

National Treasure Hall

Statues of the Eight Kinds of Mythological Beings

National Treasures

The eight statues represent the Eight Kinds of Mythological Beings. They are figures of the Buddhist pantheon that were adopted from Indian mythology as protectors of the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni, and his teachings. They are listed in the *Sutra of the Golden Light*, one of the main sutras in Buddhism to pray for the safety of the state, and are often referred to as the Eight Legions (Hachibu-shu), or Eight Legions of Devas and Nagas (Tenryu Hachibu). The presence of these deities in a Buddhist temple also reflects the belief that Buddha's teachings are intended for all sentient beings.

The statues were created in 734 using the hollow-core dry-lacquer technique. They were originally enshrined in Kofukuji's Western Golden Hall, which was lost to fire. The eight figures represent Ashura, Gobujo, Sakara, Kendatsuba, Kinnara, Kubanda, Hibakara, and Karura. However, it is likely they were meant to represent the following kinds of beings found in the Buddhist scriptures: *asuras* (demigods or titans), *devas* (gods), *nāgas* (snakes or dragons), *garuḍas* (enormous snake-eating birds), *yakṣas* (spirits of the dead), *gandharvas* (ghostly musicians), *kiṃnaras* (heavenly musicians), and *mahoragas* (snake spirits).

One unique aspect of the statues is that Ashura, Gobujo, Sakara, and Kendatsuba have the faces of young boys. Scholars have suggested this reflects the wishes of the patroness who sponsored their construction, Empress Komyo (701–760), the daughter of Kofukuji's founding patron, Fujiwara no Fuhito (659–720).

All eight images have survived multiple fires at Kofukuji over the past 1,300 years. A key factor was their portability: Most of the images weigh less than 10 kilograms, making them easy to carry to safety.