

## The Eighteen Lohan of Chinese Buddhist Temples

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When you enter the chief hall of a Buddhist temple in China you cannot fail to notice two rows of large yellow figures—one along the east and the other along the west wall. These figures, which are usually numbered and labeled, are called the Eighteen Lohan, and if you ask your guide what they are he will probably reply that these are images of Buddha's eighteen great disciples. The names, however, show that this information is not quite correct, some of them being unknown to the original Buddhist canon. If you go on to Korea and visit the old Buddhist temples in that country you will find that Buddha's Hall has rows of similar figures, but sixteen in number. If you continue your journey and visit Japan, you will find there also sixteen Rakan lining the side walls of the Buddhist temples. Lohan and Rakan are for A-lo-han, the Chinese way of expressing the Sanskrit word Arhan for Arhat. Suppose you could go back and travel to Lhassa, there also you would find sixteen Arhats, or as they are called there, Sthaviras, in the Chief Hall of Buddha's temples. Tibet, however, seems to have also its eighteen Lohan, imported from China apparently in modern times.

The great Arhat Nandimitra answered the questions of his perplexed and desponding congregation about the possible continued existence of Buddhism in the world. He tells his hearers that the Buddha when about to die entrusted his religion to sixteen great Arhats. These men are to watch over and care for the religious welfare of the lay-believers and generally protect the spiritual interests of Buddhism. They are to remain in existence all the long time until Maitreya appears as Buddha and brings in a new system. Then, according to Nandimitra, the sixteen Arhats will collect all the relics of Sakyamuni and build over them a magnificent tope. When this is finished they will pay their last worship to the relics, rising in the air and doing pradakshina to the tope. Then they will enter an ecstasy and so vanish in remainderless nirvana. At his hearers' request Nandimitra gives the names of these protectors of the faith, their homes or spheres of action, and the numbers of their retinues. These Arhats are the sixteen Rakan of the Japanese and Koreans and constitute sixteen of the eighteen Lohan of the Chinese. They have incense burnt before their images but generally speaking they are not worshipped or consulted like the gods and P'usas of the temples.

The names of the sixteen Lohan are given according to a sutra of the Duration of the Law in the order shown in the columns below. Variations exist in different temples. As to the images of the sixteen we must remember that these, whether merely works of art or consecrated to religion, are not supposed to be faithful representations of the men indicated by the names attached. The pictures and images are to be taken merely as symbols or fanciful creations. The names of the sixteen Lohan are:

Pindola the Bharadvaja	Nakula	Shupoka	Angida
Kanaka the Vatsa	Bhadra	Panthaka	Vanavasa
Karaka the Bharadvaja	Kalika	Rahula	Ashihto
Subhinda	Vajraputra	Nagasena	ChotaPanthaka