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# Buddhism and Fine Arts in Kyoto

## PART I

### TSUKAMOTO ZENRYŪ

#### 1. *The Beginning of Japanese Buddhism: The Asuka Period*

The Japanese islands lie like a breakwater off the Asian mainland, a geographical position that has enabled them to become the storehouse for many of the continent's most precious cultural assets. Among those assets are ancient art objects produced by the superior continental culture centered in China, as well as articles from Egypt, Greece, Rome, Persia and India that were brought to China via the kingdoms along the Silk Road, and from the south by sea.

Of all the importations that entered China, Buddhism had the greatest influence, both spiritually and materially. From its introduction in the first century, and especially during the second and third centuries, Buddhism gained great numbers of believers from all levels of Chinese society. Its prosperity reached a height during the fourth and fifth centuries when it spread from areas along the Yellow River, where it had taken root as early as the first century, into kingdoms founded south of the river by the Eastern Chin and Southern Ch'i.

A steady stream of emigrants from the Asian continent was by this time crossing to Japan and being assimilated. A large number of Chinese mirrors engraved with animal deities and other divine beings have been unearthed from Japanese tombs that date from the fourth

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\* This is the first of a two-part translation of "Kyoto no bukyō to bijutsu," in the *Collected Works of Tsukamoto Zenryū*, Vol. 7 (Tokyo, 1975). Tsukamoto Zenryū (1898-1980) was head priest of Seiryō-ji temple in Kyoto, professor of Chinese Buddhism at the Research Institute for Humanistic Sciences, Kyoto University, and served as head of the Kyoto National Museum from 1961 to 1972.

and fifth centuries. Of these, several are decorated with Buddhist figures, evidence that some immigrants were already devoted to the Buddhist faith.

The fourth and fifth centuries were a period of rapid growth and prosperity for the Japanese, who had established their capital in the Yamato plain. The influence of the Yamato rulers had spread even beyond their own shores, and they had been able to gain a foothold in the south of the Korean peninsula. In addition, goodwill emissaries were being dispatched to China. According to the official history of the Liu Sung dynasty (420–479), tributary envoys were sent periodically to its court from the reign of Emperor Nintoku (r. 313–399), who had his capital in Naniwa (Osaka), until the reign of Emperor Yūryaku (456–479). In return, the Liu Sung emperor acknowledged Japanese military supremacy over its Korean holdings.

As a consequence of the Japanese presence on the Korean peninsula, increasing numbers of Koreans settled in Japan. Buddhism had been brought to Korea from north China as early as 372 and had prospered. Undoubtedly, there were Buddhists among the first immigrants, as well as among the Korean functionaries and traders who travelled between the two countries. According to early Japanese historical records, Buddhism entered Japan in 552, when the king of Paekche (Kudara) sent an envoy with a gilt bronze Buddha and sutras as gifts for the Emperor Kimmei (510?–570?). But long before, among the Chinese and Korean immigrant groups who contributed greatly to Japan's social and political development, there must have been Buddhists who would have brought personal Buddhist art and craft objects with them.

The spread of Buddhism to the Japanese court followed, although not without a confrontation with indigenous Japanese religious beliefs that ended in victory for the Soga family and Prince Shōtoku (574–622), who favored Buddhism, and the downfall of the Mononobe clan, who opposed it. The result was the establishment of Buddhism in the capital at Asuka, from which emerged the Buddhist art of the Asuka period (552–646), whose beauty, simple and unaffected, has a quality that speaks directly to our hearts. The art of Asuka is linked to the art of the Buddhist states of Korea, and through them to the famous stone caves of Yun-kang at Ta-tung, capital of the Northern Wei dynasty (535–557), and from there to the Greco-Buddhist sculpture of Gandhara in northwest India.

## BUDDHISM AND FINE ARTS

Pillars with entasis curves and images of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas depicted in human form derive from the temple architecture and art of Greece and Rome. People of the Asuka period probably thought that these forms and the beautiful arabesque designs in their temples came from China, never dreaming that they had originated in the West. The progressive court faction, which had embraced Buddhism, readily accepted other elements of continental culture, and took positive steps to introduce them to Japan. We may say that Buddhism opened the eyes of the Japanese leaders of Asuka to the outside world.

During this period, the powerful state of Silla repeatedly attacked its neighbors, which were friendly to Japan or under Japanese influence, and finally, in 562, succeeded in driving the Japanese from the Korean peninsula. This, combined with the far-reaching political changes taking place in China, forced the Asuka leaders to rethink their diplomatic policies.

The Sui dynasty (581–618) gained power in China and, in contrast to the severe anti-Buddhist policies adopted during the previous Northern and Southern dynasties, the Sui emperor issued an edict declaring his active support for Buddhism. While building their new capital at Ch'ang-an, the Sui rulers took vigorous measures for the revival of Buddhism. In Japan, Prince Shōtoku determined upon a policy of promoting relations with the Sui. To this end he dispatched embassies in hopes that the introduction of the superior Sui culture would bring about rapid improvements in government, economics, and culture.

As Prince Shōtoku was himself an ardent Buddhist, it is not surprising that among the students who sailed with these embassies was a large contingent going for the express purpose of studying Buddhism. According to the official Sui history, the Japanese envoy who arrived at court with the embassy of 607 presented a message from the sovereign of Japan which said, "We understand that the Bodhisattva Emperor west of the ocean [the Sui emperor, a Buddhist] is making great efforts to uphold and promote Buddhism [after the anti-Buddhist policy of his predecessor] . . . and so we send several tens of monks to study there."

Not long after the monks had arrived, the Sui dynasty was supplanted by the T'ang. When the new dynasty had consolidated its position, it then extended its influence in all directions, prospering greatly by assimilating the arts and learning of the tributary states surrounding it. The T'ang continued the pro-Buddhist policy initiated by the Sui,

Buddhism flourished and began to lose its Indian coloring and to take on a more Chinese character. A number of new sects and schools appeared that were more closely in accord with Chinese life and society. Students who had been sent from Asuka to study Buddhism during the Sui dynasty remained into the T'ang, continuing their studies for ten or even twenty years before returning.

With the knowledge and experience gained when these students returned, Japan began to build a nation based on the political innovations set forth in the Taika (Great Change) Reform of 645-649, which were patterned on the Chinese administrative system. The capital was moved to Nara (Heijō-kyō), which had been modelled on the T'ang capital of Ch'ang-an, and the exchange of people between Japan and China and introduction and study of T'ang culture was conducted with even greater zeal.

The flowering of Japanese culture during the Nara period due to the absorption of T'ang cultural influences was the consummation of the foreign policy originated by Prince Shōtoku. This policy had as one of its fundamental goals the study and introduction of Mahayana Buddhism. Prince Shōtoku himself was a firm believer in Mahayana ideals. He is said to have lectured on the Lotus (*Hokke*), Śrīmālā (*Shōman*), and Vimalakīrti (*Yuima*) sutras, also to have attended lectures on the Sutra of Infinite Life (*Muryōju-kyō*). It should be noted that the Buddhism of the Sui and Tang dynasties represented Mahayana teaching at its height and because of that Japan became a Mahayana Buddhist country. Therefore, Japanese Buddhism differs markedly from the southern Buddhism of Ceylon, Burma, and Thailand.

The policy of supporting Buddhism adopted by Prince Shōtoku during his regency led inevitably to Buddhism becoming a state-supported religion. State sponsorship of Buddhism reached a peak in the Nara period.

## 2. *Buddhist Images in the Nara Period*

^ Buddhism in the Asuka period was for the most part influenced by Korean Buddhism. The Buddhist images of the period, those of the Hōryū-ji, for example, were of the north China-Korean type, some imported, others made in Japan. But by the Hakuho, or Early Nara, period (646-710) the students who had studied in China began to make

## BUDDHISM AND FINE ARTS

their experience felt. Statues made at the Yakushi-ji during this period show influences from lands west of India, influences assimilated amid the great cultural changes taking place at Ch'ang-an. In the Tempyō, or Late Nara, period (710-794) the government erected a group of state-supported provincial temples, the Kokubun-ji, and provincial nunneries, the Kokubun-niji, throughout the country. In Nara, the skyline was dominated by the stately tile-roofed halls and towering pagodas of the Tōdai-ji, the Saidai-ji, and the Tōshōdai-ji, the last founded by the blind Chinese monk Chien-chen (Ganjin, 688-763). The traditional culture of Japan, having steadily absorbed the fruits of superior T'ang culture, had made a great leap forward from a relatively undeveloped state to a culturally advanced nation.

The Nara period corresponds in time to the T'ang dynasty, the heyday of the great Chinese empire, an age of unprecedented luxury and splendor, when T'ang power and prestige extended far beyond its own borders. Ch'ang-an was crowded with people of many different races and creeds. Embassies and foreign students came from Korea, Japan, Tibet, and the kingdoms of Central Asia. The markets of the city were filled with an amazing assortment of products from all parts of the known world. "All roads lead to Ch'ang-an" was no idle saying.

Amid this great secular prosperity, life was closely connected with religion. Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, Islam, Buddhism, and Taoism all had their own shrines and temples, and their clergies proselytized freely. Taoism and Buddhism, however, occupied the premier positions. The former had developed from native Chinese beliefs. The latter had been transmitted from India by way of Central Asia and by the southern sea route. Chinese pilgrims such as Hsüan-tsang (602-664) and I-ching (635-713) had made the long, perilous journey to India in search of the Dharma and had returned with sutras which were translated and eagerly studied by the Chinese. Buddhism had by far the largest number of temples and priests, and its works of art outshone all others.

It was the Nara court that sent students to China to study Buddhism, and it was its support that brought about the prosperity of the Buddhist sects established in and around the capital; the Sanron, Kegon, Hossō, Jōjitsu, Ritsu and Kusha schools. All were scholastic, propagated mostly through lectures given to the upper classes. It therefore is natural that the superior products of T'ang culture, especially those

related to Buddhism, were transmitted to the Nara area and have been preserved there.

The Empress Komyō (701–760) dedicated the personal belongings of her late husband, Emperor Shōmu (r. 724–749), to the Great Buddha of the Tōdai-ji. Today, they remain in almost perfect condition in the Shōsō-in, a special storehouse built to house them at the Tōdai-ji. Some are exhibited annually to Japanese and foreign visitors, who gaze in wonder at superb treasures that can be seen nowhere else in the world. The Shōsō-in treasures are a legacy of the cultural interchange that took place between East and West at Ch'ang-an.

### 3. *The Center of Culture Moves to Heian-kyō*

In time, the Buddhist clergy in Nara became deeply involved in court affairs. A celebrated incident in which the Empress Kōken invested a priest named Dōkyō (d. 772) with unprecedented political power was but one sign of the general decadence and corruption. The situation became so grave that it was decided to move the site of the capital away from the Nara plain in order to break free of the corruption and allow government and religion to make a fresh start. The capital was transferred first to Nagaoka, southwest of present Kyoto. Ten years later it was moved again, this time to Heian-kyō (Kyoto).

The model for the new capital remained Ch'ang-an. The young generation of students, scholars, and priests, still under the spell of Chinese prestige, continued to accompany embassies to China. But the T'ang empire was now in decline, riddled by corruption and thrown into confusion by civil strife and foreign enemies.

In 894, Sugawara Michizane (845–903), a member of the aristocracy and a scholar well versed in Chinese culture, was appointed envoy to Ch'ang-an. He was already well aware of the situation in China and could accurately assess the advantages to Japan of continuing the dispatch of emissaries. Not only did he decline the appointment, in a petition to the emperor he declared that there was no need to continue sending such missions.

Michizane argued that Japan had already learned much from T'ang culture but could gain little from a country in such turmoil. He pointed out that the Japanese were still not proficient in the arts of shipbuilding and navigation. Whenever a Japanese convoy attempted the crossing

to China many of the vessels invariably lost their way and were never seen again. Some were disabled and drifted to foreign lands where their crews were killed. Only one or two ships in a fleet ever reached China safely. Michizane concluded that the loss of such gifted young men was too great a price to pay. After long debate, his petition was accepted.

The severance of contact with China meant that the culture that flourished in Kyoto took a different course from that taken in the Nara period. The hiragana syllabary was invented and the written language moved away from Chinese-style writing. The Japanese waka came into vogue, and literature began to be written in the native Japanese language; the remarkable thing being the appearance of a large number of women writers. A Japanese style of painting, Yamato-e, developed, and Buddhist art also became more Japanese in character. In contrast to the magnificent and imposing Nara culture which had eagerly embraced continental influences, the cultural blossoms that opened in Kyoto in association with the aristocratic way of life can be described as "elegant and flowery."

During the Heian period, when the arts created by the nobility were being refined and made more Japanese, Buddhist culture continued to lead the way. Even after the decline of aristocratic power, the rise of the military class, and the increasing influence of the merchant class during the Kamakura and Muromachi periods, Buddhist culture remained paramount. Although Japanese Buddhism at first had studiously attempted to follow T'ang Buddhism, it eventually adapted itself to the many social changes that took place during the Heian, Kamakura, and Muromachi periods, developing into a religion more closely attuned to the life of the Japanese people. The Japanization of Buddhist art progressed. Although official embassies to and from China had been prohibited, cultural exchanges with the continent still took place. Japanese Buddhists continued to send monks during the Sung (960-1279) and Yuan (1271-1368) dynasties. Also, a large number of foreign priests came to Japan during these dynasties. But in Kyoto, the general trend was for Buddhism to become more Japanese.

Although Nara with its wonderful store of Buddhist treasures was still revered as the old, "southern" capital, the actual capital of Japanese Buddhism was now Kyoto. It remained there for a thousand years, during which time great numbers of Buddhist images were amassed in its temples. Although not the oldest capital, Kyoto has



some superb images dating from the Asuka period, such as those enshrined in the Kōryū-ji. Foremost among these sculptures is a statue of Miroku Bosatsu (Maitreya Bodhisattva) seated in contemplative pose, which was the first work of art to be designated as a national treasure after World War II.

The Kōryū-ji was the family temple of the powerful Hata clan, one of the families that had immigrated from the continent. It was erected about 622 by Hata Kawakatsu in Uzumasa, and is said to have prospered due to the support of Prince Shotoku. From their base in Uzumasa in western Kyoto, the Hata spread throughout the Kyoto basin. They became extremely wealthy through their superior learning and their use of advanced weaving and dyeing techniques. It is said that the great undertaking of moving the capital away from Nara owed much to the financial strength of the Hata clan. At any rate, well before it became the capital, at least as early as the sixth century, the seeds of Buddhism had been sown in Kyoto's soil by these naturalized people.

Although the role of religion in politics had been a major reason for moving the capital from Nara, the seeds of faith had been firmly planted. Two large temples, the Tō-ji (East Temple) and Sai-ji (West Temple), were erected within the capital near the great southern gate, on either side of Sujaku Ōji, the main avenue, and one after another temples were erected by members of the imperial family and the nobility. These temples fulfilled their spiritual needs and contained images worthy of a great capital. Even today Kyoto remains a city of temples large and small, representing all Buddhist sects.

I myself reside in one of the old Kyoto temples, the Seiryō-ji, in which some national treasures and important cultural assets are enshrined. I am also employed in the Kyoto National Museum. I am therefore keenly aware of the growing numbers of Japanese and foreign tourists who visit the old temples of Kyoto to see their Buddhist images. Many are from distant places such as Europe and America who, even though they may be on government or private business, still find time for several days of sightseeing in Kyoto and Nara.

The number of Japanese from all parts of the country making pilgrimages to this area has increased remarkably. They behold the Buddhist images made by their ancestors and, being moved by their graceful beauty, experience feelings of peace and renewal in their busy

*Miroku (Maitreya), Koryu-ji*

*Fudō Myō-ō (Acalanatha), Tō-ji*

lives. Also, they feel pride in their country, which is good. Politicians may demand that educators instill a feeling of patriotism in their students, but no matter how they clamor and attempt to force a sense of patriotism, it is difficult to achieve; in fact, it might well be counter-productive. But when a Japanese personally encounters old Buddhist images in some quiet temple, he will be impressed by the serenity of these creations of his ancestors and will bring his doubts and questions to them and listen to their silent teachings. In this way, patriotism that is genuine and enduring may be born.

The beginnings and early development of the Japanese state having taken place in the Kinai (the home provinces) and the capital having been in Asuka, Nara, and Kyoto, the majority of Japan's cultural assets today are found in this area. The Kyoto-Nara area is not only a place where foreign tourists encounter the old Japan, it is the spiritual home of the Japanese, a place they themselves should visit more than once.

Buddhist statues are more than works of art, they embody the religious teachings from which they were created. We must not forget that their significance is an essentially religious one. Without an understanding of Buddhist teachings one cannot come into contact with the genuine—sacred—beauty of its sculptures, not to mention the sincerity and zeal of the believers who made them. If you view these images only as statues, you will not be able to question them, nor will they be able to speak to you. As only a sightseer, you will not have the heart-purifying experience that comes from religious contemplation.

#### 4. *Esoteric Buddhism: Aristocratic Life and Its Art*

A powerful Buddhist movement aimed at ending the corruption associated with the Nara sects was launched by two new Buddhist schools, the Tendai sect of Saichō (Dengyō Daishi, 767–822), and the Shingon sect of Kūkai (Kōbō Daishi, 774–835). These were the two great currents of Heian Buddhism and became closely integrated into the lives of the aristocracy who controlled the government and culture of the age.

Although both traveled to T'ang China to study, their destinations and aims differed. Kūkai went to Ch'ang-an, the city that had held the imagination of all cultured Japanese, particularly the Buddhists, since

the Nara period. He intended to remain and study in Ch'ang-an in order to master the esoteric Buddhism (Mikkyō) of India that had only recently been introduced to China. Saichō went to Mount T'ien-t'ai, far to the southeast of Ch'ang-an, where for a short time he studied the teachings of T'ien-t'ai, a school founded several centuries before during the Sui dynasty. It was his aim to introduce this school to Japan.

The T'ien-t'ai, based on the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, was first among the Chinese Buddhist sects. It had the most comprehensive doctrinal system and adhered to standards of rigorous discipline. It had been established and was being propagated far from the capital in the southern drainage area of the Yangtze River; it did not proselytize in Ch'ang-an. Because Japan had close links to the T'ang capital and introduced solely the Buddhism of Ch'ang-an, the T'ien-t'ai was not included among the Nara sects although it was known. Its tenets were set forth in lectures given by the high priest Ganjin and the Chinese priests who had accompanied him to Japan in 753. Those lectures probably suggested to Saichō that T'ien-t'ai could be the means of reforming Nara Buddhism, and so he purposely chose Mount T'ien-t'ai for his study and practice. He also studied Zen and esoteric Buddhism during his short stay in China.

The Japanese Tendai sect later incorporated many esoteric elements (forming its own esoteric branch, the Taimitsu), and expanded its teachings to counter Kūkai's esoteric Shingon. The Heian period was the golden age of esoteric Buddhism, and the aristocracy, who controlled politics and culture, could not function without esoteric rites.

Because the enormous Buddhist monasteries built in and around Nara had become overly involved in political and financial affairs, Saichō and Kūkai both established mountain-based Buddhist orders, hoping to keep them vigorous and apart from the glory and power of the capital. Kūkai selected the mountain recesses of Mount Kōya, far to the southeast of Kyoto. Saichō chose Mount Hiei just to the northeast of the capital. Geographically, Kūkai's Shingon sect was at a disadvantage for missionary work in Kyoto, which is why it also established bases at Tō-ji within the city, and at Ninna-ji in Omuro, Daikaku-ji in Saga, and Jingō-ji in Takao. Using these major temples (all but Tō-ji on the western boundaries of the capital) as their bases of operations, Shingon priests proselytized among the aristocracy, competing with the Tendai sect on Mount Hiei.

The central Buddha of the Shingon pantheon is Dainichi Nyorai (Mahavairocana); all other Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, gods, humans, birds, beasts and plants exist and develop within his influence. This cosmic Buddha, whose name means Great Sun, is the origin of the universe, the source of everything sacred, and comprehends all truths. Like the sun, Dainichi preserves and sustains all things. In fulfilling the pantheistic dictum "All is god and god is all," esoteric Buddhism synthesized not only all earlier Buddhist teachings, but the kindred teachings of Brahmanism and Hinduism as well.

Although a Buddha is one who has attained enlightenment and perfected true wisdom (*prajñā*), he does not remain savoring the fruits of enlightenment, but sets himself to work for the salvation of all beings. This represents the deeply compassionate side of Buddha-wisdom. Envisioning Dainichi as the essential embodiment of compassion and wisdom, esoteric Buddhism regards all things as manifestations of this cosmic Buddha and has made all things—from Buddhas and Bodhisattvas to demons and beasts—sacred objects of worship by representing them in two comprehensive charts (mandalas), the Taizōkai (Womb-store World) and the Kongōkai (Diamond World), both of which have Dainichi at their centers.

What is important for our purposes is that esoteric Buddhism was responsible for creating and furnishing the world of art new and strangely different religious images of varying sizes and shapes which had been unknown in earlier Japanese Buddhism.

The mandalas, with all the Buddhas and minor deities arranged around Dainichi at the center, are the most important objects used by monks who study Shingon teachings and practice esoteric disciplines. In the halls of the esoteric temples of the Heian period, Buddhist images were enshrined in specially arranged mandala groupings. The one at the Tō-ji, where twenty-one statues comprised of five Buddhas, five Bodhisattvas, five Myō-ō, a Bonten, a Taishakuten and four Tennō are set in the form of a Kongōkai Mandala, probably was arranged under Kūkai's direction. In memorial services held in the private chapels of individuals, single Buddha or Bodhisattva images called One-Sage (*Isson*) Mandalas were the objects of worship. These and the Many Sage (*Shoson*) Mandalas drew many believers to esoteric Buddhism and were particularly popular with the aristocracy, forming the foundation of its spiritual life.

## TSUKAMOTO

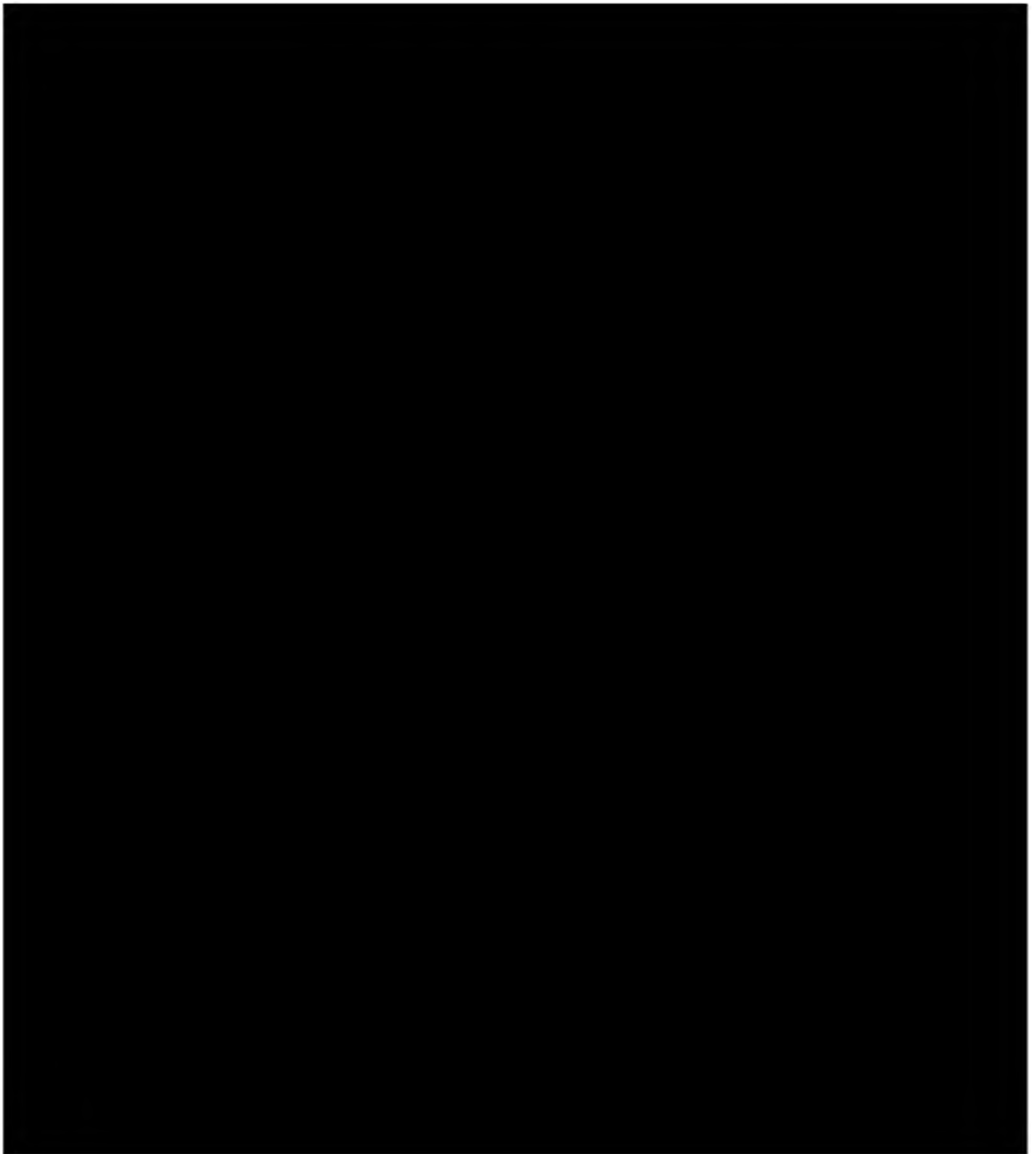
The serene-looking One-Sage Mandalas were relatively familiar, but the use of fierce-looking images of the Myō-ō (a class of minor esoteric deities adopted from Hindu religion) must certainly have appeared strange to traditional Buddhists. In Buddhism, anger, avarice, and ignorance make up the three cardinal vices known as the "three poisons." Although holy images, not only do the Myō-ō not express the basic Buddhist ideals of compassion and serenity, they confront worshippers with imposing features of anger and contentiousness—the very vices that Buddhists are supposed to eliminate.

The statues of Asuka and Nara greet us with tranquil smiles and compassionate gazes. We meet them in an atmosphere of silence and purity. The wrathful Myō-ō of esoteric Buddhism, as represented by Fudō Myō-ō, a figure who openly expresses anger, wields a sword, and is surrounded by a halo of flames, would seem to be anathema to Buddhist teaching. These dreadful Myō-ō, however, answered a spiritual need of Heian Buddhists and solemn services were frequently performed by esoteric priests with Fudō as the principal image.

During the Heian period, political and economic conditions became more stable under the leadership of the Fujiwara clan. The hereditary status of courtiers, from regents and imperial advisors on down, allowed them to live comfortably off their stipends and the large private incomes they drew from manors in different parts of the country. The nobles had no knowledge of the difficult lives of the peasants. They spent their days at court or in large, elegant residences and villas in the capital and its suburbs. Month after month, year after year, their lives were ordered rigidly by precedent and custom, weakening any will they may have had to be innovative. In such an enfeebling environment the nobility lacked the decisiveness to deal with unfamiliar situations. Being easily swayed by emotion, the tiniest incident could become the cause of doubt and confusion. In addition, they believed in a variety of "evil spirits" (*mono no ke*), were terrorized by curses and believed that the pains of childbirth and illness as well as unforeseen disasters were all caused by demons. The incantations and prayers of esoteric priests were called upon to suppress or exorcise these evil spirits. The Myō-ō, sculpted with expressions of fury and brandishing weapons, were usually the principal images used at these rites. Many temples in and around Kyoto still house excellent Heian and Kamakura paintings and sculptures of the five Myō-ō.

*Tohatsu Bishamon-ten, Tō-ji*





*Taijōkui Mandala, Tō-ji*

Evil spirits were not confined to private life. During national calamities the populace turned to the rites of esoteric priests for relief. When an epidemic struck, or when the country suffered from drought or long rain, or when hostile forces approached the capital, people relied on solemn esoteric incantations and prayers to deliver them.

Rites and ceremonies such as those for bringing or stopping rain were performed before the appropriate image according to rules set forth in esoteric teachings.

Bishamon-ten, the guardian deity of the north who protected the capital from the ravages of war, was enshrined at Kurama-dera on Mount Kurama north of Kyoto. Among the Bishamon-ten images of the early Heian period is the Tobatsu Bishamon-ten, a variant said to have been brought to Japan by Shingon monks who had studied in China after Kukai. This figure wears a suit of armor that looks Central Asian, not Chinese. One scholar says that the name Tobatsu is a corruption of Toban, or Tibet, others say that it comes from the Tibetan word for "mantle," but the true meaning of Tobatsu has yet to be determined. At the end of the T'ang dynasty when Ch'ang-an was subjected to frequent attacks by foreign armies, at the suggestion of esoteric priests a Tobatsu Bishamon-ten was enshrined on the second floor of the north entrance gate to the city, from which it glared out menacingly at enemies. This event was reported by Japanese esoteric priests who had been sent to study in Ch'ang-an during the early Heian period. It is interesting that Kyoto, where the Japanization of continental culture was in progress, should have come to possess several examples of this Central Asian-looking Bishamon-ten.

With the transmission and spread of esoteric Buddhism, diverse and colorful Buddhist images appeared (paintings being more numerous than sculptures) which had not been present in the Nara period. The painting and sculpting of these esoteric images were governed by strict iconographical rules which were dictated by secret ritual practices performed before the paintings and sculptures and passed from master to disciple. For this reason, sculptors of esoteric images were limited in their freedom of expression.

Esoteric rituals, in which magical signs are made with the fingers and incantations and prayers are intoned, are performed for the image that is the object of the rite. Such images, whether paintings or sculpture, are indispensable. For this reason, esoteric Buddhism, of all the forms of Japanese Buddhism, became closely allied to art; at the same time it was strongly bound by formalism and symbolism. Conventions govern the position of each finger, the meaning changing with the way in which the hand or the finger is folded or joined (mudra). In producing esoteric images, only when these conventions are strictly observed does

## TSUKAMOTO

the figure become sacred. An image so produced with the proper coloring and iconographical details is not merely a work of art. It is believed to be the deity itself.

When one sits in quiet contemplation before an esoteric statue, makes its mudra with one's fingers, then the other magical signs required by the esoteric ritual, and recites the magical formula (dharani) for that image while burning a holy fire, the performer himself becomes one with the deity. When a priest makes his mudras and incantations in front of Fudō Myō-ō, he *is* Fudō, the host and guest having become one. Fudō's power is called forth by his prayers. It is for this reason that the painter or sculptor of esoteric images cannot be free to do as he pleases; he must strictly obey the iconographical rules.

Unlike the images of Amida, Yakushi, Kannon, and Shakyamuni made in the Nara period, those from the middle Heian period on were produced in accordance with these esoteric rules. Although esoteric Buddhism may have limited the freedom of Buddhist artists, when we view the statues made during the Heian period—their poses, the way in which their hands and fingers are positioned, and how coloring is used—we know within what world that image exists, what it is trying to communicate, and a conversation with it becomes possible.

*[To be continued]*

TRANSLATED BY HIRANO UMEYO