



**Temple Treasures of a Sacred Mountain  
Daigo-ji – The Secret Buddhism in Japan**

**25 April to 24 August 2008  
Press conference: 24 April 2008, 11:00 am**

For the first time in Germany, this forthcoming exhibition presents the magnificent treasures of the fabled Daigo-ji temple, one of Japan's most ancient monasteries. The exhibition comprises some 240 outstanding works, among them monumental sculptures, important paintings and scrolls, exquisite lacquer objects, superb calligraphy as well as priceless sutras, the sacred scriptures of Buddhism. Looking at these remarkable objects in a museum context, it is easy to forget that they also play a vital role in the day-to-day practice and ritual of a living religion.

The history of the Daigo-ji temple on Mount Kasatori south of the ancient imperial city of Kyoto reaches back more than 1100 years. Founded in 874 AD, it remains one of the most important religious centres and is a key pilgrimage site. The monastery has always been a centre for Buddhist studies, but also for philosophy and medicine. The monks' religious charisma finds expression in numerous myths and legends. The monastery's political significance – maintained throughout its long history – is evident in its architecture and in the extraordinary wealth of its collection. In 1994 Daigo-ji was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The Art and Exhibition Hall is proud to be able to presents an unprecedented number of objects that under Japan's strict laws for the protection of cultural properties are hardly ever allowed to leave the country. This uniquely rich exhibition is the result of a close cooperation both with the lender and the National Museum of Japan, and was further facilitated by the high technical standard of the Art and Exhibition Hall. Never before has such a large number of protected objects of the Japanese cultural heritage been shown outside Japan.

The Cultural Properties Protection Division within the Agency of Cultural Affairs subdivides the Japanese cultural heritage into three categories: 'national treasure', 'important cultural property' and 'important object of art'. The Art and Exhibition Hall has been able to secure the loan of an astonishing thirteen national treasures, among them illuminated 8<sup>th</sup>-century sutras, rare paintings from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> century – some of them measuring three metres – and ancient imperial manuscripts. Also on show are ninety-three important cultural properties, among them outstanding sculptures, paintings of up to six metres height, large mandalas, Esoteric Buddhist scriptures written in gold ink, as well as lavishly ornamented 17<sup>th</sup>-century screens and works by artists such as the sculptor Kaikei (12<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> century) and the 17<sup>th</sup>-century painter Tawarayama Sotatsu.

While there are numerous exhibitions dealing with cultural history, shows on large Japanese collections are exceedingly rare, for the simple reason that Japanese works of art tend to be extremely fragile creations made of paper or wood that are too fragile to withstand long-distance transport. The sheer size of the monumental wooden sculptures will therefore come as a surprise to many visitors, as will the delicate decorations on paper. For the first time outside Japan, the exhibition presents one of the most extensive Buddhist art collections spanning more than a thousand years. Because of the fragility of the exhibits the duration of the exhibition is strictly limited, and it will be shown in Bonn only.

The exhibition is an introduction to Shingon Buddhism and presents the Daigo-ji temple as a key cultural heritage site. It demonstrates the way in which religion reverberates through art and history. The unfamiliar pictorial language that characterises much of Esoteric or Secret Buddhism is examined in the context of its religious teachings in order to elucidate the roots of its symbolism and its ritual significance. The art of Shingon Buddhism often seems confusing because of the large number of Buddhas and the unusual forms they take. By focusing on those figures of the pantheon that are relevant in the context of the Daigo-ji temple, the exhibition provides an insight into the basic structure of Shingon imagery.

The exhibition is subdivided into six chapters:

- Chapter 1 Timeless and Contemporary
- Chapter 2 Buddhism in Motion – From Mahayana to Vajrayana
- Chapter 3 Emperors, Shoguns and Honourable Monks – The History of Daigo-ji
- Chapter 4 Temple Treasures of the Holy Mountain
- Chapter 5 Footsteps of the Ascetics – Populism and Seclusion
- Chapter 6 Inheriting Beauty

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