1) **Rationale:**

**State of the field and the significance of the planned symposium:**

Zhenwu as an anthropomorphic deity entered the Daoist pantheon by the first half of the 10th century. Since then, his worship has risen steadily. According to the Zhenwu lore circulated since the Song dynasty (960-1279), the god was reincarnated in human form, and carried out a hermitic life of self-cultivation on Mt. Wudang in the present central Chinese province of Hubei. Under the Ming dynasty from early 15th to the late mid-17th centuries, the cult of Zhenwu reached its pinnacle with extensive imperial state patronage, as well as popular participation. Centered on the sacred Mt. Wudang and a series of regional summits throughout North, Central, and Southeast China since the Ming, the cult has continued to proliferate and transmit during the Qing dynasty from the 17th century even to the present. Today, as a living religious tradition, the Zhenwu cult continues to thrive in Chinese communities in mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan, and in many cities throughout Southeast Asia, Europe, and North America.

The historical study of the worship of Zhenwu is a 20th century phenomena, and one of the last few decades in particular. During the past two decades or so, the study has made great progress, including two dissertations in French, two in English, one book in Chinese and a sizable number of articles. Conferences that focused on Zhenwu worship took place in China (1995) and Taiwan (2008). The proposed conference will be the first one in North America. It will bring together some of the leading scholars in the field, all of whom have done research on this topic for years (see the bio), to present the freshest results of their reflections and most current research.

**Goals and Tentative Subjects of the Panels**

More importantly, this conference, in addition to a scholarly exchange and update, seeks to develop new paradigms with which to approach the study of the Zhenwu cult.
We propose to see Zhenwu worship as a model that helps us access the complex relationships between the divine and profane in Chinese society. It is established wisdom that a simple diarchy between the sacred and secular does not explain Chinese religious experiences, but the question of how exactly the two dimensions interacted still demands detailed exploration. We have come a long way from the naïve functionalist analysis of Chinese religion, yet a well articulated innovative interpretation is still elusive, and this conference is intended to begin the journey to achieve one.

The proposed program commences with its first panel focused on the creation of the sacred space, namely Mt. Wudang, to explore how tradition is invented through re-interpretation, and molded by various social forces. The second panel then investigates the site of Mt. Wudang and several other regional summits in the context of pilgrimage, and the social/geographical collaboration and competition expressed through the practice. The third panel examines widespread practice of pilgrimages to Mt. Wudang and other sacred sites which attests to the breadth of the adherents of the deity, and the intimate yet complex ties between the god of Zhenwu and the local society in late imperial and modern China. The varied ways of worshipping the Zhenwu god in different locales indicate the unique history of the given place, and the intricate relationship between unity and diversity in Chinese society. Finally, the fourth panel extends the perspective beyond the Chinese territories to examine the Zhenwu god in the context of globalization, where we investigates the Chinese deity acquires and reproduces the ethnic-bound religious and cultural identity as he serves the Chinese communities in the Diaspora, while retaining his universality in his appeal to the non-Chinese.

2) A Tentative List of Invited Participants:

A) Presenters

1. Shin-yi Chao 赵昕毅 at Rutgers University authored a dissertation on the worship of Zhenwu from Song to Ming and is revising it into a book manuscript.
2. Xiao Haiming 萧海明, Provincial Museum of Guangdong, China. He has published articles and a book on the iconography of the Zhenwu god in late imperial and modern China.
3. Yang Lizhi 楊立志 at Yunyang Teachers’ College, China published numinous articles on Zhenwu worship and the history of Mt. Wudang. He is the leading authority on the study of Daoism on Mt. Wudang.
4. Pierre-Henry de Bryun at University of La Rochelle, France, is author of a dissertation on Mt. Wudang which is to be published as a book in 2009.
5. Mei Li 梅莉 at Huazhong Normal University, China, has authored two books and numerous articles on topics related to local Zhenwu worship and the networks of pilgrims to Mt. Wudang.
6. Jean DiBernaldi is Professor at University of Alberta, Canada, and has spent two decades in studying overseas Chinese in Malaysia with an emphasis on their religious practices. One of her recent books devotes a chapter on the spirit mediums serving Zhenwu in Malaysia Chinese community.
7. Nikaido Yoshihiro 二階堂善弘 who teaches at Kansai University, Japan, has done textual studies on the image formation of Zhenwu in Daoism and is currently working on the Japanese adaptation of Zhenwu into a Budo-Shindo form.
B) Discussants:
Jiang Tao, Rutgers University
Susan Naquin, Princeton University
Chün-fang Yü, Columbia University /
James Robson, Harvard University

Program:

April 1, 2010 ----- Arrival and check-ins for overseas guests
April 2, 2010 ----- Session I:
9:00—9:30: Opening Remarks
    Prof. Ching-I Tu, Director, CIRU/Asian Languages/Cultures
9:30——12:00 Panel One: Creating the sacred space
    --- Wang Jianchuan, Southern Taiwan Science and Technology University
        “The Lord Zhenwu in Popular Morality Books in Late imperial China”
    --- Pierre-Henry de Bryun, La Rochelle University, France
        “Spreading the Figure of Zhenwu thru Folk Stories”
    ------ Shin-yi Chao, Rutgers University
        “The Zhenwu Cult from the Song to the Ming Eras”
Discussants:
    James Robson, Harvard University

2:00——4:30 Panel Two: Zhenwu Cult and Devotion in the Diaspora
    --- Jean DeBernadi, University of Alberta, Canada
        “Serving Lord Zhenwu: Spirit-medium among Malay Chinese Communities.”
    --- Ong Seng Huat, University of Malaysia
        “The Zhenwu Cult and the Chinese Community in Modern Malaysia.”
    --- Fang Ling, CNRS
        “Lord of the Dark Heaven in the Chinese Communities in Paris”
April 3, 2010----Session II:
9:00----11:30 Panel Three: Local and Regional Network of Pilgrimage and Cults
--- Mei Li, Huazhong Normal University, China
“从武当山金殿铜栏杆铭文看明代云南的真武信仰 The Zhenwu Cult in Ming Yunan as Seen From the Inscriptions on the Bronze Railings Around the Gold Summit Shrine on Mount Wudang.”
--- Richard Wang, University of Florida, Gainesville,
“Qiyunshan as a Replica of Wudangshan and the Religious Landscape of the Ming Empire.”
--- Xun LIU, Rutgers University
“The Network of the Patriarch Master Summits (Zushi ding) in Nanyang”

2:00--4:30 Panel Four: Localizing a Daoist Deity
--- Yamada Akihiro, Kansei University, Japan
“The Roles of Lord Zhenwu in the Jiao rite in Taiwan”
--- Xiao Haiming, Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts, China
“The Iconography of the Lord Zhenwu at a Foshan Temple”
--- Yang Lizhi, Yunyang Teacher College, China
“武當地玄帝造像的宗教意義與審美價值 The Religious Meaning and Aesthetic Value of the Xuandi Statues on Mount Wudang.”
--- Nikaido Yoshihiro, Kansei University, Japan
“Shinto-Buddho Reformation of the Zhenwu deity in Japan”

5:00--6:00: Discussion on future volume/journal publication

General Comments by all participants
7:30—9:00 PM: Farewell Dinner