TALES OF THAUMATURGY: T'ANG ACCOUNTS OF THE WONDER-WORKER YEH FA-SHAN

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Studies of great historical figures generally focus upon political or cultural leaders - statesmen, intellectuals, and representatives of established institutions. Figures who seem to fall outside of those categories are often passed over. Yet occasionally, such individuals have managed to achieve extraordinary renown, for reasons that are not always immediately obvious. One such figure from T'ang China was the wonder-worker Yeh Fa-shan (631 - 720).

Yeh is an intriguing character, for a number of reasons. He was the scion of a noble house, with a lineage traceable to the seventh century B.C.E. His father and grandfather were honored by the emperors of the early eighth century: Jui-tsung granted Yeh's father a posthumous official appointment in 713, and in 717 Hsüan-tsung had the prominent official Li Yung (678-747) compose

epitaphs for both the
father and the grandfather.1What is remarkable about these facts is that each of the
Yehs was celebrated for his proficiency in the arcane arts, and Fa-shan himself was
also recognized exclusively as a thaumaturge.
What renders these facts all the more fascinating is that accounts of Yeh's
fantastic feats appear not merely in local histories or collections of wonder-tales, but
also in the T'ang dynastic histories, archival collections, and even a memorial text
issued in the name of T'ang Hsüan-tsung in 739 (less than twenty years after Yeh's
death). In fact, that memorial text demonstrates that Yeh's reputation as a wonder-
worker was well established among the courtiers of his own day.
It must also be noted that Yeh's miraculous activities are not said to have
taken place only among the general populace, among people who might be dismissed
as naive or gullible. Yeh was reportedly courted by no fewer than five sovereigns of
the T'ang period (Kao-tsung Chung-tsung , Empress Wu Jui-tsung, and Hsüan-
tsung). And some of his wonders were reportedly performed in full view of the entire
court, or of all the notable ladies and gentlemen of Lo-yang.
Most importantly, however, it is clear that Yeh was not simply lionized as a
colorful character. Sources that must be considered quite reliable demonstrate that
Yeh's skills were widely regarded as powerful forces for the aid and protection of all
good people, especially the T'ang rulers themselves. I propose that it is for this
reason that Yeh (and his forebears) were publicly lauded by at least two T'ang
emperors. As strange as it might seem to modern observers, Yeh's

thaumaturgy was
taken very seriously among his contemporaries, like the efficacious rituals with which
Buddhists and Taoists held the attention of rulers in pre-T'ang and T'ang times (and
their Japanese counterparts). And, like noted Buddhists and Taoists, Yeh Fa-shan
was given a place in the annals of imperial history not as an amusing curiosity, but
rather as a powerful and accomplished man who rendered signal service to his
sovereign, and served as a worthy exemplar for other, less remarkable subjects of the
throne.
Nearly two dozen accounts of Yeh's exploits survive, in a broad variety of
contexts. Much of what is presented about his life is anecdotal in nature, and,
naturally, such material is of dubious historical reliability. The sources disagree
about key details of Yeh's life, such as his age at death. But while it is possible to
address that particular issue, the present endeavor is not intended as an exercise in
historiography. I am concerned here not so much with issues of historicity as with
exploring the materials that provide evidence as to the reasons for which Yeh held
such an important place among his contemporaries, and among historians and
writers of the T'ang and Five Dynasties (up to the biography of Yeh in the Chiu T'ang
shu). Later accounts of Yeh's life and deeds will be addressed here as they pertain to
the matter at hand.

Yeh Fa-shan in the Yü-chih chen-jen peiof T'ang Hsüan-tsung

The earliest account of Yeh Fa-shan's life is contained in a memorial text composed under the authority of the emperor Hsüan-tsung, the Yü-chih chen-jen pei(dated 8 April 739).2While imperial texts of this nature were issued in the name of the emperor, they were actually composed by an anonymous scholar kept on staff in a government agency such as the Han-lin or Chi-hsien academies.3 However, since the emperor may well have reviewed and approved such works, and certainly took responsibility for them, I shall, for the sake of convenience, refer the "authorship" of the Yü-chih chen-jen peito Hsüan-tsung himself.

The opening lines of this text concern the "divine Tao" of the ancient sage-kings. The remainder of the work presents an intriguing appreciation of Yeh's life. It opens with an outline of the man's ancestry:

The Master (shih) had the tabooed name Fa-shan and the style Tao-yüan . Since Chu-liang enjoyed the revenue [of the district] he was known as the Duke of Yeh.4As was the [name of the] district, so was the name of the clan. Hence in olden times they were [reckoned as] natives of Nan-yang.5His great-grandfather Tao-hsing , grandfather Kuo-chung , and father Hui-ming - granted the title of Prefect of Hsi-chou, he of the hermitage of Pi hillock - were all practiced in my Tao.6

Those who relish the olden virtues can be known for a hundred generations. Therefore their fame spreads to the center of the universe while their bodies remain above the rivers and seas. Hence in present times they are [reckoned as] natives of Ku-kua.7

The genealogical data presented here may have originated in private family records,
but court records of aristocratic lineages were also well developed in the
period in question.8It may be noted that while the Yeh clan was ancient and
respectable, it was of no great social or political importance during the period in
question. We may also note that no thaumaturgical abilities are attributed here to
any of Yeh's ancestors: though it is said that they "were all practiced in my Tao,"
there is no indication that they were wonder-workers. The next passage attempts to
establish Yeh's dates:
Coming to the Ta-yeh year of the Sui - when the yearstar was in ping-
tzu(616/17), the Master of the Formulae (fa-shih) was born. [It was]
altogether 642 cycles (i.e., 107 years) to our K'ai-yüan year - the keng-
shenyear (720/21) - when his form dissolved and he ascended on the
clouds. Hence his years [totaled] 107.
A gloss on the text says: "From ping-tzuto keng-shenwas 105 sui, but 642 cycles
indeed totals 107 sui." In fact, the chronology provided in this text engendered
confusion about Yeh's dates well into the Sung period. The Chiu T'ang shueditors
followed the present chronology to an even more confused conclusion, giving Yeh's
death year as "the keng-tzuyear of the K'ai-yüan period," when there was in fact no
such year during that reign. The Hsin T'ang shuignominiously attempts to evade the
problem by confiding that "some say" Yeh was born in 616 and died in keng-tzu, thus
aged 107.

Actually, the issue of Yeh Fa-shan's dates can be settled quite easily by reference to the Ts'e-fu yüan-kuei[Sublime Treasures from the Imperial Archives], completed in 1013. Rather than parrot the usual obituary, the Ts'e-fu yüan-kueitells us that Yeh Fa-shan died at age ninety sui, not 107.9Since it confirms the date of Yeh's death as July 720, it would follow that Yeh was born in 631, not in 616. One cannot determine where the editors located this data, but since they were notorious sticklers for archival material, it certainly stands to reason that their information came from reliable sources.10Since, moreover, the data in Hsüan-tsung's text are internally inconsistent (and since 107 years is in credible longevity), I judge the data of the Ts'e-fu yüan-kueito be preferable. Yeh Fa-shan's corrected dates would thus be 631-720, still an extremely long life.

Let us return at this point to Hsüan-tsung's epitaph. Before launching upon a chronological account of Yeh's life, the emperor offers an appraisal of the man's character and significance:

At his birth, his years were advanced, yet his appearance was childlike.
At his transformation, he cast off [his body] and [became] divine.
Hence, a silent immortal constantly follows my roamings. As I peer at him, he seems to become loftier, and as I penetrate [his mystery], it seems to become more abstruse. His secrets, investigated, [remain] chaotic; his harmonies, attained, [remain] unfathomable. It seems that in aiding the state and assisting the ruler, he is exerting himself to make

[things] clear. I was able to promote and venerate him, [but] I could not
obtain and subordinate him [in an official capacity]. [Still,] I can give
expression to the traces of his deeds, from beginning to end.

The assertion that Yeh was aged at birth, yet of childlike appearance, reflects a
hagiographical toposencountered in Chinese accounts of prodigious figures like Lao-
tzu. It is conceivable that its use here constitutes deliberate hyperbole, intended
merely to induce the reader to associate Yeh with such luminaries. But the
remainder of Hsüan-tsung's text continues to describe events that would be
considered quite incredible if they concerned ordinary humans. In the absence of
evidence that the author meant the text to be read as a work of fiction, it seems
necessary to conclude that we are expected not merely to suspend disbelief, but
actually to accept Yeh Fa-shan as a superhuman figure in some sense. The
subsequent pericope seems to confirm this understanding:

When the Master was just seven sui, he forded the river and wandered
for three years. People assumed that he had drowned. When he
returned, they asked for an explanation. So he said, "Three Blue Lads
(Ch'ing-t'ung) led me to rest in a splendid hall with carved walls, ingest
numinous pharmaceuticals, and sip a nebulous broth. The Most High
(T'ai-shang) guarded [the place]. Therefore I stayed."

The Blue Lad was a major Taoist deity who presided over a paradise in the Eastern

Sea; his triplication here defies easy explanation.11In any event, he is depicted as welcoming young Yeh warmly. The fact that the youngster is treated as an honored guest indicates that the chief authority of the supernal dimension deemed Yeh an equal of the denizens of his realm - even before Yeh had done anything that would seem to justify such an extraordinary status.12Be that as it may, the fact remains that Yeh returned in due course to the mortal world. The text sheds no light upon the reason for Yeh's homecoming, nor upon the response of his immortal hosts to the fact of his departure. Yet, the subsequent passage seems to suggest that Yeh's departure caused the immortal authorities to question his worthiness. Rather than provide him with divine guidance and supportive wonders upon his return to the realm of mortality, the powers above elected to subject him to a grueling trial:

At [the age of] fifteen, [Yeh] died of poisoning. Once again he saw the Blue Lad(s) of old, who said: "Lord Mao of T'ien-t'ai will fly and seal his belly with a seal. At first, he will be very distraught and discontinue eating. After a long time, [the poison] will be dispelled."13The Master was thoroughly moved by the supernatural response, and [within his vision] instantly proceeded as indicated, dashing to all the famous mountains, searching distantly for Lord Mao and reaching [even] the inner framework of the marchmount. When he arose, the pupils of his eyes were properly adjusted and icy-clear. [Lord Mao], with a subtle smile that charmed and captivated, said, "You have come! Your fame

has already ascended the hierarchical strata of immortality. Your body
has experienced a diabolical test. Hence [I] rescued and spared you.
You ought to take aiding others and assisting in instruction as your ambition. Be not anxious about your personal activities."
Presumably, Yeh's response to this ordeal was expected to reveal his true character -
specifically his capacity for dealing with horrific challenges. Clearly, he rose to the
occasion. After his astonishing reprieve from death, Yeh is said to have received a
transmission of several arcane arts, and roamed on a regular basis to the legendary
isle of P'eng-lai, obtaining efficacious talismans, charts, and registers:

From this point, then, he received the arts of auspication (tun-chai) and
"pacing the arcane" (pu-hsüan) from Chao Yüan-yang of Ch'ing-ch'eng,
and the taoof the "eight recorders" (pa-shih) and the "cloud-sandals"
(yün-ch'iao) from Wei Shan-chun of Sung-kao.14[Yeh] resided at [Mt.]
Lo-fu and Kua-ts'ang, going to and returning from P'eng-lai.15Numinous
diagrams ten feet square, immortal talismans secretly imparted, precious registers passed down from [the sphere of] Perfection, rolled
into being in response to the unseen and were ethereally transmitted [to
him]. When he inspected them, [there appeared] eighteen thousand spirits; when he internalized them, [there appeared] twelve hundred
wraiths. Some dove into watery chambers, and some flew into fiery halls. Some laid open their bellies and cleansed their bowels, recovering

by themselves without the aid of medication. Some plucked out eyes
and extracted sclera, eliciting commendation for their casting of talismans. Some piled up toxic drugs, and brought themselves into accord by consuming them. Some invoked demonic beings, and made
them appear at once.16[Yeh] loudly rebuked the throng of demons and
chased off the mass of spirits, as though they were servants. he was
consequently famed [everywhere] within the seas.

We are not informed here of any exploits involving such spirits, but the context seems
to imply that it was through mastering them that Yeh perfected the amazing powers
displayed in his later life. According to the emperor, Yeh came to his sovereign's aid
when other ministers had failed him:

Through a thousand mutations and a myriad transformations, the previous courts showed him favor. Through one day and three shifts, I
inquired frequently concerning the essentials of the Tao at the courts of
feudatory princes. When I came into [control of] the world, I vainly awaited straight talk. [When] disloyal ministers entertain schemes, evil
and rebellion have never failed to ensue. [When] this matter was made
clear, [Yeh] surged forth to extend subtle assistance.
Therefore I specifically added purple tassels [to Yeh] in order to enlarge the fief of the ducal lord.17Yet, firm and secure in inner virtue,
[he] did not accept awards of carriages and vestments. He can be called
ample in virtue and fulfilling the Tao, venerable and luminous.
Arriving without leaving traces was the Master's (fu-tzu) timeliness; departing without regret was the Master's compliance.
When the yearstar was in Quail-Tail (ch'un wei) and the moon was in

Quail-Fire (ch'un huo), it was the time [of Yeh's departure]. He reverted
to Perfection through suspension and dissolution.
The following day I granted him the posthumous office of Governor-General of Yueh-chou (Yüeh-chou tu-tu). After a month, [his
remains] were returned for interment in the mountains of Kua-ts'ang. I
waived the court regulations and followed my original intention.
In youth, the Elder had an extraordinary nature. When grown, he exhibited a unique integrity. His spirit shone outside his body, and his
substance effloresced beyond his physical form. Therefore the myriad
Elders regarded him, saying: "Your [written] works achieve the standard
of immortality; [your] direction is from the palace of the immortals. I
shall attain [your level] and become a colleague [of yours]." How true
[was their judgment of him]!
The I chingsays, "A superior man (chün-tzu) may either go forth [into an official position] or retire [into private life]."18Going forth deprives one of the leisure of hills and woods, while retiring deprives one
of the honor of carriages and vestments. Although the principle is the
same, the manifestations of the responses [i.e. the setting in which one
lives] are different and cannot be had at the same time. The Elder nourished the spirit of the grand harmony, and contemplated the subtleties of the mysterious female.19This [activity represents] the apex for a superior man who retires. [To receive] the authentic honor of
gold seals and have purple tassels come one's way [represents] the zenith for a superior man who goes forth. Who could be like this except
one whose taoreaches a vast greatness, and whose teunites with a spiritual brilliance?

Therefore [Yeh's] receiving favor in the royal halls has occurred for five generations. In my own time, a number of persons have transmitted the Tao. Truly, there shall shortly be no interval between
the Grand Masters (tsung-shih) [attending court]. Thus the composers
of prose note [Yeh's] true being, and those who laud virtue exalt his counsel. The Elder knew me, that I would rather not set forth my sincere feelings. [Yet,] obtusely and without shame, I can open a scroll
and render his substance visible.

The inscription reads:

Suddenly and all at once,
There is no place that he does not emerge.
Abundantly and purely,
There is no place that he does not enter.
The source of all things,
The fountainhead of all changes:
Herein contemplating the mysteries,
Truly, [he is] the eminent immortal!
The eminent immortal - what of him?
Melting away, he rejects old age!
The contemplation of the mysteries - what of it?
Triumphantly, he attains to the Tao!
Using byways and subtle assistance,
He transforms spiritually and creates supernaturally.
Excessive cults and calamitous events
Without concealment are not subdued;
[But] subduing rebellions and assisting with pacification,
He succors completion and seconds the seasons.
Departing surreptitiously for a secret investigation,
He has already rendezvoused with the spirit.
The accomplished are promoted and a grade is added;
Those who come forward are not imposed upon.

Inspecting the officials as if forgetful,
Our thoughts are disordered.
Grandly, we had sublime good fortune:
His inner virtue penetrated the principles of things.
The silent immortal has shed his form,
And the arcane developments are endless.
Wild ducks fly in Yeh district,
And cranes come to rest on distant seas.
[Though] arcane influences flourish majestically,
Our grief [will last] a thousand years!
- In the twenty-seventh year of K'ai-yüan - chi-maoin the annual sequence - the second month - chi-wei- new moon, twenty-sixth day [i.e., 8 April 739]
He mounted in transformation and departed. Far-reaching was he! One does not forget old feelings, but records all the events and the
immortal's traces. Accordingly there are inscribed steles on the borders
of the mountains and seas.20
It is clear that Yeh's exceptional loyalty and modesty won the admiration of his
sovereign, who repeatedly lauds Yeh as the embodiment of Taoist virtues. But that
fact is quite striking, because Yeh is rarely portrayed as having taken any interest in
Taoist thought, texts, or doctrines. At a later point, I shall address the question of
why Yeh's activities should have been viewed in the same terms as those of eminent
Taoists of the period. For the moment, I wish to draw attention to several points
raised in Hsüan-tsung's homage.
First, we are told that the emperor solemnified Yeh's hereditary nobility. Yeh's
ancestor in the fifteenth generation had held the title of Duke of Yeh; Hsüan-tsung
states that he granted Fa-shan the purple tassels appropriate to his

ancestral
nobility, even though Yeh was too "secure in inner virtue" to accept the other
trappings of rank. In an earlier passage, Hsüan-tsung bemoaned the fact that "I
could promote and venerate [Yeh, but] I could not obtain and subordinate him [in an
official capacity]." In the present passage, the emperor provides both the explanation
and the justification for those facts. A line from the I chingdeclared that a "superior
man" could retire into private life, just as he could accept public office. Hsüan-tsung
here argues that each course was equally valid, and that Yeh Fa-shan had been a
person whose lofty spiritual attainments suited him perfectly for retirement. It is
true that his noble rank would have also suited him well to have served in public
office, but a line in the inscription text suggests that when Hsüan-tsung bestowed his
honors upon Yeh, he felt that he should refrain from imposing upon the man,
presumably by pressing him to accept official duties.
It is fascinating that the text juxtaposes these political considerations with
repeated assertions that Yeh Fa-shan was a veritable immortal. Early in the text,
the imperial narrator muses upon the mystery of Yeh's being, and comments that "a
silent immortal constantly follows my roamings." Later, he quotes "the myriad
Elders" as remarking that Yeh's "direction is from the palace of the immortals." The
poetic encomium dilates upon these ideas, and repeats the earlier assertions that Yeh

Fashan had never actually undergone the process of death in the year 720. What had occurred to Yeh at that time was not true demise, but actually a translation to transcendent spheres, during which "his form dissolved and he ascended on the clouds." Yeh "cast off [his body] and [became] divine," and "reverted to Perfection through suspension and dissolution." These notions are entirely typical of medieval Chinese hagiography, and recur in a number of T'ang documents.21

It is in light of these facts that one must read Hsüan-tsung's reports of the amazing events in Yeh's early life. Yeh's underwater visit with the Blue Lads was an early indication of his transcendent nature. That episode shows that the reader is intended to look upon Yeh Fa-shan neither as an ordinary mortal, nor as someone who attained unusual abilities through learning and effort. Rather, we are given to believe that Yeh was - from childhood - someone who could, without effort or intention, perform feats beyond the capacity of ordinary mortals. It should be remembered that Yeh's three-year sojourn in the watery realm was accomplished without the assistance of ritual, talisman, or spirit-helper. Hence it follows that by his very nature and being, Yeh Fa-shan was able to breach the boundaries between the world of humanity and the broader world of divine beings, wondrous phenomena, and fabulous realms. These are the characteristics of the remarkable figures encountered in ch'uan-ch'itales, whose ranks included not only "immortals," but deities in the strict sense (i.e., beings who never lived in the mortal

sphere), and also
the sadly misunderstood beings known to humans as "foxes."

But what sets Yeh apart from all such beings is the fact that he was given a
mission to fulfill during his time in the human sphere. In the literature of medieval
China, quite a few people eventually ascend to immortality, but rare are they who
pass their lives in pursuit of a divinely ordained mission. One should note that the
turning point in Yeh's life was actually "the diabolical test" that reportedly snuffed out
his life at the tender age of fifteen. During the subsequent liminal encounter with the
Blue Lad(s), Yeh learned that Lord Mao would heal him, and his exertions in seeking
out that deity resulted not only in a reprieve from death, but also in a mandate to
"take aiding others and assisting in instruction as your ambition." During this
experience, Yeh had already gone through the physical process of death, and was
revived to work in the world of mortals, without the necessity of undergoing that
process again. Whether through grace or merit, Yeh was allowed to live a special kind
of life. He received special skills (both from other humans and from immortal
sources), and with steadfast virtue he applied those skills to aiding his sovereign,
T'ang Hsüan-tsung.
The primary significance of Yeh's early death, then, was not that it turned him
into an immortal: the earlier episode at the age of seven had already demonstrated

that Yeh was honored among the divine beings who dwell beyond this world. So while
it is true that his adolescent trauma relieved him of the need to die again later, the
true meaning of that event (as the text lays it out) did not concern the nature of Yeh's
being, but rather the nature of Yeh's activities in the human world. This returns us to
the fact that Yeh was never given any public office, despite the fact that his ancestry
and character allegedly warranted such responsibilities. Be that as it may, Hsüan-
tsung makes it abundantly clear that Yeh Fashan had in truth been an extraordinary
servant of the throne, but his "office" was not a post that ordinary men could ever fill.

Rather, Yeh's task in life was to serve the interests of the empire by drawing upon his
transcendent nature and upon the efficacious methods that he had acquired after his
return to life at age fifteen: "Using byways and subtle assistance / He transforms
spiritually and creates supernaturally... / [By] subduing rebellions and assisting with
pacification / He succors completion and seconds the seasons. .. / Grandly, we had
sublime good fortune. . . " In ways that ordinary people could hardly comprehend,
Yeh Fa-shan had combined the two courses available to a "superior man":without
entering public life (in the way that ordinary men might), Yeh had succeeded "in aiding
the state and assisting the ruler," and, by so doing, had fulfilled the mission entrusted
to him by Lord Mao so many years earlier.22

In sum, the epitaph attributed to T'ang Hsüan-tsung presents an interpretation of Yeh's life that is rich, complex, and remarkably coherent. The stories of Yeh's "miraculous" experiences reflect much more than a credulous mind or a credulous age. They actually constitute integral elements of a sophisticated portrait of a remarkable life, a life the significance of which was viewed as being at once transcendental and political. It is difficult to say to what extent the emperor himself may have actually had a hand in composing that portrait. But the fact remains that it is quite serious about Yeh's thaumaturgic attainments: it presents Yeh as wielding valued skills, thereby contributing signally to the stability of the T'ang throne.

Yeh Fa-shan in the Huan-hsi chihof Chiang Fang

Subsequent to Hsüan-tsung's epitaph, the first biography of Yeh Fa-shan appears in a ninth-century collection, Chiang Fang's Huan-hsi chih[Records of Magic].23 As the title indicates, Chiang's primary purpose was to transmit tales of wonder. Hence, his entire account of Yeh consists of episodes in which Yeh performs miraculous feats. I translate it here in full.

Yeh Fa-shan, styled Tao-yun, resided in Chtu-chou.24At age seven, he sank into the [Yangtze] river, and did not return for three years. When his father and mother asked him why, he said, "The Blue Lad took me to drink of a nebulous broth, so I stayed a short while, that's all."

As a young man, he entered the Mao-yu mountains.25 His doorway was near the mountain. [There was] a great boulder in the roadway, and everyone made a circuitous detour in order to pass it. The Master cast a talisman to raise the stone, and in an instant it had flown away. The road thereupon was level and smooth, and everyone was amazed.

He regularly roamed to Mt. Po-ma in Kua-ts'ang.26There, in a stone chamber, he [once] met three divinities (shen-jen), all [bedecked] in embroidered robes and jeweled headpieces. They bespoke the Master, saying, "We have received from the Most High a mandate to impart to you secret instructions. You were originally the Great-Ultimate Purple-Rarity Immortal Minister of the Left (t'ai-chi tz'u-wei tso-hsien-ch'ing).27 Because you were not diligent in copying the registers (lu), you were banished to the mortal world. You must perform acts of merit and help others. When your merit is fulfilled, you will return to your former duties. [We therefore] direct that the doctrines of the Orthodox Unity and the Triad and Pentad (cheng-i san-wu) be imparted to you." Having completed their address, they departed.

From this point, [Yeh] eradicated strange goblins and exterminated ominous sprites. He made it his aim to save people in his

neighborhood.
The wife of Chang Wei of Shu-ch'uan died and came to life again, and they once more became husband and wife.28The Master realized
[what had happened], saying, "This is the affliction of 'seduction by a
corpse'. If it is not dispelled, Chang will die!" The Master cast a talisman, and [the corpse] changed into a black wraith.
The noble lady of Grand Secretary Yao (Yao hsiang-kuo, i.e.,Yao Ch'ung) was already dead.29His affectionate remembrance was very
profound. Casting a talisman, [Yeh] raised her.
Traveling as usual, [Yeh] walked into a great river. Suddenly, he sank into the waves. It was said that he had already died of drowning,
[but] in seven days he emerged, and his clothes and shoes were not [even] damp. He said that for a while he had wandered with Ho Po (The
River Earl) to P'eng-lai.30
When Wu San-ssu assumed power [705], the Master frequently investigated bizarre omens, protected Chung-tsung, and assisted his
successors down to Hsuantsung.31He became hated by San-ssu, and
was exiled to the Southern Sea. [Later] the Master came up from the
sea riding a white deer.32
When Hsüan-tsung succeeded to the throne, all the fortunes and circumstances [of the day] had to be reported in a memorial. [Once,]
T'u-fan [i.e., Tibet] sent an emissary to present a precious box, with a
note saying, "Would your majesty please open [the box] personally, without letting the others know the secret?" Everyone in the audience
remained silent. Only Fa-shan said, "This is an inauspicious box. It is
proper to have the [T'u-]fan ambassador open it himself." Hsüan-tsung

followed this [advice], and had the [T'u-]fan ambassador open it himself.
Within the box was a crossbow, which went off, striking the [T'u]fan ambassador dead.
At the beginning of K'ai-yüan, in the first month, on the night of the full moon (14 February 713), Hsüan-tsung moved [Yeh's] residence
to the Shangyang Palace to observe the lanterns. The artisan Mao Shun-hsin , by imperial appointment, had constructed an iridescent tower of more than thirty rooms, with rooms [appointed in] gold, kingfisher feathers, pearls, and jade arranged within. The tower was one
hundred fifty ch'ihin height [approximately 44 meters]. When stimulated by the slightest breeze, it made a harmonious tinkling sound.
Lanterns were fashioned in the forms of dragons, phoenixes, hornless
dragons, and leopards. They ascended in a staggered fashion, as though
without human assistance.
Hsüan-tsung was greatly pleased [with the appearance of the tower], and hastily summoned the Master to appear below the tower,
without anyone knowing of it. The Master said, "For the abundance of
lantern reflections, there is certainly no comparison. Even the lanterns

of the chambers of the western capital this evening are secondary to
these." Hsüan-tsung asked, "Has the Master just now traveled [there]?"
[Yeh] replied, "I had just come from there when I received [your]

hasty
summons." Hsüan-tsung marveled at these words, and asked, "Can you
go there right now if you wish?" [Yeh] replied, "Easily." He thereupon
instructed Hsüan-tsung to shut his eyes and take a leap, enjoining that
no unauthorized gaze would be allowed. As he spoke, they were already
in the Milky Way. Suddenly their feet touched ground. [Yeh] said, "You
may gaze about." They then observed the reflecting lanterns, strung
together for several ten's of lit Chariots and horses were paired in
throngs, and gentlemen and ladies bustled about. Hsüan-tsung's praise
of the abundance [of the lanterns] followed his. Then [the emperor]
requested to return. Shutting their eyes again, they rose into the air and
ascended, and in an instant they were already [once again] below the
tower, and the strains of the singing and dancing had not yet ceased.
When Hsüan-tsung was in Liang-chou , [Yeh] deposited a carved
iron ju-iscepter as a security for wine. The following day, [the emperor]
gave an order to the Commissioner of the Palace Interior (chung-shih),
charging him with other matters, and dispatched him to Liang-chou. He
thereupon sought out the ju-iand returned, verifying that it was not an
exaggeration.
Then on another occasion, on the evening of the full moon of the
eighth month, the Master and Hsüan-tsung roamed to the Palace of the
Moon and listened to the celestial music within the moon. When they
asked about the song, the name given was the "Song of the Purple
Clouds." Hsüan-tsung, who had a good ear for music, silently noted

the
notes, and, upon returning, transcribed the music, and named it "Rainbow Garments and Feathered Robes."
Returning from the Palace of the Moon, they passed Lu-chou above the city walls. They looked down and saw that the suburb was
very quiet, and the moonlight was like daylight. The Master accordingly
asked Hsüan-tsung to play the music on a jade flute. At the time, the
jade flute was within the sleeping chamber [in the palace]. The Master
ordered someone to fetch it. Shortly it arrived. When the music was finished, they tossed gold coins into the city walls and returned. In ten
days, [the administrators of] Lu-chou memorialized that on the night of
the full moon of the eighth month there had been celestial music playing
near the city walls, and presented the gold coins that had been collected.

Although this account commences with the standard biographical formula (the

subject's name, style, and place of registry), the tone of the overall account is not that
of a standard chuan. We are told nothing of Yeh's family, his birth, or his death. The
aretalogical nature of the compilation is pointed up by the style of the linkage of
pericopes, which is somewhat reminiscent of the linkage of miracle-stories in the
synoptic Gospels: on this day, the subject performed this miracle at this place, and on

that day, he performed that miracle at that place. The pericopes are strung together
with little of the narrative that is so instrumental in establishing a precise chronology
or a full context for the described events. Chiang Fang merely illustrates Yeh's

miraculous feats, without constructing a unified narrative in which each element
follows naturally from the elements that precede it.
The only element that this account shares with T'ang Hsüan-tsung's account
is the episode of Yeh's childhood subriverine journey. Chiang's account then jumps to
Yeh's manhood, when Yeh was reportedly capable of working wonders through the use
of talismans. It is noteworthy that the reader has not yet been informed of how Yeh
learned the use of such amulets: the text refers neither to the supposed Taoistic
pursuits of Yeh's forefathers nor to the transmission of arcane arts from figures like
Chao Yüan-yang and Wei Shan-chün. In the place of Hsüan-tsung's pericope
about Yeh's death-vision of Lord Mao, Chiang Fang relates an epiphany in which
three divinities transmit to Yeh authentic Taoist doctrines. This revelation is most
reminiscent of scenes from Taoist texts.33It is highly significant that it addresses
directly the question of Yeh's true nature, which the first two episodes in Hsüan-
tsung's text had addressed quite obliquely. The notion that Yeh was a "banished
immortal" (che-hsien) fits in well with Hsüan-tsung's depiction of the man.34It also
explains Yeh's ability to perform feats beyond the capacity of ordinary mortals: while
others might learn to employ talismans and like devices, none could

hope to equal
Yeh's skill, for he began with an unique advantage - an immortal nature.
After experiencing the revelation at Mt. Po-ma, Yeh is said to have undertaken
a career in altruistic exorcism and thaumaturgy. In the case of Yao Ch'ung's wife, he
even indulged in the remarkable practice of resurrecting the dead. All these
accomplishments are standard features in the repertoire of many quasi-divine
wonder-workers.35One must note, however, that they are quite uncommon in
accounts of the lives of Taoists of the high T'ang period.
T'ang Hsüan-tsung had reported that Yeh once roamed to the blessed isle of
P'eng-lai, but failed to record Yeh's route or mode of conveyance. The Huan-shi chih
rectifies those "omissions." While the precise site is not identified, the text mentions a
"great river," which one may surmise to have been the Huang-ho (since that was Ho
Po's main haunt). The assertion that Yeh emerged from the water with no signs of
wetness alludes to a characteristic of Taoist saints famed since the time of Chuang-
tzu.36Contrary to Hsüan-tsung's report, Yeh is here said to have spent a single
seven-day period visiting P'eng-lai, and no mention is made of fetching Taoist
talismans, charts, or registers.
Finally, Chiang's account turns its attention to the T'ang court. It gives no
indication as to how, when, or why Yeh was first brought to court. But like Hsüan-
tsung's text, it shows Yeh as protecting his sovereign through his supernatural skills.
It is ironic that when the author finally establishes a contextual background for a

potential anecdote (i.e., the period of Yeh's southern exile), he fails to fill it.
Such is not the case when the text turns to events of Hsüan-tsung's reign.
While no definite dates are provided, the author clearly fixes the context of the events,
then describes a specific incident. The matter of the T'u-fan emissary who attempts
to assassinate the emperor is not mentioned in Hsüan-tsung's own account of Yeh.
Though such a discrepancy might provoke suspicion, it is conceivable that some
government document provided Chiang's information, particularly since the pericope

refers to Yeh as "Fa-shan" (rather than as "the Master," as in the rest of the text). It
is also interesting that Yeh practices no actual thaumaturgy here, but merely a form
of clairvoyance. While the feat is remarkable, Yeh does nothing here that modern
parapsychology has not studied in connection with reputed possessors of
extrasensory perception. Yeh displays no theurgic or talismanic skills here, much
less any traces of specifically Taoist ideas or practices.
The subsequent episode again refers to Yeh as "the Master," yet it is prefaced
with a precise date, in the fashion of a regular historical account. Nonetheless, the
story of Yeh as airborne tour guide is nothing that one can imagine encountering in
any historical text. The focus of the tale is Yeh's facility for instantaneous
translocation, which extended to the safe and speedy transportation of other persons.
Concerning such abilities, Isabelle Robinet says:
The mastery of pien-hua, the conquest of mobility with unity, is connected to the common Taoist theme of "traversing great

distances,"
ecstatic journeys similar to those of shamans. The Saint who knows how to transform himself is freed from corporal attachments and liberated from temporal-spatial bonds. He can travel a thousand miles
in a moment, fly like a bird, cross the seas, etc.37
The most famous example of this phenomenon is the journeys of King Mu of Chou in
the Lieh-tzu.38Yet it was not only Taoists who were reputedly capable of
translocation: as with the related skill of "ubiquity" (fen-hsing), both Taoist adepts
and non-Taoist magicians were reported to possess such abilities.39Moreover, it
should be noted once again that in the story of Yeh Fa-shan and Hsüan-tsung, there
is no trace of Taoist language or ideas.
The final anecdote (dated to month and day though not to year) again sees Yeh
transporting Hsüan-tsung, but in this instance they journey all the way to the moon,
and Hsüan-tsung returns with the Song of the Purple Clouds.40The addendum about
Lu-chou and the coins is clearly intended as verification that the duo had indeed
roamed far from the capital, and the music heard in Lu-chou is meant to confirm the
prior visitation to celestial realms. Anecdotes such as these are typical of the ling-
yentale, a type of tale devoted to demonstrating that certain wondrous events
actually occurred.
Two things should be noted in connection with the last three anecdotes in the
Huan-hsi chihaccount. The first is the total absence of Taoist rhetoric, or of
references to identifiable Taoist phenomena. The second is the lack of contextual
details relating the described events to the life or person of the

historical Yeh Fa-shan.
It would occasion little surprise were we to read the name of some other wonder-
worker - like Chang Kuo in the place of Yeh's in each episode.41Indeed, there is
evidence that at least one of the anecdotes was not inextricably bound to the figure of
Yeh Fa-shan: the story of Hsüan-tsung and the lunar tune shows up again elsewhere
in the Huan-hsi chih, with no mention of Yeh at all.42The reason for such a fact is not
far to seek: hagiographers in many cultures are wont to extend their subject's
miraculous record by appropriating suitable anecdotes that originally featured other
figures altogether.

In conclusion, one must acknowledge that Chiang Fang conceived his work as a
collection of wonder-tales, not as a biographical anthology. It is reasonable to
suppose that his enthusiasm for his task may have led him to credit Yeh with exploits
that had no actual historical connection with him. Among those exploits, I would
include ten anecdotes of Yeh's levitation of the great stone, his dispersion of the
noxious wraith that impersonated Chang Wei's deceased wife, and his resurrection of
Lady Yao. The episode that would seem acceptable as valid representation of Yeh
Fa-shan (though not necessarily as authentic historical data) include all the variants
of matters mentioned by Hsüan-tsung, and the story of the T'u-fan ambassador.
Nonetheless, all the wonders that Chiang credited to Yeh adhered to the latter's
reputation, and often appear in later accounts of Yeh's life.

Yeh Fa-shan in the Tao-chiao ling-yen chiof Tu Kuang-t'ing

A third T'ang author to describe the life of Yeh Fa-shan was Tu Kuang t'ing
(850-933).43Tu treated of Yeh in two distinct contexts. One was in his Tao-chiao
ling-yen chi.[Accounts of Wondrous Fulfillments in Taoism], composed cat 900.44
The other was in his Hsien-chuan shih-i[Restoration of Omissions in the Lives of the
Immortals].45It is significant that Tu's two accounts of Yeh Fa-shan are entirely
distinct, both in form and in content. The Tao-chiao ling-yenchi presents the first
formal biography of Yeh, while the Hsien-chuan shih-irelates a series of anecdotes
about Yeh, very much in the style of the Huan-hsi chih. While there are no data to
permit a relative dating of the two works, I conjecture that Tu composed the Tao-
chiao ling-yen chibiography of Yeh first, then compiled the Hsien-chuan shih-i
materials to supplement it.

The Tao-chiao ling-yen chibiography of Yeh reads as follows:

The Celestial Master (t'ien-shih) Yeh Fa-shan was a native of Kua-chou.46[His family] had been tao-shihfor three generations. They all participated in matters of divine skills (shen-shu), cultivation (she-yang)
and ascent to Perfection (teng-chen). Fa-shan [possessed] talismans and
registers (fu-lu), and could especially compel demons and spirits. During the Hsien-ch'ing period [656-661], Kao-tsung summoned him into the Taoist precincts within the palace (nei tao-ch'ang). [The
emperor's] solicitude and deference were extraordinary.
At the time, there was an imperial procession to the Eastern Capital [657].47Fa-shan constructed a fiery altar (huo-tan) at the Ling-
k'ung abbey, and initiated a great chiaoritual. The gentlemen and ladies

in the city all went and observed it. Suddenly, several tens of persons
rushed to throw themselves into the fire. The crowd was greatly alarmed, and rescued them, then released them. Moreover, they were
unharmed. Fa-shan said, "These people all have a demonic illness, which will be put to rest by my formulae (fa)." When it was investigated,
it was actually so. [Yeh] strove assiduously on their behalf, and their
illnesses were all healed.

During the five reigns of Kao-tsung, Chung-tsung, Tse-t'ien, Jui-tsung, and Hsüan-tsung, Fa-shan came and went in the famous mountains. He was repeatedly summoned into the palace.
In the second year of the Hsien-t'ien period [713], [Jui-tsung] installed [Yeh] as President of the Court for Diplomatic Relations (hung-
lu ch'ing), enfeoffed him as Duke of Yüeh, and increased his father's rank
to that of prefect of Hsi-chou.
Except for the absence of an obituary, this text is a typical example of the standard
Chinesechuan. But it does raise a number of interesting points. First, it asserts that
Yeh's family had been tao-shihfor three generations. One supposes that this
statement was inspired by Hsüan-tsung's remark that Yeh's forefathers had been
"practiced in my Tao." Yet it is by no means certain that Hsüan-tsung's remark had
been intended to signify that the individuals had actually undergone formal ordination.
It might rather indicate merely that Yeh's forebears were thought to

have had an
abiding interest in matters that were in some sense Taoist. An examination of the
inscription texts pertaining to Yeh's father and grandfather reveals no mention of
either man having been a tao-shih. Since those texts are quite detailed, and were
composed in the year of Yeh's death, it seems virtually certain that some indication
would have been given there if Yeh's forefathers had actually been tao-shih. Tu's
statement must therefore be regarded as a misreading of the historical record.

The practices attributed here to Yeh's forebears generally represent veritable
Taoist praxis. "Ascent to Perfection" was the principal spiritual goal in the Shang-
ch'ing tradition, and the use of talismans occurred to some degree in almost every
segment of the Taoist tradition from the time of Chang Lu.48Only theurgy is
questionable as an element of Taoism. Not only is theurgy difficult to relate to Taoist
doctrine and theory. But in addition, the best-known practitioners of that art - such
as Luan Pa (fl. cat 150) and Tso Tz'u (d. 306) - were not affiliated with any
recognized Taoist organization.49Perhaps Tu intended to make some point by
portraying Yeh as a practitioner of manipulative, "magical" activities, while his
forefathers are presented as having participated in the more mainstream Taoist

activities of self-cultivation. One may at least note that neither here nor in any of the earlier accounts is Yeh Fa-shan depicted as having practiced any of the usual Taoist methods of self perfection (e.g., meditation, embryonic respiration, or alchemy). On the basis of the earlier texts, it could be argued that Yeh already possessed an immortal nature, and hence had no need to undertake spiritual development. It is nonetheless striking that in Tu's text Yeh never even mentions Taoist religious praxis, or the Taoist texts that supplied the efficacy of the very activities in which his forefathers had reportedly excelled.

The report of Yeh's audience with Kao-tsung is entirely plausible, even though it does not appear in any of the earlier biographies. Likewise, the last two paragraphs in the text parrot Hsüan-tsung's account, and therefore occasion no wonder. Only the anecdote of the demonic illnesses in Loyang stands out as an aretalogical element.

The plausibility of that episode is enhanced by the provision of a firm historical context:although no date is adduced, we are able to deduce a precise year from the information supplied. Yeh displays supernatural perception in detecting the demonic cause of the disturbance, but the healing that he is said to have performed is of a very obscure nature. He performs no exorcism: wherever the demons resided that afflicted the unfortunate citizens, Yeh does not banish or exterminate them; he merely

eliminates their deleterious effects. What is more, the precise method that he
employs to achieve that cure is not reported. This is a striking fact, since the opening
of the text states that Yeh was an expert in two forms of effective magic - talismans
and theurgy and in other texts he is shown utilizing those skills successfully. Why,
then, is neither skill mentioned in connection with this healing?
Another intriguing point is raised by that episode: Yeh Fa-shan is said to have
conducted a chiao. The chiaowas a major Taoist ritual, and the statement that Yeh
performed one gives the reader the distinct impression that Yeh was a fully ordained
tao-shih. But nowhere in the text is Yeh explicitly styled a tao-shih. (It is true that
the opening line styles Yeh a "Celestial Master," but in Yeh's day that was an
honorific title with no formal meaning.) The question of Yeh's possible ordination thus
remains unsettled.

The titles that Jui-tsung granted Yeh are assuredly reliable, since they are
attested in Li Yung's epitaphs for Yeh's father and grandfather. One would imagine
that the position in the Court of Diplomatic Relations was inspired by Yeh's
management of the treacherous Tibetan emissary, were it not for the apparent
anachronism: that event is said to have occurred later, during Hsüan-tsung's reign.
Still, because of the official title given Yeh in this episode, and because of the
placement of the Tibetan episode in the Huan-hsi chihaccount, I

would go so far as to
pro pose that the T'u-fan episode had originally been set at the court of Chung-tsung
or Jui-tsung, and that Chiang Fang substituted Hsuan-tsung's name into it under the
influence of the subsequent anecdote and Hsüan-tsung's well-documented fascination
with Yeh Fa-shan.50
Finally, one notes that Yeh is referred to throughout this text as "Fa-shan."
Prima facie, that form of reference would indicate that Tu's sources were government
documents. The anecdote of the chiao, however, seems out of keeping with the tone of
most government materials. In addition, one wonders what agency would have
written up that episode, since it includes no mention of the emperor, the court, or any
public official. One line in the story is a commonplace ofling-yenwonder-tales: "When
it was investigated, it was actually so." Adding to these facts the observation that
another name could be substituted for Yeh's without disrupting the story, I tend to
rank this anecdote alongside the ahistorical elements in the Huan-hsi chih.

Yeh Fa-shan in the Hsien-chuan shih-iof Tu Kuang-t'ing

Tu Kuang-t'ing's second account of Yeh's exploits comprises another collection
of Wundererzählungendraped loosely about the figure of "the Master."51The opening
pages reproduce the Huan-hsi chihtale of Yeh's lunar journey with Hsüan-tsung. The
subsequent passage reads as follows:

Hsüan-tsung, together with his close ministers, repeatedly tested the
Master's Taoist skills. They could not entirely exhaust them, and of what they verified, none was an illusion. Therefore their respect [for

As for the rest - banishing mountain sprites, bringing winds and rain,
broiling dragon flesh, dispersing the uncanny and false - matters of supernatural efficacy, they are all in the basic biography (pen-chuan),
and are not laid forth here.

The statement that Hsüan-tsung and his ministers repeatedly tested Yeh's

abilities accords with the reports of Hsüan-tsung, and with the episode of the T'u-fan
emissary. The second passage is less comprehensible. The reference to a "basic
biography" is particularly perplexing. As a rule, such a remark would be construed as
a reference to the subject's biography in the relevant dynastic history. Yet in Tu
Kuang-t'ing's day, the Chiu T'ang shuhad not yet been commissioned.52Regardless of
the source to which Tu referred, a problem remains. Tu refers us to the "basic
biography" for reports concerning Yeh's banishment of mountain sprites, calling up
winds and rain, and "broiling dragon flesh." Certainly no such activities are mentioned
in theTao-chiao ling-yen chiaccount. Nor, in fact, are they attested in any earlier
biography that has been preserved to us. What is more, one would have expected any

anecdotes of that type to have been incorporated into precisely such an account as
Tu was compiling here, not inserted into any standard chuan. Lacking documentation
for such wondrous incidents, one has no means to determine Tu's actual intention
here.
The next passage presents another tale that would read just as well with
another's name inserted in the place of Yeh's:
In addition, Chang Yüeh, Duke of Yen, once went to the abbey to pay a
visit on the Master, and ordered wine. Yüeh asked, "Are there no other
guests?" The Master said, "There is the retired gentleman Ch'u here, who has long lived as a hermit in the forests of the mountain. He is by
nature deferential and reticent. He is much given to wine, and would
take a cupful or a gallon." Yueh requested that he be summoned. Presently he arrived. His stature did not reach three ch'ih [one meter],
and his waistband was several spans around. They had him be seated
below, and treated him with the ceremony of reverential bows, in which
he was also highly adept.53When the wine arrived, the cups and basins
were all [quickly] emptied, and [Ch'u's] mien was [still] undisturbed.
When the Duke of Yen was about to depart, the Master suddenly brandished his sword and abused Mr. Ch'u, saying, "You were without
lofty discourse or fine talk, but only went for the wine! Indeed, of what
use are you?" Accordingly, he cleft [Ch'ü] asunder, and [Ch'ü] was [revealed to be] nothing but a large wine-vat!
In this episode once again, Tu Kuang-t'ing endeavors to enhance the reader's faith in

the anecdote by inserting the name of Chang Yueh as Yeh's collocutor: Chang (667-731) was a statesman and scholar who served as chief minister under both Jui-tsung (from 711 to 713) and Hsüan-tsung (from 721 to 726).54In this anecdote, as in the story of the chiaoin the Tao-chiao ling-yen chi, Yeh reveals a vague ability to detect supernatural beings, but employs no talismans or spirit-helpers. The point of the

story - decidedly non-Taoist - would remain intact were it set in the Chou dynasty, or, for that matter, in the Ch'ing. Clearly, the figure of Yeh Fa-shan was a magnet for such tales.

The next brief passage is of a distinctly different nature: "Once [Yeh] addressed his followers, saying, 'One hundred sixty years from now, there will be someone with skills exceeding mine coming to reside in the Maoyu mountains.'"This prediction of a great skill to appear in the late ninth century is certainly an invention, intended to legitimate a figure of Tu's own day. A later text offers an identification of the figure in question.55The Hsien-chuan shih-icontinues with another Wundererzählung:

The Master resided below [Mt.] Ssu-ming, east of T'ien-t'ai, for several years. Suddenly, on the first day of the fifth month, there was

an old man who came to his gate, crying out and weeping, seeking help.
His followers said that he was ill. The Master led him in and asked him
[his plight]. [The old man] said, "There is a certain dragon of the eastern
sea. On the orders of the Lord of Heaven (t'ien-ti), he is the master of
the treasures of the eight seas. In one thousand years, he changes the
office but once. He is unsurpassed in the transcendent evidence of
immortal qualities. This one has already been there nine hundred
seventy years, and [his term] is about to be completed. [Now] there is a
Brahman (P'o-lo-men) who, presuming upon his magical formulae
(huan-fa), has gone to the seacoast, casting spells day and night, and
piling up [the waters] for thirty years. When his arts were almost
completed, the waters of the sea were like a cloud, rolling up halfway to
the heavens. On the fifth day of the fifth month, the sea [will be] on the
point of being exhausted. The treasures for which all-encompassing
Heaven guards the seas, the things for which the Lord Above (Shang-ti)
has instituted a supernatural entity, will assuredly be obtained by the
Brahman.56I beseech you, at noon on the fifth day, to condescend to
save [the treasures] by imparting the Cinnabar Talisman (tan-fu)."
When the time came, the Master took the Cinnabar Talisman
and flew there to save [the treasures]. The waters of the sea returned to
their previous state. The Brahman, ashamed, entered the sea and died.
The following day, the dragon came to report, proffering treasured
goods and precious wonders. The Master waved them off, saying,
"Within the forests and wilds, with a stilled mind, one makes no use of

pearls and treasures." He [therefore] accepted none of them. He then
addressed the dragon, saying, "Here on the cliff, one is even further from
the water. But it would be an excellent favor were you to convey [to me]
one pure spring." That evening, he heard the sound of winds and rain.
When dawn came, winding round the foot of the mountain on all four
sides there had formed a stone ditch with spring water flowing through it,
which did not dry up [even] through the winter. To this day, it is called
the Celestial Master's Ditch.57
There can be little doubt that this tale of a foreign magician is of foreign origin itself.
The villain's identification as a Brahman (or Buddhist monk) points to an Indian
provenance for the tale.58Since there is nothing in the present passage linking it to

the historical life of Yeh Fa-shan, one feels quite sure that it originally had nothing to
do with him at all: Yeh's name was once more simply substituted for that of the
original protagonist. Tu Kuang-t'ing makes no real effort to render the episode
historically plausible. The end of the tale is obviously aetiological, and must originally
have constituted an independent story.
The final story in the Hsien-chuan shih-iaccount of Yeh, explicitly cited from a
different source, is a variant of the Jonah-motif, which appears in

countless forms in
folklore and literature of cultures all over the earth:

Another account relates the following. During the Hsien-ch'ing period
(656-661), Fa-shan received a command to restore the huang-lu chaiat
Mt. T'ien-t'ai.59[He followed] the road from Kuang-ling. The next morning, he was going to cross to Kua-chou.
That day, the ferryman at the bank of the Yangtze had moored
the boat and was waiting. At the time, it was just the end of spring. The
riverside [was blessed with] clear skies and warm temperatures.
Suddenly, there were two old men, [dressed in] yellow and white, who
addressed each other, saying, "Until we board, can we amuse ourselves
playing wei-ch'i?"They then faced the empty sky and summoned a youth from the unseen. Suddenly a lad with tufted hair cleft the waves
and emerged, his clothing not even damp. One of the old men said [to
him], "Bring us a gameboard and a table." In a little while, the tufted lad,
as directed, set up the table on the sand.
[The two old men] sat facing each other, and made an agreement, saying, "The one who wins the wager shall eat the tao-shihwho comes
from the north tomorrow." At this, they had a hearty laugh, and placed
their markers. After quite a while, the old man in white said, "You are
defeated! I hope that you will not be seen usurping my fine morsel."60

Gazing into the distance, they paused, and then with slow steps advanced into the waves, going farther and farther until they submerged. The boatman realized that they were going to do injury to
Fa-shan, and was disturbed and uneasy.
When dawn came, an officer of the [imperial] household came forth on horseback to oversee the preparations of a boat's oars. Consequently, the boatman laid forth all that he had seen the previous
day, and the officer of the household was alarmed and disconcerted. When, subsequently, Fa-shan arrived, the household officer related the
words of the boatman to Fa-shan. Fa-shan smiled faintly, saying, "Is
that so? I hope that you will not be too concerned."
At the time, Fa-shan's skills with talismans were divinely evidenced; the wise and the stupid all knew [of his abilities]. Yet those
like the household officer, the boatman, and those who traveled along
with him were distressed and restive. Fa-shan knew it, and urged them
to cast off the lines. They were less than a foot from the bank when fierce winds and violent waves [arose], and the sun was blocked out. The
people in the boat all turned pale at once. Fa-shan spoke calmly to his
attendants, saying, "Fetch my black talisman and cast it on the prow."
When they cast it, the waves and currents became peaceful and still.

In a while, they had completed their crossing. Fa-shan turned to the boatman, saying, "You may indicate to the first mate that if you follow the current for the space of ten li, on some rush-covered islet or
other there will be a large scaly creature. If you could obtain it, its value

would make it a great catch.."The boatman followed his instructions,
and they had not gone but a few liwhen there was in fact a white fish
over a hundred feet long, and more than thirty spans in circumference,
[lying] stiff and exposed on the sand. They went to inspect it. There was
an opening in its brain, like an inlay, from which exuded a fatty substance. The boatmen then carved it up and carted it back. The nearby villages and hamlets ate fish for several months.

In earlier Chinese literature, the ability to calm storms by means of casting
talismans is attributed to wonder-workers in texts like the Sou shen chi.61I assume
that the great white fish represented a lake-sprite, which had earlier appeared in the
form of the white-garbed old man.62
In conclusion, then, the Hsien-chuan shih-istrings together four tales that
provide little insight into the historical significance of Yeh Fa-shan, and may all have
been artificially linked with his name. I assume that each story had already become
attached to the figure of Yeh before Tu Kuang-t'ing acquired them:he merely passed
along everything he found in which Yeh Fa-shan was the protagonist.

Yeh Fa-shan in the Hsien-yüan pien-chuof Wang Sung-nien

In the same period as Tu Kuang-t'ing, Wang Sung-nien compiled the Hsien-yüan pien-chu[Interlocking Pearls from the Garden of the Immortals].
Wang included a brief entry on Yeh Fa-shan, which reads as follows: "The Celestial

Master Yeh was named Fa-shan and styled T'ai-su. Taking T'ang Hsüan-tsung
[along], he roamed to the Palace of the Moon. Chia Sung has a rhyme-prose [on the
subject]."63Chia, of whom little is known, was a T'ang poet who also compiled a
detailed biography of T'ao Hung-ching , the Six Dynasties master to whom
mainstream T'ang Taoists traced their heritage.64Chia's fuon Yeh's lunar excursion
has not survived.

Yeh Fa-shan in the Chiu T'ang shu

A few years after the death of Tu Kuang-t'ing, the Chiu T'ang shuwas
compiled. The Chiu T'ang shubiography of Yeh Fa-shan enhances our respect for Tu
Kuang-t'ing's account in the Tao-chiao ling-yen chi.65The Chiu T'ang shuaccount of
Yeh's life opens as follows:

The tao-shihYeh Fa-shan was a native of Kua-tsang district in Kua-chou. From his great-grandfather down, [the family] had been tao-shih
for three generations. They all possessed the arts of cultivation and of
divination. When young, Fa-shan received talismans. Moreover, he could compel demons and spirits.

During the Hsien-ch'ing period, Kao-tsung heard of his reputation and
summoned him to the capital. He was about to add [to Yeh] a noble
rank, [but Yeh] adamantly refused and did not accept it. He sought to
become a tao-shih, and hence remained in the Taoist precincts within
the palace, where his endowment was very generous.

One is struck by the notice here that Yeh Fa-shan was actually a tao-shih. Later
remarks in the biography substantiate that notice so thoroughly that the reader is
left in no doubt that Yeh was a fully ordained Taoist. The depiction of Yeh's youth and
training differs from that in Tu Kuang-t'ing's account only in the addition of divination
to the list of his family's skills. I assume this change to owe to the fact that the
historians felt that their readers would be better acquainted with the topic of
divination than with "the ascent to Perfection" of Shang-ch'ing Taoism.
There is no way to confirm the assertions that Yeh refused an offer of noble
rank and underwent ordination at Kao-tsung's court. But there is nothing inherently
implausible in them, and one must allow for the possibility that the historians had
access to pertinent administrative documents. The subsequent episode falls into the
same category:

At the time, Kao-tsung ordered that there should be a general convocation of all persons who practiced Taoist arts (fang tao-shu chih
shih), together with [those who] refined the yellow and the white

[i.e.,
alchemists]. Fa-shan said to the emperor, "The Golden Elixir is difficult
to attain, squanders one's assets, and enervates the principles of government.66I implore you to probe [the practitioners'] validity or invalidity." The emperor concurred with what he said, and therefore ordered Fa-shan to test them. Subsequently, more than ninety persons
came forward, and [Yeh] dismissed every one of them.
What this episode is likewise unparalleled, it reports a public court event, a matter of
which some record could conceivably have been made. While there is nothing
incredible about the incident as a whole, the content of Yeh's address seems rather
suspicious. No indication was originally given as to the purpose of the convocation,
yet the words attributed to Yeh insinuate that Kao-tsung was considering sponsoring
some alchemical project. Such a prospect seems quite unlikely. First, I know of no
external evidence that T'ang Kao-tsung ever entertained any interest in alchemy.
And secondly, the convocation originally concerned persons proficient in all the
various "Taoist arts," not merely alchemy. In this context, Yeh's discursus upon the
drawbacks of alchemical enterprises seems entirely out of place. It is furthermore
painfully similar to the anti-Taoist dissuasions placed in the mouths of Taoist figures
in other biographies.

The story of the demonic disturbance during Yeh's chiaois included next, with
only slight modifications:
On another occasion, Fa-shan set up an altar at the Ling-k'ung abbey in

the Eastern capital and performed chiaoand chai rituals. The gentlemen and ladies in the city contended to go and observe it. All of a

sudden, several tens of persons threw themselves into the fire. The spectators were greatly alarmed, and rescued them, then released them.

Fa-shan said, "This is all [a matter of] demonic illness, which will be put to rest by my formulae." When it was investigated, it was actually so.

Fa-shan performed a general act of restriction and impeachment, and their illnesses were all healed.

It is ironic that while the Taoist Tu Kuang-t'ing wrote about Yeh's pacification of the disturbance in very oblique terms, the state historians make it clear that Yeh magically constrained the offending spirits. In addition, Tu's mention of the imperial procession to Loyang is absent, leading one to believe that Tu had adduced an irrelevant contemporary event in an artificial effort to bolster the credibility of the episode. One wonders why Tu had thought such an effort necessary, particularly if he had extracted the episode from some semi-official source text.

It is surprising to read in the following passage that Yeh engaged in anti-
Buddhist activities during his visits to court:
For fifty years, through the reigns of Kao-tsung, Tse-t'ien, and Chung-
tsung, [Yeh] constantly came and went in the famous mountains. He
was summoned several times into the palace, and questioned about the
Tao with the utmost decorum. Yet, he sought to oust [exponents of] the
Buddhist dharma, and some critics maligned him behind his back.
One is immediately reminded of the Chiu T'ang shu's interpolation of a very similar
report into Ch'üan Te-yü's biography of the Taoistic poet Wu Yün.67A similar
explanation must be presumed in relation to the present passage. Evidently, the
editors of the Chiu T'ang shuwere for some reason sympathetic to the real or
imagined slights suffered by T'ang Buddhists at the hands of-T'ang Taoists. One
surmises, however, that such Buddhist-Taoist conflicts were actually fairly minimal
in T'ang times, for otherwise evidence of them would regularly appear in other
materials besides the Chiu T'ang shu.The subsequent passage raises several
historical questions:
So highly-developed were [Yeh's] skills that to the end none could
measure them. When Jui-tsung came to the throne, he praised Fa-
shan's capacity for providing unseen assistance. In the second year of
Hsien-t'ien, he installed [Yeh] as President of the Court for Diplomatic
Relations, enfeoffed him as Duke of Yueh, and [confirming] him as a tao-
shihas before, rested him in the Ching-lung abbey in the capital. In
addition, he advanced [Yeh's] father to [the post of] prefect of Hsi-

chou.
Of the honors and favors of that period, none compared to this.
Fa-shan was born in the ping-tzuyear of the Ta-yeh reign of the Sui period [616/17], and died in the keng-tzuyear of the K'ai-yüan period,
totaling an age of one hundred seven sui. He died in the eighth year [720/21].

The remark about the immeasurability of Yeh's skills reminds us of Hsüan-
tsung's comments in his epitaph, and also of the report in the Hsien-chuan shih-ithat
Hsüan-tsung and his ministers frequently tested Yeh's abilities. The following line -
also new - informs us that Jui-tsung honored Yeh for his "unseen assistance," again a
concept familiar from Hsüan-tsung's eulogy. Someone familiar with the earlier
accounts might well get the impression that Yeh's close relationship with Hsüan-
tsung has for some reason been ascribed here to Hsüan-tsung's predecessors instead.
The line might be viewed as an attempt by the historians to minimize Hsüan-tsung's
fascination for Taoist luminaries, and to explain why it was Jui-tsung who granted
Yeh such extraordinary ranks and honors. On the other hand, it seems indubitable
that Hsüan-tsung actually downplayed his predecessors' connections with Yeh, and
emphasized his own patronage of him. Although it is not possible to judge with
certainty as to which portrayal is the more accurate, I consider the present text's
version more credible, because it is quite clear that Jui-tsung had already granted Yeh
unparalleled honors.

The Chiu T'ang shuaccount of Yeh concludes with an undated edict granting
Yeh the posthumous Governor-Generalship of Yüeh-chou:

An edict said:

The late tao-shihYeh Fa-shan, an Auxiliary Functionary (yüan-wai-chih) in the Court for Diplomatic Relations, Duke of Yueh - his natural truth was quintessentially abstruse, and his mysterious principles were subtly expansive. He grasped the secret essentials and
brought efficacious talismans into full play. Assuredly, his obscurity was difficult to plumb, and his rarity was scarcely fathomable. Yet his
sentiments roosted in P'eng[-lai] and Lang[-yüan],69and his traces blended in coalescence with the empire. He cared for the Taoist clerics
without taking [the responsibility] for granted, and was advanced to the
purple tassel without glorying in [the honor]. Pre-eminent was his unique refinement; gentle was his solitary departure. His triumphant
life-force (ch'i) precluded commonness, and his chaste demeanor was
unsullied. When [his] golden substance was stimulated without, a pearly
light responded within. Since, in this fashion, his form responded to inner
immortality, his fame ascended to superior virtue.
In my leisure from my present administration, I frequently inquired about the consummate Tao. In his lordship's methods of managing the country, he on numerous occasions memorialized with
straight talk. His counsels were mysterious admonitions; his action spread vast benefits.
I bemoan the final cessation of his euphonious tonality, and lament the sudden incidence of his physical dissolution. Unwilled as it
was, death wonderfully delayed its arrival. Endlessly, the bygone

days
will stimulate sadness within the breast. It is fitting to extend a decorous mandate, as a signal to the lane. of shades. [Yeh] may be granted [the office of] Governor-General of Yüeh-chou.7 0

This edict is quite similar in style and tone to the panegyric sections of Hsüan-tsung's
memorial text. But the entire Chiu T'ang shuaccount leaves us with a major
question about Yeh Fa-shan: was he or was he not a "Taoist"? The evidence is
equivocal. Here, as in Li Yung's inscriptions for Yeh's forefathers, Yeh is indeed
termed a tao-shih. But the details of Yeh's supposed ordination are never divulged,
and few of the other early texts give any indication that Yeh was ever known as a tao-
shih. No formal ecclesiastical title is ever ascribed to Yeh, and nowhere is he
represented as having served a known Taoist master or utilized a known Taoist text.
Moreover, in no text of T'ang date does he exhibit any knowledge of - or interest in the
doctrines and practices characteristic of organized Taoism. Certain accounts do
depict Yeh as having conducted a chiaoritual, but the historicity of that episode is
questionable on other grounds. It is also true that some of Yeh's skills are often
categorized as "Taoist arts." But the expediencies of classification are never reliable
criteria for determining historical facts. In addition, as noted earlier, there are
plentiful examples of accounts of non-Taoist magicians who displayed precisely the
same abilities.
On balance, one can only conclude that Yeh Fa-shan operated on the periphery
of organized Taoism. Even if Yeh was in fact an ordained tao-shih,

his career (as we
are told of it) was unrelated to the operations of the Taoist religious community (as
observed in the lives of figures like Ssu-ma Ch'eng-chen and Li Han-kuang).71In fact,
one gets the impression that Yeh's presence at a formal Taoist assembly would have
been a scene reminiscent of an evangelical faith-healer attending a conclave of
cardinals. In each case, there would certainly have been a consensus on a number of
topics. But there would also have been a noticeable divergence on other points, and a
definite contrast in style.
Despite occasional efforts by the official historians and some later biographers
to represent Yeh as an exemplar of Shang-ch'ing Taoism, Yeh's career in general
shows little evidence of the traditions or values of the lineage of T'ao Hung-ching. Yeh
was first and foremost a thaumaturge, and more specifically a theurge. And while a
case might be made for the compatibility of theurgy and mainstream Taoism, it must
be granted that there was a fundamental incongruity between the theological
premises of the two systems. Through T'ang times, Taoism generally esteemed
spiritual entities as sublime beings, whose wisdom and goodness lead them to aid
those mortals who seek to attain self-perfection. In theurgy, on the other hand,
spirits were understood as irresponsible forces that would inevitably wreak mischief
unless constrained by great human magi; to the theurge, spirits were much like wild
animals, which could be turned to some human advantage only if sedulously
domesticated. Hence the Taoist "immortals" and "Perfected Ones"

had no place
whatever in the theurgical Weltanschauung.72
For what reason, then, did the official historians commemorate Yeh Fa-shan as
a historic figure of the T'ang period? This question goes to the heart of the issue: like
all the figures immortalized in the dynastic histories, Yeh Fa-shan was interpreted as
someone whose life had held a profound political significance. The accounts of Yeh
that stress his Taoistic propensities - from the epitaph of Hsüan-tsung to the Chiu
T'ang shu- all concur on one point: the career of Yeh Fa-shan included as a principal
focus a protective and supportive role in relation to the T'ang throne. This

perspective on Yeh's life is validated by the fact that both Jui-tsung and Hsüan-tsung
were reportedly convinced that the man had devoted his preternatural abilities to the
preservation and sustenance of their reigns. Moreover, several of the early accounts
of Yeh's life take pains to demonstrate that Yeh's solicitude and public beneficence
resulted from his compliance with divine injunctions. In the eyes of his earliest
biographers, Yeh's support for his sovereign owed not merely to intrinsic good will or
personal loyalty: political support given for those reasons would have been jejune.
Instead, the overall perspective that emerges from the literature as a whole is that
Yeh Fa-shan magically bolstered the T'ang throne because heavenly forces had so
directed him. Hence, for the official historian, the essential fact that emerges from a
review of Yeh's life is that Heaven willed the T'ang dynasty - and its

living
representative in each successive generation - to endure and to flourish. And Yeh Fa-
shan, far from being an insignificant eccentric, was a sublime and noble man who
served as Heaven's instrument in that task. As strange as it might seem to the
modern mentality, the writers of the T'ang and Five Dynasties looked upon this
thaumaturge as a person worthy of admiration in political and religious contexts
alike.

FOOTNOTES

1) These epitaphs are preserved in Chang Tao-t'ung'sT'ang Yeh chen-jen chuan
[HY 778], 21b-28a. For more on Chang's text, see Kirkland, "Taoists of the High
T'ang: An Inquiry into the Perceived Significance of Eminent Taoists in Medieval
Chinese Society" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1986), 135-39, 389-402; and
Judith M. Boltz, A Survey of Taoist Literature: Tenth to Seventeenth Centuries
(Berkeley:University of California, Institute of East Asian Studies, 1987), 96-97.
For Li Yung (son of the renowned scholar Li Shan), see Chiu T'ang shu190B.5039-43;
and Hsin T'ang shu202.5754- 57. See also Arthur Waley, The Poetry and Career of Li
Po(London:George Allen and Unwin, 1950), 50-51. In the Cambridge History of
China, Denis Twitchest refers to Li Yung as "a royal prince." Cambridge History of
China, 3: Sui and T'ang China, S89-906, part I (Cambridge: Cambridge University
Press, 1979), 424. I have located no confirmation of royal blood in regard to Li Yung.

2) The text of theYü-chih chen-jen peiappears in the T'ang Yeh chen-jen chuan,
28b-32a. For the composition of this inscription, see idem, 17a.
3) For a detailed examination of the Han-lin academy in T'ang times, see F. A.
Bischoff, La Forêt des Pinceaux:Etude sur l'Académie du Han-lin sous la Dynastic des
T'ang et traduction du Han lin tche(Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963),
esp. pages 1-16. One of the more illustrious scholars to serve in Hsüan-tsung's Chi-
hsien academy was Ho Chih-chang; see Kirkland, "From Imperial Tutor to Taoist
Priest: Ho Chih-chang at the T'ang Court," Journal of Asian History23 (1989): 101-
133.
4) Chu-liang was a figure of the seventh century B.C.E. The name Yehwas
originally pronounced She, and the district here referred to is given as "Sheh" in
James Legge's translation of theCh'un ch'iu, Chinese Classics, 2nd ed. (1893; repr.,
Taipei, 1972), V: 388 - 89.

5) Nan-yang is in southwestern Honan. Yeh district (hsien) still exists.

6) I have located no external references to any of Yeh's forebears.

7) Kua-chou is in southern Kiangsu (present Li-shui district), near the

confluence of the Yangtze river and the Grand Canal.

8) A revival of genealogical research had occurred under Chung-tsung, and
during Hsüan-tsung's reign an official compendium of genealogies of prominent clans
had been compiled and updated by such well-known historians as

Liu Ch'ung, Liu
Chih-chi and Wei Shu . See Cambridge History of China, loc. cit., 382-83.

9) Ts'e-fu yüan-kuei(Hong Kong, 1960) 53.10a-b.

10) It is generally accepted that theTs'e-fu yuan-kueiutilized the earlierT'ang

shuof Liu Fang, rather than the present Chiu T'ang shu. I suspect that the same
might be true in the present case.
11) See Paul W. Kroll, "In the Halls of the Azure Lad," Journal of the American
Oriental Society105 (1985): 75-94; and Edward H. Schafer,Mirages on the Sea of
Time: The Taoist Poetry of Ts'ao T'ang(Berkeley: University of California Press,
1985), 108-121. I know of no external evidence that more than one Blue Lad was
believed to exist, but the text can be read in no other way. Later writers had
difficulties with this enumeration: in the T'ang Yeh chen-jen chuan, the number is
given as two Blue Lads, while in the Huan-hsi chih, no plurality is indicated at all.
12) A similar episode is reported in connection with Tung-fang Shuo in theLi-
tai shen-hsien shih, an early Ch'ing collection. See Lionel Giles,A Gallery of Chinese
Immortals (London: John Murray, 1948), 48-49.
13) Lord Mao was the eponymous deity of Mao-shan, seat of the Shang-ch'ing
order of Taoism from the fourth century onward. See further Ch'en Kuo-fu, Tao
tsang yüan-liu k'ao(1949; repr., Beijing, 1963), 9-11; and Edward H. Schafer, Mao

Shan in T'ang Times. Society for the Study of Chinese Religions Monograph,
no. 1, 2nd. ed. (Boulder, CO, 1989), 2-9.
14) Chao Yuan-yang is mentioned in the Yüan-ho hsing-tsuan(Shanghai,
1948), 7.6a. I have not identified Wei Shan-chün. Fortun-chia, see Li Shu-huan
comp., Tao-chiao ta tz'u-tien, 596; and James R. Ware, Alchemy, Medicine, Religion
inthe China of A.D. 320 (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1966), 284. I have not
identified pu-hsüan, though it sounds analogous to "pacing the void" (pu-hsü). The
"eight recorders" were the spirits of the eight trigrams of theI ching: Ko Hung says,
"through them it is possible to know in advance about things that have not yet
formed" (Ware, 255). I have located no information on the "cloud-sandals," though
they sound like a method for ascending into the heavens.
15) On Mt. Lo-fu, see Michel Soymié, "Le Lo-feou Chan, étude de géographic
religieuse," Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient48 (1956): 1-139. Kua-

ts'ang was the famous mountain of Chiang-nan, for which the neighboring district
was named in T'ang times. The mountain was located in the southeastern part of
present Hsien-chü district, while the district of the same name was located in the
southeastern part of present-day Li-shui district.
16) This series, quite obscure at many points, is reminiscent of a passage in
the Shen-hsien chuan'sbiography of Liu An and patron of the Taoist classic Huai-

nan-tzu, the famous Han dynasty prince. See Giles, A Gallery of Chinese Immortals,
44.

17) Purple tassels were a perquisite of the Chinese nobility.

18) See A Concordance to Yi Ching. Harvard-Yenching Institute Sinological

Index Series, Supplement no. 10 (Peking, 1935), 41; Richard Wilhelm,The I Ching or
Book of Changes, trans. Gary F. Baynes, 3rd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University
Press, 1967), 290.

19) The "mysterious female" is an allusion to the Tao te ching, section 6.

20) This additional paragraph might be by another hand, but a gloss in the

T'ang Yeh chen-jen chuanindicates that it was present in "the old text" that Chang
Tao-t'ung was following, hence he did not dare to delete it.
21) See, e.g., the accounts of the various figures treated in Kirkland, "Taoists of
the High T'ang."
22) For further discussion of Yeh's mission of service to state and society, see
Kirkland, "The Roots of Altruism in the Taoist Tradition," Journal of the American
Academy of Religion54 (1986): 59-77.
23) Chiang Fang (ninth century) was a secretary in the Han-lin academy: see

E. D. Edwards, Chinese Prose Literature of the T'ang Period(London: Probsthain,
1937-38), II, 136 and n. 2. The Huan-hsi chih(one chüan) consists of biographical
accounts of four wonder-workers of the early and high T'ang dynasty, with a brief
appendix detailing a dream of T'ang Hsüan-tsung. The text of the Huan-hsi chihhas
been preserved in theT'ang-tai ts'ung-shu(for which see Edwards, I, 16-22; II, 19-34,
394-410). The entry on Yeh Fa-shan appears atT'ang-tai ts'ung-shu32.6a-9a. It
might be appropriate at this point to note the existence of a set of manuscripts from
Tun-huang (Stein 6836) that concern Yeh Ching-neng, Yeh's uncle and a well-known
wonder-worker in his own right. A convenient edition and translation of that material
appears in Alfredo Cadonna, Il Taoista di sua Maestà: Dodici Episodi da un
Manoscritto Cinese di Dunhuang(Venezia: Cafoscarina, 1984). The relationship of
that material to the preserved accounts of Yeh Fa-shan deserves further study. It
should be noted, however, that the first mention of Yeh Ching-neng in an account of
Fa-shan's life appears in Sung times, in the T'ai-p'ing kuang-chi.

24) Ch'u-chou was the Sui dynasty name for Kua-chou.

25) I have located no mountain(s) of this name.

26) There have been several mountains known as Mt. Po-ma. I assume the
one in question to have been that located in present-day Hsüan-p'ing district, in
Chekiang.

27) The term "immortal minister" was a title employed by Ling-pao writers in
their depiction of the celestial hierarchy. See, e.g., the text

translated by Stephen R.
Bokenkamp, "Sources of the Ling-pao Scriptures," in Michel Striclcmann, Tantric
and Taoist Studies in Honor of R. A. Stein. Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques 21
(Bruxelles:Institut Belge des Hautes Etudes Chinoises, 1983), II, 439. I suspect
that both this term and that of "immortal prince" (hsien wang) were invented by the
Ling-pao founder Ko Ch'ao-fu in order to make the byname of his ancestor Ko Hsüan
(i.e., Ko hsien-kung) appear to have been a glorious rank bestowed upon him by the
Most High, rather than an ordinary byname.

28) I have located no further data concerning Chang Wei.

29) For the career of Yao Ch'ung (651-721), see Cambridge History of China,

loc. cit., 337-39, 345-48.

30) Ho Po was a deity venerated in north China (and later in Korea) since
classical times, being mentioned in such texts as Chuang-tzu, Han-fei-tzu, and the
Ch'u tz'u. For more on Ho Po, see Werner Eichhorn, Die Religionen Chinas
(Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1973), 46-47; Arthur Waley, The Nine Songs
(1955; repr., San Francisco: City Light Books, 1973), 47-52.
31) The text reads Yüan-tsung. During the Ch'ing dynasty (when many of our
texts outside the Tao-tsangwere printed), the characterhsüanwas tabooed, since it
occurred in the personal name of the K'ang-hsi emperor. Wu San-ssu, a nephew of
the Empress Wu, dominated the court from 705 to 707, in alliance with Chung-

tsung's empress nee Wei. See Cambridge History of China, loc. cit., 322-25.
32) In medieval Chinese poetry, Taoist divinities typically rode white deer when
travelling overland in the mortal world; see Paul W. Kroll, "Verses from on High: The
Ascent of T'ai-shan," T'oung Pao, n.s. 69 (1983): 223-60, at pp. 241, 251-52. It is
conceivable that in the present context the motif might reflect memories of an old
Turkic legend concerning the reputed progenitor of the Turks, the sea deity Jama
Shali. According to one tale preserved in theT'ai-p'ing kuang-chi, "Each day at
sunset his daughter appears to him with a white deer and invites him into the sea,
from which he emerges at dawn" (Edward H. Schafer, The Divine Woman: Dragon
Ladies and Rain Maidens in T'ang Literature[1973; repr., San Francisco: North Point
Press, 1980], 164).
33) See especially the Ling-pao scripture relating the transmission from Ko
Hsüan to Ko Hung, translated in Bokenkamp, "Sources of the Ling-pao Scriptures,"
439. Similar revelations reportedly occurred to Ho Chih-chang and the poet Wu Yün ;
see Kirkland, "Taoists of the High T'ang," 116-18.

34) On the concept of che-hsien, see Miyakawa Hisayuki "Takusen ko¯," To¯ho¯
shu¯kyo¯33-34 (1969): 1-15.
35) For examples of resurrection by earlier Chinese thaumaturges, see
Kenneth J. DeWoskin, Doctors, Diviners, and Magicians of Ancient China:

Biographies of Fang-shih(New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 81; and
Giles, Gallery of Chinese Immortals, 93. Numerous examples of "revivification" are
presented in Bruno Belpaire, T'ang kien wen tse: Florilège de littérature des T'ang
(Paris: Editions Universitaires, 1957-59), I, 213-27.

36) See, e.g., Kuo Ch'ing-fan, Chuang-tzu chi-shih, III, 727; Burton Watson,
trans., Complete Works of Chuang-tzu(New York: Columbia University Press, 1968),
232.
37) Isabelle Robinet, "Metamorphosis and Deliverance from the Corpse in
Taoism," History of Religions19 (1979): 37-70, at 48-49.
38) See Yang Po-chün, ea.,Lieh-tzu chi-shih(Hong Kong, 1965) 3.56-70; A. C.
Graham, trans., The Book of Lieh-tzu(London: John Murray, 1960), 58 -73.

39) See Robinet, "Metamorphosis and Deliverance from the Corpse," 45.

40) On the topic of lunar voyages in T'ang times, see also Edward H. Schafer,

"A T'ang Trip to the Moon," Journal of the American Oriental Society96 (1976): 27-
37. Cf. Michel Soymie, "La Lune dans les religions chinoises," in La Lune: Mythes et
Rites(Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1962), 291-321.
41) Chang Kuo (fl. cat 690-733) was a reputed specialist in alchemical
techniques, who twice frustrated emissaries of the Empress Wu and Hsüan-tsung by
stopping his breath and feigning death rather than comply with

summonses. It is
reported that Hsüan-tsung wished Chang to wed an imperial princess, but Chang
would not accept the emperor's command. He was nonetheless granted rank and
title, and honored with gifts and praise. The earliest accounts of Chang's life appear
in two texts of the early tenth century- Shen Fen's Hsü hsien-chuan[HY 295], chung,
4b-6a; and Wang Sung-nien's Hsien-yüan pien-chu, for which see below, note 63. The
standard biographies of Chang appear at Chiu T'ang shu191.5106-7; Hsin T'ang shu
204.5810-11. In later times, Chang was numbered among the "Eight Immortals." By
Sung times, at least, some writers assumed that two such illustrious wonder-workers
as Chang Kuo and Yeh Fa-shan could hardly have frequented Hsüan-tsung's court
without knowing each other: in at least one anecdote in theT'ai-p'ing kuang-chi, the
two men are portrayed as consorting together in the emperor's company: see Giles,
Gallery of Chinese Immortals, 115.

42) T'ang-tai ts'ung-shu32.8a-9a.

43) On Tu Kuang-t'ing, see Suzanne Cahill, "Reflections of a Metal Mother: Tu

Kuang-t'ing's Biography of Hsi Wang Mu," Journal of Chinese Religions13-14 (1985-
86): 127-42; and Franciscus Verellen,Du Guangting(850-933): Taoïste de cour à la fin
de la Chine médiévale(Paris: Institut des Hautes Etudes Chinoises, 1988).

44) Tu indicates that he composed theTao-chiao ling-yen chiby drawing upon

personal knowledge and by comparing two existing works: (1) the Tao-men chi-yen chi
[Records of the Collected Fulfillments in Taoism], 10 chuan by Li Ch'i-chih and (2) the
Hsüan-men ling-yen chi[Records of Wondrous Fulfillmeets in Taoism], 10 chüanby
Su Huai-ch'u . The entry on Yeh appears at Tao chiao ling-yen chi[HY 590] 14.8a-
9a.
45) The Hsien-chuan shih-iwas originally a substantial work in forty chüan.
Unfortunately, the original version was lost, probably in late Yüan or early Ming
times. The contemporary scholar Yen I-p'inghas delved into the history of the text,
and published a reconstructed version of substantial sections of it that had been
incorporated into the T'ai-p'ing kuang-chiand works preserved in the Tao-tsang. In
preparing his reconstituted version of the Hsien-chuan shih-i, Yen I-p'ing deleted the
duplicate biographies, and obtained a total of ninety-nine lives, which he divided
arbitrarily into fivechüan. See Yen I-p'ing, Tao-chiao yen-chiu tzu-liao(Taipei, 1974),
I, Hsien-chuan shih-i, p. 1; and Kirkland, "Taoists of the High T'ang," 215, n. 4.
46) For the use of the title t'ien-shihin T'ang times, see Kirkland, "Chang Kao:
Noteworthy T'ang Taoist?" T'ang Studies2 (1984): 31-36.

47) For the date of this event, see Cambridge History of China, loc. cit., 257-

48) See, e.g., Max Kaltenmark, Lao Tzu and Taoism, trans. Roger Greaves
(Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969), 126-27. Cf. Ch'en Kuo-

fu,Tao-tsang
yüan-liu k'ao, 260-61; and Holmes Welch and Anna Seidel, eds., Facets of Taoism:
Essays in Chinese Religion(New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 118, 127.
49) For Luan Pa, see Welch and Seidel, eds., Facets of Taoism, 79 and 92. For
Tso Tz'u, see Ch'en Kuo-fu, Tao-tsang yüan-liu k'ao, 90-92, and DeWoskin, Doctors,
Diviners, and Magicians, 83-86.
50) The plausibility of the event having been set in a reign before that of
Hsüan-tsung would seem to be enhanced by the fact that the Tibetans repeatedly
sent envoys to China from 707-719, culminating in the acquisition of an imperial
princess for the bride of emperor Khri-lde gtsug-brtsan Mes-ag-tshoms in 710, a few
months before Chung-tsung's death. See, e.g., Tzu-chih t'ung-chien209.6637-39.

51) Hsien-chuan shih-i, in Yen I-pting, Tao-chiao yen-chiu tzu-liao, 3.65-69.

52) Regarding Tu's reference to Yeh's "basic biography," two possibilities come

to mind. The first is that Tu intends the reader to refer to his biography of Yeh in the
Tao-chiao ling-yen chi, which is in the form of a standard chuan. This notion would
agree with my supposition that Tu compiled the Hsien-chuan shih-iaccount as a
supplement to that biography. The other possibility is that a biography of Yeh Fa-
shan existed among the official historical materials that preceded Liu Hsu's Chiu

T'ang shu.The most likely candidate would seem to be the T'ang shuof Wei Shu and
Liu Fang (completed in 760). Since that chronicle was compiled immediately after

the reign of Yeh's patron, T'ang Hsüan-tsung, it is quite conceivable that Yeh might
have received a biographical notice in it. Yet, when one recalls that Tu's biography of
Yeh in the Tao-chiao ling-yen chibears many marks of an official biography, one
realizes that these two possibilities are far from mutually exclusive. Tu may have
encountered an official biography of Yeh in a source such as the T'ang shu of Wei and
Liu, and incorporated it into his Tao-chiao ring-yen chit The reference to Yeh's "basic
biography" might thus have referred to the account which appeared both in the
official materials and in Tu's own collection. However, this remains speculation.

53) I follow Yeh I-p'ing's emendations here and in the following line.

54) For the life of Chang Yüeh, see Chiu T'ang shu97.3049-57; Hsin T'ang shu

125.4404-11; Ch'üan T'ang wen292.13b-16a; and Chten Tsu-yen, Chang Yüeh
nien-p'u(Hong Kong, 1984). Cf. Cambridge History of China, loc. cit., 339-40, 376-
79, 386-91; and Paul W. Kroll, "On the Date of Chang Yueh's Death," Chinese
Literature:Essays, Articles, Reviews2 (1980): 264-65.
55) According to the T'ang Yeh chen-jen chuan, the individual in question was
one Feng Ch'ü-she , of whom nothing further is known. See Kirkland, "Taoists of the
High T'ang," 428.

56) The text here reads "Buddhist magician" (huan-seng). Since the text
otherwise consistently refers to the figure in question as a "Brahman," I follow that
reading here (as in the parallel account in the Li-shih chen-hsien t'i-tao t'ung-chien
[HY 297], 39.1a-5a).
57) A gloss in the text of the T'ang Yeh chen-jen chuan(8b-9a) indicates the
location of the Ditch (below Ssu-ming, east of T'ien-t'ai), and records the religious sites
in the vicinity.
58) Indian magicians appear in Chinese texts as early as the Sou shen chi(4th
century), and Brahmans uttering magical spells are described in Chinese Buddhist
works as early as the Sui dynasty. For the former, see Derk Bodde, "Some Chinese
Tales of the Supernatural," Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies2 (1942): 338-57;
reprinted in his Essays on Chinese Civilization(Princeton: Princeton University
Press, 1981), 331-50, at pp. 337-38. For the latter, see Donald E. Gjertson, Ghosts,
Gods, and Retribution:Nine Buddhist Miracle Tales from Six Dynasties and Early
T'ang China. University of Massachusetts Asian Studies Committee Occasional
Paper, no. 2 (Amherst, 1978), 15-16. Tales of dragons guarding submarine
treasures were even more common, and Indian influence in them is suspected by
more than one scholar. The best-known example is the ch'uan-ch'itale, "The Dragon-
King's Daughter," by Li Ch'ao-wei (fl. 759); see the introduction and translation in
Edwards, Chinese Prose Literature,II, 86-94. On the suspected Indian influence on
such tales, see Schafer, The Divine Woman, 26, 208, n. 23. In one

tale dated to Sung
times, a man even won the hand of the "Dragon-King's daughter" by causing the sea
to boil (Chang-sheng chu haiby Li Hao-ku preserved in the Yüan-ch'ü hsüan; see
Edwards, Chinese Prose Literature, II, 86). It should also be noted, however, that the
ancient Tibetans believed in powerful water spirits called klu, who "have their homes

on the bottom where they guard secret treasures" (Helmut Hoffmann, The Religions
of Tibet[London, 1961], 17).
59) According to the T'ang liu-tien, the huang-lu chaiwas performed to effect
the salvation of all ancestors, but it was also believed to benefit the emperor and
sustain his heavenly mandate. See Charles David Benn, "Taoism as Ideology in the
Reign of Emperor Hsüan-tsung" (Ph.D. Diss., University of Michigan, 1977), 104 and
237.
60) For a reason as yet undetermined, impish spirits were fond of playing wei-
ch'ibefore claiming a life. Cf. the examples in Giles, Gallery of Chinese Immortals,
89-90, 115; cf. 105-6. 61) See Welch and Seidel, eds., Facets of Taoism, 93-94.
62) In another medieval account, a lake-sprite whom a famous monk pacified
was later revealed to have had the form of a python (see Welch and Seidel, eds.,
Facets of Taoism, 94-95). Similar parallels could likely be adduced in great numbers.
63) Hsien-yüan pien-chu[HY 596], chüan hsia, 23a-b. Wang Sung-nien (fl. cat
930) was a tao-shihof Mt. T'ien-t'ai. (One lei-shurefers to Wang as a T'ang figure, but
the preface to the Hsien-yüan pien-chuindicates that Wang was

active at least
through 923 C.E.) The Hsien-yüan pien-chucontains biographies of 132 persons,
drawn from such sources as the Lieh-hsien chuan, the Shen-hsien chuan, and T'ao
Hung-ching's Chen kao. The format of the entries follows Li Han's Meng-ch'iu, as does
the San-tung ch'ün-hsien lu. See further Ch'en Kuo-fu, Tao-tsang yüan-liu k'ao, 240-
41; Boltz, Survey of Taoist Literature, 59.
64) See Michel Strickmann, "On the Alchemy of T'ao Hung-ching," in Welch
and Seidel, eds., Facets of Taoism, 142 and n. 57.
65) The form and contents of the Chiu T'ang shuaccount also support the
conjecture that Tu's "basic biography" of Yeh may have been based upon an official
history, such as the Wei/Liu T'ang shu. The biography of Yeh appears at Chiu T'ang
shu192. 5107 -8.
66) For the Golden Elixir (chin-tan), see Chten Kuo-fu, Tao-tsang yüan-liu
hsü-k'ao(Taipei, 1983), 3-5; Chou Shao-hsien,Tao-chia yü shen hsien, 145-66; and
Tsuda Sokichi, "Shinsen-shiso no kenkyu", in Tsuda Sokichi zenshu(Tokyo, 1939),
172-333, at pp. 290-95. A T'ang recipe for the Golden Elixir is translated in Nathan
Sivin, Chinese Alchemy(Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1968), 185-86.

67) See Kirkland, "Taoists of the High T'ang," 331-32.

68) As noted above, the death date given here is obviously incorrect, since

there was no keng-tzuyear during the K'ai-yuan period; the eighth year was a keng-
shenyear.

69) Lands where immortals abide.

70) The text of this edict is also preserved in Ts'e-fu yüan-kuei, 53.10a-b; and
T'ang Yeh chen-jen chuan, 28a-b.
71) See Kirkland, "Taoists of the High T'ang," and "The Last Taoist Grand
Master at the T'ang Imperial Court: Li Han-kuang and T'ang Hsüan-tsung," T'ang
Studies4 (1986): 43-67.

72) Cf. Boltz, Survey of Taoist Literature, 293, n. 254.