

## Hassen 八仙 or Eight Daoist Immortals

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Chn: baxian. Lit. eight immortals. The eight figures considered to be the experts in and protectors of Taoism. The impetus for creating a group of eight legendary Taoists was probably an attempt to compete with the popular sixteen arhats juuroku rakan 十六羅漢 of Buddhism and is also related to Du Fu's (Jp: To Ho 杜甫, 712-70) famous poem "Eight Immortals of the Wine Cup" (Ch:Yinzhong baxiang, see Inchuu hassen 飲中八仙). Accounts and depictions vary, but generally the semi-legendary figures are: Shou Riken 鍾離權 (Ch: Zhong Liquan), who was master of Ryo Douhin 呂洞賓 (Ch: Lu Dongbin), and is usually shown wearing a large cloak and waving a plumed fan; Chou Karou 張果老 (Ch: Zhang Guolao); Kan Shoshi 韓湘子 (Ch: Han Xiangzi), nephew of the great 9c poet Han Yu 韓愈 whom he impressed with feats of magic such as making a peony burst; Tekkai (see Gama Tekkai 蝦蟇鉄拐); Sou Kokkyuu 曹国舅 (Ch: Cao Guojiu), brother of an 11c Song empress, who, to escape the persecution of an elder brother, fled into the mountains where he was taught by Ryo Douhin and is usually depicted in the costume of a government official holding a tablet of state; Ryo Douhin, Ran Saika 藍采和 (Ch: Lan Caihe), originally a Nanjing 南京 actress named Xujian she was converted to Taoism by Shou Riken and is represented begging or singing in the marketplace holding large wooden-clappers or a flute and dressed in a tattered green gown; and, Ka Senko 何仙姑 (Ch: He Xiangnu), a female ascetic taught by Ryo Douhin who gave her the peaches of immortality, which were the source of the immortality of those residing in Taoist heaven, she is often depicted wearing elegant clothing and holding a long lotus flower. The hassen theme was more popular with both Chinese and Japanese artists than with ordinary Taoist believers, although Japanese painters frequently confused the identities of the lesser-known immortals. There are notable Japanese paintings by Kaihou Yuushou 海北友松 (1533-1615) and Kanou Sansetsu 狩野山雪 (1589/90-1651). Paintings of the hassen were popular with 17c and early 18c Kanouha 狩野派 painters.



Six-Fold Screen, dated 1602 CE, by Kaihō Yūshō 海北友松 (1533–1615), photo from Kyoto National Museum

Source = <http://www.kyohaku.go.jp/ip/syuzou/meihin/kinsei/item01.html>