

Project for the Creation of “Stand-in Buddhist Statues” by High School and University Students: Conveying Wakayama’s Cultural Properties to the Future

Wakayama Prefecture



Measuring a statue using a 3D scan



An original Buddhist statue (left) and its 3D-printed *O-migawari Butsuzo*

Situation (Background/Aims)

In Wakayama Prefecture, more than 280 Buddhist statues enshrined in village temples and other places have been stolen or damaged since 2008. Underlying this is the difficulty of maintaining unmanned temples due to the declining and aging populations of these villages. Losing Buddhist statues that are objects of faith for the local community causes residents both material loss and mental suffering in addition to the cultural loss for Wakayama Prefecture. Measures are needed to prevent the theft and damage of Buddhist statues in regional temples and worship halls.

Content (Project Outline)

With the aim of resolving these issues, this project is overseen by the Wakayama Prefectural Museum, and involves Wakayama Prefectural Wakayama Technical High School students creating 3D printed Buddhist statues that are coloured by Wakayama University students. The finished Buddhist statue copies are enshrined in the temples of the original statues, while the actual statues are stored at the Wakayama Prefectural Museum and other institutions. When completed, the *O-migawari Butsuzo* travels with the high school and university students that created it to the original statue’s temple and is presented to the local community.

Results (Features and Innovation, Future Developments, etc.)

This far, a total of 32 *O-migawari Butsuzo* have been enshrined in 17 locations, and the project has directly led to the resolution of issues, with local community members making comments such as “Now I can sleep with peace of mind at night” and “I have the same faith in the Buddhist statue that the high school students made as I do in the real statue”. It is anticipated that this project will be used as a model for similar initiatives in regions throughout Japan that are facing similar issues.