

REPENTANCE AND BUDDHIST STATUES

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In Japan the term *keka* (repentance or the Buddhist ceremony for repentance regretting one's wrongdoing in the past) first appeared in an article dating to the seventh month of the first year of the Empress Kogyoku's reign (642) in the *Chronicle of Japan* (completed in 720). The meaning here was similar to used as the term *zange* (penitence or regretting one's past sins). According to a traditional study on this subject, the term *keka* included the meaning of *kigan* (prayer for the atonement of one's sins) when Keka-e (Buddhist ceremony for the confession of a person's sins to the Buddha in the hope of avoiding them) was established in the mid-8th century.

The Buddhist statues dedicated at the first Keka ceremony were Bosatsu (bodhisattva) and Shitenno (guardian deities serving as the four cardinal kings; Dhrastra, Virudhaka, Virupaksa, and Vaisra-
vana). This combination revealed the basic form of the Keka Ceremony. First of all, as a prior condition of the Keka ceremony, Shitenno have the roles of watching people on the earth to see if they observe Buddhist precepts or not. The Buddhist scripture *Shitenno-kyo* records that the Shitenno's duty was to inform Taishaku-ten (Indra) about what they observed. The writing brush and handscroll held by the statue of Komoku-ten (Virupaksa) symbolize his role to record what he observed. The statue of Taishaku-ten holding a handscroll in the Hokkedo Hall, Todaiji Temple, Nara, is also based on a description in the same document.

In ancient Japan, there was a long-standing tradition of religious observances in which people swore oaths with Shinto and Buddhist deities as sacred guarantors. In the beginning, these sacred guarantors were the spirits of emperors, heavenly and earthly deities, but from the mid-eighth century, they came to be replaced by Buddhist images, of which the central figures were Bonten (Brahmadeva), Taishakuten (Indra) and Shitenno. This combination was also based on the sutra *Konkomyo saisho-o kyo* (*Suvarnaprabhasottamaraja.-sutra*), in which it was recorded that these deities would reward to punish people according to their faith in this sutra.

The sharp eyes of Bonten, Taishakuten, and Shitenno statues at the Todaiji's Hokkedo Hall seem to indicate their roles of watchers. The Buddhist sculptors of the Tempyo period (729–749) fully understood the role of these deities and were successful in sublimating the marvelous expressions.

In addition, the seven-shaku (233.3 cm.) Kannon Bodhisattva statues, the copies of the *Konkomyo saisho-o kyo* sutra scrolls dedicated in the seven-storied pagodas of *kokubunji* temples in provinces throughout Japan, and the Great Buddha statue of Todaiji Temple, all of which were produced in the mid-eighth century as national projects, reveal a similar function to the above-mentioned deities and oaths. Emphasis is placed on the role of watchers to prevent any deviation from the project to construct the statue of Great Buddha, which was regarded as endeavor of Buddhist devotees in the society. The government accused the instigators of these national large-scale projects, from the construction of *kokubunji* temples to the Great Buddha statue, as criminals or sinners against the Buddhist faith. The deities described above relating to oaths also performed their guard duty against this type of sin.

In contrast with the role of the above-mentioned Buddhist statues for Keka ceremonies, there was another group of Buddhist statues for Sonbetsu Keka (ceremonies for repentance for various Buddhist images), in which ceremonies are individually named by each Buddhist image. A representative of this type was Yakushi Nyorai (Bhaisajya-guru), whose role was to accept a person's repentance for his or her sin of breaking the Buddhist precepts and to exonerate him or her. We can interpret the statues of Yakushi Nyorai dedicated individually at *kokubunji* temples in all provinces as fulfilling this function.

Another representative of this type was the statue of Juichimen Kannon (Eleven Headed Kannon: Skt. *Ekadasa-mukha avalokitesvara*), which was believed to perform the role of atonement for sins of the person chanting a mantra in front of it. An important function of this type of Kannon statue was to fulfill the wishes of such prayers, i.e. wiping out a person's sins through its miraculous virtue. The miraculous virtue of statues of Juichimen Kannon was eagerly anticipated by people who wanted to confirm the atonement of their sins. One was made conscious of Kannon's miraculous virtue through small movements of the statue or a voice from one of the ten small heads or images on top of the statue. As seen in some extant statues of Kannon with a half-length small statue on its head, this feature can be interpreted as the visualized virtue of Kannon in response to the expectations of the prayers. According to the Buddhist scripture associated with Juichimen Kannon (*Juichimen shinju shinkyō giki*), some statues of Kannon were made of white sandalwood in order to express Kannon's miraculous virtue. Thus we can understand that the plain, aromatic wood statues of Juichimen Kannon were created in response to prayers' expectations.

Thus Keka or Buddhist Ceremony for Repentance was performed in the hope of realizing people's wishes for the atonement of their sins. In the Buddhist concept on the law of cause and effect, good effects cannot be obtained without good deeds. As a result, Buddhist atonement for sins was counted strongly as a good deed to accomplish a person's wish. Accordingly, Sonbetsu Keka, or the Repentance Ceremony for Various Buddhist Images, should be interpreted as a form of *zange* or penitence.

Making prayers to Buddhist images is regarded as a habit of doing something good, and the meaning of the expression of the images can be understood first through using the mentality of the prayers as a premise.