



FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

David Mozina, PhD.

**8th Annual Master Sheng Yen Lecture
Series at Florida State University**

Friday, April 28, 2023

Dodd Hall Room 118

4:30pm - 6:30pm



**Efficacious Writing: The Workings
of Talismans in Contemporary Daoist Practice**

Talismans—messages to deities or demons inscribed, often with esoteric graphs, on paper, cloth, wood, metal, or in the air—have been ubiquitous in Daoist liturgical practice since it arose in the late second century CE. This talk asks what makes talismanic writing efficacious. What makes the strange script of talismanic writing do what it purports to do—compel deities and demons to obey the will of a Daoist master to heed summons and carry out liturgical tasks such as apotropaic protection or healing exorcism? This talk explores some foundational ideas about talismans and their efficacy in the major liturgical movements of the Song–Yuan period (c. 960–1368), ideas which are still informing Daoist practice in south China today. And the talk puts those Chinese ideas in conversation with current debates about material culture in the study of religion.



David J. Mozina studies living Daoist and Buddhist ritual traditions in rural Hunan province, and their roots in the liturgical vibrancy of the Song, Yuan, and early Ming periods (10th–15th centuries), and in the religious traditions of the late imperial period (16th–19th centuries). Within the comparative study of religion, he is interested in phenomenological and semiotic approaches to ritual; in the relationship between ritual and material culture (i.e., talismans, liturgical implements, religious art); and in different ways of combining ethnographic and historical research.