

Colour Schemes on Wooden Guanyin Sculptures of the 11th to 13th Centuries, with Special Reference to the Amsterdam Guanyin and its Cut Gold-foil Application on a Polychrome Ground

Fine threads of gold-foil are a special mode of surface decoration, and up to now have been considered typical for Japanese Buddhist works of art.¹ On numerous sculptures and paintings in Japan a decoration with thinly cut gold-foil, called 'cut gold' (Japan: *kirikane*), adorns the skirts and scarfs of holy beings in the Buddhist world.

In China these geometric patterns, made from extremely thin gold threads, do not seem to have been very common and are rarely found nowadays, even though gold-foil applications, generally called 'applied gold-foil' (Chinese: *tiejin*), are known at least since the 6th century dynasty. Until now it has been assumed that this skillful surface decoration had its origins in China, but reached its highest refinement in Japan. However, because of the scarcity of known material, the circumstances of the Chinese cut gold-foil decorations have so far not been properly investigated.

With the help of new material which has become available through closer examination and the restoration of Chinese wooden sculptures of the Song, Liao and Jin dynasties in Western Museums, not only the assumption that *kirikane* originated from China can now be confirmed, but furthermore the close relationship between Japanese decoration techniques and their Chinese predecessors can now be established as well. As Japan offers a well-studied and adequate range of examples of *kirikane*, I will refer to Japanese sculptures to illuminate the Chinese development of cut gold-foil applications.

After a short introduction, I will consider some technical questions. To examine the relationship between Chinese and Japanese cut gold-foil decorations, it will be necessary to take a short look at the development of cut gold-foil in both countries. In the second part of the paper, the emphasis will be laid on the Water-Moon Guanyin, kept in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, which shows a complex surface decoration with cut gold-foil.

Today, most of the wooden sculptures of the 11th, 12th and 13th centuries no longer show the original polychromy, because of more recent redecorations. Many of them have, however, preserved coats of paint which are datable to the Ming dynasty.² They now appear in an overall golden colour, with additional relief or pastiglio patterns on their skirts and scarfs. A short comparison of the front and back of the Guanyin sculpture in the Art Institute of Chicago (fig. 1) shows the different colour schemes: a completely golden surface on the front and a more colourful and varied rendering on the back (fig. 2), which probably reflects the original decoration of the 11th to 13th century.³

A similar situation can be observed on the Amsterdam Guanyin (fig. 3 and colour plate VI, 2), where the golden Ming period surface decoration was removed in the 1940s, to reveal a more realistic surface decoration underneath.⁴ Hopefully, many more original surface decorations of this period will come to light in the future through close examination and restoration of these sculptures. In any case, from what is known today we can safely assume that all sculptures of the Song to Jin dynasties – including the Amsterdam Guanyin – were originally decorated in a more 'realistic' and more colourful rendering.

Cut gold-foil was obviously an important component of this realistic conception. To proceed further, it is necessary at this point to focus briefly on the meaning and on some technical aspects of cut gold-foil applications.

Gold-foil was applied on Buddhist sculptures and paintings in order to give them a precious appearance. Gold itself was not seen as mere decoration, but as a gift to Buddha. Thus the decoration of Buddhist works of art with gold and silver was a way of expressing ones devotion to Buddha. Gold or silver paint was conceived as more precious than ink or paint, and in turn cut gold-foil was more precious than painted gold and thus expressed greater devotion.⁵

Gold-foil applications on sculptures most probably represent gold-thread embroidery or designs rendered in colour or gold-foil imprints on textiles. They most likely imitated not only Chinese textiles, but also those influenced by Central Asian clothes. In the future it needs to be considered how far cut gold-foil patterns did in fact refer to textiles, and where they developed their own effects, through, for example, straight lines and sharp angles.⁶

Technically, Japanese *kirikane* or cut gold-foil decorations need a careful preparation of the material. Three layers of thin gold-foil leaves are joined together through heating (fig. 4). Thus the foil becomes thicker and does not tear as easily. Next, a sharp bamboo knife is used to cut threads of gold-foil up to 3mm width. With glue made out of seaweed and a brush to pick them up, the gold threads are applied to a coloured surface or an unpainted wooden ground. While carefully applying the threads to the surface, the patterns, consisting of bent-lines or geometrical schemes, are developed.⁷

In the following section of the paper I will trace the development of cut gold-foil decoration in China and Japan. Cut gold-foil decorations existed in China prior to the Song dynasty, and influenced Japanese works of art. The origins of gold-foil applications on sculptures go back at least to the Northern Qi dynasty (550-577), as examples from recent excavations in Shandong province, Qingzhou, have shown.⁸

One of the earliest examples of cut gold-foil decorations representing textile patterns can be seen on the clothes of Bodhisattvas in Dunhuang. Until now, the art of cut gold-foil decorations in Dunhuang has not been analysed in detail, but recent research into patterns on the dresses of the Bodhisattvas in Dunhuang demonstrates conclusively that cut gold-foil was used in various ways from at least the Sui dynasty onward.⁹ These patterns included designs of applied cut gold-foil which are very similar to the early *kirikane* patterns found in Japan. In the Sui dynasty cave No. 427 bands of rhomboid patterns of cut gold-foil (fig. 5) are interspersed between fields of coloured patterns. Although these early Chinese cut gold-foil patterns do appear a bit crude, they make apparent that the technique of imitating golden textile patterns on sculptures was already well-known in China at the time.



Fig. 1: Guanyin, 11th-13th century, front; Art Institute of Chicago (Photo: author).

图 1. 观音, 11-13 世纪, 正面, 芝加哥艺术学院(摄影: 本文作者)。

Another Chinese example showing early Chinese cut gold-foil decorations is the marble sculpture of Da Anguo si at Xi'an, consisting of a marble base and a Buddha, now in the Shaanxi History Museum (fig. 6). This time it is not textiles which are imitated; instead, the edges of the lotus throne are highlighted with lines of cut gold-foil, and the lotus-leaves decorated with flowers made out of tiny cut gold-foil rhomboids (fig.7).

In the following examples it should become clear that the Chinese patterns were the inspiration for Japanese works of art, as Japanese sculptures show comparable patterns of tiny lozenge-shaped pieces of gold-foil which are combined with threads of cut gold-foil. One of the earlier gold-thread decorations still preserved today can be seen on the trousers of Bishamonten from the 9th century (colour plate VI, 1) in the former Ordination Hall (J: *Kaidanin*) at Tōdaiji Temple in Nara from the 9th century. On a green ground we see a geometric pattern of cut gold-foil threads, with flower-motives of lozenge-shaped pieces in-between. Motif and technique are not only comparable to the Da Anguo Si marble base, but also to the patterns we have just looked at on Bodhisattvas' dress in Dunhuang. This cross-reference confirms that already at this early stage cut gold-foil patterns on Japanese sculptures were inspired by Chinese works of art. To sum up so far, the early patterns in cut gold-foil in Japan,

as well as in China, consisted of simple geometric patterns of fine lines and rhomboid shapes.

For Japanese *kirikane* decorations it is generally accepted that the simpler patterns gradually developed into more complicated forms, which in this case means that simple patterns of a few lines grew into dense, net-like patterns. The development of more complicated motifs began in the 11th century, but during the 12th and 13th century the art of *kirikane* decorations had reached its peak. As the technique was by then fully understood and mastered, thin threads of gold-foil could be used more freely. From that time on, bent lines were *en vogue*, forming motifs like clouds or waves, and many flower and leaf patterns or complex geometric patterns appeared.¹⁰

This summit of achievement in the 12th and 13th century clearly coincides with new influences in carving styles and decorations from China. Japanese Buddhist sculptures not only bear influences from China in their carving, but also show surface decorations and patterns of cut gold-foil which are obviously influenced from China.¹¹ The sitting Kannon (C: *Guanyin*) of the 12th and 13th century kept at the Senyūji Temple in Kyōto is just one example which clearly records this connection; with its grape-leaf garlands of cut gold-foil on its knees and coat, it recalls features which appear in Japan with the beginning of the Kamakura period (fig.8). Patterns on Kaikei sculptures appear to be modern for the time and had not previously been used in Japan in this way. Kaikei is a sculptor whose style is said to have been influenced by Chinese art of the period.¹² Grape-leaf design on the borders of the Kaikei'st Amitābha's dress show up in a new variation during this period, as well as a complex hemp-leaf pattern, which covers, for example, wide areas of this sculptures attire (fig.9). The complex geometric, net-like patterns and the more natural ones with complicated bent-lines had their origin in Song China, too, an observation, which will be supported by the following Chinese examples.

Fig. 2: Guanyin, 11th-13th century, back; Art Institute of Chicago (Photo: author).

图 2. 观音, 11-13 世纪, 背面, 芝加哥艺术学院(摄影: 本文作者)。





Fig. 3: Guanyin, 11-13th century, front; Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.
图3. 观音, 11-13世纪, 正面, 阿姆斯特丹皇家博物馆。

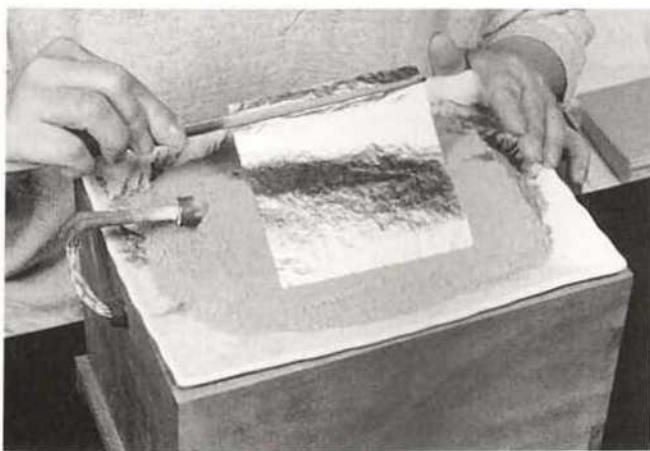
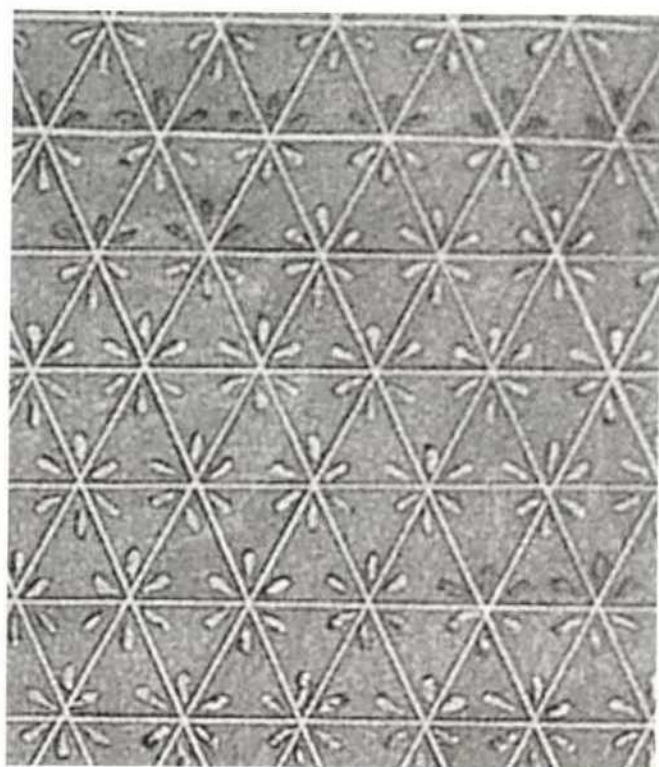


Fig. 4: Three layers of thin gold-foil leaves are joined together through heating (Repro from: YOSHITAKA).

图4. 加热使3层金箔合为一体(取自: 义孝有贺)。

Fig. 5: Bodhisattvas, two examples of garment decoration; Dunhuang (Repro from: YOSHITAKA).

图5. 菩萨, 外衣装饰两例; 敦煌(取自: 义孝有贺)。

Until recently very few Chinese sculptures which could confirm the hypothesis that the patterns of 11th and 12th century decorations were influenced by Chinese sculptures have been found. The examples of Chinese sculptures to be presented next will demonstrate that the variety and complexity of Chinese cut gold-foil-patterns was more than capable of inspiring the refined patterns seen on Japanese sculptures. Due to improved photography and recent restorations, or the removal of later coatings, it has become possible to thoroughly document Chinese wooden

sculptures with cut gold-foil decorations. The richest example in this respect is the Water-Moon-Guanyin of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. Fine geometrical and bent-line patterns in complex arrangements can be appreciated on this sculpture, and with it we can gain an impression of how high-quality pieces were decorated in China during the Song to Jin dynasties.

The sculpture of the Water/Moon Guanyin in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, dated to the 11th/13th centuries, was one of the first Chinese works of art on which a cut gold-foil decoration



Fig. 6: Da Anguosi-Buddha, marble; Shaanxi History Museum (Repro from: YOSHITAKA).

图 6. 大安国寺-佛, 大理石, 陕西历史博物馆(取自: 义孝有贺)。

Fig. 7: Da Anguosi-Buddha, detail of marble base; Shaanxi History Museum.

图 7. 大安国寺-佛, 大理石宝座局部, 陕西历史博物馆。



Fig. 8. Kannon, 12th/13th century, detail of the left knee, floral spandrel decoration; Senyūji Temple, Kyōto.

图 8. 观音, 12/13 世纪, 左膝局部, 蔓花装饰; 京都泉涌寺。

Fig. 9. Buddha Amitābha, Shunjōdō, Tōdaiji, 1208, detail of the garment, hemp-leaf-decoration.

图 9. 阿弥陀佛, 东大寺, 1208, 外衣局部, 大麻叶装饰。

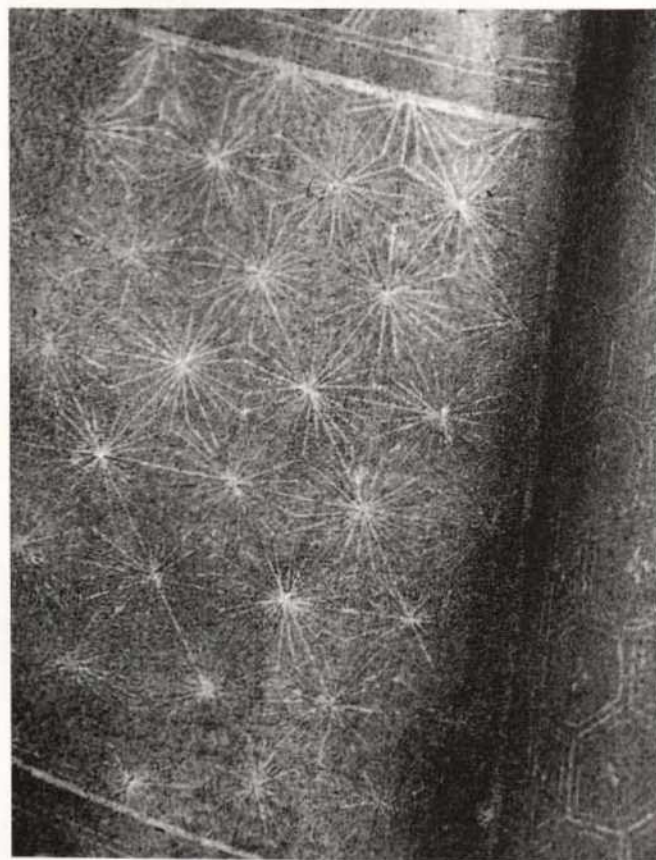




Fig. 10. Guanyin, detail around the knee; Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum (Photo: Rijksmuseum).

图 10. 观音，膝处局部；阿姆斯特丹皇家博物馆(摄影：皇家博物馆)。

comparable to Japanese examples was found (comp. fig. 3 and colour plate VI,4). The sculpture of 'Guanyin sitting in Royal Ease' has already been discussed by Dietrich Seckel, Heidelberg University. He praises the sculpture not only for its refined style, but especially for its well-preserved cut gold-leaf applications.¹³

The gold-foil-decoration on the skirt was discovered in the 1940s when the sculpture received a surface treatment. During a second investigation conducted in 1998, a more detailed picture of the paint layers could be achieved and close-up shots of the cut gold-foil decoration could be taken; these allow us now to get a clearer impression of the patterns on the skirt. The *dhoti* or skirt of this sculpture offers three different, complex cut gold-foil applications, all consisting of extremely thin threads of gold-foil on a bright red coloured ground.

The area of the knees (fig. 10) is separated from the rest of the skirt through five wavy lines of cut gold-foil. Here, the impression is of a net of stars covering the area. The pattern was probably developed geometrically according to a chequered board; this can be seen best in a drawing made by Eri Sayoko, one of

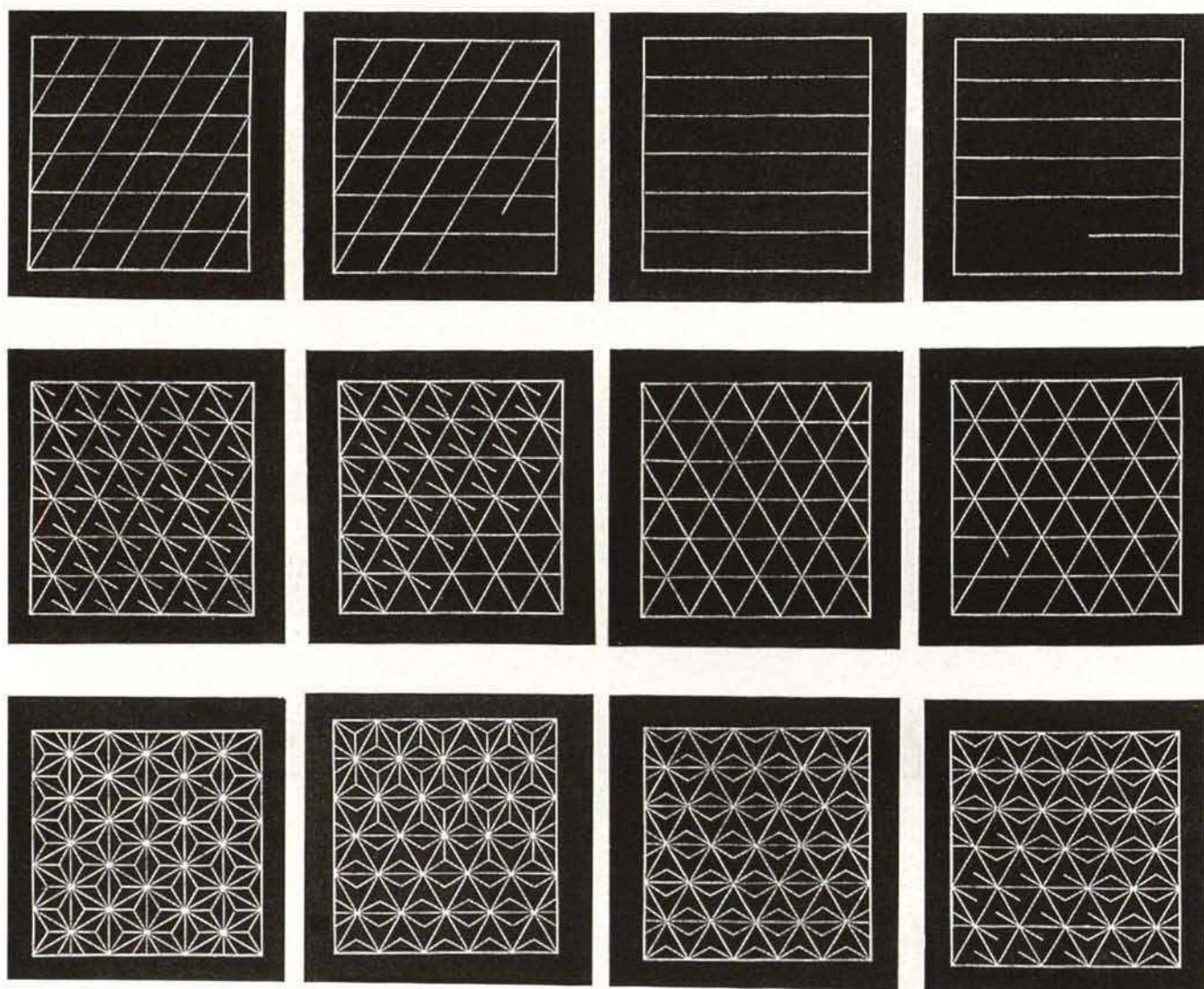
the few *kirikane* masters in Japan today (fig. 11).¹⁴ A comparison makes clear that the pattern on the Amsterdam Guanyin can be described as a hemp-leaf pattern, very much comparable to the Japanese examples discussed above.

But the Amsterdam Guanyin is not the only Chinese sculpture with such an application known today. This kind of cut gold-foil pattern was obviously quite common in China. It can be seen too, for example, on the sleeves of a sculpture of Weituo Tian, the protector of relics and books (colour plate VI,3). This sculpture, dated to the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1278), is kept today in Chôryuji Tempel in Gifu province. It is generally accepted that it was brought there from China in the 12th century.¹⁵ In another variation, the hemp-leaf pattern is interspersed with small cross-shaped flowers.

Another sculpture, also dating to the 12th century or earlier, also comes from the southern part of China. In the Provincial Museum at Hangzhou a little clay sculpture, about 40-50 cm high, is on display. It can be roughly dated to the 10th to 12th century and is assumed to come from Baixiangta Pagoda, west

Fig. 11. Geometrical pattern development (Repro from: YOSHITAKA).

图 11. 几何图案发展图示(取自: 义孝有贺)。



of Wenzhou City, in the southern part of Zhejiang province (fig. 12). In its lap, on a red coloured ground, it shows a hemp-leaf cut gold-foil pattern, very much comparable to the one we've encountered on the Amsterdam Guanyin (fig. 13).

The above-mentioned three examples of hemp-leaf pattern clearly show that this kind of cut gold-foil pattern was prolific in China from at least the 12th century onwards.

The largest area of the skirt of the Amsterdam Guanyin is covered by a net-like pattern of connected hexagonal shapes (fig. 14 and colourplate VI,4). Again, this is a pattern quite common on Japanese sculptures since the early Kamakura period (colourplate VI,5). An interesting fact worth noting here is that the hexagonal pattern on the Amsterdam Guanyin's skirt is obviously not only just laid over the red coloured ground. It would appear as well that the green clouds and phoenixes or cranes, which also decorate the skirt, are covered by the cut gold-foil pattern too. This seems unusual in comparison with Japanese examples, which always differentiate clearly between polychrome patterns and a cut gold-foil decoration on the ground layer. As could first be stated as a result of a recent analysis by Aleth Lorne, the cut gold-foil decoration of the Amsterdam Guanyin could also be a later over-decoration, applied after the first coating of a red ground colour with interspersed clouds and phoenixes.¹⁶

Another pattern belonging to the Amsterdam Guanyin's cut gold-foil decoration can be seen on a wide band or border along the edge of the skirt (fig. 15). As far as one can judge from the detail photograph, it consists of spade-like leaves set one beside the other. The pattern seems not to be one of any geometric consistency, but made instead of freely-set, bent or curved lines. The distribution of lines is not very dense, standing rather in the tradition of naturally distributed grape-leaf garlands known from Japanese sculptures at the beginning of the Kamakura period, like the above mentioned Buddha Amitābha from Kaikei or the Kannon from Senyūji temple.

Non geometrical, bent-line patterns do not only turn up on the Amsterdam Guanyin, but also on other Chinese sculptures datable to the 12th century and earlier. On the already mentioned Weituo Tian, for example, we find next to the hemp-leaf pattern a decoration of wave or cloud-like cut gold-foil application (comp. colourplate VI,3). Furthermore, I would like to consider the small sculpture sitting in 'royal-ease' which came up for sale in the Eskenazy summer exhibition of 1990 and was published in the catalogue (fig. 16 and 17): as can be deduced from the detail, while the arrangement of single threads of gold-foil is like an arm of a hemp-leaf-pattern, the lines next to it suggest that this was part of a more complex motif, perhaps flowers, as can be seen on the coat of Amida's dress. That flower and leaf motifs out of cut gold-leaf were used on Chinese sculptures as well is demonstrated in a further example. On the skirt of a nearly life-size sculpture of a sitting Guanyin cut gold-foil decoration has come to light under a Ming dynasty coating (fig. 18). The piece was exhibited in a Deydier sales exhibition in 1996 and is now in a private collection in Taiwan. The detail (fig. 19) clearly shows the naturally rendered leaves of a flower, belonging to a pattern which obviously covered a larger part of the skirt, as the pattern seems to continue adjacent to the flower. The distribution of flower leaves even seems comparable to the grape-leaf pattern shown already on the Japanese sculpture of Chōryūji in Gifu province, where flowers were organized in a border-like band.

From what we have seen of Chinese cut gold-foil decorations on the Amsterdam Guanyin and on other examples it is obvious



Fig. 12. Sitting Guanyin, 10th/12th century; Hangzhou Province Museum.
图 12. 端坐观音, 10/12 世纪; 杭州浙江省博物馆。

that complex net-like and geometric patterns as well as bent-line, flower-leaf patterns were firmly established by the 12th century and could thus have influenced the Japanese Kamakura patterns. The covering of the dresses with a system of cut gold-foil patterns, as could be observed on the skirt of the Amsterdam Guanyin, is also very similar to Japanese examples.

In conclusion cut gold-foil decoration had its origin in China and influenced the Japanese patterns at least twice, in the 7th/8th centuries and in the late 12th/13th centuries. Decorations with complex patterns of cut gold-foil were no isolated phenomenon, but frequently employed on Chinese sculptures in a highly



Fig. 13. Sitting Guanyin, 10th/12th century; detail of the skirt; Hangzhou Province Museum.

图 13. 端坐观音, 10/12 世纪; 裙子局部; 杭州浙江省博物馆。



Fig. 14. Guanyin, detail of the skirt; Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.

图 14. 观音, 裙子局部; 阿姆斯特丹皇家博物馆。

Fig. 15. Guanyin, detail of the border of the skirt.

图 15. 观音, 裙子滚边局部。



Fig. 16. Eskenazi Guanyin.

图 16. 埃斯克纳齐观音。

Fig. 17. Eskenazi Guanyin, detail of the skirt.

图 17. 埃斯克纳齐观音, 裙子局部。



skilled manner. The cut gold-foil designs discovered on Chinese sculptures during recent years are in quality and variation comparable to Japanese pieces. Further research and technical examination of sculptures kept in the collections of museums or still *in situ* in Chinese temples will be necessary in order to support and develop these observations.

Notes

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- 2 LARSON, JOHN and KERR, ROSE: Guanyin – A Masterpiece revealed. London, Victoria and Albert Museum, 1985, p. 13.
- 3 At the moment the sculpture is under examination by the Art Institute's Conservator.
- 4 VISSER, H. F. E. (without title), in: *Vereeniging van Vrienden der Aziatische Kunst En Haar Museum van Aziatische Kunst*, Amsterdam, Bulletin, Nieuwe Serie No. 3, 1946, pp. 26-28. VISSER, H. F. E.: A 12th Century Chinese Wooden Bodhisattva revealed in its Original Beauty, in: *Illustrated London News*, Christmas No. 1947.
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- 6 ITÔ SHIRÔ: Inseiki butsuzô no Kyôto to Nara-monyôarumon to shokkomon (Decoration of Buddhist Sculptures in Kyôto and Nara during the Reigns of Cloistered Emperors-marumon-circle-pattern and shokkomon-circle-pattern), in: *Kokusai kôryû bijutsushi kenkyûkai, Dai 11kai shinpojiumu: Tôyô bijutsu ni okeru sôshokusei The Society For International Exchange of Art Historical Studies, The 11th Int. Symposium: The Decoration on Asian Arts*, Kyôto 1992 p. 25.
- 7 SECKEL, DIETRICH: Kirikane – Die Schnittgold-Dekoration in der japanischen Kunst, ihre Technik und ihre Geschichte, in: *Oriens Extremus*, Vol. 1, Hamburg 1954, p. 71 ff; ERI SAYOKO: Kirikane no gi-jutsu to kufû (Mittel und Technik von Kirikane Dekoren), pp. 86-93, in: ARIGA 1997.
- 8 *Wenwu* 1998. 2, pp. 4-20.
- 9 ARIGA 1997, p. 23, plate 69; CHANG SHA'AN: Dunhuang Lidai fushi tu'an (Dress Patterns in Dunhuang through the Dynasties), Hong Kong 1986, p. 8.
- 10 SECKEL 1954, pp. 82-85.
- 11 ITÔ, SHIRÔ: Keiha sakuhin ni miru sôshokusei: Kaikei butsu no kirikane o chûshinmonyôni (The Decorativeness seen in the Sculptures by the Keiha-School, focusing on cut Gold-foil Decorations of the Buddhist Sculptures made by Kaikei), in: *Henkakusei no Bukkyo Geijutsu. Bukkyo Geijutsu kenkyû Ueno kinen zaidan – Buddhist Art During the Transitional Period. The Ueno Memorial Foundation for the Study of Buddhist Art*, Report Vol. 25, Kyôto 1994, pp. 1-6.
- 12 MIZUNO KEIZABURÔ: Unkei to Kaikei, Kamakura no kenchiku, chokoku (The Sculptors Unkei and Kaikei, Architecture and Sculpture of the Kamakura-Period), *Nihon Bijutsuzenshu* Bd. 10, Tôkyô 1991, p. 124.
- 13 SECKEL, DIETRICH: Kirikane in der Kunst Chinas und des Nahen Ostens, in: *Oriens Extremus*, Vol. 10, 1963, pp. 149-161.
- 14 ARIGA 1997, p. 91.
- 15 ARIGA 1997, p. 68.
- 16 ALETH LORNE: The Rijksmuseums Guanyin – Report of the Preliminary Technical Investigations, 2 Vols. (unpublished copy), Amsterdam/Den Haag 1998, p. 18.



Fig. 18. Deydier Guanyin.

图 18. 戴伊迪尔观音。

Fig. 19. Deydier Guanyin, detail of the skirt.

图 19. 戴伊迪尔观音, 裙子局部。



11 至 13 世纪木制观音像的彩绘结构： 以阿姆斯特丹观音及其金箔在彩绘表面上的应用为重点

宋、金、辽雕塑的装饰问题，我想在我的博士论文中进行探讨。这里我想重点讨论在西方博物馆收藏的结跏趺坐的自在观音木雕像。

关于宋、金、辽时期雕塑彩绘的研究不多。重要的出版物有约翰·拉森和罗斯·克尔编著的保护报告“观音 - 展示一件杰作”(伦敦, 1985 年), 作者关注的是维多利亚和艾伯特博物馆的雕塑。除此之外, 只有极少的且大多没有发表的在西方博物馆所做的观察工作。

佛教雕塑是宗教环境的组成部分, 受时尚的影响, 它们中的大多数都被重新修饰过多次。原始表面常常隐藏在全然不同的覆盖层之下。随着研究方法的改进, 愈来愈多的雕塑彩绘结构的真相暴露出来, 引人入胜的细部得到揭示, 这些为了解彩绘概念提供了新的线索。

我在报告中着重介绍 3 座在西方博物馆收藏的结跏趺坐的自在观音木雕像, 它们分别藏在维多利亚和艾伯特博物馆、芝加哥艺术学院和阿姆斯特丹皇家博物馆。

在仔细观察这几件雕刻时, 我讨论和分析了其彩绘, 特

别是阿姆斯特丹的观音像的切金装饰。

我将围绕下列几点对这些雕刻进行探讨:

- 重新装饰阶段的全部金色覆盖层。
- 3 座雕像的围巾、披巾和罩裙上的彩绘。
- 阿姆斯特丹的观音像上的切金装饰。

初步结果:

所有金色重新装饰, 3 件雕刻的做法类似, 均以“压地隐起”之法(*pastiglio*)构成浮雕花卉图案。覆盖层可能是辽代之后产物, 看来反映了不同的宗教雕塑思想。

- 原始彩绘结构大多受到纺织品的启示。阿姆斯特丹的观音像的装饰看来最为先进。

- 在阿姆斯特丹的观音裙子上看到的切金装饰也许并不象迄今所想象得那么独特。一大批宋至辽代雕塑的图案影响了日本平安和镰仓时代的木雕。

这项研究的目的在于更好地理解彩绘的发展, 获得更好的断代方法, 确定这些雕刻在中国艺术史中的地位。

(英译中: 陈钢林)