The Ancient Buddha Stamp, *Inbutsu*

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*Inbutsu* generally means a small Buddha stamped on paper in Chinese ink and is considered to be synonymous with *shabutsu*, though the latter originally means a bigger image or some images together rubbed on paper. However, they are quite different technically as well as historically especially from the viewpoint of their origins. It should be taken into consideration that *inbutsu* was not only printed on paper; water, sand and incense, which did not retain their form. It must have played a role in the practice of meditation as well as service for the dead. The author discusses here *inbutsu* as the implements used in the practices of Buddhism.

The remaining articles are divided roughly into following four groups.

(1) stamps of its early stage probably influenced by the ancient Indian stamps which were terracotta or made of copper with patterns of Buddha (*dokusonbutsu*) carved on them. These stamps are similar to *senbutsu* in terms of mass production of small images.

(2) terracotta or copper stamps with images of a thousand Buddhas on them. The style suggests that they served as ritual implements for service of the dead.

(3) stamps with a small mandala carved on board, whose theme could be traced to esoteric Buddhism. They functioned as implements for ascetic practices; the fine patterns show that they belonged to the series of works of "*nenjibutsu*", which reflected the aristocratic taste of the age such as small Buddhas, miniature shrine for Buddhist statues and carved plates.

(4) stamps as implements for religious practice changed later on to objects of worship like *nenjibutsu*.

(1) and (2) are relics of the T'ang dynasty of China and Chinese territory of central Asia, while (3) and (4) are works produced during the period of late T'ang dynasty of China and the Heian period of Japan. The reasons for the production and their characteristics can be traced to quite an extent from documents of China and Japan during that period.

Thus, *inbutsu* stamps that functioned as implements underwent
transformation and gradually disappeared according to aristocratic taste. On the other hand, inbutsu printed on paper turned out to gain an important meaning in the religious life of the medieval masses in Japan since it first appeared in Tun-huang during the T'ang dynasty, flourished there and later on was introduced to Japan during the Heian period.