

Kaijusenji Temple

Kaijusenji Temple is located half-way up Mount Sanjoyama, overlooking the city below with a view that takes in renowned sites like Mikanohara (an area along the river in present-day Kizugawa City), the Kunikyo Ruins (an old imperial palace), and the Kizu River (the heart of the Minami Yamashiro area). In 740, the Japanese emperor ordered the national capital to be moved to Mikanohara. According to the temple legend, Kaijusenji was built northeast of the city center, a direction traditionally occupied by the *kimon*, or demon gate. The *kimon* is located in the northeast because it is believed that this is the direction from which demons come and go, and thus is a source of bad luck. Kaijusenji Temple is believed to have been placed there to pray for the safe construction of the new capital and of Todaiji Temple's great Buddha statue. Today, however, Kaijusenji Temple is known for its view of the lower valley as well as its Five-storied Pagoda, which is a National Treasure.

History

In 740, Emperor Shomu (701–756) moved the capital to the Mikanohara area. Kunikyo, as this capital was called, functioned as the center of the state until 744. In order for the capital to be protected from evil spirits, many temples were built in this area. Kaijusenji is one such temple, built on the slopes of Mount Sanjoyama. According to *Onmyodo* (The Way of Yin and Yang), a traditional Japanese esoteric cosmology based on philosophies introduced from China in the sixth century, the northeast is an unlucky direction associated with misfortune known as *kimon*, or demon gate.

Kaijusenji Temple is thought to have been placed in the northeast in 735 to counteract the *kimon* and safeguard the area. In 1137, the original structures of Kaijusenji Temple were lost to fire, but the temple was reconstructed seventy years later in 1208 by an influential Buddhist monk named Jokei (1155–1213). At its most prosperous, the temple boasted over fifty-eight individual structures. The characters in the name Kaijusenji Temple mean sea (*ka*), dwell (*ju*), and mountain temple (*senji*), referring to the mythical pure land inhabited by Kannon (the Buddhist avatar of mercy), which is said to lie far off in the southern seas.

Treasures and Artifacts

Kaijusenji Temple also has several important works of art and cultural treasures. Among Kaijusenji Temple's structures, its five-storied pagoda is a designated National Treasure, and its Monjudo Hall is an Important Cultural Property. They were both originally constructed in the Kamakura period (1185–1333). The Standing Four Heavenly Kings (Shitenno Ryuzo) statues from the same period

used to be enshrined in the pagoda but are now entrusted to the Nara National Museum. The main hall and the sanctuary both enshrine consecrated Buddhist statues of Kannon, the beloved Buddhist avatar of compassion. These two Standing Eleven-Headed Kannon are thought to date back even earlier, to the Heian period (794–1185), and are Important Cultural Properties.