# Negotiating Boundaries: A Comparative Study of the *Shuilu* (Water-Land) Rituals in Late Imperial China

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**Abstract:** This study presents a comparative analysis of two distinct manuals for the Water-Land Ritual, a significant Buddhist ceremony for universal salvation originating in the ninth century and gaining prominence across China by the thirteenth century. The analysis focuses on the *Fajie shengfan shuilu shenghui xiuzhai yigui* 法界聖凡水陸勝會修齋儀軌 [Ritual Manual for Performing the Retreat of the Grand Assembly of All Saintly and Mundane Beings of Water and Land, *X* no. 1497; hereafter, FJSF], edited by Zhipan 志盤 (ca. 1220–1275) and Zhuhong 袾宏 (1535–1615) and prevalent in contemporary Chinese Buddhist temples, and the *Tiandi ming-yang shuilu yiwen* 天地冥陽水陸儀文 [Manual for the Ritual of All Beings of Heaven and Earth, This World and the Netherworld, and Water and Land; hereafter, TDMY], which incorporates a variety of beliefs and practices (such as Esoteric and Daoist), reflecting regional variations of the ritual. By exploring ritual space segmentation, altar configurations, and participant movements within the context of the Buddhist renewal movement during the late Ming Dynasty, this paper hopes to shed light on the question of why the FJSF eventually replaced the TDMY as the dominant version of the Shuilu ritual in modern-day Chinese Buddhist temples.

**Keywords:** Buddhism, ritual, *Shuilu*, *pudu*, Ming Dynasty, Late Imperial China

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## Introduction

Taking shape in the mid-ninth century, the Water-Land (*Shuilu* 水陸) ritual, also known as the Water-Land Dharma Assembly (*Shuilu fahui* 水陸法會), developed with an aim to bring about deliverance *en masse* for the souls of the dead and confer blessings upon the living regardless of age, gender, or social status. It became prominent during the thirteenth century and spread widely across China. As the grandest Buddhist ritual ceremony for universal salvation (*pudu* 普度) in mainland China and diasporic Chinese communities, the Water-Land ritual has recently received continuous scholarly attention. Studies analyzed the ritual from different perspectives, such as its origin and historical development,[1] its artistic representations,[2] and its socio-political dynamics.[3] According to many studies, the contemporary performances of the Water-Land ritual in most Chinese Buddhist temples is often called the 'Fajie shengfan shuilu pudu dazhai shenghui' 法界聖凡水陸普度大齋盛會 (The Universal Salvation Great Retreat of the Grand Assembly of All Saintly and Mundane Beings of Water and Land)[4] and they use a four-fascicle manual titled *Shuilu yigui Huiben* 水陸儀軌會本 [Synthetic Manual

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[1] Stevenson, 'Text, Image, and Transformation'; Makita, 'Suiriku'e shōkō'; Hou, *Zhongguo fojiao yishi yanjiu*, 281–379.

[2] Bloom, 'Descent of the Deities'; Dai, *Fojiao shuilu hua yanjiu*; *idem*, *Zhongguo shuilu hua yanjiu*.

[3] Liu, 'Shuilu fahui, Huanglu zhai'; Choi, 'Contesting imaginaires'.

[4] Stevenson, 'Text, Image, and Transformation', 33–34; Gildow, 'The Chinese Buddhist Ritual Field'. Between 2018 and 2024, I conducted fieldwork at several Buddhist temples in mainland China and Singapore. My research supported Stevenson and Gildow's conclusion regarding the widespread practice of the Water-Land ritual in Chinese Buddhist temples.

of Water-Land Rite; hereafter, *Huiben*], which traced the development of the Water-Land ritual from its mytho-historical origin of the ritual tradition coded by Emperor Wu of the Liang Dynasty 梁武帝 (464–549; r. 502–549)[5] to the redaction by Zhipan 志磐 (ca. 1220–1275)[6] of the Song Dynasty (960–1279), to the supplement made by Yunqi Zhuhong 雲棲袾宏 (1535–1615) of the Ming Dynasty, and then to the republication by Zhenji Yirun 真寂儀潤 (fl. early nineteenth c.) of the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911).[7] After Yirun, the *Huiben* was republished by several Buddhist scholar-monks[8] during the Republican era and later gained a preface by the Buddhist Master Yinguang 印光 (1862–1940).[9] While having added many details of ritual instructions and illustrations of the altars, the *Huiben* still has at its core the version edited by Zhipan and Zhuhong.[10] This text, titled *Fajie shengfan shuilu shenghui xiuzhai yigui* 法界聖凡水陸勝會修齋儀軌 [Ritual Manual for Performing the Retreat of the Grand Assembly of All Saintly and Mundane Beings of Water and Land, *X* no. 1497; hereafter, FJSF], is the focus of the following discussion.

In addition to Zhipan and Zhuhong's FJSF manual, further studies have identified numerous records in Sichuan,[11] Yunnan,[12] and Dunhuang,[13] demonstrating that the Water-Land ritual was also

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5 Stevenson, 'Text, Image, and Transformation', 43.

6 On Zhipan and his composition of the FJSF, see Satō, '*Busso tōki* senjū no basho'; Tada, 'Shiban to Busso tōki'.

7 *Huiben* 1.27.

8 Ibid., 5: 'The printing plate of its Hangzhou version has become extremely blurred. Although the Tiantong temple has printed [another one], it was hard to popularize. Therefore, our deceased Master Ji of Wanshou and Master Yu of Baolun in Yangzhou raised money to reprint it, in hope of spreading it' (此書杭垣之板, 模糊不堪. 天童雖刻, 亦難普及. 以故維揚萬壽寂公, 寶輪裕公等, 募資重刻, 以冀廣傳.)

9 Ibid., 6.

10 Bloom, 'Descent of the Deities', 52.

11 Ibid.

12 Hou, *Yunnan Azhali jiao jingdian yanjiu*.

13 Xie and Xie, 'Dunhuang wenxian yu Shuilu fahui'.

performed with regional variations. Among all, a ritual manual called the *Tiandi mingyang shuilu yiwen* 天地冥陽水陸儀文 [Manual for the Ritual of All Beings of Heaven and Earth, This World and the Netherworld, and Water and Land; hereafter, TDMY] seems to have preserved the practices of the Water-Land ritual in North and West China.[14] According to several studies, the extant recension of the TDMY manual seems to have been published in Shanxi province 山西 during the early decades of the Ming Dynasty, as the phrase 'Daming guo' 大明國 (Kingdom of the Great Ming [Dynasty]) appears occasionally throughout the text,[15] by a Buddhist monk named Yijin 義金 (act. ca. 1368–1424), who most likely based his manual on an earlier text that postdated the Northern Song Dynasty and found great popularity under the Jurchen Jin (1115–1234).[16] In contrast to the FJSF manual, which has been subject to revisions by multiple Tiantai masters and is thus firmly embedded within a distinct Tiantai doctrinal framework, the TDMY manual demonstrates a highly eclectic feature, combining a diverse range of beliefs and practices such as Esoteric Buddhism, Daoism, and folk beliefs. Various copies of the TDMY manual are preserved in both China and other countries, such as Korea, Japan, and the United States. Previous studies have shown that the copy currently held at the Princeton University library is the most complete, containing three fascicles of the main liturgy, two fascicles of assorted ritual documents (*zawen* 雜文), and one fascicle of altar images and diagrams.[17] All copies share an urtext that no longer exists.

The existence of two variations of the Water-Land ritual prompts an array of academic inquiries: How significant are their differences? Are they derived from one another, or do they exist in competition? Notably, the FJSF/*Huiben* manual is prevalently used in contemporary Chinese Buddhist temples, while the TDMY manual has seemingly vanished. This paper is grounded in these questions and adopts a comparative approach, with particular attention to the historical

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[14] Dai, *Fojiao shuilu hua yanjiu*.

[15] TDMY, *Zawen shang*, 5a; *Zawen xia*, 26a.

[16] Hou, 'Hongji zhi fanyi'.

[17] Dai, *Tiandi mingyang shuilu yiwen jiaodian*.

context of the Buddhist renewal movement during the late Ming Dynasty. This movement, led by several Buddhist masters, aimed to reform and revitalize Buddhist monastic life through changes in monastic regulations, behaviour codes, and ritual practices.[18] Zhuhong, one of the movement's pioneers, also edited a ritual manual for the Water-Land ritual as a part of his revival plan, recognizing the ritual's widespread popularity at the time.

Since its prominence during the thirteenth century, the Water-Land ritual continued to be one of the most popular Buddhist rituals throughout the following eras. After bringing an end to the war with the Mongols and establishing the new 'Da Ming' 大明 dynasty, meaning 'grand brightness', Emperor Taizu 太祖 Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 (1328–1398) was confronted with a disordered state and a demoralized population. This meant that there were numerous challenges to overcome before the new regime could truly usher in a 'bright' future. Starting from the first year of the Hongwu 洪武 era (1368) until the fifth year of the Yongle 永樂 era (1407) under the reign of Emperor Chengzu 成祖 (r. 1402–1424), the second successor of Zhu Yuanzhang, both Emperor Taizu and Emperor Chengzu consecutively held several Water-Land rituals, historically known as the 'Dharma Assembly on Mount Jiang' (*Jiangshan fahui* 蔣山法會). The primary purpose of having these rituals was to deliver the souls of soldiers who perished on battlefields and of those who lost lives in the havoc of war, thereby calming the populace and stabilizing the political situation.[19] Song Lian 宋濂 (1310–1381), a leading scholar at that time, once wrote about one of them and provided a glimpse of the grandness of the ritual performance on the state level.[20] During the Wanli 萬曆 era (1573–1620), Empress Dowager Cisheng 慈聖 (1545–1614), the biological mother of the Wanli Emperor (r. 1572–1620) and a devout Buddhist follower, generously sponsored the making of a series of the Water-Land ritual

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[18] Yü, *The Renewal of Buddhism in China*.

[19] Sheng, *Zhongguo fojiao xinyang yu shenghuo shi*, 256–64.

[20] 'Jiangshan guangjian fohui ji' 蔣山廣薦佛會記 [Record of the Extensive Buddhist Assembly on Mount Jiang], *J* no. 21: B110.647c–648b.

paintings.[21] As a female follower of Buddhism, Empress Dowager Cisheng even encouraged the painter to make slight adjustments reflecting a specific concern for women's salvation in the painting *Shuilu yuanqi tu* 水陸緣起圖 (Origination of the Water-Land Ritual).[22] Parallel to the ongoing imperial support for the Water-Land ritual was the enduring enthusiasm for the ritual among the general populace. By the late Ming period, the ritual had already become an integral part of common people's lives, as evidenced by its depiction in the novel *Jinpingmei* 金瓶梅 [The Golden Lotus]. However, at that time, the performance of the ritual raised serious concerns about its violation of monastic rules and incited harsh criticism for being disorderly and unlawful. Against this backdrop, Zhuhong took the initiative to refine and standardize the Water-Land ritual, thereby ensuring that the practice remained aligned with the broader goals of the Buddhist renewal movement. His redaction proved to be quite successful, continuing to serve as the fundamental text for subsequent Water-Land ritual manuals.

However, a detailed analysis of Zhuhong's editing, particularly in comparison to other versions of the ritual practiced during his time, remains lacking. Such a study could shed light on why Zhuhong chose Zhipan's version as the foundational text and how his redaction of the ritual reflected and responded to contemporaneous practices, potentially explaining the eventual dominance of his version in most Chinese Buddhist temples. In our discussion, we will focus on variations in the configurations of the ritual space and altars. Specifically, we will examine the differing segmentation of the ritual space and the placement of altars and pathways. Additionally, we will also look at the elements that Zhuhong removed, retained, and added to his version of the manual, along with the rationale behind these modifications.

It is important to acknowledge that this study, grounded in the analysis of ritual manuals such as the FJSF and TDMY, relies heavily on textual representations of rituals rather than direct observations of historical performances. Ritual manuals, as texts, inherently

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[21] *Huazhong sanqian jie*, 61–64.

[22] Ni, 'Huang Taihou de xuanze'; Zhang, *Thriving in Crisis*, 58–89.

lack the temporal and visual elements that would allow us to fully reconstruct past ritual practices. Therefore, to recapture these historical performances, we must engage in a degree of speculation. To supplement the textual prescriptions of the ritual provided by these manuals, I also draw on descriptions from other contemporaneous literary sources, such as personal anthologies and novels, which offer auxiliary evidence of how rituals were performed at the time. By integrating these additional sources, I aim to provide a more nuanced reconstruction of the rituals while remaining mindful of the inherent gaps in the historical record. It is crucial to keep in mind that rituals are not merely static texts but dynamic practices that hold profound meaning in their cultural and religious contexts, even as we recognize the challenges in fully capturing the lived experiences of those who participated in them.

## 1. Ritual Programs

In this section, we outline the ritual programs as prescribed in Zhipan/Zhuhong's FJSF manual and the TDMY manual, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of their respective ritual frameworks.

### 1.1 Ritual programs in FJSF

In contemporary practice, a Water-Land ritual performance is divided into two 'altars'—the Inner Altar (*neitan* 內壇) and the Outer Altar (*waitan* 外壇). The Inner Altar is the most sacred and significant part of the ritual, and is where the core rites are performed. Due to its sacredness, access to the Inner Altar is often restricted. In contrast, the Outer Altar hosts a series of supportive rites open to all participants. The ritual programs in the FJSF manual primarily focus on the practices conducted at the Inner Altar. Although other scholars have already summarized it,[23] a brief overview of the ritual structure and programs remains necessary, given that it provides the

[23] Stevenson, 'Text, Image, and Transformation'; Bloom, 'Descent of the Deities'.

framework for the following discussions. Below is a table listing the major ritual sessions (Table 1), followed by narrative summaries of some of these important ritual sessions.

The text of the FJSF manual is divided into six fascicles, each focusing on a particular ritual procedure. The first fascicle concerns a series of preparatory works (Section 1), including setting up the altar and empowering the ritual space. The rite of paying homage to the Three Treasures[24] is followed by reciting incantations of self-purification and pacification. Then, various protective deities and their attendants are summoned to guard the ritual site.[25] After that, the altar is purified and sealed with incantatory water and incense burning. Mantras (*zhenyan* 真言) are recited and the myriad Vairocana Buddhas 毗盧遮那不空如來[26] are invited. Finally, before dispatching the 'talisman-holding messengers' (*chifu shizhe* 持符使者) to send written documents, such as memorials (*zouzhuang* 奏狀), letters of invitation (*qingshu* 請書), and writs and certificates (*diewen* 牒文), to the realms of ten directions,[27] a formalized series of questions and answers about the meaning of the title of the ritual are given.[28] All of these thus mark the official opening of the Water-Land ritual.

The rest of the text constitutes the main body of the ritual performance. The second and the third fascicles treat the invoking and summoning practices (Sections 2 and 3), while the fourth and fifth fascicles are about delivering the wandering souls (Sections 4 and 5). The last fascicle is devoted to teaching the Pure Land practice of contemplation and reciting the Buddha's name (*nian Fo* 念佛) (Section 6).

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[24] FJSF 1, *X* no. 1479: 74.784b.

[25] They include Da huiji jingang 大穢迹金剛 (Ucchuṣma); Shida mingwang 十大明王 (the Ten Vidyārājas); Da fantianwang 大梵天王 (Brahma), Dishitian zhu 帝釋天主 (Indra), Hushi siwang 護世四王 (the Four Heavenly Kings), and Tianlong babu 天龍八部 (the Eight Classes of Devas and Dragons); the Monastery Guardian; and the City God, local shrine spirits, and hearth gods. FJSF 1, *X* no. 1479: 74.785a–785c.

[26] FJSF 1, *X* no. 1479: 74.786c–787a.

[27] Ibid., 787c.

[28] Ibid., 788a–b.

**TABLE 1 FJSF Ritual Program for Inner Altar**

| Section | Sequence | Program | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1.** | | **Preparing & Opening** | |
| | 1.1 | Setting up the altar | |
| | 1.2 | Paying homage to the Three Treasures | |
| | 1.3 | Self-purification & pacification | |
| | 1.4 | Summoning protective gods | |
| | 1.5 | Inviting Buddhas | |
| | 1.6 | Dispatch talisman-holding emissaries to deliver ritual documents | Documents delivered include memorials (*zouzhuang* 奏狀 ), letters of invitation (*qingshu* 請書 ), and writs and certificates (*diewen* 牒文) |
| **2.** | | **'Upper Hall' Invitation** | |
| | 2.1 | All buddhas | |
| | 2.2 | All Dharmas | |
| | 2.3 | All bodhisattvas | |
| | 2.4 | All pratekya buddhas | |
| | 2.5 | All śrāvakas | |
| | 2.6 | The twenty-three Buddhist patriarchs | |
| | 2.7 | All recluses of five supernormal powers | |
| | 2.8 | All *rāja*s and devas | |
| | 2.9 | All protective deities | Including protectors of monasteries and relics as well as protectors of the state and cities |
| | 2.10 | Ten masters of the *Shuilu* ritual | Historical or mytho-historical figures associated with the early codification and performance of the Water-Land Retreat from the Liang through the Song dynasties. |

| Section | Sequence | Program | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|
| **3.** | | **'Lower Hall' Invoking** | |
| | 3.1 | Celestial deities | |
| | 3.2 | Terrestrial deities | |
| | 3.3 | All human leaders, including Daoists & Confucianists | |
| | 3.4 | All human beings | |
| | 3.5 | Asuras | |
| | 3.6 | Hungry ghosts & wandering spirits | |
| | 3.7 | Purgatory Kings and officiants | |
| | 3.8 | Purgatorial denizens | |
| | 3.9 | Animals | |
| | 3.10 | Intermediate beings | |
| | 3.11 | Local city gods (Hangzhou, Qiantang) | |
| | 3.12 | Temple gods | |
| | 3.13 | Ancestors of ritual patrons | |
| **4.** | | **Summoning wandering souls** | No abodes in altar |
| | 4.1 | Opening purgatories | |
| | 4.2 | Bathing | |
| | 4.3 | Paying homage to the Three Treasures | |
| **5.** | | **Teaching Dharma to arouse faith** | |
| | 5.1 | Repentance ritual | |
| | 5.2 | Arousing the mind | |
| | 5.3 | Explaining the precepts | |
| | 5.4 | Imparting the precepts | |
| | 5.5 | Food offering | |
| **6.** | | **Concluding: Pure Land contemplation & *nian Fo*** | |

The invoking and summoning program is further divided into two parts. Part one, as treated in the second fascicle, is devoted to the invoking of the deities of the 'Upper Hall' (*shangtang* 上堂). Those who are invoked include ten classes of the saintly beings (*sheng* 聖), namely 1. all buddhas (一切諸佛);[29] 2. all Dharmas (一切尊法);[30] 3. all bodhisattvas (諸菩薩僧);[31] 4. all pratekyabuddhas (諸緣覺僧);[32] 5. all śrāvakas (諸聲聞僧);[33] 6. the twenty-three Buddhist patriarchs (二十三祖);[34] 7. all recluses of five supernormal powers (五通神仙);[35] 8. all *rāja*s 明王, *devarāja*s 天王 and devas 天;[36] 9. all protective deities;[37] and 10. the ten masters who developed the Water-Land ritual (製儀立法十大士).[38] The invoking is followed by making offerings to the

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[29] FJSF 2, *X* no. 1479: 74.789c–790a.

[30] These include *Da fangguang fo huayan jing* 大方廣佛華嚴經 [Garland Sūtra, *T* no. 279]; *Fanwang jing* 梵網經[Brahmā's Net Sūtra, *T* no. 1484]; *Si Ahan* 四阿含 [The Four Āgama Sūtras]; *Jingming jing* 淨名經 [The Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa sūtra, *T* no. 475]; *Jin guangming jing* 金光明經 [The Sūtra of Golden Light, *T* no. 663]; *Renwang jing* 仁王經 [The Sūtra of Humane Kings, *T* no. 245]; *Jingang bore boluomi jing* 金剛般若波羅蜜經 [The Diamond Sūtra, *T* no. 235]; *Miaofa lianhua jing* 妙法蓮華經 [The Lotus Sūtra of Wonderful Law, *T* no. 262]; *Dabo niepan jing* 大般涅槃經 [The Great Nirvana Sūtra, *T* no. 374]; *Guan wuliangshou fo jing* 觀無量壽佛經 [The Sūtra on the Contemplation of Amitāyus, *T* no. 365, etc. FJSF 2, *X* no. 1479: 74.790a–b.

[31] Ibid., 790b–c.

[32] Ibid., 790c.

[33] Ibid., 790c–791a.

[34] Ibid., 791a.

[35] These refer to the beings who obtained supernatural powers and assisted in spreading the Buddha's teachings. Ibid., 791a–b.

[36] Ibid., 791b.

[37] Ibid., 791c.

[38] Ibid., 791c–792a. These figures include Ānanda 阿難陀; the saintly monk of the Liang Dynasty 梁朝神僧聖師; Emperor Wu of the Liang Dynasty 梁武皇帝; the Saintly Master Baozhi 梁朝誌公聖師 and the Vinaya Master Sengyou 梁朝祐公律師, also of the Liang; the Chan Master Ying of Fahai Monastery 唐朝法海英公禪師 of the Tang; and the Chan Master Foyin 宋朝佛印禪師, the Chan

Upper Hall guests. After that, a sermon explaining the origin of the Water-Land ritual is given. Finally, the Upper Hall ritual ends with a statement of thirty-two wishes and veneration of the Three Treasures.[39]

The second part of the summoning program takes place in the 'Lower Hall' (*xiatang* 下堂) on the evening of the third day. After a series of routine purifications, the ritual master begins to summon the 'mundane beings' (*fan* 凡) to the Lower Hall. Compared with the Upper Hall guests, the guests for the Lower Hall are 'less enlightened' beings and come from a diversity of cultural and religious backgrounds, including the residents of the Buddhist Six Paths and indigenous Chinese deities. A full list of these beings can be found in Section 3 of Table 1. When the summoning to the Lower Hall is completed, the ritual master goes on to summon the wandering souls (*guhun* 孤魂) of those who have suffered any of the twelve types of violent deaths—everyone from royal family members to soldiers killed in battles, to the victims of pirates, and women who died in labour. These people are those whose 'physical bodies have been broken, but whose destined age has not been reached yet' (色身雖壞, 世壽未終).[40] Thus, they are 'neither taken into the subterranean bureau nor recorded by the celestial officials' (地府莫收, 天曹弗錄).[41] The summoning starts with the rite of breaking the purgatories (*po diyu* 破地獄) so that the souls can be released. This is often regarded as the climax of the evening ritual program. The verses (Skt. gāthā) of breaking the purgatories (*po diyu ji* 破地獄偈)[42] are chanted seven times or more while different mantras are used to facilitate the process. For example, there are mantras of opening the path (*kai daolu* 開道路),[43] of freeing fear (*li buwei* 離怖畏),[44] of opening the

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Master Changlu Zongze 長蘆賾公禪師, the scholar- official Su Shi 蘇軾, and the layman Yang E 楊鍔, all of the Song.

[39] FJSF 2, *X* no. 1479: 74.789c–799c.

[40] Ibid., 804a.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid., 807a. The gāthā is from the *Huayan jing* 華嚴經 [The Flower Garland Sūtra]: *T* no. 279: 10.102b.

[43] IFJSF 2, *X* no. 1479: 74 807a–b.

needle-thin throats (*kai yanhou* 開咽喉),[45] of release from karmic ties (*jie yuanjie* 解怨結).[46]

After all the wandering souls are assembled, the next step is to deliver them. The ritual master first teaches the Dharma to arouse their faith (*shuofa qixin* 說法起信).[47] Then, they confess their past transgressions and resolve to attain *bodhicitta* (*puti xin* 菩提心),[48] followed by receiving the three categories of pure precepts (*sanju jingjie* 三聚淨戒)[49] and the ten principal bodhisattva precepts (*shi zhongjie* 十重戒)[50] in sequence. Finally, all of them take refuge in the Three Treasures. The whole ritual process is accomplished through the ritual master's visualization and the chanters' recitation of spells. The ritual master concludes the ritual session of the Inner Altar by teaching the Pure Land practice of contemplation and *nian Fo*,[51] by which all wandering souls are delivered to the Western Pure Land of Amitābha Buddha.

### 1.2 Ritual programs in TDMY

Similarly, we find a three-stage preparatory – invoking/summoning – deliverance structure in TDMY's ritual programs (Table 2):

The opening of the TDMY manual tells a familiar story about the legendary origin of the ritual[52] and clarifies its name,[53] focusing particularly on the meanings of 'water' and 'land'.[54] It then proceeds to a series of preparatory works (Section 1) that include adorning and

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[44] Ibid., 807b.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid., 807b–c.

[47] FJSF 4, *X* no. 1479: 74.809a.

[48] Ibid., 810a–811a.

[49] Ibid., 811a–b.

[50] Ibid., 811c–812b. The definitive text for the ten grave precepts is the *Fanwang jing* 梵網經 [Brahmā's Net Sutra]: *T* no. 1484: 24.1004b–1005a.

[51] FJSF 6, X no. 1479: 74.819c.

[52] TDMY 1.2b–4b.

[53] TDMY, 4b–6a.

[54] Ibid., 6a–b.

TABLE 2 **TDMY Ritual Program**

| Section | Sequence | Program | Altar | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1.** | | **Preparing & Opening** | | |
| | 1.1 | Adornment & purification | | |
| | 1.2 | Invoke protective gods | | Including Piṇḍola, weather gods, city gods, etc. |
| | 1.3 | Send off documents | | Four talisman-holding emissaries |
| | 1.4 | Clear paths | | Lords of the five directions |
| | 1.5 | Empower the Yellow Path | | Yellow Path is reserved for the saintly beings 聖 only, who will arrive at the ritual arena through it. In practice, one person will carry a bridge-shape ritual prop to the summoning place to perform this rite. |
| **2.** | | **Inviting the Sagely and Mundane Beings** | Court of Inviting the Saintly Beings 請聖庭 | |
| | 2.1 | Inviting to the central seats [of the Heavenly Wheel 天輪] | Heavenly Wheel 天輪 | Those who are invited to the 'central seats' 正位 are buddhas, bodhisattvas, Buddhist saints, and Buddhist protective gods. |
| | 2.2 | Bathing the saintly beings | Bathhouse for saintly beings 聖浴 | |
| | 2.3 | Inviting celestial gods 天仙 | Heavenly Wheel 天輪 | Indian gods of 28 heavens, Chinese astral deities, the 28 lunar mansions, the Daoist Three Officials 三官. |

| Section | Sequence | Program | Altar | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 2.4 | Summoning the lower realm beings 下界 | Heavenly Wheel 天輪 | Chinese terrestrial gods, asuras, raksas. |
| | 2.5 | Bathing the celestial and terrestrial beings | Bathhouse for mundane beings 凡浴 | After bath, they are led to pay homage to the Three Treasures and escorted to take seats by sequence |
| | 2.6 | Lamp offering | Heavenly Wheel 天輪 | Lamps are lit and presented ritually to each of the assembly. |
| **3.** | | **Empowering altars** | | Altars are ritually empowered by sequence, starting with the Precept Altar of Five Directions 五方戒壇 (i.e., Sagely Altar of the Dharma Realm 法界聖壇), Heavenly Wheel 天輪, Earthly Wheel 地輪, etc. These steps are in preparation for the next ritual of summoning the purgatorial beings. |
| **4.** | | **Breaking purgatory and summoning purgatorial beings** | | No abodes in altar |
| | 4.1 | Empowering the black path 黑道 | | Black Path is reserved for purgatorial beings to arrive at the ritual arena. The ritual prop is the same as the one used for symbolizing the Yellow Path. |
| | 4.2 | Invoking the Ten Kings | Earthly Wheel 地輪 | |
| | 4.3 | Summoning all purgatorial beings 地獄受苦有情 | | |
| | 4.4 | Summoning all deceased souls 亡靈 | | |

| Section | Sequence | Program | Altar | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 4.5 | Summoning all past human leaders 往古人倫 | | Including past rulers, kings, emperors and their consort, non-Buddhist thinkers. |
| | 4.6 | Summoning Face-burning Demon King 面然鬼王 and all wandering souls 孤魂 | | |
| | 4.7 | Bathing the wandering souls | Bathhouse for wandering souls | The bathhouse is divided between genders: male and female. |
| | 4.8 | Wandering souls pay homage to the Three Treasures | | After bath, they are led to pass the golden bridge to the seats of the sagely beings (i.e., Heavenly Wheel) and pay homage. |
| | 4.9 | Food offering 施食, repentant 召罪懺悔, arouse faith 發菩提心 and receive precepts 受戒 | Unimpeded Mountain 無礙山 (i.e., Merit Mountain 功德山) | |
| **5.** | | **Concluding** | | |
| | 5.1 | Sending off the saintly and mundane beings | | |
| | 5.2 | Burning food and paper money after midnight | | |


FIG. 1 Diagram of Heavenly Wheel: This altar is created by making a circular mound of earth on the ground, using three layers of soil or earthworks. Images or tablets of the upper eight deities are placed on top of the mound, and a multi-coloured pavilion is built above them. Source: 'Tanchang shi' 壇場式, TDMY.

purifying the altars, summoning protective gods, sending off ritual documents, and clearing the paths for the ensuing arrivals of ritual guests. The most important sequence in this preparatory section is the rite of empowering the Yellow Path (*huangdao* 黃道),[55] which is reserved exclusively for the saintly beings (*sheng* 聖). When ready, the invoking and summoning session begins (Section 2).

It starts with invoking the saintly beings, which include all buddhas, all bodhisattvas, ten *rāja*s, five hundred arhats, and Buddhist protective gods. They each have an abode at the centre of the 'Heavenly Wheel' (*tianlun* 天輪) altar (Figure 1). The second round of invoking is directed at the 'mundane beings' (*fan* 凡), including non-Buddhist deities, such as Indian and Chinese celestial and terres-

[55] TDMY, 38a.

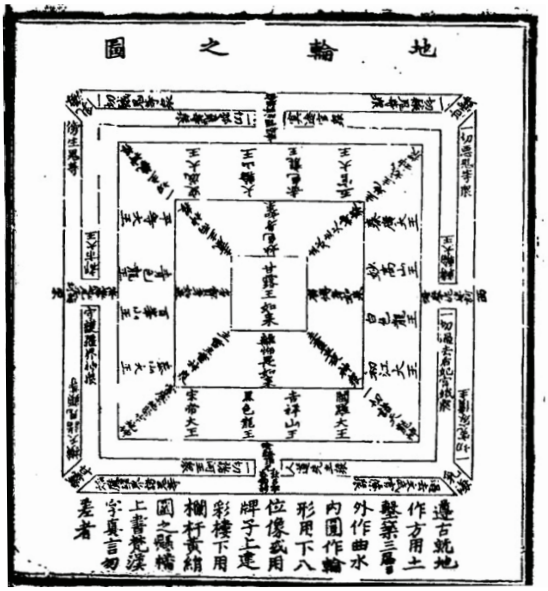


FIG. 2 Diagram of Earthly Wheel: The altar is constructed with concentric squares and its building method is similar to the Heavenly Wheel. The different shapes of the Heavenly and Earthly Wheel altars represent the traditional Chinese belief that heaven is round and earth is square. Source: 'Tanchang shi' 壇場式, TDMY.

trial gods, and lesser Buddhist gods, such as asuras and raksas. They are also seated in the Heavenly Wheel altar, but on the periphery. The assemblies of the saintly and the mundane beings are led to bathe at separate bathhouses before lamps are lit and presented to them. After that, the ritual master empowers all the altars within the ritual arena (Section 3) to prepare for the ensuing rite of summoning and delivering the souls of the dead, which is the most important part of the whole ritual. To get ready for this, the Black Path (*heidao* 黑道) is empowered to welcome the arrival of the souls (Section 4). A counterpart of the Yellow Path, the Black Path is used by the purgatorial beings to enter the ritual arena. Before they can arrive, a rite of breaking the purgatories is required to open the doors for them. The Ten Kings of the purgatories, along with their officiants, are summoned to take seats at the centre of the 'Earthly Wheel' (*dilun* 地輪) altar (Figure 2). This is followed by the summoning of the pur-

gatorial beings, the Face-burning Demon King (*Mianran guiwang* 面燃鬼王), and all wandering souls. Once they have arrived, they are led to bathe in a bathhouse divided by gender. After the bathing is complete, they are ready for the next transformative session. During this session, the souls of the dead are offered food and guided to confess their past transgressions, which prepares them to arouse Buddhist faith and receive precepts. These rites are performed before the altar known as the 'Unimpeded Mountain' (*Wuai shan* 無礙山), symbolizing that they will obtain unobstructed and limitless merits, ultimately leading them to their deliverance.

The ritual concludes with sending off both the saintly and the mundane beings. At midnight, food offerings and paper money are burned, marking the completion of the entire ritual ceremony (Section 5).

When comparing the two ritual programs outlined above, both FJSF and TDMY follow a three-stage liturgical structure: Preparatory and Opening – Invoking the Saintly and Mundane Beings – Summoning and Delivering the Souls of the Dead. However, each features a distinctive concluding session: the FJSF ritual program emphasizes Pure Land contemplation and *nian Fo* practices, while the TDMY concludes the ritual with a big banquet and the burning of paper money. These different ritual endings suggest distinct performative styles and underlying intentions of the compilers. Let us now proceed to compare their ritual configurations and performance details in the next section.

## 2. The Liturgical Configurations

### 2.1 Altar Construction in FJSF/*Huiben*

As discussed in the previous section, the FJSF ritual clearly distinguishes between the Inner and Outer Altars, and this dichotomous pattern is further reflected in the spatial arrangement of the Inner Altar itself. During the FJSF's invoking session, the saintly and mundane beings are divided and led to take seats in two separate 'halls' (*tang* 堂): the Upper Hall (*shangtang* 上堂) and the Lower Hall (*xiatang* 下堂). This bipartite arrangement of the Upper and Lower halls

was common as early as the Song Dynasty.[56] It was further elaborated in the *Huiben* in which a graphic layout of the Inner Altar (Figure 3) was provided.

As shown in the layout above, the space of the Inner Altar is divided into four sections. The narrow horizontal section at the top is designated for auxiliary services, such as preparing food and ritual equipment, and it also accommodates most of the ritual patrons. The three vertical sections, separated by walls, serve as the main areas for ritual performance. The central section is the heart of the space, where most of the ritual devices, including the offering table, incense burners, and rush cushions, are placed. Access to this area is restricted to the following individuals: the primary ritual master (*fazhu* 法主), the main chanter (*biaobai* 表白), the assisting chanter (*biaozhu* 表助), and a few representatives of the ritual patrons (*zhaizhu* 齋主). Two doors on either side of the central section provide access to the side sections.

Although the physical ritual space is divided into four sections, the 'imagined' space of the Inner Altar follows the bipartite division between the Upper and Lower halls, as we discussed earlier. These imagined ritual spaces are not physically separate rooms but are represented by the positions where the seats, in the form of placards, for these invisible guests are placed. According to the layout, the divine seats are placed against the walls of the three vertical sections. In most cases, they are represented by placards with scroll paintings hung above them.[57] There are twenty-three categories of seats in total, with seats one to ten in the Upper Hall and seats eleven to twenty-three in the Lower Hall. Each seat includes ten abodes for ten invisible guests. The division between the 'Upper' and 'Lower' halls is based on the level of enlightenment of the Buddhist pantheon. The Upper Hall is reserved for those considered 'more enlightened', such as the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, while the Lower Hall is for beings considered 'less enlightened', including Buddhist deities of lower rankings and non-Buddhist deities. Wandering souls (*guhun* 孤魂), however, have no seats in either hall.

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[56] SSTL, 115a24; 116b–118b.

[57] Stevenson, 'Text, Image, and Transformation'.

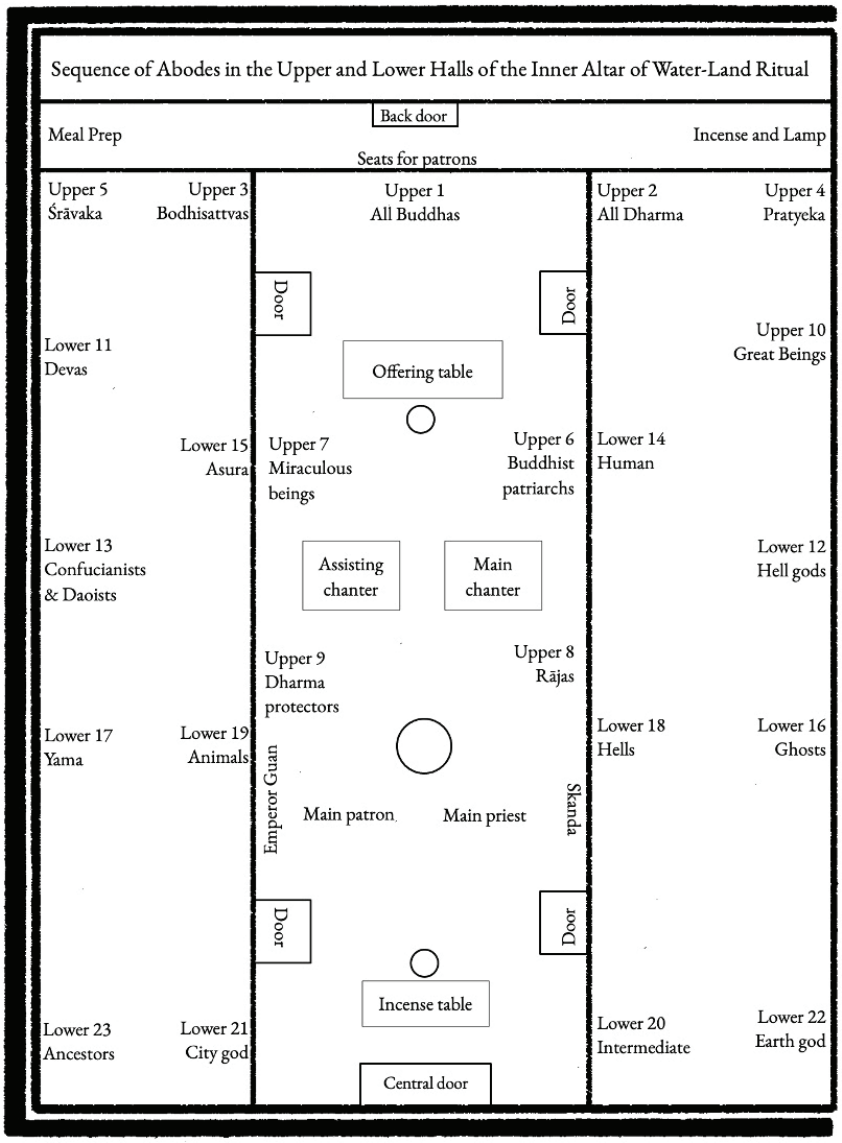


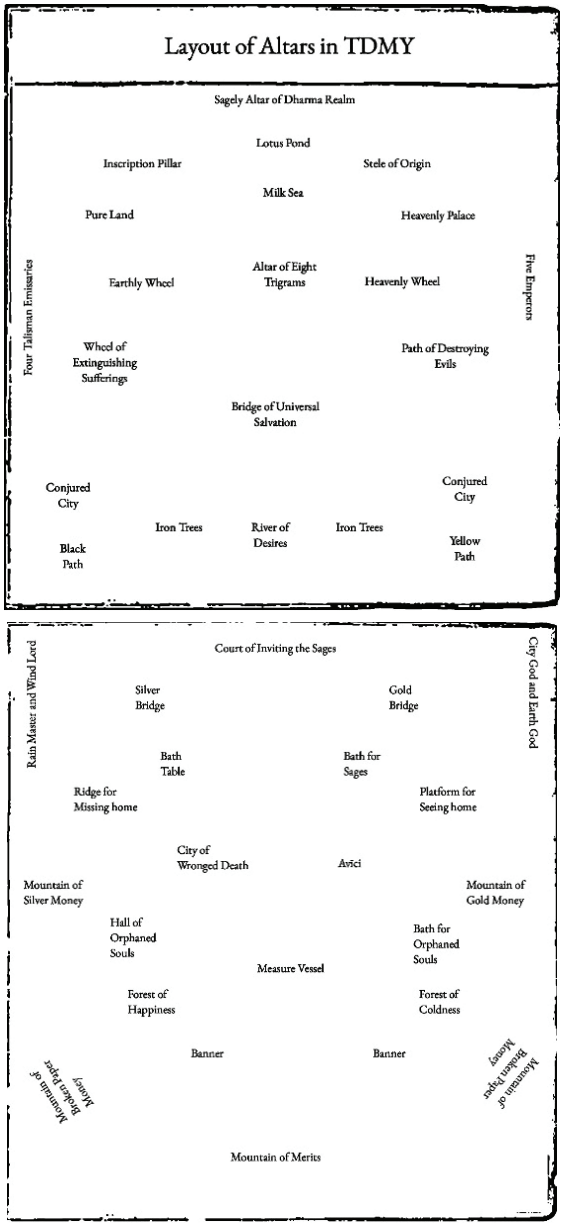

FIG. 3 Inner Altar (*neitan* 內壇): This is the central place where the core rites of the Shuilu ritual take place as prescribed in the FJSF manual. The construction follows a tripartite division. It is the most sacred space in which all the saintly and mundane beings are present throughout the ritual performance. Made and translated by the author based on the image in the *Shuilu yigui huiben* 水陸儀軌會本 [Synthetic Manual of Water-Land Rite].

## 2.2 Altar Construction in TDMY

TDMY presents a Water-Land ritual composed of a series of correlated rites performed at various altars. The fascicle of *Tantu shi* 壇圖式 [Altars and Diagrams] in the manual offers a visual guide on how to construct these altars. Let us begin by examining the layout of the different altars within TDMY's ritual space (Figure 4):

Unlike the sectional layout of the ritual space in the FJSF manual, the ritual space in TDMY features an encircling design. Positioned along the outer circle are protective deities, including the weather gods, the gods of the five directions, and local city and earth gods, as well as auxiliary ritual deities like the four talisman-holding messengers. Inside, there are a variety of altars, including Lotus Pond 蓮池, Milk Sea 乳海, Altar of the Eight-trigrams 八卦壇, Bridge of Universal Salvation 普度橋, Heavenly Wheel 天輪, Earthly Wheel 地輪, Tower of Heavenly Palace 天宮樓, Tower of Pure Land 淨土樓, Wheel of Extinguishing Suffering 息苦輪, Altar of Destroying the Evil Existence 滅惡趣壇, Transformation City 化城, Black Path 黑道, Yellow Path 黃道, Iron Trees 鐵樹, River of Desires 愛河, Court of Inviting the Sages 請聖庭, Golden Bridge 金橋, Silver Bridge 銀橋, Bathhouse for the Sages 聖浴, Bathhouse for the Mundane 凡浴, Ridge of Missing Home 思鄉嶺, Platform of Reviewing Hometown 望鄉台, City of Wronged Dead 枉死城, Avīci 無間獄, Golden Money Mountain 金錢山, Silver Money Mountain 銀錢山, Hall of Orphaned Souls 孤魂堂, Bathhouse for Orphaned Souls 孤魂浴室, Forest of Happiness 快活林, Forest of Coldness 寒林, Mountain of Broken Money 破錢山, and Mountain of Merits 功德山. Based on their names alone, many of these altars appear to be modeled on a folkloric imagining of the world beyond. Moreover, in contrast to the ritual space of the FJSF, which emphasizes a strict sacred hierarchy, the arrangement of altars in TDMY reflects a concern for their functional roles. Judging from the pictures in the text, the overall layout of the ritual space does not imply any physical separation between the altars, allowing for greater fluidity of movement between them.

When examining each altar individually, the encircling style becomes even more evident. For example, one of the main altars (Figure 5) is called the Saintly Altar of the Dharma Realms (*Fajie shengtan*




**FIGS. 4 A AND B** Overview of the Ritual Space: This is an overview of the layout of altars as prescribed in the TDMY manual. The layout features an encircling design. Made and translated by the author based on the image in the 'Tanchang shi 壇場式,' TDMY.

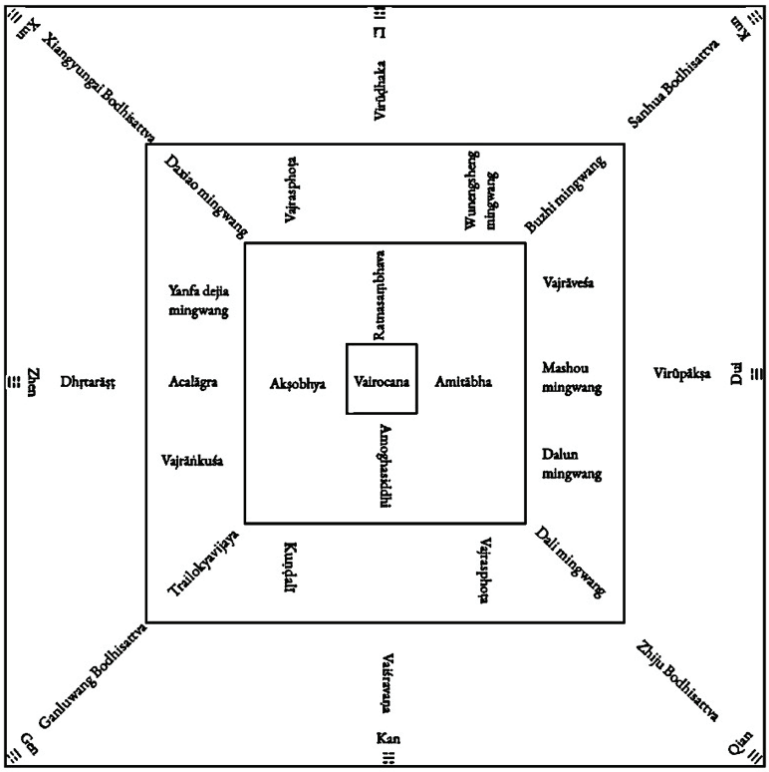



FIG. 5 Saintly Altar of the Dharma Realms (*Fajie shengtan* 法界聖壇): This is the main altar of the Shuilu ritual as prescribed in the TDMY manual. This altar is constructed in resemblance to a maṇḍala with blending elements from non-Buddhist elements. Source: Made and translated by the author based on the image in the 'Tanchang shi' 壇場式, TDMY.

法界聖壇), also known as the Precept Altar of the Five Directions (*Wufang jietan* 五方戒壇). The textual description of this altar straightforwardly calls it *mannaluo* 曼拏囉;[58] that is, a maṇḍala, a symbolic diagram used specifically in Esoteric rituals. However, when looking closely, it's evident that the arrangement of this altar incorporates many elements of traditional Chinese cosmology:

[58] TDMY 1.41b.

> The altar extends to the three realms and its colour corresponds to the five directions. Therefore, because Goumang comes first, Taigao should be placed in the position of *jiayi*. Because Zhurong is on the right, Yan Di should be placed in the palace of *bingding*. Because Zhuanxu is in charge of time, Xuanming governs solemn matters [i.e., the ritual]. Because Rushou assists [governing], Shaohao dwells in the palace of Nine *Yang*. Because Lilian ascended the throne, yellow is in the middle. Auspicious colours appear in the five directions; saintly beings are gathered from the four directions on the upper and lower levels. 壇敷三界, 色應五方. 是以句芒在先, 太皞居甲乙之位; 祝融垂右, 炎帝列丙丁之宮; 顓頊臨時, 玄冥主肅穆之事; 蓐收輔弼, 少皞處九陽之宮. 離籠即位, 黃色居中. 吉祥彩映現於五方, 集聖賢四維於上下.[59]

Goumang, Zhurong, Rushou, Xuanming, and Lilian (i.e., *Houtu* 后土) are the names of the gods of the Chinese Five Phases (*wuxing* 五行) and the corresponding five directions. *Jiayi* and *bingding* are the sexagenary names for the directions. Furthermore, if looking closely at the third tier of the altar, we notice that there are eight trigrams: *Qian* (乾 ☰), *Kun* (坤 ☷), *Xun* (巽 ☴), *Kan* (坎 ☵), *Li* (離 ☲), *Zhen* (震 ☳), *Dui* (兌 ☱), and *Gen* (艮 ☶). The display of eight trigrams and the altar with three tiers closely resemble the altar for the Daoist *Huanglu zhai* 黃籙齋 (see, *Huanglu zhai tan*, Figure 6),[60] which was the most typical altar construction used in medieval

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[59] TDMY 2.25b.

[60] *Licheng yi*, HY 508, 384a–386b. The *Huanglu zhai* (Yellow Register Retreat) is a postmortem ritual that aims at delivering the souls of the dead by means of 'uprooting the sins and transgressions of ancestors of up to nine generations' (拔九祖罪根). With its origin in the Old Lingbao scriptures (*gu lingbao jing* 古靈寶經), the full maturation of the *Huanglu zhai* as an independent liturgy was not to take shape until Du Guangting 杜光庭 (850–933) compiled the *Taishang Huanglu zhaiyi* 太上黃籙齋儀 [Liturgical Manual for the Yellow Register Retreat]. After that, the *Huanglu zhai* became a systematically organized and widely practiced liturgy that accommodated a great variety of needs, including state peace and prosperity, repose for the dead, salvation of restless spirits, exor-

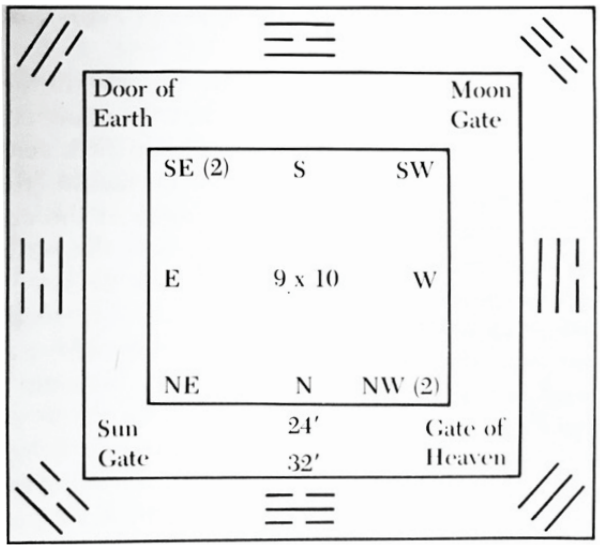


FIG. 6 Altar for the Yellow Register Retreat (Huanglu zhai tan 黃籙齋壇): This is the altar used in the Daoist ritual known as the Yellow Register Retreat (Huanglu zhai 黃籙齋). Source: Lagerwey, *Taoist Ritual*, 35.

Daoist rituals.[61] In Daoist ritual performances, an altar serves as a visual representation of the universe, encompassing concepts of both time and space. It is a common practice to use the eight trigrams to

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cism of ghosts and demons, and so on. During its transmission throughout the following centuries, the *Huanglu zhai tan* continued to absorb and synthesize new ritual developments. When it came to Jiang Shuyu 蔣叔與 (1162–1223), who compiled the *Wushang huanglu dazhai lichengyi* 無上黃籙大齋立成儀 [Standardized Rituals of the Supreme Yellow Register Retreat], the *Huanglu zhai* had already become a truly comprehensive liturgy with a soteriological goal of universal salvation—delivering the souls of the dead *en masse* regardless of age, gender, or social status, thus becoming a competitor of the Buddhist Water-Land ritual. I conducted a comparative study of these two rituals in my doctoral dissertation, Liu, 'The Unimpeded Passage'. For other studies on the two rituals, see Davis, *Society and Supernatural in Song China*, 227–41.

[61] Lagerwey, *Taoist Ritual*, 35. Huang, *Picturing the True Form*, 193–98.

manifest the cosmological directions in Daoist rituals.[62]

Despite the evident presence of Daoist elements, the deities stationed on this altar are of Buddhist origins, most of which are especially connected with the Esoteric Buddhist tradition. In the centre is Dari rulai 大日如來 (Skt. Mahāvairocana Tathāgata). Surrounding him on the first tier are four tathāgatas: Chengjiu rulai 成就如來 (Amoghasiddhi/Śākyamuni), Wuliangshou rulai 無量壽如來 (Amitābha), Baosheng rulai 寶生如來 (Ratnasaṃbhava), and Achu rulai 阿閦如來 (Akṣobhya Tathāgata). They are known as a group of five buddhas who are usually referred to as the Wuzhi Rulai 五智如來 (five *dhyāni-buddha*s/Wisdom-Tathāgatas). They belong to the Jingang jie 金剛界 (Vajradhātu) and are seen in the 'Perfected Body Assembly' (*Chengshen hui* 成身會), the first and central group in the nine assemblies that comprise the Jinggang jie maṇḍala (Vajradhātu-maṇḍala 金剛界曼荼羅). The second tier of the altar is composed of the four gathering bodhisattvas (Sishe pusa 四攝菩薩), which include Jinganggou pusa 金剛鉤菩薩 (Vajrāṅkuśa); Jingangsuo pusa 金剛索菩薩 (Vajrapâśa), Jingangsuo pusa 金剛锁菩薩 (Vajrasphoṭa), and Jingangling pusa 金剛鈴菩薩 (Vajrāveśa), whose primary work is to convert the living, and the ten wrathful wise kings (Mingwang 明王, *vidyārāja*). The third tier of the altar is occupied by the four deva kings, namely Chiguo tianwang 持國天王 (Dhṛtarāṣṭra King), Zengzhang tianwang 增長天王 (Virūḍhaka), Guangmu tianwang 廣目天王 (Virūpākṣa), and Duowen tianwang 多聞天王 (Vaiśravaṇa), and the four bodhisattvas who are in charge of flowers, nectar, fragrance, and lamps.

In summary, the altar arrangement and positioning of the central

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[62] Huang, *Picturing the True Form*, 192. The adoption of the eight trigrams into Buddhism appeared as early as the fifth century on several Buddhist stupas crafted under the Northern Liang regime 北涼 (397–439), a non-Chinese state founded by a Xiongnu descendent ruler Juqu Mengxun 沮渠蒙遜 (368–433). The eight trigrams on the Northern Liang stūpas are, according to Eugene Wang, 'symptomatic of the culture steeped in the learning of the Book of Changes and the Yin-Yang occult derived from it'. See, Wang, 'What do Trigrams Have to Do with Buddhas?'.

deities closely resemble those found in the Jinggang jie maṇḍala, a significant realm in Esoteric Buddhism. However, traditional Chinese elements, such as the gods of the five directions and the eight trigrams, have also been integrated, reflecting a blend of influences.

Beyond this central altar, other altars also adopted a centripetal maṇḍala style, with some constructed in concentric circles and others in concentric squares. For example, the altars of the Heavenly and Earthly Wheels (Figures 1 and 2) are described as being constructed in the following manner:

> A heavenly wheel is created by making a circular mound of earth on the ground, using three layers of soil or earthworks. A moat is built around the outside, and a wheel shape is formed on the inside. Images or plaques of the upper eight deities are placed on top of the mound, and a multi-coloured pavilion is built above them. Below, a railing is used, surrounded by a green curtain. Additionally, use jade-coloured flags with Sanskrit mantras written on them, and do not change the true words of the mantra. 天輪者, 就地作圓, 用土墼或土築三層. 外作曲水, 內作輪形. 用上八位像或牌子上建彩樓, 下用欄杆, 青涓圍之. 又用玉色幡子, 上書梵漢字真言勿差者.[63]

The method of constructing the Earthly Wheel altar resembles that of the Heavenly Wheel with the primary difference being that the Earthly Wheel's outer shape is square rather than circular. This distinction clearly reflects the indigenous Chinese cosmological notion that depicts heaven as round and the earth as square (天圓地方). Other centripetal altars include the Wheel of Extinguishing Suffering (*Xiku lun* 息苦輪, Figure 7), Lotus Pond (*Lian chi* 蓮池, Figure 8), Path of Destroying Evils (*Mie'e qu* 滅惡趣, Figure 9), Altar of Breaking the Purgatories (*Po diyu tan* 破地獄壇, Figure 10), and Altar of Medicine Buddha Assembly (*Yaoshi hui tan* 藥師會壇, Figure 11).

At the end of the 'Tantu shi' section, there is a list of the tablets and images (*paixiang* 牌像) corresponding to a total of one hundred

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[63] TDMY, 'Tantu shi', 4a.


FIG. 7 Diagram of Extinguishing Suffering Wheel: This altar is divided into sixteen sections, with each section hosting an image or a tablet of a bodhisattva. Source: 'Tanchang shi' 壇場式, TDMY.


FIG. 8 Diagram of Lotus Pond: This altar is constructed in the shape of wheel, with eight lotus flowers on the outer circle and the center divided into ten seats. Each seat hosts an image or a tablet of the Amitabha Buddha and the nine grades of birth in the Pure Land. Source: 'Tanchang shi' 壇場式, TDMY.


FIG. 9 Diagram of Diminishing Evil Paths: This altar is constructed in the shape of a wheel, divided into eight sections, with each section hosting an image or a tablet of eight Tathāgatas. Source: 'Tanchang shi' 壇場式, TDMY.

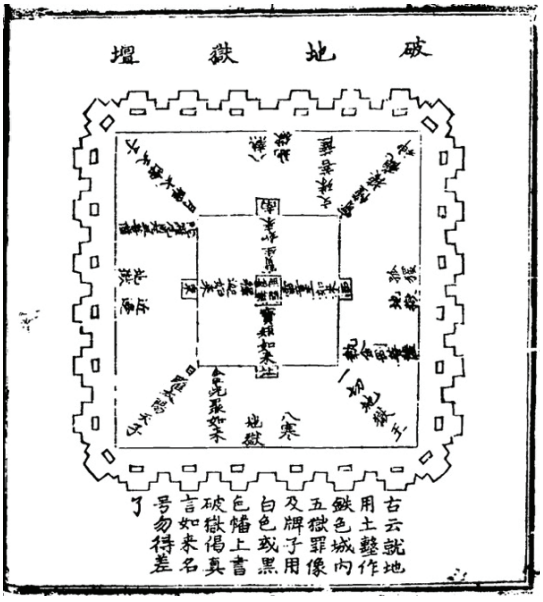


FIG. 10 Altar of Breaking the Earthly Prisons: This is the altar where the rituals of invoking and delivering the souls of the dead are performed. Source: 'Tanchang shi' 壇場式, TDMY.

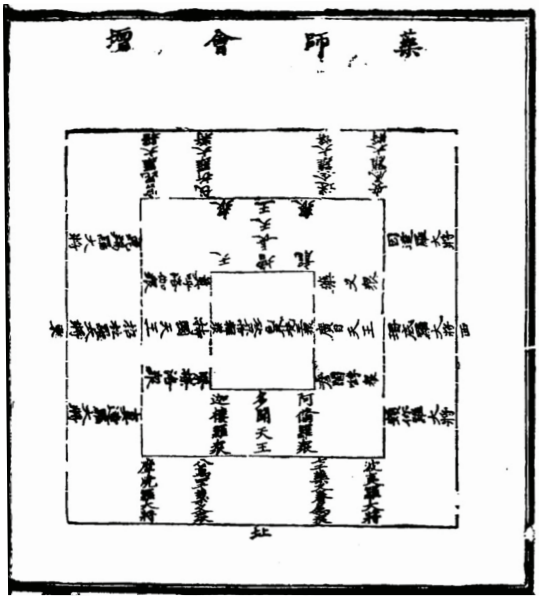

FIG. 11 Altar of Medicine Buddha Assembly: This altar is dedicated to the Medicine Buddha, whose belief is part of the Pure Land tradition. Source: 'Tanchang shi' 壇場式, TDMY.

and twenty seats, which are evenly divided into left and right categories.[64] The seats in the left category are designated for celestial gods, including the divine beings in the Buddhist heavens, directional guardian gods, Daoist celestial gods, constellation gods, the Daoist Three Officers, Daoist divine judges, as well as all souls of deceased members of royal families and common people. The seats in the right category are allocated to terrestrial and subterraneous deities, such as mountain gods, water dragon kings, city and earth gods, the Ten Kings of the underworld, as well as all denizens of the purgatories and the souls of those who suffered unfortunate deaths. In recent years, scholars have turned their attention to the large number of extant Water-Land paintings and are conducting ongoing research. Studies have found that the complete set of Water-Land paintings preserved at Baoning si 寶寧寺 in Shanxi, which dates back to the

[64] Bloom has provided a translation of the list, see Bloom, 'Descent of the Deities', 455–56.

Ming and Qing dynasties, corresponds closely to the distribution of the *paixiang* mentioned here. Although the set of Water-Land paintings at Baoning si is larger—comprising one hundred and thirty-six scrolls—these paintings are similarly divided into 'left' and 'right' categories,[65] and this classification aligns with the categorization of the one hundred and twenty *paixiang* in the TDMY manual. Despite following a similar bipartite division, TDMY employed a distinct classification system for their 'guests' compared to the classification of 'guests' in FJSF, which is primarily founded on their respective roles and areas of jurisdiction, rather than on their level of enlightenment.

### 2.3 Ritual Performance in the TDMY Manual

In addition to standard Buddhist ritual paraphernalia, such as incense burners, lamps, banners, and musical instruments, the TDMY ritual employs a diverse range of props believed to enhance the ritual's performative aspects. These props include elements of traditional Chinese architecture, such as terraces, bridges, and archways, which vividly depict scenes of the underworld. For example, the Platform of Reviewing Hometown (*Wangxiang tai* 望鄉台, Figure 12) and Ridge of Missing Home (*Sixiang ling* 思鄉嶺, Figure 13) use a high terrace to portray the scene in which the dead, escorted by an underworld soldier, climb the structure. Additionally, bridges are used as props to represent the paths through which both invisible guests and real-world ritual participants move within the ritual space (Figures 14 and 15).

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[65] Wu, 'Shanxi Youyu Baoning si Shuilu hua'. Kong, 'Shanxi Youyu Baoning si Shuilu hua tanjiu'. Liu, 'Ming dai Shanxi diqu shuilu fahui tu yanjiu'. The corpus of Water-Land paintings at Baoning si is supplemented by a sizable collection of murals and scrolls both in China and in museum collections globally. However, due to limitations of scope, these additional artworks will not be addressed in this paper. While numerous studies have been devoted to these pieces, there remains a need for further investigation into the correlation between the visual representations and the associated ritual texts.

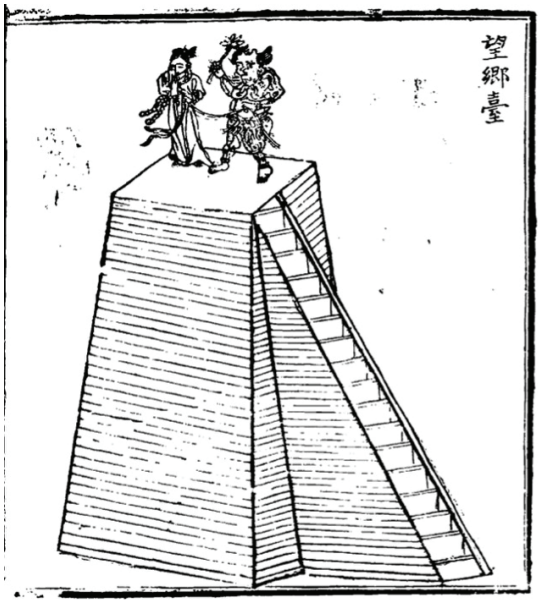


FIG. 12 Platform of Reviewing Hometown: This image portrays the soul of the deceased being escorted by an underworld soldier as they ascend a high platform. From there, the soul gazes back at their hometown in the realm of the living. Source: 'Tanchang shi' 壇場式, TDMY.


FIG. 13 Range of Missing Hometown: This image depicts two deceased souls, one of them a child, being escorted by an underworld soldier as they climb a mountain. From there, the souls look back at their hometown in the realm of the living. Source: 'Tanchang shi' 壇場式, TDMY.

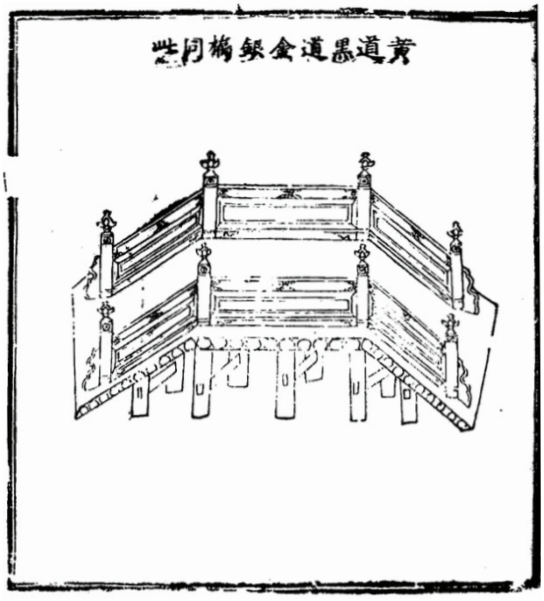


FIG. 14 Bridge pathways: This is an image of the 'bridge' prop used in various scenes during the Shuilu ritual. This prop symbolizes the 'Yellow Path', 'Black Path', 'Golden Bridge', and 'Silver Bridge'. Source: 'Tanchang shi' 壇場式, TDMY.


FIG. 15 Bridge of Universal Salvation: This image portrays the souls of the deceased being led towards salvation, crossing a bridge over the river of desires. Source: 'Tanchang shi 壇場式,' TDMY.

As discussed earlier in TDMY's ritual programs, two distinct 'paths' are used to welcome the guests: the Yellow Path, reserved for the saintly and mundane beings, and the Black Path, designated for the souls of the dead and wandering spirits. During the actual ritual performance, a bridge-shaped prop represents these paths and is moved to the appropriate position when needed.[66] Moreover, the ritual master often leads purified souls of the dead to pay homage to the Three Treasures, requiring them to cross the Golden or Silver Bridges to traverse different ritual arenas. The bridge-shaped prop is used here in a similar manner as in the path rituals.[67] Unfortunately, the actual performance of the TDMY ritual is no longer available to us, as it has already been phased out from temple practice. Only a few descriptive words scattered throughout the manual hint at the mobility of these props. However, studies of contemporary local postmortem rituals in southern and southwestern regions of China indicate that this theatrical style of the Water-Land ritual has been fully integrated into local folklore performances, particularly in adaptations of the *Xiyou ji* 西遊記 [Journey to the West], a popular Ming Dynasty novel.[68] In Xie Jian's analysis of a local ritual manual titled the 'Ritual of the Unjust Death Bureau' (*Wangfu ke* 枉府科), a text circulated in modern-day southeastern Guangxi 廣西, we learned about a unique performance known as the 'universal salvation ritual theater' (*pudu yishi ju* 普度儀式劇). This performance depicts a Tang Dynasty (618–907) monk (*Tang seng* 唐僧), who, following the edicts of Emperor Taizong 太宗 (r. 598–649), initiates the Water-Land Dharma Assembly to deliver the souls of the dead. With the assistance of Guanyin 觀音, he receives a cassock and a staff, and with the help of the Daoist deity Taibai Jinxing 太白金星, he subdues Sun Wukong 孫悟空, Zhu Bajie 豬八戒, and Sha Jing 沙精. Their journey takes them through various locations before finally reaching the destination where they obtained the true Buddhist teachings. In the opening part of the ritual theater, deities of the three realms (i.e.,

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66 TDMY 1. 36b: 舉黃道贊, 用一人持黃道至請佛處作法.

67 TDMY 3. 14b: 度過金橋, 大眾至聖前, 孤魂恭聖, 次第作法.

68 Xie, 'Xiyou qujing gushi yu duwangyi'.

Heaven, Earth, and Water) are invoked to descend and, following the Buddha's teaching, hold the retreat for delivering the souls and guard the *Tiandi Jinshan mingyang Shuilu bao'en daochang* 天地金山冥陽水陸報恩道場 (Repaying Gratitude Water-Land Ritual of Mount Jin for [Beings of] Heaven and Earth, This World and the Netherworld). Afterward, the ritual master sends messengers to invite the Five Heavenly Kings of Buddhism 五方天王 (the Eastern Heavenly King of Holding the Nation 東方持國天王, the Southern Heavenly King of Growth 南方增長天王, the Western Heavenly King of Broad Sight 西方廣目天王, the Northern Heavenly King of Hearing 北方多聞天王, and the Central Heavenly King of Great Brahma 中央大梵天王) to descend upon the arena, thus completing the altar-opening process. During the performance, different adventure locations are represented by props made with bamboo or wood sticks and red or white paper, with the troupe moving from one to another according to the plot. Although modern-day local postmortem rituals and the Water-Land ritual prescribed in the TDMY manual have diverged significantly in content and form, they share a core of theatrical elements. This shared theatricality is likely one reason why, even though the TDMY ritual has faded from Buddhist temple practices, it has been incorporated into the local folk ritual theater.

### 2.4 Ritual Performance in FJSF/Huiben

The theatrical style of TDMY appears to have been a significant factor in the widespread popularity of its rituals. Its eclectic mix of diverse religious elements (such as Esoteric, Daoist) and immersive theatrical performance style made it well-received among the populace. In contrast, the FJSF manual features a more orderly and hierarchical performance, with restricted access to certain ritual spaces and strict rules for practitioners and participants. According to the Ming Buddhist master Ouyi Zhixu 藕益智旭 (1599–1655), strict guidelines should be followed for entrance into the Inner Altar:

> In every establishment of the protective enclosure of the rituals, aside from the one main priest, two assistant chanting priests, a representative of the patrons, and five assistant priests tending to the incense

> and lamps, all other individuals are restricted to viewing and paying respects outside the enclosure, and are not permitted to enter the Inner Altar. Those who do enter and exit the Inner Altar must bathe and change their clothes, hence the name 'offering and worship according to the standard'. This is in contrast to the practices of many other regions, where sacred images are indiscriminately displayed, allowing crowds of men and women to wander through and observe, ultimately leading to the defilement of the dignified rites by those who indulge in drinking alcohol, eating meat, chewing tobacco,[69] and eating garlic. 每設供結界密護, 除主壇一人、表白二人、齋主一人、香燈五人外, 余人例於幕外瞻禮, 不得入內壇. 壇內人出入, 必皆易衣澡浴, 所以得名如法供養. 不似諸方濫張聖像, 任男女雜沓游觀, 致使飲酒食肉、吞煙啖蒜之人, 皆得熏穢尊儀也.[70]

Zhixu's proposal to enforce strict segregation of ritual space between the 'pure' and 'polluted' is implemented in the *Huiben*, the later amplification of the FJSF manual, which explains,

> The protective enclosure is surrounded by the presence of heavenly beings, and it should be treated with reverence and awe. It is necessary to assign a trustworthy and pure individual to carefully guard and prevent unauthorized people from entering and defiling the pure boundaries. 此結界處天神森布. 宜加敬畏. 須預囑一謹信淨人嚴為守護. 勿令雜人出入. 汙犯淨界.[71]

Additionally, the FJSF manual features a more traditional and less theatrical approach to ritual props. Detailed instructions for preparing ritual paraphernalia can be found in the *Huiben*, with the fourth volume containing instructions that categorize ritual devices into twelve 'gates' (*men* 門).[72] In the 'Gate of Ritual Supplies' (*Yongju men*

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[69] Tobacco arrived in China through European ships in the mid-sixteenth century. It was first regarded as a healing herb. See Benedict, *Golden-Silk Smoke*.

[70] See Ouyi Zhixu's 'Shuilu dazhai shu'.

[71] *Huiben* 1.17.

[72] The twelve categories are: 'Gate of the Halls' (*Tangsi men* 堂司門), 'Gate of

用具門), various ritual devices are specified with precise quantities. These include both Buddhist-specific and more general ritual devices. For instance, a set of seventy-three scrolls of the Water-Land painting is required. The chime stone (*qing* 磬) and wooden fish[73] are to be used for chanting Buddhist scriptures. Other Buddhist ritual items include the Vairocana Cap (*Pilu mao* 毗盧帽),[74] Buddhist rosaries, and *kāsāya*s (*zuyi* 祖衣). The non-Buddhist ritual supplies are more general and include items like incense burners, candle stands, lamps, vases, water basins, teapots, fire tongs, cushions, and curtains.[75] Distinctively non-Buddhist ritual devices can be found in the 'Gate of Paper Objects' (*Zhizha men* 紙紮門). The entire section is provided below:

> For the Upper Hall [ritual], make 105 Buddhist robes from yellow paper. For the Lower Hall [ritual], use high-quality paper to make 1,300 sets of skirts, tops, and trousers. Make 36 large paper flowers for decorating the edges of the seats. Make 300 small multicolored paper flowers with iron wire stems, each two inches long, for decorating the colourful silk rolls. Additionally, make 200 small flowers without stems for scattering in the Upper and Lower Halls and during the bathing ritual. Craft a banner officer with pink face and red beard, wearing armor, with the right hand on the waist and the left hand holding a banner in front of the altar. For issuing talismans, craft four talisman officers with horses: 1) Heavenly realm swift

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Setting Up' (*Pushe men* 鋪設門), 'Gate of Penance and Chanting' (*Jingchan men* 經懺門), 'Gate of Incense and Lamp' (*Xiangdeng men* 香燈門), 'Gate of Music Instruments' (*Guba men* 鼓鈸門), 'Gate of Paper Objects' (*Zhizha men* 紙紮門), 'Gate of Paper' (*Zhizhang men* 紙張門), 'Gate of Offerings' (*Zhaigong men* 齋供門), 'Gate of Making Offerings' (*Gongshi men* 供事門), 'Gate of Miscellaneous Affairs' (*Zawu men* 雜務門), 'Gate of Ritual Supplies' (*Yongju men* 用具門), and 'Gate of Documents' (*Shuji men* 書記門).

[73] *Huiben* 4.536.

[74] A kind of hat with an embroidered image of Vairocana Buddha worn by the main ritual master during the ritual of 'Releasing the Flaming Mouth' (*Fang yankou* 放焰口).

[75] *Huiben*, 4.20–21.

messenger holding a talisman, red face, black beard, green robe, and red horse. 2) Sky-traveling swift messenger holding a talisman, blue face, red beard, yellow robe, and blue horse. 3) Earth-traveling swift messenger holding a talisman, white face, black beard, red robe, and yellow horse. 4) Underworld swift messenger holding a talisman, black face, black beard, blue robe, and black horse. For the amnesty report, craft a swift messenger of the Brahma and Indra Heavens with a white face, no beard, a blue flower-patterned robe, and a white horse. For sending judgement, craft five judgment officers with horses: 1) Judgment officer of the Heavenly Virtue Department, white face, black beard, red robe, and yellow horse. 2) Judgment officer of the Middle Realm Virtue Department, black face, black beard, blue robe, and black horse. 3) Judgment officer of the Underworld Virtue Department, white face, black beard, light blue robe, and white horse. 4) Upper Hall officer who distributes money and appearance, blue face, red beard, yellow robe, and blue horse. 5) Lower Hall officer who distributes money and appearance, red face, black beard, green robe, and red horse. Craft one boat for sending off the saintly beings and one boat for sending off the spirit tablets, each about 1 *zhang* and 3 or 4 *chi* long (i.e., 13 to 14 feet). Make a red paper tablet for the alliance oath and one large banner with flower borders. 上堂, 用本黃紙做佛衣一百零五件. 下堂, 用高表紙做冥裙衣褲各一千三百件. 大紙花三十六枝. 插各席疏邊用. 五色紙小花三百朵. 按鐵絲腳二寸長插綵緞捲上用. 又小花二百朵. 不按腳請上下堂及沐浴所散花用. 紮旛官一位, 粉紅面, 紅髯, 身穿鎧甲, 右手叉腰, 左手執鎮守壇前旛幟. 發符, 紮符官馬四位. 一, 四天捷疾持符使者, 紅面黑髯綠衣紅馬. 二, 空行捷疾持符使者, 青面紅髯黃衣青馬. 三, 地行捷疾持符使者, 白面黑髯紅衣黃馬. 四, 地府捷疾持符使者, 黑面黑髯青衣黑馬. 告赦, 紮梵釋二天捷疾持赦使者官馬一座, 白面無髯青花衣白馬. 送判, 紮判官馬五位. 一, 天府功德司判官, 白面黑髯紅衣黃馬. 二, 中界功德司判官, 黑面黑髯青衣黑馬. 三, 地府功德司判官, 白面黑髯淡青衣白馬. 四, 上堂俵錢貌司判官, 青面紅髯黃衣青馬. 五, 下堂俵錢貌司判官, 紅面黑髯綠衣紅馬. 紮送聖船及送靈牌船各一隻. 長一丈三四尺. 做證盟疏紅紙牌一個. 大榜花邊一副.[76]

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[76] *Huiben*, 4.15–16.

A variety of paper 'officers and horses' are used in the ritual to carry out a range of bureaucratic tasks, such as holding talismans and delivering documents. At the conclusion of the ritual performance, all of these paper-made ritual devices will be burned. Despite the inclusion of various non-Buddhist ritual items, props depicting the imagination of the netherworld, as seen in TDMY, are absent here. By combining Zhuhong and Zhixu's strong advocacy for a more orderly and hierarchical ritual space with their selective incorporation of non-Buddhist elements, we can observe their efforts to reform Buddhist ritual practices in a way that would be acceptable to both the monastic community and the laity. This topic will be further explored in the subsequent section.

## 3. The Reform of the Water-Land Ritual in the Context of Buddhist Revival in the Late Ming and Beyond

To briefly summarize our findings from the comparison of the two ritual manuals, TDMY exhibits an eclectic and theatrical style of ritual performance that extensively incorporates diverse elements, including Esoteric and Daoist traditions. Its use of modular ritual props, such as the bridge-shaped prop, enhances the mobility of the entire ritual space. These props, modeled after real architectural structures, create a realistic and immersive environment for the ritual, adding a layer of dramatization to the performance. In contrast, the ritual prescribed by FJSF enforces a rigid spatial demarcation between the inner and outer, the upper and lower, and the pure and polluted. This is manifested in a clear hierarchy and well-defined boundaries, resulting in a more enclosed and less open ritual space. Furthermore, the ritual paraphernalia used in FJSF (as exemplified in the *Huiben*) primarily consists of traditional Buddhist instruments rather than theatrical props. To fully understand Zhuhong's intentions in reforming the Water-Land ritual, it is important to consider these contrasts within the broader context of the Buddhist revival in the late Ming period—a revival whose roots can be traced back to the beginning of the dynasty.

Shortly after establishing the Ming Dynasty, Zhu Yuanzhang, acutely aware of the potential threat posed by religious elements beyond political control,[77] initiated a project aimed at effectively managing religions.[78] In the case of Buddhism, he reorganized the monastic community into three categories: *chan* 禪 (meditation), *jiang* 講 (doctrine), and *jiao* 教 (teaching). This was not the first time Buddhist monasteries had been categorized; during the Song and Yuan dynasties, monasteries were classified into *chan*, *jiao* 教 (doctrine), and *lü* 律 (Vinaya).[79] In Zhu Yuanzhang's new classification, the *lü* category was replaced by *jiang*, which essentially assumed the definition of the former *jiao* category, referring to monks well-versed in Buddhist doctrines. The newly defined *jiao* category now referred to monks focused on the educational dissemination of social morality, with a particular emphasis on filial piety. Their primary method of engaging with the populace was through ritual services. In 1374, Zhu Yuanzhang publicly expressed his preference for practices that had a broader social impact:

> *Chan* and *Quanzhen* focus on cultivating oneself and nurturing one's nature, purely for one's own sake. In contrast, *jiao* and *Zhengyi*

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[77] He took a number of measurements to check the religious powers, at both the institutional and local levels: see, Hucker, *The Ming Dynasty*, 57–58; Jiang, *The Mandate of Heaven and the Great Ming Code*, 48.

[78] At the very beginning of the Ming Dynasty, Zhu Yuanzhang took a benign approach to Buddhism by incorporating it into a state-centred structure of public authority. Measures were taken to restore destructed Buddhist monasteries, and Buddhist ordination system was resumed. However, after 1380, when the purge of Hu Weiyong was completed, Zhu Yuanzhang's attitude toward Buddhism changed. It went toward a harsher direction and began to regard Buddhism as a potentially destabilizing realm that, if left unchecked, could undermine the state authority. As a result, the strict categorization of Buddhists became an effective way to separate the monastic from the secular life and thereby put them under an effective supervision by the state authority. See, Brook, *The Chinese State in Ming Society*, 132–38.

[79] Ren, *Zhongguo fojiao shi*, 11–13.

> emphasize achieving salvation, particularly tailored for the filial sons and compassionate parents. They benefit human relations and enrich customs; their merits are indeed great. 禪與全真, 務以修身養性, 獨為自己而已. 教與正一, 專以超脫, 特為孝子慈親之設, 益人倫, 厚風俗, 其功大矣哉.[80]

The *jiao* mentioned here apparently refers to the newly defined category of 'teaching' monks. Specialized in providing Buddhist ritual services to the populace, these monks were highly praised by Zhu Yuanzhang for their close connection with and potential influence on local society. During the Hongwu 洪武 reign (1368–1398), the number of *jiao* monasteries (*jiao si* 教寺) in the Jiang-Zhe region (modern-day Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces) rapidly increased, making up as much as fifty percent of all Buddhist monasteries. Additionally, the population of *jiao* monks (*Jiao seng* 教僧) comprised about forty to fifty percent of the total monk population.[81] However, to the populace, these *jiao* monks were more commonly known by their alternative name—yoga monks (*yuqie seng* 瑜伽僧). According to the late Ming Buddhist Master Hanshan Deqing 憨山德清 (1546–1623),

> The three teachings are established under one Gate [i.e., Buddhism], namely chan, jiang, and yuqie. Chan is to awaken one's mind; jiang is to elucidate the nature of the Dharma; and yuqie is to aid the spirits of the netherworld. Three great monasteries were established accordingly: the Tianjie Monastery for chan priests, the Tianxi Monastery for lecturing the scriptural Dharma, and the Nengren Monastery for the yuqie practice. This vast and expansive effort attracted followers

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[80] 'Daming xuanjiao' 大明玄教 [The Mystic Teachings of the Great Ming, HY467], 1a. In fact, the central government had had a close supervision of the religious sphere. The Great Ming Code set strict regulations for Buddhism and Daoism in regard to the establishment of Buddhist or Daoist temples at local level, as well as the ordination of Buddhist or Daoist novices. See, Jiang, *The Mandate of Heaven and The Great Ming Code*, 70–99.

[81] Ren, *Zhongguo fojiao shi*, 13.

> from all over the world. 於一門制立三教, 謂禪、講、瑜伽, 以禪悟自心, 講明法性, 瑜伽以濟幽冥. 乃建三大剎, 以天界安禪侶, 以天禧居義學, 以能仁居瑜伽, 汪汪洋洋, 天下朝宗.[82]

Here, the term *yuqie* (yoga) is used interchangeably with *jiao* (teaching). However, compared to the latter, it has a stronger connotation associated with the esoteric practices rooted in the Buddhist tantric system. Despite a much earlier origination in Indian Mahāyāna tradition,[83] the flourishing of yoga tantrism occurred during the Tang Dynasty, passed down from the disciples of the Esoteric Buddhist Master Vajrabodhi 金剛智 (671–741).[84] However, it gradually declined in later generations, as described by Zhuhong:

> Yuqie flourished under the two masters Vajrabodhi and Amoghavajra in the Tang Dynasty. Their divine power was so unimaginable that they could control ghosts and gods, and move mountains and seas. After being transmitted a few times, there were no more successors and all that remained was the ritual of Food Offering. 瑜伽大興於唐之金剛智、廣大不空二師, 能役使鬼神, 移易山海, 威神之力不可思議. 數傳之後, 無能嗣之者, 所存但施食一法而已.[85]

During the Southern Song Dynasty (1127–1279), yoga practices became intertwined with various non-Buddhist elements, such as Daoist and local cultic practices.[86] These practices, which had prac-

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[82] *Hanshan laoren*.

[83] Sørensen suggests that Esoteric Buddhism originated as a form of Mahayana that centres on ritual magic and employs various performative methods and devices, such as special altars, spells, and iconography. For a full-length discussion of the definition of Esoteric Buddhism, see Sørensen, 'On Esoteric Buddhism in China'.

[84] Orzech, 'Esoteric Buddhism in the Tang'.

[85] *Zhuchuang sanbi*, 34.

[86] Davis, *Society and the Supernatural in Song China*; Li, 'Song Yuan xindaofa yu Fujian de yujiajiao'; Ye, 'Shilun "yuqie jiao" zhi yanbian jiqi shisuhua shixiang'.

tical functions for seeking blessings and warding off evil, significantly overlapped with the esoteric techniques of yoga. It is no surprise that they were integrated and used together in ritual performances serving secular purposes. During the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368), Buddhist ritual practices continued to evolve with the support of the Mongol rulers, who followed Tibetan Tantric Buddhism. It is likely that the Water-Land ritual continued to develop with a blend of Esoteric Buddhism, Daoism, and folk culture, as evidenced in the TDMY manual, and became the most popular Buddhist ritual, spreading throughout the country.[87]

Following Zhu Yuanzhang's reorganization of the monasteries, the number of yoga monks steadily increased over the subsequent centuries. This growth was driven by the rising demand for Buddhist ritual services, which often came with generous remuneration. However, the appeal of these opportunities also attracted some unqualified monks to join the group, leading to concerns about a gradual decline in the overall standards of the monastic community.[88] Additionally, the rituals performed for the populace became increasingly mixed and disordered, a concern reflected in the critiques of the time. For example, Zhuhong, in his harsh critique, made no secret of

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[87] 'Huamu hua shiwang dengxiang shu' 化募画十王等像疏 [Memorial for Fundraising to Paint the Images of the Ten Kings and Others], 'Daxiang jianfu Shuilu daochang shu' 大祥荐父水陆道場疏 [Petition for the Water-Land Dharma Assembly in Offering to My Late Father on the Second Anniversary Memorial], 'Shuilu daochang bang' 水陆道場榜 [Notice for the Water-Land Dharma Assembly], in *Guichao gao*. The *Yuanshi* 元史 [History of the Yuan Dynasty] contains multiple records of Yuan emperors being fond of performing esoteric Buddhist rituals. Some emperors, such as Emperor Renzong 仁宗 (r. 1311–1320), also held Water-Land rituals. This suggests that the Water-Land ritual was quite popular in the Yuan court. Given that the Yuan emperors practiced Esoteric Buddhism, it is hard to imagine that their Water-Land rituals did not contain a significant amount of esoteric elements.

[88] Brook described how the corrupted monastic order brought about administrative problems for mid-Ming officials, see, Brook, *The Chinese State in Ming Society*, 143–44.

his strong disapproval of the mingling of people[89] in the Water-Land ritual performance represented in the TDMY manual. He argued that such practices were not only blasphemy but would also compromise ritual efficacy:

> To hold a ritual, one must first raise funds and resources for months or even years before achieving success. However, the elaborate decorations and redundant rites attract a constant stream of men, women, children, and elderly people who flock to the ritual like spectators at a festival, creating chaos and confusion as they jostle each other. This often leads to disrespect for divine beings, conflicts with ghosts and deities, and excessive emphasis on trivial matters, resulting in more harm than good. Such negative outcomes often prevent the ritual from completing its mission and bring about karmic retribution, which is truly frightening. 啓建道場者, 化募資費累月累年始克成就. 陳設繁文, 以致士女老幼紛至沓來, 如俗中看旗看春, 交足摩肩, 男女混亂, 日以千記, 而不免褻瀆聖賢, 衝突鬼神, 失多而過重, 有禍而無功, 多致道場不終其事而感惡報, 甚可懼也.[90]

In the novel *Jinpingmei*, there are several episodes that describe Water-Land ritual performances, similar to what Zhuhong critiqued.

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[89] 'Indiscriminate intermingling of the sexes' was one of the standard charges leveled against Buddhist heretical movements such as the White Lotus sect. See ter Haar, *The White Lotus Teachings in Chinese Religious History*, 44–45. The Song law code *Qingyuan tiaofa shilei* 慶元條法事類 in the section 'Shidao' 釋道 [Buddhism and Daoism] contains an edict banning the intermingling of men and women at nighttime ritual performances. According to Article 200 of the *Daming lü* 大明律 [Great Ming Code], in a family observing mourning, if they hold a *zhai* or *jiao* ceremony with men and women mingling shamelessly, or if they violate propriety by drinking alcohol and eating meat, the head of the household shall be punished with eighty strokes. Buddhist monks and Daoists who join in the offense shall also be punished with eighty strokes and be excommunicated (若居喪之家為親修齋設醮而男女混雜無恥, 及違禮飲酒食肉者, 罪坐家長杖八十, 僧道並與同罪, 亦杖八十還俗).

[90] *Zhuchuang sanbi*, 43.

For example, during one ritual performance led by a group of monks from the Bao'en si 報恩寺, many of Ximen Qing's friends and neighbors gathered together. One of them even brought a grand offering of sacrificial items, including pigs, sheep, and silk, accompanied by musicians playing gongs and drums. Both male and female guests were invited to the ritual, and a ghost dance was performed in front of the coffin.[91]

Therefore, it was against this backdrop that several renowned Buddhist scholar-monks, such as Zhuhong, worked towards refining and standardizing 'Buddhist services'. Besides Zhuhong, these influential figures included Zibo Zhenke 紫柏真可 (1543–1603),[92] Hanshan Deqing 憨山德清 (1546–1623),[93] and Ouyi Zhixu 藕益智旭 (1599–1655).[94] Despite their different approaches, they all recognized the necessity of reviving Buddhism and believed that the most effective approach was to rise above sectarian divisions and prioritize religious cultivation over doctrinal disputes. This revival extended to different aspects of Buddhism, ranging from monastic discipline reform to ritual standardization, aiming to establish a new liturgical code that would cater to the worldly needs of society while adhering strictly to the monastic rules.[95]

Adopting a synthetic attitude, Zhuhong's vision of a 'new Buddhism' would revive not along the received sectarian lines but follow the trend of a combination of Tiantai, Chan, and Pure Land beliefs.[96] This change is particularly manifest in his addition of the Pure Land practice of reciting the Buddha's name (*nian Fo* 念佛) to the *shiliu miaoguan* 十六妙觀 (sixteen marvelous contemplations)

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[91] *Xinke xiuxiang piping Jinpingmei*, *juan* 13, 857–58.

[92] Zhang, Thriving in Crisis, 156–98.

[93] Jiang, *Wan Ming fojiao gaige shi*, 129–92.

[94] McGuire, *Living Karma*, 17–36.

[95] Zhuhong was mainly concerned with the Vinaya, that is, the monastic disciplines, and was thus particularly committed to their revival. For a detailed description of his efforts in the Vinaya, see, Yü, *The Renewal of Buddhism in China*, 170–223.

[96] Yü, *The Renewal of Buddhism in China*, xii.

in the last volume of the FJSF manual.[97] This addition, according to Zhuhong himself, was for the sake of simplifying the practice to make it more accessible because 'the principles of contemplation are subtle, while the minds of sentient beings are complex. With a complex mind, practicing contemplation becomes difficult to accomplish' (觀法理微. 眾生心雜. 雜心修觀. 觀想難成).[98]

Nonetheless, he also demonstrated attentiveness to the non-Buddhist context within which the ritual was practiced. As discussed earlier, the FJSF ritual invokes four talisman-holding messengers (*chifu shizhe* 持符使者).[99] This group of envoys was later expanded to include more divine officials as seen earlier in the depiction of paper objects in the *Huiben*. Their presence in the Water-Land ritual suggests the existence of a divine bureaucracy operating behind the scenes. The origins of this divine bureaucracy can be traced back to the second century during the emergence of the first Daoist community, known as the Way of Heavenly Master (Tianshi dao 天師道). Emulating the communication between the earthly officials and their ruler, the Heavenly Masters developed a method called 'sending up petitions' (*shangzhang* 上章) to appeal to the 'heavenly bureau' (*tiancao* 天曹) for the cure of illnesses.[100] Zhuhong's decision not to remove these 'Daoist-inspired' elements from his redaction of the ritual manual is understandable: since China developed a bureaucratic-minded culture in the last centuries of the second millennium BCE,[101] generations of Chinese people have been deeply influenced by it, embedding its mentality and vocabulary into their character and way of life. For many Chinese, thinking within a bureaucratic framework became second nature, making it a deeply ingrained

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[97] FJSF 6, *X* no. 1479: 74.820a. For further discussions on Zhuhong's synthesis of Pure Land practices, see Jones, *Pure Land: History, Tradition, and Practice*, 114–30.

[98] FJSF 6, *X* no. 1479: 74.820a.

[99] FJSF 1, *X* no. 1479: 74.788b.

[100] Nickerson, 'Taoism, Death, and Bureaucracy in Early Medieval China'.

[101] Keightley, 'The Religious Commitment: Shang Theology and the Genesis of Chinese Political Culture'.

aspect of their worldview that is nearly impossible to challenge.

In addition, the FJSF manual also displays an inclination to incorporate Confucian values. Throughout the text, the term 'filial mind' (*xiaoshun xin* 孝順心) appears five times. For instance, when preaching the ten precepts to the souls of the dead, this term is consistently paired with 'compassion mind' (*cibei xin* 慈悲心) in the phrase: 'a bodhisattva should cultivate a constant mind of compassion, filial piety, and skillful means to protect and help all sentient beings' (是菩薩應起常住慈悲心. 孝順心. 方便救護一切眾生).[102] Rather than a simple syncretic blending, Zhuhong's approach equated the Confucian virtue of filial piety with Buddhist moral discipline (Skt. *śīla*), one of the core elements of the bodhisattva path, and extended this concept to encompass other Buddhist virtues.[103] Simultaneously, this reform resonated with the aspirations of some late Ming scholar-officials who sought to reform Confucian rituals. Wang Yangming 王

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[102] FJSF 4, *X* no. 1479: 74.811c–812a. Zhuhong's emphasis on filial piety is more evident in his personal anthology *Zhuchuang sanbi*. For example, he had a short essay titled 'Wei seng yi xiao fumu' 為僧宜孝父母 [Monks Should Be Filial to Their Parents] in which he stated: 'Some monks are not filial to their parents, and I deeply criticize them for it. Some might say that since becoming a monk involves leaving one's family and severing emotional ties, holding them accountable would only revive their emotional attachments. To this, I say, how wrong this is! Great filial piety was exemplified by the venerable Śākyamuni, who repaid his parents' kindness over many eons, accumulating causes that led to his enlightenment. As the *Fanwang jing* says, "Of the myriad precepts and practices, filial piety is the foundation." The *Guan jing* states, "Being filial to one's parents is a pure karmic cause." There were ancients who built halls to honour their mothers or carried their mothers while begging for alms, never burdened by emotional ties. How could one sever emotional ties with their parents yet seek connections with donors?' (有为僧不孝父母者, 予深责之. 或曰: 出家既已辞亲割爱, 责之则反动其恩爱心矣. 曰: 恶, 是何言也? 大孝释迦尊, 累劫报亲恩, 积因成正觉. 而梵网云: 戒虽万行, 以孝为宗. 观经云: 孝养父母, 净业正因. 古人有作堂奉母者, 担母乞食者, 未尝以恩爱累也. 柰何于亲割爱矣, 而缔交施主) See *Zhuchuang sanbi*, 30–31.

[103] Yü, *The Renewal of Buddhism in China*, 11–13.

陽明 (1472–1529), a prominent critic of Neo-Confucianism, argued that Confucian ritual reform should focus on streamlining rather than embellishment. He expressed his views on the *Jiali* 家禮 [Family Rituals], one of the foundational texts of Confucian ritual practice, in his correspondence with his contemporary, Zou Qianzhi 鄒謙之 (n.d.):

> Regarding the extant old rituals, even old teachers and learned scholars of our day cannot fully explain them. Commoners, finding them complex and difficult, set them aside and no longer practice them. Therefore, for those in positions of authority today who wish to guide the people towards the rituals, the difficulty does not lie in making [the rituals] thorough, but rather in making them simple, clear, understandable, and easy for people to practice. 古禮之存於世者, 老師宿儒當年不能窮其說, 世之人苦其煩且難, 遂皆廢置而不行. 故今之為人上而欲導民於禮者, 非詳且備之為難, 惟簡切明白而使人易行之為貴耳.[104]

Therefore, taking all of this into consideration, Zhuhong and his peers selected Zhipan's manual of the Water-Land ritual as their master copy, because, quoting his own words:

> Only the ritual text compiled by Master Zhipan of Siming [in modern-day Zhejiang] is extremely refined and precise, as well as simple and easy to understand. It is thorough without being overly lengthy and straightforward without missing any essential parts. The original version was only available in Siming and was not seen in other regions. I have revised it and had it reprinted to facilitate wider dissemination. 惟四明志磐法師所輯儀文, 至精至密, 至簡至易, 精密而不傷於煩長, 簡易而不病於缺漏. 其本止存四明, 諸方皆未之見也. 予為訂正, 重壽諸梓, 以廣流通.[105]

As a Buddhist reformer, Zhuhong was not alone. His efforts in revising the Water-Land ritual, as particularly seen in the FJSF manual,

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[104] *Yangming xiansheng jiyao*, *juan* 4, 14a.

[105] *Zhuchuang sanbi*, 43.

mirrors the approach of contemporaries like Zhixu, who emphasized the importance of ritual in karmic transformation.[106] Just as Zhixu saw the body as a site for addressing and transforming karma through ascetic practices, Zhuhong's reforms can be viewed as an attempt to cleanse and elevate ritual space, ensuring that public rituals such as the Water-Land ritual remained a powerful and effective tool for spiritual purification. By reasserting the altar boundaries and restoring ritual orders, Zhuhong sought to preserve the integrity of Buddhist practice and reinforce the ritual's role in guiding practitioners toward karmic redemption and spiritual enlightenment.

During the Qing Dynasty, the FJSF text underwent several expansions. One significant expansion, edited by Master Yirun 儀潤 (n.d.), resulted in a six-volume edition preserved under the title *Huiben* to this day. Later, Zhiguan 咫觀, also known as Zheng Yingfang 鄭應房 (active 1862–1908), provided detailed supplementary discussions on the FJSF manual, compiling them into the nine-volume *Fajie shengfan Shuilu dazhai puli daochang xingxiang tonglun* 法界聖凡水陸大齋普利道場性相通論 [Comprehensive Treatise on the Nature and Characteristics of the Dharma Realm of Saints and Mortals in the Water-Land Great Retreat and Universal Beneficence Assembly, *X* no. 1498], abbreviated as the *Jiyuan shuilu tonglun* 雞園水陸通論 [Jiyuan Water-Land Comprehensive Treatise]. In addition, he also authored the ten-volume *Shuilu daochang falun baochan* 水陸道場法輪寶懺 [Precious Repentance of the Dharma Wheel for the Water-Land Assembly, *X* no. 1499]. Following the mid-nineteenth-century Taiping Rebellion and shortly before the founding of Republican China, a new wave of Buddhist revival was initiated by a number of prominent monks. Many of these figures actively engaged with society and politics during China's tumultuous transition into a modern nation-state. Influenced by Protestant Christian missionary efforts and Japanese Buddhist models, they played a crucial role in making Buddhism, both in its organizational structure and practices, the most 'legible' religion in China.[107] Among them, Master

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[106] McGuire, *Living Karma*, 53–80.

[107] Kiely and Jessup, eds., *Recovering Buddhism in Modern China*, 7.

Yinguang 印光 (1862–1940) was a key figure[108] whose efforts to modernize Buddhism also extended to the Water-Land ritual manual. Together with another Republican-era Buddhist monk, Master Fayu 法裕 (n.d.), they recompiled the FJSF texts, added supplementary instructions for Outer Altar rituals and auxiliary practices, and included a new preface. In Fayu's notes on these revisions, he commented,

> [Master] Yunqi [i.e., Zhuhong] stated in his *Zhuchuang suibi* that the Grand Water-Land ritual, as documented in the Jinshan manual, is no longer preserved today. The ritual texts compiled by Master [Zhi]pan of Siming are the most appropriate, being both cost-effective and easy to execute (implying that the ancient rituals were likely more elaborate and costly than those of today. From the Master's word, it is evident that when performing the Water-Land ritual, the sincere intention was prioritized, without concern for complexity or expense). Therefore, they should be widely disseminated without limit. 雲棲竹窗隨筆, 謂水陸盛典金山儀文, 今藏無傳, 四明磐師所輯科儀之文, 最為允當, 且財省而易成. 以此意推之, 古仪繁重, 必倍于今时. 而观大师此言, 可知修水陆时, 只取诚意充足, 必不以烦费为事也. 正應流通無盡.[109]

Their contributions likely solidified the use of the FJSF manual—now amplified and known as the *Huiben*—as the standard manual for performing the Water-Land ritual, which has since garnered widespread acceptance within Buddhist communities.

## Concluding Remarks

Since its inception in the ninth century, the Water-Land ritual, as the grandest Buddhist universal salvation ceremony, quickly spread throughout the imperium and proliferated into a multitude of regional

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[108] On Yinguang, see Kiely, 'The Charismatic Monk and the Chanting Masses'.

[109] *Huiben*, 1.6.

variations. Among these, the version crafted by the Tiantai Master Zhipan, as represented in the FJSF manual, gained prominence in the Jiangnan region during the thirteenth century. Meanwhile, another variation, as represented by the TDMY manual, incorporated various Buddhist and non-Buddhist elements, along with theatrical performances, making it more appealing to a broader demographic. During the Ming Dynasty, substantial evidence suggested that this variant may have resonated more profoundly with the populace than the FJSF version. Its growing popularity was likely due to its gaudy performance style and the simultaneous rise of monks specializing in ritual services. However, Zhuhong, along with other contemporary Buddhist scholar-monks, criticized this particular ritual form for its perceived disorder and lack of respect for both the sacred and monastic disciplines. Driven by a desire to refine and standardize Buddhist ritual practice, Zhuhong and his colleagues undertook the task of revising the ritual manual. They chose Zhipan's manual as the foundation for reform, reaffirming monastic discipline, integrating practices across sectarian lines, and assimilating Confucian ethical principles. Over time, their work to standardize the Water-Land ritual gained widespread acceptance, eventually becoming an established practice in Buddhist temples throughout present-day China and among Chinese diasporic communities.

Daniel Stevenson once remarked, 'Ambiguity and contradiction are not places that we, with our disciplinary boundaries, necessarily find easy to visit. Yet it is precisely in the challenge to familiar horizons that the discomforts of a phenomenon such as the *shuilu* may prove to be most revealing. Here we have a Buddhist rite that carried the full ideological investments of a professional monastic sangha but at the same time was embedded within an entire network of concerns and normative expectations constituted beyond the monastery wall.'[110] The comparison of the two different Water-Land rituals vividly illustrates Stevenson's assertion. As we have seen, the evolution of these rituals was not merely a matter of religious or liturgical preference but a reflection of deeper cultural and societal currents.

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[110] Stevenson, 'Text, Image, and Transformation', 32.

The divergent paths of the FJSF and TDMY rituals demonstrate how cultural perceptions and societal needs can shape and even redefine religious practices. The FJSF version, which emphasized liturgical order and boundaries, responded to an institutional demand for a more ideologically consistent and procedurally streamlined approach, aligning with the prevailing cultural ethos through its incorporation of Pure Land practice and Confucian ethics. Conversely, the TDMY version, with its theatrical and eclectic elements, mirrored the populace's affinity for diverse expressions of spirituality.

However, the different fates of these two versions of the Water-Land ritual have implications that extend far beyond their own eras. As Stevenson further noted, 'the heterogeneity within the *shuilu* traditions indicates that the very form and idea of the *shuilu* as a ritual event were themselves subject to ceaseless alteration at the hands of local sponsors.'[111] In this context, Dharma Drum Mountain's 法鼓山 initiative under the guidance of Master Sheng Yen represents a significant evolution of the Water-Land ritual.[112] Beginning in 2007, the introduction of the 'Great Compassion Water and Land Dharma Service' (*Dabeixin Shuilu fahui* 大悲心水陸法會) reflects a conscious effort to align the ritual with contemporary environmental movements by eliminating the burning of paper objects and tablets, traditionally rooted in folk beliefs or Daoist practices.[113] This shift to digital memorial tablets and electronic scriptures marks a historic first in the digitization of Buddhist rituals in Chinese Buddhism. In 2008, the revision of the Water-Land ritual manual, culminating in the publication of the *Dabeixin Shuilu yigui* 大悲心水陸儀軌 [Manual of the Great Compassion Water-Land Ritual] in two vol-

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[111] Stevenson, 'Text, Image, and Transformation', 33.

[112] For more details on the chronicle of their renovation, see Dharma Drum's webpage on the Shuilu ritual.

[113] As Master Sheng Yen noted in the preface of the revised ritual manual, 'our reform involves removing all elements of the original repentance ritual that originated from Chinese folk beliefs or were adapted from Daoist popular rituals.' (我們的革新之舉, 就是把原來懺儀之中, 凡是源於中國民間信仰的部分, 或是採擷道家、道教的俗儀之處, 皆一一捨去.) *Dabeixin Shuilu yigui*, vol. 1, 14–15.

umes one year later, demonstrates the commitment to reimagining Buddhist practices in response to modern challenges. This ongoing transformation raises several important questions: Could Dharma Drum Mountain's initiative be seen as a continuation of Zhuhong and his successors' efforts in renewing Buddhism? What insights can we gain from this innovative approach? How are these changes in practice perceived and received by the community? How can rituals, beyond their religious objectives, function as socially effective tools that unite people and potentially forge new connections or reinforce community orders? The answers to these questions could provide valuable insights into the dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation in Buddhism. As the tradition continues to adapt to contemporary issues, further research is essential to understand the broader implications of these developments for the future of Buddhist practices.

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### Abbreviations

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| HY | *Daozang zimu yinde* 道藏子目引得. See Secondary Sources, Weng. |
| FJSF | *Fajie shengfan shuilu shenghui xiuzhai yigui* 法界聖凡水陸勝會修齋儀軌. See Primary Sources. |
| *Huiben* | *Shuilu yigui huiben* 水陸儀軌會本. See Primary Sources. |
| *J* | *Jiaxing dazangjing* 嘉興大藏經. See Secondary Sources. |
| TDMY | *Tiandi mingyang shuilu yiwen* 天地冥陽水陸儀文. See Primary Sources. |
| *T* | *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經. See Secondary Sources, Takakusu and Watanabe, eds. |
| SKQS | *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書. See Primary Sources. |
| SSTL | *Shishi tonglan* 施食通覽. See Primary Sources. |
| *X* | *Wanzi xuzang jing* 卍續藏經. See Secondary Sources. |

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