

Kōzanji Temple

This Sōto Zen temple is renowned for its beautiful autumn foliage and for its Butsuden Hall, a National Treasure. The temple has repeatedly featured in the region's political history ever since its founding in 1327.

Takasugi Shinsaku and the Kōzanji Uprising

A bronze statue of revolutionary Takasugi Shinsaku (1839–1867) sits astride a bronze warhorse on the temple grounds. A samurai of the Chōshū domain, Takasugi was a key figure in events leading up to the Meiji Restoration (1868). He was an ardent supporter of the movement to curtail overseas influence under the slogan “revere the emperor, expel the barbarians” (*sonnō jōi*).

On January 12, 1865, Takasugi gathered a mixed force of samurai and commoners at the temple, where he rallied them against the pro-shogunate faction within the Chōshū domain. This rebellion would come to be known as the Kōzanji Uprising. His forces included the Rikishi-tai, a unit made up mainly of sumo wrestlers and led in part by Itō Hirobumi (1841–1909), the future prime minister. Takasugi's army of just 80-odd men was able to seize a cache of gold and silver held by the pro-shogunate faction. This served to kick off a larger battle between imperial loyalists and supporters of the shogunate, ultimately culminating in the purge of the pro-shogunate elements from Chōshū. This was a significant step in the eventual overthrow of the Tokugawa regime and the beginning of the new Meiji era (1868–1912).

Butsuden Hall

The Butsuden Hall predates the founding of Kōzanji Temple and is designated a National Treasure. The hall is constructed in the Karayō (or Zen'yō) style, a form of Japanese Buddhist architecture that dates to the late twelfth or early thirteenth century. This architectural style was introduced from the Sòng dynasty. Typical features of this style include the bell-shaped windows (*katōmado*), decorative skirt roof (*mokoshi*), and tapered support pillars (*chimaki*). The roof is thatched with cypress bark.

An inscription on one of the pillars states that it was built on the fifth day of the fourth month of 1320, suggesting that the Butsuden Hall was completed not long after. This would make it the oldest Karayō-style structure in Japan with a recorded date of construction.

Shoin (Gokyō-senkyo no Ma)

This building was donated in 1835 by Mōri Motoyoshi (1785–1843), the eleventh lord of the Chōshū domain. Toward the end of the Edo period (1603–1867), as tensions grew between the shogunal government and anti-foreign extremists, a failed coup d'état in Kyoto prompted dissidents to escape the city. Seven pro-imperial officials fled on September 30, 1863, and five of them sought shelter at Kōzanji. The room they occupied is now called the *gokyō-senkyo no ma*, or “room where the five nobles hid.”