

# The Peach Blossom Spring's Long History as a Sacred Site in Northern Hunan

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## Introduction

Literary traditions—especially those that engage the human yearning for the utopian harmony of perfect paradises—are rarely studied for the way they relate to the specificity of any concrete locality.<sup>1</sup> A classic tale like “Record of the Peach Blossom Spring” (“Taohuayuan ji” 桃花源記) as narrated by the famous poet Tao Qian 陶潛 (Yuanming 淵明; 365?–427), about a fisherman happening upon a grotto that shelters a blissful community, is a case in point. It has been attributed with aspects of universal meaning, interpreted by literary aficionados from East Asia to North America, and it remains available for appreciation by anyone who has the leisure to read it. This freedom of consumption, however, may not always allow for an accurate understanding of the historical setting within which such traditions have been produced and disseminated. I am not referring merely to the political background, which is one interpretive venue that has long dominated the imagination of scholars in the field of Chinese literature. What I have in mind is rather the geographical concreteness that many such stories present, their rootedness in a specific locality, and the historical groundedness that this specificity can add to our interpretive repertoire.

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1 Several people have greatly improved this article by their careful reading of earlier versions. First, I would like to thank Hung Chang-tai for his early encouragement to publish this first part of my Peach Spring project as an article. The project, “The Heirs of Peach Blossom Spring: Daoist Frameworks for Chinese Village Culture,” is supported by a grant from the Hong Kong General Research Fund (GRF), 2021–2023. David Holm, too, contributed to early iterations of it. I am furthermore particularly grateful to Stephen Bokenkamp, Robert Campy, Timothy Chan, Vincent Goossaert, Wilt Idema, John Lagerwey, Paul Katz, and Gil Raz, for their generous comments and suggestions. Finally, I have benefited from the dedicated comments by the two anonymous reviewers.

It is a widely ignored fact that Tao Qian located his narrative in the hilly region of Wuling 武陵, today called Changde 常德, in northern Hunan province.<sup>2</sup> This place is adjacent to the county, also in Hunan, that perpetuates the legendary tale in name: Taoyuan xian 桃源縣, or Peach Spring county—designated by that very name as an official administrative unit since the early northern Song dynasty (960–1127).<sup>3</sup> It is in this broad region that the inhabitants of the grotto are still thought to be “present”; they are understood as efficacious (mostly female) immortals—or, as I will refer to these divine beings, “transcendents.”<sup>4</sup> There, and in large swaths of Hunan more generally, an extensive living tradition of Daoist ritual revolves around the paradise of Peach Spring.<sup>5</sup> Since medieval times the prevailing understanding of this area, also known during various dynastic periods as Langzhou 郎州,<sup>6</sup> or Dingzhou 鼎州,<sup>7</sup> has been of a place that emanates the efficacy of the transcendents inhabiting

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- 2 Tao Qian's mentioning of this precise location is all the more important in order to distinguish it from other locations that also claim a Peach Spring, such as Dayou Cave (Dayoudong 大酉洞), located roughly half-way between Chongqing 重慶 and Changde. This site still belongs to the same cultural sphere as the “original” site in Wuling. Other sites, like Xingzi county (Xingzi xian 星子縣) in Jiujiang 九江 (Jiangxi province), are farther removed. In contrast to the extensive referencing of Wuling in Tang poetry and later literati jottings, however, these locations usually come without much backing in other traditional sources, if any.
- 3 The name was used officially since the first year of the *qiande* 乾德 period (963).
- 4 My usage of “transcendent” for *xian* 仙/僊 instead of the still common “immortal” is based upon the excellent justification given by Stephen R. Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1997), 21–23.
- 5 The ritual tradition is not the topic of this article but will be closely studied in the GRF project I mention in footnote 1. So far, it has been cursorily studied by several scholars of local Daoism in Hunan province: Mark Meulenbeld, “Dancing with the Gods: Daoist Ritual and Popular Religion in Central Hunan,” in *Comparative Ethnography of Local Daoist Ritual* 地方道教儀式實地調查比較研究, ed. John Lagerwey and Lü Pengzhi (Taipei: Xin Wenfeng, 2013), 145–154; Lui Wing Sing 呂永昇 and Li Xinwu 李新吾, *Shi Dao he yi: Xiangzhong Meishan Yangyuan Zhan tan de keyi chuan cheng* 師道合一: 湘中梅山楊源張壇的科儀與傳承, in *Daojiao yishi congshu* 道教儀式叢書, ed. John Lagerwey and Lü Pengzhi (Taipei: Xin Wenfeng, 2015), 2: 111–118; and Lui Wing Sing and Li Xinwu, *Jiazhu yu Dizhu: Xiangzhong xiangcun de Daojiao yishi yu keyi* 「家主」與「地主」: 湘中鄉村的道教儀式與科儀, in *Fanzhu Sanjiao Lishi yu Shehui Congshu* 泛珠三角歷史與社會叢書 4 (Hong Kong: Xianggang Keji Daxue Huanan yanjiu zhongxin, 2015a), 57. For a literary description of relevant rituals performed during the early 20th century in western Hunan, see the account of a segment in Shen Congwen's fiction, provided by Jeffrey C. Kinkley, *The Odyssey of Shen Congwen* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1987), 127.
- 6 Used since the sixteenth year of the Kaihuang 開皇 reign of the Sui (596).
- 7 Used since the fifth year of the *dazhong xiangfu* 大中祥符 reign of the Northern Song (1012).

it.<sup>8</sup> Simply put, for the longest time Peach Spring was regarded as a sacred site with a lively cult of transcendence.

My main purpose here is to survey the major ways in which Peach Spring has been approached as a sacred site throughout its recorded history by authors representing the literary tradition, but also in epigraphy, hagiography, and official records. It should add a significant layer of historical specificity that is complementary to literary approaches, allowing for an understanding of Peach Spring as a cultic site.<sup>9</sup>

### The Peach Spring at Wuling: Literary Fiction and Utopia?

Most of the research on Peach Spring has been done by scholars of Chinese literature, as befits Tao Qian's canonical status within literary circles. Here I will survey the prevailing academic consensus on the story's literary interpretation. Before summarizing the most important scholarly work, let me provide a succinct outline of the plot and its essential components.

The tale told by Tao Qian, and the poem it prefaces, features a fisherman whose identity is only specified as a "man from Wuling" (*Wuling ren* 武陵人). During the Taiyuan 太元 reign (376–396) of the Eastern Jin 東晉 (317–420), the fisherman comes across a grotto hidden behind a forest of peach trees.<sup>10</sup> After entering the cave, he finds a blissful world that serves as a sanctuary for a community of refugees from a long bygone historical time, namely the upheaval of the Qin 秦 period (221–206 BCE). What the fisherman finds is a bountiful agrarian paradise with "rich fields and pretty ponds," "mulberry, bamboos, and other trees and plants," where "criss-cross paths skirted the fields."<sup>11</sup> When he tells the

8 The rituals for celebrating the transcendentals of Peach Spring, still performed today ubiquitously in Hunan, usually refer themselves to the site of Dingzhou.

9 The basic relationship of the Peach Spring story with a geographical location in Hunan has been taken up by one other scholar, a historical geographer. Despite the fact that the religious dimension is ever present in the sources she uses, unfortunately her interpretation remains staunchly secular. See Mao Shuai 毛帥, "Taoyuan bu zai shiwai: lun san zhi shisan shiji Wuling diqu 'Taohuayuan' shiti jingguan de jiangou guocheng 桃花源不在世外: 論三至十三世紀武陵地區"桃花源"實體景觀的建構過程," *Zhongguo lishi dili luncong* 28.1 (2013): 13–21.

10 The story does not use the common terms for grotto, such as *dong* 洞 or *ku* 窟. Instead it says that "in the mountain there was a small opening" (*shan you xiaokou* 山有小口). While it is hard to imagine that this "opening" refers to anything other than a cave to begin with, it should be noted that both the Tang poets as well as the local ritual tradition unequivocally also understand it as a grotto.

11 From James R. Hightower, *The Poetry of Tao Ch'ien* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970), 254.

cave-dwellers of the dynastic changes that have occurred during their time in the “secluded realm” (*juejing* 絕境) of the grotto-world, they all invite him to hear his stories. After several days of great hospitality, the fisherman from Wuling returns to his own world, promptly disregarding the cave-dwellers’ request to keep the community’s existence a secret from the world outside. Subsequent search efforts fail; nobody ever succeeds in finding the grotto again.

Two notions are commonly applied for understanding the story. Chinese scholars have largely interpreted Peach Spring as a colourful “literary fiction” that expresses a yearning for peace during times of upheaval, while later Western scholars redefined it in terms of a “utopia.” Both situate it in a context of elite ideology, reading it as a literati critique of socio-political turmoil, and the inherent desire of withdrawal from that world, or even from the world in general. Taken at face value, of course, a lot can be said for these interpretations. Whether the specific historical socio-political context matters or not, withdrawal from an imperfect world is certainly an important theme in the cultural history of the Eastern Jin, the period when Tao Qian lived.<sup>12</sup>

At the same time, both notions are problematic in that they represent a secular mode of analysis and thus are not well attuned to the possibility of exploring religious aspects. Robert Campany has made a well-argued case against “fiction” as a category of analysis for the sort of tales that Tao Qian represents, instead moving towards a religious interpretation.<sup>13</sup> Yet, despite the many Daoist overtones for the general theme of withdrawal and, additionally, a very widespread Daoist hermeneutics related to the story of Peach Spring in particular, religious dimensions have hardly been studied—with some important exceptions.<sup>14</sup> This is not to say that “fiction” or “utopia” couldn’t be good to think

12 See Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, 278; Donald Holzman, “Ts’ao Chih and the Immortals,” *Asia Major* 3rd ser. 1.1 (1990): *passim*; Franciscus Verellen, “The Beyond Within: Grotto-Heavens (*dongtian*) in Taoist Ritual and Cosmology,” *Cahiers d’Extrême-Asie* 8 (1995): 265–290; Li Jianguo 李劍國, *Tangqian zhiguai xiaoshuo shi* 唐前志怪小說史 (Beijing: Renmin, [1984] 2011), 480. Also see Alan J. Berkowitz, *Patterns of Disengagement: The Practice and Portrayal of Reclusion in Early Medieval China* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2000); Aat Vervoorn, *Men of the Cliffs and Caves: The Development of the Chinese Eremitic Tradition to the End of the Han Dynasty* (Hong Kong: Chinese Univ. Press, 1990).

13 Robert Ford Campany, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth: A Translation and Study of Ge Hong’s Traditions of Divine Transcendents* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2002), 98–100.

14 The most important of these exceptions are the studies by Edward H. Schafer, “Empyrean Powers and Chthonian Edens: Two Notes on T’ang Taoist Literature,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 106 (1986): 667–77, and by Stephen R. Bokenkamp, “The Peach Flower Font and the Grotto Passage,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 106 (1986): 65–77.

with, but they are very narrow and culturally determined lenses through which to look at a story about an “other world” during the Jin period.

Indeed, as Timothy Chan has noted for one version of the Peach Blossom story, “No one knows when the narrative began to be allegorized, but one finds no instance of such allegorical presentation before the late eighth century.”<sup>15</sup> Chan is very perceptive to the need to keep themes like the pursuit of transcendence anchored in the historical reality of Daoist ideology and practice. He points out that Peach Spring is an example of what he calls “transcendents’ precincts,” saying that “in early medieval China, there had been a common belief in the existence of an ‘other’ world.”<sup>16</sup> Given that Tao Qian refers to Peach Spring as a “divine realm” (*shenjie* 神界), it certainly does matter that there was such a common belief. In a most straightforward sense, the theme of any “other world” would commonly be understood as related to cults of “divine transcendents” (*shenxian* 神仙), or other otherworldly beings.

Here it should be noted that the story has been open to moralistic interpretations within the “Confucian mainstream,” too. An example of this can be found by looking at its later inclusion in the *Guwen guanqishi* 古文觀止, first compiled in 1692.<sup>17</sup> This anthology of “ancient-style prose” (*guwen* 古文) provided models for study by examination candidates, which suggests that Tao Qian’s story could be seen to represent a pastoral idyll that was not offensive to the morality of the officialdom. Had the story been more like some of its peer narratives, concretely describing the lure of female immortals, it might not have withstood this moral test. Such, indeed, is the fate of Liu Yiqing’s 劉義慶 (403–444?) story about the two gentlemen Liu 劉 and Ruan 阮, who, in Edward Schafer’s words, “traced an underground stream back to its source, to find two magical maidens who received them lovingly.”<sup>18</sup> Similarly failing the test of morality was a tale by Zhang Zhuo 張鷟 (658–730), entitled “Grotto of the Roaming Transcendents” (“Youxian ku” 遊仙窟). It describes the very erotic adventures a young scholar-official has inside a cave with two female transcendents, when “prolonged flirtatious banter, the exchange of suggestive poems, and drinking and gaming, precede the night of love.”<sup>19</sup>

15 Timothy Wai Keung Chan, “A Tale of Two Worlds: The Late Tang Poetic Presentation of the Romance of the Peach Blossom Font,” *T’oung Pao* 94 (2008): 244.

16 Chan, “A Tale of Two Worlds,” 215.

17 *Guwen guanqishi* 古文觀止, ed. Wu Chucai 吳楚材 et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 270–271. I am indebted to Wilt Idema for bringing this to my attention.

18 Schafer, “Empyrean Powers and Chthonian Edens,” 667.

19 William H. Nienhauser, Jr., “Female Sexuality and the Double Standard in Tang Narratives: A Preliminary Survey,” in *Paradoxes of Traditional Chinese Literature*, ed. Eva Hung (Hong Kong: Chinese Univ. of Hong Kong Press, 1994), 8.

Nonetheless, for Tao Qian's story to become categorized exclusively under the aegis of those two modern notions of "literary fiction" and "utopia," powerful spokesmen wielded their influence during the reforms of the early twentieth century. One of the most decisive voices is Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881–1936). In his historical survey of Chinese fiction he includes Peach Spring among several early works supposedly written as a "conscious creation"—that is, as fiction.<sup>20</sup> For his evolutionary narrative about Chinese fiction's birth specifically as a break from mythology and its gods, he needs to dismiss Tao Qian's affinity with religious practices.<sup>21</sup> So, discussing a book about spirits and gods attributed to Tao Qian, the *Soushen houji* 搜神後記 (*Sequel to In Search of the Divine*), Lu Xun says that Tao Qian "was a broad-minded man, and not necessarily attached to demons and gods" 陶潛曠達, 未必拳拳於鬼神.<sup>22</sup>

This sort of distancing from the sphere of the spiritual by claiming stories' fictionality has long become the norm in Chinese literary studies. Li Jianguo 李劍國, a foremost expert of pre-Tang fiction, maintains that Tao Qian "fictionalized the extraordinary realm of Peach Spring, separate from the world" 虛構了一個與世隔絕... 的桃源異境.<sup>23</sup> He echoes Lu Xun's verdict by saying that Tao Qian "did not superstitiously believe in demons and gods" 并不迷信鬼神<sup>24</sup> although at the same time he does point out that Tao Qian clearly had a fascination with spiritual beings.<sup>25</sup> Either way, among Chinese scholars there seems to be no significant deviation from this secular line of reasoning that runs from Lu Xun through Li Jianguo and into the present.

Even for scholars who specifically recognize the relevance of Daoist paradises in this context, the final conclusion remains that Tao Qian had no transcendental beings in mind. In his discussion of Peach Spring, the renowned scholar Yuan Xingpei 袁行霽 repeatedly defines the subject of Tao Qian's story as representing a "transcendents' precinct" (*xianjing* 仙境).<sup>26</sup> Yet, he still concludes that the difference between Peach Spring and "conventional stories about transcendents' worlds" is that it lodges "regular people" and "absolutely not divine transcendents who are immortal."<sup>27</sup>

20 The term used is *yishi zhi chuangzao* 意識之創造. Lu Xun 魯迅, *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shilüe* 中國小說史略 (Shanghai: Beixin shuju, [1925] 1936).

21 See Mark R.E. Meulenbeld, *Demonic Warfare: Daoism, Territorial Networks, and the History of a Ming Novel* (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawai'i Press, 2015), 42–43.

22 Lu Xun, *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shilüe*.

23 Li Jianguo, *Tangqian zhiguai xiaoshuo*, 479.

24 *Ibid.*, 472.

25 *Ibid.*, 466.

26 Yuan Xingpei 袁行霽, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu* 陶淵明集箋注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011), 332.

27 *Ibid.*

Equally secular in outlook, but with a different agenda, Western literary scholars have focused on Peach Spring as a utopia. Robert James Hightower, an early western interpreter of this story, calls it “an imagined utopia, no less remote and impossible for the modesty of its conception.”<sup>28</sup> In line with secularizing trends in Chinese academia, Hightower, too, seeks to detach this utopia from the feathered transcendents of early China. In his interpretation, he states that Tao Qian’s description of ordinary attire worn by the inhabitants stipulates the conviction that these were not transcendent beings or gods, but common people: “The line about the clothes worn by the inhabitants is probably intended to convey the idea that these were not immortals or other-worldly beings, clad in shining raiment, or covered with feathers, but people just like any other.”<sup>29</sup> Still, the association with “immortals” was apparently strong enough to merit rebuking.

In that same vein, although A.R. Davis affirms that the story of Peach Spring must have emerged from “within the milieu of the search for immortality,” and although he even affirms that originally “it was a tale about immortals,” according to him Tao Qian supposedly “used it to give expression to his desire to withdraw from the world not as an immortal but as a recluse.”<sup>30</sup> The Daoist concept of a transcendents’ tale is here seen as a foil for secular notions.

More recent generations of literary scholars no longer see “religion” as an aspect that needs to be addressed at all, and they instead frame the story within the theme of utopia and cognate concepts, like anarchy. Dore Levy finds in the poem an impression “not of a place at all, but of a state of mind.”<sup>31</sup> Charles Kwong relates the utopia of Peach Spring to anarchistic visions of a “natural social order,”<sup>32</sup> one that “comes to deny all forms of political organization.”<sup>33</sup> Political interpretation also determines subsequent scholarship on Tao Qian. Tian Xiaofei describes the poet as “a lofty-minded recluse, intensely loyal to the declining and later overthrown Jin dynasty; a poet who chooses to pursue self-fulfillment through a set of private values rather than through public life.”<sup>34</sup>

28 Hightower, *The Poetry of T'ao Ch'ien*, 256.

29 Ibid.

30 A.R. Davis, *T'ao Yüan-ming: His Works and Their Meaning* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Univ. Press, 1983), 200.

31 Dore J. Levy, *Chinese Narrative Poetry: The Late Han Through Tang Dynasties* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1988), 12.

32 Charles Yim-tze Kwong, *Tao Qian and the Chinese Poetic Tradition: The Quest for Cultural Identity* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, Univ. of Michigan, 1994), 54.

33 Kwong, *Tao Qian*, 55.

34 Xiaofei Tian, *Tao Yuanming and Manuscript Culture: The Record of a Dusty Table* (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 2005), 12–13.

Wendy Swartz similarly sees Tao Qian as a recluse not in terms of ascetic self-cultivation, but in terms of political disengagement.<sup>35</sup> In this regard, too, Chinese (as well as Japanese) scholars offer an identical assessment.<sup>36</sup>

### The Peach Spring at Wuling: Entering into Topography

In addition to these predominant literary perspectives throughout the twentieth century, there are a minority of alternative voices in Chinese scholarship from a relatively early point onwards. Indeed, despite the fisherman's failure to track down the Peach Spring in Tao Qian's original tale, some Chinese historians of the early to mid-twentieth century still have tried to identify its location and situate it within an actual topography. Both Chen Yinke 陳寅恪 (1936) and Tang Changru 唐長孺 (1956) offer rather precise speculations as to the whereabouts of the site. For Chen Yinke, in a famous article on Tao Qian's story, Peach Spring metaphorizes a historical sanctuary at a time of political turmoil. Political interpretations, of course, are the common stock of Chinese literary studies, but Chen Yinke explains the concept of Peach Spring as referring to actual sites like "entrenchments" (*wu* 塢) where people could find shelter from outside threats.<sup>37</sup> Chen Yinke, citing many examples of local people seeking the safety of grottoes in mountainous areas, subsequently locates the "entrenchment version" of Peach Spring in northern China.

While also arguing for a concrete geographical location, Tang Changru refutes Chen Yinke's argument for the north and instead situates Peach Spring squarely in the local cultures of Hunan and Hubei. He speculates the story originated from among the "savage" southerners of the Man people (*Man* 蠻;

35 Wendy Swartz, *Reading Tao Yuanming: Shifting Paradigms of Historical Reception* (427–1900) (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Asia Center, 2008).

36 Of the abundant examples, the following is most representative in that he distinguishes between "physical eremitism" (*xingyin* 形隱) and "eremitism of the heart" (*xinyin* 心隱): Li Wenchu 李文初, *Tao Yuanming lunlüe* 陶淵明論略 (Shaoguan: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1986), 42–43. In Japanese scholarship, trends are no different. Two representative examples include: Ikkai Tomoyoshi 一海知義, *Tō Enmei o kataru* 陶淵明を語る (Tōkyō: Fujiwara Shoten, 1958); *Tō Sen "Sōshin kōki"* 陶潛『搜神後記』, ed. Senbō Yukiko 先坊幸子 and Morino Shigeo 森野繁夫 (Tokyo: Hakuteisha, 2008). Japanese scholars of Comparative Literature have also studied Peach Spring, as an example of "ideal place"; see Tōru Haga 芳賀徹, *Yosa Buson no chīsana sekai* 與謝蕪村の小さな世界 (Tōkyō: Chūō Kōronsha, 1988). Also see Wang Xiaolin 王小林, *Nitchū hikaku shinwagaku* 日中比較神話学 (Tōkyō: Kyūko Shoin, 2014), chapters 3 and 4.

37 Chen Yinke 陳寅恪, "Taohuayuan ji pangzheng 桃花源記旁證," *Tsing Hua Journal of Chinese Studies* 清華學報 11.1 (1936): 79–88.



traditionally translated with “barbarians”), signifying a site of refuge—for the Man to escape the pressures of dynastic tax collection.<sup>38</sup> This argument is in line not only with historical records of tax-evasion both by the Man as well as the Han,<sup>39</sup> which forms its own venue of research altogether, but his move towards the local cultures of Hunan and Hubei also brings the story in a direct relationship to Peach Spring’s narrative peers; that is, there were several similar narratives circulating in this region.

Therefore, it will be useful to see just how much Tao Qian’s story of an earthly paradise at Wuling may fit in a context of local topography with its local narratives. One such story, from the fifth century collection *Yiyuan* 異苑 (*A Garden of Marvels*), is recorded by Liu Jingshu 劉敬叔 (fl. 417–426), who had been stationed close to Wuling in the town of Changsha 長沙 (today Hunan’s provincial capital), as an adjutant to Prince Jing 景 of Changsha, Liu Daolian 劉道憐 (368–422), younger brother of Liu Yu 劉裕 (r. 420–422), founder of the Liu-Song 劉宋 dynasty (420–479). And, like Tao Qian, Liu Jingshu had spent several years in Jiangling 江陵 county (now in Hubei province, not far from Wuling).<sup>40</sup> This historical and geographical coincidence is significant.

Liu Jingshu’s tale describes how “somebody from the Man of Wuling” (*Wuling Manren* 武陵蠻人) comes across a grotto while hunting.<sup>41</sup> The historical period is given as “early Yuanjia” period (*Yuanjia chu* 元嘉初), a reign period that spanned the years between 424 and 453, and is thus dated only a few decades after the Taiyuan period mentioned in Tao Qian’s story. And like Peach Spring, the grotto’s entrance is found accidentally by someone pursuing a deer. Here, too, once the hunter squeezes through “it suddenly opened up and became all bright” (*huoran kailang* 豁然開朗)—a memorable phrase identical to the one used in Tao Qian’s version. Like the Peach Spring story, also, the grotto turns out to lodge an agrarian community where mulberries are grown (indicating their ability to make their own clothing);<sup>42</sup> and like the Peach Spring story, again, the hunter marks the route to the grotto upon departing, but can-

38 Tang Changru 唐長孺, “Du ‘*Taohuayuan ji pangzheng*’ zhiyi 《讀〈桃花源記旁證〉質疑》,” in *Wei Jin Nanbeichaoshi luncong xubian* 魏晉南北朝史論叢續編 (Beijing: Sanlian, 1959), 163–177.

39 Early interpreters even claim that the name “Yao” is derived from a nickname that defines these peoples as tax-exempt. See *Suishu* 隋書 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1973), 31.898.

40 Tang Changru, “Du ‘*Taohuayuan ji*’ zhiyi,” 167–68.

41 Liu Jingshu 劉敬叔, *Yiyuan* 異苑, in *Han Wei Liuchao biji xiaoshuo daguan* 漢魏六朝筆記小說大觀, ed. Wang Genlin 王根林 et al. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1999), 1.600.

42 As we have seen from Hightower’s argument about “immortals,” the issue of clothing may be attributed with significance.

not find his way back. Even aside from the detailed narrative similarities, Liu Jingshu's tale unambiguously confirms that Tao Qian's version of a grotto discovery is not the only story of this kind referring itself narrowly to the location of Wuling.

Later versions uphold this geographical specificity. For example, in *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽, compiled from 977 to 983, an almost identical story about a (or *the* one and only?) "somebody of the Man River people from Wuling" (*Wuling Ximanren* 武陵溪蠻人) is referred to, also set during the Yuanjia reign.<sup>43</sup> The most important difference is that this hunter gains entrance to the grotto by climbing a ladder—an act that often signifies initiation into transcendental realms. Interestingly, this version is said to originate from a book containing local records of Wuling, entitled *Wuling ji* 武陵記 (*Records of Wuling*). This book, oft cited in narrative or historical fragments that pertain to Peach Spring, is now lost; nonetheless I will have more to say about it later in this section.

An explicitly Daoist version of the Peach Spring story is included in a compilation of hagiographic materials from the twelfth century (or earlier), included in the Daoist Canon of 1445, entitled *Sandong qunxian lu* 三洞群仙錄 (*Records of the Multitude of Transcendents of the Three Caverns*).<sup>44</sup> This version, entitled "Record of Peach Spring" ("Taoyuan ji" 桃源記), too, is situated in Wuling. It is somewhat shorter and, as a consequence, phrased differently.

One difference with Tao Qian's version is particularly striking: the Daoist "Record of Peach Spring" provides a personal name for the fisherman, Daozhen 道真 (lit. the "Truth of the Way"), that is repeated throughout the story. This is relevant because in many editions of *Soushen houji*, which contains Tao Qian's story without the poem, an interlinear commentary about the fisherman who finds Peach Spring states that he was a certain Huang Daozhen 黃道真.

The fisherman is surnamed Huang, his given name is Daozhen.<sup>45</sup>

漁人姓黃，名道真。

Aside from the bare fact of a mention of this name within the literary tradition, *Soushen houji* is interesting also because it is a work attributed to Tao Qian himself, even though scholars have regarded both the attribution to Tao Qian

43 *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960), 54.5b.

44 Chen Baoguang 陳葆光, *Sandong qunxian lu* 三洞群仙錄 (DZ 1248), 5.3ab.

45 Li Jianguo 李劍國, *Xinji Soushenji, Xinji Soushen houji* 新輯搜神記，新輯搜神後記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), 2:702.

as well as the name of Huang Daozhen with uncertainty.<sup>46</sup> In Li Jianguo's most recent annotated edition, the discussion of Tao Qian's authorship is not conclusive, but the argumentation is heavily slanted towards accepting the traditional attribution of authorship to Tao Qian.<sup>47</sup> As for Huang Daozhen's name, however, Li Jianguo does note that it was not included in the original story by Tao Qian.<sup>48</sup> At the same time, he does not explain what exactly is meant by the supposed "original text" (*yuanwen* 原文). Li Jianguo mentions that the name Huang Daozhen was first added to Tao Qian's story in the version included in *Jianzhu Tao Yuanming ji* 箋注陶淵明集 (*Annotated Works of Tao Yuanming*) by a certain Li Gonghuan 李公煥, who is most likely a figure from the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368).<sup>49</sup>

Sources outside the literary canon, however, reveal that the name Huang Daozhen refers to a Daoist saint in the Wuling area at least since the Tang dynasty. Whatever the "original" version by Tao Qian may have said, Huang Daozhen was associated—"on the ground" as it were—with the physical site of Peach Spring already during the ninth century. One such historical source mentions Huang Daozhen in relation to an early record of a Daoist monastery at Wuling's site of Peach Spring, called the "Peach Spring Abbey" (*Taoyuan guan* 桃源觀). Written by an official named Di Zhongli 狄中立 in 841, the "Records of the Peach Spring Abbey's Mountain-grounds" ("Taoyuan guan shanjie ji" 桃源觀山界記) state that the Peach Spring Grotto at Wuling—where this abbey is located—is the place where "Huang Daozhen, a fisherman from the southern shore of the Great River [沅 Yuan], saw the Peach Blossoms" 大江南岸漁人黃道真見桃花處.<sup>50</sup> The record by Di Zhongli also mentions in relation to this abbey another sacred being who belongs to the region, Qu Tong 瞿童, or "Young Lad Qu," of Chenzhou 辰州 in western Hunan. Both saints and the Peach Spring Abbey will be more fully introduced below.

From sources of the tenth century and later we find that the figure of Huang Daozhen is not just randomly associated with the main Daoist institution at Peach Spring. These sources indicate that he is in fact a representative of a

46 For a survey of discussions about authorship; see Li Jianguo, *Tangqian zhiguai xiaoshuo*, 464–471. In David Knechtges' bibliographic treatment of this collection, he does not accept the attribution. See *Ancient and Early Medieval Chinese Literature: A Reference Guide*, ed. David R. Knechtges and Chang Taiping (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 2: 1023.

47 Li Jianguo, *Xinji Soushenji, Xinji Soushen houji*, 2: 82–86. I am grateful to Robert Campany for pointing out to me Li Jianguo's discussion of authorship.

48 *Ibid.*, 703.

49 *Ancient and Early Medieval Chinese Literature: A Reference Guide*, 2: 1115.

50 "Taoyuan guan shanjie ji" 桃源觀山界記, *Quan Tang wen* 全唐文 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1983, hereafter *QTW*), 761.9b–10b.

local phenomenon of the area around Wuling. In *Taiping yulan*, another reference is made to the *Records of Wuling*, this time explaining the presence of Huang Daozhen. For the compendium's description of a mountain called Mt. Huangwen (*Huangwen shan* 黃聞山), or "the mountain where Huang listens," the joint occurrence of various elements reveal Huang Daozhen's local origins.<sup>51</sup>

The *Records of Wuling* says: Long ago there was Huang Daozhen of Linyuan [county]. He lived at one side of Mt. Huangwen. Once, when he went fishing, he entered the Peach Blossom Spring. Tao Qian has a *Record of the Peach Blossom Spring* [about this event].

《武陵記》曰：昔有臨沅黃道真。住黃聞山側。釣魚，因入桃花源。陶潛有《桃花源記》。

Linyuan county 臨沅縣, established during the Han dynasty, corresponds largely with the area later known as Wuling—in northwestern Hunan. In other words, in the environment of the grotto of Peach Spring at Wuling, Huang Daozhen was a local figure.

With this particular record of Mt. Huangwen we find an interesting perspective on the story of Peach Spring, one that intensifies its "local" meaning. Whereas Tao Qian's famous narrative does mention Wuling, the fisherman's name is not included in the narrative itself but added as an interlinear comment in some (later) editions. Scholars might thus be tempted, as they have been, to see this as the insertion of a personal name from the outside, an addition to the story without (local) basis. Yet, the above passage from *Records of Wuling* quoted in the *Taiping yulan* does something else: for its presentation of Huang Daozhen as a native of the Wuling area, hailing from Linyuan county, it takes Tao Qian's story and applies it to Huang Daozhen. In other words, Huang Daozhen is here understood as the primary "historical" reality of the locality, and Tao Qian's story is presented as a secondary discourse, one that merely contextualizes the local reality.

This short passage from *Records of Wuling* thus suggests that Huang Daozhen was not only known in Linyuan county, but specifically related to the sites of (1) Peach Spring, and (2) Mt. Huangwen. And (3), Tao Qian's story is said to be about this configuration. Surely, the name of the place where Huang Daozhen had lived "to the side of Mt. Huangwen" implies that it is a sacred site as well—

<sup>51</sup> *Taiping yulan*, 49.4a.

it would be unheard of to have a mountain's name associated with a common mortal if this person were not the object of a cult of worship.

Finally, a source from the tenth century connects Huang Daozhen to Wuling, to the "Peach Spring Cave," and to transcendents. This work, the *Xianyuan Bianzhu* 仙苑編珠 (*Garden of Immortals: A Pearl Treasury*), was compiled by the Daoist adept Wang Songnian 王松年 during the late Tang dynasty and included in the Daoist Canon. It has a brief entry on Huang Daozhen with all the relevant pointers tightly packed together.

The fisherman Huang Daozhen was a man from Wuling. As he was rowing his fishing boat, he unexpectedly entered the Peach Spring Cave and encountered transcendents.<sup>52</sup>

漁人黃道真，武陵人。棹漁舟，忽入桃源洞，遇仙。

Note that no mention is made of Tao Qian. The passage stands on its own as a hagiographic narrative. Combined with the *Records of Wuling* and with Di Zhongli's 841 record, Huang Daozhen emerges as an important, sacred presence in Wuling—long before the Yuan dynasty comment by Li Gonghuan.

Another passage in *Taiping yulan*, again quoting from *Records of Wuling*, makes similar connections. While it does not mention Huang Daozhen, it again moves from the locality towards the story of Tao Qian. It contains an entry on the mountains of Wuling (*Wuling shan* 武陵山; perhaps "Mt. Wuling"), and similarly connects it to the story.<sup>53</sup>

Living in the mountains of Wuling there were refugees from the Qin. When they found water, they called it "Peach Blossom Spring." Therefore, Tao Qian has his *Record of the Peach Blossom Spring* [about it].

武陵山中有秦避世人居之。尋水號曰「桃花源」。故陶潛有《桃花源記》。

In this instance, too, the basis for the entry is a location (Wuling), with a named site (Peach Blossom Spring). Again the story is mentioned in reference to the location, as belonging to the site—not the other way around. Similarly, the Qin refugees are also presented as a local "fact," and Tao Qian's story thus presented

52 *Xianyuan Bianzhu* 仙苑編珠 (DZ 596), 1.18a. I must thank Timothy Chan for kindly pointing out this reference to me.

53 *Taiping yulan*, 49.4b–5a.

as written “after the fact.” As the compendium’s entry has it: “Therefore, Tao Qian has a *Record of the Peach Blossom Spring* [about this event].” To be sure, my intention is not to say that the presence of Qin refugees must have been historically accurate; rather I mean that their presence was locally perceived as such.

Through all of this shines the importance of the *Records of Wuling*. Local lore described in this work would be all the more significant for some firm steps toward historicization, if we could be sure that these records really are what they purport to be, namely a work either written by a certain Bao Jian 鮑堅 from the Liang dynasty (502–557), or even older, by Huang Min 黃閔 from the Southern Qi 南齊 (479–502), whose writings are cited in the commentary to the *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書.

While we cannot quite push the date of the *Records of Wuling* back as far as Tao Qian’s time, we are able to date it to a time no later than the early Tang dynasty, and probably before it. This date is possible because of an early commentary to the *Hou Hanshu* that cites the *Records of Wuling*. Describing a mountain called Mt. Wu (*Wushan* 武山) to the west of Chenzhou—from where hails the saint Qu Tong—the crown prince Li Xian 李賢 (655–684) has much to say in his commentary to the *Hou Hanshu*.

Huang Min’s *Records of Wuling* states: The mountain is more than ten thousand *ren* high. Halfway up the mountain is Pan Hu’s stone chamber, which can hold tens of thousands of people. Inside there is a stone bed, a trace of Pan Hu’s presence.” Now I [Li Xian] explain: In front of the stone cave are stone sheep, stone animals, and there is an abundance of ancient traces and unique marvels. The stone cave is as big as three houses, [seen when] facing it. From afar one rock still looks just like the shape of a dog. Among the Man people there is a tradition saying that this is the likeness of Pan Hu.”<sup>54</sup>

黃閔《武陵記》曰：“山高可萬仞。山半有盤瓠石室，可容數萬人。中有石床，盤瓠行跡。”今案：山窟前有石羊、石獸，古跡奇異尤多。望石窟大如三間屋。遙見一石仍似狗形。蠻俗相傳，云是盤瓠像也。

What we can thus ascertain is that the *Records of Wuling* had spread beyond Wuling and was moreover referred to authoritatively—by a foremost member of the imperial family—during the seventh century.

54 *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965), 86.2830.

But let us stick to what we now know with absolute certainty: because of this *terminus ante quem* for the *Records of Wuling*, we are now able to say that Peach Spring at Wuling was regarded as a sacred site during the second half of the seventh century at the very latest. Thanks to Huang Daozhen's visit to Peach Spring, and his enshrinement as a local saint, we find that Tao Qian's story about Peach Spring precedes all this by a much shorter period of time than we would have been able to observe otherwise.

Li Xian's specific reference is thus useful for approximating the date by which the *Record of Wuling* was in circulation, but it also allows for a better understanding of the sacred lore of this region and the society to whom it pertained. As is attested by various sources, including the *Suishu* 隋書, the Wuling area was inhabited by Man peoples who "dwelled reclusively in mountainous valleys" (*bichu shangu* 僻處山谷).<sup>55</sup> For them, a grotto "which can hold tens of thousands of people" would be a useful sanctuary, and moreover suitably consistent with an earthly paradise. Indeed, the term "stone chamber" (*shishi* 石室) is a meaningful term that cannot be fully appreciated without referring to Daoist revelations.<sup>56</sup>

In terms of the sacred presence contained in this cave, the name Pan Hu refers to the common ancestor of the Man peoples, a fact that had not escaped the compilers of *Suishu* either.<sup>57</sup> That is to say, the concept of grottoes associated with sacred beings surely was not imported from elsewhere; it must have predated the advent of Han Chinese colonizers. Moreover, and just as important, attention to the sacredness of extraordinary places seems to be at the core of what the *Records of Wuling* is attuned to.

Pan Hu's legendary ancestry of the Man people in Wuling is recorded also in Li Daoyuan's 酈道元 (466/472–527) *Shuijing zhu* 水經注. While the fascinating details of the story are not necessarily relevant here, it deserves mentioning

55 *Suishu* 隋書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973), 31.897.

56 The great Daoist systematizer of early southern traditions, Ge Hong 葛洪 (284–343), says that stone chambers are to be found in all famous peaks and mountains. See Gil Raz, "Daoist Sacred Geography," in *Early Chinese Religion, Part Two: The Period of Division* (220–589AD), ed. John Lagerwey and Lü Pengzhi (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 1418. Several Daoist scriptures (and scripts) are said to have been revealed as writing inside such stone chambers, such as the *Taishang Lingbao wufu xu* 太上靈寶五符序 (*Array of the Five Talismans*) and the *Sanhuang neiwén* 三皇內文 (*Esoteric Writs of the Three Sovereigns*). On the former; see Gil Raz, *The Emergence of Daoism: Creation of Tradition* (London: Routledge Press, 2012). On the latter; see Dominic Steavu, *The Writ of the Three Sovereigns: From Local Lore to Institutional Daoism* (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawaii Press, 2019).

57 *Suishu*, 31.897: 承盤瓠之後. For a discussion of the Man people and their cult of Pan Hu; see Edward H. Schafer, *Vermilion Bird: Tang Images of the South* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1967).

that Li Daoyuan confirms two important aspects of this geographical region. First, he corroborates the perceived refugee-status of people in the Wuling region, saying that “in the past the Man people dwelled here to escape from bandits” 昔有蠻民避寇居之.<sup>58</sup> Secondly, he observes the sacred dimensions of this region, saying that “it truly is a habitat for divine transcendents” 信為神仙之所居.<sup>59</sup> In sum, Li Daoyuan’s comments provide further ground for situating Peach Spring in this specific environment, geographically, narratively, in ethnic terms, and in terms of the cult of transcendence.

To return to the issue of dating, if the seventh century is the earliest period by which the *Records of Wuling* can be observed in circulation throughout the received tradition, other Tang authors continue to quote it authoritatively. For example, the work is mentioned several times in Li Jifu’s 李吉甫 (758–814) *Yuanhe junxian tuzhi* 元和郡縣圖志. One of these mentions seems to quote Li Xian almost verbatim,<sup>60</sup> but the other two are independent from the *Hou Hanshu*.<sup>61</sup>

Several decades later the *Records of Wuling* was also used by a late ninth, early tenth century Daoist with close ties to the imperial house. The eminent court Daoist Du Guangting 杜光庭 (850–933), in his *Shenxian ganyu zhuan* 神仙感遇傳 (*Encounters with Divine Transcendents*),<sup>62</sup> has included an account he claims to have taken from the *Records of Wuling*. It relates an encounter with “divine transcendents” (*shenxian* 神仙) in the region around Chenzhou. Note that this is the second time we witness a distinct link to Chenzhou in western Hunan, as it is also the region from which the saint Qu Tong, “Young Lad Qu,” hails.

Once more, the particular record in Du Guangting’s collection presents this familiar story about a common mortal happening upon a grotto that hides a community of refugees. In Du Guangting’s words, however, their classification as transcendents is made explicit when he says that these refugees have “stud-

58 Li Daoyuan 酈道元, *Shujing zhu* 水經注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), *juan* 37. I would like to thank Timothy Chan for pointing out this source to me.

59 Ibid.

60 Li Jifu 李吉甫, *Yuanhe junxian tuzhi* 元和郡縣圖志 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1987), 31.19a.

61 Ibid., 31.18b and 20a.

62 On this major figure; see Franciscus Verellen, *Du Guangting (850–933): Taoïste de cour à la fin de la Chine médiévale* (Paris: Collège de France, Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1989). The theme of “encounters” with spiritual beings has also been studied by Verellen; see “Encounter as revelation: A Taoist hagiographic theme in medieval China,” *Bulletin de l’École française d’Extrême-Orient* 85 (1998): 363–84.



ied the Way and attained transcendence" (*xue Dao de xian* 學道得僊).<sup>63</sup> Like the versions in *Yiyuan* and *Taiping yulan*, the story is set during the Yuanjia reign (424–453), but this time the community of cave dwellers is said to be even more archaic, namely from the mythical times of the collapse of the Xia dynasty (supposedly around 1600 BCE). Although the main protagonist, a villager named Wen Guangtong 文廣通, spends only a brief time in the grotto, when he returns to his hometown, no less than twelve years have passed—a trope that also marks this grotto as a space for “transcendence.” And once more, when the story becomes known among mortals, the grotto can no longer be found.

As this account is much longer, much more narrative, and quite some time later than the previous sources where the *Records of Wuling* were quoted, we have less certainty about the authenticity of its content. Needless to say, we cannot tell whether Du Guangting has added much, or anything at all. Despite these uncertainties, it further confirms the status of the *Records of Wuling* as a source for tales of transcedents' precincts in this region.

In sum, after establishing the Peach Spring narrative as one local tale among similar tales, each hailing from the same region, a few issues start becoming clear at this point: (1) the notion of Peach Spring as an actual location in the mountains around Wuling (present day northern Hunan) is well developed by the early Tang dynasty; (2) the Wuling tradition of Peach Spring is not only akin to similar narratives from the same broader region, but these sites have all been associated with sacred beings, most commonly with Daoist transcedents.

Indeed, even in Li Jianguo's analysis the inspiration for Tao Qian's story about Peach Spring is proposed, first, as rooted in the lore of “adepts of divine transcedents” (*shenxianjia* 神仙家) and, second, in the region's grotto lore, including “the remains left by some ancient eremitic Daoists who may have lived there, or the remains of some ancient site” 古時隱者羽客之流居住留下遺跡, 或是古時什麼場所的遺跡.<sup>64</sup> Although Stephen Bokenkamp has looked elsewhere for the Daoist origins of Tao Qian's story, he concludes even more pointedly that we must see Daoist sacred writings as “the direct source of inspiration” for Tao Qian's tale.<sup>65</sup>

This is not to say that Peach Spring could not also be interpreted more in line with the conventions of Chinese literary studies, for example as a tale of political disengagement, or even in metaphorical terms as a sort of paradise

63 *Du Guangting jizhuan shizhong jijiao* 杜光庭記傳十種輯校, ed. Luo Zhengming 羅爭鳴 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2013), 513–14.

64 Li Jianguo, *Tangqian zhiguai xiaoshuoshi*, 479–90.

65 Bokenkamp, “The Peach Flower Font,” 65.

lost, yet what should be clear is Peach Spring's geographical specificity and the overwhelming link to Daoist notions of transcendence. These latter two aspects combined establish the tale within a primary sphere of meaning, namely that of a sacred site.

Finally, in addition to these variegated narrative links, there are yet other pathways toward a local connection with Hunan and its indigenous peoples known from historical writings as southern Man people. In a different article on a different topic, Chen Yinke comes to a conclusion that is somewhat in line with Tang Changru's, namely that Tao Qian indeed was not Han Chinese but originated from "river people" (*xizu* 溪族), a short-hand for the "five river Man peoples" (*Wuxi Man* 五溪蠻).<sup>66</sup> These southern Man peoples were concentrated around the area of Wuling, which was also known as the home of "Pan Hu's offspring" (*Pan Hu zhi hou* 盤瓠之後).<sup>67</sup> Chen Yinke's evidence for illustrating Tao Qian's likely Man ancestry revolves around Tao Qian's famous great-grandfather, Tao Kan 陶侃 (259–334), Duke Huan of Changsha 長沙桓公, who had been a general in charge of suppressing the continuous military challenges posed by the indigenous peoples of this very area. According to Chen Yinke, Tao Kan apparently was a "River Man who was well versed in warfare" 善戰之溪人.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, this tallies well with the biography of Tao Kan in the *Jinshu* 晉書, which says he was a "man of low status."<sup>69</sup> A potentially deep family link with the region of the "five river Man peoples" would further explain why anecdotal literature has a strong tendency to link the Tao lineage to the mythology and sacred lore of the local peoples living around Wuling.<sup>70</sup>

Regardless of Tao Qian's possible Man ancestry, his strong affinity with local lore is beyond dispute. It is clear that there are abundant reasons for bringing Tao Qian's tale down to earth, situating it in reference to an actual sacred site in the area of Wuling. Whether one wants to understand the Daoist notion of an earthly paradise as "fictional" or "utopian," the site itself existed in local lore

66 Chen Yinke 陳寅恪, "Weishu Sima Rui zhuan Jiangdong minzu tiao shizheng ji tuilun 魏書司馬叡傳江東民族條釋証及推論," in idem, *Chen Yinke wenji zhi er: Jinmingguan cong-gao chubian* 陳寅恪文集之二: 金明館叢稿初編 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1980), 79–82.

67 Ibid., 80.

68 Ibid., 82.

69 Knechtges and Chang, *Ancient and Early Medieval Chinese Literature*, 1092.

70 In anecdotal literature Tao Kan himself had come to be associated with divine powers, and in several sources from the Northern and Southern Song dynasties references are made to a temple for him (陶侃廟 Tao Kan *miao*). One of the more elaborate records is in Li Jingde 黎靖德 (fl. 1263), *Zhuzi yulei* 朱子語類, ed. Wang Xingxian 王星賢 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 1557.

as the dominion of sacred beings. As has been the case with many local cults in China, sacred sites that once only had a local reach often ended up absorbed into the sphere of religious institutions. In the case of Peach Spring, this institution was a Daoist monastery.

### Divine Light on Old Tales: The Peach Spring as a Sacred Site in Daoism

This section focuses on Tang poetry and argues that, as early as the sixth century and ubiquitously from the eighth onwards, Wuling's famous Peach Spring was widely recognized as a sacred site, replete with transcendents. It then paves the way for a more detailed introduction of the most prominent Daoist institution associated with this sacred site, the aforementioned "Peach Spring Abbey."

The Peach Spring was included among the "Thirty-six Grotto Heavens" (*Sanshiliu Dongtian* 三十六洞天).<sup>71</sup> This numerological configuration of a sacred geography of efficacious, subterranean sites already existed during Tao Qian's time, and was eulogized in poems by his contemporary Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 (385–433).<sup>72</sup> Like Peach Spring, the system of Thirty-six Grotto Heavens constituted "worlds believed to exist hidden within famous mountains and beautiful places. They are earthly paradises that do not suffer from floods, wars, epidemics, illnesses, old age or death."<sup>73</sup> As sanctuaries hidden within the earth, they served as safe-havens for refugees during apocalyptic times; for Daoist seekers they served as portals towards transcendence.

From Xie Lingyun's poem, however, we cannot reach any conclusions about Peach Spring per se, as his verse offers no comprehensive list of all grottoes.<sup>74</sup> It is not until the Tang that Peach Spring Grotto (*Taoyuan dong* 桃源洞) at Wuling was first attested as one of those Thirty-six Grotto Heavens. To be more precise, it is the venerated Tang poet Li Bo 李白 (701–762), who concretely relates Peach Spring Grotto to the Daoist system of the Thirty-six Grotto Heavens, in

71 Verellen, "The Beyond Within." We do not know when Peach Spring was included, but it was standardized during the Tang. For an exploration of the historical development of the "Thirty-six Grotto Heavens," see Raz, "Daoist Sacred Geography," 1429–1436.

72 Miura Kunio, "*dongtian* and *fudi*," in *Encyclopedia of Taoism*, ed. Fabrizio Pregadio (London: Routledge, 2008), 368–373.

73 *Ibid.*, 368.

74 *Ibid.* Xie Lingyun mentions only one of the grottoes, namely at Mt. Luofu (Luofushan 羅浮山). The poem is partially translated, including the Daoist preface, in Zornica Kirkova, *Roaming into the Beyond: Representations of Xian Immortality in Early Medieval Chinese Verse* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 182–83.

his words simply “thirty-six grottoes” (*sanshiliu dong* 三十六洞).<sup>75</sup> Referring to the sacred site of Peach Spring in terms of the “remnants at Wuling” (*Wuling yiji* 武陵遺跡), he moreover characterizes it as “a dominion for divine transcendents” (*shenxian zhi jing* 神仙之境).<sup>76</sup> Since Li Bo was an ordained Daoist priest, he would hardly use the discourse of transcendence in reference to the site of Peach Spring if it were not a sacred site or purely for literary effect.

Roughly a century later, Du Guangting formally includes Peach Spring Grotto in his *Dongtian fudi yuedu mingshan ji* 洞天福地嶽瀆名山記 (*Record of Grotto-heavens, Blessed Places, Ducts, Peaks, and Great Mountains*).<sup>77</sup> Indeed, according to Franciscus Verellen, “the cosmology of the Taoist grotto-heavens was only fully systematized by the Tang authors Sima Chengzhen 司馬承禎 (647–735) and Du Guangting.”<sup>78</sup> Still, this applies only to the canonical list that has survived; other configurations of grotto heavens likely circulated, as must be concluded from Xie Lingyun’s early mention and, actually, the apparent need to formalize the Thirty-six Grotto Heavens during the Tang, mentioned by Verellen.<sup>79</sup>

Be that as it may, notions and imagery related to grottoes as sacred sites constituted a burgeoning repertoire of Daoist creation and innovation during the Eastern Jin (317–420). Tao Qian’s story is recorded not long after the Daoist revelations on Maoshan 茅山 that took place between 364 and 370, chronicled in the *Zhengao* 真誥 and compiled into the *Purple Texts* (*Ziwen* 紫文).<sup>80</sup> There are many and wide-ranging similarities between the imagery of the Peach Spring Grotto and the ways in which *Zhengao* describes its grotto heavens.<sup>81</sup> If this shows anything, it is that these similarities refer to a pronounced cultural discourse regarding Daoist grotto heavens during this period and after. From the Daoist perspective, a sacred site like Peach Spring (with its local lore) would fit seamlessly into the system of grotto heavens.

75 “Fengjian shiqi weng xun Taohuayuan xu” 奉餞十七翁二十四翁尋桃花源序, *QTW* 349.11a.

76 Ibid.

77 See Verellen, “The Beyond Within,” appendix #34.

78 Ibid., 275.

79 Also see the discussion in Raz, “Daoist Sacred Geography.”

80 For the classical account of these revelations; see Michel Strickmann, *Le taoïsme du Mao Chan: chronique d'une révélation* (Paris: Collège de France, Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1981). For a translation and thorough introduction to the *Lingshu ziwen shangjing* 靈書紫文上經 (*Upper Scripture of Purple Texts Inscribed by the Spirits*; *DZ* 639), as the *Purple Texts* are entitled, see Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, 275–372.

81 *Hu Xiang wenhua mingzhu duben: Daojiao juan* 湖湘文化名著讀本: 道教卷, ed. Zhang Songhui 張松輝 et al. (Changsha: Hunan daxue chubanshe, 2013), 29–33. Verellen also describes a number of separate themes that connect Peach Spring to Daoist lore of the time; see Verellen, “The Beyond Within.”

If the tangible specificity of Peach Spring as a sacred site is thus indisputable within Daoist circles, during the Tang it was apparently widely known beyond these communities of Daoist adepts, and even promoted as a sacred site among the most highly regarded literary figures of the time. Yet, before proceeding towards a brief survey of the poets who referred to Peach Spring as a sacred site, it is necessary to disentangle the site of Wuling from other Peach Spring narratives later intertwined with it. Timothy Chan shows that Tao Qian's foundational version later became tied to a similar narrative centring on the region around Mt. Tiantai 天台 in present-day Zhejiang province.<sup>82</sup> According to Chan, this story about two gentlemen who entered the Peach Spring Grotto, Liu and Ruan, was equated with Tao's version around the late 10th century. Since then, the two traditions have often been treated indiscriminately. Also, a third tradition exists, much more extensive than the other two, associated with Mt. Bao (*Baoshan* 包山) in the region of Wu 吳 (in present-day Jiangsu province). This version has been well studied by Stephen Bokenkamp.<sup>83</sup> It is included in a Daoist scripture, cited by the famous Daoist Ge Hong 葛洪 (283–343), that has recently been dated with precision to the early fourth century.<sup>84</sup>

It is not as if there are no indications that Tao Qian himself should be placed within a Daoist milieu. As Zhang Songhui shows in some detail, Tao Qian hailed from a long lineage of literati (and other prestigious figures) who had various degrees of affinity with Daoist circles, some with a stated interest in pursuing transcendence.<sup>85</sup> Tao Qian himself was known to socialize with Daoists, at least anecdotally.<sup>86</sup> Chen Yinke even argues that the famous poet belonged to the Daoist Celestial Masters movement.<sup>87</sup>

Indeed, in a necrology written by his friend Yan Yanzhi 顏延之 (384–456), Tao Qian is referred to as “Recluse of the Southern Mountain” (*Nanyue zhi you-juzhe* 南嶽之幽居者).<sup>88</sup> Aside from the well-known fact that this mountain,

82 Chan Wai Keung 陳偉強, “Rusheng yu Xian: Liu Chen Ruan Zhao chuanshuo zai Yuan Ming yujing de shidai yiyi” 儒生遇仙：劉晨阮肇傳說在元明語境的時代意義, *Journal of Chinese Studies* 67 (2018): 41–62.

83 Bokenkamp, “The Peach Flower Font,” 65–77.

84 *Taishang Lingbao wufu xu* 太上靈寶五符序 (DZ 388). For dating this scripture, see chapter 2 of Gil Raz, “Creation of Tradition: The Five Talismans of the Numinous Treasure and the Formation of Early Daoism,” (Ph.D. diss., Indiana Univ., 2004). For a more well-rounded placement of this scripture within the broader historical environment of Daoism, see his *The Emergence of Daoism*.

85 *Hu Xiang wenhua mingzhu duben: Daojiao juan*, 24–27.

86 *Ibid.*, 27.

87 Chen Yinke, “*Weishu*,” 82.

88 Zeng Zhaoyin 曾昭寅, *Qing Guangxu Taohuayuanzhi jiaozhu* 清光緒桃花源志校注 (Changsha: Zhongnan daxue chubanshe, 2017), 48.

Mt. Heng (*Hengshan* 衡山) in southern Hunan province, and others like it, were among the most important sacred sites for Buddhist and Daoist institutions alike,<sup>89</sup> we should not take this sort of posthumous labelling lightly as mere eulogistic play of words. It clearly aligns with the Daoist discourse on transcendence at the time.<sup>90</sup> For example, it is just during this period that the revered Daoist saint Master Red Pine (*Chisongzi* 赤松子) was associated with the same mountain and named “Master Red Pine of Southern Mountain” (*Nanyue Chisongzi* 南嶽赤松子).<sup>91</sup> One Daoist priest of the Tang, a resident at Peach Spring, was called “Huang Dongyuan, of Southern Mountain” (*Nanyue Huang Dongyuan* 南嶽黃洞元), suggesting a similarity with Tao Qian in terms of Daoist affiliation.<sup>92</sup>

More broadly, of course, the literary discourse during the Eastern Jin dynasty was deeply embedded within an understanding of remarkable landscapes as the dwellings of transcendent beings. Indeed, this understanding corresponds to historical trends that can be observed among literati at that time. As argued recently by Li Fengmao 李豐楙, men of letters during the Jin dynasty commonly presented descriptions of landscapes in which they traveled, “encountering” the traces of transcendents’ presences. One example he provides is a poem by Sun Zhuo 孫綽 (314–371), entitled “Rhapsody of a Journey on Mt. Tiantai” (“You Tiantaishan fu” 遊天台山賦). In it, the poet observes the sacred “transformations” of the landscape, that is, boulders, cliffs, or, indeed, grottoes that constitute the residual presence of transcendents: “The places transformed by the Mystic Saints’ roaming, they are the cavern dwellings of efficacious transcendents” 玄聖之所遊化，靈仙之窟宅。<sup>93</sup> In other words, certain

89 James Robson, *The Power of Place: The Religious Landscape of the Southern Sacred Peak (Nanyue 南嶽) in Medieval China* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Univ. Asia Center, 2009).

90 This attribution to Southern Mountain is not to be confused with that of Wei Huacun 魏華存 (252–334), an exalted sacred being who manifested herself throughout the Maoshan revelations, whose Daoist title is “Lady Wei of the Southern Mountain” 南嶽魏夫人. In her case, the Southern Mountain referred to is Mt. Huo (*Huoshan* 霍山). See Michel Strickmann, “The Mao Shan Revelations: Taoism and the Aristocracy,” *T’oung Pao* 63 (1977): 41, fn. 67.

91 James Robson, “Nanyue,” in *Encyclopedia of Taoism*, ed. Fabrizio Pregadio (London: Routledge, 2008), 755; also see idem, “Among Mountains and Between Rivers: A Preliminary Appraisal of the Arrival, Spread, and Development of Daoism and Buddhism in the Central Hunan [Xiangzhong] Region,” *Cahiers d’Extrême Asie* 19 (2010): 9–45.

92 See below for a more extensive introduction of this figure.

93 Li Fengmao 李豐楙, “Dongtian yu neijing: Xiyuan er zhi si shiji jiangnan daojiang de nei-xiang youguan” 洞天與內景：西元二至四世紀江南道教的內向游觀, *Donghua Hanxue* 9 (2009): 160.

aspects of mountains *are* the tangible traces of sacred beings, and the mountains themselves *are* their dwellings.

Thus, when Tao Qian's poem refers to Peach Spring in Wuling as a "divine realm," we must see this as representative of the discourse of his time and take his words unambiguously as referring to a dominion of spirits, gods, and transcendents.<sup>94</sup> In this context it is meaningful that Tao Qian ends his poem by expressing his yearning for transcendence, which Hightower translates thus: "I want to tread upon the thin air, And rise up high to find my own kind" 願言躡輕風·高舉尋吾契.<sup>95</sup> But the last two characters, *wu qi* 吾契, do not accurately refer to beings that Tao Qian merely sees as his "own kind." Literally this should be translated more strongly, in the sense of an official contract, as "to whom I am bound," or "to whom I am obliged." The whole second part of the sentence would be more accurately translated as "And rise up high to seek those I have bound myself to." A concrete example of such a usage within Daoist discourse can be found in the *Nanshi* 南史, which mentions two Celestial Master Daoists, namely Gu Huan 顧歡 and Du Jingchan 杜京產, who are said to be "bonded peers" 同契.<sup>96</sup>

Such contractual language has been common within Daoist practice, used in the process of self-transformation and in transforming the world.<sup>97</sup> This can be traced back to the earliest self-conceptualization of the Celestial Masters who represented themselves as one side in a contractual obligation with the divinized Laozi 老子, called the Correct and Unitary Covenant with the Powers (*Zhengyi mengwei* 正乙盟威).<sup>98</sup> While Tao Qian does not provide easy labels to identify the other party of this mutual bond, the fact that it requires treading upon air in order to rise up high is a hint that leaves little room for interpretation beyond the scope of transcendence.

Even if we could not definitively establish Tao Qian's identity as a Daoist, it is not clear exactly why his references to a "divine realm" and to those to whom he

94 For other examples; see Kirkova, *Roaming into the Beyond*, chapter 4 (and *passim*).

95 Hightower, *The Poetry of Tao Ch'ien*, 256.

96 *Nanshi* 南史 (Taipei: Taiwan Shangwu, 2010), 75,1881. Thanks to Stephen Bokenkamp for urging me to take the original language more seriously and providing the reference.

97 The contractual relationship between an ordained Daoist and the celestial offices that he represents on earth—"carrying out the transformations on heaven's behalf" (*dai Tian xinghua* 代天行化)—forms the bedrock of the Daoist self-perception. Still today, Daoists receive an ordination document that stipulates the Daoist obligations in contractual terms. For the seminal discussion of this aspect of Daoist practice, see Kristofer Schipper, *The Taoist Body*, tr. Karen C. Duval (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1994).

98 Terry F. Kleeman, *Celestial Masters: History and Ritual in Early Daoist Communities* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Univ. Asia Center, 2016).

“is bound” should be taken metaphorically. Either way, his points of reference are deeply embedded in the discourse of transcendence; it is the logic within which Tao Qian situates his story.

It should not come as a surprise, then, that subsequent descriptions of Peach Spring also overwhelmingly see it as a sacred site, concretely located at Wuling. The oldest reference of this kind is found in a poem by Zhang Zhengxian 張正見 (ca. 528–ca. 576), presented to the Chen 陳 court that held sway between 557–589; that is, about one and a half centuries after Tao Qian recorded the Peach Spring tale.<sup>99</sup> Each line of Zhang’s poem alludes to a respective Daoist saint or site (often a combination of these), and one sentence among them mentions the flowering vitality of the peach blossoms at Wuling: “The peach blossoms of Wuling have never fallen” 武陵桃花未曾落.<sup>100</sup> Peaches constitute a well-known reference to the concept of immortality, of course, and possibly also suggest an apotropaic function that would shield the cave from outside intrusion.<sup>101</sup> What corroborates and intensifies this already existing layer of meaning within the sphere of Daoist transcendents’ precincts, however, is the title of the poem, “Divine Immortals” (“Shenxian pian” 神仙篇). Under such a title, then, this line from the mid to late sixth century is the first external reference to Tao Qian’s peach blossoms at the site of Wuling in unambiguous reference to Daoist imagery.

During the first half of the eighth century, no lesser a poet than Meng Hao-ran 孟浩然 (689/691–740) from nearby Xiangyang 襄陽 (in present day Hubei province), wrote a poem about Peach Spring. This poem, entitled “Floating on a boat at Wuling” (“Wuling fanzhou” 武陵泛舟),<sup>102</sup> similarly locates “adepts of transcendence” (*xianjia* 仙家) inside Peach Spring.

The path along Wuling’s stream is narrow,  
previously a boat entered the Flowery Forest.  
Nobody can fathom the dark spring’s interior,  
the depths of which are relied upon by the adepts of transcendence.

99 The poem has been translated in Kirkova, *Roaming into the Beyond*, 327–328. She also situates this poem within the cultural discourse of its time.

100 Guo Maoqian 郭茂倩, *Yuefu shiji* 樂府詩集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), 64.925.

101 The term *tao* 桃, meaning “peach wood,” occurs also in an apotropaic object that was so widespread by the late imperial age that a majority of local gazetteers mention it as part of the things to be prepared for the Spring Festival: “peach wood talismans” (*taofu* 桃符). It is semantically related to *tao* 逃, “to be chased away.”

102 “Wuling fanzhou,” *Quan Tang shi* 全唐詩 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960), 160.1645.



武陵川路狹，  
 前棹入花林。  
 莫測幽源裏，  
 仙家信幾深。

Aside from the unapologetic attribution of transcendents to Peach Spring's interior, what is noteworthy about this poem's discourse is also the very image of a "dark spring" (*youyuan* 幽源) itself. This sort of imagery characterizes Peach Spring as a primordial gateway to the ultimate source of the cosmos; it links the concrete presence of a geographical location with the unnamable source of all being. For Daoist readers at the time, and probably most other readers too, this certainly would have been understood as a site where the force of the Dao is active.

Another of Meng Haoran's poems similarly situates this Peach Spring with its transcendents' dwellings more broadly within the discourse of transcendence and concepts known from the classical Daoist texts.

After I inadvertently entered Peach Spring,  
 first I lamented how deep the path through bamboo went.  
 But only then I knew the dwellings of transcendents,  
 which no mortals have found.  
 Dancing cranes flew by uninhabited stairs,  
 soaring gibbons screamed through dense forests.  
 Gradually penetrating the wondrous order of the primordial,  
 I thoroughly gained a heart that sits and forgets.<sup>103</sup>

誤入桃源裏  
 初憐竹徑深  
 方知仙子宅  
 未有世人尋  
 舞鶴過閑砌  
 飛猿嘯密林  
 漸通玄妙理  
 深得坐忘心

What Meng Haoran makes very clear in this poem—and the previous one—is that the fisherman was thought to have found “the dwellings of transcendents”

103 “You jingsi ti guanzhu shanfang” 遊精思題觀主山房, *Quan Tang shi*, 160.1648.

(*xian zi zhai* 仙子宅). According to Meng Haoran, then, and very much contrary to Hightower's assertion that the inhabitants of Peach Spring's "imagined utopia" were "people just like any other," Peach Spring was not only seen as a concrete location, it was also a site where transcendents dwelled.

Reading this poem it becomes clear that Meng Haoran more pointedly placed Daoist ideology in relation to Peach Spring. What he claims to have found, apparently, is the "wondrous order of the primordial" (*xuanmiaoli* 玄妙理) that allowed the poet to accomplish the ancient art of "sitting and forgetting" (*zuowang* 坐忘), described long ago by none other than Zhuangzi 莊子. Such references should not be taken lightly, either, especially at a time in late seventh and early eighth centuries when Daoists like Sima Chengzhen wrote texts entitled *Zuowang lun* 坐忘論 (*Treatise [on the Art] of Sitting and Forgetting*).<sup>104</sup>

Far from being a lone Daoist aficionado in an otherwise secular environment of literary imagination, Meng Haoran's interpretation of Peach Spring as a site at Wuling, associated with Daoism and transcendental beings, rather was the norm throughout the Tang. Roughly contemporaneous with Meng Haoran, another major poet of this period, Wang Wei 王維 (699–759), in his "Ballad of Peach Spring" ("Taoyuan xing" 桃源行; lit. "Journey to Peach Spring"), refers to the site in no uncertain geographical terms as the "Spring of Wuling" (*Wuling yuan* 武陵源). Wang Wei calls it a "numinous realm" (*lingjing* 靈境, or "efficacious realm"), a term that is as straightforward in setting up Peach Spring as a sacred site as Tao Qian's original term "divine realm."

Wang Wei's poem is important also in that it shows the continuity between the transcendents of Peach Spring and the refugees from the Qin that Tao Qian's story narrates: it is those exact people who were thought to have transcended their mortality inside the grotto world, not some group of unrelated spiritual beings.

Originally they left the world to flee from their homestead,  
But once they attained transcendence they would not return.<sup>105</sup>

初因避地去人間，  
及至成仙遂不還

104 Sima Chengzhen 司馬承禎 (647–735), *Zuowang lun* 坐忘論 (DZ 1036). For a translation of this text; see Livia Kohn, *Sitting in Oblivion: The Heart of Daoist Meditation* (Dunedin: Three Pines Press, 2010).

105 *Quan Tang shi*, 125.1257–58.

And if this indication of the transformation that the grotto-dwellers had gone through were not enough, in the last line of the poem Wang Wei, in line with Meng Haoran's "dark spring," calls their site a "spring of transcendence" (*xianyuan* 仙源). Other poets perceive Peach Spring within the same framework as a sacred site with Daoist transcendents.<sup>106</sup>

One author quotes a source, no longer extant, that most explicitly presents Peach Spring as a sacred site. Shi Jiaoran 釋皎然 (a pseudonym for Xie Qingzhou 謝清晝, fl. 766–779), a Buddhist monk and tenth generation descendant of Xie Lingyun, mentions a work entitled "Record of the Sacred Peach Spring" ("Sheng Taoyuan ji" 聖桃源記). This title leaves no room for ambiguity: the explicit notion of Peach Spring as a sacred site existed no later than the eighth century and was known widely in poetic circles.

The quote Shi Jiaoran takes from this work also articulates Peach Spring as a concrete location. While in one poem he locates Peach Spring in Wuling,<sup>107</sup> in another he says: "While Heaven and Earth won't stay the same, the [Peach] Blossom Spring will remain.' It is this site." 「天地改，花源在。」即此地也。<sup>108</sup> Indeed, as a "spring of transcendence," it would not be lost on Tang readers that the poet contrasts the ever-changing flux of the world with the eternity of a primordial source, here used again as a metaphor for the Dao.

Shi Jiaoran's poems are important for another reason, namely in that they are among the earliest sources to reveal the presence of a Daoist monastery at the site of Peach Spring in Wuling. The poem in question refers to the monastery in its title: "Finding Peach Spring Abbey in Late Spring" 晚春尋桃源觀. The first two lines set the stage.

106 Most of the relevant poems have been compiled into a handy volume: *Lidai Taohuayuan shixuan* 歷代桃花源詩選, ed. Liang Songcheng 梁頌成 et al. (Changsha: Zhongnan daxue chubanshe, 2017). Some relevant examples are: Zhang Jiuling 張九齡 (673–740), in a poem that reflects Tao Qian's status as a recluse (*youju* 幽居), entirely situates Peach Spring within this discourse. It presents the poet's entering the "Spring of Wuling" ("Wuling yuan" 武陵源), expressing his desire to "ask about the Way of Golden Immortals" (*oufang Jinxian Dao* 偶訪金仙道, p. 11). Other poets who relate it to immortals are Lu Lun 盧綸 (737?–799?) in two poems (pp. 18–19); Liu Shang 劉商 (*jinshi* 766–779), who connects Peach Spring with "adepts of transcendence" (*xianjia* 仙家) residing in the "Grotto of Wuling" (Wulingdong 武陵洞, p. 21); Liu Yuxi 劉禹錫 (772–842), who refers to it as a place where "adepts of transcendence" dwell (*xianjia* 仙家; and furthermore in the same parlance as Meng Haoran, also 仙子 *xianzi*, pp. 28–29). More examples can be found.

107 *Ibid.*, 22.

108 *Ibid.*, 22.

Where in Wuling can I visit the transcendents' realm?  
The roads to the old abbey on the high cliffs are unkempt.<sup>109</sup>

武陵何處訪仙鄉  
古觀雲根路已荒

Here, the monastery in Wuling is mentioned as “Peach Spring Abbey,” consistent with Di Zhongli’s “Records of the Peach Spring Abbey’s Mountain-grounds” of 841. Compared to the latter, Shi Jiaoran’s poem thus confirms the abbey’s existence earlier by at least half a century. The question remains how far we can push back the founding of this monastery.

### Peach Spring Abbey and Daoist Institutions

The earliest date by which the existence of the Peach Spring Abbey can be confirmed is 748. In that year it was co-opted by the local government, an act that perhaps was a direct consequence of Sima Chengzhen’s codification of Peach Spring within the system of Thirty-six Grotto Heavens. According to Di Zhongli’s history in “Records of Peach Spring Abbey’s Mountain-grounds,” the local administrator at Wuling, referred to as Yingyang Gong 榮陽公,<sup>110</sup> conferred official status on the abbey during the seventh year of the Tianbao 天寶 reign (748), on the 13th day of the fifth month. The account is very straightforward.

[He] appropriated thirty households living near the mountain and exempted them from taxes, making them permanently responsible for cleaning [the monastery] and guarding the mountain forests.<sup>111</sup>

取近山三十戶，蠲免租賦。永充灑埽，守備山林。

The record also details that in 781 the grounds allotted to the abbey were set at a perimeter of 32 *li*—a very large area. As the mountain forests were being “guarded,” it meant that nobody could hunt animals, pick fruit, or otherwise exploit the sacred grounds surrounding the monastery.

<sup>109</sup> *Quan Tang shi*, 817.9211–12.

<sup>110</sup> This rather obscure title is also mentioned in the famous “Tale of Li Wa” (“Li Wa Zhuan” 李娃傳). See *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961), 484.3985.

<sup>111</sup> *QTW* 761.9b–10b.

If the cooptation of Peach Spring Abbey by officials of the locality is memorable, its recognition by the imperial court is all the more so. This event is commemorated by Liu Yuxi 劉禹錫 (772–842), in a poem about Peach Spring that he probably wrote between 805 and 815 when he was banished to Langzhou (i.e., Wuling).<sup>112</sup>

The court is moved by the Ultimate Dao, as the throne was bestowed by Heaven.

[...]

So [his majesty] closed off the mountain to open a secret dwelling, restoring households to maintain the purity of this efficacious abode.

皇家感至道，聖祚自天錫。 (...) 禁山開秘宇，復戶潔靈宅。

An interlinear commentary by the author further explains some of the details.

The emperor ordered twenty households of servants to be exempted from taxes in order to have them reverently keep the area clear.

詔隸二十戶免徭以奉灑掃。

It is not clear whether these twenty households are in addition to the earlier thirty households, or whether this mention effectively represents a reduction, but one would assume that with the added prestige of imperial recognition there would be an addition of personnel rather than a reduction.<sup>113</sup>

Di Zhongli's "Records of the Peach Spring Abbey's Mountain-grounds," written in 841, provides further clues of how the imperial court sponsored the site. He mentions several interesting altars and shrines, one of which was the place to carry out Daoist rituals that were on "imperial order" (*fengchi* 奉敕). This altar is named after Qu Tong, "Young Lad Qu," the local saint from Chenzhou.

The Eight Trace Altar is one hundred steps to the north of the main shrine. It is the place where Qu Tong ascended; his foot left eight imprints.<sup>114</sup>

112 The poem is called "A Visit to Peach Spring in Hundred Rhymes" ("You Taoyuan yibaiyun" 游桃源一百韻). *Quan Tang shi*, 355.3980 and Liang Songcheng, *Lidai Taohuayuan shixuan*, 26–28.

113 Alternatively, the discrepancy between the numbers could be a clerical mistake.

114 In his hagiography, it is explained that his right foot had eight toes (右足八指，羅印於地上). Fu Zai 符載 (759–812?), *Huang xianshi Qu Tong ji* 黃仙師瞿童記, in *QTW* 689.9a–11b.

When people later thought of him, they built an altar on that spot and named it accordingly. Today, whenever the emperor orders a *jiao*-offering, it will always be done at this altar.<sup>115</sup>

八跡壇在祠堂北一百八步。瞿童上升處，足印八跡。後人思之，立壇於其所，因以為名。今奉敕醮祭，皆在斯壇。

Although no details are provided, the importance of this abbey within local society is beyond doubt, as is its inclusion in official networks.

Di Zhongli's account makes one other point clear: the abbey was not merely perceived to be a "religious institution" in an otherwise "imaginary" fairytale setting, it was surrounded by sacred forces and presences. Of the "Qin-people's Cave" (*Qinrendong* 秦人洞) it says that "their sacred traces remain present" (*lingji youcun* 靈跡猶存). In addition to Wang Wei's poem, this serves as another reminder that the (supposed) refugees from the Qin were themselves regarded as sacred beings. Of its natural surroundings, Di Zhongli says that "there also are strange flowers and unusual trees, while birds and wild beasts are extraordinary: this is truly a transcendents' precinct" 又多奇花奇木，禽獸非凡。信仙境也。<sup>116</sup>

The main altar of Peach Spring Abbey, its "shrine hall" (*citang* 祠堂), was important enough to be mentioned separately in historical documents. A stele inscription by an official named Wei Qiandu 韋乾度 (fl. 822), included in the *Quan Tang wen*, describes historical details surrounding the construction of the "shrine altar" (*citan* 祠壇).<sup>117</sup> This text, "Record of the Stone Altar at the Peach Spring Abbey" ("Taoyuanguan shitan ji" 桃源觀石壇記), commemorates the construction of a grand altar made of stone, replacing the old one, made of pounded earth, which apparently often was damaged (*pique* 圯缺) during bad weather. The significance of this record lies, among other things, in that its descriptions reveal how the old altar was built after the standard for big Daoist institutions: "the abbey has a shrine altar, three complete tiers of earth" 觀有祠壇，土級三成. For a monastery to have a separate altar of this size out in the open it must have been large enough to justify such a construction and did not merely serve as a lodge for mountain hermits. Indeed, the Daoist rituals mentioned in the text—referred to somewhat vaguely as rituals of "fasting and of registers" (*zhailu* 齋籙)—corroborate the fact that it was an authoritative

115 QTW 761.10a

116 QTW 761.10ab

117 QTW 724.10a-11a.

institution where considerably large liturgical events took place, not a simple hermit's cottage.

Liu Yuxi's poem, too, situates the activities at this site in the context of mainstream Daoist ritual. He refers to Peach Spring's altar as an "altar for the *jiao*-offering" (*jiaotan* 醮壇), thus affording space to a major category of Daoist ritual, and he adds the feature of that quintessential Daoist portal towards the realm of the Void known as a "Golden Portal" (*Jinque* 金闕).<sup>118</sup> He relates all this to the Three Pure Ones (*San Qing* 三清), the highest Daoist deities. Monasteries like this did not appear out of thin air. They needed time to grow, attract a group of Daoist initiates large enough to sustain such practices, a community of devotees large enough to support them, and, indeed, to be significant enough to gain official recognition.

Official recognition for the abbey appears to have been given by an emperor several decades before Liu Yuxi's time, in this case by Xuanzong 玄宗 (713–756). In the formulation by Wei Qiandu, there is ample room for ambiguity, but he clearly states that the emperor recognized the abbey at Peach Spring as a site for attaining divine transcendence.

Investigating the recent saints, [this was] the region where Emperor Xuanzong planted fiery jujubes.<sup>119</sup>

稽近聖，元宗皇帝樹火棗之鄉。

Ambiguity lies in the circumstance that this line could be taken literally or metaphorically. That is, either Xuanzong (or his proxies) actually had trees planted on the precincts of the abbey, or it was meant to be taken metaphorically: "fiery jujubes," of course, signify something like the "ingredients for transcendence," and thus would signify that the grounds of the Peach Spring Abbey received imperial recognition as a site for cultivating transcendence. Either way, the fact of Xuanzong's recognition would apply. Repeated imperial support continued throughout the northern Song dynasty (960–1127) and after.<sup>120</sup>

118 Liang Songcheng, *Lidai Taohuayuan shixuan*, 27.

119 QTW 724.10b.

120 Wang Yinglin 王應麟 (1223–1296) mentions support by emperor Taizong 太宗 in 990, who ordered the monastery to be expanded. See his encyclopedic *Yuhai* 玉海, *juan* 163 (section on "Palaces and Mansions," *gongshi* 宮室) (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1990). Various kinds of official support continued into the late imperial age, which is one focal area of my ongoing project.

Whatever the exact historical significance of this phraseology may be, the existence of the Peach Spring Abbey during the mid-eighth century is beyond doubt, as is the site's general reputation as an immortals' dominion—a “transcendents' precinct.” As a Daoist institution, Peach Spring Abbey was populated by Daoist priests, thaumaturges, and divine transcendents. Some of them are known by name. The oldest source we have for this purpose is a hagiographical account recorded by the literatus *and* hermit Fu Zai 符載 (759–812?) in the year 784. Entitled “Record of Transcendent Master Huang and Young Lad Qu [Boting]” (*Huang xianshi Qu tong ji* 黃仙師瞿童記), it describes the relationship between the abbey's most famous Daoist, Huang Dongyuan 黃洞源 (?–802), also known as “Huang Dongyuan, of Southern Peak” 南嶽黃洞元, and his most famous disciple, Qu Tong, or “Young Lad Qu.”<sup>121</sup>

Huang Dongyuan of the Southern Peak lived in the Peach Blossom Abbey at Peach Spring in Langzhou [Wuling]. He had a disciple called Qu Boting, who was fourteen years old.

郎州桃源桃花觀，南嶽黃洞元居焉。有弟子姓瞿字柏庭，年十四。

After this simple opening, the text details the relationship between the two, saying that it had started in the fourth year of the Dali 大曆 reign (769). Towards the end of the hagiography it is recorded that their relationship still existed by the first year of the Jianzhong 建中 reign (780).

Many more historical details are known from a second piece, a stele inscription recorded by the high official Wen Zao 溫造 (766–853) in the second year of the Changqing 長慶 reign (822), which is included in the Daoist Canon.<sup>122</sup> In this text Huang Dongyuan is specifically mentioned with a formal Daoist ordination title as “Ritual Master of the Three Caverns of Upper Clarity” (*Shangqing sandong fashi* 上清三洞法師). Indeed, despite the fact that Huang Dongyuan carried the epithet of Southern Peak, apparently relating him to Mt. Heng, it appears he had risen to prominence at Maoshan 茅山 (in present-day Jiangsu), where he was recognized as the fifteenth patriarch.<sup>123</sup>

121 *Huang xianshi Qu tong ji*, in *QTW* 689.9a–11b. For a relatively detailed overview of Fu Zai's life and social network, see Wong Kwok-Yiu, “‘Hide-and-Seek’—On the Reclusion and Political Activism of the Mid-Tang *Yinshi* (“Hermit”) Fu Zai,” *Oriens Extremus* 46 (2007): 147–183.

122 *Jiang-Huai yirenlu* 江淮異人錄 (DZ 595), 21b–25b.

123 Wong, “Hide-and-Seek,” 155.



Wen Zao's hagiography yields further insights as to the Peach Spring Abbey's official recognition. The inscription reveals that in the seventh year of Dali (772), Huang Dongyuan was summoned "down to the prefecture" (*xiajun* 下郡) by the censor of Langzhou, Hu Shuqing 胡叔清. Nothing is said about their business, but that it was somewhat substantial may be gleaned from the fact that he returned to the abbey only after twenty days.

Much less is known about the abbey's Daoists during the ninth century, though some names are mentioned. In "Record of the Stone Altar at the Peach Spring Abbey" the most prominent figure is said to be a contemporary from the early ninth century, called Chen Tongwei 陳通微. Not much is conveyed about him, other than that he continued his patriarchal lineage after his masters had passed away. From the 822 stele inscription by Wen Zao, however, we learn that his given name was Jingxin 景昕 and that he had a Daoist ordination title virtually identical to Huang Dongyuan's, namely "Daoist Master of the Three Caverns of Upper Clarity" (*Shangqing sandong daoshi* 上清三洞道士). Importantly, this priest is mentioned as the source for Wen Zao's story, a "veritable transmission" (*chuanshi* 傳實). Perhaps just as importantly, the reason for Chen Jingxin's authority is that he was a "classmate" (*tongxue* 同學) of the most eminent saint of Peach Spring: Qu Tong, "Young Lad Qu," who hailed from Chenzhou in the west of present-day Hunan.<sup>124</sup>

As it turns out, the Young Lad's full name is Qu Boting 瞿柏庭, and he is presented as a dedicated disciple of Huang Dongyuan.<sup>125</sup> Nonetheless, whereas his master is consistently depicted as an eminent ritualist, the Young Lad possesses various extraordinary powers.<sup>126</sup> Both Wen Zao and Fu Zai's records tell the story of a preternaturally talented disciple who serves a fully trained, capable, yet merely mortal master. Among the special powers Young Lad Qu possesses are such feats as traveling at lightning speed, discovering transcendents' grottoes, and finding paraphernalia that belonged to the Qin refugees in the Peach Spring Grotto.

124 Very little research has been done on this figure. To my knowledge, there is only the study by Sunayama Minoru 砂山稔, "Gudō tōsen kō—Chūban Tō no shitaifu to Bōzanha dōkyō" 瞿童登仙考—中晚唐の士大夫と茅山派道教, in idem, *Zui Tō dōkyō shisō kenkyū* 隋唐道教思想研究 (Tokyo: Hirakawa Shuppansha, 1990), 364–388. I would like to thank Timothy Chan for pointing out this source to me.

125 Their relationship is also referred to in the aforementioned poem by Liu Yuxi. See *Quan Tang shi*, 355-3980 - 81 and Liang Songcheng, *Lidai Taohuayuan shixuan*, 27.

126 All this makes him very similar to other Tang dynasty sacred figures whose lives were recorded in hagiographies. See for example Bokenkamp on Xie Ziran: Stephen R. Bokenkamp, "Sisters of the Blood: The Lives behind the Xie Ziran Biography," *Daoism: Religion, History and Society* 8 (2016), 7–33.

If these miracles do not impress enough, records from late imperial gazetteers supplement the Tang records of Qu Tong's "ascent" (*shangsheng* 上升), adding more explicitly that he became a transcendent. In the words of the Ming dynasty local gazetteer of Changde (i.e., Wuling), describing the site of Mt. Peach Spring (*Taoyuanshan* 桃源山), "Transcendent Qu's flight towards ascension was here" 瞿仙飛昇于此.<sup>127</sup> Indeed, various records suggest that by the Ming dynasty the enviroing areas around the abbey were littered with paraphernalia and monuments associated with Qu Boting, sacred sites where the saint had previously dwelled.<sup>128</sup> No doubt the sacrificial cult to this local saint was very much alive during this time.

Some final observations about dating. While we thus know that a substantial Daoist institution existed at the Peach Spring in Wuling by at least the second half of the eighth century, and probably much earlier, we do not know when exactly it was founded. Nonetheless, we can say with certainty that the abbey received official status in 748. Note that this was the change of status of an already existing institution, not the creation *ex nihilo* of a new institution. Indeed, none of the sources give us the slightest reason to believe the monastery was newly built by the time we find it described in historical sources. To the contrary, Shi Jiaoran's descriptions suggest a much earlier founding date than the eighth century. Recall that he refers to it as an "old abbey" (*guguan* 古觀). Most likely this means we should interpret the meaning of "old" as very old. After all, the term translated as "old" here, *gu* 古, in classical Chinese commonly is the equivalent of "ancient" or, of course, "classical." If the poet wanted to situate the abbey in a more recent past, he might well have used *jiu* 舊. And, indeed, let us not forget that roughly during the same time Li Bo similarly writes about the grotto heaven of Peach Spring as the "remnants at Wuling." All in all, it is not only certain that the Peach Spring Abbey existed before 748, but also that its status at the time was one of an institution that had already achieved respectable age.

Even though available sources are silent about the founding date of the Peach Spring Abbey, there are yet other indications that it was built long before these eighth century records were written down. Several posit a founding date as early as the Jin, that is, precisely the time when Tao Qian wrote his famous tale. The Qing dynasty local gazetteer of Changde claims simply that it was

127 Chen Hongmo 陳洪謨 et al., ed., *Changde fuzhi* 常德府志, in *Tian Yi Ge cang Mingdai fangzhi xuankan* 天一閣藏明代方志選刊 (Shanghai: Shanghai gu ji shu dian, 1982), vol. 54, 2.9a.

128 *Ibid.*, 2.8b; 3.17a; 20.10b, 11b.

“built by Jin people” (*Jinren jian* 晉人建).<sup>129</sup> The Qing dynasty *Hunan tongzhi* 湖南通志 provides a somewhat more general impression:

The old name was Peach Blossom Abbey. It was also called Peach Spring Abbey. Built during the Jin, it was renovated repeatedly during the Tang, Song, Ming, and our dynasty.<sup>130</sup>

舊名桃花觀。亦名桃源觀。晉建，唐、宋、明、及國朝屢修。

Following modern scholarly convention, a Qing dynasty claim about a Jin founding date would not be considered reliable. Yet if we consider the fact that dating the Peach Spring Abbey to the first half of the Tang dynasty—as is verified by our sources—would have sufficed to strongly impress any reader of its time, there should have been little need to forward an even more incredible claim. Given the fact that Shi Jiaoran calls it an “ancient” abbey, we should be careful not to dismiss the Jin date outright.

There are other reasons to take seriously the possibility of a founding date during the Jin. First among those is that it would fit in the historical context of establishing Daoist institutions during this period. James Robson and other scholars suggest that the establishment of Daoist institutions in the Hunan region was well underway by the fourth century.<sup>131</sup> That by itself is relevant for anyone studying the history of Daoist institutions in Hunan, such as the Peach Spring Abbey. But it also would need to be considered for understanding the cultural references by Tao Qian, a figure steeped in Daoist discourse and with an eminent family member directly connected to the local lore of Wuling. Either way, based on Robson’s work it is important to state that there is no reason to think of a Jin founding date as exceptional, even if the endurance of this particular institution may very well have been.

There is one final piece of—admittedly circumstantial yet nonetheless suggestive—evidence for a date around the fourth century. In a poem by Jiang Kui 姜夔 (*hao* Baishi 白石, ca. 1155–ca. 1221) that records his visit to the Peach Spring Abbey, entitled “Poem of a Past Journey [to Peach Spring Mountain]” (“Xiyou shi” 昔游詩), a Jin date is also given.<sup>132</sup> Interestingly, the phenomenon

129 Ying Xianlie 應先烈 et al. eds., *Changde fuzhi* 常德府志, 12.29b. Reprint of 1813 edition. In *Zhongguo difangzhi jicheng: Hunan fuxian zhiji*, Vol. 76. Nanjing: Jiangsu gu ji, 2002.

130 Zeng Guoquan 曾國荃 et al. eds., *Hunan tongzhi* 湖南通志, 140.3a. Reprint of 1885 edition. Taipei: Huawen shuju, 1967.

131 Robson, “Among Mountains and Between Rivers,” 12.

132 The poem reads: “The old fir is a thing of the Jin period” 古杉晉時物. Liang Songcheng, *Lidai Taohuayuan shixuan*, 77.

that Jiang Kui historicizes is an apparently gigantic fir tree (*shan* 杉) that is hollow, spanning a width of 40 *chi* 尺, which would roughly correspond to 12 meters. He adds that some locals live inside, and that the tree can lodge 10 people (外圍四十尺，內可十客聚).<sup>133</sup> This sort of ancient tree would often be considered sacred and in many southern regions of China served as shrine for the god of the locality.<sup>134</sup> It doesn't matter whether (or even in exactly what sense) the tree actually was a thing of the Jin, but rather that this date is once more connected to this same site. The reason why Jiang Kui's mentioning of a Jin date is relevant thus lies in the fact, first, that his poetic observations represent a separate dating tradition as compared to the Ming and Qing gazetteers, and, secondly, in the fact that it refers to a sacred object on the abbey's precincts—not the abbey itself. In other words, these are distinct traditions of recording and distinct points of reference, all with a Jin date.

## Conclusion

Once we take into account all the local narrative traditions and historical records of Peach Spring as a concrete location in northern Hunan, we are fully justified in saying that it has existed as a sacred site for the better part of two thousand years. The Daoist monastery at the site of Peach Spring has been described in historical records for almost thirteen centuries: the starting point for such records is 748. Before that, it has been classified within a repertoire of locations and saints associated with Daoist transcendence since the mid sixth century, and Tao Qian himself eulogized it as a “divine realm.”

The date of 748, moreover, does not at all represent a real “starting point” for the existence of the abbey itself, as it was already referred to as an “ancient abbey” by the mid- or late eighth century. Indeed, the year 748 represents the date of the abbey's transition into the sphere of officially recognized institutions, a transition that always implies an earlier and probably respectable history. Surely, it's no coincidence that the number of poetic references to Peach Spring as a site for transcendence rises steeply after this date: first it was merely

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> See Meulenbeld, “Dancing with the Gods,” 132. Another source from the late Tang or northern Song confirms the presence of the “hollow fir tree” (*kongxinshan* 空心杉), saying that the “ancient tree” (*gumu* 古木) served as a place for “wandering gentlemen who seek the Way, to sit in its space” 學仙遊子坐空中. Liang Songcheng, *Lidai Taohuayuan shixuan*, 43. Also think of various stories about gigantic sacred trees (serving as “territorial god” [*she* 社]) that are mentioned in the stories of Zhuangzi 莊子.

a local Daoist monastery, after 748 it was a Daoist monastery with official status and imperial patronage.

What remains to be understood, then, is Peach Spring's history as a Daoist institution *before* 748. We know it existed, and—due to its three-tiered ritual platform—that it was in operation as a full-fledged provider of Daoist ritual services. And if we connect this Daoist site of Peach Spring to its status as one of the Thirty-six Grotto Heavens, we find another pathway into the realm of proximity to Tao Qian's own time.

Sacred sites, moreover, rarely are initiated by religious denominations or the institutions they represent. Religious institutions that belonged to Daoism (or Buddhism, for that matter)<sup>135</sup> were commonly built on existing sacred sites, such as the spaces that local lore designated as physical remnants of a saint's apotheosis. First there was a sacred site, and only afterwards there might be a religious institution like a monastery to keep the sacred presence alive in a formalized way, generating efficacy (and revenue).

Therefore, in fact, there is another “before” in this story, namely Peach Spring before Tao Qian. If we situate Tao Qian's story in a context of similar narratives from the locality, time and again we find connections to the southern Man people who formed the most prevalent ethnicity in the region around Wuling. Still today, in large parts of what is now northern Hunan, the heirs of these Man people form a distinct ethnic minority, referred to as the Yao 瑶.<sup>136</sup> Given the existence of similar sacred sites in the same region, like a huge grotto lodging the Yao divine ancestor Pan Hu, it remains to be seen whether Peach Spring's idyll is “imagined” by the creative talents of an individual author representing the Chinese literary canon, or whether it really is based upon a local, sacred site that existed before the Han domination of what is now called China. One might even wonder whether Tao Qian's piece was perhaps a commemorative record of a Daoist institution that had co-opted a cult site previously belonging to the Man people.<sup>137</sup>

135 See Bernard Faure, “Space and Place in Chinese Religious Traditions,” *History of Religions* 26 (1987): 337–356.

136 Interestingly, the ethnic groups constituting the Yao are overwhelmingly associated with Daoism. See Michel Strickmann, “The Tao among the Yao: Taoism and the Sinification of South China” in *Rekishi ni okeru minshū to bunka: Sakai Tadao sensei koki shukuga kinen ronshū* 歴史における民衆と文化—酒井忠夫先生古稀祝賀記念論集 (Tokyo: Kokusho kankōkai, 1982): 23–30. For a more recent treatment, see Eli Alberts, *A History of Daoism and the Yao People of South China* (Amherst, N.Y.: Cambria, 2006).

137 Though not referring to the Man people or to Daoist institutions per se, Zornica Kirkova has shown that a great number of famous medieval poems about transcendental realms

## Abstract

Though long seen uniquely from the perspective of the Chinese literary canon, Tao Qian's 陶潛 (365?–427) famous “Record of the Peach Blossom Spring” (“Taohuayuan ji” 桃花源記) may find an even more fruitful disciplinary home in religious studies. The story refers itself to a grotto at Wuling 武陵 (present-day northern Hunan province), a site that has been associated with Daoist transcendents (*shenxian* 神仙) at least since the middle of the sixth century. A Daoist monastery on that same site, the Peach Spring Abbey (*Taoyuan guan* 桃源觀) or Peach Blossom Abbey (*Taohua guan* 桃花觀), became officially recognized in 748 and received imperial support not long after. This article studies the long history of Peach Spring as a sacred site, or, as Tao Qian referred to it in his poem, a “divine realm” (*shenjie* 神界).

## Résumé

Bien qu'il ait été longtemps considéré uniquement sous l'angle du canon littéraire chinois, le célèbre «Récit de la Source des pêcheurs» («Taohuayuan ji» 桃花源記) de Tao Qian 陶潛 (365?–427) pourrait trouver plus naturellement sa place dans le champ des études religieuses. L'histoire se réfère à une grotte de Wuling 武陵 (dans le nord de l'actuelle province du Hunan), un site qui est associé aux transcendants taoïstes (*shenxian* 神仙) au moins depuis le milieu du sixième siècle. Une institution taoïste située sur ce même site, le monastère de la Source des pêcheurs (*Taoyuan guan* 桃源觀) ou des Fleurs de pêcher (*Taohua guan* 桃花觀), a été officiellement reconnu en 748 et a reçu un soutien impérial peu de temps après. Cet article étudie la longue histoire de la Source des pêcheurs en tant que site sacré, ou, comme Tao Qian l'a mentionné dans son poème, que «royaume divin» (*shenjie* 神界).

## 提要

陶潛 (365?–427) 著名的《桃花源記》雖然長久以來都是作為一部文學的經典受人檢視，更能充分挖掘其價值的學科範疇可能非宗教學莫屬。文章開篇即直指位於武陵 (現湖南省北部) 的一個洞室絕境，而該地至少從六世紀中葉開始就和道家的神仙有所關聯。位於該地的道觀桃源觀，又稱桃花觀，也於748年得到正式認可，並

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were “not imaginary visions of the elusive paradises ... but descriptions of actual sights: earthly simulacrum [of immortals' realms]”; see her *Roaming into the Beyond*, 161. More generally, chapter 4 offers numerous examples.

在不久之後就得到了皇家的護持。本文就作為道家聖地桃源（陶潛在《桃花源詩》中稱之為“神界”）的悠長歷史展開細緻的研究。

### **Keywords**

Peach Blossom Spring – Tao Qian – sacred site – Daoism – monastery – cult of transcendents