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The Seal of the Law: A Ritual Implement and the Origins of Printing

GRASPING POWER

Stage properties loom large in the performance of ritual. Icons, altar fittings, offerings, lamps, and aromatics contribute variously to the dramatic process. No less essential are the vestments and other trappings with which the officiant is encumbered and adorned. His gear is also apt to include a number of hand-held objects that have exact counterparts in daily use — mundane articles carried over into a universe of magical causality. On the other hand, such objects may have undergone a change of form or substance: the workaday iron tool is transmuted into a ritual implement of jade. Yet

It is with great regret that the editors of *Asia Major* report the passing away of Michel Strickmann on August 11, 1994, in Tausat, where he kept his home and commuted to teaching duties at Université Michel de Montaigne, Bordeaux 3. "Seal of the Law" was submitted to the editors more than two years ago, but, due to Professor Strickmann's move to Bordeaux, was delayed in publishing. In May of 1994 the author undertook lengthy revisions and supplied citational information, all of which is incorporated here. At the time of his death, there remained perhaps four or five small points needing resolution. Several of those were answered by consulting both his notes and university libraries, but several had to remain unanswered.

From discussions with his associates, it appears that the project involving seals and sealing ("sigillation") was first written as a conference paper titled "The Seal of the Law: A Ritual Implement and Its Vicissitudes." The conference was named "Classical Asian Rituals and the Theory of Ritual," organized in 1984 by Prof. Strickmann and colleagues at the Institute of Advanced Study, Berlin. The papers were edited in 1988 and were scheduled to be printed by a Berlin publisher in 1990 under the same title as the conference; but the book did not appear. At around that time, Prof. Strickmann adapted his paper as a chapter of a book-in-progress of his own, and later submitted it to *Asia Major*. In May, 1994, Michel Strickmann requested that the following be printed as an acknowledgment note: "This study represents the fourth chapter of a still unpublished book, *Chinese Magical Medicine: Therapeutic Rituals*, completed in 1989. It has been rescued by Stephen F. Teiser and greatly improved by Howard L. Goodman, *sapienti sat.*"

often as not, the ritual implement is set apart by consecration alone; only by its context might the archeologist be able to distinguish the "ritual" knife from its quotidian counterpart.

Ritual activity is traditionally construed by scholars to be false, irrational, or outmoded activity — action that no longer serves a real end. But the knife that kills a chicken actually slays, whether for a god's "ritual" meal or one's own (both dinners may well involve the same chicken). "Ritual murder" is no less murderous than secular homicide or manslaughter. The spheres of analysis allotted respectively to ritual and pragmatic activities constantly overlap. This is particularly evident when we examine the role of weapons in ritual performance. Swords have long figured in the panoply of authority. Brandished in ritual display, they attest to the officiant's martial potency. In China, certainly, swords have held this role since ancient times, where mighty blades were made mightier by a host of magical attributes: a lustre like that of diamonds, dominion over the five directions, or transformation into dragons. Subsequently, swords of power have also been fashioned from materials ill suited to actual physical combat. Constructed of coins, drawn or printed on paper, spirit-swords are used as apotropaic talismans. Even such numinous swords are deemed to possess a death-dealing power in the hands of a qualified master, or even an earnest officiant when following prescribed ritual.¹

The exorcist's sword also offers a prime example of ritual archaism. It has generally not been replaced by the rifle, pistol, or machine gun. Hopology has advanced in the outside world, but remains fossilized within the ritual enclave. Many of the rituals that concern us here are still alive, but their creation can be traced back

¹ See Helen M. Chapin, "Toward the Study of the Sword as Dynastic Talisman" (Ph.D. diss., U. of California, Berkeley, 1940); and the references given in Marcel Granet, *Danses et légendes de la Chine ancienne* (Paris: P.U. de France, 1926). On the technological aspects of sword casting, see Joseph Needham, *The Development of Iron and Steel Technology in China* (London: Newcomen Society, 1964). We often find that medieval Chinese tantric Buddhist ritual texts specify that a sword of damascened, or wootz, steel be used in exorcism; on this product (*pin-t'ieh* 鑌鐵, "steely iron"), see *ibid.*, pp. 45–46. For demon-dispelling swords of various substances, see J. J. M. de Groot, *The Religious System of China* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1910) 6, pp. 991–97.

to the early Middle Ages. For exorcism, they consequently call for an array of properly medieval weapons. In addition to swords, there are spears, flails, staves, and spikes, all known from medieval texts as well as present practice. They also figure in the iconography of the demonifuge pantheon.² All are real-life objects, tangible tools that "work"; yet they may also be invested with a vibrant life of their own. In hagiography and legend, swords glow in the dark, fly through the air, avenge wrongs. They stand in for their master in a variety of ways, and may even be instrumental in his ultimate transfiguration. For both swords and staves are capable of assuming the form of the initiate's own body, appearing as his corpse when he himself has vanished away as a semidivine being. "The manner in which one's body is made to join with something of another substance is not to be comprehended by reason. It is truly a singular operation."³

Given the wondrous nature of this ritual fusion of artificer and artifact, we can better understand the need for implements that have been born to serve ritual ends exclusively. Such, it would seem, is the *vajra*: a thunderbolt made tangible. The rosary, too, appears to be a specifically ritual creation, though one may think of it as a sacrosanct form of a rudimentary counting device, even as the *vajra* may be envisioned as an ornate spike.⁴ More generally, if the of-

² On the implements wielded by exorcistic deities and ritual masters, see Judith M. Boltz, "Taoist Rites of Exorcism" (Ph.D. diss., U. of California, Berkeley, 1985).

³ "Teng-chen yin-chüeh" 登真隱訣 ("Concealed Instructions for Ascent to Perfection"), in *T'ai-p'ing yü-lan* 太平御覽 665, p. 6a. See also Henri Maspero, *Le Taoïsme et les religions chinoises* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), p. 483.

⁴ Willibald Kirfel's monograph on the rosary provides an excellent model for research on the diffusion of ritual implements generally. Kirfel demonstrates the Indian, Śaivite origins of the rosary and describes its two paths of dissemination: westwards through Islam into Christianity and eastwards, with Buddhism, into all of Central, East, and Southeast Asia. His observations are potentially significant for the study of other cases of cultural diffusion. See *Der Rosenkranz, Ursprung und Ausbreitung* (Walldorf-Hessen: Verlag für Orientkunde, 1949), p. 62. Research on the migration of legends must be flexible as to form and function. One thinks of the Indian twenty-five tales of the vampire ("The King and the Corpse"), which serve as the armature for a cycle of otherwise independent Tibetan tales (A. W. Macdonald, *Matériaux pour l'étude de la littérature populaire tibétaine* [Paris: P.U. de France, 1967]) 1, or the legend of Barlaam and Ioasaph, which provides a framework for often unrelated homilies, all across Europe (G. R. Woodward, H. Mattingly, D.

ficient's right hand often clutches a long, sometimes pointed, weapon of attack (and the *vajra* is really a miniaturized weapon of this sort), the left frequently holds its complement: a more compact, hollow, or concentrated instrument — for example, a bell. In this case, as with the *vajra*, we have to do with an accessory of specific provenance within the Indian cultural sphere, for whether we find it among Chinese Buddhist monks, Taoist masters, or vernacular exorcists, the bell with a three-pronged *vajra* handle (the *vajra-ghanṭā*) is drawn from the properties of tantric Buddhism. Its primary use is in providing musical entertainment for divine visitors. More purely indigenous is the buffalo horn, used by Chinese exorcists to summon spirit-armies. Both bell and horn are examples of specialized, otherworldly instruments, and perhaps of ritual archaism as well — since neither is ordinarily employed to produce music in nonritual contexts.⁵

Two other implements often complement the sword, sometimes

M. Lang, [St. John Damascene], *Barlaam and Ioasaph* [London: Loeb Classical Library, 1967]; and more recently, John C. Hirsh, *Barlaam and Ioasaph: A Middle English Life of Buddha* [London: Early Text Society, 1986]. Similar principles may apply to the comparative study of art motifs; see the daring hypotheses of East-West transmission propounded by Jurgis Baltrušaitis, *Le Moyen Age fantastique. Antiquités et exotismes dans l'art gothique* (1955; Paris: Flammarion, 1981), esp. pp. 143–263. On European rosaries, see Eithne Wilkins, *The Rose-Garden Game. The Symbolic Background to the European Prayer-Beads* (London: Gollancz, 1969).

⁵ Of the various forms of *vajra*, most idiosyncratic is no doubt the Tibetan ritual dagger (*phur-bu*), a development of the *vajra-spike* (*vajrakīla*) and a deity in its own right. See R. A. Stein, "La Gueule du *makara*: Un trait inexplicé de certains objets rituels," in Ariane Macdonald and Yoshiro Imaeda, eds., *Essais sur l'art du Tibet* (Paris: Adrien Maisonneuve, 1977); idem, "A propos des documents anciens relatifs au *phur-bu* (*hīla*)," in Louis Ligeti, ed., *Proceedings of the Csoma de Koros Memorial Symposium* (Budapest: Akademiai Kiado, 1978), p. 427–44; and F. A. Bischoff and Charles Hartman, "Padmasambhava's Invention of the Phur-bu," in *Etudes tibétaines dédiées à la mémoire de Marcelle Lalou* (Paris: Adrien Maisonneuve, 1971), pp. 11–28. *Vajra*-bells are described and pictured in the principal studies of tantric Buddhist ritual implements, among them Ishida Mōsaku 石田茂作, "Mikkyō hōgu kakusetsu" 密教法具名説, in *Bukkyō kōkogaku kōza* 佛教考古學講座 3 (1970), pp. 39–53; Okazaki Yōji 岡崎譲治, [*Shinpan*] 新版 *Bukkyō kōkogaku kōza* 5 (1976), pp. 189–96. Nara National Museum, *Mikkyō hōgu* 密教法具 (Tokyo, 1965), pp. 7–10, and plates 1–139. For a Taiwanese vernacular exorcist with a comparable bell in his right hand and a buffalo horn in his left, see Ōfuchi Ninji 大淵忍爾, ed., *Chūgoku jin no shūkyō giri* 中國人の宗教儀禮 (Tokyo: Fukuba shoten, 1983), plate 70.

replacing it. One is the mirror, the other the graven seal. Sword and mirror both figure prominently in the gear of the medieval Chinese alchemist. They also comprise the central imperial regalia of Japan, and Fukanaga has convincingly, iconoclastically, argued for their continental Chinese origin.⁶ The mirror's universal fascination is supported by a broad spectrum of scholarly studies. The spirit-world may readily manifest itself in a mirror, or the mirror may be used as an effective demonifugic instrument.⁷ Catoptromancy, or mantic mirror-gazing, may be a classic example of the vast crosscultural diffusion of certain divinatory techniques.⁸ The mirror capable of containing images of past, present, and future also constitutes a powerful metaphor. Embodying a full range of uncanny powers, Chinese mirrors are worthy mates to the swords they partner. Reflecting only what is true, they show disguised demons in their real form, trim their own light in concert with sun and moon (whose luminous nature they share), and send forth radiance at will, independent of any external source. Certain mirrors can "see" through walls, discern malignant activities within a patient's body, and effect major changes in external

⁶ Fukanaga Mitsuji 福永光司, "Dōkyō ni okeru kagami to ken 道教における鏡と剣," *THGH* 45 (1973), pp. 59–120.

⁷ De Groot, *Religious System* 6, pp. 1000–5; in 4th–c. sources the mountain-dwelling ascetic wears a mirror on his back to ward off demons approaching from behind. Mirrors might also be set facing outwards about the perimeter of a ritual area, to keep it free of demons. See the standard Sino-Japanese printing of the Buddhist Canon, *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經 (hereafter, *T*), no. 984, p. 459a. The diagram illustrates a circle of lamps about a central incense burner; at each of the cardinal points are a mirror, banner, and sword — all doubled in the south.

⁸ In his exemplary study of catoptromancy, Armand Delatte posits a 5th–c. BC (or earlier) Greek origin; *La catoptromancie grecque et ses dérivés* (Liège: Bibliothèque de la faculté de philosophie et lettres de l'Université de Liège, 1932). In India these techniques seem first to be attested in the *Brahmajāla-sūtra* of the *Dirghāgama* (T. W. Rhys-Davids, *Dialogues of the Buddha* [London: Pali Text Society, 1899], part 1, p. 24). Here "obtaining oracular answers by means of the magic mirror" is listed among the "wrong means of livelihood and low arts" practised by certain recluses and Brahmans, persons outside the Buddhist fold. Yet before long, mirror divination was accepted and promoted in a tantric Buddhist context. The prime scriptural source is *The Questions of Subāhu* (*Subāhupariprocā*), translated into Chinese in 726 (T 895); its Tibetan translation seems to have authorized the important role played by catoptromancy in Tibet.

phenomena, working on weather, on mountains, on the sea.⁹ Moreover, the mantic aspect of mirrors is reflected in the evolution of both bronze technology and optics.¹⁰

In comparison with the mirror, the graven seal seems relatively humdrum. Incised in wood or stone, the seal, like the mirror, was utterly commonplace in everyday life. As utilitarian objects, seals were far more ubiquitous than swords. In common with the other implements already mentioned, the seal took part in doubling. Yet whereas swords or mirrors standing in for their owners cannot have been an everyday occurrence, this was the usual function of seals. In East Asia the seal became its owner's representative: his official double. In common with the mirror, the seal designed to imprint its text held its image in reverse — thus conforming to the conventions of the spirit-world, which reverses or inverts the phenomenal world. The reversed image held a truth and a power that only printing could reveal.

A closer study of seals in their ritual context shows that these ostensibly mute and soulless, routine desk-top objects, these chattels of bureaucracy, enjoyed a secret life that was anything but humdrum. A new chapter in the history of therapeutic ritual remains to be written, based on evidence for the use of seals. And it would reveal the degree to which Buddhist and Taoist specialists eventually came to share a common ritual idiom by the fifth century. Beyond this, ritual sealing marked a watershed in cultural history, for it represents

⁹ Arthur Waley, "The Poetry of Chinese Mirrors," in idem, *The Secret History of the Mongols and Other Pieces* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1963), pp. 75–81. For the mirror of the heart, see Paul Demiéville, "Le miroir spirituel," *Sinologica* 1 (1947), pp. 112–37; rpt. in Demiéville, *Choix d'études bouddhiques* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973), pp. 131–56. On Tibetan tantric mirrors and mirror-images, Alex Wayman, "The Mirror as a Pan-Buddhist Metaphor-Simile," *History of Religions* 13 (1974), pp. 251–69. The "mirror" or "spectrum" component in the titles of traditional East Asian chronicles and histories implies a capacity for predicting future events through knowledge of the recorded past. An infernal counterpart is the "mirror of sins," found in the tribunals of the Ten Kings, or judges, of hell; it displays the evil deeds in past lives of the newly dead, thus determining their retribution and future destiny.

¹⁰ Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1962) 4.1, pp. 87–97; and Jurgis Baltrušaitis, *Le miroir. Essai sur une légende scientifique. Revelations, science-fiction et fallacies* (Paris: Elmayan, 1978).

a pivotal stage in the development of printing. It is in fact under this latter aspect that the subject was first brought to modern scholarly attention.

A SIXTH-CENTURY TAOIST TEXT

In his quest for the origins of printing in China, the great sinologist Paul Pelliot (1878–1945) happened upon an intriguing passage in the *History of the Sui Dynasty*, or *Sui-shu* 隋書. This history was compiled by the successors of the Sui (581–618), the T'ang, in the first quarter of the seventh century. The bibliographic section of the *Sui History*, listing the books in the imperial library, constitutes an extended repertory of writings surviving in official circles at the end of the sixth century. Each division of the bibliography opens with a concise summary, in effect a review of the achievements in each field during the early medieval period. Pelliot was on the lookout for textual evidence of what was later to become the standard technique of Chinese printing, in which characters are carved on wooden blocks in reverse relief. The passage he noted was from the summary of Taoist writings, which informs us concerning the activities of Taoist priests:

Moreover, they make seals of wood, on which they engrave the constellations, the sun, and the moon. Holding their breath, they grasp them in their hands and print [or stamp] them. Many sick persons are cured by that means 又以木為印, 刻星辰日月於其上, 吸氣執之, 以印 疾病, 多有愈者.¹¹

Pelliot observed that this passage is somewhat ambiguous. It might refer to a clay or sand impression of a seal carved in intaglio, in the presence of the patient destined for curing — a seal, that is, not requiring ink. But Pelliot believed there was by that time a far greater likelihood that the process involved talismans actually printed using tablets similar to the official seals then in common use, on

¹¹ This follows the punctuation in *Sui-shu* (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chú, 1973) 35, p. 1093, which I emend, below, however.

which the images or characters were carved in reverse and in relief. "In order to be efficacious, these charms had to be printed while observing the respiratory rites which played such a great role in Taoist practices; and in all likelihood, they were printed on paper."¹²

Pelliot discusses this passage in conjunction with a description furnished by the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim I-ching 義淨, who was in India from 673–685. Writing in 692, I-ching noted that "monks and laymen in India make *caityas* or images with earth, or impress the Buddha's image on silk or paper, and worship it with offerings wherever they go."¹³ As Pelliot remarks, multiple Buddha images, scrolls of a "thousand Buddhas," printed by this means in the ninth and tenth centuries, were found in Tun-huang, the Chinese gateway to Central Asia. He was inclined to see in I-ching's account the record of a Chinese custom that had reached India: witness not only the printing technique, but above all the silk and paper, both of Chinese origin.¹⁴

¹² Paul Pelliot, *Les débuts de l'imprimerie en Chine* (Paris: Adrien Maisonneuve, 1953), p. 17.

¹³ I-ching [trans. J. Takakusu], *A Record of the Buddhist Religion as Practised in India and the Malay Archipelago* (London: The Clarendon Press, 1896), p. 150.

¹⁴ Pelliot, *Les débuts*, p. 18. But as Hou Ching-lang has recently shown, the Chinese verb "to stamp" or "make a seal-impression" (*yin* 印) was also used to designate the process of casting an image with a mould pressed into sand or clay. At Tun-huang in the 10th c., monks and laypersons ritualistically gathered on the morning of the 15th day of the first month, on the banks of a nearby river. In the course of their ritual they manufactured ex-votos representing stupas or Buddhist deities, using the clay or sand of the river bank. The purpose of the ceremony (印沙佛, "stamping Buddhas in sand") was to invoke the favor of the Buddhist pantheon during the coming new year. Hou points out the larger context of Buddhist practice: the procedures described by the pilgrim I-ching in 692 were still being carried out in 20th-c. Thailand, Laos, Burma, and Tibet; they were at one time also known in Japan. He also finds evidence linking the printed scrolls of multiple, identical Buddha images with the metamorphosis of the Buddha into multiple forms, by means of visualization in the course of meditation. He has shown that the production of these scrolls was one of the activities prescribed for the six monthly days of fasting, and thus essentially an individual occupation — in contrast to the communal production of images in clay or sand; Hou, "La cérémonie du Yin-cha-fo d'après les manuscrits de Touen-houang," in Michel Soymié, ed., *Contributions aux études de Touen-Houang*, Publication de l'EFEO 135 (Paris: EFEO, 1984), vol. 3. The ritual manufacture of multiple images thus appears to have an Indian origin; it provides yet another example of a Buddhist ritual activity in which Indian and Chinese

Thus we would have the Taoists first printing talismans, to heal the sick, and the Buddhists then characteristically applying the technique to their own most pressing devotional need, the multiplication of Buddha images. Certainly with both these avid spiritual denominations paving the way, all would have been ready for the great Chinese printing ventures that began in the tenth century. And to the Taoists would go all honor, as "proto-scientific" creators of proto-printing, a role fully in keeping with the technological prowess with which Taoists have been traditionally credited.¹⁵

Pelliot's monograph on Chinese printing was published years after his death, and in any case appears to represent a draft completed as long ago as 1928. Since that time much has been done in the study of Taoist texts, and we should naturally expect to find material relevant to the prehistory of printing among the nearly 1,500 works in the Taoist canon. There should certainly be first-hand evidence on this point in Taoist literature, since the authors of the *Sui History* make the practice loom disproportionately large in their account of Taoism. In fact, the canon does contain a text on this subject that to all appearances dates from the time of the Sui dynasty. It includes a lengthy section describing the use of a seal to cure disease. A careful reading permits us to correct Pelliot's translation of the crucial passage in the *Sui History*. A shift in punctuation radically alters the sense: "Holding [the seal] in their hands, they seal the sickness with it. Many are cured by that means."¹⁶ The seal in this case is impressed neither on silk nor paper, nor for that matter in clay or sand. Instead,

ideas and practices coalesce. *The Questions of Subāhu* (see n. 8, above), recommends stamping ten myriad miniature stupas in clay or sand, as a means of annihilating past transgressions (*T* 895, p. 720b). See also Giuseppe Tucci, *Indo-Tibetica* (Rome: Reale Accademia d'Italia, 1932) 1, pp. 53–60; trans. as *Stupa, Art, Architecture and Symbolism* (New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan, 1988), pp. 53–62, and p. v of the new intro. by Lokesh Chandra.

¹⁵ This view underlies the entire chapter on Taoism in Needham, *Science and Civilisation* (1956) 2, pp. 33–164.

¹⁶ This interpretation was in fact given by James R. Ware, "The Wei Shu and the Sui Shu on Taoism," *JAOS* 53.3 (1933), pp. 215–50: "They make seals of wood on which they carve the stars, the signs of the zodiac, the sun, and the moon. Breathing deeply as they grasp it, they make an imprint on the sick person. Many are [thus] cured" (p. 246).

it is applied to the body of the patient himself.

The text's title is *Essentials of the Practice of Perfection; Law Code of Right Unity* 正一法文修真旨要. The first part of this work consists of practical instructions originating in the Mao Shan revelations, copied from the *Declarations of the Perfected* 真誥.¹⁷ There is of course nothing new in this. But the instructions presently shade off into directives on ingesting primal breath and performing therapeutic gymnastics, and then on checking the state of one's health according to the "four great-ones," that is, the Four Elements (*caturmahābhūta*) of Indian medical theory.¹⁸ Symptoms observable on the mouth and lips are first listed, with their various indications regarding the predominance in the body of one or another of the elements: wind, fire, earth, and water. We are told how to rectify any imbalance in the elements through proper exhalation, in six modes: exhaling air with the syllables *ch'ui* 吹, *ho* 呵, *hsi* 嘻, *hu* 呼, *hsü* 嘘, and *ssu* 呬. For example, if one dreams of a man dressed in red, holding a sword or staff and coming to frighten you, it indicated illness in the heart: if hot, exhale *hu*; if cold, exhale *ch'ui*.¹⁹ A mirror should be set up in order to check for any alterations in appearance. If so, one withdraws into an oratory and recites the *Book of the Yellow Court* in order to assemble the body's spirits, to collect the three ether-souls and put

¹⁷ *Essentials of the Practice* is work no. 1260 in the standard printing of the Taoist Canon, as numbered in Wang Tu-chien, *Tao-tsang yin-mu yin-te* 道藏目錄, Harvard-Yenching Sinological Index Series 25 (Peking, Ha-fu Yen-ching hsüeh-she, 1935; hereafter *HY*). The *Declarations of the Perfected* (*HY* 1060) represents the visionary record and explanatory matter surviving from a 7-yr. series of divine communications (364-370), which laid the groundwork of Taoist scriptural literature. See Michel Strickmann, *Le Taoïsme du Mao Chan: Chronique d'une révélation* (Paris: P.U. de France, 1981); idem, "The Mao Shan Revelations: Taoism and the Aristocracy," *TP* 63 (1977), pp. 1-64; and Isabelle Robinet, *La Révélation du Shangqing dans l'histoire du taoïsme* (Paris: EFEO, 1984).

¹⁸ Paul Demiéville, "Byō," in J. Takakusu and K. Watanabe, gen. eds., *Hōbōgirin Dictionnaire encyclopédique du bouddhisme* (Paris: Adrien Maisonneuve, 1937) 3, pp. 249b-250b, 254b.

¹⁹ Dreams were viewed as important diagnostic indicators in the Chinese secular tradition, as well as among Buddhist and Taoist specialists; see Michel Strickmann, "Dreamwork of Psycho-Sinologists: Doctors, Taoists, Monks," in Carolyn T. Brown, ed., *Psycho-Sinology: The Universe of Dreams in Chinese Culture* (Washington D.C.: Asia Program, Woodrow Wilson Intl. Ctr. for Scholars, 1987), pp. 25-46.

the seven sperm-souls under control. One paces along the seven stars of the Dipper and ingests their primal breaths.²⁰ Moreover, the text reminds us that breath is absolutely vital to the preservation of the body; there has never been a living body without breath, nor breath without a living body. As for color: a person's red should be like vermilion inside silk, not like ochre; white should be like goose feathers, not like salt. Yellow should be like sulphur within silk gauze, not like clay; black should be like the color of multiple layers of lacquer, not like earth; and blue should be like the unctuousness of a disk of azure jade, not like indigo.²¹

This list of symptoms and their significances is interesting in itself, and suggests that it was of some importance to Taoist masters to be able to predict their patients' chances of survival. The last and longest section of *Essentials of the Practice of Perfection* emphasizes that knowledge of symptomology and prognosis is essential if the rites of the Tao are to succeed in saving people from illness or other afflictions. The original text gives the fullest and most immediate account that we have of the ritual for treating disease with an exorcistic seal:

If you are going to practise the cure of illness by spells, you should have the sufferer's family all perform the early morning obeisance to the Tao and purify themselves. The whole house should be quiet; all noise and confusion should be kept away. The Taoist master then approaches the patient, burns incense and most carefully examines the patient's state. If his physical symptoms are bad and not susceptible of cure, then the master should in any case visualize on his behalf the spirits and circulate the breaths throughout his own body, and apply the seal three

²⁰ *The Book of the Inner Effulgences of the Yellow Court* (*Huang-t'ing nei-ching yü ching* 皇庭內景玉經) named and described the body's inner spirit-personnel. Its recitation guaranteed their watchfulness, and thus made the reciter impregnable against demonic assailants; see K. M. Schipper, *Concordance du Houang-t'ing ching* (Paris: EFEO, 1975). Based on an older extant prototype, it was one of the original scriptures of the Mao shan corpus (see Strickmann, *Mao Chan*, pp. 198-202).

²¹ On diagnosis according to facial color, see Hou Ching-lang, "Physiognomie d'après le teint sous la dynastie des T'ang," in Michel Soyumié, ed., *Contributions*, pp. 55-71.

times. At noon, he should once more go and examine the patient's condition, to see whether or not it has improved somewhat. If it has not yet improved, he should once more use his spell. During the night he should again examine whether there has been any alteration, and if there has not yet been any, he should once more apply his spell. The following morning at dawn [after dawn worship] he should go and examine his condition; if there has still been no change, it means that his life is finished and he cannot be cured.

In curing illness, it is necessary to despise material rewards. If you act in the spirit of succor and charity the spirits will certainly assist you, and the vital breaths of the Tao will definitely respond. If, however, you act in hope of gain, without concern to give help, your actions will have no efficacy; on the contrary, you yourself will be harmed by them. The talismans and spells of the rites of the Tao are for helping people in sickness and suffering. The Taoist master should frequently discourse upon the venerable scriptures in the thirty-six divisions of the Taoist canon and promote the rites of talismans and spells of the sublime saints.²² He should moreover study their profound subtleties with all his might. The instructions that follow represent the arts of talismans and spells in the secret directives of the Three and the Five of the divine transcendents of Right Unity. The Twelve Asterisms and great conjunctions of the Three and the Five reveal the instructions of the dark invisible world. The Taoists' wondrous rites of spell recitation are numerous and complex, obscure in their diversity, and difficult for anyone to comprehend fully. But for saving lives in peril of death, there is nothing better than seals. In ancient times, Fan Li 范蠡 practised this, and caused mountains to crumble, rivers and seas to flow backwards, spirit-powers to tremble with fear, and thunderclaps to re-

sound.²³ With seals one can smelt metal and polish jade, restore vital breaths and bring back the ether-souls [to reanimate corpses]; how much more easily, then, can one heal the sick by these means! But for ordinary persons in their shallow delusion, the sublime arts are difficult to master. It is for that reason that most people at the present time are unable to achieve results in these practices. This is most likely due to their not having studied the techniques thoroughly, or else because their hearts are not fully focused. Li Tao-hua 李道化 has said, "I do not practise this rite with the frivolous or the young."²⁴

The difficult point to understand about the seal lies in the visualizations. But if you are able to perfect the breathing and understand the timing, then the visualization will be accomplished by itself and the spirits will all be fully present. If you coil and cincture yourself with the Five Spirits, and pace out the pattern of the first *I-ching* hexagram (that is, Ch'ien 乾, or "Heaven"), rare will be those whom you cannot cure. Now we will give a terse outline of the sequence of procedures, in order to make it manifest to fellow adepts who have not yet been able to exhaust its essential secrets.

For the sevenfold rite of the vital breaths: first one must spew forth water and eliminate impurities. In your left hand, hold a bowl filled with water, in your right, a sword. With sword and water held opposite one another, place your back to the reigning asterism of the month and face the Breaker-star.²⁵ Visualize in front of you a celestial official in a vermilion

²³ On Fan Li, a transcendent being of antiquity, see Max Kaltenmark, *Le Lie-sien tchouan: Biographies légendaires des immortels taoïstes de l'antiquité* (Peking: U. de Paris, Centre d'Etudes sinologiques de Peking, 1953; rpt. Paris: IHEC, Collège de France, 1987), pp. 103-4. The theme of geophysical change and cosmic resonance is associated with magic seals in what follows.

²⁴ I have found no other reference to Li Tao-hua; my rendering is conjectural.

²⁵ According to the "Book of Spellbinding" ("Chin-ching" 禁經) that concludes Sun Ssu-mo's 孫思邈 7th-c. *Supplementary Prescriptions Worth a Thousand*, pressure applied to this spot in the healer's hand will instantly summon spirits to furnish him with information (*Ch'ien-chin i-fang* 千金翼方 [Peking: Jen-min wei-sheng ch'upan she, 1955; rpt. 1982] 29, pp. 364a-b).

²² This mention of "thirty-six divisions" is the circumstantial evidence dating the text to the Sui period, when such a mode of classification seems to have become current.

robe; he is nineteen feet tall; on his head he wears a spirit-register; set in it is a nine-phoenix hat. In his mouth he takes water and sprays it out in front of him over the sick person and the room: it is brilliantly red, like the sun rising at dawn. Then, with sword and water held opposite one another, visualize the seven stars of the Dipper above your own head; the end star of the handle should be in the bowl of water. Recite [this spell]:

I respectfully request the spirit-essences
Of the Northern Dipper's seven stars
To descend into this water,
So that all noxious demons
Quickly depart, ten thousand leagues away!
If you do not leave, I will decapitate and kill you
And consign you to the White Youth of the West.
Speedily, as the statutes and ordinances command!

Spray out water in each of the five directions; then spray it on the sufferer, and put the seal into operation. Stand ten feet away from the patient. You press the finger joints of your left hand; your right hand holds the seal against your heart. Stand facing the reigning direction.

Step one: First visualize yourself as a spirit bearing heaven on his head, and stamping on the earth with his feet. A five-colored cloud of vapor covers your body.

Step two: Visualize over your head the five planets, each in its proper place, a foot away from your head.

Step three: Visualize in front of your face, on the left the sun, on the right the moon, nine inches away from your face.

Step four: Visualize on top of your head the vermilion bird, to the left the azure dragon, to the right the white tiger, beneath your feet the Eight Trigrams (of the *I-ching*) and the divine tortoise.²⁶ To the left and right are the jade youths and

²⁶ The eight trigrams have long been the organizing spatial principle of Chinese ritual; see Marc Kalinowski, "La transmission du dispositif des neuf palais sous les

jade maidens who put the seal into action.

Step five: Visualize five-colored vital breaths of perfection the size of strands of thread, proceeding from your five viscera, coming out of your mouth and rising into the air to a height of eighteen feet above your head. They go three times around your head. Next visualize three little men in your liver, dressed in blue robes and blue caps, coming out and standing to your left. The three little men in your heart, dressed in red with red caps, come out and stand to your right. The three little men in your kidneys, dressed in black with black caps, come out and stand behind you. The three men in your spleen, dressed in yellow with yellow caps, come out and stand to the south. They all hold swords in their left hand and war-hatchets in their right.

Next visualize above your head the seven stars of the Dipper, with the star at the end of the handle pointing at the spot where the sufferer feels pain. Then visualize the previously mentioned Perfect Official wearing the nine-phoenix hat, mounted upon red vapors of the sun. Imagine that he performs the Step of Yü with the seal in his hand, then brings it down once upon the patient's heart.²⁷ Next he presses it once upon his stomach, then once again upon the place where he feels pain. Visualize the toxic vapors coming out of the patient and rushing away. When this has been done, concentrate your vision on your own body. Close off your breath and perform the Step of Yü, nine paces, bringing you to the patient. Stand there, before you apply the seal, and breathe out of your mouth upon the sufferer three *hsi* 吸, three *cha* 吒, and three *ch'ih*

Six-Dynasties," in Michel Strickmann, ed., *Tantric and Taoist Studies: In Honour of R. A. Stein*, *Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques* 22 (Brussels: Institut Belge des Hautes Etudes Chinoises, 1985) 3, pp. 773-811.

²⁷ The Step of Yü supposedly mimics the limping gait of the legendary demiurge Yü the Great. Linked with the seven (or nine) stars of *Ursa major*, it is a mode of ritual motion shared by Taoist masters with ancient Chinese sorcerers; see K. M. Schipper, *Le corps taoïste. Corps physique, corps social* (Paris: Fayard, 1982), p. 225; Marcel Granet, "Remarques sur le taoïsme ancien," in idem, *Études sociologiques sur la Chine* (Paris: P. U. de France, 1953), pp. 243-49.

此 breaths. Next sound the bells of heaven six times, then strike heaven's stone chimes six times: for summoning, use the bells; for subjugating, use the chimes.²⁸ Then recite this spell:

The spirit-seal of the Monarch of Heaven:
 When you seal a mountain it turns to a lake.
 Seal a stone and it turns to earth.
 Seal a tree, the tree withers.
 Seal the earth, the earth splits.
 Seal wood, the wood breaks.
 Seal fire, the fire goes out.
 Seal water, the water dries up.
 Seal above, it penetrates below.
 Seal before, it penetrates behind.
 Seal the left, it penetrates the right.
 Seal malignant wraiths, and wraiths perish.
 Seal pain, and pain stops.
 Seal sickness, sickness disperses.
 Seal demons, demons flee.
 It overcomes the symptoms and eliminates knotted
 breaths,
 Banishes afflictions and punishes ghost-infestation.
 May they all flee away of their own volition
 And the True Spirits take up their abode in you.
 Swiftly, swiftly, in accordance with the statutes and ordi-
 nances of Lord Lao The Most High.²⁹

Then bring down the seal [on the patient's body]. You must close off your breaths for a good long time; only then raise the seal and step back. Then recite: "The man or woman

²⁸ Elsewhere, the text specifies that sounding the bells of heaven designates a tooth-grinding from left to right, and is used for summoning spirits; striking heaven's stone chimes involves grinding from right to left, and is used for subjugating spirits (*HY* 1260, p. 18a).

²⁹ Tai-shang Lao-chün 太上老君, the deified Lao-tzu, founded Taoism with a revelation to Chang Tao-ling 張道陵 in 142 AD, and remained the system's chief deity during most of the medieval period.

named so-and-so [fill in the blank], born in thus-and-such a year, month, day, hour, in his present life is troubled by thus-and-such an ailment, and has requested me, your servant, to cure it. Your servant respectfully requests the General of the Three Divisions, the General who Operates the Seal, the General who Cures Illness, the General who Destroys Disease Wraiths, and the General who Arrests Devils; I request that all of you accompany the seal and cure the illness, and save that person from the ailment in his body. Swiftly, swiftly, come out! I now with the seal of the Yellow God's Emblem of Transcendence seal the heart — take it out of his heart!

Sealing his stomach, it comes out of the stomach!
 Sealing the liver, it comes out of the liver!
 Sealing the lungs, it comes out of the lungs!
 Sealing the kidneys, it comes out of the kidneys!
 Sealing the spleen, it comes out of the spleen!
 Sealing the head, it comes out of the head!
 Sealing the back, it comes out of the back!
 Sealing the breast, it comes out of the breast!
 Sealing the waist, it comes out of the waist!
 Sealing the hand, it comes out of the hand!
 Sealing the foot, it comes out of the foot!
 Quickly come forth, quickly come forth,
 Swiftly swiftly in accordance with the statutes and ordi-
 nances!

Each time you apply the seal, recite this through one more time. When that has been completed, lift the seal and hold it facing the patient's heart, and recite:

Demons of the south
 Demons of the north
 Demons of the east
 Demons of the west
 Demons of the center

Demons of the earth
 Demons of spirits 神鬼
 Demons of men
 Demons of women
 Demons of sunken-corpse-spectres 沈尸, toxic-ghost-
 infestations 毒注之鬼;
 Who face the seal, die!
 Who meet the seal, perish!
 Swiftly come forth, swiftly come forth!

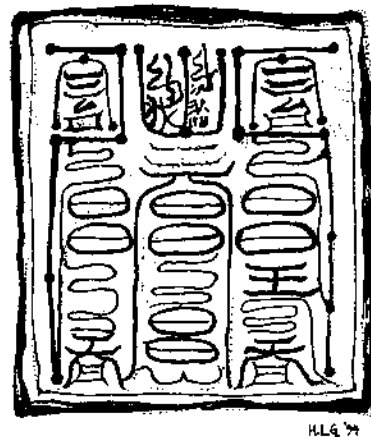
Bring the seal down to rest and recite this two more times through; only then lift the seal. After sealing, have the sufferer swallow three or two talismans. (Note in text: a man consumes three talismans, a woman two.)³⁰

In using spells to cure illness, in your visualization always visualize the perfect breaths of the ten regions [as you recite the spells]. Before taking action, you should enjoin the sufferer not to consume the five sharp flavored herbs for three days and flesh of the animals of the twelve asterisms (that is, of the twelve heavenly "stems" of cyclical time-space computation). Indeed, all shellfish, wine, and fresh meat should be avoided. Only a very small amount of dried deer meat is acceptable. Only when this has been accomplished may you apply the seal. But if the patient is unable to carry this out, then sealing will cause him harm and not do any good at all.

After using the seal, bathe it in fragrant hot water; wipe it dry with a new cloth and place it in a box. (There follows an illustration of the face of the seal):

³⁰ Though the text here makes no mention of paper or ink, it is at least possible that the talismans were to be manufactured by means of the seal itself, as we find out below, from 6th- and 7th-c. Buddhist scriptures

Figure 1. Seal Pictured in Essentials of the Practice of Perfection (rendering based on *HY*, sect. 吹下, no. 1260, p. 19b).



This illustrates precisely the quoted passage of the *Sui History* (see above). Below, two inset details point out some basic elements: a schematic doublet of the Great Dipper (*Ursa major*; left detail), and numerous stylized renditions of the archaic logograph for sun 日 (right detail). Other elements include stylized asterisms associated with the Dipper.



This seal should not be brought into a household in mourning, nor into one in which a woman has just given birth, nor into a place where there is blood or raw flesh or milk, or filth of the six sorts of domestic beast: to none of these places may it be taken. If when asleep you should suddenly be frightened by a dream, or be unusually shaken by a sound, arise at once and call out in a loud voice: "Ye seven spirits of the house, Director of Destinies, Lord of the Hearth! How have you permitted uncouth demons to strike at the descendant of the Yellow Monarch? Apprehend them, and commit them to the officer of the prison, to be punished for their crime!"

When you have said this, take the seal and hang it over the door. Return to bed, and a moment later you will hear the sound of whipping and torture.

If a person is suddenly struck by flying evil cadaver-spectres, demonic hereditary infestation, chronic faintness, and pains in the heart: seal him over the heart, and it will stop at once. If a person talks demon-speech incessantly, seal him according to the ritual and it will stop at once. If a person is walking along a road, or has gone into the mountains or

moor lands, or is crossing a river or traversing a lake; or if he sees wolves, tigers, bears, or the like, or if such animals attack any of the six sorts of domestic beast, let him seal their tracks with the seal, and tigers will run thirty leagues away. If one reverses the seal, they will come back. If while someone is in the water, dragons, fish, turtles, crawling things, poisonous snakes, or the like attack him, make a seal impression on clean yellow clay; throw it in the water and the beasts will die. If male or female slaves run away, press the seal in their footprints and they will return. If a person is suddenly struck by bad vapors, or "dies" and is unconscious, or while walking feels his limbs struck as if pierced by an awl or a knife, take the seal, close off your breaths, and press it on the painful spot and on the heart, and recite: "wraith-breaths depart, right breaths remain!"³¹

And so the text comes to an end. Here, then, we have a dramatic illustration of the extraordinary documentary value of the Taoist canon. A historical source alludes obscurely to a ritual, and a contemporary text in the long-neglected canon obligingly provides a set of instructions on how precisely it is to be performed — instructions written for initiates, but still perfectly intelligible to the modern reader. This one example shows that reading only official "historical" writings can limit the historian's enterprise. Yet the search for materials cannot stop here, even when the the historian's ingrained fear of the Taoist canon has been overcome. Relevant data will also be found in other quarters, and the next point of inquiry should be the Buddhist canon.

A FIFTH-CENTURY BUDDHIST TEXT

It is not only the ever-present possibility of an Indian prototype, the Buddhist inspiration for a medieval Chinese phenomenon, that should inspire inquiry into the Buddhist canon. Above all, it is the

³¹ *HY* 1260, pp. 15b–20a. I translate the term *hsieh* 邪 as wraiths, or wraith-breaths; these are "bent" or "twisted" pathogens, contrasted with the "straight" or "right" 正 influences, emanations, or other representatives of the Tao; see Michel Strickmann, "History, Anthropology, and Chinese Religion," *HJAS* 48.1 (1980), p. 225.

hope of finding new reflections of Chinese practice in the many scriptures that adapt fundamentally Chinese customs and beliefs to the socially prestigious framework of Buddhism. We find this in a Chinese apocryphon compiled in the 450s, the *Book of Consecration* (*Kuan-ting ching* 灌頂經). The work furnishes the most explicit account of the Taoist ritual of exorcistic sigillation — but this time, in a Buddhist context.³²

The seventh chapter of the *Book of Consecration* is given over to instructions for performing a healing ritual, in which a "devil-subduing seal" is the principal implement. A literal translation of the first few pages of this text will allow the reader to form an impression of this Buddhist version of the procedure, in close juxtaposition with the Taoist work we have just examined. Later I identify several shared elements, as well as significant differences.

"Devil-Subduing Seals and Great Spirit-Spells of Consecration as Spoken by the Buddha"

Thus I have heard: at one time the Buddha was dwelling in Śrāvastī, in the Jetavana hermitage, together with 1,250 persons. At that time the Celestial Venerable was in his *dhyāna*-chamber; it was just at the beginning of the Long Retreat, on the fifteenth of the month, when the stars were bright and clear. Śakra the Monarch of Heaven and the Four Great Heavenly Kings, the kings' ministers, and elders among the spirits beneath the earth, and the officials and people within the realm had all gone to visit the Buddha, each of them intending to question him on matters that puzzled them. The Celestial Venerable was silent, saying not a single word. In his *dhyāna*, the Buddha pondered, "All the numberless beings of the ten directions dwell forever in benighted ignorance, unable to realize the Perfect and True. They rejoice in performing the deeds of devils and in fabricating perversities; they are sunk in

³² On this scripture, *T* 133r, see Michel Strickmann, "The *Consecration Sūtra*: A Buddhist Book of Spells," in Robert E. Buswell, Jr., ed., *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha* (Honolulu: U. Hawaii P., 1990), pp. 75–118.

the sea of birth and death, yet who of them is aware of it? They revolve through the Five Ways of rebirth, and I alone know it."³³ Pondering these things in his heart, he once more closed his eyes and attached his mind to silent concentration, remaining thus for a very long time without awakening. The Monarch of Heaven had obtained the Buddha's marvelous powers and hence realized what the Buddha was pondering on. Therefore he rose, joined his palms, and prostrated himself before the Buddha, then withdrew to one side and snapped the fingers of his right hand, to awaken the Buddha, and said, "There is something that I wish to ask."

At that the Buddha awakened, and inquired of Śakra the Monarch of Heaven, "What is it that you wish to ask?" Śakra the Monarch of Heaven prostrated himself at the Buddha's feet, then knelt with palms joined and said to the Buddha: "Among the ninety-five religious rites there is still the rite of *mudrā*."³⁴ How is it that this practice is not included among the supreme, subtle, and triumphant rites of the Venerable of the World? I desire that the Celestial Venerable set forth an expedient means to transform my benighted ignorance, to cause my Eye of the Tao to open, so that I may be free from dangerous obstacles and the numberless diseases, may be released from the sufferings of the three worlds and mount the path to *nirvāṇa*. I wish you to expound an answer to this question."

The Buddha said to Śakra, Monarch of Heaven: "Good,

³³ The Five Ways of rebirth (*gati*): gods, humans, animals, ghosts, hell-beings. A sixth category, sometimes added, is reserved for the Asuras. A lucid description is found in Lin Li-kouang, *L'Aide-mémoire de la vraie Loi (Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra)* (Paris: Adrien Maisonneuve, 1949).

³⁴ *Mudrā*, "seal" — here given exceptionally, pretentiously, in a cumbersome three-syllable Chinese transcription (modern pronunciation: *wen-t'ou-lou* 文頭婁), rather than the usual Chinese equivalent, *yin*, "seal." "Ninety-five rites" or "ninety-five" teachings is a conventional designation for all the non-Buddhist communions and practices with which ancient India teemed. As this passage clearly shows, Buddhists were supposed to take over the best of these and gain all their attendant benefits, a technique which tantric Buddhist ritualists adopted with a will.

good! Now listen well, and remember. I will explain to you the rite of the Great Immortal.³⁵ If among the four classes of the Buddha's disciples any malignant wraiths 邪 or evil demons should cause disturbance, fear or horripilation, one should first visualize his own body as my image, with the thirty-two primary and eighty secondary marks, the color of purple gold. The body should be sixteen feet tall, with a solar radiance at the back of the neck.³⁶ Having visualized my body, you are next to visualize the 1,250 disciples; next, the bodhisattva-monks. When you have completed these three visualization, visualize the great spirits of the five directions. The first is named Ch'an-che-a-chia 喜遮阿加; his body is twelve feet tall, he wears a blue garment, spews forth blue vapor and dwells in the east. The second is named Mo-ho-ch'ih-tou 摩呵祇斗; he is twelve feet tall, wears a red garment, spews forth red vapor and dwells in the south. The third is named I-tou-nieh-lo 移兜涅羅; he is twelve feet tall, wears a white garment, spews forth white vapor, and dwells in the west. The fourth is named Mo-ho-ch'ieh-ni 摩訶伽尼; he is twelve feet tall, wears a black garment, spews forth black vapor, and dwells in the north. The fifth is named Wu-t'an-lo-ni 烏坦羅孃; he is twelve feet tall, wears a yellow garment, spews forth yellow vapor, and dwells in the center.³⁷ Each of these gods of the five quarters has his own retinue; each spirit-king is accompanied by 70,000 spirits. Thus with 70,000 spirits in each of the five directions, there are seven times five or 350,000 spirits, all of whom come to aid the person suffering from illness, to assist him in escaping from danger and passing through various difficulties. These spirit-kings protect human beings and keep malignant wraiths from

³⁵ *Mahārṣi*, an epithet of the Buddha himself; see *Bukkyō daijūen* 佛教大辭典 4 p. 2398 B-C, s. v. *daisen*.

³⁶ The 32 primary and 80 secondary marks are standard for Buddhas and Enlightened Beings, and distinguish them from the commonality. The solar radiance is a halo, or aureole. Buddhas are, canonically, twice as tall as ordinary men.

³⁷ Despite their ostensibly Sanskrit names (in Chinese transcription), this pentad does not appear to correspond to any Indian set of guardians. Significantly, the coordination of colors and directions is purely Chinese, not Indian.

carrying out their projects at will.

The Buddha told Śakra the Monarch of Heaven, "These are the names of the spirit-kings of the five directions. If hereafter in the last age of the world there is a day when the four classes of disciples are in danger, they should write the names of the spirit-kings and their retinues on a round piece of wood.³⁸ This is called the *mudrā* rite — such is its meaning, and you are to make it known." Śakra the Monarch of Heaven said, "What should be the dimensions of the *mudrā* on round wood?" The Buddha answered, "Let it be seven by seven-tenths of an inch." "What wood is best?" asked Śakra the Monarch of Heaven. The Buddha replied, "The best of all is gold, silver, or other precious substances. The next best is sandal or other fragrant woods. The *mudrā* is to be made of such materials. If anyone is suffering from illness, danger, or fear, or if malignant wraiths and demons are going to and fro, injuring people and disturbing them, they should perform the three visualizations as explained earlier, as well as visualizing the gods of the five directions with their corresponding colors and forms. All should be seen with extreme clarity as if they were present before your eyes, as when someone appears in a mirror, all sides are visible. If you succeed in realizing this without distractions but rather concentrating all your thoughts in singleness of purpose, those suffering from illness will be cured and those suffering anxiety will be reassured. Malignant wraiths and evil demons will all be driven off.³⁹ If a member of one of the four classes of the Buddha's disciples wishes to employ this spirit-seal, he should first bathe his body and put on a pure and fragrant

³⁸ The "spirit-kings" 神王 are rulers over vast spirit-armies, and belong to the populous class of demons who have been subdued, converted to Buddhism, and enrolled as protectors of the faithful. Images of them have survived in early-medieval Chinese Buddhist art; see Emmy Bunker, "The Spirit Kings in Sixth Century Chinese Sculpture," *Archives of the Chinese Art Society of America* 18 (1964), pp. 26-37; and Ho-nan sheng wen-hua-chū wen-wu kung-tso tui 河南省文化局文物工作隊, eds., *Kung-hsien shih-k' u ssu* 羣縣石窟寺 (Peking: Wen-wu ch'u-pan-she, 1963), plates 223-228.

³⁹ The text itself notes: *mudrā* in the language of westerners means "spirit-seal" in the language of China.

garment. He should then do reverence to the entirely perfect and truly enlightened numberless Buddhas of the ten directions.

"The way of holding the seal: it should be grasped in the right hand, whilst in the left one holds a seven-foot-long oxtail devil-dispelling staff. On your head you should wear a red *Dharmācārya* spirit-cap.⁴⁰ Stand seven paces from the patient. Seal off your breath from the space of seven respirations, and accomplish the visualizations. When they have been completed, raise your right foot in front of you and advance towards the patient.⁴¹ Holding the spirit-seal, bring it to the patient's body and press it down upon his chest. If the patient is a woman, withdraw again seven paces. Stand with your thoughts concentrated as before. Visualize the five great spirits: the spirit of the blue vapor exhaling blue vapors that enter the thumb of the patient's left hand, the spirit of the red vapor exhaling red vapors that enter the big toe of the patient's left foot, the spirit of the white vapor exhaling white vapors that enter the thumb of the patient's right hand, the spirit of the black vapors that enter the big toe of the patient's right foot, the spirit of the yellow vapor exhaling yellow vapors that enter the patient's mouth.

"When these spirits of the five vapors exhale their proper vapors and they enter the patient's body, the wraiths and evil vapors therein are entirely dispersed at the same moment. They go out from the patient's navel in a burst of smoke. It is as when a great wind breaks up the clouds and rain. If you are able carefully to control the awesome power of the spirit-seal in this manner, sickness and suffering will be

⁴⁰ *Dharmācārya*, "Master of the Law," more usually found in Chinese as *fo-shih* (which renders *Dharma-bhāṇaka*, "preacher of the Law"); see Shizutani Masao 靜谷正雄, *Shoki Daijō Bukkyō no seiritsu katei* 初期大乘佛教の成立過程 (Kyoto: Hyakkaen, 1974), pp. 286-88. The Chinese author of our text has evidently attempted a re-Sanskritization. "Master of the Law" was a standard term for a ritual practicante in both medieval Buddhism and Taoism; in Fukien and Taiwan the same term now designates vernacular exorcists, or "magicians."

⁴¹ This is evidently the Step of Yü once again, mentioned in n. 27, above.

cured and demon-vapors will be destroyed." The Buddha told Śakra, Monarch of Heaven, "The spirit-kings of the five directions always respond when one visualizes their shapes and attributes. Fully dressed in coats of mail, holding bows, with arrows at their belts, they take their places in the five orients of the seal, each according to his name. They protect the patient and keep other spirits from entering him. They drive out malignant wraiths and cause devils to scatter in disarray, so that none of them can linger on in the patient's body."

The Buddha said to Śakra, Monarch of Heaven, "By this *mudrā* all demons are crushed and annihilated, so that they are unable to act irresponsibly in opposition to the law. If one impresses this *mudrā* on a mountain, the mountain will crumble; if on any tree, it will be overthrown. If impressed on rivers, seas, ponds, or springs, their waters will dry up. If impressed in the direction of fire or flood, they will vanish. If in any of the four quarters violent winds should arise, raising the dust before them, lift the seal towards them and they will stop. If you direct the seal towards the earth, the earth will tremble. Should brigands rise up in any quarter, only lift the seal towards them and they will at once disperse. They will no longer have any evil intentions, only kindly thoughts, and all will return to their proper bailiwick. Thus this great spirit-seal brings benefits, in whatever direction it may be pointed. If you use it to seal any of the body's 404 diseases, all will be cured. Those who possess this seal should intone incantations." (These are omitted here.)

The Buddha went on to state, "If with the names of seven gods on the *mudrā* you seal a person's house, these gods will protect that person. They will annihilate wraiths and evils and expel demons to a distance of 400 *yojana* — all will flee away in confusion, and never dare to attack that person. Now I will describe this." The Buddha said, "In the dwelling places of ordinary people there are always seven protective spirits. Who are they? The spirit named To-lai-to 多賴哆, the spirit named Seng-ch'ia-lü 僧伽履, the spirit named P'o-mo-ssu 婆摩

斯, the spirit named T'i-p'o-na 埵婆那, the spirit named T'an-p'o-lo 曇婆羅, the spirit named Mi-shu-to 彌輸多, the spirit named Ch'i-na-she 耆那舍.⁴² When the names of these seven gods are impressed upon a person's house, devils and others with evil intent, on perceiving this spirit-seal, will scatter in confusion. If they do not go away but rather try to attack, their heads will break into seven pieces."

The Buddha said to Śakra the Monarch of Heaven, "After my *parinirvāna* these seven spirit-kings will protect the Buddha's disciples; they will drive off malignancies and evils, and not allow them to abide. You should make this known to all living beings, and they will protect them in all their goings and comings. Once the spirit-kings have taken up residence in their hearts, they must not offend them. Should anyone offend the spirits, they will at once leave the person's house. If a disciple of the Buddha always observes the retreats and precepts in all purity, however, these seven spirit-kings will constantly be at his side. They will bring him good fortune and protect him, so that none of the demons of the four quarters will dare approach him. The gates of the house should be impressed with clay of a good color. The seal should be kept in a fine container covered with silk cloth. Then the gods will protect you and wicked devils will depart."⁴³

At this point, the text goes on to give a version of the legend of the demoness Hārītī, who chooses this moment to come complaining to the Buddha that this ritual of sealing and spell-binding will be such a powerful safeguard that she and her demon subordinates will be effectively deprived of all nourishment and condemned to starve. The Buddha compassionately directs all Buddhists to make offerings of their leftover food to Hārītī and her demons, thus turning them into docile protectors, rather than fearsome enemies. Hārītī's plea attests to the ritual's efficacy. Moreover, by appending this etiological legend explaining the Buddhist cult of Hārītī and similar demonic

⁴² I have not found Sanskrit sources, if any, for these Sanskrit-seeming names.

⁴³ T 1331, ch. 7, pp. 55 a-56 a.

beings, the author of the *Book of Consecration* buttresses the authority of his sigillation ritual by relating it to a well-established Buddhist legendary context.⁴⁴

Despite the considerable difference in style and tone, there can be no doubt that essentially the same ritual as we found in use among sixth-century Taoists is being described here, but in Buddhist guise. In comparing the two sets of instructions for what is essentially a single type of therapeutic procedure, it becomes possible to distinguish a number of the features that set Buddhists off, in their own minds, from Taoists, even as they consciously assimilated Taoist practices. For, despite the chronological priority of the instructions in the *Book of Consecration*, there can be little doubt that the practice described here is of an earlier Chinese origin.

The most conspicuous differences between the Buddhist and Taoist instructions, are, simply, the names. Of course, this is not a question of "names" alone, but of what such names signify for spiritual lineage, and the authentication of texts and practices. Most tellingly, the shift in *nomina sacra* suggests a certain mystical obfuscation, for whereas the Taoist priest is directed to recite spells, commands, and a petition in perfectly intelligible, standard literary Chinese, the Buddhist Master of the Law (whose title itself is Sanskritized as *Dharmācārya*) must employ Sanskrit, in Chinese phonetic transcription, to invoke his divine assistants. He will presumably have received oral instruction on the significance of all these names and terms, but it is difficult to imagine that they would have been at all intelligible to the patient or his family. In any case, the transcriptions are often so idiosyncratic as to puzzle even the modern scholar with all the resources of Buddhist lexicography at his command. We cannot help inferring that this verbal transformation was a very important part of the process of changing Chinese rituals into potent Buddhist operations sanctioned by the authority of the Buddha. For that matter, the seal itself is rather pedantically called *mudrā*, as if the author were trying to rein-

force a claim of Indian origin. But running briskly through the stages of the Taoist ritual will help us to dissect its Buddhist counterpart and identify its special features.

Comparison of the texts immediately reveals how greatly written descriptions of similar rituals may differ — how considerable the variation may be, not only in the actual performance but also in the choice of details included in the description. In this case, despite all the elaborate nomenclature with which the Buddhist directives are festooned, the Taoist text is much more circumstantial about the practical details of the operations. Yet there are also certain differences in basic equipment: the Taoist master starts out with a sword and a bowl of water; the Buddhist retains the sword, but is to equip himself with a tall "devil-dispelling staff" with an oxtail affixed to its tip. The latter is the staff of an Indian exorcist, in more sociable contexts reduced in size and gentrified as the "chowry" or fly whisk held by elegant gentlemen and used to punctuate or emphasise points in conversation.

The seals themselves differ significantly, most obviously in their shape. Although the Taoist seal, actually depicted in the text, is of a standard square format, the Buddhist seal is round. This contrast at once suggests a conscious heaven-earth antithesis on the part of the Buddhist author, for in Chinese cosmology heaven is invariably described as round, earth as square. The seal's shape may be one way in which the superiority of the Buddhist model is tacitly asserted over the claims of its Taoist counterpart.

The Taoist is directed to take up a definite astrological orientation (no mention of this for the Buddhist, but perhaps it was implicitly understood). His first visualization comprises a giant spirit-official, directly in front of him, nineteen feet tall. This prodigy prepares the way for the ritual by filling the room with brilliant red vapor. The Buddhist version also opens with a visualized giant: but it is the officiant himself, self-glorified and enlarged to the height of sixteen feet, and endowed with all the distinguishing bodily marks of a Buddha. This, the officiant's identification or union with the deity, is (in my view) the prime distinguishing feature of tantric Buddhism, and it is explicitly present here in a mid-fifth-century prototantric text.

⁴⁴ On Hārītī, see Noel Peri, "Hārītī la Mere-de-demons," *BEFEO* 7 (1917), pp. 1-102; most recently, Julia K. Murray, "Representations of Hārītī, the Mother of Demons, and the Theme of 'Raising the Alms-Bowl' in Chinese Paintings," *Artibus Asiae* 43 (1981-82), pp. 253-68.

But although the tantric Buddhist may take a shortcut to divinity, one must not imagine that his visualizations are any less elaborate than those of his Taoist colleagues. As the Buddha, he next mentally recreates the presence of his own 250 disciples, and then proceeds to actualize five more giants, the guardian spirits of the five directions, each of them of only slightly lesser stature than himself. They fill the room with vapor of five different colors — another improvement on the monochrome Taoist version. Moreover, each of the five is accompanied by his own retinue of 70,000 spirits. What the Buddhist text lacks in operational precision it makes up for in sheer force of numbers. Where does this pentad come from? In fact, looking more closely we find them in the Taoist ritual, though featured less prominently. After reciting a long spell, the Taoist master finally brings his seal down upon the patient's body and holds his breath. When he at length raises the seal, draws breath again, and steps back from the patient, he utters a formal request, calling upon the General of the Three Divisions, the General Who Operates the Seal, the General Who Cures Illness, the General Who Destroys Disease-Wraiths, the General Who Arrests Devils. These five spirit-commanders are requested to work together with the seal to cure the patient; and it is clear that this pentad corresponds to the externalized and gigantized five spirit-kings, each of whom is accompanied by this vast spirit-army, in the Buddhist text. In comparison with the Taoist version, the Buddhist author seems to be aiming at larger-than-life effects; his conception of the ritual is all but cinematic. Yet we can see that his version still contains many elements of a Taoist prototype, though characteristically mutated.

Absent from the Buddhist text is all mention of the central, instrumental role of the constellation of the Great Dipper. First its handle points into the Taoist master's hand-held bowl, charging the water within; at a later stage of the proceedings, the handle singles out the patient himself, just before the master approaches to begin the actual sealing. From the point at which the Dipper electrifies the water, the Taoist text prescribes a number of operations omitted in the *Book of Consecration*: spewing the water forth, first in the five directions, then on the patient. Then, with a new astral orientation,

the Taoist master holds the seal against his own heart, and visualizes himself as a cosmic divinity: Lao-tzu himself. He bears heaven on his head, treads the earth under his feet, and is ringed about by the five planets, sun and moon, as well as the heraldic animal-spirits of the four points of the compass: bird, dragon, tiger, and tortoise. In a word, he is Lao-tzu in his own body: he is identical and coterminous with the Tao itself. At this point he exteriorizes his own visceral breaths, each in its characteristic color, which issue from his mouth and wind themselves thrice around his head. Three miniature officials then come forth from each of his five viscera, and stand, fully armed, at the ready. The Dipper's handle is then pointed at the part of his body in which the patient feels pain. The first-visualized giant is once more mobilized, on his mount of red solar vapors; he is made to approach the patient's side by means of the stylized paces of the ancient sorcerer's limping dance, the Step of Yü, and performs an initial sealing of the patient's body. Only after this prepotent spirit-representative has completed an initial treatment does the Taoist master brandish his own seal and launch himself into the dance, and the therapy.

In the Buddhist text all of this, together with the phase of the proceedings represented by the spells and prayers, appears to have been compacted into the deployment of five-colored breaths. This influx of powerful vapors is said to drive forth instantly the afflicting demons, who make their frantic exit through the patient's navel in a sudden burst of smoke. These breaths represent virtually all the Buddhist text has to say about such techniques; there is nothing about *hsi*, *t'a*, and *ch'ih* breaths, for example, that we find in the Taoist manual. Yet it is clear from the Taoist version that the entire mystery of healing was ultimately enacted by the master through careful control of this own vital breaths, transforming and directing them to heal the patient. It seems entirely probable that the Buddhist master worked in a similar manner, even though the *Book of Consecration* has left this aspect to oral tradition, or to the reader's imagination.

The concluding remarks in both texts set forth the claims for their respective seals' efficacy as useful demonifugic tools. The hyperbolic announcement that opened the Taoist instructions is only an

addendum to the directions in the Buddhist manual; to cause mountains to collapse and waters to dry up or reverse their courses are common properties of Buddhist and Taoist seals alike. The Buddhist work also specifies that a seal may be impressed in clay or plaster for keeping away all demons. Rather than the five gods of the directions, however, this domestic seal should have the names of seven protecting divinities engraved upon it. This septet of curiously named guardians does not seem to be known elsewhere in Buddhist scripture. The Taoist texts also ends by describing the variety of domestic applications to which its seal may be put. For example, if you are wakened in the middle of the night by a nightmare or some frightening sound, you may hang the seal over your door, after loudly reciting a spell. The opening words of this spell are "Ye seven spirits of the house." With the two texts thus juxtaposed, one sees that the *Book of Consecration's* author appears to have found the inspiration for his group of seven impressively named Sanskrit guardians in the squadron of seven deities that normally serve as resident protectors in every Chinese household: the gods of the door, the bed-chamber, and so forth, under the supervision of the god of the hearth. As so often, the familiar gains vastly in authority by being rendered exotic.

Despite all the information given on the subsidiary uses of these seals, there is still no mention of impressing them on paper. When not being applied directly to the patient's body, they are pressed into clay or earth, and the resultant impression serves as a phylactery bound upon the door posts. It might seem as if Pelliot's theory on the use of these seals for printing on paper must be temporarily set aside. Yet, in fact, we find evidence that comparable seals *were* being printed on paper in tantric Buddhist circles. First, though, we should look into some antecedents of our Buddhō-Taoist seals — for example, an early-fourth-century Taoist seal impressed in clean, yellow clay and used as a depth-charge, or submarine bomb, against aquatic monsters.

PREHISTORY AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT

The apotropaic use of seals was certainly well known in the same region of China more than a hundred years before the *Book of*

Consecration and no doubt long before that, as well. As early as the beginning of the first century AD, we read about seals carved on fifth days of the fifth lunar month, and on *mao* 卯 days (held in some astrological systems to be the most unlucky days in the sixty-day cycle), and hung on the person, or attached to doors, to ward off evil emanations.⁴⁵ But the most detailed textual proof comes from the book *Pao-p'u tzu* 抱樸子, written around 320 by Ko Hung 葛洪 (283–343). The seventeenth of its twenty "Inner Chapters," on occult techniques, is specifically concerned with what the adept must do in order to prepare himself for entering the mountains, where ascetic practice is to be carried out. In that chapter Ko refers to a "Seal of the Vermilion Official" and the "Twelve Seals of Enclosed Primordiality," which may be impressed on all four sides of one's dwelling. These impressions will keep away all malignant spirits.⁴⁶ Ko's chapter also illustrates a complex talisman, described as being the spirit-seal carried by Lord Lao (that is, Lao-tzu) for protection against the hundred demons, serpents, tigers, and wolves. It is to be incised on a piece of datewood-pith, two Chinese inches square.⁴⁷ The mountains in which seekers after the Tao are accustomed to dwell abound with tigers and wolves, but the adept need not fear them if he, like the men of ancient times, is equipped with a seal inscribed with the Yellow God's Emblem of Transcendence. The seal measures four inches across and its inscription comprises 120 characters. It is to be struck in clay, and the impressions placed on all four sides of one's dwelling, at a distance of a hundred paces. Thereafter neither tigers nor wolves will dare to enter those precincts. If when walking in the mountains one comes

⁴⁵ See Homer H. Dubs, trans. and annot., *The History of the Former Han Dynasty by Pan Ku* (Baltimore: Waverly Press, 1938) 3, pp. 537–43, esp. 542–43: "... use peachwood seals, six inches long and three inches square, vari-colored, on which are written characters according to the regular procedure, and display them on gates and doors." Often the terminology used in conjunction with these sealing rituals referred to numerico-calendar associations of the type used in the Han-era systems of *I-ching* astrology — "firm *mao*" and "gentle *mao*" days, odd and even numbers, and "five" as the directionally central one of the odd numbers (*ibid.*, pp. 539–40).

⁴⁶ Wang Ming 王明, *Pao-p'u tzu nei-p'ien chiao-shih* 抱樸子內篇校釋 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1980), p. 274.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 285.

upon fresh tiger tracks, impressing the seal in the direction in which they are going will cause the tiger to keep moving ahead. If the seal is reversed in the track, it will make the tiger return. One need only place an impression of the seal across the paths of evil, meat-eating spirits to render them impotent. Ko Hung next describes a great turtle-demon in a pool of the Yangtze that was responsible for numerous cases of local illness. It was spotted by a Master of the Tao named Tai Ping 戴昇 who made some hundred impressions of the seal that Ko describes, and from a boat dropped them all around the pool. After an interval an immense turtle rose to the surface of the water, and when it had been killed all the sufferers recovered.⁴⁸

Here again, it is the impression of the seal in clay that serves as the apotropaic agent, realizing the power of the seal itself. Such seals of the "Yellow God" are actually in existence. One example, 2.5 centimeters square, bears a four-character inscription: "Yellow God's Transcendent Emblem"; another, 2.4 square, reads "Yellow God's Transcendent Emblem, Seal of the Monarch of Heaven," in nine characters. Both are incised, thus giving a white inscription on a red ground when impressed in vermilion, and both have been dated to the first or second century AD.⁴⁹ They are to be sure much smaller than the seal referred to by Ko Hung, and they do not bear anything like the 120-character inscription that he mentions. Nonetheless, there are first- and second-century AD references to such seals in recently excavated texts of "tomb-quelling writs."⁵⁰ These documents, placed in graves to "stabilize" them, make it clear that the seals were issued to spirit-emissaries of the Monarch of Heaven: "the Monarch of Heaven's emissary, the Yellow God," or "the Monarch of Heaven's Master of Spirits." They were to be used by them as emblems of authority and implements of power in controlling subordinate godlings and demons. By adding such seals to his own stock of implements, the medieval occultist was affirming his own identity as an official emissary

of the Monarch of Heaven.⁵¹

The use of seals in China goes back more than a thousand years before Ko Hung's book of secrets, and it is of course possible that earlier seals were used apotropaically, or in the manufacture of demonifugic amulets, as he relates. Their predominant function, though, has always been official and juridical. The oldest examples, as well as the largest and most impressive, have always been seals of state and lesser seals of office. They served to authenticate documents and to identify the bearer. The size, shape, inscriptions, and the materials from which official seals were made were strictly regulated by law. Official seals were differentiated by grades and ranks in the administration, from the head of state on down. Among private persons seals traditionally fulfilled — and still fulfill — the same function as that of handwritten signatures in modern European society. Frequently even today, a small seal is carried on the person, serving to authenticate and authorize. It functions as a man's official double, virtually a juridical second self.

The primary purpose of seals, originally, was the authentication of deeds, official documents, and contracts. In view of their official role, it is understandable that most of the early surviving examples (from the Han dynasty, 206 BC–220 AD) bear official titles, rather than proper names, although a number of private seals, too, are extant. A

⁵¹ Wu Jung-ts'eng 吳榮曾, "Chen-mu-wen chung so chien-tao-te Tung Han Tao-wu kuan-hsi" 鎮墓文中所見到的東漢道巫關係, *WW* 298 (1981), p. 61. Wu points out that 5th- and 6th-c. Buddhist authors of anti-Taoist diatribes criticized Taoist priests for "irresponsibly serving the forces of evil, and manufacturing the Yellow God's Emblem of Transcendence, with which they kill demons." This pre-Taoist artifact thus appears to have been adopted by Taoists at an early date, and it long continued in use among them. I owe this reference to Donald Harper's concise account of the Yellow God's role at this early period as chief representative of the Monarch of Heaven and record-keeper of the dead; "The *Wu Shih Erh Ping Fang*: Translation and Prolegomena" (Ph.D. diss., U. of California, 1982), pp. 473–76. Some authorities take the two characters that I have translated as "emblem of transcendence" 越華 to be the personal name of the deity Huang Yüeh-chang. Sun Ssu-mo's "Book of Spellbinding" gives a demon-dispelling incantation that makes "the Yellow God" 黃神, here written with the homophonous character "huang" 皇, "august") and Yüeh Chang (a proper noun, or "seal of transcendence?") into two complementary personages or entities: "Before me, the August God/ Behind me, Yüeh Chang"; Sun, *Ch'ien-chin i-fang* 29, p. 247a (sec n. 25).

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 287; cf. James R. Ware, *Alchemy, Medicine, and Religion in the China of AD 320: The Nei P'ien of Ko Hung* (Cambridge, Mass.: M. I. T. Press, 1966), pp. 298–99.

⁴⁹ *Shodō zenshū* 書道全集 suppl. 1 (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1968), pp. 30, 53.

⁵⁰ Terry Kleeman, "Land Contracts and Related Documents," in *Chigoku no shisō to kagaku* 中國の思想と科學 (Tokyo: 1984), pp. 1–34.

cord running through an often ornamental handle served to attach the seal to one's belt. The characters, in these early examples, appear most often to have been carved in intaglio; giving a white impression when the surrounding ground is printed in red. But others are found, carved in relief, that print the characters in red on a white background. In time, the variety of seal types and functions increased.

Because a person's official seal embodies his juridical identity, varying aspects of his personality may be represented by different seals — seals for his role as author, calligrapher, painter, collector, and so on. In addition to his routine daily identity, a man might have other complementary or contrasting personae, as poet, patron, or collector. He might also simultaneously enjoy a further extension of his identity, as a Taoist or Buddhist initiate; and each of these aspects may quite normally have been represented by a special seal. But there need have been nothing frivolous about this plurality of personae (any more than the multiplicity of internal souls and different spirit-factions was a matter for jest). The official character of seals and sealing, the imprinting of identity, might be deadly earnest — as many cautionary tales about the fate of district magistrates who somehow lost their official seals all too clearly indicate: at the very least such unfortunates were removed from office and rusticated in disgrace.⁵²

SEALS OF ĀṬAVAKA, THE DEMON GENERAL

Sometime during the first half of the sixth century (less than a century after the *Book of Consecration*) a further set of instructions for therapeutic sealing was written down, in another proto-tantric scripture — the *Dhāraṇī Book of Āṭavaka, General of the Demons* 阿吒婆狗鬼神大將上佛陀尼經. The charter upon which this text models itself faithfully follows the standard prototantric stereotype. In the time of the Buddha, a certain monk had been despoiled by robbers, bitten by snakes, tormented by demons, and was consequently in a very

sorry plight. Āṭavaka, the demon of desert places, was moved to pity by this spectacle; he betook himself to the Buddha and offered an exceedingly powerful spell for use by Buddhist monks against evil demons and wicked persons. So strong was this incantation that with it a monk could subdue the god Brahmā himself, let alone other, lesser, spirits. But the Buddha, good soul, would at first have none of this; such a terrible wicked spell might harm living beings. Āṭavaka's response conforms to well-established eschatological precedents; and subsequently the Buddha allows himself to be convinced by the persuasive demon, and the terrible spell is pronounced. More spells follow, for specific contingencies, and then come directions for painting an icon of Āṭavaka and his suite of demon officers — a painting guaranteed to strike terror into the hearts of any potential demon-assailants. This is all standard proto-tantric fare, but derives particular interest from the subsequent destiny of the demon-general Āṭavaka, who in time became the special guardian-deity of the Japanese imperial house.⁵³ The *Dhāraṇī Book* proceeds with an extended sequence of finger-seals; but then at last come the diagrams of talismans and wooden seals, which relate to our subject, therapeutic ritual in general.

This section of the scripture is titled "The Great General's Rites of Exorcism for Driving Away Demons."

The rite is only to be undertaken after one has already achieved some success with the deity's spells; otherwise, it will not work. At dawn, the adept is to place in front of the deity's image a bowl of freshly drawn well water and an incense burner. He should then straighten his robes and sit down, his expression stern and unsmiling, his hand forming the finger-seal of great anger. Then the person suffering from demonic possession is brought in. The master should use few words and assume a stern and imperious attitude; he simply tells him "Sit down!"; and then begins to revile him furiously, as if intending to strike fear into him. He says, "How much longer do you expect the gods to be patient?"; and "Quick, tie him up!" He speaks

⁵² For a comprehensive account of Chinese seals, see R. H. van Gulik, *Chinese Pictorial Art as Viewed by the Connoisseur* (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1958), pp. 415-57.

⁵³ See Robert Duquenne's essential essay "Daigensui," in *Hōbōgirin* 6, pp. 610-40.

in a loud voice, and as soon as he has said this he has his assistants tie up the patient. He then makes as if to beat him or recite spells of banishment over him. All this time he speaks very deliberately, using few words. This is the Great General's rite for driving away indwelling demons. There is no need to recite a spell, but if you want to have someone recite my spell during the proceedings, it should generally be a man of virtue and experience; otherwise, he might come to grief. What I have given here is an abridged account. There are many ways of going about it, but if I were to expound them at greater length I could speak for an entire *kalpa* and still not be done.⁵⁴

The god's brevity is greatly to be regretted, since it is precisely such details that we so badly crave, in our attempt to reconstruct the psychic processes that are important in ritual healing. Luckily, not all authors were equally terse in describing how to go about dealing with cases of demonic possession.⁵⁵ We must at all events be grateful for the glimpse this sixth-century text gives us of the master carefully preparing his dramatic scenario. The tense atmosphere of anger and denunciation is of course directed towards the occupying demon. Stern menace is the order of the day in this Buddhist exorcist's theater of operations. Binding, beating, and confinement are deemed entirely in place, since the patient is by no means himself, but rather a hostile, recalcitrant demon that must be driven hence. A full range of variations on this approach to demonic possession was set down later in detailed writing by Taoist authors; but it is noteworthy that such procedures were already being applied in the first half of the sixth century, and in the context of Chinese Buddhism, as well. The stipulation for "a man of virtue and experience" as the spell-reciter is based on the fear that the reciter, if young and impressionable, may himself become possessed by the demon.

It is in this setting that the *Dhāraṇī Book* presents its stock of

⁵⁴ T 1238, pp. 183c-84a.

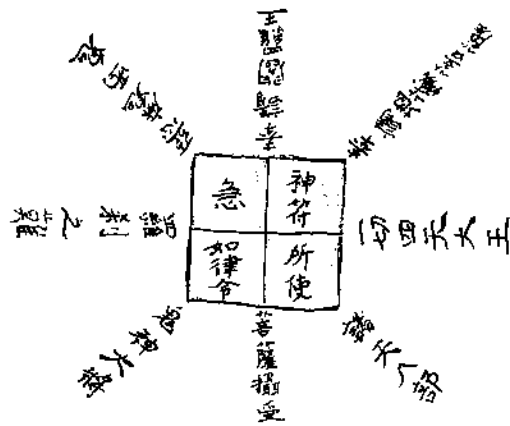
⁵⁵ For more ample descriptions, see Michel Strickmann, "Chinese Magical Medicine: Therapeutic Rituals" (Thèse d'habilitation, Laboratoire d'ethnologie et de sociologie comparative, U. de Paris X, Nanterre, 1991), chaps. 5-6.

talismans and seals. First, a talisman against disease-demons (see fig. 2a); when worn on the person it guarantees freedom from bad dreams, victory in battle, and permits "entering water without drowning, entering fire without burning." It is written in standard script, and around the periphery simply lists the spirits in whose name it operates (the Bodhisattva Earth-matrix, that is, the psychopomp Kṣitigarbha, the four Celestial Kings, eight divisions of gods, and the General of Demons). It is in fact a spell in talismanic form, and in the central square it declares "Let those whom this spirit-talisman directs be swift as the statutes and ordinances command!" — essentially the standard conclusion to a Taoist spell.

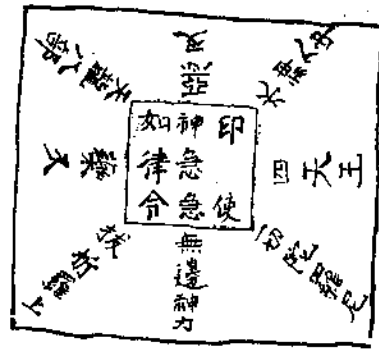
Immediately afterwards the Buddha presents the first spirit-seal (fig. 2b), termed "heart of all the Buddhas of past, future and present," and "seal that does away with the ailments of all living beings, eliminates obstacles, moves mountains, halts water courses, extinguishes fire, and drains the sea." It is then Āṭavaka's turn to present a seal, one that ensures complete command of the eight divisions of his spirit-armies, with consequent total dominion over all demons (fig. 2c). "If you wish to summon for interrogation the spirit-kings of the four quarters, simply point the seal in the desired direction and recite my spell of the eight divisions twenty-one times." Much might be said about this "summoning for interrogation" 考召, for it denotes an entire range of Taoist exorcistic procedures; once again, this Buddhist text provides important evidence that such practices were already in use.⁵⁶ The seal is similar in design to the preceding written talisman (2a), but the word "seal" has been substituted for "talisman" in the central square — "This seal directs the gods swiftly, as the statutes and ordinances command." The outer list of divine personnel also differs, including in addition to the "eight divisions of gods and dragons" a summons to the water-spirits and naming the "limitless divine power of all *dhāraṇā*" and the *vajra*.

More seals follow: for example, a small round "golden disc" seal, and a large square "lunar disc of the Asuras" (both shown as fig. 2d), and a seal of the "Dog of Heaven and the Leaping Snake," which is capable of subduing all poisonous drugs and all disease-causing

⁵⁶ On later-Taoist "summoning for interrogation," see Boltz, "Rites of Exorcism."



a. Talisman against disease-demons (I 1238, p. 184C).



c. The demon-general Ātavaka's seal, giving complete command over his eight demon-armies. To be used in the exorcistic procedure of "summoning for interrogation" (*T* 1238, p. 184C).

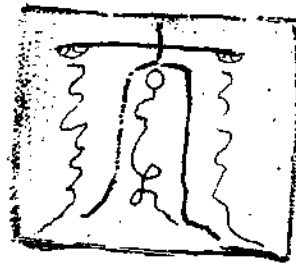
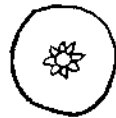


字列佛

b. "Heart of All the Buddhas of the Past, Present, and Future." The character "Buddha" is at its center (*T* 1238, p. 184C).



d. Right, the Golden Disk seal; left, the Lunar Disk of the Asuras (*T* 1238, p. 184C).



e. The seal of the sword: for printing on paper as well as on the patient's body. The talisman printed with it and swallowed will enter the patient's stomach and, sword-like, pierce the heart of the demon that is afflicting him. The patient's resultant dazed unconsciousness is an indication that the seal is taking effect (*T* 1238, p. 185A).

demons. "Dog of Heaven" is one of the dangerous baleful stars in Chinese astrological tradition.⁵⁷ In Japan, however, the name denotes a long-nosed winged being that frequents the high mountains, possesses powerful occult techniques, and is noted for unbridled lechery — in all respects a ghostly double of the mountain-dwelling ascetic (*yamabushi* 山伏).⁵⁸

After this, we are offered a "seal of flame," to be engraved in gold or copper and carried on one's person. When going somewhere, the bearer simply pointed the seal in the desired direction. Spectacular results were to be gained by imprinting it on paper and swallowing seven such talismans. The seal is designed as a round sun-emblem, a "seal of the solar disc's samādhi-flames." In the center stands the sun's heraldic beast, the three-footed crow, resembling a phoenix, and surrounded on all sides by flames.⁵⁹ (The printed version, as with that of the "Dog of Heaven," gives only an empty circle, rather than the impressive graphic.) Ātavaka's next seal is named the Sword (see fig. 2e), and contains an archaic form of the character for "sword" in its center. It may be impressed on the patient himself, as well as on paper, which is then given him to swallow; whereupon, we are told, the printed talisman enters his stomach and, swordlike, pierces the disease-demon's heart. Here, too, the directions for engraving are rather more elaborate than the printed illustrations. On top it should depict the Buddha Vairocana, above him a canopy with flying dragons, below lotus flowers in vases, and in the center the gods bound by oath to serve Buddhists, standing above a great king of *yakṣa*.

If you wish to beat demons, call upon the Black King of Heaven. If you wish to overcome all poisons and dragons, call upon the Golden-winged King of Birds (Garuḍa). If you wish to control serpent venom, call upon the big-bellied Kumbhanda-demon. If you wish to conquer the devils of the four quarters,

⁵⁷ Hou Ching-lang, "The Chinese Belief in Baleful Stars," in Holmes H. Welch and Anna Seidel, eds., *Facets of Taoism* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 1979), pp. 219–25.

⁵⁸ Carmen Blacker, *The Catalpa Bow: A Study of Shamanistic Practices in Japan* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1975), pp. 181–85.

⁵⁹ For the crow in the sun, see Michael Loewe, *Ways to Paradise: The Chinese Quest for Immortality* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1979), pp. 127–31.

call on the Celestial Devil P'o-hsün. If you wish to overcome tree-goblins, make use of the *Vajra*-beings. If you wish to conquer diseases within the body, make use of Kuṇḍalini. If you wish to deal with robbers, call upon Saṅgha Manibhadra. If you wish to conquer mountain-gods, call upon King Mucilinda. For promoting life and seeking profit, invoke the Celestial King of Merit. To accompany you at all times in all your comings and going, call upon the fourteen Rakṣasa Kings. And for anything that has not been taken care of, call upon *me*, the Great General Ātavaka!⁶⁰

After this comes a series of simple healing operations, using a sword. Simply pointing the sword at the malady will often cure it; sometimes the sword is used as a lancet (or rather, as an acupuncture needle), as in cases of dysentery or diarrhea, which can be instantly cured by a sword-prick below the navel. Lacking a sword, a finger of the adept's right hand will serve just as well in all these healing functions. From here on the text becomes utterly varied, as if the author were trying to put down every useful method while ink and light still lasted. There are teeth grinding (like that of Taoists) and perhaps one of the earliest mentions of the Lord of the Southern Dipper (the Pleiads), here said to beat the patient — or indwelling demon. The only mention of a therapeutic seal in the final section is a reference to sealing a hard-to-cure patient whose condition has been caused by a heavy karmic burden carried over from previous lives, using "the transgression-destroying seal of the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara." The text concludes with a splendid apocalyptic vision of Ātavaka and his spirit-troops marking over the ravaged world during the dark age when the Buddha's Law has already entered its most somber phase. All living creatures will take shelter in the cracks and crannies of the earth, as Ātavaka's armies smash the demons with their *vajra*-staves and pound them to dust.⁶¹

A significant feature of this work is that certain of its seals are intended not only for pressing on the body or directing off into

space, but also for printing on paper. If the text may truly be dated to the first half of the sixth century, this would make it the earliest explicit reference to the use of seals to print paper talismans, and it would thus substantiate Pelliot's plausible suggestion. Unfortunately, although there seems to be no intrinsic improbability in this early date, the work has not survived in any continental Chinese Buddhist canon. It is known only from Japan (whither it is supposed to have been imported in the ninth century), and the printing on which the current edition is based dates only from 1753. Paleographic disjuncture of this nature surrounds the history of other, similar, medieval Chinese texts.⁶²

SEALS OF UCCHUŚMA, LORD OF IMPURITIES

An even more imposing conjunction of seals and talismans is found in another body of medieval tantric Buddhist ritual literature, centering around the god Ucchuśma. This figure's name may mean "garbage," "leftovers," the remains of a meal (or offerings from the same) — suggesting the god's mode of nourishment, which was common to an entire class of deities. Ucchuśma's cult was popular in the Sino-Tibetan borderland, where he was known especially under the name of Mahābāla, "The Strong One," and numerous copies of his basic scripture have been recovered, in both Chinese and Tibetan, from Tun-huang.⁶³ Ucchuśma is especially adept at devouring, hence cleansing away, all impurities, and in Chinese this Ajax is called the *Vajra*-being of Impure Traces, or Hui-chi chin-kang 穢跡金剛. In Japan his special province has become the privy, over which he stands guard, and whose contents he willingly and voraciously consumes,

⁶² E.g., see *T 1265*, a document of the cult of the goddess Jānguli that deals with seals to be printed on the body and also ingestible talisman slips. It was translated supposedly in the 650s, but the only early version is an 1152 ms. kept in Japan.

⁶³ See F. A. Bischoff, *Ārya Mahābala-nāma-mahāyānasūtra: Contribution à l'étude des divinités mineures du bouddhisme tantrique* (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1956); Iyanaga Nobumi, "Récits de la soumission de Maheśvara par Trailokyavijaya, d'après les sources chinoises et japonaises," in Strickmann, ed., *Tantric and Taoist Studies* 3, pp. 694–98.

⁶⁰ *T 1238*, pp. 124A–85B.

⁶¹ *T 1238*, p. 127A.

and so purifies.

Three important texts of the Ucchuṣma-cult were produced by a certain Ajitasena, who worked in the Turfan region of Chinese Central Asia in the first half of the eighth century. The first of these, printed as *Taishō* no. 1227, is a longish work in three sections, much concerned with a variety of devices for summoning other-worldly beings to one's service, effecting wonders, and accomplishing miraculous cures. But right in the middle of this typically Indian collection we discover instructions for manufacturing a therapeutic seal. One is to carve it from *madhuka* wood (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*), after a preliminary fast of three days and austerities performed in water up to one's neck. Emerging from the water, one builds a fire altar, using *madhuka* wood as fuel. The wooden seal is to be dipped in curds and honey and burnt — scorched, perhaps, or simply hardened in the fire; and then it is ready for use. "If impressed on a mountain, the mountain crumbles; impressed on a sea, the sea dries up."⁶⁴ The finished seal, we are told, may be impressed on a snake which has bitten someone; the snake will then plead for mercy, and if you pardon it the victim will recover. If used to seal a person, it will bind him; if impressed on a cangue, the fettered prisoner will be released; if stamped on poisonous drugs they can be ingested with impunity. Whatever ritual is attempted, the seal will facilitate its performance. Here once again are the very words of the old Chinese jingle on the efficacy of such seals, and it is thus impossible to believe that this otherwise so Indian-seeming text is as pure an export to China as might have been supposed. Like so many works even of the most extreme tantric kind, it gives sign of Chinese adaptation, if not wholesale compilation in China.

These claims for therapeutic sealing seem modest, and the rite of sigillation might appear to occupy a very limited place in Ucchuṣma's cult. But another book in the Buddhist canon, consecrated to Ucchuṣma and attributed to the same Ajitasena as translator, has fully elaborated the suggestions latent in the longer text's passing reference to seals.

This work, the *Rites of the Vajra-Being of Impure Traces for Exorcising the Hundred Weirds* 穢跡金剛禁百變法經 (printed as *Taishō* no. 1229),

⁶⁴ T 1227, p. 150B.

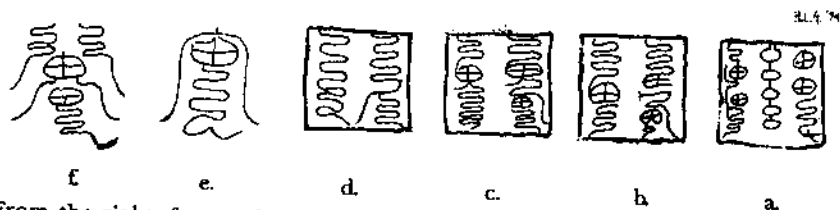
opens with what seems to be a conscious elaboration of the earlier claims that seals can cause mountains to crumble. Ucchuṣma begins by telling the Buddha just how his male or female disciples may set about uprooting a mountain, using nothing more than three pints of white mustard seed, good quality incense, a damascened sword (to draw the boundaries of the ritual area on the ground), and a clean piece of cloth. Once the boundaries have been drawn, the incense lighted, Ucchuṣma's spell recited 1,008 times and the mustard seeds scattered to the four quarters, up comes the mountain — and the gods who have been guarding its hidden treasures will abandon them, leaving them all to your exclusive use. Now it transpires that the ultimate purpose of the mountain-crumbling exercise has been the discovery of buried treasure. Predictably, matter-of-fact instructions for drying up the sea and causing rivers to reverse their courses follow (for the first objective, a copper dragon is thrown into the water; for the second, the image of an elephant modeled in "Parthian" incense, that is, gum guggul). To stop the poisonous dragons that cause sudden winds, evil rains, and crackling thunder and lightning, a special finger seal with Ucchuṣma's spell is counseled.

Ucchuṣma goes on to state that if one wishes to recite his spell, there is no need to construct a special ritual area or altar. One need only carve a *vajra*, and inside a stupa or a meditation chamber plaster the ground with fragrant clay and make offerings of assorted incense and flowers. When the *vajra* is placed in the middle of this impromptu ritual area and Ucchuṣma's spell is recited 108 times, the *vajra* will suddenly begin to move by itself. It may indeed turn itself into all sorts of things, but you are not to wonder at it; just go on reciting the spell, till you have reached 108 times. Should the *vajra* rise three feet off the ground, or even five, six, seven, or up to ten feet then the reciter should beg forgiveness for all his transgressions and state his wish. Ucchuṣma himself will then appear in his true form in the *vajra*, and will speedily grant whatever the officiant desires.

It would appear, then, that the ornate finger seals have here usurped the place of the cumbersome wooden seal, and that the magical implement *par excellence* is now the *vajra*, the massive thunderbolt-emblem of the tantric master. But spectacular though this

description undoubtedly is, it has all simply been prefatory to the second half of the text. The principal themes of seal-power have all been evoked and expatiated upon, and now it is time for the seals themselves. This *Ucchuşma* scripture has the great merit of illustrating four of them. The first (1.8 Chinese inches) is to be enchanted with the deity's spell a thousand times, and steeped in white paste incense (see fig. 3a). On the day you carve the seal, let no one observe you. If you use this seal to seal your heart, you will obtain Knowledge of the Heart, Spontaneous Knowledge, and Knowledge of Former Lives. If you hold the seal a hundred days, you will then be able to abide within all the various portals of the great Law.

Figure 3. *Ucchuşma* Talismans and Seals (renderings based on *T* 1229, p. 160A.)



From the right: four seals for impressing on the body. Following those are two talismans (e-f), also titled "seals," for writing upon the heart.

The second seal (1.2 Chinese inches) receives the god's incantation 600 times, and is to be steeped in Parthian incense (fig. 3b). Worn on the person, it will cause everyone to love the wearer, and will grant him total autonomy and complete freedom from every sort of pain and suffering. The third seal (1.5 Chinese inches), also enchanted by 600 spell-recitations, is to be steeped in white paste incense (fig. 3c). If sealing the feet with it, one will be enabled to fly up into space and go anywhere at all. The fourth seal (1.8 Chinese inches) is also to be steeped in white incense, but requires 7,000 spell-recitations (fig. 3d). When that has been done, however, it enables three million leagues of travel per day without being seen.

Characteristically, the four seals are followed in the text by a whole series of written talismans (see, for example, 3e-f), which com-

prise a section titled "miraculous rites for prolonging life." These are to be written in vermilion on paper and swallowed, chiefly to cure a variety of complaints; but one group of seven, when swallowed regularly for seven days, will bring all sorts of precious substances. Despite the obvious close resemblance between the seal pattern illustrated and the talismans that follow them, there is no suggestion in this eighth-century source that the seals might be used to manufacture the talismans. Homology or structural similarity, even identity of design, has not in this example led to any overlap in function.

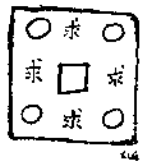
By such means, *Ucchuşma* became perhaps the principal patron of therapeutic sealing and Taoist-style talismans within the context of Chinese Buddhism. Nor was his influence limited to Buddhism, or to China. In 1781, the Japanese scholar Ōe Masasuke 大江文坡 (1728–1795), who was greatly intrigued by all manifestations of Buddho-Taoist synthesis, completed a compact encyclopedia of *Ucchuşma* lore. He attempted to sort out all available legendary information on the deity, and reproduced the seals and talismans from the eighth-century scripture we have just been discussing (which had been brought to Japan in the ninth century). In keeping with *Ucchuşma*'s specialization, Ōe also included much Chinese toilet lore — on the proper construction and astrological orientation of toilets and the rites and customs observed when visiting that perilous demon-haunted locale. He extends his interest to the stars themselves, describing and illustrating the constellation of the Celestial Cloaca (seven stars) and the Heavenly Toilet (four stars). Eager to document what he conceived as the fundamental identity of purpose of the great traditions, Buddhism and Taoism, Ōe also reconstructed a comprehensive *Ucchuşma* talisman on the basis of documents on *Ucchuşma* produced, he claims, by an eleventh-century Celestial Master of Taoism. It depicts the fiery god surrounded by his Sanskrit mantra below a Taoist-style inscription in archaic seal-script, the whole engirdled by the seven stars of the constellation of the Celestial Cloaca.⁶⁵ Even in eighteenth-century Japan, Buddho-Taoist interaction continued to flourish.

⁶⁵ Hayakawa Junsaburō 早川純郎, ed., *Shinkō sōsho* 信仰叢書 (Tokyo: Kokosho kankōkai, 1915), p. 4π. A conflation of two basic *Ucchuşma* scriptures, *T* 1228 and 1229, was printed in Nanking in 1882, and reprinted in the miscellany *Mi-chiao t'ung-kuan* 密教通關 (Taipei: Tzu-yu ch'u-pan, 1976), pp. 319–44.

FRAGMENTS FROM TUN-HUANG

Other medieval texts suggest how widespread such practices once were among Chinese Buddhists, as well as indicating the enormous confidence of medieval practitioners in the marvelous powers of seals. We can still sense something of the awe that surrounded these potent implements in a badly mutilated, untitled fragment of a Chinese Buddhist scripture recovered from the Tun-huang caves at the beginning of this century.⁶⁶ The fragment opens by mentioning procedures of the airborne immortals of the heaven of Great Purity, a recipe for going without grain-foods, and a number of formulae for doing away with the body's three corpse-worm demons, and so on. Then the Supremely Venerable King Buddha of the Dragon Race (a personage otherwise unknown, but suggesting Nāgārjuna, whose name is usually translated "Dragon-tree," and known among his other attributes as a patron of sorcerers) tells the Buddha, "There is a spirit-seal, which the more than thirty thousand Buddhas, earlier and later, have all employed to attain supreme and perfect *nirvāṇa*." Despite the many gaps in the text, one can still make out that this seal (see fig. 4) is recommended for use by all, from advanced arhats down to quite ordinary people who are just beginning to aspire to Buddhist teaching. One should take a block of "red willow wood," 1.8 Chinese inches square. "From this you are to cut the seal and carry it at your waist . . . to have control over the thousand spirits, and understanding of ten thousand arts."

Figure 4 Seal Carried on a Tun-huang Fragment (rendering based on T 2906, p. 149A).



The character *ch'iu*, "seek" or "request," is repeated four times.

First one constructs a ritual area, then goes to the toilet, bathes,

⁶⁶ Stein 2438; printed in the Canon as T 2906. See also P 3874, which is a series of seals accompanied by instructional text. The latter was studied by Michel Soymié in his 1987-88 seminar at Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, 4th. sect.

and next holds incense water in the mouth while carving the seal, reciting a mantra, and meditating upon the Supremely Venerable King Buddha of the Dragon Race. Thereupon, all that one wishes will speedily be accomplished. "It should be kept in a leather pouch worn above the shoulder blades; do not allow it to become defiled <...> Wherever you may be <...> sitting or lying down, nothing at all will hinder or obstruct you. Always recite my name, Nāmaḥ Supremely Venerable King Buddha of the Dragon Race <...> when you are about to carve the seal <...> silent and avoiding speech, incise it <...> make a vow, and only afterwards receive the seal."

After one has received the seal in the formal manner that we can glimpse through the gaps in the text, there will be three different sorts of sign, depending upon the intelligence and qualifications of the recipient. Those of the highest class will wake to find beside their pillow three pills of a black "heart of wishing-jewel medicine." A recipient of lowest capacity will hear the sound of a bell in the middle of the night; while a recipient of middling capacity will immediately perceive an exotic fragrant aroma. For persons of high intelligence in each of the three classes, these phenomena will manifest themselves instantly; but for those of middling intelligence, they will occur after three days have passed.

If you are going to test its powers, take seven cloves, seal them with the seal, crushing each of them with a single impression; mix them with water, swallow them, and in an instant you will obtain <...> knowledge. If you wish to obtain knowledge of others' hearts, take again two cloves, swallow them without water and immediately seal your mouth with the seal three times; you will instantly gain knowledge of others' hearts, and you will know in advance what will happen on the three planes of existence (gods, men, demons). Another method: take any piece from a dead person's skeleton; seal it seven times with the seal, and all the evil demons in the world will come to you and offer their submission. Another method: if you wish to obtain the services of the hundred thousand myriad spirits, *vajra*-beings, and so on, take seven catties of bark of mulberry

root, boil it until it falls apart, remove those parts that are bad, seal it with the seal, and after eating it, spit it out, and the ten thousand demons will come and offer you their submission.

There are remarkable things in this text. For example, the red wood from which the seal is to be fashioned apparently owes its origin and color to its having sprung from the Buddha's own blood; but the text is too lacunary to be certain on this point, or on the precise mythological circumstances of the bloodletting (apparently a battle with a wicked monk or monks?).⁶⁷ But most of the wonderful promises that were once revealed in this text must remain unknowable, for the gaps in the manuscript widen, and we seem to hear the voice of the mysterious Supremely Venerable King Buddha of the Dragon Race becoming fainter and fainter, choked and urgent, as he continues to tell the Buddha all the latent powers of his remarkable seal:

This seal, will immediately obtain comprehension of all the portals of limitless wisdom <...> World-honoured One, this seal <...> the strength of one man, of three men, of a hundred men <...> this seal and obtain salvation <...> standing, sitting, or lying down, have only to focus their minds to at one achieve it <...> an ounce of incense, grind it to a powder, mix with honey, heat over a fire, seal it with the seal <...> dragons and the eight divisions, great demon-kings, kings of *yakṣa*, kings of animals <...> King of the Iron Mountain, King of the Great Iron Mountain 大鐵山王, King of Mu-chen-t'o Mountain 目真陀山王 <...> Whenever you wish to carry out this method, first with your big toe rub away <...> attach to the eye(s) <...> mind, the place where you are sitting, seal it and cause it to <...>

⁶⁷ T2906, p. 145c. In a cosmological epic current in the last century among the Altai Turks, from the blood of the future Buddha, Maitreya, shed as he and the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī battle with two warriors sent up out of the earth by Erlik Khan, the earth will catch fire, bringing about the destined end of the world; see Wilhelm Radloff, *Aus Sibirien* (Leipzig, 1893; rpt. Oosterhout, 1968) 2, pp. 3-14; and Nora K. Chadwick and Victor Zhirmunsky, *Oral Epics of Central Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1969), pp. 168-69.

As the echoes of this testimony to Chinese Buddhist enthusiasm die away in torn shreds of thousand-year-old paper, another Tun-huang manuscript fragment comes to light (kindly brought to my attention by Kenneth Dean).⁶⁸ As usual, the text presents the words of some mythical or legendary figure to the Buddha, as he offers his special technique for the use of the Buddha's disciples, and it is evident that the personage in question is the bodhisattva Kuan-shih-yin 觀世音, or Avalokiteśvara, himself.

<...> if they write my seal in silver. They may use it whenever they wish. They should impress it on their bodies and recite the wishing-jewel *dhāraṇī* of Avalokiteśvara 108 times. One should wear clean vestments; none of the other things is necessary. One should burn clove incense, take a bowl of pure water <...> then impress the seal, and he will become invisible; ten thousand persons will be unable to see him. If he enters the king's palace, he can seduce the king's women; if he enters a palace of the gods, he can seduce the divine women <...> obtain complete reverence; all you need do is hold fast to purity with all your heart. This seal is called "seal that manifests all precious treasures." If anyone wishes to obtain any precious treasures, let him carve this seal in aloes wood, one and nine-tenths *ts'un* (Chinese inches) in size. He should then recite the spell of the wishing-jewel one time through with all his heart, impress the seal on the empty air, and whatever treasures there are will all be made manifest to him. This may be made use of whenever one has need of it.

If there are those who in their successive reincarnations have been able to recite the wishing-jewel *dhāraṇī* spirit-spell and wish for confirmation of their spiritual accomplishment, let them write out the seal on fine copper. They must not quarrel over the price, for if they do, their seal will not reach completion. They should recite it ten thousand times and then demarcate a ritual area. For whatever wish they may have, let them take this seal and impress it on sandalwood

⁶⁸ Peking Tun-huang Collection, no. 8738.

and recite the spell over it 108 times, continuing up to twenty-one days. By then I will be manifesting my three bodies daily, and will rub the crowns of their heads and bestow a prophecy of future Buddhahood on them. All that they desire they shall receive, without error.

If there are women who seek male or female children, they should write out this seal and swallow it on the eighth day of the fourth month (the birthday of the Buddha). Then they will certainly obtain a boy or girl child, and when they grow up they will come to be in the presence of the Buddha. If anyone is seeking *samādhi*, he should write out the seal on the crown of his head. He should then recite the wishing-jewel spell twenty-one times and spew water into the air, and there will immediately be rays of light in all five colors, illuminating the world and all the ten regions of space. The seal impressed on the crown of this head will always give forth radiance, and this is what I meant by saying that I would “rub the crown of the head and bestow a prophecy of future Buddhahood” <...> Thereupon the Bodhisattva Kuan-shih-yin was elated, and told the Buddha, “If there is anyone who is seeking the *samādhi* of extinction [*nirvāṇa*], let him carve this seal upon purple sandalwood. He should carry the seal to a quiet and secluded place in the mountains. There he should impress the seal on his heart, and he will at once enter *samādhi* — a perpetual *samādhi* that will last for eight great kalpas. When you finally arise from your meditation, you will convert all living beings and lead them to salvation. They will all become Arhats of different degrees of attainment and enter the religious life. Then entire world will become completely purified, and all defilements will be done away with <...>

This is called the seal that scatters flowers and fruits. If you carve the seal in sandalwood and carry it about with you, you will always have the gods and the bodhisattvas strewing splendid flowers about you, from incarnation to incarnation you will always attain *samādhi*, and you will always be born in the presence of a Buddha (that is, in a world where a Buddha

is alive). If a person always carries my seal about with him wherever he goes, all the people in those places will also certainly attain *samādhi*, and will enjoy supernatural powers and roam in perfect freedom through the various Buddha-lands; they will all obtain the stage of Non-regression, will turn the Wheel of the Law, and will always adhere to the ten good actions.

The text next provides a spell in transcribed Sanskrit. Then comes a method for treating a person suffering from illness, involving the recitation of the spell, massaging the top of the patient's head with the palm of the right hand, and more seals — but this time, seals (*mudrā*) in the more usual sense of the word in Buddhist ritual literature, denoting hand postures, or finger seals.

This intriguing fragment gives us an even wider view of the powers of such seals. There is at first a certain ambiguity in the account, for the text instructs the reader to “write” the seal in silver, for example, or on high quality copper, and under no circumstances to quibble about the great cost of such materials. One is also supposed to “write” the seal — presumably on paper — for swallowing by a woman desirous of obtaining a child, and it should be written, too, upon the crown of a person's head who desires to achieve *samādhi*. Normally, of course, one would expect the text to state that the seal should be impressed in these cases, rather than written out. And although it is certainly possible that the seal's design, which presumably closely resembled that of a written talisman (unfortunately the text does not furnish an illustration of the seal inscription), was in fact drawn on paper or the shaven pate in question, it might also be that the word “write” was being used, exceptionally, with the sense of imprint or impress. Even more interesting are the instructions for making use of the seal, carved in sandalwood this time, as a means for one's own spiritual advancement. First, by impressing the carved seal upon sandalwood, one obtains an auspicious caress on the crown of the head and a prediction of future attainment of Buddhahood from the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara himself. The head so imprinted will shine forth radiantly, emitting a nimbus forevermore.

Yet the seal is also capable of bringing about an even more

definitive transformation. *Samādhi*, or fixed concentration, is the immediate aim of Buddhist meditation: the trance-state of calm focus in which enlightenment may be attained. But the word *samādhi* might also be used as a conventional consecrated term for death, or rather as a means of putting a far higher valuation, in canonical Buddhist terms, on what appears as death to the uninitiated. Those ascetic monks who "entered *samādhi*" were only apparently dead; in reality, they were in a profound state of concentration, enabling them to wait thousands of years until the coming of the future Buddha, Maitreya.⁶⁹ Similarly, here we are told that the sandalwood seal can be used to enter "the *samādhi* of extinction." When one desires to withdraw definitively from this world or feels that the end is near, he may carry the seal to a secluded place deep within the mountains, seat himself with crossed legs in a lotus position — just like the monks who starved themselves into *samādhi*. He turns the seal against his own breast, and enters upon a span of "concentration" that will last for eight immense cosmic periods of time.

How far our seals have come! Once they had been exclusively apotropaic and demonifugic, used either for stamping demon-dispelling talismans in clay, or for application by ritual masters to the bodies of prostrate victims of demonic attacks. Now, though, similar seals can be turned towards the attainment of Buddhism's loftiest objectives. By means of a powerful seal, the recipient may obtain a personal prediction of his future achievement of enlightenment, one's own individual destiny as a Buddha. Moreover, by using the potent seal personally, one speedily departs from the unsatisfactory world in which he chances to live to await another, where his spiritual powers will be greatly enhanced and special qualities much more fully appreciated. Having used the suicidal seal for release from this present life, he emerges aeons hence from the chrysalis of deep meditation as a fully formed Buddha, converting the multitudes and transforming the world.

⁶⁹ See Michel Strickmann, "Heralds of Maitreya," unpub. paper given at the Princeton U. Maitreya Conference, May, 1983. Perhaps the most celebrated historical example is that of Kūkai 空海 (Kōbō daishi 弘法大師, 774–835), founder of the Shingon 真言 clan of Japanese tantric Buddhists, who awaits Maitreya at the clan's headquarters on Mt. Kōya, south of Ōsaka.

The conferral of high spiritual values upon techniques of proven efficacy, once these have entered the corpus of Buddhist ritual, is a familiar stage in the complex process of assimilation. It seems only natural that seals originally destined for treating the sick would have been freighted with grandiose metaphysical claims, once their use had gained a firm foothold in Buddhist circles. Also, integrating the Chinese seal-stamps into a complex of spiritual aspirations and linking them closely to the finger seals, as well (the same Chinese word, *yin* 印, designates both sorts of seal), helped the indigenous Chinese sealing process to become accepted as valid Buddhist medicine by Chinese Buddhist authorities. Testimony to the success of this tactic still exists in Japanese Buddhism today, as we see; but first we must consider a few more pieces of medieval Chinese evidence.

NĀGĀRJUNA'S SEAL COLLECTION

Perhaps the most idiosyncratic document of the medieval fascination with seals and sealing is also supposed to have come from India. It is credited to the great Nāgārjuna, a name that may well cover more than one personality in Indian history — a philosopher, scholiast, magician, and alchemist. Nāgārjuna is usually supposed to have lived in the second or third century AD.⁷⁰ But in its Chinese translation as "Dragon tree," the potent name was also used virtually independently in later China, to give authority to a wide range of occult books and techniques. We have already seen a possible Nāgārjuna reflex in the "Supremely Venerable King Buddha of the Dragon Race," a patron of therapeutic sigillation in the fragmentary Tun-huang manuscript studied above. Another book placed under his auspices is *Nāgārjuna's Treatise on the Five Sciences* (*Lung-shu wu ming lun* 龍樹五明論). This work, too, appears to survive only in a single manuscript copy, made in Japan probably in the eleventh or twelfth century and preserved there in a monastic archive.⁷¹ The text seems to have been

⁷⁰ Étienne Lamotte, *Le traité de la grande vertu de sagesse* (Louvain: Institut orientaliste, 1949) 1, pp. x–xiv.

⁷¹ Printed as *T* 1420; see Osabe Kazuo 長部和雄, *Tō Sō mikkyō shi ronkō* 唐宋密教史論考 (Kyoto: Kobe Joshi Daigaku tozai bunka Kenkyūjo, 1982).

written in north China during the sixth century, but it situates its own origins in the time of the Indian king Aśoka (first century BC), when large numbers of "heretics" — non-Buddhists — were ordained as Buddhist monks. They inform the king that their own original faith also has many excellent techniques for benefiting humanity and, unwilling that these valuable practices should be lost to Buddhists, they wish to bring them along into the Buddhist fold. The king assents.

These practices are, as one might expect, of the most useful and impressive sort. A human figure carved from willow wood, properly empowered with spells and buried in the courtyard of one's house, will bring great riches. Medicinal pellets composed of cow's bezoar, ginger, hemp, *Scutellaria macrantha*, *Rheum officinale*, and *Glycyrrhiza*, gathered on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month and pounded together by a young boy on the seventh of the seventh, will instantly send demons running from the body of the person whom they may have afflicted with any of a wide variety of ailments. But as we read further in the text, it turns out that the chief concern of the converted brahmans is with the writing of talismans — and talismans of the familiar Chinese sort. Eighteen types of talisman are listed, each indicated for a different purpose, to be written in vermilion upon silk of various colors. In addition to talismans for treating diverse maladies and prophylactic use against disease-demons, government officials, and other robbers, this list includes talismans to aid in childbirth, others to restore harmony, as well as one which is guaranteed to obtain high-ranking suitors for an unwed daughter.

These are followed by a series of twelve antidemoniac talismans for curing disease, with precise instructions for their ingestion according to an exact astrological schedule; the twelve are correlated with the twelve hours (each lasting two of our hours) into which the traditional East Asian day is divided. Diagnostic signs are then given, to determine a patient's condition, as well as a spell to be recited over pharmaceutical preparations, which spirits would otherwise come to gobble up as soon as you had compounded them, drawing from them all the efficacy which should by rights go to the patient. There is also a spell against garrulousness in women and children — another

impediment to spiritual progress. The text rambles on in this manner, and the first of its two chapters concludes in a cacophony of Sanskrit spells. There is rather more coherence in the second chapter, for after a few general observations and specific instructions on the performance of ritual, it is entirely devoted to seals and talismans, all fully illustrated.

The compressed summary that follows can hardly do justice to this rich source, the most elaborate single text on seals and sealing that I have found. It provides illustrations and instructions for using ten different engraved seals, as well as three written talismans. It also clearly states that the patterns on most of the seals represent stars and constellations, and it is obvious that only a close acquaintance with Chinese astronomical convention could possibly guide us towards a systematic analysis of the complex, asymmetrical seal-inscriptions. As the accompanying illustrations show, the seals are based upon linked star-diagrams, geometric patterns, Chinese characters in stylized as well as ordinary forms, and, in one case, elements of a humanoid figure. But the names borne by the seals evince an effort to integrate them within a Buddhist context: the "Crown of the Buddha's Head" (Skt.: *Bauddhoṣṇiṣā*), "Bodhisattvas Mount of the Void," "Like unto the Gods," "Vajra-fist," "Vajra-heart," "Vajra-stave," "Buddha-land."

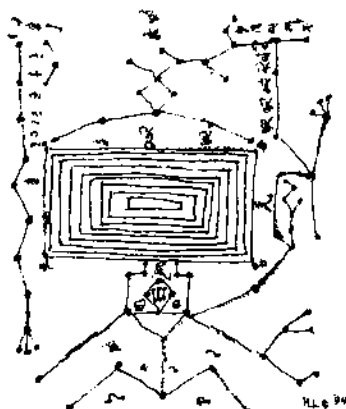
The first seal, Buddha's Crown (see fig. 5a), is to be carved from wood of a jujube-tree's root, four or five inches square. It is to be reddened by rubbing with vermilion, a brief spell is to be recited over it 700 times, and it is to be stored in a pouch of crimson silk. If desiring to enter the dwelling of a king, great minister, or brahman householder, one impresses the seal on the soles of both feet and on the chest. One then wears the seal on top of the head, and thus will be totally invisible — neither one's body nor shadow will be seen, and he may go wherever he will, undetected. When he wishes to reappear, he has only to wash the hands, face, and soles of the feet in pure water over which the charm has been recited thrice seven times, and remove the seal from the head. If wishing to cross a body of water or pass through a flood, one closes the eyes, seals the closed eyelids, and across he goes. If encountering wicked persons, one enchants the seal with the spell, presses it on his carriage and becomes

quite invisible to all pursuers. No evil person will be able to do harm: "When you perform this sealing rite, it will be extremely efficacious, as long as you do not irresponsibly transmit it to unqualified persons. You may give it to those who have faith, but to those who do not, take care that you do not carelessly transmit it."

Figure 5. Nāgārjuna's Seals (renderings based on *T*₁₄₂₀, p. 963A-B).



a. The Buddha's Crown seal.



b. untitled

The pattern remains the same for the subsequent seals. They are all to be carved under ritual conditions from different woods of long-established apotropaic virtue: peach-tree root, white sandalwood, red jujube wood, pith of jujube wood, aloeswood. All are to be brushed with vermilion when completed, and normally recharged with spells and vermilion before each application. The first seal appears to be specially designed for personal security, and even trickery — stealing unperceived into the homes of prominent personages; but in most of the remaining examples, such interests are founded on the more basic motivation to heal the sick. The second seal (fig. 5b; unnamed) should be carried about on the person, and whenever one should desire to cure anyone's ailment, he has only to rub it once more with vermilion, recite its spell thrice seven times, and impress it on the ailing part; the cure is guaranteed. Should one be traveling through wild and desolate country, he aims the seal, properly becharmed, in

the direction of his route, and all evil beasts will scatter.

There are even more dramatic displays of the second seal's prowess. If you line up ten men one behind the other, coat the seal with vermilion, recite its spell seven-times-seven times, and impress it on the forehead of the man in front, the seal impression will appear on the backs of all ten men. This resembles in general East Asian magic mirrors, the inscriptions on the back of which are reflected from the face onto a wall or other remote surface. The seal proceeds to an atmosphere of stealth and mischief, targeting the worldly powerful. Like the previous seal (5a), this one also enables the user to enter the house of a court officer unseen, to produce there all sorts of disquieting "special effects." If he prints the freshly vermilioned seal on a piece of clean paper and attaches it secretly to a wall of the main entrance so that it cannot be seen, then the head of the household will on the threshold behold uncanny spectacles — *yakṣa* and evil horse-headed *kumbhanda*-demons and their ilk will all assemble in his house and remain there firmly planted the whole day long. The family will everywhere seek out the best physicians and attempt to have the demons exorcised, but to no avail. Then the sealer comes upon the scene and preaches the Buddha's Law to them with all the eloquence he can muster. Next he secretly removes the hidden talisman, and all the family's demonic manifestations will immediately cease. The worthy householder is of course entirely won over to Buddhism, and any boon may be obtained from him. Should this plan somehow miscarry and the perpetrator be locked up, he need only point the seal at the gates, which will open for a getaway. No doubt all this trickery was conceived and enacted in a noble Buddhist cause — but it is remarkable with what brazen audacities the philosophic Nāgārjuna had come to be associated. If the perpetrator were not a card-carrying Buddhist, one might be tempted to call this witchcraft and larceny. It is at least reassuring to know that the success of this powerful seal demanded not only close secrecy, but strict avoidance of meat and alcohol, as well.

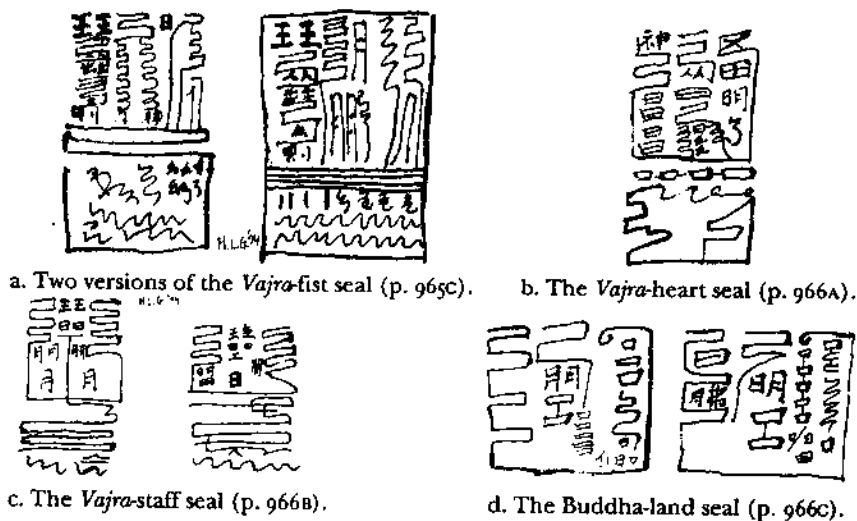
Medical uses of seals recur frequently. In one instance, medicinal drugs are first rubbed on the painful spot before sealing. In another case a seal is used to print a paper talisman for swallowing

by a woman in labor; the child will straightaway be born with ease. Invisibility remains an important theme. Passing through flood waters with eyes tightly sealed comes up again; and predictably, getting out of trouble with irate implacable kings is once more on the agenda. When a Buddhist finds himself being worsted in a debate with "heretics" (that is, proponents of other views), he need only clutch his seal, meditate with all his heart, recite the spell 700 times, and point the seal towards the heretics, right in the middle of the assembly. All their plans and projects will come to naught. Point the seal at the king, and his displeasure will instantly be changed to delight; his thoughts will soften, and the bearer will easily win him over to his side. The seal and a damascened sword should be kept on an altar in a specially purified room on a pure mountain, hidden from human gaze. Offerings should be made to seal and sword and the bodhisattva Nāgārjuna day and night for forty-nine days, whilst maintaining a strict vegetarian diet. When so charged with reverence, the seal will be at the peak of its powers. Seal your forehead, and no one will be able to see you. Press it on the soles of the feet and cross an ocean. Press it on the mouth and then expound the doctrine, instilling faith in listeners. Place the seal on the head and recite the spell forty-nine times, and one appears in the form of a *vajra*-being, and may do whatever he wishes.

Following a further variety of miscellaneous techniques are four more seals: *vajra*-fist, *vajra*-heart, *vajra*-staff, and Buddha-land; some of these names normally designate well-known finger-seals still current in tantric Buddhist ritual (see fig. 6). The wooden *vajra*-fist seal (fig. 6a) is specially designed to deal with assailants; if a talisman is printed from it in vermilion on silk and then held in the mouth, assailants will turn to beating themselves. Or a silk talisman printed from the seal may be attached to the arms, and assaulters will fall down unconscious on the spot. Or again, if a male or female slave has run away, stamp the seal on his or her bed and within a day's time the slave will return with hands bound. The seal may also be impressed on a piece of paper, which is then applied to the hand; or on iron, gold, or silver, and applied to all sorts of stone, copper, or tin — it will be imprinted as clearly as if it had been impressed in

clay. Make paper talismans with it and ingest them for eleven days, and thus acquire the strength of a thousand or ten thousand men. The seal can also be used directly on the heart of a nonbeliever, who will instantly be converted at its touch. By sealing onto the heart of someone suffering from manic fury, the worms that caused the disease will crawl away from him that very night. The seal works well on such a large variety of ailments precisely because, as the text states, the seal contains the names of all demons and spirits. Embedded in its ornate script and entangled in the intricate star-charts is an entire nomenclature of the spirit-world.

Figure 6. Further Nāgārjuna Seals (renderings based on *T* 1420).



For troubles in any of the five viscera, the patient is to be sealed on the heart. For deafness, blindness, dumbness, nasal occlusion, or sores and swellings on the body, the seal should be pressed in realgar ("male yellow") and applied to the patient's body twice seven times; sores so treated will clear up in less than a day. In the case of blindness or dumbness, use orpiment ("female yellow") on the seal. Mix orpiment with a pint of water and wash the patient's eyes with this mixture thrice daily until it has all been used up;

blindness and dumbness are in this way cured. For all lesser ailments, as well as in all cases of possession or bewitchment by phantoms (*wang-liang* 魍魎), you need only seal the victims directly with the seal. If a woman is undergoing difficult labor pains, administer a paper talisman imprinted with the seal for her to swallow, and the infant in her womb will speedily come forth holding the talisman in his hand. The seal can be used to cure persons *in extremis*, and also to summon spirits to query about future events: print the seal on green silk, which is then attached to the top of the main gateway. The spirits wished for will then immediately come to the door, and one may ask them about one's fortune. Imprint the seal on water, mix the water with vermilion powder, and rinse the eyes with it, and thereupon one sees things happening a thousand leagues away.

The catalog of techniques is still by no means done, but we have certainly seen enough to gain some notion of the virtually endless range of possibilities that lay open to the happy possessor of this Nāgārjuna text. It may all seem rather simple-minded and materialistic, but we should perhaps correct the impression that such arts were easily available for the asking. On the contrary, the text clearly states only a person of stout resolution, entirely dedicated to achieving his purpose, can compass these arts, which, we are informed, only represent a minuscule excerpt from the more than ten thousand scrolls of the complete *Treatise on the Five Sciences* composed by the bodhisattvas Nāgārjuna and Aśvaghōṣa ("Horse's Neigh"; another famous philosophical commentator, and an apt partner for Nāgārjuna, "Dragon Tree"). The adept's propitiation of these two saints must be carried out in a carefully constructed oratory, painted green and equipped with all the necessary ritual paraphernalia — canopies and banners, an incense burner in each of the four corners, standing images of the two bodhisattvas and their divine assistants, with an additional incense burner before the images and one in front of the adept himself. Here, under conditions of the strictest ritual purity, the adept is to pay homage and make offerings to the bodhisattvas thrice daily for a hundred days, reciting their spells, burning incense and lamps day and night, never leaving the room, and feeding himself on the offerings only after having presented them to the deities.

After he has performed these duties assiduously with the utmost devotion, the two bodhisattvas will send down a spirit-emissary, who will fill the room with a red or purple radiance. This spirit will do whatever he commands, and it is through his agency that the adept will be able to use the seals to accomplish healing.

To treat a patient, one submits a formal petition to the two bodhisattvas, giving all the details of the case. Up to twenty-one spell recitations in a serious case may be required, simultaneously knotting thread of five colors. Only after these preliminaries is the seal brought into action. But the practitioner must be in a preliminary state of purity, cleanliness, rectitude, chastity, quietude, and dedication before undertaking any cures. And if obedient to these rules, his focused attention upon the bodhisattva Nāgārjuna may bring the bodhisattva in person.⁷²

The power attributed to these seals may seem wildly exaggerated, and the art of sealing preposterously easy — an orgy of theater and illusion. But the text of *Nāgārjuna's Treatise* makes it clear that there was really nothing easy about the acquisition of those powers; the demands on the would-be aspirant could easily cause failure. Although we have no statistics regarding its therapeutic efficacy, it is at least certain that seal treatment of one sort or another continued in demand, and has remained in use down to the present day. From the sources we have already examined, it is clear that by the ninth or tenth century a wide variety of prescriptive texts existed to guide the operator's mind and hand in numerous applications of therapeutic and wonder-working seals.

The history of this ritual seems fairly typical of many of the ritual complexes of East Asia. First developed, it would appear, by early-medieval Chinese occultists (men neither Buddhists nor Taoists, in the strict sense of the words), it was taken up, elaborated, and codified by Taoist priests. Indeed, by the end of the sixth century therapeutic sealing had apparently become so conspicuous a feature in Taoist practice as to figure in an official description of the religion. Yet it had long since been incorporated into the practice of Chinese Buddhism, which granted it many of the religion's most arcane powers.

⁷² T 1420, p. 968b-c.

Moreover, it was in the context of tantric Buddhism that the practice was introduced to Japan, in the ninth century if not earlier. Meanwhile, Taoist masters continued to make use of their own seals in effecting marvelous cures; each of the new movements or lineages that arose in the twelfth century had a distinguishing seal or seals.

LATER TAOISTS AND THE JAPANESE

Within each lineage in the burgeoning Taoism of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, every rank in the hierarchy was at least theoretically dignified by its own characteristic seal. As in the secular, imperial administration, there was a parallel hierarchy of Taoist insignia; and the apex of this pyramid of seals was differently identified in each major ritual lineage. A thirteenth-century compendium on Taoist ritual and institutions provides a lengthy exposition of the diverse seals then current, placing it significantly just after the discussion of the various ritual offices and functions.⁷³

In addition to the seals of the more recently constituted ritual entities, we also discover here a conscious link with the old tradition, namely, two versions of the seal of the Yellow God's Emblem of Transcendence — the seal that is first found early in the fourth century, in the work of Ko Hung.⁷⁴ Ko's seal was supposed to have borne a 120-character inscription, yet one of the examples given in the thirteenth-century Taoist compendium has an inscription of 102 characters, the other of 107; both are the texts of incantations. Such seals were to be printed on all official ritual documents (which were mostly intended for burning), and, like seals in the ordinary world of workaday officialdom, they guaranteed the authenticity of the text. Thus, as we might expect, these highly official emblems and tokens were firmly established at the very center of ritual activity. In addition

⁷³ *Shang-ch'ing ling-pao ta-fa* 上清靈寶大法 [*Great Rites of Shang-ch'ing and Ling-pao*] (HY 121, ch. 27, pp. 8b-22a). From this source we also learn that seals could be functionally specialized, as in the case of a "Mao shan" seal, wielded by the living to achieve transcendence. With its inscription slightly altered, the same seal accompanied the bodies of the dead, being destined for their own use in summoning back their departed ether-souls, a *sine qua non* for immortality (ibid., pp. 10b-11a).

⁷⁴ See above, under "Prehistory and Early Development."

to the seals of various lineages that bear their names (for instance, "Numinous Treasure," "Jade Hall," "Martial Resistance," and "Heart of Heaven") the names of many others give some notion of their occult powers: "Spirit-Seal of the Flowering Gold Fire-Bell," "Seal-Emblem of the Spirit-Tiger," and "Seal of the Sublime Maiden of the Ninefold Heavens." Moreover, abundant evidence shows that a primary function of all these potent implements was in treating the sick.

In a text like the *Script of the Inner Secrets of the Three High Lords* (*San-huang nei-pi wen* 三皇內秘文), for example, we can observe sealing technique at the very heart of the Taoist demonology and therapy. The work gives a circumstantial account of the different types of demon. The Taoist master's seal may be used to force any member of the numerous and highly variegated demon population to appear in visible form. The basic technique involves smearing the seal with vermilion and pointing it in the direction proper to the type of demon desired, calling out the creature's name and then impressing the seal on a piece of paper. The demon will appear forthwith, and can be interrogated. With a seal in his right hand and a sword in his left, the Taoist master is fully equipped to summon, question, and intimidate whatever demon he wishes.⁷⁵ As the title indicates, this work purports to emanate from the three High Lords of Chinese mythology, imaginary sovereigns of prehistoric times. It accordingly offers three distinct seals, each associated with one of the archaic triad and having a specialized sphere of efficacy.

With the seal of the High Lord of Heaven, one can cause the stars to fall, the moon to wane, the sun to be eclipsed, and can affect the wind and weather. The seal of the High Lord of Earth is capable of causing the earth to split apart, can turn plants and trees to dust and ashes, cause birds to fall from the sky, and kill tigers and other ferocious beasts. It is the third seal, that of the High Lord of Man, which pertains to the human sphere and which has the special function of healing all manner of ailments. So powerful is this seal that if you impress it upon the heart of a healthy person from behind, that

⁷⁵ HY 854, ch. 1, pp. 10a-b. Does the apparent anomaly (rare indeed were lefthanded swordsmen in China) represent an intentional inversion of Buddhist practice, or a scribal error?

person will instantly die; but if you then seal this heart from the front, he will at once be restored to life. If you wish to test the seal's efficacy by a less drastic method, you may coat it with vermilion and press it upon the heart — from the front — of a seven-year-old boy. The seal impression will then appear on his back (once again, the magic mirror projection-effect).⁷⁶

The same book also gives its own version of the classic Yellow God's Seal of Transcendence, as well as another seal, that of The Ninefold Ancient Supervisor of the Immortals (*Chiu-lao hsien-tu* 九老仙督). This is a seal apparently used by a number of different Taoist lineages, and illustrations of several different designs are found. It seems to have been most closely associated with a movement that began in the ninth or tenth century but reached its full strength in the fourteenth and fifteenth — the Pure Luminous Way of Loyalty and Filial Piety. As the name indicates, this was one of many attempts to unify the major strands of Chinese tradition, this time within a Taoist framework. Here therapeutic seals became an important practical component of a spiritual amalgam that emphasized the cardinal Chinese civic virtues.

So far we have been considering prescriptive accounts, addressed to priests and initiates, informing them of how seals ought to be employed. But there are also a number of descriptive accounts that not only prove that such techniques were actually in widespread use, but also convey significant socio-historical information. The best witness to the complexity of twelfth-century ritual practice in south China was the high official and distinguished scholar Hung Mai 洪邁 (1123–1202). For more than fifty years he worked at his now-famous book *I-chien chih* 夷堅志. This collection reveals the entire range of Chinese ritual and belief as a complex living organism in which persons of all classes and conditions fully participated. Hung Mai carefully put on record hundred of accounts of remarkable events, especially those illustrating relations with the world of the spirits — accounts which were either the fruit of his own observation or had been reported to him by friends and relatives.⁷⁷ We learn, for example,

that a younger brother (or perhaps a cousin) of Hung Mai apprenticed himself to a sorcerer for the express purpose of learning the "Nāgārjuna rituals," showing not only that early-medieval practices of the sort we have been studying continued in use for hundreds of years, but that they appealed to the governing class, as well.⁷⁸

Here we may mention three instances of the use of Taoist seals as instruments of healing. The first account, from 1138, describes a woman who had died, yet whose heart nevertheless remained warm. Noting this phenomenon, her family called in a Taoist master. He impressed his ritual seal or "seal of the Law" (*fa-yin* 法印) all over her body, and then formally called back her departed ether-souls (*hun* 魂). The treatment proved successful and she was restored to life.⁷⁹ In another story, a thirty-eight-year-old official physician fell ill of a fever in 1189. His father, also a physician, felt himself too old to deal with the case, and so called in a colleague. The patient's pulses were extremely feeble, and administering a pharmaceutical preparation so exacerbated his condition that the patient broke out in a manic frenzy, rushing and clawing about until all his fingernails were ragged and torn. Another physician was called in, who, giving the patient cooling drugs, managed to restore him somewhat so that he could eat a bit of gruel. But then the fever set in once more, and the victim called for paper and brush and — in his delirium — composed several well-rhymed poems. Suddenly, he threw away the brush and turned his face to the wall, staring at it as if gazing into another country. He said he saw countless armored cavalry-riders and foot-soldiers, battling out of control; then, trembling convulsively, he cried out: "They're taking me away in a boat and are going to beat me! I want to run away from them and come back home, but I can't move!" His father hired two strong men to hold him down, and in a while he relaxed. Then he suddenly started to chant scriptures and spells, and sing bits of music that he had never known before. Only then did they finally realize that he was possessed by a malignant spirit. So they sent for a certain Master of the Law named Lung, who formally

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 28b–29a.

⁷⁷ See *I-chien chih* (Peking: Chung-hua, 1981); also Edward L. Davis, "The Worlds

of Hung Mai" (Ph.D. diss., U. California, 1994).

⁷⁸ Hung, *I-chien chih*, vol. 3, p. 996.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 574.

bestowed on him his seal of the Law, and had him hold it in his palm while he bound it to his hand. There was an immediate improvement, and within a fortnight he was cured.⁸⁰

The most significant feature of this account is the milieu the family of a hereditary official physician. Surely the doctors' obtuseness in diagnosing the true nature of their colleague's ailment was bound up with their rationalistic, pharmaceutically-based approach to healing in general. For that matter, they may have wondered (as may we) what business had a professional physician, a model of rationality, in falling victim to demonic possession? But once having produced the correct diagnosis, which took the rationalists long enough given the dramatic nature of the symptoms, they only needed to summon a qualified Taoist master for an instant cure. If I understand the passage correctly, the master actually bestowed his seal of power on the patient, as he would upon a disciple. In a formal rite of transmission he tied the seal into the sufferer's palm, and by this means transformed him into an authorized official of the Tao, with full control over the demons that were possessing him. Here, then, we appear to have yet another variation on the therapeutic functions of these remarkable implements. The patient, a professional healer in his own right, is not treated as the passive recipient of a healing sigillation. Rather he is given an enhanced identity, still as a healer, but now in the Taoist tradition. In this new persona he is able to effect his own cure, and the Taoist ritual seal is the medium of this more subtle technique of treatment.

The official physician was thus turned into a Taoist master *in extremis*, but there is ample evidence that Taoist initiation was sought and Taoist healing methods skillfully applied by members of the highest social echelons in the land. A final example from Hung Mai describes the therapeutic activities of a member of the imperial household, who practised as a master in the Ling-pao 靈寶 tradition, one of the principal Taoist lineages of the day. This was a particularly delicate case involving the beautiful but dissolute wife of an official. Undoubtedly a person of irreproachable social standing was required to treat her.

⁸⁰ Ibid., vol. 3, p. 1458.

Here is the scenario. The wife observes a richly ornamented young lady accompanying her own maidservant into the house. As the figure nears, it suddenly transforms itself into a handsome young man in a black coat, who begins flirting with the fascinated wife. She loses no time in inviting the attractive apparition to bed, and so begins an intense erotic spirit-possession that lasts for months. Reproaches and admonitions are in vain, and at length the noble Taoist master is called in. He merely presses his seal of the Law upon her chest — and suddenly it was as if she had awakened from a drunken stupor. She declares that she was just in the midst of drinking with her young man, when a red-robed emissary advanced straight towards them, holding a sword. Her lover made haste to withdraw, but she dutifully followed the emissary back to the waking world. This keeps the incubus at bay for three days, but then he returns and the Taoist master is obliged to begin more elaborate ritual operations, using a child from the family as a seer. Eventually the possessing demon is identified as the spirit of a black dog, which had been buried behind the house. When its undecayed corpse is finally exhumed, dismembered with the Taoist's sword and thrown into a river, the wife makes a full recovery. Here we need only note that the cure was initiated by direct application of the master's ritual seal.

There are additional eye-witness reports of such seals in therapeutic use from more recent times. The Reverend George Mackay, a Presbyterian missionary in Taiwan from 1871 to 1895, records that in treating cases of malaria "the Taoist priest makes charms out of peach-leaves, green bamboo, and yellow paper, which are tied around a button of the sick one's clothes, or to the cue. Sometimes a red thread is tied around the wrist, then kept there for weeks at a time. Or a stamp, like that of Lau-tsze, the founder of Taoism, is pressed on the back."⁸¹ The Dutch scholar J. J. M. de Groot, who was in Amoy from 1877 to 1878 and again from 1886 to 1890, observes that "the seals used to this day by the priesthood of the Taoist religion are mostly engraved with T'ai-shang Lao-kiün 'Supreme Lao-kiün,' the honorary name of Lao-Tszê; many bear the name or title of Chang

⁸¹ Mackay, *From Far Formosa: The Island, Its People and Missions* (New York: Fleming Revell Co., 1895), p. 312.

Tao-ling [founder of Taoism and first Celestial Master]. There are, however, many other divine seals in use, each god to whom a temple is dedicated having there, like a terrestrial authority in his official mansion, a box with seals on his altar for the use of laymen and priests.⁸²

Like so many other elements of Taoist and Chinese Buddhist ritual practice, therapeutic seals were adopted by non-Chinese peoples living in close proximity to the culturally and economically dominant Chinese. The assimilation of ritual was apparently viewed as a most effective means of obtaining a vital part of the power inherent in Chinese institutions. From the Chinese point of view, the spread of Chinese ritual was naturally seen as a means of civilizing the "tribes-people" through conversion to Taoism and Buddhism. The central role played by writing and written documents in classical Chinese ritual also meant that those in authority among the "tribes" necessarily acquired Chinese literacy. Indeed, the written Chinese language appears to have been considered primarily a sacerdotal medium. The Yao, for example, refugees from South China now settled in Laos, Thailand, and the west coast of the United States, have long been dedicated Taoists, a hierarchy of Taoist initiations having been superimposed upon their own social structure.⁸³ Mass ordination ceremonies are still held, in which all participants regardless of age and experience receive a formal written certificate of rank, together with a seal for use on ritual documents that reads: "Order from Lord Lao the Most High for immediate execution."⁸⁴ At the death of a fully-initiated priest, his seal and certificate are burnt, and thus sent before him into the heavens so that his spirit may be properly received by the celestial authorities.⁸⁵ The exorcists among the Miao people of

⁸² See de Groot, *Religious System* 6, p. 1050.

⁸³ See Michel Strickmann, "The Tao among the Yao: Taoism and the Sinification of South China," in Sakai Tadao Sensei koki shukuga kinen no kai 酒井忠夫先生古稀祝賀記念の會, eds., *Rekishi ni okeru minshū to bunka* [Sakai Tadao Festschrift] 曆史における民衆と文化 (Tokyo: Kokusho kankōkai, 1982); and Jacques Lemoine, "Asie Orientale," in vol. 2, *Ethnologie régionale*, of *Encyclopédie de la Pléiade* (Paris, 1978), pp. 808-14.

⁸⁴ Jacques Lemoine, *Yao Ceremonial Paintings* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1982), p. 28.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 135, and pl. 255.

western China have also been influenced by Taoist practice, and have had their own demon-dispelling seals. A seal figures prominently in a healing ritual recorded in the 1930s, as performed by a Ch'uan Miao exorcist. The exorcist displays his seal, directing it to-wards the patient; then points it first at heaven, then at the earth. Next he presses it once on the patient's head, twice on his body, three times on his hand, four times on his chest, and five times on his foot. The demons thereupon make haste to abandon the body of their victim.⁸⁶

Considering the number and variety of medieval Chinese Buddhist examples, we might expect therapeutic sealing to turn up among the rich complexities of present-day Buddhist ritual in Japan; and such is indeed the case. The most conspicuous instance comes in the ceremonies of the First Month at a number of older Buddhist temples, as well as some Shintō shrines. For example, on the third day of the new year, in the southern part of Kyoto at the Tōji 東寺 (a Shingon-lineage monastery), the priest in the course of a ceremony of purification wears a white mask over his nose and mouth and holds a large hexagonal seal, as he ceremoniously stamps the pillars of the hall. At the conclusion of the ritual, he stamps in vermilion the foreheads of those of the faithful or other onlookers that desire it. Similar rituals are carried out at the same season in the great Shingon mountain-headquarters of Kōyasan 高野山 (south of Ōsaka), as well as in a number of the old temples of Nara, such as the Tōdaiji 東大寺 and Tōshōdaiji 唐招提寺.

Such seals are also used to print auspicious and protective talismans for affixing to the walls of a room. In general, then, they

⁸⁶ David Crockett Graham, *Songs and Stories of the Ch'uan Miao* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Inst., 1954), p. 41. One observer of Singapore has noticed that householders there bring a variety of objects to be consecrated by exorcists and mediums at the temple, including images, domestic articles, and mirrors: "A frequent practice is for clean shirts and blouses to be brought for stamping at the back of the neck. In such cases the *dang-ki* (t'ung-chi 童乩, "medium") normally uses a seal about two inches square bearing an insignia which shows the name of the *shan* and the temple. He licks the seal and stamps it on the object. . . . The stamp marks remain visible on the backs of many worshippers and are a means of identifying devotees of spirit mediumship in everyday life." Instead of the Taoist's (and official's) vermilion, the *dang-ki*'s seal is inked with blood from his cut tongue; Alan J. A. Elliott, *Chinese Spirit-Medium Cults in Singapore* (London: The London School of Economics and Political Science, 1955), p. 58.

are used in ways closely similar to those recommended in our medieval Chinese texts, being applied not only to the human body, but also to the walls, gates, or pillars of a building. Carved in relief on this type of seal is a curious legend; it reads "Precious Seal of the Ox-king" (*gyōō hōin* 牛王寶印). Before ransacking the more obscure corners of Buddhist mythology in search of this bovine monarch, we should consider a simpler solution to the Ox-king's identity. In Japanese, "king" and "yellow" are homophonous (*ō*). In Chinese as well, the two words are close in sound (*wang* and *huang* respectively). In contrast to "Ox-king," the term "Ox-yellow" presents no difficulties at all, since it is the standard term for either ox bile or ox bezoar (bezoars being concretions found in the stomachs of cows, oxen, tapirs, and certain other animals), and is the literal equivalent of the Sanskrit term *gorocanā*. In addition to mere homophony, the character *wang* has other qualities to recommend it, for its royal associations suggest a sovereign remedy; moreover, its mere four strokes commend it to the seal-carver, in contrast to the twelve strokes of *huang*.

The significance of these seal inscriptions has been much discussed by Japanese scholars, and they are by no means agreed on their original meaning. The puzzling "Ox-king" might in fact have resulted from a misreading of some other inscription on a seal; for example, the single character for "imperial seal" 璽 might perhaps have been misread as two characters — ox and jade (the latter being nearly identical with "king"). In China, Niu-wang, the "Ox king," is the divine protector of cattle.⁸⁷ Or does the inscription simply designate the Buddha, who is like unto a "king of cattle," as some Japanese writers aver? Although various scholars find the bezoar explanation fanciful, I am inclined to favor it. First, the shape of these seals is hexagonal, or sometimes round, in any case approximating the roundish bezoar, whereas the vast majority of ordinary seals are usually square (one may recall that the seal recommended by the *Book of Consecration* was also round). Then too, early written accounts of the great historic Japanese seals of this genre always emphasize the object's marvelous healing properties. Whatever the original sense of the

⁸⁷ E. T. C. Werner, *A Dictionary of Chinese Mythology* (Shanghai: Kelly and Walsh, 1932), pp. 331-20.

inscription, there is no doubt that the seals were early identified metaphorically with the wonder-working bezoar.

Ox bezoars have been standard ingredients in the Chinese materia medica from ancient times. Scraped, ground up, and ingested, they were chiefly prescribed in treating children's convulsions caused by fright, as well as madness and epilepsy in adults. Their properties were essentially demonifuge, and they were said to eliminate malignant wraiths from the body and drive off demons. If was recognized that bezoars represented a pathological condition in the animals that produced them, and their demonifuge action was apparently deemed to be homeopathic. Taken internally, bezoars were powerful medicine indeed, and the finest specimens commanded (and still command) a very high price. Writing around the year 500, T'ao Hung-ching 陶弘景 observed that cow's bezoar was the most highly-prized and costly of all medicines, and comparable assessments can be collected in southeast Asia today.⁸⁸

PARALLELS, ANALOGIES, CONCLUSIONS

Bezoar, wielded by an expert, evokes a range of magical techniques and ritual operations that offer interesting typological parallels or even possible genetic relationships to our Buddho-Taoist practice of therapeutic sealing. In Central Asia, for example, among the Turks and Mongols, bezoars were manipulated by specialists to produce advantageous weather conditions: rain in time of drought, or magical storms to confound one's enemies in battle. Other stones were em-

⁸⁸ T'ao, *Pen-ts'ao ching chi-chu* 本草經集注; see Mori Risshi 森立之, annot., *Honzōkyō shūchū* (Osaka: Maeda shoten, 1972), p. 97, s. v. *niu-huang*. Another use for bezoars seems to have been peculiar to Japanese tantric Buddhist ritual. Cow's bezoar is triturated and mixed with water; this solution is be-charmed 108 times with the spell of the bodhisattva Kannon (Avalokiteśvara) and then applied to the vagina of a woman who has reached the term of her pregnancy. It is said to assure a speedy and easy delivery (See *Bukkyō daijiten* 2, p. 115A, s. v. "goō kaji.") This procedure was termed the "Bezoar Rite," and it became the speciality of the abbots of a particular Shingon monastery south of Kyoto (in the Daigoji 醍醐寺). During the tenth and eleventh centuries these specialists were often called upon to treat ladies of the imperial house and the metropolitan aristocracy, when the time for giving birth drew near.

ployed in this function, but it is the bezoar, a lithic substance born and nurtured in the animal realm, that represents the original and still most desirable examples of these yada-stones (Turk.: *yada-tas*; Mong.: *jada*).⁸⁹ Power over the natural elements is also a feature of Chinese seals.⁹⁰ For that matter, we may also note that both Central Asian Turks and Mongols made use of talismans, known among them as *vu*, which represents the Chinese word *fu* 符, the standard term for a written or printed talisman.⁹¹ China's direct contact with Central Asian peoples extends over more than two millennia, and occult ritual would no doubt have been as much affected by this contact as were the more mundane aspects of culture.

The aspect of healing through the application of a spiritually highly-charged object to the body of the sufferer suggests the similar use of potent signet-rings (also emblems of identity and official status in the West). Another similarity is that of direct touch or other bodily contact of a person invested with comparable spiritual potency. In ancient Greece, the hands of gods and their mortal representatives were filled with healing power.⁹² Later, the kings of England and France could, with a touch of their hand, cure scrofula, "the King's Evil,"⁹³ and the laying-on of hands is still a prominent feature of faith-healing, world-wide. In fact, the healer's entire body may be

⁸⁹ See Fuad Köprülü, "Une institution magique chez les anciens Turcs: yat," *Actes du IIe congrès international d'histoire des religions* (Paris, 1925), pp. 440-52; Jean-Paul Roux, *Faune et flore sacrées dans les sociétés altaïques* (Paris: Adrien Maisonneuve, 1966), pp. 159-63; and idem, *La religion des Turcs et des Mongols* (Paris: Payot, 1984), pp. 95-98 (sect. "La pierre à pluie").

⁹⁰ A medieval Taoist work of uncertain date, *The Most High's Book of Transcendent Seals for Communicating with the Invisible World* 太上通玄靈印經, specifies that if rubbed with ox bezoar and powdered cinnabar, one of its seals will not only summon all manner of spirits but will work large-scale geological, hydraulic, and cosmological changes, as well. Similar powers are attributed to Turco-Mongol bezoar-stones (*HY* 858, p. 4b). The same mixture of bezoar and cinnabar may be smeared on the seal, which is then held facing the east, and the great demon-commander A-t'o-k'o will arrive with his spirit-troops to "shrink the veins of the earth" over a distance of a thousand (or ten thousand) leagues, enabling one to reach the furthest destination with a minimum of effort (*ibid.*, p. 5b). A-t'o-k'o apparently derives from Aṭavaka, a tantric Buddhist patron of sealing, as we have seen, above.

⁹¹ See Roux, *Faune et flore*, p. 164.

⁹² Otto Weinreich, *Heilungswunder* (Giessen: Alfred Töpelmann, 1909), pp. 1-75.

⁹³ Marc Bloch, *Les rois thaumaturges* (Strasbourg: Faculté des Lettres de Strasbourg, 1924).

brought into contact with that of the sick person, a technique also known from ancient Greece.⁹⁴ Carefully prescribed and modulated gestures often appear as significant elements in the composition of medicine or the implementation of cures; *ubi dolor ibi digitus*, and direct contact of the hands might be employed not only to soothe and heal surface complaints, but in treating a considerable spectrum of internal ailments, as well.⁹⁵ Buddho-Taoist sealing techniques may seem to be fairly mechanical, simple-minded procedures, until we recall the complicated details involved, as set forth in the first Buddhist instructions (in the fifth-century *Book of Consecration*) and the initial, sixth-century Taoist example. The power of the implement is wholly related to the power of the officiating monk or priest — his control of the vital breaths within and his mastery of complex techniques of visualization. The seal is thus a concentrated tool of his own highly trained and heavily charged body. Its potency derives not only from the noble lineage into which the officiant belongs by virtue of his formal initiation; it draws strength directly from those supermundane powers for which his body serves as a conduit, a transceiver. It stands to reason, then, that in the hands of a fully qualified practitioner, other objects may work upon the patient as effectively as a spirit-seal.

We have already noted the considerable talismanic force that resides in sacred books, both Buddhist and Taoist. A ritual in use among priests of the Tendai Buddhist lineage in Japan today undertakes to heal all ailments of the throat by both internal and external applications. Loofa-pods (*Luffa aegyptiaca*) are wrapped ceremoniously for presentation to the sufferers, who attend the service usually held once yearly. The packaged loofah is taken home and prepared in water which is then drunk. But the culmination of the rites performed in the temple or shrine is the touching by the priest of the sufferer's forehead with a volume of the *Book of Perfect Wisdom* (*Mahāprajñā-*

⁹⁴ Otto Weinreich, "Zum Wundertypus der *συναναρχωσις*," *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 32 (1935), pp. 246-64; *synanarchōsis* is "the mingling (or contact) of bodies."

⁹⁵ See Herbert Fischer, "Heilgebarden," *Antaios Jahrbuch* 2 (1961), pp. 318-47; rpt. in Elfriede Grabner, ed., *Volksmedizin: Probleme und Forschungsgeschichte* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1967), pp. 413-43; and idem, "The Use of Gesture in Preparing Medicaments and in Healing," *History of Religions* 5.1 (1965), pp. 18-53.

pāramitā-sūtra). Traditionally placed as the opening work in the Sino-Japanese Buddhist canon (also the longest), the *Perfect Wisdom* in some sense epitomizes all of Buddhist revelation. Through this direct ritual contact, the sufferer is sealed with the wisdom of all the Buddhas.

Certain cases of touching holy books come even closer to the notion of contact with seals. Every Japanese temple and shrine has its own characteristic seal, and many Japanese carry about with them blank books in which they collect impressions of the seals of the temples they visit (*nōkyō-chō* 納經帳). The more serious and systematic enthusiasts follow a recognized pilgrimage route, comprising a certain number of temples associated administratively, or according to some other divine or geographical principle. The seal-impressions which they gather by that means will thus form a studied sequence, as well as attest to the authentic completion of the pilgrimage route. David Hall, who trained in Japan as a Tendai postulant, has told me of the traditional pilgrimages included in his course of training. Old people visiting the temples to which he and his fellow-postulants went would give them alms and then ask to borrow their books of temple-seal impressions, which they pressed against those parts of their bodies needing treatment. In this instance, the impressions stood in place of the seals themselves, as well as the cumulative power of the holy book and the merit of the young monks' pilgrimage.

Another related corpus of practices concerns the painting, smearing, or inscribing of marks or signs on the body. Here we rejoin the estimable products of the cow, for in India *gorocanā*, "cow's yellow," in addition to designating the bezoar also denotes the animal's bile — the preferred ingredient in the compound used to mark the forehead with the *tilaka*-mark.⁹⁶ In a Chinese tantric manual dating from 654 one is directed to pound *gorocanā* with flowers of the "plant of longing" (*Abrus precatorius*) and smear the resulting paste on the

⁹⁶ Recent biochemical research has shown that ox-bile is the best source of the amino acid taurine. Foremost among the properties to which it contributes is acuity of vision, and it is found highly concentrated in the retinas of kittens, whose visual tissue is still developing. The full range of its biological activity is not at this time known, but ox-bile may well have figured in alexipharmic preparations from the earliest time. Its use in making the *tilaka*-mark (in proximity to the pineal-gland, the "third eye") may have referred to inner vision.

forehead, whereupon "all hindrances will dissolve of themselves" — including hindrances to love, no doubt.⁹⁷ Bezoar and bile were important ingredients in painting and dyeing generally in India. Marking the face with apotropaic substances is also known from early Taoist texts, for example, in the instructions in the *Declarations of the Perfected* from fourth-century Mao-shan.

The application of cinnabar to the skin continued in general use down to modern times. "A curious antidote against sickness is very commonly applied by parents at Canton to their infant children on the fifth day of the fifth month. This consists in staining their foreheads and navels with cinnabar or vermilion, leaves of the sago palm and garlic bulbs being at the same time suspended over the entrance doors to prevent the intrusion of evil spirits."⁹⁸ And there are more generalized applications of less rare substances to the skin, like the marking of children's foreheads with soot from the bottom of the pot on the wood- or charcoal-fueled stove in Japan. On a more lugubrious note, during an epidemic of plague in twelfth-century Kyoto, a Shingon monk wrote the seed syllable "Aḥ" on the foreheads of 42,300 corpses, "as a seal to the Buddha."⁹⁹

The custom of placing colored markings on the skin to keep the body safe inevitably suggests more complex designs, whether painted on, cicatrized, or tattooed. The invaluable de Groot notes that Chinese characters of particular demonifugic power might be written by professional exorcists or medical men or even lay-persons, upon the chests or hearts of victims of demonic possession. The preferred medium for this was cinnabar or vermilion, and the most

⁹⁷ T 901, p. 87B.

⁹⁸ N. B. Dennys, *The Folk-Lore of China* (London and Hong Kong: Trübner & Co., 1876), p. 70.

⁹⁹ Minakata Kumagusu and F. Victor Dickens, *Hōjōki: A Japanese Thoreau of the Twelfth Century* (London: Gowen's Int'l. Library, 1907), p. 8. Francis L. K. Hsu describes the use of hand prints as apotropaic signs during a cholera epidemic in the western Chinese province of Yunnan in 1942. The hand was first pressed in decomposed limestone, then on the object destined for protection — notably, the gates and walls of the family home; *Religion, Science and Human Crises* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1952), p. 44. For the use of the hand and the fingers in East Asia as imprints or seals on official documents, see Minakata Kumagusu, "The Antiquity of the Finger-Print Method," in *Minakata Kumagusu zenshū* 南方熊楠全集 (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1973), pp. 40-43, 47-48 (rpt. from *Nature* [1894-96]).

potent characters were those for "right" or "true" (正; evocative of the True Law, or True Tao), "fire" 火 or "sword" 刀. The same authority records that talismans might also be incised or tattooed directly on the body, thus furnishing permanent protection.¹⁰⁰

Much the same effect might be obtained by placing comparable signs or seals upon the clothing, often a particular item of clothing expressly designed for that purpose and worn next to the skin.¹⁰¹ Bija-mantras, "seed-syllables," each of which represents one deity in the tantric Buddhist pantheon, are written or printed on the white garments still worn today by Japanese Buddhist ascetics. This deployment over the body of talismanic characters of power in Sanskrit script is a material realization of the ritual "sealing" of the body with finger-seals: a particular hand-formed mudra may be impressed upon parts of the body, as we have seen — most often, perhaps, the five vital loci (head, two shoulders, throat, and heart), in this way infusing the protection of a particular deity at those spots.

For two thousand years, Chinese tradition has associated tattooing most tenaciously with the peoples on the southern fringes of the Chinese empire (it also served as a punishment amongst the Chinese themselves). Ancient Annam was termed the Country of Crossed Legs by the Chinese, alluding to the resemblance of the inhabitants to fish, an effect created by the Southeast Asian custom of tattooing the male body from the waist down with a delicate, scale-like tracery of blue designs. This custom still persists in Burma and Thailand, and Southeast Asia generally provides a rich treasury of all the forms of talismanic protection.¹⁰² In one light, we observe

¹⁰⁰ de Groot, *Religious System* 6, pp. 1051, 1056.

¹⁰¹ In the words of a turn-of-the-century observer, "Gegen geringes Entgelt lässt man sich Stöcke, Pilgerkleid, Handtücher oder irgend etwas abstempeln, als Wahrzeichen, dass man an dem betreffenden Ort gewesen. Dergleichen Stücke werden dann zu Hause sorgfältig aufbewahrt. Die Japaner kleiden sich auf die Pilgerfahrt in leichten, weissen Baumwollstoff und bringen mitunter diese Kleider über und über mit Stempeln bedeckt zurück"; Hans Spörry, *Das Stempelwesen in Japan* (Zurich, 1907), p. 24.

¹⁰² François Bizot, "Notes sur les yantra bouddhiques d'Indochine," in Strickmann, ed., *Tantric and Taoist Studies* 1, pp. 155–91. The term for the Country of the Crossed Legs (or Feet) is Chiao-chih, and the natives were often said to cut their hair and tattoo their bodies in order to resemble the type of dragon known as chiao 蛟; R. A. Stein, "Le Lin-yi," *Han-hiue* 2.1–3 (Peking, 1947), p. 298; Max Kaltenmark, "Le domp-

teur des flots," *Han-hiue* 3.1–2 (Peking, 1948), p. 2.

the protective talisman and apotropaic medicament merging into written document; in another aspect they become seductive ornament. The use of Taoist and Buddhist seals for printing paper talismans intended for swallowing brings us inevitably to a final category of application, the use of seals to consecrate food. Of this one of the most conspicuous and best documented examples in Christendom is furnished by the bread-stamps used either upon the host intended for consecration, or on loaves of bread destined for distribution to the congregation after the service. This latter usage was and remains a prominent characteristic of Eastern Orthodox liturgy.¹⁰³ The variety of traditional European bread- and cake-stamps is of course enormous, ranging from the sacred and symbolic to the fantastical and ornamental, but (as we should expect in a living tradition) normally a harmonious blend of the two. Chinese festival cakes, too, are regularly stamped with auspicious signs and characters. Often the imprint is a simple stereotyped formula or single character, promising "good fortune," "official rank," or "long life." But more specialized therapeutic applications of written or printed characters on foodstuffs are also on record from China. The all-seeing de Groot has documented the custom of feeding to demonically afflicted persons cakes made of flour, on which a schoolmaster or other learned individual has written characters of exorcistic power. Such a cake would often be half eaten, half thrown away by the patient, thus corresponding to the long-standing practice of bipartition in the case of contracts or other material tokens of an oath or agreement between two parties. The broken halves, rejoined and perfectly fitting together, authenticate and guarantee the contractual bond. The word *fu*, which we have all along been translating "talisman," originally signified such a token or tally in two parts.¹⁰⁴ In the case of the half-eaten cake (as with the swallowed talismanic ashes), the binding agreement is presumably concluded with the gods.¹⁰⁵ In late-medieval and early-modern Europe,

teur des flots," *Han-hiue* 3.1–2 (Peking, 1948), p. 2.

¹⁰³ See George Galavaris, *Bread and the Liturgy: The Symbolism of Early Christian and Byzantine Bread Stamps* (Madison: U. Wisconsin P., 1970).

¹⁰⁴ See Robert des Rotours, "Les insignes en deux parties (*foi*) sous la dynastie des T'ang (618–907)," *TP* 41 (1952), pp. 1–148.

¹⁰⁵ de Groot, *Religious System* 6, p. 1052. One may compare the *Schluckbilde* of

perhaps the most widely used medicinal substances to be distributed in comparable stamped or sealed form were the siliceous preparations known as *terra lemnia* and *terra sigillata*,¹⁰⁶ specimens of which may be seen in most collections of antiquities, notably in the excellent Deutsches Apotheken-Museum at Heidelberg Castle.

There is thus nothing unusual in the use of seals to produce consecrated foodstuffs, in which sacramental, medicinal, and festival virtues combine and — through ingestion — are incorporated into the human body. Indeed, it brings us back to the theme with which we began, and which has recurred throughout this study: the association in medieval China of therapeutic seals with talismans for swallowing. Inevitably, we are drawn once more to consider the evidence for the seminal role of therapeutic seals in the early history of printing.¹⁰⁷

Bavaria and Austria; also, perhaps, the ABC cakes used to promote the learning of the alphabet by children; Bächtold-Stäubli, *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1927) 1, pp. 14–15, s. v. *Abc*.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 7, p. 1706, s. v. "Siegelerde."
¹⁰⁷ The extensive body of material on sealing in the ancient and modern Middle East can only be mentioned in passing. The Muslim tradition preserves ancient Mesopotamian rituals. But Islamic occultism also includes elements most likely imported from abroad, e.g., catopromancy from ancient Greece (see Delatte, "La catopromancie"), magic mirrors, divining-cards, and geomancy (Punktierkunst), all probably from China. Seals represent an aspect of culture shared by East Asia with the most ancient Middle East, and it may be that Islamic culture preserved traces of the encounter. See H. A. Winkler, *Siegel und Charaktere in der muhammedanischen Zauberei* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1930), p. 112: "Besonders der Kranke wird gern auf Stirn oder Hand gesiegelt und zwar mit dem höchsten Namen Allahs (etwa aus den sieben Siegeln bestehend), dem Wort 'Allah' oder dem Siegel Salomos. Aber auch Wohnungen, gesunde Menschen und ihr Leben werden gerne gegen die Dämonen versiegelt. . . Bei dieser Art des Siegels sind zwei Vorstellungen wirksam. Durch Siegelung mit dem Zeichen oder Namen eines Dämonenbezwinners wie Salomos oder gar Allahs stellt sich der Betreffende in den Schutz dieses Mächtigen oder macht sich du dessen Eigentum und Sklaven und wird durch ein solches Vertragsverhältnis zu einem Mächtigen den Dämonen unzugänglich. Für diesen Gebrauch des Siegels kann auf die juristische Praxis des jungen Islams verwiesen werden. . . Im babylonischen Talmud heisst es: 'Alles, was zusammengebunden, versiegelt, gemessen und gezählt ist, darüber haben wir (Dämonen) keine Gewalt, etwas davon zu nehmen.'" One is also reminded of the seals and sealing in early Christianity, particularly the "seal of the spirit" conveyed in the rite of baptism. Drawing upon such secular Greco-Roman uses as official and private seal-rings, and animal brands, as well as the more specifically religious uses in pagan rituals and Judaism (branding or tattooing slaves of the gods; circumcision as the "seal of the covenant"), Christians as well as Gnostics applied this rich range of metaphor to their own rite of initiation and dedication; F. J. Dölger, *Sphragis: Eine altchristliche*

Although the details of Pelliot's interpretation of the *Sui History's* statement on Taoist seals and the treatment of disease may have been mistaken, he was certainly right to draw attention to Taoist seals as an important element in the development of printing. Nowadays, at least, the vast majority of talismans on view throughout East Asia are printed on paper and sold at temples. Appropriate printed talismans may be affixed to the walls or doorways of rooms in the house, or displayed in a shop or office (or indeed, a car). They should be renewed annually. Traditionally printed from wooden blocks, they may themselves closely resemble temple seals, and in any case frequently have a temple-seal superimposed on the paper's surface.

All of this represents the ultimate stage of a long process of development, centering around the ritual seal of the Taoist or Buddhist master. A definite evolutionary sequence can be traced in the history of medieval Chinese ritual seals, perhaps best illustrated by the one seal whose name remains constant throughout the entire period of development — the Yellow God's Seal of Transcendence. In the early-fourth century this seal was already being used to manufacture solid artifacts, apotropaic talismans for installing around property-boundaries, or bombarding aquatic monsters. By the thirteenth century, a seal bearing the same famous name was generally known and used on paper for printing on documents to be submitted to heaven during the performance of a ritual. This change marks the distinction between diffuse occultism and formal Taoism. But of course this change, as well as the shift to "printing" in our sense of the term, had taken place long before, and it may be delineated as early as the first half of the sixth century. There the same text that directs the officiant to impress his seal on the patient's body also instructs him to manufacture a talisman by printing it in vermilion on bamboo-pith or paper, to be administered internally to the sufferer. Here we have explicit evidence to support Pelliot's hypothesis; as we might expect, it is found among the neglected ritual texts of medieval China — but from the Buddhists, rather than the Taoists.

Taufbezeichnung in ihren Beziehungen zur profanen und religiösen Kultur des Altertums (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1911); and G. W. H. Lampe, *The Seal of the Spirit: A Study in the Doctrine of Baptism and Confirmation in the New Testament and the Fathers* (London: Soc. for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1951).

What we have seen of the use of seals in Buddhism and Taoism richly illustrates our long-held contention that such pervasive phenomena cannot be parceled out into sectarian pigeon holes. It is fruitless to ask (as so often done) "is it Buddhist or Taoist?" Clearly, therapeutic sigillation has been *both* Buddhist and Taoist, and more besides. In this it resembles other practices shared by China's two most prominent clans of ritual specialists. The use of official seals to control relations with the invisible world appears to have begun among early-medieval occultists like Ko Hung: men who were neither Buddhist nor Taoist in the strict sense of these terms. It represents a specialized extension of an important component of secular Chinese culture — the official seal of authority. We can trace in China a special fascination with glyphic and lithic prowess, going back to the oracle bones. Political and hieratic authority were closely bound in Chinese tradition with technological expertise in carving or incising bones, stones, or metals. Countless legends attest to this fascination, legends that reverberate in later ritual, and in governmental practice.¹⁰⁸

Although the ultimate origins of the seal may be obscure, we can speculate on who was the first to adopt sigillation as a therapeutic technique. This honor seems to go to the Taoists; yet our earliest full set of instructions for performing sigillation comes from a Buddhist source, the mid-fifth-century *Book of Consecration*. This is not an unusual case; many traits and practices associated in our minds with Taoism are in fact first documented in Buddhist scriptures: for example, the so-called apocryphal sūtras written in China, directly in Chinese. The first Taoist book to provide a full-scale ritual involving sealing dates from over a hundred years later, in the second half of the sixth century. Meanwhile, Chinese Buddhist authors had been setting down further elaborations of their own.

The seals employed by Buddhists and Taoist had an ultimate common source in Chinese culture; Buddhist and Taoist seals themselves might be closely similar or even identical, and they also shared a common application against demons and disease. But as our survey has shown, Buddhist and Taoist authors elaborated the complex of seal use in distinctive ways, each in accordance with its own terminology,

doctrine, and rituals. Following the standard procedure when adapting Chinese practices, Buddhist ritualists drew upon the great resources of Indian tradition to absorb sigillation in their own system. They exploited the wide range of meanings already attached to the Sanskrit word *mudrā* (including alchemy and sexual technique) in a Buddhist context — most commonly, the finger-seals, which personified or commanded spirit-beings. Buddhist scripture further provides a rich stock of seal-metaphors, comparable to the "seal of the spirit" conferred in Christian baptism, and these were also drawn upon in the work of assimilation. The Taoists deftly incorporated the therapeutic seal into their own ritual matrix as an official implement, and it naturally meshed with the operations of their celestial bureaucracy. Behind all the early texts, though, was the oral tradition, the tradition of practice, of which even the best of our texts are only imperfect reflections.

The question of origins remains of interest, but the patterns of assimilation are even more intriguing. For the swallowed talisman and the impressed spirit-seal actually reinforce one another, and in time they even coalesce. Once the short step had been taken from the application of the seal on the patient's skin to the manufacture, by means of the seal, of an ingested talisman, the initial distinction between the two modalities, one internal, the other external, had been bridged. Moreover, this confluence of therapeutic methods marked an even more momentous technological change, namely, the supplanting of writing by printing. That this fusion of procedures was possible is due, I believe, to the common overarching matrix that informed and gave meaning to both these quasibureaucratic operations: the peculiar cause-and-effect structure of Chinese ritual, founded on the vision of cosmic Law that governed Buddhists and Taoists alike.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- HY *Tao-tsang yin-mu yin-te* 道藏引目引得, Harvard-Yenching Sinol. Index Series 25
 T *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大政新修大藏經

¹⁰⁸ See Chapin, "Sword as Dynastic Talisman."