

Shichifukujin or The Seven Lucky Gods

Worshipped in shrines and temples throughout Japan, the Seven Lucky Gods is believed to reward loads of wealth, happiness and prosperity to people.

The group is called Shichifukujin in Japanese, and most people in Hawaii don't know much about them, said Company President Robert Iida. It has never gained as much attention and popularity as the Lucky Cat or Daruma.

Still, Shichifukujin is worth knowing about, Iida said, because it is one of many cultural symbols of good luck from Japan. Shichi means seven; fuku is prosperity; and jin stands for god.

Each god comes from parts of Asia, he said. Grouped together during Japan's Muromachi Period, they were never assigned in any particular order.

The deities are Daikokuten, god of agriculture and business; Ebisu, god of fishing and commerce; Benzaiten, goddess of beauty and the arts; Fukurokuju, god of wealth and fertility; Jurojin, god of wisdom and longevity; Bishamonten, god of warriors and protection from evil; and Hotei, god of good health and happiness.

***Ebisu:**

The only god native to Japan, Ebisu is the patron of fishermen. He usually holds a red snapper under his left arm and a fishing rod in his right.

***Daikokuten:**

Originally from China, Daikokuten ensures prosperity in commerce and trade. He carries a sack of riches over his left shoulder and shakes a mallet in his right hand to pour out good fortune.

Ebisu and Daikokuten are often paired together, because they represent food and sustenance, Iida said. Daikoku symbolizes rice and Ebisu dried fish, two major staples of food in old Japan. "If you have rice and dried fish, you'll never starve," Iida explained.

***Benzaiten:**

Also called Benten, Benzaiten represents beauty and the arts. She evolved from the Hindu goddess Sarasvati from India. The only goddess in the group, Benzaiten plays a biwa, or mandolin.

***Fukurokuju:**

From China, Fukurokuju performs miracles in longevity and prosperity. Wearing a long Chinese robe with a scholar's cap, Fukurokuju holds a walking stick with a scroll believed to hold sacred teachings.

***Jurojin:**

Also from China, Jurojin is similar to Fukurokuju in age and appearance. Both have a bald head and long white beard. Like Fukurokuju, he holds a staff with a scroll, which holds the mystery to longevity.

***Bishamonten:**

A deity from India, Bishamonten gives luck in battle and defense. His mission is to protect people from evil. Wearing a full suit of armor, Bishamonten carries a small pagoda in his left hand and a spear in his right.

***Hotei:**

Based on a real Zen monk from China, Hotei is famous for his generosity to the poor. His protruding belly symbolizes his compassionate soul. Hotei carries a fan in his left hand and a bag filled with riches over his right shoulder.

In Japanese folklore, Shichifukujin is seen sailing in a treasure ship called Takarabune, pouring gifts of wealth and prosperity for the new year.

Unfortunately, Takarabune is a rare sight in Hawaii, Iida said. "People can't relate to the 7 gods anymore, like the olden days."

In few instances, Iida meets customers who don't need any explanation.

"Some local folks seem to know more than people in Japan. They must be stuck in time," but that's a good thing, he said. "Everybody is curious about their own culture."

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