

GURPS[®]

Fourth Edition

THAUMATOLOGY[™]

CHINESE

ELEMENTAL POWERS[™]

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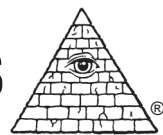
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STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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*My friend from Asia
has powers and magic.
— Robinson Jeffers,
Credo*

INTRODUCTION

"Where are you bound, foreigner?"

Father Ismael wasn't sure for a moment where the call came from; the Yangtze was loud, echoing off the banks of the gorge, and his head had been bowed in prayer. After a moment, he made out a man in a sort of skiff, out on the turbulent water, holding a long pole in both hands.

"I go to Yiling, old sir," Ismael said. "This is the road there, yes?"

"Yiling is downstream, but not much of a road.

You'd do better riding with me." The boatman poled toward the near bank as he spoke.

The water looked alarmingly rough, but Ismael could see the boatman's wrinkles; he must have been on the river a long time. Ismael descended the bank to climb into the boat. "If Heaven sends aid, man should trust in it," he said. "How should one call you, old sir?"

"I am Wang! And what do they call you?"

The Chinese found "Ismael Branco" unpronounceable, so the priest gave his usual answer: "Call me Yu, if you would." The name meant "pilgrim," which he thought fitting.

The banks grew steep as they descended the river, and Ismael thought he had made the right choice. Then he saw the rocks and white water, and wasn't so sure. As two boulders loomed over them, Wang said, "Well, pilgrim, now it gets lively. Sit down and hold on!"

The little boat slipped between the rocks, and then was swept ahead by turbulent water, faster than a man could run. Wang stood in its prow. From time to time he shoved them away from a rock with his pole, but mostly he seemed to do nothing . . . yet no wave overturned them, no snag caught them, no hidden rock smashed their hull, despite the river's roughness.

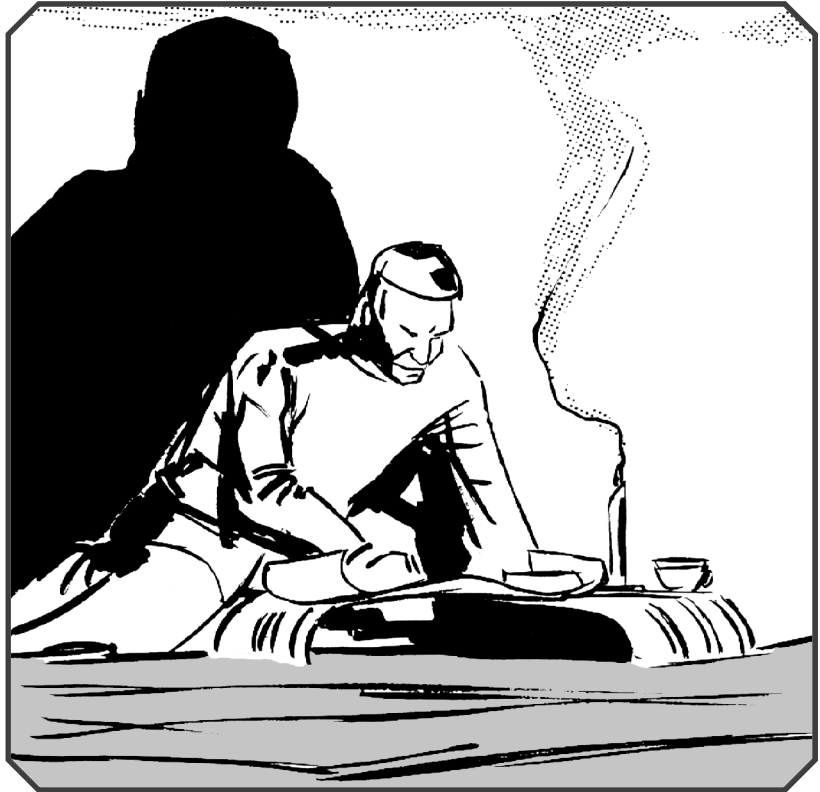
Then Wang leaned far out, so far Ismael thought he would fall. He stood up, in a crouch, hoping to save the old man – and himself, for he couldn't navigate these waters – and the boat's balance shifted and he was in the river. The current dragged him under, and he tried to make peace with God in his last thought.

A hand gripped his robes and pulled him back to the surface. He gasped for air, and realized that Wang's head was next to his, but the skiff was yards away. Then Wang's arms held him. Ismael had thought himself a decent swimmer, back in Oporto, but Wang swam like one of the seals in the harbor, dragging him back to the side of the boat. The words of the Eighteenth Psalm came into Ismael's mind: "He drew me out of deep waters."

What had he found here, he wondered: a holy man, a pagan spirit of nature, or perhaps his guardian angel?

The diverse magical arts in *GURPS Thaumatology* grow out of three roots: mana-based magic, Path and Book magic, and powers. Mana-based magic has 24 colleges worth of spells, defined in *GURPS Magic*, and *GURPS Thaumatology* offers

11 Paths and three Books of rituals for Path and Book magic – but provides only brief sketches of powers as magic. *GURPS Powers* discusses powers in depth, but does so at a very general level: powers as magic and powers in fantasy are just a few of its many options. *GURPS Thaumatology: Chinese Elemental Powers* fills out the middle ground, as a worked example of using powers to represent magical arts.



The elements of earth, water, air, and fire have played a big part in European thought, going back to ancient Greece. *GURPS Magic* reflects this idea, with its Air, Earth, Fire, and Water colleges. But the Chinese have a different list, developed by Taoist natural philosophy. The idea of "magic as power" fits the Chinese view of nature, in which each element has the power to create or restrict other elements.

The other side of this is "power as magic": the Chinese elements are treated not as a generic power source that allows free invention of abilities, but as the basis of an art comparable to a college of spells or a ritual Path. Each element has its own predesigned abilities, which define the particular things that element can do. And rather than having multiple power levels, each ability is "powered up" by extra effort, aided by a unique *Focus* technique. Thus, just as a mage can specialize in a few spells, a Chinese elemental can specialize in *Focus* to improve a few abilities.

The true man of old . . . could climb mountains without fear, enter water without getting wet, and pass through fire unscathed. This is the knowledge that leads to Tao.

– Zhuang Zi

These new rules can be added onto a cinematic martial-arts campaign as a source of high-end abilities for Chinese martial artists, comparable to but distinct from the cinematic skills in the *GURPS Basic Set*. They can be used in creating Chinese magic workers, for a historical fantasy campaign or a “hidden

magic” campaign set in the modern world. They can be the abilities of Chinese or Chinese-descended supers, paralleling the “elemental” abilities of some Western-based supers. Or they can provide a prototype for a *different* treatment of magic reflecting some other view of the elements, whether taken from another culture or newly invented.

About GURPS

Steve Jackson Games is committed to full support of *GURPS* players. Our address is SJ Games, P.O. Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760. Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) any time you write us! We can also be reached by email: info@sjgames.com. Resources include:

New supplements and adventures. *GURPS* continues to grow – see what’s new at gurps.sjgames.com.

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Bibliographies. Many of our books have extensive bibliographies, and we’re putting them online – with links to let you buy the resources that interest you! Go to each book’s web page and look for the “Bibliography” link.

Errata. Everyone makes mistakes, including us – but we do our best to fix our errors. Up-to-date errata pages for all *GURPS* releases, including this book, are available on our website – see above.

Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the *GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition*. Page references that begin with B refer to that book, not this one.

PUBLICATION HISTORY

The Chinese view of the elements was previously set forth in *GURPS China* (a *GURPS Third Edition* book). Information on Chinese medicine can be found in *GURPS Low-Tech*. The game mechanics in this work derive largely from *GURPS Martial Arts*, *GURPS Powers*, and *GURPS Thaumatology*. Some traits and modifiers from *GURPS Powers* are repeated here and used to build elemental abilities. The descriptions of powers follow the format in *GURPS Psionic Powers*. All of these books were inspirational, but the main content of *Chinese Elemental Powers* is original, and not taken from any previous source.

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

Only the *GURPS Basic Set* is required to use *Chinese Elemental Powers*. However, some parts of this work reference the magical systems of *GURPS Thaumatology*, the styles and cinematic skills of *GURPS Martial Arts*, the various realistic rules of *GURPS Low-Tech*, and the special traits and modifiers from *GURPS Powers*; readers will find all these books useful (but not *mandatory*).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

William H. Stoddard began playing roleplaying games in 1975, and published his first book, *GURPS Steampunk*, in 2000. His interest in other cultures goes back to his reading Rudyard Kipling’s Indian stories in his childhood, and has inspired campaigns with settings from the late Roman Empire and the Near East during the First Crusade to Hong Kong just after the Chinese accession. This gives him an excuse for his other favorite recreation, doing research! He lives in San Diego, in an apartment that holds far too many books.

Internal Abilities

Adapt: Most powers provide the ability to adapt the body to their own element.

Attack Foes: Most powers provide an ability that can injure or afflict humans and animals.

Attack or Control Other Element: Every power allows the practitioner's body to restrain or damage the next element in the "overcoming" cycle (*Elemental Interactions*, pp. 6-7).

Create or Nourish Other Element: Every power allows the practitioner's body to produce or aid the growth of the next element in the "generating" cycle (*Elemental Interactions*, pp. 6-7).

Impairment: Every power allows use of inner chi to disrupt another person's vital functions. This is based on the power of one's own element to control or limit another element and the organs associated with it (*Thinking in Fives*, p. 5).

Lifting: Most powers can increase lifting strength.

Movement: Most powers grant enhanced ability to move – or resist moving.

Resist Attacks: Most powers provide some form of armor or other protection against attacks.

External Abilities

Command Own Element: All powers allow control of their own element if this is present in the environment.

Neutralize Other Power: Each element can restrict the use of one other element by an adversary.

Obscure: Some powers provide a way to use their element to hinder others' perception.

Ranged Attack: All powers provide some way to attack a distant foe.

Sense Own Element: All powers can detect and analyze their own element if this is present in the environment.

Storm: All powers can create a sudden convulsion of nature. Every Storm of (Element) ability has the Elemental Storm meta-enhancement (p. 17) and Extended Duration x3 (increasing duration to 30 seconds).

POWER MODIFIER

Each ability has one or more modifiers based on its source. These modifiers define ways in which use of the ability is restricted or hindered (or augmented) in comparison to the advantages it's based on.

All Chinese elemental abilities must take the Chi modifier. Most external abilities *also* add the Elemental modifier (for a net -20%), as they can be countered. The various Knowing Hidden (Element) abilities are an example of external abilities that lack Elemental, as they cannot be blocked by mundane or supernatural countermeasures.

Chi

-10%

Your power emanates from the vital energy of your body. To be able to use that energy in performing superhuman feats, you must spend a few hours each day engaging in exercises and meditation. This requires Meditation skill (p. 20). The *requirement* for meditation and exercise is a -10-point disadvantage, which may be Disciplines of Faith (Monasticism or

Alternative Modifiers

Chinese elemental powers take Chi as a modifier because the Chinese elements are manifestations of chi. But there are other options, depending on the campaign assumptions. Whichever the GM takes, most external powers also have Elemental as a modifier.

You should still roleplay the disciplines that maintain your powers, but you need not treat this as Disciplines of Faith or a Vow. The GM may allow you to take your meditative activities as a quirk.

Magical

-10%

In a strongly fantasy-oriented campaign, the GM may have Chinese elemental powers depend on mana rather than chi, or decide that mana and chi are different names for the same thing. If so, your powers depend on mana: Rolls to use your abilities are at -5 in low-mana areas and don't work at all in no-mana areas, the Mana Damper advantage simulates the effects of low or no mana, and Magic Resistance protects others from your attacks. In addition, spells that dispel or protect against magic are effective against your powers. This is the same as the Mana Sensitive limitation (p. B34).

Super

-10%

In a supers campaign – especially a classic "four-color" one – control over the Chinese elements may be just one more set of generic superpowers, as control over the Greek elements sometimes is. Your powers can be affected by Neutralize and Static (see *GURPS Powers* for details), and gadgeteers can create weird-science devices to block or even steal them. For example, some feng shui practitioners believe that electromagnetic devices distort *qi*, so electromagnetic disruption of chi powers might be workable.

Mysticism), an appropriate Vow, or a combination of Disciplines of Faith (Contemplation) (p. 18) with either a lesser Vow (such as Three Treasures, p. 18) or Pacifism (Reluctant Killer). If you neglect this, your power fails the first time you call on it under stress, leaving you mildly ill; treat this as one of coughing/sneezing, drowsy, nauseated, or moderate pain (all p. B428), as the GM determines. You need 1d days of continued meditation to restore your inner balance.

Elemental

-10%

Your power works with one of the five elements that is present in the immediate environment. It's subject to being blocked by mundane conditions that resist that element, and to mundane countermeasures against it. These include, but are not confined to, the effects of its limiting ("father") element and of its "child" element (*Elemental Interactions*, pp. 6-7). For example, both water and earth limit fire by putting it out, so the use of water or earth is a countermeasure against most external fire powers. See Chapter 4 for details.

CHAPTER THREE

CHARACTER TRAITS

Masters of the Chinese elements may have a variety of other traits, in addition to their powers. In particular,

elementalists often learn cinematic skills and gain traits that support those skills.

ADVANTAGES

Some of the following advantages are reprinted from other supplements. Others are new interpretations of established advantages.

Blessed

see pp. B40-41

One version of this trait is a distinctively Chinese form of attunement to a cosmic power.

Harmony with the Tao: Through *wu wei* (“without doing,” or action through inaction), you can make yourself receptive to the flow of chi about you – you are attuned to the cosmic power of the Tao. You gain the ability to learn peaceful cinematic skills (*Skills*, pp. 18-20), similar to the way Trained by a Master allows learning martial cinematic skills. You do not gain the ability to learn skills with Trained by a Master or Weapon Master as a prerequisite, and do not acquire any combat benefits. Other Taoists sense your inner harmony and react to you at +1. 5 points.

Resistant

see pp. B80-B81

As with psi, it’s possible to be resistant or immune to chi. This protects against chi-based cinematic skills that allow resistance rolls: Hypnotic Hands (see *GURPS Martial Arts*), Invisibility Art (it adds to Vision rolls), Kiai, Pressure Points, Pressure Secrets, and Push (it adds to ST to resist knockback). It also protects against all chi abilities for which a resistance roll is allowed, such as the various Touching the (Internal Organ) abilities. It has no effect on threats that cannot be resisted, including most external damaging abilities; e.g., Stream of Needles (p. 30). Note that *all* Chinese elemental abilities are based on chi unless using *Alternative Modifiers* (p. 9).

If you have Resistant or Immunity to an element, you cannot use that element’s abilities. However, it’s very appropriate to buy Resistant or Immunity to the element that your element controls or limits (*Elemental Interactions*, pp. 6-7). This advantage is not restricted to those with chi-based powers or

esoteric skills; unless the GM rules otherwise, anyone may take it.

The category of “all chi abilities: powers *and* skills” is a Very Common one. Chi elemental powers are Common, any one element counts as Occasional, and any one ability is Rare. Chi-based skills are considered Occasional; each specific skill is Rare. Skills are *not* covered by Resistant or Immunity to their associated elements (*Cinematic Skills*, p. 19).

Resistant or Immunity to Metabolic Hazards (p. B81) protects against chi-based disruption of the body’s internal functions. This includes any chi attack that specifically targets the subject’s physiology; e.g., Pressure Points, Pressure Secrets, the various Touching the (Internal Organ) abilities, and any ability that inflicts toxic damage or fatigue damage without Hazard.

Super Jump

see p. B89

The following limitation (expanded on the version from *GURPS Powers*) has effects relevant to a martial-arts or fantasy campaign:

Lighter Than Air: You jump by becoming lighter than air. Your Move while jumping is not increased to 1/5 of your maximum long jump, so you may stay in the air a long time! For each second off the ground, your landing point drifts a yard in the direction the wind is blowing per 5 mph of wind speed. For instance, if you’re in the air for six seconds in a 10 mph wind from the west, you’ll land 12 yards east of the point you aimed for.

Because you’ve lightened your body, you don’t hit as hard when you land, and your collision damage is reduced:

<i>Levels of Super Jump</i>	<i>Damage Multiplier</i>
1	4/5
2	5/8
3	1/2

Every additional three levels *halves* the multiplier; e.g., with Super Jump 4 (Lighter Than Air), you’d do 2/5 normal slam damage. -10%.

Water Perks

Germinate

By holding the seed of a plant in your hand for one minute, you can induce it to sprout by rolling against HT plus Talent.

Inner Fountain‡

This is a leveled perk; see *Power Perks* (p. 8). Levels 1-4 are equivalent to Reduced Consumption 1-4 (Water Only, -50%). There are no higher levels, even if the GM allows more than four levels of Talent.

Irrigate

Prerequisite: Inner Fountain (above).

This perk allows you to restore plants that are suffering from drought. This takes a minute of concentration, after which you must roll against IQ plus Talent. If successful, you make up for a two-quart shortfall of water for one large plant (which you must touch with your bare skin) or one square yard of small leafy plants (which you need only stand among). See *Water Nourishes Wood* (p. 7)

for details. Repeated application on the same day for the same plant has no further effect.

Quenching Touch

Prerequisite: Resistance to Fire (p. 31).

This allows you to use Resistance to Fire actively. If you place your hand in a flame or on a burning object, you can use your Damage Resistance to put out the fire, with “water points” equal to your DR; see *Water Quenches Fire* (p. 7). Burning damage in excess of your Damage Resistance injures your hand.

Squirt

A perk-level version of Water Spear (p. 33). Use all the rules for that ability, except that this does no damage, no blunt trauma, and no knockback. It can startle or distract the target, or put out a small flame like a candle. If you have both Squirt and Water Spear, you can choose to do any amount of damage (for blunt trauma and knockback purposes only) from 0 to 1d+2.

Commanding Water

12 points

You can control the movement or shape of liquid water, up to 10 pints (about 1/6 cubic foot). You must touch the water to establish initial control, and roll against IQ plus Talent. Maintaining control requires constant concentration, though not contact. You can force it to flow (even uphill) at Move 1, but you can't lift it into the air! It can't cause direct damage, but creative use of it can inflict -1 to combat and other skills. A flow of water can also put out a fire (*Water Quenches Fire*, p. 7) or irrigate plants (*Water Nourishes Wood*, p. 7).

You may make a Power Block (p. 11) with Commanding Water. Extra effort increases how many pints you can control:

<i>Will Penalty</i>	<i>Quantity</i>	<i>Will Penalty</i>	<i>Quantity</i>
-2	12 pints	-12	26 pints
-4	14 pints	-14	29 pints
-6	17 pints	-16	32 pints
-8	20 pints	-18	36 pints
-10	23 pints	-20	40 pints

Statistics: Control Liquid Water 1 (Chi, -10%; Elemental, -10%) [12].

Herding Clouds

54 points

Within a radius of 0.3 mile (528 yards), you can command the movement and behavior of clouds (if any are present) with a roll against IQ plus Talent. The GM should apply between +5 and -5 based on how much existing cloud cover favors or hinders the desired effect. You can make the day brighter or dimmer, cause thunder, call down light rain (or reduce the strength of heavy rain), and so on. You can grant +1 or -1 to rolls such effects could help or hinder: increasing or decreasing darkness penalties, backing up your words with a roll of

thunder for reaction or Intimidation bonuses, or bringing down rain to dampen the ground for bad footing penalties or to enhance skills such as Farming (by watering crops) or Survival (by providing drinking water).

Extra effort adds 0.03 mile (53 yards) of radius per -2 to Will.

Statistics: Control Clouds 3 (Chi, -10%; Elemental, -10%; Natural Phenomena, +100%) [54].

Knowing Hidden Water

9 points

You can sense whether water is present and determine its direction and amount. This can locate underground springs, pipes in walls, and the like. You can also analyze its composition. Detection requires a Per roll subject to range penalties from the *Size and Speed/Range Table* (p. B550); analysis calls for an IQ roll. Talent adds to both rolls.

Statistics: Detect Water (Chi, -10%) [9].

Ruling Lakes and Seas

108 points

The most potent of the water abilities, Ruling Lakes and Seas commands the behavior of large bodies of water within a radius of 0.3 mile (528 yards) with a roll against IQ plus Talent. You can create or calm waves, cause, strengthen, or weaken currents, and so on. This grants +1 or -1 to rolls such effects could help or hinder: Boating, Seamanship, Shiphandling, Swimming, or even Intimidation for dramatic effect.

Extra effort lets you control an added 0.03 mile (53 yards) radius per -2 to Will.

The GM may allow a similar ability: Ruling Rivers and Streams. This costs 81 points and affects these natural sources of running water, but is otherwise identical.

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