

Bonsho Bell

Bonsho are large hanging bells found throughout Japan in Buddhist temples. They are used to call monks to prayer and to mark divisions of time during the day. This Bonsho bell dates to the end of the seventh century and is the oldest extant bell of its kind in Japan. It is a designated National Treasure.

Bonsho play a significant role in Buddhist festivals, and crowds will typically gather at a temple to hear the bell ring at the end of the year. Bonsho are struck using a log or beam of wood suspended on ropes. The continental-style trailing-vine motif around the base provides yet another example of Dazaifu's long-standing ties with the outside world.

This Bonsho is one of a pair of bells from the same workshop. Its counterpart is at Myoshinji, a Buddhist temple in Kyoto. This bell was cast from bronze and is 106 centimeters high with a diameter of about 86 centimeters at its widest point. It is sometimes exhibited around Japan as an object of great historical and cultural interest.