

Seated Statue of Shakyamuni Buddha (Main Hall, Chojuji Temple)

This 180-centimeter, gilded statue depicts the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni, seated in the full lotus position. The right arm is raised to chest height, palm facing outward, and fingers extended upward, in the mudra gesture that represents the dispelling of fear. The left hand is held outward, palm facing forward, with the fingers outstretched and pointing downwards. Known as the wish-granting mudra, it symbolizes the dispensing of boons. The statue is displayed on a lotus pedestal and backed by a halo denoting the Buddha's enlightenment and wisdom. Based on its style, the figure is believed to date to the twelfth century. The statue is designated an Important Cultural Property.

The figure embodies aristocratic grace, an aesthetic that pervades late Heian-period art. The face conveys meditative calm through softly rendered features: a gently rounded form, a small mouth, and narrow, barely open eyes. This delicateness extends throughout the figure's body and attire. The chest lacks the muscular definition seen in later Kamakura-period (1185–1333) statuary, and the robes are thin, with folds in graceful, flowing curves. Every detail, including the small, tight curls of the hair, reflects the subtle elegance favored by the Heian court.

Structurally, the statue was created using the *yosegi-zukuri* (joined-wood) technique. This innovative method emerged in the eleventh century as an alternative to the older *ichiboku-zukuri* (single-block) technique. It involved assembling the figure from multiple, hollowed-out pieces of timber. This technique had several advantages: it mitigated cracking and warping caused by uneven drying in large, solid wood; enhanced the figure's structural integrity; and reduced its weight for easier sculpting and transportation.

The Shakyamuni statue and a seated statue of the Buddha of Infinite Light and Life (Amida) flank the temple's altar, which contains the concealed principal image of Jizo Bodhisattva. Jizo is revered as the compassionate protector of children and souls in the afterlife. The Shakyamuni figure is positioned on the right side, with Amida on the left.