

Room Six: Painting

Buddhist Painting

The Buddhist paintings displayed here were originally mounted on a pair of folding screens, although now they are preserved as twelve separate hanging scrolls.

N 3-1-1: Prince Shōtoku and Five Attendants

Prince Shōtoku was instrumental in spreading Buddhism in Japan and was the founder of Hōryūji Temple. In this painting, Prince Shōtoku (574–622) sits under a canopy in the center, with three Buddhist monks and two aristocrats positioned around him. The figures were originally labelled on thin strips of paper, though the text is now illegible. Prior to its removal during conservation treatment, a later painting on silk of the monk Kūkai (774–835), the founder of Shingon Esoteric Buddhism, had been sewn in during a repair.

N3-1-2: Descent of Amida (Amitabha)

The buddha Amida is depicted here with three bodhisattvas riding on clouds. They are descending to earth to guide a dying believer to the Pure Land, a Buddhist paradise where anyone can attain enlightenment. Depictions of this scene were later codified, but this early work retains unique, older stylistic choices — such as painting the buddha Amida and the bodhisattvas white.

N3-1-3: Sakyamuni Triad with Sixteen Arhats

The founder of Buddhism, the buddha Shaka, sits in the center atop a lotus pedestal, his head surrounded by a halo. Before the pedestal are two attending bodhisattvas, Monju and Fugen, while his disciples, the Sixteen Arhats, are depicted on either side. The buddha Shaka's robes are decorated in detailed geometric patterns of stylized hemp leaves and Buddhist swastikas (*manji*) rendered in cut gold leaf.

N3-1-4, 3-2-1: Fudo Myoo (Acalanatha) with Two Boy Attendants

The fearsome wisdom king Fudō is charged with converting stubborn unbelievers to Buddhism and guiding them to enlightenment. He stands atop a rocky throne jutting out from the sea. He is flanked by two of his manifestations, who appear as boy attendants. The upper part of his halo is depicted as a violent swirl of flame.

N3-1-5: Shaka (Sakyamuni) Triad

The buddha Shaka, the founder of Buddhism, sits cross-legged atop a hexagonal lotus pedestal with a lion making up a part of it. He is flanked by two attendants: To his right is Monju, the bodhisattva of wisdom, while Fugen, the bodhisattva of ascetic practice, rides an elephant to his left. The details on the lotus petals along with the patterns on the deities' robes are rendered in cut gold leaf and gold paint.

N3-1-6: Aizen Myoo (Ragaraja)

Seated atop a lotus pedestal, the Wisdom King Aizen is depicted in a fearsome guise with three eyes and six arms, each of which holds a symbolic object. This deity was thought to have the power to change lust and passion into the desire for enlightenment. The base of the pedestal is inlaid with Buddhist treasures, such as flaming jewels.

N3-2-2: Miroku Bosatsu (Maitreya)

Seated with his left leg pendent, the bodhisattva Miroku is depicted with large halos around his body and head. The bright colors used in this work indicate a more recent date of production, with similar works dating from the mid-1800s.

N3-2-3: Monju Bosatsu (Manjusri)

The bodhisattva Monju, who represents the virtue of Buddhist wisdom, rides a majestic lion facing the viewer with its mouth open. He is portrayed as a child sitting atop a lotus, which symbolizes the purity of his wisdom, with a halo framing his face. A closer look reveals that this image was embellished with gold and silver pigments, as well as finely-cut slivers of gold leaf.

N3-2-4: Thousand-armed Kannon (Avalokitesvara) and Twenty-eight Followers

Shown standing atop a rock, this bodhisattva possesses a thousand arms that represent his ability to save all living beings—although the actual number depicted here is forty-two. He is flanked by thirteen attendants on either side, with the Thunder God to the upper right, and the Wind God to the upper left. The pigments are relatively well-preserved, and during conservation treatment, labels on thin slips of paper were found behind the old backing paper that listed the names of Kannon's twenty-eight followers.

N3-2-5: Descent of Amida (Amitabha) Triad

The buddha Amida is shown descending to earth to guide a dying believer to the Pure Land, a Buddhist paradise where anyone can attain enlightenment. He is flanked by two attending bodhisattvas, Kannon and Seishi. The buddha Amida's body and robes are adorned with gold paint, and his halo is decorated in cut gold leaf and gold paint, hinting at the splendor of the original work.

N3-2-6 : Shaka Nyorai (Sakyamuni)

The buddha Shaka, the founder of Buddhism, is depicted here cross-legged atop a lotus pedestal. He has halos around his body and head, and his red robe has been decorated in a fret pattern in gold paint. The lotus petals and the outline of the pedestal are decorated in relatively large pieces of cut gold leaf. Remnants of gold paint and layered gradations of color are also visible on the hexagonal part of the pedestal.

Room 6: Textiles

Colorful Twills in Ancient Buddhist Banners

Buddhist ritual banners, called *ban*, are divided into three sections named after their resemblance to the shape of a person. The top, middle, and bottom sections are called the “head,” “body,” and “legs,” respectively. The banner fragments currently on display are mainly the bottom sections, or “legs,” and are made of twill-weave silk.

To make a twill-weave textile, the weaver passes a horizontal thread over one or more vertical threads and then under two or more vertical threads in a repeated pattern, often resulting in a distinct diagonal or chevron design. Historically, twill weaves began to appear in Japan during the Kofun period (ca. 3rd century–7th century), and the earliest twill techniques were used to make geometric patterns. From around the 7th century onwards, more advanced twills, featuring representational designs, like birds or dragons, also began to appear in Japan.

This gallery traces the diverse patterns and motifs seen in the bottom sections of Buddhist ritual banners and presents an overview of the development of Japanese textiles from the 7th to 8th century.

N-319-22: Fragment of *Ban* (Buddhist Ritual Banner), With each square section consisting of four triangular pieces sewn together

Woven in twill weave, this textile is mostly covered in early geometric diamond patterns, but more advanced cloud patterns are also visible in certain sections.

N-319-27-1: Fragment of *Ban* (Buddhist Ritual Banner) “Banner Leg,” With paired dragons and four-petal flower design roundels

This textile shows a pair of dragons, their snaking bodies facing each other in a large roundel. The space around the main motif is decorated with vines and floral patterns.

N-319-87-3: Fragment of *Ban* (Buddhist Ritual Banner) “Banner Leg,” With arrowhead pattern on light yellowish green ground

N-319-106: Fragment of *Ban* (Buddhist Ritual Banner) “Banner Leg,” With arrowhead pattern

This chevron-patterned fragment uses twill-weave techniques that are particularly old, such as twill and figured twill patterning on a plain-weave ground structure (twill damasks).

N-319-111: Fragment of *Ban* (Buddhist Ritual Banner) "Banner Leg," With pattern of five diamonds inside beaded roundels

Woven using a twill-weave pattern on a plain-weave ground structure, this textile features diamonds of varying sizes positioned inside roundels encircled by beaded roundels.

N-319-119: Fragment of *Ban* (Buddhist Ritual Banner) "Banner Leg," With pattern of nested lozenges

This textile is an example of early geometric patterning and was woven using a figured twill pattern on a plain-weave ground structure

Bottom Sections of Buddhist Ritual Banners in Twill Weave

The appearance of patterns in twill-weave textiles changes depending on what angle the viewer is looking from. Try changing your position as you look.

I-336-23: *Ban* (Buddhist Ritual Banner) "Banner Leg," With alternating checkered pattern on yellow ground

I-336-25: *Ban* (Buddhist Ritual Banner) "Banner Leg," With arrowhead pattern on yellowish green ground

I-336-26: [*Ban*] (Buddhist Ritual Banner) "Banner Leg," With flowers and birds design in a tortoiseshell pattern on yellow ground

I-336-27: *Ban* (Buddhist Ritual Banner) "Banner Leg," With paired phoenixes and bead and arabesque roundels design on red ground

I-336-29: *Ban* (Buddhist Ritual Banner) "Banner Leg," With paired dragons, flowers and four-petal flower roundels design on dark yellowish green ground

I-336-33: *Ban* (Buddhist Ritual Banner) "Banner Leg," With scrolling grapevine arabesque design on white ground

I-336-36: *Ban* (Buddhist Ritual Banner) "Banner Leg," With tortoises and flowers design in a tortoiseshell pattern on yellow ground

I-336-38: Cloth, With paired birds and bead roundels design on red ground

I-336-40: *Ban* (Buddhist Ritual Banner) "Banner Leg," With paired birds and bead roundels design on dark blue ground

I-336-43: *Ban* (Buddhist Ritual Banner) "Banner Leg," With arrowhead pattern on yellowish green ground

I-336-49: *Ban* (Buddhist Ritual Banner) "Banner Leg," With checkered pattern on red ground