**Fudaraku-tokai: Crossing the Sea to the Southern Pure Land**

This is a reconstruction of a Fudaraku crossing boat. Boats like these were used by head priests of Fudarakusan-ji Temple for the practice of Fudaraku-tokai. This was a ritual self-martyrdom in which devotees sought to be transported to Fudaraku, a Pure Land in the south presided over by Kannon, bodhisattva of compassion.

Fudaraku-tokai was attempted from coastal areas across Japan from medieval to early modern times, but this temple was a particularly well-known departure point. More than 20 such departures occurred from the temple between 868 and 1722, and these are listed on a stone monument in the courtyard. For the last few departures, however, the only voyager was a priest put on the boat posthumously.

*Fudaraku Crossing Boats*

The most striking feature of the boat’s design is the sealed cabin. Nailed shut from the outside with no windows or doors, the cabin contained a limited supply of food, water, and lamp fuel so the priest could continue reciting sutras and appeals to Kannon until the very end.

The cabin was surrounded by a 49-paling fence painted bright vermillion. The fence had four torii, one on each side. This is more reminiscent of a Shinto shrine than Buddhist architecture, and reflects the syncretistic nature of the Kumano faith. The boat’s design also evokes the funerary practices of Shugendo mountain asceticism, and Fudaraku-tokai may have been seen as similar to Shugendo austerities in its potential to bring great spiritual benefit both to the practitioner and the world at large.