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BUDDHIST TALISMANS AND MANUSCRIPT CULTURE IN MEDIEVAL CHINA, CA. 500–1000

Zhai, Minhao

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BUDDHIST TALISMANS
AND MANUSCRIPT CULTURE IN MEDIEVAL CHINA, CA. 500–1000

Minhao Zhai

A DISSERTATION
PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY
OF PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
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OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

The dissertation discusses how Buddhist talismans were made, used, and understood in medieval China from the fifth through the tenth centuries. The study is based on a wide range of medieval sources, including transmitted canonical scriptures, apocryphal texts (*yiwei jing* 疑偽經), catalogues, hagiographies, standard histories, anecdotes, and unearthed ritual manuals from Dunhuang. The dissertation proposes that the current category of talismans in medieval China should be expanded. Instead of considering those labelled *fu* 符 as the only samples of talisman, the study provides a much broader conceptual framework that includes all consecrated man-made objects that release their efficacy through their contact with the human body. The new framework enables us to see the multivalent positions towards talismanic practices in medieval Buddhist communities. It also allows the dissertation to explore the commonalities in the making process between different religious traditions in medieval China. The research analyzes the major paradigms of utilizing talismans. It argues that the different patterns of logic behind these paradigms contribute to the construction of efficacy in talismans. This study also questions the bias that believes talismanic benefits are limited to the this-worldly realm. It shows that talismans were also tools concerning soteriological goals. Meanwhile, medieval people, no matter religious masters or lay practitioners, did not berate the mundane and materialistic benefits bestowed by talismans. Finally, the study reveals that talismanic practices were closely related to other ritual techniques and belonged to a larger ritual milieu. These techniques often inspired each other and were used together to address the difficulties and anxieties facing medieval minds. In sum, the dissertation proves that Buddhism, as an imported religion, both significantly benefited from and contributed to the talismanic tradition in medieval China.

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ABBREVIATIONS

b.	birth year
Ch.	Chinese
d.	death year
fig.	figure
Jp.	Japanese
P.	Pelliot collection in the Bibliothèque nationale de France
r.	reign years
S.	Stein collection in the British Library
Skt.	Sanskrit
S. P.	Printings in Stein collection in the British Library
T.	Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎, Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭, eds. *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經. 85 vols. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1924–1932.
ZH	Zhang Jixu 張繼禹, ed. *Zhonghua daozang* 中華道藏. 49 vols. Beijing: Huaxia chubanshe, 2004.

Introduction

Empowering objects through writing, sound, and bodily postures is a practice widely found in many religious traditions. Once produced, the empowered objects further empower people who bear or consume them and protect them from negative results. Although there are commondalities in the relationship between people and these special objects, there are also unique patterns of talismanic practice in different social, cultural, and religious structures.

The dissertation uses talismans in medieval Chinese Buddhism (5th–10th century) as a case study to understand the dynamics involved in empowering and utilizing objects. Talismans themselves, descriptions of them, and stories and tales of how they were deployed can be found in transmitted scriptures, archaeological findings, and rare medieval manuscripts found on the northwestern frontier of China. By considering them together in the dissertation, I aim for a more comprehensive and vivid picture showing how these objects were made, how they functioned, and who was behind the process.

Buddhists in medieval China were no strangers to the process of making and using talismans. One of the most essential Mahāyāna sūtras translated by Xuanzang 玄奘 (602-664) during the mid-seventh century, *The Large Sūtra on Perfect Wisdom* (*Da bore boluomi jing* 大般若波羅蜜經, Skt. *Mahāprajñāpāramitā sūtra*), provides a glimpse of the complicated process of making talismans and the logic behind it.

In one passage, the Buddha explains the religious apparatus surrounding and enabling talismanic practice to his disciples. As a result, the materialized, and thus talismanicized verbal

dhāraṇī incantation is believed to be efficacious in protecting a person or even a whole city. The Buddha states:

> Furthermore, Kauśika! If good men and good women write this *Great, Divine King Incantation of Pāramitā* and place it in a pure and clean place, worship it with reverence, respect and praise it, then even though [they] do not listen to it, or uphold it, or read and recite it, or diligently learn and practice it, or ruminate and think it through, or elucidate and analyze it for others, the humans, and non-humans, and others residing in the cities andcapitals, will not be jeopardized by any disasters, calamities, illnesses, and plagues. What is the reason? The reason is that the dwelling place of a *Great, Divine King Incantation of Pāramitā* like this is protected forever by the four heavenly kings up to the heaven of the most rarefied form and the various dragons and *Asuras* of the one billion worlds and other unmeasurable, uncountable, and limitless worlds of the ten directions. [They] worship it with reverence, respect and praise it, and do not allow the *Great, Divine King Incantation of Pāramitā* to be impeded by difficulties.
> Kauśika! If good men and good women fear enemies, vicious beasts, calamities and disasters, sorcery and imprecation, illnesses and plagues, poisons, and spells, etc., [they] should write the *Great, Divine King Incantation of Pāramitā*, store it inside a fragrant sachet, or place it in a jewelled tube, and always keep it with their bodies to worship with reverence according to their ability, then all the horrible things will simultaneously disappear. It is because the heavenly dragons, demons, and deities always guard it.[1]
> 復次, 憍尸迦! 若善男子, 善女人等書此般若波羅蜜多大神呪王置清淨處, 恭敬供養, 尊重讚歎, 雖不聽聞, 受持, 讀誦, 精勤修學, 如理思惟, 亦不為他開示分別, 而此住處國邑, 王都, 人非人等, 不為一切災横疾疫之所傷害, 所以者何? 如是般若波羅蜜多大神呪王隨所住處, 為此三千大千世界及餘十方無量無數無邊世界所有四大王眾天乃至色究竟天并諸龍神, 阿素洛等常來守護, 恭敬供養, 尊重讚歎, 不令般若波羅蜜多大神呪王有留難故.
> 憍尸迦! 若善男子, 善女人等怖畏怨家, 惡獸, 災横, 厭禱, 疾疫, 毒藥, 呪等, 應書般若波羅蜜多大神呪王, 隨多少分香囊盛貯, 置寶笥中恒隨逐身恭敬供養, 諸怖畏事皆自消除, 天龍, 鬼神常守衛故.

The first part of the passage talks about worshipping a written dhāraṇī incantation. It also enumerates many ways to employ the dhāraṇī, including listening to, upholding, reading, reciting, and scholastically studying etc. These are all common practices one can do to Mahāyāna

[1] *Da bore boluomi jing* 大般若波羅蜜經, trans. Xuanzang 玄奘 (602–664), *T*. no. 220, 5: 570b6–26.

scriptures.[2] At the same time, most of practicers point to the hermeneutical treatments to texts. However, the above passage does not focus on these approaches. Instead, it leads our attention to the cult of the dhāraṇī. As famously argued by Scophen, Mahāyāna sūtras tend to encourage followers to worship them as objects and thus acquire rewards and protection from them.[3] Davidson recently suggests that dhāraṇī could be understood as an encrypted and condensed version of the essence of the Mahāyānist teachings and sūtras.[4] Thus, a dhāraṇī like the *Great, Divine King Incantation of Pāramitā* should be then perceived as a crystallized essence that encapsulates the power and knowledge of the 600-volume sūtra. Once the dhāraṇī is written down and made into an object, as the core of the voluminous book, it functions as a surrogate for the whole set of the sūtra.

Meanwhile, Copp's study on the meaning of the word "dhāraṇī" in medieval Chinese context proposes that the word should be understood as "to grasp," both mentally and physically.[5] Copp's study, though originating mainly from translated Chinese texts, illuminates our understanding of materialized dhāraṇīs. As discussed in the second part of the passage, for individual practitioners, the capability of wearing a materialized dhāraṇī also guarantees them security and prosperity.

The juxtaposition of the two ways of using the dhāraṇī not only indicates a logical continuity but also reveals the same ritual structure. In order to make a dhāraṇī placed in a

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[2] See Ruben L. F. Habito, "Bodily Reading of the *Lotus Sūtra*," in *Readings of the Lotus Sūtra*, eds. Stephen F. Teiser, Jacqueline I. Stone (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 186–90.
[3] Gregory Schopen, "The phrase '*sa pthivīpradeśaś caityabhūto bhavet*' in the *Vajracchedikā*: Notes on the Cult of the Book in Mahāyāna," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 17, no. 3/4 (1975): 147–81; "The Book as a Sacred Object in Private Homes in Early and Medieval India," in *Medieval and Early Modern Devotional Objects in Global Perspective: Translations of the Sacred*, eds. Elizabeth Robertson and Jennifer Jahner (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 37–60.
[4] Ronald M. Davidson, "Studies in Dhāraṇī Literature I: Revisiting the Meaning of the Term Dhāraṇī," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 37 (2009): 97–147.
[5] Paul Copp, "Notes on the Term 'Dhāraṇī' in Medieval Chinese Buddhist Thought," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 71, no. 3 (2008): 493–508.

household or carried with the body work, multiple ritual components are involved. Writing down the dhāraṇī is only the beginning. One has to provide a clean location or an ornamented, perfumed container for the object. And after the object is appropriately installed, one has to worship and praise it incessantly. The ritual procedure incorporates not only different steps but also involves multiple power players. The worshipper of the book, as well as the carrier of the talisman, is not getting their protection directly from the Buddha's words or his ultimate power. Rather, a city, a household or an individual is made safe because the talismanic object is so sacred that all the deities and spirits will come to guard it. In other words, the protection of the worshipper and the bearer is merely a byproduct of the protection by other powerful beings of that which is borne.

The above extract shows one example of how a Buddhist talisman is made, used, and functions. Its canonical status leads us to think about how these newly imported ideas in medieval China contributed to the formation of a talismanic tradition, how indigenous Chinese talismanic practices in return enriched the Buddhist model, and how the populace, who might not have access to such canonical texts, engaged in such processes. To pursue these questions, we have first to define the parameters of the realm of talismans.

Defining Talisman in a Medieval Buddhist Context

Many early Buddologists tend to consider talismanic practice in Buddhism, along with other thaumaturgical practices, as a degenerated form of Buddhism that deserves no serious speculation. Others believe the practice is exclusively limited to those ignorant and illiterate lay practitioners. Nakamura Hajime 中村元 , in one of the most frequently consulted dictionaries of

Buddhism, claims that talismanic writing belongs to sorcery and is excluded from Buddhism.[6] Other scholars consider talismans a lower practice that only addresses daily, trivial issues.[7] To many of them, the focus of scholarship on Buddhism should be on the more sublime doctrinal texts instead of the seemingly messy practices. As Scophen put it, such an attitude reflects Protestant presuppositions in Buddhist studies.[8] According to him, the tendency is mainly a result of overemphasizing the importance of doctrinal texts by earlier generations of Western Buddhist scholars. The position assumes that Indian Buddhist texts, which usually survive as relatively recent manuscripts, must have been rigorously read and followed by early Indian Buddhists. The situation is exacerbated by the modernization movement within Buddhist communities in Asia.[9] In these movements, responding to challenges posed by Western culture and modern science, Buddhists themselves began to decontextualize and recontextualize their own traditions and present them in a modern and rational style. More and more scholars have realized the limitations of earlier approaches and are expanding our understanding of Buddhism, treating it more ritualistically as not simply a spiritual tradition or pure philosophy. Nevertheless, the tendency to consider talismanic practice as inferior contamination still exists in many works.

Moreover, for the study of the talismanic tradition in medieval China *per se*, the question is further complicated by the terminology used in describing the indigenous talismanic practice. In most cases, the Chinese word *fu* 符 is used in naming talismans. The word initially denoted an object split and kept by the two parties of an agreement, usually in a military or political context.

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[6] Nakamura Hajime, *Bukkyō go daijiten* 仏教語大辞典 (Tokyo: Tokyo shoseki, 1975), 1178a–b.
[7] For example, see Jonathan Z. Smith, ed., *The HarperCollins Dictionary of Religion* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1995), 45.
[8] Gregory Schopen, "Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions in the Study of Indian Buddhism," *History of Religions* 31 (1991): 1–23.
[9] See McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Sam van Schaik, *Buddhist Magic: Divination, Healing, and Enchantment through the Ages* (Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 2020), 4–5.

According to *The Grand Scribe's Records* (*Shiji* 史記) by Sima Qian 司馬遷, in the ninth month of the third year of Emperor Wen's reign of Western Han (178 BCE), the emperor sent bronze tiger *fu* and bamboo *fu* to commandery governors and grand councillors to kingdom princes.[10] A Later Han scholar, Ying Shao 應劭 (circa fl. 2 c.), described the use of such objects in his commentary. He noted that such *fu* were inscribed with texts in seal script (*zhuanshu* 篆書). He further explained that once the emperor decided to deploy his military personnel, he would have a messenger take half of the *fu* to a commandery or a kingdom. If the half brought by the messenger could be put back together with the half preserved in a commandery or a kingdom, the emperor's edict would then be followed.[11] Other Later Han scholars echoed the explanation. According to *Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters* (*Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字), the earliest Chinese lexicon compiled in the early second century, *fu* refers to a bamboo tally that can be split and put back together again. Thus, the meaning of the word extends to standing for the token of one's trustworthiness.[12] *Explaining Terms* (*Shiming* 釋名), a dictionary of the same period, interprets the word's original meaning as a government document sent to officials containing the order from the emperor.[13] These explanations betray two features. First, *fu* is an object symbolizing the agreement endorsed by two parties. Second, in most cases, *fu* is inscribed with writing and contains information. According to Anna Seidel and James Robson, such a

[10] *Shiji* 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982), 424; Also see William H. Nienhauser Jr. ed. *The Grand Scribe's Records*, vol. 2 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 166.
[11] *Shiji*, 424.
[12] See *Shuowen jiezi zhu* 说文解字註, anno. Duan Yucai 段玉裁 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1981), 191a.
[13] See *Shiming shuzheng bu* 釋名疏證補, collated and annoted Bi Yuan 畢沅, Wang Xianqian 王先謙, eds. Zhu Minche 祝敏徹, Sun Yuwen 孫玉文 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2008), 204. For a more detailed discussion of the meaning of *fu* and other associated concepts in early sources, see Stephan Peter Bumbacher, *Empowered Writing: Exorcistic and Apotropaic Rituals in Medieval China* (St. Petersburg, FL: Three Pines Press, 2012), 12–23.

political and military setting then led to the belief that talismans could also be used to summon and utilize deities in spiritual realms.[14]

Because of the indigenous origination and its later development in the indigenous religion, namely Daoism, the study of indigenous Chinese talismans has long been dominated by Daoist scholars. The English word "talisman" has become a standard translation of *fu*. To most scholars working on Chinese religion, when talking about the talisman, what emerges in their minds is something formed by "stylized characters, figurative elements, geometrical patterns, and symbolic signs."[15] These elements can be repeated and combined and usually, at last, configured into a vertical structure (Fig. 0.1).

[14] Anna Seidel, "Imperial Treasures and Taoist Sacraments: Taoist Roots in the Apocrypha," in *Tantric and Taoist Studies*, vol. 2, ed. M. Strickmann (Bruxelles: Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1983), 315; James Robson, "Signs of Power: Talismanic Writing in Chinese Buddhism," *History of Religions* 48, no.2 (2008): 136.
[15] Catherine Despeux, "Talismans and Sacred Diagrams," in *Daoism Handbook*, ed. Livia Kohn (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 533.

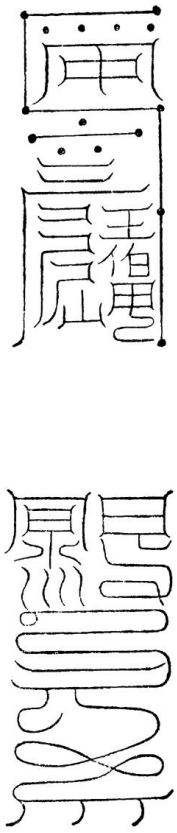


Fig. 0.1 One of the five Lord Lao's Talismans for Entering the Mountains (*Laojun rushan fu* 老君入山符).[16]

At the same time, some early scholars also used the word *fu* in a Buddhist setting and recognized the common ground between talismanic objects from different religious traditions. In the monumental Buddhist encyclopedia compiled by Mochizuki Shinkō 望月信亨, adopting a more tolerant position, he noticed that talismanic making exists widely in Buddhist and other religious traditions. Under the entry of *Gofu* 護符 (Ch. *hufu*) "Protective Talisman," he defined a talisman to be an object that usually contains an image or a text and protects the person who wears it. The image or text can be that of a Buddha, a bodhisattva, other deities and ghosts, or a

[16] The image is taken from *Baopu zi neipian jiaoshi* 抱朴子內篇校釋, anno. Wang Ming 王明 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 310.

seed mantra. And people who bear such an object will be empowered or protected by the figure or the mantra inscribed on the talisman. According to Mochizuki, talismanic making was widespread in India and other regions of central Asia.

Furthermore, he also believed that the practice was influenced by Daoist "superstition" in China. In the case of Japan, he mentioned the fact that during the *Shuni-e* 修二会 (Second-month Gathering) held in Tōdaiji 東大寺, ancient talismans of eliminating disasters were used. Besides, talismans were found in *Onmyodō* 陰陽道 and *Shugendō* 修験道 other than Buddhism. [17] Here, it seems that though Mochizuki admitted the existence of talismanic making and utilization in Buddhism, he was also aware of external influences.

The relationship between the usage of the word "talisman" and Daoist *fu* in Western Sinology is so close that sometimes scholars of Chinese Buddhism are cautious about using the word. Paul Copp's study on the materialization of the *Great Dhāraṇī of Wish-Fulfilling* (*Da suiqiu tuoluoni* 大隨求陀羅尼, Skt. *Mahāpratisarādhāraṇī*) mainly uses the word "amulet" instead of "talisman" to describe the object to mark the different religious traditions.

However, even in the English language, "talisman," "amulet," and other related terms have never been clearly separated both by people who use them and scholars who study them. Theodor H. Gaster, a biblical scholar who abridged, updated, and annotated Frazer's monumental *The Golden Bough*, once defined amulets and talismans. According to him, an amulet is "an object, supposedly charged with magical power, that is carried on the person or displayed in a house, barn, or place of business in order to ward off misadventure, disease, or the assaults of malign beings, demonic or human." A talisman, on the other hand, is "an object

[17] Mochizuki Shinkō 望月信亨, *Bukkyō daijiten* 仏教大辞典, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Sekai seiten kankō kyōkai, 1958), 1279c–1280a.

similarly used to enhance a person's potentialities and fortunes." To him, there are no significant differences between these two categories since they are "two sides of the same coin" and both rest on the belief that "the inherent quality of a thing can be transmitted to human beings by contact."[18] Another scholar makes a more distinctive differentiation by arguing that an amulet is a naturally empowered object used for general purposes. But a talisman is always prepared for a specific reason and charged with power from the preparer.[19] Don C. Skemer's recent study traces the etymology of "amulet," "talisman," and "charm." According to him, an amulet is an object worn on human bodies to ward off afflictions. Talisman, though sometimes used as a synonym for amulet, was once exclusively associated with astrological seals and figures in Western cultures. A charm, on the other hand, is more complicated. It can refer to an object, but it can also refer to a verbal charm. And transformations between a textual amulet and a charm happen all the time.[20] Although they all want to distinguish these closely connected terms, in many cases, scholars still use the words "talisman" and "amulet" simultaneously or interchangeably without much differentiation. For example, in Budge's comprehensive discussion of such objects in Egypt, Rome, Mesopotamia, and other civilizations, he mainly used "amulet" but sometimes used "talisman" without any qualification.[21] Furthermore, as Skemer has already noticed, authors in the Middle Ages also used these terms inconsistently.[22] Bearing both the emic and etic situations in mind, an overarching conceptual tool covering all these terms may be needed in analyzing the practice.

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[18] Theodor H. Gaster, "Amulets and Talismans," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, second edition, eds. Lindsay Jones, Mircea Eliade, Charles J. Adams (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), 297–300.
[19] Migene González-Wippler, *The Complete Book of Amulets and Talismans* (St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 1991), 203.
[20] Don C. Skemer, *Binding Words: Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 6–12.
[21] E. A. Wallis Budge, *Amulets and Talismans* (New Hyde Park, NY: University Books, 1961).
[22] Skemer, *Binding Words*, 10.

The above discussion reveals that when studying talismans, we should not be perplexed by the different labels used or not used by medieval Chinese practitioners. Instead, constructing a new analytical category that includes *fu* and other similar objects regardless of the linguistic labels attached to them will enable us to understand the empowered objects more thoroughly. My definition of a talismanic object will be 1) an object (textual or imaged), 2) used to empower the owner or to protect the owner from negative forces, 3) by contact (consuming, wearing, etc.) between the object and the owner, 4) or by contact with the extension (owner's house, bed, or other forms of property) of the owner.

Based on the definition, it is clear that the category of talisman in medieval China can be further divided into two major sub-categories: one is the indigenous talisman with a vertical structure formed by Chinese characters and scribbled lines and patterns (for example, see Fig. 0.1); the other is the inscribed dhāraṇī incantations (either in Siddhaṃ script or Chinese). However, the different origins of the two sub-categories do not mean that they belong to one particular religious tradition exclusively. The boundary between the two types also is not strict and usually broken. Elements from both sub-categories sometimes are combined to make full utilization the power of the symbols and texts.

As this dissertation argues, the above definition is not only a categorization system from the perspective of modern scholars, it also reflects how medieval Chinese practitioners (both makers and users) perceived talismanic objects and associated practices. One of the most stunning examples is a talisman with colorful images of deities, complex patterns of lines mixed with Chinese characters, and a short prayer preserved in the British Museum (Ch. liv. 0033, Fig. 0.2). The talisman, measuring 43.4 cm (≈ 1.42 feet) in height and 30 cm (≈ 0.98 foot) in width, is divided into two parts. The upper part contains images of two deities and two cartouches

identifying them. Xin Yu's recent study confirms that the left deity should be the goddess of Mercury and the right the Ketu, an imaginary planet in Indian astrology.[23]



Fig. 0.2 Dhāraṇi Talisman for Offerings to Ketu and Mercury of the North
計都星北方辰星供養陀羅尼符 (Ch. liv. 0033, British Museum)

[23] Whitfield first identifies the female deity on the left as the goddess of Polaris. See Roderick Whitfield, ed., *The Art of Central Asia: The Stein Collection in the British Museum* (Tokyo: Kodansha International in co-operation with the Trustees of the British Museum, 1985), vol. 2, 338, pl. 61. Yu's paper remains to be most thorough work on the diverse knowledge origins of this particular object. See Xin Yu, "Personal Fate and the Planets: A Documentary and Iconographical Study of Astrological Divination at Dunhuang, Focusing on the 'Dhāraṇī Talisman for Offerings to Ketu and Mercury, Planetary Deity of the North'," *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 20 (2011): 163–90.

The lower part of the talisman, on the other hand, is filled with squiggly patterns with Chinese characters and an instruction. The prayer explains how the talisman should be used and its benefits:

> This talisman is a dhāraṇī talisman. Whosever carries it will obtain divine penetrations and be able to remove misconducts of a thousand *kalpas*. The various Buddhas of the ten directions will gather together in front of [the carrier's] sight. Eveywhere he goes, he will encounter good fortune. Throughout his whole life, he will achieve power and fame and enjoy others' respect. His merit will be unparalleled. Protect him and purify him, and may this be carried out quickly, quickly, in accord with the statutes and ordinances.[24]
> 此符陀羅尼符. 帶者能得神通, 除罪千劫. 十方諸佛, 惣在目前. 去者無不吉, 利達一世, 得人恭敬, 功得(德)無比. 護淨. 急急如律令.

This concrete example is typical in showing elements originating from different religious traditions, such as images of deities with Indian origins, indigenous talismanic patterns, Buddhist soteriological language, and indigenous incantation, all fused to form one object.

Based on the quality of the paper used, Yu Xin infers that the talisman is a product of the 10th century. According to the prayer, the maker and the user of the talisman considered it as a "dhāraṇī talisman" (*tuoluoni fu* 陀羅尼符). However, we do not find any traces of a dhāraṇī inscribed or written on the piece of paper. Instead, the design and pattern indicate the maker drew his inspiration mostly from the indigenous model. Be that as it may, the talisman is still named "dhāraṇī talisman." The feature of this talisman reveal that for its medieval users, the category of *fu* was inclusive, and that Buddhist elements played an important role in the making of a *fu*.

[24] The translation here follows Yu's with some of my own changes.

The naming of this "dhāraṇī talisman" indicates that medieval practitioners were aware of and actively participated in the process of rendering Buddhist incantations into talismanic objects. At the same time, the term *fu* added to the name reveals that users did not consider these "dhāraṇī talismans" to be much different from Chinese indigenous counterparts. Furthermore, as I will show in the following chapters, there are other cases showing that indigenous talismans could be used together with dhāraṇī incantations. These incantations help the maker enchant and consecrate talismans.

The term "dhāraṇī talisman" in medieval China also echoes some of modern scholars' efforts. Apart from Paul Copp's recent studies on amulets made from the *Great Dhāraṇī of Wish-Fulfilling*, McBride's recent studies on Korean Buddhism show that during both the Chosŏn period (1392–1910) and modern times Korean practitioners make use of talismans inscribed with the same dhāraṇī.[25] As I will show in the following chapters, talismans inscribed with indigenous patterns and those covered with dhāraṇī incantations share a lot in common when they were made, used, and understood. Medieval people did not have a clear cut, definitive imagination of what specific religious tradition a talisman should belong to. Rather, as their flexible language indicates, their categorization was broad and open to picking up and adding new elements they found attractive.

At the same time, the phrase "dhāraṇī talisman" (*tuoluoni fu* 陀羅尼符) does not exist in the *Taishō* canon. A search in several mainstream databases of premodern Chinese texts also returns zero results.[26] Without this rare specimen, we would never know of such naming practice

[25] Richard D. McBride II, "Wish-Fulfilling Spells and Talismans, Efficacious Resonance, and Trilingual Spell Books: The Mahāpratisarā-dhāraṇī in Chosŏn Buddhism," *Pacifc World*, 3rd ser., no. 20 (2018): 55–93; "Dhāraṇī and Mantra in Contemporary Korean Buddhism: A Textual Ethnography of Spell Materials for Popular Consumption," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 42 (2019): 361–403.
[26] I tried Zhongguo jiben guji ku 中國基本古籍庫 v. 7.0, Zhonghua jingdian guji ku 中華經典古籍庫, and Lidai jiaowai shefo wenxian shuju ku 歷代教外涉佛文獻數據庫.

from transmitted sources. This talisman, along with many other ritual manuals discussed in the dissertation, comes from a so-called "library cave" found in Northwestern China. How do such sources tell us a story about talismanic objects different from transmitted accounts?

Manuscripts and Talismans in a Medieval Town

The discovery of the library cave in Dunhuang is one of the most notable events in humanities in 20th century China. The cave, now numbered DM 17, is located behind the northern wall of a corridor that leads to the larger cave DM 16. It was accidentally discovered by the caretaker of the caves, a Daoist priest, Wang Yuanlu 王圓箓, on June 20, 1900. The cave was filled with documents and other artifacts. Scholars now estimate there are over 60,000 pieces of writings. Among them, around 90% are Buddhist documents, including complete translated sūtras, catalogues, apocryphal works, and various ritual texts. The time span of these texts covers 600 years, from the late 4th century to the early 11th century. Though scholars are still having a heated debate on why these documents were sealed in the cave in the first place, since their discovery, the documents that faithfully recorded how religions were actually practiced on the ground have revolutionized our understanding of medieval Chinese religions.[27]

The talismans found in the corpus have caught the attention of scholars since the 1990s. Gao Guofan 高國藩 pioneered the discussion of talismans and associated practices found among Dunhuang manuscripts of the middle period. Gao collected the talismans and seals from Dunhuang manuscripts and discussed them by their functions. However, lacking reflection on the

[27] For overviews in English, see Rong Xinjiang, *Eighteen Lectures on Dunhuang*, trans. Imre Galambos (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 79–84; Hao Chunwen, *Dunhuang Manuscripts: An Introduction to Texts from the Silk Road*, trans. Stephen F. Teiser (Diamond Bar, CA: Portico Publishing Company), 4–11.

nature of Dunhuang manuscripts, Gao hastily believed that all talismanic materials were Daoist or at least influenced by Daoism.[28] Xiao Dengfu's 蕭登福 works on both manuscripts and transmitted texts echo Gao's argument. Like Gao, his assumptions that talismans and seals are Daoist practices and Buddhist texts only passively received the influence run through all of his works.[29]

Gao and Xiao's position is nuanced by the case studies of Christine Mollier. Instead of focusing on a one-way influence from Daoism to Buddhism, Mollier manages to show us the texts and practices that keep floating along the fuzzy boundary between Buddhism and Daoism in medieval China. However, in the case of some talismans in a Buddhist apocryphon, she still believes the Buddhists borrowed both the introductory texts and talismans from a Daoist counterpart.[30]

There are other efforts to avoid the one-way approach in the study of talismans and seals. Strickmann may have been the first Western scholar to remind us that such practices existed in a fifth-century Buddhist apocryphal scripture, predating some Daoist counterparts.[31] James Robson pushes this even further. He examines transmitted sources and Dunhuang manuscripts containing seals or talismans on both sides and discovers the surprising fact that we do not have any medieval Daoist manuscripts containing seals or talismans.[32] In other words, actual examples of talismanic writing in Buddhist sources and popular practices predates their

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[28] Gao Guofan, *Dunhuang wushu yu wushu liubian* 敦煌巫術與巫術流變 (Nanjing: Hehai daxue chubanshe, 1993); *Dunhuang fuzhou fengsu* 敦煌符咒風俗 (Hong Kong: Dongya wenhua chubanshe, 2005).
[29] Xiao Dengfu, *Daojiao xingdou fuyin yu fojiao mizong* 道教星斗符印與佛教密宗 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng, 1993); *Daojiao shuyi yu mijiao dianji* 道教術儀與密教典籍 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng, 1993); *Daojia daojiao yingxiang xia de fojiao jingji* 道家道教影響下的佛教經籍 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng, 2005).
[30] Christine Mollier, *Buddhism and Taoism Face to Face: Scripture, Ritual, and Iconographic Exchange in Medieval China* (Honululu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008).
[31] Michel Strickmann, *Chinese Magical Medicine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 123–93.
[32] James Robson, "Signs of Power," 130–69.

occurrence in Daoism. Based on these findings, Robson takes a step back and argues that Buddhism and Daoism might include such practices based on a shared circulating template at that time.

Though having different positions on the origins of talismans in Buddhist sources, what these works share in common is they still take the practice signified by the word "talisman" as the same as that by the Chinese word *fu*. However, as I will show in the following chapters, materials in Dunhuang show that people in Dunhuang at that time had a much broader category of talisman. And standard Buddhist practices, such as the use of dhāraṇī incantations, played an important role in it. I will also demonstrate that the phenomenon is not only limited to the northwestern town but also extends to other parts of medieval China.

Such innovative ways of making and using talismanic objects are consonant with Griffiths' examination of mantra and dhāraṇī inscriptions found in Indonesia. He suggests that practice was not always bound by text. The mantras and dhāraṇīs could be transmitted by themselves and outside the larger texts instructing how to use them.[33] These findings echo Webb Keane's general observation that material entities produced by religious concepts have a life of their own. The objects should not be reduced to merely evidence of ideas. Instead, they are "objects of experience" and can constantly stimulate people to have new responses.[34]

Dunhuang texts also bring us closer to the professional ritualists and their clients in medieval China. So far, most of the materials we use, transmitted or manuscripts, contain no **real** talismans. They are, as my later chapters show, guidebooks about making and using talismans. The "talismans" in these guidebooks are models for or illustrations of real talismans. On the

[33] Arlo Griffiths, "Written Traces of the Buddhist Past: Mantras and Dhāraṇīs in Indonesian Inscriptions," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 77, no.1 (2014): 137–94.
[34] Webb Keane, "The Evidence of the Senses and the Materiality of Religion," supplement, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, n. s., 14, no. S1 (2008): S110–S127.

other hand, most real talismans were burned, consumed, or carried on an individual's body and, therefore, forever disappeared in history. However, as shown in the previous section and following chapters, the cave in Dunhuang does preserve examples of real talismans that accidentally ended up there.

Meanwhile, the ritual manuals and guidebooks found in Dunhuang are more personal texts. Compared with later standard transmitted counterparts, these scrolls and booklets usually were compiled individually to address the needs of their users. The arrangement of passages from different sources, the first-hand annotations and editorial notes, and the space left for further enrichment all betray the efforts of real people behind the scenes. The manuscripts, along with transmitted texts, provide us with a much more vivid picture of talismanic practice in medieval China.

Talismans and the Sinification Model

Talismanic practice in medieval China is also a unique site for us to reflect on the Sinification model in the study of Chinese Buddhism. Starting from Zürcher's monumental *The Buddhist Conquest of China*, scholars have discussed how Buddhism was transformed and appropriated by Chinese people in its transmission to China. However, as Teiser has pointed out, the model stipulates "a fundamental opposition or difference between two distinct entities," namely, "India" or "Indian Buddhism" on the one side, and "China" on the other side. And the

problem with such stipulation is that it projects our modern understanding of "Chinese-ness" under the nation-state paradigm back to pre-modern polities.[35]

My discussion of talismanic practice in medieval China questions the model since talisman was never a patent held by any indigenous Chinese religious tradition. Though they physically looked different than Chinese versions, Indian Buddhist talisman were described and used before their introduction to China. The Buddhist practice has a lot in common with its indigenous counterpart. The observation aligns with works on other concerns similarly shared by practitioners from both sides.[36]

On the other hand, we do find translated Buddhist texts prohibiting the practice of *fu*, the indigenous Chinese talismanic practice. But how could these texts, supposedly compiled on the Indian subcontinent in a totally distinctive language, and then faithfully translated into the Chinese language, be aware of the Chinese practice? As Sharf once boldly pointed out, the Chinese encounter with Buddhism "took place almost exclusively among the Chinese themselves, on Chinese soil, in the Chinese language."[37] In the case of talismans, though the translation process of the talisman-prohibiting texts definitely involves foreign hands, nevertheless, mentioning the indigenous talismanic practice more likely indicates that foreign translators and their Chinese assistants actively chose their strategy to present model(s) of authentic Buddhism.[38] At the same time, as Sharf argues, Buddhist scriptures are only one factor

[35] Stephen F. Teiser, "Social History and the Confrontation of Cultures: Foreword to the Third Edition of The Buddhist Conquest of China," in Erik Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China: The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China*, third ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2007), xxi.
[36] For example, see Gregory Schopen, "Filial Piety and the Monk in the Practice of Indian Buddhism: A Question of 'Sinicization' Viewed from the Other Side," *T'oung Pao*, 2nd ser., 70, Livr. 1/3 (1984): 110–26; James R. Egge, *Religious Giving and the Invention of Karma in Theravada Buddhism* (Richmond, England: Curzon, 2002).
[37] Robert Sharf, *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism: A Reading of the Treasure Store Treatise* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 2.
[38] For the different translation strategies, including the Sinicized approach, see Pierce Salguero*, Translating Buddhist Medicine in Medieval China* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 67–95.

out of many in determining the parameters of Buddhist practice.[39] Regulations in Indian Buddhist texts never completely obliterated thaumaturgical practices, including the materials discussed in this dissertation. Regardless of the early efforts to curtail the scope of "Buddhism," talismans formed out of Buddhist elements and connected to Buddhist soteriology flourished in Dunhuang and other places in medieval China. Instead of considering these practices as examples of Sinification, the dissertation argues that they were more of an effort to expand the medieval ritual repertoire.

For ritualists and ordinary people in medieval China, the construction of such a repertoire was never a "Sinification" process. They did not consider Buddhism a wholesale package that needed to be transformed or remolded. Instead, they picked up individual tools from the toolkit and put them into their own repertoire. During the process, they might combine similar tools, assign some other tools new functions, and sometimes invent new tools based on old prototypes. As I will show in the following chapters, all of these strategies were applied to talismanic objects.

Talismanic Practice and Esoteric Buddhism

Most modern scholars usually categorize the Buddhist sources containing talismanic practice under the rubric of esoteric Buddhism or Tantrism (*mijao* 密教 or *mizong* 密宗). Such tendency probably results from two kinds of influence. On the one hand, most transmitted texts containing talismanic practices are grouped into the *mikkyōbu* 密教部 in the *Taishō* canon. At

[39] Robert Sharf, *Coming to Terms*, 13–14

the same time, in the study of Chinese Buddhism, esoteric Buddhism has become a leftover category into which people throw all ritual-centered texts.

The study of esoteric Buddhism in China in Western academia was initiated by Chou Yi-liang's translation and annotation of the biographies of the "three Great Masters of the Kaiyuan reign" (*Kaiyuan san dashi* 開元三大士, Shan Wuwei 善无畏 [Skt. Śubhakarasiṃha, 637–735], Jingang Zhi 金刚智 [Skt. Vajrabodhi, 669–741], Bukong Jingang 不空金剛 [Skt. Amoghavajra, 705–774]). In his dissertation, Chou argued that Tantrism was "officially introduced" to China during the eighth century though some elements have already been incorporated into translated texts as early as the third century. [40] Chou's characterization of esoteric Buddhism as both a new teaching and a new sect was heavily influenced by the prevailing sectarian model of Japanese Buddhism at his time. Ever since Kūkai 空海 (774–835) brought back the new teachings from China, Japanese Buddhists started to differentiate between two types of esoteric Buddhism. The ritual practices that predated Kūkai were named "miscellaneous esotericism" (*zōmitsu* 雜密) and those brought back by the master "pure esotericism" (*junmitsu* 純密).[41]

However, recent reflections have led us to reconsider the validity of the terms used by medieval Buddhists. Sharf argues that "dhāraṇī, mantra, and the invocation of deities, coupled with a quest for divine grace and thaumaturgical powers," which are usually categorized as "tantric," have been practiced by Chinese Buddhists since the introduction of Buddhism to China. The "sect of Chinese esoteric Buddhism," which believed to have been established by the Great Masters in the eighth century, is a retrospective construction by later biographer Zanning

[40] Chou Yi-liang, "Tantrism in China," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 8, no. 3/4 (1945): 241–332.
[41] For such dichotomy, see Ōmura Seigai 大村西崖, *Mikkyō hattatsushi* 密教発達志, Tokyo: Kokusho kankōkai, 1918.

贊寧 (919–1001).[42] Shinohara, on the other hand, shifts his focus from the debate over terminology to tracing the changes and developments in individual ritual components. By comparing similar ritual practices in early texts and texts translated during the eighth century, he insightfully points out that the practices included in the works of the three masters might better be understood as "a series of distinct phases in a process of continuous evolution."[43] Shinohara's approach is also endorsed by recent developments in the study of Indian tantrism, where Davidson discloses the existence of groups of magicians, sorcerers or witches in India before the advent of tantrism and confirms the continuation of the practices as sources for some of the ritual and nomenclature of the sectarian tantric traditions.[44]

Goble's recent book on Amoghavjra inherits the dual system of esoteric Buddhist practice and Esoteric Buddhism as a school. Admitting the former represents the ritual practices introduced to China a long time ago, he demonstrates that the latter stands for a new teaching that enjoyed local recognition in the second half of the eighth century.[45]

It is not my intention to continue the current debate on the validity of the terminology of esoteric Buddhism in China. Rather, it is also beneficial to point out that all these works share a concentration on great masters or transmitted masterworks. My dissertation will shift the discussion, analyzing how ordinary medieval people, including local ritualists, their clients, and monks of no significance, used the ritual instructions from texts labelled as Esoteric (or esoteric) Buddhism. My research shows that these people did not care about the labels, nor did they debate

[42] Robert Sharf, *Coming to Terms*, 263–78.
[43] Koichi Shinohara, *Spells, Images, and Maṇḍalas: Tracing the Evolution of Esoteric Buddhist Rituals* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), xii–xiv.
[44] Ronald M. Davidson, "Magicians, Sorcerers and Witches: Considering Pretantric, Non-sectarian Sources of Tantric Practices," *Religions* 8, no. 9 (2017): 188.
[45] Geoffrey C. Goble, *Chinese Esoteric Buddhism: Amoghvajra, the Ruling Elite, and the Emergence of a Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019).

the complicated ritual structure. Rather, they considered these techniques to be no different from other sources, including Daoist rituals, popular indigenous incantations, and apocryphal texts, and made them part of their ritual repertoire. Furthermore, the dissertation also manifests the continuity of a Buddhist talismanic tradition. Texts transmitted before the eighth century and later share similar techniques in making and using talismans.

Magic and Buddhism

The last recurring theme in the dissertation is the role of magic in Buddhism. Discussions concerning the relationship between magic and religion constitute a long tradition in the Western academia. Malinowski, as an early functionalist, claims the function of magic lies in its supply of "a number of ready-made ritual acts and beliefs" that "ritualize[s] man's optimism" and "enhance[s] his faith in the victory over fear." Religion, on the other hand, "establishes, fixes and enhances all valuable mental attitudes."[46] For Malinowski, the two, though having a lot in common, represent two poles. One for the individual level and practical techniques for special ends, one for the community and holistic faith. The position of taking the two as separated entities was then inherited by Keith Thomas. In his monumental *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, he presents the two first as indistinct but then as competitors in which magic finally declined as the Protestant reformers started to move away from Catholic rites.[47]

[46] Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magic, Science, and Religion* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1954). Originally published in 1925.
[47] Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-century England* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971). Also see Hildred Geertz's review for the book, "An Anthropology of Religion and Magic, I," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 6, no. 1 (1975): 71–89.

Instead of focusing on the people who actually were practicing religion or magic, Randall Styers' recent study shifts to how modern scholars talk about magic. According to him, even though the word "magic" once was used by the Protestants as a weapon to prescribe the parameters of legitimate religious belief and practice,[48] modern scholarly usage of the word, on the other hand, serves as a weapon to limit the realm of religion to the abstract and otherworldly.[49]

The above brief overview reveals that the word magic should not be taken as a value-free description. On the contrary, most people, whether religious pedants or modern scholars, use the word to cover their own agendas. Therefore, I refrain myself from using the word frequently throughout the dissertation. At the same time, since the beginning of Buddhism, so-called magical practices, such as spells, healing techniques, divination, and so on, have been part of the religion. Throughout the development of Buddhism, we do witness some elites recognizing and attempting to exterminate such practices. However, as I will show in the first chapter, such efforts were never intended to separate these ritual practices entirely from the more sublime and philosophical teachings. The purging of such practices always took place under the claim of removing heterodox, non-Buddhist (*waidao* 外道) elements. Therefore, the efforts themselves were contested. Different masters, communities, and sects differed significantly on these issues, and the efforts to exclude certain practices were never unanimously implemented among Buddhist communities.

[48] Also see Dale B. Martin, *Inventing Superstition: From the Hippocratics to the Christians* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004) for similar efforts from classical Greece to the Christianized Roman Empire of the fourth century.
[49] Randell Styers, *Making Magic: Religion, Magic, and Science in the Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

In other words, since the Buddha himself, Buddhism has never rejected magic practices simply because they are technical. Tambiah's fieldwork experience shows us that not only the poor and unlettered but also social elites wear amulets in 20th century Thailand.[50] A study on contemporary Japanese temples also documents how Buddhist temples actively participate in selling talismanic objects to improve their financial situations.[51] Even though the recent movement of Buddhist modernism calls for a Buddhism concentrating on rationality, meditation, and participation in global issues, nevertheless contemporary Buddhists still invest themselves in talismans and similar practices. For them, talismans are no different from other more acceptable Buddhist rituals such as reciting the sūtras or worshipping the Buddha's image.

Synopsis

The dissertation is divided into five chapters. Chapter one discusses talismanic discourses in Buddhist sources from the third to the eleventh century. I show that early foreign translators and their Chinese assistants were aware of indigenous talismanic practices (*fu*). They took the Chinese word as a handy tool to define what was evil and unacceptable and promote the new teaching, Buddhism. However, later Chinese Buddhists, who had a better understanding of the practice, started to make the technique part of their own repertoire. Their attitudes towards *fu* show their willingness to keep their Buddhist identity while living in symbiosis with their rivals. The observation is also corroborated by an apocryphal text titled *Book of Consecration*

[50] Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, "The Cult of Images and Amulets," in his *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets: A Study of Charisma, Hagiography, Secarianism, and Millennial Buddhism* (New York: University of Cambridge Press, 1984), 195–7.
[51] Ian Reader, George J. Tanabe, *Practically Religious: Worldly Benefits and the Common Religion of Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), 206-233.

(*Guanding jing* 灌頂經). The text denounces indigenous talismanic practice while at the same time expounding its own talismanic instruction without using the controversial label of *fu*.

The second chapter is an examination of how Buddhist talismans were produced in medieval China. I show that there are different logistic and ritual components in the process of making talismans—selection of special materials, purification and ornamentation, recitation of certain incantations—for the makers to choose and combine. I also argue that unreadability is forged in the process by encrypted semiotic symbols and physical designs. Finally, the chapter shows that the efficacy of a talisman also depends on whether the user keeps his/her religious promise.

Chapter three examines how talismanic objects were used in medieval China. The chapter first proposes three major paradigms of utilizing talismans based on their relationship with the body: the pharmaceutical paradigm in which talismans are internally consumed; the armorized paradigm in which talismans serve as boundary protectors; the weaponized paradigm in which talismans are cast externally. The discussion argues that the efficacy of talismans not only comes from the ultimate source, such as a deity, a Buddha, or a sacred text, but also is influenced by how the efficacy is channeled.

The fourth chapter discusses the benefits of using talismans in medieval China. Unlike many previous works that imagine that talismans only deal with trivial, daily troubles, I argue that medieval Chinese people also took talismans as a way to achieve their soteriological goals. I also show that, unlike modern practitioners, medieval texts, both ritual manuals found in Dunhuang and carefully translated Buddhist texts, do not make a clear-cut distinction between this-worldly and other-worldly benefits.

The last chapter situates talismanic practice back in its social and ritual milieu. By focusing on one long scroll, S. 2498, preserved in the British Library, the chapter shows that talismans did not occupy a significant place in the scroll compared with other ritual practices. However, the diverse techniques in the scroll either share a similar logic or can be used synthetically with talismans. Without these supporting techniques and the ritual milieu constructed by them, the talismanic practice would also be impossible. The chapter also discusses the professional ritualists behind the scroll. By examining the codicological features of the scroll, I reveal how these professionals managed and enriched their mantic knowledge.

Chapter One

Talismanic Discourses in Medieval Buddhist Sources

Introduction

How did medieval Chinese Buddhists understand talismans? Did they like them? Did they hate them? If some hated them, then how did others justify them? How did talismanic discourses help Buddhists to shape or reinforce their identity? Members of Buddhist communities in medieval China, ranging from bilingual foreign monks and indigenous literati to uneducated city dwellers and peasants, might have different opinions on these questions. But what helped bring them together and make them feel they belonged to each other?

As stated in the introductory chapter, the practice of making and using talismans has long been considered as an indigenous one. Most modern sinologists consider *fu* 符 as the single representation of the talismanic tradition in premodern China. Many medieval Buddhists, no matter foreign translators or Chinese composers, shared the concern of defining what are legitimate Buddhist practices by excluding certain practices. They believed the practice under the

label *fu* represents something non-Buddhist, and thus nefarious that needs to be suppressed. Therefore, the indigenous Chinese label *fu* became a handy symbol for launching their harsh criticism towards practices they did not approve of or support. However, the resentful feeling about the particular category *fu* never prohibited other Chinese Buddhists from talking about and deploying talismans. When it comes to the fifth century, native Buddhists who had better knowledge of the word *fu* and the practices behind the label started to develop a more open-minded attitude. At the same time, even though *fu* remains a controversial term, Buddhist texts dating back to as early as the fifth century began to encourage the usage of other talismanic objects. Many Buddhists, though they found the label *fu* and its denotation of indigenous practice unacceptable, were satisfied with similar activities that do not bear the venomous title. To many medieval Chinese Buddhists, talismans were accepted as part of their ritual repertoires.

In Robert F. Campany's recent reflection on the study of the interaction between Buddhism and Daoism, he suggests we should take religions in medieval China as "repertoires of cultural resources."[52] The suggestion means a given religious tradition should not be considered a "person" or an "organic whole." For him, religions of medieval China were not "tightly organized, logically coherent systems," but "something closer to tool kits: the many kinds of tools inside might not fit smoothly together, but each is useful for doing some particular kind of job."[53]

Many medieval Buddhists' repertoires included multiple ritual techniques dealing with troubles people faced every day. Most of the items in the ritual repertoires, such as making petitions to heavenly deities, spellbinding, forming particular hand gestures, utilizing talismans

[52] Robert F. Campany, "Religious Repertoires and Contestation: A Case Study Based on Buddhist Miracle Tales," *History of Religions* 52, no. 2 (2012): 137.
[53] Campany, "Religious Repertoires," 107.

and seals, and constructing sacred ritual space, can be found in their rivals' repertoires as well. Not all medieval Buddhists shared the same repertoire. Not all medieval Buddhists had the same degree of accessibility to a particular piece in a repertoire. Many medieval Buddhists might even find some pieces in the repertoire unpleasing and unacceptable.

As argued by Campany, viewing medieval Chinese religions as repertoires dispels the imagination that religions are agents that behave on their own. Instead, it helps us see "the agents who really and nonmetaphorically do things"[54] and understand people who practice religions on the ground. At the same time, medieval Buddhists, though might have quite diverse opinions on talismanic practices, still shared identity. These diverse opinions provided a field for Buddhists to transmit, reinvent, criticize, debate, choose and give up certain ideas and practices. They might have different positions, but the very process of these discursive activities created an "imagined community" for them.[55]

Criticizing non-Buddhist magical activities is a long-held tradition from the very beginning of Buddhism. Early Buddhist *vinaya*s have made multiple lists of magical practices that genuine Buddhist practitioners should stay away from.[56] When these *vinayas* were translated into Chinese, they usually made formal denouncements against the use of talismans and other related practices. The most frequently used Chinese word for talisman, *fu* 符, was always juxtaposed with adjectives such as evil or mistaken (*xie* 邪) or non-Buddhist (*waidao* 外道).

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[54] Robett F. Campany, "On the Very Idea of Religions (In the Modern West and in Early Medieval China)," *History of Religions* 42, no. 4 (2003): 319.

[55] For understanding religions as "imagined communities", see Campany, "Religious Repertoires," 107–9.

[56] For example, see *Mishasai bu hexi wufen lü* 彌沙塞部和醯五分律 (*Mahīśāsakavinaya*) , trans. Fotuoshi 佛陀什 (*Buddhajīva), Zhu Daosheng 竺道生, *T*. no.1421, 22: 174a29–b6; *Mohe sengqi lü* 摩訶僧祇律 (*Mahāsāṃghikavinay*a), trans. Fotuobatuoluo 佛陀跋陀羅 (Buddhabhadra, 358–429), Faxian 法顯 (337–422), *T*. no. 1425, 22: 531b1-2; *Sifen lü* 四分律 (*Dharmaguptakavinaya*), trans. Fotuosheye 佛陀耶舍 (Buddhayaśas, fl. 402–413), Zhu Fonian 竺佛念 (ca. 4–5 c.), *T*. no. 1428, 22: 963b15–c6; *Shisong lü* 十誦律 (*Sarvāstivādavinaya*), trans. Furuoduoluo 弗若多羅(*Puṇyatāra, ca. 4–5c.), Jiumoluoshi 鳩摩羅什 (Kumārajīva, 344–413), *T*. no. 1435, 23: 337b28–c15.

The effort of ruling out the use of talismanic objects and other thaumaturgical practices help to create a seldom-seen consensus between early Buddhists and modern scholars. To many scholars, Buddhism is often perceived as a rational tradition with no room for magic and superstition.[57] When there are indeed practices related to magic observed, the usual way to explain it away is to regard the practices as contaminations introduced to Buddhism to accommodate the local tradition.[58] In other cases, believers and practitioners of "Buddhist magic" are considered limited to those rural area dwellers who receive less education and have lower incomes.[59] Authorities within Buddhist communities sometimes also align themselves with such a position and try to suppress the "fake Buddhist" practices with political power.[60]

However, in this chapter, I wish to show a more nuanced picture of how medieval Chinese Buddhists manipulated talismanic discourses to respond to various factors—translated Indian sources, rivals from indigenous practices, and even political influence. By showing these efforts to curtail or expand the scope of acceptable Buddhist practices, the chapter also aims to prove that Buddhist identity and the boundaries of Buddhist communities were constantly being contested and redefined.

Talismanic Discourses in Mainstream Buddhist Sources

[57] See Gregory Schophen, "Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions in the Study of Indian Buddhism," *History of Religions* 31, no.1 (1991): 1–23.
[58] Sam van Schaik, *Buddhist Magic: Divination, Healing, and Enchantment through the Ages* (Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 2020), 4–5.
[59] Barend Jan Terwiel*, Monks and Magic: Revisiting a Classic Study of Religious Ceremonies in Thailand*, 4th revised edition (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2012), 4–5. The original was published in 1975.
[60] Thomas Nathan Patton, *The Buddha's Wizards: Magic, Protection, and Healing in Burmese Buddhism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 114–32.

Normative claims about what constitutes authentic forms of Buddhism have a long history. Similar to many modern Buddhologists and ecclesiastical authorities, early Buddhist sources are also eager to limit the scope of "genuine" Buddhist practices. Buddhism travelled to other regions with both local accommodations and efforts to police these "unacceptable" changes.

When Buddhism was first introduced to and practiced by Chinese people, confusion about authentic Buddhist practices remained a central topic in Buddhist communities. Dharmakāla (Qumojialuo 昙摩迦罗, fl. 222–250), a monk who was born and raised in central India and travelled to China later, translated the first *vinaya* in China. According to his biography, the translation was a response to the chaos in Buddhist communities at that time: local Chinese monks often imitated indigenous sacrificial rituals and even did not know how to get their ordination properly.[61]

Though this first *vinaya* in Chinese has long been lost, other early translated sources and later compositions by esteemed native Buddhist believers share the same concern about the indigenous talismanic practice. In this section, I will examine how the idea of *fu* and other related vocabularies were discussed and understood in these mainstream Buddhist texts.

The earliest case of limiting the practice of *fuzhou* 符呪 (talismans and spells) perhaps was written down no later than the fourth century. In the *Sūtra of Ānanda's Questions on the Auspiciousness and Inauspiciousness in Serving the Buddha* (*A'nan wen shifo jixiong jing* 阿難問事佛吉凶經, *Questions* hereafter), the Buddha divides activities in our ordinary world into two categories: worldly affairs (*shijian shi* 世間事) and worldly consciousness (*shijian yi* 世間意). For him, worldly affairs such as fair business transactions, hosting funerals, and arranging

[61] Huijiao 慧皎 (497–554), *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳, *T*. no. 2059, 50: 324c27–a6.

weddings are acceptable while worldly consciousness such as the practice of divination, invoking spirits, talismans and spells (*fuzhou*), suppressing demons, ritual sacrifices, and selecting auspicious dates should be banned. The Buddha explains that since his disciples observe the precepts, they will be protected by heavenly gods, dragons, ghosts, and other deities. [62] Thus, there is no need to participate in all these disturbing non-Buddhist practices.

Three versions of the sūtra survive in the Buddhist canon. Two of them (*T*. 492a and *T*. 492b) were attributed to the early translator An Shigao 安世高, who is said to have come to China during the mid-second century.[63] The other one (*T*. 495), entitled *Sūtra of Distinctions Made by Ānanda* (*Foshuo A'nan fenbie jing* 佛說阿難分別經, *Distinctions* hereafter), was ascribed to a monk named Fajian 法堅, who finished the translation during the Western Qin dynasty (385–400, 409–431).[64] The three titles do not differ from each other significantly in content. Recent studies prove that there is no firm basis for ascribing translatorship of the first two versions to An Shigao. The mistaken attribution results from the efforts of Fei Changfang (fl. 6-7 c.), an unreliable medieval bibliographer who baselessly ascribed early translators' names to many sūtras listed as anonymous in Sengyou's 僧祐 (445–518) earlier catalogue. [65] Fei recorded

[62] *Foshuo A'nan wen shifo jixiong jing* 佛說阿難問事佛吉凶經, trans. An Shigao 安世高, *T*. no. 492A, 14: 753c19–23; *A'nan wen shifo jixiong jing* 阿難問事佛吉凶經, trans. An Shigao 安世高, *T*. no. 492B, 14: 755c15–21.

[63] Huijiao, *Gaoseng zhuan*, *T*. no. 2059, 50: 324a9-10.

[64] *Foshuo A'nan fenbie jing*, trans. Fajian 法堅, *T*. no. 495.

[65] Suspicions around the dating and attribution of the two attributed to An Shigao have been around for a long time. Since Sakaino Kōyō 境野黃洋, scholars have pointed out that Fei Changfang ascribed translators to many sūtras that did not have a translator before in his catalog *Lidai sanbao ji*. Jan Nattier's meticulous work on early translated Buddhist sūtras makes a comprehensive evaluation on current translations ascribed to An Shigao. She, alongside other scholars such as Erik Zürcher and Ui Hakuju 宇井伯寿, asserts that the two titles in question are not An Shigao's works. For Nattier's evaluation of works attributed to An Shigao, see her *A Guide to the Earliest Chinese Buddhist Translations: Texts from the Eastern Han* 東漢 *and Three Kingdoms* 三國 *Periods* (Tokyo: The International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology, Soka University, 2008), 38–72. For how Fei fabricated translatorship, see Michael Radich, "Fei Changfang's Treatment of Sengyou's Anonymous Texts," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 139, no. 4 (2019): 819–41.

the *Questions* title and attributed it to An Shigao. [66] At the same time, curiously, in another fascicle, Fei recorded the *Questions* title again and attributed it to Fajian, who was working in the Western Qin in the late 4th century.[67] Fei indicated that there is no difference between the *Questions* and the *Distinctions* since the latter is just an alternative title to the former. Moreover, in this entry, Fei revealed his sources. According to the annotation made by Fei, he took the entry from an earlier *Catalogue Compiled at Shixing County* (*Shixing lu* 始興錄), a work that has been lost now.[68]

Fei Changfang's contemporary, Fajing 法經 (fl. 6 century), also recorded the title in his catalogue. According to him, Fajian is the only translator of *Questions* during Western Qin, and the *Distinctions* is a different version of the same original. He also confirmed that Fajian finished the work by the late 4th century.[69]

To summarize, when Sengyou finished his catalogue in the early 6th century, he did not know the exact translator of the scripture and therefore categorized it as "translator unknown" (*shiyi* 失譯). Fei, a later bibliographer who completed his work by the end of the 6th century, is notorious for taking these unclaimed scriptures and attributing them to renowned translators. He took the title and assigned it to the legendary early translator An Shigao. However, Fei and his contemporary, Fajing, also confirmed Fajian's tranlatorship, possibly based on some earlier sources. It seems to be safe to take the *Questions* as a 4th-century translated work. However, in the work, *fuzhou* (talismans and spells), as a compound, was only used as a generic term for practices that should not be followed by pious Buddhists.

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[66] Fei Changfang, *Lidai sanbao ji* 歷代三寶記, *T*. no. 2034, 49: 51c22.
[67] Fei Changfang, *Lidai sanbao ji*, *T*. no. 2034, 49: 83c3; c12–4.
[68] For a short description of the catalogue, see Su Jinren 蘇晉仁, "Fojiao jingji mulu zongkao (shang) 佛教經籍目錄綜考(上)," *Fayin* 法音 1998. 4: 19.
[69] Fajing 法經, *Zhongjing mulu* 眾經目錄, *T*. no. 2146, 55: 129b1–3; 160a5–7; 194b17–19.

The critical term *fuzhou* (talismans and spells) also appears in another early translation, the *Sūtra on the Fruits of Living the Ascetic Life* (*Jizhi guo jing* 寂志果經, Skt. *Śrāmaṇyaphala sūtra*), translated at roughly the same time as the *Questions*. The translation by Tanwulan (曇無蘭, fl.381–395),[70] which was done in the late fourth century, is part of the *Long Discourse* (*Dīrgha-āgama*). In the translation, the practice of talismans and spells again is prohibited:

> For the renunciate brahmins, while living on food offered by the faithful, have abnormal and errant roots and carry out actions that go against the Dharma. [They consider] practices lacking wisdom as wisdom. [They] practice divination, talismans and spells. Practices like these are behaviors of mistaken views. [However,] the renunciate monks have already stayed away from these.
> 沙門梵志, 受信施食, 或有妖妄之本行非法業. 無智之事, 自以為智, 卜問行符呪, 如是之像, 邪見之業. 沙門道人, 已遠離此.[71]

The short passage here, translated from an Indic source, stipulates the practice of *fuzhou* (talismans and spells) as something of mistaken views (*xiejian* 邪見), a term usually designating and denigrating Brahmin and other non-Buddhist religions.

Later translations show monk translators started to develop knowledge on specific kinds of *fuzhou* (talismans and spells). In the *Brahmā's Net Sūtra* (*Fandong jing* 梵動經),[72] also collected in the *Long Discourses*, for instance, the Buddha instructs that all the Buddhist monks should refrain from various thaumaturgical practices, including spellcraft, summoning ghosts, fortune-telling, astrology, as well as common medical treatment. The two surviving Chinese

[70] For a brief introduction and editions of the sūtra, see Graeme MacQueen, *A Study of the Śrāmaṇyaphala-sūtra* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1988), 1–9, 12–29.
[71] *Jizhi guo jing* 寂志果經, trans. Tanwulan 曇無蘭 (fl.381-395), *T*. no. 22, 1:274a9–11.
[72] The *Fandong jing* here is different from the *Fanwang jing* 梵網經, an apocryphal text in the East Asian Mahāyāna tradition. For this matter, see Funayama Tōru 船山徹, *Higashi Ajia Bukkyō no seikatsu kisoku Bonmōkyō: saiko no katachi to hatten no rekishi* 東アジア仏教の生活規則梵網経: 最古の形と発展の歴史 (Kyoto: Rinsen shoten, 2017), 11–2.

translations, one by Zhiqian 支謙,[73] a third-century Central Asian monk-translator, and one by Buddhayaśas and Zhu Fonian 竺佛念,[74] who translated the whole *Long Discourses* by the early fifth century, express the same message. However, compared with the current Pali edition,[75] the fifth-century translation includes a much more detailed list of various magical techniques. Judging by the expansion of prohibitions over time, later translators witnessed or knew about the proscribed practices. For instance, the fifth-century translation prohibits monks from installing a talisman and casting a spell to pacify a household (*anzhai fuzhou* 安宅符呪), a practice widely appreciated during that time.[76]

Another great translator Zhu Fahu 竺法護 (Dharmarakṣa, 230?-316), frequently used the phrase *fuzhou* (talismans and spells) in its negative sense. In one short sūtra collected in his translation of *Sūtra on Birth* (*Shengjing* 生經), the Buddha teaches panicked monks a spell to combat other spells. The sūtra is titled *Sūtra of Incantation Protecting Bhikṣus, Spoken by the Buddha* (*Foshuo huzhu biqiu zhoujing* 佛說護諸比丘呪經). In its narrative, the Buddha finds out his disciples are restless and fleeing as if fish sees fishing nets. When asked by the Buddha, one monk enumerates all the troubles they are experiencing, ranging from robbers and thieves to

[73] *Fanwang liushi'er jian jing* 梵網六十二見經, trans. Zhiqian 支謙 (fl. 223–253) *T*. no. 21. In *Chu sansang jiji* 出三藏記集, the title was attributed to Zhu Fahu 竺法護 (*Dharmarakṣa, 239–316) and was finished during the late third century and early fourth century, see Sengyou, *Chu sanzang jiji*, *T*. no. 2145, 55: 8a6, 9b28-c1. In *Zhongjing mulu* 眾經目錄 compiled by by Yanzong 彥琮 in 602, the translation was attributed to An Shigao 安世高 (fl. 148), who came to China in the mid-second century, see Yanzong, *Zhongjing mulu*, *T*. no. 2147, 55: 161a23-24. Another *Zhongjing mulu*, compiled by Tang monk Jingtai 靜泰, the translator is again changed to Zhu Fahu, see Jingtai, *Zhongjing mulu*, *T*. no. 2148, 55: 194b5-6. When it comes to Daoxuan's 道宣 (596–667) *Datang neidian lu* 大唐內典錄, two translations, one by Zhiqian, one by Zhu Fahu are enumerated, see Daoxuan, *Datang neidian lu*, *T*. no. 2149, 55: 228c6, 298a4.

[74] See *Chang a'han jing* 長阿含經, trans. Fotuo yeshe 佛陀耶舍 (Buddhayaśas, fl. 412), Zhu Fonian 竺佛念 (fl. 4th c.), *T*. no. 1.

[75] For the Pali edition, see Bhikkhu Bodhi trans., *The Discourse on the All-embracing Net of Views: The Brahmajāla Sutta and Its Commentaries* (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 2007), 61–2.

[76] See Zhang Qiming 張齊明, *Yishu yisu: Hanwei liuchao fengshui xinyang yanjiu* 亦術亦俗: 漢魏六朝風水信仰研究 (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2011).

ghosts and spirits. The Buddha kindly teaches these monks an incantation and claims the magical verse can save people from any calamity. Moreover, the Buddha promises that the spell can also protect an area as big as 400 *li* in perimeter. No thieves, ghosts, *rākṣasas* (*luosha* 羅剎, cannibalistic demons), and witchcraft will be able to break into the region. One of the expressions Zhu Fahu used in the list of evil items that will be shielded is "the way of sorcery, talismans, and spells" (*gudao fuzhou* 蠱道符呪).[77] The translator again used the phrase *gudao fuzhou* to refer to negative forces that the Buddha's orthodox spell can forestall and protect disciples from. Judging from the title and content of the sūtra, neither the Buddha nor the translator has problem with monks utilizing verbal spells as a way to protect themselves. Spells (*zhou* 呪) become vicious only when they are part of a literary expression with the problematic label *fu* attached to it.

In Zhu Fahu's other translations, such as *The Authentic Lotus Sūtra* (*Zheng fahua jing* 正法華經), when the ten dharma-protector rākṣasī go to the Buddha to vow to protect the masters, one of the threats they identify is *gudao fuzhou*.[78] The expression appears again in a later chapter when Samantabhadra discusses how the sūtra will protect people who receive it in a world stained with the five defilements. Samantabhadra considers *gudao fuzhou* as one of the bad things that will happen in the final age of the dharma. [79] However, it seems the use of *fuzhou* in the *Lotus Sūtra* as a damaging threat is a unique feature of Zhu Fahu's work. The latter two translations of the *Lotus Sūtra*, one by Kumārajīva done in the early fifth century, one by

[77] *Shengjing* 生經, trans. Zhu Fahu 竺法護 (*Dharmarakṣa, 239–316), *T*. no.154, 3: 84c17–85a12.
[78] *Zheng fahua jing* 正法華經, trans. Zhu Fahu, *T*. no. 263, 9: 130c2.
[79] *Zheng fahua jing*, trans. Zhu Fahu ,*T*. no. 263, 9: 133a12.

Dharmagupta done in the late sixth or early seventh century, do not contain similar expressions in corresponding passages.[80]

Zhu Fahu's preference for this phrase also appears in *Sūtra on Auspicious Eon* (*Xianjie jing* 賢劫經). When enumerating the four kinds of silly and miserable actions ordinary people are committing, using talismans and spells to harm someone (*fuzhou hairen* 符咒害人) is compared to those who are drowning in the water and simultaneously regretting entering the water.[81] In another Vinaya-like sūtra on the four subgroups of the Buddhist community, *Sūtra on the Four Branches* (*Sibei jing* 四輩經), the Buddha instructs that laymen should not participate in non-Buddhist practices, which include "the teaching of talismans and spells and suppression."[82] In sum, all of Zhu Fahu's translations portray talismans and spells (*fuzhou*) as an extremely evil practice that originates from non-Buddhist traditions.

It is arduous for us to spot the corresponding Sanskrit word for *gudao fuzhou* or *fuzhou* for sure since we are unable to retrieve the original Sanskrit (or any other Indic or Central Asian languages) text held in the hands of Zhu Fahu and his assistants.[83] However, Karashima Seishi 辛嶋静志 suggests that *gudao fuzhou* in Zhu Fahu's edition of *Lotus Sūtra* is a translation of the Sanskrit word *vetāḍa* based on his comparison to Kumārajīva's edition and a much later Sanskrit text.[84] Since the Sanskrit word usually denotes a class of demonic beings, Karashima believes

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[80] *Miaofa lianhua jing* 妙法蓮華經, trans. Jiumoluoshi 鳩摩羅什 (Kumārajīva, 344–413), *T*. no.262; *Tianpin miaofa lianhua jing* 添品妙法蓮華經, trans. Shenajueduo 闍那崛多 (Jñānagupta, fl. 561–592), Damojiduo 达摩笈多 (Dharmagupta, d. 619), *T*. no. 264.

[81] *Xianjie jing* 賢劫經, trans. Zhu Fahu, *T*. no. 425, 14: 6c22-23.

[82] *Sibei jing* 四輩經, trans. Zhu Fahu, *T*. no. 769, 17: 705c29.

[83] For the problem of lacking Sanskrit originals in the study of Chinese Buddhist texts, see Stefano Zacchetti*, In Praise of the Light: A Critical Synoptic Edition with an Annotated Translation of Chapters 1-3 of Dharmarakṣa's Guang zan jing* 光讚經*, Being the Earliest Chinese Translation of the Larger Prajñāpāramitā* (Tokyo: The International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology, Soka University, 2005), 7.

[84] H. Kern, Bunyio Nanjio, eds., *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* (St. Pétersbourg: Imprimerie de l'Académie Impériale des Sciences, 1908–1912). The word *vetāḍa* is a Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit word. Its classical Sanskrit counterpart is *vetāla*. As Monier-Williams explained, the word refers to "a kind of demon, ghost, spirit, goblin, vampire (esp. one

that the *gudao fuzhou* here should follow its variant reading as *gudao fuzhu* 蠱道符祝. Since the Chinese word *zhu* 祝 could refer to a witch, he translates the phrase as "one, who performs witchcraft and spells."[85] Karashima's reading makes sense since all the previous items mentioned in the list are different kinds of ghosts, spirits, and demons. However, in David Gordon White's recent work on demonology across Eurasia, he finds that a Chinese translator Yijing 義淨 (635–713) and some Central Asian manuscripts translate *vetāḍa* either as a kind of demon or the dark magic that generates the demonic beings.[86] In other words, even if we take *vetāḍa* as the original Sanskrit word, medieval translators still had different options. Since Zhu Fahu used the term *fuzhou* elsewhere in several of his translations under different contexts, it is possible that Zhu Fahua deliberately chose *fuzhou* over *fuzhu*. But why did he make this decision to use such a phrase?

As a class of beings in Indian demonology, *vetāla*/*vetāḍa* usually appears in lists of dozens of spirit-deities. Not only modern scholars, but ancient authors also seemed to have multiple classification systems and sometimes used the names of these spirit-deities interchangeably.[87] However, the *Monastic Rules in Ten Recitations* (*Shisong lü* 十誦律, Skt. *Sarvāstivāda-vinaya*) contains a depiction of the *vetāla*/*vetāḍa* as a type of zombie. It explains how to make one:

occupying a dead corpse)." See Monier Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899), 1014; also see Franklin Edgerton, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953), 508.

[85] Seishi Karashima 辛嶋静志, *A Glossary of Dharmarakṣa's Translation of the Lotus Sutra* (Tokyo: The International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology, Soka University, 1998), 167; For the corresponding word in Kumārajīva's translation, see Seishi, *A Glossary of Kumārajīva's Translation of the Lotus Sutra* (Tokyo: The International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology, Soka University, 2001), 279.

[86] David Gordon White, *Daemons Are Forever: Contacts and Exchanges in the Eurasian Pandemonium* (University of Chicago Press, 2021), 79–80.

[87] Robert Decaroli, *Haunting the Buddha: Indian Popular Religions and the Formation of Buddhism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 10–1.

> As for *vetāla*, a bhikṣu, on the 29th day [of a month], should find a dead person with an intact corpse, call its soul and cast an incantation to make the corpse stand up. Wash it with water, put clothes on it and put a sword in its hand. Recite mentally or aloud: "I made the *vetāla* for such-and-such purpose!" Then recite the incantation. This is called creating a *vetāla*.[88]
> 毘陀羅者, 有比丘以二十九日, 求全身死人召鬼呪尸令起, 水洗著衣著刀手中. 若心念若口說: "我為某故作毘陀羅." 即讀呪術, 是名毘陀羅成.

The instructions above reveal that the zombie is made by reciting an incantation to animate a corpse. As explained later in the *vinaya*, the resuscitated being can be employed to kill one's enemies except for those who enter into concentration or are protected by other *deva*s or incantations. The scenario here provides some basis for Zhu Fahu's choice of *fuzhou* over *fuzhu*. The incantation used in making the zombie here corresponds to the *zhou*, and *fu* seems to be used to express the action of summoning a corpse, which is also part of the function an indigenous talisman will do.

In all these examples from the translated sūtras, the compound *fuzhou* is considered negative. However, the word for spells, *zhou*, is neutral since the Buddha can also teach a *zhou* to protect his monks. The *fu* in the compound, no matter used as a noun referring to talismans or as an adjective modifying *zhou*, signifies something suspicious and unacceptable to early Buddhist translators. The only reason for that, though not explicitly explained, is *fu* is so closely related to non-Buddhist practices. In other words, though it is still an inference to decide which Sanskrit word makes these early translators feel they had to use the phrase *fuzhou* to represent, the choices made by them, and their teams show that they were aware of the non-Buddhist, mostly Daoist talismanic practice called *fu*.

[88] *Shisong lü* 十誦律, trans. Furuoduoluo 弗若多羅 (*Puṇyatāra, d. 404), T. no. 1435, 23: 9b22–5.

Furthermore, in most of these cases, the usage of *fuzhou* is only at the nominal level. The translators used *fu* or *fuzhou* as a label to represent the evil practices that a responsible Buddhist should never get into. Most of them did not discuss the practice in detail. In fact, similar practices are also praised in some of these sources. In the case of *Sūtra of Incantation Protecting Bhikṣus*, the Buddha still teaches powerful incantations. In the case of *The Authentic Lotus Sūtra*, it still asks people to carry the scripture in their bosoms as a talisman. These early translators hated the label instead of the practices the label signifies. They needed the label to appear in lists of things that make the world a worse place, but it is also acceptable to use similar practices to make the world a better place as long as they are under the Buddha's approval.

Debates between Buddhists and Daoists of this period also betray that the Buddhists were aware of the linkage between *fuzhou* and Daoism, its main indigenous competitor. In Ming Sengshao's 明僧紹 (fl. 5th c.) *Treatise on Rectifying Two Religions* (*Zheng er'jiao lun* 正二教论), he presents the corruption of Daoism since Zhang Daoling 張道陵 and Ge Hong 葛洪 as follows:

> When it comes to people like Zhang Daoling and Ge Hong, they all mixed [Daoism] with transforming the populace with divine transformation and misleading the world with abnormalities. Their talismans, spells, petitions, and indictments are all ascribed to the transmission of Lord Lao, and [they] enlarge them randomly. So, I cite Buddhist materials to prove that they are fake. [89]
> 至若張葛之徒, 又皆雜以神變化俗怪誕惑世, 符呪章効 [90]咸託老君所傳而隨稍增廣.遂復遠引佛教證成其偽.

Sengshao was renowned for his expertise in Confucius classics. However, instead of answering the call of duty and becoming an official, he decided to live as a hermit and occasionally visited

[89] *Hongming ji* 弘明集, ed. Sengyou 僧祐 (445–518), *T*. no. 2102, 52: 38a27–9.
[90] The 効 should be 劾 according to other editions.

monasteries.[91] Sengshao understood the practices better than early translators, who mainly used the word *fuzhou* as a compound symbolizing the wrong practices of non-Buddhists. He knew talismans (*fu* 符) and spells (*zhou* 呪) are related but different. Along with petitions (*zhang* 章) and indictments (*he* 劾), Sengshao believed they were the four genres of Daoist texts falsely attributed to Lord Lao by later Daoist masters such as Zhang Daoling and Ge Hong. According to Sengshao, these later Daoist practices have deviated from the naturalistic and non-action path set up by Lord Lao. Compared with the early translators, better knowledge of indigenous practices leaves him no choice that he had to dispute these practices eloquently instead of just brushing them off as labels.

However, when it comes to the Tang dynasty, *fuzhou* became less problematic for Buddhists. A key passage showing the turning point is also found in a treatise written by a Tang Buddhist collected into the *Expanded Collection on the Propagation and Clarification [of Buddhism]* (*Guang hongming ji* 廣弘明集). The author, Li Shizheng 李師政 (fl. 7th c.), was a Confucian who later converted to Buddhism. In his *Treatise on Inner Virtue* (*Neide lun* 內德論), in order to refute the attacks from pro-Daoism official Fu Yi 傅弈, he tried to clarify ten misconceptions of Buddhism. The second misconception, according to which is cited in the passage, is to question the legitimacy of Buddhism based on the fact that it was not mentioned in the works of the Duke of Zhou and Confucius. Fu Yi's logic is that since Buddhism is not mentioned in the *Book of Odes* (*Shijing* 詩經) and the *Book of Documents* (*Shangshu* 尚書), the sūtras are not worthy of exalting. Shizheng admitted that he used to think this way as well.[92] However, now he has changed his mind. He laid out his reasoning as follows:

[91] For his biography, see *Nanqi shu* 南齊書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1972), 927.
[92] *Guang hongming ji* 廣弘明集, ed. Daoxuan 道宣, *T.* no. 2103, 52: 189a13–4.

> As for the mystery of the celestial patterns and calendrical astronomy, the marvels of earthly textures and mountains and rivers, the diagnosis and observation of channels and veins and orifices, the magical arts of acupuncture, medicine, talismans, and spells. [These are] what are not recorded in the *Book of Odes* and the *Book of Documents*, nor articulated by the Duke of Zhou and Confucius. However, when investigating auspiciousness and inauspiciousness, [they all] have evidence. When observing their utilization, they are highly efficacious. Furthermore, things that were not mentioned by the Duke of Zhou and Confucius jumble and tumble limitlessly. Methods that were not recorded in the *Book of Odes* and the *Book of Documents* stretch endlessly. Truly, writing can never fully express words, and words can never fully express ideas. How can [you] restrict [yourself] to the limited teachings of the Six Classics and turn [your] back on the comprehensive meaning of the Three Vehicles?
> 夫天文曆象之祕奧, 地理山川之卓詭, 經脈孔穴之診候, 針藥符呪之方術, 詩書有所不載, 周孔未之明言. 然考之吉凶而有徵矣, 察其行用而多効矣, 且又周孔未言之物, 蠢蠢無窮; 詩書不載之法, 茫茫何限. 信乎! 書不盡言, 言不盡意. 何得拘六經之局教, 而背三乘之通旨哉? [93]

Compared with the early translators and debaters mentioned above, in this passage, even when Shizheng defended Buddhism, he never attacked his opponents. On the contrary, Shizheng believed that talismans and spells (*fuzhou*) did work. Even though he did not consider *fuzhou* a Buddhist practice, it helped Shizheng make his case. It was used as evidence, along with other enumerated techniques, to show that not everything that matters was recorded in the Confucian tradition. Shizheng always showed himself as a moderate debater rather than an aggressive one in the debate. In fact, for some misconceptions, he even admitted he used to hold the same view when he was young. In the third misconception immediately follows, Fu Yi praised Lord Lao and smeared the Buddha. In his response, rather than doing the opposite, Shizheng praised both sages and their teachings. He pointed out that as teachings, Buddhism and Daoism share the same essential substance (*ti* 体). To him, the two traditions "both similarly eradicate the

[93] *Guang hongming ji*, *T*. no. 2103, 52: 189a15–21.

accumulation of desires and manifest the school of non-action."[94] However, as a Buddhist, Shizheng also carefully tried to show a little bit of superiority of Buddhism. He marked:

> As for the causation of endless life and death, the meaning of the eternal karmic retribution, they are innovations of the Śākyas. The Yellow Emperor and Lord Lao did not talk about them. [I] do not know why Daoist books nowadays are similar to Buddhist texts. [Daoist books] discuss the three periods to persuade [people to observe] precepts and get out of the tracks of the nine currents. If [the authors of Daoist books] see [Buddhist texts] and talk about these, then [Daoist books] are the same as Buddhist [books] and equate to the reflection of them. If [the authors of Daoist books] hear [Buddhist teaching] and emulate it, then [they] take the Buddha as [their] teacher and follow his discourses. [If Daoist books and Buddhist texts] are reflections [of each other], then similarly, both of them should not be challenged. If [Buddhist teaching] is the teacher, then the teacher should not be smeared. How ridiculous it is to praise Daoism and denigrate Buddhism!
> 夫生死無窮之緣, 報應不朽之旨, 釋氏之所創明, 黃老未之言及. 不知今之道書何因類於佛典. 論三世以勸戒, 出九流之軌躅. 若目覩而言之, 則同佛而等其照. 若耳聞而倣之, 則師佛而遵其說. 同照則同不當非, 相師則師不可毀. 譽道而非佛, 何謬之甚哉! [95]

Shizheng here showed how Buddhism is superior to its counterpart since Daoist texts at his time borrowed a lot from Buddhism. However, he still refrained from criticizing the Daoist plagiarism directly but maintained that since the two are so similar, there is no reason to pick up one to attack the other. On the one hand, Shizheng's strategy shows his effort to get the most support from potential readers or audience of the debate. On the other hand, compared to the earlier translators, Shizheng's soft and careful stance on Daoism and Daoist practices is probably the result of the forged connection between the imagined founder of Daoism, Lord Lao, and the ruling family of the Tang dynasty.

[94] *Guang hongming ji*, *T*. no. 2103, 52: 189b5–7.
[95] *Guang hongming ji*, *T*. no. 2103, 52: 189b13–9.

A more thoroughly positive assessment of talismans (*fu*) also has its early predecessor. In *The Humane Kings Perfection of Wisdom Scripture* (*Renwang bore boluomi jing* 仁王般若波羅蜜經), which was finished in the fifth century, a group of metaphors is invoked to describe the perfection of wisdom. One of them compares the *prajñāmitā* to a divine talisman (*shenfu* 神符).[96] In a commentary by Jizang 吉藏 (549–623), a top scholastic monk of his time, he explains the analogy as follows:

> It is also called the divine talisman [because] it can communicate with the realm of truth, subdue heavenly demons, and non-Buddhists. It is able to protect all the benign roots that sprout in this world. Thus, it is compared to a divine talisman.[97]
> 亦名神符者, 能通達如實境界, 能伏天魔外道, 是世出世善根悉能守護, 故譬神符也.

The commentary compares the perfection of wisdom to a divine talisman since it intellectually helps people achieve certain cognitive objectives and physically subdues hostile forces.

Another exegist, the Korean monk Wŏnch'ŭk 圓測 (613–696), who resided at the Ximing Monastery in Chang'an, shared a similar interpretation. Wŏnch'ŭk explained why the *prajñāmitā* is a divine talisman in two approaches. On the one hand, just like a talisman, it could protect the body and life (*hu shenming* 護身命). On the other hand, demon kings of non-Buddhist traditions cannot subvert it.[98]

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[96] *Renwang bore boluomi jing* 仁王般若波羅蜜經, *T*. no. 245, 8: 832c24–5. The scripture in attribute to be a translation from Kumārajīva. However, as Orzech recently points out, the fifth century edition should be a Chinese composition. After being produced, the text got circulated anonymously during the fifth and sixth centuries, and finally became a semicanonical or canonical scripture in the seventh century. See Charles D. Orzech*, Politics and Transcendent Wisdom: The Scripture for Humane Kings in the Creation of Chinese Buddhism* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 74–9.
[97] Jizang 吉藏 (549–623), *Renwang bore jing shu* 仁王般若經疏, *T*. no. 1707, 33: 355c28–a1.
[98] Wŏnch'ŭk 圓測 (613–696), *Renwang jing shu* 仁王經疏, *T*. no. 1708, 33: 423a27–8, 423b4-5.

The scholastic monks found no problem incorporating talismanic discourses in interpreting a canonical (though apocryphal) scripture. The talisman here represents something entirely positive. In contrast to earlier usages, talismanic discourses such as *fu* provide both physical benefits to one's health and longevity and assistance to one's intellectual achievement. Moreover, instead of being labelled as non-Buddhist, both Jizang and Wŏnch'ŭk recognized that talismans were helpful tools to defend people from malicious and non-Buddhist demons.

Later biographical materials also provide a thoroughly positive assessment of talismanic practice. In one story in the *Biographies of Eminent Monks Compiled during the Song Period* (*Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳, *Song Biographies* hereafter), a Daoist talisman was requested by a monk and used to facilitate his rebirth. In the biography, a Tang monk named Yuanguan 圓觀 lived in Huilin Monastery in Luoyang. He had a friend named Li Yuan 李源, whose father was captured and decapitated during the An Lushan Rebellion (755–763). The Li family were generous patrons of Buddhism. Two of Yuan's elder brothers were monks. His father's villa was also donated to Huilin Monastery. Yuan lived in the monastery for more than fifty years and finally died there. [99]

However, in the *Song Biographies*, we know that Yuan is also a zealous practitioner of Daoist ingestion (*fushi* 服食) in the monastery. Yuanguan and Yuan used to travel together. But they could not agree on which route they would take. In Yuan's case, he wished to avoid the capital since he had made up his mind to stay far away from the political elites living there. Yuanguan then followed Yuan's route. When they arrived at Nanpu, the monk started weeping when he saw a few women fetching water. The monk told Yuan that among the women, there

[99] For the biography of Li Yuan and his father Li Deng 李憕, see *Jiu tangshu* 舊唐書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 4688–89.

was a pregnant one surnamed Wang whose belly would be his residence. She had been pregnant for three years and still had not given birth. The only reason was him not coming. Since the monk saw her, he had to return to her womb. Then he said to Yuan:

> This is what the Buddhists call rebirth. Please use talismans and spells (*fuzhou*) to make her quickly give birth to the baby. Also, please halt the boat and stay here for a while and bury me in the valley. When Wang's family bathe the babe, I also hope you can come to visit. If [the baby] look at you and smile, that is I recognize you.
> 釋氏所謂循環者也, 請君用符呪遣其速生, 且少留行舟葬吾山谷. 其家浴兒時亦望君訪臨, 若相顧一笑, 是識認君也.[100]

Yuan followed his friend's last will and gave the dose of talismans in water (*fushui* 符水) to the pregnant lady. After witnessing the death of Yuanguan and the birth of the new baby, Yuan returned three days later to visit the family again. And as Yuanguan foresaw, the infant showed a smile to Yuan.

The compiler of the *Song Biographies* was aware that the story might be challenged and even considered a violation of the sagacious teaching. In order to corroborate the story, Zanning explained that in his own day, women in southeast China engaged in a similar practice. He states that in Min 閩 area, the nuns often told women of their own paternal families that they would be reborn as sons from these women. When the nuns were about to die, they used red ink to write two words, "coming soon" (the two Chinese characters *bianlai* 便来) on their thighs. If a son is born into a family on the same day when a nun dies, they believe that the words "coming soon" will be found in red on the infant's body. Zanning concluded that people should not disdain this kind of practice because of their limited knowledge of Buddhism. Monks like Yuanguan, whose

[100] Zanning 贊寧, *Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳, *T*. no. 2061, 50: 839c25–7.

accomplishment is deep and profound, were usually beyond the shallow understanding of our ordinary minds.[101]

It is curious that in the story, a talisman is used for a Buddhist rebirth process of an accomplished Buddhist monk. The eminent monk, the pious lay practitioner, and ordinary people like the pregnant woman and her family embraced rather than resisted the practice of talisman. Moreover, the biography, which was based on primary sources formed in the Tang dynasty, and the Song compiler's comments are actually defending the efficacy of talismans from potential critics.

For the sources discussed in this section, they are either translated by renowned foreign translators, or composed by pious Buddhist defenders, or edited by meticulous monk biographers. Though ranging from as early as the fourth century to the early tenth century and are of different genres, they all share one crucial feature: they belong to the mainstream of medieval Chinese Buddhism. No one questioned their authenticity at that time, and no one thought any of them should be excluded from the Buddhist canons. However, their positions towards talisman (*fu*) are multivalent. For early foreign translators, to translate the long list of the prohibited evil, non-Buddhist Indian activities that most Chinese might have never heard of, they also needed to formulate another understandable list for Chinese people. *Fu*, as an indigenous practice, fulfilled the task. Even when the word is attached to acceptable practices such as spell (*zhou*), the whole phrase ("talismans and spells," *fuzhou*) becomes evil. Demonizing a particular kind of talismanic practice, such discourses betray an effort to show the perimeter of genuine Buddhist practices. Therefore, foreign translators wished to forge the Buddhist identity among

[101] Zanning, *Song gaoseng zhuan*, *T*. no. 2061, 50: 840a24–b3.

Chinese people by telling them what they should not do. To achieve this, they did not need to spend much time analyzing the practice or showing its absurdity.

Later Chinese Buddhists understood the *fu* practice better. They clearly made a connection between *fu* and Daoism. Some of them even considered *fu* is a symbol of the decay of the once pure Daoist tradition. Others were more open-minded. They were willing to admit the efficacy of *fu*. They used the symbol in an apocryphal text and its commentaries to show the superiority of the *prajñāmitā*. Buddhist biographers even tried to persuade people to believe a story featuring how *fu* helped a monk be reborn. Unlike their predecessors, Chinese Buddhists at that time did not try to show that the non-Buddhist practices were evil, instead, they sometimes even took the technique and made it part of their own repertoire. Their attitudes towards *fu* show their willingness to keep the Buddhist identity while living in symbiosis with their rivals.

Meanwhile, as I argue in the introductory chapter, *fu* is only a subgroup of talismans. Besides *fu*, Buddhism has its own talismanic tradition even before its advent in China. Then how did medieval Buddhists describe their own talismanic practice? Considering many medieval Buddhists still had a resentful feeling towards the non-Buddhist *fu*, how did they show their talismans were different and superior?

Mixed feelings: *Fu* and Talismanic Practices in the *Book of Consecration*

While *fu* and other talismanic practices in mainstream Buddhist texts have gone through a journey from being disdained to being partly acquiesced to, early extracanonical works also show significant interest in promoting talismanic practices. However, for those extracanonical works, how do they consider *fu* and other talismanic practices? How do they reconcile the

conflicts between genuine Buddhist practices and illicit ones? What discourses do they employ to confirm the boundary of the "imagined community"? In this section, our attention shifts to an extracanonical work finished in the fifth century.

The practice of *fuzhou* and other talismanic techniques flourish in the *Book of Consecration* (*Guanding jing* 灌頂經*)*, a collection of twelve short texts compiled in the fourth century or fifth century. The collection is attributed to Śrīmitra (Bo shilimiduo 帛尸梨蜜多, d. 343), who was famous for his efficacious thaumaturgy in the capital of the East Jin dynasty (317-420).[102] Early Buddhist bibliographers did not trust the attribution since they often placed the title under the section "translator unknown" (*shiyi* 失譯).[103] Sengyou 僧祐, the compiler of the earliest surviving catalogue containing the title, also distinguished the twelve short texts in the collection. According to him, the first nine texts constitute a collection named the *Great Book of Consecration* (*Da guanding jing* 大灌頂經). The remaining three texts were added to the group later.

Meanwhile, Sengyou also pointed out that all the texts except the last one are translated works, notwithstanding that the translators cannot be identified. The cataloger also listed the last text under the section "suspicious scriptures" (*yijing* 疑經). According to him, the text is a work

[102] A short biography of him can be found in Fei Changfang 費長房, *Lidai sanbao ji* 歷代三寶記, *T*. no. 2034, 49: 69a14–23. The *Book of Consecration* still does not receive enough attention in the West that parallels its importance in understanding medieval Chinese Buddhism. I plan to investigate it in a more comprehensive and systematic manner in the future. For major studies of this text, see Stephen F. Teiser*, The Ghost Festival in Medieval China* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 133; Michel Strickmann, "The Consecration Sūtra: A Buddhist Book of Spells," in *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha*, ed. Robert E. Buswell, Jr. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), 75–118; *Mantras et mandarins: le Bouddhisme tantrique en Chine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996); *Chinese Magical Medicine* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 113–19; *Chinese Poetry and Prophecy: The Written Oracle in East Asia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 57–75; Henrik H. Sørensen, "The Apocrypha and Esoteric Buddhism in China," in *Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia*, eds. Charles Orzech, Henrik Sørensen, Richard Payne (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 181–96; Esther-Maria Guggenmos, "Qian Divination and Its Ritual Adaptations in Chinese Buddhism," *Journal of Chinese Religions* 46, no.1 (2018): 43–70.

[103] See Sengyou 僧祐, *Chu sanzang jiji* 出三藏記集, *T*. no. 2145, 55: 31a24–b8; Fajing 法經, *Zhongjing mulu* 眾經目錄, *T*. no. 2146, 55: 120b11.

penned by a monk named Huijian 慧簡 in the first year of the Daming 大明 Era (457) of the Southern Song dynasty.[104] Sengyou also revealed that the work was not a wholly new creation of Huijian. Instead, it was composed based on excerpts (*chaozhuan* 抄撰)[105] from authentic sūtras.

Recent studies of the *Book of Consecration* suggest the hybrid nature of this intriguing collection. On the one hand, as Strickmann points out, ample features found in the collection show its effort to respond to its Daoist competitors at that time.[106] On the other hand, as Koiichi Shinohara recently argues, some passages in the collection were borrowed from early translated sources.[107] In other words, it seems the *Book of Consecration* qualifies under the category of apocryphal texts since it is largely a Chinese composition. However, it also tells us about Indian practices since it also incorporates Indian sources.

The *Book of Consecration* aligns itself with early canonical sources in prohibiting practices labelled *fu* and *fuzhou*. In its third chapter, *Protective Spells of the Three Refuges and Five Precepts, Carried on One's Body* (*Guanding sangui wujie daipei hushen zhou jing* 灌頂三歸五戒帶佩護身呪經), the Buddha teaches to his disciples how to make a talisman by writing the

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[104] Sengyou, *Chu sanzang jiji*, T. no. 2145, 55: 39a21-23.

[105] The compound *chaozhuan* 抄撰 used here indicates that Sengyou, a contemporary of Huijian, thought Huijian's work was done by 1) making extracts from previous works and 2) organizing and editing the extracted passages. The practice of *chaozhuan* was especially popular in the intellectual communities of Southern dynasties. As Makita Tairyō 牧田諦亮 points out, Sengyou actually differentiated two types of *chao* 抄. One is taking excerpts from existing sūtras. Even though he did not approve this enthusiastically, he did not regard it as forgery, either. On the other hand, for those who take the excerpts and edit with their own agenda, Sengyou did not hesitate to put them under the category of suspicious sūtras. See Makita Tairyō, *Gikyō kenkyū* 疑經研究 (Ktyoto: Rinsen Shoten, 2014), 23. For the meaning of *chao* 抄/鈔, *zhuan* 撰, *xie* 寫 in the Six Dynasties, see Xiaofei Tian, *Beacon Fire and Shooting Star: The Literary Culture of the Liang (502–557)* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007), 81-84; Tong Ling 童嶺, "'Chao' 'xie' youbie lun: liuchao shuji wenhua shi zhixiao lu yizhong '鈔''寫'有別論: 六朝書籍文化史識小錄一種," *Hanxue yanjiu* 漢學研究 29, no.1 (2011): 257–80; Funayama Tōru 船山徹, *Butten wa dō kan'yaku sareta no ka : sūtora ga kyōten ni naru toki* 仏典はどう漢訳されたのか：スートラが経典になるとき (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2013), 156–61; Cai Danjun 蔡丹君, "Nanbei chao 'chaozhuan xueshi' kao 南北朝'抄撰學士'考," *Zhongguo dianji yu wenhua luncong* 中國典籍與文化論叢 16 (2014): 177–98.

[106] Michel Strickmann, "The Consecration Sūtra: A Buddhist Book of Spells," in *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha*, ed. Robert E. Buswell (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), 75-118.

[107] Koichi Shinohara, "Rethinking the Category of Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha," *Studies in Chinese Religions* 1, no.1 (2015): 70–81.

names of twenty-five deities on a piece of paper and carry it. When expounding the benefits of the talisman, the Buddha gives a list of evil beings that can be exorcised by the power of the deity-name-talisman, which includes people who perform "non-Buddhist talismans and spells (*fuzhou*), suppression and sacrifices" (*waidao fuzhou yandao zhi zhe* 外道符呪厭禱之者). [108]

The sixth chapter, *Divine Spells on the Four Quarters of the Tomb* (*Guanding zhongmu yinyuan sifang shenzhou jing* 灌頂塚墓因緣四方神咒經), also mentions talismanic practice (*fu*). The chapter begins with the Buddha's last will when the Buddha teaches his disciples how to take care of his corpse and tomb after his *parinirvāṇa*. After explaining how his tomb will benefit sentient beings, a young boy of the Buddha's clan (*shizhong tongzi* 釋種童子) comes to the World-Honored One anxiously. The lad is nervous because he was disturbed by ghosts and deities when visiting the pagoda-tombs of his ancestors. In responding to the boy's request for protection methods, the Buddha first consoles the boy by predicting what will happen to his own tomb.

According to the Buddha, his pagodas containing his relics will at first be guarded by various devas, ghosts and other spiritual beings. However, things will start to deteriorate nine hundred years after his nirvāṇa.[109] People will divert from the right path, and his pagodas will be deserted and destroyed. When this happens, as foreseen by the Buddha, seven consequences will follow:

At first, the benign deities will not guard his pagodas anymore. Then, consecutively, his dharma will start to decline spontaneously. After that, the unfaithful followers of the Buddha will

[108] *Foshuo guanding jing* 佛說灌頂經, *T*. no. 1331, 21: 503a25.
[109] For the decline of dharma, Buddist texts develop multiple timelines, ranging from five hundred years to more than ten thousand years. However, this nine hundred timeframe is unique and hasn't been seen in other sources. For the other timetables of the decline of dharma, see Jan Nattier, *Once upon a Future Time: Studies in a Buddhist Prophecy of Decline* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1991), 33–64.

begin to fight and, consequently, break all the monastic rules and codes. What is more, they will begin destroying the authoritative scriptures taught by the Buddha. And devastatingly, they will then turn to other non-Buddhist practices, including the skills of talismanic writing (*fushu* 符書) and spellcraft (*jinzhou* 禁呪). And finally, the dharma will decline.[110]

In this horrible prophecy presented by the Buddha himself, the practice of *fu* and *zhou* are used as typical representatives of non-Buddhist practice. The consequence of cultivating these practices is so severe that it will lead to the decline of the dharma. Also, the compiler here shows a better understanding of these practices. Instead of using the ambiguous compound *fuzhou* as we discussed in the previous section, the compiler uses the phrase *fushu jinzhou* 符書禁呪. The four-character expression differentiates two kinds of activity: writing (*shu* 書) a *fu* and uttering an incantation.

A similar expression is also spotted in the final chapter, *Scripture for Eliminating Transgressions and Saving Both Live and Dead* (*Guanding bachu guozui shengsi dedu jing* 佛說灌頂拔除過罪生死得度經, *Eliminating Transgressions* hereafter). As previously noted, Sengyou considered the chapter as Huijian's composition based on authentic sūtras. However, later bibliographers such as Fei Changfang claim to have compared it with a Sanskrit version and only found minor differences.[111] Fei's claim was accepted both by bibliographers in the Sui and Tang dynasties and some modern scholars despite his often baseless practice of assigning translators to early sūtras that originally carried no attribution. The chapter here is widely accepted as the first effort to translate the *Sūtra of the Medicine Master* (*Yaoshi jing* 藥師經).[112]

[110] *Foshuo guanding jing*, *T*. no. 1331, 21: 513b22–28.
[111] *Lidai sanbao ji*, *T*. no. 2034, 49: 93b7.
[112] Zhisheng 智昇, *Kaiyuan shijiao lu* 開元釋教錄, *T*. no. 2154, 55:593c22.

Fang Guangchang's 方廣錩 new theory of the sūtra as a Chinese composition and then translated into Sanskrit and then back to Chinese has recently sparked a heated debate.[113] The debate over translating rages on, but no matter how it is ultimately resolved, it is worth comparing the chapter in the *Book of Consecration* to other later Chinese translations of the Medicine Master corpus.

In one passage of the *Eliminating Transgressions*, when the Buddha is describing the stupidity of people, he enumerates the practice of people using talismanic writing (*fushu*) to suppress and spells to curse others (*zuo fushu yi xiang yadao zhouzu yanshuo* 作符書以相厭禱呪咀言說).[114] Later in the same chapter, a bodhisattva named Jiutuo (救脫, "Salvation") also makes it clear that being attacked by a talisman (*fu*) belongs to the eighth of the nine major afflictions (*heng* 橫).[115]

If we compare them to later translations of the corresponding passages, it becomes clear that the discourses of talisman (*fu*) in the *Eliminating Transgressions* always correspond to discourses about reanimating corpses (*qishi* 起屍).

The lists of non-Buddhist evil practices in these four texts being compared here reveal that the practice of writing a talisman (*fu*) was still perceived as offensive and negative in the fifth-century *Book of Consecration*. However, when it comes to later translations in the Sui and Tang dynasties, the term *fu* is never seen in these lists. Moreover, the later translators did not simply

[113] For the debate, see Fang Guangchang 方廣錩, "Yaoshi fo tanyuan: dui yaoshi fo hanyi fodian de wenxianxue kaocha 藥師佛探源: 對藥師佛漢譯佛典的文獻學考察," *Zongjiao xue yanjiu* 宗教學研究 2014. 4: 90–100; Yang Weizhong 杨維中, "Yaoshi jing fanyi xinkao 藥師經翻譯新考," *Xinan minzu daxue xuebao* 西南民族大學學報 2014. 6: 80–85; Wang Feipeng 王飛鵬 "Yaoshi jing zhenwei wenti xinlun 藥師經真偽問題新論," *Sichuan daxue xuebao* 四川大學學報 2017. 1: 20–30. Also see Wu Xiaojie 伍小劼, "'Guanding bachu guozui shengsi dedu jing' yu 'wenhua huiliu' 灌頂拔除過罪生死得度經與'文化匯流'," *Nanya yanjiu* 南亞研究 2010. 2: 112–22.
[114] *Foshuo guanding jing*, *T*. no. 1331, 21: 533b25.
[115] *Foshuo guanding jing*, *T*. no. 1331, 21: 535c8.

delete mention of the practice. Rather, the three later translators all chose similar Chinese expressions to translate the Sanskrit word: either as a noun phrase *qishi guizhou* 起屍鬼 (ghosts made from reanimated corpses) or action of *zhouqi sishi* 呪起死屍 (reanimating corpse by spells).

Source	*Book of Consecration*	Dharmagupta's Translation	Xuanzang's Translation	Yijing's Translation
Chinese text	所作諸呪誓，或作人名字或作人形像，作符書以相厭禱呪咀言說。	書怨人字，并作其形，成就種種毒害、呪術、厭魅、蠱道、起屍鬼呪，欲斷彼命及壞其身。	書怨人名，作其形像，以惡呪術而呪詛之；厭媚蠱道，呪起屍鬼，令斷彼命，及壞其身。	書怨人名，或作形像，以惡呪術而呪詛之，厭魅蠱道，呪起死屍，令斷彼命，及壞其身。
English translation	[They] cast various spells and swear. Some write down names and draw images of people. [They] use *fu*-talismanic writing to suppress and spells to curse [on the names and images].	[They] write down courtesy names of enemies and draw images of them. They accomplish various poisoning, spellcraft, suppression of demons, the way of sorcery, and ghostly spell that bring up corpses. [They] want	[They] write down enemies' names, draw images of them, and use evil spellcraft to curse them. [They] suppress demons and employ the way of sorcery, and they use spells [to control] ghosts made	[They] write down enemies' names or draw images of them and use evil spellcraft to curse them. [They] suppress demons and employ the way of sorcery, and they use spells to reanimate corpses to

		to terminate others' lives and harm their bodies[116].	from reanimated corpses to terminate others' lives and harm their bodies[117].	terminate others' lives and harm their bodies[118].
Chinese text	八者橫為怨讎符書厭禱邪神牽引	第八橫者，厭禱、毒藥、起屍鬼等之所損害	第八者，橫為毒藥、厭禱、呪詛、起屍鬼等之所中害。	八者，橫為毒藥、厭禱、呪詛、起屍鬼等之所中害。
English translation	The eighth affliction is being dragged by enemies, fu-talismanic writing, suppression, and evil deities.	The eighth affliction is being harmed by supplicating demons, poison, and ghosts made from reanimated corpses, etc[119].	For the eighth, the affliction is being harmed by poison, supplicating demons, curses, and ghosts made from reanimated corpses, etc[120].	For the eighth, the affliction is being harmed by poison, supplicating demons, curses, and ghosts made from reanimated corpses, etc[121].

The translation practice here reminds us of Zhu Fahu's usage of *gudao fuzhou*. Per Karashima's reconstruction based on different editions of the *Lotus Sūtra*, *gudao fuzhou* corresponds to the Sanskrit word *vetāla*/*vetāḍa*, which denotes the class of demonic beings that

[116] *Foshuo yaoshi rulai benyuan jing* 佛說藥師如來本願經, trans. Damojiduo 達摩笈多 (*Dharmagupta, d. 619), *T*. no. 449, 14: 402c11–3.
[117] *Yaoshi liuliguang rulai benyuan gongde jing* 藥師琉璃光如來本願功德經, trans. Xuanzang 玄奘 (602–664), *T*. no. 450, 14: 406a28–b1.
[118] *Yaoshi liuliguang qifo benyuan gongde jing* 藥師琉璃光七佛本願功德經, trans. Yijing 義淨 (635–713), *T*. no. 451, 14: 414b1–3.
[119] *Foshuo yaoshi rulai benyuan jing*, *T*. no. 449, 14: 404b4–5.
[120] *Yaoshi liuliguang rulai benyuan gongde jing*, *T*. no. 450, 14: 408a14–5.
[121] *Yaoshi liuliguang qifo benyuan gongde jing*, *T*. no. 451, 14: 416a29–b1.

reanimate corpses. Thus, contrary to considering the appearance of discourse related to *fu* as evidence of Chinese invention, the term in the *Book of Consecration* indicates a translation technique inherited from an earlier prominent translator.

Modern scholars differ significantly from early medieval Buddhist bibliographers in deciding the nature of the *Book of Consecration*. Sengyou and his later successors either take the majority or the whole book as genuine sūtras that were translated from imported texts. Based on the descriptions of the practices of indigenous origin, modern scholars tend to treat it as an apocryphal text composed in China by Chinese hands. However, the previous analysis shows that the boundary between authentic Indian sūtra and indigenous composition can be fuzzy sometimes. The *Book of Consecration* copies and inherits passages and expressions from earlier translated sources. It can be seen as a hybrid scripture that combines the two sides. It acquires the negative assessment of the labels *fu* or *fuzhou*. It is still in line with the authentic early translations since it still uses the label to represent the unacceptable non-Buddhist practices, notwithstanding it already has gotten a better understanding of the practice.

Even though the *Book of Consecration* denounces the practice of the non-Buddhist talisman (*fu*) and incantations (*zhou*), it also encourages its own usage of these techniques. In almost every chapter, the Buddha's solution to a misadventure is to teach a spell for people to recite. The author/compiler of the book also realized this seeming contradiction. In the first chapter, one of the Buddha's principal disciples, Ānanda, poses the Buddha a serious question:

> In the final age [of the Dharma], there will be plenty of criticism [towards the Dharma]. The Buddha previously taught various scriptures and methods that contain spellcraft. Sometimes [the Buddha] said [followers] should study, recite, uphold, and practice. Sometimes [the Buddha] said [people] should not practice and learn spellcraft. The various scriptures and methods are different from each other and contradictory between the former and latter parts [on spellcraft]. This has resulted in, among bhikṣus of the final age, some

people believe and practice [spellcraft], and some people criticize [spellcraft]. Therefore, I again ask the World-Honored One and only hope [the Buddha] to expound it to those who have not heard.[122]
然末世中多有誹謗, 佛先說諸經法有呪術者, 或云應學誦持修行, 或云不應修習禁呪, 諸經法中更互不同反覆前後. 故使末世諸比丘輩, 有信行者有誹謗者, 是故重問於世尊耳, 惟願更演化於未聞.

Upon hearing the question, the Buddha praises Ānanda's question for future practitioners, and cheerfully, the Buddha answers the question as follows:

Among the various spells and incantations I talked about in the scriptures, what should not be practiced are the magical tricks of abnormal ways and mistaken views. [These tricks] bewilder the tens of thousands of surnames (i.e., ordinary people), only nurture themselves to extend their own lives. That is what I disapprove. The consecration verses I present now are authentic spellcraft of twelve sections and miscellaneous spells of various scripture from the *Āgama*s. Since they are intended to transform and guide sentient beings, they are not like the abnormal ways for benefit and profit. [The spellcraft I teach] is just for saving sentient beings experiencing disasters and sufferings. [I] do not expect benefits and profits from them. I want sentient beings to get relief. Because of this reason, I now agree and approve [the spellcraft].[123]
我經中說諸禁呪, 所不應行者, 謂諸異道邪見法術. 亂惑於萬姓但為利養, 以活身命我所不許. 今吾所演灌頂章句, 十二部真實呪術, 阿含所出諸經雜呪, 盡欲化導諸眾生故, 不如異道為利養也. 但為度脫眾生厄難遭苦患者, 不於其中悕望利養, 令諸眾生得蘇息耳, 以是因緣吾今聽許.

The Buddha further explains to Ānanda how the spellcraft he teaches will benefit sentient beings. According to the Buddha, the ignorant sentient beings of the future final age, though they have witnessed the authenticity and marvel of his Dharma, will still be vulnerable. They have been practicing evil for too long, and their roots of belief are shallow and thin. Thus, they do not comprehend the ultra-authentic manifestation of this profound Dharma. The Buddha warns Ānanda that if he does not teach these magical formulas, future sentient beings will still be

[122] *Foshuo guanding jing*, *T*. no. 1331, 21: 498c11–c15.
[123] *Foshuo guanding jing*, *T*. no. 1331, 21: 498c17–c24.

craving for joy and yield to their karmic activities.[124] In other words, authentic Buddhist spellcraft is different from that of non-Buddhist traditions, which seek merely profit in this life for one particular person. In contrast, Buddhist spellcraft should be used to ensure the welfare of all sentient beings.

The Buddha further reveals he is also concerned with competition from those non-Buddhist masters. He points out since some of his disciples are not capable of observing all the precepts and sticking to his teaching. Instead of seeking help from the Buddha's teaching, these disciples turned to masters of mistaken traditions (*yidao* 異道). The text here has a vivid description of the alternative practices of these evil masters. These masters usually attribute the current disasters to people's ancestors or various spirits and ghosts. And their solution is usually to have animals sacrificed to the deities in charge or have dancers entertaining them.[125]

The Buddha's stance here also extends to his attitude towards talismans. Regardless of his frequent criticism of talismans (*fu*), he also encourages his followers to make their own talismans. In the second chapter, *Scripture for the Protection of Bhikṣuṇīs by the One Hundred and Twenty Thousand Divine Kings* (*Guanding shi'er wan shenwang hu biqiuni jing* 灌頂十二萬神王護比丘尼經), the Buddha teaches nuns consecration verses (*guanding zhangju* 灌頂章句) in the form of a list of names of deities.

According to the Buddha, nuns should recite the list of names when they face urgent situations. Once the name-spell is uttered, thirty-six divine kings with their seventy thousand retinues will descend and protect the reciter from all kinds of evil beings. After narrating another list of twenty-one daughters of the divine kings, the Buddha assures his female disciples that if

[124] *Foshuo guanding jing*, *T*. no. 1331, 21: 498c25–c28.
[125] *Foshuo guanding jing*, *T*. no. 1331, 21: 498c29–499a17.

they bear (*chi* 持) the spell, they will be saved from both enemies and debtors of this world and evil spirit-beings. [126]

The verb *chi* here is especially important since it has two different but connected meanings. On the one hand, it means bearing in mind or memorizing the name-spell. On the other hand, it also means to carry an object physically. Later in the chapter, the Buddha also asks people to write down the spell, put it in a silk sachet, and wear the materialized talisman physically as an alternative for those ignorant nuns who are not able to recite it.[127]

The position of the *Book of Consecration* shows a mixed feeling towards magical techniques in the fifth century. As argued before, the text itself, though containing ample evidence showing its concerns over Chinese indigenous practices, still inherits the negative attitude towards the practice of *fu*. However, a better understanding of the indigenous resources enables its author(s)/compiler(s) to differentiate the practices of *fu* and *zhou* and present them more precisely. And the same time, unlike the contemporary foreign translators, the author(s) behind the *Book of Consecration* also were more aware of the competition they faced every day. They had to provide alternatives for themselves and their followers. Even though they denounced labels such as *fu* and non-Buddhist spells, they still embraced similar practices as long as they were taught by the Buddha. For them, the seeming contradiction is easily explained away by both invoking the teaching of the expedient device and showing the Buddha's selfless agenda.

Conclusion

[126] *Foshuo guanding jing*, *T*. no. 1331, 21: 501a17–8.
[127] *Foshuo guanding jing*, *T*. no. 1331, 21: 501b10–5.

In this chapter, I mainly discuss how the discourses related to *fu* and *fuzhou* were used and imagined by medieval Buddhists. I argue that after the initial introduction of Buddhism via foreign monk-translators and texts, multivalent talismanic discourses developed within the Buddhist communities.

In the case of medieval China, the early foreign translators, perhaps with more limited knowledge of the practices signified, took the *fu* label as a handy tool to police the boundaries of authentic Buddhist practice. However, for native Buddhist practitioners, their better knowledge of the practice put them in a difficult position. On the one hand, the impetus to be a loyal Buddhist made them carefully follow the contours drawn by foreign translators. On the other hand, when facing competition from the non-Buddhist masters, they had to incorporate similar practices and demonstrate the accessibility and superiority of their own versions. The mixed feelings and anxieties towards the *fu* label seem to have eased later, under the Tang dynasty. I suspect that the connection between the Tang royal family and the Daoist religion made it harder for Buddhists to add adjectives such as *xie* 邪 (evil, mistaken) to describe a practice widely utilized by Daoists. Instead, they were willing to incorporate, no matter the indigenous practice or a Buddhist version of it, into their own repertoire.

The mixed attitudes towards ritual practices are not strange in the hometown of Buddhism. In her discussion of medieval Buddhist and Jain rituals, Phyllis Granoff discerns two seemingly contradicting but coexisting tendencies: ritual eclecticism and ritual exclusiveness. For the former, Granoff defines it as insiders of one religious tradition, acknowledging the existence of rituals of other traditions and approving the practice of them along with their own rituals. At the

same time, Granoff also admits ritual exclusiveness played a significant role in a sectarian society, especially in dissolving intra-sectarian disputes.[128]

In the medieval Chinese materials discussed in the chapter, the problem of talisman or the most frequently used Chinese term *fu,* matters in marking boundaries between different traditions. However, deciding whether a practice is acceptable is not based on a careful analysis of its components or logic. Rather, it is more dependent on who performs it, under whose approval, and for what purpose. In the case of the *Book of Consecration*, even though the labels *fu* and *zhou* are sometimes denounced, when the practices they signify are done under the Buddha's instruction and for the wellbeing of the Buddha's followers and all the sentient beings, they are encouraged.

At the same time, we also notice that the Buddhists never invented their own unique term for Buddhist talismans. They either just described the practice without naming it or borrowed the Chinese term (*fu*) used by their rivals. I doubt this ambiguity was a random choice. When the Buddhists tried to criticize indigenous talismanic practice (i.e., *fu*), they avoided applying the label to their similar practice and just described it. When the label became more challenging for them to criticize, they chose to borrow it directly to share its influence and accessibility.

The reasons behind these choices are usually not scholastic ones. Discourses surrounding talismanic practice are always associated with anxieties and dangerous moments. They can be used as symbols of a corrupted era. At the same time, they can also be the solution for incoming disasters and suffering. Medieval composers of these texts made their choices mainly out of practical concerns, whether it was political pressure for them not to be able to attack a practice

[128] Phyllis Granoff, "Other People's Rituals: Ritual Eclecticism in Early Medieval Indian Religions," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 28, no. 4 (2000): 399–424; "My Rituals and My Gods: Ritual Exclusiveness in Medieval India," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 29, no. 1-2 (2000): 109–34.

widely used by Daoists or the peer pressure they had to compete to win more followers and clients.

There is a model for healing liturgy (*huanwen* 患文) found both in S. 343 and P. 3259. The model was designed for someone who had been ill for quite a while and exhausted all conventional medical options. As a last resort, the patient requested help from the Buddha and his disciples. After the description of the patient's sincere repentance in front of the monks, arduous recitation of Buddhist sūtras, and charitable transferring of the accumulated merits, the monk in charge of the ritual would speak loudly about his wishes for his client:

> May the wonderful remedies of Jīvaka flow into the body and mind, the divine broth of *prajñā* constantly moistens the four elements. May the Buddhas increase the account of the years, the nāgas and celestial deities offer the talisman of immortality.[129]
> 耆婆妙藥灌主身心, 般若神湯恆流四大, 諸佛益長年之數, 龍天贈不死之符.

Despite the formulaic nature of the text, the talismanic discourses here was perfectly incorporated with Buddhist imagination in a way understandable to the ordinary folks living in a desert town along the northwest frontier in medieval China.

The short history of talismanic discourses also shows how the boundary of an "imagined community" is set up. Masters, foreign or native, all provided their own visions of where the line should be drawn. And the lines were decided not only by the authoritative sūtras spoken by the Buddha, but also by apologetical, political, and liturgical concerns. These visions sometimes overlap, sometimes contradict each other, and sometimes supersede. But what matters most is

[129] For a brief disucssion of the liturgy, see Catherine Despeux, "Buddhist Healing Practices at Dunhuang in the Medieval Period," in *Buddhist Healing in Medieval China and Japan*, eds. C. Pierce Salguero, Andrew Macomber (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2020), 142. The translation here also follows hers with some of my own minor changes.

not where exactly the line should be drawn but the action of line-drawing itself. Only this kind of effort reminds the myriad Buddhist followers, no matter how they differ on certain practices, that they are together.

Chapter Two

Making Talismans in Medieval China

Introduction

Talismans are made of ordinary materials—paper, wood, ink, metal, cloth, etc.—that people interact with every day. Most of them are cheap in value and physically rather insignificant. Then why do people, both those living in the distant past and contemporary temple-goers, believe the force is with them when carrying a talismanic object made from these unexceptional materials?

All talismanic objects, no matter purchased at a local temple, requested from a professional on the marketplace, or even made by a self-trained common person him/herself, have to go through human hands first. What happens during this process? What transforms ordinary materials into an object that exercises power over people? Apart from the direct maker, who else participates in the process? How does this process induce confidence by the receivers/owners in these tiny objects? Answering questions like these help us to understand the fundamental mechanisms in making talismans.

The making process is also a field for different religious traditions in medieval China to compete and show off by offering diverse options. The process involved many aspects for these traditions to exploit. Some traditions emphasized the qualification of the makers; some paid more attention to the quality of the raw materials; some were more concerned about the ritualization in the process; some even addressed the question of religious identity. By tracing these different approaches in this chapter, I argue that both the (assumed) imported Buddhist elements and indigenous elements were adopted to formulate a common procedure—where power, from a higher realm, was transduced onto the object and became ready to be used. In the process, the crucial role was played by the maker, who served as the channel of efficacy and made the connections between different religious realms.

As I defined in the introductory chapter, talismans, as religiously consecrated objects that interact with multiple beings, are made by and for human beings. In his discussion of the life path of a Japanese amulet, H. Byron Earhart briefly lays out ten critical mechanisms in producing and using an amulet. Interestingly, only one of the ten stages (i.e. the first) involves creating the talisman. Earhart's ten mechanisms are: 1) transfer, where the power of a kami or a Buddha is transferred to the ordinary object through ritual; 2) movement, which involves the

obtainer's physical movement to the location of the object; 3) relationship, which is formed when the obtainer contact the object; 4) exchange, when the user buys or receive the amulet; 5) reciprocity, which is the physical *quid pro quo* for the amulet; 6) reverse transfer, where the user's wish is conveyed back to the Buddha or kami; 7) reverse movement, denoting the movement when the user brings back the amulet back; 8) installation, when the obtainer situate the object at a certain physical setting; 9) ritual treatment, which is the ritual performance the amulet gets once it is placed in a setting; 10) replacement, which refers to the annual replacement of amuletic object in a Japanese household.[130] These mechanisms do not necessarily occur altogether in the circulation of a single amulet, nor does every one of them find a counterpart in the medieval Chinese context. However, Earhart's summary is insightful in showing how different hands handle talismanic objects at different stages. Even though he is quite eloquent in discussing what happens after the object is made, he only dedicates one mechanism to the production process. In this chapter, I will focus only on this stage and analyze what complexity is involved. I argue that there are two significant processes in this stage. One is materialization, through which invisible power is transformed into semiotic symbols and gets fixed on or in a piece of ordinary material. The other one is empowerment, by which the power is activated, turning the ordinary object into an efficacious talisman. These two parts sometimes overlap and even become inseparable. The following sections will reveal how they were achieved in a medieval Chinese context.

Paper, Ink, and Rituals

[130] H. Byron Earthart, "Mechanisms and Process in the Study of Japanese Amulets," in *Nihon shūkyō e no shikaku* 日本宗教への視角, ed. Okada Shigekiyo 岡田重精 (Osaka: Tōhō shuppan, 1994), 620–611 (rev. pagination).

In this section, I will discuss the materials and techniques used in the materialization and consecration process. The passages analyzed in the section reveal that Buddhism, as an imported tradition, shared similar approaches and contributed new options to medieval talismanic tradition. The materials from Dunhuang then demonstrate how the ritualists on the ground creatively used these approaches synthetically to fulfil their own and their clients' needs. I also argue that one crucial part of the making process is to forge the unreadability of the semiotic symbols on talismans.

The most common practice of materialization is through writing. Different religious traditions in medieval China uniformly instructed practitioners to write down semiotic symbols, both recognizable characters and mysterious scribbles. Not only the action of writing itself but also how one writes and what materials should be used also are indispensable in materialization. In the "Chapter on Climbing and Wading" (Dengshe pian 登涉篇) of the *Master Who Embraces Simplicity* (*Baopu zi* 抱朴子), Daoist master Ge Hong 葛洪 (283-343) gives instructions on how to make the five talismans for entering the mountains:

> Write in cinnabar on a peach-wood plaque. The graphs should be written in large to fill the whole plaque. [131]
> 以丹書桃板上, 大書其文字, 令彌滿板上.

Cinnabar is also used to write another group of talismans used to ward off tigers and wolves in the forest in the same chapter. Physicians recognized its significance as early as the Eastern Han dynasty (25-220). In the *Divine Farmer's Classic of Materia Medica* (*Shennong bencao jing* 神

[131] *Baopu zi*, Ge Hong (283-343), in *Baopu zi neipian jiaoshi* 抱朴子內篇校釋, ed. Wang Ming 王明 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 310. The translation is mine with reference to James R. Ware, trans., *Alchemy, Medicine, Religion in the China of A.D. 320: The Nei p'ien of Ko Hung (Pao-p'u tzu)* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1967), 296.

農本草經), the oldest surviving Chinese *materia medica*, cinnabar is described as a killer of "spirits, demons, evil and vicious ghosts." [132] The choice of peach wood can also be traced back to earlier exorcist tradition. In *Zuo Tradition* (*Zuozhuan* 左傳), peach wood bows and jujube wood arrows were considered to be able to eradicate disasters.[133] The *Daybook* (*Rishu* 日書), written on bamboo slips unearthed in Shuihudi (now in Hubei Province), also shows that in order to kill the penetration ghost (*Cigui* 刺鬼), one should shoot it with a peach wood bow and a jujube wood arrow decorated with a tail made by chicken feather.[134] The belief in the efficacy of specific kinds of wood was further developed in Daoism. In later practices of carving exorcist seals, various types of wood, such as peach wood, jujube wood, maple (*fengmu* 楓木), locust (*huaimu* 槐木), pearwood (*limu* 梨木), and sandalwood (*tanxiang* 檀香), are associated with the power imbued into the seals.[135] Meanwhile, Buddhist sources also display the same concern with writing materials. In the *One-Syllable Buddhoṣṇīṣa Wheel King Sūtra* (*Yizi foding lunwang jing* 一字佛頂輪王經), a text translated by Bodhiruci 菩提流志 (d. 727), a dhāraṇī spell is asked to be shown in this way:

> If there are good men who happily wish to achieve the "One-syllable Buddhoṣṇīṣa Wheel King Spell", they should ornament and purify themselves, inside and outside, use birch bark, paper, bamboo, silk, and so on, write this Buddhoṣṇīṣa Wheel King Spell with Male

[132] Sabine Wilms, trans., *The Divine Farmer's Classic of Materia Medica*, 3rd ed. (Corbett, OR: Happy Goat Productions, 2017), 143. For a general introduction of the book, see JulieAnn Nugent-Head, "The First Materia Medica: The Shen Nong Ben Cao Jing," *The Journal of Chinese Medicine* 104 (2014): 22–6.
[133] Stephen Durrant, Wai-yee Li, David Schaberg, trans., *Zuo Tradition / Zuozhuan: Commentary on the "Spring and Autumn Annals"* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016), 1368–9.
[134] See Liu Lexian 劉樂賢, "Shuihudi Qinjian rishu jiejiu pian yanjiu 睡虎地秦簡日書〈詰咎篇〉研究," *Kaogu xuebao* 考古學報 1994. 4: 435–54; also see his "Daybooks: A Type of Popular Hemerological Manual of the Warring States, Qin, and Han," in *Books of Fate and Popular Culture in Early China,* eds. Donald Harper, Marc Kalinowski (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 57–90.
[135] Shih-shan Susan Huang, "Daoist Seals, Part 1: Activation and Fashioning," *Journal of Daoist Studies* 10 (2017): 85–8.

> Yellow. Carry it on one's shoulders and arms and recite this spell. One will attain achievement soon. [136]
> 若善男子樂欲成就一字佛頂輪王呪者, 應令內外嚴飾清潔. 以樺木皮或以紙素竹帛等, 上雄黃書斯高頂輪王呪, 佩帶肩臂并持斯呪, 速得成就.

The translation of this sūtra is recorded in a state-sanctioned catalogue. Evidence shows that the sūtra has a clear and definite Indic origin even though we currently do not have its counterpart in any Indic languages. [137] As for the materials specified in the instruction, two things are most intriguing. Birch bark is included in the writing materials, and birch bark was a frequently used writing material in the northwestern part of the Indian subcontinent and central Asia.[138] The appearance of birch bark further confirms the Indic origin of the sūtra. At the same time, similar to the earlier Daoist case we discussed before, the ink is made from realgar (Male Yellow, *xionghuang* 雄黃). The color of Male Yellow is also red, just as the cinnabar. It also shares the same effect of "killing spiritual beings, evil ghost, vicious pneuma, poison of hundreds of insects."[139] In a Chinese *materia medica* compiled during the early third century but only survives as quotes in later medical works, it is considered as the male counterpart of cinnabar.[140] Buddhist sources also ascribe similar results to the use of realgar.[141]

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[136] *Yizi foding lunwang jing* 一字佛頂輪王經, trans. Putiliuzhi 菩提流志 (Bodhiruci, d. 727), *T*. no. 951, 19:228c11–2.

[137] *Kaiyuan shijiao lu* 開元釋教錄, no. 2154, T. 55: 569c5–6. According to it, the project lasted from the summer to the winter in the third year of Jinglong 景龍 era (709). Bodhiruci carried out the project in Xichongfu Monastery 西崇福寺 with the assistance of his foreign disciple Bore qiuduo 般若丘多. The assistant's task is described as "helping to read aloud the Sanskrit version" (*zhuxuan fanben* 助宣梵本).

[138] Richard Salomon, *The Buddhist Literature of Ancient Gandhāra: An Introduction with Selected Translations* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2018), 79–82.

[139] Sabine Wilms, trans., *The Divine Farmer's Classic of Materia Medica*, 384. "殺精物, 惡鬼, 邪氣, 百蟲毒". For a general discussion of realgar in Chinese medicine, see Edward H. Schafer, "Orpiment and Realgar in Chinese Technology and Tradition," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 75, no. 2 (1955): 73–89.

[140] See Shang Zhijun 尚志鈞 ed., *Wu Pu Bencao* 吳普本草 (Beijing: Renmin weisheng chubanshe, 1984), 8.

[141] In the *Dhāraṇī Collection Sūtra* (*Tuoluoni jijing* 陀羅尼集經), a collection translated and compiled by Adiquduo 阿地瞿多 (Atikūṭa) in 654, realgar, mustard seeds, and salt are directed to be burned at night. When ghosts smell the fragrance from these materials, they will scatter. See *Tuoluoni jijing*, *T*. no. 901, 18: 876b15–6. "每夜燒摩那屎囉(此云雄黃)并白芥子鹽等, 鬼聞藥氣, 而身劈裂退散馳走."

Similar examples flourished in transmitted Buddhist and Daoist sources. The choice of materials used in the making of a talisman is crucial since the belief in their power to exorcise is key to the success of a talisman. In other words, by choosing materials carefully, the materialization of intangible power is itself a consecration process. The popular materials are one way to guarantee the efficacy of the talismanic object.

Another question addressed in the instruction is the idea of ornamentation and purification. As Huang Zheng and Teiser recently reveal, evidence from Dunhuang manuscripts shows that the concept and language of ornamentation (*zhuangyan* 莊嚴 or several other related terms, including *yanshi* 嚴飾 used here) was widespread and accepted in medieval Buddhist liturgical texts.[142] Since the instruction here asks the maker both to care about the inside and outside, it seems the maker should ornament both the ritual site and him/herself. The same can be said for the purification process. Lowe's recent study shows that the idea of purification is a crucial component in the preparation of copying sūtras in ancient Japan.[143] The instruction here also asks the practitioner to establish a pure sphere before one starts to write the talisman. Even though it does not lay out the detailed guidance for ornamentation and purification, an early unearthed Buddhist text from Gilgit might show us a glimpse of how to recite a dhāraṇī incantation properly:

> Whatever women would want a son, by her, after having bathed, after having put on new clothes and being chaste, after having honored this book with flowers, perfumes, garlands, and unguents, after she herself had mounted a seat perfumed with various perfumes and

[142] Huang Zheng 黃征, "Dunhuang yuanwen 'zhuangyan,' 'zixun,' 'zizhuang' kaobian 敦煌願文莊嚴資勳資莊考辯," orig. published 1999; rpt. in *Dunhuang yuyan wenzixue yanjiu* 敦煌語言文字學研究 (Lanzhou: Gansu jiaoyu chubanshe, 2001), 213–20; Stephen F. Teiser, "Ornamenting the Departed: Notes on the Language of Chinese Buddhist Ritual Texts," *Asia Major* 22, no.1 (2009): 201–37.
[143] Bryan D. Lowe, *Ritualized Writing: Buddhist Practice and Scriptural Cultures in Ancient Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2019), 36–45.

> covered with various spices, this *Rantnaketudhāraṇī* must be read. She will come to be one who obtains a son.[144]

The passage gives step-by-step guidance before the formal recitation of the dhāraṇī. Its emphasis on bathing, donning new cloth, and refraining from sexual intercourse represents the requirement for purification. On the other hand, applying flowers and spices on the sūtra, seat, and the practitioner herself correspond to the requirement for ornamentation.

The instruction from Gilgit is for recitation. The two components guarantee the vocal dhāraṇī is pronounced through pure media in a sublime setting, and thus its efficacy. In the case of writing down a dhāraṇī as a talisman, the requirements for purity and ornamentation also help to create efficacy in the object. Not only translated texts by foreign masters but also indigenously compiled ritual manuals in Dunhuang also show the medieval ritualists took them seriously. For example, in P. 2602v, a manual with several talismans, after a lengthy explanation of the benefits of carrying the talisman, the instruction insists that the talisman can only be bestowed to those who are purified and practice diligently. It also asks the practitioner to avoid certain kinds of food.

Meanwhile, vocal recitation is not categorically absent in making talismanic objects. In Bodhiruci's translation, he mentioned that once the practitioner carries the talisman, he/she also needs to recite the dhāraṇī, which has already been materialized and worn on the body. The recitation here serves as a way to activate the efficacy imbued into the object.

[144] Gregory Schopen, "On the Absence of Urtext and Otiose Ācāryas: Building, Books, and Lay Buddhist Ritual at Gilgit," in Gérard Colas and Gerdi Gerschheimer eds., *Écrire et transmettre en Inde classsique* (Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient, 2009), 204.

Empowering a talismanic by reciting incantations is common in Dunhuang ritual manuals as well. In P. 2602v, after laying out the illustrations for the talismans and their benefits, the section concludes with an instruction on enchanting the talisman (*zhou zhou shenfu* 呪呪神符):

> To enchant a divine talisman, [you should] recite "quickly, quickly in accordance with the statutes and ordinances." The "Incantation for Enchanting Talismans of Bodhisattva Nāgārjuna" says: *namo nabotica natica rivaya svāhā*.[145] If [you] recite as such [over the talisman] for seven days and seven nights, click your teeth thirteen times, abstain from alcohol, meat, and the five pungent roots. After seven days, [the talisman] will become efficaciously. Quickly, quickly in accordance with the statutes and ordinances.
> 呪呪神符, 誦急急如律令. 龍樹菩薩呪符呪曰: 那謨那波帝咤那帝咤離婆耶莎訶. 若七日夜呪之, 印(叩)齒十三遍, 斷酒宍, 五辛, 七日有驗, 急急如律令.

The instruction does not care too much about the material aspect. On the other hand, it places more emphasis on the ritual aspect after the object has been forged. It actually lays out two sets of incantations. One is the indigenous, cliché, frequently used by Daoists, of "quickly, quickly in accordance with the statutes and ordinances." The other is presented in a transliterated style and ascribed to Nāgārjuna.[146] The mixed nature of this instruction also emerges within the part attributed to Nāgārjuna. It not only asks the maker to stay away from the food prohibited by the *vinaya*s but also to click their teeth (*kouchi* 叩齒), a Daoist practice popular in medieval China.[147]

Other examples show that ritualists in Dunhuang frequently used a vocal incantation to consecrate their talismans and similar objects. In S. 2498, a ritual manual in a scroll format over 40 feet long, a general instruction was inserted between dozens of talismans and two seals:

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[145] The Sanskrit reconstruction is mine. However, it seems the incantation was likely a Chinese invention imitating transliteration from Sanskrit. I will turn to this question in chapter 5.
[146] Though presented this way, it still could be pseudo-Sanskrit incantation fabricated by Chinese hands. I will turn to this phenomena in detail in chapter 5.
[147] For the Daoist practice of clicking teeth and its influence on medieval Chinese Buddhism, see Xiao Dengfu 蕭登福, *Daojiao yu mizong* 道教與密宗 (Taipei: Xin wenfeng, 1993), 227–54.

> For the preceding talismans, recite the *Wish-fulfilling Incantation of Vajrakumāra* twenty-one times to empower it. Also, burn the Kunduruka incense. For the two [following] seals, recite the incantation seven times to empower them as previously.
> 右件符等並用金剛童子隨心呪度之, 誦廿一遍. 董（薰）陸香燒. 二印亦同前呪七遍度之.

Here, the instruction asks the ritualist to use the *Wish-fulfilling Incantation of Vajrakumāra* to empower the talismans and seals. And the incantation is also included in other sections earlier in the scroll.[148] The same group of talismans and seals is also spotted at the ending part of P. 2153. It also contains the same instruction. To correspond to the instruction, the ritualist who collected these talismans, along with talismans from other sources, meticulously added a short incantation to consecrate the talismans at the end of the scroll:

> *Wish-fulfilling Incantation of Vajrakumāra Killing Ghosts*, this is used to consecrate the previous talismans.
> 金剛童子隨心煞鬼呪, 用度前件符.

The two examples reveal that these ritualists, who compiled the manual for self-reference and provided service for all walks of life in the small medieval town, were serious about following the instructions. They did not take the steps as palaver. On the contrary, the existence of cross-reference between different sections (S. 2498) and adding annotation from other external sources (P. 2153) indicate they must have followed the instructions when making talismans.

Most of the talismans discussed in the section also emphasize the importance of handwriting. Even today, as printing technology has dominated the realm of passing information, many talismans are still handwritten by professional masters. Talismans do contain information,

[148] The long scroll will be discussed in detail in chapter 5.

but they are not ordinary media for transmitting knowledge as normal books and papers. The above analysis shows that the choice of materials and consecration rituals are both ways for and representation of the makers manipulating talismanic powers.

However, we do see examples of printed talismans in Dunhuang and other places in medieval China. For instance, S. P. 247 is a paper talisman with Sanskrit syllables and Chinese instructions (Fig. 2.1).[149]



Fig. 2.1 S. P. 247 (British Museum)

The printed paper talisman is 13.7 cm (≈ 5.4 inches) in height and 16.7 centimetres (≈ 6.6 inches) in width. It is divided into two parts. The right part, which is approximately a square, has

[149] For the Sanskrit incantation inscribed, see Gergely Hidas, "Two Dhāraṇī Prints in the Stein Collection at the British Museum," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 77, no.1 (2014): 105–117.

an image of the Buddha in the center. Around the Buddha, a dhāraṇī of Sanskrit syllables circles around. The left part, on the other hand, is an instruction expounding the benefits of the talisman:

> This is the Grand and Wide Wish-Fulfilling of the Great Vow of the Immeasurable Life (i.e., Amitāyus). What is hoped in mind must be fulfilled. The light of the extraordinarily auspicious consecration (Skt. *abhiṣeka*) of the Goddess of the Buddha's Eye (Skt. *Buddhalocanī*) can eliminate unfortunate destiny. Where the esoteric verses of Ucchuṣma are placed will be protected by dragons and ghosts. For the gāthā of dharma śarīra, the bodies of those who wear it will be identical to that of the Buddha. It is universally recommended for the four groups to hold, carry, and form a connection. And it is wished for them to attain the real, eternal, and marvellous fruit.
> 此無量壽大誓弘廣隨求, 心所願必從, 佛眼母殊勝吉祥灌頂光能滅惡趣. 嗢蒭澀摩密句置之處, 龍鬼護持. 法舍利之伽他, 佩之者身同諸佛, 普勸四眾持帶結緣, 並願同登真常妙果.

The instruction never talks about materials and ritual procedures that happen in the printing workshop. And the object is made of ordinary paper and black ink. It seems that the talisman was believed to be efficacious only because of the ultimate power of the dhāraṇī, the Buddha, and the deities mentioned in the instruction. However, apart from them, what other properties did the talisman acquire when it was made?

Though inscribed with man-made signs and marks, talismans are not made for hermeneutical contemplation by their users. On the contrary, I argue that the signs written/printed on and physical design of a talisman intentionally try to create a barrier of unreadability, and such unreadability contributes significantly to the efficacy of talismans.

Hindley's recent study on amulet rolls in medieval England suggests the unreadability of them results from two mechanisms. On the one hand, physically, they were designed in an extremely long and narrow format, preventing people from reading them like an ordinary scroll

or codex. On the other hand, the texts inscribed on these rolls often were written in a way intelligible to untrained people.[150]

A similar situation can also explain talismans in medieval China. The talismans discussed in this dissertation were not made for people to contemplate hermeneutically.[151] In most cases, they are hidden in the user's garments, hair knots, accessories, or even inside the user's body. In other instances, talismans have to be displayed. However, the action of displaying does not necessarily mean that what is shown can be easily comprehended. For the talismans made from dhāraṇī incantations, they are either written in strings of Chinese characters to imitate the sound value of Sanskrit verses or in Siddhaṃ script. Most medieval Chinese people could not understand the semantic meaning of these incantations.

For the indigenous talismans from the ritual manuals in Dunhuang, they are designed in a way that meaningful Chinese characters are part of and embedded in a larger pattern. Modern scholars have dedicated tremendous efforts to understand the meaning behind the complicated configurations of Chinese characters, esoteric symbols, and cursive lines within these indigenous (and mostly Daoist) talismans.[152] This type of talisman represents mystic knowledge that only professional ritualists could handle for most medieval people. In the making process of talismanic objects, the above two strategies can be employed simultaneously or separately. However, this unreadability definitely contributes to the efficacy of these objects since it creates a gap within the flow of information and knowledge, thus making the power from a higher realm even more unfathomable.

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[150] Katherine Storm Hindley, "The Power of Not Reading: Amulet Rolls in Medieval England," in *The Roll in England and France in the Late Middle Ages: Form and Content*, eds. Stefan G. Holz, Jörg Peltzer and Maree Shirota (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 289–306.

[151] For different ways of deploying talismans, see chapter 3.

[152] For example, see Jiang Sheng 姜生, "Daofu jiegou, yuyi ji gongneng yanjiu 道符结构, 语义及功能研究, " *Shehui kexue yanjiu* 社會科學研究 1997. 6: 87–91.

The above discussion depicts how a talismanic object was made and activated in the hands of medieval makers. It reveals that during this process, instructions from different origins give the makers diverse options to transform the object made from ordinary materials into something powerful. But what happens to the makers themselves during the process?

Making Objects Makes Makers

The previous section witnesses how professional ritualists prepared and made talismans in medieval China. Ordinary people, in some cases, also were equipped with skills to produce talismanic objects themselves. From the commonsensical perspective, an object has to be made before it can be used. At the same time, the activity of making usually refers to what a maker does to the object rather than how the object transforms the maker. However, the boundary between making and using a talismanic object is sometimes not clear, and so is the direction of influence between a maker and an object. In fact, the process of making a talisman can also be a process of initiation for the maker.

Anthropological studies in recent decades have complicated the issue, providing us with alternative perspectives. Miller's study on materialism in modern society reveals that in the making process, people and objects reconstitute each other. To him, objects are not only the product of ideas but, at the same time, also direct our cognitive perception.[153] Gell's examination of the agency within art objects further reveals how social contexts and surroundings help establish agency in objects that conversely influences people to interact with them.[154] Following them, Wei-Ping Lin's recent study on popular religious statues and spirit-mediums in

[153] Daniel Miller, *Material Culture and Mass Production* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987).
[154] Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 124–37.

contemporary Taiwan discloses how the materializations of magic power "redraw and reconfirm the village boundaries and connect each household by means of a kinship metaphor." [155] According to her, the materialization process forges new bonds among urban homes. These studies share in common their focus on how the process of materialization, or a finished object influences social or communal relationships. But for the people involved within the process, what, individually, do they get?

Lowe's study on ancient Japanese sūtra-copying practices again touches on one aspect of the question. He considers the scriptoriums as "disciplinary regimes," where the professional scribes became self-disciplined and obtained capabilities and skills regardless of external imposition during their training and working time. Not denying the authority from the above, Lowe's more balanced view tends to understand how these makers of sūtras in ancient Japan enriched the ethical dimension of scribal and bureaucratical practices.[156]

Carrying these insights further, in this section, I will shift to an apocryphal text compiled in the fifth century in China, the *Book of Consecration* (*Guanding jing* 灌頂經), which reveals how Buddhism, along with elements from other traditions, helped to shape a new model that challenges our vision of what is "making" and compels us to think conversely about what "making" can do to the maker. I argue that materialization is never finished at a given moment during the process. On the contrary, the efficacy of the object relies on continuous observation of certain rules. Because of this, the practitioner as a maker cannot fulfil the task without confirmation from the same practitioner as a user. During this looped process, I argue, new religious morality is enforced, and a new religious identity is thus forged.

[155] Wei-Ping Lin, *Materializing Magic Power: Chinese Popular Religion in Villages and Cities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Asia Center, 2015), 23.
[156] Lowe, *Ritulized Writing*, 149–70.

As I have already discussed in the first chapter, the twelve-fascicle collection has a complicated textual history. Medieval cataloguers were also confused about its nature. Some mentioned there was a version comprising nine fascicles (most likely corresponding to the first nine titles in Sengyou's description);[157] some identified the translator as we know it today;[158] some even claimed there was a Sanskrit version of the unreliable twelfth title.[159]

As Michel Strickmann points out, these classifications and designations represent the concerns of scholastic monks in their own time. Modern scholars should adopt different approaches. As an example, Strickmann finds that in the opening chapter of the collection, *Book on the Spell for Seventy-two Thousand Divine Kings Protecting Bhikṣus* (*Qiwan erqian shenwang hu biqiu zhoujing* 七萬二千神王護比丘呪經), lists of names of protector deities are provided. He traces the practice back to Daoist "registers" (*lu* 箓), which "contained lists of gods who were formally installed in members of the Taoist community", bestowed during their "initiations or investitures."[160] For him, the *Book of Consecration* is a perfect example to show the extent to which the Chinese Buddhist authors in the fifth century were aware of their rivals. Shinohara adopts another approach in dealing with these lists. He reveals that lists of deities in the *Book of Consecration* and several other dhāraṇī sūtras were a way to transliterate the Indic dhāraṇī verses. Instead of focusing on the Chinese-ness side, Shinohara argues that texts like the *Book of Consecration*, though a Chinese composition, still preserve characteristics of Indian tradition.[161] The positions of Strickmann and Shinohara are not mutually exclusive. The

[157] Fajing 法經(fl. 594), *Zhongjing mulu* 眾經目錄, *T*. no. 2146, 55: 120b11.
[158] Yancong 彥琮 (557–610), *Zhongjing mulu* 眾經目錄, *T*. no. 2147, 55: 151a5
[159] Fei Changfang 費長房 (fl. 562–598), *Lidai sanbao ji* 歷代三寶記, *T*. no. 2034, 49: 93b7–8.
[160] Michel Strickmann, "The Consecration Sūtra: A Buddhist Book of Spells," in *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha*, ed. Robert E. Buswell, Jr. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), 94.
[161] Koichi Shinohara, "Rethinking the Category of Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha," *Studies in Chinese Religions* 1, no.1 (2015): 70–81.

collection was produced by medieval Chinese Buddhists. Concerns for both fostering a unique Buddhist identity and strategically adopting local practices and competing with indigenous traditions were nothing strange for these medieval minds. While both Strickmann and Shinohara focus on the first chapter of the collection, I, in this section, will concentrate on the third chapter to show how the author(s) managed to forge a practice involving Indian predecessors and adoption/adaptation of indigenous practice.

The third chapter of the collection is entitled *Book on the Spell of Carrying and Protecting Body with Three Refuges and Five Precepts* (*Sangui wujie daipei hushen zhoujing* 三歸五戒帶佩護身呪經). The sūtra opens up with the common scene where the Buddha is accompanied by thousands of bodhisattvas and bhikṣus, as well as the eight groups of beings. A Brahman named Mṛgaśiraṣa (Lutou 鹿頭) who wishes to abandon the non-Buddhist teachings asks the Buddha how to take three refuges and observe the five precepts. After confirming the Brahman's resolution to take refuge in the Buddha, in the Dharma, and in the Saṃgha over his whole life, the Buddha officially endorses him to be an authentic disciple. In order to protect his newly initiated disciple and others, the Buddha orders the deities and ghosts sent by Indra to guard the men and women who have taken the three refuges. The Brahman seems to be confused by the Buddha's order and asks for clarification. The Buddha then gives a list of thirty-six benign deities. The Buddha then explains that these thirty-six divine kings accompanied by their own retinues, will protect all who have taken the three refuges. The way to redeem the protection, as taught by the Buddha, is to write down the names of these deities and carry them on the body as a talisman.

The thirty-six deities' names also are worth some contemplating. All of them share the same structure. The first three characters of every name are Militou 彌栗頭. After that, three or

four characters are attached to formulate a complete name. The compiler then spends a short note on each name, explaining its meaning in Chinese and identifying the deity's responsibility. For example, the twenty-fifth deity is named Militou Qianjiadi 彌栗頭虔伽地. The note following the name translates it as "good quality" (*shanpin* 善品) in Chinese and recognizes the deity as the one who is in charge of [preventing] poison. The explanation was read and accepted by at least one famous figure in medieval China. Zhiyi 智顗, in his oral commentary to the *Sūtra of Golden Light* (*Jin guangming jing* 金光明經) transcribed by his disciple Guangding 灌頂, reiterated the line to illustrate what is the path of poison (*gudao* 蠱道).[162] Since all the names share the same structure and their translations are also structurally close (*shan X*, 善 X), it is possible that these names were translated from a genuine Indian source in the first place.

After the protection from the thirty-six deities is confirmed, the Brahman continues, asking the Buddha to confer the five precepts. The Buddha then enumerates the precepts one by one, each time telling the Brahman that if he observes the precept, five benign divine kings will come and protect him. As before, the Buddha also lists the twenty-five deities. The names are all formulated as if they are transliterations of Sanskrit syllables. Following each name, a duty is also designated. These responsibilities, ranging from ensuring robust blood flow to shielding people from ghosts and beasts, cover almost all the calamities one can encounter. Again, the Buddha reveals that the proper way to make use of these deities is to write down their names and carry them on one's body. Then, another list of benefits one could get from holding the names is given by the Buddha.

[162] Zhiyi 智顗 (538-597), *Jin guangming jing wenju* 金光明經文句, *T*. no. 1785, 39: 79c23–4.

The Buddha's instructions with two lists of protective deities lay out the basic structure of a new mechanism. The practitioner, who vows to be the Buddha's disciple, has to make talismans by writing down the names in the two lists. Then the practitioner must carry them on his/her body to enjoy the protection from the deities on the lists. But the protection is conditioned by the fact that the practitioner has to remain in the Buddha's order and keeps his/her promise. In this mechanism, the maker and the user of the talisman are identical. As a result, the making process is inseparable from the using process since the objects only remain efficacious because they are appropriately used.

To substantiate his claim and show what will happen if someone breaks his/her promise, the Buddha then recounts a story about a wealthy Brahman in Karana. The wealthy man, who is called Zhichi 執持 (Skt. *Ādāna*), at first was devoted to non-Buddhist teachings. He decided to follow the Buddhist path since he realized that Buddhists around him all were achieving longevity and prosperity. He went to the Buddha and asked if he could be accepted into the order. The Buddha taught him how to take the three refuges and further asked him to observe the five precepts. After that, the Buddha confirmed that the thirty-six deities for taking refuges and the twenty-five deities for observing precepts would always protect the newly initiated disciple. However, when the wealthy man came back from the Buddha, he started to reconsider his decision. When he saw beautiful women, he could not restrain his desire and wanted to break the third precept; when he saw people drinking, he wished he could also partake in liquor, breaking the fifth precept. He regretted taking all the vows in front of the Buddha. So he came to the Buddha again and wished he could take back his words. Upon finishing his speech, various ghosts and deities took him and assaulted him in all possible ways. Having witnessed all this, the Buddha showed his compassion and saved the man again. The man expressed his remorse for

giving up the teaching and promised the Buddha that he would rectify all his previous mistakes. The compassionate Buddha forgave him, reintroduced him to the three refuges, and bestowed the five precepts again. However, this time, the Buddha also warned the "lost child." According to the Buddha, the deities for taking refuges and the deities for observing precepts actually are numerous. They are all dispatched by Indra, who resides above the six heavens. However, they form the units of thirty-six and twenty-five and take shifts forever. Thus, good men and women who keep their vows will be protected by them all the time from disasters and calamities. However, if a person fails to keep their vows, just like the wealthy man from Karana, these deities will leave him and all kinds of malevolent forces will come forward.

What does this story say about talismans? In this pedagogical tale, the Buddha actually does not ask the wealthy man to make talismans by writing down the names of the deities, nor is the man instructed to bodily wear a talisman. However, the important lesson here is that the coverage of protection from these deities is limited. In other words, the protection is conditional on the practitioner's observance. Only if one keeps his promise of taking the three refuges and observing the five precepts will s/he be covered.

The text goes on to the central question: how do ordinary people make use of the Buddha's powerful protection? It seems the Buddha here offered two options. The first covers men and women of pure faith from most daily troubles: being taken advantage of by evil spirits; being captured by a government official; being looted by robbers and thieves, or being trapped in severe illness or a grave disaster. It requires people to undergo a series of ritual procedures. People should bath themselves first. After that, men should don unlined robes with white hats; women should wear white dresses. They also need to purify themselves internally, including brushing their teeth, washing their mouths and adopting a vegetarian diet for seven days. After

finishing bodily purification, practitioners are also expected to establish a sacralized ritual space. A high seat should be set under a silk canopy. Scented water should be sprayed around, and fragrant sandalwood should be burned. The core of the ritual is then laid out after all these preparations: practitioners are required to recite the "abhiṣeka verses" (*guanding zhangju* 灌頂章句) seven times a day in order to exterminate limitless numbers of disasters.

But what are the "abhiṣeka verses?" The term appears in several other sources. In the *Golden Light Sūtra* (*Jin guangming jing* 金光明經), the abhiṣeka verses refer to a transliterated dhāraṇī spell the Buddha teaches.[163] In the first chapter of the *Book of Consecration*, the term is equivalent to a list of 172 (among them, only 120 are actually enumerated) deities' names.[164] For the 120 names in the first chapter, Shinohara is able to find the parallel of some of them in the *Sūtra of Births* (*Shengjing* 生經), a text claimed to be translated by Dharmarakṣa (Zhu Fahu 竺法護, 239–316). In Dharmarakṣa's translation, the dhāraṇī is simply transliterated into Chinese characters. However, when the spell was adopted by the compiler of the *Book of Consecration*, the Chinese characters were reconfigured to form names of deities. A similar practice is also applied to two translations of the *Agrapradīpa Sūtra*. [165] As Shinohara argues, the close match between the deities' names in the *Book of Consecration* and transliterated dhāraṇī spells in earlier translations shows that the compiler(s) of the former made use of the Chinese translations rather than the Indian originals directly.[166] Applying Shinohara's insight to the preceding analysis, I believe there are two aspects of the protective ritual. In the first, spells are formed

[163] *Jin guangming jing* 金光明經, trans. Tanwuchen 曇無讖 (385-433, Dharmakṣema), *T*. no. 663, 16: 345b14.
[164] *Foshuo guanding jing*, *T*. no. 1331, 21: 495a23–4.
[165] Shinohara, "Rethinking the Category," 72–3.
[166] Ibid., 73–4.

from the names of deities. In the second, practitioners are also encouraged to recite them as "abhiṣeka verses" with extensive ritual preparations.

Resuming the story of the chapter of the *Book of Consecration*, the Buddha responds to the Brahman's request. The Buddha instructs that in order to be bestowed the three refuges and the five precepts, one should first pay homage to Buddhas of ten directions. After that, he says, the disciple should verbally make a vow to take the refuges and observe the precepts for one's whole life, and then ask the Buddha, bodhisattvas, arhats, and sages to feel sympathy for him/her. Consequently, one must categorize the deities' names under refuges or precepts (like the Buddha did earlier in the chapter). When these preparations are finished, the disciple should write down these deities' names on a piece of fine white silk. The Buddha then prescribes how to use the talismanic object just made. He states:

> [One should] proceed, wearing or carrying [the talisman]. One should burn incense and pay homage to Buddhas of ten directions. One should observe the rules of restraint of eating on the eighth day of a month for seven days. If one wishes to travel, [one should] always wear it on the body. If one wears it on top or in the bosom, if one meets with evil Māras, without exception, [the Māras] will be eradicated. If a man or a woman wears the names of these benign deities for the three refuges and five precepts, if s/he enters a shrine, various evil spirits will be astonished and stand up and make obeisance to him/her. What is the reason for that? It is because this person wears or carries the names of deities for the three refuges and five precepts that are taught by the Buddha.[167]
> 帶持而行, 當燒香禮敬十方佛, 當取月八日七日持齋, 若欲行來常著身上. 若著頂上, 若著胸前, 若惡魔相逢無不除却. 若男子女人著此三歸五戒善神名字時, 若入神祠, 是諸邪神皆驚起, 為其人作禮. 何以故? 此人帶持諸佛所說三歸五戒神名字故.

The chapter concludes shortly after the instruction with the admiration of those who were listening.

[167] *Foshuo guanding jing*, *T*. no. 1331, 21: 504b28–c4.

Despite Strickmann's conclusion that the formulation of deities' names represents an effort to respond to the Daoist register practices, the structure of this chapter is still largely based on a Buddhist template. As shown in the previous section, Buddhist dhāraṇī sūtras regularly ask the practitioners to recite the dhāraṇī or to make a talisman with inscribed dhāraṇī. Thus, even though this chapter of the *Book of Consecration* is not likely a direct translation of an Indic text, it still conveys Indian practices to some extent.

The talisman prescribed in the chapter also poses questions about the process discussed in previous sections. The two components in making a talisman, materialization and empowerment, can both be seen in the Buddha's teaching. On the one hand, the Buddha does ask the practitioner to write down the names on a piece of paper/silk as a way to materialize the deities' names; on the other hand, the process of imbuing power into the object in this chapter is much more complicated.

Multiple agents are involved in this talisman of deities' names. The immediate ones, the sixty-one deities (thirty-six plus twenty-five) with their own responsibilities, are the direct providers of security. They are, according to the Buddha, subordinates of Indra. However, in the chapter, they operate under the command of the Buddha himself through Indra.[168] Thus, the power of the talisman ultimately originates from the Buddha, from his knowledge of the names of the deities, his compassion in sharing the knowledge, and his authority over Indra. However, these deities, who occupy different levels of the power hierarchy, are not the only ones that decide the efficacy of the talisman. As argued previously, the tale of the wealthy man shows that

[168] *Foshuo guanding jing*, *T*. no. 1331, 21: 501c24–5. "I should, for you and people of the ten directions, to command the various ghosts and deities sent by Indra." 我當為汝及十方人, 勅天帝釋所遣諸鬼神; *T*. no. 1331, 21: 502c11–2. "The Buddha says, Brahman, now I will explain briefly. I command Indra to dispatch the four heavenly kings to send the benign deities to protect your body." 佛言, 梵志我今略演, 勅天帝釋使四天王, 遣諸善神營護汝身.

their protection is conditional and limited. In this sense, the talisman serves as an endorsement of one's commitment to the Buddhist order. Once one decides to abandon the vows s/he took to become part of the order, the talisman carried will become an ordinary piece of paper/silk, with meaningless scribbles and no power to compel supernatural protection. In other words, when using the talisman, the carrier's behavior is consistently activating the object through incessant monitoring by power players from a higher realm.

In this looped process, the user, as an ordinary person, is also the maker of the object. However, in the making of the object, the maker-user is also initiated into the Buddha's order; s/he becomes a professional by vowing to take the refugees and observe the precepts. The maker-user transforms an ordinary object into something imbued with efficacious power, but the object also transforms the maker-user's identity into that of a disciple of the Buddha. The shift of identity also reveals the interdependence of agency between the maker-user and the object. Positively, the maker-user exercise his/her agency over the object by bodily action (writing), ritualization (burning incense, fasting on specific days, etc.), and making vows to join the order. Negatively, the maker-user can also terminate the efficacy by abandoning his/her commitment. Meanwhile, the object, together with the Buddha's instruction, makes sure the maker-users stay in line if they wish to get the benefits.

Conclusion

During Eric W. Davis' fieldwork in Cambodia, he encountered a restaurant waiter with magical tattoos (Khmer, *sak yantra*) protecting him from black magic (Khmer, *aṃboe*). After explaining their functions, the waiter claimed that the tattoos would lose their power if he did not

keep morality, which refers to the five precepts in Buddhism. As Davis pondered, the cost of obtaining worldly benefits is the responsibility to uphold Buddhist morality simultaneously.[169]

Seeking help from deities brings not only obligation but also exposes one's vulnerability. As Lowe's recent study reveals, emperors in ancient Japan were blessed with protection from deities by sponsoring sūtra copying projects. However, the deities they hoped to invoke also observed them and might punish them for misconduct.[170] Similarly, as we have read from the *Book of Consecration*, talismans made from deities' names are both able to empower and disempower people.

The idea of deities surveilling people's conduct was not novel to medieval Chinese minds. The political theory later known as "resonance between Heaven and humans" (*tianren ganying* 天人感應) proposed by early Confucian scholars considers abnormalities, such as fires, eclipses, and droughts, as warnings from heaven. However, the Buddhist case we discussed in the previous section pushes further in two directions. The surveillance can be exercised on all walks of life instead of on political elites only. Moreover, compared to the political theory that focuses on seeking prior acts of bad governance, the story laid out by the Buddha in the *Book of Consecration* emphasizes how brutal the punishments for malfeasance could be.

The *Book of Consecration* was not the only medieval text trying to send the message at that time. The *Scripture on the Four Heavenly Kings* (*Si tianwang jing* 四天王經), as Sørensen examines, was compiled during the first half of the fifth century, which is quite close to that of the *Book of Consecration*. Similarly, Sørensen also recognizes that the scripture was neither

[169] Erik W. Davis, *Deathpower: Buddhism's Ritual Imagination in Cambodia* (Columbia University Press, 2016), 185–8. For similar practice in other parts of Southeast Asia, see Joanna Cook, "Tattoos, Corporeality and the Self: Dissolving Borders in a Thai Monastery," *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology* 27, no. 2 (2007/2008): 20–35.
[170] Bryan D. Lowe, *Ritualized Writing: Buddhist Practice and Scriptural Cultures in Ancient Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2017), 201–7.

translated from an Indian sūtra nor an apocryphal work completely fabricated in China.[171] The scripture also makes the twenty-five deities responsible for monitoring the populace:

> On Indra's orders, they examine the life span [of such beings] and calculate the extent of its length. They [then] send all the good spirits to take up guard to protect them, in accordance with the number of precepts they keep. If they keep one precept, they will order five spirits to protect [such persons], and for those who keep all the five precepts they will order twenty-five spirits to keep guard at the doors of their homes. Calamities and epidemics, as well as all kinds of harmful emanation, and dark matters will be eradicated, and during the night, such people will have no evil dreams. Misfortune brought about by district magistrates, robbers and thieves, or water and fire will be eradicated and can no longer cause any harm. [Hence] seeking to avert calamities by making offerings will destroy the bad things. Only for those who keep four or [the complete] five precepts, and who maintain the six fast days, [their activity] may be likened to using a lot of water to extinguish a small fire. How can such people fail to extinguish it? At the time of death their lives are terminated, and their spirits will ascend for rebirth into the seven precious palatial halls in heaven on high. [However] without prayers this cannot be achieved. As regards the life span of those sentient beings who do not fast, who are evil and who steal, who in taking the wives of other men are immoral, and who make evil curses with their twisted tongues, who use false words and fancy speech, and who with hateful incantations curse others, who in envy rage foolishly, and who, being unfilial, are contrary to the Way—such persons will oppose the Buddha and oppose the Dharma, and slander the members of the saṃgha, and will be adverse to the distinction between good and bad. For those who act in the above manner, the Four Heavenly Kings will make it known to Indra, and all the gods will certainly be displeased. The good spirits will not guard and protect them, and they will order the sun and the moon to cease shining. The planets and the constellations will miss their [correct] intervals, and wind and rain will appear out of season.[172]
> 釋勅伺命, 增壽益算; 遣諸善神, 營護其身. 隨戒多少, 若持一戒, 令五神護之; 五戒具者, 令二十五神營衛門戶, 殃疫, 眾邪, 陰謀消滅, 夜無惡夢; 縣官, 盜賊, 水火, 災變終而不害; 禳禍滅怪. 唯斯四等, 五戒, 六齋猶如大水而滅小火, 豈有不滅者乎? 臨其壽終, 迎其魂神上生天上七寶宮殿, 無願不得. 若有不濟眾生之命, 穢濁盜竊, 婬犯他妻, 兩舌惡罵, 妄言綺語, 厭禱呪詛, 嫉妒恚癡, 逆道不孝, 違佛違法, 謗比丘僧, 善惡反論, 有斯行者, 四王以聞, 帝釋及諸天僉然不悅, 善神不復營護之, 即令日月無光, 星宿失度, 風雨違時.

[171] Henrik H. Sørensen, "Divine Scrutiny of Human Morals in an Early Chinese Buddhist Sutra: A Study of the *Si tianwang jing* (T. 590)," *Studies in Central & East Asian Religions* 8 (1995): 44–83.
[172] *Foshuo si tianwang jing* 佛說四天王經, *T*. no. 590, 15: 118b17-29. The translation follow Sørensen's with some changes.

The message is clear: handling oneself to the protection of the twenty-five deities is also subjecting oneself to the scrutiny of the deities, the four heavenly kings, Indra, and ultimately, the Buddha. However, the scripture does not ask its readers to prepare a talisman or even recite a dhāraṇī incantation. The Buddha only shares the brief moral instruction that helps him obtain the Buddhahood:

> Carefully protect one's mind and body and keep one's mouth closed. If one adheres to the Five Precepts and the Ten Wholesome Activities the Way will be obtained. Now I have obtained Buddhahood, which is the result of the [right] practices I accumulated.[173]
> 慎護爾心, 攝身, 守口, 五戒, 十善可從得道. 吾今得佛, 積行所致.

On the other hand, the *Book of Consecration* devotes more space to detailed ritual instructions. Though an apocryphal work compiled in China, its organization and diction are not that different from many dhāraṇī texts before and after.

Ritual purification, writing down the names (dhāraṇīs in the form of names) to make talismans, carrying talismans on the body, and finally keeping one's promise to the Buddha, these are the components of making talismans taught in the *Book of Consecration*. And in the process, the maker is also fundamentally transformed and assumes a new identity. Then the talismans of three refuges and five precepts, as described by the Buddha, have virtually become contracts between an individual and the Buddha. The two parties have their own rights and liabilities. The Buddhist development of the talisman in the *Book of Consecration* recalls the original meaning of the Chinese word for talisman *fu* 符, which refers to the tallies held in the

[173] *Foshuo si tianwang jing*, *T*. no. 590, 15: 118c23-4. The translation follow Sørensen's with some changes.

hands of two parties in a contract. Only when the two halves are brought together as a whole is the full effect accomplished.

In this chapter, I take a brief overview of the process of making talismans. I show that talismans originated from different traditions sharing similar procedures of production. In the procedures, however, different traditions emphasize certain elements. Both ritualists and common people in medieval China could make use of these options to fulfil their needs.

At the same time, I also point out these traditions share some elements. One of them is the forge of unreadability. I argue that unreadability is achieved by encrypted semiotic symbols and physical designs. And such a gap of unreadability is critical in empowering the talisman.

I also show that the boundary between a maker and a user, as well as that between making and using, can be fuzzy. The instance from the *Book of Consecration* indicates that a talisman's efficacy depends on the divine power from a higher realm and pertains to how the user keeps his/her promise. Such interdependence defines a loop where how a user behaves also contributes to the power in an object.

Since the above discussion of making talismans also betrays the inseparability of making and using talismans in medieval China, in the next chapter, I will shift to presenting how medieval Chinese people used talismans and how these different usages facilitate the efficacy charged in talismans.

Chapter Three

Engaging with the Ritual Body: Paradigms of Utilizing Talismanic Objects in Medieval China

Introduction

This chapter will discuss different paradigms of applying talismans by focusing on their relationship to the body. The paradigms enumerated here, i.e. pharmaceutical, armorized, and weaponized, will cover most applications of talismans in medieval Chinese life. By arranging talismanic objects in accordance with these paradigms, the chapter further reveals how talismans gain and channel their efficacy when being used.

In most previous scholarship, talismanic objects are categorized in two ways. The first way is to follow the stereotypical designations of Buddhism, Daoism, and popular religion. Talismans are often regarded as one fundamental element in Daoism both by contemporary scholars and the general public. As Catherine Dexpeux puts it, talismans, along with other mysterious diagrams in Daoism, are "closely related to the doctrines expressed in revealed scriptures and to legitimation of power invested by the gods in their representatives on earth." [174] Based on this understanding, one apparent tendency is to deny the originality of similar materials in other religious traditions, especially Buddhism.[175] More recently, scholars have started to realize that talismanic practices were also widespread in Buddhism of pre-modern China.[176] Meanwhile, most studies also agree that the inclusion of talismans and talismanic seals in some texts labelled as Buddhist is a reflection of an effort by Buddhists to assimilate indigenous practices. Zhaohua Yang's recent work, though still following this line, further reveals that in the process, tantric doctrines were creatively incorporated into some of the talismans preserved in two texts centering on the deity Ucchuṣma.[177] Nonetheless, what many of these works share is the presupposition that the making of talismans is particularly an indigenous Chinese practice. Imported religions, such as Buddhism, could borrow, incorporate, adapt, modify, or even reinvent the technique, but after all, this could only be built on an indigenous foundation or primarily by indigenous building blocks. In other words, the categorization system based on sometimes misleading categories of religious traditions prevents us from appreciating the Indian or Central Asian traditions behind the making of talismans.

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[174] Catherine Despeux, "Talismans and Sacred Diagrams," in *Daoism Handbook*, ed. Livia Kohn (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 498.
[175] Nakamura Hajime 中村元, *Bukkyō go daijiten* 仏教語大辞典 (Tokyo: Tōkyō shoseki, 1975), 1178a–b.
[176] For example, see Michel Strickmann, *Chinese Magical Medicine* (Stanford University Press, 2002); James Robson, "Signs of Power: Talismanic Writing in Chinese Buddhism," *History of Religions* 48, no.2 (2008): 130–69.
[177] Zhaohua Yang, "Devouring Impurities: Myth, Ritual and Talisman in the Cult of Ucchuṣma in Tang China" (PhD Dissertation, Stanford University, 2013), 259–315.

Another model considers the objects' physical features and the etymology of the words denoting the objects. For instance, in the study of Daoist sacraments, Anna Seidel uses vocabulary such as "talismans, charts, registers, writs, and tallies" to refer to various objects found in Daoist texts and rituals. [178] Following the same line, Despeux stipulates talismans to be something that is "oblong pieces of wood, metal or, more recently colored paper (usually yellow, red or blue) inscribed with figurative signs and formal symbols, written in black or red ink."[179] Similarly, Campany summarizes the visual features of talismans as "combinations of actual Chinese characters, sometimes mixed with diagrams of constellations," and they are largely unintelligible due to "their dense patterns of straight and curved, wavy and squiggly lines."[180] Japanese scholars also recognize this classification system based on talismans' physical aspects, such as size, material, and form, or on the texts or images inscribed on them when curating these objects in museums.[181]

A related philological model relates English words to specific Chinese counterparts.[182] In Bumbacher's work on exorcistic and apotropaic rituals in medieval China, he argues that the most commonly used Chinese word for talisman, *fu* 符, was not presented as an "isolated, single category of objects" in many early sources. By tracing the earliest examples from archaeological findings and transmitted sources, he decides to use "tally" as the broader category, which is comprised of subcategories such as *jie*-tally 節, *quan*-tally 券, *qi*-tally 契, and *fu*-tally 符.[183] This

[178] Anna Seidel, "Imperial Treasures amd Taoist Sacraments: Taoist Roots in the Apocrypha," in *Tantric and Taoist Studies*, ed. Michel Strickmann, vol. 2 (Brussels: Institut Belge des Hautes Etudes Chinoises, 1983), 292.
[179] Despeux, "Talismans and Sacred Diagrams," 498.
[180] Robert F. Campany, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth: A Translation and Study of Ge Hong's Traditions of Divine Transcendents* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 61.
[181] Shimazu Nobuharu 嶋津宣史, "Gofu to kamidana 護符と神棚," in *Nihon no gofu bunka* 日本の護符文化, ed. Chijiwa Itara 千々和到 (Tokyo: Kōbundō, 2010), 41–2.
[182] Despeux, "Talismans and Sacred Diagrams," 498.
[183] Stephan Peter Bumbacher, *Empowered Writing: Exorcistic and Apotropaic Rituals in Medieval China* (St. Petersburg, FL: Three Pines Press, 2012), 13–31.

approach is beneficial since it tries to reflect the emic complexities in various materials. However, the method suffers at least several shortcomings. First, it attempts to establish a one-to-one correspondence between two languages (i.e. classical Chinese and modern English) that have very different cultural and historical contexts, engendering more confusion than clarity. And within the Western culture itself, as discussed in Skemer's study on textual amulets in medieval Europe, the boundaries between "talisman," "amulet," and "charm" can be very fuzzy and are crossed quite frequently.[184]

Moreover, an overly literal obsession with specific words will exclude similar practices and concepts bearing no particular labels. As shown in chapter one, many practices were never named, though they shared significant similarities with the practice named *fu*.

Thus, as stated in the introduction, a new analytical framework, beyond the labels people used in primary sources, must be introduced. Under such a framework, in this chapter, I will discuss how talismanic objects were used based on their relationship to the human body.

Talismans and rituals concerning the making and using of such objects, it could be argued, responded to the fears, dangers, and anxieties faced by medieval Chinese people. They were made to exert influence on human bodies, whether on the individual or collective level. To achieve such bodily effects, talismans were designed to interact with bodies in different ways. Here, I group these different approaches to bodily engagement under three paradigms. In one paradigm, talismans were consumed and touched the body internally. In a second model, talismans were positioned on the body's boundaries. In the third approach, talismans were thrown away from the body.

[184] Don C. Skemer*, Binding Words: Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 6–12.

Internal Consumption: A Pharmaceutical Paradigm

In Webb Keane's discussion of spirit writing, he coins the idea of " 'transduction' across semiotic modalities," which happens when an invisible message from a deity is rendered into script and materialized. Once materialized, as with other ordinary artifacts, there are unlimited possibilities for people to play with the object. To Keane, apart from the divine sources of the words to be materialized, the very capacity of changing from one semiotic modality to another also contributes to the efficacy of the object.[185] In this section, following Keane's insight, I argue that the internally consumed talismans only work when properly ingested and assimilated. All prescribed procedures are designed to facilitate the process and ensure the talisman is broken down in the user's body and then becomes part of the user's body.

Examples of talismans to be consumed flourish in medieval sources, both transmitted and those unearthed from the "library cave" in Dunhuang. Here, I will first discuss an example we find in the *Great Dhāraṇī Scripture of the Avalokiteśvara of the Buddha's Uppermost Mind* (*Fodingxin guanshiyin pusa datuoluoni jing* 佛頂心觀世音菩薩大陀羅尼經), an extracanonical but popular work that is supposed to have been composed in mid-Tang (the 8th–9th century).[186] Notwithstanding that the scripture is an apocryphal work penned by Chinese hands, its popularity is attested by the dozens of copies in different physical formats and languages that we now know from different periods and geographical locations.[187] The scripture is comprised of three

[185] Webb Keane, "On Spirit Writing: Materialities of Language and the Religious Work of Transduction," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute,* n. s. 19 (2013): 1–17.
[186] For an introduction of the manuscripts of this text found in Dunhuang see Zheng A'cai 鄭阿財, "Dunhuang xieben *fodingxin guanshiyin pusa datuoluoni jing* yanjiu 敦煌寫本佛頂心觀世音菩薩大陀羅尼經研究," *Dunhuang xue* 敦煌學 23 (2001): 21–48.
[187] For different editions found in East Asia, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia, see Zheng A'cai, "*Fodingxin datuoluoni jing* zai hanzi wenhuaquan de chuanbu 佛頂心大陀羅尼經在漢字文化圈的傳佈," *Dunhuangxue jikan* 敦煌學輯刊 2015. 3: 1-19; Chen Minghua 陳明華, "Chaoxian shidai *fodingxin guanshiyin pusa datuoluoni jing*

fascicles (*juan* 卷). The first fascicle lays out the background story of the scripture. To rescue all sentient beings from suffering, the compassionate Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva implores the Buddha to teach a dhāraṇi. Upon the request, the Buddha promptly teaches the dhāraṇi. The scripture then, like all the translated dhāraṇi scriptures at that time, enumerates the endless benefits one can get from copying and reciting the dhāraṇi scripture.

However, the second fascicle shifts to more concrete and practical benefits. The dhāraṇi and its companion seal are dedicated to the treatment of obstructed labor and other serious illnesses. The most recommended therapeutic strategy is to consume a talisman inscribed with either the dhāraṇi prescribed by the Buddha or an esoteric character seal (*miziyin* 秘字印):

> Furthermore, if there are good men and good women, whose bodies suffer serious illnesses, lying in beds on the pillows, who cannot be cured by renowned medicine, [they] could write this dhāraṇi and esoteric character seal in vermillion, swallow them with sweet grass water in front of the Buddha ['s image], and the illness will be cured immediately.
> 又若復有善男子善女人, 或身遭重病, 經年累月在於床枕, 以名藥治之不差者, 可以朱砂書此陀羅尼及秘字印, 向佛前用茅香水吞之, 其病當即除差.
>
> If good men and good women develop chest pain and are not able to articulate [the pain], again write this dhāraṇi and esoteric character in vermillion, brew the dried root of *Aristolochia debilis* and fine *Cornus*, mix them and swallow them. For all the illnesses, there is no occasion that [the illness] cannot be cured.[188]
> 若諸善男子善女人, 卒患心痛, 不可申說者, 又以硃砂書此陀羅尼及秘字, 用青木香及好茱萸煎湯, 相和吞之, 一切疾患, 無不除差.

The above prescription manifests the basic structure of the pharmaceutical paradigm of applying talismans. On the one hand, the paradigm is no different from common medical practices prescribed by a medieval physician. Patients or their families are asked to brew certain types of

juanshouhua yanjiu 朝鮮時代佛頂心觀世音菩薩大陀羅尼經卷首畫研究," in *Mijiao wenwu zhengli yu yanjiu* 密教文物整理與研究, ed. Lü Jianfu 呂建福 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2014), 79–116.

[188] The transcription here follows P. 3916 with reference to Zheng's transcription.

herbal soups (sweet grass, *Aristolochia debilis*, and *Cornus*). For the talismans inscribed with dhāraṇi and esoteric character seal, the patients or their families should also follow detailed instructions on what kind of ink one should use to write the talisman, what kind of water should be drunk together with the talisman, etc.

On the other hand, what is unique in the process is that the instructions also pay attention to what religious techniques one should employ when taking the talisman. In the first recipe, the patient, though has been lying in bed for a long time, is asked to swallow the talisman in front of an image of the Buddha, who is the ultimate developer of the religious cure.

Employment of religious techniques is also evident in the beginning part of a section on talismans and seals that belongs to a larger compilation of spells, dhāraṇi spells, and mantic techniques found in Dunhuang. Instead of preparing herbal soup, the water that goes together with talismanic medicine is treated with a specific spell: "one should take the first portion of water from a well in the morning. If [one is] in a hurry, recite the *Lesser Heart Spell of Kuṇḍali* [over the water] twenty-one times. Consume the talisman with the enchanted water 取井華水，如急待用，用軍荼利小心呪即廿一遍，呪水下符."[189] Even though it is hard to pinpoint the content of the spell, there is another case that the particular spell used here is also recited over the water to purify one's clothes before he enters into visualization.[190] The instance here shows that the connection between water purification and the *Kuṇḍali Spell* in esoteric rituals was also well known by those who prescribe pharmaceutical talismans.

[189] S. 2498. For a thorogh analysis of the manuscript, see chapter 5.
[190] *Niansong jiehu fa putong zhubu* 念誦結護法普通諸部, Vajrabodhi 金剛智 (669-741), *T*. no. 904, 18: 902b3–4. "Every time one wants to recite, firstly one should take a bath and prepare a site according to the dharma, recite the *Lesser Heart Spell of Kuṇḍali* over water, and spray it on clothes 每欲誦先須洗浴依法結護, 誦軍荼利小心真言, 呪水灑散衣服上."

Apart from addressing common illnesses, talismans are specially applied to those discomforts caused by ghosts and demons. In the famous *Book on Pathogenesis* (*Fabing shu* 發病書) found in Dunhuang, talismans are assigned to patients based on the day their diseases start to develop:

> The Method for Conjecturing the Ghost of the Day on Which People Start to Feel Ill
> 推初得病日鬼法
> Divine the name of the ghost of the day on which men and women start to feel ill. If the symptoms [of the patient] correspond [to the later descriptions], people should make the image of the ghost and write talismans to suppress it, to swallow, and to post on the gate. All will be auspicious. The method for writing talismans is using vermillion and holding your breath when making them.
> 卜男女初得病日鬼名是誰. 若患狀相當者, 即作此鬼形並書符厭之並吞及著門戶上, 皆大吉. 書符法, 用朱沙, 閉氣作之.
> For people who get sick on the day of *zi*, the ghost [that causes the disease] is named Tianzei (Heavenly Thief). [It has] four tentacles and one foot, and it walks with its tongue sticking out. It makes people's limbs unable to raise, and [blood in] the five organs unable to flow. It causes edema and makes one's belly swollen, gives people hemiplegia and introduces sudden death. Suppress it with its image, and it will escape immediately. Write this talisman with vermillion, and the patient should swallow it. Also, write one and attach it to the gate, quickly, quickly in accordance with the statutes and ordinances.[191]
> 子日病者, 鬼名天賊, 四須一足而行, 吐舌, 使人四支不舉, 五臟不流, 水腫大腹, 半身不遂, 令人暴死. 以其形壓之, 即去. 此符朱書之, 病人吞之, 並書著門戶上, 急急如律令.

The short instruction here deals with three problems. First, it tries to get rid of the troublemaker, the ghost. The method here is to ask the healer to make an image of the ghost. The current Dunhuang manuscript (Fig. 3.1) actually leaves one-third of the paper blank. Judging from the gridline drawn by the copyist, it seems the copyist intentionally left the space for an illustrator to paint the images.

[191] The transcription here is based on P.2856 with reference to Chen Yuzhu 陳于柱, *Dunhuang Tulufan chutu fabing shu zhengli yanjiu* 敦煌吐魯番出土發病書整理研究 (Beijing: Kexue chuabanshe, 2017), 101.

After successfully suppressing the ghost, the instruction advises people to prepare two talismans. One will be internally consumed, and the other will be posted on the gate of the household. The purpose of consuming talismans is usually simple and direct. They are used mostly to destroy the pathogens arising from inside the human body, whether a physical discomfort or a mental disorder caused by ghosts. And accordingly, the talismanic object is used in a one-time manner like a disposable utensil or a course of antibiotics. Once the talisman is consumed, the ailment will disappear immediately. The efficacy of the talisman is thus used up. This kind of pharmaceutical talisman has a therapeutic rather than preventive function. However, since the illness is caused by a wandering ghost, it is also essential to prevent it from coming back again to the patient. Therefore, the second talisman has a preventive or apotropaic function which will be discussed in detail in the next paradigm.

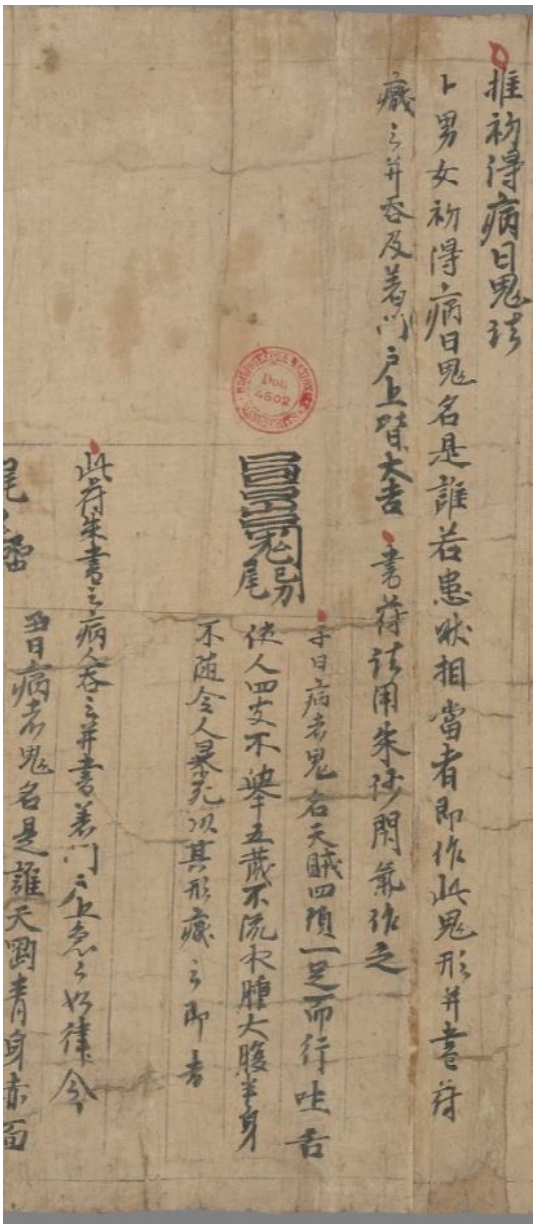


Fig. 3.1, Part of P. 2856

Even though "talismanic medicines" were widespread and even collected into state-sanctioned medical canons,[192] the therapeutic function of such talismans was not beyond dispute. A frequently cited passage in *Shishuo xinyu* (世說新語, *A New Account of Tales of the World*)

[192] For example, see Lin Fu-shih 林富士, "'Zhuyou' yixue yu daojiao de guanxi: yi *Shengji zonglu fujin men* weizhu de taolun '祝由'醫學與道教的關係: 以聖濟總錄·符禁門為主的討論," in *Xinyang, shijian yu wenhua tiaoshi* 信仰、實踐與文化調試, eds. Paul R. Katz, Shu-fen Liu, vol. 2 (Taipei: Academia Sinica, 2013), 403–48.

records conflicts between a Buddhist and a Daoist. In the story, the Daoist practitioner, who developed physical discomfort because of the consumption of too many talismans was cured by a Buddhist monk:

> Chi Yin believed in the Daoist religion with zealous devotion. Once he was suffering from an ailment in his bowels, which various Daoist physicians were unable to cure. Hearing that the Buddhist monk Yu Fakai had a good reputation, he went to consult him. After he had come, Fakai took his pulse and said, "What your Excellency is suffering from is caused by none other than an excess of zealous practice, that's all." Whereupon he mixed a dose of medicine with some hot water and gave it to him. No sooner had Chi taken his medicine than immediately he had an enormous bowel movement in which he evacuated several wads of paper, each as big as a fist. When he opened them up to look, they turned out to be the talismans he had ingested earlier.[193]
> 郗愔信道, 甚精勤. 常患腹內惡, 諸醫不可療, 聞于法開有名, 往迎之. 既來, 便脈云:"君侯所患，正是精進太過所致耳."合一劑湯與之. 一服, 即大下. 去數段許紙如拳大. 剖看, 乃先所服符也.

Since Yu Fakai was a Buddhist versed in doctrinal teachings, this humorous anecdote is frequently cited as an example of Buddhists' objection to the use of talismans. At the same time, Fakai was also a renowned physician.[194] The story shows how Buddhists used secular herbal recipes to cure a discomfort caused by Daoist talismans.

On the other hand, the anecdote also reveals some features of internally consumed talismans: they have to be written or drawn on a single piece of paper since people have to either swallow them entirely or consume them in ashes. But what should happen to the talismans after they are ingested? In the above story, what Chi Yin evacuated were wads of paper talismans, which indicates he swallowed them intact in the first place. Regardless, the talismans stayed

[193] The translation follows Richard B. Mather, *Shi-shuo Hsin-yü: A New Account of Tales of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976), 361, with some of my own changes.
[194] For the life of Yu Fakai, see his biography in *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳, Huijiao 慧皎 (497-554), *T*. no. 2059, 50: 350a13–b12.

whole even after he consumed them rather than being broken down and digested. In other words, the talismans were not successfully internalized. The narrative here betrays another crucial feature of this paradigm: the consumed talismanic object should transform and literally be incorporated—becoming part of the patient's body. Corresponding to Keane's theory noted above, the medical talisman, with semiotic symbols on them, is a materialization of the message from a deity or the Buddha. Once consumed, talismans have to go through a process of dematerialization to effectively release the drug's efficacy. Ideally, these ingredients should be absorbed and rematerialized again to become part of the human body.

Liminal Protector: An Armorized Paradigm

As Mary Douglas recognized more than half a century ago, the human body is a complicated structure that places a tremendous amount of anxiety over its external boundaries. Though as a structuralist, Douglas' focus is to consider the body as both a reflection and a symbolic medium of the larger social structure,[195] her emphasis on the vulnerability of the bodily exterior boundaries, skin or orifices, shows us why the boundaries need to be marked and guarded. Douglas' insight echoes early Chinese medical theories. The skin is considered as a site where exchanges between the inside and the outside take place rather than a rigid physical enclosure.[196] Negative forces are always able to penetrate the skin through the body's numerous orifices. Talismans are used to deal with this danger because, as agents with imbued power, apart

[195] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1966), 141–59.
[196] Shigehisa Kuriyama, "The Imagination of Winds and the Development of the Chinese Conception of the Body, " in *Body, Subject & Power in China*, eds. Angela Zito, Tani E. Barlow (University of Chicago Press, 1994), 23–41; John Hay, "Introduction," in *Boundaries in China*, ed. John Hay (London: Reaktion Books, 1994), 17–8.

from being utilized as divine medicine, they also act like protectors when they are deployed at bodily or spatial boundaries.

As early as the third and fourth centuries, Daoist masters were aware of boundary protection from various talismans. In the "Chapter on Climbing and Wading" (*Dengshe pian* 登涉篇) of the *Master Who Embraces Simplicity* (*Baopu zi*, 抱朴子), Ge Hong 葛洪 (283–343) provided Daoist practitioners who wish to enter mountains and forests with two kinds of talismans: one for the physical protection of their bodies, one for the domestic protection of their hermitages from beasts and ghosts in the wild. The talismans are either worn on bodies or attached to the gates, pillars, or the four quarters of hermitic buildings. [197] For Master Ge, Daoist practitioners at that time had to explore the wilderness whether to practice the Dao, make elixir, find unique ingredients, or just run away from mundane life and chaos. Thus, the talismans prescribed by him were for professional Daoist practitioners only. [198] And these protector-talismans' coverage not only applied to the body of the practitioner but also to his private space. For example, the first and last five talismans given in the chapter are all called Lord Lao's Talismans for Entering Mountains (*Laojun rushan fu*,老君入山符). When explaining how one could make and use them, Master Ge patiently listed where these talismans, which he said should be drawn on peach-wood plaques in vermillion, can be displayed above the door, at the four sides and four quarters of the hermitage, at strategic points beside the pathways, and also on beams and pillars in the house.[199] Talismans deployed this way serve as markers of boundaries

[197] *Baopu zi*, Ge Hong (283-343), in *Baopu zi neipian jiaoshi* 抱朴子內篇校釋, ed. Wang Ming 王明 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 309–11; James R. Ware, trans., *Alchemy, Medicine, Religion in the China of A.D. 320: The Nei p'ien of Ko Hung (Pao-p'u tzu)* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1967), 295–300.
[198] For a more detailed review on how Ge Hong understood talismans, see Campany, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth*, 61–9.
[199] James R. Ware, trans., *Alchemy, Medicine, Religion*, 296.

denoting the realm that negative forces should not enter. Moreover, they function as armor, guarding what lies within the boundaries.

However, the protection provided by Master Ge was also indispensable for the non-professional masses in addressing much broader issues in daily life. Translated sources show that Buddhists both in India and China were no strangers to using talismans to protect bodies as well as extension of bodies such as beds, bedrooms, households, neighbourhoods, and even cities. In one of the most important Mahāyāna scriptures translated by Xuanzang 玄奘 during the mid-seventh century, *The Large Sūtra on Perfect Wisdom* (*Da bore boluomi jing* 大般若波羅蜜經, Skt. *Mahāprajñāpāramitā sūtra*), the spell that encapsulates the voluminous scripture is a powerful choice for people to protect themselves:

> Kauśika! If good men and good women fear enemies, vicious beasts, calamities and disasters, sorcery and imprecation, illnesses and plagues, poisons, and spells, etc., they should write the *Great King of Pāramitā Incantation*, no matter how many copies, and store it/them inside a fragrant sachet and place it in a jewelled tube, always keeping it upon their bodies to revere it and make offerings. [Then], all the horrible things will themselves be extinguished. It is because the heavenly dragons, demons, and deities are always guarding it.[200]
> 憍尸迦! 若善男子, 善女人等怖畏怨家, 惡獸, 災横, 厭禱, 疾疫, 毒藥, 呪等, 應書般若波羅蜜多大神呪王, 隨多少分, 香囊盛貯, 置寶筩中, 恒隨逐身恭敬供養, 諸怖畏事皆自消除, 天龍, 鬼神常守衛故.

Here, the jewelled tube containing the *Pāramitā Incantation* acts like a shield, protecting people who carry it on their bodies from all these disasters and calamities. Such protective power can also be extended to a group of people or even the whole city.[201] However, in the same sūtra, the Buddha explains the mechanism behind the efficacious object in a different way. Rather than

[200] *Da bore boluomi jing* 大般若波羅蜜經, trans. Xuanzang 玄奘 (602-664), *T*. no. 220, 5: 570b21–6.
[201] *Da bore boluomi jing*, *T*. no. 220, 5: 570b: 7–11.

simply serving as a defensive shield that keeps people from negative influence, the object also acts like a sceptre, which is able to summon all supreme beings to worship and praise itself. In this way, they will not allow the object itself "to be impeded by difficulties ."[202] Hence, for people who carry the object, the consideration of their own safety is only secondary to and a byproduct of the security of the object.

Another aspect of employing such objects is that people do not simply carry or wear them. Other devotional actions, such as worshipping, recitation, making offerings are usually practiced at the same time. In his perusal of pre-Tang Buddhist miracle tales, Robert F. Campany spots one case where a Buddhist scripture was used as a protective talisman.[203] The suspenseful story was originally part of Wang Yan's 王琰 *Signs from the Unseen Realm* (*Mingxiang ji* 冥祥記) and is now survives in the Buddhist encyclopedia *Fayuan zhulin* (法苑珠林, *A Grove of Pearls from the Garden of the Dharma*). [204] According to the story, the protagonist, Xing Huaiming 邢懷明, and his superior, Zhu Xiuzhi 朱修之 were in critical condition because of a military defeat. Since they were planning for a retreat, they had to send a spy to scout for the presence of their enemy. When the spy came back several days later before dawn, he was able to

[202] *Da bore boluomi jing*, *T*. no. 220, 5: 570b: 11–5. "The reason is that the dwelling place of a *Great King of Pāramitā Incantations* like this is protected forever by the four heavenly kings until the heaven of the most rarefied form and the various dragons and Asuras of the one billion worlds and other unmeasurable, uncountable, and limitless worlds of ten directions. [They] worship it with reverence, respect and praise it, and do not allow the Great King of Pāramitā Incantations to be impeded by difficulties 如是般若波羅蜜多大神呪王隨所住處, 為此三千大千世界及餘十方無量無數無邊世界所有四大王眾天乃至色究竟天并諸龍神, 阿素洛等常來守護, 恭敬供養, 尊重讚歎, 不令般若波羅蜜多大神呪王有留難故."

[203] Robert F. Campany, "Notes on the Devotional Uses and Symbolic Functions of *Sūtra* Texts as Depicted in Early Chinese Buddhist Miracle Tales and Hagiographies," *Journal of the International Association for Buddhist Studies* 14, no. 1 (1991): 37–40. His recent paper reiterates this piece of material and considers it as an important example of how the *Lotus Sūtra* was received by medieval Chinese. See his "Miracle Tales as Scripture Reception: A Case Study Involving the Lotus Sutra in China, 370–750 CE," *Early Medieval China* 24 (2018): 43–4.

[204] For a discussion of the nature of *Fayuan zhulin*, see Stephen F. Teiser, "T'ang Buddhist Encyclopedias: An Introduction to *Fayuan chu-lin* and *Chu-ching yao-chi*," *T'ang Studies* 3 (1985): 109–28; Alexander Ong Hsu, "Practices of Scriptural Economy: Compiling and Copying a Seventh-Century Chinese Buddhist Anthology" (PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2018).

spot Huaiming and his band's location by a bright light. The light went out when the spy finally arrived. Trying to make sense of the miracle, Huaiming offered an explanation:

> Huaiming had previously been observant of the Dharma, and ever since the beginning of the campaign, he had constantly carried a copy of the *Guanshiyin Sūtra* on his head and had recited it without cease. That night, too, he had been quietly chanting it, so everyone suspected [the event must be due to] the divine power of this sūtra. Because of this, they together maintained prayerful minds, and thus they were able to escape.[205]
> 懷明先奉法, 自征後, 頭上恆戴觀世音經, 轉讀不廢. 爾夕亦暗誦, 咸疑是經神力. 於是常共祈心, 遂以得免.

In his interpretation of the tale, Campany contends that the scripture here was not only utilized as a talisman but also was considered as the symbolic equivalent of the bodhisattva or his image. Furthermore, drawing evidence from both Sanskrit manuscripts and the translated *Lotus Sūtra*, he points out that the depiction of putting a sūtra on one's head or shoulder can be either figurative or literal. [206] Other translated sources, on the other hand, make it very clear that a scriptural talisman should be literally placed upon the head. A later *Dhāraṇī Sūtra of Bodhisattva Maricī* (*Moli zhitian pusa tuoluoni jing* 摩利支天菩薩陀羅尼經) translated by Amoghavajra (Bukong 不空, 705–774), directs that the dhāraṇī be written down and put into one's hair knot or clothes.[207] At the same time, both Huaiming's miracle and Maricī's dhāraṇī also clearly reveal that the protection was conferred partly due to diligent recitation and praying.

Not only laypersons but monks belonging to the monastic community also carried scripture in their robes to protect themselves. In the hagiography of Master Sandao 三刀 (Three

[205] The translation here mainly follows Campany's, with some my own minor changes. For the translation of the whole story of Huaiming and its textual history, see Robert F. Campany, *Sighs from the Unseen Realm: Buddhist Miracle Tales from Early Medieval China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2012), 217–8.
[206] Campany, "Notes on the Devotional Uses", 38–9.
[207] *Moli zhitian pusa tuoluoni jing* 摩利支天菩薩陀羅尼經, trans. Amoghavajra (Bukong 不空, 705–774), *T*. no. 1255A, 21: 260a19–21.

Gouges, fl. 722), whose dharma name probably comes from the most terrifying episode of his life, a *Diamond Sūtra* stored in a bamboo tube saved him from being decapitated. According to the tenth-century *Biographies of Eminent Monks Compiled in Song Dynasty* (*Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳), Sandao was dedicated to renunciation when he was very young. He always recited the *Diamond Sūtra* and stored one copy in a bamboo tube and carried it with him. Once, when forced to serve in the army, he deserted due to his compassionate nature. Later, he was captured and sentenced to death by his commander's officer. When he was about to be beheaded, the executioner tried three times, but every time the executioner's blade broke. The commander then inquired and learned about the tube containing the scripture. So, the general ordered the field to be searched and found the sūtra-tube. It was examined closely, and there were three gouges found on the tube.[208] The miraculous story of Sandao is similar to Huaiming's treatment of the *Guanshiyin Sūtra.* He not only carried the text as a talisman but consistently recited it. However, the protection Sandao attained is more concrete. Instead of saving him from peril in a general sense, the biography makes it clear the specific way the talismanic sūtra-tube worked. It served passively as a coat of mail, protecting the bearer by acting as a surrogate and absorbing the blows of the axe. Compared to metal armor worn by humans, the talismanic tube actually worked remotely. Even though the tube was not with Sandao's body when he was about to be executed, the protective connection has already been formed due to longtime contact between the person and the object.

Similar stories are found across the Buddhist world. In the *Dhāraṇī Incantation of the Wish-Fulfilling with Great Freedom* (*Suiqiu jide dazizai tuoluoni shenzhou jing* 随求即得大自

[208] *Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳, Zanning 贊寧 (919–1001), *T*. no. 2061, 50: 865c–886a; For the discussion of this story and its relation to the recitation of the *Diamond Sūtra*, see Yün-hua Jan, "The Power of Recitation: An Unstudied Aspect of Chinese Buddhism," *Studi Storico Religiosi* 1 (1977): 296–7.

在陀罗尼神咒经), when a king named Brahmadāna of Uddyana sentenced a man to death, the executioner's sword burst into fire and then scattered into ashes.[209] What makes this happen is that the guilty man wore the dhāraṇī on his right arm. The story is also part of the Sanskrit *Pañcarakṣā*. In a manuscript surviving in Nepal, the guilty man not only wore the spell on his wrist but also stared at it and chanted the dhāraṇī vocally when he was about to be executed.[210] Stories like these travelled across geographical and linguistic barriers and reinforced the idea that a talisman inscribed with words from the Buddha would protect not only a devout monk but also a guilty layperson. At the same time, they also show that talismans worn on the body usually work in companion with other practices. Having a devoted mind, worshipping piously, reciting consistently, and even staring at the talisman help to protect the carrier.

Apart from functioning as passive armor and repelling attacks from the outside, sometimes the talismanic sūtra also are more active. In a miracle tale from the abovementioned *Great Dhāraṇī Scripture of the Avalokiteśvara of the Buddha's Uppermost Mind*, a young śrāmaṇera was saved by the scripture. The young lad was sent by his abbot to collect some debt from an officer who was transferred to another region. The officer invited the monk to go with him and promised to pay the debt when they arrived. However, on the boat to the destination, the officer suddenly raised an evil thought and planned not to repay the monastery's money. He ordered his retinue to put the monk in a bag and throw him in the deep pond. Surprisingly, the poor monk, who was thrown into the water, was not harmed at all because of his devotion to the scripture:

[209] Paul Copp, *The Body Incantatory: Spells and the Ritual Imagination in Medieval Chinese Buddhism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 70.
[210] Todd T. Lewis, *Popular Buddhist Texts from Nepal: Narratives and Rituals of Newar Buddhism* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2000), 139.

> As this monk, since he was seven years old, left his family to follow his master, and he always held this *Dhāraṇī Scripture of the Buddha's Uppermost Mind.* Even more, [he] made offerings without a break, [the scripture] had never left his hands. [He] took and recited [the scripture] wherever he abided. The officer, having made the killing, could not harm even a single hair [of the monk]. [The monk] only felt his own body was carried by someone in the air as if walking in a dark room. [The monk was carried] to the county of Prefecture Huai directly and waited for the officer to come.
> 緣這和尚, 自從七歲以來, 隨師出家, 常持此佛頂心陀羅尼經, 兼以供養不闕, 自不曾離手, 所在處, 將行轉念. 既此官人致煞也, 殊不損一毫毛, 只覺自己身被箇人扶在虛空中, 如行闇室, 直至懷州縣中, 專待此官人到上.

The officer was astonished to see the monk in the hall.

> Then [he] asked the monk: "I don't know what magical skills you have." The śrāmaṇera said in detail that he had three fascicles of *Dhāraṇī Scripture of the Buddha's Uppermost Mind* in his clothes. It empowered merits, [but the benefits] cannot be laid out entirely. Having heard the words, the officer prostrated and confessed. Then he requested the scripture from the monk, spent his own money to summon people to the front of the hall to copy one thousand copies. [He] put [the copies] in a ritual site and made offerings of incense and flowers daily. Later, a royal edict promoted him to the governor of Prefecture Huai. Thus, [we] know the merits of this scripture is immeasurable and boundless, [one should] have faith in it with enjoyments and hold it on the head and practice it.
> 乃問和尚曰: "不審和尚有何法術?"此沙彌具說: "衣服內有佛頂心陀羅尼經三卷, 加備功德，不可具述." 此官人聞語, 頂禮懺悔, 便於和尚邊請本, 破自己料錢, 喚人只向廳前, 抄寫一千卷置道場內, 日以香花供養. 後敕家（加）改任懷州刺史, 故知此經功德無量無邊, 歡喜信受, 頂戴奉行. [211]

In this story, the young śrāmaṇera not only carried the text with him but also recited it all the time and constantly made offerings to it. Also, the scripture is not manifested as a passive defence shield but an active agent. It pulled the poor lad out of the water and took him to fly to another location.

Not only the most influential Mahāyāna scriptures, such as the *Lotus*, the *Diamond* and the *Prajñāpāramitā,* were utilized as shields. Indigenous apocryphal texts also offered protection. The *Consecration Sūtra* (*Guanding jing* 灌頂經) gives a list of twenty-five benign

[211] The transcription here follows P. 3916 with reference to Zheng's transcription.

deities, as noted in chapter two. Each deity has its own responsibility. Once their names are written down on a piece of paper together and carried by someone, one will get unlimited benefits ranging from fending off swords and arrows to ousting evil spirits residing in toilets.[212]

As opposed to relying on the power of deities whose names are inscribed on a piece of paper, other examples of talismans show that reciting and carrying copies of apocryphal texts can protect people. *Scripture of the Transformations of Fotutang* (*Fotutang suohua jing* 佛圖棠所化經) found in Dunhuang emphasizes its own power. According to this apocryphal text, an important episode happened on the first day of the first month of the fourth year of the Heping 和平 era (463). Liu Qizhi 劉起之 of Prefecture Henei 河內郡 and other woodcutters entered mountains to cut woods. After a gust of wind, they saw a swan transforming itself into an old man. The old man said he was Fotutang, and then he informed the woodcutters of a coming fatal plague. After explaining the cause of the disaster, he prescribed several recipes to survive the plague:

> You [should] make merits in a hurry, [then you] will be able to survive. Three or five households, in accordance with the size of a village, [should] make cakes of dragon, tiger, and snake together. People should each take and eat seven, read the scripture and practice the path for one day and one night. Then one is able to survive. For those who disrespect and do not believe and receive [this scripture], his longevity will be ended, and evil will be incurred, […] must happen. There will be a serious illness for another seven or eight months, it is considered to be difficult to survive. Men or women, adults or children, should each write one, wrap and keep it in sleeve, the […] ghost will not approach people, the misfortunate spirit will not arrive. One's lifespan will be elongated, and one will be able to escape from this suffering.[213]

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[212] *Guanding jing* 灌頂經, *T*. no. 1331, 21: 503a18–b2. Also see Michel Strickmann, "The Consecration Sūtra: A Buddhist Book of Spells," in *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha*, ed. Robert E. Buswell Jr. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), 75–118.

[213] For an introduction and a transcript of this manuscript, see Tai Huili 邰惠莉, "Dunhuang xieben Fotucheng suohua jing chutan 敦煌寫本《佛圖澄所化經》初探," *Dunhuang yanjiu* 敦煌研究 1998. 4: 96–100.

汝急作福, 可得度世. 三家五家, 隨村大小, 共作龍虎舌(蛇)餅, 人各持七枚食之. 一日一夜轉經行道, 可得度世. 期(其)誹謗不信受者, 受(壽)終致惡, 必作口, 病厄右(又)七月八月, 想難可度世. 男女大小, 各寫一通, 仆（袱）著肘後, 口鬼不來近人, 殃精不至, 壽命得長, 得離此苦.

It seems for the incoming pandemic, people were instructed to make and eat specific kinds of pancakes and read the scripture and practice the path for one day and one night. However, the author of the scripture also recognized that the pandemic would not go away in twenty-four hours. So in order to protect people, no matter men or women, old or young, the scripture asks people to write one copy and carry it as a protective talisman.

Carrying a scriptural talisman is also an expedient device for those who cannot write nor recite. In *Scripture on Saving and Protecting Body and Life* (*Jiuhu shenming jing* 救護身命經), a text that has long been identified as a suspicious scripture by meticulous Buddhist bibliographers since the late sixth century, one can still enjoy the marvellous benefits by simply carrying it in his clothes:

> […] in a great fire, or in a great flood, they should constantly recite this scripture. [By doing so they] will be able to completely eliminate [these misfortunes]. Why is it so? This is because the scripture has a great authoritative and divine power, and thus, [one] should constantly read it. If one is not able to read it, [one] should carry it in the bosom. Those who receive and uphold this scripture devoutly will then hold the divine power of the buddhas of the past, present, and future. […]
> ……若在大火中, 若在大水中, 常當讀誦是經, 能悉斷除. 何以故? 此經有大威神力, 故常讀之. 若不能讀者, 但當着懷中. 致心受持是經者, 則持過去未来現在諸佛神力.……[214]

[214] There are several versions of this scripture. See Masuo Shin'ichirō, "*Kugo shinmyō kyō* no denpa to 'enmi kodoku': Tonko, Chōsen no denpon to nanatsu-dera hon o megutte 救護身命経の伝播と厭魅蠱毒: 敦煌, 朝鮮の傳本と七寺本をめぐって," in *Nanatsu-dera koitsu kyōten kenkyū soshō* 七寺古逸経典研究叢書, vol.2, ed. Ochiai Toshinori 落合俊典 (Tokyo: Daitō shuppansha, 1996), 815–51. Here, the Chinese text follows Dunhuang manuscript P.2340 in Pelliot collection. For the translation, I mainly follow Bryan Lowe's. However, here I present a different opinion on the syntax of the last two sentences. For Lowe's translation, see Bryan D. Lowe, "The *Scripture on Saving and Protecting Body and Life*: An Introduction and Translation," *Journal of Chinese Buddhist Studies* 27 (2014): 19–29.

A Daoist parallel also survives both in the library cave and as a transmitted canonical text, which shows the idea of scripture as talisman was shared by a broad spectrum of religious practitioners.[215]

Furthermore, the content and structure of the *Scripture of the Transformations of Fotutang* are closely related to other three apocryphal texts found in Dunhuang, the *New Bodhisattva Scripture* (*Xin pusa jing* 新菩薩經), *Scripture for the Promotion of Kindness* (*Quanshan jing* 勸善經), and *Scripture for Saving Sentient Beings from Sufferings* (*Jiuzhu zhongsheng kunan jing* 救諸眾生苦難經). In these three scriptures, the recommended way to survive the apocalypse is also to copy the scriptures themselves. However, instead of asking people to carry the copy, all of them instruct the copy to be posted on house gates.[216] A copy that juxtaposed both the *New Bodhisattva Scripture* and the *Scripture for Saving Sentient Beings from Sufferings* preserved in Kyoto University is recently catalogued by Takata Tokio 高田時雄. The copy bears a colophon that shows it was made and posted on a household gate on the 21st day of the seventh month of the fifth year of the Qiande 乾德 era (923) to combat a plague. As Tataka observes, another piece of paper is also pasted to the back of the heavily stained copy to

[215] For the Daoist version, see Kristofer Schipper, Franciscus Verellen, eds., *The Taoist Canon: A Historical Companion to The Daozang* (University of Chicago Press, 2004): 246–7.

[216] For a transcription of these texts, see Yuankong 圓空, "*Xin pusa jing*, *quanshan jing*, *jiu zhuzhongsheng kunan jing* jiaolu jiqi liuchuan beijing zhi tantao 新菩薩經, 勸善經, 救諸眾生苦難經校錄及其流傳背景之探討," *Dunhuang yanjiu* 敦煌研究 1992. 2: 51–62. For a comprehensive introduction to manuscripts of them, see Zhang Xiaoyan 張小艷, "Dunhuang ben *xin pusa jing*, *quanshan jing*, *jiu zhuzhongsheng kunan jing canjuan zhuihe yanjiu* 敦煌本新菩薩經, 勸善經, 救諸眾生苦難經," *Fudan xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* 復旦學報 (社會科學版) 2015. 6: 12–9. Also see Fang Ling, "Sūtras apocryphes et maladie," in *Médecine, religion et société dans la Chine médiévale: étude de manuscrits chinois de Dunhuang et de Turfan*, ed. Catherine Despeux (Paris: Collège de France, Institut des hautes études chinoises, 2010), 1001–37; Ruifeng Chen, "The Relationship between Three Short Indigenous Chinese Buddhist Scriptures and the Textual Practices Found in their Dunhuang Manuscript Colophons," *T'oung Pao* 106 (2020): 552–601.

reinforce it. The unique physical features suggest the copy might have been in actual use.[217] Similarly, in the *Consecration Sūtra*, the Buddha told Brahmacārin that the benign deities not only protect the body of an individual, they also secure the safety of palaces, houses, and gates.[218] All the evidence shows that the armorized paradigm is shared by indigenously compiled Daoist texts, translated Buddhist sūtra, and Buddhist apocryphal texts compiled by medieval Chinese people.

If we go back to the Chinese concept of the human body, the gate of a household is the orifices on the skin. Like human skin, the gates, the walls, and the fences are boundaries that can be frequently broken by ghosts, plagues, and spirits. The armorized talismans, once properly deployed, will mark and secure the boundaries, making them unbreakable.

Cast Externally: A Weaponized Paradigm

Talismans can also be deployed by being cast or thrown away from the human body. In this way, the talismans act like a spear to attack the undesirable situation. There are four talismans found in the *Scripture of the Rites of the Vajra-being of Impure Traces for Binding the Hundred Transformations* (*Huiji jingang jin baibianfa jing* 穢跡金剛禁百變法經, *Impure Traces* hereafter) that are instructed to be cast. Among them, two are for fire, one for flood, and one for storm. One of the talismans against the fire is described as follows:

> When a big fire starts, write the talisman and throw it into the fire, recite the spell for 108 times over it. In a short while, the fire will extinguish by itself. [219]

[217] Takata Tokio 高田時雄, "Jingdu daxue zonghe bowuguan suocang Dunhuang yishu jianjie 京都大學綜合博物館所藏敦煌遺書簡介," *Fojiao wenxian yanjiu* 佛教文獻研究 3 (2019): 29–30.
[218] *Guanding jing*, *T*. 21: 502c10.
[219] *Huiji jingang jin baibianfa jing* 穢跡金剛禁百變法經, *T*. no. 1229, 21: 161a1–4.

有大火災起者, 書符擲一枚呪一百八遍, 向火中須臾災自滅.



The remaining three talismans follow the same model: drawing a talisman, throwing it into the outside danger, and reciting a spell. After the model is performed, the disaster will be exterminated.

Even though the instructions of all four talismans do not specify whether the talisman should be written on paper or other media, other talismans to be ingested in the same section imply that all of them are paper-based. Related to this, in all the four talismans, the paper talismans are supposed to be consumed by the objects they are directed to. In the first two cases, paper talismans will definitely be burned into ashes in the fire. In the third and fourth cases, the talismans will inevitably be dissolved into water. This is quite similar to the first pharmaceutical paradigm, where the talisman must be consumed and transformed into another material form within the human body. Here, the cast talisman must also change the form, transduces the power from the talisman itself to its object, either a wildfire or a disastrous flood.

Another feature of the four talismans is that they are all used in companion with a verbal spell. The instruction is not clear whether the spell is used to consecrate the talisman or only recited after the talisman is thrown away.

In another example, a written Dhāraṇī spell serves to empower talismans of this paradigm. In the Jingyun 景雲 (710–712) era of the Tang Dynasty, responding to Ruizong's 睿

宗 (662–716) request for precipitation, Fazang 法藏 (638–715) mentioned an esoteric sūtra named *Wish Fulfilling* (*Suiqiu* 隨求). He told the emperor that after a ritual site was prepared and priests wrote down the dhāraṇī on a piece of paper, the dhāraṇī talisman should be thrown into a dragon pond, and the snow would fall immediately.[220] Chen Jinhua compares this episode with the Daoist ritual of *toujian* 投簡 (hurling strips) and believes there is a connection between the two.[221] However, the crucial difference between the two is that in the Daoist cases, the strips were usually made of gold, jade or wood and served as media of a message specially composed for the occasion. However, Fazang's approach was different. The dhāraṇī was part of a widely circulated scripture. It was not composed for a single occasion.

It seems both the talismans in the *Impure Traces* and Fazang's dhāraṇī talisman were inspired by the practice of throwing enchanted mustard seeds, a common practice in esoteric rituals. In the *Dhāraṇī Sūtra of the Adorned Site of Bodhi* (*Putichang zhuangyan tuoluoni jing* 菩提場莊嚴陀羅尼經), after reciting the dhāraṇī over white mustard seeds 1,000 times, these seeds can be thrown to exert power on other objects:

> If [one] takes the [enchanted] white mustard seeds and throws them in the fire, the fire will not burn.
> 若取白芥子擲於火中, 火不能燒.
> If [the seeds] are thrown in rives, the water will not flow.
> 擲於江河水即不流.
> If there is a drought, throw [the seeds] in a dragon pond, it will immediately rain heavily.
> 若天旱時擲於龍池, 即降大雨.
> If one throws [the seeds] in the air during a storm, the heavy storm will stop.[222]
> 若暴雨時擲於空中, 極暴雨止息.

[220] *Datang da jianfu si gu dade kangzang fangshi zhibei* 大唐大薦福寺故大德康藏法師之碑, Choe Chiwon 崔致遠 (b. 856), *T*. no. 2054, 50: 284b16–21.
[221] Jinhua Chen, "Fazang (643-712): The Holy Man," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 28, no. 1 (2005): 53–4.
[222] *Putichang zhuangyan tuoluoni jing* 菩提場莊嚴陀羅尼經, trans. Amoghavajra, *T*. no. 1008, 19: 673c5–6, 13–4.

The powerful seeds here are employed to cease the fire, cut the water, beg for rain, and stop the storm. The similarity in functions indicates that the paradigm discussed in this section was probably heavily influenced by esoteric rituals.

Apart from being written, specially made seals could also produce such paper talismans. In *Nāgājuna's Treatise on the Five Sciences* (龍樹五明論 *Longshu wuming lun*),[223] a Vajra Seal is beneficial for those who wish to travel by sail:

> If someone wants to hold the Vajra Seal, one should be purified and keep abstinence for one hundred days, then take the inner part of the wood of a jujube tree and carve [into a square] measuring two *cun*…For those who travel over seas and ride waves, stamp the seal on a piece of paper, and throw [the stamped talisman] into the water, it will defeat all aquatic spirits and dragons.[224]
> 若人持金剛杵印者。潔淨齋戒百日。取棗心方二寸刻之……越海淩波者。以印印紙上。擲著水中。[治]一切水精蛟龍。

The usage and function of these talismans still resemble those of the mustard seeds. Coincidentally, vajra, as a ritual instrument, was also used to consecrate mustard seeds by stamping them. In a ritual manual translated by Bodhiruci 菩提流志, one step of constructing a ritual site is to use the vajra to stamp the silver plate holding mustard seeds.[225] It seems the Chinese compiler of the apocryphal Nāgājuna's Treatise on the Five Sciences was inspired by

[223] Also see Stuart H. Young, *Conceiving the Indian Buddhist Patriarchs in China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015), 167–77.
[224] *Longshu wuming lun* 龍樹五明論, *T*. no. 1420, 21: 966b23–7.
[225] "Hold the vajra on one's left hand and stamp it over the mustard seeds on the silver plate 左手執金剛杵, 印銀盤內白芥子." See *Yizi foding lunwang jing* 一字佛頂輪王經, trans. Putiliuzhi 菩提流志 (Bodhiruci, d. 727), *T*. no. 951, 19: 249b22.

such tradition of using a vajra to stamp (*yin* 印 as a verb) on objects and invented two stamps (*yin* 印 as a noun) named the Vajra Seal (Fig. 3.2).

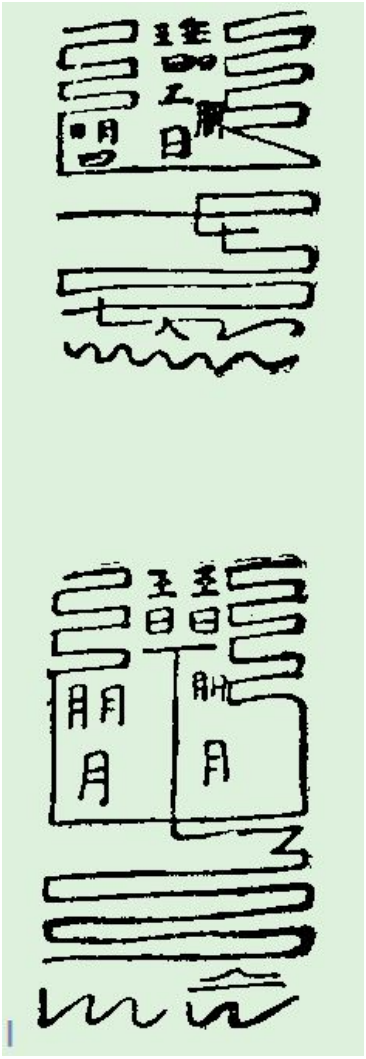


Fig. 3.2 The Vajra Seal from *Nāgājuna's Treatise on the Five Sciences*

Meanwhile, since the vajra now has been transformed into an actual seal, it then works on paper rather than mustard seeds.

Compared with writing and drawing, the process of stamping is more straightforward, more convenient, and easily repeated. There is not much room left for the maker to manipulate the process. Then the manipulation and channeling of efficacy are moved forward. Efficacy can

be maintained in the process of printing as long as ritualized elements surrounding writing or drawing are performed.

Paradigms Intertwined

The above discussion of different paradigms for talismanic usage is admittedly ideal, and it cannot cover all talismanic practices by creative medieval minds. Indeed, many examples of deploying talismans cross the bodily boundaries my system proposes. Some instructions state that a talisman can either be swallowed or worn or both at the same time. Some talismans not only help to cure internal disorders but also protect the bearer's resident by warding off evil spirits. Moreover, when facing the same danger, different paradigms and materials are utilized together to deal with the problem. To confront the risks of travelling by sea, a stamped talisman will be used to pacify aquatic spirits as seen above. At the same time, a golden foil inscribed with a dhāraṇī spell found in a shipwreck in Indonesia is suspected to have been a talisman carried by a traveller on the sea,[226] showing the armorized paradigm also was at work. No matter how a talisman is designed or used, the paradigms analyzed above show ways to channel divine power either to infuse into the human body, or to form an armored coat over the human body and its extensions, or to exert influence over an external threat whom the subject wants to fight against.

However, all the paradigms discussed in this chapter deal with the dangers, fears, and anxieties faced by the living. What about those who have already gone to the other realm? Do they also seek benefits from talismanic objects? Are talismans believed to protect the dead?

[226] Arlo Griffiths, "Written Traces of the Buddhist Past: Mantras and Dhāraṇīs in Indonesian Inscriptions," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 77, no.1 (2014): 157–9.

To answer these questions, I will turn to look at the dhāraṇī talismans inserted into bracelets or necklaces found in various medieval tombs.[227] It seems that most dhāraṇīs used for this purpose were connected to the *Dhāraṇī Incantation of the Wish-Fulfilling with Great Freedom*.[228] According to the edition translated by Maṇicintana 寶思惟 in mid-Tang, the dhāraṇī spell is supposed to be written down and worn on neck or arm. In this way, different dragons, buddhas, bodhisattvas, devas, etc., will come to protect the bearer. As the Buddha elaborates that wearing the dhāraṇī talisman leads to all the benefits one can imagine, ranging from curing a serious illness to begetting a son for a sonless king. But why would a dead person be bothered by these benefits? The Buddha finally reveals this to us:

> One who writes and carries it in accordance with the method will always get serenity and happiness. All things undertaken will be accomplished. In this lifetime, one will get happiness; for the afterlife, one will be reborn in heaven, and all the hindrances of harmful behavior will be cleansed entirely.[229]
> 能如法書寫持帶之者, 常得安樂, 所為之事皆得成就, 現世受樂後生天上, 所有罪障悉得消滅.

In the next chapter, I will turn to consider the relationship between this-worldly and other-worldly benefits of talismans as indicated in the Buddha's teaching.

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[227] For a list of archaeological findings of such objects, see Huang Yangxing 黃陽興, "Luelun tangsong shiqi de suiqiu xinyang (shang) 略論唐宋時代的隨求信仰(上) ," *Pumen xuebao* 普門學報 34 (2006): 125–54; "Luelun tangsong shiqi de suiqiu xinyang (xia) 略論唐宋時代的隨求信仰(下) ," *Pumen xuebao* 普門學報 35 (2006): 1–15.
[228] Huo Wei 霍巍, "Tangsong muzang chutu tuoluoni jingzhou jiqi minjian xinyang 唐宋墓葬出土陀罗尼经咒及其民间信仰," *Kaogu* 考古 2011. 5: 81–93.
[229] *Suiqiu jide dazizai tuoluoni shenzhou jing* 随求即得大自在陀罗尼神咒经, trans. Baosiwei 寶思惟 (*Maṇicintana, d. 720), *T*. no. 1154, 20: 642a26–9.

Chapter Four

Beyond This-worldly or Other-worldly: Benefits of Using a Talisman in Medieval China

Introduction

Even today, people use talismans for benefits. To many, the expected results are tangible and this-worldly, ranging from recovery from a severe illness to ensuring safe driving. Such impulses were not alien to people in medieval China. Living in an era with inadequate medical care and significantly lower life expectancy, they resorted to many techniques to achieve all Vulcans desire: to live long and prosper. Talismans were among their options. However, did they use these consecrated objects exclusively to address their daily difficulties? Or did they have a different perception of benefits? Furthermore, how does this perception contribute to our understanding of religions in medieval China? In this chapter, I will use both unearthed manuscripts and transmitted canonical texts to reveal how benefits were begotten and understood.

As discussed in the introductory chapter and chapter one, medieval Buddhist communities entertained different positions towards talismans. These multivalent positions symbiotically coexisted, engendering diverse strategies and knowledge about developing Buddhist talismans. But how did they understand the benefits of deploying talismans? In this chapter, I choose two types of text as our focus. One comes from an anonymous ritualist from Dunhuang, one from India via the hands of one of the most renowned foreign translators in the Tang dynasty. The two examples stand at the two ends of the spectrum. One represents the ordinary option for most commoners; one manifests the taste of the authoritative pandit. However, the discussion will reveal that the sheer difference in their backgrounds does not prevent them from sharing a similar attitude: they do not perceive the this-worldly and other-worldly benefits in a clear-cut way.

Contrary to many modern scholars, the medieval figures discussed in this chapter did not consider this-worldly benefits insignificant, degradable or even non-Buddhist. Instead, to them, longevity, health, a fine complexion, job promotion, and material fortunes were regarded not only as acceptable but also necessary for achieving loftier, ultimate goals. From this perspective, the discussion of talismanic benefits will also lead us to consider the broader question of understanding how medieval Chinese Buddhism was received and practiced in daily life.

Wishing for a Promotion and a Bodhisattva-hood: Tricks from a Dunhuang Ritualist

Our survey will first focus on several talismans found in a Dunhuang ritual manual P.2602v. The manual is valuable in two ways. On the one hand, parallels of some of the content can be found in several other Dunhuang manuscripts[230]. It suggests that the practices and techniques recorded in P. 2602v were popular in Dunhuang (and perhaps even broader regions) at that time. On the other hand, though with many similarities, P. 2602v is an unfinished copy. The latter part of the manuscript is divided into square blank spaces headed by textual instructions and waiting for a copyist to fill in the blanks by drawing the illustrations of seals and maṇḍalas (Fig. 4.1). The talismans discussed in this section were also inserted from an unknown source. These imperfections indicate that the manual was actually made and used by a professional ritualist on the ground. By analyzing the talismans and the manual they belong to, I argue that the results of using talismans not only include benefits to be redeemed in this world but also expand to other realms.

[230] For the parallels, see Paul Copp, "Manuscript Culture as Ritual Culture in Late Medieval Dunhuang: Buddhist Talisman-Seals and their Manuals," *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 20 (2011): 193–226.

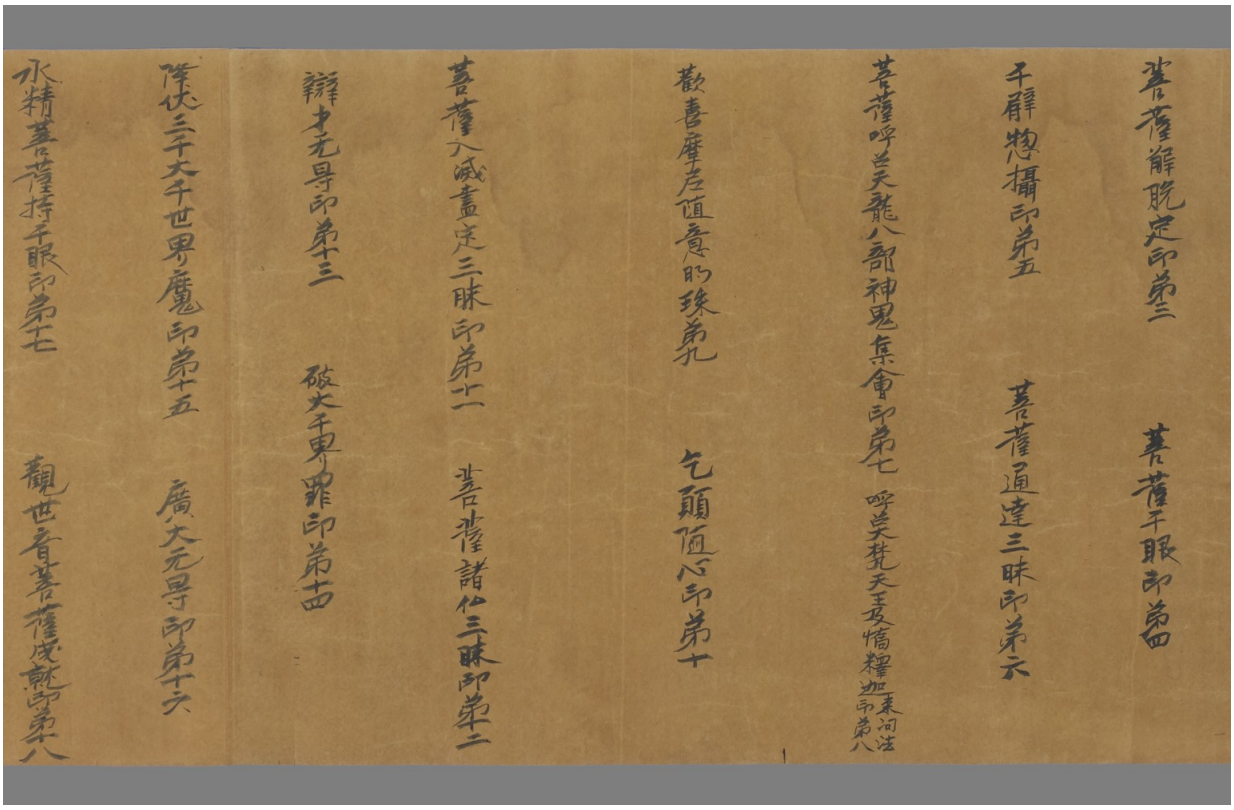


Fig. 4.1 Spaces left for illustrations

The recto side of the manuscript is the twenty-second chapter of a lost Daoist encyclopedia, *Essential Secrets of the Most High* (*Wushang miyao* 無上秘要), compiled in the late half of the sixth century. The colophon attached to the end indicates that the chapter was copied in the sixth year of the Kaiyuan 開元 era (718) by two Daoist priests of the same lineage for their deceased ancestors.[231] The manual itself on the verso side must have been copied later as a collection of various rituals, dhāraṇi spells, talismans, and seals. It starts with a title

[231] For the colophon, see Dunhuang yanjiu yuan 敦煌研究院 ed., *Dunhuang yishu zongmu suoyin xinbian* 敦煌遺書總目索引新編 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju), 245.

Talismans and Seals of Bodhisattva Avaloiteśvara, in one scroll (*Guanshiyin pusa fuyin yijuan* 觀世音菩薩符印一卷). The title was shared by another scroll S. 2498 in the Stein collection.[232]

Both P. 2602v and S. 2498 start after the title with invocations of a variety of Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and other deities from both Indian and Chinese origins. The liturgy is an instruction for creating and protecting a ritual space. After that, the two manuals bifurcate.

P.2602v proceeds to a second section with the title *Dhāraṇī Verses of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva with Wish-Fulfilling Jewel Wheel, with Seals of Separated Practices* (*Guanshiyin pusa ruyilun tuoluoni zhangju zhou yue, bing bie xingfa* 觀世音菩薩如意輪陀羅尼章句呪曰並別行法, *Jewel Wheel* hereafter). On the other hand, S. 2498 inserts four other short dhāraṇi spells with their own titles: *Dhāraṇī Incantation of Great Compassion of a Thousand Hands and Eyes* (*Qianshou qianyan dabeixin tuoluoni zhou* 千手千眼大悲心陀羅尼呪), *Incantation of Sunlight Bodhisattva* (*Riguang pusa zhou* 日光菩薩咒), *Incantation of Moonlight Bodhisattva* (*Yueguang pusa zhou* 月光菩薩咒), and *Incantation of Body with a Thousand Hands and Eyes* (*Qianshou yan shen zhou* 千手眼身呪) before it goes to the *Jewel Wheel* section.

The *Jewel Wheel* section in S. 2498 only contains the Chinese transliteration of the Sanskrit incantation. After that, it immediately moves to another transliterated dhāraṇi spell, the *Divine Dhāraṇī Spell of the Glory of the Buddha's Corona* (*Foding zunsheng tuoluoni shenzhou* 佛頂尊勝陀羅尼神呪). However, P. 2602v continues to discuss the benefits of the dhāraṇī verses as follows:

> World-Honored One, this dhāraṇi spell eliminates all roots of wrongdoing. If there are good men and good women who uphold this divine spell of Maṇibhadra, there will be five retributions in this lifetime. First, they will be born in this world and always have rhetorical

[232] The scroll will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

skills from previous lives.[233] They will not have any defilement and always will be made pure. Second, they will always attain the Buddha's eyes. Third, for continuous lives, they will always have the thirty-two marks and the eighty minor marks, which are no different from mine. Fourth, they will always be reborn in front of a Buddha. Fifth, whichever place they travel in this world, it will shake.
世尊, 此陀羅尼神咒滅一切罪根. 若有善男子善女子受持此摩尼拔陁枳羅神咒者, 現世有五種果報: 一者生於世間, 常於宿命下（卞）財, 無諸濁穢, 常令清淨. 二者常得佛眼. 三者生生世世常得卅二相八十種好等我無異. 四者常得佛前生. 五者世間行處悉皆振動.

The list here is quite similar to another transmitted text translated by Zhitong 智通 (fl. 605–653), the *Wish-Fulfilling Dhāraṇī of Bodhisattvas Avaloiteśvara and Tārā* (*Guanzizai pusa dapo duoli suixin tuoluoni jing* 觀自在菩薩怛嚕多唎隨心陀羅尼經).[234] Both lists ask practitioners to uphold (*chi* 持) the dhāraṇī. By doing this, these practitioners, as predicted in the lists, not only get benefits to be redeemed in this world but also benefits beyond this world. The lists anticipate people to get the Buddha's eyes to penetrate different realms and their past and future lives. They foresee people themselves or their children becoming enlightened beings with remarkable bodies. They stipulate rebirths to a Buddha-land in front of a Buddha.

However, it is not enough. As promised in the title of the text, Avalokiteśvara also has to give a series of seals by the order from the Buddha. But in this particular manuscript, the copyist inserted several talismans abruptly before the bodhisattva fulfils his promise.

Images are given for the first three talismans. The first one does not contain any Buddhist elements. The vertical talisman contains multiple cursive lines. The Chinese character for "auspicious" *Ji* 吉 was written twice and put in the middle of the talisman's head (Fig. 4.2).

[233] The translation is based on two parallels in P.2153 (一者生於世間, 有宿命辯才) and P. 3835 (一者生持於世間, 常有宿命辯才).
[234] Copp also spots one similarity between the description of a seal in another *Jewel Wheel* manual P. 3835 and Zhitong's work. Copp, "Manuscript Culture as Ritual Culture," 203–4.

According to the annotation beneath the talisman, it is beneficial for government officials, for extending lifespan, and for winning affection and respect from other people. It is also auspicious in general for people who carry it.

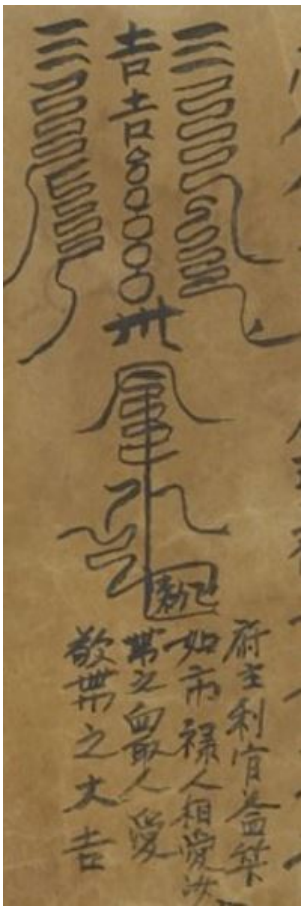


Fig. 4.2 The first talisman

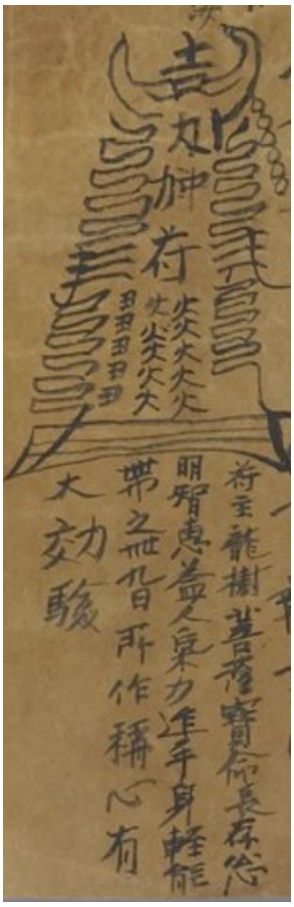


Fig. 4.3 The second talisman

The second talisman is drawn in the shape of a pagoda with two horns at the top. The Chinese character *ji* 吉 is put between the horns. Beneath *ji*, it seems the name of the talisman is added. However, the name is intelligible. Under the name, multiple characters for fire (*huo* 火) and one of the twelve earthly branches (*dizhi* 地支) *chou* 丑 are attached (Fig. 4.3). Though with

no explicit Buddhist hints, the talisman claims the master of the talisman is Bodhisattva Nāgārjuna (*fuzhu longshu pusa* 符主龍樹菩薩), who will elongate one's lifespan, help bring wisdom, benefit one's health, and finally help anyone who carries it achieve success as he wishes. It also specifically asks people to hold it for forty-nine days.

Then the third talisman is called "Talisman of a Thousand Buddha" (*Qianfo fu* 千佛符), which is beneficial for getting a fortune or a rank promotion. It asks the carrier to wear it for nine days. Though the name of the talisman relates it to the Buddha, both its image and instructions show no apparent reference to Buddhist sources (Fig. 4.4).

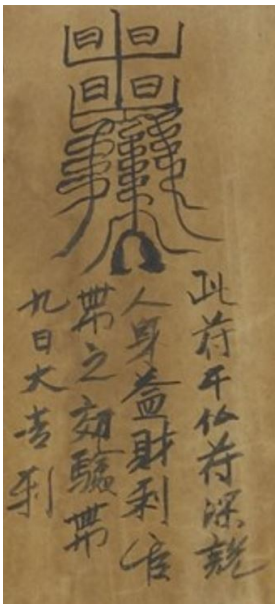


Fig. 4.4 The third talisman, "Talisman of a Thousand Buddha"

These three talismans all address this-worldly, and often materialistic benefits. The fourth talisman is more complicated, and its instruction is much longer. The space reserved for the image of the talisman was not enough, so the copyist of the manual had to put the image after the instruction (Fig. 4.5).

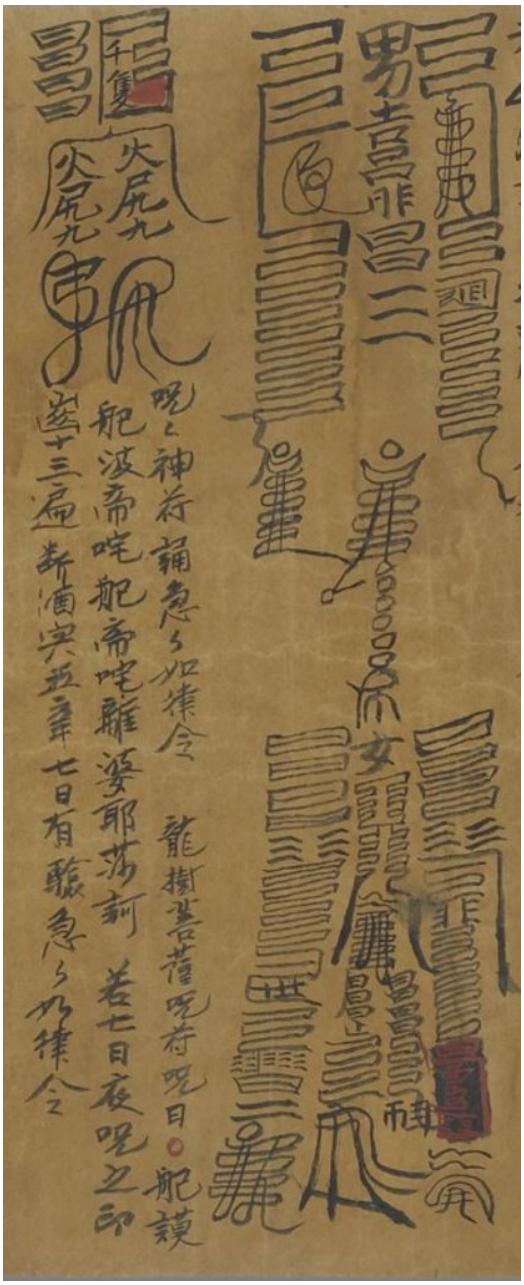


Fig. 4.5 The fourth talisman

The talisman is believed to have the Thus-Come of Abundant Treasures (*Duobao rulai* 多寶如來, Skt. *Prabhūtaratna Tathāgata*) as its master. It can bestow benefits by elongating one's lifespan, eradicating poisonous pneuma, and aiding in the recovery from an illness. And it is also

claimed that when someone carries this talisman, the thousand Buddhas of the current *kalpa* will be present in front of him simultaneously.

Furthermore, the talisman is believed to be in charge of the dharma of the Buddha, Śākyamuni. Any individual who bears it will attain wisdom for all his rebirths and finally become transcendent from the mundane world. The instruction continues to give a detailed list of ten positive retributions for an individual who carries the talisman:

> First, (he/she will get) the attainment of samādhi; second, always being a king; third, being reborn among the Kṣatriyas or the Brāhmans; seventh, karmic hindrance(s) being cleansed thoroughly; eighth, being without any defilement; fifth, (his/her) words will be accepted and trusted; tenth, always being reborn in front of the Buddha.
> 一曰者帶三昧; 二者常作國王; 三者得生剎利, 婆羅門; 七者業障悉令清靜; 八者無諸塵垢; 五者出語皆信受; 十者常生佛前.

Some of the benefits listed here are quite similar to those from upholding the *Jewel Wheel* dhāraṇī verses. However, the fourth, sixth, and ninth benefits are omitted here, and part of the sequence (fifth) is out of order. It seems the copyist here either made or inherited some mistakes. The instruction then provides another list of benefits based on how long one carries the talisman:

> If there is someone who carries it, all the benign deities and kings will support and protect [him]. It will have great efficacy. If carried for two days, ten thousand wrongdoings will be extinguished. If carried for three days, [ancestors of] ten generations will be liberated. If carried for four days, those who see [the carrier] will rejoice. If carried for five days, the buddhas from the ten directions will always be in front of [the carrier's] eyes. If carried for six days, wherever [the carrier] goes, the ground will shake. If carried for seven days, [the carrier] will get anywhere in the realms of the ten directions as he wishes. If carried for nine days, one achieves all the virtues without peers. It is miraculously effective.
> 若有帶者, 一切諸善神王皆擁護, 有大效驗. 若帶二日, 萬罪消滅. 若三日帶者, 十代總得解脫. 若四日帶者, 見者歡喜. 若五日帶者, 十方諸佛總在目前. 若六日帶者, 所行之處悉皆振動. 若七日帶者, 十方國土意去處即到. 若九日帶者, [一]切德無比, 有大神驗.

Some of the benefits are similar to the previous list. The talisman provides protection, removes previous offenses, and liberates ancestors of ten generations from bad rebirths. Moreover, for people who would wear it for six or seven days, miraculous powers will be granted. These powers are usually associated with the Buddha or a Bodhisattva. As for the shaking of the world, in the *jātaka* story where the then bodhisattva vowed to feed himself to the hungry tigress, the sky rained flowers, and the ground started to shake.[235] For the latter, the Buddha attributes the ability of miraculously and willfully penetrating and traveling in realms of the ten directions as a quality possessed by bodhisattvas and mahāsattvas.[236] Thus, the message here is that if one continues to carry this talisman for a certain period of time, he will attain the quality of a Buddha or a bodhisattva.

Then the manual teaches how to consecrate these talismans. The talismans should be imbued with efficacy by reciting the cliché "quickly, quickly in accordance with statutes and ordinances" (*jiji ru luling* 急急如律令) and another incantation. The incantation, which is named "Spell for Talismans of Bodhisattva Nāgārjuna" (*Longshu pusa zhoufu zhou* 龍樹菩薩呪符呪), is comprised of Chinese characters imitating the transliteration of Sanskrit syllables. The manual then asks people to abstain from alcohol and the five pungent roots and to recite the spell over the talisman thirteen times at night. The manual then shifts to the list of seals.

Compared with other manuals of *Jewel Wheel* found in Dunhuang, the section on talismans discussed above is unique. No other manuscript contains it. As Copp argues, the manual was not produced by a professional scribe but by a ritualist who used it.[237] This uniqueness indicates that

[235] See *Pusa toushen yi e'hu qita yinyuan jing* 菩薩投身餓餓虎起塔因緣經, trans. Fasheng 法盛 (ca. 4th–5th c.), *T.* no. 172, 3: 427a24–b1.
[236] See *Mohe bore boluomi jing* 摩訶般若波羅蜜經, trans. Jiumoluoshi 鳩摩羅什 (Kumārajīva, 344–413), *T.* no. 223, 8: 393a7–12.
[237] Paul Copp, "Manuscript Culture as Ritual Culture," 225–6.

the insertion of the talismans and instructions about how to use them as a whole is an innovation by the ritualist.

However, the innovation was not a random one. The following seven seals share some essential features with the previous talismans. Take the first seal, the "Seal of Cintāmaṇi" (*Zhantanmoni zhiyin* 旃檀摩尼之印) as an example (Fig. 4.6).[238] According to the instruction in P. 2602v, stamping the seal onto one's heart will enable him to have this-worldly benefits such as attaining affection and respect from others and winning in arguments and debates. At the same time, if someone is patient enough to carry the seal for more than three months, he will surpass the "ten grounds" (*shidi* 十地, Skt. *daśa-bhūmi*) of the bodhisattva path of the Mahāyāna tradition. In other words, carrying the seal alone helps the practitioner achieve the bodhisattva-hood.

[238] For a comparison between the seal in different manuals, see Paul Copp, "Manuscript Culture as Ritual Culture," 212–4.

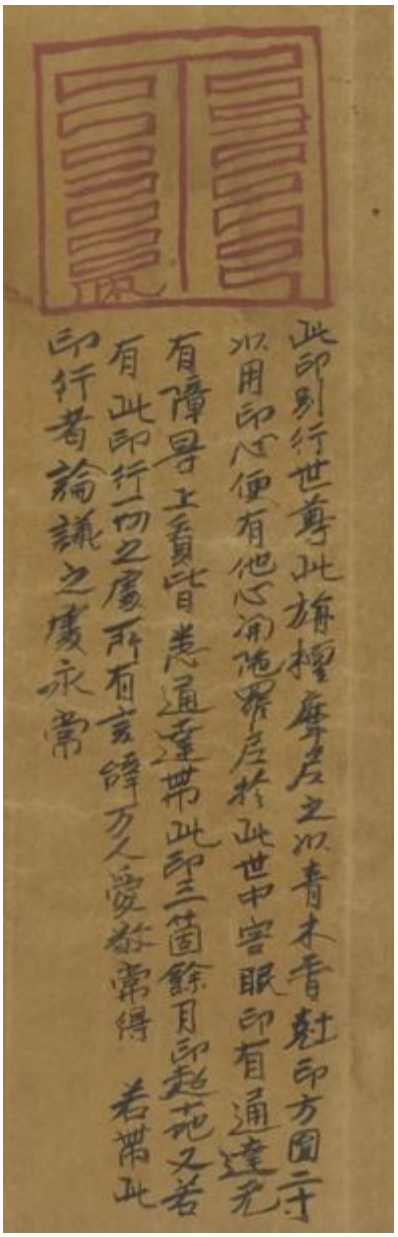


Fig. 4.6 Seal of Cintāmaṇi

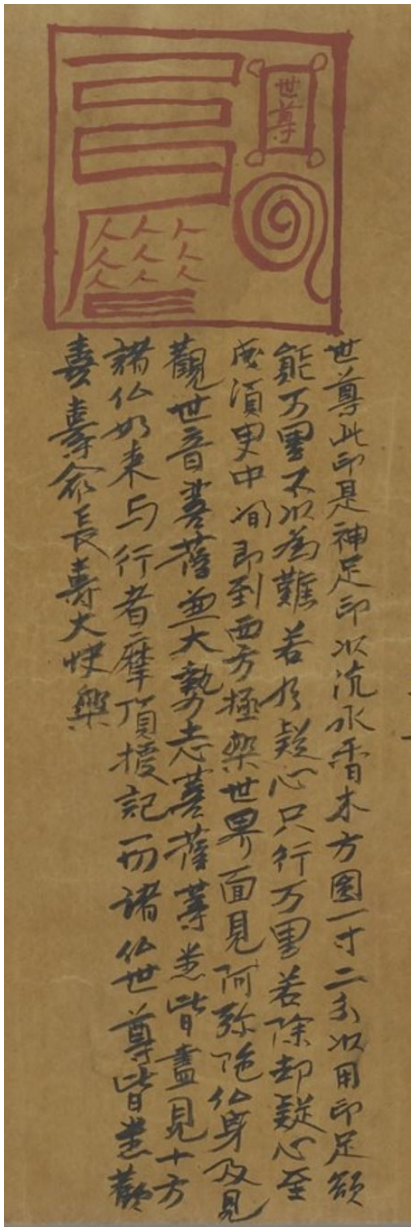


Fig. 4.7 Seal of Divine Feet

The fourth seal (Fig. 4.7) is an even better example of the blurry boundary between this-worldly and other-worldly benefits. It is named the "Seal of Divine Feet" (*shenzu zhiyin* 神足之印). The seal itself contains a small box within labelled the "World-Honored One" (*shizun* 世尊), an exclusive epithet for the Buddha.

According to the following instruction, the seal should be used to stamp on one's feet. Then:

> [You will be] able to travel ten thousand *li* without difficulty. If you are of a doubting mind, then you will only travel ten thousand *li*. If you rid yourself of doubts and have a mind of utmost sincerity, then in an instant, you will arrive at the World of Bliss to the west and see for yourself the body of Amitābha Buddha, and see Avalokiteśvara bodhisattva, and Mahāsthāmaprāpta bodhisattva, among others. The Thus-Come Buddhas of ten directions will lay their hands on the crown of your head and bestow upon you the prophecy. All the World-Honored Buddhas will be joyous. Extended longevity and great joy[239]!
> 欲能萬里, 不以為難. 若存疑心, 只行萬里. 若除卻疑心至成(誠), 須臾中間, 即到西方極樂世界, 面見阿彌陀佛身. 及見觀世音菩薩並大勢志(至)菩薩等悉皆盡見. 十方諸佛如來與行者摩頂授記, 一切諸佛世尊皆悉歡喜. 壽命長壽, 大快樂!

Another version of the same seal also claims that after being bestowed the prophecy, the practitioner will attain the fruit of *srotāpanna* ("stream-enterer") in seven days[240]. The fruit indicates the initial stage of the *śrāvaka* path that eventually leads to the achievement of arhat-ship.

The exquisiteness of the above instruction is that it creates a continuum between the literal and figurative action of travel. On the one hand, the seal helps people travel by foot in the real world to a distance to ten thousand *li*. On the other hand, the trip can also be a soteriological one for those without a doubting mind. The trip will lead the faithful towards the land of the Buddha, embarking on a path of salvation from the mundane world.

The analysis of the two seals shows that inserting several talismans between the dhāraṇī and seals was not accidental. In this manual, the "translation" of the previous *Jewel Wheel*

[239] The translation follows Copp's with some of my own changes, see Paul Copp, "Manuscript Culture as Ritual Culture," 217–18.
[240] P. 3836. 不經七日，即證須陁洹果.

dhāraṇī is attributed to Bodhisattva Aśvaghoṣa. As Stuart Young argues, over the Sui-Tang period, the pair Aśvaghoṣa and Nāgārjuna were considered the authorities on all Mahāyāna teachings.[241] The juxtaposition of these Nāgārjuna-related talismans and the *Jewel Wheel* dhāraṇī betrays that the ritualist understood the authority represented by the pair.

Furthermore, as the above analysis shows, the benefits of talismans overlap with the benefits of the *Jewel Wheel* dhāraṇī spell and seals significantly. They all make people more eloquent, whether they help their words become more convincing or make them more competitive in debates. They all equip people with qualities that belong to a Buddha or bodhisattva. They all ensure people live a happy life and enjoy longevity. They all facilitate people to cleanse their transgressions and correct their wrongdoings. Though his handwriting is scribbled, and he made mistakes here and there, the medieval ritualist who made this scroll recognized the string that goes through all these shining beads.

The listed benefits of carrying the talismans, similar to verbally reciting a dhāraṇī or stamping a seal on certain body parts, cover a broad spectrum, from the most materialistic desire for wealth and governmental positions to a better rebirth or liberation of ancestors from lower realms, and even to the attainment of bodhisattva qualities. All these benefits are mixed and enumerated together. There is no effort to differentiate them hierarchically. The phenomena here may indicate that the distinction between this-worldly and other-worldly benefits was not a matter of concern in the mind of a medieval ritualist. Here, what we see is more of a continuum. The practitioners, by acting duly in accordance with the instructions in this lifetime, are expecting benefits that connect them back to their ancestors and forward to their future rebirths. By cleansing all the defilements and promising good rebirths, the talisman to be prescribed by a

[241] Stuart H. Young, *Conceiving the Indian Buddhist Patriarchs in China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2015), 134–6.

Dunhuang ritualist not only aims to benefit an individual but also tries to help a whole community.

Furthermore, these talismans, in the hands of a local ritualist with some Buddhist knowledge, also grant qualities to the carrier. They enable the carrier to manifest supernatural faculties. How is this possible? What is the logic behind this recurring process of empowering through empowered objects? Questions like these will lead us to consider the power of translated Indic words.

Channeling Enlightened Power: Messages through Foreign Translator Monks

Translated sūtras of Indic origins also boast about a wide range of benefits when they encourage practitioners, monastic or lay, to promote them. Among the many ways to activate the scriptural power, rendering written words into talismans carried by people was transmitted to medieval Chinese people through the hands of eminent foreign translator monks.

These texts also include long lists of benefits of dhāraṇī spells and related rituals. Like the Dunhuang case, these lists are also mixtures of different benefits. The analysis in this section will continue to show that these Indian sources also do not make clear-cut distinctions between this-worldly and other-worldly benefits. On the contrary, the logic buried in these texts indicates that the seemingly shallow and mundane benefits are closely related to the more sublime ones.

One such example is found in the *Secret, Well-Established Dhāraṇi of the Vast, Widely Renowned, Gem-Encrusted Tower* (*Dabao guangbo louge shanzhu mimi tuoluoni jing* 大寶廣博

樓閣善住祕密陀羅尼經) translated by Bukong 不空 (Amoghavajra, 705-774)[242]. The scripture has three versions in medieval China. Besides Amoghavajra's translation, the earliest version was translated anonymously by someone in the Liang Dynasty (502-557). Compared with the two later translations, the Liang version lacks the preface chapter. Bodhiruci's translation was finished in the second year of the Shenlong 神龍 era (706) in Xichongfu Monastery 西崇福寺 with the assistance of an Indian monk Yi Sheluo 伊舍羅 and a Chinese monk Yunguan 雲觀. This translation is included in the *Record of Śākyamuni's Teachings Compiled during the Kaiyuan Period* (*Kaiyuan shijiao lu* 開元釋教錄). [243] According to a record of paper consumption for copying sūtras in the Bao'en Monastery 報恩寺 of Dunhuang, Bodhiruci's version was copied as part of the monastery canon at that time.[244] Amoghavajra's version was finished later and incorporated into the *Newly Revised Catalog of Śākyamuni's Teachings of the Zhenyuan Era* (*Zhenyuan xinding shijiao mulu* 貞元新定釋教目錄).[245] The version was brought back to Japan by Kūkai and widely circulated among Japanese monasteries.[246]

The sūtra is a collection of dhāraṇī spells and other ritual instructions taught by the Buddha per Vajrapāṇi's (*Jingangshou pusa* 金剛手菩薩) request. The essence of the scripture, the transliterated root dhāraṇi spell, is instructed to be employed in many ways:

> If sentient beings hear this dhāraṇī, [they should] receive, uphold, read, and recite it, practice and study it diligently, bear it in mind incessantly, pursuing the great achievement. Even simply hearing its title and touching it, or carrying it on the body or glimpsing it with the eyes, or writing it on scrolls or silk, or writing it on walls, any

[242] For Bukong's life and works, see Geoffrey C. Goble, *Chinese Esoteric Buddhism: Amoghavajra, the Ruling Elite, and the Emergence of a Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019).
[243] Zhisheng 智昇, *Kaiyuan shijiao lu* 開元釋教錄, *T*. no. 2154, 55: 563c3–4.
[244] Fang Guangchang 方廣錩, "Dunhuang siyuan suocang dazangjing gaimao 敦煌寺院所藏大藏經概貌," in *Zangwai fojiao wenxian* 藏外佛教文獻 8 (2003): 394–5.
[245] *Zhenyuan xinding shijiao xinlu* 貞元新定釋教新錄, *T*. no. 2157, 55: 934c10–2.
[246] *Nyūtō shingū seikyō mokuroku* 入唐新求聖教目錄, *T*. no. 2167, 55: 1080c16.

> sentient being who sees it; [even] those who commit the five heinous crimes and the four grave crimes, who humiliate the correct dharma and the sage, …, if these people hear this dhāraṇī, they will definitely realize the supreme, perfect enlightenment.[247]
> 若有眾生聞此陀羅尼, 受持讀誦精勤修習, 憶念不捨求大成就, 乃至聞名或復手觸, 或佩身上或纔眼視, 或書經卷或書帛素, 或書牆壁, 一切眾生若有見者, 五逆四重誹謗正法誹謗聖人…彼等諸人聞此陀羅尼, 決定當證無上正覺.

The many ways listed here not only incorporate practices that are commonly expected for a text with informative messages, such as reading, studying, and memorizing it. Almost anticipating an intellectualist bias on the part of the reader, the text enumerates these more philosophical and abstract practices first. But the text makes clear that other ways of engaging the text are just as effective.[248] The powerful words are to be written down on paper, silk, and walls for people to stare at, touch and carry. Among them, carrying it as a talisman is one of the multiple ways to receive the benefits from the dhāraṇī. The dhāraṇī's efficacy is augmented as such that even touching it will result in ultimate enlightenment. Meanwhile, the benefits also are expanded to other realms. In a later passage, the Buddha reiterates the benefits as follows:

> If one reads it, recites it, upholds it, if one wears on the body or writes it on clothes, if one places it on a pillar, if one writes it on a scroll or white cotton cloth, on walls and tablets, or even if one hears about it, or its shadow falls on one's body, or it in turn and touches other people, they definitely will attain the non-retrogressive unsurpassed bodhi. [They] can obtain unlimited hundreds and thousands of merits. [They] will distance themselves from all karmic sins, be able to achieve all benign roots, and subdue various māras. [They] will get respect and affection in all worlds and will get offerings everywhere. … They will depart from poverty and not suffer the disasters of poisons, swords, clubs, floods, and fires. Various evil beasts and terrors will not harm them … Cold malaria, common malaria, and all kinds of malaria will not fall on them. [People] will not suffer things like these in this lifetime. [They also] will attain unobstructed intelligence. At the end of their lives, their minds will not be scattered and disturbed, and all Buddhas will appear to appease them … They will repose and sleep peacefully and see hundreds of

[247] *Dabao guangbo louge shanzhu mimi tuoluoni jing* 大寶廣博樓閣善住祕密陀羅尼經, trans. Bukong 不空 (Amoghavajra, 705–774), *T*. no. 1005A, 19: 620b23–c2.
[248] For the "nonhermeneutic" dimension of sacred texts, see Fabio Rambelli, *Buddhist Materiality: A Cultural History of Objects in Japanese Buddhism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 88–128.

> thousands of Buddha fields, Buddhas, and bodhisattvas encircling them. This is because of the power of this esoteric dhāraṇi.[249]
> 若讀若誦受持, 若佩身上若書衣中, 若置幢上, 若書經卷若書素氎及牆壁牌板, 乃至聞聲手觸及影其身, 及轉觸餘人, 決定當得不退轉無上菩提, 能於現世獲無量百千功德, 遠離諸罪成就一切善根摧伏諸魔. 於諸世間皆得敬愛, 於一切處皆得供養… 離於貧窮不受世間毒藥刀杖水火等難. 諸惡獸怖不能為害… 寒瘧常瘧一切瘧病悉不著身… 如是等類現世不受, 得無礙辯, 臨命終時心不散動, 一切諸佛現前安慰…身臥安覺安, 於其夢中見百千佛剎, 及見諸佛并諸菩薩圍遶. 由此祕密陀羅尼威力故.

The Buddha here gives more suggestions on how to materialize the verbalized spell. The dhāraṇī is supposed to be written either on paper or fabric and carried. Even more, garments are to be inscribed with these powerful syllables, which transform themselves into talismans. The passage is particularly notable for enumerating more benefits. The promise from the Buddha is elaborated on a spectrum ranging from the non-retrogressive unsurpassed enlightenment to abundant merits gained in this lifetime, to shielding people from poison and poverty. Using the talisman helps one achieve a good death. It also helps people sleep better and have good dreams. All these benefits illuminate different ways of practicing Buddhism. The talisman-carrying practitioners, along with other touchers, spectators, and passersby, are able to shun the calamities common in daily life and recover from illness by the power of Buddha's words. This practice further begets merit for their elevation within the realms of existence. The benefits extend to the future as well. Practitioners hope to encounter Buddhas at the dying moment, which will lead to a better rebirth into one of those Buddha fields to significantly advance their progress in achievements. Finally, for those more enthusiastic ones, the dhāraṇī guarantees the perfect enlightenment right here, in this lifetime. The list of benefits can be sorted into different stages of a chronological path as I explained above. They are presented as a package without apparent hierarchical order.

[249] *Dabao guangbo louge shanzhu mimi tuoluoni jing*, *T*. no. 1005A, 19: 622b24–c19.

When comparing the two translations from the Tang dynasty, the quoted parts are quite similar, with only insignificant variations. Based on this and the above discussion of the history of its translation, it is safe to assume that both Tang translations should have been built on a credible Indian origin. Even in the eyes of the Indian compiler(s) and Indian translators, the practice of making a vocal spell into a materialized talisman was not strange at all. Moreover, they also did not try to differentiate the ultimate enlightenment from this-worldly benefits.

A similar situation is presented in other Indic sources. In several tales included in the *Dhāraṇī Incantation of the Wish Fulfilling with Great Freedom* (*Suiqiu jide dazizai tuoluoni shenzhou jing* 隨求即得大自在陀羅尼神呪經) translated by Bao Siwei 寶思惟 (*Maṇicintana), the spell is first employed by conventional enchanting. Then the Buddha tells a story of how an Indian king, Fanshi 梵施 (*Brahmadāna), wrote down the spell as a talisman and carried it to defeat his enemies.[250] To explain this military miracle, the Buddha instructs his interlocutor, the great god Brahmā, about how the talismanic spell transforms a person as follows:

> Great Brahmā! If there is someone carries this spell, you should know that the Thus-Come One will support and protect this person by supernormal power. You should know that this person is the body of the Thus-Come One. You should know that he is the Diamond Body. You should know that he is the body of the Storehouse of the Thus-Come One. You should know that he is the eye of the Thus-Come One. You should know that he has donned the armor of the Thus-Come One. You should know he is the brilliant and luminous body. You should know that he is the indestructible body. You should know this person is able to destroy all enemies. You should know that all the sinful obstructions of this person will be cleansed and extinguished. [251]
> 大梵! 若有人帶此呪者, 當知如來以神通力擁護是人. 當知是人是如來身, 當知是人是金剛身, 當知是人是如來藏身, 當知是人是如來眼, 當知是人披金剛甲, 當知是人是光明身, 當知是人是不壞身, 當知是人能摧伏一切怨敵, 當知是人所有罪障悉皆消滅.

[250] For a summary of these tales, see Paul Copp, *The Body Incantatory: Spells and the Ritual Imagination in Medieval Chinese Buddhism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 68–74.
[251] *Suiqiu jide dazizai tuoluoni shenzhou jing* 隨求即得大自在陀羅尼神呪, trans., Bao Siwei 寶思惟 (*Maṇicintana, fl. 693–721) , *T*. no. 1154, 20: 640b20–7. The translation here mainly follows Copp's with some of my own changes.

The above passage on protection in a military setting sets forth two different logics. First, it shows the physical protection one can get from a Buddha's talisman. The Buddha comes to the carrier and by using his supreme power to prevent the carrier from being hurt. Then, the talisman also transforms the carrier. It helps the soldier to assume the qualities of the Buddha's body. When getting the brilliant, luminous, and indestructible body of the Buddha, the carrier will undoubtedly conquer his enemies on a battlefield and cleanse his own crimes and hindrances in his own body.

However, we do not see a clear-cut distinction between the two logics in the passage. By getting the power of the Buddha and as a Buddha, the practitioner, on the one hand, destroys his conventional enemies on the battlefield and, on the other hand, ultimately achieves his own cultivation. The situation is quite similar to the *kaji* 加持 (Ch. *Jiachi*, empowerment) ritual elucidated by Kūkai. As Jason Ā. Josephson argues, that by invoking the Cosmic Buddha to unite with the practitioner, the ritual both represents the ultimate salvation and enables the empowered to channel the power to a certain end.[252] The dhāraṇī here helps the practitioner to reach the ultimate goal where his body is identified with the Buddha's body. At the same time, the power the practitioner gets from such identification is then distributed to more mundane ends.

My analysis of the esoteric texts thus helps to disprove a binary categorization of the benefits of using a talisman. The tendency to consider benefits as this-worldly and other-worldly has a deeper connection to a broader schema of characterizing esoteric Buddhism in the East

[252] Jason Ānanda Josephson, "An Empowered World: Buddhist Medicine and the Potency of Prayer in Japan," in *Deus in Machina: Religion, Technology, and the Things in Between*, ed. Jeremy Stolow (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 121–4.

Asian world. In the early sectarian efforts of Japanese priests and scholars to categorize Japanese esoteric Buddhism, the binary framework they proposed stipulates two types of it: the *zōmitsu* 雜密 (miscellaneous esoteric Buddhism) and the *junmitsu* 純密 (pure esoteric Buddhism). To them, the former flourished during the Nara period, and the latter prevailed in the Heian period after Kūkai and his contemporaries introduced the newly translated texts in the Tang dynasty. They believed that one of the key differences between these two categories is that *zōmitsu* focuses on mundane effects such as healing ailments, causing rain to fall and preventing disaster, etc., while *junmitsu* aims to transform the practitioner into an enlightened being.[253] The classification not only was widely appreciated in the Japanese sectarian circle but also readily borrowed by scholars of esoteric Buddhism in other geographical regions.[254] Abe's monograph on Kūkai, on the other hand, also proves such schema is an oversimplified and later invention designed to serve sectarian polemics.[255]

The appearance of mixed benefits actually predates the coming of esoteric Buddhism in China. In some non-esoteric texts, we can both spot the tendency to bridge and the effort to consolidate the gap between the two types of benefits. One early example is an apocryphal work called *Scripture of Trapuṣa and Bhallika* (*Tiwei boli jing* 提謂波利經). The scripture, composed by a monk named Tanjing 曇靖 (fl. 453–464), was famous for explaining Buddhist teachings with indigenous Chinese ideas.[256] Excerpts of the apocryphal work survive as scattered

[253] For example, see Ōmura Seigai 大村西崖, *Mikkyō hattatsushi* 密教発達志 (Tokyo: Kokusho kankōkai, 1918), 373–5.
[254] For a criticism of this approach applied to places other than Japan, see Robert Sharf, "On Esoteric Buddhism in China," as an appendix to his *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism: A Reading of the Treasure Store of Treatise* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002), 265–7.
[255] Ryūichi Abé, *The Weaving of Mantra: Kūkai and the Construction of Esoteric Buddhist Discourse* (NewYork: Columbia University Press, 1999), 152–4.
[256] For a general overview of this work, see Whalen W. Lai, "The Earliest Folk Buddhist Religion in China: T'i-wei Po-li Ching and Its Historical Significance," in *Buddhist and Taoist Practice in Medieval Chinese Society: Buddhist and Taoist Studies II*, ed. David W. Chappell (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1987), 11–35; Tokuno Kyoko,

quotations in multiple Buddhist commentaries, encyclopedias, and anthologies despite the fact that it was labelled as suspicious or spurious in many catalogues. Only after the discovery of the library cave in Dunhuang are we able to have a comprehensive knowledge of the widely condemned but widely popular work. In the second fascicle of the scripture, there is a section where the Buddha teaches the benefits of reading it as follows:

> The Buddha said: "If anyone wishes to pursue wealth and nobility in the next life, read this scripture; if anyone wishes to pursue longevity in the next life, read this scripture; if anyone wishes to pursue a rebirth in heaven, read this scripture; if anyone wishes to pursue respect and dignity, read this scripture; if anyone wishes to pursue the path of a Buddha, read this scripture; if anyone wishes to pursue the path of an *arhat*, read this scripture; if anyone wishes to pursue cunning and intelligence, read this scripture; if anyone wishes to pursue a proper and good [appearance], read this scripture; if anyone wishes to pursue the closing down of the three evil paths, read this scripture; if anyone wishes to have no foes, read this scripture; if anyone does not wish to become a ghost, a deity, or a nāga, read this scripture; if anyone wishes to expel birth, old-age, illnesses, and death, read this scripture; if anyone wishes to obtain nirvāṇa, read this scripture. Practice with sincerity in accordance with the dharma, and one will attain whatever he wishes. The heavenly deities will protect him."[257]
> 佛言: "欲求後世富貴者, 讀是經; 欲求後世萇壽者, 讀是經; 欲求生天上者, 讀是經; 欲求尊貴者, 讀是經; 欲求佛道者, 讀是經; 欲求羅漢道者, 讀是經; 欲求黠慧者, 讀是經; 欲求端政好者, 讀是經; 欲得閉三惡道者, 讀是經; 欲得無怨惡者, 讀是經; 不欲作鬼神龍者, 讀是經; 欲卻生老病死者, 讀是經; 欲得泥洹道者, 讀是經. 奉行如法, 所願悉可得, 天神佑之."

Though no talisman is mentioned in the verbose list, it is evident that the wishes or benefits from reading the scripture are presented as a package without any effort to distinguish them hierarchically. As for the composer, Tanjing, who was well versed both in Buddhist precepts and indigenous Five Agents (*wuxing* 五行) theory, the benefits constitute a repertoire that includes

"Byways in Chinese Buddhism: *The Book of Trapuṣa* and Indigenous Scriptures" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1994); Cao Ling 曹凌, *Zhongguo fojiao yiweijing zonglu* 中國佛教疑偽經綜錄 (Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2011), 57–87.

[257] S.2051; also see Makita Tairyō, *Gikyō kenkyū* 疑經研究 (Kyoto: Rinsen Shoten, 2014), 224.

materialistic gains of this life, better rebirths in the next life, and the final nirvāṇa. Gaps do not exist in the list. Tanjing did not promote some of the benefits over others, nor did he degenerate any.

However, when later masters started to quote Tanjing in their scholastic commentaries, they tended to elevate some wishes over others. In one of Zhiyi's 智顗 (538–597) commentaries to the *Lotus Sūtra*, he reduced the above list down to only one line:

> Furthermore, that scripture says: "The five precepts are the mother of various Buddhas. If one wishes to pursue the path of a Buddha, read this scripture; if one wishes to pursue arhat-hood, read this scripture."[258]
> 又彼經云: "五戒為諸佛之母, 欲求佛道, 讀是經; 欲求阿羅漢, 讀是經.

As Makita Tairyō 牧田諦亮 has noticed, the great master chose to focus on the more sublime goals rather than the shallower gains.[259] Compared with materialistic fortune and longevity, he was more interested in the right path and liberation. Zhiyi's effort to read the apocrypha doctrinally is also betrayed by how he interpreted talisman in the same commentary. In the *Scripture of Trapuṣa and Bhallika*, there is a section discussing how the Five Precepts (*wujie* 五戒) are related to the Five Directions (*wufang* 五方) and Five Agents.[260] At the end of the dialogue between the Buddha and Trapuṣa, the Buddha concludes that once the Five Precepts are established, practitioners will enjoy all benefits as they "have obtained the talisman of longevity; ingested the elixir of immortality; and held the seal of eternal happiness" (得長生之符，服不死

[258] *Miaofa lianhua jing xuanyi* 妙法蓮華經玄義, Zhiyi 智顗 (538–597), *T*. no. 1716, 33: 804a4–5.
[259] Makita Tairyō 牧田諦亮, *Gikyō kenkyū*, 197; also see P. L. Swanson, "Apocryphal Texts in Chinese Buddhism: T'ien-T'ai Chih-I's Use of Apocryphal Scriptures," in A. van der Kooij and K. van der Toorn eds., *Canonization and Decanonization* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 252–3.
[260] For the incorporation of *wuxing* theory in apocryphal texts, see Jinhua Chen, *Legend and Legitimation: The Formation of Tendai Esoteric Buddhism in Japan* (Bruxelles: Institut belge des hautes études chinoises, 2009), 189–244.

之藥，持長樂之印). [261] When Zhiyi quoted this in his commentary, he interpreted the talisman and seal as metaphors for more profound doctrines. As he explained, the talisman here is none other than the three vehicles, and the seal is the path of nirvāṇa.[262]

Notwithstanding Zhiyi's effort of distilling scholastic dogma from the apocryphal texts, the earlier apocryphal work echoes later translated esoteric texts that the benefits gained from putting texts into practice constitute a whole package without making distinctions between this-worldly and other-worldly benefits.

Admittedly, the observation indicates that the talismans prescribed in these translated esoteric texts never turn a blind eye to suffering and difficulties in daily life. They all address this-worldly issues such as lifespan, illnesses, childbirth, and even violent battles. One can enjoy these benefits because the talismans prescribed by the esoteric sources transform the carriers into another type of beings or beings residing in other realms. After the transformation, one may invoke the efficacy of the package of benefits to address a specific and trivial issue. In other words, the seemingly this-worldly benefits are the results and testimony of the more sublime power.

Indeed, there are talismans designed and prescribed for a single problem. Furthermore, the case from P. 2602v shows that the benefits of an almighty talisman can also be individualized by specifying how long to carry it. Nevertheless, the benefits we see both in locally produced manuscripts and from Indic sources are not ranked hierarchically.

To the composers and users of these texts, the this-worldly aspect is not despised as inferior. On the other hand, elite masters such as Zhiyi did try to highlight the loftier or deeper

[261] P.3732; also see Makita Tairyō, *Gikyō kenkyū*, 219.
[262] 長生符者，即三乘法是。長樂印者，即泥洹道是. *Miaofa lianhua jing xuanyi*, *T*. no. 1716, 33: 804a6–7.

goal. However, they did not oppose the mundane applications, either. The package of benefits offers individuals, no matter an esteemed master like Zhiyi or a commoner requesting help from a local ritualist, ample options of benefits to choose from. These users either focus on the benefits they need immediately or use them to facilitate their religious cultivation. But in their minds, these benefits never exclude each other. On the contrary, they complement each other, inspire each other, and, more importantly, testify to each other.

Conclusion

In Spiro's groundbreaking anthropological work on Burmese supernaturalism, he shows a solid tendency to subscribe Buddhism to other-worldly benefits only. By comparing Buddhism with indigenous Burmese *nat* cultus, he believes Buddhism, as a whole, unambiguously focuses on salvation from the world. Meanwhile, the *nat* cultus embraces the world and is for worldly ends.[263] Later, he develops a more nuanced understanding of Burmese Buddhism. He recognizes three forms of it: nibbanic Buddhism, kammatic Buddhism, and apotropaic Buddhism. [264] According to him, nibbanic Buddhism represents the Buddha's original message of achieving nirvāṇa (Pāli: nibbāna) and focuses on a "total and radical rejection of the world in all its aspects."[265] Kammatic Buddhism, contrary to the rejection of the current world, places more emphasis on how to attain a better life within the saṃsāra by accumulating good karma (Pāli: kamma). The third, apotropaic Buddhism, employs Buddhism as a shield against the dangers and

[263] Melford E. Spiro, *Burmese Supernaturalism*, expanded ed. (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1978), 262–3.
[264] Melford E. Spiro, *Buddhism and Society: A Great Tradition and Its Burmese Vicissitudes*, 2nd, expanded ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).
[265] Spiro, *Buddhism and Society*, 65.

hostile forces in the present, usually by invoking deities or supernatural beings. As an anthropological work based on year-long fieldwork, Spiro's classification is helpful in understanding the different modalities of Buddhism in practice in Burmese society. However, it also betrays his tendency to regard nibbanic Buddhism as the original, pure tradition, and the other two as degraded derivatives from it.

A similar division also finds its way in Geoffrey Samuel's anthropological study on Tibetan Buddhism. He highlights two types of Buddhism: shamanic and clerical. For him, shamanic Buddhism concerns both ultimate enlightenment and less aloof objectives such as long life or a better rebirth. Clerical Buddhism, notwithstanding it shares the same goal of enlightenment, usually turns a blind eye to concerns within saṃsāra. Both types exist in Tibetan societies, though they focus on disparate modes of activity and different genres of texts. Consequently, Samuel believes that they are fundamentally different in their attitudes towards the world and human experience. Meanwhile, Samuel also points out that even though shamanic Buddhism is the dominant strand of Buddhism in Tibetan societies, these two types are interwoven. [266] Compared with Spiro, Samuel's framework recognizes at least one tradition that combines both this-worldly and other-worldly concerns.

In the introduction of a co-authored monograph on this-worldly benefits (*genze riyaku* 現世利益) in contemporary Japanese religion, Ian Reader and George J. Tanabe Jr. echo some of Samuel's stance. For them, though Buddhist priests and scholars with sectarian background try to explain away the "shallow and materialistic" benefits by employing the idea of expedient means found in the most prestigious Mahāyāna scriptures, this-worldly benefits are closely

[266] Geoffrey Samuel, *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1993).

related to the more "spiritual" faith throughout the history of Buddhism in Japan.[267] Furthermore, they argue that even in translated scriptures of early Buddhism and the later Mahāyāna tradition, this-worldly benefits are readily accepted and utilized by voices of the higher register. They are not considered merely expedient means but constitute a vital component in spreading the dharma.[268]

Reader and Tanabe's observation is made mainly on contemporary Japanese religious sites and practices. But they also realize that the Japanese manifestation can be partly traced back to much older Indian tradition. Buddhism, since its birth in India, presents itself with multiple medical metaphors. The Buddha is portrayed as a great physician. His teaching is a therapeutic to the sufferings of this world. Medical treatments, both actual and metaphorical, scatter here and there in the earliest sources.[269] The tradition never looks down on these practical aspects since they play an indispensable role in elaborating the aloof aspects.

Returning to the usage of talismans in medieval China, similar phenomena also existed. Transmitted scriptures and manuscript manuals translated and compiled at the time show that this-worldly benefits were not despised at all. On the contrary, some of these texts even directly encourage people to generate this-worldly benefits by holding them talismanically. Moreover, the authors of these texts seldom made a clear-cut distinction between this-worldly and other-worldly concerns. In many cases, the talisman, as an empowered object, aims to empower and transform the practitioner. Equipped with such supreme power, it becomes the practitioner's decision to channel the power to solve his problem at hand. The seemingly this-worldly benefits

[267] Ian Reader, George J. Tanabe Jr. *Practically Religious: Worldly Benefits and the Common Religion of Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998).
[268] Ian Reader, *Practically Religious*, 73–82.
[269] For a general discussion of the Buddhist view on medicine, see Paul Demiéville, *Buddhism and Healing: Demiéville's Article "Byō" from Hōbōgirin*. Translated by Mark Tatz. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985.

then become the credentials proving the practitioner's religious achievement. From this perspective, it would be pointless to bifurcate. In the eyes of practitioners, the power residing in a talisman allows them to navigate all difficulties. By virtually becoming a Buddha, the practitioner views all such threats as the same in that they shrink before the Buddha's power.

The lesson from these talismans, along with the dhāraṇī spells and seals, can also be extended to other Buddhist rituals. Teiser's recent studies on healing liturgies (*huanwen* 患文) found in Dunhuang also show us that these liturgies not only focus on the patient's physical recovery but also extend to a rebirth in the pure land, seeing the Buddha, and embarking on the path towards enlightenment.[270] All of these indicate a ritual milieu that permeated the life of all medieval Chinese, regardless of their societal, economic, and religious status. And in the following chapter, I will shift to the discussion of this ritual repertoire to which talismans belonged.

[270] See Stephen F. Teiser (Tai Shiwen 太史文), *Yili yu fojiao yanjiu* 儀禮與佛教研究, eds. & trans., Xin Yu, Minhao Zhai (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2022), 65–106.

Chapter Five

Repertoires in Hand: Talismanic Object and Its Ritual Background

Introduction

In the second year of the Yonghui 永徽 (651) era, an Indian monk named Atikūṭa (Adi'quduo 阿地瞿多) arrived in Chang'an with his own collection of Sanskrit manuscripts in his luggage. Emperor Gaozong 高宗 (r. 649–683) first accommodated him in the Cimen Monastery 慈門寺. Shortly after his arrival, Yancong 彥悰 (fl. 627-649), one of Xuanzang's 玄奘 (602-664) most trusted disciples, along with dozens of other monks and top officials in the court, requested the Indian pandit to establish a "Maṇḍala of Universal Gathering" (*puji huitan* 普集會壇). Impressed by the auspicious omens during the ritual, Xuankai 玄楷 (fl. 653–654) and other spectators implored the master to translate the Sanskrit script for the ritual ceremony. Perhaps due to the sheer volume of the original text, *Sūtra of the Great Vajra Site* (*Jingang da daochang jing* 金剛大道場經), Atikūṭa and his assistants decided to produce an abbreviated translation capturing the epitome of the original. Their efforts resulted in a twelve-fascicle collection of ritual instructions titled *Collected Dhāraṇī Sūtras* (*Tuoluoni jijing* 陀羅尼集經). [271]

The items in the collection are categorized by the deity they center on. Atikūṭa designed a six-division system: 1) two fascicles on the Buddha (fasc. 1–2); 2) one on *Prajñāpāramitā* (fasc.

[271] The narrative is based on the preface to the *Tuoluoni jijing* 陀羅尼集經, Xuankai 玄楷 (fl. 653–654), *T*. no. 901, 18: 785a8–b4. A slightly different version is found in *Kaiyuan shijiao lu* 開元釋教錄, Zhisheng 智昇 (fl. 730), *T*. no. 2154, 55: 562c8–22 and *Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳, Zanning 贊寧 (919–1001), *T*. no. 2061, 718b17–c2.

3); 3) three on Avalokiteśvara and other bodhisattvas (fasc. 4–6); 4) three on various *vajra* deities (fasc. 7–9); 5) two on deva gods (fasc. 10–11); and 6) the last fascicle containing detailed instruction for performing the "Maṇḍala of Universal Gathering."

Modern scholars have suggested that many passages in the collection occur in other earlier translations and indigenous compilations. [272] Medieval bibliographers were also aware of this. Zhisheng 智昇 mentioned that a *Method of Lakṣmī* (*Gongde tian fa* 功德天法) translated by two other Indian monks was collected into the tenth fascicle.[273] The complexity of the origins of the *Collected Dhāraṇī Sūtras* demonstrates that for medieval Buddhists, both foreign and local, "translating sūtras" (*fanjing* 翻經) was sometimes an activity involving not only converting one language to another but also collecting, editing, and rearranging extant materials in hand.

The tradition of picking up pieces of ritual instructions from various sources and putting them together was not new to medieval Chinese Buddhists. A probably earlier and less organized example, *Miscellaneous Collection of Dhāraṇī* (*Tuoluoni zaji* 陀羅尼雜集), also carries similar features as the *Collected Dhāraṇī Sūtras*. Though unable to identify a specific composer, medieval cataloguers thought it was composed before the Tang dynasty.[274] The ten-fascicle collection, which lacks any preface or epilogue, does not explicitly articulate the background of the work or the principle of its organization. However, medieval cataloguers were also able to discern the origins of some of the dhāraṇīs in it. For them, though the work was not translated from a single Sanskrit original, it still deserved to be kept in the monasteries of the capital and recorded in a government-sanctioned catalogue.

[272] Koichi Shinohara, *Spells, Images, and Maṇḍala: Tracing the Evolution of Esoteric Buddhist Rituals* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 30.
[273] *Kaiyuan shijiao lu*, *T*. no. 2154, 55: 562c20–2.
[274] *Kaiyuan shijiao lu*, *T*. no. 2154, 55: 624b5–7.

Both the *Collected Dhāraṇī Sūtras* and the *Miscellaneous Collection of Dhāraṇī* are then medieval examples of how educated monks curated ritual techniques by synthesizing a variety of sources. But what about less educated, more humble practitioners who did not understand Indic languages? How did they compile and utilize their own repertoires to address the difficulties in their life or for their clients?

Current investigations show us that these two abovementioned collections were not particularly popular in Dunhuang.[275] Instead, people on the northwestern frontier developed their own collections. These collections vary from each other in content and physical form.[276] To understand the local practice of compiling such collections, and how talismans fit into them, the chapter will take a close look at S. 2498, a long handwritten scroll found in Dunhuang and now preserved in the British Library.

The scroll, measuring more than 12 meters long, contains 38 separate items.[277] By examining the content and origin of the sections and how they fit together as a whole, the chapter aims to show how talismanic objects formed part of larger ritual repertoires in medieval China. The repertoire drew inspiration from a spectrum of religious elements, ranging from authentic translated sources, to pseudo-foreign texts forged by Chinese hands, to indigenous practices.

In a recently published book, Imre Galambos explored the so-called "multiple-text manuscripts." He mainly focuses on the codices and concertinas that contain multiple Buddhist

[275] For the *Collected Dhāraṇī Sūtras*, there are seven fragmentary pieces remain in the cave, and for the *Miscellaneous Collection of Dhāraṇī*, there are only two. See *Taishōzō Tonkō shutsudo butten taishō mokuroku (zantei daisanban)*大正蔵·敦煌出土仏典対照目録 (暫定第 3 版) (Tokyo: Kokusai Bukkyōgaku daigakuin daigaku huzoku toshokan, 2015), 198, 209.

[276] For an overview, see Li Xiaorong 李小榮, *Dunhuang mijiao wenxian lungao* 敦煌密教文獻論稿 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2003), 299–322.

[277] Scholars have different countings concerning the number of items. Li Xiaorong counts 29, while Fang Guangchang 方廣錩 and Susan Whitfield count 53, see their *Yingguo guojia tushuguan cang Dunhuang yishu* 英國國家圖書館藏敦煌遺書, vol. 42 (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2017), 11–2. These different numbers are results of different criteria about what constitutes a separated item. The following discussion of each item will show my own understanding of the content of the items and how to separate them.

scriptures, apocrypha, and incantations. According to him, the practice of producing such manuscripts involves several hands. In some examples, Galambos argues, some copyists were members of the same family. By collecting together the contributions of each family member to the project, the family shared the merits and activated the religious power of the manuscript. [278]

The scroll discussed in this chapter seems to tell a different story: though it also contains multiple texts, and it was likely made by several different hands, compared with the portable codices and concertinas, the scroll is significantly longer. The majority of the items collected, though claiming they are excerpts from Buddhist sources, concentrate on the practical level. The items are either scripts of petition used in a ritual, or detailed guidelines to cure ghostly diseases, or instructions for constructing ritual spaces. In other words, the texts contained in the scroll need to be read and followed. The scroll is not a token for the multiple copyists to accumulate merits simply by copying it. To gain protective and apotropaic power, one has to study it carefully. This requirement represents another critical difference. Unlike any family that could contribute to the copying of a Buddhist sūtra, the makers/users of scrolls like this were professional ritualists. As a representative of medieval ritual repertoires possessed by these ritualists, S. 2498 also reveals that different textual repertoires and their material manifestation in individual manuscripts were carefully cherished, frequently consulted, and meticulously corrected by these professionals.

S. 2498, A Repertoire of Ritual Techniques

[278] Imre Galambos, *Dunhuang Manuscript Culture: End of the First Millennium* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 23–84.

Talisman was not a stand-alone category. In medieval China, they belong to larger collections of ritual techniques used by professionals and ordinary people to address their daily troubles and hopes. Tools and techniques in the repertoire could be employed individually or collectively. These thaumaturgical methods not only complement each other but also share some basic principles. The analysis of these tools and the relation between them will reveal how the ritual repertoire was constructed by drawing resources from multiple sources, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist.

Ritual manuals discovered in the "library cave" in Dunhuang also provide an invaluable window for understanding how people on the ground made and used the repertoire. This section will thoroughly investigate what items were included in the scroll and how they were arranged by its maker(s) and user(s). Disclosing the diverse origins of these items, the section argues that medieval Dunhuang ritualists had access to a variety of sources to deal with everyday troubles. By placing the items together and occasionally adding new items, these professionals showed that they were able to manage and enrich ritual repertoires.

The scroll S. 2498 has a height of 25 cm (≈9.85 inches) and a length of 1219.2 cm (≈40 feet), and it is comprised of dozens of single sheets of paper pasted together. [279] The last two sheets of paper are significantly whiter and brighter, which may suggest they were affixed to the scroll at a later time. The scroll bears a title at the beginning, *Talismans and Seals of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara*, in one scroll (*Guanshiyin pusa fuyin yijuan* 觀世音菩薩符印一卷).

[279] A transcription of the whole scroll can be found in Hao Chunwen 郝春文 ed., *Yingcang Dunhuang shehui lishi wenxian shilu* 英藏敦煌社會歷史文獻釋錄, vol. 12 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2015), 190–226. For a brief introduction to the scroll, see Li Xiaorong, *Dunhuang mijiao wenxian lungao*, 299-303. Also see Dunhuang yanjiu yuan 敦煌研究院, ed., *Dunhuang yishu zongmu suoyin xinbian* 敦煌遺書總目新編 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2000), 76; Neil Schmid, "Dunhuang and Central Asia (with an Appendix on Dunhuang Sources)," in *Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia*, eds. Charles D. Orzech, Henrik H. Sorensen, Richard K. Payne (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 368–9.

Item no.1 of the scroll is a lengthy petition to invoke multiple deities. The list of deities invited not only includes typical Buddhist deities such as the various vajras (*jingang* 金剛), rākṣasas (*luosha* 羅剎), Mahākāla, and the eight groups of spiritual beings. Chinese deities also constitute part of the list. For instance, the Magistrate of Mount Tai (*Taishan fujun* 泰山府君), who oversees the realm for the dead, is juxtaposed alongside King Yama, his Indian counterpart.[280] All these deities are summoned to ensure the security of the ritual realm established by the petitioner. According to the invocation, evil beings who enter the realm will be punished harshly:

> For beings who enter my realm, their heads will break into pieces just as the branches of an *Ali* tree. The Southern Dipper is in charge of living [beings], and the Big Dipper is in charge of the dead [beings]. Quickly, quickly in accordance with the statutes and ordinances.
> 入我界者, 頭破作分如阿黎樹枝. 南斗主生, 北斗主死, 急急如律令.

The lethal curse here shows a mixture of Buddhist influence and indigenous formula. The first part, where the heads of evil beings break into pieces, is a recurring motif in Buddhist texts. In the four *Āgama*s, one's head breaking into seven pieces is always mentioned as the result of someone being arrogant or disrespectful to the Buddha or his teaching.[281] In the Dhāraṇī chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra*, after the ten *rākṣasī*s teaches an incantation, they threaten that for beings who do not follow their incantation, their heads will break into seven pieces just as the *arjaka*

[280] The two deities were also incorporated into the sequence of the ten kings, who are appointed to judge people after their death. See Stephen F. Teiser, *The Scripture on the Ten Kings and the Making of Purgatory in Medieval Chinese Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994).
[281] *Chang a'han jing* 長阿含經, trans. Fotuoyeshe 佛陀耶舍 (*Buddhayaśas, fl. 408), Zhu Fonian 竺佛念 (fl. 5th c.), *T*. no.1, 1: 68a5–6, 83a16–8; *Zhong a'han jing* 中阿含經, trans. Qutan sengqietipo 瞿曇僧伽提婆 (*Gautama Saṃghadeva, fl. 4th c.), *T*. no. 26, 1: 453c26–8, 478c19–20, 611a29–b1, 679b16–7; *Za a'han jing* 雜阿含經, trans. Qiunabatuoluo 求那跋陀羅 (*Guṇabhadra, 394–468), *T*. no. 99, 2: 36a17–8, 303b9–10; *Zengyi a'han jing* 增壹阿含經, trans. Qutan sengqietipo 瞿曇僧伽提婆 (*Gautama Saṃghadeva, fl. 4th c.), *T*. no. 125, 2: 713b5-15, 786b12.

branches (*Ali shuzhi* 阿梨樹枝).[282] Tang translator Huilin 慧琳 pointed out that the Chinese translation *Ali shu* 阿梨樹 is inaccurate since there is no such tree. According to him, the original Sanskrit word refers to the tip of the stem of *andūka-mañjari* (Ocimum tenuiflorum). When the flower on the stem is about to bloom, the bud begins to break into seven pieces.[283]

However, the second part of the curse goes in another direction. The idea of the division of labor between the Southern Dipper and the Big Dipper appears as early as the fourth century. In Gan Bao's 干寶 (d. 336) *In Search of the Supernatural* (*Soushen ji* 搜神記), Guan Ke 管輅 (209–256), a renowned diviner of his time, explained:

> The South Dipper records the living, and the North Dipper records the dead. Whenever people conceive, they all follow the South Dipper. [When people] pray for good fortune, they all head towards the North Dipper.[284]
> 南斗註生, 北斗註死. 凡人受胎, 皆從南斗. 祈福皆向北斗.

The idea also scatters in Daoist texts. The *Demon Statutes of Nüqing* (*Nüqing guilü* 女青鬼律), a complicated Daoist text that may have been compiled no later than the fourth century with later redaction and changes,[285] makes it clear that the Big Dipper is responsible for those who have been killed, and its southern counterpart for the living.[286] Following this popular idea, a common Chinese formula, "Quickly, quickly in accordance with the statutes and ordinances" (*jiji*

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[282] *Miaofa lianhua jing* 妙法蓮華經, trans. Jiumoluoshi 鳩摩羅什 (Kumārajīva, 344–413), *T*. no. 262, 9: 59b13; Also see Leon Hurvitz, trans. *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma: The Lotus Sutra* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 323.
[283] *Yiqie jing yinyi* 一切經音義, Huilin 慧琳 (737–820), *T*. no. 2128, 54: 541c14. For the botanical identification of andūka-mañjari as *Ocimum tenuiflorum*, see Waku Hirotaka 和久博隆, *Shinsōban bukkyō shokubutsu jiten* 新装版仏教植物辞典 (Tokyo: Kokusho Kankōkai 国書刊行会, 2013), 8.
[284] Li Jianguo 李劍國 ed., *Xinji soushen ji* 新輯搜神記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), 66–67.
[285] Lai Chi-Tim, "The 'Demon Statutes of Nüqing' and the Problem of the Bureaucratization of the Netherworld in Early Heavenly Master Daoism," *T'oung Pao*, 2nd Series, 88, no.4/5 (2002): 251–81.
[286] *Nüqing guilü*, *ZH* 8: 600a.

ru lüling 急急如律令), which was derived from early Han official documents and was later adopted by Daoists, concludes the invocation.

After the formula, it seems the text goes on to teach a continuous invocation. However, before vocally uttering the petition, one should first form the hand-seal (*yin* 印, Skt. *mudrā*) of Amoghapāśa.[287] Then the petition starts to summon deities and ghosts of the twelve groups (actually, only eleven are listed). The first six groups are the four directional heavenly kings and their retinues, the heavenly deities of the Trayastriṃśa (*daoli tian* 忉利天) and their retinues, and the wheel-turning sage kings and their companions. The six groups are stationed in six directions (east, south, west, north, heavenly deities from Trayastriṃśa for the space above, and wheel-turning kings for the ground). The following five groups of deities are invited to enter the ritual realm. They are the blue god and blue deity of the east, the red of the south, the white of the west, the black of the north, and the yellow from the center. The directions in the list correspond to the colors based on the indigenous theory of five agents (*wuxing* 五行).[288] The five groups of color deities are then invited to enter the water prepared by the invoker beforehand. The water then should be spewed by the ritual performer:

> My water is restless, spew once. [My water] is as cruel as frost and snow, spew again. Having finished [spewing water], the road is cut off.
> 吾水非息, 一啄; 嚴如霜雪, 載（再）啄. 已訖, 道路斷.

[287] The method of how to form the mudrā of Amoghapāśa can be found in *Bukong juansuo shenbian zhenyan jing* 不空羂索神變真言經, trans. Putiliuzhi 菩提流志 (*Bodhiruci, d. 727), *T*. no. 1092, 20: 350b14–9.
[288] The correspondence between the five directions and five colors in constructing a ritual site is also seen in texts supposed to be translations of Indic texts. For example, see Koichi Shinohara, *Spells, Images, and Maṇḍalas: Tracing the Evolution of Esoteric Buddhist Rituals*, 80–1. For how Sinitic *wuxing* theory is integrated into Chinese Buddhism and Japanese Buddhism, see Jinhua Chen, *Legend and Legitimation: The Formation of Tendai Esoteric Buddhism in Japan* (Bruxelles : Institut Belge des hautes études chinoises, 2009), 189–244.

The line seems to be a mixture of a script (words spoken) and instructions (what actions to perform). The ritual performer needs to vocalize the four-character verses describing the water inhabited by the color-deities and then follow the instruction to spit it out. The aim of the performance is to cut off the road for some reason that has not been expounded. Considering the previous deployment of deities to guard the site, it might be an effort to prevent evil beings from intruding into the ritual arena. After manipulating the divine water, the text invites dozens of deities again to demarcate the perimeter of a sacred space.

The analysis above reveals that the first item of the repertoire, which focuses on how to invite various deities to protect and consecrate a ritual site, depicts a rather diversified pantheon that consists of both foreign and local deities in medieval minds.[289] Although the text is supposed to be composed by a Chinese hand, it employs both indigenous and imported Buddhist resources. Foreign transliterated titles of deities and local formulas are mixed to prepare and enclose a ritual site.

Item no. 2 in the repertoire is a long dhāraṇī incantation titled *Dhāraṇī Incantation of Great Compassion of a Thousand Hands and Eyes* (*Qianshou qianyan dabeixin tuoluoni zhou* 千手千眼大悲心陀羅尼呪). Following it are two more shorter incantations: (no. 3) *Incantation of Sunlight Bodhisattva* (*Riguang pusa zhou* 日光菩薩呪) and (no. 4) *Incantation of Moonlight Bodhisattva* (*Yueguang pusa zhou* 月光菩薩呪). Li Xiaorong suggests that they were all taken from *Dhāraṇī Sūtra of the Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva with a Thousand Hands and Eyes with Vast, Complete, Unimpeded Great Compassion* (*Qianshou qianyan guanshiyin pusa guangda*

[289] For such pantheon depicted in Dunhuang petitions, see Yu Xin 余欣, *Shendao renxin: Tangsong zhiji Dunhuang minsheng zongjiao shehuishi yanjiu* 神道人心: 唐宋之際敦煌民生宗教社會史研究 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2003), 56–74.

yuanman wu'ai dabeixin tuoluoni jing 千手千眼觀世音菩薩廣大圓滿無礙大悲心陀羅尼經), translated by the Indian monk Bhagavaddharma (Jiafandamo 伽梵達摩) who came to China during the Tang dynasty.[290] However, a close comparison between the incantations here and the transmitted text preserved in the *Taishō* canon shows there are significant differences. The first dhāraṇī in the Dunhuang manual is much longer than its counterparts in any Tang translation of the *One Thousand Hands and Eyes Sūtra*.[291]

Item no.5 is an *Incantation of Body with a Thousand Hands and Eyes* (*Qianshouyan Shenzhou* 千手眼身呪). Compared with the spell with a similar title in *Dhāraṇī Incantation of the Thousand-Eyed, Thousand-Armed Bodhisattva Avalokitêśvara* (*Qianshou qianyan guanshiyin pusa tuoluoni Shenzhou jing* 千眼千臂觀世音菩薩陀羅尼神呪經) translated by Zhitong 智通 in the mid-seventh century, the characters that represent Sanskrit syllables are usually different, but the overall length and structure are the same.[292]

Item no. 6 in the manual is *Dhāraṇī Verses of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva with Wish-fulfilling Jewel Wheel* (*Guanshiyin pusa ruyilun tuoluoni zhangju* 觀世音菩薩如意輪陀羅尼章句). The incantation attributes Aśvaghoṣa as its translator. The *Dhāraṇī Verses* include three separate spells. The first is the longest, and the second and third ones are significantly shorter,

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[290] Li Xiaorong, *Dunhuang mijiao wenxian lungao*, 299. For the translator, see *Kaiyuan shijiao lu*, T. no. 2154, 55: 562b27–c3.

[291] The sūtra was especially popular and was translated several times in medieval China. See *Qianyan qianbi guanshiyin pusa tuoluoni shenzhou jing* 千眼千臂觀世音菩薩陀羅尼神呪經, trans. Zhitong 智通 (fl. 7th c.), *T*. no. 1057; *Qianshou qianyan guangshiyin pusa lao tuoluoni shenjing* 千手千眼觀世音菩薩姥陀羅尼身經, trans. Puti liuzhi 菩提流志 (*Bodhiruci, d. 727), *T*. no. 1058; *Qianshou qianyan guanshiyin pusa guangda yuanman wu'ai dabeixin tuoluoni jing* 千手千眼觀世音菩薩廣大圓滿無礙大悲心陀羅尼經, trans. Bhagavaddharma 伽梵達摩, *T*. no. 1060; *Qianshou qianyan guangshiyin dashen zhouben* 千手千眼觀世音菩薩大身呪本, trans. Jingang zhi 金剛智 (Vajrabodhi, 669–741), *T*. no. 1062a; *Fan dabei shenzhou* 番大悲神呪, trans. unknown. *T*. no. 1063; *Qianshou qianyan guanshiyin pusa dabeixin tuoluoni* 千手千眼觀世音菩薩大悲心陀羅尼, trans. Bukong 不空 (Amoghavajra, 705–774), *T*. no. 1064.

[292] *Qianyan qianbi guanshiyin pusa tuoluoni shenzhou jing* 千眼千臂觀世音菩薩陀羅尼神呪經, trans. Zhitong 智通 (fl. 7th c.), *T*. no. 1057, 20: 90b21–91a24. Also, see Li Xiaorong, *Dunhuang mijiao wenxian lungao*, 300.

labelled Heart Spell (*xinzhou* 心咒) and Heart of Hearts Spell (*xinzhongxin zhou* 心中心呪). The three spells are similar to those in the transmitted sources with minor alternative characters.[293] What is interesting is that after the three spells, a "Separate Rite of the Dharma Seal of Manihadra, the Wish-fulfilling Jewel and Wheel King " (*Ruyi lunwang moni batuo biexing fayin* 如意輪王摩尼拔陀別行法印) is introduced. According to the introduction, the rite is said to be:

> Applicable to all purposes, and its efficacy is without parallel. There are thirty-six people who are able to see this Rite. Only the Aśvaghoṣa Bodhisattva can practice and use it. If there are people who are able to see this Rite, they will immediately go beyond the ten stages.
> 通一切用, 功力無仁(比 or 二). 得見此法總有卅六人可見. 唯有馬鳴菩薩得行用, 若有見此法者即超十地.

However, after the bold introduction that claims its exceptionality and great efficacy, only another short transliterate incantation follows. Compared with other Dunhuang manuscripts that contain the text, such as P. 2153, P. 2602, and P. 3835, the whole part of the dharma seals is omitted in S. 2498.[294] Considering the previous and following items, it seems here the copyist(s) were more interested in recording the verbal spells.

What follows is a new item (no. 7), the *Divine Dhāraṇī Spell of the Glory of the Buddha's Corona* (*Foding zunsheng tuoluoni shenzhou* 佛頂尊勝陀羅尼神咒). As Li Xiaorong points out, the transliteration of the dhāraṇī is significantly different from any surviving translations preserved in the Chinese Buddhist canon.[295]

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[293] *Ruyilun tuoluoni jing* 如意輪陀羅尼經, trans. Putiliuzhi 菩提流志 (*Bodhiruci, d. 727), *T*. no. 1080, 20: 188c8–189a5.
[294] See Paul Copp, "Manuscript Culture as Ritual Culture in Late Medieval Dunhuang: Buddhist Talisman-Seals and Their Manuals," *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 20 (2011): 193–226.
[295] Li Xiaorong, *Dunhuang mijiao wenxian lungao*, 300.

The next item (no. 8) is a root incantation (*genben zhou* 根本呪) pertaining to Āṭavika (Azha poju 阿吒婆拘). The incantation bears a wordy title, in which it claims the great general Āṭavika is a transformation of the historical Buddha, Śākyamuni. The title also indicates the general subdues all demonic beings such as vicious *yakṣas* and *rākṣasa* with dew. The long root incantation is followed by a much shorter spell for constructing a ritual site, which also is attributed to Āṭavika. As pointed out by Li Xiaorong, the root incantation is quite similar to the *Entrusted Incantation of Āṭavika* (*Azha boju fuzhu zhou* 阿吒薄拘付囑呪) that survives in Japan,[296] with minor differences. According to the instruction, the incantation is used when someone is going to meditate or recite sūtras. Reciting the incantation seven times will help the practitioner ward off demonic beings who perplex the mind.

The Āṭavika incantation is followed by another dhāraṇī spell (no. 9) attributed to the Blue-faced vajra (*Qingmian jingang* 青面金剛). The spell has a counterpart in the *Collected Dhāraṇī Sūtras*.[297] The Dunhuang incantation bears several minor differences from the transmitted version. Furthermore, it only extracts the transliteration of the syllables constituting the incantation without expounding on the instructions and benefits of using the incantation.

The next item (no. 10) on the roll is the *Root Heart Dharani of Eradicating Transgressions from the Akṣobhya of the East* (*Dongfang Achufo miezui genbenxin tuoluoni* 東方阿閦佛滅罪根本心陀羅尼). The short dhāraṇī does not have a counterpart in any transmitted texts. However, a recently discovered Qing manuscript (copied in 1698) contains a similar incantation as a component of a more extensive ritual. According to the manuscript, the ritual manual is attributed to Yuanzhao 元照 of Song dynasty (960–1279). However, the only Yuanzhao who left

[296] *T*. no. 1240.
[297] *Tuoluoni jijing*, trans. Adiquduo 阿地瞿多 (*Atikūṭa, fl. 652), *T*. no. 901, 18: 866c27–867a27.

his traces in Song history was a master of the vinaya texts.[298] It seems here the Yuanzhao who compiled this ritual manual for saving suffering people and bestowing benefits was a different person. The ritual manual does not survive in any canons. Nevertheless, during the Ming and Qing dynasties, it was well-received and practiced in the Yunnan region by *Azhali* 阿吒力 (ritual master, Skt. *ācārya*) masters.[299]

A short incantation (no. 11) attributed to Kuṇḍalī follows. The incantation is similar to the *Great Heart Incantation of Kuṇḍalī* (*Juntuli daxin zhou* 軍荼利大心呪) in the *Collected Dhāraṇī Sūtras*. [300]

The next title (no. 12) is again the *Dhāraṇī Verses of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva with Wish-fulfilling Jewel Wheel*. The copyist realized this repetition and added a short annotation to the title reading "this has already been copied previously" (*yi qian xiejing* 已前寫竟). The two short spells, the first one titled the Root Bodily Spell (*Genben shenzhou* 根本身呪) and the second one titled the Heart of Hearts Spell (*Xinzhong xinzhou* 心中心呪), are quite similar to the two spells in item no. 6.

What comes next (no. 13) is an incantation for capturing evil ghosts ascribed to Ucchuṣma (*Wuchusemo* 嗚蒭瑟摩), one of the luminous kings who was considered a mastermind of thaumaturgical techniques.[301] Li Xiaorong suggests there is a counterpart in the *Collected*

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[298] *Fozu tongji* 佛祖統紀, Zhipan 志磐 (1220–1275), *T*. no. 2035, 49: 278c16–8.
[299] For introduction and transcription of the Qing manuscript, see Zhao Wenhuan 趙文煥, Hou Chong 侯沖 eds., "Dizang cibei jiuku jianfu lisheng daochang yi 藏慈悲救苦薦福利生道場儀," *Zangwai fojiao wenxian* 藏外佛教文獻 6 (1998): 227–44. For the study of the *Azhali* tradition, see Hou Chong, *Yunnan yu bashu fojiao yanjiu lungao* 雲南與巴蜀佛教研究論稿 (Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 2006); *Yunnan azhali jiao jingdian yanjiu* 雲南阿吒力教經典研究 (Beijing: Zhongguo shuji chubanshe, 2008). See also Megan Bryson, *Goddess on the Frontier: Religion, Ethnicity, and Gender in Southwest China* (Stanford University Press, 2016).
[300] *Tuoluoni jijing*, *T*. no. 901, 18: 854b28–c2.
[301] For a study of Ucchuṣma, see Zhaohua Yang, "Devouring Impurities: Myth, Ritual and Talisman in the Cult of Ucchuṣma in Tang China" (PhD dissertation, Stanford University, 2013).

Dhāraṇī Sūtras.[302] However, a close comparison shows only the first two lines of the spell are similar to those of the corresponding passage.

Both of the next two incantations indicate their origins. No. 14, according to its title, is an excerpt from the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* (*Daban niepan jing* 大般涅槃經). However, its counterpart in Tanwuchen's (385–433) translation is quite different. [303] It seems the incantation was taken from a translation that has been lost.

Text no. 15, according to its long title, is part of a dhāraṇī scripture concerning the uṣṇīṣa (Buddha's peak). However, no similar incantation is found in transmitted sources or Dunhuang manuscripts.

The following several items all contain the phrase True Word (*zhenyan* 真言) in their titles, which is an alternative Chinese translation for the Sanskrit word mantra or dhāraṇī. The first one (no. 16) is called *True Word of the Five Devas Presenting Swords* (*Wutian xianjian zhenyan* 五天獻劍真言). The incantation is presented as transliteration of Sanskrit syllables. However, there are five short couplets, each ending with the Chinese word for sword (*jian* 劍):

> Chinese: 怛吒劍 鉢利劍 醯劍 摩醯劍 鉢利摩醯劍
> Modern Mandarin pronunciation: Dazha jian, boli jian, xi jian, moxi jian, boli moxi jian
> Tentative Sanskrit reconstruction: *tatkaṃ parikaṃ hākaṃ mahākaṃ parimahākaṃ*[304]

Compared with other Chinese characters used in the couplets, *jian* 劍 (medieval Chinese pronunciation: kiam^{h} or kiam` by Pulleyblank) is not frequently used in texts transliterated from

[302] *Tuoluoni jijing*, *T*. no. 901, 18: 861b10-c13.
[303] *Daban niepan jing* 大般涅槃經, trans. Tanwuchen 曇無讖 (Dharmakṣema, 385-433), *T*. no. 374, 12: 370a22–3.
[304] For the discussion of reconstruction of Sanskrit incantation based on Chinese transliteration, see Lin Guangming 林光明, *Fanhan duiyin chutan* 梵漢對音初探 (Taipei: Jiafeng chubanshe, 2011).

Indic languages. According to some medieval manuals on translation between Chinese and Sanskrit, phonetically, the character 劍 resembles *kaṃ* or simply *ka* in Sanskrit.[305] However, the combinations of *kaṃ* or *ka* with the other prefixes here are meaningless in Sanskrit. Furthermore, the Chinese transliteration shows that the last four couplets are basically wordplays of separation and recombination. If we take the title of the *Ture Word* into consideration, then these are perhaps the "swords" presented by the five devas. If this is the case, the whole spell should be a pseudo-transliterated-Sanskrit creation by some Chinese hand.

The next two items (nos. 17 and 18) are True Word associated with Vajrakumāra (*Jingang tongzi* 金剛童子). Then another incantation (no. 19) is presented in association with Tathāgata with Jeweled and Fixed Light of the South (*Nanfang baodingguang rulai* 南方寶定光如來). The epithet does not exist in any other transmitted sources. However, it seems to refer to the Ratnasaṃbhava Tathāgata (*Baosheng rulai* 寶生如來) of the South, one of the five Wisdom Tathāgatas of the Vajradhātu. The title of the incantation also suggests the Tathāgata is in the disguise of a great general named Kuta (*Quzha da jiangjun* 屈吒大將軍).

The incantation starts with a short instruction elaborating on the occasions when it can be used:

> If there are feline ghosts or corpses along roads across the wilderness, quickly, quickly [they will] be captured in accordance with statutes and ordinances.
> 若有貓鬼野道伏尸, 急急如律令攝.

[305] *Fanyu qianzi wen* 梵語千字文, Yijing 義淨 (635–713), *T*. no. 2133B, 54: 1207a16; *Xitan ziji* 悉曇字記, Zhiguang 智廣 (d. 806), *T*. no. 2132, 54: 1188c22.

The instruction betrays its Chinese origin since the indigenous formula "quickly, quickly, in accordance with statutes and ordinances" is invoked to ensure the efficacy of the following incantation. Moreover, a close examination of the True Word itself reveals that the "transliteration" may have been fabricated by Chinese hands as well. The Chinese character *ji* 急 (quickly), as used in the formula translated above, appears ten times, leading almost every couplet. The mention of feline ghosts and corpses in the wilderness also aligns with medieval Chines anxieties. According to *General Treatise on Causes and Manifestations of All Diseases* (*Zhubing yuanhou lun* 諸病源候論), a work compiled by Chao Yuanfang 巢元方 during the Sui dynasty (581–618), feline ghosts are categorized under the poison named *gu* 蠱. As Chao explains, there are several kinds of *gu*-poison. The first kind is made by people intentionally. In this case, people take different types of insects and serpents, put them into a container, and let them bite each other. In the end, the last survivor will become the *gu*. People who possess the *gu*, usually with evil intentions, harm others by putting it into their food and drink. The other category of *gu* is called "flying *gu*" (*feigu* 飛蠱). *Gu* of this kind usually come and go without a trace and its shape resembles ghostly pneuma. Then Chao enumerates symptoms of being poisoned by *gu*. One of them is called manifestations of feline ghosts. These ghosts are "spirits of old cats and wild beings that turn into ghostly creatures and parasitize human beings."[306] As scholars have discovered, the feline ghosts were also tropes frequently associated with political conspiracies.[307] The other one following the feline ghosts is called "manifestations of roads in the wilderness." It refers to *gu* without bodily hosts. They float in the wilderness and attack

[306] Ding guangdi 丁光迪 ed., *Zhubing yuanhou lun jiaozhu* 諸病源候論校註 (Beijing: Zhongyi guji chubanshe, 2013), 98; Also see Rebecca Doran, "The Cat Demon, Gender, and Religious Practice: Towards Reconstructing a Medieval Chinese Cultural Pattern," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 135, no. 4 (2015): 689–707.
[307] Lu Xiangqian 盧向前, "Wu Zetian 'weimao shuo' yu Suishi 'maogui zhiyu' 武則天畏貓說與隋室貓鬼之獄," *Zhongguoshi yanjiu* 中國史研究 2006. 1: 81–94.

people. The two threats listed in Chao's treatise correspond to the True Word's benefits mentioned in the Dunhuang piece. Thus, it seems the incantation of the Tathāgata of the south could also be composed of pseudo-transliterated-Sanskrit texts based on Chinese indigenous sources as well.

The following item (no. 20) is the *True Word of the Great Wheel* (*Dalun zhenyan* 大輪真言). An instruction on how to form a mudrā is also attached to the title. Incantations with a similar title can be found in several transmitted sources. The *Collected Dhāraṇī Sūtras* incorporates a *Dhāraṇī of Great Wheel Vajra* (*Dalun jingang tuoluoni* 大輪金剛陀羅尼).[308] A similar incantation also exists in a *Sūtra of Three Incantations* (*Zhou sanshou jing* 咒三首經) attributed to Divākara of the seventh century.[309] However, these two samples only resemble the Dunhuang True Word in the first several couplets. A much closer resemblance is found in the *Dhāraṇī Sūtra of the Great Wheel Vajra, Spoken by the Buddha* (*Foshuo jingang dalun zongchi tuoluoni jing* 佛說大輪金剛總持陀羅尼經).[310] Compared with the Dunhuang case, the transmitted dhāraṇī sūtra praises the benefits of the incantation more highly, so that if people keep reciting it by following the instructions, they will be reborn in a Buddha-land immediately after they die.

The next True Word (no. 21) is attributed to Vaiśravaṇa of the North. Compared with incantations in the transmitted sources, the Dunhuang one only shares some similar couplets but is also significantly longer.[311]

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[308] *Tuoluoni jijing*, *T*. no. 901, 18: 803b11–8.
[309] *Zhou sanshou jing* 咒三首經, trans. Dipo heluo 地婆訶羅 (*Divākara, 614-688), *T*. no. 1338, 21: 640a17.
[310] *Foshuo jingang dalun zongchi tuoluoni jing* 佛說大輪金剛總持陀羅尼經, trans. unknown, *T*. no. 1230, 21: 162a12–23.
[311] Cf. *Beifang bishamen tianwang suijun hufa zhenyan* 北方毘沙門天王隨軍護法真言, trans Bukong 不空 (Amoghavajra, 705–774), *T*. no. 1248, 21: 225b29–c8.

The succeeding three items (nos. 22–24) are all associated with Vajrakumāra (*Jingang tongzi* 金剛童子). This "Diamond Boy," according to two transmitted sources in the modern scholarly *Taishō* canon,[312] is frequently summoned to conquer enemies and eliminate disasters when people are faced with them.[313]

The first one (no. 22) is called *The Method of the Wish-fulfilling Incantation of Vajrakumāra* (*Jingang tongzi suixin zhoufa* 金剛童子隨心呪法).[314] The incantation corresponds to another incantation with almost the same title in P. 3914.[315] The incantation itself is short and only occupies one and a half lines on the sheet. However, its benefits and how to employ it are expounded in detail. The section on benefits seems to be a collection of excerpts from three foreign translators. Maṇibhadra (Moni batuo 摩尼跋陁) and his assistants contribute the most. According to them, the incantation is capable of 1) curing all kinds of illnesses and epidemic diseases caused by different evil spirits; 2) enchanting divine talismans (*zhou shenfu* 呪神符); 3) purifying a ritual site and securing its boundaries; 4) detoxifying poisons; 5) enabling people, whether young or old, man or woman, to see heavens, underworld, the dragon's palace, hell, and even the Land of Amitābha in the west; 6) empowering people to know the causes of sufferings, happiness, auspiciousness and inauspiciousness of their family and relatives for seven generations. The list then discusses a practical scenario of the benefits of the incantation—if

[312] *Sheng jiani fennu jingang tongzi pusa chengjiu yigui jing* 聖迦柅忿怒金剛童子菩薩成就儀軌經, trans Bukong (Amoghavajra, 705–774), *T*. no. 1222A/B. *Jingang tongzi chinian jing* 金剛童子持念經, trans. unknown, *T*. no. 1224.
[313] See Christine Mollier, *Buddhism and Taoism Face to Face: Scripture, Ritual, and Iconographic Exchange in Medieval China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. 2008), 86–87. Catherine Despeux, "Buddhist Healing Practices at Dunhuang in the Medieval Period" in *Buddhist Healing in Medieval China and Japan*, eds. C. Pierce Saiguero, Andrew Macomber (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2020), 128.
[314] For a detailed description of the item, also see Catherine Despeux, "Pratiques magico-religieuses bouddhiques," in *Médecine, religion et société dans la Chine médiévale: étude de manuscrits chinois de Dunhuang et de Turfan*, ed. Catherine Despeux (Paris : Collège de France, Institut des hautes études chinoises, 2010), 971–3.
[315] *Jingang tongzi suixin zhou* 金剛童子隨心呪.

someone, piously burning stick incense and inviting buddhas, bodhisattvas, and benign deities to descend, wants to know whether these guests arrive or not, s/he can tell with his/her own eyes after reciting the incantation. The list then returns to discuss the benefits again, which include subjugating various ghosts and spirits and calming the practitioner's mind.

The following list of benefits is attributed to the legendary translator Tanwuchen 曇無讖 (*Dharmakṣema, 385–433). According to him, apart from protecting the practitioner and conquering the evil Māra, each time one recites the incantation, a transformation buddha (*huafo* 化佛, Skt. *nirmāṇa-kāya*) will emerge from one's mouth. And when people die, they will be reborn into the Pure Land in the west to see the Amitābha Buddha.

The text then proceeds to ritual instructions. The first several pieces are attributed to the great translator Kumārajīva (Jiumoluoshi 鳩摩羅什, 344–413). They teach how to make images of the Vajrakumāra and how to invoke and employ a ghost by ritually harnessing a dead person's skull. No such texts attributed to Kumārajīva survive in the transmitted sources, and Kumārajīva's translatorship is highly unlikely.

The text then turns to long instructions on how to use the incantation. The three translators are mentioned again. These instructions include how to pacify a state, how to silence people who insult others, how to predict the harvest of crops, how to secure goats returning safely and keep evil demons away, etc.

The following item (no. 23) is the *Wish-fulfilling Incantation of Vajrakumāra to Kill Ghosts* (*Jingang tongzi suixin shagui zhou* 金剛童子隨心煞鬼呪). The short incantation is followed by a narrative recounting how the incantation was taught by the World-honored One. According to the narration, Vajrakumāra and Fiery-headed Vajra (*Huotou jingang* 火頭金剛,

Skt. *Ucchuṣma*) decided to challenge a great king who murdered many sentient beings. The Buddha taught the incantation as well as how to establish a ritual site.

Item no. 24 is the *Incantation and Seal of Kuṇḍalī Vajra* (*Juntuli jingang zhouyin* 軍荼利金剛呪印). The incantation and hand-seal are used to "quickly subjugate all ghosts" (*jifu yiqie gui* 急縛一切鬼). After illustrating how to form the mudrā, a transliterated incantation is attached. However, in the middle of the incantation, an instruction is inserted, "use it quickly, exclaim it quickly, and employ it quickly" *(jiyong, jihuan, jishi* 急用, 急喚, 急使). Then another "Liberation Hand-seal" is taught. The hand gesture has to be formed with a recitation of the Uṣṇīṣavijayā incantation. After that, three more incantations are introduced. Their titles all bear the Chinese character *jin* 禁, which is the indigenous term for a spell. One of the three spells is an enumeration of lords from the four directions:

> The Blue Lord of the East is the essence of wood, the Red Lord of the South is in the shape of a vermillion bird, the White Lord of the West has the body of a white tiger, and the Dark Lord of the North moves by riding a snake.
> 東方青帝目(木)中精, 南方赤帝朱雀形, 西方白帝白虎身, 北方黑帝乘蛇行.

The incantation is similar to a spell in the chapter on incantation of the *Supplement to the Essential Prescriptions Worth a Thousand Pieces of Gold* (*Qianjin yifang* 千金翼方).[316] According to its author, Sun Simiao 孫思邈 (?–682), all the incantations collected in his book are "crude and unpolished in diction, and probably emerged through folk transmission." Sun also held that he recorded them faithfully without any editing. Thus, it seems both the ritualist who

[316]Zhu Bangxian 朱邦賢, Chen Wenguo 陳文國 eds., *Qianjin yifang jiaozhu* 千金翼方校註 (Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1999), 898.

fabricated this *Incantation* and Sun picked up a similar source that was widely circulating in medieval China.

The following item (no. 25) is the *Heart Incantation of Vajrakumāra* (*Jingang tongzi xinzhou* 金剛童子心呪). The incantation has two applications. The first one is similar to the benefits mentioned above, which guarantee a transformation buddha will come out of the mouth when the incantation is recited. The second application, on the other hand, is unique. According to the instruction, if someone's property is stolen, the owner should find a young child of seven *sui*. After reciting the incantation seven times over the child, the child will be able to tell the thief's whereabouts. Having learned the thief's location, one should just recite the incantation again towards the thief's direction, and the thief will tie himself up and turn himself in. The directions also warn people that before utilizing the incantation, one must refrain from eating impure food such as the five pungent roots.

The next item (no.26) is the *Incantation of the Child with Six Arms* (*Liubi tongzi zhou* 六臂童子呪). The incantation is not found in any transmitted sources. Its instruction cautions that people should not use it to kill ghosts since it may also harm innocent individuals. What is more interesting is that immediately after this incantation, two more short spells are added. Both of them ask people to recite them seven times to attain the benefit of being released from the power of an incantation (*jiezhou* 解咒). It seems here the scribe put these two immediately after a precarious incantation as a safety net.

The next item (no. 27) is vague since it does not have a title nor has a clear relation to previous items. It describes a special ritual procedure:

> On the first day of the first month, when people still have not gotten up, ornament a burner and burn the incense. Everyone should make three prostrations to worship the Buddha of the East. Then everyone should make three prostrations to worship all the Buddhas of ten directions. Each efficacious incantation should be recited three times. [If you] follow this method, [the incantation] will be fulfilled.
> When reciting an incantation, if one is facing the east and reciting all kinds of incantations, one should practice this.
> 正月一日人未起時, 嚴爐香燒, 禮東方佛各當作三拜. 然後遍禮十方諸佛各三拜. 所誦神咒各三遍, 作此法即得神驗. 若誦呪時, 面向東方誦一切諸呪皆如是持.

Judged from the diction of the instruction, the instruction seems to be a generic procedure to utilize a variety of incantations. There is the possibility that the instruction here concludes the previous part by adding a general guideline.

After the general instruction, two images (no. 28) are added. The upper one shows four arrows on a bow. The lower one seems to depict a face, showing two flaming crystals placed above and below the two eyes. The two illustrations are inserted symmetrically between previous and later texts (Fig. 5.1). This suggests that the two images were drawn after the text was completed.

Then two identical talismans were added (no. 29, also see fig. 5.1). According to the instruction, the talisman formed by curly lines should be drawn in a bowl of water. Here, no ink or paper is needed. The water, after being imbued with the form of a talisman, is capable of cleansing one's eyes.



Fig. 5.1

Then a large and extremely complicated talisman is added (no. 30, see fig. 5.2). Apart from the talisman, two more identical but unknown characters are also displayed on the left. The character is comprised of the Chinese words for corpse (*shi* 尸), son (*zi* 子), and horse (*ma* 馬). The talisman should be swallowed by pregnant women who are experiencing obstructed labor. In order to facilitate the process, a peach soup is also prescribed to go together with the talisman. One should make the soup by using seven peach kernels with their tips cut off. The soup also has to be embellished with some drops of vinegar.[317]

[317] For the talisman, also see Hsin-yi Lin, "Dealing with Childbirth in Medieval Chinese Buddhism: Discourses and Practices" (PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 2017), 249–50.

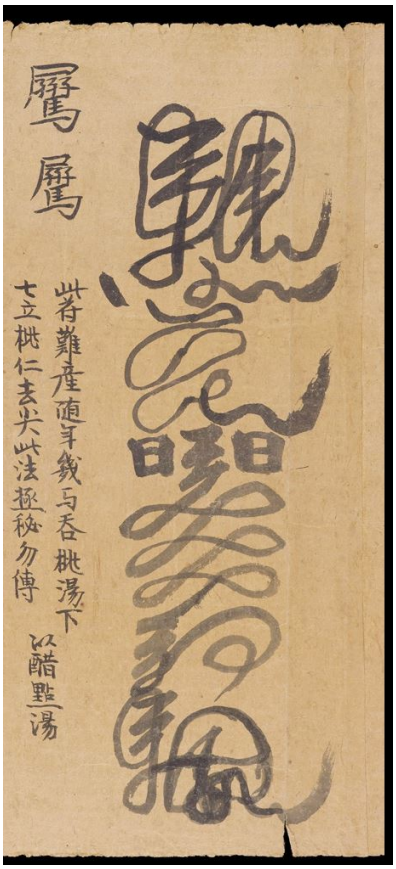


Fig. 5.2

After the talisman for hard labor, the next item (no. 31) on the scroll is a collection of dozens of talismans and seals. The benefits of them cover healing, childbirth, promotion, and longevity. Individual talismans and seals in this collection also seem to correspond to previous incantations.

A general instruction heads the collection:

> For those who write talismans and use seals to stamp on bodies, the method of making and using them is to grind cinnabar mixed with vinegar (as ink), then write or draw them, and swallow. One should also take the freshest water from a well [in the early morning]. If one is in a hurry, use the *Minor Heart Incantation of Kuṇḍalī* to recite over the water. Then use the enchanted water to consume the talisman.
> 凡慾書符及印身, 行用法皆與朱砂驗酢研之書畫並吞. 取井華水. 如急待, 用軍荼利小心呪即廿一遍呪水下符.

The instruction here seems to indicate, though with different names and forms, that talismans and seals share a lot in their application. The *Incantation of the Minor Hear*t itself is contained in the *Collected Dhāraṇī Sūtras*.[318] The transmitted source has three short incantations concerning the heart of Kuṇḍalī—the great heart, the medium heart, and the minor heart. The one for the great heart is both collected in the manuscript and the transmitted sources. The minor heart, on the other hand, is only mentioned here. The transmitted source discusses the applications of the minor heart in detail. According to it, the minor heart incantation is particularly efficacious in consecrating water. After being enchanted, the empowered water is able to detoxify and resurrect people who have died because of poison, cure wounds, and purify people before they enter a Buddha Hall. At the same time, in the *Collected Dhāraṇī Sūtras*, the three heart incantations are considered as a whole. They are powerful in not only protecting and purifying human bodies but also in washing all kinds of offerings and ritual vessels and utensils.[319] So the instruction here creatively uses canonical sources to deal with situations where people cannot fetch the freshest water in the early morning.

After enumerating dozens of talismans, the section on talismans is concluded by another general instruction. It orders:

> For the preceding talismans, recite the *Wish-fulfilling Incantation of Vajrakumāra* twenty-one times to empower it. Also, burn the Kunduruka[320] incense. For the two [following] seals, recite the incantation seven times to empower them as previously.
> 右件符等並用金剛童子隨心呪度之, 誦廿一遍. 董（薰）陸香燒. 二印亦同前呪七遍度之.

[318] *Tuoluoni jijing*, *T*. no. 901, 18: 854c6-7.
[319] *Tuoluoni jijing*, *T*. no. 901, 18: 854c13-15.
[320] For the incense and plant used for making it, see Waku Hirotaka 和久博隆, *Shinsōban bukkyō shokubutsu jiten*, 42-43.

The instruction asks the practitioner to empower the talismans by reciting a specific incantation. The *Wish-fulfilling Incantation of Vajrakumāra* is actually copied in the scroll. As stated in the previous section, the incantation has various benefits and applications. Among them, one is "consecrating divine talismans." It shows that the scroll, though containing more than thirty different items, is not a collection of random texts. These items do interact with and correspond to each other in some cases.

Furthermore, the instruction specifies that the incantation can also be used to empower two following seals. The first is called the Seal of Avalokiteśvara (*Guanyin pusa yin* 觀音菩薩印). The seal, when being stamped onto certain body parts, is able to cure all kinds of ailments. However, the instruction under the seal never indicates how it should be made. Probably the practitioner should carve it into a piece of wood and then stamp the wooden seal onto the part of the body that needs help. [321] However, the pattern of the seal can also be used in different ways. According to the instruction, the "seal" can also be carried or swallowed. In these cases, it seems the pattern is reproduced on a piece of paper. Moreover, the pattern is also able to be displayed to the patient (*yiyin zhaozhi* or *yinzhao* 以印照之 or 印照). This particular application is used when the patient is troubled by infectious diseases (*zhubing* 疰病). In this way, the patient will be exposed to powerful rays or influence of the pattern. The second seal design is called the Seal of Princess Worshipping the Buddha (*wangnü fengfo yin* 王女奉佛印) or Seal of Wish-Fulfilling (*ruyi yin* 如意印). The seal, according to its instruction, can be used as the previous one.

[321] For the making of religious seals (not *mudrā* hand-seals), see Shih-shan Susan Huang, "Daoist Seals, Part 2: Classifying Different Types," *Journal of Daoist Studies* 11 (2018): 46–81; Paul Copp, "Seals as Conceptual and Ritual Tools in Chinese Buddhism, ca. 700-1000, CE," *The Medieval Globe* 4, no. 1 (2018): 15–48.

These instructions on the talismans and seals remind us that different ritual techniques can work together when dealing with a particular situation. The incantation, whether it was transliterated from an Indic source or composed by Chinese hands to emulate an Indic model, is used to consecrate the talismans and seals. The pattern of talismans can inspire the design of seals. A seal pattern, in turn, can be used to produce a talisman. When being used, these different applications also influence and help people through different media (sound, visual, smell, and taste). The manuscript shows that for these medieval repertoires, there is not only intertextuality but also inter-technicality and inter-mediality.

The next item (no. 32) is an incantation to eliminate defilements. It still concerns curing patients. The incantation, which only contains two lines of transliterated Sanskrit syllables, should be recited twenty-one times to purify a bowl of water. After the water is purified, the healer should hold the water in the mouth and spit the water in four directions, then towards the practitioner him/herself and the patient. Then, according to the instruction, the practitioner, facing the patient, should hold an incense burner and read a petition aloud:

> Looking up, [I] petition Avalokiteśvara. Now there are good men and good women, being dazed by ghostly diseases. Now I wish to cure [them] by incantations. [They] must be highly efficacious. [I] pray that the Avalokiteśvara would transform into the Fiery-headed Vajra, guarding [the patients] and capturing the treacherous, obliterating evil spirits, swiftly searching for and capturing [evil beings] in minds and stomachs. From the crowns of their heads to their feet, the [evil beings] should be caught and removed quickly. [I] tell this ghost who is causing the disease: you should tie yourself fast, and do not exhaust my intelligence and strength. In the end, [I] will wield single-bladed sword, double-edged sword, wheel, and hook to harm you. Be bound quickly!
> 仰啟觀世音菩薩. 今有善男子善女人為鬼病所惚, 今欲禁呪療治, 必須大驗. 惟願觀世音菩薩化作火頭金剛, 守捉奸耶, 摧滅癡(魑)魅. 心裡腹中, 急為搜捉. 從頂至足, 急須除攝. 語本行病鬼: 急須自縛, 更莫勞吾心力. 終與汝刀劍輪鉤傷害汝, 急縛!

The instruction then proceeds:

> Having formed the hand-seal, say Ye! Immediately, [the practitioner should] jump down from an elevated place. If [the ghost?] is not toppled, s/he should make an enraged face and recite the *Avalokiteśvara Incantation*.
> 即作印訖, 口云:曳! 即於高下撲, 如不倒即作嗔色, 誦觀世音呪.

The transliterated *Avalokiteśvara Incantation* seems to contain two parts. The first part is the homage to the three jewels. The second part appears to be structurally similar to many other incantations collected in the *Sūtra of Divine Incantations of Avalokiteśvara with Eleven Faces* (*Shiyi mian guanshiyin shenzhou jing* 十一面觀世音神呪經).[322] The instruction also mentions the formation of a particular mudrā. However, it does not provide any details about the hand gesture. In the *Collected Dhāraṇī Sūtras*, there are several mudrās that can be used to cure disease by tying the ghosts who are believed to be the troublemakers. For example, in a mudrā related to Kunduli, there is a Mudrā for Tying Ghosts (*fugui yin* 縛鬼印). The instruction specifies how one should form the hand gesture in detail. Once the hand gesture is created, it can be used to bind all kinds of ghosts as the practitioner wishes.[323] In most cases, mudrās like this should be used with an incantation. In some general instructions, the incantation is described as a master, and the mudra is considered a companion of the master.[324]

The practitioner does not need to recite the *Avalokiteśvara Incantation* forever:

> Stop immediately when [the ghost] is tied. Then interrogate [the ghost]. Promptly, use the *Incantation of Fiery-headed Vajra* to beat [the ghost].
> 至縛即休, 然後勘當. 即用火頭金剛呪打.

[322] *Shiyi mian guanshiyin shenzhou jing* 十一面觀世音神呪經, trans. Sheyejueduo 耶舍崛多 (*Yaśogupta, fl. 561–578), T. no. 1070, 20: 150a26-c6.
[323] *Tuoluoni jijing*, *T*. no. 901, 18: 854a6–9.
[324] *Tuoluoni jijing*, *T*. no. 901, 18: 851c12.

It seems here the ritual specialists could use an incantation to beat the ghost metaphorically. An alternative way to use the incantation is to empower a whip or a tree branch and then symbolically beat the patient instead of the troublemaker. An example can also be found in the *Collected Dharani Sūtras*. A combination of mudrā and incantation ascribed to Ucchuṣma, the Sanskrit name of the Fiery-headed Vajra, prescribes:

> For all the diseases caused by ghosts, recite the incantation twenty-one times over a branch of a pomegranate tree and use it to beat the patient. The diseases will be cured immediately.[325]
> 一切鬼神病者, 以石榴枝呪三七遍, 用打病人, 其病即差.

Beating the ghost or the patient does not conclude the treatment. After reciting the incantation, the healer will call the patient and interrogate the ghost. Once the ghost's name is known, the healer is ready to use a talisman. The Wish-Fulfilling Talisman of Avalokiteśvara (*Guanshiyin suixin fu* 觀世音隨心符) is to be written on the chest and back of the patient. After that, the healer should recite another short incantation.

However, if the patient still suffers from the disease and does not respond to the healer, another ritual treatment is prescribed:

> If the person does not wake up (from ailment), immediately recite the *Vijaya Incantation*. All ghosts and deities will become delighted. Burn incense as prescribed, hold water in your mouth, and spit [the water] to four corners to deploy various ghosts and deities. If [the healer] wishes the spectators to happily witness the divine power, immediately invite the four heavenly kings and then recite the *Avalokiteśvara Incantation*. Everything [requested] will be attained.
> 其人未性(醒), 即與誦尊勝咒, 一切鬼神悉皆歡喜, 如法燒香, 含水啄四角, 發遣諸鬼神. 若欲眾人樂見神力, 即請四天王訖, 即誦觀世音呪, 一切皆得.

[325] *Tuoluoni jijing*, *T*. no. 901, 18: 861b4-5.

The instruction goes on to talk about how to lead people to the pure land to see the Buddha and bodhisattvas and how to enter into concentration. Both involve the practice of spewing empowered water. The text then explains how to consecrate the water.

The instruction on consecrating the water includes a lot of errors and ambiguities. However, the principle seems to be that five dragons are made equivalent to the emperors of five directions (east, west, south, north, and center), and the practitioner should inhale (*xi* 吸) each one of them when s/he stands facing the corresponding direction in the morning. After properly inhaling the dragons, the practitioner should take the bowl of water and start to recite an incantation:

> From the east, [I] invite the dragon king of the Blue Emperor of the east to enter my water. 東請東方青帝龍王入吾水.

The incantation should be recited three times, and then repeat the same structure for the other four directions. And then, the inhaled five dragons seem to be released into the water. The method shares the same logic as inviting the five groups of color deities mentioned in item no. 1.

The text then goes on to give a concrete example to show how different techniques are used synthetically to treat a patient:

> If one wishes to treat someone's illness, hold [previously consecrated] water in the mouth, and visualize the five colored dragons in mind. Spew [the water] over the patient and watch the five colored dragons covering the patient. The patient then becomes dazed and falls down because of the incantation. Take a single-bladed sword and stick it into the ground, and use an incense burner to empower the blade. Then take the previously consecrated water, hold the water with the right hand, hold the sword with the left hand, and say a spell: "When the water is in a well, it is called well water; when the water is in the mind, it is called divine water. Spew it on the irresolute, and the resolute will bend. Hundreds of ghosts will perish. People will no longer confront me. People who confront me will die. People who are against me will get wounded. Quickly, quickly in accordance

> with the statutes and ordinances." Hold water in the mouth and spew it at the sword seven times, then form a mudrā with the hands, and [use] the mudrā to beat the blade. At the same time, recite the incantation to consecrate the sword.
> 欲治人坐病人, 著口含水, 心作五色龍相, 啄病人. 自眼見五色龍覆此人, 其人即自昏沉呪倒. 即刀一口打入地. 即香爐度刀刃. 後取前所禁水, 右手把水, 左手把刀, 呪: "其水在井, 名為井水; 其水在心, 名為神水. 啄不剛, 剛折, 百鬼滅亡. 人不復當. 當吾者死, 值吾者傷, 急急如律令." 口含水啄刀七度, 然後手結印, 打刀刃, 即誦禁刀呪.

The following sword incantation looks like something transliterated from an Indic language. After reciting it seven times, the instruction further asks the healer to consecrate the sword by moving the burning incense up and down along the blade. Then the empowered sword will be used to cut the earth. At the same time, the healer is asked to recite another incantation called the *Peacock King's Incantation for Destroying and Crushing* (*Kongque wang cuisui zhou* 孔雀王摧碎呪). When reciting the incantation, the healer should hold the sword in the left hand and hold a cottonwood branch. Meanwhile, it seems the healer has to form another mudrā by using the right thumb to press the top joint of the ring finger. The incantation is also in the form of a transliteration of Sanskrit syllables. However, at the ending part of the incantation, a phrase "beating with the divine vajra"(*jingang shenchu da* 金剛神杵打) is inserted. It suggests that the incantation was a Chinese invention made by combining foreign sound ((pseudo-)Sanskrit transliteration) with stage directions in Chinese.

The next item (no. 33) in the scroll is an instruction for constructing a maṇḍala. The maṇḍala is associated with Avalokiteśvara. It is designed to help the practitioner learn and uphold the *Avalokiteśvara Incantation*, an incantation frequently used in the previous item in healing sick people.

The text then is disrupted by two illustrations (no. 34, fig. 5.3). The upper one depicts seven horses. The horse in the middle holds a glowing bowl on a lotus seat. It likely resembles the wind-horse (Tib. *rlung-rta*) in Tibetan tradition, where the horse usually carries the wish-fulfilling jewels of a wheel-turning king on top of a lotus seat on its saddle[326]. The lower illustration contains a bunch of vajras and other weapons.



Fig. 5.3

[326] Beer Robert, *The Handbook of Tibetan Buddhist Symbols* (Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 2003), 66–67. For the origin of *rlung-rta*, see Karmay Samten Gyaltsen, "The Wind-horse and the Well-being of Man," in his *The Arrow and the Spindle: Studies in History, Myths, Rituals and Beliefs in Tibet* (Kathmandu: Mandala Book Point, 1998), 413–22.

The item (no. 35) immediately following the illustrations is another dhāraṇī incantation—*Dhāraṇī of Avalokiteśvara Responding and Manifesting Instantly* (*Guanshiyin yingxiansheng xuyu tuoluoni* 觀世音應現身須臾陀羅尼). The dhāraṇī has a parallel in the *Miscellaneous Collection of Dhāraṇī* (*Tuoluoni zaji* 陀羅尼雜集)[327]. According to the instruction, after being recited 12,000 times, Avalokiteśvara will manifest himself and fulfill whatever wish the practitioner has in mind. The scroll then teaches another incantation that empowers water. After that, it introduces a group of short incantations used on different occasions. Most of them deal with how to handle ghosts: beating, burning, cutting, breaking, binding, capturing, and releasing.

The next item (no. 36) is an illustration of how to set up a maṇḍala for the *Vijaya Incantation* (*Zunsheng zhoutan* 尊勝咒壇).[328]

Following the diagram of the maṇḍala, the following item (no. 37) is *An Alternative Method of (Constructing) a Maṇḍala of Great Compassion* (*Dabei tanfa biexing ben* 大悲坛法别行本). The handwriting style and calligraphic features of this penultimate piece are abruptly different from previous items. Moreover, the color of the paper used is much brighter than the previous sheets. It suggests that the piece was added to the scroll at a later stage. The text itself consists of detailed instructions for constructing a maṇḍala. It claims the method derives from both the Chinese and Tibetan versions of the *Sūtra on the Great Compassion of [Avalokiteśvara with] One Thousand Eyes and One Thousand Arms* (*dabei qianyan qianbi jing* 大悲千眼千臂经). As Li Xiaorong suggests, the text significantly overlaps with the method of constructing maṇḍala in the *Body Dhāraṇī Sutra of Mother Avalokiteśvara of One Thousand Hands and One*

[327] *Tuoluoni zaji* 陀羅尼雜集, unknown author, *T*. no. 1336, 21: 631b29–c5.
[328] For studies of this maṇḍala, see Neil Schmid, "Dunhuang and Central Asia (with an Appendix on Dunhuang Sources)," 371–3; Koichi Shinohara, "The Ritual of the Buddhoṣṇīṣa Vijaya Dhāraṇī Maṇḍala," *Hualin International Journal of Buddhist Studies* 1, no. 2 (2018): 143–825.

Thousand Eyes (*Qianshou qianyan guanshiyin pusalao tuoluoni shenjing* 千手千眼觀世音菩薩姥陀羅尼身經) translated by Bodhiruci (Putiliuzhi 菩提流志, d. 727). [329]

The last item (no. 38) on the scroll is a short dhāraṇī for avoiding taking a nap (*Shaoshui tuoluoni* 少睡陀羅尼). The same short incantation also survives on P. 3835. After being recited seven times, it keeps pious people awake in front of a Buddha's image.

Having reviewed every item on this long scroll, vaguely, it seems the curator(s) of these pieces put all verbal incantations together at the beginning, then a collection of talismans and seals, and then more synthetical approaches. The manuscript does not have as clear categorization system as we can see in the case of the *Collected Dhāraṇī Sūtras*.

Many of the items on this scroll do overlap with collections made in Chang'an and other translated works by esteemed foreign translators. However, many techniques that were either created indigenously or inspired by Indic practices also constitute part of this rich repertoire that talismans belong to. Compared with incantations, in this collection, it seems talismans only occupied a less important role. Meanwhile, as discussed before, these different techniques do interact with and enrich each other when being used to address the pains and difficulties in our human world.

At the same time, for the possessor(s) of the scroll, the seemingly chaotic scroll is still a manageable repertoire. We see annotations, corrections, and punctuation marks spread throughout the scroll. Copyists and possessor(s) of this scroll left these traces showing their efforts to learn and understand the mantic knowledge.

[329] For his brief comparison of the two sources, see Li Xiaorong, *Dunhuang mijiao wenxian lungao*, 90–1.

Hands behind the Scroll

A manuscript like S. 2498 is not only a collection of fixed textual information. Once the scroll was placed and sealed in the cave in the northwestern town, just like an insect trapped in an amber fossil, it was not able to change anymore. Meanwhile, as the amber captures the vivid image of an insect for us to study animals before the advent of human beings, the scroll in question also preserves numerous valuable traces that show how people constructed, used, and transmitted it. In this section, the discussion shifts to these often-overlooked codicological features to disclose the medieval hands behind the scroll.

The first thing one notices is that the long scroll was copied by different hands. Calligraphically, it is difficult to determine how many people exactly were involved in copying the texts. However, if we zoom in to see several individual items, it will show different mechanisms in making the scroll.

The first mechanism is that copyists took shifts after an item was finished. We can spot two different handwriting styles coexisting on the same sheet of paper that contains two items. For example, when being compared, the ending part of item no. 7 and the beginning part of item no. 8 show quite different calligraphy styles (fig. 5.4).

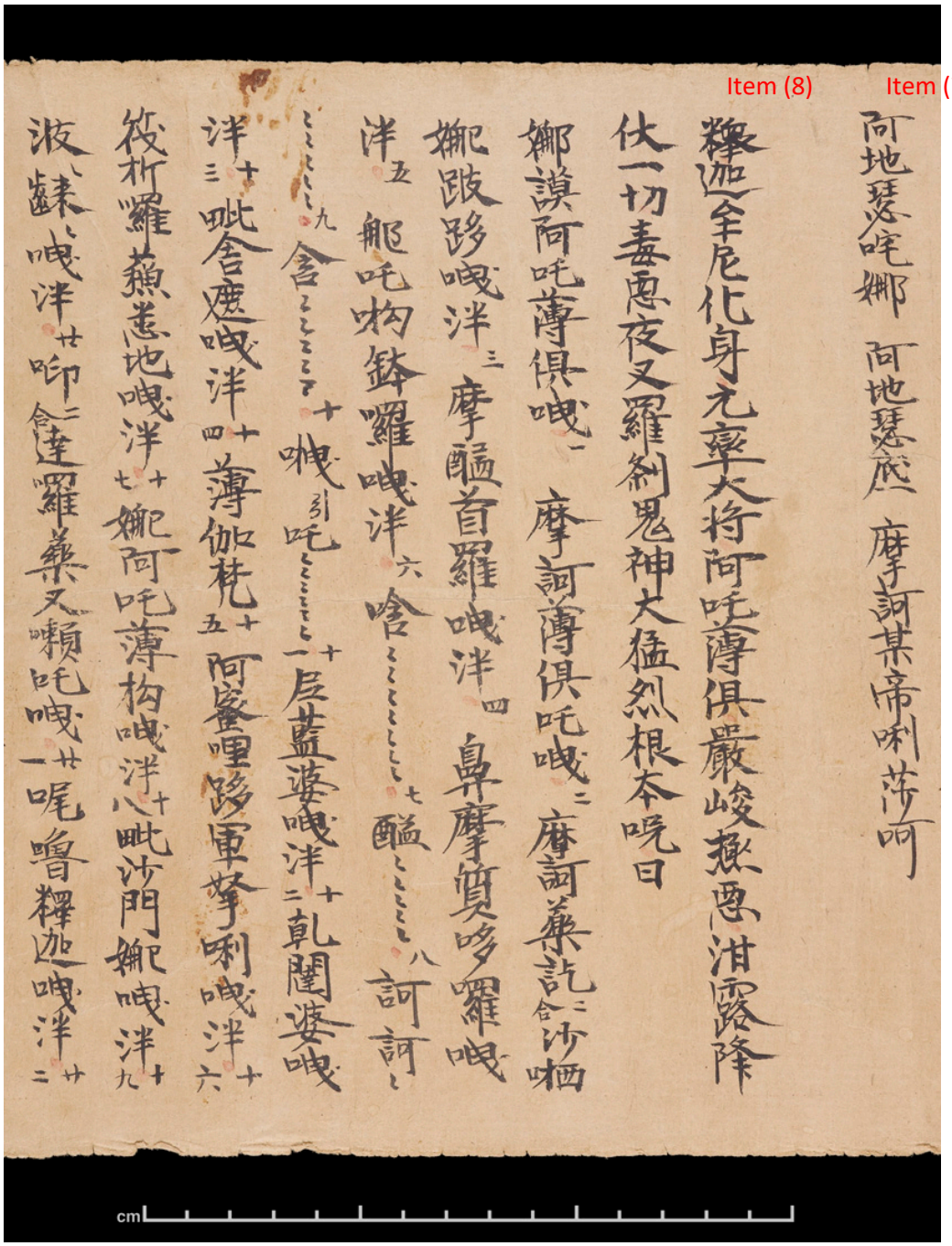


Fig. 5.4, the ending part of item no. 7 and the beginning part of item no. 8

At the same time, within one single item, there could be different hands involved, too. For example, the second item on the scroll, the *Dhāraṇī Incantation of Great Compassion of a Thousand Hands and Eyes*, is a long transliterated incantation covering four sheets of paper. The

calligraphical style and size of characters change abruptly after the joint of the second and third sheets of paper (fig. 5.5, the red arrow indicates the joint).

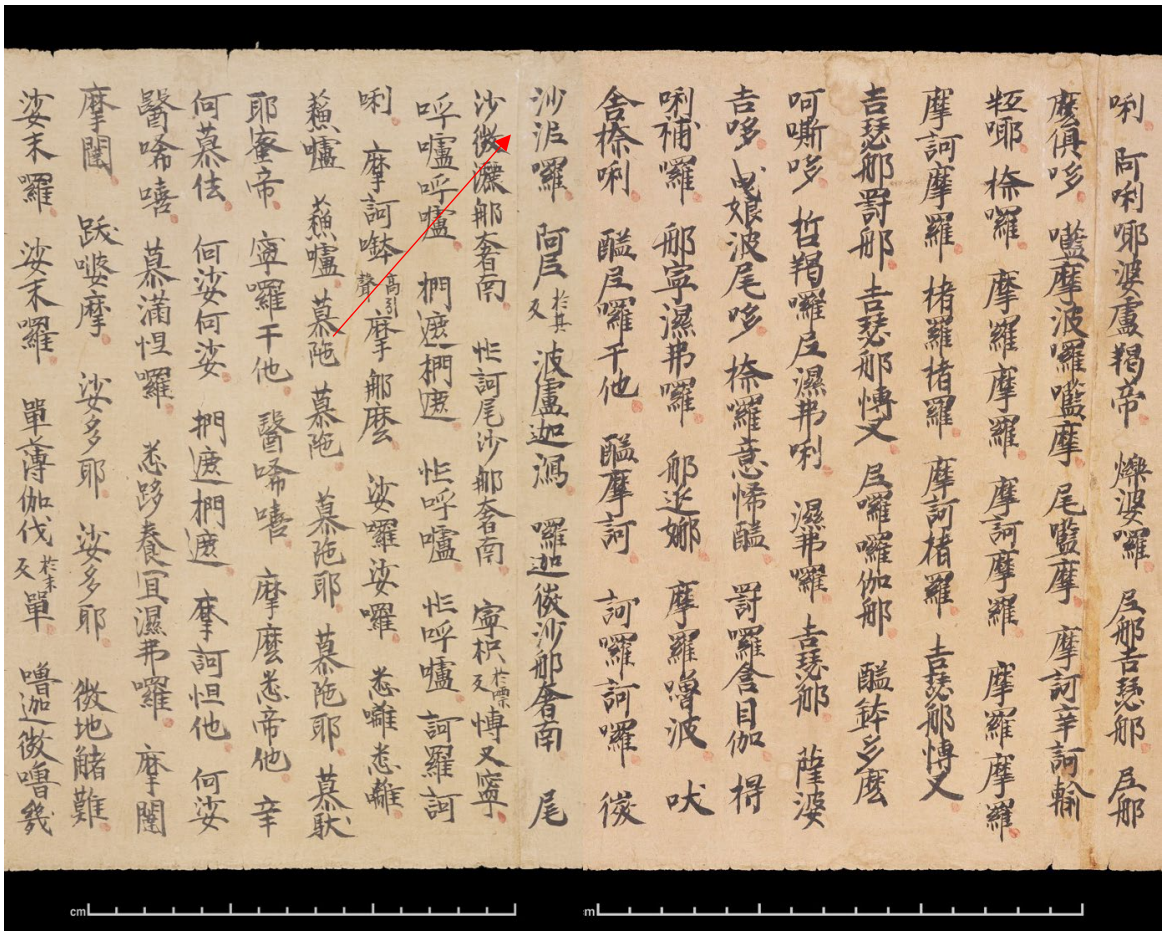


Fig. 5.5

The final example involves the last two items, nos. 37 and 38 in the scroll. Both of them were written on two sheets of paper with a much brighter color than the previous ones. Meanwhile, the calligraphical style of item no. 37 is abruptly different from all previous items (fig. 5.6). Moreover, item no. 37 has both a complete title and an abbreviated ending title, *The Method of Constructing a Maṇḍala*, in one fascicle (*Tanfa yijuan* 坛法一卷). It indicates that, once made, the item was then circulated as an individual short scroll. At some point, the

possessor of this short scroll and the longer scroll joined them together due to the close relation of the content. Item no. 38, a short dhāraṇī incantation, is again written in a different calligraphical style from item no. 36 (fig. 7). It seems someone (most likely the owner of the whole scroll) was making use of the blank space to write down something new.

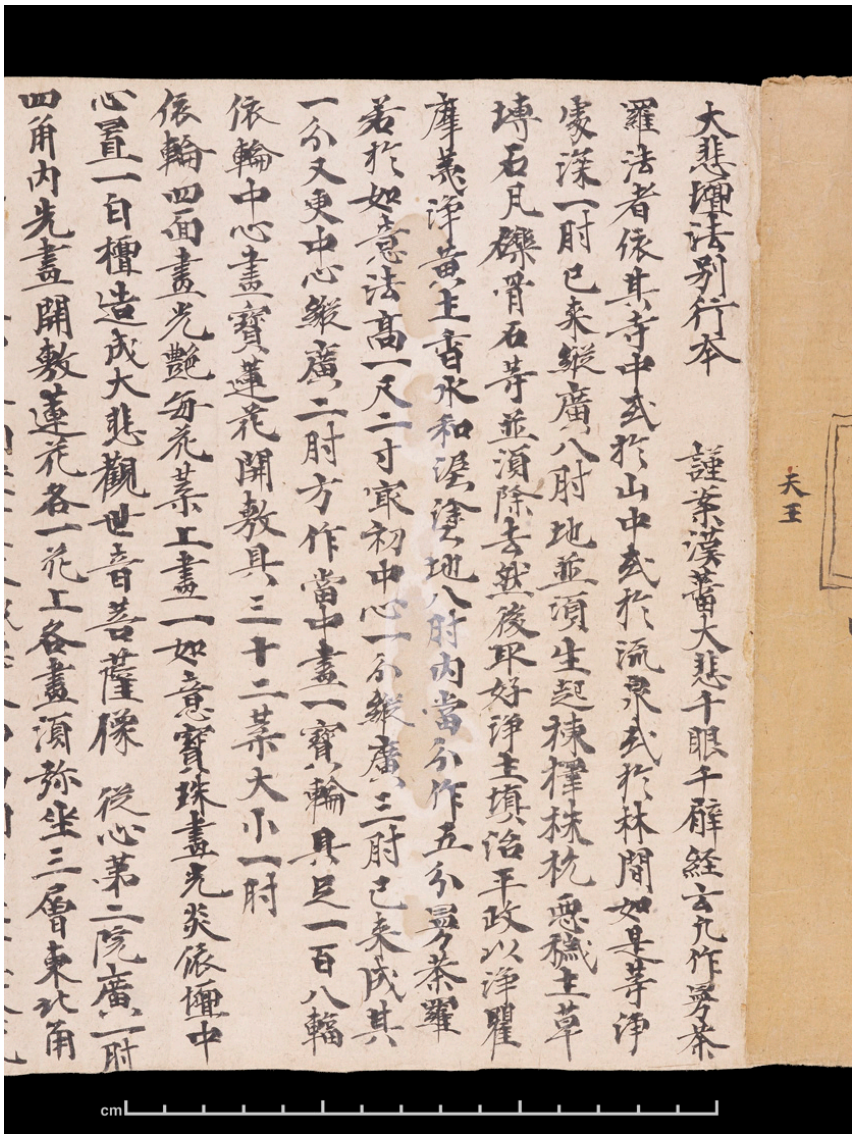


Fig. 5.6

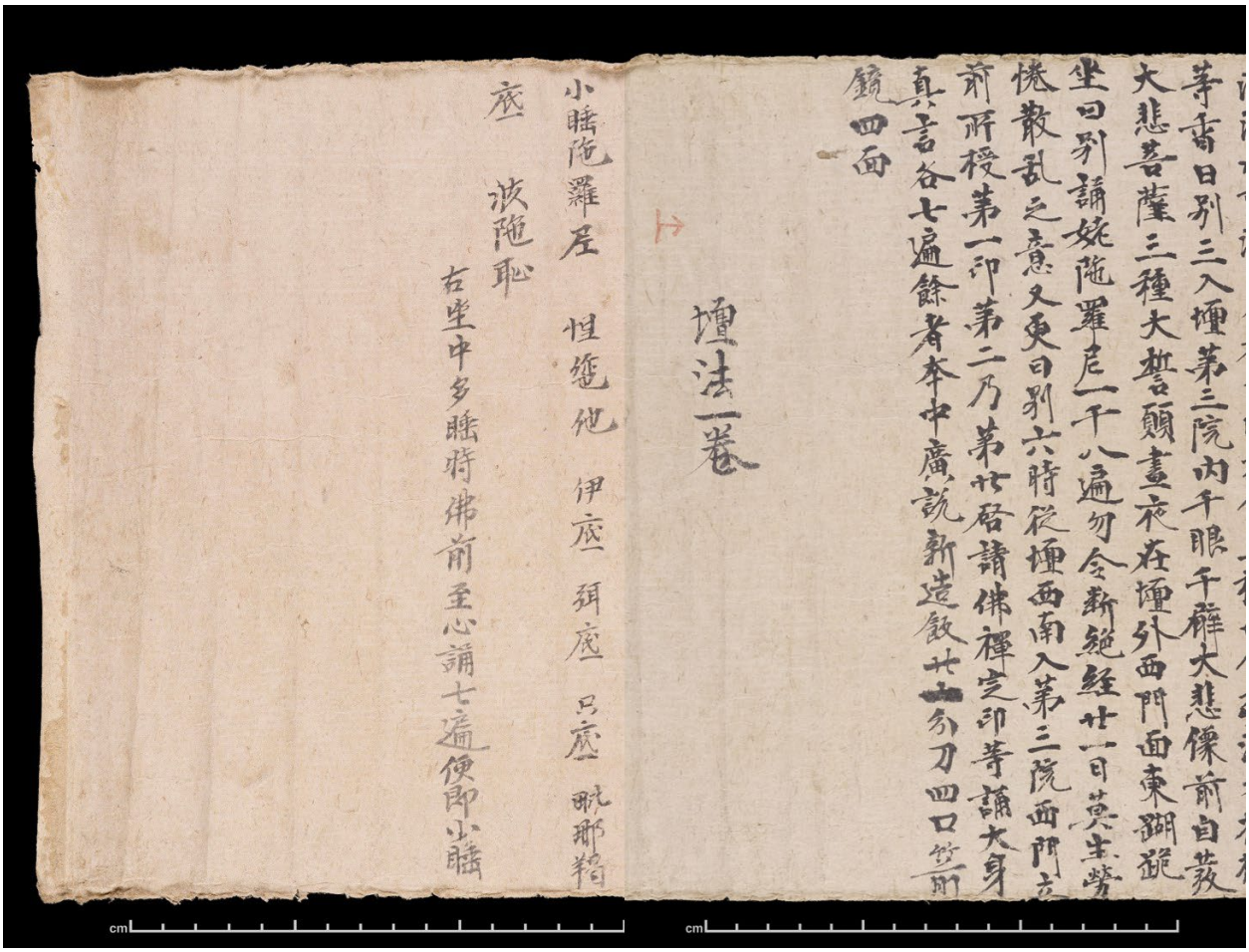


Fig. 5.7[330]

These examples offer several possible different perspectives in understanding how the scroll as a whole was made. Multiple copyists involved might have taken turns writing on the same sheet of paper when a new item was to be copied or after the joint of two sheets of paper when copying a long text covering multiple sheets of paper.

And the same time, the last two items show the scroll is an open system. An owner could extend it either by pasting his newly acquired manuscript or by writing down the knowledge he encountered in his daily reading or learning.

[330] The different colors of the paper showed in the picture is a result of combing two original pictures from IDP. They represent the same sheet of paper.

These practices show that in making this extremely long scroll, a lot of hands were involved. Unlike some sūtra manuscripts separately commissioned by donors and produced by professional scribes, when making such a collection of related but floating knowledge, some of the copyists involved were also the owners and users of the scroll. The feasibility of adding new items in the manuscript era also reveals that the current single scroll could have existed as multiple scrolls. These multiple scrolls had different lengths, contained different numbers of items, and probably were owned and used by different people at different points in history.

Apart from showing how the scroll was made, other features in the scroll also indicate how the scroll was read and used. Dunhuang manuscripts usually bear a variety of marks. These different marks help their users and readers better read and understand the texts. In a comprehensive overview of marks on Dunhuang manuscripts, Wang Jingbo 王晶波 and her colleagues propose four kinds of marks: punctuation and sectional marks, connotational and conclusional marks, editorial marks, and semantic marks.[331] Most marks found in S.2498 belong to the first and third categories.

The most commonly seen mark is the red dot. These red dots are usually placed as punctuational marks at the end of couplets. They are found on 15 items—nos. 2, 5, 8-15, 22-24, 32, 35. It is impossible to decide whether these dots were added by a single reader or several different readers. Meanwhile, the dots are not evenly distributed on the scroll. They can be divided into two clusters. The first cluster, including nos. 2, 5, 8-15, is exclusively composed of long dhāraṇī incantations. These incantations, presumably transliterated by using Chinese characters to represent the sound of Indic syllables, lack semantic meanings in the Chinese

[331] Wang Jingbo 王晶波, Zou Xu 鄒旭, Zhang Peng 張鵬, "Dunhuang wenxian shuxie fuhao de pucha yu fenlei yanjiu 敦煌文獻書寫符號的普查與分類研究," *Dunhuang yanjiu* 敦煌研究 2014. 5: 71–80.

language. Thus, for the local readers at Dunhuang, who very likely did not know any Indic languages, relying on red dots to punctuate the strings of characters serves as the most appropriate way to avoid making mistakes when reciting them.

Similar to the first cluster, items in the second cluster (nos. 22-24, 32, 35) are usually quite long texts. However, the nature of the items in this cluster is more complicated. They include not only transliterated incantations but also indigenous incantations, detailed instructions about the ritual process, and numerous benefits for performing the prescribed ritual techniques. Due to this complicated nature, apart from the red dots, the reader(s) also put a lot of sectional marks ("ǀ") in red. These marks are not simply punctuating clauses or sections of a sentence. They are also supposed to indicate the beginning of a new step in a ritual process or a new topic. For example, in item no. 32, several short incantations and their instructions are separated by this mark (fig. 5.8). The two marks divided the text into three parts. The first part, as stated above, is an incantation to tie up the ghosts that cause the patient's pain. After the sectional mark, the instruction focuses on how to interrogate the captured ghosts and release the patient from their negative influence. And then, after the second sectional mark, the text goes on to discuss the backup plan if the patient is still in a coma.

Sectional marks are also applied if multiple subsections are included. In item no. 35, a group of short incantations for punishing ghosts are taught. For each short incantation, a sectional mark is added at the beginning. It clearly helps the user pinpoint the piece he needs when necessary (fig. 5.9).

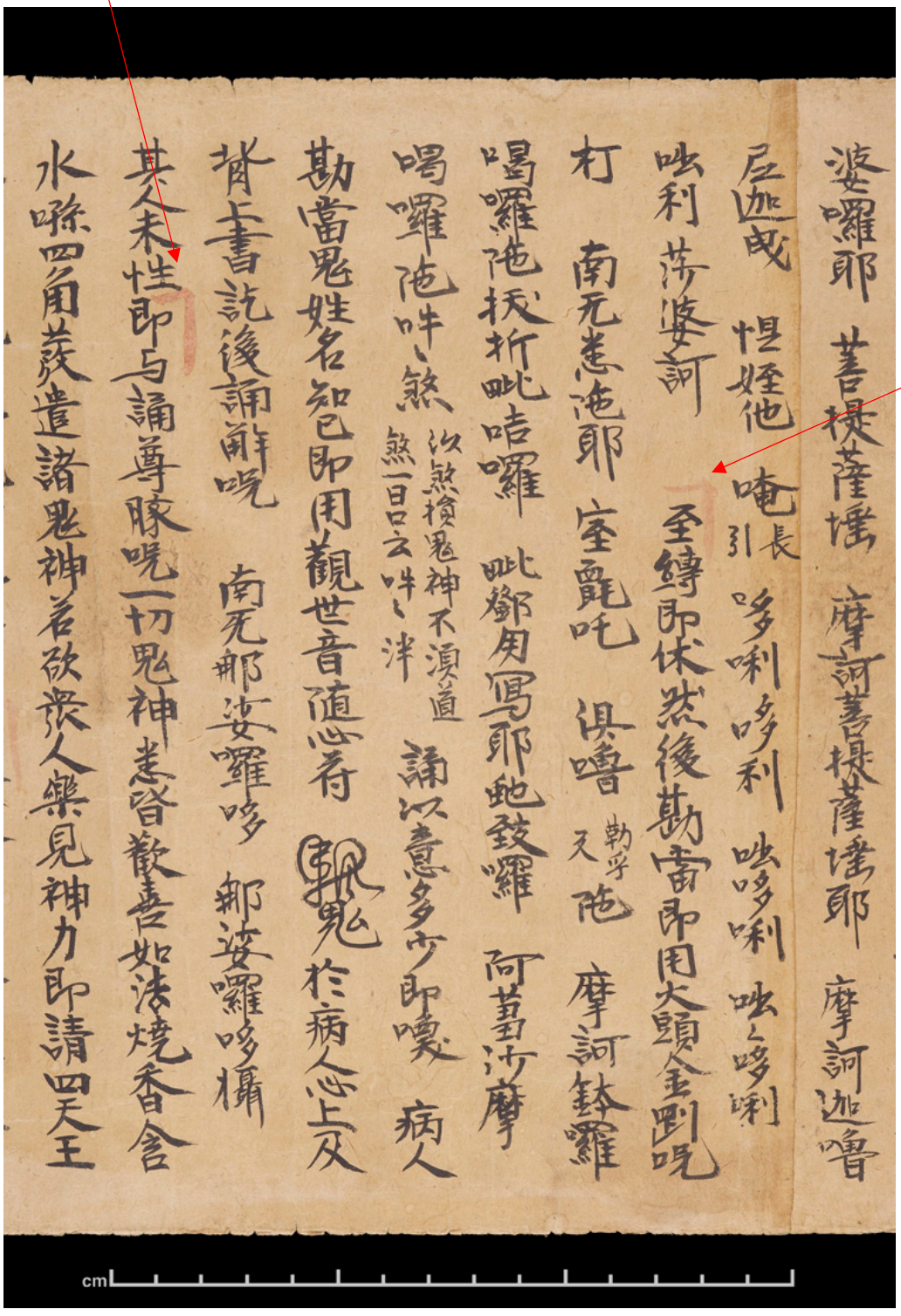


Fig. 5.8 The red arrows indicate the two sectional marks.

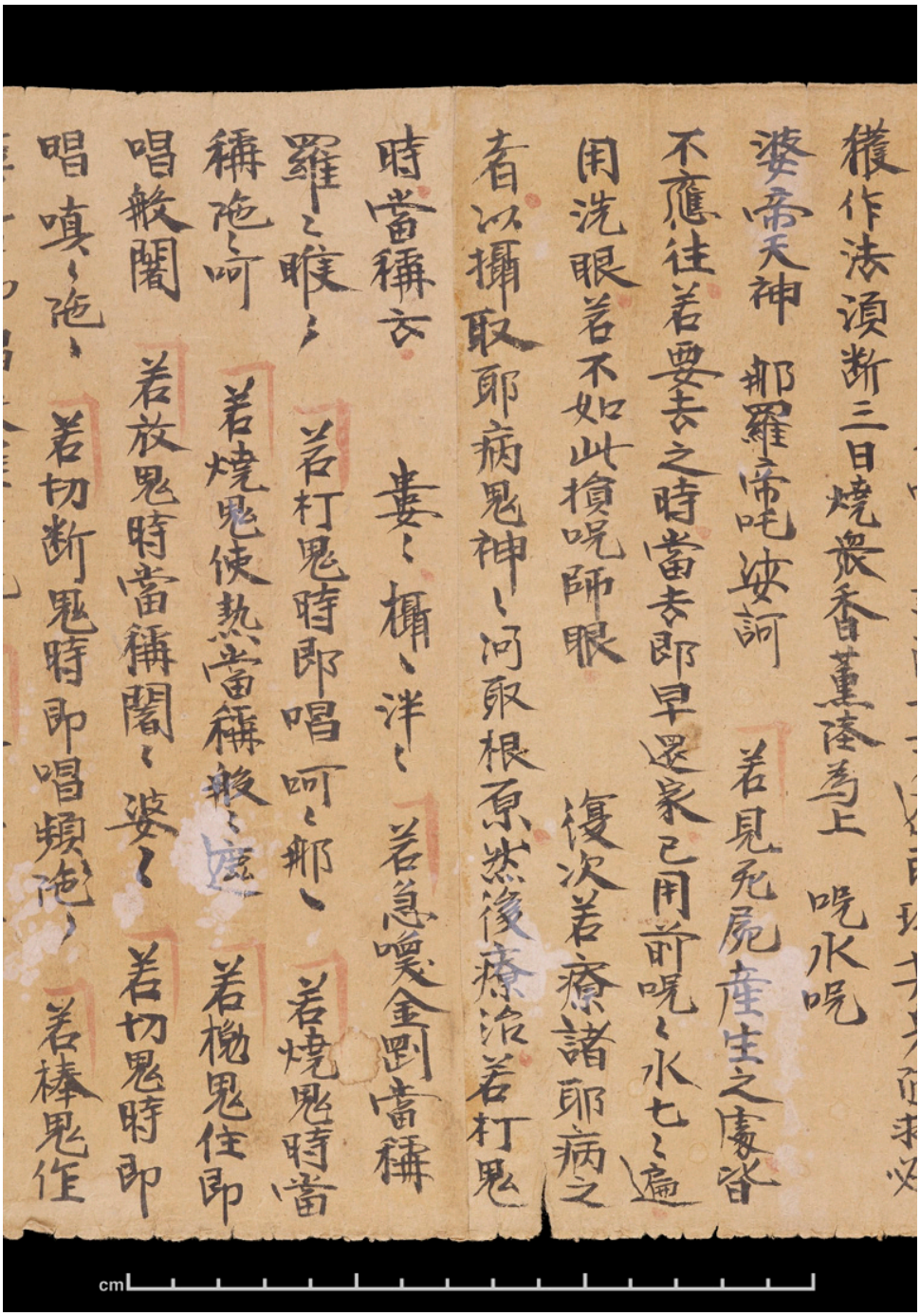


Fig. 5.9

These dots and sectional marks share some important commonalities. First, they are all in red ink. In most cases, the dots and marks are placed at spaces initially left by the makers/copyists to indicate the beginning of a new couplet or section. However, it seems the user(s) who put these marks deliberately chose the more telling and eye-catching ink to reinforce the division. Second, they are there to make the text either easier to read or make it easier to pinpoint certain passages. Their existence may indicate that the scroll was frequently used, and the user(s) needed these marks to facilitate his usage. Finally, as above mentioned, the marks appear primarily in two clusters. It may suggest that passages in these two clusters were more frequently consulted than the other parts of the scroll.

The scroll also incorporates some editorial marks and notes. The existence of these marks and notes shows us that the maker/user of the scroll was not a passive copyist/reader. They also participated in the process of active detecting and correcting errors on the scroll, commenting on and thinking about the content.

The first significant editorial note appears under the title of item no. 12. As noted above, the reader seemed to realize the title is the same as that of item no. 6, so he added a note stating the item had been written before (*yiqian xiejing* 已前寫竟).

Another editorial mark is spotted in item no. 21. In the transliterated incantation, a repetitive character *mo* 摩 is first marked with a deletion mark ("卜") and then scraped off (fig. 5.10). The practice suggests that, at least for this particular piece, there was a process of proofreading.



Fig. 5.10

At the same time, the same item also contains an unusual annotation. In the midst of the incantation, an annotation follows the reduplicated syllables *momo* 麼麼. The annotation reads (fig. 5.11):

> Disciple Yan Junhui upholds [the dhāraṇī] with utmost heart.
> 弟子嚴君會至心受持.

Annotations are frequently used in both transmitted and excavated Buddhist dhāraṇī incantations to ensure the accuracy of the reproduction of the sound. [332] These annotations usually fall into four categories: 1) numbers that indicate the punctuation and sequence of transliterated verses; 2) illustrating the pronunciation of a rarely used character; 3) indicating if two characters should be read together to form a liaison; 4) indicating the vowel of a character should be elongated or the tone of the character. However, the annotation here does not belong to any of these. Expressions

[332] For annotations used in transliterated dhāraṇīs, see Liu Shufen 劉淑芬, *Miezui yu duwang: Foding zunsheng tuoluoni jingchuang zhi yanjiu* 滅罪與度亡: 佛頂尊勝陀羅尼經幢之研究 (Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2008), 13–9.

like this usually are found at the end of a text indicating the copyist or the donor's resolution to honor and cherish the Buddha's teaching.

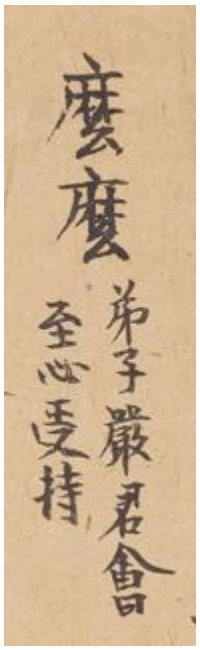


Fig. 11

Even though this is unusual, it does not come from nowhere. In the transmitted (though quite different) version of the incantation, after the syllable *momo*, a short annotation "upheld by such-and-such person" (*moujia shouchi* 某甲受持) is attached.[333] Here, *moujia* 某甲 (such-and-such person) indicates the name of the person who vocalizes the incantation should be substituted in, replacing *moujia*. Other transmitted incantations also suggest the syllable *momo* suggests the name of the practitioner should be stated here.[334]

But who was this Yan Junhui? Why is his name kept in this scroll? The same name does appear in another manuscript. The name appears six times in P. 6460v, a record for the

[333] *Beifang bishamen tianwang suijun hufa zhenyan*, *T*. no. 1248, 21: 225c6.
[334] *Foding zunsheng tuoluoni jing* 佛頂尊勝陀羅尼經, trans. Du Xingyi 杜行顗 (fl. 676-679), *T*. no. 968, 19: 353c4, 24.

Returning-to-Righteousness Army (*Guiyi jun* 歸義軍) administration's fabric and paper expenditure from 899 to 901.[335] Yan was distributed with coarse cloth for spring clothes and fine paper. The record indicates that the Yan Junhui in this document held a position in the administration. Since the name was not a commonly used one in Dunhuang, there is a high possibility that the Yan embedded in the incantation was the same person as in the administrative document.

But then, how do we explain the existence of the name? There are different possibilities. One of them is that Yan was also interested in these ritual techniques and knowledge apart from being a government official. As one of the makers/users of the scroll, he likely misunderstood the annotation when he was copying the text from an original. The annotation was designed as a reminder to make sure a practitioner would vocally say his/her name after reading or reciting *momo*. However, for Yan, he understood it as a generic script for him to insert his own name on paper.

The other possibility is that one of the copyists used Yan's copy of the incantation as one of his primary sources. However, as I have shown earlier, the incantation in the scroll was also carefully proofread. How could he make such an obvious mistake?

Perhaps we will never know for sure why Yan's name was embedded in the transliterated spell. Nevertheless, the scroll at least shows us that one person, who probably lived more than one thousand years ago, participated in the transmission of the ritual knowledge to later generations and accidentally left his name, like an ant trapped in an amber fossil.

[335] I thank Prof. Hao Chunwen for pointing out this to me.

Conclusion

The chapter dissects a rich medieval ritual repertoire used by Dunhuang professionals. As shown in previous sections, the repertoire was constructed, kept, used, and expanded by multiple hands. In the scroll, different items were loosely organized without a clear and strict principle. However, it does not mean the repertoire is a hodgepodge of fragmentary mantic knowledge. As we encountered in several cases, the techniques, including incantations (both foreign and domestic), hand-seals, talismans, seals, constructing maṇḍalas, and employing various ritual implements, are interrelated. They either share similar logic or can be used synthetically. Though without a preface discussing the organizing principle, the users of the repertoire(s) were able to view these items as a system.

Meanwhile, the above discussion also reveals that many items have their counterparts in more authoritative transmitted sources. Though not identical, the resemblance between the two poles, one being translated in the capital, one being compiled and edited in a frontier town; one by renowned monks, one by nameless ritualists, sets off a shared ritual backdrop beyond geographical and societal boundaries.

As van Schaik notices, Buddhist magic has been an excellent arena for observing the connections between Buddhism and other cultures when they face similar problems.[336] The above discussion proves that the ritualists behind these ritual repertoires were the ones who forged the connections. They were not monastery-trained monks, they did not understand

[336] Sam van Schaik, *Buddhist Magic: Divination, Healing, and Enchantment through the Ages* (Boulder, CO: Shanbhala, 2020), 170.

Sanskrit grammar,[337] and they made mistakes in copying and transmitting ritual knowledge. But at the same time, they worked together to create these repertoires, they were open to including new knowledge, and they manifested how ritual techniques from different traditions could be synthesized creatively.

At last, I have to admit that most of the items in the repertoire are incantations. Talismans, the topic of the dissertation, does not occupy a significant portion. However, talismans were not possible without the ritual milieu and ritualists manifested by the manuscript. They get their power from various Buddhas and deities, they are empowered by incantations that sound exotic, and they influence the human body through different ritual deployments. In other words, in these medieval ritual repertoires, talismans serve as a nexus that collects and distributes the efficacious power.

[337] For how medieval Chinese studies Sanskrit, see Jeffrey Kotyk, "The Study of Sanskrit in Medieval East Asia: China and Japan," *Hualin International Journal of Buddhist Studies* 4, no. 2 (2021): 240–273.

Conclusion

Talismans never constituted a patent held by any single religious tradition in medieval China. Even though the current dissertation primarily uses materials labelled Buddhist, it aims to disclose the common ritual structure and logic behind the consecrated objects. The necessity of finding out these commonalities compels us to go beyond labels and modern academic demarcations.

The dissertation does not deny that many early and medieval Buddhists tried hard to exclude certain talismanic practices from their schedule of orthopraxis. However, I also show that the motivation behind the curtain was not doctrinal but sectarian. They did not devote much space to analyzing and debating the absurdity of the practice. The only reason they hated the practice is that it was considered a token for the non-Buddhist practices that should remain outside the perimeter of their versions of Buddhism.

Meanwhile, medieval authorities were not successful in creating a talisman-free Buddhism. Medieval sources show that Buddhists even promoted their own talismans, though without using the controversial label, *fu*. Moreover, as more and more Chinese people, who had better knowledge of the indigenous talismanic practices under the controversial label, became Buddhists, the label also became less sensitive. Most Chinese Buddhists tolerated both the label and the practice it signified. Some of them even used the label as a positive trope in their writings. The reasons behind this development can be complicated. Besides the growing familiarity, the Buddhists softened their tone also because of the elevated status of Daoism, the indigenous religion that was zealously involved in the practice of *fu*-talisman, in the Tang dynasty due to royal patronage. On the other hand, the Buddhists' change of position cannot be

simply reduced to external political pressure. They taught about their own talismans all the time and drew inspiration from indigenous sources to win over their followers.

These changes can be observed judging from the instructions on how talismans should be made. Both translated sources and locally compiled ritual manuals in Dunhuang share similar concerns in making talismans. Medieval Chinese were careful in making special ink and selecting appropriate supports for the ink. At the same time, ritual components were combined to transform the then inert artifacts into efficacious talismans. These ritual components usually made sure to purify and ornament the maker and the ritual space for the "narrow" period when the talismans were made in the maker's hands.

However, making talismans and keeping their power was also an extended process. People needed some of their talismans to have prolonged lives. Some medieval sources reveal that the talismans will remain powerful only if the user keeps his/her promise. In a Buddhist context, the ethical commitment refers to the three refuges and five precepts. This moral requirement blurs the boundaries between making and using, as well as the maker and the user. Like maintaining an electric vehicle, properly using a talisman required periodic recharging. At the same time, since taking the refuges and precepts marks the embarking on the Buddhist path, talismans were also used as a way to foster religious identity.

Another phenomenon I discuss in the dissertation is that although talismans were inscribed with semiotic symbols, they were not made for people to gaze at and contemplate. In most cases, the symbols are condensed and mystic. Without professional knowledge, the user would not be able to decode the meaning. Even when a readable text was made into a talisman, its physical configuration often denied the user access to read it. The forging of unreadability was shared among different religious traditions in medieval China, though with different approaches. Then

why does creating this gap of understanding contribute to the construction of an empowered object? This is a question worth further research, along with other texts in medieval China not made for being read.

The dissertation also analyzes different paradigms for using talismans. It reveals that how talismans could be used also contributes to their efficacy. Furthermore, there was no sectarian preference for the paradigms. Medieval Chinese people chose suitable paradigms based on pragmatic needs rather than his/her religious identity.

I also argue using talismans can bestow a wide range of benefits to the users. Unlike other scholars who consider talismans a shallow magic practice for immediate, this-worldly benefits, medieval texts construe the benefits of talismans as a whole package. There were talismans made for specific mundane ends, such as getting rich, winning others' affections, and earning a promotion. But medieval texts, transmitted or unearthed, never berated these seemingly materialistic desires. Moreover, there were talismans that guarantee both this-worldly benefits as well as soteriological wishes. The modern ideas of dividing the secular from the holy, the ideological from the materialistic, and the this-worldly from the other-worldly do not apply in medieval cases.

The dissertation finally shows many of the features discussed herein were not limited to talismanic practice *per se*. Talismans constituted only one component of a rich body of medieval ritual repertoires. These repertoires were constructed by a wide range of people, from renowned Indian pandits, to monks working in monastery libraries, to ritualists in local societies such as Dunhuang. Surprisingly, but also understandably, these repertoires share a lot of similar tools. Though of different qualities, these repertoires show that medieval Chinese people actively curated and selectively employed these tools to synthetically address their troubles and

confusions. The analysis also indicates that different ritual techniques—talismans, dhāraṇī incantations, mūdras and ritual seals, etc., inform and inspire each other. The ritual milieu fabricated by these techniques and the people behind them made the talismanic practice possible and popular in medieval China.

The findings of the dissertation shed new light on several issues in the study of Chinese religion and Buddhism. First of all, the dissertation reveals the commonalities of certain ritual practices shared by multiple religious traditions. Previous scholarship has achieved much in determining who borrowed from whom or who influenced whom. The current dissertation, on the other hand, is more interested in how specific practitioners handled the techniques and knowledge originating from different backgrounds. The ritual manuals from Dunhuang suggest that these grassroots ritualists were able to discern a common ritual structure running and to tie the tools together as a repertoire. The dissertation also shows that it is misleading to consider any medieval Chinese religious tradition as an enclosed, monolithic entity. They were open systems. The efforts of setting up boundaries did exist. However, these efforts at the same time were contested and multivalent.

Second, my study touches on the materiality of medieval talismans. They were intentionally designed in such a way that they should not be hermeneutically read and contemplated. As one scholar recently argues, this objecthood of talismans made them tokens for access to supernatural power.[338] I argue, on the other hand, that the nature of objecthood bestowed multiple possibilities that enabled medieval Chinese people to be creative in their interaction with the objects. Authoritative and canonical texts did not dictate every aspect of religious life. Comparison between transmitted sources and evidence from Dunhuang shows that

[338] Dominic Steavu, "Paratextuality, Materiality, and Corporeality in Medieval Chinese Religions: Talismans (*fu*) and Diagrams (*tu*)," *Journal of Medieval Worlds* 1, no. 4 (2019): 11–40.

innovations in ritual techniques have always been taking place. The dissertation suggests that focusing on the material aspect of Buddhism helps us understand the agency of figures that we used to consider peripheral.

Third, the dissertation shows that talismanic practice in Chinese Buddhism cannot be considered evidence of "Sinification." Though indigenous elements did find ways to enter the writings labelled Buddhist, talismanic practice has always been part and parcel of many forms of Buddhism. Scholars have shown that both in Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism and Chinese Buddhism, there are cases of devotees carrying scriptures on their shoulders and heads to express reverence and receive talismanic power.[339] In Central Asia, recently discovered Khotanese manuscripts show that Buddhist dhāraṇī talismans were carried by people to keep themselves from calamities in general and to help women protect their children.[340] In South and Southeast Asia, talismans related to Buddhist texts or Buddhist saints are still used today.[341] The dissertation calls for collaborations between scholars of Buddhism in different regions, which will definitely deepen our understanding of Buddhism as a "world religion."

The dissertation only touches on some of the basic questions about talismans in medieval Chinese Buddhism. It expands the category by creating an analytical framework. Under the framework, it discusses how talismans were made, used, and understood in medieval China. But

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[339] Gregory Schopen, "The Gilgit Manuscript of the *Vajracchedikā*," in *Studies in the Literature of The Great Vehicle: Three Mahāyāna Buddhist Texts*, eds. Luis O. Gómez, Jonathan A. Silk (Ann Arbor: Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, The University of Michigan,1989), 135–6; Robert F. Campany, "Notes on the Devotional Uses and Symbolic Functions of Sūtra Texts as Depicted in Early Chinese Buddhist Miracle Tales and Hagiographies," *Journal of the International Association for Buddhist Studies* 14, no.1 (1991): 37–40.
[340] Prods Oktor Skjærvø, "A Khotanese Amulet," in *Iranian Languages and Texts from Iran and Turan: Ronald E, Emmerick Memorial Volume*, eds. Maria Macuch, Mauro Maggi, and Werner Sundermann (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz Verlag, 2007), 387–401; Duan Qing 段晴, "Duizhi shiwugui hushenfu 對治十五鬼護身符," "Mingzhou hushenfu 明咒護身符," in her *Yutian, fojiao, gujuan* 于闐·佛教·古卷 (Shanghai: Zhongxi shuju, 2013), 203–24, 225–44.
[341] For example, see Stanley J. Tambiah, *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets: A Study in Chrisma, Hagiography, Sectarianism, and Millennial Buddhism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 195–289; Todd T. Lewis*, Popular Buddhist Texts from Nepal: Narratives and Rituals of Newar Buddhism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 119–64; Pattana Kitiarsa, *Mediums, Monks, and Amulets: Thai Popular Buddhism Today* (Ching Mai: Silkworm Books, 2012), 111–24.

in the modern world, talismanic practice is also frequently seen in religious sites. How is this knowledge transmitted? How have revolutionary technologies (printing, digitalization) challenged or changed the practice? How does modern commercialization transform the process? Asking questions like these reminds us that even though living in a rather different society from medieval China, we still share something in common with the people residing in a desert town more than one thousand years ago.

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