

Hideyoshi's Pillow in the Shape of a *Baku* (*Baku mimakura*)

This pillow (*makura*) is in the shape of a *baku*, a mythical beast with origins in Chinese folklore. The *baku* might be mistaken for an elephant but is a chimera with the trunk of an elephant, the eyes of a rhinoceros, the tail of an ox, and the paws of a tiger. *Baku* are said to devour bad dreams and are also known as creatures that consume metals, such as iron and bronze. The *baku* is thus associated with peace and does not appear during times of war because the metals it requires are all in use as weapons.

This *makura* is made of wood with a covering of leather and cotton to make it more comfortable and is said to have been used by Hideyoshi (1537-1598) himself. Its shape may have had a two-fold significance. In addition to eliminating nightmares and guaranteeing Hideyoshi a sound sleep, the *baku* also serves to bring good fortune by ensuring that swords and other weapons are not close at hand, characteristics that mean it probably served Hideyoshi as a charm against assassination. Images of *baku* were often carved into gates for similar reasons, signifying that weapons were not permitted within.