



7678 A gilt-wood figure of Amida Buddha in a delicately flowing robe standing on a double lotus base

The right arm is raised and the left arm is extended with the forefinger and thumb of each hand forming a circle, representing the raigōin mudra, welcoming the believer into Amida's Great Western Paradise.

The head has gyokugan (inlaid crystal eyes) and is also 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).

Japan 12th-13th century Kamakura period

Dimensions:

Figure: H. 80cm x W. 27cm x D. 20cm (31³/₄" x 10³/₄" x 8")

Stand: H. 11cm x W. 25.5cm x D. 23cm (4¹/₂" x 10¹/₄" x 9¹/₄")

Figure and stand: H. 90.5cm x W. 27cm x D. 24cm (35³/₄" x 10³/₄" x 9¹/₂")

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 which appealed 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.

Images of Amida, Lord of the Western Paradise, are known in Japan from as early as the 7th century. Until the 11th century the deity was most frequently portrayed in a gesture of teaching and was worshiped primarily in memorial rituals for the deceased. However in the last two centuries of the Heian period worshippers started to concentrate more on the 'Teachings Essential for Rebirth' written by the Tendai monk Genshin (942-1017). The teachings describe the horrors of Buddhist hell and the glories of the Western Paradise that can be attained through nembutsu, meditation on Amida or the recitation of the deity's name.

Despite the apparent absence of formal variations in the images themselves, during the latter part of the Heian period important changes did occur in the nature of the rituals held in front of the Lord of the Western Paradise. By the twelfth century Image Halls dedicated to Amida were the ritual centres of most complexes. The function of memorial services was expanded so they benefited not only the dead, but the living too. Even rituals with no historical connection to the deity, such as the important services at the start of the New Year, were also held there. Of particular significance were the novel ritual practices that were held to guarantee one's rebirth in Amida's Western Paradise. Some, such as the re-enactment of the descent of Amida or the passing of one's last moments before death clutching a cord attached to the hands of the deity, were entirely new whilst others, which included the use of halls dedicated to Amida as temporary places of interment, reflected the fusion of more ancient practices with doctrines of rebirth.

For a similar example of Amida figure by Kaikei see Nara National Museum ed., The Buddhist Master

Sculptor Kaikei: Timeless Beauty from the Kamakura Period, (Nara, 2017), no. 85 (13th century, Enjo-ji Temple, Shiga)

For an example of Amida Nyorai standing on a double lotus base see: Asia Society Museum ed., Kamakura, Realism and Spirituality in the Sculpture of Japan, (New Heaven and London, 2016), p.102, no. 25 (mid-late 13th century, Asia Society, New York: Mr and Mrs John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection)
Radio Carbon Dating Ref: RCD-9283





