

The Stone of Admonishment

An 8-meter-tall stone stands on the eastern edge of Kasumigajo Castle Park, at the former site of the gate samurai passed through when entering or leaving the castle grounds. Inscribed on the stone are four lines of poetry:

Your wages and your stipend
Are the people's grease and sweat.
To oppress the people is easy,
To deceive heaven is not.

This admonishment to domain samurai to treat the people of Nihonmatsu with respect was inscribed on the stone in 1749 by order of Niwa Takahiro, fifth daimyo of the Nihonmatsu domain. Takahiro was a reform-minded ruler who had hired Confucian scholar Iwaida Sakuhi to advise him on ways to rectify and improve the domain's governance, and the stone was one of

Sakuhi's suggestions. The path here at the time was lower than the street today, making the stone an even more imposing presence that loomed overhead as domain officials passed by.

The lines are excerpted from a longer poem on a similar stele erected by Meng Chang, last emperor of the Later Shu dynasty in tenth-century China. Meng's example inspired the creation of numerous steles across China over the centuries to come, as Sakuhi would have known.

Records state that the stone served its intended purpose, inspiring the domain's samurai to show greater diligence and respect for the people. However, a rumor eventually spread among the farmers of Nihonmatsu that the poem was to be read backwards as an exhortation to work people

harder and take all they had. The harvest was poor in 1749, and the domain soon faced a full-blown peasant rebellion. Records state that Sakuhi went to speak with the rebels himself, explaining the true intent of the inscription so masterfully that many were brought to tears as they called an end to the

rebellion.