

On the Miniature Model of the Kyoto Daibutsu

By Chō, Yōichi

The construction of the *Daibutsu* (Great Buddha) of Hōkō-ji temple at Higashiyama, Kyoto by Toyotomi Hideyoshi was a monumental undertaking which marks the beginning of the sculptural history of pre-modern Japan. However, after repeated destruction and reconstruction, the Buddha was finally lost forever. Fortunately a 50:1 scale model of the Hōkō-ji Great Buddha known as "Miniature model of the Kyoto Daibutsu" is in the collection of the Tokyo National Museum, from which the measurements and appearance of the original statue are known.

The outside appearance of "Miniature model of Kyoto Daibutsu" is not very different from ordinary sculptural images of Buddha, but it contains a complex wooden framework. Previous research has attributed this miniature model to the Kyoto sculptor Fujimura Chūen, and based on his active years it was considered to be a model of the bronze Daibutsu produced in 1603 or the wooden one in 1664. However, this attribution was based on a document attached to the model written in the Meiji period, which is not very strong evidence.

The author researched on the history of Hōkō-ji's Daibutsu and their structural features from the time of the temple's establishment until the Kanbun era when the Daibutsu was reconstructed in wood. It came to light that the structural features of the model are similar to this wooden Daibutsu. Also, the diary of the abbot-prince Gyōjo refers to the core of the reconstructed Buddha of 1664 as "framework", which corresponds to the model's inner structure.

The author then considered the maker of the wooden Daibutsu. A record of Myōhō-in, which controlled Hōkō-ji temple, provides information on the reconstruction of the Daibutsu and names Genshin as its sculptor. A genealogy of Buddhist sculptors indicates Genshin was the teacher of Chūen. The author considers that Chūen, who was previously thought to be the maker of the model, was actually the first owner of the model.

Thus, the author concludes that the model is that of the wooden Daibutsu. In the Kanbun era, when the wooden Daibutsu was constructed, the work of Shichijō school and related sculptors showed various stylistic changes. The model of the Kyoto Daibutsu is notable not only as a copy of the now lost statue but also as a standard of Edo period sculpture.