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Hallucinogen Use in China

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ABSTRACT

On a world map that illustrates native use of eighteen categories of major hallucinogens, China is a conspicuous blank. Further, contemporary Daoist-shaman priests are not known to use psychoactive herbs. Although there is hardly any mention of hallucinogen use in early Chinese literary and historical sources, this study discovers such references in *Guideways Through Mountains and Seas*, *Songs of Chu*, and a preface to “The Rhapsody of Gaotang.” In early medieval China, Daoist adepts, searching for personal transcendence and immortality, seem to have adopted some of the knowledge accrued by the shamans. Many of the plants they ingested were hallucinogens, including a number of varieties of psychedelic mushrooms. Their knowledge is recorded in pharmacopoeias, encyclopedias, and the biographies of Daoist transcendents. This study also reveals that shamans, in ancient China and among present-day ethnic groups in northern and southwestern China, employed and still employ hallucinogens to assist their entrance into altered states of consciousness.

Keywords: hallucinogens; psilocybins; shamans; Daoist adepts; psychedelic mushrooms; pharmacopoeia; spirit journeys.

INTRODUCTION

On a world map that illustrates native use of eighteen categories of major hallucinogens in Richard Evans Schultes et al.'s *Plants of the Gods: Their Sacred, Healing, and Hallucinogenic Powers*, China is a conspicuous blank.¹ Although a few Chinese hallucinogens (such as *fangkui*, *shangla* and *yunshi*) are included in Schultes's elaborate tables on hallucinogens, their presence there is based solely on Hui-Lin Li's "Hallucinogenic Plants in Chinese Herbals."² Indeed, aside from studies of Daoist texts by the sinologists to be mentioned below, all English language works on hallucinogens used in China seem to derive from Li's article. In the context of growing recent interest in psychedelic medicines,³ this study hopes to fill that blank by presenting literature relevant to this topic in early literary and Daoist texts, pharmacopoeias, and studies of hallucinogens used by some Chinese ethnic minorities.

Shamans are healers, exorcists, and diviners.⁴ They may go into a trance state themselves, or

¹ Richard Evans Schultes, et al., *Plants of the Gods: Their Sacred, Healing, and Hallucinogenic Powers* (Rochester, Vt.: Healing Arts Press, 1998), 28.

² Hui-Lin Li, "Hallucinogenic Plants in Chinese Herbals," *Botanical Museum Leaflets* 25 (6): 161–81. They are listed as *fang-k'uei*, *shang-la*, and *yun-shih* in Li's article, and in Schultes et al.'s book cited in fn 1.

³ See Jeffrey A. Lieberman, "Back to the Future — the Therapeutic Potential of Psychedelic Drugs," *The New England Journal of Medicine*, April 15, 2021, 1460–61; and <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/09/health/psychedelics-mdma-psilocybin-molly-mental-health.html?smid=em-share>. The first psychedelic-medicine center in the country, at Johns Hopkins University, was created last year. N.Y.U.'s Langone Medical Center is establishing its first psychedelic-medicine center, which researches the use of hallucinogens to treat mental illness and addiction. U.C. Berkeley just launched a new center for psychedelic science and education. See <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/10/12/turn-on-tune-in-get-well>; <https://news.berkeley.edu/2020/09/14/uc-berkeley-launches-new-center-for-psychedelic-science-and-education/>; and Michael Pollan, *How to Change Your Mind* (New York: Penguin Press, 2018). I would like to thank my primary physician, Dr. Inez Pagnotta, for her encouragement and for sending me the above websites and articles.

⁴ I translate the *wu* 巫 as shaman. For discussions of the *wu*, see Nicholas Morrow Williams, "Shamans, Souls, and Soma: Comparative Religions and Early China," *Journal of Chinese Religions* 48 (2): 149–57. Victor Mair connects the first Chinese *wu*-shaman to the Persian *magus* and English "magician." See Victor H. Mair, "Old Sinitic **myag*, Old Persian *maguš*, and English 'Magician,'" *Early China* 15: 27–47, and his "The Earliest Identifiable Written Chinese Character" in Martin E. Huld et al., eds., *Archaeology and Language: Indo-European Studies Presented to James P. Mallory*, Journal of Indo-European Studies Monograph Series no. 60: 265–279. Due to the denigration and prohibition of the *wu* since the Song dynasty (specifically in

they might serve as ritual masters who guide spirit mediums like *tongji* 童乩 into a state of spirit possession. At present, mainstream Han Chinese shamans who claim to be Daoist priests⁵ are not known to use hallucinogens. Hui-Lin Li notably states, “So far as I know, there has been no report of any use of hallucinogenic plants in China in more modern times.”⁶ Methods used today by shaman priests in China to achieve an altered state of consciousness include: waving incense in front of the medium, chanting spells and mantras, burning talismans, and using tobacco, liquor, talisman (sacred) water, mudras, percussion instruments, and ecstatic dancing.⁷

1024 C.E., when an imperial edict banned the practice of *wu*-shamanism), most shaman priests claim to be members of Daoist sects. Shaman priests can be male or female, but most contemporary shamans are male (and might impersonate shaman priestesses or goddesses in rituals). In southern China, these shaman priests are known variously as *shigong* 師公, *duangong* 端公, *xigong* 峴公, *tongzi* 童子, *tulaosi* 土老司, etc. See Huang Jianxing 黃建興, *Shijiao: Zhongguo nanfang fashi yishi chuantong bijiao yanjiu* 師教：中國南方法師儀式傳統比較研究 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2018), esp. p. 312 for a list of fifteen different appellations.

⁵ Aside from the negative connotation associated with the *wu*, *wu*-shamanism suffers from the fact that it is still not a legally recognized religion in China. This is in contrast to the Saman religion, the shamanism practiced by ethnic groups in Mongolia and the erstwhile Manchuria of northeastern China.

⁶ Hui-Lin Li, “Hallucinogenic Plants in Chinese Herbals,” 161.

⁷ See the following for details on the methods used:

Kenneth Dean and Zheng Zhenman, “Group Initiation and Exorcistic Dance in the Xinghua Region,” *Minsu quyi* 85 (1993): 105–195. See pp. 116–17 for how a priest induced a state of trance in new initiates.

Huang Jianxing 黃建興, *Shijiao: Zhongguo nanfang fashi yishi chuantong bijiao yanjiu* 師教：中國南方法師儀式傳統比較研究 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2018), 190–217.

Huang Youxing 黃有興 and Gan Cunji 甘村吉, *Penghu minjian jidian yishi yu yingyong wenshu* 澎湖民間祭典與應用文書 (Penghu: Penghu wenhuaju, 2003), 58–108.

Yuan Zerui 袁澤銳, “Chao Shan tongji xisu diaocha yanjiu 潮汕童乩習俗調查研究” (M.A. Thesis, Guangdong Polytechnic Normal University 廣東技術師範學院, 2014).

Zhang Wei 張偉, “Qingdai difang shehui de jiangshen futi – cong Shanxi de ‘mapi’ tanqi 清代地方社會的降神附體 – 從山西的‘馬裨’談起.” *Difang wenhua yanjiu*, 3 (2018): 77–83. Page 78 offers a description of a contemporary case of using the burning of talismanic paper around spirit mediums to induce spirit possession. Talismanic paper is consecrated paper with writings of regular or created graphs.

Yao Zhouhui 姚周輝 adds, as additional methods, covering the face, fanning, gazing at a bowl of water or a bronze mirror, etc., in his *Shiheng de jingshen jiayuan – Zhongguo minjian linghun, guishen, mingyun xinyang de yanjiu yu*

The ancients apparently made no mention of the use of drugs to attain an altered state of consciousness. K. C. Chang notes regarding the Shang dynasty (ca. 1600–1046 B.C.E.):

The descent of the spirits or the ascent of the shaman or the king was achieved in a manner not altogether clear.... Did the alcohol or other substance bring about a trance, during which the shaman engaged in imagined flight? Possibly, but there is as yet no concrete evidence for this.”⁸

The lack of records about hallucinogen use by shamans continued across the centuries. The fall of shamans from their original roles, as both exalted spiritual experts and healers, began during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods (771–221 B.C.E.).⁹ Gilles Boileau is of the opinion that the *wu* in late Zhou times were “among the ‘official’ outcasts and were put in charge of dealing with chaos.”¹⁰ This decline continued, from the Han dynasty (206 B.C.E.–220 C.E.) onward, as shamans (and their role as physicians) were denigrated because of the rise of Confucianism (and its emphasis on secular concerns in the mainstream political realm). Eventually, shamans were mostly displaced by Daoist and Buddhist practitioners. The practice of shamanism was even officially banned by the

pipan 失衡的精神家園 – 中國民間靈魂，鬼神，命運信仰的研究與批判 (Nanning: Guangxi renmin chubanshe, 2002): 108–116.

Glen Dudbridge’s study of religious experiences during the Tang dynasty (618–907 C.E.) includes a man’s recitation of sutra to hallucinate and thereby heal himself of diseases:

Glen Dudbridge, *Religious Experience and Lay Society in T’ang China: A Reading of Tai Fu’s Kuang-I chi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 7–12.

8 K. C. Chang, *Art, Myth, and Ritual: The Path to Political Authority in Ancient China* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, Eng.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 55.

9 The functions performed by shamans included spirit possession, dream interpretation, divination, praying for rain, healing illnesses, and divination through astrology. Xu Dishan 許地山, *Daojiaoshi* 道教史 (Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 1996 reprint), 160–67. See also Fu-Shih Lin, “The Image and Status of Shamans in Ancient China” in John Lagerwey and Marc Kalinowski, eds., *Early Chinese Religion Part One: Shang through Han (1250 B.C.E. – 220 C.E.)* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011), 397–458.

10 Gilles Boileau, “Wu and Shaman,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 65, (2) (2002): 376.

government in 1024 C.E. during the Song dynasty; it ultimately survived in vernacular religious sects only through being given other names and incorporating Daoist and Buddhist deities.

Wang Jichao surmises that although shamans were active during the Han (as evidenced by silk texts and bamboo slips uncovered from tombs), records concerning any hallucinogens they used were not recorded by officials and literati because of their (the shamans') diminished stature.¹¹ However, as we will see, shamans used to congregate on at least one mountain with all manner of drugs, and would "ascend and descend" from there. They also used both psychedelic and non-hallucinogenic herbs in religious rituals through which they communed with deities and took spirit journeys. We even suspect that a king's erotic daydream on Shaman Mountain might have been the result of consuming a psychoactive herb or mushroom. Knowledge of the use of hallucinogens was probably passed down to Daoist adepts who used them to gain immortality and transcendence. The Daoist transcendents (*xian* 仙)¹² were associated with exotic herbs and "mushrooms of deathlessness."¹³ Pictures of Daoist transcendents (the feathered *xian* flying through space or riding mythical beasts through clouds) adorn mirrors, tomb walls, gate towers, recovered manuscripts, and other burial goods.¹⁴ Descriptions of the experiences of transcendents resemble those caused by taking psychedelic drugs.

According to the renowned Daoist Ge Hong 葛洪 (284–364), a fourth-century representative of the southern occult tradition,

You don't know the half of it! Those that have acquired geniehood [transcendence] often mount to Paradise; or soar in the purple firmament; or travel to Dark Isle; or nest a while in Pan-t'ung. They listen to God's (Creator Sky) music, and enjoy dishes of the nine sorts of excrescences.... The man occupied with God wanders freely on the rainbow

¹¹ Wang Jichao 王紀潮, "Zhongguo gudai saman hunmi zhong de yaowu wenti 中國古代薩滿昏迷中的藥物問題," *Ziran kexue yanjiu* (Studies in the History of Natural Sciences) 24 (1) (2005): 23.

¹² The *xian* is also translated as immortals and genies.

¹³ Robert Ford Campany, *Making Transcendents: Ascetics and Social Memory in Early Medieval China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), fn. 6 on p. 2.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 4. fn. 13 on this page includes a host of sources that depict such images.

and soars in the cinnabar firmament. He enlarges his boundaries to include all of space; goes where he wills. On the grand scale he moves about playing host; he never knows sorrow.¹⁵

In another work by Ge Hong, a transcendent by the name of Pengzu 彭祖 answers a question on the meaning of “transcendents.”

Pengzu Peng replies, “Those who have attained the Dao are not actually transcendents. Those who are transcendents can leap into clouds and fly without wings. Some ride on dragons and clouds, and visit the heavens. Some transform into birds or beasts and travel through azure clouds. Some dive into rivers and lakes and journey among famous mountains and streams. Some inhale primordial essence 元氣. Some consume spirit mushrooms 芝草....”¹⁶

This study will show that, although the available evidence is scarce, the use of hallucinogens by shamans and others can nevertheless be discerned in pre-Han literature, in works such as *Guideways Through Mountains and Seas* 山海經 (hereafter referred to as “*Guideways*”) and the *Songs of Chu* 楚辭. However, the most significant sources alluding to hallucinogen use in traditional China are encyclopedias, pharmacopoeias, and treatises on the herbs used by Daoist adepts. This study will also compile some lists of hallucinogens, including those of “magic” mushrooms,¹⁷ and examine some

¹⁵ James R. Ware, *Alchemy, Medicine and Religion in the China of A.D. 320: The Nei P'ien of Ko Hung (Pao-p'u tzu)* (New York: Dover Publications, 1981), 175–76.

¹⁶ Qiu Heting 邱鶴亭 annot., *Liexianzhuan zhuyi. Shenxianzhuan zhuyi* 列仙傳注譯 神仙傳注譯 [by Liu Xiang 劉向 and Ge Hong 葛洪, respectively] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1996), 104. According to legend, “Pengzu lived to 767 years of age and had outlived forty-nine wives and fifty-four children. He was a master of numerous macrobiotic techniques, including the ingestion of herbs and medicines, fasting, respiratory techniques, light gymnastics, saliva swallowing, air swallowing, and sexual yoga.” Stephen Eskildsen, *Asceticism in Early Taoist Religion* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998), 17.

¹⁷ Michel Strickmann’s “Notes on Mushroom Cults in Ancient China” (22 pages typed on a manual typewriter) does not

recipes for concocting elixirs found in such sources. Although hallucinogens are purportedly not used at present by mainstream Chinese shamans for inducing spirit possession, studies on Tungusic and Mongolian shamans in the north and ethnic shamans in the southwest reveal the use of numerous hallucinogens. This article will conclude with a description of the hallucinogens currently used by shamans among such ethnic minorities.

THE USE OF HALLUCINOGENS IN PRE-HAN LITERATURE

*GUIDEWAYS THROUGH MOUNTAINS AND SEAS*¹⁸ 山海經

A most fantastical piece of early literature, *Guideways* is an encyclopedic geography and cosmography compiled mostly from the Warring States period to the Western Han dynasty (c. fourth – c. first century B.C.E.). Possibly penned by shamans, the world of *Guideways* is populated not only by legendary prehistorical characters but also by a host of half-human creatures. Although much of *Guideways* seems bizarre, it records similar content found elsewhere. Thus, one might consider it to be a record of the worldview of a particular group of people, rather than as a purely fictional creation.¹⁹ Seventeen shaman-related names occur in *Guideways*. There is even a state named after a shaman, and a shaman mountain from which shamans make spirit journeys.

The “Guideways Through the West of the Great Wasteland 大荒西經” chapter of *Guideways*

discuss mushrooms as hallucinogens but does conclude: “Perhaps a good proportion of typical Taoist imagery might then be found to derive from mushroom-induced hallucinatory experience.” Michel Strickmann, “Notes on Mushroom Cults in Ancient China” (Gent: Rijksuniversiteit, 1966), 21.

¹⁸ Although the traditional translation for *Shanhaijing* is *Classic of Mountains and Seas*, I prefer Richard E. Strassberg’s translation which I follow here. Strassberg edited and translated, with commentary, *A Chinese Bestiary: Strange Creatures from the Guideways Through Mountains and Seas* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2002).

¹⁹ Fu Xiliang proposes that *Shanhaijing* was based on paintings of the various tribes of the realm, the *Shanhaitu* 山海圖, executed during the early Shang dynasty. These paintings were “transcribed” into written form by the *wu-zhu* shamans for the First Emperor of the Qin and survive as *Shanhaijing* with some misunderstanding of the original motifs. For example, the strange creatures were in fact representations of individual or combined tribal totems. See Fu Xiliang 付希亮, *Tuteng fenxi lujing xia Zhongguo wudi wenming yanjiu* 圖騰分析路徑下中國五帝文明研究 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2019), 33–66.

lists a Spirit Mountain 靈山 from which shamans, at least one of them female, ascended to and descended from [the heavens].” While the shamans Xian 巫咸, Ji 巫即, Pan 巫盼, Peng 巫彭, Zhen 巫真, Li 巫禮, Di 巫抵, Xie 巫謝, and Luo 巫羅 may have been either male or female, Shaman Gu 巫姑 (Shaman Damsel), judging from her name, was definitely a *shamanka* (female shaman). According to the text, “the hundred drugs are here.”²⁰ In another entry, Shaman Peng and five other shamans (with names resembling those above) are said to have used an immortality drug 不死之藥 to revive a corpse.²¹ The prevalence of drugs at this mountain, the shamans’ administering of drugs, and the performance of spirit journeys there all suggest their twin role as healers (medicine men) and religious professionals (mediums between heaven and earth). One might also assume that some of the drugs found there assisted the shamans with their ascent and descent to and from the heavens.

This Spirit Mountain may well have been the Shaman Mountain 巫山 (also translated as Witch Mountain) that is mentioned in three different entries in *Guideways*, and it is also the name of the mountain on which, according to Song Yu’s “Rhapsody on Gaotang,” a king had an erotic dream encounter.²² Yuan Ke quotes different sources that gloss *ling* 靈 (spirit or divine) as *wu* 巫 (shaman/shamanic), and concludes that the two characters were one and the same during antiquity. There is also a state named the State of Shaman Xian 巫咸國. Yuan Ke suggests this is a state established by a group of shamans, as the entry says that it is located on Dengbao Mountain 登葆山, where shamans ascend and descend.²³ I argue that the State of Shaman Xian is a state named after the shaman king who heads the state, i.e., Shaman Xian. This hypothesis is based on the fact that in another entry, the name of the legendary ruler Zhuan Xu 顓頊 (2342 – 2245 B.C.E.?) becomes the name of his state:

20 Yuan Ke 袁柯, ed., *Shanhaijing xiaozhu* 山海經校注 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1983), *Shanhaijing juan* 5, p. 396.

21 Ibid., “Hainei xijing 海內西經,” *Shanhaijing juan* 11, p. 301. Such is how the commentator Guo Pu (276–324 C.E.) interprets the passage.

22 Ibid., “Dahuang nanjing 大荒南經,” *Shanhaijing juan* 15, p. 366; “Dahuang xijing 大荒西經,” *Shanhaijing juan* 16: 406, 411. The king’s encounter will be recounted later.

23 Ibid., “Haiwai xijing 海外西經,” *Shanhaijing juan* 7: 219.

"There is a state named Zhuan Xu 有國曰顓頊."²⁴ Hence, the state of Shaman Xian was most likely a state headed by the shaman. If such a state actually existed, this would mean that shamans were not only healers and religious officiants; they could also hold exalted positions.

Despite the prevalence of shamans in *Guideways*, few references were made about specific drugs used by them to "ascend and descend." However, one might infer that at least a couple of them were used. There is a state with Ying People 盈民 surnamed Yu 於, some of whom ate only the leaves of a tree 木葉. Hao Yixing 郝懿行 (1757–1825 C.E.) notes that, according to Gao You's 高誘 (Eastern Han figure) commentary of "Chapter on Original Tastes 本味篇" of *The Spring and Autumn Annals of Master Lü* 呂氏春秋, "leaves of the red and black trees are edible. One can become a transcendent/immortal from eating them."²⁵ This may make more sense when one considers Guo Moruo's 郭沫若 (1892–1978) assertion that Yu 於, the surname of the people, was pronounced *wu* during antiquity, and used interchangeably with *wu* 巫, shaman.²⁶ Hence, the Ying People may have been a tribe of shamans who consumed hallucinogenic leaves.

"Guideway of the Central Mountains 中山經" of *Guideways* describes a mountain with a hallucinogenic herb that induces erotic experiences.

There is a mountain named Damsel Yao Mountain (Gu Yao Shan 姑媯山). The daughter of a thearch 帝 (deity-king) died there. Her name was Nüshi 女尸. She transformed into the *yao* herb 蓂草.²⁷ Its leaves are stacked and its flowers are yellow. Its fruits are similar to the *tuqiu* 菟丘. It is an aphrodisiac.²⁸

Many of the names with titles in *Guideways* follow the grammatical structure of the languages of the

²⁴ Ibid., "Dahuang nanjing," *Shanhaijing juan* 15: 377.

²⁵ Ibid., 370.

²⁶ Tang Zhangping 湯漳平 quotes from Guo Moruo's *Qu Yuan fu jinyi* 屈原賦今譯. Tang Zhangping, *Chutu wenxian yu Chuci: Jiuge* 出土文獻與楚辭九歌 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2004), 71, fn. 17.

²⁷ This *yao* should have a grass, rather than a jade, radical.

²⁸ Yuan Ke, ed., *Shanhaijing xiaozhu*, *Shanhaijing juan* 5: 142. Literally, "If you ingest it, you become alluring to people."

indigenous ethnocultures of southern China in that they are the reverse of the order found in the Chinese of the Central Plains. Their titles precede the names of numerous thearchs and shamans. For example, Di Jun 帝俊 for Thearch Jun instead of Jun Di 俊帝, Di Yao 帝堯 for Thearch Yao instead of Yao Di 堯帝, Di Shun 帝舜 for Thearch Shun instead of Shun Di 舜帝, and Wu Xian 巫咸 for Shaman Xian instead of Xian Wu 咸巫. Hence, I read the name of this mountain, Gu Yao Shan, as Damsel Yao Mountain, where *gu* is a descriptive title (damsel) rather than part of the name, which would have made the name of the Mountain, Guyao. According to this entry, the mountain was named after a thearch's daughter who was transformed into a hallucinogenic herb after death. She might have been a shaman priestess. *Nüshi*, literally female corpse, referred to ritualists who accepted offerings on behalf of deceased women during antiquity. Guo Pu's 郭璞(276–324 C.E.) commentary on *Guideways* glosses *tuqiu* as *tusi* 菟絲, dodder, *Cuscuta sinensis*, a hallucinogen.²⁹ This particular legend and the significance of the word, *yao*, as an herb — and as a part of different nomenclatures — will be discussed further in conjunction with a king's erotic encounter with a goddess on Shaman Mountain (in the preface to “Rhapsody on Gaotang 高唐賦”). Damsel Yao Mountain may have been one and the same as Shaman Mountain.

THE SONGS OF CHU 楚辭

Attributed to Qu Yuan 屈原 (ca. 343–ca. 277 B.C.E.), the collection known as the *Songs of Chu* consists of lyrics that reflect shamanistic elements from the State of Chu 楚國 in southern China. Shamanistic rituals, spirit journeys and eroticized encounters with deities abound. Take, for example, “Wandering Far Away” 遠遊, which portrays a spirit journey undertaken by a shaman. Feathered people, driving flying dragons, and traveling through space are common motifs in paintings³⁰ and in *Guideways*. “Wandering Far Away” reads:

29 Ibid. For more information on the herb, see Smith and Stuart, *Chinese Materia Medica*, 140; Schultes, *Plants of the Gods*, 246.

30 See fn. 14.

I followed the Winged People³¹ to the Cinnabar Hills,³²
And stayed in the old country of the Undying.
In the morning I washed my hair in Hot Water Valley,³³
Dried myself in the warmth of nine afternoon suns,³⁴
And drank the elixir spraying from the Flying Springs³⁵

I mustered my ten thousand chariots,
And at a leisurely pace we proceeded abreast,
Driving teams of eight undulating dragons,
Serpentine waves of streamers above us.

Rainbow pennons with yak-tail crests rose high,
Their many colors blinding,
Over the bobbing heads of yoke dragons,
And the muscular writhing of trace dragons....

I traversed the four wilds,
And traveled all over the six directions,
So high I could see through the seams between the skies,
Then I looked down toward the abysmal sea.

Below me was only landless depth,
And above me, skylless space.

³¹ The Winged People 羽人 are the *xian* 仙, transcendents or immortals.

³² The Cinnabar Hills 丹丘 are where the *xian* live. It is always bright there, day or night.

³³ Hot Water Valley 湯谷 is where the sun bathes and where the *fusang* 扶桑 tree grows.

³⁴ Nine suns grow on the *fusang* tree's lower branches, but on the top branch there is a tenth sun.

³⁵ No one knows for sure, but some scholars claim that the Flying Springs 飛泉 confer immortality.

I looked but saw the blur of nothing,
 I listened but heard the muffled silence of nothing.
 I had transcended Nonintention and arrived at perfect purity,
 A short distance from the Great Beginning.³⁶

“Mountain Spirit 山鬼,” another song from this collection, mentions many plants, of which dodder and spirit mushrooms are hallucinogenic.³⁷

There seems to be someone in the mountain hollow
 Draped in creeping fig³⁸ with pine-gauze³⁹ sash....

Drawn by red panthers, followed by striped wild cats,
 Her magnolia⁴⁰ wagon flies a flag of woven cinnamon bark.
 Cloaked in orchids,⁴¹ asarum⁴² sash around her waist,
 She picks the sweetest flowers and herbs to give her love....

I pick the spirit mushrooms in the mountains

36 Gopal Sukhu, ed. and transl., *The Songs of Chu: An Anthology of Ancient Chinese Poetry by Qu Yuan and Others* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 145–49, 150–51 fns. Great Beginning 太初 is where one finds the primordial energy.

37 The translation of excerpts of this song is from Gopal Sukhu, 18–19. The names of the herbs are based on the footnotes of Tang Zhangping, 68–71.

38 *Bili* 薜荔, *Ficus pumila*, is a creeper. See Smith and Stuart, 175, for more details.

39 According to Tang Zhangping, *nüluo* 女蘿 (*Cuscuta japonica*) is *tusi* 菟絲 (the parasitic dodder vine). Tang Zhangping, 70, fn. 2. See Smith and Stuart, 140, 247–48. Dodder is a hallucinogen, according to Schultes et al., *Plants of the Gods*, 246.

40 *Xinyi* 辛夷, *Magnolia conspicua*. See Smith and Stuart, 253.

41 *Shilan* 石蘭, literally, rock orchid. Tang Zhangping notes that it is also known as *shanlan* 山蘭.

42 According to Tang Zhangping, *duheng* 杜衡 is an aromatic herb also known as *dukui* 杜葵, *Asarum forbesii*. See Smith and Stuart, 54.

Amid rock piles and spreading kudzu....

We in the mountains love the fragrance of galangal,

We find drink in stone springs and shade beneath cypress and pine.

Afraid to act, you long for me....⁴³

The line, "I pick the spirit mushrooms in the mountains" 采三秀兮於山間 could also be translated as "I pick spirit mushrooms in Shaman Mountain." Erya 爾雅 (third century B.C.E.), the first surviving Chinese dictionary, notes that the *sanxiu* 三秀, literally, the thrice elegant, refers to *lingzhi* 靈芝, the spirit or divine mushroom that blooms thrice a year. This agrees with Sukhu's translation above. However, as mentioned earlier, *yu* 於 was pronounced *wu* during antiquity and used interchangeably with *wu* 巫, shaman. Hence, *yu shanjian* 於山間, "in the mountains," could be *wushan jian* 巫山間, "in Shaman Mountain."⁴⁴ The line could then be "I pick the spirit mushrooms in Shaman Mountain."

In "The Great Minister of Life Spans 大司命," the shaman presents the flower of cannabis or *soma* to a deity.

I pick the *yao* gem flower of the spirit hemp,

To give to you who dwell beyond.⁴⁵

The first line, *zhe shuma xi yaohua* 折疏麻兮瑤華, is literally "picking the sparse hemp; its *yao* 瑤 flower." According to Gopal Sukhu's footnote, the *shuma* 疏麻, sparse hemp, is also known as *shenma* 神麻, spirit hemp, *Cannabis sativa*.⁴⁶ Both He Zhang and Nicholas Morrow Williams propose that *shuma* is the Chinese appellation for the Vedic *soma*.⁴⁷ The female inflorescence is the most potent part

⁴³ Gopal Sukhu, 18–19; Tang Zhangping, 69.

⁴⁴ Tang Zhangping, 71, fn. 17.

⁴⁵ Gopal Sukhu, 13.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 23. Note that the correct footnote should be no. 24, not the no. 31 given in the main text.

⁴⁷ See He Zhang, "Is *Shuma* the Chinese Analog of *Soma*/*Haoma*? A Study of Early Contacts between Indo-Iranians and

of cannabis. But even if it is the flower of some other plant, the reference to it as *yao* flower confers the additional connotation of being divine or hallucinogenic. We have already encountered the word *yao* in an entry in *Guideways* on Damsel Yao Mountain, and the *yao* herb, which a Daoist commentator deems similar to the hallucinogenic dodder. Here we will link it to a tale found in the preface of a rhapsody from the Chu State, in which a king had an erotic dream encounter on Shaman Mountain due to the consumption of a psychedelic mushroom. Damsel Yao Mountain may have been Shaman or Witch Mountain — where different hallucinogens might have been used not only for “ascent and descent,” but also for fantastical experiences.

The *yao* of Gu Yao (Damsel Yao) 姑嫪, *yaocao* (*yao* herb) 蓍草 and *yaohua* (*yao* flower) 瑶華, already mentioned, and Yaoji (Lady Yao) 瑶姬 to be described below, may have derived from the swaying motion (*yaoyao huanghuang* 搖搖晃晃) induced by the use of hallucinogens.⁴⁸ Lady Yao appeared in the erotic dream of a king who visited Shaman Mountain, according to Song Yu's 宋玉 (ca. 298 – ca. 222 B.C.E.) preface to his “Rhapsody on Gaotang.” But her name and identity as the daughter of a thearch (who was transformed into a hallucinogenic herb) are not found in the commonly known version of the piece collected in Xiao Tong's 蕭統 (501–431 B.C.E.) *Selections of Refined Literature* 文選. According to this version, Song Yu told the king whom he accompanied to Shaman Mountain,

In the past, a former king visited Gaotang. He grew tired and took a nap. A woman appeared to him in a dream and said, “I am the lady of Shaman Mountain and a guest of Gaotang. When I heard that you, Lord, were visiting Gaotang, I desired to offer my pillow and sleeping mat.” The king then made love to her. She said by way of farewell, “I

Chinese, *Sino-Platonic Papers* 216, (Oct. 2011): 1–36; Nicholas Morrow Williams, “Shamans, Souls, and Soma: Comparative Religion and Early China,” 164–68.

⁴⁸ Cai Dacheng 蔡大成, “Chu wu de zhihuan fangshu – Gaotang shennü chuanshuo jiedu 楚巫的致幻方術 – 高唐神女傳說解讀.” *Shehui kexue pinglun* 5 (1988): 88.

am on the southern side of Shaman Mountain amid the dangerous rocky heights. At dawn, I am a morning cloud; at dusk, I am sudden rainfall...."⁴⁹

An entry titled "Shaman Mountain 巫山," recorded in *Old Records of the Elderly Man of Xiangyang* 襄陽耆舊記, by an Eastern Jin dynasty (317–420 C.E.) author, includes a more complete version of the preface that contains the goddess's self-introduction.

The daughter of Red Thearch 赤帝 was named Lady Yao 瑤姬. She died before she could travel and was buried at the south-facing side of Shaman Mountain. Hence, she was known as the lady of Shaman Mountain. When King Huai of Chu 楚懷王 (355–296 B.C.E.) visited Gaotang, he took a nap and dreamt of an encounter with a goddess who claimed to have been the lady of Shaman Mountain. Thereupon the king favored her and later built a shrine named Morning Cloud 朝雲 (which he dedicated to her) at the southern side of Shaman Mountain. During the time of King Xiang 襄王 (329–263 B.C.E.), the new king also visited Gaotang.

When King Xiang of Chu and Song Yu visited the wilderness of Yunmeng 雲夢, the king asked Song Yu to compose a rhapsody about Gaotang. He observed how the mist above the Morning Cloud Shrine would soar up loftily and morph into myriad forms in an instant. Thereupon the king asked Song Yu, "What kind of *qi* 氣 is this?" Song Yu replied, "In the past, the former king visited Gaotang. He grew tired and took a nap. He dreamt of a woman who was as warm as a cloud, and as lustrous as a star. She approached as if she were floating. When he was able to observe her up close, he found her to be as beautiful as Xizi 西子.⁵⁰ Greatly delighted, the king inquired about her. She replied, "I am the youngest daughter of the thearch. My name is Lady Yao 瑤姬. I died before I could travel and was enfeoffed [as goddess] at the terrace on Shaman Mountain. My spirit attached itself to an herb which is, in fact, the divine mushroom. An

⁴⁹ Based on Gopal Sukhu, xl.

⁵⁰ Xizi refers to Xishi 西施, one of the most beautiful women in Chinese culture.

aphrodisiac when ingested, the person who consumes it will meet me in dream. I am known as the damsel of Shaman Mountain 巫山之女, the lady of Gaotang 高唐之姬. When I heard that you, Lord, were visiting Gaotang, I desired to offer my pillow and sleeping mat.” Thereupon, the king made love to her.⁵¹

Both Lady Yao and Damsel Yao of *Guideways* were considered to be the daughter of a thearch; they are most likely the same goddess. Hence, Shaman Mountain and Damsel Yao Mountain were likely one and the same — a site where all manner of drug-yielding plants grew. The hallucinogen used by the king to induce the erotic experience could have been either dodder or a psilocybin mushroom.

HALLUCINOGENS USED BY DAOIST ADEPTS AND ASPIRING TRANSCENDENTS 仙

Unlike shaman priests and priestesses (who made and guided spirit journeys in order to cure diseases, exorcize demons, and connect with the spirit world on behalf of members of their communities), Daoists who aspired to become transcendents used spirit journeys for personal fulfillment. While the techniques they employed included alchemical, pharmaceutical, dietetic, respiratory, meditational, and sexual techniques,⁵² we will focus here on the various pharmaceutical herbs they used (as mentioned in pharmacopoeias, Daoist treatises, and encyclopedias).

PHARMACOPOEIAS

The ten hallucinogenic plants listed below were culled by Hui-Lin Li, mainly from Li Shizhen's 李時珍 (1518–1593) magnum opus, *Compendium of Materia Medica* 本草綱目 (first published in 1596).⁵³ The article is completely in English, with the names for the herbs in Wade-Giles romanization only. In the

⁵¹ Xi Zaochi 習鑿齒 (Eastern Jin figure), “Wushan 巫山” in *Xiangyang qijiu ji* 襄陽耆舊記 *juan* 3. See Xiong Ming 熊明, ed., *Han Wei Liuchao zazhuan ji* 漢魏六朝雜傳集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2017), 3: 1601–1604.

⁵² Joseph Needham et al., *Science and Civilisation in China: Volume 6, Biology and Biological Technology, Part 6, Medicine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 59.

⁵³ Hui-Lin Li also lists twenty pharmacopoeias from the Han to the Ming dynasties.

list below, I provide the Chinese characters for the herbs and convert the romanization to pinyin. I also provide in parenthesis the page number/s referencing each herb in Li’s article, and in Smith and Stuart’s and Schultes’s books.⁵⁴

- 莨菪 *langdan*: *Hyoscyamus niger* (Li, 166–67, 178). *Scopolia japonica*; *Hyoscyamus* (Smith and Stuart, 211, 399–400). (Schultes, 288, 298).
- 雲實 *yunshi*: *Caesalpinia sepiaria* (Li, 167–68, 179). (Smith and Stuart, 78–79). (Schultes, 335–37).
- 防葵 *fangkui*: *Peucedanum japonica* (Li, 168–70, 180). (Smith and Stuart, 315). (Schultes, 354–55).
- 商陸 *shanglu*: *Phytolacca acinosa* (Li, 169–70, 181). (Smith and Stuart, 319). (Schultes, 329–30).
- 大麻 *dama*: *Cannabis sativa*⁵⁵ (Li, 170–71). (Smith and Stuart, 90–1). (Schultes, many pages; see index). (Schultes, 94, 116).
- 曼陀羅 *mantuoluo*: *Datura alba*⁵⁶ (Li, 171–72). (Smith and Stuart, 145–46). (Schultes, many pages for *Datura*; see index).
- 毛茛 *maogen*: *Ranunculus acris* (Li, 172–73). (Smith and Stuart, 370). (Schultes, 330).
- 防風 *fangfeng*: *Siler divaricatum* (Li, 173). (Smith and Stuart, 292, 315, 407–408). (Schultes, 355).
- 龍荔 *longli*: *Nephelium topengii* (Li, 173–4). (Smith and Stuart, 331, 486). (Schultes, 343).
- 笑菌 *xiaojun*: *Panaeolus papilionaceus* (Li, 175–6). (Schultes, 43, 56, 63, 72, 74; 79 for *Panaeolus*).⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Hui-Lin Li, “Hallucinogenic Plants in Chinese Herbals,” 161–81; Schultes et al., *Plants of the Gods*, 28.

⁵⁵ See Hui-Lin Li, “An Archaeological and Historical Account of Cannabis in China,” *Economic Botany*, 28: 437–48. *Cannabis* has been found in China since Neolithic times, about 6000 years ago, with a continuous record of cultivation down to the present (437). See also Hui-Lin Li, “The Origin and Use of *Cannabis* in Eastern Asia: Linguistic-Cultural Implications,” *Economic Botany* 28: 293–301. See Shao Hong and Robert C. Clarke, “Taxonomic Studies of *Cannabis* in China,” *Journal of the International Hemp Association* 3 (2): 55–60. More recently, excavation of the 2700-year-old grave of a Caucasoid shaman near Turpan, Xinjiang, yielded a large cache of cannabis. See Ethan B. Russo, Hong-En Jiang et al., “Phytochemical and Genetic Analysis of Ancient *Cannabis* from Central Asia,” *Journal of Experimental Botany* 59 (15): 4171–82.

⁵⁶ Species of *Datura* are also known as Jimson Weed, devil’s apple, thorn apple, made apple, the devil’s week, Gabriel’s trumpet, and angel’s trumpet. Michael J. Harner, “The Role of Hallucinogenic Plants in European Witchcraft,” in *Hallucinogens and Shamanism*, ed. Michael J. Harner (Oxford University Press, 1973), 128.

⁵⁷ See also Yu Jingrang 于景讓, “Xiao jun 笑草,” *Dalu zazhi* 19 (8): 203–206.

BIOGRAPHIES OF TRANSCENDENTS 列仙傳

Biographies of Transcendents is attributed to Liu Xiang 劉向 (77 B.C.E.–6 C.E.) The following are the herbs consumed by transcendents in this earliest collection of stories of Daoist immortals. The page numbers of the herbs refer to Qiu Heting's 邱鶴亭 *Annotated Biographies of Transcendents* and *Annotated Biographies of Divine Immortals* 列仙傳注譯 神仙傳注譯.⁵⁸

- 苳藤 *jusheng* (Qiu, 18–19). *Sesamum* (in Li Shizhen's *Compendium of Materia Medica*); *Impatiens balsamina*; seeds of *Ixeris* or *Mulgedium* (Smith and Stuart, 269).
- 蒲韭根 *pujiugen* (Qiu, pp. 24–25). This may be the root of a type of 菖蒲 *Acorus* (Smith and Stuart, 54, 123, 221). (Schultes, 320–21).
- 桂芝 *guizhi* (Qiu, 26–27). The first character, 桂, is *Cinnamomum cassia* (Smith and Stuart, 107–110). The second character, 芝, indicates that it is a type of psilocybin mushroom. (Schultes, 43–44).
- 橐廬木 *tuolumu* (Qiu, 32). (橐吾 *tuowu* [*Tussilago farfara*] in Smith and Stuart, 172).
- 蕪菁子 *wuqingzi* (Qiu, 32). *Brassica rapa-depressa* seeds (Smith and Stuart, 74–75).
- 菌桂 *jungui* (Qiu, 35–36). The first graph, 菌, refers to mushrooms. The second graph, 桂, is *Cinnamomum cassia* (Smith and Stuart, 107–110).
- 桂 *gui* (Qiu, 42–43). *Cinnamomum cassia* (Smith and Stuart, 107–110). *Gui* 桂 can also refer to 木樨 *muxi* (*Osmanthus fragrans*) (Smith and Stuart, p. 232).
- 葵 *kui* (Qiu, 42–43). *Malva* (Smith and Stuart, 256–57). (Schultes, 347).
- 松實 *songshi* (Qiu, 55). Pine nuts.
- 天門冬 *tianmendong* (Qiu, 55). *Asparagus lucidus*; *Melanthium cochinchinensis*; *Asparagus cochinchinensis* (Smith and Stuart, 55–56).
- 茯苓/靈 *fuling* (Qiu, 58–59). *Pachyma cocos* (Smith and Stuart, 298–99).
- 芝草 *zhicao* (Qiu, 62). Divine mushroom. (Smith and Stuart, 271). (Schultes, 43–44).
- 藟根 *leigen* (Qiu, 63–64). Root of creeper/bramble.
- 茜草 *xicao* (Qiu, 63–64). *Rubia cordifolia* (Smith and Stuart, 381–82). (Schultes, 309).
- 瓜子 *guazi* (Qiu, 64). Squash or melon seeds.

⁵⁸ Qiu Heting, *Liexianzhuan zhuyi Shenxianzhuan zhuyi* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1996).

- 苻子 *fuzi* (Qiu, 64). *Aconitum fischeri* (Smith and Stuart, 7–12). (Schultes, 355).
- 芷實 *zhishi* (Qiu, 64). *Angelica*.
- 地黄 *dihuang* (Qiu, 65). *Rehmannia glutinosa* (Smith and Stuart, 150).
- 當歸 *danggui* (Qiu, 65). *Cryptotaenia canadensis*, *Angelica polymorpha* (Smith and Stuart, 133–34).
- 獨活/姜活 *duhuo/jianghuo* (Qiu, 65). *Peucedanum decursivum* (Smith and Stuart, 314). (Schultes, 353).
- 苦參 *kucen* (Qiu, 65). *Sophora angustifolia* (Smith and Stuart, 414–15). (Schultes, 140, 157, 346).
- 松葉 *songye* (Qiu, 65). Pine needles.
- 菊花 *juhua* (Qiu, 70–71). Chrysanthemum flowers.
- 地膚 *difu* (Qiu, 70–71). *Kochia scoparia* (Smith and Stuart, 227).
- 桑上寄生 *sangshang jisheng* (Qiu, 70–1). *Viscum* (Smith and Stuart, 455–56; 桑寄生 *sang jisheng* (*Loranthus yadoriki*), 248).
- 朮 *zhu*. *Atractylis* (Qiu, 71–72) (Smith and Stuart, 57). 白朮 *baizhu* is *Aristolochia recurvilabra* (Smith and Stuart, 49–50). (Schultes, 170).
- 菖蒲根 *changpugen* (Qiu, 71–72). *Acorus* root (Smith and Stuart, 123, 54, 221). (Schultes, 320–21).
- 禹余糧 *yuyuliang* (*tufuling* 土茯苓) (Qiu, 74–75). *Smilax pseudo-china* (Smith and Stuart, 410–11).
- 巴豆 *badou* (Qiu, 84). *Croton tiglium* (Smith and Stuart, 132–33).

Akira Akahori lists thirty-nine common drugs used for immortality, six of which (*fuling* 茯苓; *fuzi* 附子; *kucen* 苦參; *zhi* 芝; *zhu* 朮; mercury) were likely hallucinogenic.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Akira Akahori, "Drug Taking and Immortality," in *Taoist Meditation and Longevity Techniques*, ed. Livia Kohn, in cooperation with Yoshinobu Sakade (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Center for Chinese Studies, 1989), 97–98.

PSILOCYBIN/SPIRIT MUSHROOMS

The *zhi* 芝, *jun* 菌, and *xun* 蕈 are all mushrooms.⁶⁰ They include *Amanita*, *Conocybe*, *Copelandia*, *Panaeolus*, *Psilocybe*, and *Stropharia*, all of which are intoxicating mushrooms belonging to the family *Agaricaceae*.⁶¹ It also refers to mushrooms, such as *lingzhi* 靈芝 (spirit or divine mushroom), *Clavaria* or *Sparassis*, known for prolonging life or the ability to revive the dead.⁶² R. Gordon Wasson argues, although not totally convincingly, that the spirit mushroom was probably “a ‘literary’ reflection of Soma, the miraculous mushroom of the RgVeda,” since there was no mention of *lingzhi* until the Qin dynasty (221–207 B.C.E.).⁶³ According to *Expansive Elegance* 廣雅 (227–232 C.E.), one of the earliest Chinese dictionaries, “*ling* 靈 refers to shamans 巫.” Hence, *lingzhi*, “divine mushroom,” is also called shaman mushroom.

The occult Daoist Ge Hong’s masterpiece, *Master Who Embraces Simplicity* 抱朴子, includes descriptions of several spirit mushrooms. Their ability to enable spirit journeys and mystical union with heaven and earth are suggestive of psychedelic trips.⁶⁴

Sancheng zhi 參成芝 [Triple Formed Spirit Mushroom]: The triple type [spirit mushroom] is red and brilliant. When struck, its stems and caps resound like metal or stone; when broken off, it regenerates and immediately becomes as before. The wood-shield species [divine mushroom] grows against large trees, like a water lily, and has nine stalks which form one mass. It tastes sweet and acrid. The fruit of the stabilizer variety grows in the fields of Tu-kuang [Duguang 都廣]. Its skin resembles a ribbon or

60 Smith and Stuart, *Chinese Materia Medica*, 271–274.

61 Schultes et al., *Plants of the Gods*, 43–44.

62 Smith and Stuart, *Chinese Materia Medica*, 271.

63 R. Gordon Wasson, *SOMA: Divine Mushroom of Immortality* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. 1971), 81. Wasson’s assumption is that the concept of Soma came from India and became known as the divine mushroom *lingzhi* in China.

64 Pollan, *How to Change Your Mind*.

a snake, and is marked like the male phoenix. By getting and taking these three excrescences [spirit mushrooms], one will ascend to heaven in broad daylight.⁶⁵

Mamu zhi 麻母芝 [Female *Cannabis* Spirit Mushroom]: resembles hemp, its stalk is red, and its flowers, purple.⁶⁶

Not all of Ge Hong's *Master Who Embraces Simplicity* has survived. However, the section on *zhi*, excrescences and mushrooms, has been preserved in the *Encyclopedia of Literary Collections* 藝文類聚 compiled in 624 C.E., two hundred fifty years after Ge Hong's death.⁶⁷ The *zhi* here includes Rock Excrescences 石芝 (stalactites and stalagmites), Wood Excrescences 木芝, Herb Excrescences 草芝, Flesh Excrescences 肉芝 (toads), and Mushroom Excrescences 菌芝. Consumption of most of the excrescences described by Ge Hong enables one to prolong one's life by a thousand years (or even ten thousand years), and some endow one with the ability to ward off attacking armies. Most of the *zhi* mushrooms he describes also enable one to ride on clouds and meet with deities and spirits. Below, I translate those with such psychoactive properties.

Qingyun zhi 青雲芝 (Black Cloud Spirit Mushroom): It grows among black boulders on the shaded side of famous mountains. Its caps are black, stacked in three layers, and covered by cloud-mist. Its taste is acrid and sweet. Consumed after they are dried in the shade, they will enable the body to live for a thousand years without aging, ride on clouds, communicate with heaven, and see ghosts and spirits.

65 Ware, *Alchemy, Medicine and Religion*, 182–83. *Sancheng zhi* 參成芝 might also be read as *shencheng zhi* "Spirit Mushroom Transformed from Ginseng." Ware translates *zhi*, the spirit or divine mushroom, as excrescence, because many of the *zhi* mentioned in this particular source are not mushrooms.

66 Ibid.

67 Ouyang Xun 歐陽詢 (557–641) et al., "Muzhi 木芝" in *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚 (Hong Kong: Zhonghua shuju, 1973 reprint), 98: 1701–1702.

Rou zhi 肉芝 (Flesh Spirit Mushroom): If you see a little person seven to eight *cun* 寸 tall riding in a carriage when you travel on a mountain, you have encountered a flesh spirit mushroom. Consume it raw and you will attain transcendence immediately.⁶⁸

Chiyun zhi 赤雲芝 (Red Cloud Spirit Mushroom): It grows among precipitous rocks of verdant mountains. Its lower part resembles joined people and standing drums. Its color is lustrous. It should be picked during the summer and eaten after it is dried in the shade. It will enable the body to ride on clouds, view the Eight Extremities 八極, communicate with the spirits, and prolong one's life by ten thousand years.

Shan zhi 山芝 (Mountain Spirit Mushroom): This is what Han Zhong 韓終 consumed in order to merge with heaven and earth 天地相極, prolong life, and communicate with the spirits.⁶⁹

Huo zhi 火芝 (Fire Spirit Mushroom): It is usually harvested during the summer. Its top is vermilion; its stem is dark in color. Master Red Pine 赤松子 used to consume it, and subsequently float up and down, east and west in front of the Queen Mother of the West 西王母.⁷⁰

Hei zhi 黑芝 (Black Spirit Mushroom): It grows in the shaded areas and valleys of mountains. Its cap is white; its stem is vermilion. Its taste is sweet. When picked in autumn, dried in shade, and ingested daily, one's body will become light, one's teeth will become strong, and one will merge with heaven and earth 天地無極.

Baiyun zhi 白雲芝 (White Cloud Spirit Mushroom): It grows on white rocks on the

68 1 *cun* = 3.33 cm.

69 Han Zhong was an adept charged by the First Emperor of the Qin to find the herb of immortality.

70 Master Red Pine was a legendary immortal of antiquity.

cloud-covered, shaded side of famous mountains. Its caps are white and stacked in two layers. Its taste is pungent, sweet, and slightly bitter. Picked in autumn and dried in the shade, its consumption will make the body light and the teeth strong.

Gui zhi 鬼芝 (Ghost/Spirit Mushroom): It has a black cap and long stem. Chop into small pieces after it is dried in the shade. Eating 500 ml each day will enable one to see spirits and prolong life.

Another encyclopedia compiled more than 350 years after *Encyclopedia of Literary Collections*, the *Imperial Readings of the Taiping Era* 太平御覽, compiled from 977 to 983 C.E., records other spirit mushrooms consumed by transcedents.⁷¹

Zhi 芝 (Spirit Mushrooms): They grow on famous mountains. Eating them will enable one to ride on clouds and view the Eight Extremities and communicate with the spirits.

Fenghuang zhicao 鳳凰芝草 (Phoenix Spirit Mushroom): It grows on patterned rocks among metal and jade on famous mountains. Dried in the shade and consumed for a year, it will enable one to grow feathers and wings, live for a thousand years, and ride on clouds with phoenixes.

Huangyun zhi 黃雲芝 (Yellow Cloud Spirit Mushroom): It grows among metallic rocks in famous mountains. It is covered by yellow clouds. Eating it will enable one to live to be a thousand years of age, and see and communicate with spirits. Clouds will become the person's carriage; and wind, his horse.

Hu zhi 虎芝 (Tiger Spirit Mushroom): It grows on the shaded side of famous mountains.

⁷¹ Li Fang 李昉 (925–996) et al., *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽, vol. 986, "yaobu 藥部 3, zhi xia 芝下" (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960), 4365–66. See also vols. 981–1000 on incense and pharmacopeia.

Its shape resembles a tiger. Consuming it will make the body light and prolong life for eight hundred years.

Mingniao zhi 鳴鳥芝 (Chirping Bird Spirit Mushroom): It grows on the forested, sunny side of famous mountains. Its shape resembles a bird with five colors. Process by drying it in the shade before consuming. It will make one's body light and enable the person to travel with the wind.

RECIPES AND PRESCRIPTIONS

The esoteric section 內篇 of Ge Hong's *Master Who Embraces Simplicity* also includes several recipes for attaining transcendence.

Flesh excrescences 肉芝: the ten-thousand-year-old hoptoad is said to have horns on its head, while under its chin there is a double-tiered figure 8 written in red. It must be captured at noon on the fifth day of the fifth moon and dried in the shade for a hundred days.... If both of these creatures (the toad and a thousand-year-old white bat) are obtained, dried in the shade, powdered, and taken, a body can live for forty thousand years.⁷²

Some recipes seem impossible to concoct, such as liquefying mica, and some are very expensive, such as ingesting one to two hundred pounds of jade! I include them also to show the credulity required of many an aspiring transcendent.

To take the micas, first liquefy them through the use of cinnamon-onion or *Pinellia tuberifera*.... It may then be mixed to a paste with honey.... Or they may be nibbled,

⁷² Ware, *Alchemy, Medicine and Religion*, 184. The toad is also a known hallucinogen. The Colorado River toad secretes considerable amounts of the psychoactive compound 5-MeO-DMT. See Schultes et al., *Plants of the Gods*, 22.

dipped in aconite or ailanthus sap.... If taken steadily for five years, it will make possible the employment of ghosts and gods, entering fire without being burned, entering water without getting wet, walking on thorns without being hurt, and acquaintance with genii [transcendents].⁷³

Jade ... will make a man's body light enough to fly.... It is slow, however, to take effect; the results can be known only after one or two hundred pounds have been taken.⁷⁴

If pure, unadulterated lacquer is taken, it will put a man in communication with the gods and let him enjoy Fullness of Life. Directions: Mix it with ten pieces of crab. Take it with mica water, or mixed with jade water. The Nine Insects will then drop from you, and bad blood will leave you through nose-bleeds. After a year, the six-*chia* [甲] gods and the Traveling Canteen 行厨 will come to you.⁷⁵

Ge Hong's prescriptions for attaining non-transcendental goals sound more plausible. For falling frenzy or having seizures, he gives two prescriptions that make use of *langdang* 莨菪 (*Hyocyamus niger*), which Strickmann translates as henbane in his translation of Ge Hong's *Prescriptions Within Arm's Reach for Use in Emergencies* 肘後備急方.⁷⁶

Three pints of henbane seeds are to be steeped in five pints of wine, then dried in the sun. They are then to be crushed and a spoonful administered to the patient thrice daily — and no more than this, otherwise it will intensify, rather than diminish, his seizures.

⁷³ Ware, *Alchemy, Medicine and Religion*, 186–87.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 188.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 190. The unadulterated lacquer might also be interpreted as referring to pearls larger than an inch in diameter (referred to prior to this sentence in the original), which lacquer would not stick to.

⁷⁶ Michel Strickmann, *Chinese Magical Medicine*, ed. Bernard Faure (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2002), 240–41. Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 (456–536), annot. and ed., *Ge Hong zhouhou beijifang* 葛洪肘後備急方 (Beijing: Renmin weisheng chubanshe, 1963), 3: 61–62.

Another henbane-powder for falling frenzy can be produced by steeping three pints of pulverized henbane in a pint of wine for many days. Then remove the henbane, pound it, mix it again with the juice, press out the liquid, and steam the henbane over boiling water until malleable. Mold it into pellets the size and shape of small beans and administer three per day. The patient should show perceptible twitching around the mouth or elsewhere on the face. He should have the sensation that insects are moving about in his head, and there should be redness in places on his forehead, hands, and feet. If such is the case, these are signs that he will certainly recover. If these signs do not appear, he should still continue taking the pellets until all have been consumed.⁷⁷

The same book by Ge Hong treats madness 狂 by using calcined toad. Here “madness” is defined by manic exaltation, delusions of grandeur, and hyperactivity.

A sudden attack of “madness” may be treated by having the patient drink, thrice daily, a spoonful of calcined toad steeped in wine.⁷⁸

A Daoist treatise named *Taishang lingbao wufu xu* 太上灵宝五符序 (assembled in various stages and probably completed around 410 C.E.) collected various techniques and recipes for attaining transcendence. Another generally recognized hallucinogen, poke root (*zhanglu* [*Phytolacca acinose*]), is used in a recipe for suppressing hunger that also allows one to achieve an altered state of consciousness.

When the moon rests in the *yugui* constellation and the day reaches the *ding* hour (2 A.M.), gather the poke root plant. Eat a piece the size of a jujube three times per day.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 241.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

Taoist [Daoist] adepts always grow this plant in a garden by their meditation chambers.
It allows a person to communicate with the gods.⁷⁹

HALLUCINOGENS USED BY SHAMANS OF ETHNIC MINORITIES

In a study on hallucinogens used by shamans among northern ethnic groups in traditional China that is based on historical sources, Wang Jichao examines ten herbs.⁸⁰ Aside from *yunshi* and *langdang*, already examined in Hui-Lin Li's article, Wang lists *mafen* (*Cannabis* flower) 麻蕒, *jitou* 雞頭,⁸¹ *yuanhua* 芫華, *langdu* 狼毒 (Wolf's-Bane), *yangzhizhu* 羊躑躅 (Goat/Sheep Hovering), and *fuzi* 附子. According to Smith and Stuart's *Chinese Materia Medica*, *yuanhua* is *Daphne genkwa*, and *Wickstracemia chamaedaphne*; also known as Head-dizzying Flower, *mentou hua* 悶頭花, and Fish Poison *duyu* 毒魚.⁸² *Langdu*, Wolf's-Bane, is *Aconitum lycoctonum*, *Aconitum ferox*, *Mandragora*, and *Ranunculus*.⁸³ *Yangzhizhu*, Goat/Sheep Hovering is another name for *Rhododendron*; and *fuzi* is *Aconitum fischeri*.⁸⁴ *Rhododendron indicum* (azalea) 杜鵑花 is recognized as a hallucinogenic plant by the Chinese, but not in Schultes.⁸⁵ According to Smith and Stuart, the *Compendium of Materia Medica* lists various *rhododendrons* as Goat/Sheep Hovering, which "derives its meaning from the fact that when sheep eat of these plants, incoordination of the muscles is produced, and the animal staggers and falls. For this reason, it is also called the Plant Goat Won't Eat 羊不吃草."⁸⁶

A Han dynasty (206 B.C.E.–220 C.E.) bamboo slip on "Myriad Things" 萬物 found in Fuyang 阜

79 Stephen Eskildsen, *Asceticism in Early Taoist Religion* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press), 61.

80 Wang Jichao 王紀潮, "Zhongguo gudai saman hunmi zhong de yaowu wenti 中國古代薩滿昏迷中的藥物問題," *Ziran kexue yanjiu* 自然科學研究 (*Studies in the History of Natural Sciences*) 24 (1) (2005): 13–28.

81 Wang considers *jitou* to be the same as *wutou* 烏頭 (*Aconitum lycoctonum*).

82 Smith and Stuart, 143, 460.

83 Smith and Stuart, 11, 257, 370.

84 Smith and Stuart, 7–12.

85 It is not included in Schultes et al.

86 Smith and Stuart, 375.

陽, Anhui 安徽, says: “The herb *yuangen* 元根 (Yuan Root) makes the body light and enables it to traverse clouds on mountains.” Researchers of this bamboo slip believe that the *yuangen* refers to the root of the *yuanhua*.⁸⁷ Wang identifies *wutou* and *fuzi* as *Aconitum camichaeli*. Depending on the stage of growth and the region in which the herb is found, it is also known by the following names: *jin* 莖; *xidu* 奚毒; *jizi* 即子; *wuhui* 烏喙⁸⁸; *ce* 薺; *ji* 芩; *jidu* 雞毒; *cezi* 側子; and *tianxiong* 天雄.⁸⁹ Three items on the bamboo slip mentioned above claim that the consumption of *wuhui* causes humans and horses to travel fast.⁹⁰

Guo Shuyun’s 郭淑雲 study on hallucinogens and spirit medium experiences of present-day shamans (*saman*) in northern China notes that the use of hallucinogenic drugs is not prevalent among the shamans (both male and female) there. Many simply use incense, liquor and cigarettes to help stimulate and create dizziness for both the shamans and participants during rituals that frequently last for several days. Only very experienced, old shamans are privy to knowledge concerning the processing and employment of some hallucinogens, which they guard as professional secrets.⁹¹ Fortunately, Guo was able to find out and record some of them for us.

The Mongolian Oroqen people and the Tungusic Evenk people of northern China purify the ritual altar, the shaman’s robe, and ritual implements with smoke from burning the leaves of a type of juniper known as the Mountain Climbing Juniper 爬山松.⁹²

The ritual for an Oroqen shaman to become possessed by a spirit for the purpose of healing involves an assistant helping him/her through using incense that is created by

87 Wenhuabu guwenxian yanjiushi, Anhui Fuyang diqu bowuguan Fuyang hanjian zhenglizu 文化部古文獻研究室, 安徽阜陽地區博物館阜陽漢簡整理組, “Fuyang hanjian ‘Wanwu’ 阜陽漢簡《萬物》,” *Wenwu* 文物 (1988) 4: 38, 45.

88 The bamboo slip listed above also says that consuming *wuhui* for a hundred days will make people run. *Ibid.*, 38, 44–45.

89 Wang, “Zhongguo gudai saman hunmi zhong de yaowu wenti,” 18.

90 See no. 5, no. 32, and no. 60 of the bamboo slips on *Myriad Things*.

91 Guo Shuyun 郭淑雲, “Zhihuan yaowu yu saman tongshen tiyan 致幻藥物與薩滿通神體驗,” *Xiyu yanjiu* 西域研究 3 (2006): 74.

92 Literally “pine” in Chinese, although it is, in fact, a juniper bush.

placing a ball of dried Mountain Climbing Juniper leaves on a piece of burning coal. When the shaman begins to shake, indicating spirit possession, they would start the healing process. The Mountain Climbing Juniper is known as "acha 阿查" in the Oroqen language. Its Latin name is *Sabina davurica* 興安桧, and it belongs to the cypress family, Cupressaceae. It is a low lying bush that hugs rocky slopes, hence its Chinese name. The stems, leaves and flowers are harvested and dried during the summer and the fall for ritual use.⁹³

The Manchus burn an incense made of Rhododendron.

The roots, flowers and leaves of the Rhododendron (which grows among rocky cliffs and turns entire mountains red with its flowers in the spring), are collected during May and June, dried, and pulverized for use as incense in rituals by the Manchus. Known as Nianqi Incense 年期香,⁹⁴ this incense has an intense aroma and is capable of warding off mosquitos and insects.... This incense is highly pungent. Prolonged inhalation produces the effects of running nose, smarting of the eyes, dry throat, ringing in the ears, and dizziness. In other words, it is likely conducive to the shaman's entrance to an altered state of consciousness.⁹⁵

Many of the herbs used by the shamans are so poisonous that they have to be processed and used with care. Guo describes an herb called *Loudou* herb 萎兜草 for which I cannot find a translation. It is extremely poisonous, but has medicinal uses and can be made into a hallucinogenic drug.

93 Guo Shuyun, "Zhihuan yaowu yu saman tongshen tiyan," 3 (2006): 74.

94 The name for this incense probably derived from the Manchu word *Niyancihya*. Considered to be the only incense recognized by the ancestors of the Manchus, it was used by the Jurchens, ancestors of the Manchus. It was also known as Tartar Incense 鞑子香.

95 Guo Shuyun, "Zhihuan yaowu yu saman tongshen tiyan," 3 (2006): 74.

Loudou herb 萎兜草 grows shoots, leaves and flowers during the summer. Its flowers are small and purple and have intensely fragrant pistils which attract bees and butterflies. Its roots have hard black skin and a white center and are extremely poisonous. Wild boars never eat them, neither would weasels build lairs underneath them. Their stem can be dug out in autumn, cleaned with well water and roasted dry to be used as a drug through soaking in water, or liquor, or chicken blood. The prepared liquid is hot in nature, and extremely poisonous. But when used in very small quantities, it can cure colds. It produces an immediate analgesic effect when administered onto wounds; and can even be used as an anesthesia for minor surgeries. According to folk belief, a hallucinogenic drug can be prepared by combining the herb's stem and fluid with raven's blood. Consumption of this drug produces the sensation of floatation and hallucinations.... The effect being the same as communication with the spirits, ... hence, it is used in ritual events.⁹⁶

Experienced shamans might carry prepared drugs secretly to use as needed during ritual performances to maintain their physical strength and the caliber of their voices and to facilitate entrance into trance. The products include: strong medicinal liquor, drug-infused tobacco, raven tears 老鵠眼水, *Aconitum lycoctonum* water 烏頭水, tiny opium pills, etc.⁹⁷ In particular, *Aconitum lycoctonum* seems to be a particularly effective hallucinogen. It is so poisonous that only the “whiskers” of the root are used during its processing. Normally, just inhaling its sliced root soaked in water will induce drowsiness and sleep. *Aconitum* was also traditionally applied on arrow tips as poison for hunting.⁹⁸

96 Ibid., 71–72.

97 Ibid., 75.

98 Ibid., 74. *Herbal Classic of the God of Agriculture* 神農本草經 and *Compendium of Materia Medica*, quoted by Guo. Processed root of *Aconitum* is also used as medicine for colds. And, a small piece wedged between the teeth cures toothache instantly, although the patient is advised against swallowing their own saliva. Guo Shuyun, “Zhihuan yaowu yu saman tongshen tiyan,” 3 (2006): 75.

Fresh root whiskers are first cleaned in a river, and then wound into small bunches and placed on a plate covered with a piece of paper or cloth. Drops of water are administered daily to keep the paper or cloth moistened. During rituals, the shaman could dab the paper and cloth once with a goose feather and then touch their nose with the feather a few times to induce dizziness instantly.⁹⁹

Another drug used by some shamans among ethnic peoples of northern China is a plant by the name of Ground Hugging Plant 爬地株, also known as Looping Root Herb 串根子草.¹⁰⁰

The Ground Hugging Plant is a low-lying plant with small round leaves and white flowers, and so poisonous that even deer and mountain goats avoid it. Its stem and root have particularly powerful analgesic properties. The Ground Hugging Plant bears tiny purple flowers in August. The flowers are hemostatic (i.e., promotes clotting) and effective for treating pimples and sores. Shamans usually carry pellets of dried flowers with them to use as anesthesia when they operate on external wounds. People say that the further north the plant grows, the more efficacious its medical value. When soaked and processed into a medicine, it has the effects of numbing the central nervous system, increasing the speed of heartbeat, dilating the pupils and creating hallucinations which are considered to be spirit induced.¹⁰¹

Aside from plant-derived hallucinogens, some experienced shamans also use a hallucinogen derived from toads 蟾蜍. Some make toad biscuits or grind their essence into powder for consumption. Some also make a product known as Toad Frost 蟾蜍霜.

They use thin cloths or feathers to extract the fluid from toads. Tiny crystals would form

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ I have not been able to find the scientific name for this plant.

¹⁰¹ Guo Shuyun, "Zhihuan yaowu yu saman tongshen tiyan," 3 (2006): 75.

on the cloths and feathers when dried. Shamans would sew the crystals into a handkerchief and use it when they perform Spirit Medium Dances 跳神.¹⁰²

The shamans in northern China are not the only ones known to use hallucinogens to enter trance. Shamans in Tibet and southwestern China have also made use of hallucinogens to connect with the spirit world. Some Tibetan shamans consume smoked pine 杜松 tips and nuts to induce trance.¹⁰³ They have also been known to drink a hallucinogenic cocktail which contains the stems and leaves of Indian *Cannabis* 印度大麻.¹⁰⁴ Some shamans of the Zhuang People 壯族 drink *Datura* flower-soaked liquor to attain ecstasy.¹⁰⁵ Shamans among ethnic minorities in southern China also use two hallucinogens for which I am unable to find the scientific names: the fruit of a maxun tree 馬尋樹 and a stimulant called *guzibu'an* 姑茲補安 to induce possession.¹⁰⁶ The latter is used by shamans among the Yi people 彝族.¹⁰⁷

CONCLUSION

Shamans were respected ritual priests/priestesses, healers, exorcists, diviners, and even political leaders until the decline of their status (which began during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods [771 B.C.E. – 221 B.C.E.]). Although mention of the use of hallucinogens hardly exists in early literary and historical sources, this study discloses references to them in *Guideways Through Mountains and Seas*, *Songs of Chu*, and a preface to “The Rhapsody of Gaotang.” Daoist adepts, as they expanded their

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Yao Zhouhui 姚周輝, *Shenmi de huanshu – jiangshen futi fengsu yanjiu* 神秘的幻術 – 降神附體風俗研究 (Nanning: Guangxi renmin chubanshe, 2004), 82.

¹⁰⁴ Yao Zhouhui 姚周輝, *Shiheng de jingshen jiayuan – Zhongguo minjian linghun, guishen, mingyun xinyang de yanjiu yu pipan* 失衡的精神家園 – 中國民間靈魂, 鬼神, 命運信仰的研究與批判 (Guangxi renmin chubanshe, 2002), 113.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. See also Shi Chen 石沉 and Sun Qigang 孫其剛, “Yue chan Shenhua de saman wushu yiyi 月蟾神話的薩滿巫術意義.” (*Minjian wenxue luntan* 民間文學論壇, 1988), 3:(22–27), esp. 26.

¹⁰⁶ Yao Zhouhui, *Shiheng de jingshen jiayuan*, 113.

¹⁰⁷ Song Zhaolin 宋兆麟, *Wu yu wushu* 巫與巫術 (Chengdu: Sichuan minzu chubanshe, 1989), 35–36.

search for personal transcendence and immortality in early medieval China, seem to have made use of some of the knowledge accrued by shamans and passed on. A number of the plants they ingested were hallucinogens, including many varieties of psychedelic mushrooms. Their knowledge can be found in biographies of Daoist transcendents, pharmacopoeias, and encyclopedias. This study also shows that shamans, in ancient China and among present-day ethnic groups in northern and southwestern China, employed and still employ hallucinogens to assist their entrance into trance.

Characteristic effects common to psychedelic experiences observed in the United States and in ancient China include: flight through time and space, dissolution of the self, and becoming one with the universe.¹⁰⁸ Many of the motifs that appear during these experiences, however, are culture-specific. In *Guideways*, *Songs of Chu*, and Song Yu's rhapsody, for example, one encounters feathered/winged people, driving teams of dragons, meeting with spirits/deities to beseech favors or enjoy erotic encounters. The same goddess transformed into a hallucinogenic herb (either a magic mushroom or dodder) appears in both *Guideways* and in the preface to "Rhapsody on Gaotang." These culture-specific motifs seem to corroborate Robin Carhart-Harris's hypothesis that psychedelic drugs allow the subconscious to emerge by suppressing the ego-related part of the brain, the Default Mode Network.¹⁰⁹ Hence, "set and setting" and "suggestability" inform those experiences.¹¹⁰

Although this study includes a couple of medical recipes for treating madness (with the psychoactive herb henbane as the main ingredient), there is no evidence that Chinese shamans treated afflicted individuals with hallucinogens and guided them on "trips" as a method for healing mental illnesses.¹¹¹ This is not to say, however, that contemporary shamans and spirit mediums fail to use other techniques to heal mental illnesses. According to Huang Jianxing, who has befriended (and conducted fieldwork among) shaman spirit mediums in Fujian, some shamans were initially sufferers of mental

¹⁰⁸ See Pollan, *How to Change Your Mind*, 264, 339. The last attribute has been described as: Mind at Large, cosmic consciousness, the Oversoul, the Universal Mind, and an experience of cosmic unity.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 306–307.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 334, 354.

¹¹¹ Experiments on the use of psychedelic drugs for treating depression and anxiety (such as the fear of death for terminal cancer patients) always involve a guide — a therapist who might have been called a shaman in a different context. *Ibid.*, 215.

and emotional illnesses. After receiving help from established shamans and learning to control their minds and illnesses, they became shamans themselves.¹¹² It is clear that ample room remains for further research in this field of study.

¹¹² This is based on a private conversation during 2018.

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