

Ritual Healing in Early East Asia

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Call for papers

Dear Colleagues,

In many societies, healing practices initially developed in close interaction with ritual activities. In East Asia, Daoist healing practices have long attracted scholarly attention (e.g. Depeux, [1989](#), [2003](#), [2010](#); Stanley-Baker 2013, 2023; Raz, 2013; Kleeman, 2021), as have Chinese Buddhist medieval therapeutic traditions (e.g. Despeux, 2010, 2017; Salguero, 2017, 2018). The role of both religions in the Japanese medical tradition has also been enhanced for the medieval to modern period (e.g. Goble et al., 2009; Goble, 2011; Kleine, 2012; Triplett, 2019; Winfield, 2005), or as in the Onmyodo practices (Shin'ichirō et al., 2013). However, comparable Korean scholarship remains an issue (e.g. Yi, 1981; Baker, 1994; Lee, 2008).

Attention has also been paid to healing practices termed 'shamanic', in China (e.g. Lin, 1994, 2009; Sukhu, 2012; Cook and Major, 1999), in Korea for the modern and contemporary period the kut/gut rituals have also been studied as healing rituals (e.g. Oak, 2010); while there is still a gap in scholarship about the esoteric healing practices in medieval Japan (Winfield, 2005) and Korean Three Kingdoms period (Kim, 1988).

Yet, because of the scarcity and fragmentary nature of primary sources many studies lack clear connections back to healing practices of earlier periods, particularly for antiquity, where magical or ritual healing practices played key roles, even helping to define aspects of traditional medicine (for China see Harper, 1998; Liu 2019; Caro, 2025). This is still the case for the medieval period (for China, e.g. Ma, 1988; Lo and Cullen, 2005; for Japan Lomi, 2014; Triplett, 2012; for Korea Yi, 1981). Scholarship on ritual medicine even more rarely addresses issues concerning the circulation and transmission of knowledge across early East Asia (for

the role of Buddhism in the transmission of Chinese medicine to Korea and Japan, e.g. Salguero 2009, 2022; Lo, 2000; Wilms, 2005; Hsu, 2017; Triplett, 2021; Cook, 2023 for China; in Korea Suh, 2010). While some healing traditions developed in highly localized settings (for early China, e.g. Harper, 1998; Cook, 2006; Lo, Ochs, Yang, 2024; for medieval Korea to Japan, e.g. Baker, 1994), religious institutions, diplomatic exchanges, migration, and trade networks also played a crucial role in the circulation, adaptation, and transformation of healing knowledge across regional boundaries.

This Special Issue seeks to open new discussions on healing practices from antiquity to the early medieval period in China, Korea, and Japan (up to the tenth century CE), while introducing a transregional perspective to the study of ritual healing. We particularly welcome contributions examining the circulation of medical texts, religious healing techniques, ritual specialists, materia medica, and therapeutic knowledge across political, linguistic, and religious boundaries in early East Asia.

In this Special Issue, original research articles and reviews are welcome. Research areas may include (but are not limited to) the following:

- Research area A: incantations, exorcism, or other “magical” aspects of local medical traditions.
- Research area B: the transmission of local healing knowledge throughout Early East Asia.
- Research area C: ritual healing artifacts: texts, material objects, and iconography.

We hope that this Special Issue will stimulate new research on early ritual healing practices in East Asia, highlighting forms of knowledge that fall outside major religious canons, and emphasizing esoteric practices, material objects, and the transregional circulation and transformation of healing traditions across the region.

We kindly request that, prior to submitting a manuscript, interested authors submit a proposed title and an abstract of 200-300 words summarizing their intended contribution.

Please send it to the Guest Editors, Professor Constance Cook(cac8@lehigh.edu) and Dr. Eléonore Caro(eleonore.caro@ehess.fr), and CC the Assistant Editor of *Religions*, Clare Chai (clare.chai@mdpi.com). Abstracts will be reviewed by the Guest Editors for the purposes of ensuring proper fit within the scope of the Special Issue. Full manuscripts will undergo double-blind peer review.

We look forward to receiving your contributions.

The abstract deadline will be September 2026. The full manuscript submission deadline will be 30 April 2027.

More information about the special issue is as follows:

https://www.mdpi.com/journal/religions/special_issues/X896Z1EXWY

You may submit your manuscript either now or up until the deadline. Submitted papers should not have been published previously, nor be under consideration for publication elsewhere.

The minimum word count for the main text (without the references) is 5000 words, with no upper limitation.

For more information on the journal and submission guidelines, please visit the following pages:

<https://www.mdpi.com/journal/religions/instructions>

/Religions/ is an international and open access scholarly journal, publishing peer reviewed studies of religious thought and practice. It is indexed in A&HCI (Web of Science, IF of 0.6), ATLA Religion Database, and in Scopus (Citescore of 1.3). For further journal information, please visit: <https://www.mdpi.com/journal/religions>

Please do not hesitate to reach out to us should you have any questions or comments.

Thank you very much for your kind consideration.

Prof. Dr. Constance Cook

Dr. Eléonore Caro

Guest Editors