

The history of KONGOURINJI-temple



KONGOURINJI-temple was established in obedience to an order of the Emperor Shomu in 741. This temple is sacred to the Kannon Bodhisattva carved by Gyoki Bodhisattva, the first chief priest of the temple. Thereafter, it was attended by many learned priests and grew in both size and status.

In 850, it became a Tendai Buddhism temple after Jikaku Daishi came from the Enryakuji of Mount Hiei.

In 1183, Minamoto Yoshitsune, younger brother of the shogun, dropped in at this temple while he was on an expedition. He prayed for his victory and consecrated his sword.

In 1246, a three-storied pagoda was constructed.

In 1274, Japan was invaded for the first time by Mongolian empire. A great number of priests held rites in hope of a victory and peace, and then a heavy typhoon appeared and forced the invaders to withdraw. The main hall "Daihekaku" was constructed as a proof of gratitude to Kannon Bodhisattva in 1288. It is designated as a national treasure representing Japanese architecture in the Kamakura era (1186-1392). The Ministry of Education of Japan made a 1/10 scale model of the main hall and put it on exhibition at the National Museum as a representative of Japanese architecture commemorating the Tokyo Olympic Games (1964).



In the Kamakura era, KONGOURINJI-temple consisted of hundred priest's lodges, and even now, some of the ruins are seen along the approach. Many statues of Buddha were enshrined in them and fourteen of them are designated as important cultural property.

In 1573, the age of turbulence, KONGOURINJI-temple was attacked and burnt. But the wisdom of the priest saved the main hall, the pagoda and Nitenmon (a guardian gate) from the fire.

In Edo era (1603-1867), the first shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu contributed an estate to KONGOURINJI-temple and reconstruction of the ruined edifices started.

In 1632, the Imperial prince erected a branch temple called Seisen-in in KONGOURINJI-temple and practised Buddhistic austerities. In the 18th century, KONGOURINJI-temple had twelve main edifices and two affiliated temples. In 1867, Japan was in disorder due to the rapid change caused by the Meiji Renovation, Buddhism suffered persecution and KONGOURINJI-temple lost its own estate and property and all the priests were forced to leave the temple except for the main edifice Myoju-in.

Since then, reconstructions have been done with the support by a great number of devotees of Buddhism.

The main hall was restored twice, and the three-storied pagoda, which was ruined at the late Edo era, was reconstructed in 1978. KONGOURINJI-temple stands on the east of the Lake Biwa, offering a comfortable place and atmosphere to pray for peace and prosperity.

