

## Highlights of the Carvings: North Side

The left of two large panels depicts three of the Seven Gods of Fortune (*shichifukujin*) playing *sugoroku* (similar to backgammon). Kichijoten on the left is the deity of beauty and fertility. Her opponent is Benzaiten, the deity of music. Bishamonten, the deity of wealth, watches over the game. They are so absorbed that they do not notice a red demon beckoning playfully to the two women in the adjacent panel, one of whom is the Queen Mother of the West.

The Queen Mother of the West is a powerful deity in the Daoist pantheon and is regarded as the matriarch of all goddesses and the deity of fertility. In the right panel, she and her attendant stand under mandarin orange trees, which represent riches. The Queen Mother of the West holds a sacred peach, said to bestow immortality on those who eat it.

Around the sides of the inner sanctuary there are 65 *karako*, playful “Chinese children” who represent the innocence of childhood, adding touches of levity and humor. They engage in sumo wrestling, roll a snowball, and perform a lion dance. One of the children dancing as the lion appears to gaze directly at the viewer and is depicted pulling down his lower eyelid in a playful taunt.

Under the eaves, there is a joyous scene of five men drinking from an overflowing jar of wine. The scene tells the story of a wine merchant whose customer never gets drunk. The customer is a *shojo*: a mythical creature with a fondness for drinking alcohol. The *shojo* rewards the wine merchant for his generosity with a bottomless jar of wine.