

A Temple to Protect from Calamity and Pray for Happiness

Suo Kokubunji was founded in 741 at the decree of Emperor Shomu (701–756). With a reign marked by rebellions, natural disasters, and epidemics, Emperor Shomu believed that Buddhism could help restore peace and stability to his realm, and ordered the construction of state-maintained temples, or *kokubunji*, around Japan. The greatest of these was Todaiji in Nara, originally known as Yamato no Kokubunji. Sixty-eight of these state-maintained temples were built in total. In the ensuing 1,300 years, however, most of them collapsed, burned down, or were moved from their original sites.

Suo Kokubunji is unique in that it still stands in its original precincts (though the temple compound is now slightly shorter on its east-west axis) and with many of its key buildings still in their original locations. This fact was established when the main hall, or *kondo*, was restored between 1997 and 2004 and the bases of the original pillars were found directly beneath the present ones.

The main hall was erected in the late eighteenth century by Mohri Shigetaka, which is why the crest of the Mohri clan is carved into the beams of the *kobai*, the roof above the stairs leading into the building. The two-story hip-and-gable roof makes for a massive and imposing structure. In the restoration, weathered old tiles were used for the front side of the roof, while newer ones of a uniform color were used on the back. The main hall contains some fifty Buddhist images, of which the most important is the Healing Buddha.