

## Consideration about “*Buppō Tōki*” : Circumstances until the Great Buddha Eye-opening Ceremony

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*Shoku Nihongi* uses the word “*Buppō Tōki*” for the Great Buddha Eye-opening Ceremony of Tōdaiji Temple. It is generally considered that it was used in the same meaning as the word “*Buppō Tōzen*”. However, the expression “*Tōki*” is a special term and is thought to have been used in connection with the introduction of Buddhism to Japan.

The Great Buddha Eye-opening Ceremony at Tōdaiji Temple was an event that asserted the legitimacy of the arrival of Buddhism in Japan. Moreover, the ceremony alludes to the entry in the *Nihon Shoki*, describing the official transmission of Buddhism to Japan. Furthermore, the ritual marked the peak of Buddhist prosperity and was promoted by Emperor Shōmu.

The introduction of Buddhism, which is the starting point of the Great Buddha Eye-opening Ceremony, has greatly changed the country of Japan in various respects. Most notably, it has begun its path of independence from the empire of China in the East Asian world. This began, based on the Buddhist worldview, when China and Japan were positioned as equals during the time of Empress Suiko. That is, China was positioned as “the place of sunset”, “the west”, and Japan was positioned as “the place of sunrise”, “the east”. Behind this positioning was that Japan was located in the far east of East Asia. In addition, as seen in Prince Shōtoku’s Seventeen Article Constitution, Buddhist thought was also incorporated into political thought, which aimed for a centralized state system.

During the time of Emperor Tenmu, the use of the sovereign title

“Emperor”, the installing of authoritative power to Ise Jingū Shrine, and the use of the national title “Japan” were seen as ways to establish a transcendent kingship. This further emphasized the importance of “sunrise” and “east” as the identity of Japan. This is thought to have led to the origin of the word “*Buppō Tōki*”. In order to show how inevitable it was that the official transmission of Buddhism was the starting point of a major change, Dōji used his knowledge to write an article about the introduction of Buddhism in *Nihon Shoki*.

Observing the path from the introduction of Buddhism to the Great Buddha Eye-opening Ceremony, Emperor Shōmu, its organizer, paid tribute to Prince Shōtoku, the founder of the rise of Japanese Buddhism. Perhaps Emperor Shōmu learned the significance of the introduction of Buddhism to Japan and the role of Prince Shōtoku in the article on the introduction of Buddhism in *Nihon Shoki*. He must have also received instruction from Dōji himself. As a result of these experiences, it is plausible that Emperor Shōmu came to have faith in Prince Shōtoku. Moreover, it is also probable that Emperor Shōmu deepened his Buddhist beliefs and was led to the Great Buddha Eye-opening Ceremony. Furthermore, it is believed that in the background of Emperor Shōmu’s Buddhist beliefs, and his attitude toward becoming a leader of Buddhism, was his pride in being the successor to Prince Shōtoku, the founder of the rise of Buddhism in Japan.