

## **Encho Matsuri: Venue (Zenshoan Temple)**

Zenshoan, a temple of the Rinzai school of Zen Buddhism, is closely associated with an epoch-making event in modern Japanese history. The temple was founded by Yamaoka Tesshu (1836–1888), a famous samurai who played a significant role in the Meiji Restoration of 1868, when the warrior-led Tokugawa shogunate was overthrown and Emperor Meiji (1852–1912) was installed as the new head of state.

Yamaoka was a high-ranking bodyguard of the last shogun, Tokugawa Yoshinobu (1837–1913), who in March 1868 dispatched his confidant to negotiate the surrender of Edo (present-day Tokyo). By this time, the revolutionary forces loyal to Emperor Meiji had gained the upper hand in the ongoing civil war and were approaching the shogunate's capital. Yamaoka managed to convince them to take the city without resorting to force, thereby saving Edo from all but certain destruction.

The civil war between the new leaders of the country and remnants of the old, however, continued until June 1869 and resulted in the death of up to 10,000 people. The souls of those who fell in the service of the emperor were enshrined at a new sanctuary named Tokyo Shokonsha (present-day Yasukuni Shrine), but those of the opposing side were afforded no such honor. Yamaoka, who went on to become a trusted advisor to and chamberlain of Emperor Meiji, decided to right this wrong. He founded Zenshoan in 1883 to remember all victims of the war, regardless of their allegiance, and to preserve the samurai traditions he saw as endangered by the new government's eager adoption of all things Western.

The name of Yamaoka's temple also has an interesting history. It originates with the Chinese-born Buddhist priest Lanxi Daolong (1213–1278), who founded Kenchoji Temple in Kamakura (south of Tokyo) and the branch of Rinzai Zen associated with it. When traveling by sea to Kamakura at some point in the thirteenth century, Lanxi Daolong lost control of his ship and was blown ashore near modern-day Yanaka, which was on the coast at the time. A local family named Tsunoya helped the shipwrecked Zen master, who presented them with a piece of calligraphy. This scroll, which bore the characters Zenshoan ("Hermitage of All Life"), was passed down in the Tsunoya family through the centuries.

In the late 1870s, imperial chamberlain Yamaoka Tesshu noticed the Lanxi Daolong

calligraphy hanging in the Tsunoya shop in Yanaka. The shopkeeper decided to present the family heirloom to the emperor's right-hand man. Yamaoka hung the scroll in his study, naming the room Zenshoan, and later adopted the same moniker for his temple—which is said to stand on the very spot where Lanxi Daolong's ship crashed ashore some 800 years ago.