

Daishoin: Statue of Fudo Myo-o

Fudo Myo-o (Acala in Sanskrit) is one of the five Buddhist Wisdom Kings and a central deity in Shingon Buddhism. He is believed to protect the faithful and to guide followers with the fierce love of a parent. He is typically depicted with a wrathful facial expression, wielding a sword in his right hand and a noose in his left, ready to unleash his anger on demons and other enemies of Buddhism. Statues of this Wisdom King often include a halo of flames and a sturdy rock base, which is said to represent the determination of Fudo Myo-o (*fudo* translates to “immovable”). Although the origins of this deity can be traced back to early Indian Buddhism, Fudo Myo-o is particularly revered in Japan, where numerous temples honor him as their principal deity (*honzon*). This is also the case at Daishoin.

The seated Fudo Myo-o statue at Daishoin, designated an Important Cultural Property, is believed to date back to the late tenth century. Carved from a single piece of hinoki cypress, the sculpture is approximately 1 meter in height and depicts the Wisdom King with his eyes wide open, biting his lower lip, as if in a state of intense concentration. The long, straight sword he is holding has been restored to its original, shimmering state. The fiery, orange background is a reproduction, but the halo and its base are originals.

Based on the expression and appearance, this statue is thought to be modeled on a very similar statue housed at Toji Temple in Kyoto. The Toji Fudo Myo-o was carved in the year 839 and is a designated National Treasure. This theory is supported by the fact that the Daishoin statue was originally the property of Ninnaji Temple in Kyoto, the head temple of the Omuro branch of Shingon Buddhism to which Daishoin belongs. It was only relocated here in 1920, and was venerated in Dainichido Hall on Mt. Misen before being stored in the Reihokan treasure hall, where it remains today.