

How to Eat Talisman for Rebirth in the Pure Land

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1. The Buddhist-related talismans of the early Joseon Dynasty

In general, a talisman is viewed only negatively in Korean Buddhism. Thus, we consider it as something a foolish person looks for and not as something to be approached through intellectual understanding. However, we observe that many people give it a religious or symbolic meaning and believe in it. For instance, the body at the Gyeongju Jeong Clan 慶州鄭氏 tomb, excavated from Geumneung-ri 金陸里, Paju 坡州, is of Jeong On 鄭溫 (1481–1538).¹⁾ To pray for rebirth in paradise for him, his family printed a bodhisattva statue, a flying apsaras statue, *chinōn* 眞言 (mantra), *Dhārani* scriptures and Buddhist talismans on the long skirt and jacket before burying him. These patterns, including the talisman, *Dhārani* scriptures, and the bodhisattva statue, are thought to have been set by his descendants' sincere desire to drive away all disasters and bring paradise to the deceased.

It is also thought to be a Buddhist ritual with a strong esoteric nature. This is because the Avalokiteshvara bodhisattva statue, the Six Letters Mantra, and various talismans printed on the clothing are considered as careful devices for the deceased person's life in Pure Land based on the mandala rite.

There are four types of patterns printed on the clothing. On the jacket, long skirt, and *yeomsup* 殮襲 (bathing and shrouding), whose purposes are unknown, various woodblock patterns are printed, including *Dhārani* scriptures. At the bottom of the back of the jacket, *Sildamja* 悉曇字 (Siddham Letters) is arranged and *tangsaengjōngt'obu* 當生淨土符 (Talisman of the Pure Land in the Next Life) is printed in the middle with cinnabar 朱砂.

This talisman means that one meets paradise in life up to the current moment, rather than going to paradise after death.²⁾ Moreover, on the prints that surround the inside of the coffin, the Avalokiteshvara bodhisattva statue, the flying apsaras statue, the Six Letters Mantra, the statues of three spirits and various talismans are arranged like the patterns on

the jacket. Their printing is relatively good compared to the clothing, and we can identify the donor, such as *Bogyeong* 普敬. Through the contents under the talisman, we can see it is a Buddhist talisman to pray that one escapes from all bad fortune 厄 such as *Samjae* 三災 (three calamities), avoid the interference of ghosts, and be born on the Pure Land by relying on the Buddha. The Siddham Letters and “Talisman of the Pure Land in the Next Life” are printed in ink, just like those on the bottom of the jacket.³⁾

The Buddhist-related talismans appearing on the clothing of the early Joseon Dynasty are products of Buddhist faith arising from the descendants' sincere desire for the deceased to live forever.

2. The Talisman for Rebirth in the Pure Land

Talismans can usually be divided into religious and non-religious according to their origin, form, and use. They can also be categorized into Buddha, bodhisattva, Heaven, gods, letters, mantras, and others or divided into the *Byöng-bu* 病符 (talisman for illness or disease), the *Mong-bu* 夢符 (talisman for dream), *Samjaebu* 三災符 (talisman for three calamities), and *Wangsaeng-bu* 往生符 (rebirth talisman)⁴⁾. How the *Talisman for Rebirth in the Pure Land* has developed and what role this talisman plays will be described below. In particular, the *Talisman for Rebirth in the Pure Land* has developed from *Jechinönjip* 諸眞言集 [manuals for Buddhist mantra and dharana, 1569], *Seunggailyong-jakbö* 僧家日用作法 [the *Buddhist Daily Ritual*, 1666] and *Bimilgyojip* 秘密教集 [*Collection of Secret Teaching*, 1869], and also appeared in *Pulcha p'illam* 佛子必覽 [*Essential compendium for Buddhists*, 1931] and *Söngmun üiböm* 釋門儀範 [*Buddhist rituals*, 1935].

With regard to this practice, the oral invocation of the Buddha Amitabha's name hoping to be saved by Tathāgata's Primal Vow, which relies on the faith of the other power, is a mainstream meditation practice. However, there are various ways to achieve the aspiration expressed differently since the devotional practice of chanting the Buddha Amitābha's name starts with the desire to meet the Buddha. Accordingly, there can be various ways of chanting the Buddha Amitābha's name, but all have a single aim: to experience tranquility in reality and to escape from the reincarnation of the afterlife.⁵⁾ However, unlike the religious practice in Buddhism, *Pulcha p'illam* 佛子必覽 and *Söngmun üiböm* 釋門儀範 show a bizarre ritual that does not fit into the Buddhist spiritual culture. In the case of the combustible paper talisman, burning, dissolving in water, and drinking it internalizes its

churyŏk 呪力 (spell power) and invokes its religious power. That is a reference to the act of eating a talisman made of cinnabar.

3. The Talisman for Rebirth in the Pure Land in Buddhist ritual texts

In other words, the procedure for imbibing the “*Talisman for Rebirth in the Pure Land*” appears as follows in *Sŏngmun ūibŏm* 釋門儀範⁶⁾.

On the first day of the first lunar month, the third day of the second lunar month, and the ninth day of the fifth lunar month, the community wholeheartedly recites “*Amit’abul* 阿彌陀佛” a thousand times and burns the *Talisman for Rebirth in the Pure Land* after chanting “om madari hum bataḥ” one hundred and eight times. It is said that if you mix the ash in a cup of tea-water and drink the water, *chilbo* 七寶 becomes realized in this world. Then, the reality of *Talisman for Rebirth in the Pure Land* appears, immediately followed by “*Samjang Yukjaeil* 三長六齋日 (the three months of abstinence and the six monthly precept day),” which refer to *samjangwol* 三長月 (three months of abstinence) and *yukjaeil* 六齋日 (six monthly precept day). The *Samjangwol* refer to the first, fifth, and ninth months of the lunar calendar⁷⁾, when *Jeseokcheon* 帝釋天, the crown prince, and the Four *Mahārājas* 四天王, patrol humans. The *Yukjaeil* refers to the eighth, fourteenth, fifteenth, twenty-third, twenty-ninth, and thirtieth days of the lunar month⁸⁾; these are the days when the Four *Mahārājas* and others visit the world to examine people’s good and bad deeds. On these days, killing is prohibited, and one takes caution in one’s actions and cultivates good deeds. However, the *Samjang Yukjaeil* of the *Sŏngmun ūibŏm* are the first and fifteenth days of the first, fifth, and ninth months of the lunar calendar. Moreover, at *myoshi* 卯時 (the hours of the rabbit from 5:00 am to 7:00 am) of 1 January and 15 January, at *jinshi* 辰時 (the hours of the dragon from 7:00am to 9:00am) of 1 May and 15 May, and *sashi* 巳時 (the hours of the snake from 9:00am to 11:00 am) of 1 September and 15 September, it is said that when you eat *Talisman for Rebirth in the Pure Land*, you are blessed with merit and wealth, and all kinds of good devas or spirits mentioned above protect you.

4. Relationship with Samjang Yukjaeil 三長六齋日

The talismans included in the Catalog of Scriptures are often Buddhist talismans related to important issues in daily life that are unrelated to Buddhism. Talismans associated with Buddhist beliefs include being reborn in a Pure Land (當生淨土), expiating and becoming

Buddha (滅罪成佛), shattering hell and acquiring Buddha-land (破地獄成佛土), never being bound by birth and death for eternity (萬劫不受生死), and meeting Buddha (當得見佛). The majority of them are talismans from the Tantra section of the Taisho Canon or Tripitaka.

The phenomenon in which Buddhist, Shamanist, and Taoist contents coexist in the Korean Buddhist talisman can be interpreted as a reflection of worldly pain and desire Buddhist doctrine alone cannot satisfy. Even in Pure Land rebirth, the underlying principles of expiation and becoming Buddha appear to be linked to the human desire for good fortune and pleasure after death.

The talismans in the Taisho Canon or Tripitaka are included in *chinŏnjip* [manuals for Buddhist mantra and dharani] published during the Joseon Dynasty, demonstrating that it has had an ongoing influence on subsequent generations.

Even at the end of *Jechinŏnjip* 諸真言集, published by Anshimsa Temple (1569) in the Dongguk University collection, “*Taejanggyŏng wangsaeŋjŏngt’obu shikpŏp* 大藏經往生淨土符食法” is introduced in handwriting. However, the source of this talisman is unknown. If we look at the situation surrounding the *Talisman for Rebirth in the Pure Land*, first, in the above *Seunggailiyong-jakbŏp* 僧家日用作法, “*Taejanggyŏng wangsaeŋjŏngt’obu shikpŏp* (大藏經往生淨土符食法)” literally means “Method for Imbibing the Talisman for Rebirth in the Pure Land of Tripitaka.” In other words, after wholeheartedly reciting “*Amit’abul* 阿彌陀佛” on the first day of the first lunar month, the third day of the second lunar month, and the ninth day of the fifth lunar month, it says to swallow the mantra “om madari hum batah” and the *Talisman for Rebirth in the Pure Land*, and on *yukjaeil*, emissaries, the crown prince, and the Four *Mahārājas* come down to the world one after another to assess people’s good and evil deeds. In regard to *yukjaeil*, it was said that the merit is endless if one does the slightest good, even for one day, keeps the slightest precepts even for a day, gives the slightest amount of food even for a day, and gives food even for a day while sending a *gatha* 偈頌 of scripture.

Therefore, those who keep *Samjang Yukjaeil* will quickly enter the Buddhist way by achieving the precious status of eternal life, longevity, and the seven rare or surpassing treasures. Therefore, one must take the fast 齋 as the main precept of all goodness and the source of all deeds.

There is a slight difference between *Ilyong-jakbŏp* and *Bimilgyojip* in the description of

‘*Samjang Yukjaeil*.’ On ‘正月一齋食者,’ ‘五月一齋食者,’ and ‘九月一齋食者’ of *Samjang Yukjaeil* in *Ilyong-jakbŏp* 日用作法, *Bimilgyojip* 秘密教集 indicates them as ‘正月初一日十五日卯時者,’ ‘五月初一日十五日辰時者,’ ‘九月初一日十五日巳時者’ and says that the former does the ritual of abstinence each month of *Samjangwol* and the latter does the ritual of abstinence at the corresponding times of the first day and the fifteenth day of each month of *Samjangwol*. Therefore, the latter would be appropriate. Thus, we can see that *Samjang Yukjaeil* and the *Method for Imbibing the Talisman for Rebirth in the Pure Land* 往生淨土符食法 have a close relationship. In other words, on *Samjang Yukjaeil*, one must keep the precepts particularly strictly, and on this day, by swallowing the talisman for rebirth in the Pure Land according to the ritual, one keeps the precepts with more care and accumulates the merits and grains of this month. This one is protected by countless good spirits, and further rebirth in the Pure Land.

Ultimately, by accepting the powerful magical powers that exist in the form of text and pictures on paper as *sosikpŏp* 燒食法 (method of burning the talisman and then drinking the ashes mixed with water) into the body of the practitioner, the ritual for adding strength to the Pure Land rebirth’s making a Vow can be called “*Taejanggyŏng wangsangjŏngt’obu shikpŏp*.”

As in *Yŏngbu* 靈符 of Eastern Learning (東學)⁹⁾, which is similar to *wangsangjŏngt’obu shikpŏp* or “*Bujak sosikpŏp* 符作燒食法” of *Sojae gilsang bulgyeong bogam* 消災吉祥佛經寶鑑, the visual form of the talisman itself has a spell power, but it can be inferred that when the ritual was practiced by burning the talisman and absorbing it directly into the body, according to the religious background of *Bujŏk sosikpŏp*, the function and utility of the talisman could be maximized. Ultimately, burning the talisman and intaking it was a ritual that allowed the talisman’s spell power to come into as close contact with the body as possible.

5. Conclusion

The *Talisman for Rebirth in the Pure Land* is a talisman for eating. In particular, it is said that eating the talisman according to the rules set in *Samjang Yukjaeil* has a larger merit than any other. At the same time, one must keep the precepts even more strictly, as much as *Samjang Yukjaeil*, and by believing in the talisman, one is protected by countless good spirits by taking these precautions and one will live in the Pure Land. Through this

consideration, it was found that the *Talisman for Rebirth in the Pure Land*, which appears in Buddhist ritual texts, plays the following roles, and it can be inferred that both the client and the performer were satisfied during the performance of the rite.

Notes

- 1) He was a former Ch'anüi 贊儀 of Tonglyewon 通禮院, Jeong 5 poom 正五品, during the reign of Jungjong 中宗 (r. 1506–1544) in Joseon Dynasty.
- 2) “saengjǒngtoinbu 生淨土印符” in amulet of the woodblock printing *Bokjang* 腹藏 printed in 1268 has been used throughout Joseon to this day.
- 3) See Park 1998, 1–3.
- 4) See Han 1975, 28–85.
- 5) See Kang 2018, 141–142.
- 6) See An 1935, 298.
- 7) *Shi shi yao lan* 釋氏要覽, *Daocheng* 道誠, T. 2127, 54, 304c12–19; *Bu kong juan suo shenbian zhenyan jing* 不空羼索神變真言經, 2 juan, T. 1092, 20, 235a12–20; *Fanwangjing ji* 梵網經記, *Chuan'ao* 傳奧 (618–907), X. 682, 38, 266a6–15.
- 8) *Fo shuo si tianwang jing* 佛說四天王經 T. 590, 15, 118b3–9.
- 9) See Park 2016, 51–79.

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