

Panel Proposal: Ritual in the Chinese Healing Arts

Panel Participants:

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Despite the ubiquity of ritual healing in the history of Chinese medicine and religion, specialists in both fields rarely interact to examine how various kinds of healers differently interpreted the symbolic meanings in rituals expressing a plurality of approaches to disorders and their cures. On the one hand, for example, historians of medicine often disregard the ritual application of drugs in religious texts. And on the other, historians of religion rarely open medical texts to understand how physicians talked about exorcistic rituals. The purpose of this panel is to bring together scholars with different perspectives to discuss the multiple social, textual, symbolic, and disciplinary facets to ritual healing.

Speaker 1: Nathan Sivin (University of Pennsylvania)

The Efficacy of Chinese Health Care

Some students of Chinese medicine assume that, given sound diagnosis, its therapies work; others assume that none work; most avoid the question of efficacy. This paper, part of a study of health care in China ca. 1100, raises the question of efficacy not only in the high tradition but in popular and symbolic (religious, ritual) curing (the only health care available to the majority of the population). What does efficacy mean? What can it mean in traditional health care? Efficacy for what medical disorders? Who decided what was efficacious? What can modern historians take seriously?

Speaker 2: Terry Kleeman (University of Colorado)

Archaic traces of Wind as a disease vector in early imperial Chinese medicine

Wind (*feng*) has long been accorded a special place in Chinese religion, cosmology, and medicine. For the Shang (15th-11th c. BCE), the winds were deities who could influence the harvest and the hunt, and were occasionally implicated in illness. By the Warring States, wind is frequently mentioned in medical and self-cultivation treatises. The Han dynasty *Esoteric Scripture of the Yellow Thearch* (*Huangdi neijing*) systematizes these beliefs, dividing the winds into “full” or “correct” winds that are nurturing and “empty” or “deviant” winds that diminish one’s vitality, but contemporary diviner’s compasses show that in popular belief these winds were tied to the location of the deity Taiyi. In Six Dynasties sources we find more traditional beliefs concerning the winds as disease-causing deities or forces competing with systematizing ideas trying to capture the winds within a rationalized system of medicine. In this paper I will discuss early understandings of the winds and their effects on human beings, drawing from both Daoist and secular sources. I am particularly interested in a series of cases of what seem to be stroke that are attributed to the influence of wind in Tao Hongjing’s *Declarations of the Perfected* (*Zhengao*). Medicine was initially rejected by the Celestial Master Daoists of the second century as a way to avoid illness understood as divine punishment for misconduct, but by the time of the Maoshan revelations, Daoism had absorbed many southern beliefs concerning the body and health. These cases and related contemporary material should shed light on the accommodations and appropriations made by Daoism as it incorporated traditional medical lore and sought to forge a new synthesis of medicine and religion.

Speaker 3: Philip S. Cho (Partner Group of the Max Planck Institute - Chinese Academy of Sciences, Institute for the History of Natural Science)

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I examine the interplay between Chinese medicine and religious healing by tracing the evolution of a ritual therapy called *zhuyou*. Over the long development of the art and its numerous interpretations, at its heart was the process of naming an illness and interacting with patients to define and then transform the physiological and social experience of sickness. Through the performative acts of prayer, incantation, talisman burning, and discussion healers led patients to actively reorient themselves toward the perceived root cause of their ailment, often manifest as possession, emotional disorder, or immoral vice. Using a range of sources from rare manuals to medical texts, I discuss how various kinds of healers sought to reorient patients by ascribing different symbolic meanings to the growing arsenal of techniques in this therapy.

Speaker 4: Lowell Skar (University of Michigan at Dearborn)

Ritual Dimensions of the Religious and Medical Writings of Zhao Yizhen (d. 1382)

This paper will discuss the ritual features in the healing arts promoted by the Ming dynasty physician and religious codifier Zhao Yizhen. After briefly considering Zhao's life, the paper will discuss how different forms of ritual therapy are integral to two distinct types of healing that survive under his name. Besides being central to Zhao's synthesis of Qingwei (Pure Tenuity) Daoist teachings that deal with healing (found in the *Daofa huiyuan* [CT 1220] among other texts), ritual therapy is also prominent in the writings that Zhao contributed to the *Secret Formulas for External Medicine, Transmitted by the Immortals* [*Xianchuan waikē bifāng* (CT 1165 and other editions)]. Drawing on parts of the former text will permit me to relate Zhao's exorcistic rituals to how some contemporary physicians discussed exorcistic healing. Using material from the latter text, I will explore how Zhao's explanations of and drug formulas for specific disorders relate to modes of healing part of other religious texts. By focusing on the diverse social, textual, symbolic, and disciplinary facets of ritual healing that inform the practices promoted by this one figure, I hope to learn more about the complex matrix of healing practices that informed ailment and cure in premodern China.