This volume is dedicated to

Liu Wuji 柳無忌 (1907–2002)

who introduced me to Tang tales

and Karl S. Y. Kao 高辛勇 (1940–2011)

who helped me to read them carefully
“Seng Qixu” 僧契虚
(Monk Attached to Emptiness)1

by Zhang Du 张读 (fl. late 9th century)
translated by Tobias Benedikt Zürn

There was a monk Qixu 契虚 (Attached to Emptiness).2 Originally, he was a son of the Li 李 family from Guzang 姑臧.3 His father was a yushi 御史 (censor)4 at the time of Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (685–762, r. 712–756).5 From his childhood on, Qixu liked the Buddhist dharma.6 At the age of twenty,7 he shaved off his hair, wore coarse clothes, [and] lived in a Buddhist temple in Chang’an 长安.8

When [An] Lushan 安禄山 (ca. 703–757) broke through the Tongguan 潼關 (Tong Pass),9 Xuanzong went west to favour Shumen 蜀門 (the Gateway to Shu) with a visit.10 Qixu hid away in Taibo shan 太白山 (Mount Taibo),11 gathered boye 柏葉 (cypress needles) and ate them.12 From then on, he cut himself off from grain.13 One day, a Daoist master, Qiao Jun 喬君 (Lord Qiao),14 [whose] appearance was pure and emaciated,15 [his] beard and sideburns were fully white, came to visit Qixu. He said to Qixu: “Master, your spirit and bones are peerless and elegant.16 Afterward, you will be welcomed to travel17 to the xiandu 仙都 (city of ascended beings).”18 Qixu said: “I am a man of the dusty world,19 how could I visit the capital of ascended beings?” Qiao Jun said: “The capital of ascended beings is extremely close. You,
Master, may try your best to go [there]." Therefore, Qixu asked Qiao Jun to guide his path. Qiao Jun said: "You, Master, may prepare food at the inn on Shangshan 商山 (Mount Shang).\textsuperscript{21} When you meet porters,\textsuperscript{22} then comfort [them] with food to eat on Mount Shang. When someone asks you where you’re going to, just tell him that you wish to travel to Zhichuan 稚川 (River of Youth).\textsuperscript{23} There should be a porter guiding you, Master, to go there." Having heard his words, Qixu was extremely happy.

When [An] Lushan was defeated, the emperor returned from Shumen to Chang’an.\textsuperscript{24} There were no incidents under heaven.\textsuperscript{25} Qixu went straight away to Mount Shang and dwelled in the inn. He prepared sweet and pure [foods] in order to wait for the porters and to offer food to them.\textsuperscript{26} After just a few months, he met more than one hundred porters and all of them left after having finished eating. Qixu’s will was a little weakened and he thought about having been deceived by Qiao Jun [and] he was about to return to Chang’an.\textsuperscript{27} [When] he had already packed up his things,\textsuperscript{28} on that night, a porter who was of extremely young age said to Qixu: \textsuperscript{29} "Where are you going, my Master?" Qixu said: "I hoped to travel to the River of Youth for many years." The porter said surprisingly: "The River of Youth is a seat of ascended beings.\textsuperscript{30} My Master, how would you be able to get there?" Qixu replied saying: "From my childhood on I began to like spirits and ascended beings. Once, I came upon an attained person\textsuperscript{31} and he encouraged me to travel to the River of Youth. How long is the way?" The porter said: "The River of Youth is extremely close. Would you really be able to go there with me, Master?" Qixu said: "Truly, if I could travel to the River of Youth, I could die without regret." Hence, the porter and Qixu both went up to Lantian 藍田 (Blue Fields) and prepared their equipment.\textsuperscript{32}

That night, they straight away ascended Yushan 玉山 (Jade Mountain).\textsuperscript{33} They waded through dangerous [ravines] and passed rocky peaks and [after] eighty li [about twenty-five miles] they reached a grotto.\textsuperscript{34} A stream came out of the grotto. The porter and Qixu lifted a stone together to fill the entrance of the cave in order to block up its flow.\textsuperscript{35} After three days, the stream out of the grotto had just been cut off. The two people both entered the grotto. In the murky darkness one could not distinguish [anything]. They saw one gate there a dozen miles away.\textsuperscript{36} In the end, gazing at the gate, they went [to it].\textsuperscript{37}

After they emerged from the grotto, the wind and sun were calm and gentle, the mountains and waters splendid and clear and truly it was the capital of spirits and ascended beings. They traveled for another hundred and more li and climbed a high mountain. This mountain was surrounded by peaks standing tall and straight, with a rocky trail, dangerous and steep. Qixu [felt] dizzy and confused and did not dare to climb [higher]. The porter said: "The capital of ascended beings is close by, why do you hesitate?"\textsuperscript{38} Then, he took [him] by the hand and they went [on]. As they reached the top of the mountain, at the summit, it was flat and even. Looking down to the rivers and the plains, [now] so distant as they were, they could not see them. After traveling another more than one hundred li, they entered a grotto. When they came out, they saw water amassed without limits.\textsuperscript{39} In the water was a stony path, a bit more than one chi 尺 (about one foot) in width and more than one hundred li in length.\textsuperscript{40} The porter led Qixu to go and follow the stony path.

They reached the foot of the mountain. In front of them was a huge tree, misty and shady, thriving and thick, and several thousand xun 仞 (fathoms) high.\textsuperscript{41} The porter climbed up the tree and gave a long whistle.\textsuperscript{42} [After whistling for] a while, an autumn wind was suddenly rising up out of the treetop.\textsuperscript{43} Soon, they saw a huge rope attached to a kitbag hanging down from the mountain top. The porter ordered Qixu to sit in the kitbag with [his] eyes closed.\textsuperscript{44}
Just half a day [later], the porter said: “You, Master, may wake up and [take a] look.”\(^45\) As Qixu gazed [around], he was already on the mountain top. He saw that there were a walled town and the gate towers of a palace,\(^46\) with pearls and jades reflecting radiantly on each other, beyond the rosy clouds.\(^47\) The porter pointed [to it] and said: “This is the River of Youth.” Hence, they went to that place together. They saw ascended lads,\(^48\) hundreds of groups, lined up from the front to the back. There was one ascended being that said to the porter: “What is this monk doing [here]? Isn’t he a human of the human world?” The porter said: “This monk constantly wished to travel to the River of Youth. Therefore, I led [him] to reach this [place].” Before long, they had ascended to a palace hall. There was one [person] who had fully pinned on an official’s hat.\(^49\) [His] appearance was very impressive sitting and leaning on a jade stool.\(^50\) The attendant guards were positioned in a circle. They shouted “Stop!” extremely severely. The porter ordered Qixu to pay respect and bow and said: “This is the Zhenjun 真君 (True Lord) of the River of Youth.”\(^51\) Qixu bowed and the True Lord ordered Qixu to come up. Holding court he said: “Did you break with the companionship of the sanpeng 三彭 (three peng)?”\(^52\) He [i.e. Qixu] was not able to respond. The True Lord said: “You really cannot remain in this [place].” Hence, he ordered the porter to climb to the Cuixiating 翠霞亭 (Pavilion of Malachite Clouds).

This pavilion was hanging in the air positioned on railings towering above the clouds. He saw one man, naked to the waste and flashing with [his] eyes. His hair was several ten chi long and [his skin/face] was oily and darkish black.\(^53\) His heart and eyes were clear and radiant. The porter said to Qixu: “You may pay respects and bow.” As Qixu bowed, he asked: “Who is this person? Why is he flashing with [his] eyes?”\(^54\) The porter said: “This person is Supernumerary Official (Wailang 外郎) Yang.\(^55\) The Supernumerary Official is a clan member of the royal family of the Sui 倚 [dynasty] (581–618). He became the Supernumerary Official of the Nangong 南宮 (Southern Palace).\(^56\) At the end of the Sui dynasty, all under heaven was divided and dismembered. Weapons and armors caused great trouble.\(^57\) Therefore, he withdrew from the world and resided in the mountains.\(^58\) Now, he has already reached the Dao. This is not the flashing of eyes; it is nothing but a penetrating gaze.\(^59\) The penetrating gaze looks over the human realm.” Qixu said: “Would you please wake up his eyes, could you?” The porter immediately asked the supernumerary official in person. Suddenly, he woke up and gazed in the four [directions], his radiance became increasingly clear like the shine of the sun and the moon. Qixu was afraid and [his] back sweat. [All his] hair stood on end. He saw another man sleeping beneath a stone cliff. The porter said: “This person’s last name is Yi 乙 and Zhirun 支潤 is his given name.\(^60\) He is also a human from the human realm who gained the Dao and arrived at this [place].”

Before long, the porter led Qixu to return [home] down the whole path that they had been walked through before. [While] following [him], Qixu asked the porter: “The one thing I strove for was to pay respect to the true lord. The true lord asked me about the companionship of the three peng, but I was not able to respond.” He [i.e. the porter] said: “The peng are the surnames of the sanshi 三尸 (three corpses). They constantly reside within human beings to investigate and observe their crimes. Whenever the gengshen ri 庚申 day arrives,\(^61\) they report [the crimes] to Shangdi 上帝 (Lord on High).\(^62\) Therefore, those that study ascended beings should first cut off their three corpses. If this is done then one may reach the spirits and ascended beings. If not, although one takes great pains, there won’t be a reward.” Qixu realized this matter and from there he returned. Accordingly, he dwelt on Mount Taibo. He cut off grain and ingested vapor (qixi
and he never talked to anyone about the matter of the River of Youth.

In the Zhenyuan 貞元 (785–805) [reign of Emperor Dezong 德宗 (742–805, r. 779–805)] Qixu migrated and resettled at the foot of Huashan華山 (Mount Hua). There were Zheng Shen 鄭申 from Xingyang 梓陽 and Shen Yu 沈直升 from Wuxing 吳興 who had both come out eastward from Chang’an through the [Tongguan] Pass and traveled to the foot of Mount Hua. When dusk fell and it began to rain heavily, the two men finally stopped. Because Qixu had cut off the grains, his kitchen was not set up to cook. Mr. Zheng felt it strange that he [i.e. Qixu] was not eating, yet, [his] bones and frame were solid and refined. Therefore, he sought the truth from him. Only then did Qixu report the story of the River of Youth to Zheng. Zheng was fond of the extraordinary and as he listened to his story, he sighed [for joy] and was startled. When they returned from east of the Pass, they reached Qixu’s dwelling again. Qixu had probably already fled and in the end no one knew where he was. Mr. Zheng once passed his story on, calling it Zhichuan Ji 稚川記 (Records from the River of Youth).

[Colophon:]
[The story] comes from the Xuanshi zhi 宣室志 (Records from the Spacious Hall).
至山下，前有巨木，隱影繁茂，高數千尋。拂子捲木長曆久之，
忽有秋風起於林杪。俄見巨繩系一行橐。自山頂而縈。拂子命契虛
願目坐堂中。

竟半日。拂子曰。師可唾而視矣。契虛既望，已在山頂，見有
城邑宮闕，璃玉交映，在雲物之外。拂子指語：「此稚川也。」於
是相與詣其所。見仙童百輩，羅列前後。有一仙人謂拂子曰：「此
僧何為者，豈非人間入乎。」拂子曰：「此僧常遊稚川，故至而
至此。」己而至一殿上，有具僧行者，貌甚偉，遜玉几而坐。侍衛
環列，呵禁極嚴。拂子命契虛問拜，且曰。此稚川真君也。契虛拜。
真君召契虛上，訊曰：「爾絕三彭之仇乎。不能對。」真君曰：
「真不可留於此。」因命拂子登翠霞亭。

其亭叵囚，居幽雲霧。見一人袒而瞬目，髪長數千尺，凝膩黯
黑，洞靈心目。拂子謂契虛曰：「爾可試而拜。」契虛既拜。且問
此人為誰。何瞬目乎。拂子曰：「此人楊外郎也。外郎隋氏宗室，
為外郎於南宮，屬隋末，天下分叛，兵甲大擾，因避地居山，今已
得道。此非瞬目。乃靈視也。夫靈視者，寓目於人世耳。」契虛曰。
請雋其目可乎。拂子即面請外郎。忽瞬而四視。其光益著，若日月
之照。契虛悚然背汗，毛髮盡勻。又見一人臥石壁之下。拂子曰：
「此人姓乙。支縫其名，亦人間之人，得道而至此。」

己而拂子引契虛歸，其道途皆前時之涉歷。契虛因問拂子曰。
吾向者見真君。真君問我三彭之仇。我不能對。曰：「彭者三尸
之姓。常居人中，伺儕其罪。每至庚申日，籍於上帝。故學仙者當
先絕其三尸。如是則神道可得，不然，雖苦其心無補也。」契虛悟
其事，自是而歸，因還於太白山，絕粒吸氣，未嘗以稚川之事語
於人。

貞元中，徙居華山下，有榮陽鄭紳，與吳興沈津，俱自長安東
出關，行至華山下，會天暮大雨，二人遂止。契虛以絕粒故，不致
凍餓。鄭君異其不食。而骨似良秀。因徵其實。契虛乃以稚川之事
告於鄭。鄭好奇者，既聞其事，且歎且驚。及自關東回，重至契虛
舍，其契虛已逝去，竟不知所在。鄭君常傳其事。謂之《稚川記》。
出《宜室志》。

Translator's Note

The story “Seng Qixu 僧契虛” ("Monk Qixu") is included in the Tai ping guangji 太平廣記 (The Extensive Gleanings of the Reign of Great Tranquility, hereafter TPG) compiled by Li Fang 李昉 (925–996) in the late tenth century. The narrative has not received much attention since its compilation. In contrast to other examples of Tang tales such as “Du Zichun” 杜子春, “Nanke Taishou zhanan 南柯太守傳 (An Account of the Governor of the Southern Branch), or “Li Wa zhanan 李娃傳 (The Tale of Li Wa), the plot of “Seng Qixu” has not been reworked into other narratives, dramas or poems. Qixu's story has remained mostly ignored.

At first glance, this matter does not surprise, for the story appears to be quite an ordinary example of the TPG's first section “Shen xian” 神仙 (Spirits and Ascended Beings). As many of these texts, it narrates a journey of a man into the mountains on his search for ascendency. On this trip, he meets many "supernatural" beings helping him to reach a xiandu 仙都 (city or capital of ascended beings), a very common plot of tales recorded in the TPG. However, in contrast to the protagonists of comparable stories from the same chapter, like "Laozi" 老子, "Guangchengzi" 廣成子, "Pengzu" 彭祖, "Han Wudi" 漢武帝 or "Sun Simiao" 孫思邈, there is almost nothing known about Qixu. This impossibility to clearly locate the main protagonist within the social and religious history of pre-Song China unfortunately
seemed to have debased the story's valuation and might have led to its wide disregard by scholars and artists.

Likewise, its attributed textual history and origination follow conventional patterns found in the TPGJ. As most other stories, the colophon to this tale mentions that the compendium derived its version from another collection of tales, in this case the Xuanshi zhi 宜室志 (Records from the Spacious Hall). Zhang Du 张譚 (fl. late 9th century), a matrilineal grandson of the famous collector and editor of Tang tales, Niu Sengru 牛僧孺 (779–847), is said to have edited this collection. This attribution suggests that the story's earliest extant textual manifestation happened sometime in the middle of the second half of the ninth century.

According to the Jiù Tāngshù 舊唐書 (Old History of the Tang dynasty), Zhang Du, a native from Luze 陸澤 in Shenzhou 深州 passed the jinshi 進士 (presented-scholar) examination in the Dazhong 大中 reign period (847–859). The Xuanshi zhi remained the only extant text of his œuvre, bequeathing us a collection of stories of the extraordinary as many other literati of the Tang did. In this sense, the text seems to be very ordinary both from the perspective of its textual history and its plot.

However, once one considers the story's significant length and its comparatively elaborated narrative structure, both traits quite unusual for most of the Tang tales, one realizes that it enables us to catch a glimpse into the literary employment of historical times and places to create narrative units. By situating the monk's journey to the capital of ascended beings both in and beyond human time and space, the Tang tale constructs a hierarchical sequence of narrative units in order to create judgments about the importance and efficacy of the self-cultivational actions performed in each of these units.

The story consists of five unevenly sized parts of which each is spatially situated in a concrete place around the Tang capital of Chang'an. Besides the ascendency of Jade Mountain each of these narrative units is introduced temporally by a concrete historical event related to the Tang dynastic royal family. First, the story provides a short introduction that narrates Qixu's arrival in Chang'an and his background in the Buddhist monastic community during Emperor Xuanzong's reign. Following this introduction, the story situates Qixu's move to Taibo Mountain at the beginning of the An Lushan rebellion. He encounters Qiao Jun, a Daoist master who sets the monk on his path to ascendancy. After having been instructed in how to find a suitable guide to reach a capital of ascended beings, Qixu dwells during Emperor Xuanzong's return on Mount Shang. There, he finally crosses across a porter who commutes frequently between the human and the ascended beings' realm. Having prepared the ascendency with the help of the porter, Qixu moves to Jade Mountain where he visits a zhenjun 真君 (true lord) in the capital of ascended beings. Finally, after Qixu had descended Yushan and returned to Taibo Mountain, he settles on Mount Hua in Emperor Dezong's reign meeting Zheng Shen Zheng绅 and Shen Yu 沈聿. In other words, Qixu's encounters with various figures at varying temporal and spatial settings frame and define the story's narrative segments.

The unit on Jade Mountain, however, falls astray from this pattern of historically situating Qixu's adventures. Contrary to all the other units it seems to emphasize that the monk enters a historical "vacuum" on his trip to Yushan. Once the protagonists reach it, they seem to leave the human world. In addition to a lack of historicization, the story marks this change from the dusty human realm to the sparkly world of ascended beings via the depiction of the entering of caves, arising of winds and clouds, various allusions to dreams, and objects of extraordinary sizes. In fact, a meeting with a royal member of the Sui dynasty during Qixu's stay in the capital depicts this passage not only as being beyond historical markers but also as a trip into a space where the protagonists may meet with the past.
In so doing, the story constructs a fairly complex interplay between the narrative’s historical frameworks or the lack thereof, Qixu’s spatial motion, and his meetings with various protagonists in order to narrate the long and arduous trip of this Buddhist monk to ascendency. By instrumentalizing an alternation between motion and rest, of departures and arrivals, it defines and meaningfully links together the various stages of the monk’s trip to ascendency forming the rhythm of the entire story.77

The monk, however, does not only traverse these various mountains in the greater area around Chang’an. Prior to his meetings with the protagonists at each point of his journey, he performs specific, yet, changing actions or practices. These performances allude strongly to various forms of self-cultivation. In Chang’an, the monk, first, performs ordination rituals (kunfa 髭髪 and yihe 衣褐). They signal both his admission to the sangha (the community of Buddhist monks and nuns) and his leaving behind of his family and social status on his way to becoming an ascetic. On Mount Taibo, he becomes a forest dweller. He cuts off the grains (jueli 絕粒) and reduces his diet to uncultivated foods such as boye 柏葉 (cypress needles) transforming the appearance of his body (guxiu 孤秀).78 After his arrival at Mount Shang, the monk relentlessly prepares food offerings (bei ganjie 備甘潔) to porters who similar to the literary trope of woodcutters and fisherman are liminal or semi-realized people dwelling on the margins of the human realm.79 Then on the trip to the summit of Jade Mountain various activities allude to alchemical and meditative practices, blurring the boundaries between the characters’ physical (exteriorized) and meditative (interiorized) ascendance of the mountain:80 they use a stone to block up the flow of a stream (至一洞，水出洞中。挾子與契虛共攝石堵洞口，以塞其流),81 twice enter grottos (rudong 入洞) on their way up the mountain,82 or they sit with eyes closed (mingnu zuo 瞳目坐) before they ascend to the capital beyond the clouds.83 Finally, after

“Seng Qixu” (Monk Attached to Emptiness) 377

his descent, Qixu alters his dietary practice (xiqi 吸氣, “inhale qi”) to cut off the companionship of the three peng (jue sanpeng zhi qiu 絕三彭之仇), leading to his disappearance from this world.84 In other words, the narrative units are not only associated with specific time periods, places and meetings, but also display concrete performances of self-cultivational techniques.

As we have seen, thus far, “Seng Qixu” consists of a sequence of narrative units associated with concrete places, meetings, historical periods, and self-cultivational techniques. The organization of the sequence of narratological units, however, is neither neutral nor innocent. It is, in fact, a strongly suggestive order of events that creates a hierarchy between the depicted practices. As Roland Barthes claims about narratives in general,

There can be no doubt that narrative is a hierarchy of instances. To understand a narrative is not only to follow the process of the story, it is also to recognize in it certain “stages,” to project the horizontal concatenations of the narrative “thread” on an implicitly vertical axis; to read (to hear) a narrative is not only to pass from one word to the next, but also to pass from one level to the next.85

In other words, narratives necessarily present an unequal and rhythmic development of their units producing distinct emphases and importance for each part. I suggest that “Seng Qixu” follows such a vertical axis of events. Considering the mere difference in space and detail the text grants to each unit, it becomes clear that the monk’s arrival on Jade Mountain’s peak is the protagonist’s physical and the narrative’s developmental climax purporting a hierarchy between the performed practices.

Specifically, the text constructs a parallelism between the spatial summit, the disappearance of historical markers to define the monk’s entering into a space beyond the human realm,86 and his experience of an epiphany. The entire story amounts to the
divine revelation of the superior self-cultivational technology called \textit{jue sanpeng zhi qiu} （cutting off the companionship of the three \textit{peng}) that would not only allow him to reach but also to stay in the city (or capital) of the ascended beings （\textit{xiandu} 仙都). It describes the literal and/or visualized （\textit{guan} 觀）ascendance of the mountain as a preliminary step for the monk to attain the knowledge necessary to transform himself into an ascended being.

Thus, the mountain and its almost sky-high elevation become the interface between the heavenly and the human realm where divine revelations and encounters could manifest.\textsuperscript{87} In fact, it remains the only instance in the story that explicitly mentions and describes a self-cultivational technique. Thus, the story uses the protagonist's journey, vertical elevation, and the explicit and allusive depictions of self-cultivational practices to create hierarchical relationships between these various techniques. While those prior to the monk's arrival in the River of Youth are powerful enough to allow him to temporarily mingle with ascended beings, only the inhaling of pure \textit{qi} will finally transform him into a person capable of living in these realms.

The narrative's elaborate construction raises questions about the concrete purpose of "Seng Qixu." Why does the text present such an elaborately structured narration full of elements reminiscent of both \textit{shanshui shi} 山水詩 (mountain and water poetry) and literature on \textit{youxian} 遊仙 (wandering ascended beings)? Why does it depict this highly aestheticized trip to the mountains? Unfortunately, the fact that "Seng Qixu" had been collected in \textit{a leishu} and, therefore, probably been removed from its original context aggravates the search for its function(s). Although it remains impossible to provide a definite answer to these questions, I would like to provide a speculation about the story's purpose(s).

"Seng Qixu" （Monk Attached to Emptiness）

Such a hierarchization of self-cultivational techniques in narrative form is little surprising once one considers other collections like Ge Hong's \textit{Shenxian zhuans} 神仙傳 (Traditions of Divine Transcendents). These stories neither innocently recorded lifestories of Daoist practitioners, nor did they present neutral statements about the discourse of how to achieve ascendance. As Robert Ford Campany observed,

Far from lamenting the profusion of longevity techniques, Ge Hong (as well as the Grand Purity scriptures that shaped his view) cast it as an opportunity. Each technique brings benefit; the adept’s task is to select the essentials from each and combine them into a many-faceted, carefully balanced program of self-cultivation capped by the preparation of one of the greater elixirs. It is not the variety of techniques but the insistence on any one technique’s exclusive benefits that Ge Hong and the Grand Purity scriptures lament. . . . In \textit{Traditions}, Ge Hong three times uses the device of a long speech placed in the mouth of the subject of a hagiography to rank and categorize methods of transcendence. Most of the adepts he records specialize in one or a small number of techniques, so their hagiographies are implicit arguments for the efficacy of those techniques.\textsuperscript{88}

Despite the fact that it remains unclear whom these stories addressed, it seems as if they might be written and used as propagandistic material advertising the efficacy of varying self-cultivational techniques.

Within such a context, the hierarchizing structure of "Monk Qixu" and its highly designed narrative form would gain further meaning. It would indicate that the story might have been intended to implicitly advertise the practice of cutting off one's three corpses as the only self-cultivational technique that would
finally allow practitioners to ascend completely. While the ordination into a monastic community, ingestion of uncultivated foods, devotional offerings, and alchemical and meditative practices would enable the temporary realization of ascendancy, the story describes these practices to be preliminary tools on one’s way to the higher heavens. In other words, the vertical progression of the journey—from the plains of Chang’an over the foot of various mountains to the summit of Yushan—replicates and visualizes the increasing importance and efficacy of the performed practices.

In that sense, one may understand this Tang tale as another literary manifestation of the rhetorical strategy Robert Campany found in Ge Hong’s Traditions of Divine Transcendents. The text, although not included in an obviously Daoist context, might partake in a greater discourse on the efficacy of self-cultivational techniques that appeared in the third and fourth century CE. It would materialize in its structure a claim for the importance of eradicating one’s bodily worms and construct a literary example in which the superiority of such “extreme” forms of dietary practices over monastic, devotional, alchemical, and meditative rituals is realized through the example of Monk Qixu.

Bibliography

Texts
TPGJ, 28.184–86.

Studies


Note

I based this translation on the text of “Seng Qixu” from the TPGJ edition in ten volumes published by Zhonghua shuju 中華書局 in 1961 (28.184–86). The colophon mentions that the TPGJ version is derived from a text included in Zhang Du’s 張德 (fl. late 9th century) collection Xuanshi Zhi 宣室志 (Records from the Spacious Hall). In the footnotes, this translation will discuss important variants to the version in the extant XSZ whenever necessary, helpful, or illuminating. Since the two versions, however, are generally quite similar in their extant forms and the TPGJ text is far more accessible to most readers than the XSZ, I decided to base this translation on the TPGJ instead of the XSZ version.

I want to thank my colleague Lianlian Wu who patiently worked with me on the first draft of this translation to also express my gratitude to Professors William H. Nienhauser, Jr., Mark Meulenburg, Terry Kleeman, and Dennis Schilling for their suggestions and constructive critiques.

The name “Qixu” means “someone who is closely attached to emptiness.” Qi 契 refers to a tally that had been broken into two halves in order to certify contracts or relationships in early China. The successful reattachment of the parts reaffirmed an existent contract, debt, or the relationship between two parties. In that sense, qi also refers to the idea that two parts inevitably belong to each other. Xu 虛 (emptiness) is the foremost characteristic describing the final goals of both Buddhist and Daoist practitioners. Thus, emptiness is closely related to the concepts of Niope 涅槃 (Nirvana) and the Dao 道 (Way) and, as such, plays a central role in Buddhist and Daoist ontology and soteriology.

The term seng is an abbreviation of sengja 僧伽, a transcription of the Sanskrit word sangha that describes the community of Buddhist
monks and nuns. In this sense, the title of the story suggests that a Buddhist monk is the main protagonist of the story.

Guzang, is the name of the former capital of the Bei Liang 北涼 (Northern Liang; 397–439) in Gansu 甘肅 province. The city is situated in modern-day Wuwei 武威 about five hundred miles northwest of Chang’an. It was an important center for the communication with Tibet, which suggests that Qixia was in contact with Buddhist ideas from a young age on. Especially under Juju Mengsun 沐果乘通 (r. 401–433), a Xiongnu ruler that conquered and unified the entire Hexi region from the Huanghe 黄河 (Yellow River) to Dunhuang 敦煌, strong connections and combinations of Indian Buddhist and Chinese cultural elements were created in this empire. In this sense, we may assume that the mentioning of Guzang evoked in the reader associations with Buddhism and the idea of a liminal or border region that was a meeting point for Chinese, Central Asian, and Indian cultural elements.


For a discussion of sutra pillars, objects produced in the Northern Liang that seem to directly reflect the cultural hybridity of this vast region by displaying stupas in a quasi-stelae style, see Eugene Y. Wang, “What Do Trigrams Have to Do with Buddhas? The Northern Liang Stupas as a Hybrid Spatial Model,” *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 35 (1999): 75–90.

Robert des Rotours describes the *yushi* as a kind of censor whose task was to denounce any abuse or deceit in the administration in the capital and the provinces (see Robert Des Rotours, *Le Traité des Exames: Traduit de la Nouvelle Histoire des T’ang [chap. XLIV, XLV]* [Paris: Librairie Ernest Leroux, 1932], pp. 12–13).

Charles Hucker explains that in the post-Qin era (206 BCE–1912) *yushi* 御史 was “the standard generic designation of central government officials principally and characteristically responsible for maintaining disciplinary surveillance over the officialdom and impeaching wayward officials; they constituted an institution called the Censorate (*Yushi Fu* 御史府), which was ordinarily autonomous agency in the top echelon of the central government, answerable only to the Emperor” (Hucker, p. 592).

Under Emperor Xuanzong, the Tang dynasty (618–907) economically and administratively flourished. One of the frequent aims of the recuperated central government was to control and weaken Buddhist communities and monasteries which enjoyed huge social and political advantages under the reign of Empress Wu 武后 (624–705; r. 684–705). Before the rise of Empress Wu, the royal family of the Tang dynasty represented themselves as being directly descended from Laozi 老子, the ancestor of Daoism. By undoing the political agenda of Empress Wu, Xuanzong wanted to reestablish the old lineage to Laozi and so the ruling claims of the former dynasty. In other words, he recaptured the political and religious power of the early Tang including the preeminence of Daoism.

However, the reestablishment of the supremacy of Daoism did not result in a complete disfavor of Buddhism by Emperor Xuanzong. He seemed to have strong interest in those traditions of Buddhism that emphasize “esoteric” elements. As such, the story alludes to an environment that favored esoteric tendencies within Buddhism that are similar to Daoist practices over monastic and communal practices. Parallel to the political situation at Xuanzong’s court, the story of “Monk Qixia” blends “Daoist” and “Buddhist” themes in form of a trip of a Buddhist monk to the capital of ascended beings – a sacred Daoist space. For more information on Xuanzong and his impact on Buddhism in the Tang, see Stanley Weinstein, *Buddhism under the T’ang* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 51–57.

In Buddhist hagiographical writings, it was quite common to forebode the extraordinary nature of a human being by depicting a person’s prodigious skills in understanding and memorizing texts. The *Gaoseng zhuang* 高僧傳 (Biographies of Eminent Monks), a collection of hagiographies of Buddhist monks written by Huijiao 慧皎 (497–554), offers multiple examples that depict a monk as a young erudite capable of discussing complex matters with scholars. As Arthur Wright says, “again and again monks are described as having memorized the classics at an early age, as being able to memorize every page they read, as being proficient in prose or poetic writing or in calligraphy” (Arthur F. Wright,

The hagiography of Zhu Fotudeng 諸佛圖澄 (7–348), one of the teachers of Daoan 道安 (312 or 314–385), may suffice here as such an example: “Chu Fo-tu-teng was a native of the Western Regions. His secular surname was Po. When young he left lay life. He was pure and true and devoted to study. He knew by heart several hundred words of sūtras and was good at explaining the meaning of texts. Although he had not yet read the Confucian works and the histories of this country, when he discussed difficult points with scholars, all [his arguments] in a mysterious way fitted [with our Chinese traditions] like the two parts of a tally, and there was no one capable of humbling him [in debate].” (Wright, Studies in Chinese Buddhism, p. 46; for the Chinese text, see Huijian 慧jian ed., “Jinyezhong Zhu Fotudeng” 金錚中竺佛圖澄, Gaoseng zhuan 高僧傳 (Shanghai: Zhonghua Shuju, 1992), p. 345)

These prodigious accounts of extraordinary people appeared not only in Buddhist but also in writings commonly associated with Daoism or Confucianism. Hans H. Frankel, for example, discusses the paradigmatic representation of extraordinary Tang-literati in an edited volume called Confucian Personalities: “The biographies reveal a stereotyped image which the tenth-century historiographers had formed of the art of letters and of those who practiced it. The man of letters, seen as by them, was likely to be precocious, profoundly learned, endowed with a prodigious memory, and able to write at incredible speed. [...] A man’s early life is viewed not as a stage in his development but as the period when his personality type first becomes apparent.” (Hans Frankel, “Tang Literati: A Composite Biography,” Confucian Personalities, ed. Arthur F. Wright and Denis Twitchett [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962], pp. 72–80).

Ge Hong’s 葛洪 (283–343) Shenzhuan 神仙傳 (Traditions of Divine Transcendents) presents the same narratological elements of extraordinary people, or to be more precise ascendance seekers, in many of its stories. For an example of such a prodigious account, see the story of “Liu Gen” 劉根 in Ge Hong 葛洪 ed., Shenzhuan 神仙傳 (Beijing: Xueyuan Chubanshe 學苑出版社, 1998), pp. 221–224 and translated in Robert Ford Campany trans., To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth. A

“Seng Qixu” (Monk Attached to Emptiness) 387


In this context, we may understand the mentioning of Qixu’s strong interest in the Buddhist dharma at a young age as a classical element of hagiographic writings indicating that he is indeed an extraordinary person. For a discussion of the importance of learning and its implementation into Buddhist hagiographies, see also John Kieschnick, The Eminent Monk-Buddhist Ideas in Medieval Chinese Hagiography (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), pp. 112–123. For an insightful discussion of the genre of hagiographies, see Campany, Ge Hong, pp. 98–117.

7 The XSZ (p. 12) claims that Qixu was “twenty-seven years old” (nian ershiqi 年二十七).

8 Kuona 髮上 (shaving off one’s hair) and yihe 衣褐 (wearing coarse clothes) accompany an entrance in a Buddhist monastery. As John Kieschnick describes this method, “Monks and nuns in China have always been readily differentiated from other types of people. The most visible of distinguishing characteristic was the shaven pate. In traditional China, long hair was always the fashion, whether among men or women; outside of monks and nuns, only criminals had shaved heads. The custom of shaving the monk’s head can be traced back to the earliest accounts of ordination rituals in Indian Buddhism and is a practice that Chinese monks have continued to this day. In the same way, the monk’s clothing has always been an emblem of the profession, whether in ancient India or China. When biographers of Chinese monks note their subject’s decision to “leave the family” and become a monk, they do so with the phrase “he cut off his hair and donned the black robes of the monks” (John Kieschnick, “The Symbolism of the Monk’s Robe in China,” Asia Major, 3rd series, 12.1 [1999]; 9).

Following Kieschnick’s depiction, shaving off one’s hair and wearing coarse clothes were both signs for leaving behind one’s previous life, including one’s social status, and a symbol of detachment from material things. Probably the most famous example of such denunciation may be found in the Buddha’s life story. In his last reincarnation, Siddhartha Gautama leaves the palace of his father to become an ascetic. After he had left his family and the riches of the palace, as a final step he cuts off his hair and exchanges his palace robes with coarse clothes of a

The cutting off of one’s hair and the exchanging of one’s robes as a pre-step to the life of an ascetic appears also in the story “Hui Zhao” 惠照 from the TPG; “Therefore, I cut my hair and became a monk. I hid away my marks [i.e. to live in seclusion] and joined the Buddhist monastery at Mount Kuaiji.” 吾因見發為僧, 通遠會稽山佛寺 (TPG, 92.612). For a further discussion of signs of ordination of Buddhist monks, see Kieschnick, Eminent Monk, pp. 29–32. For a discussion of the Buddha’s hair and robes as relics, as signs of the Buddha’s enlightenment, see John Strong, Relics of the Buddha (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), pp. 65–84 and 216–228.

The city of Chang’an is situated near modern day Xi’an 西安 in Shaanxi province.


10 The Shumen is a mountain in present day Jian’ge County 劍閣縣 in the northern part of modern Sichuan 四川 formerly known as Shu 蜀. This area was cut off from the capital region and was often used as a retreat in cases of emergency. When Emperor Xuanzong fled from Chang’an he sought refuge in this area.

“Seng Qixu” (Monk Attached to Emptiness) 389

In times of war, xìng 幸 (to favor with a visit) was used as a euphemism to indicate that the Emperor had to take refuge outside of the capital. From the perspective of subjects to the Emperor, it was impossible to directly express a dishonoring activity such as escaping from turmoil; thus, the text depicts the escape as a visit to another place. The Grand Scribe’s Records (2:167), for example, reflects such a euphemistic use of the word xìng in the chapter “Xiaowen benji” 孝文本紀 (“Basic Annals of Emperor Xiao”): “In the fifth month (17 June–16 July 177 B.C.), the Hsiung-nu entered Pei-ti 北地, remaining in Ho-nan as raiders. The Emperor for the first time favored the Kan-ch’üan 甘泉 [Sweet Springs] Palace with a visit” (Sima Qian 司馬遷, Shiji 史記 [Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1962], v. 2, p. 425).

Interestingly, Qixu’s hiding parallels the emperors’ “visit to Shu” displaying a reaction to political turmoil and conflicts that appear often in hagiographical writings, as Campy claims: “The hagiographies give us to understand that in an era seen as one of political turmoil and declining customs, the quest for transcendence was not only an alternate path to advancement but also a superior path.” (Campy, Ge Hong, 92).

For another discussion of the relationship between political turmoil and ascendance seekers, see Aat Vervoorn, Men of the Cliffs and Caves: The Development of the Chinese Eremitic Tradition to the End of the Han Dynasty (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1990), pp. 164–169.

11 Mount Taibo is an important mountain in Daoism. Situated at the borders between Mei County 眉縣 (Mei County), Taibo County 太白縣, and Zhouzhi County 周至縣 in Shaanxi province, west/southwest of Chang’an, it is with 12,358 feet the highest peak in the Qinling 泰嶺 (Qin Mountain Range). Mount Taibo combines different types of landscapes and is described as transforming its appearance over the course of a day. Due to the prominence of the concept of hua 化 (transformation) in Daoist ideology, many temples, grottos, and monasteries were erected at the slopes of mount Taibo. See Zhang Cheng et al. 張程, Zhongguo daojiao da cidian 中國道教大辭典 (Taizhong 台中: Dongjiu Qiye Chuban Youxian Gongsi 東久企業出版有限公司, 1999), p. 310.

As examples like “Luli er sheng” 蘆李二生 (TPG, 17.119) and “Sun Simiao” 孫思邈 prove (TPG, 21.140–43), Mount Taibo was known for being a place where people executed life-prolonging techniques. The incorporation of Mount Taibo’s Duxian dongtian 德玄洞天 (Efficacious-


12 Bo ge are the needles of the cypress tree, an evergreen that from early on was thought to symbolize strength and robustness. The songbo 松柏 (conifers) together with the bamboo and the Chinese plum (prunus mume) form the suhan sanyou 歲寒三友 (three friends of the winter) all of which retain most of their vegetation and/or begin to flower during the season of death. Kongzi 孔子 (trad. 551–479 BCE) already says about the songbo in the Analects, “only after winter comes do we know that the pine and cypress are the last to fade” (Edward Slingerland trans., Confucius Analects: With Selections from Traditional Commentaries (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2003), p. 96; for the Chinese text, see Liu Baonan 劉寶楠 ed., Lunyu zhengyi 諏論正義, in Zhuzi jicheng 諸子集成 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1954), p. 193).

As a result of this association, the infestation of these plants became a literary trope, an omen that was often used in stories to describe the moral and bodily decline of a state, region, or a person. The Hou Han shu 後漢書 (History of the Later Han), for example, tells the story of the famous danggu zhi huo 黨國之禍 (disaster of imprisoning opposition) in which Emperor Huan’s untimely death is foretold by the infestation of these evergreens (see Fan Ye 范曄, Hou Han shu [Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1965], pp. 318 and 3299).

Furthermore, the ingestion of substances and food as part of an array of practices to reach sagehood has a long history in ancient China. As Roel Sterckx claims, “attitudes toward food, thinking about food, and the offering up of food in sacrifice were formative elements in the conception of models of sagehood in early China. To the ancient Chinese, consuming, exchanging, and offering up food were often seen as acts of self-cultivation that could impart physical, moral, and political benefits on individuals, society, and its rulers” (Roel Sterckx, Food, Sacrifice, and Sagehood in Early China [Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011], p. 1). In this sense, the story of Monk Qixu might refer here to a quite common practice of ingesting substances that were associated with longevity in order to transfer their abilities into the human body.


13 In Daoist dietary practices, jiueli 絕粒 (to cut off grains) was considered to be one possible way to maintain one’s life energy. As we will see later in the story, Monk Qixu not only cuts off grain to control his qi, but also ingests vapor. Thus, avoidance of grain seems to be a preliminary step on the way to a total replacement of food by pure qi itself leading to an explosion of power within and a transformation of the practitioner: “In any event, for religious thought and practice, the significance of qi is that all things are made of it, exist in it, and share it; heaven and earth, gods, humans, lesser spirits, animals, plants, minerals—all are consubstantial, despite the great range of qualities exhibited by qi in these various forms, and this consubstantiality provides a kind of ladder connecting all levels of being, a ladder that could be climbed by systematically working on and transforming the qi constituting oneself. Most longevity practices therefore work on the basic stuff of qi in some fashion, by processes typically involving its ingestion, circulation, and refinement in the biospiritual organism. If the adept can purify qi in himself, or if he can ingest and store the refined qi of herbal or mineral substances [...] he can become a longevescent being qualified to ascend into higher reaches of the heavens, where the qi is subtler and purer.” (Campany, Ge Hong, p. 19).

The idea behind these techniques was to digest purer essences of qi as found in air or uncultivated food allowing the practitioner, as Campany claims, to dwell, eat, and breathe in the higher heavens. Thus, breathing exercises accompanied most of these dietary practices as the example of the Taiqing zhonghuang zhenjing 太清中黃真經 (The True
“Seng Qixu” (Monk Attached to Emptiness)

In this context, it is not really surprising that Qiao Jun like Wangzi Qiao in “Far Roaming” or Wang Qiao in the TPGJ reveals to Qixu a dietary practice which will enable the monk to further actualize his inherent potential and reach longevity.

15 Here the expression mao qingshou 貌清瘦 (the appearance is pure and emaciated) alludes to someone who used and mastered ascetic techniques to purify her/his body. As the example of the spirit man from the Zhuangzi suggests, dietary exercises were meant to have a direct effect on the appearance of the practitioner (see Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩 ed. “Zhuangzi jishi” 莊子釋, in Zhuzi jicheng 莊子集成 3 (Shanghai: Zhonghua Shuju, 1954), pp. 14–17, Zhuangzi, Wandering on the Way: Early Taoist Tales and Parables of Chuang Tzu, trans. Victor H. Mair (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1994), pp. 6–7), and Campany, Making Transcendents, pp. 47–51.

Although Qiao Jun is not described to shine like snow, his purified, yet, haggard appearance points towards his mastery of ascetic practices.

16 The compound guxiu 孤秀 (peerless and elegant) is an abbreviation of the old saying “peerlessly placed ahead, delicate and graceful” (gubu xiuli 孤抜秀麗). The recognition and interpretation of a person’s physiognomy (xiang 紋) is a common element of stories on the revelation of esoterica. As Mark Csiszentmihalyi argues in his book Material Virtue, in early China the abilities or ethical qualities of a person were thought to have outward expressions in form of the body (see Mark Csiszentmihalyi, Material Virtue: Ethics and the Body in Early China [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2004], pp. 5–11 and 161–200).

This widespread understanding of physical manifestations of capabilities and de 慈 (powers) appears also in the depiction of ascended beings and their adepts. Masters chose disciples based on the recognition of special physiognomies that were thought to reflect their inherent potential to receive and realize a Master’s secret knowledge. Qiao Jun displays here that he recognizes Qixu’s potential due to his bone structure. Consequently, he sends him off to his trip to longevity. For more information on the recognition of disciples, see Campany, Making Transcendents, pp. 100–106 and 131–135.

17 You 遊 is translated here as “to travel” since Qixu was wandering around with a clear goal: reaching the capital of ascended beings. Nonetheless, you consistently alludes to a leisurely or hither and thither
motion comparable to a leaf floating on the water. In fact, Qixu moves back and forth between mountains that are all situated in the greater area around Chang’an.

Wolfgang Bauer discusses the interesting connection between “wandering” and “swimming,” both possible translations of the homophonic characters 遊 and 游: “the term yu, “to wander” is interesting for its ambiguity. For it refers both to aimless wandering, roaming about, vagabondage, and also to leisurely, recreational strolling, which has no aim other than itself. [...] “Leisure,” “swimming,” (especially in Taoist literature, it is not the radical for “walking” but that for “water” which is used. This is intentional. It gives the character the meaning of “swimming,” “playing”) was not really consonant with the Confucian concept of a life of duty. [...] It is therefore no accident that the journey to faraway places, and the lament about the misery of the present are closely connected in Chinese literature from the very beginning. This is also true of religious poetry, where the goal of the journey is not the discovery of a distant land, but of heaven or paradise. [...] The classical example is to be found in the first, most famous and probably also earliest among the Elegies of Ch’u. [...] Actually it is here that we find the earliest link between water – primarily the water of the Yangtzu river—and the removal into a supernatural world, a connection we encounter time and time again in curious forms on the byways of Chinese intellectual history” (Wolfgang Bauer, China and the Search for Happiness, trans. Michael Shaw (New York: The Seabury Press, 1976), p. 181).

This connection between the idea of a journey and an imagery of water will appear in later passages of the story, when Qixu wanders through moist caves on his way to the capital of ascended beings.

The xiandu 仙都 is the residence of ascended beings in the Beihai 北海 (Northern Ocean). In Daoism it is also considered to be one of the thirty-six dongtian 洞天 (grotto-heavens) which were used in meditative practices: “For Taoist practitioners, mountains and caves are sites for the practice of self-cultivation, the goal of which was to attain longevity or immortality. They also constitute places of refuge, liberation, and transcendence. Worship at such natural sites involves a journey that can be either upward or inward, or in some cases both. For mountains, the journey’s goal is not to attain the summit, but to locate and enter caves containing grotto-heavens (dongtian). Such a journey is in many ways a rite of passage, involving entry through portals and the crossing of streams. The journey can be fraught with danger, and adepts had to purify themselves and perform rituals before ascending. Mountains are also renowned for containing exotic animals, for example deer and cranes” (Paul Katz, “Taoist Sacred Sites,” The Encyclopedia of Taoism, p. 72).

The story consequently employs the motif of the grotto and all its aligned marks of a rite of passage in the depictions of Seng Qixu’s journey to the capital of ascended beings. Thus, the monk’s trip to the Zhichuan 稚川 (River of Youth) might refer here to a meditative practice as described by Paul Katz. In that sense, xiandu is a locus classicus for youxian 異仙 (wandering ascendants) literature.


Chensu zhi ren 崇俗之人 (a man from the dusty world) is another, more poetic expression for renjian ren 人間人 (a human from the human realm) emphasizing that Qixu has not reached the status of a xianren 仙人 (ascended being), yet.

Dustiness as a marker for this-worldliness is a common trope in Chinese literature. Already in the Zhizhuangzi 足莊子 “Qiwlum” 齊物論 (“On the Equality of Things”) do we find a passage that uses the image of a dusty world to contrast this-worldly or human concerns from those of a sage or an ascended person: “I have heard from Confucius, said Master Timid Magpie, inquiring of Master Tall Tree, “that the sage does not involve himself in worldly affairs. He does not go after gain, nor does he avoid harm. He does not take pleasure in seeking, nor does he get bogged down in formalistic ways. He speaks without saying anything; he says something without speaking. Instead, he wanders beyond the dust of the mundane world (chengou zhi wai 崇垢之外). Confucius thinks this is a vague description of the sage, but I think that it
is the working of the wondrous Way” (Zhuangzi. *Wandering*, p. 21; for the Chinese text, see Guo, *Zhuangzi*, p. 46).

In another famous passage from the chapter “Dechongfu” 德充符 (“Symbols of Integrity Fulfilled”), the *Zhuangzi* uses the image of an undefiled mirror to describe the power of a bright mind and the influence of a sagely teacher:

“If a mirror is bright, dust and dirt will not settle on it; if they settle on it, then the mirror is not bright. If one associates with wise men for long, he will be faultless.” (Zhuangzi. *Wandering*, p. 44; for the Chinese text, see Guo, *Zhuangzi*, p. 90). In this sense, sages are described to have literally overcome the defilements of the human world.

The famous mirror allegory that compares the sage’s and mirror’s ability to be unaffected by dust and dirt also appears in later Buddhist writings as a prerequisite for entering Buddha realms. For a discussion of dust-free and clean mirrors as windows and doors into worlds beyond the human realm, see Eugene Y. Wang, *Shaping the Lotus Sutra: Buddhist Visual Culture in Medieval China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), pp. 238–316.

20 The XSZ (p. 12) reads, “My Master may accomplish to get there” 吾師可立夫也 for the TPGI’s 吾師可力去也.

21 Mount Shang is situated in Shang County 㝐縣 in Shaanxi province, about halfway between Chang’an and Taibo Mountain. The *Hanyu da cidian* 漢語大辭典 (2:371) describes its topography as steep and rugged and its scenery as very serene and wonderful.

22 The *Hanyu da cidian* (6:625) explains the term fengzi 枋子 in two ways: 1) as a porter using a bamboo crate 2) as a woodcutter due to its homophonous variant fengzi 枋子. Although the XSZ consistently employs the variant character fengzi 枋子 (woodcutter) and despite the fact that the trope of the woodcutter is far more common in Chinese literary texts the translation here is “porter” which can be justified by the functions these characters play in the tales: both spend most of their time in the wilderness and are constantly on the move. This functional similarity suggests that both characters measure up to what Campany calls a liminal character. Such characters were meant to evoke the image of someone who is dwelling in non-populated areas spending a significant amount of time from home while encountering and living with yíwù 異物 (extraordinary beings). In this sense, the replacement of

the porter with the more common woodcutter would not provide a significant gain in meaning. It would rather limit the varieties in which such liminal characters had been described. In fact, the image of a porter who carries objects from one place to another fits much better to the story of monk Qixu who will be guided and literally carried to the capital of ascended beings. For more information on taxonomic boundaries in Chinese tales of the “strange,” see Robert Ford Campany, *Strange Writing: Anomaly Accounts in Early Medieval China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996) pp. 237–271.


23 The River of Youth is a specific capital of ascended beings including a Zhenjun 真君 (True Lord). Interestingly, the River of Youth is also the zi 字 (style-name) of Ge Hong who has written both texts on Daoist alchemy and ascended beings. We don’t know for sure whether or not the story refers here to a euhemerized or defiled version of Ge Hong as the true lord of a place that carries his courtesy name. However, such a use of his name would not surprise since already in the sixth century he had posthumously been included in a Daoist collection of hagiographies called *Daoxue zhuanc* 道學傳 (see Stephan Bumbacher transl., *The Fragments of the Daoxue zhuanc: Critical Edition, Translation, and Analysis of a Medieval Collection of Daoist Biographies and his Autobiography* [Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000]. pp. 181–184. Ge Hong’s autobiography also displays many elements typical for hagiographies of realized persons as if to suggest that he was about to reach ascendance (see Campany, *Ge Hong*, pp. 13–17). For a translation of Ge Hong’s autobiography, see James R. Ware, *Alchemy, Medicine, Religion in the China of A.D. 320: The Nei p’ien of Ko Hung (Pao-p’u tzu)* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1966), pp. 6–22. For a translation of the *Jinshu* 晉書 (History of the Jin) biography of Ge Hong, see Jay Sailey, *The Master Who Embraces Simplicity: A Study of the Philosopher Ko Hung, A.D. 282–343* (San Francisco: Chinese Materials Center, 1978), pp. 521–532.

24 This is the last time the story mentions a historical marker to introduce Qixu’s movement to a new place. Until the monk returns and descends from Yushan 玉山 (Jade Mountain), there will be no
mentioning of temporal markers within the story. In this sense, the disappearance of a temporal framework marks Qixu’s entrance into another world. It depicts his trip from Mount Shang to Jade Mountain as a retreat or hiding that literally transcends this-worldly concerns such as the An Lushan rebellion.

Many stories present the entering of a mountain as a preliminary step for ascendency. For example, the stories “Feng Gang” 峯綱 (Ge Hong, Shenxian zuan, p. 22 and Campany, Ge Hong, p. 148), “Feng Heng” 封衡 (Ge Hong, Shenxian zuan, pp. 273–74 and Campany, Ge Hong, p. 149), “Gan Shi” 賴始 (Ge Hong, Shenxian zuan, p. 273 and Campany, Ge Hong, p. 150), and the TPGJ’s “Zhang Kai” 張楷 (TPGJ, 4.30), and “Zhou Yinyao” 周隱瑤 (TPGJ, 6.42) all follow this pattern and, thus, suggest that the entering of a mountain was frequently associated with a person’s journey into a transhuman realm or ascended stage. For a brief summary of three Tang tales that display a comparable use of temporal frameworks, see Carrie Reed, “Parallel Worlds, Stretched Time, and Illusory Reality: The Tang Tale ‘Du Zichun,’” Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies 69.2 (2009a): 311–312 and Carrie Reed, “Messages from the Dead in ‘Nanke Taishou zuan,’” CLEAR 31 (2009b): 121.


25 Tianxia 天下 (under heaven) was the way in which the whole world was described in pre-modern China. Eristwhile, it referred to the world as Chinese knew it, with the son of heaven (tianzi 天子) as its legitimate and highest ruler in the center. By describing the world as having no problems, the sentence wants to emphasize and express a just and successful rulership.

As can be seen in this account, the historical markers in the story do not serve as clear and factual depictions of the erstwhile political and social environment. Describing the post-An Lushan Tang dynasty as a state without problems is quite euphemistic (see Weinstein, Buddhism, pp. 61–62). The rebellion de facto devastated the power of the central government and local quarrels undermined the authority of the emperor. However, if we take the correlation between historical events and Qixu’s trips, as well as, his location around the area of Chang’an seriously, the aftermath of the An Lushan rebellion and the subsequent hostile environment forced Qixu, the son of a censor, to stay hidden. The end of the rebellion that marks the break between the early and late Tang dynasty likewise symbolizes Qixu’s departure to the River of Youth.

26 In early China, the preparation and offering of food was never far away from sacrificial offerings that enabled the practitioners to communicate with divine figures. As Roel Sterckx asserts, “early Chinese texts are replete with moral debates on food and offering of sacrifice. One striking aspect of these debates is that discussions on how to nourish the human world were never far removed from concerns with feeding the spirits. Just as food fostered physical and moral well-being among humans, the offering of food and its associated crafts of cooking and butchering were also seen as instrumental in forging communication with the spirit world. The early Chinese only rarely distinguished the ritual or religious manipulation of food from its secular role in society.” (Roel Sterckx, Food, p. 2)

Although the story of Qixu derives from a very different historical and socio-cultural context than the resources Sterckx discusses in his book, the cooking and offering of food to the porters blurs this distinction between the spiritual and the human world. Since the offerings will finally lead to a meeting between an ascendency seeker and a being that commutes between the human and the spiritual world, we may wonder whether the offering of sweet and pure food refers to another self-cultivational practice, namely the offering of food to spiritual beings.

27 The XSZ (p. 12) writes, “Qixu’s gifts were rather exhausted” 契虛敬稍殆.

28 The term zhuang 裝 here translated as things generally refers to the compound yizhuang 衣裝 (clothes) as used in the story “Lü Weng” 吕翁
from the TPGJ: “His clothes and attire were shabby and worn out.” (其衣装破敝; TPGJ 82.522). However, sometimes it is also used as a verb that means to pack up things as in the story “Wang Yuan” 王遜: “he immediately packed up his beddings and clothes.” (就牀衣装之; TPGJ, 7.46).

Because zhuang in its verbal form refers to a wider range of objects and since Qixu spent more than a year in the inn making it unlikely that he only had some clothes with him I decided to translate 装 as things.

The communicators between heaven and the human realm are in most cases either extremely young or old. According to Robert Campany, extreme youth or age are signs of people who have reached ascendancy and dwell with ascended beings (see Campany, Making Transcendents, p. 48). In this sense, the porter's appearance points to a realization of longevity and his connection to ascended beings.

Such a depiction of ascended beings as extremely young in their appearance is quite common in Tang tales. In a story in the TPGJ on a figure called “Huang An” 黃安, the text describes the protagonist as “in years being probably more than eighty, [but] regarding his strength/health he was like a boy.” (年可八十餘, 強壯若童子; TPGJ, 1.6)

In this sense, extremely young or old age serves in these stories as a signifier for communicators or travelers between the human and a transcendent realm. See the story of “Liu Gen” (Ge Hong, Shenzhuan zhuian, pp. 221–224 and Campany, Ge Hong, p. 240) and “Zhao Qu” 趙瞿 (Ge Hong, Shenzhuan zhuian, pp. 172–73 and Campany, Ge Hong, p. 278).

“A xianren is a person who has attained immortality and may possess supernormal powers such as the ability to fly. The word xian, presently represented by the graph 仙, was originally attached to the graph 僧, which denotes the idea of “transfer” or “relocation,” and refers specifically to ascending to Heaven by moving one's arms as wings. […] An earthly bureaucratic system was projected into the celestial realm of the immortals, and differences in status were devised for them. In general, ranking descended from celestial immortals (tianxian 天仙) through earthly immortals (dixian 地仙) to immortals who had obtained “release from the corpse” (shijie). They were associated with the celestial realm, the mountains (Grotto-Heavens, dongtian) and the underworld, respectively. Becoming an immortal and gaining eternal youth and deathlessness was difficult beyond measure, […].” (Miura Kunio “Xianren 仙人,” The Encyclopedia of Taoism, pp. 1092–1093).

As Miura mentions, arriving at these seats was a very hard task and not many human beings as the porter's question suggests were thought to have actually reached them. Only those that had realized longevity by following certain techniques of self-cultivation, in the case of this story those that cut off the three peng, could stay in the capital of ascended beings, as we will see in the case of Qixu. For a discussion of the idea of “ascended beings” understood as a fictitious ideal, see Lai Chi-Tim, “Ko Hung's Discourse of Hsien-Immortality: A Taoist Configuration of an Alternate Ideal Self-Identity,” Numen 45.2 (1998): 184. For another discussion of various levels of achievements of a xianren, see Campany, Ge Hong, pp. 75–80.

Of all the sources prior to the Six Dynasties, the Zhuangzi uses the term zhiren 至人 (attained person) by far the most and aims to define such a person. The chapter “Dasheng” 道生 (“Understanding Life”) describes in a lengthy passage what comprises an attained person: “Master Lieh inquired of Yin, the Director of the Pass, saying, “The ultimate man [zhiren] can walk under water without drowning, can tread upon fire without feeling hot, and can soar above the myriad things without fear. May I ask how he achieves this?” “It's because he guards the purity of his vital breath,” said Director Yin, “it's not a demonstration of his expertise or daring. Sit down, and I will tell you. “Whatever has features, images, sound, and color is a thing. How, then, can one thing be distanced from another? And are there sufficient grounds for giving some precedence over others? They are merely forms and color, that is all. But a thing that is created from formlessness may end in nonevolution. How could other things impede someone who attains this in the highest degree? She will dwell in nonconsciousness, hide in noncausality, and wander where the myriad things have their beginnings and ends. She will unify her nature, nurture her vital breath, and consolidate her integrity so as to communicate with that which creates things. Being like this, she will preserve the wholeness of her heavenly qualities and her spirituality will be flawless, so how could things enter and affect her?” (Zhuangzi. Wandering, pp. 175–76; for the Chinese text, see Guo, Zhuangzi, pp. 279–80).
Thus, the attained person is someone who after a series of self-cultivational refinements has reached a formless stage that allows her/him to dwell with the Dao. In other words, she has ascended beyond the human realm by being without a self (zhiren wuji 至人無己, Guo, Zhuangzi, p. 11), form, and color. Consequently, such a person is thought to be unaffected by the wanwu 萬物 (myriad things).

33 It is not entirely clear what kind of equipment Qixu and the porter set up before they climbed the mountain. On one hand, this might refer to any kind of climbing equipment they needed to ascend the mountain. On the other hand, it was a common practice to offer sacrifices for and prepare protective talismans against the spirits of the mountain and its inhabitants to protect from their wrath caused by the traveler’s intrusion. As James Robson says, “the literary and artistic representations of mountains in early China were, to borrow Yi-Fu Tuan’s apt terminology ‘landscapes of fear.’ In order to enter China’s sacred mountains safely, the traveler had to know the correct season and carry powerful apotropaic artifacts, such as talismans and mirrors. Otherwise, he might become disoriented and lost, meet with harm, or die an untimely death.” (Robson, Power of Place, p. 18)

Lantian 藍田 (Blue Fields) is the name of a county southeast of Chang’an in Shaanxi province, known for its supreme jade (Hanyu da cidian, 9.588).

Qixu’s trip so far led him westward from Chang’an to Taibo Mountain, then back again to the Chang’an area, and now eastward from Chang’an.

33 Jade Mountain is a local mountain in Lantian County.

33 In this translation, dong 洞 is rendered “grotto” instead of “cave or cavern,” despite its rather gigantic dimensions. This is in line with conventions in secondary literature on Daoist dongtian 洞天 (grotto-heavens) and dwellings of ascended beings. As will be seen in the tale, these grottos were often filled with lakes and associated with watery places. Although Seng Qixu does not meet an ascended being in the grotto, it was a common idea in the Tang dynasty that such beings would live within mountains. The title of a nowadays lost collection of hagiographies of xian from the Six Dynasties (220-589) reflects this fact: the Dongxian zhuan 洞仙傳 (Records of Cave-dwelling Ascended Beings). For examples of beings reaching ascendance or ascended beings dwelling in grottos, see the stories “Wei Boyang” (TPGJ, 2.11-12), “Xu Meng” (TPGJ, 5.35) and “Longmenshan” (Dragon Gate Mountain, TPGJ, 291.2311).

Thus, caves or grottos were thought to be liminal spaces of transition between one and another sphere and played an important role in the literature of the post-Han. “As the paradises in heaven, on mountains and islands, and even on the moon began to lose their paradisiacal character [...], what arose now was the belief in the existence of ideal places reportedly lying behind mysterious caves. [...] Basically, they formed part of the sphere inhabited by ordinary men, they surrounded them on all sides, just as the wilderness had in the past. [...] This thought emerges even more clearly when we consider that in the case of the paradise caves, the transition from one sphere to the other demanded only a form of movement which was naturally man’s, i.e. locomotion on earth” (Bauer, Happiness, pp. 189–190).

Exactly the imaginaire of caves as spaces of passage is mirrored in the use of grottos in depictions of meditative and self-cultivating practices. For more information on the connection between caves and ideas of self-cultivation, see footnotes 18 and 35. For more information on the intriguing etymology of the term dong 洞 (cave) and its relation to ideas of tong 通 (passage) and shui 水 (water), see Bauer, Happiness, pp. 191–192. For a discussion of the imaginative relationship between tombs, houses, gourds, and caves, and their shared underlying depiction as a retreat, see Rolf Stein, The World in Miniature: Container Gardens and Dwellings in Far Eastern Religious Thought, trans. Phyllis Brooks (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), pp. 52–113.

33 The TPGJ version does not specify whether it is only one stone or multiple smaller stones that Qixu and the porter use to fill the entrance. The XSZ text (p. 13) is in this instance more descriptive and claims that they “shouldered a huge stone and placed it on the entrance of the grotto.” 負巨石設洞口, but the closing of the cave’s entrance with a single stone would suggest that the protagonists contain superhuman powers.

The actual closing of the cave’s entrance with a stone or stones might also refer to meditative and alchemical practices centered on the idea of the zang 藏 (viscera). Isabelle Robinet argues that mountains, stars, bodies, and their openings play a similar role in Daoist ontology (see Isabelle Robinet, Taoist Meditation: The Mao-shan Tradition of Great
“Seng Qixu” (Monk Attached to Emptiness) [...].” (Campany, Strange Writing, p. 225). As in this example, the imagery of the liminal space correlates strongly with conceptions of meditation in which viscera as mediators between the inside and the outside of the body and visualizations of trips to mountains and caves play a prominent role.

Qixu’s hesitation reaffirms and foreshadows his incapability to stay with the ascended beings. Thus, his hesitation indicates his yet unfinished transformation or realization into an ascended being and his inability to look at a realized person, as we will see later.

Early Daoist cosmologies often depict the beginning of the world as an abyss whose moist and murky attributes characterize experiences of the mystical paradise and the primordial void (see Norman Girardot, Myth and Meaning in Early Daoism: The Theme of Chaos [Hundun] [Magdalena, New Mexico: Three Pines Press, 2008], p. 129). Although, there is a huge historical gap between early Daoist depictions of the origin of the universe and the story of “Monk Qixu,” these journeys to the capital of ascended beings may incorporate elements of early Daoist cosmologies, since they include watery imagery (dongshui 方濟 “the stream out of the grotto had been cut off” or 見積水無窮 “seeing masses of water without limits”) and build on a tradition that illustrates meditative journeys with the help of “natural” sceneries. See Shih-shan Susan Huang, Picturing the True Form: Daoist Visual Culture in Traditional China (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012), pp. 78-85.

In the Tang dynasty, a Chinese foot (chi 尺) was either about 24.6 cm (xiaochi 小尺 “small chi”) or about 29.4 cm (dachi 大尺 “large chi”) long.

Xun尋 is an ancient measure equal to approximately eight chi 尺 (see Joseph Needham, Science and Civilisation in China: Volume 3. Mathematics and the Sciences of the Heavens and the Earth [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959], p. 84). Following this depiction, the tree would have been gigantic. It would exceed the size of the Coast Redwood tree, the tallest species on earth, by at least four hundred Chinese feet (see George W. Koch et al., “The Limits of Tree Height,” Nature 428 [2004]: 851-854).

The enormous size of the tree that Qixu and the Porter crest points already to its function as a connector between the mountain and the xiantu on the margins of the human realm. Lan-ying Tseng, for example,
argues that trees were used exactly as such gates to heaven in early Chinese tombs. In this understanding, trees connected the earth with the heaven symbolizing a possible transfer between the three realms that were thought to constitute the world (see Lan-yung Tseng, *Picturing Heaven in Early China* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011], pp. 211–225). In this sense, trees were used as connectors between the human and the heavenly realm in the Han. See also the passage in which Liu Yi moves from the human world to that of the dragons via a tangerine tree (in “Dongting lingyin zhuan” 洞庭靈偃傳, the first tale translated above).

Wu Hung further discusses this use of trees on the top of mountains as symbols of ascendance. “One of the most impressive “money tree” bases, excavated from the suburbs of Chengdu, vividly represents a journey in search of immortality. The clay base is shaped like a columnar mountain. Men and women are climbing the mountain and appear on three levels. [...] An interesting feature of this sculpture is the caves on the three levels. Punctuating the journey, each of them marks a particular stage in the search for immortality. [...] It is also possible that the three levels of the mountain represent metaphorically the three stages of a Taoist spiritual cultivation toward immortality.” (Wu Hung, “Mapping Early Taoist Art: The Visual Culture of Wudoumi Dao,” *Taoism and the Arts of China*, ed. Stephen Little (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 85)

The *Huainanzi* 淮南子, a book written at Prince Liu An 劉安 (179–122 BCE) of Huainan’s court in 139 BCE, contains another story on trees as connectors between the human and the heavenly realm. A famous passage from the chapter “Dixing xun” 墮形訓 (“Terrestrial Forms”) on the *jianmu* 建木 (foundation-tree) supports such an understanding of trees as connectors between heaven and the human realm. The text mentions “the Jian Tree on Mount Duguang, by which the gods ascend and descend [to and from Heaven], casts no shadows at midday. If one calls [from that place], there is no echo. It forms a canopy over the center of the world” (Liu An, *The Huainanzi: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Government in Early China*, trans. and ed. John S. Major, Sarah A. Queen, Andrew Seth Meyer, and Harold D. Roth [New York: Columbia University Press, 2010], p. 157; for the Chinese text, see Liu An 劉安 ed., “Seng Qixu” (Monk Attached to Emptiness) [Shanghai: Zhonghua Shuju, 1954], p. 57).

“Fan furen” 樊夫人 (“Madam Fan”) in the *Shenxian zhuan* provides another example of a hagiographical story describing trees as mediators between heaven and the human realm. They help ascendance seekers who need assistance to reach the heavenly realms: “The time came for them to ascend to Heaven. In the outer courtyard there was a large locust tree. Liu Gang climbed several dozen feet up it, and then, by dint of effort, he managed to take off. Lady Fan simply sat down on her mat, and then, ever so lightly, she took off like a cloud of smoke. They ascended together into the heavens and thus departed” (Campany, *Ge Hong*, p. 148; for the Chinese text, see Ge Hong, *Shenxian zhuan*, p. 153).

In medieval China, *xiao* 嘹 (whistling) played an important role as a communicative medium, often described in opposition to human speech. A Tang dynastic text of unknown authorship called *Xiaozhi* 嘹旨 (*Principles of Whistling*) describes whistling as the preferred speech to address any kind of spiritual being: “Air forced outwards from the throat and *low* in key is termed speech; forced outwards from the tongue and *high* in key is termed *hsiao* (whistling). The low key of speech is sufficient for the conduct of human affairs, for the expression of our natural feelings; the high key of whistling can move supernatural beings and is everlasting. Indeed, though a good speaker can win response from a thousand *li*, a good whistler commands the attention of the whole world of spirits.” (E. D. Edwards, “Principles of Whistling — Hsiao Chih 嘹旨 — Anonymous,” *BSOAS* 20.1/3 [1957]: 218–219)

Thus, whistling was thought to be a powerful way of commanding and influencing the world beyond human affairs. Such powers over the world of spirits via the mastery of whistling were associated with self-cultivational techniques in texts like Chenggong Su’s 成公綏 (231–273) “Xiaofu” 嘹賦 (*Rhapsody on Whistling*). The rhapsody describes and employs whistling as a sonic version of breathing techniques that recluses may utilize on their trips of ascendency:

“He alone, transcending all, has prior awakening/He finds constraining the narrow road of the world/He gazes up at the concourse of heaven, and treads the high vastness/Distancing himself from the exquisite and the common, he abandons his personal concerns/Then, filled with noble emotion, he gives a long, drawn out whistle.
III. Thereupon, the dazzling spirit inclines its luminous form/Pouring its brilliance into Vesper's Vale/And his friends rambling hand in hand/Stumble to a halt, stepping on their toes/He sends forth marvelous tones from his red lips/And stimulates mournful sounds from his gleaming teeth/The sound rises and falls, rolling in his throat/The breath rushes out and is repressed, then flies up like sparks/He harmonizes "golden kung" with "sharp chiao"/Blending shang and yin into "flowing chih"/The whistle floats like a wandering cloud in the grand empyrean/And gathers a great wind for a myriad miles [...] X. Fei Lien, the Wind God, swells out of his deep cavern/And a fierce tiger replies with a howl in the central valley/The Southern Sieve moves in the vaulted sky/And a bright whirlwind quivers in the lofty trees." (Sui Chenggong, "Rhapsody on Whistling," trans. Douglass A. White, in The Columbia Anthology of Traditional Chinese Literature: Translations from the Asian Classics, ed. Victor Mair [Columbia University Press, New York, 1994], pp. 429–433).

Here, the power to command the environment and the winds is related to the sonic responses of the kung (tiger). Already in the Chuci 楚辭 (The Songs of Chu), namely in the song "Miu jian" 諂謡 ("Reckless Remonstrance") from the cycle "Qi jian" 七謡 ("Seven Remonstrances"), do we find accounts that associate the sound of the tiger with the evocation of wind: "Like sounds harmonize together; Creatures mate with their own kind. The flying bird cries out to the flock; The deer calls, searching for his friends. If you strike gong, then gong responds; If you hit jue, then jue vibrates. The tiger roars, and the wind of the valley comes; The dragon soars, and the radiant clouds come flying." (David Hawkes trans., The Songs of the South: An Anthology of Ancient Chinese Poems by Qu Yuan and other Poets [New York: Penguin Classics, 1985], p. 257; for the Chinese text, see Wang and Hong, Chuci, pp. 254–55)

Such a correlation between sounds, animals, and natural phenomena also appears in the "Shiyi" 十翼 (Ten Wings) commentaries to the Yijing's 易經 (Book of Changes) first hexagram qian 乾 (dry) which denies the principle of Heaven: "The Master said: "Notes of the same key respond to one another; creatures of the same nature seek one another; water flows towards the place that is (low and) damp; fire rises up towards what is dry; clouds follow the dragon, and winds follow the tiger [...]." (James Legge, trans., 1 Ching: Book of Changes, [New York: Gramercy Books, 1996], p. 411). As such, these texts treat the sound of whistling as a language that may address the tiger who in return is able to evoke winds via his roaring response.

The "Xiaofu" displays elements that also appear in the story "Seng Qixu" to depict ascendance (whistling, awakening, wind, caverns, and trees). In consequence, we might conclude that the story might depict the porter as a recluse who has mastered a way to control winds and the supernatural world. In so doing, he is able to carry the monk to the realm of ascended beings via his whistling.

43) Besides being related to whistling, winds also commonly appear in moments of a staged death via a substitute (shijie 戶解) in hagiographical writings. Ge Xuan's account in the Shexian zhuan, for example, says, "When the time arrived, Ge dressed in robe and cap, entered in his chamber, and lay down. He stopped breathing, but his colr did not change. His disciples lit incense and watched over him for three days. Then, at midnight, a great wind suddenly arose from inside the room, snapping trees [outside]; there was a sound like thunder, and the torches were all extinguished. After a while the wind died down. Ge had disappeared." (Campany, Ge Hong, p. 157; for the Chinese text, see Ge Hong, Shexian zhuan, p. 192)

In this sense, the story narrates the ascendance of Qixu and the porter as both the result of an evocation via whistling and a staged death in form of a meditative practice, as we will see in a moment.

44) Closing one's eyes is a defining element of extraordinary journeys. As we will see in the next footnote, trips between the human and the heavenly realm were commonly associated with the passage between life and death or being awake and asleep. Consequently, human beings that used extraordinary transportation methods provided by an ascended being had to close their eyes before they would travel afar.

Jie Xiang's 夾象 account in the Shexian zhuan, for example, tells a story in which a messenger is capable of instantaneously moving thousands of miles by using a talisman with eyes closed:

"Jie wrote a talisman and placed it inside a green bamboo staff; then he had the messenger close his eyes and mount the staff, and he told him that when the staff stopped moving he was to buy the ginger and then close his eyes again. This man followed the instructions, mounted the staff, and in a moment, when it stopped, he found himself to be already
in Chengdu. [...] Once this man had bought the ginger, [...] he stowed the letter, shouldered the ginger, mounted the staff, and closed his eyes. In a moment he was already back in Wu, and the chef was just finishing the slicing of the fish.” (Campany, Ge Hong, p. 191; for the Chinese text, see Ge Hong, Shenxian zhuang, p. 246).

For a further example, see the story of “Luan Ba” 樂巴 (Ge Hong, Shenxian zhuang, pp. 127-28 and Campany, Ge Hong, p. 254).

The character wu 舞 (to wake up; middle Chinese *mu) is a homophonous to the religiously connoted terms wu 悟 or juewu 喟悟 (awakening; MC *mu). In this sense, the passage might not only describe a physical awakening from a sleep, but also a realization out of a meditation and a passage from one state or place to another.

Li Wai-yee argues in her book The Readability of the Past in Early Chinese Historiography that the idea of a mutual relationship between stages of dreaming and being awake existed already at the time of the creation of the Zuo zhuang 左傳 (Zuo Commentary): “The restoration of ritual equilibrium suggests the potential continuum between dreaming and wakeful states, analogous to the fluid boundaries between the realm of the spirits and the human world” (Li Wai-yee, The Readability of the Past in Early Chinese Historiography [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007], p. 238) In this understanding, the human stages of dreaming and being awake replicate the natural worlds components: the world of the spirits (dream/sleep/death) and of the humans (awake/life).

This understanding of a fluid boundary between life and death or dream and being awake also in the famous butterfly dream of the Zhuangzi 諸葛 that describes the transformation of things that would supposedly happen after somebody or something dies. In this story, Zhuang Zhou is never sure whether he actually became or only dreams to be a butterfly (see Zhuangzi, Wandering, p. 24 and Guo, Zhuangzi, pp. 53-54). As such, the alteration of one’s stage of awareness was often associated with one’s passage or transformation (hua 化) from the human to the spirit world and vice versa. Consequently, this perceived parallelism between sleep/death and awake/life reappeared in Daoist understandings of ascendance and meditation. Lin Fu-shih describes in his article on the usage of dreams in the Northern Song (960-1126) compendium Yunji qiqian 雲笈七籖 (The Bookcase of the Clouds with the Seven Labels) exactly such an affinity between dreams and human encounters with spirits (see Lin Fu-shih, “Religious Taoism and Dreams: An Analysis of the Dream-data Collected in the Yün-chi ch‘i-ch’ien,” Cahiers d’Extrême-Asie 8 (1995), 107-112). Such a use of dreams to signify a passage from one world to another indeed also appears in various Tang Tales. “Nanke Taishou Zhuang 南柯太守傳 (“An Account of the Governor of the Southern Branch”), for example, narrates the story of a young knight-errant who falls asleep after a night of heavy drinking. Once “awake,” he becomes formally invited to a kingdom whose inhabitants, as the reader will learn later, are in fact ants, a circumstance the protagonist does not realize while he is “dreaming” (see William H. Nienhauser, Jr. trans., “An Account of the Governor of the Southern Branch,” in Tang Dynasty Tales – A Guided Reader, ed. Nienhauser (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Co., 2010), pp. 152-55).

In this sense, the story of Monk Qixu uses here a quite common trope in Tang Tales that uses sleep and dreams as markers of a physical, spatial, and/or psychological transformation of the sleeper.

46 Lan-ying Tseng claims in her book Picturing Heaven in Early China that the guo 門 (gate) was not only used in depictions of city and palace gates but also became a symbol used for the heavenly gate to celestial palaces. For further information, see Tseng, Picturing Heaven, pp. 208-233.

47 Chinese texts and images are quite often full of clouds. As Patricia Bjelandal Welch asserts in her book on motifs and visual imagery in Chinese art, clouds “represent both the heavens and their linguistic fraternal twin “good fortune” (yun 雲). Five-colored clouds of red, blue, black, yellow, and white [...] were considered to be especially auspicious, and signaled a kingdom at peace.” (Patricia Bjelandal Welch, Chinese Art: A Guide to Motifs and Visual Imagery [Singapore: Tuttle Publishing, 2008], pp. 249-50). This idea of a kingdom at peace reappears in Daoist paintings. In Daoist iconography, clouds, especially rosy and multi-colored ones, surround ascended beings and divine places. In that sense, the text uses this iconographic device to mark Qixu’s arrival in the capital of the ascended beings.

For later examples of paintings that use rosy clouds to represent a Daoist ascended being or divine place, see Stephen Little, Taoism and the Arts of China, pp. 158-59, 208-13, 233-66, and 280-81.

Ascended beings such as Xi Wangmu 西王母 (Queen Mother of the West) are often depicted with an entourage of male and female xiàntóng 仙童 (young servants). As Suzanne Cahill claims about the popularity of the servants of the Queen Mother of the West, “the male and female attendants composing the Queen Mother’s retinue fascinated Tang poets as well as the hagiographer. They served as models for Taoist adepts, and fantasies about their activities provided an outlet for hopeful speculation about the world to come” (Suzanne Cahill, *The Queen Mother of the West in Medieval China* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993], p. 103).

Consequently, many stories of the TPGJ use these young servants as a sign for realms of ascendency (see “Shen Xi” 沈羲 [TPGJ 5.36], “Zhang Lao” 張老 [“Old Zhang,” TPGJ 16.112–15], and “Cui Shusheng” 崔書生 [“Scholar Cui,” TPGJ 63.392–94]). The image of the young servants welcoming the traveler as a harbinger of zhenren 真人 (realized persons) was so common that the mere mentioning of young servants together with the arrival at a fantastic-looking palace were clear signs for the protagonists’ successful arrival at the summit of a mountain or a capital of ascended beings.

This use of age as a sign for attendants of realized persons pervaded not only Daoist but also Buddhist depictions of realms of ascendency, as Joshua Capitainio showed with the example of the Vajrakumāra (“vajra-youths” 金刚童子): “one text, describing the mandala associated with the pure land of the Tathāgata Medicine King, mentions an ‘assembly of innumerable vajra-youths as the retinue’ of the twelve divine generals that inhabit that Buddha-realm. Another manual containing a sadhana for the accomplishment of the deity Padanakṣipa, a wrathful form of the bodhisattva Samantabhadra, describes the main deity as flanked on each side by a vajra-youth.” (Joshua Capitainio, “Vajrakumāra in Esoteric Buddhism and Chinese Religion,” paper presented at the annual meeting for the American Academy of Religion, Chicago, Illinois, November 17–20, 2012).

“Seng Qixu” (Monk Attached to Emptiness) 48

Here the character zan 袄 (to pin on) is read as a verb. Nonetheless, one may also read it as a compound zanmian 袄冕 denoting two different types of headgears, a guanzan 冠冕 ("hairclasp") and a limao 禮帽 ("ritual hat"), two pieces of attire typical for officials at court. In this case, the compound would function as a synecdoche for officials. Either way, the text describes a situation in which the monk meets an official of the capital of ascended beings demarcated by his headgear.

The XSZ (p. 13) replaces the official’s hat with a tablet (hu 箇) that an official would hold in two hands during an audience with the emperor.

The phrase 慄玉几而坐 (sitting and leaning on a jade stool) is a reference to two stories in the Zhuangzi stalling the disciple Yancheng Ziyou 顏成子游. In the first story from the chapter “Qiulun,” Nanguo Qi Qi南郭子綦 receives Yancheng Ziyou while he was sitting on a stool in a meditative posture. The text describes Nanguo Qi Qi’s body to resemble withered wood and dead ashes. In this conversation, Nanguo Qi Qi reveals to Yancheng Ziyou the relationship between the human and the cosmic body’s apertures and the force behind the sounds of the world (see Zhuangzi, *Wandering*, pp. 10–12 and Guo, *Zhuangzi*, pp. 21–25). In the second story from the chapter “Xu Wugui” 徐無鬼 (Ghostless Xu), Yancheng Ziyou addresses again a master, Nanbo Qi Qi南伯子綦, while sitting in meditative posture on a stool. This story also takes up the idea of apertures and of a transformation of the body into withered wood and dead ashes. However, it does not discuss the correlation between the body as vessels or carriers of sounds. It rather reveals that Nanbo Qi Qi is an ascended person who formerly dwelt in a cave (see Zhuangzi, *Wandering*, p. 246 and Guo, *Zhuangzi*, p. 367).

As Mark Meulenbeld has shown, early Chinese texts often depict the production of de 德 (power) as an outcome of huashen/bianshen 化身/變身 or huashen/bianshen 化神/變神 (bodily transformation processes) that simulated an incineration of the practitioner’s body (see Mark Meulenbeld, “From ‘Withered Wood’ to ‘Dead Ashes’: Burning Bodies, Metamorphosis, and the Ritual Production of Power,” *Cahiers d’Extrême-Asie*, 19 [2009], 243–256). In this context, shìjiè 戶解 (liberation from the body) as described in the Zhuangzi was a prerequisite to ascend heaven.
Thus, this brief reference to the Zhuangzi might aim to underline the powerful appearance of the true lord and his realization of ascendance.

The idea of the true lord first shows up in the Zhuangzi in the chapter “Qiwlun.” There the true lord seems to adopt the role of an underlying force behind the activities of both the world and the human body (see Zhuangzi. Wandering, pp. 13–14 and Guo, Zhuangzi, pp. 27–30). Especially, the understanding of the true lord as the guide of the human organs resulted in its association with the xin 心 (heart), the center of emotions and thoughts. Beyond these two meanings, the idea of the true lord became a term that describes a very high zhenren 真人 (realized person). Thus, the true lord may, on one hand, refer to an outside force (either as a ruler of a xiandu or as the power that guides the myriad transformations in the world). On the other hand, it might depict the inner bodily manifestation and reflection of such outside forces. Thus, the term zhenren alludes to both the explicit exterior trip to the ruler of the capital of ascended beings and to the search for that place (and/or force) within oneself in a meditative practice.

Here qiu 丘 is translated as “companionship” instead of “enmity” since the three corpses are bodily spirits that reside in every human’s body and, thus, accompany us right from the beginning of our lives. This connotation of an inevitable “relationship” between the worms and the human body would have been lost if were the term read as an enemy or a rival. However, we need to keep in mind that these companions do not stand in a positive relationship to their hosts since their companionship keeps humans from reaching longevity.

The three peng, often also called the sanshi 三尸 (three corpses), the sanshishen 三尸神 (spirits of the three corpses) or the sanchong 三蟲 (three worms) are three types of spirits/beings/parasites within the human body. They were thought to report the bad deeds of human beings on the Gengyin-day to the celestial emperor who would shorten the lives of the peng’s hosts as a punishment for their misdeeds.

The Baopuzi neiopian 抱朴子內篇 (Inner Chapters of the Master Who Embraces the Unhewn) says: “In our bodies are three corpses (sanshi 三尸). As for the sort of beings they are, they have no physical forms but are nevertheless real, of a type with our cloud-souls and numina, ghosts, and spirits (huangling guishen 魂靈鬼神). The three corpses wish to have us die early, in which event they are able to act as ghosts and are released to move about at will, attending people’s offerings and libations [so as to intercept and consume these]. Therefore on each gengshen day they ascend to Heaven to report to the Director of Allotted Life Spans, telling of people’s misdeeds” (Ware, Alchemy, p. 115).

Since these parasites live of the food that the host digests, cutting off the grains accompanied by meditative techniques allowed the practitioner to famish the three corpses within her/his body.


For a discussion of visual representations of the sanshi, see Shihshan Susan Huang, Picturing the True Form, pp. 52–65.

The term anhe 艾黑 commonly refers to a dark appearance, especially a dark face as we may see in the Hanshi waiwuxian 韓詩外傳 (Exoteric Commentary on the Han School Text of the Classic of Songs): “T’ao Shu-hu said to Uncle Fan, “I followed [our prince] into exile for eleven years until my complexion was burnt black and my hands and feet were [covered with] calluses.” (James Hightower trans., Han Shih Wai Chuan: Han Ying’s Illustrations of the Didactic Application of the Classic of Songs [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952], p. 109; for the Chinese text, see Qu Shouyuan 屈守元, ed., Hanshi waiwuxian jianshu 韓詩外傳箋疏 [Chengdu 成都: Bashu Shuhui Chuban Faxing 巴蜀書會出版發行, 1996], p. 306).

Seeing ascended beings in their zhengxing 真形 (true form) was thought to cause unease in the eyes of human beings that have not ascended, yet. The chapter “Ying diwang” 應帝王 (“Responses for Emperors and Kings”) in the Zhuangzi contains such a story in which a shaman cannot stand the appearance of a realized person called Huizi 虎子
“Seng Qixu” (Monk Attached to Emptiness)

58 This instance resembles the life-story of Qixu. Like supernumerary official Yang, Qixu starts his trip to ascendance at a chaotic and dangerous time of political turmoil.

59 *Cheshi* 微视 (penetrating gaze) is a feature of a realized person whose senses are not blocked so that she may receive impressions from the world without cloaking up or confusing her/his own senses and body. We find such a depiction of a realized person already in the Zhuangzi’s chapter “Waiwu” 外物 (“External Things”):

“Acute eyes make for keen vision; acute ears make for keen hearing; an acute nose makes for keen smell; an acute mouth makes for keen taste; an acute mind makes for keen knowledge; acute knowledge makes for integrity. Whatever is the Way does not like to be obstructed. If it is obstructed, then it becomes choked. If it is unceasingly choked, then it becomes stagnant. If there is stagnation, a host of injurious effects are born. That things may have knowledge depends on their breathing. If it is not plentiful, that is not to be blamed on heaven. Heaven penetrates them with it day and night without intermission, but man contrarily locks up the openings. The abdominal cavity is spacious; the mind has its heavenly wanderings. If their chambers are not roomy, wife and mother in law will quarrel; if the mind has not its heavenly wanderings, the six senses will interfere with each other. The excellence of great forests, hills, and mountains for men is because their spirits cannot vanquish them.” (Zhuangzi, *Wandering*, p. 275; for the Chinese text, see Guo, *Zhuangzi*, pp. 404–05)

This passage claims that non-obstructedness (*che*) is a defining element of the Dao. Therefore, a person who attained such “acute” senses via meditative practices has literally realized the workings of the Dao within her/his body. Thus, a penetrating gaze points to a person’s realization of the Dao. Furthermore, the passage also explains the flashing impression of such penetrating eyes by claiming that blocked senses, the opposite of the penetrating senses, are defined by stagnancy. Such stagnancy apparently results in injurious effects on the body. Consequently, the flashing of the eyes, therefore, points to the realized person’s capability of absorbing outside impressions without cloaking her/his senses.

59 Yi Zhirun 乙支論 is unknown outside of this tale.
Isabelle Robinet underlines the importance of certain days for rituals and meditative practices: "Ever since the time of the Chuang-tzu, Taoist recluse withdrew into the mountains to escape the noise and troubles of the world. [...] However, penetration into these places can only occur on certain days and at lucky hours, after fasting, and after having been strengthened with a propitiatory talisman while executing the step of Yü. Then the mountain becomes a reservoir of spiritual powers." (Robinet, Mao-shan, p. 179).

These days, however, did not only play an important role for escapist but also for people in their everyday life. As discussed partially above, "according to a belief that originated during the Six Dynasties and became widespread in the Tang period, three worms [...] or three "corpses" [...] dwell in the human body [...] On the night of the gengshen day, the fifty-seventh in the sexagesimal cycle, these worms leave the body while the person is asleep to ascend to heaven, and report his or her sins to the Celestial Emperor (Tiandi 天帝)." (Toshiaki Yamada, "Gengshen 戊申," The Encyclopedia of Taoism, p. 446)

Shangdi or Di was thought to be the highest deity in the Shang dynasty (ca. 1570 BCE and 1045 BCE), a king-like figure who resided in heaven and was able to reward or punish human beings based on their (sacrificial) deeds. David Keightley argued, that at this time "it was believed that Ti, the high god, conferred fruitful harvest and divine assistance in battle, that the king's ancestors were able to intercede with Ti, and that the king could communicate with his ancestors. [...] correct ritual procedure by the Shang kings would result in favors conferred by Ti. Ti stood at the apex of the spiritual hierarchy. Beneath him were the royal ancestors, who were to intercede with Ti as the result of sacrificial payments offered to them, often as a promise or contract, by the living kings at a still lower rank" (David Keightley, "The Religious Commitment: Shang Theology and the Genesis of Chinese Political Culture," History of Religions 17 [1978]: 212–215).

In later periods, Shangdi became a common abbreviation of one of Yudi's玉帝 (Jade Emperor) more elaborate titles: Yu Huang Shang di 玉皇上帝 (Jade Sovereign Highest Emperor). The Jade Emperor is one of the most important deities in the Daoist pantheon ranked right after the Sanqing 三清 (three pure ones) and is commonly understood to be the Tiangong 天公 (Lord of Heaven). As such, he is the regent of the universe, the celestial counterpart to the Son of Heaven who regulates both celestial and human affairs. For a brief introduction to the Jade Emperor, see Henri Maspero, Taoism and Chinese Religion (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981), pp. 88–91.

The story narrates a change in Qixu's dietary practice. At the beginning, he ate leaves and cut off grain, still depending on impure forms of qi. Now, he directly ingests the pure vapor and thus is able to cut off the food supply for the three peng. The external trip to the mountains triggers a transformation in Qixu's dietary practice as a consequence of the revelation of the technique of jue sanpeng zhi qiu 殉三 彭之仇 (cutting off the companionship of the three peng).

Emperor Dezong aimed to stabilize the battered financial and political situation within the empire. After the An Lushan rebellion, control of the borders had been established at the expense of losing centralized power. In order to regain more centralized control over the empire, Dezong tackled the shaken tax system to regain more effective ways to get hold of the population's earnings. Furthermore, he attacked local centers of military power that endangered the emperor's claim to power. As a result, he is mainly known for his financial reforms and his military operations against local warlords at the periphery of the empire (see Twitchett, The Cambridge History of China, pp. 497–513).

This story uses Dezong's rulership to frame Qixu's journey to the capital of ascended beings. As described above, Qixu started to hide in the mountains at the beginning of the chaotic political circumstances during Xuanzong's reign. Going into recluse during chaotic time periods was a common trope in literature on ascendance seekers (see footnote 10). Once these problematic circumstances dissolve and the world is again stabilized, the recluse reappears in this world. In this sense, the story uses these historical markers to point to the monk's recluse and ascendency beyond the human world.

"Mount Hua (lit. 'Flowery' or 'Glorious'); located in the Huayin district of Shaanxi northwest of Mount Lantian is the Western Peak [of the Wayue 五嶽 (Five Sacred Mountains). At about 6000 feet, it is not the highest, but certainly one of the most impressive mountains in China. Its almost vertical granite cliffs rise just above the densely populated plain. The pilgrimage trail leads through perilous stone steps and along ridges [...] Looking northward from the five summits, one can see the Yellow
River bending at famous Tongguan 關潼 pass and flowing eastward toward the sea. Located along the road between the cities of Xi'an and Luoyang, the mountain was visited by innumerable literati who contributed to a huge accumulated travel literature and poetry. Like the other peaks, as early as the second century BCE, Mount Hua had a temple [...] located at its foot where official sacrifices were conducted. [...] The Taoist acculturation of the mountain is linked [...] to ascetics who lived there, especially in the man-made caves, some of them hewn out of vertical cliffs. Since antiquity, Mount Hua had been reputed for the drugs that can be found there, and the renown of the mountain as a meeting place for immortality seekers is already mentioned in the third century CE” (Vincent Goossaert, “Huashan 華山: Mount Hua (Shaanxi),” The Encyclopedia of Taoism, pp. 516–517).

Furthermore, Mount Hua is the place of one of two important grotto-heavens, the Sanyuan Jizhen Tian 三元極真天 (Heaven of the Three Primes and Utmost Perfection) in the Xi Xuandong 西玄洞 (Grotto of the Western Dark) from the Shi Da Dongtian 十大洞天 (Ten Great Grotto-heavens) and the Zongzheng Dongtian 總真洞天 (Grotto-heaven of Complete Perfection) from the Sanshiliu Xiao Dongtian 三十六小洞天 (Thirty-six Lesser Grotto-heavens); see Franciscus Verellen, “The Beyond Within: Grotto-Heavens (dōngtian) in Taoist Ritual and Cosmology,” Cahiers d’Extrême-Asie 8 (1995): 288.

Although Zheng Shen 鄭緯 from Xingyang 榆陽, a county about seventy miles east of Luoyang in Henan province, may be the same Zheng Shen who appears in the Jiu Tangshu 舊唐書 (Old History of the Tang Dynasty), that text mentions only that Emperor Dezhong altered his official position: “On the jisi 己巳 day (the sixth day of the sexagenary cycle) of the third month of the eighteenth year of Dezhong’s reign (18 April 801), [the emperor] took Zheng Shen, the Prefect of Qizhou 趙州, and made him Prefect of Ezhou 儀州 and the Surveillance Commissioner of E 鄄, Yue 岳, Qi 經, and Mian 氏 [prefectures]”; 己巳, 浙江省台州市海門市 (Liu Xu 劉昫 et al., ed., Jiu Tangshu 舊唐書 [Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1975], p. 396).

Shen Yu沈渝 from Wuxing 吳興 is found in a tale devoted to him in the TPGJ, a tale which also takes place in the Zhenyuan reign period of Emperor Dezhong. It narrates Shen Yu’s encounter with his deceased grandfather and his decision to not only retire from his office but also to join the community of the Fa lun Si 法輪寺 (Temple of the Wheel of Dharma) monastic community in Tongzhou 同州 (see TPGJ 307.2428–29). As in the case of Zheng Shen, very little is known about Shen.

66 The XSZ (p. 13) is similar “Qixu had not set up cooking equipment because he had already given up grains” 契虛已絕粒故不置庖爨。

66 The phrase “Qixu had probably already fled and in the end no one knew where he was” 見契虛已遁去, 竟不知所在 is a formulaic expression commonly used in literature on ascended beings to mark a person’s realization of ascendancy. For examples that use this stock phrase, see the stories “Lu Ba” (Ge Hong, Shenxian zhu, pp. 127–28 and Campany, Ge Hong, pp. 252–255), “Wang Zhongdu” 王仲都 (Ge Hong, Shenxian zhu, p. 178 and Campany, Ge Hong, p. 271), and “Zhao Qu” (Ge Hong, Shenxian zhu, pp. 172–73 and Campany, Ge Hong, pp. 277–279).


68 The name of the collection XSZ refers to a Hall in the palace of Emperor Wen of Han 漢文帝 (202–157, r. 180–157 BCE) that was used for sacrifices to order the world. Although this facility was used for inquiry with ghosts and spirits by Jia Yi 蔡陽 (201–169 BCE) it is not clear how the text is related to the Hall. See Yong Rong 永瑉 et al., Siku quanshu zongmu 四庫全書總目 2 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1965), p. 1210.

69 For more information on Niu Sengru, see Rania Huntington, “Du Zichun,” p. 60.

70 Located about ninety miles east of Shijiazhuang just west of Shenzhou City in Hebei (Tan Qixiang, 5:49).
“Seng Qixu” (Monk Attached to Emptiness) by restricting his diet, Qixu was symbolically separating and divesting himself from culture and society, advancing the steps of social alienation stimulated by his Buddhist ordination. While the ordination into a Buddhist monastery resulted in a visual and exterior symbol of casting away the restrictions of family and society in form of one’s hair and clothes, the modification of one’s diet aimed on altering the inner constitution of the body, preparing it for a further ascendency.

Well before the textual manifestation of this story in the Tang, woodcutters and fishermen have already become tropes in Chinese literature. These figures commonly represented human beings who transcended or were about to fully transcend this world. The paradigm of woodcutters as guides or mediators between the divine and the human realm emerged already in the Six Dynasties. As James Crump describes this cultural image of the woodcutters in relationship to the fishermen in his book *Songs from Xanadu*, “both the fisherman and the woodcutter had already become associated with some sort of Taoist paradise by the Six Dynasties period. Though a fisherman alone discovers the paradise beyond the Peach-Blossom Fountain in Tao Ch’ien’s original, by the time of the Tang dynasty a woodcutter also shares in the knowledge of this Shangrila. [...] The woodcutter may have been simply an alternate guide to paradise, but it would appear that by the time of Hsi-yu chi a Chinese ‘pastoral’ idyll needed both Woodcutter and Fisherman [...]” Monkey assumes that the singer, a woodcutter, is himself an Immortal (Crump, *Songs from Xanadu*, pp. 92–94). Of course, James Crump covers in this depiction a huge portion of the literary history of the image of the woodcutter; however, it is important for us to recognize that both of these tropes, the fisherman who dwells on the water and the woodcutter who dwells in the mountains, were frequently associated with the knowledge needed to reach grotto-heavens and capitals of ascended beings at least by the Tang. In this sense, we can assume that the mere mentioning of the woodcutter triggered in the audience an awareness that the story was about to enter a threshold region between the mundane and the spirit world.

— According to Paul Kroll and Tian Xiaofei such journeys to the summit of mountains take on a very special and evocative position in Chinese literature. The use of natural imagery in literature of the Six
Dynasties and Tang period commonly points towards self-cultivational practices. Tian Xiaofei, for example, discusses in her book on visionary journeys the example of Sun Chuo’s “You Tiantai shan fu” (遊天台山賦). In this context, she mentions that people did not only understand these depictions of journeys to mountaintops as physical ascents but also as spiritual pilgrimages (see Tian Xiaofei, Visionary Journeys, pp. 43–51).

Paul Kroll takes Tian Xiaofei’s claim a step further and argues that modern readers need to force themselves to understand the associations medieval Chinese had while imagining or viewing mountainous landscapes. Mountains were not only places of physical and spiritual pilgrimages but also replicas of the body and the cosmos at large (see Paul Kroll, “Lexical Landscapes and Textual Mountains in the High Tang,” TP 84.1 [1998]: 69). In that sense, these scholars suggest that the sujei of a trip to mountains indicates a function beyond the mere mimetic depiction of joyful journeys through natural scenery.

83 See also note 35.
82 See also notes 18, 34, and Wu Hung’s comment on the three stages of Taoist spiritual cultivation in note 41.
83 See notes 44 and 45.
84 See note 52.
85 Roland Barthes, The Semiotic Challenge, p. 102
86 See note 24.
87 As James Robson claims, “within Chinese religious traditions, mountains became divine or numinous sites, the abodes of deities, the preferred locations for temples and monasteries, and the destinations of pilgrims. Over the centuries, religious practitioners were drawn to mountains that were considered storehouses for potent herbs, plants, and minerals — all of which could be employed in magical spells — as well as pure waters, places of refined qi, and locales with caves leading to subterranean worlds. Mountains served as auspicious places where deities manifested themselves and were therefore ideal sites to undertake necessary regimens to attain awakening or ascend as a transcendent.” (Robson, Power of Place, pp. 19–20)
88 Campany, Ge Hong, pp. 81–82.

Glossary

The following items are listed according to their appearance in the translated tales.

Tale 1, “Dongting lingyin zhuan”

chuangjie 車節 n. “windsocked staffs” were used for travel (p. 8, first poetic passage, l. 3)

dao zuo 道左 n. “to the left of the road” often suggests access to the netherworld and its inhabitants (p. 1, l. 6)

Dongting 洞庭 pn. “Dongting [Lake],” was thought to be inhabited by dragons (p. 2, l. 1)

e lian bu shu 蛾聯不舒 n. and v. “moth-like brows and face were furrowed”; fluffy “moth eyebrows” were considered the height of fashion in the Tang (p. 1, first line of the poetic description—see the two women with moth eyebrows on the back cover).

shu 社 n. “a soil altar,” where the local earth god resided, was a mound of earth with a tree growing on it; sacrifices (jisi 祭祀) to the local earth god and requests for rain were made there. The Lunheng 論衡 describes a rain-making ritual in which Dong Zhongshu 鄧仲舒 (179–104 BCE) “made earthen dragons summon rain” 設士龍以招雨 (Wang Chong 王充 [27–ca. 100]). Because of the interrelation-ship among soil altars, dragons, and rain, a soil
Tale 12, “Monk Qixu”

**boye 柏葉** n. “cypress needles”; the cypress tree, an evergreen that from early on was thought to symbolize strength, robustness, and longevity (p. 365, ll. 11–12).

**chensu zhi ren 塵俗之人** adj./n. “a person from the dusty world” refers to a human being who has not yet reached the status of a xianren 仙人 “ascended being” (p. 365, two and three lines up).

**cheshi 徹視** n. “penetrating gaze” is a feature of a realized person whose senses are not blocked so that (s)he may receive impressions from the world without cloaking or confusing her/his own senses and body. The non-obstructedness (che) of this gaze refers to a defining element of the workings of the Dao and implies that a person who attained such a sense would literally share features with the Dao (p. 369, l. 7).

**gengshen ri 庚申日** time expression “Gengshen-day”; on the night of the gengshen day (the fifty-seventh day in the sexagesimal cycle), the sanshih 三尸 (three corpses) report bad deeds of the person whose body they occupy to the celestial emperor (p. 369, seven lines up).

**jing buzhi suo zai 竟不知所在** idiomatic phrase, “in the end, [they] did not know where he was’; is an idiomatic expression commonly used in literature on ascended beings to mark a person’s realization of ascendancy (p. 370, ll. 17–18).

**juej 绝粒** v.o. “cutting off grain” is a Daoist dietary practice considered to enable the practitioner to maintain her/his life energy. The idea behind this technique was to digest purer essences of qi as found in uncultivated food allowing the practitioner to dwell, eat, and breathe in the higher heavens (p. 369, last line).

**kunfa 梳髮** v.o. “to shave off one's hair” is a practice that accompanies an entrance in a Buddhist monastery modelled on one of the steps the Buddha took to renounce his former life as a prince (p. 365, ll. 5–6).

**mao qingshou 貌清瘦** noun phrase, “the appearance is pure and emaciated”; this expression alludes to someone who used and mastered ascetic techniques with the aim to purify the body (p. 365, l. 14).

**mingmu zuo 眠目坐** v.p. “to sit with eyes closed;” commonly refers to a meditative practice that was thought to enable a practitioner to move between the human and the heavenly realm. The closing off of the orifices played a central role in these practices (p. 367, last two lines).

**sanpeng 三彭** n. “three peng,” often also called the sanshi 三尸 (three corpses), the sanshishen 三尸神 (spirits of the three corpses) or the sanchong 三蟲 (three worms) are three types of spirits or parasites that live within the human body. On the gengshen-day they report the bad deeds of their hosts to the celestial emperor so that he would punish and shorten their hosts’ life. Since these parasites live off the food that the host digests, cutting off the grains accompanied by meditative techniques allowed the
practitioner to famish the three corpses within her/his body (p. 368, l. 21).

xiandu 仙都 n. “capital of ascended beings;” is the residence of ascended beings in the Beihai 北海 (Northern Ocean) and commonly associated with dongtian 洞天 “grotto-heavens” (p. 365, two and three lines up).

xianren 仙人 n. “ascended being” is someone who reached a level of self-cultivation that would allow the person to vastly extend her/his life span. Such a realization was thought to lead to the development of supernormal powers over the environment (p. 368, l. 9).

xīqi 吸氣 vo. “to inhale/ingest vapor;” is a more refined version of jüelí (see above). Instead of basing one’s diet on uncultivated food, the practitioner directly ingested ethereal forms of qi. The idea behind these techniques was to digest purer essences of qi as found in air allowing the practitioner to dwell, eat, and breathe in the higher heavens. The total replacement of food by pure qi itself was thought to trigger an explosion of power within and a transformation of the practitioner’s body (p. 369, last line; p. 370, l. 1).

yihe 衣褐 v-o. idiom “to wear coarse clothes” is together with the practice of kungfu (see above) a sign for leaving behind one’s previous life, including one’s social status, symbolizing one’s detachment from material things (p. 365, l. 6).

zhēnjuán 真君 n. “true lord;” the idea of the true lord first shows up in the Zhuangzi in the chapter “Qiwulun.” There the true lord seems to take on the role of an underlying force behind the activities of both the world and the human body. In later periods, the true lord becomes a term that depicts a very high zhēnren 真人 “realized person” (p. 368, l. 18).

Biographical Sketches of the Translators

Meghan Cai Meghan Cai teaches Chinese Language and Literature at Grand Valley State University. Her research focuses on pre-modern Chinese narratives within their cultural contexts, particularly the roles that gossip and miscellany played in intellectual discourse.

Maria Kobzeva is working towards her Ph.D. in Chinese Literature at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Her research interests include narrative (both short stories and historical writing) from the medieval period and development of historiography in Tang. Her dissertation will explore the intertextuality of the Jin shu and Shihuo xinyu. She is also Managing Editor of Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR).

Michael E. Naparsteck received an M.A. in Asian Religion from the University of Hawai‘i and an M.A. in Chinese from the University of Wisconsin–Madison where he is currently working on his Ph.D. dissertation. His research interests focus on Daoist ritual both in practice and in the broader context of Chinese literature and material and visual cultures. He has taught at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and at the University of Vermont, and is currently at work as associate editor on the Biographical Dictionary of Tang Literati (forthcoming).