

# Flowers and Birds in the Inner Palace

## The Fourth Room and the Chodai-no-ma of the Shiroshoin

**Important Cultural Property (Paintings):** Most of the murals in Ninomaru-goten Palace at Nijo-jo Castle were painted by Kano school artists during the large-scale renovation in 1626, during the time of the third Tokugawa shogun, Iemitsu (1604-51).

This year, as part of the series “Birds-and-Flowers Paintings in a Different Key,” we focus on the murals depicted in the rooms located in the northeast of each building of Ninomaru-goten Palace. These murals depict bird and flower scenes that share similarities with other rooms while also possessing distinct characteristics.

This exhibition introduces the murals of the Yon-no-ma (Fourth Room) and Chodai-no-ma located in the northeast of the Shiroshoin of Ninomaru-goten Palace.

### Murals in Yon-no-ma (Fourth Room) of Shiroshoin and Chodai-no-ma

Located deep within Ninomaru-goten Palace, Shiroshoin served as the lord's private quarters. Until the Edo period, it was called “Goza-no-ma,” but the name “Shiroshoin” became established during the Meiji period. The complex consists of Ichi-no-ma (First Room) (upper level), Ni-no-ma (Second Room) (lower level), San-no-ma (Third Room), Yon-no-ma (Fourth Room), Chodai-no-ma, and Fuzoku-no-ma (attached rooms). The First Room served as the lord's living quarters, while the other rooms likely played supporting roles.

The murals from the First Room through the Fourth Room of Shiroshoin are painted in ink and light color, with each room featuring different subjects. The First and Second Rooms depict landscapes, the Third Room shows landscapes with figures, and the Fourth Room and Chodai-no-ma feature flowers and birds. According to *Honcho Gashi*, a history of painting in Japan compiled by Kano Eino (1631-97), painting subjects followed a hierarchy, with landscapes ranking highest, followed by figures, then flowers and birds. The subjects in each room of Shiroshoin follow this hierarchical system. The ink paintings in the First through Fourth Rooms are attributed to Kano Naganobu (1577-1654).

The Fourth Room's murals depict winter scenery. Against snow-covered, white-hazed landscapes, birds command a strong presence. Coal tits fly against snowy mountains, sparrows huddle together on bamboo, moorhens peers at the water's surface, a shima-hiyodori (a kind of bulbul) perches on a snow-laden willow, and herons gather by the waterside. Each scene is full of poetry. The depiction of two sparrows in particular have long been cherished as “sleeping sparrows,” and records show they were introduced as one of Ninomaru-goten Palace's masterpieces in the Hinode Shimbun newspaper in 1886. Rather than the exotic birds like peacocks and golden pheasants in Ohiroma, or majestic birds like eagles and hawks, this room depicts humble birds like sparrows and moorhens. These birds, living bravely in the crisp cold, evoke a sense of quiet tranquility. Furthermore, camellias and plum blossoms blooming amid the cold winter landscape bring a vibrant sense of life to the scene.

While other rooms in Shiroshoin feature ink and light color paintings, the murals in the Chodai-no-ma employ rich colors and gold leaf to express autumn scenery. The paintings are divided

above and below the *nageshi* (horizontal beams), with asters and China pinks above, and red and white Japanese bush clover, Japanese valerian, and gold-leaved brushwood fences below. The Japanese bush clover, growing upward as if surging from below, is painted with effective use of empty space, creating an atmosphere of autumn solitude.

### Renovation of Shiroshoin for the Imperial Visit to Nijo-jo Castle (also known as the Kan'ei Imperial Visit)

Nijo-jo Castle was built by Tokugawa Ieyasu (1542-1616) in 1603, and was modified from its original form for Emperor Go-Mizunoo's (1596-1680) imperial visit in 1626. Ninomaru-goten Palace underwent major renovation as a palace for the third shogun Iemitsu, and Shiroshoin also received significant modifications at this time. The current Fourth Room and Chodai-no-ma were originally a single room called Ni-no-ma (Second Room), which was divided and reconstructed into two rooms. The Second Room (now Chodai-no-ma and the Fourth Room), originally on the east side, was relocated to the south of the First Room, and the First Room's configuration was changed accordingly. Previously, the *toko* (alcove) was on the west side to the viewer's right with the *chigaidana* (staggered shelves) to the left, but it was changed to the current arrangement with the *toko* on the north side to the viewer's left and the *chigaidana* to the right.

Shiroshoin was originally designed for the lord to sit facing east with his back to the west, but this major renovation changed it so he would face south. The Chinese concept of rulers sitting with their backs to the north and facing south had long been adopted in Japan, and formal reception rooms were arranged accordingly. The reception rooms in Ninomaru-goten Palace's Ohiroma and Kuroshoin were already designed for the lord to sit with his back to the north, facing south. While we cannot state definitively why Shiroshoin was changed in this way, it may have been to incorporate more formal elements into what was a private residence.

These architectural changes also affected the murals. One *tobusuma* (displayed on the right when facing forward) is shared between Chodai-no-ma and the Fourth Room.

This is evidence of how the original Second Room, spanning four bays east to west, was divided with one and a half bays for Chodai-no-ma and two and a half bays for the Fourth Room. This *tobusuma* sliding door, repainted during the renovation, shows the pampas grass and Japanese valerian of the Chodai-no-ma on the left side, and the snow-covered plum branches and bamboo of the Fourth Room on the right. A single *tobusuma* sliding door is used across two rooms separated by a pillar, which is why two different paintings appear on it. The discolored strip about 20 centimeters wide between the autumn grasses and ink painting marks where it was hidden behind the pillar.

Flowers and birds quietly dwell in the Fourth Room and Chodai-no-ma. Only the palace lord and his close attendants knew of their quiet life. This space where time flows peacefully lives on in the deepest reaches of Ninomaru-goten Palace.

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