



Buddhist Ritual Chime

On display

Title/Description: Buddhist Ritual Chime

Object Type: Plaque, Relief

Materials: Bronze

Measurements: h. 110 x w. 175 mm

Accession Number: 1235

Historic Period: Kamakura period (AD 1185-1333)

Production Place: Asia, East Asia, Japan

This gilt bronze ritual chime (J. *kei* 鐺) was used in a Japanese Buddhist temple. Suspended from a small stand (J. *keika* 鐺架) [1] with colourful silken cords, it would have been positioned next to the officiating priest and struck with a wooden mallet during the recitation of sutras and religious teachings. The chimes mark the beginning of a ceremony, transitions within the service, and the titles of the sutras as they are chanted. The practice of using this instrument entered Japan from China with the introduction of Buddhism around the 6th century, although this particular example dates to the Kamakura Period (1185-1333).

In China, chimes (Ch. *bianqing* 编磬) made from carved and pierced jade (Ch. *yuqing* 玉磬) date from the late Eastern Zhou period (c.771-221 BCE), while 'L' shaped stone chimes are even earlier, dating from 1700 BCE. These percussion instruments were possibly used in divination rituals and were inspired by the religious belief that nature could communicate through vibrating stone and wood to the human ear. They served a ritual function within the court. [5]

The Buddhist chime in the Sainsbury Centre Collection is cast in bronze (this material is described as copper 銅 in most Japanese language catalogue entries). Its moulded decoration and form is conventional and similar items can be found in collections held by Tokyo National Museum, Kyoto National Museum and Nara National Museum. [2]

According to Nicole Rousmaniere,

'The form was most likely based on Chinese jade prototypes. Most chimes in Japan were cast in bronze and gilt. From the late Heian period (794-1185 CE) onwards a stylised lotus flower flanked by two peacocks becomes a standard design motif.'

The shape of the gong resembles a mountain, with three arcs on the upper edge and five on the lower. It also has two rings along its upper edge for attaching suspension cords. Ornamented with a relief design comprising a central stylised lotus blossom flanked by a pair of peacocks. The chime would have been struck on the lotus shaped boss. [3]

The lotus symbolises the purity of the enlightened mind while the peacock's brightly coloured fantail is associated with openness and purity. The Buddhist concept of accepting and overcoming suffering is symbolised by the peacock's ability to consume poisonous plants and remain unaffected. [4]

Vanessa Tothill, January 2023

[1] An example of a frame for the chime (J. keika) can be viewed in the Nara National Museum (object number: 808-0)

<https://www.narahaku.go.jp/collection/808-0.html> (Accessed 18 January 2022)

[2] The Sainsbury Centre chime closely resembles a Heian-period chime in the Tokyo National Museum Collection, object number: E-19975_2

<https://webarchives.tnm.jp/imgsearch/show/C0081809> (Accessed 18 January 2022)

It is also comparable to object number, E-19975_1

<https://webarchives.tnm.jp/imgsearch/show/C0041047> (Accessed 18 January 2022)

A Kamakura-period (1185–1333) example exists in Kyoto National Museum (object number: J357), although the central lotus flower boss of this object has a simpler stylised form.

https://syuweb.kyohaku.go.jp/ibmuseum_public/index.php?app=shiryo&mode=detail&list_id=2138278&data_id=6619 (Accessed 18 January 2022)

There are numerous similar examples in the Nara National Museum, object numbers: 1396-0; 1051-0; 1304-0, which range in date from the 12th to the 14th centuries.

<https://www.narahaku.go.jp/collection/1396-0.html>

<https://www.narahaku.go.jp/collection/1051-0.html>

<https://www.narahaku.go.jp/collection/1304-0.html>

(Accessed 18 January 2022)

This conventional design continues to be used centuries later. An example of an early 17th century chime is illustrated in Hou-mei Sung, ed., *Masterpieces of Japanese Art: Cincinnati Art Museum* (London: Cincinnati Art Museum and D. Giles Ltd, 2014), No.2, p. 179.

[3] https://www.google.com/search?q=%E3%82%B1%E3%82%A4+youtube+%E3%83%96%E3%83%83%E3%82%AD%E3%83%A7%E3%82%A6%E3%80%80%E6%A2%B5%E9%9F%B3%E5%85%B7&client=firefox-b-d&sxsrf=AJOqlzXdHp_WwmSEWnhS-XLecTlnUOPP7Q%3A1674822609583&ei=0cPTY66fI5WMgQbf5ZXIDQ&ved=0ahUKEwjuy9K14Of8AhUVRsAKHd9yBdkQ4dUDCA4&uact=5&oq=%E3%82%B1%E3%82%A4+youtube+%E3%83%96%E3%83%83%E3%82%AD%E3%83%A7%E3%82%A6%E3%80%80%E6%A2%B5%E9%9F%B3%E5%85%B7&gs_lcp=Cgxnd3Mtd2l6LXNlcnAQAzIFCAAQogQyBQgAEKIEMgUIABCiBDIFCAAQogQ6CggAEcQ1gQOsAM6COghEKABEAoQKjoHCCEQoAEQCjoKCAAQ8QQQHhCiBEoECEYYAEoECEYYAFDVKIjnmQFgvqEBaAFwAXgAgAHaAogBnBGSAQgyLjEzLjAuMZgBAKABAcgBAsABAQ&scient=gws-wiz-serp#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:503be1f2,vid:6ml0vULZMSc (5:34 mins) [accessed 27 January 2023]

[4] <https://formfluent.com/blog/bird-of-the-gods-how-the-peacock-got-his-feathers> [accessed 2 January 2023].

[5] <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/61946> [accessed 27 January 2023]

Further Reading

Igunma, Jay and San San May, *Buddhism: Origins, Traditions and Contemporary Life* (London: British Library, 2019)

Sung, Hou-mei, ed., *Masterpieces of Japanese Art: Cincinnati Art Museum* (London: Cincinnati Art Museum and D. Giles Ltd, 2014)

https://www.tnm.jp/modules/r_exhibition/index.php?controller=item&id=2759&lang=en
