The Seiryū-gū Honden Sanctuary (Important Cultural Property)

The Seiryū-gū Honden is the main sanctuary within the small complex dedicated to Seiryū Gongen, the protective deity of Daigo-ji, and of esoteric Shingon Buddhism in general. The current building was constructed in 1517 after the earlier structure burned down. Opposite of it is the Seiryū-gū Haiden, its worship hall, built later in the 16th century. The sanctuary and the worship hall are separated according to a common tradition owing to the Shintoist heritage, which places the residence of the deity as a special location not to be entered lightly, and thus acquiring a separated place of worship. This pattern can be seen in most Shintoist shrines across the country.

The deity Seiryū Gongen was introduced to Japan from China by Kūkai. Seiryū can be written with different characters, meaning either "pure waterfall" or "blue dragon" - a reminder of her background as the third daughter of the dragon king Shagara, who is associated with the sea and rain making. She has been believed to ward off natural disasters amongst many other benefits. “Gongen,” literally meaning ‘incarnation’, denotes a deity or Buddha originating overseas, who ‘reincarnated’ in Japan by employing indigenous deities as the familiar avatar. The pre-modern Japanese Buddhology thereby attempted to harmonize the imported teachings with the native faith, blending Buddhist divinities with Shinto divinities (*kami*).

Various memorial services and festivities are held at the shrine from the 1st to the 21st of April annually, during the festival of Seiryū Gongen Sakura-e. This cherry blossom festival celebrating the deity in conjunction with the historical cherry banquet of regent Toyotomi is a grand event with a long procession in historical costumes that draws many spectators from across the country and is one of the spring highlights of Kyoto worthwhile a visit.