



□ Shodendo with cherry blossoms  
Photo: Akagi Hitori/ PIXTA

# Kangiin Shodendo: Exquisite Carvings and Cherry Blossoms

Kangiin Shodendo, a national treasure, is renowned for its beautiful carvings and as a place for viewing cherry blossoms in the spring.

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**M**enuma Shodenzan Kangiin Temple (hereinafter Kangiin) is a Buddhist temple founded in 1179 in Kumagaya City, Saitama Prefecture, neighboring Tokyo. Saito Sanemori, a renowned military commander of the twelfth century who appears in *Heike monogatari* (Tale of the Heike), founded the temple in

his later years to be the object of worship of the people. The temple enshrines Daisho Kangiten (also known as “Shoden-Sama”), one of the guardian deities of Buddhism and the principal deity that Sanemori worshipped.

The main building, the Shodendo, is a designated national treasure. It is painted gold and vermilion and covered in elabo-

rate, richly colored carvings that captivate visitors.

Kangiin has been rebuilt several times due to fire and flood damage. The current main building was completed in 1779.

Suzuki Eizen, head of the temple, says, “Many of the famous national treasure buildings in Japan were built by powerful figures of their era, whereas the



■ Detail of a carving in which two goddesses, Kisshoten and Benzaiten, play *sugoroku*, a board game



■ Menuma Shodenzan Kangiin Temple  
Photo: Tanaka Satoshi

current Shodendo building was built with only donations from the general public. At that time, almost all the people living in the region were poor farmers. They endured difficult times with flooding and other disasters, but two or three generations—parents, children and grandchildren—cooperated to donate money for construction over more than fifty years, resulting in the creation of this magnificent building. We can see that the Kangiin was the object of worship of the people.”

Major repairs taking approximately seven years began in 2003, approximately 240 years after the building was originally completed, bringing the Shodendo back to its beautiful state.

Suzuki explains, “On the north side of the building, there is an engraved image of two goddesses, Kisshoten and Benzaiten, playing *sugoroku* (a board game). Bishamonten, Kisshoten’s husband, is absorbed watching them play the



■ Statue of Saito Sanemori

game, so he doesn’t notice there is a demon nearby. It is humorous and makes us smile. I think that this scene harbors a wish for a peaceful world in which deities are able to relax and play games, where they are not too busy saving people.”

Kangiin is also famous as a place for viewing cherry blossoms. Now is the time of year when the beauty of the richly colored main building stands out even more, surrounded by the faint colors of the cherry blossoms as spring is in full swing. 