The carved figure of a boy attendant (*dongja*) was a common sight in Buddhist temples of the Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910) in Korea. Ready to serve, it was usually positioned near one of the temple’s central sculptures. This particular figure is thought to be an attendant for one of the “Ten Kings of the Underworld.” Although created for a religious setting, this gentle-faced boy, holding a tray of peaches and pomegranates in both hands as an offering, also embodies the humorous and unpretentious folk arts tradition of Korea.

The figure was carved from a single piece of wood and then affixed to a wooden base. His hair is pulled tight and tied in a coil that descends his back. The *dongja* wears a traditional Korean costume known as a *hanbok*, which consists of a long, two-layered shirt that crosses the chest, is lifted at the waist by a belt, and is worn over a pair of trousers. Originally painted bright red and green, tiny gold patterns can still be seen near the edges of the garment.

Despite the *dongja*’s innocent and childlike qualities, this type of figure plays a significant role for Buddhist worshipers. Although only a servant to the Ten Kings, he plays an active role in the physical world, recording people’s good and bad deeds. Upon a person’s death, the *dongja*’s observations are given to the “Great King,” one of the “Ten Kings of the Underworld,” who will decide the soul’s fate.

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