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CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

DAOIST SACRED SITES

THOMAS H. HAHN

DESCRIPTION

Sacred sites, created and recreated, formed and reformed, can be found—in various layers of density—all over China. Space in general lends form, shape, definition and a vocabulary to those who experience it; sacred space adds a physical dimension to numinous power, to hierophanies and revelations. It is at first a "danger zone," then is tamed by accruing ethical or ecological value for a community. Its qualities come in two types: physical, in the form of edible plants and fruit, minerals, water and fertile soil (the case with most, if not all sacred sites in China); and behavioral in the way that it provides a crucial centrality that distinguishes it from other types of profane cityscapes or even wild spaces which are open, unexplored, non-connected and disturbingly chaotic (see Eliade 1961).

Organizational standards for charted sacred space tend to be elaborate and time-honored: they operate according to a strictly coded environmental axis (no cutting down of trees, littering, or unclean objects or persons), as well as a ritualistic matrix which structures human spatial interactions with it (in the form of professional specialists conducting religious feasts and rituals). Various modes of perception enable the seeker to establish guided and guarded rapport with the powers of sacred space as means to request religious experience (Graber 1976, 4-5).

In general, the more complex the religious community connected to a specific locality, the more complex are the rules governing that community's interactions with society at large. Daoist establishments acted as agencies to synchronize the common interests of the populace with divine will, serving as fair grounds for temple festivals or focal points for pilgrimages. However, in order for the same "congregational" or sectarian entity to function within the confines of sacred space and relate to the divine powers residing there, the organizational standards remained the same.

Followers of religious Daoism over time have accumulated a vast corpus of knowledge about the space they live in or retreat to (sometimes not entirely voluntarily). Thus we find a multitude of descriptions of scenic-sacred spaces and an equal plethora of organizational or individual approaches to living (as long as possible) within them. Longevity and immortality, the prime goals of Taoist believers, can only be achieved by associating oneself to a sacred central place, which then serves as a point of mental concentration and devout daily routine. Worldly manifestations of the Dao in the form of miraculous, inexplicable phenomena (such as lush growth despite droughts, or discovery of an ancient scroll within an uninhabited cave) are considered *ling* 靈, a term usually translated as "numinous." Spatial markers to designate holy grounds developed over time in the form of named constructed buildings such as shrines, pavilions, roofed pathways, temple structures and full-fledged monastic compounds. Yet in Daoist belief, the macro-structure, and the best place to work toward the realization of perfection is the mountain.

History

All major **Daoist schools** are in one way or another linked with a sacred mountain. Thus Zhang Daoling 張道陵, the founder of the Way of the Celestial Master, came originally from Longhu shan 龍虎山 (Dragon-Tiger Mtn.) in Jiangxi, which later became the headquarters of the school. He had his major encounter with the personified Dao on Heming shan 鶴鳴山 (Crane-Cry Mtn.), a peak in western Sichuan, and established his first community there. Similarly, the northern Celestial Master Kou Qianzhi 寇謙之 found his revelation of the Dao on Songshan 嵩山 (Lofty Mtn.), the central of the five sacred peaks. His teaching then influenced the Louguan 樓觀 group, who established themselves in Zhongnan shan 終南山 (End South Mtn.), southwest of Xi'an. This was also where Wang Chongyang 王重陽 (1113-1170), the founder of Quanzhen 全真 (Complete Perfection), had his hermitage and made supernatural contact with Lü Dongbin 呂洞賓 and other perfected beings. The school of Shangqing 上清 (Highest Clarity), moreover, was centered on Maoshan 茅山 (Mt. Mao, named after the three Mao brothers) to the southeast of Nanjing 南京 (Jiangsu). It remains a holy mountain to the present day. Other, lesser centers were established on mountains by individual patriarchs and practitioners, and a number of sacred grotto heavens were associated with them, areas for interaction with the divine and personal realization.

Outlining a history of these various sites, however important they may be, is a difficult undertaking. The records inherited through official

historical writings, religious scriptures and geographical accounts focus to a great extent on established buildings and institutionalized monastic orders, while hagiographies tend to elaborate on the virtue of the founder or resident of a cult site rather than detailing the natural environment or layout of buildings. Still, a number of things can be said on the basis of the just-listed schools and their holy centers.

Before the arrival of Daoism proper, mountains were already sacred. This sacrality was expressed through the establishment of a formal platform, often described as an elevated platform or, to use a more familiar term, **altar** (*tan* 壇). It usually consisted of several layers of tamped earth or bricks, one slightly narrower than the next, which allowed practitioners to ascend higher toward the sky and the gods. If a sacred site can be seen as a center of numinous radiation, then this altar platform is its fuse. Only specialists—magicians, shamans, ritual sacrificers, and later Daoist priests—could approach and "arm" or "disarm" the site through this fuse. Altars were thus constructed for worship and sacrificial purposes, and there is evidence of their existence in early Shang dynasty inscriptions on oracle bones and bronze vessels.

In Daoism, the altar with its three levels symbolized cosmological forces and represented the control of a vast and important mythological heritage. It was conceived as a cave and a mountain at the same time. It had depth through roads that led both inside its entrails and into the inner self of the adept, as well as height, structure and mass through which Daoists could govern the *qi* 氣 (vital energy) of themselves and the world. The altar would be constructed, invested and armed—or deconstructed and moved along—wherever spatial and spiritual reformation or transformation was thought necessary. This might be due to the death of a leading priest or other important person, when the departed soul left a gap in the community.

Many types of construction are used in Daoist altars (see Schipper 1982, 129; Lagerwey 1991, 25-27), but the core elements remain constant. In all periods of Daoist history, priests have used altars for major ceremonies and investitures. The first such institution was Zhang Daoling's, the first Celestial Master who preached to and converted people in Sichuan during the first half of the second century C.E. and established twenty-four altars in different parishes. The central altar of the Celestial Masters on Longhu shan was built by his great-grandson Sheng 盛, who not only erected an ancestral hall to worship Zhang Daoling's spirit, but also an altar to transmit registers (*chuanlu* 傳籙) and perform rituals to the Three Primes (*sanyuan zhai* 三元齋), thus ensuring the active continuity of the tradition.

Another important institution associated with sacred mountains in Daoism is the **parish** (*zhi* 治), first set up by Zhang Daoling, To organ-

ize his numerous followers, he constructed a network of twenty-four locations, in each of which he erected earthen altars (*tutan* 土壇) in simple thatched houses (*caowu* 草屋). It is not recorded whether Zhang appropriated already established indigenous cult sites that may have been dedicated to nature gods or associated with fertility cults. (A cult site of this nature was flourishing and active around Longhu shan until the Red Guards destroyed it during the Cultural Revolution). It is likely, however, that he introduced a new spiritual context to the landscape and its inhabitants, synthesizing established parameters with his immediate needs and demands. His Five Bushel of Rice Sect (*wudou mi jiao* 五斗米教) thrived within the sacred mountainous geography west and southwest of present-day Chengdu 成都 (Sichuan), including the revelation site of Mount Heming, one of the parishes.

These parishes were centered around the altars which, not unlike Celtic cairns, served to transmit locally generated and revered numinous power. They also marked territorial rights and staked a claim on the land. They mediated between forces and translated the varying local patterns of the individual spaces into a codified and comprehensible narrative of appropriation, justification and, eventually, administrative notification. To reside by and cater to an altar platform, more elaborate buildings were constructed. These have been described in various terms. **Purification halls** (*jingshe* 精舍, *jingchu* 靖廚) were probably used for dietary and purifying purposes. They opened toward the south and were closed toward the north to obstruct the influx of evil forces. **Thatched huts** (*lu* 廬) were places for individual retreat and reflection, associated both with the communal purification halls and chambers of confession and tranquility (*jingshi* 靜室; see Yoshikawa 1987; Shi 1986, 2-3). A later description of these institutions is given by Zhu Faman 朱法滿 (d. 720) in his *Yaoxiu keyi jielü chao* 要修科儀戒律鈔 (Short Summary of Essential Rules and Observances, CT 462). It says:

> In order to establish a parish with a proper purification hall according to the Celestial Master, first a space is consecrated that is eighty-one steps (*bu* 步, 73 m) long and wide, activating the [yang] number nine times nine and allowing specially for ascending yang *qi*. In the exact middle of this space the Chongxu tang 崇虛堂 [Hall for Venerating the Void] is erected; it consists of seven levels and six chambers, twelve *zhang* [34 m] wide.
>
> It has rising halls; its highest level sits on top of two central rooms and forms the Chongxuan tai 崇玄台 [Terrace for Venerating the Mystery]. On this level a great incense burner is set, five feet high, that constantly emanates [fragrant] fumes. To its east, west and south three thatched huts are erected, each with windows cut into the sides. The central edifice can be accessed via two passageways. ....
>
> Five *zhang* [15 m] north of the Chongxuan tai stands the Chongxian tang 崇仙堂 [Hall for Venerating the Immortals]. It consists of seven chambers, each fourteen *zhang* [39 m] wide and with seven pillars each. To its east is

> the Yangxian fang 陽仙房 [Chamber of Yang Immortals]; to its west the Yinxian fang 陰仙房 [Chamber of Yin Immortals].
>
> Then again, south of the Chongxuan tai, about 12 *zhang* [34 m] away and close to the southern border of the compound, there should be an edifice of five rooms and three levels to serve as the gate house. Inside, on the southern side of the eastern doorway, is the room for performing libations and sacrifices to Mysterious Tenuity (*xuanwei* 玄威); in the corresponding western chamber there is a room for sacrifices to the one who guards destinies and inspects the *qi* (*dianshi chaqi* 典司察氣). The remaining, lesser rooms I cannot describe. Of the twenty-four parishes, each and every one should be laid out like this. (ch. 10)

The idea of the parish and its central purification hall as a gathering place for religious activities thus evolved from a set of buildings erected around a plain earthen altar. Over the centuries, the Daoist mountain center became larger in scale and turned into a spatialized operation that was implemented and developed long after the Zhang family had founded their first organizations.

Another important Daoist institution typically associated with mountains is the **monastery** or abbey (also cloister or belvedere), *guan* 觀. The term, which originally means "to observe" or "to look out," was already used in an architectural context for two specific buildings during the reign of the Han emperor Wu (r. 140-87 B.C.; Shi 1986, 3). In a Daoist context, it goes back to the first monastic institution at Louguan or Louguan tai 樓觀台 in the Zhongnan mountains, founded in the late fifth century. It replaces the term *guan* 館 (community center), used earlier for Daoist mountain communities that were not celibate and did not function according to reclusive rules, such as the early settlements on Maoshan. Louguan, southwest of Xi'an and well within the sphere of influence of the old capital, marks the site where Laozi allegedly compiled the *Daode jing* at the request of the border guard Yin Xi 尹喜. It was established by Yin Tong 尹通, a putative descendant of the latter (see Kohn 1997).

With the advent of the Tang dynasty and the establishment of larger, rather affluent religious communities flourishing under imperial tutelage, monasteries became bigger and more elaborate, as described in the text *Fengdao kejie* 奉道科戒 (Rules and Precepts for Worshiping the Dao, CT 1125; see Reiter 1998). When Emperor Xuanzong (r. 713-755) further assigned the care of all Daoist clerics to the Department of the Imperial Family, all Daoists became *de iure* relatives of the emperor and their institutions were accordingly renamed *gong* 宮 or **palace**. This also reflected the playful grandeur and artful design of the lavish monastic constructions at the time. The largest such Daoist "palace" ever created in Chinese history was said to have been build in the vicinity of Xi'an (in the Zhongnan mountains) and was called Chongyang gong 重陽宮 (Pal-

ace of Renewed Yang). It was dedicated to the memory of Wang Chongyang, the founder of the Quanzhen school, and it is said that it had over 5,000 rooms and attracted more than 10,000 Daoists at any one time. When I visited the site in 1986, I found only thirty-one stele inscriptions and a few buildings remaining (see also Zheng 1994, 160-61).

A survey undertaken in the Kaiyuan period (713-741) found 1,678 Daoist institutions within the confines of the empire (including 550 for nuns). Over 1,000 years later, the two provinces of Sichuan and Yunnan alone had 773 Daoist places, and according to a survey undertaken by the Taiwanese government in 1984, Taiwan then had over 6,700 buildings devoted to the practice of Daoist religion. Even these large numbers do not fully convey the extent of Daoist worship. As there were many spiritual entities and natural forces which Daoists were trained and empowered to control, subdue and use, there were equally as many worldly manifestations of their presence. These came not only in the form of buildings—in city or country—but also in the form of natural habitats, most notably caves. There is no survey of how many caves were inhabited by Daoist practitioners at any one point in time, but for example Zibo shan 紫柏山 alone has seventy-two identified grottoes (see Boerschmann 1914). Also, before Huangshan 黃山 became a major tourist attraction, each one of its seventy-two peaks claimed to have at least three hermitages and one cave. The wide-spread Chinese eremitic tradition—which continues even today (see Porter 1993)— added to the sacrality of space. The ethical clout of the purified mountain space was also appropriated by the lay community at large and came to play a key role in popular religion.

Texts

It has been argued in a different context by Paracelsus and others that nature itself is text (Blumenberg 1986, 69-72), and that the layers of phenomenological imprints on it can be read, understood, interpreted and translated into "proper" writing. The powerful Western metaphor of the "book of nature" for centuries served as a nimble rhetorical vehicle laden with (proto) scientific instruments and driven by iconoclasts. Finally, in the "age of reason," the ultimate mirror of the universe was submitted to the letter press: the encyclopedia. Constituting a compendium of all available knowledge, this literary genre occupied itself not only with geognostic models, or describing what the "naturalist" (and here especially botanists) might have collected, but also attempted to compile a grammar of the world's inner working. Its approach to something as infinite as nature, history or the human mind, executed in terms

of presupposing a high degree of administrative finality, proved (at least according to Herder) to be the genre's fallacy.

In China, the earth was also "read," albeit in another context. Whatever locality was in question, the so-called "earth texture" (*diwen* 地文) was used in geomancy and in divination to determine the proper location of social spaces such as houses, temples, public squares, palaces and graves. A vast corpus of literature exists today dealing with the geomantically rightful or harmful appropriation of land. Prescriptions for consecration are found in manuals on "mountain methods" (*shanfa* 山法) or in "precious scrolls" (*baojuan* 寶卷), such as the *Kanyu biji baojuan* 堪輿秘笈寶卷 (Precious Scroll Containing Secret Tablets on Heaven and Earth). They describe how to deal with caverns (*xuefa* 穴法, *longxue lun* 龍穴論), valleys (*shangu* 山谷) and ridges (*beimian* 背面). These manuals may be revealed or received; they are sacred texts themselves. They do not necessarily focus on specific sacred spaces, but rather explicate the general geomantic principles underlying the process of "opening a mountain" (*kaishan* 開山), laying the foundation for a grave or mapping out the construction of a temple.

Besides the specialized literature, there are also encyclopedias (*leishu* 類書) in China, compendia born of administrative necessity that form a genre in their own right. Their underlying utilitarian conception shines through on every page. We also find local inventories or registries that focus specifically on mountains, commonly known as "mountain gazetteers" (*shanzhi* 山志). They contain data on holy places and sacred precincts as well as on famous figures and outstanding features associated with the mountain. The texts dealing with sacred sites are a sub-genre of the much studied local gazetteers (*difang zhi* 地方志) and are structured much like them. After securing and linking the site under discussion with the appropriate star constellation, a brief discussion of its toponymical history follows. The reader is informed that temple A had the name B during dynasty C, that it was destroyed by fire in the year D, and consequently rebuilt under the new name E. In some cases, fifty or more temples, monasteries and shrines are listed and surveyed in their respective "genealogies." Natural features of either numinous or scenic value, such as peaks, grottoes, groves, gardens, stones and rock formations, form a second category of physical proprieties. Earlier gazetteers tend to stress the sacred, those compiled later (probably from the mid-Ming onward) focus more on the scenic aspects of sites.

Another common feature of these gazetteers is their emphasis on hagiographic accounts of saints and persons of illustrious virtue. Monastic or mountain gazetteers may contain versions of hagiographies not included in otherwise stereotyped collections, thus providing a different reading on people and their influence upon places. Likewise, one some-

times finds highly specialized information in the gazetteers, nuggets of precious data such as a complete catalog of a monastic library or an elaborate and annotated calendar of local festivals. For example, no less than 1,600 mostly Daoist scriptures were listed in the description of a monastic library on southern Hengshan in a local gazetteer dated to 1763. Besides hagiographies, the literary sections often contain lists and texts of stele inscriptions (*beiwen* 碑文), prayer and ritual texts (*jiwen* 祭文), poetry and a variety of prose forms, such as odes or travelogues. In short, the material contained in these sources is indispensable for the study of sacred sites "all under heaven." They are still compiled today, which is a good sign: sacred sites are—again—in dire need of explanation and legitimization in China.

Worldview

HOLY MOUNTAINS. Quite possibly the archetype of sacred space on a macrolevel, holy mountains belong to the mythological foundations of Chinese civilization. They are anthropomorphical compositions of living matter as well as abstract entities in the cosmological framework of geopolitical territoriality, incorporated into the sagas of nation building and the annual sacrificial calendar. According to the *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽 (Imperial Encyclopedia of the Taiping era, chs. 38-50) of the early Song, mountains are organized along a hierarchical scale and grouped in five clusters, of which I will present the first three.

The first group consists of seven mountains which **are cosmological and mythical** in nature. They are:

Mt. Kunlun 崑崙山 (Mt. High and Precarious). This mountain, or rather mountain range, in the far west of China is the equivalent of an *axis mundi*. The yellow springs—and hence all rivers fertilizing the Chinese heartland—originate here. As the *Shizhou ji* 十州記 (Record of the Ten Continents, CT 598) states, it is "completely surrounded by a weakwater stream" (Smith 1990, 110) and houses the palace of Xiwang mu 西王母, the illustrious Queen Mother of the West, administrator of a large garden with peaches that bestow immortality. "Of all objects and creatures, it is the rare and the strange that predominate here. The celestial ones are crowded and cannot be counted. This is the root and the hub of heaven and earth, the handle of ten thousand measures" (Smith 1990, 113).

Mt. Zhong 鍾山 (Bell Mountain). Not much is known about this mountain. It is not the Zhongshan or Jinling shan 金鈴山 near the southern capital of Nanjing on the Yangzi River. Rather, it is supposed to be located north of the Northern Sea and is lauded as the native place

of "more than forty varieties of jade fungi and wondrous herbs. ... Golden terraces and gate-towers of jade there also store up the primal *qi*; it is the Celestial Lord's seat of government" (Smith 1990, 116).

Mt. Penglai 蓬萊山. This mythological mountain island in the Yellow Sea is said to be the source of herbs that prolong life. It figures prominently in stories and traditions of immortals, beginning with the First Emperor of the Qin and lasting until today. In Daoism, it is one of the key paradises of the immortals together with Mt. Kunlun. The *Shizhou ji* describes it as "the best continent." (Smith 1990, 97, 109).

Mt. Fangzhang 方丈山/州 (Square Measure Mountain or Continent). The *Shizhou ji* places it in the middle of the Eastern Sea, populated with "flocks of dragons." It also states that "there are palaces of gold, jade and crystal where the Arbiter of Fate in the Three Heavens rules. Those among the immortal multitudes who do not wish to ascend into the heavens all go to this continent" (Smith 1990, 107)

Mt. Yingzhou 瀛洲 (Oceanic Continent). This mountain is often associated with the Penglai group and is of equally obscure origin. According to the *Shizhou ji*, "is is four thousand square *li* in area, and it is located on the same level as Kuaiji, approximately seven hundred thousand *li* from the western shore." A rock cut from jade with a spring producing water "as sweet as wine" is noted as the main attraction of Yingzhou, where many immortals have taken up residence. (Smith 1990, 91-92).

Mt. Yu 玉山 (Jade Mountain). The location or characteristics of this mountain are not clearly defined in the sources. There are so many mountains all over China and beyond that it is hard to pinpoint which is the one in question.

Mt. Zhongnan 終南山 (End South Mountain). A vast mountain range in southern Shanxi, this forms the divide between central and southwestern China. It has been home to various Daoist schools and the earliest monastery of Louguan.

These seven mountains in ancient times formed the matrix for spiritual voyages, and some of them are described at length in classical travel and mythological texts, such as the *Mu tianzi zhuan* 穆天子傳 (Account of Emperor Mu, CT 291; see Mathieu 1978), and the *Shanhai jing* 山海經 (Classic of Mountains and Seas; see Mathieu 1983). It is impossible to classify them as either Buddhist or Daoist, because their status as centers of ancient myths and cults antedates such distinctions.

The second group is the **five sacred peaks** (or marchmounts) of traditional China (see Geil 1926; Landt 1994). They are:

Huashan 華山, the sacred peak of the west, is located in Shaanxi. This peak is of extraordinary structure and appearance, rising almost vertically out of the surrounding plains. It is a very old sacred site that

has the advantage of lying between the two ancient capitals Chang'an and Kaifeng (see Eberhard and Morrison 1973; Vervoorn 1990).

Taishan 泰山, the sacred peak of the east, is located in Shandong and was thought of as the residence of the dead. Its mountain lord (Taishang fujun 太上府君) served as the ruler of souls. It was central to imperial sacrifices (*fengshan* 封禪) and when the emperor made his ritual round throughout the country would be visited first. Tall and erect, it too rises apruptly from the fertile plains (see Chavannes 1910; Goodrich 1964; Baker 1971).

Hengshan 恒山, the sacred peak of the north, is located in Shanxi. It is serene, lush and adorned with spectacular cliffs and "suspended" monasteries.

Hengshan 衡山, the sacred peak of the south, is located in Hunan. It is heavily wooded (67%), and easily sustains large monastic compounds on its summit and slopes. It houses both Daoist and Buddhist centers (see Robson 1995).

Songshan 嵩山, the sacred peak of the center, is located in Henan. It is equally as reputable as Mt. Tai, but closer to the ancient capitals.

A sixth major sacred peak of China is Huoshan 霍山, sometimes called Supreme Peak (*taiyue* 太嶽). Located in Shanxi, it is sometimes confused with another Huoshan in Anhui, which is now called Tianzhu shan 天柱山. On occasion, it takes the place of the southern peak.

These mountains are among the most revered sites and sacred powers in Chinese culture and as a group they are divine rulers of the land. In mythological terms, they are often described as occupying the position of generals who control a vast staff in the form of lesser mountains distributed in their respective spheres of influence. These all report back to the "generals," who keep the registers of life and death of all human and numinous inhabitants of their domains. All five peaks are connected by a huge subterranean network. They have vast compounds dedicated to them, and their innermost powers, or so-called true forms (*zhenxing* 真形), are represented in emblematic projections such as charts or talismans whose possession grants the practitioner influence and control over ghosts and spirits.

The third group of mountains contains thirteen **significant peaks**, also considered holy and of important influence. Some were also sites of important Daoist temples or monasteries, such as Mt. Wangwu 王屋山 (Mountain of Kingly Residence, in Henan). Located near the capital of Chang'an, this was the residence of the eleventh Shangqing patriarch and important Daoist master Sima Chengzhen. It enjoyed great prominence until the Ming dynasty. The *Taiping huanyu ji* 太平寰輿記 (Return to Yu Record of the Taiping Era), an administrative geography of the Song dynasty, calls it the "finest" of all mountains. Besides Mt. Wangwu,

Mt. Emei 峨眉山 (Sichuan) is prominent in this group. As the westernmost of Chinese mountains, it is today famous as a Buddhist center. But it is also close to Heming shan, where Zhang Daoling received his first revelation, and closer yet to Qingcheng shan 青城山 (in Guan county 灌縣), where there is still a remarkable community of devoted Daoist priests and scholars. Other famous mountains such as Laoshan 勞山 in Shandong, Qianshan 千山 in Anhui, Luofu shan 羅浮山 in Guangdong and Yandang shan 雁蕩山 in southern Zhejiang are not part of the primary Song dynasty inventory of famous mountains, but were nevertheless active regional Daoist centers.

All of these mountains (among the 471 listed and ranked in the *Taiping yulan*) stand out in one way or another. They either harbor strange and potent herbs (*yicao* 異草), form a natural water divide, allow strange animals to roam or have illustrious hermits associated with them. Furthermore, they are inhabited by a multitude of powerful spirits and divinities. Their names are well known by initiates, although their forms may change through time. Daoists use meditational practices to visualize—and exorcise or control—these supernatural agents by calling upon them by their proper name.

Except for Mt. Heng, the sacred peak of the south, none of these mountains is located south of the Yangzi River. A central cluster can be defined, consisting of Zhongnan shan, Songshan, Huashan and Huoshan; the periphery of the empire would then be marked by Mts. Kunlun, Emei, Tai and Heng. The official list also has hundreds more of lesser known places, and it may well be that each community at one time or another felt the need for a protective mountain. The book *Guanzi* 管子 uses the expression "house mountain" (*menshan* 門山) to allude to the intimate relationship between a social body and the natural forces that surround it and dominate its *qi*. Similarly, many mountains are called "earth lung" (*difei* 地肥). That is, they emanate vital "breath" or benevolent "steam" which accumulates in the Daoist's body and supplies the necessary energy to achieve longevity or immortality.

Then again, mountains have a terminology associated with them that is as vast as it is metaphorical. The death of an emperor for example was perceived and officially described as a "crumbling mountain" or "landslide" (*beng* 崩).

HERMITS. As mentioned earlier, mountains formed the natural habitat for **recluses**. The degree to which hermits pursued the principle of "getting lost," or submerging themselves in wild spaces, is astounding. Hermits retreated—and still retreat—into caves cut high up into sheer cliffs that are only scaleable by iron chains and rough stone ladders. They stayed secluded for varying lenghts of time, sometimes shutting themselves up for good (see Porter 1993). There were, to be sure, many

reasons to withdraw from society. Vervoorn, writing on the perception of ethical and economic deflation towards the end of the Han dynasty, states: "This was the mode of eremitism which derived from Confucius: that of withdrawing in adverse times in order to be able to serve the Way in another place or another time" (1990, 82). When disappointed or disapproving literati officials retreated to the mountains, they usually continued their usual activities of studying and teaching. Citing the *Bailu zhou shuyuan zhi* 白鹿州書院志 (Gazetteer of the Academy at White Deer prefecture), John Meskill translates a telling account of the status of such hermit scholars. He says:

> Mountain recluses lectured and taught among themselves. ... Books were bestowed on their mountain places as special grace. ... Teacher Hu Wufeng (12th c.) studied and taught more than twenty years in his mountain retreat. ... That the master of a place for teaching students in the mountains be an officer of the lord, receiving his commission from the court, has no precedent in previous areas. In the Three Dynasties the schools of the state capital and the local communities did not accommodate the scholars of the mountain grottoes (*shandong* 山洞). In later days the teaching in the mountains had no authorization from the sovereign. (1982, 254)

This suggests that mountains were used as a space apart, and not only to distance oneself physically from the fast-paced life of the city or at court—they also provided a fertile ground on which to venture into the seemingly heterodox aspects of traditional teachings.

For another type of hermit, the mountain acted as the outer body of the self. Daoist hermits, usually more aware of the characteristics and the possibilities of a given locality than anybody else, resolutely and "naturally" placed themselves in charge of all the forces a mountain was harboring: water and forests, wild birds and beasts, ghosts and divinities, minerals and ores. By employing metaphorical argumentation and magical devices such as charms, writs and rituals to hold sway over a specifically numinous or "enriched" natural space, mountain Daoists disappeared into the wild as fishermen blended into the sea. Indeed, on those same grounds, Vervoorn denies that Daoists should be called hermits at all so long as "they dwell on a given mountain top solely because it is believed to be a place of spritual potency which offers optimal conditions for the attainment of their particular goal [immortality]" (1990, 14). Whatever their background and purpose, Chinese recluses encompassed a great number of diverse individuals, from noble ministers and religious seekers (both Buddhist and Daoist) to those "behaving strangely" (*yiren* 異人), a category common in local and mountain gazetteers. The great Daoist master Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 (456-536) may stand as representative for them all. Living high on Maoshan near Nanjing, yet entertaining a close relationship with the court and especially

with Emperor Wu of the Liang, he was called by contemporaries the "chancellor of the mountains" (*shanzhong caixiang* 山中宰相).

GROTTOES AND AUSPICIOUS SITES. Grottoes, caverns, caves, underground spaces, mountain hollows and inner corridors all possess qualities manmade places do not have. They are archetypal chambers of reflection. Despite a singular solidity, their physical permeability in terms of air- and water-flow reflects the inner workings of the human body. Blood equals water; air equals breath. Spermatic liquids (see Seidel 1983) form pools; walls constitute shapes like inner organs or viscera. Their resident, left windowless and in an enclosed void, experiences the dignity of complete independence and autarky. In this self-contained space of self-projection, he conducts alchemical procedures in search of recreating the "Perfect [Replica] of Man" (*zhenren* 真人) who exists in the double enclosure of cave and alchemical apparatus, without the natural diffusion and deflection of external relationships. Thus the totality of exterior factors stays under control, purification is complete, the "product" can be re-engineered according to recipe (Blumenberg 1989, 418). Within and yet beyond sacred space lies mindspace: the Daoist grotto (see Benton 1995).

There are scores of them. Every community was to have access to at least one. Of one hundred local gazetteers from southeast China, ninety list caves with names that carry connotations of religious significance and activity. Networked, they form sub-terrestrian passageways that expand to the remotest regions of the world. A very old hierarchy of caves forms the substratum of Daoist holy sites: the so-called ten great and thirty-six lesser **grotto-heavens** (*dongtian* 洞天), which first appear as a subtle framework in a fifth-century Daoist text (Lagerwey 1981, 77; Miura 1983; Hahn 1988, 147; Verellen 1995, 278).

A canonical body of sacred grottoes was then created with the systematization of Sima Chengzhen 司馬承真 (647-735) and Du Guangting 杜光庭 (850-933). Both were Tang Daoists with close affiliations to the imperial court, whose interest in assigning spatial sacrality served to stabilize the dynastic lineage. Thus, for example, a previously unnamed cave on a mountain named Liyu feng 立魚峰 (Upright-Fish-Peak) in Liuzhou 柳州 (province of Guangdong 廣東) was claimed to lead to a spot underneath a stone plate in the local yamen, going beneath a large area and even tunneling under the river Liu which separates the mountain from the city (see *Minsu zazhi* 民俗雜誌 47 [1929], 43-44). Especially in the beginning of the Tang dynasty, many new temples were constructed on sites listed among those sacred grotto-heavens and the seventy-two auspicious sites (*fudi* 福地), thus regulating and boosting the numinous nature of such spaces. Why there were two networks of greater and lesser *dongtian* is still debated. In chronological terms, the

number thirty-six alludes to a cosmological construction earlier than that involving the number ten. The latter was of great importance in Mahâyâna Buddhism and introduced to China only in the early fifth century (see Miura 1983, 4-5).

The distribution of the grottoes follows the pattern of Daoist expansion. Very few *dongtian* are recorded from the border provinces, such as Yunnan, Guangxi, Qinghai, Fujian or even Hebei (which in earlier times was not considered as central). Roughly one quarter of all listed sites, however, are concentrated in Zhejiang, a region that is highly divers geophysically and has a sometimes stunning mountainous landscape. Throughout history it has produced numerous scholar-officials and housed many religious centers. The **ten greater grotto-heavens** are as follows:

1. Wangwu shan 王屋山 grotto (Henan), 10.000 *li*.
2. Weiyu shan 委羽山 grotto (Zhejiang), 10.000 *li*.
3. Xicheng shan grotto 西城山 (Shanxi), 3.000 *li*.
4. Qingcheng shan grotto 青城山 (Sichuan), 2.000 *li*.
5. Xixuan shan 西玄山 [Xiyuan shan 西元山] grotto (part of Huashan 華山, Shaanxi), 1000 *li*.
6. Luofu shan 羅浮山 grotto (Guangdong), 500 *li*.
7. Chicheng shan 赤城山 grotto (Zhejiang), 300 *li*.
8. Linwu shan grotto 林屋山 (Jiangsu, in Lake Tai), 400 *li*.
9. Gouqu shan 句曲山 [Maoshan 茅山] grotto (Jiangsu), 100 *li*.
10. Kuocang shan 括蒼山 grotto (Zhejiang), 300 *li*.
(*Daoji jing* 道跡經; *Wushang biyao* 無上必要 chapter 3, p. 13b-14a; Miura 1983)

The measurement refers to the "circumference" and is given in *li* 里 (ab. 550 m), but what exactly this indicates is not clear. I take it to be an abstract value in terms of spatial relevance and influence. As is made clear in the case of the Wangwu shan grotto, the infrastructure of a grotto-heaven's immediate environment underlines its auspiciousness. According to the Ming-dynasty *Wangwu shanzhi* 王屋山志 (Gazetteer of Mt. Wangwu), the altar, here called altar of heaven (*tiantan* 天壇), is located on the top of the central peak. It is constructed of stone and bears the "real" name "grotto heaven of purified emptiness" (*qing xu xiao you dongtian* 清虛小有洞天). Sima Chengzhen attained the Dao here, and the immortal Zhang lived just to the south. The Baxian feng 八仙峰 (Eight Immortals Ridge) lies to its east, and the Jiuzhi feng 九芝峰 (Nine Fungus Ridge) to its west (1.3ab). About the grotto-heaven proper, the gazetteer cites the words of the Perfected Yan (Yan Zhenren 燕真人). He said:

> Where there is no heaven, this is called emptiness. Where there is no mountain, this is called a grotto. Where there is no human being, this is called a chamber. Hollowness [*kongxu* 空虛] in the belly of a mountain [*shanfu* 山腹] is called the grotto-palace [*dongting* 洞庭]. Hollowness in a person's head is called the grotto-chamber [*dongfang* 洞房].
>
> Thus the perfected can place himself in accord with [dwell; administer] Heaven, with the mountain and with humanity. What is called "incoming or outgoing" has [in reality] no distinction. Equivalent to heaven and earth having mountains and grottoes, the human body has orifices, through which the divine energy [*shenqi* 神氣] can pass."

In other words, heaven and the mountains are subject to the same principle and belong to the same matter as the body of the Daoist adept who has taken care that the *qi* can go about unhindered and circulates throughout the right places in his body. The metaphor of the cave, then, is used as a rhetorical device to demonstrate that the distinction between exterior and interior has been successfully overcome, that there is no more of an outside than there is of an inside.

Caves, however, are also the world of the shadows, of echoes in a void of stillness. Dragons reside here, regulating water, the life-giving source for both people and agriculture. In an exhaustive monograph, Chavannes has shown how Daoist priests and local officials worshiped and addressed the dragon-king (*longwang* 龍王) in religious ritual, offering him prayers for rain and requests for benevolent portents. Sometimes, as in 666, the emperor himself would conduct the sacrifices, during which small golden dragons were cast inside a cave, accompanied by prayers and inscribed jade tablets (1910, 91). Examples of both are still around (e.g., in the Suzhou City Museum). The cult, according to Chavannes's research, was pervasive, and included offerings held at the five sacred peaks and their caves as well as on sites outside the spectrum of specified networks.

Citing a poem about the grotto-heaven at Linwu shan in Lake Tai 太湖, a Song dynasty author describes thunder, frost and snow on its two peaks (one considered male, the other female), which are together called Dongting shan 洞庭山. He then likens the grotto to **Mt. Fengdu** 酆都山 as a place of detention. Also called GUICHENG 鬼城 (City of Ghosts), Pingdu shan 平都山 (Mountain of Plains Capital) or simply Mingshan 名山 (Famous Mountain), it is the location of the Chinese netherworld. Originally identified as an island off the coast of Liaoning, it was transferred under the Tang to southwest China, to a place on the northern banks of the Yangzi in the territory of the ethnic *Ba* 巴 people (modern Sichuan). Fengdu was one of the seventy-two auspicious sites and until the mid-1930s was adorned with twenty-seven temples and monasteries. The mountain rises only 270 meters above sea level, and

rather than its outward height it is its grotto underneath that moves the Chinese mind. "This small mountain brings together the authentic territories of death, and the 'pure lands' of immortality which border it" (Chenivesse 1997, 46; see also Chenivesse 1998). The labyrinth-like underworld, harboring illustrous places like the Shuijing gong 水晶宮 (Crystal Palace), can be decoded by the initiated through the *Fengdu shan zhenxing tu* 酆都山真形圖 (Chart of the True Form of Mount Fengdu), which expounds the pattern of the Daoist model of the human body. The souls of the dead pass into the darkness of the unknown void of the mountain, spirits that can be redeemed by the accumulated virtue of their descendants over seven generations. After that, they may enter the realm of the immortals. The link between the deceased ancestors and the surviving descendants is formed by moral obligation and ritualized communication in the form of charms and prayers. On specific days in a year, Mt. Fengdu allows "visitors" and displays sculptured hells as representations of its abysmal confines.

A MODERN VIEW. Daoist grottoes are commonly described as being filled with "refined breath" (*jingqi* 精氣). This refined flow of air in deep mountain hollows can, as modern science such as biospeleology has shown, be permeated with gases like radium and other lightly radioactive emanations such as Radon, a natural by-product of Uranium 238 (Clement 1996). Furthermore, the percentage of carbonic dioxide CO_2 in a cave (any cave, that is) can be significantly higher in concentration than normal, and limestone, the base material of many karstic caves in China, acts as a superb storage repository (Sweeting 1995, 148, Gillieson 1996, 205). In some places, table salt is dissolved in the damp microclimate of the grotto and can function as an agent to suppress asthmatic coughs and throat problems. Rheumatic fevers are successfully treated in caves with deposits of uranium minerals and mangan oxids. Stones enriched with silicic acids (like Apletit or Lapis albus) are well known to have medical properties. Hot thermal springs with a high proportion of sulphur help relieve kidney and liver problems.

In addition, caves with thermal flowing water are known to have a higher concentration of electricity. Measurements on medical patients retiring into Central European caves for treatment for example have highlighted the fact that the amount of emanation liquid taken in through the body's skin, which—as a beneficial side effect—has the capacity to dissolve body fat, almost equals the amount of liquid lost through sweating during a given period—up to 4,000 grams in a six-hour period (Lübke 1953, 231). In some cases the equilibrium was so perfect that the body could have functioned normally for weeks with hardly any food and drink. Measurements of patients in various European limestone caves have also shown that the digested emanation cir-

culated to every part of the body, penetrating cells and tissues alike, thus effecting a subtle impact of radiation throughout (Lübke 1953, Verole-Bozello 1994). It is not unlikely that Daoist hermits, focusing on inner refinement and physiological expertise, experimented with deposit or mineralic elements found in caves and within the mountains, engineering morphological and biotopic change in their immediate environment and within themselves (prolongation of metabolic cycles, or the depigmentation of the skin for example). In fact, many of these experiments and physiological exercises are documented and have been described at length in various treatises contained in the Daoist canon, testifying to salutary phenomena such as those described here.

Practices

TEMPLE FESTIVALS. Sacred sites often have also become the location of monastic establishments and duly turn into active locations during various religious occasions, such as a god's birthday or an anniversary. Pilgrims and other folk then flock to the temple grounds in vast numbers, momentarily transforming the sacred ground into a public sphere. The defense or protective character a temple may have in the form of a protective landmark for a community is—during a temple festival—put aside and overruled for a specified time. What is celebrated is its success in mediating common, popular interests and divine wisdom and purpose. Offerings and rites that renew the location's contract with the divine (or with a variety of gods) are held on a regular basis. Thus the festival calendar for an institution such as the Baiyun guan 白雲觀 (White Cloud Monastery) in Beijing can be quite elaborate, with the exception of a few weeks in winter when action ceases and all life is frozen.

Temple festivals (*miaohui* 廟會) can take on many guises. From Ming times onward, in central China at least, they have involved theater performances, mainly due to the influence of the Shaanxi merchants guild (*huiguan* 會館), as well as acrobatics, agricultural fairs and sales of arts and crafts, incense and spirit money. There are scribes and storytellers, toy peddlers and fortune tellers, persons knowledgeable in herbs and medicines, scholars and beggars. Such festivals are economically important to a market town or city. Profane products bought and sold create a situation in which religious objects also become commoditized. The service trade that caters to ordinary people merges with the religious services performed by the priests (resident or itinerant) for the benefit of the community and to the honor of the gods. The organizational infrastructure to stage such festivals rests with both the populace and the priests. Among the local people, incense societies (*xianghui* 香會) assure

proper service for incoming pilgrims (*xiangke* 香客). They cater food and tea and organize traffic and housing. Priests prepare the altar, fast for the number of days deemed appropriate—varying with the importance of the ritual—and set aside utensils, scriptures and other implements.

The *Yanjing suishi ji* 燕京歲時記 (Record of a Year's Time at Yanjing), compiled around 1900, contains a short description of a temple festival held in the Baiyun guan 白雲觀 (White Cloud Temple). It says:

> Each year, beginning with the first day of the first month, the temple is thrown open for nineteen days, when sightseers come continuously and carriages and horses rush about. On the nineteenth day it is even more busy, this day being called that of Meeting the Gods and Immortals [*hui shenxian* 會神仙].
>
> It is traditionally said that on the night of the eighteenth day there will be a descent of the Immortal Perfected, who will transform himself perhaps into a pilgrim, perhaps into a beggar. Those who by some chance then encounter him, will thereby ward off illness and prolong their years. Therefore there are always from three to five Daoist priests sitting cross-legged in a group below the corridors with the hope of experiencing just one meeting. ...
>
> On the nineteenth [ninth] day of the first month the people of the Capital come to offer sacrifice, this being called the Yen Chiu festival. (Bodde 1965, 14).

During this auspicious time pilgrims and sightseers seek blessings by stroking the stone slabs, statues and tablets of carved stone monkeys at the temple, thus receiving benevolent, soothing energies (Zhang 1995, 57-58).

SACRED TIME. The festival calendar adds the element of sacred time to the sacred space of the Daoist monastry or temple. It integrates religious activities into the annual curriculum of a predominantly agricultural society by merging economic interests with spiritual quests. Festivals continue almost all year round, and the annual religious calendar constitutes a ritualized form of time control, synchronizing with—yet also abstracting from—nature's unchanging course. Thus festivals constitute terminal points of what is inherently infinite, changing the spatial fabric as they are performed. The sacred territory they occupy may extend infinitely into space with each new event, and may include lengthy and laborious pilgrimage routes in addition to the complete transportation network involved.

Spatial cohesion expands widely when a god's birthday is celebrated and the temple gates are flung open to the public. Space recedes again after the event, when only designated, initiated persons are allowed on the hallowed ground, just trampled on by thousands of sightseers. Both sacred space and sacred time are highly mobile factors, resulting in

shifting spatial boundaries, in the transfer or the bestowal of new qualities, in construction and deconstruction. As Lefèvre has noted, the "temple is divided up into the sanctuary and the secret dwelling-place of divinity—and of thought. It has aspects but no facade. ... Visitors may walk all the way around, but the place is not an 'object' that can be grasped otherwise than by means of a thought-process capable of perceiving it as a totality, and hence as endowed with meaning" (1991, 237). Temple festivals for a moment disclose the meaning of the sacred's spatial presence to the general public by celebrating a god's birthday, stimulating participation in a grand totality of reality which is usually beyond the modes of perception of everyday life.

PILGRIMAGES are another major activity surrounding sacred sites. Pilgrimage by an individual or by an organized group of persons may coincide, but does not need to, with the festival calendar(s) outlined above. In Daoist traditions, pilgrim centers are usually associated with mountains, or are elevated to the "rank" of a mountian, though the terrain occupied by a sacred edifice may be completely flat. Pilgrimage is interpreted by Victor Turner as a primarily social process, so that "pilgrims leave home..., enter a liminal state while travelling to the sacred place and return, transformed, to be reincorporated into their home communities" (Naquin and Yü 1992, 6). The pilgrim engages in activities that involve the respectful approach to a sacred site (*chaoshan* 朝山) and the presentation of incense (*jinxiang* 進香) to the resident deity, with whom a form of contractual and spiritual rapport is being sought. In Chinese literature and early travel writings, we find many references to pilgrimages. It is hard to establish what made early (pre-Tang) pilgrimage specifically Daoist except perhaps the quest for immortality, usually associated with gaining access to mineral riches, botanical rarities and the worship of an elaborate pantheon of gods and deities in remote locations. I would argue that with the widespread pilgrimage and travel activities triggered by the "Buddhist conquest of China," Daoist pilgrimage became more organized, following calendarical cycles and established trade routes to a larger degree than under the Han and their successors. Research of early Daoist pilgrimage, however, is still in its infancy and will have to be pursued along the lines of cultural and religious historical geography.

Research undertaken and reviewed here focuses more on the Ming and Qing dynasties. Various studies examine specific persons or texts pertaining to Taishan, Maoshan, Miaofeng shan and others, but the most exhaustive fieldwork to date has been undertaken by John Lagerwey, who reports on Wudang shan that it "was organized from plain to peak as the unfolding story of the god's [Dark Warrior's] own ascension from human crown prince to divine emperor" (1992, 295). The pilgrim,

following the narrative of the god's unfolding story as it is re-enacted in the spatiality of the created, deified landscape, is engaged in a progressive encounter with the god ruling this particular patch of land.

Among Daoist pilgrimage centers, only few stand out on a national scale, including Mt. Tai and possibly some other marchmounts. But this is really hard to establish, because the ordinary pilgrim usually did not engage in quests on a national scale, but was satisfied with regional or local cult sites that promised to fulfill his needs. The main reasons to seek an encounter with a deity included offerings of thanks for a granted wish, prayers for a son, or the swearing of a vow. Organized groups of pilgrims usually had between fifteen and fifty members, but larger groups have been noted, too. Commemorative plaques documenting the size, reason, dates and places of origin of pilgrim groups once adorned many pathways, temple walls and hallways. Individual pilgrimages, on the other hand, though forming a sizeable part of the overall mix of these movements, are difficult to quantify, since source are scarce. It is interesting to note, however, that groups embarking on a specific religious quest who came from the same native place perceived themselves as belonging to "religious domains" (Lagerwey 1992, 312).

Today many traditional pilgrimage centers located on mountains are rather popular again, but many urban temples have also reopened their gates. Although many are tourist attractions, it is only partially accurate to describe their current popularity as the result of a general tendency of pleasure seeking, possible now that people in China are economically more affluent. With the communist government retreating from the control panel of everyday life in China, pious groups and believers have returned to demand the right to perform rituals, renew the cycle of the world and pray for a son.

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