Some Aspects of the Heian Sculptures
——In the Southmost Part of the Bohsoh Peninsula——

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In this paper we attempted to identify, amidst the pieces of the same period, the period during which the three Buddhist image statues of “Nyorai” (an grade title given to the Buddhas) existing at the southmost part of the Bohsoh Peninsula, Chiba Prefecture were sculptured. As a result, we put the Statue of Nyorai at Senshojji Temple in the end of the 10th century down to the beginning of the 11th, for this statue presented a style seen at a atage when they were groping for a Japanese sculptural style before Johchoh (a sculptor of the 11th century). Similarly we placed the “Amida” statue at Chion-In Temple into the end of the 11th to the beginning of the 12th century and that of Amida (the supreme Buddha of the Paradise of the Pure-Earth of the West) at Jishoh-In Temple into the latter half of the 12th century.

The age from the 10th to 12th centuries is grasped as a great historical turnabout into the medieval society accompanied by the decline and fall of the Heian period aristocrats. During this same period the History of Japanese Sculpture saw the establishment of so-called “Johchoh” style represented by the Statue of Amida at Hohoh-Doh, Uji-Byoudohin Temple in Kyoto, constructed by FUJIWARA Yorimichi, the “Kanpaku-Sadaijin” (Kanpaku: chief advisor to the Emperor; Sadaijin: the second of the three principal ministers in the Heian period) who was the first son of FUJIWARA Michinaga. This statue of Amida, by Johchoh the “Busshi” (sculptors who produced mainly the Buddhist statues; the title of Johchoh was “Hohgen”) is of Johchoh style he himself created. This style, all through the information media centering upon the buddhist sect of Tendai-Johdokyo, saw an unprecedented explosive spread all over Japan. In the local regions, on the other hand, structural and stylistic conservatism remained. Though they were influenced by the Johchoh style later on, often superficial and partial imitation thereof prevailed even at that time without any conformity to that new style. We can find, in these material examples, the mid-Heian period
style as a groping stage for a Japanese style on which was based the Johchoh style. This period of imitation lasted long. Though the new style could transmit the information on the Buddhist sect, Johdo-Kyoh all through the propagating stage into local regions, it then was found out that the sculpture of Buddhist image statues using the uniform “Yosegi-Zukuri” (marquetry work) method and sometimes even the lacquering inside the statues required a large amount of expenses. It is conceivable therefore that there existed a number of eclectic works where the sculptors contented themselves with a bit of Johchoh style incorporated.

In this paper, taking as an example the regional sculpture of Buddhist image statues at the southmost part of the Bohsoh Peninsula around the period when the new style of buddhist images, considered as generalized toward the 12th century was accepted, we tried to perform a comparative study with other regions.

In comparison with our study on the historical background which surrounded the stylistic innovation, laying main emphasis on the faith in the Johdo sect, we showed that the statues at that time sometimes produced images of strange appearance not based on the Buddhist ones. These suspicious characteristics were associated rather with local conventional “Kami” (Japanese gods so to speak) in the shinto-shrine cultural sphere, as has been described in relation with the statues at Senshohji Temple and Shinto Shrine of Awa (old name of south partin Chiba).

There hardly exists any study on the establishment and development of Johdo sect except for Kinai (Kyoto, Nara and other central ancient cities) and up to Hiraizumi for the utmost. We are convinced that in future the same study for other regions will be made possible with much more material data through the all-out investigation to be made in the local phase of Japanese History of sculpture.