Yakushi Buddha (Buddha of Healing), Its Medicinal Container, and the Prayers of the Japanese People

Jun Okuda*

1. Introduction of Buddhism into Japan

Buddhism was born in the 5th century B.C. in India, spread rapidly throughout Asia, and was introduced into Japan directly from China and the South Asian countries during the 6th and 7th centuries.

Buddhism had actually arrived even earlier through sporadic contacts with China through the Korean peninsula. In A.D.538 (or 552), the king of Paekche (a kingdom on the Korean peninsula) sent a bronze statue of Buddha, along with some canopies, banners, and copies of Buddhist sutras to Emperor Kinmei of Japan, with an enthusiastic recommendation that the teachings explained in those works be studied and taken to heart.¹ Later, when a new emperor, Yomei, suffered from disease, he became a believer in Buddhism and directed his retainers to do likewise meaning told them to become believers also.

In Japan at that time, people believed only in Shintoism (the religion holding that “god” is mainly nature: forest, wood, water, wind, thunder, stones, etc.). The Shintoists fought against the Buddhists in the Imperial Court in 587, and the Buddhists won this battle over religion. Since then, people began to believe in Buddhism as well as in Shintoism.

2. Prevalence of Infectious Diseases and Damage Caused by Natural Calamities in Ancient Times²

With the progress of exchanges of culture by personal contact between Japan and Korea or China, many kinds of infectious diseases invaded Japan and prevailed starting in the 6th century. These included

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smallpox, measles, dysentery, syphilis, rubella, typhoid fever, cholera, leprosy, pest, tuberculosis, malaria, influenza, etc. Among them, smallpox prevailed first in A.D. 735, and outbreaks of it occurred 31 times till the early Meiji era (A.D. 1900), when the vaccination against smallpox started. Other infectious diseases also often sprung up in the land. Moreover the people sometimes suffered from a variety of natural calamities (such as storms, droughts, earthquakes, etc.); however, they had no special idea as to how to prevent such diseases and disasters. Consequently, many of them were driven to despair, prayed to Yakushi Buddha to help them in their troubles, and often ended their short lives.

3. Yakushi Buddha and Its Statue

Various representations of Buddha existed throughout Asia. Among these were statues of various supreme Buddhas: Shaka Buddha (Sanskrit: Sākiya), Amida Buddha (S: Amitāyus), Dainichi Buddha (S: Vairocana), and Yakushi Buddha (S: Bhaisajyaguru). Yakushi Buddha (Buddha of Healing) was thought to be a Buddha of divine favor in this world, who cured sick persons and presided at the East Land of Happiness.

The origin of Yakushi Buddha is not clearly known. It has been proposed that the original statue of Yakushi Buddha may have been conceived as a representation of Varna, a god in Brahminism, who was believed to be a god of justice, possessing medicines and prolonging life.\(^5\) The original sutra, or dialogue, of Yakushi Buddha was written in the second or third century in India, and five Chinese translations of it later appeared.

In the original sutra, 12 special prayers to Yakushi Buddha were written. Especially, the 6th prayer concerns recovery of physically
disabled persons; and the 7th prayer describes curing of various
diseases and removal of the feeling of unrest by Yakushi Buddha.$^{3,6}$

Because the sutra gave no definite description of the shape of
the Yakushi Buddha statue, it was originally made just like that of
the common Buddha. The standing statue has a lowered left hand showing
the palm (signifying granting the request), and the right hand is
raised to the shoulder, showing the palm (to represent removing the
feeling of unrest).

In China and Korea, Yakushi Buddha was not widely accepted. However,
there were many people came to believer in Yakushi Buddha in Japan.

**In China**$^{7-10}$

Older statues of Yakushi Buddha are standing statues or sitting
statues holding a bowl or a long stick in the right or left hand.
In China, some wall paintings of the paradise of Yakushi Buddhas were
made at caves in Dunhuang, and bronze Yakushi Buddhas with a bowl
in their hand were crafted during the Sui (A.D. 581-618) and Tang
(A.D. 618-907) eras. Because the bowl in these statues is so small,
it is not easy to determine whether it is a medicinal container or
not. A Chinese priest, Fuku (A.D. 705-774), translated an Indian
text (entitled "Reading rule of sutra of Yakushi Buddha") that
describes either of two objects included in Yakushi Buddha statues,
a medicinal container or a bowl.

**In Korea**$^{11}$

Belief in Yakushi Buddha was transmitted from China to North and
then South Korea (Silla) in the 7th century. Four Yakushi Buddhas
(1 bronze, 1 iron, 1 stone, 1 precipice) are listed as National Treasure,
while 14 (2 bronze, 2 iron, 1 precipice, and 9 stone) are listed as
Treasure. Among these 18 statues, 13 of them have a medicinal container
or a bowl in the left or right hand. The shortest one (bronze gilt) is 29 cm in height (National Museum of Korea, Seoul), and the tallest one (stone) is 545 cm (kept at Asan).

In Japan 3,4,6,12~14)

The oldest wooden statue of Yakushi Buddha (made in the 7th century) is in the Horin-ji Temple (Nara). The oldest bronze statue (National Treasure) of Yakushi Buddha is believed to have been made by a Chinese sculptor (Tori) in A.D. 607, and it was placed in the golden pavilion of the Horyu-ji Temple in Nara in the year. Another old bronze statue can be found in the Yakushi-ji Temple in Nara. However, none of these three statues of Yakushi Buddha holds a medicinal container; 6) because Tori probably didn’t know about Fuku’s translation of the Indian Text at that time.

Since many later statues of Yakushi Buddhas came to have medicinal containers in their left hand, they are generally distinguished from other Buddhas by that property (medicinal container).

The typical depiction of the Yakushi Buddha triad consists of Yakushi Buddha accompanied by Nikko Bosatsu and Gakko Bosatsu and some guards (Shitenno, Junisinsho), as seen in Photo 1.

4. Medicinal Containers of the Japanese Yakushi Buddha Statues 6,12~17)

Of the 14 statues of Yakushi Buddha listed as a “National Treasure,” 8 hold a medicinal container. There are 247 statues (including the 14 National Treasure statues) listed in the I.C.P. (Important Cultural Property) registry at present. These statues were mainly made during the Nara era (A.D. 645-794) and the Heian era (A.D. 794-1185). Among them, 224 are in wood, 17 in bronze, 4 in stone, and 2 in iron. Of these 247 Yakushi Buddha statues, 191 hold a medicinal container. Almost all of the medicinal containers are just solid blocks imitating
“Photo 1 is in the printed text”

“Photo 2 is in the printed text”

“Photo 3 is in the printed text”
Table 1. Old wooden statues of Yakushi Buddha (Buddha of Healing) holding a medicinal container

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Temple</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Manufacture</th>
<th>Height (cm)</th>
<th>Wood</th>
<th>Container (cm)</th>
<th>Container dating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Horyu-ji·Saiendo(N.T.)</td>
<td>Nara</td>
<td>8th century</td>
<td>244.0</td>
<td>Dry lacquer</td>
<td>after</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horyu-ji·Daikodo(N.T.)</td>
<td>Nara</td>
<td>10th century</td>
<td>247.2</td>
<td>Jap. cypress</td>
<td>uncertain</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daigo-ji(N.T.)</td>
<td>Kyoto</td>
<td>A.D.913</td>
<td>176.5</td>
<td>Jap. cypress</td>
<td>9.1 x ? s.t.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shinyakushi-ji·Hondo(N.T.)</td>
<td>Nara</td>
<td>A.D.793</td>
<td>190.0</td>
<td>Jap. nutmeg</td>
<td>after</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jingo-ji(N.T.)</td>
<td>Kyoto</td>
<td>8-9th century</td>
<td>170.6</td>
<td>Hard wood</td>
<td>after</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shojo-ji(N.T.)</td>
<td>Fukushima</td>
<td>9th century</td>
<td>141.8</td>
<td>Zelkova</td>
<td>s.t.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kakuen-ji(I.C.P.)</td>
<td>Kanagawa</td>
<td>A.D.1294</td>
<td>181.2</td>
<td>Jap. cypress</td>
<td>s.t.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yokokura-ji(I.C.P.)</td>
<td>Gifu</td>
<td>A.D.1300</td>
<td>87.7</td>
<td>Jap. cypress</td>
<td>6.5 x 7.5 s.t.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuroishidera(I.C.P.)</td>
<td>Iwate</td>
<td>A.D.862</td>
<td>126.0</td>
<td>Katsura</td>
<td>7.0 x 9.5 after</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shouraku-ji(I.C.P.)</td>
<td>Wakayama</td>
<td>A.D.894-1185</td>
<td>102.1</td>
<td>Jap. cypress</td>
<td>uncertain</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akisino-ji(I.C.P.)</td>
<td>Wakayama</td>
<td>A.D.894-1185</td>
<td>139.0</td>
<td>Jap. cypress</td>
<td>s.t.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youchiin(I.C.P.)</td>
<td>Wakayama</td>
<td>A.D.894-1185</td>
<td>139.0</td>
<td>Jap. cypress</td>
<td>s.t.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

after: Medicinal container added after the statue had been made.
s.t.: Medicinal container made at the same time as the statue.

Note: Manufacture [Date of Manufacture]

表1 古い木造薬師如来像（重文）の薬莖で種々の形状のもの

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>寺名</th>
<th>県名</th>
<th>造像年代</th>
<th>像高</th>
<th>材質</th>
<th>薬莖の大きさ</th>
<th>製作年</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>法隆寺·西円堂（国宝）</td>
<td>奈良</td>
<td>8世紀</td>
<td>244.0</td>
<td>脱活乾漆</td>
<td>後補</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>法隆寺·大講堂（国宝）</td>
<td>奈良</td>
<td>8世紀</td>
<td>不明</td>
<td>桧</td>
<td>不明</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>醍醐寺（国宝）</td>
<td>京都</td>
<td>10世紀</td>
<td>不明</td>
<td>桧</td>
<td>不明</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>新薬師寺·本堂（国宝）</td>
<td>奈良</td>
<td>8世紀</td>
<td>桧</td>
<td>不明</td>
<td>後補</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>神護寺（国宝）</td>
<td>京都</td>
<td>8世紀</td>
<td>硬材</td>
<td>桧 (両手先は桂)</td>
<td>後補</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>勝常寺（国宝）</td>
<td>福島</td>
<td>9世紀前半</td>
<td>不明</td>
<td>桧</td>
<td>初頭</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>覚園寺（重文）</td>
<td>神奈川</td>
<td>不明</td>
<td>桧</td>
<td>不明</td>
<td>初頭</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>横蔵寺（重文）</td>
<td>岐阜</td>
<td>不明</td>
<td>桧</td>
<td>不明</td>
<td>初頭</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>黒石寺（重文）</td>
<td>岩手</td>
<td>不明</td>
<td>桧</td>
<td>不明</td>
<td>初頭</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>勝業寺（重文）</td>
<td>和歌山</td>
<td>不明</td>
<td>桧</td>
<td>不明</td>
<td>不明</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>秋篠寺（重文）</td>
<td>奈良</td>
<td>8世紀</td>
<td>桧</td>
<td>不明</td>
<td>初頭</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>櫻池院（重文）</td>
<td>和歌山</td>
<td>約8世紀</td>
<td>約120</td>
<td>絵画</td>
<td>当初</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

重文：重要文化財，後補：像造後に追加，當初：像造時に作製 *平安後期
the shape of pot or bowl.

A wooden Yakushi Buddha statue (176.5 cm in height) made in A.D. 913 has remained in the Daigo-ji Temple in Kyoto ever since that time (see Photo 2, Page 5). It holds the original medicinal container having 7 vertical lines (see Photo 3-No.3, Page 6). The medicinal container was made at the same time when the statue was carved, and the shape is similar to that of those containers held by the statues of Kakuen-ji Temple (Kanagawa; see Photo 3-No.7, container having 12 lines), Akishino-ji Temple (Nara; see Photo 3-No.11, container depicted with 7 lines) and Myoko-ji Temple (Kyoto; Photo not shown).

Some medicinal containers date from the same time (or later) as the statues (see Table 1, Page 7). The size of medicinal container depends on the size of the respective statue. They are usually 6-20 cm in height and 6-15 cm in diameter and have a decorative lid. Some containers are covered with gold foil. Medicinal containers are mostly wooden and generally have no medicines in them. Some statues of Yakushi Buddha are a “secret Buddha”, and hence nobody can see them. Even the chief priest has not touched the medicinal container of such Yakushi Buddha statue, and so it is not known whether these medicinal containers contain an offering (medicines) or not.

Of the 11 photos of medicinal containers held by statues and shown in Photo 3, Nos.9 and 10 depict not pots, but bowls.

There are seven paintings (I.C.P.) of Yakushi Buddha in seven temples in Japan. Among them, the oldest wall painting of Yakushi Buddha (A.D. 700, 312 cm in height, and 266 cm in width), located at the Horyu-ji Temple in Nara has a medicinal container or bowl. The painting was partly damaged by fire in 1949. The other six paintings (I.C.P.) are hanging scrolls. The Youchiin’s one is 166.1 cm in height and
130.9 cm in width. The medicinal container in this painting is shown in Photo 3- No. 12. Five Indian ink paintings of Yakushi Buddha with bowl or medicinal container are also listed as I.C.P.

5. Materials in Medicinal Container of Yakushi Buddha in the Suho Kokubun-ji Temple

Very recently (in Sept. 1997), a wooden medicinal container from a Yakushi Buddha statue in the Suho-Kokubun-ji Temple (Hofu City, Yamaguchi Prefecture, Japan) was found to contain an offering that included cereals, chopped medicinal plants and minerals (see Photos 4 and 5). This statue of Yakushi Buddha (195.1 cm in height) was made after a fire in 1417.

The lid had been tightly placed on the medicinal container and secured by two wooden nails. The date October 12 in Genroku 12 Nen (A.D. 1699) was written on the reverse side of lid (cover) of the medicinal container, and is believed to be the date that the offering was placed in the container. The wooden medicinal container is 18 cm in height, about 13 cm in maximum diameter and sits on the palm of the left hand of the statue (see Photos 1 and 4). It is colored light blue and decorated with 12 gold vertical lines. The inside of the container is covered with golden foil. In the medicinal container, materials (total of 220 g) in a silk pouch and a wooden Gorinto (a kind of miniature pagoda) of five stories were found. It is believed that the materials had been stored unopened for 300 years.

A sample (17.2 g) of the materials was analyzed and found to contain the materials listed in Table 2 (Page 12).
Photo 4 is in the printed text

Photo 4. Medicinal container of Yakushi Buddha statue in Suho-Kokubun-ji Temple (Hofu, Yamaguchi) and its contents.
1. Medicinal container (18 cm in height, 13 cm in diameter)
2. Contents of the container
3. Silk pouch
4. Wooden Gorinto (a kind of small pagoda) Colors (from the top) and what they represent: blue: sky, black: wind, red: fire, white: water, yellow: land
5. Hole for wooden nail

写真 周防国分寺（山口県防府市）の薬師如来像薬壷とその内蔵物
① 薬壷（高さ 18 cm, 直径 13 cm）
② 内蔵物
③ 絹袋
④ 五輪塔（青（上から）: 空，黒：風，赤：火，白：水，黄：土）
⑤ 木釘のための穴

Photo 5 is in the printed text

Photo 5. The reverse side of the lid of the medicinal container of the Yakushi Buddha statue in the Suho-Kokubunn-ji Temple. The medicinal container date:
Genroku Juni Nen, Ju Gatsu, Juni Nichi (A.D.1699, October 12)
1. Medicinal container
2. Silk pouch
3. Wooden nail (3 cm)
4. Reverse side of lid
5. Wooden Gorinto (a kind of small pagoda)

写真 周防国分寺薬師如来像の薬壷の蓋の裏
補修 元禄十二（己卯）年十月十二日
① 薬壷
② 絹袋
③ 木釘
④ 蓋の裏（金箔ハリツケ）
⑤ 五輪塔
Table 2. Materials in the medicinal container of the Yakushi Buddha statue in the Suho-Kokubun-ji Temple

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cereals</th>
<th>g %</th>
<th>Pharmacognostics</th>
<th>g %</th>
<th>Minerals</th>
<th>g %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>item</td>
<td></td>
<td>item</td>
<td></td>
<td>item</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Unhulled rice</td>
<td>1.63 9.48</td>
<td>A. Rhizoma Acori Graminei</td>
<td>0.36 2.09</td>
<td>a. Rock crystals</td>
<td>0.64 3.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Unhulled barley</td>
<td>1.15 6.69</td>
<td>B. Radix Ginseng</td>
<td>0.43 2.56</td>
<td>b. Purple glass</td>
<td>0.84 4.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Wheat</td>
<td>1.18 6.86</td>
<td>C. Flos Caryophylli</td>
<td>0.49 2.85</td>
<td>c. Blue glass</td>
<td>0.21 1.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Soybean</td>
<td>1.04 6.05</td>
<td>D. Santali Lignum Album</td>
<td>0.85 4.94</td>
<td>d. CaCO3 particles</td>
<td>0.42 2.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Adzuki bean</td>
<td>1.16 6.74</td>
<td>E. Mixtures</td>
<td>1.20 6.98</td>
<td>f. Silver foil</td>
<td>3.72 4.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Medicinal plant-dust (powder): 5.59g, 32.5%


3. Minerals: rock crystals (colorless, transparent), pieces of purple and blue glass, milky semi-transparent CaCO3, and a trace amount of silver and golden foils.

Cereals

The cereals listed above were easily identified by the naked eye. DNA analysis of rice in the container was carried out, and it revealed that the rice belonged to the *temperate japonica*, which is predominant in the present variety of Japan. The rice seeds had brownish husks.
and a short awn, and they were a tiny-pink brown rice variety. The endosperm was the non glutinous type. Seeds of barley seemed to be the six-rowed cover type, which are not so frequently found in the southwestern part of Honshu. It is still beyond our understanding as to why such types of barley seeds were preserved in a medicinal container in this temple in this area. The wheat seeds were identified as common wheat, judging from morphological analysis. Observations on the surface and inner structure of the beans made by using a scanning electron microscope revealed that the seeds were soy beans and azuki beans.

The five cereals had not germinated at all.

The district near Suho Kokubun-ji Temple was seriously damaged by a strong storm in the autumn of 1699, and so the people offered five cereals to the medicinal container to pray that a good harvest would be had in the next year (1700) and later.

**Medicinal plants (Pharmacognostics)**

The five chopped medicinal plants in the offering were first analyzed by the naked eye. The tissue structures of the sample were compared with those of authentic samples and identified by light microscopy and scanning electron microscopy. *Rhizoma Acori Graminei*, *Rhizoma Acori Calami* have essential oils, effective against fever, convulsion, and wounds. *Radix Ginseng* contains Ginsenoside (saponin), which is used for robustness and as a tonic and stimulant. *Flos Caryophilli* has essential oils (eugenol etc.), having a pleasant odor; and one of its components, eugenol, is used as an insecticide. *Santali Lignum Album* has an aromatic odor and is used in incense sticks, and to prepare medicine for gonorrhea. The later 3 were imported from Korea and South Asian countries.
It is believed that the phenolic compound, eugenol, in *Flos Caryophylli* protected these plant products from damage by insects and bacteria for the last 300 years.

So, the people prayed for the cure of sick persons and good health by placing these 5 medicinal plants in the medicinal container. **Minerals**

The elements of the six minerals in Table 2 were determined by use of a fluorescence X-ray element analyzer. Rock crystal contained only silicon, and the data on specific gravity and refraction index were identified to be those reported in chemical reference books. The purple and blue pieces of glass were identified as lead glass by elemental analysis. The CaCO₃ particles were semitransparent and probably obtained from some hot spring or limestone cave. Purities of the silver and gold were not high, being Ag 49.6% + Si 49.7% for the silver (Ag) and Au 6.6% + Ag 4.3% + Si 44.5% + Fe 22.8% + others for the gold (Au).

However, these minerals were very important and expensive at that time. So, the people wished to have the divine favor in this world by offering them to the Yakushi Buddha.

It seems that in the year A.D. 1699 people placed an offering in the medicinal container and prayed to Yakushi Buddha for their good harvest, health, convalescence, and prosperity. This is the first report of the discovery and analysis of the contents of a medicinal container of a Yakushi Buddha statue in Japan.

**6. Prayer to Yakushi Buddha by Emperors and the Japanese People**¹⁸,¹⁹)

1) Prayer to Yakushi Buddha by the Emperors and Their Families in the Asuka Era (A.D. 593-709) and the Nara Era (A.D. 710-793):
The prayers of sutra tells us the following: “Yakushi Buddha is a special buddha for curing diseases, a buddha of divine favor in this world.”

In A.D. 680, the Emperor Tenmu had made a proposal to build Yakushi-ji Temple to cure his empress’s disease. Yakushi-ji Temple with the beautiful bronze statue of Yakushi Buddha (257 cm in height, without a medicinal container) was built by his empress at Nara in A.D. 698, after his death.

In A.D. 741, the Emperor Shomu issued an imperial edict for the construction of Kokubun-ji Temples at the seat of each prefecture to protect the country and to cure diseases. At present, there are 38 Kokubun-ji Temples, of which 32 temples have a Yakushi Buddha statue as the main buddha statue.

Since the days of Shomu, believers in Yakushi Buddha gradually increased. Thus, the propaganda of Yakushi Buddha was accelerated under the influence and by the aid of emperors and their families.

2) Prayers to Yakushi Buddha by the Japanese People

From the number of statues of the 4 supreme buddhas listed as I.C.P., it is expected that the number of believers in Amida Buddha stands to be the largest in Japan, and that of Yakushi Buddha ranks second at present. Yakushi Buddha statues in the early part of the Nara era held no medicinal container; however, the additions of medicinal container to the statue without medicinal container increased after the late Heian era (A.D. 1086-1184) along with an increase in the number of believers. There are 247 Yakushi Buddha statues listed as I.C.P. and among them, 191 statues (77.3%) hold a medicinal container (only wooden or metal block) in which no offering has ever been placed, except the case of Suho Kokubun-ji Temple as mentioned the above.
Among the pilgrim’s hymns of Yakushi Buddha in Japan, that of the Kamakura School is well-known. Believers have been praying to Yakushi Buddha by singing “Pilgrim’s Hymn of Yakushi Buddha,” a hymn with a mournful melody, since ca. A.D. 1500.

7. Medical Treatment by the Priest of Temple of Yakushi Buddha

After the introduction of Buddhism to Japan, the priests studied the medical treatment written in the sutras etc., and prepared the medicines in Buddhist temples, especially in the temples of Yakushi Buddha. According to the record of Suho-Kokubun-ji Temple, the priest prepared so-called “Hoshintan” (the oldest folk medicine) and gave it to sick persons. “Hoshintan” contains Radix Ginseng, Flos Caryophylli, and Santali Lignum Album, all of which were imported from Korea and South-Asian countries.

At Majima village in Owari Prefecture during the Nanboku cho period (1336~1392), the priest (Seigan) of Myogenin Temple comprehended the miraculous medical treatment of eye diseases by revelation from Yakushi Buddha in a dream, and priest Seigan treated many sick persons afflicted with eye diseases. His clinic in the temple was supported by the emperor. Besides Myogenin Temple, there were 10 similar temples of Yakushi Buddha during that time.

8. Discussion

Japan is an island country and our ancestors were very enthusiastic to learn and to import the advanced and prominent culture from foreign countries.

Although many people died from calamities in ancient times, they died also by infectious diseases brought into Japan by foreigners. Once the infectious diseases spread in Japan, the people had no idea as to how to prevent or cure them. The Imperial Court asked priests
to read the sutra of Yakushi Buddha and imported medicinal plants. The people prayed to the Yakushi Buddha statues for relief from these diseases.

These events and circumstances caused the Japanese people to grow fond of medicine.

Yakushi Buddha was thought to be a buddha of divine favor in this world, and so many Japanese have come to have faith in Yakushi Buddha.

The results of a recent investigation on the religion of Japanese people revealed that 33.0% of them are Buddhist, 4.2%, Shintoist; 1.2%, Christian; 5.6%, believers of some other religion, and 3.4%, unknown. The remainder, 52.6%, do not believe in any religion.\textsuperscript{20} Another study found that the greater the sense of happiness, the more often religion was renounced. In Japan, as the society ages, many old people are faced with various diseases (cancer, heart disease, cerebrovascular disease, and pneumonia) and the prospect of coming death. Perhaps as a consequence and for their peace of mind, many of them are returning or for the first time coming to Yakushi Buddha. Thus, it will be interesting to observe how Yakushi Buddha cares for those facing disease and relieves them of their fear of death.

9. Summary and Conclusion

In Japan, there are 247 Yakushi Buddha (Buddha of Healing) statues in Buddhist Temples, which are listed by the designation of Important Cultural Property including 14 National Treasures. It is believed that Yakushi Buddha wrote 12 prayers in the sutra. Yakushi Buddha explained in the 7th prayer that he can relieve sick people from disease and pain when the people pray to him. So, the Japanese people have had faith in Yakushi Buddha, especially since the 7th century. The oldest wooden Yakushi Buddha statue is in the Horin-ji Temple in Nara.
Among the 247 Yakushi Buddha statues, 191 have a medicinal container (or bowl) on the palm of the left hand. However, these medicinal containers are actually wooden solid blocks imitating pot or bowl.

Very recently, however, it was found that the Yakushi Buddha statue in the Suho-Kokubun-ji Temple (Yamaguchi Prefecture, Japan) has a medicinal container on the palm of its left hand in which an offering (220 g materials) was found. The date on the reverse side of the lid places the offering at October 12, 1699. The offering is composed of five cereals (rice, barley, wheat, soybean, and adzuki bean), five medicinal plants (Rhizoma Acori Graminei, Rhizoma Acori Calami, Radix Ginseng, Flos Caryophylli, and Santali Lignum Album), and six minerals (rock crystals, pieces of purple and blue lead glass, CaCO3 particles, silver and golden foils). This is the first example of an offering found in a medicinal container of Yakushi Buddha, from which we can imagine what the people prayed to Yakushi Buddha, probably, good harvest, cure of disease and divine favor.

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