



Collectively these statuettes of Benevolent Kings are referred to as Niō, or Kongō-rikishi. Mishiku Kongō can be distinguished by his open mouth and bared teeth; Naraen Kongō is always depicted with his mouth closed in a fierce grimace. The former signifies overt power, the latter latent might. Full-sized Niō were placed as guardians at temple gates to ward off danger and evil forces. The best-known pair of carved Niō to survive stand at the Nandaimon (south main gate) of the famed Tōdai-ji, Nara. Enormous in size (measuring just over eight meters), these colossal figures were the joint effort of the great Kamakura sculptors Unkei and Kaikei.

Niō are generally represented as powerful figures with exaggerated muscles and bulging veins. The style reached its height during the Kamakura period, when a taste for baroque treatment developed. The Academy's examples fully explore the dramatic possibilities offered by their

exaggerated poses. The works are powerful, intense, and frightful. In some examples the heads are entirely shaven; others, as here, include a neatly tied chignon at the top. The menacing faces are particularly well done: their fierce countenances, swollen temples, knitted brows, bulging eyes, and scowling expressions underline their function as protectors of the faith. Judging by their reduced size, the Academy Niō were probably used within a temple in association with an altar.     HAL

#### TWO BENEVOLENT KINGS

Japanese, Kamakura period, ca. 13th century

Wood, traces of gesso and polychrome

Mishiku Kongō: h. 29¼ in. (74.3 cm.); Naraen Kongō:

h. 29½ in. (74.9 cm.)

Gifts of Robert Allerton, 1952 (I690.1, I691.1)

Guardians of a Buddhist Temple (#1690.1, 1691.1) <sup>GALT 5</sup> Japan  
Gift of Mr. Robert Allerton, 1922 13th-14th C.  
Wood, carved, traces of red, white and blue color: (Kamakura Per)  
29½" high

ARTIST: Unknown

SUBJECT: Deva kings standing on rock. Vigorous posture, legs wide apart, one arm raised, upper body bare, skirt swirls around legs, wrist and ankle jewelry, hair dressed in top knot with ribbon. The sculpture on the makai side of the doorway has a closed mouth, the other has an open mouth. Both are vigorous, active, muscular; angry the embodiment of rage.

The two figures are a pair of Benevolent Kings, who are derived from Indian door guardians (dvarapala), which are in turn derived from the Indian earth genii (yaksha). Their function is to serve as protectors of the faith by warding off evil powers from the sacred Land of the Buddha. "He turns with his mighty force against everything evil and demonic coming from outside." (Seckell, D., "Buddhism") In Japan the 2 figures are placed in a gate building at the entrance to a Buddhist temple (usually facing outside). The pair is also called Kongō Rikishi, meaning "one who holds a vajra," (thunderbolt); in Sanskrit, Vajrapani. Vajrapani was in India one Bodhisattva, but

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Guardians of a Buddhist Temple (#1690.1, 1691.1) <sup>GALT 5</sup> continued

Muscles, which are prominent, are depicted according to a formula for the surface contours, not on studies of anatomy.

INSTRUCTIONAL AIDS: Point out that these ferocious beings are not demons feared by humans, but are benevolent, that they express outrage against evil. Discuss the way the figure shows energy and strength.

**Nio, Two Guardian Figures (1690.1 - 1691.1)**  
**Gift, Robert Allerton, 1952**  
**Artist: Anonymous**

**14th century**  
**Wood, Kamakura Period**  
**Gallery 15**

**SUBJECT:** Guardians like these are placed to right and left in gateways to Buddhist temples. They are sometimes shown wielding a weapon symbolizing great power in conquering or averting evil. Other times sheer muscular force and aggressive stance suggest this power. General appearance is one of anger and tremendous strength. They are benign beings in the temple they protect and their rage is directed against any who would bring harm to Buddhism or the faithful.

**MEDIUM & TECHNIQUE:** Carved wooden figure had layer of paint, flesh was cream color, clothing painted in colors and eyes were blue.

**STYLE:** Usually uncovered to waist and impression of power is conveyed by rippling muscles and tersed veins. Exaggeration of bodily characteristics and swinging draperies add to feeling of action. Anatomical details "stylized."

**INSTRUCTIONAL AIDS:** Agyo - mouth open, exhaled power. Ungyo - mouth closed, inner power. Two together symbolize dual nature of the world. Talk about exaggeration of muscles, etc., swinging drapery and grain of the wood. Facial expressions. Most naturalistic work done in Japan, yet exaggerated.

in China he became 2 gate guardians.

The more popular name is Ni-ō (二大), 2 kings. The left is named Naraen. He has his mouth closed in the way of saying "Ah," the beginning sound in the Sanskrit syllabary. The one at right is Misshaku with mouth open saying "Om," the last sound. Within these 2 sounds are the "alpha and omega," the all; encompassing everything. Naraen represents with his thunderbolt, the spiritual world. Misshaku represents the world of matter. (HAA Naraen probably had a thunderbolt in his now empty hand.) Made since 8th C. in Japan, especially popular in Esoteric Buddhism.

**MEDIUM AND TECHNIQUE:** Wood, pieced and carved. A layer of ground oyster shells made a surface for colors. Naturalistic colors would have been used; flesh colors, bright color and detail of brocade for the garment. The eyes are blue, possibly to stress foreignness, Indianness. The face, as with most Buddhist figures, is non-Japanese.

**STYLE:** Based on Chinese gate guardian figures with sense of energetic vigor emphasized by movement of limbs and draperies. Earlier Japanese Ni-ō were more individualized in facial expression, some even wore armor, but by the 13th-14th C. when these were done there was a formula which was used for most of them. The posture is one which has lingered in Japan into Kabuki stance and Ukiyo-e prints.