

INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL SECTION THE STORY OF THE REPAIR OF A BANNER WITH PAINTED BODHISATTVAS

Kazuki Sugimoto

The banner with painted bodhisattvas 彩絵仏像幡 (South Section 155) is unique among the paintings of the Shosoin, an invaluable example of genuine painting on a silk base. Its iconography, from the esoteric Buddhist tradition, stands out brilliantly within the treasure house collection. Yet this piece presents a number of riddles, including when and by whom it was created, and the circumstances of its preservation, including repairs, over the centuries.

That such a treasure should be marred by foxing is highly disappointing, and the feasibility of repair, with the main purpose of removing the foxing, was investigated over several years. As the first step, in 1997 the Shunpoudo Company was asked to remove the legs from the banner and then, we made a thorough examination. Fortunately, we found that the main areas of foxing were on backing silk that had been added after an earlier repair, and the backing silk could safely be separated from the original silk support. At the office of the Shosoin we continued to investigate the entire banner, especially the condition of the removed legs. During this time, in the course of consultations with various specialists, we learned that the backing silk added during the earlier repair had not only caused foxing but also, because of its stiffness, placed strain on the pigment layers and adversely affected the original silk. Eventually we decided that by calling on highly skilled restoration specialists, a new repair could be performed.

We selected Oka Bokkodo of Kyoto, a company with extensive experience in the restoration of cultural properties, particularly paintings and calligraphy, as well as an exhaustive knowledge of antiquities to which all sorts of colorings have been applied. Among the Shosoin treasures they had previously repaired “folding screen panels with design of ladies under trees, decorated with bird feathers” and a “gigaku mask”. They were commissioned to perform comprehensive repairs for the purposes of removing the foxing and consolidating the pigment layer, and a studio was secured for this work at the office of the Shosoin.

The repairs were carried out in two main stages. During the first year of work (fiscal 2003), repairs were performed on the banner body. First, the banner was disassembled by Shosoin repair specialists under the joint supervision of the Shosoin office and Oka Bokkodo, and the parts were then handed over to Oka Bokkodo. After the first stage was completed, the work was interrupted for one year (fiscal 2004) to allow observation of the effects.

The second stage of repairs during fiscal 2005, included the following. Repairs were effected to the borders of the banner head, the left and right side borders of the banner body, and the panels between the images. Then, the linings of the banner legs were changed. After that, the entire banner was reassembled as it had appeared before the repairs.

Before, during and after the repair work, between 2003 and 2006, researchers in the Shosoin office made detailed studies of the technical aspects of the banner, including its construction, the weave of the plain silk used for the painting ground and the other sections, the coloring techniques, pigments, dyes and ink inscriptions. These studies yielded many useful findings.

A separate study, in collaboration with a curator of paintings on the staff of the Nara National Museum, considered the banner as a Buddhist painting and a work of art from the standpoints of iconography, style, technique and materials.

The articles in this special section of the Bulletin, assembled on the occasion of the completion of the repairs, include the repair report and related materials, and the results of the technical studies. Regarding the artistic study by the Nara National Museum, Ryoji Kajitani has kindly contributed an excellent article. It is our hope that sharing our current findings with a wider audience will lead to further progress in the study of the splendid banner with painted bodhisattvas.

REPORT ON THE REPAIR OF THE BANNER WITH PAINTED BODHISATTVAS

Takayuki Kimishima

The body of the banner with painted bodhisattvas has attached to it three head border parts, two side border parts on the left and right, three panels between the images and one base part, and three leg parts. The body and each of the attached parts are colored silk. The body size is 176.4 cm high and 27.0 cm wide. The repair work consisted of disassembling the various parts, performing repairs while making records of their conditions, and finally reassembling all the parts as before. On examination preceding the repair, it was found to have the areas of loss, flaking and exfoliation of the pigment layers due to decreased adhesion, creases and foxing.

The way to repair was as follows. First, the entire banner was inspected and photographed, the condition of the pigments was surveyed, and the damaged areas were recorded in drawings and photographs. Then, to consolidate the pigments, it was applied that first 30% ethyl alcohol solution, then rabbit skin glue solution, and after drying, 1.5–2% rabbit skin glue solution.

Next, to protect the pigment layers, two layers of rayon paper and one layer of *kozo* (a total of three layers) were applied to the recto, using *funori* paste. Then, the old backing silk was removed with small amounts of water. All the removed backing silk was set aside and kept. On the side borders of the banner body and on the image panels, the old backing paper was not removed and the areas of loss were infilled with *kozo*. At this point the verso was examined and photographed.

The top and middle layers of paper that had earlier been applied to the recto were removed along with their *funori* paste, which was absorbed with blotting paper. Next, wheat starch paste was applied to the *kozo* to provide an extra layer for backing, and then the last of the three layers of paper on the recto was removed. Then a new layer of backing was applied, at each point using the same material as the backing which was already present.

The color of the backing paper strongly affects the appearance of the painted surface. Therefore we prepared several different samples based on the color of the silk base and the color of the original backing, and checked them in pairs to select the appropriate match. For the second layer of backing paper we actually compared as a temporary backings of three different colors and selected the most appropriate paper. Chemical dye stuffs and carbon black ink were used for backing paper.

Finally, each of the parts was folded along the crease marks that were present before the repair, and the parts were remounted to the main part of the banner as before, using a mixture of wheat starch paste and *funori* paste. This treatment work did not include cleaning, stain removal or infilling.

THE BANNER WITH PAINTED BODHISATTVAS

Ryoji Kajitani

The banner with painted bodhisattvas that has been preserved in the south section of the Shosoin has four panels and three extant legs, although the streamers have been lost. It is an exceptional piece, with a color painting of a bodhisattva on each of the four panels. As the sole colored banner among the treasures of the Shosoin, it has long been an object of particular interest.

The bodhisattvas in each panel have high jeweled crowns and double halos, and are seated on lotus pedestals. Each has the left hand in front of the abdomen in a mudra gesture and the right hand in front of the chest, complementing the mudra with the palm upward and the third and fourth fingers raised (the bodhisattva in the third panel also has the second finger raised). These postures are from the tradition of esoteric Buddhism.

Esoteric Buddhist objects are hardly to be found in the Shosoin collection, with the notable exception of three-pronged vajra in the ancient style. Yet it is well known that various elements of esoteric Buddhism (*zomitsu*) were present in Japan from the 7th century, as evidenced by sculpture of that era. Documents from the Shosoin confirm many instances of esoteric sutras being sent to Japan, and furthermore the long history of the Nigatsudo Shuni-e ceremony shows clearly that there were esoteric practices at the Todaiji temple from a surprisingly early date. From the standpoint of religious history, the banner could well be more than a thousand years old.

The key questions that remain are of technique and the style of representation of the bodhisattvas. At the start, however, is the problem that there are very few similar objects dating from the era when the banner is thought to have been made. It is hoped that the present discussion will stimulate comparative studies of the technical and iconographic characteristics of this painting that will help to date this banner bodhisattvas more precisely.

In comparing the iconography of the bodhisattvas with other extant examples, similar images are found in the *Taizo zuzo*, the *Taizo kyuzuzo*, and the *Genzu mandala*. It is, however, impossible to identify each bodhisattva with a particular deity. Unfortunately, it is necessary to point out the fact that the depiction of the bodhisattvas does not follow a standard iconography. On the other hand, the proportions of the bodhisattva figures are rather close to those of seated sculptures of the *Five Bodhisattvas* in the Lecture Hall at the Toji temple, dated to 839, and those of seated sculptures of the *Five Great Kokuzo Bodhisattvas* in the Jingoji temple, which date to the first half of the 9th century. Judging from these observations, this banner can be considered as a Heian-period work from the early 9th century. Although it can be speculated that the banner was probably used for ritual ceremony in the Todaiji temple, the meaning of the banner with painted bodhisattvas remains unknown, which is a problem for future study.

BRASS MATERIAL USED IN SHOSOIN OBJECTS

Masakazu Naruse

Eight objects in the Shosoin are made entirely or partly of brass, as confirmed by X-ray fluorescence analysis. The ratios of copper and zinc vary among the objects, ranging from about 90:10 to 65:35, and some objects include considerable amounts of lead or tin. A brass long-handled incense burner (South Section 52-1) and a brass lidded bowl with pagoda-shaped knob (South Section 30) are made mostly of brass. Brass material is partly used in a copper lidded bowl with pagoda-shaped knob (South Section 29) and a copper brazier part for a long-handled incense burner (South Section 178-69). Brass wire is inlaid in the tortoise shell ground of a five-stringed red sandalwood biwa lute with mother-of-pearl inlay (North Section 29) and is inlaid in the tortoise shell ground of a red sandalwood *genkan* lute with mother-of-pearl inlay (North Section 30). Decorative brass powders are inlaid in the resin backs of two round bronze mirrors with mother-of-pearl inlay (North Section 42-5 and 42-9). All of these objects are from the middle of the 8th century, and are thought to have been made in Tang China.

Although ancient Chinese documents indicate that brass was used in China from the 4th century and was rather common during the 8th century, no object made of brass or containing brass which dates from that period has yet been found there. Accordingly, the diffusion of brass in China, Korea and Japan has been generally believed to have occurred during the 10th to 14th centuries. Under such a situation, it is confirmed that there are brass objects, and brass worked in a variety of uses, in the Shosoin Treasure House, which has great significance for the history of art in the Far East.

NOTE ON A NEWLY DISCOVERED DOCUMENT FRAGMENT FROM CHEST No.80 CONTAINING TEXTILE FRAGMENTS

Takehiko Iida

A fragment of document, apparently from the Nara Period, was discovered in the course of the classification of disintegrated old textiles in large storage chest no.80 (Middle Section 202). The size of this fragment is 77 mm high and 83 mm wide. On one side, four lines written in India ink can be made out. The details are not clear, but it appears to be a record of the size of rice fields. More notably, the fragment bears red seals with the characters 大嶋郡印 (seal of Oshima County), indicating that the document is from Oshima County in Suo Province (in what is now Yamaguchi Prefecture). The style of the characters suggests that the seal was made during the Tenpyo-shoho or Tenpyo-hoji era (between 749 and 758). The path that brought the document fragment to the Shosoin is unknown. It seems unlikely that it would have been presented through official channels from the province to the central government and then disposed of, as could happen with documents from the Buddhist Canon Scriptorium. It is possible that the document was sent directly from Suo Province to the Todaiji temple, or associated with or used in wrapping an article brought to the Shosoin, or that it otherwise turned up by chance. This article provides a brief description and a photograph of the document fragment.

THE SHIBUNRITSU SCROLLS IN THE SHOGOZO REPOSITORY

Kazuki Sugimoto

The Vinaya (律) is a major component of Buddhist scripture which sets forth the rules for monastic life, and the Shibunritsu (四分律: Japanese name for the Dharmagupta version) is the Vinaya text that has been most respected in China and Japan. Two copies of the Shibunritsu are in the collection of scrolls in the Shogozo (聖語藏) repository at the Shosoin: a Chinese copy from the late 7th century (the “Tang scrolls”), and a Japanese copy from the middle of the 8th century (*Tenpyo juni nen gogankyo* 天平12年御願經 or “scripture set blessed with prayer in Tenpyo 12 [740 CE]”, also called the *Gogatsu-tsuitachikyo* 五月一日經). These scrolls have long been recognized as important texts for scholars of history, Buddhism and classical Japanese linguistics. This article consolidates the foundations for their scholarly use, approaching the scrolls primarily in the context of ancient Japanese history.

Part 1, focusing on bibliographies, considers the *Tenpyo juni nen gogankyo* and the complexities relating to corrections of its texts. Viewing all of the parts of this scroll set together, including scrolls which are housed away from the Shosoin, makes clear the extent of its great confusion, including duplications, omissions and parts out of order. The various additions that were provided to rectify the problems, including red and white-colored insertions and other supplements, are stratigraphically reviewed.

Part 2 traces the preparation of the *Tenpyo juni nen gogankyo* and the processes of its subsequent use, by surveying records relating to the Shibunritsu which appear in Shosoin-Documents 正倉院文書. This allows a reconstruction of the progress of the text, from the copying in 737 and 738 and the ganmon copy of 740, through the revisions and reorganization done in 746 and 747 under the direction of the Todaiji monk Ankan 安寛 (yielding the titles and text corrections in red ink 朱書), and the commentary that was added in 756 (yielding the white ink 白書 insertions). The investigation reveals that the Tang scrolls in the Shogozo are the text referred to in the commentary, and establishes, through reference to the journals of Ganjin (唐大和上東征伝) and Documents of Shosoin, that Ganjin (鑑真) carried that same Tang version of the Shibunritsu with him when he arrived in Japan in 753.