ON A PAINTING OF FUGEN AND THE JūRASETSUNYO
AT THE NARA NATIONAL MUSEUM

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In the history of the depiction of the Lotus Sutra in Japan, many images of Fugen (Skt., Samantabhadra) and the ten rasetsunyo (rakusasī) were painted from the late-Heian through the Kamakura period. This fact is attested in the written record, and more than twenty such works are still extant. This study concerns one of the several of this type of painting at the Nara National Museum; specifically, one painted on silk which has been deemed an Important Cultural Property. It is examined chiefly in terms of iconography and the manner of its representation. By looking at the manner of representation in terms of the reception of Song Chinese painting and considering the problem of the evolution of the appearance of the ten rasetsunyo in Japanese dress, I have attempted to situate this work within the history of painting.

In the Nara National Museum painting are depicted Fugen Bosatsu with hands clasped in prayer atop a white elephant, Yakuo (Bhaisajyā-raja) and Yuse (Praadhānasura) bosatsu, two celestial kings, Bishamon (Vaisravana) and Jikoku (Dhṛtarāstra), nine rasetsunyo, and Kishimo (Hāritī). As regards the iconography of Fugen and the other two bodhisattvas as well as the two celestial kings, precursors can be seen in the paintings of the Lotus Sutra from the Heian period, frontispieces of sutras written in gold ink on blue paper, and images of the Coming of the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra. I have focused on the fact that instead of the ten rasetsunyo that are usually depicted, in this Nara National Museum painting, Tahotsu (Kesinī) is missing and there are only nine rasetsunyo. I have found a source for the iconography in the twelfth fascicle of the Gojikkansho of Kōnen (1121-1203), who was active in the late-Heian period, and I point out that, as regards the manner of representation, a special characteristic of the Nara National Museum painting is that it combines the style and techniques of the Song in the depiction of the bodhisattvas but carries on at the same time the tradition of representing the rasetsunyo in Japanese dress. From these stylistic characteristics, the creation of the Nara National Museum painting can be dated to the close of the thirteenth century. Additionally, I have indicated that the representation of the face of Fugen bosatsu that had been adopted from the Song style was a transformation from late-Heian iconography of Fugen. As regards the Japanese dress of the ten rasetsunyo in the Nara National Museum painting, after reexamining the description in the Gojikkansho, I indicate that its precursors, such as the depiction of the rasetsunyo in Japanese dress found in the Heike nōkyō, were painted as symbols of the female god, Itsukushima-shin, worshipped at Itsukushima Shrine. On the basis of this analysis, the evolution to the image of the rasetsunyo in Japanese dress can be situated as profoundly related to worship of female deities and their imagery, and the interpretation of them as the transformed figures of the Gojikkansho makes this possible. Finally, I indicate that at the close of thirteenth century, when the Nara National Museum painting was produced, Fugen Jūrasetsunyo images were customarily used in memorial services for retired emperors and hypothesize about the circumstances of the dedication of this Song-influenced Fugen Jūrasetsunyo painting and where the service may have taken place.