

Nine Forms of Welcoming the Dead to the Pure Land (*Kuhon Raiko-zu*)

The *kuhon raiko-zu* paintings that cover the walls and ceiling of the Phoenix Hall depict Amida Buddha (Sk. Amitabha) welcoming the spirits of the newly deceased to the Pure Land (Jodo). These scenes capture a sense of deep faith in Amida and his Pure Land. The paintings depict nine forms of Amida welcoming the dead to the Pure Land, depending on the degree of faith and the meritorious acts performed by the devotee while on earth. For a truly well-lived life, a spirit could expect to be guided to the Pure Land by Amida Buddha and a host of bodhisattva attendants. A spirit that is reborn in the Pure Land dwells there free from sadness and suffering.

It was the sincere desire of the Imperial Regent Fujiwara no Yorimichi (992–1071) to reach Amida's Pure Land that led him to build the Phoenix Hall and to have its doors and walls painted with scenes of death and re-birth. These paintings are thus of great importance in understanding belief in the Pure Land during Yorimichi's time.

The scenes in the hall are painted in the Yamato-e style, with backgrounds that include mountains and rivers and depictions of the four seasons. This style of painting was inspired by Tang-dynasty (618–907) art works and had become a fully developed style by the late Heian period (794–1185).

Although the paintings depicted here have faded over time, reproductions were created around 1970 that allow visitors to see the paintings as they would have originally appeared.