Kanō Tan'yū (1602-1674)

狩野探幽

"Bosatsu Jizō Amidst Clouds"

雲中地蔵圖

Hanging scroll, ink on silk
98 x 36.4 cm. (38 3/8 x 14 3/8 in.)

Inscription:
"Painted by Tan'yū-sai."

Artist's seal:
Ho'in Tan'yū

Recent Provenance:
Kawasaki collection

Published:
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A solitary figure with the robe and shaven head of a monk walks above the clouds, his divine status indicated by the encompassing halo. Both hands are concealed, so any characterizing implements are hidden, but the staff topped by six rings is sufficient to identify the figure as Jizō.

Along with Kannon, the Bodhisattva or Bosatsu of Mercy, Jizō is one of the most popular deities today in China and, especially, Japan. Originating in the Indian Kitigarbha "Earth Womb," the god had traveled to China by the 7th century or so, transforming into a male along the way, and was called Ti-ts'ang,"Earth Treasury." During the 8th century Ti-ts'ang was introduced into Japan and from the 9th century onward worship spread throughout the country in association with the Tendai and Shingon sects. Jizō's original charge as King of the Underworld was to ease suffering and to shorten the sentence of those in hell. This was later expanded to being Master of the Six States of Reincarnation, and later yet into a special relationship with children, charged with the protection of children, expectant mothers, of children in limbo, and of aborted or miscarried babies, hence the numerous images of Jizō in cemeteries in modern Japan. The meaning and function of the accoutrements of Jizō have also changed over time. The *shokujo* or six-ringed staff was originally used to open the gate of Hades while the *hōshunotama* jewel functioned as a light in the dark abode of suffering souls; these became, respectively, the means by which believers were awakened from their delusions and to fulfill the wishes of the faithful.

In images such as the present, one foot of the deity is usually put forward to indicate that Jizō moves throughout our world. His calm demeanor and monk-like dress characterize Jizō as being very approachable despite his separation from the sentient world by the otherworldly clouds.

Kanō Morinobu (1602-74), called Tan'yū, was the eldest son of Kanō Takanobu (1571-1618) and grandson of Kanō Eitoku (1543-90), fifth-generation head of the main Kanō line in Kyoto. Following Eitoku's death, leadership of the school passed to Kanō Mitsunobu (1565-1608), who worked mainly for Hideyoshi but who also painted for Tokugawa Ieyasu in Edo between 1606 and his death in 1608.

Takanobu, second son of Eitoku, had remained in Kyoto, engaged in the decoration of castles and palaces for the court, and it was in that environment that Tan'yū came of age. In 1612, when Tan'yū was ten years old, he accompanied his father to Edo where he met Ieyasu, founder of the Tokugawa regime. Two years later Tanyū painted in the presence of Shōgun Hidetada, who called the youth a "reborn Eitoku" and gave him a seal reading *eji koso*, "the laying on of color follows (preparation of) the plain ground," a quote from Confucius (551-479 B.C.) on the priority of character over artifice. When fifteen years of age Tan'yū became a *goyō eshi*, "master painter," attached to the *bakufu* in Edo. Leadership of the Kanō school had passed to Kanō Sadanobu (1597-1623) in 1608, but when he died unexpectedly at the age of twenty-six, he had no son to succeed him. His will specified that he should be succeeded by Yasunobu (1613-85), the younger brother of Tan'yū, who had established another brother, Naonobu (1607-50), as successor of their father Takanobu in Kyoto.

Later, both Yasunobu and Naonobu moved to join Tan'yū in Edo, where the family rapidly came to constitute the heart of official painting circles; the three brothers were all *oku eshi*, "painters of the inner court," which meant they worked only for aristocratic patrons and were given very generous annual stipends. As the family grew, and some members founded schools of their own, the Kanō lineage came to form an immense pyramid, ranging from four families of *oku eshi* at the top, to twelve families of *omote eshi*, "painters of the outer court," to *kakae eshi* serving various daimyo clans throughout the country, and down to *machi eshi* who worked for townspeople. Kanō Tan'yū may thus be credited with great foresight and organizational skills as well as immense talent in painting. Tan'yū's seal on the present painting mentions his rank as *hōin*, "seal of the law," the highest rank for artists at court, an honor he received in 1665, so the work was painted during his mature period as an artist.