



7575      A lacquer and gilt wood figure of Nyoirin Kannon (The Bodhisattva who grants desires) with six hands and various attributes seated in the posture of royal ease and contemplation on a lotus throne with a reticulated mandorla

Japan, 13th/14th century, Kamakura period

Dimensions:

Figure: H. 35cm x W. 28cm x D. 24cm (14" x 11¼" x 9½")

Figure with base and halo: H. 85cm x W. 39cm. x D. 35cm (33½" x 15½" x 14")

Nyoirin Kannon (Sanskrit, Cintamani-chakra-Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva) is a prominent deity in Mikkyo (Japanese Esoteric Buddhism) and is one of six incarnations of Kannon Bosatsu (Bodhisattva) who is believed to grant people's desires. The name Nyoirin is derived from two of the attributes, Nyoi-hoju

(wish-fulfilling jewel) and Horin (the Wheel of the Law).

The head has gyokugan (inlaid crystal eyes) and the forehead is adorned with crystals representing the byakugō (white spiralling hair). The hair is arranged in a tall standing top knot. The jewel strings of engraved florets and tassels in gilt copper adorned with semiprecious stones embellish the crown and the deity's chest. The flowing robe is decorated with intricate designs executed in kirikane (thin cut strips of gold).

In the posture of royal ease, the left leg is folded horizontally and the right knee is raised. The left foot, symbolising humans, is exposed and the right foot, symbolising the Buddha's foot, rests on it – this shows people's earthy desires are subdued by Buddha's prajna or wisdom.

Each of the six arms has different symbolic meanings:

The first right hand is raised and touches the cheek of the slightly-tilted head, with the elbow resting on a raised knee. This is the posture of reflection and shows Kannon pondering on how to save human souls.

The second right hand in front of the chest holds a Nyoi-hoju (wish-fulfilling jewel) which is capable of responding to people's wishes and desires.

The third right hand holds a rosary of 108 beads (now missing) to remove suffering.

The first left hand rests upon a rock, symbolising the earth and Mount Fudaraku, the Pure Land of Kannon.

The second left hand holds a budding lotus stem. The beautiful lotus flower comes from a plant which only grows from muddy ponds and the buds represent the souls of transient beings which have the ability to blossom from the dirty physical world.

The third left hand holds a Horin (the Wheel of the Law or Buddhist teachings, also called Dharma-wheel), which subdues people's evil thoughts and leads them to enlightenment.

Each hand also corresponds to each of the Six Realms of Existence into which a soul can be reborn: hell, hungry ghosts, animals, Asura (demigod), humans and heaven. The Six hands of Nyoirin Kannon remind the viewer of the deity's ability to save souls in any of these realms.

Kannon, the Bodhisattva of mercy, personifies compassion and is one of the most widely worshipped

Buddhist divinities in Japan. The name Kannon, meaning 'watchful listening' is the shortened version of the original title, Kanzeon, meaning 'the one who constantly surveys the world listening for the sounds of suffering'.

According to Pure Land Buddhism the task of Kannon is to witness and listen to the prayers and cries of those in difficulty in the earthly realm and to help them achieve salvation. Veneration of Kannon began in Japan in the late 6th century, soon after Buddhism had been introduced to Japan by way of China and Korea. Kannon serves various functions including protecting the Six Realms of Karmic Rebirth, acting as patron of motherhood and children, and protecting the souls of infants lost during childbirth.

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