

## Hakusan Gezan Butsu

### The Buddhist Statues that Descended the Mountain

The *gezan butsu* statues were originally located in these locations on Mt. Hakusan.

- Statue of monk Taicho Daishi, wood, 1611
- Shaka Nyorai Buddha, wood, eighth century
- Yakushi Nyorai Buddha, wood, 1712
- Kannon Bodhisattva, bronze, 1822
- Eleven-Headed Kannon Bodhisattva, bronze, 1824
- Amida Nyorai Buddha, bronze, 1822
- Eleven-Headed Kannon Bodhisattva, bronze, eleventh century
- Jizo Bodhisattva, bronze, 1183

The main attractions, however, are eight Buddhist statues lined up in a separate room, which were once housed in some of the little temples on Mt. Hakusan. When the statues were threatened with destruction toward the start of the Meiji era (1868–1912), they were saved by devout locals. Since the statues were carried down the mountain, they are now collectively known as the *gezan butsu*, “the Buddhas that descended the mountain.”

During the Meiji era, which marked the end of the period of rule by the warrior class and the beginning of a rapid drive to modernize, the government announced a policy called *shinbutsu bunri*, the forced separation of Buddhism and Shinto. After centuries of the two religions peacefully coexisting, the “foreign” Buddhist religion suddenly fell out of favor, leading to many Buddhist temples being closed or demolished, and countless Buddhist artifacts being destroyed.

The *gezan butsu* statues were saved by local residents who defied the new status quo, carrying them down the mountain and hiding them in safe locations. This was no small task, as some of the statues weighed up to 200 kilograms, and was a remarkable act of devotion. Fortunately, the policy was soon recalled, and the statues at Rinsaiji Temple could once again be displayed and openly worshipped.

## **The Statues**

### **Jizo Bodhisattva**

This 79-centimeter-tall bronze statue was originally located near the top of Mt. Hakusan, near Senjagaike Pond. Fujiwara no Hidehira (d. 1187), a regional leader and famous historical figure from what is today Fukushima Prefecture, was a believer in the Hakusan faith. It is said that he had the gilded bronze figure cast on the spot in 1183, making it a valuable cultural asset of the period.

### **Eleven-Headed Kannon Bodhisattva**

This 71-centimeter-tall statue, created by casting separate parts, was originally enshrined at Murodo, near Mt. Hakusan's tallest peak. During the late Fujiwara regency (897–1185), bronze casting was done using carved wooden molds. This Kannon is one of the very few examples remaining of this technique, and has been designated an Important Cultural Property.

### **Amida Nyorai Buddha**

This elegant bronze image of the Amida Buddha was originally located on 2,684-meter Mt. Onanjimine, one of Hakusan's peaks. An inscription on the back of the statue dates it to March 1822.

### **Eleven-Headed Kannon Bodhisattva**

Once enshrined at the very top of Mt. Hakusan, on the 2,702-meter Gozengamine peak, this statue was cast in 1824 at Hiraizumi Temple in Fukui Prefecture. It replaced the original wooden Buddha created by the monk Taicho Daishi (682–767). At 207 kilograms and 109 centimeters tall, it is one of the largest statues to ever have been placed on a mountain of this height.

### **Kannon Bodhisattva**

This statue was originally located on Mt. Bessan, one of the peaks of Hakusan. The 62.7-centimeter statue was cast by the same artist who created the Amida Nyorai statue that was originally located on Onanjimine peak.

### **Yakushi Nyorai Buddha**

This statue was once placed at Yakushido, the source of the hot spring for nearby Ichinose Onsen and a place for worship since the early Edo period (1603–1868). This 36-centimeter-tall wooden figure was first placed on the mountain in 1712.

### **Shakyamuni Buddha**

This wooden statue is said to be the actual work of Taicho Daishi (682–767), the Buddhist monk who first climbed Mt. Hakusan in 717. It was originally placed at the entrance of an ancient climbing path at Hinoki no Shuku. Only the upper half of the statue remains.

### **Statue of Taicho Daishi**

Taicho Daishi (682–767) was born in what is now Fukui Prefecture. He began to worship at Mt. Hakusan at the age of 14. When he was 36, he made the first recorded ascent of the summit, accompanied by two disciples. Carved at Echizen Hiraizumi Temple in 1611, the 60.6-centimeter wooden statue was originally located at Murodo.