



## Portraits in the Yoma

Shotoku Taishi (572-622) was an Imperial prince and an ardent Buddhist. He was a strong force behind the acceptance and spread of Buddhism throughout Japan.

The Seven Masters of Jodo Shinshu are Buddhist teachers whom Shinran Shonin revered for their clarifying insight into the meaning of the Pure Land Buddhist teaching. From India: Nagarjuna (c. 150-250) and Vasubandhu (c. 320-400); from China: T'an-luan (Donran in Japanese; 476-542), Tao-ch'o (Doshaku in Japanese; 562-654), and Shan-tao (Zendo in Japanese; 613-681); and from Japan: Genshin (942-1017), and Honen (Genku, 1133-1212).

Some temples display portraits of Shinran Shonin's wife, Eshinni (1182-1268), whose letters recorded important historical events, and Kakushinni (1224-1283), their youngest daughter who helped to preserve Shinran Shonin's legacy.

## Large Incense Burner (Koro)

A large incense burner called the *Koro* rests on a lacquered wooden stand in the front and center of the *Gejin*. There are usually two dragons, placed like handles, on the sides of the *Koro*. The dragon on the left has its mouth closed, signifying death, and the dragon on the right has its mouth open, signifying birth. Thus, we are encouraged to be mindful of birth and death as we approach the Buddha and the Dharma.

### REFERENCES:

Hongwanji International Center (2002). *Jodo Shinshu: A Guide*. Kyoto: Jodo Shinshu Hongwanji-ha.

Kodani, Masao and Hamada, Russell (1995). *Traditions of Jodoshinshu Hongwanji-ha*. Senshin Buddhist Temple: Pureland Publications.

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- Arizona Buddhist Temple
- Buddhist Church of Santa Barbara
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## Buddhist Churches of America

<http://buddhistchurchesofamerica.org>

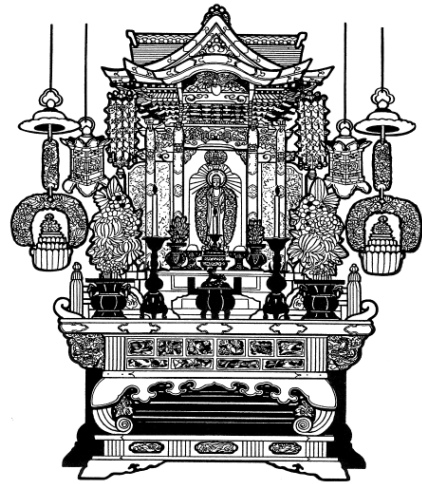


The Jodo Shinshu  
**Naijin  
Shrine**

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Have you ever entered a Buddhist temple and been amazed by the complexity of the altar? Have you ever wondered about the objects and what their purpose and symbolic meanings were?

This pamphlet describes traditions of the Jodo Shinshu Hongwanji-Ha, a school of Pure Land Buddhism founded in Japan. The Buddhist Churches of America, which began as a missionary program of the Jodo Shinshu Hongwanji-Ha, follows these traditions.



### The Jodo Shinshu Naijin Shrine

In Jodo Shinshu Buddhist temples, the main hall, or *Hondo*, is divided into two areas: the *Naijin* and the *Gejin*. The *Naijin* is the (inner) altar area, and the *Gejin* is the (outer) seating area. Most Buddhist ceremonies and rituals take place in or in front of the *Naijin*. The *Naijin* is where objects of reverence are placed and where Buddhist priests officiate during services. You may see the word spelled “*Onaijin*.” The letter “o-” placed before the word *Naijin* (or “go-” placed before other words) is an honorific form

showing respect for what the word represents.

There are many sacred objects in the *Naijin*. Each object and image has specific purpose and meaning. There are often symbolic ties to the time of the historical Buddha, or to ancient cultures of India, China, or Japan.

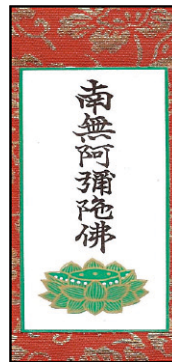
### Central Figure (Gohonzon)

The Jodo Shinshu shrine is dedicated to Amida Buddha, the Buddha of Infinite Wisdom and Unbounded Compassion. An image of the Amida Buddha is housed in the central shrine in the form of either a statue or a picture scroll. Alternatively, a *Myogo* scroll with the Chinese characters *Na Mo A Mi Da Butsu* may be enshrined.

The golden statue depicts a standing figure of the Amida Buddha, whose right hand is held up, with the palm facing forward and the thumb and forefinger forming a circle. The left arm hangs downward, with the palm facing forward and the thumb and forefinger forming a circle.

The picture scroll shows an image of the Amida Buddha on a background of forty-eight radiating lines. These symbolize the Forty-eight Vows pledged by the bodhisattva Dharmakara, who later became Amida Buddha.

The *Myogo* scroll of Chinese characters, which is read *Na Mo A Mi Da Butsu*, represents the Name of the Amida Buddha.



### Shrine Building (Kuden)

The *Gohonzon* traditionally stands within a highly ornate structure called the *Kuden*. The architecture resembles a Japanese palace. Pillars and roof beams are painted gold to signify purity, virtue and merit. Figures of dragons, peacocks, elephants, and lions adorn it, expressing the Buddha’s spiritual power, truth, and majesty.

Hanging from the corners of the roof are necklace-like ornaments called *Sumi Yoraku*. They represent the attainment of nobility through noble deeds.

Lamps are part of the Central Shrine. Two hexagonal lanterns called *Tsuri Toro* hang in front of the *Kuden*. They represent lanterns made by Shakyamuni Buddha for his disciples so that, when traveling at night, they could avoid killing insects and small creatures on the road. A pair of *Kiku Rinto*, circular lamps decorated with a chrysanthemum flower pattern, represent Enlightenment without beginning or end.

### Throne (Shumidan)

The *Kuden* rests upon a rectangular dais or throne called the *Shumidan*. The *Shumidan* is wide on the top and bottom and narrow in the middle. It represents the cosmic mountain called *Sumeru* in Sanskrit.

The *Shumidan* is made of red and black lacquered wood and is decorated with floral, wave, and animal designs.

In front of the *Gohonzon* is a small table called the *Uwajoku*. Four items are placed on this table: two water vessels, one incense burner, and one candle stand. The water vessels often hold greens, without flowers. The candle, usually red, is placed before the *Gohonzon*. A red lacquered wooden candle may be used as a substitute for a lit candle during ceremonies. There may also be a stand used as the base for the *Buppanki*, a container which holds an offering of cooked rice.

### Front Table (Maejoku)

In front of the *Sumidan* is a larger table called the *Maejoku*. It is ornately carved and decorated with animals and flower patterns.

Brocade cloths are used to cover the tables in the *Naijin*. There are two cloths for the *Maejoku*. First, a *Mizubiki* is wrapped around the front and sides. Second, a triangular-shaped cloth called an *Uchibiki* is draped over the front.

Arrangements of candles, incense, and flowers are placed on the *Maejoku*. A central incense burner with candle stand on the right and flower vase on the left is called *Mitsugusoku*. An incense burner with a candle stand on each side and a flower vase on the outside of each candle stand is called *Gogusoku*.

Candlelight represents the Wisdom of the Buddha, which illuminates the ignorance of human beings. Flowers signify impermanence; they are a reminder of the fleeting existence of human life. Incense is traditionally associated with purification, and it enhances religious feelings. Offering flowers and incense are traditional ways of praising the Buddha.

### Portraits in the Onaijin

On the right side of the wall behind the *Kuden* is a portrait scroll of Shinran Shonin (1173-1263), the founder of Jodo Shinshu. A portrait scroll of Rennyo Shonin (1414-1499), the eighth *monshu* or abbot, hangs on the left wall.

These two portraits mark the boundaries of the *Naijin*. Some temples have additional space to the right and left of the central altar. This area is called the *Yoma*. Usually a picture or statue of Shotoku Taishi is enshrined on the right side of the *Yoma* and a picture of the Seven Masters is on the left.