The History of Horyu-ji Kon-do Shaka Triad Halo Inscription
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This article considers the inscription on the halo of the Shaka Triad enshrined in the Kon-do (Main Hall) of Horyu-ji Temple as a long script containing rare information about the early stages of acceptance of Buddhism in the Japanese Islands. Based on this acknowledgement, this article emphasizes the circumstances to create the halo inscription and the historical and cultural background behind it rather than its reading or interpretation. Therefore, instead of being trapped in arguments over the meaning of each term in the inscription, this study focuses on the expression styles and sentences considered to describe people's actions, feelings, and thoughts. Specifically, our attention is aimed at two phrases “深懐愁毒” (deeply worry, lament, and agonize) and “當造釋像尺寸王身” (commit to create a statue of Shaka in the same size as the King).

There are not many precedents of these two phrases or contexts. Among such examples, Xianyu jing (the Sutra of the Wise and the Foolish) Vol.1, Book 1 and Da fangbian fo baoen jing (the Sutra of the Great Skillful Means of the Buddha to Reciprocate [His Parents'] Kindness) Vol. 1 to 3 are worth investigating. The related concepts can be found in the figurative stories of the sutras, such as the tales of self-sacrifice in the former lives of Buddha, the tales of death and illness, and the tale of King Udayana image (the first Buddha image). These two sutras were established in the Nan-Bei Chao period and spread as an easy guide to Buddhism. The creator of the halo inscription is considered to have known the figurative stories in these sutras and compared the tragic deaths (feigning deaths) and absence (loss) of kings and Buddha, as well as the sadness and fear of the bereaved, described in the stories with the disease and deaths of the retired Emperor Jogu and others and the reaction of surrounding people in order to realize and accept the actual situation. He was also influenced by the funeral customs common across Asian cultures, such as practices including self-injurious behaviors and horse sacrifices. This study attributes the inscription to Shibano-Kuratsukurino-Obitotori, Buddhist Sculptor, since he was Tori from the Shiba clan and a craftsman interested in the tale of the first Buddha image and life-size statues.

Key words: Xianyu jing (the Sutra of the Wise and the Foolish), Da fangbian fo baoen jing (the Sutra of the Great Skillful Means of the Buddha to Reciprocate [His Parents'] Kindness), figurative tale, self-sacrifice, the tale of the first Buddha image