

Pseudo-Western Architecture at the Former Kaichi School Building

The Former Kaichi School Building is one of the most famous examples of pseudo-Western (*giyōfū*) architecture, a style that was popular in the 1870s. The asymmetrical, two-story structure is built mainly of wood, but aspects of its design were intended to replicate the appearance of stone or brick. This fusion of styles was pioneered by Japanese carpenters, who attempted to imitate the designs of Western buildings using traditional Japanese construction methods. The resulting buildings have a distinctive combination of Eastern and Western design elements.

Many *giyōfū* elements can be seen in the building's façade. Sections of stonework along the lower portion of the first floor and at the corners of the building (called "quoining") are oddly flat. In actuality, this "stone" and "brick" was fabricated from wood, stucco, and paint. Similar techniques were used to make the faux brickwork on the frontispiece and octagonal tower. This representation of one material with another is a defining trait of pseudo-Western architecture.

The Balconied Frontispiece

The balconied frontispiece at the main entrance is one of the most prominent features of the Former Kaichi School Building. It spans both stories of the structure, and its motifs exemplify the mixing of Japanese and Western elements that is common in pseudo-Western architecture. These are some of the uniquely *giyōfū* traits found in the frontispiece:

The lower level is decorated with carvings of waves and a dragon. It is thought that the dragon was taken from Jōrinji, a nearby Buddhist temple. This motif of a dragon surrounded by waves is distinctly Eastern in origin. It is likely an homage to the Chinese "Legend of the Dragon Gate," in which a carp swims up a waterfall and is transformed into a dragon. The ferociousness of the carved dragon on the frontispiece presents a stark contrast to the delicate, curving lines of the metal light fixtures that are placed on either side of the entrance.

The balcony's upper level is decorated with a more markedly Western motif: a pair of cheerful cherubs who hold a banner bearing the name of the school. The design was likely based on the logo of the *Tokyo Daily News* (*Tōkyō Nichiichi Shimbun*), a major newspaper that had a wide readership in Matsumoto. The cherubs are situated within the

arch of a curved gable (*karahafu*). This type of gable would more commonly be seen at temples or shrines, and its presence here highlights the mix-and-match nature of *giyōfū* architecture.

Although there appears to be a door leading out to the balcony, this aperture is one of the windows of the lecture hall. The half-round transom window is made from pieces of imported colored glass, which was a rare building material in the 1870s. The elaborate pattern resembling a wrought-iron fence that surrounds the window is a characteristic trademark of the building's designer, local master carpenter Tateishi Seijū (1829–1894). The “iron” was meticulously created using plaster.

Perhaps surprisingly, the frontispiece looked different for much of the building's history. Most of the school building's iconic *giyōfū* design elements were removed in the late 1890s, after the building was heavily damaged by flooding of the nearby Metoba River. The dragon, cherubs, curved gable, and intricate stucco designs were all replaced with a modest, triangular dormer gable on the roof. When the Former Kaichi School Building was relocated in 1964, the frontispiece was restored to its original appearance.

The Octagonal Tower

An octagonal tower is centered on the roof above the frontispiece. In the late nineteenth century, carpenters thought of rooftop towers as one of the defining features of a proper Western-style building. At the time of its original construction in 1876, the Former Kaichi School Building's tower, with its weathervane and lightning rod, likely made the school one of the tallest buildings in the area alongside Matsumoto Castle. The school stood out against the surrounding landscape of lower-profile structures as a landmark of modernity and progress.