



## Printed charm

**Not on display**

**Title/Description:** Printed charm

**Born:** 0764 AD - 0770 AD

**Object Type:** Print

**Materials:** Ink, Paper, Silver

**Measurements:** h. 215 x w. 100 x d. 100 mm

**Accession Number:** 280b

**Historic Period:** Nara period (AD 710-794), 8th century

**Production Place:** Asia, East Asia, Japan

**Credit Line:** Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

The prayer (J. *darani*) was printed between 764 and 770 by order of Empress Shōtoku (718-770) as prayers for peace and reconciliation after her victory in defeating the Emi Rebellion in 764. [1] Emi no Oshikatsu and his faction at court had attempted to displace Empress Shōtoku's trusted and influential adviser, the monk Dōkyō, whose appointment to Chancellor of the Realm (J. *Daijō daijin zenji*) had provoked widespread resentment. [2]

The commissioned prayers were placed within one million miniature pagodas (J. *hyakuman-tō*) for distribution between the ten major Buddhist monasteries in western Japan. [3] The wooden reliquary that was manufactured to store this prayer is also in the Sainsbury Centre Collection (object number: 280a).

The prayer, titled the *Jishin'in darani-kyō*, comes from the *Sutra of Unsullied Pure Light* or *Mukujōkō darani-kyō* 無量壽清淨光菩薩摩訶薩經 (Skt. *Vimalanirbhāsasūtra*). A possible English translation of *Jishin'in darani-kyō* 慈心護念菩薩摩訶薩經 is *Charitable Heart-Mind Seal Prayer Sutra*. It is one of four prayers that have been found in pagodas of this type, the other three being the *Konpon darani* 空印菩薩摩訶薩經, *Sōrin darani* 蘇林菩薩摩訶薩經, and *Rokudo darani* 六度菩薩摩訶薩經. [4] The prayer text is arranged in 31 vertical columns that contain a maximum of five Chinese characters in each column.

*Darani* (Skt. *dhāraṇī*) are Buddhist incantations chanted by the faithful to invoke protection and accumulate religious merit. [5] A *darani* is a form of 'mnemonic device that condenses and encapsulates the meaning of part of a sutra.' [6] The prayer scrolls are the earliest examples of datable printed texts in existence with the sole exception of a *dhāraṇī* dated between 704 and 751 that was discovered in Pulguksa Temple in Kyongju, South Korea in 1966. [7]

Scholars are undecided as to whether the Japanese prayers were printed using metal plates or woodblocks; however, recent microscopic analysis of the prayers commissioned by Empress Shōtoku has revealed impressions of wood grain on some of the texts. [8]

Vanessa Tothill, April 2020

[1] Michael Ryan, Charles Horton, Clare Pollard and Elaine Wright, *The Chester Beatty Library*, (London: The Chester Beatty Library, Dublin in association with Scala Publishers, 2001, repr 2007), p. 98.

[2] Lawrence Smith and Yutaka Mino in Steven Hooper, ed., *Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection: Catalogue* (Newhaven; London: Yale University Press in association with University of East Anglia, Norwich, 1997), vol. 3, p. 143; Brian Hickman, 'A Note on the *Hyakumantō Dhāraṇī*', *Monumenta Nipponica*, 30: 1 (Spring 1975), 87-94 (p. 87).

[3] Ryan, p. 98.

[4] <https://japanknowledge.com/introduction/keyword.html?i=698> [accessed 28 April 2020]; Jana Igunma and San San May, eds, *Buddhism: Origins, Traditions and Contemporary Life* (London: The British Library, 2019), pp. 148-49.

[5] Igunma, p. 126; 148-49.

[6] Igunma, p. 162.

[7] Igunma, pp. 126; 142.

[8] <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/one-million-pagoda-charm> [accessed 28 April 2020]

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## Further Reading

Hickman, Brian, 'A Note on the Hyakumantō Dhāraṇī', *Monumenta Nipponica*, 30: 1 (Spring 1975), 87-94

Hooper, Steven, ed., *Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection: Catalogue*, 3 vols (Newhaven; London: Yale University Press in association with University of East Anglia, Norwich, 1997)

Igunma, Jana and San San May, eds, *Buddhism: Origins, Traditions and Contemporary Life* (London: The British Library, 2019)

Ryan, Michael, Charles Horton, Clare Pollard and Elaine Wright, *The Chester Beatty Library*, (London: The Chester Beatty Library, Dublin in association with Scala Publishers, 2001, repr 2007), p. 98.

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## Provenance

Acquired by the Sainsbury Family in 1967. Donated to the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia in 1973 as part of the original gift.

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