



Joanna Muchowska<sup>1</sup>

## The history of *zhuyou* healing practices: in search of data for the reconstruction of the ritual scheme

### Abstract

The article addresses the issue of Thunder rituals employed in Taoist *zhuyou* healing practices, which constituted a formal branch of Chinese medicine from the 13th to the 16th centuries. Subsequently, these rituals lost their prominence and were predominantly practiced as part of folk medicine and folk Daoism. The article serves as a contribution to the reconstruction of the schema of Thunder rituals within *zhuyou* practices, based on textual data from several unpublished manuscript source texts, primarily the *Zhuyou ke* 05953 manuscript from the National Central Library of Taiwan and the Unschuld 8070 manuscript from the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz. Both manuscripts date from the 19th century, and although they contain earlier textual material, they should be interpreted primarily as evidence of ritual practices from the 18th–19th centuries. The article provides edited excerpts from these and other source texts, which contain significant cognitive data regarding the course and specifics of these rituals. These excerpts offer valuable information about certain aspects of the healing ritual practices as well as the associated beliefs. The texts also cite incantations. Notably, in these healing rituals, the Yellow Emperor assumes the role of the deity issuing decrees against disease demons. The article attempts to provide a general outline of the basic structure of *zhuyou* healing rituals, drawing on the textual evidence presented. These data are juxtaposed with findings from earlier studies on Thunder rituals, particularly the works of Florian Reiter and Philip Cho. The methodology of source text content analysis was employed for the purpose of this research, augmented by elements of discourse analysis, hermeneutics, and semiotics.

**Key words:** *zhuyou* rituals; Thunder rituals; talismans (*fu* 符) in *zhuyou* practices; folk Taoism

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<sup>1</sup> Dr Joanna Muchowska, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, ul. Wieniawskiego 1, 61-712 Poznań, e-mail: joamuc@amu.edu.pl, nr ORCID: 0000-0003-1423-3932.

## Historia praktyk leczniczych *zhuyou*: w poszukiwaniu danych do rekonstrukcji schematu rytuału

### Streszczenie

Artykuł poświęcony jest problematyce rytuałów Gromu stosowanych w taoistycznych praktykach leczniczych *zhuyou*, które od XIII do XVI w. stanowiły jeden z oficjalnych działów medycyny chińskiej. W późniejszym okresie straciły swoją rangę i uprawiane były głównie w ramach medycyny ludowej i ludowego taoizmu. Artykuł może być przyczynkiem do rekonstrukcji schematu rytuałów Gromu w praktykach *zhuyou* na podstawie treści zawartych w kilku niepublikowanych rękopiśmiennych tekstach źródłowych, w tym przede wszystkim w rękopisie *Zhuyou ke* 05953 z kolekcji Narodowej Centralnej Biblioteki Tajwanu i w rękopisie *Unschuld* 8070 z kolekcji Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz. Oba te rękopisy pochodzą z XIX w. i chociaż zawierają również wcześniejszy materiał tekstowy, to wydaje się, że powinny być interpretowane przede wszystkim jako świadectwo praktyk rytualnych XVIII–XIX w. W artykule edytowane są ustępy tych i innych tekstów źródłowych, w których zapisane zostały istotne pod względem poznawczym dane na temat przebiegu i specyfiki tych rytuałów. Cytaty te dostarczają cennych informacji na temat niektórych aspektów praktyki rytuałów leczniczych, jak również związanych z nimi wierzeń. Przytaczane są w nich również zaklęcia. Co istotne, w tych leczniczych rytuałach rolę bóstwa wydającego dekryty przeciw demonom choroby pełni Żółty Cesarz. W artykule podjęta została próba ogólnego zarysowania podstawowej struktury leczniczych rytuałów *zhuyou* na podstawie wskazanych świadectw tekstowych. Dane te konfrontowane są z danymi z wcześniejszych badań rytuałów Gromu, w szczególności z prac autorstwa Florian Reitera i Philipa Cho. Do celów badawczych zastosowano metodologię analizy treści tekstów źródłowych wzbogaconą o elementy analizy dyskursu, hermeneutyki i semiotyki.

**Słowa kluczowe:** rytuały *zhuyou*; rytuały Gromu; talizmany (*fu* 符) w praktykach *zhuyou*; ludowy taoizm

## Introduction

Thunder rituals<sup>2</sup> (*Wulei fa* 五雷法) are known primarily from literary accounts relating to the Song period (960–1279). Nevertheless, their forms as described at the time are largely a continuation of ritual forms from earlier periods and show many similarities to earlier exorcism rituals. Thunder rituals are embedded in the Taoist theological and cosmological vision of the universe, in which astral deities play a leading role. These deities are linked to the calendar system of heavenly stems and earthly branches. Their actions show a dependence on the correlation of

<sup>2</sup> I use the term “ritual” in the sense of the classical general definition of ritual proposed by Stanley Tambiah (1979: 119). Regarding rituals in Taoism, see e.g. Skar 2000: 413–463; Davis 2001; Raz 2010: 407–424; and especially the works of Florian Reiter cited in this article.

the five agents (water, wood, fire, earth, metal), planets, colors, world directions, numbers, and certain spatial and temporal mutual alignments of celestial bodies, such as the asterism of the Northern Dipper with the earth. (Reiter 2004: 211–212, 219) Thunder rituals have a strong military tinge, revealing themselves in the military organization and armed actions of the Thunder deities and their subordinate spirits, focused on combating demons.<sup>3</sup>

The primary source of knowledge on Thunder rituals is the “Corpus of Taoist Rituals” (*Daofa huiyuan* 道法會元), *Daozang* 1220. (Cf. Boltz 2008: 116–119) The collection, published in 1445, contains many descriptions of Thunder rituals from the Song-Ming period (960–1644). In the following attempt to outline the general scheme of the Thunder ritual in *zhuyou* practices, I refer primarily to the results of Florian Reiter’s research on the Thunder rituals in *Daozang* 1220 published in his numerous articles and monographs. These are currently, to my knowledge, the most in-depth, wide-ranging and authoritative studies of this issue. It should be stressed, however, that they represent the state of ritual practices from the Song-Ming period. In later periods, the exorcist practices of the Thunder showed a tendency to be simplified and abbreviated, especially for the less formal communities of users represented by itinerant healers and other for-profit actors. Since available source texts do not, to my knowledge, document the full scheme of the Thunder ritual used in *zhuyou* practices, I make the assumption that, in principle, it replicated the general scheme of Thunder rituals and their basic components.

Scholars researching Thunder rituals highlight the existence of many variant forms in the *Daozang* 1220 text corpus.<sup>4</sup> In the chapters studied thus far, the rituals vary in terms of form, the sequence of actions, and the prayers, incantations (*zhou* 咒), and gestural actions used (*jue* 訣 “mudras”; *bugang tadou* 步罡踏斗 “pacing the stars of the Northern Dipper”), as well as the pantheon, including the names of deities and the utterances made during the ritual. The descriptions do not always form a logical and coherent narrative. (Reiter 2004: 229) They usually do not document the full sequence of ritual activities, but only selected sequences, focusing primarily on providing instructions for meditation and visualization. (Reiter 2014: 802) Consequently, it is extremely difficult

<sup>3</sup> On the military nature of the Thunder deities, see Meulenbeld 2015; 2016. Notably, Meulenbeld mentions the use of talismans of Thunder deities by the army in military operations (in reference to the 9th century).

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, Reiter 2004: 211: “Generally speaking, the sources of Thunder Magic are characterised by manifold local traditions and a huge variety of individual theoretical approaches.”

to establish a single universal paradigm for these rituals.<sup>5</sup> As Reiter notes, the Thunder rituals evidenced in the Song-Ming period are, on the one hand, the result of a process of evolution in exorcism rituals known from literary records since the Tang period, while, on the other hand, they are the result of a process of standardization in these rituals in the Song period. Many of their constituent elements are repeated in different rituals and are known from rituals from earlier periods. The same or similar activities perform different functions or appear under different names. Gil Raz, in his article “Ritual Theory in Medieval Daoism” (Raz 2010), applied the concept of “modularity” to Taoist rituals. This notion – though not in the exact same sense – may well apply to the phenomenon of complexity and variation in Thunder rituals. The same elements, “modules”, appear in different rituals, where they may have the same or a modified form and function, and appear with different names and in different sequences. They are almost undoubtedly adapted from other rituals. From the descriptions in *Daozang* 1220 (concerning different deities and types of rituals), studied by Reiter and other researchers, a general outline of a scheme emerges, constructed from several basic sequences consisting of repeated and similar components.

## Time of performing the ritual

In attempting to reconstruct a pattern of the Thunder ritual used in *zhuyou* practices,<sup>6</sup> it should be emphasized that in the descriptions of these rituals in the “Corpus of Taoist Rituals” there is a recommendation that priests (ritual masters) use only one “proper” ritual method and perform the ritual in a precise, error-free manner. This was supposed to be

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Reiter 2013: 123: “A *Corpus of Taoist Rituals* contains a welter of variant methods that document Taoist exorcism which the term *Thunder Magic rituals* summarizes. We understand that the terminological and textual differences which the many rituals and texts display, do not exclude a common basis.” Cf. also Drexler 1994: 11: “Das Herstellungsritual eines *fu*, das Zusammenspiel all seiner Komponenten, ist so komplex, daß es, wenn überhaupt, nur schwer systematisiert dargestellt werden kann. Seine Hauptkomponenten werden in unterschiedlichen Arrangements miteinander verbunden, die in der Reihenfolge der oft ineinandergreifenden Techniken variieren.”

<sup>6</sup> I would like to emphasize at this point that the available source texts on the *zhuyou* do not attest exhaustively to all of its items. Consequently, the reconstruction of this ritual is in part hypothetical, and is based on the assumption that Thunder rituals in *zhuyou* and other exorcist practices, described especially in *Daozang* 1220, showed a distinctive similarity.

a condition for healing efficacy. This recommendation also applies to the pantheon, i.e. the practice of rituals associated with specific deities.<sup>7</sup>

The time for performing the ritual was generally determined by hemerological techniques.<sup>8</sup> A distinction was made between proper and improper dates, times of day and hours. The auspicious time was established primarily on the basis of the movements of astral bodies, especially the stars of the Northern Dipper. However, correlations between other elements of the system, such as the five phases, may have been taken into account. (See, for example, Reiter 2013: 123–131; Reiter 2020a: 54) The time for performing the ritual could also be determined by applying the dichotomous *yin* and *yang* criteria to classify days and diseases. (see Drexler 1994: 29) In the case of the textual corpus of the *Zhuyou ke* 05953 manuscript, hemerological instructions appear irregularly and most often refer to either the time of day or a day in some period of time. See, for example, *Zhuyou ke* 05953, folio 19 verso, 8–9:

8. [] 或五月五日或 9. 七月七日 []

“8 [] Either on the fifth day of the fifth month, 9. or on the seventh day of the seventh month. []”

They are, however, explicitly mentioned in the instructions for the prayer before making the talisman, see folio 32 verso, 6–8:

6. 將欲書符諸神式宜齋戒沐浴焚香手執筆念咒語擇 7. 日吉時良天地開張叩請 8 軒轅帝君在天之靈令 []

“6. Anyone who wishes to write a talisman, any divine pattern, should fast, perform ablution, burn incense. Holding a brush, he should recite incantations. He should choose 7. an auspicious day, an auspicious time (when) the heavens and the earth open up. He should ask, bowing 8. to the ruler, Xuanyuan (Yellow Emperor) in the heavens, for a heavenly decree. []”

In the corresponding passage in the Unschuld 8070 manuscript, page 7, 4, the text has a different form:

4. 吉日良辰天地開張至誠叩懇祖師軒轅黃帝令 []

“4. On an auspicious day, at an auspicious time, (when) the heavens and the earth open up, one should sincerely beg, bowing to the Patriarch, Xuanyuan Huangdi (Yellow Emperor), (to give) orders. []”

<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, Reiter 2010: 143: “The various lists of Thunder divinities constitute the registers that a practitioner receives, together with instructions for rituals and the writing of amulets”; Reiter 2011: 295: “Spells and amulets express the identity of the priest with the deployed deity”. Cf. also Reiter 2004: 221; 2007a: 39; 2020a: 41.

<sup>8</sup> Regarding the issue of hemerology in Chinese divination and magical literature, see Harper, Kalinowski 2017.

The time-fixing technique is also referred to in a passage in the *Zhuyou ke* 05953 manuscript on folio 6 recto – 7 verso, which deals with the movement pattern of the Northern Dipper's asterism (related to the “*Zhuyou* ritual (*fā*) of notifying the Northern Dipper through the furnace,” see *Zhuyou ke* 05953, folio 6 verso – 7 recto).

## Place to perform the ritual

Regarding the question of place, it should be noted that the exorcism ritual – which was performed on request – could take place in the priest's home, at his home altar, or in front of the sick person, in their home. In the case of apotropaic talismans, used for protection against demons and intended for specific individuals, the priest would prepare the talisman on request at the altar in his home. He would then hand it to the ordering person, who would either carry it with them or place it in a room.<sup>9</sup>

## Talismans

The talismans usually took the form of small slips of yellow paper. (See, e.g., Reiter 2020b: 7; Mozina 2011: 236) Instructions for this can be found in *Zhuyou ke* 05953, see, for example, folio 18 verso, 6: “Write in ink on yellow paper.”; folio 20 recto, 7: “Write in cinnabar on yellow paper. Stick it on the door.”

Nonetheless, the rituals may have had particular stipulations regarding the writing materials and implements to be utilized.<sup>10</sup> Talisman could be inscribed on materials other than paper and not only with ink. The writing could be done on the ground with a sword or on a person's body. It could also be done in a physically impermanent way, such as in the air. (Reiter 2010: 39) It should be emphasized that during the ritual several copies of the talisman might be prepared, one of which would be burned to ashes, and the others preserved for protective purposes or used in other ways. Examples of such talismans are found in the *Zhuyou ke* 05953 manuscript, see, for example, folio 9 verso, 7–9:

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Reiter 2020b: 6: “A priest will help the individual client to cope with health problems or related issues, draft suitable amulets and consecrate them at altar. This is a common practice in Chinese religions life as practiced today in Taiwan. Such amulets are carried on the body and are always at hand to protect the respective person.”

<sup>10</sup> See the description of the talisman writing process in *Daozang* 1220 ch. 58.1 a; Reiter's translation in: Reiter 2017: 488–489 (also in Reiter 2007b: 190–192). For contemporary talisman writing techniques in Taiwan, see Ju 2007: 89–90.

7. 書符照式三道先一道熬化入稀米飲內与病人服又一 8. 道供養在家夜靜時用錢馬一分于患人狀前焚之又一 9. 道貼在病人房門上 []

“7. [] Write down the talisman according to the pattern, in three copies. The first copy should be burned, (and the ashes) added to rice broth and (then) given to the sick person to take. As for the next 8. copy, an offering should be made at home, at night, when peace prevails. One paper money *ma* should be used. This should be burned in front of the affected person. Another 9. copy should be pasted on the sick person's door. []”

## Ethical requirements for ritual participants

The priest had to first ascertain the sincerity and piety of the patient. (Cho 2005: 72) The ethical requirements for patients treated with *zhuyou* rituals are well attested in the "Yellow Emperor's Manual". See Zangwai *daoshu* vol. XXVI, folio 2b, 7–10:

7. 太上誠語 8a. 不誠不敬者不治 8b. 毀辱天醫者不治 9a. 疑信不決者不治 9b. 重財輕命者不治 10. 符咒不合不全者不治

“7. Taishang Sincerity Speech: 8a. Those who are insincere and disrespectful will not be healed. 8b. Those who defame the Heavenly Physician will not be healed. 9a. Those who doubt and are uncertain will not be healed. 9b. Those who value wealth above life will not be healed. 10. If talismans and spells are incomplete and unfinished, they will not be healed.”

## Diagnosing the causes of ailments

When taking the order, the priest would interview and make a diagnosis of the potential disease demon, including the etiology of the disease in terms of *yin-yang*, cf. *Zhuyou ke* 05953 folio 32 verso, 4:

4. 凡遇患病者務須辨明陰陽之癌照前法治 []

“4. Each time, dealing with a patient, it is necessary, before choosing a treatment method, to first identify the disease – (whether it is of the) *yin* or *yang* (nature). []”

In some cases, the diagnosis influenced the treatment. For example, in the treatment of ulcers, talismans were written directly on the body of the sick person, cf. e.g. *Zhuyou ke* 05953, folio 32 verso, 2–3:

1. 若陰 2. 症是寒用姜汁研墨画于腫瘡上露具瘡口用筆醮飽 3. 圈画妙字于其中待墨乾丹用豬胆水搽其瘡瘡上

“1. [] If (these are) diseases of 2. *yin*, (the cause of which) is cold, then use ginger juice to grate the ink and to paint on the open wound of the swollen ulcer. When the wound of the ulceration is exposed, wet the brush 3. and write the ‘wonderful’<sup>11</sup> character (妙) in a circle (on the ulceration). Wait for the ink to dry. Use the liquid from the pig's gall bladder to wipe the ulcer.”

<sup>11</sup> In the sense of “effective”, one that possesses divine properties.

We find another description of the ritual, whose course depends on the cause of the disease, in the manuscript Unschuld 8070, on page 6, 7 – 7, 2:

(folio 6) 7. [] 用黃表帋一 8. 張照後病患各依符字硃書於上書符時湏念咒語書

(folio 7) 1. 完加敕令二字於符頂上仍用法水噴之病者亦洗淨手 2. 面 []

(folio 6) “7. [] One sheet of yellow paper should be used. 8. Each talisman-character (符字) should be selected according to the disease. Use cinnabar to write it on (this sheet). While the talisman is being written down, the words of the incantation should be spoken. Having written everything down, (folio. 7) 1. two signs should be added on top of the talisman: ‘imperial decree’. One should use ritual water, spout on the sick person and wash clean (his) hands 2. and face.”

The conditions for effective treatment were proper diagnosis, knowledge of the demon's name, and having the proper talisman in the register. There was also a ritual technique (known from *Taishang zhuyou ke* 太上祝由科) of summoning “Heavenly doctors” (*Tianyi* 天醫) by means of talismans to cure certain types of illnesses even without an accurate diagnosis. Methods were also used to identify the cause of illness by addressing a notice/question to the deities and then reading the answer using a specific sign recognition technique.<sup>12</sup>

An acquaintance with the names of demons was part of the priest's esoteric knowledge, connected with medical knowledge of the etiology of diseases (a specific disease was caused by a specific demon, acting as a pathogen). The “Corpus of Taoist Rituals” attests to beliefs according to which familiarity with the name of a demon provided protection against it, and even gave one power over it. (Reiter 2004: 226) The name of the disease demon was needed in the ritual to perform an effective exorcism. Similarly, as in the case of the names of the gods, knowledge of the names of demons belonged to the realm of esoteric knowledge and determined the effectiveness of the rituals performed.

## Preparation for the ritual

Before performing the ritual, the priest was obliged to take preparatory steps, including cleaning the room in which the ritual was to take place, washing his clothes, and washing himself. He stocked the room with appropriate ritual objects. The catalog of such objects included: writing paper, a writing brush, an inkstone, cinnabar powder, purified

<sup>12</sup> In this context, cf. the techniques for diagnosing diseases in the *kaozhao fa* ritual discussed by Davis, see Davis 2001: 92 ff.



water (*jing shui* 淨水), incense, lamps, mirrors (to ward off demons, usually with 8 trigrams) (cf. Reiter 2020b: 7–8), a divine stick (to which the deity was to transfer his power)<sup>13</sup>, a bell, a ritual sword, and colored flags (to mark the five directions). He then lit incense to purify himself and the room. To perform the ritual, the priest also had to be properly prepared spiritually (he should fast, calm himself, clear his mind, normalize his breathing, etc.<sup>14</sup>).

## Performing the ritual

The ritual commenced with a form of meditative practice in which the priest entered a state of quasi-hypnosis. This state was characterized by the closing of their eyes and the imaginative visualization of a cosmic world, encompassing both the tangible earthly realm and the ethereal heavenly domain. He would utter incantations and make gestures that served to stimulate his imagination and transform himself into a deity (usually of the rank of marshal or general, cf. Reiter 2013: 70). As Reiter notes, prior to inscribing the talisman: “He should first adopt an alter-ego, i.e., transform himself into a *bian shen* 變神 deity, but this deity should be some specific deity of Thunder.”<sup>15</sup> Then, he should ask relevant higher-ranking deities to issue a decree for the patient (introducing him and describing his ailment). This is well illustrated by a passage in the Unschuld 8070 manuscript, in which the deity of higher rank is the Yellow Emperor himself, the creator of the *zhuyou* talismans. The Yellow Emperor assumes the role of the deity issuing the decree for the executive deities. See Unschuld 8070, page 7, 3–8:

3. [] 祝文式 4. 吉日良辰天地開張至誠叩懇祖師軒轅黃帝令 5. 某府州縣村社人氏於某年某月日患病特請御 6. 筆符章鎔化服之頃刻兵臨災散將至病除且

<sup>13</sup> *shen chi* 神尺. See Reiter 2020b: 110–118.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Reiter 2007a: 42–43. The instructions emphasize the need to maintain an appropriate breathing rate and, if it falters, to repeat the ritual.

<sup>15</sup> See Reiter 2017: 478. Some descriptions seem to suggest that the priest may have made two transformations, the first, before writing the talisman, into a superior deity who issues the decree (represented by the talisman), and then into an inferior deity, the executor of the decree. Among the *Daozang* 1220 fragments edited by Reiter is the text of chap. 92, 19a, where the instructions for the talisman state that the performer of the ritual is to transform into a “Great God-emperor and Thunder Patriarch (雷祖大帝)”, while in the text of the incantation addressed to the Thunder deities, the performer utters words implying that he is the decree maker (“Great God-emperor and Thunder Patriarch (雷祖大帝)”). Cf. also Reiter 2013: 119. See also the description of the ritual in Meulenbeld 2016: 79, where transformation into two deities is mentioned.

歹至向寧 7. 如旧咒曰天負地方律令九章捻筆在手 x<sup>16</sup>病除殃 凡書書湏閉 8. 目存想軒轅黃帝如在目前 []

“3 [] Pattern prayer text. 4. On an auspicious day, at an auspicious time, (when) heaven and earth open up, one should sincerely beg, bowing to the Patriarch Xuanyuan Huangdi (Yellow Emperor) (to issue) a decree for 5. such and such an area, region, district, village, community, (such and such) person, in such and such a year, month, day of illness. Especially to ask, 6. that within a short period of time from the burning of the talisman-stamp, written by the Emperor's hand, and taking it, the army will stand against (the demons of) misfortune and disperse them, and the generals will reach (the demons of) disease, to remove the evil 7. and restore peace, (so that it will be) as before. The incantation says: Those who stand by the will of heaven.<sup>17</sup> The earth is square. Laws and decrees in nine chapters.<sup>18</sup> With one twist of the brush in my hand (I sweep) diseases and remove plagues. (lacuna) Whenever you write down a talisman, it is necessary to close your eyes and 8. imagine that you have Xuanyuan Huangdi (Yellow Emperor) in front of you.<sup>19</sup> []”

In the manuscript *Zhuyou ke* 05953 on folio 32 verso, 5 – 33 recto, 1 there is a parallel text, though it does show differences. It reads as follows:

(folio 32 verso) 5. 將欲書符諸神式宜齋戒沐浴焚香手執筆念咒語擇 6. 日吉時良天地開張叩請 7. 軒轅帝君在天地之靈令有某處某人子某月某日某時 (folio 33 recto) 1. 得沾某病症特請書篆符章掃除禍殃即得如常[]

“5. Anyone who wishes to write a talisman, any divine patterns, should fast, perform ablution, burn incense. Holding a brush, he should recite incantations. He should choose 6. an auspicious day and time to open the earth and heaven, ask, bowing to 7. the deity Xuanyuan in heaven, for a miraculous decree for such and such a place, (such and such) man, (in such and such) month, day, (in such and such) time, 1. (man) infected with (such and such) disease. Specifically, ask that the written seals, talismans-stamps dispel misfortunes and plagues, that peace be restored, (that it be) as before. []”

The priest performing the ritual would assume certain body positions (toward certain astral bodies or world directions) and perform appropriate gestural movements: jawing of teeth, mudras, splashing of water, ritual steps, and pressing of the thumb on certain places on the body (see

<sup>16</sup> Graph unrecognized.

<sup>17</sup> *tian fu* 天負. Corrupted text. In the manuscript *Zhuyou ke* 05953 on folio 33 recto, 3 the phrase “The heaven is round.” occurs here.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. the translations of the parallel incantations in Drexler 1994: 62 and in: Unschuld, Zheng 2012, vol. 2: 1329. Regarding the phrase “The heaven is round. The earth is square,” attested in Huainanzi 淮南子 3. XXIV. 10 (2nd century B.C.E.), see Major 1993: 32–38, 67. The textual variant of this incantation, which appears in *Daozang* 1220, ch. 56, 22a, was translated by Reiter as follows: “Heaven is round and earth is square. There are six rules, nine paragraphs and eight trigrams (*pa-kua* 八卦).” See Reiter 2007a: 94.

<sup>19</sup> Alternative translation: “that Xuanyuan Huangdi is present”.

Andersen 2008: 901). He would repeat specific verbal and gestural actions, turn his face in the appropriate direction (in the direction of certain stars, such as Pojun), meditate by visualizing astral deities – such as the Three Terraces (Santai),<sup>20</sup> the Northern Dipper, and the Sun and the Moon – and inhale the cosmic powers personified by these deities. For example, in the ritual for expelling disease in *Daozang* 1220, ch. 164. 1a–1b, the priest who transforms into Marshal Tianpeng visualizes that his head carries the seven stars of the Northern Dipper, his feet stand on the Qilin, and the stars of the Three Terraces (Santai) shine above his head. (Reiter 2020a:53–54; cf. also the description in Drexler 1994: 29–30) After the transformation, the deity-priest's alter ego would summon the Thunder deities to appear with their spiritual armies and give them orders.<sup>21</sup> This would invoke (at least sometimes) a “decree” by higher-ranking deities, particularly the “Three Pure Ones” (Sanqing). This was then communicated to the demons, notifying them of the decree.<sup>22</sup> The task of the troops of the Thunder, led by the priest's alter-ego, was to act against the demons, force them to surrender, arrest them, or exterminate them (using destructive, fiery breaths, among other things). According to one possible procedure, after completing the ritual activities in front of the home altar, the priest would go with the prepared talisman to the sick person's home. There he would burn the talisman to ashes, apply it as medicine to the sick person, and perform a series of further exorcism activities before the sick person's bed. (Reiter 2020a: 53–54)

While writing the talisman, the priest would recite incantations. (Drexler 1994: 2, 9, 21–22, 29; Reiter 2017: 479) In the *Zhuyou ke* 05953 manuscript, this is well illustrated by the scheme for the *tian* symbol found on folio 43 verso, with incantations assigned to each component. The spiritual aspect of making the talisman involved visualizing an image of the deities, inhaling their supernatural powers, and then, through exhalation, placing those powers in the talisman.<sup>23</sup> The process was similar to that used to transfer power to the brush and paper.<sup>24</sup> In this

<sup>20</sup> Three pairs of stars in the constellation of the Great Bear, below the Northern Dipper, are called the “staircase of heaven.” Cf. Andersen 1989: 30; Reiter 2013: 114–115; Drexler 1994: 85–89.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. also the description of visualization in Reiter 2007a: 114.

<sup>22</sup> See the description in Reiter 2020a: 62–63 (refers to *Daozang* ch. 164); Reiter 2007a: 54–61; Reiter 2020b: 13–14, 26–34, 45–110 (fragments on the imprisonment of demons).

<sup>23</sup> Cf. e.g. Reiter 2007a: 80: “Having spoken the spell you take the breath of thunder (*lei-ch'i* 雷氣) and blow it onto the seal.”

<sup>24</sup> See Reiter 2007a: 42–47, especially the description of visualization on pp. 46–47 (*Daozang* 1220, ch. 69, 2a–2b), and also 88–91 (*Daozang* 1220, ch. 69, 17a–19b). Cf.

sense, as Reiter points out, “[...] the amulet is not so much a combination of graphic designs on paper, but it is an energetic and spiritual agent.” (Reiter 2007a: 44) We can surmise that it was believed that these powers played a particularly important role in the case of apotropaic talismans, which were worn/stored for protection against demons.<sup>25</sup> The technique of writing the talisman appears to have been an esoteric and guarded secret of the priest, transmitted mainly orally by the master during the initiation process, cf. e.g. Mozina 2011: 238. Theoretically, the writing of a talisman should be done in one motion, in a fluid manner.<sup>26</sup>

Regarding the recording of the talisman, it is worth quoting the description from the “Yellow Emperor's Manual” (*Zangwai daoshu*, vol. XXVI), cf. Cho 2005: 73–77. It shows that the priest first uttered blessings related to the preparation of the ritual water, ink, paper, brush and prayer text. In *Zangwai daoshu*, vol. XXVI, fol. 2a, 16–17 we read:

16. 凡書符先唸祝水咒次唸咒墨咒三唸祝紙咒四唸祝筆 17. 咒五唸將祝文讀完後唸書符咒三遍 []

“16. Each time, when writing the talisman, first recite the spell to bless the water, then the spell to bless the ink, as the third spell to bless the paper, as the fourth spell to bless the brush, 17. as the fifth spell to bless the text of the prayer. After finishing, recite the incantation for writing the talisman three times<sup>27</sup>. []”

He would then splash the ritual water around the altar and room to remove any potential plague or contamination. In “The Spell of Water” in *Zangwai daoshu* vol. XXVI, page 1b, the purpose of this activity is described as follows: “When I sprinkle the altar and the room, I chase away evil.”

The burning (incineration) of talismans, recommended in the instructions, is usually interpreted as an act of promulgation of the edict represented by the talisman in the supernatural world and a way of communicating with beings from the supernatural world.<sup>28</sup> It is thus a way of sending correspondence from the earthly world to the heavenly

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also, for example, Reiter 2007b: 191–192; 2013: 50, 118; 2017: 485–486; 2020a: 57; 2020b: 5.

<sup>25</sup> Regarding the role of talismans, including their role as a quasi-healing tool, Reiter put forward the interesting thesis that one of the factors that determined their popularity was the Taoists' tendency to wander and limited access to canonical knowledge resources. Designed to be used for various ailments and misfortunes, talismans were a universal and ad hoc remedy for illnesses and other problems. Cf. Reiter 2017: 479.

<sup>26</sup> Although in the case of extended talismans this seems impossible. See Reiter 2017: 479; Mozina 2011: 237.

<sup>27</sup> Spell text on folio 20 recto, 8–20 verso, 1.

<sup>28</sup> For talisman-burning techniques used in contemporary Taiwan, see Ju 2007: 89–90.

world.<sup>29</sup> The making and sending of a talisman (“edict”) to the supernatural world should probably also be interpreted as an act of notifying the deities of the cause of illness, i.e., the pathogenic demons indicated in the talisman. Healing properties were attributed to the ash that remained after the talisman was burned, which in the case of the rituals of Thunder should probably be associated primarily with the powers of the deities breathed into the talisman by the performer of the ritual (a priest transformed into a deity).<sup>30</sup> The ash was usually served for consumption with a specific decoction or drink.

Regarding the transformation of the priest into a deity,<sup>31</sup> it should be emphasized that it is usually a deity of Thunder specific to the particular type of ritual the priest is carrying out and the registers he possesses. The transformation consists of creating in the priest's imagination during meditation an image of the deity and identifying with it through the technique of internal alchemy, *neidan*.<sup>32</sup> As Reiter writes, he “engulfs the own body with divine form and might which come out of himself. On this basis the supreme divinities are believed to accept memorials from the mediating priest” and “the precondition for this success is the personal transition to and self-identification with the spiritual world.” (Reiter 2002: 172) In descriptions of these rituals, the technique assumes

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<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Harper 1982: 85: “The practice of burning talismans, petitions, and paper money in Chinese religion is indicative of the belief that fire magically transmits these documents to their spiritual destination.” See also Strickmann 2002; Mozina 2021: 169. Wang Zijie's statement quoted by Cho, saying that the burning of the talisman is “commanding spirit generals and the armies of shades to eat the disease demons,” undoubtedly refers to the contents of the correspondence. Cf. Cho 2005: 77–78.

<sup>30</sup> The practice of consuming the ashes of burned talismans is, of course, known from different cultures, and can be explained in different ways. Cf. e.g. Dean 1988: 464: “The medieval liturgical manuals reveal that the talismanic-orders were not only burned and sent to the gods or to the souls. Some were burned and then the ashes were consumed by the priest. Descending into his body, they could effect the summoning of the gods within his body, whom the priest would then send forth to merge with their counterparts in the macrocosm.”

<sup>31</sup> Cf. in this context Reiter's comment: “We learn from the sources of Thunder Magic rituals that amulets are the most important and potent ritual tools that a priest would use, performing an exorcism in order to heal, to destroy or ban wicked sprites or to call in rain and winds. [...] In fact, they are the result of a rather demanding spiritual or meditative action of the priest who has to attain the personal standing of a divinity as to be able to communicate with the divine vis-à-vis and to work out a magically effective amulet.” See Reiter 2017: 478.

<sup>32</sup> Also known as an “inner elixir”. On this technique of meditating on the five internal organs, developed and popularized during the Song period, which was also adopted in the Thunder rituals, see, for example, Pregadio, Skar 2000: 481–491; Yokote 2015; Pregadio 2019.

different forms, but the essential schematic elements repeat. The priest visualizes drawing breaths from outside, imagined as the powers of astral deities, such as the Northern Dipper, which enter his body. He then visualizes a fire igniting in his five internal organs (*wuzang*; in the heart, kidneys, spleen, lungs, and liver). The energy arising in his organs (which takes the form of “embryonic breathing” cf. Yokote 2015: 1055) is brought outward by means of breaths, where it assumes the form of a deity. The priest further imagines that it is he who has transformed into a deity (his alter ego). As Reiter points out, the deity is not summoned from another world and does not descend to earth at the call of the ritual performer. The deity emerges from the body of the ritual performer. The culmination of the ritual becomes the transformation of the performer into the deity, which is, as Reiter writes, a “precondition for any orthodox liturgical action” (Reiter 2020b: 118). Henceforth, the deity is the performer of the ritual. This is a distinctive feature of the Thunder ritual, in which the performers' transcendent relationship with the Thunder deities, with the priest acting as their representative, is based on the concept of *ziji* 自己, and built on the dogma of the divine nature of the human being. (Reiter 2007a: 16) In one description cited by Reiter, the priest transforms into the central star of the Northern Dipper, i.e., the seventh star of Pojun, identified with Tiangang and Leigong, and then moves from the “gate of heaven” (*tianmen* 天門, a place symbolized by the southeast corner of the altar) to the central star of the Northern Dipper, thus entering the heavenly world. (Reiter 2007b: 190)

In the text of the *Zhuyou ke* 05953 manuscript, which is essentially a collection of talisman designs with commentary on their properties and uses, there are no instructional texts relating to meditation and visualization themselves. The exception is an account referring to a *neidan*-like meditation technique for generating *qi* from internal organs (Eskildsen 2009: 89), found on folio 8 recto – 8 verso, in a dialogue between the Yellow Emperor and the Qi Bo physician. The technique is recommended as a part of the process necessary to ensure protection against pandemic demons, and is used to create an apotropaic talisman for physicians. Most likely, the relevant text was taken from the *Huangdi neijing suwen*, so it was written relatively early. In it we find the symbolism of colors, correlated with the directions of the world, internal organs and elements: green – east, liver, wood; red – south, heart, fire; black – north, kidneys, water; yellow – center, spleen, earth; white – west, lungs, metal. The text reads as follows: (folio 8 recto 3 – 8 verso, 2)

(8 recto) 4. 于入室先想心如日将入于 5. 疫室先想青氣自肝而出左行于東化作林木次想白氣 6. 自肺而出右行于西北化作戈甲次想赤氣自心而出南行 7.

于上化作燭明次想黑氣自腎而出北行于下化作洪水 8. 次想黃氣自脾而出化作堅土存于中央護身畢貫想頭 9. 上如北斗之煌煌然後可入于疫室此岐伯教人診疫之 10. 法也後世續製北斗符醫士頂戴于首驅瘟辟疫符炁化 (8 verso) 1. 與病人服蓋疫萬時行籍神道以設教亦治病之一則當 2. 依科奉行

“4. [] (Qi Bo's answer to the Yellow Emperor's question about how to avoid infection.) When entering<sup>33</sup> a room, first imagine that (your) mind is like the sun. Then, entering 5. the infected room, first imagine the green *qi*<sup>34</sup> in (your) liver and let it out with the left side to the east and transform it into a forest. Then imagine white *qi* 6. in (your) lungs and release it with the right side to the west, and transform it into a shield and spear. Then imagine red *qi* in (your) heart and release it south 7. upward, and transform it into a bright flame. Next, imagine black *qi* in (your) kidneys and release it northward downward, and transform it into a flood. 8. Next, imagine yellow *qi* in (your) spleen and let it out, and transform it into hard earth, and keep it inside to protect yourself. Finish.<sup>35</sup> Imagine that the top of (your) head 9. is the luminous Northern Dipper.<sup>36</sup> Then enter the infected room. This is how Qi Bo's teacher visited infected places. 10. Subsequent generations continued this method (of treatment), creating talismans of the Northern Dipper. Medics wore them on the top of their hats to avoid the plague. The talismans for the plague were burned (folio 8 verso) 1. and given to the sick person. All this protected against the plague. They acted in accordance with (instructions in) records, which are divine methods, to spread the teaching and treatment of diseases as one of the (medical methods). Only then, 2. when (you) do all these things, (you) act in accordance (with the principles) of the discipline (*zhuyou*).”

## Conclusion

The source texts cited in this article appear to provide valuable, detailed information on certain aspects of the pragmatics of *zhuyou* healing rituals, particularly from the later period represented by the *Zhuyou ke* 05953 and Unschuld 8070 manuscripts. While they do not offer exhaustive or complete descriptions, they present important data that is crucial for a comprehensive reconstruction of the ritual activities, associated beliefs, and spoken text formulas. Future research is expected to provide new insights that will expand our understanding of the complexities of these rituals and facilitate a more thorough reconstruction of their pat-

<sup>33</sup> A passage referring to the text of the Yellow Emperor's dialogue with his physician Qi Bo on the epidemic in Chapter 72 of *Suwen*, is part of the “The Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon.” This chapter, which is unreconstructed, was omitted from the English edition by Tessenow and Unschuld (Tessenow, Unschuld 2011). For a discussion of the textual status of, among other things, the 72nd chapter, see, e.g., Sivin 1993: 199.

<sup>34</sup> Or “breath”.

<sup>35</sup> I.e., finish visualizing.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Reiter 2020a: 53–59.

terns. Furthermore, such studies may help clarify the evolution of *zhuyou* practices in the post-16th century period and establish the actual standards of their performance.

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