

Deities in the Pagoda

Kūkai (774–835) designed the interior of the pagoda to reflect the sacred cosmology of Shingon Buddhism. Shingon adherents use mandalas—symbolic depictions of the universe—as aids to meditation.

At the center of the pagoda are the Five Great Buddhas (Gochi Nyorai) who occupy the highest rank in the Shingon pantheon. Dainichi Nyorai, the primordial or cosmic Buddha at the core of all things in Shingon theology, is represented by the central column. The other four Buddhas surround the column, each facing a cardinal direction: Ashuku Nyorai, the Immovable One, on the east side; Hōshō Nyorai, the Jewel Born, to the south; Amida Nyorai, Buddha of Infinite Light and Life, to the west; and Fukūjōju Nyorai, He Whose Accomplishment Is Not in Vain, to the north. They are joined by eight bodhisattvas—compassionate beings who delay their own enlightenment to help other living beings enter nirvana.