

Daiganji Temple: Fudo Myo-o

Even in a temple filled with statues, the large Fudo Myo-o statue in Daiganji Temple's Gomado Hall stands out immediately. The hall was rebuilt in 2006 after being destroyed in the early Meiji era (1868–1912), and is one of the newer buildings at Daiganji. The statue inside was carved by Kyoto-based sculptor Matsumoto Myokei to mark the occasion. The roughly 4-meter-tall, 6-ton Fudo Myo-o fulfills the requisite measurement conditions to be officially designated a daibutsu, or large Buddhist statue.

The sculpture is made of solid Indian sandalwood, which is considered the best material for Buddhist statues because of its hardness and pleasant aroma. The statue is flanked by wood from a tree that once grew on the temple grounds. Gomado Hall is kept open year-round, and ritual offerings to Fudo Myo-o are made on the 28th of every month.

Fudo Myo-o (known as Acala in Sanskrit) is a key deity in many Japanese Buddhist schools, including Shingon. He is known as the immovable Wisdom King who protects and guides the faithful, and the 8-meter-tall flames behind this statue are a common motif representing his unflappable bravery. The Fudo Myo-o in Gomado Hall sits atop a rocky outcrop—another standard symbol of his steadfast nature—and holds a sword in one hand and a lasso in the other.

Every year in November, Daiganji Temple hosts a fire festival celebrating Fudo Myo-o. Special wooden sticks with prayers written on them are burned in a large bonfire. Later, monks from the temple walk on the hot ashes of the fire to test their own discipline and to let the sacred fire of the Buddha purify their bodies. Visitors are also welcome to try firewalking with assistance from the monks.