

Seimei Shrine

[LEGENDS / HEIAN]

The five-pointed star, or pentagram, is the main symbol of Seimei Shrine and a reference to the five elements of traditional yin–yang cosmology (*onmyodo* in Japanese): wood, fire, earth, metal, and water. How these elements interact and other mysteries of the cosmos were the specialty of Abe no Seimei (921–1005), a famous astrologer and advisor to the court who was deified after death and enshrined on the grounds of his former residence to protect Kyoto from evil.

In addition to deep knowledge of the universe and its workings, Seimei was believed to possess mystical healing powers, and his prominence as a diviner and spiritual advisor to the emperor inspired numerous legends of his heroism and supernatural abilities. These stories remain a popular part of Japanese folklore.

The grounds of Seimei Shrine are thought to have been quite extensive originally, but were reduced repeatedly from the fifteenth century onward. The shrine assumed its current appearance in the mid-twentieth century, attracting a new generation of Abe no Seimei's admirers—many of whom had been drawn to the ancient mystic after reading *Teito monogatari*, a popular 1980s fantasy novel by Aramata Hiroshi (b. 1947).