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## Tao Hongjing and the Reading of Daoist Geography\*

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**Abstract:** This article studies ways in which Daoist writers in early medieval China represented sacred lands. It goes beyond the descriptions of Daoist sacred geography to analyze ways in which these texts were tools to disseminate new revelations about the ancient history and ownership of temple lands. It begins by looking at Han dynasty conceptions of mountains, in particular the role of individuals who were privy to the hidden, esoteric knowledge of land formations. The second part of the article focuses on the writings of the fifth century polymath Tao Hongjing. These commentaries provide valuable insight into the kinds of social exchanges that underpin the writing of Daoist geography. These writings about religious geography reflect the interests of a new clerical class of individuals who developed and recreated sacred sites on behalf of royal benefactors.

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“To avoid hiding critical information in a fog of detail,  
the map must offer a selective, incomplete view of reality.  
There’s no escape from the cartographic paradox:  
to present a useful and truthful picture, an accurate map  
must tell white lies.”<sup>1</sup>

For Daoists writing in the early centuries of the Common Era, texts about history and topography of mountains were surrounded by an ‘aura of sacredness.’<sup>2</sup> Such treatises were often seen as ancient artifacts that had been handed down from king to king over many centuries. In this political climate, texts about China’s geography symbolized royal investiture, proof that a ruler (or aspiring ruler) held a legitimate claim to govern over Chinese states. Throughout the medieval era, topographic knowledge played an increasingly prominent role in the transmission of Daoist texts. When readers were initiated into Daoist lineages, one of the first items they received was talismans of China’s sacred peaks, the Five Marchmounts (*wuyue* 五嶽).<sup>3</sup> Around the same time, we find the rise of a host of geographical treatises on the supernatural caverns called Grotto-Heavens (*dongtian* 洞天) and Blessed Lands (*fudi* 福地) that created a vast network of Daoist sites across China. The treatises on these terrestrial and subterranean wonders were fantastic descriptions of imaginary realms far in the reaches of outer space and even in different eons.

Previous studies of Daoist geographies have focused on ways such texts resonated with political realities. Tanaka Fumio and Li Shen have written about how the great caverns and marvelous isles in Daoist scriptures capture the world as Daoist writers imagined it existing.<sup>4</sup> This, in turn, has resulted in analysis of Daoist sacred sites as if the medieval texts reflected empirical contours of subterranean realms.<sup>5</sup> Euro-American scholarship has helped define how these geographic texts reflected intellectual currents among medieval Daoists. As early as the 1950s, scholars like Michel Soymié examined the similarities between writings of Daoist mountains and historical gazetteers, and have shown that these texts give us a sense of the kinds of groups that inhabited and shared sacred sites.<sup>6</sup> Erik Zürcher has looked at the descriptions of lands in the Daoist scriptures with attention to the ways that Buddhist cosmography shaped knowledge about the location of

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<sup>1</sup> Monmonier (1991), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Seidel (1983), pp. 304-308.

<sup>3</sup> Verellen (1995), p. 270; Raz (2009), p. 1406; Gesterkamp (2017), pp. 10-11.

<sup>4</sup> Tanaka (2002), pp. 25-51; Li (2001), pp. 145-173.

<sup>5</sup> Zhao (2012), pp. 94-110.

<sup>6</sup> Soymié (1956), pp. 19-20.

other countries (both real and imaginary).<sup>7</sup> More recently, James Robson's book highlights how written texts were rhetorical tools by which writers could cleverly shape opinion about sacred places.<sup>8</sup>

All of these studies have highlighted the need for closer attention to the spatial thinking and experience embedded in these texts. This article calls attention to the writings on Daoist geographies by polymath Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 (456-536) to explore the attitudes and perspectives that medieval Daoist brought to sacred sites. In particular, it asks how did these descriptions of fantastic worlds shape identity and sense of place? And what kinds of social relationship was Tao trying to establish, develop, or sever through the production of his texts on Daoist sacred sites? I demonstrate that writings on Daoist geography formed a medium enabling thinkers to attach imperial and ritual symbols to sites. Subsequently, these imagined geographies translated into institutional control as meanings embedded in these texts helped to shape opinion on a site's 'Daoist contours.'<sup>9</sup>

This article explores ways the geographical information was relevant to the career of Tao, especially the ways these texts helped him secure an imperial patronage on Maoshan 茅山, a mountain near present-day Nanjing. I explore Tao's early writings on Daoist geography in texts such as *Yugui ji* 玉匱記 and his 'Pivot of the Gods' ('Jishen shu' 稽神樞), a collection of revelations and Tao's commentary of the sacred qualities of Maoshan. First, I focus on ways in which Tao writes that rulers need wise ministers to help them 'read' the contours of the land. It is the job of ministers and clerics to perceive the divine worlds beneath these places and assist their sponsors to make contact with these unseen realms. Second, Tao's description of China's sacred geography helps him promote his own temple institution, as well as stifle the voices of his competitors. Tao's concomitant interest in Daoism and geography, I conclude, helped him cement and sever relationships with contemporary groups near his temple at Maoshan.

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<sup>7</sup> Zürcher (1980), pp. 121-129.

<sup>8</sup> Robson (2009), pp. 57-89.

<sup>9</sup> Others have called this 'geosophy,' 'mind maps,' and 'geotheological thinking.' See Keighren (2005), pp. 546-562; Roberts (2012), pp. 741-751; Vann (2007), pp. 21-39; Bodenhamer *et al.* (2010), p. 175.

### Tao's Interest in Ancient Geography

Tao Hongjing began his career as a civil and military official under the southern regimes of the Song 宋 (420-479) and Qi 齊 (479-502) dynasties. Upon the death of his mother in 483, Tao retired from his official post and began collecting manuscripts relating to the fourth century revelations written by Yang Xi 楊羲 (330-386 CE) over a century earlier. Tao moved to Maoshan in 492 after retiring from official life. By the time Tao arrived at Maoshan, he had already accumulated a sizeable collection of Yang Xi's manuscripts. During his first seven years at Maoshan, Tao edited a collection of Yang's rituals, poetry, and other correspondence.

Tao's literary output reached far beyond Maoshan. In his official biography, Tao is remembered for circulating treatises on the 'geography of mountains and rivers' (*shanchuan dili* 山川地理) and 'charts on regional goods' (*fangtu chanwu* 方圖產物).<sup>10</sup> Very little of Tao's writings about geography are extant in full, but fragments survive as various bibliographies, collectanea, and commentaries. A bibliography compiled by Tao's nephew, Tao Yi 陶翊 (c. 570), contains titles of at least two geographic treatises that the elder Tao circulated. One of these books was the *Gujin zhoujun ji* 古今州郡記 (Record on Ancient and Modern Provinces and Commanderies), which is now lost. Tao Yi's annotations indicate that Tao's book had an appendix, a 'map of the western regions' (*xiyu tu* 西域圖). This suggests that Tao Hongjing interspersed his writings on geography with diagrams of lands in China and abroad.

From Tao Yi's bibliography, we also know Tao Hongjing produced a second treatise on sacred lands, the *Yugui ji* 玉匱記 (Notes from a Jade Chest, hereafter *Notes*), which spanned three fascicles. Unlike Tao's first book, which was a kind of administrative geography, this second treatise detailed China's spiritual topography, i.e., her famous mountains and 'blessed lands' (*fudi* 福地). While no full copy of this book is extant, there are a handful of quotes littering medieval encyclopedias. Many of these quotes, which survive as passages in medieval encyclopedias, are terse descriptions of the subterranean channels connecting China's mountains:

From the northeast side of Mount Baodu, you can proceed many hundred li to the south [side] of Mount Heng, where there is a cave in Yunnan. If you travel three hundred li, you will end up seventy li west of Meiyang County at a place called Dongkou.<sup>11</sup>

抱犢山東北，去恆山之南數百裡，雲南有穴。行三百裡，出美陽縣西七十裡，名洞口。

<sup>10</sup> *Liangshu*, 51.743.

<sup>11</sup> *Tai ping yulan* (hereafter TPYL), 45.6b [p. 345].

Other fragments from *Notes* show that this text was not simply a list of the caves and subterranean channels. In fact, the bulk of passages from *Notes* are narratives pairing knowledge about places with stories of China's past rulers. For example, Tao includes a passage about how the mythic leader of China's past, the Yellow Emperor, travelled around China's sacred peaks to invest the various gods with authority. This, in turn, safeguarded and blessed his human realm. It says:

The Yellow Emperor enfeoffed the elders of the Five Marchmounts, the upper ministers of the marchmounts and conduits, as well as the array of perfected and transcendent [officials].<sup>12</sup>

黃帝封爲五岳丈人，乃岳瀆之上司，真仙之崇秩。

The story goes on to list various peaks that the Yellow Emperor supposedly visited, and the author concludes that these peaks:

... are where the numinous transcendent beings live and a place of many propitious omens.<sup>13</sup>

靈仙所宅，祥異則多。

This kind of story is far more complex than a list of the grotto highways connecting China's sacred peaks. First, the Yellow Emperor's investiture of the mountain gods is a potent political symbol about the imperial right to rule. Furthermore, the author details where spirits live and how proper ritual practice might produce 'propitious omens' (*xiang yi* 祥異), a term usually reserved for divine approbation of an emperor's reign over earth.

Elsewhere in *Notes* we find passages underscoring that knowledge of the land is a potent symbol of territoriality. In one story from *Notes*, the mythical Yellow Emperor is described as uncovering a buried esoteric military text deep in a cavern near Guiji. Many centuries later, Yu 禹 the Great discovers this same text floating in a jade chest atop a river after his minister, Fenghou 風后, tells him about their existence at the Guiji 會稽 grotto. The story concludes that eight of the twelve fascicles miraculously disappeared, but Yu is able to retain four fascicles of this text.

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<sup>12</sup> TPYL, 44.4b [p. 339].

<sup>13</sup> TPYL, 44.4b [p. 339].

Yu asked Fenghou, "I have heard that the Yellow Emperor had a Victory Chart describing the methods for Yin/Yang and the Six Jia.<sup>14</sup> Where is this now?" Fenghou replied, "The Yellow Emperor hid this [diagram] beneath the peaks of Guiji in a pit that is 1,000 *zhang* deep and 1,000 *chi* wide. He covered the hole with a large boulder, and it is nearly impossible to recover." After Yu saw the [gods of the] Six Jia, he inquired which river deltas [he should inspect]. After fording the Yangzi, he sounded a horn in the direction of Guiji. This caused a dragon spirit to appear, at which time a jade chest floated to the surface. Yu opened [this chest] and looked inside; he found twelve fascicles of the *Scripture of All Under Heaven*. Before Yu had a chance to take hold of this text, four fascicles flew up into the heavens, and Yu was unable to obtain them. Four more fascicles quickly sunk to the bottom of the water, and Yu was unable to keep them. Yu obtained the four central fascicles; he opened and read them.<sup>15</sup>

禹問於風后曰：“吾聞黃帝有負勝之圖，六甲陰陽之道，今安在乎？”風后對曰：“黃帝藏會稽之山下，其坎深千丈，廣千尺，鎮以盤石，致難得也。”禹北見六子，問海口所出。禹乃決江口，鳴角會稽，龍神為見，玉匱浮。禹乃開而視之，中有《天下經》十二卷。禹未及持之，其四卷飛上天，禹不能得也。其四卷復下陂池，禹不能拯也。禹得中四卷，開而視之

Yu relies on his minister's knowledge of the Guiji Mountains in order to go search for the whereabouts of ancient texts. The literary description of the mountain serves as a kind of guidebook with which Yu the Great can recover buried treasures. Also, there is continuity between the actors in these stories: the rulers (e.g., Yellow Emperor, Yu the Great) are individuals who use sagacious powers to *read* China's sacred topography to access divine powers and scriptures.

<sup>14</sup> Writers of Daoist scriptures not only used the ten Celestial Stems and the twelve Earthly Branches (*ganzhi* 干支) to mark time, but asserted that the sixty combinations resulting from the Stems and Branches were connected to one's fate. In Yang's revelations, the six *jia* (*jiazi* 甲子, *jiaxu* 甲戌, *jiashen* 甲申, *jiawu* 甲午, *jiachen* 甲辰, and *jiayin* 甲寅) were protective deities that could be summoned to help. See *Shangqing liujia qidao bifa* (*Zhengtong daoze* 584), 2a (Hereafter, texts in *Zhengtong daoze* are cited by their number in Schipper and Verellen (2004), pp. 1393-1440); Company (2002), pp. 72-75; Kalinowski (1988-1989), pp. 91-95; and (1991), pp. 87-88.

<sup>15</sup> TPYL, 82.6b [p. 511].

Yet, there is one key difference between the Yellow Emperor and King Yu. The former acts on his own, while Yu the Great obtains his knowledge of Guiji's sacred topography through the intervention of his able minister, Fenghou. The story does not tell us how Fenghou knew of the buried treasure, but it is clear that Yu the Great had to rely on his minister to reveal the subterranean realms of the mountains. Tao's representation of Fenghou as the expert of China's sacred geography reflects the idea that rulers must employ able ministers who could 'read' the landscape on their behalf.

### Tao Hongjing's Reimagining of Daoist Mountains at Maoshan

Tao underscores the ministerial role in reading sacred topographies in his treatise 'Jishen shu' 稽神樞 (Investigating the Pivot of the Gods; hereafter, 'Pivot'), contained in *Zhen'gao* 真誥 (*Declarations of the Perfected*, hereafter *Declarations*). Unlike the earlier parts of *Declarations*, where Tao's editorial comments are few, his commentary in 'Pivot' is often far longer than Yang's revelations. Furthermore, Tao often departs significantly from the content of Yang's revelations to draw readers' attention to its present condition. In a revelation concerning the ideal spot for the construction of the fourth century ritual compound, the revelation describes a spot south of the Greater Mao Peak that would serve as an ideal site:

At the bottom of Greater Mao Peak is also a font under which one could set up a quiescent dwelling. It would be best to build near the source of the aquifer, but the slope is a bit steep and uneven.<sup>16</sup>

大茅山下亦有泉水，其下可立靜舍。近水口處乃佳，當小危不安耳。

To the above revelation, Tao appends a long description of the groups who now live near the caves on the south side of the Greater Mao Peak. At the beginning of this passage, his description seems quite innocuous, as Tao writes about the nearby aristocrats who decades earlier, sponsored the construction of temple compounds for priests such as Wang Wenqing 王文清. By Tao's day, the number of worshippers living in the southern valley had expanded tenfold. Tao writes that aristocrats had sponsored temple construction at Maoshan by building *xie* 廛 (station houses).<sup>17</sup> By

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<sup>16</sup> DZ 1016, 11.15a.

<sup>17</sup> The term *xie* once described places where travelers could rest on long-distance journeys. In particular, *xie* referred to postal stations built along highways that also

the time Tao arrived in 492, the number of worshippers at Maoshan had expanded. Tao writes that there were at least ten new *xieshe* 廨舍 (station dwellings) not mentioned in the four century revelations, and there were dozens more smaller residences nearby. He disparages these groups as wayward, an attitude best illustrated by his representation of a woman known as the Grotto Clerk (*dongli* 洞吏), who would falsely predict the future for travelers.

Countless numbers of men and women have come from afar to live near this center over the past twenty years. [Their homes] stretch out for many miles. While there are over ten station dwellings constructed [before the cave], few people study the superior way and instead perform Lingbao fasts and compose talismans. Not long ago there was a woman who called herself the Grotto Clerk who arrived here to live before the cave. She has devoted herself to ensure that the cave is kept in pristine condition. She is inclined to offer shamanic arts and divination techniques, but she usually is misleading and tells many lies.<sup>18</sup>

自二十許年，遠近男女互來依約，周流數里，廨舍十餘坊，而學上道者甚寡，不過修靈寶齋及章符而已。近有一女人來洞口住，勤於灑掃，自稱洞吏，頗作巫師占卜，多雜浮假。

Tao's commentary in *Declarations* addresses the popularity of the mountain as a pilgrimage site. Five thousand visitors, he writes, visit Maoshan in the third lunar month during a popular pilgrimage.<sup>19</sup> Tao criticizes the pilgrims for abandoning their trips to the mountain due to inclement weather, and casts their devotion as superficial because neither residents nor visitors are aware of Yang's revelations. For Tao, these religious activities were a serious impediment, rather than an aid, to realizing the potential of Maoshan as a devotional site. Elsewhere in his commentary, Tao also tells about a sorceress who had amassed a considerable following

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served as the residences of higher officials on assignment in outlying areas. See Forke (1962), vol. 2, p. 174. By the fifth century, however, *xie* increasingly became perceived as places of worship in remote places, usually represented as small huts where adepts lived and worshipped. Tao, for example, described the private residence of one of his disciples as a *xie*: it contained three rooms, of which was used exclusively for ritual practice. DZ 302, 1.3a-b; Bokenkamp (1996), pp. 192-193. Given its wide range of semantic possibilities, I render *xie* into English as 'station house' to preserve its early denotative meaning.

<sup>18</sup> DZ 1016, 11.15b; Yoshikawa (2000), p. 421 (hereafter, this will be abbreviated as SKKK).

<sup>19</sup> DZ 1016, 11.13b; SKKK, 419.



and had already established a network of temples in surrounding villages. Furthermore, there are temple compounds near Middle Mao Peak where people engage in blood sacrifice, a practice forbidden for Yang's gods.<sup>20</sup> For Tao, the proximity of these temples to Maoshan meant that they should be under the jurisdiction of the gods disclosed in the fourth century revelations.

This temple is now in the Ping'e village on the east side of the mountain. There is a woman surnamed Yin who is a sorceress [there]. She has gone out into all of the villages to the west [of Maoshan] where each [community] has built a temple [in her honor]. Every year the Wuxu Temple west of Greater Mao Peak and the Shuxu Temple atop the northern face of Middle Mao Peak jointly host dancing [ceremonies]. They both engage in blood sacrifices. While [these temples] should be under the jurisdiction of [Sire] Ximing, they are not aware of the connection to the perfected and transcendent officials.<sup>21</sup>

此廟今猶在山東平阿村中。有女子姓尹爲祝。逮山西諸村，各各造廟。大茅西爲吳墟廟，中茅後山上爲述墟廟，並歲事鼓舞。同乎血祀，蓋已爲西明所司，非復真仙僚屬矣。

By Tao's account, not all the priests at Maoshan represented a threat. When priests gather at Greater Mao Peak on auspicious days, for instance, Tao claims these men are inferior not because the rites are flawed, but rather because these men lack the knowledge of the mountain's past.<sup>22</sup> Tao contrasts these rituals with his access to Maoshan's ruins and buried artifacts of antiquity as identified in the revelations; he also weighs the actions of these priests against his grasp of the ancient history of the site, which he perceives with the aid of his collection of manuscripts.

<sup>20</sup> Yang argues that blood sacrifice was unnecessary for these rarefied gods because they could not be persuaded through traditional sacrifices. For more on the representation of the restrictions of sacrifice in this period, see Kleeman (1994), p. 194.

<sup>21</sup> DZ 1016, 11.9b; SKKK, 415. Yang Xi identifies Sire Ximing 西明公 as King Wen of the Zhou dynasty (trad. eleventh century BCE). DZ 1016, 10.13b; SKKK, 370. In a different revelation, Yang claims that King Wen's posthumous rank placed him in charge of the generals serving the Northern Thearch (*Beidi* 北帝). DZ 1016, 15.5b; SKKK, 555.

<sup>22</sup> Tao uses the phrase *shaoxiang libai* 燒香禮拜 (burn incense and carry out rituals) to describe these rituals, the same phrase used elsewhere to describe Xu Hui's practice. DZ 1016, 20.10b; SKKK, 706. Yang Xi also writes that deities convened on mountains to carry out rituals (*libai*) in a similar manner. DZ 1016, 12.12b; SKKK, 455.

At present there are many rocks at the highest point [of Greater Mao Peak]. Every time there is an auspicious day, Daoist priests from near and far ascend this summit to burn incense and carry out rituals. There are no longer grasses or trees at this spot, so the [priests] have constructed a small altar out of rocks. In former times there was even a room with a tiled roof standing at this spot, but it was destroyed by the winds. Soon thereafter ancient kings came bearing heavy cauldrons with lift sockets modeled on the sun and moon, as well as three legs modeled on the Three Talents [i.e., heaven, earth, and man]. They were able to steam and concoct all the things of this world.<sup>23</sup>

今最高處乃多石。每吉日，遠近道士咸登上，燒香禮拜。無復草木，累石爲小壇。昔經有小瓦屋，爲風所倒。尋古來帝王並重鼎器者，以其兩鉉法日月，三足法三才。能烹飪，熟成萬物。

A key rhetorical strategy for Tao is to represent Maoshan in a state of devolvement after Yang's revelations. Tao writes that in the century between the revelations and his commentary, people had strayed away from the divine injunctions of Yang's revelations. Even a sincere and zealous pilgrim would be unable to make progress in spiritual cultivation because they were constantly distracted by the defilement (*xuanhui* 諛穢) of popular practice.

There are surely one or two people among these masses who have made this pilgrimage with utter sincerity and zeal, but, as they are surrounded by all this defilement, they are unable to attain the concentration needed to make contact [with the gods]. Unless they turn away from the masses to seek the beneficence of the gods, they will never attain the spiritual fruits they desire.<sup>24</sup>

縱時有至誠一兩人，復患此諛穢，終不能得專心自達，如此抽引乞恩，無因得果矣。自達，如此抽引乞恩，無因得果矣。

His solution to this problem is the eradication of these groups from the mountain to make the mountain accord with Yang's revelations. Tao's lament about the downward spiral of Maoshan presents readers with two drastically different images. The two layers of the text project a devolution in which the spiritual awareness of the mountain has gradually deteri-

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<sup>23</sup> DZ 1016, 11.15a; SKKK, 421.

<sup>24</sup> DZ 1016, 11.13b; SKKK, 419.

orated since Yang Xi communicated with the Perfected in the mid-fourth century.

Yet there is also a forward-looking quality to Tao's language in 'Pivot.' Following Yang's revelations concerning the sacred sites of the mountain, Tao writes that these would be potential spots for future development. In order to conduct future explorations at Maoshan, Tao confesses that he must wait for the support of others to embark on the building projects outlined in his prospectus. He expresses his eagerness to continue his explorations of the mountain, as these studies might uncover the identity of the miraculous sites mentioned in Yang's revelations. He laments, however, that he lacks a 'close companion' (*lianglü* 良侶) necessary to fully discover (and uncover) more places mentioned in Yang's revelations.

Tao never identifies the 'close companion' by name, but we know Tao submitted *Declarations* to Emperor Wu 武 of the Liang 梁 (Xiao Yan 蕭衍, r. 502-549 CE), and the latter was instrumental in funding a series of constructions beginning in 501. While Tao does not mention the emperor in his commentary, he often refers to his potential sponsor as a virtual participant in his Maoshan reclamation. He mentions that, at the time of composition (499 CE), his potential sponsor had expressed interest in building on the western face of Middle Mao Peak. Tao represents Yang's revelations as a guide informing Tao and his sponsor about where to construct this temple. The revelations, writes Tao, would lead the emperor to some of the best vistas on the mountain, but the emperor would first need to be initiated as a Daoist follower to build at these sites.

By promoting Yang's revelations as a guide for how an individual should construct a compound at Maoshan, Tao positions himself as an expert on the information needed for such projects. He edits Yang's revelations so as to highlight how these texts could aid his sponsors' decisions to build at Maoshan. Tao often laments the ambiguity of Yang's revelations, but he notes how his survey of Maoshan has resulted in the discovery of excellent sites for the production of alchemical elixirs. Note that in the following passage Tao assures the emperor that his commentary is a general outline, and he could reveal more about the proposed construction sites if his sponsor decided to build at Maoshan.

[This mountain] is extremely hidden from view and possesses power in its form. When you settle on a date for construction to commence, then I can describe [more about this site] in detail.<sup>25</sup>

至幽隱，有形勢。若基構有期，當更宣述耳。

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<sup>25</sup> DZ 1016, 11.14b.

Tao represents Maoshan's topography not simply to arrive at an accurate picture of what the mountain *really* looked like, but (like Fenghou to Yu the Great above) counsels his sponsor on the hidden topography of this sacred site. For Tao, earlier revelations were written proof that construction on the mountain was a possible and beneficial endeavor. Armed with the authentic manuscripts, Tao represents himself as the ideal person to interpret the texts and undertake the construction project.

Thus, through writing a commentary in "Pivot," Tao attacks groups and activities he deplors, and provides us with a description of a wide range of competing institutions in the fifth century. Tao depicts the development of Maoshan in the decades leading up to his move to the mountain as a period of decline. His solution to this problem is the eradication of these groups from the mountain, or at the very least to convert these other compounds to accord with Yang's revelations. As the resident expert on Maoshan, Tao positions himself as the leading authority to read the sacred contours of the mountain, perceive its past history, and chart a new path for its future.

### Conclusion

The writings on Maoshan's geography help us rethink what made these writings so potent (and potentially lucrative) for clerics. *Notes* and "Pivot" demonstrate that the intended audience for these texts was quite narrow; they likely circulated among a limited number of royalty. These texts were not descriptions for the general public to understand Daoist geography; rather, they reflected specific ideas about China's hidden topography and the ministers who could help sponsors utilize this information. Consequently, writing about geography helped individuals like Tao lead concerted attacks on rival groups, as well as bolster Tao's clerical status.

Tao's writings about the geographic configurations of China indicate that writings about the land paired stories of sacred figures with imperial claims over the land. In such texts, Tao was not merely describing in a straightforward fashion what existed at his Maoshan home. Rather, he was deliberately attempting to reformulate the conceptual layers surrounding the land, a montage of statements about Maoshan that shaped and reshaped his readers' perceptions about the geographic configurations of China. These texts enable us see how the human imagination unfolds as it describes and inscribes space.<sup>26</sup> And they are valuable for they reflect how a well-positioned treatise could spell the destruction or support of temple institutions.

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<sup>26</sup> Bol (2013), p. 200.

The early medieval quotes about the geographic imagination in the late Han continued to live on and were reshaped by early medieval writers such as Tao. The Daoist revelations in the post-Han era reflect keys why that writings about geography were tools that could influence readers' opinions about rightful claims of religious space. The editing and commentaries about sacred lands help writers reformulate the conceptual layers sur-rounding these sites. In the above examples, Tao writes to his sponsor who might hire wise ministers to help them 'read' the contours of the land by their knowledge of history. A capable minister, affirms Tao, is able to perceive the divine worlds beneath these places, and assist their sponsors to make contact with these unseen realms. Tao preserved, retold, and commented upon such texts, at least in part, to secure employment through his bibliographic knowledge of the deep history of Daoist geography.

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