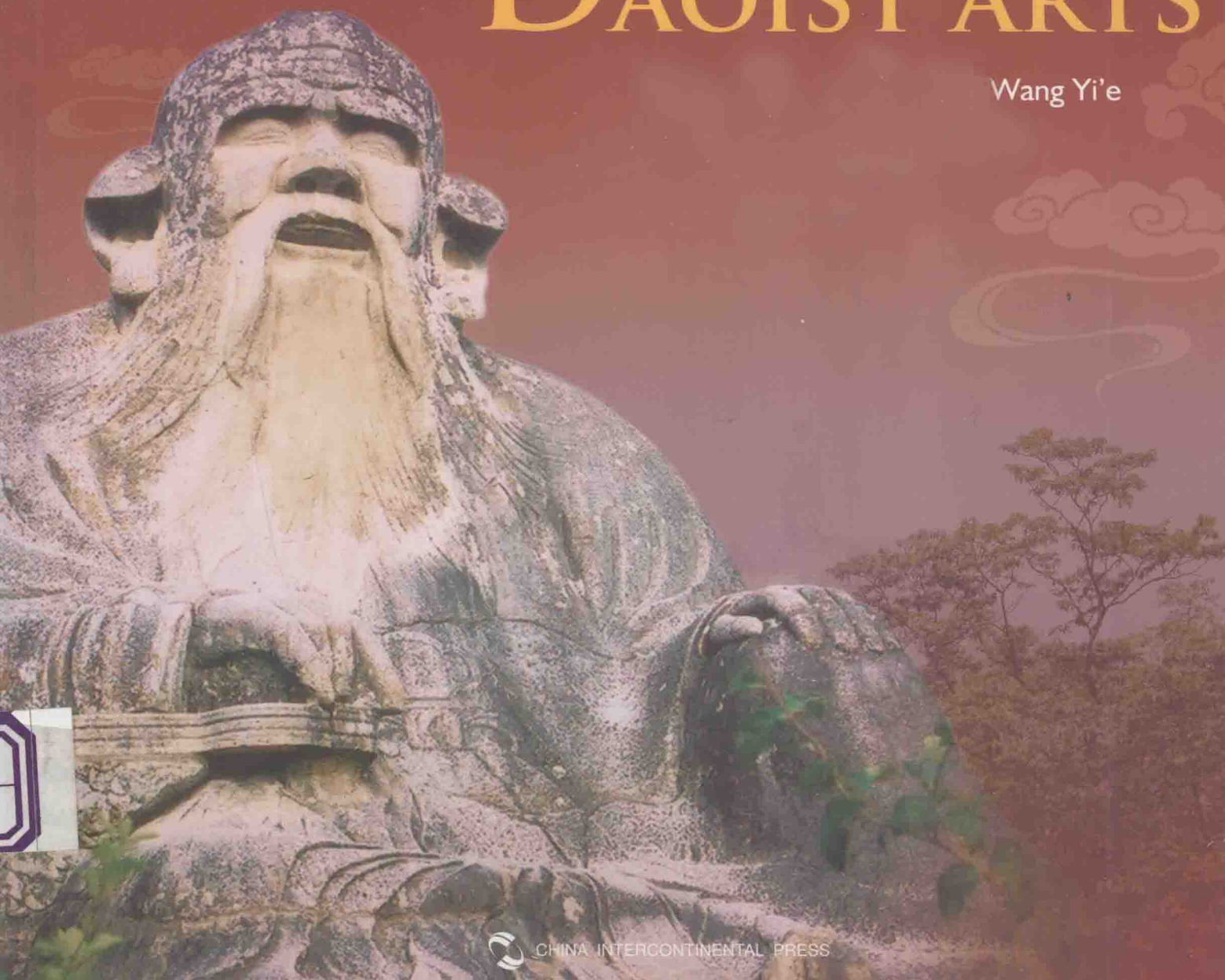


CHINESE DAOIST ARTS

Wang Yi'e



CHINA INTERCONTINENTAL PRESS

图书在版编目(CIP)数据

中国道教艺术: 英文 / 王宜峨著; 颜钟钴译. —北京: 五洲传播出版社, 2010.6

ISBN 978-7-5085-1839-8

I. ①中… II. ①王… ②颜… III. ①道教—宗教艺术—中国—英文 IV. ①J19

中国版本图书馆CIP数据核字(2010)第106137号

主 编: 赵匡为

撰 稿: 王宜峨

翻 译: 颜钟钴

翻译审校: 曾传辉

责任编辑: 王 莉 樊程旭 蔡 程

出 版 人: 荆孝敏

装帧设计: 殷金花

设计承制: 北京紫航文化艺术有限公司

中国道教艺术

出版发行: 五洲传播出版社

地 址: 北京市海淀区北三环中路31号生产力大厦7层 邮 编: 100088

发行电话: 010-82001477 网 址: www.cicc.org.cn

开 本: 210×210 1/20 印 张: 10.25

印 次: 2011年1月第1版 2011年1月第1次印刷

书 号: ISBN 978-7-5085-1839-8

定 价: 168.00元

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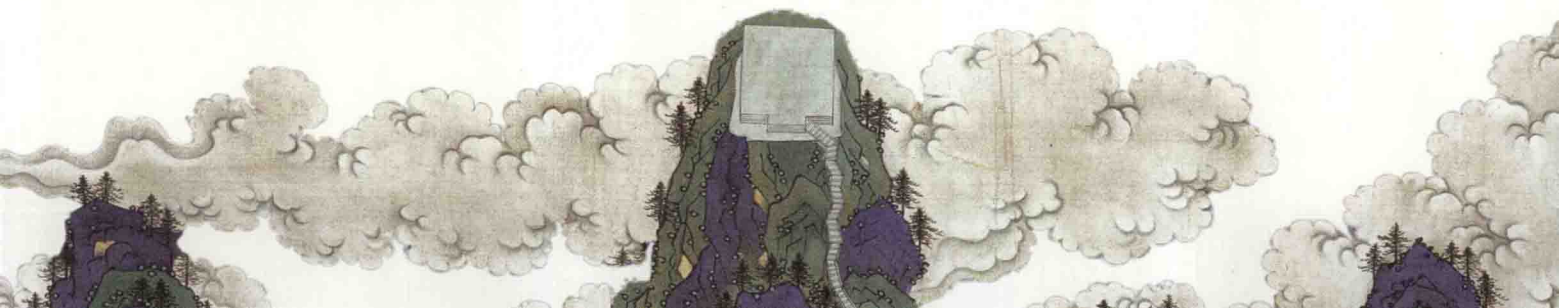
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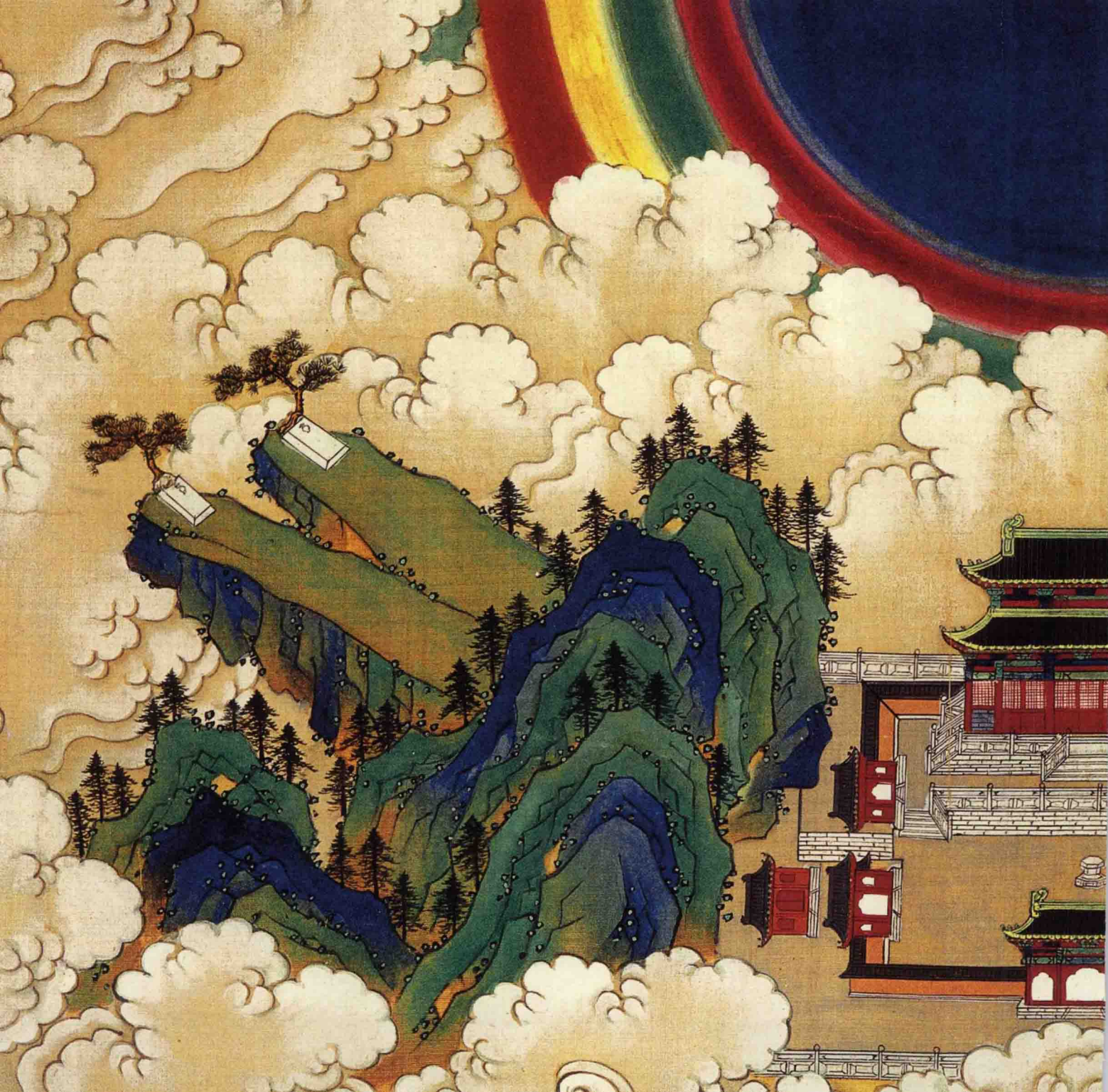


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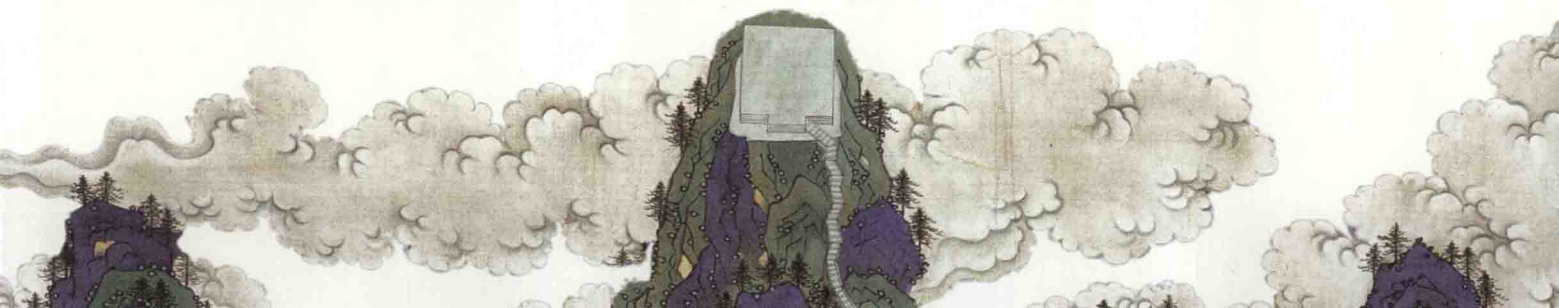
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Preface

Chinese Daoist Arts and Their Aesthetic Thoughts

Daoism came into existence at the end of the Eastern Han Dynasty (25–220). Being the only indigenous religion of China, Daoism can be traced back to the ancient antiquity on account of its many beliefs and rituals.

The earliest organized institution of Daoism began with the Way of Five Bushels of Rice initiated by Zhang Ling (Zhang Daoling) and the Way of Great Peace initiated by Zhang Jue (?–184). In the reign of the Eastern Han Emperor Shundi (115–144), Zhang Ling initiated the Way of Five Bushels of Rice in the Bashu area in present Sichuan Province. Zhang Ling (34–156) was a native of Fengyi (Present Fengxian, Jiangsu Province). He was a head of the Bashu area in the reign of Emperor Mingdi of the Han Dynasty. In the reign of Shundi, he was cultivating at Mt. Heming (Singing Crane). In 183, he composed twenty four Daoist treatises and consequently initiated a new Daoist tradition. Because every new convert must be tithed five bushels of rice, it was called the Way of Five Bushels of Rice. This tradition considered Laozi as its founder and venerated the *Daodejing* as its founding scripture. Because Zhang Ling was dicated to have the title of Celestial Master by the deified Laozi, the tradition is also called the Way of Celestial Master. The followers of this tradition all venerate Zhang Ling as Celestial Master Zhang.

Another tradition prevalent at that time was the Taiping Dao (Way of Great Peace). It was a tradition initiated by Zhang Jue, Zhang Bao and Zhang Liang, the three brothers who led the Yellow Turban Uprising^①.

Daoism developed in the Jin and Yuan dynasties (1123–1368), the three traditions that emerged from the south, namely Maoshan, Longhu and Gezao, adopted a general name of Zhengyi Dao (the Way of Orthodox One), while in the north, Quanzhen Dao (the Way of Preserve the Original Nature) Tradition emerged, initiated by Wang Chongyang.

From the Han Dynasty (206 BC–AD 220) through the Wei and Jin dynasties (220–420) to the Sui Dynasty (581–618), Daoism grew strong and mature and became one of the three pillars of thought in the traditional Chinese culture and society along with Confucianism and Buddhism. Along the way, it developed its own style of arts and cultural taste.

What is Daoist art? This is a question open for different interpretations. The Daoist arts as we define in this book refer to the artistic works with evangelic motivation and the artistic works inspired by Daoist thoughts and imaginations.

The arts are a form of social thought and a reflection of social reality. As different ideas are represented in the arts, its expressions are rich and colorful. And its expressions take many forms, such as statues, paintings and dramas. Religion and arts have much in common. Like arts, religion is a reflection of social thought. Religion and arts borrow from each other and penetrate into each other. In the development of arts and religion, their mutual influence can be easily discerned. Many art forms originated from the

religious rituals in the ancient society. And religions always use art forms to evangelize or promote its thought in a concrete way. Daoism is no exception. Hence, we have unique Daoist arts. This religion preserves the ancient belief in deities and immortals and its artistic sources can be traced back to the remote ancient society. The Daoist arts and the traditional arts shared the same roots and traditions. In contrast, the other religions have their roots from the outside of China, so do their arts.

The truly Daoistic arts originated around the Wei-Jin and Northern and Southern dynasties (220–589). The Daoist arts, which reflect the Daoist faith and absorb the Chinese traditional aesthetics and develop its own aesthetics. Generally speaking, the Daoist aesthetics inherits the thought of Laozi and Zhuangzi, in which the *Dao* or the Way, is considered the origin of all beauties. It pursues the goal of a free wandering life by returning to primitivism, following the original nature and practising actionless action. This idea is later merged with the idea of “Great Peace”, envisioned at the early Daoist religion, and the idea of immortality belief. In addition, some aesthetic elements of Confucianism and Buddhism were incorporated into the Daoist aesthetics. What we see in the Daoist arts is that the imageless *Dao*, which is the essence of cosmos, transcending time and space, and is portrayed as a personal deity, who has forms and names. The immortal beings are portrayed as having the power to transcend time and space and death, but at the same time having the human sentiments who care about ranks and statuses. The Daoist aesthetics is both worldly and spiritual. For example, the Daoists portray the Jade Emperor, the celestial monarch as dignified and awe-inspiring, a king with supreme

power and wisdom. Gods or Goddesses of Village, on the other hand, are portrayed as genteel, old men or old ladies who are generous with his fortune and protective of the land and harvests. It is the Daoist belief that the realm of immortality is much more noble and beautiful than the royal palaces. It is through the artistic images like these that Daoism inspires dedication from its faithful followers.

Like any other religion in the world, Daoism promotes its faith through arts, and its arts are nourished through the faith of Daoism.

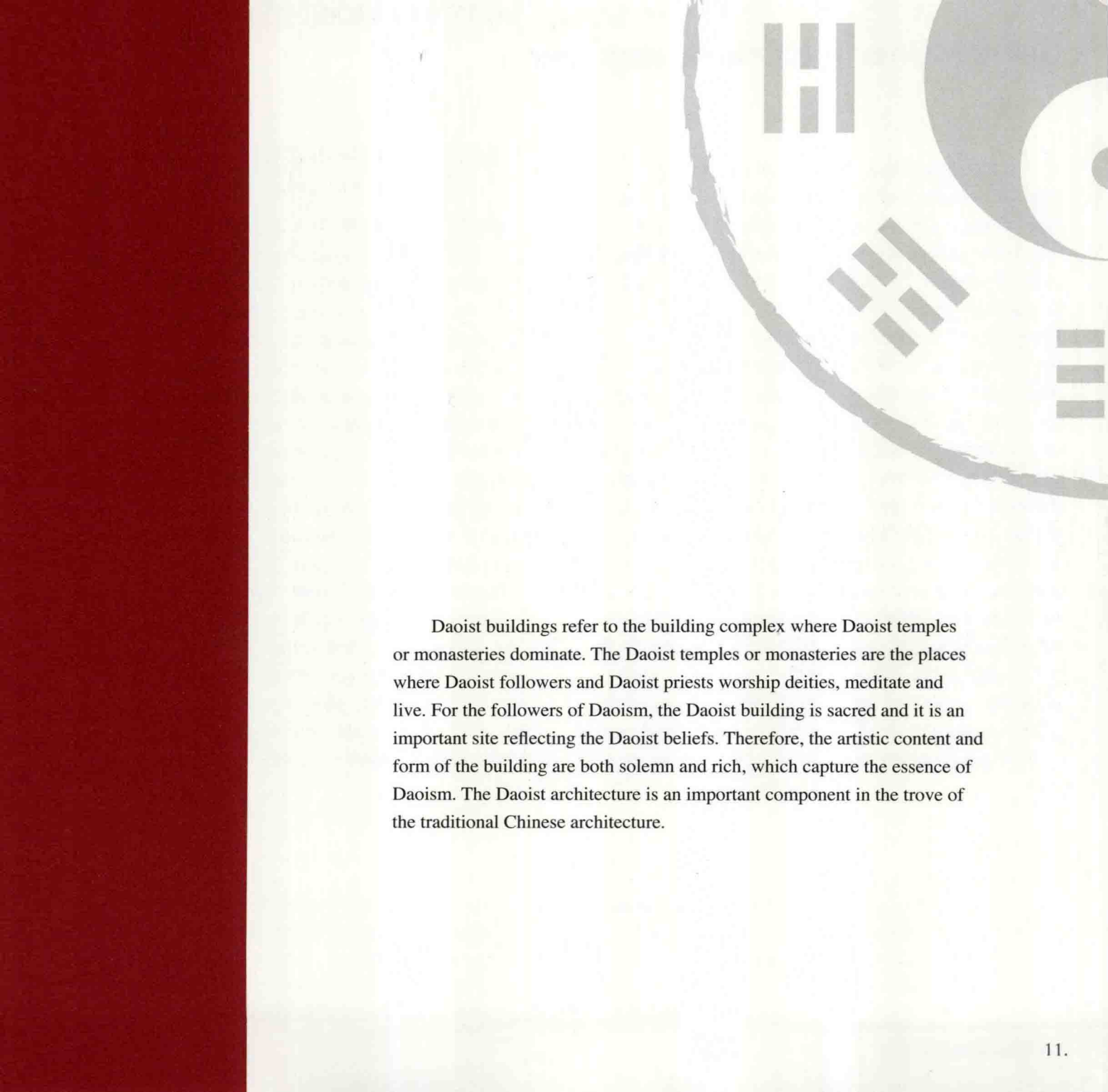
In the past two thousand years, Daoism has inspired many splendid art creations, which become an important part of the Chinese art trove. They are very valuable for the study of the traditional Chinese religions, culture and arts and social lives. This book is meant to introduce the relationship between Daoism and the arts, Daoist arts and the traditional Chinese culture through words and pictures covering the following areas:
architecture, sculpture murals, pictures of immortal beings, music and literature.

① Yellow Turban Uprising: At the end of the Eastern Han (25–220), Zhang Jue (?–184), Zhang Liang (?–184) and Zhang Bao (?–184), three brothers from Julu of Jizhou Prefecture (Southwest of the present Ningji County, Hebei Province) initiated the Way of Great Peace. The followers venerated the Scripture of Great Peace, an early scripture of Daoist religion. Within a decade, it commanded a following of over one hundred thousand people. It spread to Jiangsu, Anhui, Jiangxi, Hubei, Shandong, Henan and Hebei provinces. The uprising was scheduled to be launched on the fifth day of March in the reign of Zhongping of Han Emperor Lingdi (184). Its slogan was: "Now that the Azure Heaven is dead, the Yellow Heaven is destined to prevail. Now the year is Jiazi (the first year in the 60-year circle). It is auspicious all under heaven." The uprisers wore a yellow turban. Hence, Yellow Turban Uprising. Because of the betrayal by a Zhang Jue's disciple, the great official persecution on the followers of the Way of Great Peace followed. The uprising was launched one month before the schedule. After eight months, Zhang Jue fell ill and died. Zhang Liang and Zhang Bao died at the battles. The Yellow Turban Uprising was defeated.



Chapter One

The Palaces for Immortals – Architectural Arts of Daoist Buildings



Daoist buildings refer to the building complex where Daoist temples or monasteries dominate. The Daoist temples or monasteries are the places where Daoist followers and Daoist priests worship deities, meditate and live. For the followers of Daoism, the Daoist building is sacred and it is an important site reflecting the Daoist beliefs. Therefore, the artistic content and form of the building are both solemn and rich, which capture the essence of Daoism. The Daoist architecture is an important component in the trove of the traditional Chinese architecture.

Section One: The Origins and Functions of Daoist Buildings

The Daoist building evolves from the traditional palaces, temples and altars in ancient China. It is the site where the Daoist followers worship deities and where Daoist priests and monks meditate and live the lives of recluses. The earliest Daoist building is said to be Louguan Tai Terrace in Zhouzhi County, Shaanxi Province. This terrace was originally a place where the pass keeper Yin Xi watched astrological signs. It was also the place where Yin Xi received Laozi^① and his *Daodejing*. Therefore, the people call the place to receive immortal beings as *guan*, meaning watching or observatory. After the Daoist religion was established, the followers absorbed the ancient belief in immortal beings and built the site to worship them. Therefore, such Daoist site is also called *guan*. When the Way of Five Bushels was first established, there were also sites for Daoist meditations and other religious activities such as *zhi* (parish), *xianguan* (immortal lodging), *jing* (quiet place) and *jing* (peaceful place). These places were generally simple and the building style plain. As Daoism grew mature, and the rituals complex, the building scales and patterns became more complex. With the emperors

throughout the dynasties heaped favor on Daoism, many grand temples were built under the imperial order. These temples were supposed to house the immortals that had been honored as “imperial lords” by the emperors, and these temples are called *gong* (palaces). Since then, the Daoist religious sites are generally called *gong-guan* (temple and monastery). After the Jin and Yuan dynasties (1123–1368), when the Quanzhen Daoism was initiated, the Daoist public monastic system was introduced. The temples and monasteries became the places where the Daoist monks practised mass chanting, paid ritual service to deities, cultivated and lived. The building gradually became one that serves the purpose of Daoist service and takes on a unique Daoist art form on the basis of the traditional Chinese architectural art.

Traditionally, in the Daoist conception, there are 36 heavenly caverns and 72 blessed lands. In the Daoist lore, these caverns and lands are the places for immortal beings and the passages to Heaven. Those who cultivate the Way generally choose these places for meditation and build monasteries there in the hope of ascending to Heaven sooner. Also the number of

① Laozi (ca. 571–472 BC) was a philosopher and the founder of Daoist school. According to the Biography of Laozi in the Book of the Historian, Laozi's family name was Li, his given name Er (meaning ear) and his style name, Dan (meaning long ear). He was a native of Quren Village of Hu County, the state of Chu (on the border between present Henan Province and Anhui Province). He served as an official archive curator, who took charge of imperial library. He quitted his job and traveled through Hangu Pass, but was stopped by the pass-keeper Yin Xi. Upon the latter's request, he composed the *Daodejing*.

temples built under imperial order increased, the Daoist building flourished all over the land. Although their scales and specifications differed, they generally fall into three categories: palace-style temples such as the White Cloud Monastery in Beijing and Zixiao (Royal sky) Monastery in Wudang Mountain; Ordinary temples such

as Ancient Chongxu (Harmony with Void) Temple in Guangdong and Baopu (Embrace the Simplicity) Daoist Monastery in Hangzhou; Unadorned thatched houses or caverns such as Celestial Master Cave in Qingcheng Mountain, Sichuan Province.



Preaching Platform at Louguan Tai Temple in Zhouzhi County, Shaanxi Province

Louguan Tai (Terrace): located at the foot of Zhongnan Mountain, 25 kilometers southwest of Zhouzhi County, Shaanxi Province. Legend has it that this is the place where the pass-keeper Yin Xi watched astrological signs and received Laozi as he was riding on a black ox past the Hangu Pass. After Yin Xi accepted his discipleship, Laozi left him the *Daodejing*. According to the tradition, this is the earliest Daoist building. It carries the reputation of "Immortals' Capital" and "No. 1 Blessed Land Under Heaven". The Daoist constructions at Louguan Tai Temple has suffered from damages, natural or man-made. The terrace buildings that we have today are from the Ming and Qing dynasties. Nearby lie Laozi's Tomb, Preaching Platform, Elixir Furnace and Zongsheng (Ancestral Sage) Palace.