One Millionth of a Buddha
The Hyakumantō Darani in the Scheide Library

BY MIMI HALL YIENGPRUKSAWAN

The 8th-century Japanese sovereign Shōtoku, better known to her biographers as the eccentric queen Kōken, is remembered in history for several acts that set her apart from rulers preceding and following her. She ascended the throne twice, first as Kōken and then, after a tumultuous retirement, as Shōtoku. She promoted her priestly confidant Dōkyō, a Buddhist monk some years her junior with a flair for healing the depositions of women, to unheard-of rank and authority within the secular government. And in 764 A.D., as the consequences of her uncommon liaison with this ambitious monk began to take their toll, she commissioned, as a form of indulgence, a set of one million miniature three-storied pagodas, each enshrining a tiny scroll imprinted with a magical word formula known as a darani. Completed in 770, this vast edition has since been called the Hyakumantō darani, "Darani in a Million Pagodas."

Both pagoda and darani are important to the rituals of Buddhist worship. A pagoda (sotō, tō) contains the relics of Buddha; it is identified with him and with his absolute form, of which the cosmic deity Būrūshaka is a manifestation. A darani, "that which sustains," is a mystical litany often composed of magical syllables with no literal meaning. The sequence of words or syllables encodes the quintessence of a sutra or of the deity.

One of Shōtoku's darani scrolls, with its pagoda, is now in the Scheide Library. The print is of high quality, with the text rendered cleanly in black watercolor ink on a narrow strip of buff-colored mulberry paper. The darani consists of a series of ideograph phrases that

' The Scheide Library, the private collection of William H. Scheide '36, is housed in Firestone Library. Another of Shōtoku's miniature wooden pagodas and its printed darani scroll is in the Graphic Arts Collection of Princeton University Library.
are keyed numerically and arranged from right to left in four- and five-character columns with intralinear glosses. It is introduced, at the far right, by the title of the sutra from which it is drawn, the Mukujo-kókyó (Sutra of the Immaculate Light), followed in the next column by its formal title, Sōrin darani (Darani of the Pagoda Finial).

The darani scroll printed to be inserted in the miniature pagoda. The Scheide Library.

In its present fragmentary form (the upper and end portions having succumbed to insect damage), the Scheide darani scroll measures approximately 30 centimeters in length by 5 centimeters in width. Now mounted on heavy board, this slip of paper was once rolled up and inserted into a cylindrical cavity, open at the top, that had been drilled into the pagoda body; the cavity was then sealed by using the pagoda’s finial ornament as a stopper.

Like the majority of Shōtoku’s miniature pagodas, the Scheide example, measuring some 22 centimeters from base to finial summit, was constructed of pieces of the evergreen wood hinoki (Japanese cypress, Chamaecyparis obtusa Endlicher). These were turned on a lathe to produce a three-storied body and seven-ringed finial, both of which were painted with a white-late basecoat followed by colors. An ink inscription, barely legible, is seen on the bottom of the Scheide pagoda and appears to record a date, possibly the month and day of manufacture.

Gemlike in its neat smallness, the Scheide Hyakumantō darani is possessed of a quite large historical significance. As part of a corpus of printed darani executed between 764 and 770 A.D., it is one of the earliest examples of relief printing that have been documented to date. It is a window on Buddhist belief and praxis among aristocrats, and particularly as an aspect of rule, in the twilight of the Nara period (710-794 A.D.). Perhaps most compellingly, it speaks to us across the centuries of the vicissitudes in the life of a Nara empress.

Shōtoku lived out most of her life in the shadow of her intensely devout father, Emperor Shōmu; her politically astute mother, Empress Kōmyō; and her brilliant older cousin, Fujiwara no Nakamaro. This triumvirate of statesmen, bound by political and familial ties, in effect dictated the flow of events in Nara, the 8th-century capital of the ancient Japanese imperium, from about 724 A.D. when Shōmu took the throne, until Kōmyō’s death in mid-760.

Shōtoku was born in 718 and, as the well-educated Princess Abe, came of age during an important period in the history of Japanese state Buddhism. During her father’s tenure, the vast Tōdaiji temple complex was inaugurated in Nara as the national seat of state-sanctioned Buddhism. Its principal object of worship was a monumental gilt-bronze sculpture of Birushana, the Absolute Buddha who is the central figure of the Kegonkyō (Flower Ornament Scripture). Called the Daiabutsu (Great Buddha) of Nara, this colossal image—measuring some 18 meters in height—came to symbolize not only the abiding faith of its patron, Emperor Shōmu, but also the all-encompassing religious mandate that he so desired for his lineage. In 754, soon after the Daiabutsu of Nara had been consecrated, Shōmu, Kōmyō, and Shōtoku were ordained Bodhisattvas (Bosatsu) as they stood before this giant Buddha.

Emperor Shōmu’s importance in bringing Buddhist institutions to bear in government is undisputed. He is said to have been so virtuous that even the ants did his bidding. But it was Kōmyō, his redoubtable

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Rumanization of Japanese words is based on the system established for the Kodansha Encyclopedia of Japan (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1984). Also, Japanese names are given in the Japanese way, i.e., last name first.

In this category of ordination for both monks and laypersons, the ordination pledges to observe the precepts of the Bodhisattva as set forth in the Bonmucigū (Sutra of the Great Net).

wife, who wielded the decisive influence at court. Thanks to the machinations of her family, and in a context of bloody factionalism that marked the darker side of a great Buddhist age, Shōmu rose to power.

Kōmyō was a daughter of the Fujiwara house, whose leaders had long sought to wrest control of the monarchy away from their rivals, the Sogas. In Shōmu, son of a Fujiwara princess and soon to marry one, they found their ideal candidate for the throne. In 729 Fujiwara henchmen forced the suicide of Shōmu’s principal rival, and Shōmu succeeded to the throne as a Fujiwara monarch.

Once invested, Shōmu withdrew into religion, perhaps stricken by guilt over his accession. Kōmyō flourished. By the 740s she had entered into a powerful alliance with her nephew Nakamaro, whose subsequent career was incandescent. Together these Fujiwara were instrumental not only in bastioning Shōmu’s rule but also, by cultivating powerful Nara monks, in gaining for Shōmu’s regime, and by extension for themselves, the patina of moral sanction by the Buddhist ecclesiastic community, as epitomized by the construction of Todaiji and the Daibutsu of Nara.

Emperor Shōmu retired in 749, and his daughter Shōtoku (as Kōken) was placed on the throne. Her tenure was nominal; it was Empress Kōmyō and Nakamaro who ruled. Soon after Shōtoku’s accession Nakamaro established a splinter government within Kōmyō’s palace administration and took extrastatutory control over the affairs of state. In 758 he and Kōmyō engineered the retirement of Shōtoku in favor of a specially-groomed new protégé.

While she occupied the throne as Kōken, Shōtoku was apparently cowed by her older cousin Nakamaro. In retirement a similar state of affairs might have obtained, had Kōmyō not died in 760. Both Nakamaro and Shōtoku were profoundly affected by this loss, which left a void in both their lives. Into this void stepped the Buddhist monk Dōkyō.

Shōtoku met Dōkyō in 761, when she was in her early forties. Unmarried and given to periods of depression, she had gone into seclusion after her mother’s death. Dōkyō, a Buddhist Master of Healing (Kenbō Zenji) in the employ of the royal house, was called in to minis-
throne, and Dōkyō was catapulted into an extraordinary position for a Buddhist monk.

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According to a classical history completed in 797, Shōtoku ordered production of one million three-story morning pagodas with darani shortly after Nakamaro's defeat and death. Both internal and external evidence indicate that the project was directly related to the circumstances of her second accession to the throne.

The darani inserted in Shōtoku's pagodas are named as the Kenpon, Jishin, Sōrin, and Rokudo (Rokuara). These particular darani were drawn from the Mukujōkōhyō, a key darani sutra of Shōtoku's period. This sutra records a discourse delivered by the Buddha at Kapilavastu, the capital of his native kingdom, on the expiation of sin and the accumulation of religious merit through observance of six darani rituals centering on the construction and worship of pagodas.

The sutra opens with the story of a Kapilavastu Brahman who learned that he would die in seven days. Horrified, he sought out the Buddha and begged for a means to both lengthen his life and erase the effects of a lifetime of iniquity. The Buddha instructed that he repair a Kapilavastu pagoda that had fallen into ruin, construct a vast number of miniature pagodas, and observe six darani rituals in connection with these activities. The balance of the Mukujōkōhyō is an exposition of these darani and their rituals.

Once presented, each darani is followed by instructions on its applications and merits. The six darani are elucidated in two groups. First, the "four great darani" are presented: the Root, or Fundamental Darani; the Darani of the Pagoda Finial; the Darani of Pagoda Repair; and the Darani of the Aspectless Self. These are followed by the two darani that are to be recited during worship of darani-containing pagodas: the Darani of the Lord of Incantation, and the Darani of the Six Perfections.

The Mukujōkōhyō teaches that, by chanting and transcribing these darani, by placing copies of the four great darani in miniature pagodas constructed for that purpose, and by observing the appropriate rituals, a variety of spiritual and material benefits will accrue to the suppliant. Among these are neutralization of the five deadly sins (by most accounts, parricide, matricide, murder of a monk, drawing Buddha's blood, and disrupting the Buddhist order), closure of the gates of hell, nullification of passionate desire and jealousy, prolongation of life, and protection of the righteous monarch and kingdom. Moreover, each darani has individualized uses. For example, the Sōrin darani purifies, while the Rokudo darani grants protection to the ruler who assiduously chants and copies it.

Given the circumstances of her return to the throne in 754, it is perhaps natural that Shōtoku took to heart the teachings of the Mukujōkōhyō. She had just committed parricide, had thrown her kingdom into turmoil, and was intimately involved with a monk. The Tōdaiji yōrok (Chronicles of Tōdaiji), completed in 1106, specifically mentions that she commissioned the Hyakumanjō darani as an act of penitence, but it is likely that Shōtoku found other benefits of darani ritual equally appealing.

Erudite as she surely was, Shōtoku most probably did not arrive at this project alone. Undoubtedly Dōkyō was involved. Indeed, he had earlier borrowed a copy of the Mukujōkōhyō from the Tōdaiji library.
and was in any event a darani master. The selective use of darani also bespeaks the hand of a specialist. While observing the Mukujokyō standard of four key darani in pagoda worship, the Hyakumanrō authors have dropped the Pagoda Repair darani in favor of the Perfection darani. This signals a slight shift in emphasis that reveals the ideological underpinnings of Shōtoku's project.

Although the Konpon (Root) darani is the basic mystical formula of the Mukujokkyō, it is the Sōrin (Pagoda Finial) darani, of which the Scheide darani is an example, that establishes the conceptual basis of the Hyakumanrō project. The notion of multiple miniature pagodas as a vehicle of sin-vanishing holiness is most clearly articulated in the Sōrin text. This, in turn, emerges as the central thesis of Shōtoku's million darani pagodas. In this context it is appropriate that the Rokudo (Perfection) darani is used, for it is bound up with the Sōrin darani in that it is chanted as an aspect of pagoda worship, specifically of the myriad darani-containing pagodas built as a gesture of penitence. It is also the one darani that is primarily focused on the pagoda-worshipping sovereign.

The central importance of the Sōrin darani in Shōtoku's project is further revealed by her choice of the number "one million," a sum that has puzzled many scholars. In the text of the Sōrin ritual, the supplicant is instructed to pledge ensembles of 100,000 miniature pagodas, each containing a darani, for enshrinement around a central ritual pagoda symbolic of that at Kapilavastu. Since Buddhist cosmology postulates the existence of ten directions, each comprising a world with its own Buddha, one million darani pagodas are necessary if the Sōrin ritual is to be properly observed.

Because the transcription of Buddhist scripture is recognized as an act meritorious in its own right, most historians tend to view Shōtoku's million darani pagodas in this light. However, there is another order of meaning. The number "one million" also emerges in connection with the system of Buddhist thought structured on the Kegongyō (Flower Ornament Scripture), in which, along with the concept of a sunlike Absolute Buddha manifested as the cosmic deity Birushana, the notion of the Bodhisattva is exhaustively presented. In the Bonmokkyō, a key Kegon-system sutra, Birushana, in the form of one million Shakamuni Buddhas,13 expounds the stages of Bodhisattva practice. In view of

Shōtoku's exposure to Kegon doctrine through her father Shōmu and the Tōdaiji project, coupled with her pursuit of the Bodhisattva ideal through ordination based on the Bonmokkyō, it is reasonable to suppose that such ideas entered into her use of the number "one million" for her own great project.

Here, it is important also to consider the ancillary notion of the pagoda as an absolute form of the Buddha, a construct with which Shōtoku surely was familiar. Thus an ideology for the Hyakumanrō darani emerges. One million pagodas are one million Shakamuni Buddhas and thus, collectively, the Absolute Buddha, who, in the Kegon system, is the deity Birushana. The Daibutsu (Great Buddha) at Tōdaiji, before which Shōtoku was made a Bodhisattva in 754, was a colossal image of Birushana, the deity central to her father's concept of the Buddhist nation. By commissioning the Hyakumanrō darani, she was in effect making another Daibutsu, with her father's ideology of the Buddhist state firmly in place.

When viewed in this light, Shōtoku's behavior after 764 no longer seems as eccentric as her critics would have it. With Nakamaro gone, and having signaled her intentions by taking back the throne and commissioning the Hyakumanrō darani, she set about establishing what she perceived to be a righteous Buddhist government in Nara. That Shōtoku's objectives coincided with the ambitions of a Buddhist monk, who most probably shared her bed, lends to her story an air of tragicomedy that has not been lost on historians. Shōtoku enjoys the dubious distinction of being perhaps the most ridiculed monarch in Japanese history.

Two days after Nakamaro was killed, and shortly before she deposed the reigning monarch, Shōtoku established a new executive post in her government, that of Buddhist Minister of State (Daizin Zenji), and named Dōkyō its first incumbent. Almost exactly a year later, in 765, she named him Buddhist Grand Minister of State (Daizō Daizin Zenji), another newly-invented post. In 766, again a year later almost to the day, Shōtoku appointed Dōkyō to yet another unprecedented post, that of Hōō, comparable to Pope. But perhaps most ominous in the eyes of her increasingly disaffected constituency, in 769 word arrived from the Usa Hachiman Shrine, a Shinto establishment closely affiliated with the royal house, that the resident god would welcome Dōkyō as the new emperor.

Over the objections of Dōkyō's rivals, who had sent their own envoy
to Usa Hachiman and determined that the god had been misrepresented, Shōtoku began preparations for Dōkyō’s enthronement. That this event coincided with the completion of the Hyakumantō darani is surely not serendipitous. In 770 the project was finally realized, and Shōtoku meted out 100,000 darani pagodas to each of the ten major temples of the capital region,14 as if to underscore the commitment of her regime to the promotion of Buddhism. But the ineluctable irony of history soon took hold. Shōtoku fell ill and died not four months later, and Dōkyō, having come so close to kingship, was unceremoniously exiled to a rural temple in a distant eastern province, where he died in obscurity in 772.

A lifetime of devotion to Buddhist ideals did not spare Shōtoku the criticism of later historians, who invariably have fixed their arguments on the indiscretions of her later years. She remains the negative example, the worst-case monarch who, consumed by an ill-advised passion, upset the established order. But the million pagodas say otherwise. In concept and scale, the Hyakumantō darani paralleled the Daibutsu at Tōdaiji and, like that Great Buddha, epitomized the agenda of a devout ruler.

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Technologically the Hyakumantō darani is recognized as a feat no less significant than the casting and gilding of the enormous Tōdaiji Daibutsu. Here, scholars do not begrudge Shōtoku her due. An edition of 250,000 copies of each of the four darani was required to fulfill the commission, no mean endeavor by any standard. According to the Chronicles of Tōdaiji, the project was supervised by 157 bureaucrats and artisans, each of whom was officially commended, with an award of rank, by Shōtoku in 770.15 Archaeological finds and ink inscriptions on the bottoms of some surviving examples of miniature pagodas, which read “Left Capital” (Sakyō) and “Right Capital” (Ukyō) suggest that the production crew did its work at studios in the eastern and western municipal divisions of the Nara capital. It is not impossible that these studios were located at Tōdaiji (the name translates as “The Eastern Great Temple”) and Saidaiji (“The Western Great Temple”), the latter having been established by Shōtoku around 765.

Once distributed to their respective temples, the darani pagodas were housed in specially constructed halls, called shōtōin (miniature pagoda halls). Their fate after the 8th century was unhappy; by the modern period most were lost, with Hōryūji remaining the sole temple that still maintained a collection. When the Hōryūji collection was surveyed in 1968, there were 43,930 pagodas but only 1,771 darani. Today Hōryūji owns 102 pagodas and 100 darani. The remaining darani and pagodas have found their way into various private, library, and museum collections throughout the world.

On the basis of examinations of the Hōryūji corpus and other examples in Japan, scholars have determined that, for each darani, two master blocks (or plates) were manufactured, perhaps because the darani were printed in two studios in Nara. The eight master blocks were apparently used to produce the entire body of one million printed darani. Master-block pairs are defined as long and short, although the number of lines of text is constant in both versions.16 Differentiation is based on calligraphic style, ideograph size, the amount of space that separates columns, and the extent to which the text is faithful to the sutra version.17 For example, the Scheide darani bears the imprint of the short Sōrin darani master block, and its 21-line text corresponds almost exactly to that of the sutra.

Once printed, the darani were treated as tiny scrolls: a short, blank “frontispiece” paper strip was affixed with glue to the head of the imprinted sheet, and a similar strip was fastened to the end of the sheet. The whole was then rolled snugly, from left to right. The scroll was next wrapped in thick, sturdy paper; an identifying number (one

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14 According to Tōdaiji yōroku (Chronicles of Tōdaiji), pp. 25-28, these were Tōdaiji, Dainanji, Gaidōji, Yatahōji, Kōfukuji, Hōryūji, Saidaiji, Gufukuji, Sishōji, and Sanka


16 There are 35 lines in the Kompōn darani, 21 in the Sōrin, 29 in the jōshin’in, and 19 in the Rokudo.

17 Some of the darani were printed with a few ideographs deleted and intralinear glosses slightly rearranged.
through four, for the four *darani* was recorded on it. Finally, the entire packet was inserted into its pagoda, on the bottom of which the identifying number was again recorded.

There are two important issues raised by the production of the *Hyakumantō darani*. First, the exact technology used for the printing remains unclear. Second, the chronology of the event—764 to 770—places the *darani* among the oldest known examples of printing.

Using only eight master blocks, a run of at least 125,000 copies each was required to produce a million *darani*. Scholars have been at pains to explain the printing method involved, especially because all visual evidence points to relief printing as opposed to intaglio. Three processes have been proposed: movable type, ink impressions taken from a master block of wood, and ink impressions taken from multiple bronze plates cast from a master matrix. Because there is extensive variation in calligraphic styles for individual ideographs in these *darani*, the movable-type theory is given little credence, and argument has focused on the question, "wood or metal block?"

Because a woodblock tends to crack and tear during a prolonged run, we would expect to see evidence of wear in later impressions. However, such evidence—broken edges, excessive infill, squashed zones—is not found in the extant *Hyakumantō darani* corpus. Scholars have thus tended toward the bronze plate theory. It is argued that a durable plate of copper-tin alloy was cast, in multiples, from each of eight baked-clay, heat-resistant matrices. Two casting methods have been proposed. One would have involved the preparation of a woodcut with the text engraved in reverse; impression of this woodcut into a mold of clay or fine sand; pouring of the metal; and production of the bronze plate. The other is the *cire-perdue*, or "lost wax" method, in which a beeswax model is encased in a clay mold and displaced by poured metal, with the resulting baked-clay matrix reusable for multiple castings. In view of the history of metallurgical practices in early Japan, where the *cire-perdue* method was widely used in bronze sculpture and decorative arts, and also taking into account the pronounced detail obtainable through the technique (thus its use in goldsmithing), it is probable that the lost-wax method was used for casting the plates.

As in any early relief-printing enterprise, impressions were probably obtained by hand rubbing or, more likely, rubbing with a dry brush. The work of inking and taking the impression was perhaps done by a two-man team, as described by Thomas Francis Carter for Chinese printers working in the 1930s. The quality of the impression hinged on the sharpness of the relief image, the manner of inking, and the paper stock. Inconsistencies among *darani* imprints are attributable to these considerations and probably not to a lack of skill on the part of the engravers. In view of the fine, clean impression seen in the Scheide example, with ideographic detail well-articulated despite the small size, Tsien Tsuen-hsuin's recent assertion that in the *Hyakumantō darani* "the characters are uneven and crudely formed" seems unwarranted.19

Tsien bases his appraisal on a comparison of *Hyakumantō darani* examples with an imprint recently discovered in Korea, which raises the issue of chronology. For many years the *Hyakumantō darani* was recognized as the oldest extant example of printing in the world. Although scholars uniformly believe that the invention of printing, and xylography in particular, had taken place in China by the 8th century if not much earlier, evidence remains documentary, with substantive examples still unknown. Thus the *Hyakumantō darani*, with its recorded date of 764–770, long occupied a special position as the sole representation of a print technology thought to have been relatively widespread in China-dominated transmarine northeastern Asia of the ancient period.

In 1966 the *Hyakumantō darani* was displaced by a printed scroll of the *Mukujūkōkyō* that was discovered in a pagoda at the temple Pul-guksa in Kyongju, South Korea. The scroll measures approximately 650 centimeters in length and 6 centimeters in width, having been formed by joining narrow sheets of mulberry paper; the imprint, of the full sutra text, was taken from twelve woodblocks. Although no date is found on the work, and no documentary evidence is available concerning its production, Korean scholars have assigned it to the period between 704, when the sutra translation was finished, and 751, when Pulguksa was dedicated. Tsien further speculates that the scroll was printed by Chinese artisans, possibly in the Tang capital at Chang-an, and later transported to Pulguksa. Both views warrant caution pending the discovery of documentation on its production compara-

Bible to that which exists for the Hyakumanrō darani. In point of fact, the Hyakumanrō darani remains the most completely documented and firmly dated example of early printing.20

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It is a Buddhist maxim that the world is in flux. The scriptures and poetry tell us that the proud are like a dream on a spring night. The mighty perish and are gone, in the end but dust on the wind.21

But some are brought back to us in the artifacts of their lives and worlds, albeit in shadowlike form and without voices. Something of Shôtoku perhaps has materialized as the meaning and context of the Scheide darani have been explored. Perhaps we can look with more understanding on this uncommon 8th-century sovereign, whose vision of a Buddhist nation led her down an extraordinary path. Certainly it is fitting that the Hyakumanrō darani, conceived in the image of the Dairisshū at Todaji, marked the last of the great Buddhist projects of classical Japan.

20 Some scholars have quibbled, incorrectly, that no document mentions printing of the Hyakumanrō darani. On p. 5, Tôdaiji yôraku (Chronicles of Todaji) uses the word surihon (shôhon, "printed material") for the darani. See Tsien, "Paper and Printing," p. 150.

The Gest Chinese Research Library

BY D. E. PERUSHEK

The Gest Chinese Research Library was the precursor of Princeton's Gest Oriental Library and East Asian Collections. In this account of its founding and early years, Curator Diane Perushek recalls especially the work of its second curator, Nancy Lee Swann.

Just before the turn of the century, Guion M. Gest, president of Gest Engineering Company, purchased a Buddhist manuscript scroll from Japan dated 740 A.D.1 It was the first of many purchases of old and rare manuscripts and books for what was to become a pioneering effort to acquaint westerners with the history and civilization of East Asia.

Gest Engineering, which built transportation systems, did business all over the world. In the course of his work, which took him repeatedly to Asia, Gest developed a personal interest in Buddhism. When during another trip to China he was given a local remedy to cure his eye-trouble, his interest expanded to include Chinese medicine. Later, Gest was to organize a project for doctors at the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research to learn about the use of acupuncture to stimulate the sympathetic nervous system.

As his collection began to grow, Gest bought volumes selected by Ch'en Pao-chen, the Ch'ing scholar who had been tutor to Hsuan-t'ung, the last Chinese emperor.2 Ch'en amassed about 8,000 volumes which formed a small library of standard works. With this corpus, the Gest Library opened at McGill University in Montreal on Chinese New Year's Day, February 19, 1926. After a decade in Montreal, where it was widely recognized for the distinction of its holdings, the Library was moved to Princeton. It remains pre-eminent among Chinese col-