Biography of the Daoist Saint Wang Fengxian by Du Guangting (850–933)

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

I first became interested in hagiographical accounts of medieval Daoist holy women because they were among the few records I could find of actual women of the Tang dynasty (618–907). Tang dynastic histories and poetry written by Tang men mostly repeat standard images of women as evil empresses, bewitching concubines, or faceless victims of the Confucian patriarchy. The references are brief, and the women do not grow or develop. After reading a few biographies of female saints in the Daoist canon,[1] I realized that they tell compelling and entertaining stories. These accounts counteract simple stereotypes of medieval Chinese women, revealing a rich and complicated reality. The biographies introduce distinctly individual women of diverse geographic and class backgrounds. These people change over time, negotiate solutions to conflicts between personal goals and traditional roles, and act creatively within the limitations imposed upon them by the medieval Chinese social context. Wang Fengxian is one of these resourceful characters; her life is both exemplary and unique. When viewed from the perspective of traditional Chinese women's roles, the unmarried Daoist nun Wang emerges strongly out from under the Confucian gaze as an oppositional figure. Yet Wang remains under Confucian eyes as she faces the expectations of her parents that she marry, of her local officials that she assist them, and of her emperor that she glorify his reign by joining his harem. She circumvents the power structures of family and state to pursue her own religious objectives, but she never ignores those structures. In fact, her biographer claims that her life demonstrates a higher filial piety and loyalty than the norm because her Daoist practices help her whole family, her community, and her state.

INTRODUCTION

By the time the Tang dynasty ruled China, Daoism already had a long history as China's native major religion. Since the second century of the Common Era, Daoists had revered a host of deities, engaged in numerous rituals, and practiced self-cultivation to attain perfection, which included eternal life and residence in the Daoist heavens. During the fourth and fifth centuries, two great schools arose that continued into the Tang. These are the Shangqing or "Supreme Clarity" (after the Daoist highest heavens), and Lingbao or "Numinous Treasure," schools. The Shangqing tradition emphasized perfection through individual practices such as meditation and asceticism; it found adherents among the imperial family and the elite of the Tang. The Lingbao school favored collective ritual and community worship and provided many rites for the state and the people of the Tang. Our author, late-Tang Daoist master and courtier Du Guangting (850–933), was a Shangqing master. In his writings Du tried to unite the two main traditions of his time under the leadership of his own Shangqing school. All his works, including the present one, are meant to glorify both Daoism and his school.

Du Guangting's hagiographical account of Daoist holy women, entitled *Records of the Assembled Transcendents of the Fortified Walled City (Yongcheng jixian lu),* contains twenty-seven biographies of varying lengths.[2] The author narrates the lives of the nine saints, including Wang Fengxian, who lived closest to his own time, in the richest detail. These accounts all follow a similar structure, which derives from the official biographies in dynastic histories. The organization and style have also been influenced by the "exemplary women" *(lienü)* biographies and by earlier biographies of Buddhist nuns.[3]

Du Guangting's style is dense and allusive. His biographies begin with information about the saint's family and place of origin, followed by an account of her childhood, including any special religious tendencies or practices. Her childhood ends with the crisis of the marriage quandary: she must marry or remain celibate. If she marries, she will not be able to give full attention to her Daoist religious practice; if she remains single, she will not be doing her filial duty to her family. After resolution of the marriage dilemma, the saint carries on with her mature religious practice and may obtain special gifts, such as perpetual youthfulness, as a result. Finally, she departs from this world, leaving evidence of her sanctity, and ascends to heaven, where she takes up an office in the celestial bureaucracy. Wang Fengxian's biography adheres closely to this pattern. Each saint models a Daoist path to salvation; the individual details of each one's life make her unique.

Du Guangting's book of holy women has several expressed purposes. In

the course of the text, he states his desire to save Daoist records from the chaos attendant upon the end of the Tang dynasty, to record the lives of women saints whom other sources have neglected, to show the variety of valid paths to the Dao (the Way), and to praise the Tang dynasty for producing such auspicious signs of Heaven's approval as living saints. A careful reading of the text suggests that he also wishes to encourage imperial patronage of the Daoist church, promote the Daoist religion as a means of salvation in times of trouble, argue for the superiority of Daoism over Buddhism, support the belief that human beings can become perfected through their own efforts, and exalt the teachings of his school of Daoism over those of other schools.

For our purposes, Du Guangting's text provides an opportunity to explore several issues affecting women within the social context of medieval China. His work is the only one in the Daoist canon that presents female figures exclusively. We are able to examine their loyalty, filial piety, marriage, and social roles. We can also observe, through examination of the traces of Wang Fengxian and others like her in the historical, religious, and literary records of the time, that Daoist spiritual paths allowed some women during the Tang dynasty considerable scope for literacy, cultural contribution, and leadership.[4]

The fascinating tale of the life of Wang Fengxian (ca. 835–885), an important Daoist saint of the late Tang dynasty, is recorded in Du Guangting's work. Born in the south to a family of poor weavers, Wang Fengxian lived in a time and place of great turmoil. During her lifetime of forty-eight or fifty years, the south was the starting point for rebellions that plunged the country into chaos and signaled the beginning of the end of the three-hundred-year reign of the Tang.[5] Although unrest surrounded her, Wang's early life in the countryside is described as idyllic. After a childhood of eccentric behavior that revealed her religious inclinations, she became a renowned Daoist nun and revered teacher. She was known for her ascetic practices, skill in meditation, magical travels, services to the community of religious, and popular following.

Throughout his narration of the life of Wang Fengxian, Du Guangting repeatedly shows how her Daoist faith helps her overcome obstacles. First she avoids marriage by becoming a nun. She evades her powerful pursuers and escapes a life in the imperial harem by hiding in a temple. She moves serenely amid the bloody chaos attendant upon the collapse of the Tang dynasty and helps save others with her Daoist practices and teachings. Through Wang's exemplary biography, Du Guangting recommends Daoism as a means of saving grace in terrible times. He also commends to his readers the cult of Wang Fengxian as efficacious and worthy of reverence. The asceticism and meditation stressed by Du Guangting as part of Wang Fengxian's saintliness are precisely the practices most valued by his school,

the Shangqing tradition. Wang Fengxian's victory is indirectly presented by Du as a triumph for the teachings of Shangqing Daoism.

Wang Fengxian's biography makes a great story. It also brings up important issues in the history of Chinese religions. Du Guangting's writing shows the rivalry of Daoism and Buddhism in medieval times. In their competition for the hearts and minds and patronage of the people and the imperial court, representatives of Buddhism and Daoism constantly tried to make clear distinctions between the two religions, while at the same time continuously borrowing from each other and reinterpreting their own traditions. We see this in the account of Wang Fengxian. She is called Guanyin after a major Buddhist deity and takes refuge in a Buddhist temple, where she is revered by common people. Du Guangting calls the Daoist emperor of the highest heavens—the deity who gives Wang the elixir of immortality and predicts her celestial return—the Heavenly Honored One, which is probably a title borrowed from Buddhism. A few sentences later, Master Du instructs the reader on the superiority of Daoism to Buddhism, and he aligns Daoism with Confucian teachings.

In fact, the biography of Wang Fengxian forces us to examine what is sometimes termed the polar opposition between Confucianism and Daoism. Such an opposition seriously misrepresents the true situation, at least in medieval times. Daoist leaders like Du Guangting are quick to claim that their religion upholds the supposedly Confucian values of filial piety within the family and loyalty to the state. They see these virtues as cultural norms shared by all people of the Tang, rather than as exclusively Confucian values. Du Guangting characterizes Wang as careful to support the family and the state even as she resists their demands on her own life. She has found strategies—such as the claim that by pursuing a religious life the Daoist ascetic submits to a higher form of filial piety and loyalty than the householder—that enable her to move outside the confines of the traditional roles of wife and mother without challenging their importance.

In addition to shedding light on the relations between Daoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, Wang Fengxian's biography illuminates aspects of women's culture in the Tang dynasty. Clearly, some medieval Chinese women were able to create space for themselves within the limitations posed by the prevailing culture. A small number of women religious were able to make friends, travel, become literate, speak in public, wield power, and live independent lives. Wang Fengxian and others like her engaged in the same religious practices, such as fasting, ingesting elixirs, and meditating, as the male Daoists of their time. They hoped for the same results: immortality and celestial office. They were revered by both men and women and numbered both men and women among their disciples. After the Tang, Daoist practices for men and women were separated, and women's ability to leave the home was curtailed. But for a short period of time a few Daoist holy women managed to lead lives that should cause us all to question the image

of the timeless, traditional Chinese woman hobbled by bound feet. Wang Fengxian was such a person.

ORIGINAL TEXT[6]

Wang Fengxian ["Offering to the Transcendents"] was the daughter of a peasant family from Dangtu county in Xuan prefecture [in modern Anhui]. Her household was poor. Her father and mother wove and spun to provide for themselves.

Once when Fengxian was about thirteen or fourteen, as she ate her provision of rice [lit., "laborer's ration"] in the fields, she suddenly saw ten or more young girls.[7] After she played with them for a long time, they scattered and departed. Another day, she saw them again, just as before. From that time on, whenever she was in the fields eating her provision of rice, the flocks [of young girls] coming to play became a regular thing. For more than a month, various girls met at night in her house, talking and laughing the whole evening until dawn, when they would disperse. Some brought along strange fruits; others set out rare delicacies. None of it was anything we have in this world. Although her room was narrow and confined and the flock that came was numerous, it did not seem too constrained.

Her father and mother, hearing their talk and laughter, became suspicious. So they spied upon the visitors in order to scrutinize them, whereupon they just disappeared again. In addition, Wang's parents suspected she was being misled by bewitching goblins, so they examined her in great detail. Of course, she used other [evasive] words to answer them. From this time on, the various girls did not descend at night again.

The girls often came and went during the daylight hours. Sometimes they took her along on prolonged and distant journeys. Skimming the void, drifting far and returning, there was no place they did not reach. By evening she would return home. In addition, she never drank or ate. Day by day, she grew increasingly odd. One day, towards evening, her mother saw her throwing herself to the ground from the tips of bamboo plants growing in the corner of the courtyard [she was learning to fly]. Growing more and more worried and anxious, her mother begged Wang to tell her why she did this. So she told her mother and father about the things she had encountered. Finally, before she had even finished discussing the whole matter, the various girls [suddenly appeared and] cut Fengxian's hair, exposing her eyebrows in front and leaving just enough hair hanging down in back to reach the tops

of her shoulders.[8] From this time on, for several years, her hair simply did not grow longer.

She did not eat for a year or more.[9] Her flesh and muscles were rich and lustrous, as clean as ice or snow. With a cicada-shaped head and a rounded [lit., "maggot"] neck, she seemed made of luminous matter, with bright pupils. Her appearance was like that of a heavenly person. She was brilliant and perceptive in knowledge and argument. People south of the Yangtze River called her Guanyin.[10]

At the end of the Total Comprehension reign period (860–874), the Official Who Assists the Nation [Prime Minister], Common-Lord Du Shenquan, pacified the Jinling region, while Common-Lord Linghu Tao settled and held together the Yangzhou region.[11] Their reputation for writing poetry and making donations [to Wang Fengxian] was widespread south of the Yangtze River. Later Qin Yan requested that she remain in Jiangdu.[12]

The extended multitudes revered her. She received with ceremony lofty officials and community leaders. Energetic and diligent men who indeed took uprightness and rectitude to heart, they suspected something might be heterodox, so they visited and questioned her. Welcoming them, Wang treated them with reverence. She spoke of the Dao for several days. The community leaders asked about the basic principles of what she discussed and whether or not these principles were more or less in harmony with the essentials [of the Dao]. They also asked why she had the title of [the Buddhist deity] Guanyin. Fengxian said: "What I have encountered is the Dao. What I have gained is transcendence. Babbling common folk just flatter me with the name of Guanyin."

Some years passed and then Common-Lord Du sought her [at her hermitage] beneath Penglai and Mount Mao, intending to offer her as tribute for the consorts' apartments inside the imperial palace. She avoided this by abruptly cutting off her hair.[13] When he still would not allow her to return home to serve her parents, she remained inside a [Buddhist] temple. In the lanes and alleys people did not really understand her victory, but their gossip and praise of her reached the point where they burned incense in reverence to her, offered candles, gave her treasures, and dropped coins [in donation]. Thus some years passed. Up to the present, nobody really understands her hiding [in the Buddhist temple].[14]

Subsequently her ascetic practices and nurturing [the breaths] were not restrained or restricted to those of the rear courtyard [women's quarters]. She also did such brilliant services as performing stygian prayers [prayers for the dead] of the realized transcendents, cutting hair [to ordain nuns],

and arranging and directing [convents]. Still she was not satisfied with what she had obtained. But if we were to say she made a pair with the Dao, there would be no obstacle [error]. As Master Zhuang said: "If people consider me an ox, then I'll act like an ox. If they consider me a horse, then I'll act like a horse. Forgetting form and body, realized ones do not take the names of things as binding. Therefore they do not despise people."[15]

Moreover, whenever anyone saw her, she looked like a girl of eighteen or nineteen. Her face and appearance were different from those of ordinary people. She wore a garment with huge sleeves, made of damask and embroidery with patterns of clouds and auroral mists. What she held were transcendent flowers and numinous grasses. What she chanted and intoned were transcendent classics and chapters from the *dong* [lit., grottoes, referring to the three main divisions of the Daoist canon]. What she spoke about were matters pertaining to techniques of the divine transcendents for prolonging life and escaping from this world. Consequently, whenever she went about she could ramble at leisure or rush in a hurry, but she never experienced fatigue. She went to heavenly palaces and transcendent watch towers, golden-storied buildings and jade audience halls, narrow corridors and broad courtyards, mushroom fields and cloud orchards full of divine birds, heavenly wild animals, gemstone trees, and numinous fragrant plants—places not seen in this world.[16]

Passing over the Xinghan [Starry Han River: the Milky Way], going who knows how many thousands of myriads of *li,* she attended court to pay a formal visit to the Heavenly Honored One.[17] Inside the broad basilica in the palace of the Heavenly Honored One, feathered guards were densely arrayed. The Heavenly Honored One declared to Fengxian: "After you have lodged your life in the human world for fifty years, then you will certainly return here."[18] He ordered his attendants to the left and right to take a single cup of jade broth and give it to her to drink. When she finished, he warned her: "As for the produce of the hundred grains or fruits of the grasses and trees, eating them kills people in their youth. If you want longevity, then you should cut them off." From this time on, she did not eat for twenty years.

Now, the Heavenly Honored One performs his transformations in heaven, teaching people by means of the Dao, extending people by means of life, ruling and guiding all the myriad created things, protecting and nurturing universally on all sides: he is like a father among people of this world. [In contrast], Shakyamuni [Buddha] performed transformations on earth, urging people to stop evil and inducing people to seek blessings: he was like

a mother among the people in this world. And Zhongni [Confucius] taught the classics to the people, showing them by means of the instructions of the five constants [the five human relationships] how to take up a hundred courses [of good behavior]: he was like an older brother among people of this world. A baby in this world only recognizes its mother; it does not know its father and older brother should be revered. Thus among ordinary people, those who know the Dao are few and those who respect scholars are scarce. This is nothing to wonder at.[19]

In addition, among the people from above the heavens who have been seen, the males wear cloud caps and feathered clothes or tufted chignons and blue aprons, while the females have golden hairpins with kingfisher ornaments and either three hair coils or a pair of horn-shaped chignons. In their hands they hold jade tablets; on their necks they wear round and radiant [jewels]. They fly along, riding the void. No one can fathom their transformations. There are also riders on dragons, *qilin,* simurghs, and cranes [all auspicious creatures], as well as stalwarts with feathered standards and rainbow tallies. They are like thearchs or rulers among humans. Can't you see? As for images of bodhisattvas and Buddhas and Buddhist monks, those that emerge from paintings offered [by Buddhists] are extremely numerous. They all look like the forms of heavenly people, thearchic kings, lords of the Dao, and flying transcendents; they do not represent the actual appearance of monks and Buddhas.[20]

During the Total Comprehension (860–874) and Radiant Disclosure (874–888) reign periods, altogether about forty years, she wandered around the Wanling region of the Huai and Zhe Rivers.[21] Whenever she arrived, spectators gathered like clouds. In her preaching to the masses, she often took up the Dao of loyalty, filial piety, uprightness, and rectitude. She used words that were clear, clean, temperate, and simple; she taught the essentials of the secret (Daoist) practices for refining the body [self-cultivation].[22] Therefore everyone from far and near respected her, setting money and precious substances before her. Rejecting all the million myriads of things she was given, she departed, never looking back. She followed the rolling waves and billows of the Sanhuai region, stopped to perch in the four wildernesses, always seeming naturally unconcerned and unworried.[23] There were imposing tyrants, such as Sun Ru, Zhao Hongbi, and Shi Tao, who oppressed the masses; they wanted to annoy her with improper behavior and coerce her with white [metal] swords, so as to look secretly at the appearance of her spirits.[24] But without even knowing what they were doing, they bowed,

knelt, and extended to her the rites of disciples. Afterwards she lived at Mount Dongting in the company of two women disciples who had entered the Dao.[25]

At the beginning of the Radiant Disclosure reign period (885), she moved up to Mount Qianqing in the region of Yuhang.[26] The people beneath the mountain built her a floriate cottage to dwell in. After over a year, she was transformed without ever getting sick. She was forty-eight years old. Auspicious tokens of cloud cranes and strange fragrances were present. This tallied precisely with the period of fifty years mentioned [by the Heavenly Honored One]. In addition, she had not eaten for thirty years. She had a youth's complexion and snowy flesh as if she had remained a virgin. If not through the work of gold and cinnabar elixirs and jade fluid, how could she have reached this point? Also her spirits frequently wandered to the borders of heaven, and she could sit upright for a whole month. Sometimes she descended to inspect the affairs of earthly bureaus or stygian passes, or she sat and looked to the eight extremities; many times she spoke about this with people who possessed the Dao. People in this world do not recognize that [all her accomplishments] are on account of sitting in forgetfulness [meditation]. She is now a companion of the Primal Ruler of the Southern Pole and of the Divine Mother of the Eastern Tumulus.[27]

NOTES

I would like to thank Sue Fernsebner, Liu Lu, Cecily McCaffrey, Elena Songster, Ye Wa, and an unidentified reader for comments on this translation.

1. I use the term "saint" to mean a person in any major religious tradition who is believed to have overcome human limitations, achieved perfection, and become a focal point of veneration. Saints typically become conduits for communication with the divine as well as creators of community. I have argued elsewhere that Chinese Daoist saints are made through a process that draws upon traditional Chinese ideas to verify and then legitimize sanctity. A life of religious practice and a body that does not rot after death verify sanctity. The Daoist saint is then legitimized using the two major modes of ordering the world in traditional China: lineage and bureaucracy. The saint is accepted in a religious lineage and granted a post in the celestial bureaucracy. See Cahill, "Smell Good and Get a Job: Verification and Legitimization of Saints in Medieval Chinese Daoism."

2. The biography of Wang Fengxian discussed and translated here is found in *Records of the Assembled Transcendents of the Fortified Walled City (Yongcheng jixian lu),* completed around 910 by Du Guangting, and reprinted in the Song dynasty Daoist encyclopedia, *Yunji qiqian,* HY 1026, *juan* 114. That text is found in the *Daozang,* or Daoist canon, Zhengtong edition, reprinted in 1976, where Du Guangting's *Yongcheng jixian lu* appears in volume 38, 30344–46 (hereafter DG). Daoist

texts are referred to here by the letters HY, followed by the number assigned to the text in Weng Tu-chien, *Tao tsang tsu mu yin te.*

Du Guangting is the subject of a study by Franciscus Verellen *(Du Guangting [850–933]: Taoiste de cour à la fin de la Chine medievale).* Portions of the *Yongcheng jixian lu* have been studied and translated in Schafer, "Three Divine Women of South China"; Kohn, "The Mother of the Tao"; Cahill, "Practice Makes Perfect: Paths to Transcendence for Women in Medieval China"; Cahill, *Transcendence and Divine Passion: The Queen Mother of the West in Medieval China;* and Cahill, "Pien Tung-hsuan: A Taoist Holy Woman of the T'ang Dynasty (618–907 AD)." A brief biography of Wang Fengxian appears in a text compiled in 1154 by Chen Baoguang (*Sandong qunxian lu,* HY 1238, volume 53, 43316). For the history of the Daoist religion in China, see Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures;* and Robinet, *Taoism: Growth of a Religion.*

3. The *lienü* biographical literature, dating back to the Han dynasty work of Liu Xiang, entitled *Biographies of Women (Lienü zhuan),* is studied in Sung, "The Chinese *Lieh nü* Tradition"; and in Raphals, *Sharing the Light: Representations of Women and Virtue in Early China.* The first great collection of biographies of Chinese Buddhist nuns, the *Biqiuni zhuan* by Shi Baochang, is studied and translated in Tsai, *Lives of the Nuns: Biographies of Chinese Buddhist Nuns from the Fourth to the Sixth Centuries.* For an example of a *lienü* biography, see chapter 14.

4. For a study of a young Chinese woman who became a great saint within the confines of Ming society, see Waltner, *The World of a Late Ming Visionary: T'an-yang-tzu and Her Followers.*

5. The garrison revolt of Pang Xun, the most serious uprising of the sixties, paved the way for the disastrous Huang Chao rebellion of 878–884. Both began in the south, originating in popular unrest and lack of faith in the imperial government. On the Pang Xun rebellion, see Twitchett, *Sui and T'ang China,* vol. 3, part 1 of *The Cambridge History of China,* 695–700. On the Huang Chao rebellion, see the same work, 723–47.

6. Source: Du Guangting, *Yongcheng jixian lu.*

7. These are minor Daoist goddesses, a sign of her vocation and selection.

8. Her hair is left too short in front for the coiffure of a married woman. Her parents never have a chance to refuse her permission to enter religious life. Divine intervention in the form of an ordination ritual circumvents the question of marriage, which precipitates crises in the lives of other Daoist holy women, before it arises. Wang Fengxian is now a Daoist nun, ready to undergo further austerities. Cutting the hair is a traditional part of Daoist and Buddhist ordination practices. By Tang times, Daoist nuns no longer shaved the head but left the hair long enough to gather in coils that replicated the fashions of female immortals. On ordination of Daoist nuns in the Tang, see Despeux, "L'ordination des femmes Taoistes sous les T'ang"; and Benn, *The Cavern-Mystery Transmission.*

9. On fasting, an important Daoist ascetic practice, see Levy, "L'abstinance des céréales chez les taoistes"; and Maspero, *Taoism and Chinese Religion.* On the significance of fasting and eating for women's religious practice in medieval Europe, see Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women.*

10. Guanyin, the Bodhisattva of Compassion who saves people from catastrophes and grants their wishes, was the most popular Buddhist deity in Tang China (see chapter 2). Guanyin is the Chinese name of the bodhisattva called Avalokiteśvara in Sanskrit and Kannon in Japanese. As a female deity, she won devotees throughout

East Asia. Guanyin figures prominently in chapter 25 of the Lotus Sutra, a scripture well known even to illiterate people of the Tang. See the translation by Leon Hurvitz (*Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma,* 311–19). Calling a Daoist saint by the name of a Buddhist deity suggests intermingling of the two religions on the popular level. The change from male to female in this deity's image may already be under way here; Chün-fang Yü's forthcoming study of the cult and transformations of Guanyin addresses this transformation.

11. Du Shenquan, an official who passed the imperial examinations and served as a minister under Xuanzong (846–859), was appointed military governor in the south under Yizong (859–873). During the Pang Xun rebellion of 868–869, he was instrumental in restoring peace. Du Shenquan has official biographies in Liu Xu, *Jiu Tang shu* (hereafter JT), volume 14, *juan* 177, 4610–11, and Ouyang Xiu, *Xin Tang shu* (hereafter XT), volume 12, *juan* 96, 3863. Jinling is a city in the south, near present-day Nanjing, in Jiangning county. Linghu Tao (802–879), another official who passed the imperial examination and served as a minister under Xuanzong, held a military post under Yizong and played a part in the Pang Xun rebellion. He has official biographies in JT, volume 14, *juan* 172, 4465, and XT, volume 16, *juan* 166, 5101. Yangzhou is a city in the south of China, to the southeast of Xun, near present-day Jiangning county. These two top military governors were not embarrassed to write poems to this young woman and to support her with donations.

12. Qin Yan (d. 888), was a former thief who became a leader in the Huang Chao rebellion. He has official biographies in JT, volume 14, *juan* 182, 4715, and XT, volume 20, *juan* 224, 6401. Jiangdu is a city in the south, in present-day Jiangsu province, near Jinling.

13. Presumably, she cut her hair to make herself unattractive.

14. This episode, suggesting that she lived and received homage for a time in a Buddhist temple, perhaps passing as a Buddhist nun, perplexes her Daoist biographer. He protests that he cannot understand why she would spend such a long time in a rival institution. Wang's residence in a Buddhist temple suggests that her cult was widespread among common folk of the Tang and that she was claimed as a holy figure by Daoists and Buddhists alike. If, as I suspect, Buddhists also once claimed her as their saint, Du Guangting's perplexity on this episode is disingenuous.

15. This quotation, attributed to the Warring States Daoist thinker Zhuang zi, does not exist in any current recension of the *Zhuang zi* text. The words suggest that Wang is unconcerned with her reputation and only cares for the good of the people. The statement may also be an attempt to justify Wang's indifference to whether people consider her a Buddhist or a Daoist nun. For Du Guangting, she is one of the *zhen ren* (realized ones, or Daoist perfected). Du suggests that her brilliance, compassion, and skill in teaching rival those of Guanyin, after whom she is mistakenly called. Du Guangting implies that Wang Fengxian possesses *upaya* or "skill-in-means," the foremost teaching tool of compassionate Mahāyana bodhisattvas, such as Guanyin, to whom she has just been compared. Using skill-in-means, the bodhisattva teaches all listeners according to their ability. This miraculous skill in communication is demonstrated in the famous parable of the burning house in chapter 3 of the Lotus Sutra. See Hurvitz, *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma,* 49–83.

16. Du Guangting describes Wang as dressing like a goddess and obtaining miraculous herbal medicines. She chants Daoist texts revealed by the high gods and gains access to scriptures only known to initiates. Possessed of the secrets of longevity, transcendence, and celestial travel, she journeys to the Daoist heavens.

17. "Heavenly Honored One" (Tian Zun) is an honorific title bestowed on the highest gods of Daoism. Here Du Guangting refers either to the deified Lao zi or to a ruler of one of the three Daoist heavens. Buddhists use the same title for the Buddha.

18. The god's prediction of immortality for Wang Fengxian helps her biographer establish her legitimacy as a holy figure. The importance of prediction in Daoist lore closely parallels that in Buddhist tales, in which Buddhas of the past give predictions of future Buddhahood to bodhisattvas. Co-opting this device of prediction, Du Guangting asserts the priority of Daoism over Buddhism.

19. Du Guangting pauses in the course of his story to deliver a sermon in which he denigrates Buddhism (and mothers), while he elevates Daoism and aligns it with Confucianism. Here we see Du Guangting the court official as well as the Daoist master. He also explains why people do not revere the Dao or respect scholars and might mistakenly favor Buddhism. Notice that in comparing the Heavenly Honored One to the father, the Buddha to the mother, and Confucius to the elder brother, he places them in order of relative importance.

20. Du Guangting makes the interesting claim that the many and ubiquitous Buddhist images are not true representations of the appearances of Buddhist deities but are really copies of Daoist deities. This sheds light on a question that has been puzzling me for over a decade: if Daoism is so important in the Tang dynasty, where are all the Tang Daoist images? Maybe they have been hiding in plain sight under the guise of Buddhist images. This is an important subject that needs more work.

21. Wanling is in modern-day Anhui province and includes Xuan city, Wang Fengxian's hometown.

22. Despite her life of celibacy, which seems to contradict the demands of tradition that a woman marry and supply male descendants to her husband's ancestral line, Du Guangting stresses Wang's support of the Confucian values of filial piety and loyalty. He asserts elsewhere that her saintly life embodies a higher form of filial piety and loyalty: by attaining transcendence she gains blessings for her whole family and for the state. See DG, 30346.

23. Sanhuai (the "three Huai") is a region named for the three tributaries of the Huai River in the south. The "four wildernesses" refers to lands beyond Chinese civilization in each of the four directions.

24. Sun Ru, a great military leader at the time of the Huang Chao rebellion, has an official biography in XT, volume 17, *juan* 188, 5466–68. I have not identified Zhao Hongbi or Shi Tao.

25. The Mount Dongting intended here is a mountain in Jiangsu, rather than the more famous mountain of that name (also called Mount Zhun) near Lake Dongting in modern Hunan.

26. Mount Qianqing is located near Yuhang in present-day Zhejiang province.

27. The titles designate two great goddesses of *Shangqing* Daoism.