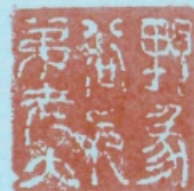


AN ILLUSTRATED COMPENDIUM OF TAOIST, BUDDHIST, AND SHINTO TALISMANS OF THE FAR EAST

東亞：道，佛，靖國神社的平安符
百科全書圖解說明

採集作者 甘慕白



Collected by James Kemp



EXHIBITION TITLE: TAOIST, BUDDHIST, AND SHINTO TALISMANS OF THE FAR EAST

The exhibition is a small portion of over 1,300 religious talismans obtained from Taoist, Buddhist, and Shinto temples in Taiwan, Korea, Japan, and Southeast Asia. They have been chosen to appeal, not only for those interested in East Asian religions, but also for those who have an interest in East Asian art. While wood block prints predominate, there are also a few stone rubbings or painted talismans on cloth or paper. The core collections of talismans from Taiwan was used as the focus of my master's thesis in the East Asian Studies Program at Florida State University. The thesis is essentially a dictionary to describe and define various signs and symbolisms of the talismans.

The collection began in Taiwan in 1975 and has continued to grow with additional material from Southeast Asia, Korea, and Japan. I obtained nearly 300 talismans directly from temples and another 1,000 by sending a request via the mail. Five thousand letters requesting talismans were sent before the collection could reach its present size.

The collection is most unique because religious talismans, made of paper, are quite fragile and are not sought nor collected as art in East Asia.

The talismans are intended to be displayed at home or carried on the person to protect the owner from a host of ills believed to be caused by ghosts and other supernatural creatures. For the bulk of the religious experience in China, Japan, Korea, and Southeast Asia, the focus of the ordinary citizen has been directed toward ways and means of dealing with the denizens of the supernatural. Only the religious elite and well-educated have had the time and skills to deal with the theological, philosophical, and cosmological experience of East Asian religions. Therefore, understanding the symbolism and function of religious talismans enables the observer to see and experience a view of another culture which has evolved with a quite different world view of life and the afterlife quite different than our own.

At present, Talismans of the Far East is comprised of 70 frames containing 56 Chinese talismans, 29 Japanese talismans, and 37 Korean talismans. An additional five frames display related materials, such as sacrificial paper money, offerings to the dead, and brocade pouches for containing talismans.

Every effort has been used to choose a broad array of talismans to display the rich legacy of folk art and religious symbolism of the Far East. Although each talisman has its own special merits, a few examples are especially worthy of comment. Two very large rubbings, the Kuei Star (23-1/2 x 53 in.) and Bodhidharma (21 x 47 in.) were obtained from the collection of the famous "Forrest of Stele" at the Hsi An Museum, China. Three Yi dynasty tiger talismans were obtained from the National Folklore Museum of Korea. A very significant talisman was handmade by the Sixty-third generation Chang T'ien Shih. It has the original seal of Chang Tao Ling, the traditional founder of sectarian Taoism from the Han dynasty. Two talismans were obtained from the famous Beikang Matsu temple in Taiwan and the seat of her most famous and prosperous cult. Seven talismans from the You Ing Kung cult were included precisely because these cults are more interesting as they are widely acknowledged as a cult for the ghosts of beggars, robbers, and other unfortunates who are greatly feared. This list could be expanded until every talisman was recognized for its unique characteristic and contribution to the

Artistically, the talismans range from bold naive folk prints to rather elegant and sophisticated prints that rank with those of any collection of Oriental wood block prints. The colors of the prints are primarily monochrome: white or black printed on white, yellow, or red paper. Most also include a vermilion seal of the issuing temple as well. The bold use of primary colors is a special feature of Far Eastern Folk Art as well as a transmission of symbolic religious meaning in Taoism, Buddhism, and Shinto. The religious and magical nature of the prints is further enhanced by the use of sacred and profane symbols and language that are obvious to even the peasant classes, as well as containing an even deeper repository of esoteric lore and sublime knowledge for the adept. Even for those who have no special knowledge of Far Eastern art of religion, the talismans are interesting and stimulating to view. For those with an interest in Oriental religion, art, or philosophy, the exhibition offers a special insight into the mingling of these three fields fused with magic.

Paper printed talismans have been in active use in East Asia for nearly two millennia. In Japan today, certainly no industrial backwater, they are becoming more popular than ever before. Not only is the talisman a type of religious oddity, it is also a type of technology to deal with the mundane as well as the spectral world. The talisman has become a veritable piece of "Cultural Flypaper." The talisman is the quintessence of Buddhist and Taoist lore, and esoteric mysticism and practices which are based upon cosmic notions of Chinese, Indian, Korean, and Japanese antiquity. All practical and popular notions of the folk religion are found in the "talismanic language" of symbols. Not only are philosophical beliefs embodied in talismans, but also great repositories of folk history and folk wisdom which are associated with the deities that appear on them. Talismans are an attempt to harness the powers of a knowable universe to assist mortals in this life: to acquire wealth, protection, good health, longevity, etc. Aside from their religious or cultural background, they certainly can be admired for their artistic qualities. Some are merely quaint folk prints, while others show great dexterity of the wood block media and the artistic problems of two-dimensional space.

Religion offers many things to many people. For some it is a quest to understand the universe and man's place in it. For others it is an attempt to know and understand a personal God and our relation to Him/Her. For many, though, it is a way to seek solace from the woes of life as well as a way to bear the unbearable. Magic and the use of talismans is faith in an ordered universe; one that is understood and one that can be manipulated. Chinese, Korean, and Japanese peasantry, until recent times, struggled with the elements and the vagaries of man himself. War, pestilence, famine, and death harried the peasant in unending cycles. Magic and talismans were aimed at enriching life here and now. It is of no great importance that the principles and symbolism were only vaguely understood by the masses. Talismanic magic was viewed as a type of technology, religiously based, but technology nonetheless. The talismanic "language" of symbols is a great repository of cultural heritage of more than 2,500 years. Some of the cosmological notions of the ancient oriental cultures may now seem quaint; but their aspirations are universal: sons will not be killed in war; there will be no disasters; domestic tranquillity will be maintained; crops will be bountiful; the nation will be a peace. None of these notions are quaint: all of us strive for these today.

EXHIBITIONS

Lemoyne Art Foundation, 125 North Gadsden Street, Tallahassee,
Florida 32301, (904) 222-8000, 8/7/87-8/30/87

Osceola Center For The Arts, Post Office Box 1195, Kissimmee,
Florida 32742, (305) 846-6257, 4/6/88-5/8/88

Tallahassee City Hall, South Wing Gallery, 6/6/88-7/7/88

The Appleton Museum Of Art, 4333 East Silver Springs Boulevard,
Ocala, Florida 32670, 9/22/88-10/29/88

Association For Asian Studies, 41st Annual Meeting, Washington,
D.C., March 18, 1989

The Morikami Museum, 400 Morikami Park Road, Delray Beach,
Florida 33446, 7/5/89-10/1/89

Museum Of Oriental Cultures, 426 South Staples, Corpus Christi,
Texas 78401, October-November 1989.

Association For Asian Studies, Southeast Conference, Hilton Head
South Carolina, Jan 15, 1992

Furman Univrsity, Roe Art Building, Greenville,
South Carolina, 2/1/92-3/1/92

Lincoln Cultural Center, Lincolnton,
North Carolina, 03/94-04/94

Mansfield Freeman Center For Eastern Asian Studies Gallery
Wesleyan University, Middletown, Ct 10/17/96 -12/08/98

PUBLICATIONS

Kemp, James. "Taoist Talismans And The Cult Of Yu Ying Kung."
Forthcoming In As Yet Untitled Book Of Chinese Folk Religion To Be Published In
Malaysia. Hock-Teung Cheu, Ed.

Kemp, James. An Analysis And Description Of The Major Categories Of Symbolism Employed In
The Taoist Talismans Of Taiwan Province, China. M.A. Thesis, Florida State University,
1979.

Pas, Julian And Kemp, James. As Yet Untitled Work On The Symbolism Of Chinese Talismans,
Forthcoming.

Kemp, James. "Taoist Resources," Volume I, No.2 (Winter 1989). Cover Illustration, The Jade
Maiden Talisman.

QUOTED IN PUBLICATIONS BY OTHERS

Pas, Julian. The Chinese Folk Religion and Folk Culture. University of Saskatchewan, 1986. Chapter 13, pp. 9-13 passim.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Born: June 29, 1947. Jacksonville, Florida

Nathan Bedford Forrest High School, 1960-1965

United States Navy, 1966-1969 Honorable Discharge

Florida Junior College, 1970-1971, A.A. (History)

Florida State University, 1971-1973, B.A. (Asian Studies)

Foreign Study, Taipei, Taiwan, 1973-1977

Florida State University, 1978-1979, M.A. (East Asian Studies)

EMPLOYMENT

Medical Disability Specialist, Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services. State of Florida, 1981 to present.

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

Association for the Study of Chinese Religions

Association for the Study of Japanese Religions

Independent Scholars of Asia

The Association for Asian Studies

INTERESTS

First Degree Black Belt, Cuong Nhu Oriental Martial Arts



THE JAMES KEMP COLLECTION

TALISMANS OF THE
FAR EAST
China

CHINESE ICONOGRAPHIC TALISMANS AS FOLK ART

Paper talismans, both printed and hand brushed, have a long, varied, and popular use in China. Like many religious traditions of Taoism, the first use of talismans is traditionally credited to Chang Tao Ling (A.D. 34-156) of the Han dynasty. From Chang Tao Ling to the present the use of talismans have been a conspicuous feature of Chinese folk religion, Taoism, and Buddhism alike. Talismans, like many other forms of magic practice, are directed toward mundane concerns: to acquire good harvests, rain, wealth, good fortune, military and civil success, familial harmony, etc. Or, they were used to repel the noxious; pestilence and illness, ghosts, monsters, wild animals, robbers, etc. Originally talismans were obtained from Taoist, and later, Buddhist priests or other specialists in the occult. Eventually they became part and parcel of the temple cult. In fact, the making of talismans must have been a chief source of revenue for priests and temples alike. Chinese literature, history, and folk stories are replete with accounts of the purchase of talismans to deal with the baleful contact with ghosts and supernatural creatures of all sorts.

In the main, Taoist priests catered to individuals with acute specific problems which talismans can ameliorate. On the other hand, temples distribute talismans to the general public and are more concerned with chronic communal concerns: seasonable rains and fair winds, public safety, and familial harmony. In common with Taoist priests, talismans are a source of revenue to the temples through donations.

The talisman is the visible instrument whereby the powers of occult Taoist knowledge are harnessed to produced empirical profane results. The talisman pierces the cosmic plane at the interface of the sacred and profane to allow sacred power to reinforce the social order and subdue chaos. This flow of sacred power gives courage to man to operate in a cosmic and social milieu of sacred and profane uncertainty.

The Taoist priest, the temple authorities, and the users of talismans would be surprised to view talismans in other than a religious-magical context. However, the talisman can also be appreciated aesthetically as a rich source of folk art as well. With rare exceptions, talismans are produced by anonymous craftsmen who are naive, unpretentious, and direct in depicting the scenes of iconographic talismans. Iconographic talismans are filled with symbols of profane power: swords, spears, manacles, court regalia, armed deputies, etc., which convey raw physical and even brutal expressions of power. This should not be surprising considering the defendants of these divine court scenes have considerable monstrous and demonic powers.

The designer of talismans has a rich lexicon to draw upon for his needs: court and

military symbolism, Taoist and Buddhist symbolism, as well as the full legacy of Chinese decorative art. The audience is not likely to require hair splitting pedantic nuance of style and technique. Perspective, never a great concern of Chinese artists, is not crucial. Colors are rich and bold; black on bright yellow or red are most common. Lines are bold, direct and minimal. Exceptions are found in ornate calligraphy, but in general it is clear standard script. The court scenes are stiff and formally posed with little attempt to soften the tension and high drama. From these courts, there is a scarce hope for appeal from the lawless. These scenes probably reflect the public collective experience with the profane legal systems of their day. In that respect, they are a small slice of times past frozen on paper and a rich source of cultural knowledge of not only Chinese folk religion but also a broad array of the Chinese folk experience in traditional times mixing the sacred and the profane.

In spite of their austerity of expression, iconographic talismans do have a naive quaintness and charm that falls well short of the grotesque. Even though they are formally posed, the iconographic talismans invite close scrutiny of the curious for a longer look. Aesthetically, once one is aware of the powerful symbolism employed by the artist, one can appreciate the dynamic energy and strength of these talismans.

The use of talismans by contemporary Chinese is the continuation and culmination of Confucian morality and ethics, with Buddhist and Taoist occult practices fused together in a visible sacred object for the faithful. By understanding the rich lexicon of symbols, one is able to penetrate the surface meaning of talismans to see how sacred power is harnessed to stabilize the profane world and give courage to the faithful to operate in a world of uncertainty.



C6

Bodhidharma, the son of an Indian prince, arrived in China in 520 A.D. He is the first patriarch of Chinese Buddhism and founder of the Chan or Zen school of Buddhism. He is also the founder of open hand combat systems (karate/kung-fu), which he taught the monks of Shao-lin Temple for both protection and meditative exercise. His legend states he crossed the swollen Yangtze river on a twig. He was buried and seen after death barefoot, carrying a single sandal. His tomb was opened and inside his coffin was found a single sandal. In this rubbing he is seen crossing Yangtze River with his sandal swinging from his staff.



C7

The Kuei star, depicted on this rubbing, serves in the divine bureaucracy as the God of Literature. Kuei is a star in the Big Dipper Constellation. According to Chinese mythology, when the Kuei star kicks the Dipper, it indicated someone will be blessed for passing the civil service examination. In the rubbing, the characters are depicted pictographically as a ghost, including a head, a skeleton, and feet. On the right, the ghost is using his left foot to kick the Dipper. The right foot stands on two characters representing a four-letter idiom *tu chuan ao t'ou*, which means to pass the civil service examination with the highest score.



C9

This is an iconographic talisman of the Cheng Huang or "City God." The Imperial bureaucracy so enamored the Chinese mind that the gods themselves were arranged in mirror fashion. City Gods derive their power and authority from the Jade Emperor, the heavenly counterpart of the mortal ruler of China's imperial past. The realm of the City God so resembles that of the living that they are depicted in official robes, regalia, secretaries, constables, and beadles. From the no-nonsense look of the court, the infernal violators of the law will find the judge stern, the law enforced, and the punishment swift. The City Gods are ranked according to the size of the locale with the promise of promotion for correct behavior; however, they could be demoted or exiled for misfeasance of office.



C10

C 9-10

These talismans of the Cheng Huang or "City God." The Imperial bureaucracy so enamored the Chinese mind that the gods themselves were arranged in mirror fashion. City Gods derive their power and authority from the Jade Emperor, the heavenly counterpart of the mortal ruler of China's imperial past the realm of the City God so resembles that of the living that they are depicted in official robes, regalia, secretaries, constables, and beadles. From the no-nonsense look of the court, the infernal violators of the law will find the judge stern, the law enforced, and the punishment swift. The City Gods are ranked according to the size of the locale with the promise of promotion for correct behavior; however, they could be demoted or exiled for misfeasance of office.



C12

C11-12

These are talismans of the Goddess Matsu. Matsu is the patron deity of Taiwan and protectress of all those who sail the sea. Her temples in Taiwan, while not the most numerous, are surely the most splendid. She was born 960 A.D. in Fukien province, the ancestral home of most Taiwanese. Following her early death a temple was built in honor and her fame flowed endlessly. In 1409 she was raised to the rank of "Imperial Concubine" who protects the country, shelters the people, and saves universally by her great kindness. Attending her general thousand mile eyes and general Fairwing Ear who see and hear all in distress. The red talisman is from Matsu's most famous temple a Peikang, where several hundred Thousand people attend her birthday celebration annually.



C15

TALISMAN OF THE WHITE DRAGON NUNNERY

This talisman has four coiling dragons on its side panels. The dragon is one of the oldest symbols in China. It was considered the King of the animals and the symbol of royalty and greatness. The centermost bold brush marks are of a mystic script, possibly by the hand of a spirit medium while in a trance. This lends the talisman an even more occult air of magic. The message is not for the living, but the dead.

廣 蘭
宮 女 玉



C16

TALISMANS OF THE JADE MAIDEN

After having a miraculous birth and childhood, when the Jade Maiden was sixteen there was a drought in northern Taiwan. The local magistrate received a divine revelation telling him to ask the Jade Maiden to pray for rain. He secretly searched for her and then asked her to pray for rain. As expected, the rains fell far and wide. On May 15, 1837, the Jade Maiden prepared fragrant soup and purified herself by abstinence and ritual bathing, burnt incense, sat peacefully, and then soared to heaven.

Her robes and dress are like a Ching Dynasty bridal costume. Her hairpin is a miniature sistrum used by Buddhist monks to resist and counterattack the host of demons always at hand to injure humans. The fly-whisk in her right hand, called a "Cloud Sweeper," is the Taoist symbol of ability to fly at will and walk the clouds of heaven. The double-chambered gourd in her left hand is said to contain a miniature mountain paradise into which the soul can wander in a state of bliss. Folk tradition has said that evil spirits can be captured and trapped inside as well. Its presence serves as a "scarecrow" to frighten off undesirable forces.



C18

This talisman from the temple of the Golden Mother of the Jasper Pool, employs a rich variety of ornate talismanic calligraphy, symbols, and orders for the protective deities of the Six Ting Heavenly Soldiers and Six Chia Powerful Knights to protect the household and banish ghost and calamities.



C22

TU TI KUNG, THE LOCAL EARTH GOD

The numbers of shrines to this deity in urban and rural areas of Taiwan are truly uncountable. He is the lowest level official of the divine bureaucracy. To him are reported all local birth, deaths, and marriages. He is also the god of abundance in farming and the god of fertility in the fields. He is expected to provide abundant rain and prevent disastrous flooding. According to Chinese tradition, Tu Ti Kung loves his people and he desires to see them happy.

“He makes the land fertile and rich, he watches over his people and protects them from harm. He is the god of the earth, worshipped by those who live off the land. But beware when he is angered, for he is the Tu Ti Kung.”



C23

KUAN KUNG, GOD OF MARTIAL VIRTUE

The legends of Kuan Kung are collected in the novel, Romance of the Three Kingdoms. The numbers of folk stories and operas associated with this deity are very numerous. He is revered for not only his chivalrous valor and loyalty, but also for mastery of the classics. In this talisman he is shown holding the open copy of Tso's Commentary on the Annals, which he had memorized. He is shown with his comrade-in-arms and blood-brother Chang Fei as arms bearer and his adopted son Kuan Ping. The sword of the public executioner was kept in Kuan Kung's Temple. Following an execution, the magistrate would stop there to worship. The ghost of the criminal would not dare to enter.



C24

SHEN NUNG, GOD OF AGRICULTURE

Shen Nung is a deity of China's archaic past. He reigned during the third millennium B.C. He is credited with inventing the plow and teaching agricultural methods to his people. Because of his knowledge of the curative properties of plants, he is also the patron of pharmacists. His cult was so important, the emperor personally participated in its rites. In this talisman he is holding a stalk of grain. His primitive character is emphasized by his cleft head and leafy dress. He is seated upon a rock outcropping as his throne. Above him are spread the stylized wings of a bat symbolic of good luck. Although he is shown as "primitive," he is not savage, nor threateningly violent.



C25

MATSU, MA TOU HSUAN T' IEN TEMPLE

This talisman is a fine example of a folk art print executed with bold lines and drama. Matsu is shown serene and attentive while her Ladies in Waiting fan her with "Fans of the Clouds of Good Fortune and Fragrant Silk." Her two ever-present retainers are below to hear or see those in peril. The Third Prince is shown directly beneath Matsu. He is not a formal member of her retinue, but may be considered a "guest". Taiwanese folk religion is extremely syncretic and temples may include Taoist, Buddhist, Confucian, and historical heroes freely mixed together.

松山靈源寺
濟公禪師

國泰民安



風調雨順



C26

CHI KUNG, BUDDHIST PRIEST

Chi Kung entered the priesthood at the age of twenty-one and became well versed in the doctrines of Buddhist. He was fond of wine and broke the rules of priesthood. He was famed for his supernatural powers in deciding lawsuits, curing sickness, and vanquishing demons. One legend has him coercing the powerful Six Chia Spirits of exorcism to help in rebuilding a temple destroyed by fire. In this talisman he is shown in meditation, but he seems to have an impish grin barely suppressed. The talisman invokes the spell Om Mani Padme Hum to cause the "Winds be harmonious, the rains favorable. The nation be at peace and the people tranquil." And, "Men acquire a hundred blessings. Women receive a thousand fold happiness."



C27

HAI YIN KU TEMPLE, BUDDHIST TALISMAN

Hai Yin Ku Temple, located on the island of Ken Men, Fukien Province, is very close to the China mainland. It has become a fortress island, "A Dagger Aimed at the Throat of the Communist," under the National government. This talisman is printed on crude, rough paper, but the execution of the design is quite clear. The circle has a protecting Buddhist mantra nested upon a lotus throne, symbolic of purity and the Buddhist nature. Within the petals is a half seed pod representing fertility. On either side of the petals are the four characters wishing the "Entire Family — Peace and Safety." The swastikas are emblems of Buddha.



C28

CHING SUI TSU SHIH, BUDDHIST PRIEST

This deified priest is the guardian and patron deity of the immigrants to Taiwan from the Chuan Chou prefecture of Fukien Province. The looped decorations on his lower robes are the "mystic knot" symbolic of long life. Just above them are the head of two dragons. His crown is of Tibetan Buddhist origin and is worn by Buddhist priests in services for the dead. Hung from the chains around his neck are chin p'ai (gold medallions) which are given to a god as thanks for assistance. The incense burner in the lower portion has its smoke disappearing into the folds of the deity's robes, lending a feeling that the deity has appeared out of the smoke.



C29

SAN T'AI TZE, THE THIRD PRINCE

This deity's name is Li No Cha. According to Taiwanese folklore, he is the favored general before the Jade Emperor who made him Commander of the Five Battalions of the Celestial Generals and Soldiers for the North, South, East, West and Center. The Third Prince is always shown with his lance menacing overhead, wielding his magic bracelet, and walking upon two magic wheels of fire. Because of his youth, his sword bearer and seal keeper are but children, which is shown by their tufted hair style. The Third Prince is associated with many cults of exorcists in Taiwan and is a favored deity for these rights.

DIMENSIONS OF EXHIBITION PRINTS

CHINESE PRINTS

NO.	PRINT	SIZE
C1	Door Ensemblage (Five Frames Total)	
	Main Panel * Three Yellow Prints	3-15/16 x 13-5/8
	* Four Black and Green	7-3/4 x 16-1/2
	Side Panel (Two)	4-1/8 X 31 Each
	Door Gods (Two)	10-1/2 x 13-1/4 Each
C2	Eighteen Kings Talismans	3-5/8 x 12-3/8
C3	Talismans of Chang Tao Ling (Gold Talisman)	13-1/2 x 31-3/8
C4	Chang on Tiger (Black and White)	12x25-1/2
C5	Chang on Tiger (Black and Yellow)	10-1/2 x 20-1/4
C6	Zen Priest Bodhidharma Rubbing	21 x 47
C7	Kuei Star Rubbing	23-1/2 x 53
C8	Round Taoist Talisman	7-1/2 Diameter
C9	City God Talismans	
	City God With Horse and OX Dieties	9-1/2 x 12-3/4
C10	City God with Tiger	7-3/8 x 13-7/8
C11	Matsu Talismans	9 x 13-3/8
	(Red Paper, Two Talismans)	1-3/4 x 9-3/8
C12	Matsu Talisman (White Paper)	6-1/8 x 13-1/2
C13	Orange Talisman	4-3/4 x 12-5/8
C14	Set of Seven Talismans of the Big Dipper Constellation	2-1/8 x 6-1/8 Each
C15	Talismans of White Dragon Nunnery	4-5/16 x 9-3/4
C16	Jade Maiden Talisman	6-3/4 x 11-1/4
C17	Ghost Money and Offerings	Various
	(Large Silver)	
	(Small Silver)	
	(Clothing)	10-11/16 x 10-1/8

C18	Talisman of the Golden Mother of the Jasper Pool	6 5/8 x 14-7/8
C19	Horse and Armor Offering (Three Prints)	4-7/8 x 2-5/16 Each
C20	Five Ghosts, Heavenly Dog, White Tiger Exorcism Surrogates (White Tiger) Various (Heavenly Dog) (Five Ghosts)	16-1/16 x 12-1/16
C21	Gold Paper Money Offerings Various (Four Prints)	5-7/8 x 25
C22	Local Earth God	5-1/2 x 9-1/2
C23	Kuan Kung	6-3/4 x 10-1/4
C24	God of Agriculture	5-1/2 x 9-1/2
C25	Matsu	8-1/4 x 12
C26	Chi Kung Patriarch	4-1/2 x 10
C27	Hai Ing Temple Talisman	5-3/4 x 7-7/8
C28	Ching Sui Patriarch	7-1/4 x 10-1/8
C29	Third Prince	6-7/8 x 9-3/4
C30	Kuei Star Rubbing	18-1/2 x 37
C31	Plague Gods (Six Talismans)	Various
C32	Liu T'ien Ting (Three Talismans)	Various
C33	You Ing Kung (Seven Talismans)	Various
C34	Kuan Yin Bodhisattva (Four Talismans)	Various



THE JAMES KEMP COLLECTION

TALISMANS OF THE
FAR EAST

Japan

THE TALISMIC TRADITION IN JAPAN

552 A.D. is the traditional date of the introduction of Buddhism to Japan from the Korean Kingdom of Paekche. A half century later another Paekche Buddhist priest arrived with Buddhist materials as well as books on calendar-making, astronomy, geography, invisibility and magic—a whole library of Taoist lore. Initially, both Taoism and Buddhism were the exclusive possession of the literate court elites. As embassies traveled from Korea to Japan and Japan to Korea and China, more and more Chinese materials were acquired in Japan. By the 8th century, a Ying-Yang Bureau was established at the Japanese court. Over time both Buddhist and Taoist lore and techniques of exorcism, divination, and occult practices diffused to the lower classes to be absorbed by the peasantry in the folk religion.

Broadly speaking Japanese supernatural creatures can be found in six classes: (1) ghosts of resentful and envious humans; (2) nature spirits that enter humans or animals; (3) the spirits of inanimate nature, trees, rocks, etc.; (4) man-made items that walk and talk, tools, pots, etc.; (5) natural phenomena, fire, air, and water spirits; (6) subhuman or half human offspring of sexual unions by gods, demons, or other supernatural beings; (7) were-animals, like fox and badger spirits that take human form. But the most feared was a subclass of category one: the female ghosts of cheated wives or lovers. They are described as “unrelenting as the blade of a steel sword.” A deceased wife with a grudge can return to haunt the living and drive them to suicide or murder. In contemporary Japan, many people still believe all sorts of calamities are due to an offense or contact with the supernatural.

Modern Japanese talismans can be broadly classified as follows: (1) traffic safety; (2) avoidance of evil; (3) opening luck; (4) passing examinations; (5) prosperity in business; (6) help in finding a mate and marriage; (7) safe pregnancy and childbirth. Many other kinds could be added, but these types are the most sought after. In fact, talismans are so popular they cannot be made quickly enough at some popular temples, and they are rationed at times. This demand had created a shift from small hand-crafted wood block printed paper talismans to mass produced ones, as well as some made from plastic with adhesive backs.

Traditionally, Japanese wood block printed talismans were made by anonymous craftsmen who were interested in producing a well-crafted product and not concerned with seeking expression of individual genius. However humble their origins, Japanese talismans express directness, vitality, rugged strength, vigor of life, spontaneity of style, archaic simplicity, and can be strikingly dramatic. By and large, they are not objects of veneration or contemplation, but a kind of religious technology harnessed to protect and reinforce social order and harmony.

Japanese religion has been preoccupied from its earliest origins with this worldly concern and finding methods of ways to share this world with man, nature, and supernatural beings. Because talismans fill this concern so completely, they have existed from early times to the present. In fact, the use of talismans has shown an upsurge of use in the past 20 years as Japan has seen enormous growth in its economic

strength and world importance. One might well expect with the very great advancements in sophisticated technology that they would completely disappear from the Japanese religious scene. A primary reason for their continuance must be the assurance they provide people to withstand moral and psychological uncertainties and anxieties in times of rapid social, political, and economic changes. The more sublime aspects of religion may offer release from woe and suffering in an afterlife, but talismans give hope and promise in this life.



Jl

These two oni or ghosts, encircled and bound by the sacred rope, are the terrors of the night that all of the talismans are directed to repel. Japanese ghosts are usually amoral, bent on mischief or revenge. All social and personal crises, such as civil wars, epidemics, droughts, earthquakes, difficult childbirth, and deaths, were believed to be the result of the vengeance of the angry spirits of the dead. Vicious, filled with spite, it is the most alien of beings. The Japanese ghost is all passion and truly frightening. The ghosts of resentful frustrated women were the most dangerous. Horrible to behold, these female spirits were both malicious and revengeful, with and without reason. Nothing could placate them except the death of an unfaithful lover or husband, and often a current mistress of the man suffered as well. The two oni in this print are thought to each drink like human beings, have devilish tempers, and gigantic size. Oni are dumb, lecherous, malicious, and cruel: in fact, there are no saving graces in oni. However, they can become the servants of man if they are bettered in a contest.

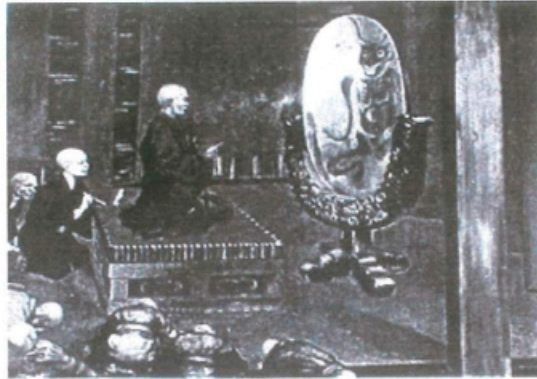
RYOGEN



Commonly known as Jikei Daishi 慈恵大師; Great Master Jikei. His posthumous name is Ryogen 良源 (912-85). He was abbot at Mt. Hiei 比叡, and reformer of the Tendai 天台 Sect. He was also known by the names Gansan Daishi 元三大師, Tsuno Daishi 角大師, and Miryou Daishi 御廟大師. He entered the Tendai headquarters at age twelve. He became abbot in 966 and spent the next nineteen years overseeing the rebuilding and expansion of the temple complex. It was under his able and inspired leadership, the Tendai sect reached the apogee of its political and historical ascendancy. Ryogen proved to be a brilliant administrator, a talented scholar, and a successful politician. The Tendai school developed the tradition of brilliant Buddhist scholarship, for which it is still noted today. Tendai Buddhism became the de facto religion of the Imperial court. Ryōgen's thinking was grounded firmly in the idea of the unity of exoteric and esoteric Buddhist teachings.

In 970 Ryogen established a standing army of *sōhei* (warrior monks), first to settle a dispute with the Gion Shinto Shrine and then as a force to be called upon whenever the Tendai schools interests were compromised. He also reinforced monastic rules and the tradition of scholarship. Ryogen's prayers for the recovery of Emperor Enyu 円融 (959-91) proved effective. Therefore, he was granted the title of daishi or "Great Master".

In later period hagiographies he was described as one of the Eight Dragon Kings and a reincarnation of Myoo Fudo and Kannon Bodhisattva. This combination of Buddhist imagery allowed Ryogen to be seen to possess both subjugating vengeful ghosts with the compassion of Kannon. His talisman prints depict variously his demon conquering side, the thirty three manifested bodies of Kannon, and as a Patriarch of Tendai Buddhism.



RYOGEN'S DEMON IMAGE IN THE MIRROR

In 984 AD, when Ryogen was 73 years old, while he was in his chamber doing meditation, suddenly there was a gust of wind accompanied by a mysterious feeling and he asked, "Who are you?" "I'm the evil god who administers the plague. I've come to invade your body," was the answer. "So I am speaking with the god of the plague? OK, I'd like you to possess me just a little bit, right here," replied Ryogen, extending forth his little finger. As soon as the evil god touched the tip of Ryogen's little finger, a chill ran throughout his entire body, quickly developed into a fever, and he was attacked with excruciating pain, Ryogen became a YAKSHA (Demon), he flicked his finger expelling the evil god, and his pain was healed. He then thought, "if it had entered into several fingers, who knows how much pain there would be. If the evil god should invade the body of one of the citizens, there would be no escape. This is truly a sorrowful situation."

Feeling great distress in his heart, the next morning Ryogen gathered his disciples and said, "whatever image you see reflected in the mirror, please make a sketch of it for me," and facing the mirror he entered into meditation. Ryogen's form as reflected in the mirror slowly transformed, soon becoming an ogre covered with bones. The disciples, overcome with surprise and fear, could only prostrate themselves. Only one disciple, was able to draw the strange image on the mirror. Coming out of meditation and seeing the sketch, Ryogen seemed to be completely satisfied and nodded approval, adding "Using this original drawing, you should carve a woodblock and print up talismans. In places where this talisman is pasted, the evil demons will not enter. Furthermore, disasters will be repelled." The effect was magical.

That is how the folk custom of pasting the talisman, known as "Horned Great Teacher," on talismans came into being.



上野公園
慈眼堂

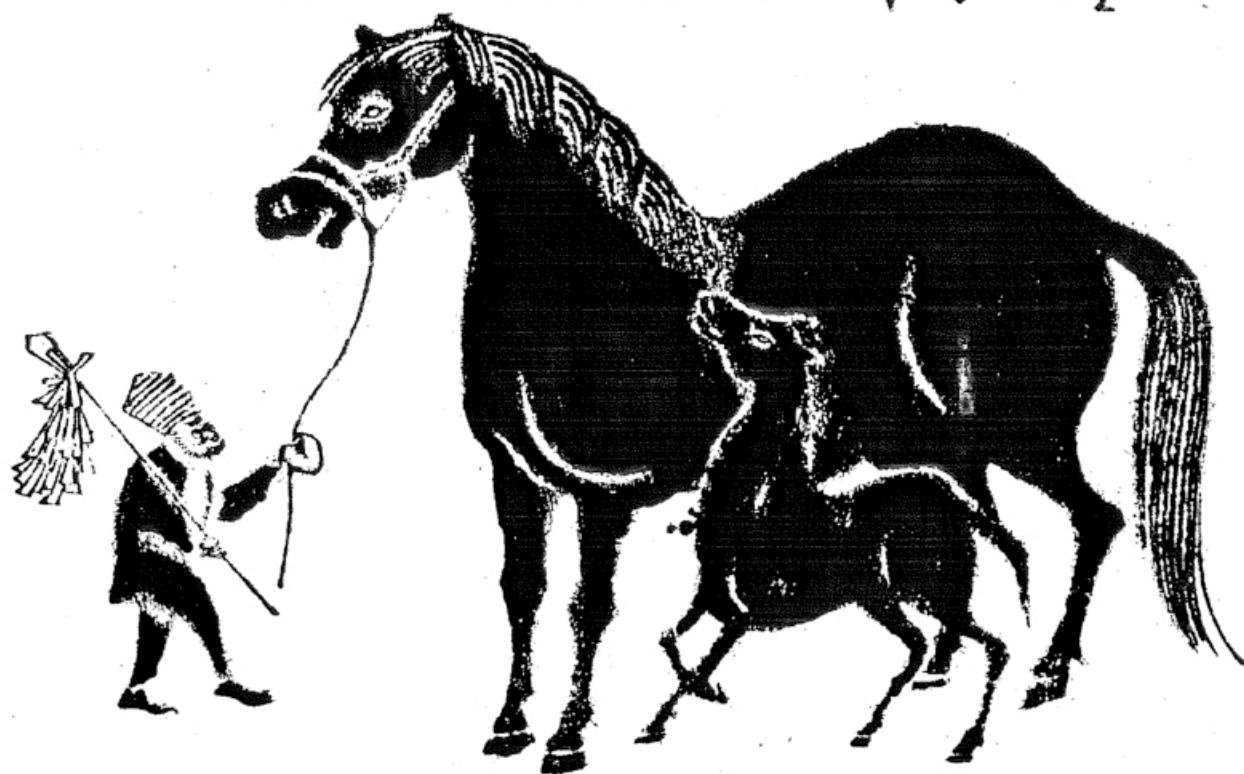


上野公園
慈眼堂

12

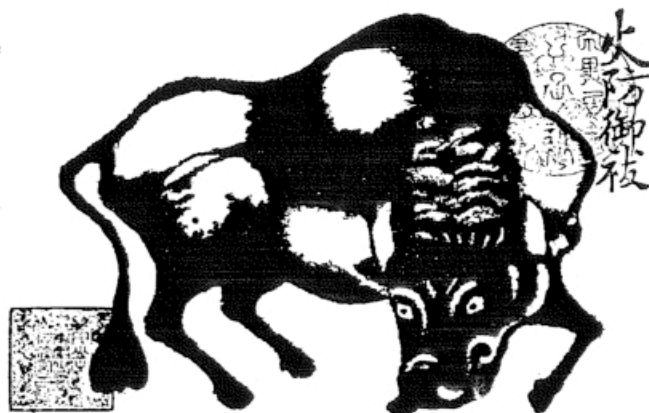
These talismans depict the Japanese Buddhist priest Ryogen (912-985 A.D.). At times the soul of a revered priest becomes a demon to protect his followers by dispelling disasters. He promised to reappear as a demon to protect the temple he founded. In Japan today there still exists a popular belief that this talisman, in the shape of a demon with horns or 33 small images of him with an extended left eyebrow, will guard against diseases or misfortune.

伊奈川馬頭觀世音



J3

Strictly speaking, this print, although religious is not a talisman. It is an ema or votive offering to a god to ask for a favor. In ancient times a monkey was kept in the Imperial stables to keep horses in good temper. The legend says that on New Year's Day the monkeys transform into Shinto priest and give divine honor to their companions. The monkey is holding a gohei, a divine wand through which a God may enter a medium. The monkey is wearing a Sambasso headdress, further showing his divine qualities. A black horse ema was traditionally offered for rain.



天 下 泰 平 五 穀 成 就
無 災 禍 樂 與 災

青
岸
渡
寺

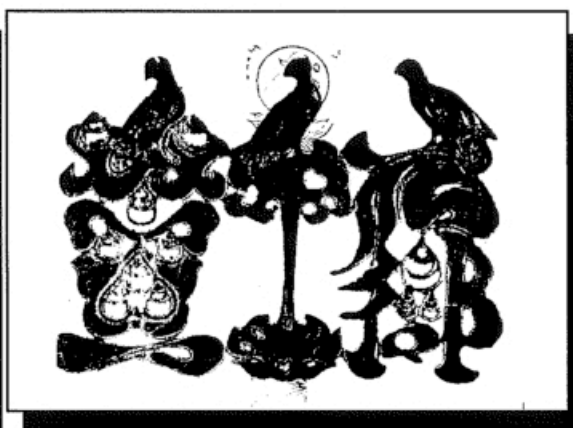


熊
野
那
智
山

J4,5,6

JAPANESE BULL TALISMANS

These two menacing bull are talismans for fire protection: a constant need for farmers living in the highly combustible straw and bamboo houses. The reads seals are the official temple seals from the talismans came No talisman is truly effective without its temple seal of authority. The third bull, with bundles of rice on its back, is an exhortation for the harvest to be bountiful and "All Under Heaven" to be peaceful and without disasters.



17,8,9,10

JAPANESE CATTLE TALISMANS

These four cattle protection talismans employ very ornate calligraphy with bird and butterfly motif. The protection of cattle was a prime worry of the farmer who depended upon his bull or oxen for the heavier work of plowing or hauling. It was probably his greatest capital investment beyond the price of his land. On the talismans one can see the ornate read temple seals of authority.



112

KANZAN

This is a talisman of the Buddhist Zen sect, Myoshinjiha, whose founder was Kanzan (1277-1360). This sect is the largest Zen group in Japan. Kanzan is shown seated on a Chinese style armchair holding a stick used to discipline monks during meditation. Behind him over his right shoulder are his staff and fly whisk. By touching the head of a disciple with the whisk he symbolically repels any obstacle to enlightenment. Above Kanzan is a floating ornamental shade peaked with a flaming jewel, or Nyo-i shu, which grants all wishes.



114

SHOKI

This is a talisman of Chung Kuei or Shoki (Jp.), the "Demon Queller." "Feverishly ill, the Chinese emperor Ming Huang dreamed a strange man fought the fever demon that was plaguing him and drove it away. Still dreaming, the emperor asked who he was. He stated he was an older student who committed suicide because of shame in failing the imperial examinations. The previous emperor gave him an honorable burial; in gratitude he promised to use his immortal energies to rid all demons from China." In this print Shoki is shown in Chinese martial garb grasping a demon to the sword. Shoki is one of the few Chinese deities that have been absorbed into Japanese folk religion, although scores of Buddhist deities have been Incorporated.



J15

SANMEN DIAKOKU

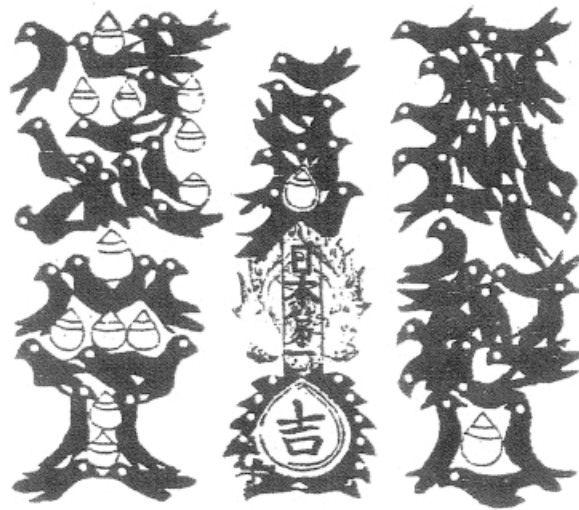
This is Sanmen Daikoku, one of the seven Gods of Luck. He is shown with three faces, seated upon two bales of rice. The bow and arrow are Buddhist weapons against evil. Above the bow he is holding vajra, symbolizing the Law, unshakable and indestructible. In his center right hand is his magic mallet. If struck with it one receives luck and wealth. His upper right hand holds the sacred key to the warehouse of the gods.



J16

KANNON

This is a talisman of the Buddhist bodhisattva Kannon (Jp.) or Kuan Yin (Ch.), "The fearless Bodhisattva of Great Compassion." Kannon was about to enter Nirvana when there was a great cry of lament from all beings, so Kannon renounced final release until all others are saved. Kannon will save anyone who ask for help and is the supreme master of skillful means who can assume any form, male or female. Kannon's most familiar form is the feminine, and she is the goddess prayed to for children. In Kannon's left hand is the lotus symbolizing purity and perfection. The lotus motif is repeated in the red temple seal and the lotus pedestal upon which Kannon stands. This triple use of the lotus is an iconic reminder of Kannon's other Indian name, Padmi-pani, meaning "Lotus Borne."



The Talisman of Kumano Goo

The characters of this talisman are written in the form of crows representing very stylized Sanskrit letters. The Crow was considered to be the messenger of the deities of the Kumano Three Grand Shrines. . It is believed at the time of legendary Emperor Jinmu's (711-585 BCE) Eastern expedition, a large divine eight-span crow guided him to victory.

This talisman is a signification of a promise between the deities of Kumano and human beings, and also between people themselves. According to legend, if someone broke their promise one crow would die at one of the Kumano Grand Shrines. This Talisman was given to pilgrims who came to Kumano and was also distributed throughout Japan by the Kumano missionary nuns. Fans painted with drawings of crows are distributed by some temples to the worshipers with the belief that waving the fans at the fields prevents insects from attacking the crops.

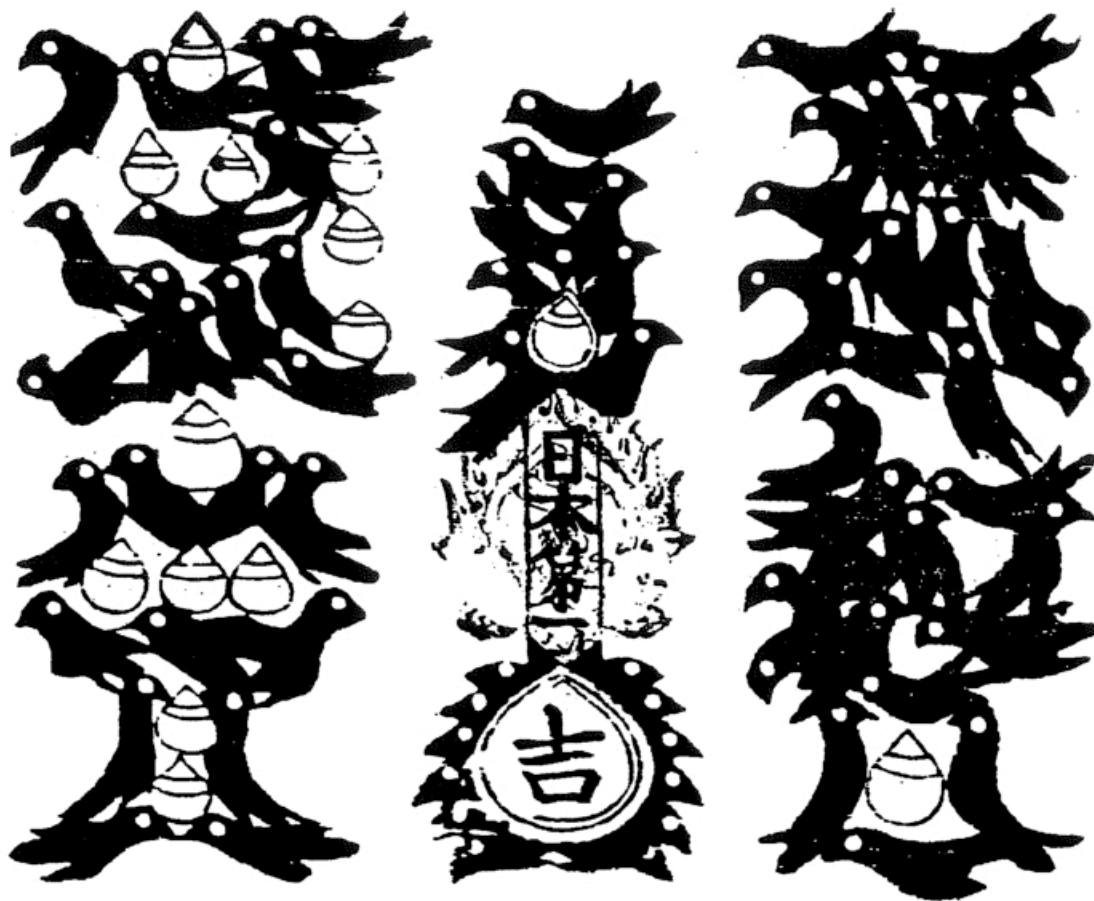


When people form an agreement over important matters, they draw up a written pledge to swear to the Shinto and Buddhist deities that they are not falsely representing the truth and will not violate the pledge. The oath lists the Shinto and Buddhist deities in which the pledging parties have faith and which states that, if the pledge is broken, the violating party will not object to being punished by the aforementioned deities. The oath is therefore a testament based on the authority of deities. From the end of the Kamakura period (ca 1333 CE), as means of expressing the firm will of the pledging parties. The oaths were written on the back surface of a paper talisman (*gofu* 護符) stamped with the "Goō Jewel Seal".



Jewel Seal 寶印

These talismans were issued by shrines and temples throughout Japan, but those of the "Three Shrines of Kumano" were used in the greatest number.



117

The "Kumano Goo" talisman has on its design crows, the sacred birds, which are believed to be messengers of the god Kumano Gongen. Thus, the talisman is also called "Revered Crows." The name "goo" may have been derived from the elixir of the same name, which is used in esoteric ceremonies, because the medicine has been used in printing the talisman. Such talismans have been used throughout Japan for personal pledges since 1568 A.D.

盜難除



J20

JAPANESE GUARDIAN FIGURE

Of the many guardians and deities of the order and nature in this exhibition, none appear to be so bored and malcontent with his station as this hapless figure! It is very difficult to speculate on his thoughts other than to comment on his apparent displeasure and obvious boredom.



J21

FIVE KINGS OF LIGHT

These protectors of Buddhist law and faithful are surrounded by flames. They are caught in a moment of estatic and dynamic ferocity. They vanquish all evil and lend their great strength to resist temptation and overcome difficulties of religious austerities. They defend the center and four directions surrounding Buddhist lands and struggle against all wickedness.

DIMENSIONS OF EXHIBITION PRINTS
JAPANESE PRINTS

PRINT SIZE (INCHES)

J1 Two Oni	17 x 13
J2 Buddhist Priest Ryogen (Two Prints)	11-1/2 x 5-3/4
J3 Horse and Monkey	12-1/2 x 9
J4 Bull	9 x 6
J5 Bull	9 x 6
J6 Bull	9 x 6
J7 Dove and Butterfly	10-1/2 x 8-3/4
J8 "Turnip" Seal	11-1/2 x 9
J9 Center Flame Seal	12-1/2 x 8-1/2
J10 Flame Seal	12-5/8 x 9-3/8
J11 Nicheren Sect Talisman	4-1/4 x 42-1/2
J12 Zen Priest Myoshiha	2-3/4 x 7
J13 Shugendo Founding Priest En-no-gyoga	4 x 8-7/8
J14 Shoki	4-5/8 x 10-3/8
J15 Sanmen Daikoku	6-1/8 x 9
J16 Boddhisatva Kannon	4-1/4 x 12
J17 Crows	10-1/4 x 8-1/2
J18 Buddhist and Shinto Talisman Pouches	2 x 3 Each
J19 Daruma Temple Six Talismans	Various
J20 Guardian Figure	6 x 12
J21 Five Diamond Kings	6-1/2 x 9



THE JAMES KEMP COLLECTION

TALISMANS OF THE
FAR EAST

Korea

THE TALISMIC TRADITION IN KOREA

The cultural, political, and military contact between China and Korea can be traced through written records for more than two millennia. Certainly contact must have preceded the surviving records by another millennium. Chinese influence in the use of Taoist art styles and iconography in Korean tombs can be archaeologically traced as early as the 2nd century A.D. Buddhism entered Korea from China and spread quickly and was recognized as the state religion in the three Korean kingdoms of Kouryo (372 A.D.), Paekche (384 A.D.), and Silla (528 A.D.).

In 624 A.D., the Korean King Yongryu sent an envoy to China requesting Taoist calendars, books, pictures, and other religious items. The Chinese Tang dynasty emperors responded to his request as well as sending Taoist priests to spread the faith.

The native religion of Korea, shamanism, can be traced in Korea through archaeological remains as far back as 10,000 B.C. Shamanism was most adaptable to Chinese Taoism, and the two became fused in Taoist-Shamanism to become the common religion of the peasants. It also greatly influenced the literate ruling elite in matters of the occult, demons, and ghosts. The magical aspects of Buddhism, with regards to the dead and spirits, also was grafted to the Taoist-Shamanism of the lower classes. This fusion can clearly be seen on Talisman K6 which combines Korean Hangul script, Chinese characters, Sanskrit letters, Taoist talismans, and red cinnabar colored ink.

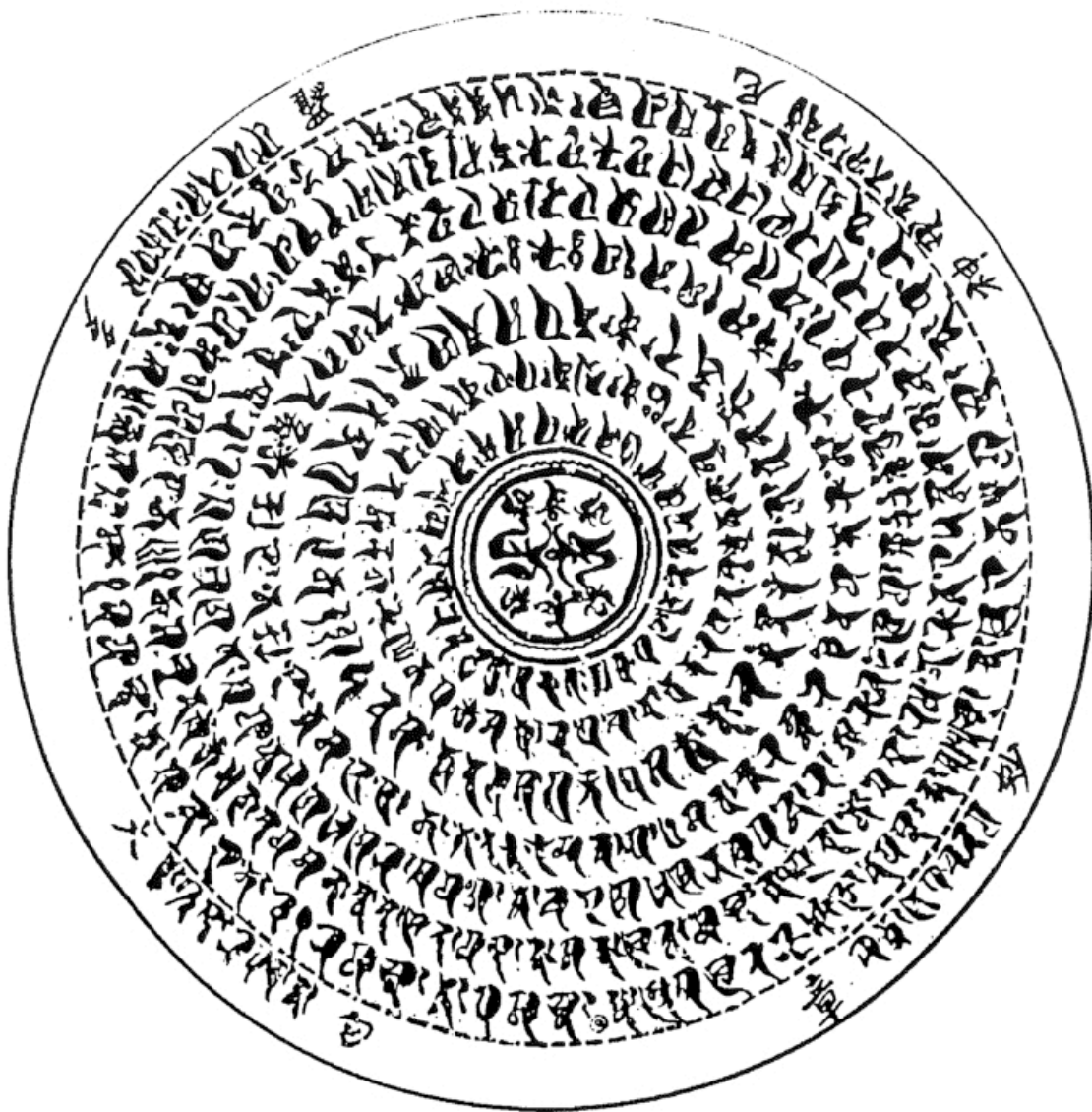
For the Korean peasantry, like their counterparts in China and Japan, religion was primarily for worldly gain and protection. Only the very few religious elite were directed towards the more sublime aspects of Buddhist and Taoist philosophy. Talismans were an effective and prudent protection of the faithful for all manner of baleful contact with ghosts, demons, and monsters of all types, as well as protection from natural disasters.

The Three Headed Falcon and Tiger talismans in this exhibition are truly representative of Korean folk religion and custom. They are artistically very bold with clean lines and full of vibrant tension. All the Korean talismans make full use of the cinnabar red ink for a strong impression and have a deeper symbolism of the color of blood and life.



K2

This Korean Buddhist talisman combines three very stylized Indian Sanskrit symbols, Chinese characters, native Korean script (Hangul), and Taoist talismanic symbols. This talisman invokes help from Amida Buddha, Kuan Yin Bodhisattva, and Ti Tsang Bodhisattva. The chanting of Amida's name is the magic passport which opens to all sinners the portals of heaven. Kuan Yin is the Goddess of Mercy. Ti Tsang is the ruler of the Buddhist hell. Therefore, this talisman is intended not only for assistance in this life, but after death as well.



K3

BUDDHIST DHARANI WHEEL TALISMANS

Dharani spells are secret initiatory language for the adepts of Tantric (magical) Buddhism. The uninitiated find dharanis unintelligible: their meaning does not belong to rational language that serves ordinary human experience. A dharani yields its esoteric meaning only when spoken in accordance to the rules of the ritual. When properly evoked, it does not stand for the deity. Dharanis are for the less advanced members of the community who are not interested in salvation, as much as, material prosperity in this life.



ROUND KOREAN TALISMAN OF GREAT COMPASSION DHARANI

Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva's Great Compassion Dharani, was spoken to before an assembly of Buddhas, bodhisattvas, devas and kings. It was translated in different versions by Buddhist Priests both Indian and Chinese, in the 6th, 7th, and 8th centuries from Indian Siddham script to Chinese. This talisman retains the original Indian Siddham script with only the name of the dharani in Chinese in the outermost ring. In part, the Great Compassion Dharani promises many temporal rewards, healing powers, and protections for its recitation.
(The following verses of the dharani are much edited.)

"If I go towards the mountain of knives, the mountain of knives of itself breaks up;
If I go towards the boiling oil, the boiling oil of itself dries up;
If I go towards the hells, the hells of themselves disappear;
If I go towards the hungry ghosts, the hungry ghosts of themselves become full.
If I go towards the Asuras, their evil thoughts of themselves are tamed.
If I go towards the animals, they themselves attain great wisdom.

Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva continued to say to the Buddha:
"People and gods who recite and hold the Great Compassionate Heart Dharani will obtain fifteen kinds of good birth and will not suffer fifteen kinds of bad death.
They will not die of starvation or poverty;
They will not die from having been yoked, imprisoned, caned or otherwise beaten;

They will not die at the hands of hostile enemies;
They will not be killed in military battle;
They will not be killed by tigers, wolves, or other fierce beasts;
They will not die from the venom of poisonous snakes, black serpents, or scorpions;

They will not drown or be burned to death;
They will not be poisoned to death;
They will not be killed by mediumistic insects;
They will not die of madness or insanity;
. They will not be killed by landslides or falling trees;
They will not die of nightmares sent by evil people;
They will not be killed by deviant spirits or evil ghosts;
They will not die of evil illnesses that bind the body;
They will not commit suicide;

Those who recite and hold the Great Compassion Holy Mantra will not suffer any of these fifteen kinds of bad death and will obtain the following fifteen kinds of good birth:

- . Their place of birth will always have a good king;
- . They will always be born in a good country;
They will always be born at a good time;
- . They will always meet virtuous friends;
- The organs of their body will always be complete;
- . Their hearts of Way(Bodhi) will be pure and mature;
They will not violate the prohibitive precepts;
All their relatives will be kind and harmonious;
- They will always have the necessary wealth and goods in abundance;
- They will always obtain the respect and help of others;
- . Their possessions will not be plundered;
- . They will obtain everything they seek;
- . Dragons, gods, and good spirits will always protect them;
- . In the place where they are born they will see the Buddha and hear the Dharma;
- . They will awaken to the profound meaning of that Proper Dharma which they hear.

When a woman is giving birth to a child,
evil demons comes to obstruct the birth and causing suffering and oppressive pain, recite the Great Compassion Dharani sincerely,
the demons will disperse, leaving a safe and comfortable birth;

If evil dragons or pestilence ghosts spread poison,
people are infected by pyrexia and about to die,
recite the Great Compassion Dharani sincerely,
diseases will be healed and lives of people will be lengthen;

If evil dragons or ghosts spread the tumescent diseases,
people suffer from carbuncles, sore, abscess, ulcer and bleeding,
recite the Great Compassion Dharani sincerely,
then spit three times to the abscesses and it will be cured."



K4

THE THREE-HEADED FALCON TALISMAN

The falcon is the guardian of the air. This falcon's three beaks will peck away samjae (a three-year period of disaster), thereby protecting you. Samjae is believed to be caused by three cosmic elements: wind, water, and fire. During every twelve-year period, every person has his or her period of samjae. The first year is entrance into ill fortune, the second is one of intense disaster, and the third is the withdrawal from samjae.



K6

In Korean folk art the tiger is an ambiguous creature combining elements of magical protection, terrifying ferocity, fearless resistance to oppressors, and sexual power. Talismans in which the tiger is perceived as a guardian spirit are the most important form in which the tiger appears in Korean art. The Korean tiger as a sacred deity and guardian lends itself naturally to the image of a maker of magic, possessing evil-repelling powers. The tiger talisman is considered a first choice for repelling the dreaded samjae, the three calamities of fire, flood, and storm afflicting one for a three-year period. Therefore, the tiger is shown with protruding fangs, glaring, bulging eyes, and body lines rippling and taut with the dynamic tension of magic strength to frighten away any assault by a ghost or demon.





K11

KOREAN MARTIAL TALISMAN

It is difficult to identify with any certainty this martial figure with certainty. In Korean folklore there are many such martial guardian generals for the protection of the household from ghosts and demons. The topmost outer designs are characters for OM. The first syllable end empowering sound for all Buddhist magic spells. Below these are Taoist talismans. The general appears to have his hands folded in prayer or veneration, while his sword is out of its scabbard but cradled in his arms.

DIMENSIONS OF EXHIBITION PRINTS
KOREAN PRINTS

PRINT SIZE (INCHES)

K1 Six Korean Talismans	2-7/8 x 4-5/16
K2 Korean Talisman with Sanscrit, Chinese and Korean Script	7-5/8 x 8-1/4
K3 Round Korean Buddhist Talisman	10" Diameter
K4 Korean Three-Headed Bird Talisman	4-3/4 x 7-1/4
K5 Korean Tiger	8 x 5-1/4
K6 Korean Tiger	13 x 24
K7 Korean Tiger	9 x 17
K8 Buddha, Kuan Yin, Amida Rubbing	16 x 24-1/2
K9 Three Round Dharani Prints	6" Diameter Each
K10 Eleven Taoist Prints	Various
K11 Divine General	9 x 8
K12 Five Prints Including Dragon and Tiger	4 x 5 Each
K13 Korean Three-Headed Bird	8 x 8
K14 Eighteen Calligraphic Talismans	4 x 5 Each



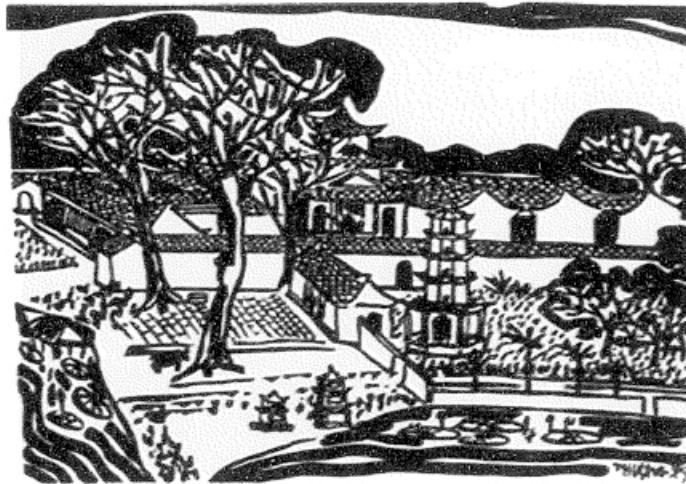
Talismans of But Thap Pagoda

Bac Ninh, Vietnam

福寧寺符

北寧省

越南國



寧福寺

BUT THAP PAGODA
BY PHAN CAM THUONG, 1999

Built on the dike south of the Duong River in Thuan Thanh District, Bac Ninh Province, But Thap (Pen Stupa) is one of the finest pagodas in the country's north and known as Vietnam's first Buddhist center. The pagoda was built under the dynasty of King Tran Thanh Tong (1258-1278) and rebuilt in 1647 in the Le Dynasty by Chinese Zen Buddhist priest Zhus Zhus, known as Chuyet Chuyet in Vietnamese.



Since 1984, Phan Cam Thuong, professor in the Hanoi College of Fine Arts' Department of the History of Art and Art Criticism, has co-authored several books about Vietnamese art history, as well as But Thap Pagoda. Like Vietnamese intellectuals before him, he practices calligraphy, paints, creates woodblock prints, and plays Chinese chess--the pursuits of a classical Asian scholar. Professor Phan was very instrumental in obtaining the Vietnamese prints for this exhibition.

Vietnamese Tantric Buddhist and Taoist Talismans From But Thap Pagoda, Bac Ninh, Vietnam



Tich Thian Am Pavillion containg the octogon nine story
revolving tower (1691).
But Thap Pagoda, 2011

Chua Ninn Phuo (寧福寺) is located in the epicenter of the introduction of Buddhism to Vietnam, a Chinese province before the 1st millenium.

“Chua But Thap ” is the more popular Vietnamese term in modern Vietnamese usage. “But Thap” in Vietnamese means Sky Brush and it refers to the shape of the pagoda top that contains the ashes of the Chinese monk Chuyet Chuyet.

The name “But Thap” was given by King Tu Duc in 1876 when, he saw the beautiful stone stupa shaped like a pen at this pagoda.



Built on the dike south of the Duong River in Thuan Thanh District, Bac Ninh Province, But Thap is one of the finest pagodas in the country's north and known as Vietnam's first Buddhist center. The pagoda was built under the Tran Dynasty 陳朝, King Tran Thanh Tong (1258-1278) and rebuilt in the Le Dynasty (陳朝), (1428 to 1788). It saw later restorations in 1739, 1903, 1915-1921, and most recently 1992-1996.

This long history of renovation is a testament to the importance of But Thap Pagoda in Vietnamese Buddhist history and popular affection of the Vietnamese people. But Thap is noted for not only its great preservation of its traditional Buddhist architecture, but also. its very high quality statuary. It includes bronze, wood, clay. And lacquer masterpieces of great cultural pride.



Amithaba, wood 18th century.
Placed in front of the Rotary Drum Tower.

“The Rotary tower is a Buddhist rite (from Mat Tong sect) of Tibetan origin. It is believed that upon completion of a rotary tower turn, peoples prayers will be increased 3,542,300 fold and the believer will thus move faster to Buddhist enlightenment.” (Pham Cam Thuong, pg 35. *But Thap.*)

But Thap Pogoda Woodblocks



James Kemp photographs by Larry Crider 2008

