

The Peach Spring Grotto in Yao Daoism: The Ritual of “Repaying a Debt to the Supreme Parents of Flowers” in Mien Society of Guangxi, China

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the flower beliefs of the Mien 勉瑤 in Guangxi 廣西, China and the ritual of “Repaying a Debt to the Supreme Parents of Flowers” (Tianpei huahuang 填賠花皇) for healing ill children. It explores themes, such as the flower soul, the Peach Spring Grotto (Taoyuandong 桃源洞), and female fertility, which are related to the Lüshan 閩山 School in Yao Daoism prevalent in southern China. In Mien beliefs, a complete human is comprised of physical, spiritual, and social aspects. The spiritual is the souls, represented as a flower, which was bestowed by the Supreme Parents of Flowers who supervise the Peach Spring Grotto. If a child is sick or has behavioral problems before puberty, it is usually regarded as related to having lost their flower souls. Therefore, the goal of the ritual “Repaying a Debt to the Supreme Parents of Flowers” is not only to compensate the Supreme Parents of Flowers, but also to redeem the lost souls from the underworld. In the Mien religious landscape, whether a spirit is regarded as a god or a ghost depends on where they dwell. The Supreme Parents of Flowers dwell in the Peach Spring Grotto and are not worshipped at the household altar, and therefore their nature is more that of a ghost than a god. However, they have the spiritual power to nurture and bestow flower souls, therefore their relationship with a Mien household is that of a “creditor” and “debtor.” The

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flower souls thus become part of the exchange between the yin/yang realms and of the interactions between inner/outer. The analysis of the ritual also shows that Mien have fully adopted the Daoist liturgical structure in their rituals related to the flower beliefs.

Keywords: Yao Daoism, Mien, flower beliefs, Peach Spring Grotto, Lüshan School

I. Introduction

This paper explores a little studied side of Yao Daoism, which is closely related to the Lüshan (Lü Mountain) school in Daoism.¹ It explores the complex of flower beliefs and a healing ritual held for children called “Repaying a Debt to the Supreme Parents of Flowers” ([Mi] tin³¹ pui³¹ pian³¹ mien⁵³ 填賠花皇) that is present among the Mien, of Guangxi, China.² In this type of “daily and small-scale ritual” (*richang xiao fashi*), locally worshipped deities and spirits — and not Daoist deities— usually play a prominent role, not necessarily requiring the presence of a Chinese-written manuscript. By paying closer attention to these rituals and their accompanied cosmologies, we are able to better understand how the Daoist elements are intertwined with local beliefs.³ The ritual thus provides a vantage point to facilitate our

¹ I thank two anonymous reviewers for their valuable feedback on earlier versions of this article.

² The romanization used is the *hanyu pinyin* system of Mandarin Chinese. This will be presented as [Ch]. To present Mien language, I use the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). They are abbreviated as [Mi]. For the sake of improved readability, I use mainly *hanyu pinyin*. Mien pronunciations will be added as necessary. I provide a list of Chinese characters used in the paper.

³ What is labelled “Daoist” here should cautiously be examined in the context of borderland communities, which are not affiliated with Daoist institutions but draw heavily on Daoist practices, concepts, and symbols, and often consciously engage with what is posited as the “Daoist” tradition and assigned to a place within a repertoire of other traditions and discourses. See David A. Palmer and Xun Liu, “Introduction: The Daoist Encounter with Modernity,” pp.

understanding of the interaction between a widespread southern Daoist school of shamanism and a “ritual master” (*fashi*) tradition⁴ among a non-Han Chinese community in South China.⁵

As are many ritual traditions of non-Han Chinese people in South China, Yao ritual tradition has been regarded as a hybrid tradition composed of many Daoist, Buddhist, even Confucian ritual and cultural elements, that have become intermingled with indigenous beliefs and practices.¹ The imperial Chinese state expansion into South China that began in the Song dynasty (960-1279) and the transmission of various Daoist schools in that region have been major accelerating forces in the Yao’s conversion to Daoism and adoption of the Chinese language, both written and spoken.⁶ Since the 1980s, their highly Daoism-laden ordination ceremony and ritual manuscripts written in Chinese have often been singled out to support scholarly discussions about Yao sinification.⁷ Hence, much scholarly attention has been devoted to explore the Daoist ordination practiced by the Yao that strongly resembles several early Way of the Celestial Masters (*Tianshidao*) practices, especially the obligatory and communal ordination for every male members, and their ritual manuscripts.⁸ In comparison, the daily and small-scale ritual practices, such as the

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⁴ Huang Jianxing has conducted a comparative study of ritual master traditions among different local societies in South China, see 黃建興,《師教：中國南方法師儀式傳統比較研究》。

⁵ South China refers to a geographical and cultural region — the exact boundary to northern China varies with context, although the Yangtze River is often culturally perceived as the north-south boundary.

⁶ Chen Meiwen, “Religion as a Civilizing Process? Rethinking Yao Religious Culture and Ritual Manuscripts,” pp. 155-209.

⁷ Michel Strickmann, “The Tao among the Yao: Taoism and the Sinification of South China,” pp. 23-30.

⁸ The study on Yao Daoist ordination is numerous. Some very important works include Jacques Lemoine, *Yao Ceremonial Paintings*, and a series of research conducted together by Chinese and Japanese scholars at the Institute for the Study of Yao Culture in Japan. For example, Zhang Jinsong and Hiroshi Maruyama’s studies of the ritual procedures of and the documents used for the ordination. See 張勁松,〈中國藍山縣過山瑤度戒儀式過程的信仰意義及度戒之功能〉,頁 9-14。丸山宏,〈湖南省藍山県ヤオ族伝統文化の諸相—馮崇軍氏からの聞き取り内容〉,頁 19-25。

“Repaying a Debt to the Supreme Parents of Flowers,” have remained relatively understudied.

The ethnographic data presented in this paper was obtained from Weihao, a Mien village located in the Tianlin County of northwest Guangxi, China. Li Decai (1944-2017), a well-respected Mien ritual master, generously shared his rich religious knowledge with me over a 17 years period. He is the key informant and human actor in the ritual presented in this article. In 2000, I witnessed and recorded an elaborate healing ritual for ill children that, due to various factors, is now difficult to access. One such factor is perhaps the accelerating pace and sweeping force of modernization into the mountainous areas of South China. Young parents leave to earn money as migrant workers in the cities; children are sent to the cities to study at a younger age; and people have become knowledgeable about modern medicine. On return visits to Weihao, it was apparent that Li Decai’s business was booming as the roads reaching this previously remote Mien village were now well-paved, bringing more distant “customers” to consult with him on a wide range of matters. As a consequence of the combination of all these factors Li Decai, before his passing away in 2017, spent less time performing healing rituals for children. Therefore, the healing ritual described in this paper bears particular witness to a tradition in decline.

II. Different Yao and Different Yao Daoism

Similar to the terms “Man” (barbarian) and “Miao”, “Yao” was once an umbrella exonym used by the Han Chinese in official records to cover a wide range of southern non-Han Chinese peoples. Yao is an English transliteration of the Mandarin pronunciation of a Chinese character written, throughout the course of Chinese history, alternatively as 獠, 徭, 瑶 or 瑤. Since the 1950s, the Yao have been one of 56 nationalities officially recognized by the communist Chinese state. The majority of the population live in the mountainous areas of South China, including Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, Hunan, Yunnan, Guangdong, Guizhou and Jiangxi.⁹

⁹ Two sub-groups of Yao-speaking people, Mien and Mun, comprised the majority of Yao people who migrated from China to countries in Southeast Asia and later to various western countries. The Yao who dispersed throughout upland Southeast Asia are the descendants of different waves of ethnic migrations that occurred intermittently within the last 300 to 400

According to a demographic survey published in 2010, the Yao in China number roughly 2.79 million.¹⁰ The ethnic label “Yao” includes diverse peoples who speak different languages and have distinct cultures. Conversely, it also excludes groups that could be meaningfully included, such as the Miao in Hainan, an omission that is a simple oversight in the 1950s Ethnic Classification Campaign (*minzu shibie yundong*), and the She people.

Linguistically, there are at least four different language groups classified as Yao in modern China. These four groups include such Miao-speaking groups as the Bunu (Pu nu), Yao-speaking groups like the Mien, Dong-Sui-speaking groups including the Lajia (Lak kja) and such Chinese dialect-speaking groups as the Pingdi Yao (Piog tuo jo).¹¹ Importantly, these four Yao groups are unable to communicate with one another using their own languages.¹² The long and the short of it is that classification into the same language group does not necessarily indicate mutual intelligibility: for instance, within the Mien (Yao)-speaking group there are at least six different subgroups speaking different languages that are sometimes mutually unintelligible.¹³ Very significant differences in cultural and religious practices are also found between these four language groups. Daoist beliefs and rituals take precedence in the religious life of most of the Yao-speaking and Dong-Sui-speaking groups, while obvious borrowings from the Daoist elements are less prominent in the Miao-speaking group.¹⁴

Mien, the focus of this study, is an autonym meaning “people” or “human.” There are various exonyms used in Chinese written documents to refer to this Yao group.

years. The Yao populations in Australia, Canada, France and the United States are the result of more recent migrations in the aftermath of the Indochina Wars (1946-1979).

¹⁰ <http://www.stats.gov.cn/english/Statisticaldata/CensusData/rkpc2010/indexch.htm> (accessed on 16 June 2021).

¹¹ These names are Chinese transliterations of autonoms in all cases.

¹² 奉恆高編，《瑤族通史·中卷》，頁 822-826。Robert S. Ramsey, *The Languages of China*, pp. 278-285. For a further understanding of the constructed nature of ethnic classification with a focus on the Yao, see Chen Meiwen, “Constructed History: Ethnic Yao in Modern China,” pp. 93-108.

¹³ 毛宗武，《瑤族勉語方言研究》。

¹⁴ 陳玟玟，《從命名談廣西田林盤瑤的人觀建構與生命來源》，頁 8-9。

One of the most commonly used exonyms is Pan Yao, literally meaning “Plate Yao” or “the people who believe in the mythic dog-ancestor Panhu.” The Mien practice Yao Daoism differently than other Yao groups. Daoism practiced by the other Yao groups, for instance the Mun (a common exonym being Landian Yao [Lanten]) and the Lajia (a common exonym being Chashan Yao), incorporates two different religious traditions and ritual experts that correspond to Dao (Daoist priest) and Shi (ritual master). By contrast, the Mien only have this Dao/Shi distinction by name (see below) and do not have two separate categories of ritual experts as the other Yao groups do. Currently, the most prominent ritual expert the Mien have is “ritual master” ([Ch] *shigong*; [Mi] *sai*³¹ *oj*³³), with this role invariably assumed by a male after he undergoes the Daoist ordination (*dujie*). Having only one prominent type of ritual expert invariably assumed by a male also sets Mien apart from most local societies in South China where various kinds of ritual experts, female spiritual mediums included, exist or/and coexist.¹⁵

In terms of scriptural tradition, the Mun and the Lajia each developed two sets of ritual manuscripts, one for Daoist priests and one for ritual masters, whereas the Mien only have one set for ritual masters. The contents of the Daoist priest manuscripts are similar to those in the Daoist canon, consisting of scriptures and rituals that bear the textual traits of the Daoist schools of Lingbao (Numinous Treasure), Zhengyi (the Orthodox Unity), and Tianxin Zhengfa (True Rites of the Heart of the Heaven). Alternatively, the ritual-master manuscripts are linked to schools of Lüshan and Meishan (Plum Mountain).¹⁶ The texts for a funeral ceremony

¹⁵ There are still very few female spiritual mediums in practice among Mien villages in northeast Guangxi, but they are almost nonexistent in other regions. Their expertise is the combination of herbal medicine and healing ritual to tend to the sick. Mien women are particularly knowledgeable about herbal medicines. See 梁宏章,〈恭城過山瑤仙娘行醫實踐與信仰治療〉,頁 67-71。

¹⁶ Such terms as Meishan daojiao (Plum Mountain school), Meishan jiao (Plum Mountain teaching), or Meishan wenhua (Plum Mountain culture) were coined to refer to a remarkable form of Daoism that mixed ritual and liturgical elements of indigenous beliefs and different Daoist schools, and is widely found among non-Han Chinese peoples of southern China, for example Yao, Zhuang and Tujia. See 雅克·勒穆瓦納 (Jacques Lemoine),〈勉瑤的歷史與宗教初探〉,頁 22-25。

show obvious Buddhist characteristics. *Biaozou*, specific manuals containing formularies for petitions to the gods and spirits, are used by both Daoist priests and ritual masters. The genre of *miyu* (esoteric words), that sets out instructions for ritual performances, is found only among the Mun and is absent among the Mien.¹⁷ Similar to the division of ritual labour and other manuscript cultures discovered in South China, the task of a ritual master concerns the living, not the dead. By contrast, a Daoist priest takes charge in matters of death and the afterlife, subjects that are often infused with sadness.¹⁸

The written and colloquial forms of Chinese predominate in the Yao religious domain, where Daoist rituals are performed. Since written memorials and talismans have always been a prominent feature of Daoist rituals, the Yao likely acquired Chinese literacy through Daoist priests in the past. The Chinese characters the Yao use to compose their ritual manuscripts can be divided into two groups: those borrowed from Chinese and those coined by the Yao. The great majority of characters in Yao ritual manuscripts are the same Chinese characters found throughout the Chinese cultural region. Apart from incorrectly written characters, there exists a relatively small number of characters invented to represent Yao words which, within the academic circle of Yao studies in China, are called “Yao demotic characters” (*Yaosuzi* or *fangkuai yaowen*). The Chinese pronunciations used by the Yao in religious setting bear close similarity to Cantonese (called *baihua* in Guangxi), and display more of the linguistic characteristics of medieval Chinese than found in modern Cantonese.¹⁹ The study of Yao ritual manuscripts has indicated that the Yao may have started using Chinese characters in reading and writing manuscripts in the Ming (1368-1644) and

¹⁷ The exhibition website of the Munich Collection: <<http://willie.itg.uni-muenchen.de:9076/projekte/exhib.htm>> (last accessed 13 March 2014)

¹⁸ The division of ritual labors and the scriptural categories between the Daoist priest tradition and the ritual-master tradition can easily be found in other local religious traditions in South China. For example, GaoYa-ning’s study of the Zhuang ritual specialists concludes that the rough classification between Daoist priests and female spirit-mediums, in terms of a division of ritual labor, means that the former take charge of the dead while the latter are concerned with the living. The only difference in the comparison between the Yao and the Zhuang is that the Yao do not have prominent female ritual experts. See Gao Ya-ning, “Singing a Hero in Ritual: Nong Zhigao and His Representation among the Zhuang People in China.”

¹⁹ 盤美花,〈試論優勉宗教儀式的傳承媒介「宗教語言」—以還盤王願為例〉,頁 158-176。

Qing dynasties (1644-1911), if not earlier. Since all the Mien boys and men are entitled to receive the Daoist ordination and religious knowledge, the writing is accessible to all Mien male members. Before the People's Republic of China implemented the compulsory education law in 1986, Mien boys and men acquired knowledge of Chinese literacy merely from their ritual masters through transcribing manuscripts.²⁰ In contrast, Mien girls and women were denied access to Chinese literacy.

In the case of Mien, the integration of various Daoist schools can be easily seen in the title a Mien male receives after undergoing the highest level of ordination ceremony. The title is “a disciple elevated into additional duties of two teachings and three commandments of Lüshan/Meishan and Shi/Dao under the authority of the Bureau of Exorcisms” (*taishang fengxing beiji quxieyuan chuantong lümei shidao erjiaosanjie shengming jiazhi dizi*). This clearly indicates a confluence of elements from a popular Daoist school Tianxin Zhengfa since the Song dynasty,²¹ and two southern Daoist schools characterized by exorcism and shamanism, Lüshan and Meishan.²² As Mien do not have the Shi/Dao distinction in terms of ritual experts, the division of ritual labors involved in caring for the living and for the dead is manifested by the distinction between Lüshan and Meishan.

The Mien narrate stories, as recorded in their manuscripts, about ritual masters going to a study hall on Lüshan, a significant center of shamanism closely associated with the stratum of the ritual-master tradition, to acquire Chinese literacy and Daoist ritual repertoire.²³ The Lüshan landscape is connected with the Peach Spring Grotto, a symbolic, imaginary flower garden where the souls as flowers reside and are tended by a series of flower deities.²⁴ However, in contrast to the Peach Spring Grotto that is the source of life, the Meishan is where ritual masters learn how to perform rituals. Meishan is also the preeminent locus in a landscape through which the souls of the

²⁰ 王荔、黃貴權，〈漢文化對瑤族文化及其教育的影響〉，頁 61-65。

²¹ 陳永海，〈天心正法的源流與影響初探〉，頁 20-31。

²² 雅克·勒穆瓦納 (Jacques Lemoine)，〈勉瑤的歷史與宗教初探〉，頁 22-25。

²³ With reference to Brigitte Baptandier, *The Lady of Linshui: A Chinese Female Cult*, p. 15.

²⁴ Since medieval times, “Peach Spring” was regarded as a sacred site with a lively cult of transcendence. See Mark Meulenbeld, “The Peach Blossom Spring’s Long History as a Sacred Site in Northern Hunan,” pp. 1-39.

dead are guided on a journey that comprises the successive stages of his/her purification and salvation.²⁵

In other parts of South China, local people worship a female deity in Lüshan school, the Lady of Linshui or Chen Jinggu, for protecting women's pregnancy and children.²⁶ Mien, however, do not venerate the Lady of Linshui; instead, they worship a series of flower deities; among them, the Supreme Flower of Parents (*Huahuang fumu*) is most prominent.

III. The Conceptualization of Person and Soul(s)

Within the above mentioned composite religious setting a Mien "person" is perceived to be comprised of three parts:²⁷

- The physical body is formed by the coming together of essences from both parents. Specifically, the father gives his muscle (*jin*) and bone (*gu*), and the mother gives her blood (*xie*) and flesh (*rou*).
- The spiritual body is composed of "souls" ([Ch] *hun/po*, [Mi] *uən*³¹ *be*²⁵⁵) and "spirit-soldier guardians" ([Ch] *bing tou*, [Mi] *pej*³³ *tau*⁴²). Mien's conceptualization of "souls" shares the same characteristics with Chinese views, namely three *hun* and seven *po*. In addition to the three *hun* and seven *po*, the Mien also use "five *hun* and six shadows" (*wuhun liuying*) and "nine *hun* and twelve lives" (*jiuhun shi'er ming*) to refer to a person's souls, located in different body parts, in a ritual context. Souls are granted by the flower deities of the Peach Spring Grotto. Conversely, "spirit-soldier guardians" are inherently granted by birth, a male 12 and a female seven. The number of "spirit-soldier guardians" increases with an individual's progression through the elevated levels of a Daoist ordination that constitutes the social body.
- The social body is mainly constituted by a Daoist ordination procedure

²⁵ 張悅、張澤洪，〈瑤族遊梅山書的宗教敘事與族群記憶〉，頁 58-71。

²⁶ 葉明生，〈道教閩山派之研究—閩山派的源流與形成〉，頁 149-184。

²⁷ See Joseba Estevez, "Healing Rituals and Sorcery among the Lanten of Laos," pp. 181-192 for a similar yet different discussion of the Mun conceptualizations of "person" and "souls."

adapted to an indigenous sequence of life-cycle initiation ritual. Consisting of expanding sets of socio-cosmological relationships, a person develops with the household, the community, and the land.

The distinction made between the three bodies of a Mien “person” differs from the Western notion of the separation of matter and spirit, body, and soul. It resembles what Kristofer Schipper has described as a Daoist body—the body as the center of the universe.²⁸ The cyclic existence of a Mien person starts at the Peach Spring Grotto, a mythical landscape where souls, conceptualized as flowers, wait to be born or reborn into the world of the living. The Peach Spring Grotto is a triple-tiered cave populated by a specific group of flower deities, including the Supreme Parents of Flowers who are the most powerful of the flower deities. To ensure the souls remain attached to a child’s physical body until puberty and are not taken back or lost in the dangerous wilderness, the Mien, invariably through male ritual masters, must continue the mutually beneficial exchange with the Supreme Parents of Flowers. As a child reaches puberty (around 16), the Mien perform a “Detaching the Souls from the Supreme Parents of Flowers” (*chai huahuang*) rite to officially settle the debt and free the souls from the control of the fertility deities and the Peach Spring Grotto. Following this, souls come under the care of a household spirit called the Lord Star of Fate for Every Family Member (*Hejia daxiao benming xingjun*). Only when a household has complete “ownership” of the souls, are boys permitted to undergo the ordination ceremony (girls have to wait until they get married).²⁹

Consequently, a Mien ritual master takes charge of all sorts of rituals and possesses various kinds of manuscripts relating to the world of the living and the dead. Most importantly, ritual masters perform the ordination ceremony that initiates the male community members into priesthood. The Daoist ordination practiced by the Mien consists of a minimum of three levels of clerical hierarchy. In order of sequence, they are: “hanging the lamps” ([Ch] *guadeng*, [Mi] *kua*³¹ *taŋ*³³), “ordination of the master” ([Ch] *dushi*, [Mi] *tu*²² *sai*³³), and “additional duties” ([Ch] *jiazhi*, [Mi] *tea*³¹

²⁸ Kristofer Schipper, *The Taoist Body*, pp. 100-112.

²⁹ The transition of souls from the Peach Spring Grotto to the household is necessary. It is also not uncommon for Mien boys/men to undergo ordination ceremonies at any given age when their families see the need and are ready financially.

tse²⁵⁵).³⁰ The progressively expanding levels and scales of the ordination ceremony decisively define the Mien perception of an ideal social body. Through the ordination a male acquires a “Yin Yang ordination certificate” (*yinyang ju*), an ordination name, and an increased numbers of “spirit-soldier guardians” to command. The “spirit-soldier guardians” accompanying a person’s birth, 12 for a boy and seven for a girl, expand to 120 for a male and 60 for a female after the rite of “ordination of the master”, and 1200 for a male and 240 for a female after the rite of “additional duties.” Together with other household deities and deified ancestors, these “spirit-soldier guardians” reside on the household altar and are led by the Yin Yang Master during a ritual to dispel malicious spirits and search for lost souls.

The clerical hierarchy of an ordination ceremony provides gifted families and talented male individuals a means to attain social status. It also projects the Mien’s yearning for a good afterlife, rank, and status in a Daoist hierarchical pantheon that mirrored the Chinese state bureaucratic system. When a person dies, the places his or her souls can go and the statuses he or she assumes follow the levels of ordination a man/husband has attained. The souls of a couple who have undergone the rite of “additional duties” go to the “twelve streets and doors governed by the Grand Supreme Lord Lao” (*Laojun shi’er jiemen*) to take up the official posts bestowed upon them. Deities from the celestial domain welcome them on their way to assume their honorable statuses. By contrast, the souls of a couple who have undergone the rite of “ordination of the master,” one level lower than “additional duties,” go to the “thirty-six grottos in the Plum Mountain” (*Meishan sanshiliu dong*) to become a cultivated transcendent. They will also be welcomed by deities from the heavenly domain, albeit this welcome is small. For the couple who have undergone only the rite of “hanging the lamps,” the lowest level of ordination, their souls also go to the “thirty-six grottos in the Plum Mountain” to become a transcendent in cultivation. Only the officials from the otherworldly office come to greet them on their way. Their welcome is without any ostentation or extravagance. The worst scenario for a couple is not to have attained even the rite of “hanging the lamps.” Such couples will be called “people wearing white clothes” (*baiyire*), and their souls will be sent back to the Peach Spring Grotto, from which their souls originally came, to await rebirth. Seeing them on their

³⁰ There is one more level of ordination, “enfeoffing liturgies” (*jiatai*), but the ceremony is no longer being performed in reality. See 竹村卓二, 《瑤族的歷史與文化》, 頁 165-166。

way back to the Peach Spring Grotto will be merely insects, monkeys, and chickens (see Table 1.).³¹

Table 1: Ordination and Afterlife Worldview of the Mien in Weihao

Level		Ordination name		Number of spirit-soldier guardians		Afterlife	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Status	Place
3	Additional duties	<i>Lang</i> 郎 Ex: Li Tong San Lang 李通 三郎 ³²	<i>niang</i> 娘 Ex: Zhao shi Er Niang 趙 氏二娘	1200	240	State officials (<i>guan</i>)	Twelve streets and doors governed by the Grand Supreme Lord Lao
2	Ordination of the master	<i>Fa</i> 法 Ex: Li Fa Tong 李法 通	<i>Shi</i> 氏 Ex: Zhao Shi 趙氏	120	60	Transcendents (<i>xian</i>)	Thirty-six grottos in the Plum Mountain
1	Hanging the lamps	Fa Ex: Li Fa Tong 李法 通	Shi Ex: Zhao Shi 趙氏	12	7	Transcendents (<i>xian</i> , still in cultivation)	Thirty-six grottos in the Plum Mountain
0	-	Mien name	Mien name	12	7	People wearing white clothes (<i>baiyiren</i> , waiting to be reborn)	Peach Spring Grotto

³¹ Various traditions inform the Mien views of a posthumous world. A set of ritual verses carries souls of both sexes through to Yang Zhou (usually written as 陽州 in Yao texts), a place many Chinese believe is where the ancestors reside after death. “Ten Kings of the Underworld” (*Shidianwang*), borne out of a mixture of Buddhist/Daoist/popular religious depictions of an underworld, give a verdict on the sins a person commits if his or her souls have to go back to the Peach Spring Grotto. See 陳玫姁,《從命名談廣西田林盤瑤的人觀建構與生命來源》,頁 58。

³² The third character is a numeral character which indicates one’s birth order.

Health, Illness and Healing in Relation to Flower Deities

In his study of Chinese goddesses, Guo Wei pointed out a prevalent phenomenon in which people share similar conceptualizations of human “souls” as “flowers” growing in an imagined garden that he dubbed the Flower Cultural Sphere (*huawenhuaquan*).³³ Flower symbolisms intersect with beliefs surrounding birth and pregnancy, which constitute the cosmologies regarding the origin of human souls in Lüshan school. Certain characteristics of the Flower Cultural Sphere present in southern China are: 1) in terms of color, male is perceived as white flower and female as red flower; 2) in terms of flower species, male is symbolized by plum flower and female as peach flower; 3) the flowers are thought to be planted in a pot, a cave or a grotto, which represents the mother and her womb;³⁴ 4) the soul(s) of a child have to be given or granted by fertility deities; 5) the fertility deities usually appear in a male-female pair, with the femaleness often highlighted. Since the flower souls are granted or given by the fertility deities, the parents or the household of a child must diligently maintain a mutually beneficial relationship with the spirit world to prevent the flower souls from leaving the physical body.

In the Flower Cultural Sphere, the worship of the Supreme Parents of Flowers, the fertility deities most relevant to the study here, can be traced back to before the mid-seventeenth century in South China. From the seventeenth century *Guangdong Miscellanies* (*Guangdong xinyu*) an entry reads:³⁵

When the people in Guangdong and Guangxi pray for offspring, they ask for help from the Supreme Parents of Flowers. The prayer verses read, “Boy, white flower; girl, red flower.” They draw on the metaphor “flowering like peach and plum” from the Book of Songs (*Shijing*). The Book of Songs uses peach and plum to refer to female and male respectively. Hence, “Taoyao”

³³ 過偉,《中國女神》,〈第四章〉。

³⁴ Barend ter Haar, *Ritual and Mythology of the Chinese Triads: Creating an Identity*, p. 90. According to Rolf A. Stein, the belief that identifies a cave-rich landscape or a rocky area with many caves as a womb appears in both modern and traditional Vietnamese and Chinese folklore. See Rolf A. Stein, *The World in Miniature: Container Gardens and Dwellings in Far Eastern Religious Thought*, p. 96.

³⁵ 屈大均 (1630-1696),《廣東新語》,〈神語〉,頁 214。

(The peach tree is young and elegant) refers to girls, and the blossoming plum indicates boys. A girl is a peach and a boy a plum.

越人祈子，必於花王父母。有祝辭云：「白花男，紅花女。」…，蓋取《詩》「華如桃李」之義。詩以桃李二物，興男女二人，故桃天言女也，標梅言男也。女桃而男梅也。

As flower beliefs are a trans-local religious practice of several hundred years, it is unsurprising to have varied stories related to this popular cult. It is also not exceptional to have varieties of representations of mythical figures.³⁶ Among the Miao of western Hunan, people refer to the parents of a prominent local god, the White Emperor Heavenly King (*Baidi tianwang*), as the Father Nuo (*Nuogong*) and his consort as the Mother Nuo (*Nuomu*). They rule over the Peach Spring Grotto and take care of women and children. Interestingly, although they appear as a pair, it is the Mother Nuo who plays the leading role in exorcism rites. She also commands all the martial deities, including the fifth Lad Surnamed Zhang (*Zhang Wulang*), the Five Furies (*wuchang*) and the Five Legions (*wuying*). The rather overshadowed Father Nuo “is said to be only good for engaging in bouts of heavy drinking, as indicated by his red face.”³⁷ In a similar vein, the prominent flower deities venerated among the Mun of southeast Yunnan are called the Parents of Flower Roots (*Huagen fumu*). Reminiscent of the privileged image of the Mother Nuo in Miao exorcist rites, the Mun give prominence to the Mother of Flower Roots (*Huagenmu*). In ritual texts and daily language, the Mun people refer to the Mother of Flower Roots as the Mother of Emperors (*Dimu*).³⁸ Pertinently, the Mother of Emperors has not taken up her abode

³⁶ Ho Ts'ui-p'ing, “Gendering Ritual Community across the Chinese Southwest Borderland,” pp. 206-246.

³⁷ Paul R. Katz, “Repaying a Nuo Vow in Western Hunan – A Rite of Trans-Hybridity?,” pp. 1-88 at 17-18.

³⁸ The Chinese characters 帝母 used to refer to the Mother of Emperors are written fairly consistently throughout Mun ritual manuscripts. Therefore, although the fertility power of the Mother of Emperors does indeed run parallel to the Mother Goddess (*dimu* 地母) who is associated with popular beliefs in the fertility power of the land, we should be careful not to confuse 地母, in written form, for the deity most popular among the Mun. For a discussion

in the Peach Spring Grotto. Instead, she lives in the Temple of Ao Mountain and rules over the Flower Mountain (*Huashan*).³⁹ To give yet another example of the various representations of the female flower deities, the Mother of Emperors is by nature a sort of Supreme Matron (*Powang*), whose worship is also very popular among the Zhuang.⁴⁰ Among these three above-mentioned ethnic communities, flower deities or female fertility deities are revered on the household altar or within the household.

In comparison, the Mien neither strongly highlight the femaleness in the pair of the Supreme Parents of Flowers, nor do they tell interesting stories about them. Most importantly, the Supreme Parents of Flowers do not share a place on the household altar. In daily context, Mien people refer to them merely as *Huagui* ([Mi] pian³¹ mien⁵³), literally meaning flower ghosts. The word mien⁵³ is the only term in daily Mien language used to refer to all kinds of supernatural beings. The nature of a supernatural being, whether it is a protecting deity or a harmful spirit, is ritualistically defined by the boundary of a household. The mien⁵³ enjoy worship on the household altar, like King Pan (*Panhu* or *Panwang*), ancestors, the Three Pure Ones (the three highest Gods in the Daoist pantheon), the Yin Yang Master, all of whom are considered household deities. All of the other mien⁵³ not worshipped on the household altar are considered dangerous spirits who might bring illness and misfortune to the people and the household. They include various spirits that reside dispersedly in the wilderness (rivers, mountains, and forests) and people who die a violent death outside the household and are without descendants to worship them. Those who are worshipped beyond the limits of household or village, such as the Gods of Shrines (*Sheshen*) or the Gods of Temples (*Miaoshen*), cause illness and misfortune to the person and the household should the person become entangled with them and bring them into the household. It is evident that the household is the focus of Mien society. It ritualistically represents a safe inside space, as opposed to a dangerous outside world.

In this context, the Supreme Parents of Flowers are seen as spirits of outside origin and are not given a place on the household altar. Their residence in the Peach Spring Grotto is a place the Mien people, in their posthumous worldview, avoid going

of the Mother Goddess, see 蕭登福,〈后土與地母—試論土地諸神及地母信仰〉,頁 1-41.

³⁹ 黃貴權,〈藍靛瑤的“花”、“斗”人觀—那洪村藍靛瑤誕生、翁花、要斗和度師禮儀的調查與研究〉,頁 161-167.

⁴⁰ Kao Ya-ning, “Diversification of the Flower Ritual among the Zhuang People,” pp. 73-92.

back to. With the Supreme Parents of Flowers, the Mien have more of a “creditor-debtor” relationship based on their role in granting souls to the household and consequently have the power to influence a child's health and well-being. Before a child reaches puberty and receives the rite of “Detaching the Souls from the Supreme Parents of Flowers,” the healing rituals held for him or her are mostly linked to the Supreme Parents of Flowers. Some of these rituals are directly related to the Supreme Parents of Flowers, while others require their presence to ensure efficacy. The ultimate goal of these rituals is to prevent the souls from leaving a child's physical body.

Health among the Mien, especially for children, is perceived as being predetermined by one's time and date of birth, namely “eight characters” ([Ch] *bazi*, [Mi] *nin*³¹ *ken*³³). That is, some illnesses, distresses, and misfortunes are considered innate and only curable through ritual interventions. The Mien apply traditional herbal medicines and seek the help of modern medicines. There is no need to address his/her illness through the ritual intervention if a sick child responds quickly to the medicines. But if this approach fails, or the child's family suspects that the spiritual realm might be involved, they will consult with ritual masters. Similar to seeing a doctor, the family will either ask for advice from a particular ritual master whom they consider to be the most skillful and powerful in the community, or they will consult with different ritual masters seeking a second opinion. As a way of diagnosis, the ritual master performs a small healing *séance* called “interrogate the divinatory blocks” ([Ch] *wengua* or *dagua*, [Mi] *bou*⁵³ *kua*²⁴), to detect the origin of the child's illness. The diagnosis involves the ritual master sending out his Yin Yang master to the Yin domain, and a dialogue between the ritual master and a family representative, usually the father or the mother, and sometimes including the child if he/she is not too sick or too young.

Every individual in the family is considered part of his/her household connected through the surname and common ancestors. Therefore, the health and wellbeing of one individual is strongly correlated with other family members (deceased or alive) in the household as a whole unit. Conversely, the debts and obligations a household owes to the flower deities, ancestors of the household, and the surname group, and to the mythic ancestor, King Pan, could influence the health and wellbeing of individuals, if the household neglects to uphold them. These debts and obligations are paid and fulfilled through sacrificial offerings and ritual performances. Hence, an examination of symptoms, context, household situation, wellbeing of the (deceased) ancestors, obligation to King Pan is required during *wengua*. While the overall spiritual

condition of the household and surname group is relevant to a child patient, the origin of his/her illness and the related problems are almost invariably associated with their spiritual parents in the Yin domain, the Supreme Parents of Flowers.

IV. Rituals in Relation to the Supreme Parents of Flowers

The various rituals related to the Supreme Parents of Flowers, highlighting the difference between the ritual of “Repaying a Debt to the Supreme Parents of Flowers” and the other Supreme Parents of Flowers-related rituals, are:

- Repaying a Debt to the Supreme Parents of Flowers ([Mi] tin³¹ pui³¹ piaŋ³¹ mien⁵³; tin³¹ pui³¹: give, piaŋ³¹ mien⁵³: flower deities). The health of a child depends, to a great degree, on whether the Supreme Parents of Flowers are adequately compensated. The size and content of the “debt” are predetermined by a child’s *bazi*. This ritual will be held if a ritual master detects, through *wengua*, that the origin of a child’s illness or problems (crying too much, lack of appetite, or misbehaving) is the Supreme Parents of Flowers asking for payment.
- Asking Forgiveness from the Supreme Parents of Flowers. The child’s illness and problems might result from the Supreme Parents of Flowers being dissatisfied with parents and their mistreatment (scolding, hitting) of the child. It again shows the continued tension between the physical body, as given by the parents, and the spiritual body, as given by the flower deities, in which the latter exhibits great influence over a child’s health and wellbeing.
- To Untangle the Supreme Parents of Flowers from Liu Lin Ghost. “Liu Lin” is a malicious spirit causing children to cry and have temper tantrums. Due to a child being under the influence of the Supreme Parents of Flowers, the entanglement of the flower deities with the “Liu Lin Ghost” also affects the health and wellbeing of a child and the harmony within a household.
- Inviting the Supreme Parents of Flowers to Witness the ritual of “Clearing the Perilous Junctures” (*jieguan*). A child is born with “perilous junctures” (*guan*), inherent obstacles which accompany his or her *bazi*. There are 100 “perilous

junctures” which children must clear between the ages of one and 16.⁴¹ When holding the ritual of “Clearing the Perilous Junctures,” the Supreme Parents of Flowers are required to present and bear witness to ensure ritual efficacy.

- Inviting the Supreme Parents of Flowers to Witness the ritual of “Attach on the Fetus Deity” ([Ch] *potai*, [Mi] 𑍇𑍆²⁴ 𑍇𑍆³³). After birth, the lingering Fetus Deity makes the attachment of the souls to the physical body more vulnerable. If not expelled, the Fetus Deity may lead the souls back to the Peach Spring Grotto or walk into the fetuses of animals, causing the death of a child. The Supreme Parents of Flowers are required to be present and bear witness to ensure ritual efficacy.

Considering these five Supreme Parents of Flowers rituals, “Repaying a Debt to the Supreme Parents of Flowers” most clearly reveals the “creditor-debtor” relationship between the flower deities and the household. Below is a detailed description of this ritual, specifically the sections concerned with reattaching the souls to the physical body, showing how the Mien achieve a socio-cosmological balance between body and souls, and further between the Yin domain, presented by a dangerous wildness, and Yang domain, presented by the inside of the household.

V. Repaying a Debt to the Supreme Parents of Flowers

This particular ritual was held from 6-8 pm on July 28, 2000 (27th day of the 6th month of the lunar calendar) for a child named [Mi] 𑍇𑍆³¹ 𑍇𑍆⁵³ (referred to as [Ch] Deman in the following) in his home. At this time, he was older than one but still unable to walk. He cried a lot, liked to hit people, and was prone to sickness. His father, Li Jinxiu, asked ritual master Li Decai to perform *wengua* to determine whether the spiritual world was involved. Based on the result of *wengua*, Li Decai concluded that the Supreme Parents of Flowers had come to ask for their payment. Using the *bazi* of Deman, Li Decai consulted a manuscript titled *Everything Concerning the Supreme Parents of Flowers and the Perilous Junctures* (*Kan huahuang kan guansha jiquan yijuan*) and gave the father the following “prescription” to treat his son (see Appendix

⁴¹ Clarke Hudson, “The Ancestors, Births, and Lives of Yao Daoist Manuscripts,” pp. 1-16

I - IV).

The Flower Father's surname is Long, the Flower Mother's surname is Lao, two flower pavilions, one bucket of white rice, one liter of white beans, twelve pieces of flower dresses, one pair of flour chicken, twelve pairs of ingots, two bowls of flower rice, one bowl of fruit

Clearing the "Perilous Juncture of Five Ghost", "Perilous Juncture of Water and Fire", and "Perilous Juncture of Falling into a Well"

An "Earth" Person

Flower roots are easy to grow, the flower tree however worries the parents, the strong wind is blowing through, making the child prone to crying

花公姓龍，花母姓老，花樓二座，白米一斗，白苳一升，花衣十二襲，粉雞一雙，元寶十二對，花飯二碗，果一碗

解五鬼關、水火關、落井關

土命 花根易長養、樹上惱爹娘、狂風手擺動、啼哭兩三場

The "prescription" includes three parts. Firstly, the surname of the Supreme Parents of Flowers of Deman, and what they ask for repayment. Second, the various perilous junctures that Deman was born with. Finally, it describes the general characteristics of a person's temperament as an "earth" person of the five elements (metal, wood, water, fire, earth).

1. Participants, Offerings, and the Ritual Space

Note, *wengua* has the effect of solving problems and curing illnesses. If *wengua* shows that a certain ritual has to be performed, it will then be followed by actions of day selection and offering preparations. After *wengua*, a person is expected to recover slowly. Should a ritual be required, the goal will be to ask the deities and ghosts responsible for the problem to leave for a longer period of time and to not return quickly to afflict others. For the same illness, you can ask different masters to *wengua*, or you can ask the same master many times. For a small ritual such as "Repaying a Debt to the Supreme Parents of Flowers," the principle of day selection, based on an almanac, is to avoid the days of "failure" (*bai*) and "disruption" (*jue*), such as Mao

Day, Wu Day, and You Day (arranged by *tiangan dizhi*, the 10 heavenly stems and the 12 earthly branches, used cyclically in the calendar and as ordinal numbers I, II, etc.). After finding an auspicious day, the family of the sick child begins to prepare the offerings needed for the ritual. Two or three days before the selected date, the child's father or mother must go, in person, to invite the ritual master as a way of showing respect.

In addition to Li Decai (then 56 years old), the participants present at the ritual included: Li Jinxiu, Li Caiyuan and Huang Xiuying. As the child's father, Li Jinxiu was responsible for consulting with the ritual master. He also prepared all the necessary offerings, including making the flower pavilions and flower dresses. The grandfather, Li Caiyuan, helped to kill the chickens and ducks and burned the flower pavilions, dresses, and paper money during the ritual. The mother, Huang Xiuying, took care of cooking. The entire set of offerings asked by the child's Supreme Parents of Flowers was as follows (see Figure 1.):

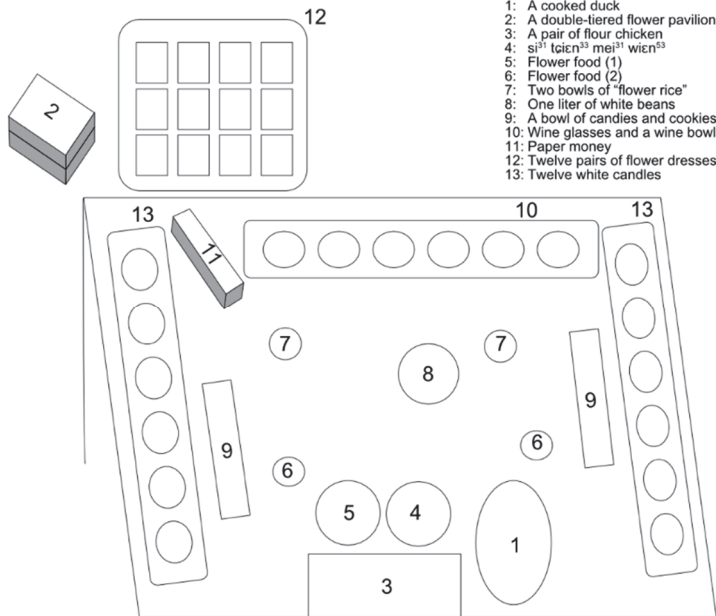


Figure 1. Layout of the offering table

No. 1: A cooked duck. The internal organs need to be removed, prepared specifically for the meat-eating flower father.

No. 2: A double-tiered flower pavilion. The flower pavilion is made of bamboo and red paper. Four bamboo branches, approximately knee-height, make the four corner pillars of the structure. Two small holes are carved into the left and right sides of each bamboo branch. Standing vertically, the four bamboo branches are connected with two thin bamboo strips of the same length on each side, forming a square structure. At the top of the structure is a curved roof, made of thin bamboo strips decorated with red paper flowers. In the middle of the structure a few thin bamboo strips intersect with the bamboo strips on four sides to form a surface that is then covered with red papers to make a floor. This double-tiered bamboo structure with red paper flowers is burned at the end of the ritual as an offering to the Supreme Parents of Flowers and becomes their residence in the Peach Spring Grotto. (See Photo 1.)



Photo 1. A double-tiered flower pavilion and twelve pairs of flower dresses

No. 3: A pair of flour chickens. These are two chicken-like dough forms made of corn flour.

No. 4: si³¹ tei³³ mei³¹ wien⁵³ (si³¹ tei³³ white cloth; mei³¹ rice, wien⁵³ bowl). A bowl of uncooked white rice and a silver ring are wrapped together in a white cloth which is tied with a thread. This can also be represented by a full bowl of uncooked white rice with a silver ring placed on it, together with a small pile of paper money, and an incense stick inserted in the rice bowl. This symbolizes the Yin Yang master, a source from which the ritual master obtains his spiritual power.

No. 5: Flower food (1) is a bowl of uncooked white rice topped with an uncooked egg that has been circled by a piece of red paper. The rice bowl with the red paper symbolizes the Peach Spring Grotto, and the egg symbolizes the child's flower. This bowl of flower food will be placed on the household altar after the ritual. The egg will be cooked for the child to eat two or three days later.

No. 6: Flower food (2) consists of two hollow bamboo tubes filled with uncooked white rice. The two bamboo tubes of rice will be placed on the household altar at the end of the ritual. The rice in the tubes will be cooked for the child to eat two or three days later.

No. 7: Two bowls of "flower rice" is two small wine glasses containing a handful of cooked glutinous rice dyed red for the Supreme Parents of Flowers to enjoy.

No. 8: One liter of white beans symbolized by a bowl of unpeeled raw soybeans, to be paid to the flower mother who does not eat meat.

No. 9: A bowl of candies and cookies symbolizing "fruit."

No. 10: Five small wine glasses and a wine bowl with a spoon in it. Homemade white wine will be poured into the glasses and bowl to persuade various deities/spirits to drink.

No. 11: Paper money made from normal white paper that can be bought at a store. The papers are cut into rectangular pieces approximately 15 cm x 6 cm in size. By hammering a round headed nail upside-down, a grid of circular marks is debossed onto the papers. Only after this process of paper debossing can a piece of ordinary paper be transformed into "paper money" with a symbolic monetary value to be offered to various deities and spirits. There is a numerical principle for the debossed grid of circular marks. The number of rows vertically (the narrow side) must be an odd number (e.g. three or five). The number of rows horizontally (the long side) is preferably an odd number, but it is not mandatory as long as the surface of the paper is debossed evenly with circular marks (see Figure 2.).

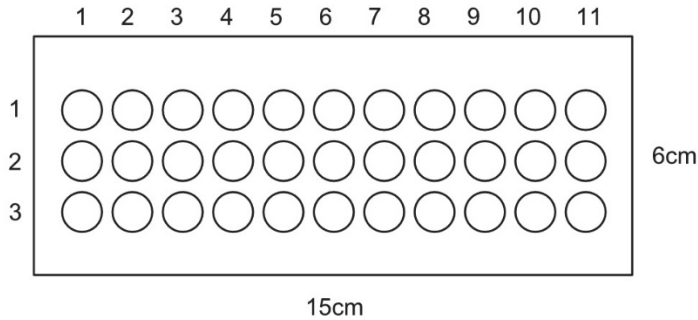


Figure 2. An example layout of paper money

No. 12: Twelve pairs of flower dresses – consisting of 12 clothing items made of red paper and 12 pairs of pants made of silver paper being placed together in pairs in 12 bobbins made of bamboo leaves, symbolizing the flower dresses to be offered to the Supreme Parents of Flowers and female flower spirits to enjoy.

No. 13: Twelve white candles, symbolizing the 12 pairs of ingots to be paid to the Supreme Parents of Flowers.

Since the Supreme Parents of Flowers are seen as deities of outside origin, the ritual space is always positioned close to the left or right side of the front door of the house with all of the ritual offerings facing outward when such rituals are performed. The ritual master performs all essential movement and recites verses facing outward. On this particular occasion, the offering table was placed at the left side of the front door inside the house.

2. Ritual Procedures and the Returning of Souls

Li Decai performed the ritual of “Repaying a Debt to the Supreme Parents of Flowers” reciting all the verses by heart, rather than reading from a manuscript.⁴² The

⁴² In principle, there are three ways of chanting present in Mien rituals and ceremonies: “reading” (*du*), “intoning” (*jiang*) and “singing” (*chang*). The first two styles are interchangeable, referring to a way of chanting falling between singing and intoning. The reading and intoning by ritual masters resembles a “mumble” (*nan*), a privileged form of communication between priest and god, in which the utterances are intentionally barely audible to others, and “reciting”

sole ritual object he used was a “master sword” ([Ch] *jian* or *shidao*, [Mi] *teim*²⁴).⁴³ While reciting, occasionally mumbling and singing, he carried out different movements in accordance with the verses. The ritual was composed of two parts (see Table 2). The first half invited the deities and sent out the spirit-soldiers to search for the lost souls (1-1 to 5). The second half was to return the souls to the physical body and to nourish the flower (souls) (6 to 14). A pair of *gao*, called *Laojun gao* (the Grand Supreme Lord Lao’s divinatory blocks) in the ritual, was used to confirm whether each section was successfully executed.⁴⁴ Li Decai performed the actions and the verses for each ritual procedure three times. Whether transforming the nature of things (from rice to spirit-soldiers or from rice to flower food) or dealing with souls, each time he ended with a common Daoist incantation, “*subian suhua Taishang laojun ji ling chi*” (transform quickly under the urgent order of the Grand Supreme Lord Lao). Finally, because the Mien believe souls reside on the left side of the male body and the right side of the female body, Li Decai used his left hand to hold objects that represented the souls/flower of Deman who a boy is.

(*song*) a manuscript out loud. The pace of the mumbling is usually faster than the recitation. Whatever form is chosen, rituals and ceremonies never involve the silent reading of a manuscript but utilize all three ways of chanting. See Chen Meiwen, “Gendered Ritual and Performative Literacy: Yao Women, Goddesses of Fertility, and the Chinese Imperial State,” p. 163.

⁴³ The *teim*²⁴ is a magical weapon necessary in every ritual a ritual master performs. The weapon is iron casted and shaped like a dagger.

⁴⁴ They are a pair of hemispherical objects used in divination, usually made of bamboo, with one side flat, the other side arched. There are three combinations: Yin *gao* (two flat sides facing up), Yang *gao* (two arched sides facing up), and Sheng *gao* (one flat side and one arched side facing up).

Table 2. Ritual procedures of “Repaying a Debt to the Supreme Parents of Flowers”⁴⁵

Ritual Steps/Goals			Confirmed by	
First Half	1-1	Inviting deities (<i>qingshen</i>)	Explaining the reasons for holding this ritual	Yang gao
	1-2		Inviting the Officers of Merit and the Supreme Parents of Flowers	
	1-3		Inviting the Patriarch Ancestor and the Yin Yang Master	
	1-4		Inviting all the flower deities	
	1-5		Checking the offerings	
	2	Inviting deities to drink alcohol (<i>quanjiu</i>)	Yang gao	
	3	Distributing paper money (<i>fenqian</i>)	Yang gao	
	4-1	Putting up bridges (<i>jiaqiao</i>)	Breaking through perilous junctures (<i>chongguan</i>)	Yin gao
	4-2		Retrieving perilous junctures (<i>shouguan</i>)	
	4-3		Fanning open perilous junctures (<i>shanguan</i>)	
4-4	Cutting through perilous junctures (<i>jianguan</i>)			
4-5	Putting up Yin bridges (<i>jiayingqiao</i>)			
5	Sending soldiers (<i>chaibing</i>)	Yin gao		
5 mins break				
Second Half	6	Pursuing souls (<i>zhuihun</i>)	Yang gao	
	7	Reintegrating souls (<i>hehun</i>)	Yin gao	
	8	Shedding calamities and distresses (<i>tuozai tuonan</i>)	Yang gao	
	9	Making souls jump [back to the body] (<i>tiaohun</i>)	Yang gao	
	10	Protecting flowers (<i>huhua</i>)	Sheng gao	
	11	Retracting bridges (<i>huiqiao</i>)	Yang gao	
	12	Receiving flowers (<i>jiehua</i>)	No need	
	13	Burning paper money (<i>shaozhi</i>)	Yang gao	
14	Sending off deities (<i>songsheng</i>)	No need		

⁴⁵ A complete record of the verses recited for the ritual can be found in 陳玫姁,《從命名談廣西田林盤瑤的人觀建構與生命來源》,頁 129-192.

(1) The First Half: Li Decai began by explaining the reasons for holding this ritual. Deman was referred to as “the first white flower born to Li Fachi (the ordination name of Li Jinxiu)” throughout the ritual. In a small-scale ritual like this, there is no need to hang on the wall ceremonial paintings that depict higher divinities, such as the Three Pure Ones, the Celestial Master Zhang, the Jade Emperor, or the Ten Kings of the Underworld, nor are these deities invited to come to bear witness and ensure ritual efficacy. The deities invited in order of sequence include: the Officers of Merit (*Gongcao shizhe*) who serve under the Jade Emperor and are in charge of the communication between the Yin and the Yang domains; the Supreme Parents of Flowers living on all three tiers of the Peach Spring Grotto (the upper and golden tier, the middle and silver tier, and the lower and treasured tier), the deified patriarch ancestor of the Li surname group, Li Fazhen, the Yin Yang Master of Li Decai, and a whole group of lesser flower deities who tend flowers in the garden.

After all the deities had arrived, Li Decai invited the Supreme Parents of Flowers, the spiritual host of this ritual, to inspect the sacrificial offerings to see if everything they had asked was prepared. When the Supreme Parents of Flowers finished their inspection, Li Decai proceeded to recite verses inviting the deities to drink the home-made white wine. A small spoon was used to ladle out the wine in the bowl into the five small wine glasses from left to right and from right to left. Next, squatting down, he held a stack of paper money in his left hand and used his right hand’s thumb and index finger to pick up the paper money, a few pieces at a time, then placed them on the ground. He did not stop this action until he confirmed with the “Lord Lao’s divinatory blocks” that the deities were satisfied with the amount.

The ritual then came to the step of putting up bridges to reach different places in five directions (east, west, south, north, and center) in the Yin domain. Li Decai began to recite verses describing a dangerous outside world with a thousand layers of clouds, fogs, traps, walls, and darkness. Before building bridges to reach all the places souls might wander and connecting the household with the Peach Spring Grotto, all perilous junctures and darkness must be cleared and dispelled. After he cleared the roads into the Yin domain, Li Decai took out a handful of the uncooked white rice from “si³¹ teien³³ mei³¹ wien⁵³” (no. 4, symbolizing the Yin Yang master of Li Decai) and transformed it into hundreds and thousands of spirit-soldiers to be led by the Yin Yang Master in search of lost souls. With the uncooked white rice in his left palm, he used his right hand to hold and point the “master sword” at the rice, drawing silently a

talisman of “Imperial Orders to Summon Military Forces” (*chibingma*) in the air as following:



Figure 3. Talisman of “Imperial Orders to Summon Military Forces”

Still holding the now rice-turned-spirit-soldiers in his left hand, Li Decai started to sing verses about the officials, generals and marshals who would also join and lead the search. They included the Messengers of the Section from the Four Realms on Duty Today (*Dangri sijie zoushi gongcao*), the four realms being Sky, Earth, Water and the Yang (the world of the living); the General of Red Lotus (*Honglian jiangjun*), the Great King of Ming Dynasty (*Mingchao dawang*), the Marshal of Red Cloth (*Hongyi dajiang*) from the Three Heavenly Headquarters Section (*Santian menxia*) and the Four Guarding Officials (*Sibao xianguan*); the spirit-soldiers from the upper tier of the household altar belonging to the ancestors of Li Jinxiu; and, the spirit-soldiers from the lower tier of the household altar belonging to the Yin Yang Master. Li Decai then tossed out the rice-turned-spirit-soldiers, little by little, through the open front door. These spirit-soldiers follow the Yin Yang Master who rides a spiritual horse and travels along the bridges to recall the lost souls.

Considering that the handling of souls is the focus of this paper, below I concentrate on the sections in the second part of the ritual that deal with the returning of souls/flower.

(2) The Second Half: After a short break, Li Decai proceeded with a series of steps for returning souls to the physical body and the flower to the household, including “pursuing souls,” “reintegrating souls,” “shedding calamities and distresses,” “making souls jump [back to the body],” “protecting flowers,” and “receiving flowers.”

Pursuing souls: During the break, the Yin Yang Master and the spirit-soldiers he was leading returned with the lost souls. Li Decai recited verses of the Yin Yang Master riding a spiritual horse and traveling extensively in five directions (east, west, south, north, and center) to search for the lost souls. Because souls reside on the left side of the male body, Li Decai kneaded three pieces of paper money into a small ball with his left hand, symbolizing the “three *hun* and seven *po*” of the suffering person being recalled back into the paper ball. As he kneaded, he recited verses dedicated to returning the souls to different body parts: head, ears, eyes, mouth, hands, neck, chest, belly, waist, and feet.

Reintegrating souls: Li Decai put the small paper ball, symbolically containing the recalled souls, on the ground. As he squatted down and held two pieces of “Lord Lao’s divinary blocks” in each hand, Li Decai recited verses on combining souls with the above-mentioned body parts and moved the “Lord Lao’s divinary blocks” around the paper ball.

Shedding calamities and distresses: While lost in the dangerous underworld, the souls were “detained” by chains and shackles, and endured calamities and distresses. To free the souls from chains and shackles, Li Decai placed the paper ball on the flat side of one of the “Lord Lao’s divinary blocks.” With the other “Lord Lao’s divinary block” he knocked the surface next to the paper ball and slowly and clearly recited, “the souls are restrained with copper nails, here I remove the copper nails; the souls are restrained with copper chains, here I remove the copper chains; the souls are restrained with copper shackles, here I remove the copper shackles; the souls are restrained with copper cangues, here I remove the copper cangues ...the souls suffered from earaches, here I remove the earaches.” Through these actions and recitations, the copper nails/chains/shackles/cangues are removed, and the pains and illnesses of different body parts are respectively healed.

Making souls jump [back to the body]: Li Decai took the paper ball and stood up. Using both his hands, he began circling the paper ball around his body, clockwise from head to toe, while singing in sequence the verses that referred to the various body parts the souls jumped back to.

Protecting flowers: Li Decai put the paper ball on top of the bowl of uncooked white rice (offering No. 5) with a raw egg (the child’s flower) circled by a piece of red paper (the garden or Peach Spring Grotto). Egg is used as a universal metaphor in the Daoist ritual traditions to represent a person’s “root” which equates to “vital energy”

and “*dan tian*” (a point two inches below the navel where one's *qi* resides).⁴⁶ In this step Li Decai first transformed the rice into “extraordinary rice” (*feifan zhimi*) to become “food” for the raw egg, namely the child’s flower to eat. He did this by pointing the tip of the master sword at the bowl while silently mumbling incantations. When finished, he took a piece of paper money in each hand, bent over, and circled the two pieces of paper money around the egg, reciting the verses that depict nourishing the flower roots from five directions. At this point, the lost souls returned to the garden to grow steadily again.

Receiving flowers: After the flower was tended in the garden, it was time to receive the flower souls into the household again. Holding a bowl of uncooked white rice in his left hand, Li Decai sang verses illustrating the Flower Matrons (*Huapo*) from five directions, mediated through the Yin Yang Master, who smiled gently and brought the true flower back to the grandparents and parents of the household, and to the household altar. The Flower Matrons smiled at the children to teach them how to smile, because only when a child smiles can the souls return. Returning the child’s true flower souls to the household is symbolic of the rebirth of the child. Predetermined by the time and date of his/her birth, the bad fate that brought disasters to the child and his/her family has, through ritual intervention and rectification, been replaced with a brand new, better start. In this way, his/her new life has also brought harmony and balance to the family.

On completion of “receiving flowers,” Li Decai gave the bowl of rice to Li Jinxiu who, after carefully moving the ladder to the front of the altar, climbed up and placed the bowl of rice on the altar. The Flower Pavilion is burned along with the paper money as payment to the Supreme Parents of Flowers. As previously mentioned, three days after the ritual the egg is boiled for the child to eat. The paper ball containing the souls of the child is carried on the child until it disappears naturally.

⁴⁶ Brigitte Baptandier, “The Kaiguan 開關 Ritual and the Construction of the Child’s Identity,” pp. 523-586.

VI. Conclusion: Reciprocity between Yin/ Yang and Inside/Outside

In their co-authored work “Rituals and the Comparison of Societies”, Cécile Barraud and Jos D. M. Platenkamp argue that society should be conceived of in terms of relationships, as people often conceptualize their society as distinct from domains beyond. The rituals help effectuate a circulation of beings and things in accordance with the relations that constitute this socio-cosmic universe.⁴⁷ The ritual of “Repaying a Debt to the Supreme Parents of Flowers” clearly reveals three aspects of Mien’s construction of their specific socio-cosmic universe: 1) It consists of a series of binary concepts, Yang/Yin, inside/outside, male/female, left/right, and the five-directional (*wufang*) and four-realm (*sijie*) world structure, all important in both Daoist cosmologies and the wider Chinese culture. 2) A child’s health is a spiritual condition that pertains not only to the physical body of a particular individual but also to an on-going reciprocal exchange between the series of binary concepts, in particular the Yin/Yang domains and the inside/outside worlds. 3) These exchanges can be best understood in terms of households. While healing rituals for children aim to establish balance by reconnecting the lost souls with the patient’s physical body, they also restore the boundary between the household (a safe Yang domain) and the imaginary wilderness (a dangerous Yin domain).

Ambiguous features ascribed to the Supreme Parents of Flowers, as creditors granting flowers (souls) as well as deities of outside/wild origin residing in the Peach Spring Grotto, are transmitted to individuals, predetermining the vulnerability in the autonomy of a Mien person and, by extension, the household and the society. Individuals receive health when the reciprocal relationships between the Yin/Yang domains and the inside/outside worlds are in balance, individuals receive illness and death if the reciprocal relationship is out of balance. Apart from the Yin Yang Master who mediates between these two domains, the patriarch ancestor of the surname group also plays a key role in stabilizing the reciprocal relationship. This shows that the health and distress of individuals is strongly correlated with both the household and the entire surname group. The ritual masters act as healers and mediators in the society

⁴⁷ Cécile Barraud and Jos D. M. Platenkamp, *Rituals and the Comparison of Societies*, pp. 103-124.

ensuring not only the health of the individuals but the reproduction of this particular socio-cosmic universe.

The imagined garden Peach Spring Grotto—a name that evokes familiar Chinese literary associations—is in itself so suggestive that one cannot help but speculate on its probable relation with a Daoist story. I refer specifically to the story of a journey into a grotto paradise that can be found in the late third or early fourth century *Scripture of Five Talismans of the Numerous Treasure, with Preface* (*Lingbao wufu jingxu*) as a part of a prefatory account relating the divine origins of this scripture. It is also a direct source of inspiration for Tao Qian's (365-427) well-known depiction of a utopian world: "Record of the Peach Flower Font." (*taohua yuanji*)⁴⁸ The Mien may have diverged slightly in that the grotto paradise is transformed into an imagined garden populated by many locally worshipped deities/spirits, and from where human souls as flowers originate.⁴⁹

This study of the flower symbolisms and fertility deities among the Mien is a manifestation of the Lüshan tradition in Yao Daoism. The ritual of "Repaying a Debt to the Supreme Parents of Flowers" has vividly demonstrated a comprehensive adaptation of Daoist models to Mien's conceptualizations of "person," "body," and "soul," especially in the ritual procedures. The Mien ritual practices exhibit shared features found in a broader Chinese religious culture, including 1) the importance of one's *bazi*, often perceived as a person's innate fate; 2) the use of an almanac for day selection; 3) the 100 "perilous junctures" which children must clear; and 4) the egg being used to represent a person's "flower" which equates to one's root and vital energy. Most importantly, the components of flower beliefs have also been integrated into the ordination ceremony. In its overall ritual setting of a Mien ordination, a "flower pavilion" (*hualuo*) needs to be built and served as "the Altar for the Deified

⁴⁸ Stephen R. Bokenkamp, "The Peach Flower Font and the Grotto Passage," pp. 65-77.

⁴⁹ Although the Peach Spring Grotto remains an important mythic landscape closely associated with the beliefs around the birth and health of children among the Mien, it does not always bear the same significance among the other societies. For instance, the Mun and the Zhuang refer to this place merely as "flower garden" (*huayuan*) or "flower pavilion" (*hualuo*). They do, however, tell more enchanting stories about how these flower spirits are deified to become soul-granting divinities, than the Mien do with the Supreme Parents of Flowers.

Ancestors” (*suyuan zuben zhongshi antai zhi shenwei*) of the participants.⁵⁰ In the Mun ordination, there is an elaborate ritual procedure called “Celebrating the Flower Pavilion” (*helou*), in which the prominent female fertility deity, Mother of Emperors, is invoked and a rite of “nourishing the flower” is performed.⁵¹ Hence, further research on flower-related rituals, oral performance, manuscripts, and cosmologies is of utmost importance to paint a more thorough picture of Yao Daoism.

(本文於 2021 年 1 月 10 日收稿，2021 年 7 月 26 日通過刊登)

⁵⁰ 張勁松，〈中國藍山縣過山瑤度戒儀式過程的信仰意義及度戒之功能〉，頁 9-14。

⁵¹ 黃貴權，〈藍靛瑤的“花”、“斗”人觀——那洪村藍靛瑤誕生、翁花、要斗和度師禮儀的調查與研究〉，頁 161-167。

Chinese Characters

Aoshan 壑山	fenqian 分錢
bai 敗	gao 筭
Baidi tianwang 白帝天王	Gongcao shizhe 功曹使者
baihua 白話	gu 骨
baiyiren 白衣人	guadeng 掛燈
bazi 八字	guan 官
biaozou 表奏	guan 關
bing tou 兵頭	Guangdong 廣東
Bunu 布努	Guangdong xinyu 廣東新語
chai huahuang 拆花皇	Guangxi 廣西
chaibing 差兵	Guizhou 貴州
chang 唱	Guo Wei 過偉
Chashan Yao 茶山瑤	Hainan 海南
Chen Jinggu 陳靖姑	hanyu pinyin 漢語拼音
chibingma 敕兵馬	hehun 合魂
chongguan 沖關	Hejia daxiao benming xingjun 闔家大小 本命星君
dagua 打卦	helou 賀樓
dan tian 丹田	Honglian jiangjun 紅蓮將軍
Dangri sijie zoushi gongcao 當日四界奏 事功曹	Hongyi dajiang 紅衣大將
Dao 道	Huagen fumu 花根父母
Dimu 帝母	Huagenmu 花根母
Dong-Sui 侗水	Huagui 花鬼
dujie 度戒	Huahuang fumu 花皇父母
dushi 度師	hualuo 花樓
du 讀	huayuan 花園
fangkuai yaowen 方塊瑤文	Huang Xiuying 黃秀英
fashi 法師	Huapo 花婆
feifan zhimi 非凡之米	Huashan 花山

- huawenhuaquan 花文化圈
huhua 護花
huiqiao 回橋
hun 魂
jian 劍
jiang 講
jianguan 剪關
Jiangxi 江西
jiatai 加太
jiaqiao 架橋
jiayinqiao 架陰橋
jiazhi 加職
jieguan 解關
jiehua 接花
jin 筋
jiuhun shi'er ming 九魂十二命
jue 絕
Kan huahuang kan guansha jiquan yijuan
看花皇看關煞集全一卷
Lajia 拉珈
Landian Yao 藍靛瑤
lang 郎
Laojun gao 老君筭
Laojun shi'er jiemian 老君十二街門
Li Caiyuan 李才元
Li Decai 李德財
Li Fa Tong 李法通
Li Fachu 李法敕
Li Fazhen 李法眞
Li Jinxiu 李金秀
Li tong san lang 李通三郎
Lingbao wufu jingxu 靈寶五符經序
Lingbao 靈寶
Linshui 臨水
Lüshan 閩山
Man 蠻
mao 卯
Meishan 梅山
Meishan daojiao 梅山道教
Meishan jiao 梅山教
Meishan sanshiliu dong
梅山三十六洞
Meishan wenhua 梅山文化
Miao 苗
Miaoshen 廟神
Mien 勉
Mingchao dawang 明朝大王
minzu shibie yundong 民族識別運動
miyu 秘語
Mun 門
nan 喃
niang 娘
Nuogong 儼公
Nuomu 儼母
Pan Yao 盤瑤
Panhu 盤瓠
Panwang 盤王
Pingdi Yao 平地瑤
potai 破胎
Powang 婆王
po 魄
qi 氣

qingsheng 請神	taohua yuanji 桃花源記
quanjiu 勸酒	tiangan dizhi 天干地支
richang xiao fashi 日常小法事	Tianlin 田林
rou 肉	Tianshidao 天師道
Santian menxia 三天門下	Tianxin Zhengfa 天心正法
shanguan 扇關	tiaohun 跳魂
shaozhi 燒紙	tuozai tuonan 脫災脫難
She 畚	Weihao 偉好
Sheng Gao 聖筭	wengua 問卦
Sheshen 社神	wu 午
Shi 師	wuchang 五猖
shidao 師刀	wufang 五方
Shidianwang 十殿王	wuhun liuying 五魂六影
shigong 師公	wuying 五營
Shijing 詩經	xian 仙
shouguan 收關	xie 血
Sibao xianguan 四保先官	Yang Gao 陽筭
sijie 四界	Yang Zhou 揚州
song 誦	Yaosuzi 瑤俗字
songsheng 送聖	Yin Gao 陰筭
subian suhua Taishang laojun ji ling chi 速變速化太上老君急令敕	yinyang ju 陰陽據
suyuan zuben zhongshi antai zhi shenwei 隨緣祖本眾師案台之神位	you 酉
taishang fengxing beiji quxieyuan chuantong lümei shidao erjiaosanjie shengming jiazhi dizi 太上奉行北極 驅邪院川通閭梅師道二教三戒陸明 加職弟子	Yunnan 雲南
Tao Qian 陶潛	Zhang Wulang 張五郎
	Zhao shi er niang 趙氏二娘
	Zhao Shi 趙氏
	Zhengyi 正一
	Zhuang 壯
	zhuihun 追魂

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*The following appendices are from *Everything Concerning the Supreme Parents of Flowers and the Perilous Junctures* (Kan huahuang kan guansha jiquan yijuan 看花皇看關煞集全一卷), a manuscript in Li Decai's collection.

Appendix I: *Bazi* and the “Debt” to the Supreme Parents of Flowers

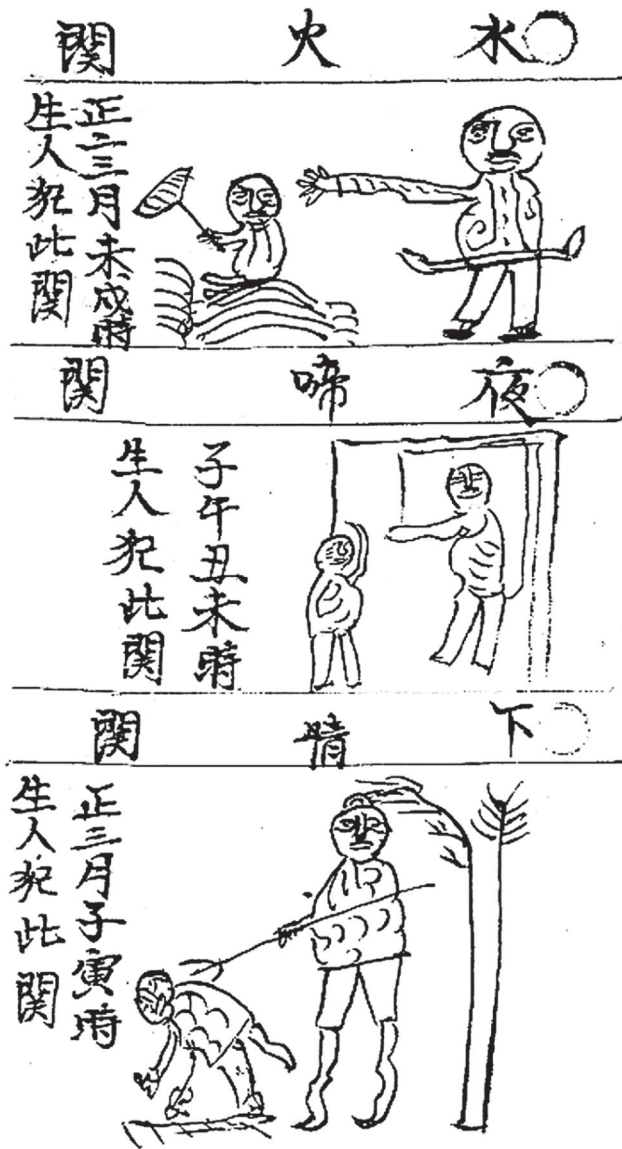
○午時生人與洲府人九歲托生未花公姓黎花母
姓謝前欠花樓四座元寶十二對帛錢四帖白
苴三升粉鵝一双青湯十二碗花飯十二碗三
牲三副菜酒奉還兄弟有分

○未時生人南陽縣人為道士托生未花公姓龍花
姓老前欠花樓二座白米一斗白苴一升花衣
十二盤粉鸡一双元寶十二對三牲二副花飯

Appendix II: Perilous Junctures



Appendix III: Perilous Junctures



Appendix IV: *Bazi* and the Five Elements (Earth)

○土命

野杏

○第九橋

○第十橋

花娘易長養(正)天(正)

樹上憶爹娘(正)七(正)

狂風子擺動(八)三(正)

啼哭兩三場(正)四

○又到看閻神

置至李德才

橋边一天蛇

兜命悲劫嗟

求佛和神保

不愁別母家

雲霧暗橋边

朦朧光不整

若然現履總

求福命延綿

瑤傳道教中的「桃源洞」： 中國廣西勉瑤的「填賠花皇」儀式

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摘要

本文藉由分析中國廣西勉瑤的花信仰及其為治療孩童所舉行的「填賠花皇」儀式，探討在其宗教傳統中與中國南方閩山派密切相關的一系列主題——花魂、「桃源洞」以及女性生育力。在勉瑤的人觀裡，一個完整的「人」包括三個層面：生理層面、精神層面和社會層面。其中精神層面的「魂魄」——以「花」作為表徵——由「桃源洞」裡的「花皇父母」所賜予。孩子在成年前一旦生病或難養，通常都與他或她的花魂走失有關，因此「填賠花皇」的儀式目的不但為了還債答謝，也為了到陰間贖魂。「花皇父母」在勉瑤的神鬼觀中屬於外鬼，卻具有養育並賜予花魂的靈力，這使得以家屋為表徵的勉瑤社會，與其形成「債權人」與「債務人」的關係，花魂因此成為陰/陽兩界與內/外之間互動時交換的一部分。而該儀式的分析亦顯示，勉瑤在與花信仰有關的儀式上，全面地採借了道教的禮儀架構。

關鍵字：瑤傳道教、勉瑤、花信仰、桃源洞、閩山派

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