

National Treasure Hall
Statues of the Ten Great Disciples
National Treasures

These exquisite images from the Nara period (710–794) are part of a group of the famous ten great disciples of Shakyamuni, the historical Buddha originally enshrined in Kofukuji's Western Golden Hall. They were made by the hollow-core dry-lacquer sculpting technique and display a variety of facial expressions. They represent disciples of various ages, with the older ones having more wrinkles and folds in their robes. Each is a representation of a Buddhist ideal, such as excellence in meditation, debate, or preaching the law.

All ten of the images survived the devastating fire of 1717, but only these six remain at the temple. They are identified today as Mokkenren, Sharihotsu, Subodai, Kasen'en, Furuna, and Ragora, but the extent to which these labels reflect their original identities is uncertain. The closed eyes of Ragora suggest it may originally have been intended to portray the blind monk Aniruddha, while the youthful image of Subodai closely matches canonical descriptions of the disciple Ananda.

The wooden frame of one of the other figures is now in the collection of the Tokyo University of the Arts. One image was lost when the Okura Museum of Art in Tokyo burned down in the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923. The whereabouts of the remaining two statues are unknown.