

Futoden and Footprints of the Buddha

The neat rows of stone statues on the south side of Gangōji Temple are collectively called the Futoden, or “Field of Buddhas.” Each of these monuments was donated or commissioned by a temple supporter, and most of them are hundreds of years old.

The taller, five-storied stone pagodas (*gorintō*) near the **Gokurakudō** represent the five elements of Buddhist cosmology: earth, water, fire, air, and void, which together make up the cosmos. Some of the smaller monuments are instead bas-relief carvings of pagodas, but their meaning is the same. The smaller monuments were discovered in 1988 in a disorderly pile on the north side of the **Zenshitsu**, and they were subsequently incorporated into the Futoden. Though the pagodas do not mark graves, they are similar to headstones—each stone monument represents a prayer for an individual person in the hope they will be granted a favorable rebirth. Many of the pagodas assembled in the Futoden were created for monks, but some were commissioned by laypeople prior to their own deaths.

The Futoden also includes hundreds of small statues of the bodhisattva Jizō, who is known as a protector of travelers and the common people. Jizō is also a savior of those who are reborn as lesser beings, such as animals or hungry ghosts. For ordinary people living during Japan’s medieval period (1185–1568), Jizō was a beloved subject of worship. Even today, statues of Jizō are commonly created for the sake of the deceased, especially children. A festival for Jizō (Jizō-e) is held each year on August 23 and 24 at Gangōji. The Futoden is decorated with over a thousand votive lamps, and prayers for health and safety are recited in the Gokurakudō.

One low, flat stone monument at the far east of the Futoden stands out among the rows of statues and pagodas. This is a *bussoku seki*, a representation of the footprints of the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni. Monuments such as these are believed to have been worshipped in ancient India as symbolic representations of the Buddha beginning in the second century BCE. In 2012, the Lanka-Japan Friendship Society donated this set of footprints to Gangōji as a gesture of goodwill and enduring friendship between Japan and Sri Lanka. The carving is marked with several Buddhist symbols, including swastikas (*manji*), which have positive connotations in Asia.
