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Monica Bethe

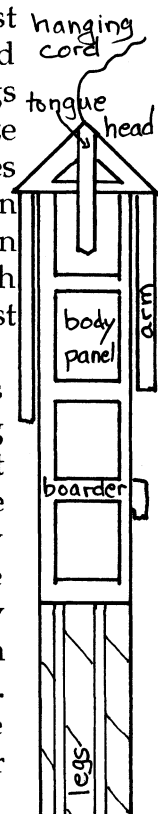
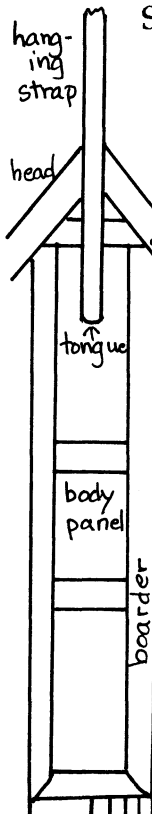
Sacred Textile Banners of Japan

Exploratory rather than
definitive, this paper summarizes
some controlling concepts that inform the
sacred banners of Japan, touching particularly
on their form, function, and fabrics used in early banners.

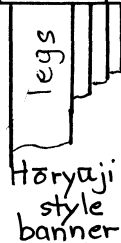
Interwoven with my ideas are some of the concerns that came up
in discussion (small print), reflecting the pan-Asian implications of the topic.

SHORT HISTORY. Banners traveled to Japan with the earliest
introduction of Buddhism. The *Chronicles of Japan* record
that in 552 the king of Paekché sent the essential trappings
of Buddhism to Emperor Kinmei of Japan: a gilt bronze
image to worship, sutras (scriptures) to chant, and canopies
and banners for adornment and ceremonial functions.¹ Then
Prince Shotoku (572-621) made Buddhism the state religion
and in 607 founded the monastery of Hōryūji, which
preserves till today the oldest banners and the oldest
depiction of banners in Japan.²

The construction of the seventh century banners parallels
that of 6th and 7th c. Chinese banners, as found in Dunhuang
and Turfan and as depicted on the walls of the Buddhist
caves dotting the Silk Road. All the components of the
baner are present: head, tongue, arms, segmented body
and multiple legs. Large numbers of such banners were
made in the late seventh and the eighth century and many
have been preserved both at Hōryūji and at the Shōsōin
Repository of the temple of the great Buddha, Tōdaiji.
Although the basic elements remain constant, the
proportions of the banners and some fabrics change over
the years, reflecting changes in Chinese styles.



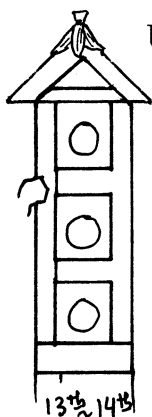
Hōryūji	open head	extension arms	wide boarders	3 elongated panels	single piece legs
Shōsōin	closed, equilateral	attached	narrow	4 or 5 near-square	joined-cloth



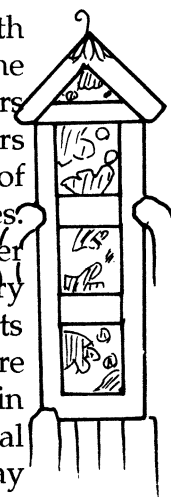
Almost every type of silk weave, surface decoration technique
and braid (see Kinoshita essay) found in textiles of the ancient
period (7th-8th c.) are represented in the banners. Thus,
the possibility of dating banners through tracing the
evolution of their form, verified by inscriptions and temple
records, has provided scholars with an invaluable key to
dating textiles in general.³



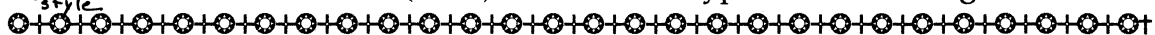
Whether the anthropomorphic labels used by the Japanese, Chinese (and Tai) for the parts of the banner
were symbolic or merely conventional (as the Japanese profess) became a recurrent topic in the discussions
after my speech. I suspect the terms to be Chinese. Parallels with the Yogic concepts of centers energy in the
body were suggested. These concepts would have traveled east by way of Tibetan Buddhism.



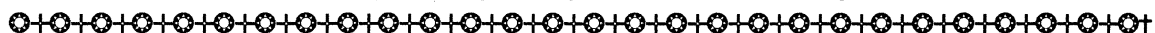
Unfortunately essentially no textiles remain from the 9th-12th centuries (Heian period) due to the destruction and the dispersion of court culture connected with the civil wars ending in 1185. Although actual examples Heian banners no longer exist, painted depictions verify a continuation of the same format and extensive use for a variety of purposes. Thirteenth century Japanese banners, of which a number are preserved abroad as well as in Japan, reveal a very fixed, balanced form with three, essentially square segments making up the body.⁴ The majority of these banners are embroidered with Buddhist figures and symbols and contain the intriguing element of rendering the hair with actual human hair, possibly from the devotee. Later banners may have arms folded in along the sides. Extant banners from the early sixteenth century and on (see Maruyama essay) are often assembled from scraps of garments dedicated to the temple for the repose of a soul. Similar recycling can be seen in Buddha's injunctions to patch together the mendicant's robe (*kesa*) from various types of cast-off rags.



16th c.
with
recycled
garments



So far I have not come across scriptures detailing the construction of a banner, naming its parts, or prescribing the materials of its construction. Japanese today do not feel there are set rules, only customs. Recycling may have been operative from early on. There are 8th c. examples of the same fabric being used in banners and for cushion covers, but we also know that new fabric was produced specifically for banners. Left over scraps must have been used.



FUNCTIONS



Banners appear in and around a temple ground, some hung permanently, others hung for special occasions, and still others carried in ceremonies. Materials include cloth, metal, wood, jewels, rope and paper. Easy to store, they impart a grandiose impact when unfurled. Symbolic import based on the scriptures authorizes their use.

Temple adornment

Chikō
Mandala
1200



Garland
Sutra
12th c.

Most commonly, banners are found decorating the holy area hung above, beside and around a Buddhist image. As such they evoke a vision of Buddha's world where celestial beings, Buddhas, bodhisatvas and other enlightened 'souls' reside in perpetual beauty among fragrant flowers, gleaming jewels and sweet music. Banners are described as adoring the holy stupa in the sky, and as offered in homage to the Buddha, incurring merit to the donor. The adornment is perpetually perpetrated through fresh offerings and supplication.

In front of Buddha a Stupa... sprang up... decorated with precious things ... and countless banners and flags and jewel garlands ... All... paid homage to the stupa with flowers, perfumes, garlands, streamers, canopies, and music... Everywhere jewel-decked awnings were spread, banners and canopies hung ...⁵

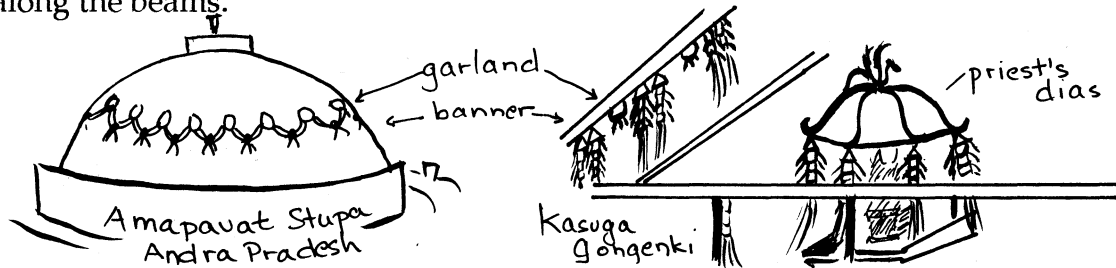


painting on
Tamamushi
Shrine 7th



Itsuku-
shima
Shrine

The origins for this vision can be found in India in the decoration of the holy stupa with flowers and streamers, both generally offerings. Along the same lines, in Japan for special services a normal room may be converted into a holy area by hanging cloth and flowers in the form of banners and garlands (*keman*) along the beams.



The close connection between the banner and the stupa rises in part from the stupa as a representation of the Buddha, fittingly adorned with signs of Indian royalty, such as canopies, banners and flowers and jewels. Buddha is shown preaching and meditating under canopies hung with banners. In Japanese temples banners (or jewel bells) hang at the corners of canopies set above the Buddhist image, the altar implements (esoteric), and above priest's seat.

The canopy bedecked with banners can be traced also, I believe, to a central story of Buddhism, that of Shakyamuni sitting under the Bodhi tree, fighting off the many temptations of the Mara and finally at dawn defeating them by revealing to them the banner, or the light, of his wisdom. His Enlightenment is synonymous with the unfurling of the banner that dispels Chaos and establishes Order. In Mahayana Buddhism, the Buddha Ratnaketu-- "jewel banner" or "jewel light" (*ketu* meaning both banner and light) embodies this banner of light appearing with the first rays of the sun (Agni, or fire, in the Vedic world), the revelation of the Dharma, the light of Wisdom that severs and dispels the darkness of ignorance.⁶

As pointed out at the conference, the banner as *ketu* also becomes the central shaft, or *axis mundi*

Representing the sun's rays with strips of cloth might be best effected with long narrow strips, and such streamers can be seen, for instance in the Indian practice of hanging narrow strips of cloth from the sacred bodhi tree to memorialize Shakyamuni's enlightenment.⁷ In a Chinese metal repoussé we see the Buddha sitting under a canopy-like tree strung with pendants and tassels. (Here I use "pendant" for dangling decorations, often stones or beads, "streamer" for long strips of cloth straight off the loom, and "tassel" for appendages to larger objects.)⁸ In an 8th century embroidery of the Buddha Preaching (Nara National Museum) we see him under a "jewel" tree whose branches are entwined with a canopy and strung with tassels. Dunhuang relics and wall paintings show the Buddha sitting under a canopy with banner-like tassels forming a fringe and classic banners (with heads, arms and legs) hung at the corners.



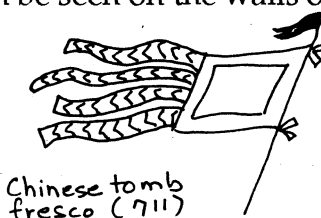
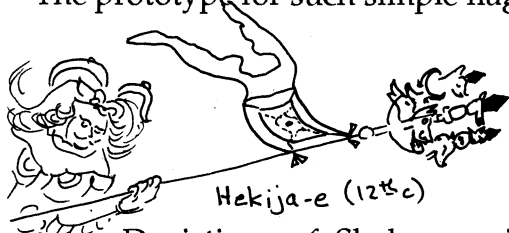
In 12th century Japanese depictions of the Pure Land the canopy is often a roof with tassel-banners hanging along the rim and standard banners (or bells) from the eaves.⁹ Banners may appear again in the bottom section of these paintings, particularly of illustrations of the Garland or Lotus Sutras where figures offer banners, gaining merit and opening an avenue for mortals to eventually enter the everlasting world of bliss.

In considering the banner context, a cluster of imagery emerges: tree, stupa, canopy, banner, streamer, jeweled pendants, bells. Telescoping and magnification operate. Microcosms contain macrocosms and a part may not only stand for the whole, but incorporate the whole within it. Just as the stupa signifies the *axis mundi*, the Buddha, the tree of life, and a multiplicity of other things, so also the triangular-headed banner decorating the stupa replicates the pagoda (stupa) form, and might thereby signify it. On some later banners the imagery may be regenerated with the banner containing a depiction of a pagoda, or of yet another banner.¹⁰

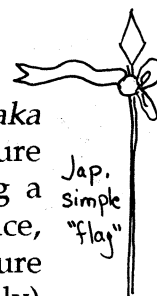
Banner with Bodhisattva holding a banner Dunhuang (Seoul D. Museum)

Banners as weapons against evil

The obvious military implications of the banner used to vanquish the evil enemy echoes secular uses of the banner, as a standard to rally forces in battle. Military imagery can be found elsewhere in the sutras. The *Holy Teachings of the Vimalakirti* describe how the Bodhisattvas "raise their standard (banners) on the field of enlightenment."¹¹ The *Kyōyō shinshō* presents religious endeavor as a metaphorical battle, stating that prayer "is like the banner of the brave warrior because it can disperse the entire army of evil spirits"¹² Various of the guardian deities that inhabit the Buddhist world appear dressed in armor and some carry flags: squares of cloth with appended strips. These flags, attached at two corners to a pole or spear, are the horizontal counterpart to the vertical banner and their prototype can be seen in Chinese war flags. Wielded against evil, the flags hold the enemy at bay as Bishamonten does in the Hekija-e: Painting of the Annihilations of the Demons (12th c., Nara National Museum). The spears of guardians, even when not equipped with square-tailed flags, generally have at least a strip of cloth tied to them and flapping in the wind. The prototype for such simple flags can be seen on the walls of Ajunta, India.



Depictions of Shakyamuni and 16 heavenly beings (*Shaka jūroku zenshino*) show him flanked on one side by a figure holding a vertical banner and on the other one holding a horizontal flag. Although there is no absolute correspondence, generally a gentle figure holds the banner, a military figure the flag. (Everywhere bodhisattvas hold vertical banners only)





Hōryūji
14th c.

These paintings were set up for the recitation of the Heart Sutra (*dai hannya kyō*) to avert calamity. The depicted banners here serve two ends: to protect against evil encroachment and to mark the identity of the crowd of figures.

← Banners flanking Shakyamuni →

Banners as ensigns and to lead processions

Held high the banner is a signpost calling all to a gathering.

For processions banners are carried like standards and function as an ensign of the presence of the Buddha or Bodhisattva. The Buddhist iconography derives from ancient Indian practice, where the king's entourage usually carried a canopy over the king to keep him in the shade and a banner to announce his presence. A similar function informs the custom in Tang China, recorded by the Japanese monk Ennin, of flying banners from tall temple buildings to advertise the presence of a holy spot, much as a medieval castle flew pendants from its towers.¹³ Today for festivals, Japanese fly long strips of five colors stitched into a tubular form at one end (*fuskinagashi*) from high poles.¹⁴



fuskinagashi

The function as an ensign is acted out in ritual processions and depicted in paintings. Particularly beautiful examples can be seen in the Pure Land Buddhist *raigō*, or Descent of Buddha (usually Amida) ceremonies and paintings. Surrounded by a host of 25 Bodhisattvas Amida descends to transport the deceased to his Pure Land. Among the host is always one Bodhisattva who leads carrying a canopy to place over the deceased, and another with a banner waving in the breeze.



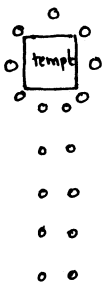
raigō-e



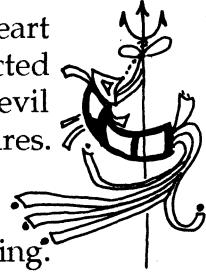
Banners to measure out and mark sacred space

For festivals and rituals banners are set up to mark out sacred space: usually circumscribing the precincts, or at least standing at the cardinal directions, and lining the sides of the approach. They may be hung from long poles set in ground foundations, or from the rafters of buildings. The hundreds of banners made for the inauguration ceremony, or Eye Opening, of the Great Buddha at Tōdaiji in 752 must have been used, in part at least, to establish the sacred area. When recently they celebrated the reroofing of Tōdaiji with gala performances reminiscent of the 752 celebration, they hung large replicas of 8th c. banners on high poles set along the approach and about the precincts as well as from the eaves of the building.

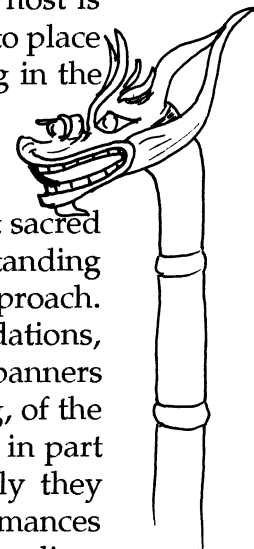
Possible
placement
of
banners



The banner poles (both stationary and carried) have intricately modeled heads, the most popular form being in the shape of a dragon. From the dragon's mouth the banner streams downward. Protectors of Buddhism, dragons are creatures



stupa
fresco
Kazil
7th c.



Banner
staff
(Hoam
Art Museum
Korea)
12th-13th c.

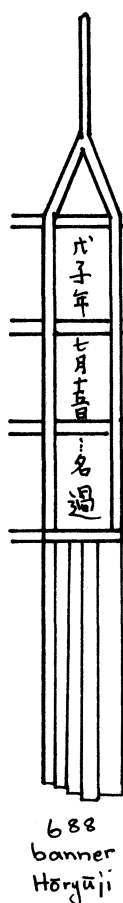
of the clouds and water who control the rainfall. They have been depicted spurting water over the new-born Shakyamuni.¹⁵ The imagery is repeated when large banners (*daikanjōban*) are placed over the head of an initiate during an ordination ceremony, during which his head is sprinkled with water.

Banners as ceremonial tools

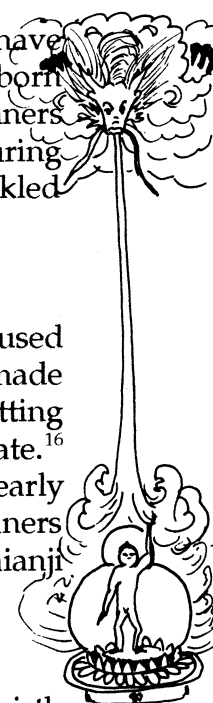
Banners may be carried during a ceremony and used symbolically. In some ordinations (*kanjō*) the banner is made to flow over the forehead of the ordained thus transmitting the virtue of the Buddha inherent in the banner to the initiate.¹⁶ The popular use of banners for ordinations in the early Japanese Buddhism is reflected in there being 14 *kanjō* banners dated to 747 at Hōryūji and 12 of the same date at Daianji and many more from 757 in the Shōsōin.

Offeratory banners

Offering banners to gain merit and ensure success gave birth to a variety of specific types of offertory banners (see Takeda essay).¹⁷ The use of an offertory banner constitutes a prayer for the soul of the maker, the person for whom it was made, and any person whose belongings (hair, garment) are incorporated in the banner. At the same time it brings them merit. An obvious and early form of supplication with banners was to pray for health. Already in the 3rd c. BC King Ashoka is said to have had a miraculous recovery from severe sickness by having banners set on the posts of his bed. His life was extended 12 years.¹⁸ Banners for the dead (*semmōia* or *myōkaban*) assure extra merit in after life. A number of banners, one from 688, inscribed with the name of the deceased, date and the word *myōkaban* remain in Hōryūji. They are mostly plain weave, solid color banners with spindly arms and some have filled in heads (unusual for Hōryūji banners). For funerals today, plain strips of inscribed white cloth are slung from poles and carried in the funerary procession, one at each of the four corners of the coffin. Prayers for the dead continue at set intervals. In 757 Japan held a state ritual to memorialize the first anniversary of the death of Emperor Shōmu. For this, records indicate that over 2500 banners were used, most produced in the space of one year. Some remain in the Shōsōin, others were sent as thank you payment to the provinces.



688
banner
Hōryūji



Buddha
just
born
(Chinese
woodblock)



Votive
banner
(nobori)

TEXTILES BANNERS at Hōryūji and the Shōsōin.

The vast majority of the extant 7th and 8th century textiles of Japan are preserved in Hōryūji and the Shōsōin. While the former include banners possibly from as

early as the 650s, most of the banners in the Shōsōin were made in the 750s, many produced for two state-wide gala ceremonies: the Eye Opening of the Great Buddha (752) and the First Anniversary of the Death of Emperor Shōmu (757).¹⁹ Even in the five years between these two ceremonies, dynamic changes can be seen in the textile techniques and patterns.



TYPES OF FABRIC IN BANNERS²⁰

Hōryūji	plain weave :solid color, crepe, ikat	<i>nishiki</i> *	<i>aya</i> **	
Shōsōin	plain weave, solid color, crepe	<i>nishiki</i>	<i>aya</i>	gauze

TYPES OF SURFACE DESIGN

Hōryūji	embroidery, ink
Shōsōin	embroidery, painting, block resist, bind resist, wax resist (hand painted, block printed (stenciling?) , gold painting

*NISHIKI FABRICS WITH MULTICOLORED PATTERN WARP OR WEFT

Hōryūji	warp <i>nishiki</i>	geometric links	beaded medallions	
Shōsōin 752	warp & weft	geometric links		<i>karahana</i>
Shōsōin 757	mostly weft		a few medallions	<i>karahana</i>

**AYA: FIGURED FABRICS

(TWILL PATTERN ON PALE GROUND, OR AGAINST TWILL IN THE SAME OR THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION)

Hōryūji	plain ground	geometric links	beaded medallions	
Shōsōin 752	mostly plain	geometric links		<i>karahana</i>
	some twill			
Shōsōin 757	mostly twill	geometric links	beaded medallions	<i>karahana</i>
	some plain			



The implications in the shift from warp to weft patterning, from multicolored to single color weft patterning, from Persian-inspired designs to Chinese and their Japanization, etc. are discussed in detail by Japanese scholars.²¹ Topics touched on include imported versus Japanese-produced cloth, technique and weave structure; also sociological implications such as the textile artisans employed by the central court, the dissemination of techniques to the provinces, and the role of tax and tribute paid in cloth.

Rather than repeat this information, I would like to pose a few questions.



The early *ikat* found in the *kantō* (or *kanton*) banners of Hōryūji (now at Tokyo National Museum) and the few fragments of multicolored *ikat* in the Shōsōin were probably imported. From where? Uemura Rokurō suggests that the argument that the name "Kanton" reflects their origin in Canton, i.e. South China, is simplistic.²² He points out similarities in motif to Tai and Indian *ikat*. Similarities to modern Afghan *ikat* were mentioned in the conference.



Kyōkechi, or block resist, described and illustrated in Ms. Bernard's presentation, is the most frequent form of surface decoration on Shōsōin banners. Introduced

put on painting by the esoteric (Tantric) sects must have contributed to the sudden outburst of these representational banners and presumably to a shift in their use. Extant 13th century Japanese embroidered banners clearly function as a canvas for figures that might be hung in the altar, and not merely as decorations around it.²⁷ These banners are similar to embroidered hanging scrolls of the period.²⁸



¹ W.G. Aston, *Nihongi: Chronicles of Japan from the Earliest Times to A.D. 697* (Vermont and Tokyo, Tuttle. 1972) Vol. 2p. 65. Another present, from Silla, sent in 622 included 13 banners (p. 149)

² The Tamamushi zushi, a portable shrine of Lady Tachibana with paintings on its sides. One depicts Buddha preaching to the dragon king in a pavillion with banners hanging from its pillars.

³ This field has been well researched by such Japanese textile historians as Matsumoto Kaneo, [including "*Shōsoin no senshokuban, zengohen*" (The Textile Banners of the Shōsoin) in *Shosōin nempō* (Annual Report on the Shōsoin) vol. 3&4 (Nara: Office of the Shosōin, Imperial Household Agency, 1981-82). *Shōsoin no nishiki*, no 293 of *Nihon no bijutsu*, (Tokyo: Shibundo, 1990) and *Shōsoin no senshoku*, no102 of *Nihon no bijutsu* (Tokyo: Shibundo 1964). Aslo Okumura Hideo, "*Nihon jōdai no ban ni tsuite*" (Japanese Banners of the Ancient Period) in *Hōryōji kennō kōmotsu: senshoku I* (Treasures from the Hōryūji: Textiles I)(Tokyo National Museum, 1986). Sawada Mutsuyo, including "*Senshoku: genshi kodai*" (Textiles: prehistoric and ancient periods)no. 263 in *Nihon no bijutsu* (Tokyo: Shibundo, 1988) and various reports on restoration of banners in *Museum* (Tokyo National Museum, 1992, 1994, 1995). A good English language reference is Matsumoto K., *Jōdaigire* (Kyoto: Shikosha, 1984) and his article "The construction of Ancient Cloth Banners: Hōryūji style and Shosōin style" in *The treasures of the Shōsoin: buddhist and Ritual Implements*, Mitsumori M, ed. (Kyoto: Shikosha) 1993.

⁴ Hickman, M. "Notes on Buddhist Banners" *Boston Museum Bulletin* 71 (1973) #363 p 4-20. Kitamura, T. " On the Embroidered Banners in the Henushi Shrine" *Bijutsushi* Vol 7 No. 2 (1957) p. 59-68. *Shubutsu* (Tokyo: Kadokawa shoten 1964).

⁵ Katō, B. et al tr. *The Three-fold Lotus Sutra* (Tokyo: Kosei Publishing Co., 1975) p. 195-6, 198.

⁶ Snodgrass, A., *The Symbolism of the Stupa* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell U. SEAsia Program 1985) p. 172.

⁷ Sekine, S. *Butsu/bosatsu to donai no shōgon*, *Nihon no bijutsu* #281 (Tokyo: Shibundo, 1989) p. 94, fig. 14.

⁸ Sanskrit words for banner include: 1) *ketu*, (J: *bukki* 仏旗) discussed earlier. 2) *hvaja* (J: *dō* 幢), hung from a pillar or pole and symbolizing the virtue of the law that wardsoff evil. 3) *pataka*, (J: *ban* 幡) banners of merit. Numerous variations exist in Japan and according to Sekine(1989:93) even in India they are not strictly distinguished .

⁹ Bells or bell pendants are common today. Early banners, particularly metal ones, often had bells for arms and legs.

¹⁰ 9th and 10th c. Chinese banners abound in depictions of figures carrying banners. For interesting Tai parallels see Gittinger, M. & Lefferts, L. *Textiles and the Tai Experience in Southeast Asia* (The Textile Museum, Washington D.C. 1992) p130, pl 3.41.

¹¹ Thurman, R. tr. *Holy Teachings of the Vimalakirti* (University Park, Pen U. Press, 1976), p. 68

¹² Ishida, M. ed., *Kyōgyō Shinshō* (Kyoto: Ryūkoku U., 1966) p. 73

¹³ Reischauer, E.O. *Ennin's diary* (New York: Ronald Press, 1955)

¹⁴ The five colors--blue (often represented as green) yellow, red, white and black (often represented as purple). The Japanese trace these to the Ancient Chinese *gogyo* system of associating the colors with compass directions, virtues, parts of the body, pitches, etc. but the Indians also seem to have had a similar type color association. The *fukinagashi*, or "blown streamer" has secular and non Buddhist ritual parallels, in particular in April and May for the celebration of Boy's day, many households fly carp streamers (*koinobori*) with the top-most streamer being the *fukinagashi*.

¹⁵ Legge M. tr. *A Record of Buddhist Kingdoms: Fa Hsien's Diary*. (N.Y.: Dover Press 1965) p. 66

¹⁶ *Hōbōgirin: Dictionnaire Encyclopédique du Bouddhisme d'après les Sources Chinoises et Japonaises* (L'Académie Impériale du Japon, 1981) p. 49-50. Reischauer 1955, p 302 describes a *kanjō* baptism where "5 jars of water were poured on my head. At night I made offerings to the 12 heavens banners...."

¹⁷ The Ordination Sutra (*kanjōkyō*, Ch. 11) lists the benefits incurred by donating banners.

¹⁸ T. 449 stipulates lighting lamps at seven levels and suspending banners of five colors to prolong life and cure illness. Story in Tt 2040x and 2123x.

¹⁹ Mitsumori, M. ed. *The Treasures of the Shōsōin: Buddhist and Ritual Implements* (Kyoto: shiksha, 1993) p. 11. As the inscriptions are written in the Chinese cyclical year system, they could be off.

²⁰ These charts are a simplification of Table III in Matsumoto, 1984, p 216.

²¹ See note 3. Recently in English: Matsumoto 1984, Mitsumori 1993, Matsumoto *Shosoin Textiles* (Kyoto: Kyoto Shōin, 1993).

²² Uemura, R. "*Indo no kasuri to sono shūhen*" (Indian *ikat* and its repercussions) *Senshoku to Seikatsu* no. 11, Winter '75:138-142

²³ Yamanobe, T. "*Indo no kyōkechizome*" (Indian block resist dyeing) *Senshoku to Seikatsu* no. 11, Winter '75: 133-137

²⁴ Takada, Y. "*Kyōkechi fukugen no koro*" (When I recreated *kyōkechi*) *Senshoku to seikatsu* No. 17, Summer '77 p 50-53.

²⁵ Hickman 1973, p. 11-13

²⁶ Today many of these are in the Musée Guimet in Paris, the British Museum, London, the Otani collection in the Seoul National Museum, Korea, and the Tokyo National Museum.

²⁷ The embroidered banners at Henushi Shrine are believed to be representations of the 32 lesser deities of the Kongōkai, meant to surround the five central figures. See Kitamura Tetsuo, "On the Embroidered Banners in the Henushi Shrine" *Bijutsushi: Journal of the Japan Art History Society*, October 1957.

²⁸ Indeed the banner and hanging scroll have a related structure. Not only the triangular head and elongated body are similar, but also technical parallels can be seen in the considerations necessary to stabilize the patchwork of different weight cloths and to maintain the shape by strengthening it at the top and weighting it at the bottom. One wonders at the origin of such nonfunctional parts of the hanging scroll as the *futai* decorative strips descending from the spot where the triangular hanging cords are attached. The *fuchin*, or supplementary tassels, function like the feet of the banner to stabilize the hanging scroll.