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The Moon Stopping in the Void: Daoism and the Literati Ideal in Mirrors of the Tang Dynasty

The Tang dynasty (618–907) represents a high point in Chinese culture, a period to which modern Chinese people look back with pride. The Tang empire was a golden age of poetry, religion, science, and art. With a succession of effective emperors on the throne, a huge economy, and vast territory, China experienced a great age of prosperity and international prestige. For much of this era, government power rested on a secure tax base in agriculture and trade; a well-organized bureaucracy ran the country; a mighty military kept peace along ever-expanding borders; and ordinary subjects of the emperor enjoyed a relatively high quality of life. The principal capital city of Chang'an, home to the imperial Li family and center of government and commercial activity, was the biggest city in the medieval world, with well over a million people. Chang'an was also the most sophisticated and cosmopolitan urban center of its time.

Tang wealth and artistic achievements were linked both to advances in native industries and to contact with other peoples along the Silk Road. The Silk Road comprised a loosely connected set of roads leading from Chinese cities in the plains of the Yellow River valley, across the mountains and deserts of Central Asia, to western kingdoms such as Persia and India. Active for more than a thousand years, these roads had long been the main conduits of trade, travel, military conquest, and the exchange of ideas between China and the West. Ancient exports from China included silk, high-value manufactured goods, and spices. Imports included horses, jade, and Buddhism. During the seventh to the tenth centuries, commercial activity and intellectual exchange along the trade routes increased in volume and importance. Influences reached from Persia across China to Japan, creating an early form of international culture or global village.

Metalwork was in the forefront of technologies affected by cultural interaction. With their combination of traditional and novel techniques, Tang metallurgists advanced rapidly in the art of fabricating bronze mirrors. Both technology and design reached new levels. Ancient Chinese metal technology was enriched by the study of foreign, especially Persian, crafts. Chinese artisans added novel techniques to the native art of casting bronze mirrors in clay molds: they experimented with lost-wax casting, granulation, hammering, stamping, openwork, gilding, repoussé, inlay, and other processes. They devised new shapes and expanded the notion

of what a mirror could look like—suddenly mirrors could be miniature, square, or have petal-shaped perimeters (fig. 1). Some resembled the lotus medallions on ceilings of Tang palaces and temples—a form that originated in lands to the west. Inventive artisans also created new designs, such as the famous lion and grapevine pattern, with its clear Western pedigree (see p. 19, fig. 12).[1]

Other changes took place as well. Fewer mirrors were inscribed in the Tang than in earlier periods. The inscriptions were usually poetic texts that did not mention dates. Tang artisans often used the whole mirror surface for their designs, as though painting on a wall or a piece of silk, rather than breaking the surface up into several discrete frames or registers. Mirrors were often thicker and heavier than before, and their profile altered. Tang metalworkers cast mirrors using a new bronze alloy, with a higher tin and lower lead content, producing a beautiful, smooth, silvery surface. New centers of mirror production arose, shifting from the capital cities of Luoyang and Chang'an along the Yellow River to

Fig. 1. Octafoil Mirror with Paired Phoenixes, Birds, and Flowers, Tang dynasty (618–907), Diam. 28.8 cm. The Cleveland Museum of Art, Gift of Drs. Thomas and Martha Carter in Honor of Sherman E. Lee, 1995.366.

Yangzhou farther south. The bronze mirror into which a Tang court lady peered to apply her makeup, or an official gentleman glanced to straighten his cap, was transformed by the new methods and patterns so that it looked dramatically different from its ancestors.

Most art historians believe that Tang dynasty mirrors changed in social role and meaning as well as appearance. They suggest that, abandoning the Daoist and cosmological designs and inscriptions of earlier eras, Tang mirrors became secular and decorative. They were purely

articles of conspicuous consumption or tokens of love (fig. 2). I take issue with this claim, arguing that, despite important changes in metallurgy, fabrication, and appearance, bronze mirrors of the Tang continued to be meaningful as well as gorgeous and precious objects. Tang mirrors are even more multi-functional than earlier examples, serving diverse purposes. Along with their roles as expensive status symbols and signs of marital felicity, they retained didactic and spiritual functions. Religious significance remained central to their identity and value. They still illustrated and embodied ideals of social and cosmic order.

As in the Han (206 BC–AD 220) and Six Dynasties (221–589) eras, Tang mirrors can be read as maps of Chinese culture. In addition to revealing the owner's aesthetic sensibilities and wealth, a mirror was a condensed reference to practices of self-cultivation, an abbreviated reminder of stories of saints and sages, a Daoist mandala or chart of the universe, a potent defense against evil spirits, or a focal point for meditation. Treasured and used in life, mirrors followed their owners into the grave, buried in tombs to light the way for the deceased into the next world. This article will show how designs and inscriptions on the backs of Chinese bronze mirrors of the Tang dynasty track changes in two central and related aspects of Chinese medieval culture: Daoism, China's native major religion, and the social ideal of the *wenren,* or cultivated gentleman. Throughout the Tang, Daoism was the main faith of the imperial Li family and part of the mental world of the cultivated gentleman.

Linking Daoism and the literati ideal may seem odd at first to modern scholars looking back at Tang dynasty culture through the distorting lens of Song dynasty (960–1279) and later Neo-Confucian interpretations. In creating the great, syncretistic system they called *lixue* (study of principles), Song thinkers combined elements from Daoism and

Fig. 2. Wang Shen (1048–c. 1105), *Looking in a Mirror by an Ornamented Box,* detail of a fan painting. National Palace Museum, Taipei. After *Gugong tongjing tezhan tulu* [Illustrated catalogue of a special exhibition of Chinese mirrors from the National Palace Museum] (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1986), frontispiece.

Buddhism with earlier Confucian beliefs and practices. As a result, ideas and practices that during the Tang dynasty were considered generally Chinese or specifically Daoist are now identified as Confucian. There was no contradiction in Tang China between Daoist faith and official social status, no difficulty in reconciling Daoist aspirations with the wenren ideal.

Daoism encompasses a wide range of both popular and elite beliefs and practices. Its numerous holy scriptures are collected in the *Daozang* [Treasure house of the way, or Daoist canon]. The Daoist religion already had a long history before the Tang dynasty. Daoist ideas go back to a core of nature mysticism embodied in the fourth- or third-century BC classics known as the *Daode jing* [Scripture of the way and its power] and the *Zhuangzi,* named for its attributive author. In the following centuries, during times of social crisis and change, the Daoist religion, faced with competition from the proselytizing foreign faith of Buddhism, took institutional form, developing deities, heavens, clergy, temples, sacred texts, rituals, and devoted followers. It fostered belief in the perfectibility of humans through faith, good works, asceticism, and meditation, leading to immortality. During the fourth and fifth centuries, two great schools of Daoism arose that continued into the Tang period. The Shangqing (Supreme Clear Realm) tradition, which took its name from the highest Daoist heaven, emphasized individual salvation through ascetic practices and found favor with Chinese imperial and official elites. The other school, known as Lingbao (Numinous Treasure) after its scriptures, focused on collective ritual and the community of believers, attracting a broad following. During the Tang period, the two schools came together. As earlier bronze mirrors reflected the Daoist beliefs and practices of the Han and Six Dynasties periods, so Tang mirrors reveal the progress of the Daoist religion in that era.[2]

The ideal of the wenren, or cultivated gentleman, as the model person arose in the south during the Six Dynasties period. The wenren was a talented and well-born individual, gifted in the arts of poetry, calligraphy, and conversation. Although qualified in terms of character and accomplishments, he may not have held office. The southern wenren was contrasted to the romantic but crude northern ideal of the military hero. The Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove, a reclusive group of well-born dropouts who cultivated refined sensibilities, wine, and friendship, are semi-legendary early examples of cultivated gentlemen or literati. The Seven Sages are often depicted in Six Dynasties art and literature.[3] Tang unification of China brought the wenren ideal back north and back into office. A Tang literatus might cultivate a career at court along with his artistic and religious sensibilities.

Ge Hong (282–343) was a medieval Chinese literati official who was also a Daoist. Tang intellectuals considered him their ancestor, as a Daoist adept and wenren. In his *Baopuzi* [The master who embraces the uncarved block], completed around 320, Ge Hong mentions mirrors several times. This book, a compendium of fourth-century science and Daoist lore, defends the cult of the immortals and asserts the magical efficacy of religious practices. His heroes spend time in their laboratories, fussing about with metallurgy and chemistry, searching for the elixir of immortality. For example, Ge records the recipe for an elixir known as the "Great Method of Mount Min." The Daoist adept "forges yellow copper alloy to make a speculum for gathering water from the moon. It is

then covered with mercury and its interior heated with solar essence. The taking of this substance over a long period will produce immortality."[4]

The use of mirrors in meditation and visualization also figures prominently in the *Baopuzi*. One entry tells us:

> A bright mirror nine inches or more in diameter is used for looking at oneself with something on the mind. After seven days and nights a god or spirit will appear. . . . When four mirrors are used, a large number of gods are seen to appear: sometimes pell-mell, other times riding dragons or tigers and wearing hats and clothes of many colors, different from those seen in ordinary life. There are books and illustrations to document all of this. If you wish to follow this procedure, you must first learn secretly the names and titles of the gods you wish to summon and also know what clothes and hats they wear. Otherwise when they suddenly arrive, you could forget which gods they are, or they could harm you through fright.[5]

Mirrors are tools to use in visualizing deities, but we must do our homework and memorize the gods' forms, so as not to invite demons into our minds.

Ge Hong assures us that mirrors can protect the adept from evil spirits, since they always reveal the true nature of what they reflect:

> The spirits in old objects are capable of assuming human shape for the purpose of confusing human vision and constantly putting human beings to the test. It is only when reflected in a mirror that they are unable to alter their true forms. Therefore, in the old days, all (adepts) entering the mountains suspended on their backs a mirror measuring nine inches or more in diameter, so that aged demons would not dare approach them. If any did come to test them, they were to look in the mirror. If they were transcendents or good mountain gods, they would look like human beings when viewed in the mirror. If they were birds, animals, or evil demons, their true forms would appear in the mirror. If such a demon comes toward you, you must walk backward, in order to drive it away. Then observe it. If it is an aged demon, it is sure to have no heels. If it has heels, it is a mountain god.[6]

The mirror shows the truth and protects the one who wears it.

By imitating the capabilities of the mirror, the Daoist adept might throw his form and seem to appear in several places at once. Ge Hong tells us his "teacher used to say that in becoming successful in the (Bright Mirror) procedure, a man would be able to multiply his body to several dozen, all with the same dress and facial expression."[7] Mirrors, in short, possess many divine powers connected with Daoist religious practices. During his life, the owner could show off his mirror and use it in magic and in rituals; when he died it would be buried with him. Tang people, who often quote Ge Hong's *Baopuzi,* developed his ideas about Daoism, literati, and mirrors.

A close look at examples of Chinese bronze mirrors of the Tang dynasty in the Carter and other collections will reveal how these circles of bronze embody and illustrate beliefs and practices of Tang Daoism, along with the self-image of the Tang wenren. Pictures, stories, and signs on mirrors reveal the shape of contemporary Daoism and the literary gentleman. What follows here is a survey of types to begin exploring this fascinating topic. We will look at images, narratives, and symbols on mirrors, and consider some inscriptions along the way.

Images

Among the most charming images that appear regularly on the backs of Tang mirrors are various immortals, divine beasts, and mountains. Such designs fill the main central area of the mirror back, favoring a perspective that forces the viewer to turn the mirror like a wheel to see the entire picture. The immortals (or *xian,* transcendents) fly around by themselves or upon divine steeds. The Daoist canon is full of descriptions of these blessed beings and their doings. They are the minor deities of Daoism, whose official shoes in the celestial bureaucracy the mirror's owner might hope to fill one day. Since the fourth century BC, mountains were associated with paradises inhabited by strange and wonderful beings and plants. They were the abode of hermits and transcendents. The fortunate adept might visit in dreams or meditation, and vow to go there after death. These auspicious creatures and places, along with lucky plants, insects, and vapors or breaths of *qi* (energy), decorate the backs of Tang mirrors, bringing good fortune to the owner.

One seventh-century example in the Carter collection shows two mounted immortals and two rising mountain peaks (fig. 3). The eight-lobed outer rim contains paired images of bees—a punning reference to advancement to noble rank (both pronounced "feng"), butterflies—a punning symbol of longevity (a man in his seventies and butterfly are both pronounced "die"), auspicious clouds of qi, and a sprig of flowering plant.[8]

Fig. 3. Octafoil Mirror with Riding Immortals and Rising Peaks, 7th century, Diam. 12.2 cm. The Cleveland Museum of Art, Gift of Drs. Thomas and Martha Carter in Honor of Sherman E. Lee, 1995.344.

Fig. 4. Mirror with Four Spirits, Sui dynasty (581–618), Diam. 19.8 cm. The Cleveland Museum of Art, Gift of Drs. Thomas and Martha Carter in Honor of Sherman E. Lee, 1995.339.

Another mirror from the Carter collection, dating perhaps to the eighth century, features a dragon coiled around the large central knob that doubles as his jewel (see p. 43, fig. 2). Auspicious clouds surround him. The dragon, that most yang of animals, has auspicious connections with spring, wood, new life, and the eastern direction. The dragon also symbolizes the Tang emperor, especially the great Daoist ruler, Li Longji or Xuanzong (r. 713–756).[9]

Mountains, so important in Daoist lore and legend, appear both in inscriptions and designs. One inscription on a mirror in the Carter collection (fig. 4) with a Sui dynasty (581–618) design of the animal spirits of the four directions reads:

> Transcendent mountains shine together;
> Equal in fame to the waterways [loved by] the wise.
> Flowers in the morning are sensual and variegated;
> The moon at night streams forth its brilliance.
> Dragons coil around the five jade discs;

Fig. 5. Square Mirror with Five Mountains, Tang dynasty (618–907), H. 11.9 cm. After Chen Peifen, *Shanghai bowuguan cang qing tongjing* [Bronze mirrors in the collection of the Shanghai Museum] (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1987), no. 77.

Simurghs [divine birds] dance in paired passion.
I've heard that in the Benevolence and Longevity [palace mirror],
They first verified canceling warfare.[10]

The inscription refers to a saying attributed to Confucius: "The benevolent love the mountains; the wise love the waterways." Daoists also love the mountains as abodes of deities and transcendents, sources of elixir herbs and minerals, and sacred spaces for ascetic and meditative practice. In addition to reflecting holy mountains and rivers, the Carter mirror is associated with further Daoist meanings: the moon, flower offerings, simurghs who transported transcendents, imperial regalia in the form of jade discs of office decorated with royal dragons, and the cessation of war. A famous mirror that hung in the Benevolence and Longevity Palace of the Sui rulers was supposed to reflect only the truth. Perhaps this mirror was cast early in the Tang dynasty, celebrating and hoping for peace.

One fascinating square-shaped mirror in the Shanghai Museum (fig. 5) shows five mountains in schematic outline, calling to mind a Daoist talisman that existed in many forms in the Tang Daoist canon. This was the *Wuyue zhenxing shantu* [The mountain chart of the veritable forms of the five marchmounts (the five holy mountains of the four directions and the center)].[11]

Narratives

Mirror designs include abbreviated references to well-known and obscure (to us) Daoist tales. Narrative mirrors use the entire surface as a picture plane that we view from one point, like a hanging scroll or mural. A single key scene embodying its main message represents a story familiar to the Tang viewer. This method of narrative representation, typical of Han through Tang pictorial art, has been called monoscenic or epitomizing.[12] The stories have didactic intentions, teaching the viewer how to become a good person or an immortal. The ideal Daoist adept practices religious discipline and embodies *ziran* (naturalness). Mirror inscriptions refer to Daoist self-cultivation. A Tang mirror with four running animals in the Carter collection (fig. 6) bears a fine example:

If I could obtain as a gift the mirror of the King of Qin,
I would certainly not resent [paying] a thousand [pieces of] gold.
It is not that I want to illuminate gall [others' secret feelings],
But especially to light up my own heart.[13]

Fig. 6. Mirror with Four Running Animals, early 7th century, Diam. 9.6 cm. The Cleveland Museum of Art, Gift of Drs. Thomas and Martha Carter in Honor of Sherman E. Lee, 1995.338.

The poem refers to a famous mirror of the King of Qin (256–211 BC), said to reveal the true feelings of anyone who stood before it, causing a faithless lover or disloyal minister to tremble in fear of being unmasked. The speaker values the mirror highly, not for its power to expose others, but so he can use it reveal his own heart and make adjustments.

The mind or heart as a mirror is an image often used in Tang Chan (Zen) Buddhist poetry as well. There too it is associated with self-cultivation and wisdom. Daoists and Buddhists regularly borrowed terms, images, and practices from one another, so we can surmise a shared understanding of the mirror image. The traditional story of the passing of leadership in the Chan school from the fifth patriarch to the sixth involves a famous poetry competition that determined the succession. The originally favored candidate, Shenxiu (606?–706), writes a verse on the wall of his monastery:

> The body is the bodhi tree,
> The mind is like a clear mirror.
> At all times we must strive to polish it,
> And not let dust collect.[14]

His rival, the eventual sixth patriarch, Huineng (638–713), a monk from a humble background whom nobody had really noticed before, responded with the winning verse:

> The bodhi tree is originally not a tree,
> The mirror also has no stand.
> Buddha nature is always clean and pure;
> Where is there room for dust?[15]

The connections between mirror, mind, self-cultivation, and enlightenment are clear.

Several edifying stories appear with frequency on the backs of Tang mirrors. Among them are the legend of the moon goddess Chang'e, the encounter of Confucius and the hermit Rong Qiqi, biographies of immortals such as Wang Ziqiao and Zhenzi, and perhaps some members of the exemplary Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove. Let us turn now to narratives that appear on Tang mirrors.

Chang'e

The tragedy of the beautiful moon goddess Chang'e is well known. Parents often use her tale as a bedtime story to caution children against greed and theft. Chang'e's husband, a legendary hero known as Archer Yi, once saved the world from calamity when ten suns were burning in the sky all at once. Yi shot down nine of the ten suns, saving the world from fire and famine. As a reward, the goddess Xiwangmu intended to give him the elixir of immortality, but before he could obtain it, his wife Chang'e stole it and drank it. The furious gods wanted to execute her, but could not kill her as she had ingested the elixir. So they exiled her to eternal isolation on the cold, distant moon. There she has only a cinnamon tree, a toad, and a rabbit pounding herbs to make the elixir. The story of Chang'e was very popular on Tang mirrors. Several extant examples of a limited number of compositions with variations recall this story.[16] In one splendid depiction on a silvery mirror from the Freer Gallery of Art (fig.

Fig. 7. Mirror with Chang'e, Tang dynasty (618–907), Diam. 14.8 cm. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, Gift of Charles Lang Freer, F1911.115.

7), the goddess lingers under her tree with the eternally pounding rabbit. The round mirror itself stands in for the moon.

There are no Tang dynasty Chang'e mirrors in the Carter collection. But even without Chang'e, the Chinese mirror is associated with the moon. (This contrasts with Japan, where the mirror was associated with the worship of the sun and the solar goddess Amaterasu, from whom the imperial line was believed to descend.) Many Tang mirror inscriptions mention the moon. A seventh-century piece in the Carter collection (fig. 8), showing three pairs of apotropaic animals in the center, has this wonderful poem around the outer rim:

> Of refined shape and divine fusing,
> Gleaming material and excellent craftsmanship;
> Like a pearl emerging from its container,
> Resembling the moon stopping in the void.
> Facing it, eyebrows can be drawn kingfisher blue,
> Opposite it, cheeks may be applied with pink;
> White damask windows and embroidered curtains,
> All may be held in its reflection.[17]

Here the mirror is the moon. Like the moon, it is associated with all that is yin: female, passive, reflective, cold, and still. Like the goddess Chang'e, it is associated with Daoism, dark arts, elixirs, and immortality.

Confucius and Rong Qiqi

The classic version of the story of Rong Qiqi and Confucius appears in "Heaven's Gifts," a chapter of the third-century Daoist classic known as the *Liezi*. In one of a series of encounters in which Confucius learns important life lessons from Daoist sages, he visits the aged recluse Rong Qiqi in his hermitage and asks him the reason for his happiness:

> When Confucius was roaming on Mount Tai, he saw Rong Qiqi walking in the moors of Cheng, in a rough fur coat with a rope around his waist, singing as he strummed a lute. "Master, what is the reason for your joy?" asked Confucius.

Fig. 8. Mirror with Three Pairs of Pixie around a Loti-form Knob, mid 7th century, Diam. 17.6 cm. The Cleveland Museum of Art, Gift of Drs. Thomas and Martha Carter in Honor of Sherman E. Lee, 1995.335.

> [Rong Qiqi replies] "I have many joys. Of the myriad things that heaven begot, mankind is the most noble, and I have the luck to be human; this is my first joy. Of the two sexes, men are ranked higher than women, therefore it is noble to be a man. I have the luck to be a man; this is my second joy. People are born who don't live a day or a month, who never get out of their swaddling clothes. But I have already lived to be ninety; this is my third joy. For all men poverty is the norm and death is the end. Abiding by the norm, awaiting my end, what is there to be concerned about?"
>
> "Good!" said Confucius. "He is a man who knows how to console himself."[18]

This story is also called "The Three Pleasures" after Rong Qiqi's three joys. The wise old recluse's calm acceptance of life and death impresses Confucius. Rong Qiqi, probably a fictional character, became an important model of the wenren for artists and writers of the Six Dynasties in southern China. He appears alongside the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove in stone carvings on the walls of royal and aristocratic tombs around Nanjing. On Tang mirrors, Rong Qiqi still represents the ultimate in wisdom, tranquility, naturalness, and liberation from the fear of death. Several excellent examples of this theme survive. One in the Carter collection (fig. 9) shows Confucius on the left holding a staff and dressed in a scholar's cap and robes interviewing hermit Rong who wears deer or leopard skin garments and carries a *qin* (Chinese table zither).[19] The figures are slender, in the style of the early Tang. A framed inscription in three registers names the actors and their activity: "Rong Qiqi is questioned by and responds to Confucius."

Wang Ziqiao

Wang Ziqiao, also known as Wang Zijin, was an ancient transcendent and Zhou prince revered by the Supreme Clear Realm Daoists. He could call phoenixes with his *sheng* (Chinese syrinx, a sort of reed pipe organ). Daoist hagiographies marvel at his asceticism and self-cultivation, claiming

Fig. 9. Lobed Mirror of Three Delights, 8th century, Diam. 12.7 cm. The Cleveland Museum of Art, Gift of Drs. Thomas and Martha Carter in Honor of Sherman E. Lee, 1995.363.

he achieved immortality, flew to heaven, and took up a job in the celestial bureaucracy. The classic version of his story appears in the *Liexianzhuan* [Transmissions concerning arrayed transcendents], a later Han compilation of lives of the immortals:

> Wang Ziqiao was the heir apparent, named Jin, of King Ling of the Zhou [r. 571–545 BC]. An adept at imitating the song of the phoenix on a syrinx, he wandered between the Yin and Luo Rivers [in modern Henan]. The Daoist Master Lord Fuqu introduced him to Mount Songgao [Mount Song, the holy mountain of the center, in modern Henan]. Thirty years later when he was being sought on the mountain, he met Bo Liang and told him: "Tell my family to expect me on the seventh day of the seventh month on the peak of Mount Goushi [in the same range as Mount Song]." On the appointed day, he did indeed alight on the mountain peak, riding a white crane. They saw him from afar but were unable to reach him. He raised his hand to take leave of the men of his time. A few days later he disappeared. Thereupon shrines were erected on top of Mount Goushi and on top of Songgao.[20]

One illustration of this biography, on a mirror excavated north of the Tang capital of Luoyang, shows a seated Wang playing his sheng while a phoenix swoops down in response. Beneath them stand mountains and above them a leafy elixir plant (fig. 10).[21]

Zhenzi feishuang

There are several fine specimens of a design featuring a seated musician, sometimes labeled with four graphs inside a square cartouche: *Zhenzi feishuang* (Realized master sends the frost flying) or perhaps *Feishuang zhenzi* (Realized master known as flying frost). The meaning of this phrase is elusive. It may be a realized master (a Daoist immortal), who is playing a tune called "Flying Frost" on his qin. Since "Flying Frost" is also the name of an elixir compound, he may be an immortal who can make that drug. Inscriptions on some mirrors with this design mention

Fig. 10. Lobed Mirror with Wang Ziqiao Playing His Sheng, excavated north of Luoyang, Tang dynasty (618–907), Diam. 12.9 cm. After *Zhongguo qingtongqi chuanji* [Complete works of Chinese bronze] (Beijing: Wenwu, 1998), vol. 16, *Tongjing* [Bronze mirrors], pl. 161.

He Jinzi, a Han hermit, while Japanese scholars identify this image as a portrait of the Warring States qin player Boya. The musician is seated on the left near a pond with four strange rocks, symbolizing the sacred mountains of the four directions, rising from its sides and a lotus pad growing from its center, with a cosmic tortoise that is also the central knob seated on top of it. This is a Daoist appropriation of the Buddhist image of the lotus pond in front of the Buddha Amitabha in the Western Paradise. In any case, we have here another paragon of naturalness and talent, another image of the wise and tranquil wenren.[22]

Several fine examples of this pattern survive. One in the Carter collection (see p. 56, fig. 12) shows a seated transcendent playing a qin in a bamboo grove to the left, visited by an auspicious phoenix that has just settled on a strange rock to the right. The inscription in the outer rim reads:

> Our phoenix paired mirrors are made of southern metal.
> Yin and yang each make a pair;
> Sun and moon constantly meet.
> A white jade, lotus-shaped box,
> A kingfisher feather inlaid, rose gem, and turquoise belt—
> Sharing the same heart,
> May we always be intimate with each other,
> Showing our minds [lit. hearts], showing our emotions [lit. gall],
> May [the pair of mirrors] protect us for 1,000 springs.

This poem suggests that there were originally a pair of mirrors, perhaps shared by lovers. The poem compares the mirrors and the lovers to yin and yang, to the moon and sun. The mirror comes in a decorated box, with a jeweled ribbon. It carries the wish of eternal intimacy, perfect knowledge of each other, and divine protection for a thousand years. A good example of the multi-functional Tang mirror, this piece combines a love pledge in the inscription together with an exemplary Daoist narrative in the design.[23]

Seven Sages

Several mirrors show tantalizing images of figures under trees, drinking wine and playing instruments, tempting speculation that they may represent some of the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove. One gorgeous

Fig. 11. Mirror, mother-of-pearl inlay, excavated from a tomb in Luoyang, Tang dynasty (618–907), Diam. 23.9 cm. After *Zhongguo qingtongqi chuanji,* 16: pl. 114.

Fig. 12. Rubbing of a brick relief depicting the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove and Rong Qiqi, from the south wall of a tomb at Xishanqiao, Nanjing, Jiangsu province, late 4th to early 5th century. Nanjing Museum. After Yao Qian, *Liu chao yi shu* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1981), pl. 162-3.

example excavated in 1955 from a tomb in Luoyang, inlaid with mother of pearl (fig. 11), shows two seated figures in a landscape setting, one playing the qin, one with a wine bowl.[24] Around them are birds, wine vessels, a servant, shrubs, and a tree. Both figures and composition resemble the Nanjing murals of the Seven Sages (fig. 12)[25] and the images on an inlaid qin and a silvered mirror in the Shōsō-in collection in Nara (figs. 13 and 14).[26] Could one of these men represent the aristocratic poet, reveler, and qin player Xi Kang (223–262) of the Seven Sages? Interestingly, the man who appears in the Nanjing murals together with the Seven Sages is Rong Qiqi, another favorite on Tang mirrors. Such figures embody both wenren and Daoist ideals.

Tang narrative mirrors remind us of famous tales of wenren, sages, and transcendents, tales that stress the virtues of naturalness, talent, discipline, cultivated sensibilities, and wisdom. The didactic stories are eclectic in regional, social, and intellectual origin. They carry on the artistic tradition associated with stories of the Daoist goddess known as the Queen Mother of the West and the divine musician Boya on bronze mirrors of the Han through Six Dynasties eras.

Fig. 13. Detail from a qin, lacquered wood inlaid with gold and silver, L. 114.2 cm. Shōsō-in, Nara, Japan. After *Nihon bijutsu zenshū* (Tokyo: Gakushū Kenkyūjo, 1978), 5: 12, 13.

Symbols

Tang mirrors can be charts of the universe, Daoist mandalas representing the world in miniature by means of symbols. These symbols include: the *bagua* (eight trigrams) from the *Yijing* [Classic book of changes], earthly stems and heavenly branches of the traditional Chinese calendrical counting system, twelve zodiac animals, round heaven, square earth, stars, constellations, lunar lodgings, and magic squares. Mirrors with these symbols are related to the TLV pattern (arrangement of markings named after the Western letters T, L, and V) and four directional animals on Han mirrors. These are microcosms that correspond to the macrocosm.

Fig. 14. Lobed Mirror with Landscape and the Eight Divinatory Trigrams (detail), silvered bronze, 8th century, Diam. 40.7 cm. Shōsō-in, Nara, Japan. After *Nihon bijutsu zenshū*, 5: 53.

Fig. 15. Lobed Mirror with Heaven and Earth between the Paired Phoenixes, mid or late 8th century, Diam. 22.5 cm. The Cleveland Museum of Art, Gift of Drs. Thomas and Martha Carter in Honor of Sherman E. Lee, 1995.351.

Such mirrors are sacred objects, used for meditation and visualization, protection from dangerous forces, and for divination. Their designs fill the whole central zone and are intended to be viewed from a fixed viewpoint located above, like a chart or map laid out on a table. Several such cosmograms survive today.[27]

A fine eighth-century example in the Carter collection (fig. 15) has an inscription just inside the rim. The upper portion of the central zone displays the round circle of heaven containing the bagua; in the lower section a square represents earth containing waterways and a magic square made of four *shan* (mountain) shapes. A pair of phoenixes prances to the left and right. The inscription describes the creation of the world by the forces of the Dao:

> Round above and square below,
> Imaging heaven and earth.
> In the center arrayed the eight trigrams,
> Completely displaying yin and yang.
> Chronograms and stars are settled and fixed,
> Sun and moon auspicious and bright.
> Around the perimeter flow waters,
> To make the four great waterways.
> Inside are arranged linked mountains,
> To make the royal marchmounts.[28]

These are lucky protective objects, numinous and holy in themselves, like charts of the veritable shape of the five holy mountains, talismanic characters in popular almanacs (also found in the Daoist canon and among the Dunhuang manuscripts), or the registers of deities in the Daoist canon.

One last, powerful example of a Daoist mandala is a badly broken mirror excavated in Shangyu in Zhejiang in 1973, published in *Kaogu* in 1976 (fig. 16).[29] It features the sun, moon, and the five planets (that is, the traditional Chinese Seven Luminaries), along with the four directional animals, four human-shaped figures, the Big Dipper, and pole star in

the central zone. Three rings of inscriptions surround this field. The innermost ring contains the graphs for the twenty-eight lunar lodgings, correctly oriented, while the second ring has graphs for the twelve branches or animals of the zodiac, along with eight of the ten celestial "stems," and the outside ring has the bagua, punctuating eight four-syllable verses. The complete text of the poem also occurs in the Daoist canon, "Illustration of the Treasure Mirror for Lengthening Life, from the Supreme Clear Realm," a text that may be associated with Sima Chengzhen (647–735), a Shangqing school Daoist patriarch who was also a Tang courtier:

> One hundred times refined, divine metal—
> A nine-inch round shape [the mirror];
> Birds and beasts guard it with outstretched wings;
> The Seven Luminaries communicate with the numina.
> Its beams embrace heaven and earth,
> And terrify hidden demons.
> Transcendents hang it at their belts on their famous mountains,
> As they speed their wheels toward the Supreme Clear Realm.[30]

This brief survey shows the variety of Daoist images and themes in Tang dynasty bronze mirrors, and connects the ideal Daoist religious practitioner with the elite literati ideal of the wenren. If we stop looking at Tang culture through the distorting lens of later Neo-Confucian (lixue) interpretations, and look at what is really there, a consistent picture emerges. Despite enormous changes in society and the arts during the seventh to the tenth centuries, Chinese mirrors continued to track transformations in Daoism and in the notion of the ideal person. As technical possibilities and social demands expanded, so the functions of bronze mirrors increased. As religion and human ideals developed, so did the iconography of mirrors. Along with metal technology and craftsmanship, Daoism and the literati ideal reached high points that would never be forgotten. They are joined in the bronze mirrors of the Tang dynasty.

Fig. 16. Rubbing of a mirror decorated with a Daoist mandala, Tang dynasty (618–907), Diam. 24.7 cm. Excavated in Shangyu in Zhejiang province, 1973. After *Kaogu,* no. 4 (1976), 277.

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1. See Nancy Thompson, "The Evolution of the T'ang Lion and Grapevine Mirror," *Artibus Asiae* 29 (1967), 25–54.

2. On the history of Daoism in medieval China, see Isabelle Robinet, *Taoism: The Growth of a Religion,* translated by Phyllis Brooks (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); and Stephen R. Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). On the connection of early medieval Chinese mirrors with Daoism, see Suzanne Cahill, "The Word Made Bronze: A Study of the Inscriptions on Medieval Chinese Mirrors," *Archives of Asian Art* 39 (1986), 62–70.

3. On the literati ideal in medieval China, see Richard Mather, *Shih-shuo hsin-yu: A New Account of Tales of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1976). On the literati ideal in Chinese art, see Ellen Johnston Laing, "Neo-Taoism and the 'Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove' in Chinese Painting," *Artibus Asiae* 36 (1974), 5–54; and Audrey Spiro, *Contemplating the Ancients: Aesthetic and Social Issues in Early Chinese Portraiture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). On Daoism and the literati ideal in the late Han, Three Kingdoms, and Six Dynasties periods, see Suzanne Cahill, "Boya Plays the Zither: Two Types of Chinese Bronze Mirror in the Donald H. Graham Jr. Collection," in Nakano Toru, *Bronze Mirrors from Ancient China: The Donald H. Graham Jr. Collection* (Hong Kong: Orientations, 1994), 50–59.

4. James Ware, *Alchemy, Medicine, and Religion in the China of AD 320* (New York: Dover, 1966), 83–84. For the Chinese text, see Ge Hong, *Baopuzi* [The master who embraces the uncarved block] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980).

5. Ware, *Alchemy,* 255–56.

6. Ibid., 281.

7. Ibid., 306.

8. Ju-hsi Chou, *Circles of Reflection: The Carter Collection of Chinese Bronze Mirrors* (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 2000), no. 62. For lobed mirrors with images of four mounted immortals, see *Gugong tongjing tezhan tulu* [Illustrated catalogue of a special exhibition of Chinese mirrors from the National Palace Museum] (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1986), pl. 122–25. For mounted immortals and mountains, see in the same source pl. 126 and 127; Toru, *Bronze Mirrors from Ancient China,* 252–53, no. 96 (M63); Annaliese Gutkind Bulling, "Notes on the Sackler Chinese Bronzes" (unpublished) (1970–80), 8-3-18; and Chou, *Circles of Reflection,* no. 62 (fig. 4 here). Chou compares this mirror to one found in tomb of Yan Wan (d. 690), niece of court official and painter Yan Liben. For immortals together with mountains, see *Gugong tongjing tezhan tulu,* pl. 120; and *Zhongguo wuqiannian wenwu jikan* [Collection of five thousand years of Chinese cultural relics] (Taipei: China Press, 1993), *Tongjing pian* (Bronze mirror volumes), 1 and 2: 251. An image of mounted immortals and dragons appears in *Gugong tongjing tezhan tulu,* pl. 121. For depictions of dragons, see ibid., pl. 117 and 118; Chou, *Circles of Reflection,* no. 72; Bulling, "Notes," 8-13-19; and *Zhongguo wuqiannian,* 307.

9. Chou, *Circles of Reflection,* no. 72.

10. Ibid., no. 49. For a discussion of mirrors with the "Benevolence and Longevity" inscriptions, see Alexander C. Soper, "The Jen Shou Mirrors," Addendum, *Artibus Asiae* 29 (1967), 55–60.

11. *Zhongguo wuqiannian,* 231.

12. For a discussion of narrative techniques in pictorial art, see Audrey Spiro, "Hybrid Vigor: Memory, Mimesis, and the Matching of Meanings in Fifth Century Buddhist Art," in Scott Pearce, Audrey Spiro, and Patricia Ebrey, eds., *Culture and*

Power in the Reconstruction of the Chinese Realm, 200–600 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 125–48.

13. Chou, *Circles of Reflection,* no. 50.

14. Adapted from William H. Theodore DeBary and Irene Bloom, eds., *Sources of Chinese Tradition,* 2d ed. (New York: Columbia, 1999), 496.

15. Ibid., 498.

16. For depictions of the story of Chang'e, see *Gugong tongjing tezhan tulu,* pl. 128 and 129; *Zhongguo wuqiannian,* 226 and 227; Bulling, "Notes," 11.115 and 11.116; and Nakano, *Bronze Mirrors,* 248–49, no. 94 (M50), and 256–57, no. 98 (M120).

17. Chou, *Circles of Reflection,* no. 51.

18. Adapted from A. C. Graham, *The Book of Lieh-tzu: A Classic of Tao* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 24.

19. Chou, *Circles of Reflection,* no. 71. For other examples, see *Gugong tongjing tezhan tulu,* pl. 130; and *Zhongguo wuqiannian,* 230.

20. Adapted from DeBary and Bloom, *Sources of Chinese Tradition,* 1: 393–95. On the *Liexianzhuan,* see Robert Ford Campany, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth: Ge Hong's Traditions of the Divine Transcendents* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

21. *Zhongguo wuqiannian,* 299. Another example in the Sackler collection (Bulling, "Notes," 8-3-17) could be Wang Ziqiao, Xiao Shi (whose biography is also found in the *Liexianzhuan*), or one of the Seven Sages.

22. For examples of this design, see Bulling, "Notes," 8-13-16; Nakano, *Bronze Mirrors,* 258–59, no. 99 (M94) (identified as Boya); and *Zhongguo wuqiannian,* 297. On Boya, see Cahill, "Boya Plays the Zither," 50–59.

23. Chou, *Circles of Reflection,* no. 70. This mirror looks just like the inscribed mirror illustrated in *Zhongguo wuqiannian;* might they have originally formed a pair?

24. See *Zhongguo wuqiannian,* 235.

25. Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove, rubbing of a brick relief from the south wall, tomb at Xishanqiao, Nanjing, Jiangsu, late 4th to early 5th century. Nanjing Museum.

26. See Shōsō-in Office, ed., *Treasures of the Shosoin* (Tokyo: Asahi Shimbun, 1965), pl. 9 and 56.

27. See *Zhongguo wuqiannian,* 254 (square with bagua inside circle with sun, moon, stars, qi, lunar lodgings); Bulling, "Notes," 8-3-15 (bagua or *fulu* [talismans and registers] mirror, successor to TLV of Han, map of the universe, with round heaven, square earth, holy mountains and rivers, sun, moon, lunar lodgings); and Nakano, *Bronze Mirrors,* 262–63, no. 101 (M45, a round mirror with bands of bagua, stems and branches, and fulu characters).

28. Chou, *Circles of Reflection,* no. 69.

29. Ren Shilong, "A Mirror of the Tang Dynasty with Images of the Heavens Discovered at Shangyu County in Zhejiang," *Kaogu,* no. 4 (1976), 277. For related Daoist texts, see *Zhengtong Daozang* [Treasure house of the way of the zhengtong era] (Taipei: Yiwen, 1976); and Wu Tu-chien, *Daozang zimu yinde,* Harvard Sinological Index Series 25 (Peking, 1935), HY 294, 429, 430, 431, and 441.

30. Wu Tu-chien, *Daozang zimu yinde,* HY 429. Translation adapted from Edward H. Schafer, "A T'ang Taoist Mirror," *Early China* 4 (1978–79), 56–59.