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Mount Longjiao's "Capital of Immortals" [龍角仙都]: Representation and Evolution of a Sacred Site from the Tang Dynasty

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Abstract

The Abbey Celebrating the Tang [*Qingtang guan* 慶唐觀], a Daoist temple on Mount Longjiao in southern Shanxi Province, played a special role in the religious history of China in the Tang dynasty. Because of the myth that Laozi himself emerged from this mountain during the war to found the Tang state, this abbey was closely linked to the political legitimation of the Tang. Even plants in this abbey were regarded as the harbingers of the fate of the state. The emperor Xuanzong erected a huge stele in the Abbey Celebrating the Tang, demonstrating the support enjoyed from the royal house. Images of the six emperors, from Tang Gaozu to Xuanzong, were also held in the abbey. After the collapse of the Tang dynasty in 907, the Abbey Celebrating the Tang lost its political, legitimizing privileges, but its connection with the local community continued to develop well into the Song, Liao, Jin, and later dynasties. The creation and transformation of the Abbey Celebrating the Tang not only show the political influence of popular religion in ancient medieval China but also provide an interesting case of how a Daoist temple grew in popularity and prestige after it lost favor with the state.

Keywords

Abbey Celebrating the Tang – Daoism temples – Mount Longjiao – sacred spaces – Tang dynasty

In southern Shanxi Province, at the border between Fushan 浮山 and Jicheng 冀城 Counties in Linfen 臨汾 Prefecture, stands a twin-peak mountain that does not offer a particularly dramatic view, geographically speaking. However, the mountain played a significant role in the religious history of the Tang dynasty [618-907]. The rulers of the Tang dynasty originally referred to it as Mount Yangjiao 羊角山. Following a mythical series of apparitions of the Highest Lord Lao [*Taishang Laojun* 太上老君] at the outset of the Tang's state-building efforts, Mount Yangjiao was portrayed as a sacred site with a special "revolutionary and sacred" character. It remained closely connected to the political legitimacy of the Tang during the period of state foundation as well as to the subsequent rise and the eventual decline of the dynasty. Those circumstances led to the renaming of the Fushan County and Mount Yangjiao, which then became known as the Sacred Mountain County [*Shenshan xian* 神山縣] and Mount Longjiao 龍角山. Lord Lao's Temple, which had been erected at the dawn of the Tang dynasty, was renamed the Abbey Celebrating the Tang [*Qingtang guan* 慶唐觀] during the emperor Xuanzong's 玄宗 [685-762] reign (the ruins are in what is now the hamlet of Guanli 貫里村 in Dongzhang Township 東張鄉 in Fushan County). In addition to this, Xuanzong commissioned "Abbey Celebrating the Tang' Inscriptions Recording the Sage" [*Qingtang guan ji sheng ming* 慶唐觀紀聖銘] to demonstrate the court's special commitment to the site. In the monastery itself, portraits of the "Six Sage Emperors" [*Liu sheng* 六聖] representing Tang rulers from Gaozu 高祖 [r. 618-635] to Xuanzong, were enshrined, making the monastery resemble Chang'an's 長安 Taiqing Palace 太清宮 by having it serve as both a Daoist temple and an imperial ancestral shrine. During the period of the Song [960-1279], Jin [1115-1234], and Yuan [1271-1368] dynasties, the Abbey Celebrating the Tang was renamed the Tiansheng Monastery and then the Tiansheng Palace 天聖觀/宮. After the connection it had enjoyed with the Tang dynasty's political legitimacy ultimately vanished, it nonetheless remained intimately woven into the social fabric of southern Shanxi. It went on to become a religious center with local importance and the scent of incense pervaded it continuously until the period of the Republic of China.

Although many historical works on Daoism touch upon the Tang dynasty's founding myth of Mount Yangjiao, a systematic study of the evolution and transformations experienced by the Abbey Celebrating the Tang has not been accomplished yet. In a 2003 article about the Tang dynasty's graphic representations of emperors, I paid some attention to the monastery,¹ but did not

1 The reader may find it useful to refer to my article on the subject: Lei Wen 雷聞, "Lun Tang-dai huangdi de tuxiang yu jisi 論唐代皇帝的圖像與祭祀 [A Discussion of the Relation

discuss its history in depth. In 2006, Wang Hanzhang 王翰章 conducted a preliminary sorting of the extant artifacts found in the monastery's ruins.² More recently, organizations and scholars in Fushan County have been producing a series of textbooks to give the site publicity and to promote the tourism industry and the development of local cultural initiatives. Unfortunately, they are not sufficiently supported by scientific evidence. The present article attempts to use material from stone inscriptions to explore the making of a sacred site with no previous ties to the Daoist tradition, as well as its development and the transformations it underwent over the ages.

1 A Brief Summary of Relevant Material

The earliest records available of Mount Longjiao and the Abbey Celebrating the Tang are found in the document "The Records of the Jin Prefecture Mount Yangjiao Abbey Celebrating the Tang" [*Jinzhou yangjiaoshan qingtangguan ji* 晉州羊角山慶唐觀記], which was penned by the Daoist priest Li Yongde 李用德 during the Tang dynasty. Although even now it remains lost, its existence was recorded in "Classes of Immortals" [*Shenxian lei* 神仙類], in "Bibliographical Treatise on Arts and Literature" [*Yiwen zhi* 藝文志], the fourth section of the *History of the Song Dynasty* [*Songshi* 宋史].³ Works such as *The Comprehensive Records* [*Tong zhi* 通志] and *The Library Catalogue of the Suichu Hall* [*Suichu tang shumumu* 遂初堂書目] also mention the document and even though its name and its author are written in a slightly different manner in them, it is possible to confirm that they refer to the same document.⁴ No

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- between Graphic Representations of the Tang Emperors and Ancestor Worshipping]," in *Tang yanjiu* 唐研究 [*Tang Dynasty Studies*], ed. Rong Xinjiang 榮新江 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2003), 261-82. See also my book: Lei Wen 雷聞, *Jiaomiao zhwai: Sui Tang guojia jisi yu zongjiao* 郊廟之外——隋唐國家祭祀與宗教 [*Beyond the Temple: Ancestor Worshipping and Religion in the Sui and Tang States*] (Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian, 2009), 112-13.
- 2 Wang Hanzhang 王翰章, "Yi pi yanjiu daojiào wenhua de zhengui wenwu: jianlun Tang wangchao zunzu chongdao wenti 一批研究道教文化的珍貴文物——兼論唐朝尊祖崇道問題" [Studies on Precious Daoist Cultural Artefacts and a Discussion on the Issue of the Tang Dynasty's Ancestor Worship in Relation to Daoist Rites]," *Wen bo* 文博 [*Relics and Museology*] 3 (2006).
- 3 "Yiwen zhi 藝文志 [The Bibliographical Treatise on Arts and Literature]," in *Song shi* 宋史 [*History of the Song Dynasty*], ed. Tuotuo 脫脫 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977). In the original text, *Qing Tang guan* 慶唐觀 [Abbey Celebrating the Tang] erroneously appears as *Qing li guan* 慶曆觀.
- 4 Zheng Qiao 鄭樵 writes in the fifth "Record on the Daoist School" [*Daojia: ji* 道家記], which appears on the sixty-seventh roll of *The Comprehensive Records* [*Tong zhi* 通志] in the section titled "A Brief Account of Arts and Literature" [*Yiwen lie* 藝文略]: "The Records of

further information is available about this document and its author, and therefore we can only attempt to infer more conclusions from the title. As discussed below, the Abbey Celebrating the Tang appellation dates to the sixteenth year of the Kaiyuan era 開元 [713-741] of the Xuanzong emperor and the renaming of Mount Yangjiao as Mount Longjiao occurred the following year. If we assume that what is recorded in the *History of the Song Dynasty* and in *The Comprehensive Records* has no errors, then it is likely that this document was composed between the sixteenth and seventeenth year of the Kaiyuan era. Its content probably relates to the multiple apparitions of the Highest Lord Lao, which are thought to have occurred during the emergence of the Tang dynasty as well as with the favors bestowed on the monastery by the imperial court. Li Yongde (or Li Yongneng 李用能) was perhaps a Daoist priest at the Abbey Celebrating the Tang, and this text appeared to mark a critical moment, namely, the commission by the Xuanzong emperor of the engraving of a stele for the monastery, in the sixteenth year of the Kaiyuan era. Because this document has been lost, it is impossible to offer a more detailed explanation on this matter. For now, the most useful data come from stone inscriptions, such as the ones listed below.

1. "The Great Tang Dynasty's Inscriptions of Mount Longjiao's Abbey Celebrating the Tang Recording the Sages" [*Datang longjiao shan qingtang guan jisheng zhi ming* 大唐龍角山慶唐觀紀聖之銘] (referred to below as "The Inscriptions Recording the Sages"). The stele was erected during the ninth month of the seventeenth year of the Kaiyuan era and was commissioned by Emperor Xuanzong himself.

At present, this is the earliest and the most valuable material data available concerning the Abbey Celebrating the Tang, and it is still standing among the monastery's ruins. The main body and top section form a 269-centimeter-tall stele that is 103 centimeters wide and 32 centimeters deep. *Bixi* 鼉, the stele-carrying tortoise on which it stands, is 73 centimeters high, and its body is 197 centimeters long and 109 centimeters

the Jin Prefecture Mount Yangjiao Abbey Celebrating the Tang' [*Jinzhou Yangjiao shan Qingtang guan ji* 晉州羊角山慶唐觀記] was penned by the Daoist priest Li Yongneng 李用能." The "blessings" [*qing* 慶] part has obviously been omitted from the document's name. See Wang Shumin's 王樹民 work for a punctuated proofread version of the Classical Chinese: Zheng Qiao 鄭樵, *Tong zhi er shi lue* 通志二十略 [*The Comprehensive Records' Twenty Monographs*], ed. Wang Shumin 王樹民 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1995), 1616. See also the geography section [*Dili lei* 地理類] of *The Library Catalogue of the Suichu Hall*, in which are included the "Records on Mount Yangjiao" [*Yangjiao shan ji* 羊角山記]: You Mao 尤袤, "Suichu tang shumu 遂初堂書目 [*The Library Catalogue of the Suichu Hall*]," ed. Wang Yunwu 王雲五 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1935), 32:15.

wide.⁵ If we add the pedestal, the entire stele is nearly 3.5 meters tall. It no doubt is a work of impressive scale, especially for something that was built in the early days of the Tang dynasty.

On the stele's top section the shape of a jade tablet is preserved, on which appear the six following characters in seal script: "Mount Longjiao's Inscriptions Recording the Sages" [*Longjiao shan ji sheng ming* 龍角山紀聖銘]. The stele's front narrates the many times that Lord Lao was miraculously manifested as well as the different auspicious omens witnessed at the monastery during the Kaiyuan era. The back of the stele was engraved by Lü Xiang 呂向, and at the top of the list of characters figure the crown prince and other various princes and chancellors, among other great names from eminent members of the imperial court. However, while the Southern Song dynasty's *Assorted Compilation of Precious Inscriptions* [*Baoke leibian* 寶刻類編] is the earliest work to mention the stele, it does not record the engraving's text.⁶ *The Complete Prose Works of the Tang Dynasty* [*Quan tang wen* 全唐文] mentions the stele but not the characters engraved on the back.⁷ Yet, in 1988, the stele's engravings reappeared in the *Brief Introduction to Daoist Metal and Stone Inscriptions* [*Daojia jinshi lue* 道家金石略], based on the rubbings taken from the Hall of Arts and Wind [*Yifeng Tang* 藝風堂] as well as on the "Supplement to the Metal and Stone Inscriptions of the Baqiong Studio" [*Baqiong shi jinshi buzheng* 八瓊室金石補正] and the *Edited Collection of Stone Inscriptions from the Area East of the Taihang Mountains* [*Shanyou shike congbian* 山右石刻叢編].⁸ In 1997, the Shanxi Archeological Bureau for the first time published the rubbings from the stele in *The Steles of Shanxi* [*Shanxi beijie* 山西碑碣].⁹ Moreover, the *Complete Collection of the Three Jin States' Stone Inscriptions: The Fushan County's (Linfen Prefecture) Scrolls* [*Sanjin shike daquan: linfen shi fushan xian juan* 三晉石刻大全·臨汾市浮山縣卷] also provides rubbings as well as a transcription of the engraved

5 The Shanxi Archeological Research Institute, comp., *Shanxi beijie* 山西碑碣 [*The Shanxi Stone Tablets*] (Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1997), 90.

6 "Baoke leibian 寶刻類編 [Assorted Compilation of Precious Inscriptions]," in *Shike shiliao xinbian* 石刻史料新編 [*A New Compilation of Historical Material Related to Stone Inscriptions*] (Taipei: Xinwenfeng chuban gongsi, 1977), vol. 1, book 24, roll 1, 18408.

7 Dong Gao 董誥, comp., *Quan Tang wen* 全唐文 [*The Complete Prose Works of the Tang Dynasty*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), roll 41, 451.

8 Chen Yuan 陳垣, comp., Chen Zhichao 陳智超 and Zeng Qingying 曾慶瑛, ed. and supp., *Daojia jinshi lue* 道家金石略 [*A Brief Introduction to Daoist Metal and Stone Inscriptions*] (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1988), 111-14.

9 Shanxi Archeological Research Institute, *Shanxi beijie*, 90-95.

characters.¹⁰ In citing the stele, the present article, without exception, compare it to the *Brief Introduction to Daoist Metal and Stone Inscriptions*, in addition to checking some sections of the characters and punctuation against the plates, to avoid any kind of speculation.

2. "The Golden Register's Ode to Purgation for the Tang Dynasty's Temple of the Great Sage Ancestor and Sovereign Emperor of Mysterious Origin [Laozi] in Mount Longjiao's Abbey Celebrating the Tang [Pingyang Prefecture]" [*Datang pingyang jun longjiao shan qing tang guan da shengzu xuanyuan huangdi gong jinlu zhai song* 大唐平陽郡龍角山慶唐觀大聖祖玄元皇帝宮金籙齋頌] (referred to below as "The Golden Register's Ode to Purgation"). It was erected on the fifteenth day of the tenth month of the second year of the Tianbao era 天寶 [742-756]. The right-hand side remedies omissions by Cui Mingyun 崔明允 and is the work of the Academy of Scholarly Worthies' [*Jixian yuan* 集賢院] Edict Attendant Shi Weize 史惟則. The stele records the great event of the Xuanzong emperor issuing an imperial edict, during the twenty-fifth year of the Kaiyuan era, regarding the holding of the Golden Register's ritual purgation. The full text appears in *The Finest Blossoms in the Garden of Literature* [*Wenyuan yinghua* 文苑英華], which, however, erroneously attributes the text to Cui Yuanming 崔元明.¹¹ Studies on epigraphy from the Song dynasty onward also include, for the most majority, remarks on this particular stele. *A Brief Introduction to Daoist Metal and Stone Inscriptions*, for its part, provides a transcription of the text based on the rubbings taken from the Hall of Arts and Literature and *A Selected Compilation of Metal and Stone Inscriptions* [*Jinshi cuibian* 金石萃編].¹² So does *The Complete Collection of the Three Jin States' Stone Inscriptions: Fushan County's* [*Linfen Prefecture*] *Scrolls*,¹³ even though the photographs that appear in it are disappointingly not clear enough for us to distinguish the text. Based on what the printing plates can tell us, this stele was inherited from a period after the Tang dynasty because, in the stele's inscriptions, the appellation of "Sovereign Emperor of Mysterious Origin"

10 Zhang Jinke 張金科, Yao Jinyu 姚錦玉, Xing Aiqin 邢愛勤, comp., *San Jin shike daquan: Linfen shi Fushan xian juan* 三晉石刻大全·臨汾市浮山縣卷 [*The Complete Collection of the Three Jin States' Stone Inscriptions: Fushan County's (Linfen Prefecture) Rolls*] (Taiyuan: Sanjin chubanshe, 2012), 18-23.

11 Li Fang 李昉, Xu Xuan 徐鉉, Song Bai 宋白 and Su Yijian 蘇易簡, comp., *Wenyuan yinghua* 文苑英華 [*The Finest Blossoms in the Garden of Literature*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982), roll 779, 4109.

12 Chen Yuan, *A Brief Introduction*, 137.

13 Zhang Jinke, *The Complete Collection*, 18-23.

[*Xuanyuan huangdi* 玄元皇帝], which designates Laozi, was avoided as taboo and replaced by the “Most Sovereign Emperor” [*Yuanyuan huangdi* 元元皇帝].

At present, an incomplete piece of a Tang stele has been preserved in the old site of the Abbey Celebrating the Tang. Based on the inscriptions, only seven lines remain, and the beginning and the end of the text are fragmentary. The plates appear in *The Abbey Celebrating the Tang*, published by the editorial board of the Fushan County’s Abbey Celebrating the Tang. When we compare these incomplete engravings to the rubbings in *The Complete Collection of the Three Jin States’ Stone Inscriptions*, we note that not only does the rubbings’ calligraphic style seem insubstantial but also that the format has also been altered to some degree, which makes it obvious that it had already been recarved by later generations. The incomplete Tang stele found among the monastery ruins enables us to glimpse the original stele’s elegant style. We refer to these epigraphs, after they were checked against the text in *The Finest Blossoms in the Garden of Literature*, and their spelling and punctuation have been partially revised based on the two plates.

3. “Li Huan’s Epigraphs of the Abbey Celebrating the Tang Temple of Paying One’s Respects to the Heaven-Sent Departed” [*Qingtang guan lihuan ye zhenmiao tiji* 慶唐觀李寰謁真廟題記]. It was engraved on the reverse side of the aforementioned “Golden Register’s Ode to Purgation” in the third month of the third year of the Changqing era 長慶 [821-824] of the Muzong 穆宗 emperor. The text is included as the “Record of Auspicious Omens” [*Ji rui* 級瑞] in *The Complete Prose Works of the Tang Dynasty*, though unfortunately the final section of the list of court officials assigned to the sacrifices is omitted.¹⁴ At the same time, *A Brief Introduction to Daoist Metal and Stone Inscriptions* offers a transcription of the text based on the “Supplement to the Metal and Stone Inscriptions of the Baqiong Studio” with the names that appeared in the list’s final section.¹⁵ These epigraphs were left by Li Huan 李寰 [862-888], a member of the imperial clan and the then—appointed regional rectifier and surveillance commissioner for military training for Jin 晉 and Ci 慈 Prefecture, among others, after he had gone to pay his respects at the monastery’s temple. It gives us an idea of conditions at the Abbey Celebrating the

14 Dong Gao, *The Complete Prose Works*, roll 716, 7362.

15 “Baqiong shi jinshi buzheng 八瓊室金石補正 [Supplement to the Metal and Stone Inscriptions of the Baqiong Studio],” in *Shike shiliao xinbian*, vol. 1, book 6, roll 65, 5052-53; Chen Yuan, *A Brief Introduction*, 165.

Tang during the mid-Tang period. As for Li Huan, his signature does not appear at the back of "The Golden Register's Ode to Purgation," but it in the first passage at the back of Xuanzong's "Inscriptions Recording the Sages" (see below for more details).

4. The *Records of Mount Longjiao* [*Longjiao shan ji* 龍角山記], a document that is part of the Ming dynasty's [1368-1644] *Daoist Canon of the Zhengtong Era* [*Zhengtong dao zang* 正統道藏].¹⁶ A collection of texts from the Tang, Song, and Jin dynasties, it includes epigraphs, imperial edicts, and prayers related to Mount Longjiao's Abbey Celebrating the Tang. It also mentions all three Tang epigraphs discussed above, which captured occasions of particular significance, with very few and slight differences with regard to spelling. The latest document in this book is "Prayers for the Rain to Come and Other Sacrificial Prayers" [*Qiyu Jiwen* 祈雨祭文], which is dated the fourth month of the eleventh year of the Dading era 大定 [1161-1189] and thus appeared in the Jin dynasty. Tablets from the Song and Jin dynasty that record events are of significant importance, because among them several have disappeared from other recording documents. As such, they are particularly useful in terms of understanding the evolution and transformations undergone by the Abbey Celebrating the Tang during the Song and Jin dynasty.
5. The *Annals of the Fushan County* [*Fushan xian zhi* 浮山縣志] from the Ming and Qing [1636-1912] dynasties. During the Ming and Qing reigns, different editions of the *Annals* were compiled one after the other. The earliest one is the work of the Ming compiler Xu An 許安 and was produced during the eleventh year of the Jiajing era 嘉靖 [1522-1566]. It was supplemented and edited twice during the Qing dynasty, in the twelfth year of the Kangxi emperor 康熙 [r. 1661-1722] and the tenth year of the Qianlong emperor 乾隆 [r. 1736-1796]. Among those local chronicles is also a large amount of valuable material regarding the repairs made to the Tiansheng Palace 天聖宮. These local annals have all been collated and are now available.¹⁷
6. *The Fushan County's [Linfen Prefecture] Scrolls in the Complete Collection of the Three Jin States' Stone Inscriptions*. Useful in terms of comparing printing plates with transcriptions, this book remains the most exhaustive

16 See *Dao zang* 道藏 [*The Daoist Canon*] (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe; Shanghai: Shanghai shudian; Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe, 1988), book 19, 692-700.

17 Fushan County's Bureau of Local Annals [*Fushan xian difang zhi bangongshi*], comp., *Ming Qing Fushan xian zhi* 明清浮山縣志 [*Annals of the Fushan County from the Ming and Qing Dynasties*] (Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 2010).

compilation to date of material regarding the inscriptions found in the Abbey Celebrating the Tang and the Tiansheng Palace. Some inscriptions were tracked by people working on the monastery's archeological site, making it a primary source. Unfortunately, however, some of the plates have become worn down over time and have quite a few issues regarding the deciphering of characters and the philological explanations provided.

2 Lord Lao's Manifestations: The Construction of a Myth at the Dawn of the Tang Dynasty

When the Tang state was established, the dynasty received the full support of the Daoists. The Louguan 樓觀 priest Qi Hui 岐暉 not only used his monastery to offer provisions to the army of Princess Pingyang 平陽公主, the daughter of the emperor Li Yuan 李淵, but after the Tang army entered the Shaanxi plains (i.e., the Guanzhong 關中 region), he also made the Louguan priests proceed in the direction of Pujin Guan 蒲津關 to welcome the troops. The Supreme Clarity School [*Shangqing pai* 上清派] master Wang Yuanzhi 王遠知 secretly circulated an omen that foreshadowed the accession of Li Yuan to the throne, hence promoting among the public the Li clan's endeavor to establish a new state.¹⁸ In fact, while Li Yuan was dispatching his troops, a series of Daoist myths emerged from east of the Yellow River, the area in Shanxi Province in which the Tang ascension to the throne was first established. These myths in particular then contributed to the foundation of the Tang state. For instance, even before the battle of Huoyi 霍邑, the Tang army had received the assistance of Mount Huo's 霍山 deity during the seventh month of the Yin-ning era 義寧 [617-618] of the Sui emperor Gongdi 恭帝.¹⁹ Furthermore, after Li Yuan had established the Tang dynasty, Li Shimin 李世民 [599-649], who later reigned as the Taizong 太宗 emperor, persisted in his attempt to subdue the warlords by waging a campaign against them. Hence, in the period that followed the founding of the state, it was not long before the Highest Lord

18 See Miyakawa Hisayuki 宮川尚志, *Rikuchōshi kenkyū: shūkyō hen* 六朝史研究·宗教篇 [*Research on the Six Dynasties' History: The Religion Volume*] (Kyoto: Heirakuji shoten, 1964), 176-187; Li Gang 李剛, "Tang Gaozu chuanyue yu daojiao tuchen 唐高祖創業與道教圖識 [The Emperor Gaozu of Tang and the Daoist Books of Omens]," *Zongjiao xue yanjiu* 宗教學研究 [*Religious Studies*] 3 (1998); Stephen Bokenkamp, "Time after Time: Taoist Apocalyptic History and the Founding of the Tang Dynasty," *Asia Major*, 3rd series, 7, no. 1 (1994).

19 Regarding this event, see Wen Daya 溫大雅, *Datang chuanyue qiju zhu* 大唐創業起居注 [*The Imperial Diary from the Days during Which the Tang Dynasty Was Established*] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1983), roll 2, 23-24.

Lao came to prominence in Fushan County in Jin Prefecture. The event was recorded in the Xuanzong emperor's "Inscriptions Recording the Sages":

My distant ancestor, the Sovereign Emperor of Mysterious Origin, is indeed the one whom the Daoists referred to as the Highest Lord Lao.... Lord Lao's manners were composed. He had a head of white hair and was riding a white horse with an auburn mane. He appeared in Mount Longjiao (which we used to call Mount Yangjiao) and delivered to us the augury which revealed the advent of our great dynasty. He then said to Ji Shanxing 吉善行, who came from Jiang Prefecture's 絳州 Datong 大通 stronghold: "I am the ancestor of your emperor, the Tang dynasty's ruler. Go and tell my posterity that their reign under Heaven will be a long and durable one." ... Ji Shanxing received Lord Lao's revelation in the second month of the third year of the Wude 武德 era [618-626], but because he was afraid he could not lend credence to it, [and] he did not dare speak of it to others. The fourth month arrived, and the Highest Lord Lao appeared once more. That time, he told Ji Shanxing: "Once the stone turtle appears, you will be able to verify my prophecy." Taizong was then still Prince of Qin [221-207 BCE], and he was leading his troops into the area around Fen 汾 and Jiang Prefectures in a punitive expedition against Song Jin'gang 宋金剛. Jin Prefecture's administrator (also referred to as the vice commanding officer), whose name was Heruo Xiaoyi 賀若孝義, heard about Lord Lao appearing to Ji Shanxing and reported the story back to the emperor. Taizong promptly dispatched one of his most trustworthy followers, Du Ang 杜昂, to Mount Longjiao in order to perform the sacrifices in Lord Lao's honor, and in the process of performing the rituals, Du Ang clearly saw our Lord Lao. Du Ang then went back to report to Taizong, telling him: "It is true!" Taizong therefore sent Du Ang and Ji Shanxing to meet the Gaozu emperor. After they arrived in Chang'an, officials who had been dispatched from the Xun 郇 area happened to be there as well, and they gifted the emperor with a tortoise-shaped auspicious stone on which was written the following: "From now on, peace and tranquility will reign under Heaven. It will be so for millions and millions of days." Since those two things were in themselves quite extraordinary, Emperor Gaozu conferred on Ji Shanxing the title of Grand Master for Closing Court and sent Secretary Liu Xian 柳憲 in the direction of Mount Longjiao to perform a sacrificial ceremony in Lord Lao's honor. The moment the gems and silks that served as sacrificial gifts were offered, Lord Lao manifested himself once more.

Beginning in the second month of the second year of the Wude era, Liu Wuzhou 劉武周 had been incessantly launching attacks on Bing 并 Prefecture. During the sixth month, Chancellor Pei Ji 裴寂 was appointed as the Jin prefectural commander-in-chief in the campaign against Liu Wuzhou. In the ninth month, he was defeated in Jie 介 Prefecture by Liu Wuzhou's general Song Jingang, and Bing Prefecture fell to Liu Wuzhou. In the tenth month, Li Shimin received orders sending him on an expedition against the enemy. He confronted Liu Wuzhou and Song Jingang on the border between Pu 蒲 and Jin Prefectures. By the fourth month of the following year, Li Shimin had crushed Song Jingang's forces in Jie Prefecture, his victory enabling him to recapture Bing Prefecture as well. Lord Lao's three manifestations occurred precisely at this moment, when war clouds hung over the country. As with what had led to the manifestation of Mount Huo's deity at the beginning of the Taiyuan 太原 uprising, the Highest Lord Lao's multiple apparitions in Mount Yangjiao are probably the result of Li Shimin's attempt to raise the spirits of his troops by adding a spectacular twist to the story, at a time when they were confronting a grim military situation. As recorded in the "Inscriptions Recording the Sages," after having sent Liu Xian to perform a sacrificial ceremony for Lord Lao, Gaozu established a temple in Mount Longjiao, "with engravings adorning the saintly features of the emperor and real guards painted with beautiful color patterns." He also changed the county's name to the Sacred Mountain County [*Shenshan xian* 神山縣]. Afterward, Lord Lao appeared twice again on Mount Yangjiao, once to foretell that a withered branch of cypress would burst into bloom at the temple in Bo 亳 Prefecture and then to predict that the Tang would be victorious against Liu Heita 劉黑闥.

Yet the Mount Yangjiao case differs from that of Mount Huo: Mount Huo had indeed already become part of the Sacred Mountains, Rivers and Seas [*yuezhen haidu* 岳鎮海瀆] ceremonial system at the time of the Sui dynasty, known as Jizhou Prefecture 冀州鎮 (later referred to as the Central Prefecture). As for Mount Yangjiao, it was far from a famous mountain to start with, at least, in the traditional sense. Regardless of whether we consider it from the point of view of the imperial geographical system and its designation of cities and administrative divisions or whether we look at the heavenly abodes that are considered sacred in the Daoist system, Mount Yangjiao never enjoyed any special status. It could be said that the Daoist tradition of Mount Yangjiao resembles that of the Lord Lao Temple [*Laojun ci* 老君祠] located at the foot of the mountain. In other words, it was established under extraordinary circumstances and strictly to pursue political goals, in a very pragmatic sense. At its foundation and origin, it represented a state's quest for power, not a local tradition of faith. Nevertheless, under the conditions in which these power dynamics unfolded,

the faith in Lord Lao took root and started to spread in the area, becoming a new and fairly common religious tradition. From the time the marginal and uninfluential Mount Yangjiao was incorporated into the grand narrative of the dynasty's foundation, all faiths that were associated with the period before the Tang seemed to be, without exception, not worth mentioning. In fact, the five manifestations of the Highest Lord Lao reported in "The Inscriptions Recording the Sages" were depicted as the most impressive events to have happened in the history of Mount Yangjiao. Every time the temple was renovated during the Tang, Song, Jin, or Yuan dynasties and every time a new monument was erected, this glorious period in history was recalled and celebrated, even down to the present.

3 The Tang Emperor Xuanzong and the Golden Age of the Abbey Celebrating the Tang

After the inauguration of the Lord Lao Temple at Mount Yangjiao by Gaozu, a series of propitious signs were recorded near the temple. One instance of this is reported in Xuanzong's "The Inscriptions Recording the Sages": "Afterward, during the Zhen'guan era 貞觀 [627-649] of the Taizong emperor, auspicious clouds of many hues floated above the temple, and during Emperor Gaozong's 高宗 [628-683] reign, propitious clouds bringing good fortune appeared near the memorial steles." During the second month of the Qianfeng era 乾封 [666-668], the Gaozong emperor, after having performed the *Fengshan* 封禪 ceremony at Mount Tai 泰山, returned to Laozi's hometown in Bo Prefecture to visit the Temple of Laozi 老子廟 and to honor the Highest and Sovereign Emperor of Mysterious Origin 太上玄元皇帝.²⁰ Therefore, it is possible that the Lord Lao Temple, which lies at the foot of Mount Yangjiao, was renamed the Temple of the Sovereign Emperor of Mysterious Origin around that time or shortly afterward. However, we could not find any further information about this memorial temple in the historical data from Tang documents and stone inscriptions, at least for the period in which Wu Zetian 武則天 [624-705] reigned. Not only did Wu Zetian have more esteem for Buddhist teachings, but, more importantly, the temple was too intimately connected to the founding myths of the Tang dynasty and as such was far more important than other Daoist temples in terms of its relationship to Tang politics. This is the actual reason,

20 See "Gaozong benji xia 高宗本紀下 [Part Two of the Basic Annals of Emperor Gaozong]," in *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 [*History of the Early Tang Dynasty*], comp. Liu Xu 劉昫 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 5:90.

following the restoration of the Tang dynasty, that its fate quickly took a favorable turn. On the fifth day of the seventh month of the second year of the Xiantian era 先天 [712-713], Yang Taixi 楊太希, a Daoist priest from the Chang'an Taiqing Monastery, received an order from Ruizong 睿宗 [662-716] instructing him to serve as "Commissioner for the Cultivation of Merit and Virtue with the honor of having been conferred an imperial mandate to deliver offerings to Mount Longjiao." [*Fenggao toulong xiugongde shi* 奉誥投龍修功德使] Yang Taixi hence went to Mount Yangjiao to gift the Sovereign Emperor of Mysterious Origin with regalia resembling that worn by emperors. After having held a five-day ceremony of purgation [*zhai* 齋] and sacrificial offerings [*jiao* 醮] and in order to demonstrate the special relationship the temple enjoyed with the imperial family, Yang Taixi also built the Celestial Worthy of the Golden Portal [*Jinque tianzun* 金闕天尊] and the Celestial Worthy of the Original Beginning [*Yuanshi tianzun* 元始天尊] as well as four memorials to which prayers could be addressed and that were personifying both Ruizong and Xuanzong as well as the two ordained princesses, the Princess Jinxian 金仙 and the Princess Yuzhen 玉真.²¹

3.1 *The Construction of Emperor Xuanzong's "Inscriptions Recording the Sages"*

During the Kaiyuan and Tianbao eras, Xuanzong initiated a surge in the number of adherents to the Daoist faith and devoted particular attention to Mount Yangjiao's Temple of the Sovereign Emperor of Mysterious Origin. Around the fourteenth year of the Kaiyuan era, multiple auspicious signs occurred at the temple, such as trees with interlocking branches, vines wound around cypresses, and withered branches burgeoning anew.²² All those signs were seen as symbols of the Tang dynasty's prosperous destiny. For this reason, Xuanzong not only ordered the transfer of seven Daoist priests from Jin Prefecture who were both strong and steadfast in faith, appointing them to the Temple of the Sovereign Emperor of Mysterious Origin, but in the sixteenth year of the Kaiyuan era, he also officially changed the temple's name to the Abbey Celebrating the Tang and added his own signature to the temple's facade. Xuanzong

21 See "Longjiao shan ji 龍角山記 [Records of Mount Longjiao]," in *The Daoist Canon*, 19:693.

22 See roll 24, "The Imperial Volumes: Auspicious Omens" [*Diwang bu: furui* 帝王部·符瑞] and roll 53, "The Imperial Volumes: Praising the Yellow Emperor and Lord Lao" [*Diwang bu: shang Huang Lao* 帝王部·尚黃老] of Wang Qinruo 王欽若 and Yang Yi 楊億, comp., *Cefuyuangui* 冊府元龜 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982), 259, 590. In the original text (roll 24), the "ninth month" [九月] was erroneously transcribed as the "ninth year" [九年].

personally inscribed the text of the "The Great Tang Dynasty's Inscriptions of Mount Longjiao's Abbey Celebrating the Tang Recording the Sages" not long afterward. The stele was erected the following year, on the third day of the ninth month. The engravings declare: "Gaozu's phoenix soared through the air, the clouds lifted, and the sun shone over Jin [Shanxi]. During the long wars fought by Taizong, the wind converged toward the fields of Qin [Shaanxi]. At Mount Longjiao's Capital of Immortals, the emperor's troops were preparing themselves." From that moment onward, then, the Abbey Celebrating the Tang was also praised by people who referred to it as "The Capital of Immortals at Mount Dragon's Horn" [*Longjiao xiandu* 龍角仙都].

Unlike the text that appears on the front of the stele, the magnificent signatures are gathered on the back of the stele and display the Tang dynasty's most powerful figures and may leave a deeper impression. These signatures are divided into three sections,²³ which all contain a considerable amount of important information. To start with, the order in which the signatures are arranged was conscientiously determined: in the first section appear the crown prince, the princes, a few princes presumptive, and commandery princes—a total of twenty-nine people who all belonged to the imperial clan. Their names are listed so that they appear in the most splendid and celebrated way, something that was meant to strongly emphasize the fact that the Sovereign Emperor of Mysterious Origin and the Li Tang imperial clan shared the same bloodline. The second section mentions thirty-four people, consisting mostly of chancellors, senior officials from the Six Ministries, Nine Courts, and Five Directorates as well as administrators of the three prefectures Jingzhao 京兆, Henan 河南, and Taiyuan. The third section mentions nine people: first, the two officials who were in charge of the stele's inauguration and then three high-ranking eunuchs, such as Yang Sixu 楊思勳 and Gao Lishi 高力士, as well as four high-ranking army generals.

Second, the list of names on the back of the stele—especially, the third section, which mentions Bai Zhishen 白知慎—provides us with a new lead for understanding how the monastery was run. Bai Zhishen served as the prefect of Jin, the prefecture in which the Monastery was located that concurrently acted as the "Abbey Celebrating the Tang Commissioner as Appointed by Imperial Decree." The fact that the prefecture's senior official also assumed

23 One more passage appears in the highest portion of the back of the stele, but it does not pertain to the signatures added at the time the stele was erected. It was added by someone, such as Li Huan, in the third year of the Changqing 長慶 era <821-824>. This is discussed in the following section.

the position of commissioner for the monastery highlights the unique status enjoyed by this Daoist temple.

Third, this list of names also reveals some details concerning the work necessitated by the construction and the engraving of the stele itself. For instance, the four-character combination *yu-zhi-yu-shu* 御制御书, which appears on the front of the stele, was the work of Zhang Yue 張說, the former chancellor and, at that time, leader of the literary lyceum. The person who was entirely in charge of this event was Lü Xiang, the “Commissioner of the Building, Rubbing and Engraving of Mount Longjiao’s Monument Recording the Sages,” who was also director of the Bureau of Receptions and one of the Academy of Scholarly Worthies. He is the person who engraved the last row on the front of the stele, which reads “Built during the seventeenth year of the Kaiyuan era, avoiding Taisui 太岁 in the ninth month of Jisi 己巳, the third day of the lunar month in Jichou 己丑 and in Xinmao 辛卯,” as well as the entire text on the back. Gao Lishi, to whom the later generations’ local historical annals refer, did not play any particular role in the process of erecting this specific stele.²⁴

For both the state and Mount Longjiao’s Abbey Celebrating the Tang, the “Inscriptions Recording the Sages” commissioned by Xuanzong were extremely significant. This imposing stele, which is 3.5 meters high and stands upright at the monastery’s gate, in addition to having a specially built and magnificent pavilion, is undoubtedly a public building with a distinct commemorating character. For the state, the claim, through the stele, of a shared lineage with Lord Lao by the Tang imperial clan as well as the multiple auspicious signs witnessed at the monastery around that time all bore crucial testimony to the firm establishment of the dynasty’s political legitimacy. The stele’s significance was perhaps even greater for the Abbey Celebrating the Tang. People who go to the temple are first greeted by this colossal monument, whose front exhibits calligraphy by the Xuanzong emperor, and the list of names on the back seemingly includes all the high-ranking officials who attended the imperial court during this period. One can easily see how anyone who had the chance to stand in

24 In the *Annals of Fushan County* dating from the eleventh year of the Jiajing era appears the following note regarding the Tiansheng Palace: “In the fourteenth year of the Kaiyuan era, the temple’s name was changed to the ‘Abbey Celebrating the Tang,’ and the emperor commissioned a stele to be engraved and ordered Gao Lishi to supervise the work.” This passage is in the sixth roll, titled “Ancient Sites: Buddhist and Daoist Temples” [*Guji: siguan* 古蹟·寺觀] in *Annals of Fushan County from the Ming and Qing Dynasties*, 29. The historical annals recently published by Fushan County insist mostly on Gao Lishi’s relation to the Abbey Celebrating the Tang, even though these claims remain entirely unfounded.

front of this stele at that specific moment in history must have felt the awe-inspiring prestige of the imperial family as well as the oppressive authority it exercised over the population, a feeling that must in turn have given rise to a sense of deference and solemn respect.

3.2 *"The Golden Register's Ode to Purgation" and the Abbey Celebrating the Tang during the Years of the Tianbao Era*

In the second year of the Tianbao era, another noteworthy stele was erected on the site of the Abbey Celebrating the Tang on the fifteenth day of the tenth month, when the people were celebrating the Lower Primordial Festival [*Xiayuan jie* 下元節]. The inscriptions of "The Golden Register's Ode to Purgation" were composed by Cui Mingyun and engraved by the calligrapher Shi Weize. This time, the stele was built in order to commemorate a grand ceremony for the Golden Register's Purgation [*Jinlu zhai* 金籙齋]. Guo Chuji 郭處寂, who was then the abbot of the monastery, was one of the seven Daoist priests who were "strong and steadfast in faith" chosen among their peers in Jin Prefecture in the sixteenth year of the Kaiyuan era. In the twenty-fifth year of the Kaiyuan era [737], he petitioned the court about holding the Golden Register's Purgation ceremony. The ceremony is one of the Lingbao doctrine's nine main kinds of purification rituals, which aims to bring harmony between ying and yang and prays for the blessing of the state and its sovereign.²⁵ It was indeed entirely appropriate for this important ceremony to be held at the monastery, which was after all the sacred Daoist site where the founding myth of the Tang dynasty originated. As written on the stele, "palace attendants and high Daoist masters arrived from the imperial capital, and so did the soft words of the emperor's secret imperial decree, which had come directly from Heaven." Yet not only did Xuanzong have eunuchs and important Daoist figures come to the monastery specially for the occasion, but he probably composed the ode himself, a small detail perhaps, but one that makes it possible for us to imagine the grand scale of the ceremony.

"The Golden Register's Ode to Purgation" is a primary source through which we can understand better, among other aspects, the sculptures and the daily religious activities at the monastery. For instance, the stele's inscriptions can teach us about some particular aspects of the consecration of the Highest Lord

25 See "Cibu langzhong yuanwailang 祠部郎中员外郎 [Supernumerary Official for the Director of the Ministry of Sacrifices]," in *Tang liu dian* 唐六典 [*The Six Codes of the Tang Dynasty*], ed. Tang Xuanzong 唐玄宗 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992), 4:125. See also Lü Pengzhi 呂鵬志, "Ling bao liu zhai kao 靈寶六齋考 [A Study of the Lingbao Six Days of Fasting]," *Wen shi* 文史 3 (2011).

Lao's image by the monastery, namely, that "the dragon-embroidered robe enlightened its appearance and the jade-tassel headwear bestowed Lord Lao with the posthumous honor of imperial status." It seems that Lord Lao was not wearing Daoist garb but was, instead, adorned with the imperial regalia that consisted of a dragon-embroidered robe and ceremonious jade-tassel headwear. In striking contrast to this is the most imposing and extant Tang-dynasty statue of Lord Lao, which was originally enshrined in the Chaoyuan Pavilion 朝元閣 of the Lintong 臨潼 District's Huaqing Palace 華清宮 and is now stored in the Xi'an Stele Forest Museum [*Beilin bowuguan* 碑林博物館]. In that case specifically, the figure of Lord Lao was wearing a Daoist cloak. As for other sculptural representations of Lord Lao from the Sui and Tang dynasty that can still be observed, for the most part they all wear Daoist garments.

To have Lord Lao wear an imperial gown and crown was obviously a way to emphasize his status as the progenitor of the Tang emperor, by portraying him as an "emperor" of a kind. Moreover, it is possible that this way of representing Lord Lao influenced to a certain degree the making of the statues found at the Taiqing Palace in Chang'an. It is recorded in *The Great Tang Dynasty's Annals of the Sacrifices Offered to Heaven and Earth* [*Datang jiaosi lu* 大唐郊祀錄] that "the sculpture portraying the genuine features of our great and sage ancestor has been placed at the south door's entrance, between the door and the window. It is wearing the imperial robe embroidered with dragons and the crown, and colorful silk garments as well as pearls and jades were considered to adorn him."²⁶ Following the spring of the twenty-ninth year of the Kaiyuan era [741], during the first month of the lunar year, a temple in honor of the Sovereign Emperor of Mysterious Origin was built in both capitals as well as in several prefectures,²⁷ and in the third month of the second year of the Tianbao era, the temple in Chang'an was officially renamed the Taiqing Palace.²⁸ Because it was founded much later than the Abbey Celebrating the Tang, it is possible that it was influenced by the sculptures that had been created for the latter. In fact, the Lord Lao statues at the Monastery were already considered unique.

26 See the section "Offerings to the Taiqing Palace" [*Jianxian Taiqing gong* 薦獻太清宮] to which has been added the document "Rites from the Tang Kaiyuan Era [*Datang kaiyuan li* 大唐開元禮]," in *Datang jiaosi lu* 大唐郊祀錄 [*The Great Tang Dynasty's Annals of the Sacrifices Offered to Heaven and Earth*], comp. Wang Jing 王涇 (Tokyo: Kyuko shoin, 1972), roll 9, 788.

27 See part 2 of "The Imperial Biography of Emperor Xuanzong [*Xuanzong benji* 玄宗本紀]," in *History of the Early Tang Dynasty*, roll 9, 213.

28 See the section "Worshipping the Teachings of the Dao [*Zunchong Daojiao* 尊崇道教]," in Wang Pu 王溥, *Tang hui yao* 唐會要 [*The Tang Compendium*] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1991), roll 50, 1015.

In the ninth month of the third year of the Dahe era 大和 [929-935] of the Wu 吳 Kingdom, when the Maoshan 茅山 School rehabilitated the Lingbao Academy 靈寶院, it is recorded that "prior to the construction of the old pavilion of the Hall of Auspicious Figures, in the three adjoining rooms, there must be statues of Lord Lao exactly as he appears at Mount Yangjiao."²⁹ As one can see, the rules that had to be followed in order to reproduce the model standards were quite unusual. Nonetheless, the fact that the Abbey Celebrating the Tang's Lord Lao sculpture was wearing imperial garments visually confirmed the Li Tang clan's shared line of descent with the Highest Lord Lao.

It is also said in "The Golden Register's Ode to Purgation" that every Daoist temple under heaven had to hold a ceremony in order to pray for both the country's and the common people's good fortune and that they had to do so on the day of each of the Primordial Festivals, namely, the Lantern Festival [*Shangyuan ri* 上元日] (the fifteenth day of the first lunar month), the Death-Spirit Festival [*Zhongyuan ri* 中元日] (the fifteenth of the seventh month), and the Lower Primordial Festival [*Xiayuan ri* 下元日] (the fifteenth of the tenth month).³⁰ The ode also refers to Xuanzong's birthday, which was to be celebrated on the fifth day of the eighth month. Later on, during the seventeenth year of the Kaiyuan era, it was officially declared a statutory holiday that ended up being known as the "Thousand-Autumn Festival" [*Qianqiu jie* 千秋節]. As a Daoist temple, the Abbey Celebrating the Tang would hold a special ceremony of purgation on all four of those days (for the most part, the Golden Register's Purgation ceremony was to be held to pray for the good fortune of the country's sovereign). This was determined by the monastery's dual nature, functioning concurrently as a Daoist temple and an imperial ancestral shrine.

29 See Wang Qixia 王棲霞, [*Wu Xugong chongjian Lingbao yuan ji* 吳徐公重建靈寶院記] "Record on Wu Xugong's Rebuilding the Lingbao Academy," in *The Complete Prose Works of the Tang Dynasty*, roll 928, 9677.

30 See Li Fengmao 李豐楙, "Yansu yu youxi: daojiao sanyuan zhai yu Tangdai jiesu 嚴肅與遊戲：道教三元齋與唐代節俗 [Solemnity and Pleasure: The Daoist Fast of the Three Primordials in Relation to the Tang Dynasty's Holidays and Customs]," in *Chuancheng yu chuangxin: zhongyang yanjiuyuan Zhongguo wen zhe yanjiu suo shi zhou nian jinian lunwen ji* 傳承與創新：中央研究院中國文哲研究所十週年紀念論文集 [*Continuing the Tradition and Innovating for the Future: A Collection of Essays to Commemorate the Tenth Anniversary of the Academia Sinica's Chinese Literature and Philosophy Research Institute*], ed. Zhong Caijun 鐘彩鈞 (Taipei: Zhongyanyuan wen zhe yanjiusuo, 1999).

4 The Six Sages and the Auspicious Cypress: The Omen Announcing the Tang Restoration

On the fourteenth year of the Tianbao era, the An-Shi Rebellion [An Lushan; *Anshi zhiluan* 安史之亂] broke out. A bitter war ensued, which lasted nearly eight years, and though it was eventually quelled by the Tang army, it had a devastating impact on the dynasty. The separatist regimes led by the military governors in the Hebei region in particular managed to tremendously undermine the country's central authorities. Starting with the emperor Daizong 代宗 [726-779], multiple generations of emperors strived to remove those governors from power, hoping that doing so would restore the powerful and prosperous empire that they had once had. In this context, the Abbey Celebrating the Tang fulfilled the role of bastion of the empire.

As recorded in "Li Huan's Epigraphs of the Abbey Celebrating the Tang's Temple of Paying One's Respects to the Heaven-Sent Departed" from the third year of the Changqing era under the Muzong emperor [823], the kudzu vine that clung to the monastery's cypress tree developed a new tendril in the third month of the fourteenth year of the Dali 大曆 era [766-779]. This special occurrence was put down in writing in augural documents. In the third month of the third year of the Changqing era, a new tendril appeared. Li Huan, who was a member of the imperial clan and was also a regional rectifier and surveillance commissioner for military training in Jin and Ci Prefecture, among others, considered it a symbol of the ongoing destiny of the Tang state. Therefore, together with allies such as the army supervisory commissioner Wu Zaihe 吳再和, he proceeded to the Abbey Celebrating the Tang to offer sacrifices to the Sovereign Emperor of Mysterious Origin. He ordered the painting of Lord Lao's features, which would be presented to the Muzong emperor, in addition to having the epigraphs discussed here engraved on the back of the "Golden Register's Ode to Purgation." As far as Muzong was concerned, this auspicious omen occurred at the exact moment when revolts were breaking out north of the Yellow River. Once again, central authorities were unable to bring under their control the You 幽 Prefecture, Chengde 成德, and Weibo 魏博 defense commands. Armed confrontations hence kept occurring between them and the imperial troops. In this particular moment of crisis during which Muzong faced great adversity, the monastery's auspicious omen undoubtedly offered him some consolation.

In his epigraphs, Li Huan also declares: "The memorial temple is situated at Sacred Mountain's Abbey Celebrating the Tang in honor of our divine ancestor, the Sovereign Emperor of Mysterious Origin. With the ceremony over, we paid

our respects to the departed Emperors Gaozu, Taizong, Gaozong, Zhongzong 中宗 [656-710], Ruizong, and Xuanzong at the temple in honor of heaven-sent rulers." This epigraph makes it clear that the saintly features of emperors from Gaozu to Xuanzong were displayed at the monastery. It had been a tradition to enshrine and worship representations of the departed emperors in Buddhist temples since the reign of the Sui emperor Wen 隋文帝 [541-604]. As the Tang rulers primarily stressed the imperial family's genealogical connection to Laozi, they preferred to enshrine ancestors from past dynasties in specially chosen Daoist temples. For instance, during Xuanzong's reign, at the Lord Lao's Temple located at Beimang Mountain 北邙山 in Luoyang 洛陽, murals were produced in which Wu Daozi 吳道子 is known to have painted the five saintly icons of emperors from Gaozu to Ruizong. In Daizong's time, Xin 忻 Prefecture also had its own Temple of the Seven Saint Emperors [*Qisheng miao* 七聖廟]. During the period of the Five Dynasties, at the end of Tang rule, the Hall of the Seven Saints [*Qisheng tang* 七聖堂] was added to the Huaqing Palace, while the Taiqing Palace, in Bo Prefecture, had portraits of six saintly emperors, "which were placed on both sides of Lord Lao to accompany him."³¹ As for the "temple in honor of the six saintly and heaven-sent rulers" to which Li Huan's epigraphs refer, it most probably consecrated the icons of the six emperors who came after Gaozu. According to "The Abbey Celebrating the Tang's Stele Inscriptions with an Additional Preface" [*Qingtang guan beiming bing xu* 慶唐觀碑銘並序], which was composed by the Sacred Mountain County's District Magistrate Han Wang 韓望, on the first year of the Dazhongxiangfu era 大中祥符 [1008-1016] of the Northern Song, "originally, the Li Tang clan would paint the saintly features of the six emperors, from the sage emperor Yao 堯 to Xuanzong, and they had them flanked by main halls dedicated to the Three Primordial Sovereigns."³² The six emperors' paintings no doubt lent a strong aura, reminiscent of the Tang imperial clan's ancestral shrine, to the Abbey Celebrating the Tang.

Below "Li Huan's Epigraphs of the Abbey Celebrating the Tang's Temple of Paying One's Respects to the Heaven-Sent Departed" appears a list of names of various officials who came to the monastery to pay their respects. The list includes the names of officials from everywhere across the country, primarily staff officers and officials at various ranks and in various places. Taken together, they constituted the core leadership of the region around Jin and Ci 磁 Prefectures. Several influential representatives from various regions also

31 See Lei Wen, *Beyond the Temple*, 111-114.

32 Chen Yuan, *A Brief Introduction*, 238.

appear on the list. Those all came from the same family clan, the Fang Shi 方氏, in addition to having achieved official rank through the imperial examinations. They belonged, in sum, to one of the period's most influential clans. The fact that they, together with officials from diverse regions, came to pay homage at the monastery's ancestral shrine clearly demonstrates that, through the practice of Daoism, the offering of sacrifices at the shrine was well integrated in the social life of the surrounding areas.

On that occasion, during which he went to pay his respects at the monastery's Temple of the Great Sage Ancestor and Sovereign Emperor of Mysterious Origin as well as to the portraits of the Six Saintly Emperors, Li Huan originally intended to thank Lord Lao for the auspicious cypresses and kudzu vines that he had lent to the monastery, namely, those that had announced to the entire country the good fortune and the ongoing destiny of the dynasty. As revolts were once again erupting on the Yellow River's north shore, and as war clouds were covering the country, these omens were seen as demonstrating Lord Lao's support for the imperial court. However, what these epigraphs reflect is actually the political context of the mid- and late Tang dynasty. Indeed, for Li Huan and the army supervisory commissioner to have included themselves among these epigraphs' three signatures, for them to actually be engraved on the back of "The Inscriptions Recording the Sages," which had been commissioned by Xuanzong, and finally for their names to appear above those of figures such as the former crown prince and other princes—all these actions should be viewed as proof of a certain disrespect toward the imperial family and as a clear breach of ritual propriety.

5 Blending in: The Monastery's Transformations in the Post-Tang Dynasty Period

At the end of the first year of the Qianfu era 乾符 [874-879] of Xizong 僖宗, an uprising led by Huang Chao 黃巢 suddenly erupted. The chaos from this armed conflict lasted ten years, a historical period that not only struck a heavy blow to the Tang imperial court but also had disastrous consequences for Daoist temples all over the country. Yet because Mount Longjiao was located in a secluded area south of Jin Prefecture, it suffered only minor effects. Sun Yizhong 孫夷中 in the Northern Song dynasty writes, in "The Three Cave Writings on Daoist Ceremonies" [*Sandong xiudao yi* 三洞修道儀], that "During the decline of the Five Dynasties period, faith in Daoism had weakened.... Only one majestic monument to Daoism remained, and that was the Taiqing Palace in Bo Prefecture. Some secondary temples still functioned as well, such as those

in Beimang, Yangtai 陽臺, and Yangfu 陽輔 and the Tang Blessings temple.³³ Clearly, after these years of violent upheaval, Mount Longjiao's Abbey Celebrating the Tang had become one of the few important temples that had survived in northern areas. This certainly laid the foundation for the subsequent and continuous evolution of the monastery during the Song and Jin dynasties.

Following the ultimate downfall of the Tang dynasty, the Abbey Celebrating the Tang lost the direct connection it had cultivated with the imperial court's political legitimacy. This forced the monastery to gradually transform its vocation; hence, its relationship with the local communities eventually became even stronger than it had been in the past. During the spring of the seventh year of the Taipingxingguo era 太平興國 [976-984] in the Northern Song dynasty, Sacred Mountain County suffered a drought and, at the Abbey Celebrating the Tang, District Magistrate Zhang Zhao 張昭 commanded that people pray for rain to come, in a strategy that was deemed successful. He hence had the halls and the sculptures renovated, and a stele memorial was also erected in the third month of the first year in the Chunhua era 淳化 [990-994].³⁴ During the Later Tang dynasty, in the Five Dynasties period, the functions performed by Buddhist and Daoist temples increasingly converged with those that had been performed mainly by local shrines. At the dawn of the Song dynasty, the monastery became the place where locals would go to recite prayers for the rain to come.³⁵ It was precisely this orientation, which had been taken by the monastery at the end of the Tang dynasty, that led it to eventually integrate itself even more fully into the daily lives of local people.

Of course, some attempts were made to establish relationships between the Abbey Celebrating the Tang and the new dynasty in power, and the Northern Song rulers perpetuated the Tang's policies supporting the Daoist faith, but in doing so, they granted the temples ample leeway. During the first year of the Jingde era 景德 [1004-1007], Liang Zhizhen 梁志真, the monastery's

33 See the preface to "The Three Caves Writings on Daoist Ceremonies" [*Sandong xiudao yi* 三洞修道儀], which dates to the sixth year of the Xianping 咸平 era under the Song emperor Zhenzong 真宗 in *The Daoist Canon* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe; Shanghai: Shanghai shudian; Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe, 1988), book 32, 166.

34 See Wang Qianli 王千里, "Jinzhou Shenshan xian longjiao shan qing tang guan chongxiu gongde bei 晉州神山縣龍角山慶唐觀重修功德碑 [The Memorial to the Meritorious Renovations of the Abbey Celebrating the Tang, Situated at Mount Longjiao in the Jin Prefecture's Sacred Mountain County]," in *The Complete Collection of the Three Jin States' Stone Inscriptions*, 34.

35 Lei Wen, "Lun zhong wan Tang fo dao jiao yu minjian cisi de heliu 論中晚唐佛道教與民間祠祀的合流 [Buddhism and Daoism during the Mid- and Late Tang Dynasty and Syncretism in Popular Sacrificial Ceremonies]," *Zongjiao xue yanjiu* 宗教學研究 3 (2003). See also Lei Wen, *Beyond the Temple*, 276-299.

director-in-chief, who was also a Daoist priest, sent a memorial to the Zhenzong emperor 真宗 [968-1022] soliciting the refurbishment of the temple. While the reconstruction work was taking place, auspicious omens like ones that had occurred repeatedly during the Tang dynasty were witnessed again, this time in the form of sweet dew falling. In the first year of the Dazhongxiangfu era, another stele was specially erected to commemorate the occasion.³⁶ Eight years later, a similar sight was witnessed: “On the eighth year of the Dazhongxiangfu era, at Jin Prefecture’s Abbey Celebrating the Tang, a new pagoda tree grew among the ancient cypresses; more than 10 feet high.”³⁷ The monastery continually provided the new rulers with auspicious omens to serve as proof of their political legitimacy, and the Northern Song rulers eventually came to realize that the monastery’s name, which referred specifically to the Tang dynasty, was far from appropriate. Therefore, in the second month of the fourth year of the Tiansheng era 天聖 [1023-1032], they issued an imperial edict ordering the name to be changed to the Tiansheng Monastery [*Tiansheng guan* 天聖觀].³⁸ The monastery’s name was to honor the first era under the Renzong emperor 仁宗 [1010-1063], and in that sense, it re-established, to a certain degree, a relationship between the monastery and the new dynasty, and moreover, this event had strong symbolic significance for the monastery.

From the Song dynasty until the Jin dynasty, the Tiansheng Monastery went through many phases of renovation. For instance, in the first year of the Zhenghe era 政和 [1111-1118] under the Song emperor Huizong, the Hall of the Three Purities [*Sanqing dian* 三清殿] was rebuilt.³⁹ In the seventh year of the Xuanhe era 宣和 [1119-1125], Mount Longjiao’s Xianshi Temple 顯施廟, which had been erected in honor of the Hua Pool’s [*Huachi* 華池] deity, was given a new name and was then known as the temple of Jiarun Hou 嘉潤侯.⁴⁰

36 See “The Abbey Celebrating the Tang’s Stele Inscriptions with an Additional Preface [*Qingtang guan beiming bing xu* 慶唐觀碑銘並序]” composed by Sacred Mountain County’s District Magistrate Han Wang, in *A Brief Introduction*, 238.

37 See part 3 of “Wu xing zhi 五行志 [Records on the Five Phases],” in *History of the Song Dynasty*.

38 See both the plate and the transcriptions of “The Secretariat-Chancellery Officializing the Tiansheng Monastery Stele” [*Zhongshumenxia die Tiansheng guan bei* 中書門下牒天聖觀碑] in *The Complete Collection of the Three Jin States’ Stone Inscriptions*, 37-38.

39 See “The Memorial Commemorating the Hall of the Three Purities’ Reconstruction [*Chongxiu sanqing dian ji* 重修三清殿記],” in *A Brief Introduction*, 319. The inscriptions also appear in the “Records of Mount Longjiao” in *The Daoist Canon*, 19:698.

40 “Longjiao shan xianshi miao jiarun hou chi bei 龍角山顯施廟嘉潤侯敕碑 [The Imperial Edict about Mount Longjiao’s Xianshi Temple and Jiarun Hou],” in *Shanyou shike congbian* 山右石刻叢編 [*Edited Collection of Stone Inscriptions from the Area East of the Taihang Mountains*], in *Shike shiliao xinbian* 石刻史料新編 [A New Compilation

Two years later, in the second year of the Jingkang era 靖康 [1126-1127], the Jin 金 brought the Northern Song dynasty to an end and took control over the Shanxi region. Yet the change of dynasty did not seem to affect Mount Longjiao and the Tiansheng Monastery. Based on what is recorded in the "Records on Renovating the Jiarun Hou Hall" [*Chongxiu jiarunhou dian ji* 重修嘉潤侯殿記], which dates from the eleventh year of the Tianhui era 天會 [1123-1135] under the Jin emperor Taizong, the Hua Pool was a pond at the summit of Mount Longjiao, and for the common people of the Sacred Mountain County, it was the place they faced when it was time to pray for rain. Moreover, after villagers such as Li Yin 李隱 and Chen Sigong 陳思恭 set to work refurbishing the main hall, they purposely picked the Daoist Death-Spirit Festival to hold, in the early hours before dawn, the ceremony for the completion of their work. They also invited the Tiansheng Monastery's priests to arrange a purgation ceremony and to "meet and celebrate jointly" with the people who had worked hard on the reconstruction of the main hall.⁴¹ That type of ceremony contributed to consolidating even further the strong relationship between the monastery and the Hua Pool's deity, which was part of Mount Longjiao's local pantheon. Not only did the Daoist monks living at the monastery organize a purgative ceremony for the occasion, but the fast was to be held in honor of the Daoist Death-Spirit Festival. It provided an opportunity for the monastery's priests to get to know the region's influential clans and the common people better, and to form stronger bonds with them. In fact, quite a few prayers from the Jin dynasty, which ask for rain or express gratitude for the rainfall, have been preserved in the *Records of Mount Longjiao*. Again, in the sixth month of the third year of the Mingchang era 明昌 [1190-1196] under the Jin emperor Zhangzong 章宗 [1168-1208], the monastery's superintendent and Daoist priest Yan Shi 閻師 similarly raised funds to rebuild the severely damaged pavilion housing the Tang emperor Xuanzong's "Inscriptions Recording the Sages."⁴²

During the Yuan dynasty, the Tiansheng Monastery became the Tiansheng Palace. In the Ming-Qing period, it developed even stronger ties with the

of Historical Material Related to Stone Inscriptions] (Taipei: Xinwenfeng chuban gongsi, 1977), vol. 1, book 20, roll 18, 1, 5348-49.

- 41 Wang Jianzhong 王建中, [*Chongxiu Jiarun hou dian ji* 重修嘉潤侯殿記] "Records of Renovating the Jiarun Hou Hall," in the "Records of Mount Longjiao," in *The Daoist Canon*, 19:698.
- 42 Mao Hui 毛麾, "Records on Renovating the Pavilion Housing the 'Inscriptions Recording the Sages' at the Tiansheng Monastery in Pingyang Prefecture's Fushan County [Pingyang fu Fushan xian Tiansheng guan chongxiu jisheng beiting ji 平陽府浮山縣天聖觀重修級聖碑亭記]," in *Edited Collection of Stone Inscriptions*, roll 22, 15438-39.

surrounding rural communities, and in the second year of the Ming emperor Longqing 隆慶 [1567-1572], when the Tiansheng Palace was renovated, more than 700 people from nearly 80 villages contributed funds and helped with the repairs. A detailed list of names on which people are entered according to their village appears on the Stele to Commemorate the Names from Every Village That Donated Funds or Material to Renovate the Tiansheng Palace [*Chongxiu Tiansheng gong gecun shizi caimuzhi xingming bei* 重修天聖宮各村施資材木植姓名碑].⁴³ Among the people who contributed money and material were, in addition to those who came from the vicinity of the palace, many residents from other towns in Fushan County. This shows that Tiansheng Palace continued to be Fushan County's most important religious center and that it enjoyed a broad base of support in the area.

It is worth paying attention to the fact that the "twenty-eight communes" that would be so active in subsequent generations did not, apparently, play any role in the palace renovations during the second year of the Ming emperor Longqing's reign. While it remains unclear exactly when these twenty-eight communes were founded,⁴⁴ the communes and the fiefs' participation in the palace's affairs evidently increased during the Qing dynasty. During the reign of Yongzheng 雍正 [r. 1723-1735], the fiefs' populations joined to collect a large sum for the Tiansheng Palace's repairs. The communes independently had a memorial built for the occasion, with the last section of its epigraph declaring: "During the tenth year of the imperial reign of the great Qing dynasty's Yongzheng, on the first day of the sixth lunar month in a *renzi* 壬子 year, the twenty-eight communes joined in efforts to erect a stele."⁴⁵ Even now, this is perhaps the earliest known mention of the "twenty-eight communes" in stone engravings. Regarding the palace's minor and major affairs, the Daoist priests in charge always discussed and engaged in transactions with commune leaders. For instance, during the sixth year under the Tongzhi emperor 同治 [r. 1862-1874], the stele pavilion of the Tang emperor Xuanzong's "Inscriptions Recording the Sages" collapsed because of heavy rainfall. The priests in charge immediately notified the leaders of the twenty-eight communes that repairs were needed.⁴⁶ This type of social organization was the bond link-

43 See Zhang Jinke, *The Complete Collection*, 94-97.

44 In the pamphlets that scholars from Fushan County have published in recent years, the "twenty-eight communes" are always traced back to the Tang dynasty period, but that dating remains entirely unfounded.

45 "Chongxiu Tiansheng gong bei 重修天聖宮碑 [Stele Commemorating the Renovation of Tiansheng Palace]," in *The Complete Collection*, 165-166.

46 "Chongxiu yu beilou jie 重修御碑樓碣 [Stone Tablet Commemorating the Renovation of the Stele Pavilion Commissioned by the Emperor]," in *The Complete Collection of the*

ing the Tiansheng Palace to nearby communities. A similar phenomenon has been observed in the ancient societies of Dunhuang 敦煌.⁴⁷ Yet this type of organization around communes and fiefs did not exist during the time of the Tang dynasty's Abbey Celebrating the Tang, because in those days, more importance was placed on cultivating a relationship with the imperial court.

6 Concluding Remarks

Originally a relatively unknown mountain, Mount Yangjiao became, in the particular context of the advent of a new dynasty, the scene of Daoist myth making. As the Li Tang clan bestowed Lord Lao with the titles of Sage Ancestor and Sovereign Emperor of Mysterious Origin, Mount Yangjiao began to build a special relationship that linked it directly to the Tang dynasty's political legitimacy. The five apparitions of Lord Lao on this site at the dawn of the dynasty eventually became an event of historical significance, which both the court and its common subjects committed to memory. The epigraphs following Xuanzong's reign also continually referred to it, to the point that the flora found on the monastery's site, through a succession of withering and flourishing cypresses and grape and kudzu vines, eventually became the barometer of the Tang empire's prosperity and decline. Such is the background against which the Abbey Celebrating the Tang gained the special attention of the imperial court and against which Xuanzong commissioned the "Inscriptions Recording the Sages," sending messengers from the imperial court and important Daoist figures from the capitals to the monastery in order for them to hold the Golden Register's Purgation ceremony and to pray for the empire's good fortune. Most importantly, because it held enshrined representations of six emperors, from Gaozu to Xuanzong, the monastery assumed the dual function of being concurrently a Daoist temple and an imperial ancestral shrine.

Following the fall of the Tang dynasty, the monastery entirely lost the connection that linked it to the former rulers' political legitimacy, forcing it to reinvent itself. On the one hand, members of the monastery kept on forging auspicious omens, in an attempt to rebuild a relationship with the new dynasties. The monastery's change of name from Tang Blessings to Tiansheng can indeed be seen as the result of all these efforts. On the other hand, the monastery also kept reinforcing its bonds with nearby communities. The Abbey

Three Jin States' Stone Inscriptions, 289.

47 See Hao Chunwen 郝春文, *Zhong gu shiqi sheyi yanjiu* 中古时期社邑研究 [*Studies on Communes and Fiefs in Ancient China*] (Taipei: Xinwen feng chuban gongsi, 2006).

Celebrating the Tang's fate reflects the capacity of political dynamics to mold religious practices in ancient China. Yet it also provides us with a successful example of how a Daoist temple that had lost the protection it once enjoyed from the empire's most powerful figures was ultimately able to restore its vitality by integrating itself into the social life of the surrounding area.

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