

## The Healing Buddha and the Benefits of This World

The principal image of worship among the fifty effigies in the Main Hall of Suo Kokubunji Temple is *Yakushi Nyorai*, or the Healing Buddha. Both its position in the center of the dais and its size relative to the other statues reflect its importance. The Healing Buddha saves people from disease, relieves hunger and thirst, meets people's material needs and, broadly speaking, provides "benefits of this world" (*gense-riyaku*).

Made with the joined-wood-block construction technique known as *yosegi-zukuri*, the Healing Buddha is seated on a lotus pedestal (a symbol of paradise) with a nimbus behind him that features carvings of the Dainichi Buddha, celestial nymphs, and fantastic birds. His attire of a simple monk's robe shows that he has found enlightenment. During the restoration of the Main Hall between 1997 and 2004, the Healing Buddha was moved. During this process, it was discovered that the medicine jar in the left hand of the image could be opened—something unique among *Yakushi Nyorai* in Japan. The jar's gilt interior contained a mixture of grains, Chinese medicine, glass, and other minerals.

At the same time, the left hand of the original tenth-century Healing Buddha was found inside the base of the present one. When the temple burned down in 1417 after a lightning strike, the statue was too large to be carried out, but the chief priest detached one of its hands and rescued it from the flames. At 64 centimeters in length, it is twice the size of the hand of the present *Yakushi Nyorai*, suggesting that the original statue was proportionately bigger.