

Murals Adorning the Imperial Seat

Ichino-ma and Ni-no-ma (First and Second Rooms) of the Ohiroma

This year, to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the Kan'ei Imperial Visit (the imperial visit to Nijo-jo Castle in 1626), we are presenting the Kan'ei Imperial Visit 400th Anniversary Series, which showcases the murals from the rooms used during the visit. The Gyoko-goten Palace, located on the south side of the Ninomaru Garden, was built to welcome Emperor Gomizunoo (1596-1680), and the main events were centered around this palace. On the other hand, Ninomaru-goten Palace was used as a viewing area for Noh performances on the stage located south of the Ohiroma, and as a venue for entertaining court nobles and temple heads of aristocratic or imperial lineage.

In autumn, we are exhibiting the murals from the east and west walls of the Ohiroma Ni-no-ma (Second Room), which served as the Emperor's seat, or throne, during the Noh performance, as well as the murals which adorned the area behind the Emperor on the north wall of the Ohiroma Ichino-ma (First Room).

Turning the Ohiroma Second Room into the Imperial Throne

The Ohiroma, located in the center of the Ninomaru-goten Palace, was the most official building in the palace, as it was where audiences with the Shogun took place. During these audiences, the Shogun would sit on the upper level, known as the "First Room," while the lower level, the "Second Room," was where those granted an audience with the Shogun sat. For this reason, the area encompassing the upper and lower levels is also called the "Audience Hall." However, during the imperial visit, this Audience Hall took on a role entirely different from its original purpose.

During the major renovations of Nijo-jo Castle in preparation for the imperial visit, a Noh stage was set up on the south side of the Ninomaru-goten Palace, in front of the Ohiroma Second Room. Therefore, when the Noh performance took place on the fourth day of the visit, the Second Room was designated as the viewing area for the Emperor, Empress, and Empress Dowager. From the *Kan'ei Gyokoki* (the record of the Kan'ei Imperial Visit; written by Ishin Suden), we learn that the sliding doors (*tobusuma* sliding doors) were removed from the boundary between the Second Room and the corridor, a bamboo blind was hung in their place, and a portable *tatami* mat for nobles and a cushion were laid in the room at the edge of the blind for the Emperor, Empress, and Empress Dowager, respectively.

Adornment of the Imperial Throne

The Second Room served as the Emperor's throne, but behind it were the *odoko* (large alcove) and shelves of the First Room. According to the aforementioned *Kan'ei Gyokoki*, in the *odoko* three hanging scrolls painted by Muxi, a Chinese painter-monk of the Southern Song dynasty, was displayed (the poets Hanshan and Shide are in the center and a dragon and tiger are on the right and left, respectively). In the center of the *oshiita* (wooden display board) within the *odoko*, a vase, incense burner, incense pillow, incense container, and incense spoon, all made of silver, were individually set on a stand made of Chinese quince, and, on either side of it, silver vases were also placed on stands made of Chinese quince. The backdrop for all of these decorations was the image of an old pine tree painted in the *odoko*.

Furthermore, in the Second Room, golden tea ceremony utensils were displayed on a *daisu* (a type of shelf) with a pear skin lacquer finish (so named because of its appearance). All of these items displayed in the Ohiroma, along with the decorations and utensils of the Gyoko-goten Palace, were presented to the Emperor.

From the First Room to the Second Room, large pine trees are painted not only on the *odoko* but also on the east, west, and south walls. If the *tobusuma* sliding doors separating the corridor and the rooms, as well as the *fusuma* sliding doors separating the rooms, had all been removed for lighting and other purposes, the lower halves of the pine paintings on the west and south sides would be missing. However, even just the remaining wall above the *nageshi* (horizontal beams) creates a horizontal image in which pine trees and peafowl stand out impressively against a golden background. In the Second Room, a total of six peafowl are painted. Two of them are painted on the wall, so the key elements of the *Matsukujyaku-zu* (*Pines and Peafowl*) would still be present even if the sliding doors had been removed. In other words, it is plausible to think that the painter of the

screen paintings, Kano Tan'yu (1602-1674), composed the murals assuming the conditions under which the room would be used as an audience hall.

Above the *fusuma* sliding doors separating the Second Room and San-no-ma (Third Room), facing into the Second Room, is a carved *ranma* (transom) with a paulownia and phoenix motif. The phoenix is an auspicious bird of legend originating in ancient China, and its concept was introduced to Japan in ancient times. By the 17th century, the image of the phoenix as "the king of birds, appearing as a harbinger of the arrival of a great emperor, living only in Chinese parasol trees, and eating only bamboo fruit" had become established. Because of its association with excellent rulers, it seems to have been favored as a decoration for castles from the Sengoku period (late 15th to late 16th century) onward. In the Ninomaru-goten Palace, the paulownia and phoenix design can also be seen on the nail head covers in the Ohiroma and the Kuroshoin.

Furthermore, records indicate that in the Honmaru-goten Palace of Edo Castle, built in 1659, there was a *ranma* with a paulownia and phoenix motif at the boundary between the lower level of the Ohiroma and the room that continued to the east, suggesting a similar positional relationship to that of the Ninomaru-goten Palace of Nijo-jo Castle. Since historical records do not allow us to trace Edo Castle before its construction in 1659, it remains unclear whether the existing example at Nijo-jo Castle preceded it, or whether there was a precedent at Edo Castle.

Peafowl and Phoenix

Peafowl are not found in the wild in Japan, but there are records of them being presented as gifts from the Korean Peninsula at the end of the 6th century. From then and right up until the Edo period, they were imported as gifts for emperors and powerful figures of the time. Records of them being kept as pets in Japan date back to the 8th century, and they were even kept at the residence of Fujiwara no Michinaga (966-1028).

Peafowl have been depicted in decorative art since ancient times, including in the Shosoin Treasures, and have continued to be used in crafts, sculptures, and paintings since the Heian period (794-1185). In Buddhism, peafowl are revered as birds that ward off misfortune and bring good fortune, as they are said to eat venomous snakes, and were worshipped as the deity Mahamayuri.

It is certain that peafowl began to be depicted on large screens like folding screens during the Muromachi period (1336-1573). Among the gold folding screens commissioned by Ouchi Yoshitaka (1507-1551), a Sengoku daimyo (ruler) of Suo (present-day Yamaguchi Prefecture), in 1541 by Kano Motonobu (1476-1559) as gifts to the Ming Dynasty, there was one with the theme of Moon, Sun, Paulownia, Peacock, and Phoenix. Although that screen no longer exists, the *Paulownia, Bamboo, Phoenix, and Peacock Folding Screen* (Cleveland Museum of Art), attributed to Tosa Mitsuyoshi and the *Four Seasons Flower and Bird Folding Screen* (Hakutsuru Fine Art Museum), attributed to Kano Eitoku, both produced during the Momoyama period (1568-1615), are gold folding screens depicting two peafowl and phoenixes. These provide clues to understanding Motonobu's screen and also demonstrate that it was not uncommon for phoenixes and peacocks to be depicted as a pair from the Muromachi period to the Momoyama period. In the Ohiroma Second Room, the presence of both phoenixes and peafowl in the form of *ranma* carvings and wall paintings is connected to this theme.

Also of note, among the peafowl in the Second Room, the most impressive is probably the flying peacock painted on the wall above the *nageshi* on the west side. With its wings spread out to the left and right like a fan, its tail feathers extended diagonally upward to the left, and its neck and beak forming an S-shape as it turns and looks down to the lower left, its posture is based on the image of cranes in Chinese paintings that had been accumulated by the Kano school. You will also notice that the phoenix second from the right in the *ranma* of the Second Room has a similar shape when reversed. The flying phoenix on the left half of the *Phoenixes by Paulownia Trees folding screen* (owned by the Suntory Museum of Art), which Tan'yu is said to have created for the Tokugawa shogunate in the mid-17th century, is also a variation of this image.

The Second Room, which served as the throne, was a space where magnificent royal birds and auspicious birds danced.

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