

Statue of Jikokuten

Jikokuten, one of the Four Heavenly Kings charged with protecting the eastern realms, wields a sword and bears a steadfast expression, emphasizing his role as a guardian of the world and the Buddhist faith. This is not a typical sword; it is connected to the *vajra*, the multi-pronged ritual implement representing the power of Buddhism to cut through the illusions and delusions of the material world. Jikokuten stands triumphantly atop a squirming demon, conveying his ability to prevail over evil influences that lead the faithful astray. This portrayal, evoking the threat of violence and combat, may seem heavy-handed from a contemporary perspective. Before literacy became more widespread, however, such imagery was crucial to impart the power of Buddhism's teachings and practice to temple-goers who could not read or understand Buddhist doctrine for themselves.