

**National Treasure Hall**  
**Statues of Twelve Heavenly Generals**  
**National Treasures**

This set of Twelve Heavenly Generals was originally housed in the Eastern Golden Hall. Scholars believe it was mounted on the pedestal of the hall's main icon, Yakushi Nyorai, the Buddha of Healing. The images, which date to the eleventh century, are considered masterpieces of *itabori* wooden relief carving.

The Twelve Heavenly Generals serve as guardians for Yakushi Nyorai, and are often depicted with fierce visages. These carvings, however, are famous for their humorous expressions, as well as for the sense of depth achieved by the sculptors using boards of Japanese cypress only three centimeters thick. The figures all strike different poses, with some performing exaggerated gestures reminiscent of kabuki actors and others portrayed in the static manner of religious icons.

Since the iconography of the twelve generals was never fixed, and the names of the images are later attributions, the original identity of each is uncertain. This display seeks to replicate the original configuration of the images on the Yakushi Nyorai pedestal. The arrangement is based on a study of their postures, hand gestures, and facial expressions.