

Hu Paper (Chinese Talisman) as A Medium Healing

Celerina Dewi Hartati

Bahasa Mandarin dan Kebudayaan Tiongkok, Universitas Darma Persada - Jakarta, Indonesia

Abstract. Amulet paper in Chinese culture is known as hu / fu 符paper. It can serve as a means of healing. This amulet paper can mean healing because it is changed from something ordinary or profane to sacred through a ceremony performed by a spirit medium (tangsin). When God enters the body of the spirit medium through trance, the spirit medium performs a ritual such as slash the tongue. With the spirit medium's blood, he wrote this amulet paper. The paper then has a sacred function as medicine. This research is an ethnographic study with a case study at Hok Lay Kiong Bekasi temple during the Capgomeh ceremony and the God's birthday ceremony. The hu paper has so far been better known as a means of obtaining good fortune and luck. Through this paper, we can see Hian Thian Siang Tee's amulet paper at Hok Lay Kiong Temple as a medium healing in Chinese society and see the changing function from something profane to sacred thing.

Keyword: Chinese talisman, Spirit medium, Ceremony, Medium healing

Received 12 January 2021 | Revised 13 July 2021 | Accepted 21 July 2021

1 Introduction

Chinese talisman (*hu/fu* paper 符) is religious handwriting or calligraphy which is believed to possess magical powers for expelling evils and avoiding misfortune. It is usually obtained from Daoism religious practitioners. Some people believe that consuming burnt Chinese talisman ashes dissolved in water is useful in curing diseases. Ingestion of burnt Chinese talisman is a possible source of lead exposure. This rare source of lead poisoning should be considered in a specific group of patients believing in this religious practice [1].

One of the early functions of the talisman was for a ruler to authorize the conduct and scope of authority of a general (e.g., how many troops he could command). The military context of talismans later found a result in the spiritual realm. It permitted their possessor to summon and control various deities that could be drawn on in battles with spirits [2].

In explanation of Graphs and Analysis of Characters (*Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字), the first Chinese graphological dictionary, completed by 100 AD, the Chinese scholar and official Xu

*Corresponding author at: Bahasa Mandarin dan Kebudayaan Tiongkok, Universitas Darma Persada - Jakarta, Indonesia

E-mail address: c.dewihartati@gmail.com

Shen 許慎 gave the following definition of the word *fu* ; 符, 信也. 漢制以竹長六寸, 分而相合 . *Fu* is a credential. According to Han 漢 dynasty (206 BC–220 AD) institutions, it is made of bamboo, six inches in length, and divided into two halves that are joined to one another for authentication [3].

Pioneering early French sinologists like Max Kaltenmark, Robert des Rotours, and others have detailed how the original meaning of the character for "tally" (*fu*) referred to two halves of an object, usually in the shape of a dragon, fish, or tiger that were split down the middle and inscribed on the back. Each of the two contracting parties would keep one half as a guarantee of an agreement [2].

In the past, communication was difficult, so a method of communication was created. *Fu* / *hu* is an object that shows a person who can be trusted (based on the Shuowen Jiezi dictionary). In this case, it symbolizes the emperor's trust in his subordinates, in the form of a fracture of a symbol (*bingfu*兵符). The *hu* paper in its history symbolizes the emperor's order and a symbol of trust.

Hu paper becomes a talisman through a ceremony that is performed by the medium spirit. The medium spirit can act as the link between the gods and humans' lives by allowing themselves to enter the spirit of God. The Chinese spirit medium has a special name according to dialect. Some call it *tatung* / *datong* (打童), *tangsin* / *tongshen* (童神), *tangki* / *tongji* (童乩), *lokthung* / *luotong* (落童). *Tatung* is the name for Chinese spirit medium in Hakka dialect and is commonly used in Kalimantan areas such as Pontianak, Singkawang. *tangsin*, who wrote a spell on the paper. Meanwhile, *tangsin* is Hokkien dialect and is usually used in Java and Sumatera. When the *tangsin* has written the spell through the process of the God entering into the body of the *tangsin*, the paper will turn into sacred. The *tangsin* writes the spell with his blood. Then, the paper written by *tangsin* has a useful spell and becomes sacred. People use or keep *hu* paper to avoid unwanted things, bad luck, protection from bad things.

The history of the medium can be seen since the early period in China (Shang Dynasty to Western Han around 1600-1060 BC), the elite served as medium or shaman (wu 巫) because of their inherent function with ceremonies, namely making predictions which is a major aspect of religion. The function of this wu is primarily as a clairvoyant, as a healer, and as someone who can cross between the physical world and the spirit world. The function as a healer or healing originates from the Dao tradition of practicing the neidan method or inner alchemy.

2 Literature Review

Durkheim defines religion from a religious perspective. This means that religion is a unity of belief systems and related practices with something sacred. Whether simple or simple, all religious beliefs exhibit one common characteristic that separates the sacred and profane ones. Sacred things are always interpreted as superior, powerful, forbidden from normal relationships, and deserving of high respect. Under normal conditions, they are left untouched and always respected. Things that which is profane are an everyday part of life, are normal. And is a practical habit of everyday life [4].

Religion is always associated with the ceremony. Through a study of group ceremonies, we can understand a religion. Religious actions are mainly manifested in ceremonies. Ritual is a religion in action. Schiavo stated ceremonies were religious phenomena connected with ancestor worship rather than the expression of an archaic shamanic practice. Several considerations can be made. First, we are not facing ceremonies that were only focused on the rebirth of the deceased in the afterlife, but with a kind of rite of passage [5].

According to their scope, ceremonies can be divided into two separate categories, namely "ceremonies" and "rituals". Ceremonies are interpreted in any organization as whatever human activities are not merely technical but related to the use of expressive ways of action from social relations. All such behavior, whether common or in fashion, is called a ceremony. While the ritual becomes evident that it is associated with mystical notions, which are thought patterns associated with phenomena that have characteristics of taste. An ethnic group has a unique identity as indigenous knowledge [6].

The ceremony, besides an act of religion or religious action, is also a ritual. Ritualization is defined as formalized behavior that, in several species, follows well-defined expressive codes, especially within courtship and intraspecific conflicts. Ethologists call "rituals" certain forms of communicative behavior to control conflicts (e.g., competitive but harmless courtship fight; Stephenson 2015, 6-7). Although in the past, the interpretation of rites in the animal domain has influenced the study of rituality in human societies, we are not in the presence of complex languages and thus cannot speak of "meaning". They covered the level of phonology, grammatical, lexicosemantic, and meaning that able to deliver the intended message [7].

The ceremony or ritual here, according to Durkheim, is the most important thing in religion. Religion is a symbol of collective consciousness in its ideal form. Religion is a means to strengthen collective consciousness, such as religious rites. People who are involved in religious ceremonies will show that their awareness of collective consciousness is getting stronger. (Ptacek, 2015). After the religious ceremony, the atmosphere of religion is brought into daily

life. Then, gradually the collective consciousness becomes weaker. Thus, religious rituals are a means that is considered to create collective awareness among the people.

3 Methodology

The research method used in this study is a qualitative descriptive method and case study with an ethnographic study approach. I use the Ethnography method because ethnography is both something to know and a way of knowing. We use it as a method, a theory, and a style of writing. Informing each of these is an ethnographic sensibility, or a sense of the ethnographic as the lived expectations, complexities, contradictions, possibilities, and grounds of any given cultural group [8].

Qualitative research methods are carried out in reasonable situations and the data collected is qualitative. This qualitative is characterized by the aim of the researcher to understand the symptoms in such a way that does not require quantification or because it is impossible to measure the symptoms precisely. The qualitative research method looks for a deep understanding of a symptom, fact, or reality. Facts, realities, problems, symptoms, and events can only be understood if the researcher explores them in-depth and is not just limited to the surface. It is the depth that characterizes the qualitative method as well as a superior factor [9].

I also used case studies as research methods to complement qualitative descriptive methods. In this study, I used an ethnographic approach. The ethnographic approach describes and interprets culture, social groups, or systems. Although the cultural meaning is very broad, ethnographic approaches usually focus on patterns of activity, language, beliefs, rituals, and ways of life. An ethnographer focuses his attention on the details of local life and relates it to broader social processes. The word ethnography is frequently used interchangeably with that of a case study [10]. Case studies were carried out in a temple, namely Hok Lay Kiong temple, Bekasi. Data were collected through interviews with temple administrators, people, observations, and participant observations. The study was conducted at the time of the temple's ceremony. The choice of source domain related to the language concept that covered the pattern and meaning [11].

4 Results and Discussion

When the ceremony for the deity's birthday, and *Capgomeh*, people often asked for *hu* paper in the temple. People use or keep *hu* paper to avoid unwanted things, misfortune, protection from bad things. Before it became sacred, *Hu* paper as a talisman was ordinary because it was an everyday item in a paper print. However, he changed the function to something sacred in the ceremony. The *hu* paper changes from ordinary to something sacred through a ceremonial process performed by spirit medium (*tangsin*.) This *tangsin* made changes to the *hu* paper. With

the *tangsin* blood that comes out in a trance, it is then written onto the *hu* paper, which becomes sacred.

When I conducted the research, The *hu* paper-making ceremony was held at noon at 14.00 and ended at 16.00. The atmosphere became very festive when *tangsin* took turns accompanied by very busy music from drums and cymbals, cut his tongue with a sword, and wrote *hu* paper on the Hian Thian Siang Tee god's paper. Many people refer to this tradition as cutting the tongue. Cut the tongue here means the *tangsin* injures its tongue with a sword. The *tangsin*'s blood that came out of his tongue was accommodated in a cup. With this blood amulet, paper (*hu pengan*) was made. The *hu pengan* started from the main *tangsin* of the Hok Lay Kiong Temple, namely Mr. Hendi. After that, another *tangsin* can immediately take turns in making *hu* paper. The Hian Thian Siang Tee god's paper that *tangsin*'s blood has written is believed as sacred and has the power. The ceremony of writing *hu* paper is one of the most sought-after parts of the celebration of a moment.

The writing from the drops of blood is a form of the request to the gods to expel evil aura, ask for smooth business, refuse reinforcements, and sustenance. This tongue-cutting ceremony is always intended to request the gods to provide safety and keep people away from all dangers. *Tangsin* blood which becomes sacred apart from being written on the yellow incantation paper of God is also for treatment which is immediately used by writing it on the neck of someone who asks for healing. In addition, it is also believed to be able to get rid of one's misfortune caused by zodiac calculations. When Mr. Hendi spoke while being entered, another *tangsin* acted as a translator who said people with certain zodiac signs were unlucky. People with the zodiac in question could come forward to get the mantra or *hu* paper.



Figure 1. The main spirit medium of Hok Lay Kiong temple wrote a *hu* paper

This can be seen in the hu paper of the Hok Lay Kiong temple, which includes the words sun (日) and moon (月) so that the writing on the paper is believed to be the language of the sky. In the hu Dewa Hian Thian Siang Tee paper, Hok Lay Kiong at the very top is written 福來宮 (Hok Lay Kiong), then on the left, there is the word moon (月) and the word sun (日) and on the

right. At the top of the middle is written the word ling (零), which means command and at the bottom is the name Hian Thian Siang Tee (玄天上帝).



Figure 2. Hu Paper of Hok Lay Kiong Temple

During the ceremony, one God can enter several *tangsin* bodies. When this God entered the state, *tangsin* showed the authority of his power. He pounded the altar table of the gods, shouted, and drank wine. The words it issues will be translated. According to Mr. Hendi, he felt very sick and heavy when he was in a trance, but it would disappear by itself when God had left his body. To get the god out of his body, another *tangsin* lowered the head of the *tangsin* to the altar table and was then followed by another *tangsin* to enter a trance as a healer. People often seek the services of a medium to treat disease. This has become a long tradition and history in China because a medium and a shaman function as a healer. On several occasions, I saw the role of the medium as a means of healing in the temple. A mother, carrying her child, consulted Mr. Hendi about his child's illness, and Mr. Hendi gave the temple water after he had performed divination called *ciamsi* and *pwa pwe*. Likewise, a mother came with her child, trying to heal her husband, who was being treated in the hospital. For some people, medical illnesses are still looking for ways to cure them through the medium. The role of the medium has a very broad scope, ranging from the media to connecting people with life and death, answering issues on life's difficulties, as a healer, and being heavily involved in modern society.

At the Hok Lay Kiong temple there are several *tangsin* including Mr. Hendi as the main *tangsin*, Mr. Bebeng, and Ari. Hian Thian Siang Tee, the main God of the Hok Lay Kiong temple, is the God of the northern sky, known by various names, namely the god of rejecting evil spirit, the God of medicine, the God of supernatural affairs. Each medium has its equipment. The medium of a civilian deity, marked with supplies such as temple stamps, ink, and brushes. These three main sacred objects are civil medium sacred objects. These sacred objects were used to write *hu* paper with *tangsin* blood cut with a sword.

Both the civilian and military mediums have their own sacred objects that characterize them. At the Hok Lay Kiong temple for a moment this was difficult to distinguish. The medium in Hok Lay Kiong temple uses both ink, brush, sword, dagger, disc ball. When they perform this medium art and in a trance act as a military god medium with movements that demonstrate military arts. The purpose of this movement is as a means of cleansing. Medium art also shows many variations and differences due to the role of the medium itself as a bricoleur, creating art itself using existing materials. When viewed from the criteria for dividing the types of civilian and military media in Bekasi, the difference is not clear, whether tangsin becomes a civilian or military medium when viewed based on the tools used and their functions. The civilian medium usually acts as a healer and prayer, while the military medium functions to clean the surrounding area, catch demons, and restore the balance of the damaged nature. Tangsin in Bekasi in a ceremony of Sejit Dewa shows its function as a military medium for cleaning or purification purposes but using sacred objects, both civilian and military medium. The distinction between civilian and military mediums is not only seen from the object used, function but also from the eyes of the medium when he is trans. During the trance, whose eyes are open, the medium that does not blink at all is a military medium, while the one that is closed is a civilian medium.

Civil medium functions as a prayer and healer can be done both at the temple and home. The trance ceremony performed by the medium for individual purposes is more of a form of exorcist healing. He is assisted by a translator who translates the meaning of the words spoken by the medium. This medium can perform ritual healing for gaining spirits, losing souls, magic, sorcery, and illness due to natural causes. The medium requires the use of mantras that include amulets, talisman, prayer sheets, and prescription medicines.

The medium art performed at the temple during God's birthday ceremony aims to purify the environment for the general welfare of the whole community. To clean it requires blood (the substance) so that the medium injures itself in a trance to fulfill this purpose. Medium art involves kicking a red-hot iron ball or swinging a spiked ball. The kicking and swinging motions represent the incandescent state of the universe, pushing yin and yang to produce the five elements and everything else that is made of them. Its main purpose is to ensure the balance of the universe in which humans live. The medium body is also smoked, burned to prove that God has entered the medium body so that it does not feel pain. Accompanied by the sounds of drums, gongs, and cymbals rung inside the temple by several officers, the tangsin outside the temple began to take walking steps barefoot. The sounds were getting louder, and the smell of incense smoke got louder, making the tangsin even more ready to go into a trance. Usually, the medium uses yellow bibs and does not wear clothes. But the tangsin in Hok lay Kiong still wears clothes and bare feet. A tangsin flag was tied around his head, and some were placed on his back. Before they appear, they must be ritually clean, abstain from sex, and follow a

vegetarian diet for the past nine days. They were not allowed to wear leather belts and metal objects, including rings and belt buckles, as these items were considered extremely repulsive to spirits.

When the drums sound, the cymbals sound louder and louder, the tangsin starts to go into a trance. The people in the temple enter into an atmosphere of "effervescence", namely, enthusiasm in the form of emotions, sentiments, and feelings. In an "effervescence" situation, humans experience changing conditions in their mental activities: human arousal increases, sensations become stronger, and all of which causes humans to no longer be able to recognize themselves. They feel themselves changing, and therefore, they also change the environment around them to be more ideal, more following the expectations of the conditions they are facing [12].

Present the results of your work. Use graphs and tables if appropriate, but also summarize your main findings in the text. Do NOT discuss the results or speculate as to why something happened; that goes in the Discussion.

Highlight the most significant results, but do not repeat what has been written in the Results section. The purpose of the discussion is to interpret and describe the significance of your findings in light of what was already known about the research problem being investigated and explain any new understanding or insights that emerged from your study of the problem. A combined Results and Discussion section is often appropriate.

Please note that all names/references mentioned in the text/article should be listed in the References section. Names that are not mentioned in the text/article should be removed from the References section.

5 Conclusion

In Chinese tradition, the hu paper consists of media and mantras, like paper is the medium and must be accompanied by a spell (jizhou). Mantra is the most important piece of paper hu. If there is no mantra, *hu* is meaningless. Hu paper became a medium of healing because of its function as a sacred thing. Through the ceremony performed in the temple by the spirit medium, the *hu* paper functions as a medium of healing. As a healing medium, hu paper is usually burned, and the ashes are mixed with water, and people can drink it. It still becomes a tradition in Chinese Indonesian society.

REFERENCES

- [1] C. Chan, C. Ching, F. Lau, and H. Lee, "Chinese talismans as a source of lead exposure," *Hong Kong Med. J.*, vol. 20, no. 4, pp. 347–349, 2014, doi: 10.12809/hkmj144235.

- [2] T. H. Gaster, C. Don, A. Faraone, D. Obbink, and S. J. Tambiah, “Signs of Power : Talismanic Writing in Chinese Buddhism Throughout much of the ancient world talismans or amulets written in an esoteric script were worn or ingested in order to repel the demonic and impel the desired,” vol. 3, no. 1968, pp. 177–206, 2008.
- [3] G. Espeset, “A case study on the evolution of Chinese religious symbols from talismanic paraphernalia to Taoist liturgy,” *Bull. Sch. Orient. African Stud.*, vol. 78, no. 3, pp. 493–514, 2015, doi: 10.1017/S0041977X15000439.
- [4] É. Durkheim, “The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life.” p. 456, 1912.
- [5] R. Schiavo, “On the Improper Use of the Label ‘Shamanism’ in Egyptology: Rethinking the Role of the Opening of the Mouth Ritual and the Tekenu Ceremony in Light of Ancestor Worship,” *История религии / Hist. Relig.*, pp. 5–15, 2018, doi: 10.22250/2072-8662.2018.1.5-15.
- [6] T. Lubis, “Indeksikalitas dalam Perspektif Antropolinguistik,” in *Seminar Antarbangsa Kajian Linguistik dan Kearifan Lokal*, 2017, pp. 128–134, doi: 10.31227/osf.io/dwa7p.
- [7] T. Lubis and A. Purba, “Metaphor and parallelism in political advertisements,” *Cogency*, vol. 12, no. 2, p. 71, Dec. 2020, doi: 10.32995/cogency.v12i2.360.
- [8] C. McGranahan, “Ethnography Beyond Method: The Importance of an Ethnographic Sensibility,” *Sites a J. Soc. Anthropol. Cult. Stud.*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2018, doi: 10.11157/sites-id373.
- [9] Y. Yusanto, “Ragam Pendekatan Penelitian Kualitatif,” *J. Sci. Commun.*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 1–13, 2020, doi: 10.31506/jsc.v1i1.7764.
- [10] M. Parker-Jenkins, “Problematising ethnography and case study: reflections on using ethnographic techniques and researcher positioning,” *Ethnogr. Educ.*, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 18–33, 2018, doi: 10.1080/17457823.2016.1253028.
- [11] T. Lubis, “Metaphors in Acehnese Literature Work,” in *Kongres Internasional Masyarakat Linguistik Indonesia (KIMLI) 2016*, 2016, pp. 861–864, doi: 10.17605/OSF.IO/GNAKM.
- [12] T. Rudyansjah, *Emile Durkheim Pemikiran Utama dan Percabangannya Ke Radcliffe Brown, Fortes, Levi Strauss, Turner, dan Holbraad*. Jakarta: Penerbit Buku Kompas, 2015.