Raishi in the Nara and Heian Periods

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It was a general practice in pre-contemporary Japanese culture to enfold letters and letter-like documents in extra sheets of paper. Scholars have called the extra sheet of blank paper that was added to the main letter the raishi, or etiquette sheet, and the paper that was used to wrap the letter, the tsutsumigami, or wrapper sheet. Recently, Minoru Tanaka has advocated calling the raishi the kasanegami, or additional sheet, instead. However, these theories are argued only on the bases of actual Medieval (13th to 16th centuries) examples and literary sources that record the proper way to write letters. It has been unclear if this practice existed in the Nara (7th to 8th centuries) and Heian (9th to 12th centuries) periods. This report discusses the investigation and organization of the information from actual examples from the collection of writings found in the Shoso-in (writings from the 8th century) and the diaries of important families in the middle Heian period (10th to 11th centuries).

The results of this research show that the raishi and tsutsumigami, mentioned in Medieval records and seen in some actual examples, go back as far as the 11th century, and that there are some examples of tsutsumigami in the Shoso-in collection. But the relationship between the tsutsumigami in the Shoso-in collection and the raishi, kasanegami, and tsutsumigami seen in the Medieval historical resources still is not clear. Concerning the origin of the tsutsumigami, there are also some entries related to this question in the Shogi (Writing Rules), a document on how to write letters that was written in the 6th century, China.