

A Guide to the Exhibition

The Temples Kanshin-ji and Kongō-ji in Japanese History



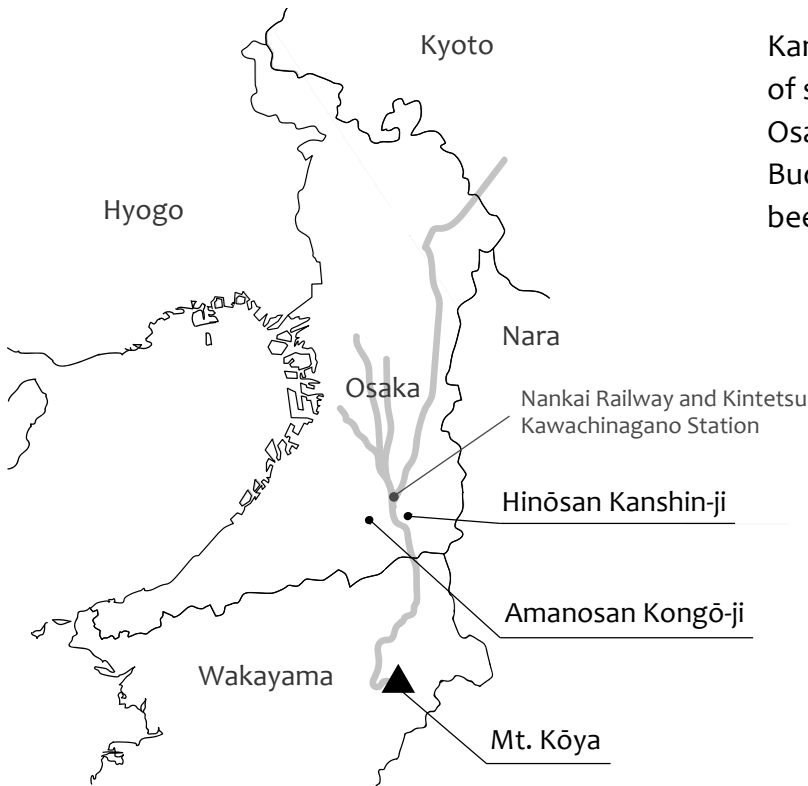
Kanshin-ji Temple

Legend traces the temple's founding to the 8th century spell master En no Ozunu. Today it belongs to the Shingon sect of Japanese Buddhism and enshrines a famous "secret icon" of Nyoirin Kannon (National Treasure).



Kongō-ji Temple

The 8th century itinerant priest Gyōki is said to have founded this temple. Today it belongs to the Shingon sect of Japanese Buddhism and enshrines a more than 3-meter tall icon of the buddha Dainichi (National Treasure).



Kanshin-ji and Kongō-ji are located at the crossroads of several ancient routes leading from Kyoto and Osaka to the sacred sites of Shingon esoteric Buddhism on Mt. Kōya. These two temples have long been the center of the region's rich Buddhist culture.

The story of the "Southern Court" shaped the history of these two temples. But what was the "Southern Court"?



Official Museum Mascot
Torarin

Special Exhibition *Kanshin-ji and Kongō-ji, Two Temples of Kawachinagano: Esoteric Buddhist Art and the Legacy of the Southern Court*
July 30–Sept. 11, 2022

Kyoto National Museum, Heisei Chishinkan Wing

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Kanshin-ji and Kongō-ji in the Age of Northern and Southern Courts

The imperial clan was divided into opposing northern and southern courts during the Nanbokuchō period (1333–1392). Kanshin-ji and Kongō-ji served as bases for the Southern Court. Emperor Go-Murakami even used the temples as temporary imperial residences!

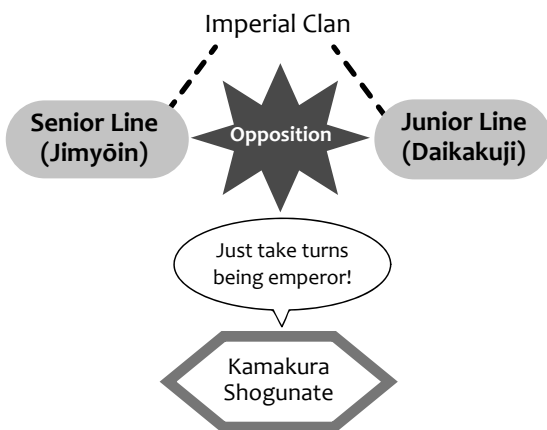
These temples shed light on the chaotic history of the fourteenth century!



A History of Opposition, Betrayal, and Loyalty

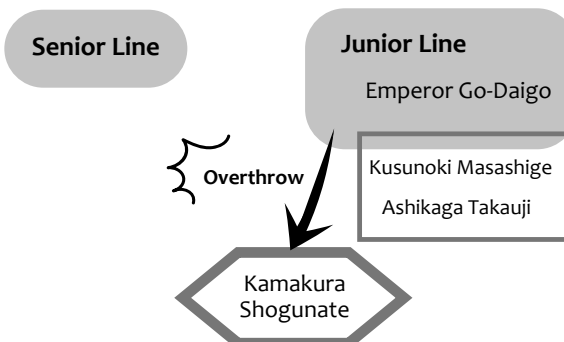
A Climactic End to the Kamakura Period (1185–1333)

The Kamakura shogunate acts as intermediary for a divided imperial house.



Fall of the Kamakura Shogunate (1333)

Emperor Go-Daigo allies with disaffected warriors to overthrow the shogunate. The legendary Kusunoki Masashige plays a key role.

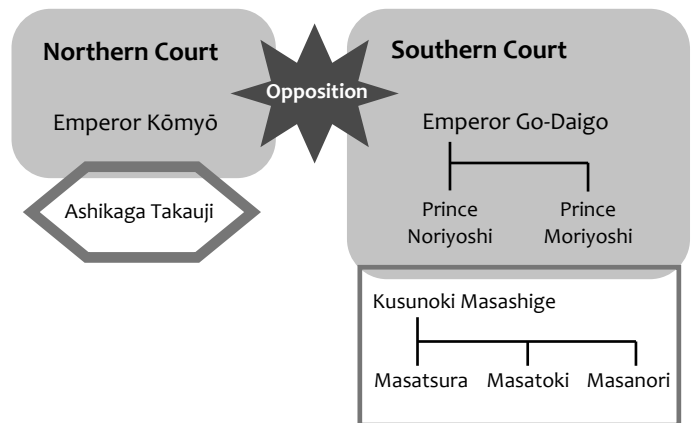


Kenmu Restoration (1334)

A new polity centered on Emperor Go-Daigo that soon ends in failure.

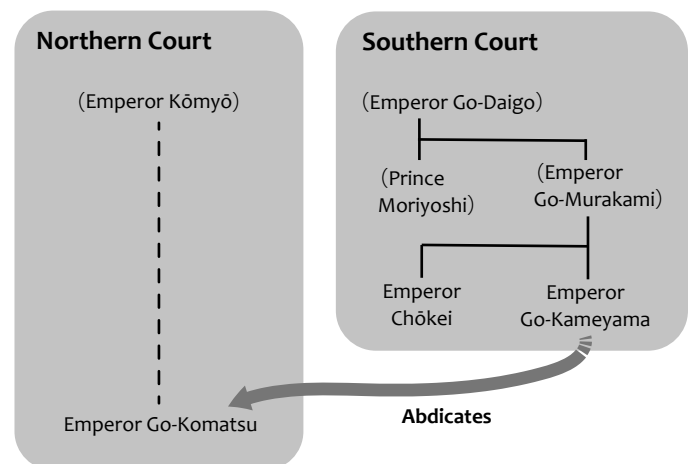
Conflict Between Northern and Southern Courts

Ashikaga Takauji betrays Go-Daigo and supports Emperor Kōmyō of the Northern Court, designating himself Japan's supreme military commander.



Re-Unification of the Northern and Southern Courts (1392)

Emperor Go-Kameyama of the Southern Court returns to Kyoto and abdicates to Go-Komatsu of the Northern Court, bringing the dramatic conflict between the two courts to an end. Kusunoki Masashige's son Masanori plays an important role in this unification.



The Southern Court and the Masashige Clan

The "Akutō" Kusunoki Masashige

The military commander Kusunoki Masashige was born in what is now Chihaya-Akasaka Village in Osaka. He is said to have studied at Kanshin-ji in his youth, and he played an active role in Emperor Go-Daigo's fight to overthrow the Kamakura shogunate. Those who opposed the shogunate at this time were designated as *akutō* (lit. "evil bands"), but Masashige and his band of warriors thrived in the Kawachinagano region. His son Masatsura also served the Southern Court. The medieval war tale *Taiheiki* encapsulates the image of Masashige as a skillful and loyal military tactician who served Go-Daigo with full devotion. These paintings of father and son were made in the early 20th century.



Masatsura

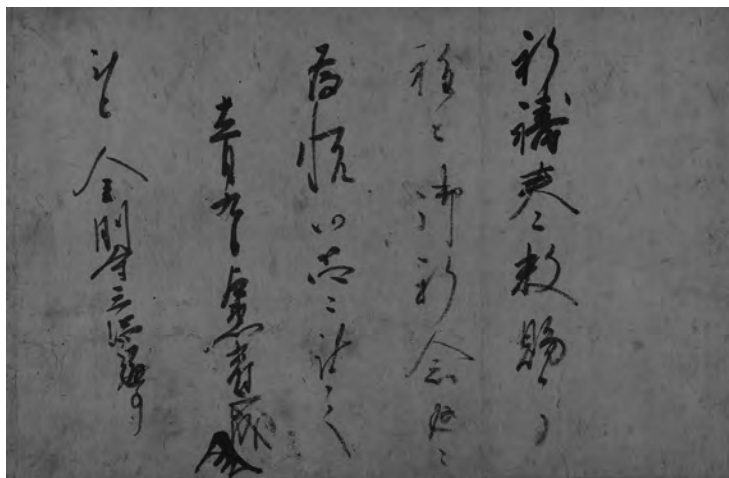


Masashige

An outlaw or a hero?
The image of Masashige
changed over time.



Kusunoki Masashige and
Kusunoki Masatsura
By Kobori Tomoto (1864–1931)
Meiji–Taishō period, 20th c.
Kanshin-ji Temple, Osaka
(on view through Sept. 11)



A Letter from Masashige

Kanshin-ji and Kōngō-ji preserve many historical documents related to the Southern Court. This letter was written by Masashige to express gratitude to Kongō-ji for offering prayers for victory in battle. It was around this time that Masashige reclaimed his fortress from the shogunate.

Important Cultural Property
Letter Signed by Kusunoki Masashige (from *Kusunoki Clan Documents*)
Kamakura period, 1332
Amanosan Kongō-ji Temple, Osaka
(on view July 30–Aug. 21)

Armor Connected to the Kusunoki Clan

This *haramaki* is one of many suits of armor preserved at Kanshin-ji and Kongō-ji with connections to the Kusunoki clan.

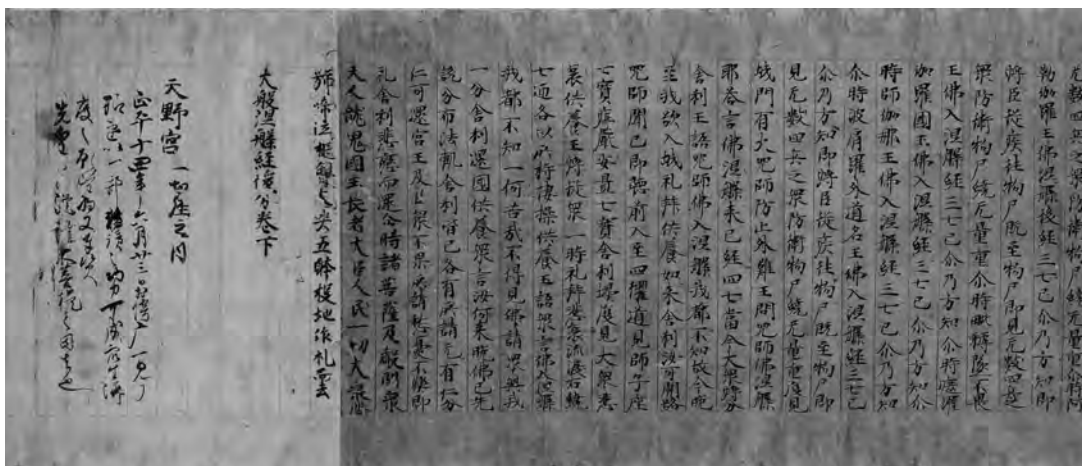
Earlier modes of warfare were dominated by warriors on horseback, but in the 14th century large groups of soldiers on foot played a central role. They wore armor called *haramaki* (lit. "belly wrap") that laced in the back and was easy to maneuver in. Originally for low-ranking soldiers, commanders also preferred this style for its convenience.

Important Cultural Property
Haramaki
Muromachi period, 15th c.
Kanshin-ji Temple, Osaka
(on view through Sept. 11)



The Southern Court Emperor Go-Murakami

Scriptures Read in Prayer for the Repose of a Mother and Father



Important Cultural Property
Latter Portion of the Nirvana Sutra, Vol. 2
Colophon by Emperor Go-Murakami
Nanbokuchō period, 1359
Amanosan Kongō-ji Temple, Osaka
(on view through Sept. 11)

Following Kusunoki Masashige's death, Emperor Go-Daigo yielded the throne to his 12-year-old son, Prince Noriyoshi (Go-Murakami) and soon passed away. The two temples Kongō-ji and Kanshin-ji served as temporary palaces for the young emperor during these trying times.

This sutra includes a colophon written by Go-Murakami shortly after the death of his mother. In it he records that he offered prayers and sutra recitations for the repose of his parents.



A Votive Icon for the Emperor

The small statue enshrined in this hexagonal shrine is Aizen Myōō, a Buddhist deity who has the power to transform love into enlightenment. He was also employed in prayers for success and for the subjugation of enemies. Go-Murakami is said to have kept this statue close to him and offered prayers to it.

Important Cultural Property
Seated Aizen Myōō (Skt: Rāgarāja) and Shrine
Kamakura–Nanbokuchō period, 13th–14th c.
Kanshin-ji Temple, Osaka (on view through Sept. 11)

Emperor as Master of the Biwa

Tradition once held that the emperor should exert positive influence over his people through his mastery of music. This is why princes began to study music from a young age.

From the reign of Emperor Go-Toba in the early 13th century, the lute-like *biwa* was the favored instrument of sovereigns. At Kongō-ji, Go-Murakami was instructed in secret songs only taught to skilled masters. This is one of three historical *biwa* preserved at Kongō-ji.

Biwa (Lute)
Nanbokuchō–Muromachi period, 14th–15th c.
Amanosan Kongō-ji Temple, Osaka
(on view through Sept. 11)

