

APPENDIX J

TIMELINE OF TAOIST HISTORY THROUGH THE CHINESE DYNASTIES

THE FOLLOWING timeline of the Chinese dynasties provides a general chronology of events referenced in this book. This appendix summarizes the key events of Chinese Taoist history as it pertains to craft and as covered in the preceding chapters. Here, “history” is used loosely to include mythology. Much of China’s early history is a blend of documented history and hearsay legend. Other than references to the extraordinary, it is often difficult to know where history ends and mythology begins.

NEOLITHIC PERIOD

(新石器時代, Xīn Shí Qì Shí Dài)

10,000–2100 BC

- The He Tu comes out of the Neolithic period of China. Fu Xi, a mythical shamanic king, was the founder of human civilization, and formulated the He Tu sequence after seeing patterns on his horse’s back.
- The Earlier Heaven Ba Gua is attributed to Fu Xi, conceived when he formulated the He Tu sequence.
- The Yellow Emperor, or Huang Di, is recognized as the first emperor of China. It is unclear whether he is a mythical or historical figure, or perhaps a combination of both. The Yellow Emperor was a shamanic king later deified and venerated in certain Taoist traditions. According to legend, he gained supernatural or occult knowledge that he learned from a supernatural mentor,

the Enigmatic Lady of the Ninth Heaven. In Taoist craft, the Yellow Emperor is considered a god of the esoteric arts.

- The mythical Cangjie, imperial historian for the Yellow Emperor, is credited as the inventor of writing. His inspiration for script came from gazing at the footprints of birds. Writing was an important milestone in human civilization, though according to Taoist practitioners of craft, not for the usual reasons cited, but because it is through writing that humans can wield the power to control demons. Thus, Taoist craft relies heavily on writing, and most significantly, on the Fu sigil.
- Invention of the sexagenary calendar, which is still used today in esoteric Taoist craft, is attributed to the Yellow Emperor.
- The earliest Chinese writing found on divinatory oracle bones is dated to this era.
- Artifacts of Neolithic shamanic culture are found in northern and northeastern China.

XIA DYNASTY

(夏朝, Xià Cháo)

2100–1600 BC

- The Lo Shu magic square is formulated. Legend holds that Yu the Great, a shamanic king, was visited by a tortoise with the Lo Shu sequence embedded on its shell. Following the sequence of the Lo Shu, Yu the Great was able to save China from a great flood.
- Yu the Great is believed to have established the Xia Dynasty, though the Xia is considered by some scholars to be a mythical dynasty, not one that is historically documented.
- The Xia is considered a golden age where the people lived in harmony with the gods and nature, credited to the practices of the shamans.

SHANG DYNASTY

(商朝, Shāng Cháo)

1600–1050 BC

- Oracle bones dating to the Shang Dynasty refer to a supreme deity residing in Heaven, Lord Di or Shang Di.
- Nature gods are venerated. Mountains, rivers, and other natural landforms and natural phenomena such as rain and thunder are believed to be the physical manifestation of gods.
- Records from this era show an ontological belief in five natural forces that created all life. The five natural forces, whether or not they are related to the Wu Xing, at the very least created the foundation for the Wu Xing.
- Records of magical practice included the calling upon of the four directions at the commencement of a ritual. Also, prior to an oracle bone divination, the four cardinal directions had to be invoked.
- The predecessors of Fu sigils were inscribed decrees or orders that invoke a supreme deity as authorizing a shaman to issue that decree or order to a lesser spirit to do as the shaman commands.
- Shamans and imperial court-appointed magicians held great power in society. Every imperial and aristocratic family would retain a shaman to serve as an adviser, diviner, and healer for the family.
- All kings were also believed to possess shamanic gifts, born with the ability to commune with Heaven and manifest the connected powers of Heaven, Earth, and Man. The Chinese character for “king” (王) comes from this belief, with the three horizontal lines symbolizing the trinity and the vertical line symbolizing the king’s ability to connect all three realms.
- While imprisoned by the ruling Shang king, King Wen arranges the eight trigrams of the Ba Gua into the Later Heaven sequence and formulates the sixty-four hexagrams of the I Ching. King Wen divined with the I Ching to predict the fall of the Shang Dynasty and the rise of the Zhou.

ZHOU DYNASTY

(周朝, Zhōu Cháo)

1046–256 BC

- Conception of the Tai Yi creation myth date to the Zhou Dynasty. According to the Tai Yi creation myth, Tai Yi, or “The Most Venerable One,” created Water. With Water, Tai Yi created Heaven (the universe beyond earth). With Heaven, Tai Yi created Earth (the planet earth was created from elements in the universe). Heaven and Earth, together, expanded into all that is above, and all that is below (stellar matter from the universe fertilized the earth to form human life), creating primordial yin and primordial yang, which in turn created the four seasons and four directions.
- Records from this era document court magicians performing exorcisms on behalf of the imperial family.
- The Tao Te Ching, dated around 600–501 BC, is considered one of the most important texts for both exoteric and esoteric Taoism. The text is attributed to Lao Tzu, a sage and scholar in the imperial court, though authorship is disputed.
- Lao Tzu is recognized as the founder of Taoist philosophy. He is immortalized as a deity in Taoist religion. In esoteric Taoist craft, Lao Tzu is invoked by some lineages to assist with magical spells and to empower psychics, diviners, and intuitives.
- Feng shui and geomancy flourish during the Zhou Dynasty, in particular the period 770–475 BC.
- First documented Fu sigils during the Warring States period (475–221 BC) of the Zhou, though the practice of sigil crafting at this time predates Taoism.
- The Shakyamuni Buddha, or Siddhārtha Gautama, is enlightened and teaches Buddhism around 500 BC. Buddhism as a religion is established.
- Confucius (551–479 BC) advances a philosophy and school of thought for morality, setting forth ethical principles for the individual and for social order.
- Magical records from the Zhou Dynasty show that to activate a Fu sigil, the paper talisman was burned or dissolved into consecrated water, and then ingested.

- Fang Shi, or alchemists, diviners, astrologers, magicians, exorcists, and shamans, gain in prestige among the imperial families and the aristocracy.
- The Zhuang Zi, dated around 300–201 BC, is given the same level of importance in Taoist philosophy as the Tao Te Ching. Authorship is credited to Zhuang Zi, also known as Zhuang Zhou, a philosopher and court official during the Warring States period. The Zhuang Zi is considered both one of the greatest works of Chinese philosophy and also of Chinese literature, as many scholars consider it a literary masterpiece.
- Zhuang Zhou's descriptions of Qi, yin and yang, and the Wu Xing form the enduring ontological principles of Taoist philosophy and also of esoteric Taoist craft. He expresses these principles as manifesting through the six fundamental forms: yin, yang, darkness, light, wind, and rain, which together become the four seasons and four directions. These six forms must be kept at homeostasis. Imbalances of these six forms are what cause calamity and disease, the rise and fall of natural phenomena, and the rise and fall of social systems. These philosophical principles are incorporated into esoteric Taoist craft in a sense to curb or compel calamity and disease, and to control natural phenomena and social order.
- *The Classics of the Esoteric Talisman*, a text on metaphysical principles that guide magical practices and craft, is speculated to have been written around the time of the Zhou Dynasty. (However, note that the earliest copy of the text dates to the Tang Dynasty.)

QIN DYNASTY

(秦朝, Qín Cháo)

221–206 BC

- The Emperor Qin Shi Huang, unifies China after the Warring States period of the Shang and Zhou. He is obsessed with Taoist alchemy and the quest for an elixir of immortality, employing a sizable legion of Fang Shi, or Taoist alchemists in pursuit of that quest. Qin Shi Huang is credited with building the Great Wall of China and the terra-cotta army.

- The Mao Shan lineage thrived during the Qin Dynasty, as did Taoist ceremonial magic.
- The prevalent political philosophy during this era was Legalism, emphasizing the autocratic power of the emperor, rewarding obedience and severely punishing disobedience. Legalist concepts are often integrated subconsciously into orthodox Taoist craft: obedience to the gods (or to the practitioner, who arrives at authority through his or her raised occult powers) is rewarded in abundance and disobedience is punished without mercy.
- Rise of Neo-Taoism, which focused on the metaphysical or esoteric aspects of Taoist thought. Neo-Taoism emphasized Mystical Learning through a Taoist philosophical framework.

HAN DYNASTY

(漢朝, Hàn Cháo)

206 BC–AD 220

- Zhong Li Quan, one of the Eight Immortals, was believed to have lived during the Han Dynasty.
- Shamanic practices and magical traditions, including Fu sigil crafting, are merged with Taoist thought.
- Confucianism and esoteric Taoist craft are blended together. It became common for aristocrats and government officials to identify publicly as Confucian, but in personal religious practice, they were Taoist.
- First magical Taoist lineage, the Tian Shi, established under the powerful magician and alchemist Zhang Dao Ling, who was later immortalized.
- Around 100 BC, Mahayana Buddhism, a distinct sect of the Buddhist faith, is established. In Chinese cultural practice, Mahayana Buddhism and Taoism are often syncretized.
- Emperor Wu expended substantial court resources to hire alchemists and magicians to create the elixir of immortality.

- Taoist magical practitioners achieved their greatest heights of power. Taoist practice during this era focused heavily on divination.
- A well-accepted ethical code was followed by practitioners of Taoist craft: if a practitioner harms another or brings harm to either Heaven or Earth, then a celestial administration would adjudicate on these deeds and return a punishment of great suffering to that practitioner or the practitioner's descendants. Fear of such repercussions greatly informed the ethical code adhered to by magical practitioners.
- There was a widely circulated prophecy of a Taoist messiah, the reincarnation of Lao Tzu. Such messianic beliefs played a significant role in medieval Taoism.
- Pacing the Big Dipper is a ceremonial practice descending from a practice started during the Han Dynasty called Flying to the Stars. The mystical pacing method was incorporated into rituals and magical craft.

THREE KINGDOMS

(三國, Sān Guó)

AD 220–265

- Before the Three Kingdoms era, around AD 184, the Tian Shi lineage of Taoist magicians led the Yellow Turban Rebellion against the Han Emperor. The Tian Shi priests were able to gain wide public favor because they performed healing magic for the people without charge. However, around AD 211, Zhang Lu, a descendent of Zhang Dao Ling and a leading priest in the Tian Shi lineage, surrendered to Cao Cao, a warlord during the Han Dynasty. Doing so, however, gained great favors and political power for the Tian Shi lineage during the Three Kingdoms era.
- Wei Huancun, a Taoist high priestess, established the Shang Qing lineage, which focused on inner alchemy.
- Ge Xuan, a Fang Shi, or magician and alchemist, receives occult knowledge on Fu sigil crafting from deities and transcribes that knowledge into what will later be known as the Ling Bao (Numinous Treasure) Scriptures.

- The Three Mao Brothers establish what would become the legacy of some of the most powerful Taoist magical lineages in Mao Shan.

JIN DYNASTY

(晉朝, Jìn Cháo)

AD 265–420

- One of the most enduring Taoist magical lineages, the Ling Bao, was established, blending Taoist magic with Mahayana Buddhism. The Ling Bao were known to be powerful practitioners of ceremonial magic.
- Bo He, a legendary immortal and sage, receives talismanic scriptures from Heaven, which he uses to craft powerful Fu sigils. Instructions for crafting Bo He's Fu sigils were later memorialized in the *Bao Puzi*, authored by the alchemist and metaphysician Ge Hong.
- Ge Hong, an alchemist and aristocrat, writes extensively about esoteric Taoism. Ge Hong stressed nonharm and to forebear from retaliatory craft or magic. In terms of Fu sigil crafting, he noted that the writing instrument used by the practitioner had to be made out of peach wood and the ink from red cinnabar.
- Cloud writing script for Fu craft is popularized, most notably found in the text titled *Three Caverns of the Supernatural Fu Talismanic Records*.
- The *Writ of the Three Sovereigns*, a seminal text on traditional Fu sigil crafting, outlines summonings, invocations, and exorcisms and is believed also to include Bo He's talismanic teachings.

SUI DYNASTY

(隋朝, Suí Cháo)

AD 581–618

- Magic mirrors were an integral part of exorcisms and Taoist magic, and were used as metaphysical weapons against demons and forces from hell.
- National Taoist institutions were established.

- Relations between Taoists and Buddhists were complicated. There was a great deal of syncretism between Taoism and Buddhism, with Taoist practice integrating Buddhist thought. However, there was also tension between the two as both struggled against each other for social and political power.

TANG DYNASTY

(唐朝, Táng Cháo)

AD 618–906

- Three of the Eight Immortals, Zhang Guo Lao, Lu Dong Bin, and Han Xiang Zi, were believed to have lived during the Tang Dynasty.
- Taoism flourished during this era and gained great favor with the imperial family, due to the imperial family's claim of lineage tracing back to Lao Tzu.
- The rise of Taoism came at the expense of Buddhism. Buddhists were persecuted during the ninth century.
- Zhang Guo Lao, one of the Eight Immortals, was a historic figure from the Tang Dynasty. He was a hermit living in the remote mountains who practiced necromancy, alchemy, and other magical arts. He is credited as the most powerful magician ever to have lived, and was thus later immortalized.
- Han Xiang Zi was documented as an aristocrat who later cultivated himself to achieve immortality. Memorialized as one of the Eight Immortals and a patron of musicians.
- The earliest copies of the *Classics of the Esoteric Talisman*, a text on metaphysical principles that guide magical practices and craft, are dated to the Tang Dynasty, though it has been speculated that it was written around the Zhou Dynasty.
- The Zheng Yi lineage, comprising practitioners of ceremonial magic, commercialized Fu talismans and began selling them as spells.
- The Lu, a formalized roster of craft, was established, and only certified Taoist priests or practitioners familiar with the contents of the Lu were authorized to craft Fu sigils.

- Most contemporary Taoist lineages claim a magical heritage that dates back to one of the lineages established during the Tang Dynasty.
- Substantial syncretism of Taoism with Buddhism and Confucianism.

SONG DYNASTY

(宋朝, Sòng Cháo)

AD 960–1279

- Cao Guo Jiu, one of the Eight Immortals, was believed to have lived during the Song Dynasty.
- A branch of magic called Thunder Rites, or thunder magic, arose. Thunder magic could be found in both orthodox traditional lineages of Taoist craft and as an eclectic practice adopted by individual practitioners.
- Hsiao Pao-Chen established the Tai Yi Tao lineage, a tradition that practiced healing magic and reconciled Confucianism and Buddhism with Taoist craft.
- The Quan Zhen lineage, a tradition that emphasized morality, ethical cultivation, and the accumulation of good deeds to achieve immortality, was established.
- The Red Hat lineage was established as a tradition of trained mediums, distinguished from shamans, who became possessed by spirits and allowed the spirit world to communicate through them, rather than the more popular shamanic approach of traveling to the underworld to commune with spirits.
- The Shen Hsiao lineage flourished during this era and was notable for its veneration of Lei Gong and the practice of Thunder Rites, or thunder magic.
- The Chinese Religious Reformation resulted in Taoist lineages diverging from sorcery, ceremonial magic, and outer alchemy toward inner cultivation, meditation, and inner alchemy.
- Records of exorcisms note processes that involve drawing out evil spirits from the body that the spirit is possessing (or the space that the spirit is haunting) and transferring them into insects that are then

trapped into a vase. To draw out and transfer the evil spirits, the practitioner used Fu sigils to command the evil spirits.

- Outer alchemy and aspects of ceremonial magic in esoteric Taoism begin to decline.

YUAN DYNASTY

(元朝, Yuán Cháo)

AD 1279–1368

- Li Tie Guai, one of the Eight Immortals, is believed to have lived around the time of the Yuan Dynasty.
- The Zhen Da Tao lineage, a magical tradition that practiced Buddhist principles of nonharm, compassion, and vegetarianism, was established. Practitioners used prayer and mantras for healing and exorcisms, rather than the ceremonial magic practices of preceding traditions.
- Kublai Khan and the Mongols rule China. (China also becomes more open to Western influences.) The Yuan emperor institutes Buddhism as the official state religion, at the expense of Taoism.
- Taoism is suppressed. A purge of Taoist texts results in the burning of many Fang Shu, or Books of Methods.

MING DYNASTY

(明朝, Míng Cháo)

AD 1368–1644

- An orphaned peasant boy turned Buddhist monk turned leader of a rebellion against the Yuan Dynasty becomes the first emperor of the Ming.
- Taoism regained favor during the Ming Dynasty, and Taoist magicians and alchemists were appointed to the imperial court.
- Fu sigil crafting, sorcery, and exorcism grow in popularity.

QING DYNASTY

(清朝, Qīng Cháo)

AD 1644–1912

- As part of the overthrow of the Ming Dynasty and rise of the Qing, the Qing court denounced Taoist magic and sorcery.
- Taoism declines dramatically during the Qing. Taoist texts on craft were intentionally excluded from the imperial library.
- There is a public shift away from esoteric Taoist craft, condemning the metaphysical practices of Taoism as superstitious and an antithesis of modern science.