

# MATERIAL AND ORNAMENT IN KATSURA AND NIKKO

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## INTRODUCTION

The Katsura Detached Palace and the Toshogu at Nikko could not be more different. Katsura, a retreat outside Kyoto constructed in the early seventeenth century, was built for Prince Hachijo Toshihito, the younger brother of Emperor Goyozei; built in the *shoin* and *sukiya* styles, materials are used plainly and left unpainted; ornament and color are kept to a minimum.<sup>1</sup> By contrast, the Toshogu, built between 1616 and 1617 to enshrine Tokugawa Ieyasu and reconstructed between 1634 and 1636 by the third Shogun, Tokugawa Iemitsu, is an ornamental orgy: there are a total of 5,173 distinct carvings and surfaces are a riot of color.<sup>2</sup>

Yet these two buildings share a place in time and some of the best artisans of the day are known to have worked on both. The supervisor of painting at the Toshogu, Kano Tan'yu, for example, is known to have painted the *Katsuradana* in Katsura's New Shoin.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, these complexes are both products of the technological advances that occurred in construction during the immediately preceding Momoyama Era, particularly the use of ratios and proportions to determine construction dimensions (*kiwarijutsu*) and the shift from simple plans to large-scale drawings, including elevations and details.<sup>4</sup> These advances led to a period of experimentation and created opportunities for greater control of siting and the possibility of developing a unified design, clearly evidenced in both Katsura and the Toshogu.

It has been suggested that differences in supervision may account for the stylistic approaches of the two architectural groupings: Katsura is assumed to have been closely supervised by Prince Toshihito himself, while the supervisors at Nikko were builders who rose through the emerging Tokugawa bureaucracy. According to this line of reasoning, the excesses of the Toshogu are a result only of the desire of artisans to display their prowess, while Katsura reflects the refinement of the educated classes.<sup>5</sup> However, the location of decoration and the significance of ornament would reinforce the theory that the development and level of finish of both Katsura Rikyu and the Toshogu were deliberate, and were not determined by the builders alone.

## ORNAMENT

Specifics regarding the design and construction of Katsura remain controversial; although generally credited to Prince Toshihito and his son, Prince Hachijo Tshitada, it has also been at least partially credited to the warrior Toyotomi Hideyoshi, with whom Prince Toshihito had a relationship by adoption, and to Kobori Enshyu, a noted garden designer and

tea master. Robert Treat Paine and Alexander Soper dated it to the Momoyama period, which is generally agreed to have ended around 1617, while others date the earliest construction to about 1616, under the supervision of Prince Toshihito, with construction continuing through 1655, supervised by Prince Tshitada. The recent two-volume encyclopedia published by Kodansha dates the original Old Shoin and some small structures to between 1620 and 1625 and remaining construction to between 1641 and 1662, again splitting credit for supervision between the two princes.<sup>6</sup> Other recent scholarship roughly shares this dating and sequence.

At Katsura, ornament is minimal and limited; instead, materials are used decoratively to achieve a rich effect. Although the paulownia and the chrysanthemum, both signifying Prince Toshihito's position as a member of the Imperial family, are used as surface patterns, there are few other ornamental motifs. Furthermore, in the ornament that exists, the references used are unusual; rather than following Japanese conventions and referring to authority, longevity, and fortune through well-established symbols such as the peony, crane, and turtle, ornaments make modest references to the daily lives of peasants and include oars, a woman's hat, a broken pine needle (perhaps signifying loss of fortune), and birds and plants considered common (the hen and the narcissus). The architecture of Katsura referred instead, in both ornament and in surface paintings (which were also limited) to traditions in literature and philosophy. This was in keeping with the *kugesbobatto*, the restrictions the Shogun had placed on the Imperial Household around 1613, enjoining them to confine themselves to areas of scholarship and the arts (rather than politics or war). The use of some of these unpretentious symbols, though, is not wholly without reference to the larger political world; while the paulownia and chrysanthemum are also found at the Toshogu, it is notable that the wisteria, or *fujii*, linked with the court in general and particularly with the powerful Fujiwara family, is used at Katsura but is not among the 51 varieties of plants seen at the Toshogu at Nikko.

In contrast to the simplicity of Katsura, ornament at Nikko is extensive and hierarchically organized, growing thicker as one moves deeper into the complex.<sup>7</sup> The number of carvings on the three gates one passes through when approaching the main shrine increases with proximity to the inner sanctum: the outer gate has 82 carvings; the *Yomei-mon*, 508; and the *Kara-mon*, 611. These three locations, along with the Inner and Outer Shrines, account for most of the carvings of sacred animals and all of the carvings of human beings (found only in the *Yomei-mon* and the *Kara-mon*), reinforcing the significance of the Inner Shrine.<sup>8</sup> The *Yomei-mon* has forty-two carvings of people, engaged in a variety of activities: adults are found reading law or

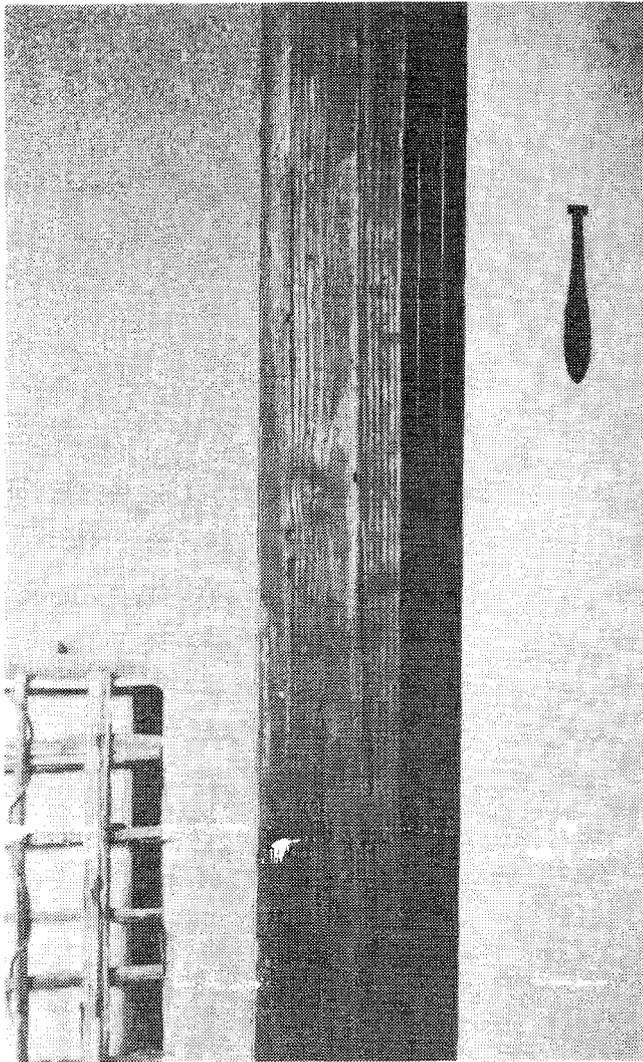


Figure 1: Detail at Katsura

playing the *koto*, while children are seen at play. (It is possible that the representations of children are intended to underscore a return to peace for Japan, after an extended period of civil strife.) The *Kara-mon*, which lies closer to the heart of the complex, has only six human figures. They are generally understood to represent Confucian myths and to underscore the importance which the Shogunate placed on Confucian values, particularly loyalty and an acceptance of the role in life which one was given. A third set of figures, however, celestial maidens, are found only on the *Kara-mon*, the Outer Shrine, and the Inner Shrine, reinforcing the particularly sacred character of these areas.

Ornament is also particularly concentrated on the front elevations of structures, relating it more closely to the processional nature of the shrine.<sup>9</sup> The front of the *Yomei-mon* is the only part of the inner precinct of the shrine that would be seen by retainers and housemen of lower rank who came to the compound with *daimyo*, as one's ability to penetrate deeply into the complex was once related to status, as it still is today at *Ise Jingu*. The significance of decoration at this gate is reinforced by its siting; it stands at the top of a stair, so that when one looks up at the shrine, the full impact of the ornament is appreciated at once.

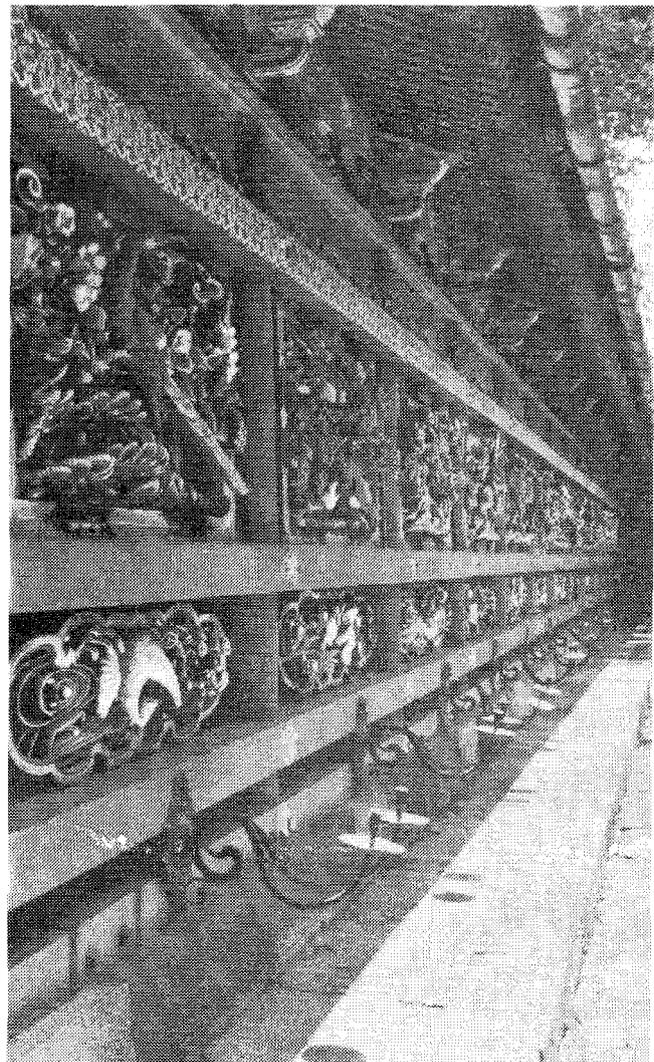


Figure 2: Carvings at the Toshogu

The site most useful in making my point briefly, though, is the ornament in the paired Shogunal Chamber and Cloistered Prince's Chamber of the Worship Hall of the Toshogu, where carving is the most intricate and most complex. Notably, in this area painted surfaces are minimal and unfinished tropical woods wrap each of these rooms. The unfinished character of these woods seems to be related to the fact that they are imported and are of great value. (The same woods, incidentally, are also used in the *Katsuradana* at Katsura, often considered one of the most important spaces in that building). These woods include betel palm, Chinese quince, rosewood, ironwood, sappanwood, black persimmon, and ebony.<sup>10</sup> The Shogunal Chamber is decorated with carvings of hollyhocks and of phoenixes in paulownia trees; the leaves of the former made up the crest of the Tokugawa family, while the latter was thought to signify the birth of a wise and virtuous emperor.<sup>11</sup> The Prince's Chamber incorporates the flower of the Imperial Family crest, the 16-petalled chrysanthemum. However, additional motifs are the few hawks existent in the complex—most commonly identified with warriors, and a favorite of Tokugawa Ieyasu—attacking a rabbit. To my knowledge this is also the only violent relationship depicted between carved animals; the Toshogu is more noted for harmonious images of animals not normally seen at rest to-

motif	Yomei-mon	Kara-mon	Outer Shrine	Inner Shrine
human figures	42	6		
celestial maidens		1	1	2

Table 1: The shift from human to celestial figures relates to the hierarchical ranking of the location

gether, such as a cat and a bird, thus suggesting a desire for national peace. Interestingly enough, the value each these rooms holds in the politics of the shrine is reinforced today in their current use. The Shogun's Chamber is pristine and exhibited to tourists as an important part of the Outer Shrine, while a jumble of trinkets intended for sale are stored in the Prince's Chamber.

A comparison of the types of motifs at the shrine complex yields other relevant observations: the most common flower, for example, is the peony, a symbol of authority and a reference to China, the former seat of learning and technological prowess. The only insect shown is the butterfly, a symbol of rebirth, eschewing even the dragonfly, which was generally identified with warriors because it resembled a knot often used in battle garments. (The cherry, also identified with samurai, is found only 14 times.) On the other hand, there is an astonishing variety of birds (47 different types), thought to be the carriers of spirits, and a variety of animals thought to signify a peaceful realm. One mythical beast added a cautionary note. The *baku* was said to eat iron and copper in times of war; it was found occurring 78 times in several key locations, but over 2/3 of all the *baku* carved are found in the Inner Shrine.

The choice of these motifs cannot have been other than deliberate and would certainly not have been determined by craftspeople working for both the Shogun and the Imperial Household, especially in light of the threatening nature of the carvings in the Prince's Chamber. However, that is just what some scholars have suggested, rejecting as simplistic the argument that the difference in the styles of these two complexes is related to the fact that they played very different symbolic roles.<sup>12</sup> Yet the complex at the Toshogu clearly reflected the continuing conflicts between the Shogunate and the Imperial Household, while Katsura had no such purpose. Most notable in this regard is the fact that the reconstructions of the Toshogu began immediately following Tokugawa Iemitsu's final pilgrimage to Kyoto to demonstrate his allegiance to the Emperor in 1634. From 1634 to 1647, there were no pilgrimages and from 1647, the Shogun was able to demand that the pilgrimages switch: rather than the Shogun traveling to Kyoto to show his allegiance, the Emperor was required to regularly travel to Nikko for a religious pilgrimage, worshipping the sanctified Tokugawa Ieyasu. This surely reinforces the importance of the Toshogu as a public statement of the relationship between the Emperor and the Shogunate.

## MATERIAL

It is not only the representational features of the Toshogu's ornament which offer insights into the role of each complex, but also the use of materials. The most significant ornament in each is made of metal. (The use of imported woods at key locations is also notable and has already been briefly discussed.) At Katsura, this use of metal is limited to door pulls, nail covers, and the like, but little other ornament exists, drawing

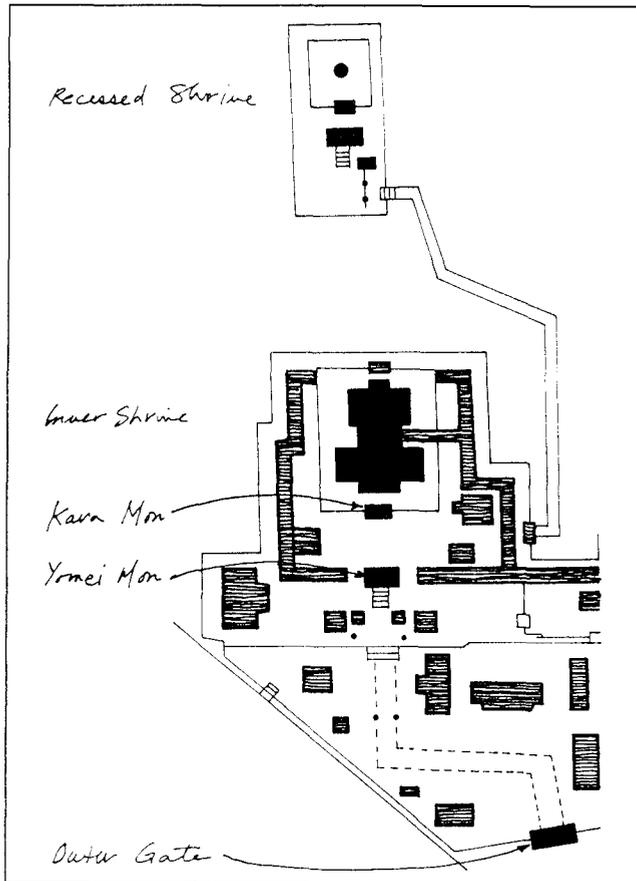


Figure 3: Plan of the Toshogu

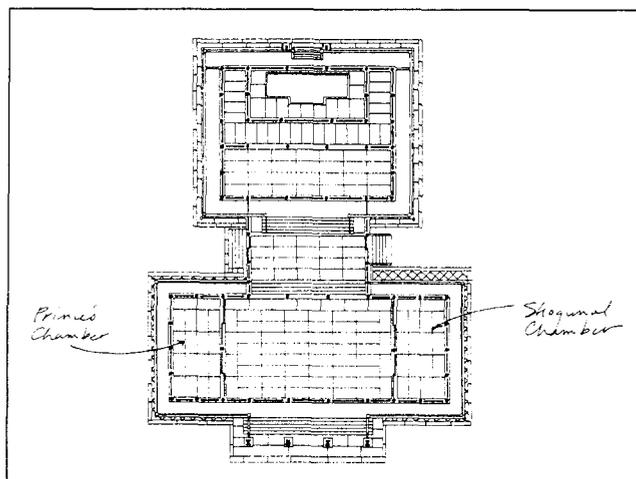


Figure 4: Plan of the Inner Shrine, showing Prince's and Shogun's chambers.

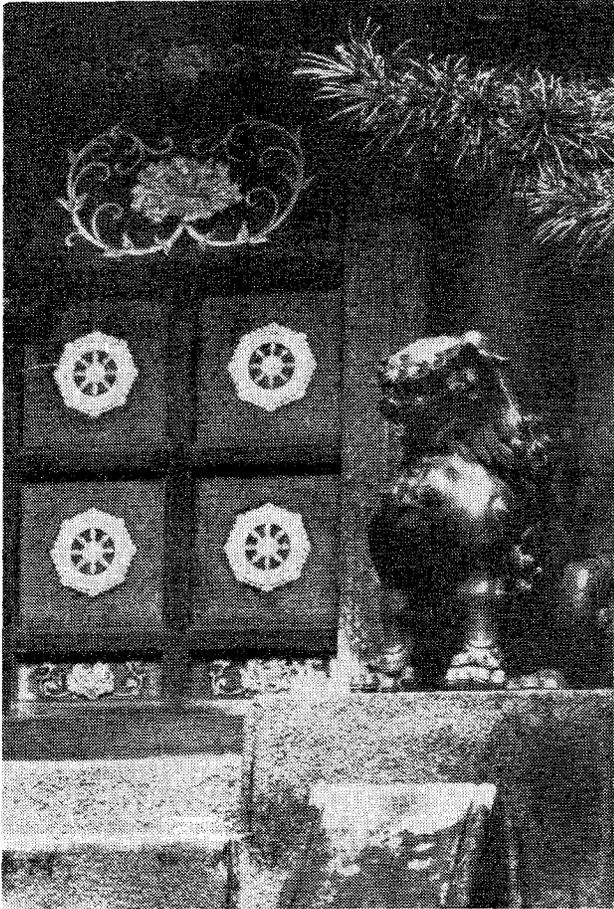


Figure 5: Worship Hall at the Recced Shrine of the Toshogu

the eye to these points. At Nikko, particularly at the Recced Shrine where Tokugawa Ieyasu is entombed, there are no riotously colored carvings.<sup>13</sup> Instead, the most sacred part of the shrine is dark and somber, finished in well-weathered bronze and copper. Contemporary visitors frequently overlook the unusual use of plate metals in this part of the complex, since large-scale metal-finished panels are certainly not out of the ordinary today. They may, though, note the extreme use of gold and gold-leaf below. Prior to the Toshogu's construction these materials were used only sparingly in Japanese architecture; their inclusion here was clearly intended to underscore political changes.

New technologies, imported from China and Europe, stimulated the recovery of precious metals in the mid sixteenth century and greater access to resources has led to the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries being called Japan's "age of silver and gold."<sup>14</sup> These metals, along with copper, were heavily exported; in the 1580s ships from Portugal alone removed 20,000 kilograms of silver annually.<sup>15</sup> But at the beginning of the seventeenth century, Tokugawa Ieyasu called for a reduction of imports. Robert LeRoy Innes, in an extensive analysis of trade in metals and its effect on the Japanese, says, "... [Tokugawa] Ieyasu's last testament praised Japan's gold and silver as superior to that of all other nations [sic] and stressed that the nation's treasure should be hoarded forever after."<sup>16</sup> Not only was there a reluctance to export (although exports did, in fact, continue to be considerable until the end of the seventeenth century), but

bronze lanterns and other metal ornaments from the Dutch were required as fealty.<sup>17</sup> Thus, the use of gold, silver, copper, and bronze as finishes throughout the complex at Nikko would have been remarkable. The political implications of these materials, especially as gifts from European powers, would not have been lost on observers of the time. It signified not only a shift, from the export of metals to Europe and the absorption of Chinese technologies to gifts of tribute from the Dutch and technological independence from China. The extravagant use of metals also demonstrated the ability of the Shogunate to squander its resources. Tokugawa Ieyasu, along with Oda Nobunaga and Toyotomi Hideyoshi, is credited with uniting the fractious country after a long period of turmoil. During the years of civil strife, expenditures on religious institutions were limited, with capital accumulation primarily related to military power. By concentrating both resources and labor on the 1634 reconstruction of the Toshogu—it is generally estimated that four-and-a-half million person-days of labor were required—Tokugawa Iemitsu signaled his firm grasp on the country and his relative disregard for defensive preparations.<sup>18</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

*Compare Katsura and Nikko, then you can distinguish clearly what is pure Japanese and what is not Japanese. This comparison is so striking that it offers the student of Japanese architecture an ideal contrast.*<sup>19</sup>

The argument that the Toshogu was "not Japanese" is based on an understanding of Japanese architecture as being simple in its form and use of materials. This interpretation is one which emerged in the early twentieth century, around the time of the rediscovery of Katsura, and was closely tied to international trends and international interpretations of Japanese architecture. Today, the Toshogu is being redeemed as offering important iconography.

The shrine at Nikko was intended to overawe and to be deliberately extravagant, while the architecture represented by Katsura had a far more limited public role, but to see only the austerity of Katsura as Japanese is grossly oversimplified. The symbolic role of the shrine, particularly as a device which demonstrated the power of the Shogun over the Emperor, was not called for at any other point in Japan's history than the Edo period, because the reversal of political hierarchies did not exist. Similarly, the manner in which the Tokugawa bureaucracy used high taxes and large public expenditures to prevent rearmament was also unique in Japan's history. It is for these reasons that the Toshogu is unusual, but clearly it is an expression of the time and of national interests. Both the Toshogu and Katsura are architectural manifestations of a singular point in the development of the country and it is two facets of the culture which they represent, not degrees of "Japaneseness."

The twentieth-century rejection of the shrine at Nikko has prevented architects from looking closely at a provocative complex. It is no longer among the landmarks deemed a necessary part of the foreigner's visit or the young architect's education. As Westerners, there is evidence that we have overlooked the significance of the Toshogu's ornaments before—the Dutch gifts to the Shogun were all ornamented with an inverted form of the Tokugawa crest—but today a renewed interest in the symbolic value of representational forms may lead to better understanding of their uses in Japan.

## NOTES

1. The main dwelling of the complex is built primarily in the *shoin* style, while ancillary teahouses are in the *sukiya* style.
2. *Shogun's Shrine: The Magnificent Nikko Toshogu. Vol. 1: Plant and Bird Carvings*, In Japanese and English, with translations by Jay Thomas. Tokyo: Graphic-sha Publishing Company, 1994. p. 130. All information related to the numbers and types of ornaments found in different parts of the complex are taken from the surveys in this book and its companion volume, *Shogun's Shrine: The Magnificent Nikko Toshogu. Vol. 2: Human and Animal Carvings/Paintings*
3. Okawa Naomi, *Edo Architecture: Katsura and Nikko, vol. 20 of The Heibonsha Survey of Japanese Art*, ed. Kamei Katsuichiro, et al. Tokyo: Weatherhill/Heibonsha, 1975. p. 129
4. *Ibid.*, p. 117
5. *Ibid.*, p. 135
6. *Japan: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*. Tokyo: Kodansha, 1993. *passim*.
7. *Shogun's Shrine, Vol. 2*, p. 130
8. *Ibid.*, p. 130
9. *Ibid.*, p. 130
10. Ogawa, p. 154
11. *Ibid.*, p. 153
12. Such as Ogawa. For a differing view, see Naito Akira, *A Princely Retreat*. Tokyo: Kodansha, 1977
13. *Shogun's Shrine, Vol. 1*, p. 130
14. Morris-Suzuki, Tessa. *The Technological Transformation of Japan: From the Seventeenth to the Twenty-first Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. p. 43 for the former and *Japan: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*, mining, for "age of..."
15. *Ibid.*, p. 43
16. Innes, Robert LeRoy. *The Door Ajar: Japan's Foreign Trade in the Seventeenth Century*. Ann Arbor: UMI, 1980. p. 299
17. See, for example, Okawa, p. 33
18. Nakane Chie and Shinzaburo Oishi, eds. *Tokugawa Japan: The Social and Economic Antecedents of Modern Japan*. Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1991, p. 28
19. Kisida [Kishida] Hideto, *Japanese Architecture*, 3rd ed., vol. 7 of the Tourist Library. Tokyo: Board of Tourist Industry, Japan Government Railways, 1940, p. 93. The differences in the spelling of Katura/Katsura and Kisida/Kishida are due to the use of differing systems of romanization used to render Japanese words into English.