

Tobatsu Bishamonten (Skt: Vaiśravaṇa)

Tobatsu Bishamonten is a manifestation of Bishamonten (Tamonten), one of the Four Heavenly Kings (Shitenno) who guard the cardinal directions. Bishamonten is the king of the north and is recognized as the most powerful of the four.

Tobatsu Bishamonten is depicted as an armor-clad god of war and is worshipped as the protector of the country. Tobatsu was a kingdom in western China during the Tang Dynasty (618–907), and legend suggests that Tobatsu Bishamonten saved the country when it was on the verge of destruction. This legend forms the basis of the warrior god's association with the protection of lands from foreign enemies.

Figures of Bishamonten are often depicted trampling on *jaki*—evil demon spirits that evoke the dark desires of sentient beings. However, Tobatsu Bishamonten is supported by the open palms of the earth goddess Jiten on a base of rolling clouds with the two dwarf demons, Niranba and Biranba, cowering at his feet. His left hand supports a *stupa* or pagoda that represents the treasure house of the Buddha's teaching. His right wields a baton-like weapon to eliminate evil influences and defeat the enemies of Buddhism.

This image of Tobatsu Bishamonten is 160 centimeters high and dates to the ninth century. It is carved from a single block of camphor wood. The image's facial features and bodily proportions emphasize power and strength. This statue is quite different from typical Chinese representations of the figure that are more evenly proportioned.