



7136 A carved wood figure of Jizō Bosatsu standing on a lotus base.

Japan 9th century Heian period

Dimensions:

Figure and stand: H. 30 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (77.5cm)

Figure: H. 23 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (59.5cm)

Jizō Bosatsu, represented as a simple monk, has existed in Japan since the eighth century, becoming widely worshipped by the masses at the end of the Heian period (794-1185) with the rise of Pure Land (Amida) Buddhism. He is usually shown in the guise of a shaven-headed priest with a kyōshoku (breast ornament) and carrying a hōju (a jewel which grants desires) in his left hand and a shakujō (priest staff) in his right. As an attendant of Amida his powers include the saving of souls condemned to the various Buddhist hells and the intervention with Yama, the Master of Hell, on behalf of those reborn in each of the six realms of transmigration. He guards travellers safely on their way, protects warriors in battle, watches over the safety of children, families and women during pregnancy.

Heian beliefs about Jizō, a compassionate Bodhisattva, involved widespread belief of the Three Periods of the Law known as the Days of the Dharma (the Buddhist teachings). This was an all-encompassing concept of society's rise and fall that originated in Indian Buddhism and later became widespread in

China and Japan. It foretold the world's ultimate decay and the complete disappearance of Buddhist practice. At the time, the Days of the Dharma in Japan were divided into three periods.

The first phase, the Age of Shōbō, was said to last 1000 years after the death of the Buddha. It was believed to be a golden period during which followers had the capacity to understand the Dharma. The second phase, the Age of Zōhō, was also to last 1000 years during which Buddhist practice would begin to weaken. The third and final phase, the Age of Mappō, lasting 3,000 years was when Buddhist faith would deteriorate and no longer be practiced. In Japan the Age of Mappō was said to begin in 1052 AD, and a sense of foreboding thus filled the land, with people from all classes yearning for salvation. This belief led to a comprehensive increase in the popularity of Jizō as the only deity man could petition in these lawless centuries for relief from pain in this life and the next.

The naturalistic treatment of the figure represented here stems from a tradition of Japanese portrait sculpture which developed in a Buddhist context and was never completely separated from the religious setting. From the beginning the majority of the subjects portrayed were religious personages, whether legendary or historical. The portraits of venerated monks, which form the body of Japanese portrait sculpture, were appreciated as objects of aesthetic value from as early as the Nara period (645-781). This tradition of naturalistic representation can also be seen in sculptures of Buddhist deities produced at the time.

For other examples of figures treated in a similar style held in the collection of Kōfuku-ji, Nara see:
Japanese Portrait Sculpture, p.54-55, pl.39-42.

Radio Carbon Dating Ref: RCD-8428