Statue of Eleven-Headed Kannon

Important Cultural Property

Standing 190.5 centimeters tall, this statue of the bodhisattva Kannon dates from the late eighth century. Often referred to as the bodhisattva of mercy, Kannon is believed to protect people from illness and help them secure food and wealth. The eleven heads set atop the Kannon’s main head have a range of expressions, but the largest radiates compassion and tranquility. There are several interpretations of why there are eleven heads including the belief that the lower ten represent the stages on the path to enlightenment, while the uppermost represents buddhahood.

This statue, including the base, was carved from a single Japanese nutmeg tree (*kaya*), an evergreen also known as the Japanese nutmeg-yew (*Torreya nucifera*). The woodworking displays skilled craftsmanship, particularly in the loose folds of cloth and lace-like carving around the upper chest area.