

The Pair of Japanese Bronze Lanterns at Brigham Young University

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Brigham Young University has recently acquired a pair of handsome Japanese temple lanterns, made of bronze.¹ Metal lanterns of this type were called *kane doro*, and they were used almost entirely as temple lanterns. They were either placed around the outside of the temple building itself, or were placed in rows in the outer gardens, often lining the avenue of approach. Generally they were pious gifts from individuals who offered them in memory of some deceased friend or relative.

These are no exception, because the inscription says that these were respectfully offered, on June 19, 1716, by a high official of the Tokugawa Family, which then ruled Japan, to be placed in the courtyard before the mausoleum of Lord Yusho (the Seventh Tokugawa Shogun, who died in 1716), in memory of him.² These were two out of a set of twelve which he presented at that time.

The two lanterns are practically the same in construction; so a precise description of one should serve to explain both. The basic idea of the whole structure is to represent the Universe in symbolic form, with all its component parts.

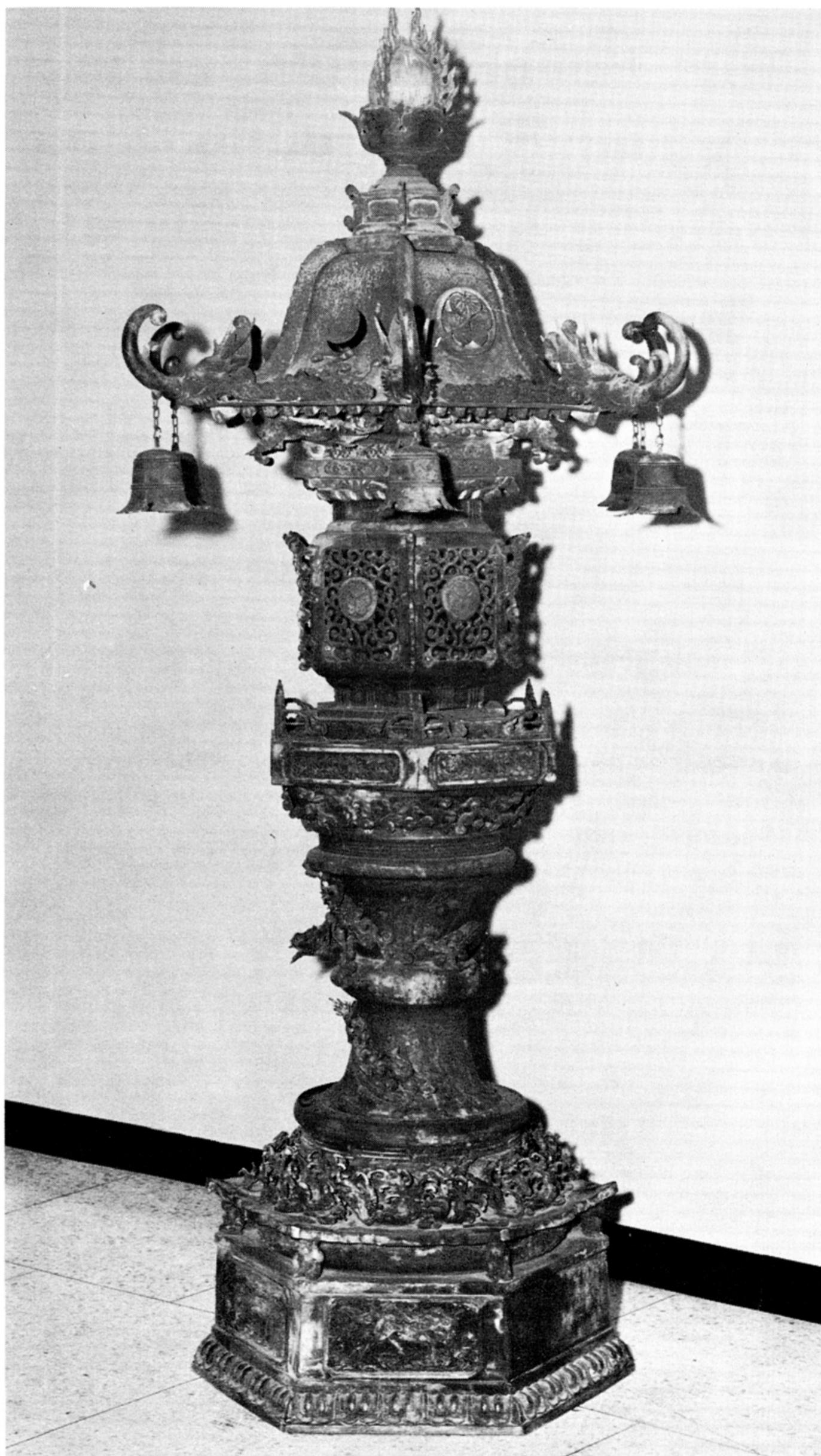
Beginning at the bottom, we find a six-sided base rising above a set of conventionalized flower petals, which represent the cosmic lotus that was thought to provide the foundation of

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¹In addition to these two lanterns donated by Lorraine Allen of Los Angeles, Brigham Young University has also recently acquired forty-five pieces of eighteenth and nineteenth century oriental ivory carving in honor of Mrs. Pearl Jones Pharis.

²The actual inscription on the two lanterns reads:
"Tokugawa Tsuna-eda, Junior Third Rank, Acting Middle Counsellor, respectfully offers, on the last day of the fourth month of the Shōtoku reign-period (June 19, 1716), twelve copper lanterns (to be placed) in the courtyard before the mausoleum of Lord Yushō (i.e. Tokugawa Testsugu)."

(Translated with the help of Professor E. Dale Saunders)



the earth. The base itself, which signifies Earth, or "land," has three panels picturing a mythical animal called a *kirin*, and three that were left plain for the inscription. Atop this, is a three-dimensional representation of waves and spray, to symbolize the seas and Water. From the center of the base, springs a circular, tapering shaft that supports the lamp proper, and around this coils a Japanese three-clawed dragon, with supernatural flames issuing from its shoulders and flanks. This middle section represents the Air or atmosphere.

Above this, resting on three-dimensional clouds, is the lantern proper, representing the Sky. Around its base is a railing, with floral panels depicting celestial flowers. Then comes the actual lamp, with a lattice panel covering each of its six sides, having enough openwork to allow the light to shine through. Three of the panels have at their centers the *mon* or crest of the Tokugawa Family, formed by three mallow leaves touching at their tips, inside a narrow circular frame.

The lantern is topped by an elaborate roof, representing the canopy of Heaven, resting on an intricate supporting structure simulating wood bracketing. The main beams supporting the brackets proper have embossed panels showing a tiger on the ground and a dragon among clouds above it. These opposing animals symbolize the *Yin* and the *Yang*, which in Old Chinese philosophy—passed on to Japan—were the two main forces in Nature, expressed in Darkness and Light, Passive and Active, Negative and Positive, Female and Male. (In China, these were more usually represented with a circle bisected by an S-curve, one side of the wavy line being black, the other side red—or white; but the Chinese also used the tiger and the dragon to illustrate this concept.)

Over the main aperture of the lamp is a figure in high relief representing a sacred mythical bird (*ho-o*), often described as the phoenix, and considered as a creature of especially good omen.

The ends of projecting rafters, under the roof, terminate in the heads of elephants—by an artist who had doubtless never seen the real animal. Elephant heads were particularly popular in the architecture of this period, and were also used on some of the gates of the first Tokugawa Mausoleum in Nikko, north of Tokyo.

The six-sided roof itself has on it six dragons, whose bodies curl down the ridges between the roof sections, and out of their mouths jut curling tongues from which hang wind bells. (These bells differ slightly on the two lanterns, probably because one complete set of them was lost and had to be replaced.)

One of the lanterns has, on the front panel of its roof, an open circle resting upon clouds. When the lamp was lit the light shining out through this would represent the Sun. The second lamp has, in the same place, a crescent riding on clouds, to represent the moon. This was the only real difference between the two lanterns when they were originally made. Three other roof panels display the Tokugawa crest in open-work, so that they would be quite conspicuous when light shone out through them.

Atop the roof, as a finial, is a flaming pearl to symbolize Divine Truth, which is above all things and yet pervades all. The three tongues of flame climbing its sides divide it into three portions to represent the *Triratna* or triple jewel, symbolic of the Buddhist Trinity.³

Such lanterns are rather common in Japan, but it is unusual to find outside that country such large ones, so rich in sculptured detail. The University is indeed fortunate to have them.

³Editor's note: Masaki Shibata of Hokkaido, Japan, has also done considerable study of the symbolism of the lantern and of the Tokugawa family. Only a fraction of his elaborate notes has been translated into English.