

## THE SEATED GOKŌSHII AMIDA OF THE GOKŌ-IN, NARA

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The seated Amida nyorai that is the chief worship object of the Gokō-in takes the form of the monk Hōzō, who prior to becoming the Buddha Amitābha went into contemplation (J. *shii* or *shiyui*) for aeons lasting five kalpas (J. *gokō*) in order to save sentient beings, and fulfilling his forty-eight vows, became a Buddha, as described in the *Muryōjūkyō* · (*Sutra of Infinite Life*). He is characterized as an extraordinary figure with outsized tufts of hair and limbs that have become indistinguishable.

This statue and that from the Kanjinsho Amidadō at Tōdaiji, the cloister that was the headquarters for the campaign to raise funds for Tōdaiji, are traditionally said to have been brought from Song China by Shunjōbō Chōgen, the monk who played the leading role in the campaign to rebuild that temple during the early-Kamakura period. However given the fact that wood used for the statues is Japanese cypress (*hinoki*), it has been surmised that they were carved in Japan but modeled on iconography brought to Japan by Chōgen. Moreover, in terms of technique, the fact that this statue is made of clay and the area of the face has been built up using dry lacquer is worthy of special attention because this has been seen as evidence that the statues are closely related to Chinese wooden statues in technique and also in terms of style.

We were able to display the Gokō-in statue in the special exhibition “The Priest Chōgen and the Rebuilding of Tōdaiji: The Kamakura Era, An Age of Artistic Revival and Innovation” in the spring of 2006. During the course of the exhibition we were also able to examine the statue and compile a research report that included x-ray photography. This article reports on the new findings attained on that occasion and is an attempt to provide evidence that this *Gokō shii Amida* was produced in Japan.

Among these new findings, we have confirmed by x-ray photography that beneath the surface of the current facial features is located the outline form of another nose and set of eyes. Therefore, the use of dry lacquer was not originally intended. It is highly probable that the dry lacquer technique was used for an urgent repair to the statue. Next, we learned that the head and trunk of the figure have been largely hollowed out (using the *uchiguri* technique) and that round or square “windows” were opened in seven places— the top, sides and back of the head, the shoulders, and the center of the back— and that these have been closed with wooden caps. These facts remind the author of the techniques and structure of cast metal Buddhist statues created from the Heian to Kamakura period.

I hypothesize that these are the signs of a shed iron core, which would have been made either vertically or horizontally and functioned to separate the inner and outer molds during the casting process, or the handles for the mold, or that they represent the mimicking of a shed core print (*habaki*). If this theory is correct, the original iconography brought by Chōgen would have been of a metal statue rather than a painting.

The creator of the statue seems to have understood the forms that existed for simply technical reasons to be significant attributes, and thus it can be imagined that the creator was rather far removed from the original circumstances of its production, that is to say, it is highly probable that the statue was created by a Japanese Buddhist sculptor. This theory also accords with the incontrovertible fact that the statue was produced in Japan from Japanese cypress.