

***Bonsho* (Temple Bell)**

The *bonsho* (temple bell) was cast in 1255, two years after Kenchoji Temple was founded. It is one of the oldest features of the temple and is designated a National Treasure. It bears an inscription by Kenchoji's founding abbot, Lanxi Daolong (1213–1278). In it, Daolong referred to himself as the abbot of “Kencho zenji” (literally “Zen temple Kencho”) which serves as proof that the temple was a dedicated Zen temple when the bell was made.

The 2.1-meter tall, 2.7-ton bell was made by Mononobe Shigemitsu, one of the most famous metalworkers of the thirteenth century. It survived the fires that destroyed most of the temple during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. During World War II, the historical status of the *bonsho* saved it from being requisitioned by the government and melted down, making it one of the few temple bells in Japan to avoid such a fate.

While the other temple buildings have tiled roofs, the bell tower retains its traditional thatched roof. Despite its age, the *bonsho* is still used for its original purpose: telling time. The bell is rung between 5 p.m. and 6 p.m. daily (depending on the season) and is also used on special occasions.