

Komyoin Inari Shrine

One of the functions of Inari shrines is to protect Buddhist temples. This small Inari shrine protected Komyoin Temple, which was once located on this site. Komyoin was a temple of the Tendai school of Esoteric Buddhism and was founded by the monk Benkaku (dates unknown) in 1240. When Komyoin was established, it unified the various temples of Nikko that were not associated with Shihonryuji Temple, the temple founded by the monk Shodo Shonin (737–817). Following the government order to separate Shinto and Buddhism in 1868, the Buddhist elements of Nikko, including Komyoin and Shihonryuji, were combined to become Rinnoji Temple in 1871.

Inari is a kami of agriculture, the production of rice and other grains, success in business, and material wealth. Rice was used as a currency in Japan until the nineteenth century, which explains its association with success and wealth. Inari is also known as Dakiniten, a Buddhist deity that manifests as a goddess riding a fox.

The fox is the messenger of Inari and is often depicted holding a key in its mouth, a reference to the storehouse where rice was kept. Inari foxes are also usually associated with a wish-granting jewel. Wish-granting jewels look like an orb with a pointed top and concentric circles emanating from the top. There are a number of wish-granting jewels on this shrine: on the doors, on the roof tiles at the ends of the eaves, and above the main door.