

Futaiji Temple Statues

Futaiji Temple has multiple wooden statues of Buddhist deities that date to the Heian period (794–1185). The temple's principal object of veneration is its statue of Kannon, the bodhisattva of compassion. According to legend, the 1.9-meter katsura wood statue was carved by poet and aristocrat Ariwara no Narihira (825–880), the founder of Futaiji, as a representation of his ideal woman. Until the Meiji era (1868–1912), the statue was kept hidden. According to the *Washūji-shaki*, a record from the late 1600s, the statue was seen only by the chief priest, who was allowed to glimpse it just once during his tenure.

Although legend indicates the statue is a ninth-century creation, elements of the statue's design suggest it was carved a century later. These elements include the figure's large topknot, flowing locks, and the sharply ridged folds of the robe. The broad ribbons on either side of its crown are another notable design element. While much of the paint has now flaked off,

revealing the wood beneath, the statue was originally painted with a white base and brightly colored floral designs. The statue underwent extensive conservation work in 2022 to stabilize its peeling pigments and address discoloration at its joints.

Futaiji's main hall also houses five statues of the Five Wisdom Kings, or Myō-ō. Unlike the peaceful, placid expressions of other Buddhist statuary, the wrathful faces of these deities express their fury at the worldly delusions that lead people away from the path of Buddhism. Each statue is made from multiple pieces of *hinoki* cypress wood. The five deities depicted are Gundari Myō-ō, Gōzanze Myō-ō, Fudō Myō-ō, Kongōyasha Myō-ō, and Daiitoku Myō-ō.

These statues are thought to have been carved between the 900s and 1100s, but the inlaid crystal eyes of the Fudō Myō-ō statue (the frontmost statue on the right) were added later, during the Kamakura period (1185–1333).

The five Myō-ō statues were once kept in their own individual hall (called *kondō*) before being consolidated in the main hall. Of the five statues, only Fudō Myō-ō sits atop a flat plinth with a traditional flaming mandorla. It is thought that the other four statues were placed atop boulder-shaped pedestals during repairs in 1914.