

Takatsuki Kannon-no-Sato History and Folklore Museum

The Kohoku region north of Lake Biwa is known for its many statues of the Buddhist deity Kannon, the Bodhisattva of Compassion. This museum displays about 30 statues of Kannon, some of which are more than 1,000 years old. The statues have survived the centuries thanks to the efforts of local Buddhists, who hid or protected them from destruction during wars and natural disasters.

Kannon is a bodhisattva, a divine being who has achieved the penultimate level of Buddhahood, and she is believed to manifest in various forms. The many statues of Kannon in Kohoku came to be there as a result of the region's location: Kohoku was at a confluence of different Buddhist sects that flowed in from the imperial capitals of Nara and Kyoto, from the Tendai monastery complex on Mt. Hiei, and from the Hokuriku region on the Sea of Japan. Each of these groups brought their own Buddhist statuary. Worship of Kannon became especially widespread beginning in the eighth century, and dozens of Kannon statues can still be found in the area.

Kannon worship in Kohoku began to decline in the fourteenth century, and many statues were relocated or simply shut inside abandoned temples. Later, in the sixteenth century, Kohoku was ravaged by repeated battles between warring samurai factions. During these tumultuous times, townspeople protected the statues from pillaging and destruction by hiding them in caves or burying them in fields and riverbeds. Many of the statues still bear visible signs of damage from this chapter of their history.

Several statues of Kannon remain enshrined in temples in and around Kohoku today, and visitors can obtain a map of their locations from the museum. The closest, Dōganji Temple, is just a few minutes away, and its statue of the eleven-headed manifestation of Kannon has been designated a National Treasure.