

**Central Golden Hall**  
**Statues of Four Heavenly Kings**  
**National Treasures**

The Four Heavenly Kings are guardian deities who protect the four sides of Mt. Sumeru, the mountain that stands at the center of our “world-system” according to Buddhist cosmology. Jikokuten protects the east, Zochoten the south, Komokuten the west, and Tamonten the north. These magnificent images, made of joined wood blocks, are highly realistic, with details such as faces engraved in the armor. They represent the height of twelfth-century Japanese Buddhist statuary.

Jikokuten holds a sword in his left hand and a jewel in his right, Zochoten a sword in his left hand and a trident in his right, Komokuten a trident in his left hand and a snare in his right, and Tamonten a trident in his left hand and a miniature stupa in his right. All four statues trample demons underfoot and stand before flaming nimbuses. Their imposing and majestic appearance evokes a sense of power that was new to this period, while their overall bulk and heavy torsos echo the sculptural styles typical for the Nara region in the second half of the twelfth century. The variations in armor and pose make the set both visually striking and well balanced.

All four images were constructed in the workshop of Kokei (active 1175–1200) in the early years of the Kamakura period (1185–1333). Records indicate that the carving took place between 1189 and 1193, and was supervised by Kokei’s younger brother Jitsugan. The statues were housed in the Southern Round Hall until the completion of the Central Golden Hall in 2018.