



7234 A bronze okimono (decorative object) in the form of Ebisu and a fish. The eyes are inlaid in gilt, shakudō (copper and gold alloy) and shibuichi (copper and silver alloy).

Signed: Kisetsu koku (made by Kisetsu)

Tomobako (original box) inscribed: Ebisu tai osae (Ebisu holding down a sea bream)

Japan 19th/20th century Meiji period

Dimensions: H.11½" x W. 12¼" (29cm x 31cm)

Ebisu, one of the Shichifukujin (Seven Gods of Good Fortune) is depicted as a fat and cheerful fisherman dressed in traditional court robes and holding a large tai (sea bream). Ebisu is believed to bring good luck to commercial ventures. He is said to be deaf and was unable to hear the bell calling him to join the other gods for the Shinto festival at Izumo celebrated in October. As a result he founded Ebisu Ko, his own festival at a separate temple in Osaka.

Bishamon, Benten, Fukurokuju, Hotei, Jurojin, Daikoku and Ebisu are the seven popular Japanese deities, known as Shichifukujin (Seven Gods of Good Fortune) thought to bring good luck and happiness. Each one personifies a different aspect of good fortune but, although they were included in the Shinto pantheon, only two of them, Daikoku and Ebisu, were indigenous Japanese gods. Others were versions of popular Buddhist gods imported from China, while Benten and Bishamon originated as Hindu deities,

and Hotei as a Daoist god. Buddhism was declared the official religion of the Japanese imperial court in AD 593, but instead of trying to stamp out Shintō, the existing faith, Buddhist missionaries in Japan drew parallels between the two faiths and proclaimed the identities of the deities to be the same. Because of this peaceable marriage of the two faiths, it was easy for attractive and popular Buddhist gods, such as those of good fortune, to be assimilated with the innumerable kami (spirits, natural forces, or essence) of the old religion.



