

The Four Heavenly Kings at the Reihokan

Images of Jikokuten and Komokuten adorn the front of the Reihokan Treasure Hall, which was built in part to house works of art and Buddhist statuary that have been handed down since Ninnaji's founding in the late ninth century. Made from sheet copper, these images represent two of the Four Heavenly Kings, the Buddhist guardians of the four cardinal directions. The deities can be identified by the items they hold: Jikokuten, who represents the east, holds a sword, while Komokuten, guarding the west, holds a brush and scroll.

These are relatively recent additions to the Reihokan, which until then included statues of Amida, Buddha of the Western Paradise; Tamonten, the guardian of the north; and Zochoten, the guardian of the south—but not Jikokuten or Komokuten. As Amida Buddha is often accompanied by all four of the Heavenly Kings, Reihokan officials decided to commission new images of missing ones. Today these adorn the entrance of the Reihokan, both to complete Amida's retinue and to protect the building itself from malicious influences. The Jikokuten and Komokuten copper sheet engravings are thought to be by Kataoka Yasushi, an architect and designer active in Japan during the first half of the twentieth century.