

Statue of Kangen

Kangen (854–925) was a Shingon priest who became the abbot at Ninnaji in 900, marking the starting point of an illustrious career. Over the next 25 years he took on a number of leadership positions at other prominent temples, including Toji and Daigoji, both in Kyoto, and at Kongobuji in Wakayama. He was therefore an important figure not only at Ninnaji, but in the overall development of Shingon Buddhism during the Heian period (794–1185). He is best remembered for petitioning the emperor to grant the priest Kukai (774–835), founder of the Shingon school, the posthumous title of “Great Teacher of the Buddhist Faith” (Kobo Daishi). Kangen also played a pivotal role in moving sacred texts that Kukai had brought back from China in 806 to the sutra repository at Toji, and in founding Hannyaji temple in Nara.