



Chu Witchcraft and the Origins of Early Taoism

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Abstract

Taoism is a native religion in China, and its main ideological source is the Taoist thought that was born in Chu. Chu was the epicenter of ancient Chinese witchcraft culture, deeply influencing early Taoism through three aspects: gods, necromancy, and medicine. In response to inexplicable happenings, the Chu people invented a variety of gods and ghosts; they worshipped and sacrificed to these gods and ghosts in order to ensure the continued existence of their ethnic group. Chu's belief in ghosts and gods served as the impetus for the early Taoist immortal system. The Chu people used objects with images of human figures to accompany the burial ceremony, which they believed had witchcraft functions to help the tomb owner ascend to heaven and earth. This was consistent with the early Taoist immortals ceremony. In a low-productivity environment, Chu people often relied on the power of wizards to eliminate diseases through spells, prayers, medicine, and acupuncture. Early Taoist medicine was mostly inherited from witchcraft medicine, but with the rise of Taoism, witchcraft medicine was gradually abandoned.

Keywords

Chu witchcraft; early Taoism; gods; necromancy; medicine

1. Introduction

In ancient China, Chu was divided into Eastern Chu, Western Chu, and Southern Chu. Eastern Chu covered the eastern part of present-day central Hubei Province, Western Chu roughly included present-day northern Jiangsu Province, western Henan Province, and southwestern Hubei Province, while Southern Chu roughly included the southern part of present-day Anhui Province, Jiangxi Province, and Hunan Province. In general, Chu covered the middle reaches of the Yangtze River, the Hanshui River basin, and the upper reaches of the Huaihe River. Chu had complex landforms, varied climates, and abundant vegetation. Living in this unique natural geographical environment, the Chu people were particularly concerned about birth, old age, illness, and death. Once they encountered mental pressure, they instinctively felt panic and tension, which led to many taboos and witchcraft to alleviate their inner anxiety. Ban Gu's *Hanshu (Book of Han)* reported Chu as "believing in witchcraft and valuing sacrifice" (Ban, 1962, p. 1286).

Taoism, a Chinese native religion, regards Taoist thought as the highest belief. The historical relation between Taoist thought and Taoist culture is actually caused by Laozi, the founder of Taoism, who was born in Chu. Laozi is revered as the leader of Taoism, and his *Tao Te Ching* is revered as the sacred book of Taoism. However, the *Tao Te Ching* itself has no religious significance, and its mysterious philosophy has been incorporated into Taoist doctrine; it is not the real source of Taoism. The witchcraft culture prevalent in Chu of Laozi's hometown is fundamentally different from the *Tao Te Ching*, as witchcraft is based on "worship of ghosts and gods". The worship of ghosts and gods, immortal necromancy, medical prescriptions, and other aspects of early Taoism all have direct or indirect connections to Chu witchcraft culture. Therefore, the academic community generally believes that Chu witchcraft culture is one of the main sources of early Taoism (Wu, 2009, p. 39).

In recent years, many archaeological materials from the Chu culture have been unearthed, which has directly promoted the new thinking of early Taoism research. As early as the beginning of the 20th century, Wang Guowei pithily

pointed out: "Since ancient times, the rise of new learning is mostly due to the discovery of new archaeological materials" (Wang, 1983, p. 65). Therefore, firstly, this article uses the method of literature analysis to classify the types of Chu witchcraft reflected in Qu Yuan's *Chu Ci*, and repeatedly studies the Taoist classic *Tao Te Ching*. Then, this article employs the double evidence method to complement and argue newly unearthed archaeological materials in Chu with the *Chu Ci*, providing a more comprehensive explanation of Chu witchcraft. Finally, this article employs the method of comparative research to reveal in detail the elements of Chu witchcraft in early Taoist behaviors from three aspects: gods, necromancy, and medicine, in order to benefit early Chinese religious research.

2. The Influence of Chu Gods and Ghosts Belief on Early Taoism

The gods and ghosts' belief in Chu has a long history, influenced by various factors, and the types of god and ghost beliefs have also changed over time. In the Neolithic Age, a set of striking jade-carved statues was unearthed at the Shijiahe Cultural Archaeological Site in the middle reaches of the Yangtze River in China, which clearly restored the earliest spiritual world of the Chu ancestors. In the Eastern Zhou Dynasty, the Chu people had their own beliefs in gods and ghosts. The *Chu Ci*, written by Qu Yuan, fully reflected the types of gods and ghosts that Chu people believed in more than two thousand years ago, as well as the witchcraft practices used to deal with them. Taoism is a polytheistic religion, similar to the belief in ghosts, gods, and witchcraft practices in Chu. In the Taoist lineage of gods and ghosts, various gods and ghosts perform their respective duties, forming a huge bureaucratic system. In order to communicate with people, gods, and ghosts, Taoists usually have a unique set of methods and rituals. From this, it can be seen that the Taoist thought, which developed in the soil of Chu culture, was inevitably influenced by Chu witchcraft. In the formation and development of the early Taoist immortal system, we can obviously see the shadow of the belief in gods and ghosts in Chu.

2.1 The Neolithic Jade-carved Statues at Shijiahe

As early as the Neolithic Age, the people of Shijiahe, who lived in the middle reaches of the Yangtze River, regarded land, celestial bodies, mountains, rivers, hills, animals, and plants as gods. They believed that all things had spirits, and all things operated according to rules: through certain witchcraft rituals, they could communicate with gods and control nature (Jiang, 2010, p. 49). Therefore, people utilized the enigmatic and exquisite jade as a crucial instrument in their witchcraft rituals, imbuing it with the spirituality necessary to interact with the gods. The Shijiahe Cultural Archaeological Site has unearthed many jade artefacts related to witchcraft, with the jade-carved statues best reflecting the unique beliefs of the Shijiahe people. Du Jinpeng divided the jade-carved statues into two types: Type A with fangs and curved corners (see Figure 1), while Type B represents the image of an ordinary human (see Figure 2) (Du, 1993, p. 52). The Type A jade-carved statues should be the shape of gods in the minds of the Shijiahe people, because personifying animals and plants (putting human faces on animals and plants) was a fixed way of man-made gods in prehistoric times, which was the product of natural worship. The Type B jade-carved statues should be the shape of the ancestors or leaders of the Shijiahe people, which was the product of ancestor worship. It is evident from the shapes of the jade-carved statues in Shijiahe that the creation of gods in the Neolithic Age witchcraft world occurred in two stages: the natural gods, who were closely associated with the lives of the Shijiahe people, formed the first stage, and the ancestral gods, who developed on the foundation of the natural gods, formed the second. The "emperor" of the Shang and Zhou Dynasties was a king who represented the gods to govern the entire society. He was a blend of the natural gods and the ancestral gods.

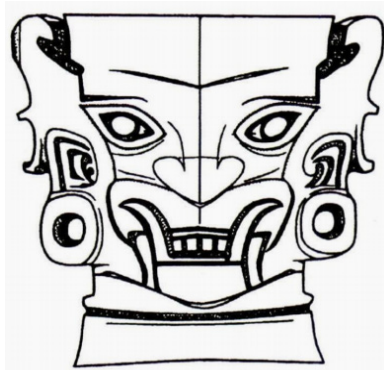


Figure 1. Xiaojia Wuji Site W6: 32 jade-carved statue.



Figure 2. Xiaojia Wuji Site W6: 14 jade-carved statue.

2.2 Qu Yuan's Nine Songs and the Gods and Ghosts Belief in Chu

During the Eastern Zhou Period, Chu broke away from the control of the Zhou Dynasty and developed into an early state that was almost equal to the Zhou. According to the Zhou ritual, "the emperor worships heaven and earth, and the feudal lords worship the state" (Zheng, 1999, p. 385). The King of Chu claimed that he was equal to the emperor and that he "worshipped heaven and earth, the sun, the moon, and the stars, as well as the mountains and rivers within the country" (Xu, 2002, p. 518). With the strengthening of absolute monarchy and the improvement of astronomical knowledge, the sacrificial system of Chu people became more perfect. The *Nine Songs of Chu Ci*, written by Qu Yuan, fully described the heavenly gods, earthly gods, and human ghosts that must be worshipped in Chu:

Eastern Emperor Taiyi - Sun and Moon (Eastern Lord, Cloud Lord) - Other Heavenly Gods (Da Siming, Shao Siming) - Earthly Gods (Xiang Lord, Xiang Lady, Mountain Ghosts, Hebo) - Human Ghosts (National Martyrs). (Zhao, 2009, p. 73).

The Eastern Emperor Taiyi was referred to as the "Upper Emperor" in the *Nine Songs of Chu Ci* and was ranked first, signifying that he was the supreme god in the Chu people's belief in gods and ghosts. It should be noted that the Taiyi sacrifice was a part of the worship ritual of the Chu royal family, with the Chu king himself most likely serving as the chief priest. Consequently, the nobility of the Chu royal family was the primary group of people who believed in the Eastern Emperor Taiyi. The ordinary Chu people were relatively unfamiliar with the Eastern Emperor Taiyi. The objects of their worship, first of all, were the sun god Eastern Lord and the moon god Cloud Lord, followed by the lower ranking heavenly gods Da Siming and Shao Siming, then the northern god Hebo, and the southern gods Xiang Lord, Xiang Lady and Mountain Ghosts, and finally the soldiers who died in war.

2.3 The Inheritance of the Gods and Ghosts Belief in Chu by Early Taoism

In the group of gods respected by Chu people, "Taiyi" was absorbed into the immortal lineage by Taoism and became an important element among them, and was even revered as the supreme god in the *Tao Te Ching*. During the Warring States Period, the Chu people were still unclear about the image of Taiyi, and at that time, the Taoist school emerged. In the eyes of Taoism, Taiyi is the Tao, the origin of the universe that gives birth to all things, and "serving as bridges that connect the ethereal realm of ideas with the tangible realm of human comprehension" (Huang & Li, 2023, p. 5). The Guodian Chu Bamboo Slips *Taiyi Shengshui*, written in the middle and late Warring States Period, elaborated on the creative function of Taiyi: "Taiyi gives rise to water, and water in turn assists Taiyi. Thus, heaven is formed in this manner ... The four seasons are produced by Yin and Yang. Yin and Yang are produced by the gods. Gods are created by heaven and earth. Heaven and earth are created by Taiyi. Therefore, Taiyi is hidden in the water and runs over time. It repeats itself as the mother of all things" (Li, 2007, pp. 41-42). Taiyi is the origin of the universe and the creator of all things. These characteristics are easy to touch in the ancient people's worship of the "Creator". Taoism uses this complex to transform Taiyi into a supreme god above all gods, and thus the creation theory of "Tai Yi" is increasingly popular.

The radiance of the sun and moon shines on all things. In order to express their worship for the sun and moon, the Chu people imagined them as human figures and worshipped the sun and moon gods through certain rituals. *Eastern*

Lord and *Cloud Lord* are two divine sacrificial songs in the *Nine Songs of Chu Ci*, written by Qu Yuan. The academic community generally believes that the order of the *Nine Songs* is closely related to the sacrificial system of Chu people. Jiang Liangfu believed that the status of the Eastern Lord and the Cloud Lord was relatively high, second only to the supreme god in Chu, "Eastern Emperor Taiyi". People worshipped the Cloud Lord alongside the Eastern Lord, just as they did the Da Siming and Shao Siming, the Xiang Lord and Xiang Lady. Accordingly, the Eastern Lord was the Sun God, and the Cloud Lord was the Moon God (Jiang, 1987, p. 190). On the basis of the primitive worship of the sun and moon in Chu, early Taoism further clarified the surname, dress, and authority of the gods of the sun and moon, and integrated the meditation of the sun and moon into the practice of Taoism. Regarding the responsibilities of the sun and moon, the *Laozi Lizang Zhongjing* states: "The sun and moon are the Situ and Sikong of heaven and earth" (Zhang, 2017, p. 254). As for the meditation of the sun and moon, it is an important necromancy prevalent in Taoism, which includes both the elements of communication between people and the gods of the sun and moon, as well as the elements of absorbing the natural essence of the sun and moon (Yuan, 2019, p. 26). In short, the "sun and moon" have played an irreplaceable role in Taoism.

The heavenly gods, such as the sun, moon, and stars, were regarded as the highest level of deities. Only the nobility and intellectual class of Chu were granted the witchcraft privilege to communicate with the heavenly gods, while the ordinary people were deprived of this power. They could only communicate with the mountain gods, plant gods, and water gods of lower levels around them, such as Xiang Lord, Xiang Lady, Mountain Ghosts, and Hebo. During sacrificial ceremonies, the Chu people prayed for the earth god, water god, insects, plants, and trees to return to their own places to ensure normal and orderly agricultural production and life. Taking Hebo as an example, Hebo is recognized as the water god of the Yellow River. Chu's territory was vast during the Warring States Period, and it included some parts of the Yellow River. The Chu people worshipped Hebo to pray for rain and harvest. Early Taoism widely absorbed the folk gods of Chu and incorporated them into the immortal system. Hebo was regarded as an immortal official who attained enlightenment and became immortal. Tao Hongjing's *Zhenling Weiye Tu* listed him on the right side of the Taiqing. From this, it can be seen that the earthly gods in Chu have received certain attention in the Taoist immortal system.

Among the sacrificial objects of the Chu people, there was also a special type of ghost, namely, human ghosts. Lai Guolong pointed out that nobles who failed in political struggles and soldiers who died in wars were considered restless ghosts, full of revenge. In the religious life of the Eastern Zhou Dynasty, these vengeful ghosts and gods became the dominant divine force at that time (Lai, 2015, p. 29). As the *National Martyrs of Nine Songs* recorded: "Although people are dead, their soul will never fade away. Their spirit is resolute and worthy of being a hero in the ghost" (Wang, 2017, p. 64). It reflects the Chu people's mourning and memorial to the dead soldiers. The rise of this new type of ghosts and gods, as well as the emergence of witchcraft to deal with them, had a great impact on the early Taoist concept of life and death and burial practices.

Early Taoism inherited the belief in gods and ghosts prevalent in Chu during the Warring States Period, along with witchcraft practices and ceremonies for communication between people, gods, and ghosts. As the times changed, new gods and ghosts constantly joined the fold, while the old ones gradually disappeared. They manage the life and death affairs of secular society beyond the political power.

3. The Influence of Chu's "Image Necromancy" on Early Taoism

Figure images were not given much importance in China from the Neolithic Age to the Shang and Zhou Dynasties. It was not until the Warring States Period that Chu people changed their attitude towards the concept of figure images, and "image necromancy" began to prevail in Chu, which was evidenced by the freshly unearthed tombs of Chu nobility. This article believes that "image necromancy" refers to the living's hope of realizing the witchcraft function of using particular image forms to assist the tomb owner's ascent to heaven and earth. In essence, Chu's "image necromancy" in the Warring States period was consistent with the early Taoist immortals ceremony.

3.1 The Human Figurines in Chu Tombs

The regular occurrence of human figurines in Chu nobility's tombs during the Warring States Period was surely a direct manifestation of "image necromancy". Two painted wooden human figurines were unearthed from the Wu-chang Yidi Chu Tomb M6 in Jiangling County, Hubei Province (Wang, 2021, p. 67). The human figurines were dressed in different colors from left to right, which should be the clothes of Piandu, referred to as "Pianyi". This

strange "Pianyi" was regarded as unlucky clothes in the Central Plains, but it was very popular in Chu. Looking at the unearthed human figurines from the Warring States Period, it can be proven that the figurines in different colored clothing on both sides are unique burial objects of Chu, which have not been found in other regions. As for the function and identity of these Chu figurines, we can search for clues from Qu Yuan's *Da Siming of Nine Songs*: "I am wearing spiritual clothes and Luli's jade pendants. I master the changes of Yin and Yang, and the people cannot understand my actions" (Wang, 2017, pp. 53-54). The spiritual clothes refer to the "Pianyi", which can be regarded as the religious ceremonial attire. This article speculates that these Chu figurines wearing clothes of different colors on both sides should have the function of communicating with the gods. In the Chu, only wizards were granted the privilege of communicating with gods and became the medium of communication between gods and people. Therefore, the figurines carved by the Chu people should be the images of wizards. The purpose of burying wizard figurines in Chu tombs is to help the tomb owners lead their souls to heaven, reflecting the Chu people's funeral view that the soul is immortal.

3.2 The Tomb Beasts in Chu Tombs

The common tomb beasts found in Chu tombs were also an important manifestation of "image necromancy". According to the available data, more than 5,000 Chu tombs have been excavated in Hubei, Hunan, Henan, and Anhui Provinces; among them, more than 400 Chu tombs were buried with tomb beasts. The owners of these tombs were mainly scholars, followed by nobles. It can be seen that the belief in tomb beasts is only the choice of a few intellectuals and has not been popularized among the public. Scholars and nobles are a cultural community, and their intention to bury the tomb beasts should be the same. Most senior researchers have inferred from the shape and placement of tomb beasts that they have the function of guarding tombs, warding off evil spirits, and leading souls to heaven (Wang, 2022, p. 108). In 1990, a bronze square pedestal with the inscription "Qieyi" was unearthed from the Heshang Ling Chu Tomb in Xichuan County, Henan Province, providing new ideas for the academic community to solve the mystery of tomb beasts. Zhao Ping'an, based on ancient Chinese pronunciation, believed that "Qieyi" should be pronounced as "Wanqi" and found in unearthed documents, as a god of eating ghosts (Zhao, 2007, p. 70). Lai Guolong took a different approach and pointed out that "Qieyi" was the "Zuwei" repeatedly mentioned in the divination and prayer bamboo slips unearthed from Chu tombs during the Warring States Period, and was also written as "Jianmu Wei". Combined with the evolution of the shape and structure of the tomb beast, he believed that its prototype was initially an abstract male root image, and then gradually evolved into a personified hybrid divine image of half human and half beast, which had the function of praying for childbirth (Lai, 2015, p. 122). Based on the discussion of the senior researchers, this article finds that the pedestal of the Chu-style tomb beasts is mostly square or trapezoidal, symbolizing the earth, and has the meaning of warding off evil objects from all directions and protecting the souls of the deceased. The inscription of the bronze square pedestal of the Heshang Ling Chu tomb, which reads "Qieyi", corresponds to the words of Lai Guolong and can be interpreted as "Zuwei". However, this article believes that the inscription is a reflection of the ancestor worship of the Chu people. The Chu-type tomb beast is a medium for the dead to communicate with their ancestors and heaven, and should be used as a religious objects.

3.3 The Inheritance of the "Image Necromancy" in Chu by Early Taoism

One of the main objectives of religious activities is to solve the problem of life and death. The Chu people held the concepts of "image necromancy" and "immortal soul" in relation to life and death, which greatly influenced early Taoism's approach to dealing with this issue. Taoism values life, and Taoists cherish the world, living with joy and mourning with death. When death must come, they use death as a bridge to become immortal, avoiding the unknown and fear of death. In short, Taoists solve the problem of life and death by "becoming immortal", and their attitude towards life and death is to pay attention to the other world. Similar to the burial activities in Chu, "image necromancy" is the main way for Taoists to pursue immortality. For instance, several Han painted stone statues of the West Queen Mother and other Taoist elements have been discovered in Han Dynasty tombs in Shandong, Jiangsu, Henan, Shanxi, Sichuan, and other regions of China. Because the West Queen Mother is a prestigious god in the Taoist lineage of gods and ghosts, it is said that the West Queen Mother has immortal peaches, which can make people live long, so Taoists depict their longing for the immortal world on the painted stone statues in their tombs, hoping that they can go to the immortal world after death, and realize the long-expected wish of immortality.

As early as the pre-Qin Period, "image necromancy" had been regarded as a means of social control. Images in tombs, especially human figures, were often endowed with specific witchcraft functions. The reason lay in the

changing attitudes towards the dead during this period. Out of the ambivalence of both fear and respect for the dead, the living tried to use the witchcraft function of artistic images to help confirm, control, and guide the dead to the immortal realm, in order to complete the transition from life to death, from a new state of death to a benevolent ancestor in the rituals of life (Lai, 2015, p. 99). Early Taoism inherited the tradition of "image necromancy" in Chu during the pre-Qin Period. In the tombs, the Taoists placed Han painted stone statues in the images of the Western Queen Mother and Eastern Prince, as well as the portraits of the tomb owners themselves. They hoped to achieve the ideal of immortality through this way of transcending death.

4. The Influence of Chu Witchcraft Medicine on Early Taoism

The background of witchcraft medicine is animism. In the pre-Qin Period, when social productivity was backward, the production and lives of people were constrained by nature. Due to their lack of understanding of nature, they were full of fear of natural objects, natural forces, and natural phenomena. These invisible fears would cause them to associate diseases and disasters with some supernatural force, such as the presence of gods and ghosts. In order to get rid of pathogenic gods and ghosts in the human body, the Chu people often used witchcraft to drive away evil spirits, so the medical activities of Chu included a lot of witchcraft, and most wizards concurrently served as doctors. Early Taoist medicine was mostly inherited from witchcraft medicine. In the Han Dynasty, the Taoists held high the banner of "governing the world and saving people", and spread Taoism by medical methods such as spells, prayers, medicine, and acupuncture. Taoism had reached a higher level by the time of Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties, and its dissemination was no longer urgent. Taoists began to be interested in medical prescriptions, and gradually abandoned the witchcraft medical methods of seeking help from ghosts and gods.

4.1 The Medical Methods of Chu Wizards

Spells and prayers are the major medical methods used by Chu wizards, which refer to the use of methods such as greeting gods, sending off gods, spiritualism, divination, and reciting spells by wizards to diagnose and treat diseases. Divination witchcraft was an important basis for the Chu people to diagnose the cause of diseases. In 1994, a total of 1571 bamboo slips were unearthed from the Geling Chu Tomb in Xincui County, Henan Province. The organizers divided them into divination prayer records and burial documents according to the content of the slips. Among them, the divination prayer records were the words used by the tomb owner, Pingye Jun, to inquire about his illness and pray. As recorded in Chapter 189 of the *Chu Bamboo Slips of Xincui Geling*: "Pingye Jun asks: both the heart stuffy and swollen, he sicked with Baila. Divination is the solution, both..." (Henan, 2003, p. 194). The Chu people usually carried out divination and sacrificial prayers together. Wizards would diagnose the cause of the disease based on divination signs. When the cause of the disease was determined to be caused by ghosts and gods, wizards would hold witchcraft activities such as greeting gods and sending off gods to pray for their blessings and eliminate diseases. Regarding the worship ceremony of greeting gods and sending off gods, as the *Eastern Emperor Taiyi of Nine songs* recorded: "The wizard with a beautiful face, dressed in gorgeous costumes, danced to welcome the arrival of the gods, and the whole sacrificial place was filled with fragrant flowers" (Wang, 2017, pp. 43-44). It is worth mentioning that Chu wizards perform the "Snake Dance," which involves holding a long snake in hand, as part of their disease-treating ritual. A colorful lacquer painting unearthed from the tomb of Chu in the Warring States Period in Xinyang City, Henan Province, depicted a picture of a wizard wearing gorgeous clothes and dancing with a snake. Song Gongwen and Zhang Jun believed that this painting depicted a scene of Chu wizards singing and dancing to welcome gods and treat diseases (Song & Zhang, 1995, p. 383). When diagnosing and treating minor illnesses or mental illnesses caused by ghosts and gods, the most distinctive method used by Chu wizards was spell witchcraft. The Chu wizards used spells to provide patients with a positive psychological suggestion, enabling them to activate their internal defense functions and treat diseases. In addition, in the face of more serious diseases and even death caused by the soul leaving the body, wizards often used spiritualism to find the soul that has left the human body. The *Da Zhao* and *Zhao Hun* in the *Chu Ci* both record scenes of Chu people using spiritualism. The spiritualism ceremony can be roughly divided into four steps: praying, inviting wizards, summoning souls from all directions, and guiding souls to return. Specifically, first of all, the cause of the spiritualism is explained through prayer, and then the wizard is invited to preside over the spiritualism ceremony. During the ceremony, the wizard describes the dangers of the four directions, arranges the hall, prepares the summoning equipment, and finally guides the soul to return to the body. The aforementioned medical methods can sometimes be effective in treating sudden diseases, but they are less effective

in treating chronic diseases. Instead, Chu wizards need to use medicine and acupuncture to alleviate pain.

Another important medical method used by Chu wizards is medicine and acupuncture, which encompasses the use of animals, plants, medicine, acupuncture, and other methods to treat patients. The Chu wizards believed in the principle of mutual benefit among the same kind. While praying to the gods for patients, they would also search for animals and plants related to the disease to assist in treatment. For example, red dates that have a blood-like color are used as blood-refilling drugs. Ginger has a spicy taste and is used to dispel wind and cold. There are many medicines recorded in the *Chu Ci* for treating diseases, such as the "Za Duheng and Fangzhi" mentioned in the *Li Sao* (Wang, 2017, p. 8). Duheng is a remedy for a wind-cold cough. As recorded in the *Xi Song of Nine Chapters*, "Sow Jiangli and chrysanthemums and make them into dry food for consumption in spring" (Wang, 2017, pp. 96-97). Jiangli's primary function is to clear heat and detoxify. The Chu was rich in medicines, and wizards would search for divine mountains to collect immortal medicine and pray for eternal life. According to the *Strategies of the Warring States*, it is recorded that "Someone presented the medicine of immortality to the King of Chu, and the messenger carried it into the palace." (He, 2019, p. 631). This is a story of a wizard offering the medicine of immortality to the King of Chu, which reflects that in the minds of Chu wizards, taking medicine has the purpose of witchcraft, making people live forever. In addition, Chu wizards discovered the acupuncture methods that could cure diseases during their long-term medical activities. They believed that blood stasis was caused by ghosts and gods entering the body. They used stone needles, bone needles, and other needles to puncture the blood stasis area, release the blood stasis, and the ghosts and gods would run away; the disease would be cured. In short, the Chu people advocated witchcraft to cure diseases. This custom had a profound influence on Chu, was inherited by the Taoist thought born in Chu, and was extensively applied in the early Taoist medicine.

4.2 The Inheritance of Witchcraft Medicine in Chu by Early Taoist Medicine

Early Taoist medicine was a derivative of witchcraft medicine, with the purpose of preaching and the means of treating diseases. It emphasized the use of witchcraft methods, such as "Fushui Zhoushuo" and "Guibai Shouguo". Qu Pu pointed out that the records of medicines in the *Taiping Jing* are concentrated in two chapters in Volume 50, namely "Grass and Tree Formula" and "Biological Formula". However, there is no record of the quantity of medicines in the *Taiping Jing*, nor does it mention any specific medicine, any specific prescription for treating diseases, or even a single medicine. This indicates that early Taoist classics inherited from witchcraft medicine and did not conduct in-depth research on medical theory and prescriptions (Qu, 2023, p. 3917). The so-called herbal medicine and other methods of treating diseases are only used as explanations for saving lives, rather than true medicine. The main content of Taoist medicine changed in the Wei, Jin, Southern, and Northern Dynasties. Some famous Taoists, such as Ge Hong and Tao Hongjing, who were good at medicine, began to explicitly oppose witchcraft medicine and advocated traditional Chinese medicine based on the idea of "correspondence between heaven and man". Taoist medicine and witchcraft medicine gradually drifted apart.

The witchcraft medicine in Chu was characterized by suppressing ghosts and gods, which was widely spread among the people. Due to the tendency of the early Tianshi Dao to govern the world and save the people, Taoist medicine initially mainly inherited the relevant content of witchcraft medicine to expand its influence among the people. During the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties, Taoism was once regarded as the state religion by the ruling class, and Taoists abandoned the witchcraft medical methods of praying to gods to try to cure diseases, paying more attention to personal health, and began to transform into traditional Chinese medicine.

5. Conclusion

The witchcraft culture of the pre-Qin and Qin Han Dynasties was most prevalent in Chu. The gods and ghosts revered by Chu people, as well as the witchcraft skills of Chu wizards, provided the prerequisite for the emergence of early Taoism in Chu.

Firstly, the gods and ghosts revered by Chu people have human emotions and strong practical significance, which provides a reference for the formation of the early Taoist gods and ghosts lineage. The *Nine Songs of Chu Ci*, written by Qu Yuan, is a set of sacrificial music songs that fully demonstrate the Chu people's belief in heavenly gods, earthly gods, and human ghosts. These gods and ghosts all come from the spiritual world of the Chu people, conveying their hopes for changing reality and yearning for a better life. Early Taoism borrowed from the belief in gods and ghosts in Chu and modeled it on the human world to establish a huge imaginary bureaucracy of gods and ghosts, which managed the life and death affairs of secular society beyond the political power, and became an invisible force to

constrain human behavior.

Secondly, the Chu people believed in "immortality of the soul" and used images as a unique witchcraft technique, which echoed the religious concept of "immortality" promoted by early Taoism. Based on the principle of sympathetic witchcraft, the Chu people used images such as human figurines and tomb beasts to help tomb owners ascend to heaven and earth, expressing their longing for the deceased. Early Taoism also accepted the idea of "immortality of the soul" as a means of resolving the conflict between human life and death. This idea led Taoists to attain immortality, which is a way beyond death, eradicating their dread of the unknown and death.

Thirdly, Chu wizards used witchcraft to treat diseases according to local conditions. This resulted in the broad adoption of witchcraft culture among the populace and was recognized by early Taoism as a significant method of preaching. Chu wizards used divination to determine the cause of diseases, used spells and prayers to diagnose and treat mild and strange diseases, and used medicine and acupuncture to treat chronic diseases. These medical achievements have made witchcraft medicine famous and have been imitated by the public. In the early stage of Taoism, natural and man-made disasters continued to occur, with frequent outbreaks of diseases. Many people in the lower class suffered from diseases, but they could not get timely treatment. Emerging Taoist groups used disease treatment as the main means of attracting followers, and witchcraft medicine played a crucial role in the spread and development of Taoism.

Chu's witchcraft was assimilated and integrated into early Taoism through a difficult and drawn-out process. The Lao-Zhuang thought, which was born in Chu, was deeply influenced by witchcraft culture and spread to the Qi through the propaganda of Chu wizards. At the Jixia Academy, it was assimilated and integrated with various immortal and necromancy thoughts to generate the Huang-Lao thought. As Huang-Lao thought spread and evolved, it progressively took on a religious bent, giving rise to Huang-Lao Tao. Early Taoism finally emerged from the integration of witchcraft with Fang-Xian Tao and Huang-Lao Tao. Therefore, many thoughts and rituals in Taoism carry the shadow of Chu witchcraft.

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