

Reimeiden

A sacred jewel adorns the top of the Reimeiden, a hall of memorial tablets located just to the northeast of the Shinden. This structure was built in 1911 to enshrine a statue of Yakushi Nyorai, the Buddha of Medicine, that had previously served as the principal image at a Ninnaji branch temple called Kita-in. The building combines a cypress-bark roof with a recurring motif of palmettes, a juxtaposition that is typical of Kyoto master craftsman Kameoka Suekichi (1865–1922), who was known for integrating classical Japanese architectural features with contemporary design elements.

As a hall of memorial tablets, the Reimeiden contains a full dais of imagery, with the statue of Yakushi Nyorai as its central image. The Yakushi Nyorai from Kita-in was believed to have been brought to Japan from China by the monk Kukai (774–835), founder of the Shingon school, of which Ninnaji is a part. The statue was known as a “hidden Buddha”—a statue deemed as possessing such great supernatural powers that it was kept out of the sight of general worshippers and even most members of the clergy—until the temple permitted scientific testing in 1986 to determine the statue’s exact age. The survey revealed that it was not as old as was formerly believed and was instead a copy of the one Kukai had brought from China. Kukai’s statue, it transpired, had been destroyed by fire in 1101; its replacement was unveiled 1103, and it is this statue, designated a National Treasure in 1990, that can be seen today in the Reimeiden Hall.