

Dragon Painting

The main hall of Kuonji Temple, known as the Hondo, is one of the most well known and beloved edifices in Nichiren Buddhism. The hall has a unique architectural design and is filled with elaborate decorations. In 1875, the main hall was lost in a large fire, but after many years the entire hall was rebuilt; the opening ceremony for the new Hondo was held in 1985. During the ceremony, the Dragon Painting (Bokuryu) was unveiled, extending across the ceiling.

The black and white painting was created by the renowned Japanese painter Kayama Matazo (1927–2004). Kayama was an award-winning artist and professor at the Tokyo University of the Arts. Spanning 9 square meters, the painting depicts a five-clawed dragon in gold leaf. It is among the highest class of dragons and is an important mythic creature in Buddhist mythology.

The Kuonji dragon is made up of parts from nine different animals. The head is that of a camel; it has the eyes of a rabbit, the ears of a cow, and the horns of a deer. The dragon's neck is that of a snake, its paws are those of a tiger, the talons of a hawk, the scales of a carp, and the stomach of a Komodo dragon.

The Dragon Painting was designed so that no matter where one stands in the main hall, the dragon's eyes seem to follow the visitor. This helps create the impression that the dragon is watching over and protecting the hall.