

## THE SHAMAN AND THE SPIRITS: THE MEANING OF THE WORD ‘LING’ IN THE *JIUGE* POEMS\*

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In all major dictionaries the first entry for the Chinese word ‘ling’ is ‘shaman’ (*wu*). This meaning of the word is based on Wang Yi’s interpretation of two *Jiuge* poems in the *Chuci* collection. The present article investigates the possibility of this identification and concludes that there is no evidence to support Wang Yi’s opinion. On the other hand, there is ample evidence to suggest that the accepted meanings of *ling* (spirit, numinous, magical) and the general characteristics of the Chinese shaman are indeed interrelated in many respects.

*Key words:* Chuci, Jiuge, lexicography, Wang Yi, Zhu Xi, commentary, shamanism.

In recent decades, an increasing number of studies have been published which focus on topics that might exclusively have been found among the notes of dictionary compilers before. The wide scope of the two extremes in Sinology – microphilological analyses and comprehensive systematisations – renders it urgently necessary to elucidate on certain fundamental concepts not yet analysed in real depth. In researching Chinese philosophy, this approach is not new as the comprehension of philosophical texts necessitates a clarification of the precise meanings of basic philosophical terms. Consequently, scholars incessantly publish articles that provide new interpretations of elemental notions, like *dao* 道, *de* 德, *fa* 法, *wuwei* 無為, or *zhengming* 正名 (see for example Gassmann 2000–2001; Hansen 1993, 1995; Holzman 1998 and Shun 1993). The situation, however, is different when the theoretical clarification of some basic notions in Chinese religion, literature or historiography is concerned.

Kern’s study could still provide new information on the word *wen* 文, a key word in Chinese culture (Kern 2001). Similarly, the well-known linguist, Christoph Harbsmeier seems to be convinced that it is worth exploring the exact contextual usage of such self-evident words like *ku* 哭 and *ai* 哀 (mourning, weeping) (Harbsmeier 1999). Further examples, which could be amply added, would also testify to the need

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for a more thorough scrutiny of concepts which, despite the considerable Chinese lexicographical tradition, have yet to be fully explicated. The investigation of these fundamental ideas could contribute to a better understanding of classical Chinese heritage.

In the present article, I explore the semantic field of the word ‘*ling*’ 靈 which is generally considered to be not especially problematic, though seems to be difficult to translate. The starting point and the basic reference will be the *Jiuge* 九歌 (Nine Songs) of the *Chuci* 楚辭 (Songs of the South) collection.

## 1. *Chuci* and *Jiuge*

Without becoming absorbed in the philological minutiae surrounding the *Chuci* collection, the genesis and authorship of which is one of the most controversial topics in Sinology, I will briefly sum up the generally accepted view, and then proceed to summarising the structure and the commentaries of the anthology presently available.

The *Chuci* includes seventeen separate compositions,<sup>1</sup> most of which were attributed by its Han 漢 compiler, Wang Yi 王逸 (early 2nd c. A.D.), to Qu Yuan 屈原 (trad. 343–290 B.C.), a nobleman from the southern state of Chu 楚. Qu Yuan, a highly esteemed, but later unjustly exiled politician, is credited with the authorship of *Lisao* 離騷, *Jiuge*, *Tianwen* 天問, *Jiuzhang* 九章, *Yuanyou* 遠遊, *Buju* 卜居, *Yufu* 漁父, and *Dazhao* 大招 by both Wang Yi (Hartman 1986) and, with the exception of the last item, by Ban Gu 班固 (*Hanshu* 30.1747; Chan 1998, p. 293). The authorship of the remaining nine poems is attributed to others (Song Yu 宋玉, Jia Yi 賈誼, Liu An 劉安, Dongfang Shuo 東方朔, Yan Ji 嚴忌, Wang Bao 王褒, Liu Xiang 劉向, and Wang Yi) (Hawkes 1993, p. 49). Although the question of authorship is not relevant in the present analysis, it may be noted that I basically agree with scholars who minimise the role of Qu Yuan as an author, and emphasise Wang Yi’s importance as a canoniser of this otherwise rather unclassifiable collection.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The issue grows more complicated if we consider the fact that the contents of the *Chuci* collection differ slightly in the various redactions. Zhu Xi, for example, drops *Qijian* 七諫, *Jiutan* 九歎 and *Jiusi* in his *Chuci jizhu*, and inserts two poems by Jia Yi. In his *Chuci tongshi* 楚辭通釋, Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619–1692) adheres to the first twelve works, but replaces the last five poems with four other ones (Hawkes 1993, p. 49). The non-definitive character of the contents of the *Chuci* corpus can be attributed to the fact that the title originally referred to a specific tradition rather than a complete collection of individual works (Hawkes 1993, p. 48).

<sup>2</sup> On this opinion, see for example Chan (1998) and Hartman (1986). The canonical status of the *Chuci*, and more precisely the *Lisao*, is referred to several times in the tradition. Chan’s study describes the *Lisao* as a canonical work (*jing* 經), and the other compositions in the collection as explanations (*zhuan* 傳) (Chan 1998). In canonising the *Chuci*, Liu Xie, the well-known Six Dynasties aesthete, occupied a crucial role (Sun 2001, pp. 20–24). Gopal Sukhu is probably right in stating that the Han dynasty commentaries of *Chuci* (like those of the *Zhouyi* or the *Shijing*) were taught to speak Confucian: “The text [of the *Lisao*], while beautiful, said embarrassingly shamanistic things, so it had to be ‘taught’ to speak as a classical scholar would before it could be admitted to higher literary society” (Sukhu 1999, p. 161). It was the commentators’ task to find the appropriate method of disengaging the *Chuci* collection from its shamanic background. The shift of emphasis to Qu Yuan’s figure provided the opportunity for this “hermeneutical attack”: “Qu Yuan becomes a kind of exegetical coloniser representing the forces of ‘civilisation’ in the barbarian texts of Chu” (Sukhu 1999, p. 165).

At present, four commentaries on the *Chuci* are available: 1. Wang Yi's commentary (*Chuci zhangju* 楚辭章句), written around 100 A.D., which attempts to provide a comprehensive allegorical interpretation of the anthology. Sometimes he only gives the equivalent of certain words; however, in some cases this is our only starting point for interpretation, as it is the single surviving pre-Song commentary. Later commentators hardly question his statements, although D. Hawkes and M. Schimmelpfennig, among others, think that Wang Yi is not among the great Han dynasty commentators.<sup>3</sup> 2. The Tang dynasty "Five Ministers" commentaries on the *Chuci* poems in the *Wenxuan* 文選 collection (ca. 775 A.D.).<sup>4</sup> 3. Hong Xingzu's 洪興祖 (1090–1155) *Chuci buzhu* 楚辭補注 (Additional remarks on the *Chuci*), in which he offers phonetical orientations (*fanqie* 反切) for ambiguous words. He often provides the classical equivalents for certain passages, provides information on *realia* (e.g. plants, animals, and river) and explicitly applies Wang Yi's political identifications (e.g. spirit = king, sorcerer = minister).<sup>5</sup> 4. Zhu Xi's 朱熹 (1130–1200) late work, the *Chuci jizhu* 楚辭集註 (Collected commentaries on the *Chuci*), written in 1196 when he found himself in a state similar to that of Qu Yuan (Waters 1986, pp. 24–26).<sup>6</sup> It is usually considered to revolutionise the earlier commentary tradition with its imaginative and subjective remarks (Hawkes 1993, p. 52).

The present study will focus on the *Jiuge* (Nine Songs) hymns of the *Chuci* collection. Several explanations were proposed for the discrepancy between the number in the title and the eleven poems in the cycle itself. Basically, there are two popular views, one of which points out that the last two poems (*Guoshang* 國殤 and *Lihun* 禮魂) both differ greatly in theme and form from the other nine poems (Waley 1955, p. 15; Waters 1986, p. 34);<sup>7</sup> while the other states that the number nine (as in the case of *Jiuzhang* 九章, *Jiubian* 九辯, *Jiuhuai* 九懷, and *Jiusi* 九思) is rather a symbolic expression than a quantitative one.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>3</sup> "He does not seem to have been an exceptionally distinguished or talented person. Indeed, the frequent imbecilities of his commentary tend to make one forget that, because of his familiarity with the dialect and local traditions of Chu, he often provides us with the only key to what would otherwise be insoluble difficulties" (Hawkes 1959, p. 170). Also see Hawkes (1993, p. 52). On Wang Yi's *Chuci zhangju* and its possible sources, see Schimmelpfennig (2000–2001); Yi (1991, pp. 62–77).

<sup>4</sup> "The *Wenxuan* selection comprises all of *Lisao*, six songs from *Jiuge*, one poem from *Jiuzhang*, *Buju* and *Yufu*, four poems from *Jiubian*, *Zhaohun* and *Zhaoyinshi*" (Hawkes 1993, p. 50).

<sup>5</sup> On Hong Xingzu's *Chuci buzhu*, see Yi (1991, pp. 269–280).

<sup>6</sup> On Zhu Xi's *Chuci jizhu*, see Yi (1991, pp. 293–312). On a comprehensive presentation of the entire exegetical tradition, see Yi (1991).

<sup>7</sup> The thematic difference is obvious, the formal markedness of the *Guoshang* is its unusual orderliness, while in the case of the *Lihun*, its extreme brevity distinguishes it from the other poems.

<sup>8</sup> Wang Yi's note to the Nine Arguments (*Jiubian*) already indicates the importance of the symbolic meaning: "Nine is the *Yang* number, the fundamental principal of the *Dao*" (Waters 1986, pp. 31, 33–37).

## 2. *Jiuge* and shamanism

Though Chinese shamanism as a whole is a rather controversial subject,<sup>9</sup> the prominent role of shamanism in the southern state of Chu and other southern territories has been scarcely questioned.<sup>10</sup> With the *Chuci* being the earliest major poetic manifestation of Chu and neighbouring cultures, many scholars have associated this collection, and especially the *Nine Songs* with shamanic practice.<sup>11</sup> As a result of Arthur Waley's and David Hawkes' analyses, the aesthetical interpretations of the *Chuci* became gradually eclipsed by religio-historical inquiries (Waley 1955; Hawkes 1959). These explorations primarily emphasised the implicit shamanic contents of the poems and possible clues they may contain to assist in reconstructing the religious history of the late Warring States. Furthermore, these interpretations often contrasted the ecstatic, transcendent and mythic nature of the *Chuci* with the more realistic and formal *Shijing* 詩經 (Schneider 1980, pp. 94–109; Sukhu 1999, pp. 164–165).<sup>12</sup> Many scholars think that the *Jiuge* is one of the most ancient layers of the entire collection (Lewis 1999a, pp. 184, 432, n. 142), and nearly everybody acknowledges that the presence of shamanism, often associated with the *Chuci*, is most conspicuous in the *Nine Songs* part.<sup>13</sup> This kind of shamanic context was originally alluded to by the first editor and commentator of the *Chuci*, Wang Yi himself:

(九歌者，屈原之所作也。)昔楚國南郢之邑，沅、湘之間，其俗信鬼而好祠。

其祠，必作歌樂鼓舞以樂諸神。屈原放逐，竄伏其域，懷憂苦毒，愁思沸鬱。出見俗人祭祀之禮，歌舞之樂，其詞鄙陋。因為作九歌之曲。上陳事神之敬，下見己之冤結。(Chuci zhangju 1, pp. 32b–33a).

(The *Nine Songs* were written by Qu Yuan.) “In former times the people living in the area lying between the Yuan and Xiang rivers south of

<sup>9</sup> For a summary of the topic, see Boileau (2002); Mathieu (1987) and Kósa (2000, 2001). On specific aspects of it, see e.g. Keightley (1998); Falkenhausen (1995) and Lin (1994).

<sup>10</sup> “By the late Warring States period, however, *Chu* was one of the states singled out as a place where belief in shamans and ghosts were common” (Sukhu 1999, p. 149). On Chu shamanism, see for example Major (1978, 1999); Zhang (1991); Xiao (1991) and Cai (2001, pp. 240–247).

<sup>11</sup> “The unique rhythms of the *Chuci* are clearly related to the anthology's origins in the state of Chu and to that state's practice of institutional shamanism” (Hartman 1986). “*Jiuge* (the ‘Nine Songs’) is a sort of shaman's liturgy” (Hawkes 1959, p. 9). Also see Sukhu (1999); Chen (1986); Xiao (1992, pp. 226–269), and Waley (1955, pp. 9–17). Although some scholars discovered the influence of Yue culture in the *Jiuge* (Zhang 1996<sup>3</sup>/1987<sup>1</sup>, pp. 258–260), recently excavated finds (e.g. from Baoshan 包山) seem to reinforce its basic Chu connection (Liu 1993; Goldin 2002, p. 133, n. 30). G. R. Waters is perhaps the only scholar who rejects the basic shamanic character of the *Jiuge* (Waters 1986, pp. 18–19, 74–75).

<sup>12</sup> Naturally, not everybody agrees with this kind of contrast (Waters 1986, pp. 12–13; Peters 1983, pp. 126–133).

<sup>13</sup> “All the earlier *Chuci* poems (i.e. those traditionally attributed to Qu Yuan or his disciple Song Yu) are often influenced by or connected with the beliefs and practices of shamanism. Some (*Jiuge*, *Zhaohun*, *Dazhao*) are explicitly concerned with these practices; but even in those which are not, the supernatural world of the shamans makes intermittent appearances” (Hawkes 1993, p. 51).

Nanyang were superstitious and much given to the worship of spirits.<sup>14</sup> In their service of the gods they would sing, play, drum, and dance to do them pleasure. It was in this area that Qu Yuan concealed himself after his banishment. Full of grief and bitterness and in a greatly disturbed state of mind, he would go out to watch the sacrificial rites of the local inhabitants and witness the singing and dancing which accompanied them. Finding the words of their songs crude and barbarous, he composed the Nine Songs to replace them.<sup>15</sup> In his work he both sings the praises of the gods and at the same time uses the hymns as a vehicle for expressing his own resentments.”<sup>16</sup>

Excluding the last two poems, which most probably do not belong to the hymn-cycle, all the poems narrate the relationship between a supposed shaman(ess) and the spirit of a certain natural phenomenon (sun, cloud, river, or mountain). Thus, the contents of these songs clearly exemplify the well-known fact that the shamans (*wu* 巫)<sup>17</sup> of ancient China were primarily responsible for contact with the spirits of nature (Falkenhansen 1995, pp. 297–298). The magical trimeters in the poems also point to a religious context (Harper 1987, p. 267; Hawkes 1967, p. 81),<sup>18</sup> though some scholars assume that the original shamanic songs were (perhaps only partly) recast for courtly entertain-

<sup>14</sup> In his sub-commentary to Wang Yi's commentary, Hong Xingzu (1099–1155) adds: “The *Hanshu* says: ‘In Chu, the people believe in sorceresses and prize lewd sacrifices.’ The *Suizhi* says: ‘In Jingzhou [Chu] they especially prize sacrifices.’ Qu Yuan's creation of the *Nine Elegies* probably originated from this. 漢書曰：楚地信巫鬼，重淫祀。隋志曰：荊州尤重祠祀。屈原制九歌，蓋由此。” (*Chuci buzhu* 2.3a; Waters 1986, p. 31).

<sup>15</sup> Zhu Xi explains the origin of the poems as follows: “Their [people of the Chu region] sacrifices required male and female sorcerers [*wuxi* 巫覡 (added by G. K.)] to make music, sing and dance in order to give pleasure to the Spirits. The vulgar phrases of the barbarous people of Jingzhou [Chu] were crude, and in their intermediacy between *Yin* and *Yang*, man and ghost, they were unable to avoid the confusion of profanity and licentiousness. Qu Yuan had been banished. Because he saw their sacrifices and was moved, he emended their words somewhat. He cast out their excesses and used the idea of serving the Spirits to express his sentiment: ‘I am loyal to my prince, I love my country; my devotion to them will never diminish.’ 其俗信鬼而好祀。其祀必使巫覡作樂歌舞以娛神。蠻荊陋俗詞既鄙俚而其陰陽人鬼之間，又或不能無褻慢淫荒之雜。原既放逐見而感之，故頗為更定其詞。去其泰甚而又因彼事神之心以寄吾忠君愛國眷戀不忘之意。” (*Chuci jizhu* 1.33a; Waters 1986, p. 33).

<sup>16</sup> From Wang Yi's introduction to the *Jiuge* (Hawkes 1967, p. 73, n. 5). Hawkes uses this particular part of the introduction to prove that the poems of the *Chuci* are, actually, secularised versions of an originally oral and religious tradition (Hawkes 1967, p. 73). The same attitude is echoed in the words of Liu Yuxi's (772–842): “Of old, when Qu Yuan was living in the region of *Yuan* and *Xiang* [rivers], the people of those parts summoned the spirits in crude and rustic language; he then wrote the Nine Songs, and even today [during the Tang dynasty – G. K.] they sing and dance them in Chu” (Schneider 1980, p. 66). The adjectives used to describe the original poetry of Chu is, of course, to be understood in comparison with the standards of the more refined and, at the same time, more secular poetry of the North.

<sup>17</sup> For the sake of simplicity, I will use the word shamanism and shaman (*wu*) throughout, even though I do not consider these terms fully applicable to the ancient Chinese context.

<sup>18</sup> Takeji Sadao notes that in the 253 lines of the *Jiuge*, in 131 instances the structure is “3 syllables + *xi* 兮 + 2 syllables”, while in 67 cases there is a “3 syllables + *xi* 兮 + 3 syllables” structure (Harper 1987, p. 267, n. 87).

ment (Lewis 1999a, pp. 184–185). The shamanic character of the *Jiuge* and the *Chuci* is so much accepted that interpreters, most often based on self-references in the *Lisao*, attribute a shamanic role to the supposed author, Qu Yuan himself (Sukhu 1999, pp. 163–164; Lewis 1999a, pp. 188–189; Xiao 1992, pp. 263–269; Hartman 1986, p. 352).

Consequently, one can expect with reason that the *Chuci*, considered to be “the most shamanic” work in the Chinese literary tradition, and its most ancient part, the *Jiuge*, would often refer to the Chinese equivalent of the shaman, the *wu*. Surprisingly enough, in the *Jiuge* the word *wu* does not appear at all; what is more, the entire *Chuci* collection only mentions the figure of *wu* five times, all referring to names of ancient, mythic shamans (like *wu* Yang 巫陽, *wu* Xian 巫咸).<sup>19</sup> One can find three possible explanations for this amazing fact: 1. *Chuci* has no connection whatsoever with the shamanic culture and the figure of *wu*; Chinese tradition and Western scholarship on this topic are completely incorrect. 2. The complete lack of the shaman figure in the *Chuci* actually supports its intimate relationship with the *Chuci* as the authors of these songs viewed themselves from inside, and not as objective observers. 3. As Wang Yi’s remark attests, *wus* in the state of Chu were referred to as *ling*; thus, in order to explore the shamanic features of the *Chuci* or the *Jiuge*, one must search for the word *ling*, which does often appear in the collection.

As the validity of the first argument is not supported by any other data, and there is substantial contrary evidence, it will not be further investigated here. Though the second explanation seems plausible, being an *argumentum ex silentio*, it cannot be decisive. In the next pages, the third possibility will be discussed in detail.

### 3. The word *ling* in the *Jiuge* cycle

The major scholarly problem about the *Jiuge* is our ignorance of the original settings and (if they existed at all) the dramaturgy of the hymns. Consequently, traditional and modern interpretators are often free to choose who is speaking to whom (Hawkes 1959, p. 35).

In the eleven poems the word *ling* occurs fourteen times; it appears immediately in the first poem, the *Donghuang Taiyi* 東皇太一. These lines are the following in D. Hawkes’ and G. R. Waters’ translations:<sup>20</sup>

靈偃蹇兮姱服，芳菲菲兮滿堂

“Now the priestesses come, splendid in their gorgeous apparel,  
And all the hall is filled with a penetrating fragrance.” (*Chuci zhangju* 1.34a; Hawkes 1959, p. 36).

“The sorceress dances lofty and arrogant, beautifully ornamented.  
The scent wafts fragrantly and fills the hall.” (Waters 1986, p. 73).

<sup>19</sup> Wu Xian 巫咸, the first mythic shaman is mentioned in the *Lisao*, Wu Yang 巫陽 is the protagonist in the *Zhaohun*, and a reference to the myth of a shaman in the *Tianwen*. The absence of the word *wu* was also remarked by Boileau (2002, p. 358).

<sup>20</sup> To diminish possible distortions of any poetic translations, in the following analysis, I will always quote at least two translations simultaneously.

These translations are all based on Wang Yi's gloss on these lines:<sup>21</sup> "*Ling* refers to the shamaness (*wu*). 靈，謂巫也。" The fact that at the very first song of the *Jiuge*, at the first appearance of the word *ling*, Wang Yi identifies it with *wu* naturally raises the question if this unusual identification remains valid for the next thirteen cases. Moreover, after reviewing the other commentaries on these lines, one wonders why later commentators, who most often accept Wang Yi's opinions and simply complement them, in this case seem to disagree on this particular passage. Hong Xingzu and Zhu Xi note:

古者巫以降神。靈偃蹇兮姣服言神降而託於巫也。

"In former times sorceresses made Spirits descend. "*Ling yanjian jiao-fu*" refers to the descent of the Spirit and its possession of the sorceress." (*Chuci buzhu* 2.4b; Waters 1986, p. 74)<sup>22</sup>

靈謂神降於巫之身者也。 (...) 古者巫以降神。神降而託於巫則見其貌之美而服之好甚。身則巫而心則神也。

"*Ling* refers to the Spirit descending into the body of the sorceress. (...) In former times sorceresses made Spirits descend. The Spirits descended and possessed the sorceress. Thus, as for seeing its beautiful appearance and fine adornment, the body is of the sorceress but the mind is that of the Spirit." (*Chuci jizhu* 1.34b; Waters 1986, p. 74).

Thus, Hong Xingzu and Zhu Xi, though not explicitly, make it clear that for them *ling* means not the shamaness, but the spirit and/or its descent. Naturally, as both of the commentators probably had the contemporary practice of mediumism in mind,<sup>23</sup> they identified this Song dynasty practice with the not necessarily mediumistic scene described in the *Jiuge*.

In a gloss on the second poem of the cycle (The Lord of the Clouds, *Yunzhong jun* 雲中君), Wang Yi identifies these two concepts again: "*Ling* is the shamaness. The Chu people call the shamaness *lingzi*. 靈，巫也。楚人名巫為靈子。" (*Chuci zhangju* 1.34b). It is worth noting that Zhu Xi's interpretation, though not so explicitly as in the former example, in this case also differs from that of Wang Yi: "*Ling* is that which causes the Spirit to descend. The Chu people call the sorceress *lingzi* or *shenzi*. 靈神所降也。楚人名巫為靈子。若曰神之子也。" (*Chuci jizhu* 1.35a; Waters 1986, p. 94). From Zhu Xi's writings it is clear that he interprets *ling* as some kind of power or force; thus in this late commentary he presumably implies a similar meaning (Marshall 2000, pp. 139–140). From this note it is also evident that Zhu Xi thinks Wang Yi's *lingzi* means the son of the spirit(s), as he equates it with the expression "the sons of the spirits" (*shen zhi zi* 神之子). In summary, Zhu Xi asserts that *ling* in *lingzi* refers to the spirit, not the shaman.

<sup>21</sup> Not all translators accept this meaning: "The Spirit moves proudly in his splendid gear; Sweetest scents with gusts of fragrance fill the hall" (Waley 1955, p. 23); "The Spirit moves proudly in his glorious vesture; Gusts of fragrance fill up the hall" (Chen 1986, p. 128).

<sup>22</sup> *Jiaofu* inserted by G.K.

<sup>23</sup> On the popularity of the mediumistic cults during the Song, see Davis (2001).

However, it is not only Zhu Xi's gloss that seems to oppose Wang Yi's identification, but, strangely enough, Wang Yi himself. In a gloss on the second appearance of *ling* in the same poem (*Yunzhong jun*), he claims that in this second case "*ling* refers to the Cloud Spirit. *Huanghuang* depicts beauty. *Jiang* means to descend. 靈，謂雲神也。皇皇，美貌。降，下也。" (*Chuci zhangju* 1.34b). In this instance *ling*, in accordance with Wang Yi's gloss, clearly refers to the spirit as the verb *jiang* 降 is nearly always connected with spirits, celestial beings or natural phenomena in the *Chuci*. Thus, Wang Yi seems to contradict himself within the same poem.

While D. Hawkes and G. R. Waters accepted Wang Yi's interpretation in the first poem, in this second case none of the translators agrees with him. The relevant part of the poem is the following in three translations:

靈連蜷兮既留，爛昭昭兮未央· (...)

靈皇皇兮既降，森遠舉兮雲中·

(*Chuci zhangju* 1.34a–34b; 1.34b–35a).

"The god has halted, swaying, above us. Shining with a persistent radiance. (...)

The god has just descended in brightest majesty,

When off in a whirl he soared again, far into the clouds." (Hawkes 1959, p. 37).

"Now in long curves the Spirit has come down in a blaze of brightness unending. (...)

The Spirit in great majesty came down; now he soars up swiftly amid the clouds."

(Waley 1955, p. 27).

"The Spirit moves sinuously, he is already here.

The fiery luminescence shines brightly, still increasing. (...)

He is magnificent, having descended; then suddenly he rises far and high into the clouds." (Waters 1986, p. 84).

In its first occurrence, *ling* is associated with some twisting or winding movement and lingers for a while as it glows with an intense radiance. Wang Yi (and partly G. R. Waters) think that the movements refer to the ecstatic dance of the shamaness (Waters 1986, p. 96).<sup>24</sup> The context, however, makes it unambiguously clear that the swirling spirit arrives, remains and glows for a while, and then leaves towards the clouds. Consequently, Wang Yi's interpretation in this case seems to be unsubstantiated if contrasted with the second usage and the context.

Thus, the question remains if the self-contradictory interpretation of Wang Yi can be supported by any further evidence from the *Jiuge* cycle, the *Chuci* or any other, contemporary texts. The real importance of this apparently minor philological problem rests in the fact that all major dictionaries (like *Cihai* 辭海, *Ciyuan* 辭源, *Hanyu da cidian* 漢語大詞典, *Hanyu da zidian* 漢語大字典, *Zhonghua da zidian* 中華大字典) (*Cihai* vol. 2, p. 2439; *Ciyuan* vol. 4, p. 3345; *Hanyu da cidian* vol. 11, p. 747; *Hanyu da zidian* vol. 6, p. 4082; *Zhonghua da zidian* p. 2602) gives shamaness as the first meaning of *ling*, always citing the definition of this possibly wrong Wang Yi gloss.

<sup>24</sup> Marshall (2000, pp. 142–143) resolves the contradiction by stating that *ling* denotes the shamaness and the spirit simultaneously, i.e. the shamaness possessed by the spirit. This interpretation would be valid if the *Jiuge* cycle contained descriptions of possessions; this is, however, probably not the case.



In the majority of the poems, *ling* explicitly denotes the spirit or the god(ess). As mentioned before, in *Yunzhong jun* the word *ling* appears twice, both referring to the goddess. Similarly, *Hebo* 河伯, the god of the river, rides a white turtle.<sup>25</sup> In *Xiang furen* 湘夫人 (Lady of the Xiang river), it is stated that the spirit, or most probably the spirits, arrive like clouds.<sup>26</sup> The metaphor of the cloud might imply the complete absence of palpability, and/or the fact that their basic essence is made of *qi* 氣. In *Dongjun* 東君 (The Eastern Lord), presumably the same metaphor is expanded; thus these spirit-clouds cover the sun (蔽日 *biri*).<sup>27</sup> The identification of spirits and clouds is worth noticing. In the *Da siming* 大司命 the expression *ling-robe* (*lingyi* 靈衣) might in theory signify some kind of magical (or even shaman-)robe,<sup>28</sup> but the commentaries unanimously claim that *ling* actually stands for cloud (*yun* 雲). Truly, *yunyi* 雲衣 (cloud-robe) appears twice in very similar contexts in the *Chuci*.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, this interpretation is borne out by the fact that the parallel structure, which often functions as a grammatical sign-post in classical Chinese, also clearly hints at its being the component or the decoration of the clothes like the jade mentioned in connection with the belt. Thus, as jade cannot be the owner of the belt, *ling* cannot mean the shaman is the wearer of the garment.

Among the seven remaining examples, *Xiangjun* uses an obscure expression (*yangling* 揚靈) twice, which refers to expressing magical power or “radiate one’s divinity” (Hawkes 1967, p. 81; Waters 1986, pp. 166–167), but the word *ling* in it can in no way denote the shamaness herself.<sup>30</sup> In the last hymn of the cycle, *Guoshang* has two *lings* in it. In the first expression, it is used in connection with the anger of the powerful gods or spirits (*weiling nu* 威靈怒). In the same poem, the word *ling*, in the company of many words denoting some aspect of soul or spirit (*shen* 神, *ling*, *hun* 魂, *po* 魄, *gui* 鬼), appears again. The parallel structure of the poem reveals that

<sup>25</sup> 靈何為兮水中，乘白龜兮逐文魚。(Chuci zhangju 1.44a) “What is the Spirit doing, down in the water? Riding a white turtle, followed by stripy fish” (Waley 1955, p. 47); “And what does the god do, down there in the water? Riding a white turtle, he chases the spotted fish” (Hawkes 1959, p. 42).

<sup>26</sup> 九疑繽兮並迎，靈之來兮如雲。(Chuci zhangju 1.39b) “But from the Nine Doubts in a troupe to fetch her Spirits are coming, many as the clouds” (Waley 1955, p. 34); “The hosts of the *Jiu Yi* come to meet her: Like clouds in number the spirits come thronging” (Hawkes 1959, p. 39).

<sup>27</sup> 應律兮合節，靈之來兮蔽日。(Chuci zhangju 1.43a) “Singers who keep their pitch, instruments in strict measure. The coming of many Spirits cover the sun” (Waley 1955, p. 45); “Pitch and beat all in perfect accord! The spirits, descending, darken the sun” (Hawkes 1959, p. 42).

<sup>28</sup> 靈衣兮被被，玉佩兮陸離。(Chuci zhangju 1.40b) “He trails his spirit-garment, Dangles his girdle-gems” (Waley 1955, p. 37); “My cloud-coat hangs in billowing folds; My jade girdle-pendants dangle low” (Hawkes 1959, p. 40).

<sup>29</sup> In the *Dongjun* poem of the *Jiuge* poems and the *Yuan shi* 遠逝 in the *Jiutan* 九嘆 cycle.

<sup>30</sup> 望涇陽兮極浦，橫大江兮揚靈。揚靈兮未極，女嬋媛兮為余太息。(Chuci zhangju 1.36a) “I gaze towards the furthest shores of Cenyang; But athwart the Great River she lifts her godhead, Lifts her godhead higher and even higher; Reluctant, her handmaids follow her; for my sake heave great sighs” (Waley 1955, p. 29); “Far out I gaze to the morning at Cenyang, And over the great River waft my spirit: Waft, but my spirit does not reach her; And the maiden many a sigh heaves for me” (Hawkes 1959, p. 37).

the poem contrasts the dead body with the still powerful soul (神以靈 *shen yi ling*).<sup>31</sup> It is to be remembered that *ling* here seems to be some kind of function of *shen*. In *Shangui* 山鬼 (Spirit of the Mountain), *Lingxiu* 靈脩 refers to the spirit<sup>32</sup> who sends down magical rain (*lingyu* 靈雨).<sup>33</sup> Its relationship with the Mountain God is obvious, as mountains were, among other things, in charge of rainfalls (Boileau 2002, p. 363; Lewis 1999b, pp. 56–57; Major 1993, p. 158).

Finally, one exciting expression is left, the *lingbao* 靈保 in *Dongjun*, which, as a compound, may indeed denote somebody similar to the shaman:

鳴篴兮吹竽，思靈保兮賢姱。  
翾飛兮翠曾，展詩兮會舞。  
應律兮合節，靈之來兮蔽日。  
(*Chuci zhangju* 1.43a).

“Let the flutes sound! Blow the pan-pipes! See, the priestesses, how skilled and lovely! Whirling and dipping like birds in flight! Unfolding the words in time to the dancing. Pitch and beat all in perfect accord! The spirits, descending, darken the sun.”

(Hawkes 1959, p. 42).

“Sound of flute, blowing of the red-organ; A clever and beautiful Spirit-guardian Lightly fluttering on halcyon wings. Verses chanted to fit the dance, Singers who keep their pitch, instruments in strict measure The coming of many Spirits cover the sun”

(Waley 1955, p. 45).

Similarly to the second *ling* in the excerpt, *ling* of *lingbao* refers to the spirit (*ling*) whom the shaman (sorcerer, or medium) can hold close to him/herself for a certain period (Kaltenmark 1960, p. 577), or according to other interpreters, *lingbao* is the shaman who takes care of the soul (*ling*) of a dying person.<sup>34</sup> Curiously enough,

<sup>31</sup> 身既死兮神以靈，子魂魄兮為鬼雄。(Chuci zhangju 1, p. 47a) “Their bodies may have died, but their souls are living: Heroes among the shades their valiant souls will be” (Hawkes 1959, p. 44). This kind of dichotomy was probably more characteristic than the supposed *hun-po* dualism (Brashier 1996).

<sup>32</sup> 杳冥冥兮羌晝晦，東風飄兮神靈雨。留靈脩兮憺忘歸，歲既晏兮孰華予。(Chuci zhangju 1, p. 45b) “All is murk and gloom. Qiang! Darkness by day! The east wind blows gust on gust, spreading magic rain. Waiting for the Divine One I linger and forget to back. The year is drawing to its close; who will now beflower me?” (Waley 1955, p. 53); “So steep and hard the way is, that I shall be late. The clouds’ dense masses begin below me: When the east wind blows up, the goddess sends down her showers. Dallying about the Fair One, I forget about returning. What flowers can I deck myself with, so late in the year?” (Hawkes 1959, p. 43). Wang Yi underpins his historical interpretation by stating that *Lingxiu* refers to king Huai 懷王 of Chu. The argument (added to its first occurrence in the *Lisao*) is the following: *ling* means spiritual, *xiu* means distant. It is the king’s virtue which can clearly see into the distant future or regions spiritually; thus *Lingxiu* refers to the king (靈，神也。脩，遠也。能神明遠見者，君德也故以論君). Though the explanation is strange, *Lingxiu* does indeed seem to refer to king Huai in the *Lisao*, but not in the *Jiuge* (Hawkes 1959, pp. 213–214). On *Lingxiu*, also see Xiao (1992, pp. 285–292).

<sup>33</sup> The expression also occurs in the *Ding zhi fang zhong* 定之方中 poem of the *Shijing* 詩經 (50).

<sup>34</sup> “The term ‘Lingbao’ (靈寶, inserted by G. K.) or ‘Numinous Treasure’ derives from the southern term *lingbao* which means ‘guardian of the numinous’ and originally referred to the spirit

Wang Yi asserts again that “*ling* refers to the shaman. 靈，謂巫也。” (*Chuci zhangju* 1.43a). Wang Yi’s opinion, however, is not shared by later commentators: “The men of old said: ‘order the *lingbao*, summon the *fangxiang*!’” The explanation says: *lingbao* denotes a magical shaman (*shenwu* 神巫). 古人云：詔靈保，召方相！說者曰：靈保神巫” (*Chuci buzhu* 2.23b). The poem mentioned by Hong Xingzu is *Guangcheng song* 廣成頌, written by Ma Rong 馬融 (79–166):

詔靈保，召方相，驅厲疫，走蜮祥，捎罔兩，拂游光，枷天狗！  
 “Order the *lingbao*! Summon the *fangxiang*! [Let them]<sup>35</sup> expel the demonic pestilences! Send running venomous prodigies! Behead *wangliang*! Batter *youguang*! Put the cangue on the *tiangou*!”<sup>36</sup>

*Lingbao* and *fangxiang* both function as exorcisers in this passage.<sup>37</sup> The best analogy for *lingbao* seems to be *shenbao* 神保 (the representative of the dead), appearing first in the *Chuci* 楚辭 poem of the *Shijing* 詩經.<sup>38</sup> As a *shenbao* has close contact with the ancestor, *lingbao* has direct access to the spirits of nature. *Shen* and *ling* in both expressions, however, refer to the spiritual entity, not the person who communicates with it.<sup>39</sup>

We can therefore conclude that the word *ling*, including its first emergence in a slightly ambiguous context, never denotes the shaman(ess) in the *Jiuge* poems. In nine examples it denotes the spirit(s), god(s) or the soul (*Donghuang Taiyi*, *Yunzhong jun* (twice), *Hebo*, *Xianfuren*, *Dongjun*, *Guoshang*, *Shangui*, and *Dongjun*), three times it means the power of the spirits or the shaman (*Xiangjun* (twice) and *Guoshang*), in one case it means magical (*Shangui*), and in one instance it stands for cloud (*Dasiming*).

Interestingly, if we expand the scope of our research to the entire *Chuci* collection, we find that *ling* most often appears in names (*Ling Jun* 靈均, *Ling Fen* 靈氛, *Lingxiu* 靈脩, and *Ling Huai* 靈懷),<sup>40</sup> or in specific expressions (*linghun* 靈魂, *lingnü* 靈女, *linggu* 靈鼓, *jiuling* 九靈, and *baling* 八靈).<sup>41</sup> In these cases *ling* may refer to some kind of supernatural ability or magical power attributed to the person or thing in question, but *ling* itself never denotes a shaman.

mediator who summoned and controlled the numinous souls of the dead. (...) A *lingbao* or guardian of the numinous was a specially gifted communicator with the spirit world who played a role highly similar to that of the shaman (*wu* 巫)” (Yamada 2000, pp. 226–227).

<sup>35</sup> Added by G. K.

<sup>36</sup> *Hou Hanshu* (*liezhuan*, 50A. 10b) (1982, p. 1964); Harper (1987, p. 261). (Exclamation marks added by G. K.)

<sup>37</sup> On a detailed description of the *Nuo* 傩 exorcism and the role of the *fangxiang*, see Bodde (1975, pp. 77–84).

<sup>38</sup> “先祖是皇、神保是饗。 (...) 神保是格。 (...) 鼓鍾送尸、神保聿歸。”

<sup>39</sup> Zhu Xi (in his *Shi jizhuan* 詩集傳) and the 17th-century Jiang Ji 蔣驥 both equate *lingbao*, *shenbao* and the impersonator *shi* (Xiao 1992, p. 275; Kaltenmark 1960, p. 579, n. 1). Also see Carr (1985); Davis (2001, pp. 186–190); Goldin (2002, pp. 14–16).

<sup>40</sup> *Ling Jun*, *Ling Fen*, and *Lingxiu* all appear in the *Lisao*, while *Ling Huai* occurs in the *Lishi* 離世 poem of *Jiutan*, written by Liu Xiang 劉向 (77–6 B.C.).

<sup>41</sup> *Linghun* appears throughout (*Tianwen*, *Chousi* 抽思, *Aiming* 哀命), *linggu* and *baling* in *Yuanyou* 遠遊 and *Yuanshi* 遠逝 of the *Jiutan* 九歎 cycle, respectively; *lingnü* and *linggui* in *Jishi* 疾世 and *Daoluan* 悼亂 poems of the *Jiushi* 九思, respectively. *Jiuling* is used in the *Sizhong* 思忠 of the *Jiuhuai* 九懷 poems.

In summary, Wang Yi's identification of *ling* with the shamaness is inconsistent with the later commentaries (Hong Xingzu and Zhu Xi); it cannot be reinforced by the appearance of this word with a similar meaning anywhere in the *Jiuge* cycle in particular, or in any other poem of the *Chuci* in general. The question may arise: why do tradition and later all dictionaries accept this identification? Is there any further evidence outside the *Chuci* corpus where direct support can be found?

#### 4. *Ling* and the *Shuowen jiezi*

*Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 (Explaining simple and analysing compounded characters), written by Xu Shen 許慎 (d. 147 A.D.), is roughly contemporary with Wang Yi's commentary. Subsuming all characters under 540 classifiers, the *Shuowen jiezi* (*Shuowen* hereafter) is the first comprehensive Chinese lexicographic work. Three major editors and/or commentators are especially worth mentioning: 1. Xu Xuan 徐鉉 (d. 991), who added a pronunciation part based on the "reverse cutting" system (*fan-qie*). 2. Duan Yucai 段玉裁 (1735–1815), who, with his *Shuowen jiezi zhu* 說文解字注, in many respects revolutionised *Shuowen* studies (see Kwok 2000). 3. Ding Fubao 丁福保, who collected all earlier commentaries in his *Shuowen jiezi gulin* 說文解字詁林 (A Forest of Glosses on the *Shuowen jiezi*).

In his entry for the character *ling*, written with a jade classifier, Xu Shen provides the following information: *Ling* – "the magical shaman (*lingwu*) serves the spirits with jade. 靈巫以玉事神。" (Xu 1991, p. 13). It is to be emphasised that Xu Shen is providing a sort of explanation here for the written form of the word, and is not defining the meaning of the word itself; this is all the more clear as he does not provide any further meanings definitely known to him. Primarily used as mnemonic aids, Xu Shen's "definitions" are notorious for not being reliable as etymological explanations.<sup>42</sup> Although Xu Shen does not equate the two terms, he still links a sort of shamanic activity to the character *ling* with a jade classifier.

Xu Xuan (916–991), whose edition is regarded as the most authentic (Boltz 1993, p. 436), preserved the sentence above; in 1807, however, Duan Yucai, in the annotated edition (*Shuowen jiezi zhu*), altered it for the following definition: "*Ling* is the *wu*. 靈，巫也。" (Duan 1981, p. 19). As it is well known that Duan Yucai checked all sources and commentaries to restore the original definitions of the *Shuowen* characters (Boltz 1993, p. 437), from this single sentence it already seems likely that he relied on Wang Yi's definition when he changed the sentence in the most authentic Xu Xuan edition. As supposed, Duan Yucai cites three lines from the *Jiuge*: the ones from *Donghuang Taiyi*, *Yunzhong jun*, and *Dongjun*. Duan adds that

<sup>42</sup> "(...) Xu Shen did not intend the *liushu* to explain the etymology of characters. His primary purpose was to provide a teaching tool for the nine thousand characters students had to master in order to become a historian. Therefore, he intended the *liushu* to be used as a set of mnemonic principles for the acquisition of characters. In later dynasties, the purpose and origin of the *liushu* became obscured and scholars interpreted it as an attempt to explain the etymology of characters" (Galambos 2002, p. 77; also see pp. 82 and 86).

Wang Yi wrote in these three cases that “*ling* is the shamaness (*wu*). 王注皆云。靈，巫也。” As we have discussed before, this identification cannot be substantiated. To further support his view, Duan Yucai, based on Wang Yi again, puts forward what he thinks to be an additional argument: “Chu people call their shamaness *ling* 楚人名巫為靈。” (Duan 1981, p. 19). This statement by Duan is inaccurate as Wang Yi asserted that the Chu people apply the term *lingzi* to their shamans. In summary, although Duan Yucai is noticeably eager to reinforce his right to alter Xu Shen’s definition, he is unsuccessful in this endeavour. As a conscientious philologist, Duan naturally accepted the interpretation of Wang Yi, who was both temporally and locally closer to the genesis of the *Jiuge*.

Beside Wang Yi’s three glosses, most of the major dictionaries attempt to verify the first meaning of *ling* as shamaness with the *Shuowen jiezi* definition. Though attributed to Xu Shen, this definition in reality was added by Duan Yucai, who in turn derived his data from Wang Yi. Though direct influence cannot be ruled out either, it seems that, interestingly enough, two Han sources “communicate” and shape one another through a Qing dynasty philologist. The conclusion, however, is clear-cut: none of the sources (*Jiuge-Chuci*, Wang Yi’s *Chuci zhanghu*, Xu Shen’s *Shuowen jiezi*) provides any evidence to prove that *ling* can mean shamaness in Han or pre-Han sources.

As a next step, I have attempted to check all available sources up to the end of the Six Dynasties to find some further trace of this identification in other works. None of these sources gives any direct clue to this meaning of *ling*.<sup>43</sup> In many early sources, as is well known, *ling* is an adjective denoting magical, extraordinary or mysterious things or persons. Furthermore, it is often associated with rain, Heaven or celestial phenomena,<sup>44</sup> or with the soul and the spirit of men and gods. Although it is often connected with supernatural abilities, extraordinary entities or unusual powers,<sup>45</sup> it never denotes a shaman(ess).

<sup>43</sup> The principal sources were the following: *Maoshi* 毛詩, *Zhouyi* 周易, *Shangshu* 尚書, *Zhouli* 周禮, *Liji* 禮記, *Yili* 儀禮, *Zuozhuan* 左傳, *Gongyangzhuan* 公羊傳, *Erya* 爾雅, *Mengzi* 孟子, *Daodejing* 道德經, *Zhuangzi* 莊子, *Liezi* 列子, *Mozi* 墨子, *Yanzi chunqiu* 晏子春秋, *Guanzi* 管子, *Hanfeizi* 韓非子, *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋, *Xunzi* 荀子, *Xiaojing* 孝經, *Xinshu* 新書, *Mutianzi zhuan* 穆天子傳, *Guoyu* 國語, *Zhanguoce* 戰國策, *Yuejueshu* 越絕書, *Hanshi waizhuan* 韓詩外傳, *Xinyu* 新語, *Shanhaijing* 山海經, *Qianfulun* 潛伏論, *Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋, *Huainanzi* 淮南子, *Kongzi jiaoyu* 孔子家語, *Lunheng* 論衡, *Xinlun* 新論, *Shuoyuan* 說苑, *Da Dai liji* 大戴禮記, *Yanshi jiaxun* 顏氏家訓, *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語, *Shizi* 尸子, *Soushenji* 搜神記, *Wenxuan* 文選, *Huangdi neijing* 黃帝內經, *Zhushu jinian* 竹書紀年, *Baopuzi* 抱樸子, *Hanguan* 漢官, *Yantielun* 鹽鐵論, *Shiji* 史記, *Hanshu* 漢書, *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書, and *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚.

<sup>44</sup> In the Hungarian version of this paper, I attempted to show that *ling* was originally associated with the fall of blissful rain and that its meaning later applied to anything beneficent from the Heaven or the celestial beings (Kósa 2003).

<sup>45</sup> Without further evidence, I remark that the semantic field of *ling* in many respects coincides with that of the controversial concept of *mana*. Unlike Kryukov, I consider *ling* and not *de* to be a good analogy to this Oceanic notion. Cf. “The word *mana* also resists lexical identification; among its meanings are: power, might, authority, good luck, miracle, prestige, influence, truth, rightness, efficacy, control, sacred, magic and so on” (Kryukov 1995, p. 327).

### 5. *Ling* and shamanism

Although *ling* and *wu* are not identical, their intricate connection becomes manifest in many sources. As an appendix, I will only briefly summarise the conclusions of these investigations. The most obvious connection is the shamans' principal engagement with the spiritual world, with the spirits of dying/dead persons, or the gods/goddesses.<sup>46</sup> The closest connection is naturally the shaman's possession by the spirit (*ling*). Based on contemporary practice, later commentators (Hong Xingzu and Zhu Xi), associated the encounters described in the *Jiuge* with possession. Though these particular poems are in fact not examples of possession, certain aspects of Chinese shamanism definitely have a strong mediumistic character.

As is well known, many early documents attest to the fact that one of the *wus*' primary functions was to pray or dance for rain.<sup>47</sup> "The Female Shamans are in charge of anointing and ablutions at the exorcisms that are held at regular times throughout the year. When there is a drought or scorching heat, they dance in the rainmaking ritual. 女巫：掌歲時祓除、灋浴。旱暵則舞雩。"<sup>48</sup> On the other hand, rainmaking is

<sup>46</sup> "Those among the people whose souls were not flighty and were able to be reverential and inwardly upright, their wisdom could interpret the upper (Heaven) and lower (Earth) realms; their sanctity was able to enlighten the distant, proclaiming it with clarity; their intelligence was able to illuminate it (good spirits); their cleverness was able to understand and eliminate it (evil spirits). For this reason, the bright spirits descended into them; if (they descended) into a male, (he) was called *xi*; if into a female, (she) was called *wu*. 古者民神不雜·民之精爽不攜貳者，而又能齊肅哀正，其智能上下比義，其聖能光遠宣朗，其明能光照之，其聰能聽徹之，如是則明神降之，在男曰覡，在女曰巫。" (*Guoyu, Chuyu* 18.1a–1b; Paper 1995, p. 117). "They [the Managers of the *wu*] are in charge of the rituals by which the *wu* make [the spirits] descend. [司巫] 掌巫降之禮" (*Zhouli* 50.15a–19b; Falkenhausen 1995, p. 285). "In the book about divine Immortals mention is made of magic power to call down gods and arraign and punish spectres, as also magic enabling men to see spectres. (...) seers of spectres are *xi* of the male sex or *wu* of the female, and that their second sight is a natural gift, which cannot be acquired by study or practice. 又神仙集中有召神劾鬼之法，又有使人見鬼之術。(...) 或云見鬼者，在男為覡，在女為巫，當須自然，非可學而得。" (*Baopuzi* 11; Groot 1982, p. 1215). "Knowing the spirits extremely well is called *ling*; to be fond of performing sacrifices to the spirits is called *ling*. 極知鬼神曰靈，好祭鬼神曰靈。" (*Yi Zhoushu* 逸周書, *Shifa jie* 謚法解; Xiao 1992, p. 232).

<sup>47</sup> "Apparently all rainmaking methods in China were magical or religious until the eighteenth century, when we first hear of a 'scientific' method. Even then the latter was carried out after obtaining the permission of the mountain and river deities" (Cohen 1978, p. 244; Needham 1954, p. 473). "The role *par excellence* of the ancient shamaness was that of a dancer for rain" (Schafer 1951, p. 156). "The rite *chi* is equated with procedures mentioned in Zhou texts as *puwu* 'exposing the shaman', and *fenwu* 'burning the shaman'. Professor Chen cites numerous texts from the bones in which *chi* appears as a verb, frequently with a personal name as its direct object, this name being taken to be name of a shaman or shamaness" (Schafer 1951, p. 130). "Seeking rain in the spring when there is drought (...) Expose female shamans and gather emaciated persons for eight days" (*Chunqiu fanlu* 16.3a.6.1–3b.3.15; Queen 1996, p. 107). Also see *Zuozhuan Xigong* 21 (Schafer 1951, p. 132). Even as late as the Tang dynasty, Du Fu writes ("Thunder"): "Due to the great drought, mountains and hills are parched. / The South is a land of swamp fevers. / The disaster has made the work in the fields harder than ever. / In these parts sorcerers must dance and sacrifice for rain. / The gorges echo with the beatings of drums" (Glum 1982, p. 245).

<sup>48</sup> *Zhouli* 50.20a–23b (Falkenhausen 1995, p. 290). Also see *Taiping yulan* 11.3a–7a, 879.2b–8a (Cohen 1978, p. 247, n. 10).

closely associated with the word *ling*: the character itself contains the element rain,<sup>49</sup> and one of its first occurrences in the *Shijing* already points to its intimate connection with it:

靈雨既零、命彼倌人。星言夙駕、說于桑田。  
 “When felicitous rain had fallen, he gave orders to the groom;  
 when it cleared during the night, early he yoked his carriage,  
 he halted in the mulberry fields.”<sup>50</sup>

In the *Mingyu* 明雱 chapter of his *Lunheng* 論衡, the Han dynasty Wang Chong 王充 describes the *Ling* (in the Dragon constellation) (Bujard 2000, p. 173, n. 34) as the principal object of rain sacrifices:

《春秋》《左氏傳》曰：“啓蟄而雱。”曰：“龍見而雱。啓蟄龍見。”皆二月也。春二月雱，秋八月亦雱。春祈谷雨，秋祈谷實。當今靈星，秋之雱也。春雱廢，秋雱在。故靈星之祀，歲雱祭也。

“In Zuo Qiuming’s commentary to the *Chunqiu* it is said that, when the torpid insects begin to stir, it is time for the rain sacrifice, and also that, when the Dragon appears, the rain sacrifice is offered. The insects begin to move, and the Dragon becomes visible in the second month. The second month of spring is the time for the rain sacrifice, and the eighth month of autumn likewise. In spring they sue for grain, and in autumn, that the grain may bear fruit. Our present worship of the *Ling* constellation is the autumnal rain sacrifice. The vernal sacrifice has fallen into desuetude and only the autumnal remains. Thus the invocation of the *Ling* constellation is the yearly rain sacrifice” (Forke 1911, pp. 335–336).<sup>51</sup>

Thus, both the word *ling* and the shaman are closely tied to rain and rainmaking.<sup>52</sup> Beside these two major links, there are many concrete examples with the expression *lingwu* (靈巫), that is a shaman with (supposed or real) magical skills. The *Mozi* 墨子 mentions that “all spiritually powerful shamans (*lingwu*) from houses outside (the walls) who are known for (their abilities in performing) great sacrifices are to invoke together there and to supply the prayers and the sacrificial animals. 從外宅諸名大祠，靈巫或禱焉，給禱牲。” (*Mozi* 15, p. 339; Marshall 2000, p. 57). Another passage from the 2nd century B.C. *Xinyu* 新語 also uses the same expression. It also makes clear that a *lingwu* is not necessarily efficacious – though it probably should be:

<sup>49</sup> Although Xu Shen and B. Karlgren think that the upper element of the character is exclusively phonetic, there is compelling evidence to show that a semantic link does exist most probably; this is what Boltz calls an “etymonic compound” (*huiyi* 會意) in connection with the *liushu* 六書 of *Shuowen jiezi*: “characters in which at least one component serves to convey both phonetic and semantic information simultaneously” (Boltz 1993, p. 432).

<sup>50</sup> *Shijing* 50 (定之方中 *Ding zhi fang zhong*); Karlgren (1944, p. 187).

<sup>51</sup> Wang Chong also adds: “The worship of the ‘Ling’ constellation is a very ancient custom. 今有靈星，古昔之禮也。” (Forke 1911, p. 337).

<sup>52</sup> On the erotic character of rainmaking and the “shamanic” origin of the expression *yunyu* 雲雨 (cloud and rain), see Gulik (1974, pp. 38–39).

退而不用，乃使靈巫求福請命，對扁鵲而咒，病者卒死，靈巫不能治也。夫扁鵲天下之良醫而不能與靈巫爭用者。

“He would not employ (Bian Que) and instead asked a shaman [with magical skills]<sup>53</sup> to pray for good fortune and to ask life for his son. The [shaman] prayed for him in the presence of Bian Que, but the patient eventually died. The shaman could not cure the son’s illness, Bian Que was a world famous doctor but still could not compete for employment with a shaman” (*Xinyu* 7; Ku 1988, p. 105).

As mentioned before, *shen* and *ling* are synonymous and often interchangeable;<sup>54</sup> Zhuangzi 莊子 uses the expression *shenwu* (神巫):

鄭有神巫曰季咸，知人之死生、存亡、禍福、壽夭，期以歲月旬日，若神。

“In the state of Zheng, there was a magus<sup>55</sup> of the spirits named Ji Xian. He knew all about people’s life and death, preservation and loss, misfortune and good fortune, longevity and mortality – predicting the year, month, week, and day as though he himself were a spirit” (Mair 1994, p. 68).

The *Soushenji* 搜神記 links the hymns sung to the spirits with shamanic practice:

十月十五日，共入靈女廟，以豚黍樂神，吹笛，擊筑，歌上靈之曲。既而相與連臂踏地爲節，歌赤鳳皇來乃巫俗也。

“On the ides of the tenth month, all would repair to the temple of the Spirit Woman and offer suckling pigs and millet to the goddess. To the accompaniment of small flutes and zithers, they would sing the Song to the Great Spirit. After that we would dance shoulder to shoulder to the proper rhythm and sing *Come Red Phoenix*, as was common with shamans” (*Soushenji* 2, p. 43; DeWoskin – Crump 1996, p. 23).

There are many further examples when *ling* is associated with some shamanic activity. The *linggu* 靈鼓, for example, is a magical drum, while Lingshan 靈山 is a place from where the shamans often ascend: “There is *Ling* Mountain. *Wu* Xian, Ji, Fen, Peng, Gu, Zhen, Li, Di, Xie and Luo, these ten *wus* ascend and descend from here. All the various medicinal plants are here. 有靈山巫咸、巫即、巫盼、巫彭、巫姑、巫真、巫禮、巫抵、巫謝、巫羅十巫，從此升降百藥爰在。” (*Shanhai-jing jiaozhu* 1993, pp. 453–454).<sup>56</sup> All the above examples illustrate that *ling* was frequently associated with shamans and shamanic practice.

<sup>53</sup> Curiously, the word *ling* was not translated by Ku Mai-kao.

<sup>54</sup> See *ling* as the function of *shen* (*Guoshang*, 神以靈), or similar usages: *lingbao* 靈保 – *shenbao* 神保; “楚人名巫為靈子 (*lingzi*)。若曰神之子也 (*shen zhi zi*)。” (*Chuci jizhu* 1.35a). Also see *Da Dai Liji* (58): “The essential vapour of *yang* is called *shen*, the essential vapour of *yin* is called *ling*. 陽之精氣曰神，陰之精氣曰靈。”

<sup>55</sup> Mair’s term for shaman (*wu*), based on etymologic arguments; see Mair (1990).

<sup>56</sup> This is a slightly modified version of Marshall’s translation (2000, p. 95). Finally, as an illustration, a sentence from a much later source (Shen Gua’s *Mengxi bitan* 夢溪筆談, chap. 20



## Conclusion

1. Despite the fact that Wang Yi, the 2nd-century commentator of the *Jiuge*, states explicitly that *ling* means *wu* (shaman) in three poems, none of these references can be substantiated by any further evidence. Neither in the *Jiuge*, nor in the *Chuci* can one find any proof for such an identification. In two cases (*Yunzhong jun* and *Dongjun*), Wang Yi is evidently wrong, while in the first case (*Donghuang Taiyi*) both the context and the later tradition contradicts such an opinion. Wang Yi's note that people in the state of Chu call their shamans (*wu*) *lingzi* is sometimes quoted in support of his thesis, while it clearly contradicts it, as *lingzi* also indicates that *ling* means the spirit whose son (cf. Zhu Xi's remark) is the *wu*.

2. In the 2nd-century work *Shuowen jiezi*, Xu Shen originally provides a definition (or explanation) of the character which does not identify *ling* and *wu*. The Qing dynasty editor and commentator of the *Shuowen*, Duan Yucai, altered this original message by actually inserting Wang Yi's (wrong) gloss into Xu Shen's definition.

3. In the majority of Chinese dictionaries (e.g. *Cihai*, *Ciyuan*, *Hanyu da cidian*, *Hanyu da zidian*, and *Zhonghua da zidian*), the first meaning of *ling* is given as *wu*. All these dictionaries quote either Wang Yi's gloss (with the relevant *Jiuge* lines) or the *Shuowen* altered by Duan Yucai. Investigating the available Han and pre-Han sources, one can find many references to the word *ling* denoting spirits, soul, supernatural or extraordinary abilities, but none of the occurrences substantiates the *wu* meaning. In summary, including Wang Yi's commentary and the *Shuowen jiezi*, there is no evidence whatsoever to support this meaning of the word *ling*.

4. Although there is no evidence that would attest to the identity of *ling* and *wu*, their intricate connection is obvious. The fundamental meanings of *ling* as soul, spirit or gods are naturally associated with the *wus* whose distinctive duty is direct communication with these entities. Further examples can be cited as shamans are chosen by the spirits (they are their "sons", *lingzi*) and can be possessed by them in certain rituals. Moreover, the *wus*' main and almost exclusive task of inducing rain is also linked in many ways (etymological, *Shijing*, *Lunheng*) to the word *ling*. The character *ling* itself contains the element of *wu*; even originally, when it had a jade classifier, Xu Shen associated it with a shamanic activity. Furthermore, there are numerous expressions and sources when these two concepts are linked (e.g. *lingwu*, *linggu*, *Lingshan*), denoting a person with supernatural ability.

5. The third possible explanation, mentioned at the beginning of the present article, for the lack of the word *wu* in the *Jiuge* and the *Chuci* can thus be abandoned; a valid accounting for this strange phenomenon, however, must remain the task of a future study.

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神奇) is quoted which gives a clear picture of the complex semantic relationship between *wu* and *ling*, also explaining their connection with *shen*: "On the southern side of the mountain, there was a shamaness, her spirit was extremely efficacious. 山陽有一女巫，其神極靈。" The spirit may be that of the shamaness herself or her helping spirit.

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