

The Buddha of Kamakura and the “Modernization” of Buddhist Statuary in the Meiji Period

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Introduction

During Japan’s revolutionary years in the latter half of the nineteenth century, in particular after the Meiji Restoration of 1868, people experienced a great change in the traditional values that had governed various aspects of their life during the Edo period (1603-1867). In their religious life, Buddhism lost its authority along with its economic basis because the Meiji government, propagating Shintoism, repeatedly ordered the proclamation of the separation of Shintoism and Buddhism after the Restoration. The proclamation brought about the anti-Buddhist movement *haibutsu kishaku* and the nationwide movement doomed Buddhist statuary to a fate it had never before met.¹ However, a number of statues were fortunately rescued from destruction and became recognized as sculptural works of Buddhist art in the late 1880s. This paper examines the change of viewpoints that occurred in the 1870s whereby the *Buddha of Kamakura*, a famous colossus of seated Amida (*Amitābha*) from the mid-thirteenth century, was evaluated afresh by Western viewers; it also tries to detect the thresholds that marked the path toward a general acceptance of the idea that Buddhist statuary formed a genre of sculptural works in the fine arts during the Meiji period (1868-1912).

Buddhist statuary in the 1870s

It is widely known that the term *bijutsu* was coined in 1872, when the Meiji government translated the German words *Kunstgewerbe* (arts and crafts) and *bildende Kunst* (fine arts) in order to foster nationwide participation in the Vienna World Exposition of 1873. These words originally had appeared in a document classifying exhibits for the exposition.² The word *bijutsu* became known to people as a word meaning “fine arts” by the late 1880s.³ As more people recognized

and understood the word, traditional categories of arts and crafts, such as painting, calligraphy, lacquer ware, porcelains, potteries, metal work (casting and chasing swords, arms, and armor), as well as wood and ivory carvings were redefined and gradually reorganized into the two opposing categories of fine arts and handicrafts.⁴ At the same time, acceptance of the word *bijutsu* brought an understanding of the aesthetic quality of artworks, a viewpoint from which people had never appreciated any product that was created in a field of arts and crafts belonging to the traditional categories.

The position of Buddhist statuary, which had been traditionally categorized under the field of woodcarvings or metal work, was particularly unstable in the 1870s, mostly due to the anti-Buddhist movement. Eyewitnesses bear testimony to the fatal destiny that some statues met during this period. In his early twenties, the famous sculptor Takamura Kôun (1852-1934) noted the following anecdote in his memoirs:

A metal broker bought dozens of wooden Buddhist statues at an amazingly low price from a famous temple in Edo with the intention of burning them and from the ashes recovering the gold and silver, which were used for crowns, necklaces, bracelets, and other accessories of the statues.⁵

In the first volume of *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*, Ernest Fenollosa (1853-1908) reproduced a photograph showing a mass of broken Buddhist statues and their fragments. According to the caption of the plate, the original photograph was taken at Tôshôdai-ji temple in Nara in 1880.⁶

In 1871 the Meiji government decreed the preservation of *koki kyûbutsu*, literally meaning ancient vessels and old things, in order to prevent the destruction of ancient objects and relics in the prevailing current of *bunmei kaika* or civilization and enlightenment, which had driven people to abandon the old and pursue the new since 1868. Following this policy, the famous antiquarian officials of the Museum Bureau of the Ministry of Education, Machida Hisanari (1838-1895), Uchida Masao (1838-1876), and Ninagawa Noritane (1835-1882), conducted a comprehensive study of treasures and old relics in the collection of eminent temples and shrines in the western area of Japan in 1872.⁷ Employed by the bureau to document their research, the pioneer photographer Yokoyama Matsusaburô (1838-1884) took

numerous pictures including images of the Great Buddha of Nara⁸ and the Shaka Triad from the seventh century in Hôryû-ji temple's Golden Hall.

Oddly enough, there is no evidence that they considered the principal Buddhist statue, to which the temple was dedicated, as an important piece of *koki kyûbutsu*.⁹ Although the exact reason for their ambiguous attitude remains unclear, it may have been because the concept of *koki kyûbutsu* apparently concerned antiquities from the Edo period and, seemingly, the antiquarians excluded such religious icons as Buddhist statuary from their studies and collections. Consequently, the Meiji government's almost simultaneous, but probably unrelated, introduction of the incompatible concepts of *koki kyûbutsu* and *bijutsu* suspended a thorough evaluation of Buddhist statues until they came to be regarded as sculptural artworks in the late 1880s.

It is true that the anti-Buddhist movement put a disastrous end to innumerable Buddhist statues but, ironically, the decline of Buddhism "released" Buddhist statuary from the status of religious icons and instead "elevated" it to the category of sculptural art in the modern sense of the word.¹⁰ While notions of modern aesthetics spread from the West and "modernized" Buddhist idols, Western viewers visiting Japan after the "opening" of the country in 1854 seem to have played an important role in instigating discussions, both positive and negative, about Buddhist statuary in the late 1860s and particularly in the 1870s.

This process, however, has not yet been carefully examined because most Japanese did not partake in these discussions and, at times, even ignored Buddhist statuary, unless they regarded it from a traditionally religious viewpoint.¹¹ Furthermore, many scholars consider the Western views that dominated during the 1870s to be a negligible "influence" on the process of accepting the newly coined word *bijutsu* in the late 1880s. It is not until the 1880s, when Ernest Fenollosa became an active mediator between the East and the West in the field of arts, that the modern aesthetic value of traditional Buddhist icons was recognized by members of Japan's intellectual elite, such as Fenollosa's student Okakura Tenshin (1863-1913), who was an official of the Ministry of Education, and Kuki Ryûichi (1853-1931), a member of the Ministry of the Imperial Household.¹²



Fig. 1: Felice Beato (1832-1909), The Bronze Statue of Dai-Bouts, 1863, albumen silver print, 22,9cm x 29,4 cm, courtesy of Yokohama Archives of History (Yokohama Kaikô Shiryô-kan).

Early visitors to the Buddha of Kamakura

We must ask, therefore, how the view on Buddhist statuary changed. I argue that the Buddha of Kamakura provides a fixed point from which the change can be observed and plotted. The statue became one of the most popular tourist destinations for Western visitors after *kaikoku* or the “opening of the country” in 1854, and many of them remarked on this curious figure in literature.¹³ Interestingly, the perspectives from which the icon was evaluated had changed, as can be detected in comments by tourists during the 1870s and 1880s. This change reflects a greater shift in the status of Buddhist statuary during these decades.

The bronze, thirty-eight foot high seated Buddha statue of Amida became widely known in Europe when in 1870 Aimé Humbert (1819-1910) reproduced a photograph taken by Felice Beato (1832-1909) in 1863 (figure 1) in the book *Le Japon illustré*.¹⁴ Heading a Swiss mission, Humbert arrived in Nagasaki in April 1863, and stayed in Japan for ten months. After describing the posture of the statue, he recorded his impressions:

Le saisissement involontaire que l'on éprouve à l'aspect de cette grande image, fait bientôt place à l'admiration. Il y a un charme irrésistible dans la pose du Daïboudhs, ainsi que dans l'harmonie des proportions de son corps, dans la noble simplicité de son vêtement, dans le calme et la pureté des traits de sa figure. Tout ce qui l'environne est en parfait rapport avec le sentiment de sérénité que sa vue inspire. (Aimé Humbert, *Le Japon illustré*, 1870, tome 1, p. 240)

The involuntary amazement produced by the aspect of this great image soon gives place to admiration. There is an irresistible charm in the attitude of the Daïboudhs, as well as in the harmony of its proportions. The noble simplicity of its garments and the calm purity of its features are in perfect accord with the sentiment of serenity inspired by its presence. (Aimé Humbert, Cashel Hoey, tr., H. W. Bates, ed., *Japan and the Japanese: Illustrated*, 1874, p. 122)

The author's description is characterized by keywords such as "admiration," "harmony," "simplicity," "purity," and "serenity." In the context of this passage, these words function in two different ways. While "admiration" and "serenity" relate to the religious nature of the statue, "harmony" and "simplicity" refer to an aesthetic value, and "purity" probably to both. Humbert's observation was keenly conscious of the work's double nature:

Le monument dédié au Daïboudhs, c'est-à-dire au grand Bouddha, peut être envisagé comme l'œuvre la plus accomplie du génie japonais, au double point de vue de l'art et du sentiment religieux. (Humbert 1870, pp. 239 f.)

This building [monument] is dedicated to Daïboudhs, that is to say, to the great Buddha, and may be regarded as the most finished work of Japanese genius, from the double points of view of art and religious sentiment. (Humbert 1874, p. 122)



Fig. 2: E. Théron, Le Daïboudhs, statue colossale du Buddha à Kamakoura. Dessin d'après des photographies de Béato, engraving from Alexander Hübner, Promenade autour du monde, 1871, tome 1, (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1873), p. 281, courtesy of the Japan Foundation Information Center Library, Tokyo.

Globetrotters in the 1870s

In the 1870s, the Buddha of Kamakura enjoyed considerable fame and attracted a number of globetrotters. For example, the Austrian diplomat

Alexander von Hübner (1811-1892) arrived in Yokohama in July 1871 and stayed in Japan for two months. Escorted by the British diplomat and eminent Japanologist Ernest Mason Satow (1843-1929), he visited the statue in Kamakura (figure 2). In the entry for August 31 of *Promenade autour du monde, 1871*, Hübner described the statue:

La physionomie du dieu respire la parfaite quiétude et une douceur ineffable. On se demande comment il est possible de produire un si grand effet avec de si simples moyens. Cette œuvre est encore une preuve irrécusable de la perfection que l'art du fondeur avait atteinte à une époque si reculée. (Alexander von Hübner, *Promenade autour du monde, 1871, tome 1*, 1873, p. 282)

The face of the god breathes perfect quiet, and an ineffable sweetness. One asks oneself how it is possible to produce so much effect by such simple means. This great work is an irresistible proof of the perfection to which the founders' art had attained at so distant a period. (Alexander von Hübner, Lady Herbert, tr., *A Ramble Round the World 1871*, 1874, volume 1, p. 393)

The pivotal words in this passage are “perfect quiet” and “ineffable sweetness,” both referring to the religious nature of the statue. Yet, the statue’s aesthetic nature did not seem to catch the attention of the author. Instead, he mentioned the skillful finish of the work. Although he described the Buddha of Kamakura as “the greatest *chefs-d’œuvre* which Japan has produced” in another part of this volume (*ibid.*, p. 91), we can safely surmise that his evaluation was not based on an aesthetic viewpoint. Hübner’s position in evaluating the artistic nature of the statue was different from that of Humbert; the former being technical and the latter aesthetic. But the amazing balance between the static posture of the figure and its massive dimensions equally characterized their impressions of the statue’s religious nature.

In October 1871, three months after Hübner had arrived, two Frenchmen, Henri Cernuschi (1821-1896) and Théodore Duret (1838-1927), disembarked at Yokohama. They had left Liverpool in June 1871 for New York, crossed the American continent, and sailed for Yokohama from San Francisco in fall. Cernuschi, a wealthy banker coming from Italy as a political refugee, purchased a grand, bronze, seated Amida from the Banryû-ji temple in Meguro, a village in the southwest of Tokyo. He exhibited it along with 1,500 other bronzes from his collection two years later at the *Exposition des Beaux-Arts de l’Extrême-Orient* in Paris. Soon

after, Louis Gonse (1846-1921) reproduced the image of the Buddha in *L'Art japonais* (1883), and the original is now in the collection of Musée Cernuschi in Paris.¹⁵ The banker's companion, Théodore Duret, known as an art critic and spokesman for French impressionist art, recorded their adventure in *Voyage en Asie*, published in 1874. According to this document, they visited Nara and had a chance to see the greatest Buddha of Nara at Tōdai-ji temple in January 1872:

Le Bouddha de Kamakoura, près de Yokohama, que nous connaissons, est moins haut que celui de Nara, mais, par sa pose et son geste différents, il paraît surtout beaucoup moins colossal. Qu'on ne s'imagine point du reste une statue n'ayant d'autre mérite que ses dimensions; tout au contraire, nous sommes en face d'une véritable œuvre d'art. La tête est moins vieille que le corps même de la statue, ayant dû être refaite, il y a un siècle, à la suite d'un incendie. Elle est moins heureuse de forme que celle du Bouddha de Kamakoura; mais on n'y retrouve pas moins, avec un grand cachet de simplicité, l'expression obligée de calme et d'abstraction que comporte le type de Bouddha. Ce colosse produit une grande impression quand on le découvre pour la première fois, et l'impression ne fait que grandir à mesure qu'on l'étudie et qu'on tourne autour. (Théodore Duret, *Voyage en Asie: le Japon, la Chine, la Mongolie, Java, Ceylan, l'Inde*, 1874, pp. 59-60)

The Buddha of Kamakura, near Yokohama, which is known to us, is less high than that of Nara, but owing to its different pose and gesture it appears much less colossal. Yet one should not imagine this to be a statue with no other merit than its dimensions. On the contrary, we are in front of a true work of art... The head is not as old as the body of the statue itself, having been surely remade, following a fire a century ago. It is less agreeable in form than that of the Buddha of Kamakura, but one finds there, with a great character of simplicity, no less than the obligatory expression of calm and abstraction that the type of Buddha requires. This colossus produces a great impression when one discovers it for the first time, and this impression grows as one studies it and moves around it.¹⁶

Cernuschi and Duret were among the earliest foreign travelers who visited Nara, where they found an even more colossal statue than at Kamakura, which they had already seen. Duret compared it with that of Kamakura and concluded that the form of its head was not as good as that of Kamakura because it had been remade along with later reparations.

Another viewpoint: Émile Guimet

Accompanying the French painter Félix Régamey (1844-1907), wealthy businessman and Orientalist Émile Guimet (1836-1918) arrived at Yokohama in August 1876 to conduct research on Buddhism in Asia.¹⁷ During his stay, he ordered a set of downsized copies of the twenty three statues composing the three-dimensional mandala in the lecture hall of Tō-ji temple, Kyoto, which he would display at the Paris world exposition of 1878.¹⁸ Guimet and Régamey, unfortunately, did not have time to visit Nara, but did visit Kamakura in September 1876 to see the Buddha. Guimet described the statue in his travel account *Promenades japonaises*:

Nous ne tardons pas à voir au-dessus des arbres, semblable à une colline de bronze noir au milieu des montagnes vertes, la tête immense du Daï-boutz, statue gigantesque non pas du Bouddha Sakia-Mouni, comme on le dit toujours, mais du Boutsou Roshana, forme de Daï-niti-nioraï. Puis, en avançant nous arrivons en face du colosse, qui nous apparaît dans son calme effrayant et sa majesté divine et puissante. (Émile Guimet, *Promenades japonaises*, 1878, p. 119)

We soon see over the trees the immense head of Daibutsu, looking like a hill of black bronze in the middle of green mountains. The gigantic statue is not the Buddha Shakyamuni as he is always called, but *Vairocana* in the form of Dainichi Nyorai (*Mahavairocana*). As we advance, we arrive in front of the colossus, which appears in all its frightening calm and its divine and powerful majesty.

This description is exceptional in its reference to the iconography of the statue. Guimet was familiar with Buddhist iconography before coming to Japan, having studied the chapter “Das Buddha-Pantheon von Nippon” that is included in the fifth volume of Philipp Franz von Siebold’s (1796-1866) *Nippon*.¹⁹ This chapter is the German translation of the Japanese text *Butsuzō zui* (Collection of Buddhist iconography), a revised edition of 1783 (Tenmei 3) with illustrations by Tosa Hidenobu (fl. 1775-1800). Guimet’s impression, while facing the statue, is characterized by such words as “calm” and “divine and powerful majesty.” These words are obviously related to the religious nature of the statue.

Viewpoint of Christopher Dresser

Sent by the South Kensington Museum, known today as the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, the English designer Christopher

Dresser (1834-1904) arrived at Yokohama in December 1876, carrying the Museum's collection of European craftworks for the Meiji government.²⁰ He was received by the Meiji government as an official visitor, which gave him the opportunity to conduct research on treasures in the collection of Shôsô-in treasury of Tôdai-ji temple in Nara. In his record of the journey *Japan: Its Architecture, Art, and Art Manufactures*, Dresser began the entry for his first day in Nara with the line: "Saturday the 3rd of February 1877 will always remain a great day in my history."²¹

Dresser visited the Buddha of Kamakura on 18 January 1877. In the entry for the day, he summarized his impression of the statue in a sentence after describing details of its posture: "The figure sits in dignified repose with a most placid expression of countenance."²²

In Nara, however, he recorded a negative evaluation of the Great Buddha in comparison to that of Kamakura: "The head of this figure I do not like nearly so well as that of the Great Dai-butzu at Kamakura; and indeed it is much inferior to that of the other parts of the figure. The new head was cast in the sixteenth century."²³

The author's taste for the statues reflects the aesthetic judgment of a designer. Interestingly, Dresser repeats here the negative evaluation of the Buddha of Nara, particularly of the head,²⁴ which Théodore Duret had recorded in 1872.

Negative evaluation of Buddhist statuary

The most negative evaluation of Buddhist statuary was presented by Georges Bousquet (1846-?), who was employed by the Meiji government to engage in jurisprudential education and stayed in Japan for four years from March 1872 to March 1876.²⁵ While in Japan, he started contributing to the *Revue des deux mondes* a series of articles based on his experience in Japan, and he wrote an article "L'Art japonais" for the magazine after his return to France in 1877. His articles were published in the two volumes of *Le Japon de nos jours et les échelles de l'Extrême Orient* in the same year. In the chapter about Japanese art in the second volume of the book, Bousquet harshly criticized Buddhist statuary from an artistic point of view and referred specifically to the Buddha of Kamakura:

L'extrême Orient ne l'a pas compris; à force de vouloir saturer ses figures d'expression, il en a fait des symboles froids et sans

vie qui nous étonnent sans nous toucher, parce qu'ils nous sont étrangers. Aussi a-t-il dû, pour racheter ce mépris des formes, cette insouciance de l'anatomie, sculpter dans le granit ou couler en bronze des colosses imposants par leurs dimensions. La solennelle inertie de ces géants d'airain produit en nous l'impression du sublime en arrêtant notre esprit sur des pensées de puissance éternelle et d'insondable rêverie. Ramenées à des proportions naturelles, ces statues perdent leur caractère et leur sens avec leur énormité; la plus célèbre au Japon, parce qu'elle est la plus grande, est le Daï-buts de Kamakura; les réductions qu'on en rencontre partout ne sont que d'insignifiantes idoles. (Georges Bousquet, *Le Japon de nos jours et les échelles de l'Extrême Orient*, 1877, tome 2, p. 160)

The Far East has not yet understood; by dint of wishing to saturate its figures with expression, it makes symbols cold and lifeless, which astonish us without touching us, because they are strange to us. Moreover, it was obliged to make up for its disregard of form, or its lack of concern for anatomy, to sculpt in granite or to cast in bronze colossuses—imposing by their sheer dimensions. The solemn inertia of these giants in bronze evokes in us the impression of the sublime, while it fixes our spirit on thoughts of eternal power and of unfathomable meditation. When brought back to natural proportions, these statues lose their character and their meaning along with their enormity; the Daibutsu of Kamakura is the most celebrated of Japan because it is the largest; the reductions which one encounters everywhere else are only insignificant idols.

Drawing attention to the lack of concern for anatomy, Bousquet clearly criticized Buddhist statuary from a viewpoint based on the criteria of Western art, the tradition which was believed to originate in Greek art. Moreover, he appears to insist that once viewers are able to find release from the impact of the statue's unfamiliar appearance that comes from its religious nature and its huge dimensions, they discover the inferior quality of its aesthetic nature. Indeed, his argument seems to contain an objection to Aimé Humbert's "double points of view," which ascribed to the Buddha of Kamakura both aesthetic and religious qualities. According to Bousquet, Humbert combined the two different criteria and missed the point as a result. Bousquet also suggested the unreliability of a visitor's impressions, when compared with the judgments of a resident who draws on his experience in Japan.

Discovery of unknown Buddhist statues

Bousquet's arguments, pertaining to the evaluation of Buddhist statuary, reflect the ambiguous attitude that Western viewers had toward it, when they evaluated it from an aesthetic viewpoint. This attitude, however, becomes positive when European viewers find an unknown object that matches the standards of Western art. When visiting Nara on 3 February 1877, Christopher Dresser by chance found remarkable figures among the numerous remains of old statues at Hokuen-dô, the North Octagonal Hall of Kôfuku-ji temple:

I am struck with the simplicity of treatment which these figures present, and with the crispness and beauty of their folded drapery, indeed, the treatment of the drapery reminds me by its simple excellence of the best sculptured works of our own mediæval times; and between some of these figures and those with which we are familiar in our own cathedrals there is a striking resemblance (Fig. 25). (Dresser 1882, p. 91)

The author noted the skillful treatment of the drapery on the figures and, on the same page, offered an illustration of one of these figures from the back.²⁶ The image, which he probably drew himself, looks identical to the statues of two standing priests, Mujaku (*Asanga*) and Seshin (*Vasubandhu*), both created by Unkei (?-1223) in the early thirteenth century and known for their naturalistic style in representing a human figure.²⁷

Two years later, on 7 December 1879, Ernest Satow and his close friend William Anderson (1842-1900) visited Tôdai-ji and Kôfuku-ji temples in Nara. At the North Octagonal Hall they observed the same pair of figures and found another pair displaying a perfect sense of anatomy:

At the back of the Shaka [Buddha] are two excellent statues of Sei-shi and Mu-jaku, full of character. Amongst a crowd of miscellaneous images are an excellent pair of Ni-ô [guardian kings], the anatomy of which is perfect. They are the best examples of sculpture in wood to be seen in Japan. (Ernst Mason Satow and A. G. S. Hawes, *A Handbook for Travellers in Central and Northern Japan*, second and revised edition, 1884, p. 389)

William Anderson, employed by the Japanese Navy as a medical doctor, is known as the author of *The Pictorial Art of Japan*, published in 1886.

It must have been Anderson who suggested the outstanding quality of the second pair when he and Satow evaluated them from an anatomical viewpoint. The pair is identified as two standing figures, Niô or Kongô Rikishi; both early thirteenth century works are attributed to Jôkei (?-?) and are now in the collection of the treasure house of Kôfuku-ji temple.²⁸

Ebbing popularity of the Buddha of Kamakura

In the introduction to his 1936 *The Craft of the Japanese Sculptor*, the prominent historian of Asian art Langdon Warner (1881-1955) called his reader's attention to the different notions of sculptural art in East and West:

The statues illustrated in this small book were made by carvers and modellers after things that were seen in their minds. One look at them is enough to demonstrate that they were not copies made in wood or bronze or clay from natural models. If the modern westerner judges their beauty or success by the standard of likeness to the shapes he knows in nature, he obviously must lose their own peculiar beauty. Naturalistic art (copied from nature) and derivative art (copied from other men's products) may of course be successful and be superficially lovely; but they can never vie in perfection with the art of direct imagination of the sort that Europe produced in the past and Asia has nearly always produced. (Langdon Warner, *The Craft of the Japanese Sculptor*, 1976 [1936], pp. 4 f.)

The introduction begins by stating that the book is not written for specialists or students of art history but for general readers. Judging from Warner's standpoint, this statement seems to allude to the fact that, for a long time, many specialists improperly evaluated Buddhist statuary. According to the author, such a specialist tended to rely on the "standard of likeness to the shape he knows in nature," or in many cases, likeness to the human figure that he supposed the work was modeled after. Warner's criticism is true in the cases of Ernest Satow and William Anderson, who found and evaluated the two pairs of statues, Mujaku and Seshin and a pair of Niô, at the North Octagonal Hall of Kôfuku-ji temple in Nara in 1879, and probably also Christopher Dresser, who had first discovered the two sculptures of priests at the same spot two years earlier and compared their artistic excellence with that of Western medieval works.

We can safely surmise that the discovery of naturalistic works, such as the pair of Niô of Kôfuku-ji temple, facilitated a new way to evaluate Buddhist statues in the late 1870s. This viewpoint, which Warner would criticize later in his book in 1936, seems to have enhanced an unfavorable reputation of non-naturalistic works, such as the Buddha of Kamakura.

Adolf Fischer (1857-1914), the founder of the Museum of East Asian Art in Cologne, first visited Japan in 1892 and briefly commented on the Buddha of Kamakura in his book *Bilder aus Japan*:

Nicht weit davon ragt in einem Haine frei empor der kolossale Daibutsu (große Buddha) aus dem 13. Jahrhundert, entschieden die künstlerisch schönste, wenn auch nicht älteste Buddhastatue Japans. (Adolf Fischer, *Bilder aus Japan*, 1897, p. 367)

In a grove not far from there, a colossal thirteenth-century Daibutsu (Great Buddha) statue towers into the sky. It is definitely the most artistically beautiful, if not the oldest, Buddha statue in Japan.

It should be noted that the author inserted a conditional clause “if not the oldest” in his comment while appreciating the artistic quality of the statue. Fischer most probably had in mind the oldest works from the seventh century in Hôryû-ji and Yakushi-ji temples. In 1884, Ernest Fenollosa and Okakura Tenshin had discovered the standing wooden statue from the seventh century, Guze Kannon (*Avolokitesvara*) at Yumedono (Hall of Dreams) in Hôryû-ji temple. The aesthetic quality of the oldest works discovered in the 1880s was appreciated in direct connection with the Greco-Roman style of Buddhist statues discovered in northern India. The Meiji government published the first comprehensive volume of Japanese art history, *Histoire de l'art du Japon*, to commemorate the Paris World Exposition of 1900. However, the volume did not include any image of the Buddha of Kamakura. The impressive colossus had lost its fame in the 1880s and thereafter sank into oblivion.

Conclusions

Is a Buddhist statue an art object or a religious object? This question seems to have been and continues to be problematic. In her *Japanisches Tagebuch*, Frieda Bartdorff (1874-1945), the wife of Adolf Fischer,

refers to a curious experience she had in the gallery of the Nara Imperial Household Museum (presently the Nara National Museum) on one summer day in 1902:

Daß der Japaner, der aus seinem frommen Sinn heraus religiöse Bilder in seinem Hause niemals aufhängt, nun aber solche, wenn auch nur zeitweilig, aus den geweihten Stätten entfernte und ohne religiöse Absicht in einem Profanbau, dem Museum, ausstellte, war eine einschneidende Neuerung. Das einfache Volk hat auch wenig Verständnis dafür, und oft beobachtete ich, daß Männer und Frauen sich den Bildern und Statuen im Museum betend nahten mit derselben Andacht wie in den Tempeln. (Frieda Fischer, *Japanisches Tagebuch: Lehr- und Wanderjahre*, 1938, p. 40)

That the Japanese, who from a sense of piety would never display religious pictures in their homes, now removed those, if temporarily, from their sacred locations and exhibit them without religious intention in a secular building, the museum, was an incisive innovation. The simple people could not appreciate this, and I have often witnessed men and women approaching the paintings and statues in the museum in prayer with the same devotion as in temples.

The author's experience gives us a clue to the question. Buddhist statuary has both qualities, artistic and religious. The essential problem lies not in the aspect of religion but rather in the modern aesthetic idea that intentionally ignores the religious nature of icons. More precisely, modern aesthetics do not coincide with the religious nature of an icon in one specific figure of a Buddhist statue. In this sense, Georges Bousquet was right when he criticized the attitude conflating the two different natures of Buddhist statuary.²⁹ At the same time, however, his criticism exposed an ideological aspect of modern aesthetics when he tried to persuade the viewer not to be dazzled by the unfamiliar appearance of the colossal Buddha.

As much as the aesthetic nature of a Buddhist statue was appreciated, its religious nature was increasingly ignored. Historically speaking, the shift from one evaluation of Buddhist statuary to the other happened not at once, but slowly and steadily in the 1870s and 1880s. In 1888 an official mission of specialists, headed by Kuki Ryūichi from the Ministry of the Imperial Household, was sent to the western part of Japan, including visits to Nara and Kyoto, in order to conduct research on art treasures in the collection of temples and shrines, and to catalogue them according to their historical and aesthetic values. While they stayed in the area for several months,

the leading members of the mission Kuki, Okakura Tenshin, and Ernest Fenollosa repeatedly delivered public lectures in Nara and Kyoto, in which they compared Nara and Kyoto respectively to Greece and Rome. They were the first to publicly offer these comparisons, which would strongly influence the formation of the narratives that directly connected the ancient European empires with Japan's, former capitals that remained rich in cultural heritage and old Buddhist artworks, such as seventh-century statues in Horyû-ji and Yakushi-ji temples.

In the same year, the Temporary Bureau of the Nationwide Research on Treasures was founded. It designated some of the ancient Buddhist statues in Nara and Kyoto as treasures that were to be preserved due to their historical and aesthetic values.³⁰

The Great Buddha of Kamakura witnessed the change as part of the process to “modernize” Buddhist statuary in the Meiji period. Ironically, since it was released from the burden of modern aesthetics, the statue now enjoys the position as the most popular tourist spot in the city and looks as peaceful as ever (figure 3). Since Japan's period of economic growth during the 1960s, it was no longer religious or aesthetic concerns, but rather the commercial exploitation of the colossal figure as a tourist resource, that propelled interest in the Buddha of Kamakura. Tourism, of course, was a byproduct of modern society's aesthetic interest in Japanese statuary in the middle of the nineteenth century.



Fig. 3: The Buddha of Kamakura and Visitors, 2010, photograph by the author

1 The anti-Buddhist movement destroyed numerous treasures preserved for generations in temples and shrines, in particular those located in the areas where Shintoism prevailed. Among the better known sites were Hie Sannō shrine in Ōmi and Iwashimizu Hachiman shrine in the southern area of Kyoto, where Shintoist provocateurs thoroughly destroyed Buddhist constructions and treasures in 1868, as well as Kōfuku-ji temple in Nara, where all the Buddhist priests were forced to renounce the cloth in the same year. See Yasumaru Yoshio, *Kami-gami no Meiji ishin: Shinbutsu bunri to haibutsu kishaku* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1979).

2 See Aoki Shigeru and Sakai Tadayasu, eds., *Nihon kindai shisō taikai 17: Bijutsu*, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1989, 403-405; and Satō Dōshin, *Nihon bijutsu tanjō: Kindai nihon no "kotoba" to senryaku* (The birth of *bijutsu*: Words and strategies of modern Japan), Kōdansha mechie 92, (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1996), 34 f.

3 Basil Hall Chamberlain (1850-1935) pointed out the problematic nature of the word *bijutsu* in a *nota bene* of the entry for "art" in the first edition of *Things Japanese: Being Notes on Various Subjects Connected with Japan* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner; Tokyo: Hakubunsha, 1890), writing, "A curious fact, to which we have never seen attention drawn, is that the Japanese language has no genuine native word for 'art.' To translate the European term 'fine art,' there has recently been invented the compound *bi-jutsu*, by putting together the two Chinese characters *bi** [followed by the Chinese character *bi* or *mei*], 'beautiful,' and *jutsu** [followed by the Chinese character *jutsu* or *shu*], 'craft,' 'device,' 'leger-de-main.' But this compound is only understood by the educated." 40 f.

4 For the establishment of the newly introduced categories of arts, see Satō Dōshin, op. cit. (supra, n. 2), 41-66. And for the process of reorganizing objects after the introduction of the modern exhibiting system from the West in the 1870s, see my argument in Suzuki Hiroyuki, *Kōkoka tachi no 19 seiki: Bakumatsu Meiji ni okeru "mono" no arukeorogii* (Nineteenth-century antiquarians: An archaeology of object during the period of late Edo and early Meiji) (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2003), 70-117.

5 Takamura Kōun, *Bakumatsu ishin kaiko-dan*, Iwanami bunko Ao-467-1 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1995), 158-165.

6 See the second plate in Ernest Fenollosa, *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*, vol. 1, first edition (London: W. Heinemann, 1912), 100-101. The caption reads "A Mass of Broken Statues and Interesting Refuse, such as was found by Professor Fenollosa in the year 1880, at Shodajji."

7 See Tokyo Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan, ed., *Tokyo kokuritsu hakubutsukan hyaku nen shi* (The one-hundred-years history of Tokyo National Museum), part 1 (Tokyo: Daiichi Hōki, 1973), 37-40 and 73-80.

8 See plates 5 and 7 in Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, ed., *Image and Essence: A Genealogy of Japanese Photographers' Views of National Treasures*, exhibition catalogue (Tokyo: Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, 2000), 13-14.

9 Ninagawa Noritane did not refer to the Great Buddha of Nara or the Shaka Triad in the Golden Hall of Hōryū-ji temple in the diary *Nara no suji michi* (A path to Nara), which he wrote during the research of 1872. He only mentioned numerous statues in the hall as a whole and regarded all of them as coming from India or China. See Yonezaki Kiyomi, ed., *Ninagawa Noritane Nara no suji michi* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōron Bijutsu Shuppan, 2005), 171 and 244.

10 Mukasa Akira has argued that the anti-Buddhist movement provided a moment that realized the “modernization” of Buddhist statuary. The present paper has been inspired by his argument in which he gave an example of the Amida Buddha by Jôchô (?-1057) in the Hôô-dô (Phoenix Hall) of Byôdô-in temple in Kyoto and showed the intricate process of recognizing the modern aesthetic values in Buddhist statuary. See Mukasa, “Byôdô-in Hôô-dô Amida nyorai-zô no kindai,” in Kinoshita Naoyuki, ed., *Kôza Nihon bijutsu-shi 6: Bijutsu o sasaeru mono* (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppan-kai, 2005), 241-274.

11 For the relationship between the pre-modern popular shows, where Buddhist statues or various figures modeled after Buddhist statues were often displayed, and the general reception of *bijutsu* in the Meiji period, see Kinoshita Naoyuki, *Bijutsu to yû misemono: Aburajaya no jidai (Bijutsu on display: An age of the oil painting teahouse)*, Imêji ridhingu sôsho (Tokyo: Heibon-sha, 1993).

12 The author is preparing a book with the tentative title *Fenorosa no bôken* (The adventure of Ernest F. Fenollosa) discussing the role that Fenollosa played in forming narratives of a history of Japanese art after he had first visited the country in 1878.

13 Since the Tokugawa shogunate and foreign countries had concluded *Gaikoku-jin yûho kitei* or the foreigners’ boundary treaty in the 1850s, foreigners were prohibited from traveling beyond the treaty limit of 10 *ri* or 24.29 miles from any open port or city. One of the reasons why the Buddha of Kamakura was popular among foreign visitors for a long time is due to the fact that Kamakura was located within the treaty limits, eleven miles away from the open city Yokohama. In 1874 the terms of the treaty were relaxed, and thereafter foreigners could travel beyond the treaty limits with a passport issued by the Japanese authorities. The relaxation virtually afforded foreigners a right to freely travel all over the country with their passports. See Maruyama Hiroshi, “Kindai tsûrizumu no reimei: ‘Naichi ryokô’ o megutte” (The dawn of the modern tourism: On “domestic travel”), in Yoshida Mitsukuni, ed., 19 *Seiki Nihon no jôhô to shakai hendô* (Kyoto: Kyoto Daigaku Jinbun Kagaku Kenkyûjo, 1985), 89-112. Following a suggestion by Alexander von Siebold (1846-1911), the Meiji government commissioned the famous doll maker Nedzumiyu Denkichi (1839-1875) to make a replica of the Buddha of Kamakura in order to be exhibited for the Vienna world exposition of 1873. The replica that he had skillfully made from paper lost the body by an accidental fire in transit but had a good reputation in Vienna. Its great success in Vienna proves the fame of the Buddha of Kamakura in Europe. See Kinoshita Naoyuki, *Bijutsu*, 27-29.

14 See the plate, captioned “Le Daïboudha, statue colossale du Buddha à Kamakura,” in Aimé Humbert, *Le Japon illustré*, vol. 1 (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 2005), 241 (originally published Paris: Librairie de Hachette, 1870).

15 See articles in the special issue of *Ebisu*, numéro hors série, Christophe Marquet, ed., *Henri Cernuschi, 1821-1896: Homme politique, financier et collectionneur d’art asiatique* (Tokyo: Maison Franco-Japonaise, 1998); and Les musées de la Ville de Paris, ed., *Henri Cernuschi, 1821-1896: voyageur et collectionneur*, exhibition catalogue (Paris: Musée Cernuschi, 1998).

16 Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are by the author.

17 See Keiko Omoto and Francis Macouin, *Quand le Japon s’ouvrit au monde: Émile Guimet et les arts d’Asie*, Découvertes Gallimard 99 (Paris: Gallimard et Réunion des musées nationaux, 2001).

18 *Ibid.*, the plate, 104, captioned “Salle du Mandala. Musée Guimet de Paris, photographie, fin XIXe s. Coll. part., Paris,” 187.

19 See Bernard Frank, «L'intérêt pour les religions japonaises dans la France du XIXe siècle et les collections d'Émile Guimet», in Akiyama Terukazu and Haga Tôru, eds., *L'Age du japonisme: La France et le Japon dans la deuxième moitié du XIXe siècle* (Tokyo: Société franco-japonaise d'art et d'archéologie, 1983).

20 Koriyama City Museum of Art and Brain Trust Inc, eds., *Kurisuotô Doressâ to Nihon* (Christopher Dresser and Japan), exhibition catalogue (Koriyama: "Christopher Dresser and Japan" Catalogue Committee, 2002).

21 Christopher Dresser, *Japan: Its Architecture, Art, and Art Manufactures*, 1882, 89.

22 Ibid., 47.

23 Ibid., 94.

24 On June 12, 1875, an article of the *Japan Weekly Mail*, reporting the first exposition at the city of Nara, referred to the unfavorable head of the Buddha of Nara: "It is fifty-three feet high, being three feet higher than the better known Dai-butzu at Kamakura. The head also of the statue is of more modern date than the rest. The temple having been burned in the sixteenth century, the head was so injured that it required to be replaced; the present face is much coarser and sterner than that of the Kamakura Dai-butzu, and is probably not an exact reproduction of the original." Similarly, in the first edition of *A Handbook for Travellers in Central and Northern Japan* (Yokohama: Kelly & Co.; Shanghai and Hong Kong: Kelly & Walsh, 1881), Ernest Satow used frank words in his negative evaluation of the head of the Buddha of Nara. He wrote: "The modern head [of the Buddha] is extremely ugly, owing to its black colour, and to its broad nostrils and swollen cheeks." 390.

25 See Matsuda Kiyoshi, 'Gioruju Busuke no bunmei kan' (Georges Bousquet view to the civilization) in the same author's "Furansu kara mita bunmei kaika" (Civilization and enlightenment as seen by the French), in Hayashiya Tatsusaburô, ed., *Bunmei kaika no kenkyû*, Kyoto daigaku jinbun kagaku kenkyûjo hôkoku (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1979), 214-225.

26 See figure 25, captioned "Small God, or Statue, carved in Wood," Dresser *Japan*, 91.

27 For the back of the two figures, see the plates in Nara roku daiji taikan kankô kai, ed., *Kôfuku-ji 2*, Nara roku daiji taikan 8 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1999 (1969)), 153 and 159.

28 Ibid., plates, 36-39 and 168-173.

29 For discussions of the two different natures of Buddhist statues, see Fabio Rambelli and Eric Reinders, "What Does Iconoclasm Create? What Does Preservation Destroy? Reflections on Iconoclasm in East Asia," in Stacy Boldrick and Richard Clay, eds., *Iconoclasm: Contested Objects, Contested Terms*, Subject/Object: New Studies in Sculpture (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 15-33. With thanks to Professor Melanie Trede for informing me of this article.

30 For the mission of 1888, see Takagi Hiroshi, *Kindai tenno-sei no bunkashiteki kenkyû* (Cultural-historical studies on the modern emperor system) (Tokyo: Azekura Shobô, 1997), 352-357.