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Finding a Place for Jizō

A Study of Jizō Statuary in the Buddhist Temples of Sendai

Statues of the bodhisattva Jizō can be found in most Buddhist temples in Japan. However, the role they play within the confines of the temple grounds has received little attention from scholars of Japanese Buddhism. In this article, the author analyzes the placement of Jizō statues at 214 temples in the city of Sendai. The eclectic arrangement and styles of these images provide an aesthetic particular to this group of temples, often serving to delineate the boundaries of the temple, the sacred spaces within the temple, as well as the border between mundane and supramundane worlds. As this study demonstrates, the ubiquitous Jizō statues have a variety of purposes that encompass a wide range of religious practices and beliefs in contemporary Japanese Buddhism.

KEYWORDS: Jizō Bosatsu—Sendai—stone statues—sacred space—*mizuko*

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THE JIZŌ 地藏 cult is one of the most prominent folk cults in Japan. You can find Jizō statues in almost every neighborhood, standing on the roadside, or in small sanctuaries called Jizōdō 地藏堂. It can even be said that Jizō is one of the most beloved Buddhist deities in Japan. In his study of the medieval Jizō cult, Hank Glassman argues that in the eyes of believers Jizō replicates the role of the Buddhist clergy with his appearance as a human renunciant and functions as a mediator between this world and the next (GLASSMAN 2011, 6, 44–93). However, scholars of Japanese Buddhism often exclude this bodhisattva from their analyses of Buddhist temples and the Buddhist pantheon.¹ Indeed, Jizō is often labeled a “commoner deity” (*shomin no hotoke* 庶民の仏), a deity that is readily available to grant a petitioner’s wish, and is associated with folk beliefs (WATARI 2011, 3).² Nevertheless, the cult of Jizō is an important part of Japanese Buddhism. Japanese people typically encounter Jizō every time they visit their *bodaiji* 菩提寺, a temple housing a family grave and ancestors’ memorial tablets.³ However, the question of Jizō’s place in modern Japanese temple Buddhism has yet to be studied.

Through an analysis of the results from field studies carried out in the city of Sendai, Miyagi Prefecture, I examine the position of Jizō statues within the precincts of temples in the area as well as the religious context of such placement. I chose Sendai for two reasons. First, most temples in this city are *bodaiji* and are not well-known tourist or pilgrim destinations.⁴ As the aim of this case study is to present a glimpse into the everyday circumstances of the Jizō statues, an area with numerous temples that rely primarily on parishioners and locals offers several

1. For example, Ōshima Tatehiko argues that in contemporary Japan, reverence for Jizō has been reduced to a traditional custom and has lost its sense of religiosity (ŌSHIMA 1992b, 1).

2. Yoritomi Motohiro uses the phrase “folk beliefs” to describe the cults of Jizō, Kannon 観音, and Fudō Myōō 不動明王. Studies of Japanese Buddhism and folk cults often discuss these three deities as a set (YORITOMI 1984; HAYAMI 1996; UEHARA 1989).

3. Japanese Buddhism is often referred to as funerary Buddhism (*sōshiki Bukkyō* 葬式仏教), because the main activity of Japanese Buddhist temples is generally connected to funerals and death rituals. The name itself derives from Tamamuro Taijō’s book of the same name that evoked a wide discussion in the 1960s concerning the role of Buddhism in modern Japanese society (TAMAMURO 1963; ROWE 2004; 2009; 2011).

4. The only non-*bodaiji* temples in Sendai are Saihōji 西方寺 (also known as Jōgi Nyorai 定義如来), Daikanmitsuji 大観蜜寺 (also called Sendai Daikannon 仙台大観音), a new temple dedicated entirely to the bodhisattva Kannon, and Rinōji 輪王寺, which is famous for its garden and zazen sessions. Sendai Daikannon has not been fully studied, but an account of its religious significance for visitors can be found in ODAJIMA (2016).

examples of how Jizō is represented at a typical Sendai temple. Second, Sendai was severely affected by the 2011 tsunami and earthquake, and many temples were damaged or swept away. The process of rebuilding the temples and outside precincts also included finding a new place for Jizō statues. An examination of how these temples present the image of Jizō offers some insight into how the Jizō cult has been maintained in modern Japanese temple Buddhism.

The Features of Jizō Images in Japan

As indicated by his name, Jizō is often associated with the earth or earthly realm (the character 地 means “earth”). Following Manabe Kōsai, many scholars see the prototype of Jizō in the ancient Indian earth goddess Prthivi (MANABE 1959, 4–5; HAYAMI 1975, 11; YORITOMI 1984, 97). As a bodhisattva of the earth, Jizō was the counterpart to another bodhisattva, Kokūzō 虚空藏, who, as his name suggests, was associated with the sky or heavenly realm (虚空 means “sky” or “empty space”). Jizō was perceived to be a merciful “earthly” deity who takes care of all living creatures, while Kokūzō was understood to be a heavenly deity who brings true knowledge and wisdom to believers (SAWA 1974, 97). Thus, the most recognizable feature of Jizō is his familiarity, friendliness, and accessibility for common people.

In the *Daijō daishū Jizō jūrinkyō* and *Jizō bosatsu hongankyō*, Jizō’s role is explained as follows: Jizō is a savior of beings suffering in the world without buddhas (*mubutsu sekai* 無仏世界), that is, after the Buddha Śākyamuni has entered nirvana but before the next buddha appears.⁵ Jizō supposedly changes in appearance in response to a believer’s prayers. However, in legendary tales, this bodhisattva most frequently appears as a young monk or a nun (KATAYORI 1974, 432–62; DYKSTRA 1978). In Japanese iconography as well, Jizō is almost always depicted as a Buddhist monk or a nun without the usual attributes of a bodhisattva, such as beautifully decorated garments and a crown. Jizō is attributed with the power to fulfill all worldly prayers, but he is closely connected with the after-life, especially hell. Jizō is believed to be the savior of those suffering in hell. At the same time, according to the *Bussetsu Jizō bosatsu hosshin in'en jūō kyō*, he is interchangeable with Enma ō 閻魔王, the most prominent of the ten kings of hell who judge the dead in the underworld.⁶

5. For a brief explanation of the Jizō sutras, see MANABE (1960, 73–154).

6. According to Manabe Kōsai, the *Bussetsu Jizō bosatsu hosshin in'en jūō kyō* was written in Japan and mainly concerns the trial of the ten kings of hell that everyone must undergo after death. Manabe writes that the sutra is actually a mixture of Buddhist and Daoist beliefs, as nine kings of hell out of ten are Daoist deities (MANABE 1960, 124–31). For more information about Japanese notions of hell and Jizō’s role within it, see SHIMOIZUMI (2015, 79–132); SAWADA (1968, 113–21); ISHIDA (1985, 236–55); IVY (1995, 156–57).

In addition to his role in the underworld, Jizō is considered to be the protector of children, both living and dead. In this world, Jizō assures successful childbirth, cures childhood diseases, stops children from crying at night, and so forth, while in the underworld he cares for the children who died too young to properly pay homage to their parents. According to a well-known legend, they are stuck on the Sai riverbank (*Sai no kawara* 賽の河原), piling stones into small stupas to accumulate merit for their families. Every evening demons appear to knock down the towers at which time Jizō intervenes to console the children. The next morning the endless cycle of piling up stones into stupas starts all over again.⁷

The most widespread form of Jizō in Japan is a standing monk-like figure, holding a ringed staff (*shakujō* 錫杖) in the right hand and a wish-fulfilling jewel (*nyoihōju* 如意宝珠) in the left hand. Statues of a seated Jizō appear as well. Usually, these images represent the bodhisattva seated in the lotus position (*kekka-fuza* 結跏趺坐) and holding wish-fulfilling jewels with both hands. There are also statues called Enmei Jizō 延命地藏 that depict Jizō with one leg on the ground as if getting ready to stand up and immediately depart on a rescue mission (*hanka-fuza* 半跏趺坐), and they typically hold both a wish-fulfilling jewel and a ringed staff (MIYA 1983, 56–72).⁸ Other traditional forms include the standing Jizō making the hand gesture of prayer or greeting (*gasshō* 合掌) and Jizō holding a lotus flower. Both images are frequently used for small stone images of Jizō (Dōji Jizō 童子地藏), which either mark the burial place of a child or were erected as a memorial for a deceased child. This type of Jizō statue can be easily recognized by the inscription of the posthumous name of a child, ending with *dōji* 童子 for boys or *dōnyo* 童女 for girls.⁹ Another frequently seen form of Dōji Jizō holds a wish-fulfilling jewel with both hands.

One of the prominent subcategories of Jizō is the Roku Jizō 六地藏, a group of six Jizō statues, or one statue/image depicting six Jizō, believed to guard living beings of the six realms (*rokudō* 六道). According to Gorai Shigeru 五来重, Akamatsu Keisuke 赤松啓介, and other Japanese researchers, these statues are often placed at the entrance to a cemetery, but they can be seen in other places such as

7. For more on the Sai riverbank, see HAYAMI (1975, 152–58); TAKARADA (1984); TANIGUCHI and MYŌKEN (1985, 108–10).

8. The iconography of Enmei Jizō statue is presumably derived from the *Enmei Jizō bosatsu kyō*, though the images of Jizō with one leg down are found in China as well. For an iconology of Jizō in China, see ZHIRU (2007).

9. The only study dedicated entirely to Dōji Jizō is YOSHIDA Shōya (1962), which is a collection of Dōji Jizō photos taken in a historical district of Inaba, the eastern part of present-day Tottori Prefecture. Although Yoshida considers all small-scale carved Jizō images with childlike appearances as Dōji Jizō, in the present study the author deems only those statues that bare an inscription with a posthumous name of a child to be Dōji Jizō. However, we should bear in mind that some small statues that have no inscriptions could have been erected as Dōji Jizō.

at the gates (GORAI 1980; AKAMATSU 1931). The typical form of Roku Jizō consists of six upright Jizō statues holding different objects in their hands. Although these objects are not defined, Roku Jizō are typically depicted as follows: (1) Jizō holding a ringed staff and wish-fulfilling jewel; (2) Jizō holding a wish-fulfilling jewel and making a consoling gesture (*semuiin* 施無畏印) with his other hand; (3) Jizō holding a lotus flower; (4) Jizō holding an incense container; (5) Jizō holding a banner (*dōban* 幢幡); and (6) Jizō doing *gasshō*. Each Jizō is supposed to guard his own realm, although it is unclear which Jizō is guarding which realm (GORAI 1980; 2007, 261–65; SHIMOIZUMI 2015, 155–58; AKAMATSU 1931).

Most Buddhist temples have at least one Jizō statue. Moreover, after the spread of mourning rituals for childbirth deaths, miscarriages, and aborted fetuses (*mizuko kuyō* 水子供養) in the 1970s and 1980s, Mizuko Jizō 水子地藏 statues became commonplace at many temples.¹⁰ Parishioners worship these images, bringing toys and sweets as offerings for their unborn children. But, for the priests, these artifacts appear rather confusing. As one of my informants, an abbot of a rural temple, puts it,

Mizuko kuyō is too closely associated with abortion and *tatari* 祟り, the revenge of an angry spirit. It is as if we are blaming women for this, making them feel guilty. This is why although there is a Mizuko Jizō in my temple, I don't conduct any rituals or events concerning it. People can bring offerings freely, but this is their business, not mine.¹¹

In a majority of cases, Mizuko Jizō can be easily recognized; most statues depict Jizō with a baby in his hands, sometimes surrounded by other small children clinging to him. Mizuko Jizō statues can hold ringed staffs and/or wish-fulfilling jewels, but some of them do not have any of the usual Jizō attributes except for a shaved head and monk's garments. The other type of Mizuko Jizō is a small (about 70 centimeters) childlike figure, usually doing *gasshō* or holding a ringed staff and wish-fulfilling jewel. These statues are mostly erected as an individual memorial and bear an inscription with the family name or deceased child's name.

Jizō Statues Inside the Buildings of Sendai Temples

During my field studies, I treated all the Jizō statues on the temple grounds as objects of study, although there were several exceptions. First, I excluded private Mizuko Jizō statues erected within the perimeters of a family grave, because

10. Regarding *mizuko kuyō* and its connection with Jizō, see HARDACRE (1997); LAFLEUR (1992). For a study of *mizuko kuyō* outside Japan, see WILSON (2009).

11. This point of view, which is quite widespread among Sōtōshū priests, echoes an article by ISHIKAWA Rikizan (1993).

these are primarily objects of individual veneration. Second, I did not include the small statues gathered into various *muen tō* 無縁塔 (memorial monuments consisting of tombstones from abandoned graves),¹² because the statues gathered there are remains of private graves and are treated altogether as a separate memorial object dedicated to the forgotten dead. Also, I considered Roku Jizō and some other sets of Jizō statues as a single object due to their symbolic unity.

Out of 214 temples and sanctuaries in Sendai, 165 have at least one Jizō statue. In total, there are 2,298 statues or sets of statues, which means an average of fourteen statues per temple. At the same time, thirty-two temples store more than twenty Jizō statues on their premises. The temple with the greatest number of statues is Rinkōin 林香院 with 169 statues, followed by Kokubunniji 国分尼寺 with 107, and Kōjuin 光寿院 with eighty-three.

At Rinkōin, the statues are used in the design of the cemetery, hiding the fence separating the temple from the street. This positioning of the statues creates a corridor leading to the cemetery and at both ends of each row of graves. At Kokubunniji and Kōjuin, small Jizō statues, which were mostly erected to commemorate a dead child and stand at private burial spots, are gathered together with a larger Jizō statue in the middle. At Kokubunniji this group of statues is placed at the entrance of the temple's cemetery, but in Kōjuin they are placed in front of the temple's main gate (*sanmon* 山門). Thus, they are the first thing a visitor sees when entering the temple. At the same time, they are technically outside the temple's precincts.

The majority of temples that have Jizō statues on their grounds actually maintain more than five statues. In addition to the thirty-two temples mentioned above, seventy-one temples possess less than twenty, but still more than five Jizō statues. This means that 103 temples out of 165 actually have Jizō statues literally scattered across their grounds. Forty-six temples have more than one statue, but less than five, and only sixteen temples have one Jizō statue on their grounds.

We cannot say whether temples chose to have so many Jizō statues on their precincts. Temples located in the central part of Sendai, especially around Shintera koji 新寺小路, had to reduce or remove their cemeteries due to construction, which led to the relocation of multiple graves. Jizō statues that were previously part of these family graves found a new place in the temple's precincts. Some of the temples, like Kenshōji 見松寺, accepted statues from surrounding neighborhoods that were abandoned or turned into modern residential quarters. In other temples, parishioners simply brought statues to the temple without asking permission. At the same time, not all the temples have Jizō statues inside their buildings. There are ninety-seven temples that have at least one Jizō statue within their buildings, for example, the main worship hall (*hondō* 本堂) or memorial

12. For more information on *muen tō*, see ROWE (2011).

TABLE 1. Temples that store Jizō statues inside their buildings.

	MAIN WORSHIP HALL	MEMORIAL TABLET HALL	JIZŌDŌ
Jizō statue as their main object of worship (<i>honzon</i> 本尊 or <i>shuson</i> 主尊)	6 temples	3 temples	
Store one Jizō statue	19 temples	21 temples	19 temples
Store more than one Jizō statue	18 temples	16 temples	11 temples
TOTAL	43 temples	40 temples	30 temples

tablet hall (*ihaidō* 位牌堂). Jizōdō, sanctuaries built exclusively for Jizō statues, are present at thirty temples.¹³

Forty-three temples have Jizō statues in their main worship hall. Only six temples (Kōzenji 光禪寺, Dōkeiji 同慶寺, Kōdenji 耕田寺 in Kagitori, Shōrinji 昌林寺, Shōbōji 正法寺, and Komegafukuro Shibari Jizōson 米が袋縛り地藏尊) out of 214 have enshrined Jizō as their main object of worship. At the same time, thirty-one temples enshrine Kannon as the main object of worship, and in fourteen temples Fudō Myōō 不動明王 is granted this position. This lack of Jizō as the main object or central object of worship might be related to the overall impression that Jizō is a bodhisattva reserved specifically for stone statues (*sekibutsu* 石仏). In one Sendai temple, Ryūkōin 龍香院, I was told by the abbot that he actually considers his large and old Koyasu Jizō 子安地藏 as the main object of worship as it has always been the primary object of reverence for local parishioners, but because this was a stone statue it was placed outside the temple's gates, while Senju Jūichimen Kannon 千手十一面観音 is worshiped in the temple's main hall (interview conducted on 13 October 2016).

Eighteen temples maintain more than one Jizō statue in their main hall. Still, the statues are mostly arranged in clusters of other statues of buddhas and bodhisattvas and are rarely granted any prominent position inside the main hall. A similar situation can be seen in memorial tablet halls. In forty temples that store Jizō statues in these halls, only three have chosen to position Jizō as the central image despite the bodhisattva's role as a savior from hell.¹⁴

13. As my respondents tended to consider any small hut with a roof to be Jizōdō, I follow their definition. However, it should be noted that the majority of Jizōdō are very simple with no walls but simply a roof on four pillars. An intricate question arises here: Can we consider these statues to actually be inside a building, or are they outside? Although they are technically inside a building, this building can be situated outside of the temple's grounds and can be easily dismantled if needed. I tend to think that this is not the same as statues secured in a main worship hall or in a proper sanctuary. However, this difference is rather subtle, so I employ a single definition of Jizōdō regardless of the structure of the building in which they are housed.

14. For Jizō's role as a savior from hell, see HAYAMI (1975, 99–115); ISHIKAWA (1995, 202–10).



FIGURE 1. Ryūkōin's Koyasu Jizō (photo taken by author 13 October 2016).

As I have previously mentioned, there are thirty Jizōdō in Sendai temples.¹⁵ The majority of them were built for one particular Jizō statue, but eleven of these Jizōdō have gathered multiple Jizō statues under one roof. Some of them are still referred to as a single object of veneration—for example, there are four statues enshrined in Abohara Jizōdō 阿保原地藏堂 at Daimanji 大満寺 in Mukaiyama—but others are grouped together simply because they are all Jizō.

Jizō statues are also found in other sanctuaries such as Kannondō 観音堂, Jūōdō 十王堂, and so on, the corridor of the temple (specifically, the entrance to the main hall), the room for visitors to the temple, and the scriptorium (*shoin* 書院). In Daikanmitsuji 大観密寺, a Jizō statue is one of the “108 buddhas,” 108 statues located inside the one-hundred-meter-tall Sendai Daikannon statue. Sengakuin 仙岳院 has several statues on display in its treasure hall (*hōmotsukan* 宝物館). Shōonji 松音寺 stores its Jizō in the basement treasury. And, Mitakisan Fudōin 三滝山不動院 has a small water reservoir near the main hall where a small statue of Jizō is placed.

15. I have not included Komegabukuro Shibari Jizōson 米ヶ袋縛り地藏尊 among these thirty temples. Although this sanctuary originally was built as a Jizōdō, it eventually became an independent temple. In this case, the main building is referred to as the main hall, instead of Jizōdō.



FIGURE 2. Abohara Jizōdō in Daimanji (photo taken by author 11 August 2014).



FIGURE 3. Jizōdō at Fukujiin 福寿院 (photo taken by author 13 October 2016).

Except for a few cases in which stone statues are placed into a main hall, the majority of statues enshrined inside temple buildings are wooden; stone statues tend to be enshrined inside Jizōdō. As we can see, Jizō statues are on rare occasions installed as the main object of worship at a temple or as the central object in a temple building. At the same time, only thirty temples have built additional sanctuaries such as Jizōdō to store Jizō statues on their grounds. Instead, they prefer to store their Jizō statues either inside the main hall or monument table hall, usually together with some other statues (especially when the statue is made of wood), or simply place it outside without a sanctuary (typically in the case of a stone or metal statue). Wooden statues are often secured inside to avoid weather damage, but this is not necessarily the case for older Jizō statues. Many of the more famous and revered statues listed in compilations of stone statuary and local temple histories in the Sendai area note that older wooden statues are left outside the sanctuary. The quantity of temples keeping Jizō statues in the main or tablet hall is almost equal, hence it could be assumed that both buildings are considered suitable locations for a Jizō statue. At the same time, securing a Jizō statue or cluster of statues in a Jizōdō is less frequent, meaning that constructing a Jizōdō for a stone statue does not seem to be obligatory even if the statue is valuable for the temple. In Ryūkōin, mentioned above, the statue of Koyasu Jizō, regarded as the temple's main image by the abbot, stands outside of the temple facing the road. No sanctuary has been constructed for it, and there are no plans for building one.

Jizōdō were destroyed at some temples affected by the 2011 tsunami, but there are no future plans to reconstruct them. The Koyasu Jizō of Jōdoji 浄土寺 was left without a sanctuary, and, at least at the time of publishing this article, it remains in its original place despite the temple having moved to a new location.¹⁶ At Shōtokuji 照徳寺 a statue was moved to the main hall.¹⁷ Thus, some sanctuaries may have disappeared in the disaster of 2011 or some other misfortune such as a fire or typhoon, but the fact that they are not being rebuilt suggests their dispensability.

Jizō Statues Outside Temple Buildings

Now, let us take a closer look at Jizō's position outside of the temple grounds. In TABLE 2, I list the number of temples that enshrine Jizō statues in specific places external to the temple. I divide these spaces on the periphery of the temple into the following categories: (1) the area around the main gates, (2) the stairway inside the main gates and the path leading toward the main hall, (3) the area in front of the main hall, (4) the cemetery behind or sometimes surrounding the

16. A photo of this statue secured within the Jizōdō can be found in ISHIGAKI (1983, 41).

17. A photo of the sanctuary prior to its destruction can be seen at www3.plala.or.jp/gameticket/27takasago.html (accessed 21 October 2019).

TABLE 2. Temples with outdoor Jizō statues.

QUANTITY OF STATUES	TEMPLE GATES	STAIRWAY OR PATH TO THE MAIN HALL	AREA IN FRONT OF THE MAIN HALL	CEMETERY	ENTRANCE TO THE CEMETERY ^a	OTHER
One	19 temples	9 temples	23 temples	23 temples	10 temples	21 temples
Roku Jizō ^b	11 temples	4 temples	5 temples	3 temples	2 temples	1 temple
More than one, less than five	17 temples	9 temples	16 temples	25 temples	25 temples	14 temples
Five or more	20 temples	24 temples	7 temples	17 temples	21 temples	4 temples
TOTAL	67 temples	46 temples	51 temples	68 temples ^c	58 temples	40 temples

a. This category denotes the entire vicinity opening to the cemetery, not just the entryway. At some temples, it is not possible to locate a single entrance to the temple's cemetery. Usually, there is a path leading from the temple's garden to the back of the temple's main building, where the cemetery is located, and, on occasion, the visitor finds herself suddenly surrounded by tombstones. At some temples, the cemetery completely fills the temple's grounds from the main gates to the back of the main hall, where most graves are located.

b. Although rare, I include the configuration of twelve Jizō statues, symbolizing the twelve signs of the Chinese horoscope, in this category. Like Roku Jizō, they are symbolically a unit.

c. It should be noted that not all temples have a cemetery.

main hall,¹⁸ (5) the entrance to the cemetery, and (6) the garden or other areas between the front of the main hall and the path leading to it.

The quantity of statues is also important. Therefore, I distinguish between temples that retain only one statue in a specified location, those that gather together a few statues, and those that amass a group of five or more Jizō statues. I granted Roku Jizō a special category, because they share symbolic unity while being physically distinct images.

As can be seen in TABLE 2, the most frequent place for temples to store Jizō statues outside is a cemetery, with sixty-eight temples having at least one Jizō statue in the cemetery and fifty-eight temples have Jizō statues erected near the entrance of the cemetery. The space at the temple's main gates is likewise a popular place to store a Jizō statue, with sixty-seven temples locating at least one Jizō

18. In general, sanctuaries (*odō* お堂) do not have a cemetery, but temples do. At the same time, a sanctuary might possess a private cemetery belonging to a local family. One such case is Monjudō 文殊堂 in Hachiman, Aoba Ward. Also, some temples in Shintera and other central areas of Sendai have moved their cemeteries to Kuzuoka Boen 葛岡墓園, and, in these cases, the layout of the cemetery differs from the cemetery at a typical temple.



FIGURE 4. A Mizuko Jizō statue near the water faucet at Rinsenji (photograph taken by author 12 August 2015).



FIGURE 5. Oyako Jizō 親子地藏 (Parent and Child Jizō) at Kenshōji (photo taken by author 4 September 2014).

in this area. Fifty-one temples have Jizō statues in front of the main hall; forty-six temples place Jizō statues along stairways or paths toward the main hall; and in the remaining cases Jizō statues are found at other locations around the temple grounds.

As we can see, the majority of statues are situated in or near a cemetery. But not all Jizō statues found in cemeteries have a distinct connection with death. For example, at three temples (Rinsenji 林泉寺, Mankōji 満興寺, and Kokubunniji) Jizō statues are placed near the water faucets used by visitors to family graves. In Rinsenji and Mankōji, there are small Mizuko Jizō statues, and in Kokubunniji we can find a simple Jizō statue with a ringed staff and a wish-fulfilling jewel.

As the abbots of Rinsenji and Mankōji explained, these statues symbolize the sacredness of water and should remind visitors to treat water with respect, that is, conserve it. At the same time, the reason could be more complex since three statues (two in Rinsenji and one in Mankōji) are Mizuko Jizō. The temple Kōzenji has a Mizuko Jizō near a water tap, but in this case, the abbot said that she did not know the reason why this particular image was erected here, suggesting it was merely customary. A priest from another temple, not located in Sendai but still in Miyagi Prefecture, once told me that *mizuko*, which literally means water (*mizu* 水) child (*ko* 子), often gather near open water. Thus, it is important to erect Mizuko Jizō near an open water source to avoid *tatari*. There could be a connection between the three cases of Mizuko Jizō located near the cemetery water faucets and this belief.

Another example of Jizō statues that do not function as memorial objects are the so-called “cute” statues, designed to greet visitors or make them smile. These statues are erected by the abbots and are not regarded as objects of veneration. When explaining their reasons for using such peculiar statues at their temples, the abbots state that these images brighten the atmosphere of the cemetery and are intended to convey their feelings towards their parishioners. However, these statues could have another meaning. It might be suggested that these “cute” statues transmit the abbots’ views on Buddhist values. If we look closely at examples such as Oyako Jizō (FIGURE 5), we notice that they reaffirm the concept of the ideal family (two parents, different in height, and a child between them) and filial piety (parents and children are waiting for their living relatives to come and care for them).¹⁹ Although these examples of Jizō statues were not erected as memorials for the deceased, they nevertheless contribute to the overall atmosphere of the cemetery.

19. I would like to give credit for this interpretation to Dale Andrews of Tohoku Gakuin University, who proposed this possibility in a private communication.



FIGURE 6: A row of Jizō statues in the cemetery at Rinkōin (photo taken by author 16 February 2017).



FIGURE 7: Rows of Jizō statues in front of the gates of Kōjuin (photo taken by author 21 November 2016).



FIGURE 8. Roku Jizō in front of the gates to Ryūsen'in 龍泉院 (photo taken by author 10 February 2017).

If we look at the quantity of Jizō statues per cemetery displayed in TABLE 2, it becomes evident that there is typically more than one statue. There are large groups or rows of Jizō statues in seventeen cemeteries, and in twenty-one temples they are erected nearby the cemetery. Furthermore, while twenty-three temples have only one Jizō statue in their cemeteries, only ten temples have a solitary statue at the entrance to the cemetery. Rows of statues are apparently more common for this area.

There are thirty-seven temples with two or more Jizō statues and nineteen temples with only one Jizō statue near the vicinity of the main gate. Twenty temples have more than five statues near the entrance, comprising rows that a visitor must pass before entering the temple. One would usually pass by these before entering the temple's grounds; in forty-eight out of sixty-seven temples the statues are located outside the main gates. These statues are often the first thing a visitor sees and they become a marker for the temple as they are visible even before the gate itself comes into sight.

A visitor next passes through the stairway (if the temple is situated on a hill) or a path towards the main hall. Here, rows of statues dominate the landscape; in twenty-three out of forty-five temples, there are rows of Jizō statues on one side or both sides of the path. Only nine temples have only one statue. Moreover, in thirty-eight temples the statues are directly facing the path as if overlooking visitors to the temple. In the area in front of the main hall a single Jizō statue tends



FIGURE 9. Jizō statues separating the cemetery from the temple's main grounds at Tōshūin (photo taken by author 17 February 2017).



FIGURE 10. A row of statues framing the steps towards the main hall of Daimanji in Izumi Ward (photo taken by author 17 September 2015).



FIGURE 11. Jizō statues forming a row leading to the main hall of Saikōin 西光院 (photo taken by author 8 August 2016).

to be standard. Here, only seven temples had more than five statues placed in a row. The usual pattern is one or two Jizō statues, which is the case at thirty-seven out of fifty temples.

Jizō statues that do not fall into any of these categories are usually hidden beneath the bushes or grass in the temple's garden. These are often solitary statues, which is the case in twenty-one out of forty temples. Although there is occasionally more than one statue in the garden, only in five temples were there rows or groups of Jizō statues in the temple's garden or some other location not specified in the categories mentioned before. In one case at Kōsaiji 光西寺, there are seventeen Mizuko Jizō statues behind the Jizōdō, because there was not enough space inside the sanctuary. In another four temples, a special place is provided in the temple's garden for small Jizō statues. In the remaining thirteen temples, the statues were unsystematically scattered around the garden.

The custom of erecting Jizō statues in the cemetery is related to the correlation between Jizō and death rituals, but as we can see from TABLE 2 the next most common locations where Jizō statues can be seen is the area near or in front of the main gates to the temple and the entrance to the cemetery. In other words, Jizō statues stand on the border between the temple and the outside world, or, in the case of the entrance to the cemetery, on the border between the temple and its cemetery. In some cases, it is difficult to make a clear demarcation between the temple and its cemetery. These statues may have been used to create such borders. For example, in Tōshūin 東秀院, the temple's grounds are almost completely surrounded by a cemetery. Two large Jizō statues mark the path to the cemetery, dividing it from the path to the main hall. There are

no other markers such as gates or signboards that separate the temple from the cemetery.

One possible explanation for why Jizō statues are often found on the borders of the temple and cemetery might be the connection between Jizō and Dōsojin 道祖神. According to Gorai Shigeru, Jizō statues replaced Dōsojin in the role of protector from evil spirits. Dōsojin was the basis for many popular conceptions of Jizō, including, presumably, its phallic shape (GORAI 2007, 257–75).²⁰ Therefore, erecting a Jizō statue at the border of a temple or at the entrance to a main worship hall conveys this traditional folk belief. However, the abbots do not make this connection to Dōsojin. When discussing the reason for this placement of the Jizō statues, they simply refer to it as “a custom” or suggest that seeing these images in these locations is aesthetically pleasing.

Additionally, there is a pattern of gathering Jizō statues in rows, especially in and near a cemetery, at the main gates of a temple, and on the sides of a path to a main hall. These corridors or rows usually lead into a temple from the main gates or stairway but can also lead towards a particular image of Jizō, which is the case at Seijōkōin 清浄光院, or towards the entrance of a Kannon sanctuary, as can be seen at Daibaiji 大梅寺 and Seisuiji 清水寺. The statues comprising these corridors are generally small (70 centimeters or smaller), and most are Dōji Jizō, Mizuko Jizō, or were erected as memorials for an adult. Nonetheless, in most cases, the abbots do not refer to them as memorial objects. The reasons for placing these Jizō statues in a row vary, but many abbots mentioned that it is customary to erect a Jizō statue at the side of a road. An interesting case is at Seisuiji 清水寺, where the abbot’s mother clearly remembered the individuals these statues were erected for but was uncertain if they could actually be considered as memorial objects because they were guarding the entrance to the Kannon sanctuary. Hence, she was inclined to see the Jizō statues as small guardian deities for the Kannon sanctuary.

Along with the doctrinal rationalizations for erecting a statue, the symbolism of Roku Jizō can be sacrificed for the sake of the structural unity of the corridor. As in the case of Daimanji (Izumi Ward), Jūkokuji 充国寺, and Daihōji 大佛寺, the border may be delineated by means of statuary other than Roku Jizō.

Satō Sōtarō, who has conducted studies of stone statues in Japan and India, argues that stone statues in temple grounds serve the function of distinguishing the religious space of a temple from its profane surroundings. In the case of a cemetery, a statue divides life from death, this world from that world. In Japan, these roles are performed by the liminal Jizō statues (SATŌ 1982, 139–48).

20. The relation between Jizō and Dōsojin is frequently mentioned by researchers. See, for example, TANIGUCHI and MYŌKEN (1985, 18–24); FUJI (1974, 59–78); ŌSHIMA (1992a).

In her essay on the Japanese custom of wrapping, Joy Hendry writes that Shinto shrines generally consist of several layers of decreasingly sacred space moving out from the *shintai* 神体 (sacred body of the deity) outward toward the gates of the shrine. According to Hendry, these layers are separated by *shimenawa* 注連縄 (straw rope), as well as gardens, stones, fences, and other types of wrapping that mark the potential point of contact with spiritual power (HENDRY 1996, 295). Jizō statues, apart from being objects of worship, provide a similar “wrapping” for a Buddhist temple, indicating the entrance, guarding the path towards the buildings in which major objects of worship are placed, and creating a desirable spiritual atmosphere. Although other statues and stone monuments may perform the same function, Jizō tends to be the dominant figure.

Conclusion: Identifying Patterns of Jizō Statues at Buddhist Temples in Sendai

As demonstrated by this survey of 214 temples in Sendai, Jizō statues are prominently seen within temple grounds. However, inside temple buildings, Jizō statues do not hold a high position among the objects of worship enshrined in the main halls or memorial tablet halls. A Jizōdō is not always provided even for the statues that are highly treasured by temples. On the periphery, Jizō is mostly found in or near the cemetery or on the path toward the cemetery. In other words, he resides along the border between the world of the living and the world of the dead. Jizō statues are also erected in the area around the main gates of a temple, most often in front. This position technically places them outside of a temple's boundary.

As we can see from the data provided, Jizō statues are not always understood to be objects of worship. Other than well-known and revered images, there are many small statues placed in rows or groups that are included in the special arrangement of the temple. These clusters of images are primarily communal in function. The individual statues may not be considered objects of worship, but the collection of several Jizō statues at specific sites around a temple's grounds are a significant factor in creating a religious atmosphere for visitors.

Even in cemeteries, the place where Jizō statues are typically found, there are Jizō statues that serve as a means of communication (for example, “don't leave the water tap open”), as well as Jizō statues that are erected as decorative objects. There are places inside a temple's territory that are reserved for Jizō statues, such as the area around the cemetery and the main gates. This is where one typically finds the Jizō statues aligned in rows. Therefore, these statues often indicate a border between the sacred and the profane, or they denote various degrees of sacredness; for example, they delineate the periphery of the temple from the main worship hall. Although not always venerated as a bodhisattva, images of Jizō play a major role in defining and facilitating the sacred space of a temple.

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