

Gyoki and Saihoji

Gyoki (668–749) was a revered Buddhist priest who founded Saihoji Temple almost 1,300 years ago as one of the 49 monasteries built in accordance with the imperial edict of Emperor Shomu (701–756).

Gyoki founded Saihoji on land that is said to have belonged to Prince Shotoku, a sixth-century regent and diplomat who, like Gyoki, was highly instrumental in spreading Buddhism in Japan. According to some accounts, Gyoki was of Korean descent. He would roam the countryside, spreading Buddhist teachings among the common people, reading the scriptures, and helping the sick and impoverished. Indeed, some of the monasteries and nunneries he helped build also functioned as hospitals for the poor.

Gyoki was involved in numerous other social and civic welfare projects, such as the construction of bridges and dikes. According to one historical account, he attracted thousands of followers and he became known as “Gyoki Bosatsu,” a reference to bodhisattvas (*bosatsu*), who are on the path to enlightenment but selflessly choose to hold themselves back in order to help others.