The Word Made Bronze: Inscriptions on Medieval Chinese Bronze Mirrors

SUZANNE CAHILL
University of California at San Diego

Some of the mirrors cast in China during the first six centuries of the Christian era bear inscriptions as well as images on their nonreflective surfaces (Fig. 1). Scholars have long recognized that these inscriptions provide information about Chinese archaeology, technology, and history. The inscriptions have another dimension, not sufficiently noted in the past: their texts are basically religious in nature and specifically Taoist in content. Furthermore, they document the transition from the early, primitive Taoism of the Eastern Han dynasty (A.D. 25–220) to the later, more sophisticated Taoism of the Six Dynasties period (220–589).

During the second to fifth centuries A.D., the Taoist religion underwent a great transformation. Numerous religious sects and local cults, both popular and elite, flourished during this period. With the collapse of the Chin dynasty capital of Loyang in 317, the northern aristocrats fled south, taking with them literati culture, the imperial worship of the holy mountains and waterways, and popular northern shamanism. They mingled with the drug-taking southern elite and dabbled in local southern cults. The resulting fusion of northern and southern religious strains first appears in the works of the cult of the transcendents, ideal beings believed to have perfected themselves and attained immortality. This fusion led ultimately to the Mao shan[a] school of Taoism, named for Mount Mao, near the southern city of Nanjing, where it began.

In the fifth century the great Mao shan adherent T'ao Hung-ching[b] edited the textual corpus of his school. Afterward, Mao shan Taoism remained the dominant form of Taoism for centuries to come. T'ao organized an enormous scriptural heritage, placing accounts of revelations to the Mao shan

Fig. 1. TLV mirror, Han dynasty, Freer Gallery of Art (11.108). Figs. 1, 3–5, 7–8 courtesy of the Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

founders at the head of the Taoist canon. After works connected with the founders, he included the earlier works of local northern and southern cults and of the cult of the transcendents, which the Mao shan school claimed as scriptural ancestors. He unified the texts, arranged them in hierarchical order, and put the stamp of orthodoxy on the final configuration.[1]

The Taoist canon itself does not reveal directly the editing and ordering of earlier texts that led to its production.[2] Nor does it disclose the joining of the several religious strains represented by the texts. But mirrors—sacral and commemorative objects to members of the early cults and later to Mao shan Taoists—provide a continuous record of the

Fig. 2. Icon mirror, second–third century A.D., Royal Ontario Museum (934.17.163). Courtesy of the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Canada.

Fig. 3. Four Animal Heads mirror, A.D. 174, Freer Gallery of Art (39.38).

changes in Taoism. The mirrors, in their inscriptions as well as in their designs, reflect earlier stages in the process of development within Taoism that T'ao Hung-ching brought to completion when he edited the Mao shan canon.

Mirrors themselves were numinous objects to the Taoists. The adept used mirrors in meditation, visualization,[3] and astral travel. Mirrors had a place in Taoist ritual. In the liturgy the celebrant arranged mirrors to create an altar. Mirrors were also emblems signifying the legitimacy of a master's lineage. Carried by the living, mirrors protected their owners from malevolent forces. Buried with the dead, mirrors illuminated the path of the soul to the next world. The images and designs depicted on the mirrors have clear religious significance. For example, mirrors of the type called TLV after elements of the design which resemble the letters T, L, and V, are charts symbolizing the Han scheme of the cosmos (see Fig. 1).[4] Other mirrors depicted well-known Taoist deities, such as the Queen Mother of the West, Hsi Wang Mu[c] (Fig. 2). On Han and Six Dynasties mirrors, the words that accompany the designs also have religious meaning.

In mirror inscriptions, even words that seem to convey only secular information have religious implications. For example, inscriptions often begin with a date. These dates provide records that help art historians and archaeologists arrange the mirrors in chronological order. But the dates are not just what they seem. For example, the inscription on one mirror in the Freer Gallery of Art (Fig. 3) asserts that this mirror was cast on the cyclical day ping wu[d] in the first month of the year corresponding to A.D. 174. Yet no ping wu day occurred in the first month of that year. The fictitious date, however, does not make the mirror a fake. Many mirrors in collections all over the world bear the same false date.[5] These inscriptions claim that the metalsmith cast the mirror on the day that, from the symbolic point of view, was correct for casting. In the cyclical numbering system the Chinese used for the calendrical calculations, the graph *ping* corresponds to fire, while the graph *wu* corresponds to the sun at its zenith. Therefore, a ping wu day was most suitable for casting a shining mirror of molten bronze; a mirror cast on that day would draw potency from its alignment with natural forces. The Mao shan Taoists used the cyclical numbering system to calculate auspicious and inauspicious days for all important activities. They derived the system from the cosmological speculation

current in the Eastern Han dynasty. The inscription on the mirror in the Freer Gallery of Art shows an early adherence to the same system. The date has a religious validity more important and more real to its makers than historical accuracy.

The dates on mirrors also tell us about their historical context. Mirrors with dates inscribed on them begin to appear in the Eastern Han.[6] The earliest known example is dated in accordance with A.D. 6; the most numerous group comes from around 100 to 500, a period of great creativity in Taoism. This era saw the growth and merging of the traditions that formed Mao shan Taoism.

Geographical names mentioned in the inscriptions place the mirrors close to developments in Taoism. Some mirrors name Loyang, a center of the cult of transcendents as well as the eastern capital of the nation during the Han and Chin dynasties. The place mentioned most often in inscriptions is Tan-yang,[e] an area near Nanjing.[7] Inscriptions name Tan-yang, the region of Mao shan itself, as the source of the copper used in the bronze alloy from which craftsmen made the mirrors. The sites where archaeologists have excavated mirrors in recent years, especially Shao-hsing in Chekiang province, were also important Taoist centers; archaeology thereby confirms the information furnished by the inscriptions.

Other places named in the inscriptions figure in the early native Chinese religion later appropriated by the Taoists. For example, mirror inscriptions mention the Five Marchmounts or holy mountains, such as Mount T'ai[8] and Mount Hua, places where transcendents lived and deities might descend at any time. One inscription mentions the mythical world mountain, K'un-lun,[f] home of the Queen Mother of the West, the highest goddess of Mao shan Taoism.

The inscriptions also refer to the technology of casting mirrors, employing such terms as *make*,[g] *fashion*,[h] *refine*,[i] *regulate*,[j] *combine*,[k] *harmonize*,[l] and *complete*.[m] In matters of technology as in dates, the inscriptions reflect Taoist concerns. The terminology compares to that used in Taoist alchemical classics and recipes for compounding elixirs of immortality.[9] One phase appears repeatedly: "In seclusion, I refined the three shang elements"[n] (Fig. 4). The

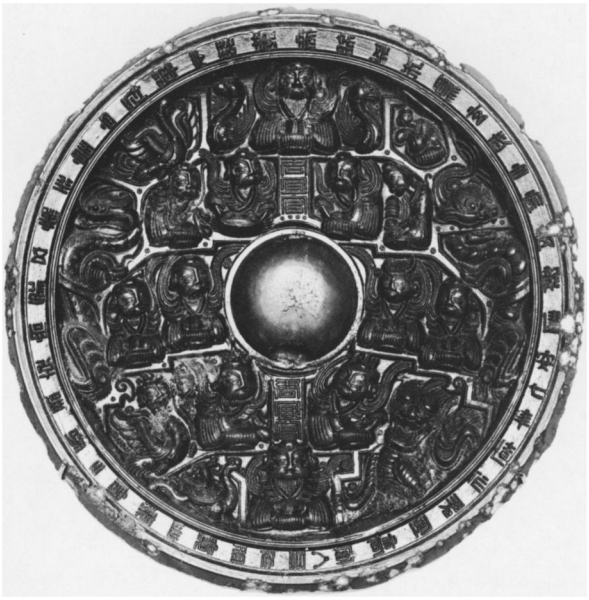

Fig. 4. Deities in Tiers mirror, A.D. 202, Freer Gallery of Art (36.4).

term *refine*[i] [10] occurs in the works of elixir alchemists, applied to successive stages of purification of the elixir ingredients through a blending and heating process. Later, in the works of believers in internal or meditative alchemy, the term *refining* means perfecting the Taoist adept's soul. As a religious practice, the Taoist alchemist secluded himself while he refined the metals. The craftsman prepared himself ritually for his work by fasting and other prescribed forms of abstinence.

The three shang[o] elements are the three metals combined to make bronze: copper, tin, and lead. They take the name *shang* from their correspondence to the shang tuning of musical instruments. According to Chinese categorical thinking, the shang tuning corresponded to the element metal. Other phrases that appear both in mirror inscriptions and as technical terms in alchemical texts are the "florescence of lead"[p] for refined lead, or "the white and the yellow"[q] (see Fig. 3) for metals of those colors. "The white" and "the yellow" also appear as esoteric terms in classics of Taoist internal alchemy. Another phrase in the inscriptions refers to the fabrication of the mirror: "I have my own rule"[r] [11] or sometimes "I have my own Way (or Tao)."[s] [12] The phrase boasts of the adept's possession of special formulas and procedures that allow

him to transform dirty rocks into numinous bronze.

The content of the inscriptions embodies the concerns of the cult of transcendents inherited by the Mao shan school of Taoism. In many cases the texts of the inscriptions are identical or comparable to specific scriptures still preserved in the Taoist canon. For example, some inscriptions resemble passages from the "Transmissions Concerning the Divine Transcendents"[t] and the "Master Who Embraces the Uncarved Block,"[u] both attributed to Ko Hung.[v] [13] The Mao shan Taoists claimed Ko Hung, a stout defender of the cult of the transcendents, as one of their patriarchs. In common with such texts, and often in the same words, the mirror inscriptions convey two principal concerns: protection from baleful forces and attainment of long life.

Taoists believed that mirrors possessed apotropaeic powers, protecting the bearer from harm. In the "Master Who Embraces the Uncarved Block," Ko Hung tells the story of an adept searching for elixir drugs in the mountains. A seductive woman beckons him as he wanders; she is in fact a tiger in disguise. The adept's mirror, which reflects only reality, reveals her true nature and scares her away, saving his life.[14] Mirrors often bear the phrase, "[May you remain] greatly without injury."[w] [15] Inscriptions name and invoke creatures such as the Averter-of-Evil[x] to ward off inauspicious beings. Inscriptions frequently call upon the gods of the four directions[y] (see Fig. 4), among the most powerful of Chinese deities, to safeguard the believer. Mirror inscriptions identify these deities as the blue dragon of the east,[z] the white tiger of the west,[aa] the vermilion bird in the south,[ab] and the dusky warrior in the north.[ac] One mirror in the collection of the Freer Gallery of Art invokes the Yellow Thearch Huang ti[ad] to dispatch evil. Another calls upon a lion[ae] to protect the adept.[16]

The major concern of the cult of the transcendents and the Mao shan Taoists was longevity. The Taoist adept's goal was to create inside himself a perfect immortal embryo, through religious practices such as meditation and prayer along with special breathing and dietary regimes. When the adept's mortal body decayed and died, the immortal embryo would ascend to the heavens in broad daylight.

Fig. 5. Deities and Animals mirror, second–third century A.D., Freer Gallery of Art (9.340).

The most frequent request in the inscriptions asks for longevity—an extension of the life span allotted to the individual by the Taoist masters of destiny. One mirror in the Freer Gallery of Art bears an inscription claiming it can "cause a person to prolong his destined life-span."[af] [17] Using a varied vocabulary, rich in synonyms and metaphors, many request longevity greater than that of metal or stone[ag] (Fig. 5). The wishes "may you live ten thousand years!"[ah] and "may you prolong your life!"[ai] are other expressions of requesting a reprieve from mortality. Inscriptions also mention processes that prolong life, such as eating elixir foods. The often repeated ideal is the divine transcendent who does not even recognize old age.

Mirror inscriptions invoke heroes, transcendents, deities, and deified natural forces worshiped by the cult of the transcendents and Mao shan Taoists. Many describe lives of the transcendents. One mirror in the Mackenzie Gordon Collection[18] reads:

> The imperial armory made this mirror; it is truly of great craftsmanship. On the surface are transcendent people who do not know old age. When thirsty they drink from the jade springs; when hungry they eat jujubes. Their longevity resembles that of metal or stone. Heaven for an extended time protects them!

Fig. 6. Icon mirror, second–third century A.D. Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, The Avery Brundage Collection (B60B595).

Fig. 7. Animal Band mirror, Han dynasty, Freer Gallery of Art (17.166).

Another mirror in the Gordon Collection concludes: "Floating from heaven, they descend to the (land within) the Four Seas." A third reads:

They ascend Mount T'ai and see divine people,
Eat jade blossoms and drink from limpid springs.
Harnessing patterned dragons, they mount the floating clouds,
Obtaining the Way of Heaven, they brandish that which is so-of-itself.

A standard formula describing transcendents' lives in early Chinese literature appears over and over again in the mirror inscriptions: "pleasure without end."[aj] The inscriptions evoke the lives of the immortals, and express the adepts' desire to emulate and join them.

The mirror inscriptions name major Taoist gods and goddesses, such as the Yellow Thearch, the Queen Mother of the West, and the King Common-Lord of the East[ak] (Fig. 6). These beings hold high positions in the Mao shan hierarchy of deities. Another category of Mao shan deity that appears in the mirror inscriptions is the body god. Visualized in Taoist meditation, the body gods were believed to dwell in and govern every part of the body. Such Taoist texts as the "Central Classic of Lao-tzu"[al] and the "Classic of the Yellow Courtyard"[am] [19] describe systems for identifying and meditating upon them. We find the body gods in mirror inscriptions such as the one in the Sackler Collection that invokes a host of small deities, calling them by nicknames such as Blue-eyed Kid[an] and Radiant Center Kid.[ao] Perhaps the inscription on a mirror in the Freer Gallery of Art which reads, "The transcendents, nine esquires, sit in the central courtyard"[ap] [20] refers to meditation on the body gods, since the central courtyard was located in one of the interior body palaces. The same text mentions nurturing the immortal embryo growing within the adept. "Dwelling in the center,"[aq] another inscription formula (Fig. 7), means centering the adept's thoughts in order to attract the celestial deities to come down and dwell in his center.

Mirror inscriptions contain instructions that treat the mirror itself as a holy object. Some refer to the mirrors as a "literary emblem."[ar] [21] This recalls the Taoist concern with emblems, registers, and talismans. Such emblems protected the adept and allowed him to call upon certain deities. Mirrors were concrete symbols that established the legitimacy and attainments of the adept. Inscriptions frequently close with the phrase, "Transmit it and report it to later generations."[as] [22] The same formula

occurs at the end of many Taoist texts. Canonical texts frequently close with instructions to the reader regarding transmission of the text.

The form of the inscription may fit into the design of the mirror as a whole in several different ways. First, in many cases, the inscription itself is the design.[23] In such cases, the craftsman has decorated the mirror solely or mainly with graphs arranged in a manner intended to be both beautiful and meaningful. This is probably the earliest type of inscribed mirror. Second, the inscription may be part of the decoration of the mirror, forming one design element among many that the craftsman arranges in the main field of decoration (Fig. 8). Third, the craftsman may incorporate the inscription into the design of the mirror in an independent band, separate from the main decorative field.[24]

Fig. 8. Joined Arcs with Quatrefoil Center mirror, first century A.D., Freer Gallery of Art (11.102).

The content of the inscriptions may function together with the design of the mirror in a number of ways. An inscription may simply label the figures.[25] It may also name deities who do not appear on the mirror, filling gaps in the design to complete the iconographic program of the whole mirror. In general, inscriptions define and amplify the religious meanings the object and its decor carry. Words and images together explain the mirror as a chart of the universe, a concrete physical example of Taoist thought that linked microcosm and macrocosm.[26] It is tempting to speculate that the inscriptions, together with the design, formed a set of instructions that would identify the mirror for the adept and explain how best to actualize its power.

Writing on mirrors, in keeping with its religious function, differs from writing in other Chinese arts. Like the poems inscribed on Chinese paintings, mirror inscriptions involve the interaction of the art of words with that of pictorial images. But we usually think of Chinese calligraphy as a performance art, done swiftly by a literary gentleman using a brush upon a fragile and transient medium such as bamboo, silk, or paper. In contrast, the mirror inscription is made by a skilled but perhaps illiterate craftsman who can work slowly as he carves his clay mold; he has time to repair mistakes. As opposed to the calligrapher with the brush, who imitates the deities with his spontaneous and individual act of creation, the craftsman who casts inscriptions in bronze copies the gods by creating a product that is as standard and permanent as he can make it. Standardizing it, he makes it ritually perfect. Producing a permanent object, he makes the word immortal.

The written word, according to the Mao shan Taoists, was a gift revealed to humans by the highest deities. The Taoists believed that the original and eternal sacred word existed in ideal form in the pure realms of the Taoist heavens. Classics of the Mao shan school, such as the "Declarations of the Perfected,"[at 27] describe the original heavenly texts as cast in metal or carved in jade. The word, existing among humans in history, has progressively deteriorated. Casting the sacred word in bronze was the closest approximation the medieval Chinese could find for making a permanent and pure version of the immortal texts of the scriptures for use on earth. The mirrors as objects had the authority and ritual power of the texts they bore: they could protect the adept or guide a soul to paradise.

Function, meaning, and form in the mirror inscriptions all reflect the religious nature of the writing. Appearing at a transition point in the history of Chinese religion, the point of development from one system of Taoism to another, the mirror inscrip-

tions document and embody that transition. The Taoist religious content unifies the mirror inscriptions, defines their relationship to the decorative elements, and provides a basis for interpretation. Recognition of the religious content of the inscriptions gives us some appreciation of what these small magical bronze objects must have meant to the people who made and treasured them, and who used them to light their way to a life of "pleasure without end" as transcendents.

Chinese Characters

a 茅山
b 陶弘景
c 西王母
d 丙午
e 丹陽
f 崑崙
g 作
h 造
i 湅(鍊)
j 治(冶)
k 合
l 和
m 成
n 幽湅三商
o 商
p 鉛華
q 白黃
r 自有紀
s 自有道
t 神仙傳
u 抱朴子
v 葛洪
w 大毋傷(傷)
x 辟邪
y 四神
z 青龍
aa 白虎
ab 朱鳥
ac 玄武
ad 黃帝
ae 獅子
af 仝(乞)人長命
ag 壽(於)金石
ah 萬歲
ai 長生
aj 樂無央, 樂未央
ak 東王公
al 老子中經
am 黃庭經
an 青目子
ao 光中子
ap 仙×九郎坐中庭
aq 居中央
ar 文章
as 傳告后氏
at 眞誥
au 王士倫
av 陳國府
aw 道藏
ax 道藏原流考
ay 翁獨健
az 洞玄靈寶道學科儀
ba 老君明照法叙事
bb 雲笈七籤
bc 洞玄靈寶道士
明鏡法
bd 上清明鑑要經
be 太上明鑑眞經
bf 洞眞上清青要
紫書金銀象經
bg 登眞隱訣
bh 上清含象劍鑑圖
bi 上清長生寶鑑圖
bj 南嶽總勝集
bk 神仙鍊丹點鑄
三元寶照法
bl 彭祖傳
bm 漢槐(魏)叢書

Notes

This research was made possible by a postdoctoral grant from the Smithsonian Institution that allowed me to study at the Freer Gallery of Art from 1982 to 1983. While there I received advice from Thomas Lawton, Director; Shimizu Yoshiaki, Curator of Japanese Art; and W. Thomas Chase, Head of the Technical Laboratory. I presented preliminary results at the 1983 meeting of the College Art Association, where James Cahill made cogent comments. I have discussed mirror iconography with Annaliese Bulling and Schuyler Cammann of the University of Pennsylvania, and technical matters with Ursula Franklin of the University of Toronto, all of whom provided valuable insights. I am also grateful to Wang Shih-lun[au] of the Hangzhou Museum and Ch'en Kuo-fu[av] of Tienjin Technical College for spending long hours talking with me about mirrors. Any mistakes are my own.

1. For a discussion of Mao shan Taoism, see Michael Strickmann, The Mao Shan Revelations: Taoism and the Aristocracy, *T'oung Pao* 62 (1977): 1–64.

2. For a discussion of the history of the text we know as the Taoist canon, the *Tao tsang*,[aw] see Ch'en Kuo-fu, *Tao tsang yüan liu k'ao*[ax](*An Examination of the Origin and Development of the Taoist Canon*) (Shanghai: Chung hua, 1949). Recently the *Tao tsang* Project in Paris, under the direction of Kristopher Schipper, has been studying the canon in depth and detail.

3. Numerous texts in the *Tao tsang* attest to the importance of mirrors in Taoist practice and theory. In the examples below, texts in the *Tao tsang* are cited according to their serial number in Weng Tu-chien,[ay] *Combined Indices to the Authors and Titles of Books in Two Collections of Taoist Literature* (Taipei reprint, 1966), number 25 of the Harvard Yenching Institute Sinological Index Series. The citation reads "HY" plus the serial number after the name of the text. Numerous texts concern meditation and visualization, among them "Classified Ceremonials of Taoist Study of the Numinous Treasure [Lineage] from the Grotto Mystery (Section of the Canon)"[az] (HY 1118); "An Explanation of the Bright Illuminating Method of the Lord Lao"[ba] in "Seven Slips from a Bookbag of Clouds"[bb] (HY 1026); "The Taoist Master's Method of the Bright Mirror, of the Numinous Treasure [Lineage] from the Grotto Mystery (Section of the Canon)"[bc] (HY 1235); "Classic of the Essentials of the Bright Speculum from the [Realm of] Supreme Clarity"[bd] (HY 1197); "Realized Classic on the Bright Speculum from the Grand Supreme [Realm]"[be] (HY 1198); "Classic on Gold and Silver Images from the Blue Essentials and Purple Texts, of the [Realm of] Supreme Clarity from the Grotto Verity (Section of the Canon)"[bf] (HY 1304). "Secret Teachings about Climbing to Realization"[bg] (HY 421), by T'ao Hung-ching, features the Divine Lord of the Bright Mirror as an important body god. "The Chart of the Sword and Mirror from [the Realm of] Supreme Clarity That Contains Images"[bh] (HY 431), by the Mao shan master Ssu-ma Ch'eng-chen, shows mirrors used for prognostication. "The Chart of the Precious Speculum for Prolonging Life from [the Realm of] Supreme Clarity"[bi] (HY 429) shows the mirror as a microcosm of the macrocosm. "A Collection of Comprehensive Victories of the Southern Marchmount"[bj] (HY 606) shows the mirror as a means of enlightenment and communication with deities. "The Method of the Divine Transcendents for Refining Cinnabar, Then Transmuting and Casting the Three Prime Treasures Illuminator"[bk] (HY 862) describes the process of making magically efficacious mirrors of heaven, earth, and man. The texts cited here represent a small and incomplete survey of the important works on mirrors in the *Tao tsang*, most of which still await study. One exception is HY 431, which Edward Schafer has studied in A T'ang Taoist Mirror, *Early China* 4 (1978–1979).

4. For a study of TLV mirrors that surveys the most recent scholarship on the subject, see Michael Loewe, *Ways to Paradise: The Chinese Quest for Immortality* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1979), chapter 3.

5. For a discussion of the fictitious ping-wu date in mirror inscriptions and a collection of some examples, see Bernhard Karlgren, Early Chinese Mirror Inscriptions, *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 6 (159) (1934).

6. The classic study of dated mirrors is Umehara Sueji, *Kan Sangoku Rokuchō kinen kyō zusetsu* (*An Illustrated Discussion of Dated Mirrors from the Han, Three Kingdoms, and Six Dynasties Periods*) (Kyoto, 1943). For the mirror dated A.D. 6, see note 1.

7. Animal Band mirror, second–third century A.D., Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC (9.274).

8. Icon mirror, second–third century A.D., Freer Gallery of Art (11.99).

9. I am indebted to Ch'en Kuo-fu of the Tienjin Technical College for explanations of the Taoist alchemical terms. I read texts with him in the fall of 1981, and have also used an unpublished manuscript on alchemical terms in the *Tao tsang* that he presented at the Third International Taoist Studies Conference at Unterägeri, Switzerland in 1979.

10. Deities and Animals with Semicircles and Seals mirror, second–fourth century A.D., Freer Gallery of Art (35.17).

11. Animal Band mirror, first–second century A.D., Sackler Collection, New York (V4037).

12. Animal Band mirror, second–fourth century A.D., Freer Gallery of Art (17.274).

13. For example, a mirror of Eastern Han date in the Hangzhou Museum bears the inscription:

> I climb the great mountain, see the divine people;
> Eat jade blossoms, drink from the fragrant spring;
> Harness a patterned dragon, ride the floating clouds . . .

Another mirror of the same period in the same collection bears an inscription that reads:

> When thirsty they drink from the jade springs, when hungry they eat jujubes;
> They float and wander through the subcelestial realm, rambling within the four seas;
> They pace back and forth to the famous mountains, gathering fungi and herbaceous plants;
> They have longevity like that of metal or stone. Let this [mirror] be a national treasure.

This compares to a passage in the "Transmissions Concerning P'eng Tsu"[bl] in the "Transmissions Concerning the Divine Transcendents." That text is now lost in the *Tao tsang*, but survives in the *Han Wei tsung shu*.[bm] The passage runs: "As for the transcendents, sometimes with erect body they enter the clouds, flying without wings; other times they harness dragons and ride clouds, on high reaching the borders of heaven. Sometimes they transform into birds and wild beasts, floating and wandering through the blue clouds; other times they splash around through the rivers and seas, soaring to the famous mountains. Sometimes they eat the primal pneuma, other times they feed on fungi and herbaceous plants. Sometimes they enter among human kind, but people do not recognize them; other times they hide their bodies and people do not see them. Moreover they engender different bones, and their bodies have strange fur. They gravitate towards and like deep seclusion, not mingling with the popular or common."

Similarly, the deities of the four directions, often mentioned in Eastern Han dynasty mirror inscriptions and depicted in the designs on the mirrors, appear in the "Miscellaneous Responses" section of the "Master of the Uncarved Block" (HY 1177). The passage in question describes an image of Lao-tzu as follows: "On his left were twelve blue dragons, on his right twenty-six white tigers. Before him were twenty-four vermilion birds, behind him seventy-two dark warriors."

These are just a few of many examples. I am grateful to Wang Shih-lun for showing me the mirrors in question.

14. The "Master of the Uncarved Block," attributed to Ko Hung, appears in the *Tao tsang* (HY 1177). The "Inner Chapters" have been translated by James Ware in *Medicine, Alchemy, and Medicine in the China of A.D. 320: The Nei-p'ien of Ko Hung* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1966), ch. 17, 2a.

15. Animals under Boss mirror, second–fourth century A.D., Sackler Collection (V4019).

16. The bronze mirror that mentions the Yellow Thearch (36.4) is dated 202; the one that refers to the lion (9.341) also dates to the second half of the Han dynasty. The Yellow Thearch (Huang ti), often translated as Yellow Emperor, was a high deity of traditional China taken over by the Taoists.

17. Deities and Animals with Semicircles and Seals mirror, second–fourth century A.D., Freer Gallery of Art (17.165).

18. The bronze mirrors in the Mackenzie Gordon Collection in Washington, DC, date to the late Han dynasty.

19. The "Central Classic of Lao-tzu" (HY 681) and "The Yellow Courtyard Classic" (HY 19) are standard works of Mao shan Taoism; see note 3.

20. Deities and Animals mirror, second–third century A.D., Freer Gallery of Art (9.341).

21. Animal Band mirror, first–second century A.D., Sackler Collection (V4102).

22. Icon mirror, second–third century A.D., Freer Gallery of Art (39.52).

23. Inscription mirror, first century B.C., Sackler Collection (V412).

24. Deities and Animals with Semicircles and Seals mirror, second–fourth century A.D., Freer Gallery of Art (11.119); TLV mirror, first–second century A.D., Sackler Collection (V4027).

25. Icon mirror, second–third century A.D., Sackler Collection (V4031).

26. Icon mirror, second–third century A.D., Freer Gallery of Art (11.98).

27. An account of the history of writing from the point of view of the Mao shan Taoists appears in the "Declaration of the Perfected" (HY 1010), ch. 3.