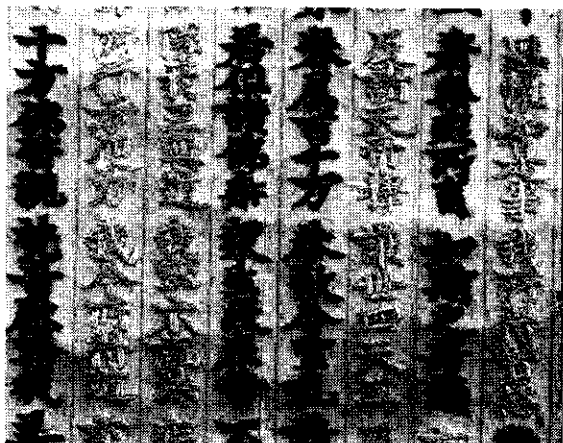


Explamation of the cover illustration

著者	HAYAKAWA Monta
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Explanation of the Cover



Embroidered Text of Lotus Sutra

Kamakura period (13-14th centuries)

Height : 27.5 cm. Width : 50.3 cm.

(Kyoto, Private Collection)

Photograph by Maki Naomi

The design on the cover was made over 700 years ago and is a close-up photograph of the text of a Lotus Sutra of one Buddhist sutra.

In Japan the practice of sutra copying of Buddhist sutras occurred around the latter half of the seventh century, however, commencing in the middle of the Heian period (eleventh century) there numerous decorated sutra sutra copies were made. In general decorated sutras were splendidly ornamented as the surface on which the sutras were written were covered in gold, silver and various colors, further the frontispiece was also painted with elegant pictures and designs, while the scroll tip was extravagantly finished in quartz etc. The featured work is one kind of decorated sutra that uses colored thread as the sutras are embroidered, these are called embroidered sutras.

In this work, the sutras are manifested by using embroidered threads of white, yellow, orange, green, blue, purple, in fact nine varieties of thread in all, on thick hemp paper that has been drawn with ruled lines in gold pigment. Embroidered sutras which are the articles of the deceased have been transmitted to us in several varieties, however, the use of colored thread in this work is rather remarkable. Moreover, the embroidery technique is remarkably conscientious as each letter of the sutra clearly floats to the surface, while the majestic penmanship gives true expression. In this work only 25 lines of the sutras have been left behind, but for those unused to embroidered sutras even among decorated sutras it is of a highly superior style. Nevertheless, the photograph is not an exact copy, as both the top and bottom margins are scattered with various kinds of tiny pieces of gold and silver cut foil, a truly magnificent finish.

Finally, what was the reason for the concern for the magnificently decorated sutras, and in particular the Lotus Sutra, in the midst of the numerous humbler sutras. The first reason is that : in copying the Lotus Sutra naturally that person became virtuous, and when entering Nirvana was able to an explanation of the Lotus Sutra. However, what reason produced the strong motive for decorating these sutra copies, the intention of the Lotus Sutra was to do justice to Buddha's eternal life, freely using the literary expressions of poems and metaphors, and by doing so succeed in depicting that world in a flamboyant way.