

7286 A lacquer and gilt-wood figure of Amida Nyorai seated in jō-in (meditation mudra).The head is adorned with crystals representing the byakugō (white spiralling hair) on the forehead and the nikkei-shu (red jewel on the protrusion on top of the Buddha's head). The robe is elaborately decorated in low relief with a continuous scrolling design.

Japan 12th/13th century Kamakura Period

Dimensions:

Figure: H. 10¼" (25.50 cm)

This type of jō-in mudra is frequently used in Japanese Esotericism, especially in statues of the co-called Esoteric Amida. This particular version is characterized by circles formed with the thumbs and index fingers and represents a specific rank in the Amida hierarchy.

The symbolism of the jō-in mudra is closely associated with the concept of complete absorption of thought by intense contemplation of a single object of meditation, in such a way that the bonds relating to the mental faculties to so-called 'real phenomena' are broken and the worshiper is thus enabled to identify himself with the Supreme Unity through a sort of super-intellectual raptus. In the jō-in the position of the hands is that of the adepts of yogic contemplation. Thus the jō-in symbolises specifically

zenjō (ecstatic thought) for it is the gesture which indicates the suppression of all spiritual disquiet in order to arrive finally at the complete concentration on the truth.

The position of the hands in the mudra of concentration derives, in accordance with the tradition, from the attitude which the historical Buddha assumed when he devoted himself to final meditation under the Bodhi tree. This is the attitude he was found in when the demon armies of Mara attacked him. He was to alter it only when he called the earth to witness at the moment of his triumph over the demons. Consequently the position symbolises specifically the supreme mediation of the historical Buddha but also the Buddhist qualities of tranquillity, impassivity and superiority.

The circle formed by the fingers in this figure means the perfection of the Law because the circle is the perfect form. The formation of the two circles by the two hands representing respectively the world of the Buddhas (right hand) and that of Sentient Beings (left hand) indicates that the Law conceived by the Buddha is sustained by Sentient Beings who integrate themselves into it completely. The two juxtaposed circular shapes represent the accomplishment and the perfection of Buddhist Law in its relationship to all Beings. The right-hand circle symbolises the divine law of the Buddha, the left-hand circle, the human law of the Buddha. Side by side, the circles symbolise the harmony of the two worlds, that of Sentient Beings and that of the Buddha. The fingers are entwined or superposed; those of the left hand represent the five elements of the world of Beings and those of the right hand the five elements of the world of the Buddhas.

The two circles of this type of jō-in mudra also stand for the two aspects of cosmic unity; the Diamond World and the Matrix World. These circles are separated from each other because they are formed by two different hands. The circles are joined in this mudra to constitute a single unity which symbolises, by the form of their juxtaposition, the double aspect of a single world and the concept of All-One, the basic principle of Esotericism.

Belief in Amida as Lord of the Western Paradise rose in popularity during the late 10th century. Based primarily on the concept of salvation through faith, it was not only a religion appealing to a broad range of people, but also a direct assertion of piety against the dogmatic and esoteric ritual of the more traditional Tendai and Shingon sects. In Amida's Western Paradise the faithful are reborn, to progress

through various stages of increasing awareness until finally achieving complete enlightenment.
Another factor that engendered faith in Amida was a 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 of 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 lasting 3,000 years, the Age of Mappō, 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 leading to a widespread practice of continuously repeating the mantra of Amida Buddha.
n.b. It is most likely that the gilding and low relief decoration is of a later date.







london | brussels
e: info@japanesescreens.com w: www.japanesescreens.com