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Search A-to-Z

- QUICK START**
 Home: What's New
 Buddha's Teachings
 History & Timeline
 Historical Buddha
 Student's Guide
 Teacher's Guide

- DEITY GUIDES**
 Who's Who
 Bodhisattva
 Buddha
 Myo-o
 Shinto Kami
 Shugendo
 Stars & Planets
 Tenbu (Deva)

- OTHER GUIDES**
 About Site Author
 Bibliography
 Buddhism in Japan
 Busshi Glossary
 Carving Techniques
 Cycle of Suffering
 Drapery/Robe Guide
 Mandala Guide
 Mudra Guide
 Pilgrimage Guide
 Shinto Guide
 Statues by Artist
 Statues by Era
 Terminology

Our Sister Site
 Hand Carved Buddhist Statues

 Online Store
 buddhist-artwork.com

- A TO Z INDEX**
 3 Element Stele
 3 Monkeys
 4 Bosatsu
 4 Celestial Emblems
 4 Heavenly Kings
 5 (Number Five)
 5 Elements
 5 Tathagata
 5 Tier Pagoda
 5 Wisdom Kings
 6 Jizo
 6 Kannon
 6 Realms
 6 Nara Schools
 7 Lucky Gods
 7 Nara Temples

観音

KANNON BOSATSU, KANNON BODHISATTVA
LORD OF COMPASSION, GODDESS OF MERCY
 Represented as both Male and Female
 Assists People in Distress in the Earthly Realm

- Sanskrit = Avalokitesvara, Avalokiteshvara, Lokeshvara
- Japanese = Kannon, Kanjizai, Kanzeon, Kwannon
 - Chinese = Kuan Yin, Guanyin, Guanshiyin
 - Tibetan = Spyan-ras-gzigs

- Last Update June 2008
 Maria Kannon (Side Page)
 Fukukenjaku Kannon (Never Empty Lasso)
 Nyoirin Kannon at Raikoji Temple, Kamakura
 Six Kannon to Protect All in Six Realms
 Big Kannon Statues (Side Page)
 Juntei Kannon



11-headed Kannon
 Heian Era (794 - 1185 AD)
 Rakuya-ji Temple (Kyoto)

▲ Top ▲

Historical Notes. Kannon Bodhisattva (Jp. = Bosatsu) embodies compassion and is one of the most widely worshiped divinities in Japan and mainland Asia. Avalokitesvara, the Sanskrit name for this deity, can be translated as "Lord Who Regards All," and the Sino-Japanese term Kannon 観音 maintains this nuance, for Kannon literally means "watchful listening," and is often translated as "the one who sees/hears all." This is indeed the task of the compassionate Kannon -- to witness/listen to the prayers and cries (sounds) of those in difficulty in the earthly realm, and to help them achieve enlightenment. In Mahayana Buddhism throughout Asia, Kannon is considered an active emanation of **Amida Buddha**. In Japan, numerous individuals are considered emanations of Kannon, including **Prince Shotoku Taishi** and **Daruma** (the Father of Zen Buddhism). To Tibetans, the current Dalai Lama is an incarnation of Kannon.

観ん ありきや そわか
 Japanese Mantra for Kannon Bosatsu

- 8 Legions
- 8 Zodiac Patrons
- 10 Kings of Hell
- 12 Devas
- 12 Generals
- ♦ 12 Zodiac Animals
- 28 Legions
- 28 Constellations
- About the Author
- Agyo
- Aizen
- Amano Jyaku
- Amida Nyorai
- Apsaras
- Arakan (Rakan)
- Arhat (Rakan)
- Ashuku Nyorai
- Asuka Era Art Tour
- Asura (Ashura)
- Bamboo
- Benzaiten (Benten)
- Bibliography
- Big Buddha
- Birushana Nyorai
- Bishamon-ten
- Bodhisattva
- Bosatsu Group
- Bosatsu of Mercy
- Bosatsu on Clouds
- Buddha (Historical)
- Buddha Group
- Buddha Statues
- Busshi (Sculptors)
- Calligraphy
- Celestial Emblems
- Celestial Maidens
- Children Patrons
- Classifying
- ♦ Color Red
- Confucius
- Contact Us
- Daibutsu
- Dajizaiten
- Daikoku-ten
- Dainichi Nyorai
- Daruma (Zen)
- Datsueba (Hell Hag)
- Deva (Tenbu)
- Donations
- Dosojin
- Dragon
- Drapery (Robes)
- Early Buddhism
- Japan
- ♦ Ebisu
- Eight Legions
- En no Gyoja
- Estores
- Family Tree
- Footprints of Buddha
- Fox (Oinari)
- Fudo (Fudou) Myoo
- Fugen Bosatsu
- Fujin (Wind God)
- Fukurokuju
- Gakko & Nikko
- Gardens
- Gigeiten
- Godai Nyorai
- Goddess of Mercy
- ♦ Goddesses

Kannon's Sanskrit, Chinese, and Japanese Names

- Avalokiteśvara (Sanskrit for Kannon)
- 阿婆盧吉低舍羅 (Chinese transliteration of Avalokiteśvara)
- 光世音 Guānshìyīn (Chinese for Kannon)
- 觀音 Guānyīn (Chinese for Kannon)
- 觀自在 Guānzìzài (Chinese for Kannon)
- 觀世自在 Guānshì Zìzài (Chinese for Kannon)
- 六觀音 Liù Guānyīn (Chinese for Six Kannon)
- Spyan ras Gzigs (Tibetan); Savior of the Land of Snow
- 觀音 Kannon (Japanese)
- 觀世音 Kanzeon (another Japanese name for Kannon)
- 六觀音 Roku Kannon (Japanese); Six Kannon (English)

Kannon's Various English Translations

- Bodhisattva of Compassion
- Goddess of Mercy or God of Compassion
- One Who Hears the Prayers of the World
- One Who Observes the Sounds of the World
- One Who is Sensitive to the Sufferings of the World
- Hearer of the World's Sounds (or World's Cries)
- Lord Who Looks Down with Pity on All Living Beings
- ♦ • Lord Who Regards All (Sentient Beings) ♦



SA

Kannon's Sanskrit Seed Syllable

**Guardian of People Born
in the Zodiac Year of the Rat**
Who is Your Patron Deity? Click Here to Find Out.

▲ Top ▲

The Male Goddess? The Kannon is considered male in the Buddhist traditions of India, Tibet, and Southeast Asia. But in China, the Kannon is commonly portrayed as female (for reasons not easily explained or understood). In Japan, the male form predominates in sculpture and art, although female manifestations of Kannon are nonetheless plentiful. Indeed, a persistent femininity clings to Kannon imagery in both pre-modern and modern Japan. In Western nations, Kannon is most commonly known as the "Goddess of Mercy." But the "goddess" part is doubtful and unsupported by any canonical text in the Buddhist scriptures. Gender-specific depictions of Kannon, moreover, are always male. If you click the gold-colored photo shown immediately below, for example, a close look will reveal that the "goddess" has a mustache.



▲ Top ▲

♦ 33 Forms of Kannon

Jp. = 三十三身

♦ Sanjuusan Shin

The Kannon can appear in many different forms to save people according to their time and place. The Avalokitesvara Sutra mentions **33 specific forms**. Says Shaku Soen (deceased), lord abbot of Engakuji Temple in Kamakura: "She will be a

Gongen
Gravestones
Hachi Bushu
Hachiman
Hands (Mudra)
Hell (10 Judges)
Hell Hag (Datsueba)
Hell Scrolls
Henge
Holy Mountains
Ho-o (Phoenix)
Hotei
Idaten
Ishanaten
Ishidoro (Ishidourou)
Jikokuten
Jizo Bosatsu
Jocho Busshi
Juni Shi
Juni Shinsho
Juni Ten
Junrei (Pilgrimage)
Jurojin
Juuzenji
Jyaki or Tentoki
Kaikai Busshi
Kankiten
Kannon Bosatsu
Kappa
Kariteimo (Kishibojin)
Karura
Karyoubinga
Kendatsuba
Kichijouten
Kitchen Gods
Kishibojin (Kariteimo)
Kitsune (Oinari)
Kokuzo Bosatsu
Koujin (Kojin)
Komokuten
Koushin
Lanterns (Stone)
Links
Making Statues
Mandara (Mandala)
Maneki Neko
Marishiten
Miroku
Bosatsu/Nyorai
Monju Bosatsu
Monkeys
Moon Lodges
Mother Goddess
Mudra (Hands)
Myoken (Pole Star)
Myo-o
Nara Era Art Tour
Newsletter Sign Up
Nijuhachi Bushu
Nikko & Gakko
Ninpinin
Nio Protectors
Nyorai Group
Oinari (Fox)
Phoenix (Ho-o)
Pilgrimage Guide
Pottery
Protective Stones
Raigo Triad
Raijin (Thunder God)
Rakan (Arhat)

philosopher, merchant, man of letters, person of low birth, or anything as required by the occasion, while her sole aim is to deliver all beings without exception from ignorance and suffering." <quoted from **Kamakura: Fact and Legend** by Iso Mutsu, ISBN: 0804819688 >

In traditional Japanese Buddhist art and sculpture, the "Shou Kannon" (聖観音 or 正観音) represents the unchangeable form of the deity -- the "pure and sacred" form -- while her other manifestations are commonly referred to as the 33 Keshin (incarnations; see adjacent table and **below photos**). Shou comes from the Sanskrit "Arya," meaning holy.

The worship of Kannon Bosatsu began in Japan in the 7th century, soon after **Buddhism reached Japan** by way of Korea and China. For many more details on Japan's earliest artwork of Kannon, please see **JAANUS (outside link)**. In Japan, the Kannon is often depicted with eleven faces/heads (Juuichimen Kannon 十一面観音), symbolic of shedding sweetness and mercy in all directions. Since s/he is one of the principal attendants of **Amida Buddha**, the Buddha of the Western Paradise, you will also find a figure of the **Amida** among her eleven heads (see the topmost central figure in the headdress of above photos). In some traditions, the lower ten heads represent the ten stages of development required to attain enlightenment. The 11th head is that of Amida. For much more on the iconography of the 11-Headed Kannon, **click here**.

The Kannon is also often shown with a thousand arms (Senju or Senju Kannon 千手観音), symbolic of her ability to embrace earth and alleviate the suffering of all people in the earthly realm. In Japan, the most widely known pilgrimage circuit devoted to Kannon covers **100 sites**, and making the circuit to each in proper order is said to save the believer from Hell and to open the gates to everlasting life. Kannon occupies a major place in the liturgy of the Pure Land Sect in Japan, whose principal deity of worship is **Amida**.

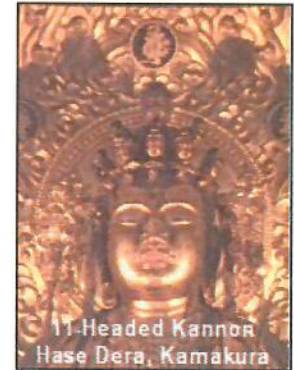
In Japan, three of the most common feminized forms of Kannon are Koyasu Kannon (子安観音 child giving), Juntei Butsumo Kannon (准胝仏母 pure one, the mother of the Buddhist deities), and Jibo Kannon (慈母観音 loving mother). See **Patrons of Motherhood** for more on these forms.

NOTE: Among the three Daigoji 醍醐寺 (Kyoto) sects of the Ono branch 小野流 of Esoteric Shingon Buddhism, Juntei Butsumo 准胝仏母 (Skt. = Cundi), is considered a **Bodhisattva** 菩薩, a form of Kannon 観音, and one of the **Six Kannon** (Roku Kannon 六観音). In the Hirosawa 広沢流 branch of Esoteric Shingon 真言 and in Tendai 天台 Buddhism, however, Juntei is considered a **Buddha**. Juntei is also known as Shichigutei Butsumo 七俱胝仏母 or Butsumo Juntei 仏母准胝. Juntei is a deity called upon to gain wisdom, conjugal harmony, long life, rain, or to obtain a child. Shōbō 聖寶 (+822-909), the founder of the Ono School of Shingon 真言 and the **Daigoji Temple**, is associated with the deity, who, according to legend, was invoked by Shōbō and credited with the birth of two emperors. <Source: See **JAANUS**>

In Japan, the Buddhist nun Chuujou Hime (Chujo Hime 中将姫) is said to be an incarnation of the Kannon. Chujo Hime is also regarded as one of the greatest early Japanese embroidery artists. **See below** for legend involving this Buddhist nun. To Tibetans, the current Dalai Lama is an incarnation of Kannon.

Chinese Legends About Kannon

Known as Guanyin (Kuan-yin) in China, the Kannon is said to be the spiritual son of **Amitabha (Amida)**, although images of the Kannon appear mostly as a goddess. The Chinese also say that



十一面観音

11-Headed (Faced) Kannon
Jyuichi Men Kannon

千手観音

Kannon of 1000 Hands/Arms
Senju Kannon

馬頭観音

Kannon with Horse's Head
Batou Kannon
Protector of Animals

聖観音

Sacred (Pure) Form of Kannon
Sho (Shou) Kannon

如意輪観音

Omnipotent Kannon
Nyo-irin Kannon
Often has six arms
Holds the wish-granting jewel

一言観音

One Prayer Kannon
Hito Koto Kannon
Will only answer one prayer

ふくうけんさく 不空羅索

Fukukensaku Kannon
Click here for image
"Unfailing Fishing Line"
or "Never Empty Lasso."
Often has eight arms.
Holds lasso (net) to catch
straying souls and lead
them to salvation.

Top of Page

- Red Clothing
- Reincarnation
- Robes (Drapery)
- Rock Gardens
- Sanbo Kojin
- Sanno Gongen
- Sarutahiko
- Sculptors (Busshi)
- Seishi Bosatsu
- Sendan Kendatsuba
- Seven Lucky Gods
- Shachi, Shachihoko
- Shaka Nyorai
- Shape Shifters
- Shichifukujin
- Shijin (Shishin)
- Shinra Myoujin
- Shinto Concepts
- Shinto Main Menu
- Shinto Shrines
- Shishi (Lion)
- Shitenno
- Shoki
- Shomen Kongo
- Shotoku Taishi
- Shrines
- Shugendo
- Siddhartha
- Six States
- Star Deities
- Stone Gardens
- Stone Graves
- Stone Lanterns
- Stones (Top Menu)
- Suijin (Water Kami)
- Tamonten
- Taishakuten
- Tanuki
- Temples
- Temple Lodging
- Tenbu Group
- Tengu
- Tennin & Tennyo
- Tentoki or Jyaki
- Terminology
- Tibetan Carpets
- Tibet Photos
- Tibetan Tanka
- Transmigration
- Ungyo
- Unkei Busshi
- Water Basin
- Wheel of Life
- Yakushi Nyorai
- Yasha (Yaksha)
- Zao Gongen
- Zen (Daruma)
- Zen Art Tour
- Zodiac Calendar
- Zochoten

Kuan-yin (Kwanjin) was born into this world as the daughter of the King of the Chow Dynasty. Sentenced to death by her father for refusing to marry, she was sent to the executioner's block, where it is said the executioner's sword broke without inflicting a wound. Other Chinese tales say her spirit was once transported to the underworld, where **King Yama** (Skt.), the lord of hell, attended to her with great respect. But her radiance turned hell into paradise, so **King Yama** sent her back to earth again, transporting her on a lotus flower.

There are many other famous legends. In the **Legend of Miaoshan** (text by Chinese Buddhist monk Puming after a vision he experienced in 1103 AD), the king's daughter gives up her own eyes and arms to help cure her ailing father. In another legend, said to have occurred in 817 AD during the Chinese Tang dynasty, a beautiful girl in the countryside was much sought after for marriage by eligible young men. As the number of men who were eager to marry her was large, she adopted a novel method for selecting a suitor. She put forth a condition that she would marry the person who would memorize the Guanyin chapter of the Lotus Sutra in one night. Twenty men succeeded in doing this but because there were still too many for the marriage, she again made a request that these twenty should learn by heart the Vajracchedika sutra overnight. Once again there was a sizable number of men who had achieved the feat. The girl's third condition was that he who memorized the entire Lotus Sutra in just three days could marry her. A man named Ma Lang was the only one who could accomplish this and so the marriage was to take place. Just as the marriage ceremony was to commence the girl took ill and died. Soon after the burial an old priest visited Ma Lang and requested him to dig up the grave. The coffin contained only pieces of golden bones. The old priest said that the girl was a manifestation of Guanyin who had come to lead people to salvation. After saying this the old man too vanished. From then on the people of the district became Guanyin devotees. <For much more on Kannon lore, please see **THE CREATION OF GODDESS OF MERCY FROM AVALOKITESVARA**, from the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (New Delhi). The story of Ma Lang, quoted above, comes from this site.>



子安観音
Koyasu (Child-Giving) Kannon
Protector of Children

マリア観音

Maria Kannon (Side Page)
Statues of Virgin Mary
disguised as Kannon
For more forms, [click here](#)



Japanese Legend Hatakiri Kannon 幡切観音

- The **88-Temple Pilgrimage on Shikoku Island** (Japan) is still a popular pilgrimage today. Temple number ten, Kirihata-ji Temple 切幡寺, located on Mt. Tokudozan 得度山, is associated with a very curious legend involving Kannon Bodhisattva. This temple venerates a manifestation of Kannon named Hatakiri Kannon 幡切観音 (cloth-ripping Kannon). Says longtime site contributor **Gabi Greve**:

Once upon a time, at the bottom of Mt. Tokudozan, there lived a young girl who made a living by weaving cloth. One day, a poor priest came along and asked her for a piece of cloth. Without further ado, she cut in half the cloth she was working on and gave one piece to the priest. The girl's father had been banished to a faraway island, although he had not committed any crime. The girl's mother, who was pregnant when this happened, came to the mountain to give birth to the daughter, but died without being able to fulfill her wish of praying properly to the Holy Kannon. So the priest carved a statue of the Holy Kannon with a piece of cloth over her arm and gave it to the girl to pray to every day. The girl then transformed herself, sending out seven layers of light, and transformed into the Holy Kannon. As you might guess, the priest was no other than Kobo Daishi (774 - 835 AD), the founder of Japan's esoteric sect of Shingon Buddhism as well as the founder of the **88-Temple Pilgrimage in Shikoku**. < end text from **Gabi Greve** >



Hatakiri Kannon

This legend should not, perhaps, be taken at face value. It appears to be a variation of an earlier story. Says **JAANUS**:

Scholars believe that the original Taima **Mandara** was a large-scale embroidery imported from Tang China (618 - 906 AD). It is believed that in 763 AD, during Japan's Nara period, the devotee Buddhist nun Chuujou Hime 中将姫 ([see above](#)) had it woven with lotus threads (Guushi 藕糸) based on a vision she had experienced. Thus the original woven work is sometimes also called

The deities **Amida**, Kannon, and **Jizo** became extremely popular during the Kamakura Period (1185 - 1333 AD), and today remain the bedrock of Buddhism

for the common folk.

- **Amida** for the coming life in paradise,
- **Kannon** for salvation in earthly life, and
- **Jizo** for salvation from hell.

Amida Triad

Kannon often appears in the **Amida Raigo Triad**, for the Kannon is one of the principal attendants of **Amida**, the Buddha of the Western Paradise. Often, you will find a figurehead of Amida among the Kannon's eleven heads (see headdress in top photo; Amida in central top position). Kannon is sometimes attended by **Nikko and Gakko Bosatsu** as well.

Below Text From: jodo.org

According to the Meditation Sutra (kammuryoju-kyo), the Kannon Bodhisattva, together with **Seishi Bodhisattva**, accompanies **Amida Buddha** and welcomes people who recite the name of the Buddha at the time of their deaths. Popular worship of Kannon began in India and then spread throughout China and Japan. Originally male in form, Kannon is now commonly portrayed as female in China, Japan and the rest of East Asia.

the Guushi Mandara (藕糸曼荼羅). The miraculous weaving of the 4.5 meters square tszure-ori 綴織, usually translated as "figured (hand woven) brocade," is said to have been accomplished by this nun, who was believed to be a human incarnation of Kannon Bodhisattva, the main attendant to **Amida**. This 8th-century work is still preserved today at Taimadera 當麻寺 (Taima Temple) in fragments with a great many Kamakura period repairs. From the Heian period (10th century), with the increasing popularity of Pure Land beliefs, the work grew ever more revered. In the Kamakura period Hounen's 法然 (1133-1212) disciple Shoukoku 証空 (1177-1247), founder of the Seizan 西山 branch of the Joudo sect (Joudoshuu 浄土宗), actively propagated the teachings of the **Taima Mandala (outside link at JAANUS)**. <end JAANUS quote >

Above Photo of Hatakiri Kannon 幡切観音 courtesy: www.e-nikki.jp/nikki.php?user=hirochan&date=2005-03-31

▲ Top ▲

• **Treasures of Hase Dera, Kamakura**

This large 11-headed gilt statue (see photo at right), built sometime in the 8th century, stands over nine meters high, making it the largest wooden statue in Japan. Folklore says this wooden statue was carved from a giant camphor tree by the monk Tokudo in 721 AD, who made two images from the same tree. The first image was enshrined in a temple in Nara Prefecture, while the second (the statue now at Hase Dera in Kamakura) was cast into the sea with prayers that it float to an area where it had greatest karmic connection and thereafter save souls in that area. According to legend, it washed up on shore in 736, at Nagai, in the Miura Peninsula, slightly south of Kamakura, glowing brightly, it is said, and later it was transferred to its present site at Hase Dera in Kamakura.



• **33 Keshin (Incarnations) of the Goddess of Mercy**

Thirty-three wood-carved figures were presented to Hase Kannon Temple (aka Hase Dera) by shogun Yoshimasa (1449-1471). They represent the keshin, or incarnations, of the Goddess of Mercy, who, it is said, comes in many forms to save the souls of the suffering. To Tibetans, for example, the Dalai Lama is an incarnation of Kannon. Pictured here are some of the 33 Keshin. Photo at right scanned from brochure of Hase Dera in Kamakura.



• **Number 33**

The Avalokitesvara Sutra mentions 33 specific forms of the Kannon. But it is unclear why the number 33 was used. One theory relates to the Buddhist realm called Mt. Shumisen (or Mt. Sumeru, originally from Hindu mythology). In this heavenly palace of the Buddha and all followers, there are 33 deities who guard and protect the realm. They are commanded by **Taishakuten**, who governs the other 32 gods who live in Zenkenjo (Palace of Correct Views) in the Buddhist heaven (Trayastrimsha) on the peak of Mt. Sumeru; [click here](#) for more. In Japan, there are **100 temples nationwide** that are sacred to Kannon, and making the circuit to each in proper order is said to save the believer from Hell and to open the gates to everlasting life.

▲ Top ▲



Above: Photos of some "Keshin" (Incarnations of Kannon)

From Hase Dera (Hase Kannon Temple) in Kamakura
Presented to Hase Dera by Shogun Yoshimasa (1449-1471 AD)

▲ Top ▲

Kannon With Horse's Head (Batou Kannon, 馬頭観音)

See above photo with horse's head. Farmers pray to this particular manifestation of the Kannon for the safety and preservation of their horses and cattle, and Batou Kannon is not only said to protect dumb animals, particularly those who labor for mankind, but she extends her power to protecting their spirits and bringing them ease and a happier life than they experienced while on earth. (Source: Myths and Legends of Japan, by F. Hadland Davis, 1913)

Says site reader and contributor GABI

"By neighing like a horse, these deities ward off the bad demons. Batou Kannon has been known in Japan since 7th century. She is especially honored by the horse breeders in Northern Japan. Nowadays you even find bicycles in front of the stone votive statues on waysides. There is also a version with the head of an ox (gotoo Kannon) or a pig (tontoo Kannon). There is also a special mudra for the horse headed deity -- Batou Myoo-in, Bakoo-in (or makoo-in) -- as quoted from Ashida and Hanayama." <end quote by GABI>

▲ Top ▲

More About Batou Kannon

Courtesy **JAANUS: Japanese Architecture & Art Net Users System**

NOTE: Below text uses Japanese characters. You'll need a Japanese font set on your computer to read the Japanese characters.

Batou Kannon 馬頭観音

Sk: Hayagriva. Also called Batou Myouou 馬頭明王. The "Horse-headed" Kannon. Kannon 観音 in an angry, funnu 忿怒, form. He is also considered to be the angry form of the Buddha Muryouju 無量寿. One of the Six Kannon, Roku Kannon 六観音, who saves those in the realm of animals, and also one of the Hachidai Myouou 八大明王. He is distinguished by the white horse's head that he wears like a crown. The horse is one of the symbols of dominion of the "Ideal king," Kyouryurinjin 教令輪身 (or Kyouryoujouou 教令聖王; Sk: Chakravartin). There are many different forms of Batou having one to three faces and two to eight arms, and he holds different attributes in different images. In the Kannon Section of the **Taizoukai Mandala** 胎藏界曼荼羅, he has three faces and two arms, is red in color, and makes the komponin 根本印 gesture in front of his chest. However, in art forms with three faces and eight arms are most common. The cult of Batou appears not to have been as popular as those of the other esoteric Kannon, although it is recorded that an image of Batou was enshrined in Saidaiji 西大寺 in Nara in the late 8c. Batou is sometimes found in sets of the Six Kannon, but independent images dating from the Heian period (794-1185) are rare. Well-known examples dating from the Kamakura and Muromachi (1392-1568) periods include the standing statues in Kanzeonji 観世音寺 of Fukuoka prefecture and Joururiji 浄瑠璃寺 of Kyoto, as well as the painted image of seated Batou in the Boston Museum of Art. In the Edo period (1600-1868), Batou came to be worshipped as a protector of horses due to his iconography and his role as savior of those in the realm of animals. Many remaining stone statues (**sekibutsu** 石仏) of Batou were once set in place to protect travelers and their horses from injury on dangerous paths. It is also thought that Batou became conflated with a folk horse deity believed to be the vehicle of a deity (kami 神), who rides between this world and the sacred realm. Because of this identification, he became the protector of horses and the Buddhist counterpart (honjibutsu 本地仏) of deities of common Komagata 駒形 (lit. "Horse-shaped") shrines, which are found all over Japan. <end quote from JAANUS>



See below links for more on Batou Kannon:

- [Cleveland Museum of Art – Batou Kannon Page](#)
- [Norman Havens, Fujino Township, Batou Kannon Page.](#)

▲ Top ▲

1000- Armed Kannon (Senju Kannon)

For a side page with more details, [click here](#).

Although the word Senju Kannon means thousand-armed Kannon, most sculptures show only 42 arms - two are regular arms, but each of the remaining 40 arms represents the 25 Buddhist worlds (thus, 40 times 25 equals 1000).



1000-arm Kannon (Senju Kannon)
8th century, Fujii-dera (in Osaka)

Above photo courtesy of:

日本仏像史

The Concise History of Japanese Buddhist Sculpture
2001, Bijutu Shuppan-sha . ISBN4-568-40061-9



1000 Armed Kannon

Zodiac Amulet of the 1,000 Armed Kannon
Guardian Deity for People Born in the Year of the Rat
[Available for Online Purchase at Our Sister Site](#)

▲ Top ▲

Six Basic Forms of Kannon. Like Japanese groupings of the **Six Jizo Bosatsu**, the Kannon in Japan is also shown in six basic forms to protect people in all **six realms of rebirth (reincarnation)**. The six forms of Kannon, of Chinese origin, are shown below. There seem to be at least three variations of the grouping, but the earliest known reference to the grouping comes from a Chinese Tendai text entitled 摩

訶止觀 (Jp. = Makashikan; circa 594 AD), translated as "Great Concentration and Insight." By the early-mid 10th century AD, effigies of the Six Kannon were used in Japan to pray for the welfare of the dead. The six also appear frequently in the Rokujikyō Mandara 六字經曼荼羅 of Japan's Shingon sect. (Source **JAANUS**)

In Tendai & Shingon texts, the Six Kannon differ slightly.

1. Shoukannon; the holy one; 聖觀音 (hell)
2. Senju Kannon; 1000-armed; 千手觀音 (hungry ghosts)
3. Batou Kannon; horse-headed; 馬頭觀音 (animals)
4. Juuichimen Kannon; 11-faced; 十一面觀音 (ashura)
5. Juntei 准胝 (humans); but in Tendai texts, Fukukenjaku Kannon 不空罽索觀音 replaces Juntei
6. Nyoirin Kannon 如意輪觀音 (deva; Jp = ten)

Another Variant of the Six Kannon

(Source: Soothill's Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms)

- | |
|--|
| 1. 大悲 Most Pitiful (Senju Kannon, 1000-Armed Kannon) |
| 2. 大慈 Most Merciful (Sho-Kannon, the Holy One) |
| 3. 獅子無畏 Of lion courage (Bato Kannon, Horse-Headed Kannon) |
| 4. 大光普照 Of universal light (Juuichimen Kannon, 11-Headed Kannon) |
| 5. 天人丈夫 Strength of gods and people (Cundi; Juntei Kannon) |
| 6. 大梵深遠 Great Brahma (Nyoirin Kannon, Jewel & Wheel Kannon) |

The Six Realms of Rebirth:

For much more on the Six Realms, click here.

1. Beings in Hell (Naraka-gati in Sanskrit)
2. Hungry Ghosts (Preta-gati in Sanskrit)
3. Animals (Tiryagyoni-gati in Sanskrit)
4. Asura (Asura-gati in Sanskrit)
5. Humans (Manusya-gati in Sanskrit)
6. Deva (Deva-gati in Sanskrit)

六觀音 ROKU KANNON. SIX KANNON.



Shō Kannon 聖觀音, Senju Kannon 千手觀音, Batō Kannon 馬頭觀音

Above and Below

Six Kannon 六觀音 by **Jokei II**, Dated +1224
Wood, Treasures of Daihō-onji Temple 大報恩寺 (Kyoto)

**Six Kannon Protect All Sentient Beings
in the Six Realms of Reincarnation**

1. Beings in Hell, Shō Kannon 聖觀音, 177.9 cm

2. Hungry Ghosts, Senju Kannon 千手観音, 180.0 cm
3. Animals, Batō 馬頭観音 (Horse-Headed) Kannon, 173.3 cm
4. Ashura, Jūichimen (11-Headed) Kannon 十一面観音, 180.6 cm
5. Humans, Juntei Kannon 准胝観音, 175.7 cm
6. Deva, Nyoirin Kannon 如意輪観音, 96.1 cm

Note One. See [Six Realms](#) for many more details.

Note Two. [Professor Sherry Fowler](#) (U. of Kansas) has done extensive research into the Six Kannon at Daihō-onji Temple.



Jūichimen Kannon 十一面観音, Juntei Kannon 准胝観音, Nyoirin Kannon 如意輪観音

▲ Top ▲

Buddhism for the Common Folk

The three deities **Amida**, Kannon (this page), and **Jizo** are intimately connected with Japan's popular Pure Land sects, which came to prominence among the common folk during the Kamakura period (1185 - 1333 AD). All three remain the bedrock of folk Buddhism in modern Japan -- **Amida** for the coming life in paradise, Kannon for salvation in earthly life, and **Jizo** for salvation from hell. Both Kannon and Jizo serve Amida. The three, along with **Fudo Myo-o**, are perhaps the most widely venerated Buddhist deities in Japan, and statues of all four, in stone or wood or plastic or ceramic, are found throughout the Japanese islands. Kannon, moreover, appears prominently in the Lotus Sutra, which is the main object of worship in Japan's popular Nichiren sect. In addition, in Asia, there is a grouping called the **Four Great Bodhisattva**, with each of the four symbolizing a specific aspect of Buddhism. They are Kannon Bodhisattva (compassion), **Monju Bodhisattva** (wisdom), **Fugen Bodhisattva** (praxis), and **Jizo Bodhisattva** (vast patience and salvation from suffering).

▲ Top ▲



1000-Armed Kannon and Shaka Nyorai (The Historical Buddha)
Praying Hands Amulet that opens and closes (hinged)
Available for Online Purchase at Buddhist-Artwork.com

▲ Top ▲

THE RITE OF REPENTANCE SHUNI-E CEREMONY FOR KANNON Special Kannon Ritual at Todaiji (Toudaiji) Temple in Nara Below Text Courtesy of Temple's English Brochure

The Shuni-e Ceremony is best known by the name of **Omizutori**. Begun in 752 AD by Jitchuu, the chief disciple of Rouben who founded Toudaiji Temple, the ceremony is formally a rite of repentance to the **Eleven-Headed Kannon** in which penitence for one's misdeeds is sought in front of an image of the **11-Headed Kannon** (Jp. = Senju Kannon). Due to the Three Poisons -- covetousness, anger, and ignorance that are the true nature of humans -- we commit myriad offenses which accumulate as contaminants of the spirit; as a result we become unable to see the truth and we also become ill. Through the ceremony, one can repent one's misdeeds and attain a pure mind and body, do away with the misfortune and woes that are the retribution for one's evil deeds, and obtain well-being. However, although the Shuni-e is a rite of repentance, it is important to remember that when it was begun it was a ritual performed on behalf of the state. Natural disasters, epidemics, and rebellions were all seen as "illnesses" of the state and the ritual was performed in order to cure such illnesses, to gain a fruitful harvest of the Five Crops, and to achieve peace under heaven -- in other words, to guarantee the welfare of the people.

When the rite of repentance is for the state or all its people, a special group of performers and a ceremony of a suitable scale become necessary. Thus, rites of repentance as services to be held by a large number of monks were devised and the Shuni-e Ceremony took form as on such ritual. The monks who participate in it are called the RENGYOU SHUU. Presently their number is eleven, among whom various responsibilities are divided. The four senior positions include the WAJOU, who administers the Buddhist precepts to the entire group; the DAIDOUSHI, who chants the prayers and the essence of various texts and who functions as the leader of the whole ceremony; the SHUSHI, who determines the sacred boundaries of the ritual space and who intones the *daranis* (secret incantations) while forming **mudras** (symbolic hand gestures); and the DOUTSUKASA, who ensures that the ceremony proceeds properly and is in charge of miscellaneous affairs surrounding the Shuni-e Ceremony. The remaining seven participants are known as the HIRASHUU. In addition, there are a number of people who assist the RENGYOU SHUU, so in all almost 30 individuals are directly involved with this ceremony.

The RENGYOU SHUU repent misdeeds on behalf of all people and seek their welfare by praying to Kannon. Since they function in many ways as intermediaries between Kannon and ordinary people, they must possess a considerable amount of religious insight.

The ceremony begins with a preparatory period held at the Kaidan-in between the 20th and the 28th of February, known as the BEKKA. During this time the RENGYOU SHUU cut themselves off from their

usual lives and gradually purify their minds and bodies. In addition they prepare the paper for paper garments, known as KAMIKO, worn only during the Shuni-e Ceremony and they make artificial camellias used to ornament the altar of the Nigatsu-dou and practice SHOUMYOU, the chanting of Buddhist sutras.

On the afternoon of February 28th when the BEKKA ends, the RENGYOUSHUU move to the Shelter of Reclusion located below the Nigatsu-dou, where they reside for the duration of the ceremony. Late that evening the main ceremony begins. Lasting two weeks it is divided into the Former Seven Days and the Latter Seven Days. In turn, each day of the ceremony is divided into six periods: noon watch, sunset watch, first evening watch, mid-evening watch, latter evening watch, and dawn watch, which are known as the Observances of the Six Hours (Rokuji no Gyoubou). Because the sutras chanted at each time vary according to their length and speed, throughout the day the SHOUMYOU is exceedingly varied. In many ways, this recitation should be seen as a type of Buddhist music.

During the first evening watch, the Register of the Names of the Kami (JINMYOU-CHOU) is presented and read, a practice of great antiquity. When Monk Jitchuu first held the Observances of the Six Hours, at the presentation and recitation of the names of the Kami (Shinto divinities), he summoned the myriad Shinto deities throughout the land and they rushed to the Nigatsu-dou to pray for the success of the ceremony and to provide it with protection. But the god O-Nyuu Myoujin of Wakasa was late because he had been fishing. It is said that when he finally did arrive just as the observance was ending, he was so moved that he promised that he would provide lustral water to apologize for his tardiness. Thereupon, two comorants, one white and one black, shattered a great boulder and water gushed out of the ground. From that time onward, sacred water has flowed plentifully from the spring. After midnight on the 12th day of the ceremony, this sacred water is drawn and offered to Kannon, and it is from this practice that the name OMIZUTORI, literally "the drawing of water," is derived.

Other parts of the ceremony include the HASHIRI, when the RENGYOUSHUU tuck up their robes and running, circumambulate the inner sanctum; the fire ritual known as the DATTAN, in which a great pine torch is swung about in the inner sanctum; and the presentation and recitation of the Register of the Names of the Dead, including that of the legendary Lady in Blue who is said to have appeared during the ceremony in the Kamakura Period inquiring as to why her name was not included in the list. It has been thus performed from that time onward. <end quote from Todaiji Temple, Nara>

▲ Top ▲

不空罽索観音
FUKUKENJAKU KANNON

The Fukukenjaku (Fukūkenjaku) Kannon 不空罽索観音 at Tōdaiji Temple 東大寺 in Nara stands 12 feet high (see photo below). It is dated to +746 and is made of dry lacquer. The Kannon is flanked by **Nikko** (to right of main statue) and **Gakko** (to left).

This form of Kannon has eight arms. Fukukenjaku means "never empty lasso." It refers to the coil of rope which the **Kannon** holds in one of the lower arms (viewer's right). Kannon uses this rope to catch straying souls and lead them to salvation. The lasso (noose) is found in other multi-armed forms of Kannon as well, and is said to bind attachment rather than catch straying souls.



Fukukenjaku Kannon
by **Kokei**, dated +1189.
Wood, lacquer & gold leaf
H = 348 cm, Kōfukuji 興福寺
Temple, Nara. Photo from
Heibonsha Survey, Vol. 11

Fukukenjaku Kannon, Todai-ji, Nara, Japan

NARA



Fukūkenjaku Kannon 不空罽索觀音
Flanked by **Nikko** (right) and **Gakko** (left)
with hands in the **Gassho mudra** (prayer, veneration).
746 AD, Dry Lacquer, Tōdaiji Temple 東大寺 (Nara)
Photo courtesy www.art-and-archaeology.com

▲ Top ▲

19 **Nyoirin Kannon** 如意輪觀音. Sanskrit = Cintamanicakra. One of the many forms of Kannon. In Japan, the six-armed Shingon version is the most prevalent. Typically shown holding the Wish-Fulfilling Jewel (Nyoī Hōju 如意宝珠) and the Dharma Wheel (Rinpō 輪宝), the latter symbolizing the teachings of Buddhism.

来迎寺
西御門

西御門にあり
来迎寺に連れて行く
下は。
如意輪観音が
見たいです。



April 9, 2010



Nishi-mikado
region of
Kamakura City

- **Above Photos.** The Nyoirin Kannon 如意輪観音 statue at Raikoji (Raikōji) Temple 来迎寺 in Kamakura features beautiful "domon" 土紋, or clay crests. The **domon technique** was used for decorating Buddhist statues and is unique to Kamakura, and is thus also known as Kamakura Domon 鎌倉土紋. Clay is kneaded 練 (neru) into patterns or placed in molds and then affixed to the statue with lacquer, resembling a relief. The crests on the Raikoji statue are said to ward off evil (厄除け yakuyoke) and to ensure easy delivery (安産 anzan) to women in labor. Statue dated to 14th century.
- **Nyoirin Kannon Legend at Raikoji Temple:** A sad story about the Nyoirin Kannon tells about a man in Yui (由比), who was living a luxurious life, with not a care in the world. The man had a daughter he loved very much, but one day a large eagle swooped down and carried her off. The father frantically searched for his daughter, and although he eventually found her, she was dead. He interred her remains inside the body of this Nyoirin Kannon for the repose of her soul. <legend quoted from the
- **Kamakura Citizens Net**, as told by the temple>

▲ Top ▲

LEARN MORE

- **Buddhist-Artwork.com**. Hand-carved statues of Kannon are available for online purchase at our sister site.



- **Kannon Photo Tour (40+ Photos)** - Last Update Sept. 2004
- **Kannon Pilgrimages Nationwide**. Complete list of 100 Japanese sites sacred to the Kannon Bodhisattva (Bosatsu).
- **Kannon Pilgrimage in Kamakura**.
33 Sites in Kamakura sacred to Kannon Bosatsu.
- **Koyasu (Child-Giving) Kannon, Juntei Kannon**
Kannon as the Protector of Children
- **Manjushri.com - Avalokitesvara Page**
Research on Kannon from Manjushri.com. However, this site is no longer online. The above page was thus copied to the A-to-Z Photo Dictionary to allow viewers to gain access.
- **Kannon in Woodblocks by Utagawa Kunisada** (outside link)
- **Japanese Architecture and Art Net Users System (JAANUS)**
Outside link. Highly recommended. A wonderful online dictionary that includes many more details on Kannon Bodhisattva in Japanese art. Also includes entries on the most important manifestations of Kannon in Japan, including:
 - Kannon (Kanzeon 觀世音, Kanjizai 觀自在)
 - Shō Kannon 聖觀音 (Skt. Aryavalokitesvara)
 - Henge Kannon 變化觀音 (Transformations of Kannon)
 - Fudarakusen 補陀落山 (Skt. Potalaka). Also written 普陀樂山, 布落迦山; also called Fudaraku 補陀落, 光明山, 海鳥山, 小花樹山. The paradise inhabited by Kannon.
 - Sanjūsanshin 三十三身 (33 Forms of Kannon)
 - Tara Bosatsu 多羅菩薩 (Kannon's female manifestation)
 - Juntei 准胝 Kannon (mother of Buddhas & Bodhisattvas)
 - Senju Kannon 千手觀音 (Thousand-Armed Kannon)
Skt. Sahasrabhuja-arya-avalokitesvara
 - Nyoirin Kannon 如意輪觀音 (Skt. Cintamanicakra)
 - Fukūkenjaku Kannon 不空罽索觀音 (Non-Empty Noose Kannon)
 - Jūichimen Kannon 十一面觀音 (11-Headed Kannon)
 - Batō Kannon 馬頭觀音
Skt. Hayagriva; Horse-Headed Kannon
 - Roku Kannon 六觀音 (Six Kannon)
 - Guze Kannon 救世觀音 (Non-esoteric form of Kannon)
Another name for Shou Kannon; the earliest extant statue of Kannon in Japan.
 - Byakue Kannon 白衣觀音 (Skt. Panduravasini)
White-Robed Kannon; also called Byakushozon 白処尊 and Byakue Kanjizaimo 白衣觀自

在母

- Yōryū Kannon 楊柳觀音 (Willow Kannon, Yakuou Kannon)
- Maria Kannon マリア觀音 (Mother Mary and Kannon)

- **NEED TO RESEARCH**

The Japanese martial art Isshin-Ryu uses Megami-no-Isshinryu as its symbol. Megami is also represented as a water goddess named Ryuzu Kannon. This goddess is often depicted riding a **dragon**, seated on a dragon, or sometimes standing next to one. See the **Kannon Photo Tour** (this site) for images of Kannon riding a dragon. Also, this form of the Kannon may have originated at Japan's holy **Mt. Hakusan**.

- **Images** (google search results; click the "images" button)
- www.msishinryu.com
www.msishinryu.com/megami/megamidebate.shtml
Biographies, pictures and insights on Isshin-Ryu, with comments by Scott Robert
- www.msishinryu.com/articles/aja/nahanchi_sanchin.html
- www.olemiss.edu/orgs/karate/megami.html
- www.issin1.com/tatsuo_shimabuku.htm

▲ Top ▲

TO DO

Gabi Greve. **Karamatsu Kannon** 唐松觀音

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