

The Tao 道 of the Wu 巫: Shamanism Meets Taoism Integrating Shamanistic Principles and Taoist Witchcraft

Step into the mystical lineage of the Wu 巫 shamans, ancient spiritual intermediaries whose practices shaped the roots of Taoist magical traditions. We will reach far back in to history and explore the cultures of the Yellow River to extract first principles that will be useful to any practice of core shamanism. Drawing a clear evolutionary line from 3,000-year-old records of shamanism to contemporary Taoist witchcraft, we'll reveal how these ancient traditions of the Wu have been refined and preserved within Taoist magical systems. Wu shamanism and Taoist witchcraft offer a timeless, dynamic pathway to reconciling the seen and unseen worlds, empowering you to live in alignment with the Tao.

Whether you are a seasoned practitioner or a curious seeker, a mystic or an academic, this lecture gives clear and easy insights into East Asian mysticism that are otherwise hard to find in the English language.

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Lecture Outline

I. Introduction

A. The Key Objectives of Our Discussion

- i. **Explore Historical Roots:** Understand the origins and roles of Wu 巫 shamans during the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties, and their influence on the cultural and spiritual development of early China. The presentation not only teaches historical facts but also encourages viewers to draw universal wisdom from Wu and Taoist traditions — insights about balancing forces, navigating spiritual planes, and understanding the symbolic importance of practices like the Big Dipper pacing rituals, the Lo Shu magic square, and the integration of sound, words, and writing as vessels of power.
- ii. **Trace the Evolution of Practices:** Analyze how the mystical traditions of Wu shamanism were integrated into Taoist secret societies and Taoist metaphysics, spirit-mediumship, and witchcraft. The objective is to show that Taoist esoteric practices, such as divination, talisman crafting, and celestial rituals, are directly inherited from ancient Wu shamans.
- iii. **Connect Between Shamanism and Taoism:** Examine the continuity of shamanistic practices within Taoist magical systems, highlighting their preservation, refinement, and evolution over millennia.
- iv. **Identify First Principles:** Extract foundational principles of shamanism and Taoism from historical contexts and learn how to apply them to contemporary spiritual practices.
 1. Like mathematics and science, there are core learnings from Wu shamanism that can be considered universal principles, aimed at advancing our collective understanding of the world and benefiting our society.
 2. Unlike cultural expressions that are deeply tied to identity, beliefs, and sacred practices—such as rituals, symbols, and traditional clothing—there are ways to extract core insights from what I'll be presenting today to help us be part of the solution, to solve the problems our society faces, to share knowledge, and to encourage collaboration across cultural boundaries.
 3. There is a universality of knowledge here, built on a cumulative tradition where ideas from various cultures have contributed to this shared body of knowledge (i.e., the various Wu 巫 shamanic traditions documented during the Shang and Zhou dynasties to medieval and present day Taoist mysticism).
- v. This subject matter is useful and important core learning for any pagan, esoteric, or occult-leaning path, universally, as a way to study how millennia-old traditions of magic are the roots of what we practice today.

Consider how you might integrate similar ritual tools, techniques, and doctrine into your practice.

B. Translating “Wu 巫” to English

- i. For decades the most common English translation for “Wu 巫” was “witch” and “witchcraft,” due to the Chinese-English cultural exchanges happening primarily as a result of Christian missionaries in China and the Christian lens through which most Chinese is translated into English.
- ii. *Example:* Shangdi 上帝 is one of the oldest concepts of a supreme sky deity found on oracle bones. Yet as a result of Christian missionaries, the term was translated to the Abrahamic God. Today, “Shangdi 上帝” has been fully appropriated by Christians and is now the Chinese translation for the Abrahamic God, erasing the original cultural shamanic understanding Shangdi 上帝.
- iii. **Shaman:** Given the way Pre-Qin texts describe the role of the Wu 巫 and comparing that description to the practices found in Siberia and Central Asia, using the loan word “shaman” to translate Wu 巫 makes the most sense, as this presentation will endeavor to show.
 1. Translating “Wu 巫” to “shaman” captures the function as an intermediary between the human and spiritual realms.
 2. It aligns well with the global anthropological framework of shamanism.
 3. Like the shaman, the key roles of the Wu 巫 are as a spiritual-physical realm intermediary, diviner, and healer.
 4. However, the term “shaman” is specific to Siberian and Central Asian cultural traditions, and so this translation risks confusion, conflation, and even false equivalencies.
- iv. **Witch or Sorcerer:** I’m aligned with this translation as well. This translation reflects the Wu 巫 practice of rituals, spells, talismans, and incantations to influence the physical and spiritual realms. The strong and intuitive connection to nature and the land is also captured.
 1. Translating “Wu 巫” to “witch” emphasizes the ritualistic and magical aspects of the Wu 巫.
 2. Aligns with both Pre-Qin and Imperial Chinese descriptions of the Wu 巫, including the negative connotations of these labels.
 3. In terms of indigenous self-identity, most native practitioners pre-Millennial who would describe themselves as Wu 巫 would reject the label “witch” and consider it derogatory, whereas practitioners post-Millennial and younger wear that badge proudly.
- v. **Spirit Medium:** Present-day Wu 巫 practices emphasize their role as conduits who channel messages from the spirit world.
 1. The Chinese term Tongji 童乩 or Jitong 乩童 is more directly in-scope of the descriptive “spirit medium,” serving as oracles who channel gods and spirits, or who are able to communicate with the dead, whereas the Wu is a slightly different category of practitioner.

2. However, this translation omits one of the most crucial roles of the Wu 巫, both historically and culturally, and that is as a healer, and the medicinal and therapeutic aspects of the Wu 巫.
3. This translation erases the historical significance and role of the Wu 巫 in early Chinese healthcare. Even today, a key function of Wu 巫 is to heal holistically, mind, body, and spirit. The term “spirit medium” fails to cover that key function.

C. Defining the Wu 巫

- i. Per the *Complete Imperial Edicts of History* 冊府元龜 (Cè Fǔ Yuán Guī), a Song dynasty (960 – 1279 AD) historical treatise:
 1. The Wu 巫 were ghost seers, specialists with the ability to see and confer with spirits and specters 見鬼者.
 2. They are vessels, themselves consecrated to receive the gods/spirits 巫主接神.
 3. Shamanesses (f.) perform the annual purification rite/exorcism 女巫掌歲時祓除.
 4. Here, use of the term “元龜, yuán guī” in the title of the treatise is itself interesting. During the Song, this term meant:
 - a. Divination (in reference to tortoise shell divination) 古代用於占卜
 - b. Currency, capital, economics (as tortoise shells were used as a form of currency during the Han dynasty) 漢·王莽時貨幣
 - c. A metaphor for past events and histories 比喻可資借鑒的往事
- ii. During the Shang dynasty, men who were wu 男巫 were referred to as Xī 覡, and primarily performed the following functions:¹
 1. Led the sacrificial rites
 2. Read the omens
 3. Led the divination rituals (using yarrow stalks), i.e., were the shì rén 筮人
- iii. Whereas women who were wu 女巫 were simply referred to as Wu 巫,² and primarily performed the following functions:

¹ This particular delineation of separated Wu 巫 functions based on gender is found in the 453 BC text *Guo Yu* 國語, oft translated to *Discourses of the State*, and while it was written during the Zhou dynasty, was making reference to the rites and practices of the previous Shang dynasty. Additional insight into the gendered roles of the Wu 巫 is found in the *Book of Rites*, Sections 142 and 143, circa 300 BC – 100 BC, and the *Shuowen Jiezi* 說文解字, circa 1st century AD. See in the *Shuowen Jiezi*: “覡：能齋肅事神明也。在男曰覡，在女曰巫。从巫从見” (Xi: One who performs the ceremonial rites and rituals. Wu who are men are called Xi; Wu who are women are called Wu. Etymological origins: “Wu” + “Sight”) in Scroll 6 卷六, Chapter “巫部” Word 3019. Scroll 6 also delineates the various titles and positions within the Wu (shaman) department of the king’s court.

² From *Shuowen Jiezi*: “巫：祝也。女能事無形，以舞降神者也。象人兩褻舞形。與工同意。古者巫咸初作巫。凡巫之屬皆从巫” (Wu: One whose incantations hold power; one who leads the sacrificial rites (cross-referencing another term in the text, 祝, etymological origins = “mouth” + “Wu, shaman”). Wu who are women are able to move

1. Were the spirit mediums
 2. Performed exorcisms
 3. Tasked to ward off evil and vanquish demons and ghosts
 4. Prepare the purification baths
 5. Prepare tinctures and herbal remedies
- iv. What defines the identity of the Wu 巫 is the Voice of the Wu 誣. The music, speech, utterances, words, song, tones, declarations, or incantations in the Voice of the Wu are how the powers of the Wu are channeled and transmitted.³ Note earlier the *Shuowen Jiezi*⁴ definition for Wu 巫 is one whose incantations hold power.
- v. According to Xunzi 荀子, the role of the shaman is to:⁵
1. Observe the natural patterns of yin and yang | 相陰陽
 2. To divine omens of disaster | 占禳兆
 3. To use tortoise shells to read the hexagrams | 龜陳卦
 4. To facilitate exorcisms of malignant forces and know the Five Mystical Arts⁶ | 主禳擇五卜
 - a. Spiritual Cultivation 仙學
 - b. Divinatory Arts 卜筮
 - c. Study of Appearances 相學
 - d. Study of Fate 命學
 - e. Study of Healing Arts 醫學
 5. To assess whether a path will be auspicious or inauspicious | 知其吉凶妖祥
 6. Also, typically the shaman is one marked by a physical defect or deformation | 伛巫跛击之事也

the unseen and summon spirits through dance. Wuxian 巫咸 was the first shaman and all who are Wu descend from Wuxian), Word 3018.

³ Definition of the word “Wū 誣” from the *Shuowen Jiezi* (100 AD): “誣：加也。从言巫聲。” (“Wu: The words uttered by a Wu 巫. The term for ‘words 聲’ means the music, speech, utterances, words, song, tones, declarations, or incantations in the Voice of the Wu.”) Scroll 4 卷四, Chapter “言部,” Word 1606.

⁴ Around 100 AD during the Eastern Han dynasty, the scholar and philologist (the study of words) Xǔ Shèn 許慎, who was also an authoritative expert on the I Ching, undertakes the task of categorizing nearly 10,000 classical Chinese characters based on 540 root radicals from Chinese oracle bone and seal script. He then provides etymological explanations and definitions for these words, including their origins. His *Shuowen Jiezi* becomes the first systematic dictionary of Chinese characters and is considered the most authoritative text when it comes to definitions of words as they were used in Classical Chinese, which is Han dynasty and earlier, and the etymology or origins of each character.

⁵ Source: 《荀子·王制篇》 circa 400 BC, a collection of essays on philosophy, metaphysics, ethics and morality, and political science.

⁶ A common doctrine in Taoism 道教 (Dào Jiào) traced from Wu shamanistic traditions 巫文 (wū wén) is the Five Mystical Arts 五術 (wǔ shù), which in pre-Qin texts were referenced as the Methods of Craft 方術 (fāng shù). All Five Mystical Arts are taught through the *I Ching, Book of Changes*. This doctrine of the Five Arts linking Wu shamanism to Taoist mysticism is cited in the *Zhuangzi* 莊子. 《莊子·天下篇》

- vi. The Shang and Zhou dynasty Wu 巫 were also in charge of giving the last rites at funerals. They first exorcise or purify a coffin and consecrate it so that whosoever is laid to rest within it will be safeguarded for eternity.⁷
- vii. Aggregating the learnings from historical and archaeological sources referenced herein, the pre-Qin Wu 巫 serve the following roles:
 1. Mediator: An intermediary between the human and spirit realms, who is able to relay and receive messages between the realms. They have been chosen by the gods to speak to humans on their behalf, to relay messages from the spirit world to the human world.
 2. Healer: One who is able to diagnose, treat, and prevent illnesses and injuries. They help to restore the health of a kingdom and the health of individuals.
 3. Political Advisor: They provide geopolitical counsel⁸ and use divination and astrology to advise on political strategy.
 4. Historian-Scribe: One who studies, interprets, and documents the clan's past, preserving knowledge
 5. Religious Leader: In the capacity of one who preserves the clan's culture and legacy, leads rites and rituals

II. Historical Context of the Wu 巫史

A. Pre-Qin Roots of Shamanism to Taoist Mysticism in Imperial China

i. PRE-QIN CHINA: *A Summary and Overview*

1. 5000 – 3000 BC: **YANGSHAO, LONGSHAN, AND THE NEOLITHIC CIVILIZATIONS** by the Yellow River
 - a. **Early Animism & Ancestral Worship** – Spiritual practices centered around nature worship, fertility rites, and reverence for ancestors, with evidence of early shamanic burials suggesting ritualistic functions in the community.
 - b. **Shamanic Burial Practices & Totemic Symbols** – Grave goods and ceramic designs, particularly dragon and serpent motifs, suggest an early mythological system linked to spiritual protection and transformation.
 - c. **Divination & Proto-Wu Practices** – Longshan culture introduced early forms of divination, with cracked tortoise shells and bones hinting at proto-Wu 巫 shamanic practices that later evolved into oracle bone divination in the Shang

⁷ From the Book of Rites 周禮, Section 141: “巫先拂柩” noting the following: “掌群巫之政令。若國大旱，則帥巫而舞雩。國有大災，則帥巫而造巫恒。祭祀，則共匱主及道布及蕝館。凡祭事，守瘞。凡喪事，掌巫降之禮。” (They oversee law and policy. In the event of a severe drought, the highest ranked Wu 帥巫 performs the Yu rain dance (舞雩, wǔ yú). The reference to a “巫恒” (wū héng) in that passage is to a generational Wu, one who has inherited the role of the Wu from a long line of Wu. Héng “恒” is also Hexagram 32 of the I Ching, The Eternal, the trigrams Thunder over Wind, and one of the most important and instructive hexagrams on shamanism, Taoist mysticism, and spiritual cultivation.

⁸ Jizi 箕子 of the Shang dynasty, considered one of the wisest and most strategic political advisors in Pre-Qin history, was described as a Wu 巫 for his use of divination and astrology for providing counsel to the kings.

- dynasty. Evidence of oracle bone proto-writing can be traced back to these Neolithic civilizations.
- d. **Matriarchal Clan** – Early Neolithic civilizations were matriarchal clan-based societies.
2. 2070 – 1600 BC: **XIA** dynasty
- a. Traditionally regarded as China's first dynasty, though archaeological evidence remains debated, with Erlitou culture often associated with the Xia.
 - b. **Mythological Origins of Kingship** – The legendary Xia kings, particularly Yu the Great, were depicted as possessing divine or shamanic abilities, such as controlling floods through spiritual communion with nature.
 - c. **Wu 巫 Shaman-Kings & Ritual Governance** – The rulers were believed to act as intermediaries between Heaven and Earth, reinforcing the idea that political authority was tied to mystical power.
 - d. **Transition to Sacrificial & Ancestral Worship** – Ritual sacrifices to deities and ancestors became more formalized, with early ceremonial structures hinting at evolving state-sponsored religious rites.
3. 1600 – 1046 BC: **SHANG** dynasty
- a. We are now entering the Bronze Age of Chinese civilization.
 - b. **Oracle Bone Divination & Spirit Communication** – The Shang elite practiced pyromantic divination using oracle bones, with the king and Wu shamans interpreting messages from spirits and ancestors.
 - c. **Pantheon of Spirits & Ancestral Deities** – The supreme god Shangdi 上帝 was venerated as the ultimate celestial authority, while deceased ancestors were honored and consulted through sacrifices.
 - d. **Wu Shamans & State Rituals** – Shamans held high positions at court, conducting elaborate rituals, rain-making ceremonies, and exorcisms to maintain cosmic harmony and political stability. Furthermore, kings acted as both a political leader and religious intermediary – the chief Wu shaman – and so right from the beginning, politics and magic were intertwined.
4. 1046 – 256 BC: **ZHOU** dynasty
- a. **Mandate of Heaven 天命 & Theocratization of Rule** – The Zhou justified their conquest by developing the Mandate of Heaven, framing rulers as moral stewards whose legitimacy depended on virtue and cosmic favor.
 - b. **Rise of Philosophical Traditions** – Confucianism, Taoism, and Mohism emerged, shifting religious focus from purely ritualistic practices to ethical self-cultivation and metaphysical principles.

- c. **Decline of Wu Shamanism's political Power & Institutionalized Rituals** – While Wu shamans persisted in folk traditions, court-sponsored ritualists (such as *Li* scholars) began systematizing ceremonies, emphasizing structured ancestral worship over spontaneous shamanic trance practices. Toward the tail end of the Zhou dynasty, we see the decline of political and social prestige held by the Wu 巫.
- 5. 475 – 221 BC: After the Zhou dynasty came the **WARRING STATES** period
 - a. This was a period of intense political chaos, though with it came military innovations and “war magic” or battle magic.
 - b. **Philosophical Revolution & Esoteric Traditions** – Competing schools of thought (Taoism, Confucianism, Legalism) debated the nature of cosmic order, morality, and governance, while esoteric practices like Fangshi 方士 mysticism gained traction.
 - c. **Alchemy & Immortality Cultivation** – Taoist alchemists and mystics sought physical longevity and spiritual transcendence, laying the groundwork for later internal alchemy, or *Neidan* 內丹 traditions.
 - d. **Emergence of Protective Magic & Occult Practices** – Ritual specialists developed talismanic Fu 符 magic, incantations, and spirit evocations to ensure divine favor, reflecting a synthesis of ancient shamanism and emerging Taoist magical traditions.
- ii. **QIN** Dynasty
 - 1. 221 – 206 BC: Qin Shihuang conquers the warring states and centralizes power with his reign. This is the first time that the north and south clans are unified, designated himself the first emperor of China.
 - 2. Qin Shihuang's obsessive quest for immortality plays a pivotal role in the development of Taoist alchemy.
 - 3. Although politically the north and south of China mainland are united under the Qin dynasty, culturally the south remains definitively different, absorbing more influence from the religious traditions of northern India. Buddhism, for example, enters the southern regions and syncretizes with regional shamanism much earlier than it does northern China.
- iii. **HAN** Dynasty (The era beginning with the Han dynasty until the Qing ending in the early 1900s is called “Imperial China.”)
 - 1. 202 BC – 9 AD: Qin Shihuang's harsh Legalist policies (heavy taxation, conscripted labor, draconian laws) led to peasant revolts and overthrow of the Qin
 - 2. Rise of Taoist mysticism integrating Wu 巫 practices (exorcisms, spirit pacification, healing rituals, divination, inducing ecstatic

states aimed at astral travel and communication with celestial beings)

3. Many longstanding Taoist magical traditions trace their origins back to the Han dynasty

B. The Wu 巫 in Pre-Qin China

- i. The Wu 巫 were the spiritual pillars of their respective clans. In addition to the king or leader of the clan being considered a Wu, divinely endowed with the ability to commune between spirit and human realms, astronomers, writers, historians, physicians, pharmacologists, all specialized professions were the functions of the Wu.⁹
- ii. Under a king's employ would be a full department of Wu 巫, consisting equally of men and women, as it was believed that each specialized in different roles and functions of the Wu 巫.¹⁰
- iii. The Wu 巫 were a specialized profession during the Xia, Shang, and part of the Zhou dynasty whose duties and role were as follows:
 1. Resolves affairs with the spirits and honors the gods | 事鬼降神 (shì guǐ jiàng shén)
 2. Receives prophecies 預言 of fortune and misfortune | 預言吉凶 (yù yán jí xiōng)
 3. Prays and petitions for blessings and to ward off disasters | 祈福禳災 (qí fú ráng zāi)
 4. Mediator between Heaven and Humanity; Emissary and liaison for the spirits and gods | 是天人的溝通者和鬼神的代言人 (shì tiān rén de gōu tōng zhě hé guǐ shén de dài yán rén)
- iv. The *Book of Documents* 尚書, also known as the *Book of Heaven* 天書, records that King Wu, founding king of the Zhou dynasty, went to visit Jizi, described in the *Book* as a shaman, or more specifically, a Wu 巫.
 1. It was Jizi who taught King Wu the art of divination, phrased in the *Book* as jī yí 稽疑, which is to use divination to investigate doubts, for planning before taking action, and for guidance to be cautions in handling affairs.
 2. Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasty kings, legendary or historical, were described as Wu 巫, or shamanic kings, e.g., Yu the Great as the shamanic king who received the revelation of the Lo Shu; the Yellow Emperor, King Wen as the shamanic king who received the revelation of the I Ching Book of Changes, etc.

⁹ 《中國古代的巫》 *The Wu 巫 (Witches/Shamans) in Ancient China* (1995) by 童恩正 Tong Enzheng (1935 – 1997), a seminal historical and archaeological text defining the scope of primitive Yellow River religions, polytheism, monotheism in these cultures, and Wu shamanism, examining the function of Wu shamans in Neolithic China as an elite social group. Tong was a Chinese archaeologist and university professor.

¹⁰ Source: 《禮記·春官宗伯》, Section 39, circa 300 – 100 BC: “男巫，無數；女巫，無數；其師，中士四人，府二人，史四人，胥四人，徒四十人。” (The department of shamans that advise the king would consist of numerable men and women Wu, their respective superiors, four specializing in the art of war, two in governance, four in history, four scribes, and then forty disciples.)

- v. The Wu Zhu 巫祝 (or “Those Who Commune with Spirits and Petition Deities for Blessings or Protection”)
 1. The Wu Zhu 巫祝 serves the following functions:¹¹
 - a. Minister: acts as a spiritual leader, guiding the community through rituals and teachings to ensure harmony with the divine and natural order
 - b. Mystic: seeks direct experience of the transcendent, engaging in altered states of consciousness to access hidden knowledge and spiritual truth
 - c. Intercessor: bridges the human and spirit worlds, conveying prayers, offerings, and messages to deities, ancestors, or other supernatural entities
 - d. Mediator: resolves conflicts between opposing forces—spiritual or worldly—ensuring balance and alignment between the seen and unseen realms
 - e. Liturgist: performs sacred rituals and ceremonies, often involving chants, invocations, and symbolic actions to align the community with cosmic forces
 - f. Sage: embodies wisdom and insight, drawing on spiritual knowledge, life experience, and intuition to guide individuals and the collective in navigating life's challenges
 2. The Wu Zhu 巫祝 is one who has been designated to be an intermediary between the worlds, to serve as a conduit for the spirits.
| 能齐肃事神明者
 - a. *Note*: “祝” is an ideogram of a person kneeling by an altar 示, mouth 兄 open as if reciting an incantation.¹²
 - b. The type of Wu who served as spirit mediums were primarily women.¹³
 - c. The Wu dances to commune with the gods and spirits.¹⁴
 - d. *Note*: “巫” is an ideogram of two people dancing.¹⁵
- vi. Wu shamans acted as intermediaries between the human and spirit worlds, and in that capacity, performed healing, divination, and rituals to maintain cosmic harmony.¹⁶

¹¹ The *Shuowen Jiezi* dates back to 100 – 121 AD. On what defines a Wu 巫, it notes: “巫，祝也。女能事无形，以舞降神者也。象人两褒舞形。”

¹² “巫，祝也。” (Wū, zhù yě)

¹³ “女能事无形” (nǚ néng shì wú xíng) – noting that the shamaness (*f.*) has the ability to engage with and navigate the formless realms of existence; she manages the realms beyond physical manifestation and interacts with the unseen and shapeless forces.

¹⁴ “以舞降神者也” (yǐ wǔ jiàng shén zhě yě).

¹⁵ The *Shuowen Jiezi* 说文解字, circa 25 – 220 AD, noting: “象人两褒舞形” (xiàng rén liǎng bāo wǔ xíng) [the ideogram depicts two people engaged in a dance rite].

¹⁶ Oracle bones, ritual vessels, and early medical tools unearthed from Neolithic and early dynastic sites illustrate the practical and ritualistic aspects of Wu practices.

- vii. The *Book of Rites* 周禮 describes a ritual performed by the Wu 巫 that involves:
1. a box containing the wood effigy or host,
 2. a ritual cloth, or spirit cloth,
 3. a basket of grass stalks that will be needed by the diviner shaman during the ritual,
 4. summoning and petitioning the gods or spirits with those grass stalks, and
 5. calling upon the gods and spirit guardians of the four directions.
 6. The Wu 巫 would wear black robes. The black dye was made from iron vitriol.

C. From Shamans to Physicians

- i. The etymology and historical context of the terms 巫 (wu) and 醫 (medicine) shows an interconnected development.¹⁷ The ancient character for medicine was written as “醫,” where the base or root of the character is Wu “巫.”
- ii. During the Shang dynasty (1600 BC – 1046 BC), the physician and the shaman were one and the same occupational role.¹⁸
- iii. Wuxian 巫咸, the primordial ancestor¹⁹ and ascended master over all Wu 巫, was a healer and physician, and one of the Ten Wu overseen by Wuxian 巫咸, named Wupeng 巫彭, is designated the primordial ancestor Wu 巫 of all healers and physicians 醫.²⁰ See the later section, “Wuxian 巫咸 and the Ten Wu 十巫.”
- iv. To heal, the Wu 巫 used rituals, chants, herbal remedies, talismans, and spiritual invocations to treat illnesses.
- v. Healing practices associated with the Wu 巫 evolved into formalized concepts of Medicine 醫.²¹
 1. Excavated artifacts, such as ritual tools, oracle bones, and early medical instruments, provide material evidence of the Wu 巫’s dual role as healers and ritualists.

¹⁷ Ka, Yee Wong 王嘉儀. The Profession of Wu Shamans and Healers in Ancient China 從古文字看巫與醫之關係, 2015. Lingnan University, PhD dissertation, Hong Kong.

¹⁸ Source: 《說文解字》 or *Shuowen Jiezi*, a dictionary compilation by Xu Shen 許慎, circa 100 AD.

¹⁹ Xu Shen’s *Shuowen Jiezi* (100 AD) defines the Wu 巫 as: “巫，祝也。女能事无形，以舞降神者也。象人两褰舞形。” (“One whose incantations hold power. Women Wu are able to move the unseen and summon spirits through dance.”)

²⁰ Xu Shen’s *Shuowen Jiezi* (100 AD) defines Yi 醫 as: “治病工也。酒所以治病也。《周禮》有醫酒。古者巫彭初作醫。” (“One who treats illnesses. The *Book of Rites* makes reference to medicinal wine. The primordial ancestor Wu Peng was the first to practice medicine.”). Scroll 15 卷十五, Chapter: 酉部, Word 9803.

²¹ References to Wu shamans performing healing rituals appear in classical texts, such as the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 and the *Shiji* 史記, *Records of the Grand Historian*, which document their societal roles in addressing spiritual and physical ailments.

2. The persistence of spiritual elements in Chinese medicine, such as the use of talismans and incantations, demonstrates the lasting influence of Wu 巫 practices on later medical traditions.
- vi. The Wu 巫 played a foundational role in the evolution of Chinese health care by establishing the earliest frameworks for understanding disease, healing, and the interplay between natural and supernatural forces.
- vii. Illness was seen as caused by malevolent spirits or cosmic disharmony, which the Wu 巫 sought to rectify through spiritual and magical interventions. Divination was used to diagnose.
- viii. Yet the Wu 巫 were among the first to explore the medicinal properties of plants. Their empirical knowledge of herbs and their effects on the human body became the foundation of Taoist alchemy and Traditional Chinese Medicine.
- ix. Shamanic practices such as chanting, breath control, deliberate physical movements paired with mental focus, and trance-like states influenced the development of qi gong, tai chi, and Taoist meditation techniques.
- x. Developments in medical theory evolved the concept of malevolent spirits or cosmic disharmony to *jing*, *qi*, and *shen*, as found in the *Huangdi Neijing*, the seminal Han dynasty text on Chinese medicine.²²
- xi. The Wu 巫's dual role of spiritual healer and ritualist is the precursor to the formal medical profession that emerged during later dynasties.
- xii. As mediators between the human and spiritual realms, the Wu 巫 treated diseases as spirits interventions. Physicians 醫 inherited this role but focused more on physical interventions, such as herbal medicine and acupuncture.
- xiii. The Wu profession influenced both Taoist mystical practices and the systematic development of Chinese medicine.

D. From Shamans to Historians & Scribes

- i. During the Xia and Shang, the shamans 巫 and historians 史 were one and the same occupation. It was the role of the shaman to be a historian, the shǐ wū 史巫.
- ii. There is even a reference to a shaman-as-scribe (shǐ wū, 史巫) in the I Ching, Hexagram 57 (Xun 巽: Use Gentle Force), Line 2: "A gentle force moves beneath. Call upon the shaman-scribe. To disturb, to obey; to dispute, to comply; in this way—auspicious to proceed."²³
- iii. During both the Shang and Zhou dynasties, a king would have a full court of advisors, and among the advisors would be a department of imperial Wu 巫. One Wu 巫 specializes in government affairs. A second specializes in

²² The shift from Wu 巫 shaman-led healing to structured medicine is evidenced in Han dynasty era texts, including the *Huangdi Neijing* 黃帝內經, where spiritual concepts are integrated into medical theory.

²³ “九二：巽在床下·用史巫·紛若吉”

history and traditions, a storyteller. A third serves a bit like an investigator or detective. Then there would be ten disciple Wu 巫.²⁴

- iv. During the Western Zhou dynasty, the role of the shaman and the role of the historian gradually separated, forming a new hierarchical system of historians 史官制度, shǐ guān zhì dù.
- v. Eventually, the system of historians 史官 became integrated into the Confucian class of scholar-officials 士, the highest and elite occupational class in Imperial China.
 - 1. The elite status of the shaman 巫 during the Shang and early Zhou was supplanted by the scholar-official 士.
 - 2. *Note:* The four Confucian social classes in hierarchical order were: (1) 士 the scholar official, which included the military, (2) 農 farmers, (3) 工 artisans and craftsmen, and (4) 商 merchants. The word for merchants, *shang* 商, is also a reference to the Shang clan rulers of the Shang dynasty.

E. Wuxian 巫咸 and the Ten Wu 十巫

i. Wuxian 巫咸, the Great Ancestor of all Wu Shamans

- 1. Wuxian 巫咸 (also Xian Wu, 咸巫) is the ancestor god and ascended master of the Wu 巫. Venerated as the first and most masterful Wu 巫 and thus every Wu 巫's primordial ancestor, he may or may not have been an actual historical figure; either way, Wuxian is a fixture in Chinese lore and deified as a patron god to shamans, healers, diviners, and astrologers.
- 2. Per the *Book of Realms* (世本, Shiběn), Wuxian specialized in divination | “巫咸作筮。”²⁵
- 3. He is credited with the following, per common lore:
 - a. Inventor of the drum²⁶ | 鼓的發明者
 - b. A musician and artist | 音樂家, 藝術家
 - c. Inventor of divination with yarrow stalks | 用筮 (一種草) 占卜的創始人
 - d. Renowned astrologer | 占星家
 - e. Physician; master at pharmacology | 醫藥學家

²⁴ Rites of Zhou 周禮, dated around 300 BC to 100 BC, Section 38 (春官宗伯): 司巫：士官長；府一人，史一人，胥一人，徒十人。The *Book of Rites* also makes reference to the Wu as healers.

²⁵ “巫咸作筮” (“Wuxian performs divinations [with yarrow stalks].”). *Source:* 《Shì Běn 世本· Zuò Piān 作篇》, also known as the *Book of Origins*, an ancient encyclopedic compilation of mythical genealogy and records of the first clans of Yellow River civilizations. Earliest reference to the *Book of Origins* is 200 BC. Notes History and Archaeology professor Guan Weiliang 管維良 (Beijing University): “巫咸是占星家和占卜” (“The divinations that Wuxian performed were with astrology and yarrow stalks”) and “巫文化，則是上述古時期的占星術和占卜術為主要內容的文化” (“Ancient Wu culture and traditions were mainly focused on astrology and divination.”) “巫文” means “the culture and traditions of the Wu shamans.”

²⁶ Earliest drums “靈鼉之鼓, líng tuó zhī gǔ” excavated date back 4,200 years ago to the Xia dynasty in the Shanxi Province. There were a total of seven drums made from hollowed-out tree trunks stretched with crocodile skins (*alligator sinensis*).

4. Per the *Imperial Reader* (太平禦覽, Tàipíng Yùlǎn), Wuxian served as a minister for Emperor Yao (2356 – 2255 BC), and was also the emperor's physician, given Wuxian's great mastery of the healing arts | “巫咸，堯臣也，以鴻術為帝堯醫。”²⁷
5. A later reincarnation of Wuxian served as the minister (and shaman) for King Tai Wu of the Shang dynasty
6. “Wuxian will descend at dusk.”
 - a. Invocation ritual
 - b. *Source*: 最早见于《楚辞》记有“巫咸将夕降兮”。|
7. Wuxian was an ancient astrologer, the originator of astronomy, and the founder of divination
8. Wuxian and other ancient sages used astrology and divination to observe celestial phenomena and predict human affairs, exploring the connection between human beings and the universe. From the ancestry of Wuxian sprang the Wu tradition 巫文, which went on to influence various disciplines, such as the sciences, pharmacology, history, and the arts.²⁸

ii. Wuxian Five Star Divination 巫咸五星占

1. *Five Star Divination* 五星占 was a manuscript on astrology found amongst the Mawangdui Manuscripts, focusing on the five major planets: Venus, Jupiter, Mercury, Mars, and Saturn, consisting of ephemeris tables for these five planets during the reign of Qin Shihuang (246 BC).
2. The horoscopic chart was a nine-sector grid, following the Lo Shu magic square. The correspondences for each of the nine sectors mirror the feng shui correspondences of the Lo Shu we still use today.
 - a. The sun's placement represents the nature of *yang* energy.
 - b. The moon's placement represents the nature of *yin* energy.
 - c. The five planets Mercury, Mars, Venus, and Jupiter are triangulated with the sun and moon's placement, and that is how you interpret the implications of the five planets' placements.
 - i. E.g., Mercury, which corresponds with the Wu Xing element Water, is interpreted twice: first triangulated with the placement of the sun for Yang Water

²⁷ *Source*: 《太平禦覽》卷七二一引, a compilation of historical essays, compiled between 977 – 983 AD. This quote is also cited in *Ancient Mythology* 上古神話演義, Chapter 35: Wuxian's Art of Healing for Emperor Yao and the Yueshang clan (i.e., modern-day Vietnam and Laos); Divination with Tortoise Shells | 第三十五章巫咸鴻術為堯醫越裳氏來獻神龜, and is believed to have originated from the *Book of Realms* (200 BC).

²⁸ See Too, Seng Hee. The Writing Paradigm and Cultural Connotation of Miraculous Stories (Tales of Spiritual Efficacy) in Lu Shengyan's Contemporary Works 盧勝彥當代著作中靈應故事的書寫典範與文化詮釋. 2021. Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman 拉曼大學, PhD dissertation, Malaysia (“巫咸等上古先賢們透過運用占星術和占卜術，上觀天象，下測人事，探索著人類與宇宙之間的聯繫，創造了影響各類學科的璀璨巫文化。”).

- implications and then triangulated with the placement of the moon for Yin Water implications.
- ii. Mercury corresponds with Water and indicates matters pertaining to law and politics or one's career matters.
- iii. Mars corresponds with Fire and indicates matters pertaining to the military or to one's ambitions and future conquests.
- iv. Venus corresponds with Metal and indicates matters pertaining to education, scholarship, literature, the sciences, etc.
- v. Jupiter corresponds with Wood and indicates matters pertaining to agriculture and thus by extension prosperity and resources.
- vi. Saturn corresponds with Earth and indicates matters pertaining to leadership, sovereignty, land and territories, the kingdom, stability, and judgment. It can also indicate matters pertaining to marriage, heirs, and/or political alliances.
- d. One of the five Wu Xing elements is dominant or assigned to each of the nine Lo Shu sectors, and each planet is assigned an element; the alchemical interaction between the element of the sector (i.e., "astrological house") and the planet determines the interpretation.
 - i. For example, Mars (Fire) in the eastern sector (Wood) is empowered because Wood amplifies the forces of Fire.
 - ii. When Jupiter (Wood) is in the southeastern sector (also Wood), it is auspicious because it's Wood on Wood, i.e., there is elemental resonance.
 - iii. When Venus (Metal) is in the southern sector (Fire), it is debilitated or ill-dignified, because Fire defeats Metal.
- 3. Wuxian Five Star Divination is based on a sidereal chart, i.e., calculating the actual positions of Venus, Jupiter, Mercury, Mars, and Saturn relative to fixed stars in the sky, e.g., Polaris (the North Star; Ursa Minor), Sirius (Canis Major), Spica (Virgo), Arcturus, Vega (in Chinese known as the Weaver Maiden), Betelgeuse and Rigel (in Orion).
- iii. In *Classic of Mountains and Seas* (Shang Hai Jing, 山海经), there is a sacred mountain where the Ten Wu reside.²⁹
 - 1. They are:

²⁹ Source: 《山海經·大荒西經》, known in English as the *Classic of Mountains and Seas* or *Shan Hai Jing*, is traced back to the Zhou dynasty, written during the Warring States period (476 BC - 221 BC), but finalized in its present form during the early Han dynasty. While intended to be a treatise on history and geography, much of it is mythologized, including entries on gods and goddesses, immortals, fairies, and fantastical beasts.

- a. The **Ascended Master Wuxian** 巫咸, primordial ancestor spirit of all Wu shamans
 - i. Unity of all archetypes, representing the shaman who has mastered each of the Nine Domains and synthesized them into a cohesive spiritual philosophy
 - ii. Represents harmony with the universe
 - iii. Culmination and unification of the other nine shamanic practices
 - iv. Leadership in ritual; alignment of all energies
- b. The **Shaman of Temperance Wuji** 巫即, who helps the shaman to exercise self-control toward the path of transcendence
 - i. Reflects the shaman's role in maintaining balance, within individuals, communities, and nature
 - ii. Aligns with the Wu practice of harmonizing yin and yang
 - iii. Domain of Learning: The shaman must embody temperance to remain impartial and grounded, ensuring spiritual and societal stability
- c. The **Shaman Who Seeks Clearly Wupan** 巫盼
 - i. The Shaman Who Sees Clearly, or Clear Sight, represents the ability to the past, present, future, and hidden realms. This is divination and fortunetelling gifts.
 - ii. Signifies intuition and prophecy.
 - iii. Domain of Learning: The shaman's insight guides others, ensuring wise decisions and revealing hidden dangers. The shaman must be a gifted diviner.
- d. The **Healer Wupeng** 巫彭, primordial ancestor spirit of all physicians and pharmacologists
 - i. The Healer represents the shaman's duty to restore physical, emotional, and spiritual health
 - ii. This archetype of the shaman includes herbal medicine, energy healing, and soul retrieval
 - iii. Domain of Learning: Healing is a cornerstone of shamanism, addressing individual and communal health
- e. The **Shamaness-Priestess Wugu** 巫姑
 - i. Wugu represents spiritual connection and ritual knowledge
 - ii. The Priestess is the shaman's ability to access unseen realms, interpret divine will, and conduct sacred rituals (similar to the *Shuowen Jiezi* definition of the function of women Wu)

- iii. Domain of Learning: Mastery of ritual and connection to spirit realms is fundamental to shamanic work, ensuring effective communication with spirits and ancestors
- f. The **Shaman of Truth and Wisdom Wuzhen** 巫真
 - i. The Shaman of Truth signifies honesty and ethical responsibility
 - ii. Truth embodies the shaman's commitment to authenticity, moral clarity, and integrity
 - iii. Represents the ethical foundation of every shamanic practice
 - iv. Domain of Learning: A shaman must be a reliable moral compass, holding themselves and others accountable to cosmic and societal laws
- g. The **Shaman of the Great Rites Wuli** 巫礼, who brings the blessings of the gods, who leads the ceremonial rituals
 - i. Great Rites focuses on the performance of large-scale rituals that align human actions with cosmic forces, such as Pacing rituals, rain dances, and seasonal ceremonies and rites of passage
 - ii. Domain of Learning: These rituals reinforce the interconnectedness of humanity, nature, and the divine, maintaining cosmic balance.
- h. The **Shaman Who Protects Wudi** 巫抵
 - i. Shamanic domain of guardianship and defensive magic
 - ii. Shaman Who Protects highlights the shaman's duty to safeguard individuals, communities, and spiritual spaces
 - iii. Domain of Learning: The Wu is both healer and protector, using talismans, invocations, and energy manipulation to defend against malevolent forces
- i. The **Harbinger Wuxie** 巫谢, who warns of danger, guardian of endings, keeper of the shadows
 - i. The domain of Change and Transformation
 - ii. The Harbinger signifies the shaman's role as an agent of transformation, initiating growth, and guiding transitions (e.g., life, death, seasonal rites, etc.)
 - iii. Domain of Learning: Wu shamans mediate major shifts, ensuring these changes are aligned with natural and spiritual cycles.
- j. The **Shaman of Prosperity, Wuluo** 巫罗, who catches and safeguards treasures
 - i. Prosperity reflects the shaman's ability to invoke blessings, ensure abundance, and foster success in material and spiritual endeavors

- ii. Domain of Learning: Prosperity rituals and spell-working that sustains an individual's or a community's well-being.
 2. *Shuowen Jiezi*, citing the Zhou dynasty *Book of Rites*, notes that Wupeng 巫彭 is the primordial ancestor of those who practice medicine.³⁰
 3. Atop this sacred mountain, all varieties of medicines can be found | 百藥爰在
 4. This was where the first humans settled was also where the most renowned shamans first gathered (the “renowned shamans” being a reference to the Ten Wu) | 自然是人類最早聚居、名巫最早雲集的地方
- F. Shamanism and Divination
- i. Among the *wu* one holds a particularly important office in the king's court of ministers, and that is the *wu* shaman in charge of divination, the *shì rén* (筮人).
 - ii. “All important events of the kingdom must be determined first and foremost by divination.”³¹ All such divinations were performed by a subset of Wu 巫 specializing in divination, the *shì rén* (筮人).
- G. The Religion of the Wu 巫教
- i. The main religion during the Shang and Zhou dynasties was Wu shamanism. 週的宗教形式主要表現為巫教.
 1. The supreme god in this religion was Shàngdì. 巫教信仰的最高神是上帝 (Note, however, that in the present day, Shàngdì 上帝 is now the Chinese translation for Jehovah.)
 - a. The main deity in the indigenous Chinese religion called Tian 天. Primordial creation god. Today, the revival of this religion is called Tianism.
 - b. Speculated that later, Shangdi 上帝 became syncretized with the Jade Emperor 玉皇大帝.
 2. According to Cheng Mengjia 陳夢家 (1911 – 1966), the preeminent Chinese scholar on the Shang dynasty and oracle bones, the Wu 巫 shamans of the Shang invoked eight emanations of divinity:³²

³⁰ The *Shuowen Jiezi* 說文解字 (“Explaining Pictograms and Analyzing Characters”) was a text completed around 100 AD by the court scholar Xu Shen 許慎, who was considered an authority of his time on interpreting the Five Classics (I Ching, Book of Rites, etc.). The *Shuowen Jiezi* was the first systematic dictionary of Chinese characters, categorizing nearly 10,000 characters into 540 of its root radicals, and providing etymological explanations based on their ancient seal script forms and origins. This text is vital to Chinese linguistics, culture, and history, as it preserves the early interpretations of these Chinese characters and reveals insights into ancient thought on these terms and concepts.

³¹ As quoted from the Book of Rites 《禮記·春官宗伯》, circa 300 – 100 BC, Section 129: “凡國之大事，先筮而後卜。” (Fán guó zhī dà shì, xiān shì ér hòu bō.)

³² Source: 陳夢家 (Chen Mengjia), 古文字中的商周祭祀 (“The Ancient Writings of the Shang and Zhou”), *Yenjing Journal* 19 (June, 1936): 125 – 129.

- a. **Shàngdì** 上帝, later syncretized with Tiāndì 天帝, a god of the skies, emperor of the heavens; ruler of the upper realm; associated with jade or gold talismans and mirrors (as ritual tools)
- b. **Shè** 社, a god of the soil, later syncretized with Lords of the Lands, Tǔdì gōng 土地公, patron spirits of the earth who must be placated if you seek to use a particular parcel of land
- c. **Fēng** 風, a deity of the wind, later associated with the combined powers of Fuxi and Nuwa (creators of humanity), and thus the tools of an architect or carpenter; best invoked with wood or bamboo talismans
- d. **Xún** 旬, a divine personification of Time, characterized as the ten-day week. Since ten indicates a complete cycle in terms of time (i.e., ten days, ten degrees in an astrological decan, ten heavenly stems, yin and yang binary within each of the five phases equals ten, etc.), Xun as Ten is a reference to Time as a whole concept.
- e. **Hé** 河, a divine personification of the rivers, with associations to the moon and lunar energy (via tidal forces); divine powers of water are harnessed through sound (thus mantra recitations, prayers, music, etc.).³³
- f. **Yuè** 岳, a divine personification of the mountains, associated with ancestors; one must climb to the peak of a mountain to find the gateway to the underworld; today is a oft-invoked divinity in Korean shamanism
- g. **Dōng Mǔ** 東母, the Eastern Mother, associated with the yang, and in Taoism, becomes Dōng Wáng Gōng 東王公, the Grand Duke of the East. Personification of the sun.³⁴ Sacrifices of cows were used to honor the sun.³⁵ By the Jin dynasty, 310 – 376 AD, references to an Eastern Mother in pairing with the Western Mother were replaced by a fatherly Grand Duke of the East 東王公 paired with the Queen Mother of the West.

³³ An iteration of the river goddess is Luo Shen 洛神 is a Shang and Zhou dynasty goddess of the Luo River 洛河. An early notable mention of the Luo river goddess is in the *Chuci* 楚辭, or Songs of Chu, from the Warring states period (475 – 221 BC). Otherwise, most of the historically documented references we have of the Luo river goddess is from the Han dynasty (206 BC – 220 AD) and Three Kingdoms Era (220 – 280 AD). Luo Shen is described as extraordinarily beautiful, graceful, in elegant makeup and dress. In “Ode to the Luo River Goddess 洛神賦,” the poet Cao Zhi describes the goddess as “graceful as a swan, gentle as a swimming dragon, with a bun like clouds, and bright white teeth.”

³⁴ Professor of Cultural Anthropology and Linguistics Cháng Yào Huá 常耀华, author of over 50 research papers on oracle bones and ancient Chinese religion, contends that the Eastern Mother references in the Shang oracle bones were to a mother goddess of the Sun, whereas the Western Mother were references to a mother goddess of the Moon.

³⁵ In Han Kuanshu 漢寬舒’s *Book of Fengshan* 封禪書 (Western Han, 202 BC – 9 AD), “Sacrifices made to the Sun shall be cattle; sacrifices made to the Moon shall be sheep or boar.” (祭日以牛，祭月以羊彘特) Moreover, Shang dynasty oracle bone divinations included inscriptions of cow sacrifices to the Eastern Mother.

- h. **Xī Mǔ** 西母, the Western Mother, associated with the yin, later syncretized with the Queen Mother of the West, Xi Wang Mu 西王母 (and her various regional manifestations), associated with darkness and all that the darkness implies. Personification of the moon. Sacrifices of sheep and boars were used to honor the moon.
- ii. Five essential aspects characterize the Wu religion 巫教³⁶
 - 1. Veneration and Divination: Communion
 - 2. Traditions and Customs: Inherited Craft
 - 3. Artistic Expression: Song and Dance
 - 4. Writing and Words as Magical and Sacred
 - 5. Knowledge of Medicine and Healing
- iii. The fundamental purpose for those five essential aspects is to be an intermediary between physical and spirit realms, mediating between the seen and the unseen.
- iv. *Note:* The shamanic practices of the Mongols, Khitan, and Jurchen in China are referred to as Wū Jiào 巫教.

III. From Shamanism 巫 to Taoist Witchcraft 巫

A. The Historical and Cultural Evolution

- i. During the Spring and Autumn period (770 – 481 BC), state reliance on the Wu 巫 went on the decline.³⁷
- ii. By the Qin dynasty (221 – 206 BC), the Wu 巫 lost their prominence after the emperor Qin Shihuang abolished Wū Jiào 巫教 as an institutionalized religion. Those who had continued to practice Wu 巫 Jiào 教 were thus absorbed into Taoism, or Tao 道 Jiào 教.³⁸
 - 1. Specifically, records of what had been referred to as Wū Jiào 巫教 were later found in Huang-Lao Taoism 黃老道 and the Yin-Yang School of Thought 陰陽家.
- iii. During the Han dynasty, Zhang Daoling 張道陵's lineage, Way of the Five Grains of Rice (五斗米道, Wǔ Dǒu Mǐ Dào), circa 142 AD, integrated southwestern Wu 巫 shamanistic practices and beliefs.

³⁶ This is as set forth by Beijing University Prof. Guan Weiliang 管維良, who is a leading expert on Wu historical shamanism and pre-Qin China. He is also an archaeologist who has led notable explorations across Yellow River sites.

³⁷ However, Wū Jiào 巫教 did continue to endure in the State of Chu 楚, or present-day Hunan, Hubei, Chongqing, Guizhou, Henan, Anhui, Jiangxi, Jiangsu, and Zhejiang. Also, the Buddhism practiced in Tibet integrated with its regional cultures of Wu 巫 shamanism and became known as Bön or Bönism (苯教, Běn jiào).

³⁸ Taoism 道教 is a religion indigenous to China 中國, evolving from the shamanistic religions Wū Jiào 巫教 that preceded it. The shamanic practices associated with the Yellow Emperor (Huangdi, 黃帝), as a Wu 巫 shamanic king, in combination with the teachings of Lao Tzu 老子, both immortalized as ancestral spirits or ascended masters (神仙, shén xiān), formed the basis of Taoist mystical practices called Huang-Lao Taoism (黃老神仙家, Huáng Lǎo shén xiān jiā). See also: [Taoism: A Decolonized Introduction](#).

1. The lineage, led by Zhang Daoling, unified into the Way of the Celestial Masters, or Tianshi Tao 天師道, and led rebellions to overthrow Han dynasty rule.
 2. In 194 AD, they won their independence, becoming their own theocratic state governed by the Celestial Masters.
- iv. Maoshan Taoist Magic 茅山道: Táohóngjǐng 陶弘景 (456 – 536 AD) was a Southern Qi Taoist scholar, alchemist, pharmacologist, and mystic. He founded the Maoshan sect of Taoism (茅山道術, Máoshān Dào shù), which integrates rituals, soul retrieval practices, exorcistic rites, and talismans from Ge Hong's *Baopuzi* and Huang-Lao Taoism 黃老道, syncretized with Mahayana Buddhism.
- v. Maoshan Taoist practitioners strive to receive the Ten Channeled Powers (十种神通, shí zhǒng shén tōng or 十通, shí tōng) based in esoteric Mahayana Buddhism, which are as follows:
1. Claircognizance 善知他心智神通
 2. Clairsentience 無礙清淨天眼智神通
 3. Reading & Recalling Past Lives 宿住隨念智神通
 4. Predicting the Future 知盡未來際劫智神通
 5. Remote Hearing & Remote Viewing 無礙清淨天耳智神通
 6. Astral Travel; Journeying Between Realms 無體性智神通
 7. Clairaudience 善分離一切眾生言音智神通
 8. Thaumaturgy or Performing Miracles 誕生無量色身智神通
 9. Empowered Incantations 一切法智神通
 10. Transcendence 入所有法滅盡智神通
- vi. A southern descendant of the Celestial Masters called the Way of the Orthodox Unity (正一道, Zhèngyī Dào) gained prominence during the Song dynasty (960 – 1279 AD) and also later during the Yuan dynasty (1271 – 1368 AD), when China was ruled by Mongols.
1. During the Yuan, the Mongols granted the Zhèngyī Celestial Masters the right to oversee all Taoist schools.
 2. During this time, Southern Han traditions of Wu shamanism syncretized with Mongolian shamanism 巫教 within the school of Zhèngyī.
- B. Key Taoist Deities Inherited from Wu Traditions 巫文
- i. **Jade Emperor** (玉皇, Yù Huáng or 玉帝, Yù Dì), the Taoist primordial god of heaven evolved from Shangdi 上帝, an oft-mentioned deity in Shang oracle bones.
 - ii. **Nüwa** 女媧, a mother goddess, dates back to the Shang dynasty (with records of the kings of Shang venerating her), though continued to endure as a venerated goddess among Taoists, Confucianists, and Buddhists. She and her brother-husband Fuxi 伏羲 created humanity.
 - iii. **Queen Mother of the West** (西王母, Xī Wáng Mǔ) is a patron goddess of many Taoist secret societies, and was likely an evolution from the Western

Mother, or Xī Mǔ 西母 referenced in Shang dynasty oracle bones and Wáng Mǔ 王母, as referenced in the I Ching, Hexagram 35 (晉, Jin): Advancement.

- iv. **Lady of the Nine Heavens** (九天玄女, Jiǔ tiān xuán nǚ), also known as the “Mysterious Lady of the Nine Heavens” is associated with the Mysteries (Xuán 玄), esoteric wisdom, and spiritual cultivation. She is also associated with warfare, military strategy, and martial arts.

1. The “Nine Heavens” reference is to the Lo Shu Nine Palaces that is the basis of Taoist metaphysics, and also to the mythological concept of nine heavens.³⁹
2. Sima Qian’s *Records of the Grand Historian* makes a passing reference to the Wu 巫 of the Nine Heavens, akin to priestess devotees to Jiǔtiān.⁴⁰
3. She could be associated or connected with Tài Xuán Nǚ 太玄女 as described by the alchemist and Taoist mystic Ge Hong. Ge Hong describes the goddess as having been mortal first, named Zhuan He 顓和, widowed at a young age. She subsequently pursued Taoist cultivation and the “Art of Jade 治玉子之術.” Tài Xuán Nǚ acquired the power to walk on water, her body stayed warm even in the iciest winter, put out wildfires with her breath, could unlock any lock, and she attained the power to influence governments, kingdoms, and cities. With her magical staff, she could knock on rocks and the rocks would open like gateways.⁴¹
4. There’s also striking similarity to the Luo River Goddess 洛神, said to be a Shang and Zhou dynasty goddess of the Luo River, i.e., the Lo Shu magic square. It was from the Luo River that the nine-sector square emerged and appeared to Yu the Great, upon the back of a dragon tortoise.

C. Esoteric Taoism 玄道 and the Twelve Secret Forms 道術

- i. Xuan Dao 玄道, meaning the Arcane Way or Mysterious Tao, refers to a doctrine in Taoist occult philosophy premised on passages from the Tao Te Ching⁴² and as interpreted by Ge Hong, in his seminal text on Taoist magic and alchemy, *Baopuzi* 抱樸子.

³⁹ The *Tai Xuan Jing* (太玄經) from the Western Han dynasty (206 BC – 9 AD) lists and names the nine heavens 九天: “九天: 一為中天, 二為姜天, 三為從天, 四為更天, 五為睟天, 六為廓天, 七為減天, 八為沈天, 九為成天。九地: 一為沙泥, 二為澤池, 三為沚崖, 四為下田, 五為中田, 六為上田, 七為下山, 八為中山, 九為上山。”

⁴⁰ The Wu of the Nine Heavens or “九天巫” is referenced in Sima Qian’s *Records of the Grand Historian* 史記 (109 BC – 91 BC), Section 38 of the Chapter “封禪書” in “書.”

⁴¹ Source: *Shénxiān Chuán* [Legends of the Immortals] 《神仙傳》《卷四》[Volume 4] 《太玄女》[The Great Xuannu] by Ge Hong (316 – 421 AD). Ge Hong’s stated purpose for writing *Legends of the Immortals* was to prove to his disciples that gods exist, that these immortals and ascended masters of Taoism were real.

⁴² The word Xuan 玄 appears in 7 verses of the Tao Te Ching: Verse 6, revealing the Mysterious Feminine; Verses 1 and 10; Verses 15 and 51; and Verses 56 and 65. Most notably is this line from Verse 1: “Mystery, this perpetual Mystery, is a gateway to the universe of wonders” [玄之又玄, 衆妙之門]

1. The Mysteries, Xuán 玄 is the primordial ancestor of all things, and the original source of all things.⁴³
2. “The Way of the Mysteries starts within, a quiet flame where truths begin. Guarded outward, strong and true, it shines with spirit, clear as dew. Skill alone won’t guard the flame; its form obscures the deeper aim. The secret path, both vast and near, begins with thought made pure and clear.”⁴⁴ – from *Baopuzi*, “Limitless Mystery 暢玄”
3. Xuan Dao (玄道), the Way of the Mysteries, is attained by achieving three levels of cultivation.⁴⁵
 - a. Tài Xuán 太玄: The first and initial level is to attain knowledge and wisdom of the Supreme Mystery.
 - b. Zhòng Xuán 重玄: The next level is to attain knowledge and wisdom of the Profound Mystery.
 - c. Xuán Yī 玄一: The highest and final level of attainment is the Mysterious One. To attain Xuan Yi means “the return of fate and destiny to their purest form, where one merges with the primordial emperor’s original essence.”⁴⁶
- ii. In accordance with the *Canons*, the Taoist mystic strives to master the Twelve Secret Forms 道術, keys to accessing Xuan Dao 玄道, which are as follows (also known as 法術):
 1. 占卜 zhān bǔ: Divination (with Yarrow Stalks)
 2. 符籙 fú lù: Crafting Talismans, Sigils, and Seals
 3. 祈禳 qí ráng: Petitioning the Spirits (also: Spells)
 4. 內丹 nèi dān: Inner Alchemy
 5. 外丹 wài dān: Outer Alchemy
 6. 爐火黃白 lú huǒ huáng bái: Gold and Silver Alchemy
 7. 辟谷 bì gǔ: Spiritual Fasting
 8. 導引 dǎo yǐn: “Yoga + Tai Chi + Breathing Techniques”
 9. 行躋 xíng qiāo: Astral Journeying (with a Pole & Magical Shoes...)
 10. 方藥 fāng yào: Traditional Chinese Medicine
 11. 服氣 fú qì: “Eating Qi for Nourishment,” a form of Qi Gong
 12. 存思 cún sī: “Meditation + Spirit Invocations”
- iii. The Twelve Secret Forms 道術 are cultivation methods for attaining Xuán Yī 玄一, oneness with the Xuan, or oneness with the Great Mystery.

⁴³ English translation of “玄者，自然之始祖，而萬殊之大宗也” from *Baopuzi* 抱樸子.

⁴⁴ English translation for: “夫玄道者，得之乎內，守之者外，用之者神，忘之者器，此思玄道之要言也。” 《抱樸子·暢玄》 The reference to skill “器” (Qi) can be to tools, technology, but also to personal skill, talent, and capabilities.

⁴⁵ From the *Supreme Caverns Jade Sutra* (大洞玉經, Dà Dòng Yù Jīng) from the *Taoist Canons* (大洞仙經認為，以道而論，性命相合謂之玄，其修玄的初級功為太玄，二步功為重玄，最高階段則為玄一。)

⁴⁶ English translation of “玄一者，命復歸性，結就圓珠中生帝一也。” From the *Supreme Caverns Jade Sutra* 大洞玉經, “Commentary on the Twelve Essentials 疏要十二義.”

1. Per the canonized *Supreme Caverns Jade Sutra*, mastery over the Twelve Secret Forms will reveal knowledge and wisdom of the Twelve Principles (or Meanings) 義.
2. Yet paradoxically, staying attached to one's mastery over the Twelve Secret Forms will hold one back from fully attaining the level of Xuan Yi. Thus, one must strive to master the twelve, and then forget the methods and forms of the twelve.
- iv. Xuán Dé 玄德, meaning the Hidden Code or the Code of the Mysteries, is referenced in Verse 10 of the Tao Te Ching 道德經: “To birth, to nurture, born without needing, to do and not need to do, to be skilled without teachings—this is called Xuán Dé 玄德, the Hidden Code.”⁴⁷

IV. Wu 巫 Shamanic Practices Integrated into Taoist Magic

A. Yarrow Stalk Divination

- i. The Book of Rites 周禮, dated around 300 BC, noted that under the employ of the king were nine Wu 巫 charged with the role of divination 筮 for the kingdom, three specializing in each of the three forms of divination, named as Liánshān 連山, Guīcáng 歸藏, and the third, Zhōuyì 周易, the Zhōuyì being a reference to the I Ching.⁴⁸
 1. Both the Guīcáng 歸藏 and Zhōuyì 周易 divination methods utilized yarrow stalks or dried stalks of grass and reeds.
 2. Thus, I Ching divination was historically under the purview of the Wu 巫
 3. An I Ching diviner, called a *shì rén* 筮人, would be considered a Wu 巫, but was a specialized subset within Wu 巫 shamanism.
- ii. Divination “筮” (Shì) is a reference to using yarrow stalks to prophesy good and bad omens | 筮，用蓍草占卜吉凶
- iii. In Classical Chinese, the character for divination “筮” is composed of bamboo divination stalks and the character for shaman.⁴⁹ The character for shaman “巫” relates to the ritual dance and performance of rites.⁵⁰
- iv. Per a 3rd c. BCE text, a divination ritual requires:

⁴⁷ English translation of “生之、畜之，生而不有，為而不恃，長而不宰，是謂玄德” from Verse 10 of the Tao Te Ching 道德經.

⁴⁸ From the chapter “Chūn Guān Zōng Bó 官宗伯” in the Rites of Zhou 周禮 (also known as the Book of Rites), Section 129, describing three schools or systems of divination used by the court *wu* 巫 shamans: “掌三易以辨九筮之名，一曰「連山」，二曰「歸藏」，三曰「周易」。” This account is also found in the Taiping Yulan 太平御覽 (also known as the Imperial Reader of the Taiping Era) from the Song dynasty (AD 977 – 983), in the chapter titled “Divination 筮上.”

⁴⁹ From Xu Shen's *Shuowen Jiezi* (100 AD): “筮：《易》卦用蓍也。從竹從巫。 𠩺，古文巫字。” (“Divination: Using the I Ching and yarrow stalks. Etymological origins: From “stalk” and the character “巫”. 𠩺 is an ancient Chinese character for shaman.”) Scroll 6, 卷六, Chapter “竹部.”

⁵⁰ From the *Stories of Master Su* 蘇氏演義, a collection of notes from the Tang dynasty, noting about the character for “divination 筮” (古文筮字从竹从巫。竹者，筮之数；巫者，舞也。舞以降神，谓之巫。巫字象两袂而舞者也。) 《蘇氏演義》卷上曰

1. 視日 (1) observing the sun, meaning astrological timing
 2. 齋戒 (2) fasting, and this requirement comes up several times in several different texts on divination
 3. 脩涂 (3) consecration, which involves incense
 4. 几筵 (4) preparing the spiritual seat, and your guess is probably as good as mine on what that means
 5. 饋薦 (5) making the sacrifices, and here, it's a form of sweet grain, sorghum, maize, or millet.
 6. 告祝 (6) reciting the prayers
- v. *Note:* You'll find several instances across many pre-Qin texts describing a basket or bundle of dried stalks, be that grass, reeds, or bamboo, as an important tool of the Wu 巫. These stalks are used during ritual, in rites and ceremonies, divination, and for communicating with the gods and spirits.
- B. Lunar-Solar Astrology
- i. The sexagenary (cycles of 60) lunar-solar calendar system of 10 heavenly stems and 12 earthly branches used by Taoist magicians today originated from the Shang dynasty. We know this because the heavenly stems and earthly branches were found on Shang oracle bones, used for timekeeping.
 - ii. The 10 heavenly stems (天干, tiān gān) are based on the Wu Xing five elements and the innate binary yin and yang polarity within each, resulting in a total of 10 combinations.
 1. Each polarity + element (e.g., yang Wood, yin Wood, yang Fire, yin Fire, etc.) is assigned to certain correspondences, based on observations of nature cycles and constellations.
 2. There is a 60-year cycle, 60-day cycle, and 60-point directional (geographical) cycle referenced in astrology and feng shui (geomancy).
 3. Astrologically, the 10 heavenly stems also correspond with 10° decans.
 - iii. The 12 earthly branches (地支, dì zhī) correspond with the 12 animals of the Chinese zodiac, based on Jupiter cycle observations (the Jupiter cycle of 12 years).
 1. Each zodiac sign (polarity + element) corresponds with a 2-hour segment of time called the ascendant (similar to planetary hours in Western astrology).
 2. Like planetary hours in Western ceremonial magic, the 12 earthly branches are often used in talisman crafting and the timing of rituals and spells.
 3. They also correspond with the four seasons and their cyclical transitions.
 - iv. The I Ching makes frequent references to the heavenly stems, earthly branches, and Jupiter cycle.
 - v. Ba Zi (Four Pillars of Destiny) calculations and feng shui use this Lunar-Solar astrological system for interpreting fate, personalities, to identify opportunities, and to guide decision-making.

C. Pacing the Big Dipper 步罡踏斗

- i. In various pre-Qin texts we find references to a Wu ritual called “Dancing the Dragon” (冬舞龍, Dōng Wǔ Lóng), or “Winter Dragon Rites,” with “冬” being a reference to Winter and the North.
 1. Note also that if the Rites are performed at night facing the north, then the ritual would be facing the Big Dipper with the handle facing “downward” to the north, as if the gods of the Big Dipper were descending down to earth.
 2. The god invoked for the Dragon Dance is Xuán Míng 玄冥, a god of the underworld, of darkness, and of the night. Xuán Míng was also the god of winter, water, and the North.
 3. Xuán Míng 玄冥 was later syncretized with Xuán Wǔ 玄武 is still venerated in various Taoist lineages today; another incarnation of the north god, who is considered a dark god, is Bei Dì 北帝.
 4. Per the *Dew of Spring and Autumn Annals* 春秋繁露 circa 179 – 104 BC, the “Dancing of the Dragon” Rite was performed in winter, for six days, praying to the spirits of the Sacred Mountains⁵¹ for blessings and protection. The Wu, robed in black, dance upon an altar of nine sectors (Nine Palaces), with four “gates” on the four sides of the Nine Palaces, mirroring the Lo Shu magic square, to invite in the four guardians. Dragon effigies are placed along the four gates. Both a dark wine and a clear wine are drunk.⁵²
 5. For more information on the Lo Shu magic square: [The Lo Shu Magic Square \(雜書, Luò Shū\)](#)
 6. The Rite was integral to Tianism, or veneration of Heaven found during the Shang and Zhou dynasties, venerating a Shangdi as the supreme god of heaven and creator of the universe. Tianism

⁵¹ This is a reference to the Five Sacred Mountains of the five cosmic deities: Mount Tai 泰山 in Shandong, Mount Hua 華山 in Shaanxi, Mount Heng 衡山 in Hunan, Mount Heng 恒山 in Shangxi, and Mount Song 嵩山 in Henan. Note also that “Sacred Mountain” in lineages that are more syncretized with Buddhism will also recognize the Four Sacred Mountains per Chinese Buddhism: Mount Wutai 五台山 for the bodhisattva Manjusri, Mount Emei 峨眉山 for Puxian bodhisattva, Mount Jiuhua 九華山 for Ksitigarbha or Dizang Wang Pusa, and Mount Putuo 普陀山 for Kuan Yin. Per Taoist metaphysics, Mountains generate Qi, and the greener and lusher the mountain, the more auspicious and vitalizing the Qi. Water conducts Qi, as do lakes, rivers, and fountains.

⁵² The text is often translated into English as the *Luxuriant Dew of the Spring and Autumn Annals* 春秋繁露, the chapter on Prayers and Rites for Rain 求雨, dated to the Western Han (206 BC – 9 AD), attributed to Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒, a philosopher and statesman who advocated for Tianism (sky or heaven worship), similar in general concepts to Mongolian Tengrism; Tianism venerates Shangdi as the supreme god of heaven, who was worshipped during the Shang and Zhou dynasties; Tianism also included ancestor veneration and polytheism Earlier in that same chapter of the *Annals*, the text notes how Wu 巫 shamans are to be selected for the rites and rituals: “擇巫之潔清辯利者以為祝。” (“The Wu 巫 must be selected based on Purity 潔清 and Eloquent 辯利.”) The word choice implies that if the Wu 巫 does not meet those prerequisites, the blessings will hold no power. The term “Purity 潔清” suggests one who is honest, has integrity, is morally upright, and in this context of ritual, would have also performed the extensive personal purification rites prior to the ceremony. The descriptive “Eloquent 辯利” is in reference to one with strong oratory skills, great at public speaking, commands presence, is fluent in speech and writing; someone charismatic and emanates with power.

- included veneration of the Big Dipper and North Star (Polaris) as domiciles of gods.
- ii. The Dragon Dance evolved into the Taoist ritual dance “Pacing the Big Dipper 步罡踏斗” (another name for it is “Pacing the Dragon 步龍”). Records the Pacing the Big Dipper dance ritual date back to 300 AD.
 - iii. The objective is to ascend to the celestial realms through astral flight and meet with gods and/or ancestral spirits. The purpose of such meetings is to request blessings, protection, assistance in soul retrieval, healing, or assistance with exorcism of a demon or malefic ghost. The purpose will determine the specific pacing method employed.
 - iv. “Pacing the Big Dipper” (步罡踏斗, bù gāng tà dòu): A “Pacing the Big Dipper” ritual was popularized during the Three Kingdoms Era (220 – 280 AD), and per common lore among Taoist mystics, was performed by the ceremonial magicians of the Han (206 BC – 220 AD). Historically, this Rite was also known as the Pacing of the Alkaid (步天綱, Bù Tiān Gāng), Alkaid being the seventh star at the end of the “handle” of the Big Dipper.⁵³
 1. Although there are countless variations of Pacing the Big Dipper, specific to each Taoist lineage, generally a ritual space of approximately 9 feet by 9 feet delineating the Lo Shu Nine Celestial Palaces (九天) is cast onto the ground.
 2. The practitioner enters a trance-like state, visualizing oneself in astral flight, ascending to the nine heavens that the Lo Shu Nine Palaces represents.⁵⁴
 - a. Music, chanting, ritual cymbals, ritual wood blocks, and/or drums are typically integral to the ritual.
 - b. Steps in the formation of the seven stars (or in some cases, nine stars) of the Big Dipper are taken toward a mat painted or embroidered with the Ba Gua eight trigrams arrangement and/or the Lo Shu square.
 - c. Once the practitioner has paced onto the mat, proprietary, often secret pacing methods are utilized on the mat to help the practitioner’s astral spirit ascend to a different realm.
 3. Three small, quick successive steps are taken within a Palace (one of the nine sectors), followed by a stride “leaping” into the next sector, and then in the next sector, three small, quick successive steps are taken.
 - a. Three small, quick successive steps taken within a Palace represents movement within one of the Seven Stars.

⁵³ Chinese names for Alkaid are the Běidǒuqī 北斗七, or the Seventh Star of the Northern Dipper, and Yáoguāng 瑤光, Star of Twinkling Brilliance. Per Hindu and Buddhist lore, this seventh star is associated with Marici, or in Chinese, Mólìzhītiān, 摩利支天, bodhisattva of Light and the Sun.

⁵⁴ Flying Star Feng Shui (玄空飛星, xuán kōng fēi xīng), a school or tradition of feng shui practice, is premised on a similar concept to Pacing the Big Dipper and “flying” through the stars as diagramed on the Lo Shu, utilizing the Ba Gua eight trigrams and Wu Xing five elements. For more information on the [Eight Trigrams: Bā Guà 八卦](#)

- b. A “leaping” stride represents crossing a celestial bridge into the next Palace (or sector of the Lo Shu).
4. Another method of Pacing is to take small, quick successive steps within a Palace based on the Lo Shu numbers and directionality. Thus, for example, in the eastern Palace, you take three steps before a stride into the next sector, and then in the northwestern Palace, you take six steps.
5. A third method consists of nine steps to invoke the nine gods of the Big Dipper, which correspond with the following stars of Ursa Major:
 - a. The traditional Seven Stars:
 - i. Dubhe (α Ursae Majoris)
 - ii. Merak (β Ursae Majoris)
 - iii. Phecda (γ Ursae Majoris)
 - iv. Megrez (δ Ursae Majoris)
 - v. Alioth (ϵ Ursae Majoris)
 - vi. Mizar (ζ Ursae Majoris)
 - vii. Alkaid (η Ursae Majoris)
 - b. Plus, two more to make Nine:
 - i. Polaris (North Star, α Ursae Minoris)
 - ii. Mizar’s companion, Alcor
6. “Cloud shoes” (云鞋, yún xié) are worn while pacing the Big Dipper, and in general, are the shoes of the Wu or priest during ritual.
 - a. Cloud shoes are made of vibrantly colored brocade with embroidered cloud patterns, and rounded toes.
 - b. During the Eastern Jin dynasty (316 – 420 AD), cloud shoes were woven from grass, with peach wood or jujube wood soles, adorned with ornamentations of phoenix heads, flowers, and clouds, to represent a celestial kingdom.
 - c. During the Southern and Northern dynasties (420 AD – 589 AD), cloud shoes were described as having to be woven from the five colors (corresponding with the Wu Xing five changing phases, or five elements).⁵⁵
7. Others present during the ritual will recite an incantation in unison while the practitioner paces the Big Dipper/Lo Shu. The incantation begins by describing the heavenly plane (mirroring, essentially, a horoscopic wheel or Lo Shu grid), then invoking the gods and spirits, and then narrating the practitioner’s steps. The practitioner’s dance will then follow the instructions narrated by the incantation.
8. *Channeling the North Star’s Stability*: The North Star (Polaris) is unmoving in the sky and serves as a fixed point of spiritual navigation—suggesting that the practitioner is aligning themselves with celestial permanence and order.

⁵⁵ For more information about the [Wu Xing: Five Movements Toward Change 五行 · 오행](#)

- v. The Big Dipper is viewed as a celestial gateway connecting the physical world with the spiritual and divine realms. The seven stars of the Big Dipper are thought to lead to the higher realms of the Jade Emperor or the celestial courts. [As noted earlier, there are both Seven-Star and Nine-Star delineations of the Big Dipper, with the Nine-Star delineation including Polaris and Alcor.]
 - vi. Just as the ancients relied on the Big Dipper in the north to guide their journeys through the dark night, the Big Dipper is a guide for the astral spirit's journey through the cosmos. Astral flight will often start with an invocation, blessing, or visual meditation of the Big Dipper.
 - vii. The seven stars of the Big Dipper are also domiciles for seven celestial emperors who govern the seven Po 七魄 aspects of the human soul. (Hun Po 魂魄 soul dualism will be covered in our “Soul Retrieval in Asia; Death in Buddhism” lecture.)
 - viii. According to lore, Pacing the Big Dipper is a development from an unbroken tradition of Pacing the Steps of Yu 禹步, Yu being a reference to Yu the Great.
 - 1. In Taoist mysticism, Yu the Great is described as a shaman-king, a Wu. He performed a Rite seeking divine guidance and in response, the Great Tortoise was sent to him, which revealed the Lo Shu magic square.
 - 2. Another telling of the legend has Yu the Great observing the footprints of birds, following in those footprints, which then became the Steps of Yu.
 - 3. In either case, the Pacing of the Steps of Yu was in its essence a ritual for pacing the Lo Shu magic square (雜書步罡圖, Luò Shū Bù Gāng Tú), following its numbered sequence (i.e., 1 in the north, 2 in the southwest, 3 in the east, 4 in the southeast, etc.)
 - 4. Pacing the Lo Shu 雜書步罡圖 helps the practitioner attain alignment with the Later Heaven Ba Gua, which is to say mastery over control of the Tao, the “Flow” of the universe.
 - 5. Pacing the Lo Shu pattern enables the practitioner to harmonize with the Tao in motion, making them a vessel through which the Tao operates effortlessly.
 - 6. The pathways for pacing the Lo Shu is itself a living, moving sigil.
 - a. The human body is a microcosm of the universe. Moving through the Lo Shu's structure mirrors the greater flows of the cosmos, helping the practitioner internalize the rhythms of nature and the Tao.
 - b. The Lo Shu is a map of spatial, temporal, and energetic relationships—pacing it properly helps the practitioner understand and tap into these hidden connections.
- D. Soul Retrieval: Psychospiritual Healing
- i. Soul retrieval is a shamanic healing practice that involves a form of journeying to diagnose and then treat a fragmented aspect of a person's soul, attributed to imbalanced or baneful spirit interference.

- ii. The *Huangdi Neijing* 黃帝內經 from the Warring States period (475 – 221 BC) makes reference to the aspects of soul that can be fragmented from the body and prescribes measures for retrieving that fragment to restore wholeness.
 - iii. The *Taoist Canons*, or *Daozang* 道藏, is a collection of orthodox texts dated from the Zhou dynasty to 400 AD that represent Taoist spiritual practice, from meditations and rituals to exorcisms and Fu talismans, including soul retrieval.
 - iv. Dated to the Jin dynasty (266 – 420 AD), the *Purple Verses from the Divine Book of the Celestial Emperor of the Golden Palace* 皇天上清金闕帝君靈書紫文上經 is a canonized Taoist sutra on magical spells, rituals, and talismans for protecting the soul from fragmentation and on how to retrieve soul fragments.
 - v. The *Baopuzi* (283 – 343 AD) is considered an authoritative text on the three *hun* and seven *po* aspects of soul and mystical practices for soul fragment retrieval.
 - vi. See also my “Soul Retrieval in Asia; Death in Buddhism” ConVocation 2025 presentation.
- E. Journeying to the Underworld (or Inner World)
- i. A spirit-mediumship practice that is still popular today, primarily in the southern regions of China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Southeast Asia, is called Guān Luò Yīn 觀落陰, a form of astral journeying to the underworld.
 - 1. 觀 Guān means to visit, to observe, to see
 - 2. 落 Luò means to descend down into
 - 3. 陰 Yīn is a reference to Yin Jiān, the realm of Yin, meaning the Underworld
 - ii. Guān Luò Yīn 觀落陰 is considered a form of Wū shù 巫術, or shamanic witchcraft.
 - iii. Some traditions conceptualize the descent as beginning from the entrance to a cave at the base of a mountain; others conceptualize it as a palace with many floors descending down into the deep earth.
 - iv. In its modern iteration of practice, it is used to cure generational curses (i.e., heal generational trauma) or if a demon is causing undue trouble on earth, go to the underworld to “speak to that demon’s manager.”
 - v. For an overview of this form of journeying to the underworld, see my video [“Descent into the Underworld 觀落陰 \(Wu Shamanism\)”](#) See also [“Your Inner Palace and the Akashic Records”](#)
- F. Talismans for Healing and Protection
- i. The earliest records of talisman crafting with inscriptions of invocations or protective spells, or carvings for protection and blessings were from the Shang and Zhou dynasties, between 1600 BC to 256 BC.

- ii. These early talismans were typically made of jade (yù 玉)⁵⁶, bronze, carved bone or antler enhanced with pigments to make the inscriptions more visible, tortoiseshell, wood, or gemstones. There was also the ritualistic use of ceramics as protective charms, made into small tokens or plaques with magical inscriptions.
- iii. By the Han dynasty, the talismans were primarily fashioned from specific types of wood, selected based on their metaphysical properties, bamboo, and/or paper.
- iv. In modern times, the most common method of talisman crafting is the Fu 符, using imperial yellow paper, red cinnabar ink, and consecrated calligraphy brushes or pens.

V. Extracting Core Principles from Wu Shamanism and Taoist Witchcraft

A. Fluency with Divination & Astrology

- i. This is the principle of pattern recognition to forecast change.
- ii. Divination and astrology evolved from the Wu shaman's foundational need to map nature's rhythms.
- iii. What is the core function of both divination and astrology? Understanding patterns in nature and using them to predict outcomes or guide decision-making.
- iv. Fluency with both divination and astrology, no matter what we specialize as practitioners or mystics, helps us to:
 - 1. Attune to the rhythm of time, nature, and cycles, which becomes a prerequisite skill in shamanism
 - 2. Fully and completely understand how time, nature, and human events are interconnected, and their dynamic interdependence
 - 3. Realize that the future reveals itself in the echoes of the present
- v. ☒ LEARNING DIVINATION TECHNIQUES: To harmonize Wu 巫術 shamanism and Taoist witchcraft 道術 within your modern spiritual practice, learn the I Ching, a legacy divination system from the Wu 巫.

B. Facilitate Healing

- i. The Wu 巫 and the Taoist 道士 works with *qi* life force to improve health by clearing energy flow.
- ii. ☒ HEALING WITH SOUND: Singing “Wu”
 - 1. Sacred sounds, mantras, and incantations (e.g., chanting spells or sutras) align you with cosmic vibrations and activate magical power.
 - a. The practice is similar to tuning your musical instrument.
 - b. Tuning a musical instrument adjusts the instrument so that it produces pitches and frequencies that will be in harmony. Likewise, healing with sound is tuning you as an instrument

⁵⁶ Note also Xu Shen's *Shuowen Jiezi* etymological origins for word “靈巫” (Líng Wū, meaning the “Spirit Work of the Wu”): “以玉事神。从玉霝聲” (the word is derived from the ideogram for jade ritual tools or objects used by the shamans in veneration of gods and spirits). From Scroll 2 卷二, Chapter “玉部,” Word 206.

- so that you are more aligned and in harmony with the cosmos. The more in harmony you are with the cosmos, the healthier you will be.
- c. Concert pitch (A4 = 440 Hz) is the optimal pitch for singing “Wu” and attuning to energizing, revitalizing frequencies. Alternatively 432 Hz or 528 Hz works as well, attuned more for emotional balancing, calming, and relaxation purposes.
2. In the seminal text on Traditional Chinese Medicine, the *Huangdi Neijing*, Wu 巫 is mentioned in one passage. The Yellow Emperor Huangdi asks his master teacher Qibo, “Why is it that Wu sing incantations and utter words in ritual?”⁵⁷ The teacher Qibo replies, “The ancient shamans could trace the origins of diseases by using incantations, and thus these sounds can heal.”⁵⁸
 3. Arising from that wisdom is the practice of singing the word “wū” routinely, and consistently at the same hour every day, as a method of improving Qi circulation throughout your twelve meridians and strengthening your defensive Qi (i.e., immune system).⁵⁹
 4. Even the word for prayer “zhū 祝” has that same “ooh” sound as “wū 巫,” like the sound of wind, and the sound of a primal, instinctive howl.
 5. According to Traditional Chinese Medicine, Qi flows through the body at a regular cycle, attuned to the rising and setting of the sun, to the ascendant hours per astrology. Choose the time period that corresponds with the area of body you seek to heal:
 - a. 3:00 am – 4:59 am: **Lungs.** Qi of the respiratory system most active. These are also the hours that the unconscious mind is most active and most stimulated by Qi, specifically of dreamwork, underworld journeying, spirit contacts, and ancestral memory. Through gas exchange and that interaction between personal Qi and collective Qi, the body is expelling baneful and pestilent energy. Healthy skin and the olfactory senses are regulated during the Metal hours.
 - b. 5:00 am – 6:59 am: **Large Intestine.** Qi of the gastrointestinal tract and digestive system is most active. Personal Qi is collecting in the colon and rectum. These are the best hours to awaken from sleep, to hydrate, and to release the bowels. This is an ideal time for meditation or light exercise. Qi is also stimulating the seat of Jing essence and the root chakra.
 - c. 7:00 am – 8:59 am: **Stomach.** Qi continues to be active in the digestive system, moving upward in the body. These are the best hours for digestion and maintenance of digestive health, which is

⁵⁷ From Huangdi Neijing 黃帝內經 (Western Han, 475 BC – 9 BC), Book: 靈樞經, Chapter: 賊風: “黃帝曰: 其祝而已者, 其故何也?” Note: 祝 Zhù is a subset of Wu shamans who sing and recite incantations in rites and rituals.

⁵⁸ Same passage, continued: “歧伯曰: 先巫者, 因知百病之勝, 先知其病之所從生者, 可祝而已也.”

⁵⁹ From 唱“巫”的秘诀: 音乐也能祛病 *The Secret of Singing “Wu”: Music Can Cure Disease* by Prof. Zhao Shimin 赵世民 (World Book Publishing Company Beijing Branch, May 2013).

- determined by the body's activities during these hours. Intake of nutrient-rich foods is best during these hours.
- d. 9:00 am – 10:59 am: **Spleen.** Qi is active in the immune system; the Qi of red blood cells is also active. Metabolic health is determined by the body's activities during these hours. Ideal to be doing work and mentally active; exercise the mental capacity. Challenge the mental faculties for optimal health.
 - e. 11:00 am – 12:59 pm: **Heart.** Qi moves more actively through the blood stream and is active in the muscles. The body's activities during these hours determine circulatory and muscular health. Making sure the body is physically active and the mind is highly alert during these hours is optimal. Socialization also helps keep the Qi healthy and increases vitality.
 - f. 1:00 pm – 2:59 pm: **Small Intestine.** During these hours, personal Qi is facilitating the body's absorption of minerals and nutrients, such as vitamin B₁₂. This is a time to let the mental faculties rest. Letting the body and spirit rest and conserve energy is optimal during these hours.
 - g. 3:00 pm – 4:59 pm: **Bladder.** Increase intake of water during these hours. Qi is most active in the urinary bladder. Intake of fluids to hydrate the body helps to keep the Qi clean and clear. Make a conscious effort to facilitate that flow of Qi through increased water intake. Active, routine, engaged work and physical movement are also advised during these hours. Healthy bones and skeletal system are also determined during the Water hours.
 - h. 5:00 pm – 6:59 pm: **Kidneys.** Qi flows from the urinary bladder to the kidneys. These are the best hours to eat a nutrient-rich meal. The body's activities during these hours determine the health of the kidneys and nervous system. Qi is also active in the lower part of the spinal cord. Healthy habits during these hours lead to healthy blood pressure levels. These are the hours that Qi can strengthen bone marrow and the body's ability to maintain homeostasis. These are the most important hours for ensuring the mind and heart are calm.
 - i. 7:00 pm – 8:59 pm: **Pericardium.** Qi continues upward into the pericardium, around the heart and chest area. The vascular system and lymphatic system are regulated by the Qi during these hours. The body's Qi is strongest during these hours. This is also considered the best time for conception and leisurely activities.
 - j. 9:00 pm – 10:59 pm: **Thyroid and Adrenals.** Qi is most active in the endocrine system, especially the thyroids. Avoid eating during these hours. This is the time when the body is transferring energy to optimize its functions, regulating its temperature and its metabolism. Qi is now slowly moving downward into the adrenal glands.
 - k. 11:00 pm – 12:59 am: **Gall Bladder.** Qi is most active in the gall bladder and regulating the body's bile. These are also the hours of cellular repair. Sleep and rest is critical during these hours for the body to regenerate. The eyes, eyesight, and a person's innate sense of goodwill toward others is regulated during the Wood hours.
 - l. 1:00 am – 2:59 am: **Liver.** Qi moves in to the liver and continues to detoxify the body. Qi helps facilitate the production of biochemical during this time. Qi is also active in the unconscious mind, specifically for the processing of life experiences.

6. Everyday during that period of time, set aside 15 minutes to breathe in deeply and exhale the sound “wū” with a similar intonation as “Om.”

iii. ☒ **HEALING WITH QI: Standing Tree (站椿, zhàn zhuāng)**

1. Nourishing Your Personal Qi with a Tree's Qi: Locate a tall, strong, healthy tree and stand by its base, your feet shoulder-width apart. Keep your knees slightly bent, and relaxed. Make sure your weight is evenly distributed while in this standing position.
2. Align Your Body: Tuck your pelvis slightly to align your lower back. Relax your shoulders so they naturally drop. Visualize a string at the crown of your head that is being pulled upward into the skies, lengthening your spine.
3. Harness the Qi: Raise your arms as if hugging a large tree, keeping a gentle curve at the elbows. Your palms should face your chest. Focus on your breath work.
 - a. Each inhale is taking in *qi* from the tree's roots and base up through your two feet. The inhale should be slow and steady, your mind following the circulation of that powerful *qi* throughout your body.
 - b. With each exhale, impure energy is leaving your body, out through your feet, getting absorbed by the ground beneath.
 - c. Focus on the area near your sacral chakra, below your navel, your body's energy center, the Gateway of Life. This is also the Liver-Kidney Axis that governs homeostasis, metabolism, and detoxification.
 - d. Visualize energy flowing from the tree and earth into your feet, rising through your body, and gathering at sacral chakra point.
 - e. Your hands are warm and begin to tingle. Continue the visualization of *qi* flow and energy empowerment within while you remain standing still.
4. Stand in this non-action *wu wei* position for as long as you are physically and mentally able to. Although your body should be still in Standing Tree, your mind should be actively visualizing the flow of nourishing *qi* from the tree circulating throughout your body, rejuvenating and revitalizing your organs, muscles, tissue, blood, and limbs.
5. Combine this self-healing exercise with the previous one on sound healing. As you stand in position, with your exhale, sing “wū” in a slow, drawn-out manner, similar to “Om” in meditation. As you sing the “wū,” visualize Qi flowing throughout your body, calming, strengthening, relaxing, and healing all that flows through.
6. Sealing in the Qi: Your palms meet in prayer mudra. Rub your hands together until you've generated heat, then place them over your closed eyes. Repeat this three times.

- iv. ☒ CREATING AND USING TALISMANS: To learn more about Fu talismans in the Taoist traditions, check out my book *The Tao of Craft: Fu Talismans and Casting Sigils in the Eastern Esoteric Tradition* (North Atlantic Books, 2016).

C. Mastering Control of Qi 氣 (Vital Energy)

- i. To facilitate healing, the Wu and the Taoist mystic both observe and help to regulate Qi. Storing, transmitting, and processing Qi is how practitioners move the universe.
- ii. Qi 氣 is the vital life force that permeates the universe, and it flows in a cyclical pattern that can be mapped out by the superimposition of the Lo Shu magic square over the Ba Gua, aligned with the four directions.
- iii. Harmonization of Qi is central to healing, divination, and all functional practices of the Wu shamans, as well as for Taoist mystics, from Fu talismans and understanding of astrology to breathwork and ritual.
- iv. An underlying root principle of Qi is the principle of correspondences:
 - 1. There is an inherent dualism to the Tao, to Qi, and that is ascribed yin and yang, but yin and yang are not concrete polarities, but rather, they represent a fluid spectrum.
 - 2. The Wu Xing Five Phases represents five states of change that any of the given Ba Gua eight trigrams can be expressed in, though each trigram will be “home” and most amplified in one of those five phases, e.g., the trigram Thunder corresponds with Wood, meaning it is at “home” in Wood, though there are nonetheless Fire expressions of Thunder, Water expressions of Thunder, etc., with each materializing at different intensities of volatility.

D. Strive for Ecological Harmony: Alignment with Nature

- i. Both the Wu 巫 and Taoists 道士 (Dào shi) practice harmonizing with natural patterns
 - 1. Festivals, celebrations, sacrificial rites, and rituals are performance in accordance with the solar terms and lunar phases.
 - 2. Timing of spells and magical workings are vital for their success.
- ii. Knowledge arises from the systematic observation of the natural world and the application of this wisdom to life and spirituality

E. The Principle of Spirit Mediation

- i. ☒ QUESTION FOR THOUGHT: In what ways are you or do you strive to serve as an intermediary between the human and spirit realms?
 - 1. What is your personal process for calling upon deities for divine assistance?
 - 2. Would leaning on the power and support of ancestral spirits support the work that you do?
 - a. If yes, in what ways will you strengthen your connection and relationship with those ancestral spirits?
 - b. If no, have you pursued cultivating connection and relationship with another line of spirit support? E.g., ascended masters such as Wuxian, the ancestral spirit of Wu

shamans, or Wupeng, the ancestral spirit of healers, immortals, or ascended masters.

3. In what ways do you ensure harmonious co-existence with the spirits that reside on the land that you occupy?
 - ii. Humans possess the capacity to enter liminal states where subjective experience interfaces with a symbolic or transpersonal reality
 - iii. Trances and flights to transpersonal realms can be induced in multiple ways, e.g., breathwork, chanting, meditation, rhythmic movement
 - iv. Techniques like dance, music, and chant are universal tools to transcend ordinary perception, connecting practitioners with higher wisdom or archetypal forces

F. Sacred Tools and Ritual Implements

- i. The materials that certain objects are made of, in addition to the geometric form and shape it gets configured into hold innate metaphysical properties that can amplify a practitioner's work.
- ii. However, the practitioner needs to first consecrate the material so that the earthly object is more attuned to the Qi or energetic frequencies of spirit realms, i.e., consecration of the tools.
- iii. A bronze ritual dagger, peach wood or jujube wood sword is a ritual implement that extends your personal power farther than it can otherwise go, amplifies and conducts your power, and helps facilitate channeling of Divine Will.
- iv. Jade as a protective talisman safeguards shamanic journeys and acts as a shield to block the physical body from unseen malefic forces. Traditionally jade is believed to amplify the shaman's connection to the spirit world and your ability to communicate with the divine realms.
- v. A symbiotic relationship should be cultivated between you and the jade protection talisman. The jade is not passive, but an active participant in your spiritual work, as is the ritual dagger. These tools help you to shape your energy and laser-focus your intentions, create protective boundaries, and anchor your energy to mitigate risk of soul fragmentation during intense energy work.
- vi. Considered a "feng shui cure," emblems of dragon and dragon symbolism fortifies the Qi in an environment with divine protection, helps to facilitate leadership success, executive decision-making as a leader, and empower you with the strength you need to overcome obstacles.

G. Mastering the Secret Forms for Qi 氣 Cultivation

- i. Taoist mystics believe that intensive magical work dramatically depletes your Qi that, if not proportionately replenished, could harm your physical, emotional, or spiritual health.
- ii. Thus, the practitioner is strongly advised to integrate Qi cultivation practices into their routine work.
- iii. Among the Twelve Secret Forms that the Taoist mystic strives to master, as noted in Section III.C, practices such as Inner Alchemy (內丹, nèi dān), which would include meditation and Qi gong practices, Dǎo Yǐn 導引, "Eating Qi" (服氣, fú qì), and Cún Sī 存思 meditation help to fortify the

practitioner's Qi, so that intense magical work doesn't deplete your Qi and cause physical or mental health concerns.

- iv. Practices such as Spiritual Fasting 辟谷 and Traditional Chinese Medicine 方藥 help to refine, purify, and consecrate your Qi.

VI. Closing Thoughts

A. Summary of Key Learnings from Our Discussion

i. **Wu Shamanism is the Foundation of Taoist Mysticism**

1. The origins of the Wu 巫 trace back to Neolithic Yellow River civilizations and served as leaders and ministers in Pre-Qin China, where their primary roles were as diviners, astrologers, historians, and healers (both healers of their community and of individuals).
 - a. In their capacity as diviners and healers, the Wu 巫 acted as intermediaries between the spirit realm and human realm to retrieve prophesies and diagnoses. The diagnoses were based on knowledge of pharmacology, rituals and incantations, and/or talismans.
 - b. By the Han dynasty, the role of the Wu 巫 was supplanted by that of the scholar-official, who continued to cultivate learned knowledge in alchemy, astrology/astronomy, and divination. The legacy of Wu 巫 shamanistic traditions and culture (called wū wén huà 巫文化) was absorbed into Taoist practices.
2. Many Taoist magical, alchemical, and metaphysical practices — from pacing the Big Dipper to crafting Fu talismans — trace back to Wu shamanistic rituals and beliefs. The Wu were not just spirit mediums but also healers, astronomers, diviners, and historians — roles later absorbed into Taoist philosophy and magic

ii. **Sound, Words, and Writing are Powerful, Sacred Tools**

1. The Wu's spoken incantations and written divination charges weren't just symbolic — they were believed to channel cosmic power.
2. This belief carried into Taoist magic, where writing talismans or speaking invocations is an act of wielding divine energy. Words are more than communication; they're a force of creation, protection, and healing.

iii. **The Big Dipper and Lo Shu Magic Square are Spirit Maps**

1. Wu shamans used the Big Dipper and the nine-sector Lo Shu grid to navigate both physical and spiritual realms — a practice preserved in Taoist mysticism.
2. These symbols serve as cosmic compasses, guiding the soul through otherworldly planes, ensuring balance, and unlocking esoteric wisdom.

B. Questions for Contemplation and Integration

- i. The Wu 巫 emphasized community healing. How do you view your role in fostering harmony and healing within your own community?
- ii. How might the Wu's connection to local spirits and deities inform your own spiritual relationship with your environment?
- iii. In what ways does the interplay of shamanistic and Taoist traditions provide a framework for your own spiritual exploration?
- iv. How do the historical roles of the Wu shamans as intermediaries between the spiritual and physical realms inspire your understanding of personal spiritual practice?
- v. In what ways can you use divination or astrology to deepen your alignment with natural patterns in your spiritual practice?
- vi. What are some ways you can extract first principles from Wu 巫 and Taoist 道 traditions and apply them to your present-day spiritual path?

C. Additional Resources

- i. [History of Taoist and Buddhist Mysticism in China](#) (2019 Jan. 5)
- ii. [Taoist Sorcery and Its Cultural Practice](#) (2019 Jan. 10)
- iii. [Taoist Metaphysics](#) (2019 Jan. 12)
- iv. [A Thought Tour of the Chinese Occult](#) (2019 Feb. 2)
- v. [Taoist Magic for Beginners](#) (2023 Jul. 7)
- vi. [Secret Book of Three Sovereigns & Seal of the Nine Immortal Realms](#) (2024 Mar. 20)
- vii. [Most Influential Grimoire in Taoist Practice: Baopuzi](#) (2024 Aug. 25)
- viii. [Taoist Spirit Maps, 靈圖, Língtú](#) (2023 Feb. 9)

VII. About Your Presenter

- A. Author of *I Ching, The Oracle* (2023), a tome that seeks to restore the *Zhouyi* 周易 Book of Changes 易經 to its Wu 巫 shamanistic origins; it is a treatise for guiding the mystic on mastering divination, astrology, healing, and history.
- B. Author of *The Tao of Craft* (2016), a primer for Western readers on how to craft Fu 符 talismans by distilling first principles from canonical Taoist traditions, enabling this Wu 巫 practice accessible and transformative.
- C. Corporate attorney of 17 years currently practicing law in the healthcare and medical technology space, licensed in California and New York.
- D. *Not* under my pen name and under my legal name, I've published peer-reviewed legal research in the areas of feminist jurisprudence, intellectual property law, antitrust, and healthcare law.
- E. For a repository of free resources and educational downloads on reference guides on a variety of topics in occult philosophy and mysticism, visit: www.benebellwen.com.
- F. Subscribe to my YouTube channel ([@BenebellWen on YouTube](#)) for deep dives into mysticism, Taoist metaphysics and craft, tarot, and esoteric practices made more approachable for the modern seeker.