

# The Power of Concealment: Tōdaiji Objects and the Effects of Their Burial in an Early Japanese Devotional Context

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# The Power of Concealment: Tōdaiji Objects and the Effects of Their Burial in an Early Japanese Devotional Context

AKIKO WALLEY

## Introduction

**D**URING its restoration in 1907, workers who were placing scaffolding on top of the raised dais of the colossal seated Vairocana Buddha in the Great Buddha Hall (Daibutsuden 大仏殿) of Tōdaiji 東大寺 (Nara City, Nara Prefecture; figure 1) accidentally unearthed three sets of eighth-century objects (hereafter “Tōdaiji objects”; figure 2). In 1927, Ueda Sanpei 上田三平 (1881–1950) tentatively characterized these artifacts as “platform pacifying objects” or *chindangu* 鎮壇具. In the article, Ueda carefully states:

We cannot draw any conclusions on the religious purpose of the objects based only on the treasures discovered thus far... However, since we know for certain that these objects were found inside the central dais of the Great Buddha Hall, it might be safe to assume that they were for platform pacification rites [*chindan hō ni mochiitaru ihō* 鎮壇法に用ゐたる遺寶], though it is probably difficult to garner what this “platform pacification rite” entailed from the Buddhist scriptures and teachings of the Tenpyō period.<sup>1</sup>

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The material herein was presented at several venues, including Ewha Womans University; University of Southern California; University of California, Los Angeles; and the College Art Associa-

tion’s Annual Conference, Los Angeles Convention Center, 21–24 February, 2018. I am grateful to the organizers and participants for their interest in this material and their invaluable comments. I would also like to thank the anonymous reviewer for the meticulous reading of the manuscript and suggested revisions.

1 Ueda, “Tōdaiji Daibutsuden,” p. 68. Ueda was not present at the time of discovery, and when he wrote his article, he did not have access to details regarding the arrangement of the objects within each cavity. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

2 The set of objects was first designated as a National Treasure in 1930, then re-designated in 1957 under the revised Act of Protection of Cultural Properties. Morimoto, “Kondō chindangu,” pp. 8–9.

3 Okumura, “Kokuhō Tōdaiji Kondō chindangu.” The Tōdaiji objects were introduced to a United States audience for the first time in 1986 when select pieces appeared in the exhibition, *The Great Eastern Temple*. Organized by the Art Institute of Chicago, this exhibition marked the first large-scale presentation of Tōdaiji treasures in the West. The catalogue entry for the Tōdaiji objects—which was adapted from the preceding 1980 traveling exhibition in Japan—also followed the convention and characterized the artifacts as “‘*chindan-gu*,’ literally, ‘instruments to charm the spirits of the dais.’” Mino, *The Great Eastern Temple*, p. 151.



**Figure 1.** Seated Vairocana Buddha. Great Buddha Hall (Daibutsuden), Tōdaiji, Nara Prefecture. Gilt bronze. Nara period, mid-8th c. Reproduced from Ōtsuka, *Nihon no kokuhō*, vol. 5, p. 10.



**Figure 2.** Sample of objects unearthed from beneath the seated Vairocana, Daibutsuden, Tōdaiji, Nara Prefecture. Nara period, latter half of 8th c. In the collection of Tōdaiji. Courtesy of Nara National Museum.

categorized the objects as *chindangu* while emphasizing their differences from other examples—even questioning their effectiveness or, conversely, proposing other provisional defining categories such as “caches inside a statue,” or *zōnai nōnyūhin* 像内納入品, but using the term “*chindangu*” nevertheless for convenience.<sup>4</sup>

The debate over the original function of the Tōdaiji objects is presently at a standstill. Insufficient records from the time of their discovery make analysis challenging. The general placement of objects was diagrammed as they were unearthed, but certain details an archaeologist would have thought important—such as whether the objects were discovered from the same layer of compounded earth, or the distribution of the glass beads—were never recorded. No systematic excavation was ever conducted. No scholar has yet presented a detailed review of how much of what was unearthed in 1907–1908 actually reflects the original Nara 奈良 period (710–784) arrangement: the fact that the restoration project also unearthed a few items of later periods is a subject largely neglected in the present discourse on the Tōdaiji objects. The Great Buddha Hall of Tōdaiji was completed in the latter half of the eighth century, but it burned down time and again through its long history. The central icon also did not survive the test of time completely unscathed; it went through repairs to the Buddha head and much of its torso, and part of its bronze pedestal, including around where the artifacts were discovered. For this reason, a comprehensive reexamination of the Tōdaiji objects as they were at the time of their discovery is key to any further debate of the circumstances surrounding their initial emplacement.

Tōdaiji was the most extravagant and complex Buddhist endeavor undertaken on the Japanese archipelago since the establishment of the first fully-fledged Buddhist monastery, Asukadera 飛鳥寺 (Takaichi-gun 高市郡, Nara Prefecture), in the late sixth century. The Tōdaiji objects are believed to have been emplaced almost immediately following the completion of the central icon. Elsewhere, I propose that the Tōdaiji objects

could be thought of as “proto-*tainai nōnyūhin*” (胎内納入品) and the space below the statue of Vairocana Buddha as the extension of its “womb” (*tainai* 胎内).<sup>5</sup> To further consider this hypothesis, this study reassesses the foundational evidence presently used to scaffold any argument on the function of the Tōdaiji objects in the eighth century. First, it establishes that the diagrams produced during the 1907–1908 restoration can be used to recreate the initial arrangement of at least some of the Tōdaiji objects. Then it will argue that in a comparable way to later *tainai nōnyūhin*, the act of concealment enabled the devotees to harness the symbolic potency already inherent in these objects to use them as their expression of prayers and wishes.

### What We Know: Tōdaiji, Vairocana Buddha, and Finding the Tōdaiji Objects

Tōdaiji, more formally known as Kin[Kon]kōmyō Shitennō Gokoku no Tera 金光明四天王護国寺 (Temple of the Golden Light and Protection of the State by the Four Heavenly Kings), stands on a north-eastern hill of present-day Nara City.<sup>6</sup> Its construction within Heijōkyō 平城京 began in 745, following Sovereign Shōmu’s 聖武 (701–759; r. 724–749) edict issued in 741 that ordered the establishment of state-maintained temples (*kokubunji* 国分寺) and nunneries (*kokubun niji* 国分尼寺) across the Yamato domain.<sup>7</sup> Tōdaiji

4 An intriguing example that encapsulates this twist in the discourse surrounding the Tōdaiji objects is found in Aoki Atsushi’s introduction to the practice of inserting *zōnai nōnyūhin*. In his work, Aoki explains that he thought of the Tōdaiji objects as he “traced the root of *zōnai nōnyūhin*.” In his explanation, however, he continues to use the term *chindangu*, following his agreement with the generally shared understanding of their function. Aoki, *Butsuzō*, pp. 34–35.

5 Walley, “Sheltered by the Buddha,” pp. 67–71. This study was inspired by Aoki Atsushi’s proposition to view the Tōdaiji objects as a “root” of *zōnai nōnyūhin*. Aoki’s work was aimed at a general readership, so he had no room to elaborate on his meaning, and his introduction to the Tōdaiji objects was problematically overdetermined. In addition, it is clear from his discussion that as a scholar of medieval Japanese Buddhist art, Aoki’s interest lay in introducing the practice of inserting caches from the eleventh through the fourteenth centuries. Thus, he applies the definition of *zōnai nōnyūhin* of the later practices to the Nara period, resulting in the exclusion of few contemporaneous instances where objects were discovered inside a statue. The article explored Aoki’s proposition within the context of Nara-period Buddhist and other ritual offerings. Aoki, *Butsuzō*, pp. 34–35. For the choice to use *tainai nōnyūhin* instead of the presently more common *zōnai nōnyūhin*, see Walley, “Sheltered by the Buddha,” p. 71, n. 3.

6 Regarding Tōdaiji’s formal name, two readings of 金光明 (which is based on the title of the sutra, *Konkōmyō saishō kyō* 金光明最勝王經) circulate. In English transliteration, the more prevalent reading seems to be *konkōmyō*. The official name according to Tōdaiji, however, is “Kinkōmyō.”

7 Tenpyō 天平 13 (741).3.24. SN 2: 386–91. The process of building Tōdaiji was complicated because Shōmu was also

was to be the largest *kokubunji*, most intimately tied to royal rule.<sup>8</sup> The casting of its central statue—a colossal fifteen-meter gilt bronze seated Vairocana Buddha—began on the twenty-ninth day of the ninth month of 747 (figure 1). In 749, after the body of the statue was cast, the construction of the Great Buddha Hall began.<sup>9</sup> The Eye-Opening Ceremony (Kaigen'e 開眼会) took place on the fourteenth day of the third month of 752, though at this point the statue was probably only partially gilded and still lacked its lotus pedestal and mandorla. The monumental project continued for another couple of decades.<sup>10</sup>

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considering moving the imperial capital. The initial edict to construct Vairocana Buddha was issued in 743, and the preparation first went underway in Shigaraki 紫香樂 (present-day Shiga Prefecture), one of the short-lived potential sites for Shōmu's new capital. Shōmu ultimately remained in Heijōkyō, established by Sovereign Genmei 元明 (661–721) in 710. The construction of Vairocana Buddha was resumed at the present Tōdaiji location in 745. For an accessible English introduction to the building of Tōdaiji, see Rosenfield, "Introduction," pp. 20–24. An introduction to the original Great Buddha Hall and subsequent major restoration campaigns can be found in Coaldrake, "Architecture of Todai-ji." There is a large body of scholarship in Japanese on the construction of Tōdaiji. For an accessible introduction to Shōmu's attempts to establish a new capital, his eventual return to Heijōkyō, and the subsequent construction of Tōdaiji, see Shigaken Bunkazai Hogo Kyōkai et al., *Shōmu Tennō to sono jidai*.

- 8 Presently, it is popularly perceived that Shōmu established Tōdaiji to serve as the umbrella institution (*sō kokubunji* 総国分寺) overseeing all *kokubunji*. Yoshikawa Shinji, however, cautions that as far as we can trace from documentary evidence, the concept of *sō kokubunji* only came about in the medieval period. Yoshikawa, "Kokunbunji," p. 88.
- 9 The exact date of completion of the Great Buddha Hall is unclear. According to the *Essential Record of Tōdaiji* (*Tōdaiji yōroku* 東大寺要録), compiled in the twelfth century, the Great Buddha Hall was completed by 751, a year prior to the Eye-Opening Ceremony. However, the *Chronicles of Japan, Continued* (*Shoku Nihongi* 続日本紀; completed in 797) records that in the fourth month of 754, Shōmu, Kōmyō 光明, and Kōken 孝謙 (770–718) received the Bodhisattva Precepts "in front of" the Great Buddha Hall, suggesting that the hall was still under construction. The fact that the commemoration for the forty-ninth-day anniversary of Shōmu's death in 756 took place in nearby Kōfukuji 興福寺, but the one-year anniversary the following year was celebrated in Tōdaiji, most likely means that the Great Buddha Hall was completed sometime between the sixth month of 756 and the fifth month of 757. Okumura, "Kokuhō Tōdaiji Kondō chindangu," pp. 10–11.
- 10 Yoshimura Rei argues that Shōmu was determined to carry out the Eye-Opening Ceremony in 752 because it marked the two-hundredth anniversary of the formal introduction of Buddhism in 552 as it is recorded in the *Chronicles of Japan* (*Nihon shoki* 日本書紀). The construction was delayed significantly due to the change of venue, and the Great Buddha Hall was not yet fully done when Shōmu passed away in 756. The construction of

Vairocana Buddha sits cross-legged on a lotus pedestal. His right hand is raised in a "no-fear" gesture (*semui-in* 施無畏印), while his left hand, in a "wish-granting" gesture (*yogan-in* 与願印 or *segan-in* 施願印), rests on his knee. There were multiple conflagrations at Tōdaiji that significantly damaged the statue, including its head, torso, and entire mandorla. Fortunately, the lower half of the torso at the front and the pedestal still retain a large portion of the eighth-century original. In the early part of the twentieth century, the Great Buddha Hall went through a government-sponsored restoration.<sup>11</sup> The Tōdaiji objects were discovered between 1907 and 1908 from about forty-five centimeters below the surface of the raised dais at south, southwest, and north locations around the lotus pedestal.

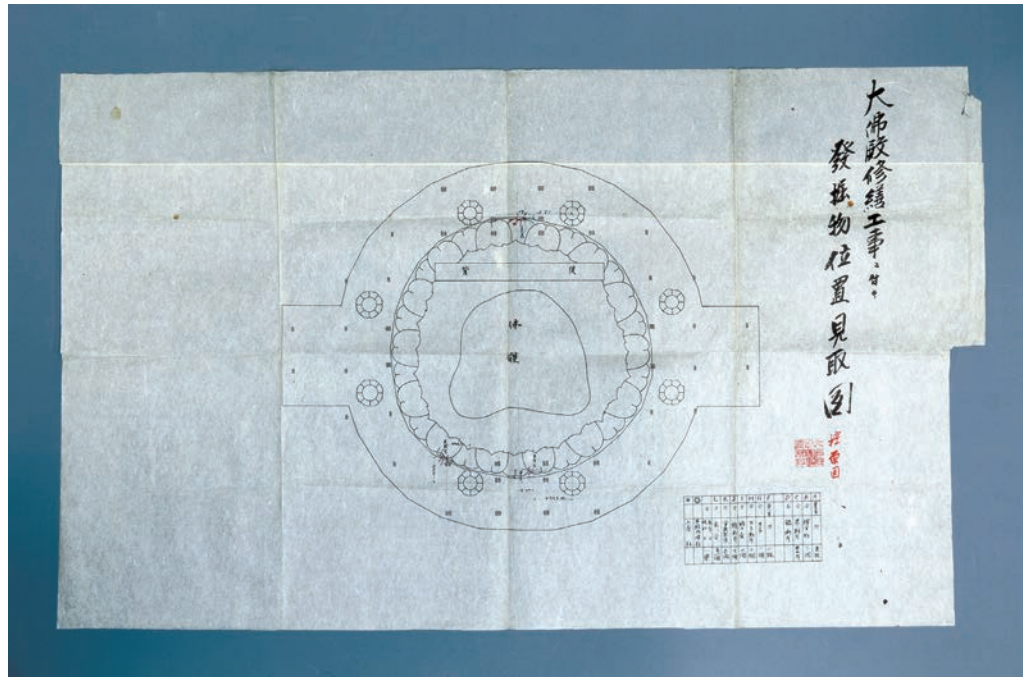
In 1976, Okumura Hideo published a diagram titled, "Layout of the Objects Discovered during the Restoration of the Great Buddha Hall" (*Daibutsuden shūzen kōji ni tsuki hakkutsu-butsu ichi mitorizu* 大仏殿修繕工事二付キ発掘物位置見取図; hereafter *Layout*) which he found among the private possessions of renowned art historian, sinologist, and Buddhologist, Ōmura Seigai 大村西崖 (1868–1927) (figure 3).<sup>12</sup> Most likely prepared around 1908, the *Layout* recorded not only the three locations of the unearthed Tōdaiji objects, but also their general arrangements, giving scholars for the first time a fighting chance to understand the original intent of the ensemble. Included at the bottom right corner of the diagram is an inventory of discovered objects. Below the title and next to the official seal of the Daibutsuden Restoration Office, one finds a notation in red ink clarifying that this is a "copy" of some original.

In 2011, what may have been the original drawing to this "copy" was found among nearly one thousand diagrams and photographs documenting the restoration project that were stored in a "cabinet" (*tansu* タンス) inside Tōdaiji storage (figure 4).<sup>13</sup> Titled, "Diagram

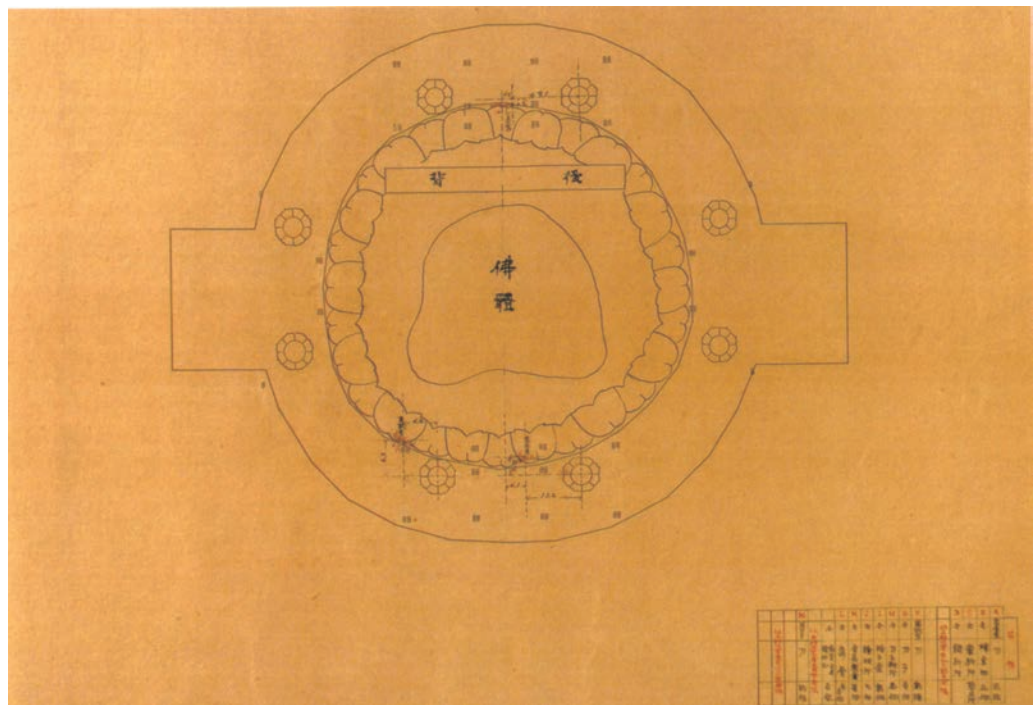
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the mandorla for Vairocana Buddha did not commence until 763. Yoshimura, "Tōdaiji Daibutsu kaigen-e." For a concise timeline of key events surrounding the initial building of Tōdaiji, see Nara Kenritsu Kashihara Kōkogaku Kenkyūjo Fuzoku Hakubutsukan, *Daibutsu kaigen*, p. 71.

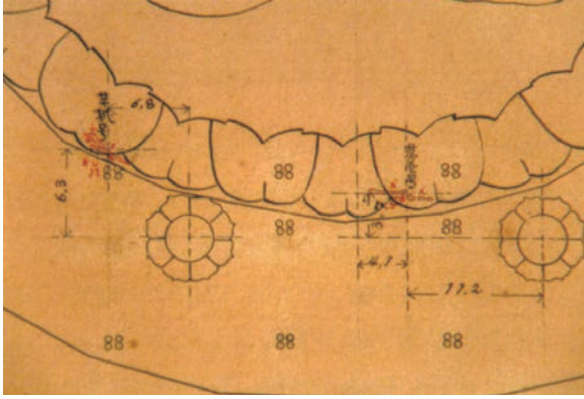
- 11 There are conflicting records regarding when this restoration project began, but the general consensus is that the actual work was underway by the first few years of the twentieth century. Tsukamoto, "Konkai no hozon shūri," p. 3.
- 12 Okumura, "Kokuhō Tōdaiji Kondō chindangu."
- 13 According to Bandō Toshihiko, it is unclear when the documentation concerning the restoration project were placed in the



**Figure 3.** Layout of the objects discovered during the restoration of the Great Buddha Hall. Meiji period, 1907 or 1908. In the collection of Tokyo Geijutsu Daigaku Bijutsu Gakubu Kingendai Bijutsushi Daigaku-shi Kenkyū Sentā. Courtesy of Geidai Archives Center of Modern Art.



**Figure 4.** Diagram with the locations where the ancient swords were discovered (detail). Meiji period, 1907 or 1908. In the collection of Tōdaiji. Reproduced from Gangōji Bunkazai Kenkyūjo, *Kokuhō Tōdaiji Kondō chindangu*, p. 311.



**Figure 5.** The location and state of swords discovered from the south and southwest cavities. Diagram with the locations where the ancient swords were discovered (detail). Reproduced from Gangōji Bunkazai Kenkyūjo, *Kokuhō Tōdaiji kondō chindangu*, p. 311.

with the Locations Where the Ancient Swords Were Discovered” (*Kotō hakkutsu ichi no zu* 古刀発掘位置之図; hereafter *Locations*), this drawing also includes an inventory of objects at the bottom right corner. But unlike the *Layout*, this inventory shows modifications in different ink, relaying that the diagram itself was likely prepared immediately following the first discovery in 1907, then expanded as more artifacts were unearthed.<sup>14</sup> The drawing of the three cavities on the *Locations* and *Layout* are nearly identical, and they are consistent with the brief written accounts of the discovery. The items listed on the two inventories also match the content of the remaining Tōdaiji objects.<sup>15</sup> For this reason, it is safe to conclude that *Locations* and *Layout* present us with reliable documentation of the Tōdaiji objects at the time of their discovery.

cabinet or when the cabinet was placed in storage. Bandō, “Daibutsuden,” p. 309. Katori Tadahiko first introduced this drawing in 1976 as an appendix to his article. See Katori, “Tōdaiji Daibutsu no sōzō-ji,” pp. 99–102.

<sup>14</sup> Bandō, “Daibutsuden,” p. 310.

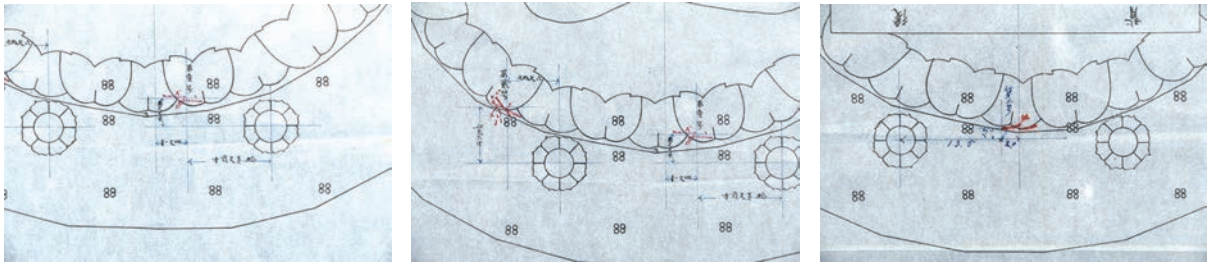
<sup>15</sup> A discrepancy exists between the *Locations* and the inventory of artifacts Ueda Sanpei reproduces in his article regarding the location of discovery for some of the glass beads. Ueda’s article also fails to mention where the scales of the armor were found. Because Ueda was not present at the time of discovery, he had no means to confirm the accuracy of the inventory in his possession. This discrepancy does not affect the argument of this essay, but it is worth noting that for the above reasons I believe the *Locations* and *Layout* are more reliable documentation of the discovery. Ueda, “Tōdaiji Daibutsuden,” pp. 68–70. A convenient comparative chart of how the Tōdaiji objects are listed in primary sources and seminal works can be found in Tsukamoto, “Konkai no hozon shūri,” pp. 6–7.

The *Locations* and *Layout* present a birds-eye view of Vairocana Buddha and its pedestal in black ink. The large circle with the square left and right protrusions indicates the stone dais. The central portion of this dais originally constituted the core of the stone outer lotus pedestal for the Vairocana statue but was damaged in the 1180 conflagration that decimated the Great Buddha Hall. The eight large lotus symbols show the location of the wooden posts on the dais. The smaller symbols with a cluster of four circles represent the scaffolding put up during the 1907–1908 restoration that led to the discovery of the deposits. In both diagrams, the locations of the deposits are labeled in red ink using the alphabetic letters A through M, corresponding to the inventory. The location of each cavity is given as a distance from the nearest dais posts.

The outline of Vairocana Buddha and its surroundings in the two diagrams are nearly identical but there are differences. Based on the title of the *Locations*, the main concern of those who prepared it was the six swords discovered at the three cavities. They carefully record the exact placement of the swords within the cavity (letters A, E, and M) and their state of preservation (figure 5). On the other hand, the *Layout*’s interest lies in recording all of the objects and not just the swords. Consequently, the *Layout* indicates the distance of the cavities from the nearest posts in light blue—as opposed to black ink used for the *Locations*—allowing the viewers to read the arrangement of each object more easily. Finally, at the southwest cavity, the *Layout* indicates more carefully the locations where the silver jar and crystal containers were unearthed (I through K).<sup>16</sup>

According to the *Layout*, in all three locations, some or all of the artifacts were buried just beneath the edge of the bronze pedestal (figure 6). The types of objects included differ from one location to the next with the exception of the swords. In addition to the pair of swords, from the south side also found were a metal lock in the shape of a cicada, fragments of a lacquered

<sup>16</sup> The fact that the *Layout* is noted to be a “copy” may mean that at least two diagrams were produced at the time of the discovery, possibly for different reasons. Notably, when Katori first discovered the *Locations*, it was accompanied by three colored life-size drawings of select swords from the Tōdaiji objects. This indicates that the *Locations* was prepared specifically to mark where the swords in the drawings were unearthed. Katori, “Tōdaiji Daibutsu no sōzō-ji,” pp. 101–2.



**Figure 6.** (From left to right) South, southwest, and north cavities. Layout of the objects discovered during the restoration of the Great Buddha Hall (detail). Courtesy of Geidai Archives Center of Modern Art.

box, and scales from armor (figure 6, left).<sup>17</sup> The southwest cavity yielded the greatest number of objects. Beyond the swords, there were fragments of small knives; a silver-lidded jar, which included sixteen crystals and two small crystal containers that held a total of twelve pearls; a small flower-shaped mirror; glass beads and precious jewels of different sizes; and a human tooth and bone-like fragment (figure 6, center). The only artifacts discovered from the north side (figure 6, right) were the two swords.

No record of these objects has yet been found, creating a significant challenge to understanding the circumstances surrounding their emplacement. Stylistically and scientifically, however, the Tōdaiji objects belong to the mid-eighth century, contemporaneous with the initial construction of Vairocana Buddha, with the exception of the glass beads found from the southwest cavity.<sup>18</sup> According to the 2011 analysis, the 155 glass beads include pieces that may have been produced sometime after the late Heian 平安 period (794–1195).<sup>19</sup> Ōga Katsuhiko hypothesizes that these later beads were buried or scattered onto the dais after a restoration. Unfortunately, the inventories on both the *Locations* and *Layout* only list the glass beads as “one-bag full,” bundling them together with Nara-period amber pieces also unearthed from the same general location

(letter L; figure 6, center).<sup>20</sup> On the *Layout*, location L seems slightly away from the bronze pedestal instead of directly underneath it, making Ōga’s hypothesis compelling. The conflagration in the twelfth century damaged the stone outer dais. New objects could have been emplaced for the purpose of commemorating its restoration. Neither the *Locations* nor *Layout* include enough detail, however, concerning how the beads were arranged at the time of discovery, nor whether there was a difference in depth between the layers of compounded earth of the dais from where each of the artifacts was found.

### State of the Field: The Mystery of Two Swords and the Function of the Tōdaiji Objects

Okumura Hideo’s 1976 article that questioned the validity of the identification as *chindangu* is the landmark study on the Tōdaiji objects after Ueda Sanpei’s initial introduction. Commonly, *chindangu* were emplaced into the platform (*kidan* 基壇) for an architectural structure either during its construction or after its completion, but prior to the building of the structure itself. The Tōdaiji objects, however, were less than a meter below the surface of the dais, placing them about two meters above the actual platform for the Great Buddha Hall. In addition, what is presently the surface of the “dais” was originally not the dais at all but the core of the stone outer lotus pedestal that rose 2.5 meters above the floor of the building (figure 7).<sup>21</sup> Okumura

17 At the time of discovery, the lacquered box fragments were recorded as “leather box,” but the 2015 analysis did not find any traces of leather. Eno, “Urushi seihin,” pp. 172–74.

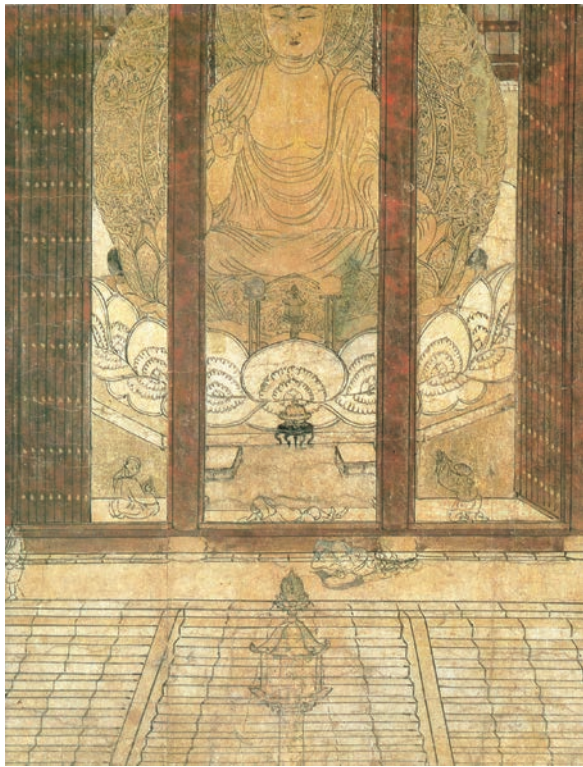
18 For a recent assessment of when each item in the Tōdaiji objects was created, see the essays included in Gangōji Bunkazai Kenkyūjo, *Kokuhō Tōdaiji Kondō chindangu*.

19 Due to a lack of sufficient samples, presently it is inconclusive whether or not the beads exhibiting chemical composition comparable to glass from the Heian period or later are actually from the later period. See Ōga, “Tōdaiji Kondō shutsudo gyokurui.” For a more detailed data analysis, see Tamura, “Tōdaiji Kondō chindangu no garasu kodama,” pp. 109–24.

20 Ueda, “Kagaku bunseki.”

21 Okumura, “Kokuhō Tōdaiji Kondō chindangu,” p. 7. A scene from the twelfth-century *Picture Scroll of the Cause and Effect of Mt. Shigi* (*Shigisan engi emaki* 信貴山縁起絵巻) portrays an additional stone lotus pedestal on an octagonal base surrounding

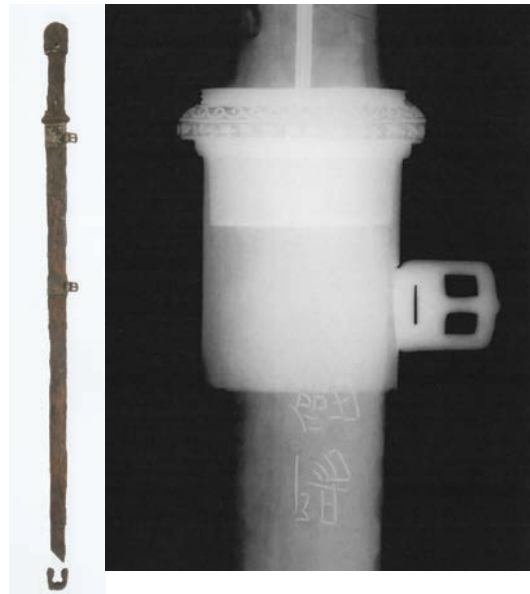




**Figure 7.** The original bronze inner and stone outer lotus pedestals. Picture scroll of the *Cause and Effect of Mt. Shigi* (*Shigisan engi emaki*), scroll 3. Chōgōsonshiji, Nara Prefecture. Heian period, 12th c. Reproduced from Murashige, *Shigisan*, figure 9.

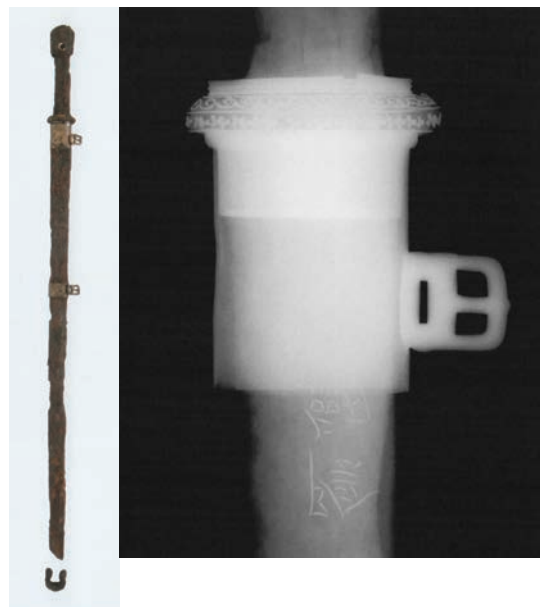
instead reviewed the milestone events in the construction of Vairocana Buddha and its hall, concluding that the deposits were likely made either at the first-year anniversary of Shōmu's death in 757, or sometime after Kōmyō's 光明 (701–760) death in 760.<sup>22</sup>

In 2011, an x-ray analysis of the Tōdaiji objects revealed the inscriptions on the two swords unearthed from the southwest cavity, one reading “Yang Sword” (*yōken* 陽劍; figures 8a and 8b), and the other, “Yin Sword” (*inken* 陰劍; figures 8c and 8d).<sup>23</sup> The Yang Sword is 98.5 centimeters with the blade measuring 79.2 centimeters in length. The Yin Sword is overall slightly shorter than the Yang Sword, measuring 97.8



**8a.**

**8b.**



**8c.**

**8d.**

**Figure 8a.** Yang Sword (*yōken*) and **8c.** Yin Sword (*inken*) paired with **8b** and **8d**, their respective inscriptions (x-ray). Discovered from southwest side (figure 6 center, F<sup>1</sup> and F<sup>11</sup>) from beneath the Seated Vairocana Buddha, Daibutsuden, Tōdaiji. Nara period, mid-8th c. Presently in the collection of Tōdaiji. Reproduced from Gangōji Bunkazai Kenkyūjo, *Kokuhō Tōdaiji Kondō chindangu*, pp. 210, 213, 216, and 219.

the bronze pedestal. The stone pedestal was remodeled during the Kamakura 鎌倉 (1185–1333) and Edo 江戸 (1603–1867) periods, and became the stone “platform” that we see today. Kawamura, *Tōdaiji*, p. 58.

22 Okumura, “Kokuhō Tōdaiji Kondō chindangu,” pp. 17–18.

23 For a summary regarding the finding of the inscriptions, see Tsukamoto, “Konkai no hozon shūri.”



Figure 9. Entry on *in hōken* and *yō hōken*. *Kokka chinpōchō* (detail). Nara period, 756. Reproduced from Tōdaiji Myūjiamu, *Kokuhō*, p. 20.

centimeters, but the blade itself is virtually identical in length, measuring 79.0 centimeters (figure 8 b). On each sword, the inscription was incised on the blade (possibly with gold inlay). Their discovery caused a sensation because *inken* and *yōken* closely resemble the names given to a pair of swords on the *List of the Nation's Rare Treasures* (*Kokka chinpōchō* 国家珍宝帳; hereafter *Chinpōchō*). *Chinpōchō* is the inventory of over six hundred artifacts offered to Tōdaiji's Vairocana Buddha upon Shōmu's death in 756 (hereafter "756 offering"). The donated items were subsequently stored in the temple's repository, Shōsōin 正倉院.<sup>24</sup> The named swords in question appear under the category of "one hundred swords": one listed as the "Yin Precious Sword" (*in hōken* or *in no hōken* 陰寶劍), and the other, "Yang Precious Sword" (*yō hōken* or *yō no hōken* 陽寶劍) (figure 9).

The physical swords that correspond to this entry no longer exist, but we can trace their removal through

24 The most comprehensive study of the Shōsōin arms and armor is Kondō, *Nihon kodai no bugu*.

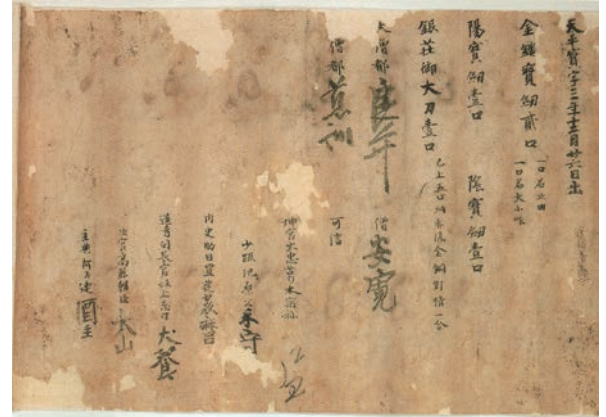


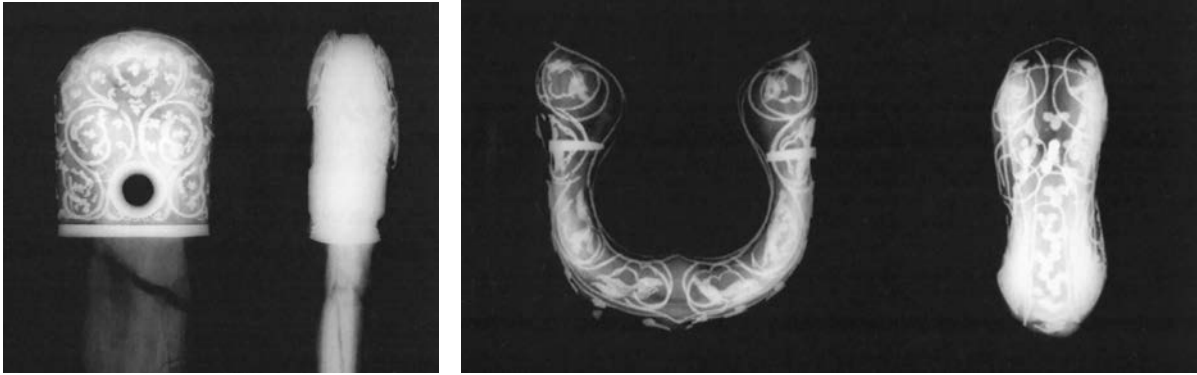
Figure 10. *Shutsuzōchō* record concerning removal of five swords. Nara period, 759. Reproduced from Tōdaiji Myūjiamu, *Kokuhō*, p. 21.

documentation. The entry for the Precious Swords in *Chinpōchō* comes with small rectangular addenda pasted immediately above the main headings, noting that they were "removed items" (*jomotsu* 除物). The "record of removal" (*shutsuzōchō* 出藏帳) dated to the twenty-sixth day of the twelfth month of 759 corroborates the addenda (figure 10). The record (hereafter *Shutsuzōchō-1*), which documents the monastery's permission to extract select items from the repository, lists five swords, including the Precious Swords. If the Yin/Yang Swords in the Tōdaiji objects were indeed the very swords listed on *Chinpōchō*—and subsequently retrieved from the repository in 759—the two documents can provide a much-needed historical context. Furthermore, if the Tōdaiji objects were buried at the same time, *Shutsuzōchō-1* may also determine the timing of dedication for all the deposits by association. Based on this discovery, some scholars have attempted to connect other items in the Tōdaiji objects to pieces noted "removed" in *Chinpōchō*.<sup>25</sup>

The matter, however, is not so simple. Despite the compelling similarity in the names, the physical traits of the two sets of swords do not fully match each other.<sup>26</sup> *Chinpōchō* states:

25 For example, see Morimoto, "Kondō chindangu"; Tsukamoto, "Tōdaiji Kondō chindangu no hozon shūri"; Tsukamoto, "Konkai no hozon shūri ni itaru," pp. 6–16; Hashimoto, "Tōdaiji Kondō chindangu."

26 Yoshizawa, "Tōdaiji Kondō chindangu no chōsa kenkyū," p. 117. See also Kondō, "Kokka chinpōchō."



**Figure 11.** Ivy motif done in gold inlay on the hilt (left) and at the end cap for the scabbard (right). *Yōken* (detail). Reproduced from Gangōji Bunkazai Kenkyūjo, *Kokuhō Tōdaiji Kondō chindangu*, p. 213.

*Yō no Hōken* (one item), *In no Hōken* (one item)

The blades for both swords measure 2-*shaku* 6-*sun* 9-*bu* [about 79.6 cm]; single edge; each comes with the characters “treasure sword” [*hōken*] inscribed; rosewood pommel; ray skin hilt; circular strap hold, scabbard mouth, cord knobs, and end cap are lined with gold; cord knobs and end cap are painted in gold lacquer and gilt; purple braided cord; purple leather cord for strap hold; blackish-purple twill cord for strap; crimson ground brocade bag with scarlet twill backing.<sup>27</sup>

The description does overlap with some details we can observe on the Tōdaiji swords. The Yin/Yang Swords come with single-edged blades of about 79 centimeters. Fragments of ray skin remain on their hilts. Although their colors are unknown, each sword had pieces of leather and twill silk still on them. On the other hand, critical differences include the material used for the pommels and surface ornamentations.<sup>28</sup> According to *Chinpōchō*, the pommels of the two Precious Swords were made of rosewood, while those of the Yin/Yang Swords are iron. Unlike the pair in *Chinpōchō*, which apparently did not have any notable inlaid motif on

the surface, the Tōdaiji counterparts are adorned with a delicate ivy motif in gold inlay on the pommel and end cap of the scabbard (figure 11). The lining and gilding on the Shōsōin pair were done in gold, while the Yin/Yang Swords are adorned with silver lining around the scabbard mouth and on at least one of the cord knobs. Finally, the Tōdaiji pair used braided cords with gold threads for their strap holds, not purple leather, and one of the textiles used for the bag was not brocade but most likely a type of plain-weave *kasuri* 緋 fabric known as *higon* 秘錦 imported from Silla.<sup>29</sup>

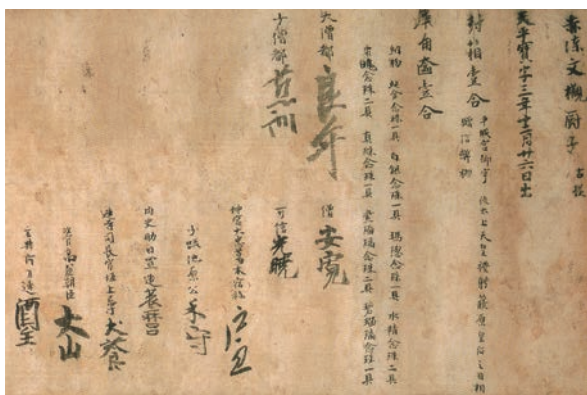
Only a handful of swords listed in *Chinpōchō* remain in Shōsōin, making it difficult to determine if the differences between the two sets of swords are within acceptable variations or significant enough to disregard their connection. Compilers of *Chinpōchō* did make mistakes, but the inventory uses notable physical traits to distinguish items within the same category.<sup>30</sup> The Precious Swords are the first items under its category, meaning they were the most treasured among the hundred swords dedicated during the 756 offering. It is difficult to imagine, therefore, that the compilers misidentified something so readily recognizable as the material of the pommels, presence of ornamental motifs, or types of threads, fabrics, and precious metals used.

27 For the transcription, see *Tōdaiji kenmotsuchō*, p. 438.

28 Kondō also notes the subtle discrepancies between the names of the swords (*inken* and *yōken*) and the counterparts recorded in *Chinpōchō* and *Shutsuzōchō-1* (*in no hōken* and *yō no hōken*), arguing that “yin” and “yang” were used in the inventory simply to distinguish the two swords that were virtually identical. Though Kondō’s meticulous categorization of Shōsōin weapons is significant, I agree with scholars such as Hashimoto Hidemasa and Tōno Haruyuki who argue for caution against ascribing too much meaning into the difference in the names. Kondō, “*Kokka chinpōchō*,” pp. 13–14; Hashimoto, “*Tōdaiji Kondō chindangu*,” pp. 103–4; Tōno, “*Yōken, inken*,” p. 285.

29 Yamada and Komura, “*Keikō zanketsu*,” pp. 294–95. Concerning *higon*, see Tōno, *Kentōshi*, pp. 141–60.

30 For instance, there are three entries in *Chinpōchō* that are accompanied by later notations on the margin stating, “No object found. Suspected duplicate entry” (*jitsu nashi jū sai utagau* 无實疑重載). *Tōdaiji kenmotsuchō*, pp. 436–37. For a detailed examination of all the addenda to *Chinpōchō*, see Yoneda, “*Kokka chinpōchō*’ no fusen.”



**Figure 12.** *Shutsuzōchō* record concerning the removal of items from the Zelkova cabinet (*Shutsuzōchō-2*). Nara period, 759. Reproduced from Tōdaiji Myūjiamu, *Kokuhō*, p. 21.

*Shutsuzōchō-1* also warrants reconsideration as evidence to connect the *Chinpōchō* pair to the Tōdaiji counterparts. *Shutsuzōchō-1* lists three other swords removed at this time: another pair of “precious swords” (*hōken*) with gold inlay ornamentation named “Sukita” 次田 and “Daishōgui” 大小咋, and a straight sword with silver decoration. But *Chinpōchō* does not list any swords that fully match them.<sup>31</sup> This means that by 759, Shōsōin had already stored items other than the 756 offering.<sup>32</sup>

*Shutsuzōchō-1* is typically considered in tandem with another record of removal that comes with the identical date of issue (hereafter *Shutsuzōchō-2*; figure 12). *Shutsuzōchō-2* records the discharge of two sets of items: a “locked box” containing personal documents exchanged between Shōmu and Queen Consort Kōmyō,

and another box made of rhinoceros horn with eleven Buddhist prayer beads (*nenju* 念珠). The two *shutsuzōchō* have been used as key justifications to consider the Yin/Yang Swords within the eighth-century religiopolitical circumstances and to connect other pieces in the Tōdaiji objects to items listed as “removed” in *Chinpōchō*.<sup>33</sup> Tantalizingly, some of the beads found from the southwest cavity come with holes, indicating that they were strung together possibly as Buddhist prayer beads. The cicada-shaped lock and fragments of ornate lacquered box seem precious enough to have held the personal exchanges between the royal couple.

Once again, however, the issue is not so simple. Although the two *shutsuzōchō* share the same date, there are differences in detail. At the right edge of *Shutsuzōchō-2* appears a notation of an imperial heirloom called the “Red-Lacquered Zelkova Cabinet with Fine-Grain Pattern” (*Sekishitsu bunkanboku no onzushi* 赤漆文槻木御厨子) also included in the 756 offering, clarifying that two boxes were removed from this cabinet.<sup>34</sup> The discharge is again confirmed in *Chinpōchō* by the addenda, *jomotsu*. We have no information on why these sets of objects required separate approval forms. Yet the two *shutsuzōchō* seem to at least reveal a difference in bureaucratic procedures for removing items particularly important to the imperial lineage and those that were less dear to the imperial family or not as politically significant, albeit precious. At the end of both *shutsuzōchō*, autographs of Tōdaiji officials are included immediately below their titles. Intriguingly, a cleric named Kōgyō 光暎 autographed *Shutsuzōchō-2* but not -1. Apparently for the swords, it was not necessary for all ten members to approve.

Beyond this potential procedural difference, the existence of two *shutsuzōchō* with the same date could also mean that the sets of items were retrieved for a different occasion. Neither *shutsuzōchō* includes any information regarding the purpose of removal. However, *Shutsuzōchō-1* has a note stating that the swords were “placed in a red-lacquered lidded box with gilt-bronze nails” (*ijō gokō o sekishitsu kondō-tei no hitsu ichigō ni osamu* 已上五口納赤漆金銅釘櫃一合). This tells that

31 Scholars, including Kondō Yoshikazu, hypothesize that one of the other pair of named swords (Sukita and Daishōgui) may match the shorter *tachi* 横刀 sword in *Chinpōchō* noted as *jomotsu*. This identification, however, is problematic because the name of the sword, included as the singular identifying trait in the *Shutsuzōchō-1*, does not appear in *Chinpōchō*. In addition, the description of the three swords in *shutsuzōchō* does not match any of the *Chinpōchō* headings. *Shutsuzōchō* seems to mirror the exact phrasing in *Chinpōchō*. If so, it is more reasonable to consider that the pair of swords with gold inlay is also an example of items stored in the Shōsōin repository but not part of Kōmyō and Kōken’s initial donation. For Kondō’s discussion on this matter, see *Nihon kodai no bugu*, pp. 79–82.

32 In addition to the 756 offering, the Shōsōin repository stored ritual implements and objects donated during notable ceremonies, including the Eye-Opening Ceremony in 752, the one-year death anniversary for Shōmu’s mother in 755, the funeral for Shōmu in 756, and the one-year anniversary of Shōmu’s death in 757. Hashimoto, *Shōsōin no rekishi*, pp. 17–18, 64–65.

33 For studies that explore the function of the Tōdaiji objects on the premise that they were initially part of the Shōsōin treasures, see Sugimoto, “Kōmyō Kōgō to Shōsōin hōmotsu”; Okumura, “Tōdaiji Kondō chindangu.”

34 For a recent study on the Zelkova Cabinet, see Yoneda, *Shōsōin hōmotsu*, pp. 111–62.

the five swords were removed at least to be stored together in a new container, if not used at the same occasion.<sup>35</sup> Only five swords (not six) were removed and none of the items included in either *shutsuzōchō* is an exact match to the Tōdaiji objects. In short, without additional collaborating evidence, we cannot unequivocally conclude that the Yin/Yang Swords in the Tōdaiji objects are indeed the Precious Swords from the 756 offering. Because the comparative studies between the remaining Tōdaiji objects and items listed as *jomotsu* in *Chinpōchō* rely on the provenance of Yin/Yang Swords as their justification, much of their claims are also critically undermined.

### A Complication: The Timing of the Deposit of the Southwest Objects

In sum, presently we do not know if there are other objects buried into the dais of Vairocana Buddha.<sup>36</sup> Despite scholars' efforts, it is not possible to place the Tōdaiji objects into a historical context in any certain terms. Furthermore, it is possible that the glass beads discovered from the southwest cavity include pieces from a later period. Tōdaiji retained its centrality within Japanese Buddhism even after the political center moved away from the Nara basin in 784. The Shōsōin treasures attest that devotees continued to make offerings to the monastery. Given the scientific evidence, we must entertain the possibility that there might have been additional offerings deposited around Vairocana

Buddha at some point in the history of the Great Buddha Hall. The possible inclusion of later glass beads, therefore, warrants additional discussion to move any further with our investigation into the devotional function of the Tōdaiji objects.

Notably, the 1907–1908 restoration also unearthed a few other later pieces from somewhere on the dais, including a fragment of a mirror from the Heian period (or later), a small block of bronze, and iron nails, making clear that deposits were made onto the dais later than the Nara period.<sup>37</sup> If so, does the fact that the glass beads may include later pieces mean all the Tōdaiji objects were deposited sometime after the Heian period? Not necessarily. Returning to the *Layout*, the distribution of the alphabetic letters for the southwest cavity shows two clusters of items: those discovered from directly underneath the pedestal (F, G, H, I, and K) and others from locations slightly further away (J and L). The accounts of discovery provide no insight on this matter, but based on this pattern of scattering, it is possible that the southwest cavity included deposits from two different periods.

The convention of devotional deposit in East Asian Buddhism dictates that objects from past offerings when discovered were either removed from the site or re-emplaced. New deposits were often prepared either to replace, or be offered alongside, the older ones as part of merit-making for donors involved in the re-emplacement.<sup>38</sup> If the glass beads at location L were unearthed together with pieces of eighth-century amber, then

35 Interestingly, on the fourth day of the first month of 760, Emi no Oshikatsu 惠美押勝 (a.k.a. Fujiwara no Nakamaro 藤原仲麻呂, 706–764) was promoted to the highest official rank of Daishi 大師, an equivalent to the earlier Dajō Daijin 太政大臣, which had been vacant since the death of his grandfather, Fujiwara no Fuhito 藤原不比等 (659–720). Prestigious swords, including the pair of Yin and Yang Treasure Swords, named after the binary forces (*qi* 氣) that constitute the universe itself, would have been an appropriate imperial gift commemorating Oshikatsu's promotion. *Shoku Nihongi*, Tenpyō Hōji 3 (759).11.30 and Tenpyō Hōji 4 (760).1.4. SN 3: 334–35, 340–41. As an alternate theory, Yoneda Yūsuke hypothesizes that the swords may have been worn by Junnin 淳仁 (733–765; r. 758–764) during the New Year's rite in 760. Yoneda, "Kokka chinpōchō' no fusen," pp. 18–20.

36 Yoshizawa Satoru comments that enough scaffolding was set up during the restoration so that if there were more objects the workers would most likely have found them. Naturally, this does not mean that no other object was interned initially. However, given the amount of damage the Great Buddha Hall sustained, if there were any, they might have been lost over the centuries. Yoshizawa, "Tōdaiji Kondō chindangu' no chōsa kenkyū," p. 146.

37 Ibid., pp. 140–45.

38 A latter example would be the reliquary discovered from the heart pillar for the west pagoda at Taimadera 當麻寺 (Nara Prefecture), which included the initial seventh-century nested containers surrounded by offerings from the seventh century, Heian period, 1219, 1767, and 1914. In China, the famed underground crypt at Famensi 法門寺 (Shaanxi Province), which received an imperial veneration roughly every thirty years during the Tang dynasty, retained few items donated by earlier emperors alongside offerings made in 873 by Emperor Yizong 懿宗 (r. 859–873). In addition, Sonya S. Lee discusses the case of Jingzhi Monastery (Jingzhi 靜志寺), which at the time of discovery in 1969 held items from five distinct relic burials in 453, 606, 858, 889, and 977. On the Korean Peninsula, although the exact layout of the objects is unclear due to looting in 1964, the former nine-story pagoda at Hwangnyongsa 황룡사 (皇龍寺), Gyeongju, most likely held offerings from at least two (and possibly three) periods: first, its initial completion in 645; and at the time of its restoration completed in 871. For Taimadera reliquary, see Yamashita and Naitō, Taimadera. See also Lee, *Surviving*, pp. 202–63; Gukrib Jungang Bakmulgwan, *Bulsari jangeom*, p. 112; Choi, "Early Korean and Japanese Reliquaries," p. 183.

one could surmise that Tōdaiji also followed this re-emplacement custom during subsequent restorations.

Location L is slightly away from the bronze pedestal. Considering the shallowness of the cavities, one could easily imagine that the conversion of the outer stone pedestal into the dais we see today disturbed the Nara-period deposits.<sup>39</sup> Then upon completion of the circular dais, the pieces that were accidentally unearthed may have been buried back together with new pieces. This means the amber pieces, tooth, and bone-like fragment found together with the glass beads in location L, as well as the eighth-century bronze mirror discovered from location J—even further away from the bronze pedestal—may reflect an arrangement of some later deposit, although stylistically and scientifically they date from the eighth century.

Conversely, the same convention also allows us to estimate the original moment of emplacement: if all the objects that were unearthed together date from just one period, then we can reasonably deduce the timing of their burial based on the timing of their production. The south and north cavities show no sign of the scattering of objects, and all of the pieces discovered from these two locations are from the Nara period. In addition, the tips of *kaeribana* 反花—the upturned lotus petals around the bottom of a pedestal—directly above the south and north cavities retain much or all of the eighth-century original.<sup>40</sup> If the petals had needed no significant repairs, there would have been little reason to disturb the earth immediately below them, thus making it likely that the objects at these two locations survived intact. The bronze pedestal was completed by circa 756, which provides the earliest possible timing of the initial burial.

In contrast, the tip of *kaeribana* above the southwest cavity shows signs of repair from a restoration sometime prior to the eighteenth century, and *kaeribana* immediately to the left (west) was also repaired during the restoration of Vairocana Buddha in 1686–1692.<sup>41</sup> If

repairing *kaeribana* disturbed the surface of the dais underneath, it could have exposed the buried artifacts at locations F through K. Does this mean that even the contents of the southwest cavity immediately below the pedestal—which include the Yin/Yang Swords and the silver jar with crystal containers—must be excluded from a discussion of the Tōdaiji objects in the eighth century? Once again, not necessarily so.

Yin/Yang Swords and the silver jar are contemporaneous to pieces discovered from the south and north cavities.<sup>42</sup> The *Layout* shows that the arrangement of the objects discovered from below the pedestal at the southwest cavity (F through K) shares similarities to the south and north locations, suggestive of a coherent program. The two swords at each location were placed side by side aligned horizontally to the edge of the pedestal. Other items at the south (B, C, and D) and southwest (G, H, I, and K) cavities were found just next to where the pair of swords meet one another to the side further away from the statue. It is noteworthy that although at first glance the three sets of swords seem almost identical in their arrangement, there is one key difference. As opposed to the southwest swords, F<sup>I</sup> and F<sup>II</sup>, which were discovered clearly crisscrossing each other in an X, the A<sup>I</sup> and A<sup>II</sup> (south) and M (north) swords were positioned side by side with one sword slightly closer to the center of the pedestal than its counterpart, but not actually crossing each other. Given the likelihood that the south and north cavities survive from their initial emplacement, one can deduce that A<sup>I</sup> and A<sup>II</sup>, and M, reflect the intended arrangement of the eighth-century donors. If so, the similarities and the subtle difference in the positioning of the F<sup>I</sup> and F<sup>II</sup> swords could evidence an effort by someone who was not cognizant of the coherent program of the original donation to re-bury the most significant pieces unearthed from the southwest location as close as possible to the arrangement in which they were discovered.

39 After the Meiji-period restoration, the area immediately surrounding the bronze pedestal was sealed using mortar, making it impossible to confirm the cavities by sight. Regarding the present condition of the area surrounding the pedestal, see Okumura, “Tōdaiji Kondō chindangu,” pp. 169–70.

40 Maeda, “Tōdaiji Daibutsu no chūzō,” pp. 35, 41–42, 48.

41 In 1968, a team of scholars examined the twenty-eight *kaeribana* of the bronze pedestal. They found clear differences between the areas that retain the original and those with repairs. The team reserved judgment on the exact timing of repairs, however,

except for the ones carried out at the end of the seventeenth century. *Ibid.*, pp. 29–31, 36–37.

42 Tōno Haruyuki argues that the calligraphic style of the incised inscriptions on the Yin and Yang Swords (F<sup>I</sup> and F<sup>II</sup>) is contemporary with that of *Chinpōchō*, placing them around the mid-eighth century. The silver jar is also identified to be from the eighth century through its shape and the technique used to secure the handle on the lid. See Tōno, “Yōken, inken,” p. 286; and Yoshizawa, “‘Tōdaiji Kondō chindangu’ no chōsa kenkyū,” p. 55.

## The Efficacy of Concealment in the Tōdaiji Objects

Conclusions about the Tōdaiji objects based on the available partial information are these: at the time of the 1907–1908 discovery, the objects at the south and north locations were in their original arrangement; the objects at the southwest location may have been reburied sometime prior to the twentieth century, but at least the items from immediately underneath the pedestal generally retained their arrangement from the initial emplacement; the most likely timing of the initial emplacement is the latter half of the eighth century sometime after 756. According to Tōno Haruyuki, the calligraphic style used in *Chinpōchō* and the inscriptions on the Yin/Yang Swords were newly popularized in the Tenpyō Shōhō 天平勝宝 era (749–757), placing the initial deposit closer to 756 than later.<sup>43</sup>

As offerings worthy of Vairocana Buddha, the Tōdaiji objects match in quality to the items from the 756 offering. Tōdaiji's status as the apex of all state-maintained temples meant that the access to the central statue was limited to the imperial family, clerics of the temple, and courtiers within the inner circle of the Yamato rulership. In other words, burying an offering underneath its pedestal could not have been possible without the approval of—if not an active instigation from—the reigning sovereign or the Queen Dowager Kōmyō. Thus, although it is not possible to tie any of the Tōdaiji objects to the 756 offering, the two sets can still be considered as the twin pinnacles of the eighth-century gifts to Tōdaiji. The types of artifacts in the Tōdaiji objects, in fact, overlap with the 756 offering in a significant way. If they were made around the same period by the same group of people to be offered to the same deity, why did the Tōdaiji objects need to be buried in the first place instead of simply being offered to the Buddha to be stored in the temple's repository? What was the difference in nuance of expected devotional efficacy between the two types of offerings? To inquire further, we must now reconsider the hypothesis that the Tōdaiji objects were *chindangu*.

*Chindan* 鎮壇 (platform pacification) is often discussed in tandem with a similar practice of *jichin* 地鎮 (ground pacification). The earliest use of the term *chin-*

*dan* appears in *Mizukagami* 水鏡 compiled between 1170–1195.<sup>44</sup> However, examples from sites such as Sakatadera 坂田寺, Kōfukuji 興福寺, and Hokkeji 法華寺 attest that this ritual was already performed by the Nara period.<sup>45</sup> Strictly speaking, a *jichin* ceremony takes place prior to breaking the ground to celebrate the earth spirit and receive divine blessing for the construction, while *chindan* sanctified the foundation for a building.<sup>46</sup> Items such as swords and small knives included in the Tōdaiji objects appear in other instances of *chindan* deposits, but as Okumura Hideo already observed, unlike typical *chindangu*, the Tōdaiji objects were buried after the completion of the Great Buddha Hall and central deity.<sup>47</sup> Pragmatic concerns probably had an impact on the location and timing of the burial. The combined height of the present statue and its pedestal is about eighteen meters with an estimated weight of roughly three hundred and seventy tons. The statue was so colossal that it had to be constructed first, and its pedestals, platform, and the Buddha Hall built around it. The process, thus, had to be different from a typical construction of a Buddhist monastery, where the central deity was built concurrently with, or after, the structure that housed it. The logistical complexity of its casting must also have restricted when and where one could have made a deposit. Yet, the cavities for the Tōdaiji objects were small enough (each hole dug at the time of the restoration was about 2 meters in diameter) that it would have been possible to carry out a more conventional *chindan* deposit if that had indeed been what was desired.

Broadening our scope, the Tōdaiji objects overlap with other ritual burials in the kind of items offered. Kang Woo-bang observes that the types of artifacts for

44 Ishida, *Reibun bukkyōgo daijiten*, s.v. "chindan."

45 In the Asuka 飛鳥 (ca. first half of sixth century–710) and Nara periods, *jichin* and *chindan* rites were called *chinsai* 鎮祭, *shizume matsu* 鎮め祭 ("pacification ceremony"), or simply *shizume* 鎮め ("pacification"). For a concise discussion of the documented instances of *chinsai* during the seventh and eighth centuries, see Mori and Yabunaka, *Chindangu kara miru kodai*, pp. 49–52.

46 In the Nara period, it is unclear whether or not the two ceremonies were distinguished so strictly. The practice was more formalized through the spread of esoteric Buddhism, particularly after the tenth century. For a general introduction to pacification practices, see, for example, Mori, "Jiin no jichin, chindan."

47 For other notable examples of *chindangu*, see Mori and Yabunaka, *Chindangu kara miru kodai*, pp. 33–35. Although they are outside of the scope of this investigation, mirrors and glass beads are also usual suspects among the objects offered during a *chindan* ceremony.

43 Tōno, "Yōken, inken," p. 286.



**Figure 13.** Seated Vairocana Buddha. Seoknameomsa 석남엄사 (石南嚴寺), Gyeongsangnam-do, South Korea. Stone. Unified Silla, 766. Reproduced from Gukrib Jungang Bakmulgwan, *Bulsari jangeom*, p. 38.

*chindan* and *jichin* were often indistinguishable from funeral burials or the enshrinement of Buddhist relics.<sup>48</sup> The same can be said of the Tōdaiji objects. The nesting of the crystal containers inside the silver lidded jar is more reminiscent of a reliquary ensemble than of any other type of ritual burial of the period, further depriving us of the reason to consider the Tōdaiji objects necessarily as *chindangu*.<sup>49</sup> A key question that has not yet been raised in the discussion of the Tōdaiji objects

48 Kang, "Kankoku kodai no shari kuyōgu, jichingu, chindangu." The central concern of Kang's article is to compare the offerings discovered on the seventh- and eighth-century Korean Peninsula and Japanese archipelago, focusing on two sets of sites (Bunhwangsa 분황사 [芬皇寺] and Asukadera, and Hwangnyongsa and Kōfukuji).

49 If they were buried at the same time as the other objects, then the inclusion of the tooth and bone-like fragment will naturally be the most direct connection to relic veneration. Okumura Hideo comments that the tooth and bone-like fragment may have been those of Shōmu. Morimoto Kōsei argues that the silver jar could correspond to a Buddhist reliquary, where the two crystal containers nested inside it symbolically held the "relics" of Shōmu and Kōmyō. The bodily fragments were discovered in the vicinity of the glass beads (some of which were emplaced later), suggesting caution is warranted before we associate them with the Nara period. Okumura, "Kokuhō Tōdaiji Kondō chindangu," pp. 11-12; Morimoto, "Kondō chindangu," pp. 14-15.



**Figure 14.** Reliquary. Seoknameomsa 석남엄사 (石南嚴寺), Gyeongsangnam-do, South Korea. Stone. Unified Silla, 766. Reproduced from Gukrib Jungang Bakmulgwan, *Bulsari jangeom*, p. 38.

is how the space inside of a Buddhist pedestal was perceived during the Nara period.

No comparable examples to the Tōdaiji objects are found from the Nara period. Deposits had been found from inside the pedestals of the central Medicine Buddha (Yakushi 藥師; Sk. Bhaiṣajya-guru) and Bodhisattva Sun Light (Nikkō Bosatsu 日光菩薩) of the eighth-century Yakushi triad in the Golden Hall of Yakushiji 藥師寺 (Nara City), but due to the evidence of fire damage, scholars speculate that they were deposited after a conflagration at the monastery and not when the statues were cast.<sup>50</sup> Elsewhere, however, we can find instances of objects inserted into the pedestal of a statue. Juhyung Rhi reports a statue at Nāgārjunikoṇḍa (Andhra Pradesh, India) stood on a pedestal with a cavity for a reliquary between its feet.<sup>51</sup> The stone seated Vairocana Buddha at the

50 The items emplaced inside the pedestal of the seated central Buddha include bronze plates with vine motifs and "fish-roe" (*nanako* 魚々子) patterns, mirrors, and coins datable to circa 720. A small seventh-century statue of the "Buddha at Birth" (*tanjōbutsu* 誕生仏) was found in the lotus-shaped pedestal of the Bodhisattva Sun Light. Machida, "Yakushi sanzonzō," pp. 50 and 53. For a brief introduction in English, see Kuno and Inoue, "Study of the Yakushi Triad," p. 102.

51 Rhi, "Images, Relics, and Jewels," p. 175, n. 28. There are Chinese examples with cavities for inserting caches but primarily somewhere on the statue's body and not the pedestal. For a



former site of Seoknameomsa 석남엄사 (石南嚴寺; Gyeongsangnam-do, South Korea) originally held a nested reliquary that contained a copy of the “Great Dhāraṇī of Pure Unsullied Light” (*Muku jōkō dai darani* 無垢淨光大陀羅尼) datable to 766 CE (figures 13 and 14).<sup>52</sup>

The Tōdaiji Buddha was not fully finished until circa 771, so the Seoknameomsa statue can be considered contemporaneous though it postdates the Eye-Opening Ceremony of the former. Significantly, the outer urn of the Seoknameomsa reliquary has an incised inscription stating that the great *dhāraṇī* was placed “inside” (*nae* 内) the stone Vairocana Buddha.<sup>53</sup> Unlike Tōdaiji’s colossal Buddha, this statue is independent from any architectural foundation, and its deposit did not contain any artifact that one might associate with pacification rituals.<sup>54</sup> This allows us to surmise that at least in Unified Silla (668–935), the space within the pedestal was perceived as an extension of the interior of a Buddhist image. During the Nara and Unified Silla eras the two entities had a rocky diplomatic relationship but objects and people arriving from Silla impacted Buddhist culture within the Yamato imperial court. Related to Tōdaiji, an envoy headed by Gim Taeryeom 김태렴 (金泰廉) arrived in Yamato in 752, whose stay included a visit to the newly consecrated Tōdaiji Great Buddha.<sup>55</sup> In short, although the evidence is circumstantial, it is plausible that the devotees in the Nara-period Yamato court perceived the space within a pedestal as part of the statue’s *tainai*, making the Tōdaiji objects comparable to *tainai nōnyūhin* of the later period.

If we can accept that Tōdaiji objects were indeed (proto-)*tainai nōnyūhin*, then their initial function must be considered in connection to the statue. Notably, one can draw an axis connecting the north and south cavities which will run straight through the central Buddha, and a sword discovered from the north

cavity has a motif of the Northern Dipper, also suggesting that the directionality of the deposits vis-à-vis the statue was a concern.<sup>56</sup> Beginning in the seventh century, Yamato authorities acknowledged the political importance of astronomy and astrology. The main chamber of Takamatsuzuka Kofun 高松塚古墳 (Taka-ichi-gun, Nara Prefecture) adorned its ceiling with the map of the “Twenty-eight Lunar Mansions” (*nijū hasshuku* 二十八宿) based on a Chinese template. The Northern Dipper held a key status within East Asian astronomy as the one constellation always in sync with, and pointing towards, the Polar Star. Known as the “imperial star” (*tentei* 天帝), the Polar Star was identified with the emperor as the ruler of the heavens.<sup>57</sup> The colossal Buddha is seated facing south inside the Great Buddha Hall, which stands on a north-south axis. To place a Northern-Dipper motif at the northern edge of the pedestal effectively doubled the central Vairocana Buddha with the Polar Star/imperial body at the center of the heavens.

This example of the sword underscores the transformation the act of concealment brings to an object.<sup>58</sup> Each artifact in the Tōdaiji objects, including the swords, had quotidian utility and preestablished symbolic connotations attributed through its use in contemporaneous ceremonial or devotional customs.<sup>59</sup> It

recent summary of studies on the practice of inserting caches into East Asian devotional statues, see Robson, Lee and Kim, “Introduction.”

52 Gukrib Jungang Bakmulgwan, *Bulsari jangeom*, pp. 38, 114.

53 “為石毘盧遮那仏成内無垢淨光陀羅尼.” Inscription left in original as it was written in Chinese on a Korean-made statue. For circumstances surrounding the identification of this reliquary, see Park, “Yeongtae 2-yeon,” pp. 13–14.

54 Jeong Won-Gyeong comments that the Seoknameomsa reliquary may be the earliest format of “caches inside a statue” (*bokjang* 帑藏; 腹藏). *Ibid.*, p. 13.

55 *Shoku Nihongi*, Tenpyō Shōhō 4 (752). 6.22. SN 3: 124–25.

56 For more detail on the discovery of this incised ornamentation, see Tsukamoto, “Konkai no hozon shūri,” pp. 5, 12. Details regarding the present condition of the sword can be found in Hashimoto, Komura, and Yamada, “Tachi rui,” p. 150.

57 The regularity with which the Northern Dipper revolves around the Polar Star was recognized in China early in the history of astrology and became the central attribute of this constellation as the overseer of time and season. There are many studies on the Northern Dipper cult in East Asia. See for instance Schafer, *Pacing the Void*, pp. 42–53. An accessible introduction to early worship of the Northern Dipper in Japanese can be found in Hayashi, *Myōken Bosatsu*, pp. 18–29. On the Northern Dipper iconography in China, see Huang, *Picturing the True Form*, pp. 40–52. For a discussion of the Northern Dipper in the context of the Myōken cult (deification of the Polar Star) in Japan, see Faure, *The Fluid Pantheon*, pp. 64–71. For an extensive discussion of the Northern Dipper motifs on swords, see Sugihara, “Shichi-sei ken no zuyō to sono shisō.”

58 The role of concealment proposed here overlaps with Wei-Cheng Lin’s characterization of the underground crypt as a space for the ontological transformation of broken icons into relics. Lin, “Broken Bodies,” pp. 90–97.

59 It is important to note that during the Nara period, swords were made for pragmatic use in combat and for ceremonial purposes. Presently, Shōsōin holds a total of fifty-five Nara-period swords. Most of them do not match the descriptions in *Chinpōchō*, and thus it is unclear when they entered the repository. Nevertheless, the examples make clear that swords for combat were

would have evoked a significance beyond what one might universally associate with a well-crafted luxurious object (such as taste, intellect, financial and worldly authority, etc.). However, the act of concealment inevitably depleted the Tōdaiji objects of their quotidian function and instead amplified their symbolic presence.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, conceivably, the devotional potency of the Tōdaiji objects—not just as the avatars of the donors, but also as the embodiment of Vairocana’s spiritual presence—hinged on the very relinquishing of their value within the everyday lives of the devotees who offered them through burial.<sup>61</sup>

In the 756 offering, the existence of *Chinpōchō* alone evidences that this was an event to be recorded and remembered. The preface elucidates when and for whom the offering was made and what wishes devotees hoped to fulfill through their good deeds. The notations on the margin also relay that the items on *Chinpōchō* remained in use after the donation—a fact easily substantiated by records of temporary and permanent removal of treasures.<sup>62</sup> The weapons and armor from the 756 offering, for instance, were deployed to quell Fujiwara no Nakamaro’s 藤原仲麻呂 (706–764) rebellion in 764.<sup>63</sup> Other artworks and musical instruments were also lent out to imperial projects or the members of the

imperial court.<sup>64</sup> It is true that, as *chokufūsō* 勅封倉 (imperial sealed storehouses), only a select group of people on limited occasions were ever allowed physical access to the Shōsōin pieces, and over time, the nature of their use became more purely ceremonial than utilitarian. Nevertheless, the Shōsōin objects maintained their relevance and utility through history, eventually reaching societal groups beyond the imperial court. The most famous case in point is the log of agarwood, named Ranjatai 蘭奢待, which joined the Shōsōin collection sometime by the fifteenth century (thus not part of the eighth-century imperial offering).<sup>65</sup>

In 1019, Fujiwara no Michinaga 藤原道長 (966–1027)—recently retired from his political post as the regent—received the precepts (*jukai* 受戒) at Tōdaiji. At this time, Michinaga sent for the key to the Shōsōin repository safeguarded in the Heian court for a special viewing of the treasures stored within. Henceforth, it became customary for emperors and high-ranking court officials who took priesthood upon retirement to be allowed a viewing of the Shōsōin treasures, which was then adapted by Ashikaga shoguns and powerful warrior lords (who had not yet renounced the world) as a method to confirm their secular authority. Reflecting his passion for the increasingly popular art of tea drinking and *kōdō* 香道 (incense appreciation), Ashikaga Yoshimasa 足利義政 (1439–1490) further expanded this custom by requesting the temple for a gift of the fragment of Ranjatai. Oda Nobunaga 織田信長 (1534–1582) followed suit about a century later, making the identical demand to Tōdaiji in 1574. The gifting of Ranjatai came to be known widely during the Edo period across the social strata through printed guidebooks to the Nara region.<sup>66</sup> With regard to items within the 756 offering, a set of “folding screens with

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constructed sturdier, with minimal adornment on both hilts and scabbards, and easily distinguishable from lavishly ornate swords designed for ceremonial use. According to the descriptions in *Chinpōchō*, the 756 offering included forty combat swords and sixty ceremonial swords. Yet all but one ceremonial sword were deployed to quell a rebellion in 764, indicating that the “ceremonial” swords never lost their pragmatic “use-potential” as weapons. Kondō, *Nihon kodai no bugu*, pp. 26–29. See also Nishikawa, “Shōsōin no buki, bugu,” pp. 130–31. For this reason, this study proceeds from the assertion that the six swords in the Tōdaiji objects, which were most likely made for ceremonial use based on their ornamentation, also retained their presence as weapons.

- 60 A similar case is made of later practices of inserting caches within Buddhist statues. For instance, in her analysis of the inclusion of used garments as part of *bokjang* (or *pokchang*) during the Joseon dynasty (1392–1910), Korea, Youn-mi Kim states, “the ontological status of a donor’s garment also changes when enshrined within a Buddhist statue... it is the spatial framing that changes the object’s status.” See Kim, “Surrogate Body,” p. 122.
- 61 The fact that this transformation necessarily involved a death of sorts for an object’s utilitarian life resonates with what Fabio Rambelli describes as the “re-enchantment” of objects through memorial services for inanimate objects, one method of which was burial. Rambelli, *Buddhist Materiality*, pp. 211–58.
- 62 Yoneda, *Shōsōin to Nihon bunka*, pp. 69–110.
- 63 Kondō, *Nihon kodai no bugu*, pp. 26–29.

- 64 The items from the Shōsōin repository were lent out for varying reasons. In 759, sixty-seven rugs were temporarily discharged to be used in a Buddhist ceremony. In 770, three folding screens were taken out to be used as templates for new works. Especially during the Heian period, the imperial family and courtiers frequently borrowed notable calligraphy and musical instruments for their appreciation. Some of these borrowed items were never returned. Hashimoto, *Shōshōin no rekishi*, pp. 189–96.
- 65 Unless otherwise noted, the discussion of Ranjatai in this paragraph is based on Hashimoto, *Shōshōin no rekishi*, pp. 210–12.
- 66 Examples include the ten-volume *Nanto meishoshū* 南都名所集 (Collection of the Famous Sites Around the Southern Capital) by Ōta Nobuchika 太田叔親 (fl. ca. 1670s) and Murai Michihiro 村井道弘 (1652–1716), and Akisato Ritō’s 秋里籬島 (d. ca. 1830) *Yamato meisho zue* 大和名所図会 (Illustrated Guide to Famous

bird feathers” (what are presently called *torige byōbu* 鳥毛屏風) was displayed during the special public viewing (*kaichō* 開帳) at Tōdaiji in 1847, commemorating the eleven hundredth anniversary of the monk Gyōki’s 行基 (668–749) death.<sup>67</sup> Thus, although their actual use may have shifted over time from the originally intended mundane functions, the objects stored in Shōsōin repository—including the 756 offering—retained their utility within the secular world long after the donation, and to a certain degree their karmic merit was predicated upon such potential future use.

What this means, then, is that there is something fundamentally extroverted about the Shōsōin objects: the very use potential of these items allowed them to function effectively as the embodiment and expression of the ubiquity of Vairocana’s presence. Instead, what Tōdaiji objects present to us is the possibility that the act of concealment functioned as its own mechanism to direct spiritual potency of an offering. The concealed offerings could enliven their divine recipient in the devotees’ minds most effectively if the devotees knew of their presence. Thus, in the later practices, the *tainai nōnyūhin* were prepared as a communal event, often involving large-scale fundraising and sutra-copying, and the priests continued to remind the devotees of their presence through ceremonies and written accounts long after the initial dedication.<sup>68</sup> Such promotion of concealed caches was not yet common during the Nara period. For the Tōdaiji objects, no evidence remains of a rigorous effort made to maintain or even remember the deposits buried under Vairocana Buddha. It is true that one cannot rule out the possibility that documentation regarding their emplacement was lost over time, or the lacquered box discovered from the south cavity (location C) initially held a record or inventory of this offering.<sup>69</sup> On the other hand, the Great Buddha is one

of the most documented projects of this period. That we are unable to find any recorded dedicatory ceremony for the Tōdaiji objects or any subsequent anecdotes or legends of their later discovery—especially when we can reasonably surmise that some of the items were unearthed prior to the twentieth century—at least underscores the difference in attitude to the close tracking of the items in the Shōsōin repository.<sup>70</sup> Whether or not documentation was initially buried with the Tōdaiji objects, it is safe to extrapolate that keeping the memory of this event alive was not a significant concern at least for the temple. The idea that offerings could continue to impact their divine recipient under concealment even after their existence is long forgotten differs fundamentally from what Paula M. Varsano terms the “rhetoric of hiddenness,” and others the effect of “secrecy,” which are both predicated upon the idea of visibility (or at least partial visibility), revelation, or remembering. Varsano explains that a primary role of the “rhetoric of hiddenness” is “not just to convey meaning, but to signal what is meaningful.” In order for the “hiddenness” to serve this role, it is necessary for the “hider” and “seeker” to at least remember that something is hidden.<sup>71</sup>

Nara-period ritual implements and items of offering included object types with utility also in the secular world, such as mirrors, arms and armor, small knives, boxes and jars, etc. For these items, their familiar functions in daily lives provided inspiration for their believed spiritual or talismanic efficacies.<sup>72</sup> The

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清凉寺 (Kyoto; 985 CE) also included an inventory. However, no example from the Nara period has yet been found. Alternately, Eno suggests the lacquered box may have been the container for the armor, the scales of which were discovered from the same cavity, drawing on an example from *Chinpōchō*. Eno, “Urushi seihin,” p. 174.

70 Not all the offerings stored in the Shōsōin are as carefully tracked as the items in *Chinpōchō*. However, *Shutsuzōchō-1* alone demonstrates that even pieces that did not belong to the initial imperial donation were noted when removed from the repository.

71 Varsano, “Lowered Curtains,” p. 3. Varsano refrains from concretely defining the “rhetoric of hiddenness,” but comments, “the rhetoric of hiddenness, by virtue of its belonging to the domain of rhetoric, is never unilaterally imposed by a hider on a seeker, but creates and then thrives on their unspoken complicity,” indicating that whatever was hidden was meant to be sought out. For a summary of recent discussions concerning “secrecy” in devotional context, see Robson, “Hidden in Plain View,” pp. 179–80.

72 Cynthia J. Bogel terms this effect in ritual context “residual emplacement,” which she defines as “multiple meanings that adhere to the object of ritual or to the viewer-participant in ritual,

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Sites around the Yamato Region), first published in 1675 and 1791, respectively.

67 Morimoto, “Tōdaiji hōmotsuroku’ (Kōka 4 nen),” pp. 39–40. According to Morimoto, the screens happened to be removed from the repository in 1833 for repairs and were never returned, providing the opportunity for the temple to exhibit them as part of Tōdaiji’s legacy.

68 For a discussion of efforts made by priests in the Saidaiji Order during the medieval period to guide their devotees to perceive the statues with deposits as *shōjin* 生身 (living bodies), see Wu, “Wooden Statues as Living Bodies,” pp. 89–92.

69 A stone-carved inventory accompanied the imperial offering to the relics at Famensi (Shaanxi Province, China) datable to 874. The cache inside the wooden Śākyamuni Buddha at Seiryōji

very reflective nature of mirrors imbued them with the power to repel evil and turned them into the embodiment of the divine light itself. Small knives used to scrape the wooden surfaces while writing tied them to the life of a bureaucrat intellect, making them effective as avatars for devout officials in ritual offerings or reflections of parents' wishes for their sons' success in placenta burials.<sup>73</sup> These items of offerings differ from, for instance, Buddhist scepters (*nyoi* 如意; Ch. *ruyi*) or flywhisks (*hossu* 払子) that all but lost their original profane use in the course of transmission to perform solely within a ritual context.<sup>74</sup> In *nyoi* and *hossu*, their singularity of ceremonial function also restricted their symbolic utility, while objects such as mirrors, swords, and small knives were far more versatile, able to manifest a broader array of supernatural forces and express more nuanced and layered relationships among the devotees, their wishes, and the divinity's spiritual power to respond to its followers. If a mirror was used as the receptacle to embody and project *kami* in a shrine, a funerary good to repel evil spirits, or a symbolic reflection of the divine light within a Buddha hall, it would have been perceived appropriate for the occasion due to the same reflective quality of the object, but naturally what it would have been tasked to "reflect" differed according to the context of use.<sup>75</sup> This versatility, on the other hand, also meant that for an artifact with both common daily use and symbolic potential, a change in circumstances or fluctuation in the mindset of those who engage with it could have had a critical impact on the nature of its presence.<sup>76</sup> The fear of unexpectedly witnessing the transcendent ability of a mundane ob-

ject is best exemplified by mirrors that are associated with taboos even today (never place a mirror facing up; cover a mirror at night; never look into a pair of facing mirrors, etc.).<sup>77</sup>

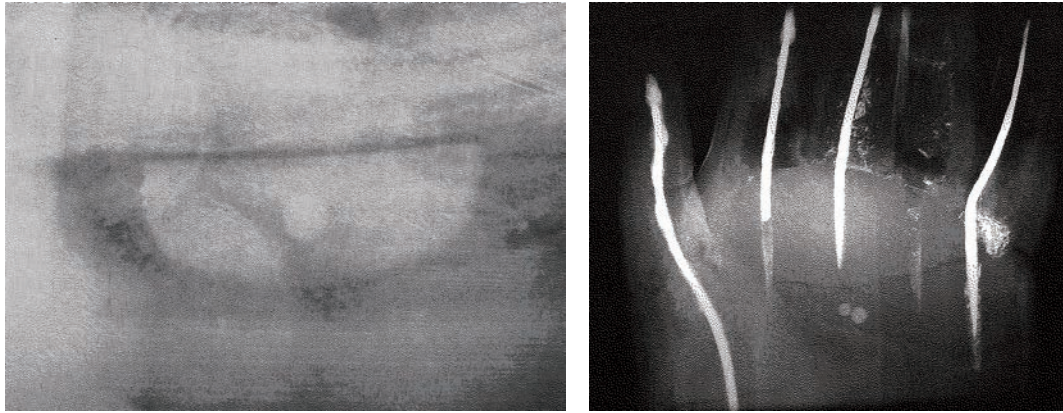
In the 756 offering, where the future use of the artifacts was expected but open-ended, a possibility remained for any piece to resume its secular utilitarian function, or if occasion arose, to jog its spiritual potency. In contrast, the act of concealment, in essence, worked to shut down all other possible "use-potentials" of an object, so that its innate spiritual power could be harnessed for a specific effect or efficacy. A concrete eighth-century example of this phenomenon is the dry-lacquer seated Vairocana Buddha from the Golden Hall at Tōshōdaiji 唐招提寺 (Nara City), which comes with small beads embedded into its hands and eyes, making it the one definitive case of *tainai nōnyūhin* from this early period (figure 15).<sup>78</sup> The beads serve as the stand-in for the relics of the Buddha that animate the image and ensure the icon's salvific perfor-

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and which then figure in subsequent interpretation regardless of ritual enactment." Bogel, *With a Single Glance*, p. 55.

- 73 In placenta burial during the Nara period, the placenta of a boy was placed in a jar with writing utensils, such as brushes, ink stones, or small knives, then buried at the entrance to one's residence. Mori and Yabunaka, *Chindangu kara miru kodai*, pp. 94-96.
- 74 In China, scepters had symbolic connotations in both secular and Buddhist contexts, but in Japan, they appear exclusively in a Buddhist context. *Nihon kokugo daijiten* 日本国語大辞典, s.v. *nyoi*. <http://japanknowledge.com/>. For *ruyi* scepters in China, see Kieschnick, *The Impact of Buddhism*, pp. 138-52.
- 75 Osaka Furitsu Chikatsu Asuka Hakubutsukan, *Mitōkutsu kofun no sekai*.
- 76 The relationship between the mundane use and symbolic presence of an object in the daily lives of its users is far more complex, but outside of the scope of this article. For a thoughtful discussion on this topic, see for instance Rambelli, *Buddhist Materiality*, pp. 172-210.

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- 77 Although it postdates the Nara period, a related sentiment of anxiety and anticipation for a surprise transformation also appears in Sei Shōnagon's 清少納言 (ca. 966-1025) *Makura no sōshi* 枕草子 (*The Pillow Book*), compiled at the end of the tenth and into the early eleventh century. The passage (*dan* 段) on "things that make your heart beat fast" (*kokoro tokimeki suru mono* 心ときめきするもの), includes "looking into a Chinese mirror that's a little clouded" (*kara kagami no sukoshi kuraki o mitaru* 唐鏡の少し暗きを見たる). No consensus is reached as to why a "clouded" (more literally "darkened") Chinese mirror should make one excited or anxious. Given Sei Shōnagon's famed erudition, the interpretation that Zhang Peihua proposes seems most plausible, as it connects the "Chinese mirror" to the magical "treasure mirror" (*baojing* 寶鏡). This *baojing* is featured in an early Tang-dynasty *changqi* 傳奇 (marvel tale) called *Gujing ji* 古鏡記 (Record of an Ancient Mirror; compiled sometime in the seventh or eighth century), which describes its supernatural quality to cloud during solar and lunar eclipses. According to Zhang's reading, Sei Shōnagon is musing that her heart leaps when a Chinese mirror begins to cloud for it could be a sign that it is the very "treasure mirror" revealing its true nature. The exact passage number differs from version to version. This study referenced Passage 27 in Matsuo and Nagai, *Makura no sōshi*, p. 69. For an English translation, see Sei Shōnagon, *The Pillow Book*, p. 30; Zhang, "Makura no sōshi," pp. 28-29. For an English summary of hypotheses regarding *Gujing ji*'s author and its production date, see Chen, "History and Fiction," pp. 161-72.
- 78 Bunkachō Bunkazai Hogobu Bijutsu Gakugeika, *Tōshōdaiji*. Two additional standing wood-core-dry-lacquer statues from Tōshōdaiji, dating from either the late Nara or early Heian period, also come with beads embedded into their hands. In China, there are recorded instances of inserting beads either between the eyes or into the chest of a statue. See also Oku, *Seiryōji Shaka nyorai zō*, pp. 47-48.



**Figure 15.** Beads inside right eye (left) and left hand (right). Seated Vairocana Buddha (detail). Tōshōdaiji, Nara Prefecture. Nara period, latter half of 8th c. Reproduced from Bunkachō Bunkazai Hogobu Bijutsu Gakugeika, *Tōshōdaiji Kondō kokuhō kanshitsu Rushanabutsu zazō*.

mance.<sup>79</sup> The fact that the beads are not on the surface as part of the statue's materiality, but within, is what allows them to serve in this role. The beads within the eyes are not part of the representation of the statue's pupils but the essence of Vairocana's vision, and those embedded into the palms energized the divine hands.<sup>80</sup>

Returning to the Tōdaiji objects, we can observe the same mechanism at work in other items. For instance, the conventional use of the small knives in other rituals informs that the ones discovered from the southwest cavity (location G) served as the surrogates of the donors. The cicada-shaped metal lock at the south cavity, which may have sealed the lacquer box found nearby going into the ground, was freed of its practical duty as the box was permanently removed from use. In China, the cicada had been an auspicious motif since the Han dynasty, denoting rebirth or rejuvenation in a funerary context, or within the court, a hope for attaining high official ranks.<sup>81</sup> The association with rebirth or rejuvenation corresponds well to the vine motif adorning the swords discovered from the south and southwest cavi-

ties, as well as the floral pattern on the lacquered box, both of which express life force, particularly in a Buddhist context.<sup>82</sup> A full investigation of Tōdaiji objects in the context of eighth-century politics and devotion is outside of the purview of this essay. The above examples, however, reveal the presence of an underground web of relationships and effects of devotionally charged objects connected through the central Vairocana Buddha, serving to enhance the statue's spiritual efficacy. What made this web possible was the act of concealment itself that eliminated the mundane use of the items, distilling them down to their essential symbolic presence.

## Conclusion

Analyzing the two diagrams produced in 1907–1908, this study argues that although some of the Tōdaiji objects may have been mixed with artifacts deposited in the Heian period or later, it is plausible that at least the pieces discovered from under the bronze pedestal retained their original arrangement into the twentieth century. The comparison between the Tōdaiji objects and the 756 offering underscore a mechanism by which utilitarian items offered in concealment exuded potent symbolic power, manifesting the donors' intentions.

Returning to the consideration of the relationship between one's awareness of a secret and the secret's effi-

79 Helmut Brinker also discusses the role of concealed deposits to the transformation of an image into an icon, stating that while what gave an image meaning as an icon was faith, the "secret and sacred caches incorporated for animation functioned to establish a response to the quest for intimacy with the unseen sacred." Brinker, *Secrets of the Sacred*, pp. 6–7, 10–12.

80 This idea of concealment as a key condition to focus the spiritual potency of an object coincides with Helmut Brinker's observation concerning the concealed metal coil behind the forehead of the portrait statue of Eizon 叡尊 (Saidaiji 西大寺, Nara; 1280) as a "kind of charismatic focus loaded with spiritual energy." Brinker, "Facing the Unseen," pp. 52–56.

81 Takahama, "Chūgoku kodai no kisshōmon," pp.16–17.

82 For more on the vine motif in seventh- and eighth-century Japanese Buddhist art, see Walley, "Instant Bliss," pp. 154–55.

cacy, Elliot R. Wolfson comments, “the knowing of the secret invests power upon the individual.”<sup>83</sup> Although propositions such as Wolfson’s seem to primarily be concerned with human agency, they can also be applied to forgotten caches, as is suspected to have been the case with the Tōdaiji objects through much of their history. An extroverted offering intended for use kept the donors’ initial vow alive through continuous engagement. In the 756 offering, the items continued to generate spiritual merit for the donors and dedicatee through use, but even when an item was used up, lost, or replaced, the survival of the *Chinpōchō* ensured that the memory of the initial benevolent act survived. In contrast, for Tōdaiji objects, an introverted offering existed in concealment, and the very efficacy of the gift relied on the relinquishing of its engagement with the hands and minds of people. Arguably, the act of burying ensured the offerings under Vairocana Buddha would continue imbuing the icon with spiritual power in secret because once the memory of the offerings faded among the living, the icon remained as the only agent left that “knew” of their presence.

Strictly speaking, with Vairocana Buddha at Tōshōdaiji noted above, in addition to the act of concealment, what restricted the devotional function of the beads as relics was their strategic placement within the statue that made the intent of the makers unmistakable. Due to the variety of items included, the devotional connotations expressed through the Tōdaiji objects as an ensemble would have been richer and more complex than the Tōshōdaiji counterpart. A contextual analysis placing the Tōdaiji objects in the eighth-century religiopolitical circumstances would make clearer the range of symbolic potential available at the donors’ disposal.

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83 Wolfson, “Introduction,” p. 2.

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