

Mishotai Shakujoto Staff Finial

A cast metal finial for a Buddhist staff or *shakujo* (*khakkhara* in Sanskrit) is enshrined at the temple. The finial is a loop of metal, with a figure of Shoden (Kangiten) at its center. Shoden, the Buddhist representation of the Hindu god Ganesha, is depicted as two elephant-headed figures in an embrace. Because of the sacred nature of the image, the finial is kept from public view in the inner sanctuary of the main hall (Shodendo) of Menuuma Shodenzan Temple. The finial is displayed only on special occasions such as the anniversary of the temple's founding.

Metal rings hang from the cast metal finials used to ornament wooden *shakujo* staffs, and the finials themselves have a sharp tip. Monks sometimes shake the staff, which causes the rings to clatter, as an accompaniment to chanting. In the past, monks carried the staff on pilgrimages where they could shake it to scare away predatory animals or use it as a weapon to protect themselves from attackers.

The Mishotai Shakujoto staff was donated to the temple in 1197 by a nephew and two grandsons of Saito Sanemori (1111–1183), the local governor who founded the temple. They dedicated the finial to commemorate the renovation of the main hall. The Mishotai Shakujoto is a National Important Cultural Property.