

Jizo Statues (Sentai Jizo)

Some 1,300 small stone statues of the bodhisattva Jizo, a much-loved Buddhist figure, line the northern border of the temple grounds. Jizo is considered the protector of children, particularly the souls of those who are stillborn or who died at a young age. According to Buddhist beliefs, these children are caught in a kind of limbo, unable to cross the river to the afterlife. On the riverbank, they are resigned to stacking stones into towers to gain the right to cross, while demons come out at night to knock them down in an endless repetitive cycle. Their only comfort comes from Jizo, who has postponed his own salvation to help carry these lost souls across the river in his sleeves.

The statues are clothed in knit caps and bibs, brought by mourning parents, who also leave offerings of toys, such as pinwheels, to thank Jizo for his protection. The clothing is usually red, a protective color associated with Amida Buddha. Jizo Bodhisattva is also the protector of travellers, pregnant women, and lost souls.