

Eastern Golden Hall
Statue of the Bodhisattva Monju
National Treasure

Monju (Manjushri) is one of the great bodhisattvas of the Mahayana Buddhist tradition. As the personification of wisdom, he represents the Buddhist teachings and serves as the protector of the scriptures that convey and express its teachings. Due to his association with learning and knowledge, the Monju of the Eastern Golden Hall has been revered by generations of Kofukuji scholar-monks as their patron bodhisattva. Students also pray to Monju for help in passing high school and university entrance examinations.

Scholars believe this statue was carved in the last decade of the twelfth century, possibly by Jokei or another sculptor of the Kei School. It is made of Japanese cypress wood blocks using the sculpting technique known as *yosegi-zukuri*, and features inlaid crystal eyes, applied pigments, and gilding.

Monju sits on a lotus pedestal resting on the back of a lion. He sits in half-lotus position in front of a mandorla shaped like two medallions, and wears a cuirass with a robe draped over it. Although the rich, and once-colorful decoration of the robe and armor evoke the style of the late Heian period (794–1185), the overall appearance of the image is based on models imported from Song-dynasty China during the twelfth century. The face is rendered with wise, boyish features and crowned with a topknot on which rests a book bound in the Indian style, a reference to Monju's role as the protector and transmitter of the Buddhist teachings.