

Digitalizing “Scrolls” at the British Museum

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Research Background

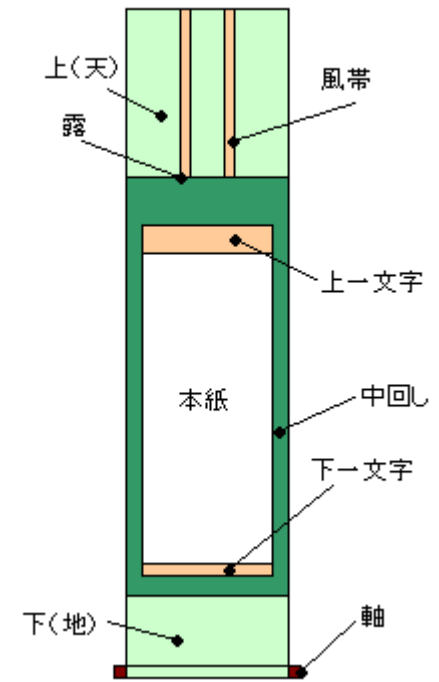
- Hokke-shu (法華宗): a Buddhist school established by the monk Nichiren in the 13th century, Japan.
- Art of Hokke-shu flourished throughout the Medieval and early Modern times.
- How art and religious activities were associated during the Edo period (1603-1867).

Purpose of Dispatches

- 01/26/2011-03/28/2011
University of London (SOAS)
- 08/26/2011-11/02/2011
University of London (SOAS)
- To collect materials at libraries and archives in UK which relate to the research topic.
- To photograph and digitalize paintings at the British Museum.

Outline of the Digitalizing Project

- Focusing on the format of “scroll”: hanging scroll (掛幅) and handscroll (卷物).
- Hanging scroll originally associated with the Buddhist context.
- Expanded into other themes, such as landscape, portrait and genre painting.





Outline of the Digitalizing Project (2)

- Handscroll also initially connected with Buddhism, particularly hand-copying of sutras (写経).
- Many kinds of themes to appear.

The format of “scroll” was space where the religious and secular contexts mingled together.

Scrolls at the British Museum

- More than 2000 scrolls at the British Museum.
- Hanging scroll and handscroll are stored together in the shelves.
- Classified by the size, but not by the subject.

How to Photograph Scrolls at BM?

- Difference between hanging scroll and handscroll: hanging scroll is a painting, while handscroll is more closely related to a book.
- Each scroll needs a different type of setting to photograph.
- For hanging scroll: uses zoom lens to deal with various sizes.
- For handscroll: uses macro lens to keep distortion to a minimum.

Whole and Detailed Images



Whole image



Detailed images



Achievements from the Dispatches

- More than 500 scrolls have been photographed and digitalized.
- Hanging scroll are 503, and handscroll are 84.
- Around 5000 images taken.
- Some works are closely related to my research topic.

Output of the Dispatches

- “Patronage and Viewership in Art of the Hokke Sect” at Association for Asian Studies, in March 2011.
- “Nichiren Shōnin or Jion Daishi?: A Portrait of a Monk at the British Museum” at Association for Asian Studies, in March 2012 (coming).
- Creating an image database of painting at the Art Research Center.

Future Works

- Approximately 1500 works to be photographed at the British Museum.
- Add metadata to the image database at ARC.
- Write theses based on research at SOAS and the British Museum, and submit to academic journals.