

Daishoin: Namikiri Fudo Myo-o Statue

The statue of Fudo Myo-o, one of the Five Wisdom Kings of Buddhism, housed within Chokugando Hall is Daishoin's principal deity (*honzon*). Believed to protect the faithful and to guide followers with the fierce love of a parent, Fudo Myo-o is a central deity in Shingon Buddhism and is typically depicted with a wrathful facial expression, bearing a sword in his right hand and a noose in the left, ready to unleash his anger on demons and other enemies of Buddhism.

This wooden carving depicts Namikiri Fudo Myo-o, the “wave-breaking” manifestation of the deity. Honored as the protector of seafarers, Namikiri Fudo Myo-o has its origins in a ninth-century legend. In this story, Kukai (774–835), the priest who established the Shingon school and is also considered the founder of Daishoin, was caught in a storm on his way back to Japan from China, where he had been studying. With the sea raging around him, Kukai carved a likeness of Fudo Myo-o out of a sacred piece of wood. The fearsome deity stilled the waves, allowing Kukai to return home safely.

Namikiri Fudo Myo-o was worshiped by the sixteenth-century warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–1598), who chose the deity as his personal protector and installed a statue of it on his ship before commanding an invasion of the Korean Peninsula in 1592. The statue now housed at Daishoin is said to have been donated by Hideyoshi after his return from Korea and portrays its subject standing up, his left fist clenched and his sword raised to waist level. The asymmetric background features red flames raging in every direction, seemingly engulfing the deity. This fire symbolizes purification and the removal of impediments to enlightenment.