

## The Four Tutelary Deities

The temple's water theme is also represented through Ryujin ("dragon god"), one of the protective *kami*, or Shinto deities that reside at the four cardinal points of the temple grounds. In Japanese mythology the dragon is the tutelary deity of the sea, worshipped in Shinto faith as a water *kami* with rituals held to invoke its blessings in procuring agricultural rains and fishermen's good fortune. Legend has it that when Ganjin was traversing the ocean from China to Japan, Ryujin, who guards the east of the temple, petitioned the monk to allow him to become the protector of the Buddha's relics that Ganjin carried with him.

To the south, beside the Southern Great Gate, is a Shinto shrine dedicated to Benzaiten, or Benten, a goddess who originates from the Hindu deity Saraswati. Over the centuries, the role of Benten has changed from the goddess of eloquence to the goddess of monetary good fortune. She is also known as a general protector of the people.

In the northern part of the temple is another shrine devoted to Kishibojin, a mythical demon-turned-goddess known for feeding the flesh of abducted children to her own offspring, who numbered in the hundreds. Determined to make her see the error of her ways, the Buddha hid Kishibojin's youngest son under a rice bowl. After suffering through this loss, she understood the pain she had caused other mothers and vowed to become the protector of children and pregnant women.