain grants permission to solicit donations for their repair. | |
| | 1876 | Raises funds for repairs to restore the Great Buddha Hall. (the Great Buddha Hall is in a dangerous condition with its eaves collapsed and at risk of falling down.) | Inscriptions on the munafuda plaque Carved inscriptions on the one-tiered and three-tiered onigawara (ridge-end tile) |
| | 1877 | | Inscriptions on the one-tiered structure gate doors, and inscriptions on the one-tiered and three-tiered sliding doors Carving of the shumidan (main altar) |
| | 1876–1877 (Second major renovation) Addition of three-tiered structure (second floor) / Modifications to the circulation routes of the two-tiered and three-tiered structures (including renovation of the rear staircase in the inner sanctuary, addition of a ramp, modification of the staircase chamber at the rear of the two-tiered structure, and installation of a new staircase to the three-tiered structure) / Alteration of the shumidan (main altar) *Repairs are also carried out on the entire structure | | |
| | 1879 | Large-scale repairs are made to the Five Hundred Arhat statues. | Inscription on the Five Hundred Arhat statues (1879–1881) |
| | 1891 | Suffers damage from the Nobi Earthquake | |
| Taisho | 1903 | Donations for the repair of the Great Buddha Hall are solicited, primarily from influential figures within the city. | |
| | 1904 | The repair of the Great Buddha Hall is carried out. | |
| | 1915 | The Great Buddha Hall is introduced as a landmark of Gifu City. | |
| Showa | 1959 | Suffers damage from Isewan Typhoon | |
| | 1960 | The repair of the Great Buddha Hall is carried out. | Plaque displayed inside the Great Buddha Hall |
| | 1974 | The Great Buddha is designated as an Important Cultural Property of Gifu Prefecture. | |
| | 1975 | The repair of the Great Buddha Hall is carried out. | Plaque displayed inside the Great Buddha Hall |
| Heisei | 2014 | Shoboji Temple becomes an important component of the Cultural Landscape "Cultural Landscape of Gifu in the Midstream Region of the Nagara River." | |
| | 2015 | The Great Buddha Hall is designated as an important cultural property of Gifu City. | |

The Value of Shoboji's Great Buddha Hall and Gifu Great Buddha

1 Great Buddha Hall, a huge space for enshrining the Great Buddha

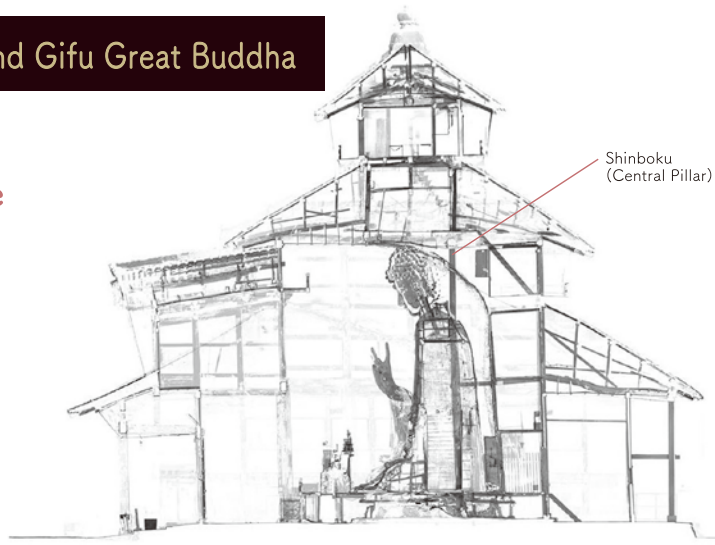


Shoboji's Great Buddha Hall, First floor plan

2 Unique structure of the Great Buddha and Great Buddha Hall as a single structure

The Great Buddha Hall was built in parallel with the Great Buddha because a large covering was necessary to protect it. The statue was made by layering paper with sutra texts and lacquered foil over a clay core, requiring substantial protection from the elements. Inside the statue of the Great Buddha stands a thick pillar called "shinboku," which directly supports the roof structure of the hall, so that the hall and the Great Buddha can be seen as a single structural unit. This is a very unique structure that has never been seen anywhere else.

2



Orthoimage: East-West Cross Section of Shoboji's Great Buddha Hall

In order to enshrine a Great Buddha over 10 meters tall, a massive space is required. The interior and structure of the Great Buddha Hall were designed specifically with the objective of housing the giant statue. The most distinctive feature of the hall is that the octagonal columns are arranged in an octagonal shape to form a large space, which is a unique form not found anywhere else.



The Shinboku Running Through the Great Buddha and Its Halo

The making of Kappa Daibutsu at Shinagawa Kaianji Temple in Edo (present Tokyo)

5 An example of the late modern period's entertainment culture, stemming from the tradition of Kappa Daibutsu (Kappa Great Buddha).



Katsushika Hokusai, "Nanasatofuki (volume 2)" (Owned by Waseda University Library)

The period when the 11th abbot Ichu planned the construction of the Great Buddha coincided with the popularity of Kappa Daibutsu in Edo (present Tokyo), which were constructed as part of entertainment shows. The Kappa Daibutsu was made similarly to the Gifu Great Buddha, using a large tree as its shinboku, then weaving bamboo around it to form a rough shape, and finally covering it with paulownia oil paper (kappa) to complete the statue.

It is speculated that the construction of the Gifu Great Buddha was influenced by the techniques used in making the Kappa Daibutsu.



The Five Hundred Arhat statues enshrined in the Great Buddha Hall

3 The Great Buddha Hall houses the Five Hundred Arhats, serving the function of the Arhat Hall

An Arhat (Rakan) is someone who has practiced the Buddhist path, escaped the cycle of delusion, and attained the state of having severed worldly desires. During the Edo period (1603–1867), the worship of the Five Hundred Arhats became popular, and statues of the Five Hundred Arhats were created across Japan.

The Five Hundred Arhat statues of Shoboji Temple were created alongside the Great Buddha. Initially, they were enshrined in a separate building, but around 1960, they were moved into the Great Buddha Hall. The 108 remaining statues were repaired and refurbished between 1879 and 1881, as part of the large-scale restoration project of the Great Buddha Hall and the Great Buddha that took place from 1876 to 1877.

4 Pilgrimage architecture that allows visitors to walk around the interior of the Great Buddha Hall and worship the Great Buddha from nearby

4

In the late Edo period (mid-18th to mid-19th century), structures known as "sazae-do" appeared in the Kanto and Tohoku regions. These buildings, which allowed visitors to walk around the interior of the Buddhist hall for worship, attracted the attention of the general public. Among them, some gained popularity by serving as observation platforms that offered views of the surrounding landscape.

The changes in the pilgrimage pathways at the Great Buddha Hall (such as the route leading from the double-rim decoration to the observation platform via the stairs installed during the 1823–1829 renovation and expansion, and the modifications to the pilgrimage path following the 1876–1877 addition of the three-tiered structure and ramps) reflect the influence of such pilgrimage architecture.



The ramps and observation platform inside the Great Buddha Hall

The skill and strength of Gifu Town in creating and preserving the Great Buddha Hall and the Great Buddha

6

The completion of the Great Buddha Hall and the Great Buddha can be attributed to the fact that Gifu Town served as a hub for distributing goods using the Nagara River. Timber, bamboo, and washi paper were transported from upstream, and local cultural crafts such as Gifu umbrellas and Gifu lanterns flourished. It is believed that the construction of the Great Buddha Hall and the creation of the Great Buddha were made possible through the contributions and cooperation of the local people, including donations of materials.

Furthermore, major repairs, renovations and expansions in the past have been supported by the local community (mainly Gifu Town), and have kept the building as it is today.

3D surveying was conducted to record the current status of Shoboji's Great Buddha Hall and the Great Buddha, and an introductory video was created using the surveyed data. For more information, click here →



Shoboji's Great Buddha Hall and the Great Buddha using 3D surveying data (created by Kyoto Institute of Technology)

