A HYPOTHESIS ON THE PRECURSORS OF TŌDAI-JI

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Many aspects in long history of Tōdai-ji, a representative temple of the Nara period, remain obscure. This study explores that period of history just prior to the establishment of Tōdai-ji. In this effort, it attempts to examine the issue from a comprehensive point of view transcending academic disciplines, while at the same time consulting the results of recent scholarship. The following are the main points made in the article.

1. The halls of the Jō-in (upper precincts) of Tōdai-ji, whose layout was modeled on the plan of Kōfuku-ji, are situated on the original site of the temple Fukuju-ji, one precursor of Tōdai-ji. In contrast, the halls located in the Maruyama area (the West Maruyama site and the Tenchi-in site) across the valley from the Jō-in can be associated with the temple Konshusenbō, other precursor of Tōdai-ji.

2. The author argues that the name Konshu-ji referred to both Konshusenbō and Fukuju-ji, and that, while the date of commencement of the use of the name Konshu-ji is unclear, the temple was nearly synonymous with Konkōmyō-ji, which was established in the fourteenth year of the Tenpyō era (742). Konkōmyō-ji, which integrated Karakunidō located in the vicinity of the Kaidan-in, was renamed Tōdai-ji in Tenpyō 19 (747).

3. It can be surmised that Fukuju-ji, which was constructed around Tenpyō 10 (738) by Empress Kōmyō and embodied the notion of Buddhism’s protection of the nation and imperial consciousness, was operated with the aid of Genbō.

4. The Konshusenbō was probably originally a private, mountain retreat for the priest Rōben. It seems to have been of a different lineage than the mountainous Sanbō temple established in the fifth year of the Jinki era (728), which was very likely located on the subsequent site of the Közendō temple.

5. In contrast to the Hokkedō hall (the Kondō of Kōnkōmyō-ji), whose construction was substantially completed by the fourteenth year of the Tenpyō era (742), the statue of Fukūkensaku Kannon (Amogha-pāsa-avalokitesvara) is judged to have been completed sometime between Tenpyō 20 (748) and approximately the first year of the Tenpyō-Shōhō era (749).

6. The author surmises that the main worship statue of the Hokkedō was changed at some point from a Sakyamuni trinity to the Fukūkensaku Kannon but that the other dry-lacquer statues in the Hokkedō were enshrined there from the first.

7. The Fukūkensaku Kannon statue in the Hokkedō was likely originally produced for a hall like the Saikondō in the Jō-in area. It was probably installed as the main icon of worship in the Hokkedō after the Raidō was built as an addition to the hall.

8. The author hypothesizes that the replacement of the main worship statue in the Hokkedō was conducted with the concurrence of Emperor Shōmu and Rōben. The causes of this change likely derive from the new precedence given to the Kegonkyō (Avatamsaka-sutra) over the Konkōmyōsaihōkyō (Suvarnaprabhasottama-sutra) as well as from the provision of materials for the production of the Daibutsu (Great Buddha).