The Who’s Who of Japanese Deities
And how to identify them in Japanese art
Questions?

• Q&A function at the bottom of your screen
• Two or three from the list
Test your knowledge
Slide One: Classification
Slide Two: Specific Deity
Bishamonten

Amida

Jizō
Purpose of this series

• Art history perspective
• Classifications of Buddhist deity
• Basic terminology associated with Buddhist icons
• To help laypeople identify the most common figures by looking at specific features
What this series is not
(due to time constraints)

- A history of Buddhism in Japan
- A discussion of Buddhist teachings and practice
- A detailed narrative of iconographic transformation
- An exhaustive list of the Buddhist pantheon
Three Questions

• Who is the deity?
  • Origin

• What role does it serve?

• How can it be identified?
  • Hand gesture (J: in 印)
  • Clothing, headgear
  • Implements, tools (J: jimotsu 持物)
There is always an exception.
The Hierarchy of Deities

• Buddhas (J: nyorai 如来)
• Bodhisattvas (J: bosatsu 菩薩)
• Wisdom Kings (J: myōō 明王)
• Celestial Beings (J: tenbu 天部)
Tenbu 天部

- Adopted into the Buddhist pantheon
- Guardians and protectors
- Attendants
- Highest of the six realms of rebirth
  - Celestial Beings, Asuras, Humans, Animals, Hungry Ghosts, Hellish Beings
- Mortal; subject to demotion
Shumisen 須弥山
Shitenno 四天王

- Lokapala; directional protectors
- Wrathful face (J: funnōsō 忿怒相)
- Headgear
- Chinese-style armor
- Demon (J: jyaki 邪鬼) underfoot
Tamonten
多聞天
North

Jikokuten
持国天
East

Zōchōten
増長天
South

Kōmokuten
広目天
West
Kōmokuten

- Virupaksa
- Deity of expansive vision
- Western slope
- Writing brush (J: fude 筆)
- Sutra scroll (J: kyōkan 経巻)
Tamonten

• Kuvera; Vaisravana
• Deity of prosperity
• Northern slope
• Chief of the shitennō
• Treasure pagoda (J: hōtō 宝塔)
• Trident (J: sansageki 三叉戟) or baton (J: hōbō 宝棒)
Taishakuten 帝釈天

- Indra
- Presides over Tōriten 忏利天
- Chief of the celestial beings
- Robes or armor
- Thunderbolt (J: kongō 金剛)
- Sometimes seated on an elephant
Bishamonten
毘沙門天

- Tamonten, but independent
- Nearly identical in appearance
Shichifukujin 七福神

- Likely a Muromachi (1392-1573) grouping
- Daoist
- Shintō
- Buddhist
- Treasure boat (J: takarabune 宝船)
Benzaiten
弁才天

- Sarasvati
- Patron deity of the arts
- Two-armed version
- Lute (J: biwa 琵琶)
- Eight-armed version
- Chinese-style robes
Kichijōten 吉祥天

- Lakshmi
- Deity of prosperity and good fortune
- Tang dynasty (618-906) court lady dress
- Wish-fulfilling jewel (J: nyoihōju 如意宝珠)
- Lotus (J: renge 蓮華)
- Mudra of charity (J: yogan-in 与願印)
Associated with Bishamonten
Niō 仁王, also kongō rikishi 金剛力士

- Benevolent Kings
- Dvarapala: gate guardians
- Vajrapani; in Japan, Shukongōshin 執金剛神
- Bodyguard for historical buddha
- Usually shirtless; heavily muscled
Ungyō 咲形
(sword)

Agyō 阿形
(thunderbolt)
Jūnishinshō 十二神将

• Twelve divine generals
• Originally yaksa (J: yasha 夜叉)
• Attendants to and emanations of Yakushi 薬師
• Martial postures
• Flame-like hair; helmets
• Sometimes with emblematic animal motifs
Quiz
via the poll function
1. Jūnishinshō
2. Niō
3. Shitenno
Bishamonten/Tamonten

Jūnishinshō – Dragon General
Sites

- Shitennō – Hōryūji 法隆寺; Kaijūsenji 海住山寺
- Shitennō with Taishakuten – Tōji 東寺
- Bishamonten and Kichijōten – Hōryūji 法隆寺
- Kichijōten – Jōruriji 淨瑠璃寺
- Eight-armed Benzaiten – Yakushiji 薬師寺
- Two-armed Benzaiten - Tsurugaoka Hachimangū 鶴岡八幡宮
- Niō – Tōdaiji 東大寺
- Jūnishinshō – Shin’yakushiji 新薬師寺
Questions
via the Q&A function
Please take a moment to complete the digital lecture questionnaire via the poll function. If you would like to comment on today’s programming, you may do so through the Q&A function.

Further questions can be directed to my michaelvanhartingsveldt@gmail.com