

Ohara

Ohara is a village some 20 kilometers north of Kyoto. It is known for its rich connections to Buddhism, including Buddhist chanting, Imperial family connections and the cultivation of red shiso (perilla.)

Buddhism and Ohara

Buddhist priests and aristocrats fleeing internecine rivalries in Kyoto started settling in Ohara in the Heian period (794–1185). Temples were built to accommodate these newcomers. Over the years, many buildings were lost due to fire. Those that survived or were rebuilt are among the finest examples of temple architecture in Japan. Several house religious artifacts designated as National Treasures. One of the oldest and most famous temples is Jakko-in, which was established in 594 and now a convent for nuns of the Tendai school of Buddhism.

Buddhist Chanting

Ohara is known for a form of Buddhist chanting called *shomyo*, the melodic incantation of sutras. *Shomyo* was brought to Japan in the Nara period (710–794). It was popularized by priests such as Saicho (767–822), the founder of the Tendai school of Buddhism, and Ennin (794–864), one of his followers.

Imperial Connections

In 1185, the Minamoto warrior clan became the most powerful military and political force in Japan after defeating the Taira clan. Empress Dowager Taira no Tokuko (1155–1214) of the defeated Taira clan sought refuge at Jakko-in. She became a nun, taking the name Kenreimon-in and living at Jakko-in until her death.

The graves of several imperial family members are in Ohara. That of Prince Koretaka (844–897) is on a hillside overlooking the town, while the graves of Emperor Go-Toba (1180–1239) and Emperor Juntoku (1197–1242) are next to Sanzen-in Temple.