



Printed charm

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* 慈心護念法華經 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* 空印陀羅尼, *Sōrin darani* 蘇林陀羅尼, and *Rokudo darani* 六度陀羅尼. [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]

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.

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.
