

Kichijo Tennyo Painting

Kichijoten is a goddess of good fortune and fruitful harvests who provides guidance to those seeking enlightenment. As in this painting, she is also a goddess of beauty and happiness who can be traced back to the Hindu goddess Lakshmi, also known as Shri Mahadevi. Mahayana Buddhism often incorporated Hindu deities into its pantheon, where they served as protectors and special patrons.

The *Kichijo Tennyo* painting dates back to the Nara period (710–794) and is registered as a National Treasure. It is the oldest extant individual image painted on hemp in Nara; there are a few other examples of such images, but they are extremely rare. The depiction of the deity is believed to reflect the era's perception of beauty and is remarkable for its skillful suggestion of movement. The colorful robes, replete with patterns in vogue at the time, appear to swish gently as she takes a step forward. In her left palm she holds Nyoï Hoju, a miraculous gem believed to grant all good wishes. The painting is only unveiled once a year during the New Year's Buddhist Service, when, for a three-day period, worshipers can bow before Kichijoten, repenting their sins of the previous year and praying for guidance and peace during the coming one.