

Article

Ritual and Space: The Therapeutic Function of the Recitations of the Hexi Baojuan

Shichang Zhao

School of Chinese and Literature, Henan Normal University, Xinxiang 453007, China; shiliunian556520@sina.com

Abstract: In the region where the Precious Scrolls of Hexi (*Hexi Baojuan*) are recited, people often use the Precious Scrolls (*Baojuan*) as a tool to pray for peace and happiness, to prevent plagues and calamities, and to heal ailments. By creating a sacred healing field, the rituals of Hexi Baojuan materialize, symbolize, and sanctify the space to expel disasters and cure illnesses. Through the mechanism of imagination and symbolism, its functions of averting disasters and curing diseases become apparent.

Keywords: *Hexi Baojuan*; rituals of recitations; sacred space; therapeutic function

1. Introduction

Wang Guowei, a scholar in the late Qing Dynasty and early Republic of China, proposed that “every generation has its own literature” (Wang 1996, p. 1); the same also applies to regions. Different regions produce different types of literary styles. Even foreign literary styles, when influenced by local people, become local specialties, as is the case with the Precious Scrolls (*Baojuan* 宝卷). The Baojuan is a type of script of recitations that spreads religious ideas, nurtured by “transformation texts” (*bianwen* 变文) and scriptures (*jingwen* 经文). It primarily consists of verse and prose, among which the Baojuan used for various rituals is known as the Baojuan of rituals (*yi-shi-lei baojuan* 仪式类宝卷). According to studies, the rituals described in the Precious Scrolls of Hexi (*Hexi Baojuan* 河西宝卷) were not truly indigenous. Namely, they came with the influx of immigrants, folk sects, and refugees in the Ming and Qing Dynasties (Che 1999, p. 40). However, those people heavily adapted their Baojuan to align with the local customs, language, habits, folk beliefs, and cultural patterns, resulting in the emergence of Hexi Baojuan.

For a long time, there has been a great misconception in the understanding and research of Hexi Baojuan. According to the published collections of the Hexi Baojuan, the Baojuan of storytelling (*gu-shi-lei baojuan* 故事类宝卷) appears to be in the majority, but in fact, there is also another tradition of the Baojuan of rituals. Recently, there has been research (e.g., National Social Science Foundation Project “Hexi Baojuan from the Perspective of Folk Religion”, hosted by Cui Yunsheng, 2015) on the Hexi Baojuan of rituals from the perspective of folk religion. This paper focuses on the ritual function in the Hexi Baojuan. It should be mentioned that although some of the Baojuan cited are Taoist scriptures, the local Baojuan masters considered them Baojuan, as they recited these scriptures during their rituals. In the eyes of ordinary people, it really does not matter what the contents of the Baojuan recited are; rather, the construction of the sacred space of the ritual and the integrity of the ritual links matter. Here, we have adopted the view of the local Baojuan masters and included some of the Taoist scriptures that they used in our discussion of Baojuan. This can also be illustrated by the overlap of the identities of the local Baojuan master and the local Taoist priest; both recite the Baojuan of storytelling and utilize the Baojuan of rituals. The focus of this paper is to discuss the therapeutic function of the rituals of recitations and, in particular, to analyze the mechanism of this function, namely how the ritual functions. It is a theoretical study rather than a survey report of ritual practice (Sun 2016; Berezkin 2018, 2021).¹



Citation: Zhao, Shichang. 2023. Ritual and Space: The Therapeutic Function of the Recitations of the Hexi Baojuan. *Religions* 14: 1025. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14081025>

Academic Editor: Xiaohuan Zhao

Received: 3 March 2023

Revised: 7 August 2023

Accepted: 7 August 2023

Published: 10 August 2023



Copyright: © 2023 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

To discuss the related rituals and content of the Hexi Baojuan, it is essential to have a degree of understanding of the local history, geography, customs, cultural features, and even the natural climate of the region.

2. Recitations of the Hexi Baojuan

2.1. Regions with Recitations of the Hexi Baojuan

The use of the Baojuan is not limited to the Hexi region. Baojuan are produced and circulated in most parts of China. The classification of Baojuan is generally based on their content or the regions where they circulate. Based on content, Baojuan can be divided into a ritual type and a storytelling type. For the classification by region, they can generally be divided into Northern Baojuan (*beifang baojuan* 北方宝卷) and Southern Baojuan (*nanfang baojuan* 南方宝卷) or directly named according to the name of the region or county, such as Jingjiang Baojuan 靖江宝卷, Jiexiu Baojuan 介休宝卷, Henan Baojuan 河南宝卷, Hebei Baojuan 河北宝卷, Qinghai Baojuan 青海宝卷, Hezhou Baojuan 河州宝卷, etc. In the case of Hexi Baojuan, it is somewhat complicated as the title “Hexi” actually encompasses several separate areas along the so-called Hexi Corridor (*hexi zoulang* 河西走廊).

There are several reasons why the Hexi Baojuan is unique. Firstly, the “Hexi region” has become an independent geographical concept. Although regions such as Wuwei 武威, Zhangye 张掖, Jiuquan 酒泉, and Jinchang 金昌—which are included in the Hexi region—have their different regional cultures, they generally have similar historical, geographical, and cultural attributes. Secondly, the cultural affinity among those regions results in consistency in the Baojuan found there. They have some similarities in the narrative style, and the circulated Baojuan texts are mostly the same. By comparing several collections of Hexi Baojuan, it is evident that there are many repetitions in the content (Y. Zhu 2015, pp. 65–79+166).² While the tradition of reciting Baojuan as a religious ritual is diminishing in various regions, the Hexi Baojuan has managed to preserve its distinct cultural ecosystem and maintain a unique living space.³

According to Li Yan (Yan Li 2022, pp. 171–233),⁴ the Hexi Baojuan include Jiuquan Baojuan 酒泉宝卷, Zhangye Baojuan 张掖宝卷, Jinchang Baojuan 金昌宝卷, and Wuwei Baojuan 武威宝卷, in a broad sense. The Hexi Corridor is located to the west of the Yellow River in China, running from northwest to southeast. It is mainly a narrow plain shaped like a corridor, which is how it obtained its name. The Hexi Corridor was a necessary route on the ancient Silk Road (*si-chou-zhi-lu* 丝绸之路). It ranges from the Wushaoling Mountains 乌鞘岭 in the east to the Yumen Pass (*yu-men-guan* 玉门关) in the west, between the southern mountains (the Qilian Mountains 祁连山 and the Altun Mountains 阿尔金山) and the northern mountains (the Mazong Mountains 马鬃山, the Heli Mountains 合黎山, and the Longshou Mountains 龙首山). In the north, people can pass through the Juyan Lake Basin (*ju-yan-hai* 居延海) and enter Mobei 漠北 along the Steppe Route of the Silk Road (*caoyuan si-chou-zhi-lu* 草原丝绸之路). It is about 900 km long and from several kilometers to nearly 100 km wide. The whole Hexi Corridor is governed by Gansu Province 甘肃省, Haidong City 海东市 and Xining City 西宁市 of Qinghai Province 青海省, and Ejin Banner 额济纳旗 of Inner Mongolia 内蒙古自治区. As most of the area belongs to Gansu Province, it is also called the Gansu Corridor (*gansu zoulang* 甘肃走廊).

Historically, the Hexi Corridor was first occupied by Dayuezhi 大月氏 and Xiongnu 匈奴. Since the exploration of Hexi by Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty (*han-wu-di* 汉武帝), it has become an important passage connecting the Central Plains (*zhongyuan* 中原) with Xinjiang 新疆 in the western regions. It was a part of the eastern end of the ancient Silk Road and also an important international channel for the political, economic, and cultural exchanges between the Han region and the Western world in ancient China. For most of its history, the Hexi Corridor was the northwestern end of China’s unified dynasties, and the Han 汉朝, Tang 唐朝, Yuan 元朝, Ming 明朝, and Qing 清朝 dynasties all controlled the Hexi Corridor. The climate in the Hexi region is a temperate desert climate, dry and rainless (mainly because it is far away from the sea). However, in summer, the snow water

from the Qilian Mountains can be utilized for oasis irrigation and planting, and this way of production and life continues to this day.

Regionally, Hexi mainly includes Lanzhou City 兰州市 of Gansu Province (known as Jincheng County 金城郡), Xining City of Qinghai Province, Ejin Banner of Inner Mongolia, and the “Four Counties of Hexi” (*he-xi-si-jun* 河西四郡): Wuwei (known as Liangzhou 凉州), Zhangye (known as Ganzhou 甘州), Jiuquan (known as Suzhou 肃州), and Dunhuang (known as Shazhou 沙州).⁵ As early as the Western Han Dynasty 西汉朝, Emperor Wu established four counties there, namely Wuwei County 武威郡, Zhangye County 张掖郡, Jiuquan County 酒泉郡, and Dunhuang County 敦煌郡. In the Western Han Dynasty, Xihai County 西海郡 in Qinghai was established, and in the Eastern Han Dynasty 东汉朝, Xihai County 西海郡 in the Juyan Lake Basin was established. At present, the Hexi region is mainly inhabited by Han, Mongolian, Yugur, Tibetan, and other ethnic groups.⁶ Located in the core area of the Silk Road, the Hexi region has always been the economic and trade center of Northwest China, as well as a transportation and cultural center.

2.2. Rituals of the Recitations of the Hexi Baojuan

In a sense, “ritual” is a universal cultural phenomenon and an important field of anthropological research. As it carries fertile social and cultural connotations, studying cultural cognition from the analysis of ritual is an effective approach to anthropological research. The anthropological study of ritual can be traced back to Durkheim, in the early 20th century, who regarded ritual as a means to maintain and extend society and enhance the cohesion of its members. He also explored the characteristics of ritual participants from a psychological perspective to distinguish them from their emotions in daily situations (Durkheim 2008, p. 517). In our field investigation of the healing ritual of the Hexi Baojuan, we paid great attention to the changes in and mutual influence of the participants themselves, especially the comparison between the states of the patient before and after entering the ritual space. The sanctity of the rituals of the Hexi Baojuan can be studied from the ritual’s source of origin, the use of religious musical instruments (symbols), and the therapeutic effects. Viewed from the origin, “telling scriptures” (*jiangjing* 讲经) for lay people in the Tang Dynasty and ashram activities (*daochang* 道场) performed by monks for their followers in the Song Dynasty 宋朝 to some extent directly gave rise to the recitations of Baojuan. In the beginning, Buddhist sutras were spread orally among people, but in the process of spreading, because it was difficult for people to directly understand the teachings, preachers could only use vivid stories and popular languages (the vernacular) to preach. Therefore, in the early period, “transformation texts” and sutra preaching were also passed down orally, and the dictation was later written down for preservation. Still later, ordinary people made private copies and dictated them, leading to the gradual emergence of the Baojuan and the rituals. To disseminate the Baojuan, Baojuan compilers often promised readers a good vision for the future and regarded the Baojuan as a magic key for the accumulation of virtuous deeds, thereby sanctifying the act of the recitations of the Baojuan. This conclusion can be drawn from the full participation of deities in the ritual process.

In an interview, Dai Jisheng 代继生,⁷ an inheritor of the Hexi Baojuan, shared that during the healing ritual, he initiates the process by lighting incense (*shangxiang* 上香), presenting a petition (*huabiao* 化表), and reciting incantations (*nian zhouyu* 念咒语). The incantations are the god-invoking incantations (*qingshen zhou* 请神咒), and the main content is to explain what this ritual is for and which god needs to be invoked to give the master of the ritual a divine talisman (*fulu* 符箓) to cure the disease of the patient. Secondly, the master draws the talisman and utters specific brush pen incantations (*chibi zhou* 勅笔咒), namely the incantations of a specific brush pen, specific paper, and specific ink. After the talisman is drawn, the god is guided to the proper position, and the corresponding divine package (*shenling bao* 神灵包) is written, which generally states that someone who lives in a certain place will thank the god and pray to him/her for healing and blessing. He has specially prepared this stamped (Taoist seal) document package, which contains money for the gods

and the talisman, and he asks the god to take them. Thirdly, offerings such as fruits and flowers are placed on the altar table, with the written divine package in the middle, and then recitations of the Baojuan (scriptures) start. According to different causes of the disease, different Baojuan are recited, usually including the Precious Scrolls of Rescues (*Jiujie Baojuan* 救劫宝卷), the Scripture to Eliminate Pestilence and Demons (*Quwen Saomo Jing* 祛瘟扫魔经), the Precious Scrolls of Blood Pond (*Xuehu Baojuan* 血湖宝卷), the Scripture of the Deity of Transportation (*Jiuzhi Shihua Shi'er Yayun Jing* 九值十化十二押运经), and the Scripture of the Earth God (*Dangfang Fude Zhengshen Tudi Jing* 当方福德正神土地经), etc. Sometimes, incantations are uttered before reciting these Baojuan, such as the Incantation for Pacifying the Earth God (*an tu-di-shen zhou* 安土地神咒), the Incantation for the Offering of Incense (*zhuxiang zhou* 祝香咒), the Incantation for Purifying the Mouth (*jingkou zhou* 净口咒), the Incantation for Purifying the Heart (*jingxin zhou* 净心咒), the Incantation for Purifying the Body (*jingshen zhou* 净身咒), the Incantation of the Golden Light (*jingguang zhou* 金光咒), and the Incantation with Mysterious Connotations for Recitations (*kaijing xuanyun zhou* 开经玄蕴咒). Finally, when a recitation of the Baojuan is over, the person concerned kneels and kowtows, burns the petition letter, and bids farewell to the god. Normally, the master of the ritual is forbidden from eating beef or dog meat, and women who are menstruating are also not allowed to participate.

It can be seen that the ritual of recitations is complicated and there are numerous taboos. Moreover, water (for cleaning hands), portraits (pictures of the god), fragrance (incense), sacrifices (offerings), music (the music of religious musical instruments and Qupai 曲牌 and tunes for recitations of Baojuan), incantations, and a talisman are used at the same time for treatment. The key to the ritual is to repeatedly manipulate the same form that is endowed with certain meanings, and the metaphorical text of the ritual is read repeatedly in this process. Through repetition, the symbolic forms have the chance to be internalized and encoded into the subconscious through the senses, ultimately becoming ritual symbols (Xiaoming Zhao 2011, p. 24).

2.2.1. Supernatural Beliefs in the Healing Ritual

Zhang Xun 张珣, in the study of the Taoist Sacrificial Ceremony (*jijie yishi* 祭解仪式), once asked why among local folks, there are many who still claim that ghosts disturb people and make them sick. It was thought that people would turn into ghosts after death, living in the netherworld isolated from humans; so, how could ghosts easily cross the boundary to disturb humans? For this problem, Poo Mu-chou's 蒲慕州 study of ghost culture can provide some enlightenment. He believes that the causes of the concept of ghosts, the origin, the nature, the relationship between ghosts and human beings, and the distinction between ghosts and gods vary from culture to culture. Once the imaginary world of ghosts is created, it becomes a cultural and social experience with real power, which can concretely influence people's behaviors and thoughts (X. Zhang 2008, p. 397). It can be said that the world of ghosts and gods is a kind of cultural existence from a symbolic perspective.

From a philosophical perspective, the existence of the world of ghosts and gods as an entity is not limited to the fictional world; in-depth research assumes the full acknowledgment of the existence. In the healing ritual of the Hexi Baojuan, the Baojuan master first invokes gods and admits that it is difficult to achieve therapeutic effects by relying on his/her own strength, because the cause of the disease is likely to be the haunting of some evil spirits.⁸ The imagination of ghosts is actually the patient's fear of the unknown or the inner unease after doing something wrong. Invoking gods and offering sacrifices can exorcise evil spirits, namely symbolically dispel inner fear or unease. When ghosts inflict disasters, the human-god/ghost boundary is crossed, and the liminal state comes into being. The liminal state is typically characterized by the existence of ambiguity, impurity, filth, immaturity, or danger (Zhou 2015, p. 6). As beings from another realm, ghosts should not live with people; otherwise, they have to be driven away or even subdued (Yongping Li 2020, pp. 227–51), and the way of driving away or subduing demons is to pray for help from higher-level gods and Buddhas. It is worth noting that in the process of

the recitations of the Hexi Baojuan, in addition to the common Taoist and Buddhist deities, such as the Great White Planet (*taibai jinxing* 太白金星), Lv Dongbin 吕洞宾, Han Xiangzi 韩湘子, Arhats (*luohan* 罗汉), the Victorious Fighting Buddha (*dou-zhan-sheng-fo* 斗战胜佛), etc., there are also a considerable number of local deities, such as the Immortal Maiden Equal to Heaven (*pingtian xiangu* 平天仙姑), the local Earth God (*tudi shen* 土地神), etc. This is the result of localization in the spread of the Baojuan.

2.2.2. Incantations in the Ritual

There are myriad incantations in the healing ritual, and they are kept secret. According to the Baojuan master, the incantations are given by gods, and if they are revealed, they are no longer effective, and the gods exact punishment. As we know, incantations are part of magic arts (*fashu* 法术), and the original meaning of incantations is for blessing or praying. It is to use a mysterious language to control some power and make ordinary things have the function of magic arts. Reciting incantations is a spiritual revelation that can ward off diseases and bad luck and turn bad luck into good. In other words, reciting scriptures and incantations not only meets the physical and mental needs of individuals but also serves an important cultural function (Zhuang 1991, p. 129).

From the perspective of both faith and healing, the incantations used in the ritual can increase the patient's confidence and improve the healing power of the Baojuan master. In the healing ritual of the Baojuan, incantations are used many times, and the power of words is also repeatedly emphasized, which reflects the concept of a divine source in the language of ancient people. When ceremonies become lost at the court, it is necessary to search for them in the folk population.⁹ The folk customs, beliefs, and cultural ecology of the people in the border area retain more information about ancient rites and customs. The incantations used by the Baojuan master to treat the patient also have musical, emotional, and imaginal characteristics. In fact, they are a kind of poetry that combines the language intervention of psychological counselling with the emotional guidance of music therapy. The healing ritual of the Hexi Baojuan is essentially a kind of magic art, and primitive magic arts require a language to initiate, explain, or command the desired outcome. When performing the ritual, the incantations make people feel the mystery and the compulsiveness of the command; meanwhile, the melody and the vividly changing rhythm of the incantations bring the patient a rich experience of life and a sense of liberation.

2.2.3. Baojuan Texts in the Rituals

In the ritual, the master uses different Baojuan for healing according to different causes. Most commonly, in the event of a plague, the Scripture to Eliminate Pestilence and Demons (*Quwen Saomo Jing* 祛瘟扫魔经) is recited; in the event of a nasty disease, the Scripture to Dispel Disasters by the Xiayuan Water God (*Xiayuan Shuiguan Jie'e Jing* 下元水官解厄经) is recited.¹⁰ We believe that the Baojuan play more of a symbolic role in the ritual. According to the Baojuan masters, a scripture in the house can keep the family safe. Since people worship texts and scriptures and believe that scriptures are equivalent to deities, with the functions of salvation and healing, they feel at ease when they see the Baojuan in the ritual, thus enhancing their confidence. At the beginning of Baojuan texts, there are usually suggestive phrases like "reading a Baojuan will make you refreshed" (*zhanjuan shenqing qishuang* 展卷神清气爽), while at the end of Baojuan texts, there is usually a boast of the function of the recitations of the Baojuan, which constitutes a strong hint to the patient that their diseases can be cured through the ritual. The basic approach is to enter the sacred space created by the Baojuan to empathize and realize the purpose of compensating their spiritual debts through the people or things described in the Baojuan. Everyone who completes the ritual feels a profound change in themselves. This sense of rebirth is what the ritual is meant to achieve (Some 2000, p. 25).

To summarize, the ritual of the recitations of the Hexi Baojuan can achieve healing effects by invoking gods and driving away evil spirits with the help of divine power. The Baojuan master sometimes uses incantations directly to command the evil spirit to leave.

The therapeutic power comes, on the one hand, from the sacred space of ritual, and on the other hand, from other sacred symbols, such as the Baojuan texts, offerings, portraits, music, fragrances, talismans, and incantations.

3. Sacred Space for the Recitations of the Hexi Baojuan

Like the Precious Raft (*baofa* 宝筏) preached in Baojuan, sacred space has an effect of protecting and delivering people through troubles. The most important thing in the ritual of the recitations of the Hexi Baojuan is the construction of a sacred healing space. Only in this space can the patient relax, can the master of the ritual obtain divine help, and can the participants gain the power of collective inspiration.¹¹ Ultimately, it is through the creation of this sacred space that the desired therapeutic effects can be achieved. The construction of sacred space requires the master to perform a great deal of preparatory work and construct it in strict accordance with the requirements of the ritual procedure. The process is similar to the practices for building the altar (*shentan* 神坛) before Taoist priests conduct religious rites, preparing paper models (*zhihuo* 纸货) and establishing the Fengdu City 酆都城 before Taoist priests conduct Dajiao 打醮 (a Taoist ritual) (S. Zhao 2021a, p. 125), and the practices of torch sending, torch dancing, and Dafengtan Gathering (*qiju da-feng-tan* 齐聚大丰滩) before wizards dance the Playing Tartars (*tiao wan-lao-da-zi wu* 跳玩老鞑子舞) (Zhao and Luo 2020, p. 266). Then, what exactly is sacred space, and how does the Baojuan master construct sacred space?

3.1. What Is Sacred Space?

The ritual field, as a healing space, has two levels of meaning. The first one is the meaning of container. The ritual space can serve as a container to accommodate the participants and help the person concerned (the patient) recover. The concept of the “container” is often likened to a mother’s womb or to a cave with restorative power that has the function of creation or regeneration. The container possesses a “divine” attribute. The second is a composite space in which a variety of symbol systems are crossing over, such as text symbols (the Baojuan and talisman), sound symbols (the reciting sound of the Baojuan master and the Buddha-worshipping (*hefo* 和佛) sound of the Baojuan listener), musical symbols (the healing music produced from holding and playing religious musical instruments, as well as the music of the Qupais and tunes used by the master), metaphor symbols of motions (the ritual display and fixed hand gestures of the master and the body movements and echoing of the listener), archetypal image symbols (portraits, lights, candles, incense, yellow paper, and joss paper), etc. The transformation between these different symbol systems on its own also activates the party (the patient) to restore his/her sick body to health.

In this space, the conversion of the symbol systems is realized through the different representations of the bodies of participants (the doctor and patient), such as the symbols for standing, lying down, sitting, and deity possession. Meanwhile, it also includes the position change of participants in the ritual space, e.g., the participant being outside the ritual space, the participant being inside the ritual space but outside the symbol, and the participant being inside both the ritual space and the symbol. The ritual space serves as a bridge between heaven and earth. Here, heaven and earth or the upper world and underworld refer to their archetype images. Heaven can be collective wisdom and the existing spirit, and Earth can be the prototype of the Great Mother Goddess and the source of security (Xiaoming Zhao 2011, p. 34). The patient completes the healing process in this sacred space by projecting his or her emotions into the ritual space and the Baojuan text space through the ritualistic work of the body, to accept the warmth and order adjustment of the space, and to realize spiritual redemption and perfection.

3.2. Construction of the Sacred Space for the Rituals of the Hexi Baojuan

The construction of the sacred space is crucial for the effectiveness of the rituals. For the party, it may not matter what kind of Baojuan is recited, and the Baojuan only act as a placebo. What really matters is the various symbols used in the healing space and the

symbolic meaning of the whole space to the party. The construction of the sacred space sometimes takes longer time and more energy than the ritual itself; the key to the success of the ritual is whether the preparatory work is complete. Following are the key elements of constructing the sacred space.

3.2.1. Symbols in the Sacred Space

Before the ritual of reciting the Hexi Baojuan, the steps that the master has to take, including lighting lamps (*diandeng* 点灯), offering incense (*shangxiang* 上香), hanging portraits (*gua-hua-xiang* 挂画像), drawing magic signs (*huafu* 画符), invoking deities (*qingshen* 请神), and burning joss paper (*shaoqian* 烧钱), are all to construct a sacred healing space, and these objects also become symbols, with important prompting meaning to the party (the patient). When the symbols are presented to people, they have an intuitive experience with such types of symbols in a phenomenological sense. The key to symbolic therapy is the communication of people's emotions and symbol forms in the ritual space, and the process of this communication is essentially the mechanism of the "interaction ritual chains" (Collins 2005, pp. 102–40)¹² or the construction of linguistic meaning modes. The difference from other types of art therapy is that symbolic therapy is performed in a sacred space (including the physical space) rather than in the human brain.

In a more concrete sense, the lamps lit in the ritual space are candles or oil lamps. Even though electric lamps are now available, the use of oil lamps still holds symbolic significance. The lamplight serves three functions. Firstly, to the visual sense of people, a lamplight is a kind of guide on the journey. Its function is equivalent to that of the leading light (*yinlu deng* 引路灯) in the funeral ritual,¹³ which guides the spirit to find the way out and then to safely pass through the liminal stage and transition zone. Secondly, lamplight gives out brightness and heat. For the whole ritual space, it also has the effect of heating. Being in the space, the participant feels warm and relaxed. This is also where the healing effects start. Thirdly, in folk sacrificial ceremonies and religious activities, lighting lamps is usually a necessary step. According to the master of rituals, lighting lamps also have the function of communicating with deities. Among the gods of folk religions, there is Dipankara Buddha (*randeng gufo* 燃灯古佛). In Baojuan rituals, there is a kind of Eliminating Malefic Planets with Lamp Lighting (*rangxing dengke* 攘星灯科), where the malefic planet is replaced with a lamp. The rituals for warding off calamities and prolonging life through setting up lamps are quite common in ancient Chinese novels (Luo 1973, p. 861).¹⁴

After offering incense in the ritual, the smoke from the incense connects this realm and other realms (like heterotopia), serving as an intermediary between the visible and the invisible. The diffusivity of the smoke can link the metaphysical world (invisible) and the physical world (visible), and the aroma can attract ritual objects (e.g., deities and ghosts). Moreover, the aroma can unite and unify the party in the ritual, and the cross-border characteristics of scent can lead the party into another world (the sacred world). Due to the characteristics of diffusion and continuity, the aroma causes unclassifiability and fuzziness to the sense of smell, which makes it the best intermediary in consciousness that temporarily disables all classifications (such as life and death) to re-enter the next stage (i.e., from the mundane to the sacred). Therefore, incense has two levels of characteristics: material and spiritual and especially the characteristics of linking the two worlds. From a scientific point of view, incense stimulates the olfactory area of the brain, leading to the temporary interruption of the logical thinking system, making people think that they are entering another world (namely crossing the boundary and entering the other world). In this world, the rationality and logic of the real world are temporarily stripped away, and individuals enter a realm of phenomenological experience. Incense smoke permeates the ritual space, and its aroma is inhaled by the people and also permeates the inner space of their bodies. The whole world is purified by the aroma; so, incense smoke also has a spatial quality, which is not a physical space that already exists but a space enriched by the aroma (Zhong 2019, p. 4).

The characteristics of incense smoke or aroma, as well as the calming effect of its physical components, determine its important position in folk rituals—incense is used in almost all rituals of sacrifice, prayer, and rituals for averting disasters and healing. Sometimes it is used more than once. In the reciting ritual, incense (smoke) is the transcendence of the visible/invisible worlds of the universe. It has the power to evoke fantasies and divine feelings, which give people the sense of real experience, even though such fantasies themselves are not real. The haze of smoke slowly opens the curtain between the underworld and this world, similar to the widely-known practice that the Native Americans use tobacco to attract the attention of deities. Of course, in many cultures, scented weeds, wood, and resins can all serve as intermediaries for connections and conversations with the supernatural. Incense, therefore, can link and combine incompatible elements, candles and food and, more obviously, the worshipers of physical beings and the dematerialized spirits, whose corresponding spirits and divinities will ingest the fragrance of life. It is often said that incense is the provision for the deities, and ashes—in this case, the ashes are the leftover of the burned incense—are seen as an element that is conducive to recovery and regeneration (Blake 2011, pp. 76–93).

The portrait of the god or the founding master (*zushi* 祖师) hung in the ritual or the picture of the god inserted in the front matter of Baojuan is a serious reminder to the participants that the invoked god is watching all the time, so that the participants can stay focused and at the same time feel the presence of the god, thus enhancing their confidence in the healing rituals. For the Baojuan master, reciting in front of the portrait also has a connotation of talking about the picture.¹⁵ Namely, the portrait plays a role equivalent to a teleprompter for the master.

In general, the various symbols in the ritual (such as the flickering candlelight, curling smoke, vague images, burning flames, and food for the gods) all have different modes of meanings, which jointly construct the sacred healing space. In these rituals, widely used materials are often endowed with tangible characteristics, which can be transformed into binary symbolic structures (odd/even numbers, rough/delicate, hard/soft, bright/dark, whole/part, quiet/noisy, etc.) (Blake 2011, pp. 76–93). This is why folk rituals seem so simple that everyone could perform them, but they are actually incredibly complicated. Many ritual performers, let alone ordinary people, have no idea what these symbols mean, but it does not stop them from performing the rituals.

3.2.2. Motion Metaphors in the Sacred Space

Behind every motion of the body, there is a corresponding mood or emotion associated with it. In English, the word “emotion” itself contains a morpheme “motion”. A movement, a pose, and a posture of walking all form part of a system of bodily symbols. It can be said that the body posture reveals the close relation between the quality and nature of body movement and the available space to the body. From the flow, direction, and the form of body movement, one can see how an individual views his body posture (Xiaoming Zhao 2011, p. 76). Symbols are also physical memories, while motion metaphors can be regarded as a form of nonverbal communication. Body language is often ineffable, but it can be visualized by people, and the expected answer and result can also be obtained through the metaphorical way of body movements.

Participants in the reciting rituals (the doctor and patient) perform body movements in the ritual space and gain a deeper understanding of the ritual through the extension and experience of body movements. As one researcher has pointed out, extraordinary actions such as magic figures or incantations and handprints, combined with a world of gods and Buddhas, create a source of power. Such rituals can stimulate the imagination and potential of the patient, so they can gain a source of confidence and strength in the fight against ghosts (C. Li 2005, p. 72). Of course, the body movements as performed in the ritual of the Hexi Baojuan are not strong, not as obvious as magic dances or ritual dances, but their subtleties are also strongly metaphorical, such as the motions of worshipping and pacifying gods of the master and the motions of worshipping Buddha of the participant. Moreover,

the body sense and emotion in the ritual space are also a topic well worth discussing, but due to space, they cannot be fully discussed here (Boddy 1994; Itzhak 2018; Tooker 2019; Wilson 1967).

4. Healing Principle of the Rituals of the Hexi Baojuan

It has always been difficult to study the mechanism of any therapeutic action, especially folk therapy (S. Zhao 2021b, pp. 134–40). Despite some dissertation work and research on the principles of literature therapy (*wenxue zhiliao* 文学治疗), the viewpoint and perspective have been mostly from the Western tradition (Tang 2013, pp. 6–13). Most studies in medical anthropology and public health affirm the social–psychological effects of indigenous healing methods in the treatment process. In particular, indigenous healing methods provide etiological explanations and relieve the psychological pressure of the patients and their families. Many scholars have also pointed out that indigenous healing methods not only have significant effects on the psychological and social levels but also have good therapeutic effects in the treatment of diseases.

However, it is disappointing that although the therapeutic effects of indigenous healing methods are acknowledged, they are often labelled as “superstitions”, a hindrance to medical treatment, only psychological effects, utilitarianism, and money-accumulating, etc.; so, the medical resources provided by indigenous healing methods have not been taken seriously for a long time (Y. Zhang 1996, p. 4). We surely must strictly distinguish the fundamental difference between indigenous healing methods and the quack techniques of scamming for money. On the one hand, we should not give up an undertaking on account of a small obstacle and deny the effect of indigenous healing methods because of some deceptive techniques such as hand-touch healing. On the other hand, we should also be vigilant to avoid being brainwashed by evil skills and crooked ways under the banner of religious medicine and folk medicine.

According to Qiu Huiying 丘慧莹, the period from the late Qing Dynasty to the early Republic China was the heyday of the development of the Baojuan. In Jiangsu Province 江苏省 and Zhejiang Province 浙江省, people would invite Baojuan preachers to recite whether they were getting married, conducting funerals, celebrating birthdays, praying to have babies, getting sick, suffering disasters, having a full moon celebration for children, celebrating the completion of a new house and other festivals, or holding other folk activities (Qiu 2017a, p. 97). The connotation of preaching the Baojuan to suppress evil spirits and cure diseases is nothing more than to entice people with benefits, suppress evil spirits with power, provide professional ability, and persuade people to do good deeds and cultivate themselves according to religious doctrines. These prescriptions are faith-based. With the means of preaching rituals and through the power of words, people perceive and respond, which is a kind of psychic healing at the spiritual level (Qiu 2017b, p. 287). It should be pointed out that, according to Qiu, the therapeutic effect of the Baojuan relies more on the text and content, rather than the power of preaching ritual and space.

4.1. Restoration of Order and the Power of Interpretation

From the perspective of etiology, according to the surveys and interviews of the masters, the causes of diseases can be put into three groups. First, one cause is the problems arising in the relationships between people. People, especially relatives, need to assume the agreed responsibilities and obligations and play appropriate roles in the kinship network to maintain a harmonious relationship. When a conflict occurs, the harmonious relationship between people is disrupted, and diseases come. This is the opposite of the so-called saying that “harmony at home brings prosperity” (*jia-he -wan-shi-xing* 家和万事兴). A second cause is the problems arising in the relationship between humans and nature. When a natural disaster occurs, or when people are at odds with nature, epidemic diseases such as plagues and influenza often break out. A third cause is the problems arising in the relationship between humans and the supernatural. In particular, the problems in the relationship between humans and ghosts/gods are the common etiological explana-

tion used by Baojuan masters. These three explanations are derived from the concept of the functioning and constitution of the cosmic order in traditional Chinese thoughts. In the integrated and balanced system of cosmic problems, disasters (including diseases) occur when people are unable or unwilling to play their roles in the functioning of the system, or when the functioning of the system itself goes wrong. The healing method is primarily to maintain harmony among the functioning components of the system, restore order to the universe, and avoid confrontation or compromising the functioning of the system (Y. Zhang 1996, p 38).

Sacrificial activity and ritual started to emerge at the dawn of the formation of human settlements. The main purpose of these activities was to hope that Heaven or gods could maintain the stability of the universe and make the world favorable to avoid natural disaster (N. Zhu 2012, p. 191). From a sociological perspective, ritual therapy deals specifically with disorders and abnormal events and provides socially practical maintenance through treatment. Every culture has its design for avoiding or reversing the ravages of diseases to reduce unnecessary anxiety and prepare for emergencies (Y. Zhang 1996, p. 64). Meanwhile, to create meaning in life, humans keep building up sequences of events and experiences to develop consistent views of themselves and the world around them (White and Epston 1990, p. 10).

Order and meaning are produced in the process of interpreting the Baojuan ritual. Through the Baojuan ritual, the damaged order is restored. Through the master's interpretation, the patient understands his or her problems, regains a sense of the meaning of life, and this is where the therapeutic effects come from. Baojuan rituals often combine with the folk Taoist talisman, religious musical instruments, and skills to exorcise evil spirits (namely the intruders to the stable order and balanced world), to realize the social-cultural therapy in the symbolic sense (Li and Wang 2020, 6th ed.).

4.2. Functions of Vision and Creation of Imagery

As the saying goes, "seeing is believing" (*yan-jian-wei-shi* 眼见为实), and the various cultural systems of human beings have strong belief and faith in evidence that can be seen. This is reflected in many adjectives in our language that attach the attribute of being capable of understanding to human beings and to appropriate ideas (White and Epston 1990, pp. 33–34). Through the visual sense, our mental states, including emotion and reasoning, are being constantly stimulated. Visual art had been an invaluable asset to humankind long before history was recorded, and people are constantly trying to visualize their world. When people are confronted with images, they are often awakened to address their unresolved issues and to fix them in symbolic ways (Gladding 2016, pp. 91–122). Whether it is a portrait hanging in the reciting ritual, an illustration in the Baojuan, or a talisman created by the Baojuan master, it is a strong visual stimulation for the patient. This stimulation awakens the patient's self-perception and makes him or her believe that there are gods involved in the ritual, where the master is the servant of the gods, and his or her illness can be cured.

In addition, imagery is also used in many different ways in rituals. According to the study of Samuel T. Gladding, Freud was the first to pay close attention to imagery and its meaning in the contemporary treatment of mental health disorders, particularly the role of dreams. Freud emphasized the explicit and implicit meanings of dreams and described them as the royal road to the unconscious (Gladding 2016, pp. 71–90). Based on interviews with participants in the rituals, the patients said frankly that entering the healing ritual was like entering dreams. After entering the sacred healing field, they remembered nothing and only felt things like the symbols and images provided in the ritual space. Obviously, the mechanism of action is similar to modern art therapy.

4.3. Placebo Effect

A placebo is an inactive substance known as a dummy pill that is given to the patient, which is often shown to be as effective as the active agents. In trials, placebos were used

instead of aspirin or morphine to reduce pain, and in more than a third of cases, they were as effective as the pain reliever (Dorling 1995, p. 62). Baojuan healing rituals not only use substances such as incense ash or paper ash that are commonly used in folk healing but also use the prescriptions attached to the end of Baojuan.¹⁶ It is not known how effective such prescriptions are; but, after the ritualistic blessing and taking some magic medicine in the prescription, there is no doubt a placebo effect.

More broadly speaking, the recitations of the Baojuan can allow individuals to empathize with and express their symptoms or personal worries. According to our field study, we found that most symptoms or worries came from internal anxiety rather than some diseases or pains. Through the ritualized performance and work of the body, the patient projects his or her feelings into the sacred ritual space and the Baojuan text and realizes spiritual self-redemption and perfection. This is the real reason why Baojuan play a role as a placebo.

4.4. Safely Passing through the Liminal State

The term “liminality”, derived from the Latin “limen”, refers to the state of intermittency or ambiguity. It is originally a psychological term, used to refer to the minimum amount of external stimulus that causes an organism to feel. Later, the term was applied in the field of anthropology to establish the so-called theory of liminality. The theory proposes to call a special zone that exists between two structures or two stages a liminal stage. The French anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep pointed out in his *Les rites de passage* that important rituals in the course of human life are composed of three stages, namely separation, transition, and combination, and the liminal stage is equivalent to the transition stage (Van Gennep 2011, pp. 1–18). Victor Turner renamed Van Gennep’s three phases of life rites as the preliminal, liminal and postliminal phases and focused his research on the core of the ritual process, liminality, which is the transitional phase. According to Turner, liminality is not a “state”, but it is at the junction of the structure, a transition between two stable “states” (Turner 2017, pp. 94–130).

In the Hexi Corridor, an important use of the ritual of the Baojuan is the funeral ceremonies. Baojuan masters (or folk Taoist priests) are often invited by people to recite scriptures, such as the Scripture of the Lingbao Blood Pond (*Lingbao Xuehu Ke* 灵宝血湖科), the Precious Scroll of Invoking Shangqing God (*Shangqing Qing Zhongshen Juan* 上清请众神卷), the Dragon King Praise (*Longwang Zan* 龙王赞), and the Scripture of the Ten Kings (*Shiwang Jing* 十王经), to help people pass through the liminal stage. In funeral ceremonies, the transition stage between life and death of the dead has a typical attribute of liminality and is full of danger and power. Due to the influence of traditional culture and the shaping of local knowledge by people, funeral ceremonies not only have the characteristics that local cultures/customs vary over even small geographical distances, but they also share some common features.

In people’s minds, when the dead pass away, they become ghosts that should enter the underworld as soon as possible, rather than lingering in the human world. The dead no longer belong to the human world. They have become what people call unclean things that need to be released, separated, expelled, and purified, using tools such as scriptures (or Baojuan), rooster’s blood, and fire. Namely, when a person passes away, he or she becomes an outlier and can no longer live with the living; the purpose of cleaning the environment of the deceased is to prevent them from returning to the human world. Most outliers or anomalies, because they violate or escape the bottom line of social cognition and cultural classification, are regarded as the existence of ambiguity, impurity, filth, immaturity, or danger (Zhou 2015, p. 6). And then, through the cognition and classification by local knowledge, people can distinguish between order and disorder, internal and external, and clean and unclean. Ambiguous boundaries, abnormal situations, etc., are all considered unclean, dangerous, and filthy (Douglas 2001, pp. 123–24). In the context of funeral ceremonies, concerns such as the presence of a living corpse, an evil man, or an

evil ghost reflect the imaginative fears and explanations that extend beyond one's familiar understanding of the self.

When faced with dangers, the response of people is to invite monks, folk Taoist priests, or other religious figures to release the spirits and at the same time to invite masters (sometimes acted by folk Taoist priests concurrently) to recite Baojuan. When a reciting ritual is held, crowds of people tend to watch and burn paper to worship. The folk Taoist priest holds religious musical instruments in his hand and recites and dances, which is highly lively. Its nature is similar to the sacrificial ritual of social fire Niuduye (*shehuo niu-duye* 社火牛犊爷) in the Lantern Festival (*yuanxiao jie* 元宵节), in which all people, men and women, young and old, can participate. Hidden behind the lively scene are the ritual activities of subduing demons, which have evolved into a lively and noisy social aesthetic psychology that permeates various kinds of cultural texts (Yongping Li 2018, p. 116). Namely, through the reciting ritual, on the one hand, it releases the spirit of the dead; on the other hand, it also has an implied meaning of subduing demons and driving away ghosts, highlighting the function of averting disasters and healing. On the one hand, a series of cleaning practices are conducted to release the spirit of the dead, ward off evil spirits, and avert disasters; on the other hand, reciting rituals is used to soothe people and treat their anxiety so that they can pass through the liminal stage safely.

From a functionalist perspective, funeral anxiety is a prominent liminal anxiety, and the transition ritual tries to make the dead, an uncertain and fuzzy liminal subject and anxious object, acquire logical meaning and transformation form (S. Li 2015, p. 122). For the deceased, on the one hand, they are the subjects of the liminal stage, and on the other hand, they are the anxious objects of the deceased's children and neighbors. Through the cleaning ritual and the ritual of reciting, the uncertain factors of the transition zone become logical and routinized, so the function of averting disasters and healing are maximized. In this process, the folk Taoist priest first guides the dead to realize that they have passed away and become ghosts who cannot live with the living. Then, through the rituals of crossing the Naihe Bridge (*nai-he-qiao* 奈何桥) and the Blood Pool (*xuehu* 血湖), the folk Taoist priest escorts the spirit of the dead smoothly into the underworld. Finally, through the step of crying to paper (*kuzhi* 哭纸), the folk Taoist priest confirms that the spirit of the dead has left this world and then completely eliminates the fear and concern of the living.

5. Postscript

This paper focuses on the therapeutic function of the Hexi Baojuan. Similar to reciting major epics and early literary forms in various cultures, the recitations of the Hexi Baojuan often serve the purpose of averting disasters and healing diseases. Compared with the healing ritual of reciting King Gesar (*ge-sa-er-wang* 格萨尔王), which frequently lasted for several days, the ritual of reciting the Hexi Baojuan, although sometimes lasting for two or three days, is mostly conducted within a few hours. Due to the sacred status and important function of Baojuan in the Hexi Corridor, the ritual of reciting the Hexi Baojuan has become a cultural tradition and a standard reciting format. No step of the ritual can be omitted, and the conduct of a ritual needs to be presided over and guided by the master. In many cases, it does not matter much which Baojuan is recited; more important is the ritual procedure and the construction of the sacred space, which are the focus of this paper.

The author's main focus has been on understanding the mechanism of the healing ritual of reciting the Baojuan. Whether it is a series of preparatory activities before the ritual or the construction of the space, the purpose is to give a full display of the therapeutic role of ritual. The combination of symbols in the sacred space and the performance of the master work not only to rebuild the cosmic order but also to provide a reasonable explanation of the cause of diseases. Once the patient has gained the confidence, good results can come with some help of medicine. In the eyes of most people, rituals are sacred. In the author's view, rituals actually have a placebo effect, also known as a dummy pill effect. The ultimate effect of the reciting rituals prescribed in the Hexi Baojuan is to make the patient safely pass through the so-called liminality, a stage of a rite of passage, most

evident in funeral ceremonies. Finally, in terms of the relationship between the rituals of healing in the Hexi Baojuan and the shamanism in many archaic cultures, they both share similarities in dealing with spiritual healing. However, they differ in specific and concrete forms, such as whether there is spirit possession involved.

Funding: 2024 Henan Province University Humanities and Social Sciences Research General Project “the Cultural Connotation of the Tatar Dance Ethnic Community in the Han Tibetan Ethnic Cross Zone of Gansu Province”: 2024-ZDJH-467; the Major Program of the National Social Science Foundation of China “Collation and Research of Overseas Chinese Baojuan”: 17ZDA266; the Major Program of the National Social Science Foundation of China “the History of Chinese Popular Religious Thought”: 18ZDA232.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and approved by the Academic Committee of the School of Liberal Arts of Henan Normal University (28 April 2023).

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study. Written informed consent has been obtained from the patients to publish this paper.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ Daniel L. Overmyer was a pioneer in the field of Baojuan research. His *Precious Volumes: An Introduction to Chinese Sectarian Scriptures from the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* is the representative work of the study by Western scholars on the relationship between Chinese Baojuan and folk religion. Several articles by Russian Sinologist Rostislav Berezkin focus on the Baojuan texts used in the preaching rituals in Jiangnan region 江南地区 and the study of ritual practices, rather than the study of the mechanism of the ritual functions, as are Sun Xiaosu’s articles.
- ² Related research results that have not yet been published, the *Summary of Hexi Baojuan (hexi baojuan shuyao 河西宝卷述要)*, which was co-authored by Guo Yulie 郭郁烈 and Zhang Xiping 张曦萍, studying the same Baojuan or different versions of the same Baojuan, have provided detailed statistics on the existing collections of the Hexi Baojuan, mainly on the version information, form, compilations of published and nonpublished versions, and the current state of public and private collections. According to the available information and the author’s statistics, there exist about 200 kinds of Hexi Baojuan (including copies and carving copies), excluding different versions of the same Baojuan (little change in the content).
- ³ The so-called “ecocultural circle” refers to the ecological humanistic sphere formed naturally among living things in a specific time and space. According to the local climate, landform, culture, and other factors, different ecocultural circles are often formed. Different local climates, landforms, and cultures often lead to the creation of different ecocultural circles.
- ⁴ In this Appendix, Li Yan described the detailed geographical distribution, preservation, and interviews of the inheritors of the Hexi Baojuan. Other relevant research findings: (Huang 2020; and Wu 2010, on the overall ecology of Hexi Baojuan; Xufeng Zhao 2014, on the distribution of Baojuan in Wuwei region 武威地区; He 2003, on the distribution of Baojuan, especially Yongchang Baojuan, in Jinchang region 金昌地区).
- ⁵ There are also Guazhou 瓜州 and Shanzhou 鄯州, which are not included in the Four Counties of Hexi but belong to the Hexi region.
- ⁶ The history, geography, climate, ethnic distribution, and other information of the Hexi Corridor are mainly seen in the Pan (2010).
- ⁷ Dai Jisheng 代继生 is a local master who recites scrolls and is also a folk Taoist. Between 2018 and 2020, the author conducted multiple interviews and onsite observations on Dai’s rituals related to the scrolls.
- ⁸ Depending on the condition and living environment, the Baojuan master will tell the patient what kind of evil spirits caused the disease.
- ⁹ This sentence comes from the *collection of Yiwenzhi in Hanshu (hanshu yi-wen-zhi 汉书·艺文志)*, and it is Confucius’ 孔子 words.
- ¹⁰ The Scripture to Dispel Disasters by the Xiayuan Water God (*Xiayuan Shuiguan Jie’e Jing 下元水官解厄经*) is collected by Dai’s family in Zhangye, Hexi region.
- ¹¹ Agitation refers to the state of shock caused by the excitation of things or shock and turbulence. Here, the term of collective agitation used refers to the wisdom and kinetic energy of healing triggered by the collective power, so as to achieve the purpose of healing.
- ¹² The term of “interaction ritual chains” was proposed by Collins, an American sociologist, to connect the macro and micro concepts. It refers to the development of different interactive rituals through constant contact and their combination in complex forms. Collins believes that people have common emotional impulses based on common psychology and concerns. When people use the same symbols to express their common concerns and emotions, interaction rituals are generated. Different levels of

encounters form different interaction rituals, and with the extension of time, they combine in complex forms and then form an interaction ritual chain. Its continuation depends on the strengthening of emotional energy and reward of the two sides. He also believes that the whole society can be seen as a long interaction ritual chain through which the macro social structure is established (Randall Collins 2005).

- ¹³ The leading light that appears in the funeral ceremony in some areas (such as Linze of Zhangye 张掖临泽, Yadang of Hezheng 和政牙塘, Gangu of Tianshui in Gansu 甘肃天水甘谷, and Sangyuan of Juxian in Shandong 山东莒县桑园) is also known as the ever-burning lamp. The purpose of the lamp is equivalent to the stars in the sky, mainly for showing the way. Among them, the most representative one is the Seven Stars Leading the Way (*qi-xing-yin-lu* 七星引路), in which copper coins are placed in the shape of the Big Dipper (*bei-dou-qi-xing* 北斗七星), meaning the dead will go to the underworld. The Big Dipper is composed of the seven stars of Tianshu 天枢, Tianxuan 天璇, Tianji 天玑, Tianquan 天权, Yuheng 玉衡, Kaiyang 开阳, and Yaoguang 瑶光. In ancient China, the seven stars were thought to be linked together and imagined as a dipper for scooping wine. In Taoism the Big Dipper is called the Qiyuan Jie'e Xingjun 七元解厄星君, who live in the seven palaces of the Big Dipper, namely, Tanlang Xingjun in Tianshu Palace 天枢宫贪狼星君, Jumen Xingjun in Tianxuan Palace 天璇宫巨门星君, Lucun Xingjun in Tianji Palace 天玑宫禄存星君, Wenqu Xingjun in Tianquan Palace 天权宫文曲星君, Lianzhen Xingjun in Yuheng Palace 玉衡宫廉贞星君, Wuqu Xingjun in Kaiyang Palace 开阳宫武曲星君, and Pojun Xingjun in Yaoguang Palace 瑶光宫破军星君.
- ¹⁴ A typical example is the one in Chapter 103 "In Shangfang Valley Sima Yi Gets Trapped, at Wuzhang Plains Zhuge Liang Expels Evil Stars" 上方谷司马受困 五丈原诸葛禳星 of the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (*sanguo yanyi* 三国演义). When Zhuge Liang 诸葛亮 scanned the sky at night, he found his life might end at any moment. Then, he wanted to use the magic of expelling evil stars to extend his life, "I am in the habit of praying, but I don't know the will of God. However, prepare me forty-nine guards and let each have a black flag. Dress them in black and place them outside my tent. Then I will pray for the Big Dipper in my tent. If my master-lamp remain alight for seven days, then is my life to be prolonged for twelve years. If the lamp goes out, then I am to die." His specific practices were as follows. Zhuge Liang prepared incense and offerings in his tent. On the floor of the tent, he arranged seven lamps, and, outside these, forty-nine smaller lamps. In the midst he placed the lamp of his own fate. All day he labored at his military plans, and at night he paced the magic steps—the steps of seven stars of Ursa Major and Ursa Minor. Zhuge Liang was loosening his hair, his hand holding a sword, his heels stepping on Ursa Major and Ursa Minor to hold the leadership star.
- ¹⁵ Part of the Baojuan appears in the form with images on the upper half of the page and text on the lower half, which is very close to the style of talking about the picture, e.g., the collection of the *Complete Portrait of the Tang Monk's Journey to the West* (*quanxiang tangseng chushen xi-you-ji zhuan* 全像唐僧出身西游记传), also known as the *Newly Carved Complete Biography of the Triratna's Birth* (*xinke sanbao chushen quanzhuan* 新刻三宝出身全传), in the Asian-African Library of the University of London.
- ¹⁶ Such as the *Pangong Mianzai Jiunan Baojuan* 潘公免灾救难宝卷. At the end of this Baojuan, there are references to planchette writing, such as the *Dongyue Dadi Tongsheng Baoxun* 东岳大帝同生宝训, the *Wenchang Dijun Xingshi Jibi* 文昌帝君醒世乱笔, the *Guanyin Dashi Quanshan Chaojie Wen* 观音大士劝善超劫文, the *Wenchang Dijun Chuixun Guangquan Jibi* 文昌帝君垂训广劝乱笔, and several prescriptions.

References

- Berezkin, Rostislav. 2018. Paying for Salvation: The Ritual of "Repaying the Loan for Life" and Telling Scriptures in Changshu, China. *Asian Ethnology* 77: 307–29.
- Berezkin, Rostislav. 2021. The Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond in the "Telling Scriptures" Tradition in Changshu, Jiangsu, China. *Religions* 12: 865. [CrossRef]
- Blake, C. Fred. 2011. *Burning Money: The Material Spirit of the Chinese Lifeworld*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Boddy, Janice. 1994. Spirit Possession Revisited: Beyond Instrumentality. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 23: 407–34. [CrossRef]
- Che, Xilun 车锡伦. 1999. Mingqing Minjian Zongjiao Yu Gansu De Nianjuan Yu Baojuan 明清民间宗教与甘肃的念卷与宝卷. *Dunhuang Yanjiu* 敦煌研究 4: 40–49+187.
- Collins, Randall. 2005. *Interaction Ritual Chains*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Dorling, Kindersley Limited. 1995. *New Age Paranormal Medicine* 新时代灵异医疗术. Translated by Zenquan Liu 刘增泉. Taipei: Zhuoyue Wenhua Shiye Gufen Youxian Gongsi.
- Douglas, Mary. 2001. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. New York: Routledge.
- Durkheim, Emile. 2008. *The Elementary Forms of the Religion Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gladding, Samuel T. 2016. *The Creative Arts in Counseling*. Alexandria: American Counseling Association.
- He, Denghuan 何登焕. 2003. *Yongchang Baojuan-Qianyan* 永昌宝卷·前言, An Internal Document, GP Approval No. 0156-016.
- Huang, Jing 黄靖. 2020. *Zhongguo Huo Baojuan Diaocha* 中国活宝卷调查. Nanjing: Hehai Daxue Chubanshe.
- Itzhak, Nofit. 2018. Making Selves and Meeting Others in Neo-Shamanic Healing. *Ethos* 43: 286–310. [CrossRef]
- Li, Chongxin 李崇信. 2005. Zongjiao Yiliao Zhi Falv Wenti Yanjiu-Yi Yi-shi-fa De Guifan Weizhu 宗教医疗之法律问题研究——以“医事法”的规范为主. In *Zongjiao Yu Minsu Yiliao Xuebao (Chuang-kan-hao)* 宗教与民俗医疗学报(创刊号). Edited by Zhiming Zhen 郑志明. Taipei: Dayuan Shuju.
- Li, Shiwu 李世武. 2015. *Wushu Jiaolv Yu Yishu Zhiliao Yanjiu* 巫术焦虑与艺术治疗研究. Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe.
- Li, Yan 李妍. 2022. *Hexi Baojuan Yuanxing Yanjiu-Fulu* 河西宝卷原型研究·附录. Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe.

- Li, Yongping 李永平. 2018. "Danao" Yu "Fumo": Zhang-si-jie Danao Dongjing Baojuan De Rangzai Jiegou "大闹" 与 "伏魔": 《张四姐大闹东京宝卷》的禳灾结构. *Minsu Yanjiu* 民俗研究 3: 116.
- Li, Yongping 李永平. 2020. *Gudianxue Zhi Wenhua Dachuantong Shijiao* 古典学之文化大传统视角. Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe.
- Li, Yongping 李永平, and Yinping Wang 王银萍. 2020. *Wajue Baojuan Zhong De Wenhua Rangzai Zhihui* 挖掘宝卷中的文化禳灾智慧, 6th ed. Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Bao 中国社会科学报.
- Luo, Guanzhong 罗贯中. 1973. *Sanguo Yanyi* 三国演义. Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe, p. 861.
- Pan, Jingwan 潘竟万. 2010. *Zhongguo Hexi Zoulang Xilie Congshu (Quan Sice)* 中国河西走廊系列丛书 (全四册). Lanzhou: Gansu Wenhua Chubanshe.
- Qiu, Huiying 丘慧莹. 2017a. Jiangsu Changshu Xuanjuan Huodong De Xinbian Jiqi Yiyi 江苏常熟宣卷活动的新变及其意义. *Shi-he-zi Daxue Xuebao (Zhexue Shehui Kexue Ban)* 石河子大学学报 (哲学社会科学版) 1: 97.
- Qiu, Huiying 丘慧莹. 2017b. Zhensui Yu Zhibing-Wudi Xuanjuan De Yiliao Zuoyong 镇祟与治病——吴地宣卷的医疗作用. *Hanxue Yanjiu* 汉学研究 2: 287.
- Some, Patrice. 2000. *Africa Maridoma: The Healing Wisdom of Africa: Finding Life Purpose Through Nature, Ritual, and Community* 非洲·马里多玛: 原住民的治疗智慧. Translated by Limei Jiang 江丽美. Taipei: Zhiku Gufen Youxian Gongsi.
- Sun, Xiaosu 孙晓苏. 2016. Liu Qingti's Canine Rebirth and Her Ritual Career as the Heavenly Dog: Recasting Mulian's Mother in Baojuan (Precious Scrolls) Recitation, CHINOPERL. *Journal of Chinese Oral and Performing Literature* 35: 28–55. [CrossRef]
- Tang, Qiuyan 唐秋燕. 2013. *Wenxue Zhiliao Yuanli Fenxi* 文学治疗原理分析. Master's Dissertation, Hubei University for Nationalities, Enshi City, China.
- Tooker, Deborah E. 2019. Rethinking Depth Metaphors with a Cosmocentric Self: The Steep and the Level in Akha Emotional Practices. *Ethos* 47: 346–66. [CrossRef]
- Turner, Victor Witter. 2017. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. New York: Routledge.
- Van Gennep, Arnold. 2011. *Les Rites De Passage*. Paris: Editions A&J Picard.
- Wang, Guowei 王国维. 1996. *Songyuan Xiqu Shi* 宋元戏曲史. Beijing: Dongfang Chubanshe.
- White, Mike, and David Epston. 1990. *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Wilson, Peter J. 1967. Status Ambiguity and Spirit Possession. *Man* 2: 366–78. [CrossRef]
- Wu, Yutang 吴玉堂. 2010. *Hexi Baojuan Diaocha Yanjiu* 河西宝卷调查研究. Master's Thesis, Northwest Normal University, Lanzhou, China.
- Zhang, Xun 张珣. 2008. Daojiao "Jijie" Yishi Zhong De Chanhui Yu "Tishen": Yige Wenhua Xinlixue De Tantaos "祭解" 仪式中的忏悔与"替身": 一个文化心理学的探讨. In *Bentu Xinli Yu Wenhua Liaoyu Lunlihua De Keneng Tanwen Lunwenji* 本土心理与文化疗愈伦理化的可能探问论文集. Edited by Anbang Yu 余安邦. Taipei: Zhongyang Yanjiuyuan Minzu Yanjiusuo.
- Zhang, Yuquan 张育铨. 1996. Shen-ming-dan De Yiliao Ren-lei-xue Fenxi-Yi Xin-zhu-shi Weili 神明单的医疗人类学分析——以新竹市为例. Master's Dissertation, Tsinghua University, Xinzhu, Taiwan.
- Zhao, Shichang 赵世昌. 2021a. Guodu Yu Jiejing: Huanghe Liuyu Sangzang Yishi "Yuxian" Shuxing Yanjiu-Jiyu Sandi Tianye Diaocha Fenxi 过渡与洁净: 黄河流域丧葬仪式"阈限"属性研究——基于三地田野调查分析. *Qinghai Minzu Daxue Xuebao (Shehui Kexue Ban)* 青海民族大学学报 (社会科学版) 1: 125.
- Zhao, Shichang 赵世昌. 2021b. Hexi Baojuan Zhiliao Yishi Chutan-Yi Chaoxie Yishi Wei Zhongxin De Kaocha 河西宝卷治疗仪式初探——以抄写仪式为中心的考察. *Shijie Zongjiao Wenhua* 世界宗教文化 2: 134–40.
- Zhao, Shichang 赵世昌, and Jinhai Luo 罗进海. 2020. Yishi Yu Jiyi: Hezheng Yadang Shehuo "Niu-du-ye" Renleixue Jiedu 仪式与记忆: 和政牙塘社火"牛犊爷"人类学解读. *Zongjiaoxue Yanjiu* 宗教学研究 2: 266.
- Zhao, Xiaoming 赵小明. 2011. *Wenhua Yishu Fuhao Zhiliao* 文化艺术符号治疗. Beijing: Shijie Tushu Chubanshe.
- Zhao, Xufeng 赵旭峰. 2014. *Liangzhou Baojuan·Xu* 凉州宝卷·序. Lanzhou: Gansu Renmin Meishu Chubanshe.
- Zhong, Zhenyu 钟振宇. 2019. Xiangqi De Zhexue Tantaos 香气的哲学探讨. In *Dangdai Shenghuo Meixue Gongzuofang: Yi Chadao Weizhu De Tantaos Lunwenji* 当代生活美学工作坊: 以茶道为主的探讨论文集. Taipei: Zhongyang Yanjiuyuan Zhongguo Wenzhe Yanjiusuo.
- Zhou, Xing 周星. 2015. Han Wenhua Zhong De "Shengse" "Jiasheng" Yu "Chengshu" 汉文化中人的"生涩" "夹生" 与 "成熟". *Minsu Yanjiu* 民俗研究 3: 6.
- Zhu, Naixin 朱乃欣. 2012. *Xunzhao Naozhong Shenming: Zongjiao De Nao-ke-xue Guan* 寻找脑中神明: 宗教的脑科学观. Taipei: Lixu Wenhua Shiye Youxian Gongsi.
- Zhu, Yuzhang 朱瑜章. 2015. Hexi Baojuan Cunmu Jikao 河西宝卷存目辑考. *Wenshizhe* 文史哲 4: 65–79+166.
- Zhuang, Jifa 庄吉发. 1991. Qingdai Minjian Zongjiao De Yuanliu Jiqi Shehui Gongneng 清代民间宗教的源流及其社会功能. In *Zongjiao Yu Wenhua* 宗教与文化. Edited by Zhiming Zheng 郑志明. Taipei: Xuesheng Shuju.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.