

About the Shurakuen Great Buddha

The Shurakuen Great Buddha, completed in 1927, was Japan's first large Buddha statue of ferroconcrete construction. At the time it also boasted a size that made it the largest in Japan. The Great Buddha was erected by an industrialist named Saikichi Yamada, with work on the statue begun in 1924 as a venture commemorating the marriage of the Showa Emperor (Emperor Hirohito) and taking three years to complete. After Saikichi Yamada's death the Great Buddha passed into corporate ownership, and in 1983 it became the property of Daibutsuji Temple, a religious corporation, and major repairs were made through donations from many private citizens. As a semi-public structure that anyone can visit, the Shurakuen Great Buddha is a favorite of the people both in the city and from elsewhere, and has become symbolic of Tokai City.



Consecration ceremony (1927)

The Shurakuen Great Buddha As a Designated Cultural Property

City-designated Cultural Property (Place of Scenic Beauty)

Designated November 24, 1983

The Shurakuen Great Buddha and the temple grounds were evaluated with respect to the following points and were designated a place of scenic beauty.

- The countenance of the Shurakuen Great Buddha is exalted and dignified, with the half-closed eyes filled with affection projecting a meditative depth, and the statue has high value in terms of aesthetic appreciation.
- The temple grounds are on an elevation that faces Ise Bay and were therefore recognized as having exceptional scenic beauty.

City-designated Cultural Property (Building)

Designated February 18, 2021

The Shurakuen Great Buddha and Niō statues were evaluated chiefly with respect to the following points and were designated Cultural Property structures.

- At the time of its erection the Great Buddha was Japan's first and largest giant Buddha statue of ferroconcrete construction.
- The strength of the concrete is extremely high, and technically as well the structure has an advancedness that exhibits new potential for giving shape to ferroconcrete construction.
- As semi-public structures that anyone can visit, they are appreciated both by city residents and by people from elsewhere, and play a central role in shaping the region's scenery.

Structure of the Shurakuen Great Buddha

The Shurakuen Great Buddha is hollow inside, and a Buddha hall has been provided. What supports the Great Buddha is a backbone-like iron frame and four surrounding columns. The ferroconcrete that is the core of the structure is about 10 to 60 centimeters thick, and the exterior has a smooth mortar finish.



Cross-sectional view of the Shurakuen Great Buddha

Concrete – Made using cement + water + fine aggregate (sand) + coarse aggregate (gravel), etc. Used mainly for the structural body.

Mortar – Made using cement + water + fine aggregate (sand), etc. Used mainly for the structure's exterior finish.

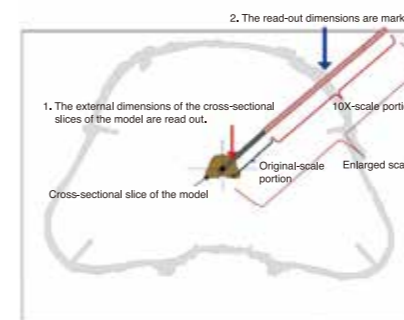
The Steps Through to Completion of the Shurakuen Great Buddha

There were no design drawings for the Shurakuen Great Buddha, unlike as there are for modern structures. A small statue that served as the model was fashioned. This was then enlarged, and molds into which concrete was to be poured were assembled level by level.

- 1 A carved-wood model statue of one-tenth actual size was made.
- 2 To fashion the concrete molds level by level, the model statue was sectioned laterally and special rulers were used to draw lines enlarged to the actual size.
- 3 The iron frame that serves as the backbone was made, and the base of the iron frame was buried deep in the ground.
- 4 Based on the expanded lines, reinforcement bars that were about 1.3 centimeters thick were joined together vertically and horizontally at intervals of about 18 centimeters, thereby fitting together the reinforcement bars that became the core of the ferroconcrete.



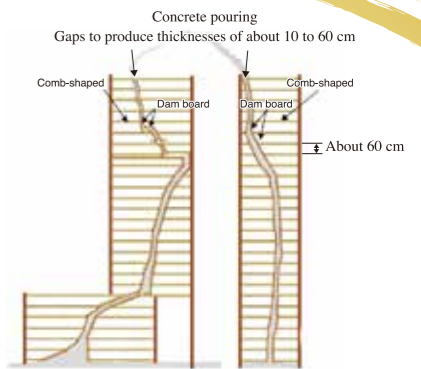
1 Pictured: the model statue for the Great Buddha at Jofukuji Temple in the city of Nishio (the Great Buddha of Kariyado)



2 Expansion of the model statue (schematic depiction)

- 5 Molds for poured concrete and measuring about 60 centimeters high were made. These seem to have been molds of complex three-dimensional shapes, and reflect the high level of technology of the time.

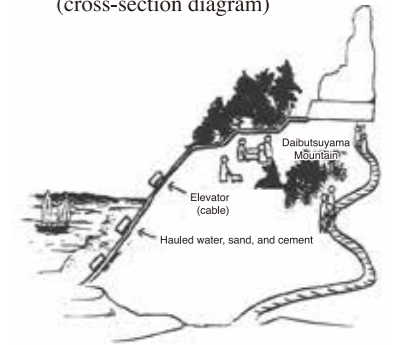
- 6 After several levels of molds had been made, the concrete was poured. The large amounts of cement and other materials were hauled up by an elevator constructed on the sea-side slope.



5 Mold assembly (cross-section diagram)

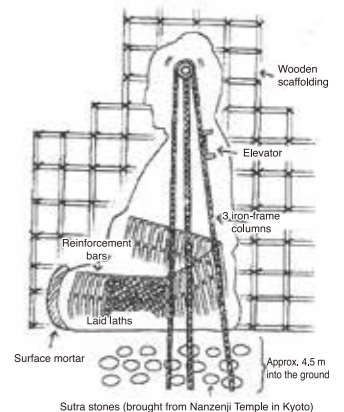
- 7 By repeating steps 4 through 6, the Great Buddha was constructed. For high-up areas, the concrete seems to have been hauled by an elevator installed on the central reinforcement bars.

- 8 Finishing work for the Great Buddha's exterior was carried out. The metal netting (laths) that served as the core was fixed in place, and mortar was applied. At this time coloring was mixed in to give color to the statue.



6 Artist's conception based on information from interviews (Original drawing courtesy of Mr. Shiko Murase)

- 9 The interior elevator and other equipment was dismantled, and trappings such as the Buddha hall were fashioned. A large hole had been made behind the Great Buddha for bringing in loads of material, but this was filled in when the finishing work for the interior was carried out.



7 Artist's conception based on information from interviews (Original drawing courtesy of Mr. Shiko Murase)

- 10 Finishing work was performed for the base and other areas to complete the statue.

Fun Facts about the Shurakuen Great Buddha

- The urna (the whorl on the Great Buddha's forehead) is made of clear glass, and is said to have formerly been fitted with an electric light that created lighthouse-like illumination. What is now left of the electric light inside seems to have been installed after the war.



What is left of the electric light inside

- The number of hair whorls on the Buddha's head is said to be 108. The hair whorls on the head of the Shurakuen Great Buddha were added later, and are 108 in number, including the upper light-passing windows.



Overhead view of the hair whorls