

Room Six: Textiles

Buddhist Ritual Banners (*Kanton-ban*) and Fragments of Banner Legs

The current exhibition features Buddhist ritual banners passed down at Hōryū-ji Temple, including examples of impressive plain-weave and twill-weave silk ikat banners. Other works include banners and banner legs using various colors.

Ban

Buddhist ritual banners called *ban* were displayed at Buddhist temples. *Ban* is usually 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.

N-25: *Kanton-ban* (Buddhist Ritual Banner) in Plain-Weave Silk

To make the cloth used in the upper section of this banner, specific sections of the vertical warp threads were dyed different colors before being woven together, in a technique called “warp ikat.” Textiles from the 7th century that were dyed using warp ikat techniques are common in the collection passed down at Hōryū-ji Temple. In contrast, there are virtually no textiles made using this technique in the collection of Tōdai-ji Temple’s Shōsōin repository, which mostly contains works from the 8th century. This warp ikat cloth was used in this ritual banner probably because it was considered a valuable import from China or Korea.

N-304-2: *Kanton-ban* (Buddhist Ritual Banner) in Twill Weave

This invaluable ritual banner still retains its original top, middle, and bottom sections. The rectangular sections in the middle, which are now mostly empty, contained fragments of twill-weave silk as well as warp ikat textiles called *kanton*, from which the name of this banner is derived. Another noteworthy characteristic of this work is the presence of round, gilt-bronze fittings.

N-319-38: Large *Ban* (Buddhist Ritual Banner)

This large ritual banner features a colorful ensemble of fabrics. Not a single panel remains in its entirety from the middle section of this banner, but it is evident that the original was relatively large and made up of elongated rectangular panels. Conservation process revealed that plain-weave silk fabric from Japan’s Sanuki Province (present-day Kagawa Prefecture) was used in one of the long, thin bottom sections of the banner. It was given to the temple as a form of tax payment.

N-319-11: Fragment of *Ban* (Buddhist Ritual Banner)

N-319-13: Fragment of *Ban* (Buddhist Ritual Banner)

N-319-20: Fragment of *Ban* (Buddhist Ritual Banner)

N-319-28: Twill-Weave Fragment of Bottom Section with Large Pair of Dragons, Vines, and Four-Petaled Flowers

This twill-weave fragment features a large roundel enclosing two powerful dragons with snaking bodies facing each other. Small flowers and vines encircle the roundel. Twill-weave patterns reflect light differently depending on where the viewer stands. A simple change in viewing angle can make the woven pattern more visible.

N-319-49: Cloth Fragment

This textile fragment in plain-weave silk features brilliant red coloring. Although dyes tend to fade quickly through exposure to light, the red, purple, and dark blue dyes seen in the textiles passed down at Hōryū-ji Temple have retained their vivid colors to a surprising extent. The top of the bottom section features an ink inscription that reads “Ikaruga-dera,” an alternative name for Hōryū-ji Temple.

Colorful Fragments of the Bottom Sections of Buddhist Ritual Banners

All that remains of some banners are fragments of the bottom sections. These fragments are colored in various shades of red, blue, and yellow, and serve as examples of the beautiful textiles that people of the Asuka and Nara periods (6th–8th centuries) created out of religious devotion.

N-319-51-2: Fragment of *Ban* (Buddhist Ritual Banner): “Banner Leg”

N-319-51-3: Fragment of *Ban* (Buddhist Ritual Banner): “Banner Leg”

N-319-57-1: Fragment of *Ban* (Buddhist Ritual Banner): “Banner Leg”

N-319-61-1: Fragment of *Ban* (Buddhist Ritual Banner): “Banner Leg”

N-319-67-2: Fragment of *Ban* (Buddhist Ritual Banner): “Banner Leg”

N-319-81-2: Fragment of *Ban* (Buddhist Ritual Banner): “Banner Leg”

N-319-98-3: Fragment of *Ban* (Buddhist Ritual Banner): “Banner Leg”

N-319-137: Fragment of *Ban* (Buddhist Ritual Banner): “Banner Leg”