

Room 6: Calligraphy

Buddhist Sutras of Ancient India and Japan

N-8-1 Heart Sutra and Dharani Mantra in Sanskrit

These are palm-leaf manuscripts featuring Sanskrit transcriptions of the *Heart Sutra* and a mantra called the *Sonshō Dharani* (lit. “the victor’s chant”). In ancient India, palm leaves were used for Buddhist transcriptions before they were replaced by paper. The round edges of dried palm leaves were cut to form rectangles, and ruled lines were added for writing. These pieces are among the oldest extant examples of palm-leaf manuscripts.

N-8 Transcription of the Heart Sutra and Dharani Mantra in Sanskrit with annotations in Chinese

The palm-leaf manuscripts of the *Heart Sutra* and the *Sonshō Dharani* (lit. “the victor’s chant”) were carefully preserved at Hōryūji Temple for nearly a thousand years before being transcribed here by the monk Jōgon (1639–1702). Jōgon is known for founding Reiunji Temple in the Yushima district of Tokyo (then Edo) and was an expert on Sanskrit’s ancient Siddham script – the script used in the original manuscripts. He added explanatory notes and marks in red along with an afterword to aid in understanding the text.

N-11 Fragment of the Sutra of the Wise and Foolish (Ōjōmu)

This fragment was sourced from a thirteen-volume transcription of the *Sutra on the Wise and Foolish*. The handwriting is more majestic and powerful than other transcriptions, and its alternative name *Ōjōmu* (lit. “Great Shōmu”) implies that it was brushed by Emperor Shōmu, though the handwriting suggests otherwise.

N-14: Sutra of the Buddhas’ Names

The *Sutra of the Buddhas’ Names* preaches that a person may repent for their sins by remembering all the names of the buddhas. This version of the sutra consists of three volumes – one each for the past, present, and future – with each volume listing the names of a thousand buddhas. According to the colophons, a monk named Ryūkei held a ceremony in 1141 commemorating the one-year anniversary of the death of his mentor, Rinkō Taishi. This sutra was read aloud in this ceremony and offered to the temple afterwards.

Room 6: Textiles Ancient Canopies

This exhibition features ancient ornamental canopies made of silk. These canopies can be traced back to the parasols of ancient India, which were used to provide shade for noble figures, and later came to symbolize nobility. In Buddhism, canopies are often hung above sculptures of Buddhist deities to emphasize their exalted status. Canopies in Buddhist temples were reserved for high priests and important banners. The materials include silk as well as metal and wood. These canopies, passed down at the Hōryūji Temple and the Shōsōin Imperial Repository, reflect stylistic developments from the 7th to the 8th century.

N-319-26: Canopy Fragments; Asuka–Nara period, 7th–8th century

These fragments are from an ornamental drapery that was hung around the edge of a canopy. The valance consisted of triangles sewn over a long, pleated section. The patterns of grapevines and double-dragon vines on twill weave reflect influence from Tang-dynasty China (618–907).

I-336-30, 31: Pendent Canopy Decoration with Grapevine; Twill-weave; Asuka–Nara period, 7th–8th century

These ornaments are similar to the one displayed nearby (N-396-26). From the Asuka period (593–710) to the Nara period (710–794), ornamental draperies developed from acute to obtuse triangles, then eventually became U-shaped.

I-337-51: Pendent Canopy Decoration with Birds in Dotted Diagonal Lines; Plain-weave silk, wax-resist dyeing; Nara period, 8th century (passed down at the Shōsōin Imperial Repository)

This fragment of a pendent ornament and the other works from this point on were passed down at the Shōsōin Imperial Repository. These U-shaped ornaments have compound-weave patterning around the borders. They were decorated using a technique in which melted resist-wax is stamped onto the fabric. After dyeing, the parts that were covered in wax would appear in the original color of the fabric. This technique likely developed during the Nara period (710–794). This piece shows birds flying among intersecting diagonal

lines.

I-337-166, 167: Pendent Canopy Decoration with *Karahana* Flowers; Compound-weave; Nara period, 8th century (passed down at the Shōsōin Imperial Repository)

The stylized *karahana* floral motifs are rendered with compound-weave. Literally translated as “Tang flower,” the *karahana* was derived from a stylized lotus flower in a circular arrangement and was a popular design during China’s Tang dynasty (618–907). This design was brought to Japan during the Nara period (710–794), and was used on lacquerware and Buddhist sculpture, in addition to textiles. There are traces of needle holes at the top, suggesting it was originally attached to a canopy.

I-337-231: Pendent Canopy Decoration with Flowers, Birds, Beads, and Linked Circles; Compound-weave; Nara period, 8th century (passed down at the Shōsōin Imperial Repository)

Birds and flowers are depicted inside a geometric pattern of linked circles. The composition of placing birds around flowers precedes a pattern that became popular during Heian period (794–1192).

I-337-232: Pendent Canopy Decoration with Flowers; Compound-weave; Nara period, 8th century (passed down at the Shōsōin Repository)

This textile fragment features a compound-weave pattern forming two types of stylized floral motifs (*karahana*). A close look at the petals reveals subtle gradations of light and dark green, attesting to the painstaking techniques used to render the pattern. The layered combination of white, purple, and green suggests influence from China’s Tang-dynasty (618–907). These colors are often found on artifacts from the 8th century.

N-31: Silk Canopy; Nara period, 8th century

This canopy is believed to have belonged to Prince Shōtoku, an influential figure in spreading Buddhism in Japan and the founder of Hōryūji Temple. It consists of three pieces of silk dyed in vibrant red and sewn together to form a nearly square rectangle.