

Introduction

I address this book both to specialists and non-specialists. I want my students and my non-sinologist sisters as well as my colleagues to be able to read it. The introduction is meant to provide the reader with the background needed to understand the translations and place them in their cultural context. Experts may want to skip some sections.

Aims and Issues

My main aims are simply stated. I want to put women back into the historical picture and come to understand medieval Daoism a little better. Du Guangting's collection of biographies gives me the opportunity to do both. Women are not ahistorical, as Du clearly recognized. Women may live on the borders or inner frontiers of Chinese society, constrained by law and custom, with limited access to means of self-expression, and with limited recognition in Chinese literature, society, and religion. But they are there, creating their lives with the resources available to them.

The present work is part of a long-term project to find women wherever they are and return them to Tang history. Biographies of women, often depicted as marginal or oppositional figures, can provide the historian with information about contradictions in social systems, and arguments or disputes about those systems including attacks on them and justifications for them. I want to look at what women do to create culture in limited spaces with restricted financial security, political or familial power, materials, and skills. I want to examine both positive and negative consequences of women's working in this limited cultural space. Here I look at women's participation in Tang society through the window of their participation in the full religious life of Daoism, the major native religion of the time. In particular I examine issues of family relationships, education, control and self-control, body and gender, literary and religious expression, and the results of religious practices such as asceticism and meditation. I investigate both the bright and dark sides: social

empowerment and religious transformation on the one hand, physical danger and commodification on the other.¹

What can we find out about medieval Chinese women and their experiences, thoughts, and emotions? Where can we find it? The significant limitations of religious biographies, including the partisan viewpoint of the writer, and the mixing of matters of fact and faith, have led many scholars to neglect them as primary sources. The presentation of miraculous occurrences, such as flying to heaven in broad daylight or conversing with animals, next to mundane details of everyday life, such as birthplace, work, or family relations, can be disorienting for the modern reader, to say the least. Hagiography makes a different claim than historical biography about the truthfulness of its narrative. Daoist hagiography claims to be truthful in the sense that individual saints' lives are genuine or authentic (*zhen* 真) embodiments of the doctrines of the Daoist religion. In fact the term for one kind of Daoist transcendent is *zhenren* 真人, literally a "realized" or "perfected" person. In most cases, critical readers of holy biographies have few problems separating reliable historical or social evidence from matters of faith. I would argue that hagiography provides a rich and underutilized resource—especially if read carefully, alongside other texts and material remains of the period.

Texts like Du Guangting's collection help us understand how ascetic physical practices (discipline) lead to Daoist religious goals (transformation) for women. We can examine the links between asceticism, sacrifice, and self-destruction. We can shed light on how medieval Chinese Daoists conceive of the body and self. These texts illuminate the differences in belief and practice between Daoists and their non-Daoist contemporaries and between women and men. We can see how women religious practitioners fit into Chinese society, including the family and the state. We can determine what kind of models these were, and in what sense they represent women of their time, or women in other times and places. Most importantly, we gain insight on what they thought they were doing, and what problems they were solving.

¹ My approach to the study of women in Chinese history has been deeply influenced by several thinkers. Dorothy Ko (1994) argues against victim feminism and for a more nuanced approach to women's history. Patricia Ebrey (1993) gives the practical advice that we should study women where we find them: in her case within marriage, in my case in the Daoist church. She also makes useful contrasts between women's situations in the Tang and Song dynasties. Francesca Bray (1997) reminds us to include material culture and technology, and to locate women in the context of their dwelling spaces, work, and relationship to motherhood. And Charlotte Furth (1999) shows the importance and complexity of cultural constructions of the gendered body.

This is a work of exemplary literature rather than a statistically meaningful sample. Du Guangting's accounts provide cases to consider regarding their implications for Chinese society. It has both the rewards (good stories) and the limitations (uncertainty as to how broadly to apply the conclusions the material suggests) of case studies everywhere.²

My methodology has been a patchwork of systems worked out to deal with this specific text and the issues it raises. I have drawn upon my training in text criticism, medieval Chinese literature, history, art history, religion, and gender studies. I have also borrowed from the works of anthropologists, archaeologists, and historians of medieval European religion. I believe that the best way to study Du Guangting's rich and complex text is to apply an interdisciplinary approach. I try to make observations and draw conclusions that will be useful to readers in several fields. I relegate discussions of specific disciplinary questions and theories to endnotes.

The Context: Tang Dynasty (618-907)

During the Tang dynasty, when the Daoist master and courtier Du Guangting 杜光庭 (850-933) wrote most of his book and when many of his subjects lived, Chinese wealth, territory, and civilization had reached fabulous heights. The Tang represents a high point in Asian culture, a period in which Chinese people still take great pride. 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 the first half of this era, government power rested on a secure tax base in agriculture and trade; a well-organized bureaucracy ran the country; a mighty and well-equipped army kept peace along ever-expanding borders; and ordinary subjects of the emperor enjoyed a relatively high quality of life. The Tang dynasty is considered the golden age of poetry, arts, and sciences. The principal capital city of Chang'an, home to the imperial family and center of government and commercial activity, was the biggest city of the medieval world with over a million people. Chang'an was also the most cosmopolitan city of its time, the location of a sophisticated international culture.

²For the courage to consider meaningful a study of medieval culture that relies on models rather than statistics, I rely upon works such as Georges Duby's *Medieval Marriage* (1978). He reconstructs the social history and practice of marriage in one European country during the middle ages, using a small amount of surviving material. He also presents useful information for comparison with China.

But in 755, everything changed. A dissatisfied general from the northwestern frontier, An Lushan 安祿山, led a rebellion that shook the country to its roots. Although his army was defeated and he was killed, the country never fully recovered, and many changes took place. The transformations in the Chinese government, economy, and society were so profound that many scholars now locate the transition from medieval to pre-modern China in this mid-Tang rebellion and its aftermath.³

Du Guangting lived at court during the waning years of the Tang and witnessed events leading to the downfall of the dynasty and to the subsequent establishment of a smaller kingdom called Former Shu (907-925) with its capital in Chengdu, Sichuan. Du's work is influenced by the circumstances of chaos and crisis, and by the prevailing mood of anxiety and depression that characterized his era.

According to the somewhat idealizing constructions of later Chinese thinkers, Tang society was divided into four main social classes. On top were the bureaucrats or literati officials, who monopolized government and education. Most Tang authors were officials originating in this class. Du Guangting, an official as well as a Daoist master, lived at court with the imperial family and associated with literati officials while he was writing his biographies of Daoist women. Beneath the small, literate official class were the farmers, honored for their essential role in producing food and the economic surplus that allowed Chinese civilization to flourish, but rarely rewarded in any way commensurate with their contributions.

In the Tang dynasty, farmers made up the vast majority of the population. Next were the craftsmen, providers of essential services, also respected for their important contributions to material culture and the economy, but not necessarily well compensated. Last were the merchants, who the Chinese traditionally viewed as parasites living off the labor of others. The government was suspicious of merchants, fearing their ability to accumulate wealth and possibly pose a threat to the central power of the Chinese imperium. Outside the traditional class system, and organized in a hierarchical system that paralleled the relations of bureaucrats and farmers, were the military leadership and the soldiers. Struggles between the civil (*wen* 文) and military (*wu* 武) sides of government were a constant and characteristic contradiction of the imperial bureaucratic system.

³For history of the Tang dynasty, see Twitchett 1979. See also Adshead 2004; Benn 2002. On the capital city, see Xiong 2000. On Tang society and history, see the ongoing series edited *Tang Yanjiu* (Tang Studies), from Beijing University Press.

The actual picture of social classes in medieval China, according to contemporary Tang sources, was more fluid and complex. Merchants along the Silk Road contributed substantially to government coffers, officials participated in commerce, and the early Tang emperors were proud of their own military origins and prowess. Du Guangting's subjects, representing the diversity of Tang society, come from all social classes.

Geographers divide China into two great regions: the northern one centered on the Yellow river and its plains, and the southern one centered on the Yangzi River and its surroundings. But a cultural geography would divide the Tang world most prominently into the areas around the capital cities on the one hand, and, on the other, everywhere else. The two capitals of Chang'an and Luoyang, seats of government and centers of culture and commerce, both located in the north on tributaries of the Yellow River, were considered the most central and desirable locations. Another important city for our story is Chengdu in mountainous Sichuan province to the southwest of the capital cities. Du Guangting accompanied the Tang emperor and court to Chengdu when they were forced to flee the capital in 881. Du also lived there as a courtier in the subsequent Former Shu dynasty. Several of our subjects were also active there. The women in Du's biographies come from all over the Tang empire, with a strong preference for south.

Along with the official world of government administration and tax registers, there was a world of holy mountains and waterways. The most prominent of the holy mountains and the oldest were the marchmounts or sacred mountains of the five directions: Mount Tai 泰山 in the East, Hua 華山 in the West, Song 嵩山 in the Center, Heng 衡山 in the North, and another, different Heng 恆山 in the South. There were also famous Buddhist mountains such as Mounts Emei in Sichuan and Tiantai in Zhejiang, still pilgrimage sites today. And there were Daoist holy mountains. One of the most famous was Mount Qingcheng in Sichuan, where the Celestial Masters school of Daoism began. Du Guangting probably lived there while compiling his text. Another eminent mountain was Mount Mao, residence of the three Mao brothers, deities associated with the beginnings of the Supreme Clarity school of Daoism in the fourth century C.E.

In addition to actual places that we can locate on a map, there were imaginary sites, such as the heaven of the Queen Mother of the West on Mount Kunlun far beyond the borders of the known world in the exotic occident, and Penglai and other Isles of the Blessed far away in the Eastern Sea. Above the earth there were many Daoist heavens, and tribunals or courts for the dead beneath the earth. And for Daoists, there were

grotto heavens, cave worlds beneath holy mountains where the faithful could go to survive the chaos and destruction that arrived at the end of each world age. All of these otherworldly places were inhabited by divine beings such as creators, heavenly honored ones, and transcendents. Du Guangting was a student of holy cosmography—the mapping of the religious world—and wrote several works on numinous and lucky places. His subjects often travel to or ultimately reside in such places.⁴

Daoist Religion in the Tang

By the time the Tang dynasty ruled China, Daoism already had a long history as China's native major religion. Since the second century of the Common Era, Daoists had revered a host of deities, engaged in numerous rituals, and practiced individual self-cultivation, all in order to attain perfection, which included eternal life and residence in the Daoist heavens. The two earliest traditions of Daoism that could be considered religious institutions began in the late Han dynasty, one in Sichuan province and one in the capital city of Luoyang. In Sichuan the school known as the Celestial Masters (Tianshi 天師) began with visions of the deified Laozi by the first Celestial Master Zhang Daoling 張道陵 in 142 C.E. The group grew into a great organized community, producing scriptures, precepts, methods of organization, and ritual practices that continue in some form down to the present. The Great Peace (Taiping 太平) School that began in Luoyang was utopian, messianic, and apocalyptic. They also created scriptures and practices that survive today.

During the fourth and fifth centuries, two great schools arose which continued into the Tang. These are the Supreme Clarity (Shangqing 上清) and the Numinous Treasure (Lingbao 靈寶) schools. The Shangqing tradition emphasized perfection through individual practices such as meditation and asceticism; it found adherents among the imperial family and elite of the Tang. The Lingbao school favored collective ritual and community worship and provided many rites for the state and people of the Tang. The main Daoist schools were religious institutions, with clergy organized in a hierarchical fashion that echoed both the imperial and the divine bureaucracy. Texts and rituals were handed down through lineages. There was always considerable overlap and borrowing between different schools. For most lay people, distinctions between schools made

⁴ On mountains and caves in Daoist cosmology and practice, see Hahn 1988; 2000. More detailed studies of specific mountains are found in Chavannes 1910 on Mount Tai; Robson 1995a, 1995b, 1995c on the southern Mount Heng.

little difference in daily belief and practice. More important for the average believer would be local and official cults along with family and regional traditions. But for clergy like Du Guangting, we can assume that school and lineage did have meaning. Du Guangting was a Shangqing master, the pre-eminent member of the Shangqing lineage in his generation. In his writings, Du tried to unite the two main traditions of his time under the leadership of his own Shangqing school. All his works, including the present one, are intended to glorify both Daoism and his school.⁵

Daoist adepts worked to achieve perfection by means of religious practices that were organized in a hierarchical order leading from the simplest stages to the most difficult. They began with faith and good works, progressed to ascetic practices such as fasting and sexual abstinence, and finally reached meditation and visualization. Mature and successful religious practice led to fruits of the faith, such as youthfulness and superpowers. In the end, the successful adept departed from this world and ascended to heaven to become part of the celestial bureaucracy.⁶

A perfected or realized person in Daoism is comparable to a saint in the Catholic Church. Saints in most religions are made by assignment of titles by imperial or religious authorities or by popular acclaim, and defined as receivers of cult, creators of community, and conduits to the divine. A Catholic saint is verified by investigation under canon law and legitimated by the church, one of the most powerful institutions of medieval Europe. In contrast, Daoist saints prove their transcendence by the manner of their departure: their perfection is verified when they do not die and decompose, but instead ascend to heaven leaving either no corpse at all or a light and fragrant shell. And Daoist saints are legitimated by their ties to two of the most important social systems of medieval China: lineage and bureaucracy. They are placed within a school lineage and granted a posthumous position in the celestial bureaucracy. Thus verification is linked to proof of body's incorruptibility, while legitimization is linked to inclusion in a Daoist fictive family and lineage, and assignment of heavenly office.⁷

⁵For Daoism, its history and texts, see Kohn 2000, 2001; Bokenkamp 1997; Robinet 1997; and Kirkland 2004. On Tang-dynasty Daoism, see Barrett 1996; Kirkland 1997; Kohn and Kirkland 2000.

⁶For relevant studies, see Kohn 1989; Cahill 1990; Robinet 1993; Eskildsen 1998.

⁷On the process of sanctification in the Catholic church, see Woodward 1990. On sainthood in the western middle ages, see Brown 1981; Vauchez 1997. All three follow a long tradition of scholarship that assumes the importance of saints and hagiographies in medieval western history. This contrasts with the attitudes of several great early twentieth century historians of China, such as Hu Shih (1891-1962), who scorned Daoism and Buddhism as products of a backward era that posed obstacles in the path of China's modern-

Gender Roles in the Tang

Gender roles during the Tang dynasty were heir to the ideas and customs of earlier eras. Concepts still governing understanding of women's roles in the Tang include *neiwai* 内外 (literally, "inside and outside"). This is the Chinese version of the model of gender relations sometimes called "separate spheres" in which the men work and operate outside the household in the worlds of agriculture and public life, while the women live and work within the household, taking charge of child-raising and the domestic economy. While separate spheres denotes distinctions in location, the Chinese folk expression "men till and women weave" expresses the difference in terms of economic function. Another concept informing female and male roles is that of yin and yang. Yin, originally the shady bank of the river or side of the hill, represents the dark, wet, passive, responsive female force. Yang represents the bright, hot, active, creative male force.

By the Han dynasty, yin and yang come to represent equal and opposite forces in the universe, constantly acting upon one another to create and maintain the world. This implies a certain equality in the value of male and female; yin-yang duality has often been used by Chinese feminists to find something positive and worth keeping in past traditions. Later more negative connotations attach to yin, and the term comes to imply something inferior or even harmful. Another model, suggesting the lower position of women compared to men in the social hierarchy, is that of *san-zong* 三從, literally: "the three follows." This suggests that a woman follows, that is: takes her status from and obeys, men in her family at all stages of her life. As a child, she follows her father, as a young wife, she follows her husband, and as an elderly widow, she follows her oldest son. One final expression important in understanding gender roles in early China is *nannü zhi bie* 男女之別, literally: "distinctions between men and women." This implies that men and women are and should be different. Taken together, these ideas and expressions assume that men and women are distinguishable, that certain activities and places are appropriate for each, and that women follow men in the gender hierarchy.

Women in early Chinese society were expected to conform to norms that later came to be called "Confucian ideals." According to classical literature, medical texts, and books on appropriate behavior written especially

zation and strength. Chinese scholars in general, from the second half of the twentieth century on, have started to recognize the importance of religion in Chinese history. On the process of making Daoist female saints in China, see Cahill 1999.

for women, women were to be virtuous, hard working, and filial. Their greatest duty as loyal subjects and filial daughters-in-law was to bear and raise sons for the patriline into which they married. Their own interests were subordinated to or identified with the interests of their family.⁸

The Tang dynasty has the reputation of being a good time for women. Several famous women of the period, such as the empress Wu Zetian 吳則天 (d. 705) and the beauty Yang Guifei 楊貴妃 (d. 756), are well known even today. Bound feet were still in the future. Women could inherit property and widows could remarry. Many factors account for women's relative power and prestige during this time. The Tang ruling family derived partly from nomadic tribes in Central Asia, generally referred to as *hu* 胡 (Turkish or barbarian) in classical literature. They had different and more relaxed notions of the proper roles and work of women. In addition, intermarriage between powerful clans intensified during the Tang dynasty, with women from prominent families becoming highly desirable as wives. The positions of women from the great clans in their husbands' families depended to some extent on the political clout their original families maintained in society.⁹

Tang Women had more political power, personal freedom, and chances for social prominence than in the following period, when Li-school thinkers (known in the West as Neo-Confucians) were to assert that a virtuous woman could not be talented. Still, we must not lose sight of the many significant restrictions placed on Tang women by patriarchal law, custom, and social ideals. As our biographies show, this was not exactly a golden age for the liberation of Chinese women, although it was a time in which some women found great opportunities for leadership and accomplishment.

Women and Daoism in the Tang

Religion was a source of both power and constraint for medieval Chinese women. The belief that yin force was equal and opposite to the yang force in Daoist cosmology was extended, however unevenly, to women's power and prestige in the Daoist church. Women played important roles in the Daoist religion from its earliest beginnings in the Celestial Masters and Great Peace schools of the Later Han dynasty. Even before the Tang, women contributed to Daoist ritual, practice, teachings, and institutional

⁸ For studies of this aspect of Chinese women, see Raphals 1998; Hinsch 2002.

⁹ See Tung 2000; Deng 2003; Yao 2004.

life, both as leaders and followers. Along with nuns, priestesses, and laywomen, there were prominent female Daoist saints, hermits, and wonderworkers. Daoist scriptures, like those of the Buddhists, show a range of attitudes towards women.

The attitudes displayed by Daoist and Buddhist texts alike concerning women's social and family roles reflect the surrounding culture more than any fundamental teachings of the faith. The Daoist church provided both female clergy and laywomen with opportunities to acquire education and play leadership roles in society and politics. And the Daoist church, much like the Buddhist, provided a social and economic safety net for women in need. Daoist female deities and saints provided women with devotional foci and models for their spiritual lives. Famous and infamous Daoist women of the Tang, including princesses such as Jade Verity (Yuzhen 玉真, ordained 711), imperial consorts such as Yang Guifei (d. 756), and nun-poets such as Yu Xuanji 魚玄機 (d. 868) served as examples of female agency.¹⁰

While many accounts of Daoist female figures are found scattered throughout the Daoist canon, Du Guangting's collection is the first and only text to present exclusively the lives of female Daoists. In Du's day, there were already well-known collections devoted to the lives of Buddhist nuns and exemplary Confucian women. Perhaps the author intended to supply a set of Daoist biographies to rival those. In addition, the textual record suggests that through the end of the Tang dynasty, Daoist women and men engaged in roughly the same practices and rituals. After the Tang, special Daoist practices for women appear, clearly intended to separate them and distinguish their activities from those of men. Du Guangting's sequestering of women's biographies in his collection prefigures the segregation between men and women in Daoist life and practice that occurs in the following period.

Women and Buddhism in the Tang

Du Guangting considered Chinese Buddhism his most important competition. Du frequently compared Daoism and Buddhism, arguing that Daoism was superior to Buddhism as a religious choice for women in particular, as well as for society as a whole. While there are distinctions

¹⁰On women and Daoism, see Despeux and Kohn 2003. On Daoist nuns, see Zhou 2004. On equality between men and women in Daoism, see Anderson 1994. To compare the history of nuns in the West, see McNamara 1996. On fasting and women in medieval Europe, see Bynum 1987.

between women's roles in the Buddhist and Daoist religions, there are also similarities.

Buddhism, originally imported from India along the Silk Road, was transformed and domesticated by the beginning of the Tang dynasty. The Buddhist religion was a rich, prestigious, and powerful institution, supported by people and rulers alike. Buddhist scriptures show a broad range of attitudes towards women, from the most misogynistic writings of early celibate monks portraying women as lewd temptresses, to later Mahayana scriptures arguing that women as well as men possessed a buddha nature and could be enlightened.

The Chinese had translated the *Vinaya* or monastic rules for nuns, and nuns lived in convents in the capital and elsewhere throughout the realm. A great early sixth century work, the *Biqiuni zhuan* 比丘尼傳 (Transmissions Concerning [the Lives of] Nuns),¹¹ detailing their heroic contributions to society and to the faith, was an important model for Du Guangting in writing his biographies of Daoist female figures. Eminent women Buddhists, such as Sui Wendi's mother and Empress Wu Zetian, provided models of women wielding power. Inscriptions in cave temples near Luoyang and Dunhuang show the prominence of nuns as patrons of religious art. The same inscriptions reveal that many laywomen devotees also controlled wealth and used it to make donations to the Buddhist church. The Buddhist order for women provided great opportunities for women to gain an education, live independently of the patriarchal family system, and exercise social leadership and influence.

Most women, however, did not take holy orders. For laywomen, Buddhism offered social and religious support. The Buddhist deity known as Guanyin, often depicted as female after the Tang dynasty, personified the virtue of compassion, and was a figure of devotion believed to bring women children and salvation from all kinds of disasters. Chinese laywomen living in the family also had to cope with the Buddhist version of ritual impurity adhering to childbirth. The Chinese family system required that they bear sons. Yet popular Buddhist belief held that women who had given birth had to atone for a sea of blood released by childbearing. Unless the proper religious rituals performed by their filial children rescued them, they would live forever in the lowest hells after death. Tang Buddhism provided a broad and often contradictory range of attitudes towards women and models for them to follow.¹²

¹¹ This important collection is translated in Tsai 1994.

¹² For women in Buddhism in general, see Paul 1980. A comprehensive study of Guanyin is found in Yü 2001. On gender politics in traditional China, see Lai 1999.

The Author

Du Guangting (850-933) was a native of Guancang in Chuzhou (modern Zhejiang). As a young man, he failed the imperial exam in the classics, then moved to Mount Tiantai. Better known in the Tang as a Buddhist than a Daoist holy place, Mount Tiantai was sacred to both religions. There Du prepared himself for the Daoist priesthood. He became one of the greatest masters of the Shangqing school, the Daoist tradition that emphasized self-cultivation. This school appealed especially to the official class and royal family. Du joined the court of the Tang emperor Xizong (r. 874-888) as an official and as a Daoist master.

In 881, during the rebellion of Huang Chao 黃巢 (d. 884), Du followed Xizong into exile in Chengdu, Sichuan. He returned to the capital with the emperor and his entourage in 885. The last date specifically named in Du Guangting's text is 886. Emperor Xizong died in 888. In the meantime his military commander, Wang Jian 王建 (847-918), was taking control of Sichuan. He was ruler there by 891, founding a kingdom known as Former Shu. Du Guangting was honored at the new court and awarded high positions and grand titles, including his best known honorific title "Prior-Born of Broad Completion," bestowed upon him in 913. Du signs off his introduction to the collection with that honorific, suggesting he completed the book shortly after 913, unless the epithet was added later. During Wang Jian's reign, Du was tutor to the heir apparent. When his student took the throne as the second Former Shu sovereign, Wang Yan 王衍 (r. 919-925), Du received further honors and titles, including that of Celestial Master who Transmits Truth, before retiring to Mount Qingcheng at the summit of the Mingshan range.

Du Guangting was a prolific editor and author, many of whose works survive today in the *Zhengtong Daozang* 正通道藏 ("Daoist Canon of the Rectified Unity Reign Period; 1445). Of his numerous works, in addition to the present text, those most relevant to this study concern ritual procedures, holy places, and relations of the Daoist church with the Chinese imperium. Du Guangting tried in his writings to unite the two main teachings of his time, Shangqing and Lingbao, under the leadership of his own school. All of Du's works, including the present one, glorify both Daoism and his school.¹³

¹³On the life and works of Du Guangting, see Verellen 1989. I have generally followed Verellen in matters of dating Du Guangting's career and works. See also Bell 1987; Yang 2000; Luo 2003a; 2003b. Luo cites the many worthwhile studies undertaken by Chinese scholars in recent decades, and raises several fascinating questions on the biographical

Du Guangting's book of holy women has several expressed purposes. In his introduction to the text, Du states his desire to record the lives of women saints neglected by other sources, to link his female subjects in a religious lineage that joins past and present, and to show the great variety of valid paths to the Way. He recommends these saints as authentic and worthy of veneration. He also intends to demonstrate that adepts can and must seek their own salvation through religious practice. And he praises the Tang dynasty for producing such auspicious signs of heaven's approval as living saints.

A careful reading of the whole text also suggests some motivations that Du Guangting does not state directly. His hidden agendas are not directly related to gender, but include concerns that pervade most of his writings. Du wants to clarify points of Daoist doctrine. He argues for the superiority of Daoism over Buddhism, for the unification of the Daoist church, and for the exaltation of his school over others. He wants to explain local cults to individual saints in a way that will bring these cults into his school and make them acceptable to his audience of literati officials and Daoist leaders. He wishes to save Daoist records from the chaos attendant upon the end of the Tang dynasty, encourage imperial and literati patronage of the Daoist church, and promote the Daoist religion as a means of salvation in troubled times. He wants to ally the Daoist church with the imperial bureaucracy and with Confucian values such as loyalty and filial piety. He supports the legitimacy of the Tang court in exile in Chengdu, laying the groundwork for his own future service in the subsequent Former Shu court there. Intentionally or not, by separating women's biographies, Du reinforced the separation of men and women in all aspects of life that was to increase in severity and momentum during the subsequent Song dynasty.

The Text

Song imperial bibliographers list Du Guangting's hagiographical account of Daoist holy women, the *Yongcheng jixian lu* 壩城集仙錄 (Records of the Assembled Transcendents of the Fortified Walled City) and state that it was ten scrolls in length and contained 109 separate accounts. Today a work of this title is preserved in two different versions in the *Daozang* of

study of Du Guangting, including the possibility that there existed two authors named Du Guangting, some of whose works may have been conflated by modern scholars.

the Ming dynasty. One recension (DZ 783)¹⁴ contains thirty-seven separate accounts; the other consists of twenty-seven accounts, collected in the authoritative Song-dynasty encyclopedia *Yunji qiqian* 雲笈七籤 (Seven Slips from a Bookbag of Clouds, DZ 1032), chs. 114-16. Du Guangting's preface says that his collection is ten scrolls in length, but the longest version extant today is only six scrolls long. Perhaps at some point editors divided the original work and added additional material. Also, a further twenty-six lives derived from Du Guangting's original work appear in the Song imperial encyclopedia *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 (Broad Records from the Era of Great Peace), chs. 56-70. If we eliminate biographies that are repeated, a total of seventy-nine of Du's original accounts are preserved today.

Of the twenty-six lives in the *Taiping guangji*, nine tell the stories of figures also recounted in one of the *Daozang* editions, but they are shorter and less detailed. They also contain significant differences in plot and characterization. I conclude that these accounts may retain the outline of Du Guangting's original work, but they have been abbreviated and altered too much to be counted as authentic examples of his hagiographical corpus.

The two versions preserved in the *Daozang* deserve further study as works by Du Guangting. They have only two biographies in common: those of the Queen Mother of the West and the Mysterious Woman of the Nine Heavens. The two overlapping biographies are virtually identical in both versions. But other than these two shared accounts, the two editions of Du Guangting's records differ in subject matter and purpose. The first text mentioned above (DZ 783) narrates the lives of major and minor celestial goddesses and spells out their ranks and duties. This text could help a Daoist adept to visualize the goddesses as part of meditative practice, or let a believer know the appropriate deity to call upon for help in a specific situation.¹⁵

¹⁴ "DZ" stands for *Daozang* (Daoist Canon). Texts in this collection are referred to according to numbers in Komjathy 2002; Schipper and Verellen 2004. The *Yongcheng jixian lu* is found in 30: 24154-207 of the reduced 60-volume edition (Taipei: Yiwen, 1977).

¹⁵ While I do not pursue the study of DZ 783 here, I do not mean to disparage it. Organizing the gods according to identity and rank is a great service. The gods and goddesses of Daoism are numerous and complex, many of them with multiple names and appearances. Du Guangting follows the example of the earlier Shangqing master Tao Hongjing (456-536), whose work he certainly knew. Tao clarified the roles and ranks of both gods and goddesses in his *Zhenling weiye tu* (Chart of the Ranks and Functions of Realized Ones and Numina, DZ 167).

In contrast, the second version in the *Yunji qiqian* (hereafter abbreviated YJQQ) begins with the lives of two heavenly goddesses, but then devotes the majority of its entries to biographies of women who started out as mortal human beings. It is this second version that I translate below. It interests me more than the first for several reasons. For one, most of its subjects started life as human women living on this earth in identifiable historical periods. As we will see, the biographies have wildly varying degrees of historical plausibility, but they have the potential to reveal more information about real women in Chinese history than goddess narratives.

This version also seems more authoritative on a number of counts. First, it includes Du Guangting's own preface. Secondly, the Song dynasty editors of the YJQQ found this recension the most convincing and included it in their work. Thirdly, I believe that this version of the text hangs together as a whole, forming a lineage register recording the transmission of Daoist teachings from deities in the heavens to human women on earth.

The term *lu* 錄 in the title of Du's text, which I generally translate "records," is also used to designate Daoist registers of deities and lineages. This religious genealogy begins with the Queen Mother of the West, an eternal goddess whose special task was bestowing techniques and texts on humans, and proceeds in roughly chronological order through various Daoist female figures from the earliest times to Du Guangting's own era. Du Guangting himself suggests he has written a lineage document when he says, at the end of his preface, that he "gathered this flock of explanations [biographies] and collected them as the records of a single household." The term for household or family, *jia* 家, is commonly used for religious lineages. The Queen Mother appears at the beginning of the text as the ancestress of the women whose lives follow as well as the ultimate source of their texts and arts. Part of her name, *wangmu* 王母, which I usually translate "Queen Mother," is glossed in Han dynasty dictionaries as "ancestress." In this way, Du provides his subjects, even the unmarried and childless ones, with an ancestral lineage to care for them in the next world and bring them status in this one. He also combines accounts of women representing different traditions, to create a unified lineage. Du is both inclusive, pulling women into the history of Daoism, and exclusive, separating female from male figures.

Du Guangting's compilation covers twenty-seven biographies of varying lengths, including three goddesses and twenty-six women. (Two of the biographies have more than one subject.) They span the period from before creation up to Du's own lifetime. The author narrates the lives of the

nine saints who lived closest to his era in the richest detail. His hagiographical accounts all follow a similar structure, which derives from numerous sources. Official biographies in the dynastic histories rank first among Du's sources. These are called *zhuan* 傳 or "transmissions," a term that includes but is not limited to biographies. The organization and literary style have also been influenced by earlier "exemplary women's" biographies and by hagiographical accounts of Chinese Buddhist nuns. In addition, earlier Daoist hagiographical works and collections of "strange tales" (*zhiguai* 志怪) certainly influenced the author. And the miscellaneous short stories later called fiction (*xiaoshuo* 小說), so popular among Tang literati, must have been in Du's mind as he wrote his biographies. These fictional works also frequently covered narratives of the lives of extraordinary individuals and their trials, conflicts, and accomplishments. Du must also have competed with the powerful and popularizing example of Buddhist transformation tales such as those found at Dunhuang on the Silk Road. Finally, public and private epitaphs along with family and religious genealogies or lineage registers provided a model for Du's "Records."¹⁶

Du Guangting's style is dense and allusive, combining material from many works available to him that are no longer extant. He also weaves miracles and wonders together with observations on social institutions and everyday life in Tang China. These complexities can make translation and interpretation challenging, but the work repays the effort. The "Records of the Assembled Transcendents" is a primary source unequalled in its richness for investigating the social and religious history of medieval Chinese women.

Form of a Typical Biography: The Life Cycle of a Daoist Female Saint

The biographies vary in length from one paragraph to many pages, but they all follow a similar and predictable format, covering the life and times of the subject in chronological order and addressing certain key questions. They combine the formal structure of a dynastic biography with the religious concerns of a Daoist master. They proceed through certain important stages in the religious development of the subjects. The

¹⁶ On official biographies, see Cutler and Crowell 1999; Mou 1999, 2004. For studies of strange tales, see Campamy 1996; DeWoskin and Crump 1996. A study of Dunhuang transformation tales is found in Mair 1989.

typical life cycle of a female Daoist practitioner found in Du Guangting's accounts fits into what we might call a quest narrative or pilgrim's progress, following a journey or path of life that includes obstacles, ordeals, and tests. The subject faces struggles, contests, and challenges that lead her to discipline, transformation, and liberation. She assumes such roles as teacher, warrior, magician, or leader. Each saint models a path to Daoist salvation; the individual details of each one's life make her unique.

Du Guangting's accounts open with information about the saint's ancestors, immediate family, and place of origin. This locates her in time, space, and social class. Du may also include her family's religious background. Here we see great diversity, as though Du was trying to be as inclusive as possible.

Next Du turns to the childhood experiences of his subject, including the presence or absence of family support for the individual's Daoist practice.¹⁷ Childhood is often the time for the saint's first experience of contradictions in values between filial piety and her religious vocation. Du may describe her appearance and health, her material life and circumstances. In covering her childhood, Du also reports on his subject's education, providing valuable evidence about female literacy in medieval times. Early evidence of her vocation, such as devotion, precocity, and virtue, along with evidence of her special selection, such as magical powers or visits from divinities, may also appear during her childhood. She begins her religious practice, expressing faith, and performing good works (especially *yin'gong* 陰功 or "hidden good works"). She may even begin ascetic practices.

Childhood ends with her second big struggle: the marriage crisis. Around puberty, conflict may arise between a subject and her family over whether or not she is to marry. As Du Guangting says in his introduction, marriage or "the Way of one yin and one yang" can be a religious vocation for some Daoists. Cases of companionate marriages occur among Du's subjects. And traditional Chinese social and familial values demand marriage. To be a filial daughter and a loyal subject, a woman must marry. But for some, religious vocation demands celibacy. Celibacy in this context has a range of meanings from temporary abstinence from sexual intercourse to lifelong virginity. In social terms, it means refusal to reproduce; asceticism denies offspring to her husband's ancestral line. Ritual purity may at times, or even for a lifetime, demand abstinence from sexual activity. And Daoist texts often regard sexual intercourse as a drain of *jing* 精 (essence) and *qi* 氣 (breath or vital energy) that the prac-

¹⁷ Childhood in Tang China is an understudied subject. See Kinney 1995; 2004.

tioner needs to save for religious practices. For such female adepts, marriage is an obstacle. Some go so far as to mutilate themselves so that they become unmarriageable, or even to commit suicide to avoid marriage. And some married women claim sickness as a pretext to avoid intercourse.

Some women who do not marry may become hermits, wanderers, or wonderworkers. Others enter the convent. Along with professed religious vocation, we can identify several reasons women enter convents. They may be given to the convent by their parents to honor a vow or save the child from illness or want. They may become nuns to escape a life of poverty, in response to a charismatic or healing master, or to avoid marriage and childbirth. Members of the imperial harem may enter holy orders after retiring, at the death of the emperor, or as a temporary measure intended to purify themselves between marriage to one royal family member and another. On the positive side, they may join to attain freedom and literacy or the opportunity to become social or political leaders. When a woman enters a convent, the convent then becomes her family, according to Tang law as well as to her own self-concept.¹⁸

After figuring out where and how she is to live, the subject enters the stage of mature religious practice. In a household, convent, or hermitage, in sickness or in health, most subjects make the contributions that earn them transcendence during this phase of life. The saint may engage in good works, the more secretly the better, such as feeding starving people and animals or burying abandoned corpses. She may act explicitly on behalf of the Daoist church by restoring shrines, relics, and holy places. She may strike blows for Daoism against the rival faith, Buddhism. Some subjects defend their bodies against the evil intentions of libidinous Buddhist monks, or protect shrines from Buddhist vandals. Others argue forcefully with Buddhist thinkers. They may weave or embroider industriously and skillfully, putting women's work in the service of devotion to the deities or financial support of the convent. They may teach and lead people in the convent or outside it, contributing to the wellbeing of others and the transmission of the Dao.

Several of Du's subjects involve themselves with Daoist rites. They receive and promulgate new ceremonies. They perform, lead, and teach

¹⁸ The law code of the Tang dynasty is the first Chinese law code surviving in its entirety. In the section on general principles, chapter six, article fifty-seven concerns Daoist priests and nuns. Article 57.2a states: "The relationship of Daoist and Buddhist priests and nuns to their masters is the same as for paternal uncles and aunts." Article 57.2b continues: "The master's relationship to his [or her] disciples is the same as for nephews and nieces in the male line." See Johnson 1979; 1997.

rituals. They read, chant, and copy ritual texts, and transmit them to others. Along with rituals that benefit the human community, Du's subjects engage in Daoist religious practices intended to lead to individual transcendence. These include techniques of ascetic self-cultivation such as calisthenics, fasting, and celibacy. After perfecting asceticism, they may progress to meditation practices including breathing exercises, visualization, inner alchemy, and ingesting divine vapors.

The good works, asceticism, and meditative practices lead to rewards for the subject. She will be free from social and physical constraints. She may gain supernatural skills such as flight, communication with animals, the ability to disappear, and multiplying foods. She will retain youthfulness, beauty, and good health in old age. She may live centuries. These fruits of the faith provide evidence of her perfection.

Finally, at the end of her earthly life, each subject undergoes her ultimate transformation, from this world to the next. Often a deity gives the saint a prediction of her time for departure. She thus knows and controls her own end. There are two main methods by which she can take leave. The first, also the rarest and most prestigious, is ascension to heaven in broad daylight in the presence of witnesses. The second is liberation by means of the corpse (*shijie* 尸解), in which the subject appears to die and to leave a corpse behind for burial. But the body she leaves is in fact just an empty husk, light as a beetle's carapace, and the adept has escaped secretly to the heavens.¹⁹ Either of these forms of departure is sufficient evidence to affirm her transcendence. Additionally, in both cases the subject's corpse does not decay. Her body remains beautiful and youthful; her hair might even keep growing. She emits a miraculous fragrance rather than the stench of rotting flesh. This odor of sanctity is another proof of her perfection. Her departure reveals her perfection and is an important moment in the formation of her cult.²⁰

Also important to cult formation is the subject's afterlife. After her career in this world among humans, she takes up a post in the heavenly bureaucracy. Whereas a regular dynastic biography ends with posthumous official positions awarded by the emperor to the subject as an honor, a Daoist hagiography often closes with bestowal of celestial positions that Daoists take literally. Entering a Daoist lineage and the celestial bureaucracy, she is legitimized as a saint. Her afterlife will continue in cult, ritual,

¹⁹ On this form of ascension, see Robinet 1976a; Cedzich 2001.

²⁰ This life cycle has remained classical for female Daoist saints as can be seen from the legend of He Xiangyu, one of the Eight Immortals. See Jordan and Overmyer 1986, 56-57; Grant 1995, 37-38. It is, moreover, also typical for Buddhist saints and female saviors. See Levering 1989; Grant 1995.

images, and in Du Guangting's account. Her ascension provides hope for other believers, both male and female.

Other Sources

Several types of text supply valuable comparative information on women in Tang China to help us understand Du Guangting's "Records of the Assembled Transcendents." One is Buddhist writings, including both hagio-graphical writings such as the *Biqiuni zhuan* and Buddhist canonical literature found in the *Vinaya* (Monastic Rules) and *Sutra* (Sermons of the Buddha) sections of the *Taisho Tripitaka* or Chinese/Japanese Buddhist canon in its 1910 edition. Another important type of source is found in Daoist hagio-graphies such as the *Liexian zhuan* 列仙傳 (Transmissions Concerning Arrayed Transcendents, DZ 294) of the Han dynasty and the *Shenxian zhuan* 神仙傳 (Transmissions Concerning Divine Transcendents),²¹ contained in the *Daozang jiyao* 道藏輯要 (Collected Essentials of the Daoist Canon), a supplement to the Daoist Canon. Other Daoist canonical literature includes texts on ritual and meditation.

Then there are imperial encyclopedias, such as the *Taiping guangji*, and official dynastic histories, especially the *Jiu Tangshu* 舊唐書 (Old Book of the Tang), and *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書 (New Book of the Tang). In addition, poetry collections such as the *Quan Tangshi* 全唐詩 (Complete Tang Poetry), *Tang caizi zhuan* 唐才子傳 (Transmissions Concerning Talented Tang [People]), and *Tangshi jishi* 唐詩記事 (Recorded Anecdotes Concerning Tang Poetry), provide insight into women's inner lives. Exemplary and prescriptive literature for women, such as the *Lienü zhuan* 列女傳 (Transmissions Concerning Arrayed Women), attributed to the Han scholar Liu Xiang 劉向 (ca. 79-8 B.C.E.); Lady Ban Zhao's 班昭 *Nüjie* 女戒 (Precepts for Women); the *Nü Lunyu* 女論語 (Analects for Women); and the *Nü Xiaojing* 女孝經 (Classic of Filial Piety for Women), reveal contemporaneous perceptions of women's virtues.²² Fictional prose accounts of women by Tang and later literati such as Huangfu Mei, Mori Ogai,

²¹ The *Liexian zhuan* is translated in Kaltenmark 1953, and the *Shenxian zhuan* in Company 2002.

²² On the Han Dynasty courtier, historian, and essayist Ban Zhao, see Swann 2001. On exemplary women's biographies, see Lee 2003; Mou 1999. For women's moral precepts and filial piety, see Wang 2003; Ebrey 2003.

and Robert van Gulik, show how these women have been understood then and later, in China and elsewhere.²³

Important Terms

Chen 辰, “chronograms,” refers to the asterisms recognized by Chinese astronomers along the paths of the moon and planets across the sky. They include the twelve stations of Jupiter on the ecliptic, analogous to the twelve signs of our zodiac, and the twenty-eight lunar lodgings. They are used in many scales of keeping time, from the hours of the day to the sixty year cycles of the almanac and the official Chinese calendar. “Chrono-” comes from the time-keeping function of these asterisms, and “-gram” from the idea that they make a pattern.²⁴

Guan 觀, “belvedere,” refers to a Daoist temple or sometimes a convent or monastery. The Chinese term indicates a good view or a place for viewing the heavens, and so belvedere with its root meaning of beautiful vista seems suitable. The institution matches the Buddhist *si* 寺, originally the name of a government office, that refers to a temple or monastery compound.

Jing 景, “phosphors,” refers to heavenly bodies of exceptional brightness, suggesting a divine message, being, or purpose. The sun and moon are referred to as *erjing* 二景, “the two phosphors.”

Sanshi 三尸, “three corpses,” also known as the “three worms,” form part of Daoist psycho-physiology. They represent hostile forces within the adept’s own body that conspire to thwart the adept’s efforts to achieve perfection through Daoist practices, even if that means killing the adept. They must be destroyed or at least brought under control for a person to make progress in spiritual cultivation.²⁵

Shijie 尸解, “liberation by means of the corpse,” refers to a process of attaining transcendence. The adept who has perfected himself or herself appears to die, leaving behind a corpse suitable for burial, but in fact the dead body is an illusion, and the adept has already departed for the

²³See Kelly 1978; Mori 1951; Van Gulik 1968. These three sources shed light on Yu Xuanji, a Tang-dynasty Daoist nun who does not appear in Du Guangting’s account, but whose life provides insights and comparative materials. For a study, see Cahill 2002.

²⁴The translations for *chen*, *jing*, and *wuyue* were devised by Edward H. Schafer (1977a, 5-6).

²⁵For a study of these divine parasites, see Kohn 1995b.

heavens. Sometimes this method of transformation is compared to the shedding of a cicada's carapace.

Wuyue 五岳, "Five Marchmounts," refers to five sacred mountains that in ancient times were believed to stand at the four outposts and the center of the habitable world. Ancient kings, such as Mu of the Zhou Dynasty and the Martial Thearch of the Han dynasty, would periodically tour their realms on horseback, with these holy mountains marking the boundaries of their marches. Important in ancient China, the marchmounts are deeply embedded in Daoist ritual and imagination. During the Tang dynasty, as noted earlier, the Five Marchmounts included Mount Tai located in modern Shandong in the east, Mount Heng in Hunan in the south, Mount Song in Henan in the center, Mount Hua in Shanxi in the west, and Mount Heng in Shaanxi in the north.

Xian 仙, also written 僊, "transcendent" or "immortal," refers to a Daoist ideal being, who has transcended the human condition, including mortality. Daoist adepts were believed to ascend to transcendence after a life of religious practice. The translation "transcendent" comes from the root meaning of the word: "to leap over."

Yinde 陰德, "hidden virtue," refers to good works that are performed secretly with no expectation of reward or fame. The term especially applies to acts of compassion such as feeding starving animals or people, caring for the sick and needy, and burying abandoned corpses. *Yin'gong* 陰功, "hidden good works," is a synonym for *yinde*. Good works in general, and especially hidden good works, were the Daoist answer to the popular Buddhist idea of good karma. The notion of karma developed in India in the sixth century B.C.E., in response to persistent questions about reincarnation. Karma is a system of accounting for good and bad deeds; when an individual dies, the good and bad karma is measured. If good prevails, the individual gets a fortunate rebirth. If bad prevails, the person may be reborn as an animal, hungry ghost, or even as a denizen of hell. Karma, in combination with rebirth, explains social injustice while promoting social stability. The Daoists took over this useful and comforting notion, and renamed it "good works," *de* 德 or *gong* 功.

Zhenren 真人, "perfected," or "realized person" refers to a person who has achieved the Daoist ideal of perfection, including immortality, through religious self-cultivation. These perfected beings reside for the most part in the Daoist heavens; they may teach or transmit texts to mortals.

Zhuan 傳, “transmissions,” refers to texts or teachings that have been transmitted from one person (or deity) to another. Such transmissions include biographies, such as those included in the dynastic histories. But *zhuan* is not limited to biographies; in the dynastic histories it can refer to essays on important groups, such as the essay on the border people known as Xiongnu in the *Shiji* 史記 (Records of the Historian) of Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145–85 B.C.E.). In Daoist contexts, *zhuan* can refer to a teaching or indeed to the Dao itself that is being transmitted.

Format and Conventions

In the chapters that follow, I introduce, translate, and annotate the “Records of the Assembled Transcendents of the Fortified Walled City.” I begin with Du Guangting’s own preface to the work, and continue through the entries in the order in which they appear in the YJQQ version of the text. The biographies are grouped in four sections, according to types of subject, in the following order: goddesses, matriarchs, inhabitants of the grotto heavens, and Tang saints and transcendents. In most cases, an individual introduction precedes each translation, and notes follow. (The exception is the inhabitants of the grotto heavens, who receive a collective introduction.) The individual introductions set the context, clarify specific issues, and link the particular sections of text with themes outlined in this chapter.²⁶

The Chinese text of the YJQQ version of Du Guangting’s “Record” is included below as an appendix. References to the page numbers in the Chinese text are inserted where appropriate in my translations.

Tang emperors and their reign titles—official mottos given to signify the relevance of the age—are mentioned on occasion, especially in the biographies of Tang saints (Part 4). The dates of rule and the exact dates of the reign titles that occur in the text are as follows:²⁷

Taizong	626-649	Honorable Outlook	23 Jan. 627—7 Feb. 650
Gaozong	664-666	Qilin Virtue	2 Feb. 664—14 Feb. 666

²⁶ I use *pinyin* romanization throughout, except when quoting or citing sources that use Wade-Giles or other systems. Tang reign periods follow Kroll 1984. Dates in the Chinese sixty-unit cycle are romanized in *pinyin*, then translated by a letter A–J for the ten stems followed by one of the twelve animals of the Chinese zodiac for the twelve stems. For example: a *wuchen*, “E-Dragon” year.

²⁷ The dates and translations follow Kroll 1984.

Ruizong	684-690 710-712	Cultured Illumination Spectacular Cloud	27 Feb. 684—19 Oct. 684 19 Aug. 710—1 Mar. 712
Wu Zetian	690- 705	Prolonged Longevity	23 Oct. 692—9 June 694
Xuanzong	712-756	Opened Prime Heavenly Treasure	22 Dec. 713—9 Feb. 742 9 Feb. 742—12 Aug. 756
Daizong	762- 779	Great Calendar	18 Dec. 766—12 Feb. 780
Shunzong	Feb.-Sept., 805	Eternal Probity	1 Sept. 805—25 Jan. 806
Xianzong	805- 820	Primal Accord	25 Jan. 806—9 Feb. 821
Yizong	859-873	Broad Illumination Radiant Disclosure	17 Dec. 860—17Dec. 874 2 Apr. 885—7 Apr. 888