

Jizō-kō and *Sentai-Jizō wo horu kai*: Finding new bonds through *Jizō* carving activity

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ABSTRACT

Jizō is used to revitalize Japanese Buddhism, attracting more people to temples, even those who have never had any contact with temples and/or Buddhism as a whole. This article therefore aims to find new bonds through the activity of carving *Jizō*. The method used is a qualitative method with data derived from field research. The data collection techniques were through observation, interviews and documentation. The result of this research found that *Jizō* is a Bodhisattva loved by many Japanese people, "easy to relate to", but, in addition, *Jizō* is easy to carve, therefore, even beginners can expect to produce a good-looking statue within a few months as it can provide a good quality of worship activity.

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Introduction

Bodhisattva Jizō (地蔵) is one of the most prominent folk deities in Japan (Dykstra, 1978; Lakić Parać, 2016). The statues of this bodhisattva can be found anywhere – in temples, in small sanctuaries *Jizō-dō* (地蔵堂) and even on the roadsides. However, *Jizō* is sometimes placed outside the Buddhist temple or even outside Buddhist pantheon (Tatehiko, 1992). Being labeled a “commoner deity” (Motohiro, 1984), “a deity that is always near to grant any personal wish” (Kōichi, 2011). *Jizō* has a strong association with folk belief. Nevertheless, *Jizō* plays a big role in modern Japanese temple Buddhism. Many Buddhist temples store famous statues of *Jizō*, that are said to have miraculous powers, others purchase pretty statues to cheer up visitors. Hank Glassman argues that, in the eyes of believers, *Jizō*, with his appearance of a human renunciant, replicates the role of the Buddhist clergy, mediating between this world and the next (Glassman, 2011).

It is natural to assume that this folk bodhisattva, dressed as a Buddhist monk or nun, can be instrumental in popularizing the image of local temples and

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their clergy, for example, through festivals and other events, dedicated to *Jizō*. Also, the usage of *Jizō* imagery can be suitable for revitalizing Japanese Buddhism, drawing more people to a temple, even those, who had never had any connection with the temple and/or Buddhism as a whole. For example, *Jizō* imagery was used in activities related to the aftermath of the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami by Cafe de Monk (McLaughlin, 2013) カフェデモンク *an initiative of local religious specialists, who helped people living in temporary housing, to cope with their grief and depression.*

Making of clay Jizō figurines and prayer beads-like bracelets helped to make a suitable atmosphere for starting a conversation. The conversation means the inner interaction that religious believers have with their God. As Taiō Kaneta 金田諦應, a monk who started this initiative, told me, *Jizō* was chosen exactly because although this is a Buddhist figure, he doesn't have a strong association with Buddhism only, thus, people, who are not Buddhists, can engage in making *Jizō* figurines without a feeling that they are participating in a religious ritual. It would have been natural to assume that some Buddhist temples, aiming to draw more people from outside to their precincts, would also use *Jizō* for that. Temples that rely on the belief in bodhisattva *Jizō*, for example, those temples that enshrine *Jizō* as their *honzon*, or those who have a famous *Jizō* statue on their territory, usually do hold rituals and events dedicated to *Jizō*. Usually, these are *Reitaisai* 例大祭 (festival, dedicated to some deity), that happens once in a year and is usually open for everyone, and *Jizō-kō* 地蔵講 that can take place either once a year or once a month and is often accessible only for the temple's parishioners. However, I believe that *Jizō-kō* has a potential to be converted into an event that will not only draw new people to the community, but also will make them stay. First of all, this is an event that keeps an atmosphere of intimacy, allowing the priest and his family to engage in a free talk with the participants. Also, the format of the event is quite flexible.

To prove these points, I would like to concentrate on one particular example of *Jizō-kō* converted into an event for everyone - *Sentai-Jizō wo horu kai* 千躰地蔵を彫る会 (A meeting to carve thousand *Jizō* statues) of Kōzenji 光禅寺, a temple in Sendai city, Miyagi prefecture, and show how this event helps believers to get closer to *Jizō* and, through this, feel their bonds with the temple and *sangha* - Buddhist community. I chose Kōzenji, because this is not a big and famous temple, and thus, has to concentrate only on its events to popularize itself. I have been visiting Kōzenji's *Jizō-kō* for 6 years, witnessing changes that happened in its' structure, and based on the initial observations that I have made that is one of the main things (if not *the* main thing) that helps this small temple to stay appealing to people around it and draw new believers. Also, I am determined to show that the format of the activity and the ideas transmitted during it influence the whole image of the temple. To prove that the format of *Jizō-kō* has originally the potential to become this kind of an open event, I will first provide an insight into three other *Jizō-kō* from the same area, that of Dōkeiji 同慶寺, Zenkyūin 全玖院, and Genkōan 玄光庵 in order to show how the activity of Kōzenji, while staying in the great tradition of *Jizō-kō*, modernized and evolved the practice.

Jizō-Kō Meaning As Seen By Japanese Researchers

The term *Jizō-kō* is often explained as a community of people who believe in *Jizō*, which, alongside with a religious function, fulfills social functions of relaxation and recreation (Keisen, 1989). These communities are spread throughout Japan and usually become objects of research. However, researchers often concentrate on independent *Jizō-kō*, sustained by local community, where priests participate only occasionally or do not participate at all (Tatehiko, 1992). Sakurai Tokutarō, who was the major researcher of *Kō* in Japan, pointed out that there exist two different variations of *Jizō-kō* and other Buddhist *Kō* - the one that was “folklorized”, that is, turned to a type of a local belief (*Minkan-shinkō-ka shita kō* 民間信仰化した講) and the one that takes place at a temple (*Jiin de okonawareteiru kō* 寺院で行われている講), but in his research he concentrated on the first one, saying very little about the second type of *Kō* (Tokutarō, 1977).

In fact, the term *Kō* itself is remarkably wide, including almost all the types of gatherings and communities inside of major communities, from religious pilgrimage groups to mutual aid communities that have nothing to do with religion. Sakurai defines *Kō* as “A type of social community, organized by people, who have a similar religious, economic or another goal” (Tokutarō, 1977). However, according to Sakurai, the main function of *Kō* is communication and recreation gained through it (Tokutarō, 1977). Similarly, *Kō* that take place in temples usually aims at creating more tightly knit relationships between the believers and the abbot/temple (Tokutarō, 1977).

This duality of goals, according to Sakurai, is easily understandable. *First*, In his major work *Kō Shūdan-no Kenkyū* 講集団の研究 (“The research of *Kō* communities”) he is citing the abstract from a book of Nishikawa Joken, Edo period Japanese geographer, astronomer and essayist, *Chōnin-bukuro* 町人囊 (“A bag of townfolk”), where Nishikawa criticizes “modern *Kō*” for being depraved and centered on alcohol drinking and idle talk instead of sincere help and support (Joken, 1942). Sakurai agrees with Nishikawa on the point that in the 17th century Japan *Kō* activities were sliding more and more towards entertainment, but, at the same time, he saw it as natural and meaningful, as *Kō* and *Matsuri* 祭り (festivals) were the only possibilities for commoners to escape the pressure of *Bakufu* regime (Tokutarō, 1976). For Sakurai, even if *Kō* is offering nothing more but a space for communication, it still fulfills its’ main role, as he considers recreation and human relations as the main goals of any *Kō*. Hence, even in religious *Kō*, in Sakurai’s thoughts, social functions are the most important (Tokutarō, 1976).

Second, Wakamori Tarō was much more critical towards modern *Kō*. He stated that in comparison with Buddhist rituals like *Hōe* 法会 (usually referred to memorial services), which promote charity through the emphasis on penitence, *Jizō-kō* and *Kannon-kō* are nothing more than “meetings for drinking and eating” (Tarō, 2007). Here, he meant what Sakurai called “folklorized” *Kō* (Tokutarō, 1988), while, apparently, *Kō* that take place in temples were considered “real”, “serious” Buddhist rituals. *Third*, Yanagita Kunio, too, pointed out that the goals of temple *Kō* and independent *Kō* are different. The former is aimed at expanding religious commune and educating parishioners about the doctrine of the sect, while the latter is aimed at fulfilling personal religious needs and deepening mutual understanding (Kunio,

1951). Sakurai, his disciple, also tended to see temple *Kō* as an instrument of promoting faith, not mutual understanding (Tokutarō, 1988). Thus, a possibility that temple *Kō* can fulfill the same goals as independent *Kō*-recreation and communication - for both parishioners and priests was not considered by Sakurai, Yanagita, and Wakamori. *Fourth*, However, Shinno Toshikazu shows that *Kō*, even those that are based on clear religious ideology, actually are quite independent and can have many variations. In his book *Nihonyūgyōshūkyōron* he introduces cases, when religious *Kō* combined their religious functions with economic ones, or when *Kō* activities, connected with religious pilgrimage, e.g., visiting sacred mountains, played a role of a rite of passage for young men and women (Toshikazu, 1991). Also, he writes that after the period of economic growth in 1960s and all the changes that came with it, *Kō* didn't lose their necessity for the society, being a very effective system of religious groups (Toshikazu, 1991).

Here arises a question - is there indeed a noticeable difference between the roles that temple *Kō* and independent *Kō* can come to play inside a certain community? And if we talk about a distinctive type of *Kō*, in the case of the present research, it is *Jizō-kō* - is there a format of this event that priests might follow in their own temples, apart from the fact, that *Jizō-kō* should be somehow dedicated to no one else but *Jizō*? Manabe Kōsai, referring to multiple sources from Edo period and earlier, wrote that *Jizō-kō* were very much varied, from simple meetings for a short prayer to structuralized groups with their own budget for offerings and banquets (Kōsai, 1959). Some of them had clear recreational functions, while there were groups that evolved to mutual aid communities. There were cases when *Jizō-kō* collected money for the temple's needs as well (Kōsai, 1959). These facts show that religious *Kō* is not always easy to categorize. The fact that *Jizō-kō* is maintained by an abbot of a temple doesn't necessarily exclude a possibility that it can be a spot for recreation. Moreover, by offering a space of recreation, a temple can reach the goal of promoting faith, drawing more visitors to the temple.

Traditional Jizō-Kō (Sendai Examples)

I believe that before introducing Kōzenji's *Jizō-kō*, I should say some words about the traditional way of *Jizō-kō*. During my field studies and before them I have visited several *Jizō-kō* in different temples of Northern Japan. It is natural to suppose that there are some regional differences, and *Jizō-kō* from other regions of Japan may look quite different. However, as the goal of this article is to show a metamorphose of a certain religious event in a temple of Sendai, I selected several examples of *Jizō-kō* from Sendai, two of them located just a walking distance from Kōzenji. Unfortunately, there were no other temples that hold *Jizō-kō* that belong to the same sect of Buddhism, as Kōzenji - Tendai-shū. All the other temples that granted me an opportunity to witness their *Jizō-kō* belong to Sōtō-shū. At the same time, the abbot of Kōzenji confirmed that the way of Kōzenji's *Jizō-kō* before the transformation had some similarities with other examples, presented in this research.

Dōkeiji was first opened in 1587 under the name of Chōfukuji 長福寺 in Gōroku-mura 郷六村 village. It was soon moved to neighboring Kamiyashi-mura 上愛子村, and renamed in 1717. *Hondō* burned down in 1873 (Iinkai, 1953), and only in 2000, it was properly rebuilt. Today, the temple is located in a rural area, far

from the city, in a scenic place surrounded by nature. There are several farms near Dōkeiji and a small residential area with one-store houses. The temple's parishioners are mostly farmers. *Jizō-kō* takes place twice a year, on 4th April and 4th November. It used to take place on *Jizō's Ennichi* 縁日 (a day related to *Jizō* and thought to bring divine blessing to those who celebrate it) on 24th March and 24th October, but it was decided to move the date of the spring *Jizō-kō* to separate it from *Haru Higan* 春彼岸 (Spring *Higan*), and soon the date of autumn *Jizō-kō* was unified, for the participants could easily remember it. There are 60-70 people participating every time. The majority are temple's parishioners, but some people who simply live near-by participate, too. The majority are seniors. Sometimes a newcomer joins the event, usually invited by other participants or the abbot.

The ritual part is quite simple and characteristic to a majority of other temple events and activities. First, participants chant *Hannyashingyō* 般若心經 (Heart Sutra, probably the most popular of all Buddhist scriptures). Then, they move to the altar to offer some incense sticks and perform *Fudō Sanpai* 普同三拜 (three bows to the temple's *honzon*), and after that, a chapter from *Shushōgi* 修証義 (*Dōgen's* work on the Zen practice for laity) is read. The abbot commented on the selection of scriptures that *Hannyashingyō* and *Shushōgi* are well-known to the participants, and everyone is used to reading it aloud. After *Shushōgi*, the abbot chants *Jizō-bosatsu Shingon* 地藏菩薩真言 (*Jizō* mantra - Om ha ha ha vismaye svāhā) and Dharani. After that, he tells a brief sermon, mostly about the things that happened in 6 months after the last *Jizō-kō*. After that, participants move to a banquet room and have a party with drinks and food. Spring *Jizō-kō* is combined with *Hanamatsuri* 花祭り (Buddha's birthday festival), so some of the activities usually done on *Hanamatsuri* - like pouring *Amacha* 甘茶 (hydrangea tea) on a small Buddha's statue - are also taking place.

As the abbot and the participants explained to me, *Jizō-kō* is the most important annual event for Dōkeiji. It is not just a meeting to worship *Jizō*, it is a major opportunity for temple's parishioners to visit the temple and meet the abbot and other parishioners. Many of them think of the autumn *Jizō-kō* as the year's last visit to the temple, and the spring *Jizō-kō* as a jolly celebration of spring. Some of the participants told me that they had to leave Ayashi and move elsewhere, but twice a year, during *Jizō-kō*, they return to their home village to meet with friends and neighbors. Even if they return any other time, it would be impossible to gather so many acquaintances in one place. *Jizō-kō* consists of two main parts - the ritual part and a free communication part. The ritual part, as mentioned above, is simple and basic, without an emphasis on *Jizō* (even *Jizō Shingon* is read only by the abbot). The free communication part is recreational in nature. It gives a chance to the participants, the abbot and believers alike, to engage in a free talk with people, some of whom they meet only twice a year. Hence, it might be that a chance to gather together is what is the most valuable in this *Jizō-kō*.

The Outline Of Kōzenji

According to the documents Kōzenji and Sendai-shi Shi (History of Sendai), the temple was opened in 857-8 by Jikaku Daishi, who had made thousands of Jizō statues with his own hands and enshrined them in Aobayama in a shrine. However, in 1601, when Date Masamune visited it, the chronicle says that he was so impressed that he actually chose the name "Sendai" for his new city. The temple had to be demolished due to construction work, but the statues were moved to other temples in Sendai. The most elaborate statue was to be moved to Sengakuin 仙岳院, one of the largest and wealthiest temples in Sendai at the time, but on the way to the temple, the carriage carrying the statue suddenly stopped moving after the procession stopped for a moment at Benzaiten-dō. This was taken as a sign that Jizō wanted to stay there, and Benzaiten-dō was renamed Kōzenji.



Figure 1. Kōzenji's honzon. (The pictures were taken on 2016.09.24)

The temple's honzon (figure 1) is presented in *Kōzenji Dayori* 『光禪寺便り』 (Kōzenji's news) in the following way: 1150 years ago, at the place where later Aoba castle was constructed, Jikaku-daishi Ennin erected thousand *Jizō* statues, and that is said to become the origin of the name "Sendai". *Jizō* stores and raises all the lives and treasures of the earth, covers all, saves all and guides all of us (Kōsai, 1959). The temple's leaflet adds some points about *Jizō*: Our honzon is Bodhisattva *Jizō*. The temple's nickname is "O-*Jizō-san*". This is a *hotoke-sama* that is said to bear the suffering instead of us. We are determined to be a temple that is easy-to-relate-to, with a low threshold. On both sides of honzon, there are tiny wooden *Jizō* statues. These statues are made during *Sentai-Jizō wo horu kai* 千躰地藏を彫る会 (A meeting for carving thousand *Jizō* statues), that is taking place once in a month (figure 2). We are going to discuss *Sentai-Jizō wo horu kai* in the next chapter.



Figure 2. Sentai-Jizō next to Kōzenji's honzon. (The pictures were taken on 2016.09.24)

On the second floor of the temple, in a room where temple's activities - zazen sessions, tea ceremony lessons, calligraphy lessons etc. are taking place, there is an *Amida Nyorai* statue in the center, and next to it, there is another wooden *Jizō* statue, made in the 18th century or earlier, approximately 10 cm tall. Apart from this statue and *honzon*, there are no other old wooden statues in Kōzenji.

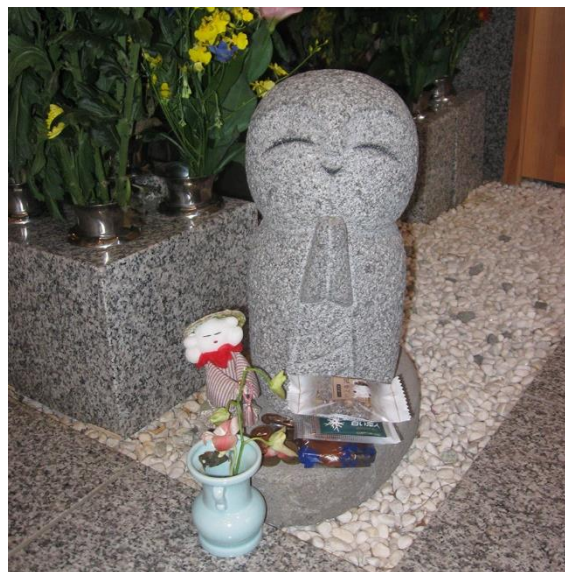


Figure 3. Stone Jizō inside Kōzenji. (The picture was taken on 2014.09.23)

This *Jizō* was made from an old stone, it is fragile. Besides, it is very important for the people who have made it, so I decided to place it inside. Now let us take a look at *Jizō* statues in the outside territory. First, there is *Jizō-dō* next to the temple's *Sanmon* (figure 3 and 4). *Jizō* statue that occupies this *Jizō-dō* is made of stone and is a size of a human in sitting position. Its nickname is *Kirare Jizō* 斬られ地蔵 (*Jizō* cut by a sword) and there is a legend, according to which this statue used to laugh at night saying *Yoru na, Yoru na* よるなよるな ("It's night, it's night!" Also, a phrase

“Don’t come near” is pronounced in the same way, so it is a wordplay) and scaring passers-by.



Figure 4. Jizō-dō with Kirare-Jizō in Kōzenji. (The picture was taken on 2014.09.08)

The temple’s territory does not include a traditional cemetery, instead, there are rows of *Eidai-bo* 永代墓 - burial places that are supported by the temple for a designated period of time without an intervention of families of the deceased. Facing the rows of the burial places, there is a pretty *Jizō* statue (65 cm tall, figure 5), nicknamed *Shiawase-Jizō* 幸せ地蔵 (Happy *Jizō*, *Jizō* that brings happiness).



Figure 5. Shiawase-Jizō in Kōzenji’s Eidai-bo. (The picture was taken on 2014.09.08)

This statue was erected even before *Eidai-bo* as a memorial for a parishioner who had always visited the temple. After the parishioner died, the family of the deceased wanted to erect a statue of *Jizō* in Kōzenji that the deceased loved so much. The abbot agreed on their point. She sees the statue mostly as a memorial for the deceased person, but at the same time, the statue has a deeper meaning: This statue,

although it was erected before *Eidai-bo*, today is an integral part of this territory with a deep meaning and an important role of cheering up the visitors. The curious thing here is that there is no other *Mizuko-Jizō* in Kōzenji, the one that would have been used for *Mizuko-Kuyō* (figure 6).



Figure 6. The only *Mizuko-Jizō* of Kōzenji, near the well. (The picture was taken on 2014.09.08)

Kōzenji is not only a temple with close bonds with *Jizō*, it is a temple that propagates a will to create close bonds with its parishioners as well. These two aspects of Kōzenji's ideology become mixed together when it comes to deciding on the erection of new statues of *Jizō* or moving the existing ones. The temple's *honzon* was made by Jikaku-daishi, but the small wooden statues that fulfill the composition are made by the temple's parishioners and occasional visitors.

Kōzenji's *Sentai Jizō Wo Horu Kai*

Jizō-kō began after the Second World War and, according to the abbot, was very similar to Dōkeiji's and Zenkyūin's, except for the usage of Shushōgi, characteristic to Sōtō-shū. It included the sutra reading part (*Hannyashingyō*), paying homage to *honzon*, sermon and a free talk with a small tea party. *Jizō-kō* was held once a month, on 24th, but since 2000, the number of participants grew smaller and smaller, they started gathering only once or twice a year and it was inevitable that *Jizō-kō* would soon disappear.

In 2012, while the temple was being rebuilt, the abbot decided to change the format of *Jizō-kō*, so that it could be held even in a simple room. Then the abbot had an idea of starting a wooden *Jizō* statue carving activity. This idea was based on two main points. First of all, the name of the temple's *honzon* implied that there should be a thousand of statues, while only one statue survived. The newly erected temple needed a new *honzon*. Besides, Buddhist statue carving is one of the ascetic practices, and it could draw the interest of people who wanted to try something new.

The new activity began on 24th March of 2012 instead of usual *Jizō-kō*. It wasn't an easy decision, though, as the majority of participants were seniors and not everyone liked the idea. There were many people who stopped coming because it was too hard for them to carve statues, or because they simply were not interested in this kind of activity. However, new people started coming up, some of them had been never seen at the temple before. After an article about *Sentai Jizō wo Horu Kai* had been introduced in a free paper for seniors *Shirubā Netto* シルバーネット, more than 30 newcomers appeared, some of them are still participating today. There are many people who come once or twice, carve a statue and stop coming.

The activity is evolving. From 24th October of 2015, with the help of the abbot's friend, Sōtō-shū nun, *Shakyō* sessions were started on the same day of 24th, before *Sentai Jizō wo Horu Kai*. There were many people who wanted to participate in both activities, so the abbot started cooking lunch for them. First, it was some simple vegetarian lunch - soba noodles with vegetables and such, but now the abbot cooks an elaborate *shōjin ryōri* set every time, carefully explaining the recipes and the advantages of every ingredient to the participants. Today, the participants once a month can spend half a day at Kōzenji. For the better understanding of the atmosphere and the schedule of this activity, I have sketched one such day as precisely as I could.

Usual *Sentai Jizō Wo Horu Kai* In Kōzenji

People start gathering around 9:30. The majority of visitors follow the pattern of bowing first to Kirare-Jizō, leaving a few coins for her, then moving on to Inari shrine, which is located in the temple precinct, and only then do they proceed to Hondō. First, we recited Sangemon 懺悔文 (an excerpt from *Kegonkyō* 華嚴經, which is often used in ceremonies for the laity), then - *Hannyashingyō*, and started writing at 10:20 (figure 7).



Figure 7. During *Shakyō*

At 11:00, the abbot's son and assistant played a CD called *Hannyashingyō ni manabu* 般若心經に学ぶ ("Let's learn from *Hannyashingyō*!" by Hanayama Shōyū). After everyone has finished writing the *Hannyashingyō* (the whole text) or a random

page from the Hokkekyō 法華經, we read the Hannyashingyō one more time, and end with Ekōmon 回向文 (a short chant, often used as a ceremonial ending). Now the participants set the table for lunch (figure 8). The abbot and his assistants prepare the food.



Figure 8. Participants help themselves to vegetarian meal

We end the lunch with a prayer as well. All the participants help to clean the dishes and prepare the tables for *Jizō* carving. It is already 13:00. Some of the participants stay, others have to leave earlier. *Shakyō* teacher, who is usually present for both parts, has to leave earlier this time, as she is going to Nagano next morning. Now there are 15 people (including the abbot). Carving teacher, a *Jōdo-shū* priest, comes and starts explaining the process to a new participant.

The Advantages Of *Sentai Jizō Wo Horu Kai* And Its' Influence On Kōzenji

Sentai Jizō wo Horu Kai is a step from a simple activity that anyone can participate in (*Hannyashingyō* chanting, incense offering) to a more elaborate practice of carving wooden statues and writing *Shakyō*. Although no preliminary level is required, and participants can always choose between *Hannyashingyō* and more complicated *Rengekyō* tracing, as well as choose a type of statue they want to carve, as we could see, many of those who participated in the original *Jizō-kō* stopped coming. However, new people came and keep on coming. Moreover, the abbot is completely satisfied with the new activity and says that, in her opinion, it was a big step ahead for the temple.

Sentai Jizō wo Horu Kai attractive both to the participants and the abbot: *First*, The communication part became longer. After *Shakyō*, performed in complete silence, the participants can engage in a free conversation for more than 4 hours. The abbot sometimes leads the discussion, but the participants are free to ask questions, bring up a new topic or even come up with a lecture. The abbot says that this way she can become closer to her parishioners and other visitors, hear their thoughts on Buddhism, answer their questions. The abbot considers an opportunity to create a Buddhist statue with one's own hands the main feature of *Sentai Jizō wo*

Horu Kai: When you carve *Jizō* from a piece of wood, you can feel your bonds to Buddhism more clearly. That's what I often hear. They say "I have made a good connection (*li en ga dekita* いい縁ができた)!". The participants can place their statues near the temple's *honzon*, in this way contributing to the temple and leaving something that might overlive them. Or they can bring them home and put them on their home altars. Either way, their bonds to the temple become visible and palpable, something that is hardly reachable for the majority of Japanese temple parishioners.

Second, The activity is cross-sectarian, with priests from Sōtō-shū and Jōdo-shū participating, thus, instead of targeting Tendai-shū believers, it calls out to everyone who has an interest in Buddhism in general, without an emphasis on the sect. The abbot says, that through this activity she herself understood that Buddhism is truly united. *Third*, The majority of the participants are older people, but as we can see from the act of placing the article about *Sentai Jizō wo Horu Kai* in a free paper for seniors, the abbot acknowledges this tendency and is ready to face it. *Sentai Jizō wo Horu Kai* is aimed at people who have time to come on 24th day of every month, hence, the majority of those who are able to come, are housewives or retired. The abbot said on many occasions that she, as a woman and an older person, feels comfortable with this category of people, as she knows what problems they face and what they want to hear about Buddhism and their way of life. Hence, it might be assumed that at least in the case of Kōzenji instead of drawing younger people to the temple, the abbot concentrates on drawing more older people.

Conclusions

Sentai Jizō wo Horu Kai derives from traditional *Jizō-kō*, but by giving the participants more time for free conversation and by offering them physical contact with Buddhism through *Jizō* statues they carve, the abbot has managed to reach two goals - the activity became more recreational and communal, but, at the same time, it can be said that it became more "Buddhist", as the activities that the participants engage in are more complicated, and the knowledge they get from participating in *Sentai Jizō wo Horu Kai* might be deeper. I believe that *Jizō* statues play a significant role in this activity. *Jizō* is a beloved Bodhisattva for many Japanese, "easy-to-relate-to", but, besides, *Jizō* is easy to carve, hence, even absolute beginners can hope to produce a nice looking statue in a few months time. This free format and the usage of the most popular and beloved Bodhisattva allows *Jizō-kō* to be transformed into something a little bit different, an event with a unique set of activities, constantly developing and incorporating more and more ideas to introduce the participants traditional and modern Buddhism.

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