



7747 A carved wood figure of Jizō Bosatsu, with a shakujō (priest staff) in his right hand and a nyoi-hōju (wish granting jewel) in his left hand, standing on a lotus base

The head has gyokugan (inlaid crystal eyes) and is also adorned with crystal representing the byakugō (white spiralling hair) on the forehead.

There are traces of fine, delicate decorations on the flowing robe in gesso, polychrome pigments and kirikane (thin cut strips of gold) with stylised flowers, foliage and geometric designs.

Japan 13th century Kamakura period

Dimensions:

Figure and stand: H. 97cm x W. 38cm x D. 38cm (38¼" x 15" x 15")

Figure: H. 76.5cm x W. 26cm x D. 28cm (30¼" x 10¼" x 11¼")

Jizō Bosatsu is one of the most beloved Japanese divinities and a bodhisattva who is believed to save all beings during the era between the death of Shaka (Gautama Buddha) and the rise of Miroku Bosatsu (Maitreya, a future Buddha). Jizō's Sanskrit name Kshitigarbha means "the earth" and "containment" or "womb". As such Jizō is considered to personify the "virtue of the earth". He vowed not to achieve Buddhahood until all are saved, and thus is represented as a simple monk and embodies compassion and universal salvation. Jizō guards travellers safely on their way, protects warriors in battle, watches over the safety of children, families and women during pregnancy. As a guardian of children, he is sometimes depicted in an endearing manner to resemble the children he protects. Jizō's powers to save the souls reborn in the transmigration extend to all the Six Realms of Reincarnation (Rokudō): hell, hungry ghosts, animals, Asura (demigod), humans and heaven. The belief of Jizō has existed in Japan since the eighth century, becoming widely worshiped by the masses at the end of the Heian period (794-1185) when people sought salvation along with the rise of Pure Land Buddhism.

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 1,000 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 1,000 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 as early as the Nara period (645-781) 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 and were popular especially from Kamakura period (1185-1333). This tradition of naturalistic representation can also be seen in sculptures of Buddhist deities produced at the time.

Jizo is usually shown in the guise of a priest carrying a nyoi-hōju (a jewel which grants desires) and a shakujō (priest staff). Nyoi-hōju means a jewel that has the capacity to grant fulfilment of all desires. In Buddhism, by its luminosity and brilliance, it symbolises the Buddha and the Doctrine. As a pearl, an emblem of purity, it also represents the truth of the Buddha and the veracity of the Law.

Shakujō is a Buddhist ringed staff used in prayer to make a distinctive sound and it originates from the Indian khakkhara (sounding staff). It is said that it engenders goodness by awakening the compassionate Bodhisattva heart. The shakujō is one of the thirteen things which a pilgrim monk should carry with him and its jingling sound is used to warn off small beings (e.g. vipers) from being accidentally trodden on. Ringing also helps to alert and inform villagers that there is

a travelling/itinerant [monk](#) within earshot in need of alms. This staff, an attribution of Jizō is considered to have derived from his journey amongst the Six Realms of Reincarnation.

For comparable examples see:

Tokyo National Museum ed., Japanese Sculpture of the Kamakura Period, (Tokyo, 1975), no. 51 (dated 1295, by Injō, Important Cultural Property, Kyoto)

Suzuki Tsutomu ed., Ketteiban Mihotoke no kokoro Nihon no Butsuzo [Definitive edition, Buddha's spirit: Buddhist figures in Japan], (Tokyo, 1979), p. 234 (Jōrokuji temple, Kyoto; late Heian; Important Cultural Property)

Nara National Museum ed., The Buddhist Master Sculptor Kaikei: Timeless Beauty from the Kamakura Period, (Nara, 2017), no. 72 (by Kaikei, 12th-13th century, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

The similar design of foliage rendered here with kirikane (thin cut strips of gold) on the robe can be seen on

several sculptures made by Kaikei (act. c. 1183-1223). See Nara National Museum ed., *The Buddhist Master Sculptor Kaikei: Timeless Beauty from the Kamakura Period*, (Nara, 2017), p. 104-105, 176, no. 57 (a standing Amida Nyorai, Kaikei, c. 1194, Kengōin temple, Kyoto); p. 184 (a standing Amida Nyorai, Kaikei, Kōdaiin temple, Wakayama).

Radio Carbon Dating Ref: RCD-9373







gregg baker  
asian art





gregg baker  
asian art

