

Daigo-ji

The Daigo-ji is a vast Buddhist temple complex and monastery located in the southeastern part of Kyoto-city, that was founded by the monk Shōbō (aka Rigen Daishi 832–909) in 874. It has prospered under the patronage of successive Japanese emperors and a close association with the Imperial family for more than 1,000 years. Today, it continues to be a globally active site of Buddhist worship, and a center of cultural importance for the people of Japan. Daigo-ji is in more than one way a leading temple of Shingon Buddhism. It is the mother temple of the Daigo order of the Shingon School, and one of the largest holy sites along the Saigoku Kannon Pilgrimage route – one of the most established pilgrimage routes of Japan. It is also the principal temple of a Shugen-dō mountain ascetic order, a highly syncretistic faith that merged Buddhism and mountain asceticism in Japan since the Heian period. Its treasure chamber houses 75,522 National Treasures as well as 425 Nationally Designated Important Cultural Properties. Owing to its esteemed history, it has been listed as an UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1994. The temple's name derived from the Japanese word *daigomi* meaning the purest essence, which was used to refer to the spring water of the mountain.

Monk Shōbō was a second-generation disciple of the renowned master Kūkai (aka Kōbō Daishi 774–835), the founder of esoteric Shingon Buddhism in Japan and one of the foremost saints of Japan. The Japanese Buddhism of Shingon is today one of the only two branches of active esoteric Buddhism that traces its roots back to the third and last vehicle of Vajrayana, the diamond vehicle that evolved following Mahayana Buddhism, the other being Tibetan Buddhism. According to legend, Shōbō first came across the place he chose

as the location of his temple when he was led by a local deity to a spring of holy water. The tradition of Shugen-dō also begins with the ascetic Shōbō at Daigo-ji.

Daigo-ji with its three different parts sprawls across the entire Mount Kasatori: Sanbō-in, Shimo-Daigo and Kami-Daigo. Two of them are found at the foot of the mountain: Sanbō-in, the historical residence of the abbots of Daigo-ji, and Shimo-Daigo, a complex of shrines and halls that forms the main part of the temple. The lower part of the complex is home to Kyoto's oldest building, the five-storied pagoda (Gojū no tō). The nearby Reihōkan Museum has been inaugurated in 1935 to house the treasure chamber of the temple. Today, it offers visitors a permanent exhibition and additional seasonal special exhibitions of numerous Tangible Cultural Properties, including National Treasures that are exemplary of Japanese sacred art, including many thousands of valuable documents, Buddhist statues and paintings. The summit of Mt. Kasatori is crowned by the old precinct of Kami-Daigo, the site of the original temple founded by Shōbō in the 9th century.

The temple complex was developed and expanded between 897 and 967 under the auspices of three devoutly Buddhist emperors, Daigo, Suzaku, and Murakami. By the 16th century, however, the ravages of the Ōnin War and natural disasters had devastated much of the temple. Therefore, its current appearance is owing much to the grand scale 16th-century temple restoration and renovation undertaken by Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–1598), a feudal lord and later regent, renowned as the second of the three unifiers who brought closure to the warring era in Japanese history.