

## **Ozo Hakusan Shrine**

### ***Gezan Butsu*: The Buddhist Statues that Descended the Mountain**

#### **Ozo Hakusan Shrine**

#### **Designated Tangible Cultural Properties of Ishikawa Prefecture**

The Buddhist statues and bell preserved within this tiny shrine were once housed in small temples along the Kaga-Zenjodo, one of the main pilgrimage and climbing routes (*zenjodo*) up Mt. Hakusan. The mountain has been considered sacred since the eighth century, from which time it has served as a center for Shugendo, a religion blending Buddhism, Shinto, and mountain worship.

However, at the start of the Meiji era (1868–1912), a time of great change and rapid modernization in Japan, the new government demanded that the once-intertwined Shinto and Buddhist religions be separated. This led to the destruction of many temples and Buddhist statues, threatening to include those on Mt. Hakusan. In 1874, local people quietly retrieved the statues of their beloved Buddhas and carried them down the mountain. They then hid them in Ozo Hakusan Shrine, where they remain to this day. The statues are affectionately called *gezan butsu*, “the Buddhas that descended the mountain.”

The two oldest figures are a wooden statue of Amida Nyorai, the Buddha of Infinite Life and Light, dating to 1216, and a wooden statue of the Eleven-Headed Kannon, the bodhisattva of compassion, from 1636. Other treasures include a bronze Jizo guardian statue from 1700, an embossed bronze plate of the protector deity Fudo Myo-o from 1702 and one of his attendants Kongo Doji, along with several other Jizo statues. The collection also includes one Buddhist bell.

## **Hakusan City**