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# Exploring Four Block-Printed Indic Script Mahāpratisarā Dhāraṇī (Chinese: 大随求陀罗尼) Amulets Discovered in China

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# Exploring Four Block-Printed Indic Script Mahāpratisarā Dhāraṇī (Chinese: 大随求陀罗尼) Amulets Discovered in China

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**Abstract:** This study examines four block-printed Indic-script *Mahāpratisarā Dhāraṇī* amulets from the late Tang to early Song periods, revealing a more complex history of *dhāraṇī* practices in China than previously understood. By analysing seed syllables and Indic scripts on the Xu Yin, Li Zhi-Shun, Ruiguang Si, and Hangzhou amulets, it highlights their ritual, symbolic, and textual significance. The findings challenge assumptions that these texts were static, showing instead their evolution across time and space. This research opens new directions for understanding Chinese Buddhist practice through *dhāraṇī* materiality, language, and visual culture.

**Keywords:** seed syllable; dhāraṇī amulets; Mahāpratisarā Dhāraṇī; Buddhist textual transmission; Indic scripts in China

## 1. Introduction

*Dhāraṇī maṇḍala* amulets, those circular or square ritual objects inscribed with Indic scripts, have long been marginalised in Buddhist textual studies. Regarded more as protective charms than textual witnesses, they have largely escaped serious scholarly attention—particularly in terms of their Sanskrit content. Perhaps because these amulets were not typically intended for reading or chanting, or because their makers in medieval China often lacked any Indic literacy, scholars have neglected their textual significance. Instead, their focus has rested on the canonical dhāraṇī texts preserved in palm-leaf or birch-bark manuscripts, leaving these printed artefacts to be discussed primarily in art-historical or devotional contexts. Yet, this study reveals that many of these xylographic amulets preserve some of the earliest and most valuable versions of Buddhist *dhāraṇī* texts. By comparing recensions preserved on these artefacts, we can track evolving textual variants, script usage, and ritual priorities that might otherwise remain invisible.

This research examines four Indic-script *Mahāpratisarā Dhāraṇī* amulets from late Tang (9th–10th centuries) to early Song (10th–11th centuries) China. While they have previously been studied collectively in terms of iconography or devotional practices, their Indic-script content—whether in Siddhaṃ, Nāgarī, or hybrid scripts—has not been analysed with linguistic rigour. This project treats these amulets not only as material culture but also as legitimate Sanskrit textual witnesses. It introduces transliterations, comparative analyses, and interpretations of *dhāraṇī* variants, contributing to the growing field of editorial studies of Buddhist incantation literature.

A key argument of this project is that block-printed *dhāraṇī maṇḍala* amulets, especially those produced in China with little to no Indic literacy, nonetheless preserve early versions of Buddhist texts now lost in manuscript form. Though these amulets were not created for reading or chanting, and were often carved by printers unfamiliar with Sanskrit, their fine workmanship and faithful reproduction of older materials make them unexpectedly valuable textual witnesses. Through detailed analysis of mantra structures, seed syllable arrangements, script use, and visual layout, this study repositions these artefacts at the centre of Buddhist textual transmission. Some reveal script styles, textual recensions, or mantric elements found nowhere else, pointing to lost lines of transmission distinct from canonical manuscripts in Nepal or Tibet.

In doing so, this study also contributes to our understanding of medieval Sino-Indian cultural exchange. The appearance of up-to-date Nāgarī script, previously thought absent from Chinese Buddhist materials, reveals that Chinese Buddhists had access to—or at least knowledge of—contemporary South Asian textual styles. This points to ongoing scribal exchanges and devotional interactions between India and China during the late first millennium CE.

By foregrounding the editorial potential of these amulets, this project reimagines their role within Buddhist textual history. They are not simply ritual accessories, but dynamic records of textual adaptation, visual creativity, and cross-cultural religious transmission.

The following chapters are structured as follows: Chapter 2 provides the necessary historical and religious background, including the development of *dhāraṇī* literature in Indic Mahāyāna and its transmission to China, as well as the evolution of printing and amulet production in the medieval period. Chapter 3 presents four case studies—amulets commissioned by Xu Yin, Li Zhi-Shun, the Hangzhou National Archives, and Ruiguang Si—offering in-depth textual and material analysis. This chapter forms the core of the research, showcasing how close philological study of these artefacts can illuminate broader networks of Buddhist textual transmission.

## 2. Background

### 2.1. Dhāraṇī in Indic Mahāyāna

Dhāraṇīs are texts that emerged within Indic Mahāyāna from the first century CE and were transmitted during the earliest stages of the spread of Buddhism to China. *Dhāraṇī* are variously interpreted as symbolic or codes to significant teachings or qualities of the Buddha or, in contrast, as nonsensical phrases to encapsulate the ineffability of reality.

*Dhāraṇī* is the name for a phrase or an element of text found in Mahāyāna Buddhist literature, believed to bestow some form of support on the path, access to broader teachings represented in the phrase, or of protection or power. The *dhāraṇī* may be relatively short, consisting of a number of syllables, or quite long, often equal to a section within a *sūtra*. It may stand on its own or be found within a larger text or, if extensive, form a complete text in its own right, the equivalent of several pages long (around a few hundred short sentences or phrases).

The body of a longer *dhāraṇī* text is often divided into padas (smaller sections) of short phrases, invocations, and mantras.[1] In brief, dhāraṇīs usually consist of a list of feminine vocatives embedded with some series of literally incomprehensible yet potent syllables.

The use of incantation of mantra and *dhāraṇī* existed more broadly in Indic religion and became familiar within the Buddhist monastic community since at least the first century of the common era.[2] This incantational function of *dhāraṇī* is a feature that continues from its Indic origin into East Asia. While similar in function to mantras, the latter are shorter and usually preserved in the formula that begins with 'oṃ' and sometimes ends with 'svāhā,' neither of which has a clear discursive meaning.[3] Some *dhāraṇī* have known names. The one that concerns us most here, the *Mahāpratisarā dhāraṇī*, is found on amulets discovered in China, which also usually contain mantras written immediately after the *dhāraṇī* proper.

As noted above, *dhāraṇī* can also be the focus or even content of entire texts—*dhāraṇī sūtra*s (incantation scriptures). These *sūtra*s are sometimes named with a long title that encompasses one or more terms denoting power, such as dhāraṇī, mantra, and vidyā; other terms like kalpa, pratyaṅgirā, and *sūtra* are also applied.[4]

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[1] Gergely Hidas, "Dhāraṇī Sūtras," in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Buddhism Online*, (Brill, 2020), The Language of *Dhāraṇīs*, accessed April 2024, https://doi.org/10.1163/2467-9666_enbo_COM_0013.

[2] Davidson

[3] Sanchez

[4] Gergely Hidas, "Dhāraṇī Sūtras," The Definition of *Dhāraṇī sūtra*. Additionally, South Asian *dhāraṇī* sūtras do not necessarily have the word *dhāraṇī* in their title.

Given their mantric components and functions, *dhāraṇī sūtra*s, such as the *Mahāpratisarā dhāraṇī sūtra*, are attributed to a new Buddhist soteriological path within the Mahāyāna tradition during the first half of the first millennium—the Mantranaya (Method of Mantras). This is an early stage of what we now call tantric Buddhism in general, which received its name for its unique employment of mantras and other potent linguistic phrases for soteriological and practical purposes.[5] Although modern scholars usually refer to this school as Mantrayāna, it is a name received far later than its actual establishment. This study uses the name Mantrayāna for chronological clarity, for it occurs earlier than the seventh-century appearance of the Vajrayāna (the Path of Diamond or the Diamond Way).[6]

*2.2. Mahāpratisarā and Transmission (Textual History and Iconography)*

The extant versions of the *Mahāpratisarā dhāraṇī sūtra* usually include two dhāraṇīs, four mantras, an introduction to the background and cause of the nidāna (the frame story), a frame story of the Buddha teaching the dhāraṇīs, two kalpas (ritual manuals) for each dhāraṇī, instructions for amulet-making and healing, general sections enumerating the anuśaṃsāḥ (various benefits), and nine narratives about how the dhāraṇīs were used in the past. Among these nine narratives, six seem to be original works of this scripture, while the second, third, and seventh can be found in earlier Buddhist literature.[7]

The *Mahāpratisarā dhāraṇī sūtra* is composed probably no later than the sixth century, instructing the creation of a protective and wish-fulfilling amulet through the writing down of the *Mahāpratisarā dhāraṇī* with provided rituals.[8] This *sūtra* was incorporated into a collection of five *dhāraṇī sūtra*s called the *Pañcarakṣā* (Five Protections) some centuries after its composition.

The first *dhāraṇī* and mantras from the *Mahāpratisarā Dhāraṇī Sūtra* are often inscribed on physical objects to empower the object and create 'amulets.' For the sake of convenience, I shall refer to this *dhāraṇī* as the *Mahāpratisarā Dhāraṇī* in this investigation. These amulets may be in the form of paper, silk, bracelets, armlets, necklaces, and bricks, for example.

Baosiwei (寶思惟, d. 721)[9] was a Kashmiri monk who arrived in Luoyang in 693 CE and became the first person to translate the *Mahāpratisarā Dhāraṇī Sūtra* into Chinese.[10] His translation represents an earlier phase of the text's transmission into East Asia. It was almost forty years later that Vajrabodhi from South India discovered the 'incompleteness' of this edition.[11] Later, in the mid-eighth century, Amoghavajra (Chinese: 不空, fl. 705–774), a key figure in the development of esoteric Buddhism in China, produced another translation.[12] Amoghavajra was one of the most influential Buddhist monks of the Tang dynasty, known for his efforts in transmitting tantric Buddhist texts from South Asia and translating them into Chinese. His translations of *dhāraṇī* literature, including the *Mahāpratisarā Dhāraṇī Sūtra*, played a crucial role in shaping the esoteric Buddhist practices of the

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[5] Paul Williams, Anthony Tribe, and Alexander Wynne, *Buddhist Thought: A Complete Introduction to the Indian Tradition*, 2nd ed. (London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2012), 146-147, 184.

[6] Paul Williams, Anthony Tribe, and Alexander Wynne, *Buddhist Thought*, 166; and Thomas Cruijsen, Arlo Griffiths, and Marijke J. Klokke, "The Cult of the Buddhist *dhāraṇī* Deity Mahāpratisarā along the Maritime Silk Route: New Epigraphic and Iconographic Evidence from the Indonesian Archipelago," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 35, no. 1/2 (2014), 74. Gergely Hidas, *Mahāpratisarā-Mahāvidyārājñī*, 21; and Paul Williams, Anthony Tribe, and Alexander Wynne, *Buddhist Thought*, 271, provide further explanation and distinguishment between Vajrayāna and Mantrayāna.

[7] Gergely Hidas, *Mahāpratisarā-Mahāvidyārājñī*, 13.

[8] Gergely Hidas, *Mahāpratisarā-Mahāvidyārājñī*, 21.

[9] Reconstructed Sanskrit name: Ratnacintana or Maṇicintana. For information on the construction process, see Antonino Forte, "The Activities in China of the Tantric Master Manicintana (Pao-Ssu-Wei 寶思惟: ? - 721 A.D.) from Kashmir and of His Northern Indian Collaborators," *East and West* 34, no. 1/3 (1984): 301–347, 303-304.

[10] This is recorded in the *Taishō Tripiṭaka*, numbered T1154.

[11] 至十八年庚午[…]沙門智[…]又於舊隨求中更續新呪 "Until the eighteenth year of Kāiyuán (開元, 730 CE), Buddhist monk [Vajra]bodhi updated new spells to the old *suíqiú* (隨求, *pratisarā dhāraṇī*)." T2154_.55.0571c11.

[12] This is recorded in the *Taishō Tripiṭaka*, numbered T1153 and T1155.

period. The widely applicable potency of this particular *dhāraṇī* informed its prestige and popularity around Asia and, in turn, has led to it being explored by scholars from different fields.

In most *Mahāpratisarā Dhāraṇī Sūtra* manuscripts dated after the sixth century, after introducing and telling the frame story, the Buddha describes the benefits of using the *Mahāpratisarā Dhāraṇī*.[13] Then, the Buddha teaches the first *kalpa* (ritual), which at the center of it introduces the first *dhāraṇī*. Nine narratives are applied after this *kalpa* to demonstrate the efficacy of the *dhāraṇī* in various circumstances. Between the seventh and eighth narratives, there are the four mantras. Following this is a demonstration of how to make an amulet with this *dhāraṇī*, which ends the first part of the scripture. The second part follows the same order as the first, beginning with the enumeration of benefits when using the second *dhāraṇī*, then the second *kalpa* with *dhāraṇī*, further description of benefits regarding the narratives in the first part, and finally, an instruction on how to perform a healing ritual with the recitation of the second *dhāraṇī*.[14]

In addition to this general structuring of the content, one should notice a significant change and expansion to the scripture at the end of the seventh and start of the eighth centuries. Hidas points out that the scripture probably had only one *kalpa*, and therefore one *dhāraṇī*, when first compiled. One piece of evidence is Baosiwei's 693 CE Chinese translation, which includes only the first *dhāraṇī* and *kalpa*. This translation further suggests that there had been refinements of the *sūtra* in the late seventh century to integrate it with Mantrayāna, for its geographical location in the *nidāna* is still the historical Gṛdhrakūṭa instead of the later Mantrayāna setting's supernatural mountain, the Great Vajrameru, which appears to be in Amoghavajra's translation.[15]

The *Mahāpratisarā Dhāraṇī Sūtra* was also translated into Tibetan, Uigurian,[16] and Mongolian from the eighth century onwards.[17] Most recently, Hidas published an annotated English translation of the entire *sūtra* in the same book where he puts the critical Sanskrit edition. This article primarily consults Hidas' English translation.[18]

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[13] Note on manuscripts: Manuscripts of the *Mahāpratisarā Dhāraṇī Sūtra* and the *dhāraṇī* itself are discovered in a wide range spanning from the south of Asia across the deserts and snow mountains to the very east of this continent. The earliest independent Sanskrit manuscripts of the scripture are written on five fragmentary birch bark manuscripts from Gilgit, which Hidas dates from the first half of the seventh century. Starting from the eighth century and ending in the tenth, a plentiful collection of painted or printed *Mahāpratisarā Dhāraṇī* amulets are found in Central and East Asia, and those discovered in China are the top focus of this research. Another abundant source of manuscripts, mostly the entire scripture, is discovered in Eastern India and Nepal, where there is an extensive series of *Pañcarakṣā* manuscripts spanning from the ninth to the twentieth centuries. In addition to this, on page 7 of Hidas' *Mahāpratisarā-Mahāvidyārājñī*, he writes, 'While four of these fragments (GBMFE 1080–1165) most likely contain parts of the MPMVR, the fifth one (GBMFE 3328–3335) does not seem to be the MPMVR itself. Approximating the length of this ms. on the basis of its folio numbers, it seems that this ms. contains a shorter auxiliary scripture of the MPMVR, perhaps a *Mahāpratisarā-dhāraṇī*.'

[14] Thomas Cruijsen, Arlo Griffiths, and Marijke J. Klokke, "The Cult of the Buddhist dhāraṇī Deity Mahāpratisarā," 76-78.

[15] Gergely Hidas, *Mahāpratisarā-Mahāvidyārājñī*, 14, 23.

[16] Fu Ma recently constructed a critical edition of Uigurian manuscripts in "Unedited Old Uighur Buddhist Literature Preserved in the National Museum of China: The Mahāpratisarā dhāraṇī and 'On the Three Qualities'," Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae (14 Dec 2022): 563–592.

[17] Gergely Hidas, Mahāpratisarā-Mahāvidyārājñī, 9-10.

[18] Gergely Hidas, Mahāpratisarā-Mahāvidyārājñī, 195-252.
In addition to this, this research also consults the *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō*'s critical Sanskrit edition of the first and second Mahāpratisarā dhāraṇīs at the end of the text numbered T1153 from Volume 20, in both Latin translation (IAST) and Siddhaṃ script, an Indic script popular in use for Buddhist Sanskrit writing since the seventh century, and in between the outermost circle and innermost square are four offering bodhisattvas. Transliterations of the first in Chinese characters can also be consulted in T1061, 1153, 1154, and 1155. Chinese transliteration for both dhāraṇīs is found in T1153.

*2.3. Dhāraṇī in China and the Development of Printing*

Regardless of their origins, *dhāraṇī* were ascribed protective powers and became integral to various aspects of Chinese Buddhist practice. In China, they were used for longevity, virtue, power, wealth, warding off danger, ensuring a favourable afterlife, and aiding spiritual progress. To harness these benefits, *dhāraṇī* were presented in visual form as amulets, which were inscribed on various materials such as paper, silk, and bricks. By the late Tang, the widespread use of printing enabled the mass production of *dhāraṇī* in printed form, leading to the *dhāraṇī* amulets examined in this exploration.

Beyond their amuletic function, dhāraṇī, in their written form, were also regarded as relics of the Buddha or his teachings. Copies of *dhāraṇī* have been discovered in small *stūpa*s (pagodas), a practice still observed in Buddhist communities today. This belief can be traced to South Asia, as Xuanzang (fl. 602-664 CE) reported that people placed scripture fragments, referred to as 'dharma relics,' into *stūpa*s in India.[19] In China, this belief extended to the practice of writing *dhāraṇī* on banners.[20]

One of the most significant developments in the dissemination of *dhāraṇī* in China was their connection to the invention and spread of printing. The second year of Chángshòu (693 CE)[21] was an eventful one: in the ninth lunar month, Empress Wu officially adopted the Buddhist title of Cakravartin (金輪聖神皇帝, "Divine Empress of the Golden Wheel").[22] That same year, the Kashmiri monk Baosiwei arrived in Zhou and became the first person to translate the Sanskrit *Mahāpratisarā Dhāraṇī Sūtra* into Chinese in Luoyang,[23] the political centre of Zhou.[24]

While the amulets explored here date from the late Tang, some two hundred years later, they emerged as a direct result of these earlier developments. On the one hand, xylographic amulets were identified as containing the *Mahāpratisarā Dhāraṇī* first translated by Baosiwei. On the other hand, they were shaped by the emergence of printing under Empress Wu and the belief in the power of sacred phrases. These beliefs included the idea that such phrases encapsulated the qualities of the Buddhas, were relics of the Buddha, ensured meritorious reproduction, and granted longevity and protection.

Some of the earliest printed works in existence are dhāraṇī, such as the *Hyakumantō*, produced during the mid-seventh century under Empress Shōtoku in Japan.[25] Tim Barrett has suggested that the development of printing was influenced by various factors during the rule of Empress Wu Zhao (武曌, fl. 624-705 CE), including the belief in Buddhist *sūtra*s as relics of the Buddha and the merit of reproducing texts for protection. Wu Zhao, the only female emperor[26] in Chinese history, used Buddhist legitimacy to consolidate her rule, claiming to be both the reincarnation of Maitreya and a Cakravartin ruler.[27] To emulate the Indian Cakravartin Aśoka, who was believed to have distributed 84,000 Buddhist relics, she initiated the mass copying of Buddhist scriptures.

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[19] Paul F. Copp, *The Body Incantatory*, 34-35.

[20] Other common places where the Chinese write *dhāraṇī*s are the pillars that serve more dissemination purposes.

[21] The date of the translation of this *dhāraṇī sūtra* can be found in T2154_.55.0567a08.

[22] Liu Xu et al., 舊唐書: *[16 冊 200 卷] / Jiu Tang shu: [16 ce 200 juan]* (Beijing: 中華書局 / Zhonghua shu ju, 1975), 1:123.

[23] *The Scripture of the Dhāranī Spirit-Spell of Great Sovereignty, Preached by the Buddha, Whereby One Immediately Attains What Is Sought* (*Fóshuō suíqiú jí dé dàzìzài tuóluóní shénzhòu jīng*, 佛說隨求即得大自在陀羅尼神呪經), T1154_.20.0637b15. English translation from Chinese by Paul F. Copp, *The Body Incantatory*, 61.

[24] 大唐北印度迦濕彌羅國三藏寶思惟於天宮寺譯 "Translated by the Tripiṭaka Maṇicintana of the Great Tang and North India, Kingdom of Kāśmīra, at Tiangong Si (Luoyang)," T1154_.20.0637b17 and T1154_.20.0637b18.

[25] Peter Kornicki, "The Hyakumantō Darani and the Origins of Printing in Eighth-Century Japan," *International Journal of Asian Studies* 9, no. 1 (2012): 43.

[26] About why she was not called "empress," see T. H. Barrett, "Chapter Five: The Lives and Loves of the Li Family." In *The Woman Who Discovered Printing*, by T. H. Barrett. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008. Accessed April 2024. https://aaeportal-com.ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/?id=-21856.

[27] T. H. Barrett, "Chapter Five: The Lives and Loves of the Li Family." In *The Woman Who Discovered Printing*, by

Attracted by *dhāraṇī sūtra*s for their claim to function 100,000 times more effectively than other scriptures, she promoted their translation and dissemination during her reign (690-705 CE).[28] While printing would not experience a full resurgence until later in the Tang dynasty, Wu Zhao's initiatives set a precedent for Buddhist printing, inspiring rulers such as Empress Shōtoku and influencing the production of *dhāraṇī* amulets.

In most studies of *Mahāpratisarā Dhāraṇī* amulets in China, these amulets are classified into three types based on their method of production: (1) hand-written, (2) partially hand-written and partially printed, and (3) fully printed.[29] Table 1 at the end of this chapter details the discovery sites, colophons, devotee names, and sources of information where applicable. This classification provides insight into the historical development of amulet production alongside the evolution of printing technology in China.

**Table 1.** List of Indic Script Mahāpratisarā dhāraṇī Amulets Discovered in China[30].

| Place of Discovery | Container | Name of Devotee | Name of Carver | Current Location | Estimated Date of Creation | Handwritten or Printed? |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Turfan (Turfan 72TAM188:5) | No case (covered on the corpse) | NA | NA | Turfan? | Early mid-eighth century? | Handwritten |
| Turfan (Turfan 72TAM189:13) | No case (covered on the corpse) | NA | NA | Turfan? | Early mid-eighth century? | Handwritten |
| Xi'an (Fenghao Rd 西凤路高洼) | Armlet of gold-enameled bronze, 1 cm in width, with copper box riveted to it, 4.5*2.4 cm | Jiao Tie-Tou | NA | Shaanxi Provincial Museum (陕西历史博物馆) | Late eighth century? | Handwritten |

T. H. Barrett. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008. Accessed April 2024. https://aaeportal-com.ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/?id=-21856.

[28] T. H. Barrett, "Chapter Six: A Woman Alone." In *The Woman Who Discovered Printing*, by T. H. Barrett. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008. Accessed April 2024. https://aaeportal-com.ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/?id=-21857.

[29] Paul F. Copp, *The Body Incantatory*, 233-237; and Shi-Chang Ma, "大隨求陀羅尼曼荼羅圖像的初步考察," [Preliminary Exploration of the Images of the Dasuiqiu Darani Mandala] *Journal of Tang Studies* no. 十 (10) (2004), 527-528.

[30] According to sources: Paul F. Copp, *The Body Incantatory*, 233-237; Shi-Chang Ma, "Preliminary Exploration of the Images of the Dasuiqiu Darani Mandala," 527-579; Katherine R. Tsiang, "Buddhist Printed Images and Texts of the Eighth-Tenth Centuries: Typologies of Replication and Representation," in *Esoteric Buddhism at Dunhuang: Rites and Teachings for This Life and Beyond*, ed. Matthew T. Kapstein and Sam van Schaik (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2010), 201-252; and The Sutra of Mahapratisara Dharani [大隨求陀罗尼经咒]; Weng Lianxi and Jin Liang, eds., 琳琅萃珍――唐宋元明清典籍特展 (A Collection of Treasures: A Special Exhibition of Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing Dynastic Classics) (Beijing: National Library of China Press, 2024); Tang dynasty woodblock print, Hangzhou Branch of the National Archives of Publications and Culture.

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| NA | NA | Madame Wei | NA | Yale Art Gallery | Ninth or tenth century | Handwritten |
| Xi'an (Diesel machine factory) | Arc-shaped copper pendant, 4.5*4.2 cm | Wu De [ _ ] | NA | Xi'an? | Ninth or tenth century? | Partially |
| Xi'an (Fenghe 冯河) | Copper tube, 4*1 cm | Jing Sitai | NA | NA | Mid/late eighth century? | Partially |
| NA. Previously owned by Jiuxitang | Copper container? | NA | NA | Hangzhou Branch of the National Archives of Publications and Culture (杭州国家版本馆) | Mid/late eighth century? | Printed |
| Sichuan University / Jin River, Chengdu | Silver armlet | NA | NA | National Museum of China (中国国家博物馆) | Late ninth (post 841) or very early tenth century. | Printed |
| Xi'an (Sanqiao 三桥镇) | Copper armlet, 9 cm in diameter, 1 cm in width. | Monk Shaozhen | NA | Shaanxi Provincial Museum (陕西历史博物馆) | Late ninth century | Printed |
| NA. Previously owned by Bodhi-nature / Shanghai auction? | Metallic container? | NA | NA | NA | Ninth or tenth century? | Printed |
| Luoyang | Small tube (dimensions and material unknown) | Xu Yin, Monk Zhi Yi | Shi Hong-Zhen | Luoyang Cultural Relics Work | 926 | Printed |

| | found near ear of corpse. | | | Team (洛阳文物工作队) | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mogao Cave 17, Dunhuang | No case | Li Zhi-Shun | Wang Wen-Zhao | British Museum and Musée national des Arts asiatiques - Guimet (Pelliot Collection) | 980 | Printed |
| Mogao Cave 17, Dunhuang | No case | Yang Fa | NA | Musée national des Arts asiatiques - Guimet (Pelliot Collection) | Late tenth century? | Printed |
| Ruiguang Si, Suzhou | Found in small pillar inside *stūpa* | Monk Xiu Zhang | NA | Suzhou Museum (苏州博物馆) | 1005 | Printed |
| Xiasha Outlet Gallery Museum | NA | NA | NA | Xiasha Outlet Gallery Museum | Ninth or tenth century? | Printed |
| Xiasha Outlet Gallery Museum | NA | NA | NA | Xiasha Outlet Gallery Museum | Ninth or tenth century? | Printed |
| Xiasha Outlet Gallery Museum | NA | NA | NA | Xiasha Outlet Gallery Museum | Ninth or tenth century? | Printed |
| Xiasha Outlet Gallery Museum | NA | NA | NA | Xiasha Outlet Gallery Museum | Ninth or tenth century? | Printed |
| Xiasha Outlet Gallery Museum | NA | NA | NA | Xiasha Outlet Gallery Museum | Ninth or tenth century? | Printed |

| Xiasha Outlet Gallery Museum | NA | NA | NA | Xiasha Outlet Gallery Museum | Ninth or tenth century? | Printed |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Xiasha Outlet Gallery Museum | NA | NA | NA | Xiasha Outlet Gallery Museum | Ninth or tenth century? | Printed |
| Xiasha Outlet Gallery Museum | NA | NA | NA | Xiasha Outlet Gallery Museum | Ninth or tenth century? | Printed |
| Xiasha Outlet Gallery Museum | NA | NA | NA | Xiasha Outlet Gallery Museum | Ninth or tenth century? | Printed |

While the potency of Buddhist phrases as relics and sources of power contributed to printing's spread, all the amulets discussed here date no earlier than the eighth century, when printing had become widely established. Over time, a trend of increasing amulet size emerged towards the end of the tenth century. Examples range from an amulet associated with Madame Wei (21.5 × 21.5 cm) to that of a monk named Xingsi (44.5 × 44.3 cm), which will be discussed in the next section.[31] Though precise dating remains uncertain for most amulets, the earliest ones are believed to date from the mid-eighth century, coinciding with the second translation of the *Mahāpratisarā Dhāraṇī Sūtra*.[32] According to Copp, the earliest of these amulets is the one that belongs to Madame Wei.[33]

Hand-written and partially hand-written amulets tend to be more personalised than printed ones. They often contain devotee names and Buddhist terms in Chinese characters alongside Indic scripts, presumably identifying the owners.[34] For instance, the silk hand-written *dhāraṇī* amulet associated with Madame Wei includes her name in the sixth circle from the centre (Figure 3).[35] Similarly, the silk amulet of Jiao Tie-Tou features his name alongside phrases such as *All Buddha's Heart Spell* (*yīqiè fó xīn zhòu*), *ablution* (*guàn tāng*),[36] and *formation of enclosure* (*jí jiè*)[37] (Figure 4).

Conversely, printed amulets were mass-produced and lacked such customisation. Their standardised scripts reflect broader trends and 'fashion' in Buddhist material culture. The colophons of some printed amulets reveal their commercialised distribution across China by the ninth century.[38] The most prominent example is an amulet discovered in a tomb in Xi'an, which took place in Chengdu, some seven hundred kilometres from Xi'an.[39] Ma connects this amulet with another

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[31]  Paul F. Copp, *The Body Incantatory*, 75. For more sizes of other samples, see Paul F. Copp, *The Body Incantatory*, 233-237; and Shi-Chang Ma, "Preliminary Exploration of the Images of the Dasuiqiu Darani Mandala," 527-581.

[32]  For a study of the chronological order of the *Mahāpratisarā dhāraṇī* amulets discovered in China, see Jean-Pierre Drège, "Les Premières Impressions Des 'Dhāraṇī' De Mahāpratisarā," *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 11 (1999-2000): 25-44.

[33]  Paul F. Copp, *The Body Incantatory*, 75.

[34]  Paul F. Copp, *The Body Incantatory*, 75.

[35]  Shi-Chang Ma, "Preliminary Exploration of the Images of the Dasuiqiu Darani Mandala," 530.

[36]  Ma suggests that there is a mistake in writing this term and that it should be *guàndǐng* (灌頂, a Buddhist ritual that sprinkles water on top of the devotee's head). From Shi-Chang Ma, "Preliminary Exploration of the Images of the Dasuiqiu Darani Mandala," 529.

[37]  English translation from Chinese, by Eugene Wang, "Ritual Practice Without a Practitioner? Early Eleventh Century Dhāraṇī Prints in the Ruiguangsi Pagoda." *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 20, no. 1 (2011), 137.

[38]  Shi-Chang Ma, "Preliminary Exploration of the Images of the Dasuiqiu Darani Mandala," 542.

[39]  Whose colophon reads: [*Someone from*] *the Bao'en Temple at Huanhuaxi in Chengdu Fu respectfully creates this print* [*of Buddhist scripture*] (成都府浣花溪報恩寺[39]生敬造此印施) (Figure 6).

Chengdu-printed *Mahāpratisarā Dhāraṇī* amulet excavated at Sichuan University. The similarities in location and formatting suggest a shared origin. Since the dating of the Chengdu-discovered amulet is confirmed to be late Tang (late ninth century), Ma argues that the Xi'an amulet was likely produced in the second half of the ninth century.[40]
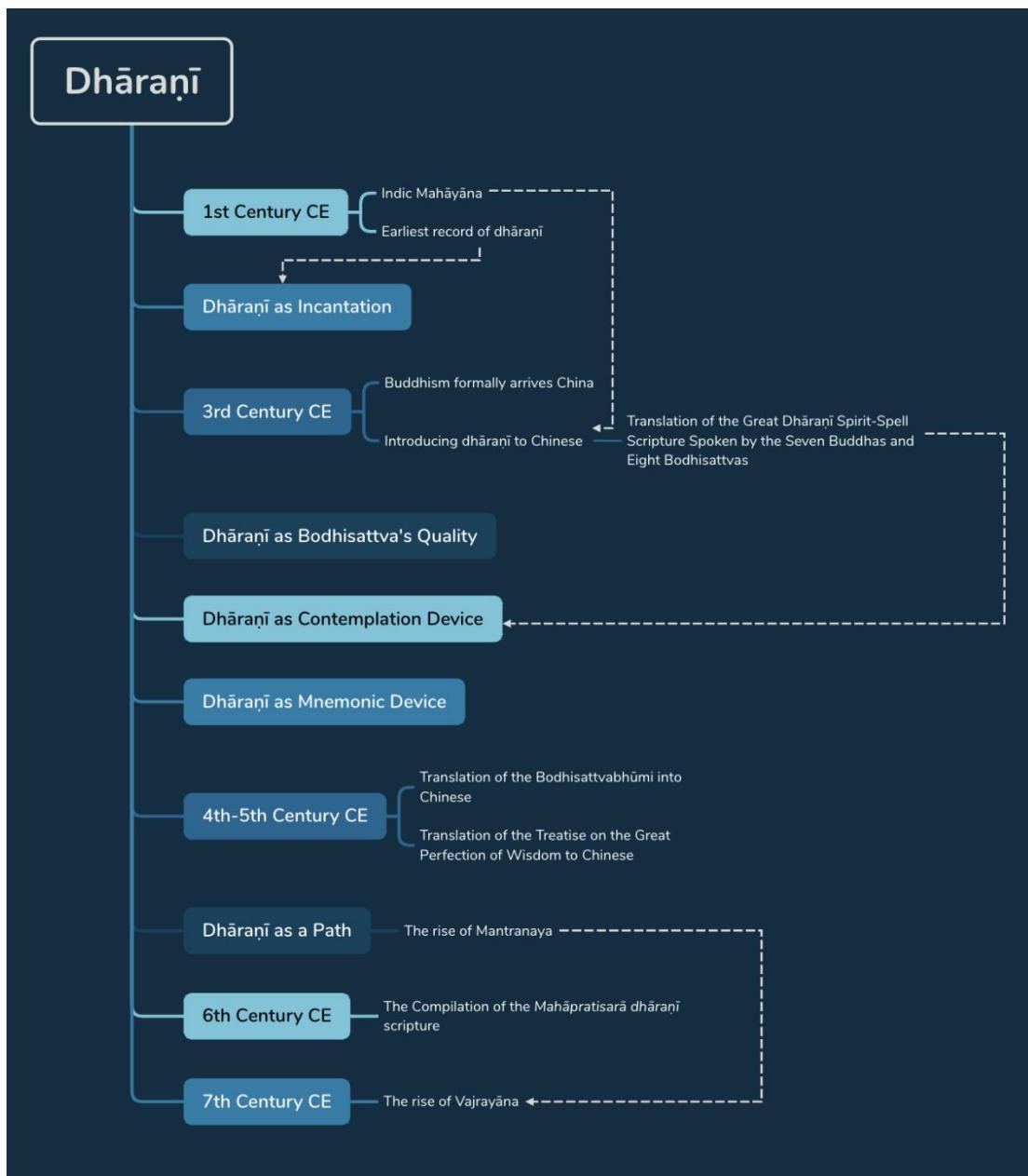


**Figure 1.** Timeline of *dhāraṇī*.

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40  Shi-Chang Ma, "Preliminary Exploration of the Images of the Dasuiqiu Darani Mandala," 541-2. The colophon of the Chengdu amulet further supports this, indicating its production and sale: [*Chengdu Fu*] *Chengdu Xian… Longchi Fang… Jin Bian… printed spell for sale* (Figure 5).

| Time | Name | Place |
|---|---|---|
| 5th Century CE | Earlier layers or forms of the MPMVR | North India |
| 6th Century CE | Mahāpratisara Mahāvidyārāja | North India |
| Early 7th Century CE | Mahāpratisarā Mahāvidyārājñī, | Gilgit |
| Late 7th Century CE | Refinement for integration into the Vajrayāna (the Diamond Way) and the appearance of the protective goddess Mahāpratisarā | NA |
| 693 CE | Chinese translation of the *Fóshuō suíqiú jí dé dàzìzài tuóluóní shénzhòu jīng*[41] | Luoyang |
| Early 8th Century CE | (Grouped with the) Pañcarakṣā | Samye |
| 8th Century CE | Chinese translation of the *Pǔbiàn guāngmíng qīngjìng zhìshèng rúyì bǎoyìn xīn wúnéngshèng dàsuíqiú tuóluóní jīng*[42] | Xi'an |

**Figure 2.** Basic timeline of the *Mahāpratisarā dhāraṇī*.

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[41] T1154, *Fo shuo sui qiu ji de da zi zai tuo luo ni shen zhou jing* (佛説隨求即得大自在陀羅尼神呪經), Copp (*The Body Incantatory*, 61): *The Scripture of the Dhāranī Spirit-Spell of Great Sovereignty, Preached by the Buddha, Whereby One Immediately Attains What Is Sought*. Chinese translation from Sanskrit, by *Bǎosīweí* (寶思惟, Reconstructed Sanskrit name: Ratnacintana or Maṇicintana, d. 721).

[42] T1153, *Pu bian guang ming qing jing zhi sheng ru yi bao yin xin wu neng sheng da ming wang sui qiu tuo luo nijing* (普遍光明清淨熾盛如意寶印心無能勝大明王大隨求陀羅尼經), *The Prevalent Illuminous Pure Flaming Mind-Satisfied Treasure Seal/Gesture Heart of the Scripture of the Great Wish-Fulfilling Dhāranī of Great Illuminous Sovereignty who is Undefeatable*. Chinese translation from Sanskrit, by *Bùkōng* (不空, Sanskrit name: Amoghavajra, 705-774). Amoghavajra's (fl. 705-774) mid-eighth-century Chinese translation of the entire *dhāraṇī* scripture could have been titled after the Sanskrit name of this *dhāraṇī* (T1153_.20.0616a04). The title includes the word *xīn* (心, heart), which translates the Sanskrit term *hṛdaya*, the word according to Gergely Hidas's "Dhāraṇī Sūtras," meaning that it is "in a concise form… containing the essence (*hṛdaya*) of a longer text, said by tradition to have existed at some time in the (perhaps mythical) past." This indicates that the title could have only been the name of the *dhāraṇī* instead of the *dhāraṇī sūtra*.
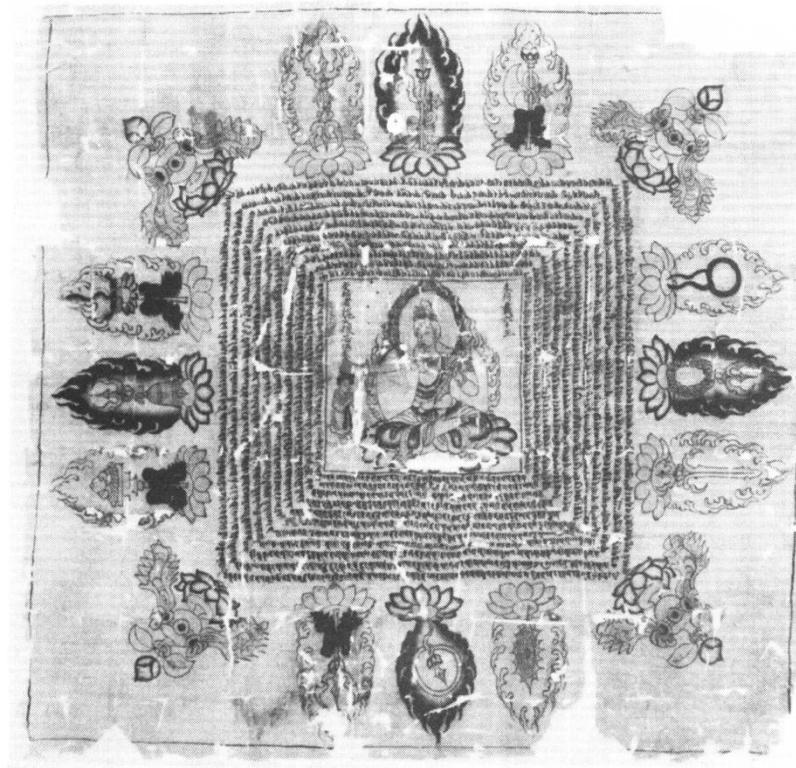
**Figure 3.** Madame Wei (魏大娘)'s handwritten and painted silk, centre image Vajradhara empowering Wei, *Mahāpratisarā dhāraṇī*, mid-eighth century (743-758 CE), now in Yale University Art Gallery, The Hobart and Edward Small Moore Memorial Collection. After Shi-Chang Ma, "大隨求陀羅尼曼荼羅圖像的初步考察," *Journal of Tang Studies* no. 十 (10) (2004), 566.

**Figure 4.** Jiao Tie-Tou (焦鐵頭)'s hand-written silk, centre picture showing devotee kneeling beside the six-armed bodhisattva *Mahāpratisarā, Mahāpratisarā dhāraṇī*, mid-to-late Tang, now in Shaanxi Provincial Museum (*shǎnxī lìshǐ bówùguǎn*, 陝西歷史博物館). After Shi-Chang Ma, "大隨求陀羅尼曼荼羅圖像的初步考察," *Journal of Tang Studies* no. 十 (10) (2004), 565.
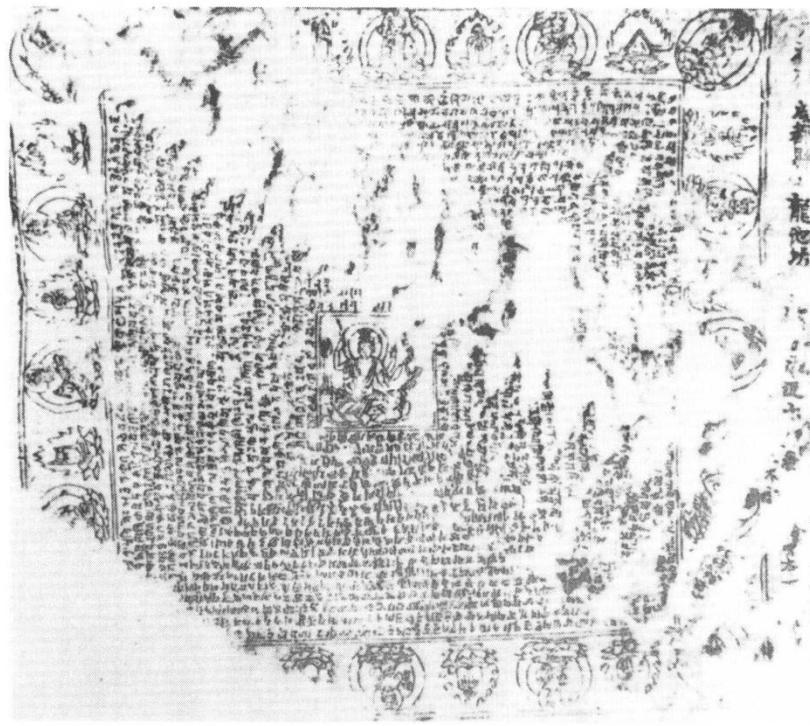


**Figure 5.** Block print, eight-armed bodhisattva *Mahāpratisarā, Mahāpratisarā dhāraṇī*, printed in Longchi Fang (龍池坊, Longchi Alley) Chengdu, discovered in former Sichuan University near Jin River, in silver armlet, very late ninth century. After Shi-Chang Ma, "大隨求陀羅尼曼荼羅圖像的初步考察," *Journal of Tang Studies* no. 十 (10) (2004), 571.
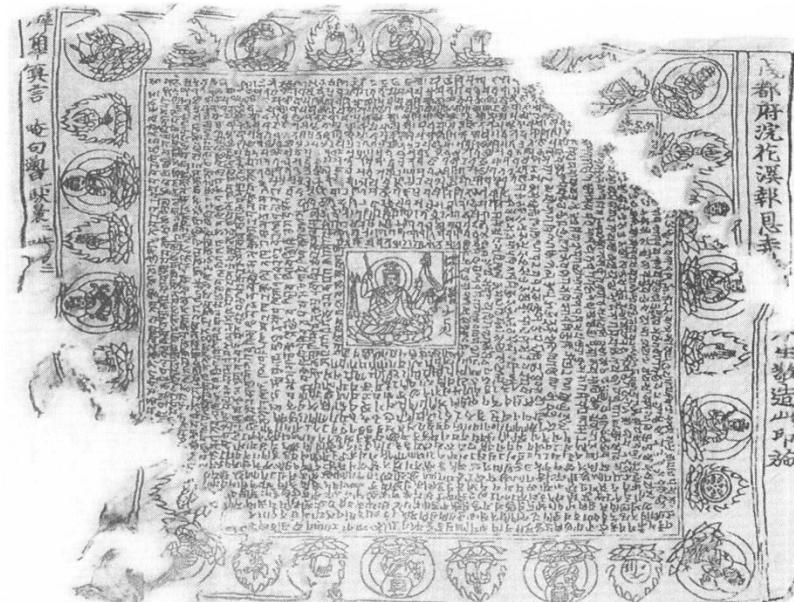


**Figure 6.** Monk Shaozhen (比丘僧少貞)'s block print on silkworm cocoon paper (絹, juān), with handwritten name in the centre, eight-armed bodhisattva *Mahāpratisarā, Mahāpratisarā dhāraṇī*, printed in Baoen Si (報恩寺, Baoen Temple) Chengdu, discovered in Xi'an, late ninth century, in copper armlet. After Shi-Chang Ma, "大隨求陀羅尼曼荼羅圖像的初步考察," *Journal of Tang Studies* no. 十 (10) (2004), 572.

### 2.4. Indic Script in Chinese Amulets

Modern approaches to these amulets usually focus on Chinese inscriptions, imageries, formatting, storage, and usage. The Indic script found on them, meanwhile, is usually neglected. In my study, I will focus on the Indic scripts in the printed amulets. Therefore, the rest of this article, in subsequent the subsequent chapter, centres on printed amulets, examining in detail four xylograph amulets from the late Tang to early Song periods. My four xylographs are:

1) Xu Yin (徐殷)'s amulet

2) Li Zhi-Shun (李知順)'s amulet

3) Hangzhou National Archives' amulet

4) Ruiguang Si (瑞光寺) amulet

The exploration will begin with a general background introduction to each sample before analysing them with, if applicable, some transliteration and translation of their Indic script.

## 3. Case Studies

### 3.1. Introduction

The *dhāraṇī* amulets examined in this chapter provide a distinctive perspective on the interaction between Chinese Buddhist artisans, donors, and the broader Sanskrit manuscript tradition. Rather than indicating that these texts were intended for a Sanskrit-literate audience, their presence within these objects suggests a connection to Sanskrit textual traditions through reproduction and adaptation. Rather than focusing on script forms or transliteration, this study examines how these amulets preserve Sanskrit textual material, sometimes in imperfect yet revealing ways, offering alternative sources for studying Sanskrit dhāraṇīs outside traditional manuscript traditions.

A key objective of this study is to determine whether original Sanskrit texts, potentially lost in their manuscript form, might be embedded within these *dhāraṇī* amulets. Currently, scholars often rely on Nepalese manuscript evidence for studying Sanskrit *Mahāpratisarā Dhāraṇī* texts, yet these amulets present an alternative and possibly earlier source for reconstructing textual transmission. By identifying parallels between the Sanskrit content in these artefacts and known manuscript traditions, this chapter seeks to clarify how accurately Sanskrit was copied, how faithfully it was preserved, and whether these texts reflect local adaptations or a direct link to transregional Buddhist networks.

This investigation, therefore, moves beyond the question of who could read these texts and instead asks: What do these inscriptions reveal about the transmission of Buddhist dhāraṇīs? How do these textual artefacts challenge existing manuscript-based reconstructions of Sanskrit Buddhist texts? And to what extent do these amulets serve as material witnesses to Indic scriptural traditions that may no longer survive in manuscript form? Through a close reading of the amulets' textual components, this chapter reexamines the role of script, copying practices, and transmission networks in shaping Buddhist material culture during this period.

### 3.2. The Dhāraṇī Amulets as Textual Artefacts

The *dhāraṇī* amulets examined in this study offer critical insights into the transmission and adaptation of Sanskrit Buddhist texts in China. These artefacts, often discovered in reliquaries, caves, and private collections, contain intricate combinations of dhāraṇīs, bījākṣaras, and donor inscriptions that provide valuable context for their production and use. Across different examples, we observe the interplay of textual fidelity, artistic execution, and ritual intention, raising important questions about how these amulets were copied, transmitted, and perceived by their users.

One of the earliest examples analysed in this study was unearthed in Shijiawan, Luoyang, dating to 926–927 CE (Figure 7). This amulet was commissioned by Monk Zhiyi (僧知益) of Baoguo Temple, inscribed by Shi Hong-Zhan (石弘展), and ultimately acquired by Xu Yin (徐殷), whose handwritten addition dates to early 927 CE. The main body consists of a large *dhāraṇī* square on the right, surrounded by sixteen bījākṣaras, with a Chinese inscription running down the left-hand side of the main square. The *dhāraṇī* itself is rendered in Siddhaṃ script, whereas the Chinese inscription

provides an explanatory passage, stating that writing down and wearing this *dhāraṇī* would eliminate all bad karma and protect the wearer from disasters, in accordance with the scriptures. This particular amulet is significant not only for its meticulous carving but also for the additional layer of textual engagement provided by Xu Yin's personal annotation, which allows us to trace both its initial printing (May 21, 926 CE) and subsequent acquisition (February 12, 927 CE). [43] The careful arrangement of eight circular seals, seven square sections of Siddhaṃ script, and four offering bodhisattvas further reflects its role as an object of devotion and ritual efficacy.

One of the earliest examples analysed in this study is an amulet discovered in Mogao Cave 17, Dunhuang, dated to 980 CE (Figure 8). This artefact, commissioned by Li Zhi-Shun (李知順) and carved by Wang Wen-Zhao (王文沼), presents an intriguing combination of Siddhaṃ bījākṣaras and Nāgarī script dating to the 6th–8th centuries. Unlike earlier *dhāraṇī* amulets, which predominantly relied on Siddhaṃ as the standard script for rendering Sanskrit texts in Medieval China, this amulet demonstrates the presence of Nāgarī script as an alternative means of writing Indic syllables. The use of Nāgarī in a Chinese Buddhist context suggests that Siddhaṃ was not the only script employed for transcribing Sanskrit dhāraṇīs, highlighting the more diverse landscape of script usage in medieval China than previously assumed. Whether this reflects direct manuscript influence, an experimental variation, or the scribal choices of the block carver remains open to interpretation. However, this example contributes to a broader understanding of the multiplicity of Indic scripts in Chinese Buddhist textual culture.

A further example, now housed in the Hangzhou Branch of the National Archives of Publications and Culture, was originally acquired through auction by a private collector, Jin Liang (Figure 9). [44] While its exact date remains uncertain, the museum has tentatively attributed it to the

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8th–10th centuries.[45] This amulet is largely illegible due to preservation issues and poor printing quality, making its Siddhaṃ script unrecognisable. However, another piece, believed to have been printed from the same woodblock, is now preserved in the Xiasha Outlet Gallery Museum. This second specimen is far clearer, with legible Siddhaṃ characters and a handwritten inscription at the bottom of the lotus seat.[46] The handwritten addition expresses a wish to be reborn in the Tuṣita Realm of Maitreya, a goal that the *Mahāpratisarā dhāraṇī* promises to fulfil.[47]

The existence of two nearly identical prints from the same block suggests a larger production network for such amulets. While the Hangzhou-branch example is too faded for detailed textual analysis, its presumed twin in the Xiasha Outlet Gallery Museum provides key insights into both the textual and ritual dimensions of these objects. Despite uncertainties about its precise provenance, this case further illustrates the continued use of bījākṣaras and dhāraṇīs in private devotional practice, reinforcing their role in esoteric Buddhist traditions. Further research is needed to clarify its place within the broader landscape of *dhāraṇī* circulation and transmission in medieval China.

A compelling example of *dhāraṇī* amulets in medieval China comes from the Ruiguang Stūpa (瑞光寺塔) in Suzhou, dating to 1005 CE (Figure 10). Two copies of the *Mahāpratisarā dhāraṇī* were found in a reliquary on the third floor of the *stūpa*: one written in swirling Chinese calligraphy (dated 1001) and the other in 9th-10th century Nāgarī script (dated 1005).[48] This latter example, carved by Monk Xiu Zhang (沙門秀璋) and donated by Geng[…]Wai (耿[…]外), presents a distinct composition. Instead of a standard bodhisattva icon or an image of devotees, its central figure is Tejaprabhā, the Effulgent Buddha, surrounded by nine planetary luminaries and twelve zodiac signs. By the time this amulet was created, Tejaprabhā had become part of the Buddhist pantheon and was regarded as a counterpart to the Daoist deity, the Great Emperor of the Arch of the North Pole of the Purple Enclosure (Ziwei Beiji Dadi).[49]

Scholars such as Eugene Wang, Katherine R. Tsiang, and Paul Copp have examined this artefact in detail, noting its fusion of Daoist cosmology and Buddhist ritual imagery. The association between Tejaprabhā and the Daoist deity Ziwei Beiji Dadi suggests an ongoing process of syncretic adaptation, in which Buddhist protective dhāraṇīs absorbed liturgical elements from Daoist astrological traditions.

Beyond its iconographic significance, the use of Nāgarī script in this amulet is particularly noteworthy. While earlier Chinese Buddhist materials primarily employed Siddhaṃ script, this amulet, together with Li Zhishun's amulet, reflects a gradual transition toward alternative Indic scripts in 10th-11th century China. The presence of Nāgarī alongside Siddhaṃ suggests an increasing openness to new calligraphic traditions, possibly influenced by international Buddhist interactions. This shift may indicate broader developments in textual transmission, script adoption, and evolving scribal practices in Chinese Buddhist communities.

Across these case studies, *dhāraṇī* amulets functioned not only as ritual objects but also as markers of textual and artistic exchange. Whether meticulously copied, imprecisely carved, or infused with new iconographic elements, these amulets reflect the multifaceted processes of adaptation and transmission that shaped the material culture of esoteric Buddhism in medieval China.

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[45] Hangzhou Branch of the National Archives of Publications and Culture, *Museum Label for Paper Block-Print Dasuiqiu Tuoluoni Jingzhou*, late Tang dynasty (Hangzhou: National Archives of Publications and Culture, n.d.).

[46] Weng Lianxi and Jin Liang, eds.，琳琅萃珍――唐宋元明清典籍特展 (A Collection of Treasures: A Special Exhibition of Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing Dynastic Classics) (Beijing: National Library of China Press, 2024), 29.

[47] Chinese: '弟子高維維頭[this could have been a scribal mistake, this translation takes the alternate reading 願]生兜率天宮得慈尊'. English translation: Disciple Gao-Weiwei hopes to be born in the Heavenly Tuṣita Palace of Noble De-Ci.

[48] A. K. Singh, *Development of Nāgarī Script* (Delhi: Parimal Publications, 1990), 70–100.

[49] Eugene Wang, "Ritual Practice Without a Practitioner? Early Eleventh Century Dhāraṇī Prints in the Ruiguangsi Pagoda," *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 20 (2011): 145-152.
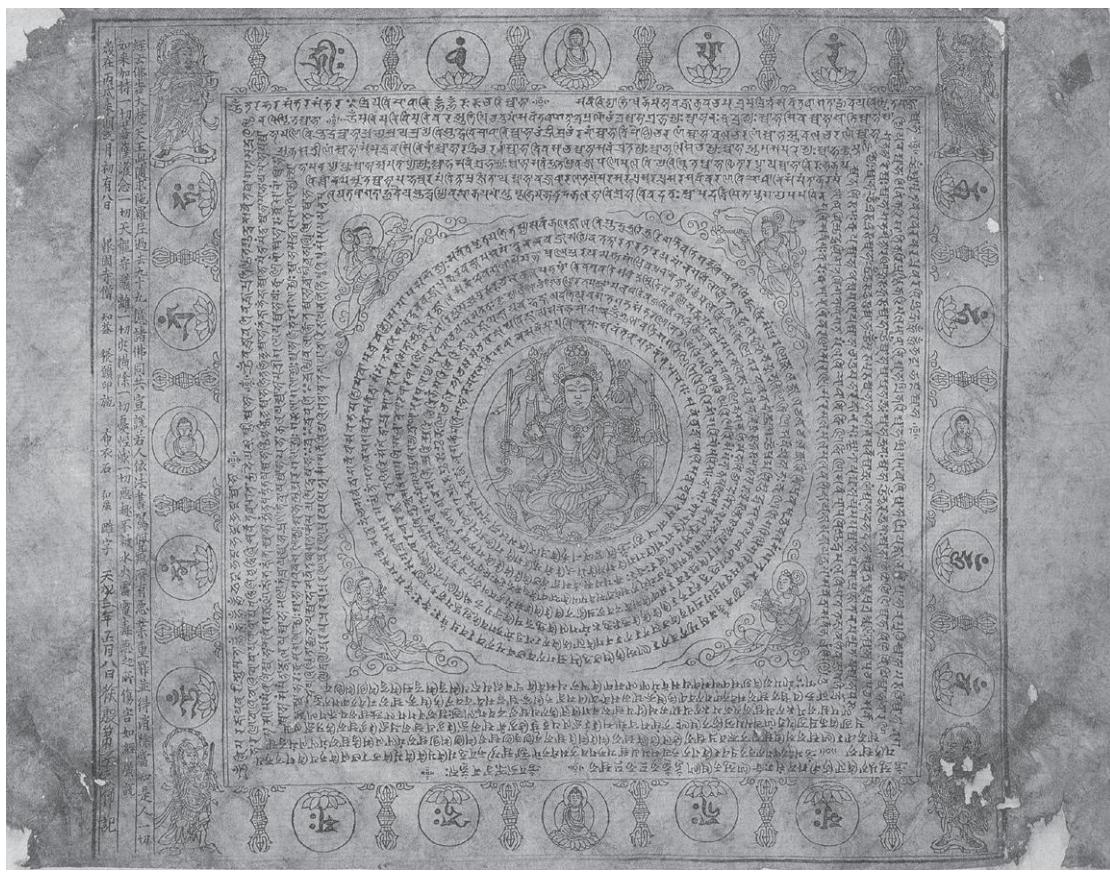
**Figure 7.** Xu Yin (徐殷)'s Block Print Paper, Siddhaṃ script, Eight-armed bodhisattva *Mahāpratisarā dhāraṇī*. After Ling Li, "大隨求陀羅尼咒經的流行與圖像," [The Popularity and Imagery of the *Da sui qiu tuo luo ni jing*] 普門學報 [*Pu men xue bao*] no. 45 (May 2008): 127-167, 138.

**Figure 8.** *Mahāpratisarā dhāraṇī amulet*, print on paper, Dunhuang, 980 CE. Museum number: 1919,0101,0.249. © The Trustees of the British Museum. Source: British Museum Collection Online.
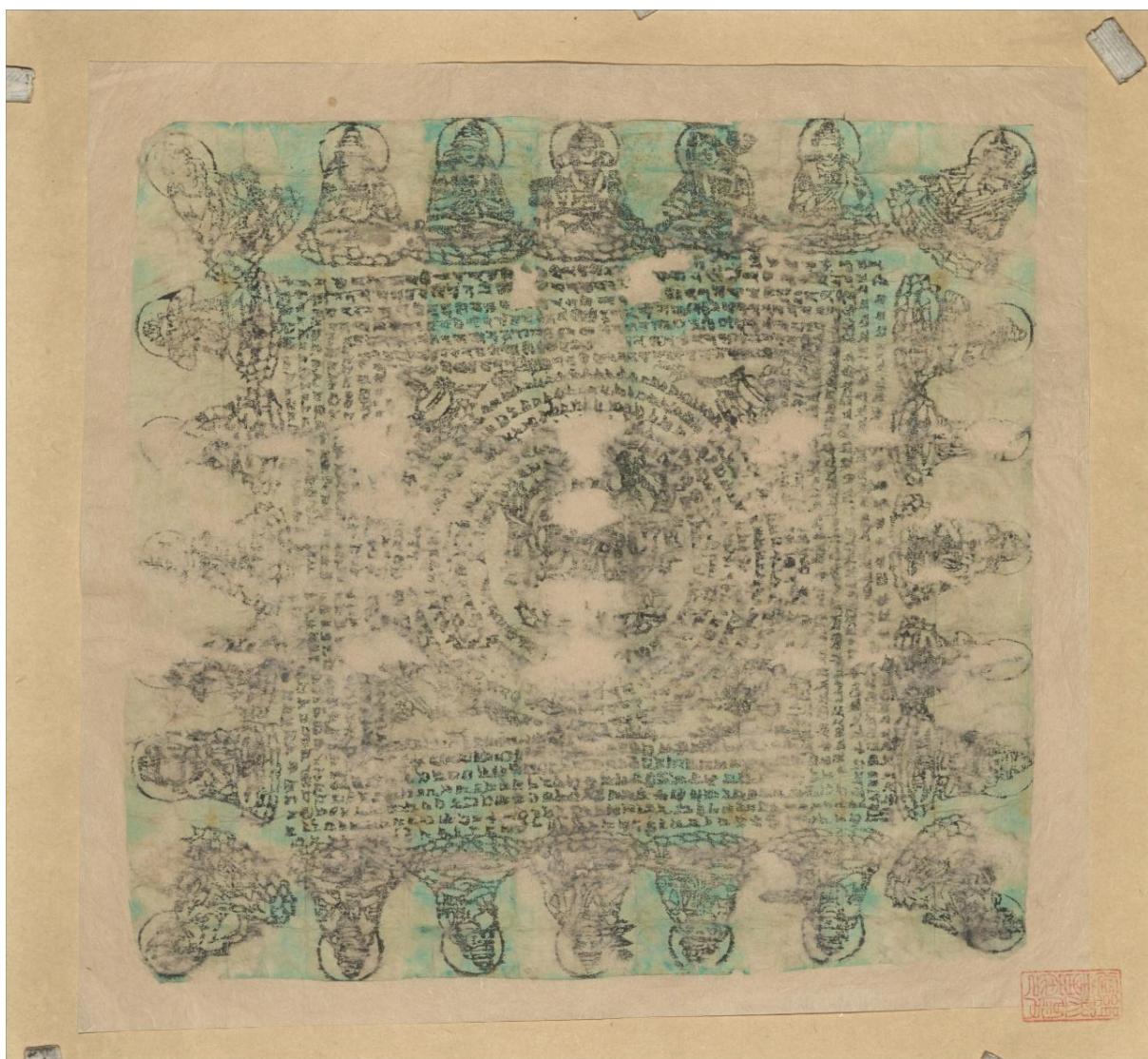
**Figure 9.** *Mahāpratisarā dhāraṇī amulet*, paper block-print, late Tang dynasty (8th–10th century). Curated by the Hangzhou Branch of the National Archives of Publications and Culture (杭州国家版本馆). Image reproduced with permission.

**Figure 10.** Ruiguangsi Block Print Paper, Siddhaṃ script, Tejaprabha Buddha, *Mahāpratisarā dhāraṇī*. After Shi-Chang Ma, "大隨求陀羅尼曼荼羅圖像的初步考察," *Journal of Tang Studies* no. 十 (10) (2004), 576.

*3.3. Sanskrit Texts*

**Amulet of the Hangzhou Branch of the National Archives of Publications and Culture**

The Hangzhou National Archive Museum labels this print as a *Mahāpratisarā dhāraṇī*.[50] Although explicit documentation supporting this identification is absent from the Archives' catalogues, the attribution remains plausible given the estimated date of the amulet and the widespread tradition of creating and using *Mahāpratisarā dhāraṇī* amulets during the 8th to 10th century. Despite the severe damage preventing conclusive textual identification, comparison with the clearer Xiasha amulet—which, although not definitively confirmed to have used exactly the same woodblock, clearly contains readable *Mahāpratisarā dhāraṇī* text in intelligible Siddhaṃ script—strengthens the attribution of the Hangzhou amulet as part of this *dhāraṇī* tradition.[51]

**Xu Yin's Amulet (926–927 CE)**

Xu Yin's amulet features sixteen bījākṣaras (seed syllables) arranged symmetrically around the central dhāraṇī. Each bījākṣara is seated on blooming lotuses, positioned in groups of four along each side, and separated by five vajras. These syllables are often understood as esoteric syllabic particles that constitute mantras or symbolise Buddhist deities.[52] The reading order follows the standard

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[50] Hangzhou Branch of the National Archives of Publications and Culture, *Museum Label for Paper Block-Print Dasuiqiu Tuoluoni Jingzhou*, late Tang dynasty (Hangzhou: National Archives of Publications and Culture, n.d.).

[51] Weng Lianxi and Jin Liang, eds., 琳琅萃珍——唐宋元明清典籍特展 (A Collection of Treasures: A Special Exhibition of Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing Dynastic Classics) (Beijing: National Library of China Press, 2024), 29.

[52] "Bīja." *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*. Princeton University Press, 2013.

mantra structure, beginning with "oṁ" at the bottom left corner and continuing upwards along the square. The transliteration is as follows:

(left) oṁ aṃ trāṃ haḥ

(top) hrīḥ dhaṃ māṃ raṃ

(right) kaṃ haṃ hūṁ vaṁ

(bottom) aḥ jaḥ hoḥ saḥ

The bījākṣaras on this amulet appear to have been printed using a different woodblock from the *dhāraṇī* itself, or possibly added onto the woodblock after the lotuses were carved. Some of their strokes overlap onto the lotuses, suggesting a possible secondary layer of carving. This variation raises the question of whether these bījākṣaras served as ritual additions rather than being intrinsic to the amulet's original design.

Intriguingly, the outermost layer of the amulet's *dhāraṇī maṇḍala* contains four complete mantras:

oṃ amṛtā vare vara vara pravara vipujre hūṃ hūṃ phaṭ phaṭ svāhā ||

oṃ amṛtā vilokini garbha saṃraḥkṣaṇi akaṣiṇi hūṃ hūṃ phaṭ phaṭ svāhā ||

oṃ vajrāddhāna hūṃ jaḥ oṃ vimarajaya varī amṛte hūṃ hūṃ hūṃ hūṃ phaṭ phaṭ phaṭ phaṭ svāhā ||

oṃ bhara bhara saṃbhara saṃbhara idriya visodhani hūṃ hūṃ rūrūcari svāhā ||[53]

Given that some sounds from these mantras, such as "aṃ" from "amṛtā" and "jaḥ" from the penultimate mantra, correspond closely to certain bījākṣaras, it is plausible—though speculative—that the sixteen bījākṣaras might represent abbreviated or symbolic forms of these four mantras. However, each bījākṣara could carry multiple meanings, and thus, identifying a direct correspondence between specific bījākṣaras and individual mantras remains uncertain without additional evidence.

**Li Zhi-Shun's Amulet (980 CE)**

Li Zhi-Shun's amulet, unlike Xu Yin's, contains twelve bījākṣaras, distributed between its inner and outer frame boundaries. The transliteration is as follows:

Outer frame: oṁ hūṃ rī traḥ gaḥ hrīḥ aḥ aḥ

Inner frame: trāṁ gīḥ kṛṁ hoḥ

These *bījākṣara*s on this piece of amulet were first studied by Matsumoto Eiichi, who suggested that the ones in the inner boundary were the representatives of the four inner offering bodhisattvas,[54] the four at the corners of the outer boundary stood for the outer offering bodhisattvas,[55] and the four remaining ones at the middle of each side resemble designate the four *Pāramitā* (perfection) bodhisattvas.[56] He also provided a diagram to show whom they symbolise (Figure 11). A translation of this diagram is shown in Figure 14. Besides this suggestion, Ma notes that the *bījākṣara*s in the inner boundary are emblems of *Sìshēn púsà* (the Four-body bodhisattva).[57] This structure indicates that the bījākṣaras on this amulet were not merely syllabic components of a mantra but also symbolic tokens representing deities, reinforcing their role in esoteric visualisation and ritual practice.

Another notable feature is the Chinese transliteration of Sanskrit mantras found on the sides of Li Zhi-Shun's amulet (980 CE). In addition to the symbolic arrangement of bījākṣaras, the Li Zhi-Shun amulet also contains Chinese-transliterated Sanskrit mantras that invoke the eight tools held by Mahāpratisarā, the central figure in this amulet's design. The transliteration and translation of these Chinese-transliterated Sanskrit mantras are as follows:

Right side frame:

唵縛日羅二合 唵縛日羅二合娑縛二合 唵播奢 唵竭誐

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[53] For full transliteration, see Appendix A.

[54] Chinese: 內四供養菩薩. From *Jingang ding yu jia lve shu san shi qi xin yao* (金剛頂瑜伽略述三十七尊心要) T0871_.18.0294a21 to T0871_.18.0294c29.

[55] Chinese: 外四供養菩薩. T0871_.18.0294a21 to T0871_.18.0294c29.

[56] Eiichi Matsumoto, *Tonkōga no kenkyū*, 1985, 606.

[57] Shi-Chang Ma, "Preliminary Exploration of the Images of the Dasuiqiu Darani Mandala," 551.

'oṃ vajra' twice, 'oṃ vajra' twice and 'sarva' twice, 'oṃ pāśa,' 'oṃ khaṅga'

Left side frame:

唵真多麼抳 唵作羯羅 唵底哩戍哩 唵摩賀尾

'oṃ kaṇṭhamaṇi,' 'oṃ cakra,' 'oṃ trisula,' 'oṃ maghava'

These mantras are mostly assigned with the name of the powerful object written in Chinese characters before them (in order):

chǔ (club, Skt: vajra), fǔ (axe), suǒ (lasso, Skt: pāśa), jiàn (sword, Skt. khaṅga), bǎo (jewel, Skt. kaṇṭhamaṇi), lún (wheel, Skt. cakra), jǐ (spear, Skt. triśūla), jiá (folder).

This direct association between the mantras and the eight ritual tools, also held in each of the central figure's eight hands on this amulet,[58] reinforces the idea that Mahāpratisarā was not only invoked through the *dhāraṇī* but also through her attributes, connecting textual and visual elements in a structured ritual composition. These findings suggest that the bījākṣaras and mantras functioned as ritual markers within a carefully structured tantric framework, aligning them with the esoteric Buddhist practice of visualisation and deity invocation.

### Comparison and Analysis of the Bījākṣaras

The sixteen bījākṣaras on Xu Yin's amulet are placed only along the sides, while the twelve on Li Zhi-Shun's amulet are arranged both on sides and corners. Their patterns differ significantly, sharing only their initial and final syllables. Moreover, the four outer offering bodhisattvas are already decorated in the four corners of the *dhāraṇī maṇḍala*.[59] Therefore, Matsumoto's hypothesis linking the bījākṣaras on Li Zhi-Shun's amulet to offering and Pāramitā bodhisattvas is unlikely to apply directly to Xu Yin's amulet. Any direct connection would require assuming a rapid change in symbolism within the fifty-three-year gap separating these two amulets.

Nevertheless, both amulets clearly reflect the concept of ritual space construction as suggested in Baosiwei's and Amoghavajra's translations of the *Mahāpratisarā dhāraṇī sūtra*. Ma has identified a shift in iconography among *Mahāpratisarā dhāraṇī* amulets, noting that earlier Tang-era examples frequently featured *mudrā*s and Buddhist power instruments on their borders, whereas later amulets like Xu Yin's emphasise bījākṣaras instead.[60] The Tang amulets often included elements such as *mudrā*s on their frames—for example, the Xi'an suburb fragments (eight or ten *mudrā*s),[61] Wu De's amulet (ten *mudrā*s),[62] the Metallurgy Works amulet (ten *mudrā*s),[63] Jing Si-Tai's amulet (four *mudrā*s),[64] and the Longchi Fang and Baoen Si fully printed amulet (eight *mudrā*s).[65] The bījākṣaras

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[58] She has ten hands in total. The remaining pair of hands are folded into a namaskāra.

[59] In Mantrayāna tradition, the term "bodhisattva" often refers to a class of male deities whose origin is the five Dhyāni Buddhas, a group of five Buddhas that represent the five directions and five primordial elements (Bhattacharyya, 1958, p. 82). Each of them is said to have a female consort. The Sanskrit generic name for these female counterparts is "*śakti*" or "*bodhisattva śakti*," and in Chinese, they are often called the "offering bodhisattvas (供養菩薩)" or "offering goddesses (供養天女)." The four inner offering bodhisattvas, also known as the Four Dance Deities, are *Mālā* (Garland), *Gītā* (Song), *Lāsyā* (Beauty), and *Nirtī* (Dance); the four outer offering bodhisattvas, who also appeared in Xu Yin's amulet, are *Pūṣpā* (Flower), *Dhupā* (Incense), *Alokā* (Light), and *Gandhā* (Perfume) (T0871_.18.0294a21 to T0871_.18.0294c29). The *Pāramitā* bodhisattvas are from a different category—the philosophical deities, as Benoytosh Bhattacharyya would call it when describing their iconographies. There are twelve female *Pāramitā* bodhisattvas, each identified as one of the perfections of twelve virtuous qualities on the way to attain Buddhahood (although in Mahāyāna Buddhism, there are usually only six *pāramitā*s; however, the *Vajrayānists* raised the number to twelve) (Bhattacharyya, 1958, p. 323). The four *Pāramitā* bodhisattvas believed to appear in their *bījākṣara* form are the *Vajra Pāramitā* in the East, *Ratna* (Jewel) *Pāramitā* in the South, *Bala* (Power) *Pāramitā* in the West, and *Upāya* (Method) *Pāramitā* in the North (Bhattacharyya, 1958, p. 323-8). These bodhisattvas are often employed in *maṇḍala*s for ritual purposes.

[60] Shi-Chang Ma, "Preliminary Exploration of the Images of the Dasuiqiu Darani Mandala," 545.

[61] Ibid., 531–532.

[62] Ibid., 535–536. For the controversy in dating, see Jean-Pierre Drège, "Les Premières Impressions Des 'Dhāraṇī' De Mahāpratisarā," *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 11 (1999–2000): 25–44.

[63] Ibid., 536–537.

[64] Ibid., 538–539.

[65] Ibid., 540, 542.

on Xu Yin's and Li Zhi-Shun's amulets could be seen as evolving from these earlier visual *mudrā*s, potentially taking over their ritual function as 'seals' (印, yìn) or keys to the dhāraṇī-portal, as explicitly prescribed in the *Mahāpratisarā dhāraṇī sūtra* translations.[66] The scripture instructs that multiple seals should be drawn around the mantra for an amulet to be ritually effective.[67] Each amulet embodies a ritual altar, visually representing powerful instruments—such as vajras, lotuses, and various offerings—around the central deity. This visual design directly follows the scriptural instructions, effectively making the amulet a portable ritual space for personal devotion. Thus, the most plausible theory for the configuration of *bījākṣara*s on Xu Yin's amulet suggests that it may stem from an evolution—from *mudrā*s, serving as "seals" for the "*dhāraṇī*-portal" to control its open and close, to the *bījākṣara*s, the need of "seals" on each side of the amulet which form the *mantra*s and *dhāraṇī*s that bridge the profound knowledge, a power received from a new interpretation of Amoghavajra's translation.

### The Ruiguang Si Amulet (1005 CE)

Unlike Xu Yin's and Li Zhi-Shun's amulets, the Ruiguang Si amulet (1005 CE) does not feature bījākṣaras but introduces a Nāgarī script inscription that closely resembles 9th–10th century Western Indian inscriptions, as classified by Singh.[68] This resemblance suggests a possible textual transmission route from regions such as Vidarbha, which falls within this classification.[69]

A particularly intriguing aspect of the Ruiguang Si amulet is its final invocation, which differs significantly from earlier *dhāraṇī* amulets. It contains an invocation of Vairocana, a feature absent from Xu Yin's amulet (926 CE), followed by a mysterious concluding phrase:

oṃ amogha-vairocana-mahāmudrā-padma-pravarttani hūṃ phaṭ svāhā

(Translation: oṃ, O the Jewel-lotus that is the Great Seal of the Unfailing Vairocana, turn over, hūṃ phaṭ svāhā.)

Additionally, the final mantra on the Ruiguang Si amulet includes the unusual phrase:

vidani sulekha

This phrase is particularly interesting because it does not follow standard mantric structures, which typically begin with "oṃ" and conclude with "hūṃ," "phaṭ" or "svāhā."[70] The term "sulekha" is the Sanskrit word for "well-written," reinforcing the idea that this phrase may have been a scribe's mark or a ritual affirmation of the dhāraṇī's scriptural power.

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[66] The term *mudrā* in the Chinese translation *yìn* (印, seal) was introduced to China in the medieval period for ritual use and became popular in the form of hand gestures since the seventh century (Orzech and Sørensen, p.77). *Mudrā*s are not just hand gestures. In yogic traditions, the *mantra*s could only manage to invoke deities with the appropriate usage of *mudrā*s (Gonda, p.26). They function as the key-like seal to the *dhāraṇī* portal. If the *bījākṣara*s were to replace the *mudrā*s, the *dhāraṇī* be left with no keys to open or close, or it is possible that the medieval Chinese practitioners granted the *bījākṣara*s the same power and function as the *mudrā*s in the amulets.

[67] There is a direct demonstration of drawing "seals" (印) on the amulets in the second part of Amoghavajra's translation of the *Mahāpratisarā dhāraṇī sūtra*: "[One] should draw multiple kinds of seals on the four sides of the *mantra* […] If a king wears this, [he] should draw Avalokiteśvara in the centre, and draw multiple kinds of seals (*mudrā*s) on his four sides. ("於真言四面，應畫種種印, […]帝王若帶者，於中應當畫，觀自在菩薩，又於其四面，畫種種印契," T1153_.20.0624b04.)" Given that the former "seal" should be drawn by all practitioners, the earlier amulets created after the mid-seventh century should have followed this instruction by illustrating *mudrā*s around the *dhāraṇī maṇḍala*. However, Amoghavajra did not specify the "multiple kinds of seals" in his translation. Therefore, I suspect there has been great freedom in selecting *mudrā*s.

[68] A. K. Singh, *Development of Nāgarī Script*, 70–100.

[69] For full Latin script transliteration of the Sanskrit component, see Appendix B.

[70] According to Castro-Sánchez's summary from Wayman and Bühnemann, The forms of Tantric mantras can be classed into threefold according to their gender: the male ones ending with expressions such as *hūṃ* or *phaṭ*, female ones ending with *svāhā*, and neuter ones ending in *namaḥ* (Castro-Sánchez, 2011, p.20-1). On the other hand, since the other mantras that occurred in this *dhāraṇī* sheet often include both *hūṃ* or *phaṭ* with *svāhā*, I would consider them as a separate classification from the case that is mentioned by Castro-Sánchez.

However, the meaning of "vidani" remains uncertain. One hypothesis is that it represents a proper noun, possibly the carver's name. Alternatively, it could relate to Vidarbha, aligning with the Nāgarī script's resemblance to 9th–10th-century Western Indian inscriptions.[71] This hypothesis is strengthened by the fact that Nāgarī 'ni' and 'bhi' look very similar. If this was a scribal error, and the word should instead be read as "vidabhi," it would closely resemble the name "Vidarbha," a historical, geographical region in Western India.[72]

These amulets illustrate how *dhāraṇī* practices in medieval China were not static but adapted dynamically, incorporating new deity associations, evolving script choices, and developing distinct regional mantra traditions that persisted beyond China into Japanese esoteric practices. Whether through the invocation of Mahāpratisarā's attributes, the adaptation of deity-associated syllables, or the integration of newly emerging scriptural formulas, these amulets bear witness to a complex process of ritual and textual reinvention.
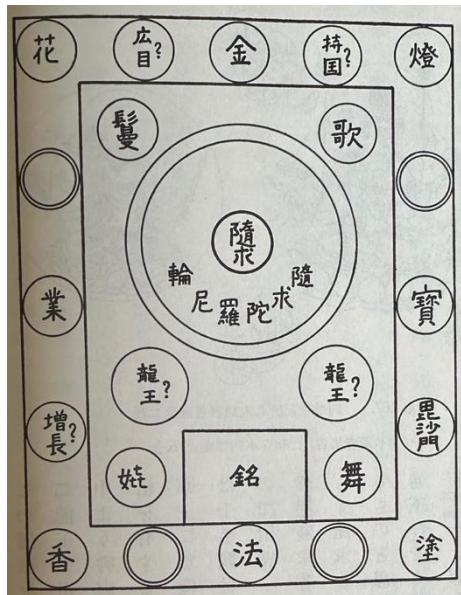


**Figure 11.** The seating positions on the *Mahāpratisarā dhāraṇī maṇḍala* (of Li Zhi-Shun's amulet). After Eiichi Matsumoto, *Tonkōga no kenkyū*, 1985, 606.

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[71]  A. K. Singh, *Development of Nāgarī Script*, 70–100.
[72]  I suspect this could be an irregular locative form of the place "Vidarbha" with the "r" sound omitted.
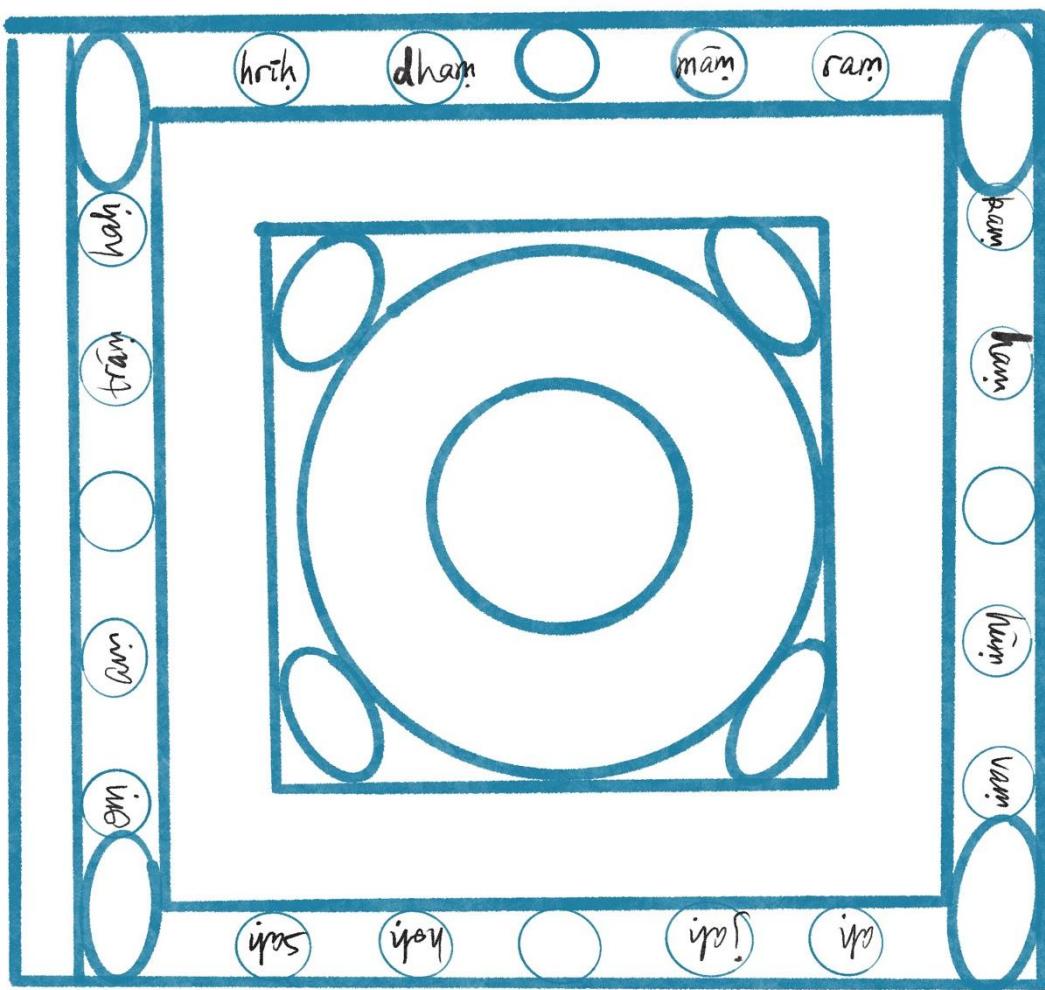
**Figure 12.** Transliteration of the *bījākṣara*s on Xu Yin's amulet.
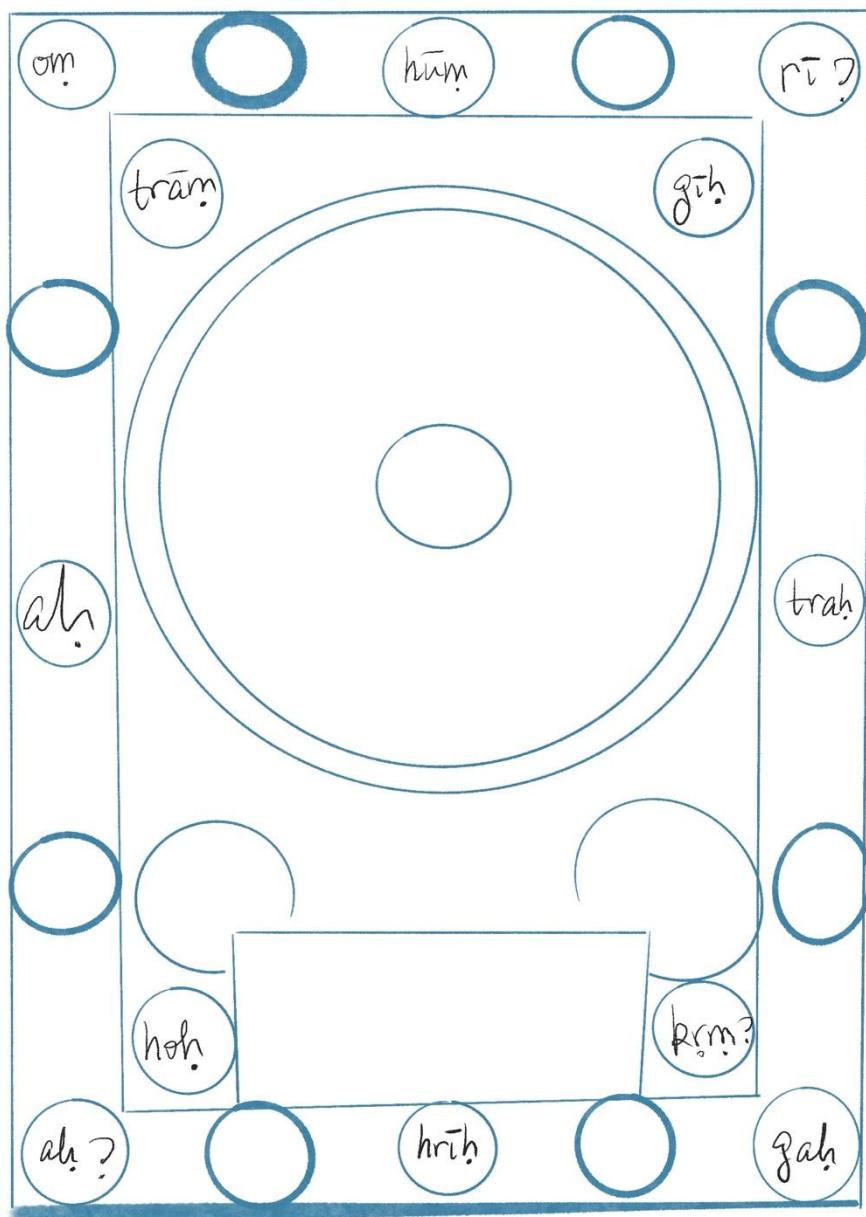
**Figure 13.** Transliteration of the *bījākṣara*s on Li Zhi-Shun's amulet.
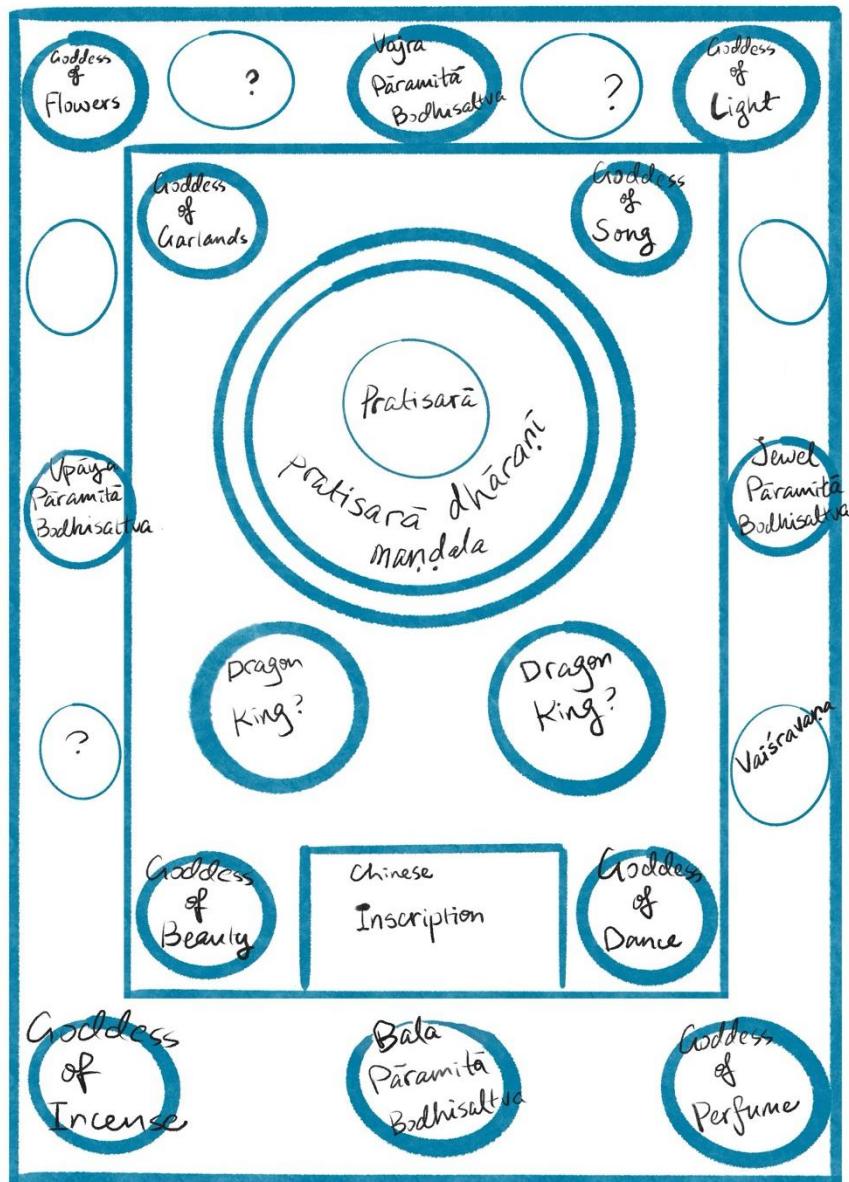
**Figure 14.** Translation of Figure 11.

*3.4. The Role of Copying Practices in Buddhist Transmission*

**Li Zhi-Shun's Amulet**

The Li Zhi-Shun amulet is significant in two primary ways: first, for its refined printing technology and embellished illustrations; second, for the script of the written *dhāraṇī* itself. While every character is clearly visible, the script employed diverges considerably from standard Siddhaṃ, rendering it difficult to decipher. The brushwork suggests an influence from Chinese calligraphy—characterised by predominantly straight strokes with abrupt turns—contrasting with the typical carving patterns of Indic scripts. Despite the familiar iconography, this *dhāraṇī* does not match any known versions of the *Mahāpratisarā dhāraṇī*.

For example, an attempt at transliteration of the innermost circle of the *dhāraṇī* reveals significant uncertainties, marked here as [?]:

baddhabadhiǀǀ[?][?]tathā[ga?]toyalaga[ja?][?]pra[rro?][?][?]hārvāhāyalidhāga[ya?]bharāyayad hā[?]badhiǀli[?][?]ǀ[?][?][?][?]rākṣa[?][ya?]dhara[?]traṇigabha[?]ṣaṇi[ga?][rdha?][?][ga?]

The phrase preceding the first double daṇḍa "ǀǀ" may be "buddha-bodhi," while the word immediately following the daṇḍas is "tathāgata." However, most *Mahāpratisarā dhāraṇīs* (see Hidas' transliterations and the one recorded in T1153_.20.0632b01) begin with a veneration phrase including

the term "namaḥ" (to bow, honor, or salute). If this salutation is missing, the subsequent phrase still does not appear in any known versions of the *Mahāpratisarā dhāraṇī*. Due to these uncertainties, further research is required to establish the textual basis of this dhāraṇī.

### The Hangzhou Amulet

A key distinguishing feature of the Hangzhou amulet is the absence of a Chinese colophon, which is typically crucial for identifying printed dhāraṇīs. Despite its blurred state, the Siddhaṃ script provides two important insights regarding the structure and orientation of the *dhāraṇī maṇḍala*:

1.  Unconventional Script Orientation: The central circular *maṇḍala* follows an 'inside-out' writing pattern, whereas the surrounding square-shaped *maṇḍala*s are oriented 'outside-in.' This contrast in orientation is not observed in comparable *dhāraṇī* amulets, such as those by Xu Yin, Li Zhi-Shun, or those in the Pelliot Collection (MG 17689). However, the Xiasha amulet shares this exact script orientation, suggesting that the Hangzhou amulet may belong to the same production tradition or scribal lineage. This unique layout may indicate regional variation, a specific ritual function, or the stylistic preferences of the block carver.

2.  Esoteric Symbolism and Script Blur: The amulet maker may have viewed the entire *dhāraṇī maṇḍala* not as a readable script but as a talismanic image designed for divine interaction rather than human interpretation. The indistinct yet Siddhaṃ-resembling characters suggest an intentional shift towards esotericism in Buddhist *dhāraṇī* talismans. This conclusion is further supported by the initial blurriness of the print, which indicates that the printer was likely more concerned with the symbolic and ritual function of the amulet rather than ensuring the legibility of the text itself.

### Xu Yin's Amulet

Xu Yin's amulet presents an intriguing case within Buddhist copying practices. Unlike the other amulets discussed, this piece appears to have been purchased or received from Huguo Temple (护国寺), yet the exact location of this temple remains uncertain. While the amulet was discovered in Luoyang, it is possible that it originated from a Huguo Temple in Yuncheng, more than 200 km away. However, due to the lack of definitive records, we cannot rule out the possibility that there was a Huguo Temple in or near Luoyang at the time. This raises broader questions about the movement of *dhāraṇī* amulets across monastic networks and commercial exchange within religious institutions.

The fact that Xu Yin's amulet was initiated by a monk also aligns with patterns seen in the Ruiguang Si amulet, where monastic figures played a role in producing and circulating these sacred objects. This suggests that amulet production may not have been purely devotional but may have also involved an element of commercialised religious practice within Buddhist monasteries.

### The Ruiguang Si Amulet

The Ruiguang Si amulet, found stored inside a *stūpa*, presents an unusual departure from the more common wearable format of *Mahāpratisarā dhāraṇī* amulets. Typically, these amulets were designed for personal use, in accordance with the *dhāraṇī sūtra*'s prescription that they be worn on the body for protection. The *stūpa* placement of the Ruiguang Si amulet suggests a possible fusion of ritual practices between different dhāraṇīs. Notably, the *Sarva Durgati Pariśodhana Uṣṇīṣa-vijaya Dhāraṇī*, another protective Buddhist spell, was frequently enshrined in *stūpa*s and pillars, yet it also appeared in wearable amulet forms similar to *Mahāpratisarā dhāraṇīs*. This cross-influence between *dhāraṇī* traditions may have contributed to the decision to enshrine this particular *Mahāpratisarā* amulet within a *stūpa*.

The involvement of monastic figures in commissioning both Xu Yin's and Ruiguang Si's amulets further reinforces the idea that Buddhist amulet production was embedded within monastic economies. Monasteries likely played an active role in facilitating both devotional and commercial circulation of these sacred objects, allowing dhāraṇīs to reach a wider audience beyond immediate temple communities.

### Conclusion

The copying practices observed in these amulets highlight the fluid nature of Buddhist textual transmission. The significant variations in script styles, orientations, and textual fidelity suggest that

these amulets were not merely textual reproductions but also ritual objects shaped by evolving devotional and esoteric practices. Whether through the unconventional calligraphic influences seen in Li Zhi-Shun's amulet or the blurred script of the Hangzhou amulet, these objects reflect the broader landscape of Buddhist textual adaptation and transmission in medieval China.

## 4. Conclusions

This study has demonstrated that *dhāraṇī maṇḍala* amulets, long dismissed as ritual ephemera, hold untapped value for the study of Buddhist textual transmission, scribal practice, and cultural exchange. Focusing on four representative examples from the late Tang and early Song periods—those associated with Xu Yin, Li Zhi-Shun, the Hangzhou National Archives, and Ruiguang Si—I have argued that these artefacts not only preserve otherwise unattested versions of the *Mahāpratisarā Dhāraṇī,* but also reveal the evolving forms and functions of Buddhist visual-linguistic expression in medieval China.

Though not produced for active recitation or reading, these amulets preserve a wealth of textual data. Their use of Indic scripts, especially Siddhaṃ and Nāgarī, provides material evidence of script transitions and scribal networks stretching between South and East Asia. Moreover, their layouts, *bījākṣara* arrangements, and use of mantra formulations allow us to reconstruct lost or otherwise unrecorded ritual practices. In particular, the discovery of Nāgarī script in tenth- and eleventh-century Chinese amulets challenges previous assumptions about script standardisation and reveals a continuing dynamism in Sino-Indian textual relations well into the second millennium.

Each of the four amulets contributes unique findings:

Xu Yin's amulet (926–927 CE) provides one of the most complete and clearly dated examples of *Mahāpratisarā* recensions in Siddhaṃ, featuring carefully arranged bījākṣaras that likely functioned as seals or symbolic representations of the mantras.

Li Zhi-Shun's amulet (980 CE) presents a sophisticated use of both Siddhaṃ and early Nāgarī, and includes rare Chinese-transliterated mantras. It also contains one of the earliest known structured visual mappings of *bījākṣaras* to Buddhist deities, suggesting highly developed ritual knowledge.

The Hangzhou amulet, although partially damaged, is part of a larger corpus of amulets preserved in the Xiasha Outlet Gallery Museum, revealing regional print networks and unexpected textual parallels that demand further editorial analysis. It also hints at script visualisation becoming an object of devotion itself.

The Ruiguang Si amulet (1005 CE) stands out for its integration of Nāgarī script, planetary deities, and the figure of Tejaprabhā, showing how Chinese Buddhist imagery absorbed and reinterpreted Indic and Daoist elements in new ritual contexts. Its mysterious ending phrase "vidani sulekha" opens the door to future research on scribal culture and textual closure.

Looking forward, three urgent areas of research emerge. First, a comprehensive comparative study of *Mahāpratisarā Dhāraṇī* recensions is now possible, especially thanks to newly discovered amulets in the Xiasha Outlet Gallery Museum. Editorial work across multiple recensions can clarify textual evolution, transmission paths, and ritual adjustments. Second, we need a dedicated lexicon or multilingual dictionary of bījākṣaras. These potent syllables recur across Buddhist and Hindu traditions but remain poorly understood outside of performative contexts. Scholarly tools are necessary to decode their meanings, functions, and patterns. Third, the *Mahāpratisarā* amulets should be studied alongside other major *dhāraṇī* amulets from the same period, such as the *Uṣṇīṣa-vijaya dhāraṇī*. Such cross-textual analysis could yield insights into genre formation, ritual overlap, and the dynamics of *dhāraṇī* culture in East Asia.

Ultimately, this study is not only about four amulets. It is about challenging our assumptions regarding what counts as a text, who gets to produce it, and where meaningful textual histories might be found. The *dhāraṇī maṇḍala* amulets may be small in size, but they carry the weight of expansive historical processes—of translation, ritualisation, visualisation, and transmission—that continue to shape Buddhist cultures to this day.

## Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| d. | died |
| fl. | floruit |
| MPMVR | *Mahāpratisarā Mahāvidyārājñī* |
| NA | Not applicable |

## Appendix A. Diplomatic Transliteration of the *dhāraṇī* in Xu Yin's Xylograph (Luoyang)

Circle 1: namaḥ sayaṃ tathāgatānāṃ namo namaḥ sarvaṃ buddha bodhisattvā budha dhama saṃghebhyaḥ oṃ vipragarbhe oṃ vipula vimale jaya garbhe vajra jvala garbhe gati gahane gagana viśodhane sarva pāpa vi-

Circle 2: sodhane oṃ guṇavati gagariṇi giri giri gaṃbhari gaṃbhari gaḥ ha gaḥ gogari gāgari gagari gagari gaṃ[?]ri gaṃbhuri gati gati gamadi ai e gurū gurū gurūṇi cale maca sama cale jaya vijaye sarva bha-

Circle 3: ya vagate garbha saṃbharaṇi siri siri siri giri ghiri ghiri saṃmaṃtākaṣaṇi sarva śatrūpramathaniṃ raḥkṣa mama sarva sarvadaṃ ca diri diri vigatā varaṇa bhamānasami suri suri ciri kaṃmari piri jaye jaye jayavahe jayavati

Circle 4: ratna makuṭa maladhari vajra vividha vicitravaṣarūma dhāriṇi bhagavati mahā vidyā devi raḥkṣa raḥkṣa mama sarva sathā daṃca saṃmaṃtā sarvatrā sarva pāpa viśodhani hurū hurū maḥsatrā mala dhariṇi raḥkṣa raḥkṣa māṃ sama [anathabhya?] [trāmomarayamoṭya?] para mocaya pamarṇatuḥkyebhyā caṃḍi caṃḍi caṃḍi-

Circle 5: ni vegavati sarva [duṣṭini?] varaṇi śatrūmaḥsa pramathana viruya vaṃhami hurū hurū mārū marū curū curū ayūmarani sūra vara mathāni sarva devatāmujite dhiri dhiri saṃmaṃttā va ghaharatraha prake suprabha viśuddhe sarva māya visodhāne dhāra dhāraṇi dhāra dhāri sūma rūrūcale cale mahaṣāṃ

Circle 6: muraya meha māṃ srivasradhava jaya kaṃmale ddhiṇi kṣiṇi varayevacadāṃ kūśe oṃ pradma visuddhe sodhaya sodhaya buddhe hara hara hiri hiri hurū hurū māṃgala visuddha mavitrāma[?][?]miṇi vegiṇi vera vera jvare tāmiri saṃmaṃddhāprasāre tāva bhasitā sujvala jvala sarva deva galā saṃmala ghraṇi

Circle 7: sa[tyi?]vatet tāra tāraya māṃ nagavilokite lahra lahra hraḍa hraḍa kṣiṇi kṣiṇi sarva grahā bhaḥkṣaṇi pigari piṃgari bumu bumu amu amu vavicale tāra tāra nagavilokiṇi tāravu māṃ bhagavati aṣṭa mahā bhavebhyā saṃmudrā sāgaramayaṃttāṃmatālagagavetrāṃ sarvatrā saṃmaṃtanani samaṃddhana vajra prakara vajra pasamaṃndhenane vajra

Circle 8: jvala visuddhe bhuri bhuri garbhavati garbha viśodhani kukṣisaṃpūraṇi jvala jvala cala cala jvarini pravaṣatu deva saṃmatena divyodakena amṛta vatāraṇi abhiṣicatumi sugatā vacana mṛtā vara vapūṣe raḥkṣa raḥkṣa mama sarva satvānāṃca sarvatrā sarvadā sarva bhayebhyi sarvopadravebhyi samopasargebhyaḥ sarva daṣṭa bhaya bhitebhyā sarvakali-

Square 1: kalahā vigrahā vivada duḥsvopadarnimitāmbhagatya mama vina sati sarva yaḥkṣa raḥkṣa nāga viharaṇi saraṇi sara mala mala malavati jaya jaya jayatu māṃ sarvatrā sarva kalaṃ sidhyaṃtu me imāṃ mahā vidyā sadhāya sadhāya sa[rva?] maṃ[lā? or ḍā?]lā sadhāni mohāya sarva vighnāna jaya jaya siddhe siddhe a siddhe sidhyi sidhyi budhyi budhyi pūraya pūraya pūraṇi pūraṇi pūrayasi āśāṃ sarva vidyovigattāvate jayātāri jayavati tiṣṭha tiṣṭha saṃmayayanupalaya tathāgatā hṛdaiya suddhe vyivalokaya māṃ aṣṭa himahata da-

Square 2: ṇa bhaye sara sara prasara prasara sarva varaṇa visodhāni saṃmaṃtākara maṃlāla visuddhe vigate vigate vigatāmaṃla viśodhāni kṣiṇi kṣiṇi sarva pāpa visuddhe mala vigate tejavati

vajravati trailokyadiṣṭhete svāhā sarva tathāgatā budhābhiṣikte svāhā sarva bodhi sattvā bhaṣikte svāhā sarva devatābhiṣikte svāhā sarva tathāgatā hṛdayadhiṣṭhitā hṛdaya svāhā sarva tathāgatā saṃmaya siddhe svāhā idra idravati idra vyivaloktite svāhā brāhmā brahma dhyiṣite svāhā viṣṇā namaskṛte svāhā mahesvara dittā pūjitāye svāhā vajra dhāra

Square 3: vajra paṇi mala viryādhiṣṭhite svāhā dhṛtāraṣṭrāya svāhā virūha bhaya svāhā virūpaḥkṣaya svāhā veslamalāya svāhā catu mahā raja namaḥskṛtāya svāhā varūṇāya svāhā marūtāya svāhā mahā marūtāya svāhā ag[ni? or vi?]ye svāhā nagavilokitāya svāhā devagaṇebhyaḥ svāhā nagagaṇebhyaḥ svāhā yaḥkṣagaṇebhyaḥ svāhā raḥkṣagaṇebhyaḥ svāhā gadharvagaṇebhyaḥ svāhā asuragaṇebhyaḥ garūḍagaṇebhyaḥ svāhā kidara gaṇebhyaḥ svāhā ma[hra? or ho?]ra gaṇebhyaḥ svāhā manuṣyebhyaḥ svāhā amanuṣyebhyaḥ svāhā sarvagrahebhyaḥ svāhā sarva bhutebhyā

Square 4: svāhā sarva pretebhyaḥ svāhā piśacebhyaḥ svāhā apasamarebhyaḥ svāhā kūmbhaṇebhyaḥ svāhā oṃ dhurū dhurū svāhā oṃ turū turū svāhā oṃ muru muru svāhā hāna hāna sarva svātrūṇaṃ svāhā dahā dahā sarva duṣṭa pratraṣṭaṇaṃ svāhā paca paca sarva prabhyāthika prabhyamitraṇaṃ ye mama ahiteṣiṇaḥ teṣāṃ sarva māṃ sariraṃ jvalaya duṣṭe cittānāṃ svāhā jvarittāya svāhā prajvarittā svāhā dimṛjvalapra svāhā saṃmaṃttā jvalaya svāhā maṇibhaṃ drāya svāha pūrṇa bhaṃdrāya svāhā mahā kalaya svāhā matrīgaṇaya svāhā yaḥkṣaṇināṃ svāhā raḥkṣasānāṃ svāhā akasatrīṇaṃ svāhā saṃmudra vasinināṃ svāhā ratricaraṇāṃ svāhā divasāca-

Square 5: raṇaṃ svāhā trimovyicaraṇaṃ svāhā velacaraṇaṃ svāhā avelacaraṇaṃ svāhā garbha hāresvaḥ svāhā garbha mettāraṇi hurū hurū svāhā oṃ svāhā svā svāhā bhūḥ svāhā bhuvaḥ svāhā oṃ bhūra bhūvaḥ svāhā ciṭi ciṭi svāhā vāraṇi svāhā vāraṇi svāhā aṣṭi svāhā teja vaipra svāhā cile cili svāhā siri siri svāhā budhyi budhyi svāhā sidhyi sidhyi svāhā maṃlāla siddhi svāhā maṃṇḍala maṃddhe svāhā sīmavāndhi svāhā sarva satrūṇaṃ jaṃbha jāṃbha svāhā staṃbhaya staṃbhaya svāhā cchinda cchinda svāhā bhinda bhinda svāhā bhaṃja bhaṃja svāhā maṃddhā maṃddhā svāhā mohāya mohāya svāhā maṇi vibuddhe svāhā sūrya sūrya sūrya visuddhe visodhani svāhā caṃdrī sucaṃ-

Square 6: dre pūrṇaṃ caṃdre svāhā grahebhyaḥ svāhā naḥkṣadrebhyaḥ svāhā sāti svāhā sātityiyane svāhā śivaṃkari sātikari pūṣṭikari malamādhani svāhā srikari svāhā sriyamathāvi svāhā sriyajvalani svāhā namuci svāhā marūci svāhā vegavati svāhā|| ||oṃ sarva tathāgatā bute pravara vigatā bhaye samaya svāme bhagavate sarva bhamebhye svāstrī bhaya oṃ muni muni vimuni care calani bhaya vigate bhaya hāraṇi bodhi bodhi bodhaya bodhaya buddhili buddhili sarva tathāgatā hṛdaiya juṣṭī svāhā|| ||oṃ muni muni vimuni vara abhiyicatu māṃ sarva tathāgatā

Square 7: sarva vidyābhiṣekai mahā vajra kavaca mudra mudritai sarva tathāgatā hṛdaiyadhiṣṭitā vājra svāhā|| || oṃ amṛtā vare vara vara pravara vipujre hūṃ hūṃ phaṭ phaṭ svāhā|| || oṃ amṛtā vilokini garbha saṃraḥkṣaṇi akaṣiṇi hūṃ hūṃ phaṭ phaṭ svāhā|| || oṃ vajrā[?]ddhāna hūṃ jaḥ oṃ vimarajaya varī amṛte hūṃ hūṃ hūṃ hūṃ phaṭ phaṭ phaṭ phaṭ svāhā|| || oṃ bhara bhara saṃbhara saṃbhara idriya visodhani hūṃ hūṃ rūrūcari svāhā|| ||

## Appendix B. Diplomatic Transliteration of Ruiguangsi Indic Xylograph

Line 1: namaḥ sarva tathāgatānāṃ namo namaḥ sarva buddha bodhi satvā buddha dhamra saṅghebhyaḥ tadyathā oṃ viprala garbhe vi_ vimale vimala garbhe jaya ga-

Line 2: rbhe ja vajvā la garbhe gati gahana gagana visodhani sarva pāpa visodhana oṃ guṇavati gagana vicāni gagavi_ ṇi gagariṇi 2 giri 2 gamari 2

Line 3: gaha 2 gargari 2 gargāri gambhari gaha 2 gati 2 gahi 2 gamana gana guru 2 guruṇi 2 culu 2 cala mūcale jaya vijaye sarva bhaya vigate garbha ga-

Line 4: rbha saṃrasvaṇi giri 2 miri 2 ghiri 2 sarva mantrā karṣaṇi sarva satrū pramathani rakṣa 2 bhagavati māṃ saparivāraṃ sarva sattvāṃsca sarva naya aḥ(?) sarvo padrā-

Line 5: vebhyaḥ sarva vyādhibhyaḥ ciri 2 diri 2 viri 2 dhiri 2 vigatā varaṇa vināsani muni 2 cili 2 kamala vimale jaya jaya vahi jayavati bhagavate

Line 6: ratna makuṭa mālādhāriṇi varu vivadha vicitraveṣa dhāraṇi bhagavati mahā vidya devi rakṣa 2 bhagavati māṃ saparivāraṃ sarva sattvāṃsca samantā

Line 7: sarvatra sarvapāpa visodhani huru 2 rakṣa 2 bhagavati māṃ saparivāraṃ sarvasattvāṃsca nathānatraṇānaparāyaṇana parimocaya sarvaduḥkhebhyaḥ caṇḍi 2 ca-

Line 8: ṇḍini 2 vegavati sarva duṣṭanivāraṇi vijaya vāhina huru 2 muru 2 curu 2 ayūḥ ṣālani sura vara mathani sarva deva gaṇa pūjite dhiri 2 mama

Line 9: sarva lokite prabhe 2 suprabhe visuddhe sodhaya suddhe sarva pāpe visodhane dhara 2 dharaṇi dhari sumu 2 sumu 2 rurucale cala 2 _ya duṣṭāṃ puraya ā-

Line 10: sā srī vasudhare jayaka male kṣiṇi 2 varadīkuse oṃ padma visuddhe sodhaya 2 suddhe 2 bhara 2 bhiri 2 bhuru 2 maṃgala visuddhe pavitra mukhi khaṅgire

Line 11: 2 khara 2 jvaleta sikhare samantāprasāritā vabhāsitā suddhe jvala 2 sarva deva gaṇa samākarṣaṇi satya vātara 2 tāraya oṃ bhagavata māṃ sapa

Line 12: rivāraṃ sarva sattvāṃsca nāga vilokite laru 2 hutu 2 kiṇi 2 kṣiṇi 2 ruṇi 2 sarva graha bhakṣaṇi piṅgale 2 cumu 2 mumu 2 cuvicare 2 nāgavi

Line 13: lokite tara yatu bhagavate māṃ saparivāraṃ sarva sattvāṃsca aṣṭamahā dāruṇa bhayebhyaḥ sarvatra sarvattena disantina vajra prakarā vajra pāsa vandhanina

Line 14: vajrajvāla visuddhe bhuri 2 bhagavati garbhavati garbha visoddhani kukṣismāpūraṇi jvāla 2 cala 2 jvāleni varṣatu divaḥ sarvattena divyodakena amṛta

Line 15: varṣaṇi devāvatāraṇi abhiṣiñcantu māṃ sagati vāraṃ sarva sattvāṃsca sugatā vara vacanāmṛta va-

Line 16: rapūṣe rakṣa 2 bhagavati māṃ saparisarva sattvāṃsca sarvatra sarvadā sarva bhayebhyaḥ sarvopadrāvebhyaḥ sarva

Line 17: vyādhibhyaḥ sarva duṣṭa bhayabhūtebhya sarva kalakālāha vigraha vivādā duḥsvapardadunimittā maṃgala pā

Line 18: pa visodhani sarva yakṣa rakṣasa nāga vidāriṇi cala 2 vala vate jaya 2 jayavnatu māṃ sarva kā-

Line 19: laṃ sidhyantu me_yaṃ maṃhā vidya sādhaya 2 māṇḍalaṃ ghātayaṃ vighnā jaya 2 siddhya 2 buddhya 2

Line 20: pūraya 2 puraṇi 2 puraṇi āsāṃ sarva vidyoṅgatattejaya jayotari jayakari jayavati tiṣṭha

Line 21: 2 samayam anupālaya sarva tathāgatā hṛdaya suddhe vyāvalokaya bhagavati mama saparivāraṃ sarva sa-

Line 22: ttvāṃsca aṣṭamahādāruṇa bhayeṣu sarva māṃ paripūraya traya sva mahā bhayebhyaḥ vārāṇi sarva bhayeṣu

Line 23: sara 2 prasara sarva varaṇa visodhani samantākāra maṇḍala visuddhe vigatamala sarva mala viso-

Line 24: dhani kṣiṇi 2 sarva pāpa visuddhe mala vigate tejovati vajravati tralokyā diṣṭhānādiṣṭhe te svāhā

Line 25: sarva tathāgatā gatā mūrddhābhiṣikte svāhā sarva buddhā bodhisattvābhiṣikte svāhā sarva tathagatā hṛdaye suddha svāhā sarva

Line 26: devatābhiṣikte svahā sarva tathāgatā hṛdayādhiṣṭhita hṛdaye svāhā sarva tathagatā samaya siddhe svāhā indre(?)

Line 27: indra(?)vati indra vyāvalokite svāhā brahme brahmādhyūṣikte svāhā viṣṇu namaskṛte svāhā mahesvara vanditā pūji-

Line 28: tāyai svāhā_ rāṣṭrāya svāhā virūdhakāya svāhā virūpakṣaya svāhā vaisravanāya svāhā caturmahā rāja na-

Line 29: maskṛtāya svāhā yajmāya svāha yamra pūjite namaskṛtaya svāhā varuṇaya svahā mārutāya svāha mahā mahā maru-

Line 30: tāya svāhā agne svāhā vayavasvāhā nagavilokitāya svāhā devagaṇebhyaḥ svāhā nāgaganebhyaḥ svāhā yakṣaga-

Line 31: ṇebhyaḥ svāhā rakṣasagaṇebhyaḥ svāhā gandharvagaṇebhyaḥ svāhā asūrāgaṇebhyaḥ svāhā kinnā-

Line 32: rāgaṇebhyaḥ svāhā mahoragagaṇebhyaḥ svāhā manuṣyebhyaḥ svāhā amanuṣyebhyaḥ svāhā sarva grahebhyaḥ svāhā sarva bhute-

Line 33: bhyaḥ svāhā sarva pretebhyaḥ svāhā sarva pasmārebhyaḥ svāhā sarva kumbhaṇḍebhyaḥ svāḥā oṃ dhuru 2 svāhā oṃ turu 2 svāhā oṃ ku-

Line 34: ru 2 svāhā oṃ curu 2 svāhā oṃ muru 2 svāhā hana 2 sarva satru svāhā daha 2 sarva duṣṭaṃ svāhā paca 2 sarva pabhyarthika prabhyamitrāṃ svāhā ye mama u hetiṣiṇas teṣāṃ sarīraṃ jvālaya sa-

Line 35: rva duṣṭa cittārāṃ svāhā jvalītāya svāhā prajvālatāya svāhā dipujvālāya svāhā vajra jvālāya svāha samantā jvālāya svāhā maṇibhadrāya svāhā pullābhadrāya svāhā kālāya svāhā ma-

Line 36: hā kālāya svāhā mātṛgaṇaya svāhā yakṣiṇināṃ svāhā rākṣasīnāṃ svāhā preta pisāca dākinināṃ svāhā ākāsa matrīṇā svāhā samudra vāsinīnāṃ svāhā rātṛcatrāṇaṃ 2 svāhā

Line 37: divamācarāṇaṃ svāhā grisa_acarāṇaṃ svāhā velācarāṇaṃ svāhā āvelācarāṇāṃ svāhā garbhahārebhyaḥ svāhā garbhahāraṇebhyāḥ svāhā garbha sandhārāṇi svāhā huru 2 svāhā

Line 38: oṃ svāhā svaḥ svāhā bhuḥ svāhā tuvaḥ svāhā oṃ bhurtuvaḥ svāhā ciṭi 2 svāhā viṭi 2 svāhā dharaṇaya svāhā agni svāhā tejā vapuḥ svāhā cili 2 svāhā sili 2 svāhā

Line 39: giri 2 svāhā dukṣa 2 svāhā tikṣa 2 svāhā maṇḍalā siddhe svāhā maṇḍalā bandhe svāhā sīmavandhe svāhā sarva satrūr bhajeyaṃ 2 svāhā jagna 2 svāhā cchinda 2 svāhā bhinda

Line 40: 2 svāhā bhañja 2 svāhā vandhu 2 svāhā jambhaya 2 svāhā mohaya 2 svāhā maṇi visuddhe svāhā sūya sūya visuddhe svāhā visodhani svāhā candre 2 sucandreṇa _ svāhā

Line 41: grahebhyaḥ svāhā nakṣatrebhyaḥ svāhā viṣebhyaḥ svāhā sivebhyaḥ svāhā sānti svāhā svastāyana svāhā sivaṃkāri svāhā sāntikari sāṣṭikari svāhā valadhani

Line 42: svāhā valavarddhani svāhā srīkāri svāhā srīvarddhani svāhā srījvalani svāhā namuci svāhā muci svāhā maruci svāhā vegavati svāhā।। ।।oṃ sarva tathāgatā mūrtti pravara

Line 43: vigatā bhaye samaya svama bhagavati sarva pāpaṃ svāsta bhavatu mama sarva sattvānāñca muni 2 cari 2 cala 2 ne bhaya vigate bhaya hariṇi bodhi 2 bodhaya 2 buddha

Line 44: li 2 sarva tathāgatā hṛdaya juṣṭi svāhā।। oṃ muni 2 vare abhiṣiñcātu māṃ sarva tathāgatāḥ sarva vidyābhiṣekaiḥ mahā vajra kavaca mudrataiḥ sarva tathāgathā hṛdaya dhi-

Line 45: ṣṭi vajre svāhā।। atra sarva padmaḥ siddhaḥ sarva kammaka gasuṇaḥ।। oṃ amṛtāvara 2 pravara visuddhe hūṃ hūṃ phaṭ phaṭ svāhā।। oṃ amṛta vilokini garbha saṃrakṣaṇi

Line 46: akarṣaṇi hūṃ hūṃ phaṭ phaṭ svāhā।। oṃ aparājitā hṛdaya oṃ vimali jayavā(?) amṛte hūṃ hūṃ phaṭ phaṭ svāhā।। oṃ bhara bhara sambharā indriyavala vi-

Line 47: sodhani hūṃ hūṃ phaṭ phaṭ rurucale svāhā।।oṃ amogha vairocana mahāmudrā padma pravarttani hūṃ phaṭ svāhā।। oṃ pravathani svāhā।। vidarbhi sulekha

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