

Hara Hirofumi

“The *Vajrasekhara-sutra* and the Function of the Sculptural Programs of Tōji’s
Lecture Hall”

In this article, Hara Hirofumi reconsiders the issue of the iconographic interpretation of various sculptures in Tōji’s Lecture Hall starting with the established views of accumulated research on the topic since Takada Osamu’s work. He attempts to explain the intricate relationships that exist between the iconographic composition, the religious functions of the principle fifteen sculptures, and the *Vajrasekhara-sutra*.

The theory that has long been supported regarding these issues is that the compositional principle of the Lecture Hall sculptures developed from Kūkai’s own compositional plan; that over the course of history the *Diamond Realm Sutra* and the *Humane Kings Sutra* were conflated, and that there was a mutual relationship between the three groups of five sculptures based on the “three wheel embodiments.” However, unanswered questions still remain regarding the “three wheel embodiments.” There are some indications that, in terms of Buddhist studies history, this doctrine was established after Kūkai’s death.

With these various issues in the research history in mind, Hara reexamined the basis for the theory linking the Lecture Hall sculptures and the *Humane Kings Sutra*. A thorough reconstructive analysis suggests that the missing attribute originally held in the right hand of the *Kongōharamitsu* image -- the central figure of the Five Bodhisattvas group -- was a vajra, thus making it a deity related to the *Vajrasekhara-sutra*. In regards to the sutra on which the Five Myōō images were based, Hara went on to indicate that the source is *the Commentary on the Dhāranī for Humane Kings* whose text is a quotation from the Sanskrit version of the *Vajrasekhara-yoga* owned by Xuanzang, thus arguing that there was the acknowledgement that the sculptures were based at the compositional stage on the unabridged translation of the *Vajrasekhara-sutra*. On the other hand, regarding the animal vehicles of the five Buddhas and five bodhisattva central worship images, Hara confirms that their sutra source is the *Vajrasekhara-sutra*. Given the above evidence, Hara concludes that the 15 principal worship images in the Lecture Hall were based on the unabridged translation of the *Vajrasekhara-sutra*.

Next, in terms of the compositional principles of the central images interpreted according to the concept of “three wheel embodiments,” Hara demonstrates that the corresponding relationship between the five bodhisattvas and the Five Myōō is not in accordance with ritual laws provided in the doctrine, and offers the new interpretation that in order to

avoid the mismatch of bodhisattvas and the Five Myōō figures used a combination of *Gobuzoku* (Five Clans) concepts of the *Vajrasekhara-sutra* and the Buddha Triad composition in use since the Nara period.

Further, regarding the function of the principal images, Hara went on to discuss the relationship between the images and the form and aims of the exoteric style “*Denbō-e*” ceremonies of transmission that were begun almost immediately after the eye opening ceremony of the sculptures in the Lecture Hall. He linked the religious function of the sculptures to two aims: revealing to Shingon priests the path to “achieving enlightenment in their present bodies” and defining the practices of Shingon priests as good actions that lead to the-protection of the nation. In Hara’s discussion of function, he interprets the results of the teachings based on the *Vajrasekhara-sutra* as a Mahayana construct, thus differentiating it from the national protection function argument based on the relationship between the sculptures and the *Humane Kings sutra*.

This argument is persuasive thanks to Hara’s accumulation of detailed analysis of documentary sources and esoteric iconography. In particular, the argument that, based on the premise of Kūkai’s view of the *Vajrasekhara-sutra*, the compositional principles of the Lecture Hall sculptures uniformly accord with the unabridged translation of the *Vajrasekhara-sutra* presents a novel hypothesis linked to a paradigm shift, and thus is of note for its offering of a new viewpoint and methodology for future art historical research.

For these reasons we have awarded the Bijutsushi Article Prize to Hara Hirofumi.